

Key Words in the Study of Racism

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These terms and their descriptions are presented as talking points in your discussions about Racism.

Prejudice: Usually unfavorable, but sometimes favorable opinions or attitudes held by members of one group toward/against another. These preconceived views are often based on hearsay and are resistant to change even in the face of direct evidence or new information. People often harbor favorable prejudices toward groups with which they identify and negative prejudices against others, but they can also harbor positive prejudices against a group. Prejudice is often born of stereotypes that are passed on from parent to child, community to community, and media to individuals. These prejudices can lead to a person being discriminated against.

Negative examples:

- Boys are better at math.
- White people are better homeowners.
- Immigrants will take our jobs.
- Gay partners should not raise children.
- Blacks are more likely to commit crimes.
- Muslims are terrorists.

Positive examples: These statements sound positive, but they make all of a particular group naturally inclined to behave in a certain way.

- Asian students are really smart.
- Black people are excellent athletes.

Race: A socially constructed classification system based on physical characteristics most often associated with skin color. Race is outwardly manifested. It is not based in scientific fact or grounded in genetics. Race is one aspect of a person's identity. Other aspects are gender, ethnicity, class, ability, religion, etc. Racial distinctions do more than describe human differences; they also affect patterns of power and inequality within society.

Racism: Racism is what happens when race-based prejudices are translated into action based on the belief that others are inferior. It is complex and happens both on a micro and macro level at various levels of severity.

Examples:

--A person calls 911 to report the presence of a black person who is behaving lawfully.

--Using racial slurs

--Doing a more extensive background check on a black applicant

--Not selling a home to a black person

--Hanging a noose in a black person's athletic locker

--Crossing the street to avoid walking next to a group of young black

men

--Increased traffic stops and searches for people of color

Systemic Racism (a.k.a. Institutional Racism): This term describes the systems of racism that operate in all our daily lives, even when we do not “embrace overtly racist thinking. Systemic racism, like other forms of oppression (ex. sexism, classism), is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices, as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals.” This system of power has been constructed over the course of American history, which is why we all participate in it even if we don't want to. It is the result of a complex historical process. (See: Ta-Nehisi Coates' [The Case for Reparations](#)). “In the context of the United States, this system clearly operates to the advantage of Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color” (Beverly Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? and Other Conversations about Race*). The following statistics are some of the present-day consequences of the **system** of racism:

Examples:

—Among lower and middle income households, white families have four times as much wealth as black families and three times as much as Hispanic families.(Pew research, 2017)

—Companies are more than twice as likely to call minority applicants for interviews if they submit whitened resumes than candidates who reveal their race—and this discriminatory practice is just as strong for businesses that claim to value diversity as those that don't (Harvard Business School, 2017).

-- Black workers are twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers overall (6.4% vs. 3.1%). Even black workers with a college degree are more likely to be unemployed than similarly educated white workers (3.5% vs. 2.2%).

—According to the Economic Policy Institute, “The disparate racial impact of the [corona] virus is deeply rooted in historic and ongoing social and economic

injustices. Persistent racial disparities in health status, access to health care, wealth, employment, wages, housing, income, and poverty all contribute to greater susceptibility to the virus—both economically and physically.”(2019)

-- In 2017, there were 1,549 black prisoners for every 100,000 black adults – nearly six times the imprisonment rate for whites (272 per 100,000) and nearly double the rate for Hispanics (823 per 100,000). (*Washington Post*, 2020).

--Although half of the people shot and killed by police are white, black Americans are shot at a disproportionate rate. They account for less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, but are killed by police at more than twice the rate of white Americans. Hispanic Americans are also killed by police at a disproportionate rate. (*Washington Post*, 2020)

(Sometimes, systematic racism can be confused for systemic racism. According to Merriam-Webster, “**systematic**” means “relating to or consisting of a system.”(Systematic is the plan, systemic is the system itself.)

White privilege: Privilege--having greater access to power and resources than people of color (in the same situation) --is the result/consequence of systemic racism.

White privilege is not the suggestion that white people have never struggled. Many white people do not enjoy the privileges that come with relative affluence, such as food security. Many do not experience the privileges that come with access, such as nearby hospitals. And white privilege is not the assumption that everything a white person has accomplished is unearned. Most white people who have reached a high level of success worked extremely hard to get there. Instead, ***white privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, separate from one’s level of income or effort.***

Whites are more likely to be treated as individuals, rather than as representatives of (or exceptions to) a stereotyped racial identity. This has negative effects for people of color, who, without this privilege, face the consequences of racial profiling, access to resources, stereotypes, and lack of compassion for their struggles.

Examples:

- The privilege of having a good relationship with the police.
- The privilege of shopping in a store without being followed as if a shoplifter.
- The privilege of learning about my race in school.
- The privilege of easily finding children’s books that overwhelmingly represent my race.

Non-racist: Non-racism is the **passive** rejection, opposition, and disassociation from behaviors, discourses, and ideologies that are considered racist. (Bery, 2014; King & Chandler, 2016)

Anti-racist: Anti-racism is the **active** process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably. (NAC International Perspectives: Women and Global Solidarity).

Cultural Appropriation: The unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.

Examples:

- Names of sports teams: The Fighting Sioux, The Washington Redskins, The Atlanta Braves.
- Using a Native American headdress as a Halloween costume.

Cultural Assimilation: The process by which a person or a group's language and/or culture come to resemble those of another group, usually the dominant culture. In order to fit in, racial minorities often are forced to adopt the beliefs, language, and customs of the dominant culture, thereby losing some of their own culture in the process.

Examples:

- Building public school breaks around Christian holidays.
- Code-switching: depending on the audience, a person may “switch” his/her/their language and behavior to better fit in.
- Forcing persons to stop speaking their original language, requiring English only.
- Adjusting to or having difficulty with learning styles in educational settings that are based on what fits the mainstream.

Segregation: The practice of requiring separate housing, education, and other services for people of color. Segregation was made law several times in 18th and 19th century America as some believed that black and white people were incapable of coexisting. There are two types of segregation: *de jure* (by law) vs. *de facto* (by the fact; in reality).

Examples:

- De jure - Redlining in housing
- De facto - People choosing to sit with, live near, go to school with people that are racially similar

Microaggressions: An indirect, subtle, or unintentional statement, action, or incident directed towards members of a marginalized group. Microaggressions can have a negative or positive intention, but they are painful because individual appearances or

behaviors are used as representative of an entire group. A key part of what makes them so disconcerting is that they happen casually, frequently, and often without any harm intended, in everyday life. "People who engage in microaggressions are ordinary folks who experience themselves as good, moral, decent individuals. Microaggressions occur because they are outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrator."

(<https://www.vox.com/2015/2/16/8031073/what-are-microaggressions>)

Examples:

- A woman clutches her purse more tightly when a Black person enters the elevator with her.
- An Asian woman is complimented on her fine English speaking skills even though she was born in the US.
- A teacher asks a new Asian student, "Where are you from?" implying that the student is not American.
- Asking a Black person if you may touch his/her hair.
- A statement like, "You're so lucky to be Black--it's so easy to get into college."
- Greeting the Black doctor that enters the examination room with, "You're the doctor?"
- Attending a professional meeting and assuming a woman is a secretary and not the boss.
- Assuming a woman who is angry is on her period

Equality is the provision of equal treatment, access, and opportunity to resources and opportunities (Gunn, 2018). Essentially, everyone gets the same thing, regardless of where they come from or what needs they might have.

Equity is the provision of personalized resources needed for all individuals to reach common goals. In other words, the goals and expectations are the same for all students, but the supports needed to achieve those goals depends on the students' needs (Equity Education, 2019).