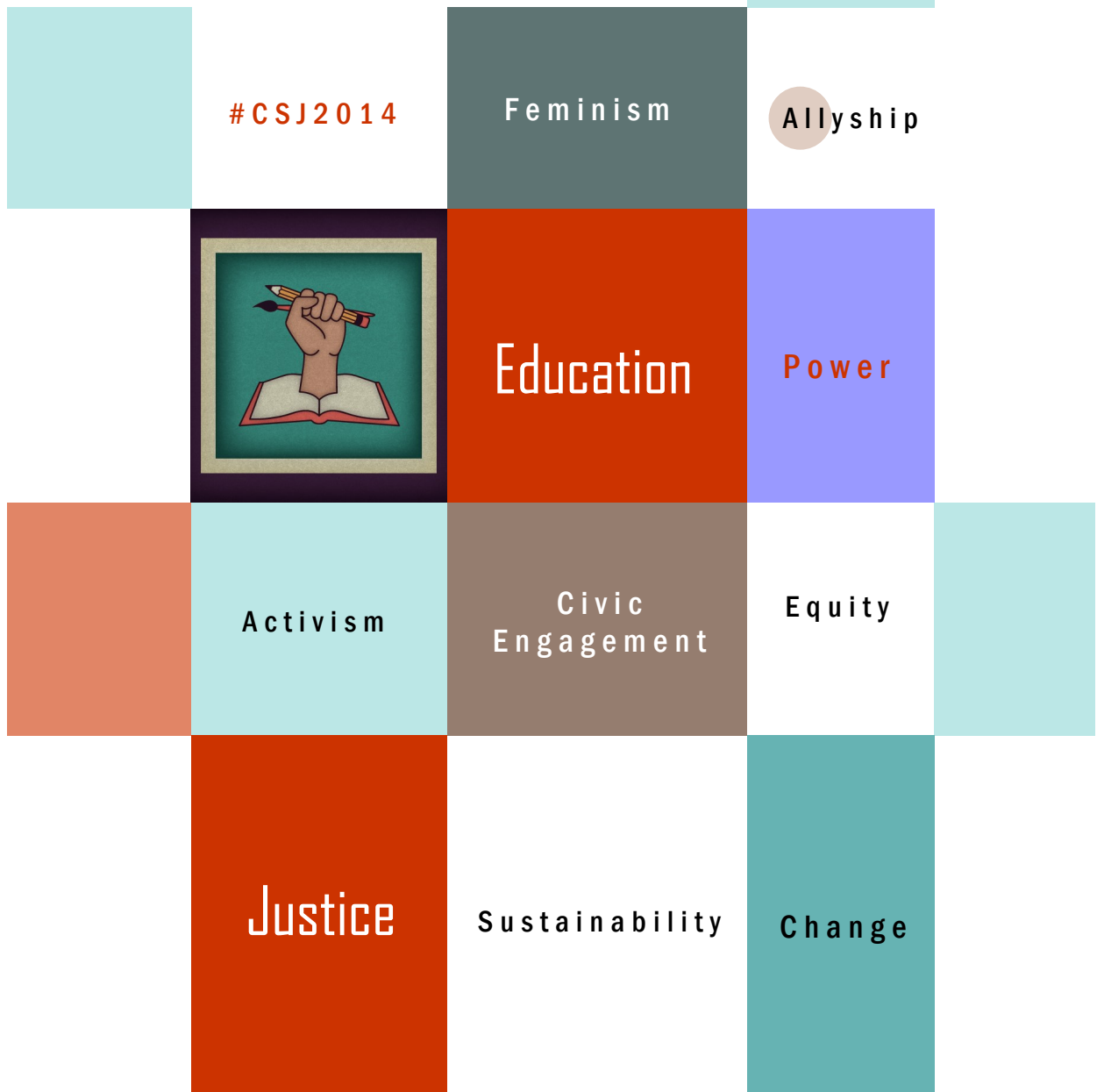


# Critical Social Justice Toolkit

Engaging in Difficult Dialogues

March 3-7, 2014



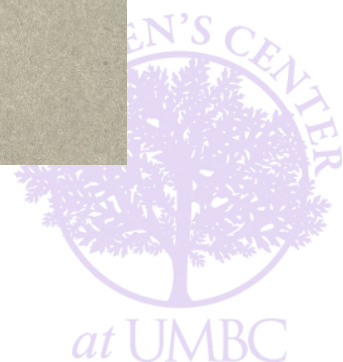
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Source: "A Social Justice Lens: A Teaching Resource Guide."  
<http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Publications/SJLens.pdf>



# About Critical Social Justice

The Critical Social Justice initiative began in Fall 2013 when UMBC Women's Center/Honors College intern Amelia Meman envisioned a multifaceted programming campaign aimed at supporting dynamic engagement with social justice issues and advocacy. Responding to ongoing conversations about constructive self-reflexivity and crucial intersectionality in activist and academic spaces, the Women's Center launched the inaugural Critical Social Justice campaign with the theme "Engaging in Difficult Dialogues" to be held March 3rd through 7th, 2014. Later joined by Student Life's Mosaic Center and other departmental co-sponsors, the CSJ initiative was met with incredible support from partners across the UMBC community who were interested in expanding opportunities for participatory learning beyond the classroom.

With an emphasis on integrating creative, analytical, and affective approaches to collaborative education and civic engagement, Critical Social Justice examines the margins and intersections of issues, identities, and systems. By coordinating an annual week of concentrated interdisciplinary programming, the CSJ campaign provides a unique platform for facilitating inclusive conversations on the meanings and challenges of social justice across different spaces. Critical Social Justice promotes sustained intellectual and practical engagement with social justice ideologies and movements through critical pedagogy and praxis with the aim of cultivating collective investment in transformative education and productive action.

Follow Critical Social Justice on social media and visit the blog to learn more about the CSJ initiative, future programming, and other opportunities for civic engagement:

[critsocjustice.wordpress.com](http://critsocjustice.wordpress.com)  
[criticalsocialjustice@gmail.com](mailto:criticalsocialjustice@gmail.com)

[facebook.com/critsocjustice](https://facebook.com/critsocjustice)  
Twitter @critsocjustice

If your university is interested organizing Critical Social Justice at your campus, contact the Women's Center at UMBC for more information:

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[umbc.edu/womenscenter](http://umbc.edu/womenscenter)



# What Is Social Justice?

Social justice theory focuses on equity for all and critical theory requires action and systemic change.

Central to all is a commitment to equity requiring systemic change. Often bandage-type solutions are inadequately used to solve urgent and emerging problems.

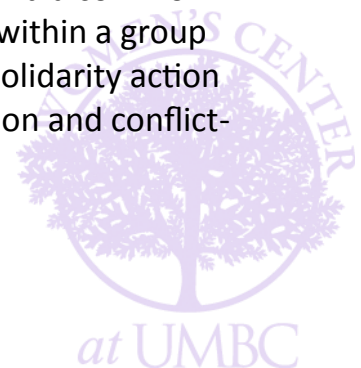
There are four distinct interconnecting filters to social justice — access, agency, advocacy, and solidarity actions. Each represents an aspect of social justice work and the true potential of these filters lies in engaging with all four simultaneously. Participatory democracy, civil society, transformative practice, and systemic change are necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of equity.

**Access** is the gateway to inclusion and participation. It hinders or enables an individual or group to take part in opportunities and act as a full member of society. Institutions only open to a privileged or select few have a high social injustice quotient.

**Agency** means that individuals know their rights. They have the capacity and the ability to voice their concerns and to take actions that create change for the better. Learning how to think critically about the world is a key strategy to develop their agency. In conjunction, a social justice education is imperative for developing socially responsible, democratic participation in a civil society.

**Advocacy**, which can be done individually or in groups, is a deliberate process of influencing outcomes so that change can occur. It requires a set of skills that allows a person to understand a problem and effect change using varied strategies and tactics. Developing the skills to successfully advocate for oneself or on behalf of others involves awareness (knowing what is happening), analysis (seeing the different parts, their impact, and the importance to the whole), and action plans (knowing what to do and how to do it). Action plans include a purpose, a message, a way to express the message, and an audience.

**Solidarity Action** refers to working with others to act for the collective betterment of society. It requires us to recognize injustice, to work across differences to find a common ground, and to achieve equity. Solidarity action requires coalition building within a group and networking with other groups. Examples of skills that help to achieve solidarity action can include empathy, cooperation, coalition building, and effective mediation and conflict-resolution skills.



# Terminology

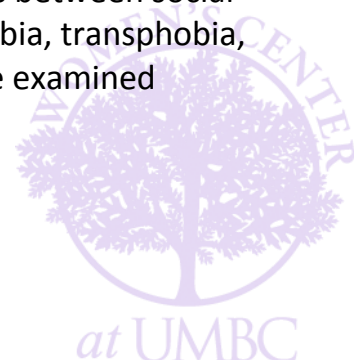
**Oppression** *The Social Work Dictionary* defines oppression as: "The social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group or institution. Typically, a government or political organization that is in power places these restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so that they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. The oppressed individual or group is devalued, exploited and deprived of privileges by the individual or group which has more power" (Barker, 2003). Institutional power is a fundamental component of oppression as it operates on a systemic level beyond merely interpersonal interactions and motivations.

**Privilege** operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. In the United States, for example, privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups:

- ⇒ **White people**
- ⇒ **Able-bodied people**
- ⇒ **Heterosexuals**
- ⇒ **Males**
- ⇒ **Christians**
- ⇒ **Middle or owning class people**
- ⇒ **Middle-aged people**
- ⇒ **English-speaking people**

**Privilege** is characteristically invisible to those who have it. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned the privileges that they enjoy or that everyone could have access to these privileges if only they worked to earn them. In fact, privileges are unearned and they are granted to people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not, and regardless of their stated intent. Unlike targets of oppression, people in dominant groups are frequently unaware that they are members of the dominant group due to the privilege of being able to see themselves as individual persons rather than stereotypes.

**Intersectionality**, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a concept often used in critical theories to describe the ways in which the complex power dynamics between social groups and identities and systems of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and thus cannot be examined separately from one another.





# Terminology cont.

**Microaggressions** are brief, commonplace, and often subtle actions or incidents that perpetuate oppressive ideologies and reinforce hegemonic structures of power and privilege. This can include verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities— whether intentional or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward marginalized groups or individuals. Those who inflict microaggressions are often unaware that they have done anything to harm another person.

**Institutional Power** is the access to resources and the capacity to influence social institutions like the government, educational system, or media. Institutional power is afforded to dominant groups and denied to marginalized groups—independently of individual intentions.

**Systemic Oppression** refers to the ways in which laws, ideologies, practices, and institutions systematically reflect and produce inequities and otherwise interact to maintain a hierarchy of power based on social differences and identities privileging the dominant group to the detriment of marginalized groups.

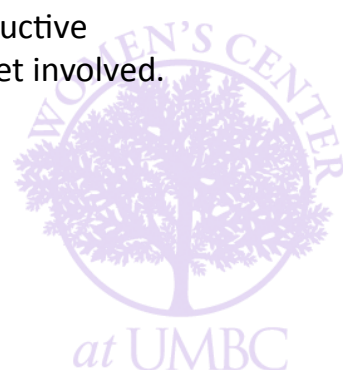
**Equity** accounts for diversity and disparity and seeks to give everyone what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. **Equality**, in contrast, disregards difference and aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives. Like equity, the goal of equality is to promote fairness and justice, but the focus on sameness discounts the lived realities of different people with different needs.



# Facilitation and Participation Guide

Critically engaging with these important and complex social justice issues can be enlightening and inspiring, as well as challenging. Here are some suggestions to support self-reflexive inquiry and facilitate productive difficult dialogues:

- ♦ It should be made clear at the beginning of the event if there are particular guidelines for the program or expectations of participants. For example, attendees should be aware if a program is supposed to be a “safe space” or if there may be potentially triggering material.
- ♦ Balance active listening with thoughtful speaking. Try to use “I” statements and avoid speaking for others or making generalizations.
- ♦ Lively, thought-provoking, and respectful discourse is expected and encouraged. Contextualize statements and distinguish between opinions, informed analysis, and various kinds of knowledge.
- ♦ Challenge by choice and recognize that discomfort can be a valid and even crucial part of the learning process
- ♦ Take time to reflect on how structures of power, privilege, and difference shape our experiences and perspectives--whether we realize it or not.
- ♦ Be open to new ideas that may conflict with dominant narratives and personal views.
- ♦ Focus on actions and their impact as distinct from intent. Jay Smooth’s video “How To Tell Someone They Sound Racist” illustrates the effectiveness of redirecting potentially contentious interactions away from individual motivations and character and instead refocusing the conversation on accountability for actions and their effects.
- ♦ Continue engaging with these issues beyond the initial events. Join constructive conversations on social media and find opportunities to learn more and get involved.



# Social Justice Lens Checklist

*by Marianne Neill, CASJ—Peace and Global Education Action Group member*

Here is a checklist that you can use to assess whether programs, resources, events, and so forth meet the criteria of the social justice lens. Note that some criteria may not apply to the specific item you are evaluating.

## Access

- ☐ values a welcoming and inclusive approach to all people equally
- ☐ values openness to the ideas and opinions of others as equal participants
- ☐ teaches the value of multiple perspectives
- ☐ demonstrates respect for democratic processes and civil society
- ☐ values community and co-operation
- ☐ responsive to all others equally

## Agency

- ☐ develops understanding of one's right to create change
- ☐ encourages belief in one's ability to affect one's own reality
- ☐ nurtures action and empowerment of everyone equally
- ☐ develops ability to think critically about social problems
- ☐ develops leadership skills
- ☐ values recognition and respect for the agency of others
- ☐ actively encourages leadership in working towards positive change that benefits everyone
- ☐ encourages people to find their own voice
- ☐ empowers people
- ☐ values participatory democracy
- ☐ contributes to the development of ability to participate in the world
- ☐ contributes to the development of ability to change the world

## Advocacy

- ☐ builds skills needed to effect systemic change using various strategies
- ☐ develops an understanding of one's position and privilege in society
- ☐ develops awareness of social realities
- ☐ develops analytical ability
- ☐ develops awareness of how to respond to make change
- ☐ develops voice and agency to enhance the ability to influence outcomes
- ☐ empowers the voice of disenfranchised and minorities

## Solidarity action

- ☐ promotes transformative work for the betterment of others
- ☐ nurtures an understanding that an injury to one is an injury to all
- ☐ values co-operation and coalition-building
- ☐ works across differences to find common ground
- ☐ advocates broad interconnections and common goal-setting and actions
- ☐ shows recognition of the strength in unity
- ☐ shows effectiveness in mediating and resolving conflict to build alliances
- ☐ encourages collaboration with disenfranchised or minorities
- ☐ nurtures ability to take action with empathy

