



Race | Racism Glossary

Race

For many people, it comes as a surprise that racial categorization schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that viewed some groups of people as superior and some as inferior. There are three important concepts linked to this fact:

1. Race is a made-up social construct, and not an actual biological fact.
2. Race designations have changed over time. Some groups that are considered “white” in the United States today were considered “non-white” in previous eras, in U.S. Census data and in mass media and popular culture (for example, Irish, Italian, and Jewish people).
3. The way in which racial categorizations are enforced (the shape of racism) has also changed over time. For example, the racial designation of Asian American and Pacific Islander changed four times in the 19th century. That is, they were defined at times as white and at other times as not white. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, as designated groups, have been used by whites at different times in history to compete with African American labor.

Racism

Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination.

Racism = race prejudice + social and institutional power

Racism = a system of advantage based on race

Racism = a system of oppression based on race

Racism = a white supremacy system

ALLY

An action, not an identity. Members of the advantaged group recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups to dismantle the systems of oppression(s) from which they derive power, privilege, and acceptance. Requires understanding that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. It means taking intentional, overt, and consistent responsibility for the changes we know are needed in our society and often ignore or leave for others to deal with; it does so in a way that facilitates the empowerment of persons targeted by oppression. This framework can be used to imply that one does not feel directly implicated by the oppression.

Source info for this second “Ally” definition (only): *This definition was found on the White Noise Collective webpage “Shared Understandings” with this source note:* Definitions, quotes and examples compiled from many sources.

Color-blindness

Color-blind ideology or color-evasiveness purports to not notice race in an effort not to appear being racist. It asserts that ending discrimination merely requires treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. Color-blindness, by overlooking the cumulative and enduring ways in which race unequally shapes life chances and opportunities for people from different groups, actually reinforces and sustains an unequal status quo. It also ignores cultural attributes that people value and deserve to have recognized and affirmed. And it serves as a device to disengage from conversations of race and racism entirely.

DEI (Diversity Equity Inclusion)

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, thus not only race, ethnicity, and gender, but also

other differences such as: age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, physical appearance. It also includes differing ideas, perspectives, values, skills and styles.

Equity is fairness to all. It is ensuring that all people have equal access to opportunities and fair treatment, and thus the elimination of discriminatory practices, systems, laws, policies, social norms and cultural traditions. An equity emphasis seeks to render justice by considering structural factors that benefit some social groups/communities and harm other social groups/communities. Sometimes justice demands, for the purpose of equity, an unequal response, hence equity is not the same as equality.

Inclusion is when we seek out diversity and challenge excluding norms and stereotypes. It is when all people are valued and able to participate and contribute to their fullest. It involves authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

Sources info for "DEI" definition: Lisa Kepinski and Tinna C. Nielsen. *Definitions Matter – Just Don't Talk About Them. Diversity, Equity, Belonging, Inclusion*. Inclusion Nudges. <https://inclusion-nudges.org/definitions-matter-just-dont-talk-about-them-diversity-equity-belonging-inclusion/> Accessed March 2025 & source listed at the end of this document (used with adaptations).

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

Structural Racism

The normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics, and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

Systemic Racism

1. This is an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between the individual, institutional and structural levels which function as a system of racism. These various levels of racism operate together in a lockstep model and function together as a whole system. These levels are:

- Individual (within interactions between people)
- Institutional (within institutions and systems of power)
- Structural or societal (among institutions and across society)

2. In many ways "systemic racism" and "structural racism" are synonymous. If there is a difference between the terms, it can be said to exist in the fact that a structural racism analysis pays more attention to the historical, cultural, and social psychological aspects of our currently racialized society.

Tokenism

A superficial effort made by organizations to appear diverse and inclusive by including individuals from underrepresented groups – but without genuinely addressing systemic inequalities. The term "token" refers to the one/few individuals from these groups who are included, often for the purpose of appearing inclusive, progressive, or compliant with diversity initiatives. Organizations may appoint these individuals to visible positions without giving them actual decision-making power or institutional support. This only serves to maintain the status quo, put undue pressure or unrealistic expectations on the token, while genuine influence remains concentrated among the majority group. Source info for "Tokenism" definition: *Develop Diverse* website: https://www.developdiverse.com/deib_dictionary/tokenism/ Accessed August 12, 2024

Source for all definitions (except as noted): *Racial Equity Tools Glossary*, MP Associates, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and World Trust Educational Services, December 2023. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary> Accessed April & August 2024 & March 2025.

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