

Silence Breakers for Whites in Cross-racial Discussions

The Silence Breakers are suggested openings intended to address two common challenges for whites in cross-racial discussions: 1) they speak to the fear of losing face, making a mistake, or not being able to manage impressions that often prevent Whites from authentic engagement; and 2) they engender a stance of curiosity and humility that counters the certitude many Whites have regarding their racial perspectives. In doing so, they tend to open, rather than close, discussion and connection.

1. I'm really nervous/scared/uncomfortable to say this...and/but...
2. From my experience/perspective as (identity)...
3. I'm afraid I may offend someone, and please let know if I do, but...
4. It feels risky to say this and/but...
5. I'm not sure if this will make any sense, and/but...
6. I just felt something shift in the room. I'm wondering if anyone else did.
7. It seems like some people may have had a reaction to that. Can you help me understand why?
8. Can you help me understand whether what I'm thinking right now might be problematic?
9. This is what I understand you to be saying... Is that accurate?
10. I am unsure of how we are using the term... in this discussion...?
11. I have always heard / thought that.... What are your thoughts on that?
12. Can you help me understand ...?
13. Is... a good example of what ...is saying?
14. How would you respond to... from an anti-racist framework?
15. I am having a "yeah but." Can you help me work through it?
16. This perspective is new to me, but I'm wondering if it is accurate to say that...?
17. I'm still working through / processing this, but right now where I am at is...
18. Such and such point was made. I am still thinking through that and trying to make sense of it for myself.