

# Language and Definitions for Equity and Social Justice

## Social Location

Social location is the combination of groups that a person belongs to because of their identity. Everyone has a social location. There are many factors that go into the complex ways that social location plays out, but the main areas that have exceeding social impact in the US are gender, race, class, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, immigration status/nation of citizenship, and Native American or Indigenous Affiliation. The combination of these identities determines one's social location. A person's identity and social location is influenced by history and other social factors. It is necessary to think about how your identity and social location shapes any role that you take on. It's central to decision-making, art making, managing conflict, communicating, leadership, and much, much, more. It is most important to understand where you have privilege, and how you can use your voice strategically in solidarity. -artEquity.org

## Gender

Refers to socially constructed roles, behavior, activities, and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender is also an individual's self-conception, as distinguished from biological sex. "Transgender" is the state of one's gender identity not matching one's 'assigned sex,' while "cisgender" is to have a gender identity that does match one's assigned sex. "Gender nonconforming" is another identifier, used to indicate that one doesn't adhere to stereotypical understandings of gender expression and roles. Examples: Woman, Man, Transgender, Cisgender -artEquity.org

## Race

A social and artificial construct with exceeding social, economic, and political significance. Race is often associated with physical characteristics, e.g., skin color, hair types, eye shape, eye color, lip shape, etc. -artEquity.org

Examples: Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, Latinx, Black, White, Bi/Multiracial

## Disability

This definition of disability is a compilation of several resources, which focuses on and promotes the concept of disability from the perspective of the *social model* rather than the traditional, antiquated medical model, which emphasizes impairments and limitations and puts the onus on disabled people to be "fixed" or adapt to societal barriers. Developed by disabled people, the social model regards disability as a socially constructed experience that identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) as contributory factors in disabling people. The social model promotes the notion that while physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological variations may cause individual functional limitation or impairments, these lead to disability only if society fails to take account of and include people regardless of their individual differences. The social model further recognizes disability as a community and a culture.

-*"Disability Deep Dive Language Guide,"* by Claudia Alick, Christine Bruno, and Beth Prevor  
Examples: Person with a disability, disabled person, autistic, blind, Deaf/deaf, currently nondisabled (*Note: preferences vary within disability communities about the use of person-first vs. identity-first language*)

### **Sexual Orientation**

An individual's physical and/or emotional attraction to another individual. A person's sexual orientation is sometimes distinct from a person's gender identity and expression.

Examples: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pan-Attractual, Heterosexual, Queer -artEquity.org

### **Class**

A relative social ranking or category based on income, financial resources, education, status, and/or power. Class categories are usually associated with levels of access to resources such as money, contacts, education. Our perceptions of class identity are often tied to culture, food, clothing, language, cars, entertainment, work, and more. Examples: Poor, Working Class, Middle Class, Owing Class, Ruling Class -artEquity.org

### **Religion**

An institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine. Faith is a system of religious or spiritual beliefs. Spirituality is an individual's belief and commitment to matters that are considered to be sacred to that individual. Examples: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Agnostic, Atheist -artEquity.org

### **Immigration Status; Nation of Citizenship; Native American, Tribal, or Indigenous Affiliation**

Immigrant status refers to the status of a person's residency-in this context, in the United States. Nation of citizenship refers to where one holds citizenship status. Citizenship and certain immigration statuses bring with them a host of protections and privileges. - artEquity.org  
Native American/Tribal sovereignty in the United States is the inherent authority of indigenous tribes to govern themselves within the borders of the United States of America. -Wikipedia  
Examples: United States, Mexico, Nigeria, Korea, Ireland, Turkey, Syria, France, South Africa, Cherokee, Sioux

### **Age**

Refers to how long a person has been alive. Ageism is stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups on the basis of their age. The term was coined in 1969 by Robert Neil Butler to describe discrimination against seniors, and patterned on sexism and racism. While the term has also been used to describe prejudice and discrimination against adolescents and children, including ignoring their ideas because they are too young, the term is predominantly used in relation to the treatment of older people. -Wikipedia

Examples: Child, Young Adult, Middle-Age Adult, Elderly

**Diversity:** Diversity has come to refer to the various backgrounds and races that comprise a community, nation or other grouping. In many cases the term diversity does not just acknowledge the existence of diversity of background, race, gender, religion, ability/disability, sexual orientation and so on, but implies an appreciation of these differences. The structural racism perspective can be distinguished from a diversity perspective in that structural racism takes direct account of the striking disparities in well-being and opportunity areas that come along with being a member of a particular racial group and works to identify ways in which these disparities can be eliminated. - Aspen Institute

A diversity focus primarily addresses the symptoms of racism [and other oppressions] - with the goal of minimizing tensions and maximizing people's ability to tolerate difference and get along. There can be diversity without equity. - [Rinku Sen](#)

**Inclusion:** Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work. The process of inclusion engages each individual and makes people feeling valued essential to the success of the organization. Individuals function at full capacity, feel more valued, and included in the organization's mission. This culture shift creates higher performing organizations where motivation and morale soar. - [Wikipedia](#)

Authentically brings the perspectives and contributions of all people to the table, equitably distributes power, and incorporates their needs, assets and perspectives into the design and implementation of processes, policies, activities, and decision-making.

- [Baltimore Racial Justice Action](#)

Simple inclusion leaves structural inequity intact, and fails to address the role of institutions in perpetuating injustice. Making inclusion in unjust institutions the goal, rather than regarding it as a step in a longer journey toward justice, forces us to accept that winning for some means losing for others – that some of us just don't fit in the vision of America we're creating. - [Race Files](#)

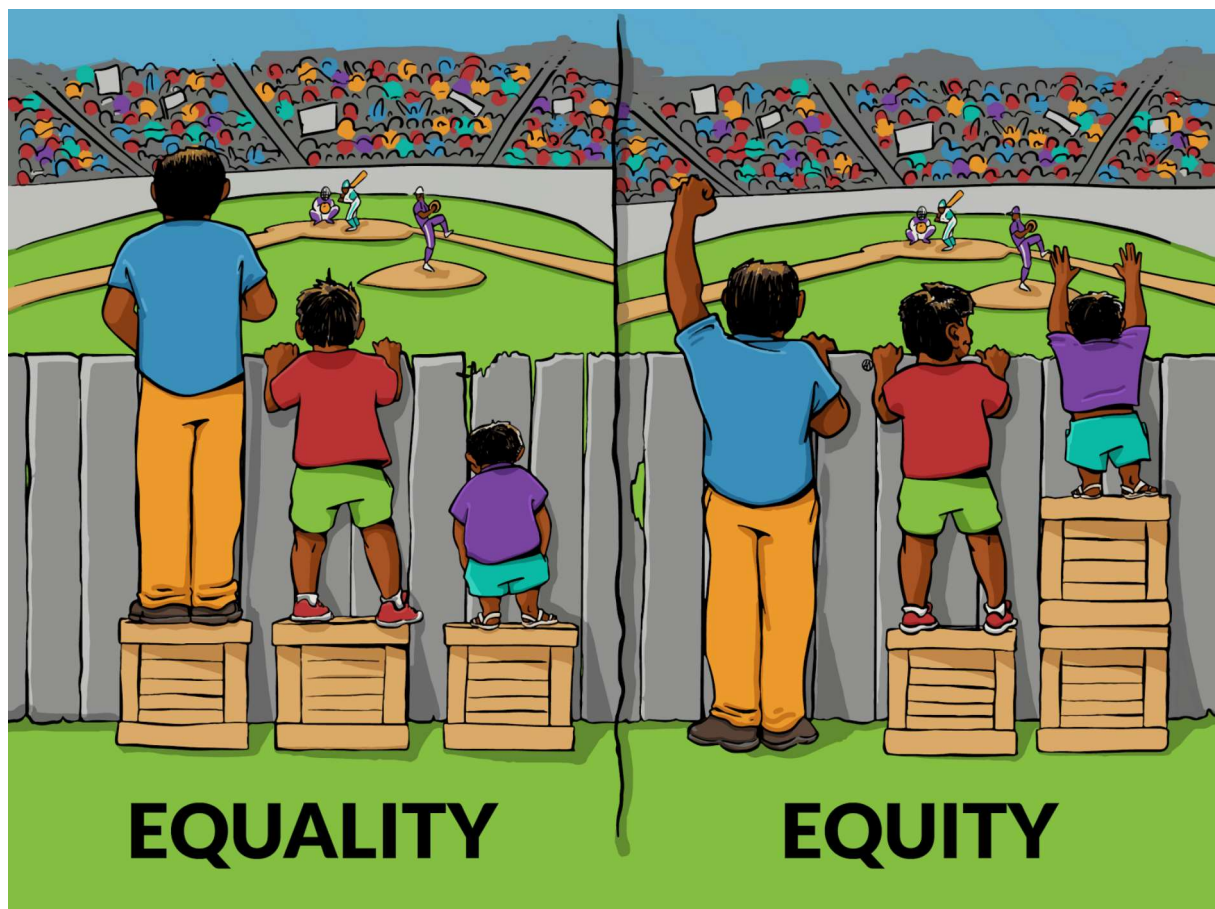
**Equity:** The condition that would be achieved if the identities assigned to historically oppressed groups no longer acted as the most powerful predictor of how one fares, with the root causes of inequities, not just their manifestations, eliminated. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce or fail to eliminate differential outcomes by group identity/background (economic, educational, health, criminal justice, etc.).

- [Baltimore Racial Justice Action](#)

Racial equity refers to what a genuinely non-racist society would look like. In a racially equitable society, the distribution of society's benefits and burdens would not be skewed by race. In other words, racial equity would be a reality in which a person is no more or less likely to experience society's benefits or burdens just because of the color of their skin. This is in contrast to the current state of affairs in which a person of color is more likely to live in poverty, be imprisoned, drop out of high school, be unemployed and experience poor health outcomes like diabetes, heart disease, depression and other potentially fatal diseases. Racial equity holds society to a higher standard. It demands that we pay attention not just to individual-level discrimination, but to overall social outcomes. - Aspen Institute

### **Equality vs. Equity:**

Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equality is treating everyone the same. Equality aims to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help. Equity appears unfair, but it actively moves everyone closer to success by "leveling the playing field."



*Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire  
interactioninstitute.org and madewithangus.com*

**Justice:** the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes for all. A justice focus primarily addresses the causes of inequality and the solutions and strategies for producing equity. - [Rinku Sen](#) [Racial justice movement today](#)

Justice ≠ Diversity (Diversity = Variety)

Justice ≠ Equality (Equality = Sameness, “Equal” Opportunity)

Justice = Equity

## **Privilege**

Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, access, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of marginalized groups. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned the privileges that they enjoy or that everyone could have access to their privileges if only they worked to earn them. In fact, privileges are not earned and they are granted to people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not.

-Ignite! Anti-Racist Toolkit

## **Oppression**

Institutionalized power that is historically formed and perpetuated over time. It allows certain ‘groups’ to assume a dominant position over ‘other groups’ and this dominance is maintained at institutional and structural levels. This means oppression is built into institutions like government, education, criminal justice, philanthropy and every other sector.

-Ignite! Anti-Racist Toolkit

## **Systems of oppression** (The "ism"s)

...have a history – they have formed over time in specific political, economic and social contexts.

...run through our language and shape the way we act and the way we do things.

...are built around what are understood to be “norms” in our societies.

...are linked - multiple forms oppress (or privilege) each of us at the same time

-Ignite! Anti-Racist Toolkit

## **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is the study of intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination or discrimination. This was first named by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, though the concept can be traced back to the 19th century. The theory suggests that—and seeks to examine how—various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and other axes of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systemic injustice and social inequality. Intersectionality holds that the

classical conceptualizations of oppression within society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and belief-based bigotry, do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination. -Wikipedia

**Structural/Systemic Racism:** A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist. - Aspen Institute

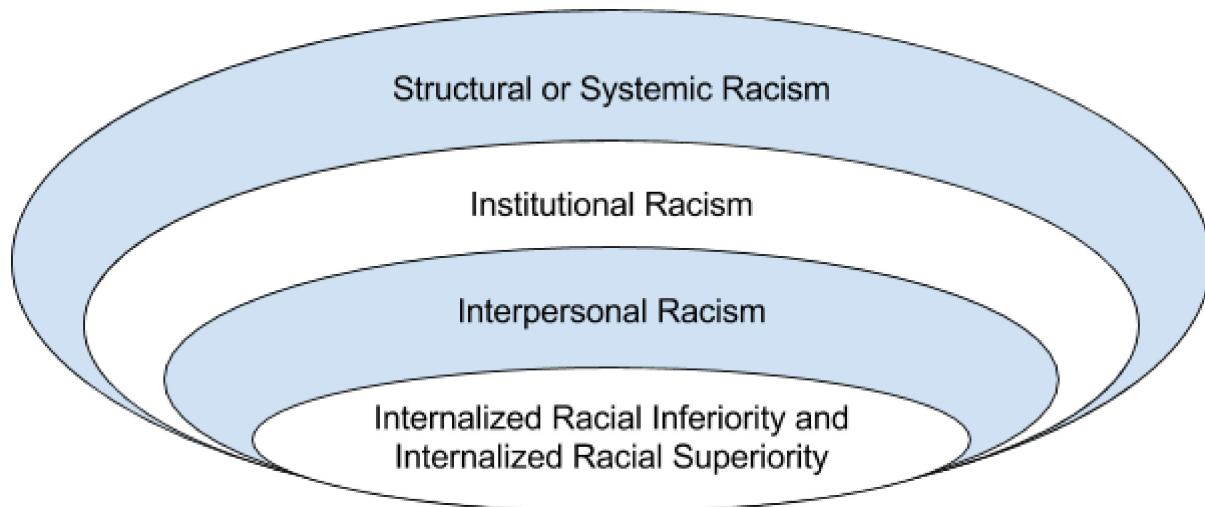
**Institutional Racism:** Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Poignant examples of institutional racism can be found in school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished at much higher rates than their white counterparts, in the criminal justice system, and within many employment sectors in which day-to-day operations, as well as hiring and firing practices can significantly disadvantage workers of color. - Aspen Institute

Those established laws, policies and practices within an institution, supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority, which systematically reflect, produce and maintain racial inequalities in U.S. society to the advantage of whites and the disadvantage of other races. Institutional racism is often discrimination without prejudice. Individuals can unintentionally discriminate by applying policies and practices that perpetuate past inequalities. While their attitude may be unbiased, their behavior enforces the philosophy as well as the practice of racism. - [Baltimore Racial Justice Action](#)

**Interpersonal Racism:** Individual racism can include face-to-face or overt actions toward a person that intentionally express prejudice, hate or bias based on race. - Aspen Institute

### **Internalized Racial Inferiority / Internalized Racial Superiority**

Lies within individuals. These are private beliefs about race that reside inside our minds. Internalized Racial Inferiority - the acceptance of and acting out of an inferior definition of self, given by the oppressor, is rooted in the historical designation of one's race. Over many generations, this process of disempowerment and disenfranchisement expresses itself in self-defeating behaviors. Internalized Racial Superiority - the acceptance of and acting out of a superior definition rooted in the historical designation of one's race. Over many generations, this process of empowerment and access expresses itself as unearned privileges, access to institutional power, and invisible advantages based upon race. - People's Institute



**Cultural representations** refer to popular stereotypes, images, frames and narratives that are socialized and reinforced by media, language and other forms of mass communication and “common sense.” Cultural representations can be positive or negative, but from the perspective of the dismantling structural racism analysis, too often cultural representations depict people of color in ways that are dehumanizing, perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes, and have the overall effect of allowing unfair treatment within the society as a whole to seem fair, or ‘natural.’ - Aspen Institute

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*Acknowledgment: Gratitude to each of the sources noted above.*