

# Shared Language: Social Justice Glossary of Concepts

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**  
san antonio

## WHY A GLOSSARY OF CONCEPTS?

Words can be powerful. Over time many terms and concepts have evolved and carry different meanings. The purpose of this glossary of concepts is to promote a shared understanding of words and concepts related to racial and social justice.

***We hope this glossary will help provide a framework & springboard for continued dialogue about racial/social justice and equity/inclusion.***

This glossary is not exhaustive and includes some of the most commonly used terms. This glossary is a compendium of terms derived from resources including other YWCA affiliates, Harvard University, and Racial Equity Tools.

# GLOSSARY

## Terms are ordered alphabetically.

**Ally:** A person who is not a member of a marginalized or disadvantaged group but who expresses or gives support to that group.

**Anti-racist:** an active and conscious effort to work against multidimensional aspects of racism,\*

**Bias:** Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in an unfair or negative way. Unconscious bias, also known as implicit bias, is defined as “attitudes and stereotypes that influence judgment, decision-making, and behavior in ways that are outside of conscious awareness and/or control”.

**Cultural Appropriation:** Originally coined to describe the effects of colonialism, cultural appropriation generally entails adopting aspects of a minority culture by someone outside the culture, without sufficient understanding of its context or respect for the meaning and value of the original. Cultural appropriation done in a way that promotes disrespectful cultural or racial stereotypes is considered particularly harmful.

**CIS Gender:** From the Latin cis-, meaning “on this side.” A person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth. For example, a person identified as female at birth who identifies as a woman can be said to be a cisgender woman.

**Disability:** A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of an individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment (from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

\*Robert J. Patterson, professor of African American Studies at Georgetown University,

# GLOSSARY

**Diversity:** The condition of being different or having differences. Differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, health, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, religion, physical size, education level, job and function, personality traits, and other human differences. Some describe organizational diversity as social heterogeneity.

**Diversity v. Inclusion v. Belonging:** Diversity typically means proportionate representation across all dimensions of human difference. Inclusion means that everyone is included, visible, heard, and considered. Belonging means that everyone is treated and feels like a full member of the larger community, and can thrive.

**Equity:** Fair treatment for all while striving to identify and eliminate inequities and barriers.

**Gaslighting:** First popularized in the 1944 movie Gas Light, it means a deliberate attempt to undermine a victim's sense of reality or sanity. In a work context, it usually means behaviors that undermine the success, self-confidence, self-esteem or wellbeing of the target. For people in underrepresented or less powerful groups, it is more likely to occur, with more severe and harmful cumulative effects. Tactics can include withholding (critical information, meeting invitations, silent treatment), isolation (exclusion, causing conflict with coworkers), and discrediting (consistently shooting down the target's ideas, ignoring or taking credit for them).

**Gender Nonconforming or Gender Nonbinary:** A way of identifying and/or expressing oneself outside the binary gender categories of male/masculine and female/feminine.

# GLOSSARY

**Intersectionality:** The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, and their multiple effects on the same individuals or groups. Also refers to the view that overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and inequality can more effectively be addressed together.

**LGBTQ+:** An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexuality

**Latinx/Latine:** Relating to people of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina). Latine is an alternative to Latinx that describes people of Latin American origin or descent using "e" as a genderless descriptor. In Spanish, the 'e' is a vowel that is already used in genderless words, such as 'estudiante'.

**Microaggression:** A comment or action that unconsciously or unintentionally expresses or reveals a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group, such as a racial minority. These small, common occurrences include insults, slights, stereotyping, undermining, devaluing, delegitimizing, overlooking or excluding someone. Over time, microaggressions can isolate and alienate those on the receiving end, and affect their health and wellbeing.

**Oppressed:** A system for gaining, abusing and maintaining structural and institutional power for the benefit of a limited dominant class. The inequitable distribution of structural and institutional power. A system where a select few hoard power, wealth and resources at the detriment of the many. The lack of access, opportunity, safety, security and resources that Minoritized populations experience; a direct result of a vacuum created by privilege. A state of being that is the opposite of social justice.

# GLOSSARY

**Prejudice:** An assumption of knowledge about something or someone not rooted in personal experiences with the particular some

**Privilege:** An unearned, sustained advantage that comes from race, gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, age, and other differences. For example, readers are invited to “unpack” white and male privilege in these papers by Wellesley College’s Peggy McIntosh.

**Power:** The ability to name or define. The ability to decide. The ability to set the rule, standard, or policy. The ability to change the rule, standard, or policy to serve your needs, wants or desires. The ability to influence decisions makers to make choices in favor of your cause, issue or concern.

**Pronouns:** Words to refer to a person after initially using their name. Gendered pronouns include she and he, her and him,,hers and his, and herself and himself.

“Preferred gender pronouns” (or PGPs) are the pronouns that people ask others to use in reference to themselves. They may be plural genderneutral pronouns such as they, them, their(s). Or, they may be ze (rather than she or he) or hir (rather than her(s) and him/his). Some people state their pronoun preferences as a form of allyship.

**Queer:** An umbrella term used by people who wish to describe themselves as neither heterosexual nor cisgender.

**Race:** A social rather than biological construction. An umbrella term used to minimize ethnic variety and emphasize broader group identity markers most often rooted in appearance, skin tone, and ancestral homelands or origins.

# GLOSSARY

**Racism:** A belief that racial differences produce or are associated with inherent superiority or inferiority. Racially-based prejudice, discrimination, hostility or hatred. Institutionalized racism, also known as systemic racism, refers to forms of racism that are engrained in society or organizations. It is when entire racial groups are discriminated against, or consistently disadvantaged, by larger social systems, practices, choices or policies.

**Racial Profiling:** The systemic targeting, surveillance, policing, and harassment of folk of color that begins with the assumption that folk of color are more likely to be criminals. At the community level, the discriminatory practice of racial profiling has emerged as a national concern. African-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Arab-Americans, have reported being unfairly targeted by police who use race, ethnicity, national origin, religion and even gender when choosing which individuals should be subjected to stops, searches, seizures, and frisks on the streets, during routine traffic stops, at national borders and in airports.

**Social Justice:** 1. An anti-oppression orientation to social and political organization. 2. The process and goal of addressing the root causes of institutional and structural "isms." 3. A vision of equality equity the world where all groups of people can live (and be perceived) as fully human on all levels (personal, social, institutional, and structural). 4. A vision of the world not rooted in the dominance of any one group over all others. Such a vision would include recognizing the inherent worth and connectedness of all people, animals, plants, and all other resources of our planet and universe. Additionally, this vision of the world would not be rooted in a scarcity model that devalues things that are abundant (many can have access to or can acquire) and highly values that which is scarce or rare (very few can have access to or acquire).

# GLOSSARY

**URM:** An abbreviation for Under-Represented Minorities. Some institutions have defined sub-groups within larger racial/ethnic minority groups that are particularly under-represented relative to their size. For example, in a given field, Mexican-Americans may be an under-represented minority, even if Hispanic people are otherwise proportionately represented.

**Violence:** A primary tool of oppression. A coercive spectrum of tools used to acquire, build and/or maintain power. A continuum of economic, political, cultural, religious, psychological, and physical resources, behaviors and practices used as vehicles of violence.

**White Fragility:** Coined by Robin D'Angelo, it is used to describe the privilege that accrues to white people living in a society that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. D'Angelo argues that this builds an expectation of always feeling comfortable and safe, which in turn lowers the ability to tolerate racial stress and triggers a range of defensive reactions.

# RESOURCES

**For additional glossary resources, please visit:**

**Harvard Human Resources:** <https://dib.harvard.edu/terms>

**Racial Equity Tools:** <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

**YWCA Boston:** [https://www.ywboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MISS\\_VIT\\_BLD-SUPP-FOR-MISS\\_TRN-AND-DEVEL\\_SJ-GLOSSARY\\_MARCH\\_2016.pdf](https://www.ywboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MISS_VIT_BLD-SUPP-FOR-MISS_TRN-AND-DEVEL_SJ-GLOSSARY_MARCH_2016.pdf)