

## LESSON NUMBER 14

### TASK: RACISM AND SEXISM

**CONDITION:** In a small group discussion environment.

### STANDARD:

- Define racism and sexism.
- Identify factors in development of racism and sexism.
- Identify relationship of power bases.
- Identify examples of racist and sexist behaviors.
- Identify strategies for combating racism and sexism.

**TIME OF INSTRUCTION:** 1 Hour

**LEAD IN:** Racism and sexism are forms of discrimination which are very similar. Sexism is based on gender while racism is based on color.

1. *Definition.* Personal racism or sexism is an attitude of superiority, coupled with an act to subordinate an individual, because of their race or gender.

2. *Factors in the development of racism and sexism.*

a. Contact between racial and ethnic groups is nearly as old as human life itself. People have always migrated from area to area. These migrations were for various reasons, but regardless of the reasons, these migrations resulted in contacts with different cultures.

b. Social visibility. With contact, comes social visibility. Society likes to categorize things, to include people. The easiest way to categorize people is through obvious traits. Something visual, such as skin color; names, i.e. Jewish, Hispanic, Polish; language, or other features such as folds of the eyes, are all traits that make categorizing people simple to do. Cultural habits such as what we eat, how we prepare meals, celebrations, what utensils we use, all can play a factor in social visibility differences. It is common to take the position that “different means wrong.”

c. Unequal power. Whoever has the power can control resources and make policies. The group in control develops a feeling of superiority.

d. Ethnocentrism is a belief that one’s own ethnic group is superior to all other groups. If this group also holds the power - likely the majority - then this belief can become even more damaging to the minority groups.

e. Competition. When everyone wants a piece of the pie, some are likely to get a bigger piece than others. Generally, it will be the group in power who gets the bigger piece.

f. Stereotypes. We learn our stereotypes from parents, schools, peers, and the media. Stereotypes maintain prejudice.

g. Sex-role socialization. This is the process by which males and females learn to display appropriate behavior for their sex. In learning these roles during sex-role socialization, we also acquire attitudes and values associated with these roles.

3. *Personal racist and sexist behaviors.* Some behaviors that we observe, on a daily basis are actually racist and sexist behaviors. Let's look at a few of these behaviors and discuss their impact on minorities and women.

a. Paternalism. This behavior takes the form of acting 'fatherly' or over-protective of someone. Frequently, this behavior will take place toward a female, and when it does, can be a form of sexism. It may imply that the woman is incapable of doing her job, or surviving without the man taking her under his wing and helping her along.

b. Ignoring. Discounting what an individual says because they are a minority or a female.

c. Speaking for. Not letting people speak for themselves. When someone asks a direct question of them, interrupting and answering the question yourself.

d. Testimonials. "I am not prejudice, some of my best friends are black" (or women or any other minority group).

e. Ethnic, racist, or sexist jokes. This area is pretty self-explanatory and does not require elaboration or clarification. They only continue to reinforce stereotypes.

f. Frequent interruptions. This indicates that you don't take what someone is saying is being important. You have a 'better grasp' or understanding of the points they may be making and feel compelled to make sure you make it clear what 'needs' to be said.

g. Stereotypical language. Speaking in terms that use statements, which indicate or reinforce the stereotypes about the group you, are talking about. A statement like: "all women are just too emotional to handle the stress filled command environment."

h. Titles and ranks. Calling minorities and women by their first names while addressing majority members (males) by their titles or rank.

i. Denying opportunities. Simply put, providing more beneficial jobs, positions, or assignments to majority members than to minority members.

#### 4. *Factors that support racism and sexism.*

a. Reference groups. Groups or association with like attitudes and like values. Examples include the Ku Klux Klan and some fraternal organizations. These reference groups enable people to associate with people that have the same attitudes as they do.

b. Conformity to norms. Some individuals find it easier to conform to the standard norm of the group than it is to challenge the attitude.

c. Self-fulfilling prophecy. We can influence the behavior of another person by expressing our expectations of that person. If we assume that because a person is a minority, they will not achieve the same level of competence as a majority member, frequently, that is exactly what appears to happen. While there are many factors that may factor into this phenomenon, the whole concept is called the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.

d. Pro-sexism. Accommodating sexist behavior by reinforcing it, rather than questioning, checking, or opposing it.

#### 5. *Strategies for combating racism and sexism.* While nothing is likely to completely eradicate racism and sexism, there are things we can do to minimize their affect on our units.

a. Awareness. To make a difference in these areas, we must be aware the potential for both racism and sexism exist. We must also make a conscious effort to look for problems or problem areas in which either or both could happen.

b. Education. Education empowers people to recognize behaviors related to racism and sexism. Individuals can then reflect and check their own behaviors and attitudes.

c. Legislation. This not only refers to the 'laws of the land' relevant to racism and sexism, but also to the standards and policies implemented within your unit.

d. Participation. This refers to taking part in activities in which you interact with members of different races and genders.

e. Self-analyze. Often, one of the hardest things a person must do is to be honest with themselves. If we harbor prejudices and fears about other groups, it is best to be able to acknowledge that to ourselves. Only then can we figure out what steps we need to take to overcome these attitudes and beliefs we hold.

f. Acknowledging and understanding differences. We are each different. This holds true among our own race and gender, we well as between races and genders. If we can simply accept that we are different, and that one characteristic isn't necessarily wrong or better, then we'll be well on the road to having a better understanding of those who are different than ourselves.

g. Commander's responsibility. The commander is responsible for his or her command climate. He or she needs to know if there are incidents of racism or sexism in order to take appropriate actions.

6. *CLOSING*: During this block of instruction we have learned that racism and sexism has many similarities. Both can cause the mission and the unit to suffer. We have looked at ways to identify these two forms of discrimination and we have looked at ways to combat racism and sexism. How would these work in our unit?

