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# Talking Comfortably About Race

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# A Bit About Me

- Jill Scott
- EDI Expert for more than 25 years
- Mainly worked in the public sector
- Specialising in delivering training, race and gender issues, and addressing bullying and harassment
- Passionate about making a difference and improving people's lives

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# What About You?

- What are your challenges to talking comfortably about race? Take a little bit of time to reflect for yourself on why it's difficult for you.

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# The Topic of Race

- Race is a HUGE topic
- You need to understand about history (slavery, Windrush, etc), how race is socially constructed, structural and institutional racism, white privilege, overt racism, covert forms of racism, including unconscious bias and micro-aggressions, and so on (do you feel exhausted yet)?
- So one of the barriers to talking about race is it just feels so overwhelming and difficult to address

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# Barriers to Talking Comfortably (1)

- Don't know what language to use
- BAME, BME, people of colour, racialised minorities or something else?
- Although language is important, don't let it get in the way of taking action.

# Use of Language – Helpful Hints

- Ask someone what they prefer - people will often have a view on how they wish to be addressed.
- If you are deciding what terms to use as an organisation, consult everyone but then just make a decision. If you have decided to use a particular term, communicate why.
- Language about race evolves – keep up with the changes.
- Understand why language about race can be emotive.
- Try not to offend people – if you do, apologise and learn from what went wrong.
- Don't let the fear of offending someone stop you having conversations about race.

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# Barriers to Talking Comfortably (2)

- Talking about differences pushes us apart rather than uniting us.
- People are afraid of being called racist – even noticing race feels risky and potential divisive and dangerous.

# Bringing Communities Together (2)

- Find out more about people and their culture in a positive, supportive way.
- Identify key dates for your own personnel/service users and celebrate them collectively.
- Have special events where people share food, cultural practices, etc
- Invite people to deliver presentations about their own race, history, geography, etc (if they want to).
- One of the key ways to reduce unconscious bias is to increase contact and communication between people of different races. Interracial contact also appears the best way for reducing anxiety about race more broadly.



# Barriers to Talking Comfortably (3)

- Good/bad binary.
- Idea that racism is an individual thing practised only by bad people.
- Stops us talking about and addressing issues, and challenging views held by people who are progressive and liberal (but could do better).
- Also ignores the impact of institutional racism.

# The Binary Construct of Racism

## Racist = Bad

- Uneducated
- Bigoted/Backward thinking
- Prejudiced
- Cruel/unpleasant
- Old
- Geographically specific (rural)

## Not Racist = Good

- Educated
- Progressive/Forward thinking
- Open-minded
- Well-intentioned
- Young
- Geographically specific (urban)

**Lack of understanding of structural factors**

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# Listen more than speak

- Moving beyond the good/bad binary involves hearing about people's lived experiences.
- Realising that however well meaning you are, you don't know what it's really like.
- Talking (and more importantly, listening) to other people about how racism causes challenges and barriers for them is what's required – and asking them how we can support and empower them.

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# I'm not biased – am I?

But I'm not biased – am I? I do my best to treat everyone fairly and equally.

But what **assumptions** do we make about other people that influence the way we act?

Why not try the Harvard Implicit Association Test and find out what your own biases are: [Project Implicit](#).

# Thinking in Stereotypes

- Good/bad racist is just one of the stereotypes we hold about race.
- We often believe Black people are good at sport but not likely to excel in financial services, for example (footballer/accountant).
- We assume East Asian people will be scientists or mathematicians – but what if they want to be actors?
- We create stereotypes of whole races and groups of people (what do you think about Irish Travellers or Eastern European people, for example?)

# Challenging Stereotypes

- Review media sources very carefully – who is telling the story and do they have a vested interest?
- Reframe your own stereotypes – identify where they come from and consider whether or not they are based on reality.
- Get involved with events such as Black History Month to see other perspectives on issues.
- If you don't know anyone in a particular group, your ideas will be second (or third or fourth) hand. Seek out people from that group and get to know real individuals and see them as people.

# Review

- Looked at language and terminology
- Considered how acknowledging difference can bring communities together rather than pushing them apart
- Thought about how the good/bad binary gives us a misleading view both of ourselves as the caped crusader flying to the rescue and what the issues really are
- Seen how thinking and responding in stereotypical ways reinforces and entrenches racism and racist views.
- But we're not finished yet ...

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# But if you're up for a challenge ...

- Are you up for some challenging conversation?



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# How to Challenge Others Effectively

“If ... your goal is to foster a more equitable culture, you need to stop yelling ‘Racist!’ at anyone who doesn’t see the world exactly as you do. Somehow you need to find enough common ground for a real conversation about race. Very few people are stupid or irredeemably mean. They’ll listen to what you have to say if they trust you’ll listen to what they have to say back.”

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# Secret Ingredient

- In all conversations about race, there's a key element that will resolve most of the issues we've identified.

EMPATHY

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# Is being comfortable what matters?

- So although we started off with the title Talking Comfortably about Race, we've ended up by considering some things that may in fact make us feel quite uncomfortable.
- And that's OK.

# Personal Reflection and Commitment



Something I learned today was...

Something (or some things) that I will do as a result of what I've learned is/are ...

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# Thank you!

- Thank you for listening!
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# Any Questions?

