

# GLOSSARY OF EDUCATION TERMS

The following terms and definitions are often associated with and provide a common, working language for ADL's anti-bias programs and resources.

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

## A

**ABLEISM:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people with mental and/or physical disabilities.

**ACTIVIST:** Someone who gets involved in activities that are meant to achieve political or social change; this also includes being a member of an organization which is working on change.

**AGEISM:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their real or perceived age. Although ageism is often assumed to be bias against older people, members of other groups, such as teens, are also targets of prejudice and/or discrimination based on their age.

**AGGRESSOR:** Someone who says or does something harmful or malicious to another person intentionally and unprovoked.

**ALLY:** Someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else.

**ANTI-BIAS:** An active commitment to challenging prejudice, stereotyping and all forms of discrimination.

**ANTI-SEMITISM:** Prejudice or discrimination that is directed towards Jews. Anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes and myths that target Jews as a people, their religious practices and beliefs, and the Jewish State of Israel.

## B

**BIAS:** An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

**BIGOTRY:** An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices.

**BISEXUAL:** A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some people of more than one gender.

**BULLYING:** Repeated actions or threats of action directed toward a person by one or more people who have (or are perceived to have) more power or status than their target in order to cause fear, distress or harm. Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological or any combination of these three. Bullying behaviors can include name-calling, obscene gesturing, malicious teasing, rumors, slander, social exclusion, damaging a person's belongings, threats and physical violence.

**BYSTANDER:** Someone who sees something happening and does not say or do anything.

## C

**CLASSISM:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their real or perceived social and economic status.

**COMING OUT (OF THE CLOSET):** To be “in the closet” means to not share a part of one’s identity. Some LGBTQ people choose to disclose that part of their identity in some situations (to be “out”) and not in others (to be “closeted”). To “come out” is to publicly declare one’s identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a lifelong process. In each situation, a person must decide where they are at that point in time with their identity. In each new situation, a person must decide whether or not to come out.

**CONFRONTER:** Someone who speaks out when an incident of bias takes place. The role of confronter can be filled by other people (allies) or by targets themselves.

**CULTURE:** The patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, dating rituals and clothing, to name a few.

**CULTURAL APPROPRIATION:** When people use specific elements of a culture (e.g. ideas, symbols, images, clothing) without regard for that culture. It usually happens when one group exploits the culture of another group, often with little understanding of the group’s history, experience and traditions.

**CYBERBULLYING:** The intentional and repeated mistreatment of others through the use of technology, such as computers, cell phones and other electronic devices. Cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, sending mean, hurtful or threatening messages or images about another person; posting sensitive, private information about another person for the purpose of hurting or embarrassing the person; and pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad and/or to intentionally exclude someone from an online group.

## D

**DISABILITY:** A condition that limits a person in being able to see, hear, walk or speak. Some people with disabilities may be blind, or deaf, or may use a wheelchair if they are unable to walk.)

**DISCRIMINATION:** The denial of justice and fair treatment by both individuals and institutions in many arenas, including employment, education, housing, banking and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial thinking.

**DIVERSITY:** Means different or varied. The population of the United States is made up of people from different places and from diverse racial and cultural groups.

## E

**ETHNICITY:** Refers to a person's identification with a group based on characteristics such as shared history, ancestry, geographic and language origin, and culture.

## G

**GAY:** A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other people of the same gender. Can be used to refer to people of all genders, though it is used most commonly to refer to males. Some women and girls choose not to identify as gay, but as lesbian.

**GENDER:** The socially-defined "rules" and roles for men and women in a society. The attitudes, customs and values associated with gender are socially constructed; however, individuals develop their gender identities in two primary ways: through an innate sense of their own identity and through their life experiences and interactions with others. Dominant western society generally defines gender as a binary system—men and women—but many cultures define gender as more fluid and existing along a continuum.

**GENDER EXPRESSION:** Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice and emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing their bodies' characteristics. Gender expression is not an indicator of sexual orientation.

**GENDER IDENTITY:** How an individual identifies in terms of their gender. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

**GENDER ROLE:** The set of roles and behaviors expected of people based on gender assigned at birth.

## H

**HETEROSEXISM/HOMOPHOBIA:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). While **homophobia** is usually used to describe a blatant fear or hatred of LGBT people, **heterosexism** is a broader term used to describe attitudes and behaviors based on the belief that heterosexuality is the norm. Other related, specific, terms are transphobia and biphobia.

**HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT:** A person who is emotionally, physically, and/or romantically attracted to some members of another gender.

## I

**IMPLICIT BIAS:** The unconscious attitudes, stereotypes and unintentional actions (positive or negative) towards members of a group merely because of their membership in that group. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. When people are acting out of their implicit bias, they are not even aware that their actions are biased. In fact, those biases may be in direct conflict with a person's explicit beliefs and values.

**INEQUALITY:** An unfair situation when some people have more rights or better opportunities than other people.

**INEQUITY:** refers to a lack of fairness or justice; unfair and avoidable differences in treatment or experience.

**INJUSTICE:** A situation in which the rights of a person or a group of people are ignored or disrespected.

**INTERSEX:** A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

**ISLAMOPHOBIA:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be Muslim or of Arab descent, and a fear or dislike of Islamic culture.

## L

**LESBIAN:** A woman who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other women.

## M

**MICROAGGRESSIONS:** The everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations and other marginalized people experience in their day-to-day interactions. Microaggressions can appear to be a compliment but contain a “metacommunication” or hidden insult to the target groups to which it is delivered. They are often outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrator, which means they can be unintentional. These messages may be sent verbally (“you speak good English”), nonverbally (clutching one’s purse more tightly) or environmentally (symbols like the confederate flag or using American Indian mascots).<sup>1</sup>

**MULTICULTURAL:** Means many or multiple cultures. The United States is multicultural because its population consists of people from many different cultures.

## N

**NAME-CALLING:** The use of language to defame, demean or degrade individuals or groups.

**NATIONALITY:** Solely refers to a person’s citizenship by origin, birth, or naturalization.

## P

**PREJUDICE:** Prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes.

## Q

**QUEER:** An umbrella term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Some use as an alternative to “LGBT” in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many within the LGBT community have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

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<sup>1</sup> The term microaggressions was coined in the 1970s. This definition is from Derald Wing Sue’s *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* (4:24 mins., John Wiley & Sons, 2010); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0jsAS4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0jsAS4), accessed 2/18/14. Derald Wing Sue, a Columbia University professor who did a study and wrote a book on microaggressions.

**QUESTIONING:** Refers to people who are in the process of understanding and exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. They are often seeking information and support during this stage of their identity development.

## R

**RACE:** Refers to the categories into which society places individuals on the basis of physical characteristics (such as skin color, hair type, facial form and eye shape). Though many believe that race is determined by biology, it is now widely accepted that this classification system was in fact created for social and political reasons. There are actually more genetic and biological differences within the racial groups defined by society than *between* different groups.

**RACISM:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on the social construction of race. Differences in physical characteristics (e.g. skin color, hair texture, eye shape) are used to support a system of inequities.

**RELIGION:** An organized system of beliefs, observances, rituals and rules used to worship a god or group of gods.

**RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on their religious beliefs and/or practices.

## S

**SCAPEGOATING:** Blaming an individual or group for something based on that person or group's identity when, in reality, the person or group is not responsible. Prejudicial thinking and discriminatory acts can lead to scapegoating.

**SEXISM:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on their real or perceived sex. Sexism is based on a belief (conscious or unconscious) that there is a natural order based on sex.

**SEXUAL IDENTITY:** Sexual identity labels include "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "bi," "queer," "questioning," "heterosexual," "straight," and others. Sexual identity evolves through a developmental process that varies depending on the individual. Sexual behavior and identity (self-definition) can be chosen. Though some people claim their sexual orientation is also a choice, for others this does not seem to be the case.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** Determined by one's emotional, physical and/or romantic attractions. Categories of sexual orientation include, but are not limited to; **gay, lesbian**, attracted to some members of the same gender; **bisexual**, attracted to some members of more than one gender; and heterosexual, attracted to some members of another gender.

**SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS:** An individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, as measured by factors such as income, wealth and occupation.

**STEREOTYPE:** An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

**STRAIGHT ALLY:** Any person outside the LGBTQ community who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTQ people.

## T

**TARGET:** Someone against whom mistreatment is directed.

**TRANSGENDER:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identify differs from the sex they were assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression do not match society's expectations with regard to gender roles. The term may include identities such as: transsexual, gender queer, gender nonconforming, FTM, MTF, and gender-variant. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

**TRANSPHOBIA:** Fear or hatred of **transgender** people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment, and discrimination.

**TRANSSEXUAL:** An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seek to transition from male to female or female to male. Many do not prefer this term because it is thought to sound overly clinical.

## W

**WEIGHTISM:** Prejudice and discrimination against overweight and obese people.

## X

**XENOPHOBIA:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against anyone or anything that is perceived to be foreign or outside one's own group, nation or culture. Xenophobia is commonly used to describe negative attitudes toward foreigners and immigrants.

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