

# The Knapsack Institute

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## **Basic Working Definitions**

Encountering new language can be confusing; however, developing and redefining language is often essential to advancing theory and knowledge. The power inherent in the ability to name oneself and others is tremendous. For these reasons, we encourage you to consider the following definitions as a rough starting point. Many of these terms and definitions will and should change over time. We welcome readers to critically interrogate these terms and take part in the process of reconstructing language in the service of social justice.

**Diversity:** Reflects a wide representation of experiences of differences among groups of people and individuals based on social identities such as ability, ethnicity, geographical location, gender, language, race, religion, social economic status, sex, sexuality and so forth.

**Inclusiveness** indicates a commitment to create an environment that supports, represents and embraces members of diverse social groups and identities; cultivated through congruent individual and institutional behaviors, attitudes, practices, and policies, thus creating a culture where all members feel that they belong.

**Intersectionality:** an approach largely advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another. They interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive.

**Matrix of Domination:** This theory states that based on one's social location, a person can be oppressed in some ways and privileged in others. Different social locations interact with each other, that is, race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. work together to privilege or oppress, and to shape everyone's lives. Further, racism, sexism, heterosexisms, etc. are interacting systems. (Patricia Hill Collins, 1990).

**Microaggressions:** Subtle words, cues, and/or behaviors that insult, invalidate, or exclude traditionally marginalized group members. The long term effect of microaggressions can have a significant negative effect on one's health.

**Oppression:** Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; Oppression exists when some people are denied something of value, (such as access to resources, opportunities, and networks; legal protections and rights; notions of societal belonging and acceptance, etc.), based on their social group membership while other members of society have ready access; Oppression is based on social group membership, not individual experiences, thus it must be distinguished from discrimination that can be experienced by any individual regardless of their social group memberships.

**Privilege:** Systemic favoring, valuing, validating, and including of certain "normative" social identities over others. Individuals cannot "opt out" of systems of privilege; rather these systems are inherent to the society in which we live. Therefore, our choices are whether or not to acknowledge privilege as it operates in our lives and whether or not to use our privilege as a means of creating social change.

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**Social Identity:** Social identities or social locations can include those based on ethnicity, race, gender, age, class, sexual orientation, abilities, religious and spiritual values, political viewpoints, veteran status and gender identity and expression, among others. We all have multiple social identities which define who we are.

**Social Inequality:** When people have unequal access to valued resources, services, and positions in society. This is the result of placing evaluative meanings on differences.

**Social Justice:** Challenging the underlying systems that frame privilege and oppression in an effort to manifest an equitable and accessible society.

**Stereotype Threat:** a situational predicament in which individuals are at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their group. It is the resulting sense that one might be judged in terms of negative stereotypes about one's group instead of on personal merit.

**The above definitions have been taken or adapted from the following works:**

Ferber, Abby L. Kimberly Holcomb and Tre Wentling, *Sex, Gender and Sexuality: The New Basics*. Oxford University Press. 2008; Johnson, Allan. *Privilege, Power and Difference*. McGraw Hill, 2003; Lober & Moore's *Gendered Bodies: Feminist Perspectives*. Roxbury, 2006; Transsexual Road Map Glossary; Yoder, Janice D. *Women & Gender: Making a Difference* 3eds. Sloan Educational Publishing, 2006; *The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States*, 2nd edition, ed. By Joan Ferrante and Prince Brown Jr. Prentice Hall, 2001; *Privilege, Power and Difference*, 2nd edition, by Allan G. Johnson, Mayfield. 2006; and *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities and Future Reparations*, by Joe R. Feagin. NY: Routledge, 2000; *The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States*, 2nd edition, ed. By Joan Ferrante and Prince Brown Jr. Prentice Hall, 2001; *Privilege, Power and Difference*, 2nd edition, by Allan G. Johnson, Mayfield. 2006; and *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities and Future Reparations*, by Joe R. Feagin. NY: Routledge, 2000; Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. Mayfield, 1990. Steinberg, S. R. & Kincheloe, J. L. (2009). *Christotainment: Selling Jesus through popular culture*. Boulder: Westview. International Longevity Center's report, Ageism in America: <http://www.ilcusa.org/media/pdfs/Ageism%20In%20America%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>; Inzlicht, Michael and Toni Schmader (2011). *Stereotype Threat: Theory, Process, and Application*. Oxford Scholarship Online.