

THE TERMINOLOGY DEBATE CONTINUES

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[This is the 'penultimate draft of an article that appeared in *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness* (2004), 98, 3, pp. 133-4.]

I am very pleased that people found the time to read and respond to 'Blindness and the problems of terminology', *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness* (2003), 97, 9, pp. 519-20, the very aim of which was to stimulate debate.

The short paper identified many ways in which a term like "the blind" might prove burdensome for the persons it is meant to denote. I acknowledged that there is empowerment in the act of appropriation, in the act of subverting the traditionally negative connotations of a phrase like "the blind" by using it with pride. However, as an alternative to this social strategy, I suggested that new, disassociating terminology might be considered.

As a writer, with an obvious professional interest in the use and meaning of language, Paul Cockburn of *Disability View Magazine*, has informed me that the article certainly gave him some points to ponder. Mary Wilkinson of *Disability Now* has advised me that while interested to learn just how numerous are the negative associations with the term blindness, she found one alternative, "visually inhibited individuals", rather unwieldy. There is much room for improvement and it is for this reason that in recent research I have applied the slightly modified term "persons with inhibited vision".

Nevertheless, disability studies pioneer Lennard J. Davis brought to my attention only today that the word "inhibited" has connotations of someone who is repressed and awkward, as in an inhibited person. For this reason, though no closer to being convinced about accepting the term "blindness", I again find myself considering alternatives. I recognise that in some instances it is quite accurate to speak of persons who are unsighted, partially sighted, visually impaired or persons who have low vision. However, the umbrella term that I will suggest

in a forthcoming article for *British Journal of Visual Impairment* is "persons with visual disabilities".

"Let the blind decide for themselves" is Stuart Wittenstein's retort, "let the blind lead the terminology decision making". I am tempted to ask just who is being encouraged to do this letting. I am tempted to assert that innovative, egalitarian ideas can be advanced by all persons, irrespective of high or low visual acuity. I am tempted to argue that "the blind" do not exist, that there is no such homogenous group. Instead I will play by the same rules as Wittenstein and simply agree that "the blind" should indeed lead the discussion on terminology. After all, I have been registered as blind for nearly twenty years, which makes me as much a representative of "the blind" as is anyone else, and though not exactly leading, I certainly will go on contributing to the debate.