



Using Inclusive Language: Engaging in Humanistic Practice

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Learning Objectives



1

Participants will be able to describe the important shift to inclusive and person-first language.



2

Participants will be able to discuss the value of adopting a humanistic approach to sex offense practice.



3

Participants will be able to understand at least two ways to incorporate inclusive language into their practice.

**What do
you like
to be
called?**

Hello
my name is





In what ways do we
dehumanize people?



Original Investigation | Ethics

Physician Use of Stigmatizing Language in Patient Medical Records

Jenny Park; Somnath Saha, MD, MPH; Brant Chee, PhD; Janiece Taylor, RN, PhD; Mary Catherine Beach, MD, MPH

Table 1. Negative Language Categories^a

Categories	Definitions	Examples ^b
Questioning credibility	Implication of physician disbelief of patient reports of their own experience or behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He insists the pain is behind his knee. • He claims that nicotine patches don't work for him. • I listed several fictitious medication names and she reported she was taking them, and that she takes "whatever is written there"
Disapproval	Highlights poor reasoning, decision-making, or self-care, usually in a way that conveys the patient is unreasonable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports that if she were to fall, she would just "lay there" until someone found her • He was adamant that he does not have prostate cancer because his "bowels are working fine." • Counseled that there is no evidence for this, but patient has strong beliefs. • She is adamant that she cannot perform any kind of exercise due to pain and will not change her diet.
Stereotyping	Quoting African American Vernacular English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief complaint - "I stay tired" • Reports that the bandage got "a li'l wet"
	Quoting incorrect grammar or unsophisticated terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States that the lesion "busted open" • Reports she was unable to fill prescription for the "sugar pill"
Difficult patient	Inclusion of details with questionable clinical significance that depict the patient as belligerent or otherwise suggests that the physician is annoyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She persevered on the fact that "a lot of stuff is going on at home with my family" but that "you wouldn't understand." • I informed her that this is unlikely to be helped by antibiotics and talked about smoking cessation with her. She said she will ask her 'sinus doctor' for antibiotics.
Unilateral Decisions	Language that emphasizes physician authority over patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She was told to discontinue... • I have instructed him to...


PART II: The Power of Words

"Words are also actions."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Below we offer alternative language and terms to consider. As a general matter, it is almost always best to use the young person's first name when referring or talking to them. Or, you may want to ask the young person how they would like to be addressed. We hope to encourage system actors to adopt language that supports positive identity development; that promotes fairness, equality, and justice; and that affirms the dignity and value of all youth.

LANGUAGE THAT DEMEANS YOUNG PEOPLE	LANGUAGE THAT AFFIRMS & HUMANIZES	CONSIDER USING LANGUAGE THAT
Aggressive	Assertive about opinions	 Recognizes normal adolescent behavior & trauma
Defiant Non-compliant	Struggling to manage some of our expectations	
Disrespectful Oppositional	Appears to be frustrated by what is being expected Appears to be having difficulty meeting certain expectations	
Incorrigible	Requires additional support and guidance	
Loud	Impassioned response	
Manipulative	Eager for a specific outcome Trying to figure things out	
Resistant	Struggling to connect	

Source: *A Resource for Understanding Behavior & Using Language in Juvenile Court*

Bodies ("move the bodies from the holding cell")	Please escort [youth's first name] to/from the courtroom	 <p>Accurately and respectfully talks about a youth's identity and situation</p>
Drug addict Abuser	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Youth in need of drug treatment	
Drug dealer	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Youth adjudicated for drug distribution	
Gang member	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Youth affiliated with a group	
Illegal immigrant Alien	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Undocumented youth Youth seeking citizenship	
Inmate	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Residents/youth/ young people in the facility	
The mother The father Family member	Mr./Mrs./Ms. with family/guardian's last name	
Thug	Youth's first name (or preferred name)	

Source: *A Resource for Understanding Behavior & Using Language in Juvenile Court*



Person-Centered Language

- We commonly describe problems instead of people, which is dehumanizing
- Shifting to person-centered language helps remove stigma and prejudice from our clinical jargon

COMMONLY USED	PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE
Mentally ill people	People with mental health experiences/conditions
Schizophrenic/Bipolar/Borderline	A person living with Schizophrenia/Bipolar Disorder/BPD
Mental retardation	Intellectual disability

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION *with person-first language*

People with mental health conditions are not "others."



In fact, a full 1 in 5 Americans experience a mental health condition every single year.

The language you use to talk about us matters!

The words used to describe us can influence:

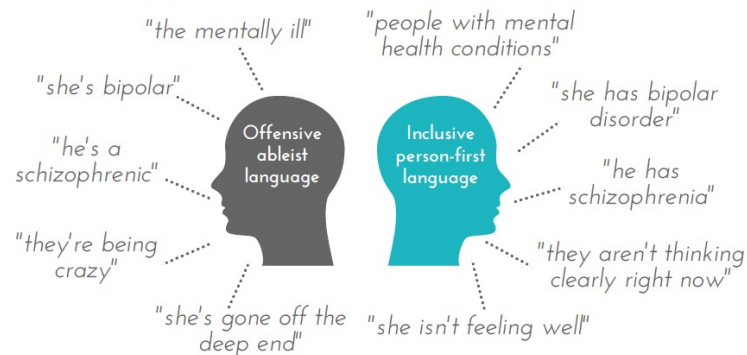
- What the public thinks of us
- How we are represented in the media
- How included we are in healthcare policy-making
- How comfortable we are getting treatment

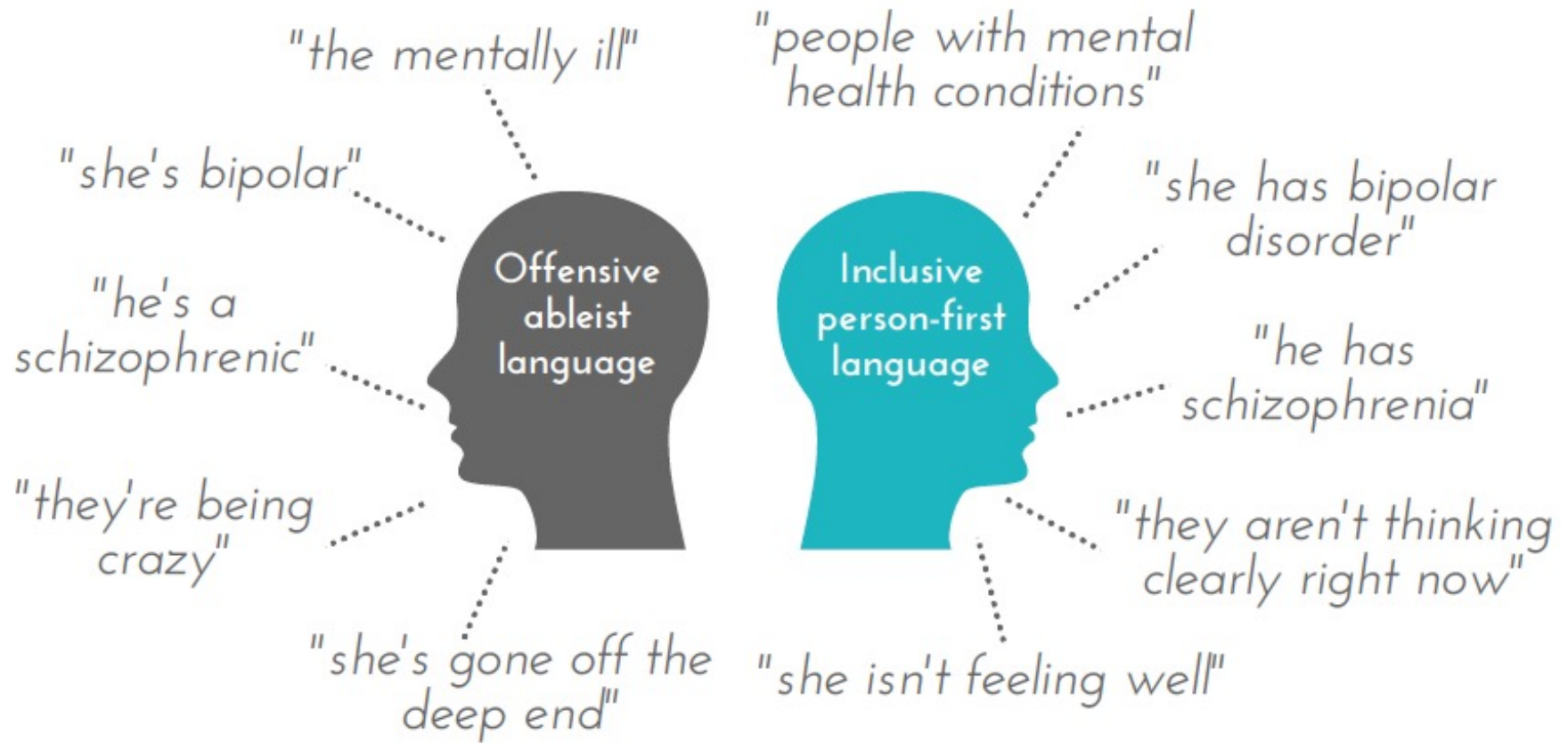
When you use person-first language, you prioritize personhood over health status.

People with mental health conditions are just that. People who have a health condition. Their diagnosis does not define who they are, just like your asthma, diabetes, cancer, or arthritis doesn't define who you are. Wouldn't it be frustrating if everyone kept calling you by your diagnosis? We think so too!

When you use inclusive language, you respect people's dignity, not tear them down.

People who are experiencing symptoms of their mental health condition deserve to be discussed respectfully just like anyone else. After all, we don't use insults or jokes to talk about people experiencing an asthma attack or low blood sugar. Using words like "crazy" is insulting. We cannot help having symptoms sometimes.







Equity, Diversity, *and* Inclusion

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES



“By embracing inclusive language and encouraging others to do the same, we firmly believe that we will not only communicate effectively with more people, but also better adapt to a diversifying society and globe.”




Maysa Akbar, PhD, ABPP
APA Chief Diversity Officer

Are Labels Accurate?

- Using terms like "offender" or "sex offender" implies a trait-like tendency to engage in criminal behavior
- Perpetuates myths about high recidivism risk in a one-size-fit-all manner
- Homogeneity exists

Youth

These labels can have major consequences for youth

LANGUAGE THAT DEMEANS YOUNG PEOPLE	LANGUAGE THAT AFFIRMS & HUMANIZES	CONSIDER USING LANGUAGE THAT
Delinquent	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Youth adjudicated of delinquency	 Does not reduce a youth to their criminal status; avoids labeling and permanently stigmatizing
Felon Convict	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Youth with a felony adjudication	
Offender	Youth's first name (or preferred name)	
Juvenile	Youth's first name (or preferred name) Youth	 Affirms the presumption of innocence
Perpetrator Perp	Minor Young person Kids Children	
Respondent	Youth's first name (or preferred name)	
Dangerous neighborhoods High-risk neighborhoods	Communities experiencing high levels of [X]	 Defies stereotypes and respects youth individuality
Minorities	Identify the specific racial or ethnic group People of color	
Poor	Youth from low-income or underserved families	
Projects Section 8	Government-subsidized housing	

Source: *A Resource for Understanding Behavior & Using Language in Juvenile Court*

Do you believe that treatment works?

“None of us are defined by a single attribute, no matter how salient or sensational. Person-first language helps move beyond simplistic and often inaccurate understandings of people who have offended sexually” (p. 480).

PSYCHOLOGY, CRIME & LAW, 2018
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2017.1421640>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

 Check for updates

Why call someone by what we don't want them to be? The ethics of labeling in forensic/correctional psychology

Gwenda M. Willis 

School of Psychology, The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Labeling a person by their past behavior or a criminal conviction is commonplace throughout forensic and correctional psychology. Labels including 'offender' and 'sex offender' infiltrate academic writing and conference presentations, names of professional organizations and treatment programmes and, at times, traverse therapeutic work. That such labels are frequently used and rarely advocated against suggests that helping professionals either (i) don't recognize labeling as an ethical issue, or (ii) don't consider it their role to challenge. The current paper aims to encourage critical reflection on the use of labels in forensic and correctional psychology. Key concerns are illustrated through a focus on labels commonly assigned to individuals who have sexually abused, where labeling is especially prolific. The scope of labeling is reviewed, and implications for rehabilitation and reintegration discussed. Next, an analysis of the ethics of labeling individuals on the basis of criminal convictions, past behavior or psychological phenomena is presented. It is argued that the use of such labels contradict core ethical principles including beneficence and nonmaleficence, respect for the dignity of all persons, and responsibilities to society. A de-labelling movement for forensic/correctional psychology and related fields is proposed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Labeling theory; pygmalion effect; professional ethics; desistance; rehabilitation

Close to 30 years ago, Wayne Bethurum was living in Wray, in his late 40s, when he groomed an underage family member and entered into what he wrongly thought of as a relationship.

He says he now understands now there is no such thing as a “relationship” between a child and an adult. He completed his prison sentence for sexual assault on a child, and today he lives in Cedaredge, a small town in western Colorado.

Bethurum has not reoffended. He’s been involved in his community as a photographer who helps put on veterans’ events and motorcyclist meetups. A local nonprofit earlier this year named him volunteer of the month. After that honor, he said, “Somebody ran my name and found out I was on the registry.”

“Now I can’t volunteer anymore,” he said. “All kinds of stuff is spread around town and half of it is not true. I’ve been ostracized in the community... They think of me as the worst of the worst.”

The Denver Post (2021, Sept 6)

Ethics

- Beneficence/Non-maleficence
- Justice
- Respect

Table 1. Ethical principles and the obligations they bring.

Respect for people and their own human dignity (humanity principle)

- Do not objectify people by using them as means to an end
- Refrain from undermining people's self-worth, reputation and privacy (rights against intrusion and to confidentiality)
- Respect people's autonomy to make informed, free and voluntary decisions about their own interests and to act on them (autonomy)
- Be accountable, honest and open (integrity)

Justice

- Strive to make fair decisions (procedural)
- Strive to distribute benefits, resources, risks and costs fairly (distributive)

Fidelity

- Be trustworthy
- Provide services within expertise
- Maintain boundaries that will allow objective and effective services
- Place service recipients' interests before own

Care

- Do not cause harm, or engage in behaviour that can reasonably be foreseen to cause harm and minimise unavoidable or unintended harm (non-maleficence)
- Act benevolently and ensure the optimal outcome for all involved by balancing the benefits, risks and costs of decisions (beneficence)

Responsibility

- Obey the law and do research that will benefit states and their citizens (social)
 - Refrain from doing anything that will bring the profession into disrepute (professional)
 - Honour contracts, including those with payers and employers (contractual).
-

From Allan (2018)

Ethics

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020; pg. 131-149) contains a discussion the use of biased language

- "Precision is essential in scholarly writing; when you refer to a person or persons, choose words that are accurate, clear, and free from bias or prejudicial connotations" (p. 132).
- "Respect the language people use to describe themselves; that is, call people what they call themselves" (p. 133).
- "Choose labels with sensitivity, ensuring that the individuality and humanity of people are respected" (p. 133).

Recent Systemic Changes

Guest Editorial

Promoting Accurate and Respectful Language to Describe Individuals and Groups

Across psychology and criminology research, persons who have engaged in offending behavior are often referred to collectively as “offenders,” or categorized according to their criminal convictions (e.g., “sex offenders,” “fire setters,” “murderers”). However, it is well-known that individuals with similar criminal convictions do not represent homogenous groups. Recent articles in *Sexual Abuse* and elsewhere draw attention to problems with using the same terms to describe knowingly diverse populations (e.g., Harris & Socia, 2016; Willis, 2018). In this editorial, we summarize these problems and introduce a new journal submission guideline intended to promote accurate and respectful language to describe persons and groups in *Sexual Abuse*.

Sexual Abuse
2018, Vol. 30(5) 480–483
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DOI: 10.1177/1079063218783799
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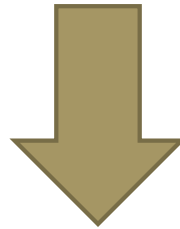

In 2018, *Sexual Abuse* (the ATSA journal) introduced a person-first language guideline.

Authors are encouraged to be thoughtful about the connotations of language used in their manuscripts to describe persons or groups. Person-first language (e.g., “persons with sexual offense histories”, “individual who has been adjudicated for...”, “child/adolescent with sexual behavior problems”) is generally preferred because it is often *more accurate and less pejorative than terms like “sex offender”*. Terms like “sex offender” imply an ongoing tendency to commit sex offenses, which is inaccurate for many persons who have been convicted for sex offenses given current sexual recidivism base rates. Similarly, the term suggests a homogeneous group defined and stigmatized on the basis of criminal behaviors that may have taken place infrequently or many years in the past. Person-first language is also consistent with APA style guidelines for reducing bias in written language...

Recent systemic changes



ASSOCIATION FOR THE TREATMENT OF SEXUAL
ABUSERS (ATSA)



ASSOCIATION FOR THE TREATMENT & PREVENTION
OF SEXUAL ABUSE (ATSA)

Recent systemic changes


AT-RISK
YOUTH



AT-PROMISE
YOUTH

In 2019, California governor Gavin Newsome signed a law removing "at-risk youth" from California's Education and Penal Codes and replaced the term with "at-promise youth"

Addressing Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Research

Sexual Abuse
2022, Vol. 0(0) 1–5
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I am grateful to [Fanniff and Alexander \(this issue\)](#) for so cogently and powerfully articulating why Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) considerations are important for this journal. Social science is conducted by people, within existing systems, and it is increasingly clear that people and systems can be biased in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. There are many potential forms of bias that can influence the design, handling, interpretation, dissemination, and journal review process of research. Fanniff and Alexander point out how racism and other forms of bias are relevant in the research that is published in this journal, given race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation can be associated with perpetration, victimization, reporting, law enforcement, and criminal justice and social service processes that in turn influence how we understand sexual exploitation and abuse.

Language

Authors will be reminded this journal adheres to the publication style of the American Psychological Association, which includes guidelines about bias-free and person-first language. We have specifically addressed person-first language in this journal (see [Seto, 2018](#); [Willis & Letourneau, 2018](#)). Consistent with [Buchanan et al.'s \(2021\)](#) recommendation, we will also encourage authors to use system-centered language when appropriate, which means framing data and results in terms of the systemic structures that maintain disparate outcomes ([O'Reilly, 2020](#)). For example, low socioeconomic status is often described as a characteristic of people, but this framing ignores historical and contemporary systemic forces (e.g., redlining in the United States) that cause some people to have lower incomes and earning potential than others (see [American Psychological Association, 2019](#), for an open access document suggesting alternative framing).

What are our options?

- Persons with sexual offense histories
- Individual who has been adjudicated for...
- Child/adolescent with sexual behavior problems
- Child/adolescent adjudicated for illegal sexual behaviors
- Person with pedophilic interests

Each acknowledges the behavior, and we can still hold a person accountable for that behavior! Language change doesn't change the other amazing work we're doing.



Sex Offender Management Board Votes to Change Language in Standards & Guidelines for Treatment Providers

(November 19, 2021) - The Colorado Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB) voted today to use “adults who commit sexual offenses” in place of “sex offenders” in the standards and guidelines used by treatment providers who assess, evaluate and treat people convicted of sexual offenses.

After discussion and public comment, the board voted 10-6 to make the language change to the [Standards and Guidelines for the Assessment, Evaluation, Treatment and Behavioral Monitoring of Adult Sex Offenders](#). This revision to the Standards will be open for public comment for 20 days. The Board will then review the public comment, discuss any adjustments based on the public comment, and ratify the language revision during the [Board's next public meeting](#).

Members of the public can submit their comments using this form by **December 12, 2021 at 5:00 pm**.

The language change applies only to the SOMB Standards; the term “sex offender” will continue to be used in Colorado statute and the criminal justice system, including courts, law enforcement and the Colorado Sex Offender Registry. The name of the SOMB itself will also remain unchanged.

The SOMB is a 25-member board created by the Colorado General Assembly in order to establish “evidence-based standards for the evaluation, identification, treatment, management, and monitoring of adult sex offenders and juveniles who have committed sexual offenses at each stage of the criminal or juvenile justice system to prevent offenders from reoffending and enhance the protection of victims and potential victims.”

Members of the public and the media can review the minutes, discussions and votes of SOMB meetings, including video recording of past board meetings, by browsing the [SOMB Public Records repository](#).

Recent

[Statement on Referral of VRA Complaints to Colorado Attorney General](#)

(February 16, 2022) - Colorado's Constitution and statutes clearly define certain rights for victims of crimes. The Victim Rights Act (VRA), in particular, ensures that crime victims are treated with...

[Governor Polis Proclaims January 11 as Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)

(January 11, 2022) - January is National

NEWS > CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY • News

Colorado board reverses controversial change to “sex offender” label at urging of Gov. Jared Polis and his appointee

In November, the state Sex Offender Management Board voted to replace “sex offenders” with “adults who commit sexual offenses.” Then the board opened that decision up to public comment, and that’s where things went off track.

The Denver Post (2021, Dec 20)



“The research is overwhelming that how we label people impacts their ability to build healthy, prosocial identities and lifestyles that are incompatible with sexual offending,” Laurie Rose Kepros, director of sexual litigation for the Office of the State Public Defender, told The Denver Post. “The SOMB Standards provide the regulations that govern the professionals charged with supporting these positive changes, so the language should support that mission. Do we want these clients to reoffend or not?”

The Denver Post (2021, Dec 20)



Thought Questions

What language
needs to change
at your agency?

Is your
paperwork
inclusive?

Future Directions



Shifting towards more humane language across systems



May involve changing language across systems and changing public policy



Discussion of how to sensitively navigate with community

Thank you!

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