

Three Levels of Racism

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“Think of solutions within the context of different levels of racism and the different ways that racism impact people and block their progress and their ability to develop the human capital.”
- Thomas A. LaVeist

Level One: Interpersonal Racism

Definition for download: Interpersonal racism is the form of racism that most people talk about when we talk about racism. They are talking about bigotry, somebody has a bad attitude or feeling about somebody due to their race and that is what most people think of as racism

Direct quote: “Interpersonal racism is the form of racism that most people talk about when we talk about racism. They are talking about bigotry, somebody has a bad attitude or a bad feeling about somebody due to their race and that ends what most people think of as racism. I would argue that this is the least important, the least relevant, the least impactful form of racism. What another person thinks of me is of very little consequence unless that person has the ability to do something to enact that attitude that would even impact on my ability to progress.”

Level Two: Structural Racism

Definition for download: Structural racism refers to the ways that the society has been organized in such a way that it leads to racially different outcomes. Structural racism does this even if the structures had not been created by people who had racist intent. But even if there was no racist intent, we have structures that produce racially differential outcomes, regardless of anyone’s attitudes, values, or beliefs.

Direct Quote: “Structural racism, I would argue, is still only the second most important form of racism. Structural racism refers to the ways that the society has been organized in such a way that it leads to racially different outcomes. Structural racism does this even if the structures had not been created by people who had racist intent, although I would argue in many cases they have been. But even if there was no racist intent, we have structures that produce racially differential outcomes, regardless of anyone’s attitudes, values, or beliefs. One example of this that I think is a good way to illustrate this issue: social security is a program that is available to any American or legal resident who has paid into the social security system for at least 10 quarters. At age 67, you’re able to receive social security. However, we have race differences in life expectancy, which means that the beneficiaries of that program are going to vary in how much benefit they are going to get from the program, regardless of how much they paid into the system. Now, I’m not suggesting that social security is racist, I’m suggesting that the social security system produces a racially different outcome because of the structure, because of the way that it’s organized. And this is an example of how structural racism operates, it doesn’t matter who is running the social security program, it doesn’t matter who is mailing out the checks. The system is set up in such a way that there will be a racially

disparate outcome, regardless of anyone's attitudes, values, beliefs, or actions. This is a form of racism that has had a huge impact and hugely impacted the ability of African Americans to pursue happiness as the constitution suggests we should be able to do."

Level Three: Internalized Racism

Definition for download: Internalized racism is when people themselves, who are the targets of racism, begin to adopt these negative beliefs about themselves and about their own group of people. If someone can convince another that they are inferior, and then no one has to create structures to hold anyone back, they are holding themselves back because they simply will conclude that they cannot compete.

Direct quote: "This is when people who are themselves the target of racism begin to adopt these negative beliefs about themselves and about their own group of people. If I can convince you that you are inferior, then I don't have to create structures to hold you back, you are holding yourself back because you simply will conclude that you cannot compete."