

Social Justice Definitions

Ableism – Prejudice or discrimination against people with mental and/or physical disability.

Advocate – Someone who speaks up for her/himself and members of his/her identity group; e.g. a woman who lobbies for equal pay for women.

Ageism – Prejudice or discrimination against people because of their perceived age. This bias targets older people and teenagers.

Ally – A person of one identity group who speaks in support of members of another group; typically member of privilege group standing beside member of targeted group; Allies also support each other, regardless of identity, in the work of social justice.

Breakthrough “ –Shifts of mind and heart” that occur when human beings are engaged in open ended dialogue and inquiry.

Bias – an inclination or preference, either for or against, an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgement.

Bigotry – an unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices.

Bisexuality – having the capacity to be romantically and sexually attracted to both males and females, also, known as polysexual.

Cisgender – having a gender identity that society considers appropriate for one’s biological sex. The term was created in 1995 to describe non-transgender people.

Class – the economic status of people that is determined by the money they have. This is also known as social economic status (SES).

Classism – Prejudice or discrimination against people because of their perceived social or economic status.

Culture – the patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. Examples of these patterns can be seen in language, government, arts, food, customs, holiday celebrations, dating rituals, and clothing to name a few.

Discrimination – The denial of justice and fair treatment by both individuals and institutions in many arenas of life including housing, employment, education, and political rights.
Discrimination = prejudice + privilege + power.

Diversity – the differences of ideas, opinions, values, beliefs, histories, lifestyles, and cultures that exist among human beings. Society works better if there is respect and understanding of these differences rather than judgement.

Gender – refers to “male” and “female”, but is different from one’s physical anatomy. Gender is a label assigned by how one meets society’s expectations of appearance, behaviors, and attitudes based on one’s biological sex.

Genderism – Prejudice or discrimination against people whose appearance, behaviors, and attitudes don’t match what society considers appropriate for their biological sex. This bias favors cisgender people and targets transpeople.

Heterosexism – attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. It includes the presumption that everyone is heterosexual and that opposite-sex attractions and relationships are the norm and that homosexuality or any behavior that is outside traditional gender roles is wrong.

Heterosexuality – having a primary romantic or sexual attraction for the opposite gender. It is known commonly as “straight”.

Homosexuality – having a primary or exclusive romantic and sexual attraction for one’s own gender. It is known commonly as “gay”.

Internalized Oppression – phenomenon that occurs when target groups come to believe and act as if the oppressor’s belief system, values, and way of life are reality. Believing the stereotypes about them, they often act them out and keep the stereotypes alive. The term “self-hate” often refers to internalized oppression.

Institutionalized Oppression - The ways in which conscious or unconscious oppression is manifested in the institutions (governments, schools, business, etc.) through practices and policies.

Intersex – refers to a person born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that is not considered to be society’s norm for either male or female.

Lesbian – a term referring to female homosexuals.

Lookism – Attitudes, bias, and discrimination against people who do not meet a certain standard of beauty. In the U.S., this bias favors people who are slim, athletic, with “classic” features.

Microaggression – Commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target groups. Often unintentional but always subtle ways of invalidating target groups and creating a toxic environment because they can be easily excused or dismissed.

Oppression – unjust system of controlling people that is reinforced by society. This system divides people into privileged and target groups and allows the exercise of authority and power by the privileged group over target groups. It includes imposing the privileged group’s belief system, values, and ways of life over the target groups’.

Prejudice – an idea held about a person or group without sufficient knowledge or experience with them. Prejudices are often based on stereotypes.

Privileged Group – group that is given unquestioned, unearned, and most often, unconscious advantages, assumptions, and expectations based only on membership within the group. Privileged groups are given preference, seen as the norm, or dominant in society. The number of privileged group memberships an individual has defines one’s social power and status in America.

Racism – Prejudice or discrimination against people based on the social myth of race. Differences in physical traits such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape are used to support a system of inequities.

Religionism – Prejudice or discrimination against people based on their religious beliefs and/or practices. In the U.S., the privileged religion is Christianity.

Sex – refers to “women” and “men” and is assigned based on physical anatomy at birth.

Sexism – Prejudice or discrimination against women based on the belief that men are inherently superior.

Social power – access to the resources that enhance one’s chances of getting what one wants and/or influencing others.

Stereotype – an oversimplified generalization of a group without regard for individual differences.

Target Group – group that is denied access and power based only on membership within the group.

Transpeople – is a collective term that includes anyone who challenges “traditional” gender roles, anyone whose experiences or choices don’t match what society considers appropriate for their biological sex. This group includes transsexuals, drag queens/kings, and intersexed people, to name a few. While not all transpeople identify with the larger GLBT community, many do.