

## The Three Powers of Racism

Racism = race prejudice + misuse of power by systems and institutions

Racial prejudice that is enforced by systems and institutions of society

- gives power and privilege based on race to the group in power, and
- limits power and privilege of the racial groups that are not in power

**Power<sup>1</sup>** What racism does to people of color

- Racism's power to disempower and oppress people of color

Racial oppression has the power to destroy people of color spiritually, emotionally physically and intellectually. Over many generations, depriving POC of their power and their rights expresses itself in self-defeating behaviors such as low self-worth, self-hate and a distrust of the world at large.

Power<sup>1</sup> oppression continues in the disparities between whites and people of color with regard to education, healthcare, the criminal justice system, access to housing and accumulation of wealth.

**Power<sup>2</sup>** What racism does for white people

- Racism's power to provide unearned privilege and power to white society

White privilege is the unearned and unfair advantages which white people enjoy, but which others do not enjoy. These advantages can be:

- *material* - greater opportunity in the labor market, or greater net worth, due to a history in which whites had the ability to accumulate wealth to a greater extent than persons of color
- *social* - presumptions of competence, creditworthiness, law-abidingness, intelligence
- *psychological* - not having to worry about triggering negative stereotypes, rarely having to feel out of place, not having to worry about racial profiling

The end goal of systemic racism is to provide power and privilege to white people. The *means* to the end is the oppression of POC through the Power<sup>1</sup> form of racism.

**Power<sup>3</sup>** Racism's power to destroy all of us

- Racism's power to dehumanize everyone and destroy society

Power<sup>3</sup> is the most dangerous and insidious power of racism. This is racism's power to shape racial identity. Power<sup>3</sup> is racism's power to socialize whites into being racists and people of color into being victims.

As children we are socialized into society. We internalize messages from our socialization process. People of color often internalize messages of inferiority. This process is called Internalized Racial Oppression, or IRO.

IRO is defined as “a complex multi-generational socialization process that teaches people of color to BELIEVE, ACCEPT and LIVE OUT negative societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out inferior societal roles. These behaviors support and help maintain the race construct”.

White people aren't born believing themselves to be superior to people of color. Rather, they are socialized to accept white superiority and often internalize these messages. This process is called Internalized Racial Superiority, or IRS.

IRS is defined as “a complex multi-generational socialization process that teaches white people to BELIEVE, ACCEPT and LIVE OUT superior societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out superior societal roles. These behaviors define and normalize the race construct and its outcome – white supremacy”.

### **Caucusing**

In order to work together to dismantle racism, people of color and white people must understand how these identity dynamics operate and devise strategies to overcome the barriers and oppression that are created by them. One strategy to confront the effects of IRO and IRS is *caucusing*.

Caucusing provides space for people to work within their own racial group. POC and white people each have work to do separately and together. For POC, a caucus is a place to work with peers on their experiences of internalized racism, for healing and to work on liberation. For white people, caucusing provides time and space to work explicitly and intentionally on understanding white culture and white privilege and to increase one's critical analysis around these concepts. A white caucus also puts the onus on white people to teach each other about these ideas, rather than constantly relying on POC to teach them.

Groups that use caucuses in their racial equity work generally meet separately and then come back together for collective work. Accountability is a key principle of this work.