

Social Justice Terminology

This is a list of carefully researched and thoughtfully discussed definitions for key social justice terms. It is by no means a comprehensive list, but it is a good place for us to start. If there is a term that you feel should be included here, please let us know.

Ableism: A system of oppression that includes discrimination and social prejudice against people with intellectual, emotional, and physical disabilities, their exclusion, and the valuing of people and groups that do not have disabilities.

Ageism: A system of oppression that works against the young and the old and values individuals in their 30s to 50s.

Ally: a person who is a member of an advantaged social group who takes a stand against oppression, works to eliminate oppressive attitudes and beliefs in themselves and their communities, and works to interrogate and understand their privilege.

Anti-Semitism: the systematic discrimination against and oppression of Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture and traditions.

Classism: The institutional, cultural, societal, and individual beliefs and practices that assign value to people based in their socio-economic class. Here, members of more privileged socio-economic classes are seen as having a greater value.

Collusion: Thinking and acting in ways that support dominant systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Both privileged and oppressed groups can collude with oppression.

Discrimination: When members of a more powerful group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful group (Qkit: LGBTQ Residence Hall Programming Toolkit, UC Riverside)

Gender: Socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society deems masculine or feminine. This social construct is often linked to and confused with the biological construct of sex.

Gender Binary: a social construction of gender in which there are two distinct and opposite genders: male/masculine/men and female/feminine/women.

Gender Expression: a person's presentation of their gender. These outward expressions of gender can be intentional or unintentional and involve one's mannerisms, clothing, hair, speech, clothing, and activities (and more!).

Gender Identity: a person's innate sense of their own gender: being a man, a woman, a girl, a boy, in between, or outside of the gender binary.

Heterosexual: an identity term for a female-identified person who is attracted to male-identified people or a male-identified person who is attracted to female-identified people.

Homophobia: the fear, hatred, and intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as gay or lesbian.

Horizontal Oppression: When people from targeted groups believe, act on, or enforce dominant systems of oppression against other members of targeted groups.

Internalized Oppression: the fear and self-hatred of one's own identity or identity group. Internalized oppression is learned and is based in the acceptance of oppressive stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs about one's own identity group.

Intersectionality: A feminist sociological model and/or lens for critical analysis that focuses on the intersections of multiple, mutually-reinforcing systems of oppression, power, and privilege. Intersectional theorists look at how the individual experience is impacted by multiple axes of oppression and privilege. Variables include, but are not limited to: race, gender, ethnicity, religion ability,

education, sexual orientation, sexuality, gender identity, gender expression, class, first language, citizenship, and age. (J. Beal 2011)

Intersex: A person whose genitals, secondary sex characteristics, chromosomes, and/or hormone levels do not fit into the medical/societal definition of male or female. This is the preferred term to hermaphrodite.

Islamophobia: the irrational fear or hatred of Islam, Muslims, Islamic traditions and practices, and, more broadly, those who appear to be Muslim.

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 that saturate most aspects of life in our society.

- Oppression denotes structural and material constraints that significantly shape a person's life chances and sense of possibility.
- Oppression also signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privilege groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups.
- Oppression resides not only in external social institutions and norms but also within the human psyche as well.
- Eradicating oppression ultimately requires struggle against all its forms, and that building coalitions among diverse people offers the most promising strategies for challenging oppression systematically. (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, editors. Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook. New York: Routledge.)

Power: the ability to get what you want (The GLSEN Jumpstart Guide: Examining Power, Privilege, and Oppression).

Prejudice: A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be

recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics. (Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. A Community Builder's Tool Kit. Claremont, CA: Claremont Graduate University.)

Privilege: A group of unearned cultural, legal, social, and institutional rights extended to a group based on their social group membership. Individuals with privilege are considered to be the normative group, leaving those without access to this privilege invisible, unnatural, deviant, or just plain wrong. Most of the time, these privileges are automatic and most individuals in the privileged group are unaware of them. Some people who can “pass” as members of the privileged group might have access to some levels of privilege (J. Beal 2009).

Pronouns: a word that substitutes for a noun. Most people have pronouns that they expect others to use for them. Most cisgender individuals use pronouns that line up with their birth-assigned sex. Many GenderQueer and Trans folks have selected pronouns that best suit who they are and sometimes generate new terms.

Racism: oppression against individuals or groups based on their actual or perceived racial identity.

Religious Oppression: oppression against individuals or groups based on their religious beliefs and practices.

Sexism: a system of oppression that privileges men, subordinates women, and devalues practices associated with women.

Sexual Orientation: a person's sexual and emotional attractions, not necessarily dependent on behavior. Terms associated with sexual orientation include: gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, heterosexual, and more!

Social Justice: a process and a goal. A commitment to a socially just world and the committed actions to make that world a reality. Or, “The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes 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, their society, and the broader world in which we live.” (Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice)

Transgender: an umbrella term for people who do not identify with their birth-assigned sex and/or whose gender expression does not conform to the societal expectations. Trans* is used as an inclusive abbreviation.

Transsexual – people who change their presentation to express their gender identity. Examples of these transitions might include: changing one’s name, pronouns, hair, or manner of dress, and medical transitions, like gender affirmation surgery, hormone replacement therapy.

White Privilege: The concrete benefits of access to resources and social rewards and the power to share the norms and values of society that Whites receive, tacitly or explicitly, by virtue of their position in a racist society. (Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, Second Edition, Routledge, 2007)

Xenophobia: the fear and hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange.

Suffolk University Boston