



**Elevating
Equity**

Elevating Equity Thematic Glossary

Note: This glossary is a working document, which will grow as terms and definitions for small and large group conversations and analysis need to be added.

Accountability: Andreas Schedler offers a definition of accountability that contains two levels: answerability and enforceability. At the first level, answerability, a group or groups share information and explain decisions to one another. Enforceability involves the ability for one group to enact consequences on another for the violation of the agreements. Typically, those with more power are able to enact consequences on those with less and don't even have to meet the "answerability" level of accountability.

The "answerability" form of accountability guides the ongoing work of our Community of Practice, Action and Accountability, and is why cohort member's anti-oppression experiments/projects will be visible to the entire cohort. That said, we must all examine the ways in which we can leverage answerability and enforceability to enact transformation and hold social and political systems of oppression and oppressors accountable, including ourselves and where we each individually sit in this system.

Justin wrote an [article](#) about this in the Stanford Social Innovation Review and you can read Schedler's work directly in "Conceptualizing Accountability," a chapter in "The Self Restraining State: Power & Accountability in New Democracies.")

Anti-oppression experiment: These **experiments** or "**limit acts**" are designed to help us get beyond the "**limit condition**", and to reach the "**untested feasibility**", or the imagined world that sits beyond

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the current one defined by oppression. The experiment or limit-act is simply “if we take x and y steps, we will achieve z (i.e. the untested feasibility)”.

Authentic word: This idea is central to Freire’s work as can be seen in the comment “To speak a true word is to transform the world.” The authentic word both contains thoughtful reflection and inspires action. It names the oppressors and oppressed to the best of our understanding. Words without aligned action = verbalism / empty words. Action without reflection = acts without transformation. (pg. 86). In our conversations and experiments we are challenged to use authentic words and to provide feedback to one another authentically.

Conscientização / Critical consciousness: Critical thinking and self-awareness that, through dialogue and action, empower people to examine their current situation and relationship to social and political systems that are causing oppression and inequity, in order to change that situation so that all people are humanized and dignified. In the Freirian model, critical conscious can mean the capacity to see the underlying themes in a material situation, see the heart of the issue in terms of **oppression**, **oppressor** and **oppressed**, summarize it in naming the **limit situation**, imagine a world beyond the current oppression with the **untested feasibility**, and bring this world into being with **limit acts**. Here’s another local perspective on critical consciousness theory from the Newark Community Collaboration Board:

<https://newarkccb.org/framework/critical-consciousness-theory/>

Dialectics: There are many versions and meanings for the term "dialectics", but essentially it is a process to find deeper and deeper truths, or an understanding of both the whole and the particular, using some manner of conversation or dialogue. Whether the question-and-answer style attributed to Socrates where two people are literally in an ever-deepening dialogue or Freire's style of looking at the relation or conversation between opposites: subject/object; material/abstract; limit-condition/untested feasibility; fatalism/limit-acts. After Socrates, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel may be the most famous person associated with dialectics and he influenced Marx and both influenced Freire. European culture is often given sole credit for the idea of dialectics, but many cultures have ideas on interplay between opposites. Most familiar to us as Americans may be the Asian system of yinyang (yin/yang).

Dialogue / Dialogic: Dialogue sits at the heart of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. At the heart of the generative dialogue is our use of the “**authentic word**”. The dialogue develops as we pose problems to one another to name the factors of oppression we see or are experiencing (**themes**), continues as we identify the unifying factor of these themes (**limit-condition**), develops further as we imagine a situation in which this oppression has been overcome (**untested feasibility**) and could be said to culminate in defining the actions that will take us beyond the oppression i.e the **limit-act**, our commitment to action. “True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking...thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved.” (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed – 50th Anniversary Edition*, 2020. pg. 92). Dialogue also sits in the underlying “twoness” to much of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed i.e. limit-situation/limit-act; immersion/critical consciousness; banking education/problem posing education. In this way, problems contain their solutions and vice-versa. This could also be said to be a dialectic.

False Generosity: The nonprofit sector is framed in terms of “charity” both from a narrative standpoint and from legal structure. Freire sees structures such as this as a form of “false generosity” born of oppression and states: “In order to have the continued opportunity to express their ‘generosity, the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this ‘generosity,’ which is nourished by death, despair and poverty. [...] That is why the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source. True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity.” (pg. 44-45) As a name for a number of funder behaviors, False Generosity is also a “**limit-situation**”.

Generative Theme: indicators or elements of oppression; often these are symptoms of a deeper underlying, unifying or summary root-cause or “limit situation.” These are often designed to be obscured.

Immersion: This is a state in which oppression is made normal and is thus invisible to the oppressed and oppressors. **White privilege** is a form of immersion and so immersion is a limit-situation. The purpose of **critical consciousness** is to disrupt immersion and so can be an **untested feasibility**.

Limit-Act: The limit act is that which moves beyond the **limit situation** and brings about the **untested feasibility**.

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Limit-Situation: The fundamental and addressable summary of the identified themes. Deeper root causes of oppression, intended by oppressors to be perceived as an immutable “reality” or “truth” an unchangeable limit. “For (Professor Alvaro) Viera Pinto, ‘the limit-situations’ are not the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin.’ They are not ‘the frontier which separates being from nothingness but the frontier which separates being from being more’”. (Footnote 15 in Chapter 3 of Pedagogy of the Oppressed). In other words, **limit-situations** invite **limit-acts**.

It could be argued that Freire sees the ultimate limit situation as the anti-dialogic nature of the system and the ultimate limit-act as the construction of dialogic processes and practices. He then offers 4 key expressions of what it is to be anti-dialogic and dialogic. Please see below the key strategies of anti-dialogic (oppression) and dialogic practice (resistance).

ANTI-DIALOGICAL (oppressive)	DIALOGICAL (liberatory)
<p>1. Conquest. This demands that men be subjugated, kept passive and made to adapt, and therefore remain oppressed.</p> <p>2. Divide and rule. This aims at preserving the status quo. People’s problems are here not looked upon as part of a totality but focalized into problems of local areas. This prevents the people from having a proper understanding of their real condition and militates against the process of the oppressed people’s unification and united action on their part.</p> <p>3. Manipulation. This is achieved by means of myths propagated by the oppressors. This prevents people from thinking critically and also the emergence of an authentic</p>	<p>1. Co-operation. This is based on the communion between leaders and the people and promoted the process of liberation.</p> <p>2. Unity for liberation. This must necessarily be based on cultural action on the part of leaders and the people, which permeates all spheres of living and is based on a real understanding of their total situation.</p> <p>3. Authentic organization. This involves the process by which real unity is forged for the common task of liberation.</p>

<p>organization of the people for their real liberation.</p> <p>4. Cultural Invasion. By this process, the oppressors impose their views of the world and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression and also creating in them a sense of inferiority.</p>	<p>4. Cultural synthesis. This is achieved through continuous dialogue between the leaders and the people, thereby enabling them to create their own guidelines for action.</p>
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(Chapter 4 concept definitions from Summary of Pedagogy of the Oppressed as summarized by Kacy O’Brien of Gathering Ground)

Nonprofit Industrial Complex: Non-profit industrial complex, or "NPIC" for short, is a term which is used by [social justice](#) activists to describe the way [non-profit organizations](#), [governments](#), and [businesses](#) are related. Many [activists](#) carry out their work as [employees](#) of or with the assistance of non-profit organizations. Many of their goals need money in order to be achieved, and nonprofits are registered with the [government](#) in order to be allowed to receive large amounts of money legally. These activist nonprofits usually get money from even bigger nonprofits, which are connected to big businesses and rich people who control [industries](#). But because many activists criticize things in society that businesses and rich people support, they might not get the money if they are too critical. So, in order to stay funded, they may have to change the ideas they have for improving society to be more acceptable to industry.

People who believe these kinds of relationships between activists and industries are harmful to activism use the term non-profit industrial complex as a faster way to discuss these relationships, instead of explaining the whole system each time. They have written many articles and books describing the effects of the NPIC by studying patterns of funding or discussing how the goals of some activists changed once their movements began to receive more money. - Source Wikipedia

Oppressed: Classes of people that are acted upon and in an effort to make them **objects** of the will of oppressors. In the multi-level and complex society developed by **racially gendered capitalism**, these categories are not fixed, but are relational. One can be in a class oppressed by others and also be in a class oppressing others.

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Oppressors: Classes of people that seek to deny the humanity, the subjectivity, of other classes of people in order to keep the capacity to be **subjects** for themselves and to turn other classes into **objects**, i.e. those that will be acted upon. In the multi-level and complex society developed by **racially gendered capitalism**, these categories are not fixed, but are relational. One can be in a class oppressing others and also be in a class oppressed.

Praxis (Action/Reflection): Praxis is the fusion of theory and action. A “**limit-act**” or “**anti-oppression experiment**,” ideally, is praxis.

Racialization: Learning from the work of critical race scholar, Neal Gotunda, we are attempting to make visible that race is not simply a category, but rather an ongoing process and, in doing so, to disrupt that process. Racialization is the process of assigning human beings into arbitrary and hierarchical categories with those appearing to be fully of European descent to be ranked at the top of the human scale and those appearing to be full and direct descendants of Africa to be at the bottom of the scale

Racially gendered capitalism: An economic formation of European development that carries within it a gender and racial logic that both justifies and guides the injustice oppressive classes generate in their accumulation and distribution of financial, labor, environmental and social resources. In the assumptions of the Elevating Equity program, this is a very high order “**limit-situation.**”

Structural Racism in the U.S.: the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege, and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people. Keith Lawrence, *Aspen Institute on Community Change* and Terry Keleher, *Applied Research Center at UC Berkeley* For the Race and Public Policy Conference, 2004

Untested Feasibility: The untested feasibility could be said to be the reality that lives right outside the limit situation, is the way we imagine reality if the **themes** of oppression were eliminated.

White Fragility: A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable [for white people], triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-

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inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. From <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>. SOURCE: Robin DiAngelo, “[White Fragility](#)” (International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 2011). White fragility is a regular occurring **theme** in the nonprofit sector and often exposes its **false generosity**, which could be said to be a higher order **theme** or **limit-situation**.

White Supremacy: “By “white supremacy” I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and un-conscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.”

-Frances L. Ansley, *Stirring the Ashes: Race, Class and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship*, 74 CORNELL L. REV. 993, 1024 n.129 (1989) as cited in Cheryl Harris’ “Whiteness as Property” *Harvard Law Review*, Jun., 1993, Vol. 106, No. 8 (Jun., 1993), pp. 1707-1791

Work Avoidance: “In every organization people develop elaborate ways to prevent the discomfort that comes when the prospects of change generate intolerable levels of intensity.” Work avoidance has “two common pathways in the patterns by which people resist the potential pain of adaptive change: diversion of attention and displacement of responsibility.” (Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, Marty Linsky, *The practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 2009. Pg. 84-86).

We see the following work avoidance tactics detailed by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, deliberate or unconscious, as overlapping with White Fragility and avoidance to change oppressive systems:

- **Diverting Attention:**
 - Focus only on the technical parts of the challenge and apply a technical fix.
 - Define the problem to fit your current expertise.
 - Turn down the heat in a meeting by telling a joke or taking a break.
 - Deny that the problem exists.
 - Create a proxy fight, such as a personality conflict, instead of grappling with the real problem.
 - Take options off the table to honor legacy behaviors.

Solutions can be said to be work avoidant in that they are not attempting to create a world that lives beyond the oppression we experience but rather make ever so slight adjustments so as to make the oppression more tolerable. This is one of the prime goals of **false generosity**.



Program Consultant



This Thematic Glossary, unless otherwise cited, was written by Justin Laing of Hillombo LLC with assemblage support provided by Kacy O'Brien of Gathering Ground.

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