



HARVARD  
DIVERSITY  
INCLUSION  
BELONGING

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESS,  
INCLUSION & BELONGING*

**FOUNDATIONAL  
CONCEPTS &  
AFFIRMING  
LANGUAGE**



## Foundational Concepts & Affirming Language

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At Harvard University, we aim to become the world's recognized leader in sustainable inclusive excellence by fostering a campus culture where everyone can thrive. To reach this goal, we seek to transform our community into a highly informed campus with overlapping goals and shared vocabulary which will enable all of us to advance inclusive excellence where we work, live, and learn. The Office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging offers this glossary to serve as a resource for achieving this shared vision. This document is intended to provide a starting point for exploring key terms as they relate to diversity, equity, inclusion, oppression, identity, access, and culture. This glossary includes terms used in diversity-learning frameworks, social justice movements, and academic research.

Aligned with the Office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging mission, we hope this glossary will:

- ground our discourse in mutual understanding
- aid in facilitating difficult conversations and encourage constructive dialogue
- hinder the spread of misinformation
- and foster a campus culture where everyone can thrive

This glossary of terms was formatted and adapted by the Office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging using several resources and consulting with members of our community and the DIB Leadership Council. This is not meant to be an exhaustive listing of terminology used in our conversations about diversity and equity. Because language is a reflection of the lived experience, many of these words and terms will continue to evolve as the lived experience evolves. Even so, it is still useful to have a reference that provides basic working definitions to facilitate shared discussions.

This is a living document, so please share your ideas and suggestions with us. To suggest an addition or change contact [dib@harvard.edu](mailto:dib@harvard.edu).

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# Contents

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<b>Foundational Concepts</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Ability</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Gender Minorities and Sexuality</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Race, ethnicity, and National Origin</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Racism</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Religion and Spirituality</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Social Justice</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Related Terms</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Infographics</b>	<b>24</b>

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## Foundational Concepts

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**Affirmative Action:** The practices or policies that focus on improving opportunities for groups of people, like women and minorities, who have been historically excluded in United States' society. The initial emphasis was on education and employment. President John F. Kennedy was the first president to use the term in an Executive Order in 1961.

**Belonging:** Connotes full membership in the Harvard community. This entails success in achieving not merely formal participation but also rewarding participation for all members of a diverse campus community in the opportunities, resources, and decision-making structures of the campus. Accountability to one another is important and essential to creating a sense of belonging.

**Bias:** Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in an unfair or negative way. *Unconscious bias*, also known as *implicit bias*, is defined as “attitudes and stereotypes that influence judgment, decision-making, and behavior in ways that are outside of conscious awareness and/or control”. Work on implicit bias and its relationship to diversity was pioneered by Harvard Professor Mahzarin Banaji (with Tony Greenwald) and includes the [Implicit Association Test](#).

**Culture:** The conceptual system that structures the way people view the world—it is the particular set of beliefs, norms, and values that influence ideas about the nature of relationships, the way people live their lives, and the way people organize their world.

**Cultural Competence:** Set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that enable a system, agency, or professional to function effectively across cultural difference (Cross, 1988). In this context, cultural difference (also called diversity) includes, but is not limited to, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic class. As Cross notes, “systems, agencies, or professionals do not start out being culturally competent. Like other types of competence, cultural competence is developed over time through training, experience, guidance, and self-evaluation.

**Discrimination:** Actions based on conscious or unconscious prejudice that favor one group over others in the provision of goods, services or opportunities.

**Diversity:** All of the ways in which people differ, including primary characteristics, such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical abilities, and sexual orientation; and secondary characteristic, such as education, income, religion, work experience, language skills, geographic location, and family status. Put simply, diversity refers to all of the characteristics that make individuals different from each other, and in its most basic form refers to heterogeneity. ([View the Five Layers of Diversity & Inclusion Model](#))

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

**Diversity and Inclusive Excellence:** A community that draws on the widest possible pool of talent, one that fully embraces individuals from varied backgrounds, cultures, races, identities, life experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and values, unifies excellence and diversity. In so doing, it achieves inclusive excellence. The aspiration to achieve inclusive excellence moves beyond the goal



of nondiscrimination and toward embrace of the value that flows from bringing diversity of experience and thought to campus, and the rich and varied forms of excellence that can emerge from that diversity.

**Equity:** The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all students, faculty, and staff, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.

**Groups Previously Excluded:** Harvard's 2016 Presidential Taskforce Report on Inclusion and belonging called for an expansion of our understanding of diversity to include broader categories of difference and capture groups previously excluded from the University's faculty, staff, and student body - going beyond race and gender - encompassing areas including, but not limited to, immigration status, religion, and disability.

**Implicit Bias:** Occurs when someone consciously intends to reject stereotypes and supports antidiscrimination efforts but also holds negative associations in his/her mind unconsciously.

**Inclusion:** The notion that an organization or system is welcoming to new populations and/or identities. This new presence is not merely tolerated but expected to contribute meaningfully into the system in a positive, mutually beneficial way. Inclusive processes and practices are ones that strive to bring groups together to make decisions in collaborative, mutual, equitable ways.

**Intersectionality:** The theory — conceptualized in the 1980s by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw — that markers of identity do not act independently of one another, but exist simultaneously, creating a complex web of privilege and oppression and “negating the possibility of a unitary or universal experience of any one manifestation of oppression” (i.e. a gay Latino man experiences male privilege differently than a gay white man AND homophobia differently than a gay white man). Examining the experiences of people who live at the intersections of two (or more) subordinated identities becomes a useful way to diagnose oppression within a system. (Adams:Crenshaw) It reflects the ways that our socially constructed identities come together in one body, and concerns the interrelatedness of our social identities, both privileged and oppressed, and how this mixture impacts both our self-perception and how we are viewed and treated by other individuals, groups, institutions, and by society. (Collins & Bilge :Kirk & Okazawa-Rey)

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

**Microaffirmation:** A small gesture of inclusion, caring or kindness. They include listening, providing comfort and support, being an ally and explicitly valuing the contributions and presence of all. It is particularly helpful for those with greater power or seniority to “model” affirming behavior.

**Microinequities:** Small events that may be ephemeral and hard to prove; that may be covert, often unintentional, and frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator; that occur wherever people are perceived to be different; and that can cause serious harm, especially in the aggregate.



**Micromessaging:** Small, subtle messages, sometimes subconscious, that are communicated between people without saying a word. We each send between 2,000 and 4,000 positive and negative micro-messages each day. Micro-messages are small behaviors that add up to have a big impact. These subtle, semi-conscious, universally understood messages, both verbal and physical, tell others what we really think about them.

**Oppression:** Results from the use of institutional power and privilege where one person or group benefits at the expense of another. Oppression is the use of power and the effects of domination.

**Prejudice:** A pre-judgment in favor of or against a person, a group, an event, an idea, or a thing. An action based on prejudice is discrimination. A negative prejudice is often called a stereotype. An action based on a stereotype is called bigotry. (What distinguishes this group of terms from all the others on these two pages is that there is no power relationship necessarily implied or expressed by “prejudice,” “discrimination,” “stereotype” or “bigotry.”)

**Privilege:** An advantage that comes from historical oppression of other groups. Privilege can be seen in race, gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, age etc. Acknowledging it isn’t meant to shame those with certain privilege but rather challenge the systems that make it exist. It does not mean that you with a certain privilege have never had challenges in life, just that there are some challenges you will not experience because of your identity.

**Stereotype:** An oversimplified generalization about a person or a group. These can be about both negative and positive qualities but regardless, they lump people together. Stereotypes are cognitive shortcuts and become a bias when you apply the stereotype to an action. Example: saying that white people can’t dance and Black people are good dancers is a stereotype. Asking a Black person to dance with you instead of the white person for this reason is a bias.

There are two concepts at play here.

1. **Stereotype threat:** a phenomenon where an individual subconsciously acts to fit a stereotype. Example: Women perform worse on math exams when they think that the results will show a gender difference.
2. **Empirical Generalization:** A fact about a large group of people. Example: Men are taller than women. Statistically this is true but not universal to all men.

**Unconscious Bias:** An implicit association, whether about people, places, or situations, which are often based on mistaken, inaccurate, or incomplete information and include the personal histories we bring to the situation.

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

## Ability

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**Ableism:** Beliefs or practices that rest on the assumption that being able-bodied is “normal” while other states of being need to be “fixed” or altered. This can result in devaluing or discriminating against people with physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities. *Institutionalized ableism* may include or take the form of un/intentional organizational barriers that result in disparate treatment of people with disabilities.

**Accessibility:** The "ability to access" the functionality of a system or entity and gain the related benefits. The degree to which a product, service, or environment is accessible by as many people as possible. *Accessible design* ensures both direct (unassisted) access and indirect access through assistive technology (e.g., computer screen readers). *Universal design* ensures that an environment can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people.

**Accommodation:** Any change, alteration or modification to the way things are customarily done that provides an equal opportunity. Examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to, sign language interpreters, materials in alternative formats (such as braille, different font size or digital format), preferential seating, and assistive listening devices.

**Assistive Technology (AT):** Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve ease of use or usability for individuals with disabilities. Examples include message boards, screen readers, refreshable Braille displays, keyboard and mouse modifications, and head pointers.

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

**Learning Disability:** A genetic and/or a neurobiological condition that interferes with a person’s ability to store, process, or produce information. Learning disabilities should not be confused with intellectual disabilities, autism, deafness, blindness, and behavioral disorders.

**Mental Health Disability:** A medical condition that can disrupt a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning. Mental health disabilities can affect persons of any age, race, religion or income and are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing.

**Neurodiversity:** When neurological differences are recognized and respected as are any other kind of human differences or variations. These differences can include Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, and Tourette Syndrome.

**Non-Visible Disabilities:** There are many people with non-visible disabilities that can range from chemical sensitivities to diabetes. Given their particular situation they may require some assistance. If a person tells you assistance is needed, do your best to provide it - even if it take a little extra time.

**Person First vs Identity First Language:** Person first language is preferred by many when speaking about persons with disabilities. Person first language, such as saying “Person with a Disability” rather than using expressions like “handicapped,” or “challenged,” emphasizes that the person is more important than the disability. However, there are individuals who prefer to be

identified first by their disability such as a “Deaf Person.” Presently, it is best to take your cue from the individual with a disability regarding preference.

**Universal design (UD)** – Also known as "inclusive design" and "design for all," this is an approach to the design of products, places, policies and services that can meet the needs of as many people as possible throughout their lifetime, regardless of age, ability, or situation.

**Reasonable accommodation** – A modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity. For example:

1. Modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enable a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the position such qualified applicant desires; or
2. Modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position; or
3. Modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity's employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by its other similarly situated employees without disabilities.

## Learn More



[Digital Accessibility at Harvard](#)  
[Harvard Accessible Education Office](#)  
[Harvard University Disability Resources](#)

## Gender Minorities and Sexuality

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**Affirmed Gender:** An individual's true gender, as opposed to their gender assigned at birth. This term should replace terms like *new gender* or *chosen gender*, which imply that an individual's gender was chosen.

**Benevolent Sexism (BS):** Involves subjectively positive images of women, such as considering women as nurturing, sensible, caring, and having a sense of aesthetic and moral superiority. BS idealizes women but only if they conform to the traditional roles men assign them and do not challenge men's authority. BS encompasses three different components (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997). The first one, Complementary Gender Differentiation, involves the belief that although men and women harmonize, women are the better gender—but only in ways that suit conventional gender roles. The second component is Heterosexual Intimacy or the belief that there are powerful feelings of personal need and intense affection between men and women and that a man can achieve true happiness in life only when involved in a romantic relationship with a woman. The third one is Protective Paternalism—the main interest in the current studies. Protective Paternalism refers to the belief that men should protect, cherish, and provide for the women on whom they depend.

**Biological Sex:** Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that determine if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include both primary and secondary sex characteristics, including genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, and genes. Often also referred to as “sex,” “*physical sex*,” “*anatomical sex*,” or specifically as “*sex assigned at birth*.” Sex is often conflated or interchanged with gender, which is more social than biological, and involves personal identity factors as well.

**Bisexual:** Refers to an individual who has the capacity for attraction—sexually, romantically, emotionally, or otherwise—to people with the same, and to people with different, genders and/or gender identities as themselves. People who identify as bisexual need not have had equal experience—or equal levels of attraction—with people across genders, nor any experience at all: it is attraction and self-identification that determine orientation. Sometimes referred to as *bi* or *bi+*.

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth align (e.g., man and male.) (Sometimes the shortened “cis” is used.)

**Coming Out:** For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, the process of self-identifying and self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life, and the sharing of their identity with others. Sometimes referred to as *disclosing*. Individuals often recognize a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/gender-expansive, or queer identity within themselves first, and then might choose to reveal it to others. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It's important to remember that coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

**Feminism:** As defined by Black feminist bell hooks in 2000, feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression.



**Gay:** A term used to describe (trans or cis) boys/men who are attracted to (trans or cis) boys/men, but often used and embraced by people with other gender identities to describe their same-gender attractions and relationships. Often referred to as 'homosexual,' though this term is no longer used by the majority of people with same-gender attractions.

**Gender:** A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual along a spectrum of man, woman, both, or neither.

**Gender-Affirming Surgery (GAS):** Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their innate gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older term *sex change*. Also sometimes referred to as *sexual reassignment surgery* (or *SRS*), *genital reconstruction surgery*, or *medical transition*.

**Gender-based Violence:** Sexual and gender-based violence refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and/or unequal power relationships.

**Gender Binary:** The disproven concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies that gender is biologically determined. (Watch [Beyond the Binary: Gender as a Constellation](#) by the Harvard College Women's Center)

**Gender Expression/Presentation:** Outward manifestations of one's gender identity as presented by one's vocal tenor, body shape, hairstyle, clothing selection, behavior, etc. Many transgender people seek to align their gender expression (how they look) with their gender identity (who they are), rather than with the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth. For example, a transgender man who was assigned female at birth may want to have a masculine gender expression, whereas someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as genderqueer may want to have a more androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine, or both masculine and feminine) gender expression.

**Non-Binary:** Refers to individuals who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man or woman. It is an identity term which some use exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like genderqueer, gender creative, gender nonconforming, gender diverse, or gender expansive. Individuals who identify as nonbinary may understand the identity as falling under the transgender umbrella and may thus identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as NB or Enby.

**Gender Identity:** One's internal sense of being male, female, neither, both, or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity. For transgender and gender non-conforming people, their sex assigned at birth, or natal sex, and their internal sense of gender identity are not the same.

**Gender Neutral:** Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns and salutations/titles—see *Gender-neutral salutations or titles*), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

**Gender Spectrum:** The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

**Heteronormativity:** The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities



**Heterosexual:** Refers to a person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to a person of the opposite gender. This is often referred to as straight.

**Homophobia:** An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Homophobia is also a structural form of discrimination manifesting in policies and institutions. Similarly, *biphobia* is an aversion people who are bisexual, and *transphobia* is an aversion to people who are transgender. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as *anti-LGBTQ+ bias*.

**Homosexual:** An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms *gay*, *lesbian*, or *queer*.

**Hostile Sexism (HS):** Covers a wide range of negative feelings and beliefs toward women, such as the belief that women try to sexually seduce men in order to gain advantages over them.

**Internalized Sexism:** Women's incorporation of sexist practices, and to the circulation of those practices among women, even in the absence of men.

**Intersectional Feminism:** Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American law professor who coined the term in 1989 explained Intersectional feminism as, "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other." Intersectional feminism centers the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context.

**Intersex:** Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceed to perform surgeries to 'align' their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children. Formerly the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudo-hermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

**Lesbian:** Used to describe (trans or cis) girls/women who are attracted to (trans or cis) girls/women. Often referred to as 'homosexual,' though this term is no longer used by the majority of women with same-gender attractions.

**LGBTQ+:** An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. It is sometimes stated as *LGBT* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) or *GLBT* (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). The addition of the *Q* for *queer* is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition, which recognizes more fluid identities; and as a move towards greater inclusivity for gender-expansive people (see *Queer* below). The *Q* can also stand for *questioning*, referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. The "+" represents those who are part of the community, but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity.

**Lifestyle:** A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ+. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ+ is a choice.



**Misgender:** To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

**Misogyny:** The term “misogyny” is derived from the Ancient Greek word “mīisogunīā” which means hatred towards women. Misogyny has taken shape in multiple forms such as male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, belittling of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification.

**Misogynoir:** The co-constitutive, anti-Black, and misogynistic racism directed at Black women, particularly in visual and digital culture (Bailey, 2010). The term is a combination of misogyny, the hatred of women, and noir, which means Black but also carries film and media connotations. It is the amalgamation of anti-Black racism and misogyny in popular media and culture that targets Black trans and cis women.

**Outing:** The deliberate or accidental sharing of another person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression without their explicit consent. Outing is considered disrespectful and a potentially dangerous act for LGBTQ+ individuals.

**Pronouns:** Words to refer to a person after initially using their name. Gendered pronouns include she and he, her and him, hers and his, and herself and himself. "Personal/Preferred gender pronouns" (or PGPs) are the pronouns that people ask others to use in reference to themselves. They may be plural gender-neutral pronouns such as they, them, their(s). Or, they may be ze (rather than she or he) or hir (rather than her(s) and him/his). Some people state their pronoun preferences as a form of allyship. (see Gender 101 Resource Sheet for [students](#) and [staff](#) by the Harvard College Women’s Center)

**Queer:** Historically a derogatory term used against LGBTQ people, it has been embraced and reclaimed by LGBTQ communities. Queer is often used to represent all individuals who identify outside of other categories of sexual and gender identity. Queer may also be used by an individual who feels as though other sexual or gender identity labels do not adequately describe their experience.

**Questioning:** Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. For many reasons this may happen later in life and does not imply that someone is choosing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.

**Sexism:** Sexism originally referred to the belief in the existence of a hierarchy where men are advantaged and women are disadvantaged. Sexism derives its basis during a time in which there existed a binary of sex and power, divided into the categories of men and women, respectively. Sex is an important aspect to sexism since it is in the term and makes up the base definition of sexism, which is relating to the categories of male and female. Today’s understanding of sexism has evolved to include:

- The belief that one sex is superior to the other
- The belief that everyone belongs to the male sex or the female sex
- Using the identities of man or woman to define ability
- Attitudes of hatred of women or men because of their gender
- Attitudes that demand or force masculinity on men and femininity on women

**Sexual Orientation:** Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition, one's sexual activity does not define one's sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term used to describe people who are not cisgender, who have a gender identity different than their sex assigned at birth. (Sometimes the shortened "trans" is used.)

**Transition:** A term sometimes used to refer to the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control. The validity of an individual's gender identity does not depend on any social, legal, and/or medical transition; the self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

**Two-Spirit:** A term used within some American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) communities to refer to a person who identifies as having both a male and a female essence or spirit. The term-- which was created in 1990 by a group of AI/AN activists at an annual Native LGBTQ conference-- encompasses sexual, cultural, gender, and spiritual identities, and provides unifying, positive, and encouraging language that emphasizes reconnecting to tribal traditions. (*With thanks to Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board [NPAIHB].*)

**Womanist:** A black feminist or feminist of color. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

## Learn More



[Harvard BGLTQ Office](#)

[Harvard Medical School Sexual and Gender Minority Health Equity Initiative Guide for Foundational Concepts and Affirming Terminology Related to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Sex Development](#)

[Harvard Title IX Office](#)

## Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin

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**American Indian and Alaska Native:** Those “having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment” (Grieco and Cassidy 2001, p. 2).

**Asian:** Defined in the United States (U.S.) Census as “people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent,” including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (Grieco and Cassidy 2001, p. 2).

**BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) is used to highlight the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black (African Americans) people have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all people of color within a U.S. context.

**Black/African Americans:** According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) people whose origins are “in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (p. A-3). The term includes descendants of African slaves brought to this country against their will and more recent immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and South or Central America (many individuals from these latter regions, if they come from Spanish-speaking cultural groups, identify or are identified primarily as Latino). The term Black is often used interchangeably with African American, although for some, the term African American is used specifically to describe those individuals whose families have been in this country since at least the 19th century and thus have developed distinctly African American cultural groups. Black can be a more inclusive term describing African Americans as well as for more recent immigrants with distinct cultural backgrounds.

**Ethnicity:** Ethnicity refers to the social identity and mutual belongingness that defines a group of people on the basis of common origins, shared beliefs, and shared standards of behavior (culture).

**Indigenous Peoples:** Those people native to a particular country or region. In the case of the United States and its territories, this includes Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, and American Indians.

**Latinos/Latinx:** Those who identify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino Census categories—Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban—as well as those who indicate that they are “other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino.” Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. (*Latinx:* An inclusive, gender-neutral term, sometimes used in place of the gendered, binary terms *Latino* or *Latina*, used to describe a person of Latin-American origin or descent.)

**Multiethnic:** A person who identifies as coming from two or more ethnicities; a person whose biological parents are of two or more ethnicities.

**Multiracial:** A person who identifies as coming from two or more races; a person whose biological parents are of two or more different races.

**People of Color:** Used primarily in the United States to describe any person who is not white; the term is meant to be inclusive among non-white groups, emphasizing common experiences of racism.

**Race:** A specious classification of human beings created by Europeans (whites) which assigns human worth and social status using ‘white’ as the model of humanity and the height of human



achievement for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power. (Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington, *Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change*. People's Institute Press. People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. 1444 North Johnson Street. New Orleans, Louisiana, 70116. 1997. Second Edition. p. 30—31.)

**Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders:** Those with “origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands” (Grieco and Cassidy 2001, p. 2). Other Pacific Islanders include Tahitians; Northern Mariana Islanders; Palauans; Fijians; and cultural groups like Melanesians, Micronesians, or Polynesians.

**White People:** Term used mostly for people with origins in any of the original peoples of Europe. This category includes people who indicate their race as White or report entries “such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish” (Grieco and Cassidy 2001, p. 2). The term has been expanded to encompass persons of Middle Eastern and North African descent (for example, in the United States of America Census definition).

## Racism

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**Anti-Blackness/Anti-Black Racism:** The Council for Democratizing Education defines anti-Blackness as being a two-part formation that both voids Blackness of value, while systematically marginalizing Black people and their issues. The first form of anti-Blackness is overt racism. Beneath this anti-Black racism is the covert structural and systemic racism which categorically predetermines the socioeconomic status of Blacks in this country. The structure is held in place by anti-Black policies, institutions, and ideologies. The second form of anti-Blackness is the unethical disregard for anti-Black institutions and policies. This disregard is the product of class, race, and/or gender privilege certain individuals experience due to anti-Black institutions and policies. This form of anti-Blackness is protected by the first form of overt racism.

**A Non-Racist:** A non-term. The term was created by whites to deny responsibility for systemic racism, to maintain an aura of innocence in the face of racial oppression, and to shift responsibility for that oppression from whites to people of color (called “blaming the victim”). Responsibility for perpetuating and legitimizing a racist system rests both on those who actively maintain it, and on those who refuse to challenge it. Silence is consent.

**An Anti—Racist:** Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you are; it is about what you do.

1. As applied to White People: Being antiracist evolves with their racial identity development. They must acknowledge and understand their privilege, work to change their internalized racism, and interrupt racism when they see it.
2. As applied to People of Color: It means recognizing how race and racism have been internalized, and whether it has been applied to other people of color.

**Blackface/Minstrelsy:** Minstrelsy, is a type of comedic performance of “Blackness” by whites in exaggerated costumes and make-up. The first minstrel shows were performed in 1830s New York by white performers with Blackened faces. Blackface performances grew particularly popular between the end of the Civil War and the turn-of-the century in Northern and Midwestern cities. Blackface and the codifying of Blackness— language, movement, deportment, and character—as caricature persists through mass media and in public performances today. In addition to the increased popularity of “Black” Halloween costumes, colleges and universities across the country continue to battle against student and professor Blackface performances.

**Color-blindness:** Note: We recognize the problematic ableist language of this term, but we also acknowledge it as a term used by scholars to describe an important social phenomenon. Colorblind ideology (purporting to not notice race in an effort to not be racist) asserts that ending discrimination merely requires treating individuals as equally as possible without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity.

**Cultural Appropriation:** Originally coined to describe the effects of colonialism, cultural appropriation generally entails adopting aspects of a minority culture by someone outside the culture, without sufficient understanding of its context or respect for the meaning and value of the



original. Cultural appropriation done in a way that promotes disrespectful cultural or racial stereotypes is considered particularly harmful.

**Horizontal Prejudice:** The result of people of targeted racial groups believing, acting on, or enforcing the dominant (White) system of racial discrimination and oppression. Horizontal racism can occur between members of the same racial group or between members of different targeted racial groups.

**Institutional Racism:** Racism at the institutional level is reflected in the policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that advantage whites as a group and disadvantage groups of color. Such institutions include, religion, government, education, law, the media, the health care system, and businesses/employment. (Bell, et al., p.135)

**Internalized Racism:** Individual or internalized racism lies within individuals. These are private manifestations of racism that reside inside the individual. Examples include prejudice, xenophobia, internalized oppression and privilege, and beliefs about race influenced by the dominant culture.

**Interpersonal Racism:** Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. Once private beliefs come into interaction with others, the racism is now in the interpersonal realm. Examples include public expressions of racial prejudice, hate, bias and bigotry between individuals.

**Model Minority Myth:** This term is often used to refer to a minority group that is perceived as particularly successful (economically, academically, or culturally), especially in a manner that contrasts with other marginalized groups. The designation is often applied to Asian Americans and many argue it intends to drive a wedge among marginalized groups, particularly among people of color in the US.

**Racial Justice:** The proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all.

**Race-consciousness:** Signifies being mindful of the impact of policies and practices on different racialized groups in our society. Race-consciousness can motivate a desire to become informed about how injustice occurs and to be intentional about seeking redress (Bell, 2016). Race-consciousness contradicts color-blindness through actively seeking to perceive, understand, and challenge racism. It also paves the way for imagining a more just and inclusive society that affirms diversity rather than reducing it to a white normative ideal.” (Bell, et al., p. 138)

**Racism:** The combination of individual prejudice and individual discrimination, on one hand, and institutional policies and practices, on the other, that result in the unjustified negative treatment and subordination of members of racial or ethnic groups that have experienced a history of discrimination. Prejudice, discrimination, and racism do not require intention. ([View the Four Dimensions of Racism Diagram](#))

**Reverse Racism:** A term created and used by white people to deny their white privilege. Those in denial use the term reverse racism to refer to hostile behavior by people of color toward whites, and to affirmative action policies, which allegedly give ‘preferential treatment’ to people of color over whites. In the U.S., there is no such thing as “reverse racism.”

**Structural/Systemic Racism:** Structural Racism or systemic racism in the U.S. is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the



preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people. ([View the diagram on Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization](#))

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

**White Privilege:** A privilege is a right, favor, advantage, immunity, specifically granted to one individual or group, and withheld from another. White privilege is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of: (1) Preferential prejudice for and treatment of white people based solely on their skin color and/or ancestral origin from Europe; and (2) Exemption from racial and/or national oppression based on skin color and/or ancestral origin from Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world. U.S. institutions and culture (economic, legal, military, political, educational, entertainment, familial and religious) privilege peoples from Europe over peoples from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world. In a white supremacy system, white privilege and racial oppression are two sides of the same coin.

**White Supremacy:** The racial ideology of white supremacy describes the belief system that rationalizes and reproduces white advantage in the political, social, and cultural institutions of society. This belief system holds that white people, white culture, and things associated with whiteness are superior to those of other racial groups. It assumes as normal and rational that the interests and perceptions of white individuals are central in society (Gillborn, 2006, p. 318). Unlike overt white supremacist groups, this racial ideology may be unexamined or unconscious. Relations of white dominance and subordination of others are reenacted daily throughout institutions and social settings in a society where whites overwhelmingly control material resources, and ideas about entitlement are widespread (Ansley, 1997).

**Whiteness:** “A location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at themselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.” (Frankenberg)

**Xenophobia:** Derived from the Greek word “xenos,” meaning stranger or foreigner, Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of those who are perceived as foreigners, manifested by suspicion of their activities, a desire to eliminate their presence, or seen as a threat to their national, ethnic or racial identity. Both xenophobia and racism often overlap, but the former is most likely associated with people outside of the country or community, while racism is associated most often with inferiority associated with physical characteristics or biological inferiority.

**Learn More**



[Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations](#)  
[Initiative on Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery](#)  
[Institutional Anti Racism and Accountability Project](#)

## Religion and Spirituality

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**Affirming Congregation:** Congregations, usually Christian churches, which welcome LGBTQ people.

**Agnostic:** A person who holds the belief that a greater entity, or existence of deities, is unknown or unknowable.

**Anti-Semitism:** A certain perception of Jewish people, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jewish people. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

**Interfaith:** Involving people of different faiths.

**Islamophobia:** A contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve “civilizational rehab” of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended.

**Religion:** A system of beliefs, usually spiritual in nature, and often in terms of a formal, organized denomination.

**Religious Accommodation:** Any adjustment to the work environment that will allow an employee or applicant to practice his or her religion. The need for religious accommodation may arise where an individual's religious beliefs, observances or practices conflict with a specific task or requirement of the position or an application process. Accommodation requests often relate to work schedules, dress and grooming, or religious expression in the workplace.

Learn More



[Harvard Chaplains representing the world's religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions](#)

## Socio-economic Status

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**Classism:** The institutional, cultural, and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign differential value to people according to their socioeconomic class in a social system characterized by economic inequality.

**First Generation Student:** One whose parents or guardians have not completed a course of study at an accredited four-year undergraduate institution, or an equivalent and recognized qualification abroad.

**Low-income Student:** Those whose family incomes fall below 50 percent of the federally established poverty guideline for their family size.

**Socio-economic status (SES):** The social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power and control.

### Learn More



[Harvard First Generation Program](#)

[Harvard Primus, a student led organization supporting first generation and/or low income students at Harvard](#)

## Social justice

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**Black Lives Matter:** A human rights movement co-founded by Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi. The movement campaigns against violence and systemic racism toward Black people. The movement began with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin in February 2012.

**Blaming the Victim:** Blaming the victim refers to the tendency to hold victims of negative events responsible for those outcomes ([Ryan, 1971](#); [Eigenberg and Garland, 2008](#)). While victim blaming can occur in a variety of situations, it appears to be particularly likely in cases of sexual assault ([Bieneck and Krahé, 2011](#)).

**DACA:** Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a program established by former President Obama in June 2012. Under DACA, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deferred taking action to remove qualifying undocumented immigrants and also granted renewable work authorization. However, on September 5, 2017, DHS issued a memorandum detailing the rescission and eventual phase-out of the DACA program. In early 2018, federal courts in California and New York enjoined the rescission of DACA, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) established a process for resuming DACA renewals. On November 12, 2019, the Supreme Court heard argument on whether the Trump administration could end the DACA program. On June 18, 2020 The Supreme Court blocked the Trump administration's attempt to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Some people use the term *undocumented* or *documented* to describe their status.

**Hate Crime:** Hate crime legislation often defines a hate crime as a crime motivated by the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation of any person.

**Hate Speech:** Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be de

**Me Too Movement:** The 'me too.' movement was founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing. In less than six months, because of the viral #metoo hashtag, a vital conversation about sexual violence has been thrust into the national dialogue. What started as local grassroots work has expanded to reach a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to de-stigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of a sexual violence worldwide.

**Safe Space/Brave Space:** A safe space can allow marginalized individuals opportunities to retreat from the very real threats and demands they face by their very existence and it can also serve as a space to allow students to process new and uncomfortable ideas productively. The term brave space was first popularized by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) in chapter eight—"From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces"—of their book *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators*. In it, a brave space within a classroom environment contains five main elements:



1. "Controversy with civility," where varying opinions are accepted
2. "Owning intentions and impacts," in which students acknowledge and discuss instances where a dialogue has affected the emotional well-being of another person
3. "Challenge by choice," where students have an option to step in and out of challenging conversations
4. "Respect," where students show respect for one another's basic personhood
5. "No attacks," where students agree not to intentionally inflict harm on one another

**Social Justice:** Social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure.

**Trigger:** A trigger is something that an individual says or does or an organizational policy or practice that makes us, as members of social groups feel diminished, offended, threatened, stereotyped, discounted, or attacked. Triggers do not necessarily threaten our physical safety. We often feel psychologically threatened. We can also be triggered on behalf of another social group. Though we do not feel personally threatened, our sense of social justice feels violated.

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## Related Terms

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**Ally:** a person who is a member of the dominant group who works to end oppression in his or her own personal and professional life by supporting and advocating *with* the oppressed population.

**Emotional Tax:** Noun: The combination of being on guard to protect against bias, feeling different at work because of gender, race, and/or ethnicity, and the associated effects on health, well-being, and ability to thrive at work.

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

**Health at Every Size:** Known by the acronym HAES, a social and health promotion movement that challenges social stigma based on weight, size and shape. The movement emphasizes body positivity, health outcomes, and eating and movement for wellbeing rather than weight control.

**Historically Black College or University (HBCU):** Historically Black colleges and universities—commonly called “HBCUs” —are defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 as, “...any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans.”

**-Ism:** A social phenomenon and psychological state where prejudice is accompanied by the power to systemically enact it.

**Imposter Syndrome:** The Imposter Syndrome, sometimes known as the Imposter Phenomenon or IP, can be defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy, particularly around one's academic or professional abilities. The feelings persist even in the face of information, which indicates the person's validity and successes. This is because the Imposter Syndrome is experienced internally as chronic self-doubt, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

**Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs):** Minority Serving Institutions emerged in response to a history of inequity, lack of minority people's access to majority institutions, and significant demographic changes in the country. Now an integral part of American higher education, MSIs—specifically Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) — have carved out a unique niche in the nation: serving the needs of low-income and underrepresented students of color.

**Power:** “Power” is a relational term. It can only be understood as a relationship between human beings in a specific historical, economic and social setting. It must be exercised to be visible:

1. Power is control of, or access to, those institutions sanctioned by the state. (Definition by Barbara Major of People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, New Orleans)
2. Power is the ability to define reality and to convince other people that it is their definition. (Definition by Dr. Wade Nobles)

3. Power is ownership and control of the major resources of a state; and the capacity to make and enforce decisions based on this ownership and control; and (Alternative definition to #1)
4. Power is the capacity of a group of people to decide what they want and to act in an organized way to get it.
5. (In terms of an individual), power is the capacity to act.

**Rape Culture:** Rape Culture is an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety.

**Social Construction:** The notion that patterns of human interaction (often deemed to be normal, natural or universal) are, in fact, humanly produced and constructed by social expectation and coercion but is presented as "objective." For example, the erroneous assumption of women being better at housework is not at all connected to their female anatomy, but to social expectations and pressures imposed on women.

## Learn More



Visit the [Learning Hub](#) on the DIB Office Website to explore more resources

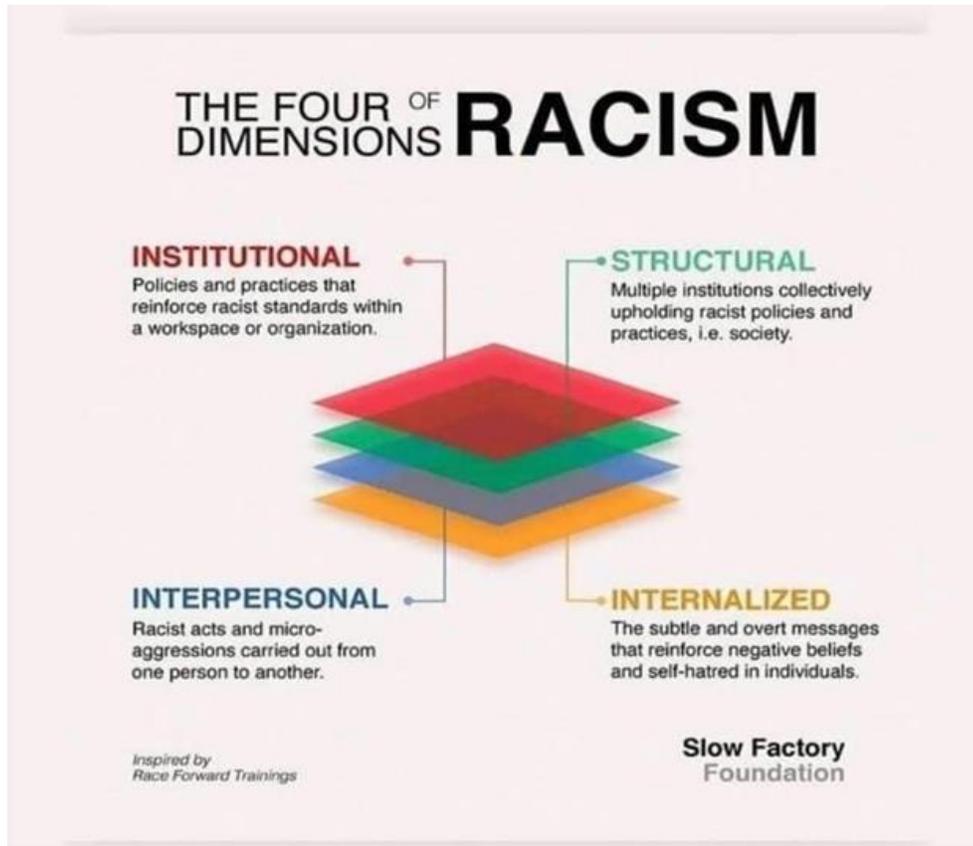
Visit the [DIB Link Channel](#) to keep up with events, people, and resources from across Harvard

## Infographics

### *Key Inclusion and Belonging Factors The Five Layers of Diversity*

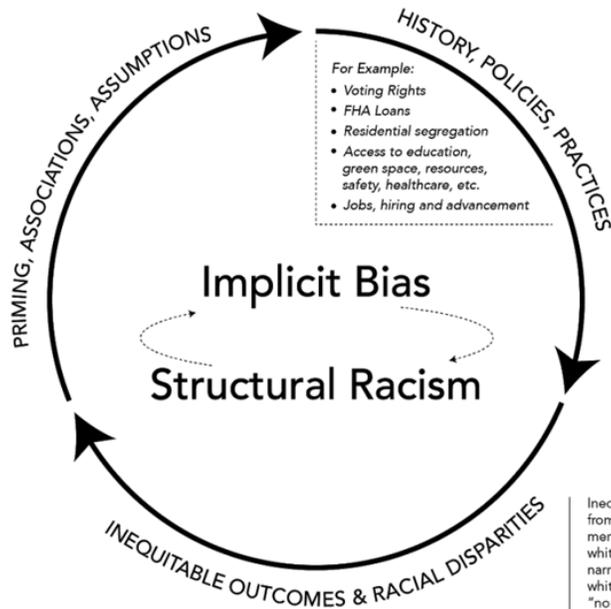


1. A model for understanding the layers of diversity. View the model and access the [Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Toolkit](#) from the Center for Workplace Development.



2. A diagram of the Four Dimensions of Racism from the **Race Forward** trainings.

Dominant narratives about race (family, media, society) coupled with racialized structural arrangements and differential outcomes by race all prime us to believe that people of color are inferior to white people, create and maintain harmful associations, and lead us to make harmful assumptions, consciously and unconsciously, about people of color



Race is created to justify enslaving people from Africa (economic engine of country)

Policies and practices that consolidate and protect power bestow unearned economic, social, cultural, and political advantage to people called "white," and unearned disadvantage to people of color

National narrative (ideology, belief system) about people of color being "less than" human (and less than white) justifies mistreatment and inequality (white supremacy)

Inequitable outcomes and experiences resulting from policy decisions in health, housing, employment, education, and life expectancy - reinforces white supremacist beliefs and ideology; dominant narrative uses disparate outcomes as evidence of white superiority, promotes whiteness as "normal" and desirable and justifies inequality

3. "Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization," By Kathleen Osta & Hugh Vasquez, National Equity Project.