

Anti-Racism Glossary

Language is dynamic and constantly evolving; within the realm of race and anti-racism in particular there are no universally-accepted definitions. Sometimes this causes friction and stress as people can feel strongly about the use of one term over another. Making efforts to establish a shared understanding of the terms that are most appropriate to your context, however, can be a powerful community-building practice.

That said, here are some key terms and definitions to get you started:

Accountability: In the world of anti-racist practice, accountability is not punishment; it means “taking responsibility for harm, making things right, being willing to understand, change, and transform the harmful behavior and its underlying motivations.”¹ Accountability is meant to attend to both repair and relationships.²

Allyship: “an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group.”³

Anti-racism: “Anti-racism is the active, ongoing process of dismantling systems of racial inequity and creating new systems of racial equity. Anti-racism demands that this work be done at the individual, organizational/ institutional, and cultural levels in order to effectively address systemic racism. Anti-racism is an approach, not an end-point, and thus provides a useful frame for an organizational change process.”⁴ Said differently, racism is the problem and anti-racism is a way to find solutions to that problem.⁵

BIPOC: “An acronym that stands for ‘Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour...’ The term can be used generally to represent the non-white experience, however, many ‘BIPOC’ individuals agree that using specific language when referring to racialized groups or experiences is ideal.” Some people feel the term BIPOC collapses unique and sometimes very diverse experiences and histories.⁶

¹ Russo, A. (2012, September 9). *10 Strategies for Cultivating Community Accountability*.

https://transformharm.org/ca_resource/10-strategies-for-cultivating-community-accountability/

² Anderson, P. (2021, June 28). *Building a culture of accountability: Advancing racial equity within your organization requires making accountability a cultural norm*. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_a_culture_of_accountability#

³ Anti-Oppression Network. (n.d.). *Allyship*. <https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship/>

⁴ CommunityWise Resource Centre. (2017). *Anti-racist organizational change: Resources & tools for nonprofits*.

https://communitywise.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AROC-Resources-and-Tools_web.pdf

⁵ University of Alberta (n.d.). *Building an anti-racist way of being*. Black Canadians: History, Presence, and Anti-Racist Futures. <https://www.coursera.org/learn/black-canadians>

⁶ Our CARED Collective (2017). *Our glossary*. CARED Glossary. <https://aclrc.squarespace.com/glossary>

Ethnicity: “Ethnicity is most commonly used as a social–political construct and includes shared origin, shared language, and shared cultural traditions.”⁷ Ethnicity is distinct from ideas of race. For example, a whole office staff could self-identify as a Prince Edward Islanders, but their racial identities might be distinct from each other (some may identify as Black, others Indigenous, others white).

Harm: Within racial equity circles “harm” is a term that refers to general wrongdoing that has hurt someone psychologically, emotionally, and/or socially. Examples of harm can include microaggressions, misgendering, perpetuating biases, dismissing someone’s abilities, etc.

Intersectionality. “The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise.”⁸ This term was coined by African American Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in a journal article in 1989;⁹ she has gone on to explain that intersectionality is a “lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.”¹⁰

Microaggression: “Brief and common verbal, behavioural or institutional actions that play into stereotypes or discrimination against a group of people, often from underrepresented groups... Taken in isolation, one instance of microaggression can seem like a minor event; however, members of underrepresented groups often experience the same microaggression repeatedly over time, producing adverse emotional, social, psychological and health impacts... Examples of microaggressions include implying a member of an underrepresented group is an ‘equity hire’; asking where someone is ‘really from’...”¹¹ (this term was first coined by Chester M. Pierce)

Race: “Modern scholarship views racial categories as socially constructed, that is, race is not intrinsic to human beings but rather an identity created, often by socially dominant groups, to establish meaning in a social context.”¹² That is, the concept of “race” (the existence of biologically distinct groups) is false; the effects of racism, however, are very real.

⁷ Ford, M. E., & Kelly, P. A. (2005). Conceptualizing and categorizing race and ethnicity in health services research. *Health services research, 40*(5 Pt 2), 1658–1675. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6773.2005.00449.x>

⁸ Oxford English Dictionary. (2023). Intersectionality. In *Oxford English dictionary*.

https://www.oed.com/dictionary/intersectionality_n?tab=meaning_and_use#335059799

⁹ Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1), 139-167. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=uclf>

¹⁰ Columbia Law School. (2017, June 8). Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectionality, more than two decades later.

<https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>

¹¹ Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Anti-racism lexicon*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/systemic-racism-discrimination/anti-racism-toolkit/anti-racism-lexicon.html>

¹² Calgary Anti-Racism Education. (2021). *Racialization*. <http://www.aclrc.com/racialization>

Racialization: “The act of being “raced” or seen as someone belonging to a particular race... the very complex and contradictory process through which groups come to be designated as being part of a particular 'race' and on that basis subjected to differential and/or unequal treatment.”¹³

Racial profiling: “Any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection that relies on assumptions about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin rather than on reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or differential treatment.”¹⁴

Racism: “Racism is a belief that one group is superior to others - performed through any individual action, or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their colour or ethnicity.”¹⁵

Social location: “the social position an individual holds within their society and is based upon social characteristics deemed to be important by any given society. Some of the social characteristics deemed to be important by U.S. society include social class position, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion and so on.”¹⁶

¹³ Calgary Anti-Racism Education. (2021). *Racialization*. <http://www.aclrc.com/racialization>

¹⁴ Canadian Race Relations Foundation. (n.d.). *Glossary of terms*. <https://crrf-fcrr.ca/glossary-of-terms/>

¹⁵ Canadian Race Relations Foundation. (n.d.). *Glossary of terms*. <https://crrf-fcrr.ca/glossary-of-terms/>

¹⁶ Benness, B. (2017, October 12). *Social location: What people mean*. Medium. <https://medium.com/@bennessb/social-location-what-people-mean-27dd94c29dd5>