

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Vocab

Ableism: This can refer to either individual or institutional actions and language that disadvantage or disempower people with disabilities, people experiencing disabilities, or disabled people. Ableism includes mental, physical, and emotional disabilities.

Affinity Bias: Unconscious preferences we have for people who are more like us.

Allyship: Allyship is a philosophy rooted in action; it demands doing what is necessary to recognize and subvert systems of oppression. Allyship is a process, is based on trust and accountability, looks different for everyone based on your identities, experiences, and spheres of influence, and is not self-defined (i.e., you don't to label yourself as an "ally"). Recently, allyship has been critiqued as being too passive and replaced by accompliceship. For a more robust discussion of this topic see the article "[Accomplices not Allies](#)" as well as www.whiteaccomplices.org.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. (i.e. a person assigned female at birth identifies as female).

Class: Class refers to how much wealth you have access to through property, inheritance, family support, investments, or other wealth not directly associated to wage earning. It is different than socioeconomic status.

Code-switching: The practice of altering behavior, appearance, and language to fit in. Code-switching happens for many reasons, but in the DEI context, code-switching typically refers to the practice by people with marginalized identities of changing their behavior, appearance, and language to assimilate to the dominant culture and gain access to advantages experienced by people with dominant identities.

Cultural competence(y) is the ability to interact effectively across various facets of diversity, to flex with differences. Cultural competence is what we need to be inclusive. It requires (1) being self-aware of your own culture, assumptions, values, styles, biases, attitudes, privilege, etc.; (2) understanding others' cultures, assumptions, values, styles, biases, attitudes, privilege, etc.; and (3) based on this knowledge, understanding your potential impact on others and interacting with them in a situationally appropriate way.

Colorblindness: The process by which a person attempts to ignore the existence of race or skin color in service of seeing past race and just seeing the person. This de-emphasizing of race, however, ignores the real, lived experience of people of color in the US and ignores their experience. We often shy away from using this term when possible because it is also ableist in that it diminishes the experiences of people who are actually blind or experience visual impairments.

Confirmation Bias: Our tendency to interpret information based on a way that confirms our own previous beliefs and experiences.

Culture: A set of shared ideas, customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices shared by a group of people that is constantly changing, in subtle and major ways.

Disability: A mental, emotional, or physical difference that limits a person in everyday activities. Increasingly, disability is being discussed as a social construct, meaning that the mental, emotional, and physical norms from which we then determine what is different or what is a disability are arbitrary.

Diversity: The differences among us based on which we experience advantages or encounter barriers in access to opportunities and resources. Race and ethnicity is not the only way in which we are diverse as a group. There are countless visible and invisible facets of diversity. Furthermore, a person cannot be “diverse” (as in “diverse candidate”). Diversity is the outcome of inclusion and equity efforts.

Equity: An approach based in fairness to dismantle systems that privilege and disadvantage people based on their identities. In practice, it ensures everyone is given equal opportunity to thrive; this means that resources may be divided and shared unequally to make sure that each person can access an opportunity. Equity takes into account that people have different access to resources because of system of oppression and privilege. Equity seeks to balance that disparity.

Ethnicity: A group of people who identify with one another based on shared culture.

Inclusion: Celebrating, valuing, and amplifying perspectives, voices, styles, and identities that have been marginalized. Inclusion is not merely tolerating or accommodating differences; it’s about actively valuing and honoring it. Inclusion is also not about surmounting, overcoming, or transcending differences to focus on “our common humanity.” Diversity is what we are, and inclusion is what we do.

Gender Binary: The false assumption that there are only two genders, male and female.

Gender Expression/Presentation: The way that someone outwardly displays their gender through clothing, style, demeanor, and behavior.

Gender Identity: Refers how a person self identifies on the gender spectrum. There are countless ways in which people may identify themselves. Gender is a universe and we are all stars.

Genderqueer: A person whose gender identity or gender expression does not align with the gender binary.



Indigenous: Also known as first peoples, aboriginal peoples, native peoples, or autochthonous peoples, indigenous people are ethnic groups who are descended from and identify with the original inhabitants of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently.

Intersectionality: A term coined by feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality originally was created to account for the ways in which black women experience both racism and sexism. The term has now expanded to account for the ways that an individual can experience multiple forms of oppression based on multiple marginalized identities. A salient quote on intersectionality is Audre Lorde's quote "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

Justice: Justice is the end goal of equity efforts. Justice is the result of dismantling systems of oppression and privilege that create barriers to people's ability to access resources (e.g., the "isms").

Microaggressions: Unconscious everyday behaviors that often unintentionally disempower someone based on a marginalized identity (real or perceived). They can feel small or subtle to the person engaging in the microaggression, but the impact can be large for the recipient. If experienced chronically, a person can feel, "death by a thousand tiny cuts."

Oppression: The flip side of privilege, oppression constitutes mistreatment we experience or barriers and disadvantages we encounter by virtue of one or more of our identities, called "marginalized" or "disadvantaged" identities. Systems of oppression refer to systems of power in society that advantage certain groups over others, and include ideologies such as racism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, elitism, classism, ableism, nativism, colonialism, ageism, and sizeism. (collectively "the isms").

People of color: This term is a blanket term to include those who do not identify as only white or Caucasian. This is the preferred and most inclusive term, currently.

Privilege: The flip side of oppression, privilege constitutes advantages we receive, consciously or not consciously, by virtue of one or more of our identities, called these "dominant identities". These advantages are upheld by systems of power that advantage certain groups over others, and include ideologies such as racism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, elitism, classism, ableism, nativism, colonialism, ageism, and sizeism. (collectively "the isms"). Privilege is the freedom from stress, anxiety, fear of harm related to your identity.

Race (versus Ethnicity): Race is a false construct that conflates skin color and ancestry with behavior, intelligence, and culture. Though race is a false construct, it has real consequences for all people.

Romantic Orientation: An affinity for someone that evokes the desire to engage in an emotionally intimate relationship often described based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are romantically attracted to.



Sex or Biological/Natal Sex: A term used to classify individuals as male, female, or intersex (often at birth or based on an ultrasound) based on their chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics.

Sexual Orientation: the type of attraction one feels for others, often described based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are sexually attracted to.

Socioeconomic status: The amount of money you earn in wages each month or year. This can change rapidly.

Stereotypes (versus Norms): Stereotypes refer to the widely held, oversimplified ideas we hold about a person based on their identities (real or perceived). Usually, stereotypes are based on assumptions, popular opinion, or misinformation, are generally negative, are sweeping and simple, and are often characterized by words such as “always” and “never.” Norms, on the other hand, are based on observable experiences within a community, are not necessarily negative, are helpful and intended to guide people in their actions, are complex, and are often qualified by words such as “often,” “sometimes,” and “may.”

Transgender: A person whose gender identity (and sometimes expression) is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans* is an umbrella term that refers to various different ways that people identify differently than their biological sex.

Unconscious Bias: Unconscious, subtle, involuntary assumptions or judgments we make every day based on our prior experiences and culture

