

An anti-racist's dictionary: 16 words on race, gender, and diversity you should know

[Marquerite Ward](#) Jul 12, 2020, 8:00 AM

- Conversations on race, power, and privilege are happening in homes and offices around the country.
 - As a reporter who covers diversity and inclusion, I thought it would be helpful to compile and define some of the most common words and phrases I hear when speaking with my sources.
 - Here are 16 terms you should know, from "allyship" to "intersectionality" to "white fragility."
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America, it seems, is undergoing a transformation.

Calls for racial equity, diversity, and inclusion can be heard from protesters and [corporate executives alike](#). People who were once silent on issues of racial justice and inequality are speaking up — in the office, at home, and online.

As a reporter who focuses on diversity and inclusion, I have a lot of conversations about topics of race and identity. I've covered [why corporate leaders](#) seem to finally be listening to calls for racial justice, [what company executives](#) need to do differently when it comes to diversity and inclusion, [which companies](#) are taking the right steps toward equality, and much more.

This doesn't make me an expert, but it does mean I learn from my sources every day. They've taught me how language can be used to exclude and, conversely, to elevate and empower.

I thought it would be helpful to include a list of some words you're likely hearing more of given the nationwide protests in the wake of George Floyd's killing. This list is by no means exhaustive or comprehensive, but it's a starting point for someone seeking to educate themselves on important words related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Here are 16 words to know.

Allyship

[Merriam-Webster](#) defines "allyship" as "the state or condition of being an ally: supportive association with another person or group." But allyship goes beyond that.

The [Rochester Racial Justice Toolkit](#) offers a more in-depth explanation, describing allyship as "a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people."

Being an ally means learning from and listening to marginalized groups, empowering them, advocating for them, and looking inward to recognize your own bias and privilege.

Anti-racist

[Activists](#) and [leading scholars](#) have argued that it's not enough for allies to say they're "not racist." Instead, they have to actively adopt anti-racism, a set of beliefs and actions that oppose racism and promote the inclusion and equality of Black and brown people in society.

Ibram X. Kendi, a scholar and the author of "[How to Be an Antiracist](#)," has helped popularize the term.

BIPOC

This acronym, which stands for "Black, Indigenous, and people of color," has gained popularity as a more inclusive term than "people of color" when talking about marginalized groups affected by racism.

Cisgender

It's important to know that one's sex and one's gender are two different things. "Cisgender" is a term for people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

Sarah McBride, the national press secretary for the Human Rights Campaign and author of "[Tomorrow Will Be Different: Love, Loss, and the Fight for Trans Equality](#)," explained more in [Women's Health](#).

"It's a term used to ensure that when we're talking about people who are trans, we don't use a problematic term like 'normal' to describe those who are cisgender," she said.

Cisgender people experience privilege in many aspects of life, from being able to easily find a restroom that matches their gender expression to having their sex listed on their driver's license match their gender.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

"Diversity, equity, and inclusion" is used in corporate spaces to encompass efforts by business leaders to make their spaces more diverse, fair, and inclusive. But what does that mean?

Diversity initiatives aim to increase the number of people from marginalized backgrounds in places where they are underrepresented — for example, on a company's board.

Equity efforts are those that seek to "to promote justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems," [according to D5](#), which [described](#) itself as "a five-year coalition to advance philanthropy's diversity, equity, and inclusion."

Inclusion is an organizational effort "in which different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed, and equally treated," the leaders of the consulting firm [Global Diversity Practice](#) [wrote in a blog post](#).

They added: "Inclusion is a sense of belonging. Inclusive cultures make people feel respected and valued for who they are as an individual or group."

Emotional tax

"Emotional tax" refers to the unseen mental work that people from marginalized backgrounds have to do every day to feel included, respected, and safe.

The research firm [Catalyst](#) [defines it as](#) "the combination of being on guard to protect against bias, feeling different at work because of gender, race, and/or ethnicity, and the associated effects on health, well-being, and ability to thrive at work."

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is the belief or assumption that all people are heterosexual, or that heterosexuality is the "normal" state of being.

"A heteronormative society operates on the assumption that heterosexuality and specific gender features are the human 'default,'" [according to The Queer Dictionary](#). "These assumptions can be hurtful because they are stigmatizing and marginalizing, making people who are LGBT+ feel like they are perceived as deviant or unnatural."

Intersectionality

[Catalyst](#) [defines "intersectionality"](#) as "the intertwining of social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, which can result in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers."

Microaggression

Microaggressions are indirect expressions of racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, or another form of prejudice. They can be in seemingly innocuous comments from people who might be well-intentioned. However, they make another person feel different, violated, or unsafe.

Here are some [examples of microaggressions](#).

Misgendering

Misgendering, [per Merriam-Webster](#), is when someone incorrectly identifies a person, such as a transgender person, by using the wrong label (such as Mr. or Ms.) or pronoun (such as she, he, or they). It often makes a person feel invalidated as a human being.

In a [2018 article for The Aragon Outlook](#), the student newspaper of Aragon High School in San Mateo, California, one student explained the personal impact of being misgendered.

"I don't know exactly how to describe it, but it's just a deep pain [to be misgendered]," the student told the newspaper. "It sort of destroys my faith in humanity to a certain point and makes me just a little more afraid of leaving the house the next day."

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity, [as explained by the UK nonprofit Autism Awareness Centre](#), is "the concept that humans don't come in a one-size-fits-all neurologically 'normal' package."

It "recognizes that all variations of human neurological function need to be respected as just another way of being, and that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal/natural variations in the human genome."

Nonbinary

[The Human Rights Campaign](#) defines "nonbinary" as "an adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman."

"Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories," the definition says. "While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do."

Phobic (e.g., transphobic, homophobic)

To be transphobic is to have a "fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people," [according to the Human Rights Campaign](#).

Similarly, to be homophobic is to have a fear of, hatred of, or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Unconscious bias

There's explicit bias, or bias we're aware of, and then there's implicit bias, or prejudicial beliefs we don't even know we have.

The University of California San Francisco's Office of Diversity and Outreach offers a comprehensive explanation [on its website](#): "Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness ... Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values."

White fragility

Robin DiAngelo, a researcher and author of the bestselling book "[White Fragility](#)," [explains the phenomenon](#) as "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves," including "the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation."

An example of this could be a Black person pointing out a white person's problematic or racist behavior and the white person immediately jumping to defend themselves, making excuses and crying instead of listening and accepting what the other person is saying.

White privilege

White privilege is the vast set of advantages and benefits that people have solely because they are white or pass as white.

"Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it," [the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's blog](#) says.

Examples include being able to walk around in a department store without being followed by a store clerk who suspects you of shoplifting, or being able to drive around a neighborhood without fearing that someone will call the police on you.