

EMBRACING EQUITY

EQUITY 101: A GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Build your knowledge of equity and your capacity to engage in conversations about DEI with this glossary of common equity terms, phrases, and concepts.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list. It should also be noted that the language of equity is ever evolving and expanding. We will take care to update and modify this list in keeping with best practices and preferred terms for various communities. However, we encourage you to remain open to continuous and independent learning.

ABLEISM

The pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who are differently abled, including differences in mental, cognitive, emotional, and/or physical abilities, through attitudes, actions, or institutional policies. Defined as a form of discrimination or prejudice against individuals with physical, mental, or developmental disabilities that is characterized by the belief that these individuals need to be fixed or cannot function as full members of society ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

AGEISM

Refers to a socially constructed way of thinking about older persons based on negative attitudes and stereotypes about aging and a tendency to structure society based on an assumption that everyone is young, thereby failing to respond appropriately to the real needs of older persons. Ageism also includes discrimination that is more systemic in nature, such as in the design and implementation of services, programs, and facilities ([Canadian Race Relations Foundation](#); [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)).

ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and its legacy. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices, to the extent that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society. Anti-Black racism is manifest in the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians, which includes unequal opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system ([Government of Ontario](#)).

ANTI-INDIGENOUS RACISM

The ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by Indigenous People within Canada. It includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain, and perpetuate power imbalances, systemic barriers, and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial policies and practices in Canada. Systemic anti-Indigenous racism is evident in discriminatory federal policies such as the Indian Act and the residential school system. It is also manifest in the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in provincial criminal justice and child welfare systems, as well as inequitable outcomes in education, well-being, and health. Individual lived-experiences of anti-Indigenous racism can be seen in the rise in acts of hostility and violence directed at Indigenous people ([Government of Ontario](#)).

ANTI-OPPRESSION

Strategies, theories, and actions that challenge social and historical inequalities/injustices that have become part of our systems and institutions and allow certain groups to dominate over others. ([Canadian Race Relations Foundation](#)).

ANTI-RACISM

A process, a systematic method of analysis, and a proactive course of action rooted in the recognition of the existence of racism, including systemic racism. Anti-racism actively seeks to identify, remove, prevent, and mitigate racially inequitable outcomes and power imbalances between groups and change the structures that sustain inequities ([Government of Ontario](#)).

ANTI-SEMITISM

Latent or overt hostility, hatred, or discrimination directed toward individual Jewish people or the Jewish People for reasons connected to their religion, ethnicity, and their cultural, historical, intellectual, or religious heritage ([Government of Ontario](#)).

BURNOUT

When a team member that has experienced excessive and prolonged emotional, physical, and mental stress, enters a state of near-constant exhaustion. Burnout in the workplace has real and lasting impacts whether someone is working virtually, in-person, or both ([Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#)).

CISGENDER

People whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth ([Canada Department of Justice](#)).

COLOUR BLINDNESS

The idea that we should not see race. While this may sound ideal, it's empirically false. For those of us who have full use of our eyes, our brains see gender, race, and most other visible categories, whether we consciously pay attention to them or not. Saying 'you don't see race' invalidates experiences with racism and the way race impacts people's lives ([Findings Report, 126](#)).

DISCRIMINATION

The denial of equal treatment and opportunity to individuals or groups because of personal characteristics and membership in specific groups, with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment, access to services, goods, and facilities. This behaviour results from distinguishing people on that basis without regard to individual merit, resulting in unequal outcomes for persons who are perceived as different. Differential treatment that may occur on the basis of any protective grounds enumerated in human rights law ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

DIVERSITY

A term used to encompass the acceptance and respect of various dimensions, including race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, age, physical abilities, political beliefs, or other ideologies. Unfortunately, in discourses of privilege/racism, the recognition of diversity has been used, falsely, as evidenced of genuine equality, social justice, and the end of racism. In other words, “diversity training” has, at times, devolved into a simplistic recognition of “differences” with little attention to racism, systemic/institutional racism, unequal distribution of power/authority, and little change in attitudes or actions of the most privileged ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

DOMINANT GROUPS

Refers to those groups who hold the most power, privilege, social capital, and workplace status in a given setting. It is important to recognize that some people have greater influence, authority, and discretion when it comes to self-expression, decision-making, resource allocation, workflows, advancement, and more. It is also notable that being in the numerical majority doesn't automatically denote that a group is dominant ([Findings Report, 22](#)).

ENGAGEMENT

The measure of how connected team members feel towards your organization and its goals. The right conditions at work will enable team members to focus on their job, not other survival worries, and will lead to increased engagement ([Findings Report, 72](#)).

EQUITY

Equity aims to give everyone what they need to be successful, unlike equality which treats everyone the same. Equity recognizes that everyone is different and has unique needs that must be met so they are able to meaningfully participate and achieve their full potential ([Findings Report, 41](#)).

GLASS ESCALATOR EFFECT

The suggestion that white men end up in leadership because they are perceived as having desirable traits for leadership roles, more so than racialized men and women ([Findings Report, 34](#)).

GROUPS EXPERIENCING MARGINALIZATION

Those who are systematically excluded from opportunities on the basis of one or more identity characteristics and are not often given power to create change. It is important to realize that groups in the numerical majority can still experience marginalization ([Findings Report, 23](#)).

HARASSMENT

A form of discrimination that involves any unwanted physical or verbal behaviour that offends or humiliates you, whether subtle or overt. Generally, harassment is a behaviour that persists over time. Serious one-time incidents can also sometimes be considered harassment ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

HETEROSEXISM

The assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Can include discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBQ+) people that is less overt, and which may be unintentional and unrecognized by the person or organization responsible for the discrimination ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 4](#)).

HOMOPHOBIA

Negative attitudes towards homosexual people and homosexuality which may be manifested in discrimination, hostile behaviour, or hate crimes. The use of 'phobia' has been criticized as implying a pathological or irrational fear rather than a form of prejudice analogous to racism ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

INCLUSION

Relates to the quality of the experience designed for people, whether in their teams or organizations, as well as the services provided ([Findings Report, 54](#)).

INTERPERSONAL RACISM

Racism occurring between individuals. Examples include public expression of racial prejudice, hate, bias, and bigotry between individuals ([Racial Equity Tools](#)).

INTERSECTIONALITY

A framework that acknowledges that we all have more than one identity that makes up the full picture of who we are. This term was first coined by Black Feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw ([Findings Report, 27](#)).

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear, or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic, and societal level ([Government of Ontario](#)).

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Defined as everyday indignities, conveyed intentionally or unintentionally by words, acts, or environments, that communicate hostile and derogatory messages to people from groups experiencing marginalization. Microaggressive acts may be fleeting, ambiguous, and easily overlooked, but they have detrimental effects on those they target ([Findings Report, 285](#)).

MISOGYNOIR

The unique hatred, discrimination, distrust, prejudice, stereotypes, bias, etc. that Black women face by virtue of their intersecting identities ([Government of Canada, Department of Defence](#)).

MISOGYNY

The social systems and environments where women face hostility and hatred because they are women in a historical patriarchy. Misogyny is a feature of patriarchy, serving to continuously enforce women's place as subordinate to men. ([Government of Canada, Department of Defence](#)).

MYTH OF MERITOCRACY

The idea that power and privilege is solely allocated on merit rather than influenced by someone's social location and prevailing systems of bias, oppression, and marginalization. Meritocracy in a working environment applies to a group whose advancement within an organization is perceived as being based on ability and talent rather than intersecting privileges, entrenched biases, and network advantages ([Findings Report, 127](#)).

MYTH OF REVERSE DISCRIMINATION

Whether it's antisemitism, cissexism, or racism, or words that end in 'ism' can't be reversed. An 'ism' is when prejudice is combined with the power to scale, amplify, and codify that prejudice on a societal level. Using an 'ism' to describe an experience immediately implicates systems and broader patterns of marginalization and inequity in our social world ([Findings Report, 128](#)).

OPPRESSION

The systemic, institutionalized, or individual subjugation of one individual or group by a more dominant individual or group; it can be overt or covert. Put simply, it is an abuse of power that is justified by the dominant groups' explicit ideology. To uphold this unequal dynamic, physical, psychological, social, or economic threats or violence are often used. The term also refers to the injustices suffered by marginalized groups in everyday interactions with members of the dominant group ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

PATERNALISM

The practice of making all the decisions for the people you govern, employ, or are responsible for, so that they cannot or do not have to make their own decisions ([Collins Dictionary](#)). In the context of equity, paternalism refers to making assumptions and decisions about how best to address the inequities impacting people from marginalized communities.

PATRIARCHY

The norms, values, beliefs, structures, and systems that grant power, privilege, and superiority to men, and thereby marginalize and subordinate women. While patriarchy does privilege men, this privilege does not automatically extend to all men—i.e. men of colour, Indigenous men, gay/bisexual men, men living in poverty, or differently abled men—given the intersecting operation of racism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism ([Government of Canada, Department of Defence](#)).

PRIVILEGE

Unearned power, benefits, advantages, access, and/or opportunities based on membership or perceived membership in a dominant group ([Government of Canada, Department of Defence](#)).

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The shared belief that a team can take interpersonal risks without facing adverse actions or negative consequences. Psychological safety is not about forcing consensus, insulating yourself from discomfort, or avoiding accountability for actions, behaviours, and language. When workplaces foster psychological safety, they leave room for dissension, engagement with discomfort, and restorative practices that enable people to grow from mistakes ([Findings Report, 131](#)).

RACIAL TRAUMA

A series of traumatic events that occur as a result of witnessing or experiencing racism and/or discrimination, interpersonally and/or institutionally, that can have a profound impact on the mental health of individuals exposed to these events. It refers to the stressful impact or emotional pain of one's experience with racism and discrimination that can manifest in mental and physical symptoms ([McMaster University Faculty of Social Sciences](#)).

RACISM

A system of advantage and oppression based on race. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. It involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices ([Racial Equity Tools](#)).

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

An approach to justice that is rooted in Indigenous knowledges. It rejects approaches to justice that center on shame, punishment, and retribution. It provides those involved in conflict or harm with the opportunity to discuss how they've been impacted and encourages the person who caused harm to take responsibility for the harm and engage with those who've been harmed to work collective healing, growth, and restored relationships ([Findings Report, 286](#)).

SEXISM

The cultural, institutional, and individual set of beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women, and devalue ways of being that are associated with women ([Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre](#)).

SYSTEMIC RACISM

Consists of patterns of behaviour, policies, or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate a position of relative disadvantage for racialize persons. These appear neutral on the surface but have an exclusionary impact on racialized persons ([Government of Canada, Department of National Defence](#)).

SYSTEMS-CENTERED LANGUAGE

Language that acknowledges and highlights the systems and structures that place limitations of groups of people, not the groups themselves holding limitations ([Findings Report, 23](#)).

TRANSGENDER

A person whose current gender does not align with the sex that they were assigned at birth ([Canada Department of Justice](#)).

TRANSPHOBIA

The aversion to, fear of, or hatred of trans people and communities. It is based on stereotypes that are used to justify discrimination, harassment, and violence towards trans people ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 9](#)).

UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

Refers to disproportionately low representation of a group within an organization. Underrepresentation does not always correlate to marginalization ([Findings Report, 22](#)).

WHITE SUPREMACY

The idea that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to people of colour and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. White supremacy expresses itself interpersonally as well as structurally (through our governments, education systems, food systems, etc.) ([Government of Canada](#)).