
TOWARDS A NON-RACIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

A HANDBOOK

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of the
National Action Committee
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In Co-operation with

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WOMEN WORKING WITH
IMMIGRANT WOMEN, METRO TORONTO

March 1990

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INTRODUCTION

The Women's Movement has historically focussed its attention on the concerns and issues of white women, with emphasis on sexism and all that the term implies. Sexism has been seen as the primary cause of women's oppression and the barrier to equality and empowerment of women. For women of colour and immigrant women, while sexism is part of their oppression, racism has been a major cause but little attention has been accorded to it within the movement.

Racism is one of the legacies of our society, and whether as victim or perpetrator, we all suffer the effects. It dehumanizes us all, and consciously or unconsciously, acts as a barrier to the full participation of women of colour within the women's movement.

The Visible Minority and Immigrant Women Committee of NAC has sponsored many workshops and discussions on the issue at AGM and mid-year meetings during recent years, but this has resulted in little behavioural or structural change within the organization.

With the changes contemplated, and the movement at this time towards a more accessible and representative organization, we feel that there was an even greater need for NAC to take responsibility for addressing racism within its own ranks, and to work towards eliminating it.

This handbook provides some guidelines, tools, resources and information to assist both executive members and member groups in their anti-racist training.

PART I: THE AUDIENCE AND THE PURPOSE

Many women have asked the question how they can engage in the fight against racism, and how they can assess their own racism. The handbook has been prepared to assist those women to address the problem. It has also been prepared for those who do not understand the dynamic of racism and the effect it has on interpersonal and intergroup interaction. It is to enable them to recognize racism as a feminist issue, for which they must take some responsibility.

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of the handbook is to:

1. Assist groups to examine the causes and effects of racism;
2. Enable member groups to take some responsibility for identifying and eliminating the barriers which racism has erected in the women's movement;
3. Assist member groups in recognizing and understanding racism;
4. Assist groups to work towards an organization which embraces women of colour and immigrant women as equal partners in the struggle towards equality and empowerment of women.

PART II: HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

The prejudices, stereotypes and deeply rooted attitudes formed as a result of the legacy of racism have had a profound impact on the interactions between white women and women of colour, and have, in large measure, determined the involvement of women of colour in NAC. To effect any real change, these prejudices, attitudes and stereotypes must be understood in relation to organizational structure and systemic racism. Con-

consciousness raising as a tool has been very effective in helping you to understand the effects of sexism in your own lives and oppression. This tool should be used again to help develop that personal-political understanding of racism. Exercises are included in the handbook to assist you in developing this understanding.

There is a progression in the exercises, and each exercise should be followed by discussion in group settings --executive meetings, group meetings and staff meetings. The audio-visual and print materials suggested will provide further information and learning. The material can be expanded through the use of resource persons with expertise in your community.

It is important to remember that sporadic and short-lived attention to the issue or the exercises will not resolve the dilemma. There must be a sincere commitment to the change, if there is to be any real impact on the organization.

PART III: DEFINITIONS

The terms "discrimination", "racism", and others used in the text often awaken negative feelings in many of us. To ensure a common understanding of these terms within the context of this handbook we offer some definitions.

Prejudice: Prejudice means to "pre-judge". It is making judgements about individuals or groups and casting them in an inferior or negative mold, based on assumptions and little or no verifiable evidence. Prejudice is irrational. Prejudiced attitudes though based on misinformation, have become a way

to justify the mistreatment of individuals and groups, eg. native people, people of colour and others, because the attitudes are legitimized by society.

Stereotype: A stereotype is a "fixed" or "set" image of a group of people as a whole. The image is generalized for all members of the group, because of the behaviour of a few members eg. women are poor drivers , native people are drunkards, black people are lazy and shiftless, black people have low I.Q.'s.

Stereotypes contain only a grain of truth, but they block any rational or objective attitudes towards the members of the particular group.

Discrimination: Discrimination is behaviour based on prejudiced feelings and attitudes. Discrimination leads to differential and unfavourable treatment of persons based on physical and biological differences, as well as other factors such as religion and class.

Discrimination may be intentional or systemic, and works to exclude or restrict access or participation in an organization, institution, employment, education, accommodation and services. An important element in discrimination is the exercise of power, whether it is social, economic or political.

Racism: Racism is any action or practice, by individuals or institutions, which subordinates individuals or groups because of their race, colour or ethnicity.

Racism is a form of discrimination and combines prejudice and power to the advantage of one group, a dominant group, and to the disadvantage of another, a minority group.

Systemic Racism: Systemic racism refers to the pervasive structures and practices that exclude groups on the basis of race and ethnicity, and that makes individual acts of discrimination acceptable.

PART IV: **MANIFESTATIONS OF RACISM**

Racism is a complex system. It is sustained by personal attitudes, prejudices and institutional or systemic structures and forces. Just as sexism is a system of oppression for the purposes of excluding and dominating socially, economically and politically, so is racism a system of oppression, and for the same reasons.

As illustrated in the example and definitions in the previous section, attitudes such as racist stereotypes and prejudices are linked to racist acts and systemic racism, and all reinforce one another. So while it is necessary to acquire an intellectual understanding of racism, it is essential that white women also develop a "personal-political" analysis which directly translates into action. This is the responsibility of white women and it is required if there is to be any positive change in the movement, and if Women of Colour are to participate fully within the movement.

Racism exists on different levels within the women's movement and Women of Colour experience racism in different ways within the movement and NAC.

- Women of Colour are systematically excluded from decision making structures and processes or given token representation.

- It has been the experience of many Women of Colour within NAC to get "pulled in" at the last moment into an action or a project for the purpose of showing a representative group. What it does show is false representation and a disrespect for Women of Colour.

- There is often a lack of concern or a lack of discussion or debate whenever Women of Colour present a position on issues such as housing or daycare, or present issues such as immigration or employment equity. This is patronizing and shows a lack of respect, concern and openness. The message this gives is that Women of Colour are not worth debating or that their positions are not important enough to listen to and learn from.

- There is the perception among white women that the movement "belongs" to them. There is an ownership of feminism which is built on a white model. This leads to white women resisting, or giving little credence to the issues which are critical to the lives of Women of Colour and Immigrant Women, such as immigration, refugees, language training and employment equity. The only way these issues get any attention is when Women of Colour push and challenge the assumptions and politics of the women's movement. When Women of colour do struggle to get their issues on the agenda, the issues are usually ghettoized. They are not integrated into the "mainstream feminist agenda" and many times Women of Colour and Immigrant Women are only seen as an issue of the organization instead of as a constituency within the movement.

- Analysis of issues do not take into account the experience of Women of Colour or the effects of racism. The emphasis is only on the effects of sexism. Racism is rarely

addressed when analyzing issues such as daycare, employment, housing and social services, and when addressed in the women's movement is seen as a single issue, not related or integrated into every other issue.

- The experiences of Women of Colour are too often interpreted by white women. Decisions are implemented on behalf of Women of Colour without prior consultation. These actions by white women communicate their disrespect and mistrust of Women of Colour and result in the denial of equal power to Women of Colour. The power stays in the hands of the white women.
- There is the expectation that Women of Colour are to continually explain racism and its manifestations to the members of the movement. There is the lack of recognition by white women that addressing racism is also their issue, and that they must take responsibility for their learning and understanding of their own racism, and take action to eliminate it from the movement and society.

Racism exists in the structures, processes, politics and attitudes of the women's movement and within NAC. To address the problem of racism effectively, anti-racism must be integrated throughout NAC organization and the movement as a whole. Racism must be addressed on all these levels and in all its forms.

**PART V: STRATEGIES:
WHAT MUST BE DONE BY NAC**

The NAC executive must take a leadership role in effecting changes in the organization and among its member groups.

INITIATIVES TO BE TAKEN

1. Incorporate a structure, process and politic which represents, and is accessible to ALL women so that there are no "outsiders" or women who are "external to the women's movement", except those who do not subscribe to the aims and purposes of the organization.
2. Initiate affirmative action measures to ensure women of colour and immigrant women will participate on the executive and the decision-making process, and all activities, not just those which are perceived to be related to women of colour and immigrant women.
3. Declare racism a feminist issue and take some responsibility for eliminating it from the women's movement and society.
4. Establish mechanisms, strategies and policies which will ensure economic accessibility to annual general meetings. e.g. Fees and sliding scales which are based on membership of organizations.
5. Ensure caucuses at the AGM for Women of Colour to break down isolation, increase voice, become empowered, and ensure leadership.
6. Ensure that analyses of issues integrate the perspectives of women of colour, and immigrant women, and include the effect of racism as well as gender.
7. Commit to continued anti-racism education, to raise the awareness of the barriers which racism erects in the women's movement, and its influence on intergroup and interpersonal interactions. This must apply to all levels of the organization.

8. Initiate out-reach programs at both the national and regional levels to increase representation of minority groups in the organization.

PART VI: EXERCISES

This section of the handbook provides some exercises and activities to assist in raising awareness of individual racism, its origins, and its effects on interaction between women of colour and mainstream women in the movement. The exercises are designed to provide insight and opportunity to assess and understand attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes, and how they affect behaviour.

There is a certain progression to the exercises which cover three interest areas: - (i) early childhood experiences; (ii) adolescent and early childhood; and (iii) racism in the women's movement. The material covers the periods when attitudes are formed, become crystallized, and their manifestations in the movement.

The material is focussed on racial differences, but can be substituted if the concern is class or disability.

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING ACTIVITIES*

A. EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The object of the exercise is to emphasize how the attitudes that will influence behaviour in the future are learned from significant others.

1. When were you first made aware of race and racial differences? How old were you? Recall any incident if you can. How did you feel?
2. What kind of contact have you had with people of different races? Were they adults, playmates, or other children?
3. How did you first experience racism? From whom did you learn it? What did it mean to you? How did it make you feel? How did it affect your relationship with other people?
4. What did you learn at home about people of colour?
5. Was what you learned about people of colour in any way connected to racism?
6. Brainstorm and list all the terms you were taught or heard about people of colour.

B. ADOLESCENCE/EARLY ADULTHOOD

The object here is to raise some understanding of the reinforcement and crystallizing of attitudes impressed earlier.

1. What kinds of messages did you receive about racial groups as you entered adolescence? Did your group of friends change? Why and how?
2. How did different groups of students get along in your school? Were you aware of divisions by race and class? How did it feel?

3. How were different groups of students treated by teachers and the administrators in the school?
4. What kind of information did you receive about people of colour through the media?
5. Discuss the connections between coming of age, sexuality and racial separation eg. dating.
6. If you had interactions with people of colour through political or social groups, what proportion of these interactions were with (a) males and (b) females?
7. What were your experiences as white women with men of colour? In what ways did these experiences help you to explore your own racism? How did it contribute to your developing feminism?

C. RACISM IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

1. When did you begin to make the connection between your own experiences and those of other women?
2. As you became a feminist, to what extent did you feel connected to women of racial and ethnic divisions and their life styles?
3. How do you see yourself as different from a woman of colour? How do you see yourself as the same?
4. How does your background affect your racism and making connections with women who are different from yourself? What are the barriers you have to overcome in order to make these connections?

5. Think of your relationship with women of colour and white women who are co-workers, neighbours and acquaintances. What differences result from the racial factor in the relationships? Have you ever had a woman of colour as a close friend? Can you imagine such a friendship? Why or why not?

6. The following statements will lead to some insight into stereotypes. Each individual must complete the blanks before hearing responses from others in the group.

"Women of colour always _____

When I am with people of colour, I always feel or usually feel _____

"I wouldn't want people of colour to _____

"When I am with people of colour I'm afraid that _____

"I'm afraid I will _____

"I'm afraid they will _____

7. Discuss different values you think white women and women of colour have about family, sexuality, and other issues.
8. Discuss what happens when you confront another white woman about her racism? How does it feel to do this?
9. Discuss any issues that the Women's Movement has worked on and which might be considered racist because they do not address the experiences and perspectives of women of colour. Discuss any issues which cross racial lines, touch the lives of all women and which you have considered priorities or have worked on.

* Adapted from "Face to Face, Day to Day, Racism Cr", But Some Of Us Are Brave, Edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, 1979.

D. SELF-INITIATED ACTIVITIES*

Added to the exercises which may be completed and discussed in groups or pairs, you may want to work on some assignments for the group. The following is suggested as a suitable assignment: You or members of your group can think of others. Take notice of racist situations - things you see, hear or read. These things could be shared and discussed at the beginning of your sessions.

PART VII: RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Resources are available to provide the theoretical framework and tools for increasing awareness and understanding of the complex system - racism, Regional representatives and member groups can search in their areas for the resources and make the information available to member groups.

A. GROUPS/ORGANIZATIONS

Urban Alliance On Race Relations, Toronto
Cross Cultural Communication Centre, Toronto
National Organization of Immigrant and
Visible Minority Women, Chapters In All Provinces
Congress of Black Women of Canada,
Chapters In All Provinces except P.E.I. & Newfoundland
Coalition of Visible and Minority Women, Toronto
Coalitions of Third World and Other Women's Groups
In Your Area
Women Working with Immigrant Women, Toronto
Third World Women's Groups, In Your Area

KEEP YOUR EARS AND EYES OPEN FOR WORKSHOPS, PUBLIC MEETINGS, NEWSLETTERS AND NEWSPAPERS PREPARED BY THE GROUPS IN YOUR AREA.

B. AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL

Audio-Visual material can be obtained from the National Film Board and local organizations, and libraries, in your area.

Cross Cultural Communication Centre in Toronto houses an excellent collection of audio-visual materials on racism and other issues of importance to the lives of immigrant and visible minority committee.

C. PRINT MATERIALS

Here are some resources that are available from the Cross Cultural Communication Centre, and which can be used to provide a framework for your discussions, and a broader understanding of the issue of racism:

COMBATting RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE: A COURSE FOR WORKERS, Barb Thomas and Charles Novogrodsky, 1986

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN: A COURSE FOR COMMUNITY WORKERS, Veronica Moreno and Judy Vashti Persad, 1989

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY: HOW TO USE IT TO FIGHT WORKPLACE RACISM, Jane Allen, 1988

LEARNING FROM OUR HISTORY: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BY IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN ONTARIO, Tania Gupta, 1986

LETTERS TO MARCIA: A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION, Enid Lee, 1985

RIVERS HAVE SOURCES. TREES HAVE ROOTS: SPEAKING OF RACISM, Dionne Brand and Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta, 1986

Also recommended reading —

AIN'T I A WOMAN: BLACK WOMEN AND FEMINISM, Bell Hooks, South End Press, 1981

FEMINIST THEORY: FROM MARGIN TO CENTRE, Bell Hooks, South End Press, 1984

Also check out your local library and Visible Minority and Immigrant Women's Centres in your region, for further information about resources.

REFERENCES:

Cross, Klein, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, "Face to Face" Day to Day - Racism Cr, 1979

Hooks, Bell, **Ain't I A Woman**, South End Press, 1981
Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, South End Press, 1984

Thomas, Novogrodsy, **Combatting Racism in the Work-Place**, Cross Cultural Communication Centre, Toronto, 1986.