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UC DAVIS



Office of Campus Community Relations



Glossary

Words hold power beyond their meanings. A term used in one context or by a certain group may constitute a slur or insult in another context or to someone else. Their meanings also evolve and often cannot be fully described in a few sentences.

With that in mind, this glossary is not an exhaustive list or definitive collection of definitions. Rather, it draws from academic sources used by other universities as a starting point to understand terms related to community, diversity and identity.

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A

Abelism: Privilege and assumed access by able-bodied and able-minded people.

African American: 1. Refers to Black individuals living in the United States with African ancestry.
2. Refers to individuals of African heritage living in the United States having similar experiences, culture heritage and ancestry of former slaves.

Ageism: Discrimination based on age—i.e., of the elderly based on the notion that they are incapable of performing certain functions such as driving, or of the young based on the notion that they are immature and therefore incapable of performing certain tasks).

Ally: One who rejects a dominant ideology and takes action against oppression of a particular group—although they are not a member of the targeted group—out of a belief that eliminating oppression will benefit both the agents and targets of such actions.

Anti-Semitism: Hatred toward Jews; prejudicial belief in the "racial" or religious inferiority of Jews*.

Anti-Arab: Racism coupled with anti-Islamic practices (religious and/or cultural) against people of Arabic or Middle Eastern descent.

Asian American: Refers to individuals living in the United States with Asian ancestry.

Assimilation: An incoming group's adoption of the cultural traits and identity of the host group.

B

Bias: Prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bisexual: A person with a sexual and affectional or emotional orientation toward people of both sexes; bisexual men and women have sexual and romantic attractions to both men and women. Depending upon the person, his or her attraction may be stronger to women or to men, or it may be approximately equal. A bisexual person may have had sex with people of both sexes, or only of one sex, or he or she may never have had sex at all. It is important to note that some people who have sex with both men and women do not consider themselves bisexual. Bisexuals are also referred to as "bi."

C

Chicana/o: People of Mexican decent in the U.S. It is a political and ideological term that was chosen self-consciously to connote a shared experience of internal colonization and cultural marginalization.

Class: Category of division based on economic status; members of a class are theoretically assumed to possess similar cultural, political and economic characteristics and principles.

Classism: Discrimination based on class.

Community: Entity and ideal. Can signify geographical area, social group, shared values, histories, and/or interests.

Culture: Aspects of a social environment that are learned and used to communicate values such as what is considered good and desirable, right and wrong, normal, different, appropriate or attractive. The means through which society creates a context from which individuals derive meaning and prescriptions for successful living within that culture (language, speech patterns, orientation toward time, standards of beauty, holidays that are celebrated, primimages of a "normal" family).

D

Diaspora: A historical dispersion of a group of people deriving from similar origins—i.e., the African Diaspora includes African Americans, Africans, Caribbeans, Afro-Russians, Black Brazilians, Afro Latinos, etc.

Disadvantaged: 1. A historically oppressed group having less than sufficient resources to fund all of basic needs; without expendable income. 2. A group characterized by disproportionate economic, social and political disadvantages.

Discrimination: A biased decision based on a prejudice against an individual group characterized by race, class, sexual orientation, age, disabilities, etc.

Diversity: A situation that includes representation of multiple (ideally all) groups within a prescribed environment, such as a university or a workplace. This word most commonly refers to differences between cultural groups, although it is also used to describe differences within cultural groups—e.g., diversity within Asian-American culture includes Korean Americans and Japanese Americans. An emphasis on accepting and respecting cultural differences by recognizing that no one culture is intrinsically superior to another underlies the current usage of the term.

Dominant culture: The cultural values, beliefs and practices that are most common or that are most powerful and influential, within a given society.

E

Emigrant: One who leaves his/her country of origin to reside in a foreign country.

Ethnicity: 1. 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. 2. A quality assigned to a specific group of people historically connected by a common national origin or language. Ethnic classification is used for identification rather than differentiation.

Ethnocentrism: A practice of unconsciously or consciously privileging a certain ethnic group over others. This involves judging other groups by the values of one's own group.

Eurocentrism: The practice of consciously or unconsciously privileging the culture of Europe over other cultures.

European American: An individual living in the United States with European ancestry.

F

Feminism: Movement advocating equal rights, status, ability and treatment of women, based on the belief that women are not in any way inferior to men.

G

Gay: 1. Term sometimes used to refer to a homosexual person of either sex. For example, some lesbians identify as igay.i However, igayi most commonly refers to men who primarily have emotional and sexual attraction to men. Self-identified gay men do not necessarily have sex only with men but may occasionally engage in sex with women.

2. A man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other men. He may have sex with men currently or may have had sex with men in the past. A smaller number of gay men may never have had sex with another man for many reasons such as age, societal pressures, lack of opportunity or fear of discrimination, but nonetheless realize that their sexual attraction is mainly to other men. It is important to note that some men who have sex with other men, sometimes exclusively, may not call themselves gay. 3. An inclusive term encompassing gay men, lesbians, bisexual people and sometimes even transgender people. In the last 20 years, this has become less and less common and "gay" is usually used currently to refer only to gay men. The term is still often used in the broader sense in spoken shorthand, as in "The Gay Pride Parade is at the end of June."

Gender: System of sexual classification based on the social construction of the categories "men" and "women," as opposed to sex which is based on biological and physical differences and that form the categories "male" and "female."

Gender identity: A person's sense of self as being either male or female. Gender identity does not always match biological sex; for example, a person may be born biologically male yet have a female gender identity; at birth, we are assigned one of two genders, usually based on our visible genitals. For many people this gender assignment fits and feels comfortable and they never think about it

further. Others do not feel as comfortable with their assigned gender, either because they find the two-gender system too limiting or because they feel greater identification with the gender opposite that to which they were assigned at birth. People deal with this discomfort in many ways, sometimes only in personal ways and sometimes in ways visible to others.

Genocide: The deliberate and systematic extermination of a nationality or racial group.

Glass ceiling: Term for the maximum position and salary some claim minorities and women are allowed to reach without any chances of further promotion or advancement within an employment scenario.

H

Happa: Hawaiian word denoting mixed ethnic heritage.

Heterosexism: 1. Social structures and practices that serve to elevate and enforce heterosexuality while subordinating or suppressing other forms of sexuality. 2. Belief that heterosexuality is the only "natural" sexuality and that it is inherently healthier or superior to other types of sexuality; an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior; condones discriminatory practices and violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals and creates unique developmental challenges otherwise not present such as overcoming internalized homophobia and coming out.

Heterosexual: Individual with a primary sexual and affectional orientation or emotional attraction toward persons of the opposite sex. Heterosexuals are sometimes referred to as "straight"; a man or woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to people of the other sex. She or he may or may not have had sex with another person, but still realize that his/her sexual attraction is mainly to people of the other sex. Some people who consider themselves heterosexual have or have had sexual contact with people of the same sex.

Hispanic: Linguistic distinction often used as ethnic classification of individuals living in the United States with ancestry from Spanish-speaking countries (created by Nixon to use in census).

Homophobia: Irrational fear or hatred of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people; the responses of fear, disgust, anger, discomfort and aversion that individuals experience in dealing with gay people; often it is manifest in the form of discrimination and prejudice.

Homosexual: Individual with a primary sexual and affectional orientation or emotional attraction toward persons of the same sex. Male homosexuals are often referred to as "gay," whereas female homosexuals are referred to as "lesbians." Historically, the psychologically appropriate and sensitive term to identify individuals who were primarily sexually aroused by others of the same sex.

I

Immigrant (n): A person who resides in a nation, country or region other than that of his/her origin. Also known as nonnative, outlander, outsider, alien, etc. (ant. emigrant)

Indigenous: Originating from a culture with ancient ties to the land in which a group resides. The term used by the United Nations in its recognition of the special or unique rights of 'first peoples' or 'first nations.'

Institutional Racism: Refers to a system of laws, policies, and other political/economic arrangements that perpetuate and maintain subordinate and dominant group positions in society according to race or ethnicity.

Intersex: Having physical gender markers (genitals, gonads, chromosomes) that are neither clearly female nor male.

-Ism: Used to refer to practices, beliefs, attitudes and institutions that benefit the agent group at the expense of the target group. i.e. ableism, ageism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, racism, sexism, sizism.

J

Jew(s): members of a people based on a background of shared historical experience and of religious heritage (Judaism). Membership is through birth or conversion. Not all Jews are religious. Jews can be understood in both ethnic and religious terms.

L

Latina/o: Individual living in the United States originating from, or having a heritage relating to, Latin America.

Lesbian: A woman who has primary emotional and sexual attraction to other women. Sometimes a lesbian engages in sexual behaviors with men, even though she may self-identify as lesbian; a woman whose primary sexual and romantic attractions are to other women. She may have sex with women currently or may have had sex with women in the past. A smaller number of lesbians may never have had sex with another woman for a whole host of reasons (age, societal pressures, lack of opportunity, fear of discrimination), but nonetheless realize that their sexual attraction is mainly to other women. Some lesbians have sex with men and some don't. It is important to note that some women who have sex with other women, sometimes exclusively, may not call themselves lesbians.

LGBT: Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. Sometimes written LGBTI to include Intersex. Other common acronyms are GLBT or GLB.

M

Marginalized: Excluded, ignored or relegated to the outer edge of a group.

Minority: Term used to describe a group that represents a relatively smaller percentage of the overall population of a nation/state/ continent etc.

Multi ethnic: A person of multiple ethnicities, cultures, and/or heritages.

Multiculturalism: The practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, attitudes and opinions within an environment.

N

National Origin: System of classification based on nation from which a person originates, regardless of the nation in which he/she currently resides.

Native American: Refers to the descendants of the various indigenous populations that occupied the land now designated America.

Neo-colonialization: Term for contemporary policies adopted by international and western "first world" nations and organizations that exert regulation, power and control over poorer "third world" nations disguised as humanitarian help or aid. These policies are distinct from but related to the original period of colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas by European nations.

O

Oppression: Unjust cruel exercise of power of authority; systematic subjugation of a social group by a group with access to social power.

Oriental: Relating to or deriving from the language, traditions, or cultures of the peoples of Asian nations in the region designated as "the Orient," or "the East," by Europeans. This term is conspicuously Eurocentric, as "the East" is constructed as being opposed to a fixed reference point, "the West," or western Europe.

P

Pan-Africanism: 1. Describes the theory relating to the desire to educate all peoples of the African Diaspora of their common plight and of the connections between them—e.g., a problem faced by one group affects the lives of other groups as well. 2. Theory relating to the desire to link all African countries across the continent through a common government, language, ideology or belief.

People of Color: A term used to describe all non-white racial or ethnic groups.

Prejudice: 1. Exerting bias and bigotry based on uniformed stereotypes. 2. An unfavorable attitude toward a group/person based on inaccurate and/or negative beliefs that are uniformly distributed among the individuals of the group.

Privilege: 1. Power and advantages benefiting a group derived from the historical oppression and exploitation of other groups. 2. Unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their social group membership; benefits or advantages given to some individuals who are members of a certain group or class, often without their knowing it or asking for it.

Q

Queer: Some Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) people, particularly young people living in the coastal U.S., use the term "queer" to encompass the entire LGBT community. For these people, the term "queer" is positive and empowering. Other LGBT people find this term degrading.

R

Race: 1. Classification of humans based on genetic characteristics. 2. Classification of people based on common nationality, history, or experiences. 3. A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time.

Racial and Ethnic Identity: An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe him- or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization and personal experience.

Racism: 1. An act of discrimination based on an ideology of racial superiority. 2. The institutionalization of collective prejudice resulting in a system of advantage based on one race having power over others. In the United States, it is the systematic oppression of people of color by white people. This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society.

Religion: 1. An organized belief system based on certain tenets of faith. 2. A belief in a supreme supernatural force or god(s)

Religious/Spiritual Discrimination - The loss of power and privilege to those who do not practice the dominant culture's religion. In the United States, this is institutionalized oppressions toward those who are not Christian.

S

Sex: System of sexual classification based on biological and physical differences, such as primary and secondary sexual characteristics, forming the categories "male" and "female" as opposed to gender which is based on the social construction of the categories "men" and "women."

Sexuality: Affection, affiliation and/or behavior with regard to a person's self-identity regarding romantic attraction.

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation refers to one's sexual and romantic attraction. Those whose sexual orientation is to people of the opposite sex are called "heterosexual", those whose sexual orientation is to people of the same sex are called "homosexual" (or lesbian or gay), and those whose sexual orientation is to people of both sexes are called "bisexual." The term "sexual preference" is misleading because it implies that this attraction is a choice rather than an intrinsic personal characteristic. Sexual orientation is not necessarily the same as sexual behavior.

Significant Other: Life partner, domestic partner, lover, boyfriend or girlfriend. Because gays and lesbians are not allowed to marry legally in the United States (although gay and lesbian marriages are allowed in some European countries), "significant other" is often equivalent to the term *ispousei* for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Sizeism: The collective and institutionalized prejudice towards those who are considered to be overweight, too thin, too short, too tall or not fitting societal ideals about "beauty."

Stereotype: 1. To categorize people based on an artificial construction of a certain group designed to impart the "essence" of that group, which homogenizes the group, effacing individuality and difference. 2. A generalization applied to every person in a cultural group; fixed conception of a group without allowing for individuality.

Social Group: A group of people who share a range of physical, cultural or social characteristics within one of the categories of social identity.

Social Power: Access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one needs or influencing others in order to lead a safe, productive, fulfilling life.

T

Tolerance: Acceptance and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes and cultures; does not necessarily mean agreement with the differences.

Transgender person: Person whose gender identity or gender expression is not congruent with his or her biological sex. Transgender persons usually live full- or part time in the gender role opposite to the one in which they were born. "Transgender" sometimes may be used as an umbrella term encompassing transsexuals, transvestites, and cross-dressers.

Transsexual: Individual whose gender identity is that of the opposite sex. There are female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals. A transsexual may or may not have had sex reassignment surgery.

U**W****X**

Xenophobia: From the Greek work meaning "fear of strangers," the fear or hatred of anything that is foreign or outside of one's own group, nation, or culture.

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University of Maryland: <http://www.ubalt.edu/diversity/dictionary.html>

UCLA: http://www.lgbt.ucla.edu/findout_gloss.html

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