

## Glossary

**agency:** the capacity of individuals to make their own decisions and control their own destiny; often used in contrast to “structure”

**culture:** the beliefs and practices acquired from society that are lived by a particular group of people

**essentialism:** the idea that there are certain characteristics that all members of a particular group of people naturally possess; for instance, the notion that females are inherently caring and nurturing

**ethnicity:** an ethnic group is a group of people identified as a community owing to shared cultural traits; although the term may be used in distinction from “race,” which is often more explicitly associated with skin color or other biological variation, the terms “race” and “ethnicity” are often used interchangeably

**gender:** aspects of masculinity and femininity that are learned from cultural context; in contrast to “sex,” which is a biological phenomenon, gender is socially constructed

**holistic medicine:** a philosophical approach to health that considers physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health as inter-related

**humanistic approaches to health:** the study of health with a focus on the individual; everyday life experiences and goals of the individual are seen as critical to constructing knowledge

**identity:** characteristics that distinguish a particular individual from others, shaped by factors such as experience, personality, and position in society

**intersectionality:** the idea that different aspects of societal oppression inter-relate in ways that reinforce discrimination

**life-world:** the lived experiences of an individual, forming part of a philosophical approach that focuses on the uniqueness of individual experiences

**marker of difference:** a characteristic that distinguishes an individual from other members of the community

**“Other”:** things that are marginalized or undervalued because they fall outside mainstream understandings of how things should be are sometimes referred to as the “Other” or being “othered”

**patriarchy:** the structuring of society around men as the dominant figure, resulting in oppression of women

**positivism:** a philosophical approach that emphasizes measuring, counting, and observing physical phenomena as a means of generating knowledge—the basis of the scientific method; critics argue that not all relevant social phenomena can be observed or measured in this way

**race:** regional groupings of people identified by differences in physical characteristics such as skin color; race used to be attributed to genetic differences among populations, but the biological validity of racial groups has been challenged and race is now often considered to be a socially constructed phenomenon

**socially constructed:** the idea that a phenomenon is produced by cultural and political understandings of how things should be

**structural violence:** the way in which social structures or institutions cause certain individuals to be disadvantaged, preventing them from meeting their basic needs or otherwise harming their health

**well-being:** an individual’s life satisfaction; a variety of factors may contribute to well-being, including good physical and mental health, spirituality, happiness, and self-worth