

List of Terms/Context

Intent vs. Impact

Paying attention to this difference can help during conversations about race and racism.

- **Intent:** What one intends through speech or action.
- **Impact:** How one's speech or action is perceived or experienced by another

**** When dealing with race it is usually far more productive to deal with IMPACT, not INTENT. Most people do not intend to speak or act in ways that reinforce bias, prejudice, or racism. Unfortunately, people often unconsciously act in ways that hurt or offend others. If we hope to have productive dialogues on race, we need to stay open to hear about how even our best efforts are experienced in unintended ways.*

Overconfidence and Lack of Confidence (book excerpt)

When we enter multiracial spaces, we often take with us our own discomfort with our racial selves...Especially for those of us who have only recently begun to recognize the ways that the more subtle forms of racism emerge, our earlier lack of sensitivity can turn into an awkward oversensitivity. Where once we never noticed race (or at least claimed not to), increased awareness makes issues of race appear ever-present. Race consciousness is at its height and we can often feel paralyzed while trying to figure out how to behave in order to subvert the racism in the room while not appearing racist by concentrating on race in the room! What will the person of color think? What if I say the wrong thing?

Whereas white people can experience a *lack* of confidence when first coming to awareness of race issues, we can also be *overconfident* if we join social causes while seeing racism as existing only outside of ourselves...We can be *overconfident* when it comes to our ability to offer ourselves in service if we do not see how our racial socialization affects us and how it might be associated with adverse effects.

Savior Complex (book excerpt)

The savior complex refers to a pattern wherein white people see our participation in a community as essential...When our approach incorporates the idea that another group needs us for their betterment, we overestimate the value we bring to the situation. We ignore or justify the effects of our inexperience, saying things like, "At least I am here. Without me, they would be worse off."...Our mission can be read as missionary, and like those who descend upon another's land without sufficient cultural knowledge and respect, we can do real damage as we neglect cultural mores and unintentionally offend, thereby rendering our work less effective. This same basic scenario plays out...anywhere we find white people volunteering or hired to "make a difference" in communities other than their own.

Superiority Complex (book excerpt)

The savior complex often goes hand in hand with a sense of superiority. When we approach communities of color with an attitude of internalized superiority (usually not a consciously held opinion), we often move toward leadership positions before gaining sufficient knowledge of the community's members, concerns, and contexts. Even without this vital information, we sometimes believe that we know what the community or organization's goals should be and what needs to be done to achieve those goals.

We can also be unconscious of our tendency to take over the direction of conversations. In other words, we take up valuable time and space without dedicating enough time to listen, to learn, and to gain the skills required for success within the community. Making matters worse, we are all too often unconscious of how people of color read this lack of humility as enactments of privilege and racism.