

Some thoughts from a white first time attendee of the White Privilege Conference for other white attendees.

1. **It's all about you, but it's not all about YOU.** Being white in the United States means you are a member of a "one up" group relative to "one down" groups with other racial identities. In general, members of "one up" groups have a hard time seeing themselves as members of a group; they prefer to see themselves as individuals and to attribute their success to their individual effort. A significant part of the awakening is recognizing that you, as a white person, are part of a "one up" group which receives benefits based on skin color. Your job is to see yourself as a part of a group of white people, and, conversely, to see people of color as individuals. Identifying yourself as a member of a group can also help prevent making yourself the center of attention or taking things too personally, both of which can derail the process of taking responsibility for your "one up" group status.
2. **Statements like, "White is a color, too," or "There is only one race, the human race," or "I'm not white: I'm pinkish-tan," are not helpful.** These comments are true but they obfuscate the discussion. No one really has black, white, red or yellow skin, and skin color is a continuum of pigmentation. While these comments do affirm the unity of the human species, they have the effect of minimizing the very real and pernicious effect of a non-white racial identity in a white dominant culture. The challenge is holding two seemingly contradictory ideas at once: race is not a biological distinction and the social/political construct of racial identity has significant effects on people's physical and psychological health, and economic wellbeing.
3. **Respect the space- physical, verbal, and personal.** When an event at WPC is only for people of color, don't go if you consider yourself white. It's natural to be curious about what is going on, but showing up is plain rude, and in it, you are putting your need to know above others' need for privacy, and privileging your whiteness. Resist this. The same is true in discussion and questions during small group sessions. White people tend to talk too much- you know it's true! We are used to using up all the verbal space. Practice silence and listening, and be honest with yourself about the difference between storytelling for your benefit and asking a question. Storytelling is wonderful in the right place, but not when it's masked as a question. Lastly, respect the personal space of people of color. It is a natural that in our good intentions, we white people at WPC will try to make eye contact with every person of color we see. Most of the people of color at WPC will have their share of white friends, are not looking to make more and will avoid eye contact. Sit with this discomfort and recognize that it is likely what people of color experience everyday in white environments.
4. **Competing with other white people to be the best anti-racist is a display of whiteness.** Feeling superior to other white people who aren't "as far along" as you are or as "open-minded" or use "incorrect" terminology is going to be an irresistible temptation, both at WPC and at home. It might help to remember that white people as a group value the individual, individual competence and competition very highly, so these temptations are part of our cultural heritage. You can play out these values or choose other ones instead. A dichotomy of "good" whites and "bad" whites is a non-starter.
5. **I want my lsm's to be Wasm's.** (Credit to Steve Jones) White culture values the outcome over

the process. From that viewpoint, it is natural to want to have figured out all the subtleties and skills of anti-racism work right away. Remember that being a learner is more than ok; it is a desirable state of mind. Skill building comes from experience and experience comes from learning and mistakes. Also, having an identity as a member of a “one down” group doesn’t automatically give you skills in managing your “one up” status in other areas. Everyone has growth potential for skill building.

6. **The “painful work” narrative can be a downer.** This work is about taking responsibility for the white superiority and racism that we have internalized in our acculturation and identity development. It can produce a lot of guilt, sadness and anger, and participation in the WPC can cause emotional distress. However hard work can be more than painful; it can also be done with playfulness, love, and kindness to self and others, and can liberate a tremendous amount of energy.
7. **Taking care of yourself is not just advised, it is critical.** Attending all the events at WPC can cause informational overload and paralysis. Don’t be a martyr. Take care of yourself by exercising, staying in your room to read a book, practicing mindfulness or whichever coping skill helps you care for yourself. Your ability to take care of yourself parallels the larger question of “for whom are you doing this work?” This is not a humanitarian mission or a do-gooder effort to help the “underprivileged.” This is more than helping others; it is about helping yourself expand your empathy and humanity and heal from the illness of racism and white privilege, so that participating in systems of injustice and inhumanity is no longer tolerable.
8. **If it all gets too much and you can’t take it anymore.** You can retreat into white privilege by walking out the door. Unfortunately, it’s just that easy.