

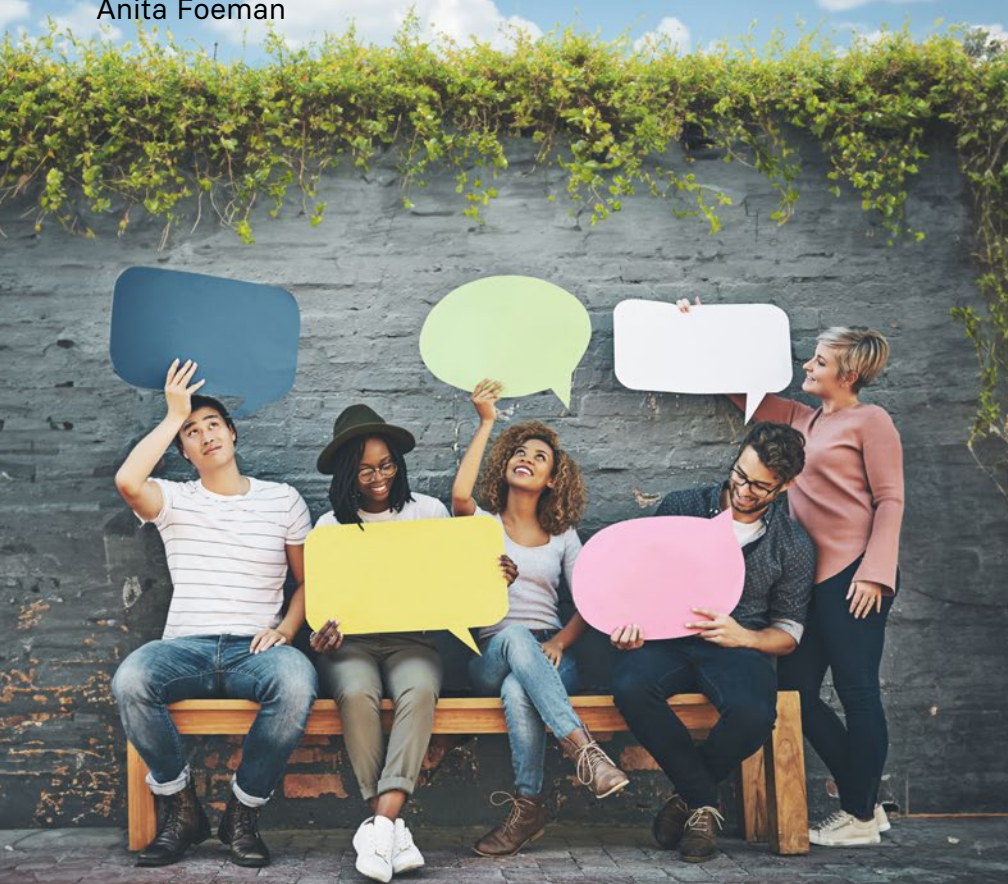
**WONDRIUM**

Topic  
Professional &  
Personal Development

# How to Talk about Race

Guidebook

Anita Foeman



# WONDRIUM

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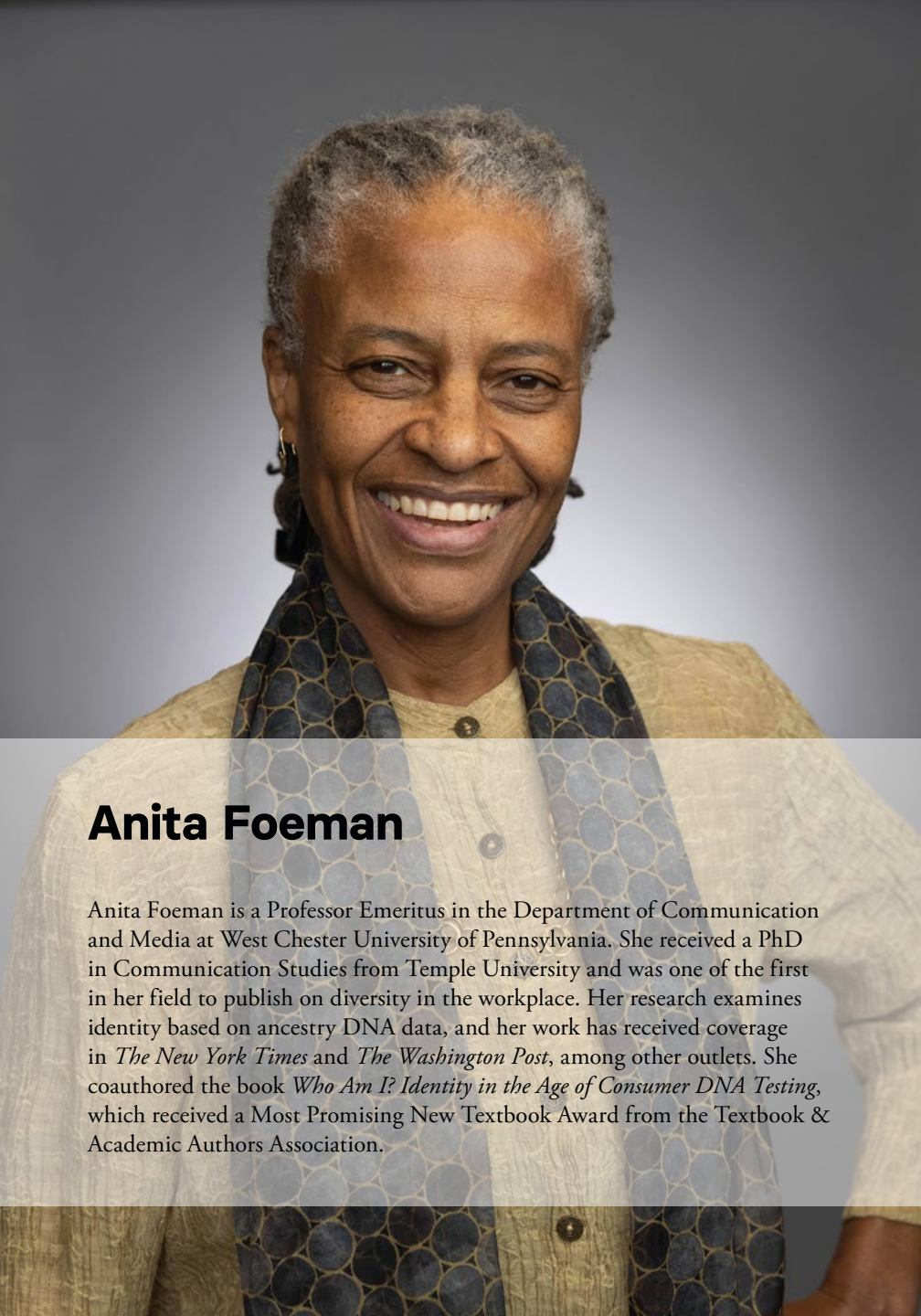
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# How **TALKING** about Race **CAN HELP**

**T**his course's goal is to help you build greater effectiveness, comfort, and confidence as you enter into conversations about race with family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. A fruitful conversation about race is a valuable experience that can show the value in many life paths and illuminate ways to solve human problems. And given how widespread discussions about race are, the ability to speak across difference is a necessary and particular skill.

## A THIRD PERSPECTIVE

The first rule for talking about race is to talk about race. It's common for well-meaning people to grow up with the belief that talking about race is bad. However, making race unmentionable limits people's ability to talk about how race shapes experience. And to the extent that some people's lives are defined by race, it silences them. It makes them invisible or at least unclear.

Some people approach the topic of race by saying they are color-blind and do not see racial differences. Some go to another extreme, as shown by debates and diatribes in the media during which one person stereotypes another group. But stereotyping and color-blindness are two sides of the same coin. They make race seem unspeakable.

Both perspectives are silencing. Instead, consider a third possibility: that the individual exists within a cultural context. When you look at an individual, that person is largely shaped by the culture in which they live—all the elements, seen and unseen, that express who they are. That goes whether a person is a Mexican immigrant, a third-generation Irishman from Boston, a Japanese American from California, or another identity.

Culture, in all its aspects, shapes people but isn't people. Culture provides language, food and music preferences, and many other parts of being human. Every individual takes all of these elements and turns them into a unique performance and experience of self.

That is at the core of dialogue on race—getting at the interplay between individual and context. The key is to talk with people about race knowing all individuals bring important and multifaceted perspectives. The goal is to move beyond the simplicity of one story or two sides.

## THE ICEBERG

An often-used model for talking about layers of identity is the iceberg. Just as the tip of an iceberg is visible, there are some visible elements of race, such as skin color or hair. But most of the iceberg is hidden from view.

In terms of race, there might be hidden history, such as the kind of neighborhood a person grew up in or the nature of their extended family. Further, factors such as social class, mental and physical health, country of origin, and myriad other factors intersect with race to shape racial identity.

### GETTING COMFORTABLE

It's productive to work on getting comfortable just noticing that you notice race. Try to recall a situation in which you thought that race may have been a factor, but you pushed the idea aside. Think about how you might have confronted it.

For example, one therapist relayed that for a long time, whenever he had a new client of a different race, he always wondered if the client was comfortable. He has learned to say in the first session, "Obviously, we are of different races; please feel free to let me know if you ever think that is a barrier or if it is something we need to discuss."

The therapist has found that many clients begin by saying, "Oh, no!" Then, several sessions in, they bring up the topic of race, and he is glad he has given them permission to have the conversation.

It's also important to acknowledge that race will be more top-of-mind for some people than others. For some people, everything is about race, and others insist that nothing is about race. Both points of view are sincere. Both grow out of life experience, and both shape how conversations about race unfold.



## ACTIVITIES: DISCUSSING AND JOURNALING

As you begin this course, see if you can find a friend who is willing to discuss the upcoming lessons with you. You may want to work with one or multiple people while using this series. Ideally, this group should be diverse, but any partner will do to start. If you are working alone, consider journaling on the theme of the discussion.

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1** How would you describe yourself and your culture?
- 2** What assumptions were made about race in your household growing up?
- 3** What does your group of friends look like?
- 4** How often are you the minority in different situations?



## BEYOND Thanksgiving: Talking Race in the FAMILY **2**

**T**his lesson's topic is the ways that race can emerge at family gatherings, particularly—though not only—at Thanksgiving. The lesson lists five race-related situations that may spontaneously come up during family get-togethers, and it offers ways to use these openings to generate fruitful discussion or to ease tensions when conversations become difficult. The five situations occur when:

- 1** Someone makes a statement they think is innocuous but nevertheless causes tension.
- 2** Someone tries to be provocative or makes a controversial statement.
- 3** Someone comments on an interracial relationship.

- 4 The family greets a newly adopted child of another race by saying something like, “You’re a saint to take in one of those children.”
- 5 Someone makes a strong political statement.

### **SITUATION 1: SUPPOSEDLY INNOCUOUS STATEMENTS**

The first situation comes up when someone says something they think is innocuous. Many situations that cause tension are not intentional at all. When someone from another generation, for example, describes an African American as “colored,” it is often not intended to provoke.

When such situations arise, one great activity for families is to talk about how things have changed over generations. Helpful questions to ask people from older generations include, “What was once OK and now is not? What do older family members think about it? What did people call you?”

You can broaden the conversation, whether it’s about immigrants or interracial marriage. For instance, you might ask what constituted a mixed marriage back in someone’s youth. Who were the supposed undesirables back then?

The demographics of America are changing. In that context, ask the person you are talking with about what demographic changes they have seen, and share your perspective.

### **SITUATION 2: DELIBERATE PROVOCATIONS**

In the second type of situation, someone tries to be provocative by saying something such as, “Our Jenny here has blue eyes and blond hair, but she thinks she’s an Indian with all her turquoise jewelry and whatnot.” Responses from other family members can vary, with examples including, “I can’t believe you said that” and “Can we agree not to do that at the family table?”

Racist jokes represent a variation on being provocative. While intentionally edgy, in some ways the joke teller is assuming that it's OK to make such a statement within the family.

Calling out the assumption that everyone around the table condones a behavior is often a productive move. One way to do so is by saying something like, "Why would you assume that we would find that funny?"

If you find yourself being the target of racial teasing, one option is to ask, "Why do you talk to me that way?" The person will likely say that they are just joking. The response could be, "Well, that hurts me," "That disrespects me," or "A joke is supposed to be funny." It's up to you.

### **SITUATION 3: A COMMENT ON AN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIP**

In the third type of situation, someone comments on an interracial relationship, as in, "Mommy loves a White man!" Such comments can catch a person off guard. Many times, people are shocked by what their kids notice or by the reaction of family to a new person. They are surprised when people stare or sputter when a friend of another race comes to dinner.

An interracial couple can be bombarded with questions like, "What's the matter with people of your own race?" or "Why [this race] instead of [another race]?" Questions may also come about their choice regarding having kids, regardless of the stage of their relationship.

If you're in an interracial relationship, what can you say when confronted with these kinds of questions? One generic response that can work in many dicey situations is, "Gee, this is awkward." Another option is to say, "Let's talk about this later." But it's likely going to happen again, so you'll need to think about how you want to handle it in the future.

Your next conversation should be with your significant other. With them, openly identify the situation without projecting shame or embarrassment and agree on how it should be addressed. Together, you decide how to respond to friends and family.

## **SITUATION 4: GREETING A NEWLY ADOPTED CHILD OF ANOTHER RACE**

In the fourth type of situation, a family greets a newly adopted child of another race by saying something like, “You’re a saint to take in one of those children.” There may also be actions such as a condescending pat on the child’s head. As with the dialogue between an interracial couple, the nuclear family must make ongoing space for open and direct conversation.

A strategy that is useful for any parent in many situations is to have a safe word. Your child can say the word as a signal when they want to express something like, “Aunt Gene said most people would not want to adopt a person like me.” You can just listen without reacting. Discussion can occur another time.

You can also give your kids some tools and strategies. One example is to tell your kids that if they ever feel uncomfortable with something someone says, they can respond, “You should talk to my mom or dad about that.”

Replies of parents to unwanted comments about their adopted children include:

- ▼ “We are the lucky ones.”
- ▼ “I am not comfortable discussing that, especially in front of our children.”
- ▼ “Let me share a book on this very topic that you might like.”

## **SITUATION 5: STRONG POLITICAL STATEMENTS**

In the fifth type of situation, someone makes a strong political statement. For example, imagine you’re at a Thanksgiving celebration where someone says, “Why would we celebrate a holiday that glorifies genocide and colonialism?”

While such a point of view can come from anyone, it is not uncommon for college students to come home at Thanksgiving full of new information and new perspectives. Parent responses can vary from full agreement and pride to anger and dismissal.

If you're a parent, keep in mind that your kids will live in a world you didn't grow up in, with inclusion, diversity, and voices you may have never known. Lots of parents with limited exposure know this and say that they want more for their kids than they had.

As for young people, some say statements along the lines of, "It isn't worth trying to change people from older generations, so don't bother." But if you've expressed such a sentiment, be aware of ageism that may prevent you from continuing to engage people of all generations. Attitudes may change, regardless of age.

People across generations often connect powerfully as years go by. Grandparents and grandchildren can come to agreements one never would have expected. Some mixed-race kids who were the result of marriages scorned by families nevertheless receive wonderful treatment from grandparents. The takeaway point is that talking about race is not one conversation. Leave the door open if you can.

### **ACTIVITY: CALL A RELATIVE**

If you want to explore your family's interactions with the topic of race, call a relative and ask about the family history and race. Organize your thoughts. Set aside a large chunk of time. Listen and ask lots of questions.

When the session is over, reflect on what you have learned. Discuss it in your dialogue group, if you have one, or with other family members.

## JOURNALING

If you're keeping a journal to follow along with this course, reread your first journal entry to see how things are coming along. If you do the Call a Relative activity, jot down how it went.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How have societal perceptions of race changed in your lifetime?
- 2 Who were the groups that were looked down on in your youth?
- 3 What demographic changes have you seen in your lifetime?
- 4 What comments about race were seemingly OK in the past but are not now?



## DISCUSSING Difficult Race Issues WITH KIDS

# 3

**C**hildren have the capacity to understand injustice and to play a part in making things better. Adults need to meet them in a developmentally appropriate way. To provide more information on the topic, this lesson touches on the stories of Vernon Odom, a Black journalist, and Talon Silverhorn, an indigenous interpreter and liaison. The lesson also summarizes a useful article.

## VERNON ODOM

Vernon Odom, in his 70s at the time of this course's production, is an accomplished newsman whose family defines the American Black intelligentsia. Their history reveals much about that of America. One pivotal moment for Vernon was the first time someone called him the *n*-word, followed by his mother's explanation. In his words:

The first time I ever heard the *n*-word, I was about six years old, and we were in Akron, Ohio. We lived there, and I used to go home after kindergarten or first grade with a little guy named Kenny. ... And he just popped up one day and said, "My daddy says you're an *n*-word." I said I didn't really know what it meant. I went home, and I asked my mother, and she explained the whole deal to me.

From his own life experience, Odom knows that kids navigate race. Adults should not pretend that they don't. As Odom says, "There's nothing to hide."

### "TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT RACE AND RACISM"

In the 2021 article "Talking with Children about Race and Racism," psychologist Katherine Lingras affirms that children notice race from a very early age, even as babies. Small children can observe and understand injustices among people. Further, the article notes that the more isolated children are and the longer they go without exposure to diversity, the more tentative they will likely be to engage with people of a different race.

One example of how to introduce children to new points of view comes from Talon Silverhorn's work as a cultural interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg and for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. These positions have seen him engage children of all ages on a regular basis.

Many resources are available to help parents discuss race with their young children. For instance, Katherine Lingras's article lays out guidelines corresponding to the letters *A* through *G* for talking with children about race. Their points are helpful, and a summary follows.

- ▼ **A**ccess resources. There are wonderful children's books, museums, websites, podcasts, toys, clubs, and so on. Different houses of worship may offer guidance, too. Using these resources, kids can be exposed to new stories and situations under their adults' supervision, and conversation can be directed.
- ▼ **B**e proactive. Be intentional, and don't assume that without intervention, kids grow up neutral. No baby is born racist, but it's easy to miss opportunities to set them up with an open mind.
- ▼ **C**oncrete, honest language is important. If you don't answer your kids' questions openly, others will, and it may not be in a way you like.
- ▼ **D**evelopmentally appropriate explanations are important, too. Practice hard questions and answers in the mirror. For instance, if a child asks why the police sat on a man and killed him, how do you want to frame your message? It is OK to acknowledge people do terrible things, and it is also OK to say if certain things confuse you, too.
- ▼ **E**ase feelings of distress and acknowledge impact. Always acknowledge when a child expresses distress. Also, help them develop skills to make the world a better place. Writing letters, interviewing people, and volunteering are all concrete things that make sense for small kids.
- ▼ **F**ind hope and safety. Let kids know you are always open to talk and that home is a safe space. Let them know about all the things that people have done to make the world better, drawing on examples such as members of the civil rights movement and other people who have fought for justice.
- ▼ **G**uide conversation based on a child's knowledge and interest. Follow your child's lead. If your child is artistic or into science or technology, see how their skills can spread ideas and help humanity.

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The Southern Poverty Law Center. “Learning for Justice.” <https://www.splcenter.org/learning-for-justice>.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What was your life (or another family member’s life) like in the 1990s while some Native American children were in Indian boarding schools?
- 2 What have children in your life asked you about race? How did you respond?
- 3 If you have children, what have you done to introduce diversity to their lives?



## Finding Where You Fit into the **RACE DIALOGUE**

# 4

**T**his lesson's topic is how people fit into hierarchies that may come up in dialogue about race. You don't have to have a specific attitude or perspective on your place, but it is important to think about it with clear eyes. When the topic of race privilege comes up, don't run for the hills.

## PEGGY MCINTOSH'S WORK

Celebrated scholar Peggy McIntosh reflected on her background and observations in a work published in the summer of 1989. Her article became one of the most consequential works on the topic of race privilege. Here is a useful place to start when considering your position in discussions of race:

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. ... White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

McIntosh then makes 26 assertions related to privilege. She invites readers, regardless of their background, to consider how the assertions relate to themselves. A few of the assertions are:

- ▼ “I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.”
- ▼ “If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I want to live.”
- ▼ “I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.”
- ▼ “I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.”

## FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND POSITIVE IMAGES

McIntosh's assertions suggest two broad themes. One is freedom of movement. The other is the ability to see positive images of yourself reflected as typical in society.

The ability to move freely is not a given. Some people do not want Black people to move into their neighborhood, for instance. Furthermore, people of color receive lower offers for their homes, have experienced

redlining, and have been legally excluded from federal housing programs for veterans. Some people in privileged positions see their neighborhoods as opportunities to purchase a cheap home and wait for the area to gentrify.

On the topic of positive images, relevant is a hand-drawn image that went viral on the internet. It was a cross-section medical drawing of a fetus in gestation, but the fetus was Black. The image brought up the point that it is vanishingly rare to see a fetus of color in publications.

Communication scholars Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizeck, in their essay “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” say, like McIntosh, that the invisibility of this kind of normalcy is what makes it hard and uncomfortable to unpack. That is why people must make a concerted effort to see it.

### **HOMES AND HIERARCHY**

In 2018, researchers from Gallup and the Brookings Institution found that a home in a majority Black neighborhood is likely to be valued at 23% less than a near-identical home in a majority White neighborhood. This is racial hierarchy at work.

### **TIPS FOR FINDING YOUR FIT**

If you’re trying to figure out where you fit into the conversation about race, here are a few suggestions:

- 1** Be ready to discuss the kinds of questions that Peggy McIntosh poses. Decide how you would articulate your level of privilege. What examples can you give? One option is to look up McIntosh’s full article and add up the score for its 26 assertions.

- 2 Make time for this discussion in conversations with peers, family, friends, and others. Do not shame yourself or others.
- 3 Give statements relevant to your personal context. For instance, the sentence, “I grew up never knowing any White, Asian, or Black people,” moves away from making a grand pronouncement about the world and toward an expression of your level of privilege.

Closing such a discussion with others, it is often nice to share something you hope to preserve that you associate with your race and/or culture. You can also share something you hope to leave behind that is associated with your race and/or culture.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How do you personally relate to the idea of race privilege?
- 2 What about your background and race is a source of pride?
- 3 What in your background and race is a source of shame?



## Avoiding LAND MINES When Talking about Race

# 5

**T**wo major themes keep people from beginning dialogue about differences or stop conversation in its tracks. The first is fear of losing control and doing or saying something wrong or unconstructive. The second is fear of being misconstrued, targeted, or humiliated in a conversation about race. To help you avoid those pitfalls, this lesson offers 10 suggestions on how to approach discussions of race.

## HOW TO APPROACH DISCUSSIONS OF RACE

- 1** Value openings, even if they seem small. Don't think you will solve every challenge all at once. Appreciate small inroads. Be ready to say, "I hope we can talk again."
- 2** Be humble. Think as much about your own shortcomings as those of others. Be willing to say, "I made a mistake."
- 3** Empathize. Think of the other person as a person who is shaped by their experiences, just like you. Try asking, "What experiences have you had that make you think this?"
- 4** Know your limits. What will trigger you? What conversations are just too raw? It is OK to say, "I am not ready to talk about this yet."
- 5** Explain what you are learning. Give yourself credit for your growth. Affirm yourself with language like, "I never thought about this that way before." Another way to put it is, "This is exciting; I am learning so much."
- 6** Keep showing up. Even if one conversation is a problem, say, "Perhaps we can talk about this in another way next time." Suggest some ground rules, such as, "Let's not talk about this at a family gathering in the future."
- 7** Especially in formal settings, ask about the goal or purpose. Some example language is, "Can we just use this time to listen to one another without comment? Everyone will get a turn to speak."
- 8** Be generous. Sometimes, it is important to say something along the lines of, "I think we are all doing the best we can." Giving grace and asking for it is powerful.
- 9** Speak for yourself. Don't assume that you speak for others. Allow others to add their voices. Don't assume that you know what other people or groups are like—even your own identity group. You can simply say, "I don't know how everyone feels about this. This is my reaction. I'd like to hear from others."
- 10** Choose hope. Things aren't perfect, but being hopeful beats being hopeless every time. Saying as such can be important.

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Gurin, Patricia, Biren (Ratnesh) A. Nagda, and Ximena Zúñiga. *Dialogue across Difference: Practice, Theory, and Research on Intergroup Dialogue*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** Have you ever gotten into a conflict with another person based on attitudes about race?
- 2** Have you ever felt that you have been misjudged about some situation related to race?
- 3** Have you ever felt that someone was unfairly targeted related to talking about race?
- 4** Can you think of a situation in the media where people were punished for something they said or did related to race?



## EXPLORING Our Many Layers of IDENTITY

# 6

**T**his lesson discusses two frameworks for understanding identity. One framework looks at race and other qualities from a critical power perspective—how complex power dynamics shape race relations. The other looks at layers of culture, of which race is a part. The first metaphor is one of intersectionality; the other is the cultural iceberg.

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw has brought into focus a vision of the intersection of systems of oppression. She highlights the idea that one category of alienation does not disappear in the face of another. For example, being a Black fatherless boy is a specific identity and an intersection of oppressions. Similarly, the experience of an Italian American transgender woman may differ from that of a cisgender Asian woman, although sharing categories does provide a sense of commonality between people.

This work gives voice to a perspective that was frequently missing in conversations about race and diversity. It can be easy for people to tend to ignore the experience of people who do not fit neatly into a category. For instance, certain kinds of mental health issues, such as depression, were characterized as White and middle-class, with dominant theories such as Freudian psychology guiding perspectives.

However, for a positive example, consider discussions of environmental racism, which focus on the intersection of environmental issues and race. Such discussions acknowledge intersectionality and make creative problem-solving more possible.



## THE CULTURAL ICEBERG

The cultural iceberg model is generally credited to anthropologist Edward T. Hall. In his book *Beyond Culture*, Hall's cultural iceberg model looks at the depths of culture. Just as with a real iceberg, only a small percent of culture is seen above the surface; the larger portion is hidden beneath.

These surface elements are what people experience through the five senses. They include things such as skin color, food, and language. To know only these, Hall suggests, makes one a cultural tourist. Only through years of immersion do people begin to gain real insight.

Even more challenging is that people often can't articulate deeper, invisible assumptions and beliefs within their own culture, much less those of others. On a positive note, when a person meaningfully interacts with other cultures, they may gain insight into both those cultures and their own.

Conflict styles are a great example of cultural beliefs people may not initially recognize but certainly feel when they're different from their own. For instance, a person whose family handles conflict privately may feel disoriented when they encounter people who handle it openly. If a visible difference, such as race, is at play, it could lead to tension or stereotyping.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** When you think of certain categories of people, what images immediately come to mind? For example, consider these:
  - ▼ Trust fund baby
  - ▼ Criminal
  - ▼ Professional athlete
  - ▼ Violinist
- 2** When you think of a stereotyped image, do you find yourself trying to think of exceptions? At what point do the exceptions change a stereotype?
- 3** Can you identify a food that you associate with your culture? Can you discuss the origin of the food and how it has been influenced by or has influenced other cultures?
- 4** Have you ever attended a religious service of your own religion but in another community? How did the experience differ from attending a religious service in your community?



## TALK That Builds BETTER BRIDGES

In this lesson, the focus is on expanding frames of reference and using that expanded framework to change conversations, making them more creative and expansive. The lesson begins with a look at individualism and collectivism; then, it moves to examine materialism, progress, and competition.

## FRAMEWORK 1: INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

The paradigm of individualism and collectivism is one of the most often-used frameworks for talking about cultural differences and explaining cultural conflict. Geert Hofstede explored the concept of individualism and collectivism based on his work with thousands of survey respondents over many years.

Notably, this research took place in the setting of work, which heightens the idea that these profiles reflect a more formal realm of privilege. Hofstede's original schema included four dimensions: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty-avoidance, power-distance, and masculinity-femininity. This lesson's focus is solely on individualism and collectivism.

America is the most individualist culture on earth, followed by Australia, the United Kingdom, and others labeled by Hofstede as part of the Anglo cluster. On the other hand, collectivist cultures are more characteristic of Asia, Africa, and Hispanic societies. Note that while the broad American culture privileges an Anglo style, many other cultures exist within this society.

A person who is highly individualistic generally believes it is their goal and obligation to be their own person, separate from their family, be financially successful, express their opinions, and follow their bliss. This person may eventually create a family of their own, focusing on the nuclear family—the parents and their children.

### FRUSTRATION INTO INSIGHTS

If you're frustrated with someone, you may be able to turn that into a chance to prompt new insights. The next time you feel frustrated with another person's behavior, ask them, "How can I support you?" Be specific about your common goal. Their ideas may seem jarring to some but desirable to others, such as flexible work hours or a new dress code. Approach those ideas with an open mind.

## THE CROWN ACT

The state of California passed the CROWN Act in July 2019, becoming the first US state to prohibit discrimination against workers and students based on their natural hair. The legislation, which some people did not see as significant, in fact helps people who do not have straight or wavy hair to feel accepted.

Another person may be far more collectivist in outlook. Such a person typically has an obligation beyond the self. This person is obligated to a nuclear family, an extended family, a community, and even a racial group. Their self-image and primary responsibility are wound up in a collective identity. This motivates and influences their behaviors.

Consider this extended example from the work world: Two people may work tirelessly, one for personal advancement and the other to fulfill an obligation to a family or community. The collectivist is well aware that the group has an investment in their outcomes. The individualist and collectivist show the same behavior but have different motivations.

Two other workers may seem lazy and not committed to the job. The individualist might think, “I just don’t want to work that hard and stress myself out for someone else.” The other lethargic employee might have a collectivist outlook. In a work world that privileges leaving one’s personal life at the door, work can feel cold and unaccommodating. For this person, being understood as a full human being and part of a community is key.

## DISCUSSING COMMUNITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The next time you come across people talking about the social climate or environment of your workplace, try appropriately introducing questions such as:

- ▼ Do you think this feels like a community?

- ▼ How important is it to you to have a sense of community?
- ▼ Do you think some people feel alienated here?
- ▼ What are some examples of things, large or small, that people have felt are supportive?
- ▼ What are some things that have felt alienating?

If the topic of dress or appearance comes up, be especially careful not to single anyone out. Start with a question to the entire group: “Has anyone ever felt that your clothes or hairstyles or manner were not adequately accepted here?” Two follow-ups are:

- ▼ “Are we too rigid in what we see as appropriate dress and presentation here?”
- ▼ “How can we change our guidelines to reflect a more open attitude?”

Identifying unnecessary and divisive rules and attitudes is a way to start giving more people a feeling of community. Often, even people who think less about work climate and connection enjoy a sense of collective support.

## **FRAMEWORK 2: MATERIALISM, PROGRESS, AND COMPETITION**

To examine the values of materialism, progress, and competition, worth considering are the thoughts of indigenous citizen and cultural liaison Talon Silverhorn. In this interview excerpt, he talks about collectivism that goes beyond immediate blood relations, community, and even people:

When I think about myself as a Shawnee person, the way that I think about myself is as a point on a long timeline at basically coming out of the earth. ... We talk about other living things in the world as our relatives because that’s kind of the way that we see the world, right, versus more colonial cultures that have sort of sterilized that maybe at one time were indigenous cultures.

Talon referenced manifest destiny as the moral imperative that gave colonizers the feeling that they were entitled to spread their culture from shore to shore, overriding anything in their way. He shares that indigenous communities often see this relationship between people and the land in a very different way.

Indigenous communities oftentimes have a much stronger connection to the idea that whatever happens to this thing is ultimately going to come around and happen to me, and even if it's out of some self-preservation, we should keep the rest of these things in balance and working as they should be.

Conversations about race often miss the mark because the talk is based on different underlying values that people rarely excavate. For example, in the larger American culture, some may see the Native American population as categorically disadvantaged and deficient, while Talon sees colonial culture as broken, destructive, and sad.

Father Thomas Berry, a Catholic monk, spent much of the 20th century engaging in dialogue to bridge the gap in cultural perspectives. Looking for Western models that naturally link to the holistic sensibility, he developed a dialogue that included indigenous people, religious and governmental leaders, and academics, lawyers, and creatives. The dialogue's goal was the recognition of the rights of the earth. It is a view of the oneness of everything—and it stretches the thinking of all who share an exceedingly individualistic, materialistic, and competitive mindset.

While the dialogue about materialism and consumerism is not always easy, it helps people understand behaviors that may initially baffle them, and it offers a wider range of insights to solve human problems. Talon Silverhorn and others state that the idea is not ultimately to make a hierarchy of cultural styles but to see each culture as growing out of a particular history and each as offering insight to the other.

**ACTIVITY: CONSIDER YOUR PERSPECTIVE**

Think about your perspective. Is it more individualistic or collectivist? Where do you fall in terms of materialism, competitiveness, and the love of progress? What about the people you know?

Can you seek out opportunities to explore other cultural perspectives in real dialogue? If you can't talk to someone directly, watch a film from another culture and see what styles and behaviors seem to be privileged. Rewatch a popular film you like and see if you can view it with new eyes.

Remember to keep journaling about your thoughts and experiences. Looking back on them will allow you to see how your own perspective is changing and evolving along your journey.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you think of a time that your core values seemed to clash with another person’s?
- 2 Would you describe yourself as an individualist or a collectivist?
- 3 How important are your possessions to you? How has your past shaped your attitude?
- 4 How would you define a quality life?



## Ways to TALK about Race AT WORK

# 8

**D**iversity training is a primary way that organizations attempt to improve the ability of their employees to talk about race. This lesson focuses on diversity training and helping you get the most out of it. A model of a day-long race-related diversity training session serves as the backbone of the lesson, and throughout, there are tips for attendees and organizers. Since at-work diversity training is intended to help you talk about race, you will gain some very practical ideas for talking about race at work.

## A MODEL OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

### THE START

This lesson's model training would typically include about 12 to 15 participants. It would be introduced by someone in authority. Depending upon the organization's need and the level of comfort, a group can consist of an entire department that can work together or of people from around the organization.

If you're going to a training, try to arrive on time. This is your first opportunity to demonstrate respect for the process.

A typical first order of business is introductions. Participants say their names, department, time at the organization, and so on. One standard prompt is to invite people to say what they hope to get out of training or what they fear in this type of training.

Think about how you would like to introduce and present yourself. Do you want to articulate where you think your position is in the race conversation? You can save that for later if you wish. Indicate that you think the training is important and you are open to the process.

Clear your calendar. Don't spend the entire session answering texts and responding to your daily job responsibilities. Your nonverbal behaviors express as much as your words.

### TIPS FOR PLANNING AND SCHEDULING DIVERSITY TRAINING

If you are planning or scheduling diversity training, schedule training on company time rather than employees' free time. And train everybody: the company president, project managers, maintenance people, and everyone else. People who are often overlooked have important tales to tell. These people are often the most appreciative of diversity training and can be the greatest beneficiaries.

## THE MORNING AGENDA

The morning agenda will likely include a short introductory lecture from the training’s facilitator, a small group activity, reports from each small group back to the facilitator and the larger group, and a discussion. In a full-day workshop, the morning is often dedicated to a general overview of race-related issues, and the afternoon will target the specific organization and its strengths and challenges. The afternoon often involves case studies or role-play.

The facilitator highlights ground rules and asks participants to add any special rules they would like. You can think about any needs you want to express to the group. Ground rules generally relate to how to engage one another, and examples including speaking only for oneself and sharing the floor.

An opening short lecture is often related to things such as cultural styles, color blindness, and so on. Bouncing off of this, the group moves into small clusters or pairs to discuss their reaction to what was said. Prompts may include, “When did you first notice race?” or “What cultural styles have you seen?”

Moving into these breakouts, try to group up with others consciously. Try to participate in a group with others you think will enrich your experience—people different from yourself, others you’d like to understand better, and people you’d value talking with on the topic of race. Start with more introductions if needed.

When talking about race and across race, it is more important than ever to be considerate, to show respect, and to take time to get to know one another. People often filter generic rudeness and insensitivity through race.

## TELLING STORIES AND HAVING DISCUSSIONS

People eventually return from the breakouts to the large group and tell their stories. During these stories, it's always invaluable to show kindness and consideration toward each other.

In workshop discussions, people often ask about language that baffles them. "What do people want to be called?" is a typical question, coming up in the context of situations such as calling someone Black versus African American.

Do talk about the genesis and meaning of the words, such as what it means to a person to be called one name versus another. Ask participants what they associate with various terms and how they identify their affinity groups. Do not argue with people about how they identify or what should or should not offend them in terms of how they want to be named. It is not another person's place to tell you who you are, nor should you do that for others.

### CUSTOMERS AND CLIENTS

When interacting with the public, the issue of race may be more opaque and harder to manage. A customer, for example, may not tell you if they experience your behavior as racist. But they will tell their friends. Customer behavior toward you may be equally challenging. Situations that can come up range from a customer calling you by a racial name to accusing you of being racist. There are also situations when customers get into a conflict in front of you.

Try to remain gracious. Ask for everyone to be kind. Ask yourself, "How would I handle this situation if someone I loved was acting this way?" If you are a manager, though, never insist that an employee continue to serve a customer who is being abusive.

Another note on language is that it is never appropriate to use any kind of racial slurs in the workplace. In training, people often ask specifically about the use of the *n*-word, and they say that it confuses them.

The discussion of the *n*-word is often complicated, sometimes tense. In any conversation regarding the *n*-word, stick to using the euphemism “*n*-word,” and only use the euphemism if absolutely necessary.

## TRANSITIONING TO THE AFTERNOON

In training, after lengthy discussion, people are generally ready for lunch. The facilitator may give people a chance for any last words. Take advantage if you need to so that you don't leave with a burning issue on your mind.

People often continue chatting informally over lunch. Some people just take a walk to be alone and reflect. Do what works best for you and explain if you need to.

In an afternoon session, the group begins by sharing the goals of addressing concerns specific to the particular organization. The facilitator may ask people to develop a role-play of a work concern. Sometimes, the facilitator will have worked with management beforehand to develop case examples.

It is typical during the afternoon that people are put back into groups. This is often a time for participation, such as acting out case studies and doing some role-playing. Groups may be asked to develop a scenario and to keep it generic so as not to identify specific individuals. Participants will likely find that many incidents are common across settings.

Scenarios include the kinds of topics that have been discussed in other lessons in this course. A few themes have included

- ▼ the colleague who tells inappropriate jokes;
- ▼ the colleague who thinks any correction is racist;
- ▼ the colleague who does not want any language other than English spoken in the workplace;

- ▼ the manager who cannot see potential in anyone unlike themselves; and
- ▼ the international employee who does not understand race in the US.

What scenarios come to your mind?

People work out misunderstandings and do conflict resolution during these sessions. They look at alternative approaches. It really does help. It is worth your time, so try to participate when you can.

In scenarios, people may be asked to develop three versions—the ideal, the disaster, and the most likely—and then make plans for each. As they work, many people find colleagues who are willing to be a sounding board for people struggling with ongoing situations. That is always a plus.

If the space seems comfortable, individuals sometimes ask for feedback on how they are managing race issues at work. Only ask for feedback if you really want it. There is research to indicate that successful people see feedback as helpful or not helpful rather than good or bad, so you decide what you can handle. You can practice being non-defensive or gracious as is appropriate. If you feel speechless, you can say something like this: “You have given me something to think about.”

At the end of the day, the facilitator may do a final go-around asking participants to say something they learned or a general reaction to the training. Hopefully, participants leave with a higher level of comfort and some practical ideas moving forward.

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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you identify a work challenge that you think was influenced by race or cultural styles?
- 2 Have you had diversity training at work? What was your experience?
- 3 What are the most and least helpful aspects of diversity training that you have experienced?



## How to **SPEAK AS AN ALLY** 9 If You're a Bystander

**T**his lesson explores the role and options of the bystander when situations about race arise and you, as the bystander, think you can help. This is a different level of contact in talking about race. You are moving beyond what happens to you directly, and you are interjecting yourself into a contact between other people. It is not a simple transition. However, this lesson will discuss some choices available to you if you feel that a situation calls for your intervention and that you can help.

## BYSTANDER TRAINING

Bystander training grew out of the Green Dot strategy developed by psychologist Dorothy Edwards. The goal of the original training was to help bystanders intervene in situations of sexual abuse and violence. The strategies quickly expanded to a range of circumstances where people see a need to step in. This kind of bystander training provides a range of behaviors to help you manage a situation that has the potential to turn into a real problem.

The behaviors identified for the bystander fall into five categories: distract, delegate, delay, direct, and document. There are different approaches you might take based on the authority you bring to a situation. In every case, select the approach that works for you, knowing that choices may change from situation to situation and over time.

### THE FIVE Ds

To start, you can **distract** from offensive behavior by basically changing the focus. Often, people use this strategy feeling that they have to pick their battles. It is also a strategy used by people who are averse to direct conflict or by people in situations where they do not feel they can exert control.

**Delegating** means to ask someone of authority to step in. Think of someone with the gravitas to command respect and bring reason to the situation. When people see mistreatment in the community, having good relations with social services and law enforcement is vitally important. Creating good community relations is the key to both avoiding and intervening in race-related conflict situations. Note that a person with less power reaching out to a person of authority is assuming that that person will act with authority and competence. People with institutional authority have the responsibility to get training to address diversity issues, including talking across race effectively.

**Delaying** refers to delaying your response. This is useful when you can't do anything at the moment but can check on the person afterward. Do try to do more in the moment if you can. Consider saying, "Can we try to be reasonable here?" or "Can we try not to attack one another?" It is

also important to follow up. Pretending nothing ever happened is an additional affront that you can avoid. The follow-up will also help you know the signs of the problem in the making. Consider a formal meeting with an agenda with the aggressor and the target—together or separately as appropriate. If you do not have formal authority, you can still talk to the targeted person or aggressor and process what happened. However, in either case, a delayed response is not no response.

At the other end of the spectrum is **direct confrontation**. Make sure it's the right thing to do to manage a situation. You don't want to escalate a dangerous circumstance. That said, direct confrontation can be powerful. It may be right to tell someone, "That's inappropriate" or "That's not fair." It is particularly helpful for you to speak up when another person can't effectively speak for themselves. If you are comfortable with direct confrontation, consider using that skill to develop collaborative, workable solutions when possible. Use your power for good. If you have institutional authority, be sure that your behavior is presented clearly as part of company standards and policy.

Finally, **documenting** is also great. For example, take out your phone to record an encounter. It is shocking how people change their behavior when it is being documented. A note for yourself: If you are tempted to do or say something that you would not want to be documented, think twice before you act.

## REFINING YOUR SKILLS

As you become more skilled in talking about race, you may notice places where your intervention can help. The abilities to distract, delegate, delay, direct, and document are skills you can call on. Used in combination, these strategies can help you manage situations you find yourself in and help others who are having a hard time.

Prepare yourself for situations you think may arise. Once you feel comfortable with any one approach, consider whether another strategy might be useful as well. For example, perhaps you have become good at distracting. Try a more direct approach and see if the outcomes are better. Look in the mirror or talk to a friend and practice. As you venture

out, make your choices strategically. Look for people with gravitas who can also chime in. Think of every situation as a learning opportunity that you can improve on for the next encounter. Keep a record when needed. Think about how justice can be achieved for all.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 In the past, have you ever failed to intervene for someone in distress? Why?
- 2 Have you intervened in a dicey situation? How did it work out? What would you change?
- 3 Can you think of a person you know who is especially good at managing conflict situations? What are their primary skills?



## Navigating Conversations about RACE and POLITICS

# 10

**T**his lesson will articulate the positions often taken by conservatives (also labeled Republicans or libertarians) and progressives (also labeled Democrats or liberals). In exploring this, on several occasions, you will see references to the work of the Braver Angels, a national dialogue group dedicated to bridging the partisan divide—with leadership at every level of the organization equally balanced between conservatives and progressives. You will focus not on the intersection between race and political personalities but rather on the intersection between race and policies and ideologies.

## CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE VALUES

According to Braver Angels' posted materials, conservatives tend to believe in individual freedom and responsibility. They also have a reluctance to focus on racial group categories for public policy purposes. Other beliefs include that being color-blind is the ideal; that government has limited ability to root out racism without trampling on individual liberties or creating unintended consequences (as with affirmative action); and that welfare-type programs are a problem but supporting economic development is good. They tend to focus on family stability and school choice as key in creating the best racial outcomes. Many conservatives state that fair opportunities do not guarantee equal outcomes. They tend to focus on policy rather than interpersonal process.

Now, consider progressive values. Progressive perspectives tend to include the belief that since injustices, including unequal access to GI loans, redlining, and slavery, have been visited on people based on their race, it is entirely appropriate to correct injustices at that level. Not seeing race means not seeing injustices, unequal opportunities, and more difficult life circumstances that go along with race in America. Racism is a combination of personal bias and hierarchical power over others based on race. Progress must involve cultural change, including the acceptance and elevation of a diversity of cultural styles. Among other things, this involves paying careful attention to how Whiteness confers privileges and how ordinary, unremarkable actions can show respect or cause harm based on race.

Do any of these attitudes sound familiar to you? How many do you agree with? How many do you resist? Do any truly get under your skin? Do you find yourself saying and advocating different approaches in different circumstances, or would you define yourself squarely in one camp? Whatever your perspective, to move conversations forward, Braver Angels suggests a process that it describes as “Invite, Listen, Acknowledge, Pivot, and Perspective.”

## THE BRAVER ANGELS' PROCESS

To start, invite a conversation rather than an argument. Then, listen with interest, patience, and the goal of understanding. As you listen, monitor your own internal reaction. Acknowledge any overlap you see and that your co-communicator has a valid point of view. Pivot, indicating that you'd like to share your view. Assuming the other person says, "OK," move on to your perspective. Where possible, suggest where you see common purpose.

One important element of the conversation is to own your experiences through personal stories. After all, most people believe what they believe based on what has happened to them. Stay with the conversation as long as you can. Try to come up with some concrete possibilities and agreements, and talk about what you can do to create synergy and policy.

Always remember that you can quit while you're ahead and plan for future conversation. You may find that a conversation reaches a point of departure. Some sentences for transitioning out of a conversation include: "I hope we get to speak again later" or "Can we summarize what we agree on?" You will also want to reflect on how you have changed and if you felt any movement from your co-communicator.

## THE PROCESS IN PRACTICE

Consider a short conversation. The topic is mass incarceration. The Sentencing Project, which tracks and advocates against mass incarceration, reports that Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of White Americans. Thus, the racial implications are clear. A conversation across political perspectives (and perhaps between people of different races) might look like the following:

Invite.

"I heard you say that it is wrong for felons to have the right to vote since they have given up the right to be part of society. Can you tell me more about that?"

“I think if someone has committed a serious crime, they have forfeited the right to be part of society. My sister was carjacked when she was in her twenties, and it traumatized her for life. I am sick of coddling criminals and acting like they have more rights than victims. People make it a Black and White thing. I don’t care what color you are. Commit a crime, and you give up your rights.”

Now, listen. Make eye contact. Don’t interrupt. Then, acknowledge.

“What an awful thing to have happen to your sister. I am so sorry. I can certainly understand that you feel that some people have committed crimes that are hard to forgive.”

Pivot.

“Do you mind if I share my experience with some felonies?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

Perspective.

“Many felonies are nonviolent, such as drug convictions, and some offenses with marijuana wouldn’t even be considered crimes today. And the racial disparity is so significant. My friend spent three years in prison for drug use. He had a drug problem, not unlike the people who are addicted to prescription drugs today. My friend would have been better served with a drug program and possibly some job skills training. Anyway, when he came out, he was like a pariah—couldn’t get a job, couldn’t vote. It was like he wasn’t a member of society anymore. Society would be better off if he could move back into citizenship. He paid his debt to society. He hurt himself, not anyone else.”

Ask: “Might our positions overlap a little?”

“I don’t think someone needs to be excommunicated for a nonviolent drug crime. I’m sorry about your friend.”

“I don’t think every person who commits a felony can be redeemed, unfortunately. Can we perhaps think of actions that we can both agree on and leave the more thorny ones for another time?”

“I think yes.”

## MOVING FORWARD

Talking openly about differences is key. One-to-one communication can also help you see people as unique individuals, not stereotypes. Everyone is complicated and shouldn’t be defined solely by the labels of *Black*, *White*, *conservative*, or *liberal*. This is important in your conversations with others but also a good thing to examine in yourself. It can be easy to call out problematic behavior on the other side but more difficult to call out such behaviors in your own groups. What challenging advice do you have for your own groups?

The bottom line is that we will never all see the world the same. We will never agree on every element on how to solve long-entrenched problems that challenge us all. However, we can assume that most of us are trying to be good people and doing the best we can with what we know. Thus, you should be willing to say your piece, listen, and find common ground. Be willing to question yourself and your own group. See if you can build a bridge.

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1** How would you describe your political leanings? Explain why you hold this position.
- 2** What rankles you about another political “side”?
- 3** What rankles you about people in your own group?
- 4** Where do you think you overlap in political ideology with others?



## Are You Woke? **LOADED** Words and **USEFUL** Words

**L**istening can be hard when language triggers an intense emotional reaction. People toss around words such as *woke*, *cancel culture*, *microaggression*, *critical race theory*, *Karen*, and *virtue signaling*. This lesson will drill down on a few such terms in common usage that may have different meanings for different people. You'll learn about the genesis of the terms, scholarly and popular perspectives on them, and the controversy surrounding them. This discussion aims to help you gain some insight and to keep these words from stopping the conversation when the topic is race.

## **BIPOC, AFFINITY GROUP, AND ALLY**

The acronym *BIPOC* refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It reflects an evolution from old discussions that often focused on Black and White dynamics only and acknowledges a range of non-European ancestries.

Another term, *affinity group*, is often used in the educational setting. It refers to the people one identifies with. They are often identified by race, ethnicity, political identity, ability, sexual identity, or purpose. There is copious discussion of what a person sees as an affinity group and how the intersection of identities (such as being gay and White) shapes one's affinity. A person identifies their own affinity group based on their own life experience.

*Ally* refers to people who support others who may be in a vulnerable position. However, there can be a blurry line between people who are allies and those who are seen as usurping issues and silencing the voices of people who are marginalized.

Finally, the distinction between equality and equity is noteworthy. It is most often explained as the difference between giving everyone the same (equal) and giving everyone what they need for success (equity). What people need will differ, and some need more of certain resources than others. There are variations on this theme that distinguish among concepts such as equality, equity, and justice or reality, equality, equity, and liberation. The intersection of race and other factors, such as social class and education, is important.

## **WOKE AND KAREN**

For decades in the Black community, being “woke” meant being aware. It was a statement of caution. “Stay woke” was a serious warning, even more pointed because it was in the vernacular. However, being woke in the vernacular does not belong only to Black people anymore. When conservatives use *woke*, they are often talking to and about White progressives, and it's usually a poke at the social activism of Whites on



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the left. It may also be a poke at nonstandard English. When you hear the expression, know that its roots are in an important and multifaceted Black experience.

*Karen* is a more recent epithet with different origins. On July 31, 2020, Henry Goldblatt published an article in *The New York Times* offering “A Brief History of ‘Karen.’” He writes:

In 2020, *Karen* is no longer “an easy name.” Once popular for girls born in the 1960s, it then became a pseudonym for a middle-aged busybody with a blond choppy bob who asks to speak to the manager. Now, the moniker has most recently morphed into a symbol of racism and white privilege.

Why “Karen”? Comedian Dane Cook presented a sketch, “The Friend Nobody Likes,” in 2005. He named that friend *Karen*. Cook says, “You basically keep them there to hate their guts.” *Karen* is an interesting example (along with the hashtag *#SoWhite*) that reflects the perspective of people of color—helping other people see the world through their eyes, changing the lens.

## **MICROAGGRESSIONS, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND VIRTUE SIGNALING**

Microaggressions are subtle offenses that can go unnoticed or unacknowledged but often have accumulating negative impacts on people of color or other marginalized people. One example is the classic “Where are you from?” said to a person because of their race, even though they were born in the United States.

White supremacy is a belief that Western European culture is inherently more worthy and to be promoted over all others. Meanwhile, White replacement theory is based on the fear that immigration of non-Western, non-European people will change Western culture and replace the people who represent it. Sometimes, terms such as *White supremacy* are used to describe the problems with America’s culture.

The last term to consider, *virtue signaling*, is often used to raise a flag about someone’s behavior. The academic journal *The Conversation* defines the term as “moral grandstanding.” British financial journalist James Bartholomew is credited with popularizing the term and describes it as saying something virtuous without the responsibility of doing something. It is used as a jab toward mainstream media from both sides.

## **THE SEMANTIC TRIANGLE**

The semantic triangle attempts to display the relationship between language, reality, and thought. The thought or concept label is at the top, with the referent in the real world at one bottom corner and the word to represent it at the other. There is a dotted line between the word and the thing it refers to. You see a person, and you have a word for that person and all kinds of internal thought responses to that word and person. The dotted line indicates that there is not a physical link between the word and what it refers to. The only link is in our minds.

In such a model, we see a person in the world, and we have a name for them. However, we may have widely different reactions, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts about the person and the words we use to describe them. The semantic triangle shows that the relationship between the word and the referent is unstable. We may select different words

for the same person or use the same word for different people. The interpretations from one person to the next may be so different to the point that two people with different backgrounds may hardly be talking about the same thing, even as they seem to be speaking the same language. Real communication takes place where our meanings overlap, where we share or can create common understanding and associations.

To help us see our own often unknown biases and automatic responses, Project Implicit offers the free Implicit Association Test, which is intended to measure attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to recognize. There are tests that relate to race, religion, skin tone, and other areas of diversity. The interpretations of outcomes are controversial, but they can certainly spark conversation.

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1** Discuss the positive and negative associations you have with the following words: *immigrant*, *White privilege*, *minority*. Can you think of other words to discuss?
- 2** Identify some race-related terms that have very negative associations for you.



## How to **DO MORE** Than Just Talk about Race

# 12

In this lesson, you will learn about the Villanova University project by Dr. Teresa Nance on intergroup dialogue. It is for people who hope to have ongoing dialogue about race and attach it to positive social change. The discussion will show you how you can use the stages of group development to help you keep the process of interaction and action going. The four-stage dialogue program will provide you with a framework to understand how dialogue can develop in a variety of different situations, including within a family of two White parents and their adopted Black child, Daniel.

## STAGE 1

Stage 1 involves forming and building relationships and clarifying the meaning of dialogue as opposed to other forms of communication. There are distinctions among debate, discussion, and dialogue. The purpose of a debate is for someone to win. Discussion has a predetermined outcome; you're asking questions to get to a particular place. Dialogue is about understanding, about collective coming together around the experience. When you're telling stories, you're automatically connecting with people because you are talking about the commonality of elements of the human experience.

This first stage starts with agreeing to communicate through dialogue, which offers a unique opportunity to learn from others' experiences. Daniel's family's fundamental belief is that we are all part of the same human family; thus, cross-race adoption was natural for them. However, the impact of race caught them off guard. They soon learned that beginning a dialogue about race was an important step to help their family thrive.

Notably, when Daniel was young and not able to articulate his feelings about being cross-racially adopted and his sense of exposure, his pain and disorientation came out in the form of anger and acting out. It took quite a while for the issue of race to come into focus. However, Daniel's parents trained themselves to listen through their frustration and confusion, to fail and try again. When the topic of race came into focus around the middle school years, Dad approached conversations about race with openness and the desire to understand his son's experience of race related to the outside world while simultaneously keeping him attached to his adoptive family. One of the first things he did was make sure that the church they attended was multiracial. He changed his circle of influence to consciously include diversity.

In this first stage, whether you are talking with family members, coworkers, or friends with whom you are engaged in a long-term conversation about race, think about who you are and why you are who you are. Further, think about why you are together and why the conversation about race is relevant. Establish the foundations for honest and meaningful dialogue and building trust.

## STAGE 2

Stage 2 involves exploring differences and commonalities and thinking about identity. If you are fortunate, there is some level of trust in your family, friendship, work, or community setting. However, talking about race may require even more. In the case of Daniel's family, he might have found that his parents had a hard time hearing about his pain. They might have rejected him on some level; he might have rejected them.

In this stage, one of the new awarenesses is that people have multiple social group memberships and dynamics of inequalities. For Daniel, he was dealing with adoption, race, and, at one point, adolescence. Others are shaped by different characteristics beneath the tip of the iceberg, whether it be poverty or a particular ethnic tradition or ability. Rather than lecturing to people about race, ask them questions. Allow them to talk about their own intersections of race, class, gender, and the rest. Acknowledgment that we are all trying to balance on roller skates is both humbling and comforting.

## STAGE 3

In stage 3 of these long-term dialogues, groups of people are encouraged to explore and discuss hot topics, especially those related to systems of privilege, power, and oppression. This includes dialogue about controversial issues regarding group equity and experience and learning to stay in "dialogue mode" even when we disagree with each other. In Daniel's family, for example, his parents made a commitment to providing acceptance when they might have been hurt as he talked about the pain of being adopted, the pain of being a Black child raised by White parents, and the fact that his situation was always exposed for the world to see because he does not look like his parents.

This was a conscious decision on the part of Daniel's parents. As a result of their openness to Daniel's experience, despite being part of a White family, Daniel was clear to express that he is and wants to be seen as a Black man. Imagine the level of love and empathy it took for Daniel's parents to raise a proud Black man. This stage of dialogue

requires exploring deeper levels of thinking, feeling, and responding and interpersonal commitment. In fact, Daniel confirms that only a high level of dialogue and trust allowed this family to thrive as it has.

## STAGE 4

Finally, in stage 4, people develop long-term action planning and do alliance building. This is the next step for participants who wish to move from dialogue to action. Unknowingly, Daniel's parents began their action for social change when they adopted a Black child. When the weight of this decision came into focus, they took further steps. For example, they changed their church. Their integrated church sponsors discussion groups around race, and they try to bring people together who may not naturally be predisposed to understand one another.

Daniel's dad has taken on the role of talking with other White people, especially men, to help them gain insight. The family's goal is to be able to talk effectively about race whenever and wherever it comes up. We must perpetually maintain dialogue between ourselves and others to increase understanding and take appropriate action.

## READING

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify some special people, places, or things from your early life. Explain why they are important to you.
- 2 Share or describe old photographs or other artifacts from your childhood and explain what they mean to you.