

2019/20 Language Building Terms

Dis/Ableism

A system that produces social and physical barriers based on one's abilities (mental, neurological, intellectual, emotional, and/or physical) and one's contributions to "productivity" within a capitalist and colonial framework. Dis/ableism depends on a binary, exploiting disabled individuals for the benefit of abled individuals. Disabled people are subject to social stigma, isolation, and systemic barriers to resources, and are targeted with violence and oppression.

Ageism

A system of oppression that produces social and physical barriers based on one's age, particularly those deemed especially young or especially old. Unlike many systems of oppression, ageism contains two binaries. One of them benefits adults at the expense of children, teenagers, and youth; while another binary benefits middle-aged individuals at the expense of elders and seniors.

Ally

Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways.

Anti-Racism

The active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably

Assimilation

The process through which one cultural group adapts to the attitudes, belief systems and ways of life of another culture. Degrees of assimilation range widely. In some cases a group will, over time, lose its cultural distinctiveness and adopt the attitudes, belief systems and ways of life of a dominant culture. In other cases a cultural group will become part of a new culture while maintaining important aspects of its tradition and cultural distinctiveness.

Belonging

Belonging is a recognition that we are connected to people we know, and also to those we don't. When people feel they belong—to a region, a community or in decision-making—we establish the right conditions for changing the ways we work together to confront our greatest challenges.

Cisism / Cissexism

A system of oppression that produces social and physical barriers based on one's gender identity, specifically individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and/or within the gender binary of (cis) man and (cis) woman. Cissexism also depends on a binary of cisgender and transgender, erasing and invalidating the vast spectrum of gender expression and gender identity.

Classism

A system of oppression that produces social and physical barriers based on one's real or perceived economic status or background. It is associated with but not mutually exclusive to capitalism. While we may describe classes as poor/low income/working class, middle class, and upper class, a binary also exists within classism. This binary exploits poor, low income, and working class people for the benefit of middle and upper class individuals.

Colonialism

Can be defined as some form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a people. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban or industrial encroachments. The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact. The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation is the adoption or the theft of icons, rituals, aesthetic standards, and behavior from one culture or subculture by another. It generally is applied when the subject culture is a minority culture or somehow subordinate in social, political, economic, or military status to the appropriating culture. This “appropriation” often occurs without any real understanding of why the original culture took part in these activities or the meanings behind these activities, often converting culturally significant artefacts, practices, and beliefs into “meaningless” pop-culture or giving them a significance that is completely different than they would originally have had.

Discrimination

The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion and other categories.

Diversity

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term "diversity" is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values.

Gender

The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and characteristics that a given society categorizes as 'masculine' and 'feminine'; not defined by one's biological sex

Gender identity

A person's individual and subjective sense of their own gender; gender identities exist in a spectrum, and are not just masculine and feminine

Heterosexism

A system that produces social and physical barriers based on one's sexual orientation, specifically individuals who are questioning, lesbian, non-labeling, bisexual, asexual, queer, pansexual, gay, or identify in any other way that is not heterosexual/straight. Heterosexism depends on the binary of straight and gay, making invisible the vast spectrum and fluidity of sexual orientation. It also enforces, and is enforced by, the gender binary.

Implicit Bias

Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.

Internalized oppression

Occurs in a racist system when a group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power. It involves four essential and interconnected elements:

Decision-making - Due to racism, people of color do not have the ultimate decision-making power over the decisions that control our lives and resources. As a result we may think white people know more about what needs to be done for us than we do, and we may not support

each other's authority and power - especially if it is in opposition to the dominating racial group. Structurally, there is a system in place that rewards people of color who support white supremacy and power and coerces or punishes those who do not.

Resources - Resources, broadly defined (e.g. money, time, etc), are unequally in the hands and under the control of white people. Internalized racism is the system in place that makes it difficult for people of color to get access to resources for our own communities and to control the resources of our community.

Standards - With internalized racism, the standards for what is appropriate or "normal" that people of color accept are white people's or Eurocentric standards.

Naming the problem - There is a system in place that misnames the problem of racism as a problem of or caused by people of color and blames the disease - emotional, economic, political, etc. - on people of color. With internalized racism, people of color might, for example, believe we are more violent than white people and not consider state-sanctioned political violence or the hidden or privatized violence of white people and the systems they put in place and support

Internalized superiority

A complex multi-generational socialization process that teaches white people to believe, accept and or live superior societal definitions of self

Intersectionality

An approach largely 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.

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

When an agent (dominant) group, whether knowingly or unknowingly, abuses a target group. This pervasive system is rooted historically and maintained through individual and institutional/systematic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice, resulting in a condition of privilege for the agent group at the expense of the target group.

Patriarchy

A social system and institution in which men have primary power in the political, social, economic, legal, and familial spheres; patriarchy favors male-dominated thought, and is centralized on the male narrative or perspective of how the world works and should work

Power

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). Learning to "see" and understand relations of power is vital to organizing for progressive social change.

Prejudice

A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups 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're taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.

Queer

An umbrella term within the LGBTQQIA community that refers to anyone who doesn't prescribe to societal views of gender and sexuality; implies elasticity and a resistance to the notion of a predetermined gender and sexual identity based on biology

Race

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

Racial Equity

Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities

not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

Racism

A system that produces social and physical barriers based on ethnicity and ethnic heritage, real or perceived, specifically by an ethnic group who historically dominates in all levels of society. Racism depends on a binary of a superior ethnic group, usually lighter in skin colour, over another, minimizing the reality that ethnicity, language, and culture are complex and that many people are also mixed ethnicities. It is important to understand that “race” is a social construct designed to benefit the oppressor, and for that reason it exists. (White supremacy is responsible for creating, perpetuating and maintaining the notion of “race” and racism itself.)

Sexism

A system that produces social and physical barriers based on gender, specifically for girls and women. Sexism historically conflates one’s sex (our genitalia, anatomy, chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs) with our gender (our gender expression and gender identity) and depends on the gender binary of women and men. This binary also erases intersex and trans girls and women.

Stereotype

An attitude, belief, feeling, or assumption about a person or group of people that are widespread and socially sanctioned; though stereotypes can be positive and negative, they all have negative effects because they support institutionalized oppression by validating oversimplified beliefs that are often not based on facts

Trans

An umbrella term used to refer to more than one identity within gender identity and gender expression, beyond what is generally assigned at birth: transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, third gender, two-spirit, bigender, pangender, trans woman, trans man, and more.

For Western English-centric people, we often describe these individuals as trans, transgender, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming. It is important to understand that ethnic cultures around the world historically have their own languages in describing their diverse understandings of gender identity and gender roles

White Privilege

Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.

Structural White Privilege: A system of white domination that creates and maintains belief systems that make current racial advantages and disadvantages seem normal. The system includes powerful incentives for maintaining white privilege and its consequences, and powerful negative consequences for trying to interrupt white privilege or reduce its consequences in meaningful ways. The system includes internal and external manifestations at the individual, interpersonal, cultural and institutional levels.

Xenophobia

Fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign.