DEI Glossary

Note: Definitions of identity are complex and constantly evolving. It is impossible to have a singular definition of any one identity because what feels true and authentic to one person may feel inauthentic or damaging to another person. Rather than defining each specific identity group in this glossary, we define the larger social identity groups discussed throughout this course. We include some examples of how people might identify in these groups; however, these examples represent only a fraction of the ways in which people might identify.

We encourage you to continue exploring your identities and how they might align or not align with the defined identity categories in this glossary.

If you are curious about some of the many ways in which identity groups define themselves, you can check out resources such as:

- Diversity Style Guide
- GLAAD Media Reference Guide
- Racial Equity Tools Glossary
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Glossary of Terms
- BC campus’s Indigenization Foundation Glossary of Terms
- University of Washington’s Glossary of Disability-Related Terms

15% solution

A technique used to create a large impact by shifting only a few actions, words, or behaviors in everyday life. When personal strengths and challenges are identified, the 15% solution is implemented as a commitment to change.

Ability

A person’s experience and connection to their physical, mental, and emotional capabilities. Someone’s ability can evolve over time as people age or have specific physical, mental, and emotional experiences that change the way they operate. Someone may identify as having a disability if they have a physical, mental, or emotional condition, illness, or capability that is considered to be “different” from the societal norm and therefore is not accounted for in the way people and systems operate. It can involve mistreatment by others and a lack of resources or access points.

Some broad examples of this identity category include: able, able-bodied, and disabled.

Acknowledgement

Recognition of the existence of something, such as another person’s point of view or opinion.

Acknowledging something is not the same as agreeing with it.
Active listening
A technique requiring the listener to fully concentrate on and understand the content of what the speaker is saying, then remember what the speaker has said.

Advocacy
Any action that aims to support or influence a cause, particularly on behalf of the most vulnerable in our society.

Allyship
An active and consistent practice of unlearning and reevaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group.

Antiracism
Any idea that suggests that racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences - that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group. (Adapted from Ibram X. Kendi.)

Antiracist
One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea. (Adapted from Ibram X. Kendi.)

Belief
The feeling of being certain that something exists or is true.

Belonging
The feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group. It is when an individual can bring their authentic self to work.

Bias
An opinion, feeling, or influence that strongly favors one side in an argument or one item in a group or series. A preconceived negative opinion or attitude about a group of people who possess common physical characteristics or cultural experiences.

Bias incident
A bias incident is action taken that one could reasonably and prudently conclude is motivated, in whole or in part, by the
alleged offender’s bias against an actual or perceived aspect of diversity, including, but not limited to, age, ancestry or ethnicity, color, creed, disability, gender, gender identity or expression, height, immigration or citizenship status, marital status, national origin, race, religion, religious practice, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or weight.

**Binary**

Composed of or involving only two things that are often considered opposites, such as electric power being either on or off.

**BIPOC**

“Black, Indigenous, [and] People of Color.” This term is used to center the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and communities of color.

**Bystander effect**

A social psychology theory that states the greater the number of people present; the less likely people are to intervene and help another in distress.

**Calling in**

A communication method used when an individual wants to speak with another person, publicly or privately, about their behavior in a compassionate and patient way.

**Calling out**

A communication method generally focused on pointing out a mistake or disagreement instead of rectifying the damage caused.

**Coalescing**

To grow together; to unite for a common end.

**Core Values**

In 2019, Cornell University adopted a set of values that serves as the foundation for a more equitable and inclusive atmosphere on all Cornell campuses.

**Culture**

A system of shared beliefs and values established within an organization or a group of people.
**Cycle of liberation**

A cyclical process that leads to some degree of liberation from oppression for those involved, regardless of their individual roles.

**Cycle of socialization**

A cyclical process that helps us understand the way in which we are socialized to play certain roles, how we are affected by issues of oppression, and how we help maintain an oppressive system based on power.

**Debate**

A conversation on a particular topic in which two differing opinions or arguments are brought forward with the objective to defeat the other’s position.

**Dehumanization**

The process of depriving a person or group of positive human qualities, personality, or dignity.

**Dialogue**

Conversation among two or more with the common goal of a better understanding of each other.

**Discrimination**

The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of marginalized identities. Unfair treatment or consideration of a person based on their group, class, or identity rather than on individual merit.

**Discussion**

Talking about something with the goal of exchanging information; often to persuade a listener of your opinion while avoiding any conflict.

**Diversity**

The age, socioeconomic background, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity differences in the workforce. At Cornell, we express this as "Open Doors, Open Hearts, and Open Minds."

**Emotional labor**

Originally defined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild as the unpaid and personally draining work of regulating or managing emotional expressions as an expected part of one’s professional work role (such as a server having to smile and be
courteous to a customer who is rude to them). The definition has since been broadened to apply to many kinds of expected and unpaid emotionally taxing work, such as soothing, comforting, and easing the way for others in the workplace at the expense of one’s own emotions.

Empathy

The ability to imagine what something might feel like for someone who experiences the world in a different way than you do. It involves showing sensitivity and responding to another’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences as though you were experiencing them yourself.

Ethnicity

A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

Examples of different ethnic groups are: Cape Verdean, Haitian, African American (Black); Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese (Asian); Cherokee, Mohawk, Navajo (Native American); Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican (Latinx); Polish, Irish, and Swedish (White). (Adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook, Maurianne Adams, Lee AnneBell, and Pat Griffin, editors. Routledge, 1997.)

Equity

When everyone has access to the same opportunities.

Feedback

Information provided about a comment, action, or behavior that can be used as a basis for improvement.

Free and open inquiry of expression

The principle of freedom with responsibility is central to Cornell University. Freedoms to teach and to learn, to express oneself and to be heard, and to assemble and to protest peacefully and lawfully are essential to academic freedom and the continuing function of the University as an educational institution. Responsible enjoyment and exercise of these rights mean respect for the rights of all. Infringement upon the rights of others or interference with the peaceful and lawful use and enjoyment of university premises, facilities, and programs violates this principle.

Gender identity

A person’s internal understanding and perception of their gender. This understanding can be aligned with the social conditioning around their assigned sex at birth — what’s known as being cisgender — or it can be different from the social conditioning around their assigned sex at birth, which can encompass identities that are considered nonbinary, transgender, trans, gender nonconforming, or others. (Adapted from the GLAAD Media Reference Guide.)

Growth mindset
As summarized by psychologist Carol Dweck who coined the term, “Individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others) have a growth mindset. They tend to achieve more than those with a more fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts). This is because they worry less about looking smart and they put more energy into learning. When entire companies embrace a growth mindset, their employees report feeling far more empowered and committed; they also receive far greater organizational support for collaboration and innovation.”

**Hook**

A stimulus, such as a person, place, or thing, that elicits an unwanted emotional or behavioral response.

**Impact**

The effect that words, actions, or circumstances have on someone. This may or may not match the way the words or actions were intended by the person who performed them.

**Implicit bias**

A prejudice or an assumption that we unconsciously make about another person based on common cultural stereotypes, rather than on a thoughtful judgment.

**Inclusion**

The invitation for someone to actively engage as their authentic self in their environment.

**Inclusive**

To include or encompass all topics, services, or items expected to be covered. To not exclude any of the parties or groups involved.

**Indigenous**

People who share ancestral relationships and ties to the physical land and resources they currently occupy or from which they have been displaced due to historic colonization and conflict.

**Individual racism**

Occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, and hateful words or actions. (Adapted from the National Museum of African American History & Culture’s “Talking About Race.”)

**Inflection**

A change in the way a word is spoken, typically by adjusting the pitch or volume. Changing inflection can modify the
emphasis or mood that the word conveys.

Institution

An established organization or corporation (such as a bank or university), especially of a public character.

Institutionalized racism

Occurs in an organization. This includes discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for whites over people of color and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies typically do not mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages. An example is a school system where students of color are more frequently distributed into the most crowded classrooms or underfunded schools and out of the schools with greater resources. (Adapted from the National Museum of African American History & Culture’s “Talking about Race.”)

Integrity

Living according to your deepest values, abiding by codes of honesty and fairness, and letting strong morals direct your activities and decisions.

Intent

The original purpose behind someone’s words or actions. The words or actions may not be received in this way by the recipient; in these cases, it is said that the intent did not match the impact.

Intersection of identities

The complex, cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect; the crucial ways in which identities (race, gender, sexuality) exist together.

Judgment

The process of forming an opinion and/or making a decision based on comparing information.

LARA method

A method developed by Bonnie Tinker for discussions around LGBTQIA+ rights, now adapted as a tool for managing communication around many social issues. This method helps us to engage in empathetic discussions which invite unique perspectives and create shared meaning. The four steps of LARA are Listen, Acknowledge (or Affirm), Respond, and Add information.

Latinx

Relating to people of Latin American origin or descent.
Leadership

The process of social influence that maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal.

Leadership Skills for Success

The foundation of what is expected of every leader working at Cornell. These skills have been identified so we know what is expected of us and so we can be successful both individually and as an organization.

Liberation

Used to refer to activities connected with removing the disadvantages experienced by particular groups within society.

Listening loop

The process that occurs in the first two steps of the LARA method (Listen and Acknowledge), where the focus is on the speaker. The listener may need to cycle for some time among listening, acknowledging, and new replies from the speaker in order to clarify their understanding of what lies beneath the speaker’s words.

Macroaggressions

Large scale and extreme forms of aggressions towards those of a certain race, gender, culture, etc.

Marginalized

When a person or group is oppressed, and they are treated as insignificant and without power.

Marginalized identities

Members of social identity groups who are discriminated against, treated as insignificant, excluded, oppressed, classified in defined roles, or exploited by an oppressor and the oppressor’s system of institutions without identity apart from the target group.

Micro-affirmations

Small actions that can clear the way for opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening. Mary Rowe, who coined the term micro-affirmations, defined them as small acts that foster inclusion, listening, comfort, and support for people who may feel isolated or invisible in an environment.

Microaggressions
Brief interactions, either conscious or unconscious, that demean and/or discriminate against members of marginalized groups. This could be inappropriate jokes, rolling eyes, blatant disregard of someone while they're speaking, or other, more subtle behaviors.

Dr. Derald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as "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. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment."

**Mindfulness**

A state of being fully focused on the present moment.

**Negate**

To deny evidence or truth of a topic, event, or someone's lived experience, making it seem inaccurate or as though it did not occur.

**Networks**

A group or system of people with similar interests.

**Neurodiversity**

The awareness that every person’s brain operates differently. Neurodiversity encourages people to recognize that everyone may have different methods of learning or remembering information, as well as different ways of processing information and socially interacting with others.

Examples of neurodiverse identities include, but are not limited to, people who identify as experiencing autism, ADHD, ADD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, sensory-processing sensitivity, and Tourette’s Syndrome.

**Nonverbal cues**

All types of communication that do not have a direct verbal translation, including body language, position, and movements; facial expressions; and movement of objects.

**Norms**

A standard or pattern, especially of social behavior, that is typical or expected of a group.

**One Cornell**

The Ithaca campus collaborates with Weill Cornell Medicine and Cornell Tech as One Cornell.
Oppression
To govern harshly; to treat with continual cruelty or injustice.

Oppressor
A person or group that treats people in a cruel or unjust manner.

Orientation
The relative position or direction of someone or something, such as a new environment or purpose.

Paraphrase
To rephrase or restate what someone said using other words, often to confirm or clarify your understanding.

Person/People of Color
The term “person of color” (plural: people of color, persons of color; sometimes abbreviated POC) is primarily used to describe people who do not racially identify as white. Persons of color include, but are not limited to: African/African Americans, Latinx/Latinx Americans, Asian/Asian Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islander Americans, Middle Eastern/Middle Eastern Americans, and multiracial Americans.

Power
The ability to control or influence others to believe, to behave, or to value as those in power desire them to.

Power dynamics
Refers to how power can affect a relationship between two or more people, usually when one side may be exerting more power than the other.

Prejudice
An unreasonable opinion, like, or dislike of something or someone.

Privileged identities
Groups that hold certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups. Within American and other Western societies, those with privileged social identities have historically occupied positions of dominance over others.
Psychological safety

Creating and allowing for a space where team members feel comfortable showing ones full, authentic self, and surface problematic behaviors, without fear of negative consequences from employers or coworkers.

Race

For many people, it comes as a surprise that racial categorization schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that considered some groups of people as superior and some as inferior. There are three important concepts linked to this fact:

1. Race is a made-up social construct, not an actual biological fact.
2. Race designations have changed over time. Some groups that are considered “white” in the United States today were considered “nonwhite” in previous eras. This type of intentional racialization was connected to acts of genocide and discrimination.
3. The way in which racial categorizations are enforced (the shape of racism) has also changed overtime. For example, the racial designation of Asian American and Pacific Islander changed four times in the 19th century. In other words, they were defined at times as white and at other times as not white. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, as designated groups, have been used by whites at different times in history to compete with African American labor.


Racial and ethnic identity

An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and/or ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe themself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience. (Adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook. Maurianne Adams, Lee AnneBell, and Pat Griffin, editors. Routledge, 1997.)

Racism

An umbrella term for individual, institutional, and systemic forms of racial prejudice. Any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way. (Adapted from Ibram X. Kendi.) Other definitions include the idea that racism is the result of racial prejudice plus institutional power (Patricia Bidol, 1970). (See also: Individual Racism, Institutional Racism, Systemic Racism).

Racist

One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea. (Adapted from Ibram X. Kendi.)

Religious identity

A person’s experience and connection to being a member of or affiliated with a religious group. This identity can evolve and change over time. Someone’s religious identity can be based on their experiences being socialized in a specific religious context, their current or past religious practices and/or beliefs, their cultural connection to a specific religion, or their family history with religious beliefs and practices. Someone can have a religious identity without being a believer or practitioner of
that religion.

Some examples of religious identities include, but are not limited to: Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Taoist, Pagan, Wiccan, African traditional and diasporic, Secular Humanist, and Voudon.

**Resilience**

The ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

**Respect**

The unbiased consideration for the rights, values, beliefs, and property of other people.

**Romantic orientation**

A person’s preference in romantic partners. Romantic orientation can evolve over time as someone has more romantic experiences or discovers romantic attractions to different sorts of people. It also includes a spectrum of aromanticism, where some people may find that they prefer not to engage in romantic acts or attractions, or that they prefer their engagement to exist in a specific personal context. Romantic orientation is often confused with sexual orientation, but they are actually separate ideas.

Some examples include, but are not limited to: aromantic, homoromantic, biromantic, panromantic, heteroromantic, demiromantic, and grayromantic.

**Salient**

Most notable or important.

**Screen reader**

An assistive technology, primarily used by people with vision impairments, that converts text, buttons, images, and other screen elements into speech or braille.

**Sex**

An identity category typically assigned to someone at birth based upon their genitalia. This includes a broad category known as intersex, which refers to when someone’s genitalia does not neatly fit into the binary male and female categories people are typically aware of.

**Sexual orientation**

A person’s preference in sexual partners. Sexual orientation identities can evolve over time as someone has more sexual experiences or discovers attractions to different sorts of people. Sexual orientation also includes a spectrum of asexuality, where some people may find that they prefer not to engage in sexual acts or prefer their engagement to exist in a specific personal context.
Some examples include, but are not limited to: heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, homosexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, demisexual, and graysexual.

Skills for Success

The foundation of what is expected of every employee and leader working at Cornell. These skills have been identified so we know what is expected of us and so we can be successful both individually and as an organization.

Social class

A person’s experience and/or connection to a socioeconomic identity. This can also be referred to as socioeconomic status or financial class. This identity can shift and change depending on someone’s life experiences and perceptions. This identity is based on someone’s lived experiences with economic and social systems, their socialization within those systems, the way others perceive them, and their cultural connections to those systems.

Social class and experience take into account both immediate wealth (what someone and their immediate family earns economically and has in capital) and generational wealth (the economic opportunities and capital their family has experienced over generations). Examples of social class include, but are not limited to: poor, lower class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class, and more.

Social identities

How we identify ourselves in relation to others based on what we have in common. These memberships either give us power and privilege in society or prevent power and privilege in society. Social identities on an institutional level will often impact someone’s access.

Socialization

The process of learning to behave in a way that is acceptable to society.

Solidarity

Unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on a community of interests, objectives, and standards.

Spheres of influence

An area or network in which the power, influence, or interests of a person or organization are of greatest importance.

Status Quo

A Latin word that means "existing state" or the current state of things, situations, or conditions.
Merriam-Webster defines this as a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment.

**Stimulus**

A thing, event, or detectable change that causes an emotional response or reaction; a thing that incites activity or energy.

**STOP**

An exercise developed that allows us to press the “pause” button. The letter “S” stands for stop and pause for a moment; “T” stands for take a breath and use your breath to focus in; “O” stands for observe and release that breath while being aware of your entire body; and “P” stands for proceed, asking yourself what feels like a wise next step.

**Structural inequality**

The overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society that sustains inequality.

**Systemic racism**

The overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society that sustains racism.

**Targeted/marginalized identities**

Social identities who, for whatever reason, are denied involvement in mainstream economic, political, cultural, and social activities.

**Transparency**

The act of informing others about what is occurring within a relationship or organizational structure.

**Whiteness**

Whiteness, as a concept, refers to the way in which white racial identity is normalized and considered the default in American society. Examples of this concept might include the color “nude” and what this has historically looked like in the clothing industry, a photographer’s failure to provide proper lighting when photographing people with darker complexions, a lack of hair products for individuals with textured hair, and greetings cards with mostly white-appearing illustrations.

**Zero-sum game**

A situation in which one person or group can win something only by causing another person or group to lose it.