

Race and Health Equity Glossary

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This Glossary, developed by regional thinkers (listed below) committed to advancing regional equity, is a tool for moving conversations, initiatives, organizations, projects, programs, plans and other types of efforts forward with an equity lens. It is an endorsed list of terms aimed at establishing a shared language in our region. A shared language is essential for effective collaboration. The definitions are adapted from numerous sources, including [Women of Color Health Equity Collective](#) and *Awake to Woke to Work*. The vocabulary is ever changing as our national reckoning of equity evolves quickly, and this Glossary will be updated periodically to reflect these shifts. As always, language is a source of comfort and discomfort in the evolution of humanity. We hope this Glossary both strengthens the current equity efforts and catalyzes others. For questions, concerns, or recommendations, please [contact the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts](#).

ABLEISM

Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities and/or people who are perceived to be disabled. Lack of equity or barriers to equity created or reinforced against people with disabilities or perceived with disabilities (physical, mental, lack of benefits in workplace to achieve equity within the workplace).

ACCOMPLICE

The term ally is defined as someone who advocates for groups or individuals who do not come from the same place of privilege as the ally. Being an ally is considered one of the first steps in race and social justice work. The term accomplice encompasses allyship but goes beyond advocacy. An accomplice uses their privilege to challenge existing conditions at the risk of their own comfort and well-being. ⁱ

ALLY

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ANTI-OPPRESSION ORGANIZATION

An organization that actively recognizes and mitigates the oppressive effects of white dominant culture and power dynamics, striving to equalize that power imbalance internally and for the communities with which they work.

ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism is an active and conscious effort to work against multidimensional aspects of racism (Robert J. Patterson). Racism scholar Ibram X Kendi says one is either racist or anti-racist. There is no room for neutrality, and there is no such thing as a "non-racist."

ASSIMILATE

The phenomenon occurs when people belonging to the nondominant group understand dominant culture norms and take on their characteristics by choice or force. Many people of color are asked to "check their identities at the door" in professional settings to make their white peers comfortable. By doing so, many people of color find it easier to get promotions and professional opportunities, as well as to gain access to informal networks typically accessible only to whites.

BELONGING

Belonging engages the full potential of the individual, where innovation thrives, and views, beliefs, and values are integrated.

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous People of Color. This is a newer term that highlights the specific experiences of Black and First Nation people as autonomous AND part of a collective. The distinction is recognizing those who were a part of systems of chattel slavery/apartheid and genocide.

CO-CONSPIRATOR

A person who conspires with one or more others. A person who conspires or assists others to do harm or creates a plan to harm.

COLLUSION

Ways that members of agent and target groups think and act, often unconsciously, that support oppressive systems and maintain the status quo.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

A theory that explicitly states and recognizes that racism is ingrained in the fabric and system of American society. Even without overt racists present, institutional racism is pervasive in dominant culture. Critical Race Theory examines existing power structures, and identifies these structures as based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuate the marginalization of people of color. Overall, Critical Race Theory examines what the legal and social landscape would look like today if people of color were the decision-makers.

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural humility is a humble and respectful attitude toward individuals of other cultures that pushes one to challenge their own cultural biases, realize they cannot know everything about other cultures, and approach learning about other cultures as a lifelong goal and process.

CULTURE

A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors, and styles of communication.ⁱⁱ

DECOLONIZE (MIND)

We exist within societal structures rooted in historical facts, one of which is colonialism: the policy and practice of acquiring control of land (frequently occupied by people of color), occupying it, and codifying power structures to elevate one race and culture above all others. The international practice of colonization informs the dominant culture that characterizes American society today, driving ideologies and subconscious biases rooted in centuries of racism, classism, and white privilege. To dismantle white supremacy and the white dominant culture norms it influences, one must actively “decolonize” the mind, recognizing and counteracting the thoughts, preferences, practices, and behaviors that are deeply rooted vestiges of colonization.

DISCRIMINATION

Actions, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favor one group over others in the provision of goods, services, or opportunities. (Institutionalization actions, policy, practices or procedures or systems in which conscious or unconscious prejudice is embedded, which favor one group over others)

DIVERSITY

Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles.

DOMINANT CULTURE

Dominant culture in a society refers to the established language, religion, values, rituals, and social customs on which the society was built. It has the most power, is widespread, and influential within a social entity, such as an organization, in which multiple cultures are present. An organization's dominant culture is heavily influenced by the leadership and management standards and preferences of those at the top of the hierarchy. In this definition, dominant culture refers specifically to the American context in which organizational culture is defined by white men and white women in positional power. See also "White Dominant Culture."

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP

Voluntary, employee-led groups that foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with organizational mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives. Often, these groups provide support to staff who formally or informally lead race equity work in some capacity within an organization.

EQUITY

Equity is the absence of unfair, avoidable, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, geographically, or by other dimensions of inequality (e.g., sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation).

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY

Equality means everyone gets the same amount or same thing; equity is everyone gets the amount or thing that they need to reach their full potential for health and wellbeing; it is in comparison to those that have much more than they "need".

INEQUITY VS. DISPARITIES

Disparity is the quantity that separates a group from a reference point on a particular measure of health that is expressed in terms of a rate, proportion, mean, or some other quantitative measure. When discussed in context of health outcomes, inequities are defined as unfair, unjust, and reversible, whereas disparities are not necessarily so. An example of disparity could be that more people over the age of 70 die than people under the age of 15. An inequity example could be that Latina's are six times more likely than their white peers to become teenage moms.

GENDER

The socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity; the 'appropriate' qualities accompanying biological sex.

HEALTH EQUITY

Health equity means achieving the conditions in which all people have the opportunity to realize their health potential – the highest level of health possible for that person. Health is a fundamental human right. Health equity is achieved when everyone can attain their full potential for health and well-being when there is absence of unfair, avoidable, or remediable differences among groups that manifest in health inequities.ⁱⁱⁱ

IMPLICIT BIAS

Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

INCLUSION

Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.^{iv}

INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions, and policies including the administration, governance, and implementation within the institution.

INTERSECTIONALITY

An approach advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as Gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive.

INVESTMENT/DISINVESTMENT

Community investment refers to a set of investment strategies and instruments that target positive social and environmental impacts in specific communities and geographies. Disinvestment is when no investments are made in certain communities over extended periods of time.

- ISM

A social phenomenon and psychological state where prejudice is accompanied by the power to systemically enact it.

LATINE

Someone of Latin American descent; a Latino or Latina

LATINX

A person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina).

LEADERSHIP

Individuals who influence a group of people to act towards a goal. Individuals may or may not be in positions of authority.

MICROAGGRESSION

The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

OPPRESSION

Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm.

PATRIARCHY

A system of social structures and practices, in which men govern, oppress and exploit women and children.

POC

Person/People of Color is a term that denotes the collective power of groups of people who do not identify as white. It should not be used to lump all non-white people together as this “erases” or “dismisses” the experiences of each racial/ethnic group.

POWER (SOCIAL)

Access to resources that enhance one’s chances of getting what one needs to lead a comfortable, productive, and safe life. Power is unequally distributed globally and in U.S. society; some individuals or groups wield greater power than others, thereby allowing them greater access and control over resources. Wealth, whiteness, citizenship, patriarchy, heterosexism, and education are a few key social mechanisms through which power operates. Although power is often conceptualized as power over other individuals or groups, other variations are power with (used in the context of building collective strength) and power within (which references an individual’s internal strength).

PREJUDICE

A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or group toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.

PRIVILEGE

Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we are taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.

QUEER

A person who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or otherwise not heterosexual, non-binary, non-conforming; Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.

RACE

A political construction created to concentrate power with white people and legitimize dominance over non-white people.

RACE EQUITY

The condition where one's race identity has no influence on how one fares in society. Race equity is one part of racial justice and must be addressed at the root causes and not just the manifestations. This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race.

RACE EQUITY CULTURE

A culture focused on proactive counteraction of social and racial inequities inside and outside of an organization.

RACE EQUITY LENS

The process of paying disciplined attention to race and ethnicity while analyzing problems, looking for solutions, and defining success. A race equity lens critiques a "color blind" approach, arguing that color blindness perpetuates systems of disadvantage in that it prevents structural racism from being acknowledged. Application of a race equity lens helps to illuminate disparate outcomes, patterns of disadvantage, and root cause.

RACIAL JUSTICE

The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

RACISM

A system of advantage and oppression based on race. A way of organizing society based on dominance and subordination based on race. Racism penetrates every aspect of personal, cultural, and institutional life. It includes prejudice against people of color, as well as exclusion, discrimination against, suspicion of, and fear and hate of people of color.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

A concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the distribution of power, wealth, education, healthcare, and other opportunities for personal activity and social privileges.

SOCIAL SECTOR

The group of organizations that consist of both nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

The arrangement of institutional, interpersonal, historical, and cultural dynamics in a way that consistently produces advantage for whites and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It illuminates that racism exists without the presence of individual actors because it is systemically embedded. When the United States was founded, racist principles were codified in governance structures and policies. As a result, racism is embedded in institutions, structures, and social relations across American society. Today, structural racism is composed of intersecting, overlapping, and codependent racist institutions, policies, practices, ideas, and behaviors that give an unjust number of resources, rights, and power to white people while denying them to people of color.

Structural Racism encompasses the entire system of white supremacy, diffused, and infused in all aspects of society, including our history, culture, politics, economics, and our entire social fabric. Structural Racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism (e.g., institutional, interpersonal, internalized, etc.) emerge from structural racism.

SYSTEMIC RACISM

Normalization of policies and practices that exist throughout a whole society or organization, and that result in and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race. Systemic racism includes normalization and legitimization.

WHITE

The term "White race" or "White people" entered the major European languages in the later 17th century, in the context of racialized slavery and unequal social status in the European colonies. Description of populations as "White" in reference to their skin color predates this notion and is occasionally found in Greco-Roman ethnography and other ancient or medieval sources, but these societies did not have any notion of a White or pan-European race. Scholarship on race distinguishes the modern concept from pre-modern descriptions, which focused on physical complexion rather than race.^v

WHITE DOMINANT CULTURE

Culture defined by white men and white women with social and positional power, enacted both broadly in society and within the context of social entities such as organizations. See also "Dominant Culture" and "White Supremacy Culture".

WHITE PRIVILEGE

The power and advantages benefiting perceived white people, derived from the historical oppression and exploitation of other non-white groups.

WHITE SUPREMACY

The existence of racial power that denotes a system of structural or societal racism which privileges white people over others, regardless of the presence or the absence of racial hatred. White racial advantages occur at both a collective and an individual level, and both people of color and white people can perpetuate white dominant culture, resulting in the overall disenfranchisement of people of color in many aspects of society.

WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

Characteristics of white supremacy that manifest in organizational culture, and are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the full group. The characteristics are damaging to both people of color and white people in that they elevate the values, preferences, and experiences of one racial group above all others. Organizations that are led by people of color or have majority of employees that are people of color can also demonstrate characteristics of white supremacy culture. Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun identified twelve characteristics of white supremacy culture in organizations: Perfectionism, Sense of Urgency, Defensiveness, Quantity of Quality, Worship of the Written Word, Paternalism, Power Hoarding, Fear of Open Conflict, Individualism, Progress is Bigger/More, Objectivity, and Right to Comfort.

Sources

The definitions in this Glossary are adapted from numerous sources, including [Women of Color Health Equity Collective](#) and *Awake to Woke to Work*. The regional partners that worked on this include: Community Foundation of Western MA, Behavioral Health Network, Inc, United Personnel, Western MA Economic Development Council, Health New England, Baystate Health, Franklin County Regional Council of Governments, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Gandara Center, Faith Based Health Alliance, Stavros, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services, Wayfinders, Davis Family Foundation, City of Springfield, Department of Health and Human Services Office of Health and Racial Equity, the MA Dept of Public Health MA Tobacco Cessation Program and Public Health Institute of Western MA. Below are additional references:

ⁱ https://greatlakesequity.org/sites/default/files/202003022136_newsletter.pdf

ⁱⁱ Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. A Community Builder's Tool Kit

ⁱⁱⁱ World Health Organization

^{iv} <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-h0EWxqHAZUfheFvuFRtVpEz50DSxul6/view>

^v https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_people