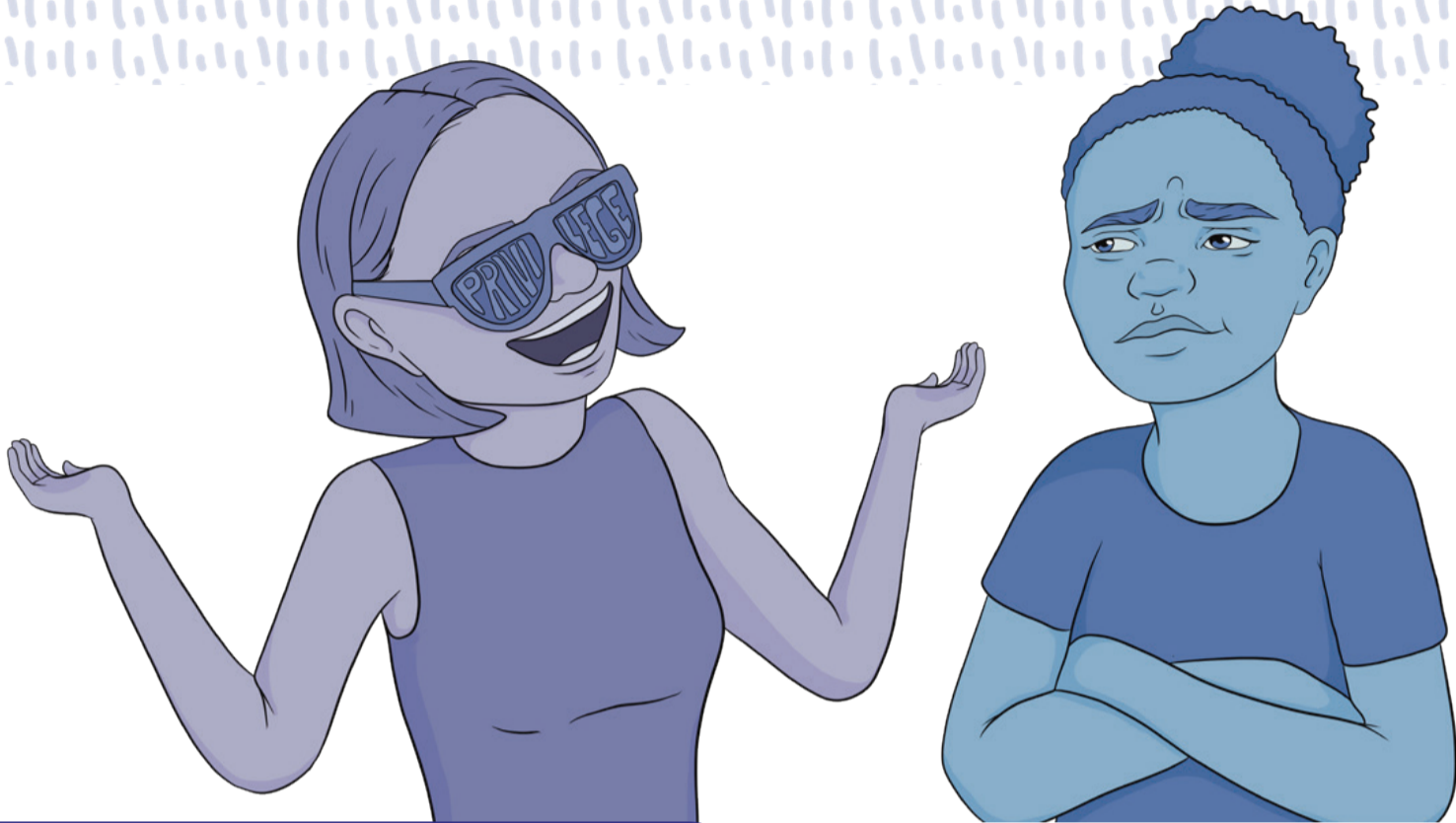


FACT SHEET THREE

THE MISCONCEPTION OF NOT “SEEING” RACE



What's the misconception?

Some people believe that ignoring race – often expressed as “I don’t see colour” – is the best way to treat everyone equally. This mindset assumes that treating everyone the same, regardless of race, leads to fairness and eliminates racism. This belief confuses formal equality (treating everyone the same) with equity or substantive equality (addressing systemic disadvantage). This misconception makes racism harder to recognise and address.

What's the reality?

Ignoring race doesn’t make racism go away – it makes it harder to recognise. Race plays a big role in shaping people’s lives; from the opportunities they have to the challenges they face. Pretending to not be conscious of race dismisses the experiences of communities subjected to racism, and the barriers they face. Claiming to “not see colour” can also be used as a way to avoid uncomfortable truths about privilege and discrimination. To achieve true equality we need to acknowledge the harm caused by racism and confront the systems that perpetuate inequality.

Why is this misconception harmful?

It ignores systemic racism: “Not seeing race” denies the real barriers communities harmed by racism experience every day.

It dismisses lived experiences: Claiming to “not see race” allows people to avoid discussion about racism, erasing the experiences of groups that experience racism. This stops us from recognising how we may be contributing to systemic racism.

It blocks progress: Meaningful action towards equity needs to be informed by those who experience racism. Avoiding conversations about racism hinders this.



How can we challenge this misconception?

- Be aware of the impact of race, racism, and “not seeing” race, and actively listen to the lived experiences of First Nations peoples and people from other communities subjected to racism. Acknowledge where “ignoring race” has reinforced barriers to opportunity or resulted in poor outcomes.
- Advocate for anti-racism, building our anti-racism skillset and supporting First Nations and other communities harmed by racism in leadership and anti-racism initiatives.