

**RACE TALK
AND THE CONSPIRACY
OF SILENCE**

*Understanding and Facilitating
Difficult Dialogues on Race*

DERALD WING SUE

WILEY

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*I would like to dedicate this book to my wife, Paulina Wee;
my son, Derald Paul; my daughter, Marissa Catherine;
my daughter-in-law, Claire Iris; and my granddaughters,
Carolyn Riley and Juliette Daisy.
I have been truly blessed in having such a loving
and supportive family, and they bring such joy to my life.*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Helping People Talk About Race: Facilitation Skills for Educators and Trainers

I [Author] was conducting a workshop on antiracism for a group of teachers in a school district. I remember one particular session where the topic was on past discrimination and oppression against people of color. As I traced the history of enslavement of Blacks and the taking away of land from Native Americans, I noticed that one female teacher seemed agitated about the topic. As I pressed forward with how Whites historically have oppressed these groups, the teacher raised her hand. I could tell from her facial expression and body language that she seemed upset. When I called on her, she forcefully and angrily stated that women were an oppressed minority group as well, and wondered why I was not talking about sexism and the detrimental impact on women. She implied that by ignoring the plight of women, I was guilty of a gender microaggression by making her feel invalidated. The following represents how, in my early days, I would handle the situation.

Unsuccessful Racial Dialogue

Female Trainee (stating her thoughts angrily): Why aren't we also addressing issues like sexism? We women are an oppressed minority group

as well! I always feel training like this makes women invisible and that our needs are ignored. Women are paid less than men, the Equal Rights Amendment was never passed, and we are treated like sex objects. . . . I mean, everything is about race and racism, but what about us . . . what about our situation?

Me: Yes, I can understand that, but we can't cover every single group that has been oppressed, and this training is about the oppression of people of color and the harm they experience from oppression. [Attempting to deal with the challenge intellectually and losing control of the process.]

Trainee (raising voice): Women are harmed too . . . why does it have to be like that anyway? Why use an arbitrary decision in deciding which group to address? I just don't believe you can relate to my situation as a woman!

Me (becoming slightly defensive, and attempting to calm and appease the trainee): Okay, let's talk about the plight of women as an oppressed group. It's not my intent to ignore discrimination against women. In fact, many of our studies on discrimination have dealt with gender microaggressions like sexual objectification.

Since those early days, I have come to understand that this was a *potential trap* that could serve to (a) deflect the conversation away from race to some other sociodemographic identities such as gender, (b) dilute the importance and impact of racism by equating it with all the other "isms" of the world, (c) create defensiveness in me, and (d) allow participants to escape from exploring their own racial biases and responsibilities. In the past I would have taken the bait (as I did in this example) and tried to explain why I was covering racism only and not sexism, argued how racism and sexism were different forms of oppression, and/or become defensive in the implied accusation. I would have interacted with the trainee on an intellectual/cognitive content level. Although my factual arguments were solid and accurate, it seldom seemed to have a desirable resolution. The debate usually resulted in a very poor outcome in that the lesson I was trying to convey would be lost, and the discussion between the trainee and me would only result in both of us staking out our positions. Both of us would feel unheard and resentful. The interaction would then be

debated on a content (cognitive) level with the underlying strong feelings unrecognized.

Since that time, I have learned that to facilitate a difficult dialogue on race, I need to understand not only the content of the communication but also the process resulting from the interpersonal dynamics. I have learned that race talk is often not about the substance of an argument, but a cover for what is actually happening. In the preceding example, I was responding to the content of the argument, trying to present my case in a logical fashion, and trying to placate her strong feelings. But the substance of the trainee's argument really had little to do with why she reacted in such an angry way. In essence, I had lost control of the process, become defensive, and failed to understand what the strong reactions of the trainee really meant.

The following is an example of a more enlightened intervention, which led to a discussion of the trainee's strong reactions and what they meant.

Successful Racial Dialogue

Female Trainee (stating her thoughts angrily): Why aren't we also addressing issues like sexism? We women are an oppressed minority group as well! I always feel training like this makes women invisible and that our needs are ignored. Women are paid less than men, the Equal Rights Amendment was never passed, and we are treated like sex objects. . . . I mean, everything is about race and racism, but what about us . . . what about our situation?

Me: I'm glad you brought that up. You make excellent points. Yes, women are definitely an oppressed group, and we can talk about that as well. Before we do that, however, I'm picking up on lots of strong feelings behind your statement and wonder where they are coming from. [In this response, the trainer controls the process by refocusing exploration on the trainee.]

Trainee: What do you mean?

Me: You seem angry at something I've said or done.

Trainee: No, I'm not . . . just upset that women get short shafted.

Me: I can understand that, but the intensity by which you expressed yourself made me feel that my points on racism were being dismissed and that issues of racism were unimportant to you. Being a woman, I know

you understand prejudice and discrimination. Can you use the experience of having been oppressed to better understand the experience of people of color?

Trainee: I guess so. . . . I . . . I guess racism is important.

Me: You don't seem very sure to me . . . you still seem upset. What is happening now? Can you get into those feelings and share with us what's going on?

Trainee: Nothing is going on . . . it's just that, you know, it's a hot topic. I guess, talking about racism, it seems like you are blaming me. And, I don't like to feel wrong or at fault or responsible.

Me: Tell me about feeling blamed. In what ways do you feel blamed?

Trainee: Well, maybe there are feelings of guilt, although I'm not to blame for slavery or things of the past.

Me: Good, let's *all* (referring to entire workshop group) talk about that. Now we are getting somewhere. (Turning to entire group of teachers who have been transfixed by the interaction) I wonder if some of you can tell me what you see happening here. Do any of you feel the same way? What sense do you make of the dialogue we just had here?

Questions: What do you see happening between the facilitator and the trainee? What do you think the real issue is? Can you distinguish between the content of what is being discussed and the process of the discussion? What feelings are being expressed by the trainee? What is behind them and what meaning do they have for her? What is different in how the facilitator handled the matter in the first situation and that of the second? Why is the second approach considered by the facilitator to be more successful? Can you outline the reasons? Given your understanding of the situation, how else might you facilitate the dialogue? Can you provide a rationale for the actions you would take?

Welcome to difficult dialogues on race! As educators and facilitators involved in racial conversations, we are often confronted in our teaching or training with challenges about how to make them teachable moments rather than failed exercises. Difficult dialogues on race can happen spontaneously or be expected or planned by facilitators. Most teachers, for example,

may encounter race talk in their normal day-to-day teaching activities whether due to the content of the day's lesson or remarks by students, which represent microaggressions to students of color. Thus, teachers need to be able to recognize and be equipped to facilitate race talk discussions in a productive manner. Facilitators who conduct training or workshops on raising critical consciousness of race, racism, Whiteness, and White privilege must also contain in their training armament tools, techniques, and strategies to help trainees work through the intense and oftentimes explosive interactions that occur in race talk.

As mentioned throughout this text, dialogues on race are usually clashes between the racial realities of one group (people of color) and another (generally Whites). The conflicts and their hidden meanings between racial groups are most likely manifested in race talk. The opening example is representative of the characteristics of race talk and the dilemma that often teachers face in classrooms and that facilitators encounter in workshops on racism and antiracism. In this chapter, we concentrate on providing effective facilitation strategies for educators and trainers to conduct positive race talk outcomes. These suggestions and strategies, however, are based on the assumption that facilitators are enlightened individuals who have done the necessary personal work to develop nonracist and antiracist identities (Helms, 1990; Spanierman et al., 2006; Sue, 2013; Tatum, 1997). It is important to note that these suggestions are based on and derived from research findings, scholarly deconstruction of linguistic meanings, and social psychological/sociopolitical analysis of race talk provided in each of the previous 12 chapters.

INEFFECTIVE STRATEGIES: FIVE THINGS NOT TO DO

It may seem strange to begin this section with a discussion of ineffective strategies, but our studies indicate that they are widespread among teachers and facilitators who have not developed a good sense of who they are as racial/cultural beings. These behaviors generally lead to negative outcomes in race talk, but contain the lessons for what not to do and suggest possible solutions (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2010; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2011; Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). These responses by teachers/facilitators have been identified by participants as highly ineffective in race talk, and may result in greater misunderstanding among racial groups, hardening of biased racial beliefs, increased anger and tension toward one another, and lost opportunities to increase awareness and understanding (teachable moments).

All of the following behaviors have several things in common: They are behaviors that (a) are characterized by inactivity, (b) allow the discussion to be deflected away from the problematic area, and (c) generate defensiveness on the part of the trainer, as evidenced in our opening scenario.

1. *Do Nothing*

In the face of a difficult dialogue on race, many facilitators remain silent as heated race talk occurs between participants. In classrooms, for example, they allow the students to take over the conversation, and they exhibit not only behavioral but emotional passivity in their own reactions. They offer little if any guidance to students about the conflicting conversations and make few attempts to bridge the differences being discussed. This does not mean, however, that teachers or facilitators are uncaring, unconcerned, or unfeeling. In general, our studies suggest that they are experiencing powerful emotions and fears when a dialogue on race occurs (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009), but they attempt to conceal them for fear of appearing lost and inept. Many educators in the study were unable to critically ascertain what was happening, and they felt confused about what to do. They became concerned about being perceived as incompetent, of losing control of classroom dynamics, of being biased, and of being inadequately prepared to handle the situation. Their perception of the problematic situation became constricted due to anxiety, as they became more focused on themselves (self-protection) rather than being concerned with understanding and helping their students. They expressed feeling paralyzed, a lack of critical racial consciousness, and confusion as to how best to effectively intervene (Valentine et al., 2012). In general, the inactivity and feelings of impotence by facilitators and teachers led to a deep and personal sense of failure and disappointment in them; more problematic is that their actions or lack of actions model to students and participants that race talk should be avoided.

2. *Sidetrack the Conversation*

In the opening vignette, we have a prime example of a White female trainee attempting to sidetrack the conversation from the topic of race to gender. In classroom settings, race talk is often uncomfortable for students and teachers alike. In the first intervention scenario, the discomfort and avoidance of talking about race or racism are clear for the participant as she tries to sidetrack the

conversation to something more safe for her (gender) and less anxiety provoking. The trainer may unintentionally collude with the participant in avoiding race talk for many reasons (being unaware of how to handle the situation, taking the bait, or becoming defensive), but the ultimate result is to be diverted from discussing the real issue. Trainers have to be cognizant of the many defensive strategies used by participants to avoid race talk in order to anticipate and overcome them. More problematic, however, is when sidetracking the conversation comes from the facilitator's own discomfort and fears about racial conversations. In class, a racial dialogue may ensue with the teacher being unprepared to handle it. He or she may be sufficiently uncomfortable with the topic and allow the topic to be changed. These maneuvers are often very visible to students or trainees in a racial dialogue. Their use often diminishes the credibility of facilitators and makes them even less effective in teaching and training.

Race comes up, you know, the faculty person is uncomfortable, they change the subject, they get support from some students in the classroom to change the subject, and then we're all sitting there. It's a big elephant in the middle of the room. The ignoring it is a feeling for many students of color and some White students of complete invalidation. (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009, p. 1105)

3. *Appease the Participants*

Appeasement is a strategy often used by facilitators to avoid a disagreement on a race issue with participants. In many cases, appeasement is the result of anxiety over the ability of the facilitator to handle challenging situations associated with race talk and the discomfort that comes from confronting participants about their personal biases and prejudices. To avoid conflict or a potential heated exchange with participants, to maintain the involvement and goodwill of an audience, and to not lose credibility or influence, appeasement becomes the goal. Usually, the trainer is uncomfortable with the expression of powerful emotions in race talk that may prove divisive.

Appeasement may take many forms:

- Allowing the conversation to be sidetracked.
- Avoiding confrontation with the points being made by the participant.
- Stressing commonalities and avoiding differences.
- Discussing superficial issues without exploring deeper personal meanings.

Many teachers, for example, avoid deep discussions of race in order to maintain what they perceive as classroom harmony and the fostering of positive feelings. They are sensitive to how the workshop or class is perceived by the school, college, or organization and attempt to elicit positive feelings and opinions of participants or students. The problem with the maintenance of harmony is that it negates deeper explorations of biases, stereotypes, and nested emotions associated with race and racism. The teachable moment is lost.

4. *Terminate the Discussion*

When facilitators are concerned that a racial dialogue threatens to get out of control and are unable to determine how best to handle the situation, one of the most common techniques is to terminate the dialogue using several strategies.

- First, conditions may be placed on how the dialogue should be discussed or conducted. A professor may, for example, make it known that the topic is not relevant to the content of the course, that opinions or feelings are not facts, and that issues should be discussed with respect. In many cases, such a tactic dictates avoidance of emotions or feelings, which are considered irrelevant to classroom dialogues.
- Second, the facilitator may simply table the discussion, in essence ending any further race talk. Some teachers may say that they will return to this issue in the future, but never carry through on the promise.
- Third, a facilitator may ask the parties involved to discuss the matter with him or her individually outside of the workshop or class. This action compartmentalizes the dialogue and removes it from the larger public arena.
- Fourth, the facilitator may stress that the parties involved should calm down, respect one another, and discuss the topic in a rational manner.

There are several downsides to these strategies. Usually, the facilitator fails to realize that race talk between several individuals does not occur in isolation from other observers or students; although other participants may not have actively engaged in the dialogue, they are usually vicariously involved. By shutting down the communication between two individuals, it shuts down the entire group process. Further, the ground rules being imposed by the facilitator may be culturally and educationally biased (objectivity is valued over subjectivity and emotion is antagonistically opposed to reason).

5. *Become Defensive*

Although facilitators/trainers may be White or people of color, defensiveness or having one's buttons pushed is a very common phenomenon. When dealing with difficult racial conversations, feeling blamed or accused of wrongdoing (being racist) is a common reaction of race talk, especially among White trainees. These feelings of defensiveness may be conscious, but generally occur outside the level of awareness. Race talk between trainer and trainee operates on the principle of reciprocity as evidenced by our opening vignette. When trainees feel accused of being biased, they engage in self-protective behavior in the form of righteous indignation or innocent victimhood. That is the reaction and hidden meaning of the female trainee's reaction in our opening scenario; she felt wrongly accused and closed her mind to information being presented by the trainer. In order to deflect the perceived criticism, trainees may directly or indirectly attack the content of the communication (message) and/or the credibility of the communicator. When confronted with a defensive challenge by trainees, facilitators of race talk may also become defensive when they find that their message is being invalidated or that their credibility is being assailed. A White trainer, for example, may be indirectly accused as being a bleeding heart liberal or a sellout. Faculty of color in our studies reported implicit and explicit microaggressions they received from White students who challenged their authority or expertise (Sue, Rivera, et al., 2011). In these situations, facilitators often report becoming defensive, going into a self-protective mode, becoming angry, shutting down two-way communication, and themselves becoming contentious. In these cases, both trainers and trainees feel unheard, misunderstood, invalidated, frustrated, angry, and resentful (the precise characteristics of an unsuccessful dialogue on race).

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES: ELEVEN POTENTIALLY POSITIVE ACTIONS

Having critical racial consciousness formed from a nonracist and antiracist orientation is a necessity to the development and use of successful race talk strategies. Most of the ineffective reactions just outlined provide us with clues about what facilitative conditions need to exist and the type of interventions most likely to help trainees move from racial obliviousness to becoming racially conscious of themselves and one another. A most important lesson is that inaction or passivity on the part of the facilitator, trainer, or teacher leads

to negative outcomes (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). Some requirements and suggestions for effective intervention are provided next. They are directly derived from the psychology of racial dialogues presented in the first 12 chapters of this book: (a) understanding the dynamics and characteristics of race talk; (b) being knowledgeable of the ground rules that hinder open discussions of topics on race, racism, Whiteness, and White privilege; (c) anticipating and being able to deconstruct the clash of racial realities between different groups; (d) being cognizant of how race talk is embedded in the larger sociopolitical system and influenced by it; (e) being aware and nonjudgmental about communication style differences; (f) understanding White and people-of-color fears about engaging in racial conversations; and (g) having knowledge of racial/cultural identity development.

1. *Understand One's Racial/Cultural Identity*

First and foremost, teachers, trainers, and facilitators must understand themselves as racial/cultural beings by making the invisible visible. Unless they are well grounded and comfortable about who they are, a lack of insight and awareness only perpetuates ignorance in the students or participants they hope to help. They cannot be effective facilitators unless they are aware of their own worldview—their values, biases, prejudices, and assumptions about human behavior. For, example, what does being White, Black/African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latino/Hispanic American, or Native American mean to them? How does their racial identity impact the way they view others and the way they view you? There are three aspects that are important in this goal:

1. Understanding oneself as a racial/cultural being inevitably goes hand in hand with how well grounded and secure one will be in a racial dialogue. Self-protection of self-esteem will be minimized resulting in low defensive reactions.
2. Awareness of differences in worldviews of participants will allow for empathic understanding and help facilitators deconstruct worldview differences. They are thus able to help trainees more realistically understand the differences in racial realities.
3. Awareness of one's racial identity will allow facilitators to anticipate how their own race will impact racial dialogues and take effective educational actions to facilitate a difficult dialogue.

2. Acknowledge and Be Open to Admitting One's Racial Biases

On an intellectual/cognitive level, teachers and trainers must be able and willing to acknowledge and accept the fact that they are products of the cultural conditioning of this society, and as such, they have inherited the biases, fears, and stereotypes of the society. When facilitating a difficult dialogue on race, most trainers or teachers are wary about communicating their own prejudices and will respond in a cautious fashion that may be less than honest. I would suggest that covering up, refusing to self-disclose, or playing it cautiously may actually hinder race talk and may only model to trainees the very behaviors that obstruct honest dialogue. But publicly and honestly acknowledging their personal biases and weaknesses (to self and to others) may have several positive consequences:

- It frees them from the constant guardedness and vigilance exercised in denying their own racism or other biases.
- They can model truthfulness, openness, and honesty to students or participants about race and racism.
- They communicate their courage in making themselves vulnerable by taking a risk to share with students their own biases, limitations, and attempts to deal with their own racism.
- It may encourage others in the group to approach the dialogue with honesty, because their own teachers/trainers are equally flawed.

3. Be Comfortable and Open to Discussing Topics of Race and Racism

On an emotional level, it is best if trainers are comfortable in discussing issues of race and racism, and are open to, honest about, and vulnerable in exploring their own biases and those of trainees. If students, for example, sense the teacher is uncomfortable, it will only add fuel to their own discomfort and defensiveness. One of the goals of a teacher or facilitator is to become comfortable and open to race talk. Attaining comfort means practice outside of the classroom or training situation. Remember, addressing one's own personal biases is more than an intellectual exercise of reading books or going to workshops. Attaining comfort and understanding comes from lived reality experiences that require continued and frequent interaction with people who differ from them in race, culture, and ethnicity. In Chapter 12 we provided numerous examples of such experiential activities and learning situations.

4. Understand the Meaning of Emotions

For both trainers and trainees, deconstructing the symbolic meaning of emotions in race talk is an essential ingredient for successful dialogue. Because few of us can have experiences with all groups who differ from us in worldviews, discomfort and confusion when diversity/multicultural issues arise are normal. These feelings should not be denied, avoided, or suppressed. Rather, the effective facilitator should help others to make sense of them—what do they mean and say about the person? This is a two-prong approach that involves the ability to monitor and attribute meaning to one's own feelings and those of the trainees. Remember, I have repeatedly stressed that nested or embedded emotions are frequently expressed in race talk—although they may not be acknowledged or understood by those initially engaged in such conversations. The skilled facilitator helps others make sense of these feelings and frees the individual from being controlled by them. As long as feelings remain unnamed and unacknowledged, they represent emotional roadblocks to having a successful dialogue. The most common feelings and their hidden meanings derived from earlier chapters are the following:

- *I feel guilty*: "I could be doing more."
- *I feel angry*: "I don't like to feel I'm wrong."
- *I feel defensive*: "Why blame me? I do enough already and am not responsible."
- *I feel turned off*: "I have other priorities in life."
- *I feel helpless*: "The problem is too big. What can I do?"
- *I feel afraid*: "I'm going to lose something." "I don't know what will happen."

If the teacher or trainer experiences these feelings, it is important to acknowledge them even if it does not make immediate sense. By doing so, anxiety or confusion is lessened. Teaching and encouraging trainees to do so likewise allows further exploration of the feelings, as in the example of the effective intervention given in the opening scenario.

5. Validate and Facilitate Discussion of Feelings

This is a primary goal in race talk. In the previous suggestion, I note how important it is to understand the meaning of feelings and what they symbolize. In this situation, the facilitator or teacher must create conditions that

make the expression and presence of feelings a valid and legitimate focus of experience and discussion. As we have seen, the academic protocol works against the discussion of feelings in classroom settings, and the belief that emotion is antagonistic to reason places restrictive ground rules for race talk in many other training venues. In our studies in classroom settings, nearly all students indicate

- The importance of allowing space for the strong expression of feelings.
- That it was okay to have them.
- That talking about their anxieties or anger helped them understand themselves and others better.
- That it was important to create conditions that allowed for openness and receptivity to strong emotions.

They especially appreciated instructors who were unafraid to recognize and name the racial tension and the feelings emanating from the discussion because it helped them demystify its source and meaning. One participant provided a specific example of what he found helpful: "A here and now discussion with a facilitator who knows when to let it happen and when to interject ... have the facilitator say, 'how are you feeling right now talking or being confronted by this Black person?' and going off on real feelings rather than trying to rationalize it or make it cognitive" (Sue, Rivera, et al., 2010, p. 210).

6. Control the Process and Not the Content of Race Talk

When a heated dialogue occurs on race, the duel between participants of different races is nearly always on the substance or content level. But the hidden and less visible levels are where the true dialogue is taking place (White talk vs. back talk). When referring to dreams, Freud took the stance that the manifest content (what one recalls about the dream) is not the real or latent content of the unconscious. What one remembers about their dreams is only the tip of the iceberg that contains hidden fears and meanings. Again, it is important to note that race talk, especially White talk, has hidden meanings, and that using process observations or interventions ultimately helps in unmasking the beliefs and attitudes (biases and prejudices) of the communicants. Some common statements (content level) when White talk occurs are

- "So what, we women are oppressed, too."
- "My family didn't own slaves! I had nothing to do with the incarceration of Japanese Americans."

- "Excuse me sir, but prejudice and oppression were and are part of every society in the world ad infinitum, not just the U.S."
- "We Italians [or Irish] experienced severe discrimination when we arrived here. Did my family harp on the prejudice? We excelled despite the prejudice. Why? Because the basic founding principles of this country made it possible!"
- "I resent you calling me White. You are equally guilty of stereotyping. We are all human beings or we are unique."

The substance of these assertions has great validity, but to deal with them strictly on the content level will only result in having race talk sidetracked, diluted, diminished, or ignored. There is a time to discuss these issues, but understanding the hidden transcript that generates these statements is important for both the facilitator and trainees to deconstruct. In our opening scenario, we indicated how the facilitator made process observations (the strong feelings behind the woman trainee's statements) that allowed the conversation to focus on the strong feelings and their meanings. He controlled the process and not the content of the dialogue. An important educational exercise would be to practice analyzing these statements from both the content and process levels.

7. Unmask the Difficult Dialogue Through Process Observations and Interventions

Strategies 6 and 7 are intimately related to one another. The goal here is to use an understanding of group process to unmask the meaning of the difficult dialogue occurring between two parties by (a) acknowledging the accuracy of statements (when appropriate), (b) intervening in the process rather than the content, (c) helping participants see the difference between intention and impact, and (d) moving to the feeling tone level of the communication.

- a. While all the statements in item 6 are to most extent true, they can hinder a successful dialogue by covering up the real one. As in the opening scenario, by agreeing with the accuracy of the statement, it no longer becomes the distraction (argument) and allows the facilitator to focus on the real issues, feelings, and conflicts in worldviews.
- b. Do not get sucked into the argumentative dialogue by taking sides in the debate of content. Rather, intervene in the process by directing students and participants to examine their own reactions and feelings. Encourage them to explore how their feelings may be saying something about them.

- c. The blame game creates monologues. Help participants differentiate between their intention and impact. When the female trainee says, "So what, we women are oppressed as well!" have her explore the intention behind the statement and the impact. In most cases, trainees will state that they only had the best of intentions—to point out the oppression of others or to indicate they had also experienced discrimination. Get them to understand that it might have been their intention, but the statement itself tended to dilute, diminish, and negate the racism examples. This type of statement serves only to create a chasm, rather than bridge an understanding. How else could they have responded, for example, to bridge mutual understanding rather than separate and divide?
- d. Refocus the dialogue on feelings: "I wonder if you can tell me how and what you are feeling." For example, the teacher might say, "John (Black student) has just agreed with you that women are an oppressed group. Does that make you feel better? [Usually the student says no.] No. I wonder why not." Try to help the student to explore why the feelings are still there. If there is continued difficulty, enlist speculation from other members in the group. The last option is for the facilitator to make the interpretation or speculation.

8. Do Not Allow a Difficult Dialogue to Be Brewed in Silence

When a difficult dialogue occurs and an impasse seems to have been reached, do not allow it to be brewed in silence. Resolving issues and making race talk a teachable moment may require time to understand what has happened. Likewise, many facilitators also need time to reflect upon a particular situation and are not equipped to deal with it in the immediacy of the moment. Ignoring it and not addressing the impasse only creates the elephant in the room that will continue to hold power over participants throughout the workshop or class. Several strategies may prove helpful in unlocking the blockage and allowing some resolution:

- When in a classroom situation or continuing workshop, the facilitator can make note of the impasse and instruct the group to process their thoughts and feelings about the situation, informing them that they will take it up at the next meeting. The important lesson here is that solutions and understanding require time and that the facilitator and group do not intend to avoid the challenge.
- Although it is nearly always better to have participants work through their conflicts, the facilitator may, in some situations, choose to personally

intervene by using any number of relationship models to help participants listen, observe, reflect, or paraphrase back to one another. Sometimes an impasse is due primarily to participants engaging in monologues rather than a true dialogue. We have not really discussed communication-skills training, but facilitators should consider familiarizing themselves with these various techniques so that they are armed with communication tools to help participants work through a difficult dialogue on race (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2014).

- As indicated in our second intervention strategy of the opening scenario, facilitators may enlist the aid of class or workshop members in helping to overcome the race talk barrier. This latter technique is very useful because it actively involves other members by simply asking, "What do you see happening here?" or "What do you see happening between John and Mary?" This strategy opens up multiple channels of communication and ensures a diversity of perspectives.

9. Understand Differences in Communication Styles

Differences in communication styles often present difficulties in race talk because different culture-bound conversation conventions may lead to increased misunderstandings. Race and gender are powerful determinates of how people communicate with one another. In Chapter 7, for example, we noted that African Americans, Asian Americans, and White Americans communicate in ways that may lead to misinterpretations or may trigger fears and biases associated with stereotypes. The stereotypes of the angry Black man or woman; the passive, unfeeling, and uncaring Asian; or the sterile, objective White may be triggered by the styles of African Americans (speaking with passion and emotion), Asian Americans (being reserved and relatively nonverbal), and Whites (task orientation). A skilled facilitator may use his or her knowledge of these styles to advance effective dialogue in several ways.

- First, it is important for the facilitator to be aware of his or her own communication style and the possible impact it has on the group when race talk occurs. A White facilitator may have a different social impact on participants than an African American or Asian American. This is also compounded by the race/style of the facilitator with either the race or style of participants.
- Second, differences in communication styles that have race implications commonly occur among the participants as well. Getting people to be

cognizant of these differences and mistaken interpretations aids successful race talk.

- Last, as indicated earlier, differences in communication styles often reflect unconscious biases or fears held by participants in race talk. Being able to acknowledge and deconstruct them are important elements of successful race talk.

10. Forewarn, Plan, and Purposefully Instigate Race Talk

One of the most valuable techniques for facilitating race talk is to prepare students or workshop participants for difficult dialogues that will likely occur. For example,

This is a workshop (or class) on race and racism awareness. We are going to have some difficult, emotional, and uncomfortable moments in this group, but I hope you will have the courage to be honest with one another. When we talk about racism it touches hot buttons in all of us, including me. Being honest and authentic takes guts. But if we do it and stick it out, we can learn much from each other. Are you willing to take a risk so that we can have that experience together?

Even in classes or other forums where the topic is not specifically on racial topics, race talk can be instigated in a purposeful, educational, and meaningful manner. For example, sometimes instigating a difficult dialogue through an exercise, assignment, or role play can preempt resistances by introducing the concepts of prejudice and bias in a step-by-step fashion. Watching a video or film on racism allows participants to discuss the topic in a safer and distant manner. The trainer then helps participants move to a more personal discussion through facilitation techniques or other activities (role plays) that personalize race talk issues. One of the great advantages of preplanning a difficult dialogue is that it allows the facilitator to immediately control the process rather than having a dialogue arise by happenstance. There are many videos, such as *The Color of Fear* and *A Class Divided*; contemporary films such as *12 Years a Slave*; simulation and gaming activities/exercises; and role plays that are excellent resources to raise racial issues and generate meaningful race talk. In my teaching, for example, I often plan exercises or assignments for my students that place them in situations that expose them to events that question their racial reality. I have them visit minority communities, make home visits, and/or do internships in agencies where racial/ethnic minorities comprise the majority of clients. Only recently, however, have I come to the realization that

if the eradication of racism is dependent on the courses or workshops we offer, then we have lost the battle. Only if teachers and parents are willing to create their own learning experiences will they have any hope of becoming helpful in race talk situations.

11. Validate, Encourage, and Express Admiration and Appreciation to Participants Who Speak When It Is Unsafe to Do So

Engaging in race talk is often a threatening situation for participants. Although many of my colleagues often talk about creating a safe space for race talk, I have begun to believe that what is safe for one group (Whites) may not be safe for another (people of color). In an earlier chapter, I mentioned that what White Euro-Americans consider safe is often based on White conversation conventions and White definitions of respect; these conditions may inherently be unsafe for people of color. Thus, I prefer to encourage, validate, and express admiration for those individuals willing to speak when it is unsafe to do so. Courage, I tell them, is to be honest when it is unsafe to speak their true thoughts and feelings. It takes little courage to express one's point of view when they feel safe. Thus, I am constantly seeking opportunities to express appreciation and validation to members of the group who take a risk and show courage, openness, and willingness to participate in a difficult dialogue. This can be done throughout a dialogue:

- "Mary, I know this has been a very emotional experience for you, but I value your courage in sharing with the group your personal thoughts and feelings. I hope I can be equally brave when topics of sexism or homophobia are brought up in this class."
- "As a group, we have just experienced a difficult dialogue. I admire you all for not 'running away' but facing it squarely. I hope you all will continue to feel free about bringing up these topics. Real courage is being honest and risking offending others when the situation is not safe. Today, that is what I saw happen with several of you and for that, the group should be grateful."

These 11 suggestions represent only a few of the important ones that educators and facilitators may find helpful in aiding others to grow from healthy race talk. There are many other strategies that are helpful in facilitating difficult dialogues on race, too numerous to cover in one chapter. Furthermore, it is important to realize that facilitating difficult dialogues may be more an

art than a science. There are very few places where we can open a book with clear suggestions and directions about how to handle and facilitate a difficult racial dialogue. Trial and error, experience, an ability to understand oneself as a racial/cultural being, understanding and feeling comfortable with the worldview of others, and developing appropriate intervention skills are crucial to becoming an effective facilitator. Finally, becoming culturally skilled and competent in facilitating difficult race talk is a constant lifelong journey. Understanding that everyone commits racial blunders or makes insensitive remarks is a given. As one of my colleagues once said, "It is how one recovers, not how you cover up that matters."

Although this book is on the psychology of race talk, it is really more than that. The attitudes, beliefs, and fears inherent in race talk symbolize our society's resistance to unmasking the embedded inequities and basic unfairness imposed on citizens of color. We avoid honest racial dialogues, but innocence and naïveté can no longer serve as excuses for inaction. Courage, risk, and vulnerability have been a constant theme stressed in our race talk analysis. Race talk potentially makes the invisible visible and opens possibilities to view the world of oppression through realistic eyes. The final question I pose to readers, therefore, is this: As a nation, will you choose the path we have always traveled, a journey of silence that has benefited only a select group and oppressed others, or will you choose the road less traveled, a journey of racial reality that may be full of discomfort and pain, but offers benefits to all groups in our society? It would be unfortunate, indeed, to look back one day and echo the words of poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who wrote, "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been!"

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