

## ANTI-RACISM DAILY

May 21, 2024

### Unpack the four levels of oppression.

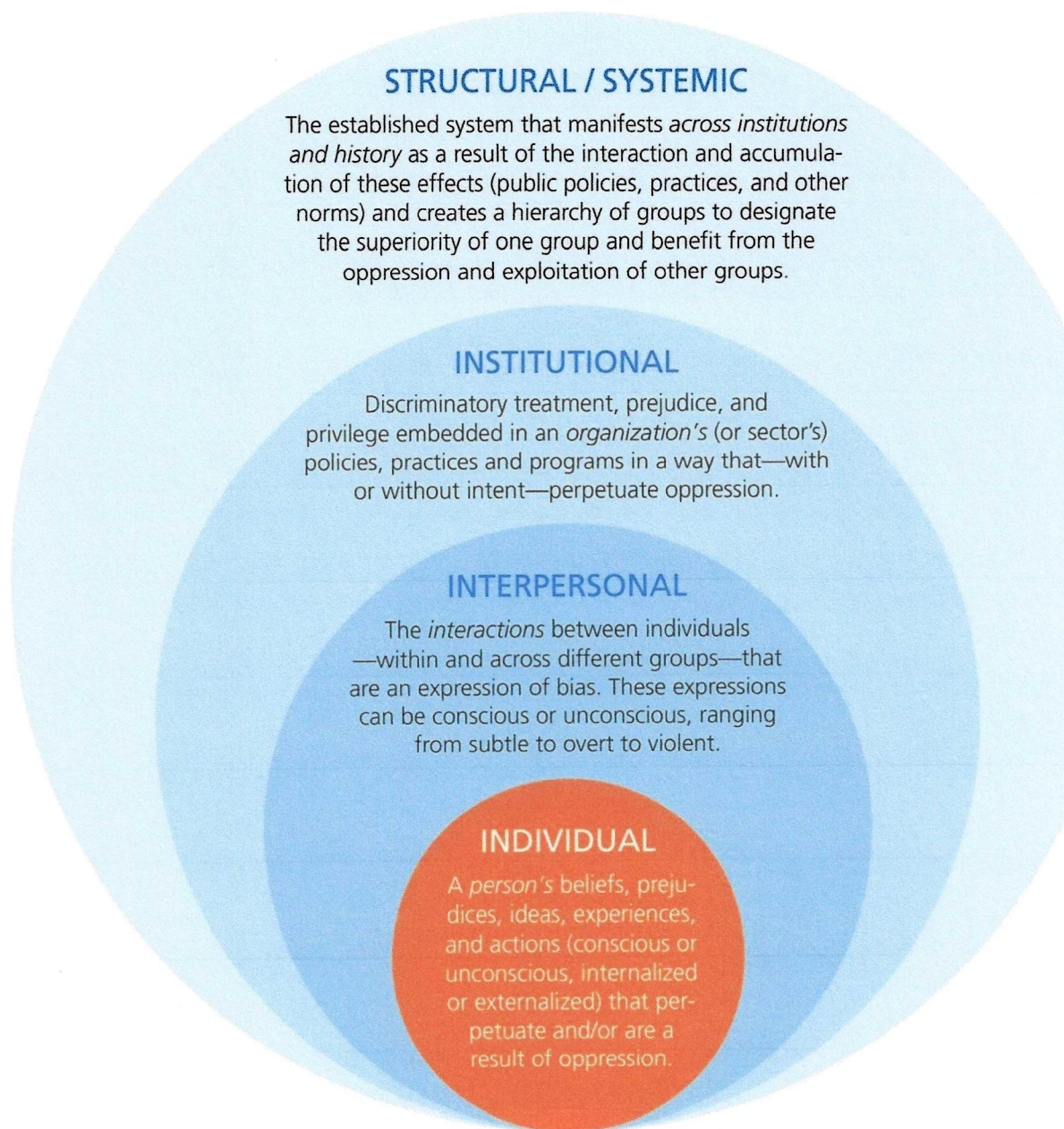
#### TAKE ACTION

- Consider: How does the definition of racism below compare to your current understanding?
- Take a moment to find an example of racial bias within these four categories below based on moments in your life.

#### GET EDUCATED

According to a fall 2021 Pew Research Center survey, Americans tend to view racism by individuals as a bigger problem for Black people in the United States than racism in the nation's laws. Black Americans themselves, however, are more likely to say racism in U.S. laws is the larger problem ([Pew Research](#)). I found this insight fascinating but unsurprising. It feels like we see more instances of racism go "viral" when they're between two people – like the "Karen" videos or stories of people being discriminated against by a business. And even when there's an instance of police brutality, the conversation often focuses on the two people in the incident rather than questioning whether an institution of armed people should disproportionately target people of color.

In truth, all levels of racism have to be dismantled to achieve justice and liberation. But that might be hard to witness if the discourse only shows one type. Let's look at the four types of racism – internalized racism, interpersonal racism, institutional racism, and structural racism – to understand how it persists in society entirely.



*This graphic shows the four levels of oppression, a framework of four overlapping circles. Note that our individual attitudes and beliefs are at the center, influencing how we show up across all other planes. Source: FSG.*

**Internalized racism happens within us.** This racial bias might play out when we're looking at ourselves in the mirror. For a white person, it could be a feeling of **white superiority** and power over other people of color. For a person of color, it could be negative feelings about one's identity. These biases are shaped by our individual experiences and what we've learned (or unlearned) from the society around us. They can lead to adverse health outcomes for ourselves and influence how we choose to act around others.

**Interpersonal racism happens between us.** It occurs when one individual's personal racial beliefs affect their public interactions with others and influence their thoughts about a group of people based on their race. Sometimes, interpersonal racism is unintentional, a result of false stereotypes taught to us by society. But regardless of intent, interpersonal or personally mediated racism results in harmful interactions between two or more people.

**Institutional racism happens *within* institutions and systems of power.** This occurs when institutions create, maintain, and enforce policies and practices rooted in racial inequity, creating adverse results for people of color. An example of this would be a school policy banning hairstyles common to people who identify as Black.

**Structural racism is racism *among* institutions and society.** It results from a long history of racial bias, which can be hard to see because it is embedded in our institutions and policies. Structural racism is not unique to any one institution or society. And it's a result of the cumulative effects of all the other forms of racism from above. We see structural racism when we look at the history of homeownership for people of color, voter disenfranchisement, the racial wealth gap, and other macro trends of racial inequity (Race Forward).

It's sometimes difficult to label an instance of racial bias as just one of these four categories because we are greatly influenced by the institutions we live in. If a hiring manager avoids hiring a person of color for a role historically associated with white men because they feel like people of color aren't qualified, there's interpersonal racism at play. But there's also institutional racism at play because this hiring manager doesn't just represent themselves, but an organization. This is a good reminder that we, as people, carry great responsibility. We are members of communities bigger than ourselves.

Remember that all aspects of racism are reinforced by the other -isms in our society, including (but not limited to) ableism, antisemitism, classism, and ageism. Gender inequity influences how men, women, and nonbinary people of color are perceived. LGBTQ+ people of color are more likely to experience harassment and discrimination. These isms are also informed by race. That's why it's essential to understand that all parts of our identity are interconnected, and we can't eradicate racism by only focusing on racial inequities alone.

Change must happen at the individual and institutional levels. It will take a radical shift in systems that aren't serving us, like our criminal legal system. We also have to keep dismantling our own biases. All of this might feel overwhelming, but we can identify ways to rally against each part more effectively by understanding how things persist.

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## QUIZ

**Which type of racism focuses on racial bias within institutions and systems of power?**

*Scroll down for the answer.*

- a) Internalized racism
  - b) Institutional racism
  - c) Interpersonal racism
  - d) Structural racism
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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A new study indicated that people of different racial backgrounds and political affinities see racism as a different type of problem in the U.S.
- There are four levels of racism, and we must dismantle all of them to achieve justice and liberation.
- These four levels are fluid, and racial bias demonstrated within one helps reinforce the biases present in the rest.
- Our biases on gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and other parts of our identity also influence our perception of race. This is why we must dismantle these inequities to find racial equity.