

CAUCUS GROUPS TAKEN FROM TDSJ2

Option 2

Caucus Groups

Invite participants to join one of two groups: people of color or white people. Encourage mixed race participants to choose either the white or people of color group depending on which group they identify with more strongly, or depending on the numbers and makeup of the class. Provide the option of creating a third group for people who identify as mixed race. Tell participants that they will spend 45 minutes in these groups and that they will have the opportunity to share insights and thoughts about their small group discussion with the larger group afterward. The white facilitator then gathers the white participants and takes them to the room that has been designated for their caucus group. The facilitator of color gathers the participants of color and takes them to their designated room.

Once in the caucus groups, each facilitator begins the discussion by reviewing a list of focus questions for their particular group.

Questions for People of Color Caucus Group

1. What thoughts or feelings do I have about meeting in caucus groups?
2. How have I been affected by internalized racism and horizontal racism? How do I collude with the system of racism?
3. How can I empower myself and others in the group to deal with racism in our lives and to take action to end racism?
4. What are the costs and benefits of actively confronting racism and doing anti-racism work?

Questions for White People Caucus Group:

1. What thoughts or feelings do I have about meeting in caucus groups?
2. How have I benefited from white privilege?
3. How can I move from feelings of guilt and shame about racism to taking responsibility for my role as an agent of racism?
4. What are the costs and benefits of becoming an ally to people of color and doing anti-racist work?

Dialogue between Caucus Groups (30–45 Minutes)

The closing discussion should include attention to issues that participants have about leaving their caucus group to rejoin the large group. Strategies to address these concerns include talking about how participants feel about their time together and about re-joining the larger group, discussing how to

maintain safety and trust in the larger group, and whether it is fair to hold particular expectations of the other group(s).

When the caucus group time is over, bring the groups back together. Reiterate that the purpose of the caucus groups was to allow members of the advantaged and targeted groups to have separate time to discuss some of the specific ways that racism influences their lives. By referring to the guidelines and asking the groups to acknowledge though not necessarily agree with each other's concerns, an exchange of information between the groups can begin.

Structure the dialogue so that each group has the same amount of uninterrupted time. Suggested topics for participants of color to address include: a) Something about race or racism I never want to hear again, b) Something I want white participants to know, c) Something that makes me proud to be a member of my racial group, d) Something I am planning to do to address racism, e) A question I have.

Some suggested topics for white participants to focus on include: a) What I want people of color to know about me, b) Something I learned about racism, c) Something that makes me proud to be a member of my racial group, d) A question I have, e) Something I am planning to change in my attitudes or actions.

After one group has presented, members of the other group(s) may ask questions for clarification but should respect the experiences and thoughts shared by the other group. If there are more than two groups, adapt the time spent in this section to accommodate additional report-outs.

In closing the dialogue, make connections between this activity and those in the other modules, and highlight how racism affects everyone. Whites are affected by denial of racism, since it requires them to develop an inaccurate sense of the impact of race on society. They are also affected by their emotions once they recognize racism. Racism can form barriers against authentic, open friendships between white people and people of color. People of color are limited in their access to goods and services and in their ability to establish a full and positive sense of self. All people have received misinformation and partial information about race and racism. Initiating change requires a conscious effort to break the system of racism and an assessment of the costs and benefits of both keeping the system going or interrupting it.

Facilitation Issues

This activity works best if the facilitation team includes a white person and a person of color. If you are teaching alone, you might instead bring in a panel of people from different groups of color and anti-racist white people to discuss their perspectives and actions to challenge racism in their communities and the conditions under which they are able to work effectively in coalition with other groups.

We have found that caucus groups can enable a level of sharing, challenge, and reflection that participants are less likely to experience in the mixed group. Caucus groups work well when participants have some level of awareness of racism. The facilitators in each caucus group should share the same racial identity as the participants in that group. If there are more than two facilitators, you might form a group for biracial or multiracial people. Or they can facilitate additional caucus groups of white people or people of color, depending on the racial background of the facilitator and the number of participants in either the targeted or advantaged racial groups represented in the class.

Issues Associated with Splitting the Group: Splitting the larger group into targeted and advantaged groups often has a profound effect on participants. White participants are sometimes anxious and doubt that they can have a meaningful conversation about racism without people of color in the room. Participants of color often express relief that they will have a space to talk about their experiences without having to monitor what they say in the presence of white people. They may also feel safer talking about collusion and horizontal racism in a group just for people of color because

such discussions can be seen as airing dirty laundry in front of Whites. The distinct experiences of inter-group conflicts among Asian, Latino, Native American, and African heritage participants can also add complexity to caucus group discussions.

As much as possible, encourage participants to choose the racial group to which they feel both personally connected and to which the culture assigns them. White people in interracial relationships may feel that they are treated like a person of color when they are with their partners, but they still receive privilege as a white person, even though they may have been subjected to racial prejudice through their relationships with a person of color. Use the questions for each group as a way to help participants decide where they belong. For example, the group for people of color will be discussing internalized racism, a concept not applicable to white people. Unless a person experiences white skin privilege, the discussion in the white group will not be relevant to his or her experience.

Issues in the White Group: In the white group, some participants may deny that they as individuals receive privilege from racism or that they collude even passively with the racist system. One way of highlighting the power and privilege of participants' white identities is to encourage them to explore the similarities in their experiences as Whites and the differences related to other social identities. For example, a White lesbian, a white Jew, and a white man in a wheelchair will probably still have the same experience of seeing mostly white people in the media, being taught in school by mostly white people, living in districts represented by mostly white Congress people and not being targeted *exclusively* because they are White. Help participants focus on the racial aspect of their identity for this discussion so that they can examine the difference between denying privilege or being overwhelmed by guilt on the one hand and being a responsible ally on the other.

Issues in the People of Color Group: Participants in this group may start a discussion about which targeted racial group has been hurt the most by racism or attempt to create "a hierarchy of hurt." Such a discussion can be an opportunity to address horizontal oppression, how it creates tensions among targeted groups and deflects attention away from the racism of the dominant culture. While differences in experience and history need to be acknowledged, a comparison of who is hurt most by racism is generally nonproductive and may reinforce racist stereotypes and inaccurate information about different racial groups. The concept of empowerment, that is also part of the discussion for this group, calls us to move beyond this competitive dynamic to create new coalitions where the experiences of different targeted racial groups can be shared, listened to respectfully, and valued.

Issues in Creating the Dialogue Between Groups: The dialogue between caucus groups can be a powerful experience for participants. For some White people, it may be the first time that they hear directly the perceptions of people of color or the emotional intensity that accompanies these experiences. For some people of color, it may be the first time that they hear Whites taking responsibility for White privilege or talking about how they are hurt by racism. When the report-out from either group involves intense emotions, participants will need support to fully attend to and process the experience. Whites who are struggling with guilt feelings will need to be reminded of the difference between guilt and responsibility and encouraged not to retreat into denial because their emotions cause them discomfort. People of color who are centered in their own experience of racism may discount the experiences of white people or may want to respond by challenging the legitimacy of their feelings.