

Diversity Glossary

Ableism

A form of discrimination, a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon a person's disability often in ways that dismiss their abilities and talents.

Acculturation

The process of acquiring a second culture. It is different from assimilation which implies abandoning one's first culture.

Ageism

A form of discrimination, a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon a person's age.

Ally

A person who takes action to support the efforts of a marginalized group but who is not a member of the group (e.g., a white person who takes actions to dismantle or combat racism against people of color, a man who takes action to support ending sexism against women).

Assimilation

A process whereby a person or group joins a group or society by abandoning aspects of identity and culture (e.g., cultural practices, behaviors, values, language, and histories). In most cases, the process of assimilation is combined with pressures from the dominant group to singularly adopt the dominant culture rather than become bicultural or multicultural.

Bias/Unconscious Bias

A conscious or unconscious belief which interferes with impartial judgment. It often results in not treating others fairly or kindly.

Bigotry

Intolerance toward people who differ in some way from oneself or one's group.

BIPOC

An acronym for "**Black, Indigenous, People of Color**". A contemporary phrase sometimes considered an alternative to "People of Color (POC)." Proponents argue that adding "Black" and "Indigenous" to "People of Color" more squarely references the experience of Black people who are marginalized and oppressed under assumptions of white supremacy, including anti-Black sentiments among non-Black people of color. It also explicitly includes Indigenous Peoples who are often overlooked in discussions and actions combating racism.

Biracial/Multiracial

A term describing a person of biracial/interracial parentage.

Cissexism/Cisgenderism

A form of discrimination, a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon whether a person is cisgender or transgender.

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Classism

A form of discrimination, a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon social class

Code Switching

When a person switches between languages or dialects while speaking. Code switching may occur for several reasons. For example, the speaker may switch based upon the setting and who is in the setting. Or, they might switch if a concept or idea is better expressed in one language or dialect compared to another.

Color-blind

A term often employed by people who want to ignore other people's racial identities. Use of the term is often framed as benevolent or noble by the user or as a means to appear non-racist. However, its use is criticized because it often denies the other person's experience of living in a society where race is a factor and that racial experiences shape who people are and how they experience life.

Cultural Competence

The ability to respond appropriately and affirmatively to people of varying cultures, ages, races, religions, sexual orientations, abilities, and ethnicities.

Culture

A group's social practices passed on within the group, often to enhance survival or wellbeing and preserve group identity. Culture can include behaviors, ceremonies, relationship types, forms of communication, values, beliefs, food, clothing, and art.

Commonalities

Those characteristics and needs that most, if not all, human beings share.

Discrimination

Actions and social structures (policies, social practices, laws, etc.) that give advantage to some people and disadvantage others.

Diversity

The reality that people differ from each other in a variety of ways. Diversity is typically associated with organizational innovation and progress. Drawn from examples in biological adaptation, emerging social challenges are best met with strategies that can be found among people from different cultures and experiences tied to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, language, gender, sex, or physical characteristic, etc.

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Dominant Group

The subset of people in a society or organization who hold the most power. The dominant group should not be confused with the majority group. For example, men are often the numeric minority in many organizations. However, compared to women, they hold most of the economic, social, and decision-making power.

Ethnocentrism

Using one's own group as a standard or norm by which to assess others.

Ethnicity

A form of identity often tied to a common heritage. Ethnicity should not be confused with race. Ethnicity is not synonymous with race. Ethnicity differs from race because it is not defined by physical characteristics. For example, people in the USA may identify in ways tied to different heritages (e.g., Italian-American, Irish-American, Mexican-American, Polish-American, etc.) even if they are members of the same race (a concept typically associated with skin color).

Equality

An effort to enact fairness by providing every person with exactly the same thing (resources, opportunities, requirements, etc.). It assumes that everyone starts at the same place. Equality is often contrasted with equity.

Equity

An effort to enact fairness that works to ensure that everyone has access to equal results and outcomes regardless of their starting point. Equity is often contrasted with equality.

Female

An adjective that may refer to humans, plants, or animals, typically based upon some type of biological characteristic and the characteristic can vary.

Gender Expression

How a person represents or expresses their gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.

Gender Identity

An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or transgender. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender

Socially constructed categories that are typically, but not always, associated with sex categories. Cultures vary in the number of different genders they recognize. Gender is a performance we learn and is often mistaken for something "natural" or a core essence of a person. However, gender is something we repeatedly "do," not something we "are."

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Gender Non-conforming

A term used by some individuals whose gender expression varies from societal expectations related to gender.

Generation

A group, defined by age, who often have shared experiences and perceptions as a result of living (growing up) during a particular time in history.

Gender-Neutral Terms

Words, such as pronouns or titles, that do not designate the gender of the subject (police officer vs. policeman).

Gender Roles

The activities and behaviors that a culture or social group assigns to different genders.

Gender-Neutral Pronouns

Pronouns that do not designate gender or impose a gender upon someone. Routinely, use of the singular “they/them” is considered correct and should be used unless/until the person to whom you are referring has indicated their appropriate pronoun.

Heterosexism

A form of discrimination, a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon a person’s sexual orientation.

Homophobia

The fear of homosexuality and homosexual people.

Heteronormativity

The assumption that heterosexual is the best way to be and that other sexual identities are inferior and deviant rather than normal variations of human sexuality.

Intersex

A person whose hormonal or anatomical sex characteristics cannot be categorized as male or female.

Inclusion

The degree to which a group, institution, or organization promotes the participation of all individuals from all backgrounds and groups in decision-making and other practices.

Intersectionality

The notion that all human beings have multiple identities (race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, body type, etc.) and that the way these identities combine shape each person’s experience in the world relative to privilege and discrimination.

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Inclusion

The practice or policy of including and integrating all people and groups in activities, organizations, political processes, etc., especially those who are disadvantaged, have suffered discrimination, or are living with disabilities.

LGBTQ

A continually evolving acronym for "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer." Different letters might be added to reflect the inclusion of other groups defined by either sexuality or gender.

Misogyny

Hatred of females/women/girls.

Male

An adjective that may refer to humans, plants, or animals, typically based upon some type of biological characteristic and the characteristic can vary.

Misandry

Hatred of males/men/boys.

Microaggression

A comment or an action that subtly and often unintentionally or unconsciously conveys prejudice toward a member of a marginalized group.

Multiracial/Biracial

A term describing a person of interracial/biracial parentage/heritage/ancestry.

Non-binary

A person whose gender identity (and perhaps expression) is outside of the gender binary (neither male/masculine nor female/feminine). Non-binary people may or may not identify as transgender.

Outing

Intentionally or inadvertently giving information about another person's sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent.

People of Color (POC)

The term "people of color" was adopted to replace the term "colored people." By placing "people" first it was a way to recognize the humanity of its subjects and also reject a term used by white supremacists. See also BIPOC

Prejudice

Preconceived negative beliefs or attitudes about members of a particular group.

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Patriarchy

A social system that is male dominated (men hold most of the power in the group compared to others), male identified (people endorse and align themselves with men more often than women), and male centered (the activities and interests of men are given more attention than the activities and interests of others). As a result of these characteristics, most people who identify as men in the system have advantages that others do not. In a patriarchy, not all men have the same unearned advantages. For example, working class men have less privilege than wealthy men, white men have more unearned advantages compared to men of color. Overall, however, men as a group have more opportunities, are more valued, and more rewarded than those who are not male.

Privilege

Unearned power, benefits, advantages, opportunities, rights, and freedoms that are experienced by members of the dominant group in a given context. A person does not have to be aware of privilege to experience or use it. Typically the unearned power and opportunities are based upon characteristics such as race, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Political Correctness

Efforts to use language and phrases that acknowledge diversity and reflect the words that people adopt for themselves. "Politically correct" terms often distance themselves from language previously associated with discrimination or oppression. Examples might include "people of color" rather than "colored people" or "sexual orientation" rather than "sexual preference." Note: In contemporary life, "political correctness" is sometimes used as a derogatory term to reference people and actions meant to accomplish the above.

Queer

An umbrella term that individuals or groups may use to describe sexual orientations, gender identities or gender expressions that do not conform to dominant societal norms. Very often adopted by folks who reject binary (categorical) explanations of sexuality and gender. Sometimes the term is used to simply describe anyone who is either non-heterosexual or transgender.

Reverse Discrimination

Discrimination against the dominant or majority group resulting from policies meant to correct past discrimination against members of non-dominant and minority groups.

Race

A social construct typically used to categorize people, often based upon a physical characteristic such as skin color. Race should not be confused with ethnicity nor used synonymously.

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Racism

A form of discrimination based upon race (in the USA, "race" is most often associated with skin color). Racism can be either an individual act against another person or a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon race (called "systemic racism"). Racism is different from prejudice and bigotry in that racism is when prejudicial beliefs and bigotry are enforced by policies, laws, and similar acts of power that advantage or disadvantage racial groups differently. Most often, racism can be understood as either/both individual and institutional practices and policies that are rooted in the belief that a particular race is superior to others (prejudice and bigotry). Racism results in depriving certain individuals and groups of civil liberties, human rights, and resources, hindering opportunities for social, educational and political advancement, and inequitable levels of surveillance and more violent forms of control by civil authorities

Reverse Discrimination

Discrimination against the dominant or majority group resulting from policies meant to correct past discrimination against members of non-dominant and minority groups

Sexism

A form of discrimination, a system of advantage or disadvantage based upon sex or the perception of a person's sex.

Sexual Orientation

A concept meant to describe a person's erotic and sexual desire. Typically, the characteristics of a person's entire life are shaped by their sexual orientation as it forms the basis of public and private life. • A lesbian is a female person whose primary erotic/sexual attraction is toward other females (also called homosexual women) • A gay man is a male person whose primary erotic/sexual attraction is toward other males (also called homosexual males). • A heterosexual person (also called straight) is one who is primarily erotic/sexually attracted to people of a sex different than one's own (e.g., a male who is sexually attracted to females; a female who is sexually attracted to males). • A bisexual person is erotically/sexually attracted to both males and females, but not necessarily to the same degree at the same time. • A pansexual person is someone whose erotic/sexual attraction is not limited by the other person's sex (biology) or gender (cultural category). • An asexual person is someone who does not experience sexual attraction (they have needs for emotional relationships just not the desire to express that sexually).

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Stereotypes

Assumptions or generalizations made about an entire group/community.

Transphobia

Discomfort about, or fear of, transgenderism and transgender people.

Transsexual

A person who transitions from one sex and/or gender to another. For example, a female-bodied person who takes steps to live as a male-identified person. The transition can be a social transition alone or it can include steps to physically change one's body to match the person's authentic gender identity (the gender that feels the most appropriate to the person).

Tolerance

Passive acknowledgement of identities, cultures, values, beliefs, and behaviors that differ from one's own. The notion of "tolerance" sometimes implies a minimal acceptance and in some cases even condescension and minimal respect. "Tolerance" is typically seen as falling short of "affirmation" which implies respecting differences as valuable and useful for organizational and social progress.

Transgender

An overarching (umbrella) descriptor of people who reject, move between, or transcend socially-defined gender categories, boundaries, behaviors, and norms. There are many expressions of what it means to be transgender and each person who identifies as transgender has the right to adopt their own expression and identity. Identifying as transgender can include people who do not define themselves using the masculine or feminine binary common in many societies. It can also include people whose gender identities do not align with their anatomical/biological sex and who identify as a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth based upon their bodies. People who are intersex may sometimes identify as transgender but not always.

White Supremacy

An ideology asserting that White people are superior to all others. It manifests in both individual beliefs as well as social systems (policies, practices, etc) that give White people advantages and protections while denying those same opportunities and protections to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Beyond simply denying opportunities and protections, white supremacy also justifies acts of violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as a means of preserving the relative advantages and power experienced by white people.

Xenophobia

A fear (or dislike) of people from other countries

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