

1 Examining Diversity

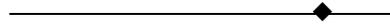
Throughout the book, certain terms will be interchangeable. In the spirit of the book topic, we asked when we were unsure of what to call certain groups. Chapter 9, “Going to the Source,” explains reasons we found for terms used for different ethnic groups. For example, *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* uses the term *black*, not *African American* (Goldstein, 1998). *Black* covers a broader group, including American-born blacks, recent African immigrants, Haitians and Jamaicans. We use both terms and use the exact terms interviewees used. Some newer textbooks are using *African American*, yet the leading journalists organizations are named the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Black Media Coalition.

Native American is used for *American Indian*. Some newspapers have returned to using *American Indian* as distinguished from *Asian Indian*. The professional journalists organization is the Native American Journalists Association.

Hispanic is broad-based and covers numerous ethnic groups, whereas *Latino* generally means those from the Latin American countries. *Mexican American* or *Puerto Rican* is more specific and preferred. Many Mexican Americans use the term *Chicano* also. The journalists organization is named the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

It is obvious the book cannot meet all needs, but we tried to use all acceptable terms. The fact is that terms change with the times and with social drama. The job now is yours, to ask

your story subjects what they would like to be called if the story requires an ethnic identification.



The social climate in the 21st century makes the job of reporting difficult. Journalists, covering local, national and global strife, struggle to report as fairly as possible on issues such as ethnic cleansing, government raids on religious sect compounds and gang drive-by shootings.

Media develop stories daily on political, religious and lifestyle differences, and many stories report urban struggles among groups within the community. Many issues involve fairness, accuracy and ethics, while giving readers and viewers a news picture from which to make up their own minds about the events.

The Importance of Covering the Community

Today's reporters need to understand differences. Print and broadcast reporters must be able to confront a story, armed with open minds and a willingness to listen. They must be equipped with adequate language and the symbols of our culture to report American diversity and to cover the community. Additionally, the imagemakers, photographers and graphic designers especially need sensitivity to the community images they present to the public.

Care should be taken to emphasize the community and to support community harmony. Yet, communities exist within communities. Although American differences make America interesting and strong, an overlying theme should be respect for differences and support for unity as Americans. This country weaves a patchwork quilt with millions of pieces that make up the whole. Each piece shows uniqueness, with varying colors, textures and sizes. Yet, the strength of the quilt unifies the pieces.

Keith B. Richburg (1997), a black American who runs *The Washington Post's* Hong Kong bureau, says, "Having seen in Africa what tribal

hatreds can do, I believe that separation is the wrong approach. There's no point in talking about going 'back' to anywhere, in finding missing 'roots.' Far better that we all put our energies into making America work better, into realizing the dream of a multiracial society, than into clinging to the myth that we belong anyplace else."

The Importance of Diversity in the Newsroom

One of the major issues media need to address is to diversify their staffs. Women and minorities have had a hard time making in-roads into positions in newspapers, radio, and television. The numbers are slowly rising, but there is not a close population reflection in reporters, editors and news managers.

David Nakamura, a *Washington Post* writer, covers Maryland sports for the *Post*. He is the son of a Jewish mother and a Japanese father. He says he thinks journalists meet their greatest obstacles in the newsroom. Because there are few Asian athletes, he says he faces discrimination in getting assignments. The stereotype is "Asians don't get involved in sports." He says that many times he is the only Asian in the news box at a sports event. Although he usually covers Maryland sports, he was sent to Washington, D.C. to cover the "Million Man March."

"I find that discrimination uses code phrases," he says. "Rather than telling white men applying for media jobs, 'You're just not a good enough writer,' those hiring say, 'Well, you're a white man, and we have to hire minorities.' This makes white men hate minorities" (D. Nakamura, 1995).

Nakamura, a graduate of the University of Missouri, was hired by the *Post* in 1994. He encourages minority students to take internships to get a foot in the door. He says he believes internships are essential to new journalists and encourages them to apply for as many as they can afford to take. Some are paid and others unpaid; the student usually has to fund some of his or her expenses. Nakamura says students should apply early because large newspapers start recruiting for summer interns in November of the year before.

Defining Diversity

Diversity describes an environment, such as a community, that includes representation of multiple groups. Diversity places an emphasis on accepting and respecting differences by recognizing that no one group is intrinsically superior to the other.

Reporting events involving this diverse population takes skill and sensitivity to differences. Not until the 20th century did the idea emerge that immigrants could serve the country best by keeping their identity and by enriching the culture of the whole with their special contributions. Reporting without bias can be achieved by paying attention to these contributions.

Journalists should also carefully consider the following elements when writing.

1. **Choose the right word** and remember the English language is ever-changing, colorful and rich in nuances and connotations.
2. **Avoid stereotypes.** In reporting the news, journalists should not use words that demean or trivialize any group. Endeavor to include differences in reporting a news event.
3. **Don't omit.** This denigrates diverse people and groups when media stories cover predominantly white males.

Because today's majority will be tomorrow's minority, journalists cannot limit reporting the world through a male, European heritage perspective. The yardstick for any story should embody a separate measure of the news event and positive differences of the people involved.

Scholar Jean Gaddy Wilson says, "Our goal should be to provide an inclusive, nonbiased and nonjudgmental language that reflects today's reality. By eliminating both blatant and subtle sexism, racism, ageism and other stereotypes from our writing and speech, we actually provide a more reliable, credible look at today's culture" (Brooks, Pinson and Wilson, 1997).

This country's history of slavery and suppression of gender and minority rights leaves us with a language that diminishes the roles of women and minorities. It leaves us with a powerful root system of bias that is going to take some time and sensitivity to change.

When speaking to Unity '94 delegates, Dorothy Gilliam, a *Washington Post* columnist and former president of the National Association of Black Journalists, said, "A media that does not reflect its community eventually will not survive."

Unity '94 brought together a convention of four separate organizations: the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Asian American Journalists Association and the Native American Journalists Association. The next convention meets in 1999.

Evelyn Hsu, a *Washington Post* editor and former president of the Asian American Journalists Association, pointed out at the convention, "Our common goal is to have better portrayals of our community. . . . Our message to the industry is that diversity is better for the product. . . . Having people with divergent backgrounds helps give you a richer product."

A Unity-sponsored study done at San Francisco State University found that in photos, through headlines and in news footage African Americans are often portrayed as "rap stars, drug addicts (or) welfare mothers," while Latinos are portrayed as "aliens and foreigners." Asian Americans are seen as "inscrutable, manipulative" invaders of U.S. business, and Native Americans are seen as "Indian drunks" (*News Watch*, 1994).

Developing Awareness

Communication studies show that changes in attitude about different groups are brought about by sharing information, reducing uncertainty and building trust. People who encounter a belief that they think is harmful will not change that belief easily, nor should they. What journalists must do is develop an awareness of differences.

Everyone screens others through a cultural bias; therefore, it is necessary to *understand your own beliefs* before understanding that others have a right to their differences. Journalists, writers, photographers and imagemakers can work on understanding that different values, attitudes and styles of communication are not necessarily bad or inferior, just different.

Listening is the key to cross-cultural communication. Journalists can *develop active listening skills* to learn about the needs and the cultures of others. Paying attention to word usage and different meanings attached to words will benefit the writer. You might say that each special group has a jargon of its own, and sometimes those words are used in a way that the mainstream press misunderstands.

For example, a television journalist in the Midwest described how she met a friend she had not seen for months. The friend asked her how things were down at the TV station. The friend did not know the station had gone out of business. The journalist explained the station had “gone to black,” which is TV talk for end of story. A few sentences later in the conversation, the friend asked the journalist how it was working for all black management.

Identifying “Ism”s

For journalists to identify every “ism” is impossible, yet there are blatant examples that can be a beginning point of identification. *Racism, sexism, ageism* and *classism* are some that insult and limit the potential of many special groups. These “ism”s are demonstrated in word choices, stereotypes or typecasting and in omission.

Words convey values, opinions and beliefs. Words can objectively report, or they can show bias and hatred. For example, after cartoonist Dennis Renault of *The Sacramento Bee* used the word “nigger” in a cartoon on the editorial page in the February 4, 1994 edition, community response was loud and vocal (Alim, 1994). Although Renault’s intent was satirical, the cartoon was taken another way by the black community. (See Chapter 6 for discussion.)

Stereotypes, which bring to mind a derogatory image, are quick picture messages that tell readers, listeners or viewers how they should think about an individual or group. Media use stereotypes as a shorthand to get instant attention. Advertisements show stereotypes, and so do cartoons. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a quick image unless it demeans a person or a special group.

For example, the dumb, blonde sexy image of a female “decorating” a refrigerator or an automobile limits the way the reader or viewer

thinks about women. This says blondes are not intelligent, women use sex to manipulate, women should be used to sell products and sex comes when you buy the product. This, translated into daily lives, affects the way employers view and hire blondes and all women, how employers think women should be treated, and ultimately, how they think they should be paid.

Omission of an individual or special group that should be represented is perhaps the largest “ism” that can be identified. Since minorities and women are many times excluded from mainstream news and prime-time news, readers and viewers don’t think about them not being there. What effect could this have on culture? If we don’t see African American doctors, disabled people actively participating in sports, Mexican American CEOs, gay, fundamentalist ministers or women mathematicians, how will we ever envision those groups taking part in all segments of life? These people do exist, but rarely does the public get a glimpse of them through mainstream media

Following are some “ism”s that media reflect.

Sexism is an “ism.” Women are making progress in some areas, but they must be represented more equally to break down stereotypes that have existed for centuries. Some of these stereotypes are: Women are not strong. Women have emotional problems related to their reproductive organs. Women are just not suited to some professions. Additionally, these stereotypes imply that only women should be in the home, taking care of the children. These images limit jobs and life potential for women.

Male bashing demonstrates a swing in the opposite direction, and many men are tired of being the object of sexism. For example, stereotypes exist that men should be macho, protect females and show little emotion. Many believe men do not love their children as deeply as women because of the image of the absentee father. Beliefs such as these have created a chasm within male-female relationships. These concepts are sexist and just as damaging to men as images that are racist or ageist.

Homophobia contributes to strident criticism of homosexuals, male or female. Although some experts say homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, a number of credible studies point to homosexuality as a biological fact. This in turn equates to discrimination toward a person because he or she is born with a certain trait, such as blue eyes.

The AIDS epidemic has hit a large population in the male, gay community. Journalists reporting on this segment of the population and reporting on HIV-positive individuals should present the stories as sensitively as possible to avoid further discrimination of the group. AIDS is not just a problem for gays. The World Health Organisation estimates that by the year 2000, 40 million people will be infected with HIV globally (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 20, 1996).

Racism is the belief that certain races are superior to others. This tends to contribute to the fact that society then grants special status to certain races. This belief system advocates a separation from that "inferior" group or groups, and sometimes promotes violence toward that group. This is true of cultural and ethnic differences also. With race and cultural bias xenophobia adds to the complex issues relating to differences among people. *Xenophobia* is a fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners (Hussey, 1994).

Journalists must report on geographic bias that exists worldwide. Recent conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan bring to the forefront that racial, cultural, ethnic and religious differences intermingle to create problems people have not learned to deal with peacefully.

Characteristics of culture are vast, and people are intolerant of religions, dialects, gestures, dress, eating habits, time consciousness or lack of it, group values and work habits. When media report these elements of race and culture, they should seek perspective from within the specific group to explain the news story in its context.

Social scientists agree that one reason why people hold prejudice is because of a lack of understanding. Many newspapers are creating positions called, "the ethnic beat" or "the cultural beat" to be more sensitive to community differences. Murray Dubin, reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, created one of the country's first ethnic beats in 1986.

Physical prejudice exists among people surrounding *ageism*, *youthism*, *sizeism* and *disabilities*. The term *geezer bashing* has come to describe blaming the aging population for the economic drain on the country through Social Security. Additionally, older employees have been laid off from their jobs early to make way for younger, cheaper employees. American culture shows little respect for aging.

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING DIVERSITY

1. When practical and relevant to the story, ask those involved in the story how they want to be identified.
2. Identify your own biases. Are they getting in the way of the story?
3. Don't reinforce cultural assumptions and stereotypes. Avoid omission.
4. Be aware that colloquial expressions may be verbally acceptable but not acceptable in print unless they are needed in quotations.
5. Go where the people are. Attend cultural awareness workshops. Volunteer with special groups so you can understand their day-to-day problems. Go to their meetings. Go to foreign film festivals.
6. Don't sensationalize a story, using cultural biases (i.e., highlighting a mixed marriage), unless it is relevant to the story.
7. Although the scoop is desirable, accuracy is more desirable. Don't jump to conclusions just to get the story first. Don't speculate what might happen because people form opinions from your speculations.
8. Don't always tell the story through the white male perspective. Put yourself in the shoes of your interviewees. How would you like to be reported?
9. Always talk with representatives of both sides of the issue. Use balance in presenting different voices within your story.
10. Be a good storyteller. Put your reader into the story by showing sensory details: *the black armband, the smell of curry, the touch of the older woman's cold, wrinkled hand.*
11. Develop sources within special groups. They can get you inside the story.
12. Work on being nonthreatening. Tell your interviewees they are doing you a favor by talking with you, and they will help the public better understand their group: religious, racial, ethnic, gender and age.
13. Find and nurture sources among many local and national racial, ethnic and special interest groups. For example, *USA Today* has developed a source book that aids reporters in understanding the different segments of the population among their readership.
14. Talk with people in their own territory so they feel more comfortable.
15. Clean up quotes unless the story is about language. Don't publicly embarrass innocent interviewees.

Prejudice against people who are overweight can take the form of job discrimination. Women are particular targets of weight control programs that are advertised endlessly. Current scientific studies report that genetics have a great deal to do with a person's size. This weight phobia is a cultural bias perpetuated by media that makes no allowance for a 200-pound woman or a 130-pound man. Both are discriminated against. Large women are considered lazy, sloppy and unproductive. Small men are considered sexually inadequate and wimps to be picked on. In the workplace these prejudices can translate into less pay and less promotion—or worse, rejection for employment.

People with disabilities have become quite vocal. Recent changes in American Sign Language point out that people who cannot hear may be more sensitive to the diverse issues around human differences.

Interestingly, Professor Elissa Newport, a University of Rochester psychologist, says, "In American Sign Language, politically incorrect terms are often a visual representation of the ugly metaphors we have about people" (*The New York Times*, January 3, 1994).

In recent years, a hearing-impaired person would sign the word "Japanese" simply by twisting the little finger next to the eye. Now American Sign Language users avoid this because it makes a graphic reference to a stereotypical physical feature. Instead, they press the thumb and index fingers of both hands together and pull them apart, carving the silhouette of Japan in the air.

Occupational prejudice is sometimes subtle. Wrapped up in this category are elitism, class and caste systems, all supporting power and money. Some young people turn down McBurger jobs because they pay minimum wage and because society makes fun of the jobs. Others discriminated against are store workers such as those who work at McMart, garbage collectors, janitors, waitresses, itinerant farm workers and house cleaners. Many people who are clustered in these jobs are the disenfranchised: the poor and uneducated.

Because Americans are diverse, journalists, photojournalists, public relations practitioners and mass media have the task of understanding and interpreting the vast world that exists.

Gerald M. Sass, former senior vice president of The Freedom Forum, said, "We make progress through people, not programs. That's people first. Second, there's no progress without some abrasiveness. Third, there's no progress without risk" (Sass, July 28, 1994).

WORKING THE BEAT

Exercises

1. List on a piece of paper all the *special interest groups* to which you belong, such as race, ethnic group, geographic group, religious group, gender and class. Also list physical traits that describe you such as disabled, overweight or unattractive by media beauty standards. Discuss: Has anyone in the class never felt any prejudice because of belonging to at least one of these groups? What do you think causes people to show discrimination? Discuss how you can work on this as it relates to your writing and reporting?

2. List all the derogatory words, phrases, stereotypes and assumptions you can think of pertaining to one of the special groups you listed you belong to in Exercise 1. Pair off within the classroom and share your list with your partner. Discuss and ask your partner if he or she knows anything else to add to your list. How do you feel when you see this list? Discuss in class. Are you surprised at some of the words and stereotypes to which others object?

3. Clip five articles about at least three different diversity groups. Analyze these articles. Were the groups and individuals portrayed fairly? Was the whole story told? What would you have done differently if you had written these stories?

4. Nonverbal communication is 93 percent of the total. Choose a classmate you do not know as a partner. Allowing 5 minutes total, introduce yourself to your partner without using any words. What did you learn? What were your similarities? Your differences? How does observation play an essential part in reporting a story about diversity and women?

5. For the following story, write a newspaper headline, the lead and the nut graph (a sentence that states the main focus of the story), using two different viewpoints: first write the story from an economically well-off, white male perspective; next write the story from a black female perspective— a woman who lives in that neighborhood.

Story Facts:

- ◆ Two black teenaged males were killed Sunday at 4 p.m. in a shoot-out in Pine Park, which is within a poor, diversely populated neighborhood. The police suspect drugs are at the core of the dispute.
- ◆ Businesses in the area are suffering from the crime-ridden neighborhood.

WORKING THE BEAT (continued)

- ◆ The Chamber of Commerce has pumped \$50,000 into the area to boost business.
- ◆ At least 15 other teens were in the park Sunday when the two youths were killed.
- ◆ Because of past violence, neighborhood mothers have formed a mother's club. Ironically, they were meeting at the time of the deaths.
- ◆ Fill in any story details you need to write the story from the two perspectives.

Who would you interview for quotes and information? Where would you get background information about the neighborhood? How are your story angles different? Should they be different? How do race and special interests enter into this situation?