



Office of Equity and Human Rights

Realizing Equity. Enhancing the City of Portland.

421 SW 6th Avenue Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204

City of Portland, Oregon
Amanda Fritz, Commissioner • Dante J. James, Director

Definition of Key Terms

Bias – An inclination of preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgement.

Discrimination – unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a group. In contrast to prejudice, discrimination is behaviour. To discriminate is to treat a person, not on the basis of their intrinsic individual qualities, but on the basis of a prejudgement about a group.

Diversity – All the differences that people bring to a group or society. Diversity includes age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, as well as values, world views, mindsets, ethics, paradigms, core intelligences, etc.

Equity – is when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential. We have a shared fate as individuals within a community and as communities within society. All communities need the ability to shape their own present and future. Equity is both the means to healthy communities and an end that benefits us all.

Ethnicity – A group of people who have a common way of thinking, feeling, and acting – based on a shared common geographic and social history.

Ethnocentrism – An attitude that one's own culture, society, or group is inherently superior to all others, producing an inability to appreciate others whose culture may include a different racial group, ethnic group, religion, morality, language, political system, economic system, etc.

Inclusiveness – The act of encouraging belonging.

Institutional Racism – is that which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations, and culture of public or private institutions – reinforcing prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn. Whereas individual racism is the expression of personal prejudice, institutional racism is the expression of a whole organization's racist practice and culture. It is also the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, race, and, ethnicity.

Internalized Racism – Groups targeting by oppression often “internalize” the mistreatment and misinformation about themselves. People of colour sometimes thus “misbelieve” about themselves. Internalized racism is an involuntary reaction of people of colour to the experience of racism.

The acting out of racism on one’s self. People of colour believe the messages they receive and because of racism, act harmfully toward themselves.

Intersectionality – The exploration of the intersections that occur among and between cross cultural constructs such as race, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation, etc. Intersectionality theory purports that all oppressions are interconnected; held together by power, continue to operate because of guilt, etc.

Micro-Inequities – Tiny, damaging assaults perpetuated upon individuals by the society in which they live. Micro-inequities are usually subtle, and seem inconsequential in nature, but not trivial in effect. They are typically small events that are fleeting, covert, and often unintentional or unrecognized by the perpetrator; hard to detect, hard to prove, hard to respond to; viewed as petty when identified; powerful especially when it comes from multiple sources.

Oppression – The systemic mistreatment of a group of people by society and/or by another group of people who serve as agents of a society, with the mistreatment encouraged or enforced by society and its culture.

Power – access to resources, the ability to influence others, and access to decision makers to get desired outcomes.

Prejudice – A positive or negative attitude toward a person or group, formed without just grounds or sufficient knowledge.

Privilege – An unearned advantage that works to systemically over-empower certain groups in our society. A right that only some people have access or availability to because of their social group memberships. Because hierarchies of privilege exist, even within the same group, people who are part of the group in power (White people with respect to people of colour, men with respect to women, etc) often deny they have privilege even when evidence of differential benefit is obvious.

Race – A classification not based on biology, but on social construct. The concept of race has historical roots. During colonial expansion, Europeans constructed race (in terms of skin colour) to sort and designate non-white people to be of the “lower” races. Today, relationships between differently raced people are still determined by this social construction and remain unequal; where White people have the most power and privilege and are considered the norm; i.e., “non-raced.” It is important to understand that White is also a created racial category.

Racial Microaggressions – Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour.

Racism – The conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional system of oppression based on race that involves the unequal distribution of systemic power for people with white skin colour privilege in four main areas: power to make and enforce decisions; access to resources; ability to set and determine standards for what is considered appropriate behaviour; and the ability to define reality and have other people accept it as if it were their own.

Social identity – is an individual's self-concept which comes from perceived membership of social groups.

White Privilege – is a system, historically constructed by White peoples, European nations, and the United States, to exploit and oppress nations and peoples of colour. The point of the system is to maintain and perpetuate wealth, power, and privilege for nations and peoples of European descent. White privilege is also a system, institutionally based, that (1) rewards and privileges White people solely because of their skin colour and European origins; and (2) exempts Whites and European-descended peoples from racial oppression. White supremacy anchors white privilege and racism in our society, meaning that it is not simply about individual prejudice. Individual and organizational acts of racism are rooted in, and replicate, an entire social construct of white privilege and supremacy.

White Guilt – A frequent response of White people to learning about white privilege. White guilt makes Whites feel shameful about the history of the oppression of people of colour and the role Whites have played in perpetuating that system, as well as their individual complicity with that system. To dismantle racism, white guilt must first be overcome.