



## Working Glossary of Frequently Used Terms

**Please note that these are working definitions.** We welcome suggestions and feedback at [darcy@youthpassageways.org](mailto:darcy@youthpassageways.org). Sources include: 2013 Anne Braden Anti-Racist Training Program, Etymonline, dictionary.com, Eleanor Hancock of White Awake, [TeenTalk.ca](http://TeenTalk.ca) Learn About Gender Identity, Planned Parenthood, Anti-Definition League, Access Living, and Class Action.

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**Ableism:** the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require ‘fixing’ and defines people by their disability. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies entire groups of people as ‘less than,’ and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations of people with disabilities. For more, see [Ableism 101 - What is Ableism? What Does it Look Like?](#)

**Agent:** someone who experiences agency within the dominant culture based on a particular identity, meaning that they are able to (knowingly or unknowingly) reap advantage based on the system in ways that targets are not. An agent group has the power to define and name reality, and determine what is normal, real and correct.

**Ancestor:** One who has gone before. For the purposes of this course, when we use the term “ancestor” we are referring to human and non-human beings to whom we are connected by blood (we share DNA), kinship tie (like marriage or adoption), path (such as a religious faith or profession), or collective impact (significant social identity markers we share with them).

**Ancestral recovery:** (Recovery—“to regain health or consciousness”) a multigenerational process, whereby those long-disconnected from the stories and traditions of their ancestors regain a relationship with their ancestors, including both the healthy aspects and the wounded aspects, as part of restoring health to ourselves, our lineages, and our communities.

\*Note: the emphasis of this course is on cultivating a relationship with our ancestors, not on adopting specific cultural forms. Whether or not we adopt traditions or practices our ancestors used, restoring the relationship opens up new possibilities for health and balance.

**Anti-Semitism:** Belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews. For more, see <https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>.

**Capitalism:** An economic system in which the means of production and distribution (of goods and services necessary for human life and society) are privately or corporately owned and the operations are funded by profits. This is in contrast to an economic system in which common resources are managed by all who depend upon them, with an eye on how these resources can be maintained sustainably for generations to come, or even with an understanding of how humans are in relationship with all other forms of life.

The nature of capitalism is to perpetually accumulate wealth in fewer and fewer hands (only when the basic systems of capitalism are interrupted are resources distributed in the opposite direction; from few to many). Capitalism prioritizes short term profit above anything else, including the basic framework of life itself; in this way, capitalism is inherently unstable and unsustainable. (see this [Fast Company](#) article for more; also [What Is Capitalism](#) by Jacobin)

**Classism:** when someone is treated differently—better or worse—because of their class (or perceived class). Classism is similar in many ways to racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression. Classism appears individually through attitudes and behaviors, institutionally through policies and practices, and culturally through norms and values. Like other forms of oppression and prejudice, it includes the tendency to make sweeping generalizations or stereotypes about people, such as “Poor people are lazy,” as well as subtler forms of exclusion or discrimination. For more, see [About Class](#).

**Cisgender:** Cisgender is a term to describe someone whose gender matches what they were assigned at birth. For example, they were assigned female at birth based on being born with a vagina and know themselves to be female.

**Cis-Heteropatriarchy:** a system of society in which cis people, men, and heterosexuals (especially heterosexual cismen) are privileged, normative, dominant, and hold disproportionate institutionalized power.

**Colonization:** The practice of invading other lands and territories for the purpose of settlement and/or resource exploitation. As an ongoing practice, colonialism is the system of rule of one people over another, in which sovereignty is operated over the colonized at a distance, often through the installation of settlements of colonists in the related process of colonization. Both words derive from the Roman term *colonia*, initially definable as a settlement of citizens in conquered territory. (drawn from David Mattingly and *Unsettling Ourselves* reader)

**Cultural appropriation:** Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission. Results from the assumption of a dominant culture’s right to take cultural elements from marginalized or oppressed groups.

**Cultural exchange:** Sharing in cultural elements from someone else’s culture. Takes place within a context of mutual understanding, equality, and respect, and reciprocity between the parties.

**Cultural protocol:** Written or unwritten, formal or informal, explicit or implicit, tenets for behavior and sharing of cultural elements (songs, stories, dances, etc.), supporting order and upholding values in a community.

**Decolonization:** An ideology that calls for the ending of colonialism and the liberation of the colonized. In order to be liberated, the process of colonization must be reversed—beginning with the mental

aspects and moving towards the physical. While decolonization can be an act of cultural revitalization, it also requires the transforming of government and social systems based on control and exploitation. This is a struggle that has historically involved peaceful negotiations and/or violent revolt and armed struggle by the native population. The UN has stated that these are legally justified actions, and that in the process of decolonization, there is no alternative to the principle of self-determination.

**Earth-based traditions:** Practices that grow, or have grown, out of connection with a particular place, and the natural cycles experienced in that place

**Empire:** A geopolitical entity (a “state” of some kind) that asserts control over very wide territories and many different peoples largely without their consent. Incorporation into an empire is often fought fiercely, which indicates the non-consensual nature of an empire. Empires generally rule vast areas and huge populations via comparatively small numbers of imperial servants. (summarized from *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* by David J. Mattingly)

**Gender fluid:** Gender fluid may refer to a gender which varies over time. Someone who identifies as gender fluid may fluctuate between genders or express multiple genders at the same time. Their gender may also vary at random or vary in response to different circumstances.

**Gender expression:** Gender expression is about how someone acts and presents themselves to world. For example does someone wear makeup? Do they wear dresses? Do they prefer to only wear pants? Gender expression is not related to someone’s gender or sex, but rather about personal behaviours and interests. A cis man may wear nail polish or a trans woman may not like wearing dresses. Sometimes people don’t express their gender in the way they would like to because they don’t feel safe to do so. This is why it’s important to not assume someone’s gender just based on how they look, but rather by checking in with them. Gender expression is also deeply tied to culture. What Euro-Canadian culture codes as being either ‘male’ or ‘female’ can be different than what other cultures may code as being ‘male’ or ‘female’.\*

**Gender identity:** How a person feels and who they know themselves to be when it comes to their gender. There are more than two genders, even though in our society the genders that are most recognized are male and female (called the gender binary) and usually are based on someone’s [anatomy](#) (the genitals they were born with). This is a gender assignment and it is based on an assumption that someone’s genitals match their gender. However, gender isn’t about someone’s anatomy, it is about who they know themselves to be. There are many different gender identities, including male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit, third gender, and all, none or a combination of these.

**Gender neutral:** Someone who feels they are neither male or female may identify as gender neutral.

**Gender queer:** Someone may identify as genderqueer if their gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This identity is often related to or in reaction to the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

**Indigenous:** Indigenous peoples, also known as first peoples, aboriginal peoples or native peoples, are ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently. Groups are usually described as indigenous when they maintain traditions or other aspects of an early culture that is associated with a given region. (Wikipedia)

### [UN Fact Sheet: Who Are Indigenous People?](#)

According to the UN the most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define indigenous peoples.

This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in a number of human rights documents.

Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

- Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

Indigenous peoples are the holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and possess invaluable knowledge of practices for the sustainable management of natural resources. They have a special relation to and use of their traditional land. Their ancestral land has a fundamental importance for their collective physical and cultural survival as peoples.

**Intersectionality:** The idea all of our kinds of [privilege](#) interact. Different oppressions can build on each other, or they can affect each other in really complicated ways. In some cases, even though you have a lack of privilege, you may be using your other privileges to oppress others in the same marginalized category as you. Developed originally by Kimberle Crenshaw to describe their particular intersection of race and gender for Black women; frequently co-opted without sourcing.

**Microaggressions:** Verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

**Non-binary:** Someone who does not identify as a man or a woman, or solely as one of those two genders. It's often used as an umbrella term for identities that fall outside the male/female gender binary. Being non-binary means different things to different people, so this definition is purposely broad.

**Neurodiversity:** a term used to refer to variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense. It was coined in 1998 by sociologist Judy Singer.

**Neurotypical:** individuals of typical developmental, intellectual, and cognitive abilities, typically in contrast to individuals who live with autism, are on the spectrum, or who have other developmental differences.

**Settler:** Members of a settler colony, as defined above. Settlers materially benefit from living on occupied land, however do not necessarily all benefit equally.

**Settler colonialism:** While colonization involves invasion of “other lands”, distance is not necessarily a defining feature of settler colonialism, particularly when these settler colonies organize to form their own independent state (such as the case in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and other). In this case, the process of colonization and the relationships of colonialism remain in tact through established relationships of exploitation and control of settler over colonized, even though the settlers may live upon the colonized land for multiple generations.

A defining feature of settler colonialism is genocide. The goal of this type of colonialism is to invade and replace the original population with a new, settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty. (see [Global Social Theory](#) for more)

**Spiritual Bypass:** A psychological defense mechanism that encourages an individual to shield themselves from disturbing aspects of their inner or outer world by focusing on more comfortable spiritual concepts such as unity, love, and oneness.

**Syncretism:** The amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. The blending of animistic local beliefs and traditions with Christianity under the forces of colonization is an example of this.

**Target:** a member of a non-dominant social identity group who experience marginalization, discrimination, and/or exploitation.

**Trancestor:** An ancestor, one who has come before, that transcends the gender binary. These are both human ancestors, typically revered in our lineages before cisheteropatriarchy, as well as other-than-human kin who defy the male/female dichotomy.

**Transgender:** Someone whose gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth might identify as transgender. Sometimes trans or transgender gets used as an umbrella term for gender diverse people. However, not everyone uses it to describe themselves. When in doubt ask, and always honour someone’s personal terms when it comes to gender identities.

What do we mean assigned at birth? Think about one of the first things the doctor (or midwife) says when someone is born, “It’s a girl” or “It’s a boy.” This is gender assignment and it is based on an assumption that someone’s genitals match their gender. However, we know this isn’t always the case and that each of us gets to decide what gender we know our selves to be. It may not align with the genitals we are born with or be part of the gender binary (male-female). For example, someone may be born with a vagina but know themselves to be male.

**Transphobia:** the fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn’t conform to traditional gender roles. Transphobia can prevent transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people from living full lives free from

harm. Transphobia can take many forms, including: negative attitudes and beliefs, aversion to and prejudice against transgender people, irrational fear and misunderstanding, disbelief or discounting pronouns or gender identity, derogatory language and name-calling, and bullying, abuse, and violence. For more, see [What's Transphobia? | Facts About Transphobic Discrimination](#).

**Two-Spirit:** A modern English term that an Indigenous person might identify as that comes from the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples in Canada/Turtle Island/North America. It can mean a person who walks between genders; one who carries the gifts of both males and females, or one who is gender unique (not specific to any gender) and/or as a way to identify as 2STLGBQ+. When Europeans arrived in North America, they introduced homophobia and transphobia to many Indigenous nations and dishonoured the idea of what it means to be Two-Spirit. Today, many Indigenous Peoples are reclaiming the ancient understanding that there are more than two genders.

**Turtle Island:** A non-colonial term used to describe what is known as North America from Baffin Island in the north and including Central America in the south, from the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe creation stories. (Pegi Eyers)

**White supremacy:** An historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white people and nations of the European continent and/or of European descent; for the purpose of maintaining and defending an international system of wealth, power, and privilege. (see [What is White Supremacy?](#) by Elizabeth Martinez for more)

First formalized through law in the 17th century, this new legal construct - which established new parameters of privilege and exploitation - divided laborers (of primarily European and African origin) in order to protect the social standing and wealth of the colony elites. (see [Birth of a White Nation](#), by Jacqueline Battalora)

White supremacy has continued to operate, from the colonial period up to the present, as the essential divide-and-rule strategy upon which capitalism depends in order to perpetuate itself. (see [Chris Crass](#) selected quotes for more).