



Anti-Racism Learning Process in Practice

This summer, WCSAP released a [support statement](#) for the #blacklivesmatter Movement as a recommitment to our anti-racism work and allyship with African American communities. In that statement, we committed to being transparent about our ongoing process and to sharing tools that we find helpful along the way with our membership. We don't have all the answers, but we want you to come along with us as we continue and deepen our anti-racism work.

For the last several years, WCSAP has institutionalized a monthly Anti-Oppression meeting. When staff met to develop our statement, we also agreed that we would reserve the next few meetings to discuss anti-black racism and white privilege.

In July, during the first of these meetings, staff read the article "[I, Racist](#)" by John Metta. We spent time discussing both the broader systemic challenges that the article addresses, as well as personal internal processes and biases that contribute to the anti-black racism we see in current events. We watched news clips about Sandra Bland, and considered both the parallels to victim blaming that we fight against in the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement and the intersection of gendered violence and racist violence that happened to her.

Additionally, we processed some of the responses we received from the field to the statement we issued and how those responses can inform our anti-racism work moving forward. We found that the "I, Racist" article effectively addressed some of the reasons why people may feel challenged by anti-racism work, and why this can be a barrier to allyship with the African American community.

It's important to reserve space to discuss racism itself and the places where it intersects with gendered violence at our agencies. It is equally important to have practical ways to incorporate those discussions and the commitments that come out of them in agency structure and programming. Here are some ideas to incorporate discussion at your program:

- Reserve time during a staff meeting or board meeting to read "I, Racist" and use the discussion questions we developed (see Suggested talking points and discussion questions for the article "I, Racist" below) or create your own!
- Use "I, Racist" as a part of your Advocate Core training. WCSAP has incorporated reading the article into our curriculum during the Day One lesson on Diversity, Cultural Competency, and Anti-Oppression.

- There is no shortage of articles and information on anti-black racism and allyship. Reserve a space to have regular and ongoing discussions relevant to current events and racism. WCSAP often shares these articles on our social media platforms, so check there if you need an idea for an article to use.
- Challenge yourself and your co-workers to locate the intersections between violence against Black communities and sexual violence.
- Acknowledge the race-based trauma and stress triggered by current events in the news and social media that so many people of color in our field may be experiencing.

Consider the guidelines for your staff conversation carefully:

Try to create a safer space. Navigating safety in conversations about race is a big challenge. Because white people and people of color will have different experiences of safety in this context, all you will be able to create is a “safer” space.

Identify feelings. White people need to take a greater responsibility for their feelings during conversations about race with people of color. It is important, as a white person, to sit with any feelings of being uncomfortable or unsafe and examine those feelings internally. Sometimes those feelings are really sadness, nervousness, defensiveness, guilt, or a trigger of unexamined racial bias or deep seated learned racist stereotypes.

Allow people of color to set guidelines that help them feel safer.

Step back. White people should be sure to be aware of the amount of space they take up in a conversation like this. If you often talk during your typical staff meetings or in your leadership role, use this opportunity to listen and ask questions. If you plan to have a series of meetings or discussion, offer the opportunity to rotate facilitators, depending on level of comfort of others to lead.

Be present. Be prepared to talk about the issues and to invest the emotional and mental energy it takes to make the conversation meaningful and productive.

Remember, it is not the responsibility of people of color to explain racism to white people. However, if people of color choose to share their lived experiences of racism with white people, that is an opportunity to learn. As advocates we hold stories and believe survivors every day. Employ the same philosophy in conversations with co-workers and community members about their lived experiences of racism.

This work is hard. Let us know how your conversations go and if you are looking for more resources and ideas. We look forward to continuing the dialogue at WCSAP and sharing with you more of what we learn.

Suggested Talking points and Discussion Questions: "I, Racist"

The author describes how his aunt can't see her privilege. As advocates in the anti-sexual violence movement, we are probably all coming from a place of believing that racism exists, but may struggle to identify how we are influenced and benefit from systemic oppression

Question: How do you think white people, who may think of themselves as anti-racist, still benefit from a system of racist oppression as described in the article?

Question: What are effective strategies to show those who have privilege that they have it and how they benefit from it?

The author describes a number of fictional works (e.g. film adaptations of books) where characters are presumed to be white, or are portrayed as white despite evidence to the contrary.

Question: What are other examples can you think of where fictional characters are assumed to be white? Why is this a problem?

Question: Consider how you envision characters in fictional works you read. How much of how you picture characters is influenced by your experience and how much is influenced by the media?

Referenced in the excerpts below, the author talks about the difference between the collective "we" in the black community and the individualistic "I" among white people.

"We don't see a shooting of an innocent Black child in another state as something separate from us because we know viscerally that it could be our child, our parent, or us, that is shot."

"Black people think in terms of we because we live in a society where the social and political structures interact with us as Black people. White people do not think in terms of we. White people have the privilege to interact with the social and political structures of our society as individuals."

Question: How does this article connect with the ideas of collective and historical trauma that communities of color and indigenous peoples experience?

Question: How might this impact... (1) everyday interactions? (2) the response to community violence? (3) the response to sexual assault? (4) discussions about racism?