

Assessing Racial Comfort

(adapted from an exercise by the Transformative Teaching Collective)

Purpose:

- Assess your comfort level when confronted with different hypothetical situations, conversations, or interactions that center issues of racism or contain racially charged dynamics.

Audience:

- This activity is mainly geared towards people racialized as white who have the privilege to remove themselves from issues of race and racism. Within white dominant culture, people of color rarely have the freedom to *not* be racialized in every interaction, situation, or conversation.

Learning Objectives:

- Think critically and honestly about your capacity for anti-racism
- Observe your reactions to racially charged situations without assigning judgements
- Consider ways to grow your capacity for anti-racism based on your areas of discomfort

Procedure:

1. Read each of the following prompts and rate your comfort level on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very uncomfortable or completely avoidant of engagement, 3 is willing to engage but with hesitation, and 5 is very comfortable or able to engage immediately without hesitation.
 - a. Try to practice radical honesty. These are just hypotheticals, your answers will not cause harm to others, and your answers cannot be used by others to judge you. This kind of honesty can be scary, but this activity aims to provide you with a low-risk environment to be brave, vulnerable, and deeply self-reflective.
 - b. Obviously, there are many contextual factors that could impact your comfort level for each given prompt. Try to imagine one scenario that fits the description and go with that. Regardless of the context, your self-assessment will be informative and directive.

Part 1: Family, friends, random social situations

What is your comfort level when...	Comfort Level (1-5)
you are the only person from your racial group at a social event?	
confronting a friend or family member who made a racist comment?	
educating friends or family members about movements for racial justice?	
sharing what you know about Native American culture and history when asked?	
having a conversation about racism with a group that is predominantly people of color?	
having a conversation about racism with a predominantly white group of people?	
listening to a person of color tell you about their racial trauma?	
traveling to a country where white people are visibly in the minority?	
Total:	

Part 2: Personal racial identity and confrontation

What is your comfort level when...	Comfort Level (1-5)
you are asked to consider your racial socialization?	
you are told that something you said, did, or wrote was racist?	
you are asked to consider your participation in white supremacy?	
you are asked to consider your privilege as a result of your racial identity?	
you are told that you should not or cannot say certain words or phrases because of your racial identity?	
Total:	

Part 3: School, work, and/or music teaching spaces

What is your comfort level when...	Comfort Level (1-5)
a student opens up to you about their experience of racism in your class?	
a student asks about the racial identity of the musicians, composers, authors you are featuring in your class?	
confronting administrators or higher-ups about racist policies or procedures?	
you have to mediate a conflict between students that involves race or racism?	
confronting a colleague who made a racist comment about their students?	
you learn that the majority of your class are students of color?	
teaching about music or content that does not reflect your racial or cultural background?	
Total:	

Grand Total: _____ /100

2. Reflect on this exercise:

- a. How did it feel to assess your comfort level? Did any of the prompts cause visceral reactions? If so, make note of those that did.
- b. There is no such thing as a *bad* score. The purpose of scoring yourself is to assess your comfort level and check in with yourself without assigning value judgments. There is also no such thing as a *perfect* score. Even if you got 100%, there is *always* still more work to be done. That being said, here are some potential next steps depending on your score:
 - i. 70-100: Nice work! It seems like you have already done some work to unlearn your racism or heal from racial trauma. How can you use your racial comfort as a resource? Can you use your own experience to educate or hold others accountable? What are some ways that you want to continue along your journey of racial healing?

- ii. 40-69: Not bad! You are likely at a tipping point in your journey of unlearning racism or healing from racial trauma. What is preventing you from moving forward? Do you notice any trends in your lower scores? Where do you think the underlying hesitation or discomfort comes from?
 - iii. 0-39: Don't panic! While it might be tempting to get angry at the activity or yourself, remember that shame, guilt, and insecurity are some of the main ways that racialized violence has been perpetuated throughout history. Consider some small steps that you can take. What is one area of the activity where you scored highest? How might the skills embedded in your areas of higher comfort be transferable to other areas? Pick one situation or prompt where you want to grow your comfort level and focus on it for this week. Then, pick a new one next week. Remember that "small is all" (brown, 2017); every incremental adjustment moves us towards individual and collective transformation.
- c. Try this activity again in a month or a year to see how you've grown or changed!