

Anti-Bias/Social Justice Vocabulary List

Language both contributes to oppression and privilege and can also potentially be a tool of liberation. The power inherent in the ability to name oneself and others is tremendous. For these reasons, we encourage you to consider the following definitions as a rough starting point. Many of these terms and definitions will and should change over time. We welcome your input.

Ableism: The system of oppression based on ability; assumes disabled people as flawed, insufficient, and inferior. Includes assumptions about what is “normal” and results in the marginalization of the disabled. In brief, it is the unearned privilege afforded to non-disabled people.

Ageism: Is the pervasive oppression of people based on their age. Discrimination comes from the societal myth that older and younger people cannot perform certain cognitive or affective standards in the same way simply because they are younger or older. Therefore, based on people's ages, they have unfairly prescribed roles.

Ally: A person who supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of those groups. This person will often directly confront and challenge systems of oppression.

Anti-Racism: More than an intellectual opposition to the principles of racial supremacy, it is the recognition of racism as part of institutional structures and the struggle to stop power and gain based on racism and/or race bigotry.

Assimilation: Assimilation-from the Latin, *assimilare*, to make similar-is the process whereby newcomers to society are encouraged to give up their cultural way of life and accommodate as quickly as possible to values and culture of the host society. It is an ethnocentric, one-way process of cultural exchange, in that only the newcomer is expected to adapt, with the implied promise that group acceptance will be the social reward.

Attitudinal barriers: People with disabilities face barriers as part of their everyday lives, including “systematic barriers” in the workplace and society. Attitudes are often the greatest barrier, reflecting society’s low expectations and unwillingness to recognize and appreciate the full potential of people with disabilities.

Bias: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bigotry: An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes or prejudices.

Bisexual: A person who has significant romantic, emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions to both men and women, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally.

Christonormativity: The system of oppression which assumes Christianity as the norm, favors Christians, and denigrates and stigmatizes anyone that is not Christian. Equates Americanness with Christianity.

Cisgender: The term used to describe those having a gender identity or performing in gender roles that society considers appropriate for one's sex.

Class: A class consists of a large group of people who occupy a similar economic position in the wider society based on income, wealth, property ownership, education, skills, or authority in the economic sphere. Class affects people not only on an economic level, but also on an emotional level.

Culture: Culture is the sum total of human creations-material and nonmaterial that comprise the complex pattern of living that directs human social life, and is handed down through generations by communicative interaction rather than by genetic transmission.

Disability: Depending on the model informing the definition (i.e., medical, social, economic, feminist, legal, social justice, etc.) social, historical, political, and mythological coordinates impact the actual meaning of disability and disabled people as objects of institutional discourse.

Ethnicity: A social construct which divides people into groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group identity, values, culture, language, history, ancestry and geography.

Feminism: A term commonly and quite indiscriminately used. Some of the currently used definitions are: **(a)** a doctrine advocating social and political rights for women equal to those of men; **(b)** an organized movement for the attainment of these rights; **(c)** the assertion of the claims of women as a group and the body of theory women have created; **(d)** belief in the necessity of large-scale social change in order to increase the power of women.

Fluid Identity: The concept that identity is not rigid, but can and does change. This idea is often used in terms of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as other factors of identity. This concept is fundamentally contrary to binary systems. A person who feels her/his identity is fluid often believes that rigid categories are oppressive and incapable of accurately describing her/his experience and identities.

Gay: A term used to describe an individual who is emotionally, physically, an/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex. This term is often used in relation to men.

Gender: Socially constructed categories of masculinity and manhood, femininity and womanhood. Gender identity: A person's internal sense of themselves as a specific gender.

Gender Binary/Gender Dualism: A system that defines and make room for two and only two distinct, natural, and opposite genders (i.e., male and female). These two genders are defined in opposition to each other, such that masculinity and femininity are seen as mutually exclusive. In this system, there is no room for any ambiguity or intermingling of gender traits.

Gender expression/image/display: The external presentation of self as gendered through cultural identifiers/markers such as clothing, behaviors, etc.

Genderqueer: A self-identifying term for someone who rejects the male/female gender binary in favor of a more fluid, nontraditional identity which merges or blurs characteristics of gender and gender norms.

Heterosexism: The system of oppression which assumes heterosexuality as the norm, favors heterosexuals, and denigrates and stigmatizes anyone whose gender or sexual behavior is considered non-heterosexual.

Inclusiveness: A commitment to foster a climate that represents and values members of diverse social identity groups. Inclusive practices occur at the individual, cultural and institutional levels, creating a culture where all members feel they are welcome and belong.

Intersectionality: An approach largely advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive.

Lesbian: A term used to describe a woman whose primary romantic, emotional, physical, and sexual attractions are to other women.

Microaggressions: Microaggressions are subtle words, cues, and/or behaviors that insult, invalidate, or exclude traditionally marginalized group members. The long term effect of micro aggressions can have a significant negative effect on one's health

Oppression: Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, while others have ready access.

People first language (PFL): Puts the person before the disability. "People with disabilities" acknowledges that individuals with disabilities are people first and not their diagnosis or disability.

Privilege: Systemic 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: A political term or identity to describe any person living or identifying outside of heteronormative ideals

Race: A social construct that divides people into groups based on factors such as physical appearance, ancestry, culture, history, etc; a social, historical and political classification system.

Racism: A system of oppression involving systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups by those who have relatively more social power. This subordination occurs at the individual, cultural and institutional levels.

Sexism: A system of oppression that privileges men, subordinates women, and denigrates women identified values. This subordination occurs at the individual, cultural, and institutional levels.

Sexual orientation: A concept referring to sexual desire and preference for emotional and sexual relationships with others based on their sex/gender; often implies that sexual object choice is an essential, inborn characteristic, so may be problematic to some.

Social class: (as in upper class, middle class, lower class, working class) refers to people’s socioeconomic status, based on factors such as wealth, occupation, education, income, etc.

Transgender Person: A broad umbrella term for people whose self-identification challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality and do not conform to traditional understandings of labels like male and female or heterosexual and homosexual.

White Privilege: Institutional set of benefits, including greater access to resources and power, bestowed upon people classified as white.

White Supremacy: The assumption or theory that whites are superior to all other races and should be in power and control.