

**Shift**

**to**

**Action**

## **A Guide to Bystander Intervention**

**How to put action  
into your reaction.**

# Amina's Story

Illustration by Sanya Anwar



## Were you there?



If you had been, would you have said something?



Or would you have gotten off a stop sooner to avoid the conflict?

### What's happening here?

Amina is being threatened by three men exhibiting Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate. Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hate is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that can lead to anger, aggression and/or intolerance of Muslims through threatening, harassing and abusive actions. This form of racism targets the symbols and markers of being Muslim, for example, forms of dress, beliefs, or modes of religious practice.

The scenario on the opposite page isn't that uncommon for some Edmontonians. **But it should be.**

We've all witnessed some sort of racism in our day-to-day lives, often leaving us feeling shocked, helpless and even guilty for not saying or doing something.

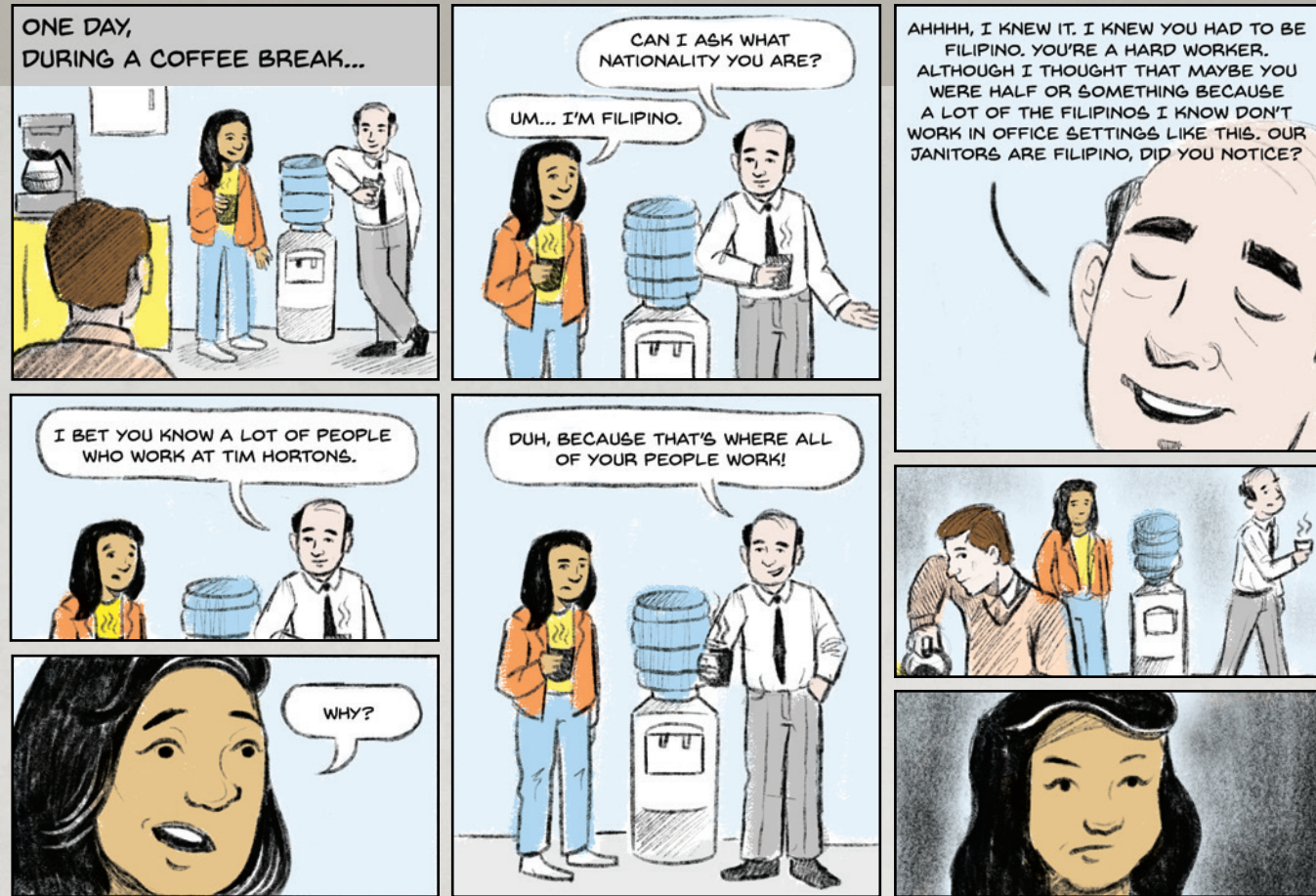
Let's **shift into action** and change the outcome. Empower yourself and others to speak up against **microaggressions, racial profiling and hate incidents**. Sometimes speaking out is enough to make the perpetrator's words less harmful, and prevent further racial abuse.

### ! Bystander Safety

It is up to the person intervening to decide whether it is safe or not safe to do so. Every situation is unique and must be evaluated in context. When possible and safe, it is always preferable to take action. When intervening is deemed unsafe, call for help or report the incident.

# Joan's Story

Illustration by Paul Twa



## P What's happening here?

This is an awkward situation. These comments are harmful and Joan is bothered by what her coworker has said. She didn't say anything in the moment because she didn't want to risk embarrassing or upsetting him. There is a good chance the coworker is not even aware his comments are offensive, or realize they are microaggressions **D**.

## A Potential actions for bystanders:

### Option 1: Talk to the Coworker

**Explain what they've done wrong:** "I overheard you talking to Joan at the water cooler. I realize you were just trying to make conversation, but some of the comments you made about Filipinos were generalizations."

**Focus on work outcomes:** "When you say things like that it makes people feel like you don't see them for who they are. Comments like that upset people and distract them from their work."

### Option 2: Consult Someone Else

Consider speaking to a supervisor or the human resources department.

**Suggest new policies:** Work with your personnel director or human resources department to create new policies and procedures. You can also ask your company to provide anti-bias training.

**Existing policies:** Call upon existing policies to address bigoted language or behaviour.

### Option 3: Offer Joan Support

People in this situation often feel terribly alone and silence amplifies their isolation; it also tacitly condones the act of racism. Small acts of kindness can help.

**Ask them if they're okay** and let them know you disagree with your coworker's comments.

**Ask them if there's any way you can support them.** Offer to help report it if they want to.

# Johnny's Story

Illustration by Paul Twa



## P What's happening here?

The man who has witnessed the confrontation is confused. Is the Indigenous man being racially profiled **D**? The security guard has singled out the Indigenous man even though both men kept to themselves in the park. He believes the situation escalated quickly because the man is Indigenous.

## A Potential actions for bystanders:

### Option 1: Record the Incident

Record the incident so you can see it again and make a decision about what it is you saw. If anything, you have something to show if you choose to report this.

#### When recording, make sure to:

- Keep a safe distance.
- Film street signs and other landmarks that help identify the location.
- Say the date and time.

Always ask the person who was harassed what they want you to do with the recording. Never post it online or use it without their permission.

### Option 2: Report the Incident

Reporting acts of racism can be a way of supporting – and speaking up on behalf of – these groups.

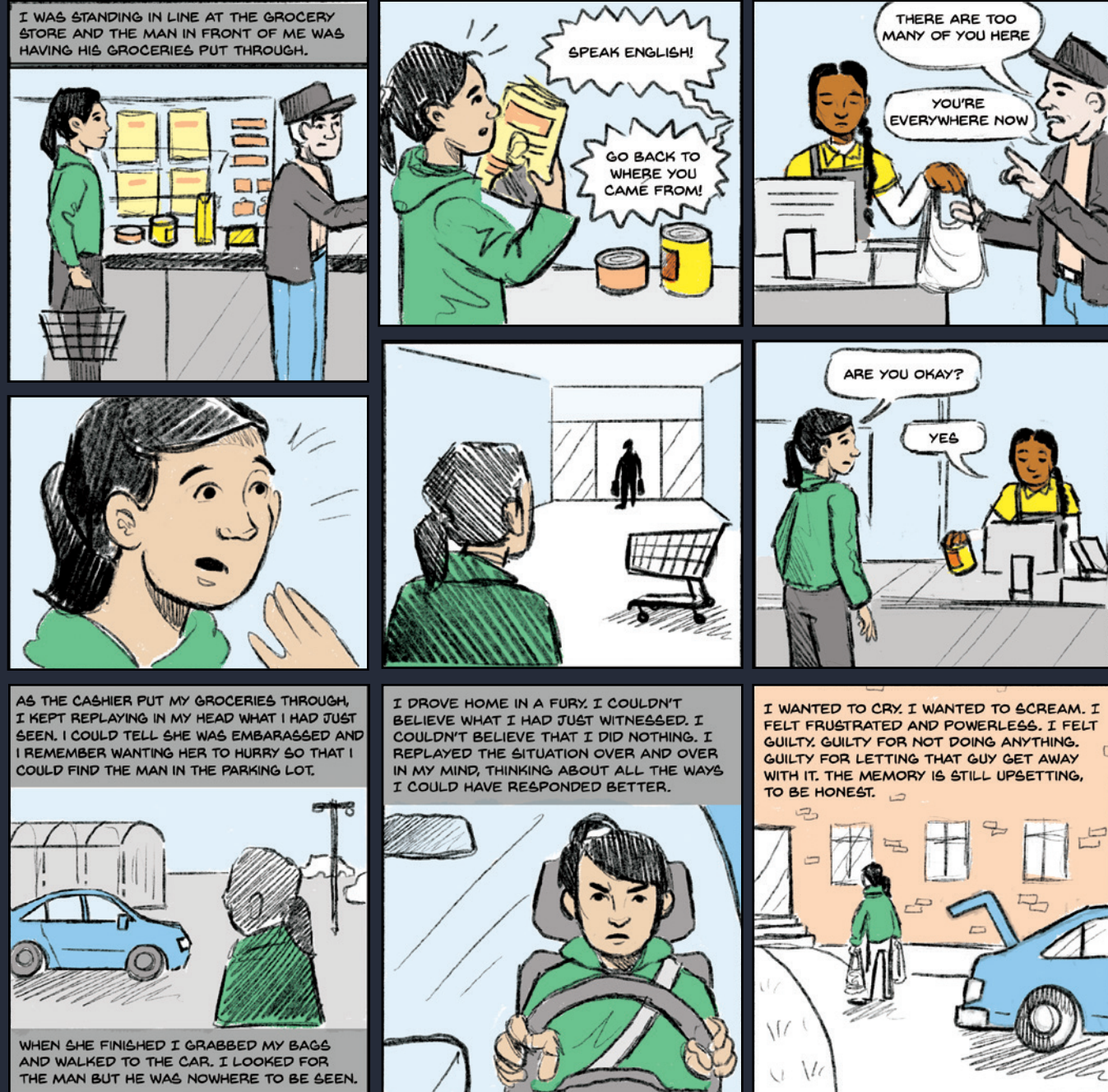
Reporting incidents such as this one helps government organizations and ally groups generate information that supports important education and outreach initiatives. Every report builds a picture of what is really going on in our city, showing patterns of behaviour against a certain group or by particular individuals.

You can ask the person if they would like you to report the incident, but be aware that people who regularly experience racial harassment and discrimination can feel reporting is pointless, and disillusioned toward a system that works against them and doesn't seem to change. If you are asked not to report the incident, respect the person's wishes.

In this particular instance, you could report to: [StopHateAB.ca](http://StopHateAB.ca)

# Paz's Story

Illustration by Paul Twa



## It's important to speak up.

When nobody speaks against racist comments, the person who has spoken will assume everyone agrees with them. Bystander intervention can:

- Limit the potential for escalation.
- Reduce physical, social, psychological and emotional harms.
- Promote norms and ideals that can weaken the acceptance of racism in the future.

# Become an Active Bystander



## Incident Happens

You witness a confrontation and suspect racism is involved.

### A few examples of racism:

- Slurs
- Physical violence
- Assumptions based on race or ethnicity
- Microaggressions

### Did you know?

Not all racism is overt. We tend to imagine racism as an extreme situation, but it can also be a subtle comment or assumption.



## Is it safe to intervene?

Every situation is unique and must be evaluated in context.

When possible and safe, please speak up. Letting everyone involved in the situation know that racism in any form is not acceptable makes a difference.



## Shift into Action

Based on the situation, act on any or all of these options.



## Engage the Person Being Harassed

Start a conversation with the individual targeted by racial harassment. The goal is to create comfort and allyship.

### Focus on the person's well-being:

- Have a light-hearted conversation.
- Listen to what they need.
- Ask how they are doing.

And

## Engage the Person Harassing

The most effective way to engage is to avoid making them feel defensive and angry.

**Interject:** Clearly demonstrate and assert that you disagree with their racist perspectives/actions.

**Express your feelings:** Let the individual know that you feel uncomfortable about their feelings and actions.

**Promote empathy:** Help the individual reflect on his or her feelings and behaviour, and why they are harmful.

**Identify harm:** Clearly show that the individual's actions caused offence and damage — be intentional and assert that racism is harmful.

**Ask questions:** Ask the individual to clarify his/her actions. Ask why they think those opinions are acceptable, and help them reflect on the harm.



## Engage Other Bystanders

Actively seek out allies when racist incidents occur. Ask others to report the incident to authorities, join in conversation with the person being harassed, or engage the person harassing.

## Is the person harassing still engaged?

Yes

No

## Can you call for help?

Yes

No



## Call For Help

Contact the proper authority:

**Parks/Streets**

- Police (911)
- 211

### Transit

- Security
- Transit officers
- Transit drivers

### Workplace

- Manager
- Employer
- Human Resources

### School

- Teachers, staff or principal
- Other students

And



## Report the incident at StopHateAB.ca

## **Roots of Racism in Canadian History**

### **Doctrine of Discovery, 1452<sup>1</sup>**

*"...invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Sarcens and pagans whatsoever placed,...,and the principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable good whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the,..., principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit"*

— Pope Nicholas V (Papal Bull 1452)

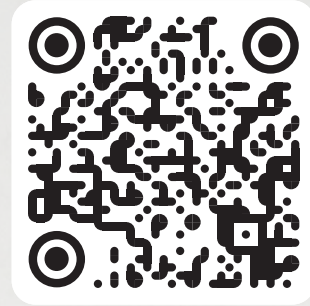
"Discovery was used as legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous Nations, including First Nations in what is now Canada. During the European "Age of Discovery," Christian explorers "claimed" lands for their monarchs who felt they could exploit the land, regardless of the original inhabitants.

This was invalid, based on the presumed racial superiority of European Christian peoples, and was used to dehumanize, exploit and subjugate Indigenous Peoples and dispossess us of our most basic rights. This was the very foundation of genocide. Such ideology lead to practices that continue through modern-day laws and policies."

— Johnny Lee, Indigenous Activist

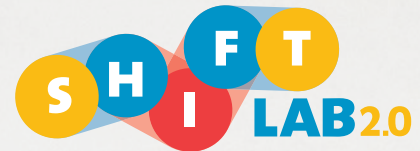
<sup>1</sup>Assembly of First Nations, *Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery*, 2018.

See Calls to Action #45, 46, 47 and 49 in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*.



For additional resources and to learn how to shift into action, scan the QR code with your phone or visit:

**edmontonshiftlab.ca**  
**/tools/#resources**



## **Racism can disguise itself in many forms – here are just a few:**

Prejudiced jokes and assumptions about someone's race can be **microaggressions**. Whether intentional or unintentional, they demean the lived-experiences and perspectives of the targeted individual, and can invalidate group identity by communicating that the target is different, inferior, and/or must fall under certain stereotypes because of their background.

**Racial profiling** is any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection that relies on stereotypes about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion

or place of origin, or a combination of these, rather than on a reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or different treatment. Typically but not always, profiling is carried out by persons in positions of authority.

A **hate incident** is a non-criminal action committed against a person or property, the motive for which is based in whole or in part upon the same characteristics mentioned above. Because they are non-criminal in nature, police are limited in their ability to be involved.

