Social Justice Definitions

Antisemitism/ Anti-Jewish Oppression: Antisemitism is the specific form of race-based oppression directed against Jewish people and the descendants of Jewish people. Anti-Jewish oppression is the early and preracialized roots of religion-based oppression. (Adams & D'Errico, 2007)

Cultural Competence: The capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities one serves. (Cross)

Diversity: Having a variety of social identities (sex, race, gender, class, religion, ability, health, ethnicity, migration history and many others) that spend time in shared spaces, communities, institutions or society. (Adams 2013)

Domination: The ability of a particular social identity group to marshal social resources toward one’s own group and away from others. This process can often be rendered invisible and seen as a “natural order.”

Equity: The notion of being fair and impartial as an individual engages with an organization or system, particularly systems of grievance. It reflects processes and practices that both acknowledge that we live in a world where everyone has not been afforded the same resources and treatment while also working to remedy this fact. “Equity” is often conflated with the term “Equality” which means sameness and assumes, incorrectly, that we all have had equal access, treatment, and outcomes. In fact, true equity implies that an individual may need to experience or receive something different (not equal) in order to maintain fairness and access. For example, a person with a wheelchair may need differential access to an elevator relative to someone else.

Hegemony: The ability of a dominant or ruling group to impose its own values and ideas about what is natural or normal on a subordinated group, often defining the parameters of what is even considered an acceptable topic within the dominant discourse (also referred to as the Master Narrative). (Gramsci)

Inclusion: The notion that an organization or system is welcoming to new populations and/or identities. This new presence is not merely tolerated but expected to contribute meaningfully into the system in a positive, mutually beneficial way. Inclusive processes and practices are ones that strive to bring groups together to make decisions in collaborative, mutual, equitable ways.

Intersectionality: The theory—conceptualized in the 1980s by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw—that markers of identity do not act independently of one another, but exist simultaneously, creating a complex web of privilege and oppression and “negating the possibility of a unitary or universal experience of any one manifestation of oppression” (i.e. a gay Latino man experiences male privilege differently than a gay white man AND homophobia differently than a gay white man). Examining the experiences of people who
live at the intersections of two (or more) subordinated identities becomes a useful way to diagnose oppression within a system. (Adams) (Crenshaw) It reflects the ways that our socially constructed identities come together in one body, and concerns the interrelatedness of our social identities, both privileged and oppressed, and how this mixture impacts both our self-perception and how we are viewed and treated by other individuals, groups, institutions, and by society. (Collins & Bilge 2016) (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 2013)

Master Narrative: A term brought into prominence by Jean-François Lyotard implying a “narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience, or knowledge, which offers a society legitimation through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealized) idea.” (Childers and Hentzi) It is the “story that produces all other stories; or, to put it another way, the Big Story that lends coherence and shape to all the little stories... A master narrative is not a particular story; it is the story [we] are always writing when [we] tell the stories [we] typically tell.” (Rosen)

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” (Wing). For example, “One must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism.” (Pierce)

Multisystemic Privilege and Oppression (Lawrence and Keleher)

Privilege: A system of advantage based on social identity (Wellman). It is the unearned social, financial, cultural, and psychological advantages that individuals receive based solely on their membership in a dominant identity group. These advantages confer social advantage over non-dominant groups, but about which its members are “meant” to remain oblivious. Akin to an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions readily available to dominant group members. (Not the same as “luck” because these advantages are not assigned by chance, but by identity). (McIntosh)

Oppression: A system of disadvantage based on social identity (Wellman). Oppression maintains advantages and disadvantages based on social group memberships and operates intentionally and unintentionally, on individual, institutional and cultural levels. (Goodman)

Privilege and oppression exist when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do.

Internalized: Lies within individuals

Interpersonal: Occurs between individuals. Biases that occur when individuals interact with others and their internalized beliefs affect their public interactions

Institutional: Involves institutions and systems of power. unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that
routinely produce inequitable outcomes for marginalized people and advantages for privileged people. The institutional policy may never mention any social identity group, but their effect is to create advantages for some social identity groups and disadvantages for other social identity groups.

**Structural:** An array of normalized dynamics – historical, cultural, internalized, interpersonal, institutional – that produce inequitable outcomes over and over again. Most profound, pervasive, and challenging to name because it involves the effects of multiple institutions, norms, past and present.

**Race:** A misleading and deceptively appealing classification of human beings created by White people originally from Europe which assigns human worth and social status using the White racial identity as the archetype of humanity for the purpose of creating and maintaining privilege, power, and systems of oppression. (Lawrence and Keleher)

**Racism:** The combination of individual prejudice and individual discrimination, on one hand, and institutional policies and practices, on the other, that result in the unjustified negative treatment and subordination of members of racial or ethnic groups that have experienced a history of discrimination. Prejudice, discrimination, and racism do not require intention. (Pine and Hilliard)

**Social Construction:** The notion that patterns of human interaction (often deemed to be normal, natural or universal) are, in fact, humanly produced and constructed by social expectation and coercion but is presented as “objective.” For example, the erroneous assumption of women being better at housework is not at all connected to their female anatomy, but to social expectations and pressures imposed on women. (Berger and Luckman)

**Social justice:** An analysis of how power, privilege, and oppression impact our experience of our social identities. “Full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable” and all members of a space, community, or institution, or society are “physically and psychologically safe and secure.” (Adams et al. 2016)

“...social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are psychologically and physically safe and secure” (Bell, 2013, p. 21).

**Socialization:** The process through which we become accustomed to societal norms, i.e. rules about appropriate or acceptable social identities, beliefs and behaviors. We are bombarded by these messages even before we are born. These messages are offered by a widening social network (interpersonal, institutional, structural). Through socialization, we learn about social identity categories, such as socioeconomic status, race, assigned sex, gender, religion, health status, sexual orientation, and many other social identity categories, as well as the boundaries of human worth and value. It is training/education like any other.
We are great students! We then use this framework to guide our behaviors, beliefs, and professional practices. (Harro) (Sensoy & DiAngelo)

**Subordination**: The experience of social dispossession, dislocation, and disempowerment relative to a dominant social group. This experience of being seen as “less than” or “minoritized” can often be rendered invisible and seen as a “natural order.”

**White Fragility**: The state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves [in white people]. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. (DiAngelo)

**Whiteness**: “A location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.” (Frankenberg)

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**Bibliography**


