

Education Glossary Terms

The following terms and definitions are often associated with and provide a common, working language for ADL's educational anti-bias programs and resources. The definitions are written for older youth to adult reading levels, unless otherwise specified, and some include age-appropriate versions for younger ages.

Considerations

All forms of bias can be both *explicit* (aware, voluntary and intentional) and *implicit* (unaware, involuntary and unintentional). All manifestations of bias and discrimination can be both *personal* (an individual act of bias, meanness or exclusion) or *systemic* (policies and practices supported and sanctioned by power and authority and that benefit some and disadvantages others).

The specific, pervasive systems of oppression and marginalization described in some of these definitions are upheld by institutionalized, cultural and historical ideologies and discrimination. These systems exist simultaneously, compounding the harm to individuals with multiple marginalized identities. Individual acts of prejudice and discrimination are informed by and perpetuate these systems, which exist regardless of individual prejudices and interpersonal acts of bias.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A

ABILITY: Having the mental and/or physical condition to engage in one or more major life activities (e.g., seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning or caring for oneself).

ABLEISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who have disabilities, including temporary, developmental, physical, psychiatric and/or intellectual disabilities.

ACTIVIST: Someone who gets involved in activities that are meant to achieve political or social change; this also includes being a member of an organization which is working on change.

- *Elementary school version:* A person who uses or supports actions such as protests to help make changes in politics or society.

AGEISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of older people based on the belief that older people are inferior, incapable or irrelevant. Ageism also describes the marginalization and/or oppression of people who are too young to have social independence.

AGGRESSOR: Someone who says or does something harmful or malicious to another person intentionally and unprovoked.

- *Elementary school version:* Someone who says or does hurtful things to another person on purpose and over and over.

ALLY: Someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.

■ *Elementary school version:* Someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias.

ANTI-BIAS: An active commitment to challenge bias within oneself, others and institutions.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT BIAS: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are of immigrant origin, transnational or outside the dominant national identity or culture. *(Other related terms include xenophobia to describe a fear to anyone or anything that is perceived to be foreign or strange.)*

ANTI-MUSLIM BIAS: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Muslim based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Muslim people, Islam and countries with predominantly Muslim populations. *(Often called Islamophobia to describe a fear of anyone or anything that is perceived to be of Islamic religion or culture. Anti-Muslim bias is supported by racism, anti-immigrant bias and religious bias. People who are not Muslim may be racialized as Muslim and experience prejudice and/or discrimination.)*

ANTISEMITISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.

ANTI-TRANS BIAS: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are transgender and/or non-binary (identifying as neither a man nor a woman) based on the belief that cisgender (gender identity that corresponds with the sex one was assigned at birth) is the norm. *(Often called transphobia to describe a fear of anyone who is perceived to be transgender. Other related, specific terms include cissexism, transmisogyny and binarism.)*

B

BIAS: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

■ *Elementary school version:* A preference either for or against an individual or group that affects fair judgment.

BIGOTRY: An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices of individuals and groups belonging to one or more social identities.

■ *Elementary school version:* Prejudice and/or discrimination against a person or group based on stereotypes.

BISEXUAL: A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some people of more than one gender.

BULLYING: Repeated actions or threats of action directed toward a person by one or more people who have (or are perceived to have) more power or status than their target in order to cause fear, distress or harm. Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological or any combination of these three. Bullying behaviors can include name-calling, obscene gesturing, malicious teasing, rumors, slander, social

exclusion, damaging a person's belongings, threats and physical violence.

- *Elementary school version:* When a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.

BYSTANDER: Someone who sees bias or bullying happening and does not say or do anything.

C

CISGENDER: A term for people whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

CLASSISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are from low-income or working-class households based on a social hierarchy in which people are ranked according to socioeconomic status.

- *Elementary school version:* Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their socioeconomic status (how much money their families have or do not have).

COMING OUT (OF THE CLOSET): To be “in the closet” means to not share a part of one’s identity. Some LGBTQ people choose to disclose that part of their identity in some situations (to be “out”) and not in others (to be “closeted”). To “come out” is to publicly declare one’s identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a lifelong process. In each situation, a person must decide where they are at that point in time with their identity and whether or not to come out.

CULTURE: The patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, relationships, family roles, clothing, etc.

- *Elementary school version:* The patterns of daily life that can be seen in language, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, beliefs/values, music, clothing and more that a group of people share.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: When people use specific elements of a culture (e.g., ideas, symbols, images, clothing) that misrepresents and/or disrespects the culture of that marginalized group of people. It usually happens when one group exploits the culture of another group, often with little understanding of the group’s history, experience and traditions.

CYBERBULLYING: The intentional and repeated mistreatment of others through the use of technology, such as computers, cell phones and other electronic devices. Cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, sending mean, hurtful or threatening messages or images about another person; posting sensitive, private information about another person for the purpose of hurting or embarrassing the person; and pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad and/or to intentionally exclude someone from an online group.

D

DISABILITY: A mental or physical condition that restricts an individual’s ability to engage in one or more major life activities (e.g., seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, communicating, sensing, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning, working or caring for oneself).

DISCRIMINATION: The denial of justice, resources and fair treatment of individuals and groups (often based on social identity), through employment, education, housing, banking, political rights, etc.

- *Elementary school version:* Unfair treatment of one person or group of people because of the person or group’s identity (e.g., race, gender, ability, religion, culture, etc.). Discrimination is an action that can come from prejudice.

DIVERSITY: Means different or varied. The population of the United States is made up of people belonging to diverse groups characterized by culture, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.

E

ETHNICITY: Refers to a person’s identification with a group based on characteristics such as shared history, ancestry, geographic and language origin, and culture.

EQUALITY: Everyone having the same rights, opportunities and resources. Equality stresses fairness and parity in having access to social goods and services.

- *Elementary school version:* Having the same or similar rights and opportunities as others.

EQUITY: Everyone getting what they need in order to have access, opportunities and a fair chance to succeed. It recognizes that the same for everyone (equality) doesn’t truly address needs and therefore, specific solutions and remedies, which may be different, are necessary.

- *Elementary school version:* The quality of being fair or just.

EXPLICIT BIAS: The conscious attitudes, stereotypes and overt intentional actions (positive or negative) toward members of a group merely because of their membership in that group.

G

GAY: A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other people of the same gender. Can be used to refer to people of all genders, though it is used most commonly to refer to males. Some women and girls choose not to identify as gay, but as lesbian.

GENDER: The socially-defined “rules” and roles for men and women in a society. The attitudes, customs and values associated with gender are socially constructed; however, individuals develop their gender identities in two primary ways: through an innate sense of their own identity and through their life experiences and interactions with others. Dominant western society generally defines gender as a binary system—men and women—but many cultures define gender as more fluid and existing along a continuum.

GENDER EXPRESSION: Refers to how people communicate their gender to oneself and others through appearance, behavior, dress, etc.

GENDER IDENTITY: Relates to a person's internal sense of their own gender. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

GENDER ROLE: The set of roles and behaviors expected of people based on gender assigned at birth.

GENOCIDE: The act of or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire religious, racial, national or cultural group.

H

HATE: An extreme dislike for something, someone or a group. Hate that is based on an aspect of someone's identity (e.g., race, religion, sex, gender expression or identity, ability, sexual orientation, etc.) can result in interpersonal bias, discrimination, hate incidents, hate crimes and/or involvement in an organized hate group.

HATE CRIME: A criminal act against property, a person or group where the victim is intentionally targeted because of their actual or perceived race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, gender/gender identity or ethnicity.

HETEROSEXISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and/or asexual, based on the belief that heterosexuality is the norm. *(Often called homophobia to describe a fear of anyone or anything that is perceived to be LGBTQ. Other related terms include anti-LGBTQ bias, cissexism, biphobia and transphobia.)*

- *Elementary school version:* Based on the thinking that homosexuality is wrong and/or that all people are straight (that all boys date only girls, and girls date only boys).

HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT: A person who is emotionally, physically, and/or romantically attracted to some members of another gender.

I

IDENTITY: The qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others.

IDENTITY-BASED BULLYING: Refers to any form of bullying related to the characteristics considered unique to a person's identity, such as their race, religion, sexual orientation or physical appearance.

- *Elementary school version:* When someone is bullied based on an aspect of who they are or are perceived to be: their identity.

IDEOLOGY: A collection of beliefs, ideas and/or values that are not based on factual evidence and form the basis of economic, sociological or political policy.

IMPLICIT BIAS: The unconscious attitudes and stereotypes and unintentional actions (positive or negative) toward members of a group merely because of their membership in that group.

INCLUSION: An environment and commitment to respect, represent and accept diverse social groups and identities; an environment where all people feel like they belong. (In K-12 learning environments, inclusion can sometimes also refer to the practice of integrating students with disabilities into the classroom setting.)

INEQUALITY: An unjust situation or condition when some people have more rights or better opportunities than other people.

■ *Elementary school version:* An unfair situation when some people have more rights or better opportunities than other people.

INEQUITY: Refers to a lack of fairness or justice; unfair and avoidable differences in treatment or experience.

INJUSTICE: A situation in which the rights of a person or a group of people are ignored, disrespected or discriminated against.

INTERSECTIONALITY: The examination of overlapping and connected social systems that compound oppression for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized social groups based on their race, gender, class, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.¹

INTERSEX: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

L

LGBTQ: Acronym that groups lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning individuals into one group based on their common experience as targets of heterosexism and transphobia and their common, yet complex, struggle for sexual and gender freedom. This term is generally considered a more inclusive and affirming descriptor than the more limited "gay" or the outdated "homosexual."

LEARNING DISABILITY: A cognitive impairment in comprehension or in using language, spoken or written, that manifests itself in a person's ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (e.g., Dyslexia, Dysnomia, Dysgraphia). The term does not include persons who have learning difficulties that are primarily the result of mental retardation, emotional disability, or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

LESBIAN: A woman who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other women.

M

MARGINALIZATION: The treatment of a person, group or concept as secondary, unimportant, inferior or abnormal compared with those who hold more power in society.

MICROAGGRESSIONS: The everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBTQ populations and other marginalized people experience in their day-to-day interactions. Microaggressions can appear to be compliments but often contain a “metacommunication” or hidden insult to the target group. Microaggressions are often outside the level of conscious awareness of the people who say them, which means they can be unintentional. Microaggressions may be communicated verbally and/or nonverbally.²

MULTICULTURAL: Means many or multiple cultures. The United States is multicultural because its population consists of people from many different cultures.

■ *Elementary school version:* Including many different cultures.

N

NAME-CALLING: The use of language to defame, demean or degrade individuals or groups.

■ *Elementary school version:* Using words to hurt or be mean to someone or a group.

NATIONALITY: Solely refers to a person’s citizenship by origin, birth, or naturalization.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION: Aspects of communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, which do not involve speaking but can also include nonverbal aspects of speech (tone and volume of voice, etc.).

O

ONLINE HATE: An attack against people or groups based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, immigration status, etc. that occurs in digital social spaces through the use of technology, such as computers, cell phones and other electronic and digital devices. *(Some examples of digital spaces include internet-based platforms such as apps and websites, work/business communication platforms, social networking sites, dating sites, blogs, online games, direct and instant messages and email.)*

OPPRESSION: A system of mistreatment, exploitation and abuse of a marginalized group(s) for the social, economic or political benefit of a dominant group(s). This happens within a social hierarchy where people are ranked according to status, often based on aspects of social identity.

P

PEOPLE FIRST: Acknowledging the personhood of individuals with disabilities before their disability (e.g., “people with disabilities”, “person who uses a wheelchair”, “person with cerebral palsy”, “person has a physical disability”, etc.).

PREJUDICE: A premature judgment or belief formed about a person, group or concept before gaining sufficient knowledge or by selectively disregarding facts.

■ *Elementary school version:* Judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before

you actually know them. Prejudice is often directed toward people in a certain identity group (race, religion, gender, etc.).

PRIVILEGE: The unearned and often unrecognized advantages, benefits or rights conferred upon people based on their membership in a dominant group (e.g., white people, heterosexual people, men, people without disabilities, etc.) beyond what is commonly experienced by members of the marginalized group.

Q

QUEER: An umbrella term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Some use as an alternative to “LGBT” in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many within the LGBT community have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

QUESTIONING: Refers to people who are in the process of understanding and exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. They are often seeking information and support during this stage of their identity development.

R

RACE: Refers to the categories into which society places individuals on the basis of physical characteristics (such as skin color, hair type, facial form and eye shape). Though many believe that race is determined by biology, it is now widely accepted that this classification system was in fact created for social and political reasons. There are actually more genetic and biological differences within the racial groups defined by society than between different groups.

RACISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people. (See also [Systemic Racism](#).)

- *Elementary school version:* The disrespect, harm and mistreatment of people of color based on made up ideas that white people deserve to be in charge and treated better.

RELIGION: An organized system of beliefs, observances, rituals and rules used to worship a god or group of gods.

RELIGIOUS BIAS: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who belong to one or more religious groups or no religious group based on the belief in a correct or sanctioned faith system.

S

SCAPEGOATING: Blaming an individual or group for something based on that person or group’s identity when the person or group is not responsible. Bias, prejudicial thinking and discriminatory acts can lead to scapegoating.

- *Elementary school version:* The action of blaming a person or group for something when, there may not be a person or group responsible for the problem. Example: “If the girls weren’t talking so much, we wouldn’t have lost the game.”

SEGREGATION: The separation or isolation of a race, class or other group by enforced or voluntary restriction of their access to housing, schools, etc. or by other discriminatory means.

■ *Elementary school version:* The practice of keeping people of different races, religions, etc., separate from each other.

SEXISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of women, based on the belief in a natural order based on sex that privileges men.

■ *Elementary school version:* Prejudice and/or discrimination based on a person's sex. Example: Someone tells a joke or puts a person down because the person is male or female.

SEXUAL IDENTITY: Sexual identity labels include "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "bi," "queer," "questioning," "heterosexual," "straight," and others. Sexual identity evolves through a developmental process that varies depending on the individual. Sexual behavior and identity (self-definition) can be chosen. Though some people claim their sexual orientation is also a choice, for others this does not seem to be the case.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Determined by one's emotional, physical and/or romantic attractions. Categories of sexual orientation include, but are not limited to, **gay, lesbian** (attracted to some members of the same gender), **bisexual** (attracted to some members of more than one gender) and **heterosexual** (attracted to some members of another gender).

SOCIAL JUSTICE: A set of conditions and principles that ensure every person has equitable economic, political and social rights, access and opportunities.

SOCIAL POWER: The capacity to control, access and/or influence people, institutions and resources.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: An individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, as measured by factors such as income, wealth and occupation.

STEREOTYPE: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.

■ *Elementary school version:* The false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

STRAIGHT ALLY: Any person outside the LGBTQ community who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTQ people.

SYSTEMIC RACISM: A combination of systems, institutions and factors that advantage white people and for people of color, cause widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity. One person or even one group of people did not create systemic racism, rather it:

- (1) is grounded in the history of our laws and institutions which were created on a foundation of white supremacy;
- (2) exists in the institutions and policies that advantage white people and disadvantage people of color; and

(3) takes places in interpersonal communication and behavior (e.g., slurs, bullying, offensive language) that maintains and supports systemic inequities and systemic racism.

(See also **Racism**.)

T

TARGET: Someone against whom mistreatment is directed.

- *Elementary school version:* Someone who is bullied or treated in hurtful ways by a person or a group on purpose and over and over.

TEASING: Laugh at and put someone down in a way that is either friendly and playful or mean and unkind.

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

- *Elementary school version:* A term for people whose gender identity differs from how they were assigned at birth (e.g., assigned girl or boy).

TRANSSEXUAL: An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seek to transition from male to female or female to male. Many do not prefer this term because it is thought to sound overly clinical.

W

WEIGHTISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are larger than the socially constructed norm for body size.

Endnotes

¹Definition of “intersectionality” derived from Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(1), Article 8, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

²The term microaggressions was coined in the 1970s. This definition is from Derald Wing Sue’s *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* (4:24 mins., John Wiley & Sons, 2010); www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2PQJsAS4, accessed 2/18/14. Derald Wing Sue, a Columbia University professor who did a study and wrote a book on microaggressions.