

Diversity Definitions

Racism is the power individuals and groups of one race use to systematically oppress those of another race. The power bases through which this oppression takes place are:

1. Government
2. Business and Corporations
3. Education
4. Other institutions (churches, judicial system, etc.)

Racism is also defined as the assumption that psychocultural traits and abilities are determined by biological race and that races differ decisively from one another in this respect. This assumption is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to dominate others.

According to these definitions, the United States would be considered a racist society. For example, the power bases listed above are controlled primarily by white males. (In this sense we would also consider the U.S. to be a sexist society.) The majority of these white males make “power decisions,” unconsciously or consciously, which benefit white people.

It is unconscious in the sense that they are making decisions based on their experiences of being white in a white society and based on input from other white people. In addition, it is unconscious in that the white males do not realize the need to consider how their decisions may impact on minorities, or the need to have input from minorities.

The decision makers are consciously making racist decisions in that they realize to some degree that their decisions will impact more favorably on white people than on minorities. Even with this realization, they are still not concerned about getting input from minorities, or making decisions which will be positive for everyone. Until minorities have equitable input in power decisions, we will continue to be a racist nation.

Prejudice is a prejudgment on insufficient grounds. These judgments can be in a positive or negative sense. Any individual, be they white, black, red or brown, can be racially prejudiced. However, no individual can be racist in isolation. An individual must be able to translate racial prejudice into societal forms that perpetuate a particular color group’s advantages over another color group.

Although blacks in our society can be racially prejudiced, blacks cannot be racists because they are not in a sufficiently influential stance to translate their objectives into power, which is a structural or cultural form that would oppress or discriminate against white people.

Discrimination is the act, practice or instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually. It is the according of differential treatment of persons of an alien race or religion (as by formal or informal restrictions imposed in regard to housing, employment, or use of public facilities).

Stereotyping is something conforming to a fixed or general pattern and lacking individual distinguishing marks or qualities. Racist stereotypes exist when characteristics attributed to groups simplistically and uncritically are assumed to be rooted in significant biological differences.

Pluralism is a state of coexistence in a mutually supportive relationship within the boundaries or framework of one nation of people of diverse cultures with significantly different patterns of beliefs, behaviors, color, and in many cases languages. Pluralism demands an equitable distribution of resources, power, and decision making among all groups. Diversity of groups and cultures would be prevalent and differences respected. Groups collaborate with one another rather than one group dominating all the others.

Bishop, Massaro, and Riehl, "*Combatting Racism in Residence Halls*," SEAHO, 1988

Diversity: Creating Institutional Readiness on College Campuses

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