

Glossary of Definitions and Core Concepts for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

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The purpose of this glossary is to help provide a starting point for open and honest conversations about social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was originally prepared to support the work of the Advisory Group on Diversity Equity and Inclusion in HSR in order to build a shared language of understanding for the Group's work.

This glossary is not intended to be a definitive list. Importantly, it draws on the work of other experts, and citations are provided throughout.

In addition, because the meaning of words can change and evolve, and in keeping with the recommendations of the Advisory Group, we aim to design future versions to enable reader updates and modifications.

A

- **Advocate:** (1) A person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group (noun); (2) To actively support/plead in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance, educate others, etc. (verb) (Unity First, 2019)
- **Agency:** In social justice work, a psychological concept that relates to the development of an individual identity and ability to act independently and make conscious decisions to set and achieve personal goals; related to self-determination (Lewis and Clark College, 2014)
- **Ally:** In social justice work, a person who uses their privilege to advocate on behalf of others who don't hold the same privilege. (Wright, 2020)
- **American Indian (Native American) or Alaska Native:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment (US Census Bureau, 2020)
- **Anti-Racism:** As defined by author and historian Ibram X Kendi, a group of deliberate actions that identify and describe racism in order to dismantle it and create an equitable society (Wright, 2020)

Origins of DEI

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) movement in the United States is not new. It has its roots in the 1960s civil rights movement and has grown to include gender, sexual orientation, religion, country of origin, and other identities. As described by the Greenlining Institute (2018), the focus in the 1960s into the mid-1970s was on tolerance, meaning the acceptance of integration of workplaces, schools, and communities. From the mid-1970s into the 1990s, the focus was on multiculturalism and being aware of the achievements of various racial and ethnic minorities.

As the demographics began to shift and there were projections about "majority minority" culture by the 2040s, the emphasis has been on inclusion and equity. Since the early 2010s, there has been an increased emphasis on accountability to ensure that that diverse groups are represented at all economic and social levels, often using social media to hold government, corporations, and civil society accountable (see Greenlining Institute DEI Framework <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Racial-Equity-Framework.pdf>).

- **Anti-Racist:** A set of beliefs and actions that oppose racism and promote the inclusion and equality of Black and brown people in society (Wright, 2020)
- **Asian:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (US Census Bureau, 2020)

B

- **Bias:** An inclination of preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment (Wright, 2020)
- **Bigotry:** Prejudice carried to the extreme of overt hatred, often carried to the point of violence (Wright, 2020)
- **BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color);** An umbrella term for non-white people, especially as they face racism and discrimination in a white-dominant culture (Wright, 2020)
- **Black or African American:** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (US Census Bureau, 2020)

C

- **Caste:** An artificial hierarchy that helps determine standing and respect, assumptions of beauty and competence, and even who gets the benefit of the doubt and access to resources (Wright, 2020); (Also see Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*, Random House, 2020)
- **Centering:** Making the center of attention; centering marginalized people means putting them at the center of attention rather than at the margins, where they are not visible. (Griffith, 2018)
- **Change agent:** A person inside or outside an organization or system that helps to transform how it operates (NIH, Communities Blog, 2019)
- **Cisgender:** Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (Wright, 2020)
- **Classism:** Any attitude or institutional practice which subordinates people due to income, occupation, education and/or their economic condition (Unity First, 2019)
- **Code-switching:** Adjusting one's speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality, service, employment opportunities, and other benefits (McClune et al., 2019)
- **Colonization:** The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. The action of appropriating a place or domain for one's own use (Unity First, 2019)
- **Colorblind:** The belief that everyone should be treated "equally" without respect to societal, economic, historical, racial or other difference. This has the effect of allowing people to ignore persistent discrimination and makes people of color feel unseen and marginalized. (Wingfield, 2015)
- **Colorism:** Skin-color bias, explicit or implicit, in favor of lighter skin color; coined by Alice Walker (D. Knight, What's Colorism? Learning for Justice 2015)
- **Critical Race Theory:** A theoretical framework that examines the role of racism on social and economic status; coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in late 1980s (Hardeman & Karbeah, 2020)
- **Cultural Appropriation:** The non-consensual/misappropriated use of cultural elements for commodification or profit purposes – including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgment, or respect for its value in the original culture (UW 2021)

D

- **Decenter whiteness:** The default power structure in the US has white people and beliefs in its center; decentering whiteness puts other people at the center of power and attention. (Crenshaw, 1991)
- **Decolonize:** The active and intentional process of unlearning values, beliefs, and conceptions that have caused physical, emotional, or mental harm to people through colonization. It requires a recognition of systems of oppression. (UW 2021)
- **Disability:** Physical or mental impairment that affects a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (UW 2021)
- **Disparities (see health disparities)**
- **Diversity:** Socially, it refers to the wide range of identities. A broad view includes race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, veteran status, physical appearance, etc. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values. (UW 2021)
- **Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of members of various groups, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favor one group over others on differences of race, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, language, age, national identity, religion, and other categories (UW 2021)

E

- **Emancipation:** A process of making the white racial frame visible so it can be analyzed and counter-framed from the perspectives of Critical Race Theory and racial equity (Hardeman & Karbeah, 2020)
- **Emotional tax:** The unseen mental and emotional work that people from marginalized backgrounds have to do every day to feel included, respected, and safe (Unity First, 2019)
- **Equity:** The fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist in the provision of adequate opportunities to all groups. (UW 2021)
- **Ethnicity:** Refers to shared cultural practices, perspectives, and distinctions that set apart one group of people from another. The most common characteristics distinguishing various ethnic groups are culture, religion, language, country of origin, and heritage. (Wright, 2020)

F

- **Folx:** A gender-neutral variation on the word "folks" that refers to a group of people (Dictionary.com)

G

- **Gender identity:** Distinct from the term "sexual orientation," refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others. (UW 2021)

- **Gender non-conforming:** An individual whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender. (UW 2021)

H

- **Harassment:** The use of comments or actions that can be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning, and unwelcome. (UW 2021)
- **Health disparities:** A particular kind of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and environmental disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect group of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial or ethnic group or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion. (Healthy People 2020).
- **Health equity:** “Everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.” (RWJF, 2017)
- **Hispanic or Latino:** An ethnic category commonly used interchangeably; Hispanic references Spanish speaking ancestry while Latino/a/x indicates Latin American origin. When used individually, these specifications exclude Brazilians and Haitians, and Spaniards, respectively. There is no clear preference for one term over the other, though nation of origin (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, etc.) is known to be a particularly salient identity. Hispanics and Latinos can belong to any race, as it is not its own racial category (Pew, 2020).
- **Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs):** A degree-granting, public or private nonprofit institution of higher learning with an undergraduate enrollment that is 25% or more Hispanic (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2020).
- **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):** Any college or university that was established before 1964 with the mission of educating Black Americans (as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965). (The Hundred Seven, 2018).

I

- **Implicit bias:** Negative associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold and that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions; also known as unconscious or hidden bias (UW 2021)
- **Inclusion:** Providing equal opportunity to all people to fully engage themselves in creating an environment and a cultural attitude whereby everyone and every group feels accepted, has value, and is supported by a foundation based on trust and mutual respect (Wright, 2020).
- **Indian Country:** A statutory term referring to land that is located within the internal boundaries of an Indian reservation that is under the jurisdiction of the United States government. Defined in 18 U.S.C. § 1151 and 40 C.F.R. § 171.3 (Cornell Law School, no date).
- **Indigenous peoples:** People who inherit and practice unique cultures, languages, and ways of relating to people and the environment that are distinct from the dominant societies in which they live (United Nations, 2020)
- **Institutional racism:** The ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes and opportunities for different groups based on racial discrimination (UW 2021)
- **Internalized racism:** Private racial beliefs held by and within individuals as beliefs, biases, and prejudices. For people of color, it can involve believing in negative messages about oneself or

one's racial group as a direct result of systemic racism experienced on an individual level (AECF, 2020; Bivens 2020)

- **Interrogate:** In the context of Critical Race Theory, a process that examines policies and practices that are taken for granted by prioritizing the voices of participants and respecting the multiple roles held by scholars of color (Chapman, 2007; Hardeman & Karbeah, 2020)
- **Intersectionality:** Frameworks and strategies that address a vision of racial justice that embraces the intersections of race, gender, class, and the array of barriers that disempower those who are marginalized in society; coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (African American Policy Forum, no date).
- **"Isms":** A way of describing any attitude, action or institutional structure that subordinates (oppresses) a person or group because of their target group. For example, color (racism), gender (sexism), economic status (classism), older age (ageism), religion (e.g., anti-Semitism), sexual orientation (heterosexism), language/immigrant status (xenophobia), etc. (UW 2021)

J

- **Jim Crow laws.** State and local statutes in the US enacted after the Civil War to legalize segregation. Named for the character "Jim Crow" in minstrel routines in the 1830s where a white actor performed in Blackface (History.com, 2021).

L

- **Latinx:** A gender-neutral alternative to Latino/a. An intentional deviation from the gendered Spanish language to either assert individual identity preferences or signal inclusiveness. *Not fully integrated beyond academic usage. (see Pew, 2020)
- **LGBTQIA:** An inclusive term for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. (UW 2021)

M

- **Marginalization:** A view or process that keeps people who lack power outside of the power center, at the margins (based on Crenshaw, 1991).
- **Microaggression:** The verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, insults, or belittlement, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon discriminatory belief systems (UW 2021)
- **Middle Eastern Northern African (MENA).** Originating from the countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa. Usually applied to describe the geographic region for purposes of trade and commerce, which can be traced back to colonialism. The US Office of Management and Budget, which sets the racial categories used for the Census and other purposes, considers people from MENA to be white (Pew Stateline, 2014). This is outdated and dislocating for people whose origins are in those regions and is inconsistent with their identities since it only applies in the US.
- **Misgendering:** When someone incorrectly identifies a person, such as a transgender person, by using the wrong label (such as Mr. or Ms.) or pronoun (such as she, he, or they). (Unity First, 2019)
- **Misogyny:** Extreme form of sexism; hatred or extreme discrimination against women (Blackburn Center, 2020)
- **Misogynoir:** Racist, anti-Black misogyny experienced by Black women (Blackburn Center, 2020).

- **Multicultural Competency:** A process of embracing diversity and learning about people from other cultural backgrounds. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world, and an openness to learning from them. (UW 2021)

N

- **Native American (see American Indian).**
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander:** A person having origins in any of the original people of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands (US Census Bureau, 2020)
- **Neurodiversity:** The concept that humans don't come in a one-size-fits-all neurologically 'normal' package. It recognizes that all variations of human neurological function need to be respected as just another way of being, and that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal/natural variations in the human genome. (Unity First, 2019)
- **Nonbinary:** A person who identifies as neither a man nor a woman and sees themselves outside the gender binary. This is sometimes shortened to N.B. or enby. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. (Unity First, 2019)

O

- **One-drop rule:** In the United States, any person with any known Black ancestry is defined as Black. In the Jim Crow South, this became known as the “one-drop rule.” (Davis, 1991).
- **Oppression:** The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures. (UW 2021)

P

- **Paper bag test:** Within Black communities, a historical practice of preference shown to individuals whose skin was as light in color as a brown paper bag (Kerr, 2006).
- **Passing:** A social phenomenon of being perceived, and choosing to be perceived, as part of a particular racial group on the basis of appearance and behaviors (adapted from Davis, 1991).
- **Patriarchy:** Actions and beliefs that prioritize masculinity. Patriarchy is practiced systemically in the ways and methods through which power is distributed in society (jobs and positions of power given to men in government, policy, criminal justice, etc.) while also influencing how we interact with one another interpersonally (gender expectations, sexual dynamics, space-taking, etc.). (UW 2021)
- **People of Color:** A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latinx, and Native American, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian descent; as opposed to the collective “white”. (UW 2021)
- **Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs):** Those institutions of higher learning in which white people make up more than 50% of the student enrollment and where the faculty, leadership, and culture are white.

- **Prejudice:** An inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment and can be rooted in stereotypes that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics (UW 2021)
- **Privilege:** Exclusive access to or availability of material and immaterial resources based on the membership in a dominant social group. (UW 2021)
- **Psychological safety:** A climate in which people are comfortable being (and expressing) themselves without fear of being punished or humiliated (Edmondson and Mortenson, 2021)

Q

- **Queer:** An umbrella term that can refer to anyone who transgresses society's view of gender or sexuality. The definitional indeterminacy of the word Queer, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics: "A zone of possibilities." (UW 2021)

R

- **Race:** A social construct with no biological basis or scientific standing that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly skin color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. (UW 2021)
- **Racial capitalism:** The process of deriving value from the racial identity of others (Harvard Law Review, Leong, 2013)
- **Racial equity:** Equity involves trying to be just, impartial, and fair and to give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. Equality aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives but it can only bring equity if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things (adapted from AECF, Equity v. Equality, 2020).
- **Racial justice:** The systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. All people are able to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of race, ethnicity or the community in which they live. (AECF, 2020)
- **Racialization:** A classification system that emerged in support of European colonialism, oppression, and discrimination. It does not represent the patterns of human biological diversity but has been tied historically to the use of race to explain a belief with no scientific basis in the inherent superiority and inferiority of different groups based on skin color, facial features, and hair type. (AAPA, 2019)
- **Racism:** A complex system of racial hierarchies and inequities that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. It includes the micro or individual level of personal beliefs, both conscious and unconscious or implicit; interpersonal actions such as bigotry, hate speech or racial violence; organizational or structural discrimination such as promotion and salary disparities; and societal or systemic level, e.g., discriminatory laws, policies and practices (adapted from AECF, 2020)
- **Reconstruction.** In US history, the period after the Civil War where constitutional amendments were enacted to provide Black people with equal protection and the right to vote. Ended in 1877 when the Supreme Court blocked Congressional efforts to protect formerly enslaved people (Equal Justice Initiative, 2021)
- **Reparations:** The legal concept and process of addressing human rights violations through compensation to address past wrongs. May take many forms, including individual payments and settlements, scholarships, waiving fees, and initiatives to offset injustices, including land-based compensation, economic development, apologies, and other means. Applied to US

slavery, it means that the US Government, corporations, and individuals who benefitted from the forced free labor of enslaved people should provide reparations (N'COBRA, 2020). In the US, "reparations would mean a revolution of the American consciousness, a reconciling of our self-image as the great democratizer with the facts of our history." (Coates, 2014)

S

- **Safe space:** Refers to an environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule, or denial of experience (NC State Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity)
- **Self-determination:** The right of an individual or a group of people to make choices and direct their own lives, including the right to create organizations that serve their interests. Used in disability rights, civil rights, and human rights, and other fields (NMAAHC <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/foundations-black-power>)
- **Sexual orientation:** An individual's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are separate and independent of one another. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. (UW 2021)
- **Social determinants of health:** Conditions in the environment where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide variety of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks (Healthy People 2030)
- **Social justice:** A form of activism based on principles of equity and inclusion that encompasses a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and society as a whole. (UW 2021)
- **Stereotype:** A form of generalization rooted in blanket beliefs and false assumptions, a product of processes of categorization that can result in a prejudiced attitude, uncritical judgment, and intentional or unintentional discrimination. Stereotypes are typically negative, based on little information that does not recognize individualism and personal agency. (UW 2021)
- **Structural inequality:** Systemic disadvantage(s) of one social group compared to other groups, rooted and perpetuated through discriminatory practices (conscious or unconscious) that are reinforced through institutions, ideologies, representations, policies/laws, and practices. When these inequalities are related to racial/ethnic discrimination, it's referred to as systemic or structural racism. (UW 2021)
- **Structural racism:** Structural racism (or structural racialization) is racial bias across institutions and society. It describes the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of factors that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. (Unity First, 2019)
- **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. Sometimes the term is used to refer to systemic racism. (UW 2021)

T

- **Tokenism:** Presence without meaningful participation, with the expectation that a single individual represents all the members of a group they belong to. For example, a superficial invitation for the participation of members of a certain socially oppressed group, who are expected to speak for the whole group without giving this person a real opportunity to speak for themselves. (UW 2021)

- **Transgender:** People who identify with the characteristics, roles, behaviors, or desires of a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth. (Unity First, 2019)
- **Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs):** TCUs are institutions created by tribal governments to provide higher education to American Indians through programs that are locally and culturally based, holistic, and supportive. There are 37 TCUs with more than 75 sites in more than 30 states. All offer associate degrees; 14 offer baccalaureate programs; and five offer master's degree programs (AIHEC, no date).
- **Trigger or triggering event:** Something that makes you relive a trauma (Unity First, 2019)

U

- **Unconscious bias:** Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values. (Unity First, 2019)

W

- **White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (US Bureau of the Census, 2020).
- **White fragility:** Feelings of guilt, sadness, confusion, defensiveness, or fear experienced by white people when they are challenged by racial stress, which triggers a range of defensive moves such as calling law enforcement for assistance or avoiding situations perceived to be uncomfortable. Can have the effect of making people of color solely responsible for navigating inappropriately racialized situations due to the discomfort and denial of white people. (Term coined by Robin DiAngelo in her book *White Fragility*; described by NMAAHC, 2021)
- **White nationalism:** Belief rooted in white supremacy and feelings of entitlement and racial superiority that calls for the US to be an all-white nation because of belief that diversity will lead to the destruction of whiteness and white culture (NMAAHC, 2021).
- **White privilege:** "Since white people in America hold most of the political, institutional, and economic power, they receive advantages that nonwhite groups do not." (NMAAHC, 2021)
- **White supremacy:** An ideology in which white people are believed to be superior to nonwhite people (NMAAHC, 2021).
- **Whiteness:** The way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups are compared (NMAAHC, 2021)

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