Unlearning Racism Webinar – Review

I recently booked myself onto a two-part webinar entitled “Unlearning Racism” and run by the Unlearning Racism Collective in conjunction with the Racial Justice Network. This was a new venture as their courses haven’t previously been delivered digitally.

The idea was to introduce us to whiteness, understand the links between everyday and structural racism and how to action the learning.

I was relatively recently introduced to the idea that it is not enough to simply say “I’m not racist” and that in fact I must be actively “anti-racist”. This was so obvious when I thought about it, but I, along with most white people, have trundled through life simply claiming not to be racist, but reaching that conclusion based on an extremely superficial appreciation of what racism actually is, and how it affects the world and those around me.

The first thing that struck me as interesting about the webinars was that they are delivered by a group of white identifying individuals (the Unlearning Racism Collective). I thought this odd at first, but they explained that the burden of fighting racism usually falls on people of colour which is deeply unfair and can often cause the person of colour more trauma, particularly as the people engaging with the webinar reflected on and verbalised their own racism.

Webinar one introduced us to various concepts such as:

* White Supremacy - the ideology that perpetuates white racism, which can result overt racism (for example name calling, racist jokes or genocide) or covert racism (racial profiling, lack of representation, statements like “some of my best friends are black” and failures to challenge racism;
* White Fragility - the intense emotional reaction of white people when ideologies such as colour blindness, meritocracy and individualism are challenged; and
* White Privilege - the unearned privilege attaching to white people that is often not appreciated by them as conferring benefit. Examples might include knowing that if you turn on the TV or your children learn about history at school, that your race will be well represented; never being asked to speak for all white people; knowing that if you’ve been pulled over by the police that you haven’t been singled out because of your race.

We were encouraged to honestly reflect on our relationship with these terms. The learning was delivered clearly and we had a couple of breakout sessions where we were put in small groups (mine had 3 others in it) and we were given prompts to help us reflect on our relationship with these terms.

The second webinar was all about taking action. We started by looking at systemic (otherwise known as structural) racism. A poll was conducted to allow us to get an understanding of the perception of the audience of the effects of systemic racism. It resulted in some eye-opening realisations – like black people in West Yorkshire (where the Collective is based) are 9 times more likely to be stopped by police than white people; and that people of colour have to send 60% more job applications to get the same number of callbacks as white people.

We were asked in our breakout groups to give examples of when we had witnessed systemic racism with the example of one of our group (an historian) being the almost total lack of representation of people of colour in school and university-taught history.

We then explored opportunities for action and how we could put the learning into action in our everyday lives, for example in our jobs, through our volunteering, protesting and in our white communities.

The Collective were at pains to point out that unlearning racism is not something you can “tick off”. It is a process and something you need to invest in every day. You don’t wash yourself with soap once and accept you will always be clean – unlearning racism is the same.

I found the webinars hugely valuable in helping me to develop my understanding of racism and how important it is that I play my role in challenging it every day.

I cannot recommend signing up enough. They operate on the basis that you should make a donation to Racial Justice Network that reflects your income, so if you do sign up, please do pay what you can afford.

You can sign up here for alerts on upcoming anti-racism courses <https://racialjusticenetwork.co.uk/unlearning-racism/>