



Glossary of Terms

Diversity Equity and Inclusion Division

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The Region of Durham (the Region) promotes the use of person-first inclusive language free of racism, stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice and hate. Using inclusive language has the power to create safe, equitable and inclusive spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

It is critical for our personal and collective success that who we are in terms of our cultural identity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliation, age, and all other unique identities are respected and that the language we use reflects acceptance and understanding. We all have a role in fostering and building an inclusive region.

The Region's glossary of terms is a living document that will be updated to reflect changes in terminology as language continues to evolve. To develop this glossary, we consulted with the Region of Durham's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group, as well as inclusive language materials developed by groups and institutions across North America. A complete list of resources can be found at the end of this glossary.

If you have comments or suggestions about the content of this glossary, please send us an email at diversity@durham.ca



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60's Scoop

A period in Canadian history (1960s–1980s) when over thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their families and communities, usually without consent, by child welfare services and placed in non-Indigenous homes, often losing their cultural identity.

94 Calls to Action

Recommendations made by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. They cover areas such as education, justice, and child welfare.

2SLGBTQI+

An acronym that stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning and Intersex and additional gender identities and sexual orientations.

AAPI (Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders)

An umbrella term that includes people with origins in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands. It recognizes the shared and distinct experiences of these communities, particularly in the context of racialization and marginalization in Western societies.

Ableism

Attitudes or belief systems in society that devalue persons with disabilities. People with disabilities are assumed to be less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and take part, and of less value than other people. Ableism can be conscious or unconscious and is embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society.

Accessibility

A general term for the degree of ease that something (e.g., device, service, physical environment and information) can be accessed, used and enjoyed by persons with disabilities. The term implies conscious planning, design and/or effort to make sure something is barrier-free to persons with disabilities. Accessibility also benefits the general population, by making things more usable and practical for everyone, including older people and families with small children. Ontario has laws to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the Ontario Human Rights Code, and the Ontario Building Code.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005

The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement and enforce standards for accessibility related to goods, facilities, employment, accommodations, and buildings. Along with the standards established through the AODA, a target date of January 1, 2025, has been set for making Ontario an accessible province.

Accessible

Does not have obstacles for people with disabilities—something that can be easily reached or obtained; a facility that can be easily entered; information that is easy to access. People with disabilities have the right to equal treatment, which includes the right to accessible workplaces, public transit, health services, restaurants, shops and housing.

Accommodation

Making adjustments to policies, rules, requirements and/or the built environment to ensure that people with Ontario Human Rights Code-related needs have equal opportunities, access and benefits. Accommodation is necessary to address barriers in society that would otherwise prevent people from fully taking part in, and contributing to, the community.

Accommodation does not mean lowering essential qualification standards, which are the skills or attributes that one must meet for a particular job, to graduate from a class or program, etc.

Accommodation is a shared responsibility. Everyone involved, including the person requesting accommodation(s), should co-operate in the process, share relevant information, and jointly explore solutions.

Advocacy

Covers a range of strategies and tactics designed to move people to action. Advocacy tools can include communications, research, education, personal influence, persuasion, coalition building and organizing. The ways in which these tools are applied are often adjusted for different audiences or targets of influence.

AFAB/AMAB

(Assigned female at birth/Assigned male at birth)

Terms used to describe the sex a person was assigned at birth, often used in trans and non-binary communities to discuss gender without reinforcing binary norms.

Affirmative Action

Action designed to address the historic disadvantage that identifiable groups (e.g., women, racialized persons) have experienced by increasing their representation in employment and/or higher education.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

A dialect tracing back to the era of slavery, when enslaved Africans were torn from diverse linguistic backgrounds and forced into English-speaking environments. This dialect was created as a coping mechanism and a means of preserving a sense of community by combining African languages with English. AAVE has evolved significantly since its inception, which is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of African communities throughout history.

African-Canadian

A Canadian of African origin or descent.

African Nova Scotians

A distinct cultural group in Canada descended from Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons, and other African diasporic communities.

Ageism

Discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice toward others or oneself based on age.

Agency

The capacity of individuals or groups to act independently and make their own free choices. In DEI contexts, agency is often discussed in relation to marginalized communities reclaiming power and self-determination.

Allyship

An active and consistent practice in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group. Allyship is not an identity—it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency and accountability with marginalized individualized and/or groups of people. Allyship is not self-defined—a person's work and efforts must be recognized by the people they seek to ally themselves with.

Alternative Format

A method of communication that takes into account a person's abilities. Examples include providing a text version of a website, or a large print version of a document for people with varying visual abilities. Different formats ensure everyone has equal access to the information which is required under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

Alternative (or Alt) Text

Descriptive text that conveys the meaning and context of a visual item in a digital setting, such as a web page or online PDF. Alternative text is designed to make digital content accessible to all. Screen readers can read text aloud so individuals can better interact with digital materials. Well-written, descriptive alternative text reduces ambiguity and improves user experience.

Androgynous

Having physical elements that can be considered both masculine and feminine, whether expressed through sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

Anishinaabe (Ojibwe)

(Phonetic spelling: An-ish-in-ah-beh, Oh-jib-way)

Anishinaabe (other variants include Anishinabe, Anicinape, Nishnaabe, Neshnabé and Anishinabek) refers to a group of culturally and linguistically related First Nations that live in both Canada and the United States, concentrated around the Great Lakes. The Ojibwe, Chippewa, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin, Saulteaux, Nipissing and Mississauga First Nations are Anishinaabeg (plural form of Anishinaabe). Some Oji-Cree First Nations and Métis also include themselves within this cultural-linguistic grouping.

Anti-Asian Racism

The historical and ongoing discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by people of Asian origin, based on others' assumptions about their ethnicity and nationality. People of Asian origin are subjected to specific, overt and subtle racist stereotypes at individual and systemic levels, which lead to their ongoing social, economic, political and cultural marginalization, disadvantage and unequal treatment.

The term Asian encompasses a wide range of identities that the very term Asian can obscure. While they may experience being "othered," specific experiences of anti-Asian racism vary. Some are constantly being perceived to be a threat; some face gendered violence; some are more likely to be subjected to online hate and racist portrayals in the media, while others face Islamophobia and other forms of religious-based discrimination. (see the definition Othered)

Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Black racism refers to policies and practices embedded in Canadian institutions that reflect and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, stereotyping and/or discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization.

Anti-Indigenous Racism

The ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping and injustice experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada. It includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain and perpetuate power imbalances, systemic barriers and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial policies and practices in Canada. Systemic anti-Indigenous racism is present in discriminatory federal policies such as the Indian Act and the residential school system; in the overrepresentation of Indigenous people incarcerated and child welfare systems; as well as inequitable outcomes in education, well-being and health.

Anti-Oppression

Strategies, theories and actions that challenge social and historical inequalities and injustices that are ingrained and operate within our systems and institutions, through policies and practices that allow certain groups to dominate over other groups.

Anti-Oppression Practice

Seeks to recognize the oppression that exists in our society and attempts to mitigate its affects with the goal of equalizing the power imbalance in our communities. It looks at ways to deconstruct power and privilege and to address systemic inequality and advocate for change in systems and thinking that create oppression.

Anti-Racism

An active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional and systemic racism as well as the oppression and injustice racism causes.

Anti-Semitism

Hostility toward or discrimination against Jewish people or communities as religious, ethnic or racial groups.

Asexual/Ace

A sexual orientation describing individuals who experience little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum and may include people who experience romantic attraction or engage in relationships without sexual activity.

Assistive Devices and Technologies

Devices to help people—primarily people with disabilities, health conditions or impairments—to perform a task. Examples of assistive devices and technologies include a wheelchair, personal oxygen tank, assistive listening device, electronic device with adaptive technology, or visible emergency alarm.

Asylum Seeker

A person who is seeking asylum. Until a determination is made, it is impossible to say whether the asylum-seeker is a refugee or not.

Audism

Discrimination toward the Deaf community. It includes a general lack of willingness to accommodate those who cannot hear or are hard of hearing, including the refusal to use American Sign Language (ASL).

Barrier

An overt or covert obstacle that prevents a person from fully taking part in all aspects of society, including physical, architectural, information or communications, attitudinal, economic and technological. The obstacle can be in the form of policies or practices.

Belonging

Having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of political, social and cultural structures that shape one's life—the right to both contribute and make demands upon society and political institutions. Belonging requires mutual power, access and opportunity among all groups and individuals within a shared container (such as a society, organization, club, etc). It is a feeling of security, support and acceptance felt by a person within a space or a system.

Bias

The tendency, inclination or prejudice toward or against something or someone. Biases are mental shortcuts based on social norms and stereotypes.

Bigotry

Intolerance, negative attitudes or stereotypes related to another person's creed, race, sexual orientation, etc.

Biological Sex

The biological classification of people as male and/or female. A doctor usually assigns sex at birth, by visually assessing external anatomy. Sex terms are "male," "female" and "intersex." Biological sex is not to be mistaken for gender which involves personal identity factors.

Biphobia

Animosity, hatred or dislike of bisexual people (see Bisexual) which may manifest in the form of prejudice or bias.

BIPOC

BIPOC is an acronym that stands for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.” It’s often used to mean instead of “marginalized” or “minority.”. This term is not encouraged in discourse as it can exclude some groups and places people into predetermined categorizations.

Biracial

A person whose ancestry includes members of two racial groups.

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually attracted to members of more than one gender.

Black

A social construct referring to people who have dark skin colour and/or other related racialized characteristics. The term has become less of an indicator of skin colour and more of racialized characteristics.

The first letter of Black is often capitalized in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense, conveying an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa.

Black People

People originally of Black, African heritage. Because of a long history of enslavement, colonialism and migration, Black people and communities include people from all over the world, including Canada.

Some Black persons may choose to refer to themselves and members of the same racial group as “a Black” or “Blacks,” however, the use of the noun in the singular and the plural by non-Black people can be offensive and should therefore be avoided in favour of using the adjective “Black,” such as “a Black person” or “Black communities.”

Blindness

Covers a broad spectrum of visual disability, from when a person’s sight is impaired enough to interfere with daily activities like reading, cooking or driving, up to total blindness. Each person’s experience of blindness is unique.

Brave Space

An alternative to the safe space paradigm, a brave space is created by emphasizing the need for courage when discussing diversity and social justice issues rather than the illusion of safety. This better positions groups to accomplish learning goals by having genuine dialogue regarding challenging and controversial topics. The foundation for this linguistic shift is the realization that the pervasive nature of systemic and institutionalized oppression precludes the creation of safety within said system.

Bullying

Abuse that can take different forms. It is targeted and repeated and involves power, aggression, intimidation and shame.

Bystander

A person who witnesses an act of injustice, harm, or violence but is not directly involved. Bystanders can choose to intervene, support, or remain passive.

Capitalism

An economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and operation for profit. Critics argue it can perpetuate inequality and exploitation, particularly along lines of race, gender, and class.

Champion

A person who assumes leadership by working with others to create and influence change in the organization or the wider community.

Cisgender

A person whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity

The commonplace assumption that all people are cisgender and that everyone accepts this as “the norm.” The term “cisnormativity” is used to describe prejudice against trans people that is less overt or direct and more widespread or systemic in society, organizations and institutions. This form of systemic prejudice may even be unintentional and unrecognized by the people or organizations responsible.

Cissexism

The belief that cisgender identities are more valid or natural than transgender identities. It manifests in systemic discrimination and marginalization of trans people.

Classism

Treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Class groups perceived to be of a lower socioeconomic status, level of income, education attainment and social network are discriminated against, and the class groups perceived to be of a higher status experience varying benefits.

Code-Switching

The ways in which Indigenous, Black or racialized people (consciously or unconsciously) adjust their language, syntax, grammatical structure, behaviour and appearance to fit Eurocentric culture. Code-switching can be damaging and cause people to feel like their natural and authentic selves are unacceptable, unprofessional, unpalatable and undesirable.

Cognitive Disability

A broad term for conditions that affect mental processes such as memory, problem-solving, attention, and language. It includes intellectual disabilities, brain injuries, and some neurodevelopmental disorders.

Colonialism

When one country violently invades and takes over another country or territory. The invading country claims the land as its own and sends its own people to live on that newly acquired land. Colonialism is a practice of domination and involves the control or enslavement of one group of people to another. Europeans, through the Doctrine of Discovery, aggressively colonized what is now known as Canada and forcefully applied systems of law, government and religion on this territory which displaced Indigenous communities and disconnected them from traditions, culture, land, air and waters.

Colonization

The process of establishing control over foreign territories or peoples, often for purposes such as cultivation, trade, exploitation, or settlement. This process typically involves the occupation of land and the imposition of the colonizer's culture, language, and governance on the Indigenous population. Colonization in Canada refers to the forced disconnection of Indigenous peoples from land, culture, and community by European settlers.

Colour Blind Racial Ideology

We recognize the ableist language of this term. We reference it as used by scholars to describe an important social phenomenon. Colour-blind racial ideology (or colour-vasiveness— to not notice race in an effort to not appear racist) asserts that ending discrimination requires treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture or ethnicity. This ideology, by overlooking the cumulative and enduring ways in which race unequally shapes life chances and opportunities for people from different groups, actually reinforces and sustains an unequal status quo.

Colourism

A prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, sometimes among people of the same ethnic or racial group. Typically, favouritism is demonstrated toward those of lighter complexions while those of darker complexions experience rejection and mistreatment.

Coming out

The process of recognizing, accepting, and sharing one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others. It is a personal journey and can happen multiple times in different contexts.

Community

A group of people having common goals, rights, responsibilities and privileges which enables them to communicate effectively and openly in order to work together toward goals identified as being for their common good. It means respecting, valuing and harnessing the richness of ideas, backgrounds and perspectives that are unique to each individual.

Consent

Voluntary, informed, and freely given agreement to engage in an activity. In DEI contexts, consent is essential in discussions of bodily autonomy, sexual health, and respectful communication.

Convention Refugee

A person who meets the refugee definition from the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This definition is used in Canadian law and is widely accepted internationally. To meet the definition, a person must be outside their country of origin and have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Policies, practices and business models where an organization is accountable to itself, and the public to operate in ways that enhance society and the environment.

Covert Racism

A form of racial discrimination that is disguised and subtle, rather than public or obvious. Concealed in the fabric of society, covert racism discriminates against individuals often through unnoticeable or seemingly passive methods. Covert, racially-biased decisions are often hidden or rationalized with an explanation that society is more willing to accept. These racial biases cause a variety of problems that work to empower the suppressors while diminishing the rights and powers of the oppressed. Covert racism often works subliminally, and often much of the discrimination is being done subconsciously.

Cultural Appreciation

Cultural appreciation is the mindful and respectful recognition and understanding of the cultural traditions, practices, and beliefs of a group that differs from one's own. It involves learning about these aspects with an open mind, with the intention to honour and respect their origins, significance, and value.

Cultural Appropriation

Theft and/or misuse of cultural elements (including symbols, art, language, customs, etc.), for one's own use, benefit or profit, often without understanding, acknowledging, or respecting its value in the original culture.

Cultural Assimilation

The full adoption by an individual or group of the culture, values and patterns of a different social, religious, linguistic or national ethos, resulting in the elimination of attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of the original individual or group. This can be voluntary or forced.

Cultural Competence

An ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, particularly in human resources, non-profit organizations, and government agencies whose employees work with persons from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Cultural competence has four components:

1. Awareness of one's own cultural world view.
2. Attitude toward cultural differences.
3. Knowledge of different cultural practices and world views.
4. Cross-cultural skills (developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures).

Cultural Humility

Cultural humility is a practice of self-reflection on how one's own background and the background of others, impact teaching, learning, research, creative activity, engagement, leadership, etc.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety refers to the practice of creating an environment in which individuals feel secure and respected in their cultural identities. Cultural safety goes beyond mere cultural competence; it demands an active effort to understand, respect, and validate the diverse cultural backgrounds of individuals, thereby promoting inclusivity and equity.

Cultural Sensitivity

Involves the recognition that the lived experiences of all people include aspects similar and different to our own and that our actions affect other people. It involves getting to know and understand other cultures and perspectives. Culturally sensitive approaches acknowledge that difference is important and must be respected. However, culturally sensitive approaches in health care tend to focus on “others” as the bearers of culture. For example, although a culturally sensitive approach to nursing promotes respecting differences among patients/clients, people are ultimately expected to conform to certain health care standards. Situations involving family visiting, medication, and dietary compliance are common areas of conflict. Cultural sensitivity does not involve challenging the dominance of a health care system that “treats everyone the same” nor does it involve health care providers critically reflecting on their own actions and health care relationships in the context of our wider society.

Culture

The customs, beliefs, behaviours and/or achievements of a particular time and/or people; behaviour within a particular group.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical and interpretive framework that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In recognizing the existence of racism, we can confront the beliefs and practices that enable it to persist while also challenging these practices in order to seek liberation from systemic racism. CRT scholarship also emphasizes the importance of finding a way for diverse individuals to share their experiences.

Cyberbullying

The use of digital technologies to harass, threaten, or humiliate someone. It can include spreading rumors, sending threatening messages, or sharing private information without consent.

Deaf

Deaf with an uppercase 'D' is generally used to describe individuals with a severe to profound hearing loss, with little or no residual hearing. It also signifies people who consider themselves culturally deaf with deafness being part of their identity, and who belong and participate in the Deaf Community. Some Deaf people use a spoken language and speech reading, combined with their residual hearing and hearing aids, communication devices, and/or cochlear implants to communicate. Others use a signed language, such as American Sign Language (ASL) or la langue des signes québécoise (LSQ).

deaf

When written with a lowercase "d", deaf is becoming more accepted as a reference to a hearing deficit only. It does not refer to any culture and/or language. Deaf (uppercase D) represents a social-cultural perspective (see Deaf above), and the other (lowercase d) a medical-pathological view.

Decolonization

A long-term journey to dismantle the process by which one nation asserts and establishes its domination and control over another nation's land, people and culture. It is the framework through which colonialism's legacies are undone and new ways of thinking and being are adopted. We all have a role to play in this transformative and systemic change that honours Indigenous perspectives, culture and peoples.

Diaspora

The movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions. There is a common element in all forms of diaspora; these are people who live outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories and recognize that their traditional homelands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, religions they adopt, and the cultures they produce.

Dimensions of Diversity

The unique personal characteristics that distinguish us as individuals and groups. These include but are not limited to age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, physical and intellectual ability, class, creed, religion, sexual orientation, educational background, lived experience and expertise.

Disability

An umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Defining disability is complex and evolving.

Disenfranchised

Describes individuals or groups who are denied of rights, privileges, or access to opportunities that others enjoy, often in a systemic or institutionalized manner. It's a form of marginalization where people are excluded from important social, political, and economic processes, typically based on factors such as race, gender, socio-economic status, or other identity markers.

Discrimination

Treating someone unfairly by either imposing a burden on them, or denying them a privilege, benefit or opportunity enjoyed by others, because of their race, citizenship, family status, disability, sex or other personal characteristics (note: this is not a legal definition).

Disinformation

False information that is spread by people or a group while knowing that it is false, usually for the purpose of influencing others to believe their point of view.

Diversity

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizes our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. Diversity can also be considered in terms of organizational, professional and societal differences.

Duty to Accommodate

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, employers, unions, housing providers and service providers have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities who are adversely affected by a requirement, rule or standard. Accommodation is necessary to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunities, access and benefits. Employment, housing, services and facilities should be designed inclusively and must be adapted to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability in a way that promotes integration and full participation.

East Asian Peoples

Refers to people with ancestry from countries in East Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan. This group is culturally and linguistically diverse and often racialized in Western contexts.

Economic Migrant

A person who moves countries for a job or a better economic future. The term is correctly used for people whose motivations are entirely economic. Migrants' motivations are often complex and may not be immediately clear, so it is dangerous to apply the "economic" label too quickly to an individual or group of migrants.

Elder

An Elder is a respected individual who plays a key role in Indigenous communities. Elders are important knowledge keepers, and they also help to ensure cultural continuity. As living connections to the past, Elders serve as teachers, healers, advisors and counsellors.

Equal Access

Recognizing that “one size does not fit all” in diverse urban/rural communities, equal access to health programs and services for all individuals requires the removal of barriers associated with literacy levels, language, culture, geography, social factors, education, economic circumstance and mental and physical ability.

Equal Opportunity

Aims to ensure that all people have equal access; free of barriers; equal participation; and equal benefit from whatever an organization has to offer. Note that equal opportunity extends beyond employment.

Equal Treatment

Treatment that brings about an equality of results and that may, in some instances, require different treatment. For example, to give all students equal treatment in entering a building, it may be necessary to provide a ramp for a student who uses a wheelchair.

Equity

Equity is a principle and process that promotes fair conditions for all persons to fully participate in society. It recognizes that while all people have the right to be treated equally, not all experience equal access to resources, opportunities or benefits. Achieving equality does not necessarily mean treating individuals or groups in the same way, but may require the use of specific measures to ensure fairness.

Equity-Deserving Groups or Equity-Priority Groups

Communities that endure systemic discrimination; face barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources; and actively seek social justice and reparations. Equity-deserving groups experience exclusion based on characteristics not limited to age, citizenship status, disability, ethnicity, economic status, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation and race.

Equity Lens

The purpose of an equity lens is to be deliberately inclusive and to focus on equity in both processes and outcomes of policies and practices. An equity lens provides a framework to understand how decisions and actions either breakdown or reinforce the barriers that prohibit equal participation and benefit. Components of an equity lens include:

- Identifying barriers where they occur.
- Eliminating barriers by making adaptations that reflect the lived experience of those affected.
- Creating new ways of doing by considering inclusion at the earliest stages rather than at the end.

Ethnicity

Refers to shared cultural practices, perspectives and distinctions that set apart one group of people from another. That is, ethnicity is a shared cultural heritage. The most common characteristics distinguishing various ethnic groups are ancestry, a sense of history, language, religion, and forms of dress. Ethnic differences are not inherited; they are learned.

Ethnocentrism

Characterized by, or based on, the attitude that one's own group is superior. Ethnocentric habitual disposition is to judge foreign peoples or groups by the standards or practices of one's own culture or ethnic group.

Eurocentrism

The practice of using Europe and European culture as a frame of reference or standard criteria from which to view the world. Eurocentrism favours European cultural norms and excludes the realities and experiences of other cultural groups.

Feminism

Feminism is the advocacy for gender equality, addressing the social, economic, and political disparities that perpetuate inequality between men and women. It challenges systemic oppression and seeks to create an equitable society where everyone has equal opportunities, rights, and access to resources, regardless of gender.

First Nation

A term used to describe Indigenous Peoples of Canada who are ethnically neither Métis nor Inuit. This term came into common usage in the 1970s and '80s and does not have a legal definition. While "First Nations" refers to the ethnicity of First Nations peoples, the singular "First Nation" can refer to a band, a reserve-based community (or a larger grouping), and the individuals who live in them.

Fragility

A state in which even a minimum amount of stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt; and behaviours such as being argumentative, silent, or leaving a stress-inducing situation.

Francophone

Persons whose first language is French, plus those whose first language is neither French nor English but have a particular knowledge of French as an Official Language and use French at home.

Gaslighting

A form of manipulation and psychological control where individuals being gaslit are deliberately and systematically fed false information leading them to question what they know to be true. Gaslighting often results in people doubting their memory, perception and sanity making it difficult for them to know what is true.

Gay

A term used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender. In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves.

Gender

Whereas “sex” is a person’s physical characteristics, “gender” is about what it means to be a man or woman in society. It is the expectations and stereotypes about behaviours, actions, and roles linked to being a “man” or “woman.” Social norms related to gender can vary depending on the culture and can change over time.

Gender Binary

A social system whereby people are thought to have either one of two genders: “man” or “woman.” These genders are expected to correspond to birth sex: male or female. In the gender binary system, there is no room for interpretations, for living between genders, or for crossing the binary. The gender binary system is rigid and restrictive for many people who feel that their “birth–assigned sex” does not match up with their gender, or that their gender is fluid and not fixed.

Gender Diverse

A term that is used to describe people with gender behaviours, appearances, or identities that are incongruent with those assigned to their birth sex. Gender diverse individuals may refer to themselves with many different terms, such as transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer and gender fluid. Gender diverse is used to acknowledge and include the vast diversity of gender identities that exists.

Gender Dysphoria

Deep distress or discomfort that may occur when a person’s gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender Expression

How a person publicly presents or expresses their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as clothing, hair, makeup, body language and voice. A person's chosen name and pronoun are also common ways people express their gender. Others perceive a person's gender through these attributes.

Gender Identity

Each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex.

Gender Inclusive

Inclusive language to describe relationships (spouse and partner instead of husband/boyfriend or wife/girlfriend); spaces (gender-inclusive or universal restrooms for use by all genders); pronouns (they and ze are gender inclusive pronouns), among other things.

Gender Neutral

Describes language, spaces, or practices that do not assume or assign a specific gender. Gender-neutral approaches aim to be inclusive of all gender identities, including non-binary and gender-diverse individuals.

Gender Non–Conforming/Gender Variant/Genderqueer

Individuals who do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth. They may identify and express themselves as “feminine men” or “masculine women” or as androgynous—outside of the categories “boy/man” and “girl/woman.” People who are gender non–conforming may or may not identify as trans.

Gender Norms

The gender binary influences of what society considers “normal” or acceptable behaviour, dress, appearance, and roles for women and men. Gender norms are a prevailing force in our everyday lives. Strength, action, and dominance are stereotypically seen as “masculine” traits; while vulnerability, passivity, and receptiveness are stereotypically seen as “feminine” traits. A woman expressing masculine traits may be chastised as “overly aggressive,” while a man expressing “feminine” traits may be labelled as “weak.” Gender norms can contribute to power imbalances and gender inequality in the home, at work, and in communities.

Gender Role

The culturally and historically specific expectations and restrictions that are placed on a person based on whether they are assigned female or male at birth. Can be empowering, oppressive, or neutral.

Gender Spectrum

The representation of gender as a continuum, as opposed to a binary concept.

Gender-Based Pricing/Pink Tax

The practice of charging more for products or services marketed toward women compared to similar or identical items marketed to men. This is a form of gender discrimination that contributes to economic inequality and is often seen in personal care products, clothing, and services.

Gender-Based Violence

Violence directed at an individual and/or group based on their gender or gender identity. It includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm and is rooted in gender inequality, power imbalances, and harmful norm.

Gender-Affirmation Surgery

Refers to medical procedures that alter a person's physical characteristics to align with their gender identity. Not all trans people pursue surgery.

Genocide

Deliberate decisions and actions made by one nation or group of people in order to eliminate, usually through mass murder, the entirety of another nation or group. The term has also been used to refer to the destruction of the culture of a people, as in cultural genocide.

Gentrification

A process of urban development in which higher-income individuals move into historically marginalized neighborhoods, often displacing long-term residents and altering the community's culture and affordability.

Harassment

Engaging in a course of comments or actions that are known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. It can involve words or actions that are known or should be known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning or unwelcome. Harassment under the Ontario Human Rights Code is based on the prohibited/protected grounds.

Harm Reduction

A public health strategy aimed at minimizing the negative consequences of certain behaviours, such as substance use, without necessarily requiring cessation. It emphasizes dignity, autonomy, and non-judgmental support.

Hate Activity

Comments or actions against a person or group motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on race, ancestry, nationality or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, marital status, family status, sexual orientation or any other similar factor. Examples are: hate crime, hate propaganda, advocating genocide, telephone/electronic communication promoting hate, and publicly displaying hate in notices, signs, symbols and emblems.

Hate/Bias Crime:

A broad legal term that encompasses a diversity of motives, perpetrators, victims, behaviours, and harms. Research has identified individuals and groups that are at a particular risk of hate/bias crime victimization, including Indigenous peoples and those targeted because of race, religion, ethnicity, national orientation, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or an intersection of more than one of these identities.

Hate/bias crimes affect not only individual victims, but also the larger community. Hate/ bias crimes also have consequences that reach far beyond a specific incident and are particularly concerning because they:

- can have uniquely violent and assaultive characteristics,
- cause trauma to victims, family, and friends,
- can cause fear of being targeted for future crimes,
- can escalate and prompt retaliation,
- can foster community unrest,
- threaten national values of tolerance and inclusion.

Haudenosaunee (Iroquios)

(Phonetic spelling: How-den-oh-show-nee, Ee-ro-kwah)

Haudenosaunee means People of the long house. Travelling from community to community they both succeeded in persuading the Chiefs of each nation to join in the Great League of Peace and founded the only government with a direct connection to the Creator. It is one of the first and longest participatory democracies in the world. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy includes Six Nations: the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, and Tuscarora.

Hard-of-Hearing

A person whose hearing loss ranges from mild to profound and whose usual means of communication is speech. It is both a medical and sociological term.

Hearing Impairment

A diagnosed auditory defect, or medical condition, ranging from mild to profound that may not respond to medial intervention or amplification, and results in functional limitations in one or more areas of daily living. It should never be used to refer to Deaf people or people with hearing loss.

“Hearing impaired” or “hearing impairment” is not a collective noun for people who have varying degrees of hearing loss and should never be used to refer to Deaf people or people with hearing loss. It fails to recognize the differences between the Deaf and the hard of hearing communities.

Heteronormativity

The assumption that heterosexuality is the default or normal sexual orientation. It reinforces binary gender roles and marginalizes 2SLGBTQI+ identities.

Heterosexism

The assumption that heterosexuality is superior and preferable, and is the only right, normal or moral expression of sexuality. This definition is often used when looking at discrimination against gay, lesbian or bisexual people that is less overt, and which may be unintentional and unrecognized by the person or organization responsible.

Heterosexual

A person who has emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual attraction to persons of the opposite sex.

Historical Disadvantage

Disadvantage resulting from historic patterns of institutionalized and other forms of systemic discrimination, sometimes legalized social, political, cultural, ethnic, religious and economic discrimination, as well as discrimination in employment. This also includes under-representation experienced by disadvantaged groups such as women, First Nations, Métis and Inuit, persons with disabilities, 2SLGBTQI+ persons and racialized people.

Homelessness

A situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring it. It can be chronic, episodic, or transitional, and is often linked to systemic issues like poverty, discrimination, and lack of affordable housing.

Homosexual

A person who has emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual attraction to persons of the same sex. It is considered outdated and often insulting to many gay people and communities.

Homophobia

Negative attitudes, feelings or irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of gay, lesbian or bisexual people and communities.

Human Rights

Affirms and protects the right of every individual to live and work without discrimination and harassment. Human rights policies and legislation attempt to create a climate in which the dignity, worth and rights of all people are respected, regardless of age, ancestry, citizenship, colour, creed (faith), disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender, marital status, place of origin, race, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.

Immigrant

Refers to a person who is, or has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants are either Canadian citizens by naturalization (the citizenship process) or permanent residents (landed immigrants) under Canadian legislation. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for a number of years, while others have arrived recently.

Impairment

A physical, sensory, intellectual, learning or medical condition, including mental illness that limits functioning and/or requires accommodation. An impairment may be apparent to others or hidden, inherited, self-inflicted or acquired, and may exist alone or in combination with other impairments. Impairments can affect anyone (whatever their gender, sex, race, culture, age, religion, creed, etc.).

Imperialism

A policy or ideology of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, military force, or other means. It often involves the exploitation of resources and people in colonized regions.

Impostor Syndrome

When a person believes they are undeserving of their achievements, incompetent or unintelligent, when in reality they are well accomplished and capable. Those experiencing impostor syndrome, which is not an official diagnosis, often attribute their success to external causes such as luck or good timing. To overcome those feelings, a change in mindset is necessary which could include avoiding comparisons with others and personal reminders that one can only do their best.

Inclusion

Acknowledging and valuing people's uniqueness to enrich social planning, decision-making, and quality of life for everyone. In an inclusive municipality, we each have a sense of belonging, acceptance, and are recognized as valued and contributing members of society. Real inclusion takes place when those already included in the "mainstream" learn from those who are excluded and initiate change.

Inclusive Design

Taking into account what makes individuals and groups distinct when designing something, to avoid creating barriers. Inclusive design can apply to systems, facilities, programs, policies, services, education, etc.

Indian Act, 1876

A Canadian federal law that governs matters related to Indigenous peoples. It has been widely criticized for its role in enforcing colonial control, including the creation of reserves and residential schools.

Indigeneity

The fact, state, or experience of being especially with reference to the history and effects of settler colonialism. Indigeneity is tied to land and place.

Indigenous

First used in the 1970s, when Indigenous peoples worldwide were fighting for representation at the United Nations, and now frequently used by academics and in international contexts (e.g., the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). Understood to mean First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, peoples, and nations that have a historical continuity with pre-invasion, pre-settler, or pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, as distinct from the other societies now prevailing on those territories (or parts of them).

Indigenous Peoples

In Canada, the term Indigenous Peoples refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. These are the original inhabitants of the land that is now Canada. (UN – Factsheet on Indigenous Peoples) The terms “Aboriginal” and “Indian” have historically been used in Canada to refer to First Nations people, and in some cases, to refer broadly to Indigenous peoples.

Indigiqueer

A term used by some Indigenous people to describe their queer identity in a way that is rooted in Indigenous culture and traditions, rather than Western LGBTQ+ frameworks.

Institutional Racism

The ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. Institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for some and oppression and disadvantage for others.

Intellectual Disability

A disability characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, affecting conceptual, social, and practical skills. It presents before the age of 18.

Intergenerational

Existing or occurring between different generations of people; involving more than one generation.

Intergenerational Trauma

Describes adverse emotional and behavioural reactions from descendants of a person who experienced a terrifying or traumatic occurrence (e.g., residential school system, slavery, indentured servitude etc.).

Internalized Ableism

This occurs when people living with disabilities absorb and apply ableist opinions and views reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions.

Internalized Racism

Occurs when individuals from marginalized racial groups adopt and internalize the dominant society's racist beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes about their own group. This can manifest in self-doubt, mistrust of others in the same group, or preference for dominant cultural norms.

Internally Displaced Person

A person forcibly displaced but is still within the borders of their home country.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, originally coined by American lawyer and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a framework centring the intersection, or crossover, of our many identities and how that affects how each of us experience life. These intersections occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments, other political and economic unions, religious institutions and media).

Intersex

A term used to describe a person born with reproductive systems, chromosomes, and/or hormones that are not easily characterized as male or female. This might include a woman with XY chromosomes or a man with ovaries instead of testes. Intersex characteristics occur in one out of every 1,500 births. Typically, people that identify as intersex are assigned one sex, male or female, at birth. Some identify with their assigned sex, while others do not. Some choose to identify as intersex.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Behaviour by a current or former partner or spouse that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm. This includes acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors.

Inuit

(Phonetic spelling: in-u-eet)

The Indigenous Peoples of Arctic Canada who live primarily in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and northern parts of Labrador and Québec. The word Inuit means “people” in the Inuit language—Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk. Their traditional languages, customs and cultures are distinctly different from those of the First Nations and Métis.

Islamophobia

Can be described as stereotypes, bias or acts of hostility towards individual Muslims, followers of Islam or people perceived to look Muslim. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia leads to viewing Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic and societal level.

Knowledge Keeper

In Indigenous communities, a Knowledge Keeper refers to someone who has been taught by an Elder or a senior Knowledge Keeper within their community. This person holds traditional knowledge and teachings, they have been taught how to care for these teachings and when it is and is not appreciate to share this knowledge with others.

Land Acknowledgement

A territorial or land acknowledgement is an act of reconciliation that involves making a statement recognizing the traditional territory of the Indigenous Peoples who called the land home before the arrival of settlers. A land acknowledgement reminds us that we are accountable to respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and that accountability involves all of us listening, learning, and reflecting on the historic and ongoing injustices in these communities.

Land Back / Rematriation

A movement advocating for the return of Indigenous lands to Indigenous peoples. “Rematriation” emphasizes restoring the sacred relationship between land and Indigenous matriarchal traditions.

Learning Disabilities

A number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or non-verbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. Learning disabilities range in severity and may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking. Persons with learning disabilities can succeed when timely specialized assessments and interventions are developed.

Lesbian

A term to describe women who are emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to other women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term. A lesbian can have any gender expression or sex characteristics.

Lesbophobia

A specific form of discrimination and prejudice directed at lesbians. It combines elements of homophobia and sexism, often manifesting in the erasure, fetishization, or invalidation of lesbian identities.

Lived Experience

Knowledge rooted in direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events and experiences rather than through representations constructed by other people.

Marginalization

A social process by which individuals or groups are, intentionally or unintentionally, distanced from access to power and resources and constructed as insignificant, peripheral, or less valuable/privileged to a community or “mainstream” society. Marginalized groups or people are those excluded from mainstream social, economic, cultural or political life. Examples of marginalized groups include, but are by no means limited to, groups excluded due to race, religion, political or cultural group, age, gender/gender expression or financial status.

Marginalized Groups

Groups or communities who have been socially and economically disadvantaged and may have also experienced discrimination. Such groups are excluded from full participation in the community.

Mental Health

More than the absence of a mental health condition or illness, it is a positive sense of well-being, or the capacity to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. Mental health is not fixed; it is influenced by a range of factors, including our life experiences, workplace or other environments, and the social and economic conditions that shape our lives.

Mental Illness

A broad range of psychological or behavioural symptoms that reduce an individual's capacity to cope with daily life. For instance, a person may lose contact with themselves; their emotions may be uncontrolled; behaviour might be inappropriate; or a person might lose the ability to communicate effectively with other people. For some people it develops due to a chemical imbalance in the brain, while other causes may relate to the amount of stress in their lives; the patterns of communication they develop within their families; poverty and poor housing; the number of close friends and family they have to support them through difficulty; and the degree to which each of them views their self-esteem. Common groups of mental illnesses, according to health professionals include: anxiety, mood, eating, psychotic, personality or childhood disorders, and dementia.

Métis

(Phonetic spelling: May – tee)

A distinct Indigenous people with a unique history, culture, language and way of life. The Métis Nation is comprised of descendants of people born of relations between First Nations women and European men. The offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry and over time a new Indigenous people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these individuals. The "ethnogenesis" of distinct Métis communities occurred as these new people were no longer seen as extensions of their maternal (First Nations) or paternal (European) relations and began to identify as a separate group.

Microaggression

The everyday verbal, non-verbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

Migrant

A person who is outside their country of origin. Sometimes this term is used to talk about everyone outside their country of birth, including people who have been Canadian citizens for decades. More often, it is used for people currently on the move or people with temporary status or no status at all in the country where they live.

Minority

A convenient, if misleading, word for non-dominant ethnic identities in Canada. While people with non-dominant identities are numerically in the minority in many parts of Canada, they are not numerically a minority in the world.

Misgender

To refer to someone using language (especially pronouns or gendered terms) that does not correctly reflect their gender identity.

Misinformation

False information that is spread by people or organizations who think it is true.

Misogynoir

A term coined by Moya Bailey to describe the unique form of anti-Black sexism faced by Black women. The oppression that Black women experience is often characterized by a combination of racism and sexism.

Misogyny

The hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls. Misogyny can be manifested in numerous ways, including social exclusion, sex discrimination, hostility, androcentrism, patriarchy, male privilege, belittling of women, violence against women and sexual objectification.

Mixed-Race

A person who identifies as having ancestry from more than one racial group. This identity can be complex and is shaped by personal, familial, and societal experiences.

MMIWG2S (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit Peoples)

A term that acknowledges the national crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in Canada and the U.S. It highlights systemic failures in justice, policing, and social services, and calls for accountability and action.

Model Minority Myth

A myth based on stereotypes that perpetuate a narrative that people of Asian descent are of a singular mould: polite, law-abiding individuals who have achieved a higher level of success than others through innate talent and “pulling-themselves-up-by-their-bootstraps”. Like all stereotypes, the model minority myth erases the uniqueness among individuals and increases the pressures associated with Asian identities.

Multiracial

A person whose heritage includes members of multiple racial groups.

Multiculturalism

A federal policy announced in 1971 and enshrined in law through the Multiculturalism Act of 1988. It promotes the acknowledgment and respect of diverse ethnicities, cultures, races and religions; and supports the freedom of these groups to preserve their heritage, “while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians.”

Neo-Pronouns

Alternative pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some non-binary and gender diverse persons. Some examples include “ze/hir” and “ey/em.”

Neurodivergent

People who function and whose brains differently from the social standards of “normal”. This term is not the same as neurodiverse.

Neurodiverse

A group of people with different minds. This term is not a replacement for neurodivergent. Example: an organization with neurodivergent and neurotypical employees is a neurodiverse organization.

Neurodiversity

The diversity people's minds and the different ways we function, including how we think, feel, learn, communicate, take in information and interact with the world around us.

Neurodiversity Movement

A social justice movement working towards the rights, equality, respect and inclusion for neurodivergent people.

Neurodiversity Paradigm

An approach to understanding and supporting people and their difference, seeing recognizing diversity as natural and valuable.

Neuronormativity

A belief based on widely accepted social standards that there is a "normal" or “right” way for brains to work. This believe is harmful and unfair, showing up in both people's attitudes and larger systems like schools, workplaces and healthcare.

Neurotypical

Opposite of neurodivergent. Individuals whose minds function within the societal standards of “normal”.

Newcomer

An inclusive term for immigrants or refugees who have been in Canada for a short time, usually less than five years. Newcomers contribute greatly to a country’s social and economic prosperity.

Non-Binary

An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside of the man-woman binary.

Oppression

The use of power to disempower, marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group or category, often in order to further empower and/or privilege the oppressor. Social oppression may not require formally established organizational support to achieve its desired effect; it may be applied on a more informal, yet more focused, individual basis.

Othered

A phenomenon in which some individuals or groups—usually from equity-deserving groups—are defined and labelled as not fitting in with societal norms. It is an effect that influences how people perceive and treat those who are viewed as being part of the in-group versus those who are seen as being in the out-group.

Overt Racism

Frank and open, including graffiti, intimidations or physical violence, expressions of negative racial stereotypes. Racial and ethnic slurs or so-called “jokes” are other examples of obvious racial discrimination. People often ignore racism because they do not know how to deal with it.

Pansexual

A term for a person who is attracted to other people regardless of gender.

Passing/to Pass or Blending

When a person is perceived by others as belonging to a different identity group than their own, often used in the context of trans individuals being seen as cisgender or multiracial individuals being seen as monoracial.

Patriarchy

The norms, values, beliefs, structures and systems that grant power, privilege and superiority to men, and thereby marginalize and subordinate women and other gender identities.

Pay Equity

The principle of equal pay for work of equal value. For example, the requirement to pay employees within the same organization the same salary for work that is judged to be of equal value regardless of gender.

Person-First Language

Language focusing on the individual while de-emphasizing a particular aspect of their identity which could be an illness, disability or condition. Using it shows respect for an individual as a person.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with one or more long-term, short-term or recurring disability (see definition for Disability).

Positionality

Socially-constructed positions based on social identities and groups a person belongs to, including but not limited to gender identity, race, ethnicity, class and/or education level. Some identities hold power or advantage while others could result in disadvantages. These positions can change based on the situation or location of an individual and the larger societal and political context.

Power

Access to resources, position, status, wealth or personal strength of character that gives a person or a group or system the ability to influence others. Power can be used to affect others positively or negatively.

Power Dynamics

Power dynamics refer to the inherent structures and influences of power that exist between individuals and groups within a given context. This idea extends beyond mere authority or control, delving into more nuanced territories of influence, dominance, privilege, and communication styles. In its simplest form, power can be understood as the ability to influence or control outcomes.

Permanent Resident

A person granted the right to live permanently in Canada. The person may have come to Canada as an immigrant or refugee. Permanent residents who become Canadian citizens are no longer permanent residents.

Person without Status

A person who has not been granted permission to stay in the country, or who has stayed after their visa has expired. The term can cover a person who falls between the cracks of the system, such as a refugee claimant who is refused refugee status but not removed from Canada because of risk in the country of origin.

Prejudice

To have preconceived notions about a person or group negatively, usually without adequate evidence to substantiate the position. Frequently, prejudices are not recognized as false or unsound assumptions. Through repetition, they come to be accepted as common-sense notions and when backed-up with power, result in acts of discrimination and oppression.

Privilege

Unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group, simply by being a member of that social group. Having privilege is not inherently a bad thing and most people possess identities that gives them both unearned advantages and unearned disadvantages. The idea behind recognizing and examining one's privilege isn't to remove it, but to give others access to the same advantages.

Prohibited/Protected Grounds

The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination or harassment based on personal characteristics. The specific protected grounds include: age, ancestry, citizenship, colour, creed, disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender identity and gender expression (recently added to the Code), marital status, place of origin, race, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, receipt of public assistance (in housing) and record of offences (in employment).

Pronoun

Words used to refer to someone in place of their name (e.g., he, she, they). Using correct pronouns affirms a person's gender identity and shows respect.

Psychological Safety

A culture or environment where individuals feel safe to be their authentic selves which goes beyond being comfortable in the workplace. It is about creating a space where people are encouraged to learn, take risks, share their ideas and speak up without fear, judgment or reprisal.

Queer

A term used by some 2SLGBTQI+ people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is also considered by some to be inclusive of the entire community and by others who use the term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are 2SLGBTQI+, some people within the community dislike the term. Due to its varying meanings, use this word only when self-identifying or quoting an individual who self-identifies as queer.

Questioning

An umbrella term to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. Questioning people can be of any age. Questioning is a profoundly important process, and one that does not imply that an individual is choosing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer.

Race

A socially constructed, rather than a biological, classification. Race is not intrinsic to human beings but rather an identity created, often by socially dominant groups based on skin colour, to establish meaning in a social context. This often involves the subjugation of groups defined as racially inferior.

Racialization

The process through which groups come to be socially constructed as races, based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, language, economics, religion, culture, politics, etc.

Racial Profiling

Any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection, that relies on stereotypes about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin (or a combination of these), rather than on a reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or negative treatment.

Racism

An ideology that either directly or indirectly asserts that one group is inherently superior to others. It can be openly displayed in racial jokes and slurs or hate crimes, but it can be more deeply rooted in attitudes, values and stereotypical beliefs. In some cases, these are unconsciously held and have become deeply embedded in systems and institutions that have evolved over time. Racism operates at a number of levels, in particular, individual, systemic and societal. Racism is a wider phenomenon than racial discrimination. While the Code seeks to combat racism through public education and the advancement of human rights, not every manifestation of racism can be dealt with through the current human rights complaint mechanism and process. Nevertheless, racism plays a major role in fostering racial discrimination.

Racism (Cultural)

Refers to representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviours and values associated with white people or whiteness are automatically better or more normal than those associated with other racially defined groups.

Racism (Environmental)

Refers to racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and the enforcement of regulations and laws; the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities; the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities; and the history of excluding people of colour from the leadership of the environmental movement.

Racism (Individual)

The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Racism (Internalized)

The personal conscious or subconscious acceptance of the dominant society's racist views, stereotypes and biases of one's ethnic group. It gives rise to patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that result in discriminating, minimizing, criticizing, finding fault, invalidating and hating oneself while simultaneously valuing the dominant culture.

Racism (Structural)

The macro-level systems, social forces, institutions, ideology, and processes that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups.

Reconciliation

Efforts by individuals and institutions to raise awareness about colonialization and its ongoing effects on Indigenous people and communities. Reconciliation also refers to efforts made to address harms caused by policies and programs of colonization, such as residential schools. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission defined reconciliation as the process of establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The journey towards reconciliation involves committing to improve the experiences of Indigenous communities with respect to child welfare, education, health care and justice, among other systems.

Refugee

A person who is forced to flee from persecution and who is located outside of their home country.

Refugee Claimant

A person who has made a claim for protection as a refugee. This term is more or less equivalent to asylum-seeker and is standard in Canada. Asylum seeker is more often used internationally.

Relational Reflexivity

A framework centring power in our relationships that involves a critical examination of how power operates in our relations with others.

Resettled Refugee

A person who has fled their country, is temporarily in a second country and then is offered a permanent home in a third country. Refugees resettled to Canada are selected abroad and become permanent residents as soon as they arrive in Canada.

Residential Schools

Government-funded, church-run institutions in Canada that operated from the 1800s to the 1990s. They aimed to assimilate Indigenous children by removing them from their families and cultures, often subjecting them to abuse and neglect.

Restorative Justice

An approach to justice that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage all parties. It emphasizes accountability, healing, and community-based solutions over punishment.

Safe Space

In educational institutions, safe space (or safe-space), safer space, and positive space are terms that, as originally intended, were used to indicate that a teacher, educational institution, or student body did not tolerate anti-2SLGBTQI+ violence, harassment or hate speech, thereby creating a safe place for all 2SLGBTQI+ students.

The term safe space has been extended to refer to an autonomous space for individuals who feel marginalized to come together to communicate regarding their experiences with marginalization, typically on a university campus. As safety is an individual experience, it can only be determined by the individual and not be determined or guaranteed by the organizer or host of the space.

Segregation

The enforced or institutional separation of groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or religion. Historically and currently, segregation leads to unequal access to resources, opportunities, and rights.

Settler

A person who is not Indigenous to the land they inhabit, particularly in the context of colonialism. In Canada, settlers are non-Indigenous people living on Indigenous lands, often benefiting from colonial systems.

Sex

The classification of people as male, female and intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth and is based on an assessment of a person's reproductive systems, hormones, chromosomes and other physical characteristics.

Sexism

Prejudice or discrimination based on sex, usually though not necessarily against women; behaviours, conditions or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex. Sexism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society.

Sexual Identity

How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond or neither.

Sexual Orientation

The scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations. The offensive term "sexual preference," is used to suggest that being gay or lesbian is voluntary and therefore "curable."

Sizeism

Discrimination or prejudice based on a person's body size, often targeting individuals who are perceived as overweight or underweight. Sizeism intersects with other forms of oppression and can affect access to healthcare, employment, and social acceptance.

Social Class

The hierarchical order of a society based on such indicators of social rank as income, occupation, education, ownership of property, family, religion and political relationships.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

The non-medical factors that influence health outcomes, including income, education, employment, social support, and access to healthcare. These determinants are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources.

Social Exclusion

The process in which individuals are blocked from or denied full access to various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to all and are fundamental to human rights (e.g. housing, employment, health care, civic engagement, democratic participation and due process).

Social Justice

A concept premised upon the belief that each individual and group within society should have equal opportunity, fairness, civil liberties, and participation in society, including in the education, criminal justice, health and financial systems.

Social Location

The groups people belong to because of their place or position in history and society. All people have a social location that is defined by their gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Each group membership confers a certain set of social roles and rules, power, and privilege (or lack of), which can heavily influence one's identity and how one sees the world.

Social Movement

A collective effort by a group of people to drive or resist social change. Social movements often arise in response to injustice and aim to shift cultural, political, or economic systems.

Solidarity

Unity and mutual support among individuals or groups, especially in the face of oppression or injustice. Solidarity involves recognizing shared struggles and working collectively toward equity.

Stereotypes

A preconceived generalisation of a group of people, ascribing the same characteristic(s) to all members of the group, regardless of their individual differences. Stereotyping may be based upon misconceptions, incomplete information and/ or false generalizations about race, age, ethnic, linguistic, geographical or natural groups, religions, social, marital or family status, physical, developmental or mental attributes, gender or sexual orientation.

Systemic Barriers

Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation in, and the benefits of, social, economic, and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but are built into the way society works. Existing policies, practices and procedures, as well as assumptions and stereotypes, reinforce them.

Systemic Discrimination

The institutionalization of discrimination through policies and practices which may appear neutral on the surface but have an exclusionary impact on particular groups, such that various minority groups are discriminated against, intentionally or unintentionally. This occurs in institutions and organizations where the policies, practices and procedures (e.g. employment systems – job requirements, hiring practices, promotion procedures, etc.) exclude and/or act as barriers to racialized groups. Systemic discrimination may also result from some government laws and regulations.

Temporary Resident

A person who has permission to remain in Canada on a temporary basis (the main categories are student, temporary workers and visitors).

Tokenism

A form of covert racism wherein those in power undertake actions just to appear non-racist or as champions of diversity. These actions could include hiring people from equity-deserving backgrounds for leadership positions but keeping all the power and assigning them with only tasks related to “diversity and inclusion.”

Toxic Masculinity

A collection of offensive, harmful beliefs, tendencies, and behaviours rooted in a dangerous idea of “manliness” that perpetuates domination, misogyny, homophobia, and aggression. It can be harmful to the mental health of all genders and can have serious consequences.

Transgender or Trans

An umbrella term that describes people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man in society. Trans can mean transcending beyond, existing between or crossing over the gender spectrum. It includes but is not limited to people who identify as transgender, cross-dressers or gender non-conforming (gender variant or genderqueer).

Trans includes people whose gender identity is different from the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex. Trans people may or may not undergo medically supportive treatments, such as hormone therapy and a range of surgical procedures, to align their bodies with their internally felt gender identity. People who have transitioned from one gender to another may simply identify as female or male. Others may also identify as trans – as a trans woman or a trans man. Some people may identify as trans and not use the labels “female” or “male.” Others may identify as existing between male and female or in different ways beyond the binary of those terms.

Trans people may identify their gender in many ways. There is no single or universal experience of what it means to be trans. As a result, different trans people face distinct forms of discrimination in society, and this may relate to whether they identify as male, female, a person in the process of transitioning, a trans man, a trans woman, or gender non-conforming.

Trans Man

A person who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a man.

Trans Woman

A person who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a woman.

Transphobia

The aversion to, fear, hatred, or intolerance of trans people and communities. Like other prejudices, it is based on stereotypes and misconceptions that are used to justify discrimination, harassment, and violence toward trans people.

Transitioning

Refers to a host of activities that some trans people may pursue to affirm their gender identity. This may include changes to their name, sex designation, dress, the use of specific pronouns and possibly medically supportive treatments such as hormone therapy, sex-reassignment surgery or other procedures. There is no checklist or average time for a transition process, and no universal goal or end point. Each person will decide what meets their needs.

Trauma-Informed Care

A framework that recognizes the prevalence and impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into policies, procedures, and practices. It prioritizes safety, trust, and empowerment.

Treaty

A formal agreement between sovereign nations. In the Canadian context, treaties are legally binding agreements between Indigenous nations and the Crown, often involving land use and rights. These agreements are foundational to the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian state.

Trigger

A stimulus such as a word, image, or situation that causes a person to recall a traumatic experience. Triggers can lead to emotional or physical reactions and are often associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Turtle Island

A name used by many Indigenous Peoples, specifically Algonquian and Iroquoian-speaking peoples to refer to North America. It originates from various Indigenous creation stories and symbolizes a worldview rooted in respect for the land and interconnectedness.

Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk)

Etuaptmumk (Mi'kmaw for Two-Eyed Seeing) is a framework for bringing knowledge systems together grounded in Mi'kmaq understandings of the gift of multiple perspectives.

Two-Spirit

Two-Spirit is a cultural concept specific to some Indigenous communities and its meaning encompasses cultural, spiritual, sexual and gender identity. It reflects complex Indigenous understandings of gender roles, spirituality, and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures, and as such should only be used by Indigenous people.

Undue Hardship

Under both the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act, there are provisions for employers and service providers that outline their duty to adjust rules, policies or practices to a reasonable limit in order to accommodate an employee's needs that are related to the protected grounds of discrimination. The reasonable limit is known as undue hardship. Employers and service providers can claim undue hardship as the reason why certain policies and practices need to stay in place. In these cases, the hardship must be exceptional, excessive and disproportionate.

Universal Design

The design of products, spaces and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Upstander

Someone who takes action to support those being harmed or marginalized, rather than remaining a passive bystander. Upstanders challenge injustice and advocate for equity.

Visual Impairment

The accepted and politically correct term for describing the whole spectrum of vision, or lack thereof, experienced by people with a visual disability. A majority of people living with visual impairments have some degree of vision.

Wage Gap

The persistent disparity in earnings between different groups, most commonly between men and women, and further exacerbated by race, disability, and other intersecting identities. It reflects systemic inequalities in access, opportunity, and valuation of labour.

West Indian

Refers to people from the Caribbean islands, particularly those colonized by European powers. The term can encompass a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and racial identities and is often used interchangeably with Caribbean.

White

A social colour. The term is used to refer to people belonging to the majority group in Canada. It is recognized that there are many different people who are "White" but who face discrimination because of their class, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, language or geographical origin. Grouping these people as "White" is not to deny the very real forms of discrimination that people of certain ancestry, such as Italian, Portuguese, Jewish, Armenian, Greek, etc., face because of these factors.

White Fragility

The discomfort White people may experience in reaction to discussions about racism. This term was popularized by sociologist and author Robin DiAngelo in her book, "White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism".

Whiteness

defined as a set of characteristics and experiences generally associated with being a member of the white race and having white skin. It reflects the privileges and power that people who appear white receive because they are not subjected to the racism faced by racialized individuals.

White Privilege

The inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their racial identity in a society, characterized by racial inequality and injustice. This concept does not imply that a white person has not worked for their accomplishments, but rather, that they have not faced the same barriers encountered by others due to their racial identity.

Xenophobia

Any attitude, behaviour, practice or policy that explicitly or implicitly reflects the belief that people from other cultures or countries are inferior to the dominant group of people. Xenophobia is reflected in interpersonal, institutional and systemic levels of oppression and is a function of white supremacy.

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