


Identifying racism

Bubalamai Bawa Gumada: Healing the Wounds of the Heart Resiliency against racism

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 Suggested time: 60 minutes

Preparation

- Read the background information and view the video *Healing the Wounds of the Heart*

Whole group activity

Introduction (2 minutes)

- Use the Purpose and Overview from *Healing the Wounds of the Heart* reproduced on page 2 to explain the purpose of the session

Preparation for watching the video (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of *Healing the Wounds of the Heart* notes to each participant.
- Ask participants to note anything that they find important about the effects of racism and how to deal with it offered by speakers in the video. Use the overview notes to provide examples (This can be done during the video or at the end.)

View the video (27 minutes)

After viewing the video (25 minutes)

- Ask participants to make a personal response to the two questions and then participate in a group discussion.

Conclusion (1 minute)

- Understanding the effects of racism and developing strategies to deal with racism can help the target of racism as well as the whole community.

From *Healing the Wounds of the Heart*

Purpose

- This video can be used for both staff and students.

The purpose of *Healing the Wounds of the Heart* is to:

- develop greater understanding and empathy towards what is racism
- promote discussion about effects of racism
- discuss positive strategies for creating resilience against experiences of racism

Overview

Healing the Wounds of the Heart uses the voices of respected and highly successful Aboriginal Australians. The documentary is not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but for everyone.

The people who are sharing their experiences in the documentary are very successful Aboriginal people. They include; managers, writers, historians, business owners, artists and respected Aboriginal elders, who despite their age are still very productive in their communities.

The key ideas raised trigger discussion about:

- the harmful effects of racism
- building resilience can help overcome racism
- identifying racism for what it is
- staying positive about yourself
- staying calm
- respectfully challenging racism
- seeking support and talking about racism
- proving that racism is wrong.

Before the video

Background information

Within the last 20 years, there has been a substantial increase in a particular field of racism based research. This field has, in part, moved the lens from trying to understand why prejudice, racism and other forms of discrimination may exist and how it can be minimised (often falling under the anti-racism label), and instead has focused on the perceptions and experiences of those who must endure racism and other forms of discrimination.

The pioneering work of both international (e.g., Claude Steel, 1995, 2010; Philomena Essed, 1992) and Australian authors (David Mellor, 2003; Yin Paradies, 2005) has led to a greater understanding of how many differing forms of racism and discrimination may negatively impact upon livelihood of children, youth, adults, and elderly peoples from a wide diversity of cultural groups around the world. Importantly, research has more recently begun to focus on methods to minimise the impact of varying forms of racism and discrimination by seeking to identify strategies to promote strength and resiliency for any individual or group of people who may experience the significant stressor of racism and discrimination.

It is identifying positive strategies for creating resiliency against experiences of racism and discrimination where the *Healing the Wounds of the Heart* documentary comes into play. More specifically, this documentary was motivated by an influential research paper by Johns, Schmader, and Martens (2005), who not only identified the detrimental impact of negative stereotypes on the performance of female students in statistics courses (that is they did not perform as well as men), but found an effective, yet simple method of negating these detrimental performance effects. That is, *the participants were simply given a brief description of the negative stereotypes and how inaccurate they are, and told that any negative feelings due to such stereotypes are not reflective of their ability to succeed*. The results revealed that not only did the females who received the intervention perform significantly better than the females who did not receive the intervention, but also they performed as well as the male participants within the study.

Post Video discussion

The following are 2 stimulus questions with a guided script.

People in this documentary spoke openly about their experiences of racism and more importantly about how they overcame racism.

Question 1: What are some effects of racism that people in the video spoke about?

Ask and list all effects provided. After all the effects have been listed present the following additional information.

Firstly, we need to understand that racism is not something that is meaningless, or that people are just being too sensitive when they speak of racism. Within Australia and around the world, much research has emerged to show that racism (whether it be words or actions) can do a lot of damage. For example:

- In a rural town in Australia, research found that Aboriginal Australian adults who experienced racism in the daily lives, they were 3 times more likely to report poorer physical health, and 9 times more likely to report poorer mental health (like feeling depressed). It is also important to note that similar results found for non-Aboriginal Australians, so racism can hurt us all (see Larson, Gillies, Howard, & Coffin, 2007 reference);
- In Western Australia, research on over 4000 Aboriginal youth aged from 4 to 17 years found that if they experienced racism, they were twice as likely to:
 - take up smoking, alcohol and drugs
 - suffer from clinically significant emotional (anxiety) and behavioural problems (anger/lashing out)
 - to have suicidal thoughts (see Zubrick, et al., 2005, 2006 references).
- Across five metropolitan and rural New South Wales high schools, Aboriginal students who experienced racism in their daily lives were found to have a 5 to 10% disadvantage in their school grades and test results. They were also at much greater risk of disengaging, and wanting to give up at school. Similar results were found for the non-Aboriginal children across these schools, so again racism can be seen to hurt us all (see Bodkin-Andrews, et al. 2010 reference).

This research shows the detrimental effects of racism.

Question 2: What are some of the ways people discussed dealing with racism they experienced?

These strategies are targeted for Aboriginal students but can be applied to all students.

Identify racism for what it is:

Comments usually centre around that people who are racist are sick, that racism can be catching, and maybe even cured. It is important to encourage the interpretations of the students, especially if it shows some form of deeper thought.

The message Gavin Andrews was trying to get across was indeed that racism can be considered a sickness, but most importantly, it is a sickness 'someone else suffers from'. What this means is, if you or your friends experience racism, it is not reflective of who you are. It is the racist who has the problem, not you or your friend.

Stay positive about yourself:

As Auntie Mae said in the documentary, "don't take racism on", or as Chris Blacklock said, "Keep your head up high, and stay strong." Remember that racism is not about you or your friends, so you should not have to suffer for it. Be proud of who you are.

Stay calm:

Linda Burney suggested the need to count to ten before responding to racism, and all of those interviewed within the video spoke of not reacting violently. Although, as James Wilson Miller suggested, staying calm may be hard thing to do, you should realise that acting with anger may only further justify the racists attitudes. Put simply, do not lower your standards to that of the racist.

Respectfully challenge racism:

Here you need to consider not only your own emotions, but the situational context of the racist incident. Carefully consider if the racist individual can be approached or by confronting them, will it lead to heightened risk of conflict (if so, move away from the racism).

Here it may be possible to focus on recent media attention towards incidences of racism on busses or trains. Explaining the role of a witness, ask the students what they would do? Suggesting varying scenarios from a lone individual to a group of men calling out racist taunts. Also suggest that supporting the victim of racism is not the same as fighting the racist. Simply offering personal support may be more productive than contributing to a hostile situation.

Also consider intent. In many cases, individuals may not mean to be racists (e.g., "I'm just joking") and may not understand how hurtful such words could be. Whilst ignorance is no excuse for racism, respectfully letting the person know that you don't appreciate such jokes and explaining why they can be considered to be offensive, may at least lessen the likelihood of such jokes being repeated. Finally, being calm, open, and forgiving may be argued to be one of the strongest ways to combat unintentional racism.

The Australian Human Rights Commission [Racism. It Stops With Me](#) campaign, provides ideas suggested by young people about what we can do if we experience racism or see racism towards someone else.

Seek support and talk about it:

As already discussed, being targeted with racism can be an emotionally taxing experience. It is important that you do not hesitate to talk about it with those you trust. As suggested by Lyn Riley, just get it out of your system. You could speak to friends, family members, or even support people such as school teachers, ARCOs and helplines such as [Kids Helpline](#) and [ReachOut.com](#).

Prove that racism is wrong:

As Aunty Frances Bodkin explained, prove the racist wrong. Don't take on their problems (or disease), don't meet the expectations of the racist (reacting violently), just be the best you can be at whatever you do. Prove the racist wrong.

Healing the Wounds of the Heart notes

Speakers in the video	Something they said that you liked
Cindy Berwick	
Anthony Dillion	
Lynette Riley	
Linda Burney	
Fran Bodkin	
Gavin Andrews	
Aunty Mae Robinson	
James Miller	
Bronwyn Bancroft	
Fabri Blacklock	
Keith Hall	