**How to Design Racially Safe Spaces in the Workplace**

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Racially safe spaces may not mean much to some people. It may sound obsolete, archaic and even out of date for some. All the more so in 2017. Afterall, there is no such thing as segregation or racial prejudice in today’s times, right?

Well, you’re wrong.

If you are a person who have ever been the racial minority or token person of color in a public space, you may have noticed the effects that it has had on you. From how you behave and conduct yourself in front of others, to even perhaps being overly mindful about associating yourself with certain racial stereotypes.

To feel **racially unsafe** is to be painfully aware of being the only token race in a room. It means carrying the burden of being sole representation of an entire group. In a completely or relatively homogenous group, such as a business meeting full of white colleagues for example, it can be difficult to feel racially safe when you are the only person of color in the room. This marries well to the example of being the only woman in the room. Although not racial, your gender identity also puts you at risk of feeling unsafe in a room. This is why identities and social privileges can have deep effects on you and your ability to be physically and mentally safe in any environment, thus how you perform at work (or more importantly, how you are **perceived** at work).

So how can we design racially safe spaces in the workplace, such as an office or a meeting room, or any spaces that requires active collaboration?

To design racially safe spaces, what is helpful is if all members of the team is trained to be **quietly** cognizant about the lack of diversity in the room. Note the word **quietly –** voicing racial injustices or bringing attention to the only person or color can make everyone in the room uncomfortable, the same way calling out the only person of non-abled body to speak about their experiences, or treating the only other gender of the room in a different way from the rest is uncomfortable.

When I say **quietly cognizant**, it is to prevent individuals from altering their behavior or being overtly conscious. Becoming mindful to racial inequities does not need to be an uncomfortable experience, but a path towards developing your collaborative and communication skills.

Racially safe spaces are spaces where each person in the room, regardless of their race, feels safe to express who they are without fear of retribution. This should be achieved, not by erasing the race of every member in the room (an impractical approach) but by being cognizant of our racial identities as a intuitive, natural part of each person’s identity and accepting them as who they are.

When I look at North American history, it is hard for me to deny how odd racial identities have progressed throughout the years. We went from using racial differences to fuel the foundations for capitalism and the betterment of the white race, to banning racism and making it taboo. Racism, as it seems looking back, was outlawed overnight. This failed to teach the people how to treat or view different racial identities in the globalized world. Most of our gut reaction to racial identities are racist – because the legacy of racism continues on today. No singular person can overcome centuries of prejudice that is culturally embedded in our society.

We went straight to ignoring race altogether. But your racial identity is a part of you – it is visible, it is one the first characteristic about you that people notice about you, and it contributed to who you are today, just like ethnic, gender, sexuality, or any other social identities make up who you are.

Starting from a place that acknowledges our history and who we are and how different our experiences are, and being compassionate not dismissive, is the first step into creating racially safe environments in the workplace.

By the way, why is it important to write about designing racially safe work spaces? Because in North America there are 90% of caucasainns.

active visibility of each persons’ awareness can help. Although it is not an all fix solution, as some people may find the active voicing and attention to their tokenness uncomfortable, it is a starting ground to make aware what is painfully obvious.

This does not work with invisible identities, such as sexuality or class. However, to pretend to not notice race or gender, something that anyone with vision can immediately mentally assess in a room, is to turn a blind eye to what is painfully obvious. So limiting the issue to race, which is visible – it helps to voice the concern. It will also help, if the voice of concern comes not from the person of minority race, but a majority race.

You will hear me speak about the importance of both minority and majority identities working together on issues such as diversity and equity in other articles as well, and it is no exception here.

It is important that the voice that start the conversation going is one from the majority identity, in order to prevent the misconception. Minority anything, is an easier target than majority. This is a true of a red golfball in a sea of white golf balls, and it is true of race in human context.

By acknowledging the

This is extremely tricky to do – so I strongly do not suggest that if you are white person that you do not go into every meeting and pointing out the first person of color you see. Sometimes mental awareness and sensitivity to these issues is the first step anyone can take into allowing to create a safe space for all.

My articles always ties back to the concept of fairness, or equity. Fairness is a hard concept to grasp, it is a not a perfect science for which there is an exact equation that leads to a solution. It is subjective to each own, and like the law, it can sometimes fail us. But to ask what is fair is better than to not address it at all. Because by struggling to find the answer you are closer if not more knowledgable the factors at play.

So I ask you – that if you are person of color or the minority in a room: To not be overly sensitive to the fact that you are the only “Blank” in the room. Most times, people are too busy and wrapped up in their worlds to notice. And when there is a lack of awareness, you being overly aware and sensitive to your racial identity can do you more harm, than anything else.

I ask that if you are a member of the majority – whether that means you are racially the majority in the room, or you and rest of your colleagues have worked in the same office the longest amount of time, or that you are the majority anything – to be aware and mindful about the lack of diversity. With the same advice I also ask that you do not go overboard in your fight or sense of responsibilitly over the issue of unfair racial makeup or diversity, because no single person is fully responsible for a lack of diversity in a company or a school – there are so many socio-economic-cultural factors at play here. So I relieve you of your responsibility to overact, but to instill your responsibility to care, and to encourage you to become more knowledgable about racial identities and how that works against minorities and people of colour.

To feel racially unsafe, is to constantly filter my social interactions and behaviours in order to not highlight parts of my personality that might prompt cpmparisons to existing sterotypes.

To feel racially unsafe, is not being able to be your true self, in fear of being rejected for your race with your peers.

So is it necessary to design racially safe spaces? I believe it is.

So how do we do that?

Beverly Daniel Tatu speaks about the importance of forming a positive racial identity about yourself from a young age. In countries built by immigration and migration, and political and cultural mixing pots such as America and Canada, due to the historical legacy of racisms this is proven to be especially difficult. It affects all children who are not caucasian by birth.

in clear words what microaggresion that I experienced as a person of color was in empirical terms, but it was also interesting to watch various people's reactio to me reading a book with the title "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together at the Cafeteria?". More than once, I got glances and raised eyebrows from fellow commuters or people in the office.

Reading Beverly Daniel’s Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together at the Cafeteria? was a metamorphic experience for me. Not only did I for the first time in my life, had an academic explanation to all the microaggression that I experienced as a person of color, but it also gave me the language I needed to finally speak about my experiences.

https://www.amazon.ca/Black-Kids-Sitting-Together-Cafeteria/dp/0465083617

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGZniOuoREU

![Nulla faucibus vestibulum eros in tempus. Vestibulum tempor imperdiet velit nec dapibus](./1.jpg)

in spaces such as school, work, and other environments, you may realize the importance of having racially safe spaces.

As a previous refugee and immigrant, who have lived in what is widely claimed as the one of the most diverse places in the world in Canada, I have not personally felt safe in my racial identity my entire life. The reality is

totally not necessary, and it might even make some people feel uncomfortable. I also imagine there are some people who instantly understands the importance of instilling racially safe spaces in our work, schools and other environments.

Speaking as a person of colour, a Canadian, a person with a higher education and operating mainly in downtown of Toronto - I personally do not feel safe in my racial identity at my school or work or professional spaces. The reality is that if I, a South Korea born feel unsafe in my relatively passable racial identity of the Asian race, feel this way, this is doubly amplified in the experiences of a more visible minority with less privileges than mine.