

DEFINITIONS – During the advance we'll consider and discuss core aspects of our individual identities and how they shape our interactions, leadership and experiences. We hope that the definitions below will help us all have a rich discussion by providing some shared understanding and language, whether you are already well-versed with the concepts or considering them for the first time. The list is by no means exhaustive and is always evolving as society evolves.

Identity – Identity is a socially and historically constructed concept. We learn about our own identity and the identity of others through interactions with family, peers, organizations, institutions, media and other connections we make in our everyday life.

Race & Ethnicity

Race - Race presumes shared biological, physical or genetic traits, whether actual or asserted. It is a social construct, and as such definitions and categorizations of race have evolved over time.

Ethnicity - the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. Some ethnic groups also share linguistic or religious traits.

Racism - As an ideology, racism is the belief that population groups, defined as distinct "races," generally possess traits, characteristics or abilities, which distinguish them as either superior or inferior to other groups in certain ways. In short, racism is the belief that a particular race is (or certain races are) superior or inferior to another race or races.

As a system, racism is an institutional arrangement, maintained by policies, practices and procedures — both formal and informal — in which some persons typically have more or less opportunity than others, and in which such persons receive better or worse treatment than others, because of their respective racial identities. Additionally, institutional racism involves denying persons opportunities, rewards, or various benefits on the basis of race, to which those individuals are otherwise entitled. In short, racism is a system of inequality, based on race.

A simple way to think about racism or other (isms) is the combination of Prejudice + Power.

* By using a definition of Prejudice + Power, concepts of "reverse racism" or other "reverse isms" are invalid. People of color can have prejudices against and anger towards white people, or individual white people. They can act out those feelings in destructive and hurtful ways towards whites. However, the individual prejudice of black people, for example, is not backed up by systems and institutions.

Gender, Sex, Sexual Identity or Sexual Orientation

Gender – A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures.

Gender Identity – An individual's internal sense of being man, woman, both, neither, or other gender(s). Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender Expression – How a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.

Cisgender – referring to an individual who has a match between the sex they were assigned at birth and the roles and behaviors considered by society to be appropriate to their particular gender.

Trans (Or Transgender) – An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. People who identify as neither female nor male and/or as neither a man or as a woman. Transgender is not a sexual orientation; transgender people may have any sexual orientation. “Trans” is shorthand for “transgender.” (Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus “transgender people” is appropriate but “transgenders” is often viewed as disrespectful.)

Sex – A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Common terms are “male,” “female” and “intersex.”

Sexual Identity (Sexual Orientation): A term describing a person’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to other people of the same gender or a different gender, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, heterosexual, or asexual.

Queer – an umbrella term for sexual identities, sexes and genders that are not heterosexual and/or cisgender and/or binary. Some use queer as an alternative to “gay” in an effort to be more inclusive, since the term does not convey a sense of gender. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way. Queer may be used by those who reject traditional gender identities as a broader, less conformist, and deliberately ambiguous alternative to LGBT and the mainstream LGBT movement.

Intersectionality & Other Concepts Regarding Equity

Intersectionality - a theory that suggests—and seeks to examine how—various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, and other elements of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to social inequity.

Privilege - a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a group of people based upon core aspects of their identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, ability, gender, sexual identity, class. Individuals may be afforded privilege according to one aspect of identity, while experiencing disadvantage according to another aspect of identity.

Implicit Bias – Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection.

Microaggressions – Everyday interactions such as comments, jokes, and slights (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages or assumptions about a marginalized group

Stereotype – An oversimplified generalization, distorted truth, or exaggerated belief about a person or a group of people that does not take individual differences or social variations into account. Even “positive” stereotypes are harmful and have a negative impact.

Stereotype Threat - stereotype threat is defined as a socially premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. According to stereotype threat, members of a marginalized group acknowledge that a negative stereotype exists in reference to their group, and they demonstrate apprehension about confirming the negative stereotype by engaging in particular activities.