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# Person First Planet: A Comprehensive Review of Person First Language

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Person First Planet

A Comprehensive Review of Person First Language

by

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### **Abstract**

Person First Language has been around for thirty years yet remains confined to the borders of government agencies, special education classrooms, and professional psychology. Beginning here in Salem, Oregon as an offshoot of the People First Movement (Wehmeyer, Bersani, & Gagne, 2000), a self-advocacy group for persons with disabilities at Fairview Rehabilitation Center. It has since grown from an isolated appeal into an international movement and is the current accepted terminology in the APA and reflects in the language of all pertinent government acts (ADA, IDEA, etc.). Despite all these well intended improvements everyday use of PFL by non-laypersons has not increased, even when the disabled community asks for it. This paper reviews the existing literature and data on Person First Language to discover why and seeks to determine means of increasing Person First Language awareness and use. Since the literature and studies have been extremely limited on PFL and spanning a broad range of disciplines, they have been condensed and presented in this comprehensive review. A survey has also been developed and proposed to test the efficacy of PFL awareness training to perhaps fill this gap in our current understanding.

## Dedication / Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first and foremost Tiffany Jones, for all her knowledgeable support in the drafting of this paper. I would like to thank Portland State Special Education Department for all their guidance and support. To all my friends and family who have encouraged me along the way, with a special thanks to Solomon for all his countless hours keeping me focused. I would also like to acknowledge you, the reader, for participating.

*A category such as a number (singular vs. plural) is an attempted interpretation of a large order of experience, virtually of the world or of nature; it attempts to say how experience is to be segmented, what experience is to be called “one” and what “several.” - Benjamin Lee Whorf*

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### Introduction

George and I waited for the bus after a day on the town. We went to a movie, stopped at a restaurant, and now we were waiting for the bus to take us home. George made a joke, laughed, and pulled up his shirt in the front. He was hot he said. I looked at the line of traffic as the cars piled up, George looked at me. One small black car in particular caught my attention. The father (or I assumed him to be the father of the boy in the passenger seat) was staring at my friend George, so was his son, they were smirking and talking to each other as they waited at the red light.

I made eye contact with the man. I wanted him to see me seeing him, looking at us and staring. It was rude. We locked eyes for a moment and I shot what I hoped would signify malice in those two long seconds. Then he broke away, and looked ahead. I was pretty upset and felt I should look away too so as to not get any angrier, as I felt I had already made my point.

I noticed the light change, and the cars began to move. I looked over at our new friends in the black sports car, and to my disbelief here was the kid with his phone on the sly out the edge of his window. That little creep was taking a picture! Probably to take home to his friends so they could all laugh at my friend George, his Pa and him could have some good hoots and hollers, and more than likely posting it on social media for the perusal of his friends.

I was furious! Livid! I started to run after that car; I would chase them down and scream at them. The car drove away at the light and I was left impotent at my bus stop with all my anger and rage.

Those (explicatives) I thought. I knew just what I'd say to them. I would look at the kid and say "I can accept that from you, but you", and here I would turn to the man, "I would expect that you would be more mature." And back to kid. "I'm sorry your Dad's an

(explicative) and I can see there's no hope for either of you. This is how ignorance is passed down. F you sir, f off, etc. He's a person, and my friend."

I imagined catching up to the car down the road, yelling these things at them. I just wanted to wake them up, I just wanted them to know how angry I was. And instead I had to let it go. I was still visibly shaking when we got on the bus.

Thankfully, George didn't take notice of them. He kept on making silly noises and laughing, talking to the bus driver. Maybe he didn't see. Maybe he was used to it. I was pissed off. I thought the world of grownups was more compassionate, more aware, more humane, but instead I find that many people don't think like me, they don't have the same values. Unfortunately, they probably will never get a chance to meet someone as good as George, because they won't see beyond they're ignorance. To them, George is something to laugh at. To me, he's a person and a friend.

By the way George isn't his real name, but the story is real and true, every part of it. I can't change the world, but I can change my attitude, and hope that the world catches on and follows suit.

### **Person First is a Twentieth Century Civil Right**

During the end of the twentieth century in America several disenfranchised groups sought redress from negative and derogatory terminology in an attempt to destigmatize negative stereotypes. Certain forms of address had become outdated, outmoded, and clearly hurtful, and were stricken from the mainstream culture. In an effort to reform identity along more positive lines, and to signal a change in ideological perspectives on race and minority, several terms were introduced during this decade to usurp existing accepted terms. Blacks became African American, people of Spanish descent became Latino Americans, Indians finally were correctly

identified as Native Americans, and we seemed to be on the precipice of a new era of acceptance. Within this climate, Americans with disabilities (formerly known as disabled or handicapped) proclaimed their right to be called People with Disabilities, which was only a small part of a larger self-advocacy “People First” movement started here in Oregon, right out of Fairview Training Center in Salem (Wehmeyer, Bersani, and Gagne, 2000). The activist group implored the use of “Person First Language” when speaking about persons with disabilities, and removing certain disparaging terminology; they wished to be considered people first, before their disability, to stop letting others define them. The movement spread from Oregon to other states and then caught on amongst disability activists, politician, caretakers, classrooms, and the related professions.

Moving towards a more politically correct, more fully aware, and a more open America, we seemed to be embracing a new equality, but it certainly wasn’t without tremendous efforts and social movements of those underrepresented groups by repeatedly petitioning for redress. Along with African Americans, Latino Americans, women, and countless other groups, Americans with Disabilities (Linton, 1998) have had to struggle for their equal share in American society and continue to struggle today.

### **Literature Review**

#### Welcome to the Planet

As a burgeoning field of academia, Disability studies has reexamined the antiquated models of disability and supported the self-activism of the least publicized civil rights movement. One of the techniques proposed by The People First Movement for counteracting negative stereotypes has been the practice of Person First Language. It is the syntactic shift of speaking the person first, then using descriptors only if pertinent, or taking the emphasis off the

disability and putting it on the person first, while removing unnecessary and pejorative phrases and terminology. The application of person first language may seem like a naïve politically correct band aid for injustice but when we truly consider the broad influence speech and language have on shaping our culture (our culture is embedded or at least recorded in language) then we must consider the impact our own speech has on others and ourselves. Following the leads of several other disenfranchised groups in claiming ownership and/or demanding a change in stereotyping terms, Person First effectively does this for People who have a disability. If social interaction is embedded in language, how can we affect positive changes through the power of language to improve social equity?

During the late 1980's and 90's in America amidst several other aggressive social reforms to create a more equitable society, "Person First Language" emerged as a countermeasure for derogatory thinking embedded in language referring to persons with disabilities. It was part of what has been termed as the third wave in the disability movement (Wehmeyer, Bersani, and Gagne, 2000) which was the first to involve self-advocacy by people with disabilities. Americans with disabilities demanded to be treated as "people first" *before* their disability. Tired of being misdefined by their "handicap" and judged by a set of misinformed stereotypes, some forward thinkers and self-advocacy groups proposed changing the language of disability, and reclaiming their own identity.

Using post modified instead of the typical premodified nouns, Person First supporters proposed the language modification to place the emphasis on the person first, and minimize the stigma attached to a person's characteristics (Blaska, 1993; Snow, 2001).

These initiatives caught on in government agencies (Froschl et al. 1984), state organizations working with people with disabilities (Oklahoma State Dept. of Human Services 1993), special education classrooms, and in the burgeoning field of disability studies. The American Psychiatric Association adopted person first in

In 1990, an amendment was passed in congress changing the name of Education for All Handicapped Children (EHA) to IDEA, for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to reflect the new terminology. Federal agencies followed suit. The reform was embraced by all those affected by Person First Language, or involved with the community in some way (with some specific exceptions addressed below). The key difference between Person First and other politically corrective efforts was that terms like “African American” and “Latino American” went mainstream almost overnight, with significant pressure from all social angles, and received widespread support from everyone (even those that didn’t agree or care felt the peer pressure of society to reform) and so no one doubted the validity of the language shift. Person First, on the other hand, lost impetus within its own borders, and only truly effected those that were already well aware of a need for change. Person First only reached those that already knew there was a problem.

A preliminary study was conducted in 1994 (Groombridge, Lynch, and Thuli, 1994) as to how effective person first language could be in influencing hiring practices. The study only concluded that further studies should be done, and couldn’t prove any positive difference in behavior. However, the study only looked at one isolated encounter with PFL, in one isolated environment. The sample study merely showed that a gap existed in critical inquiry about Person First, and encouraged others to analyze the subject.

Four years later, in 1998, a study was conducted on the readability of person first language materials, for fear that PFL could be doing more harm than good (Guth and Murphy, 1998). Reviewing middle school materials for comprehension by all students (with or without disabilities) showed that no significant change in understanding or confusion was created by the Person First materials.

By the turn of the new millennium Person First still remained within the disability community's borders; completely unheard of by your average American. Efforts continued, and in 2005 "Rejecting the Label: A Social Constructionist Analysis", Finlay et al suggested removing the term "retarded" entirely from conversational use. The term has pejorative and hurtful meanings, and they found that no person for whom the term may pertain ever had a positive response to the word "retard" or "retarded".

As stated by Simi Linton in *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*:

The medical meaning-making was negotiated among interested parties who packaged the version of disability in ways that increased the ideas' potency and marketability. The disability community has attempted to wrest control of the language from the previous owners, and reassign meaning to the terminology used to describe disability... This new language conveys different meanings, and, significantly, the shifts serve as metacommunications about the social, political, intellectual, and ideological transformations that have taken place over the past two decades. (Simi Linton 1998)

The question no one seems to have asked, is how do people with disabilities feel about Person First Language? How do they feel about being referred to as crippled, handicapped, wheel chair ridden, or retarded? Shouldn't we consider the impact on others by the manner in which we speak? Do we care enough to find out?

The fire is out on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and modern cognitive science and Linguistics has since disproved this enticing fallacy, and so we must concede to recent skepticism by linguists that simply changing language cannot change thinking. (Halmari, 2011) We can however, look at the benefits of PFL in the other direction. Using Person First Language does not alter the attitude of the user, but simply taking the mental effort to be conscious of one's language, of actively making word choices does cause a moment of reflection. In that very moment where you choose to alter your language by using PFL rather than standard pejorative constructions, means that you are, in fact, practicing thinking that can *lead to a change* in behavior. You are demonstrating respect in your language choices; you are considering the impact that your language choices have on others. You have the opportunity to begin rethinking lines of classification of others and yourself, and be able to look beyond unnecessary categories.

A racist person's thinking doesn't suddenly change by reforming their language and removing racial slurs from their speech, they have, however demonstrated respect and conscious effort, they have considered the impact of their language. They have begun to consider other's feelings as valid. They have taken the first step towards a greater awareness of the world and the error of their ways. Most importantly, they have at least stopped causing harm, pain, and anguish to an undeserving target. They begin to treat people as people. A racist person reforming their language doesn't cause themselves to change their thinking but it does *reflect* a change in thinking that already has occurred, and it does affect the group that the racism pertains to.

In the same manner Person First Language cannot change thinking, but perhaps adopting it for a period of time, of making the effort to be considerate of your language impacts on others,

may allow a platform for increasing understanding, and of breaching the invisible and ridiculous barrier between “able” and “disabled” people. Most importantly, it demonstrates respect.

By using the construction of head N(noun) + PP(preposition phrase), head N + relative cause, or head + participial, Rather than A(adjective) + head N, the effort takes the emphasis off the disability and places it instead on the person, first. Also, an utter rejection of certain terms has been implemented. Disability Activists have sought to reclaim terms from social inequity, choosing either to claim them or reject them as the case may be (Simi Linton, 1998). Changes have been sought to combat powerlessness imposed by a social system that rejected disabilities; a system which in fact, until recently, completely sequestered and hid away its citizens with disabilities (Charlton, 1998). Person First Language was just one of the means of rejecting ableism.

Recently, the Journal of Pragmatics published a piece by a professor of Linguistics entitled “Political Correctness, Euphemism, and Language Change: The Case of People First”. In it, Halmari argues that Euphemism, and the adoption of new terms to do away with embedded stereotypes, only works for a period, until that new euphemism becomes absorbed by culture and again takes on elements of the old terminology. Person First, she argues, takes this process one step further by changing syntax structure, in an effort to destigmatize language along with euphemism. She conducts a review of ten years worth of newspaper articles in the *Houston Chronicle* and *Google News* searching for all articles including the words “mental” + “retard” for PFL. The search produced surprising results discovering the Non PC construction in almost 75% of all articles, and the selection far from arbitrary. She found the proper PFL used in articles where the target audience would be those affected, such as announcements of specialized activities, schools, and recent findings involving disabilities. Both papers used the non PC in all

articles where the referent was either criminal, victim, or fictional character, which comprised a majority of all articles containing the terms; in other words, when the person could not retaliate.

The Halmari article brings up one final point pertinent to a comprehensive study of Person First Language, that, “The People First proposal echoes the linguistic relativism of Benjamin Whorf (1956), the belief that language may restrict our thinking. This view may imply that as soon as language is ‘fixed’ into a prescribed norm, a desired line of thinking will automatically follow” (Halmari, 2011). This viewpoint reproaches PFL for building on naive and disproven lines of thought. Steven Pinker explains how modern linguistics has refuted the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in his book *The Language Instinct* and thanks to Chomsky and the Universal Grammarians the strong form of the theory doesn’t work. Pinker proves that the Whorf Hypothesis must be false, given recent advances in Linguistics and cognitive science, and uses a series of clear examples to show why. Pinker also explains the current structure of Linguistics along the way, covering Chomsky’s methods for diagramming sentences and uncovering the embedded structures of language, exploring the search for universal grammar, and taking apart and putting together pigeons, creoles, and the English Language.

So the question remains, can PFL affect change?

In 1984 Khosroshashi did a study of gender neutral pronouns and how language reform could change identity and perception. She took a pool of Harvard students that had and had not reformed their written language to include a gender neutral pronoun construction, and presented them with several ambiguous scenarios describing a person. When asked to identify the gender of person described in the scenario an overwhelming majority of participants chose a male figure, with the exception of the women who had reformed their language. Males who had reformed showed no significant change from those who had not. This study shows, that while

changing language does not change thinking, it does affect the identity and perception of the target group.

Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf never suggested the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf and linguistic relativity, but a conflation of their theories and speculations manifested and carried their names. (Whorf, 2012) They did, however, explore the correlations between language and thought, and thought on language. Changing language cannot determine a change in thinking, but it certainly provides a platform for change. Just as learning a new language affords new possibilities of expression, PFL offers a new line of thought.

Person First Language may not fix anyone's thinking, but its use could improve the identity of those most impacted, and increase compassion and understanding by all that employ it, in shifting their interactions, rather than their thinking.

The last ten years has seen some international studies on the effects of inclusion on school children attitudes (Olalye, et al., 2012) (Tirosh, et al., 1997) and whether or not person-first language is used by college students (McCoy, & DeCecco, 2011). Inclusion seems to improve student's attitudes towards peers with disabilities but also appears to vary from culture to culture. Using the same attitudinal scale, Tirosh, et al. found widely different attitudes between Israeli students and their Canadian counterparts. Nigerian students also seemed more receptive to their classmates with disabilities than both (Olaye, 2012). The results of the 2011 study of PFL by college students was especially discouraging, showing only 23% of respondents used PFL while the overwhelming majority (71%) use non PFL constructions in their language. So while inclusion has been shown to produce positive effects on attitudes towards disabilities studies such as Halmari and McCoy & DeCecco clearly show that person-first language has yet to move into the common vernacular.

The following proposed course of action attempts to fill the gaps in the current available research on Person First Language. The relative obscurity of the language reform has not offered much in the course of self-reflection on the practice. While intuitively reform is necessary, much more comprehensive study is needed before we can proclaim the potential success and benefits of PFL. As time runs short for this comprehensive review, the following is a proposed course of study on PFL which I personally hope to complete in my graduate studies. I hope the need for further information and study infects other like-minded peoples and perhaps they can conduct their own inquiries, upon this model or any other. The research questions for this proposed study are as follows: What are the effects of Person First Language in and for the lives of persons with disabilities? What are the effects of using Person First for everyone?

### **Method**

A mixed method approach using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathered by means of survey and interviews.

### **Participants**

Person First Planet will draw on existing research and use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data in the form of a survey and interviews. An entrance and exit survey will be given to undergraduate Disabilities Studies Students, regarding their perception of and attitude towards persons with disabilities, administered before and after taking a course on the subject which includes the implementation of Person First Language as part of the curriculum. An

adapted form of the survey techniques used in similar attitudinal surveys as templates in accordance with several similar studies has been created.

### **Assessments and Measures**

#### Person First Survey

Based on the likert scale

0 – 4 (0 for strongly disagree to 4 for strongly agree)

Questions prompting negative responses will be scored in reverse

1. Do you know what person first language is?
2. Do you actively use person first language in your own speech?
3. Do you personally know a person with a disability?
4. Do you have a disability, hidden or visible?
5. People with disabilities are just like anyone else.
6. I have friends with disabilities.
7. I would be friends with a person with disabilities.
8. I would be upset if my child had a disability.
9. I know how to use person first language?
10. I prefer person first language.
11. I will tell others about person first language.
12. I often use the term retarded when joking around with friends.
13. People who practice PC terminology are just uptight or scared to offend anyone.
14. We should show respect to persons with disabilities.
15. All buildings should be handicap accessible.
16. People with disabilities have it easy.
17. I know what ADA stands for.
18. I know what IDEA stands for.
19. I am aware of the fight for disability civil rights.
20. I know what the person first movement is.
21. Disability is a major part of a person's identity.
22. Disability rights matters a lot to me.
23. My life would be different if I had a disability.
24. People with disabilities have to struggle harder to do normal things.
25. It is difficult for people with disabilities to be independent.

Short Answer Questions:

Please describe someone you know with a disability.

Please describe your understanding of Person First.

The survey contains twenty-five items for ease of scoring with a total of one hundred possible points. A baseline score can be established by giving the test at the beginning of the semester. Students will take the survey a second time after spending a semester practicing person first, to see if there is any shift in attitude. The additional questions allow for observation of person first use in their answer construction, or lack thereof.

In order to conduct a comprehensive study of Person First Language will require further research in the existing fields of inquiry, which include Disability Studies, Linguistics, Cognitive Science, Politics, Special Education, and Psychology. The research question spans all these fields yet cannot be considered just part of any one of these, thus my research will have a narrow focus within a broad set of fields. Disability Studies remains such an emerging field as to have limited self-reflection on its directives, Linguistics can explain the construction of Person First and analyze it down to its constituent parts but it fails to account for cultural value of PFL, Cognitive Science can give us the tools for determining what's actually going on in a brain during thinking but can't ever describe what it feels like, Politics and Political movements are too relative and fragile, and Psychology has a vested interest in maintaining and supporting medical models which run contrary to Person First values, despite having seemed to adopt it. The only remaining field, Special Education, has an altogether different agenda than PFL, and as with Disability Studies, has little time for self-reflection since the actual work never ends.

The field of inquiry has become focused and the appropriate questions are in place. Person First Planet has a clear argument for the positive value of Person First Language, and a method for proving and validating the hypothesis. Regardless of the results of the survey and interviews, a comprehensive reflection and study of the effects of language reform has been conducted. Hopefully, further study will be encouraged.

### **Discussion**

#### A Note to Ownership

As we have explored the possibilities of Person First for language reformation we must note the one singular exception to this method, viz. ownership of a formally derogatory term. In some specific cases, take the deaf community for example, a solid and strong identity has already been formed with the term, and the members of that community don't wish to have their identity reformed through person first, and as such, we must respect these wishes. This has also been true of some members of the autistic community. People who have been diagnosed with Asperger's often refer to themselves or one another as "Asbies." In many of these cases the group which has been targeted has developed its own community and self abdicated until they felt comfortable enough to retain the identity in question imposed by the term. They have, in effect, taken ownership of the term and saved it from exploiting them by embedding positive qualities and redefining the term to their own meaning without harming their self worth. But this has only happened in a few cases. This is an entirely recent trend which has solidified into the newly entitled Identity-First Language (Dunn & Andrews 2015) in which the community reclaims the terminology and chooses to reassign meaning to the term. The APA has followed suit by adopting identity first language where desired and appropriate. This is still a very nascent movement and we have yet to see how far it will spread.

The majority of terms still used have pejorative connotations, even those which have been reclaimed, and so it is best to err on the side of caution. Just because an African American chooses to usurp and claim a derogatory term does not in any way justify anyone else using it. If a family member of a person with a disability, or the person themselves for that matter, chooses to use seemingly inappropriate terminology then we must defer and allow them their right to ownership, but we should not follow suit. The best possible idea for figuring out how to address and refer to a person with special needs is to simply ask them. Find out if you are being respectful or not, and listen, they will tell you. Once you get a few steps farther in your relationship you will find a plethora of more useful descriptors for when you want to talk about that person.

### **Conclusion**

The world in which we live has enlarged and grown smaller at the same time. Globalization and technology have brought us in closer intimacies with people all over the world than ever before. The distance and space that we once used to distinguish one group from another has begun to break down as we learn more about each other and ourselves; the human similarities supersede the antiquated divisions. As our world becomes closer and more accessible we find we may have to redefine our vision, our views, and our perceptions, to make them more consistent with the overwhelming facts of life. We all want the right to pursue our lives as we see fit. We all need food, shelter, stimulation, community, and love. We all need security and peace to enjoy a life free from dangers. As we move towards a global view and an aggregate culture of humanity we also must turn to reflect on our own internal culture, and look at the divisions within. Hopefully we will find these categories breaking down in the wake of a

new humanity, a more humane and intelligent view, one in which we see the similarities which outweigh the petty differences.

We have gone about the world separating ourselves from others by any distinction we could find, and now we find these divisions superficial. It is far easier to perceive differences than similarities, especially when we want to give ourselves excuses for inhumane treatment of others. When we can separate ourselves from others, make them alien, it allows us to treat them differently; acts we would never think to perpetrate upon our neighbors we inflict upon people in distant lands, and if we can figure out a way to distinguish ourselves from our neighbors then they too can fit into the category of other.

Thankfully, the world finally moves towards a more just and equitable society. We are no longer a series of nations and various peoples but are all members of the same human race. When we begin to grow towards a more compassionate and comprehensive network of one people, we must also reevaluate internal divisions within our borders. The United States was and always has been, a nation of immigrants. No person here (besides Native Americans) has any claim to the US more so than another. We have tried to capitalize on divisions and differences, based on points of origin, sex, sexuality, religious belief, and social class. This hierarchical system allowed a small percentage of the minority to remain in charge and in power of this nation, and thankfully, those people have stood up and demanded the right to be treated as equal humans. These outdated divisions still exist, especially when the politicians wish to divide the people, but more and more the succeeding generations are waking up, living together, and learning to understand each other. Our cultural differences are simply the colors and attributes that make us all different and unique, and it is the greatest thing we have to share with one another, since we all have them.

One such group of attributes has been used to subject a large minority of our society to harsh discrimination and segregation, simply because we can easily distinguish people with disabilities from our standard of “normal.” In ancient times, and in small communities, there has been a long tradition of supporting and incorporating people with disabilities into the family and community, for they have always been a part of our human existence. Through the harsh competition of industrialization and modernization we began to produce “ugly laws”, segregation of people with disabilities to state facilities, and even subjected them to horrible medical practices. Just a century ago, the wave of eugenics sought to wipe these people out, to purify the races and remove what we deemed to be a problem, and people with disabilities were subject to sterilization, experimentation, surgeries, and other atrocities. While other minority groups fought for equal rights and treatment, so did people with disabilities join together to combat oppression. Despite being overshadowed by other civil rights groups, people with disabilities waged an active and patient protest to demand fair treatment. Section 504, ADA, IDEA and many other acts have passed congress but the fight still continues. Person First has been around for approximately twenty years but still lives in obscurity, and has still failed to reach mainstream usage.

We have evidence that society is aware, albeit dimly, of this reform as shown by the study conducted by Halmari. Special Education classrooms use it, politically correct government officials use it, as well as the medical field and social services, but Person First has remained within the borders of those who were already aware of a problem. The next great challenge will be to inform the rest of the world and hopefully make them more aware of the words they choose to describe persons with disabilities. Whether or not this occurs is truly up to

us, each of us, has to make an individual choice to stop promoting discrimination through pejorative terminology. Respect must be learned and practiced.

Simple language reformation will never change viewpoints, but it may be a necessary piece to the solution, an active practice which causes changes in the way we think and act towards people with disabilities. When we take the time to consciously change the order of our sentences, when we take the moment to reach back into our grammatical formations and actively alter our choices, we have in fact spent some energy and thought on being more aware of how our language impacts others. Person First is just one exercise which can open the doors to new thinking and new experiences. When we cut ourselves off from others by lines of distinction and difference, we limit our opportunities for experience. Dismissing a group of people because of obvious or even not so obvious differences, we miss out on so much potential good.

My greatest hope, and the goal of this review and study, is to make more people aware of PFL and to promote further study and investigation. I hope to spark interest and fill a gap in the existing information on Person First Language. What I intuitively believe is correct and right must be justified to the skeptics, and I am certain time will prove this true. PFL is no solution to discrimination, but one of many steps which must be taken to include all people and promote equal access to the fruits of our society. The fight for justice has been a long road, and there is much to do in the future.

If we wish to be respectful, compassionate, and aware, it is past time for the mainstream adoption of Person First Language. To you, the reader of this article, I hope that you tell your friends, you tell your family, and you tell everyone you can about person first. Our greatest obstacle is obscurity, but our greatest strength is righteousness. The world will change

whether or not the old aristocracy wants it. We as a people must demand a change and learn to live together, not just for ourselves but for everyone. We all have something to offer this world, and when we limit a group of people we limit ourselves as a society, missing all the rich culture and activity which they have to give. Person First is just one of the necessary steps to making amends for the horrible treatment we as a nation have inflicted upon persons with disabilities, and can lead us to new awareness and more profound experiences.

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## **Children of the Sun**

**By James Kirszenbaum**

Once I knew One who spoke sixteen languages, and had a photographic memory. Reading was like downloading pages, He could recite passages and pages from books and tell you which page they were on. This One's Father was a diplomat, had lived in DC for decades, and knew some very important ones. So also He, who had brown eyes and also graying (say mostly gray) brown hair, had a peculiarity of manner patterning about the tip of the nose (in fact, well groomed some would say) (with the exception of a singular hair traveling out of his nose that he had to repeatedly ((as may be the custom with a fly)) swat that hair back up the nostril in a most intense and purposeful manner one's attention could not but help but to be drawn to it (meanwhile espousing the details of some book he read ten years ago or the particular h'ors d'oerves at some fantastic cocktail party twenty five years prior) and an intense, childish fascination with pretty women (Some saw he giggled and turned to mush). Absolute genius, this One was, worked in the same book store for fifteen years without ever receiving any raise other than those mandatorily imposed by minimum wage. Wages in the nation's capitol were never that good. Salaries were amazing.

One should have seen him crossing the circle before our store. DC is made up of circles, the last defense against the grid of a 5 mile by 5 mile rectangular city, and these circles serve as parks and rest areas and neighborhood centers. Dupont Circle had a fountain in the center (with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir Sundays, Cuban drum circles on Saturdays, hustlers and chess players and chess hustlers everyday) of a small round park packed with benches and

people from the corners of the earth. One might say Ned was the only one who could understand most of the others conversations, as they carried on in so many tongues. The circle functioned as a non static intersection with about eight different streets adjoining the circle and shooting off in their respective directions, each one with its respective crosswalk.

Now see, if one isn't from the East Coast one may not know how hazardous being a pedestrian can be out on that side of the country (where time is so precious one could run over one's grandmother to save ten seconds off their commute ((this is only mild exaggeration)) so the danger should not be understated in the following anecdote) but one should not be underestimating the veracity of walking commuters and their impatience as well. Often times, crosswalk signs were simply ignored when cars weren't approaching the circle, other times the cars didn't necessarily stop when the lights went red. This of course, could all be compensated for as the flow of human traffic, regardless of the indicative traffic lights and signs.

Many a time I caught Ned paralyzed before a crosswalk, clearly in a hurry, frustrated, and increasingly perturbed every time he saw his fellow ambulatory ones disregard the DON'T WALK sign. He waited impatiently and tapped his foot, patted his leg, looked around in what could only be described as condemnation, mentally recording all those violators of traffic laws and when the WALK sign appeared one could see the relief in his body as he proceeded across the street. Walking along the circumference with a group of many oftentimes the sign would change before the crowd got there and then, to his amazement, the crowd continued across the street to the other side. This crowd (doing rather complicated physics computations in their heads instinctually rather than on paper, as such) walked as a group secure in their safety towards the opposite corner (or moreover piece of arc) leaving Ted vexed and chagrined before a sign clearly indicating DON'T WALK. Navigating the circle took this One

considerable more TIME than most others but this is somewhat amusing to watch from the center of the circle, near the locus of the fountain, Portuguese, Mandarin, Cuban Spanish, Ecuadorian Spanish, and various dialects of Standard American English for a din/ soundtrack (three sources of music can be heard).

This One would stand there alone against the flow, the only one following the rules.

He once argued to me the merits of a McDonald's (I'm Loving It™) hamburger, cited the parsimony, and "It being virtually impossible to assemble the same ingredients and prepare an hamburger with the same value of the McDonald's (I'm Loving It™) hamburger," or moreover the cheeseburger when you consider the toppings involved plus the time of gathering those ingredients not to mention actually cooking and preparing everything, ultimately one had to recognize the superior economic power of the McDonald's (I'm Loving It™) hamburger. One dollar. "You can't beat that!" Ned said.

Across the country another One I knew spent every single day pretty much the same way. Waking up just as the sun rose to smoke a cigarette and knock on the door for breakfast, and to receive this morning's pills, an inhaler for asthma, waffles and syrup, some coffee. This One's morning was typical of most ones' morning, viz. pills, coffee, and food. "I'm not going to work today," this One says. "Please, no work."

"You can stay home today," someone usually says.

Now He is happy. "Okay! No work today, I want to go smoke," he says. This One Loves Smoking. He walks off just to turn around moments later. "Oh," he says, "is my ride coming?" Yes again Today, he thinks of his ride, and moving; this One has been waiting fifty years for his Dad to pick him up, but some days its Gary, or Jerry, or the bus from the other home (It depends

on the hour) but usually it's his Dad, James T. Love. So much depends upon the hour for this One as his brain recently got attacked and events can now only occur in the present with a simultaneous fixture in the past, but certainly each hour brings a new world, and minutes ago never happened. Such profound Patience, one has never seen. Oftentimes other ones are compelled to block his way through doorways or to say hurtful mean sardonic things and this One just shrugs it off and goes the other way, every time. He has waited fifty years for his Father to pick him up since he dropped him off at the Training Center.

He used to work picking up the things that fall off the trees but he never got paid for it.

Once the sun goes down and it gets dark out this One gets tired. The ride is coming tomorrow, all his things are ready in boxes because tomorrow he is going home. His name is Love, Nathaniel B.

Another One runs One's own business, freelances, White hats, Black hats, programs, and repeatedly discovers and infiltrates Microsoft's© security designed by a whole team of Many ones who are well paid, just for the fun of it because, "I like to figure out how stuff works." Microsoft© got so tired of it they offered her a job providing services to hackers, an online playground for those who can penetrate code, and this One runs it. Several times a year the FBI shows up with quite a fanfare and machine guns and a supererogatory show of force out of the blue to confiscate her hard drives. They always bring them back.

Also she can hardly read, but she taught herself a fictional language and can read code like it makes sense. She can reverse engineer anything there is, and can go places one wouldn't imagine One really can go, such as security cameras inside 7-11™ or one's phone. This One can travel the world via Ethernet and fiber optic wires, but hardly ever leaves the basement. Also, water hurts her skin, due to hypersensitivity issues regarding certain textures and chronic back

pain which also gets this One an ounce a month, all legit. She stands six foot four inches with a brain the size of a planet underneath a pile of curly red hair. She cries a lot.

This One has an entire team that used to work for her via the internet: one from Germany, two from Alaska, one from DC, two from France, and one from Montreal. All these ones would hang out all day on Skype™ or some other VPN by proxy and “work” which as far as anyone could tell involved playing video games and bragging about their internet exploits but also running a video game for persons all over the world which if one looked next to her computer one would notice the Server and one would speculate how so many ones could run around that glowing box for something like years. And it would fall apart and break down and Janis would put it back together again (Janis being this One’s name) and apologize to customers and give out free experience, items, etc. as such. Then one day they stopped running around that Universe in Janis’s room because there was a much more interesting virtual universe that was building itself, somewhere out there in interspace, something called Bioware and getting bigger everyday via exploration that even Janis jumped on board (she wrote a program that has auto characters run around and “kill things, run around, and jump, sometimes they get stuck running in circles ((I have to fix that)) and then when they get up to level 50 I sell the profiles on Ebay™,” says Janis, “300 dollars each.”).

Then all these ones stopped talking so much and drifted apart. The one in DC is applying to the NSA. Somebody (one of the members of the group) sold the really really cool trick Janis would use to get into anywhere in less than 60 seconds, and now it’s an old card, not as valuable anymore. Someone sold her out for a couple thousand dollars, plus ego. Janis works on leaving the house. She wants to start doing her own laundry. Next month, she goes to Disney World for a date. She’s going to get laid.

Also, somewhere in Europe is an account with over 3 million dollars in it, in Janis's name. She never talks about it; she doesn't want anyone to know.

The next One is Love's archnemesis and can be identified by the maniacal laughter that accompanies any conversation with this One. The strangest things can be utterly hilarious, for example guessing the name of the sandwich One had for lunch that day or the name of a band from the 80's. Like a cartoon villain, this One, when HE laughs, and his belly shakes as his head tilts back just ever so. One goes on, too, for minutes some times.

The next most defining feature of this one is his walk, or moreover, plodding one might say, at perhaps two-thirds the typical speed, and there happens to be a shifting from side to side (hence the plodding) but altogether unstoppable. He can be seen plodding about his daily routine (schedule is so important ((Pig N Pancake™ every morning (((same thing every morning, viz. 2 pancakes, 2 scrambled eggs, well done, 2 pieces of soft bacon, toast, and coffee and/or diet coke))) work from noon to four Monday through Thursday, then it's off to the mall)) forever riding on the same public transit routes, spending more time traveling back and forth than he ever does at one place) listening to head phones and almost singing along to the most eclectic grouping of pop music from the eighties and nineties one has ever assembled. This One rides escalators, singing "Oops!... I Did it Again" by Britney Speers© or mumbling along to "Eye of the Tiger" seven days a week, every possible free hour is another excuse to return to the mall. His record is 8 times in one day, three times to one mall and five to another. That day is this One's fondest memory.

One time this One spent a whole week searching for Guns'N'Roses first album *Appetite for Destruction* on CD after hearing "Welcome to the Jungle". He has an extensive

Compact Disc Collection which he continues to build despite the medium having fallen out of fashion decades ago.

And this One, let's just say his name is Don, because it is, plays jokes on people which he finds hilarious, viz. telling one he is on the Green train when he's really on the Blue, or calling up people on their day off to tell them that the boss wants them to come in, or even one time calling a Moving Company Truck to come over and move out a roommate he didn't like, who happens to be Nathaniel B. "I tricked you!" he always says and he laughs and laughs and laughs.

A couple times a week as Don wanders around town electricity strikes his brain, and knocks him down where he stands, sending him to sleep and folding his body to the ground. Some days his head hits the ground, some days his face, other times he's more fortunate. Some weeks one would think him a pugilist, with the black eyes, scratches, and bruises on his face. Often One wakes up surrounded by paramedics, tells them he was just sleeping, and sometimes they go away, other times they take him downtown for a series of tests (it's become so commonplace that he finds it hard to get a ride home). Often, One rides the bus home from the hospital and after having a seizure and all the tests he usually falls asleep, right on the bus.

If One has any money left, Don will even go to mall, right from the hospital.

Seizures try to slow this One down, but they never stop him (at least as soon as they're over), and one doctor even suggested he wear a helmet, just as precaution, which this One will never do, and many ones wonder and fear for the day he falls down in front of a train, or in the middle of the street, but this has never happened.

Also, this One knows a magic trick for changing traffic lights. Ned would get a kick out of him.

“I couldn’t stay awake,” he says whenever you ask, “I was like this.” He tilts his head and closes his eyes. “I couldn’t stay awake,” he repeats and he laughs.

This One repeats himself till he is sure you’ve heard him, sometimes repeating the same thing twenty or thirty times, even if you repeat the words back to him. It’s incredibly annoying, especially on the phone. He’s just being sure. Then this One laughs and laughs; everything is hilarious.

Also, this One is a twin so this One is Two. The only difference being his brother is one hundred pounds lighter and lives with his mother. The other One never goes to the mall, hardly goes anywhere at all.

Right now Don is on a mission down at the Mall of America looking for a CD. Ned is helping him (Ned’s father who was an octogenarian diplomat got transferred for diplomatic reasons ((something involving cars, a person who was a prostitute, drunk driving, and several pedestrians, and other reasons)) near the Mall of America). Don sings, “Owww Baby Baby Oww Baby Baby” while Ned decides whether to type in “Smush It” or “Push It” in the search engine.

Janis wrote that search engine and doesn’t know how to spell.

Meanwhile Mr. Love becomes thoroughly convinced that Don stole his bird, since one is missing, and he forgot that it had died two days ago, we all buried it in the yard, set up a stone, and made it a little plaque, even Janis came outside to help us. It was a beautiful afternoon. On it we wrote our epigraph:

Every little bird,

And every little person

Is vitally important

And should be allowed to sing

In the sun.