



Guide 03



EUROPEAN
CHIPS
DIVERSITY
ALLIANCE



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Let's Talk DEI: Terms You Should Know

Perfect for anyone looking to strengthen workplace communication

About the Glossary

This glossary provides concise definitions of **35 terms** related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in **alphabetical order**.

Find more opportunities and tools, get in touch with the ECDA team!



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www.diversityinchips.eu

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1. ABLEISM

Beliefs or practices that rest on the assumption that being able-bodied is “normal,” while other states of being need to be “fixed” or altered. This can result in devaluing or discriminating against people with disabilities. Institutionalised ableism may include or take the form of un/intentional organisational barriers that result in disparate treatment of people with disabilities.

Examples:

- A company automatically filters out job applicants who disclose a disability, assuming they won't be able to perform as well as others – without considering accommodations or individual abilities.
- During team meetings, people who speak slowly due to a speech impairment are regularly interrupted or ignored, while faster speakers are given more attention.
- An internal company platform is not compatible with screen readers, making it difficult or impossible for blind employees to access essential information or complete tasks.



Examples and practical tips



Image source: <https://www.physiopod.co.uk/what-ableism-looks-like-by-jamie-shields.shtml>, accessed July 17, 2025.

2. ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility in the workplace aims to ensure that all people can fully participate professionally and meet their basic needs with dignity. It means providing resources, support, and potentially accommodations to help everyone thrive. Intriguingly, up to 80 percent of disabilities are not apparent, and only 21 percent of disabled people disclosed their disability to HR. That is why the focus needs to shift from disability disclosure to disability inclusion, i. e. systemic elimination of physical, technological, organisational, informational, communicational, and attitudinal barriers.



Examples:

- An employee with a chronic illness that causes fatigue is allowed to work flexible hours and take breaks as needed, without having to repeatedly justify their condition.
- During meetings, the team uses clear agendas, avoids speaking over each other, and provides written summaries afterward.
- A company makes sure that all meeting rooms are wheelchair-accessible, equipped with adjustable lighting and sound systems, and located near accessible restrooms. Meetings can also be joined remotely for those who cannot attend in person.



What is accessibility in the workplace?

Image source: <https://blog.skyelearning.com/common-employee-concerns>, accessed July 17, 2025.

3. AGEISM

Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel), and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age. The term is generally used to refer to age-based discrimination against older adults.

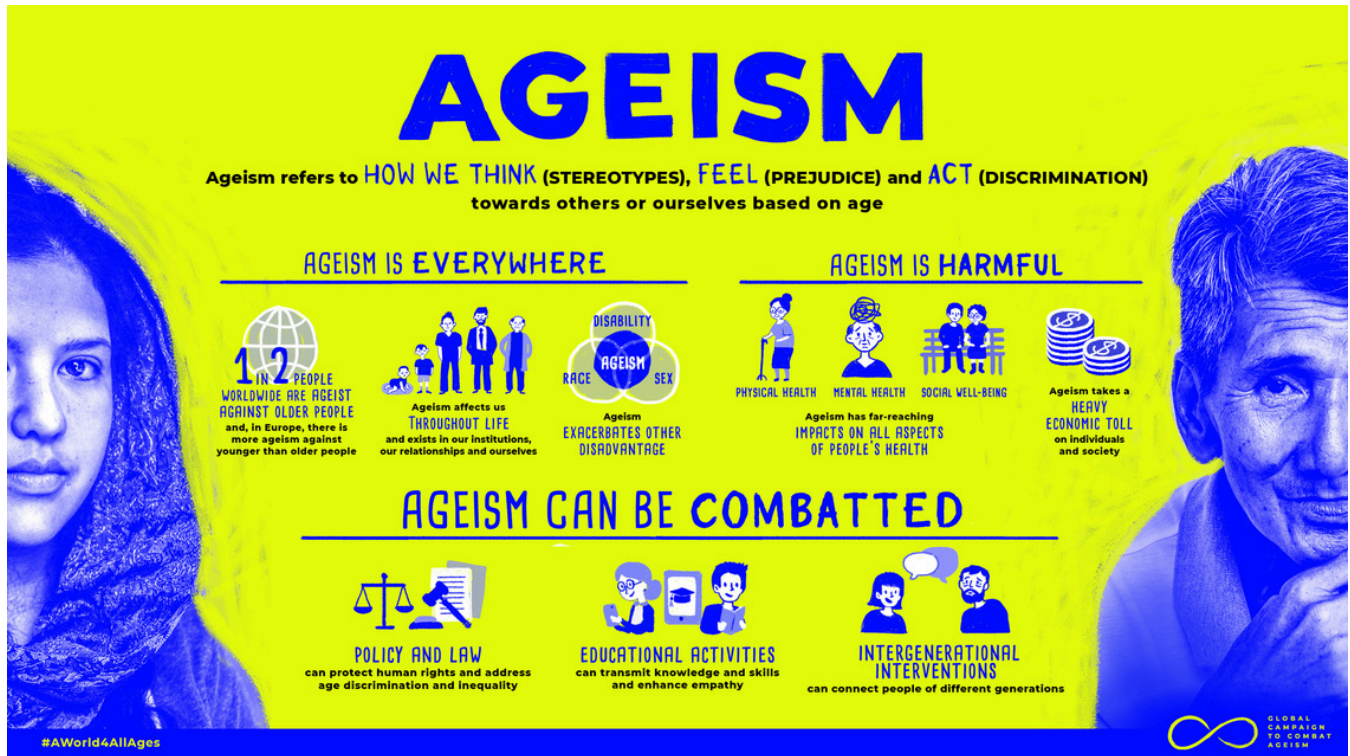


Image source: <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism>, accessed July 17, 2025.

Examples:

- Overlooking older candidates based on the assumption that they won't be as adaptable or willing to learn new skills.
- Older employees are routinely left out of professional development programs or digital upskilling workshops because managers assume they're "close to retirement" or "won't be interested."
- A junior team member proposes a well-researched idea during a strategy meeting, but it's dismissed with comments like "You're too young to understand how things work here" or "Let's hear from someone with more experience".



[Ageism: Explained](#)

4. ALLY

A person who uses their privilege to advocate for those who either do not hold some form of power, or who do not share the same social identity, to end discriminatory or oppressive systems and practices. An ally works actively towards the inclusion and empowerment of a marginalised community, without being a member of that community.

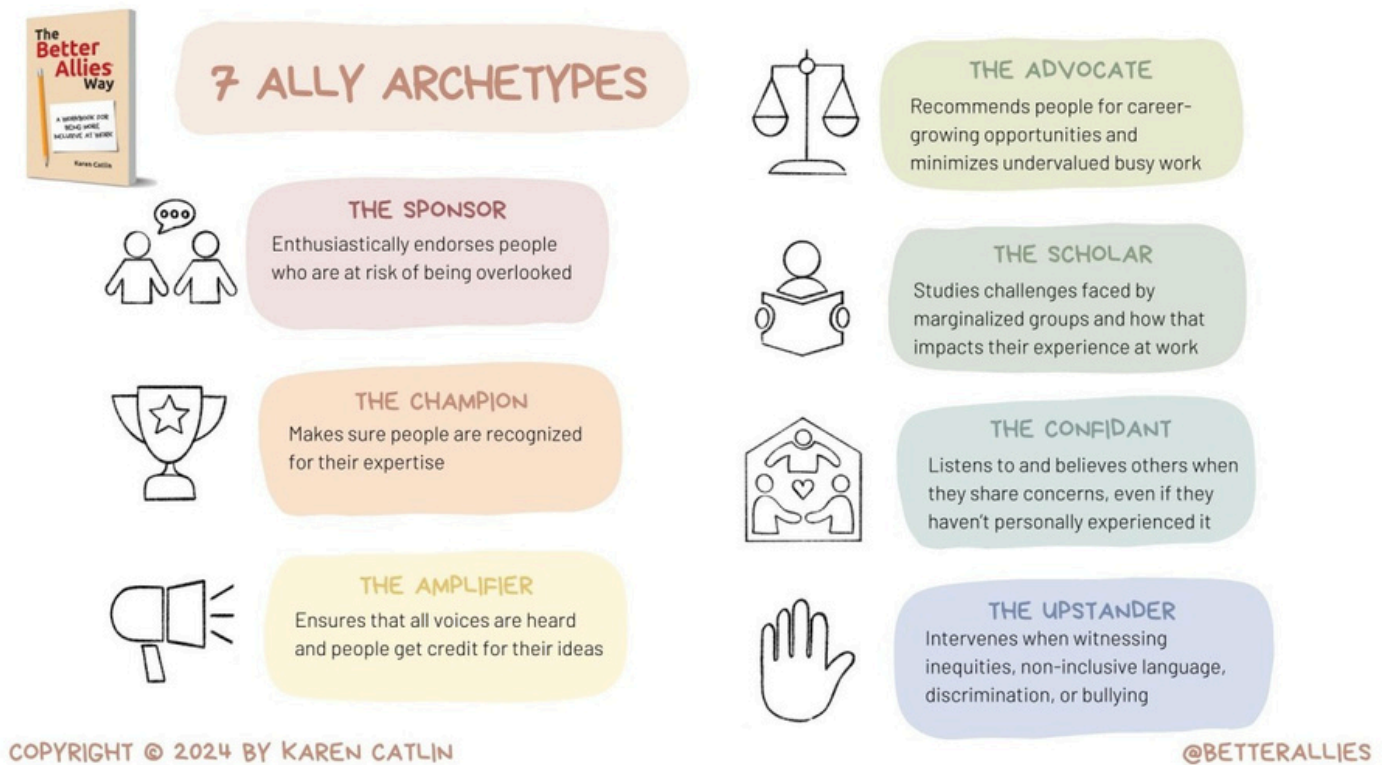


Image source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/5-ally-actions-may-24-2024-karen-catlin-wkqvc/>, accessed July 17, 2025.

Examples:

- During a meeting, a colleague repeatedly interrupts a woman of color. A white male team member notices and intervenes by saying, “Let’s make sure everyone has a chance to finish their thoughts.”
- A non-disabled employee joins a working group to improve workplace accessibility. They push for automatic doors, captioned videos, and flexible scheduling based on input from disabled colleagues.
- After being praised for a project, a senior employee highlights that a junior colleague contributed a key idea and ensures they’re publicly acknowledged.



What is Allyship?

5. AWARENESS

Awareness means recognizing and understanding important issues, situations, or experiences — especially those that affect other people. In the context of inclusion, awareness involves being open to learning about different identities, perspectives, and social inequalities. It is the first step toward empathy, respect, and meaningful action.

Examples:

- An employee realizes they tend to assume leadership roles are better suited to men. After attending a workshop on gender bias, they start questioning their assumptions and work to change their behavior.
- A manager learns that using terms like “you guys” may exclude some people. They begin using more inclusive phrases like “everyone” or “team.”
- A colleague becomes aware that conditions like anxiety or chronic pain may not be visible but still impact people’s work. They stop making assumptions and become more supportive when someone asks for accommodations.



6. BELONGING

Belonging is the subjective feeling of inclusion or acceptance into a group of people. This sense of **community** or connectedness in a social group is a basic human need that individuals must satisfy to maintain their identity, physical well-being, and mental health. In DEI, belonging means the level of security and comfortability an employee feels at work when they are accepted, included, and supported. Feelings of belonging at work support engagement, high performance, and employee well-being and help teams build cohesion and achieve organisational goals.

Examples:

- A new employee from a different cultural background is warmly welcomed by their team. Colleagues show interest in their traditions, pronounce their name correctly, and invite them to social events.
- During meetings, team members at all levels are encouraged to share ideas without fear of being dismissed or judged. A junior employee suggests a change, and the team leader genuinely considers and implements it.
- A nonbinary employee is supported by their manager in using their correct pronouns and given access to an inclusive restroom. The organization publicly commits to inclusion through training and policies.

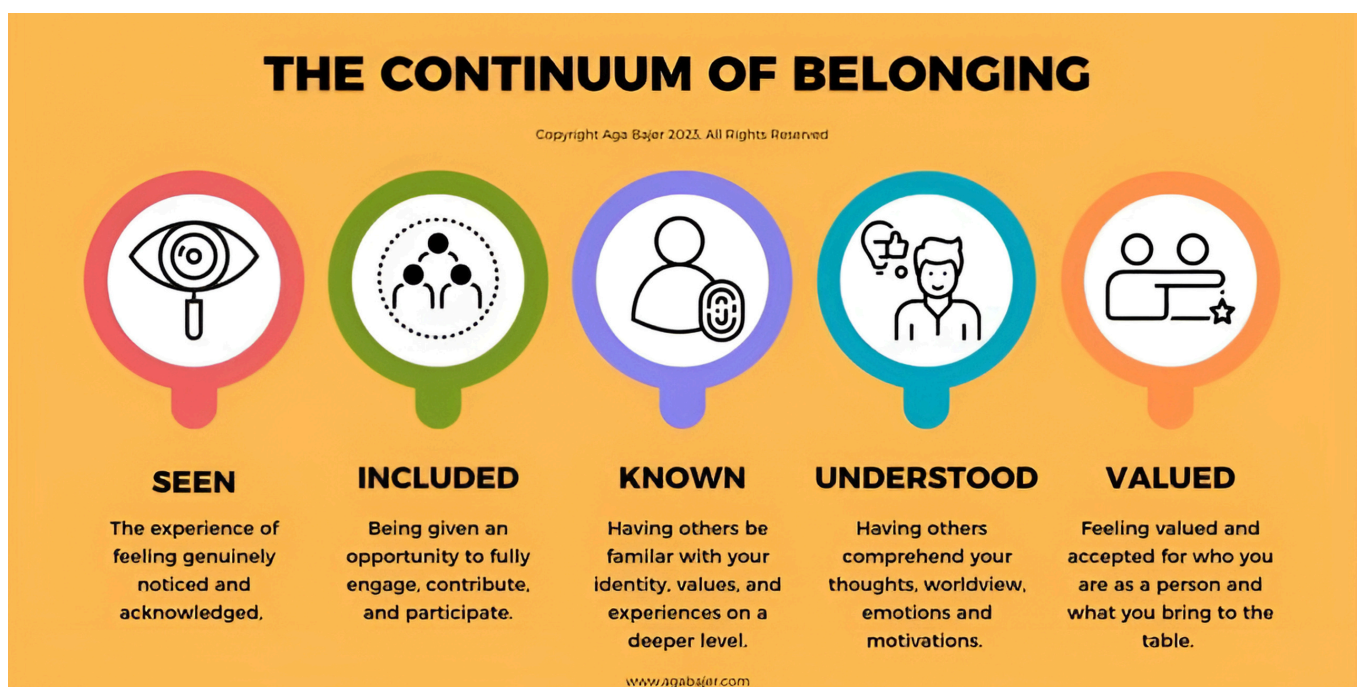


Image source: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/agabajer_culture-belonging-culturebrained-activity-7119316718040100865-ztvd/, accessed July 17, 2025.

7. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity refers to the variety of cultural expressions, practices, and identities within a society or community. It encompasses the different backgrounds, languages, traditions, and beliefs that shape individuals and groups. Recognizing and valuing cultural diversity is essential for promoting inclusion, fostering mutual respect, and enhancing social cohesion. Cultural diversity plays a pivotal role in the context of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Embracing cultural diversity not only enriches communities but also enhances organisations and institutions.

Examples:

- A company ensures that interview panels include people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to reduce unconscious bias and reflect a broader range of perspectives.
- On a casual dress day, an employee wears a traditional piece of clothing from their home country. Instead of being judged or exoticised, they receive positive curiosity and respect from coworkers.
- An employee whose first language is not English sometimes struggles to follow fast-paced meetings. The team agrees to slow down, avoid slang, and provide written summaries afterward.



Cultural diversity in communication



8. DISABILITY

The term has been used to identify the impairments that result from disease and injury, the physical, mental, or emotional functional limitations or difficulties a person has due to the impairments, and the participation restriction they experience when the environment is not supportive. Thus, disability has been used to represent almost any conceptual component associated with the ability continuum that impacts the person. People with disabilities may face unfair treatment or negative attitudes because of their disability — this is known as ableism. To help prevent this and ensure equal participation, it's important to design spaces, tools, and systems so that everyone, including people with disabilities, can use them. This is called accessibility.

Examples:

- An employee who uses a wheelchair is unable to access certain meeting rooms because there are no ramps or elevators available, limiting their full participation.
- A worker with a mental health condition is not offered flexible working hours or support, making it harder for them to manage their workload and wellbeing.
- A company fails to provide assistive technology, like screen readers or speech-to-text software, for an employee with a visual impairment, which affects their ability to complete tasks efficiently.



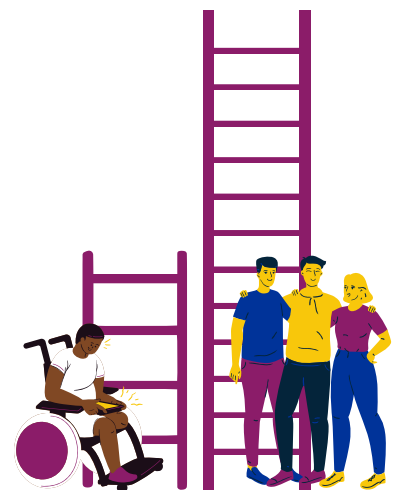
[Disability Sensitivity Training Video](#)

9. DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination means unfair treatment of people who are in the same situation but differ in things like race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or other traits. It can happen through obvious exclusion or through rules that seem fair but actually put some groups at a disadvantage. These inequalities often come from social or organizational habits, laws, or history that favor some groups over others.

Examples:

- A qualified woman is passed over for a promotion because the company prefers male candidates for leadership roles.
- An employee with a disability is not given reasonable adjustments to perform their job, making it harder for them to succeed.
- A worker is excluded from important meetings and projects because of their ethnic background, limiting their career growth.



[Types of Discrimination](#)

10. DIVERSITY

Diversity encompasses the range of similarities and differences everyone brings to the workplace, including (but not limited to) language, race, national origin, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status. Diversity acknowledges how people differ, including race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, and ability, but diversity in the workplace also refers to diversity in how people think.

Examples:

- A company hires employees from different cultural and national backgrounds, which brings a variety of perspectives and ideas to team discussions.
- During a brainstorming session, team members with diverse educational and professional experiences contribute unique approaches to solving a problem.
- An organization values neurodiversity by actively including people who think and process information differently, such as individuals with autism or ADHD, and creates an inclusive environment for all.



- Rethinking Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Moving Beyond the Business Case Approach
- Diversity and Inclusion (as it was)



Image source: <https://www.equalture.com/blog/statistical-benefits-of-diversity-within-the-workplace/>, accessed July 17, 2025.

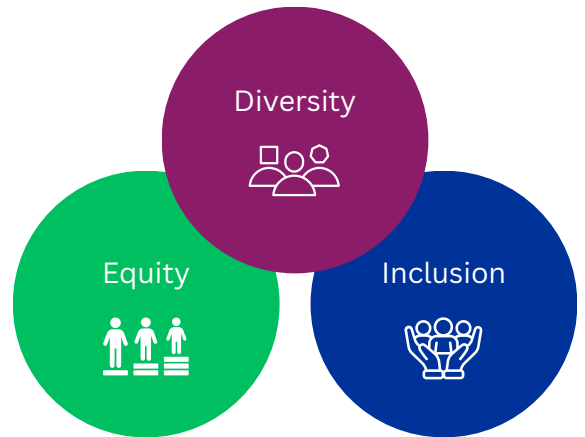
11. DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)

Diversity refers to differences in race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, civil and family status, education, and many other characteristics. Diversity means having different types of people in a group or organization.

Equity means being fair, not just treating everyone exactly the same. Equity recognizes that people start from different places and may need different resources.

Inclusion means making sure everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to participate fully. It's about creating spaces where people can be themselves and where everyone's ideas and contributions are valued.

Together, DEI helps create environments where everyone has opportunities to succeed, feels they belong, and can contribute their unique perspectives.



- [Rethinking Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Moving Beyond the Business Case Approach](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion \(as it was\)](#)

12. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) FATIGUE

The term refers to the mental exhaustion and stress individuals can experience when engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Instead of feeling supported for their efforts, they are met with pushback at every turn. DEI fatigue typically sets in when an organisation's efforts around diversity are made the responsibility of a committee that is given neither the power nor the resources to effect any real change.

Examples:

- An employee who is part of the DEI committee feels burned out after repeatedly advocating for inclusive hiring practices, only to see leadership ignore their recommendations without offering any explanation or support.
- A company hosts regular DEI workshops, but employees start feeling overwhelmed and disengaged because the sessions are mandatory, poorly facilitated, and not followed by meaningful action or change.
- Staff members from marginalized groups are constantly asked to share their personal experiences to educate others, but they receive little recognition or compensation, leading to emotional exhaustion and frustration.

13. EMPLOYEE LIFE CYCLE

The employee life cycle is a model that represents the key stages and events an employee experiences during their time with an organization — from recruitment and onboarding to development, promotion, leave, and eventual exit.

The number and nature of these stages can vary depending on the size of the organization and the duration of employment. Understanding the employee life cycle helps HR professionals and managers create a more supportive, efficient, and engaging work environment.



14. EQUALITY

Equality refers to the state in which individuals or entities are treated the same in relation to a specific attribute or standard, despite differences in other characteristics. It does not imply complete sameness (identity), nor is it based on vague resemblance (similarity).

In practice, equality recognizes shared rights, status, or treatment in a particular respect, while acknowledging diversity in other aspects. For example, saying that all employees are equal means they are entitled to the same fundamental rights and opportunities, regardless of their personal differences.

Examples:

- Two employees doing the same job with the same level of responsibility and performance receive the same salary, regardless of their gender, age, or background.
- All staff members, regardless of their position or seniority, are given the opportunity to attend professional development workshops and courses.
- During hiring, all candidates are evaluated based on their qualifications and experience, without discrimination based on race, disability, or other personal characteristics.



- [Equality, Equity, and Social Justice](#)
- [Equity vs. Equality](#)



15. EQUITY

Equity refers to fair treatment, access, and advancement of each person in an organisation, including fairness in pay, fairness in daily work experiences, and opportunities for advancement.

It's important to note the difference between equality and equity. Equity focuses on achieving equal outcomes and helping diverse groups achieve success and a higher quality of life by providing equal access to opportunities.

Examples:

- An employer provides individualized learning plans and resources based on employees' unique needs and career goals, recognizing that not everyone starts from the same place.
- Employees with significant caregiving responsibilities are offered flexible hours or compressed workweeks so they can balance work duties with family needs without sacrificing career progression.



Let's talk about equality and equity.



Image source: <https://www.equalture.com/blog/statistical-benefits-of-diversity-within-the-workplace/>, accessed July 17, 2025.

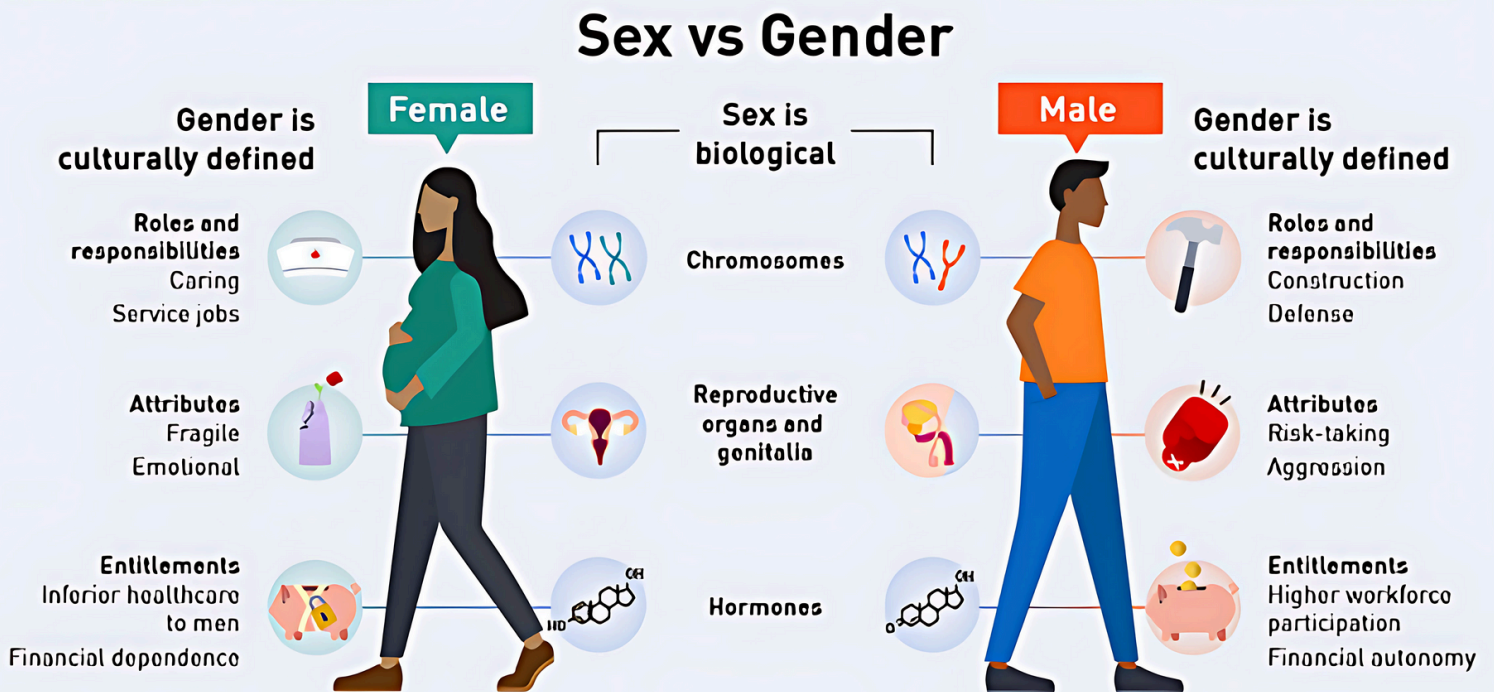
16. GENDER

Gender is a social and cultural idea about what it means to be a man, a woman, or another gender. It includes expectations about how people should look, act, and live based on how they are seen by society.

Gender is not the same as biological sex - it is shaped by history, culture, and personal identity, and it can change over time and across different places.



- Gender Roles, Gender Identity, Gender Expression
- Did You Know: The difference between sex and gender



THE LANCET

Source: Lancet Series on Gender Equality, Norms and Health. Paper 1, 2019

Image source: Lancet Series on Gender Equality, Norms and Health. Paper 1, 2019, accessed July 17, 2025.

17. GENDER ROLE

A gender role is a set of social expectations about how people should act, look, or live based on whether they are seen as male or female. These expectations are shaped by ideas about masculinity and femininity and can influence many parts of life - like how someone dresses, what job they choose, or how they behave in relationships.

Gender roles can be different in each culture and may also be influenced by a person's race or ethnicity. While gender roles are changing over time, they have often placed women in private, home-based roles and men in public, work-related roles.

Examples:

- Girls are often taught to be caring and expressive, while boys are encouraged to hide emotions and be assertive. These early lessons shape adult expectations, where women are seen as natural caregivers and men as strong leaders, reinforcing inequality at home and at work.
- Traditional roles cast men as providers and women as supporters. Men are expected to focus on careers and finances, while women are often assumed to prioritize family. This affects job choices and leadership perceptions, with men seen as more competent by default.
- Women face pressure to look attractive and behave gently, while men are discouraged from appearing too emotional or engaging in “feminine” activities. These norms limit self-expression and reinforce unequal expectations in relationships and public life.



Gender Roles, Gender Identity, Gender Expression



18. GENDER IDENTITY

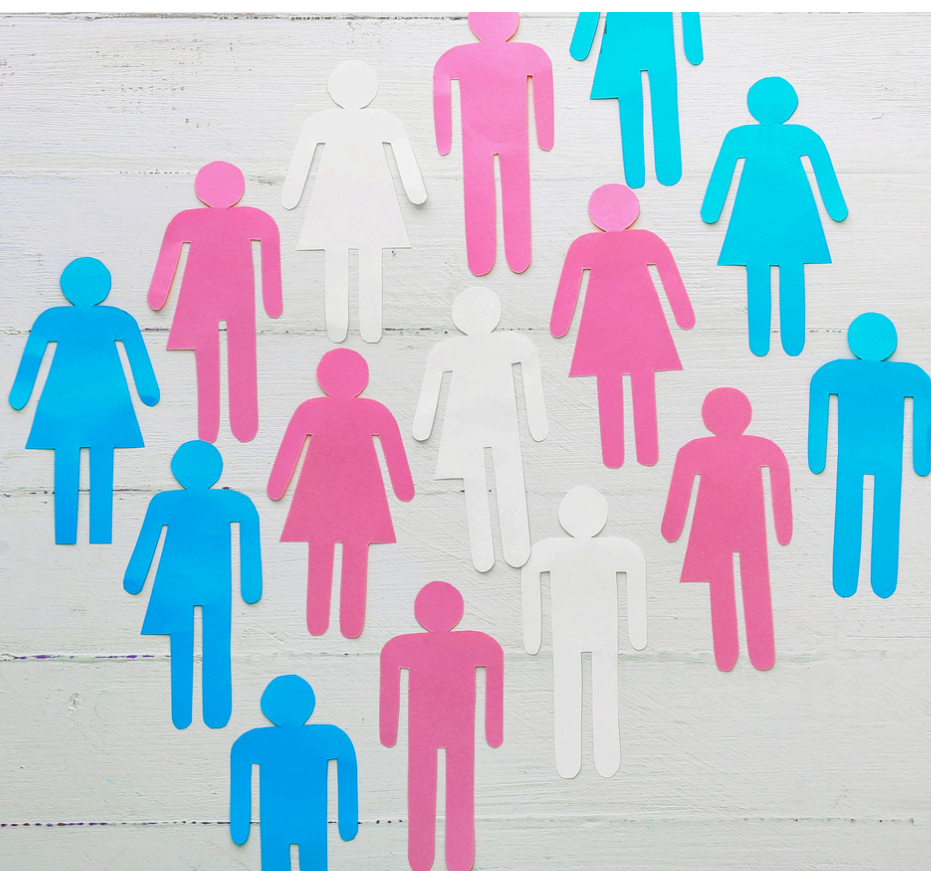
Gender identity refers to each person's deeply felt internal sense of their own gender — for example, identifying as male, female, both, neither, or something else. This internal experience may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth. It is distinct from gender expression, which is how a person outwardly presents their gender through appearance, behavior, and mannerisms.

Examples:

- A company updates its onboarding documents to include more than just “male” and “female” options when asking about gender, allowing employees to self-identify in a way that reflects their gender identity.
- An employee includes their pronouns (e.g., they/them, she/her, he/him) in their email signature to reflect their gender identity and to encourage a culture of respect and visibility for all gender identities.



Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

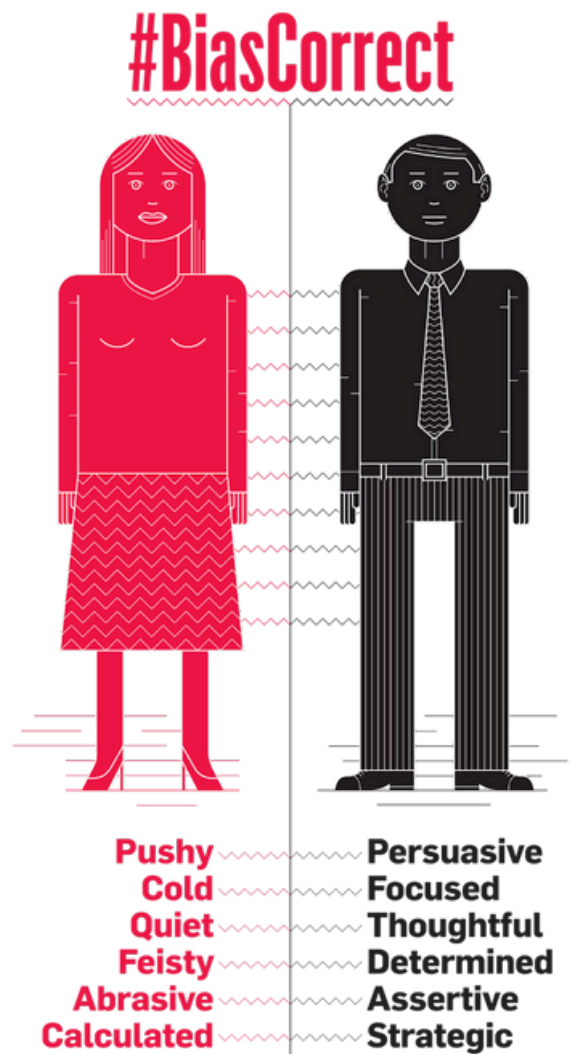


19. GENDER BIAS

Gender bias means treating people unfairly or differently because of their gender. It often happens without realizing it and is based on stereotypes - like the idea that men are strong leaders or that women are better at caring for others. Gender bias can affect who gets a job, who is listened to, or whose experiences are taken seriously.

Examples:

- In research, gender bias can happen when scientists only study men's experiences but act like the results apply to everyone — even though women might have different experiences. Many medical studies are based mostly on male participants, which can lead to treatments that don't work as well for women, whose bodies may respond differently.
- A company chooses a male candidate over an equally qualified woman because they assume the woman might take maternity leave soon — even though she hasn't mentioned it.
- A woman in a leadership role may be described as "too bossy," while a man showing the same behavior is called "confident" or "strong."



Gender bias against women in academia and research (training video)

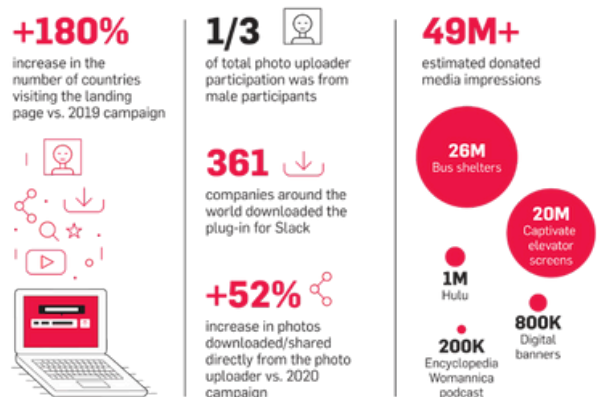


Image source: <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/infographic-biascorrect-campaign-results-show-theres-still-work-to-be-done/>, accessed July 17, 2025.

20. GENDER MAINSTREAMING

A globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation, and monitoring of programmes and projects.



[An essential guide to gender mainstreaming](#)

21. GLASS CEILING

The **glass ceiling** is an invisible barrier that prevents certain people — often women or members of minority groups — from advancing to higher positions in their workplace, even if they have the skills and experience. It's called "glass" because you can see the top jobs, but it's very hard to get there — as if something transparent is blocking the way.

Examples:

- A qualified woman is repeatedly passed over for promotion, while her less-experienced male colleagues are promoted into leadership roles.
- An employee from an ethnic minority group rarely sees anyone who looks like them in senior positions, even though many colleagues at lower levels are from diverse backgrounds.
- A working mother is not given important projects because her manager assumes she is too busy with family, even though she has not requested fewer responsibilities.



Image source: <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/infographic-biascorrect-campaign-results-show-theres-still-work-to-be-done/>, accessed July 17, 2025.



[A glass ceiling - or a broken ladder?](#)

22. HOMOPHOBIA

Homophobia encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward people who identify or are perceived as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual. It has been defined as contempt, prejudice, aversion, hatred, or antipathy, may be based on irrational fear, and may sometimes be attributed to religious beliefs. Homophobia is observable in critical and hostile behaviour, such as discrimination and violence, based on non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

Examples:

- A qualified employee who is openly gay is passed over for a promotion in favor of a less experienced colleague, with the reason being that their sexual orientation is viewed as "inappropriate" for a leadership role.
- A coworker makes repeated offhand comments about the LGBTQ+ community, including using slurs or mocking a colleague for their sexual orientation, creating a hostile work environment for those affected.
- An employee in a same-sex relationship is denied equal benefits, such as family leave or health insurance coverage for their partner, while employees in heterosexual relationships receive these benefits without issue.
- A coworker frequently makes inappropriate jokes about being gay, and when the employee expresses discomfort, others dismiss it, creating an unwelcoming and discriminatory atmosphere.



23. INCLUSION

Inclusion is a policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. It is about creating an environment where all team members, regardless of their differences, can thrive and fully participate.

Examples:

- A company allows employees to choose flexible work hours or work from home to accommodate parents with caregiving responsibilities. This ensures that all employees, regardless of family situation, can succeed without facing discrimination.
- A company provides gender-neutral bathrooms in their office, ensuring that all employees, including those who are transgender or non-binary, feel comfortable and included in the workplace.
- A company makes a conscious effort to hire people from various backgrounds, including different races, genders, and abilities, ensuring equal opportunity for all candidates and fostering a more inclusive work environment.



That Little Voice

24. INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive language is language that respects and acknowledges the diversity of people's identities and experiences, avoiding terms that exclude, stereotype, or marginalise individuals or groups. However, language related to identity, disability, culture, and other personal characteristics is always evolving, and what feels respectful or empowering to one person or community may not to another. There are no universal, one-size-fits-all rules for inclusive language; the best practice is to ask individuals or communities about their preferred terms and to respect their choices.

Person-first vs identity-first language

Person-first language (PFL) and identity-first language (IFL) are two approaches to referring inclusively to people with disabilities or other characteristics. The choice between them can be deeply personal and context-dependent.

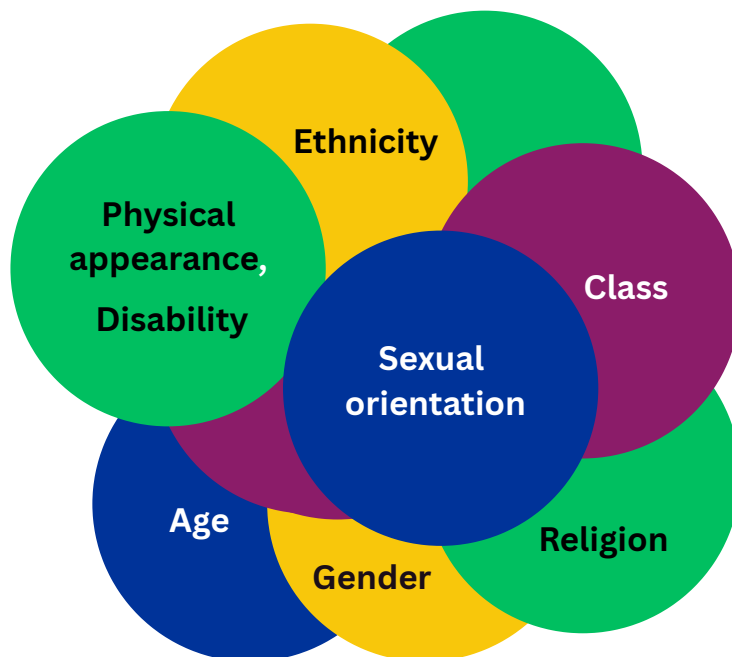
- **Person-first language** emphasises the individual before their condition or characteristic, using a structure like "person with [condition]." For example, "person with autism" highlights that the person is not solely defined by their diagnosis. The goal is to reduce stigma by affirming the individual's humanity and separating them from the condition. This approach is frequently preferred in medical, educational, and professional contexts.
- **Identity-first language**, on the other hand, places the identity or condition before the person, using a structure like "[condition] person." For example, "autistic person" reflects the view that autism is an integral and inseparable part of someone's identity. The goal is to affirm the identity as something to be proud of and to reject the idea that it is inherently negative. This form is often seen as empowering and is commonly preferred within specific communities, such as many autistic and Deaf individuals.

25. INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality helps us understand how different parts of a person's identity - like gender, race, age, or disability - work together to create unique experiences of both discrimination and privilege. It shows how these factors overlap and impact how people are treated in society. Since everyone's identity is made up of different parts, each person's experience is different.

Examples:

- A Black woman might face both racism and sexism. While both Black people and women experience discrimination, her experience is different from that of a Black man or a white woman because of the combination of her race and gender. She may face unique challenges in the workplace or in society due to these overlapping identities.
- An older person with a disability might encounter challenges that are different from a younger person with a disability or an older person without a disability. For example, in a job market, older disabled individuals may face ageism combined with ableism, making it harder for them to find employment or access services.
- A working-class LGBTQ+ person may have a different experience than a wealthy LGBTQ+ individual. They may face additional struggles related to economic inequality, such as less access to healthcare or fewer job opportunities, along with the challenges that come with their sexual orientation.
- A Muslim woman who wears a hijab might face both racial discrimination and religious discrimination. Her experience of prejudice could differ from that of someone who is Muslim but doesn't wear a hijab or someone who is of a different race.



26. LEAKY PIPELINE

The leaky pipeline is a term used to describe how women and other underrepresented groups gradually leave a career path — especially in fields like science, technology, or leadership — before reaching top positions. At each stage (education, early career, promotions), more people “leak out,” meaning fewer of them make it to the highest levels. This leads to less diversity at the top, even if many started out.

Examples:

- A company hires men and women in equal numbers, but most women leave before reaching management roles due to a lack of support for work-life balance.
- After starting a family, a woman finds it difficult to return to a demanding full-time role because of rigid schedules, leading her to step back from her career path.
- Young women in tech jobs feel isolated in male-dominated teams, and without mentorship or advancement opportunities, they leave the field entirely.



[The Leaky Tech Pipeline](#)

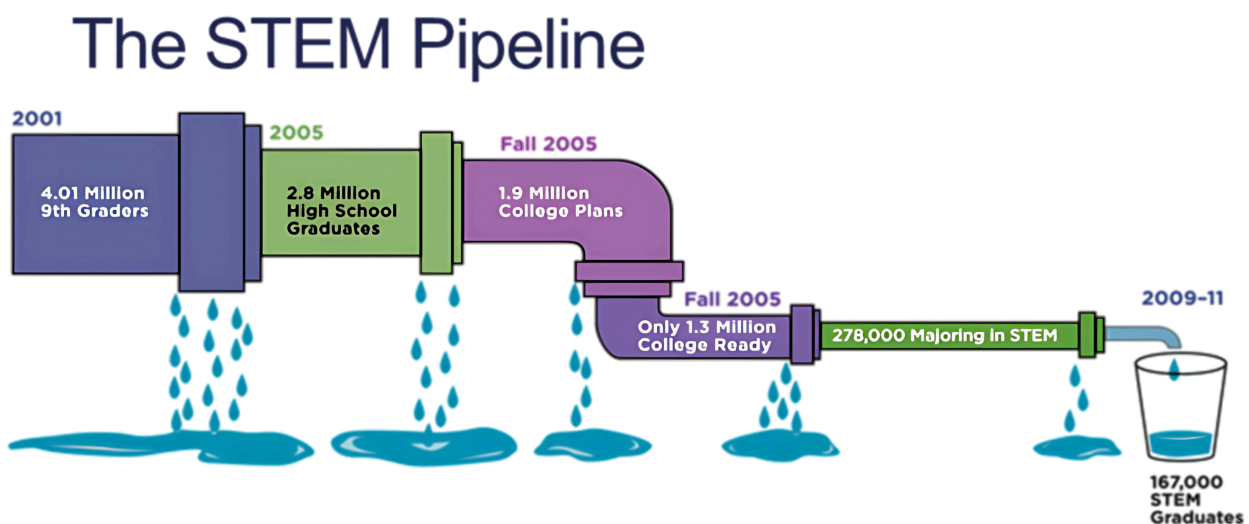


Image source: <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/infographic-biascorrect-campaign-results-show-theres-still-work-to-be-done/>, accessed July 17, 2025.

27. NEURODIVERGENT

Neurodivergent describes people whose brains function and process information differently.

It is a non-medical umbrella term that refers to the diversity in mental functioning within the human population. The term is often associated with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or other neurological differences.



Neurodiversity Term Definitions
(What is Neurodivergent & Neurotypical?)

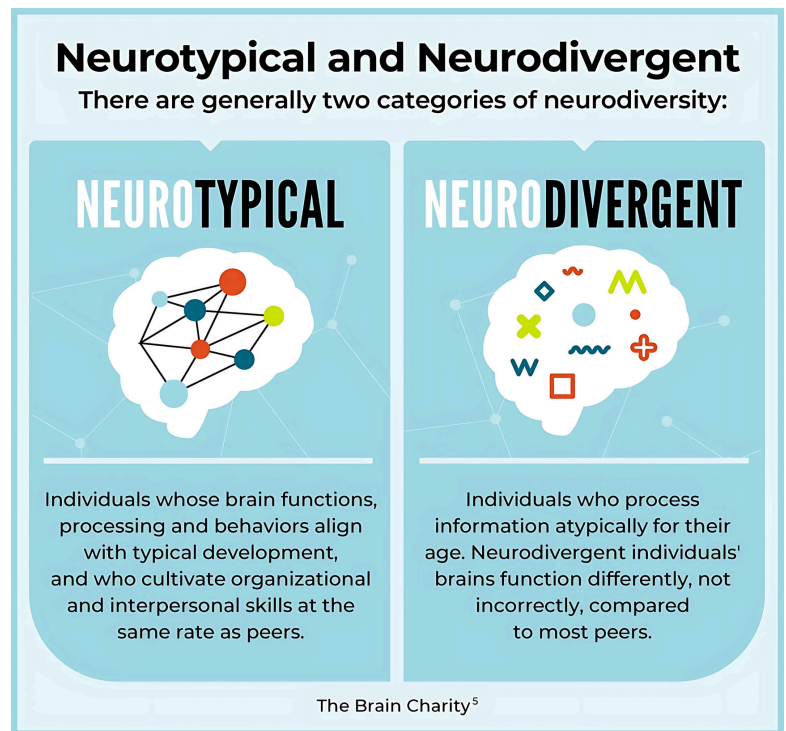


Image source: <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/infographic-biascorrect-campaign-results-show-theres-still-work-to-be-done/>

28. NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity recognizes that people's brains naturally work in different ways. We differ in how we think, learn, and process information.

Some people are neurodivergent—a term often used to describe those with neurological differences in brain processes from what is socially considered typical (e.g., people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia). Others may be described as neurotypical. However, these terms are understood and used in different ways, and their meanings are subject to ongoing discussion within both academic and activist communities.



What is Neurodiversity? – BBC Ideas

29. PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT

In DEI strategies, focusing on person-environment fit shifts attention away from viewing disability or difference as a problem within the individual. Instead, it emphasises how the workplace environment can be designed or adapted to meet diverse needs.

This approach promotes recognition that barriers often arise from the environment rather than the person's abilities, encourages the creation of accessible, flexible, and inclusive spaces that allow everyone to succeed, and values diverse ways of working, thinking, and communicating. It also supports proactive adjustments, rather than expecting individuals to "fit in" or adapt on their own. By prioritising person-environment fit, organisations foster equity by removing systemic barriers and enabling all employees to contribute authentically and fully.

For example, a company with an open-plan office finds that a neurodivergent employee struggles to focus due to sensory sensitivity. Rather than expecting the employee to cope, the company provides noise-cancelling headphones, flexible seating, and remote work options. This enhances person-environment fit by tailoring the environment to support the individual, rather than attempting to "fix" the person.



30. POLITICAL BELIEF

A political belief is what someone thinks is best for how society should be run. It includes opinions about the government, laws, rights, economy, and how power should be used. People can share general beliefs and belong to political parties. Others may not follow any party, but still have strong political views. Political beliefs can be influenced by family, education, media, or personal experiences. They can change over time and may vary on different issues.

31. RELIGIOUS BELIEF

A religious belief is a person's trust or conviction in the core ideas of a religion — such as believing in a god or a set of teachings. Not everyone who follows a religion believes exactly the same things. Religions can have different groups (denominations) like Catholics or Protestants in Christianity. Respecting religious differences means not treating people badly because of their beliefs and making space for everyone to practice their religion — for example, offering kosher food or scheduling around prayer times.



32. SEX

Biological sex refers to the physical characteristics of a person's body that are related to reproduction and development. These include things like chromosomes (such as XX or XY), hormone levels (like estrogen or testosterone), reproductive organs (like ovaries or testes), and other physical traits such as body hair or voice pitch.

Most people are assigned as female or male at birth based on these characteristics. However, not everyone fits neatly into these two categories. Some people are born with a mix of biological traits that don't clearly match what is typically considered male or female.

So, while we often think of sex as simply "female" or "male," biological sex is actually more complex. There is a wide range of traits, and they don't always line up in the same way for every person. In reality, sex exists on a spectrum.



Sex Determination: More Complicated Than You Thought

33. SEXISM

Sexism means treating someone unfairly or disrespectfully because of their sex or gender. It is often based on the belief that one gender (usually men) is better or more capable than others. Sexism can affect anyone, but it most often impacts women and girls. It can be obvious — like saying women shouldn't lead — or more subtle, like always asking women to take notes in meetings. Sexism can happen in everyday life, at work, in the media, and in laws or policies.

Examples:

- A qualified woman is passed over for a promotion because her boss assumes she might have children soon and be "less committed."
- A man and a woman do the same job with the same level of experience, but the man earns more because of assumptions that he is the "main breadwinner."
- Colleagues make jokes that stereotype women as overly emotional or men as always aggressive.
- A woman is told during a performance review to "smile more" or "dress better" rather than receiving feedback about her actual work performance.



- Sexism
- Sexism and the English language

34. SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A component of identity that includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction. A person may be attracted to men, women, both, neither, or to people who are genderqueer, androgynous, or have other gender identities. Individuals may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual, among others.



Sexual orientation and gender identity

35. UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious bias (also called implicit bias) refers to attitudes or stereotypes that we hold about other people without realizing it. These biases happen outside of our awareness and often stem from cultural messages, personal experiences, or media influences — even if we believe we treat everyone equally. Because these biases are unconscious, we don't intend to be unfair. But they can still affect how we think, feel, and act — especially in situations like hiring someone for a job, working on a team, or meeting someone new. Unconscious bias can lead to unfair treatment, microaggressions, and discrimination — even in people who genuinely want to be inclusive.

Examples:

A teacher may unintentionally call on boys more often than girls in math class, believing boys are “naturally better” at math — even if the teacher consciously supports gender equality.

During a job interview, a manager may feel a stronger connection with a candidate who went to the same university, and rate them more positively than others with equal qualifications.

A person might assume that someone with a foreign-sounding name doesn't speak the local language well — even if that person was born and raised in the country.



Peanut Butter, Jelly and Racism (3 minutes),
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