

The Answers:

Discussing and Defeating Racism in America

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MODULE 1
EXAMINE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS
ALLOW YOURSELF TO THINK & WRITE FREELY

Before discussing the subject of racism with anyone, you must examine and understand what you think and why you hold the beliefs that you do. Identifying what has shaped your thoughts about the world around you and the people in it is essential. Examining other perspectives and keeping an open mind are also essential components in this process of growth and learning.

Critical thinking skills are also needed in this process of discovery and recollection. According to criticalthinking.org, critical thinking is the active process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, putting together, and evaluating information as it is gathered. The information gathered can come from various places including personal observation, personal experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication. Thinking critically as you process this information serves as a guide to belief and action.

As you move through each module, I will continue to emphasize critical thinking, because you may find the conversation about racism difficult to have, **even with yourself**, as you reflect

and gather your thoughts. Although the emphasis is on critical thinking, be patient with yourself, and allow yourself plenty of time to think through these questions and write your answers down. Then you will be ready to have “the race talk” with friends, family and other community members, in the most appropriate, effective ways. Use the stories you gather as you complete this course to serve as the core material you will share with those you discuss your perspectives with. In doing so, the people you choose to have the race conversation with will hopefully respect your willingness to be transparent and vulnerable.

Critical thinking focuses primarily on two types of assumptions: **power assumptions** and **hegemonic assumptions** (Brookfield, 2004). In general, an assumption is a guide to a belief entrenched in your point of view (Brookfield, 2004). Assumptions are the daily rules that determine how you make decisions, and all of your communication, both verbal and nonverbal are subject to a continuous set of assumptions. We make assumptions about the meaning behind the words that we and others use, about the meaning of certain gestures, expressions or pauses, or about how to respond to a comment. Assumptions inform our judgments about whether or not someone is telling the truth, or how to recognize when we are being manipulated (Brookfield, 2004).

Power assumptions influence how we view power and relationships in our lives. Power is the ability to directly exert influence on things or people (Morris, 2015). Power can be defined as a means or as an outcome. Therefore, power assumptions have an impact on how we make

decisions based on who we believe has the power to make things happen. If we assume that we are supposed to have power based on our ethnicity, and we don't have it, that greatly hurts the psyche. If we assume that we are not supposed to have power, and we obtain power, we may abuse it.

What assumptions do you hold as it relates to your ethnic group and the power held by the group in which you identify?

How much power do you believe your ethnic group has to promote or influence politics and economics on the local level where you live?

How do you feel about the power the ethnic group you identify with has? Does it make you feel happy, sad, guilty, angry, etc.? How do those feelings affect your decisions?

How does the way you feel about your power affect the way you treat people from other ethnic groups? Do you feel powerful or powerless?

How do people from other ethnic groups perceive you (and your power), at first glance?

What experiences with power have you had or witnessed from childhood to present, that have shaped your thoughts and feelings? Recall several of these experiences to share with people you know well and trust. Include the lessons you learned from each situation and how each experience made you feel. If you need help jogging your memory, ask childhood friends, family members or colleagues what they remember. You may be surprised by what you can recall, and surprised by how the feelings from those situations resurface. Use the spaces below to recall your experiences.

Elementary School Experiences

Middle School Experiences

High School Experiences

Work Experiences

Other Experiences

Hegemonic assumptions influence how we embrace particular thoughts because we believe those thoughts are in our best interest. Hegemonic assumptions work against you in the long term, because they misinform your beliefs and your behavior (Brookfield, 2004). For example, a White middle-class person spends one afternoon every Christmas volunteering at an inner-city soup kitchen. Afterward, that person shares their “expertise” about underprivileged people (Thomas, 2015). The hegemonic assumption made is that there is a right to authority or knowledge of the experience of poverty, based on that one brief experience as a volunteer. The privileged volunteer is tempted to feel noble about the rare glimpse into another world and tempted to “teach” other people touching lessons about the poor unfortunate people they encountered during their volunteer experience (Thomas, 2015).

What assumptions do you have about African American people? Men, women, and children?

What assumptions do you have about White people? Men, women, and children?

What assumptions do you have about children? Your children? Your relatives' children? Your friends' children? Children of other people you do not know?

How might the assumptions you hold effect how you perceive events reported every day on the news and in other media?

What are the best and worst attributes of the ethnic group you most closely identify with?

How do the assumptions you hold affect the information you receive about other ethnic groups?

Are you able to effectively and open-mindedly process new information?

How can you replace assumptions with a commitment to open-mindedness?

Why is it important to understand what your assumptions are before you talk to other people about racism?

CONGRATULATIONS!

You have now uncovered your biases and your true feelings about power. You examined your assumptions and challenged your beliefs. You have recalled past experiences and now you are ready to share those discoveries with others. Remember to BREATHE, BE HONEST, and ENJOY sharing and being vulnerable with the people you love most in this world.



