MULTICULTURALISM MATTERS
Perspectives and Guides about Diversity for Media Makers

The Diversity Committee of the Department of Journalism & Media Communication Colorado State University
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Table of Contents

Preface & Acknowledgements ......................................................... v

Introduction .................................................................................... 1

Part 1: Questions ............................................................................. 7

What do you really mean by diversity? ............................................. 8
Shouldn't I try to be identity blind? ................................................. 12
Why are some people so sensitive? ................................................... 17
How do I face feeling uncomfortable? ............................................. 21
What about having multiple identities? .......................................... 25
What do I need to know? ................................................................. 29
What about the metrics? ................................................................. 33

Part 2: Guides .................................................................................. 37

Language & Style ............................................................................ 38
Age .................................................................................................... 39
Class & Socio-Economic Groups ..................................................... 40
Disabilities ....................................................................................... 41
Gender & Gender Identity ............................................................... 42
National Origin ................................................................................ 44
Race & Ethnicity .............................................................................. 45
Religion ............................................................................................ 50
Sexual Orientation .......................................................................... 51
Veterans & Military Service Members ......................................... 52

What Now? ...................................................................................... 53

Endnotes .......................................................................................... 54
Multiculturalism Matters

This publication is meant to be a starting point for conversations and research that we hope will inspire and inform the media you create.

This publication is for students and early career professionals in media who want a starting point to stimulate conversation, research, and new perspectives on matters of identity and multiculturalism in the United States. It is ideal for courses in communication, public relations, journalism, marketing, advertising, and other topics around media content.

We use the terms multiculturalism and diversity in our title because we want to join our efforts with other organizations seeking to promote equity through their initiatives and activities as well as with the work around multiculturalism generally.

What you’ll find here is far from the whole story, however. If what you read puzzles you, if you think there must be other sides to the issues we raise, or if you think we missed something important... well, you’re probably right. These essays and guides are only a starting point that we hope will inspire and inform your own research and discoveries.

What’s Inside

Part I addresses real questions about diversity and media asked by real people we interviewed for this project. To come up with clear, direct answers, the team conducted extensive research tapping the knowledge and expertise of journalists, activists, and academics from a wide range of groups. Many of the people we interviewed are current or former staff, faculty, or students at Colorado State University living in Colorado or around the country.

Part II provides introductory discussions about language around nine categories of identity: age, class, disability, gender and gender identity, sexuality, national origin, race/ethnicity, religion, and veteran/military status. These categories are commonly identified by government, education, and business as historically under-represented or most subject to bias and discrimination in the United States.

More about Visuals

Although we do make note of key issues around images in this volume, other texts do a far more comprehensive job discussing the impact of images on how we think about the world around us.

We recommend:

- *Diversity in US Media*, by Catherine A. Luther, Carolyn Ringer Lepre, and Naeemah Clark.
- *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* by Paul Martin Lester
- *On Photography*, Susan Sontag’s excellent essays on the history of photography in society
- Celeste Fisher’s *Black on Black: Urban Youth Films and the Multicultural Audience*
Acknowledgements

The material in this publication comes from research conducted by a team of students and faculty in the Department of Journalism and Media Communication at Colorado State University. We interviewed media professors, campus staff, and media professionals in a wide range of media environments, including the Hollywood film industry, major newspapers, web development companies, boutique public relations firms, and others.

Department of Journalism and Media Communication (JMC) Chair Greg Luft conceived this collection of essays. Dr. Rosa Mikeal Martey directed the project as part of the department’s Diversity Committee and was lead writer. Ph.D. student Leah Stone was the project manager. Contributions to research, interviews, planning, design, graphics, and writing were made by (in alphabetical order) Susan Clotfelter, Katelyn Crocker, Peyton Garcia, Kimberly Kandra, Holly Graham, Hannah Hemperly, Bradley Kaye, Erin Oppenheim, Selena Palomino, and Grace Stamps. JoAnn Cornell and Michael Humphrey served as editors, reviewers, and consultants. Mandy Switzer designed and developed the graphics and layout. Kate Jeracki was copy editor and proofreader, and Stephanie Scott provided additional edits.

We sincerely thank the members of the JMC faculty, the CSU Student Diversity Programs and Services offices, and the members of the 2015 – 2016 JMC Diversity Committee (Catherine Knight Steele, Jangyul Kim, and Daniela Castillo) for their edits, feedback, and suggestions. Special thanks to Kirk Hallahan for title suggestions and invaluable feedback and edits.

Grateful acknowledgements to the many professionals in public relations, news, photography, film, social and other media who shared their stories and advice for these pages.
Introduction
Positions and Perspectives

Making media involves making choices about the people, points of view, emphases, and representations we use to tell a story.

#targeting #frames #objectivity #positionality #power

The images, words, and sounds that we use to make media are powerful tools for expressing ideas and meaning, and they can change the way we think about concepts, people, groups, and events. Media scholar Joseph Turow points out that mass media such as television shows, news, and movies have the ability to connect us through shared media experiences—or fragment us along cultural and social lines related to our identities, beliefs, and experiences.¹

It makes sense, then, that the wrong word or image in media content can be offensive, damaging, or upsetting, especially when that word or image is used to describe you. Subtle differences in phrasing—even when the literal meaning is the same—communicate different ideas.

Words and images get these different associations from their history, from the most common ways people use them, and from individual and group experiences with them.

The choices that we make about language, perspectives, and ideas in the media we create can be inclusive, speaking to a broad range of audiences and communities, or they can be divisive, reinforcing tensions and misunderstandings among us. Knowing how different people see the media you create can help you make better choices.

Targets and Messages

One way to think about how you make choices about media content is the way that advertisers and marketers do: as targeting. Consider this case: In April 2016, the University of Washington cheerleading team circulated a poster with guidelines for their team tryouts that showed a slim, blond white woman with a list of body and makeup “Dos” and “Don’ts.” These included having a “bronze, beachy glow,” a “natural tan or spray tan,” an “athletic” physique, “hair down” and hair “curled or straight.”

The poster received a torrent of backlash on social media, especially from women of color, because the instructions provided weren’t applicable to many of them. The posted seemed to say that only slim, white (preferably blond) women would be welcome on the team—or at least that they would be the team’s preference. (As a side note, men were actually invited to try out for the team, as well.) That exclusivity was probably not the message the team wanted to send. But from a marketing and advertising perspective, it’s easy to see how this poster used visual and verbal cues to define their primary target audience as white, slim, blond, and young.

Marketers and advertisers do this all the time, especially to target messages for specific genders and ages. For example, television ads targeted at women often use the color pink, flowers, soft music, smooth and slow segment transitions, and soft focus images. Ads for teens tend to use rapid cuts, high-energy music, and trendy slang; ads for seniors use simpler, cleaner design, often with a nostalgic feel.

These stylistic choices invite the intended target audiences to pay attention, but they also signal to those outside of the target audience that a product or service is not for them. For example, fitness ads use a different language to signal if their products are for men or for women: ads for men might talk about your physique, while ads that talk about your figure are intended for women, not for men.

We as consumers are very well-trained to read these cues. We know when something is targeted at us, and we know when they’re telling us, “Don’t bother with this, it’s not for you.” That’s exactly what happened with the UW cheerleading poster. Media-savvy students of color looked at the poster and read, “this isn’t for you.” With simple changes, the poster could have suggested inclusivity rather than exclusivity. But for that to happen, content developers have to ask if all of the verbal, visual, stylistic, and contextual content communicates the way it is meant to. Is the message you’re communicating really not for people of color or men or people with a curvy rather than “athletic” physique? Unless you have a reason you want to actively exclude those groups, you need to be sure you don’t send signals that they’re not welcome.

Nuances in communication like these matter not just because some people might be offended (although, of course, that matters too). They matter because language and images can be used to reinforce the status quo—or they can lead us to think about things in new ways.

Considerable research backs up this idea. For example, researchers in 1983 found that when newspapers used sexist language like the generic “he” in describing elected political positions, people were more likely to think the position was most appropriate for a man—and a more masculine one, at that.

Non-inclusive language frames a media product, inviting people to see the events or people it depicts in certain ways and sending the message that certain types of people aren’t welcome in the conversation. Patterns like these establish social power, even if they don’t do much to one person’s individual power.

In other words, sexist, racist, ableist, ageist or other discriminatory language doesn’t just reflect societal problems, it reproduces and enhances them in our society.

Frames and Choices

Making media involves making choices about the people, points of view, emphasis, and representations we use to tell a story. These choices combine into what writer and sociologist Todd Gitlin calls media framing, or ways that media define, explain, and organize ideas around a topic. Because media frame prioritize and accentuate some aspects of reality and de-emphasize others, they
can influence how people interpret the topic, its causes and effects, its importance in society, and its impact. Even the initial act of selecting a topic for representation in media can influence whether or not we see it as significant.

Addressing multiculturalism is, in part, addressing the frames we use to tell our stories. Selecting frames to communicate specific ideas is basic practice in the work of strategic communicators such as marketers, PR writers, or advertisers, but this happens in all kinds of media, even in news that aims to objectively report “just the facts.”

Anyone asking key journalistic questions related to who, what, where, when, and why can’t start to answer them without making choices on some level. Some of those choices come from your training. Basic journalistic guidelines dictate that some events are newsworthy while others are not. Common PR practices say some concepts have broad appeal while others do not. Social values and personal habits lead us to pay close attention to some ideas but not to others, and our individual assumptions about individuals and groups guide our views about what audiences need or prefer. These choices result in frames that affect how people see the topics we address.

Media frames are often communicated as a set of symbols, such as selecting the image of a gray-haired white man to illustrate “a professor” or presenting accused criminals in menacing photographs. Selecting an image of a young black woman as a professor changes that frame considerably, as does using a school photo of a convicted rapist rather than his mug shot for news stories, as happened in media coverage in 2016 of a Stanford student athlete who was convicted of assaulting an unconscious woman.5

The frames media makers select often reflect how they speak to and for specific audiences, especially those that are seen as most dominant in society – or as most desirable to advertisers.

As a result, media frames are often subtle and appear as natural or normal ways of seeing and portraying the details of events. As much as we might want to create media without frames, it’s almost impossible to do so. Even live filming of an event creates a frame – a literal one – based on where the camera is placed, what is and is not included in the frame, and which part of an image is in or out of focus. We can’t create media without inserting ourselves and our perspectives into our content at least somewhat.

Reflecting on Objectivity

Thinking about the power of frames may require some changes to how we think about objectivity, especially for journalists. If framing is impossible to avoid, then we can’t really be completely objective. Long a non-negotiable requirement for the news industry, the notion that journalists should strive to be perfectly objective has recently been called into question by citizen journalists, scholars, bloggers, and others. In fact, they argue that the point of view of the writer might actually help create better, more easily understood, and more engaging media because being aware of how we frame our work helps us make better choices about it.

Journalist Elle Nash argues that newsroom traditions of objectivity bring with them specific cultural and social ideas about the types of judgments used to decide what information is presented or left out of a story. As a result, striving for objectivity can position white, male, cisgender, able-bodied, and/or straight perspectives as “normal” and other views as “non-normal,” which can restrict what is considered valid content and “omit or overlook ‘unusual’ or ‘non-normal’ experiences.” This in turn can lead to “marginalization, stereotyping, misunderstanding, and disenfranchisement” of underrepresented communities, she argues.6

Brent Cunningham argued in a 2003 Columbia Journalism Review article that the principle of objectivity makes us “passive recipients of news, rather than aggressive analyzers and explainers of
Positionality and Reflexivity

Identifying our own perspectives can be difficult. The concept of positionality from cultural anthropologists can help us understand how our identity and our point of view affect how we see and interact with others. This idea says that we are always interpreting the world from a particular standpoint, and that we always have a position from which we are writing, talking, knowing, and interacting. Positionality is a way to think about our personal biases, including the assumptions and blind spots we develop over time. Positionality is related to another anthropology term, reflexivity, which asks us to stop and reflect on our position. Whenever we learn, we build on what we knew before. That is, our ways of understanding new ideas and new experiences develop out of previous ideas and experiences we’ve had. Being able to name and explain where we’re coming from – the previous life experiences that shaped us into who we are – makes us more aware of the filters we use to make sense of the world around us.

Together positionality and reflexivity remind us that we can never eliminate how who we are influences the ways we see the world. Challenging and examining our position in society helps us understand how things we see as “normal” or take for granted might be different for other people. For example, heterosexual couples can be confident that if one spouse is in the hospital, the other will be permitted to visit him or her. Gay and lesbian couples, however, are often denied this right. When straight people recognize the reasons that their position makes situations such as this one easy for them, they can understand how some situations might not be as easy for gay and lesbian couples as they are for straight couples.

Making it clear where we stand can help us be more fair, communicate across cultures better, and make better media.

People, Power, and Institutions

The life experiences that lay the groundwork for our individual perspectives on the world don’t just come from our interactions with other individual people, although of course the way we were raised, our friends, our parents, our teachers, and our families certainly contribute.

What’s harder to see are the ways that larger patterns in society shape those experiences – and how those larger patterns help some people and harm others. These patterns are the result of repeated – institutionalized – differences in power for different groups.
In his article “Institutional Racism Is Our Way of Life,” Jeff Nesbit explains that these patterns of discrimination show up at all stages of life, from class and racial disparities in preschoolers’ suspensions, to decisions about when to try juveniles as adults in the court system; from employers’ racial biases reviewing job candidates, to systematic discrimination in granting home mortgages to white buyers more than to people of color. Some of those patterns come from individual interactions, some come from interacting with long-standing norms in society, such as how we decide who can qualify for a loan, what education is considered most valuable, how we design cities and buildings, how we define marriage, or rules about who can enter specific bathrooms and locker rooms.

It is because of institutionalized discrimination that personal biases and prejudices aren’t the same as systems such as racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, trans-phobia and so on. Individual people can try to unlearn racism, but one person can’t remove institutional patterns of discrimination that affect marginalized populations. This is also why activists object to the term “reverse racism.” Reversing the direction of prejudice from one individual to another is possible; but that doesn’t reverse the systematic patterns of differences in power throughout society.

### Making a Difference

If we can understand how these dynamics have an impact on our communities and society, as well as on us as individuals, we can make powerful content that matters in real ways.

Inclusive media that represents a range of voices – especially voices that we rarely hear – can have more impact. If we can understand how these dynamics affect us as individuals, as well as on our communities and society, we can make media content that enlightens others, inspires change, and appeals to more audiences.

Incorporating multiple perspectives in your work doesn’t just increase your audience size, it can make your media better. Research from the University of Texas at Dallas found that including other perspectives improves the work people do because socially diverse teams produce more innovative, effective, inclusive, and profitable work. This is because diverse groups have different perspectives and information that can help people make better decisions.

Thinking about so many perspectives when you create media can seem daunting – and time-consuming. It is. Even more, making changes to how you see yourself and other people in relation to these identities isn’t easy. Both require adjustments that might be uncomfortable, embarrassing, or even irritating.

Columbia Business School professor Katherine W. Phillips suggests that we can think about the pain of making these adjustments like the pain of exercise. “You have to push yourself to grow your muscles. The pain, as the old saw goes, produces the gain.” Just like exercise, diversity in teams, organizations, and media content is necessary for us all to grow, innovate, and change.

But really, isn’t making careful choices about communication what we all signed on for when we decided to make media in the first place?
The positionality of the development team for this publication come with their own blind spots and biases just as much as anyone else’s. First, most of the interviews conducted for this project were with people associated with our own institution, Colorado State University. This emphasizes lenses rooted in a particular set of geographical, class, and other social positions.

Our individual cultural identities also affect our perspectives. Our development team is made up of typically abled, cis-gender members of a university community, with the related socioeconomic, social, and cultural privileges those categories confer. Some of us are Latino, some African American, some Asian, some mixed race; some of us are straight, others are lesbian or bisexual; most of us are women; some of us are Christians, and some are unaffiliated with any religion; all of us are documented residents of the United States.

In our market research with students and consultations with professionals we sought out perspectives that were different than our own, including ones with very different political and cultural lenses on the topics we address here.

Ultimately, the content of this book reflects our combined vision, and the details (and missteps) in this volume come from our own ideas about how to integrate academic and market research into the advice we believe is most helpful.
Part 1: Questions

**Q1 What do you really mean by diversity?**
The word diversity refers to the range of specific social and cultural identities historically underrepresented in organizations and positions of power.

#inclusion #multiculturalism #equity

**Q2 Shouldn’t I try to be identity blind?**
Blindness to the identities of those around you and to your audiences doesn’t help you take their perspectives into account and often indirectly leads to exclusion.

#recognition #awareness #interculturalCommunication

**Q3 Why are some people so sensitive?**
Ask yourself whether what seems to you to be someone’s “sensitivity” might be instead a pattern of exclusionary media representations.

#publicDebate # faultLines #startTheConversation

**Q4 How do I face feeling uncomfortable?**
Digging into discomfort can lead you to its source – and solutions to overcome it. Examining your perspectives can help you understand how others see things.

#apologies #positionality #open2change

**Q5 What about having multiple identities?**
Combining marginalized identities should not be seen as additively increasing barriers, but rather as changing the nature of the barrier entirely.

#intersectionality #multidimensional #doubleJeopardy

**Q6 What do I need to know?**
Learning about the experiences different communities have had with issues, institutions, and challenges helps you connect with and be sensitive to all your audiences.

#history #analytics #askExperts

**Q7 What about the metrics?**
Analytics – nuanced analyses of who does what, where, and with whom – are better than simple metrics, especially when considering multicultural audiences.

#conversations #preferences #engagement #attention
What do you really mean by *diversity*?

Aren’t we all diverse?

The word *diversity* refers to the range of specific social and cultural identities that have historically been underrepresented in organizations and positions of power.

#inclusion #multiculturalism #equity

The word *diversity* is used as a catch-all to refer to the makeup of social groups that include identities which are often underrepresented or actively shut out of institutions and groups. It is used widely in businesses, college campuses, and government. But it doesn’t quite mean any difference or variety — so no, we’re not all diverse. There are some problems with the word, though.

First, the word is often misused: Populations can be diverse, but not individuals — stay away from calling someone a “diverse candidate” or a “diverse expert.”

Second, the term is sometimes seen as a watered down code word that exacerbates schisms among groups rather than addressing them. Preferred terms include *multicultural*, *equity*, and *inclusion*.

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**What are diversity efforts for?**

The notion of diversity is a cornerstone of many institutions. Statements such as this one from Colorado State University’s Office of the Vice President for Diversity often provide a broad list of the identities they aim to serve: “Our definition includes age, culture, different ideas and perspectives, disability, ethnicity, first-generation status, familial status, gender identity and expression, geographic background, marital status, national origin, race, religious and spiritual beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and veteran status. We also recognize that the historical exclusion and marginalization of specific social groups must be addressed to promote equity.”

16
Federal law defines protected groups more narrowly, and only for certain types of laws, such as those forbidding employment discrimination (although not other types of discrimination, such as businesses providing goods and services) based on race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, and military service, among others. Missing from federally protected classes are sexuality, gender identity, and socio-economic status.

Considering these perspectives, designing media to reach a broad range of audiences is challenging but important. We spoke with Nicole Mossing Caputo about her work as manager of digital and emerging media for the University of Colorado Health system. She explained that balancing voices in the media her organization makes is paramount.

“There are many health care activists working to ensure equity. I hear from them through social media, email, and phone calls,” Caputo said. “Everyone wants to make a difference, whether it’s from within or outside organizations. I think we can all get a little frustrated when change doesn’t happen immediately. What to do? RESPECT others and their intentions and avoid negativity and frustration,” said Caputo.

Sometimes media makers face resistance when they try to integrate diverse perspectives into their content. For example, James Clark, co-founder of the marketing firm Room 214, explained to us that they have had to push clients to show more diversity in the models they use for promotional materials. “Our clients have gotten frustrated with us pushing them to include more racial and gender diversity in their content,” he said. “Understand the limits, and when there is resistance, bring facts, not pressure.”

Greg Luft, professor and chair of CSU’s Journal-
ism & Media Communication department, explains how his worldview changed by working as a television reporter in Fort Myers, Florida. “As someone who grew up on a farm near a small town, my view of diversity was very limited when I started college. That began to change as my worldview expanded,” he said.

“I had to learn to approach each situation with an open mind, but also with a sense of caution about how the visibility and situational emotion of a ‘story’ impacted the people who were involved in my work,” explained Luft.

These types of conscious, careful efforts to include a range of voices and question our own assumptions are underlying goals of diversity efforts in media and communication.

Sentiments around the word diversity are certainly positive, but the word diversity itself isn’t always seen as helpful – especially by those whom these goals are intended to support.

Shonda Rhimes, creator of the hit shows Grey’s Anatomy and Scandal said in a speech in 2015 that the word diversity, “[suggests] something … other. As if it is something … special. Or rare. Diversity! As if there is something unusual about telling stories involving women and people of color and LGBTQ characters on TV.”

Moreover, many people reduce the term to mean primarily African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, and it has been criticized for being a polite way people can avoid talking about difficult issues such as identity-based discrimination. It can also lead people to problematic “identity-blind thinking,” which can render the experiences of marginalized groups invisible.

Research suggests, in fact, that diversity trainings sometimes make things worse, rather than better. One study examined 829 companies’ training programs conducted over 31 years and found that these trainings actually decreased the chances that white and Black women as well as Black men will become managers.

The word diversity may even have lost its meaning entirely. The Atlantic quotes sociology professor Adia Harvey Wingfield: “Diversity becomes defined so broadly that using diversity programs or affirmative action as a way of remedying ongoing historical inequalities can easily become overlooked and dismissed. People become focused on having diversity for the sake of diversity and it loses the power to addresses existing inequalities.”

The Huffington Post quotes director and screenwriter Ava DuVernay: “[Diversity] is a medicinal word that has no emotional resonance, and this is a really emotional issue.”

So it may be time to add some alternative terms. Journalist Jeff Chang suggests the term equity because it emphasizes change and balance. Another good word is inclusion – this incorporates the idea of actively bringing a range of perspectives into your work, thinking, and life.

Or try multiculturalism, which emphasizes multiplicity and combinations of cultures. It’s used to promote the idea that we can maintain multiple cultures rather than assimilate or segregate them.

Regardless of the term you use, actively identifying different life experiences and perspectives and integrating them into your work is vital to making good media. We urgently need the programs, goals, and conversations the word diversity is trying to encompass.

How can I integrate diverse perspectives into my work?

We can start to uncover the blind spots we develop because of our specific perspectives by examining how particular identities affect the way we see ourselves and others.

Tony Phifer, communications specialist at CSU, explains that only by confronting his own preconceived notions was he able to see the whole of the people and communities he writes about. “Few stories go the way you think you they will.
Never go in with preconceived notions because you’ll miss the story,” he said.

CSU journalism professor Patrick Plaisance explains, “I encourage students to get out of their comfort zones. That involves getting out and talking to people who are totally beyond their circle of familiarity.

Good journalists are always pushing themselves to get familiar with the unfamiliar. Good journalists are always thinking about getting into the lives of people who are not like them.”

Following that advice requires considering how your position is influenced not just by what makes you unique, but also by what ties you to other groups in society – and often, to groups organized around age, gender, national origin, disability, sexuality, gender identity, and military service.

Identities are part of how we treat ourselves and each other, which in turn can shape our opinions, ideas, and knowledge.

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Stories from Professionals

Tonie Miyamoto, Director of Communications, CSU Division of Student Affairs

The videographer on my team is a person of color and deeply committed to inclusion and diversity. He produced a series of web videos on campus that we felt were authentic and told the student story in a very genuine fashion. Our visible diversity on campus is around 20 percent so it is always a balance to highlight diversity and inclusion without going overboard and misrepresenting our population as more diverse than it truly is.

We featured both visible and invisible identities and used the students’ words to tell their own story. We were really proud of the outcome and were devastated when we received feedback from one of the stakeholders that the videos weren’t diverse enough.

The take-home lesson is ensuring that all stakeholders share the same vision for diversity and inclusion going into a project. We now ask in advance of each project, “What does success look like?” and “What are your expectations around diversity and inclusion?”

It’s amazing how varied the responses can be and how often clients say they want a focus on diversity and inclusion but they haven’t given any thought to what their goals are or what that means to them. As communicators, we see ourselves as advocates for telling the whole story and that means representing multiple perspectives and viewpoints.
Shouldn’t I try to be identity blind?

I try to treat everyone the same.

Blindness to the identities of those around you and to your audiences doesn’t help you take their perspectives into account and often indirectly leads to exclusion.

#recognition #awareness #interculturalCommunication

The short answer is, no, being blind to different identities doesn’t help you take their perspectives into account. The ideology of identity blindness may have come from a place of good intentions, but trying to ignore people’s race, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, age or other identities denies important realities for many people.

Aiming to be identity blind makes it harder to talk about marginalized identities. To some, this suggests that there’s something wrong with the feature you’re ignoring.

How can I be fair without being blind to people’s identities?

On the surface, being blind to race and other identities seems like a good thing – judging people on their character rather than their identity, focusing on what we have in common rather than what divides us. But that blindness denies the barriers that marginalized groups still can face every day.

As media makers, it’s our job to see, represent, and inform about a range of topics. Aiming to be blind – colorblind, gender blind, age blind, etc. – to important dimensions of the people we talk about and to keeps us from doing our job.

In short, as Monica Williams argues in an article in Psychology Today, being blind to an identity makes that identity taboo – and we can’t fix problems we’re not allowed to talk about.

To say “I don’t pay attention to the color of someone’s skin,” or “it doesn’t matter if they’re male or female,” or “their sexuality isn’t an issue” ignores the institutionalized discrimination that these and other groups must overcome.
Institutionalized discrimination – as opposed to individual prejudices – comes from patterns of legal, organizational, and/or community practices that have a negative impact on marginalized groups, even if those practices were established without an intent to harm.

Specific individuals might not be particularly prejudiced, but living and working within a system that is biased can have consequences that benefit some and damage others in small and large ways.

Those consequences aren’t only about hurt feelings or offense. They are about real bodies and lives. For example, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on social media emerged in the wake of video recordings of systemic violence done against Black bodies, especially by white police. The push-back – #AllLivesMatter – espouses a colorblind view, but this non-racist statement isn’t enough. “Black Lives Matter” is an actively anti-racist statement intended to heighten our consciousness of how institutionalized racism can literally kill.

This awareness is vital because some practices that look fair or neutral on the outside still create systemic inequalities. Take schools, for example. Public schools were once segregated by race, and despite decades of desegregation efforts, in 2010, nearly half of all Black and Latino students were attending schools that were 90 percent to 100 percent racial minorities. These schools often have less funding, larger classes, and fewer teachers in comparison to schools where the majority of students are white. In fact, public schools are more segregated today than they were in 1968.27

To understand how it affects people’s everyday lives, this type of disparity needs to be seen. Being identity blind doesn’t provide that opportunity.

Some long-standing discriminatory practices become normalized in society, like women being kept from front-line combat positions in the military. Although all combat positions were finally opened up to both genders in 2016, women still made up only 15.3 percent of active duty military in 2015.28 Women’s experiences differ from men’s precisely because they are women.

The consequences of their gender include not only feelings of invisibility in the military, but also fewer opportunities for advancement and leadership, lower pay, and increased likelihood of assault.

Being identity blind is often what we think we should do when we follow the “Golden Rule” (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you). But that creates problems as soon as you start interacting with people who are different than you because their needs and wants are probably different, too.

This aspect of identity blindness often leads to default assumptions that really only fit a particular default identity – which is often straight, white, cis-gendered, typically abled Christian men.29 As white blogger John Halstead explains, he previously tried to be colorblind, but, “what this meant was that, whenever a Black person passed through my white bubble, I would make an effort treat them like a white person.”30

Try instead the “Platinum Rule”: Do unto others as they would have done unto them. Coined by author and scholar Milton Bennett in the 1970s, then later popularized by motivational speaker and author Dr. Tony Alessandra and others, the Platinum Rule reminds us that what we see, feel, experience, and are sensitive to isn’t the same for everyone.

Instead, the Platinum Rule asks us to find out what others want – and then do that.31, 32 Background research and open conversations often reveal that others have needs that you simply did not expect or consider because of your assumptions.

Considering different worldviews when you interact with people is always helpful, but it’s especially important in what is called intercultural communication, or sharing information across cul-
tural or social groups. Bennett outlines six stages we experience as we learn to integrate different worldviews into our own, called the “Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.” We start with denial, move through defense and then acceptance, and finally to adapting and integrating those differences.

**How do I consider other points of view?**

The Platinum Rule is more complicated than it sounds because of what psychologists call “projection bias.” This cognitive bias leads you to assume that other people think similarly and have the same outlook and values as you do.

Research shows that people regularly overestimate the similarity between other people’s priorities and values and their own, even when they are trying to be completely rational and objective. For example, a Millennial (born after 1983), might prioritize a stable career, but if you assume that’s equally important to a cynical Generation Xer (born 1965 - 1983), you might miss an important cue to that generation’s perspectives on freedom and career flexibility.

Asking sources and people you work with about their identities, their sensitivities, and their needs will help you avoid projecting onto them your own way of seeing. In fact, the best way to counteract projection bias is by starting out with the assumption that other people are absolutely nothing like you – finding commonalities later on might turn into a pleasant surprise, rather than a disruptive one.

Andrés Tapia, a business consultant for diversity efforts, explains in his 2013 TEDx talk that to make diversity efforts work, we first need to think about what we believe, why we believe it, and where those beliefs came from.

Only then can we understand what our differences really might mean – and how they help us.

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**DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

- **Stage 1:** We start with denial of difference, feeling our view of the world is the only real or accurate one.
- **Stage 2:** We move to defense, recognizing other views but feeling our own worldview is superior.
- **Stage 3:** Minimization follows, thinking we’re more alike than different.
- **Stage 4:** Acceptance of difference is next, seeing our worldview as one of many.
- **Stage 5:** We start to adapt to difference, learning how to expand our worldview to understand others.
- **Stage 6:** Finally we integrate other views into our own, finding ways to expand who we are as a person to move in and out of different ways of seeing the world.

This way, he says, we can move from seeing, tolerating or even celebrating difference to actively recognizing that we need others’ differences – and they need ours.  

This requires reflecting on how our own unique position can make it more difficult to see others’ positions – including the assumptions and experiences that are part of those positions.  

For example, people who learned English as a second language may face different social challenges than a native English speaker. Others may assume that an accent means the speaker is less intelligent. People with an accent might be teased or mocked. Those experiences could impede someone’s willingness to speak publicly, and they may become more flustered or annoyed when someone interrupts them or asks them to repeat statements.  

Trying to be blind to those differences also makes us blind to the ways that systemic and institutionalized biases shut out some people and benefit others. For example, if we overlook disabilities when we talk about use of technology, we ignore the reason that some people have an automatic disadvantage when attempting to use software, devices, and media content. That blindness leads us – often without our conscious knowledge – to contribute to the biased system.  

So how should I treat people?  

Identity blindness doesn’t work because it keeps us from talking about individual, institutional, and environmental discrimination.  

Movements like Black Lives Matter try to show that the consequences of specific identities are not just about asking us to make the right choice, but to see there’s a choice to be made in the first place. Media makers can respond by intentionally recognizing and celebrating people’s different cultures, upbringings, and struggles. They can make positive contributions and dramatically expand their work by seizing opportunities to be multicultural.  

Being multicultural in your approach means that even when a project or story isn’t primarily about identity or a specific identity group, you intentionally seek out the perspectives of people on different fault lines. You can explore place and personality from an expanded point of view.  

Tonie Miyamoto, director of communications for Colorado State University’s Division of Student Affairs explained that, “this means telling an authentic and genuine inclusion story that relies on capturing the moment and/or lived experiences rather than staging photo or video shoots.”  

This increases the depth and detail of your communication. In the workplace, you might come to recognize how a coworker’s different experiences and perspectives can add value to projects. Addressing identity directly also might provide insight about sources, making your media content more interesting.  

Ryan Avery, author and public speaking consultant, explains: “It is more important to ask and accidentally offend someone, in my opinion, than not to ask and assume and make a BIG mistake,” he said.  

Deborah Beck, public opinion researcher and founder of Beck Research, summed up what she has learned about different perspectives in her two decades of public research. She explained, “I realized everyone is impacted by the time, place, and way they were raised. Everyone has a bias. Everyone has a worldview. Everyone is a little (or a lot) racist. But once you start listening and asking questions, you almost always find common ground. The catch is people need to want to face those differences and work through them.”  

In short, it’s almost always a better idea to honestly integrate, rather than separate, people’s identities from your work about them or for them.
Stories from Professionals
Kyle Cassidy, photographer

In 2011, I got a press release from a group having a fat-positive event and they’d asked if I’d cover it. As someone who’s struggled with his weight for a long time, I thought it would be great to support a fat-positive event.

So I went and there were lots of body-positive fat people, but there were also some decidedly not-fat people there as allies, holding signs. I thought, “I should get a photo of these people too.” While I was shooting, one of the organizers said, “Do you want me in this photo too?” I said, “No, I got this,” because the photo had already formed in my head and the last thing any professional photographer wants is someone suggesting how you compose something. But she reacted strongly – she said, “Typical media!” in an angry and insulted way.

I felt bad, and I figured my shot was ruined anyway, but I wanted to try to repair the damage. So I said, “No, please get in the photo.” She said, “Now he’s backpedaling!” Everybody was upset. I was exasperated because I thought I was trying to help and I’d just made everybody angry. That scene replays itself in my head not infrequently.

It’s been a valuable lesson… As a photographer I want the freedom to make the best images I’m able to, but I also need to be aware of how the media typically treats people and the things that they may be concerned with when inviting the media to their events.

I’ve learned that advocacy involves listening and not talking, amplifying voices that don’t get heard enough, but also going into a situation being aware that people who are marginalized shouldn’t be expected to be grateful because you think you’re being magnanimous; they have more important things to deal with every day.
Why are some people so sensitive?

Isn’t everything offensive to someone?

Ask yourself whether what seems to you to be someone’s “sensitivity” might be instead because of a history of exclusionary media representations.

#publicDebate # faultLines #startTheConversation

People are sensitive, it’s true. In a sense, that’s what this book is about: how different groups are sensitive to different issues in different ways.

It’s especially helpful to watch out for outdated representations of different groups, assumptions about communities’ characteristics, and implying a few voices stand in for the views of an entire group. It’s also important to keep an eye on the images you use: Be sure they represent populations and individuals in equitable, inclusive ways.

Be open to different viewpoints related to your own work, acknowledge your oversights, and learn from your mistakes.

How do I know what people are going to be sensitive to?

For marginalized groups in the United States, the sensitivities about language that get so much press (not to mention Twitter debates) are part of a bigger picture about lived experiences and power in society that influence how people see the world. What might not seem important to one person could tap into issues someone else has been facing every day for a long time. Those larger patterns reflect significant ways we organize and categorize ourselves in society.

The Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education uses the notion of “fault lines” to highlight the most powerful cultural tensions in American society: race/ethnicity, gender, generation, class, and geography. Along with these fault lines, there are other cultural and social “fis-
sures” such as religion, political ideology, disability, and sexuality that shape our interpretations and responses to issues and events.\textsuperscript{38}

Dori J. Maynard, late president of the Maynard Institute explained that where we are positioned on these fault lines affects our frame of reference and our blind spots. It can be confusing for someone from one fault-line perspective to understand why someone from another fault-line perspective is sensitive to particular words, ideas, or cultural symbols.

For some people, crossing those fault lines feels a bit like walking on eggshells. But examining how each fault line might affect a person or situation can help us check assumptions, examine tensions, and correct gaps in our thinking. This process can help us avoid reinforcing stereotypes, power differences, and discrimination.\textsuperscript{39}

Some issues emerge or change over time, such as media’s portrayal of military veterans. From stereotypes of the noble World War II veteran to the bitter Vietnam veteran and the “broken hero” returning from Iraq or Afghanistan, stereotypes affect how the public sees veterans.

In a panel discussion on portrayals of veterans in movies and television, veterans activist Chris Marvin said, “We believe the way veterans are portrayed on the screen is the way they will be thought of in the living room and the way they will be treated in the community.”\textsuperscript{40}

For example, a 2012 study from Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research found that over half of respondents believed that most Iraq or Afghanistan veterans suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (the actual number is around 20 percent).\textsuperscript{41} Damaging media stereotypes can have real-life consequences, from civilian employment opportunities to community support.\textsuperscript{42}

Some of what seems to be a new development in how people feel about certain types of language and behavior – “has society become TOO sensi-
tive?” – is more a new development in how much we all know about those sensitivities.

Newsrooms and public relations firms alike have long received scores of letters detailing all the ways words, facts, and ideas they publish are incorrect, offensive, or misguided. Most of those letters never left the desk of the person assigned to open them. But in today’s media environment, the equivalent of those letters can go live for all to see in seconds on Twitter, blogs, or YouTube. Conversations, objections, and confusions that people used to express in private have become public.

For example, Black women in the U.S. have been talking about and dealing with white standards for “good” hair for generations.\textsuperscript{43} But in recent years, other people have been privy to some of those conversations on social media and blogs. It might seem to white readers that Black women are suddenly sensitive to offensive comments about their hair, but it’s probably just that white people are more aware of the issues than they were when those conversations mostly happened in private.\textsuperscript{44}

We all have access to many more voices – from many more communities – than we had when most people only watched a few television stations and read a few major newspapers. We have cameras and blogs and Twitter and Instagram letting us peek into regular people’s lives and opinions like never before. We have violence filmed by those regular people that heightens our sense of fear, but as Ta-Nehisi Coates put it: “The violence is not new; it’s the cameras that are new.” And, importantly, how we can distribute what those cameras capture is new.\textsuperscript{45}

And the new media environment has a lot of voices we rarely heard publicly, especially voices of marginalized communities. Where the most powerful media voices were once almost entirely from within one particular set of fault lines (white, male, urban, and upper-class), we now
have access to media from many other fault-line perspectives.

But disparities in big-name companies still exist today. For example, white women and all people of color are still vastly under-represented among media tech workers, daily newspaper staff, TV news operations, and radio personalities. Statistics on LGBTQ and disabled identities in media aren’t widely available, but those groups also face significant disparities.

Hollywood is overwhelmingly white, as apparent in 2016’s all-white slate of Oscar actor nominations (voted on by an academy whose 5,500+ members were 94 percent white and 77 percent men in 2012⁴⁶) that sparked the #OscarsSoWhite social media backlash and boycotts from prominent actors.⁴⁷

Working-class and poor families are often underrepresented or portrayed using negative stereotypes. Recent studies of television sitcom characters and their family relationships found that white, working-class fathers are consistently portrayed as incapable, bumbling idiots, while middle-class white fathers (and mothers) are generally depicted in a positive light.⁴⁸

These trends are part of why media content from major outlets still tend to reflect certain perspectives more than others. Just as importantly, it may mean that attempts to represent diverse groups are poorly contextualized or simply inaccurate portrayals.

**How do I use inclusive representations?**

Avoiding long-used stereotypes and poorly constructed generalizations is simply a good idea when you make media that you want audiences to see.

The Society of Professional Journalists recommends using the Maynard Fault Lines as a checklist or framework for brainstorming. They say, “Each time you write, consider the fault lines and ask just what the story is really about. Review your sources and consider whose voices are telling the story and whose have been left out.”⁴⁹

Ensuring photographs are inclusive is just as important as ensuring language is. When representing broad populations such as university students

### PERCENT WOMEN AND BLACK AND/OR HISPANIC WORKERS BY INDUSTRY

[Graph showing percent of women and black and/or Hispanic workers by industry]

Analysis of Black and Hispanic workers only. Other ethnicity data not available.

Tech firms are Google, Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo, LinkedIn, Apple, Amazon, & Microsoft. Data are from 2015, except for film industry stats, which are 2014. Sources: DOL ASNE, RTDNA, DGA, MIC.
or town residents, include people from diverse backgrounds and aim for equitable placement and photo quality across representations.

Common pitfalls include creating unintended negative impressions of particular peoples based on poor photo quality or lighting; relegating certain types of people to secondary positions within photos; photos being less prominently featured in a photo spread; and how captions are written.

Being sensitive and voicing that sensitivity is a GOOD thing – we need those debates and conversations to engage, question and learn. Exchanging ideas by expressing our views and listening to how others think helps us develop new ideas and perspectives. In fact, formal debates can improve critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, according to a 2011 study by psychologists from Columbia University. But be thoughtful when you start those debates. Especially because platforms like social media and blogs make it so easy for people to engage, conflicts are common.

Sarah Harlow, former reporter for KSDK in St. Louis, explained to us, “Sometimes, taking 10 minutes to think something through can make the difference in your career. When in doubt, ask some people you trust for feedback before posting anything.”

Using the framework of fault lines can help you recognize your own sensitivities and understand the sensitivities of others – even if you might not agree with them. Then, the conversations you open up with your media can help you learn more about your audiences and about your work.

Stories from Professionals
Doni Ambrosine, founder, Culturs magazine

Some years ago, I was at a diversity training session, bored almost to tears with disappointment that what seemed like the same diversity discussion I’d heard 20 years prior was still circulating.

As the session divided into sub-groups for roundtable discussions, the moderator visited each table to provide instruction. Within that instruction came a few pointed words that would forever change the way I interact with the world: “...and in that, also consider your gender privilege.”

[That question] made me realize what a privilege it is to wake up not having to think about what gender you are or what gender other people think or may think you are, how society would expect you to act based on those thoughts/assumptions, and whether those thoughts/assumptions resonated with your personal feelings, wants, needs, and desires.

It was the first time anyone had ever placed that sort of question in front of me, and taking the time to consider the question, as well as the subsequent discussion, raised my awareness and opened my eyes tremendously. It also provided insight to just how blind we all can be to privileges we, as individuals, so easily take for granted every day without consideration for the struggle of those for which such privileges are not available, or don’t come so easily.

That experience also highlighted the power of words — as that portion of a sentence made a huge difference in altering my internal belief system and helped to foster understanding. It underscored a simple principle: Every action counts. It’s important that we query, advocate, and educate whenever we have the ability — for those small actions often are the building blocks of change.
How do I face feeling uncomfortable?

Bringing up sensitive topics can feel rude. Digging into discomfort can lead you to its source – and solutions to overcome it. Examining your own perspectives can also help you understand how others see things.

#apologies #positionality #open2change

Discomfort is an occupational hazard in creating media. Get more used to it by purposefully placing yourself outside of your comfort zone. Even with small experiences, you can get better at dealing with discomfort, uncertainty, and stress over time.

The best way to learn from those experiences is to recognize your anxiety and identify the triggers for your discomfort. Is it an unknown location? Are the people different than your normal circle of sources? Are they upset about an event or issue? Are you concerned that your questions will antagonize them?

Although audiences might (and probably will) find certain things you say, write, or design offensive, acknowledging your own limitations in terms of your positionality can help reduce the fallout that can come from mistakes you make.

Honesty with your audience is an excellent way to build trust, improve your reputation, and start new conversations.

**Should I try to avoid discomfort?**

Asking uncomfortable questions, putting yourself in nerve-wracking situations, and voluntarily engaging with uncertainty are part of making great media, whether it’s for a news story, a travel video, or a nighttime television drama.

But there’s an upside to the stress and worry: Discomfort, disruption, and distress can actually hone critical-thinking skills, enhance creativity, teach you to problem-solve, and ultimately, make you more confident.

In her TED talk, health psychologist and author Kelly McGonigal explains how stress and discomfort are mostly harmful for people who believe
they’re harmful. McGonigal suggests that we rethink stress as preparation for action – your pounding heart and deep breathing are really just your body gearing up to perform.

Her research found that people who purposely tried to see their stress as something positive and helpful were more confident and, well, less stressed.

In other words, if we can get better at seeing stress as part of engaging and rising to challenges, we can actually benefit from discomfort.

As a media maker, you will probably have a lifetime of uncomfortable topics, questions, and experiences to deal with. When those topics involve your own and others’ marginalized identities – especially ones associated with prejudice, bias, and hate – it can be an emotional and frightening experience.

Sometimes people feel uncomfortable because they’re worried what they say will sound racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, or generally offensive. That’s especially likely when the topic involves delicate factors related to someone’s personal identity or beliefs.

It helps to acknowledge that you probably will say the wrong thing. Investigate how others dealt with missteps – and responses to them – to craft your own approach. But most importantly, know that you can only do your best to consider different perspectives, even though you’ll probably miss something.

For example, the American Red Cross missed something on a poster they created to explain swimming pool rules to children. The poster depicted kids doing “Not Cool” things, like running, pushing other kids, or diving off the side of the pool, and “Cool” things like using the diving board and helping smaller kids in the water. But all but one of the “Not Cool” kids depicted had dark skin, and all the “Cool” kids were white.

When the issue was brought to their attention, the Red Cross responded immediately with a tweet saying, “Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We’re removing this from our site immediately & are creating new materials.”

Uncomfortable? Yes. But the apologies – and related media attention over the gaffe – actually helped the Red Cross address their audiences better.

Clay Lambert, editorial director at a San Francisco-based weekly newspaper, has felt that tension in his own work as a reporter and editor. “I know that some in the Latino community here consider my home newspaper to be just another white institution. As a sports reporter, I can recall times when I felt a bit frozen out as much by my [white] race as by the fact that I was a member of the media,” he said.

Making connections in the community over time is vital to facing and overcoming that discomfort. “I think we all confront our own preconceptions every day, but mine have certainly become less defined over time,” Lambert said.

How do I avoid saying the wrong thing?

When describing what it’s like to ask uncomfortable questions, one college student wrote, “I’m nauseated by the thought that my work will appear under my name … that they will tear me to shreds for my ignorance, my biases, my moronic interpretations of their lives.”

One defense against that sick feeling in the pit of your stomach is to do your homework: Learn as much as you can about the background, the key issues, and the sensitive topics for the groups you work with. That will help you focus on the most important issues for your work and your interactions with others.

When you talk to other people, use active listening, which involves focusing on what the speaker says and repeating some of their words back to them. That can help avoid misunderstandings, communicate respect, and even encourage people to open up to you more.
Another way to keep from saying the wrong thing is to find out what the wrong thing is to say. Look for media that triggered debates or criticism and try to figure out what went wrong. Understanding how others stumbled can help you avoid the pitfalls and find the positives in the context of the story you want to tell.

We interviewed Steve Bredt of Forte Advertising, who gave this advice on public responses to media you make: “Be prepared to receive feedback from EVERYONE – people who are not like you, people who are like you, strangers, friends – everyone. Balance your desire to tell people what you think with their desire to tell you what they think. Communication is a two-way street.”

Although you can’t please everyone, you can be open, thoughtful, and educated about groups that have been and continue to be historically, legally, and culturally excluded from visibility and power. Listening to how that affects groups and individuals can provide a lot of insight.

Thorough knowledge of your audience and their background – and awareness of the blind spots you might have because of your own fault-line perspectives described in the previous chapter – will go a long way in helping you avoid offense.

Cale Rogers, digital media production manager at Colorado State University’s College of Business, explains, “No one should expect a positive outcome with every story. Sometimes things just don’t work out, and that’s okay as long as you care to learn from the mistakes. There is always another day to get back out and work on your skills and network relationships.”

In her 2016 article on diversity and product design in Women 2.0, Anna Lauren Hoffman explains that getting things “right” might not even be the best goal, because there’s almost never a clearly “right” thing to do.

Instead, Hoffman says, practice humility and recognize that, “It’s not about perfection, it’s about making some progress and continually trying to do better. If someone raises an issue, listen carefully and with a willingness to adjust and change. After all, listening without being willing to learn and change isn’t really listening at all.”

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**ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS**

- **Listen**
- **Focus**
- **Repeat**

Can be used to:
- avoid misunderstandings
- communicate respect
- encourage people to open up to you more
Recently, I wrote a brief editorial featured on a women-focused tech industry website. The piece discusses how gendered and racial biases arise out of seemingly “neutral” data or designs.

Then the editorial went live. And without my knowledge or approval they used an image of a well-muscled, shirtless Black man from behind. You can’t see his face, but you can see that he is wearing a snapback and Beats headphones. In other words, the editors decided to put a faceless Black body on display to accompany a white writer’s discussion of bias and privilege in tech design.

I was angry and frustrated and I wrote them and asked them to change the picture or take the piece down altogether.

Certainly, I had no or little control over much of this. But I was the one gaining a byline and recognition, so I don’t feel like I can totally shirk responsibility. I am the one that stands to benefit, however minimally, so I can’t escape all culpability (hence my frenzied email yelling to get things changed).

Fortunately, they responded and changed it quickly. But I also think it’s important to be forthright and talk about these things when they do happen rather than quietly changing things and sweeping them under the rug, if only to raise awareness and improve practice in the future. We can all – always – do better.
What about having multiple identities?  
How do identities combine together?

Combining marginalized identities should not be seen as additively increasing barriers, but rather as changing the nature of the barrier entirely.

#intersectionality #multidimensional #doubleJeopardy

We all have multiple identities: a gender identity, a racial identity, an age identity, a regional identity, a work identity, family identity, personality identity, and more.

The key is understanding how different identities intersect with each other and with specific contexts. For example, the issues that someone might face because of age can be radically different for men than it is for women. Consider how older women are pressured to look young, but older men are often seen as wiser and more capable in media portrayals.

In addition, remember that some groups unified by one identity – their gender, for example – may still be divided by others, such as race or sexuality.

The larger picture of the media you make can take into account how differences and commonalities combine, even if you cannot and should not attempt to account for all possible iterations of intersecting identities.

How do multiple identities affect us?

Identities – those categories, groups, or definitions of ourselves we use to join with others or differentiate ourselves from them – are complex and always multidimensional. Our different identities may be more and less relevant and can affect us in different ways, depending on the context of the issue, event, or words.

What’s important to keep in mind is that some identities – those that are marginalized, stigmatized, or alienated in society – combine in ways that other identities don’t. For example, being a geek in the tech industry garners teasing from some circles, and respect (and high salaries!)
from others. Being a woman geek in the tech industry layers expectations from geek culture onto expectations of women, such as being attractive or being supportive and kind. Layer on top of that expectations for and assumptions about Black women, and you’ve got a complex and powerful mix of intersecting issues that aren’t the same as those faced by a white male who was teased for being too bookish as a child.54

Because of the ways that stereotypes and assumptions combine, these layers generate multiple paths of discrimination and prejudice – in other words, the problems can get you from more directions. And the ways that intersecting identities affect us can be even more invisible.

An example of this is the interaction between gender and age in media portrayals. Older men appear almost 10 times more frequently than older women in media.55 Women are bombarded with messages urging them to look younger – but where are all the men’s anti-aging ads and products? And magazines showing older women are consistently altered to remove signs of aging such as wrinkles and gray hair that older men retain in photos.

In Hollywood, men in their 40s, 50s and even their 60s are regularly shown as attractive male leads, but they’re paired with female romantic leads in their 20s. Why? Because women over 40 – or even younger – are considered too old to be a love interest. For example, in 2015, the 37-year-old actress Maggie Gyllenhaal reported that she was told she was “too old” to play the love interest for a 55-year-old male actor.56

This intersection affects younger women, too, especially in the workplace. Many women well into their 20s find themselves being treated as naïve, inexperienced girls whose opinions, efforts, and skills aren’t taken seriously, while their male counterparts are seen as promising young men.

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to discuss her research on Black women workers who sued General Motors for racial and gender discrimination. The courts decided that they couldn’t combine the two types of discrimination into one, and ruled against their suit. The ways that multiple oppressions are experienced reflect more than just multiple issues; the combinations of injustices don’t easily fit into legal or cultural categories, and generate a whole
that is different — and greater — than the sum of its parts.57

Some argue that movements such as the feminist movement should focus on what joins us together — here, being women — and leave other identities at the door. But this philosophy resulted in the feminist movement often ignoring how Black or gay or trans women face very different types of discrimination — it sometimes even actively excluded them. Those who try to bring up other identities such as race or sexuality are often accused of “dividing us” or “complicating the issues.”

Intersectionality also helps us understand why some white men and women are offended when they’re told they have privileges because of their race. Although their race affords them specific benefits that people of color do not have, other factors such as class, sexuality, disabilities, and religion can generate discrimination and other barriers.

Each of these factors brings different types of barriers, however. And unfortunately, facing one combination of discriminations rarely helps people understand what it’s like to face another combination of them.58 Acknowledging that intersecting identities generate different types of privilege and oppression can help us bridge that understanding.

The term intersectionality is from 1989, but the issues it reflects have a long history, including from Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech in 1851 that points out how as a Black woman, even those few niceties afforded to white women weren’t afforded to her: “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!”59

The suffrage movement of the turn of the 20th century had some — such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton — who also championed Black women’s rights. But many others, especially Frances Willard, argued for women’s vote specifically to ensure that white people could better pursue their racial supremacy.60

Black author and activist bell hooks points out that the influential The Feminine Mystique written by Betty Friedan in 1963 ignores the needs of non-white women and poor white women. And cultural studies scholar Rachel Bowly points out that Friedan’s book is profoundly homophobic, ignoring lesbian women’s different needs and goals, and even positioning the “increase in the overt manifestations of male homosexuality” as the ultimate negative consequence of sexism.61

These mini history lessons are to show how intersectionality, far from referring to a simple list of issues from multiple directions, instead reflects complex, intertwining sets of power dynamics that demand a different set of approaches to address.

Intersectionality helps us avoid the “oppressions olympics” (“my oppression is worse than yours”) and instead illuminates how intersecting factors can create different kinds of challenges and histories. Factors such as national origin or veteran status, for example, create an important difference in the context within which gender issues emerge. Age and race change the type and consequences of, as well as the solutions to, homophobia. If you’re examining poverty in a region, ask yourself, which groups in that region are poorest and what contributes to their poverty.62

**How do I integrate intersectionality into my work?**

Crenshaw encourages us to be flexible, open, and willing to question how one struggle against power might be using another kind of power to get ahead. Consider ways that common narratives and histories of one group might obscure or even damage the histories of other groups.
It is important to explore how combining marginalized identities should not be seen as additively increasing barriers, but rather as changing the nature of the barrier. In other words, facing barriers because of, say, national origin and religion does not simply add two different types of bricks to a wall. Instead, using intersectionality as a lens shows us that these multiple identities create a substantively different type of wall.

To take the complex workings of intersectionality into account in your work, examine the context of the topics and ideas you address. Ask yourself, Could this context be different for someone with one type of privilege but not another? Could the opportunities given from one identity be undermined by another identity?

Aaric Guerriero, director of The Pride Resource Center of Colorado State University, explains that in his daily work, he often has to stop and intentionally consider multiple lenses because it’s challenging to integrate different identities. “It has been important for me to recognize that LGBTQ+ students also have many other identities they come to us with. I often have to push myself to engage students across disability and socio-economic status identities because those are not identities that we often discuss,” he said.

Examine your own assumptions about a given identity and see if you might be overlooking important perspectives.

Stories from Professionals
Malini Bartels, freelance blogger/writer

Often times when writing local pieces, I worry that I sound very “white washed” when I am not even close to that. I’ve found that people appreciate honesty and candor even if it does not directly relate to them.

Then I started writing with more “blatant bite,” as I like to call it. The response was very positive from readers, colleagues, and friends. It’s more of my true voice and I believe it really carries through, especially when writing blog pieces. Unless an autobiographical inquiry is essential to the piece, I don’t see a need to say anything about not being white.

For the most part, with entertainment and lifestyle pieces, cultural background is irrelevant. If it matters for the sake of the piece, I make some mention about being Indian or “brown,” otherwise, I just let it be. To most people, I believe the ethnic identity of the writer only matters when it affects the content of the work.

It’s such a relief to me when I can present work where the color of my skin does not convey a message one way or another. After all, I cannot control the reader’s personal opinions about diversity.
What do I need to know?
I can’t learn it all on a tight deadline!

Learning about the experiences different communities have had with issues, institutions, and challenges helps you connect with and be sensitive to all your audiences.

#history #analytics #askExperts

Learning the entire history of a group is, in fact, too much when you’re on a tight deadline. The key to what pros do to get a big project or story done on a 14-hour day without overlooking the background is this: They learn the history when they’re not on a deadline. They learn the histories of their whole community of coverage and groups within it as part of their education and their everyday jobs. They take courses in ethnic studies or multicultural communication; they belong to multicultural groups or associations.

Finding ways to connect with and learn about a range of identities on your off time prepares you for when it’s crunch time.

What should I focus on?

It is impossible to develop ideas, select a compelling lens, and use appropriate language without preparation. Background is key to understanding the big picture, including the history of an issue, its key characters, the influences of legal or social factors, and past media representations. Solid research can dramatically improve your chances of creating excellent media. Without it, you can overlook vital context that affects how audiences interpret your message.

For example, The Commercial Appeal newspaper of Memphis, covered a deadly shooting of police in Dallas in mid-2016 with the headline “Gunman Targeted Whites.” A massive outcry from their community – especially from members of its 65 percent African American population – made it clear the headline offended many people.

In an apology issued shortly afterwards, the paper’s editor Louis Graham acknowledged their mistake, explaining that it “badly oversimplified a very complex, rapidly evolving story ….” In my
view the headline was so lacking in context as to be tone deaf, particularly in a city with a 65 percent African American population."

That needed context also included the broader conversations about the deaths of Black men at the hands of police, and the specific history of the paper in the city’s white and Black communities, including its problematic history reporting on civil rights in the city where King gave his famous, final “I’ve been to the mountaintop” speech.  

“In an environment so fraught with anger and anxiety we added unnecessary fuel. That’s not our role. Ours is to explore and explain. The headline required restraint and we didn’t provide it,” wrote Graham.  

Knowing about both the paper’s and the city’s history of race relations – along with the events of the civil rights movement more generally – are crucial to understanding how to address issues that arise in 2016, and what kind of coverage will connect with audiences – or offend them.

Creating good media content – and the research, source selection, interviews, and context needed – requires good preparation. Understanding the background of an issue and its key figures, the legal or social factors that might influence it, and the ways that the issue has been represented in the past are fundamental.

One way to uncover missing perspectives is to look at media content around you. Michael de Yoanna, news director at KUNC in Greeley, Colorado, gives this advice: “You can always look at who is being quoted in a story. Go back and look at who is considered the experts. Do news organizations keep going to the same middle-aged white guys when there might be other voices? That helps you learn whose voices are being heard and look for who isn’t there or who isn’t being heard. “Get out of your comfort zone a little bit. Go and get to know a community you haven’t — jump in,” he said.  

Virtually any type or genre of media content can benefit from journalistic-style research. Fact-checking for detail and context improves hard news, feature stories, and documentaries as well as the fiction found in novels, television programs, and movies. It doesn’t matter whether your content involves descriptions of scientific information, or depictions of neighborhoods, personalities, or cultures. Checking on the facts you collect from online research as well as from your sources will help you make better content.

Going beyond fact-checking, though, can help you avoid assumptions, especially about peoples and cultures, that might be harder for you to see in your own work. For example, you might not realize that you don’t know enough about a community’s previous experiences with environmental disasters. That would be a significant disadvantage if residents are facing an incoming hurricane.

Background depth makes it easier for you to express your ideas and interpret the histories, complexities, and reactions relevant to your work. If you don’t have a clear understanding of the broader context, you can’t create media content other people are going to understand and connect with well.

How do I do the research?

Communicators do their background research on multicultural communities by consciously consuming new and evolving media that focus on specific different perspectives, such as Colorlines, This Week in Blackness, Feministing, LGBTQ Nation, and others. You can also follow community leaders and journalists on social media such as Twitter to keep up with a wide range of perspectives.

Manny Sotelo Jr., a photojournalist for KUSA-TV / 9News in Denver, explains that his best advice is, “Simply ask questions. I’ll have more respect for a young journalist who will honestly say, ‘I’m not familiar with that issue; may I ask
you a few questions so I can educate or viewers or readers?"

It’s important to find and develop relationships with authoritative sources who can address touchy subjects. For basic background, a simple search for online diversity and multicultural resources can help you confirm key terminology and issues related to a topic.

It’s also essential to talk to the people who live the story, rather than just talking about those people. Find sources, consultants, and advisors who can give you some different perspectives on your work and its impact.

For some professionals, analytics can help here too. Find out how both your target audiences and specific topics play out in social media, related news articles, or even popular TV and movies. Beyond events and people, analytics also offer insight about reactions, opinions, preferences, and habits.

Remember that people are vocal online, so when re-searching media about an issue, explore comment sections that identify areas not investigated, sources not consulted, or topics left silent. As-

sume nothing.

During interviews, don’t be shy about asking for basic information, and before you finish an interview, ask your sources, “Do I have this right?” “Who else is an important voice on this?” “What isn’t being discussed?” and “What is most important about to you about this topic?”

Then, when you’ve met your deadline, follow through. Thank your sources, ask if your interpretations are accurate, be open to corrections, and ask how you can stay engaged in the conversation. And if you make a mistake, find out what you did wrong, apologize, and fix it.

WAYS TO LEARN & RESEARCH

- Fact checking
- Historical & legal research
- Glossaries & style guides
- Join cultural groups
- Classes on relevant topics
- Follow opinion leaders online
- Check content with sources
Stories from Professionals
Amy Guttmann, Creative Director, SE2

Our Hispanic insights expert was asked to consult on a television shoot for a Colorado nonprofit that was producing a million-dollar marketing/communication campaign about healthy eating. They concepted the advertising in English first, wrote the script, then translated it and headed into production to create both English and Spanish versions.

Their team was in L.A., literally on set. They sent my colleague a rough cut of their Spanish-language TV spot, asking for his thoughts on pronunciation, the casting, the visuals, and any other red flags that might pop up before they finalized the work and flew back to Colorado.

My colleague had been pushing to be involved earlier in the project but was told that they didn’t have the budget to bring him in early on and that his best use was just as a final set of eyes before launching the campaign.

Much to their surprise, his feedback turned everything upside down. Their ad, which was a spot suggesting that kids drink water or juice instead of soda, had a major flaw. It talked about how families should avoid “cola” ... and little did the nonprofit know, but “cola” in Spanish is slang for “butt.”
What about the metrics?
Shouldn’t I just make media people want?

Analytics – nuanced analyses of who does what, where, and with whom – are better than simple tallies from metrics, especially when considering multicultural audiences.

### conversations #preferences #engagement #attention

Metrics are important. The number of eyeballs that see your story, unique visitors to a site, and the number of comments all matter to the jobs and pay of media makers.

But counting clicks isn’t enough for two reasons. First, what’s popular may not be what’s important. Kittens may get the most Facebook views, but news coverage of an adorable feline shouldn’t take precedence over events in your community.

Second, metrics measure what are, but making good media also needs to account for what can be. Use analytics instead. These focus on factors like attention, engagement, and interests to help you understand your potential audiences.

### What should I track?

Metrics matter because they display numbers of clicks. Because clicks represent audience connections, they are important for media companies and advertisers. So what’s the problem with just making popular content?

First, the reason a media product “goes viral” might not be because of its content at all. In his book on what makes online content popular, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, Jonah Berger describes a series of studies showing that emotion-inducing headlines with positive messages and frames are shared much more than neutral or moderate takes on the same topics. 68

If you only look at metrics and ignore the influence of how the story is told, and the impact on popularity, you’ll miss some of the key drivers of success.
Another problem is that metrics only reflect what consumers of media have done, not what they want or need. When your publication’s history of click counts lead you to revisit topics that were popular in the past, you shortchange new ideas, new audiences, and new interests. Especially when what was popular last month offered little to under-represented populations, your next project runs the risk of not serving and growing those audiences.

Instead you can learn about the impact of your content by examining community demographics, tracking social conversations on sites like Twitter and Facebook, and identifying audience interests and preferences.

A major movement is underway for media to rethink page views and clicks in favor of the “Attention Web,” which emphasizes engagement and depth over click-and-leave. This approach provides more information than a simple popularity contest. It helps media professionals understand how much people are engaging with specific content.

For example, the web analytics company Chartbeat found that 55 percent of people spend fewer than 15 seconds actively on a page. Counting clicks might show you that news stories on hairstyles and Syria are equally popular, but engagement analytics show you that people spent five times as long reading the latter. Ignoring depth of attention in favor of metrics can lead you to miss real opportunities to engage with your audiences in meaningful ways.

Considering what’s coming next, not just what’s popular now, also expands your perspective and potential impact. For example, multicultural consumer bases are rapidly growing, and traditional news frames often don’t serve them well. A report from the media research firm Nielsen found that multicultural consumers, especially Black and Hispanic consumers, are more likely to be “super consumers,” or those who are the most involved and engaged in the 15 consumer categories that were studied.

Census projections indicate that multicultural residents will become a majority of the U.S. population by 2044. Media, however, often still concentrate the most effort on outdated perceptions of their

**SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG ALL U.S. INTERNET USERS**

* Other races not analyzed in this study.  

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34
audiences – from how they populate focus groups for product and brand development to the techniques they use to access their audiences.

To make this a bit clearer, consider some recent media use stats: in 2015, only 23 percent of the total U.S. population used Twitter. Does that mean media makers shouldn’t bother with Twitter? Put another way, do we really want to ignore things unless they’re the most popular? Probably not. After all, 23 percent of the U.S. population represents more than 70 million users.

Media professionals need to learn how and where attention and engagement are happening. Knowing who is on Twitter and what they’re talking about is a lot more valuable than just knowing how many people are on it – and that helps you figure out where your message is really going to resonate.

**How do I include more perspectives?**

Learning how to “read” the cultures of your communities through analytics and through face-to-face conversations will help you tell better, more nuanced and equitable stories. Learning what excites and entertains your audiences can help you leverage data to make compelling content.

Multiculturalism is the killer app of the 21st century, and analytics provide the tools to help us see communities that media have traditionally ignored, understand current trends, and adjust media products and marketing efforts. For example, women already dominate our economy, driving 70 percent to 80 percent of all consumer purchasing decisions, but good analytics show us that they are still underrepresented and misrepresented in media.

News that covers issues about gender or race often gets relegated to special sections, or it focuses on conflict or controversy. It angles issues and events in ways that metrics suggest without understanding what’s underneath them. This can segregate content – and audiences – and undermine the reach and power of your stories.

NBC’s coverage of the 2016 Olympics may have fallen prey to that type of thinking. An article by Todd VanDerWerff in the online magazine *Vox* discussed how clinging to specific narratives for targeting and entertainment purposes made the coverage tired, biased, and full of gaps. He reported that the network’s chief marketing officer for the Games, stated, “The people who watch the Olympics are not particularly sports fans. More women watch the games than men, and for the women, they’re less interested in the result and more interested in the journey.”

Beyond the overtly sexist implications of this statement – even if the metrics indeed show more women viewers – this statement reflected a blindness to how the Games might matter in different ways to different audiences, said VanDerWerff. By skipping key events because they had no U.S. competitors, they missed multiple opportunities to show exciting competition. By focusing on competitors’ personal stories and struggles rather than their athletic accomplishments, they missed opportunities to tell stories about unanticipated champions, such as Gabby Douglas, the first Black woman in Olympic history to win the all-around gold in gymnastics. NBC’s approaches didn’t just make its coverage sexist, racist, and unfair to sports fans, he wrote. It made “awful, awful television.”

Connecting with audiences is more than counting clicks and eyeballs, it’s understanding them. Companies and communication professionals ignore analytics at their own peril.
I wrote a long piece about a spoken word poetry regular event in Kansas City’s jazz district. I was very proud of finding this event, and it took a long time to convince my editors to let me write about it. The resistance was that the section’s readership was largely white and older, while this event was largely young and Black. And while I was able to convince my editors, finally, to let me write the piece, I gave in too much to this demographic demand. In the end what I did was to angle a piece toward an argument that this was ‘real’ art, meaning it had properties that white people perceive as ‘real’ art, a subtext that many in the African American community picked up and criticized. They were right.

The Black Lives Matter movement has been largely misunderstood for the very reasons that caused me my problems. Yes, it is very tempting to believe that all people share stories that are simply human. There is a basic humanity and it matters. But what I failed to see in my early years was that history matters, context matters, and, most importantly, my privilege matters.

Elon James White often says to white men like me during debates about race and privilege, ‘You could just listen.’ I think as communicators we often forget that should be a large part of our job – to just listen.
Part 2: Guides

1. Age
   Although identifying age was once standard in news stories, current guidelines suggest only mentioning age when vital to the content.

2. Class & Socioeconomic Groups
   Income and class aren’t the same; class is a complex identity that often includes assumptions about other identities like race and national origin.

3. Disabilities
   Knowing disability etiquette and communities’ preferred terms can help you avoid assumptions about origins, characteristics, or challenges associated with specific disabilities.

4. Gender & Gender Identity
   Gender-neutral language is standard in writing for news, public relations, and marketing, and gender identity isn’t always the same as gender assigned at birth.

5. National Origin
   Understanding the ethnic, cultural, and geographic characteristics of the relevant region – including regions in the U.S. – is vital to writing about national origin.

6. Race & Ethnicity
   Precision and accuracy help avoid offensive terms, overgeneralizing, or setting up problematic binaries such as “minority” vs. “non-minority.”

7. Religion
   Be aware of the accurate terminology for groups and subgroups of different religions, including names of leaders, followers, institutions, and holidays.

8. Sexual Orientation
   An increasing proportion of the U.S. population identify as part of LGBTQ communities, especially among younger people.

9. Veterans & Military Service Members
   Use sensitivity and good background research to accord dignity and respect to service members while developing your content.
Language & Style
There’s plenty of history, nuance, and detail we don’t address here. Use our lists of comprehensive guides from other organizations to learn more.

This chapter provides brief guides that introduce key issues around writing about and with marginalized groups of different types, including the relevant guidelines from the Associated Press Stylebook.

This is not a list of what you’re “allowed” or “not allowed” to say, nor is it for policing language or silencing certain voices. Instead, the advice we give here is meant to serve as a starting point for understanding the language of inclusion and equity and how that relates to the media you make. There are many exceptions and different views on what is or isn’t inclusive, sensitive language.

We also can’t address every term or issue in these brief pages, so we included lists of comprehensive style guides and glossaries in each section so you can learn more. General resources for media and diversity are listed on this page – they’re a great place to start.

The nine groups addressed by these guides are based on federally defined “protected classes” in the United States, most of which were established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a landmark anti-discrimination bill that, among other things, abolished segregation in schools and outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin in public businesses. We have added other categories (age, class, disabilities, gender, sexuality, and military status) often identified by government or organizations such as the U.S. Census or the Associated Press as most subject to bias and prejudice. There are plenty of nuances in these categories that a single document cannot address, and it’s important to remember that most people have ties with more than one.

Every category here is made up of vastly different people with very different views and experiences. There are a range of views on how to use specific terminology, so your best bet is to check with members of the communities you serve to be as respectful as you can.

This goal isn’t just about being respectful, though; it’s about good manners – and good business. Successful media in the United States aims to serve and inform an increasingly diverse public. Engaging audiences is difficult business, and inclusive language can help.

Resources
- Bias Busters: Guides to cultural competence [blog], Michigan State University School of Journalism
- The Diversity Style Guide, Online guide
- Diversity, Poynter Institute
- A Guide to Bias-Free Communications, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Guide to Bias Free Communication, University of California, Davis, Cross-Cultural Center
- A Progressive’s Styleguide, Sum of Us, Hannah Thomas
- Language of Difference: Writing about Race, Ethnicity, Social Class, and Disability, Johnston Writing Center at Hamilton College
Age

Although identifying age was once standard in news stories, current guidelines suggest only mentioning age when it’s vital to the content.

Dig into the details...

- International Longevity Center, Media Takes: On Aging
- The FreeChild Project, Discrimination Against Youth Voice, Glossary
- healthPROelderly, Evidence-based Guidelines on Health Promotion for Older People, Glossary

Ageism is one of the most common—and least discussed—prejudices in U.S. culture, and takes some careful work to recognize and avoid. The AP Stylebook explains that age should only be mentioned in writing “when deemed relevant to the situation.” If a source is talking about age, or if being a specific age is part of the situation at hand, including for “profiles, obituaries, career milestones, and achievements unusual for the age,” noting age is appropriate.

AP style recommends using the terms elderly and senior citizen sparingly, although they are appropriate when they don’t refer to individuals (“concern for the elderly”). In general, the comparative, not the absolute, is considered more respectful: oldER people rather than old people.

Careful use of age terminology is especially important in media about crime. Calling a 17-year-old who is suspected of a crime a man implies a different set of expectations, standards, and legal implications than calling him a boy or a teen.

Age terminology intersects with race, as well. For example, research has found that Black boys as young as 10 are more likely to be seen as older—even as adults—than white boys, especially when accused of a crime. Even when youth are tried as adults, they should be referred to as teens, youth, girls, boys, etc.

Although we sometimes colloquially refer to adults as girl or boy, this is not appropriate in non-fiction media. Women, for example, are often called girls well into adulthood, which can infantilize them. Black men have historically been referred to as boy in a derogatory manner. AP style suggests using youth for boys and girls from age 13 to 17, and man/woman for those 18 and older.

Cultural associations with different age groups can lead us to make assumptions about people, such as teenagers are rebellious, an 80-year-old is inactive, or all 30-year-olds prioritize career goals. The terms and images we use to talk about age can reinforce these assumptions in harmful ways, especially those for older adults. And for the past several decades, studies have found a marked underrepresentation of people over 60 on television and in movies, contributing to this group’s invisibility.

Ageism affects teens and youth, as well, from workplace discrimination to being excluded from political and social considerations and decisions. Media portrayals of teens, especially boys, frequently depict them in a negative light, and news about teenage issues rarely include the voices of the teens themselves.
Class & Socio-Economic Groups

Income and class aren’t the same; class is a complex cultural identity that often incorporates assumptions about other identities like race.

Dig into the details...

- National Union of Journalists, NUJ guide to reporting poverty
- Media Trust, Reporting poverty in the UK: A practical guide for journalists
- Center for Economic and Social Justice, Just Third Way Glossary
- Chronic Poverty Research Center, Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Class in the United States is often overlooked as influence on people’s experiences and attitudes. For this reason, class isn’t just a description of how much money people make. Class can serve as an identity, a cultural group, or a social status. Like other identities, class identity is a label that media makers need to consider carefully — and ask the people we represent for their own views. Some of these labels are stigmatized, and not always in predictable ways.

There are a lot of code words used to refer to class without discussing it — a practice that can make harmful messages worse. These include ideas such as the “welfare queen” popularized in the 1980s to suggest people were taking advantage of the welfare system; and the term entitlement, which has been used to imply an illegitimate claim to programs for the needy, such as veterans benefits, food stamps, or health care.

In general, judgment statements such as rich or poor can be avoided by getting more specific. AP style recommends using low income or living below the poverty level, generally with a dollar figure. They also caution against using ghetto or barrio as a synonym for sections of cities dominated by Black or Hispanic residents or the poor in favor of district, section, or quarter.

Discussing poverty in an identity context can be difficult, as well. First, income levels are not the whole picture for class. Disparities in wealth — resources such as savings, investments, property, and the like — can be much larger than disparities in annual income. Regional or neighborhood differences can be related to social class and affect things like access to health care, government services, and businesses such as grocery stores or services such as after-school programs.

Second, assumptions about class are often — and sometimes invisibly — folded into other identities. It’s not uncommon to see assumptions like rural means poor, or white means well-off. Consider how socio-economic status merges differently with other characteristics such as ethnicity, race, age, gender, disabilities and more.

Media often overlook the experiences, needs, and actions of lower-income people. From focusing our news and entertainment media on the lives of the wealthy to disregarding as “outside the norm” the experiences of the working class or poor, much of our media tend to imply that only the elite are worthy of our attention. More stories in both news and entertainment are needed to help us understand class in American society better.

Avoid...

- Disadvantaged
- Ghetto, barrio
- Less fortunate
- Low/high class
- Poor / Rich

Use...

- Below poverty level
- Low/High income
- Low/high socio-economic status
- Section, district, area, quarter
Disabilities

Knowing etiquette and preferred terms can help you avoid assumptions about characteristics or challenges associated with specific disabilities.

Dig into the details...

- National Center for Disability and Journalism, Arizona State University, Disability Language Style Guide
- Team Up, California Mental Health Services Authority, Style Guide: Reporting on Mental Health
- National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institute on Drug Abuse Media Guide

Nearly 20 percent of the U.S. population has a physical or mental disability, and the language used to describe them and their experiences has changed considerably over time. Different communities have different preferences, and many commonly known terms, such as able-bodied are considered offensive to some because they are seen as implying inferiority or other negative connotations.

AP style recommends you do not describe a person as disabled unless it is clearly relevant to the story or requested by the person you’re talking to. They also suggest avoiding language that implies pity, such as afflicted with or suffers from. For mental illnesses, they suggest including information about the source of a diagnosis, as well as exercising caution when linking specific behaviors with an illness, especially violence.

A common language trap to avoid is use of the term normal. Using this term to refer to someone who does not have a disability implies that people living with disabilities are deviant or strange. Typical is a better choice – this can be used with abilities, as typically abled, or with ways the brain works as neurotypical (which is part of neurodiversity that includes autistic, bipolar, and dyslexic people). Another tricky one is disease. Avoid confusing diseases (something you contract from the environment) with genetic conditions (something you are born with).

Different communities of people with disabilities have different ways of using language to describe themselves. For example, a common piece of advice for journalists or marketers is to use “people-first” language (“person with disabilities”) that emphasizes the person, not the disability. However, some communities prefer identity-first language (“I am disabled”).

When covering issues around disabilities, you can ask specialists to explain key issues, show you facilities, or explain technologies. Talk to members of the communities you’re discussing. Find experts, ideally endorsed by reputable organizations associated with disabilities, to integrate into your work.

Also, be aware that you may not know about or notice someone’s disability. Many disabilities are invisible but no less important to understand.

Avoid...
- Able-bodied
- Abnormal/Normal
- Addict, Alcoholic
- Differently-abled
- Handicapped
- Retarded
- Confined to wheelchair

Use...
- Disabled
- Has a disability
- Experiencing a drug / alcohol problem
- Neurotypical, neuro-minority
- Typical, typically abled
- Uses a wheelchair
Gender-neutral language has become standard in writing for news, public relations, and marketing. Although the masculine *he* was once considered accurate for referring generically to all people, linguists, activists, and writers point out that it retains implications of maleness and that people are more likely to think of men when the generic *he* or *man* is used. The use of the generic *man* as in *postman* or *mankind* reinforces the sense that men are the “norm” and women the exception. This is also seen in the use of unqualified terms for men and qualified ones for women, such as the old-fashioned *author* and *authoress* or *aviator* and *aviatrix*, and current practices such as *astronaut* and *female astronaut*.

The *AP Stylebook* explains that instead, writers should use gender-neutral language to avoid “assuming maleness.” The simplest way to do this in English is by using the plural: Rather than “a reporter tries to protect his sources” use “reporters try to protect their sources.” Using *he/she* is also effective, but can be awkward.

It is important to avoid more subtle assumptions of maleness, as well, such as “physicians and their wives” – this should be “physicians and their spouses” because, of course, some married physicians have husbands.

In both images and writing, be aware of the relative positions of men and women. Especially common – and problematic – is focusing on women’s looks, family status, or clothing where representations of men focus on professional accomplishments or abilities.

Avoid non-parallel terminology such as *man and wife* or *men and girls*; *men and women* or *ladies and gentlemen* is preferred. Similarly, a common mistake around gender in news and strategic communication writing is to use women’s first names and men’s last names. Using one or the other for everyone is the best way to avoid this disparity.

It’s common to see the adjective *female* turned into a noun: “a female was in the room,” but using the adjective *female* to refer to the whole person replaces a complicated human with one characteristic: her biological sex. AP style requires it to be used only as an adjective: *female voter*.

The *AP Stylebook* also warns against the opposite: Don’t use *woman* as an adjective; a *woman soldier* is out, a *female soldier* is in. Just plain *soldier* is usually an even better choice because *female* is often used to highlight difference even when gender isn’t the focus of the story, which can cause offense. This is especially important for gender-stereotyped roles and occupations: it’s just *nurse*, not *male nurse*; it’s *doctor*, not *female doctor*, etc.; and so on.

AP style also recommends, “Copy should not gratuitously mention family relationships when there is no relevance to the subject.” These problems are common in stories about athletes, actors, and politicians, and should be avoided.
When creating media about gendered phenomena, especially gender-based violence such as rape or assault, be aware of offensive trends. For example, focusing on a victim’s actions, clothes, or location can be seen as suggesting she was to blame for an assault. Consider instead frames that highlight consent or support for the victim.

Gender identity refers to something slightly different than gender: it’s the gender people consider themselves to be. Not everyone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth, and not everyone is born with a clear biological sex. Transgender people generally identify with a different gender than they were assigned; and cisgender people have a gender identity corresponding with the gender they were assigned at birth.

The right term to use is transgender, rather than transgendered. Transgender is an adjective, not a noun nor a verb. A person is not “a transgender,” and they have not been “transgendered.” Some transgender people also use the shortened version of the term, trans, but not all.

Although gender identities are generally thought about on the binary—a man or woman—it is important to remember that these do not describe all gender identities or sexes. Intersex people are born with biological characteristics typically associated with both males and females. People may identify by their fluctuation along a spectrum of the gender dualities, such as a genderfluid or genderqueer person. An agender person falls outside of traditional gender categories.

There are many ways that transgender people may express their gender identity, and expressions commonly related to gender, such as clothing or hair length, do not indicate a specific gender identity. Some people have operations or medications to change their bodies to fit their gender, but some do not. You may not be aware of these details—and it’s impolite to ask, just as it would be impolite to ask cis-gendered people about their genitalia. Avoid overemphasizing the role of surgeries in gender identity, and avoid oversimplifying with phrases such as biologically male or genetically female.

An important distinction to be aware of is that although anyone may wear clothes associated with a different gender, this is not the same as being transgender. Cross-dresser and drag queen generally refer to cis-gendered men who dress like women for entertainment purposes.

Important to work with transgender people is understanding how they want to be identified, what pronouns they use, and how the content you are creating would best portray their stories. Don’t qualify that identity with phrases such as “goes by” or “prefers to be called,” as this implies a person’s identity is somehow not “real.”

The AP Stylebook recommends, “Use the pronoun preferred by the individuals who have acquired the physical characteristics of the opposite sex or present themselves in a way that does not correspond with their sex at birth. If that preference is not expressed, use the pronoun consistent with the way the individuals live publicly.”

Consider, too, how other identities, such as race, class, religion, physical abilities, and sexuality might affect people’s gendered experiences. For example, many Black women have written about how white women’s movements actively exclude women of color, and many lesbian and transgender women point to their discomfort and rejection in feminist communities.
National Origin

Understanding ethnic, linguistic, and geographic characteristics of different regions – including in the U.S. – is vital to writing about national origin.

Dig into the details...
- Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, Covering Immigrants & Immigration: Tips from Experts
- Jack David Eller, Cultural Anthropology: Global Forces, Local Lives, Student resources: Glossary
- Immigrant Justice Network, Common terms defined

When discussing national origin, use the most accurate and current names for countries and their residents. Nations and identities are defined in different ways for different groups, and their languages differ, too. For example, a common error is referring to people from Latin American countries as Spanish. Although they may speak the language Spanish, this term as a nationality is only for people from the country Spain – otherwise, use the specific country, such as Mexican, Chilean, Peruvian, etc. Understanding the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and geographic characteristics of the relevant region – including regions in the U.S. – is vital to writing about national origin. The *World Factbook* is a helpful resource.

Immigration issues are especially subject to problematic language. By definition, a person cannot be illegal, and terms such as illegal alien or illegals are considered offensive. Inclusive approaches address the humans involved in the issues rather than focusing exclusively on groups. The *AP Stylebook* instructs avoiding the term illegal when referring to a person. They explain, “use illegal only to refer to an action, not a person: illegal immigration, but not illegal immigrant.” Many replace illegal in such cases with undocumented or unauthorized. Be aware that some countries have a range of ethnic groups, and as such people might refer to themselves using ethnic, rather than national, identities. For example, the Kurdish people are an ethnic group who live in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, among other countries.

Sometimes race, ethnicity, or religion is used in place of national origin, which can perpetuate stereotypes. For example, Muslims are a religious group, not an ethnicity or race, and there are Muslims who live all over the word, including in the United States, of a wide range of ethnicities, including white American and European Muslims, African American Muslims, and Asian Muslims.

In general, be mindful of stereotypes associated with different countries – usually negative, but not always – that can be offensive or cliché. Avoid generalizing all people in a given country.

Finally, there are differences among citizens, residents, nationals, and natives. The *AP Stylebook* suggests using resident in most cases. National is used when referring to people who are living in a country other than where they are a citizen, and native (used as an adjective, not a noun) means the person was born in a specific location. People born in the United States are not “foreigners” or “immigrants,” regardless of ancestry.

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Race & Ethnicity

Precision and accuracy help avoid offensive terms, over-generalizing, or setting up problematic binaries such as “minority” vs. “non-minority.”

Dig into the details...

- Arab Stereotypes.org, Resources
- Asian American Journalists Association, AAJA Guide to Covering Asian America
- Center for Native Education, Center for Native Education Style Guide
- Community Foundations of Canada, Diversity at Work: Inclusive language guidelines
- National Association of Black Journalists, NABJ Style Guide.
- Native American Journalists Association, 100 Questions, 500 Nations
- Race Forward, Race Reporting Guide: A Race Forward Media Reference
- Society of Professional Journalists, Guidelines for Countering Racial, Ethnic and Religious Profiling
- Walker, R., Jacobs, J., & Galanda, G. , Indian Country Stylebook

When discussing race it is vital to remember that language precision matters. Aim for language that uses a multiracial lens, is devoid of stereotypes, and is inclusive of all communities of color.

When communicating about tensions, struggles, or challenges related to race, integrating contextual information (political, historical, and cultural) expands your work and enriches it. Consider how factors other than race may affect the story and how stories about race and ethnicity merge together with issues around other identities such as age, gender, community, disability, sexuality, socio-economic status, etc.

The way people identify race is often – but not exclusively – influenced by the socially constructed definitions of race used by the U.S. Census Bureau. These racial categories are listed on the Census as: white, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander. It is important to understand that some of these definitions refer to national origin or sociocultural groups, and these racial definitions do not accurately define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In many cases, too, the terms from the Census are not always those preferred by the groups they refer to, such as using Native American versus American Indian.

Many of the terms identifying race and ethnicity append “American” to a regional or ethnic term, such as Asian American, Arab American, Russian American, or the like. These terms no longer use a hyphen. It’s important to note that this assumes the person is living in the U.S. – a non-resident visiting from Asia is not Asian American.

Avoid labeling identities X and non-X such as minority and non-minority. This approach divides people into an artificial binary, and generally suggests a “normal/other” way of thinking that can reinforce marginalization and an “us versus them” mentality. The “non-” identity is also confusingly broad. Using more specific, careful terms will make your writing clearer, more effective, and more inclusive.

The term minority used to refer to ethnic or cultural groups is falling out of favor. Sometimes a once-called minority group isn’t a minority within a specific region or town. White people in the U.S. are not the majority in many cities and in some states. The term minority is also often considered derogatory because it is associated with “less than” or feels dismissive. Journalists and even some city governments are increasingly avoiding minority for more precise and accurate terms, such as naming the specific ethnic groups. 

45
Often, *people of color* is preferred when referring to a broad range of racial identities. However, this term, too, has some problems, such as overgeneralizing vastly different experiences and basing assumptions about social and cultural positions on a person’s skin color rather than a more nuanced understanding of heritage and history. For example, some Latinos or people from India may be labeled people of color in the U.S. but are considered as racially elite—including as white—elsewhere because of their social and/or economic class.

On the most general level, it is important to recognize that identifying people’s race with broad terms such as all of these introduces challenges and can often be offensive.

Racial and ethnic terminologies also change over time. For example, in 2016, President Obama signed a bill that changed the definition of racial minority on government documents from the outdated, “a Negro, Puerto Rican, American Indian, Eskimo, Oriental, or Aleut or is a Spanish speaking individual of Spanish descent.” Instead, the bill changes the language to, “Asian American, Native Hawaiian, a Pacific Islander, African American, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, Native American, or an Alaska Native.” Some older organizations retain this outdated language, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the United Negro College Fund; they should be identified using these proper names.

**Avoid...**
- Anglo
- Barrio, ghetto
- Caucasian
- Colored
- Diverse person
- Mestizo
- Minority (to mean all people of color)
- Mulatto
- Negro
- Oriental

**Use...**
- African American
- Asian American
- Biracial
- Black
- First Nations
- Hispanic
- Latino
- Marginalized groups
- Mixed race
- Multiracial
- Native American
- Native peoples
- People of color
- Underrepresented groups
- White

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**Focus on African American**

In the U.S., terminology for people of African descent has undergone important and politically charged changes for over 150 years. From *Negroid*, to *colored*, to *Negro*, to *Black*, *Afro-American*, and *African American*, such terms have been part of changing political and cultural landscapes. As such, they have associations with particular periods of American history. For example, *Negro* is associated with offensive ideas about Jim Crow subservience and segregation for many, and *colored* is associated with slavery.

In the civil rights movements of the 1960s, many Black leaders began to reject the terms designat-
ed by white people for their racial and ethnic identities. In 1988, political leader and activist Jesse Jackson officially declared *African American* as the preferred term, although many people prefer the term *Black*, which had been used intermittently for centuries.

Some of these changes to terminology are surprisingly recent: the *New York Times* used *Negro* more often than *African American* as recently as the mid-1990s. The *AP Stylebook* now uses *black* or *African American*, as do, because of recent changes at the federal level, the U.S. Census and federal forms. It is important to use *Black* as an adjective, not a noun (*a Black person*, not *a Black*).
Considerable debate has gone into the question of whether or not the racial groups white and Black should be capitalized. AP style capitalizes the names of races/ethnicities except for these, under the argument that black and white are not races but instead descriptions of color, and are thus properly lower-case. But the question has been debated in and outside of different Black communities for many years.

A 2014 editorial in the New York Times by journalism scholar Lori L. Tharpe argues that Black should be capitalized because it refers to a culture, and according to AP style, proper names of “nationalities, peoples, races, tribes” are capitalized, such as Asian, African American, and Hispanic — and, she argues, Black Americans “are indeed a people, a race, a tribe.” The U.S. Census, Tharpe points out, capitalizes both.103

Some prefer to capitalize Black but not white, because, as argued by Luke Visconti, founder of the online magazine DiversityInc.com, capital W in White suggests a sense of ethnic cohesion, which is inaccurate (and is commonly used by white supremacists).104 We capitalize Black but not white in this volume, despite its use in lower case by AP style.

**Focus on Hispanic/Latino**

Although some (including most U.S. government forms) use Hispanic interchangeably with Latino, others distinguish them. For some, Hispanic means Spanish-speaking, while Latino means from Latin America. This would mean that Latin Americans who don’t speak Spanish (Brazilians, for example) are not Hispanic, and Spanish-speakers from outside Latin America (those from Spain, among others) are not Latinos. Not all take this view, however.

Some object to both terms because they overemphasize the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of Latin American countries and ignore the Indian and African roots of many of the people the terms seek to describe. There are also debates about whether Hispanic/Latino refer to a race, an ethnicity, or both.105 Many people from Latin America call themselves white, Black, Indian, or terms that combine these, often depending on other factors such as social status, heritage, and national context.106

In the U.S., most government and institutional forms use both terms to refer to ethnicity, not race, separating out questions of race from questions of Hispanic/Latino identity. Many institutional analyses of race and racism, however, generally approach this identity no differently than racial identities such as Black, Native American, or white, disregarding the intersections and overlaps among them.

A 2013 study from the Pew Research Center found that many in the U.S. are ambivalent about the debate between using Hispanic versus Latino, although among the 50 percent or so who do have a preference, Hispanic was preferred over Latino by a ratio of about 2-to-1.107 Some suggest simply replacing both of these with terms that refer to country of origin — Mexican, Brazilian, Panamanian, etc. — to avoid the problematic implication that the people of those racially complex and diverse countries should be seen as a single race or ethnicity.

Other terms have been reclaimed by U.S. communities, such as Chicano, which once had negative connotations but is now sometimes used by Mexican American communities to express pride in their origins. Recently, a new gender-neutral term has been used, Latinx, which replaces the gender designation of “o” (male) or “a” (female) of the term Latino/a.108 Another way these gender-specific letters are replaced is as Latin@.109

**Focus on Native American**

Acceptable terms for the native peoples of the U.S. have a complex history. For most media publications, Native American is considered the best choice (and, along with American Indian, is recommended by AP style). To some, the term
Indian is perfectly acceptable — or even preferred. For others, it is associated with Christopher Columbus and his famed error of believing that the Caribbean Islands where he first landed were in the Indian Ocean, leading him to dub its inhabitants “indios.” Because Columbus is also associated with widespread subjugation and genocide of native peoples, this link is problematic. Indian can also be confused with a reference to people from India, of course. AP style, along with many activists and scholars, recommends, “Where possible, be precise and use the name of the tribe;” if not, default to Native American or American Indian.

For many, terms that group tribes into a whole such as these are all unacceptable because it blurs the lines among very different cultures. Other terms such as First Nation or aboriginal Americans are sometimes used. Like other politically charged terms, there are strong arguments both for and against all these. Asking an individual’s preference is vital.

Also important to know is that Native Americans are often members of federally recognized, self-governing political entities that are not subject to many U.S. regulations. Native Americans can retain membership in their tribe without actually residing on a reservation or other federally designated “Indian lands.”

Focus on Asian

The term Asian generally refers to people with ancestry from the eastern part of the continent of Asia. It and Asian American replaced the outdated and generally offensive “oriental” by the mid-1990s. A few decades ago, the term oriental, which is derived from the orient, meaning “the east,” referred to some Asians (most commonly Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants). The term oriental has largely disappeared from use in the mainstream media — it was even removed from all government forms. Oriental is offensive in part because of its association with stereotypes of exoticism and the “model minority” who doesn’t speak out and knows his or her (lower) place. For many Asian Americans, the term implies they are foreigners, but of course, many Asian Americans were born on American soil and are just as American as those descended from European immigrants. Moreover, Asia is only “the east” for those who are somewhere else — in Asia itself, of course, it’s just “here.”

Many consider Asian American (or often, simply Asian) an acceptable alternative, although it, too, has some problems. The term can be too broad because it combines extremely different backgrounds, political positions, and cultural histories in problematic ways.

The U.S. Census defines Asian as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.” But of course Asia also technically includes India, and in the United Kingdom, people from that continent often identify as Asian. Surprising to many, Asia also includes Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and more, muddying this term even further. A safer bet is to ask people how they identify, or be specific: Japanese American, Korean American, Chinese American, Thai American, etc.

Focus on Mixed Race

A variety of terms have been used to refer to some — but not all by any means — people with multiple racial backgrounds, such as biracial, multiracial, mixed, Mestizo, and Mulatto. Mulatto (believed to derive from the old Portuguese word for mule) is generally considered outdated and offensive in the U.S., although some Latin American countries still use it frequently.
*Mulatto* generally referred to the children of one white and one Black (historically, slave) parent. This term and the Spanish *Mestizo* are derogatory terms that came into use during slavery to reflect a class system of different races – those of mixed race were considered diluted or polluted. Like *Negro/Negroid* and *Caucasian*, *Mestizo* and *Mulatto* are sometimes seen as more formal or “scientific.” But because of this history, these terms have negative connotations for many and should be avoided.

Other terms are largely only used in scientific writing, such as *Eurasian*, which some anthropologists use to refer to the mix of Asian and European ancestry as well as to the combined continental land mass of these two continents.

Terms such as *mixed* or *multiracial* are more neutral and preferred.

**Focus on White**

White as a race has some sticky histories. Among them is the term many consider the “formal” term for white people: *Caucasian*. Indeed, this term is common in government and formal business reports. However, its history is neither formal nor scientific at all.

The term *Caucasian* originated as part of the 18th-century science of racial classification used to justify the slave trade and oppression of Africans and other people of color. The term technically refers to people of the Caucasus Mountains in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. (Actually, people from those mountains would be properly called *Asian*, as they are officially on the Asian continent.) It was thought (erroneously) by a prominent anatomist to be where humans originated because he considered the people there to be the “most beautiful on earth,” and thus a genetic ideal in their whiteness.

Unlike, for example, the term *African American*, the word *Caucasian* has little to no relationship with regional heritage, but rather with a racist political history. As such, the word is heavily loaded with racist assumptions and histories. *White* is a much better word to use.

**Focus on Middle Eastern**

The U.S. Census does not officially list “Middle Eastern” as a racial/ethnic category, but the Pew Research Center reported in 2014 that the Census Bureau has been considering it. Currently, people of Middle Eastern and North African descent are categorized as *white*, which is defined as: “A person having origins in any of the original people of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.” Organizations representing those groups argue this is inaccurate. Many people of Arab descent in the U.S. don’t identify as white, no matter the tone of their skin, which ranges from extremely pale to very dark.

The Arab American Institute estimated there were 1.8 million Arab Americans in 2012. Randa Kayyali, professor of sociology at American University, explains in a 2011 article that this group has been deeply divided on matters of racial and ethnic identities in the U.S. for more than 100 years.

Another important issue to be aware of is that although people in the U.S. often associate Middle Easterners with Muslims, there are many Christians, Jews, and others there living in many different countries in that region, including in Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel.

Middle Eastern and Arab identities are a clear example of how racial and ethnic identities change over time – and how they are influenced by current events, political trends, and cultural views. Remember, “Caucasians” are technically Asians, and the Caucasus Mountains are located in the middle of what the U.S. calls “the Middle East.”
Be aware of accurate terminology for groups and subgroups of different religions, including names of leaders, followers, institutions, and holidays.

Accurate and respectful communication about religion (spirituality, faith, religious ethics) requires attention to the details of nomenclature, denominations, people, and institutions.

The AP Stylebook and the resources listed here provide guidance on religious titles (such as rabbi, reverend, father, or sheikh), places of worship (such as synagogues, temples, churches), and religious holidays. For example, the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim deity should be referred to as God (rather than God, Yahweh, and Allah respectively) and capitalized; but for polytheistic religions, the words gods and goddesses are lower case.

Speak to scholars or religious leadership for exact terminology – often laypeople won’t know details such as the proper way to address an archbishop or that the Dalai Lama is capitalized when referring to the holder of that title, but is lower case when referring to the position generally. Learn about legislation, such as local interpretations of religious freedom.

Be aware of the differences among the names of religions, their followers, and the geographic regions associated with them. A common error is calling those who follow the Islamic faith “Islamic” – the proper term is Muslim. Neither of these should be confused with Arabs – Muslims can be any race or ethnicity and live all over the world.

Similarly, it is considered offensive to use the term Jew as an adjective, as in Jew teacher – Jewish should be used instead. Because of its history as a pejorative, some recommend against using Jew as a noun, as well, preferring Jewish people or of Jewish background. Jewish people may or may not have ties to Israel, and residents of Israel may be Christian, Muslim, or of no faith at all.

Neutral treatment of religious belief is vital to fair representation – avoid implying that you personally do or do not believe in specific religious positions, events, or figures. For example, avoid labeling some denominations of Christianity as true Christians or bible-believing. By definition, all Christians believe the bible. Don’t assume that members of a given faith share the same viewpoints – claims like “Christians think X” or “Wiccans prefer Y” can suggest people believe something they don’t.

Although the majority of Americans report they are Christian, other faiths and unaffiliated populations are growing. Religious news stories should be inclusive of multiple viewpoints, and they often overlap with other issues such as politics, international conflict, racial identity, war, abortion, end-of-life discussions, sexuality, women’s roles, and more.
Sexual Orientation

An increasing proportion of the U.S. population identify as part of LGBTQ communities, especially among younger people.

Dig into the details...

- Gender Equality Society of Saskatchewan, Media Style Guide - Best Practices
- GLAAD, GLADD Media Reference Guide
- National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association, Stylebook

Sexual orientation refers to someone’s identity in relation to the gender they are attracted to. The most common terms for sexual orientation are lesbian (women attracted to women), gay (men attracted to men), and bisexual (people of any gender attracted to both women and men). It’s important, too, to remember that the 3-4 percent of Americans who actively identify as part of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) community includes a wide variety of different sexual orientations. There are sexualities outside of binary understandings of sex and gender including pansexuality, which is sexual attraction to people outside of the gender binary, and asexuals who do not experience any sexual attraction at all.

A major shift in language about sexuality is a move from the term sexual preference to the more neutral sexual orientation. This is because the idea of “preference” is associated with active choices in who we’re attracted to. But in recent decades the science of sexuality has shown us that people have little if any control over their attractions.

Another important part of sexual orientation that is often overlooked is romantic orientation, which describes someone’s romantic, rather than sexual, attraction. For most, sexual and romantic orientations align. However, this isn’t always the case. Romantic orientations fall along the same general guidelines as sexual orientations — heterosexual meaning opposite, homosexual meaning same, bisexual meaning both, pansexual meaning all, and asexual, without.

Along with orientations it is important to attend to relationship terminology. The AP Stylebook recently changed its rules from using couple or partner to refer to people in same-sex marriages or civil unions to the following guidance: “Regardless of sexual orientation, husband or wife is acceptable in all references to individuals in any legally recognized marriage. Spouse or partner may be used if requested.” Sometimes legal designations are relevant, as well, such as a common-law spouse, which have similar, but not identical, legal parameters as formal marriages, depending on the state people live in.

It is a common assumption in the media that all audiences and sources are heterosexual, as well as that they are or aspire to be romantically or sexually involved. But diverse sexual orientations are becoming even more important to remember as time goes on. A 2016 study from the J. Walter Thompson Innovation Group reported that while 86 percent of Baby Boomers identify as completely heterosexual, only 67 percent of Millennials and 48 percent of the 13- to 20-year-olds of Generation Z identify as such.
Veterans & Military Service Members

Use sensitivity and good background research to accord dignity and respect to service members while developing your content.

Dig into the details...

- Michigan State School of Journalism. 100 Questions and Answers about Veterans
- Reporters Committee. Military reporting tips
- Mike Reilley, Resources for journalists covering the military
- Poynter, Resources for Covering Veterans’ Issues

Reporting on veterans and the military means more than remembering to find out a service member’s rank and abbreviate it correctly – although that’s an absolute must. It also means being aware of the nuances in titles, ranks, and branches of the military. For example, use capitals when referring to U.S. forces – U.S. Army, the Army – but not for other nations: the French army. Anyone who has served in the military and has been released from active duty is considered a veteran.

The U.S. military has a complex history in its relationship with race and gender. For example, although women and African Americans were allowed to serve in America’s early wars, U.S. forces were segregated through World War I, and many were discharged when the wars were over. All combat jobs were made open to women in 2016, and the Marine Corps announced later that year that they are changing over a dozen job titles to replace the word man in terms such as infantryman and assaultman with Marine: infantry Marine, assault Marine, and so on. The Navy is also looking into changing a set of gendered job titles and rating names.

Deepen your media about the military by considering the role of government agencies in the experiences of service men and women as well as of veterans; by looking into charities and consultants that work closely with the military; by learning about PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and how it affects people’s lives; and considering the caregivers and other family members of those who serve.

Victims of sexual assault within the military and service members who are physically or psychologically wounded may have extremely complicated relationships with their history of service and with the military itself. And they may face challenges seeking care and benefits. Use your best research skills to understand how disabilities may play a role in a veteran’s experiences, and follow good practices when representing or discussing those disabilities.

According dignity and respect to service members – especially those affected by trauma – while working a story takes sensitivity. Following an information trail through the bureaucratic maze to do classic watchdog reporting requires an entirely different, sometimes opposite mindset of doggedness and determination. Professional organizations such as the Poynter Institute have seminars and webinars on both aspects of military reporting.

Avoid...
- Accident (for war-related violence)
- Army used as generic military
- Serviceman

Use...
- Armed forces
- Military, or specify the branch
- Service member
What Now?
Learning and Correcting

Learn what you can, ask people for their perspectives, and know that you’ll most likely make mistakes along the way.

#keepLearning #doingmybest #TLDR

The advice and guidelines in this book are mostly about ways you can create more inclusive, open, and beneficial media content. But these many pages of advice — even the stuff that sounds simple — are complicated, nuanced, and can be overwhelmingly confusing.

What’s worse, humans are messy, unpredictable, capricious, and, well, diverse. Things we recommend here might not reflect the preferences or views of everyone in your audiences.

Trends in terminology, politics, and conflicts can cause words that were once perfectly respectful to become associated with prejudice and offense.

The words that offend some people in a group might be the ones that others in that group use to describe themselves with pride. What people call themselves might not be what they want others to call them.

When you can, the very best thing to do is ask.

Trying to figure out what pronoun to use? Just ask.

Not sure how to describe a person’s disability? Just ask.

Confused about how one religious group is different than another one? Just ask.

And remember: somewhere, somehow, you’ll probably say something that offends someone. When that happens, find out why what you said was offensive and apologize for your mistake.

Then start a conversation to learn more.

That’s what we plan to do.
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93 Colombia Journalism Review. “‘Illegal,’ ‘undocumented,’ or something else? No clear consensus yet.” http://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/illegal_immigrant_or_undocumented.php


105 Pew Research Center, June 15, 2015. “Is being Hispanic a matter of race, ethnicity or both?” http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/15/is-being-hispanic-a-matter-of-race-ethnicity-or-both/


111 Indian Country, May 21, 2015. ‘Blackhorse: Do you prefer ‘Native American’ or ‘American Indian’? http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/05/21/blackhorse-do-you-prefer-native-american-or-american-indian-6-prominent-voices-respond


XO Jane, June 8, 2015. "I'm Middle Eastern and white, and those are not the same thing." [http://www.xojane.com/issues/middle-eastern-people-need-their-own-racial-classification-in-the-us]


58