

Cultural Competence Glossary

Developing a working vocabulary related to issues of diversity can help you communicate more effectively with other people and examine what more you have to learn.

Ableism: Discrimination or prejudice based on a limitation, difference or impairment in physical, mental or sensory capacity or ability

Afrocentric: Emphasizing or promoting emphasis on African culture and the contributions of Africans to the development of Western civilization

Ageism: Discrimination or prejudice based on age, particularly aimed at the elderly

Bias: A personal judgment, especially one that is unreasoned or unfair

Biracial: Of two races; usually describing a person having parents of different races

Classism: Discrimination or prejudice based on socioeconomic status

Cultural Dominance: The pervasiveness of one set of traditions, norms, customs, literature, art and institutions, to the exclusion of all others

Cultural Competence: The ability to work effectively with people from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, races, religions, classes, sexual orientations and genders

Cultural Group: A group of people who consciously or unconsciously share identifiable values, norms, symbols and some ways of living that are repeated and transmitted from one generation to another

Cultural Sensitivity: An awareness of the nuances of one's own and other cultures

Culturally Appropriate: Demonstrating both sensitivity to cultural differences and similarities and effectiveness in communicating a message within and across cultures

Culture: The shared values, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, folklore and institutions of a group of people who are unified by race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation and/or religion

Cultural Competence Glossary, Cont'd.

Disability: A limitation, difference, or impairment in a person's physical, mental or sensory capacity or ability

Note: It is preferable to use people-first language—that is, language that puts the person before the disability. For example, the phrase “people with disabilities” is preferred over “the disabled.”

Discrimination: An act of prejudice or a manner of treating individuals differently due to their appearance, status or membership in a particular group

Disproportionality: Overrepresentation or underrepresentation of various groups in different social, political or economic institutions

Dominant Group/Culture: The “mainstream” culture in a society, consisting of the people who hold the power and influence

Ethnicity: The classification of a group of people who share common characteristics, such as language, race, tribe or national origin

Ethnocentrism: The attitude that one's own cultural group is superior

Gender: A social or cultural category generally assigned based on a person's biological sex

Gender Identity: A person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification as a man or woman, which may or may not correspond to the gender assigned to them at birth (some individuals identify as neither male nor female as our society generally understands these terms, and instead identify as a third or other gender)

Heterosexism: An ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity or relationship

Homophobia: Fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality, homosexuals or same-sex relationships

Institutional Racism: Biased policies and practices within an organization or system that disadvantage people of a certain race or ethnicity

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer

Language: The form or pattern of communication—spoken, written or signed—used by residents or descendants of a particular nation or geographic area or by any group of people. Language can be formal or informal and includes dialect, idiomatic speech and slang.

Cultural Competence Glossary, Cont'd.

Minority: The smaller in number of at least two groups; can imply a lesser status or influence and can be seen as an antonym for the words "majority" and "dominant"

Multicultural: Designed for or pertaining to two or more distinct cultures

Multiracial: Describing a person, community, organization, etc., composed of many races

National Origin: The country or region where a person was born

Person of Color: A term used primarily in the United States to describe any person who does not identify as white

Prejudice: Over-generalized, oversimplified or exaggerated beliefs associated with a category or group of people, which are not changed, even in the face of contrary evidence

Questioning: A term that can refer to an identity, or a process of introspection, whereby one learns about their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity

Race: A socially defined population characterized by distinguishable physical characteristics, usually skin color

Racism: The belief that some racial groups are inherently superior or inferior to others; discrimination, prejudice or a system of advantage and/or oppression based on race

Sexism: Discrimination or prejudice based on gender or gender identity

Sexual Orientation: The culturally defined set of meanings through which people describe their sexual attractions. Sexual orientation is not static and can shift over time. Sexual orientation has at least three (3) parts:

- a. **Attraction:** One's own feelings or self-perception about to which gender(s) one feels drawn; can be sexual, emotional, spiritual, psychological and/or political
- b. **Behavior:** What one does sexually and/or with whom
- c. **Sexual Identity:** The language and terms one uses to refer to their sexual orientation, which may or may not be based on either of the above and can also be influenced by family, culture and community

Cultural Competence Glossary, Cont'd.

Heterosexual: A person who is primarily or exclusively attracted to people of a different sex romantically, affectionately and sexually; sometimes referred to as straight

Homosexual: A term used to refer to a person based on his or her same-sex sexual orientation, identity or behavior (many LGBTQ people prefer not to use this term because of its historically negative use by the medical establishment)

Bisexual: Attracted to either gender

Socioeconomic Status: Individuals' economic class (e.g., poor, working-class, middle-class, wealthy) or position in society based on their financial situation or background

Stereotype: A highly simplified conception or belief about a person, place or thing, based on limited information

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression is different from those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth (e.g., the sex listed on their birth certificate)

Values: What a person believes to be important and accepts as an integral part of who he/she is

Xenophobia: A fear of all that is foreign, or a fear of people believed to be "foreigners"