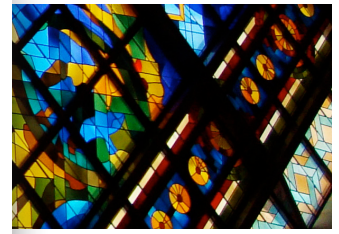




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 31

The Effect of Internalized Racism



Learning

Alcris Limongi

Internalized racism is a commonly misinterpreted term. When we mention internalized racism in anti-racism workshops, what first comes to people's mind is "a White person becoming a racist." However, internalized racism is not about White people. It is about us, Indigenous and racialized people. It happens when we consciously or unconsciously open the door in our minds to the continuous, overt, covert, racist messages that we receive personally and systemically, and that we begin to accept, believe, and enact. It is comparable to the notion of "limiting beliefs" in the area of coaching or cognitive psychology. However, internalized racism is more than that. It is systemic, and it is not the fault of Indigenous and racialized people.

Internalized racism happens to Indigenous and racialized peoples who are living in a White supremacist society, where our achievements and needs are often

rendered invisible, our racial groups are often stereotyped, our voices are silenced or ignored, and our reality and experiences are seemingly irrelevant to the dominant society. For example, many of us start to believe that we are of less value, less gifted, less important, and just not good enough.

We could react by projecting the rejection on our own racial group, or by rejecting ourselves. It keeps us disconnected from one another and from ourselves; it keeps us from achieving our potential and developing our gifts. Some of us may act in denial, pretending that racism does not exist or does not affect our lives; others feel shame and confusion, frustration, or anger; others need to prove themselves; and others just impose limitations on themselves.

I need to mention that this is not the universal experience of all Indigenous and racialized people. Also, I cannot pretend to represent all experiences and groups; this

Internalized racism is one of the most real, invisible, and painful impacts of racism.

reflection comes from my own personal experience, my work in the field of racial justice and my observations on what I have heard from racialized people like me. It takes time to change this. First, even when this is real and painful for us, we need to identify it and name it, to identify the systemic aspect of it. In other words, we who are Indigenous and racialized need to identify what is happening inside ourselves and what and how these negative messages are impacting our self-esteem, our physical and mental health, and our struggles about our identity.

I remember when I first came to Canada. I attended a workshop for newcomers about finding for work. It was for Latinos in a well-known community center. Throughout the session we were encouraged to find a job in the

garbage collection services. It was well paid, we were told, and our one and best opportunity in the Canadian soil. (There is nothing wrong with garbage collection; however, it was one of the only options offered for our consideration.) I still remember how I felt; it was the “invisible ceiling” painted for us. This impacted me greatly, but I rapidly identified what was wrong in the picture of a well-intentioned systemic message designed to help and support newcomers.

For us, as people who are Indigenous and racialized, it is important to really listen to what we hear every day. Using Jesus’ symbolism in John 17, it is like washing our feet after a long day out. We need to identify the systemic and patronizing voices around us before we unconsciously let them in and impact our existence. For White people, it is important to also hear what is

being said to and about racialized people in their own contexts. When we intentionally observe, it is amazing the things we notice. This is one of the first steps to become an ally: to be informed and understand what is happening in the “invisible” background. Here the voices of our allies are

particularly useful because at times they are more easily heard than us. Remember that the most common detour in conversations about racism is denial, the idea that everything is subjective and that we are oversensitive. The whole self is necessary for transformation.



Faith Reflection

Alcris Limongi

There is no better passage to reflect on internalized racism than that of the woman in Luke 13: 10-17. This woman had been living with a condition that left her unable to stand straight for over 18 years.

- a. Read the passage. If you are in a group, ask each person to read the verses out loud. Engage in speaking and listening.
- b. Discuss the woman’s condition. What labels do you think might have been put on her throughout those 18 years? What were the attitudes of Jesus and the others described in the verses? Reflect on racial stereotypes, and discuss how those labels can restrict the lives of Indigenous and racialized people. Then consider how lives may change when those labels are lifted.



Children’s Activity

Alcris Limongi

Clear and consistent anti-racist messaging for children can help in unlearning and resisting internalized racism. There are several ways in which families can make use of affirmations in their anti-racism work. For example:

1. Develop a family affirmation and teach it to your children. Encourage them to repeat it after you as a ritual before heading out the door to school or as an end-of-day practice before bedtime.
2. If your child expresses a form of internalized racism, develop an affirmation that will directly challenge that thought. For example, if a child says: “I don’t like my hair,” a simple affirmation in response can be, “My hair is beautiful. I like how creative I can be with my hair.” You may decide to create an art activity based on this affirmation, such as making a poster that they can display beside the mirror they use everyday. (You could also use a whiteboard marker to simply write the affirmation on a mirror.)
3. For older children, it may be possible to have a more in-depth conversation about the challenges they are facing and what words would be affirming to offer in response. This activity could lead to creating an art project like an affirmation deck, writing their affirmations with sidewalk chalk, or a video project where they record themselves speaking the affirmations out loud.



Group Commitment

Alcris Limongi

One way that we can continue to resist internalized racism, and understand the ways in which it exists in people’s lives in very intimate and significant ways, is to engage in and celebrate Indigenous and racialized artists whose work promotes self-love and celebration of their identities and culture. We are very blessed to have many examples of people in current pop culture who, through their own expressions of self-love, are in fact

teaching others to resist internalized oppression. Some personal favourites I would include are Lizzo (especially her song “Soulmate”) and Janelle Monae (and their song “Q.U.E.E.N.”).

Resisting internalized racism can also include surrounding ourselves with social media that uplifts the successes of Indigenous and racialized people and tell stories in ways that are anti-racist. For

example, when American gymnast Simone Biles decided to withdraw from some parts of the 2021 Summer Olympics gymnastics competition, there were many strong and opinionated reactions in the media. Did you notice what kind of stories were being told about Biles? Was it one that affirmed her agency, celebrated her desire to listen to her body, and respected her decision—or not?



Advocacy

Alcris Limongi

What sort of spoken or unspoken messages that Indigenous and racialized people may receive can you name?

Make a commitment to listen to these systemic and personal messages.

How can you offer/receive healing and freedom?



Alcris Limongi came to Canada from Venezuela in 1996. Her experiences in different settings as a racial “other”, along with academic opportunities, guided her in learning about racism and anti-racism. She joined The United Church of Canada around 1997, and has served in different roles as General Council staff, as a volunteer, and as a minister. She is part of the Anti-Racism Common Table and a facilitator of Racial Justice training.

