



Historic difference!

MountainTop Institute Jacksonville, Florida

DISCRIMINATION - PREJUDICE - RACISM

A Working Definition

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1. **Discrimination:** The word “Discrimination” literally means “to distinguish between”. In our context, this act of “distinguishing” combines with **cultural and social conditioning** to produce actions in the form of personal or social behaviors that diminish, devalue or disadvantage individuals or groups regardless of their personal merit or accomplishments. The act of discriminating is frequently based on a surface characteristic such as race, gender, sexual identify, age, religion, class, physical ability or other cultural or social differences. The word discrimination tends to refer mainly to behaviors --- discriminatory practices and policies --- as opposed to referring to deep-seated beliefs, attitudes or values.
2. **Prejudice:** Literally, to pre-judge. Prejudice is a way of thinking in which we make judgments about other people or groups of people before we know them. Prejudiced refers to our capacity to judge in advance of knowing, without the deep, personal, contact that sees below the superficial characteristics of the individual or group. These advance judgments frequently relate to the essential humanity of “The Other” person or group, leading us to **dehumanize** others. “The Other” is seen is less-than human, less-than worthy or lower in status and value. Prejudice, as with all systems of belief, operates largely outside of our

consciousness. It is driven by deep cultural conditioning and sustained by ages-old stereotypes.

3. **Racism - Colorism (and all the "ISMS")** --- MountainTop Institute defines racism as patterns of belief, ingrained behavior (personal and institutional) and cultural conditioning in which European people and their institutions are **overvalued** and in which people of color and their institutions are **undervalued**. This tendency to overvalue and undervalue operates within (and in contradistinction to) the standard that all people are inherently of **equal value**. The patterns are largely color-based. In our anti-Racism training we at MountainTop Institute increasingly use the term **Colorism** instead of **Racism**. This definition suggests that the undervaluing of people and institutions becomes more powerful the darker the skin tone; and the overvaluing of people and institutions becomes more powerful the lighter the skin tone. We view this dynamic as a consequence of European colonialism.

An underlying dynamic that supports all of this is the concept of **white supremacy**, a system of beliefs perpetuated through colonization around the world of nations of color by Europeans who defined blacks and other people of color as uncivilized and primitive, suggesting European forms were inherently superior to others.

Some psychologists, including James Hillman at Yale, have suggested that the color preferences have archetypal meanings --- in the Jungian sense of archetype; lightness and darkness carrying significant and ancient content.

The power of cultural conditioning suggests that all people in the culture are affected by this overvaluing and undervaluing belief system --- including people of color. This further suggests that people of color can undervalue themselves in some cases and overvalue European forms. We find this to be especially true for African Americans, whose slavery heritage may have been deeply internalized (**internalized racism**) in the undervaluing/overvaluing dynamic. When the patterns show up among whites this frequently results in what is called **white privilege** or **externalized racism** --- a socially-reinforced ability to deny or avoid responsibility for racist thinking or behavior.

These patterns of overvaluing and undervaluing show up throughout the culture -- within individuals, in groups and teams, and in entire systems. This is called **systemic racism** and **institutionalized racism**).

The patterns are imbedded in **stereotypes**, which keep them alive and which impact people and organizations in unconscious ways. The power of the unconscious is a key dynamic in sustaining racism and other forms of cultural devaluation and overvaluation. Clinical psychologists suggest that 80% of our thinking is **unconscious or subconscious**, making it difficult, though not impossible, for any individual to be fully aware of the nature, depth and scope of his or her cultural conditioning --- the degree to which we may devalue or overvalue others without meaning or intending to.

4. **THE "ISMS"**: MountainTop Institute defines any "ISM" as: The conscious and unconscious perpetuation of deeply-imbedded cultural conditioning borne by

stereotypes that overvalue one cultural-identity group and undervalue another cultural-identity group. This operates simultaneously at the individual, group, system and community or societal levels.

The following is taken from "The Inclusion Breakthrough - Unleashing the Real Power of Diversity", by Frederick A. Miller and Judith H. Katz © 2002 by the Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc.

Racism: *A form of oppression or discrimination based on race. This includes a prejudicial power dynamic that is the basis for privilege or oppression in organizations or society at large*

Racism: *One-up / one-down --- a system in which one social identity group experiences privilege or power (one-up status) while another is oppressed (one-down). As a result, privilege and oppression are linked, with the success of one group necessitating the failure of another. This dynamic does not allow for true equality or equal opportunity; it instead fosters dominance and subjugation. The two groups often have very different perceptions of privilege, group identity, and the need for change.*

5. How They Operate

Discrimination, Prejudice, Racism/Colorism and the other ISMS, as defined above, operate at five levels. These levels are interconnected and operate simultaneously in a self-replicating process.

- ❖ **The Individual / Personal Level**
- ❖ **The I-Group Level (Intimacy Group Level)**
- ❖ **The T-Level (Team or Task Group Level)**
- ❖ **The Systemic / Institutional / Community Level**
- ❖ **The World Level**

The Individual level refers to our intrapsychic operations, where biases, both conscious and unconscious, operate to. This refers to those deeply ingrained beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, values and assumptions that we have ingested from the culture --- our internalized cultural conditioning. Importantly, operations at this level are both conscious and unconscious. Since roughly 80% of our brain function is unconscious, the capacity to discriminate and prejudge operates largely outside of our conscious thought, in our deep subconscious or unconscious.

The I-Group Level refers to family and close working relationships --- those individuals with whom we have intimate daily contact at home or at work. This results, for example, in gender issues showing up in traditional male-female family settings where the shift from male-dominated gender roles to equitable gender roles result in a new set of gender dynamics that sometimes result in the abuse of women and that increasingly are cited as a primary cause of the increase in the rates of divorce and separation.

The T-Level refers to work groups, project teams, task forces, committees and other temporary structures in the workplace that meet from time-to-time to achieve a purpose or goal. These may be long-term or short-term groups. The T-Level also refers to non-work related environments such as churches, clubs, organizations, athletic teams, etc.

Race, gender and other ISMS continually present themselves in work groups and task forces in ways that inhibit maximum teamwork and creativity.

The Systemic / Institutional / Community Level refers to the operations of racism, sexism, etc, in total systems. This results in predictable patterns of gender or race-based arrangements in organizational hierarchies. These patterns continue to repeat themselves in spite of earnest efforts to equalize hiring, promotion, retention of women, people of color, persons with disabilities, gays and lesbians, etc.

The World Level refers to the ISMS as they function in a variety of ways around the world. Issues of gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity and other dynamics continue to confound attempts at peace and reconciliation. Cultural conditioning with regard to human and cultural differences are intertwined with the human capacity to prejudge (prejudice), to discriminate, and to hold one identity-group as better than another identity-group.

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