

# **Building a Bridge Toward a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Multi-Racial Multi-Cultural Society: Tearing Down Walls of Hate, Ignorance and Fear**

## *Developing a Common Language for All to Access Glossary of Terms and Definitions*

### **A**

#### **Ableism:**

*Ableism* is prejudice and/or discrimination against people with mental or physical disabilities.

#### **Acceptance:**

It is considered vitally important in multicultural education that differences between persons and cultures be accepted as significant and not something to be resolved. Some consider “acceptance” the second step toward multiculturalism: after “tolerance” and before “respect, affirmation, solidarity, and critique.”

#### **Acculturation:**

The general phenomenon of persons learning the nuances of or being initiated into a culture. The term is sometimes used simply to acknowledge that culture is indeed something persons learn. Acculturation may also carry a negative connotation when referring to the attempt by dominant cultural groups to inculturate members of other cultural groups into the dominant culture in an assimilationist fashion.

Some critics have noted that in many cases multicultural education was conceived as:

- 1) having to do with minorities, and
- 2) having assimilation into the norms of the majority as its eventual goal.

Most proponents of multicultural education at present disparage the casting of multicultural education in terms of acculturation into a dominant culture. Yet some do wish to argue that the creation/celebration of a common culture is a legitimate aspect of multicultural education.

#### **Affirmative Action:**

The creation of policies intended to redress existing imbalances in representation or power according to sex, sexual orientation, race, class, ethnicity, physical, emotional or mental abilities. Taking positive measures to “advantage” members of a previously “disadvantaged” or suppressed group.

#### **Ageism:**

*Ageism* is prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their age.

**American:**

Although technically and literally this term ought to refer to any resident of the American continents (South, Central, or North), it is largely assumed in the U.S. to refer to residents, or citizens of the U.S.

**Anti-bias:**

*Anti-bias* is an active commitment to challenging prejudice, stereotyping and all forms of discrimination.

**Anti-Racism:**

“A conscious intentional effort to eradicate racism in all its forms – individual, cultural, and institutional.”

**Anti-Semitism:**

*Anti-Semitism* is a prejudice and/or discrimination against Jews. Anti-Semitism can be based on hatred against Jews because of their religious beliefs, their group membership (ethnicity) and sometimes on the erroneous belief that Jews are a “race.”

**Asian:**

Recent Asian immigrants to the U.S. and second- and third-generation U.S. Americans of Asian descent are typically referred to collectively as “Asian” by many writers. Others are careful to designate U.S. Americans of Asian descent as Asian Americans. Groups of U.S. Americans with a common Asian heritage, however, are typically delineated as Korean American, Chinese American, and so forth.

**Assimilation:**

A process by which outsiders (persons who are others by virtue of cultural heritage, gender, age, religious background, and so forth) are brought into, or made to take on and then live out of, as much as possible, the existing identity of the group into which they are being assimilated.

The term has a decidedly negative connotation in recent educational literature, implying a coercion and a failure to recognize and value diversity. However, this term is viewed quite neutrally in sociological and psychological literature, where adaptation and assimilation are simply understood as survival techniques for individuals and groups.

**B**

**Bias:**

*Bias* is an inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

**Bigotry:**

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

**Biphobia:**

*Biphobia* is the fear of intimacy with and closeness to people who do not identify with either a homosexual or heterosexual orientation. Bisexuals confront bias from both the gay and heterosexual communities and often feel that they are in two closets. Bisexuals are sometimes seen as trying to have it both ways or as homosexuals who haven't admitted it yet.

**Bisexuality:**

Romantic and sexual attraction to and/or behavior with members of both genders. It's normal, not an illness, and has no known cause.

**Black:**

Used by some to designate a racial group distinguishable by skin color. Used by others to designate a cultural group or subculture such as U.S. Americans or Canadians with an African heritage. Race and culture are not synonymous: race designates lineage or genetics; culture refers to the particular historical and linguistic patterns which inform a person's or group's world view. Authors tend to capitalize "Black" when a cultural group is intended, and use "black" in reference to race. However, the *Harvard Educational Review* insists on "Black," and *The New York Times* consistently uses "black" in all cases.

Through much of U.S. history, "black" has often been used negatively, especially by European Americans—as in identifying black with "dirty." Such usage reflects negatively back on people identified with dark skin hues.

It is not uncommon for individual authors to alternate inexplicably among "black," "Black," and "African American."

## C

**Classism:**

*Classism* is prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their real or perceived economic status.

**Coming Out:**

The never ending process of becoming aware of one's homosexual or bisexual orientation; accepting it, acting on it, and telling others about it. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people often are only partially "out".

**Conservative:**

When used in Christian religious circles, this term usually refers to a set of attitudes and beliefs directed to the preservation of existing institutions and practices. Adherents tend to value gradual change in social and religious matters.

**Cultural Racism:**

"When whites use power to perpetuate their cultural heritage and impose it upon others, while at the same time destroying the culture of ethnic minorities."

**Culture:**

*Culture* is 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, dating rituals, and clothing, to name a few examples.

**Cross cultural:**

Most writers seem to treat this term as synonymous with intercultural, referring to some sort of relating, or attempts to do so, between cultural groups. Others use the term to highlight the differences (or the gap) between cultures; Sleeter and Grant refer to “cross cultural differences which might interfere with communication.”

**Crossdresser:**

*Crossdresser* is a person who, in order to relieve stress, dresses in clothes usually reserved for people not of their birth gender.

**D****Disability:**

Commonly used to refer to physical or mental or emotional limitations relative to others.

**Discrimination:**

*Discrimination* is the denial of justice and fair treatment by both individuals and institutions in many arenas, including employment, education, housing, banking, and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudiced thinking.

**Diversity:**

*Diversity* means different or varied. The population of the United States is made up of people from diverse races, cultures and places.

**Dominant Culture:**

Used widely and rather unanimously to refer to the cultural group with the greatest political power in a given context, e.g., European American, Protestant, and/or male culture in traditional U.S. society.

**E****Ethnicity:**

Concerns the heritage, character, experience of people distinguished by political and geographic boundaries whether chosen or received. Refers to the “memory, response, mood coded into the soul, transmitted through generations.” As such, ethnicity functions as a “public metaphor” for “a knowledge related to heritage, character, social experience of people” and can be distinguished from culture (which has to do explicitly with shared patterns of living) and race (which is often considered a matter of genetics).

**Ethnocentricity:**

Considered by some to be an attitude that views one's own culture as superior. Others cast it as "seeing things from the point of view of one's own ethnic group" without the necessary connotation of superiority.

**Eurocentric:**

The ethnocentric inclination to consider European culture as normative. While the term need not imply an attitude of superiority (since all cultural groups have the initial right to understand their own culture as normative for them), most writers use this term with a clear awareness of the historic oppressiveness of Eurocentric tendencies in U.S and European society.

**Evangelical:**

Originally identified in the United States and Canada with that part of Protestant Christianity that emphasizes the centrality of the Bible and the necessity of a "conscious personal conversion" leading to a spiritually transformed life of moral commitment and conduct. In recent years, especially in the popular press, the term has been used to refer to any Christian holding these basic principles. Lutherans have traditionally used the term as a rough equivalent for Protestant.

**F****Fundamentalism:**

Originally this term referred to those evangelicals who uncompromisingly resisted "modernist" theology, first among U.S. American Protestant Christianity and, increasingly, in reference to any anti-modernist movement in major religious communities; as in "Modern fundamentalists."

**G****Gay:**

A descriptive label assigned to people, most often men, who are romantically and sexually attracted to members of their own gender. The label *gay* is used often as an umbrella term for both gay men and lesbians, especially in the United States. The term became popular in the late 1960's as a symbol of self-acceptance and self affirmation.

**Gender:**

Having to do with whether someone or something is masculine, feminine, or neuter (originally a grammatical term pertaining to article and verb conjugation). Issues of gender have become prominent in multicultural education since females can be understood as a minority culture, and since feminist theory has come to inform many multicultural theorists.

**Gender Bias:**

Most often used in reference to the hidden (or unrecognized) male perspective, or bias, in a given theory or practice. The unrecognized male perspective has often been considered "generally human," which automatically favors masculine ways of thinking and acting. The first step toward dealing with this bias is to recognize it.

### **Gender Roles:**

The roles or culturally “appropriate” patterns of behavior prescribed for persons tend to differ according to gender and are understood by many to be socially or culturally constructed. Therefore proponents of multicultural non-sexist education (some assume that multiculturalism and non-sexism go together, others make this linguistically explicit) are inclined to attend carefully to the images or messages which are conveyed in the classroom concerning gender roles.

## **H**

### **Handicap:**

A condition in a person’s environment that serves as an impediment. Some advocates for persons with disabilities urge that this term not be used to refer to a disability.

### **Hate Crime:**

Hate crimes are defined under specific penal code sections as an act or an attempted act by any person against the person or property of another individual or group which in any way constitutes an expression of hostility toward the victim because of his or her race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, gender, or ethnicity.\* This includes but is not limited to threatening phone calls, hate mail, physical assaults, vandalism, cross burnings, destruction of religious symbols, and fire bombings.

\* Elements of crime statutes and protected classifications vary state to state.

### **Hate Incident:**

Hate-motivated incidents are defined as behavior which constitutes an expression of hostility against the person or property of another because of the victim’s race, religion, disability, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Hate-motivated incidents include those actions that are motivated by bias, but do not meet the necessary elements required to prove a crime. They may include such behavior as non-threatening name calling, using racial slurs or disseminating racial leaflets.

### **Heterophobia:**

For some homosexual persons, the fear or distrust of heterosexuals and anything associated with heterosexuality; often based on negative life experiences.

### **Heterosexism:**

*Heterosexism* is a powerful cultural assumption that everyone is heterosexual or should be, that heterosexuality is the only normal, right, and moral way to be, and that anything else, therefore, is abnormal, unnatural, and wrong.

### **Heterosexuality:**

Romantic and sexual attraction to and/or behavior with members of other gender. It’s normal, not an illness, and has no known cause.

**Hispanic:**

Technically refers to Spanish-speaking persons in general, but is most commonly used in the U.S. to designate persons native to, or whose lineage can easily be traced to Central or South America or surrounding islands (rather than to Spain or Portugal).

**Homophobia:**

*Homophobia* is the irrational fear and intolerance of people who are believed to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Homophobia is the problem, not homosexuality. Even gay people may internal homophobia.

**Homosexuality:**

Romantic and sexual attraction to and/or behavior with members of the same gender. It's normal, not an illness, and has no known cause.

**I****Immigration:**

The act or instance of coming to a new country, region, or environment for the purpose of settling there. Also refers to the number of persons doing so during a certain period, e.g., "a large immigration of Vietnamese during the 1980s."

**In The Closet:**

Being totally or partially secret about one's gay, lesbian or bisexual orientation; often necessary due to self-denial, discrimination, and/or antigay violence. Keeping the secret takes incredible energy and often causes psychological pain.

**Inclusive:**

Having a posture (attitude or policy) of inclusion of diverse others.

Inclusion, however, does not inherently imply diversity or pluralism and can even be seen to imply the opposite in some instances. For example, a company may hire a prescribed quota of women and minorities but then expect and require these persons to take on the pre-existent white male corporate identity. This company may then refer to itself as "inclusive," but it is not pluralistic since a single dominating identity remains, which others are assimilated into. Or to put it another way, the newly "inclusive" company is seeking to be inclusive while ignoring or erasing diversity.

**Inclusive Language:**

Refers to non-sexist language, or language that "includes" all persons in its references. For example, "a writer needs to proofread his work" excludes females due to the masculine reference of the pronoun. Likewise, "a nurse must disinfect her hands" is exclusive of males and stereotypes nurses as female.

It is widely believed and documented that the male-biased sexism of "traditional" modern English creates and reinforces discrimination against women and that inclusive language can help to rectify this.

For some persons, inclusive language means the use of male/female gender-neutral language and imagery. For others, it means avoiding the use of pejorative or hierarchical language in reference to gender, physical conditions, marriage status, race, age, and other culturally differentiated relationships among people. These same distinctions may be found among those advocating for an inclusive language in reference to divinity.

### **Institutional Racism:**

It is widely accepted that racism is, by definition, institutional. “Institutions have greater power to reward and penalize. They reward by providing career opportunities for some people and foreclosing them for others. They reward as well by the way social goods are distributed – by deciding who receives training and skills, medical care, formal education, political influence, moral support and self-respect, productive employment, fair treatment by the law, decent housing, self-confidence and the promise of a secure future for self and children.”

### **Intersexual:**

*Intersexual* is person born with mixed sexual physiology; an actual medical condition exhibiting the physical manifestation of genital/genetic/endocrinological differentiation which is different from the “cultural norm”.

## **L**

### **Latino:**

People of Latin American and Caribbean heritage. Often used interchangeable with Hispanic, Latino seems preferable on the U.S. West Coast and Hispanic on the East Coast. Some feel that Latino is more inclusive of these groups’ African and indigenous heritage as well as their Spanish heritage. Others prefer Hispanic since Latino is masculine, and is not a clear ethnic designation (the word does not refer to a specific country or locale).

Latino/a is sometimes used in an effort to avoid sexism. For some, the term more technically refers to people whose heritages are traced to countries where languages derived from Latin are spoken, e.g., Spain, France, Portugal, Italy, and Romania.

### **Lesbian:**

The term of preference for most gay women because it offers an identity independent from men. The term originates from the island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea, which was the of the Greek poet Sappho, who was a lover of women.

### **Liberalism:**

When used in Christian religious circles, this term usually means a belief in the value of a critical attitude toward authority and tradition, and an openness to the insights from the scientific study of religious belief. Often used as a contrast to conservative.

### **Lifestyle:**

The term is used to describe the way individuals lead their lives. For example, some people like living in the country. Others like the city life, using public transportation, and taking advantage of all the city has to offer. The word lifestyle is sometimes used incorrectly to describe a person’s to describe a person’s sexual orientation, as in “She is living a gay lifestyle.” This

usage is problematic because gay people live many different lifestyles. Being gay, in and of itself, is not a lifestyle any more than being heterosexual is a lifestyle.

## **M**

### **Mestizo:**

Literally “mixed” or “hybrid,” this term is increasingly used to identify “the origination of a new people from two ethnically disparate parent peoples.” The primary reference is to the Spanish and Native American cultural heritage of Mexico, but it has also been used to identify Hispanics in the United States.

### **Minority:**

A group or subgroup, or a member of such, which has limited access to positions of power and therefore little influence upon the larger group, institution, or society.

Since women (who are roughly fifty percent of the population) are often, but not always, referred to as a minority group (some use the phrase “minorities and women” to reference those outside the dominating “majority”), and African Americans and Hispanics retain their “minority” status even if they constitute over fifty percent of the population of an area, it is clear that “minority” is not determined numerically.

The term is considered by some to have derogatory connotations, and some writers seek to avoid the term altogether by using positive designations such as persons of color or “primarily Black” schools and so forth.

### **Multicultural:**

This term is used in a variety of ways and is less often defined by its users than terms such as multiculturalism or multicultural education.

One common use of the term refers to the raw fact of cultural diversity: “multicultural education ... responds to a multicultural population.”

Another use of the term refers to an ideological awareness of diversity: “[multicultural theorists] have a clear recognition of a pluralistic society.”

Still others go beyond this and understand multicultural as reflecting a specific ideology of inclusion and openness toward “others.”

Perhaps the most common use of this term in the literature is in reference simultaneously to a context of cultural pluralism and an ideology of inclusion or “mutual exchange of and respect for diverse cultures.”

When the term is used to refer to a group of persons (or an organization or institution), it most often refers to the presence of and mutual interaction among diverse persons (in terms of race, class, gender, and so forth) of significant representation in the group. In other words, a few African Americans in a predominantly European American congregation would not make the congregation “multicultural.”

Some, however, do use the term to refer to the mere presence of some non-majority persons somewhere in the designated institution (or group or society), even if there is neither significant interaction nor substantial numerical representation.

**Multiracial:**

Designating a context or ideology of racial pluralism: “Black, White, Asian, Latino/a, Native American persons.” Multicultural generally intends wider diversity, implying recognition also of gender, economic, and political differences.

“Multiracial education” is preferred over multicultural education by some since it conceptually addresses the issue of institutionalized racism more directly.

## **N**

**Nation:**

A historically developed group of people with territory, economy, culture(s), and language(s) in common.

**Native American:**

Person whose ancestors were long-established residents of North America prior to the fifteenth century. The term American Indian (or Plains Indian, Pueblo Indian, and so forth) is also used. Native American is more often preferred as a general designation since Indian originated as a misnomer and is offensive to some.

Yet “Native American” has never really been the preferred self-designation of people who understand themselves to be Cherokee, Pueblo, Aleut, and so forth therefore “Indian” (especially in conjunction with a tribal name) is a common self-designation.

**Non-White:**

Used at times to reference all persons or groups outside of white culture, often in the clear consciousness that white culture should be seen as an alternative to various non-white cultures and not as normative.

**North Americans:**

Usually refers to the peoples of Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

## **O**

**Other:**

Referring quite simply to “those who are not me/us,” this term has taken on a special significance for many philosophers, ethicists, and educators who are concerned with issues of multiculturalism, pluralism, and diversity. The term is sometimes italicized or put in quotations to draw attention to this special usage.

An “other” in this context is someone who is “not me” or “not us” in some significant way. For example, women are “others” for men, and African Americans are “others” for

Hispanic Americans. The challenge of multiculturalism, as many see it, is to acknowledge, respect, and celebrate the diversity of others present in a pluralistic society.

## **P**

### **Person of Color:**

Used in the United States by some to designate “Blacks and Hispanics.” For many others, this includes all non-whites. In South America and the Caribbean, it is most used to refer to blacks.

### **Political Correctness:**

Refers for some to efforts to “use the right words” and insist that others do so without giving clear attention to the philosophical, theological, sociological, or ethical issues which make the language or actions desirable or undesirable. Others use the term to refer to perceived attempts to exclude or make taboo any challenges to a certain (liberal) political agenda.

### **Power:**

*Power* is the key that locks the system of racism and any system of oppression in place.

### **Prejudice:**

*Prejudice* is a set of negative beliefs generalized about a whole group of people. All people hold prejudices, but only the dominant group has the power to enforce laws, establish institutions and set cultural standards that are used to dominate those who are the subject of their prejudice. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes.

## **Q**

### **Queer:**

Deriving from the expected, unconventional; often refers to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered community at-large, but is often used to define transgressive individuals more broadly speaking as well.

## **R**

### **Racism:**

*Racism* is racial prejudice plus power. Racism is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior origin, identity of supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economical, political and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude. It is the institutionalized form of that attitude. It is both overt and covert.

### **Refugee:**

There is significant political import at present attached to whether or not persons fleeing oppression in other countries and seeking asylum in the U.S. can be granted “refugee” status.

“Political refugees” are granted asylum, but those judged to be fleeing economic oppression are generally turned away.

**Relativism:**

This is not commonly understood as a posture which maintains that the basis for judgment in matters of ethics or knowledge is relative, differing according to persons and contexts. Therefore, universal judgments applicable to all persons and all contexts is difficult or impossible.

It does not follow, however, that all judgments are therefore equal in this view (that judgment could only be made from an objective perspective which the relativist denies), nor that one cannot assess judgments as better or worse from one’s own culturally bound point of view.

The issue of relativism is raised by discussions of cultural diversity, since the claim is often made that no one cultural perspective is absolute and universal but rather that there is much to be gained from a sharing of multiple cultural vantage points (each relative to the peoples and contexts which form it).

**Retarded:**

Means literally that development or progress is stunted. This is considered a derogatory term if used in reference to persons. The most common and acceptable term for persons whose intellectual development is significantly below the norm is developmentally disabled.

## S

**Scapegoating:**

*Scapegoating* is the action of blaming an individual or group for something when, in reality, there is no one person or group responsible for the problem. It targets another person or group as responsible for problems in society because of that person’s group identity.

**Sexism:**

*Sexism* is prejudice and/or discrimination based on gender.

**Sexual Orientation:**

*Sexual Orientation* denotes the deep-seated direction of one’s romantic and erotic attraction toward the same sex (homosexual), other sex (heterosexual), or both sexes (bisexual). Sexual orientation is a continuum, not a set of absolutely distinct categories. People do not choose their sexual orientation; they discover their feelings of attraction. The only choice is whether or not to act on those feelings. Some people’s feelings vary over time.

**Stereotype:**

A *stereotype* is an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

# T

## **Tokenism:**

Hiring or seeking to have in representation a few women and/or racial or ethnic minority persons so as to appear inclusive while remaining monocultural.

## **Tradition:**

The handing down of stories, beliefs, customs, and so forth from generation to generation, or a long-established custom or practice which approximates an unwritten law. In its singular form, this term is often a point of contention in debates between “traditionalists,” who assert that the Western tradition is formative and normative for Western culture and therefore ought to form the core curriculum in Western educational institutions, and non-traditionalists (pluralists, postmodernists, multiculturalists), who contend that there are multiple and diverse Western traditions as well as multiple non-Western traditions that ought to be part of our cultural discourse and part of educational curricula.

## **Transgender:**

*Transgender* is a general term which refers to anyone who does not fit into the stereotypical two gender labeling system of male or female. Gender identification and/or presentation does not conform to culturally standard patterns. This term is commonly used as an umbrella term to include all manner of gender transgression, including transsexuals, crossdressers, transvestites, and intersexuals, as well as other self-defining people.

## **Transgressive:**

Challenging the accepted expectations and/or rules of appropriateness of “polite society”.

## **Transsexual:**

*Transsexuals* are men and women who feel their true identity is that of the other gender and that they have been born with the wrong set of sexual organs. Many transsexuals have sex-change operations. Transsexuals may be gay, bisexual or heterosexual, in the same way that the general population may be.

## **Transvestite:**

*Transvestite* is an individual who enjoys wearing the clothes of and appearing as the other sex. Also known as cross-dressers. Most are heterosexual men. Some gay people enjoy drag and cam as liberating humor.

## **Tribe:**

A group of persons, families, or clans believed to be descended from a common ancestor and which presently forms a closely knit community. The term is considered derogatory by some, but is often used, along with a tribal name, to highlight a group’s unique identity and to counter the tendency to stereotype or to fail to recognize diversity among peoples with a common or similar ethnic background.

## W

### White:

The most commonly used designation for Europeans and for Americans descended from them. The terms Anglo and European American are also used, but much less often. Non-white or persons of color are sometimes used in contrast to white in attempts to divide U.S. society into two groups, based not only on skin color but also and more importantly on historic social power. It is worth noting that Hispanics and Asians are generally not considered “white” no matter how light their complexion, while southern Europeans are generally considered “white” no matter how dark their complexion. This hints at the term’s usage as both a racial and cultural label.

The term is most often not capitalized (although it is always capitalized in some publications, such as the *Harvard Educational Review*). Some writers use “European American” to capture the cultural designation and then use “white” only in reference to race.

### White Privilege:

*White Privilege* is the spill over effect of racial prejudice and White institutional power. It means that a White person in the United States has privilege, simply because one is White. It means that as a member of the dominant group a White person has greater access or availability to resources because of being White. It means that White ways of thinking and living are seen as the norm against which all people of color are compared. Life is structured around those norms for the benefit of White people.

White privilege is the ability to grow up thinking that race doesn’t matter. It is not having to daily think about skin color and the questions, looks, and hurdles that need to be overcome because of one’s color. White Privilege may be less recognizable to some White people because of gender, age, sexual orientation, economic class or physical or mental ability, but it remains a reality because of one’s membership in the White dominant group.

***This list is compiled from a variety of sources by the Office of Racial Justice and Multi-Racial, Multi-Cultural Transformation, United Church of Christ, Cleveland Based Team, Fall 2006***