

# Key Terms

Compiled by Ali Michael, Ph.D.

## Affinity

---

Affinity technically refers to a natural attraction, liking or feeling of kinship. It is used in schools to refer to student support groups that are composed of students who share a common identity. Sometimes this is race, sometimes gender, sometimes family structure (students of divorced parents, students of same sex parents), sometimes life experience (students who have had a death in the family or who live with mental illness or alcoholism in their families) and sometimes sexual identity (most affinity groups for sexual identity do not demand that students declare their identities—these can be important spaces for students who are questioning). The point of affinity groups is to give students a safe space to discuss things that come up for “kids like them” in which they do not have to explain themselves.

## Anti-racism

---

“Being anti-racist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected *materially* (receive benefits or disadvantages) and *ideologically* by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality.”

(Definition from Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism without Racists*)

## Aversive Racism

---

Aversive racism is a form of racism expressed by people who endorse egalitarian values, regard themselves as non-prejudiced and discriminate in subtle, rationalizable ways, often related to anxiety and unexamined biases. (From the research of Dr. John Dovidio)

## Colorblindness

---

A term that people use meaning to express that one “does not see race.” It is often used on the individual level by people who want race not to matter. It can be particularly hurtful to people of color as it suggests that having a race is bad or that the speaker refuses to acknowledge others’ races. It is broadly harmful on the systemic level where the Supreme Court and many in Congress have used the pretense of “colorblind” policies to strike down affirmative action decisions and to deem unlawful the use of race for creating equity by countering historical wrongs based on race.

## Collusion

---

To give one’s agreement through silence or by going along with prejudicial comments or acts of racism. For people of color, they may remain silent or appear to go along with offensive behavior as a matter of survival. Whites may misinterpret this reaction as validation that the situation or action is “okay.” Whites may also stay silent out of fear of breaking ranks with other whites or out of a lack of awareness; the effect, however, is to enable a tacit agreement amongst whites that perpetuates racism.

(Definition from Antje Mattheus and Lorraine Marino's *Whites Confronting Racism* manual)

## **Colorism**

---

Colorism refers to discrimination based on skin color. The phenomenon has its roots in slavery when light-skinned slaves received better treatment than dark-skinned slaves, usually because they were biologically related to the White slave-owners. It often refers to the ways that lighter skin and finer hair textures (and other markers of Whiteness) are more highly valued within communities of color. In this way it is an in-group term. –Definition from Nadra Kareem Nittle

## **Cultural Appropriation**

---

The unhealthy aspect of multiculturalism, where a more powerful culture adopts elements of a less powerful one as its own. This is done without rightfully acknowledging the original culture or understanding the context for these cultural elements. Once these elements are taken out of their original context, their meaning can be widely divergent and minimized. This appropriation differs from various ways cultures blend or are inspired by one another in respectful ways.

(Claire Light <http://claire.ight.typepad.com/seelight/2009/01/defining-cultural-appropriation.html>)

(Definition from Antje Mattheus and Lorraine Marino's *Whites Confronting Racism* manual)

## **Discrimination**

---

Discrimination is behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships.

Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices. (*Teaching Tolerance*)

## **Equity vs. Equality**

---

Equality means everyone gets exactly the same thing – without regard to individual differences. Equity means everyone gets what they need to yield the same outcome. If one of my children is disabled, for example, treating both my children *equally* may mean sending them both to the same school. Treating them *equitably*, however, would mean choosing the schools that meet both of their needs.

## **Implicit Bias**

---

Scientific research has demonstrated that biases thought to be absent or extinguished remain as “mental residue” in most of us. Studies show people can be consciously committed to egalitarianism, and deliberately work to behave without prejudice, yet still possess hidden negative prejudices or stereotypes. (*Teaching Tolerance*) To gauge your own implicit bias, go to: <https://implicit.harvard.edu>

## **Intent vs. Impact**

---

Our intent is invisible to the other person; however, our impact is not. It is the impact, or effect, of an action or statement that the other person experiences. Intent and impact are not always the same, and this disconnect is often a source of tension across race. Whites (or members of a mainstream group) tend to focus on their intention, not the impact of their actions. So they may feel angry or hurt when someone's reaction does not seem to recognize their intention. People of color (or folks in a marginalized group) focus on impact. For regardless of someone's intention, the effect is still real. Some actions or statements are not in themselves racist; however, they may have that impact. For example, not paying attention when a person of color is speaking: this behavior on its own would not be called racist. But the effect of a white person as a dominant group member on a marginalized group member can have a negating effect. A key skill is understanding that both are present and to acknowledge one's impact rather than denying it.

(Definition from Antje Mattheus and Lorraine Marino's *Whites Confronting Racism* manual)

## Multicultural Education

---

Multicultural education is a political movement and process that attempts to secure social justice for individuals and communities. Achieving it requires not only classroom changes, but also school reform. The underlying goal is the elimination of educational inequities. It has been shown to be good for all students.

"Despite good intentions, much of what U.S. educators, activists, scholars, and others refer to as multicultural education is not multicultural education at all, but small changes and programs within an inequitable educational system" (p. 70).

(Definitions from Paul Gorski's "Unintentional Undermining of Multicultural Education" in *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms*)

## Othering

---

To other somebody is to treat them as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself. It is the way that an individual or group becomes mentally classified in somebody's mind as "not one of us" (From [therearenoothers.wordpress.com](http://therearenoothers.wordpress.com)).

## Prejudice

---

A prejudice is an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members (*Teaching Tolerance*). It often involves using stereotypes to form opinions of another. It is different from racism in that it does not usually involve having or exercising power.

## Privilege

---

The dominant group takes or easily receives benefits because of their group's power – such as good jobs, high income, access to money, physical safety, good education, quality health services, good housing, respectful treatment, being held in high regard, favorable historic interpretations, etc. Privilege can show

up in “simple” ways such as being able to catch a cab when you need one; or not to be treated with suspicion while shopping. It also shows up in “not-so-simple” ways such as being reasonably sure you’ll find a place to live where your neighbors are welcoming or at least neutral; or, that you will be treated fairly when stopped for a traffic issue.

(Definition from Antje Mattheus and Lorraine Marino’s *Whites Confronting Racism* manual)

---

## Racism

Racism is prejudice plus power.

“The use of race to establish and justify a social hierarchy and system of power that privileges, preferences or advances certain individuals or groups of people usually at the expense of others. Racism is perpetuated through both interpersonal and institutional practices.”

(Definition from [www.understandingrace.org](http://www.understandingrace.org) by the Association of American Anthropologists)

---

## Race as a social construction

“(Race is) a recent idea created by western Europeans following exploration across the world to account for differences among people and justify colonization, conquest, enslavement, and social hierarchy among humans... Ideas about race are culturally and socially transmitted and form the basis of racism, racial classification and often complex racial identities.” There is no biological basis for race; in fact there is more similarity among people across racial groups than within racial groups. Race carries tremendous social meaning that significantly impacts the lives of all people as a result of the myths, ideas and systems that reinforce it.

(Definition from [www.understandingrace.org](http://www.understandingrace.org) by the Association of American Anthropologists)

---

## Racial Microaggressions

“Racial micro-aggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. “

(Definition from Dr. Derald Wing Sue’s *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life*)

Racial microaggressions are characterized by almost always having vastly different intent and impact. They gain power from their cumulative effects and the underlying messages that are being communicated. When teachers consistently call a Chinese American student by another Chinese American student’s name, for example, the underlying messages that are communicated from many different teachers are: you all look the same, you are not an individual, I don’t care enough to learn your name. Of course the teacher’s intent is to greet the student by name in a gesture of friendliness.

---

## Racial Stress

“The race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being”

(Definition from Dr. Shelly Harrell's *A multidimensional conceptualization of racism-related stress: Implications for people of color*, p. 43).

## **Stereotype**

---

A stereotype is an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group—a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative (*Teaching Tolerance*).

## **Stereotype Threat**

---

Stereotype threat is the “social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies.” In experiments, Black students and women have been shown to score lower on tests for intelligence, simply by being reminded of their membership in a group that is stereotyped to have lower intelligence. When this identity trigger is not activated, their scores do not differ. - Drs. Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson

## **White Supremacy**

---

The assumption or theory that White people are superior to people of all other racial backgrounds and should therefore be in power or control (Moore, Penick-Parks, and Michael, 2015). “White Supremacy” is also a term used to describe U.S. society, which was historically premised on this theory. The U.S. was established as a nation in which White people were granted superior rights, access and privileges, based on racial classification (Haney-Lopez, 2006). This racial legacy is evident in many U.S. systems and institutions today, and the theory of White superiority (including a belief in the superiority of White ways of speaking, acting, relating, etc.) is still operational at the individual, group and systems levels throughout the U.S.