

What does “BPoC” mean?

The term 'Black Person and Person of Colour' (plural: Black People and People of Colour; abbreviated BPoC) is a self-determined designation of and for people who are not 'white'.

The 'Black People and People of Colour' description assumes that people who are not 'white' skinned have a common horizon of experience in a predominantly 'white' society. The term encompasses all 'non-white' people, emphasising common experiences of systemic racism. The term may also be used with other collective categories of people such as 'Black Communities and Communities of Colour', 'Black Men and Men of Colour' (BMoC), and 'Black Women and Women of Colour' (BWoC).

It is necessary to differentiate between 'Black People' and 'People of Colour' since 'Black People' are also discriminated by other 'People of Colour' and vice versa. Sometimes these two terms are used interchangeably, yet also sometimes as complementary; as these are relatively new and self-designated terms, they are still being debated. Therefore, the term 'Black People and People of Colour' was developed as a self-determined term to bridge this divide. Both 'BPoC' and 'PoC' are especially used in Germany in academic and political contexts. 'People of Colour' (PoC) is a common term in many English-speaking countries and therefore used more often within that social context.

Black and white

The terms 'black' and 'white' are never really about the colour of skin, nor an exactly definable number of people: in the same way that all 'European whites' from Sweden to southern Spain cannot be assigned to a single 'group', neither can that work with all 'Black People'. However, such social similarities arose from the construct of racism, and a need to name it, such as the fact that throughout history and still today, there are different opportunities in the housing and labour markets. Thus, the terms 'white' and 'black' have proven themselves as a marker of distinction with regard to unbalanced power dynamics. In this way, socio-political affiliations rather than 'biological' attributes are of importance here.

'Food for Thought' – some statements to think about

1. Anyone who thinks they know better who a BPoC is and who is not, behaves in a racist way.
2. 'Black' and 'white' are not biological characteristics, but social constructs; they name the different backgrounds, socialisations and realities of life.
3. We are educated to perceive and name the colour and specific shades of the skin's surface for 'Black People' but not 'white people' who have a far more colourful colour spectrum.

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