**Guidelines for using Disability Language among Journalists**

Student’s Name

Institution

Professor

Course

Date

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As social norms, perceptions, and language change faster, it is becoming very difficult for journalists or other communicators to know how to refer to individuals with disabilities. The term “disability” itself is no longer accepted universally. According to Dunn & Andrews 2015, it is important to consider some basic elements when referring to disabled persons. First, individuals must refer to any disability only when it is important to the story and when that diagnosis originates from a reputable source like medical experts. If possible, the first language should be used unless indicated by the source. If possible, the journalist must ask the source how they would like to be described. When the source is unavailable, they should seek permission from trusted family members or organizations representing individuals with disabilities.

Individuals living with disabilities usually complain but in the good sense that their disability is described even when that story has nothing to do with that disability. Writing stories about disability is very complex and needs a little bit of sensitivity. This is a criterion that is a must for any journalism that involves individuals. According to Brueggemann 2013, if any journalist is in doubt concerning how to describe a person, he/she must seek clarification from that person. And if that individual cannot be asked, writing guides must be followed to the latter. When involved in writing, the journalists must follow key principles to ensure that the language they use is free of bias.

The language used when referring to disability is still rapidly evolving. The general principle for using disability language is maintaining the worth and dignity of all human beings. Each author writing about disability is encouraged to use accurate descriptions or terms that explain and honor the individual-first and identity approach (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). The language must be chosen because the expressed individual preference of individuals with disabilities concerning identification surpasses style matters. The disability nature should only be mentioned when it is important.

References

Brueggemann, B. J. (2013). Disability studies/disability culture. In M. L. Wehmeyer (Ed.), The Oxford handbook of positive psychology and disability (pp. 279–299). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398786.013.013.0019>

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