

Definitions

Note: These concepts are very complex. There is disagreement amongst scholars about the meanings of these terms, especially the finer points or things that vary with different contexts. The definitions offered here are very basic. Our purpose is to have a shared understanding as a foundation, not to fully explore the concepts or suggest that these definitions fully capture the complexity of the concepts.

Culture – is a learned and variable (changing) system of meanings that are shared and transmitted by an identifiable group of people and represent a way of living.

It is fluid and dynamic. Systems of meanings encompass include social norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as more concrete things like food, art, architecture/buildings, music, etc. Culture has modal practices (what “most” people do within a culture that characterizes that culture) as well as individual manifestation (how a particular individual engages with or reflects a culture).

Ethnicity or ethnocultural experience – the distinctive cultural patterns shared by a group of people *that are often unified by a common geographic origin and common history.*

Race – a social category to which individuals are assigned by themselves and others, usually on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color. Although related to physical characteristics such as skin color, racial categories and their distinctions are not biological, genetic, or inherent. Historically, racial categories were created and are maintained to differentiate those who are “entitled” to power and resources and those who are not. See [American Anthropological Association statement on race](#).

Sex – is a socially constructed categorization, conceptualized as distinctions related to biological differences in chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organ,s and secondary sexual characteristics. The expectation is that these will all be congruent with either a male or female binary category, but this is not always the case.

Gender –is a socially constructed, often categorical distinction, related to how different groups of people are expected to act and the characteristic they are expected to have, based in socially created ideas about the meaning of sex. The dominant imposed view of binary gender (man and woman) is increasingly being challenged

Sexual Orientation – the sex or gender one chooses in romantic, sexual, or affectional relationships. Includes aspects of identity, behavior, emotional attraction, sexual attraction.

Class – a status related to different kinds of resources, access, or capital, including financial capital (money), educational capital, social capital (relationship), and social status (determined by cultural hierarchies)

Minority – any group of people having less power and privilege in society.

Bias – the tendency to think, feel or behave in a certain way, which arises alongside the natural processes of generalization and categorization influenced by social categories and distinctions related to power.

Stereotype – an overgeneralization about a group of people. Stereotypes tend to arise from assumptions based on biases that become rigid and then spread more widely amongst a culture or group.

Power – the ability to exert influence over an outcome, or a person's actions, feelings or thoughts.

Privilege – the power and advantages one holds as a result of belonging to a dominant group or a group that is of higher social status. It is a social phenomenon and not a property of individuals. Here, we are referencing unearned privilege, rather than merit (power earned through effort).

Racism – A system of judgments, beliefs, actions, norms, and social/institutional practices based on race that protect privilege. Racism can be interpersonal, cultural, institutional, or internalized. Racism can be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional. The system of racism is most harmful to those who are in the minority (lacking the privilege and power) but is also damaging to the dominant group. This definition can be generalized to all of the "isms", such as sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, etc. All of the isms are systems of privilege that are formed from the interaction of power with stereotypes, prejudice, and bias.