

Diversity and Social Justice Glossary

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A glossary of working definitions*

*This glossary is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every word and term used in our conversations about diversity and social justice. Because of the way language works especially around these concepts, many of these words and terms will continue to evolve. Even so it can be useful to have a reference that provides basic working definitions that help spur discussions.

Ableism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental, and/or emotional ability; usually that of able-bodied / minded persons against people with illness, disabilities, or less developed skills / talents.

Accessibility: The extent to which a facility is readily approachable and usable by individuals with disabilities, particularly such areas as the personnel office, worksite and public areas.

Adulthoodism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions against young people, in favor of older people.

Agender: Not having a gender.

Androgyne: A non-binary person who is both a man and woman, neither man nor woman, or between man and woman.

Androgynous: Having an appearance that is traditionally seen as both masculine and feminine, neither masculine nor feminine, or in between masculine and feminine.

Advocate: Someone who speaks up for themselves and members of their identity group; e.g., a woman who lobbies for equal pay for women.

AFAB/AMAB: Assigned female at birth; assigned male at birth. These terms are often critiqued for their tendency to enforce a binary, but can be useful descriptors at times. (Not a preferred term, see TME/TMA).

Agent: The perpetrator or perpetuator of oppression and/or discrimination; usually a member of the dominant, non-target identity group.

Ageism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in age; usually that of younger persons against older.

Allosexual/alloromantic: Experiencing sexual or romantic attraction to other people. The opposite of asexual/aromantic.

Ally: A person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another group; typically member of dominant group standing beside member(s) of targeted group; e.g., a man arguing for equal pay for women.

Anti-Semitism: Hatred of or prejudice against Jews or Judaism.

Aphobia: Hatred of or prejudice against people on the asexual or aromantic spectrums.

Appropriation: Adopting elements of a different culture without understanding, credit, or permission. This occurs when a dominant culture takes from a minority culture and involves a power imbalance.

Aromantic: Experiencing a lack of romantic attraction towards other people. Aromantic people have varying preferences on relationships. Some enjoy participating in romantic relationships, some prefer queer-platonic partnerships, and some prefer not to be in a relationship. Can be combined with other terms (bisexual aromantic, etc.)

Asexual: Experiencing a lack of sexual attraction towards other people. Asexuality encompasses a wide range of experiences; asexual people can be sex repulsed, sex neutral, or sex positive, and can have varying sex drives. Commonly abbreviated to “ace.” Can be combined with other terms (asexual panromantic, etc.)

Bias: Prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

Biphobia: Hatred of or prejudice against bisexuality and bisexual people.

Biracial: Belonging to two races, or having biological parents of two different races.

Bigender/Dual Gender: Having two genders. These may be binary or nonbinary genders.

Binary: The division of society into only men and women, which ignores the existence of nonbinary and intersex people.

Bisexual/biromantic: Experiencing sexual/romantic attraction to two or more genders.

Categorization: The natural cognitive process of grouping and labeling people, things, etc. based on their similarities. Categorization becomes problematic when the groupings become oversimplified and rigid (e.g. stereotypes).

Cisgender: Having a gender that matches one’s sex assigned at birth. The opposite of transgender.

Classism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in socio-economic status, income, class; usually by upper classes against lower.

Coalition: A collection of different people or groups, working toward a common goal.

Codification: The capture and expression of a complex concept in a simple symbol, sign or prop; for example, symbolizing “community” (equity, connection, unity) with a circle.

Collusion: Willing participation in the discrimination against and/or oppression of one’s own group (e.g., a woman who enforces dominant body ideals through her comments and actions).

Color Blindness: A sociological concept describing the ideal of a society where racial classifications do not limit a person's opportunities, as well as the kind of deliberately race-neutral governmental policies said to promote the goal of racial equality. The ideology is problematic, especially on a personal level (i.e., “I don’t see race, gender, etc.”), as it does not recognize the continued existence of racial privilege support by racialized structures and practices.

Contact Hypothesis: The original scientific motivation for integration of education and the armed forces, this theory posits that bringing peoples of different backgrounds together (on a college campus, for example) will lead to improved relations among them. Additional research has shown this to be true only under certain conditions including: sanction by authority, common goals, and equal status contact (both numerically and psychologically). (Allport, 1957)

Demigender: Having a partial connection to one or more genders. Often used as demigirl, demiboy, etc.

Demisexual/demiromantic: Experiencing sexual/romantic attraction only after forming an emotional connection with other people. Under the asexual umbrella.

Dialogue: “Communication that creates and recreates multiple understandings” (Wink, 1997); it is bidirectional, not zero-sum and may or may not end in agreement; it can be emotional and uncomfortable, but is safe, respectful and has greater understanding as its goal.

Discrimination: Actions, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favor one group over others in the provision of goods, services, or opportunities.

Diversity: The wide variety of shared and different personal and group characteristics among human beings.

Dominant Culture: The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

Drag Queen/King: A person who exaggerates gender presentation, usually for the purpose of performance or entertainment. This is a form of gender exploration, but

being a drag performer does not necessarily mean someone is part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Dyadic: Having sex characteristics that can be categorized into a binary sex. The opposite of intersex.

Ethnicity: An ethnic group; a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like.

Erasure: The invalidation of an identity, which includes exclusion and lack of representation. A form of silencing.

Fat Acceptance: A social movement that seeks to counter fatphobia. Similar movements include body positivity.

Fatphobia: Hatred of or prejudice against fat people.

Fundamental Attribution Error: A common cognitive action in which one attributes his/her own success and positive actions to his/her own innate characteristics (“I’m a good person”) and failure to external influences (“I lost it in the sun”), while attributing others success to external influences (“he had help, was lucky”) and failure to others’ innate characteristics (“they’re bad people”). This operates on the group levels as well, with the ingroup giving itself favorable attributions, while giving the out-group unfavorable attributions, as way of maintaining a feeling of superiority. A “double standard.”

Gay: Experiencing attraction to members of the same or similar gender. Can also occasionally be used as an umbrella term for anyone who is not straight.

Gender: A description of one’s internal state of being, which is not limited to the traditional gender binary. Gender is a spectrum that includes a huge variety of different identities.

Gender Dysphoria: Severe distress or discomfort experienced by a trans person due to the difference between their gender and the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gendered: Having a denotative or connotative association with being either (traditionally) masculine or feminine.

Genderfluid: Having a gender that is not static and can vary over time.

Gender Nonconforming: Expressing oneself in ways outside of society’s binary gender roles.

Genderqueer: Having a gender that is outside of the gender binary.

Gender Roles: Binary societal norms that are expected to shape the behavior and experiences of men and women.

Hapa: The term originates from the Hawaiian Pidgin word for "part" or "mixed" and refers to any person of mixed ethnic heritage, regardless of the specific mixture.

Hate Crime: Hate crime legislation often defines a hate crime as a crime motivated by the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person.

Heterosexism: The presumption that everyone is, and should be, heterosexual.

Heterosexual/heteromantic: Experiencing sexual/romantic attraction to members of another gender.

Homophobia: Hatred of or prejudice against homosexuality and gay or lesbian people.

Homosexual/homoromantic: Experiencing sexual/romantic attraction to members of the same or similar gender. (Not a preferred term. See: Gay, Lesbian)

Inclusion: the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure.

Indigenous peoples: ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently. In the United States, this can refer to groups traditionally termed Native Americans (American Indians), Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. In Canada, it can refer to the groups typically termed First Nations.

In-group Bias: the tendency for groups to "favor" themselves by rewarding group members economically, socially, psychologically, and emotionally in order to uplift one group over another. Also known as favoritism.

Intergroup Conflict: Tension and conflict which exists between social groups. And which may be enacted by individual members of these groups.

Intersectionality: The interaction of a person or group's social identities or roles that result in the specific way they experience the world. In other words, the way that someone's identities interact result in an experience that isn't just the sum of those identities, but is unique to that combination of identities. For an example, see Misogynoir or Transmisogyny.

Intersex: Having sex characteristics that cannot be categorized into a binary sex. The opposite of dyadic.

Islamophobia: Hatred of or prejudice against Islams or Muslims, especially as a political force.

Ism: A social phenomenon and psychological state where prejudice is accompanied by the power to systemically enact an institutionalized form of discrimination.

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to other women.

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, and other identities that are non-heteronormative and non-cisnormative (i.e. not straight or not cisgender.)

Marginalized: Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

Misogyny: Hatred of or prejudice against women.

Misogynoir: The specific type of misogyny that is directed toward black women.

Model Minority: a demographic group (whether based on ethnicity, race or religion) whose members are perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average. This success is typically measured relatively by income, education, low criminality and high family/marital stability. A controversial concept that has historically been used to suggest that there is no need to adjust for socioeconomic disparities between certain groups, to pit non-dominant groups against one another, and to diminish the achievements of relevant groups.

Monosexual: Experiencing attraction to only one gender. Straight, gay, and lesbian are monosexual identities.

Monosexism: Hatred of or prejudice against non-monosexual identities, including bisexuals, pansexuals, omnisexuals, polysexuals, etc.

Multiculturalism (n): is the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles.

Multiplicity: The quality of having multiple, simultaneous social identities (e.g., being male and Buddhist and working class).

Multiracial: An individual whose heritage encompasses more than two races.

Multiethnic: An individual that comes from more than one ethnicity. An individual whose parents are born from more than one ethnicity.

Naming: "When we articulate a thought that traditionally has not been discussed".

National Origin: The political state from which an individual hails; may or may not be the same as that the person's current location or citizenship.

Nonbinary: Having a gender outside of the gender binary. Often shortened to nb or enby.

Oppression: Results from the use of institutional power and privilege where one person or group benefits at the expense of another. Oppression is the use of power and the effects of domination.

Pansexual/panromantic (also referred to as **omnisexual**): Experiencing sexual/romantic attraction regardless of gender or to all genders.

People of Color: A collective term for people of Asian, African, Latin and Native American backgrounds; as opposed to the collective "White" for those of European ancestry.

Personal Identity: Our identities as individuals-including our personal characteristics, history, personality, name, and other characteristics that make us unique and different from other individuals.

Polyamory: The practice of nonmonogamy, having more than one relationship, or having relationships with more than two people. Polyamory prioritizes communication, honesty, and consent from all individuals. This is not an LGBTQIA+ identity, as it refers to how someone participates in relationships rather than who they are attracted to.

Polysexual/polyromantic: Experiencing sexual/romantic attraction to multiple genders.

Prejudice: A preconceived judgment about a person or group of people; usually indicating negative bias.

Privilege: Benefits and opportunities that are available disproportionately for majority groups at the expense of minority groups and are usually taken for granted.

Queer: An umbrella term that refers to being part of the LGBTQIA+ community. This word has historically been used as a slur and therefore should not be used except through personal reclamation.

Questioning: Being uncertain of one's sexual/romantic orientation or gender.

Race: a class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics. Race is often argued as being a social construct because race is not biological. A person categorized as black in the USA could be categorized as white in Brazil and colored in South Africa. If race were biological, racial categories would remain constant across boundaries. However, racialized experiences, responses and reactions are a reality and cannot be ignored on the premise of biology alone.

Racism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in race/ethnicity; usually by white/European descent groups against persons of color.

Re-fencing: A cognitive process for protecting stereotypes by explaining any evidence/example to the contrary as an isolated exception. Also known as exception-making.

Religion: A system of beliefs, usually spiritual in nature, and often in terms of a formal, organized denomination.

Romantic Orientation: A description of how someone experiences romantic attraction.

Safe Space: Refers to an environment in which everyone feels comfortable in expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule or denial of experience.

Same Gender Loving: a term coined by activist Cleo Manago as a description for homosexuals, particularly in the African American community. SGL is an alternative to Eurocentric homosexual identities e.g. gay and lesbian.

Saliency: The quality of a group identity of which an individual is more conscious and which plays a larger role in that individual's day-to-day life.

Sex: A socially constructed classification system based on a person's sex characteristics. Sex is a spectrum that includes a variety of sexes much larger than just male or female, based on biological differences.

Sexism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions, typically against women, on the basis of sex.

Sexual Orientation: A description of how someone experiences sexual attraction.

Silencing: The conscious or unconscious processes by which the voice or participation of particular social identities is excluded or inhibited.

Social Identity: It involves the ways in which one characterizes oneself, the affinities one has with other people, the ways one has learned to behave in stereotyped social settings, the things one values in oneself and in the world, and the norms that one recognizes or accepts governing everyday behavior.

Social Identity Development: The stages or phases that a person's group identity follows as it matures or develops.

Social Justice: can be defined as both a process and a goal. "The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure."

Social Oppression: "Exist when one social group, whether knowingly or unconsciously, exploits another group for its own benefit" (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997)

Social Self-Esteem: The degree of positive-negative evaluation an individual holds about his/her particular situation in regards to his/her social identities.

Social Self-View: An individual's perception of to which social identity groups he/she belongs.

Split Attraction Model: A model developed by the asexual and aromantic communities that separates different types of attractions into sexual, romantic, platonic, etc., and allows people to specify how their preferences vary for different types of attraction (for example bisexual demiheteromantic, or asexual panromantic). This model is not useful for everyone but is a very helpful tool in allowing for more complex descriptions of attraction.

Spotlighting: The practice of inequitably calling attention to particular social groups in language, while leaving others as the invisible, de facto norm. For example: "black male suspect"(versus "male suspect," presumed white); "WNBA" (as opposed to "NBA," presumed male).

Stereotype: Blanket beliefs and expectations about members of certain groups that present an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment. They go beyond necessary and useful categorizations and generalizations in that they are typically negative, are based on little information, and are highly generalized.

System of Oppression: Conscious and unconscious, non-random, and organized harassment, discrimination , exploitation, discrimination, prejudice and other forms of unequal treatment that impact different groups.

TME/TMA: Transmisogyny exempt/transmisogyny affected. An alternative to AFAB/AMAB for trans people that allows for a focus on social effects rather than sex assignment at birth.

Tolerance (n): Acceptance and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes, and cultures; does not necessarily mean agreement with the differences.

Transphobia: The fear or hatred of people perceived to be transgender.

Transgender: Identifying as a gender other than the gender assigned at birth. This may be a binary or nonbinary gender.

Transmisogyny: The specific form of misogyny experienced by trans women.

Two Spirit: a modern, pan-Indian, umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans to describe certain people in their communities who fulfill a traditional third-gender (or other gender-variant) ceremonial role in their cultures.

Veteran Status: Whether or not an individual has served in a nation's armed forces (or other uniformed service).

Worldview: The perspective through which individuals view the world; comprised of their history, experiences, culture, family history, and other influences.