

Let's Talk About Race And Racism: An Anti-Racist Toolkit For Staff

Introduction

UCL believes in changing the world for the better. That must start in our own community. For most people this is a great place to work or study. Yet, where unacceptable behaviour does exist, it can have a real impact and it can be difficult to know how to challenge it. So, UCL is asking our community to come together and say Full Stop.

This resource is intended for all staff.

In order to understand how racial harassment and micro-aggressions manifest, we must unpack race and racism, and the role we all must play in shaping a new narrative: let's talk about race.

Not being racist is not enough. Not being racist does not change a racist world. We must learn to understand what racism is and how it blights lives and practice being actively anti-racist and active allies.

What is race and racism?

Racism is a system of inequality, like misogyny or other systems of power. Racism is commonly misunderstood as a series of intended discriminatory or prejudicial actions by one person towards a person of colour. Racism is not a series of individual instances of dislike towards an individual, rather it is group prejudice backed by institutional power. Racist behaviour may not always be intentional. Racism exists within our history, it is entrenched in political structures, social systems and in human behaviour. Racism exists at UCL.

In the UK, race is understood to be related to skin colour, or nationality. It can also mean your ethnic, linguistic or national group. When understanding racism, we need to understand the role of prejudice and xenophobia. Prejudice is to have preconceived opinions about something or someone, which is not based on reason or experience.

However, xenophobia is understood to be an extreme dislike, or fear of foreigners, including their customs and belief systems.

What's important to recognise is that we all have biases, and we are all capable of prejudice and xenophobia. However, what we can influence is how we act and behave towards others. For example, Harvard University developed a helpful tool to understand "[Implicit Bias Association](#)"

To understand race and racism, we must explore uncomfortable subject matter and understand the role of white privilege and fragility in reinforcing the prejudice backed by institutional power; as sociologist Dr Robin Di Angelo highlights we need to stop defining racism by slurs, and instead recognise it as prejudice backed by power.

'Privilege is invisible to those who have it'.

In his talk about why gender equality is good for men, Michael Kimmel (an American sociologist) highlights various privileges that exist, including the privilege for White people not to have to think about race. In fact, many White people don't consider themselves as racialised, or having a racial identity.

Kimmel says 'It is a privilege not to have to think about race every day.' Read the [White Privilege Checklist](#) to find out more.

There are a number of messages and resources discussed in this toolkit to help unpack different concepts, encourage reflection and challenge all members of the UCL community to talk about race, and challenge the prejudice and power that allows racism to exist.

History of race and racism

The concepts of race and racism have a complex history and there are several schools of thought. A short but useful introduction is [A History: The Construction of Race and Racism](#). Race is a human construct and not part of the natural world and the racism we understand today, is the result of a historical progression several hundred years old. It has helped justify oppression, colonialism and imperialism and is intimately connected to the [construction of Whiteness](#) and White superiority.

Historically, evolving attitudes have and continue to frame behaviours and attitudes from explicit racist aggression to the more common micro-aggressions and harassment

experienced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in our society and our University today.

[Reni Eddo-Lodge](#) provides a good introduction to racism in the UK within a historical context.

What is racial harassment, and how does it manifest?

Racial harassment is defined under the Equality Act 2010 as unwanted conduct, based on race or ethnicity, which violates a person's dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone. Racial harassment can be intentional, or unintentional and can occur in person, in writing/and or through electronic means.

Most students and staff can identify the extreme examples of racial harassment, for example, physical or verbal acts of violence, however lower level or subtle behaviour can be more difficult to identify and address. These are racial micro-aggressions, which are brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and demoralising messages directed at people of colour.

Micro inequalities is a theory coined by Dr. Mary Rowe, MIT, that refers to ways in which people can be overlooked, singled out, ignored or discounted on the basis on an unchangeable characteristic, such as race. Micro inequalities can have a harmful impact on people and the cumulative effect can stack up to a form of bullying or harassment.

Just because the behaviour is not overt, doesn't mean it doesn't have a negative impact.

Micro-aggressions can be dismissed but continuous low-level behaviour can have a very damaging effect. Often, people of colour are pressured into denying or downplaying these forms of discrimination, dismissing incidents as merely "banter" or "jokes".

Micro inequalities and micro-aggressions can manifest in different ways, and include:

- Using racist slurs or labels
- Verbal and nonverbal communication that may demean a person's identity or racial heritage.
- Communications that exclude, or negate the feelings of a person of colour, such as asking a person of colour where they came from.

As part of the [Race Equality Charter](#), UCL undertook a number of qualitative interviews and surveys to understand the experiences of staff of colour. The following anonymised quotes provide examples of micro inequalities, and the harmful impact they have.

“I wouldn't feel comfortable reporting a race-related incident because I would likely be labelled "too sensitive" or unable to take a joke. I also wouldn't want to cause trouble for the person, as quite often they don't say things out of any malicious intent - just ignorance.”

“It would be good if specific issues around race and religion were included. I trust my manager wholeheartedly ... but I wonder whether he is equipped to offer resolutions to issues around race and religion other than downplaying any potential issues which is really demoralizing.”

“There is a lack of consistency to offering development opportunities and promotions. It is clear that we are thankfully moving away from the 'tap on the shoulder' but we need more consistency and transparency.”

It's important to remember that micro inequalities are less obvious to the actor (person engaging), and possibly to the target. The target may feel insulted, but may not be sure why. The [Let's Talk about Race campaign](#) hopes to inform students and staff about how racial harassment manifests in our community, and encourage everyone to play a role in challenging such behaviour.

Together, we can say Full Stop to racism and racial harassment at UCL.

Key Messages

- Racial harassment is never acceptable and is part of the everyday lives of students and staff of colour. This is unacceptable. While we all have different perceptions about what is acceptable or unacceptable, we need to be mindful our life experiences will differ from those of staff and students of colour. Our understanding of what is unacceptable, therefore differ.
- Not sure if the behaviour is appropriate – ask yourself these three questions: 1. Do you think race is factor to what you have witnessed or heard? 2. Does it seem like there is a power imbalance? 3. Is there a need to express the sentiment, or another way to frame it?
- Still not sure if you or your peers' behaviour is acceptable? Ask yourself and colleagues these questions? Would you want to be queried about where are you really from? Or race and background, or told your name is hard to pronounce?

Would you want to be constantly interrupted or talked over? Are there any signs the behaviour is making someone uncomfortable?

- If you have experienced racial harassment or racialized unacceptable behaviour at UCL and want to understand your options, contact an Advisor through 'Report + Support'.
- Racial harassment and micro-aggressions can have a profound impact on individuals, departments and the institution. We must all call out and challenge this behaviour where possible.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to confirm and therefore call out racial harassment especially in the form of racialised micro-aggressions.
- It is never too late to disclose or report an incident. To find out more about UCL support or to report, please visit 'Report + Support'
- Want to find out more about how you can help create a supportive and inclusive environment at UCL? Visit the 'Campaigns' page on 'Report + Support'.
- Do you know the four D's of being an active bystander? Direct, distract, delegate and delay. Find out more about how you can be an active bystander on Report + Support. #FullstopatUCL. Find out how you can tackle racism and racial harassment and become an active bystander. Visit [Report + Support](#) for more information.

How you can get involved?

As an individual

- Read the article [The way you define racism, may stop you from seeing it](#) and reflect on your understanding of race and racism. Ask yourself: what definition do you hold?
- Practice the four Ds of bystander intervention: direct, distract, delegate and delay (please see below)
- Learn to recognise and understand racism as a system that we are all part of, and watch Robin Di Angelo's [Deconstructing White Privilege video](#) discussing racism as a system and white privilege.
- Join the social media conversation and share #letstalkaboutrace
- Speak with a peer or colleague about micro inequalities or behaviour that appears to be racial harassment. How do they identify it? What do they do to challenge it? However, please be mindful if talking with students or staff of colour.
- Think about a colleague or peer who demonstrate positive and inclusive behaviour and helps shape a positive working and learning environment and raise this with them. It's important to celebrate positive ways of interacting within a diverse community and listening to the voices of that diverse community and trying to understand their worldview and stories.

As a department/faculty

- Establish a reading group and discuss books, for example ["Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race"](#) by Reni Eddo-Lodge
- Profile students and staff who have want to share their experiences of being BAME at UCL. Share diverse stories.
- Share the resources below and throughout the toolkit with peers and colleagues relating to understanding race and racial harassment.
- Canvass the views of students and staff of colour within your department and consider race equality actions through your department or faculty EDI committee

- Have a regular communication about diversity and inclusion initiatives with students and staff, and highlight progress made on race equality.
- Encourage staff to sign up to the RaceMatters email network (informational and social group).
- Reach out to the RaceMatters group or Equalities team to find out how you can talk about race with friends, family and colleagues.

As an institution

- Offer students and staff training on understanding racialisation and racism
- Undertake the Race Allies training (currently in pilot-phase)
- Encouraging BAME staff to share their stories on their experiences of racial harassment at UCL.
- Working with the UCL Centre for Behaviour Change to design new interventions to address and prevent racial harassment.
- Developing a new 'Prevention of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct policy' for students and staff.
- Conducting quarterly trend analysis reports and sharing insights and interventions with Faculties and Departments

Frequently asked questions?

Where can I report issues of racial harassment?

Further information can be found on the [Report + Support site](#), including all relevant/associated policies and procedures for students and staff.

What can I do if I witness unacceptable behaviour?

An active bystander is someone who not only witnesses unacceptable behaviour, but who chooses to act and challenge that behaviour in order to disrupt a potentially problematic situation or keep it from escalating. A bystander can prevent as well as deal with a potential outcome.

As a staff member, consider participating in 'Where do you draw the line?' workshop. All information on [training](#) is available on the [Report + Support site](#).

You should only challenge behaviour if you feel safe to do so. If it is an emergency call 999 (or 112 from a mobile). If there is no immediate danger you can report it.

What are the four Ds of being an active bystander?

Direct Action

As a bystander, you can directly intervene when you see a situation of street harassment by confronting the situation head on. For example, you can ask the harasser to stop bothering the person they are targeting.

Distraction

As a bystander can take an indirect approach to intervening. For example, if you notice someone being harassed, you can approach them to ask for directions, greet them or check a meeting time or location, thus de-escalating that situation.

Delegation

This is when you seek outside assistance to intervene in the situation. For example, a bystander can seek help or assistance from the police, a public transport worker or another party such as a line manager, personal tutor, HR or Students Unions. For example, the Students' Union UCL will remove perpetrators from their events.

Delay

This is when you wait for the situation to pass, and you check in with the person who was targeted to make sure they are okay. Even if you were unable to intervene at the time, checking in later makes a difference to the person who was harassed. Remember, the delay tactic is an important step when witnessing any unacceptable behaviour, and it important to do to ensure the person targeted understands the support options available to them.

Resources

Books

Cousins, Susan (2019) - Overcoming Everyday Racism: Building Resilience and Wellbeing in the Face of Discrimination and Microaggressions

DiAngelo, Robin (2019) - White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism

Eddo-Lodge, Reni (2017) - Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race

Oluo, Ijeoma (2019) - So You Want to Talk About Race

Trepagnier, Barbara (2017) - Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide

Nikesh Shukla (2016), The Good Immigrant

Yassmin Abdel-Magied (2019), You Must be Layla

TED Talks

[The danger of the single story – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#)

Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discusses how she found her authentic culture voice, and warns that if we hear on a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

[How to deconstruct racism one headline at a time – Baratunde Thurston](#)

Baratunde Thurston explores 'living while black' narratives through news headlines. In this through-provoking and often hilarious talk, he reveals the power of language to change stories of trauma into store of healing.

[How to overcome our biases, walk boldly towards them – Verna Myers](#)

Our biases can be dangerous, even deadly — as we've seen in the cases of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner, in Staten Island, New York. Diversity advocate Vernā Myers looks closely at some of the subconscious attitudes we hold toward out-groups. She makes a plea to all people: Acknowledge your biases. Then move toward, not away from, the groups that make you uncomfortable. In a funny, impassioned, important talk, she shows us how.

[To be colour blind, or colour brave – Mellody Hobson](#)

The subject of race can be very touchy. As finance executive Mellody Hobson says, it's a "conversational third rail." But, she says, that's exactly why we need to start talking about it. In this engaging, persuasive talk, Hobson makes the case that speaking openly about race — and particularly about diversity in hiring -- makes for better businesses and a better society.

YouTube Resources

[Dr. Robin DiAngelo discusses 'White Fragility' - 1.23:30](#)

University of Washington professor Dr. Robin DiAngelo reads from her book "White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism," explains the phenomenon, and discusses how white people can develop their capacity to engage more constructively across race.

[Deconstructing White Privilege with Dr. Robin DiAngelo - 22:05](#)

Dr. Robin DiAngelo is the author of "What Does it Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy" and has been an anti-racist educator and has heard justifications of racism by white men and women in her workshops for over two decades. This justification, which she calls "white fragility," is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation.