



Glossary of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB) Terms

Here is a glossary of terms relating to diversity, inclusion and belonging. It is not comprehensive, but rather, is meant to serve as a starting point for communication and learning.

Ableism: Beliefs or practices that rest on the assumption that being able-bodied is “normal” while other states of being need to be “fixed” or altered. This can result in devaluing or discriminating against people with physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities. *Institutionalized ableism* may include or take the form of un/intentional organizational barriers that result in disparate treatment of people with disabilities (PWDs).

Accessibility: The "ability to access" the functionality of a system or entity, and gain the related benefits. The degree to which a product, service, or environment is accessible by as many people as possible. *Accessible design* ensures both direct (unassisted) access and indirect access through assistive technology (e.g., computer screen readers). *Universal design* ensures that an environment can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people.

Accommodation: A change in the environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to have equal opportunity, access and participation.

Ally: A person who is not a member of a marginalized or disadvantaged group but who expresses or gives support to that group.

Bias: Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in an unfair or negative way. *Unconscious bias*, also known as *implicit bias*, is defined as “attitudes and stereotypes that influence judgment, decision-making, and behavior in ways that are outside of conscious awareness and/or control”. Work on implicit bias and its relationship to diversity was pioneered by Harvard [Professor Mahzarin Banaji](#) (with Tony Greenwald) and includes the [Implicit Association Test](#).

Black Lives Matter: [Black Lives Matter](#) is a human rights movement, originating in the African-American community, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism toward black people. The movement began with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin in February 2012.

Cultural appropriation: Originally coined to describe the effects of colonialism, cultural appropriation generally entails adopting aspects of a minority culture by someone outside the culture, without sufficient understanding of its context or respect for the meaning and value of the original. Cultural appropriation done in a way that promotes disrespectful cultural or racial stereotypes is considered particularly harmful.

Cisgender: From the Latin *cis-*, meaning “on this side.” A person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth. For example, a person identified as female at birth who identifies as a woman can be said to be a cisgender woman.

Disability: A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of an individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment (from the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) of 1990).

Diversity: The condition of being different or having differences. Differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, health, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, religion, physical size, education level, job and function, personality traits, and other human differences. Some describe organizational diversity as social heterogeneity.

Diversity v. Inclusion v. Belonging: Diversity typically means proportionate representation across all dimensions of human difference. Inclusion means that everyone is included, visible, heard and

considered. Belonging means that everyone is treated and feels like a full member of the larger community, and can thrive.

ERG: Abbreviation for Employee Resource Group. Typically, an employer-sponsored or –recognized affinity group of those who share the interests and concerns common to those of a particular race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. [ERG's at Harvard](#) are intended to build community, strengthen networks and supportive relationships, and improve the mobility and retention of diverse people.

Equity: Fair treatment for all while striving to identify and eliminate inequities and barriers.

Gaslighting: First popularized in the 1944 movie *Gas Light*, it means a deliberate attempt to undermine a victim's sense of reality or sanity. In a work context, it usually means behaviors that undermine the success, self-confidence, self-esteem or wellbeing of the target. For people in underrepresented or less powerful groups, it is more likely to occur, with more severe and harmful cumulative effects. Tactics can include withholding (critical information, meeting invitations, silent treatment), isolation (exclusion, causing conflict with coworkers), and discrediting (consistently shooting down the target's ideas, ignoring or taking credit for them).

Gender Nonconforming or Gender Non-binary: A way of identifying and/or expressing oneself outside the binary gender categories of male/masculine and female/feminine.

Health at Every Size: Known by the acronym HAES, a social and health promotion movement that challenges social stigma based on weight, size and shape. The movement emphasizes body positivity, [health outcomes](#), and eating and movement for wellbeing rather than weight control.

Intersectionality: The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, and their multiple effects on the same individuals or groups. Also refers to the view that overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and inequality can more effectively be addressed together.

Latinx: Used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina to describe a person of Latin American origin or descent.

LGBTQ: An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

Microaggression: A comment or action that unconsciously or unintentionally expresses or reveals a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group, such as a racial minority. These small, common occurrences include insults, slights, stereotyping, undermining, devaluing, delegitimizing, overlooking or excluding someone. Over time, microaggressions can isolate and alienate those on the receiving end, and affect their health and wellbeing.

Microaffirmation: A microaffirmation is a small gesture of inclusion, caring or kindness. They include listening, providing comfort and support, being an ally and explicitly valuing the contributions and presence of all. It is particularly helpful for those with greater power or seniority to “model” affirming behavior.

Neurodiversity: When neurological differences are recognized and respected as are any other kind of human differences or variations. These differences can include Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, and Tourette Syndrome.

Privilege: An unearned, sustained advantage that comes from race, gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, age, and other differences. For example, readers are invited to “unpack” white and male privilege in [these papers](#) by Wellesley College's Peggy McIntosh.

Pronouns: Words to refer to a person after initially using their name. Gendered pronouns include she and he, her and him, hers and his, and herself and himself. "Preferred gender pronouns" (or PGPs) are the pronouns that people ask others to use in reference to themselves. They may be plural gender-neutral pronouns such as they, them, their(s). Or, they may be ze (rather than she or he) or hir (rather

than her(s) and him/his). Some people state their pronoun preferences as a form of allyship.

Queer: An umbrella term used by people who wish to describe themselves as neither heterosexual nor cisgender.

Racism: A belief that racial differences produce or are associated with inherent superiority or inferiority. Racially-based prejudice, discrimination, hostility or hatred. *Institutionalized racism*, also known as systemic racism, refers to forms of racism that are engrained in society or organizations. It is when entire racial groups are discriminated against, or consistently disadvantaged, by larger social systems, practices, choices or policies.

Transgender: An umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity is something other than their Sex Assigned at Birth (SAAB). The SAAB is a person's first association with gender, typically based on physical sex characteristics.

URM: An abbreviation for Under-Represented Minorities. Some institutions have defined sub-groups within larger racial/ethnic minority groups that are particularly under-represented relative to their size. For example, in a given field, Mexican-Americans may be an under-represented minority, even if Hispanic people are otherwise proportionately represented.

White Fragility: Coined by Robin D'Angelo in this [article](#), it is used to describe the privilege that accrues to white people living in a society that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. D'Angelo argues that this builds an expectation of always feeling comfortable and safe, which in turn lowers the ability to tolerate racial stress and triggers a range of defensive reactions.