

DEFINITIONS

There are a number of different definitions that are currently in use for the key terms we have listed below. While we acknowledge these variations, we feel that it is important to share the definitions we have employed in developing the Lens to ensure a common understanding of some of the key concepts as we move forward. As such, we offer the following definitions:

CLASS – Class is relative status according to income, wealth, power and/or position (Class Matters). Class relations extend beyond income, and reflect the entire structure of society.

CLASSISM - “Classism is differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It’s the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class” (Class Action).

COMMUNITY CAPACITY - Community capacity focuses on 10 areas: active participation, leadership, rich support networks, skills and resources, critical reflection, sense of community, understanding of history, articulation of values, and access to power. Community capacity-building operationalizes the concept of empowerment (Wallerstein, 2002).

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR - Communities of color are identity-based communities that hold a primary racial identity that describes shared racial characteristics among community members. The term aims to define a characteristic of the community that its members share (such as being African American) that supports self-definition by community members, and that typically denotes a shared history and current/historic experiences of racism. An older term for communities of color is that of “minority communities” which is increasingly inaccurate given that people of color are majority identities on a global level. That term has also been rejected for its potential to infer any inferior characteristics. The community may or may not also be a geographic community. Given that race is a socially-defined construct, the definitions of these communities are dynamic and evolve across time. At present, in Multnomah County, the Coalition of Communities of Color defines communities of color to include Native Americans, Latinos, Asian and Pacific Islanders, African Americans, Africans, Middle Eastern, and Slavic communities (Coalition of Communities of Color).

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY (RESPONSIVENESS) – Cultural proficiency (responsiveness) is a transformational approach and an inside-out perspective on change, involving making the commitment to lifelong learning for the purpose of being increasingly effective in serving and integrating the needs of cultural and ethnic groups. Employees and leaders who embody cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Randall, Graham, Westphal, & Jew, 2008):

- recognize and value professional development;

- hold a value for social justice; and
- advocate for students and community groups as part of their professional responsibility.

DISABILISM – According to Emerson (2010), “disablism is discrimination based on disability” (p. 683). Barnes, Colin, and Mercer (2004) extend the definition by identifying that “one who is disabled can be subject to social oppression. Disablism functions alongside sexism, racism, ageism, and homophobia in society” (p.4).

DISABILITY - The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an individual with a disability is a person who: (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; OR (2) has a record of such an impairment; OR (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. In line with a social justice perspective, the focus of this definition should not be on the individual with an impairment, but on how society excludes people living with disabilities from meaningful participation, employment opportunities, and access to resources to thrive (U.S. Department of Justice).

DISCRIMINATION - Unequal or different treatment of an individual in any personnel action on the basis of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, political affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identify, source of income, familial status, or physical or mental disability or other protected status in accordance with applicable law (Multnomah County).

EQUITY – Equity is an ideal and a goal, not a process. It ensures that everyone has the resources to succeed.

ETHNICITY – While related to race, ethnicity refers not to physical characteristics but to social traits that are shared by a human population. Some of the social traits often used for ethnic classification include: nationality; tribe; religious faith; shared language; and shared culture and/or traditions. Unlike race, ethnicity is not usually externally assigned by others. The term ethnicity focuses more upon a group’s connection to a perceived shared past and culture (Cavalli-Sforza, Monozzi, & Piazza, 1996).

GENDER – Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for masculine and feminine (World Health Organization). Sex is biological and refers to physical attributes such as sex chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, internal reproductive structures, and external genitalia. At birth, it is used to identify individuals as male or female. Gender on the other hand is far more complicated. Along with one’s physical traits, it is the complex interrelationship between those traits and one’s internal sense of self as male, female, both or neither as well as one’s outward presentations and behaviors related to that perception. Therefore, gender is a construct that exists on a spectrum, rather than two static choices (Gender Spectrum).

GENDER INEQUITY - Like race, gender is a social construct. Traditions, laws, roles, and behaviors, and most importantly gender relations of power greatly affect access to necessary resources, the ability to meaningfully participate politically, the ability to achieve one's full potential economically, and the prominence of discriminatory acts. The inequities themselves can place many people who identify as women in positions leading to violence and exploitation (Hofrichter, 2010). One's perceived gender can also be tied to violence and other oppressions because gender expression is often tied to a stereotype of one's sexual orientation.

HEALTH – The “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1948).

HEALTH EQUITY – All persons have access to the resources and power they need to attain their full health potential.

HEALTH INEQUITIES – Systemic, avoidable, unfair and unjust differences in health status and mortality rates, as well as in the distribution of disease and illness across population groups (Hofrichter, 2010).

HIERARCHY - Hierarchy is the categorization of a group of people according to ability or economic, social, or professional status. Hierarchies can have positive and negative attributes. The negative effects of hierarchy manifest when there is an established dominant group that tends to enjoy a disproportionate share of assets, resources, and other areas of positive social value (Pratto, Sidanius & Levin, 2006): The ability or official authority to decide what is best for others, the ability to decide who will have access to resources, and the capacity to exercise control over others (Leaven, 2003; Visions, Inc.).

MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT – (1) potentially affected community residents and communities most affected by inequities have appropriate and culturally responsive opportunities to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment and/or health; (2) the public's contribution can influence the agency's or jurisdiction's decision; (3) the concerns of all participants involved will be considered in the decision-making process (and measures will be taken to document how they were or were not considered); and (4) the decision makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected and communities most affected by inequities (Environmental Protection Agency).

OPPRESSION – Young (2011) refers to oppression as “the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms-- in short, the normal processes of everyday life” (p.41). She continues, to emphasize that oppression “also refers to systemic constraints on

groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather in that the result of a few people's choices or policies" (p.41).

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH - Positive mental health is a resource and a pathway to obtain what one needs to thrive, meaningfully participate, and engage. Positive mental health is promoted by making sure people have the material resources they need, have a sense of control over their lives, and have the ability to participate in important decision-making in community governance. (See Concept Paper *Positive Mental Health and Equity*)

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT - "Continuous and ongoing effort to achieve measurable improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, performance, accountability, outcomes, and other indicators of quality in services or processes which achieve equity and improve the health of the community" (Riley, Moran, Corso, Beitsch, Bialek, Cofsky, 2010).

ROOT CAUSES – The underlying factors leading to inequities, including, but not limited to:

- inequities in living and working conditions;
- unjust decision-making;
- disempowering engagement processes; and
- racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination (sexism, ageism, homophobia, disabilism, etc.)

POPULAR EDUCATION – "A philosophy and methodology that seeks to bring about more just and equitable social, political, and economic relations by creating settings in which people who have historically lacked power can discover and expand their knowledge and use it to eliminate societal inequities" (Wiggins, 2011, p.38).

RACE – A race is a human population that is believed to be distinct in some way from other humans based on real or imagined physical differences, and at its core, race is a social construct. Racial classifications are rooted in the idea of biological classification of humans according to morphological features such as skin color or facial characteristics. An individual is usually externally classified (meaning someone else makes the classification) into a racial group rather than the individual choosing where they belong as part of their identity (Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, Piazza, 1996).

RACISM – Conduct, words, practices or policies which advantage or disadvantage people because of their culture, ethnic origin or color. Racism is just as damaging in obvious forms as it is in less obvious and subtle forms, and is still called racism whether intentional or unintentional (Lopes & Thomas, 2006).

- **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM** – "The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages for White people and discrimination, oppression and disadvantage for racialized people" (Lopes & Thomas, 2006, p.270).

- **SYSTEMIC RACISM** – “The conscious or unconscious policies, procedures, and practices that exclude, marginalize, and exploit racialized people. Systemic racism is supported by institutional power and by powerful (often unexamined) ideas which make racism look normal and justified. Systemic racism allows individuals to practice racism in organizations, unchecked by effective complaints procedures, performance appraisals, and promotions which require equity competencies” (Lopes & Thomas, p.270).

SEXUAL ORIENTATION - The deep-seated direction of one’s sexual (erotic) attraction. It is on a continuum and not a set of absolute categories. Sometimes referred to as affection, orientation or sexuality. Sexual orientation evolves through a multistage developmental process, and may change over time (UC Berkeley Gender Equity Resource Center).

- **LGBTIQ** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS - The social determinants are the conditions and circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and are key factors in how populations experience equity or inequity. Examples include: housing, transportation, education, dignity and respect, social supports/networks, health care, race/ethnicity, wealth and income development, and public safety, to name a few. (See Concept Paper *Social Determinants of Health and Inequity*)

SUSTAINABILITY - Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to sustain their own needs. Sustainability is often tied to three distinct goals:

- To live in a way that is environmentally sustainable or viable over the long term;
- To live in a way that is economically sustainable, maintaining living standards over the long-term; and
- To live in a way that is socially sustainable, now and in the future (Dillard, J., Dujon, V. & King, M. C., 2009, p.2).