

UNDERSTANDING RACISM, BIAS, AND DISCRIMINATION



LMSD | Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve



RACISM | Racism is a system of oppression/advantage based on race. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.

BIAS | Part of the way our brains make sense of the world is by putting things into categories. The tendency to sort into groups and to order these groups is inherent: by five years old, children can sort people into groups based on age, gender, and race. This is not enough, in and of itself, to lead to bias, however. Bias arises from our tendency to sort people into groups while also paying attention to what kinds of people are most likely to have power and resources in a society. Noticing that specific characteristics—for example, race or gender—are associated with having more or less status, power, resources, or respect from others leads to judgments about people or groups. In many cases, these associations are reinforced by our families, communities, or larger social groups. This way of attaching social value to particular characteristics is what leads to bias: a disproportionate preference for (or, on the other hand, an aversion to) an idea or a group of people, usually in a way that is close-minded or unfair. This, in turn, can create discriminatory behaviors, practices, and institutional policies.

What is Implicit Bias? Implicit bias is an unconscious or immediate thought process that may go directly against our conscious beliefs. We are often biased in favor of people or groups we see as familiar (which makes us think of them as “safe”), and biased against groups we have learned to see as unsafe or “strange.” These often unconscious associations can shape our attitudes and comfort levels around people we perceive as different, and can in turn affect how we treat them. Examples of implicit bias include:

- Preferring to socialize with people that only look like you or or have similar identities to yours, without noticing that you tend to do this
- Reflexively feeling discomfort when you are around individuals or groups with certain characteristics (for example race, sexual orientation, or gender), even though you do not know anything about them as people
- Automatically changing how you speak to others, like classmates or coworkers, who identify differently than you

- Regularly showing more respect or giving preferential treatment to certain people based solely on particular characteristics
- Having a negative opinion about someone—for example, assuming someone is unhealthy or unintelligent—based on their race, age, gender, or other characteristics—without any personal knowledge of them as an individual

What makes it even more confusing is that being a victim of discrimination does not mean we are not also a perpetrator of discrimination; seeing and addressing unconscious bias takes conscious effort.

What is Explicit Bias? Explicit bias is the conscious process in which we evaluate another person, deem them “acceptable” or “unacceptable,” and then treat that other person according to how we see them. Unlike implicit bias, which is most often unconscious or automatic, explicit bias is holding a clear and conscious judgment about groups of people based on their identity. Examples of explicit bias include:

- Consciously using language that is derogatory, disrespectful, a slur, or othering when speaking about people with different identities
- Reacting angrily or disrespectfully to someone speaking another language, or wearing a piece of clothing that is significant to their culture, religion, or ethnicity because of your own negative feelings about what it means to be part of that culture, religion, or ethnicity
- Treating a person with a disability like they are unintelligent or immature, or being overtly condescending
- Bullying or excluding someone from social activities because they are different from you, either because of your own biases or because you want to belong to the “in” group

DISCRIMINATION | Discrimination means partiality toward or prejudice against someone based on handicap/disability, race, color, age, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity or national origin.