

HIRING REVOLUTION / RESOURCE

A Guide to Disrupt Racism + Sexism

KEY TERMS → A Brief Discussion of Terminology and Vocabulary

People are pretty freaked out about using the “right” words when it comes to talking about racism and sexism. No one wants to “get it wrong.” But it also feels like words and phrases are changing so rapidly! *How is a person supposed to keep up?*

Here’s the truth: words are important; words are meaningful; and **words and phrases related to culture and identity are in constant flux**. Their meanings live in impermanence. Our approach here is *not* to define words in the English language once and for all. Rather, we want to create shared meaning between you and us. How we use language changes often, even from day to day, and members of different groups, and even members of the same group, may not agree on word choice. These are the words we use; if members of your team or potential hires express a preference for other terms, listen to and respect their preferences.

As you read, keep in mind two key concepts of language use:

- 1) While we use terms to discuss groups of people, we know that these are *not* monolithic groups with identical experiences.
- 2) Discrimination at the intersection of race and gender (such as for trans women of color) compounds the devastating effects of underhiring, resulting in current and historical poverty.



Words + Phrases We Use in *Hiring Revolution*

Hiring Revolution uses a set of words and phrases to describe groups of people, conditions those groups experience, and the nature in which cultural behavior influences hiring practices and outcomes. What follows is the linguistic sandbox we developed for this distinct project. This list is not in alphabetical order. Instead, it is grouped by related concepts. The language and definitions we share here are both imperfect and specific: these are the words and phrases we need access to in order to spark the Hiring Revolution.

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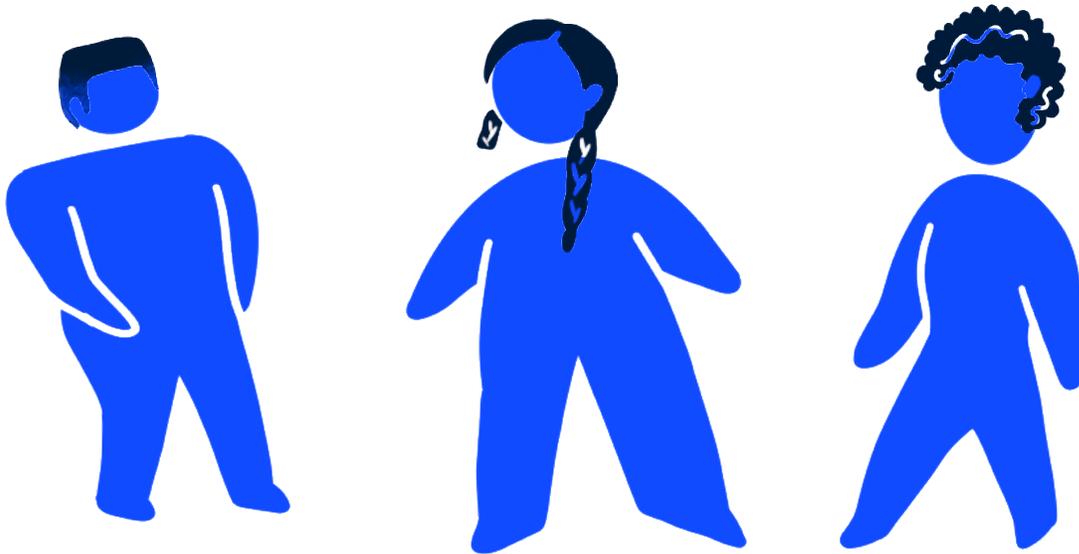
We compiled this list with gratitude to activists, scholars, thought leaders, and revolutionaries who, throughout time, have sought to put language to the lived experience of socially constructed realities such as race, class, and gender. So, with enthusiasm and humility, we offer this English-language container to guide our work together toward our individual and collective revolution!

Race and gender are made up AND real in their consequences.

Sit with that a minute. It's wild. Say it out loud if it helps you slow down and allow this strange duality to sink in.

Social identity markers such as race and gender have been used by societies in recent centuries to **define belonging** to a group that shares a sense of connectivity. Historically, it was most common to identify first with one's own geography (for example, Rome) or religious practices (such as Islam) as a way of making sense of who someone was and to whom they were connected. The rise of European imperialism brought with it a need to create social stratification **defined by lightness and darkness of skin**, as well as the societal expectations of a **binary differentiation between men/boys and women/girls**.¹

When we talk about **race** in the twenty-first century, we're typically referring to a whole host of characteristics (skin color, hair texture, facial features, and more). In a historic and modern American context, race refers to **the intentional construction of social hierarchy based on the darkness of one's skin. The lighter, the better.**



¹ For more background on this shift, see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

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The preference for lightness over darkness is **colorism**.

(If you need to, stop reading for thirty seconds and shake this grossness out of your body. You're also welcome to give your disgust and disappointment sound. Make some noise—it won't hurt anybody to say a bunch of swear words in a row to get it out. Try *"Damnit, damnit, damnit, damnit, damnit!"* This is part of our practice when we've had to listen to lies that have taken hold and hurt ourselves and our friends. Try it!)

When discussing race in the United States, we often think about **racialized categories** with names including (but not limited to) Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, North African/Arab/Middle Eastern, and white.

A mix of characteristics, including skin pigment, hair color, hair texture, eye shape, and shape of nose and lips, have been used to try to jam individuals with whole histories and complex family lineages into tidy racialized categories, thus inferring a ton about the **conflation of race with a person's inherent value and right to dignity.**



This construction of race and its rank ordering of associated characteristics rely on **racism** to enforce a hierarchy of human value wherein whiteness is preferred over all other races. Racism, as defined by leaders and scholars Gita Gulati-Partee and Maggie Potapchuk, refers **to history, policy, culture, practice, and belief to maintain a racial hierarchy.** In the US context, this racial hierarchy is organized with white people at the top. Hiring practices prefer white people and the associated behaviors of whiteness that often get coded as "professional," "appropriate," and "ideal." The Hiring Revolution requires that we upend our workplace preferences for white people and behaviors associated with whiteness as universally supreme.

Today, it is crystal clear that zero reputable science supports the claim that any one race is genetically (physically, intellectually, emotionally) superior to any other.² It's important to recognize, as we rumble with race and racism in today's workplaces, that centuries of junk science have been used to "prove" the inferiority of People of Color and the superiority of white people.

From Nazis preaching dehumanizing propaganda about the superiority of a light-skinned, light-eyed, light-haired, Christian "Master Race" to early pseudo-anthropologists fabricating a hierarchy of three racial categories based on human skull measurements, white supremacists have consistently and effectively peddled racist propaganda.

Although the science on race is clear, giving up a racialized hierarchy remains hard for some people because we have been personally, institutionally, and structurally programmed to believe otherwise.

² For more background, see: Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2017); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011); and Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the 21st Century* (New York: New Press, 2012).

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We have all ingested millions of pieces of data defining whose bodies are dangerous, whose customs are “backward,” and who is more and less intellectually capable. We have a lot of unlearning to do, at the deepest psychological levels, in order to reroute our neurological pathways, catch our preferences for whiteness in action, and behave more in accordance with our values and what we know to be true.



GENDER refers to the three-part combination of our sense of self (identity), the way we outwardly express that sense of self (expression), and how we choose to or are expected to participate in a group or community (role), all in the context of how masculinity and femininity are defined, valued, and enforced.

GENDER IDENTITY can be explained as our knowledge of who we are in terms of gender and the words we choose to use to describe our own gender. Most often we think of only two genders: woman and man. However, there is a vast multitude of ways to refer to one’s own gender. People whose gender identity does not fit neatly inside society’s two gender boxes use many different terms, but collectively they are often referred to as nonbinary people. For example, Jonathan Van Ness, from the hit TV show *Queer Eye*, is nonbinary.

Our insistence on only two gender identities at best limits creative personal expression and at worst creates the conditions in which gender violence and discrimination limit the health and success of women and nonbinary people. Additionally, the limited view of only two genders is a particularly white framework. For millennia, different cultures recognized, and even celebrated, a gender spectrum and variance in gender identities, including recognition of various Indigenous communities of two-spirit people and recognition in India of a third gender known as hijra.

In the United States today, words and phrases for identity broadly fall into two umbrella categories: transgender and cisgender.

TRANSGENDER folks are people whose gender identity does *not* match the biological sex (female/male) they were assigned at birth. **CISGENDER** refers to folks whose gender identity matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

Alfonso: For example, when I was born, it was proclaimed, “It’s a boy!” I was raised as a boy and conditioned as a man, and I call myself and live as a man.

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TRANSGENDER (cont.)

The insistence that there are only two genders limits our hiring opportunities because it demands we categorize people into two limiting boxes with the assumption that everyone in each box is having the same lived experience. Additionally, the American workplace has developed a set of leadership qualities and images that presume men to be more capable, professional, and likely to possess leadership qualities, thus resulting in increased hiring, paying, and promoting of men in the workplace.

Further, the preference is for masculine-presenting men above all other qualities and behaviors.

The revolution requires the destruction of the binary and an expansive reimagining of the various and varied capable bodies leadership comes in. Throughout the book we'll talk about the disparate impact of existing hiring practices on women and nonbinary people. When we talk about women we mean both transgender and cisgender women. We are also aware that nonbinary people consistently experience lower rates of hiring because of their nonbinary identity and expression.

GENDER EXPRESSION is primarily about our outward expressions of femininity and masculinity. Dominant assumptions about gender expression assume each one of us is singularly "more feminine" or "more masculine" all the time and that, given our gender identity, we use a narrow set of ways to express ourselves. For example, at work, women and nonbinary folks "can wear skirts, dresses, or pants," and men "should wear pants." Why? What does the fabric covering our lower bodies matter?

How does it limit or make it more or less possible for a worker to do their job? In the workplace, traits we tend to describe as "ideal leadership qualities" and "professionalism" are associated with masculine- categorized behaviors, while we diminish leadership behaviors currently associated with the idea of femininity.

The American workplace prefers masculinity so strongly that masculine-presenting people and men get hired, paid, and promoted more,³ and those who prefer a more feminine expression are expected to perform masculinity to get ahead in the workplace. Which sucks.

The Hiring Revolution demands we end this preference for masculinity, develop a broad set of desired leadership qualities, and authentically value them across a spectrum of femininity and masculinity.

GENDER ROLES are about a group's or society's expectations of what is okay and not okay for people of a certain gender to do or perform. For example, we expect men to be good at "money stuff" in the workplace and women and nonbinary folks to be good at "managing interpersonal disputes" (eyeroll!).

Gender roles in the workplace are limiting to our workers, teams, and businesses because they:

- 1) are **based in a false binary** that there are only men and women and those identities are supposed to be good and bad at only certain work tasks, and
- 2) **limit the menu of options** for skills we might expect workers of various genders to build.

The Hiring Revolution expects that assumptions about gender roles will be replaced by a shared set of expectations about what we need our next hires to be able to do, create, and learn.

³ "Men 40 Percent More Likely Than Women to Be Promoted in Management Roles," *Engage Employee*, August 25, 2020, <https://engageemployee.com/men-40-percent-likely-women-promoted-management-roles/>.

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PREFERENCE FOR WHITENESS AND MASCULINITY: Patterns of choice and decision-making assign higher value to white people and white-coded behaviors and to men and masculine-coded behaviors, even though work can be performed by people of any and every race and gender. As a result, masculinity is preferred over feminine-coded behaviors, and white people and white-coded behaviors are preferred over Black and brown bodies and behaviors.

RACIST AND SEXIST HIRING PRACTICES: Patterns of hiring reinforce a hierarchy of human value sustaining the false idea that white people and men are better, more equipped, more capable, and more professional. This results in predictable wealth disparities, both now and in the past, between People of Color and white people and between men and women/nonbinary/trans people.

We consciously and on purpose use *sexist* in this book because our assessment of the American workplace indicates that the current practices are situated inside an assumed biological binary without great awareness of or appreciation for the expansive possibilities of gender. We also understand sexism as a root of homophobia and transphobia (with gratitude to the generation-defining work of Suzanne Pharr), among other problems. These racist and sexist norms create societies, and thus workplaces, where the white and masculine is supreme, whether we personally believe it is or not. Dominance continues to dominate (👁️).

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE: Women and trans people are targeted by people and structures, in predictable ways, for the infliction of physical, mental, or emotional pain because of their gender identity and expression. They are also underhired, underpaid, and underpromoted system wide; this is discrimination.

RACE IN PRINT: We capitalize the terms *Black*, *Indigenous*, and *People of Color*, and other terms for ethnic identity, to acknowledge that active power dynamic in printed English while keeping *white* lowercase as a way to help other white allies and accomplices in divesting themselves of the weight of an uppercase *W*. Too often in the United States and its colonies has *white* been followed by the words *Power*, *Culture*, *Heritage*, and ultimately *Supremacy* as a means to establish power.

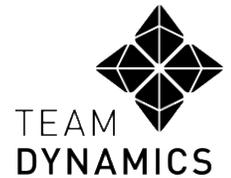
PEOPLE OF COLOR: When we say *People of Color* we refer to our current understanding of who is and isn't considered and treated as white in the United States. We capitalize the *P* and the *C*. Right now, in our awareness, *People of Color* as an umbrella term includes people with Black and brown bodies who might also identify as Black, African American, African, North African/Arab/Middle Eastern, Indigenous/Native American, Alaskan, Hawaiian, Latino/a or Latinx, or Asian Pacific Islander.

WHITE PEOPLE: When we refer to white people we mean folks in America who have the experience of being perceived as, live as, and benefit from being considered white. We lowercase *white* when referring to it as a race. This is separate and distinct from the complexity and richness of ethnicity and familial and/or religious tradition.

Trina: For example, I am a white person. I am ethnically Scandinavian. I was raised Lutheran. When I need something from a hospital, bank, school, or member of law enforcement, I receive all the rights, privileges, and assumptions of me being a white person. In those moments it does not make a difference whether folks think I am German, English, Australian, or Norwegian: I'm treated as a white person. Nothing about acknowledging my white identity, and my associated white privilege, takes away from my being Norwegian, Swedish, and Christian as well as white. The truth is, I am treated as my race far more than I am my ethnicity. It's a both/and.

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WHITE PEOPLE (cont.)

We know that who has and has not been able to **claim whiteness or white identity** in the United States has been and continues to be in flux. We recognize that many people's families and ancestors have been considered white, and then not, off and on throughout history. That can feel incredibly confusing, frustrating, and unsettling. Who gets invited onto and kicked off the "white people team" is ever changing! Different geographic origins, ethnicities, and traditions have been targets for discrimination and violence throughout US colonial history. We recognize that many white people fled their nations of origin, or were forced to leave, because they were being harassed, starved, or even murdered. While painful, these horrors are distinct from the devastating projects of American race and racism. For example, we know that Jewish, Irish, Armenian, and Italian people, among many others, have been intermittently considered both white and not white in America. **At present, many who fall into those categories, though not all, currently receive the benefits of whiteness the vast majority of the time.**

Remember that categories may be helpful tools, but they do *not* fully represent the complexity of real human lives. Individual people often fall into more than one category: Jewish people may also be Black, white, Indigenous, or People of Color. Armenian people may have lighter or darker skin that changes their relationship to categories involving whiteness. Categories are *not* monolithic: people who fall into them are not an undifferentiated mass that can be only one way. We must acknowledge the beautiful diversity of human experience even as we deploy categories to understand our relationships with each other.

Who is perceived or assumed to be white or a Person of Color shifts within geographic context and in relationship to the lightness or darkness of one's own skin. We're holding that complexity with you and inviting you into the understanding that preferences for white people and whiteness are at play in every American workplace.

Alfonso: I am a light-skinned Mexican American with a brown, ethnically Mexican mom and a white, ethnically German dad. Depending on time of year and how much time I've spent in the sun, my skin color ranges from beige to olive to a toasty brown color. Depending on where I am in the United States and who I am with, folks make different assumptions about if I am white or not. However, I identify as a third-generation Mexican American, Latinx Person of Color.

WHITE SUPREMACY: This long-term project aims to establish and keep white people (and white behaviors) at the top of a made-up human hierarchy **for the explicit and intentional purpose of controlling land, labor, and the economy.** White supremacy is a framework designed and executed to benefit white people over all others through the murder, dislocation, subjugation, and exploitation of People of Color. It began with the forced migration and attempted genocide of the Indigenous peoples who had inhabited these lands for millennia. It continued with the stealing of African and Caribbean people for the dehumanizing purposes of serving as chattel slaves. Throughout US history, it continued in extracting labor, at the lowest possible wages and in terrible conditions, from immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, especially those from what is now considered Mexico, Central America, South America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

To this day, being white converts the identity status through which one is afforded the largest and most **consistent financial and health benefits** (both personally and in the form of wealth and opportunity accumulation from one generation to the next).

The Southern Poverty Law Center, known by many as an expert source tracking US hate groups and domestic terrorists, defines **white nationalism** as a movement based in white supremacy and white separatism. The white nationalism movement is about establishing a "pure and powerful white ruling race" (yuck!). White nationalism relies on its close cousin white supremacy for a unique distinction wherein Jewish people (many of whom experience being perceived as

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white and benefiting from white skin in America) are used as scapegoats in an openly anti-Semitic way for what white nationalists consider major societal ills—in particular, the ebb and flow of the economy.

Throughout *Hiring Revolution* we will talk about your candidate pool “mix.” In HR this is often referred to as “diversity,” but when we talk about mix we mean **the fact of human difference**. Whenever two people are together, a “diversity” of identities is present. But not every aspect of our mix of identities has the same impact. For example, our difference in race has a greater effect on our experience of job seeking, job having, and equitable pay than our difference in height or hair color. We acknowledge, neutrally and regardless of how we wish the world was, that *differences make a difference*.

Key Takeaways

Language is always on the move. If you feel a bit lost in a maze of new terminology, take a moment to breathe. We hope you will refer back to this list as needed as you read, and with practice the terms will help you communicate clearly and with precision. You don’t have to memorize the list! **Our goal is for everyone reading this book to stop dancing around identity and injustice—and instead, speak plainly so we all know exactly what we’re talking about and working to address.**

We strongly encourage rereading the key terms pages out loud, if that’s possible for you. The act of wrapping your mouth around these words will help shift these phrases from interesting intellectual concepts on a page to precise language that you can regularly use in order to help you in your quest to better tell the truth about the realities of inequity and hiring, plus what you plan to do about it.

Preferences for whiteness and masculinity; racism, sexism, and gender violence; white supremacy, and white nationalism are embedded in every level of every structure, system, and relationship in the United States. This is hurtful, insidious, and at this point predictable. That’s the world we live in. It’s depressing, it’s distressing—and it’s fixable. How do we know? Because these structures were designed. We can design a new way. It will not be easy. But we refuse to give up by succumbing to overwhelm. Revolutionizing the way we treat whole people and whole peoples is possible.

This was *not* a fun list to write. We bet it was not a picnic for you to read. Thank you for reading it anyway. **These terms and phrases are an important foundation for our deepened and growing understanding of what we can do and how we’ll need to do it in order to transform.**

When we face hard truths, when we acknowledge these painful realities together, then we can make progress toward charting a new and better course!

The Hiring Revolution alone does not upend these realities in all aspects of life. We know that. It can, however, dismantle one stronghold of these insidious forces: namely, who gets which jobs. The Hiring Revolution is an opportunity to level the playing field in a historically racist, sexist, out-of-balance economy.

If you’re new to some or all of these concepts, or to saying or using these words or phrases at work, in this way, and with this level of specificity, welcome! We’re very glad you’re here! We can choose to practice consistent truth-telling together.