

**Lan-  
guage**

**De-  
coded**

---

Canadian Inclusive Language Glossary

The Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation would like to honour and acknowledge all that reside on the traditional Treaty 7 territory of the Blackfoot confederacy. This includes the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani as well as the Stoney Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. We further acknowledge that we are also home to many Métis communities and Region 3 of the Métis Nation. We conclude with honoring the city of Calgary's Indigenous roots, traditionally known as "Moh'Kinsstis".

# Contents

**01** **Introduction** - The purpose and power of language.

**02** **Themes** - Stigmatizing terminology, gender inclusive pronouns, person first language, correct terminology.

**03** **-ISMS**

**03** **Ableism** - discrimination in favour of able-bodied people.

**06** **Ageism** - discrimination on the basis of a person's age.

**08** **Heterosexism** - discrimination in favour of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships.

**10** **Racism** - discrimination directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

**14** **Classism** - discrimination against or in favour of people belonging to a particular social class.

**14** **Sexism** - discrimination on the basis of sex.

**17** **Acknowledgements**



**Language  
is one of  
the most  
powerful  
tools that  
keeps us  
connected  
with one  
another.**

# Introduction



The words that we use open up a world of possibility and opportunity, one that allows us to express, share, and educate. Like many other things, language evolves over time, but sometimes this fluidity can also lead to miscommunication.

This project was started by a group of diverse individuals that share a passion for inclusion and justice. We wanted to develop a resource that reflects the growth of our society and represents all of our unique community members. Words have the ability to shape how we see the world and each other, therefore it is important to create conversations everyone feels welcome to be a part of.

This glossary is intended to empower anyone who reads it. It symbolizes the stories of all of the people, experiences, and perspectives that exist, and encourages us to be more mindful of how we choose to convey ourselves. By opening up to new ways of understanding the world, we become strengthened through unity. Adopting an inclusive vocabulary promotes others to accept, embrace, and celebrate our differences, and acts as a catalyst for more meaningful changes to take place.

This tool was envisioned to be used as a guide that provides valuable history and context, and was not produced to shame, belittle, or otherwise dictate one's self-expression. Due to its ever-changing nature, language selection will rarely be a black or white issue. However, we are certain that with the right awareness, intentions, and alternatives, that we can all engage in discussions that treat others with respect and dignity. While the knowledge contained within this glossary encompasses many topics, we also recognize that there may be additional words or phrases missing from our list. Please use this as a prompt for further discussion within your own lives about the intricate and multifaceted power of language, and how we can all work together to generate positive change.

# Themes

This document explores issues that impact an array of individuals and community members. It touches on important themes that span across multiple populations, many of which are rooted in power imbalance or differences. Unfortunately, many of the words that we commonly use to describe or depict other people are innately harmful. Our tendency to label others by characteristics that are only a small part of their identity often results in stereotypes, myths, and biases that influence how they are treated. It is human nature to categorize or compartmentalize other people as a way of understanding their place in our world; however, when we reduce someone to a few minor traits, we prevent ourselves from seeing the whole person and all of their capabilities as an individual. With this in mind, we must also recognize that our interactions do not exist in isolation. Each of the conversations we engage in occur under layers of context, whether that be cultural, professional, educational, etc. Ultimately, we should be careful to use our words as tools to communicate—not weapons.

**Language is a fluid construct, and we should acknowledge that our conversations will always adapt depending on the environment we find ourselves in and the people around us.**

**Gender inclusive language and pronouns:** Contemporary scientific evidence tells us that sex and gender are much more complex than we previously thought; sex embodies the physical and gender encompasses the psychological. This has prompted many individuals to feel more open expressing their gender beyond the traditional binary. As we enter this new territory, we can be respectful to others by always asking and honouring preferred pronouns, and refraining from making gender-based assumptions.

**Person first language:** The notion of person first language comes from the recognition that people are not defined by their circumstances. For example, calling someone a “person with” a trait vs. labelling them by their trait is a small shift that helps to avoid erasing their agency as an individual.

**Stigmatizing terminology:** Stigma is fundamentally another word that describes a sense of shame. Stigmatizing words or phrases often carry negative connotations about someone that has been determined to be part of a particular group. The use of this terminology dehumanizes people on the receiving end, attributing them and/or the characteristics they possess as being less valuable. There is always an alternative to using stigmatizing language.

**Correct terminology:** While it may sometimes be difficult to identify when words are interpreted as painful or offensive, it is important for us to listen, learn, and do our best to use correct and appropriate terminology. Our world is home to many co-existing, overlapping, and unique identities, and using correct terminology prevents miscommunication by allowing us to respect each other’s differences in a positive way.

This project was made in partnership with distinct organizations that are experts in the fields that they have made contributions to. Each of these entities are respectively dedicated to promoting social justice and inclusion for all.

■

I

S

M

S

■

I

S

M

S

■

I

S

M

S

■

I

S

M

S

■

I

S

M

S

# **ABLEISM** : discrimination in favour of able-bodied people.

## **Addict / Crackhead / Druggie / Junkie**

The use of these words reduces an individual to their drug use, and trivializes the medical condition of an addiction. However, some individuals may self-identify with this label.

*Alternatives: Person (living) with an addiction, Substance use or misuse (depending on context)*

## **Basket case**

"Go do your work, don't be such a basket case."

The origin of Basket Case goes back to World War I. It was originally a slang indicating a soldier who had lost all four limbs, thus making them unable to move independently.

*Alternatives: Useless, Annoying, Lazy*

## **Cancer**

"That video gave me cancer."

Cancer is a group of diseases involving abnormal cell growth with the potential to invade or spread to other parts of the body.

*Using this word to describe things you hate doesn't make sense. An alternative use words that actually make sense.*

## **Crazy / Cray / Mental / Mental Case / Moron / Manic / Maniac / Psycho / Psychotic / Looney / Looney Bin / Lunatic**

Using these terms views people as their disability. These terms can be condescending and group people into one undifferentiated category. They do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities.

*Alternatives: Absurd, Illogical, Irrational, Intense, Misleading, Not making sense, Not thinking, Naive, Mistaken, Confused, Mised, Misinformed, Uninformed, Ignorant*

## **Depressed**

"I can't believe I got a bad grade on that test, I'm so depressed."

Depression is a serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities. Depression is not just a passing sadness where you feel a little down. Turning a serious illness into something light rather than something that can end one's life can have serious consequences.

*Alternatives: Upset, Sad, Blue, Disappointed, Melancholy*

## **Anorexic / Eating disorder**

"Eat a sandwich." "She is so skinny."  
"It's disgusting to look at her."

Anorexia is a psychological disorder, marked by starving oneself. It is inappropriate because some people are naturally thin and cannot gain weight.

*Using this word in a negative manner towards another person is inappropriate.*

## **Bipolar**

"The weather is so bipolar today."

Bipolar refers to someone who has a type of manic-depressive disorder. Bipolar disorder involves extreme changes in moods that occur for weeks that can ruin people's lives. Being bipolar isn't as simple as having a tiny mood swing throughout a day.

*Alternatives: Erratic, Unreasonable, Back-and-forth, Random, Indecisive, Moody, Scattered, Inconsistent*

## **Commit**

"He committed suicide."

We most often use the word "commit" when it comes to the act of carrying out a crime. The act of suicide is now widely known to be the result of mental illness. Suicide is associated with unsuccessful treatments, not enough treatment, and hopelessness. Families of people who have died by suicide most often face stigma. The person who has died by suicide is not often remembered for how they lived but rather how they died. In order to shatter the stigma surrounding suicide, we must change how we speak of it.

*Alternative : Died by suicide*

## **Cripple / Crippled**

Cripple refers to someone with a physical or mobility impairment.

*Alternatives: Physically challenged, Mobility impaired, Differently-abled. This word's shortened form, "crip" is reclaimed by some people with disabilities as a positive identity.*

## **Derp or Herp derp**

This may seem like a quirky phrase, but even before its inception as an internet meme, it has been consistently used to mock people with intellectual disabilities.

*Alternative : Use words that actually make sense.*



## **Dumb**

"He's so dumb, I don't want him on my team."

Dumb refers to deaf or hard of hearing people, people with speech-related disabilities, or people with linguistic or communication disorders or disabilities. It is not an alternative for describing someone ridiculous.

*Alternatives: Foolish, Arrogant, Ridiculous*

## **Imbecile**

Imbecile was the diagnostic term for people with IQ scores between 30–50 in the early 1900s. It is no longer used professionally. Prior to the development of the IQ test in 1905, imbecile was also commonly used as a casual insult towards anyone perceived as incompetent at doing something.

*Alternatives: Foolish, Incompetent*

## **Madhouse**

"I'm living in a madhouse these days."

Madhouse refers to an institution housing people with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

*Alternatives: Stressful situation*

## **OCD**

"I'm so OCD when it comes to my stuff."

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder in which people have unwanted and repeated thoughts or behaviours that make them feel driven to do something.

It is not a desire for things to look pretty and neat, or a recognition of perfectionate attitudes. It is an illness that can completely dominate someone's life.

*Alternative: Particular, Perfectionist, Thorough, Meticulous*

## **Special Needs**

This is a term that has been widely used by education systems and therefore remains part of everyday language. The term is seen as patronizing and has been used to make fun of disabled people.

*Avoid this vague euphemism unless officially used in a title, (i.e. where "special" is part of the title of an institution). We all have special needs. Saying that someone has "special needs" raises more questions than it answers. Saying that someone uses a wheelchair, needs a voice synthesizer to speak or is a non-reader makes clear what you are saying.*

## **Handicapped / The Blind / Deaf**

Using these terms views people in terms of their disability. These terms can be condescending and group people into one undifferentiated category. They do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. *Alternatives: Differently abled, Person with a disability, Person with visual impairment, Person who is hard of hearing.*

*If you're unsure of the proper term or language to use, ask. The best way to refer to someone with a disability is the same way we all like to be referred to: by name.*

## **Lame**

"Aghh, I have homework, so lame."

Lame refers to someone with physical or mobility disabilities. You not liking someone or something should not be compared to a disability.

*Alternative: Uncool, Cheesy, Tacky, Corny, Unfair, I don't like it*

## **Mongoloid**

Mongoloid refers to someone with intellectual disabilities and specifically Down Syndrome. This word derives from racism and ableism, from the belief that people with Down Syndrome look like people from Mongolia.

*There is no need for an alternative.*

## **Retard / Tard**

"That's so retarded."

Retarded refers to someone who may be limited in mental development. Being retarded, or mentally disabled is not a choice. It is an intellectual disability that severely infers with one's life and how the world views and treats them.

*Alternative: Confusing, Foolish, Silly, Weird, Funky, Strange*

## **Speech Impairment / Impediment**

Don't label others as their disability. *These terms are only acceptable if a speech impairment is a relevant detail to the story.*

*Never assume someone has a specific condition. Someone who stutters a few times during one speech you happen to hear may not have a speech impediment.*

## **Suffering from or with / Afflicted by**

"I feel so bad for him, he's suffering from bipolar disorder."

People are not "suffering from" their disabilities or mental health. People are simply depressed, bipolar, autistic, disabled, etc. Don't place value judgments on other people's experience. People could be living with a specific illness, but you are not free to declare them to be "suffering from" anything.

***Avoid using descriptions that connote pity.***



# **AGEISM**: discrimination on the basis of a person's age.

## **Anti-aging**

This term glorifies the state of being “young” and preventing the state of growing older. We see this word most often in cosmetic media, advertisement, and products that promise a younger and brighter appearance while considering growing older as something that is undesirable or unwanted. With this word, an ideal life would be that of a young person who is physically attractive and does not show signs of aging.

*This is an impossible standard to hold someone against and it is discriminatory towards those who are of an older age.*

## **Blue hair / Crone / Hag / Geezer / Over the hill / Golden ager / Bitty / Spinster / Has been**

These terms describe aging as a negative part of life.

*Using old as a negative identifier is not appropriate.*

## **Dumb as a doornail / Blind as a bat**

Some hearing and vision loss is inevitable in the aging process. No person should be made out to feel ashamed for this process.

*Alternatives: Vision loss, Hearing loss*

## **Old timer**

“He’s such an older timer here.”

This term is used to refer to an older person in a derogatory manner. While not traditionally considered an insult, using this term stereotypes people of a certain age and should not be used to respectfully address an older individual.

*Using old as a negative identifier is not appropriate*

## **Past your prime**

This phrase devalues older people by signifying that they are no longer “young” like they used to be.

*Using old as a negative identifier is not appropriate.*

## **Pensioner / Retiree**

*Do not use these terms if you are defining people by what they do (or don’t do), rather than who they are.*

## **Senior moment**

“Are you having a senior moment again?”

This term is used to describe an individual that has forgotten or misplaced something. It implies that seniors are typically people that are forgetful, lack mental function, or may be suffering from memory loss. Using this word mocks seniors and elderly people for health conditions which they have no control over as they age.

*Alternatives: Memory lapse, Forgetful, Inattentive, Absent-minded*

## **Bed blockers**

Bed blockers is a term used to refer to older persons in a hospital bed awaiting additional support or level of care. Usage of this term has often occurred when bouncing from home to hospital without proper rehabilitation.

*Alternative: Patient*

## **Cougar**

“Damn your aunt is a cougar.”

Calling a woman a Cougar is both sexist and ageist and neither progressive nor supportive of women.

*Women are not animals, they are women.*

## **Gerries**

“The gerries always visit our store in the afternoon.”

Referring to seniors as Gerries, which is (short for Geriatrics, Gerontology, a field of study) is not acceptable.

*Do not refer to people as fields of study.*

## **Old fart / Old bag / Old dog / Old trout / Old fossil / Dirty old man**

These terms describe aging as a negative part of life. *Using old as a negative identifier is not appropriate.*

## **Senile old fool**

“Be quiet you senile old fool.”

This term is used to refer to a person having or showing the weaknesses or diseases of old age, especially a loss of mental power. Suffering from dementia and being a fool are not related.

*Alternatives: Dementia patient, Cognitive health*

## **Silver tsunami**

“Canada now has more people over the age of 65 than youth under the age of 15 and is bracing itself for the silver tsunami of aging baby boomers.”

**Silver Tsunami** refers to the **aging of a generation** to a natural disaster. i.e. a relentless, destructive, expensive, devastating phenomenon. Furthermore, a tsunami is an unexpected crisis and we have known about this age wave for a long time.

**Alternatives: The aging of the population, Demographic shift, Age wave**

---

**You're still working? Give your job to someone who needs it**

Rather than shaming older people for working at their age, we should encourage and acknowledge the years they have put into their service and careers. Everybody deserves to have a career, passion, etc.

*This comment is highly inappropriate.*

**You can't teach an old dog new tricks**

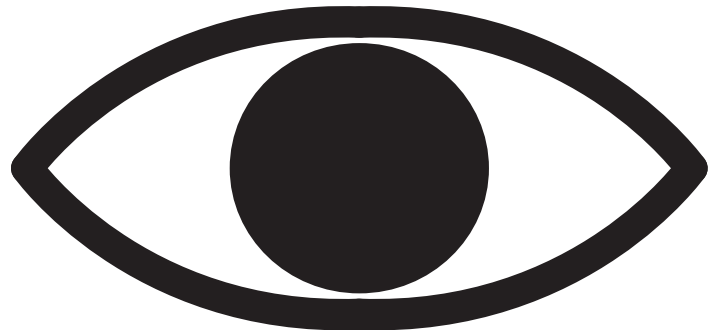
There is no age limit to learning a new skill or doing what one wants to do. Older people have a lot of experience with learning new things.

*Eliminate cross reference to animals. Using old as a negative identifier is not appropriate*

**You don't look your age / Successful aging / They were a very-young and spry looking couple of 70 year olds**

Being or looking young is framed as a compliment and old as a thing to avoid and to hide. It is only kind of ok to be old, if you don't look it. Saying “for your age” implies lower expectations for someone simply based on their age. It also congratulates them for looking younger.

*Using “young” instead of old is supposed to be a compliment that feeds into an ageist mentality. Changing the expression from old to young doesn't help - we wouldn't say 10 years young. To the extent that commenting on someone's appearance can be considered acceptable (intentions and tone matter too), simply telling someone “you look very nice today” or “they were a great-looking couple” should be sufficient.*



# **HETEROSEXISM**: discrimination in favour of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships.

## **Assumptions**

Do not make the assumption that every gay or lesbian knows what every other gay or lesbian is thinking. It's similar to asking a Japanese person why Sony is investing heavily in the United States.

*Assumptions should be avoided, especially when you don't know the person well.*

## **Faggot / Fag / Fairy / Poofter**

These words come with heavy homophobic baggage. You can't impose your own meaning on these words. You also can't reclaim something without a thorough understanding of where it came from and the problem surrounding it. You may not think you're being homophobic, but saying you are "just joking" or only saying it to people who aren't gay doesn't free you of blame. You may not be able to solve the issue of homophobia in our society. But what you can do is make sure you aren't — consciously or not — contributing to it.

*The best alternative is: Go with what they are calling themselves. It's not about your comfort level - it's about showing respect and using the term that individuals and groups of people have chosen for themselves. Ask them what they prefer.*

**The best alternative is: Go with what they are calling themselves. It's not about your comfort level — it's about showing respect and using the term that individuals and groups of people have chosen for themselves. Ask them what they prefer.**

## **Gay boys have such great style / Lesbians are so loyal**

Stereotypical statements ignore the reality of wide differences within any group and are potentially insulting to all groups.

*Stereotypical statements should be avoided.*

## **Queer**

"Dude, that's so queer."

Historically, this term was used to devalue, demean and insult, discriminate against people who identify with the LGBTQ2S+ community. There has been recent movement to reclaim the word and use it as an umbrella term to describe sexual minorities or as an identity label an individual can use to simply define themselves.

*The best alternative is: Go with what they are calling themselves. Show respect and using the term that individuals and groups of people have chosen for themselves. Ask them what they prefer.*

## **Dyke**

"What a dyke."

The term dyke is an offensive slang noun meaning lesbian. This word originated as a derogatory label for a masculine, tomboyish, or butch woman. It is often used as a negative term by those not in the community.

*The best alternative is: Go with what they are calling themselves. It's not about your comfort level - it's about showing respect and using the term that individuals and groups of people have chosen for themselves. Ask them what they prefer.*

## **No Homo**

By saying "no homo" you are basically alienating yourself from homosexuality because you're afraid of being associated with it. *You don't need to state your sexuality when complimenting others of the same sex.*

## Tranny

Behind this term is a history of violence and oppression inflicted on transgender bodies that we need to recognize, and respect those who continue to overcome it. If you do not identify with this term, do not use it.

*The best alternative is: Go with what they are calling themselves. It's not about your comfort level - it's about showing respect and using the term that individuals and groups of people have chosen for themselves. Ask them what they prefer.*

## You're so gay / That's so gay

If you are describing something or someone as gay, you are still using the term in a condescending, demeaning and often insulting manner. *Alternatives: Anti-social, Annoying, Frustrating, Depends on the situation.*

## You don't look gay

Complimenting gay men or anyone in the LGBTQ2S+ community by saying that they don't look it is not ok nor needed. *This comment is not needed.*

## PRONOUNS

There is nothing wrong with gender pronouns. However "he" and "she" come with a certain set of expectations about how someone should express their identity and relate to the world. For some it can be normal and for others limiting. Language matters. **Gender-inclusive language** is language that avoids bias toward a particular sex or social gender.

**Someone might proactively tell you if they prefer gender-neutral pronouns, but if you make an assumption about their pronoun without asking, then the responsibility will fall on them to correct you. This can be awkward, so why not just ask what they prefer their pronoun to be?**

**THEY - THEM - THEIR**  
**SHE - HER - HIM - HE**

# **RACISM**: discrimination directed against someone of a **different race** based on the belief that one's own race is superior. Racism and power are closely linked in a **hegemonic relationship**.

## **Ape / Kaffir / Monkey**

These are insulting term, for persons with African descent. They are apartheid era terminology used by Afrikaners (Dutch) to insult Blacks in South Africa. The words are used to describe mannerisms similar to a monkey or someone with little intelligence.

*The best choice is not to use the following words. There is no need for alternate words.*

## **Beaner**

This word was created to insult Mexican immigrants.

*The best choice is not to use the following words. There is no need for alternate words. In some context go with what they are calling themselves.*

## **Chinese Whisperer**

This is another name for the game titled Telephone, where participants whisper a phrase to the person next to them until it reaches the last person in line. The origin of this phrase has to do with the Chinese language being difficult to understand and/or translate by Americans.

*Alternative: A game of telephone*

## **Chink**

Chink is a word that originated around the 1890's in North America. It was derived from the phonetic word 'Ching' of the Chinese 'Ching' Dynasty. Chinese people who immigrated in the 1800's and early 1900's were from the 'Ching' Dynasty and the word 'Chink' was used as a racist slang. Many Chinese of the Ching Dynasty endured years of slave labour in Canada, building the railroads and working mines.

*The best choice is not to use the following words. There is no need for alternate words.*

## **Barbarian / Barbaric**

Barbarian is used to describe someone who is perceived to be either civilized or primitive. The Greeks used this term for all non-Greek speaking peoples, emphasizing their otherness, because the language they spoke sounded to Greeks like gibberish represented by the sounds "bar..bar." This word is also associated with colonialism.

*Alternative: Cruel, Brutal*

## **Brownie**

Brownie has been used to insult Middle Eastern and South Asian people for many years.

*The best choice is not to use the following words. There is no need for alternate words. In some context go with what they are calling themselves.*

## **Ching chong / Ching chang chong**

These are pejorative terms sometimes employed by speakers of English to mock or play on the Chinese language, people of Chinese ancestry, or other East Asians perceived to be Chinese.

## **Chug**

*"That chug is wasting his life."*

Chug is a racist slang term used against people of Indigenous origin, referring to them as heavy drinkers.

*The best choice is not to use the following words. There is no need for alternate words.*

## **Darkie**

This term was used across the world by colonizers to describe people of colour.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

**Don't be an Indian giver** This is an American expression used to describe a person who gives a gift and later wants it back, or who expects something of equivalent worth in return for the item. It is based on cultural misunderstandings that took place between early European colonizers and the Indigenous people with whom they traded. Often the Europeans would view an exchange of items as gifting, believing they owed nothing in return to the Indigenous who were generous with them, while the Indigenous people saw the exchange as a form of trade or equal exchange, so had differing expectations of their guests. *The best choice is not to use the following words. There is no need for alternate words.*

## **Drunken good for nothing**

This is a racist phrase used to describe Indigenous peoples in Canada.

### **Flip**

Flip was originally a derogatory term used for Filipinos by U.S. soldiers. In recent times there has been a trend by the community to reclaim the word, so that it can be used between them but not by outsiders.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

### **Gooks**

A colonial and racist term used to describe people of Southeast Asian and East Asian descent.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

### **Half breed**

This is a racist term used to describe a person of mixed race in a negative manner.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

### **Illegal / Illegal Aliens / Illegal Immigrant**

Illegal can refer to the act of stealing a car, but not in reference to immigrant populations. It's pretty simple to explain: Actions are illegal, people are not. The word illegal has been applied and abused by those advocating for harsh immigration policies that are undoubtedly racist and xenophobic.

*Alternative: Undocumented workers*

## **Marijuana**

This "exotic-sounding" word emphasized the drug's foreignness to white Americans and appealed to the xenophobia of the time. As with other racist movements, a common refrain was that marijuana would lead to miscegenation. Harry Anslinger, the bureaucrat who led the prohibition effort, is credited as saying back then: "There are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the US, and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos and entertainers. Their Satanic music, jazz and swing result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers and any others."

*Alternative: Cannabis*

### **Eskimo**

People in many parts of the Arctic consider Eskimo a derogatory term because it was widely used by racist colonizers. Many people also thought it meant eater of raw meat, which connoted barbarism and violence.

*This word's racist history means it is not okay to use it.*

### **FOB (Fresh off the Boat)**

This is often used as a means of mocking and other-ing an individual, while also downplaying the realities that many refugees and immigrants may be faced with when relocating to a new state. Some individuals may self-identify with this label.

*Alternative: Newly Immigrated, Immigrant, Refugee*

### **Gypsy / Gypsy Soul**

This is a derogatory term for a group of people called the Romani or Roma. Originating in India, the Romani people took to a traveling lifestyle and made money through trades. They primarily settled in Eastern Europe, but they live all over the world today.

### **Jew / Jewed**

"I just got Jewed."

This is a hateful word used to describe an instance that pertains to being cheap, associating it with the Jewish community.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

### **Exotic**

If your new coworker has a name you've never heard of before, hold your tongue before telling them it's "exotic." Using this word ends up exoticizing whomever you're referring to, usually with nasty racial underpinnings. It's a major verbal microaggression we need to undo.

*Exotic is a term that others. It's also a term usually reserved for animals and plants. So let's not even go there.*

### **Ghetto**

By comparing things, behaviours, or people to an idea of ghetto is racist, as it paints a wrongful and hurtful picture of what ghetto is. The media and the masses have an idea of what 'ghetto' might be because of what has been seen in popular culture, through the lenses of someone who hasn't been in a marginalized situation. The term perpetuates the stereotype of certain people, styles, behaviours, or things being ghetto, when they probably aren't.

*Alternative: Poor community, Underdeveloped*

### **Long Time No See**

This phrase was originally meant as a humorous and insulting interpretation of a Native American greeting used after a prolonged separation.

*Alternative: I haven't seen you for a long time.*



## Mulato

Mulato was historically used to describe the child of a black person and a white person. The term originates from the Spanish word “mulato,” which originates from the word “mula,” or mule—the offspring of a horse and a donkey.

### No Can Do

This phrase stems from Americans making fun of American immigrants who spoke English as a second language. To mock these people, native English speakers would say ‘no can do’, which is the grammatically incorrect way of saying ‘I cannot do that.’ Saying it only reiterates the thinly veiled racism that surrounds the lives of many.

*Alternative: I cannot do that. There is no way I can do that That is not possible.*

## Red Indian / Indian / Red skin

“Ask that red indian boy.”

For Indigenous people, the word Indian is a symbol of shame. Many have been subjected to repeated slurs using the word. It has been used to stereotype them as savages.

## Sand Ni\*\*er / Camel Jockey

This slur is often associated towards Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

## Slant-eyed savage / Spear chucker / Teepee creeper

This racial slur is referred to describe Indigenous peoples in Canada.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

## Spic

Spic is a racial slur used against a person from a Spanish-speaking country of Latin America.

*The best choice is not to use the following word.*

# WHERE are you FROM?

**The problem is the question. You don't really want to know that I live at Grand Ave. Cambridge Ontario. You want to know my **ethnicity**. And sure if we're close enough, I may feel comfortable telling you this... but if not, don't expect me to tell you this.**

****Tone** is important here. If you know the person well enough, you could ask: What part of your **heritage** are you proudest of? Or what is your **ethnic background**?**

## Ni\*\*er / Ni\*\*ah

(so inappropriate, we can't even spell it out). The word started off as just a descriptor, with no value attached to it. As early as the 17th century, it evolved into an intentionally derogatory word, and it has never been able to shed that baggage since then—even when black people talk about appropriating and reappropriating it. The word is inextricably linked with violence and brutality on black psyches and derogatory aspersions cast on black bodies.

## Paki

“Wanna hit up Paki town for food (aka Brampton).”

Paki acquired offensive connotations in the 1960s when used by British tabloids to refer to subjects of former colony states in a derogatory and racist manner. In modern usage Paki is typically a derogatory label used for all South Asians, including Pakistanis, Indians, Afghans and Bangladeshis. To a lesser extent, it has also been applied to Arabs and others perceived to resemble South Asians. In recent times there has been a trend by Pakistanis to reclaim the word, so that it can be used between young Pakistanis, but not by outsiders.

## Squaw

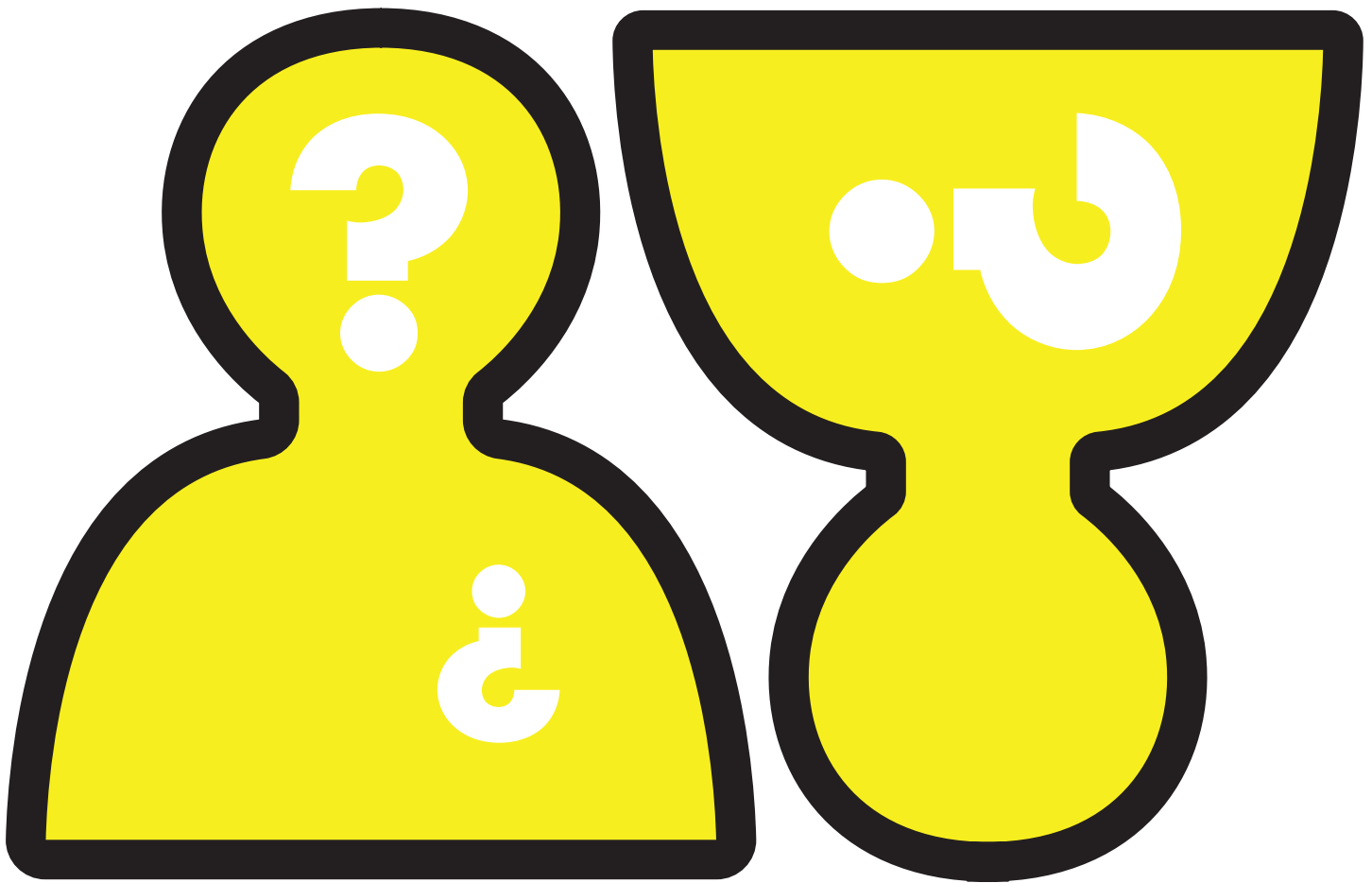
This word is offensive and stereotypes Indigenous women back to a time when settlers believed that Indigenous women were voiceless child bearers, enslaved and subhuman.

*The best choice is not to use the following word. There is no need for alternate words.*

## Towelhead

Towelhead is an ethnic slur for people of Arab descent, especially those wearing Keffiyeh. As well as people who wear a turban.

*Alternative: A hijab is a hijab, A turban is a turban, A Keffiyeh is a Keffiyeh*



## ***Indigenous or Aboriginal?***

**What is a collective noun for the original inhabitants of Canada?**

**Indigenous is the collective noun but on the topic of correct *terminology* — avoid using the possessive phrase “Canada’s Indigenous Peoples” as that *implies ownership* of Indigenous Peoples. The right answer is: Go with *what they are calling themselves*. It’s not about your comfort level — it’s about showing *respect* and using the term that individuals and groups have chosen for themselves. *Ask them what they prefer.***

### **Terrorist**

“Your beard is terrorist level bro.”

Using this term is demeaning and disrespectful as you are critiquing someone’s appearance by comparing them to a preconceived notion of what a ‘terrorist’ might look like.

*There’s no reason to comment on someone’s appearance by comparing them to a ‘terrorist’*

### **Wagon burner**

“Get off the road you wagon burner.”

This racial slur is used to describe Indigenous peoples in an offensive way. It derives from early colonial days.

### **Wetback**

Wetback is an ethnic slur that was originally coined and applied only to Mexicans who entered the U.S. state of Texas, presumably by swimming or wading across the river and getting wet in the process.

# **CLASSISM** : discrimination against or in favour of people belonging to a particular social class.

## **Uppity**

The word uppity, originated as a word used by Southerners in reference to African-Americans that they deemed didn't know their place in society.

## **White trash / Cracker / Hillbilly / Redneck**

We've all heard these terms in reference to poor white people living in North America. These terms stretch back into early America and were developed largely as a way for rich white people to insult poor white people. So while they might not be expressly racist, they're definitely classicists. Which is still terrible.

**The right answer is: Go with what they are calling themselves. It's not about your comfort level — it's about showing respect and using the term that individuals and groups of people have chosen for themselves. Ask them what they prefer.**

# **SEXISM** : Discrimination on the basis of sex.

## **Basic / Bimbo / Broad / Blonde / Airhead**

"Don't ask the broad, she wouldn't know."

"Look at what that girl is wearing, she's so basic!"

These words are female insults that enhance gender discrimination. People should have the freedom to appear as they wish without feeling shame or harassment, or having their intelligence insulted.

*If someone feels the need to comment on how someone is dressed, they can say "differently".*

## **Bombshell, Man-eater**

*These terms are violent and sexist.*

## **Bossy / Pushy / Feisty / Sassy / Whiney**

Have you ever seen a man be described with any of these words? That's a general rule of thumb on how not to be sexist.

*Alternatives: Strong, Forward, Aggressive, In-charge, Powerhouse, Assertive, Boss, Exemplary, Commanding, Confident, Leader, Fearless, Impressive*

## **Bitch**

"Do you see the way she acts? She's such a bitch."

"Don't be such a basic bitch."

"When a woman is in charge, she is a bitch."

This derogatory word is often used to describe women who are strong or outwardly opinionated. When someone calls a man a bitch, it is often to say they are like a woman, or feminine, and they can be easily submissive. We often see this in movies, shows, and books to denote a comedic situation where someone is put in a position of little to no power.

*If you are trying to say the person is not nice or rude, simply say that.*

## **Bridezilla**

*There is no need for alternatives.*

## **Catfight / Catty**

When women disagree with each other, the proceedings are sometimes stereotyped as a catfight. Men's disagreements are not called catfights or dogfights or anything else.

*Alternatives: Arguments, Disagreements, Debates, Discussions, Conflicts, Disputes*

## **Cocksure / Cocky**

This is used to often describe both sexes, although it tends to be used more often for men.

*Alternatives: self-confident, overconfident, arrogant, self-important, in love with oneself, pushy, overbearing, swaggering, aggressive, conceited, haughty, supercilious; jaunty, brash, cheeky, flippant, saucy, nervy, impertinent, insolent, careless*

## **Fu\*k Boy**

This word is often used to “slut-shame” men. Originally it was used as a slur against male victims of rape, specifically prison rape. A fu\*kboy was a male prisoner who was passed around as sexual property of fellow inmates and because they were weaker and smaller, they were taunted and called fu\*kboys.

*There is no need for alternatives.*

## **Hormonal / Raging female hormones / Over-sensitive / PMS / Period shaming**

It’s known that PMS (pre-menstrual stress) can affect women’s moods – but this phrase ignores that and just assumes that if a woman’s frustrated or angry about something, it must be all down to her hormones.... because women can’t have any real cause for anger.

*Both men and women have hormones, but hormonal is often only used to describe women.*

## **Cunt / Cunt / Cuntish / Cunted / Cunting / Munt (male version of cunt)**

The word was originally used to describe a vulva or vagina, but is now used as an insult to describe women. This word has a strong misogynistic overtone.

*There is no need for alternatives.*

## **Fu\*k her right in the Pussy / FHRITP**

*“Hey dude, she’s hot, FHRITP.”*

This phrase started off as a vulgar videobombing prank meme that went viral and is incredibly degrading for women.

*There is no need for alternatives.*

## **High-maintenance**

This term is always used to describe women. The ‘high-maintenance girlfriend’ stereotype is yet to surface.

*There is no need for alternatives.*

## **Hysterical**

The word hysterical derives from the Greek word for uterus. It usually gets tossed around as a description for emotional women and feeds into the sexist stereotype that women are unstable.

*There is no need for alternatives.*

## **Man purse / Man bun / Manpower / Mankind / Manlike / Manly / Like a man**

By definition, whatever a man does or like is manly or manlike because a man is doing it.

*Alternatives: Courageous, Strong, Brave, Upright, Honorable, Mature, Noble, Resolute, Straightforward, Vigorous, Adventurous, Spirited, Direct, Competitive, Physical, Mechanical, Logical, Active, Self-confident, Workforce, Personnel, Workers, Staff, Humankind*

## **Ditz / Ditzzy**

These terms are used primarily used to describe women.

*Alternatives: Out of it.*

## **Forefathers**

*Alternatives: Ancestors*

## **Guys**

*Alternatives: Folks, People, Everyone*

## **Slut / Skank / Whore / Hoe**

*“I cannot believe you kissed her! She is such a slut.”*

*“That dress makes you look like a whore.”*

*“Stupid hoe forgot to give me back my change.”*

The word slut originally meant a “messy, dirty, or untidy” woman or girl. Because of this, it was frequently used as a term for kitchen maids and servant girls. Later on the word took on the meaning of a “promiscuous woman.”

As a culture, we are quick to use these words that paint female sexuality as disgraceful – even if we don’t realize that we are doing it. For some young women, the stigma of these words are so hurtful that it leaves their lives in ruins.

*The double standard remains: Why is it that a girl who has sex is a whore/slut, but a boy who has sex is a stud/player?*

*There are many sex-positive alternatives that we can use:*

*She was exploring her newfound sexual desire. She was experimenting with what she likes and doesn’t like. She was taking a defined step into adulthood She was opening herself up to new possibilities She was – simply – trying something new.*

## Social butterfly / Bubbly

This phrase generally refers to a woman. Social butterfly conveys a sense of light-mindedness along with the sociable, gregarious character of the person.

*Alternatives: Gregarious, outgoing, social, sociable, socially active, convivial, extroverted; joiner, gadabout, socialite*

## Working mom

The word 'dad' is rarely preceded by 'working'.

There is no need for alternatives.

## **Context: Wording dependent on the situation.**

### Fat / Chubby

"Lose some weight, fatass."

"You are killing yourself with how fat you are. Go on a diet."

"How do you live with yourself when you're so fat?"

Stop using "fat" in a way that shames others – or even yourself. Sure, fat is something we all have and need to survive. But being concerned about "looking fat" in a dress is a way to shame people who might not fit the conventional beauty standards of our society. It's a way to verbally value thinner people over others.

*Allies, feel free to reclaim fat as an empowering identity (here's looking at you, #fatspo). But if you're going to pull a Facebook and say you're "feeling fat" today, refrain. Fat is not a feeling. Fat is not a put-down, nor is it shameful. Fat is a part of your body.*

### It was just a joke

It is inappropriate when someone makes an offensive comment and expects the other person to take it as a joke.

### Rape

"That test just raped me."

This is vulgar. Rape is not a joke.

*Alternatives: Describe what you mean.*

### Victim

Victim is a passive term that makes the subject of the story seem helpless, although sometimes this helplessness is used intentionally (i.e. "She was the victim of psychiatric treatment"). It is important to check with the person before describing them as a victim.

*Alternative: Survivor*

**WHO ARE YOU SPEAKING TO?**

**WHERE ARE YOU SAYING IT?**

**WHY ARE YOU SAYING IT?**

**HOW ARE YOU SAYING IT?**

# Acknowledgements

The Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation is a not-for-profit organization run by committed Millennials who volunteer their time for the greater good. We work to improve race relations in Canada and also mitigate racism by creating cultural understanding through multicultural education, technology and arts. Being on the forefront of advocacy and multiculturalism, the foundation often works with ethnic communities on projects.

This document could not have been possible without the endless help of committed folks and organizations across Canada who worked with us to compile all the words and phrases that affect their community.

## **A special thanks to:**

Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation (Iman Bukhari, Hanaa El Moghrabi, Hunzah Hayat, Francisco Benavides), Society for the Advocacy of Safer Spaces, LinkAges, Canadian Mental Health Association, Bow Valley College, Pakistani Canadian Cultural Association of Alberta (Asjad Bukhari), Earth Educators Inc. (Seema Jindal), Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (Benedicte Schoepflin), Change the Face of Addiction (Emily McMillan), Alberta Council on Aging (Donna Durand), altView Foundation (Mike) and the many others who contributed to this project.

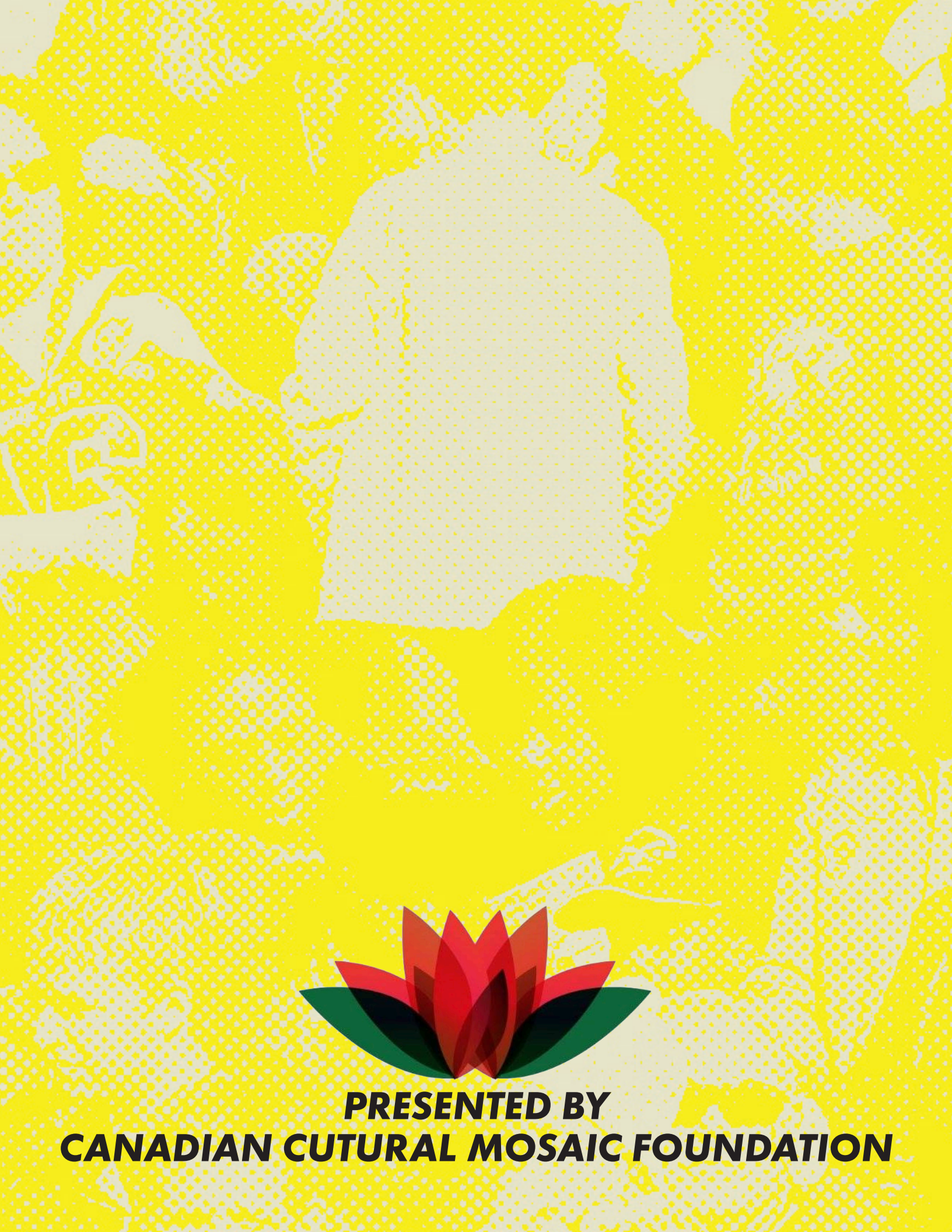
Editors: Iman Bukhari, Emily McMillian, Hunzah Hayat, Nicholas Gunhouse

Graphic Designer: Nicholas Gunhouse

Published © 2018



**We are certain that with the right awareness, intentions, and alternatives, that we can all engage in discussions that treat others with respect and dignity.**



**PRESENTED BY  
CANADIAN CULTURAL MOSAIC FOUNDATION**