

AVOIDING PREJUDICIAL TERMINOLOGY

Someone once said, "The more we are different, the more we are the same..." Considering the reality of our world, we are all human. But, we are very different.

We are different colors, different religions, different ages, different classes, and different genders. Some of us forget these differences; some of us revel in these differences; and, some of us rebel against these differences.

However, regardless of our political beliefs, we need to have language which helps us to discuss issues of culture without discriminating or without infusing our language with prejudicial overtones or undertones. Such language must be appropriate and as close to specific as possible. Such language helps us to delineate ourselves from others for the purposes of social scientific identification, for health reasons, and for other academic study (or consideration).

GENETIC DISPOSITIONS OF SKIN COLOR AND CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

Before we talk about proper terminology, let's talk about improper terminology.

Race is a term which is used in an attempt to qualify such things as our genetic disposition towards skin color and genetic physical differences; however, it does not accurately represent the problem of geographic location, nor does it allow for sub-categorization of people by geographic region or social activity. In a sense, the idea of race is simply problematic.

For example, it is possible to have a white or black African. Thus, an African-American may be black or white. Since the term, African-American, is primarily associated with Black/brown-skinned people, the term is mostly erroneous.

Likewise, common beliefs that Mexicans (Hispanic people from Mexico) are all brown is erroneous as well, for there are white, blue-eyed Mexicans (even with blonde hair).

Moreover, as far as Hispanics are concerned, we do not call those with brown-skin, "brown." And, if we did, we might have to delineate those people with brown skin as either Hispanic or Middle-Eastern.

If we tried our best to use skin color to delineate us, then we would end up with something like this:

Black-Blue – People from Africa

Black – People from Africa, the Atlantic Islands, Aboriginal Australians etc.

Brown – People from India, Africa, Asia, and the Arctic Regions

Tan – People from South America, the Middle-East, Asia, the Pacific Islands etc.

Yellow – People from Asia, the Middle-East, etc.

Red – People from Native America, Europe, etc.

White-Pink – People from Europe, Africa (albinos), etc.

So, the idea of color is essentially problematic for identification; moreover, the idea of race is entirely problematic. So, we might as well "throw out" the idea of race entirely, right?

Well, some people claim that we must continue to identify ourselves as members of a group by skin color using general terms such as Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic. And, because people celebrate difference, that's okay.

Yet, we can also identify members of a group by religious differentiations which do not pertain to genetic difference.

In a sense, we can be much more specific by introducing terms representative of nationality (e.g. American, Canadian, etc.), which are more ethnically neutral and less offensive (since they represent the reality of one's location in relation to others on the planet).

Therefore, the term "culture" should be used to refer to cultural identity (or racial identity), since it covers a broad range of concerns beyond simple delineation by skin color but manages to also include ideas of nationality and even religion.

With respect to difference, some American cultural groups seek to delineate themselves from simply being referred to as Americans, demanding some acknowledgement of cultural ancestry or ancestral nationality. When this delineation is made textual, then a college/professional writer must be aware of the norms of naming cultures and the careful line between geographic-ancestral indication and prejudicial word choice.

When using words to refer to different cultures, it is difficult to choose terms which are appropriate, respectful, and effective. Therefore, we attempt to discuss "mainstream cultural differences" as best as possible.

Black

The most challenging terminology belongs to those who are deemed, "Black." The term Black refers to those with darker skin color, although more brown than black (in most cases); hence, the term is somewhat invalid. However, with the "political correctness" movement of the 1990's, individuals in journalism and professional writing proposed more "sensitive" terms such as African-American to replace the term "Black." However, such terminology has been found to be ineffective, inappropriate, and culturally limiting at times.

Aside from the reasoning discussed above, some Black Americans have resented being labeled African Americans, since generations have separated them from their African ancestry. Therefore, more specific or more general types of cultural identification may offer much more acceptable terminology to the writer.

Therefore, use
Black
(General)

OR

Black-American (non-specific)
Kenyan-American (Specific)
Nigerian-American (Specific)
Angolan-American (Specific)
Namibian-American (Specific)
Gabonese-American (Specific)
Cameroonian-American (Specific)

Congolese-American (Specific)
Zambian-American (Specific)
Mozambican-American (Specific)
Ghanaian-American (Specific)
Tanzanian-American (Specific)
Burkina-American (Specific)
Ethiopian-American (Specific)
Nigerian-American (Specific)
Chadian-American (Specific)
Mali-American (Specific)

Hispanic

The same may be true of many Americans with Latin American, Spanish, or Portuguese cultural backgrounds. For example, to say Latino or Latina may be problematic since some groups tend to claim such identification exclusively; just as Mexican-Americans claim the Chicano identification (in order to distinguish themselves from other Latinos/as).

On the other hand, even terms such as Chicano are problematic, since some Mexican Americans prefer not to be connected to their Mexican ancestry, but simply prefer the term Americano. Continuing, there is the problematic nature of terms such as Chicano, which some Mexican-Americans claim is too similar to the term use to describe Mexicans traditionally from a particular state in Mexico (e.g. Chihuahua).

This situation is similar to calling all people from the United States either a “Texan” or “Californian” (even though many of us are from different states in the United States). Regardless, you can see the problematic nature of such terms.

Therefore, use
Hispanic (General)

OR

Hispanic-American (non-specific)
Mexican-American (Specific)
Panamanian-American (Specific)
Salvadorian-American (Specific)
Puerto-Rican American (Specific)
Brazilian-American (Specific)

And, so forth...

Whites or Caucasians

Even mainstreamed whites find their own identification problematic. For example, the term Anglo-Caucasian is the current acceptable term for white-skinned people. However, those of specific heritages consider the *Anglo* component of the term to be insufficient and invalid to some scholars.

Therefore, use
White or Caucasian (General)

OR

White-American (Non-Specific)
British-American (Specific)
Scottish-American (Specific)
Irish-American (Specific)
Canadian-American (Specific)
Czech-American (Specific)
French-American (Specific)
German-American (Specific)
Polish-American (Specific)
Austrian-American (Specific)
Luxembourgian-American (Specific)
Belgian-American (Specific)
Norwegian-American (Specific)
Swedish-American (Specific)
Finnish-American (Specific)
Russian-American (Specific)

Asian

Using appropriate terminology for people of Asian descent can be particularly challenging as well. The term *Oriental* seems too broad and contains some negative connotations. The term *Asian* seems to have much more acceptable overtones in contemporary American culture, given its geographical significance and validity.

Therefore, use
Asian (General)

OR

Asian-American (Non-Specific)
Japanese-American (Specific)
Thai-American (Specific)
Chinese-American (Specific)
Vietnamese-American (Specific)
Indian-American (Specific)
Burmese-American (Specific)

Native American

One long-standing concern is the confusion between Indians (of India) and Native Americans (of America). In using appropriate terminology, Indians should consistently refer to those from India, not perpetuating European determinants and/or misdirected facts from the past. Furthermore, Native Americans should be labeled as such.

Therefore, use
Native American (General and/or Non-Specific)

OR

Navajo-American (Specific) *or simply* Navajo
Cherokee-American (Specific) *or simply* Cherokee
Ojibwa-American (Specific) *or simply* Ojibwa
Yavapai-American (Specific) *or simply* Yavapai

Middle Easterner

Middle-Easterner (General)

OR

Middle-Eastern American (Non-Specific)

Iranian-American (Specific)

Iraqi-American (Specific)

Israeli-American (Specific)

Lebanese-American (Specific)

Pakistani-American (Specific)

Afghani-American (Specific)

Saudi-American (Specific)

Sudanese-American (Specific)

Libyan-American (Specific)

Egyptian-American (Specific)

Pacific-Islander

Pacific-Islander (General)

OR

Pacific-Islander American (Non-Specific)

Australian-American (Specific)

Tongan-American (Specific)

Hawaiian-American (Specific)

New Zealand-American (Specific)

Native Australian-American (or Aboriginal American or Australian Aboriginal American)

Atlantic-Islander

Atlantic-Islander (General)

OR

Atlantic-Islander American (Non-Specific)

Jamaican-American (Specific)

Dominican-American (Specific)

Cuban-American (Specific)

Haitian-American (Specific)

RELIGIOUS CULTURAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Religious cultural identification can be challenging. In fact, new religions and their denominations are formed/created every year. Likewise, many religions originate from similar paths. For example, Islam descends from the lineage of Abraham (similar to Judaism and Christianity); in fact, many of the same passages included in the Koran (or Quran) are included in Judaic and Christian scripture. Likewise, the Hindu faith may recognize a polytheistic model which may embrace Christian ideals and even Christ as a religious deity. Thus, religion may be greatly complicated by such adaptations.

Here are a few samples for proper religious cultural identification (including nationality).

Christian (General)

OR

Catholic-American (Specific)
Lutheran-American (Specific)
LDS-American (Specific)
RLDS-American (Specific)
Baptist-American (Specific)
Seventh-Day-American (Specific)
Evangelical Christian-American (Specific)

Jewish or Jewish-American or Judao-American (General)

OR

Mainstream Jewish-American (Specific)
Orthodox-Jewish-American (Specific)

Muslim or Muslim-American or Islamic-American (General)

OR

Sunni-Muslim-American (Specific)
Shiite-Muslim-American (Specific)
Sufi-Muslim-American (Specific)
Nation of Islam-American (Specific)

Buddhist or Buddhist-American (General)

OR

Zen Buddhist-American (Specific)
Theravada Buddhist-American (Specific)
Vajrayana Buddhist-American (Specific)
Mahayana Buddhist-American (Specific)

Author's Note: Some Buddhist denominations are more philosophical than theistic; therefore, it is possible to have religious and philosophical forms mixed. For example, a person may be a Buddhist-Christian (observing Christian beliefs under Buddhist dogma/philosophy).

Hindu or Hindu-American (General)

OR

- Saivite-Hindu-American (Specific)
- Shakti-Hindu-American (Specific)
- Vaishnava-Hindu-American (Specific)
- Smartha-Hindu-American (Specific)
- Bhakti-Hindu-American (Specific)

And, so forth...

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATIONALITY IN OTHER COUNTRIES

A simple equation exists for extending appropriate terminology to those claiming particular heritage and/or ancestral nationality in their current locations outside of the United States.

Cultural HERITAGE (or Ancestral Nationality) + Current NATIONALITY

EX:

- Lebanese Canadian
- Black Canadian
- Black English
- French Israeli
- Haitian Canadian
- White South African

However, if one wanted, he/she could use cultural delineations as building blocks (adding other sub-categorizations to the basic equation):

EX:

- Black Sunni-Muslim Egyptian

CLASS DISTINCTIONS

Prejudicial language is most commonly found when referring to economic or social class. In fact, most cultural slurs, most forms of strong prejudicial language, and/or condemning language used against members of different cultures or between members of the same culture is related to class (not just culture).

Furthermore, the terminology with the strongest prejudicial overtones includes terms used to refer to the lower class, as well as those of lower social status/acceptance or less-than-civil aptitudes (from the point of view of the speaker).

The Continuum of Prejudicial Language

(Acceptable)	(Not Acceptable)
Hispanics-----	Wetbacks/Migrants
Blacks-----	Niggers/Spooks
Whites-----	Wiggers/White Trash
Europeans-----	Pollocks/Micks
Upper-Class-----	Richies

Lower-Class-----Po-Po's

With class distinctions, it is appropriate to use terms such as upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class, referring to those based on their level of income and social status.

Upper-Class
Middle-Class
Lower-Class

Since the middle-class is thought to be significantly larger (in America) than in many other countries, we have adopted further delineations referring to class.

Thus,
Upper-Middle Class
Middle Class
Lower-Middle Class

COMBINING CLASS AND CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS

Similar to the "cultural heritage + nationality" equation, it might be preferable to place class distinctions ahead of cultural distinctions, which provides us with another simple equation (for combining both notions).

EX:

Lower-Middle Class, White American families
Upper-Middle Class, Black American families
Upper-Middle Class, Jewish American families

Or, even

Lower-Middle Class, Finnish Canadian families.
Upper-Middle Class, Black English families

BICULTURAL AND MULTICULTURAL INDIVIDUALS

In the case of those claiming belongingness to two or more cultures, the terms bicultural, biethnic, multicultural, or multiethnic should be used. These individuals claim identification with multiple cultures or ancestry.

Terms such as mixed-blood, biracial, mutt, Mulatto, Mestizo, Creole, Cajun, and others seem more or less tied to exploiting cultural difference, and such terms are representative of the historical strife of people with multi-ethnic ancestry. Therefore, the terms bi-cultural, multi-cultural, or multi-ethnic seem much more appropriate.