DISCUSSION PAPER
ON SYSTEMIC RACISM

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Introduction

There is no question that racism violates human rights. Whether conscious or unconscious, subtle or overt, it diminishes human dignity and it erodes democracy. Because of historic and ongoing racism and racial discrimination, Indigenous, Black, and other racialized[1] people experience greater poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing and homelessness, and food insecurity. They are also at higher risk of chronic illness and diseases than white people.[2] Such widespread inequities are not the result of individual racist actions and beliefs alone, but of deeply entrenched systemic racism.

Canada has domestic and international obligations to combat systemic racism. The right to be free from racial discrimination is enshrined in the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canada has also ratified or endorsed a number of international human rights instruments that address discrimination on the basis of race, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which has also been brought into Canadian law.

Systemic racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian society. It is in our written and unwritten policies, our laws, public practices, beliefs, and systems which "produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread, unfair treatment and oppression" of racialized people.[3] Systemic racism — and the negative repercussions arising out it — has been repeatedly recognized by people with lived experience, by international and regional human rights mechanisms, by civil society and Indigenous organizations, by domestic human rights institutions and, in many cases, by various levels of government. Nevertheless, progress towards eliminating systemic racism and discrimination in a meaningful way remains largely elusive. This will continue to be the case as long as any doubt remains about the meaning — or even the existence — of systemic racism in Canada.

As has often been said, no one is free until we are all free. Many societies, including our own, have been constructed in a way that places value on certain traits or identities to the exclusion of others — for example, white, male, Christian, English-speaking, thin/fit, not having a disability, heterosexual, gender conforming. Because of this, many people and communities in Canada and elsewhere face some form of discrimination, and many face multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to explore the concept of systemic racism, including the historic context of Canada's colonialism. This paper provides an overview of the different levels of racism in Canadian society, and examines the mechanisms that perpetuate it. The paper highlights the importance of learning about systemic racism in Canada and suggests tools to champion anti-racism.

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[1] Though some documents and pieces of legislation, such as the Employment Equity Act, use the term "visible minorities" the Commission is of the view that this is an antiquated term and is now using the term "racialized people."

[2] Public Health Agency of Canada, "Inequalities in health of racialized adults in Canada", available at https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/science-research-data/inequalities-health-racialized-adults-18-plus-canada.html

[3] Braveman, P et al. 2022, 'Systemic and structural racism: Definitions, examples, health damages, and approaches to dismantling', Health Affairs, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 171-178, available at https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/epdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01394

What is race?

Though listed as a prohibited ground, race is not defined in the Canadian Human Rights Act. The Commission understands race to be a social construct, rather than something innate or biological in people. As expressed in the Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy, "society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people."[4]

The process by which groups of people come to be socially constructed as races, based on characteristics such as skin-colour, ethnicity, language, economics, religion, culture, politics, etc. is called "racialization."[5] Modern scholarship views these socially constructed racial identities as often being created by socially dominant groups, and involving the subjugation of groups seen as racially inferior. As stated by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, these "racial identities reflect the cultural attitudes of imperial powers dominant during the age of European colonial expansion."[6] For more on this point, please see the section on Colonialism and Racism in Canada.Throughout history, this intertwining of religion and culture has led to instances of the racialization of religious minorities. An example of this is antisemitism, often referred to as the world's oldest hatred - and which has been acknowledged as both a racial as well as religious form of discrimination.[7]This broad and inclusive understanding of what constitutes race and racism is seen in the Government of Canada's 2019–2022 Anti-Racism Strategy, which includes antisemitism, as well Islamophobia, in its annex of terminology.

What is racism? What is racial discrimination?

Addressing systemic racism begins by being able to understand and identify what it is. In broad terms, racism is the belief that one racialized group is superior to another racialized group, specifically because of their race. Racism can be a set of beliefs that can be held consciously or unconsciously by individuals or groups of individuals. It can also operate through complex processes and structures (political, economic, judicial, etc.) to create a systemic-level of disadvantage that is linked to race. These processes and structures can be both current and historic, can influence each other, and can shape and be shaped by the racist beliefs of individuals or groups of individuals.

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[4] Department of Canadian Heritage, "What we heard – Informing Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy", available at https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/what-we-heard.html#a2

[5] Canadian Race Relations Foundation, "Glossary of Terms," available at https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/resources/glossary-a-terms-en-gb-1?letter=r&cc=p

[6] Ibid

[7] Moerdler, Z. (2017). 'Racializing antisemitism: The development of racist antisemitism and its current manifestations', 40 Fordham Int'l L.J. 1281. Available at https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ilj/vol40/iss4/5/

Colonialism and racism in Canada

Colonialism is the policy or process of one nation or people subjugating another nation or people. It is done by claiming full or partial political control over another, and by establishing colonies of settlers from the dominant group. It is done usually for the purpose of economic exploitation (of land, resources, and/or people).The process of colonization may also involve imposing the dominant language, religion, worldviews, institutions, and other cultural practices on the subjugated nation or people. This process is usually intentionally violent and destructive towards the colonized nation or people. It results in their marginalization, oppression, traumatization, and in generational damage to or loss of their own languages, religions, worldviews, institutions, other cultural practices, and lives.

Colonialism and racialization mutually reinforce each other. They have been tools used throughout history by European imperial powers to assert, justify, and maintain their dominance as "white people" over the groups they deemed to be racially inferior to themselves. Racialization and its positioning of white people as superior, also known as white supremacy, spread around the world as European imperial powers colonized large parts of the world and violently established the systems that would maintain their dominance. These systems persist globally to this day.

Canada is a settler colonial state. Its existence is rooted in the colonization of Indigenous peoples, who were positioned by Europeans as being racially inferior to them. Indigenous lands and resources were therefore considered automatically available to be claimed by European powers (according to the doctrines of discovery and of terra nullius). The continued presence of Indigenous peoples was viewed as an obstacle to these European land claims, and to the establishment and growth of the Canadian state. So institutions, policies, and practices were developed based on this racist view of Indigenous peoples. This deeply entrenched colonial dynamic continues to inform the relationship between Canada, non-Indigenous Canadians, and Indigenous peoples.

European colonialism created a system of social hierarchy based on skin colour, which has led to racial discrimination against Black and other racialized people with darker complexions. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices. It is informed by Canada's history of enslavement, segregation and marginalization, which shapes interactions with people of African descent and those from other racialized groups, and prevents their equal access to employment, services and opportunity.

Racism depends on societal systems of power, and reinforces and is reinforced by existing systems of oppression. The result is that the racialized group that has historically been positioned as superior also has societal, political, and economic power over other racialized groups. White supremacy is such a system of power. It is both an ideology and a historic political system. It is the belief that white people, because of their race, are superior to all other people, and should therefore be the dominant group.

This belief takes root early in life: studies have shown that children can develop stereotypes and exhibit racist behaviours at very young ages.[8] Children are able to observe how race structures the world around them. They will notice who the heroes are in the shows,

movies, and books they consume — in which Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups continue to be underrepresented, female characters are most often presented as thin and are likelier to be sexualized, and very few characters if any show signs of physical disability or chronic disease.[9] Children will notice that politicians in power tend to be white and male, that the wealthiest families and individuals in their communities and in society tend to be white, and as research has shown, will begin to associate white people with wealth and prestige.[10]

These racist ideologies and processes can manifest themselves through the treatment of, or decisions about people, on the basis of race. **This is racial discrimination, and it is prohibited in Canadian law.**

Race is listed in section 3(1) of the Canadian Human Rights Act as a prohibited ground of discrimination. Section 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms also affirms the right of every individual to be free from discrimination based on race.

While there is no fixed definition of the term racial discrimination, Canadian case law views it as, "any distinction, conduct or action, whether intentional or not, but based on a person's race, which has the effect of imposing burdens on an individual or group, not imposed upon others or which withholds or limits access to benefits available to other members of society."[11]

Racism and racial discrimination can be manifested explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly, at individual, institutional, and structural, and systemic levels.

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[8] Kelly, D.J., Quinn, P.C., Slater, A.M., Lee, K., Gibson, A., Smith, M., Ge, L. and Pascalis, O. (2005), Three-month-olds, but not newborns, prefer own-race faces. Developmental Science, 8: F31-F36. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2005.0434a.x ; Katz, P. A. (2003). Racists or Tolerant Multiculturalists? How Do They Begin? *American Psychologist, 58*(11), 897–909. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.11.897b; Pahlke E, Bigler RS, Suizzo MA. Relations between colorblind socialization and children's racial bias: evidence from European American mothers and their preschool children. Child Dev. 2012 Jul-Aug;83(4):1164-79. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01770.x. Epub 2012 Apr 26. PMID: 22537347.

[9] Levinson, Jordan. "Why Diversity in Children's Media is So Important" available at https://www.psychologyinaction.org/psychology-in-action-1/2020/3/5/why-diversity-in-childrens-media-is-so-important

[10] Mandalaywala TM, Tai C, Rhodes M (2020) Children's use of race and gender as cues to social status. PLoS ONE 15(6): e0234398. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234398

[11] Ontario Human Right Commission, "Racial discrimination, race and racism (fact sheet)", available at http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-race-and-racism-fact-sheet

What the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has said

Allegations of racial discrimination can be "notoriously difficult to prove because in most cases, discrimination based on race is not overt and manifests in subtle ways."[12] In its 1988 Basi decision, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal referred to the "subtle scent of discrimination"[13] which, as the Tribunal later explained in its Grover decision, often has to be identified by assessing circumstantial evidence.[14]

Tribunals have also recognized that a finding of racial discrimination can be made without there having been a discriminatory intent or motive. It is enough for there to have been a discriminatory effect.[15] Something can also be considered discriminatory even when racial discrimination is only one of several reasons for an action or decision.[16] This means that, according to Canadian case law, people can engage in racial discrimination without realizing it or doing it consciously, even if they have other reasons to explain their decision or behaviour. For instance, there may be a number of reasons why someone's employment could be terminated, including legitimate documented performance issues. But the existence of these other factors does not, in itself, mean that there was no racial discrimination. If the decision to terminate the person was at least partly based on their race, whether consciously or unconsciously, this would constitute racial discrimination.

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[12] Fitzgerald v Toronto Police Services Board, 2019 HRTO 22, para 96

[13] Basi v. Canadian National Railway Co. (No. 1) (1988), 9 CHRR D/5029 (CHRT)

[14] Grover v. National Research Council of Canada (No. 1) (1992), 18 CHRR D/1 (CHRT) at para 158

[15] Ontario Human Rights Commission v. Simpson-Sears Ltd., [1985] 2 SCR 536

[16] Gray v. A & W Food Service of Canada Ltd. (1994), CHRR Doc. 94-146 (Ont. Bd. Inq.), Dominion Management v. Velenosi (1997), 148 D.L.R. (4th) 575 at 576 (On CA), Smith v. Mardana Ltd. (Div. Ct.)

What is systemic racism?

> "Race-based discrimination may be understood as systemic when it goes beyond isolated individual wrongdoing to encompass broader patterns of racial inequality."[17]

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation defines systemic racism as "an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between the individual, institutional and structural levels, which function as a **system of racism**. These various levels of racism operate together in a lockstep model and function together as a whole system."[18] While previous sections of this paper have touched briefly on these levels of racism, the following sections will discuss them further and explore how they relate to each other.

Individual racism (interactions between people)

To many people, this may be the most easily identifiable form of racism — person to person. It is framed by the conscious and unconscious negative race-based values, assumptions, and beliefs of individuals. Individual racism can be manifested both directly and indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, in words, attitudes, ideas, behaviours, and actions. Some of the more obvious forms of individual racism are racist slurs or other derogatory comments, hate speech, and direct attacks. Less obviously, individual racism can be manifested as jokes, microaggressions preconceived ideas about racialized people, unconscious gestures or facial expressions, among others.

Microaggressions – or subtle acts of exclusion – are defined as brief, indirect, and everyday slights, indignities, put-downs, and insults that communicate discriminatory attitudes towards members of equity-deserving groups. These slights can be behavioural, verbal, or environmental, and can be intentional or unintentional. Microaggressions can leave those subjected to them feeling uncomfortable, unwelcome, insulted, othered, and painfully reminded of stereotypes associated to their identities. Examples of racist microaggressions include, among many others, insistently asking a racialized person where they are really from, complimenting a racialized person on the quality of their English, or clutching one's bag tighter in the presence of a Black man. While there may be no harm consciously intended, microaggressions nevertheless cause harm, and the harmful impact is cumulative as racialized people experience these microaggressions frequently in their day-to-day lives.

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[17] McGill Centre for Human Rights and Pluralism - Understanding how racism becomes systemic Colleen Sheppard, Tamara Thermitus, and Derek J. Jones, 18 Aug 2020. Article was originally published in The Globe and Mail on July 24, 2020, and was reproduced on McGill.ca with permission.

[18] Canadian Race Relations Foundations, "Glossary of Terms," available at https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/resources/glossary-a-terms-en-gb-1?letter=r&cc=p

Institutional racism (within institutions and systems of power)

Institutional racism is generally understood to be embedded in an institution's policies, practices and regulations. These are then developed, carried out and enforced by individuals who may or may not be conscious of the racism underpinning all of it. One of the challenges is that the policies, practices and regulations may appear neutral on their face. Yet they can still result in the discriminatory or differential treatment of individuals based on race. This is because those policies, practices and regulations are rooted in a set of values, principles and norms that perpetuate racial inequality. Examples of such institutional systems can include the education system (including schools and school boards), the criminal justice system (including police services, courts, sentencing and prisons), the health care system (including hospitals and other physical and mental health care service providers), government departments, and other employment and service providers.

Structural, societal, and cultural racism (society-wide)

This level of racism manifests at the societal level and "represents the ways in which the rooted inequities of society produce the differentiation, categorization, and stratification of members of society on the basis of race, and in turn their participation in economic, political, social, cultural, judicial, and educational institutions."[19] In other words, this form of racism is manifested in the ways that the dominant culture defines reality to advantage white people and to disadvantage racialized people.

One such ideology is white supremacy. It is an entire system of power that was invented to "justify the establishment of explicitly racist codes and institutions that protect white dominance."[20] It has manifested itself throughout Canadian history, serving, for example, to rationalize slavery, the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples, the oppression of women, Japanese internment camps, and discriminatory immigration policies including the Chinese head tax, antisemitic immigration policies, and immigration restrictions against people with disabilities. The objective of such policies has often been to protect the existing systems of power that privilege the dominant race. In this way, white supremacy has been the "rigid nexus of power that protects and enforces"[21] systemic racial oppression.

White supremacist political systems have historically used law and policy to exclude non-white people from full participation and citizenship, by limiting their voting rights, property rights, other civil and political rights, as well as their economic, social, and cultural rights. These systems were the codification of white supremacist ideology, and in turn, served to reinforce white supremacy.

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[19] Carl E. James, Seeing Ourselves: Exploring Race, Ethnicity, and Culture. 4th edition. 2010. p. 221

[20] Nakagawa, Scot. "Is it White Supremacy or White Nationalism?" available at https://scotnakagawa.substack.com/p/is-it-white-supremacy-or-white-nationalism

[21] Smith, Barbara. "The problem is white supremacy" available at - https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/29/opinion/problem-is-white-supremacy/

Internalized racism

> "Because white supremacy culture is the water we swim in, we inevitably internalize the messages about what this culture believes, values, and considers normal. We absorb these messages as individuals and as a collective. As a result, white supremacy culture shapes how we think and act, how we make decisions and behave."[22]

Internalized racism are the individual beliefs, ideas, stereotypes, values and images which are perpetuated by the white dominant society about one's own racial group.[23] These can lead to feelings of self-doubt, disrespect, and disgust for one's race or oneself as a racialized person. One way this is manifested is in colourism within and among communities of colour, wherein value is attributed to having lighter skin, and darker skin tones are perceived more negatively or as less desirable. Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people may also alter the way they speak or dress, wear their hair differently, adopt or express certain beliefs about themselves or other racialized groups. The presumption is that "aligning oneself with whiteness will provide benefits, access and opportunities. Within communities of color, it is a common practice to align with and assimilate into white society as a means to advance and propel. White adjacency adopts the notion that proximity to whiteness will equate to advantages. But we cannot forget that the system exists to oppress."[24]

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[22] Okun, Tema. "What is White Supremacy Culture?" available at https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/what-is-it.html

[23] Pyke, K. 2010, 'What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries', Sociological Perspectives, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 551-572.

[24] Gassam Asare, Janice. "We All Uphold, Continue, and Contribute To White Supremacy" available at https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2021/03/21/we-all-uphold-continue-and-contribute-to-white-supremacy/?sh=4ef135dd57ea

How do these levels of racism interact with each other?

Because this is how our society has been built, systemic racism and white supremacist ideology continue to perpetuate themselves even without the awareness or intention of every person within those systems. To focus only on one level of racism, such as individual incidents of race-based discrimination, is to ignore the ways in which racism is so deeply embedded in our institutions and societies that it has become normalized and often invisible to socially dominant groups.

A focus on individual racism also disregards the ways in which racism and racial discrimination in one sphere may exacerbate or be exacerbated by racial inequality in another sphere.

> "Systemic racism is a well-established concept rooted in our colonial past, embedded in our legislation, enabled in our institutional practices and sustained in our organizational culture. A common misconception about racism is that it involves a few bad apples who engage in racist thoughts and behaviours. This is not true, because imperfectly good people can commit acts of omission that allow individual racists to survive and even thrive in organizations. Imperfectly good people can also consciously or unconsciously enable systems to create and perpetuate policies and practices that work to the advantage of some groups and to the disadvantage of others."[25]

Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people and communities experience far more negative realities than white people and white communities in a number of key areas, including: health, education, levels of poverty, access to adequate housing, employment, career growth, and many others. These negative outcomes compound each other and are reflective of the systemic nature of racism in Canadian society. A few examples:

- **Unequal health care outcomes:** Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people in Canada have consistently reported poorer health care outcomes, with Indigenous women facing the worst outcomes of any population group in Canada. This includes higher rates of hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, cervical and gallbladder cancer, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, mental illness, and suicide. "Studies suggest that a number of factors negatively affect the health of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people in Canada, including: the psychological stress of living in a racist environment; unequal economic opportunities; poor housing; lack of food security; inequitable access to education and other social resources; disproportionate exposure to environmental toxins; employment in dangerous and precarious work; mistrust of the health-care system; and underutilization of screening programs."[26]

  Additionally, a low proportion of physicians in Canada are Indigenous, Black, or racialized. This can contribute to stereotyping and bias throughout the healthcare system. This underrepresentation is itself underpinned by systemic racism. It is rooted in the systemic racism in the education system, beginning at the earliest grades, combined with other factors such as

[25] Hansard, Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, Systemic Racism in Policing in Canada, July 24, 2020 available at https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-1/secu/meeting-10/evidence

[26] Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change, "Fact sheets" available at https://colourofpoverty.ca/fact-sheets/

poverty,[27] unmet housing needs,[28] and food insecurity — all products of systemic racism. This leads to lower levels of educational attainment overall for Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people.[29] This can mean lower enrollment in medical school. Additionally, many Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people who do enroll in medical school or related programs and become health care providers report experiencing racism at school and in health care institutions. All of these factors interact to result in persistently unequal health outcomes.

- **Overrepresentation in the criminal justice system:** Indigenous peoples are consistently overpoliced and overrepresented in Canadian prisons. There are a variety of systemic factors that influence this outcome, including what many advocates refer to as the "school to prison pipeline."

  Similarly, research shows that anti-Black racism in the education system leads to the over-disciplining and criminalization of Black youth, bringing them disproportionately into contact with police. In turn, Black people are overrepresented in prisons and the criminal justice system. Indigenous individuals are also drastically overrepresented in prisons, making up over a third of the prison population across Canada, despite representing less than 5% of the general population.[30] Research has shown a link between the discriminatory underfunding by the federal government of First Nations Child and Family Services, the vastly disproportionate

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[27] According to the 2016 Census, 20.8% of racialized people were low-income, compared to 12.2% of white people - see https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?TABID=2&Lang=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=1341679&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=110563&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=120&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0; The Census also showed that 81% of First Nations reserves reported median incomes below the poverty line. Refer to, "Over 80% of reserves have median income below poverty line, census data shows," available at https://globalnews.ca/news/3795083/reserves-poverty-line-census/

[28] Individuals from racialized and newcomer communities experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates, and the same is true for Indigenous persons, who constitute anywhere from 10% to 90% of the homeless population in cities across Canada, see https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/racialized-communities; Racialized people were also nearly twice as likely to be in core housing need, which is defined as living in an unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable dwelling, and being unable to afford alternative housing in their community, see https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201002/dq201002a-eng.htm; Data also shows that nearly 18% of Indigenous households live in core housing need, compared to 12% of non-Indigenous households, see https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/blog/2019-housing-observer/indigenous-households-core-housing-need

[29] While 84% of white students graduated high school in 2015, this number was only 69% for Black students, and 50% for Indigenous students. Refer to "Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change," Fact sheets available at https://colourofpoverty.ca/fact-sheets/

[30] Office of the Correctional Investigator, "Indigenous People in Federal Custody Surpasses 30%; Correctional Investigator Issues Statement and Challenge" available at https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20200121-eng.aspx

number of Indigenous children in foster care, and this over-incarceration — a phenomenon dubbed the "care-to-prison pipeline"[31] or the "child-welfare-to-prison pipeline."[32]

- **Unequal access to a clean and healthy environment:** Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities have long been sounding the alarm about the impacts of environmental racism and have been leading efforts to combat them. Environmental racism can be attributed in part to targeted placement of environmentally hazardous activities and industries, discriminatory policies, the exclusion of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized peoples from regulatory and decision-making bodies, and a lack of human rights protection. Yet, the intersecting dynamics of discriminatory policies and colonial legacies have threatened the ability of the most vulnerable communities to exercise their inherent and constitutional rights.

  Exposure to environmentally hazardous activities creates serious health risks; and, for people living in communities where there are disproportionate amounts of environmentally hazardous activities, health risks intensify. The chemicals and toxins from these activities contaminate the air, water and land surrounding these communities, and as a result, the constant exposure can lead to negative health impacts and, in some instances, potential life-threatening illnesses.

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[31] "Data gap: Governments don't track how many inmates have been in care" available at https://globalnews.ca/news/7323821/child-welfare-care-prison-data-not-tracked/

[32] Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare" available at http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/interrupted-childhoods

Intersectional discrimination/intersectionality

Systemic racism can also interact with other forms of discrimination. **Intersectionality** is a concept that recognizes that different kinds of discrimination reinforce and influence each other. The various identities a person identifies with, such as their race, class, gender, physical or mental ability, or sexual orientation, can shape the nature of the discrimination they face in their lives.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, the scholar who coined the term, intersectionality, describes this concept by explaining that a Black woman, who experiences both racism and sexism, experiences different racism than a Black man, and different sexism than a white woman, because her two identities intersect (hence intersectionality). The two identities compound upon each other in the face of discrimination. It means the woman faces stereotyping and harassment that is exclusive to Black women.[33]

Applying an **intersectional approach** means taking into account that a person has more than one social category or identity, and that their experiences and lives are influenced by those other categories or identities.

It is important to acknowledge that the combined effects of multiple grounds of discrimination can have a greater impact than discrimination based on a single ground.

What can we do?

Systemic racism dehumanizes us all. Whether consciously or unconsciously, a failure to champion anti-racism makes one complicit in the oppression of those harmed by racial injustice. Achieving a truly equitable society will require the dismantling of the systems that inherently place a greater value on some identities than others, such as those listed in the Introduction. Addressing systemic racism requires awareness and, more importantly, action at every level — individual, institutional, and structural.

In learning about and tackling systemic racism, we need to listen to and amplify voices[34] and lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people. They are the ones who have been fighting the longest for systemic change. They are the ones who can best describe what is needed to end systemic racism. When it comes to real, concrete actions that we can all take there are many resources to turn to. These actions apply to everyone from individuals and families to institutions and governments. This section provides just a few examples, but there are so many others. Think about what you can do!

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[33] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" available at https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

[34] Centering Voices of Those Most Impacted in Health Equity Efforts, available at https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/316/2019/04/Centering-Voices-Principles_MATCH_Sept-2018.pdf

- **Developing the tools to understand and recognize how systemic racism and white supremacy operate within each person and in everyday life is a crucial step.** Having meaningful conversations about race is necessary because white supremacist messaging cannot be avoided: "Cultural racism—the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites [sic] and the assumed inferiority of people of color—is like a smog in the air. Sometimes, it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in."[35] We all need to pay attention to the ways in which white supremacy exists, from examining our biases, to learning more about colourism and its impacts. It is all of our responsibility to learn more about Canada's colonial history.

- **Changing the way white children are taught about racism is an important step forward.** Research has shown that white parents do not talk to their children about racism as often or in the same way as Indigenous, Black, or other racialized parents — who do so knowing that systemic racism will negatively affect the lives of their children.[36] White parents are also likelier to approach conversations about race in ways that have been shown to be ineffective at combating racism, including emphasizing colour-blindness, and telling their children that race does not matter and that people are all the same on the inside.[37] It is vital that white parents have deeper, more nuanced conversations about race and the history of racism and colonialism in Canada with their children.

- **Employers and service providers also have a role to play in combatting systemic racism and white supremacy within their organizations.** It is widely accepted that organizations that intentionally value diversity and inclusion perform better than their non-diverse counterparts. Research has found that "companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians. Companies in the bottom quartile in these dimensions are statistically less likely to achieve above-average returns."[38]
One way of addressing systemic racism in organizations is by adopting special programs or special measures.[39] These not only help address inequalities on a societal level, but also will encourage a healthier and more effective workplace overall.

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[35] Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?": And Other Conversations About Race" revised and updated (New York: Basic Books, 2017), p. 86

[36] Nathoo, Zulekha. "How to talk to kids about race, and why you should start now" available at https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/how-talk-to-kids-about-race-1.5596169

[37] Sullivan, J. NIcky, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, & Steven O. Roberts. "Conversations about race in Black and White US families: Before and after George Floyd's death" PNAS September 21 2021 118 (38) e2106366118; https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2106366118

[38] Business Development Bank of Canada, "Workplace diversity: Why it's good for business" available at https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/employees/recruit/business-benefits-workforce-diversity

[39] A **special program** is any plan, arrangement, rule, or policy designed to prevent, reduce or eliminate a disadvantage or representation gap experienced by any group of individuals related to one or more prohibited grounds of discrimination as defined in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Under the Employment Equity Act, a **special measure** is adopted in an employment situation to correct situations of underrepresentation in the workforce of individuals identifying as belonging to one of four designated groups: women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and racialized people. For more information on special programs and special measures,

- **Ensuring a diverse and inclusive organization is key.** Employees from a wide range of backgrounds bring unique perspectives that foster innovation and creativity, and also allow organizations to better understand the community that they serve. But representation is only a first step. Employers should also ensure that Indigenous, Black, and other racialized employees have the tools, support, and opportunities to succeed within their organizations.

Conclusion

As this paper illustrates, one of the keys to combatting and dismantling systemic racism in Canada is to first learn how to correctly define it, identify it and recognize it as an embedded structure within Canadian society.

While individual actions and organizational policies are also essential to the way forward, significant and sustainable progress towards eliminating systemic racism also requires societal and cultural shifts. In turn, these shifts will entail change, action, and support from governments, and national and international institutions.

The reality remains that systemic racism continues to inform how we structure our communities and our systems, how we determine value, and how we perceive reality. These are systemic problems that require urgent, systemic solutions, ongoing dialogue and concrete actions.

We are not free until we are all free.

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see the Commission's guide called "Levelling the Field: Developing a Special Program or a Special Measure Under the Canadian Human Rights Act or the Employment Equity Act" available at https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/publications/levelling-the-field-developing-a-special-program-under-the-canadian-human