

Valerie Batts – Visions Inc.

4 Levels of Modern Racism

rac·ism 'rā,sizəm/ noun

1. prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior

"a program to combat racism"

synonyms: racial discrimination, racialism, racial prejudice, xenophobia, chauvinism, bigotry, casteism

"Aborigines are the main victims of racism in Australia"

2. the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Valerie Batts, a woman of color and well-known social scientist writes that racism exists on 4 levels.

1. Personal: At this level, racism is prejudice or bias. It is the maintenance of conscious or unconscious attitudes and feelings that whites are superior and that blacks or other people of color are inferior or that these groups' differences are not acceptable in some way. Personal level racism includes cognitive or affective misinformation or both. The misinformation may be learned directly, as through overt messages, or indirectly as through observation. <---white people often think this is the sum of racism. Without being able to identify the misinformation and unconscious bias we have absorbed, white people deny their personal racism, and therefore believe systemic racism does not exist.

2. Interpersonal: Behaviors based on conscious or unconscious biases about self and others are interpersonal manifestations of racism. It is often through uncomfortable or tense cross-cultural interactions that individuals discover subtle racist behaviors within themselves or others. <---microaggressions

3. Institutional: An examination of power relationships reveals institutional racism. The question to be asked is, to what extent do the intended and unintended consequences of policies, practices, laws, styles, rules, and procedures function to the advantage of the dominant group and to the disadvantage of people of color? To the extent that whites in this society have the political, economic, educational, social, and historical power and access to institutionalize prejudices (i.e., the myths of white superiority and black inferiority) against blacks and other people of color, whites are in a position to practice or maintain institutional racism.

4. Cultural: The ability to define European-American and Western cultural preferences as "right and beautiful" is the consequence of having institutional power and access in this country. When the standards of appropriate action, thought, and expression of a particular group are perceived either overtly or subtly as negative or less than, cultural racism has occurred. Conformity to the dominant culture is then viewed as "normal" when in fact the myth of the inherent superiority of the group setting the standards is operating. If such is the case, it is likely that a given individual will need to change her behavior to fit those of the dominant group just to be accepted as competent, attractive, or talented.