

Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man

Episode 2: White Allergies

We all have implicit biases, tendencies to process information based on unconscious associations and feelings (Dictionary.com), even if they conflict our conscious beliefs. In the second episode of 'Uncomfortable Conversations with A Black Man,' featuring Matthew McConaughey, we talk about what implicit bias is and how we can work towards correcting it.

Notable Discussions from Episode:

1) Should I say, 'black people' or 'African American?'

A- 'Black' is the most appropriate because it is the most accurate and least offensive. There are some black people do not identify as African because that heritage was stripped from them.

2) Matthew: "How can I do better as a white man?"

A-. Acknowledge the problem and take ownership of it. Acknowledge implicit bias that society has taught you: As a white person, you will find a black person walking toward you on the street as more of a threat than you would a white person. If you discover that you have a bias, you have to take initiative to fix it yourself.

3) Matthew: "Is BLM a banner that is a bridge; when we [as people] see that black lives matter and we all understand that and it's agreed on, then we can wave the flag, but not until [we make that realization]?"

a. Not until. Right now, the world is focused on finding a cure for COVID-19; we are part of the biggest pandemic since the Spanish Flu. That is not to say that, right now, cancer does not matter, HIV/AIDS doesn't matter, ALS doesn't matter, all those things still matter. But right now, COVID is killing

people. On the same token, once we get these black lives that are being ended unjustly, if we can get those handled through conversations like these, then we can be at a point to focus on everything else. You came in with a mask on, why? Because there is a virus. Well there's another virus going around to, it's just one of the mind, not the body.

4) Matthew: What is equality and what is it not?

A- There is no such thing as equality in America. The wake of slavery is still hitting African Americans. When you get on a boat, there is a wake that follows, and while you may not be driving the boat, there are still African Americans getting smacked by the wake left by slavery: systemic injustice, poor school systems, voter suppression. There is still a wake. Don't feel guilty, just acknowledge it.

5) White allergies: where we were raised and how we were raised in our history, there's imported obvious ways that we're prejudice in ways that we don't understand.

A- Matthew: Looking at me: Longview high school, it is over 50% black. I applied to Grambling. I was the first white to ever work at Catfish Station, an all-black blues bar on 6 th street. I am married to a non-white immigrant, I have black friends all through my life, and still do. But what prejudices do I have that I may not be aware of? I am diving deeper and looking into myself...maybe I've been living in a way where I didn't quite see all sides as clearly as I could of.

B. Emmanuel: One of the greatest, obvious white allergies we, as black people, see are backhanded compliments. In high school, kids would say to me, "Acho, you don't even talk like you're black," or, "Acho, you're like an orea; black on the outside, white on the inside," or, "you don't even dress like you're black." I did not realize how offensive that was at the time. You were assuming that black people do not sound educated? You are

assuming something about black people, and I contradicted that assumption. You are assuming that to be black, I have to wear a durag, or a wave cap and be sagging my pants, and as a result, I am not black.

i. I think it's a white allergy, because white people don't recognize it.

6) Emmanuel: We are not that far removed from slavery! From Jim Crow laws, we're not! I get emails from people saying this will die off with our ancestors, IT WON'T! Because where do you think you acquire information? *More is caught than is taught.*

7) Matthew: What can I do? What is my responsibility?

a. Emmanuel: People should take the responsibility proactively and say, 'you know what? Maybe I'm a part of the problem.' Maybe I can fix this not just by being not racist, but *anti-racist*.

Beyond the Video:

How can we look at ourselves and begin acknowledging our implicit biases?

The American Academy for Family Physicians (AAFP), has eight tactics to identify and reduce your implicit biases in the acronym IMPLICIT:

- *Introspection: Explore and identify your own prejudices by taking implicit association tests or through other means of self-analysis.*
- *Mindfulness: Since you're more likely to give in to your biases when you're under pressure, practice ways to reduce stress and increase mindfulness, such as focused breathing.*

- **Perspective-taking:** Consider experiences from the point of view of the person being stereotyped. You can do this by reading or watching content that discusses those experiences or directly interacting with people from those groups.
- **Learn to slow down:** Before interacting with people from certain groups, pause and reflect to reduce reflexive actions. Consider positive examples of people from that stereotyped group, such as public figures or personal friends.
- **Individuation:** Evaluate people based on their personal characteristics rather than those affiliated with their group. This could include connecting over shared interests.
- **Check your messaging:** As opposed to saying things like “we don’t see color,” use statements that welcome and embrace multiculturalism or other differences.
- **Institutionalize fairness:** Support a culture of diversity and inclusion at the organizational level. This could include using an “equity lens” tool (multco.us) to identify your group’s blind spots or reviewing the images in your office to see if they further or undercut stereotypes.
- **Take two:** Resisting implicit bias is lifelong work. You have to constantly restart the process and look for new ways to improve.