DEFINITIONS AND SHARED LANGUAGE

These definitions of key anti-oppression terms were generated by AORTA (Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance) or adapted from the work of Dismantling Racism Works, Suzanne Pharr, Merriam-Webster dictionary, or the Johns Hopkins University LGBTQ Life Glossary.

Ally
An action or an approach by a person to confront oppression, especially when they aren't the direct target of the oppression. We might think of ally not as a stagnant label or identity, but more as a verb: a constant opportunity for solidarity.

Anti-Black Racism
"If there's one thing missing in our country, it's an acknowledgment of the broad humanity of Black folks. Racism—and anti-Black racism in particular—is the belief that there's something wrong with Black people." -Ta-Nehisi Coates
Underlies the Black/white racial dichotomy we have in the US, and then situates other people of color on that spectrum. Reinforced by systemic domination and violence.

Assimilation
Taking on the appearance and values of the dominant culture.

Cisgender
Someone who was assigned a sex at birth that culturally matches their gender identity. Someone who is not trans. For instance, when someone was born, the doctor said, 'Congratulations! It's a girl' and today that person still identifies as a girl or woman.

Cultural Appropriation
Taking a symbol or cultural practice out of its original context and placing it somewhere else, making it devoid of its original meaning. The people who are doing the extraction often are benefiting, whether through personal gain, financial gain, or entertainment.
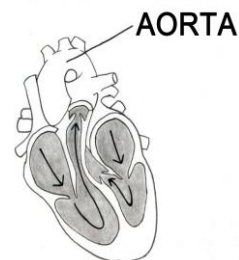
Defined Norm
A standard of being or behavior that is backed up with institutional and economic power as well as institutional and individual violence.

Diversity
Composed of people from various unique characteristics, backgrounds and beliefs. Characteristics may include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, or political beliefs, among others. The term has come under scrutiny for being a too-neutral term that does not address power disparities or acknowledge systemic violence. The term has also been linked to a similarly too-neutral term—multiculturalism—that was frequently used in the 1990s.

Equity
A set of social justice practices, rooted in a solid understanding and analysis of historical and present-day oppression, aiming towards a goal of fairness for all.

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Fatphobia/Sizeism/Anti-fat oppression
A set of beliefs and practices that disparage, stigmatize, and discriminate against people who are fat. Fatphobia leads to unequal access to (for example) health care, housing, education, job opportunities, and physical safety for fat people. Often intersects with issues of gender, class, race, and ability.

Gender
A socially constructed system that classifies and assigns qualities of femininity and masculinity to people. The attributes of gender can change over time and differ between cultures. Terms for gender identity include woman, man, genderqueer, gender noncomforming, and agender.

Homophobia and heterosexism
Fear of and violence towards people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (LGBTQ*) or express traits that are considered queer. This can also include more subtle normalization of heterosexual relationships, culture, and family structures, and the "othering" of LGBTQ people.

Individual Solutions
Seeking to create change at an individual level rather than at the level of social change.

Internalized Oppression
The devaluing of one's own identity and culture according to societal norms.

Intersectionality
A term coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, building on a history of Black feminist thought, to describe the combined oppressions experienced in particular by Black women. Crenshaw argued that looking at sexism and racism as completely separate issues distorts our understanding of both, and does not give us the tools to accurately describe the specific manifestations of oppression resulting from the intersection of racism and sexism. Intersectionality is now used to describe the ways that multiple systems of oppression (including and beyond racism and sexism) inform each other in the experiences of those impacted by them.

Islamophobia/Islamo-racism
Fear of and violence towards people who are Muslim or are interpreted as Muslim. Islamophobia is supported by the normalization of dominant Christian culture and practices.
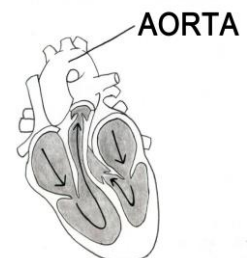
Microaggression
An indirect, subtle, or unintentional remark or incident that communicates and reinforces prejudice against members of a marginalized group. Microaggressions are commonplace and are often experienced many times per day, creating a cumulative demoralizing impact on those who experience them.

Oppression
The denial, threatening, or constraint of someone's power and/or dignity. Systemic oppression manifests in our social, political, and economic structures and institutions in ways that organize power to advantage some groups of people over others.

The Other
Those who are not part of the defined norm, seen as different, exotically attractive, lacking, or wrong.

Participatory Democracy
Broad and meaningful engagement of members or constituents in the direction and operation of all levels of a project, organization, or society. People having the power to make decisions and create policies that impact their lives.

Patriarchy
A historic and contemporary system in which people who are considered men are afforded more political, economic, social, and cultural power than people who are considered women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.

People Of Color (POC)
People who identify as not white. Black, Brown, Multiracial, and Indigenous peoples, all representing different lineages, skin tones, lived experiences, and identities, may identify as People Of Color.

Privilege
A set of rights, favors, advantages, or immunity specially granted to one individual or group, and withheld from another. This includes access to systems and institutions sanctioned by the state, as a result of historical and legal processes that have afforded power and influence to one's identity group. At times for those who hold it, this might feel less like additional perks and advantages and more like the absence of experience of disadvantage, discrimination, and violence.

Queer
Term reclaimed by queer communities to describe people who have a non-normative sexual orientation or gender identity—can include lesbians, gays, bisexual people, transgender people, and a host of other identities.

Solidarity
Seeking unity in common interests. Mutual support within a group and across groups. Showing up for each other in word and action.

Stereotyping
Defining people through beliefs about a group of which they are a part, usually a product of ignorance about the diversity and potential power differences among individuals within any given group.
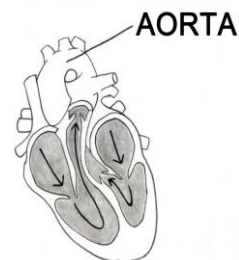
Structural Change
Refers to major changes—within society, institutions, political systems—that affect the way that authority, responsibility, decision-making, privilege are distributed within them.

Transgender
An umbrella term for those individuals whose gender identity does not match with their assigned sex. Transgender people may identify as straight, gay, bisexual, or some other sexual orientation. Sometimes shortened as trans or trans*.

Transphobia

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A historic and contemporary system that creates and rewards hostile responses to perceived violations of gender norms and/or to challenges to the gender binary, which affects the economic, political, cultural, and social lives of those who transgress traditional gender expression.

Tokenism
A limited number of people from non-dominant groups are chosen for (potentially prestigious) positions in order to deflect criticism of oppression.

White Fragility
A term coined by Robin DiAngelo in 2011 as "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves [by people who identify as white]. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium." (http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/view/249)

Whiteness/ White Identity
White identity is a legal and historical construct for segregating and screening groups in American society. Over the last three hundred years, it has become a "default" racial category, against which other racial groups are compared, marginalized, and deemed transgressive. Whiteness functions as currency for access to the systems and institutions that are sanctioned by the state. Culturally, white identity represents a traumatic disconnection and dislocation from cultural practices for those with European ancestry; and importantly, a rationalization for dehumanizing acts committed against non-whites.

White People
An umbrella term for people who are not currently racialized in the United States. This grouping includes a wide range of ethnicities, religions, class backgrounds, and lived experiences. There are many nuances to this classification; some people currently considered white might come from an ethnic group that at one time experienced ethnic discrimination in the U.S. or abroad.

White Supremacy
A historic and contemporary system in which people who are considered white are afforded more political, economic, social, and cultural power than people who are not considered white.

Xenophobia
A historic and contemporary system in which people who are considered part of the homeland are afforded more political, economic, social, and cultural power than people who are considered immigrants, refugees, or outsiders.