

Step 2: Definitions and Frameworks

Before you can create curriculum or engage in discussion with learners about topics that address racism and race, we must have a shared understanding of common definitions and frameworks. Please review the definitions below.

DEFINITIONS

Anti-Blackness

Anti-Blackness is a theoretical framework that describes societal devaluation and disregard for the lives and humanity of people racialized as Black.⁴ The ideological roots of anti-Blackness are tied to the exploitation and dehumanization of Black people during chattel slavery. Anti-Blackness manifests as overt discrimination, violence, and structural/systemic racism against Black people, and in the de-prioritization of their issues.

Anti-racist

Someone who expresses an anti-racist idea or supports an anti-racist policy or action that yields racial equity.⁵

Color-blindness

One mainstream approach race in the United States is to insist that race is unimportant (or unseen) and does not impact a person's achievements or abilities.⁶ However, because of racism, people of different races have different lived experiences. Espousing a colorblind ideology that race does not matter ignores the actual differences in lived experience that people have based on how others perceive and respond to them in conscious, subconscious, and systemic ways. Becoming conscious of how race affects one's experiences in the world, or becoming *color-conscious*, is an important step in addressing racism.⁷

Implicit bias

Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes, associations and beliefs towards individuals and social groups that affect one's feelings, actions, understanding, and decisions.⁸

Ethnicity

Ethnicity, like race, is a social construct that has been used for categorizing people based on perceived differences in appearance and behavior. Historically, race has been tied to biology and ethnicity to culture, though the definitions are fluid, have shifted over time, and the two concepts are not clearly distinct from one another. According to the American Anthropological Society, "ethnicity may be defined as the identification with

⁴ Ross, 2020

⁵ Kendi, 2019

⁶ Flagg, 1992

⁷ Crenshaw et al, 1995

⁸ "Talking About Race Toolkit"

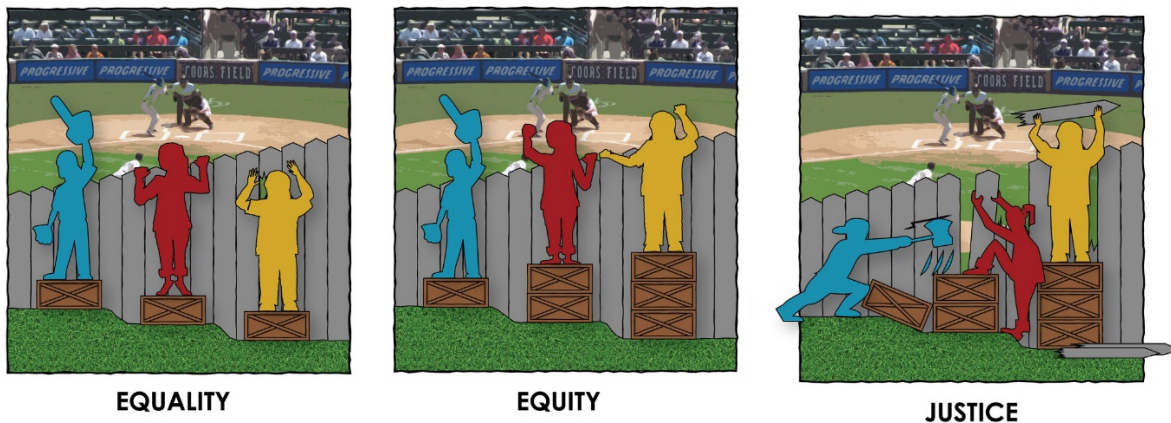
population groups characterized by common ancestry, language and custom. Because of common origins and intermarriage, ethnic groups often share physical characteristics which also then become a part of their identification--by themselves and/or by others. However, populations with similar physical appearance may have different ethnic identities, and populations with different physical appearances may have a common ethnic identity.”⁹ Race and ethnicity, social constructions, are often conflated with, and used as a surrogate for, ancestry. Ancestry more specifically and accurately identifies ancestral genetic lineage than does race or ethnicity.

Equality

Equality is a state/outcome that is the same among different groups of people. Equality is sameness.¹⁰

Equity

The process by which resources are distributed according to need. Equity is fairness.¹¹



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Race

The concept of race was constructed as a tool to categorize people with the purpose of validating racism. Race has no biological basis. During historical projects such as colonialism and slavery, race was artificially imposed on people in different political positions to create a moral hierarchy used to justify the harm inflicted by inequitable systems, exploitive capitalism, and white supremacy.^{12,13} Although the construct of race is dynamic and evolves with changing social, political, and historical norms,¹⁴ the construct perpetuated the false idea that there are static, innate characteristics that apply to sets of people despite diverse origins, life experiences, and genetic makeups. However, race is distinct from ancestry. Ancestry denotes people’s shared traits based

⁹ AAA Response, 1997

¹⁰ “Visual Glossary”

¹¹ “Visual Glossary”

¹² Roberts, 2011

¹³ Kendi, 2019

¹⁴ Morning, 2011

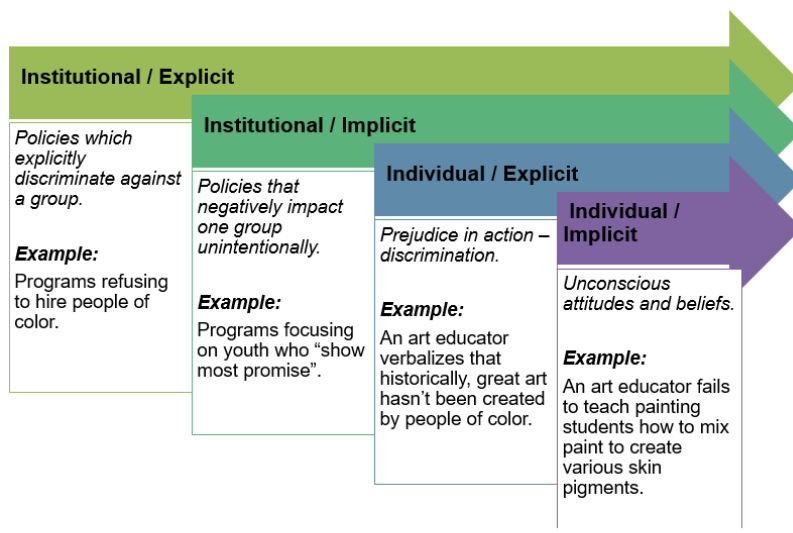
the genetic similarities of their ancestors and accounts for the complexity of geographic variation and fluidity.¹⁵ While race is socially constructed, the consequences of this social construct are experienced individually and collectively by communities in the form of racism. The effects of racism can be seen in differential outcomes in health, wealth, socioeconomic status, education, and social mobility in the United States.

Race Privilege

Race privilege is a term that identifies people who may be afforded privileges over others, usually because of their race’s relative historical or current proximity to whiteness when compared to another person identified as being of a different race.

Racism

Geographer and social theorist Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines *racism* as “the state-sanctioned and/or legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct and yet densely interconnected political geographies.”¹⁶ Importantly, her definition centers on how people of color *experience* racism, rather than focusing on how race is *imagined* or intended by white people.¹⁷ Racism exists in many forms. **Institutional racism** describes the “policies, practices and procedures that work



better for white people than for people of color, *regardless of intention.*”¹⁸ When describing how these institutions combine across history and present day reality to create systems that negatively impact communities of color, we call this **structural racism**.¹⁹ Our experiences in the world and interacting with institutions and social structures results in **internalized racism** that shapes our biases and beliefs about ourselves and

others. These beliefs may manifest on an interpersonal level as **individual racism**, or the “pre-judgement, bias, or discrimination by an individual based on race”.²⁰ Although individually exercised, individual racism is internalized from racist institutions and systems. Because it exists in the context of structural racism, there is no such thing as



¹⁵ Roberts, 2011
¹⁶ Gilmore, 2002
¹⁷ Brooks, 2006
¹⁸ “Talking About Race Toolkit”
¹⁹ “Talking About Race Toolkit”
²⁰ “Talking About Race Toolkit”



“reverse racism” since the inequitable systems upon which racism is based are set up to benefit white people.

White Privilege

White privilege is a term that identifies disproportionate access to opportunities, privileges, protections, head starts, or benefits (eg. absence of burdens, barriers, oppression) that afford social and economic mobility that people perceived to be white enjoy that are not typically afforded to people of color. These benefits can be material, social, or psychological.²¹ Anti-Blackness is one mechanism that establishes and reinforces white privilege.

White Fragility²²

Multicultural education scholar Dr. Robin DiAngelo describes white fragility as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar.” White fragility may be a learned and is often a subconscious emotional response, resulting from white people lacking the prior experience to develop the tools for constructive engagement across racial divides. It is nefarious in that it works to protect, maintain, and reproduce white privilege by centering the emotions of white people in dialogues about racism, thus impeding discussions about racist systems that need dismantling.

Whiteness

Often conversations about racism can feel personal, rather than focused on the systemic mechanisms that maintain or protect racism. In order to set the stage for productive conversations about racism at UCSF, we want to introduce the useful theoretical framework of *whiteness*. Whiteness is beyond white skin; it refers to a *systematic* prioritization that advantages white people and disadvantages people of color. The fundamental premise of the concept of whiteness is that being white is the standard and being a person of color is a deviation from this norm.²³ Whiteness influences everyone because it is a ubiquitous set of cultural assumptions to which we are all pressured to conform. It is, essentially, the water in which we all swim.²⁴ For example, consider what understood to be “normal” when Band-Aid describes a pale tan bandage as “skin tone”, when a patient expresses surprise that their doctor is Black, or when a person’s name is described as “unusual” when it is really just unfamiliar to someone. The normative ideals of whiteness often go unnamed, unexamined, and unquestioned. This has tangible consequences, and often violent effects, for those who do not default into the norms of whiteness. Whiteness, and its consequent white supremacy, permeate medicine and health care in complex and nuanced ways. A

²¹ McIntosh, 1998

²² DiAngelo, 2011

²³ McLaren, 1998

²⁴ Tatum, 1997

discussion or critique of whiteness is not a critique of white people, but of a system from which they benefit and often uphold.

KEY FRAMEWORKS

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from legal scholarship in 1989 in response to the limited and narrow scope of how law defined and addressed racism. It offered a set of key racial equity principles and a methodology to illuminate and combat the root cause of structural racism. This methodology has since been adapted to the field of health and medicine to help scholars attend to equity while carrying out research.²⁵ Critical race theorists recognize that racism is ingrained in the United States' historical fabric and argue we must explicitly identify and name racial power dynamics in order to address racism.²⁶ CRT challenges the fundamental assumption that science is objective because scientific activity occurs within, and is informed by, the social context in which we live, which is biased.

Public Health Critical Race Praxis (PHCRP) is a framework that applies CRT to health equity and public health research. PHCRP offers a semi-structured process to evaluate current and historical research, by applying a “race conscious orientation” to methods and offering tools for racial equity-informed approaches to knowledge generation. Researchers evaluate how racism (institutional and personal) informs their study design. They use these findings to refine their research and advance our understanding of how racism influences public health and disease.²⁷

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. Anti-racism examines and disrupts the power imbalances between racialized people and non-racialized (white people). In order to practice anti-racism, a person must first understand:

- How racism affects the lived experience of people of color and Indigenous people
- How racism is systemic and manifested in both individual attitudes and behaviors as well as formal policies and practices within institutions
- How both white people and people of color can, often unknowingly, participate in racism through perpetuating inequitable systems
- That dismantling racism requires dismantling systems that perpetuate inequity such as exploitive capitalism

Remember, these concepts are complex and these conversations can be challenging. Try to lean into the discomfort with the goal of talking about systems, and our roles in

²⁵ Ford, 2010

²⁶ Crenshaw et al, 1995

²⁷ Ford & Airhinenbuwa, 2018

perpetuating or dismantling unjust systems, rather than attacking or defending one's character.

Questions and exercises for self-reflection:

- *Before engaging this toolkit, how did you know what race and racism meant? How has your definition of race and racism shifted over time?*
- *Assess your implicit biases with the [Implicit Association Test](#). What surprised you about your results? What feelings did you notice bubbling up?*
- *How does institutional racism or structural racism manifest in the criminal justice system? In your educational training? In your work place?*

Suggested reading/listening:

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