



### Commonly Used Vocabulary in Social Justice

**Ability/Disability:** Disability and ability are umbrella terms that have different meanings for different communities and in different contexts. Three ways of defining disability follow: (a) *The Americans with Disabilities Act* defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (b) the *medical model* holds that disability results from a physical or mental impairment of the individual and is largely unconnected to the social or physical environments, and (c) the *social model* views disability as a consequence of environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from maximum participation in society. Other definitions/models may be intersectional and may consider that all human beings have physical or mental variations that can become a source of vulnerability or disadvantage in some settings.

**Accomplice:** The actions of an Accomplice are meant to directly challenge institutionalized racism, colonization, and White supremacy by blocking or impeding racist people, policies, and structures. Realizing that our freedoms and liberations are bound together, retreat or withdrawal in the face of oppressive structures is not an option - you are complicit. Accomplices' actions are informed by, directed and often coordinated with leaders who are members of the target group. Accomplices aren't motivated by personal guilt or shame.

**Advocate:** A person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy. A person who pleads on someone else's behalf. Speaking for someone with or without their permission.

**Affirmative Action:** Policies that attempt to redress the cumulative harm of hundreds of years of oppression and policies that subjugated people of color, women, and low-income whites.

**Ally:**

- A person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another social identity group.
- Someone who advocates for and supports members of a community other than their own. Reaching across differences to achieve mutual goals.
- Someone who supports a group other than his/her own. Allies stand in solidarity with a group by acknowledging the group's historical and/or current marginalization and commit themselves to reducing their own collusion in the oppression of that group.
- Someone who supports members of a community other than their own and reaches across differences to achieve mutual goals. Being an Ally is not an invitation to be in spaces to gain brownie points, lead, take over, or explain. Allies need to constantly educate themselves.

**Anti-Racist:** "Being an antiracist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality." (Bonilla-Silva, 2003)

**Asexual:** A person who is not sexually attracted to any gender. (Asexual individuals can and are often still romantically attracted to other people.)

**Bias:** An opinion, preference or inclination formed without any reasonable justification.

**Biphobia:** The irrational fear and/or intolerance of people who identify as bisexual.

**Bisexuality/Bisexual:** (Also bi.) A person who is attracted to two (or more) sexes or genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally.

**Christonormativity:** The system of oppression, which assumes Christianity as the norm.

**Cisgender:** A person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.



**Cissexism:** The set of acts and norms that privilege cis people and/or oppress trans people. More broadly, cissexism is the appeal to norms that enforce the gender binary, and gender essentialism, resulting in the oppression of gender variant, non-binary and trans identities.

**Colorism:** Refers to discrimination based on skin color. Colorism disadvantages dark-skinned people while privileging those with lighter skin. Research has linked colorism to smaller incomes, lower marriage rates, longer prison terms, and fewer job prospects for darker-skinned people.

**Coming Out:** To recognize one's own sexual orientation or gender identity, and to be open about it with oneself and/or with others.

**Crossdresser:** Someone who wears clothes associated with another gender part of the time, but are usually comfortable with their gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Not necessarily a drag performer or a transgender individual. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of male crossdressers identify as straight.

**Cultural Competence:** Refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures.

**Culture:**

- The shared ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, norms and way of life of a group of individuals.
- Culture is a way of life. Culture is passed on, from generation to generation, through institutions, groups, interpersonal, and individual behavior. Culture provides the glue that gives institutions their legitimacy from generation to generation. For individuals, culture provides a sense of identity, belonging, purpose, and worldview.

**Discrimination:**

- The act of showing partiality or prejudice; a prejudicial act.
- To act or treat people unfairly based on their sex, race, ethnicity, class, religion political affiliation, marital or family status, sexual orientation, age or disability, either unconsciously or deliberately.
- The differential allocation of goods, resources, and services, and the limitation of access to full participation in society based on individual membership in a particular social group.

**Diversity:** Individual and social (group) differences that contribute to dynamic relationships and interactions.

Understanding each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. Encompasses acceptance and respect.

**Drag:** The act of dressing in clothing and adopting behaviors as part of a performance, most often as a gender not associated with your gender identity. Drag Queens perform femininity theatrically, while Drag Kings perform masculinity theatrically. Drag performance does not indicate sexuality, gender identity, or sex identity.

**Equality:** The state or quality of being equal. Supports the notion that everyone deserves the same (resources, treatment, etc.)

**Equity:** Belief that people should have basic needs that should be fulfilled, rewards should be spread evenly across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness, and justice towards these ends. Creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented and currently marginalized populations to have equal access to and participate fully in educational programs and other offerings that are capable of closing the gap in experience and achievement.

**Ethnicity:**

- Cultural values and norms that distinguish the members of a given group from others.
- Ethnicity is a social construct, which divides people into social groups based on characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, religion, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. Ethnicity shapes a group's culture.



**FTM/F2M:** Abbreviation for a female-to-male transgender person.

**Gay:** A self-identified man who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted exclusively to self-identified men.

**Gender:** The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Often conflated with sex. See also gender expression and gender identity.

**Gender Dysphoria:** For some transgender people, the difference between the gender they are thought to be at birth and the gender they know themselves to be can lead to serious emotional distress that affects their health and everyday lives if not addressed. Gender dysphoria is the medical diagnosis for someone who experiences this distress. Not all transgender people have gender dysphoria. On its own, being transgender is not considered a medical condition. Many transgender people do not experience serious anxiety or stress associated with the difference between their gender identity and the sex they are thought to be at birth, and so may not have gender dysphoria.

**Gender Expression:** The way in which a person expresses their gender identity through clothing, behavior, posture, mannerisms, speech patterns, activities, and more.

**Gender Fluidity:** Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may even change from day to day. Gender fluid people do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries of stereotypical expectations of women and men. For some people, gender fluidity extends beyond behavior and interests, and actually serves to specifically define their gender identity. In other words, a person may feel they are more woman on some days and more man on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately. Their identity is seen as being gender fluid.

**Gender Identity:** An individual's internal sense of gender, which may or may not be the same as the gender or sex they were assigned at birth. Often conflated with sex, although they are separate concepts.

**Gender-Neutral Pronouns:** Pronouns that do not follow the binary gender construct, and that do not identify the gender of an individual. Gender-neutral pronouns are not transgender specific—they are used by people of many sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Reasons for using gender-neutral pronouns vary, including identifying outside of the gender binary. Examples are "ze/zir", "ze/hir" or singular "they", "their" and "them", instead of he/him or she/her.

**Genderqueer:** A person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This identity is usually related to or in reaction to the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes, and the gender binary system. Also known as non-binary.

**Heteronormativity:**

- The assumption that heterosexuality and a rigid gender binary are normal and natural. This assumption normalizes heterosexuality and the gender binary, while stigmatizing the LGBTQ+ community.
- The cultural bias in favor of opposite-sex relationships of a romantic/sexual nature, and against same-sex relationships of a romantic/sexual nature.

**Heterosexism:** Assuming every person to be heterosexual (or that every person should be heterosexual) therefore marginalizing people who do not identify as heterosexual. Also defined as believing heterosexuality is superior to any other sexual orientation.

**Heterosexuality:** Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to a sex or gender other than your own.

**Homophobia:** The irrational fear and/or intolerance of people who do not identify as heterosexual.

**Homosexuality:** Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to the same gender.



**Identity:** Refers to either (a) social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) socially distinguishing features a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential.

**In the Closet:** Keeping one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity a secret.

**Inclusion:** The act of creating involvement, environments and empowerment in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate with equal access to opportunities and resources embrace differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.

**Inclusiveness:** A commitment to foster a climate that represents and values all members. Active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity in every aspect and in ways that increase awareness, cognitive sophistication, and empathetic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.

**Internalized Oppression:** The process by which an oppressed person comes to learn, believe, accept, and/or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group.

**Intersectionality:** Introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is a framework for understanding the ways that multiple aspects of our identities intersect, influence one another, and compound to create unique experiences. The concept is regularly used to describe the ways that societal privilege and oppression is complicated by the different parts of our identity that are marginalized or privileged in society.

**Intersex:** An intersex person is someone who is born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or internal reproductive systems that are not considered "standard" for either male or female (by members of the medical profession). Previously referred to as hermaphroditism, which is not considered an appropriate term.

**Lesbian:** A self-identified woman who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted exclusively to self-identified women.

**LGBTQIA:** Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual. Many other versions of this acronym are possible, including switching the order, using more or less letters, and/or adding ellipses or plus-signs to the end to demonstrate possibility and inclusivity.

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

**Microaggressions:** Brief and commonplace (daily) verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.

**MTF/M2F:** Abbreviation for a male-to-female transgender person.

**Misogyny:** Manifests as treating women, regardless of if they are cis, trans, or non-binary women, as less capable, as less worthy of respect, or as reduced to some sort of demeaning status, e.g., sexually objectified.

**Non-binary:** An individual who identifies outside of the gender binary of male and female. Also known as genderqueer.

**Oppression:**

- The prolonged exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner. Oppression operates at the personal/interpersonal, cultural, and structural levels.
- Illegitimate institutionalized power, built and perpetuated throughout the course of history. Allows certain "groups" to confer illegitimate dominance over other "groups", and this dominance is maintained and perpetuated at an institutional level.



**Outing:** The act of disclosing and often assuming a person's (often queer) sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent.

**Pansexual:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, sexually, affectionately, or relationally attracted to people regardless of their gender identity or biological sex. Use of the term usually signals a repudiation of the concept of binary sexes (a concept implied by "bisexual").

**Patriarchy:** an economic, political, cultural and social system of domination of women and transgender people that privileges non-transgender men. Patriarchy is based on binary definitions of gender (male/female) with strict gender roles. It also relies upon rigidly enforced heterosexuality that places male/straight/non-transgender as superior and women/queer/transgender as inferior. Patriarchy shapes and is shaped by white supremacy, capitalism, and the state. Together, they form interlocking systems of oppression.

**People of Color:** A collective term for people of Asian American/Pacific Islander, African American/Black, Arab American, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American/Indigenous backgrounds; as opposed to the collective "White" for those of European ancestry.

**Power:** Power is the ability to affect the world, or to change your circumstances. The ability to do, act, think and behave as we would like - to have control over our own lives and others. Power is control of, or access to those institutions sanctioned by the state. Institution power is the social, political and economic power which provides access to resources, the ability to influence others, and access to decision makers to get what you want done.

**Prejudice:** Prejudice is a set of negative personal beliefs about a social group that leads individuals to pre-judge people from that group or the group in general, regardless of individual differences among members of that group.

**Privilege:** Systematic favoring, enriching, valuing, validating, and including of certain social identities over others. Individuals cannot "opt out" of systems of privilege; rather these systems are inherent to the society in which we live.

**Queer:** Multiple definitions: (1) often used as an umbrella term to refer to all LGBTQIA+ people. (2) A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation or gender identity, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid. (3) An inclusive label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires (for example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders in different ways may identify as queer.) Queer is a term that has a history of pejorative use, but since the 90's has been reclaimed.

**Questioning:** The process of examining one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Can be used as an adjective. Often used to describe a definite period of time; questioning can also refer to an ongoing identity.

**Race:** The concept of dividing people into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of physical characteristics, with skin color being the most often identifying feature (which usually results from genetic ancestry) i.e. Caucasian, Black, African American, Asian, Pacific Islander.

**Racism:** Racism, both personal and institutional, involves prejudice and the power to enforce it. It is revealed in attitudes, behavior and systems in which white people maintain supremacy over people of color. Human beings create the systems, which in turn, reinforce racism. Personal/individual racism is a result of the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of people that support or perpetuate racism. It happens at both an unconscious and conscious level, and can be both passive and active.

**Same-Gender Loving (SGL):** A term often used in some Black communities to describe one's sexual orientation, seeing "gay" and "lesbian" as primarily white terms. "Same-sex loving" is also in use.

**Sex:**

- A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics, and hormonal balances. Common terms are "male," "female," and "intersex."



- Biological classification of male or female (based on genetic or physiological features); as opposed to gender.

**Sexual Orientation:** The deep-seated direction of one's sexual attraction. It is on a continuum and not a set of absolute categories.

**Sexuality:** The complex range of components which make some people sexual beings; includes emotional, physical, sexual aspects, self-identification (including sexual orientation and gender), behavioral preferences and practices, fantasies, and/or feelings of affection and emotional affinity.

**Social Justice:** 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.

**Socioeconomic Status:** Socioeconomic status (SES) is a measure of class standing, typically indicated by income, occupational prestige, educational attainment, and wealth.

**Spirituality:** A process of personal transformation in accordance with religious ideals. It may refer to almost any kind of meaningful activity or blissful experience, but without a single, widely-agreed definition.

**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.

**Transgender:** Multiple definitions: (1) Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans) people are those whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. (2) An umbrella term for those whose gender identities don't match their assigned sex. Trans is not a sexual orientation – transgender people can have any sexual orientation.

**Transition:** A multi-step process that can take years as a transgender person brings their anatomy and/or gender expression in line with their internal gender identity, if they choose to do so. Transition can involve surgery and/or hormones, or a social transition. Most places have specific laws about what one would need to do to be able to change their gender marker on legal documents, which can be taken into consideration when people are planning their transition.

**Transphobia:** Irrational fear and/or hatred of transgender people.

**Two-Spirit:** American Indian/First Nations/Native American persons who have attributes of or blur the lines between men and women, and have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes. This term is for American Indian/First Nations/Native American individuals – it is considered cultural appropriation for non-native people to use this term.

**White Privilege:** Historically based and institutionally perpetuated system of preferential prejudice for and treatment of white people based solely on their skin color and/or ancestral origin from Europe and grants exemption from racial/national oppression.

**White supremacy:** White supremacy is the institutionally enforced system of racism. It is historically based on: 1) the theft & military conquest of native lands of North America; and 2) the economic exploitation of North American land through slavery. Institutional racism/white supremacy is the network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for whites, and discrimination, oppression and disadvantage for people of color.

**Xenophobia:** A system of oppression based on the fear, hatred or mistrust of that which is foreign, especially strangers or people from different countries or cultures.