THE MACRO LEVEL refers to oppression and discrimination that happens in the larger society. It describes the relationship between individuals or groups, and social institutions, systems and structures. Social institutions may include the media, organized religion, the government or educational systems.
MARKERS OF DIFFERENCE
A marker of difference is a defining, sometimes evident, characteristic or attribute that distinguishes groups or individuals from one another in society. The meaning and value of these markers are shaped and informed by society. Race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion and ability are markers of difference. All individuals and groups are marked in multiple ways, some of which are immediately apparent and some that are not.

MARKERS OF DIFFERENCE VS. FORMS OF OPPRESSION
Race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and other markers of difference are not inherently oppressive or forms of oppression. Forms of oppression and discrimination are racism, classism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, ableism, Islamaphobia, or ageism. They are systematic and violent acts of maintaining hierarchies and privilege in society. For example, simply being Latina in society is not inherently oppressive or bad. As a woman of color, she may find strength and power in her race and gender. The issue is being Latina in a sexist and racist society that privileges a particular race, gender or sexual orientation (i.e., white, male and hetero-sexual).
This week’s practice: LEVELS OF RACISM

Read "Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and A Gardener’s Tale" by Camara Jones, MD, MPH, PhD. (Article appears at the end of this document.)

Reflections:

• How do you experience the levels manifesting in your personal life? In your community? In your work?
• What impacts are you noticing and/or experiencing?
• What practices sustain you?

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality refers to the ways race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, status and other markers of differences intersect to inform individual realities and lived experiences.

Intersectionality recognizes that individuals and groups are shaped by multiple and intersecting identities. These identities often inform an individual’s world view, perspective and relationship to others in society.

HISTORY OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality gained visibility in the late 1980s and early 90s when feminists and women of color began to use the term to articulate their experiences in society and within movements for social change and equality. They argued that systems of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and other markers of difference were intersecting and interlocking. These markers often interact with institutions and structures in society to limit access to resources and information to privilege some groups over others, and to maintain power. One of the earliest articulations of the intersectional framework is outlined in the groundbreaking article Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color by noted legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw.
Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener’s Tale

Camara Phyllis Jones

ABSTRACT

The author presents a theoretic framework for understanding racism on 3 levels: institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized. This framework is useful for raising new hypotheses about the basis of race-associated differences in health outcomes, as well as for designing effective interventions to eliminate those differences.

She then presents an allegory about a gardener with 2 flower boxes, rich and poor soil, and red and pink flowers. This allegory illustrates the relationship between the 3 levels of racism and may guide our thinking about how to intervene to mitigate the impacts of racism on health. It may also serve as a tool for starting a national conversation on racism. (Am J Public Health. 2000;90:1212–1215)

Levels of Racism

Race-associated differences in health outcomes are routinely documented in this country, yet for the most part they remain poorly explained. Indeed, rather than vigorously exploring the basis of the differences, many scientists either adjust for race or restrict their studies to one racial group.1 Ignoring the etiologic clues embedded in group differences impedes the advance of scientific knowledge, limits efforts at primary prevention, and perpetuates ideas of biologically determined differences between the races.

The variable race is only a rough proxy for socioeconomic status, culture, and genes, but it precisely captures the social classification of people in a race-conscious society such as the United States. The race noted on a health form is the same race noted by a sales clerk, a police officer, or a judge, and this racial classification has a profound impact on daily life experience in this country. That is, the variable “race” is not a biological construct that reflects innate differences,2-4 but a social construct that precisely captures the impacts of racism.

For this reason, some investigators now hypothesize that race-associated differences in health outcomes are in fact due to the effects of racism.5,6 In light of the Department of Health and Human Services’ Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health by the Year 2010,7,8 it is important to be able to examine the potential effects of racism in causing race-associated differences in health outcomes.

Levels of Racism

I have developed a framework for understanding racism on 3 levels: institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized. This framework is useful for raising new hypotheses about the basis of race-associated differences in health outcomes, as well as for designing effective interventions to eliminate those differences. In this framework, institutionalized racism is defined as differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. Institutionalized racism is normative, sometimes legalized, and often manifests as inherited disadvantage. It is structural, having been codified in our institutions of custom, practice, and law, so there need not be an identifiable perpetrator. Indeed, institutionalized racism is often evident as inaction in the face of need.

Institutionalized racism manifests itself both in material conditions and in access to power. With regard to material conditions, examples include differential access to quality education, sound housing, gainful employment, appropriate medical facilities, and a clean environment. With regard to access to power, examples include differential access to information (including one’s own history), resources (including wealth and organizational infrastructure), and voice (including voting rights, representation in government, and control of the media). It is important to note that the association between socioeconomic status and race in the United States has its origins in discrete historical events but persists because of contemporary structural factors that perpetuate those historical injustices. In other words, it is because of institutionalized racism that there is an association between socioeconomic status and race in this country.

Personally mediated racism is defined as prejudice and discrimination, where prejudice means differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others accord-
Institutionalized racism

- Initial historical insult
- Structural barriers
- Inaction in face of need
- Societal norms
- Biological determinism
- Unearned privilege

Levels of Racism: A Gardener's Tale

When my husband and I bought a house in Baltimore, there were 2 large flower boxes on the front porch. When spring came we decided to grow flowers in them. One of the boxes was empty, so we bought potting soil to fill it. We did nothing to the soil in the other box, assuming that it was fine. Then we planted seeds from a single seed packet in the 2 boxes. The seeds that were sown in the new potting soil quickly sprang up and flourished. All of the seeds sprouted, the most vital towering strong and tall, and even the weak seeds made it to a middling height. However, the seeds planted in the old soil did not fare so well. Far fewer seeds sprouted, with the strong among them only making it to a middling height, while the weak among them died. It turns out that the old soil was poor and rocky, in contrast to the new potting soil, which was rich and fertile. The difference in yield and appearance in the 2 flower boxes was a vivid, real-life illustration of the importance of environment. Those readers who are gardeners will probably have witnessed this phenomenon with their own eyes.

Now I will use this image of the 2 flower boxes to illustrate the 3 levels of racism. Let's imagine a gardener who has 2 flower boxes, one that she knows to be filled with rich, fertile soil and another that she knows to be filled with poor, rocky soil. This gardener has 2 packets of seeds for the same type of flower. However, the plants grown from one packet of seeds will bear pink blossoms, while the plants grown from the other packet of seeds will bear red blossoms. The gardener prefers red over pink, so she plants the red seed in the rich fertile soil and the pink seed in the poor rocky soil. And sure enough, what I witnessed in my own garden comes to pass in this garden too. All of the red flowers grow up and flourish, with the fittest growing tall and strong and even the weakest making it to a middling height. But in the box with the poor rocky soil, things look different. The weak among the pink seeds don't even make it, and the strongest among them grow only to a middling height.

In time the flowers in these 2 boxes go to seed, dropping their progeny into the same soil in which they were growing. The next year the same thing happens, with the red flowers in the rich soil growing full and vigorous and strong, while the pink flowers in the poor soil struggle to survive. And these flowers go to seed. Year after year, the same thing happens. Ten years later the gardener comes to survey her garden. Gazing at the 2 boxes, she says, "I was right to prefer red over pink! Look how vibrant and beautiful the red flowers look, and see how pitiful and scrappy the pink ones are."

Personally mediated racism

- Intentional
- Unintentional
- Acts of commission
- Acts of omission
- Maintains structural barriers
- Condoned by societal norms

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Internalized racism

- Reflects systems of privilege
- Reflects societal values
- Erodes individual sense of value
- Undermines collective action

This part of the story illustrates some important aspects of institutionalized racism. There is the initial historical insult of separating the seed into the 2 different types of soil; the contemporary structural factors of the flower boxes, which keep the soils separate; and the acts of omission in not addressing the differences between the soils over the years. The normative aspects of institutionalized racism are illustrated by the initial preference of the gardener for red over pink. Indeed, her assumption that red is intrinsically better than pink may contribute to a blindness about the difference between the soils.

Where is personally mediated racism in this gardener’s tale? That occurs when the gardener, disdaining the pink flowers because they look so poor and scraggily, plucks the pink blossoms off before they can even go to seed. Or when a seed from a pink flower has been blown into the rich soil, and she plucks it out before it can establish itself.

And where is the internalized racism in this tale? That occurs when a bee comes along to pollinate the pink flowers and the pink flowers say, “Stop! Don’t bring me any of that pink pollen—I prefer the red!” The pink flowers have internalized the belief that red is better than pink, because they look across at the other flower box and see the red flowers strong and flourishing.

What are we to do if we want to put things right in this garden? Well, we could start by addressing the internalized racism and telling the pink flowers, “Pink is beautiful!” That might make them feel a bit better, but it will do little to change the conditions in which they live. Or we could address the personally mediated racism by conducting workshops with the gardener to convince her to stop plucking the pink flowers before they have had a chance to go to seed. Maybe she’ll stop, or maybe she won’t. Yet, even if she is convinced to stop plucking the pink flowers, we have still done nothing to address the poor, rocky condition of the soil in which they live.

What we really have to do to set things right in this garden is address the institutionalized racism. We have to break down the boxes and mix up the soil, or we can leave the 2 boxes separate but fertilize the poor soil until it is as rich as the fertile soil. When we do that, the pink flowers will grow at least as strong and vibrant as the red (and perhaps stronger, for they have been selected for survival). And when they do, the pink flowers will no longer think that red pollen is better than pink, because they will look over at the red flowers and see that they are equally strong and beautiful. And although the original gardener may have to go to her grave preferring red over pink, the gardener’s children who grow up seeing that pink and red are equally beautiful will be unlikely to develop the same preferences.

This story illustrates the relationship between the 3 levels of racism. It also highlights the fact that institutionalized racism is the most fundamental of the 3 levels and must be addressed for important change to occur. Finally, it provides the insight that once institutionalized racism is addressed, the other levels of racism may cure themselves over time. Perhaps the most important question raised by this story is Who is the gardener? After all, the gardener is the one with the power to decide, the power to act, and the control over the resources.

In the United States, the gardener is our government. As the story illustrates, there is a particular danger when this gardener is not concerned with equity. The current Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health by the Year 2010 is to belaus as the first explicit commitment by the government to achieve equity in health outcomes.

Many other questions arise from this simple story. What is the role of public health researchers in vigorously exploring the basis of pink-red disparities, including the differences in the soil and the structural factors and acts of omission that maintain those differences? How can we get the gardener to own the whole garden and not be satisfied with only the red flowers thrive? If the gardener will not invest in the whole garden, how can the pink flowers recruit or grow their own gardener?

The reader is invited to share this story with family members, neighbors, colleagues, and communities. The questions we raise and the discussions we generate may be the start of a much-needed national conversation on racism.

References
Community-Based Public Health: A Partnership Model

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Developing meaningful partnerships with the communities they serve is crucial to the success of institutions, nonprofit organizations and corporations. This book focuses on public health practice in communities, the education and training of public health professionals at colleges and universities, and public health research and scholarly practice within academic institutions. The experiences shared will provide a model for philanthropic organizations.

A valuable resource for: public health educators, researchers, colleagues in philanthropy, leaders of community-based organizations.

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