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DE&I: Good Terms to Know

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1. Introduction

Background Context

Diversity is one of Babbel's core values. It's a strategic advantage for the company and lives at the heart of our work in language learning. But we've still got room for growth. In our journey toward building an anti-discriminatory company, we want to make sure that everyone – our teams, partners, learners and audience – feels seen, included and valued. And that's why we're committed to making our content more inclusive.

These guidelines were developed by **inclusive content and design strategist, Sandra Camacho**, in close partnership with a global cross-functional team of 40+ people across Didactics, Creative Ops, Marketing, Brand, Product and P&O.

Babbel believes this information, and resources like this, should be perceived as a public good, critical for every sector and every workplace. These products stand to strengthen internal diversity and equity initiatives across workforces, improving how we learn, interact and engage with one another. As such, Babbel has made this **publicly available.**

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Extensive research was conducted to inform the development of this resource. A comprehensive audit of Babbel's assets, training materials and internal documentation was carried out to contextualize the best practices, source relevant examples and understand use cases and practical applications. Interviews were conducted with experts across intersectional identities and areas of expertise, including Max Masure (gender identity and design), Jourdan Saunders (disability, speech language pathology and branding) and Irina Ruskaova (neurodiversity, research and design). User research and testing was conducted with a panel of 6 language learners across intersectional identities to understand the needs and expectations in representation, gauge the relevance of best practices and test a selection of best practices and examples.

Key Sources: All In: Inclusive Marketing Guide, Marketing with Purpose Playbook, Racial Equity Tools, The Trans Language Primer, Conscious Language + Design | Conscious Style Guide, Diversity Style Guide, Disabled World, Disability Language Style Guide

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2. Foundations of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

A. Diversity versus Inclusion versus Equity

KEY DEFINITIONS

The terms diversity, equity and inclusion are often used interchangeably. But they have quite distinct definitions:

Diversity means the presence of a variety of identities, perspectives and backgrounds within a group of people.

It's like being invited to the party without having to chase after the invite

Inclusion means that the thoughts, perspectives, and beliefs of all people matter and that they are accepted and welcomed.

It's like having the music to dance to and not being judged for your moves

Equity means ensuring that everyone has the same level of access to information, resources and opportunities.

It's like being able to attend the dance without anyone blocking the entrance

WHAT ARE COMMON MYTHS ABOUT DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION?

MYTH #1	Equity means treating people equally.

Equality means giving everyone the same resources. **Equity, on the other hand, means distributing resources to people *based on their needs.*** It is about *fairness* for all people, regardless of their background or their identity. And this means breaking down barriers (e.g., racism, gender norms) that lead to unequal access to resources and opportunities. Let's take a look at a concrete example of riding a bike to put this into perspective:

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Let's start with the top panel of the image, which illustrates the concept of equality. You see a person in a wheelchair, a tall person, a medium-sized person, and a small child, who all receive the same average-sized, two-wheel bike. In this "equality" scenario, only one person (the medium-sized person) can ride the bike and get to their destination.

In the bottom panel, we see each person receive a bike adapted to each person's unique need. The person in the wheelchair gets a wheelchair bike, the tall person gets a tall bike, the medium-sized person gets an average-sized bike, and the small child gets a children's bike. **In this "equity" scenario, there are no more access barriers to riding a bike.** *Everyone* **can ride and get to their destination.**

MYTH #2	**Giving opportunities or advantages to a certain group means fewer opportunities for others.**
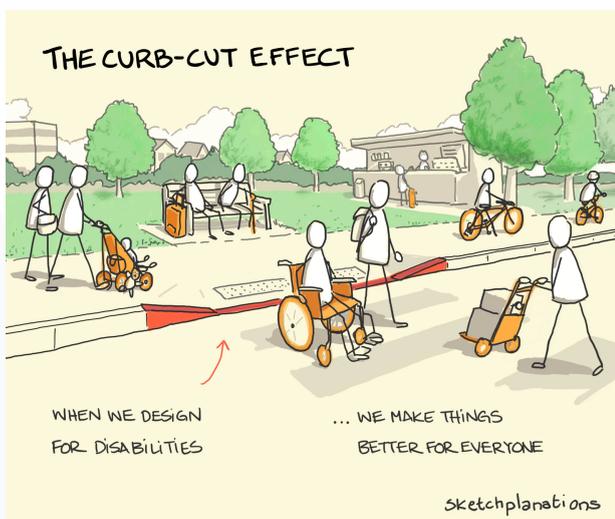
© Sketchplanations

Equity isn't a "zero-sum game" where one group benefits and another group loses as a result. We see this with curb cuts. Curb cuts (shown in the illustration on the left) were designed for people in wheelchairs. They allow smooth passage between the sidewalk and the street.

Curb cuts not only help people with disabilities fully participate in society. They also help people with strollers, people on skateboards and people on bicycles. A solution designed specifically for people with disabilities brings benefits to everyone. This shows that, with equity, everyone wins.

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MYTH #3	Diversity without inclusion or equity is better than nothing at all.

It's not possible to promote true diversity and address historic inequalities without inclusion or equity. Remember that diversity means the presence of people with different identities in a group. So what happens when everyone in the group doesn't have the same chance to speak or to participate (what we call inclusion)? And what if barriers to access and opportunities aren't lowered or removed (what we call equity)? Then, diversity becomes *performative*.

Performative diversity means embracing diversity only to give an appearance of change. As marginalized groups are still denied equal access to resources and opportunities, this means that no real change has taken place.

B. Identity Groups, Intersectionality and Positionality

WHAT IS IDENTITY?

Identity is a social construct.

Identity is created as a result of human interaction and experiences. Identities aren't universal or a natural "biological" part of you — they are constructed. You learn about your own identity and the identity of others *through* interactions with others. Your identity is also created through interactions. The fact that you "perform" your identity based on your interactions with others ends up inevitably *creating* that identity. The social norms, beliefs and practices of the society in which you live regulate your actions.

In simpler terms, identity is who you are.

Identity is a combination of labels (let's call them **"identity markers"**) that you use to represent or define yourself. Sometimes you share these identity markers with other people. In this scenario, you and these other people will be seen as belonging to the same "identity group" (also called an "affinity group"). Sometimes, these identity markers are unique to you.

> **Examples of Identity Markers:** Sex, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, ability, religion, spirituality, age, socio-economic status, language

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Certain identity markers are "fixed," meaning that they don't change. Others are fluid, can evolve over time and are culturally specific.

Your social identities influence your thinking and behavior.

Socialization is the ongoing process of adopting the norms and ideologies of society as your own. Society governs how you learn and how you think about ourselves and others. It guides how you interact with others and how you understand what is expected of you. It also influences your thoughts on what outcomes you'll face if you deviate from expectations.

Identity is also intersectional.

Your individual and unique combination of identity markers will have an impact on how you experience the world. Intersectionality is a term coined by feminist scholar and professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. It describes how marginalised identities can overlap with one another to create an experience of oppression, discrimination and/or disadvantages that is different from the sum of each of those identities.

Example: A Black woman might face discrimination from a business due to a combination of the two factors: her race *and* her gender. Why? Because the business does not discriminate against black men nor against white women.

The concepts of "ideological diversity" and "diversity of thought" will not be covered in these guidelines. You can't resolve systemic inequalities and promote inclusion without the presence of people across a diversity of identity markers.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race and ethnicity are sometimes used interchangeably, but they don't mean the same thing. Both are social constructs used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations.

Race is a social construct that categorizes people into groups that share certain physical traits (e.g. skin color, eye shape, hair texture). While race is usually associated with biology, it has no genetic basis. There's no evidence for the existence of biologically distinct human races. Not one characteristic, trait, or gene distinguishes all members of a given "race" from all members of another "race."

Definitions and categories of race have changed over time and differ from country to country. Race was first used to classify speakers of a common language and then people

who shared a national affiliation. By the 17th century, race adopted its modern-day definition of common physical traits.

Example: In the United States, the following racial categories are used: White (or Caucasian), Black, Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander.

Race was created and has been used as a tool of colonial oppression and resistance in both past and present. Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to resources and opportunities. It can also assign moral worth, cognitive ability, heritage and culture to people. While race isn't biological, racism is still real. We'll touch on racism and microaggressions in the section on "Power, Privilege and Bias."

Ethnicity is a broader term than race. It's a social construct that divides people into smaller social groups, which are called "ethnic groups" or "ethnicities." Shared characteristics can determine your ethnic group. Examples include a sense of group membership, language, political and economic interests, history, and a geographical base.

Examples: Haitians, Chinese people, Turks, Nigerians, Romani people, Jews, Arabs (Moroccan Arabs, Sudanese Arabs), Mexicans, Swedish people

Identifying language refers to the terms that you use to label a person's identity. Self-identification refers to the label that you attribute to yourself. For instance, in the case of race and ethnicity, you can self-identify as LatinX, Hispanic or Brazilian (or all the above).

People around the world ascribe different labels to groups of people based on shared racial and/or ethnic identities. These labels are constantly evolving over time, are constantly challenged and aren't universal. In the United States, people who don't self-identify as white are referred to as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and/or POC (People of Color). In the United Kingdom, BAME is the term used to refer to people who self-identify as Black, Asian and/or Middle Eastern.

NATIONALITY

Nationality refers to the legal state of being part of a nation whether by birth, naturalization or ties to a specific nation. It's sometimes used interchangeably with citizenship. The key difference is that nationality is a term used in international law, while citizenship is used within the state.

You can become a citizen if you are born on the territory of the state, which is known as birthright citizenship (or *jus soli*). You can also become a citizen if you're born to one or two parents who are citizens of the state, which is known as the principle of *jus sanguinis*.

Examples: A person born in Japan to German parents (*jus sanguinis*) has German nationality. A person born in the United States (*jus soli*) to Spanish parents has dual American and Spanish nationality. A Colombian person who immigrated to France and becomes a naturalized French citizen has dual French and Colombian nationality.

A person who doesn't have citizenship of any state is said to be stateless. For instance, a subset of the Kurdish population in Syria was stripped of their citizenship in the 1960s. While Syrian Kurds are considered to be ethnically Kurdish, they don't have Syrian nationality nor citizenship.

Note that nationality and citizenship are different from ethnicity and national identity.

Example: Consider very young children from Mexico who were brought to the U.S. with no legal documentation. These undocumented children grow up in the U.S. with little contact with their native country and culture. As a result, they identify as American. But from a legal standpoint, they are nationals of a different country and are ethnically Mexican.

A person who moves to a country to live there permanently is defined as an "immigrant." A "migrant" is a person who moves within a country or across an international border temporarily or permanently. A person who lives outside of their native country is known as an "expatriate" (or expat, for short).

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In daily use, these different terms tend to adopt racist and classist connotations. People often use the term "expat" to refer to people who are white and who have higher socioeconomic status. "Expat" is also used to describe people with qualified professions and those who hail from Western or Global North countries. On the other hand, terms like "migrant" and "immigrant" typically refer to the opposite: lower income and unqualified workers from non-Western or Global South countries. People who are undocumented, are seeking asylum or have refugee status are also called "immigrants."

LANGUAGE

A language is a structured system of communication used by humans, based on speech and gesture (spoken language), sign, or often writing.

Examples: German, Swahili, American Sign Language

There are a variety of ways that linguists categorize varieties of language. This includes:

Argot: An argot is a language primarily developed to "disguise" conversation, so others can't understand what you're saying.

Accent: An accent refers to how people in a particular area or country pronounce words. Dialect: A dialect is a way of speaking based on geographical or social factors. This includes the pronunciations, grammar and vocabulary that people use within a group.

Jargon: Jargon refers to words and phrases related to a specific activity or profession, such as a medical or scientific subject. Jargon helps people be more precise when referring to specific procedures, techniques and materials. Sometimes people use jargon to an excessive degree, often to conceal the truth or deceive or to exclude outsiders.

Slang: Slang is a very informal language or a vocabulary of terms used by a particular group of people or in a specific subculture. Slang terms can be invented words or those whose meanings are adapted to new senses. Slang often develops out of a subculture's desire to disguise — or exclude others from — their conversations. Subcultures often invent new slang as the mainstream population adopts older terms.

Vernacular: A vernacular is a native language or dialect spoken by regular people or "commoners" of a given country or region, such as Spanish, French, or Italian.

People can associate the way a person speaks to a specific socioeconomic status. This leads to an accent "bias." For instance, in Britain, the British accent most often featured in the media is "Received Pronunciation" (RP) or "The Queen's English." People see this accent, spoken by people of high socioeconomic status, as neutral,

DISABILITY

There is no single way to define disability – it's an umbrella term with different meanings across different people.

A **disability** is any condition of the body or mind that makes it difficult for a person to do activities in life and interact with the world around them. Another word for these conditions is "impairments." Impairments can be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or a combination of these. Note that a person doesn't have to have an impairment to be considered disabled. Simply being *perceived* as disabled is enough. Over 1 billion people in the world have apparent and non-apparent disabilities.

Apparent disabilities: Impairments that are visible to others, such as lower-body paralysis.

Non-apparent disabilities: Impairments that aren't immediately visible, such as chronic fatigue.

What are the different models of disability?

The **medical model** states that people are disabled by their impairments or differences.

The **social model** states that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. The social model is strongly endorsed by people with disabilities and their advocates.

Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets. Barriers can also be people's attitudes and behaviors, such as the assumption that disabled people can't do certain things. For instance, think of the last meeting or workshop you participated in. Someone who is deaf or blind may not have attended or contributed. This is most likely the case if the organizer didn't ask about accessibility needs or didn't make an effort to accommodate them. People may assume that people with disabilities can't participate. Or they may not even think about people with disabilities *at all*. This leads to exclusion.

What types of disabilities and/or impairments exist?

A disability may occur during a person's lifetime or may be present from birth. It can be permanent, temporary and situational. The image below shows these different variations. On the left, you see a person born with one arm (permanent impairment). In the middle, you see a person with a cast who has broken an arm (temporary impairment). And on the right, you see a new parent holding a child in one arm (situational impairment).

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Let's take a look at the most common categories of disability:

Vision: Decreased ability to see to a degree that causes problems not fixable by usual means, such as glasses or medication.

> **Examples:** Blind, colorblind or low-vision.

Hearing: Partial or total inability to hear.

> **Examples:** Deaf (when used as a cultural label, the D is capitalized) and hard-of-hearing.

Mobility/physical: Disability that affects movement ranging from gross motor skills, such as walking, to fine motor movement, involving manipulation of objects by hand.

> **Examples:** spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, amputation, and paralysis.

Cognitive/intellectual/learning/neurological: Certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills such as communication, self-help, and social skills. Subtypes include:

> **Aphasia:** difficulty speaking (finding words), reading, writing and/or understanding language
> **Autism:** social skills that differ from the majority of people, hyperfocus, repetitive behaviors, different communication style
> **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** different focusing styles, lots of energy
> **Dyslexia:** difficulty recognizing letters and words
> **Dyscalculia:** difficulty recognizing numbers and symbols
> **Memory loss:** difficult time remembering past events, new events, or both

Neurodiversity is a term used to describe variations in the human brain regarding perception, focus, social interactions, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense

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Chronic health conditions: Long-term health conditions with persistent effects that may not have a cure. These conditions can be "invisible" or "hidden" (meaning they aren't immediately apparent to others).

> **Examples:** HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), long COVID, diabetes, fibromyalgia, and heart disease.

Psychiatric/mental health: Conditions of mood or feeling states that are either short term or long term and can vary in severity.

> **Examples:** Depression, anxiety, personality disorders and schizophrenia

SEX, GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sex, gender and sexual orientation are ways to classify people's bodies, identities and sexualities. Your sex is about your body, your gender identity is who you feel you are, and your sexual orientation is who you desire. Note that these identities are all independent of one another. For instance, your sex doesn't determine your gender or your sexual orientation.

What is sex?

Sex is the classification of a person as "male," "female" or "intersex" at birth by medical institutions. The medical assignment of sex is based on (but not determined by) biological factors. These factors include a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external organs, secondary sex characteristics (e.g., body hair, bust, etc) and hormonal balances.

Sex itself is a social construct. It classifies different configurations of our bodies into two distinct and coherent categories: male and female. These binary categories are constructed as natural and biological. But they are created and upheld by the beliefs and views of society. They also don't take into account intersex people and natural sexual variations between male and female.

Who is considered intersex?

Intersex describes someone who is born with genitals, reproductive organs, chromosomes, and/or predominant hormones that don't fit into binary sex categorisations. Some intersex folks prefer to describe themselves as having "differences of sexual development" (DSD).

Endosex refers to a person who isn't intersex; a person born with sex characteristics that fit widely-held medical or social ideas for female or male bodies. Also known as dyadic.

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What is gender?

Gender is a complex combination of roles, expression, aesthetics, body configurations, identities, and social interactions. People in society tend to assign certain meanings to these factors. But how you embody and define gender varies from culture to culture and from person to person.

In many societies, gender is constructed as a **gender binary** of either male and female. The binary exists within our social systems — for instance, in the separation of male and female toilets. But you may not experience gender as binary (e.g., either male or female) or as a spectrum (e.g., something between male and female). You may see yourself as outside the gender system completely.

There are many societies around the world and in history that have embraced gender roles outside of the binary. There are over 150 pre-colonial Native American tribes that have acknowledged third genders in their communities. An example of this is "Two-Spirit" people, a label that is still used in Indigenous communities today.

What is gender identity?

Gender identity represents how you relate yourself to gendered categories or, in simpler terms, how you feel about your gender. Your gender identity may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth and it may not be apparent to others. Gender identity is fluid — it can fall in a continuum across female and male. It could be female, male or both. Or it could even fall outside of this continuum entirely.

Gender identity is split into two broad categories based on the medical assignment of sex:

Cisgender (often abbreviated as cis) is a term used to describe a gender identity that aligns with your assigned sex at birth.

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For example, if you were assigned as female at birth and also identify as a woman, you are cisgender. If you are a man who is cisgender, you can call yourself a cis man. If you are a woman who is cisgender, you can call yourself a cis woman.

Transgender (often abbreviated as trans), which is an umbrella term used to describe a gender identity that differs from the gender that you were assigned at birth. Transgender is an adjective and should not be used as a noun.

For example, if you were assigned male at birth but identify as female, you are transgender. If you are a man who is transgender, you can call yourself a trans man. If you are a woman who is transgender, you can call yourself a trans woman.

The term transsexual is a mostly outdated term, referring to trans people who underwent a medical transition and shouldn't be used, unless by the person themself.

Which gender identities fall under the umbrella of transgender?

Transgender includes many different identities that don't always align with what society says gender should be.

Nonbinary is an umbrella term with a few different gender identities under it. In simple terms, you can call yourself nonbinary if you identify as neither entirely male nor female. Nonbinary is an adjective and should not be used as a noun.

For example, you might identify as both genders ("bigender") or sometimes male and sometimes female ("genderfluid"). You might think of your gender identity as a protest against the whole gender system ("genderqueer").

You can also consider yourself nonbinary if you know that you aren't a woman nor a man but are currently unable to find a term that fits you.

Gender nonconforming (often abbreviated as GNC) means that you don't fully conform to society's expectations of a particular gender (including but not limited to expression or roles).

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Gender expansive means that your gender expands beyond the typical boundaries of the gender binary or gender spectrum. It's difficult to give it a specific definition because the possibilities are infinite. If you're gender expansive, you fall under the gender nonconforming umbrella. But you may or may not identify as transgender or nonbinary specifically.

Agender means that you don't identify with any gender. You may see yourself as completely outside any gender definition. You may even refuse the concept of gender. Identifying as agender doesn't mean you also identity as nonbinary and/or transgender.

The category of transgender may or may not include drag and crossdressers. In the case of drag queens and drag kings, some may consider their identity and gender expression to be separate from their drag work. Working as a drag performer does not necessarily mean that the performer identifies as trans.

What does it mean to transition?

Transitioning refers to the steps that you take to affirm your transgender identity. Trans men, women and nonbinary people may or may not transition physically, legally, or socially. Transitioning can include changing your name and dressing as you choose. It can mean taking hormones, having surgery, keeping or removing your body hair and so forth. Transitioning is a very individual process. It's based on your understanding of your relationship with gender and your access to transitioning within your culture.

How does gender expression differ from gender identity?

Gender expression is how you choose to express your gender identity outwardly. It can also be the dimensions of your expression that have gendered connotations in your culture. The ways that you express gender to the world can include but aren't limited to your name, pronouns, appearance, behavior, and/or body. Like gender identity, this expression is fluid. There's no right or wrong way to express your gender. Common gender expressions include:

> **Femme** refers to an outward expression of feminity (as understood within your culture), though it can be so much more. Men and women, as well as nonbinary people of all sexual orientations, can be femme if their presentation is feminine.

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Butch describes the degree of masculinity that you display. The term is often used by female, trans or nonbinary individuals with more masculine traits But a masculine person of any gender can also be described as butch. Butch has also been claimed as a nonbinary identity that is neither male nor female.

Androgynous refers to having an appearance that goes beyond feminine or masculine traits (as defined within your culture). It can also refer to blending gendered traits. Historically, it has mostly been used to refer to white, thin people.

What are gender pronouns?

Pronouns are the words that you use to refer to yourself, whether it's "he" (English), "she" (English) or "they" (English). It's best to ask someone directly what pronouns they use rather than making assumptions. But don't call them "preferred" pronouns — call them pronouns. Regardless of your gender, you can use any pronouns that you choose.

Examples of gender-neutral pronouns: "iel" (French), "elle" (Spanish), sier/xier (German), hen (Swedish)

What is misgendering and what happens if I misgender someone?

Misgendering someone is the act of attributing the wrong gender to a person. For example, calling trans women "men" or someone "it" intentionally. Or accidentally using a different pronoun than the one by which a person wishes to be referred to. If this happens, the best way to proceed is to thank the person for correcting you, correct yourself, and proceed with using the correct gender in the future.

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is your physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to members of the same gender, a different gender or no gender. In simpler terms, it means "who you desire."

Remember that sexual orientation is completely separate from gender. You can have any sexual orientation no matter what your gender is. Sexual orientation can be flexible or rigid and may change over time. A few examples of sexual orientations include:

Heterosexual: You're considered heterosexual if you're attracted to a person of a different gender. This is also known as straight. Being straight has no relation to gender identity. For example, a cis man who loves a trans woman is straight.

Lesbian: If you consider yourself to be a woman and you're attracted to other women, then you can call yourself a lesbian. You can be both trans and lesbian.

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Lesbian trans women are attracted to women, regardless of whether the women are cis or trans.

Gay: If you're attracted to someone of the same gender, you're considered gay. Remember that a trans person can be both trans and gay.

Bisexual: You're bisexual if you're attracted to more than one gender but not necessarily all possible genders. Bisexuality was historically understood as people who are sexually attracted to "both men and women." But the definition of bisexuality has grown over time. The understanding of gender and its possible manifestations is constantly evolving in society. The definition now includes not only its historical meaning but also a wide range of experiences. Polysexual is another term used to describe similar forms of attraction. It means that you're attracted to people of multiple genders.

Asexual: If you're asexual, it means that you don't experience sexual attraction. You may choose to engage in sexual behaviours for various reasons even while not experiencing sexual attraction. Asexuality is an identity and sexual orientation. It's not a medical condition.

Pansexual: You're considered pansexual if you are attracted to other people regardless of their gender.

> Heteronormativity is the tendency to think that heterosexual relationships and families are the default or the norm. This includes the often implicitly-held idea that everybody is straight until proven otherwise. It also includes the belief that other sexualities are "different" or "abnormal."

What does it mean to "come out"?

Coming out refers to the ongoing process by which you share your sexual orientation and/or gender identity openly with other people. You can also "come out to yourself," where you acknowledge and/or accept your identity. Coming out isn't a one-time event. It's ongoing, as you constantly have to come out throughout your life. For example, when you meet new people, change jobs, and navigate social interactions. The concept of coming out is sometimes critiqued as being too "essentialist." This is the idea that sexuality or gender identity is something that's "natural" part of you that never changes. Some also consider coming out as a Western-centric vision of homosexuality and queerness.

The act of outing someone is when you disclose or reveal someone's sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent. Even if done accidentally, outing someone

represents a violation of privacy and can lead to harmful outcomes for the person who you out.

How do people who fall outside of cis-heterosexual identities call themselves?

LGBTQIA+ (also known as LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+) is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (or questioning), intersex, asexual and others. It refers to a population of people united by having gender identities and/or sexual orientations that differ from the heterosexual and cisgender-endosex majority.

Queer is a term used by some members of the LGBTQIA+ people to describe themselves and/or their community. It originally means "strange" or "peculiar." It's been used as a pejorative insult against gay, bisexual and lesbian individuals and couples.

During the gay rights movement in the 1990s, the term was partially reclaimed. Activists and theorists, such as the group Queer Nation, started using it as a neutral and positive self-affirming term. The term has now evolved to reflect several meanings. Some see it as inclusive of the entire community. Others find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. It can also be understood as a sexual orientation that is neither straight nor gay. Or a sexual orientation that's possibly fluid and falls under the umbrella of LGBTQIA+. The term also carries political and theoretical connotations of anti-normativity and anti-assimilationist thinking.

Queer is a label that is controversial and that some in the LGBTQIA+ community reject. Use this term only when you are self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. "My friend identifies as queer" or "My friend is a queer person").

> The term homosexual, which can describe gay or lesbian people, may be offensive depending on the speaker. It was originally used as a scientific or clinical term to describe people who are attracted to people of the same gender. Gay and lesbian people have since reclaimed the term and may use it to refer to themselves or another member of the community. Non-LGBTQIA+ people should avoid using the term.

What are the symbols of the LGBTQIA+ community?

Pride flags are symbols of pride and social movements in the LGBTQIA+ community. While the rainbow flag is most often used to represent the community, it's not the only flag. Over the years, Different groups within the community have come up with their own flags to bring awareness to their unique needs and experiences. A lot of flags exist and before representing a specific part of the LGBTQIA+ community, make sure to check out the wider collection here. Let's examine the ones you will most likely encounter and use in our marketing:

Traditional Pride Flag (Rainbow Flag)

The original Pride flag was designed by artist and openly gay military veteran Gilbert Baker in 1978. The flag came at the request of Harvey Milk, a historic figure in the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights. Gilbert has said that "The rainbow came from earliest recorded history as a symbol of hope." The eight colours represent unique aspects of life: pink for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, turquoise for magic and art, indigo (blue) for serenity, and violet for spirit. The pink and turquoise from Gilbert's original flag were excluded so it would be easier to mass produce.

The Progress Flag

The Progress flag was created in 2018 by queer, non-binary Oregon-based designer Daniel Quasar (xe/they). They designed this variation of the flag to deepen the meaning of the traditional design. The chevron design with white, pink, and light blue stripes (on the left) reflects the colours of the Transgender Flag. The brown and black stripes represent marginalized people of color. The black stripe has a dual meaning: honoring those lost to HIV/AIDS and the stigma surrounding those still living with HIV.

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Transgender Pride Flag

The Transgender flag was first created in 1999 by Monica Helms, transgender activist, author, and veteran of the U.S. Navy. Light blue and pink are featured because they're the traditional colors associated with baby boys and girls in the United States. The white stands for those who are intersex, transitioning or those who don't feel identified with any gender (nonbinary).

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status is the position of an individual or group within a hierarchical society. It is used interchangeably with the term social class. It's often measured as a combination of income, education level, and occupational prestige. Your social network and your subjective status, which is how others perceive your social status, can also play a big role.

Income: This is how much you earn, including wages and salaries. It also includes other forms of income, such as investments, savings, and unemployment benefits. The definition of income is sometimes expanded to include owned property, self-built wealth, wealth inherited from previous generations and intangible assets, such as intellectual property.

Education Level: Your level of formal education can have a direct impact on your earning ability. This means that, as you earn higher income, you'll have access to more educational opportunities. And more education increases your potential to make more income in the future.

Occupational Prestige: Occupations are jobs or professions that enable you to earn money to support yourself (i.e. to pay for housing, food and taxes). It's difficult to describe occupations objectively because there are thousands of them. This means that the status ascribed to an occupation is subjective.

Occupations fall into two categories: **qualified** (also known as white-collar) and **non-qualified** (also known as blue-collar).

Qualified professions (e.g., physicians, surgeons, lawyers) are seen as more prestigious. You need higher levels of education to enter these

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Socioeconomic status is typically broken into three levels (high, middle, and low). Any or all of the three variables — income, education, and occupation — and other factors can determine what level you occupy. The definitions of each level are subjective and will vary among cultures. Each socioeconomic status aligns with different levels of power and privilege in society.

If you're in the **upper class**, you likely have high levels of wealth and hold the most political power in society.

If you're in the **middle class**, you typically have money left over after paying for necessary expenses. You can spend this discretionary income on things like refrigerators, the cinema, holidays. You also are more likely to overcome unpredictable events in the economy (e.g., a recession) without falling into poverty.

If you're in the **lower class**, you typically occupy low-paying wage jobs with very little economic security. In this scenario, you'd also be considered to be part of the working class. But if you lack the means necessary to meet basic personal needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, then you're considered to be living in poverty.

Is it possible to change your socioeconomic status?

Yes, but the opportunity isn't easily available to everyone. **Economic mobility** describes changes in your wealth or income. **Social mobility** is when you, your family or another category of people move between different status levels of society.

Mobility can happen within a generation, which is known as intragenerational mobility. If it happens across generations, it's known as intergenerational mobility. Intergenerational mobility is much more common. This happens when you find yourself in better economic and social circumstances than those of your parents or grandparents. Education is a key determinant of social mobility.

People across Western societies hold strong beliefs of meritocracy, which is the idea that people succeed in life based on their own accomplishments and hard work.

One of the most famous displays of this is the so-called "American Dream," which promotes the view that every U.S. citizen and documented immigrant has an equal opportunity to achieve upward mobility.

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However, systemic barriers often reduce or curb this upward mobility. Economic and social mobility is very difficult to achieve, especially for people of lower socioeconomic status. Poor quality education, racism, discrimination, lack of affordable housing, and cycles of poverty keep people from moving freely within a system of inequality.

EDUCATION

From the point of view of the learner, education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It can be formal and structured or informal and part of everyday life.

Formal education occurs in an organized and structured environment. It typically takes place in an education or training institution (e.g. a secondary school). In these sorts of places, you'll learn academic knowledge, skills, and cultural norms.

Informal education refers to learning that results from activities related to daily life experiences, work, family, or leisure. This includes learning that happens without you realizing it. In many Western countries, education is typically used as a synonym for formal education, to the detriment of most informal types of education.

In formal education, your **education level** is the academic credential, certificate or degree that you've obtained from an educational institution.

Examples: A high school diploma, a Bachelor's Degree, a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)

Your **educational attainment** refers to the highest level of formal education that you've successfully completed. Informal education isn't recognised or taken into account.

Access to formal education and the quality of formal education around the world can vary by geography (for example, urban areas versus rural areas), a person's identity (for example, gender or level of ability), and cost (for example, public institutions that are free and private institutions with fees).

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Formal education levels, academic credentials and degrees differ by country. Certain countries recognise formal degrees and qualifications awarded in another country thanks to international conventions and agreements. This is often the case between countries in the European Union. However, Western countries often don't recognise non-Western academic and professional qualifications. This leads qualified professionals to take unqualified jobs or restart their education.

> The skills and expertise that you build outside of work or professional settings aren't always recognised by employers. A preference for formal education and formal work experience creates disadvantages among candidates. You'll likely leave informal learning off of your curriculum vitae (CV). Without the same level of access to formal education as others, you may miss out on job opportunities.

AGE

Aging happens as we grow older. There are different conceptions of age:

Chronological age, the number of years that have passed since your birth.

Biological age, which is a subjective description of how old our bodies seem based on different factors. This includes how your chromosomes have changed over time and the effects of diet, exercise and sleeping habits.

Psychological age, which is your cognitive capacity and emotional beliefs about how old you are compared to people of similar age.

Social age is based on the social roles and expectations related to your age.

A **generation** is a label used to categorize groups (known as "cohorts") of people based on when they were born (for instance, between 1995 and 2015). This cohort of people are perceived as a collective that shares similar beliefs and behaviors. They're also seen as having lived through social trends and historical events at similar phases of life.

In many Western countries, generations are defined as spanning a period of about 15 to 20 years. For example, in the United States, generations are classified as follows:

Baby Boomer: 1946-1964
Gen X: 1965-1980
Millennial: 1981-1996
Gen Z: 1997-2015
Generation Alpha: 2015-present

Generations aren't universal. Geography and culture influence the dates, behaviors and norms that are ascribed to each generation.

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RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL AFFILIATION

Religion is a specific set of organized beliefs and practices, usually shared by a community or group. **Religious affiliation** is your self-identification with a religion, denomination or sub-denominational religious group. Denominations are also known as subgroups, branches or sects. Schools and traditions are other ways to classify religious subgroups.

> Members of religious groups and various subgroups can carry a wide range of beliefs. It's important to remember that the most dominant movement or what you see most discussed in the media doesn't apply to all members of a religious group. For instance, there exist progressive movements within the Islam faith. Their goals include creating a more welcoming and inclusive space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Nearly 84% of the world's population identifies with a religious group. Almost all religions have subdivisions. According to 2015 figures, here are the major religions based on population:

Christians form the biggest religious group with 2.3 billion adherents. The largest subgroup is Roman Catholics with almost 1.3 billion adherents. Other sub-denominations include Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Anglican among others.

Muslims represent the second largest group with 1.8 billion people. In terms of subgroups, Muslims may be Sunni (the majority), Shia, Ibadi, Ahmadiyya or Sufi. Islam is also the fastest-growing religion in the world – more than twice as fast as the overall global population. This is mainly due to births and deaths rather than religious conversion.

Hindus number 1.1 billion and have four main groups: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism

Buddhists represent 500 million people. There are two main traditions in Buddhism: Theravāda and Mahayana, each with subgroups.

After these top four religions, the next category of people is folk or traditional religions — there are 400 million adherents. Adherents of lesser-practiced religions, including Sikhism, Baha'i and Jainism, add up to 58 million. There are also 14 million Jews in the world.

> 1.2 billion people in the world have no religious affiliation at all. This includes, but isn't limited to, atheists and agnostics. Atheists don't

Spirituality isn't the same thing as religion. There are many definitions, but it's generally defined as a belief in something beyond the self. It's more of an individual practice and can be tied to searching for a sense of peace and purpose. It can also relate to the process of developing beliefs around the meaning of life and connection with others. You may identify as being any combination of religious and spiritual. Being religious doesn't automatically make you spiritual and being spiritual doesn't make you religious.

I understand identity markers better now. Where does my own identity come into the picture?

You're right, it's not enough to look outwards at others' identities. You also have to closely examine your own. This means building an understanding of how all the intersecting parts of your identity influence your worldview. It means examining the assumptions you make about other people. And it means assessing the unique set of privileges and power (or lack thereof) ascribed to you by society based on your intersectional identities. This sense of self-awareness is called **positionality**.

For instance, if you're white, this might mean looking at positive outcomes and accomplishments you've had in life under a new lens. Being white means that you've benefited from unearned advantages. Why? Because you live in a society where whiteness carries greater social value, opens doors and lowers barriers.

Greater awareness of your power and privilege relative to others becomes a tool to interrupt dominance and oppression. It'll increase the impact of your efforts to work toward a more inclusive society. And it'll help you to make space and break down barriers for those who have not had the same advantages.

C. Culture

Culture is an umbrella term that refers to the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people. This encompasses language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.

It's a system of rules and norms that form the foundation of what you are. Culture affects how you express yourself as part of a group and as an individual. It's not a fixed thing — it's fluid, changing, and constantly in motion.

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Culture cuts across religion, food, what you wear and how you wear it. It influences what you believe is right or wrong and how you greet visitors. It encompasses how you behave and connect with your loved ones and a million other things.

Cultural literacy is your ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. It's made up of two "layers": cultural competence and cultural humility.

Cultural competence is the foundation of cultural literacy. It refers to your ability to effectively interact, work, and develop meaningful relationships with people of various cultural backgrounds.

This includes **cultural knowledge**. This means learning and understanding the characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group.

> **Questions you may ask:** "What are other cultures like?" and "What strengths do different cultures have?"

It also includes **cultural sensitivity**. This is the willingness, ability and sensitivity required to understand people with different backgrounds.

> **Questions you may ask:** "How do I communicate with other cultures?" and "Is it appropriate and realistic to depict a culture this way?"

Once you've built enough cultural competence, you can start to move toward **cultural humility**. This is a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique. You'll start by learning about another person's culture. You'll then eventually examine your own beliefs and cultural identities. This is closely tied to the concept of positionality (as defined earlier).

In practice, this means examining, reforming or even dismantling systems of oppression (e.g., sexism). It also means challenging **cultural appropriation**. This happens when a dominant group takes elements from a cultural group and benefits from it. No permission is ever asked. The dominant group also doesn't acknowledge the origins of the cultural symbols.

> For example, a fashion designer incorporates traditional Native American woven patterns and feathering into their clothing collection. They don't recognise, compensate or credit any tribe. This represents an exploitative and commercial use of traditional elements of long-established cultures.

D. Bias, Privilege and Power

What is bias?

Bias is a particular tendency, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is without reason or evidence. You may develop biases toward or against many things: an individual, an ethnic group, a sexual or gender identity, a nation, a religion, a social class, a political party, etc. If someone says you're biased, it means you're showing a preference for one side. It can also mean you're lacking a neutral viewpoint or not having an open mind.

Bias can be **conscious**, meaning that you're very clear about your biased feelings and attitudes. Your behavior is then carried out with intent. It could also be **unconscious** (otherwise known as **implicit bias**). This means that your bias operates without you being aware of it. It can even be in direct contradiction with your core beliefs and values.

Stereotypes fall under the umbrella of bias. They are exaggerated, fixed beliefs about members of a particular group. When you use stereotypes, you apply a belief to everyone who shares a common identity (e.g., sexual orientation). In doing so, you fail to acknowledge differences among members of the group. As such, stereotypes are unreliable and inaccurate.

Stereotypes can be either negative or "positive" in terms of how they describe people. Most of the time, they are negative. They'll describe what is perceived in society as negative characteristics, qualities or behaviors. Even when they are "positive" and depict people favorably, stereotypes are still problematic. They can uphold generalizations about people that are invalid. They can create negative effects for the recipient, such as shame, embarrassment or harm. And they can even promote the idea of **essentialism**. This is the view that categories of people have an underlying and unchanging nature or set of attributes.

> **Examples of "Positive" Stereotypes:** "Asians are all good at math", "People of African descent have greater athletic ability", and "Women are warmer and more communal".

> **Examples of Negative Stereotypes:** "Women are bad drivers", "Blondes are dumb", "Refugees are criminals"

Microaggressions are the everyday interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups. They can be subtle, such as a comment, a sudden change in behavior or even a compliment. Or they can be overt, like an offensive gesture or a direct insult.

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Examples: A Franco-Chinese student is complimented by a professor for speaking perfect French when it's actually their first language. A woman suddenly pulls her purse against her when a Black man walks in front of her.

Prejudice is more extreme than bias. It's a judgment or opinion that is formed on insufficient grounds. This means that you will believe something before knowing any facts or even if facts directly contradict your belief. Prejudices are learned and can be unlearned.

What is privilege and power?

Privilege is a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group. This typically takes the form of unearned social power that is accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to all members of a dominant group (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, class privilege, etc.).

Most of the time, these privileges are automatic. They can be visible or invisible to others. Most individuals in the privileged group are unaware of their own privileges. Some people who can "pass" (or be accepted or perceived) as a member of a more privileged identity group might have access to greater levels of privilege than someone who doesn't pass.

For instance, an able-bodied person who doesn't face discrimination because of their abilities benefits from non-disabled privilege. A light-skinned biracial person who passes as white may benefit from white privilege compared to a darker skinned biracial person. And trans people who pass as cis men or cis women may benefit from cisgender privilege compared to trans people who do not or cannot do so.

Power is the ability to act or produce an effect over something or someone. It enables you to oppress other people's rights, privileges, beliefs, and representation. Power is unequally distributed globally and in society. This means that some individuals or groups hold greater social, economic, and political power than others. This typically enables them to gain greater access and control over resources.

Wheel of Power/Privilege

The Wheel of Power/Privilege (illustrated below) is a useful tool to understand how different identities carry power and privilege. Start at the outside with marginalized identities. These are the people who are at the edges of society with the least amount of

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power and privilege. Then, slowly work your way to the middle. Here lie the identities with the most power and privilege.

This wheel serves as a reminder that identity is intersectional. Your different identity markers can generate privilege and disadvantage at the same time. So where do you fall in this wheel? What about your team? Make sure that you're taking intersectionality into account (e.g. white, low-income, female). Don't think of yourself or other people as singular identities (e.g. white person).
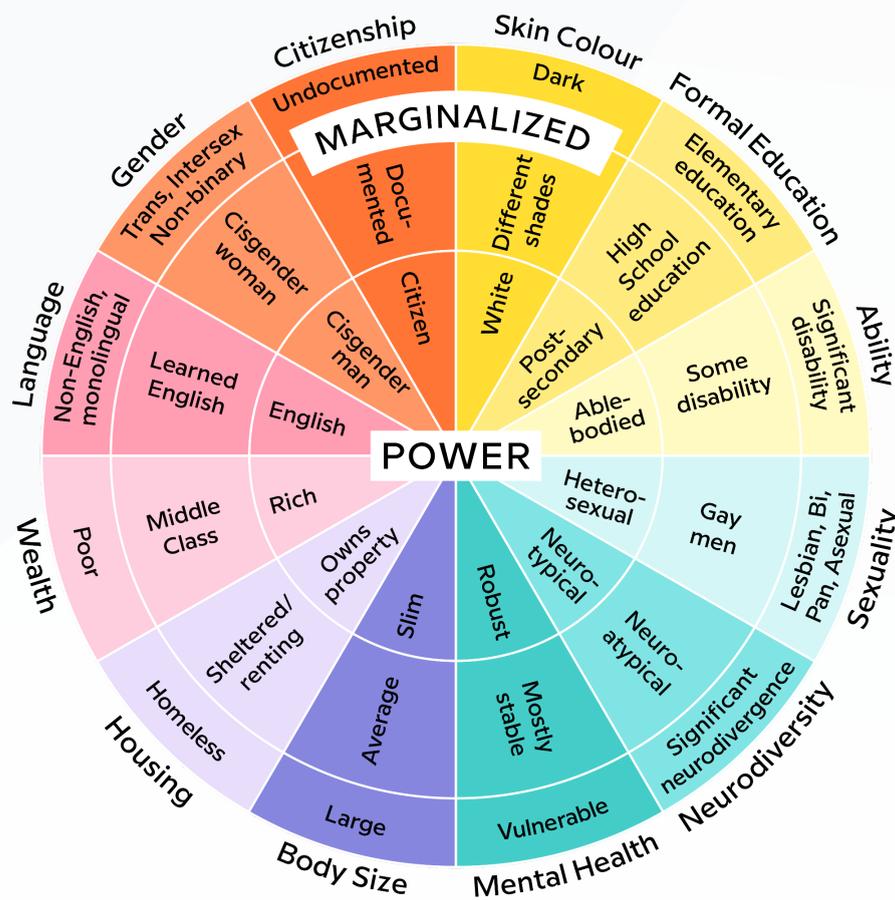
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Dominant groups aren't always the majority (in terms of size) in any given population. In the South African system of apartheid, whites were the dominant group politically, although they made up only 10% of the population. Racial discrimination against non-whites, who made up 90% of the population, was upheld by the law.

Minority group describes a smaller group in terms of size. But in everyday language, the terms "minority group" and "marginalized group" have come to mean the same thing. Today, it also describes a category of people who are at a disadvantage relative to dominant social groups.

How does oppression play out in society?

Power and privilege are the underpinnings of oppression. **Oppression** is a state or condition where there is inequality of power and privileges between groups. Dominant groups use their higher levels of power and privilege against marginalized groups. They do this to restrict marginalized groups from having the same opportunities, freedom, and benefits. As a result, oppression helps maintain existing inequalities between groups.

Oppression happens at all levels. It's reinforced by societal norms, institutional biases, interpersonal interactions and individual beliefs.

Individual or ideological oppression lies within individuals. It refers to your beliefs, attitudes, and actions that may support or perpetuate systems of oppression. Remember that your beliefs can be subtle. They can also be conscious or unconscious.

> For instance, a white person minimising the contributions of non-white people or giving white people the benefit of the doubt more often (sometimes without even realising it).

Interpersonal or group oppression occurs between individuals. It refers to the idea that one group is better than another and has the right to control the other. This seems to "give" permission to members of the dominant group to disrespect or mistreat individuals in the oppressed group. This can happen through interpersonal interactions.

> For example, a man whistling at a woman as she walks down the street.

Institutional oppression occurs within institutions. You may find discrimination upheld by policies, laws and regulations. There may also be standards, cultural norms, and practices that are grounded in stereotypes or prejudices. This sort of oppression can be done in a visible way or can happen more discreetly. It can also be intentional or unintentional.

> An oppressive social norm is the standard use of the term "maternity leave." It promotes the idea that only the mother should take time off due to pregnancy and giving birth. It's often used in place of the more inclusive "parental leave." This term broadens the definition to include all parents and supports the concept that both parents contribute to child-raising and should take time off to do so.

You can also adopt negative beliefs about your own identity groups. **Internalized oppression** occurs when a member of an oppressed group supports the supremacy of the dominating group. Oppressed groups adopt the attitudes, behaviors, social structures,

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and ideologies of the dominating group. This is often done to their own detriment, as it helps to reinforce inequalities.

> For instance, a transgender person who hasn't come out to their family because of feelings of shame about their identity and experiences harmful thoughts due to inferiorizing messages about who they are.

These different levels of oppression come together to form a system of oppression. This is also known as structural or systemic oppression. This means that oppressive beliefs embed themselves into culture, ideology, behaviors and institutions. And they go deeper and deeper over dozens, hundreds or even thousands of years. This means that systems of oppression are very difficult to eliminate. Why? Because it requires a substantial dismantling of oppression across all levels of society.

Oppression based on identity group membership can be classified into different categories. These categories are known informally as the "isms". Remember that you don't have to necessarily self-identify as being part of a group to be subject to oppression. This can happen even if you're merely perceived as belonging to a certain group.

Main systems of oppression

Racism: Based on race or ethnicity

>   **Colourism:** Based on skin tone
>   **Antisemitism:** Hostility to, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews
>   **Antiziganism:** Hostility to, prejudice, or discrimination against Romani people

Sexism: Based on sex or gender

>   **Misogyny:** Fear of, hatred of or prejudice against women

Ableism: Based on ability or disability

Heterosexism: Based on sexual orientation

>   **Homophobia:** Fear of, hatred of, or prejudice against gay and lesbian people
>   **Transphobia:** Fear of, hatred of, or prejudice against transgender people
>   **Biphobia:** Erasure, fear of, hatred of, or prejudice against bisexual people.

Ageism: Based on age

Classism: Based on social class or socioeconomic status

Religious intolerance: Based on religious affiliation
Islamophobia: Fear of, hatred of, or prejudice against the religion of Islam or Muslims in general

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Xenophobia: Based on immigrant status

How do historical systems of oppression continue in the present?

Oppression isn't something new or recent. Throughout history, people around the world have lived through systems of oppression, exploitation and marginalization. White European colonists dominated foreign lands and peoples for centuries. And the effects of imperialism and colonialism remain today.

We see this in **settler colonialism**. This is where colonizers replace the original populations of a colonized territory with new settlers.

> For example, in countries like Canada, the United States and Australia, the rights, sovereignty, humanity of Indigenous people and their lands are still being erased and challenged.

We see this in **neocolonialism**. This happens when the economic and political systems of one state are influenced or controlled by a more powerful state. This control and influence isn't always direct. The dominating state is typically a former colonial ruler.

> Traditional colonial practices included military and political dominance as means of subjugation of existing communities. Neocolonialist states utilize economic superiority, and often offers of assistance, aid or military support, to influence another country's foreign policy. Kwame Nkrumah, anti-colonialist leader, Marxist theorist, and first president of independent Ghana, suggested, "The result of neocolonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than the development of the less developed parts of the world." (IEP)

We see this in **heteropatriarchy** (a term drawn from feminist theory). This is a socio-political system where cisgender and heterosexual men have the most authority and exert it over others.

> For example, this is seen in Hungary's anti-LGBTQIA+ law passed in June 2021. This law bans the distribution of content in schools that is seen as promoting homosexuality and gender reassignment. This is part of a wave of legislation in the country promoting "the traditional family unit" and retracting existing laws from LGBTQIA+ individuals in the country.

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We see this in **white supremacy**. This is the belief that white people are superior to those of other races and should dominate them.

> For example, this is seen in far-right groups across Europe (such as France's Front Nationale, Germany's AFD, UKIP in the UK, Italy's Lega Nord or Spain's Vox). These groups are supporters of "nativism." They believe that "foreigners'' disregard local customs and reject local values. Foreigners, in this case, typically refers to non-white immigrants.

We see this in **orientalism**. This concept refers to a movement in art and literature and a corresponding academic area of study of "the East". This broad category included all Asian civilizations encountered by Europeans in their eastern expansion, creating a legacy of unrealistic and generalized representations about peoples and cultures of the East (e.g. Middle East, East Asia).

Orientalism continues today and often manifests through "**othering**", a pattern of exclusion and marginalization. Why does this occur? Because identities in the East are perceived as being different from the Western "norm." Westerners have turned to orientalism as a way to rationalize oppression and marginalization.

> For example, we see orientalism in the depiction of Muslim people as threatening "others"--the thinking that animated the narrative used to justify the series of interventions in the Middle East (e.g. the Persian Gulf War, the Iraq War), as well as the continued presence of institutions like Guantanamo Bay. This is also illustrated through depictions of the desert as empty land-- in this emptiness, one doesn't see the populations that were displaced or eliminated by colonization.

These systems of oppression can be continued and furthered in a capitalist system. **Capitalism** is an economic and political system where industries are for-profit and privately owned, not state-owed. The generation of profits for the individual or corporation is an essential feature in this system. This system creates a class structure, in which there is a class of "owners" of the means of production and a class of "laborers", who provide the labor for that production.

The systems of oppression discussed previously stand to be reified under this political system. **Capitalism** can engender an imbalanced and unequal class structure and can favor profit over equitable distribution and individualism over communalism. As such, the systems of oppression can be furthered in the general prioritization of profit over the collective good.

> For example, many corporations have made many efforts to suppress worker unions, as this could have a negative impact on profits. Unions enable workers to self-organize to rally for better pay and working conditions.

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E. Political Correctness and Allyship

What is political correctness?

Political correctness is the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against.

A few related concepts fall under the umbrella of political correctness:

Culture of accountability is the popular practice of holding public figures or companies accountable for their wrongdoing by withdrawing support from them. In simple terms, this means that the person or company that has done something offensive has lost the support of the public. A few years ago, this practice was called "canceling" and was popularized under the label of "cancel culture". Nowadays, the term "cancel culture" has been mostly recuperated by conservative ideologies, and used to undermine those trying to hold public figures and companies accountable.

> For example, J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter book series, lost some public support and was held accountable after a series of transphobic tweets.

Wokeness is an awareness of racial discrimination in society and other forms of oppression and injustice.

> For example, corporate wokeness is illustrated through the creation of an ad campaign promoting anti-racism to appeal to Gen Z consumers.

Trauma-informed practices come from the human services industry (e.g., psychology, social work). These practices recognise the impact of trauma and seek to actively resist re-traumatising others. They also promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing.

Trigger and content warnings are regularly used with respect to content. They warn people of content that might evoke a strong or potentially harmful emotional reaction.

> For example, an article on the Syrian Civil War may have the following warning: "Trigger Warning: This article has graphic photos of violence and combat. Please engage in self-care as you read this."

The term "woke" and the phrase "stay woke" emerged back in the 1930s in the United States in the Black community. The term and phrase were used by Black Americans to signal the need to be aware of racially motivated threats and the potential dangers of white America.

The term became more mainstream in the 2000s and 2010s, starting with protests in the United States in 2014 following the fatal shooting of a Black man, Michael Brown, by a white police officer and continuing with the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 following the murder of another Black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer. It is sometimes also used ironically by conservative ideologies to undermine the very principle of the term.

Is political correctness problematic?

The term "politically correct" was originally used to describe what is politically wise. It was also employed as a means of ironic self-mockery. Since the 1960s, however, the usage of the term has been associated with criticism of the ideals or practice of diversity.

Today, some people see political correctness, wokeness and cancel culture as problematic or laughable concepts that limit free speech and promote censorship. These views are held by people across a spectrum of political beliefs. But they're more pronounced among people who are more ideologically conservative.

Wokeness, for instance, is accused of being a false show or "performance" of progressive activism. Cancel culture is seen as public shaming. Trigger and content warnings are criticized for promoting excessive fragility. They are seen as threatening freedom of expression and open debate. The effectiveness of these warnings is currently being questioned.

Why is political correctness necessary?

Language matters. Political correctness is the process of changing language to hold people accountable for the way in which our words impact others. It attempts to identify spaces where language causes harm and amend these spaces to avoid offense, pain or oppression. It operates under the understanding that language gives us the framework through which we see the world and as such, shapes our biases, stereotypes and prejudices. This can have serious consequences, including impacting equitable access to opportunities and resources across a person's lifetime, defining a person's social and economic mobility and adversely affecting a person's mental health.

But it is regularly challenged through various tactics:

Tone policing is a silencing tactic used to lessen the validity and importance of a statement.

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> For example, telling activists to be "rational," "civil" or "not so emotional", by attacking the tone used to communicate it.

Cancel culture is the conservative deformation of what can now be better called the Culture of Accountability. It typically uses the concept of Free Speech to undermine marginalized communities' efforts to hold public figures and companies accountable for their inappropriate and often harmful behavior.

> For example, when Trump was deplatformed after encouraging the attack of the US Capitol on January 6th 2021, many of his supporters claimed that he was being canceled and that it was an attack on Free speech.

Toxic positivity is the belief that no matter how difficult a situation is, people should maintain a positive mindset. This belief serves to minimize the harm and pain caused by systems of oppression.

> For example, marginalized groups are told to not "spread negativity" and to focus on the positive side of things, such as "how far along we've come with racism."

These tactics show that political correctness isn't enough. Allyship is also vital in challenging and dismantling systems of oppression.

What is allyship?

An **ally** is someone who supports a group other than their own (in terms of racial and ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). Allies acknowledge the disadvantage and oppression of other groups while also acknowledging their own privilege. They take risks and actions on behalf of others. They also invest in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression.

A common misconception of allyship is that it requires big, public action or loud proclamations of beliefs and values. But the opposite is true. Allyship can happen in every interpersonal interaction. It can be very powerful when demonstrated through quiet, private action.

Two common pitfalls of allyship to avoid

The first is a **savior complex**, which is the tendency to "save" or "help" those with less power and privilege who have not asked for help. This is usually done in a self-serving manner. For instance, you "help" others to feel good about yourself, to feel morally

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superior and to create a positive image of yourself to the public. Saviors often ignore or overlook the inputs and experiences of those who they are helping.

If you identify as white, this takes the form of **white saviorism** (also known as the **white savior complex**). This is where white people operate on the assumption that they know what people of color need. This reinforces the idea that communities of color lack the ability, willpower or intelligence to uplift themselves on their own. They need the "helpful" actions of white people.

For example, the founding of charities in nations in Africa can sometimes do more harm than good. Some of these charities, founded by white foreigners who lack in-depth knowledge of the geo-political context, often disregard local needs and practices.

Non-disabled people who try to "help" people with disabilities also can be subject to a **disability savior complex**. They may see people with disabilities as lacking independence or self-sufficiency.

For example, this happens when a person may force a person who is blind to cross the road that they don't want to cross. They may guide the person who hasn't requested to be guided and can navigate themselves.

The second is **performative allyship**, which can happen to anyone regardless of racial and ethnic identity. This is where being an ally becomes an identity rather than lifelong action. Allyship is something you "are'' rather than something you "do." This leads to a sense of entitlement. You're expecting to be rewarded or honored for doing the bare minimum for the oppressed. This ends up centring the concerns of the privileged over those who you're supposed to be supporting. When called out for oppressive or offensive behavior, you get offended or uncomfortable.

An example of this was the display of Black squares on Instagram by individuals, celebrities and brands following the murder of George Floyd. This was meant to be a show of support or solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement. But it ended up being an empty gesture. No concrete or significant actions were taken to tackle systemic racism.

It's important to navigate around these challenges with a heightened sense of self-awareness. This will help you focus your allyship on solidarity and impact. Allyship is an inherently uncomfortable thing to do. It takes courage, vulnerability, and humility. This means taking accountability for mistakes, even if they are well-intentioned.

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3. Conclusion

One of the foundations of the project is that we all have more to learn. Babbel knows that a company doesn't become more inclusive overnight, but instead, that doing better starts with understanding what "better" could look like.

Here are **10 takeaways** about working towards more inclusive environments learned while working on the creation of these guidelines.

1. **Good DE&I start from a shared understanding**. To avoid confusion and miscommunication, it's important to know we're all talking about the same thing. That's why we created "Good terms to know", a glossary of important DE&I terms. It gives us a shared reference point, useful for navigating doubts or disagreements.

2. **Good DE&I is a team effort**. Babbel's guidelines drew on knowledge from people who shared their expertise and their own lived experiences. But no one person is an expert on everything. There's a lot to know, and we each have our own expertises and blind spots. Good DE&I draw on the knowledge of a deep pool of people.

3. **DE&I is everyone's responsibility, but someone needs to wear the hat**. While it's a team effort, it's a good idea to have people who will specifically wear their DE&I hat when reviewing content. Don't expect editors to pick it up in a regular edit or proofread, when their focus may be more on typos and grammar. Make a moment that is dedicated specifically to a DE&I review.

4. **Think about DE&I early in the process**. It's hard to "add in" more inclusion to content that's already written. It needs to be considered early and built into the brief before any writing is done. Make DE&I another part of your content strategy, and plan how new content will address inclusivity and representation, whether there are identities you specifically want to include, who will review it for you and when.

5. **An example is worth 1000 words**. Definitions are a great starting point - but examples of good and bad practice will help your content creators to know exactly what you want them to do. A clear "Like this, not like this" example gets right to the point.

6. **DE&I covers much more than race, gender identity and sexual orientation**. These have been the focus of growing awareness in recent years. But companies also need to consider how we represent age, ability, neurodiversity, body type, socioeconomic status and much more. With so much to be aware of and learn about, Babbel has been recommending our content creators dive into one area of the guidelines at a time, and gradually broaden from there.

7. **Representation is not the whole story**. But it is a good start. Beyond simply featuring diverse groups, being truly inclusive means being authentic. This means making sure that when we include various identities, we do so in a way that feels respectful and true, and that allows people of those identities to speak for themselves when possible.

8. **Real DE&I comes from having a community of people with a variety of experiences and identities, who contribute their perspective to everything the company does.** There's a limit to how well you can represent a wide range of

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voices if your workforce only draws from a few demographics. Not only does a more diverse workforce drive more representative content, but it's also what companies should really be striving for: to be more diverse, equitable and inclusive employers.

9. **Include how you will navigate discussions or change processes around DE&I.** Discussions around DE&I can be confronting, and require people to be open and to give and take criticism constructively. It's a good idea to formalize how DE&I discussions should happen and who will be the decision maker if there are disagreements. Ask your HR team how they can help and if there's a need to bring in experts to advise. Something Babbel found helpful was the idea of calling in versus calling out. Calling someone out involves telling them they were wrong. Calling someone in invites them to a conversation and opportunities to reflect.

10. **It's ok to make mistakes.** It can feel hard as an adult to make mistakes or be corrected. We can spend a lot of time kicking ourselves or feeling embarrassed we got it wrong. But we're all always learning. If someone offers you feedback, say thanks, take the new information onboard, and try to remember it moving forward. Reframe the moment from "I can't believe I said that" to "I learned a new thing today". And remember that learning takes a lifetime.