Equity and Anti-Racism Primer for Municipalities and Villages

Office of Equity and Anti-Racism

This resource is intended to provide prescribed municipalities and villages with definitions and concepts that are essential to meaningfully engage in the development of equity and anti-racism plans in accordance with the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act*. Municipalities and Villages will be the first public bodies prescribed under the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act* requiring them to have plans in place by April 1, 2025. Recognizing municipalities and villages may have existing knowledge and awareness of the concepts, in-depth review of this resource may not be necessary for some.

This resource can be used for self-directed or group learning by municipalities and villages in tandem with other supports offered through the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism (OEA) and the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism – OEAengagement@novascotia.ca.

1. Introduction to Foundational Concepts

Defining Hate and Racism

Hate means provocation, hostility or intolerance by means of threats, harassment, abuse, incitement or intimidation motivated by the actual or perceived race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, disability or sexual orientation of any person.

Racism means the discrimination or antagonism by, or the prejudice of, an individual, community or institution against a person or people based on the person's or people's membership or perceived membership in a racial or ethnic group, and having the power to carry out that discrimination, antagonism or prejudice through institutional policies and practices that shape cultural beliefs and values of a society.

In order to understand racism, it is first important to understand that race is a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly colour), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, and racial classification to suit the social and economic interests of the dominant group at that time. Race is a false construct that conflates skin color and ancestry with behavior, intelligence, and culture. Though race is a false construct, it has real consequences for all people.

Racism:

- is a belief that one group is better than another group because of race or skin colour;
- can be a conscious or unconscious attitude or value based on an assumption about characteristics of a particular group or religion;
- can be deeply rooted and displayed openly in racial jokes and slurs or hate crimes;
- can happen on an individual level, or on a systemic or institutional level;
- can result in profiling or stereotyping of individuals because they belong to a certain race;
- can occur when policies or practices that may seem neutral on their surface or are intended to be neutral but that may have discriminatory effects on individuals based on racial, ethnic, national or religious group identity; and
- can result from historical privilege of people who have power.

Anti-racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. This is achieved through the identification and elimination of racism by changing oppressive systems, structures, policies, practices, and attitudes so that historic, current, and future harm can be eliminated and so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.

Anti-racism:

- Identifies, isolates and challenges racism
- Challenges beliefs that foster racism
- Uses direct action at personal and institutional levels
- Creates and implements actions to fight racism for individuals and within an organization or workforce.

An antiracist organization is an organization that:

1. Has restructured all aspects of institutional life to ensure full participation of racialized people, including their worldview and culture; and the full participation of white people as allies in eliminating racism;
2. Has the ability to diagnose and address different types of racism within the organization in a manner that builds strength, community, and trust;
3. Implements structures, policies, and practices with inclusive decision-making and other forms of power-sharing throughout the institution;
4. Commits to the struggle to dismantle racism in the wider community; and
5. Builds clear lines of accountability to racially oppressed communities.

RESOURCES:

- Evidence-informed practices for anti-racism in government: Embedding anti-racism in the workplace and policy
- Antiracism and Organizational Change Guide
- Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide

Equality, Equity and Inequity

Equality is one of the central principles of democracy and is based on the belief that all people should have the same opportunities to be successful and have a productive, enjoyable life. The idea of equality is key to the notion that everyone will be able to achieve based on their efforts and contributions to society instead of their status or position.

Equity recognizes that everyone doesn't begin in the same place in society. Some people face adverse conditions and circumstances making it more challenging with the same effort to achieve the same goals. Equity advocates for those who may have been historically disadvantaged, making it difficult for them to be successful. What is "fair" as it relates to equity isn't a question of what is the same but rather the point from which a person begins. Equity considers historical and other factors in determining what is fair.

Inequity, by contrast, refers to a state of unfairness or lack of justice in which biases are being perpetuated and individuals or groups are treated differently and unequally, often resulting in systematic and patterned disparities in opportunities, resources, rights, or outcomes. Inequity can stem from past and current decisions, systems of power and privilege, policies and the implementation of those policies made on social, economic, racial, or gender-based distinctions, and it can manifest in various areas of life, including education, healthcare, employment, and access to basic services.

Think of **equity** as: The intentional creation of opportunities for historically underserved and underrepresented populations to have equal access to resources. Equity enables proactive measures and reasonable accommodation necessary to identify structural, systemic and cultural barriers; discrimination, unfairness, and disadvantage; and ensure equitable pathways and opportunity structures for Indigenous peoples,

visible/racialized minorities, persons within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and, in some cases women, in all spheres of life.[1]

Equity of all kinds acknowledges that inequalities exist, and our work should aim to eliminate them and seeks to balance disparities. In developing equity and anti-racism plans, Municipalities and Villages should seek to:

1. Call attention to and identify patterns of inequitable outcomes.
2. Take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of their constituents.
3. Critically reassess policies and practices.
4. Demonstrate race-consciousness.
5. Understand the social and historical context of exclusionary policies and practices.

Summary:

- Equality means everyone is treated the same exact way, regardless of differences. It means access and distribution of a set of resources evenly across individuals. When everyone gets the same opportunity, that is considered fair to those who come with an existing (and often unconscious) unfair advantage.
- Equity helps even the playing field so that everyone can thrive. Equity of all kinds acknowledges that inequalities exist, and our work should aim to eliminate them and seek to balance disparities.

Diversity

Diversity means having a variety of people from a range of different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, life experiences, competencies and faiths represented on teams, in workplaces in general and particularly in processes like engagement. Representational diversity is an outcome of proactive measures to correct systemic disadvantage, and to create equitable opportunity structures and pathways for a critical mass of those who are historically underserved and underrepresented.

Diversity can be reflected in three different dimensions, all of which shape our identity, as outlined below.

- Demographic diversity (our gender, race, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and so on) is tied to our identities of origin — characteristics that classify us at birth and that we will carry around for the rest of our lives.
- Experiential diversity (our affinities, hobbies, and abilities); influences we might call identities of growth.
- Cognitive diversity (how we approach problems and think about things) makes us look for other minds to complement our thinking: what we might call identities of aspiration.

Inclusion

Inclusion encompasses norms, practices, and intentional actions to promote participation, engagement, empowerment, and a sense of belonging for members of historically underrepresented and underserved groups in all aspects of life. It is about celebrating, valuing, and amplifying perspectives, voices, styles, and identities that have been marginalized by promoting an institutional culture and practices to ensure all can experience a welcoming space of fairness, dignity, and human flourishing.

Think of **inclusion** as: the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity. Diversity is what we are, and inclusion is what we do.

Where diversity may focus on the quantitative representation, inclusion focuses on the qualitative experience of belonging. Diversity may exist with inequity, isolation, and marginality, but social inclusion focuses on culture and practices that deepen participation and engagement. Inclusion requires proactive measures to transform cultures and relations of power and privilege, resulting in the social exclusion of under-represented groups so that there are no impediments to full participation by members of equity-deserving groups.

[1] https://www.ucalgary.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/literacy-education/edi-glossary

2. Social Identities, Underserved and Underrepresented Groups & Intersectionality

Social identity

A **social identity** is a category of differences that describes a set of common physical traits, characteristics, or attributes[2]. It is influenced by social categories such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and by the social groups we belong to. A social group is a group of people who share a range of physical, cultural, or social characteristics within one of the social identity categories.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of examples of social identity categories:

- **Sexual identity and romantic orientation:** Asexual, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian
- **Persons with Disabilities:** Invisible and/or visible disabilities.
- **Race**: Black, East Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern, South Asian, White
- **Indigenous Identity**: Mi'kmaw, First Nations, Inuk/Inuit, Métis
- **Religious Identity**: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh
- **Age**: Elders, adults, youth, children
- **Gender identity**: Woman, man, two-spirit, trans, gender diverse
- **Ethnicity**: African Nova Scotian, Hispanic, South Asian descent, European descent

Underrepresented and Underserved Communities in Nova Scotia

When we speak of underrepresented and underserved communities, we are referring to those groups who experience discrimination and exclusion because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions.

This includes systemic inequity and/or racism towards people based on one or more protected characteristics as identified in the *Human Rights Act*, which includes: age, race, colour, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, physical or mental disability, ethnicity, national or Indigenous origin, family status, marital status, source of income, and political belief, affiliation, or activity. Below are examples of underrepresented and underserved groups in Nova Scotia. Each of these groups has their own unique story, historical setting and history of discrimination and marginalization (this list is not exhaustive and may not include all groups):

- Mi'kmaw and Persons of Indigenous descent;
- African Nova Scotians and Persons of African descent;
- Persons of Colour;
- Newcomers (immigrants and refugees);
- 2SLGBTQIA+--2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual/Biromantic, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic and others whose identities are not reflected;
- Persons with disabilities (physical and mental);
- Persons who are neurodivergent; and
- In some contexts, women.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is defined as the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (for example, racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. The wheel of power and privilege can be used as a visual tool for promoting awareness and understanding of interconnected systems of privilege, oppression, and power dynamics within society. It provides examples within the Canadian context to illustrate how intersectionality of thirteen categories of social identity uphold power and privilege and shape our interactions

[2] https://snohomishcountywa.gov/5686/Social-Justice-Terms

and experiences. Mapping out these complex dynamics can help to recognize personal positions of privilege as well as understand how systemic inequalities impact different groups within society. This understanding is essential for:

- identifying and addressing barriers to participation;
- guiding efforts to ensure inclusive, meaningful, equitable and accessible programs and services for all members of the community;
- navigating conversations around inequities, ensuring diverse perspectives are heard and valued; and
- developing strategies to address power imbalances and create more equitable outcomes in projects, programs, polices, and decision-making processes.

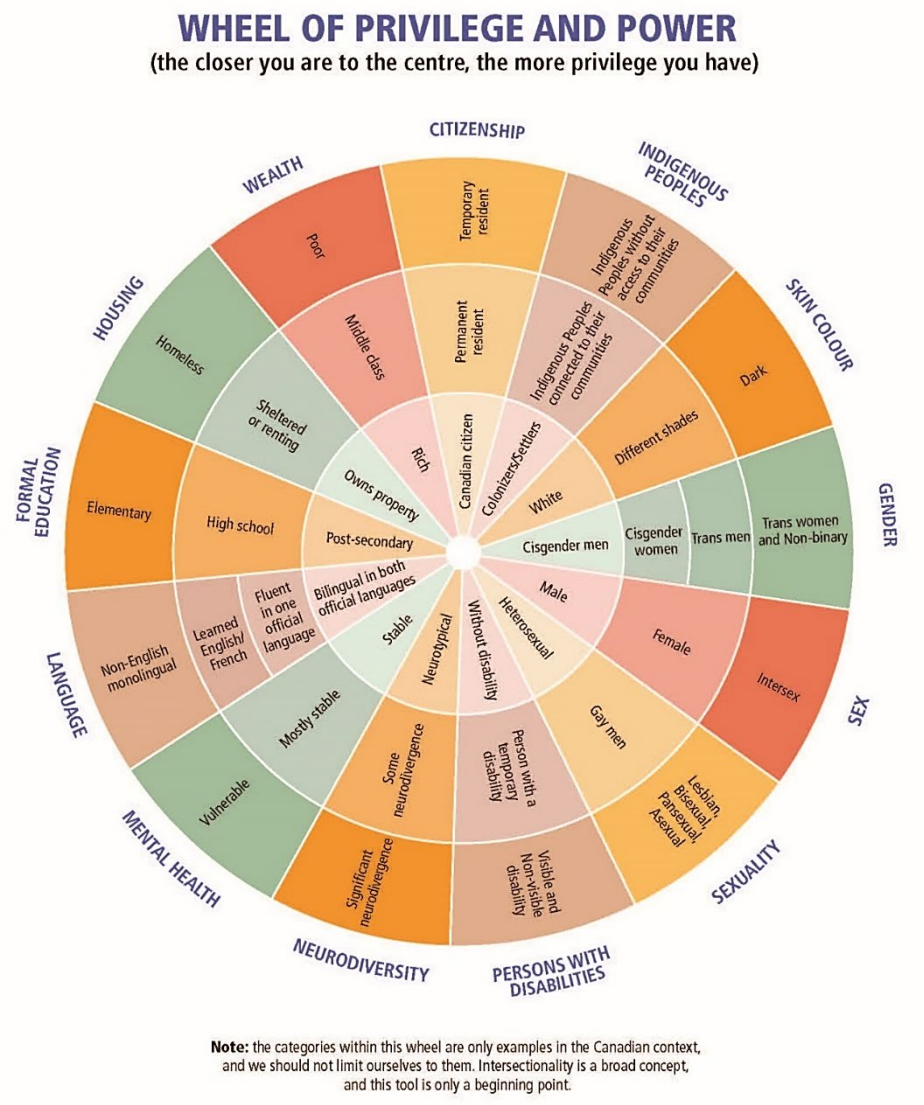


Image adapted from Sylvia Duckworth (2020).

WATCH:

- Intro to Intersectionality
- Kimberlé Crenshaw - On Intersectionality
- What is Intersectional Feminism?
- There is no hierarchy of oppressions - Audre Lorde

3. Understanding Power and Privilege

Power and privilege are two related concepts that influence the dynamics of social injustice. Understanding how these concepts interact and overlap can assist individuals in creating practical ways to foster a more equitable society.

Power is the capability to influence the behaviour, thoughts, and decisions of others, oneself, and/or the course of events. It can be derived from the economy, government, or community. Economic power involves managing money and resources, while political power entails implementing changes in government decision-making processes. Social power involves using cultural values, beliefs, and norms to alter people's actions, thoughts, and emotions.[3]

Institutional Power is the ability or official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The capacity to exercise control over others.

WATCH:

- How to understand power - Eric Liu - YouTube

Privilege refers to unearned access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one needs in order to lead a comfortable, productive and safe life. It is only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership and is often invisible to those who have it.

Privilege can be based on a variety of social identities such as race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, ability status, sexuality, age, education level and more. Determining who has privilege or disadvantage is complex because cultural, social, and historical changes affect which groups are privileged and which groups are not. When talking about privilege, most folks feel uncomfortable. Having privilege is not inherently a bad thing, but it is how you utilize it and how others are impacted by it, that you must vigilantly attend to.

Privilege can be experienced on personal, interpersonal and institutional levels. The social, economic, political and psychological unearned advantages that privileged groups hold come at the expense of marginalized groups. In Canada, privilege is typically granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups: white people, males, heterosexuals, wealthy, middle or owning class people, Christians, English-speaking people, and able-bodied people. They have historically held dominance and power over underrepresented and underserved groups. Some everyday examples of privilege:

- An able-bodied person can make plans to visit somewhere new without concern for how the sidewalks are maintained or if the building has mobility supports like a working elevator or ramps. This is an example of able-body privilege.
- White and light-skinned people can easily find and purchase products like bandages, makeup and stockings labeled "nude" or "flesh" that match their skin tone. This is an example of white privilege.
- A person who can expect their work or school holiday schedule to reflect the religious holidays they celebrate has religious privilege.

Once someone acknowledges their privilege, they can move forward in leveraging that privilege to confront societal and institutional discrimination. Other ways a person can leverage their privilege are to have brave conversations with family and friends, advocate for folks without the same privileges, and utilize bystander intervention techniques to support someone you see being harassed because of their identity.

WATCH:

- Does Privilege Make You Angry?
- Privilege is power, how you can use it to do some good!

[3] https://joeydolls.com/easy-guide-social-justice-talking-about-power-privilege/

- What Is Privilege?
- How Privileged Are You?
- Unboxing Privilege
- Pedagogy of Privilege

RESOURCES:

- Explaining white privilege to a broke white person
- Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

4. Discrimination and Systems of Oppression

Discrimination is the act of denying equal treatment and opportunities to individuals and groups. It operates through policies or practices that exclude or limit an individual or groups from accessing services, employment, housing and enjoying all the benefits of society.

Oppression occurs when individuals are mistreated and excluded from society due to their identity. Oppression is the combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that maintains advantage and disadvantage based on social group memberships. Oppression discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant groups”).

WATCH:

- Oppression 101
- The 4 I’s of Oppression: Ideological, Institutional, Interpersonal, and Internalized

RESOURCES:

- Institutionalized Oppression Definitions
- Oppression Matrix
- Download this fact sheet on privilege and oppression in American society from Kalamazoo College
- AORTA Continuum on Becoming a Transformative Anti-Oppression Organization

Systems of Oppression

The term "**systems of oppression**" helps us better identify inequity by calling attention to the historical and organized patterns of mistreatment. Examples of these systems or “isms” are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, and ageism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing. Society's institutions, such as government, education, and culture, can all contribute to or reinforce the oppression of marginalized social groups while elevating dominant social groups.[4]

Systems of oppression run through our language, shape the way we act and do things in our culture, and are built around what are understood to be “norms” in our societies. A norm signifies what is “normal,” acceptable, and desirable and is something that is valued and supported in a society. It is also given a position of dominance, privilege, and power over what is defined as non-dominant, abnormal, and therefore, invaluable or marginal.[5]

[4] https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/social-identities-and-systems-oppression
[5] https://simmons.libguides.com/anti-oppression

RESOURCE:

- Lens of Systemic Oppression - The lens of systemic oppression is a lens intentionally employed to sharpen focus on the ways in which any given form of oppression (race, gender, class, language, sexual orientation, etc.) may be negatively impacting people's ability to make progress on the things they care about and/or preventing individual or collective action toward the achievement of a particular goal.[6]

5. Implicit Biases, Stereotypes and Microaggressions

Implicit biases, stereotypes and microaggressions are interrelated concepts. Implicit biases are developed through exposure to stereotypes and other forms of misinformation over time. These implicit biases can then lead well-intentioned people to commit microaggressions against racialized people, Indigenous people, and others with marginalized identities.

Implicit bias refers to unconscious, subtle, involuntary assumptions or judgments we make every day based on our prior experiences and culture. This happens "below the surface", deep in the subconscious, where there is no awareness or intention of bias. Implicit bias is also "activated" involuntarily, it is not something that can easily be turned on or turned off. Additionally, implicit bias can be positive or negative.

Examples of implicit bias

- We tend to see an individual as a representation of a particular group rather than as an individual.
- We tend to favor, prefer, and associate positive characteristics with members of the group to which we belong.
- We tend to associate negative characteristics with or disfavor members of groups to which we do not belong.

RESOURCES:

- Understanding Prejudice: Implicit Association Test
- Teaching Tolerance: Test Yourself for Hidden Bias
- Act, Communicating, Implicit Bias (racialequitytools.org)

WATCH:

- Implicit Bias Defined
- Implicit Bias – Concepts Unwrapped
- Verna Myers: How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them - YouTube
- Breaking Bias - Unlearning: Breaking Bias. Building Community. - YouTube

Stereotypes refer to the widely held, oversimplified ideas we hold about a person or people based on their identities (real or perceived). Usually, stereotypes are based on assumptions, popular opinion, or misinformation, are generally negative, are sweeping and simple, and are often characterized by words such as "always" and "never."

WATCH:

- When you picture Doctors Without Borders, what do you see?
- Why Do You Think Stereotypes Are True? | Decoded | MTV News - YouTube

EXERCISE:

- Deconstructing Stereotypes

RESOURCE:

- When & How to Avoid Stereotypes | LiteraryTerms.net
- Teaching About Stereotypes 2.0 | Learning for Justice

Implicit biases and stereotypes can impact our relationships and interactions with each other in many ways. They can lead us to commit microaggressions.

Microaggressions are subtle verbal or nonverbal insults or denigrating messages communicated toward a marginalized person, often by someone who may be well-intentioned but unaware of the impact their words or actions have on the target.

Microaggressions are more than just insults, insensitive comments, or generalized jerky behavior. They're something very specific: the kinds of remarks, questions, or actions that are painful because they have to do with a person's membership in a group that's discriminated against and/or subject to stereotypes.

WATCH:

- Microaggressions (Clean) - YouTube
- Understanding Microaggressions - YouTube
- If Microaggressions Happened to White People | Decoded | MTV News - YouTube

RESOURCE:

- What are Anti-Black Racism Microaggressions?
- The Micropedia of Microaggressions - the first encyclopedia of microaggressions.
- 21 Racial Microaggressions You Hear On A Daily Basis (buzzfeed.com)

EXERCISE:

- What is the message? (Versions A-E)

Confronting microaggressions may result in a defensive response, but it is important to actively combat inequitable and/or racist behaviour when you are able. One way to address these types of inequitable and/or racist comments is to ask for clarification on the comment and challenge the person to consider the impact of their words. For example, if someone were to say, “our colleague doesn’t act Black/gay/like a woman,” ask what they mean. By asking this question, it forces the person to examine what they’re saying. This challenge may raise their awareness that they are reinforcing the idea of what ‘acting Black/gay/like a woman’ means based on generalization and harmful stereotypes.

Summary:

- Implicit biases are unconscious assumptions or judgements that reinforced or created by stereotypes and other influences.
- Stereotypes are widely held, oversimplified ideas we hold about a person or people based on their identities (real or perceived). Many stereotypes are rooted in prejudice.
- A prejudice is a belief or opinion. It refers to biased thinking. Prejudice is an opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience and usually negative feelings or attitudes toward members of a group; they often come from a place of suspicion, fear, or intolerance.

- Microaggressions are an expression of our prejudiced attitudes through words or actions, often unconsciously or unintentionally. They are closely tied to implicit biases.

6. Inclusive Language and Communication

Being committed to equity and anti-racism requires the use and adoption of inclusive language and communication. Language is not neutral - it is closely tied to the personality of the communicator and the culture and society in which it is used. Language is not always intended to exclude a person or a group, but it may unintentionally have that effect.

Inclusive Language - language that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

A central tenet of inclusive language is for people to think about the impact their words and phrases have on others. Inclusive language avoids terms, phrases, or expressions that could be racist, sexist, or biased against any group of people. Inclusive language is more than just avoiding the use of a few antiquated or offensive terms and phrases. It is about embracing communication that acknowledges the power differentials and dynamics of our society and their deleterious effects. It is about showing appreciation for the diversity everyone brings to the table. And finally, it is about creating cultures where people can feel free to be their full authentic selves.[7]

Essential ideas relating to Inclusive Language:

- **Observe, confirm, and utilize the terminology that people use to describe themselves:** It is always good practice to observe how the individual refers to themself, and to check with the person to see which terms they may personally prefer. Start by listening to how people talk about themselves.
- **"Person-First" approach:** This approach emphasizes the humanity in all of us by using terminology that puts the person before a particular aspect of their identity. For example, the person-first approach would use phrases such as "person with a physical disability" rather than "disabled person", or "people who use drugs" instead of "drug users". This person-first approach can be helpful for creating inclusive spaces for every person, and this approach can also complement the "identity-first" approach.
- **Language and terminology are always evolving:** Language and terminology constantly change to reflect the ever-evolving values and mindsets of our society. A phrase or term once used may now have a different meaning or may have added connotations when said, so that term may now be outdated and should no longer be used. Be attentive to changes in language used among identity communities.
- **We all must continue learning:** Mistakes can and will happen as we are always learning the best way to use inclusive language as we adapt strive to be inclusive.

WATCH:

- How language shapes the way we think
- Why Gender Pronouns Matter

RESOURCES:

- Using Inclusive Language in the Workplace: An Introduction Written by Katharine Park, Advocacy Lead, Wellness Works Canada
- A Short Guide to Inclusive Language
- What is Inclusive Language in the Workplace? Examples, Steps, & Strategies
- Words Matter: Guidelines on using inclusive language in the workplace (2018)

[7] https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2022/09/inclusive-language