



# Race fluency

## The Drive for Equitable Change

Channel 4





At the time of writing, it is clear that we still have a long way to go to combat racism in all the environments in which we live, work and play. Equity and Inclusion is at the heart of our commissioning process and this publication intends to unravel, unpack, and unpick the ideas of racism and propel us to a greater understanding of ourselves and each other. My intention is that this publication stimulates healthy and brave conversations to set the paths to a more equitable and inclusive broadcast industry.

Naomi Sesay



As a committed anti-racist organisation, Channel 4 is always working to ensure more equitable representation on and off screen. We commission authentic content that speaks to the myriad experiences of people across the UK. And we are also always seeking to drive change across the industry. We hope that this training will help ensure that all our productions are truly inclusive environments and that staff from all backgrounds feel safe and comfortable working on them.

Ian Katz



# Introduction

As a publisher broadcaster, Channel 4 wants to encourage all of its production to have diversity, equity and inclusion at the heart of its priorities. As content makers and leaders, we have a pivotal role in helping to shape and reflect the cultural standards and beliefs of our audiences.

This race fluency module has been created for senior leaders and independent producers working with Channel 4 to use as a resource for learning, reflection and implementing change during their commission. This represents a piece of mandatory training as part of Channel 4's commitment to diversify the industry's workforce, increase representation on screen and equip our suppliers with effective tools towards becoming more equitable. We encourage you to download this editable PDF and use it alongside your commissioning process.

Race fluency is being able to understand, discuss, and navigate race-related conversations and issues effectively. This involves various skills and knowledge, including understanding the historical and social context of race, recognising and addressing racial discrimination and developing empathy and self-awareness. This document examines race fluency and applies this competency to foster inclusive and equitable cultures.

While this document does not aim to and cannot cover the nuance of every single experience of racism it is a starting point for developing race fluency and will require further reading and application. To engage with this module effectively and authentically, it is necessary to understand the value of tackling topics that you may find uncomfortable and recognise that this will be an ongoing personal journey that requires commitment and effort. There are many reasons that people may feel uncomfortable with the subject matter however it is essential to embrace openness and curiosity and sit with discomfort as a tool for growth.

This module hopes to provide you with the tools to improve racial fluency. It is split into chapters and covers three major themes.

- **Race & racism – what is it, and where did it come from?**
- **How racism manifests in society and affects us**
- **Applying learnings and principles & implementing change**

This module is formatted with questions for reflection and with note sections to write down your learnings and experiences. We advise you pull out topics and do further research.

For advice or questions please contact the Creative Equity team.  
[creativeequity@channel4.co.uk](mailto:creativeequity@channel4.co.uk)



**Equity is recognising that individuals have different needs and circumstances. It focuses on distributing resources and opportunities equitably to address these differences and level the playing field.**



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# Section 1

# Race and racism

**What is it and where  
did it come from?**





## Section 1: Race & racism

### Microaggressions

The commonly used term 'microaggressions' refers to the small, subtle and frequent everyday slights, incivilities, put-downs, insults, and poor behaviours of employees who may intend no malice towards colleagues with different cultural backgrounds. They signal that these colleagues are outsiders who do not "fit" into the mainstream culture of the organisation. Microaggression was a term coined in the 1970s by Harvard University professor Chester Pierce to describe daily racial offences.

"Microaggressions" are subtle insults or negative remarks that can be hidden within jokes, making them seem harmless on the surface. However, they often convey a sense of "othering," where someone is made to feel different or inferior. These remarks can be very harmful because they're often issued without the person realising the impact they have.

It is crucial to understand that the harm caused by racial microaggressions can be likened to cuts over and over again that compound.

Take a look at this video by filmmaker Meena Ayithey that illustrates the cumulative effect of microaggressions and how they can negatively impact mental health.

 <https://www.shots.net/news/view/new-film-cuts-to-the-heart-of-racist-micro-aggressions>



**Aggressions are aggressions, whether they are micro or otherwise.**

There are three main types of microaggressions<sup>1</sup>: **Assaults, Insults and Invalidations**. Here, we have included some examples based on true scenarios.

### Assaults

**The most overt type of microaggression.**

Shall we invite some white people to the training scheme so it doesn't look like a herd of gangsters are coming to party?

This is a racialised assault on a specific group's perceived character.

### Insults

**A more subtle type of microaggression with a subtext.**

Are you the new hire?  
Have you come to work in IT?

To assume a colleague works in a certain department because of the colour of their skin is a race based insult.

### Invalidations

**Denial of a marginalised persons reality.**

I don't see colour.  
I treat everyone the same.

Initially, it was often used with good intentions. However, it can dismiss the lived experiences and struggles of individuals from marginalised racial or ethnic groups. It implies a refusal to acknowledge the systemic racism and discrimination that different ethnic groups. Asserting that 'you don't see colour' communicates racial illiteracy and that you are less experienced to recognise racism. It implies a refusal to acknowledge the systemic racism and discrimination that different ethnic groups face.

Have a think about how the individuals who were issued with these statements would have felt. It is also important to note that some people may not categorise these as microaggressions but rather outright racism.

1. Derald Wing Sue et al (2007)





## Section 2

# Historical & social context of race and racism

## Section 2: Historical & social context of race and racism

### Race is a social construct.

The concept of race as a social construct has deep historical roots. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, in 1779, played a significant role in popularising the notion of distinct races, perpetuating the idea that humans could be categorised based on physical characteristics. Pseudosciences like phrenology and craniometry emerged, utilising the study of skulls to reinforce false racial classifications and justify differential treatment of perceived races. (Cruz & Duplass 2009)

Over centuries, the false notion that “white” people were inherently smarter, more capable, and more human than non-white people became accepted worldwide. This categorisation of people became a justification for European colonisation and subsequent enslavement of people from Africa.

The media at times has played a pivotal role in perpetuating the notion of white racial superiority, gaslighting communities into accepting and justifying the mistreatment of those considered 'other.' This distorted narrative became deeply entrenched, shaping societal attitudes and practices.

Contrary to these historical beliefs was the Human Genome Project which was a groundbreaking scientific endeavour that aimed to map all the genes in the human DNA (Human Genome Project Information Archive 1990-2003). It revealed that humans are genetically very similar to each other and that most genetic variations are found within 'racial' groups rather than between them, demonstrating that the concept of distinct races lacks biological or genetic validity. (Tishkoff et al., 2009, Science).

Despite this scientific evidence, the language of race continues to be used to classify individuals and their ethnicities, this is due to historical legacy and entrenched social constructs. Whiteness became manufactured as the measure of modernity (Saini, 2019).

Understanding the historical context of the construction of race helps dispel the myths that have fuelled discrimination. Acknowledging the lack of biological basis for racial classifications is crucial for understanding human diversity. However, it is important to note that many people have formed their identities around race.

For more information take a look at these articles:

→ [nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race](https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race)

→ [historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/another-england/a-brief-history/racism-and-resistance/](https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/another-england/a-brief-history/racism-and-resistance/)



**Race is a social construct that is based on historical myths of inferiority and superiority that still persist today. In order to address it we need to understand how it came to be this way.**



**What is the benefit of understanding the history of race?**

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1. Cruz & Duplass 2009  
2. Saini, 2019

## Section 3

# Racism is learned

**How racism manifests  
in society and affects us**



## Section 3: Racism is learned

**Much like various non-biological aspects influenced by our autonomic nervous system, Racism is a learned behaviour that becomes ingrained in our neurological responses. Our reactions to language and behaviour in different environments become automatic due to cognitive programming that forms habits**

The idea of unlearning racism or discrimination isn't completely accurate because we can't erase the emotional reactions tied to these thoughts or actions. Instead, we can overlay them, similar to quitting smoking. When a smoker first tries a cigarette, their body reacts to the chemicals, sparking an emotional response. Even though the decision to keep smoking starts consciously, the body's reaction to the cigarette's chemicals creates habits. Eventually, the body takes over, making the action unconscious.

Racism is a psychologically learned behaviour that requires a conscious effort to override with new behaviours. Similar to quitting smoking, this process demands considerable effort, determination, willingness, and patience to alter deeply ingrained behaviours.

The challenge lies in recognising that actions or words may unknowingly derive from racist ideas, emphasising the need for self-awareness and active efforts to dismantle these learned behaviours.

It is essential to dispel the notion that we are free from racist ideas and that we don't need to engage in the work of eradicating racism within ourselves. Most people have been brought up within a system encoded with racist ideas that persist and are absorbed over time. Acknowledging this influence is crucial to achieve genuine commitment to change and actively challenging ingrained prejudices.

In the context of racism, cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals who profess to believe in equality and reject racism nonetheless engage in discriminatory actions. This contradiction causes discomfort and denial, as their actions conflict with their stated values.

We must also consider how some of the information we acquire as children impacts us throughout our lives and the implications this has upon entering adult life and then the workforce. 'Even when race is not explicitly discussed, children internalise both implicit and explicit messages about it from their environment'. (DiAngelo 2016). To highlight this, we invite you to watch the "Doll Test\*" video below. The Doll test which was originally devised by Kenneth and Mamie Clarke in the 1940s contributed to the dismantling of segregated schools in the United States (Brown vs Board 1950).

### Doll test video

*\* Sensitivity flag: This video could be distressing, especially for those within racialised identities.*



**How did this video make you feel?  
Where do you think these children learnt  
their views on race and skin tone?**

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This illustrates the power of routine and exposure to certain ideas and how they are embedded from an early age. It's important to think about how these ideas and thoughts manifest in the workplace and everyday life



**Since racism is learnt, habitual racist thoughts need to be overlaid with positive, inclusive thoughts. This takes work, personal commitment and discernment.**

## Section 4

# White skin privilege

## Section 4: White skin privilege

### Many equate privilege with wealth, money and status.

Although that kind of advantage can indeed award you with many perceived unfair advantages, white skin privilege refers to advantages that are ascribed due to skin colour. White skin privilege was a term coined by Theodore W Allen 'Through his 40- year analysis, the data consistently revealed that there were societal privileges that benefit people identified as white beyond what is commonly experienced by non-white people under the exact same social, political or economic circumstances' (Reid, The Good Ally 2021). It can feel invisible to those who have it (Allen 1994).

Take a moment to watch this video of children learning about white skin privilege in the Channel 4 show:

#### **The School That Tried To End Racism.**

The combination of white skin privilege and systemic racism in society persists. Many people, regardless of their background, are not aware of these subtle privileges afforded to white skin.

To address this problem, we must all be aware of our privileges and recognise that others who do not have these privileges may need equitable solutions to get to the same position.

In TV, racism can show up as:

- Underrepresentation in Senior Roles
- Whitewashing
- Stereotyping
- Mockery
- Microaggressions

Within society, racism affects life chances and this is evident in many ways. Here are a few examples:

- **Stop and search:** In the year ending March 2022, there were 27.2 stop and searches per 1,000 Black people and 8.9 stops and searches per 1,000 Asian people, compared to 5.6 for every 1,000 white people (Gov UK 2022).
- **Death in childbirth:** Between 2020 and 2022, women from Black ethnic minority backgrounds faced a statistically significant risk of maternal death that was nearly three times higher than that of White women, while women from Asian backgrounds were twice as likely to experience maternal death compared to White women (MBRRACE UK, 2024)
- **Likelihood of institutionalisation:** Black people are five times as likely as white people under the Mental Health Act (Gov UK 2023).



**When have you been aware of white skin privilege and what feelings did it leave you with?**

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Take some time to watch these segments from Channel 4 news. Think about how race played a role in the treatment of these individuals. Think about the structures and systems at play.

 **Bank manager story**

 **Former IPCC Commissioner story**



**In society having white skin and proximity to white skin, affords advantages to certain groups. It is important to be aware of this and use your position to evoke equity.**



## Section 5

# Being anti-racist

**Applying learnings and principles  
& implementing change**

## Section 5: Being anti-racist



**What do you understand by the term anti-racist?  
Think about behaviours.**

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**Many people would consider themselves to be 'not-racist' because they don't believe themselves to perpetuate racist ideologies.**

Author and activist Ibrahaim X Kendi argues that the opposite to racist is in fact anti-racist. 'Anti-racist' is an active practice whilst 'Not being racist' does not actively confront or disrupt racism.


If the stance is 'not racist' instead of anti-racist, we then allow racism to continue to flourish (Kendi 2016).

Becoming anti-racist it is an active practise and requires you to encompass a combination of behaviours. For example:

- **Developed racial literacy:** Cultivate a clear understanding of how race and racism is at play in society, prioritising education and building awareness.
- **Taking responsibility:** Understanding of your own actions and beliefs and the skills to question assumptions and behaviours, separating them from societal structures that promote oppression. Embrace self- reflection and examination, recognising that racism isn't just 'something others do'.
- **Amplification of other voices:** The process of decentring oneself and platforming the voices of marginalised groups.
- **Commitment:** A commitment to continuously working on dismantling racism over the long term.
- **Disruption:** Challenge and question the status quo of upholding racist practices and narratives. This refers to beliefs, stereotypes and representations that reinforce racist ideas.
- **Policy and action:** Ability to scrutinise, advocate and improve systems, processes and structures so that they are more just and equitable.

1. Kendi 2016

## Section 5: Being anti-racist

 **How can you exercise these behaviours in your professional role?**  
**How can you use your influence?**

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**Being anti-racist is a commitment to a set of behaviours that take work and dedication. The ultimate goal is to disrupt racist ideas, structures and systems.**



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## Section 6

# Getting past the fear of talking about race

## Section 6: Getting past the fear of talking about race

**It is important to note that in order to become more racially fluent and anti-racist, we must be comfortable in having uncomfortable conversations.**

When we are open to listening to other viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives, we are one step closer to fostering a more inclusive environment.

**The power of discomfort:** Changes cannot be made in spaces where we ignore, avoid and deny situations that need addressing for the sake of our own comfort. Ignoring issues that don't affect oneself can be harmful. This approach can silence those affected who fear their concerns will be ignored or minimised

To engage in productive conversations, we need to work on various skills. We have discussed a few so far which include:

- **Education and understanding**
- **Self-awareness**
- **Recognising privilege**
- **Decentring oneself**
- **Tone policing**



Additional key competencies to encompass and build upon include:

- **Overcoming Fragility:** Overcoming fragility involves addressing guilt, shame, disbelief, defensiveness and fear. According to the work of author Robin DiAngelo (*White Fragility*, 2018) acknowledging and overcoming white fragility is a necessary step in creating spaces for open dialogue and constructive conversations about sensitive topics.
- **Emotional intelligence:** developing emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in navigating conversations about race. Nova Reid emphasises the importance of reflecting on emotional response in understanding and managing emotions to build more inclusive and empathetic relationships (Reid 2022).
- **Empathy:** The ability to understand other's feelings is crucial for fostering positive connections.
- **Active listening:** listening to understand is integral for building relationships and trust.

Uncomfortable conversations are necessary. In his book 'How To Have Difficult Conversations About Race' Kwame Christian speaks about the necessity of approaching these topics with courage, compassion and curiosity (Christian 2022).

To do this successfully you need to practise feeling uncomfortable.



## Section 7

# Taking steps for racial equity in your teams

## Section 7: Taking steps for racial equity in your teams

**This section looks specifically at the implementation of our learnings. Remember that you can make an impact in any organisation regardless of role via your circle of influence.**

Well-managed diverse and inclusive teams are the highest-performing teams<sup>1</sup>.

It is essential not only to include people who are different from us but also to ensure their involvement in the decision-making process. This means integrating diversity at all levels within the organisation and fostering an inclusive, safe and healthy environment where everyone can thrive. Diverse and inclusive teams will lead to highly innovative output, which is integral for the future of the media industry.

Let's look at some ways to build this by considering:



***What makes you feel safe and included? Eg. Is it seeing people that look like yourself? Is it being able to put forward ideas?***

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<sup>1</sup>. DiStefano, 2000



## Section 7: Taking steps for racial equity in your teams

### Creating racially inclusive environments

Inclusion is defined as the practice of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised by creating environment, policies etc that ensure all individuals feel valued, respected and supported.

It is about creating safe spaces where every colleague can bring their authentic selves to work without fear of consequences.

Dr. Amina Aitsi-Selmi states, "People don't leave jobs; they leave toxic work cultures." They also leave due to feelings of being unsupported by their line managers.

True inclusion focuses on value, ideas, and connection, cultivating a sense of safety and belonging. Recognising and understanding exclusion helps in building inclusive cultures where people understand the emotional aspects crucial for teamwork.

To retain and progress talent, we must establish environments where everyone has the ability to succeed. Consider institutional practices that may result in unequal opportunities, such as representation in leadership roles, employee retention and career development.

### Intervention, creating equitable solutions

Equity involves recognising and addressing disparities in access to opportunities among individuals. When we understand that not everyone has the same advantages, it becomes necessary to provide additional support. This can be offering additional resources to help bridge the gap. This is imperative as an intervention. Incorporating racial equity specially into decision making processes is essential because historical and systematic factors have often disadvantaged certain racial or ethnic groups. By actively considering and addressing these disparities, organisations can level the playing field and ensure fair opportunities.

### Challenge and escalation: confronting inequality

Having the confidence to challenge effectively is necessary. Encourage a culture where challenging disparities are not only encouraged but celebrated.

You can lead by example.

Providing tools and training to empower individuals to confront inequality is necessary. Establish or be aware of clear channels for reporting inequalities and ensure individuals feel supported in openly addressing these challenges.

### Accountability measuring results-based racial equity

It is important to establish benchmarks and reporting systems to track your progress, which help in gauging success. To measure results-based equity, it is necessary to use both quantitative data and lived experience information. Continuous evaluation enables us to assess the effectiveness of initiatives and make informed adjustments as needed.

### Envisioning racial equity

Consider what your industry would look and feel like if true racial equity existed.

A company that embraces racial equity can boast diverse, innovative, and high-performing teams. It can also foster an inclusive culture that values everyone's unique contributions. Think about the impact and influence you have in your role.

This will take long-term commitment and continuous work.



## Section 7: Taking steps for racial equity in your teams



**What could you do to make your team more racially inclusive and equitable? Think about , hiring, retention, career development, casting and environment, consider culture, conditions and measurements.**

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In order to create high-performing inclusive teams there are a number of conditions that need to be met. It is important to develop skills for diverse and equitable solutions, as well as create inclusive environments.

## Section 8

# Moving forward



## Section 8: Moving forward

This module has aimed to enrich your understanding of:

- Developing race literacy and comprehending the intricacies of race and racism.
- Uncovering how racism manifests, particularly in relation to the TV industry as well as society at large.
- Embracing the importance of actively engaging in discussions about race and racism.
- Acknowledging and sitting with discomfort as a tool for growth.
- Grasping the core of being anti-racist and associated behaviours.
- Contributing to the creation of racially inclusive teams and environments.

We understand that we can make a difference within our organisations, society and programming by applying learnings. This can be through policies, actions, long-term commitment, challenging your own assumptions, beliefs, biases and ideas that have been long held and ingrained through our existence within society.

It vital to consider tangible actions and outcomes that will lead to systemic change rather than being performative.



Progress must be measured by impact and by the extent to which you have made a difference, not whether you've ticked off action points on your diversity and inclusion to-do list

Shereen Daniels, 2022

## Section 8: **Moving forward**



***Please use the space below to note down some changes you can make in your workplace and beyond to help tackle unequal power structures relating to race and racism in the industry.***

***Note down five sustainable things you could do across the next year. i.e think about crew, casting, safeguarding and policy***



In this module, we have covered the different forms of racism and emphasised the need to address it in various aspects of society, including workplaces and personal attitudes, to bring about change. This involves learning, speaking up, and critically evaluating our actions and systems. Continuous education and tangible steps for systemic change are crucial. This topic is vast, so we have curated a list of resources for further learning.

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# Section 9

# Resources

## Section 9: Resources



### Further reading

#### **The Good Ally: A Guided Anti-Racism Journey from Bystander to Changemaker**

Nova Reid (2021)

#### **Me and White supremacy**

Layla F Saad (2022)

#### **East Side Voices: Essays celebrating East and Southeast Asian identity in Britain**

(2022)

#### **Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain**

Sathnam Sanghera (2021)

#### **Maybe I Don't Belong Here**

David Harewood (2021)



### Recommended watching

- How to talk about race at work
- <https://deltaalphapsi.com/delta-talks-psychological-safety/>
- <https://deltaalphapsi.com/everyones-talking-about-psychological-safety-for-inclusion/>
- <https://fs.blog/carol-dweck-mindset/>



*Please use this space to note down further learning, insights and information.*

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# Notes

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For further information

**For further information, get in touch  
with the Creative Equity team**

via [creativeequity@channel4.co.uk](mailto:creativeequity@channel4.co.uk)

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