

KEY UNTRAINING CONCEPTS

From the work of Rita Shimmin and Robert Horton

Prejudice: A set of preconceived judgments about others based on limited information.

Racism: A system of advantage based on race, with visible and invisible privileges. Whereas prejudice refers to an individual's judgments and preferences, racism is more than a set of attitudes and beliefs; it is the system of advantage that keeps white people in a dominant position in society—in government, education, finance and other institutions of power.

White Privilege: The social, economic, political, and other benefits that white people receive simply for being white. White people inherit these privileges as a group and benefit from them as individuals, often unknowingly. One aspect of white privilege is that white people usually have a choice about whether to notice their privilege and whether to acknowledge and confront racism. Even those engaged in unlearning racism have the privilege to take breaks from it in a way that people of color generally do not.

White Conditioning/Training: White people, like all people, have cultural conditioning. White people are socially conditioned to be white by parents, teachers, peers, textbooks, news media, advertisements, business and government leadership, and other institutions, and by continual feedback (often subtle) from those around us. This conditioning is presented as value-neutral, non-ethnic, normal, mainstream, or regular (as are the cultural values of other privileged groups such as heterosexual people, people without disabilities, Christians, etc.). However, white conditioning *is* based on a set of values—those of white culture—that have been made the dominant values in the U.S. Because these values are the “norm” they are often invisible to those who hold them and can cause unintended harm. It is helpful to remember that no one *chooses* social conditioning, no one is exempt from it, and anyone can change their relationship to it by persistently working to develop awareness of it.

Basic Goodness: Basic goodness is present in everyone; it is part of our humanity. Reminding ourselves of our basic goodness can keep us from spiraling into the depths of guilt, shame and self-blame that can cause great harm to ourselves, people of color, and other white people.

Multidimensionality: This is the ability to hold more than one reality (or “truth”) at a time. This practice provides an alternative to framing perspectives in a rigid “right” or “wrong” dichotomy, or in other mono-dimensional ways. For example, multidimensionality is the practice of holding the reality that white people have privilege and conditioning that disadvantages people of color while also holding the reality that white people have basic goodness. This is a tool used in the UNtraining to help build capacity for feeling compassion for self and others. It reminds us that while white training has infiltrated our thought, belief, and value systems in ways we may not like, we also have a core of basic goodness. It helps us hold and work with complexities of situations where race is involved. Over time, this practice may become more automatic and help us to access more ways of relating to racism and other difficult issues.

Tracking: Tracking is a specific process of exploring and reflecting on an experience with the intent of better understanding the roles that white conditioning and other forms of social oppression play in the situation.