

# Racism and White Privilege

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## QUADRANT 2

**Name of Activity:** Contemporary and Systemic Racism Activities, Option A: The Web of Institutional Racism

**Purpose:** The actual web created in this activity symbolizes the “web” of institutionalized racism that, like the spiders web, “catches” targets and limits their mobility and life chances.

**Learning Objectives:** To build an actual web in the classroom to illustrate how various institutions work together to systematically limit the full participation of people of color in society

**Time Needed:** 30 minutes to implement the activity; please note any preparation time needed as well as time needed

**Materials Needed:** Masking tape or ball of yarn, note cards

**Degree of Risk:** Medium- to high-risk

### Procedure:

1. Review the social institutions that perpetuate racism through policies, practices, and norms. Then ask the participants to think of examples of ways that racism in one institution supports or reinforces racism in another institution.
2. Ask the participants to stand in a circle, assigning an institution to each participant and yourself (schools, local businesses, the military, places of worship, the media, banks, criminal justice system, etc.). Write the institution on a note card and have each person tape it to themselves, so that the group can see all the institutions. As facilitator, begin by giving an example of how your assigned institution perpetuates racism. Then, holding one end of a roll of masking tape, toss the roll to another participant while naming a connection to that person’s institution. That person should then give an example of how their institution perpetuates racism and, holding their spot on the tape, toss the roll to someone else in the circle while naming a connection to that person’s institution. Other participants can help name a connection if the person is stumped. Continue until as many connections as people can think of have been made.
3. If the participants have trouble on their own thinking of examples of institutionalized racism and how various institutions are connected, then ask the group to provide some examples. With a less-advanced group, this activity can be framed from the start as more of a group activity, broadening the sources of data, taking the pressure off of individuals, and incorporating information covered in readings or other information sources.
4. At the end of the exercise, the participants will find they are attached through a web of tape. You can ask them to gently place their tape on the floor and step away. What

is left is a web of tape showing connections among institutions in our society that support racism. You can make the point that these connections continue whether we are standing in the web or standing apart from it. This helps make the point that systemic racism continues with or without the active, conscious participation of individuals, and that we are implicated in this web whether we wish to be or not.

5. Summarize some of the connections made. Emphasize the importance of understanding racism as consisting of interrelated, institutionalized practices and the need for collective social change efforts to address these various aspects.

**Facilitation Notes:** The following is an example of how various institutions are connected to perpetuate racism: Financial institutions are connected to housing in that a bank manager may see people of color as a greater financial risk than white people and thus be less likely to offer mortgages to them. Without a mortgage, people cannot afford to buy a home. People who cannot buy homes are more likely to live in neighborhoods that have less funding for schools. People who attend inadequately funded schools receive a lower level of education. People who receive a lower level of education get lower-paying jobs.

As an alternative to using tape or a ball of yarn in this activity, the web can be created on paper by writing the various institutions in a circle when they are first generated by the larger group, and then drawing lines to symbolize the connections the group makes among these institutions.

**Credit:** Barbara Love