

StirFry Seminars & Consulting

May 2013

The Privilege of Numbness

Recently, I led a workshop in which I shared a very personal life experience as a Chinese American child growing up in Oakland, California. After I finished sharing, a European American man, Michael, in the front row, raised his hand and declared that he had a story he wanted to share. I was surprised and shocked. Like so many other minorities in a predominantly white audience, I hesitated. Why? Because at that one moment I had to decide: Do I tell him truthfully how I felt about what he said or do I play it safe and listen to *his* story? Each of these scenarios carries a price to be paid both personally and professionally for someone who is a minority. If I tell the truth, I might be labeled as overly-sensitive or, at the very worst, invalidated, trivialized, or not invited to return. If I listen to his story, I leave feeling not heard and angry at myself for not telling him the truth. The latter experience is not my first reaction, but rather one that has been ingrained in me as a means of survival from my family and the history of being a minority in this country. There is a price to be paid if a white male is made to feel uncomfortable, out of control, irritated or angry.

For those of you who know me, you know that I chose to tell him the truth. I told him that before he share his own story, I needed to hear how he felt about my story. He was obviously surprised and explained that his story would illuminate how he felt. Once again, I felt unheard. But, I also felt he was being evasive. I could also feel the discomfort of the group and the sense that we were entering uncharted ground. But I persisted. "No, I want to hear how you felt about my story as a child." He paused and looked upward trying to 'think' about how he felt. After what seemed like forever, he said, "I don't know how I feel about what you said." I shared with him that not knowing how he felt was a white privilege. That perhaps his not knowing revealed a white history of being able to go "numb" whenever the pain or experiences of minorities are shared. And then just as I finished, a white woman blurted out, "I still want to hear his story." Once again, I was at a crossroads and it took all my courage to tell her that before I could hear his story, something was missing for me as a person of color--how did she feel about what he said or what I had shared? How did the rest of the group feel about what either of us shared?

It was at this point that Michael interjected and thanked me. He shared that he had never thought about how he, as a white man, had often bypassed how he felt. And that perhaps what he was really hiding was that he had difficulty sharing his emotions and maybe even hearing someone become emotional. That this numbness was something he seriously needed to look at. He also thanked me for my courageousness in confronting him. His admission was the turning point of the discussion, because soon afterwards, two women from South America shared that they had similar experiences to mine when Michael wanted to share his story and how often they, too, had been 'talked over.'

This 'disconnect' is something I have often experienced time and time again whenever whites are confronted with reflecting upon their own racism. There is either a long silence, a change of subject, questioning the integrity of the speaker, or wanting to interject with their own story.

What is needed from whites is an authentic emotional response to what they've heard from people of color, an acknowledgement of what has been shared, a sense of genuine curiosity, taking responsibility and a willingness to reflect and to change. Maya Angelou once said, "Some may never remember what you said or did, but they will always remember how you made them feel." The truth is always there. Saying it out loud...that's the hard part.

Lee Mun Wah



Cross-Cultural Facilitation Techniques

5-day Intensive for Diversity Trainers • Facilitated by Lee Mun Wah

Facilitating a group with many cross-cultural perspectives and experiences requires a keen understanding and knowledge of how cultural differences can impact group dynamics, relationships and their sense of safety.

In this unique training, Lee Mun Wah will guide each participant through a series of exercises and mindful techniques that will enhance their understanding of the impact of culture on relationships, conflictual cultural situations, as well as how to develop a deeper and more authentic sense of community and openness within diverse groups. Participants will explore their perception and attitudes about diversity issues through the use of films, books, vignettes and personal stories.

* A Special Preview of Lee Mun Wah's new documentary,
"If These Halls Could Talk: The Feature Film" will be Shown! *

July 31 - August 4, 2013

Wednesday: 2 pm-9 pm; Thurs - Sat: 9 am - 5 pm; Sunday 9 am-2 pm

Quan Yin Training Center • 2311 8th Street, Berkeley, CA

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO REGISTER, PLEASE VISIT WWW.STIRFRYSEMINARS.COM/BTC

On Demand Digital Streaming Rentals of StirFry Films!!

For the first time, Stirfry is making our films available on line/on demand for students & individuals via digitally streamed video. Here, you can view films such as *The Color of Fear*, *Last Chance for Eden* and *Stolen Ground* from the comfort of your own home for a small rental fee; rentals provide a link to the films online, good for 24-hours of viewing. Please note StirFry Seminars' Copyright and Use Agreement prior to purchase. (If instead, you prefer to own a dvd copy of our diversity training films, you can purchase them on the Stirfry Seminars & Consulting website at www.stirfryseminars.com.)

For questions, contact us at: products@stirfryseminars.com or call 510-204-8840 x100. www.diversitytrainingfilms.com

S
A
L
E



Get **30% off** for a limited time off of **all** regularly-priced diversity training materials (including Lee Mun Wah's latest documentary, *If These Halls Could Talk (Teacher's Edition)*, and new book, *Let's Get Real: What People of Color Can't Say & Whites Won't Ask About Racism*.)

Enter coupon code **NEWS30** upon online checkout at www.stirfryseminars.com/store.

Some restrictions apply. Expires June 15, 2013



S
A
L
E

StirFry Calendar of Events

May 21, 2013 Dallas, TX	Let's Get Real About Racism American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) Conference • Open to the Public
May 29, 2013 New Orleans, LA	If These Halls Could Talk: Feature Film Showing & Diversity Dialogue AND The World is All Around Us National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE) • Open to the Public
June 11, 2013 San Francisco, CA	The World is All Around Us National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) • Open to the Public
June 19-23, 2013 ** Berkeley, CA	Cross-Cultural Facilitation Skills for Diversity Trainers, Educators & Therapists: Five Day Intensive Open to the Public
July 31-August 4, 2013 ** Berkeley, CA	Cross-Cultural Facilitation Skills for Diversity Trainers, Educators & Therapists: Five Day Intensive Open to the Public
August 28-29, 2013 Edwardsville, IL	An Unfinished Conversation Some events Open to the Public

** Held at the Quan Yin Training Center, 2311 8th Street, Berkeley, CA

For StirFry's complete Calendar of Upcoming Events, please visit www.stirfryseminars.com/events

Contact Us: 510.204.8840 Trainings, Films & Diversity Products, ext. 103 • www.stirfryseminars.com • www.diversitytrainingfilms.com