

Response to 'Critical Whiteness Studies' survey

Race matters. We, at the YWCA of Minneapolis where our mission is to eliminate racism and empower women and girls, appreciate the fact that a 'Critical Whiteness Study' survey was conducted by the University of Minnesota sociology department because it adds empirical factual information to our body of knowledge about race relations. It affirms our belief that sharing life experiences and cultural histories is essential to create understanding across culture, race, and ethnicity. When people of diverse cultures, including white people of European descent, come together and become resource people for each other, they create understanding. This understanding leads to action. Action leads to change. When people of all races, cultures, and ethnicities motivate themselves to become allies, whose collective power creates change. Change created by diverse people working together is a powerful, positive force. That's why our Community Dialogues are so important. We encourage people to organize their own facilitated dialogues where they invite their friends, family, neighbors, and work colleagues to come together and share stories. In this experience, everyone who participates gets an understanding of what it's like for those who are not white, who are not advantaged by their skin color and race.

The topic of race encompasses many people, and we believe it must include perspectives from a wide range of racially diverse people beyond white, black and Latino people: Native American, people of diverse Asian cultures, Middle Eastern cultures, multiracial people who define their identities rather than being required to choose one category or culture, among others. The topic of race is enriched when people are asked to bring their histories to share with each other, and also when they raise questions and issues to be discussed and analyzed critically for the purpose of broadening the base of our understanding.

Data from this study is important, and the truth is in the details, often far more complex and interesting than anyone could have imagined. Professor Hartmann and his colleagues suggest in their analyses "that whiteness is both an identity for some, and an absence of identity for others; that it captures awareness and understanding of social inequalities of some, and the absence of such understandings; that it is at once ubiquitous and privileged, localized and universal—are the essence of the phenomenon of whiteness." We find in our Unlearning Racism workshops that talking and listening to each other is key to helping understand this complex thing called racism. By listening to each other and learning the details people begin the process of exploding stereotypes and generalities. This is why the YWCA of Minneapolis calls 'eliminating racism' a journey rather than a destination. Eliminating racism is our mission, and we are serious in our pursuit of this journey.

Many government, business, and community leaders understand that it is important to talk about race – that talk is action. It's why our Fourth Annual IT'S TIME TO TALK: FORUMS ON RACE two-hour luncheon is successful in drawing 700 people each year. These leaders bring colleagues, co-workers, and friends to hear nationally known keynote speakers discuss race and ethnicity and pose questions to the audience who then dialogue

at their tables. It's been a huge success. It creates a safe place to talk about an unsafe subject.

Race matters. Doing something to improve race relations matters. Getting more people involved in the conversation and determined to do something by creating understanding that leads to action and positive change is worth our time and energy. Thinking of ourselves as cultural people and learning more about the many cultures that enrich our lives is one of the ways we can add purpose and meaning to our lives.