

Glossary of Key Terms

Bias: A preference for or tendency toward a particular viewpoint or outcome. Bias stems from the internalization and institutionalization of particular values, beliefs, and assumptions. Not to be confused with bigotry, which is motivated by ill-intent, bias can co-exist unconsciously with good intentions, but nevertheless result in outcomes that are inclined to favor some groups over others.

Discrimination: Discrimination denotes different treatment. As a term of law, however, it refers specifically to the illegal denial of equal rights and protections based on such characteristics as gender, race, ethnicity, and disability.

Equity: The proportional distribution or parity of desirable outcomes across groups. Sometimes confused with equality, equity refers to outcomes, while equality connotes equal treatment. Where individuals or groups are dissimilarly situated, equal treatment may be insufficient for or even detrimental to equitable outcomes. An example is individualized educational accommodations for students with disabilities, which treat some students differently in order to ensure their equitable access to education. (See Parity)

Ethnicity: The shared sense of a common heritage, ancestry, or historical past among an ethnic group. Ethnicity is a distinct concept from race, as illustrated by the fact that Hispanics, designated an ethnic group in the U.S., may nevertheless be of any race. In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget definition of ethnicity, the U.S. Census Bureau defines ethnicity or origin as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

Harassment: Harassment is a form of illegal discrimination defined as unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, and/or age. Harassment becomes unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive. Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or lawsuit under these laws; or opposing employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws.

Intersectionality: Refers to the analytical framework through which the relationship among systems of oppression can be understood. African American women made an early contribution to this analysis in the 19th Century. Recognizing that they experienced racism and sexism differently from both black men and white women even while they shared commonalities with both, they argued that a struggle that did not simultaneously address sexism and racism would only perpetuate both. Since then, movements against racism, sexism, heterosexism, disability, colonialism, and imperialism both within the U.S. and abroad have recognized similar correspondences, enabling more broad-based coalition-building.

Justice: Fairness, equity, and morality in action or attitude in order to promote and protect human rights and responsibilities. In most societies, people work for justice by organizing through different categories of rights, such as civil, political, economic, social, and cultural.

Marginalization: The experience of groups who are denied political, economic and social equity in society, and hence, relegated to its margins. It can also refer to an individual who is rendered voiceless or irrelevant in particular social context.

Microaggressions: The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. (Sue, 2010)

Minority: In the social sciences the term minority may be applied to those groups that are considered protected classes based on historical exclusion and discrimination. In general usage, it is commonly used to refer to people of color as in minority community and minority students. Such labels are increasingly disfavored as they naturalize the minor political, economic, and social status to which people of color have been subjected. (See People of Color/Women of Color)

Multicultural: Arising from or informed by cultural heterogeneity. Goals for multicultural education vary along a continuum that includes demographic inclusion, student empowerment, intergroup understanding, educational equity, and social transformation.

Oppression: A system of individual, institutional, and cultural beliefs and practices that privilege a dominant group at the expense of the subordinate groups.

Parity: The proportional distribution of desirable outcomes, or equity, across groups. Sometimes confused with equality, equity refers to outcomes, while equality can simply mean equal treatment. Where individuals or groups are dissimilarly situated, equal treatment may be insufficient for or even detrimental to equitable outcomes. An example is individualized educational accommodations for students with disabilities, which treat some students differently in order to ensure their equitable access to education.

People of Color:: The term of color embraces Black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous peoples both within the U.S. and transnationally, whose collective marginalization as colored peoples and colonial subjects informs coalition politics that cut across many issues. In contrast to the label minority, which carries negative connotations, 'of color,' is an example of self-naming that is positively associated with a politics of empowerment.

Privilege: Privilege is best understood as the systematic advantage that is conferred to one group at the expense of another. The function of hegemony is to rationalize privilege as natural, legitimate, and earned. Hence privilege goes unnamed while its effects, described by such euphemistic terms as under-privilege and disadvantage, are often blamed on individual misbehavior, character flaws, and cultural deficiencies. Terms such as white privilege, male privilege, and heterosexual privilege make explicit the relationship between privilege and the group for whom it is intended to function.

Race: A spurious taxonomy of human beings that assigns worth and status on the basis of phenotypic and cultural characteristics. Race is not a fixed, biological essence passed on thru the genes. [It is a] complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.

Racism: A system of oppression based on the social construction of a racial hierarchy, which is expressed in individual, institutional as well as cultural forms and functions for the benefit of the dominant race at the expense of the others.

Social Justice: The practice of promoting and protecting human rights and responsibilities, with a particular emphasis on the economic and social rights of society's most vulnerable groups.

White Fragility: "A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium." (DiAngelo, 2011, p.54)

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Sources: <http://guides.lib.ku.edu/c.php?g=421095&p=3616784>
Xavier University, Minnesota Human Rights Education Experience and National Center for Transgender Equality
DiAngelo, R. (2011). White Fragility. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54-70.