

Inner Work to Combat Racism: Distancing Behaviors

People within dominant groups (males, “white” people, people without disabilities, heterosexuals, etc.) often employ these techniques to avoid acknowledging and acting on oppression.

Tactic	Explanation
1. Denial	Denial of existence or responsibility for the oppression. When an issue involves racial justice: “It’s not about race, it’s really more about class” “Racism ended when Obama was elected”
2. Deflecting or Minimizing	Changing the subject, minimizing oppression when we see it: “Enough about racism, what about the drones in Pakistan?” “People of color may have it rough here, but at least they’re better off than people in Afghanistan or Mexico.”
3. Blaming the Targeted Group	When faced with an incident of police brutality against a person of color, we think, “What was the ‘victim’ doing wrong to deserve it?”
4. Over-Analyzing	Nitpicking about definitions of oppression to prove their existence, when we wouldn’t do the same for other subjects. Debating the problem ad nauseum without taking any action.
5. Scapegoating	Shifting conversation to an extreme example of <i>someone else’s</i> oppressive behavior. “We’re all all-white community and haven’t really looked at racism in our communal structures- true. But you should listen to my mother-in-law - she’s sooooo racist! It’s terrible!” The accusing person feel righteous, and meaningful discussion is closed down.
6. They Just Didn't Know	When soup line guests make racist comments, making excuses and rationalizing: “It was only a joke, don't take everything so seriously. They don’t know any better. We don’t want to make a scene.”
7. Targeting the Expert	Without a real relationship, asking a person of color to represent all others in a tokenistic way: “What do Arab Americans think about the Syria situation?”
8. Claiming Innocence	“There aren’t that many people of color in our town, so our community doesn’t make it a priority to address racism.” “We participate as little as we can in ‘the system’, so we’re not responsible for structural racism.”
9. Competing Victimization	Claiming that people of color have too much/enough power: “The events of the local Hispanic culture group are diverting resources away from our (very important) ministry to women.”
10. Savior Complex*	Unrealistic view of ourselves as indispensable to people of color without acknowledgment of the privilege dynamics present. Guilt, shame, and a desperation to help, without being asked. “White hero” complex.
11. Superiority Complex*	Inappropriately taking leadership positions within communities of color; overestimation of our education and skills/underestimation of our inexperience; an “I know best” attitude.
12. Sympathy Trap*	Outrage over racism morphs into pity, causing us to act in disempowering, paternalistic ways; over-analysis without action; focusing only on the results of racism while underplaying groups’ resources and successes.

From **Witnessing Whiteness, Shelly Tochluk*