

THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF WHITE PEOPLE: FACILITATOR GUIDE

PREPARATION

Make copies of the papers to be passed out at the meeting before these pieces are discussed:

- The Emotional Lives of White People*
- The Anatomy of White Guilt*

Or you can also refer participants to download the papers from the Unitarian Universalist Association web site at www.uua.org/araomc/143205.shtml

I think it would also be useful to give people the list of questions about the emotional lives of white people before the session so as to get them thinking about the questions ahead of time.

- Reflections on the Emotional Lives of White People* - print and hand-out only (not available on Individuals site).

*Available on the Facilitators web page.

Make flipchart notes where needed.

FORMAT

Have the participants read the two papers entitled “The Emotional Lives of White People” and “The Anatomy of White Guilt.”

Then reflect on the questions regarding the emotional lives of white people that have particular importance for you. Note that there are spaces between the questions for participants to make notes on their reflections.

Explain that you will be breaking into small groups at the next meeting. At that time participants will have an opportunity to talk about the emotional dynamics of whiteness that are most significant in their lives.

I suggest that you take one hour for the participants to work in small groups. Then come back into the large group. Have each group report back one important learning they had from their discussion. Then spend fifteen minutes giving all of the participants an opportunity to what it felt like to reflect on their emotional lives as white people.

OPENING WORSHIP

Begin each session with a brief opening worship which might include a chalice lighting, reading or song.

REVIEW OF THE GUIDELINES FOR BEING TOGETHER

Please see the facilitator guide for the Examining Whiteness curriculum for some suggested guidelines.

REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

If there is another meeting before you do this session you might want to review the key learning's and what further insights participants may have had during the week.

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE SESSION

The emotional life of white people is complex – to say the least.

The word guilt is often used to describe the emotional life of white people. The author of the curriculum argues that the emotional life of white people is far more complicated than that. If we are to affect change we need to understand this complexity.

There are some particular emotions that white people experience. These feelings are: fear, hatred, amnesia, anesthesia, indifference, denial, guilt, shame, loneliness, and hopelessness. And there are feelings that we are required to repress like anger, grief, and sadness. These are feelings that white people have in the context of a society based on race and rooted in racism. With all these dynamic we are very confused about our feelings.

The author doesn't claim this is an exhaustive list. But it's a list that helps us get into the conversation.

NOTE: The presenter might want to list these emotions on newsprint.

No one of us as whites has the same emotional make up. Each of us has our own unique blend of all of the different emotions that comes from being white. Each of us has our own way of expressing (or not expressing) feelings, our own family history, our own class background, our own socialization as men and women and so on

Each of us has a history of emotional development around issues of race. We express different emotions as white people at different times of our lives.

PERSONAL REFLECTION BY THE AUTHOR: For example, for the first twenty five years of my life my primary feelings were amnesia, anesthesia and denial. For the next ten years my primary emotions were guilt and helplessness. In more recent years I have expressed more anger and sadness.

THE EMOTIONAL COST OF WHITENESS

Those of us who are white are imprisoned by our whiteness.

Paulo Freire in his book The Pedagogy of the Oppressed reminds us that oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Personally I can't be in right relationship if I am caught up in fear and hatred. I can't express the full range of emotions as long as I am caught in amnesia, anesthesia, indifference, and denial caused by my socialization into white superiority. I can't express appropriate feelings of anger and grief in a white culture that suppresses them.

Becoming aware of the impact of racism on my emotional life, I see how racism distorts my emotional life and destroys me as a person.

I want to move beyond the deadening power of whiteness. I want to discover my full humanity. I want to break free from limited emotions. I want to feel the joy of living in right relationship with all people.

Wanting to “save my soul” I become empowered to work for change. I can then make a decision to dismantle white institutional power and be accountable to People of Color leaders.

STRUCTURING THE MEETING (Outline format on newsprint)

We will be breaking into small groups. Each of us will have an opportunity to talk about the emotional dynamics of whiteness that are most significant in our lives.

We will take one hour for the participants to work in small groups.

Then we will come back into the large group. I am going to ask that each group report back one important learning they had from their discussion.

Then we will spend fifteen minutes giving all of the participants an opportunity to what it felt like to reflect on their emotional lives as White People.

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

Summarize the key learning from the session.

EVALUATION

Evaluate the format and the quality of the information regarding the issues discussed.

DESCRIBE THE NEXT SESSION

At our next meeting we will.....In preparation for our next meeting please read.....

CLOSING RITUAL

Close with prayer, reading, song or appropriate ritual.