

# Empowerment Course (Preview)



Stadt Köln

# HANDOUT

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## MODULE 1: THEORETICAL INPUT ON EMPOWERMENT

### **Safer Space**

Safer spaces are usually organised by people who have experienced discrimination for others in similar situations. The intention is to create a space, where they can feel safer from discriminatory behaviour, comments or attacks. Since we live in a system where many discriminatory practices are normalized, no room in this society can be completely free or safe of discrimination. But “safer” spaces provide an environment where people with similar awareness of social issues can come together and openly share their experiences without them being invalidated or questioned and are more so protected from ignorance.

In such spaces it can be empowering to be understood by people who have had similar experiences and learn how they dealt with them.

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment means strengthening individuals and communities by increasing confidence and skills, which enable them to take control of their own lives and stand up for their rights. It involves overcoming powerlessness, recognizing your own value, and using available resources to create positive change, both for yourself and with others. In social and civic life, empowerment encourages people, especially those from disadvantaged groups, to participate, take responsibility, and challenge unfair systems of power. Empowerment courses are all about reflecting on your own life story and identity, understanding how systemic racism influences personal experiences, and developing shared strategies that combine knowledge, lived experience and collective action.



## MODULE 2: BIOGRAPHICAL WORK/ REFLECTIONS ON RACISM & EMPOWERMENT

**What do you think an empowerment course could help you with?**

**1. Building Confidence:**

“I want to feel more confident in my decisions and actions.”

**2. Strengthening My Voice:**

“I want to learn how to speak up and advocate for myself and others.”

**3. Overcoming Fear and Self-Doubt:**

“I want to break free from limiting beliefs and doubts about my abilities.”

**4. Understanding My Cultural Identity:**

“I want to explore and embrace my unique cultural background and history.”

**5. Building Resilience:**

“I want to develop the mental and emotional strength to face challenges head-on.”

**6. Creating Stronger Connections:**

“I want to connect more deeply with others in my community and beyond.”

**7. Navigating Systemic Inequality:**

“I want to gain tools to address and challenge racism and other forms of discrimination.”

**8. Finding a Sense of Belonging:**

“I want to find a community where I feel understood and supported.”

**9. Healing and Self-Care:**

“I want to prioritize my mental, emotional and physical well-being.”

**10. Empowering Others:**

“I want to learn how to lift up and support others in their growth and empowerment.”



## MODULE 2: BIOGRAPHICAL WORK/ REFLECTIONS ON RACISM & EMPOWERMENT

### Systems & mental health

Racist systems don't just affect individuals – they shape opportunities, access and even how you see yourself over time, operating on a structural and societal level. These systems impact how we all move through the world. Racism isn't just about individual prejudice; it's built into the policies, practices and norms of our institutions, from education to healthcare to the justice system.

On top of that, racism is deeply connected to mental health. The chronic stress, exclusion and discrimination you may face can take a serious toll on your emotional well-being. It's not something you can just 'get over' – it's an ongoing, real experience that many of us carry with us daily.

Understanding this connection is key, because caring for your mental health isn't a sign of weakness – it's a vital part of your empowerment and resilience. When you take care of your mental health, you're not just surviving – you're actively fighting for your well-being and your future.



## MODULE 2: BIOGRAPHICAL WORK/ REFLECTIONS ON RACISM & EMPOWERMENT

**How does it show up in my body, my thoughts or my daily decisions?**

**Body parts that can be affected:**

### **1. Head (Mind/Thoughts) 🧠**

Racism often leads to mental exhaustion, worry, and anxiety. Constantly questioning your worth or anticipating discrimination can create mental fatigue and stress, affecting your concentration and emotional clarity.

### **2. Eyes (Perception/Observation) 👁️**

Experiencing racism can alter how you see the world and how you are seen by others. You might become hyper-aware of how you are being judged or scrutinized, leading to heightened vigilance or mistrust.

### **3. Chest (Heart/Emotions) ❤️**

Racism can create feelings of sadness, anger or helplessness that sit heavy in the chest. You might feel a weight on your heart or experience physical sensations like tightness in your chest, especially when faced with discrimination.

### **4. Stomach (Gut/Anxiety) 🌀**

The stress and pressure of racial discrimination can trigger anxiety and can show up physically, leading not only to an upset stomach or a constant sense of bodily discomfort, but also illness or even chronic disease. You may experience a „gut feeling“ of unease when confronting or anticipating racism, leaving you exhausted.



## MODULE 2: BIOGRAPHICAL WORK/ REFLECTIONS ON RACISM & EMPOWERMENT

### 5. Shoulders (Pressure/Responsibility) 🏠

Carrying the weight of racism—whether it's personal experiences or the broader societal burden — can physically manifest as tightness or tension in your shoulders. You might feel like you're carrying an extra load, trying to prove your worth or justifying your position.

### 6. Hands (Actions/Decisions) 🙌

Racism can influence the choices you make, from the way you express yourself to the opportunities you pursue. You may feel hesitant to take action in certain spaces or experience doubt when making decisions due to fear of discrimination.

### 8. Neck (Voicing Concerns/Self-Expression) 🗣️

Racism can lead to feelings of being silenced or not being able to fully express yourself. You may feel a tightness in your neck or throat when you're afraid to speak out, whether it's because of fear of retribution or feeling misunderstood.

### 9. Legs (Movement/Freedom) 🦵

Racism can impact your sense of freedom and agency. You might feel restricted in your movement, whether it's in the workplace, in public spaces, or in your own community. A feeling of being held back or unable to fully move forward can manifest physically in your legs.

### 10. Feet (Grounding/Security) 🦶

Racism can shake your sense of stability, making you feel insecure or unstable in your place in the world. This might show up as a sense of unease in your feet, as though you're not grounded or fully secure in your environment.



## MODULE 2: BIOGRAPHICAL WORK/ REFLECTIONS ON RACISM & EMPOWERMENT

### 11. Arms (Support/Embrace) 🤝

You might feel that others don't extend support or that you're not able to embrace opportunities as easily due to societal barriers. This can create a feeling of limitation or a sense of being emotionally „cut off“ from others.

### 12. Pelvic Area (Sexualization/Body Autonomy) 🍑

Racism and sexism often intersect in ways that impact your body's autonomy, particularly in how your sexuality and identity are perceived. You might feel objectified, sexualized, or disrespected based on both your race and gender. These experiences can impact your sense of safety, control, and self-worth, especially when your body is treated as a space for others' judgment or exploitation.



## MODULE 3: BODY METHODS

### Loving-Kindness Meditation

#### 1. Settling In:

- Sit or lie down comfortably.
- Feel the contact with the ground or chair underneath you.
- Breathe calmly in and out, find a slow rhythm.

#### 2. Turn your attention inside:

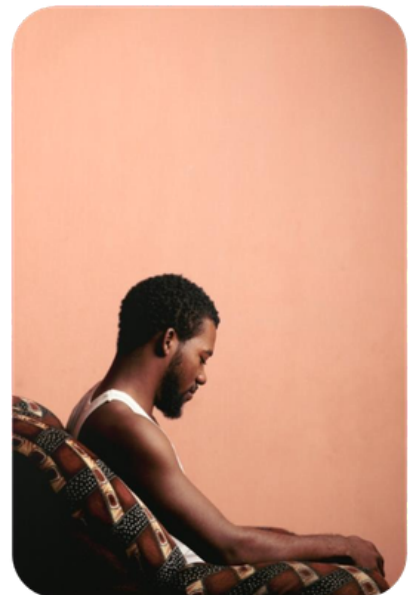
- Optionally, place a hand on your chest and close your eyes.
- Notice the warmth, texture or movement under your palm.
- Repeat silently, slowly, and kindly to yourself:
  - May I be calm.
  - May I feel safe.
  - May I live in peace.
  - May I be kind and loving to myself.
- Choose 1–2 phrases that feel right for you or feel free to add your own.
- Continue breathing calmly while repeating these in your mind in a pace that feels serene to you
- Take as much time as you need

#### 3. Now optionally, you can extend your affirmations:

- To a close person
- To a neutral person
- Or to all beings
- Example:
  - May you be safe.
  - May you live in peace.
  - May you feel loved.
  - Or else

#### 4. Slowly resurface

- Pause briefly to notice how you feel.
- Do not judge your experience, stay kind.
- Give thanks to yourself for holding you throughout.
- Turn your focus back on the outside, feel the ground or the room surrounding you.
- If you closed your eyes, you can now open them again



## MODULE 5: COURSES OF ACTION / COMMUNITY BUILDING

It's important that we do not solely understand ourselves as shaped by society, but also to recognize that we actively shape society through our everyday actions. Taking action can bring us to see our own power and understand that we can influence our surroundings. Exploring different forms of engagement—personal, group-based, or political—helps us understand multiple ways we can contribute to a community or society and make a meaningful change. This can build self-confidence, a sense of purpose, and hope.

### **Individual action:**

Taking care of your mental health, setting individual boundaries or speaking up against discrimination in everyday situations are possible ways to practice empowerment on a personal level.

*What is one small action you can take in your daily life to cultivate your well-being or stand up for yourself?*

### **Group-based action:**

Joining or creating groups with shared values and needs, community initiatives or creative spaces allows people to build each other up or fill their life with more joy.

*In which group or collective space do you feel you could contribute or feel supported?*

### **Political action:**

Engaging in activism, advocacy, voting, or public education can challenge structural inequalities and work toward long-term social change.

*What is social or political issue that matters to you, and how could you engage with it in a capacity that feels possible for you?*

