

## **Race and ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity are two concepts related to human ancestry. Race is defined as “a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits.” The term ethnicities is more broadly defined as “large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.”

“Race” is usually associated with biology and linked with physical characteristics such as skin color or hair texture. “Ethnicity” is linked with cultural expression and identification. However, both are social constructs used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations.

## **Genetics and race**

Neither race nor ethnicity is detectable in the human genome. Humans do have genetic variations, some of which were once associated with ancestry from different parts of the world. But those variations cannot be tracked to distinct biological categories. Genetic tests cannot be used to verify or determine race or ethnicity, though the tests themselves are associated with an increased belief in racial differences.

Though race has no genetic basis, the social concept of race still shapes human experiences. Racial bias fuels social exclusion, discrimination and violence against people from certain social groups. In turn, racial prejudice confers social privilege to some and social and physical disparities to others, and is widely expressed in hierarchies that privilege people with white skin over people with darker skin colors.

## **Categorizing race**

Race and ethnicity are often regarded as the same, but the social and biological sciences consider the concepts distinct. In general, people can adopt or deny ethnic affiliations more readily than racial ones, though

different ethnicities have been folded into racial categories during different periods of history.

As legal scholar Tanya K. Hernandez writes, “The social experience of being consistently viewed as distinct is what informs a racial identity, not a shared culture.” People who share an ethnicity may speak the same language, come from the same country, or share a religion or other cultural belief or expression.