



### What is Racial Discrimination or Racism?

For the Manitoba Human Rights Commission (MHRC), “Discrimination under *The Human Rights Code* (the Code) is treating a person or group differently, to their disadvantage and without reasonable cause, on the basis of a group characteristic, such as ancestry, sex, or disability.” (Manitoba Human Rights Commission)

The MHRC defines racism as being “Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference, intentional or unintentional, based on race, colour, cultural or ethnic origin that has the purpose of nullifying or impairing the equal enjoyment or exercise of human rights.”

### What Does the Manitoba *Human Rights Code* Say about Racial Discrimination or Racism?

*The Human Rights Code* (the Code) protects individuals and groups in Manitoba from discrimination. The Code prohibits unreasonable discrimination based on the following grounds, called “protected characteristics.”

- Ancestry
- Nationality or national origin
- Ethnic background or origin
- Religion or creed, religious belief, religious association, or religious activity
- Age
- Sex, including gender-determined characteristics such as pregnancy
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Marital or family status
- Source of income
- Political belief, political association, or political activity
- Physical or mental disability
- Social disadvantage

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission defines the following terms related to ethnic background or origin (see [Human Rights in the School](#) by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission):

### Race

A socially created category to classify humankind by common ancestry or descent; it is reliant upon differentiation by general physical or cultural characteristics such as colour of skin and eyes, hair type, historical experience, and facial features.

### Racism

A set of implicit or explicit beliefs, assumptions, and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one racial or ethnic group over another. Racism can be evident within organizational or institutional structures and programs, as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns.

The Code protects Manitobans from racial discrimination in

- public services and facilities (such as schools, restaurants, government offices, or hospitals)
- employment (includes hiring, firing, wages, or other terms of employment)
- tenancy (renting a place)
- buying a house, condominium, mobile home, or other property
- publications (such as newspapers, posters, or signs)

## What Forms does Racism Take?

Racism can take many forms. It can take the form of language, such as verbal abuse, racist slurs, and/or disparaging language. It can be written in a piece of text or the use of an image that is stereotypical, disparaging, or offensive. It can take the form of social interaction, from refusing to stand or sit next to someone to outright physical attacks. It can also be present or embedded in the policies, practices, and patterns of relationships in an organization and society.

**Racism may be by omission or commission, direct or indirect, individual or institutional**

Racism occurs between individuals on an interpersonal level, but it is also embedded in organizations and institutions through their policies, procedures, and practices. Often, it is easier to recognize individual or interpersonal acts of racism, such as when someone says a racial slur, or is ignored in a social or work setting, or is the victim of an act of violence.

### *Individual Racism*

**Individual racism** refers to an individual's racist assumptions, beliefs, or behaviours and is "a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious personal prejudice" (Henry and Tator, p. 329). Individual racism is connected to/learned from broader socio-economic histories and processes and is supported and reinforced by systemic racism.

Examples of individual forms of racism in schools:

- making fun of clothes, food, or physical appearance of people from different cultures
- telling jokes directed against people from particular groups
- using insulting language about particular cultural groups
- making fun of people's accents or names
- refusing to work or play with or sit next to other people who are from a different culture or speak a different language
- writing graffiti against people from particular cultural backgrounds
- stereotyping people from different cultural or linguistic groups
- telling people to "go back where they came from"
- not including students from particular backgrounds in class activities
- favouring students from some backgrounds more than others
- not helping students from some backgrounds as much as others
- expecting students from some cultural or linguistic groups to do better or worse than others in schoolwork
- not respecting people's different religious beliefs
- bullying students from different cultural and linguistic groups
- assaulting people from different cultural backgrounds

However, "individual" racism does not emerge from a vacuum. It is often the result of or nurtured by a society's foundational beliefs and ways of seeing/doing things, and is manifested in organizations, institutions, and systems (including education).

## *Systemic Racism*

**Systemic racism** includes the policies and practices entrenched in established institutions that result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups. It differs from overt discrimination in that no individual intent is necessary (Toronto Mayor's Committee on Community and Race Relations).

It manifests itself in two ways:

- Institutional racism: racial discrimination that derives from individuals carrying out the dictates of others who are prejudiced or of a prejudiced society
- Structural racism: "inequalities rooted in the system-wide operation of a society that excludes substantial numbers of members of particular groups from significant participation in major social institutions (Henry and Tator, p. 352)."

Some forms of systemic racism may be more explicit or easier to identify than others (e.g., the Indian residential schools system in Canada; the exclusion of Jews from some public facilities; race-segregated schools; the way that "universal suffrage" did not include Indigenous North American women; how Indigenous men did not receive the vote until 1960, unless they gave up their status/identity as Indigenous).

Some Canadian examples of systemic racism are the 1885 Head Tax, the 1923 *Exclusion Act*, the 1897 *Female Refugees Act*, and there are many more.

Examples of systemic forms of racism in schools:

- School curricula that claims to be "inclusive" and "representative" but omits representation from certain groups or is under-representative of some groups (although there have been significant improvements in curriculum development and delivery in recent decades)
- School trustees and divisional and school administrators that are not representative of the diversity in the school and community
- Lower teacher expectations of students from certain groups
- Inequities in educational outcomes
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate programming

Other forms or manifestations of systemic racism may not be as readily obvious to some—usually those who are privileged by the system. Fortunately, individuals can be anti-racist within, and despite, systems and institutions that are systemically racist.

## What are the Effects of Racism on Students and School?

Racism can be experienced by all sorts of people at school—students, teachers, parents, maintenance staff, office staff, canteen staff, and casual workers—and it can be embedded in the school culture and practices. Here are some ways in which racism might affect the students, the teachers, and the whole school. What other effects might racism have on people?

Students who experience racism might

- be afraid of going to school
- have trouble studying and concentrating in class
- stay away from school
- feel anxious and unhappy
- have trouble making friends
- fall behind in schoolwork
- get lower results in their exams
- not speak their first language for fear of being teased or picked on
- reject their own culture and parental values
- be confused about their own identity
- be aggressive or disruptive

Teachers who witness or experience racism might

- not want to go to work each day
- lose confidence in their ability to teach
- feel anxious and unhappy
- stay away from school
- lose enjoyment in teaching

The effects of racism on the whole school include

- students making friends only with others from the same background
- conflict and fights between students from different cultural or linguistic groups
- conflict between staff and students from different backgrounds
- unfriendly school environment
- parents not having confidence in the school and education system

---

**Notes**