

A Glossary of Diversity Terms

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Acculturation: The process of acquiring the culture of an organization; merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact.

Affirmative Action: Set goals for the hiring and upward mobility of women, people with disabilities, African-Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, Asian-American/Pacific Islanders, and/or Native-Americans. Goals are based upon the difference between the availability of these groups in the population and their actual representation in the organization. Affirmative Action does *not* impose quotas, but uses instead goals and/or targets.

Ageism: Prejudice or discrimination against a particular age group, usually the very young, or the elderly.

Anti-Semitism: Oppression of Jewish peoples based on their religion or ethnic identity.

Assimilation: Being absorbed into the culture of an existing group; conforming to a corporate culture.

Bias: An inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bisexual: Gender-neutral term preferred by people who are open to intimate relationships with persons of either sex.

Classism: The subjugation or subordination of those from a lower social rank; goes beyond being merely class-conscious.

Corporate culture: A system of informal rules that guide how people behave; the basic assumptions that a group has invented or developed about how it operates; the practices, values, and the taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world.

Discrimination: To treat differently; to differentiate or discern between two or more people or things (racial or sexual discrimination means to treat people differently based on their race or sex).

Diversity: The fact or quality of being different.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO): The right to have an equal opportunity for hire, promotion, and all terms and conditions of employment without regard to seven prohibited factors: race, sex, color, religion, national origin, age (40 and older), and disability.

Equality: Dealing fairly with all concerned without bias or favoritism; equal does *not* necessarily mean “the same.”

Ethnocentrism: A belief in the superiority of one’s own race/ethnicity or culture.

Gay: A term used to identify those who are homosexual in their sexual orientation or preference; often used exclusively to describe males when using the term lesbian to describe females.

Gender Identity: A set of constructed behaviors defined by society as appropriate for men and women, solely on the basis of their sex.

Homophobia: Irrational fear of homosexuality or homosexuals (generally misused to mean hatred of rather than fear of...).

Hostile environment: One type of sexual harassment claim; frequent, non-trivial acts of a sexual nature that create the effect of a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.

Lesbian: Term most preferred by women who form their primary emotional/sexual relationships with other women (see also Gay).

Managing diversity: Creating an environment in which differences are valued, encouraged, and leveraged to meet the needs of the business. A strategically driven approach to recognizing, valuing, and fully utilizing all employees’ talents, skills, backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives to achieve business-related objectives. This approach views diversity as an asset, rather than a problem, and employs a pragmatic approach where the organization benefits, and morale, profit, and productivity increase.

Melting pot: A traditional orientation in the U.S. that assumes that “foreigners” should assimilate into the mainstream culture and noticeable differences should be minimized; this notion has largely been replaced by term such as “salad bowl,” “quilt,” “orchestra,” or “mosaic,” wherein people’s individual differences are valued as they add to the richness of the mix.

Multi-cultural organization: An organization whose employees are of different backgrounds, races, ages, genders, and other dimensions of diversity.

Pluralism: An organization or state in which members of diverse racial, ethnic, or social groups maintain their own culture and traditions and differences are valued.

Prejudice: To pre-judge, to form an opinion without knowing the facts. A feeling, unfavorable or favorable, toward a person or thing prior to, or not based on, actual experience. A prejudice, unlike a simple misconception, is actively

resistant to all new evidence. (My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts.)

Primary diversity: Characteristics that differentiate people that cannot be changed such as race, ethnicity, age, sex, physical abilities/qualities, or sexual orientation.

Quid pro quo: A type of sexual harassment claim; unwelcome activity of a sexual nature in exchange for tangible job benefits or the loss of tangible job benefits owing to the rejection of such activity (if you do this for me, I'll do this for you...).

Racism: The subjugation or subordination of a person or group of persons based on their race; belief that one group of people are superior to another and therefore have the right to dominate and the power to institute and enforce their prejudices and discriminatory practices on those deemed inferior.

Reasonable person: The judicial construct of a mythical individual who thinks and responds the way an ordinary, logical, and careful person would under the same conditions; a standard for behavior used in courts of law.

Secondary diversity: Characteristics that differentiate people that can be changed such as work background, education, marital status, religious beliefs, geographic location, or income.

Sex: A system of categorizing persons according to their reproductive organs and chromosomal composition (often confused with the term gender, which refers to the characteristics defined as "masculine" or "feminine").

Sexism: The subjugation or subordination of a person or group of persons based on their sex; stereotyping of males and females on the basis of their sex; the treatment of people in society based on the belief that sex is an indication of ability or relevant worth.

Sexual harassment: Unwelcome and repeated conduct of a sexual nature toward an employee in the workplace, which can involve a hostile environment or quid pro quo.

Social similarity: The widespread tendency for people to hire and promote persons similar to themselves along sex, racial, ethnic, or religious dimensions.

Stereotype: A relatively rigid and oversimplified conception of a group of people in which all individuals in the group are labeled and often treated based on perceived group characteristics.