Whiteness as the Anglo-European racial identity in the US has gone through several transformations. Following the Civil War when Jim Crow segregation was established, white supremacy was the dominant form of whiteness. White supremacy was overtly racist maintaining clear economic, political and social lines based on race. Race mattered and white dominated.

Whiteness began its change from white supremacy to colorblindness during the Civil Rights period. Colorblindness is in opposition to white supremacy but it views race and ethnic group membership as irrelevant. Race no longer matters. The individual and our common humanity does. Those who adhere to colorblindness want racism to go away. But colorblindness is a form of aversive racism based on denial that racism still exists and denial that race still matters.

Colorblindness is characterized by the following features:

- Denies that race makes a difference in people’s lives.
  - Based on the overt and covert racism that still exists, race certainly impacts people’s lives: both those who are systematically advantaged by it (whites) and those who are systematically disadvantaged by it (people of color).

- Assumes people are either racist or non-racist.
  - When we think of a racist, we are taught to think of a member of the white supremacy movement. This image reinforces the idea that anyone else can’t possibly be racist in any way, or even think racist thoughts.

- Supposes that we are only individuals, and ignores that we are also part of a system of social inequalities that affects all of our lives.
  - Culture supports stereotypes and social hierarchies. Through exposure to cultural ideologies, including an adherence to the notion of colorblindness, we are socialized to maintain those inequalities. Only by challenging cultural stereotypes and inequalities at both the individual and systemic levels, can we overcome those inequalities.

- Perpetuates the idea that to notice and/or mention race must be racist, and is therefore, taboo.
  - People do, in fact, see race; we have just been taught not to discuss it. Pretending we “don’t see race” discounts the impact race has on our lives, and studies show it is not an effective strategy to combat racism (Anderson, 2010).

- Sees whiteness as the standard to which all other racial/ethnic groups must aspire.
  - Colorblindness believes we all will, and should, assimilate into the “mainstream,” or in other words, whiteness.


- Ignores the experiences and realities of people of color.
  o Under the misguided pretext of equality, colorblindness removes the responsibility we all have for our part in maintaining and perpetuating a racist system. In so doing, it dismisses the reality of inequalities many people of color experience on a daily basis.

- Considers intent, not impact, as important.
  o Due to lack of discussion of race (it’s a taboo, as previously mentioned), many people don’t realize the subtle negative messages their language (both verbal and non-verbal) and behavior might impose on other people. Stating that race doesn’t matter is often heard as, “I don’t want to take responsibility for racial inequalities I might be perpetuating.” The impact of colorblindness, though often well-intentioned, can have severely negative consequences, and can leave scars that are difficult to heal.

- Color is beautiful and colorblindness can’t see it.
  o Colorblindness can serve to disconnect one person from another person; it can sever relationships as it discounts and discredits the experiences of people of color.

Many whites are deeply afraid of dealing with race for fear of appearing racist. Colorblindness serves to deny race as a factor that still advantages whites at the expense of people of color. With colorblindness as a prevailing notion, white still dominates.

An Intersectional Approach:

Seeing the ways in which colorblindness challenges equality, and disconnects us from others, in what ways might blindness to other forms of oppression (based on gender, sexual orientation, etc.) produce the same result?

References: