

Book Club Guide

But I'm NOT Racist: Tools for Well-Meaning Whites

Developed by the author, Kathy Obear

This type of Book Club as well as other white affinity spaces can be a source of support for whites to deepen our capacity and courage to challenge, examine, and unlearn racist attitudes, and to change our behaviors to be far more effective partners in dismantling racism and white supremacy in organizations and in society.

These are many of the questions and prompts I used in a pilot Virtual Book Club in May 2017.

Session #1: Prompts and Homework Suggestions

We first created the container for engaged dialogue, offered some Working Agreements, and then moved into discussion.

Suggested Working Agreements/Community Guidelines

To maximize our connections and learnings, we hope you will:

- Help create a brave space where our comments are directed at racism, white supremacy and how we are impacted by these
- Be fully present to your feelings and thoughts
- Participate fully: honest, authentic
- Share the air-time: Move in, move out
- Speak from own experience, sharing feelings, behaviors, and impact
- Listen deeply, especially if you first disagree or feel defensive
- Engage each other respectfully
- Engage yourself respectfully
- Notice if you feel triggered, explore what that is about, be willing to share
- Be willing to get honest and authentic, do your self-work
- Relate in and support each other as we heal from the ravages of racism, internalized white supremacy, white privilege, etc. (not the space for debate, devil's advocate, critiquing people personally)
- Maintain confidentiality
 - No recording
 - No names shared, or their individual stories you hear here
 - Do share your insights, learnings, and common dynamics and experiences

Introduction

- Reflect: Why do you do racial justice work?
 - Work as an ally to interrupt racism?
- Can you relate to Kathy's fear of being called racist?
 - What are you, we as whites, afraid of?
- How has having this fear impacted your ability and development as a white change agent?
- Can you remember and share an example where you were confronted on your behaviors that others experienced as racist?
- How did you navigate the aftermath?
 - Like Kathy: isolation, shame, withdrawal?
 - Running away, hiding from the reality and the truth of the depth of the racist attitudes and beliefs she had absorbed?
 - Other ways?
- Can anyone share an example of "fronting" or performing: How we learned what to say in front of people of color and other whites to appear competent enough to not get challenged?
- Can you relate to creating and maintaining artificial relationships with people of color?
- And who can relate to over-confronting other whites to try to appear like the "good one"?
- How have you reacted less effectively if confronted, called-in on your behaviors?
- Who has felt lost, thinking and/or saying about people of color: "What else do they want from me? I don't know what else to do?"
- When have you resisted gathering with other whites to explore the probable racist attitudes and behaviors you/we do?
- Remember a time you responded pretty effectively when someone confronted you about behaviors they experienced as racist. What happened?
- How, if at all, do you relate to Kathy's comment, "I believe we sell our soul, our humanity for white privilege."

Chapter 1: I Mean, I Can't Be Racist!

- What are your common triggered reactions if confronted on your behaviors?
 - Fight
 - How dare you confront me?
 - Flight
 - Leave, run away
 - Freeze
 - Shut down
 - Flounder
 - Spin out of control
 - Another F word?
- How effective are these triggered, stress reactions?
- What are some of the feelings and thoughts you had when you were confronted?
- What are some of your fears about being confronted in the moment? And what could happen afterwards?
- Can you relate to how Kathy sometimes feels anger at being confronted? Wanting to say, “Didn’t I earn some grace for all I have done in the past? For you?”
- Who has used these common Dialogue Traps: defense mechanisms
 - PLEs? Perfectly Logical Explanations
 - That was not my intent!
 - You are blowing this out of proportion!
 - That’s not what I said? You misunderstood me!
 - This is an isolated incident!
 - That has nothing to do with race!
 - You’re too sensitive, playing the race card!
 - HOW you confronted me was unprofessional, inappropriate
 - Using tone policing
 - I say that to white people, too
 - Credentialing: my best friend, who happens to be black, says it ok to say this
 - At least I am trying and showing up at committee meetings...give me a break.
- Anyone relate to ever feeling, “Damned if I do, damned if I don’t!”
 - And so, sat back, watched, observed, stayed under the radar
- What have you done AFTER the interaction where you were confronted?
 - Gossiped to other whites
 - Denigrating the person of color
 - Avoided
 - Resented
 - Punished them, sought retribution

- When, if at all, is guilt and shame useful as white allies?
- What can be the impact of “white women’s tears”?
 - When, if ever, can white women’s tears not be a trigger? Unproductive?
 - How, if at all, might we navigate group dynamics effectively when a white person cries?
- After being confronted, how many have looked to people of color to teach us, tell what not to do in the future?
 - What, if anything, could be problematic about this dynamic?
- How do you/could you make meaning/view it when a person of color confronts you:
 - So you are more open, willing and engaged?

Chapter 2: Becoming Aware of Our Racist Comments ~ Socialization

- **Reflection questions** that may be useful in book clubs:
 - When was the 1st time you realized you were white?
 - How were whites depicted in the media/tv, history books, literature, kid’s books? How were people of color depicted?
 - How did people you looked up to/respected talk about: whites, people of color? People who identify as multiracial? Race, racism?
 - What were some of the ways you saw whites get treated and talked about?
 - People of color get treated and talked about?
 - How were you learning about race, whiteness, and white privilege?
 - Even if you didn't notice it at the time
- (As people share, relate in and try to connect with each other’s stories, experiences
 - See the similarities and differences)
- What racially coded language or not-so-coded comments did you hear growing up?
- Reflect, what were some of the racist stereotypes around you?
 - That you may have unconsciously absorbed, if not consciously bought into?
- Who, if anyone, offered you an alternative narrative, view of race and racism?
- If members of your family reinforced racist attitudes and behaviors, how do you feel and think about them today?

- What, if any, dilemmas do you experience as you engage them?
- How might your early socialization have impacted how you:
 - Engaged with people of color and whites?
 - Treated people of color and whites?
 - Chose where to live? Socialize? Connect in your community? Where to work?
- What are some examples of how you acted out of racist beliefs and stereotypes when you were younger?
 - Accepted white privilege, whiteness as right, better?
- What are some early experiences that began to challenge you and help you wake up?
 - To question the racist socialization
 - To unlearn racist stereotypes
 - To recognize the truth about racism, white supremacy, whiteness, white privilege?
- Who have been role models for you of effective white change agents?
 - How did you/can you engage with them? And others?

Suggested homework for Session #2 (Chapters 3-4):

- Write your race journey
 - Key moments, milestones, turning points
 - Share it with a few other people within your racial identity group
 - Identify the racist beliefs and stereotypes one might have absorbed in these early experiences
- Read Chs 3-4 in prep for the next session
 - Take some notes on the types of racist microaggressions you see, hear about
 - Note those you have done in the past, recently
 - Note examples of internalized dominance that you see, think, and/or act on
- Relate into the Dialogue Traps
 - Come with some examples
- Reflect on times you effectively responded to disrupt racist dynamics. Come with 1-2 examples to share.
- Take the Harvard Implicit Bias test, or another similar assessment
- Reflect on the costs of racism to whites
- And what's in it for whites to be consistent, persistent change agents?

Chapter 3: Recognizing Racist Comments and Actions: Tools to Respond

Note: Remind participants to print out and come prepared to discuss several of the handouts on Kathy's website, www.drkathyobear.com/facebook:

1. Common Patterns of Racist Attitudes and Behaviors of Many Whites
 2. *PAIRS*: EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE SKILLS
- Who can relate to being like Gabriela's friend? A person of color confronts you about not speaking up, and you freeze, don't know what to say, and don't really understand what their concern was?
 - What are some of the racist microaggressions you have witnessed, experienced or done?
 - What was the probable impact of these?
 - Who has seen or done these types of racist microaggressions:
 - Whites greet other whites enthusiastically, and are far more impersonal, if they greet people of color at all
 - Talk over people of color
 - Interrupt people of color
 - Rephrase what a person of color just said
 - Not notice that a person of color made a point until someone notes that a white person just repeated what a person of color had said earlier.
 - Not notice that a person of color gets more questions, criticism, and argument against their ideas; more challenges to their data and evidence
 - People of color have to prove they are competent; they are not given the benefit of the doubt or initially assumed to be competent
 - No one follows up or comments on a person of color's suggestions
 - Misunderstand, not fully grasp the comments of a person of color
 - People of color are asked to repeat their directions and questions
 - Seem to listen less intently when people of color speak; having side conversations, looking at their phones or reading materials
 - People of color are assumed to be in service or support roles; not readily recognized as the leader of the group
 - Not follow the directions of the leader of color; decide to do it a different way
 - Not being introduced or addressed with the same level of credentialing or formality as white peers
 - Having their names mispronounced
 - Being mistaken for another person of color in the department
 - Receive resistance or criticism if raise concerns about racial justice in the organization
 - Not invited to informal social activities where relationships get built

- Not get the same level of informal coaching and mentoring, stretch opportunities
 - Expected to show up and do extra work to raise the organization's racial profile and reputation
- How often do these types of daily indignities happen to people of color compared to whites of a similar position or level?
 - What are some examples of the cumulative impact many people of color experience in organizations that you have observed or been told about?
 - How do you feel knowing that most, if not all, people of color experience numerous racist microaggressions every single day?
 - What are some examples of “whitesplaining” or “re-centering whiteness” you have observed or participated in?
 - How would you define the term, “internalized dominance?”
 - As we discuss the handout, *Common Patterns of Racist Attitudes and Behaviors of Many Whites*, downloaded from Kathy's website: www.drkathyobear.com/racebook, what are some examples of racist behaviors or attitudes you have seen from other whites?
 - What are some you have thought, felt, or done some time in your life? Recently?
 - What is the “pay-off” or benefit to us as whites when we continue to believe these racist thoughts and perpetuate racist actions?
 - What are some examples when we fall into the trap, “That was not my intent!”
 - Why do we sometimes use Perfectly Logical Explanations when confronted with examples of racist dynamics?
 - What are other examples of Dialogues Traps?
 - Any reactions to the example of engaging the white faculty member who said, “I'm color-blind?”
 - Which of the various tools and skills in the *PAIRS* model have you used in conversations with whites about race and racial justice?
 - What was the probable impact when you used these tools?
 - How have you engaged other whites less productively that did not result in deeper understanding, connection, and learning?
 - What was probably fueling why you reacted in these less productive ways?
 - What was the probable impact of your reaction?

Chapter 4: Why Would Whites Want to Change?

- Any reactions to taking the Harvard Implicit Bias Test or a similar tool?
- What experiences help you come from a place of humility and willingness to keep learning and unlearning?
- What are some of the costs of racism, white privilege, and white supremacy that you resonate with?
 - Whites live in isolation, separate worlds
 - We walk on eggshell around people of color
 - Feel more anxious and incompetent
 - Stay silent for fear of being called racist
 - Feel awkward and uncomfortable in situations with people of color
 - Don't show up as our authentic selves
 - Have superficial relationships with people of color
 - Stay distant from whites who are more aware and active change agents
 - Waste time and energy fronting, performing
 - Leave people behind, feel alone as a change agent
 - Tension, conflict in our families, among friends, partners
 - Loss of relationships with other whites
 - Value transactions, tasks over people and relationships
 - Teams under-perform
 - Lack of retention; revolving door = short-staffed, costs to organization to hire, loss of revenue
 - Constraint of living within white cultural norms: having to hold in emotions, be impersonal, compete and debate, work in isolation as an individual, live in constant urgency and perfectionism, always concerned you are not good enough, could be fired
 - Learned a one-dimensional view of history; biased current news and information
 - Shame and guilt when we realize the truth of how whites perpetuate and benefit from racism
 - Guilt and shame of recognizing our own racist attitudes and behaviors, how we benefit from white privilege
 - The level of fear, distrust, and hatred we carry towards people of color
 - We lead such limited, narrow lives
 - Live in fear that people of color will do to us what we do/have done to them
 - Do not have the critical skills and competencies to work on diverse teams or serve increasingly racially diverse populations
 - Work with incompetent white leaders
 - Lack of capacity to build coalitions to create greater equity and inclusion for all
 - Loss of our humanity
- What are examples from history and current day of effective white change agents?

- Why do you do racial justice work? What are the benefits of doing this work?
- Who can relate to some of the unproductive motivations for doing this work?
 - To help people of color
 - To lessen or avoid feelings of guilt and shame
 - Prove you are a “good white” in order to avoid looking at the impact of your racist behaviors
- Can you relate to stopping out or dropping out of this work?
 - What were some of the reasons?
- How do you build your resilience to stay engaged for the long haul?
 - What benefits of racial justice work help you stay in it?

Suggested homework:

- Read Chapters 5-6
- Think about your own racial journey through the Path to Competence©
- Come with examples of:
 - White privilege
 - White cultural dynamics in organizations, society
 - Racist policies, practices, and services in organizations and society
- Begin to use the MCOB model to identify the current state of development in your organization
- Review Chapter 6 and be prepared to share some examples about:

Chapter 5: How Do I Get There From Here?

- (Consider starting this session with people sharing examples of progress: personal as well as what they are observing in their organizations
 - To keep up our energy, passion, and commitment as change agents, it is important to share examples of “how far we have come” while we gear up to work harder on “how far we need to go”.)
- What are some examples of when you were in the **Box of Denial**?
 - Unaware of how ineffective we were/are
- The **Box of Judgment**
 - What examples of “social justice arrogance” have you had? Experienced?
 - What is the impact when we blame and shame other whites?
 - Sit in our own blame, shame, and guilt?

- How do you relate to Kathy's experience, " ...one of the only ways I got any relief from my deep shame was to blame and shame other white people as I aggressively confronted them on their racist behaviors. As long as I could focus on others and judge them, I could avoid focusing on myself."
- **Box of Fear**
 - More aware, still mostly ineffective
 - Examples of when you were/are afraid you will be called racist?
 - What are some of your fears as a white ally?
 - Making a mistake
 - Making things worse
 - Saying something racist
 - Share examples of how other whites nudged you, effectively confronted you in your development.
 - How, if at all, do you relate to Kathy's shift from seeing the billboard, "Less intense, just as effective."
 - How, if at all, do you relate to Kathy's comment, "I felt deep remorse for how I traded my humanity for the illusion of superiority and white privilege."
 - Describe times you have sat with the deep grief and remorse, the pain of realizing the impact you have had on people of color.
 - Have you experienced the dynamic that Kathy describes, "...the more I talked about my racist attitudes and actions, the more the other white participants seemed willing to look at themselves and talk about their own experiences. The more they shared, the more I felt connected to them at a deeper emotional level."
- **Box of Engagement**
 - Share stories of times you were able to engage and respond more effectively as a white change agent, even though you still had to think about it and intentionally focus.
 - Share examples of how other whites supported you, nudged you in your development.
- **Box of Competence**
 - Any examples of "being in the flow" and being very effective? Not having to think about it, just responding in unconscious competence?
- **Suggested Competencies of White Change Agents**
 - Using a scale of 0-10: 0 = not at all to 10 = fully competent, rate yourself on the following competencies:

- Knowing and understanding the history of race and racism
 - Recognizing white privilege
 - Interrupting white privilege
 - Recognizing white culture
 - Shifting white cultural practices
 - Recognizing racist microaggressions
 - Recognizing the impact of racist actions
 - Interrupting and shifting racist microaggressions
 - Recognizing resistance
 - Engaging resistance effectively
 - Building connections with other whites
 - Engaging out of compassion
- **White Affinity Groups**
 - How have you felt about white caucuses/affinity spaces in the past?
 - When have you found white affinity/white caucuses useful?
 - What are your reactions to ways Kathy sets up and facilitates white caucus spaces?
 - What else have you seen or experienced that is helpful?
 - What have been some unhelpful, problematic behaviors and attitudes of whites in white affinity spaces?
 - What have been most useful to your learning and healing in white affinity spaces?
 - How have you found or created white affinity spaces?

Chapter 6: Creating Change at the Organizational Level

- **White Privilege**
 - When do you remember first realizing you received white privilege?
 - What were your feelings and reactions?
 - How do you relate, if at all, to Kathy's comment, "It was and still is painful to sit in the reality that I received a multitude of advantages because people of color are oppressed and denied basic human rights."
 - What are some examples of white privilege you have noticed? Received?

- What are your reactions to Kathy’s reflection, “As I deepened my awareness, I felt such guilt and shame. I questioned my competence and skills. Had I gotten this job because I was white and people assumed I was smarter, more capable, and a better leader and employee? When the illusion of meritocracy came crashing down, I felt devastated. It was so difficult to begin to wonder if people liked, respected, and accepted me because I was smart and competent, or because I was white and colluded with white culture and racism. I began to question just about everything in my life.”
- **White Culture**
 - When did you first begin to recognize the ways white cultural values are embedded in most aspects of predominantly white organizations?
 - What does “being professional” mean in your organization?
 - How many of the characteristics of *White Supremacy Culture*, in article by Tema Okun, do you experience in your organizational culture?
 - What is the impact of white cultural dynamics, including: perfectionism, urgency, only one right way, objectivity, power hoarding, worship of the written word, the right to comfort, either-or-thinking, quantity over quality, fear of open conflict, and individualism impact:
 - productivity
 - creativity
 - morale
 - team work
 - How have you shifted white cultural practices to be more inclusive?
- **Institutional Racism**
 - What are examples of racist practices and white cultural norms in hiring practices?
 - What racially coded phrases have you heard?
 - How do you explain why the term, “qualified minorities” is troublesome and racist?
 - What hiring practices minimize racist dynamics?
 - What are your reactions to Kathy’s focus on shifting from using hiring to only increase racial demographics to focusing on hiring a more racially diverse AND culturally competent staff?
 - How are the performance management practices in most organizations inherently racist?
 -

- What are other examples of institutional racism in organizations?
 - In society?
- **Multicultural Organizational Development (MCOD)**
 - Does your organization have a shared vision of a racially just organization?
 - A shared understanding of the current state?
 - A clear analysis of the gap between where you are and where you say you want to go?
 - How, if at all, do you relate to this comment from the book, “Most organizations seem to have a change process that is haphazard, unplanned, and incremental as well as one that is often hastily formed in reaction to the most recent crisis or negative headline (Harper, 2011; Marchesani & Jackson, 2005; Obear & Kerr, 2015).
 - What are some examples of Stage 1-2, Monocultural Organizations?
 - Stages 3-4: Non-Discriminating Organizations?
 - Stage 5-6: Inclusive Organizations?
 - Which Stage do you think best describes the current state of your organization?
 - What is your evidence?
 - What resistance exists as people work to create greater racial justice in your organization?

Homework:

- Read Chapters 7-8
 - Come with 1+ dilemmas and situations where you feel stuck ~ so we can coach each other.
 - Think about how you will continue to keep learning as a white change agent.

Chapter 7: Responding to Racist Situations

- Talk about times you have observed other whites respond and intervene in effective ways:
 - What seemed useful about their responses?
 - What was the impact of their response?
 - How did you feel as they were engaging and responding?

- What did you learn from observing them?
- Share a time you noticed a racist dynamic and responded relatively effectively?
 - What did you say and do?
 - What was the impact?
 - What motivated you to speak up?
- Think of times you didn't speak up.
 - What are reasons we chose to not speak up?
 - What is the probable impact?
- Which of the fears in the book do you relate to feeling?
 - Any others?
- What are your common triggered reactions in racist dynamics: fight, flight, freeze, and/or flounder?
- What is your reaction to Kathy's encouragement to reach out and develop relationships with other whites in your organization now, to deepen your working relationships, especially with those you judge as "not getting it"?
- What are some possible ways to engage whites when confronted about a racist comment, and their first response is, "That wasn't my intent!"
- What are some ways you can engage a white colleague who has a pattern of shifting the conversation away from race to focus on one of their marginalized identities?
- Who has an example of a racist comment or behavior that we can use to practice using the skills in *PAIRS*?
 - How could we use PANNING to begin the conversation?
 - What questions could we ASK to engage the other white person?
 - How might we INTERRUPT the dynamic?
 - What are ways to RELATE IN?
 - How could we SHARE about our own feelings and experiences as we engage this person?
- What are your reactions to these various skills in *PAIRS*?
 - How else have you used them effectively?
 - Or could imagine using them in the future with other whites?
- Are there other examples Kathy described or ways she engaged whites that got your attention? You want to discuss further?
- Let's use some of our examples and identify possible ways to respond.

- Who has an example? (Or, you can have everyone write down 2-3 specific situations, each one on a separate piece of paper. Have them fold them up and throw them into the center of the group. Then ask someone to pick one, read it, and ask the group for ideas to respond. You might first ask them how they imagine feeling in that situation, and why.)
- (Continue discussing ways to respond to at least 5-7 examples.)
- Take a deep breath. How are you feeling as we have just discussed ways to respond to multiple racist dynamics?
- Who has sometimes felt triggered and thrown off-balance in these types of situations?
 - What are some ways we can regain our center, get more grounded so we can respond more effectively?
 - (You may want to share this link with members who would like to know more about navigating their triggered reactions. www.drkathyobear.com/book-pdf On this site, they can download a free copy of my book, *Turn the Tide: Rise Above Toxic, Difficult Situations in the Workplace*. It is also available on Amazon.)

Chapter 8: Conclusion

- How have you reacted when people raised issues with your behaviors or attitudes?
- What are productive ways whites can stay in the conversation as we are confronted about our behaviors and attitudes?
- What do you think of Kathy's approach to focus on racist behaviors and attitudes, but not call people racist?
- How will you keep unlearning racism and deepening your capacity as a white change agent?
- What, if anything, has been the impact of participating in this Book Club?
- What have you appreciated about this group?

Developed by Kathy Obear, 2017 www.drkathyobear.com
 To access the handouts and resources, www.drkathyobear.com/racebook