

Please read **BEFORE** the
Thursday, Oct. 9, 2014,
Obici Healthcare Foundation Forum with special
guest, The Honorable Angela Bryant



EXCERPTS FROM
***IS RECONCILIATION POSSIBLE: LESSONS FROM**
COMBATING “MODERN RACISM”
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Introduction

The full “Is Reconciliation Possible?” article can be found at www.visions-inc.org. A summary of the article follows. The “Reconciliation” article lays out VISIONS’ framework for understanding the multiplicity of ways in which dysfunctional power imbalances can occur in the United States. While this article uses race as the variable for discussion, racism is not the only form of oppression. Other “isms” sexism, heterosexism, ageism, adultism, for example, also manifest themselves in power imbalances. Within the context of health policy and system changes, we acknowledge that power imbalances exist based on race, gender, age, and other differences. We also acknowledge that reconciliation, a process of transformation for both sides in a conflict, is possible when all parties in a conflict understand each other in ways that lead to behaving differently. This summary is offered as a resource through which participants can discuss and understand the impact of “power dynamics” as they manifest themselves among and between collaborators. It invites the reader to consider engaging in reconciliation at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels when the inevitable cultural conflicts arise. It is anticipated that this material can serve as a resource for continually engaging one another internally and externally in helping to create an inclusive environment as well as collaboratively address policy and system change organizationally and across organizational relationships.

Assumptions and Definitions

Reconciliation is, at its core, a process of transformation for both sides in a conflict. The same transformation is also critical to an effective multicultural strategy of change. In our work on anti-racism and multiculturalism at VISIONS, Inc. we define multiculturalism as: the process of recognizing, understanding and appreciating one’s own culture as well as the culture of others. Multiculturalism stresses learning to appreciate the impact of differences in social location based on such variables as race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability and language. This learning process is dynamic; as we begin to see the impact of differences, our sense of ourselves, others, and the world shifts. We impact others and others impact us differently. There is an interactive process occurring, potentially at four levels: the personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural. (See Figures 1 and 2 below).

Two weeks after September 11, 2001, the bishops of the Episcopal Church, USA met for a scheduled meeting on the topic of "globalization and difference." The book Waging Reconciliation is a compilation of papers and speeches from that meeting, including Dr Batts' following presentation. See: Douglas, Ian T. ed. Waging Reconciliation: God's Mission in a Time of Globalization and Crisis. New York: Church Publishing, 2002. www.churchpublishing.org

Figure I

VISIONS, Inc. Assumptions and Definitions

MULTICULTURAL PROCESS OF CHANGE

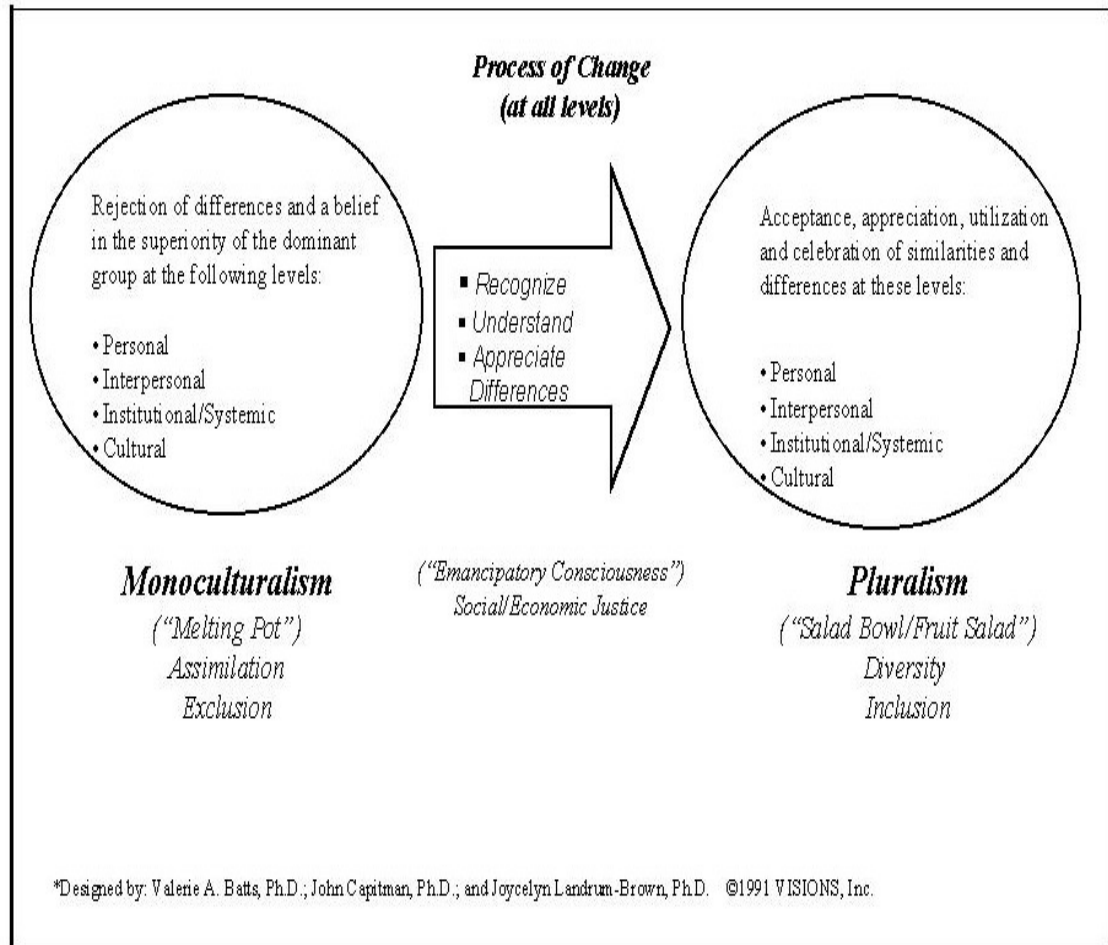


Figure 2

Types of Oppression	Variable	Non-Target Groups	Target Groups
Racism	Race/Color	White	People of Color (African, Asian, Native, Latino/a Americans)
Sexism	Gender	Men	Women, Transgender
Classism	Socio-Economic Class	Middle, Upper Class	Poor, Working Class
Elitism	Education Level	Formally Educated	Informally Educated
	Place in Hierarchy	Managers, Exempt, Faculty	Clerical, Non-Exempt, Students
Religious Oppression	Religion	Christians, Protestants	Muslims/Catholics, and Others
Anti-Semitism		Christians	Jews
Militarism	Military Status	WW I&II, Korean, Gulf War Veterans	Vietnam Veterans
Ageism	Age	Young Adults	Elders (40+ by law)
Adultism		Adults	Children
Heterosexism	Sexual Orientation	Heterosexuals	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender
Ableism	Physical or Mental Ability Bodied	Temporarily Able-Bodied	Physically or Mentally Challenged
Xenophobia	Immigrant Status	US Born	Immigrant
Linguistic Oppression	Language	English	English as a Second Language Non-English

A Model for Combating “Modern Racism”

Although forms of oppression vary, we have found the model and the process of change outlined in the remainder of this chapter to be useful in identifying and challenging power imbalances and thereby leading to a process of transformation and reconciliation. I invite you to “try on” our model of combating “modern racisms” as one framework or strategy necessary for “waging reconciliation.” *Please review the full article for a discussion of “old-fashioned racism”.*

Expressions of Racism

Modern racism has been defined as “the expression in terms of abstract ideological symbols and symbolic behaviors of the feeling that blacks are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo.”¹ It is, further, the attribution of non-race related reasons for behaviors that continue to deny equal access to opportunity to blacks and other targets of systemic oppression². It is still based on the assumptions, the underlying beliefs, that blacks are inferior and whites are superior. The negative affect that accompanies these beliefs does not change just because of changes in law and practice. Rather the affect has to be submerged given the changes in what is viewed as legal and acceptable in the society.

Modern racism can be expressed at the *personal, interpersonal, institutional, or cultural* levels. In its typical expression these levels interact. *A fuller discussion of the interact is under how modern oppression and internalized oppression interact.*³

A definition of each level of racism is offered below:

Personal:

At this level, racism is prejudice or bias. It is the maintenance of conscious or unconscious attitudes and feelings that whites are superior and that blacks or other people of color are inferior or that these groups' differences are not acceptable in some way. Personal level racism includes cognitive or affective misinformation or both. The misinformation may be learned directly, as through overt messages, or indirectly as through observation.

Interpersonal:

Behaviors based on conscious or unconscious biased assumptions about self and other are interpersonal manifestations of racism. It is often through uncomfortable or tense cross-cultural interactions that individuals discover subtle racist behaviors within themselves or others.

Institutional:

An examination of power relationships reveals institutional racism. The question to be asked is, to what extent do the intended and unintended consequences of policies, practices, laws, styles, rules, and procedures function to the advantage of the dominant group and to the disadvantage of people of color? To the extent that whites in this society have the political, economic, educational, social, and historical power and access to institutionalize prejudices (i.e., the myths of white superiority and black inferiority) against blacks and other people of color, whites are in a position to practice or maintain institutional racism.

Cultural:

The ability to define European-American and Western cultural preferences as "right and beautiful" is the consequence of having institutional power and access in this country. When the standards of appropriate action, thought, and expression of a particular group are perceived either overtly or subtly as negative or less than, cultural racism has occurred. Conformity to the dominant culture is then viewed as "normal" when in fact the myth of the inherent superiority of the group setting the standards is operating. If such is the case, it is likely that a given individual will need to change her behavior to fit those of the dominant group just to be accepted as competent, attractive, or talented.

Modern Racism

As illustrated in the example above (*see full article for the example*), modern racism is often not malicious by intent. Understanding the expressions or levels just outlined helps in clarifying how the consequence of particular behaviors can result in racism regardless of motivation. The schoolteacher, for instance, was very supportive of institutional changes that would bring in more black and Latino teachers. Yet, her personal and cultural biases and preferences made it hard for her to accept a prospective latino language teacher who in English classes taught Spanish to English speakers and English to Spanish speakers, and then had them spend some time dialoguing in the non-native and then the native languages in each class. The white teacher found herself agreeing with the administration that while this idea perhaps had some merit, it was not efficient and it was redundant with what the students learned in Spanish foreign language classes.

Following is a description of suggested ways that modern racism occurs. It is useful to consider that the behaviors outlined can manifest themselves at each of the four levels defined above. It is also the case that currently racism is likely to manifest itself in subtle forms. The following list of behaviors or manifestations of modern racism for the dominant or non-target groups come from VISIONS' work in educational settings.

1. Dysfunctional rescuing:

This form of modern racism is characterized by helping people of color based on an assumption that they cannot help themselves; setting them up to fail; being patronizing or condescending; helping people of color in such a way that it limits their ability to help themselves. This "help that does not help" is often motivated out of guilt or shame. It may be conscious or unconscious and is often embedded in the "culture of niceness or politeness" thus making its limiting aspects hard to discern.

Examples of dysfunctional rescuing are:

A white teacher “gives” a black student who is making a “B+” an “A” instead of challenging her. The student is active in the black student association and is obviously quite bright. The teacher feels vaguely guilty about societal injustices and worries that the student might see him as racist. The teacher is not active in campus efforts to change institutional racism and believes that if he just “does right by blacks,” everything will be okay.

A white department head brings a 30-year-old black female into a previously all white male biology department. He feels good about insisting that she be chosen and denies the importance of the reluctance of his colleagues. All of these faculty have been at the institution for at least 10 years and have failed to support the hiring of any target group members. The department chair fails to recognize the potential set up for failure involved in bringing target groups into a hostile environment without a plan for impacting the culture. “Tokenism” is another name for this process of “doing what’s right” without preparing the existing organization for this change.

2. Blaming the victim:

In this form, racism is expressed by attributing the results of systemic oppression to the target group; ignoring the real impact of racism on the lives of blacks or other people of color; blaming people of color for their current economic situation; or setting target group members up to fail and then blaming them.⁴ To provide structural and status changes but to give inadequate support, that is, time, training, or mentoring, for the development of positive and constructive outcomes, is one illustration. The non-target accepts little or no responsibility for current inequities and puts all the responsibility on target group members for negative outcomes.

Examples of blaming the victim include:

A black student is labeled as having misplaced priorities because of her work on black issues on her campus; she is considered bright but too busy being angry to study. She was not accepted into a student leader’s campus honorary society because her concerns were viewed as “too narrow.”

A Latina female becomes depressed and exhibits paranoid symptoms in a faculty meeting after being the lone Latina and female faculty person for a year in a previously all white male department where she is largely avoided or patronized. The chairman recommends she get psychiatric treatment.

3. Avoidance of contact:

Modern racism may also be manifested by not having social or professional contact with people of color; making no effort to learn about life in communities of color; living in all white communities; or exercising the choice that whites most often have of not being involved in the lives of people of color.

Examples of the avoidance of contact are:

A white university administrator who lives in an all white neighborhood says, “I just don’t have the opportunity to meet black people.”

A white supervisor is a very pleasant person but does not confront a situation when two black male employees engage in conflict. The supervisor, however, would confront the situation if the employees were white.

4. Denial of cultural differences:

In this expression, modern racism means minimizing obvious physical or behavioral differences between people as well as differences in preferences that may be rooted in culture; discounting the influence of African culture and of the African-American or Asian-American experience; or being color-blind in a way that masks discomfort with differences.

Examples of the denial of cultural differences include:

A white faculty member describing the only black faculty member he works with, and trying hard to avoid saying that the faculty member is black.

A white administrator says with much exasperation, when being given information about racial differences in retention of blacks in his university, “What does race have to do with it? Aren’t people just people? Skin color doesn’t matter, we are all just people.”

5. Denial of the political significance of differences:

Finally, modern racism may be manifested by not understanding or denying the differential impacts of social, political, economic, historical, and psychological realities on the lives of people of color and whites, minimizing the influence of such variables on all our lives and institutions. This modern racism may be accompanied by an attitude that cultural differences are just interesting or fun. Such a stance results in an unwillingness to acknowledge the multiplicity of ways in which the impacts of the myth of white superiority continue. The stance also minimizes white privilege as well as the insidious nature of the prevalence of the mentality and practice of “West is Best” by those in positions of power and control in key aspects of life in the United States and most of the world as the beginning of the 21st century. This type of modern racism is firmly entrenched and is perhaps the most binding. Unraveling the hold of a dominant Western perspective will take a massive rethinking of many of our ways of being and doing in the United States, especially in light of September 11th.

Examples of the denial of the political significance of differences are:

A white middle level manager came to a workshop very upset about the affirmative action plan his company has implemented. He was convinced that affirmative action was reverse discrimination and said, “We don’t need affirmative action here. We hire blacks.” Blacks comprised 10% of the management positions (up 8% in two years because of the plan) and 90% of the custodial positions.

A white faculty member dismissed Jesse Jackson’s campaign for president as minimally important at best, for after all, Jackson had no governmental experience. When students pointed out the number of voters Jackson had registered and the large number of popular votes he had obtained, the faculty member said, “That’s not really important; what’s important is that he is not a qualified applicant.”

Internalized Oppression

As discussed in the definition of institutional racism above, African-Americans and other targets of racism are in a reactive posture. This is not to minimize in any way the personal, economic, and political power that target group members have available to them. It is intended to challenge targets and non-targets to think seriously about the extremely detrimental impact of maintaining a society where institutional power is distributed predominantly to one group.

It is difficult for those who suffer at the hands of oppression not to buy into, at some level, the misinformation that society has perpetuated about victim status.⁵ Internalized oppression is the incorporation of negative or limiting messages regarding our way of being and responding in the world by targets of systemic oppression. We define our uniqueness as inferior or different in an unhealthy or un-useful manner. As the character of racism changes, so does the reaction of people of color to it. Most forms of internalized oppression had their origins in situations when their manifestation was necessary for physical or psychological survival.⁶ Such behaviors are most likely to occur initially as survival responses in institutions or in situations where the target person perceives a threat. Five expressions of internalized oppression have been identified.⁷

1. System beating:

This expression of internalized oppression involves attempting to get over on, or around the system; manipulating others or the system through guilt, psychological games, or illicit activities; acting out anger; or playing dumb, clowning, being invisible. The strategy involves awareness that one is an outsider; on the belief that the target group member cannot succeed by being direct and/or by being herself or himself. The target group person feels a need to “take care” of whites feelings or to hide parts of oneself for fear of being misunderstood or viewed unfavorably because of his or her “difference.” It may also take the form of using anger or hostility to manipulate whites.

Examples of system beating are:

A black student manages to go through four years of college with a reading deficit. He is a star basketball player and learns through the grapevine how to take courses where he can “get over” and receive a passing grade.

A Latino teacher in an “upscale” independent school does not speak out, for fear of being disliked, when faculty and staff condemn Latino yard workers for speaking Spanish and using English poorly.

A black hospital employee intimidates all of her white superiors such that she just comes and goes to work as she pleases, and does as little work as possible. Any negative feedback is defined by this employee as racism on the part of her bosses.

2. Blaming the system:

This manifestation is characterized by deflecting responsibility for one's actions; putting all the blame on the other or the system for one's problems; or refusing to learn about and acknowledge mental, emotional, and stress related issues as real. This expression results in an externalizing and blaming of others that in effect gives away the target group members' ability to effect change. It sometimes masks a sense of hopelessness in the target group's ability to visualize and/or implement a more desirable system.

Examples of blaming the system include:

A black student, who is not studying, blames his teacher and the "system" for his bad grades. He is unwilling to accept what role his lack of preparation may have in his failure to succeed.

A Latina employee applies for a job for which she is not qualified, and says it is the system's fault when she does not get hired. She is unwilling to take advantage of opportunities to get the appropriate training and "blames" it on the fact that her English is too poor.

3. Anti-white avoidance of contact:

This form of internalized oppression includes avoiding contact with whites; distrusting all whites (obsessive concern and suspicion); being overly sensitive to rejection; rejecting people of color who are perceived as "not black enough" or "not Chinese enough," etc.; escaping (through fantasy, dreams, drugs, alcohol, sex, food, withdrawal). Such a stance is fueled by a rage that can be self-destructive to the person who carries it. The utility of anger is to stop injustice and to insist on and create equity; when it becomes internalized it can hamper the autonomy of the target group person.

Examples of anti-white avoidance of contact are:

A Chinese employee who refuses to talk to a white supervisor about a job related problem because he says the supervisor will not understand. He does not admit that he is really uncomfortable talking to whites. He therefore limits his own chances for a positive change in his situation.

A black who calls another black an "Uncle Tom" because the latter is working hard to get a promotion and because he is light-skinned. This perpetuation of "colorism" and of a denial of the impressive "profound work ethic" among black people is self-limiting.

4. Denial of cultural heritage:

In this expression, internalized oppression means distrusting one's own group, accepting that one's group is inferior, giving deference to whites, ejecting or devaluing one's cultural heritage, valuing and overemphasizing white standards of beauty, valuing and accepting whites as the highest authority and white standards as superior. Such a stance colludes with the myths of "white superiority and inferiority of people of color."

Examples of denial of cultural heritage include:

A Latino patient who does not want a Latino nurse or doctor because the patient thinks they are not as well qualified as a white nurse or doctor.

A black employee who does not associate much with blacks, who is uncomfortable considering her African heritage, and who, when with whites, aggressively expresses negative opinions of blacks as a group.

5. Lack of understanding or minimization of the political significance of racial oppression:

Internalized oppression can also be manifested by being passive and unassertive; feeling powerless (learned helplessness), misdirecting anger to persons with less power, having difficulty expressing anger, avoiding conflicts at all costs, turning anger inward resulting in high blood pressure, strokes, ulcers; buying copiously (symbolic status

striving; conspicuous consumption of goods,- clothes, cars, etc.); in-group fighting, displaying sexist or other “ism” behaviors, e.g. heterosexism, classism, etc., taking advantage of the lack of information or feelings of powerlessness of other people of color. This stance involves failure to examine the pervasive nature of racism and the multiplicity of ways in which target group members are set up to collude with its perpetuation. It can also result in an unwillingness to accept that the historical legacy of racial oppression has not been corrected systematically and its effects continue to impact most aspects of life.

Examples of a lack of understanding or minimization of the political significance of racial oppression are:

A black first level manager is unwilling to apply for a promotion because he does not think he will get it. He is sure that the organization will not promote a person of color simply because there are none presently. He has the necessary skills but does not believe he can be successful. He does not understand how to seek out and organize support to promote systemic change.

An Asian supervisor always does what the white manager wants and is harder on the employees of color whom he supervises. He believes that the white supervisor cannot be and should not be successfully confronted but feels powerful as he “pushes” his supervisees of color.

One can see that the five modern racisms have their corollary, or parallel in the five internalized oppressions. Figure 3 below shows their relationship to each other:

FIGURE 3
Behavioral Manifestations of Modern Racism and Internalized Oppression

Modern Racism	Internalized Oppression
1. Dysfunctional rescuing	1. System beating
2. Blaming the victim	2. Blaming the system
3. Avoidance of contact	3. Anti-white avoidance of contact
4. Denial of differences	4. Denial of cultural heritage
5. Denial of the political significance of differences	5. Lack of understanding of the political significance of differences

How Modern Racism and Internalized Oppression Interact

Challenging modern racism and internalized oppression begins as individuals give up the need to deny that “isms” still exist. Rather, they start to look for manifestations of oppression in the personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural contexts. Modern racism and internalized oppression are often played out in a complementary fashion. Given a white who practices dysfunctional rescuing, for example, many people of color will resort to system beating rather than confront the behavior, if they perceive it to be the safest choice, or if they have no permission to be assertive with whites. Such actions reinforce the dysfunctional behavior on both parts and keep the system intact.

People of color, who for a variety of reasons have adopted a “Don’t trust whites” stance, will often be misunderstood by whites who practice avoidance of contact. The white person will take the person of color’s avoidance of contact stance personally, and will often use it as justification of further avoidance. Such whites discount the realities of racism for blacks or other people of color and do not seek information about their experiences. They are also likely to perceive blacks or Latinos, for instance, who are in a pro-black or pro-latino posture as anti-white when the individuals are not.

At the institutional level, most welfare laws of the late 1960's were written from a dysfunctional rescuing position. Recipients, typically children and their mothers were set up to fail and are now being blamed for their plight. Monetary benefits were inadequate, the process for attaining help was dehumanizing, and the incentives for getting training or for working were not available. Those welfare recipients who attempted to beat the system used blame to justify their actions while avoiding any responsibility for changing their conditions.

Using the system when there are no other feasible options is “survival behavior” and not reactive internalized oppression. Indeed, a critical question to be asked as individuals are teasing out “the dance” between modern racism and internalized oppression is: when is a given target group members’ “difficult behavior” reflective

of a survival strategy? In the face of overt or covert racism, internalized oppression behaviors can be the key to psychological or physical survival. It is very important that such behaviors which are reactive to racism not be used to blame people of color or other target group members for their adaptations to oppression.

Process of Change

Diversity speaks to the need to change numbers and, in many cases, perspective. It addresses who is in a given organization and what ideas, images, processes, etc. are included in the group's work. **Cultural diversity** speaks specifically to the inclusion of such aspects from a cultural instead of, or in addition to, an individual perspective. **Anti-bias** efforts are also aimed at ensuring that multicultural work looks at all forms of bias or discrimination. We believe that successful anti-racist, multicultural work has to include this focus.

Anti-racism efforts speak to the need to explicitly address historic and current power imbalances. Addressing these imbalances successfully will include attention to how they play out with respect to all power discrepancies. Women of color, for example, are targets of racism and sexism. To address sexism successfully, one must address racism. To address heterosexism successfully, as another case in point, racism must be addressed as well since there is differential access for lesbians and gay men of color. In both instances, non-targets experience costs in addition to privileges as men and as heterosexuals. And the list goes on. It is not possible to successfully address racism in any lasting manner without raising these other aspects.

We see multiculturalism as the process through which change occurs. Multicultural strategies are designed to increase the ability of individuals and groups to recognize, understand, and appreciate differences as well as similarities. This three-step process occurs most often in stages and involves first recognizing and unlearning one's biases.

The second step of a multicultural change process involves seeing and thinking about the content of cultural group differences. Reclaiming one's ethnic background is part of this process, as well as giving up dysfunctional ethnocentrism. The goal is coming to experience that being equal does not mean being the same and that valuing diversity means being willing to accept the validity of ways of being other than one's own. As a third step this belief begins to be applied personally and systemically. It includes explicit attention to power sharing, redistribution of resources, and redefinition of "what is right and beautiful" at all levels. As the implementation of this worldview starts to occur, appreciation becomes the process. Participants start to embrace the value, philosophy, and practice that any system, institution, program or curriculum is enhanced by the acknowledgment and usage of cultural differences as a critical factor.

Personal and interpersonal change involves, then, acknowledging and valuing one's own cultural background and recognizing the particular dynamics found within different cultural groups. This process includes working through cognitive and affective misinformation about other cultural groups as well as about one's own group. It is facilitated by regular contact with persons from and information about different groups as well as with on-going contact with members of one's own group as mentors. Willingness to try on new behaviors, to make mistakes, and to disagree are necessary parts of the process.

It is important to stress that unlearning modern racism and internalized oppression in all of its expressions is a *process*. Part of the reason that the character of racism shifted for most people in the United States rather than changed is because there was such an urgent need to fix the problem. The goal in changing racism is to stay open when behaviors or practices arise which are, in their consequences, regardless of their intent, discriminatory. It also means examining fully the multitude of ways in which our society currently still functions economically, socially, politically, and culturally to the advantage of whites and to the disadvantage of people of color. As long as such institutional and cultural racism continues to exist, modern racism behaviors or practices will continue to emerge even among well-intentioned people.

Changing institutional and cultural racism involves a commitment by all members of an organization to examine norms, values, and policies. Overt power discrepancies must be changed. More subtle reward systems that reinforce status quo behaviors must give way to systems that include diversity and multiculturalism at every point. Institutions typically have to start by acknowledging the fear among those who control the current structure of either losing that control or of doing the wrong thing (i.e., being called a racist or making things worse by focusing on differences). These fears often manifest as anger, backlash, need to control how change occurs and/or as guilt, shame or the experiencing of target group authority figures as not experienced or competent enough. There is a need to acknowledge and work through those fears at all levels of the organization.

Training in racism awareness and multiculturalism is crucial to removing fear and other barriers. Such training helps organization members appreciate what they will gain as individuals and as an organization by fully embracing multiculturalism. Training should occur within and across different levels of the organizational hierarchy, and within and between different cultural groups.⁸ ***It is crucial to a long-term successful intervention that all individuals come to see that some of the work in dismantling oppression entails working within one's own group; that is, whites need to learn to challenge and support other whites, and people of color need space for continual self definition, and within-group problem solving and agenda setting. Successful group coalitions at this point in our history entail the ability to coalesce and to separate.***

Review of organizational structures, processes, norms, and values by multicultural teams is a crucial next step. Individuals working within a structure to create change will need to develop allies. Involvement of team members as facilitators, trainers, and institutional change agents with high visibility helps employees see that the organization's commitment is real and is on-going. The team should set up methods of communicating their process and important outcomes. Problem spots within the organization need to be highlighted and changed. Areas that are acknowledging differences and working well should be celebrated.⁹

Unlearning racism in all its expressions is offered as a model for understanding how oppression works in any target/non-target relationship.¹⁰ It is crucial that individuals realize how each person is sometimes in both positions. Multiculturalism, then, involves committing to the process of altering the variety of ways in which individuals and groups establish one-up/one-down dynamics. To paraphrase James Baldwin's comments in an open letter to Angela Davis, "If they come for you tonight, they will be back for me in the morning."

This model was originally published as: Valerie Batts, *Modern Racism: New Melody for the Same Old Tunes* (Cambridge: Episcopal Divinity School Occasional Papers, 1998). A form of the paper was distributed to the bishops as background reading in preparation for their meeting of September 2001.

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