



**There is one thing that drives me absolutely nuts.
It is when people say “*I don’t see color. We’re all the same.*”**

I usually assume the statement comes from a good and sometimes fragile place. It is an attempt to soothe the complexities of discussing race. Even in contemporary America, we are still very uncomfortable with this topic. I've worked in a myriad of great organizations with some that struggled with understanding the relevancy and importance of discussing (1) the implications of race on the workforce and (2) the intersection of race with the overall mission of the organization.

This “**race frigidity**” keeps organizations from moving towards systems of equity. Ultimately, organizations that deny the importance of this topic falter or at most, hold on to status quo performance (which, over time, leads to irrelevancy and faltering anyway). The reality is if we don't have actual sight impairments, we DO see color. The other reality is we are NOT all the same. The best news is we don't need to pretend like we are color-blind or homogeneous. Diversity welcomes our differences and does not require that we explain

away the fact that you and I could be as different as night and day. Race frigidity has caused us to suffer from “**diversity fatigue**.” This is an actual phenomenon best described as being “sick and tired of talking about diversity.”

The important thing to understand about diversity fatigue is what causes it in the first place. It is caused by lived experiences. Diversity fatigue can be caused by the way you grew up. I grew up in the segregated South. Not good times. I have literally been talking about diversity my entire life. I'm exhausted! Sometimes it is caused by a specific experience. That experience has now shaped how you feel about a particular topic or diversity. Keeping up with relevant language is also something that causes diversity fatigue. Remember when queer was a bad word? Now it is a relevant term. These kinds of things cause tip-toeing around language. This causes diversity fatigue. Ever wonder if you're supposed to say Black or African American?

Is it Hispanic or Latino? What we have to remember about diversity fatigue is that there is always something that triggers it in you. You must always know what that trigger is. When our diversity fatigue is triggered, we almost always have a visceral reaction that shows up in our bodies - you know, like deep, irritated huffs, eye-rolling, disengagement, etc. We have to keep this in check as that visceral reaction is almost always confused with other things - even as severe as discrimination.

Race is a loaded topic. Much of the gravity of this rests squarely with the negative history around race we have had in this country. It has polarized us in ways that are indescribable and it has caused insurmountable levels of historical trauma in generations of people. Ignoring this doesn't make our responsibility to tackle racial equity go away.

Our quest to “**just get over it**” is a cursory and insensitive way to move towards systems of equity. You can't have health equity, education justice, racial equity or fairness of any sort if you don't understand the implications of race. If you sterilize this topic by conceptually equalizing all us (this is what happens when we try to ignore the reality that we are not all the same), you are likely to be:

- Stunned, shocked and shaken when the data is presented that challenges your notion of equality. *How could that happen here?*
- Your organizational/community assessment begins to show signs of disengagement or displacement. *Why aren't people connected anymore?*
- You become an outlier in communities that don't look and behave like you. *Why don't I know about what is happening around me? We are industry leaders!*

Organizations and communities are working on the legacy-building work of creating systems of equity. The challenge is no major U.S. system was built with equity in mind - that is our painful history. Not healthcare. Not education. Not even the justice system. This makes our work even more important.

As we chip away at our past to create systems that are built so all of us get what we need to thrive (that's equity!), we have to remember at the core of the work is reconciling racial equity. If we don't eradicate racism and its negative impact, the rest of equity cannot be realized.

We can't have **health equity** if racism exists in the healthcare system.

We can't have **education justice** if racism exists in the education system.

We can't have **justice** for people if racism exists in the justice system.

If we can't talk about race, we simply create version 2.0 of what we already have. I'm not interested in that model.

Are you?