

Understanding Racism PART ONE: Let's Talk About It

This article offers definitions of common terms and concepts.

(Please see end for sources)

“As well-intentioned as it is to avoid discussing racism for fear of 'saying the wrong thing', it is vital that we talk about it, that we listen, and that we understand exactly what is being said before responding.” (Sukrithi Wahi)

Identifying Racism

(based on work by Don Operario and Susan T. Fiske)

Racism = Power + Prejudice

'Racism' is an instance when a racial group asserts some form of dominance over another racial group.

Overt Racism

Overt racism is widely understood. There are acts that are intentional, direct and easily identifiable. We frequently associate this with the idea of “white supremacy” which is easy to condemn. There are also deliberate forms of exclusion, discrimination or aggression that are racially based, for example telling a racist joke or using a racial label, locking doors after seeing an unknown person of colour in your street (but not doing the same for an unknown person who is white), or not hiring someone of colour because "something feels off about them". (Sukrithi Wahi)

Covert Racism

“I’m not racist, but...”

“I was taught to see racism only in the individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.”

Peggy McIntosh

Unconscious bias

The author of *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo, acknowledges that when we label racism as “bad,” it immediately becomes difficult to identify or name, because we see ourselves as good, moral, decent people and would not like to be viewed otherwise. However, supremacy is an ideology, meaning we can absorb it and be formed by it without recognising it. We don’t notice our fears and ignorance operating in the form of prejudice and stereotyping. We would not say out loud, “We’re better than those people...” and yet our actions, choices, tone and attitude can communicate that message. It is integrated into our value system or beliefs in ways that make it at first difficult to see and then uncomfortable to acknowledge.

“Unconscious biases are the learned stereotypes about certain groups of people that are formed outside of conscious awareness. They are automatic, unintentional, deeply engrained in our beliefs, universal and have the ability to affect our behaviour,” (Racismnoway.com.au)

Personal Racism

Examples:

- deliberately avoiding contact with members of a racial group.
- ignoring or silencing members of a racial group.
- labelling and stereotyping.
- racially insensitive language jokes, comments, or messages.
- suspicion.

Systemic/ Structural/ Institutional racism

Resources, power, and opportunities have historically been distributed such that certain groups benefit, and others are excluded. This indicates how notions of white superiority are entrenched in everyday thinking at a systems level.

These different systems can include policies, laws, criminal justice, healthcare, education, housing, employment practices or access, and more. Statistics show how insidiously systemic racism manifests from a socio-economic perspective, and the flow-on effect this has. (Sukrithi Wahi)

“This form of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group, so that the practices of that group are seen as the norm to which other cultural practices should conform.” (Racismnoway.com.au)

Examples in education:

- culturally biased curriculum, or curriculum which uses racial stereotypes, or omits material due to race.
- retaliation against anyone who makes a complaint about racial discrimination.
- disproportionate representation of racial groups at any level in an institution.
- the assumption that black people are unqualified; or were hired for equity reasons.

"All of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion. Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustice it produces, then healing can occur." – U.S. bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts

This article continues in Understanding Racism PART TWO: GOING DEEPER

Devin Lai Thom *"Overt and Covert Racism"* http://www.infobarrel.com/Overt_and_Covert_Racism

Sukrithi Wahi *"How to talk about race."* <https://www.harpersbazaar.com.au/culture/how-talk-about-race-20371>

NSW Department of Education (Racismnoway.com.au)

Don Operario and Susan T. Fiske *"Racism equals power plus prejudice: A social psychological equation for racial oppression."*