





THE ALPHABET OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

These are a list of social justice terms that are relevant to the current issues of today. We hope to create this as a resource tool specifically for Southeast Asian diaspora communities within America, to use in dialogue and conversations, as well as a reference for those who work with these communities.

Abolition: The attempt to eliminate punitive responses to criminalized problems, as well as to get rid of institutions which are no longer seen as legitimate in helping people. Abolition has been used in the past to fight against slavery, torture, capital punishment and the prison system.

Example: In the US, the 13th amendment made sure that slavery was abolished and would forever be unconstitutional to have slaves in the US.

Ableism (or disability oppression): The pervasive system that oppresses people living with disabilities while privileging people who do not currently live with disabilities. Ableism can be manifested through prejudicial thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental, and/or emotional ability; usually that of able-bodied/minded persons against people living with illnesses, disabilities, or less developed skills/talents.

Example: People with disabilities are significantly disadvantaged and treated differently than those without disabilities, which are ableist.

Adulthood (or youth oppression): The pervasive system that oppresses young people through prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions, such as treating someone as weak or unintelligent because they are not adults; usually those of older persons against younger persons. Young people are excluded by practices that give adults the power to act on and for them, often without their agreement or consent.

Example: Adults not listening to young people because they assume they know better because they are older, which is adulthood.

Advocate: Someone who speaks up for themselves and members of their identity group; e.g., a woman who lobbies for equal pay for women. An advocate can also be a person who works on behalf of those affected by a specific policy or practice. Those people who are being advocated for might not know that such action is taking place.

Example: A parent fighting for quality education services for all children is an advocate.

Agency: The capacity to act independently and to make free choices. Human agency is the capacity for people to make choices and to impose those choices on the world. A person exhibits agency when they can act for themselves even in the face of social structures that oppress them.

Example: Workers who are being treated unfairly by their employer, band together to strike against their employer are considered to have agency.

Agent (or privileged identities): The perpetrator or perpetuator of oppression and/or discrimination; usually a member of a dominant or majority group.

Example: ICE agents (immigration and customs enforcement) arrest and detain thousands of undocumented immigrants.

Change agent: Someone who works to bring change. A person who works to build an inclusive and just community through taking action to dismantle oppression, including being aware of our own role in the system of oppression and of power dynamics in groups.

Example: Being a change agent is protesting against police brutality by challenging the oppressive system that oppresses communities of color.

Ageism: Systematic subordination and mistreatment of elders based on age. Elder oppression includes restricted access to goods, services, and privileges. This is manifested through prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions, such as referring to someone's age in a context in which age isn't relevant, based on differences in age; usually those of younger persons against older persons.

Example: Assuming that young people can't lead in organizations and older people do not know how to use technology is ageism.

Ally: People in dominant groups who work in coalition with people from oppressed groups. An ally makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on race, gender, class, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice.

Example: Being an ally is supporting, advocating for, and defending oppressed groups.

Allyship: An active verb; leveraging personal positions of power and privilege to fight oppression by respecting, working with, and empowering marginalized voices and communities. Allyship also requires humility, a willingness to listen and learn, and a commitment to do the work without expecting a reward or recognition.

Example: The long-time history of Jewish communities supporting and advocating against hate and fear of Black communities is seen as an allyship.

Anti-Blackness: Behaviors, actions, and practices that are opposed to or hostile towards Black people. Anti-Blackness describes the inability to recognize Black humanity.

Example: Black children are more likely to be punitively disciplined in schools than other racial groups, which is anti-black.

Active Listening: A process of hearing and understanding what someone is saying by empathizing with the speaker(s) and considering their perspective(s).

Example: Asking questions to understand people's ideas instead of asking to respond back to them is part of active listening.

Accountability: The ways in which people and communities hold themselves to their goals and actions and acknowledge the values and groups to which they

are responsible. To be accountable, one must be visible, with a transparent agenda and process.

Example: Members of a community or individuals in a community being transparent with funds raised for a community cause is being accountable.

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color): The term BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color. It is meant to unite all people of color in the work for liberation while intentionally acknowledging that not all people of color face the same levels of injustice.

Example: People who are non-white are considered BIPOC, regardless of where they come from.

Bias/Unconscious Bias: A conscious or unconscious preference that limits a person's capacity for impartial judgment. A biased way of thinking can result in unfair or discriminatory acts or policies.

Example: Southeast Asian elders might distrust the U.S. government because of historical trauma from their homelands, which is based on bias.

Black people: People who self-identify their connection to genetic ancestry associated with indigenous peoples of Africa and who seek to take a word that was historically used as a pejorative during times of slavery and Jim Crow and reclaim it as a term of pride.

Black Lives Matter: A political and social movement to address systemic and state violence against African Americans. BLM is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted. It is an affirmation of Black people's humanity, their contributions to society, and their resilience in the face of oppression.

Colonization: The exploitative historical, political, social, and economic system established when one group or force takes control over an indigenous territory and sovereign people. The result of such exploitation is the unequal relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Example: The French colonized Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam during the Indochina era.

Cisgender: A term for people whose gender identity matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

Example: Someone who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth is a cisgender woman.

Cisgenderism: socially constructed assumption that everyone's gender matches their biological sex, and that that is the norm from which all other gender identities deviate.

Example: Cisgender people can use public restrooms without fear of verbal abuse, physical intimidation, or arrest.

Cissexism: A system of oppression that values cisgender people, upholds the gender binary, and marginalizes, oppresses, and makes invisible the lives and experiences of transgender people.

Example: Transgender people are not allowed to serve in the US army unless they do so in the sex they were assigned at birth.

Classism: A system of oppression that includes institutional, cultural, societal, and individual attitudes or institutional practices that assign value to people based in their socio-economic class. Here, members of more privileged socio-economic classes are seen as having a greater value.

Example: Hostility and blame towards working-class or low-income people.

Colorism: Prejudicial or preferential treatment of people based solely on the darkness or lightness of their skin tone. Prejudicial treatment is given to darker-skin toned Black people and People of Color and preferential treatment is given to lighter-skin toned Black people and People of Color.

Example: Making comments about people with darker skin, and trying to convince them to stay out of the sun or using whitening lotions.

Decolonization: A liberatory process that allows for a systematic critique of the traumatic history of colonialism in Native and Third World people. The goal of decolonization is to move toward self-determination, the claiming of an intellectual identity, and active participation in the transformation of material conditions.

Example: School curriculum in a place where decolonization can occur. Schools need to consider whose knowledge and ways of being are given priority, re-establish links to the community, and reflect on the goal of education.

Diaspora: The voluntary or forced dispersion of a group of people who live outside their homeland due to an historical event that caused them to flee or which forcibly removed them from their homelands into new regions. Their traditional homelands are reflected in the languages they speak, their faith, and the cultures they produce.

Example: After 1975 post-war, Hmong, Khmer, and Laotians make up more than 3 million in the diaspora living in France, Australia, and the U.S.

Diversity: A multiplicity of shared and different individual and group experiences, values, beliefs, and characteristics among people. The wide range of national, ethnic, racial and other backgrounds of U.S. residents and immigrants as social groupings, co-existing in American culture. The term is often used to include aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class and much more.

Example: Communities encouraging and being tolerant to differing religious beliefs, races, and economic classes within their community.

Discrimination: The unequal allocation of goods, resources, and services, and the limitation of access to full participation in society based on individual membership in a particular social group; reinforced by law, policy, and cultural norms that allow for differential treatment on the basis of identity.

Example: Not being hired for a job you are qualified based on your name or race.

Disenfranchised: Being deprived of power and/or access to rights, opportunities, and services. Disenfranchisement occurs in the context of racialized threats against BIPOC communities.

Example: Threats of deportation for Southeast Asian refugee immigrants.

Empathy: A learned skill that allows people to recognize and deeply listen to another person's story or experiences, and connect them to common understandings and emotions.

Example: Having empathy acknowledging people's pain even if you do not feel it directly personal.

Equity: The situation in which all people or groups are given access to the correct number and types of resources for them so as to achieve equal results. Equity differs from equality, which focuses on the equal distribution of resources rather than equal results. An equity emphasis seeks to bring justice by deeply considering structural factors that benefit some social groups/communities and harms other social groups/communities.

Example: Equity is when men and women are being paid the same amount for the same type of work they do.

Ethnocentrism: Consciously or unconsciously privileging one's own ethnic group over others; assuming or judging other groups according to one's own group values. Also, a belief in the inherent superiority of one's own nation or ethnic group.

Example: People who are not part of our group are all the same.

Feminism: The pursuit of the social, economic, and political equality of all people, regardless of sex, gender, sexuality, race, geographical location, body size, socioeconomic status, physical and mental ability, and religion.

Example: Paying people the same regardless of their social identities and giving them access to opportunities and promotions is part of a feminist agenda.

Genocide: The intentional attempt to completely erase or destroy groups of people based on their specific identities, through structural oppression and/or open acts of physical violence.

Example: During the Khmer Rouge regime also called the Cambodian

genocide, under a push towards communism, almost 2 million Cambodians died.

Gentrification: Demographic shifts that usually occur in big cities in which upper-middle class and/or racially privileged individuals and businesses move into historically working class and poor and/or racially oppressed neighborhoods and communities.

Example: Long-term residents of an area cannot afford rent and expenses after higher earning people start moving to that area.

Hate Crime: A form of violence where a perpetrator intentionally selects and commits a crime toward someone based on actual or perceived membership in a particular group, usually defined by race, religion, ability, ethnicity, etc.

Example: Vandalizing a place of worship because you see people with different beliefs as a threat.

Homophobia: On a personal level, homophobia is an irrational fear, aversion, or dislike of homosexualities and people who identify as homosexual; on a social level, homophobia is the ingrained structural discrimination against homosexuality and those who identify as homosexual that prevents access to certain resources or opportunities and prevents individuals from feeling safe or able to be socially recognized as homosexual.

Example: Same-sex couples are rejected by some religious institutions and cannot celebrate their marriage.

Immigrant: A person who moves from one country or region and intends to reside permanently in that country or region.

Example: A student from China studying in the United States is an immigrant.

Indigenous people (First peoples, First Nations, Aboriginal peoples, or Native peoples): Ethnic groups of people who are the original or earliest known inhabitants of an area, land, or known as the current country.

Example: Native Americans are indigenous to what is currently known as the United States of America.

Injustice: Situation, act, or practices where the rights of individuals have been violated by others and the outcome is unacceptable, unfair, and wrong.

Example: The murder of George Floyd by police brutality was an injustice.

Inclusion: Bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power and welcoming spaces.

Example: Creating inclusive policies and practices that ensure that all people from different social groups are treated equally in different spaces and institutions.

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of race, class, gender, etc. which can create interdependent systems of oppression or discrimination to populations of those identities. Intersectionality is useful to examine the ways in which racism interacts with patriarchy, heterosexism, classism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and disempowerment.

Example: A human resources professional who supports anti-racism policies in the workplace should have an intersectional approach to including anti-sexism, anti-socioeconomic status, etc as well.

Internalized Oppression: Destructive patterns of feelings and behaviors experienced by the people who are targets of oppression, turned inward upon themselves and directed at other members of the target group.

Example: Asian American students who believe they are not good in math or science is due to internalized oppression.

Transformative Justice: A process where all individuals affected by an injustice are given the opportunity to address and repair the harm. Those affected consider and recount how an act has affected them and what can be done to repair the harm.

Example: A college offering free college programs to prison inmates in return for less incarceration time is transformative justice.

LGBTQIA+: The umbrella term for a community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer, questioning, intersex, and/or asexual.

Example: In 2015, the Supreme Court declared same sex-marriage a constitutional right, which is a historic moment for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Marginalization: The systematic disempowerment of a person or community by denying access to necessary resources, enforcing prejudice through society's institutions, and/or not allowing for that individual or community's voice, history, and perspective to be heard.

Example: Denying people access to employment because of their immigration status is a form of marginalization.

Marginalized Group: A group of people that are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities, and resources.

Example: Homeless people are a marginalized group who are unable to have access to proper housing where they can have meals and an adequate place to sleep.

Microaggression: The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages that are primarily experienced by marginalized groups.

Example: Continuously failing to say someone's name correctly after working with them for many years is a form of microaggression.

Model Minority: Refers to a minority ethnic, racial, or religious group whose members achieve a higher degree of success than the population average and who are assumed by the dominant group to be a model of assimilation for other marginalized groups. This success is typically measured in income, education, and related factors such as low crime rate and high family stability. The model minority myth creates an understanding of ethnic groups, including Asian Americans, as a monolith, or as a group of people who are all the same.

Example: The model minority myth is heavily stereotyped against Asian Americans, which has been detrimental to the Asian American community who are upheld to high expectations.

Movement Building: The effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative vision or solution. Movement building requires a range of intersecting approaches through a set of distinct stages over a long-term period of time.

Example: Black Lives Matter has been movement building among chapters locally, nationally, and internationally.

Oppression: When an agent group, whether knowingly or unknowingly, abuses a target group. This pervasive system is rooted historically and maintained through individual and institutional/systematic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice, resulting in a condition of privilege for the agent group at the expense of the target group.

Example: Sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism are all examples of systems of oppression. Society's institutions and culture contribute or reinforce the oppression of marginalized social groups.

Patriarchy: A social system and institution in which men have primary power in the political, social, economic, legal, and familial spheres; patriarchy favors male-dominated thought, and is centralized on the male narrative or perspective of how the world works and should work.

Example: Patriarchy in a community means only men make the decisions.

Peace: Being free of oppressive and unpleasant thoughts and emotions.

Example: There was peace in the village before war and militarization started.

Police Brutality: A rights violation that occurs when a police officer acts with excessive force against citizens they're meant to protect. This includes, but is not limited to, bullying, physical or verbal harassment, physical or mental injury, property damage, and even death.

Example: The police officer that put his knee against George Floyd's throat, which resulted in his death, is a form of police brutality.

Prejudice: An assumption of knowledge about someone or something not based on personal experiences with the people or issue in question but on stereotypes enforced by society. Prejudices are learned and can be unlearned.

Example: A White neighbor who has never interacted with his Southeast Asian neighbors hold prejudice against them.

Privilege: Special advantage or entitlement to social power, political, economic, and psychological benefits given by society to all members of a dominant group that has specific institutional and structural power.

Example: Heirs of wealthy families have privileges that give them advantages that others from non-wealthy families don't have.

White Privilege: Privileges associated with identifying as or appearing White in a racist society. Living and existing as a White person in a world that operates on the cultural default of Whiteness.

Example: When a White person gets good customer service in comparison to a Black person in the same retail shop, it's White privilege.

Race: A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as a physical appearance (particularly color) ancestral heritage, cultural affiliations, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time.

Example: The race "Asian" includes numerous ethnic groups and nationalities, such as Hmong, Korean, Taiwanese, Laotian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian and more than hundreds of ethnicities.

Racial Battle Fatigue: Stress and anxiety caused by constantly dealing with both overtly racist actions and subtle references to one's race.

Example: After the murder of George Floyd, many Black activists became stressed and anxious due to racial battle fatigue.

Racism: Involves explicit and implicit acts, behaviors, and practices in which a specific group has the power to carry out systematic discrimination based on another group's race, through institutional policies and practices, that shape the ideologies and cultural beliefs that support racist policies and practices.

Example: Managers who punish Black employees to be on time but don't do the same for White employees are using racism in their management policies.

Refugee: People who have fled war, violence, conflict, and/or persecution from their country of origin and have crossed borders to seek safety and asylum in another country.

Example: Minnesota is home to more than 500,000 Southeast Asian refugees after the Vietnam War and Secret War, including Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese.

Resilience: Refers to the means through which we make a positive reaction to adversity. It is the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, are strengthened from, and more resourceful.

Example: Survivors who go through war, trauma, poverty, and state-sanctioned abuse are resilient.

Rights (civil and human): Rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.

Example: Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more as outlined in the United Nations.

Self-Determination: The process of one's freedom to live as one chooses and to have the ability to control one's own destiny, without consultation and interference by anyone else or anything else.

Example: During the uprisings, communities exemplified self-determination by starting their own system for mutual aid through free meals and cash assistance.

Social Justice: Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs.

Example: Social justice is achieved when all veterans of the Vietnam War and Secret War are able to have burial rights and veteran benefits.

Solidarity: An awareness of shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies creating a sense of unity of social groups or classes. It refers to the ties in a society that bind people together as one.

Example: Asian Americans who helped organize alongside Black activists in the 1970s were in solidarity during movement building.

Stereotype: A trait assumed to be true of all members of a particular social group. Many American cultural practices and policies are rooted in racial, gendered and class based stereotypes.

Example: All Asians are good at math is a stereotype.

Target or Oppressed Identities: Social groups that are negatively valued, considered to be inferior, abnormal, or dependent and given limited access to resources and social power.

Example: Black people in America are part of an oppressed group

Tolerance: Acceptance and open-mindedness to cultures, practices, and attitudes that are different from one's own does not necessitate agreeing with those differences but are welcomed and included.

| *Example: A Christian person being tolerant of those who practice Islam.*

Whiteness: Seen to provide material and/or social privilege to those who are considered white, or pass as white, or are given honorary white status.

| *Example: One's whiteness, regardless of their actual ethnic background, can be seen as favorable than another person who isn't.*

Supremacy/White Supremacy: The belief that White people are superior to people of all other races and should be dominant over them.

| *Example: Nazis in Germany are White supremacists.*

Xenophobia: Fear and/or loathing of people who hold social group identities or memberships that are different from your own; the "other" or "those people."

| *Example: Covid has fueled anti-Asian racism and xenophobia against Asian Americans across the world.*

Sources:

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You can access all Pause & Grow Care Package resources online at: www.theseadproject.org/covid19

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