

Terminology - Equity and Social Justice
Social Venture Partners Minnesota
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“Definitions belong to the definers—not the defined.” Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

These equity and social justice (E&SJ) terms and definitions provide a starting point for engaging in open and honest conversation, and is a tool meant to build a shared language of understanding. This list is a living document, to be updated often with definitions based in US current and historical context. As well, future versions may include global context. We invite you to share your ideas for future versions’ consideration, to help us enhance this learning tool. Contact Esther at egoldbergdavis@svpmn.org with your ideas. Sources used to create this list are included at the end of this document.

GENERAL E&SJ TERMS:

AFFINITY GROUPS: A group of people who choose to meet to explore a shared identity such as race, gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation. They can be subdivided to meet the needs of the group i.e. people of color, multi-racial multi-racial/women.

ADVOCACY: An activity by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions.

ALLY: A lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and groups of people – seeking to unite or form a connection for the common purpose. It is not self-defined; efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally with.

BIAS: Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared to another; usually in a way considered unfair. An inclination of temperament or outlook to present or hold a partial perspective, often accompanied by a refusal to even consider the possible merits of alternative points of view. People may be biased towards or against an individual, a race, a religion, a social class, or a political party, to name a few. Biased means one-sided, lacking a neutral viewpoint, not having an open mind. Implicit bias is unconscious, explicit bias is conscious.

- **IMPLICIT BIAS:** Occurs when someone consciously rejects stereotypes and supports anti-discrimination efforts but also holds negative associations in their mind unconsciously. Scientists have learned that we only have conscious access to 5% of our brains--much of the work our brain does occurs on the unconscious level. Thus, implicit bias does not mean people are hiding their racial prejudices. They do not know they have them.
- **UNCONSCIOUS BIAS:** Negative stereotypes regarding a person or group of people; these biases influence individuals’ thoughts and actions without their conscious knowledge. We all have unconscious biases.

CODE SWITCHING: The structure of verbal repertoires - includes a much greater number of alternates, reflecting contextual and social differences in speech. Linguistic interaction can be most fruitfully viewed as a process of decision-making, in which speakers select from a range of possible expressions. Speakers choose among this repertoire in accordance with the meanings they wish to convey. No matter your race, ethnicity, class or cultural background, you probably code switch. A few reasons that people code switch include, but are not limited to: our subconscious brain takes over without us noticing it, we want to fit in (or stand out), we want to get something, we what to say something in secret, and it helps us convey a thought.

COLONIALISM: Some form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a people. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban or industrial encroachments. The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact. The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

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CULTURE: Learned and shared values, beliefs, languages, and customs of a social group. Shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive structures, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization.

DEMOCRACY: A governmental system whose actions and principles value and reflect the people's views, through their votes and elected officials. In the US, our founding ideals and values include: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people; with liberty and justice for all; all men (women) are created equal.

DISCRIMINATION: Acting on/from bias or prejudice. The prejudicial treatment of an individual or group based on their actual or perceived membership in a certain group or category.

DIVERSITY: Demographic representation, awareness, and appreciation of individual, social, economic, and cultural differences. A multiplicity of shared and different individual and group experiences, values, beliefs, and characteristics among people. The differences between us based on which we experience systemic advantages or encounter systemic barriers to opportunities.

DOMINANT CULTURE (HEGEMONY): The cultural beliefs, values, and traditions of the colonizer which are centered and dominant in society's structures and practices. Dominant cultural practices are thought of as "normal" and therefore, preferred and right.

EQUALITY: A state, quality, or ideal of treating everyone the same. It only works if everyone starts from the same place. Since not everyone starts from the same place due to historic and current power dynamics, systems, and institutions, equity (see definition below) is the approach to achieve equality (the outcome).

EQUITY: A state, quality, or ideal of being fair and just within the context of historical and current power dynamics. Everyone gets what they need. It looks at the big picture and daily lives. It examines causal systems and history and how they impact individuals. It looks squarely at power, privilege, and access to resources. It allocates resources to ensure everyone has access to the same resources & opportunities. Equity recognizes that advantages and barriers—the 'isms'—exist. Equity is the approach & equality is the outcome.

GATEKEEPER: A person or position that controls access and criteria for access to resources.

INTERSECTIONALITY: The theory that individuals can face multiple threats of discrimination when their identities overlap a number of minority classes. Humans are complex beings who hold a variety of identities. Intersectionality refers to the identities, both experienced internally and externally by a person. Examples of these minority classes and related identities include: race, gender, gender expression, age, ethnicity, health/disability, socio-economic class, and other characteristics.

INCLUSION: A state, quality, or ideal of being a part of a group or structure where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized and respected. Fostering a sense of belonging by centering, valuing, & amplifying the voices, perspectives & styles of those who experience more barriers based on their identities.

MICROAGGRESSIONS: Everyday verbal, nonverbal, 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. These actions and remarks, often well-meaning, convey an unconscious bias and hurt the person on the receiving end. Language is one tool of an oppressive system – words are powerful, they are not neutral, and they matter. One example includes: "I'm color blind." "When I look at you, I don't see race/color." *Indicates a white person does not want to acknowledge race. This denies a person of color's racial/ ethnic experiences and denies the individual as a racial/ cultural being.*

MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCY: A process of learning about and becoming allies with people from other cultures, thereby broadening our own understanding and ability to participate in a multicultural process. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world and an openness to learn from them.

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OPPRESSION: Prejudice + power (institutional and historical); systemic devaluing, marginalizing and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, others have access. Ex - Systemic, institutional, and interpersonal.

POWER: The ability or official authority to make decisions for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The capacity to exercise control over others. Power operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels.

PREJUDICE: Making a judgment or assumption about someone or something before having enough knowledge to be able to do so with guaranteed accuracy. The word prejudice is most often used to refer to preconceived judgments toward people or a person because of race, gender, social class, ethnicity, age, disability, body type, religion, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.

PRIVILEGE: Systemic and unearned favoring, enriching, valuing, validating and including of certain social identities over others. Individuals cannot 'opt out' of systems of privilege; rather these systems are inherent to society. In the United States, privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups: white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender, English-speaking, Christian, middle or owning class; middle-aged. If we have privilege, we bear a larger burden in listening with empathy and responding with humility.

POSITIONALITY: Status of a person beyond hierarchy often reflective of dominant and power-based norms.

REPARATIONS: Initiatives that seek to address the harms caused by systemic human rights violations. They can take the form of compensating for the losses suffered, which helps overcome some of the consequences of abuse. They can also be future oriented—providing rehabilitation and a better life to victims—and help to change the underlying causes of abuse. Reparations publicly affirm that victims are rights-holders entitled to redress.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: Active engagement toward equity and inclusion that addresses issues of institutional, structural, and environmental inequity, power, and privilege. Justice is about dismantling barriers to resources and opportunities in society so that all individuals & communities can live a full and dignified life. These barriers are essentially the "isms" in society: racism, classism, sexism, ableism, etc. To engage impactfully: 1) lean in with these openers (these help us move through this stress, and help advance equity): curiosity, grief, humility, hope, and emotional/spirituality work, and 2) work to eliminate these stoppers (these make us stuck in this stress, and help advance the status quo of inequities): guilt, shame, and blame.

STEREOTYPE: Generalizing in an oversimplified way about an identifiable group.

STEREOTYPE THREAT: The fear that one's behavior will confirm an existing stereotype of a group with which one identifies; this fear may lead to an impairment of performance.

SYSTEMS CHANGE: A framework that addresses the root causes (rather than symptoms) of social problems, which are often intractable and embedded in networks of cause and effect. It is an intentional process designed to fundamentally alter the components and structures that cause the system to behave in a certain way. Unless we attempt to deal with the root causes of social problems, we will only be mitigating the consequences of malfunctioning systems, or even providing inadvertent cover for their failure—we will not create the change we want to see.

RACIAL E&SJ TERMS:

ANTI-RACIST/ANTI-RACISM: A person actively involved in anti-racist action. Anti-racism includes beliefs, actions, movements, and policies adopted or developed to oppose racism. Anti-racism is intended to promote an egalitarian society in which people do not face discrimination on the basis of their race.

COLORISM: Discrimination based on the skin color.

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ETHNICITY: A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. The cultural characteristics that connect a particular group or groups of people to each other. “Ethnicity” is sometimes used as a euphemism for “race,” or as a synonym for minority group. While ethnicity and race are related concepts, the concept of ethnicity is rooted in the idea of societal groups, marked especially by shared nationality, trivial affiliation, religious faith, shared language, or cultural and traditional origins and backgrounds, whereas race is rooted in the idea of biological classifications according to morphological features such as skin color or facial characteristics. Examples of different ethnic groups are: Haitian, African American (Black); Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese (Asian); Cherokee, Mohawk, Navaho (Native American); Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican (Latino); Polish, Irish, and Swedish (White).

RACE: Socially constructed categories of relative social rank based on skin color and physical features. Today in the US, there are five racial narratives: black, white, red, brown, and yellow.

RACIAL EQUITY: Closing the gaps so that race does not predict one’s success, while also improving outcomes for all. A few examples include: 1) targeting strategies to focus improvements for those worse off and address root causes of these inequities, not just their manifestation (symptoms), and 2) moving beyond services and focusing on changing policies, practices, attitudes, cultural messages, institutions, and structures that reinforce differential outcomes by race.

RACIAL EQUITY TOOL: A decision-making tool to help ensure we’re advancing racial equity (and making it less likely that we’re replicating the status quo). A team-based approach with diverse members, it’s a continuous loop used early and often throughout a decision-making process. Multiple tools and approaches exist to advance racial equity. As just one example, RaceForward’s tool includes six steps with various questions to ask in each step. At the very minimum, ask these four questions for every decision made about your policies, programs, procedures, and practices, etc.: 1) Who benefits from the decision? 2) Who is burdened by the decision? 3) How are we advancing racial equity? and 4) How are we mitigating the unintended consequences (intent vs impact)?

RACISM: The conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional enactment of racial power, grounded in racial prejudice, by an individual or group against another individual or group perceived to have lower racial status. A system of privilege (advantage) based on race. In today’s context that means discrimination of people of color by white people.

- **INTERNALIZED RACISM:** Internalization by people of color of the stereotypes/myths about members of their own group, including themselves. People of color are not racist because they do not systematically benefit from racism. And equally important, there is no systematic cultural and institutional support or sanction for the racial bigotry of people of color. Using the same logic, the term sexist is used to describe men having gender-based prejudices. Though women can and do have these gender-based prejudices, only men systematically benefit from sexism.
- **PASSIVE RACISM:** A more subtle version of racism and can be seen in the collusion of laughing when a racist joke is told, letting exclusionary hiring practices go unchallenged, accepting as appropriate the omissions of people of color from having representation or a seat at the table, and avoiding difficult race-related issues, to name a few. Racism is deeply ingrained in the American institutions; it is easily self-perpetuating and requires “business as usual” to maintain it.

RACIAL HEALING: To restore to health or soundness; to repair or set right; to restore to spiritual wholeness.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION: Reconciliation involves three ideas. First, it recognizes that racism in America is both systemic and institutionalized, with far-reaching effects on both political engagement and economic opportunities for minorities. Second, reconciliation is engendered by empowering local communities through relationship-building and truth-telling. Lastly, justice is the essential component of the conciliatory

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process - justice that is best termed as restorative rather than retributive, while still maintaining its vital punitive character.

WHITE FRAGILITY: The way white people have extremely low thresholds for enduring any discomfort associated with challenges to our racial worldviews. The inability of white people to tolerate this racial stress. Racial stress is triggered when our positions, perspectives, or advantages are challenged. White fragility functions to block the challenge and regain white racial equilibrium.

GENDER/GENDER EXPRESSION E&SJ TERMS:

ASEXUAL: A term that describes a person who lacks sexual attraction or desire for other people.

BISEXUAL: A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

CISGENDER: Person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

GAY: A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to some members of the same gender.

GENDER: Socially constructed categories of masculinity/manhood and femininity/womanhood not based on biology. A person's internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither (gender identity), as well as one's outward presentation and behaviors (gender expression.) Gender norms vary among cultures and over time.

GENDER BINARY: The idea that there are two distinct and opposite genders - male and female. This model is limiting and doesn't account for the full spectrum of gender identities and gender expressions.

GENDER EXPRESSION: How a person expresses their gender through outward presentation and behavior. This includes, for example, a person's name, clothing, hairstyle, body language, and mannerisms.

GENDER IDENTITY: An internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, a blend of both or neither - how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same as or different from their sex assigned at birth.

HOMOPHOBIA: The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex or gender.

LESBIAN: A term describing a woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to some other women.

LGBTQIA+: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual and/or ally.

NON-BINARY: An umbrella term for people who transcend commonly held concepts of gender through their own expression and identities. Other terms for this might include gender expansive, gender creative, or genderqueer. Some non-binary people also identify as Transgender.

OUTING: Exposing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity to others without their permission.

QUEER: A term some people use to identify themselves with a flexible and inclusive view of gender and/or sexuality. Also used interchangeably with LGBTQ to describe a group of people such as "queer youth." It is also seen in academic fields, such as queer studies or queer theory. Historically it has been used as a pejorative, or negative, term for LGBTQ people. Some people still find the term offensive while some embrace the term as an identity.

SEX: One's biological and physical attributes - external genitalia, sex chromosomes and internal reproductive structures - that are used to assign someone as male or female at birth.

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SEXISM: A system of privilege based on gender. In today's context that means discrimination of women by men. Internalized sexism: involuntary belief by women that stereotypes/myths about women that are delivered to everyone in a sexist society are true (ex: stupid, weak, passive, manipulative, gossip, emotional, etc.).

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth: A term used to describe people who identify as a different gender from the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS E&SJ TERMS:

SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS: Socially constructed categories of relative social ranking or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, occupation, wealth, status, and/or power. It specifically relates to the "net" that catches you – economic security is a more accurate measure of someone's class status than their class performance. Today in the US, the five main class divisions include: poor, working class, lower middle, professional middle, and owning.

DISABILITY E&SJ TERMS:

ABLEISM: Discrimination toward a person who is disabled. This discrimination can be directed toward physical and/or mental abilities. See "disabled" definition.

DISABILITY: According to the ADA, "disability" is a legal term rather than a medical one. By the ADA's standards, a person with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. We use "people first" language. (i.e. a person with a disability rather than a disabled person). Additionally, terms like "handicapped" are no longer commonly used.

LANGUAGE LEARNER E&SJ TERMS:

LANGUAGE LEARNER: A term used for people learning a language they have not yet mastered. Other terms like "English Language Learning" (ELL) or "English as a Second Language" (ESL) are also used. The term ESL implies the person only knows one other language. Using the term "Language Learning" is a broader term and is more widely used. Several countries outside of the United States use English as their national language. Because a person does not have an "American" accent, does not mean they aren't a native English speaker.

* **Acknowledgement:** In creating this terminology document, we reviewed various resources and are deeply grateful for their content. This list was adapted from Larson Facilitation Tools. Other sources include (in alphabetical order): American Psychological Association, The Americans with Disabilities Act, Avarna Group, Dr. Beverly Tatum's *Defining Racism*, Derald Wing Sue's *Micro-aggressions In Everyday Life*/UC-Santa Cruz Academic Affairs Adaptation, Fellowship for Race & Equity in Education, Hackman Consulting Group SVP retreats and conference sessions, HRC Foundation's *Welcoming Schools – LGBTQ Definitions For Adults*, John J. Gumperz-American Anthropologist, Lewis and Clark College ABC's of Social Justice, NPR Blog - Code Switch, RaceForward's Racial Equity Tool, Rachel Wharton-New Philanthropy Capital/Alice Evans-Lankelly Chase Foundation - Blog, Racial Equity Tools Glossary, Dr. Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, and Vanderbilt University-Power and Privilege.