

ABC's of Social Justice

A Glossary of Working Language for
Socially Conscious Conversation*

* This is not intended to be a comprehensive glossary of all the language used in conversations regarding social justice, diversity, and allyship. In every context, the meaning of these words may change and evolve. This glossary and its definitions provide a starting point for engaging in open and honest conversation, and is a tool meant to build a shared language of understanding.

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active listening: a process of hearing and understanding what someone is saying by empathizing with the speaker(s) and considering their perspective(s)

adultism: prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions, such as treating someone as weak or unintelligent because they are not adults; usually those of older persons against younger persons

affirmative action: action taken by a government or private institution to make up for past discrimination in education, work, or promotion on the basis of age, birth, color, creed, nationality, ethnic origin, physical or mental ability, familial status, gender, language, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation

ageism: prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions, such as referring to someone's age in a context in which age isn't relevant, based on differences in age; usually those of younger persons against older persons

agency: the ability to act independently and make free choices; the ability to make conscious decisions for oneself

agent: a member of a dominant or majority group

allyship: an active verb; leveraging personal positions of power and privilege to fight oppression by respecting, working with, and empowering marginalized voices and communities; using one's own voice to project others', less represented, voices

assimilation: the process of adapting or adjusting to the culture or behaviors of a dominant or majority group or nation

Be Uncomfortable: the act of putting yourself outside of your comfort zone, and into situations in which you are not privileged where you otherwise would be

Does not include putting oneself in physical danger!

bias: an inclination of preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment

bicultural: a person who functions effectively and appropriately and can select appropriate behaviors, values, and attitudes within either of two cultures; a person who identifies with two cultures

capitalism: an economic and political order that relies on a mostly-private, unequal market system of production and consumption

cis: a gender identity in which a person's experiences of their gender matches the gender and sex they were assigned at birth

cisgenderism: a socially constructed assumption that everyone's gender matches their biological sex, and that that is the norm from which all other gender identities deviate

civil rights: the rights established and ensured by a state government regarding political and social equality

classism: any attitude or institutional practice which subordinates people of a certain socioeconomic class due to income, occupation, education, and/or their economic status; a system that works to keep certain communities within a set socioeconomic class and prevents social and economic mobility

coalition: an alliance or union of different people, communities, or groups working for a common cause

code-switching: the conscious or unconscious act of 'switching' between two languages, dialects, or intonations depending on the specific situation of who one is speaking to, what is being discussed, and the relationship and power and/or community dynamics between those involved

colonialism: the exploitative historical, political, social, and economic system established when one group or force takes control over a colonized territory or group; the unequal relationship between colonizer and the colonized

color-blindness: a term referring to the disregard of racial characteristics. Proponents of color-blind practices believe that treating people equally inherently leads to a more equal society and/or that racism and race privilege no longer exercise the power they once did, while opponents of color-blind practices believe that color-blindness allows those in power to disregard or ignore the history of oppression and how it is experienced today.

cultural appropriation: the act of members of dominant/powerful/privileged groups claiming ownership of, or the rights to, less powerful/privileged groups' cultural and/or religious symbols, dress, and ceremonies

cultural competence: the ability to effectively and empathetically work and engage with people of different cultural identities and backgrounds in order to provide safe and accountable spaces for dialogue and discourse; cultural competence is relevant in all fields of work, education, and informal social interactions

democracy: a governmental system whose actions and principles value and reflect the people's views through their votes

dialogue: a bi-directional conversation between people of two different groups or communities coming together to create and recreate multiple understandings of a topic or issue

disability: being differently abled (physically, mentally, emotionally) from that which society has structured to be the norm in such a way so that the person is unable to move, or has difficulty moving—physically, socially, economically—through life

disenfranchised: being deprived of power and/or access to rights, opportunities, and services

discrimination: actions or thoughts, based on conscious or unconscious bias, that favor one group over others

diversity: a multiplicity of shared and different individual and group experiences, values, beliefs, and characteristics among people

Educate yourself: taking time to learn about issues from other communities for oneself without making people of those communities spend time teaching you. By learning about the histories and experiences of target groups, we can become better allies and advocates.

empathy: a learned skill that allows one to recognize and deeply listen to another's story or experiences, and connect them to common understandings and emotions; differs from sympathy

equity: the situation in which all people or groups are given access to the correct number and types of resources for them so as to achieve equal results; differs from equality, which focuses on the equal distribution of resources rather than equal results

ethnocentrism: consciously or unconsciously privileging one's own ethnic group over others; assuming or judging other groups according to one's own group values

feminism: the pursuit of the social, economic, and political equality of all people, regardless of sex, gender, sexuality, race, geographical location, body size, socioeconomic status, physical and mental ability, and religion

fundamental attribution error: the often unconscious bias to place more emphasis on perceived internal or innate characteristics to explain someone's behavior in a given situation; doesn't take into consideration the external factors that can, and often do, impact an individual's behavior

gender: the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and characteristics that a given society categorizes as 'masculine' and 'feminine'; not defined by one's biological sex

gender identity: a person's individual and subjective sense of their own gender; gender identities exist in a spectrum, and are not just masculine and feminine

gender neutral pronouns: pronouns that do not adhere to the he:she and his:her binary, and can refer to a number of different gender identities

genocide: the intentional attempt to completely erase or destroy a peoples through structural oppression and/or open acts of physical violence

gentrification: demographic shifts that usually occur in big cities in which upper-middle class and/or racially privileged individuals and businesses move into historically working class and poor and/or racially oppressed neighborhoods and communities

Give grace: assuming best intentions from others and always approaching a situation with your own best intentions

hegemony: one group or community holding all authoritative power or dominance over other groups in a given society, geographical region, and/or political system

heteronormativity: a socially constructed assumption that heterosexuality is the natural norm from which all other sexual preferences deviate; the assumption that everyone identifies as heterosexual until shown or proven otherwise

homophobia: on a personal level, homophobia is an irrational fear, aversion, or dislike of homosexualities and people who identify as homosexual; on a social level, homophobia is the ingrained structural discrimination against homosexuality and those who identify as

homosexual that prevents access to certain resources or opportunities and inhibits individuals from feeling safe or able to be socially recognized as homosexual

horizontal hostility: the structural strategy to intentionally place two or more oppressed groups in competition with one another; a strategy that aims to divide and conquer

immigrant: a person who moves out of their country of birth, supposedly for permanent residence in a new country

Indian: a term that is being reclaimed by some peoples known as Native Americans or American Indians

institution: any established law or custom that is accepted as part of a culture

institutional oppression: the systematic mistreatment and dehumanization of any individual based solely on a social identity group with which they identify that is supported and enforced by society and its institutions; based on the belief that people of such a social identity group are inherently inferior

intersectionality: the intersection of race, class, gender, and ability identities within each individual that informs how one views, discusses, and navigates through the world the way each of us views and discusses the world

justice: the establishment or determination of rights according to rules of law and standards of equity; the process or result of using laws to fairly judge crimes and criminality

LGBTQQIA: the umbrella community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, two-spirited, queer, questioning, intersex, and/or asexual

marginalize: the systematic disempowerment of a person or community by denying access to necessary resources, enforcing prejudice through society's institutions, and/or not allowing for that individual or community's voice, history, and perspective to be heard

microaggression: subconscious and often well-meaning actions or remarks that convey an unconscious bias and hurt the person at the receiving end

mobility: the ability to move through society, both physically and socioeconomically

Move Up, Move Up: a phrase used to encourage individuals to be attentive in conversation, and to move up their listening or move up their speaking when appropriate

multiethnic: a person who identifies as coming from two or more ethnic groups; a person whose biological parents come from different ethnic groups

multiracial: a person who identifies as coming from two or more racial groups; a person whose biological parents come from different racial groups

nativism: prejudiced thoughts or discriminatory actions that benefit or show preference to individuals born in a territory over those who have migrated into said territory

nonviolence: a strategy employed by social and civil advocates that stresses social and political change through acts that do not involve physical violence against oneself or others; nonviolent language is used to imply language that does not perpetuate structural inequalities

oppression: the systemic use of institutional power and ideological and cultural hegemony, resulting in one group benefiting at the expense of another; the use of power and the effects of domination

patriarchy: a social system and institution in which men have primary power in the political, social, economic, legal, and familial spheres; patriarchy favors male-dominated thought, and is centralized on the male narrative or perspective of how the world works and should work

People of Color: an umbrella term for any person or peoples that is considered by the society in which they live to be non-white

prejudice: a preconceived, often unconscious, judgment or opinion about a person or group; usually a negative bias

privilege: benefit, advantage, or favor granted to individuals and communities by unequal social structures and institutions

queer: an umbrella term within the LGBTQIA community that refers to anyone who doesn't prescribe to societal views of gender and sexuality; implies elasticity and a resistance to the notion of a predetermined gender and sexual identity based on biology

questioning: someone who is questioning their gender identity and/or sexuality

race: a term used to identify and define individuals as part of a distinct group based on physical characteristics and some cultural and historical commonalities; once used to denote differentiations in humankind based on physiology and biology, race is now understood as a social construct that is not scientifically based, though is still commonly associated with notions of biological difference; race is still sometimes perceived as innate and inalterable

racism: an ideology and institution that reflects the racial worldview in which humans are divided into racial groups and in which races are arranged in a hierarchy where some races are considered innately superior to others; racism is the effect of domination of certain racial groups by other racial groups, historically the domination of people of color by white/European peoples

reclaim: to take back or demand the return of something that was lost or taken away; to restore to a previous state

respect: giving consideration and attention to a given person, group, or situation that takes another's perspective and experiences into account

safe space: spaces in which people, often of marginalized or underrepresented social groups, can say, be, and share their experiences without fear or judgment

saliency: characteristic of a feature that is made prominent, important, or is brought to the forefront of a person's social identity and how they are perceived by others

silencing: the conscious or unconscious act of excluding or inhibiting certain groups' voices, thus preventing their experiences, perspectives, and histories to be heard

slur: an insulting or derogatory comment, reference, or label

social justice: the practice of allyship and coalition work in order to promote equality, equity, respect, and the assurance of rights within and between communities and social groups

solidarity: unity or agreement based on shared interests and objectives; long-term mutual support within and between groups

stereotype: an attitude, belief, feeling, or assumption about a person or group of people that are widespread and socially sanctioned; though stereotypes can be positive and negative, they all have negative effects because they support institutionalized oppression by validating oversimplified beliefs that are often not based on facts

stereotype threat: the risk of internalizing and confirming others' negative biases towards one's social group

supremacy: the superiority of one group of people over other groups of people through a system of domination and subordination

tolerance: acceptance and open-mindedness to cultures, practices, and attitudes that are different from one's own; does not necessitate agreeing with those differences

unconscious bias: negative stereotypes regarding a person or group of people; these biases influence individuals' thoughts and actions without their conscious knowledge. We all have unconscious biases.

union: a formal organization of workers that is formed to protect the rights of its members; a joining together of many things into one

UPstander: a person who chooses to take positive action in the face of injustice in society or in situations in which individuals need personal assistance; the opposite of a bystander

vote: the ability to formally express your opinion and influence politics and legislation in a democracy

white guilt: the individual or collective guilt felt by some white people for the historical and current oppressions experienced by people of color; though white guilt has been described as being a detrimental consequence of racism, experiences associated with white guilt are not comparable to the experiences of systemic oppression faced by marginalized communities

white privilege: the right or advantage provided to people who are considered white; an exemption of social, political, and/or economic burdens placed on non-white people; benefitting from societal structuring that prioritizes white people and whiteness

whiteness: like race, whiteness is a social construct rather than an essential characteristic or biological fact; is used as cultural property, and can be seen to provide material and/or social privilege to those who are considered white, pass as white, or are given honorary white status

xenophobia: the unreasonable fear or dislike of things, cultures, forms of expression, or people that are different from oneself and one's own experiences of the everyday; fear of that which seems foreign or strange

Yes Means Yes: a phrase that defines sexual consent as an “affirmative, unambiguous, and conscious decision by each participant to engage in mutually agreed-upon sexual activity” according to California state legislation; ‘yes means yes’ shifts the responsibility of confirming consent from just one party to all parties involved

SOURCES

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