

## A35 Group-Specific Label Use in Anthropology: A Review of the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 2010–2019

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will have an appreciation for the range of group-specific term use by anthropologists in forensic research in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* from 2010 through 2019.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** Attendees will gain a better understanding of the implications for the group-specific terminology used by anthropologists in its influence of the medicolegal community and anthropology as a discipline.

Race is defined as a self-ascribed, cultural construct. From this, we appreciate that it is distinct from biology (i.e., not pre-determined by our genes) and it is learned (i.e., a product of our cultural context). Forensic anthropologists instead employ the term “ancestry” to ascribe biological meaning to unidentified skeletal remains with the understanding that this term is intended to be a more accurate biological reflection of broad geographic patterning produced by natural selection over evolutionary time. However, the additional group-specific terminology used in case reports and publications has repercussions for both academia and forensic practice. The medicolegal community and law enforcement must be able to interpret research and reports in a racialized world often outside of academic understanding and consideration.

In this study, 541 articles from the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* from 2010–2019 were reviewed for use and type of group-specific labels. Evaluated research was categorized as “Anthropology” or “Physical Anthropology” or cross-listed with these categories. “Group” synonyms assessed include: “ancestry,” “race,” “population,” “descent,” “sample,” “origin,” and “ethnic/ethnicity. Group-specific labels evaluated include: “African American,” “European American,” “Africa/n,” “Europe/an,” “Asia/n,” “Caucasian,” “black,” “Black,” “white,” “White,” “Hispanic,” “Latin/x/o/a,” and “Native American” as well as notation of country-specific labels. Terms were marked as present if they were used in the description or evaluation of the data in the given study and not marked present if used in discussion of research from other authors or as part of a literature review as it is assumed those labels and/or language may be mimicking the original citation.

Of the 541 anthropology-related articles, case studies, and technical notes examined, 216 (39.9%) employed at least one group synonym and group-specific label. From 2010–2019, group synonyms and group-specific term use ranged from 29.6%–51.0% per year. Group synonym use by article results consisted of: ancestry (67.7%), race (18.5%), population (81.9%), descent (15.2%), sample (88.4%), origin (22.7%), and ethnic/ethnicity (28.7%). In most articles, more than one of these terms are used to describe the data with only ten (5.5%) employing only one term throughout. For research that employed the group labels “B/black” and/or “W/white” (78.7% of total sample), 35.9% used lower case “b” and/or “w” and 64.1% using capitalized group labels. For research referencing Hispanic and/or Latin/x/o/a groups (26.3% of total sample), 82.5% used the label “Hispanic,” 17.5% referenced Latin/x/o/a, with 14% employing both sets of terms in description or background explanation of the data.

As a discipline, forensic anthropology should consider how group-specific terminology is employed in academia as well as outside and the implications for our efficacy to the medicolegal community. Since the remains that we evaluate are often devoid of cultural context, we should strive to employ group-specific labels that are a reflection of defensible biological and evolutionary principles and use the most tentative prose when employing culturally laden terminology that cannot be justified as self-ascribed.

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### Forensic Anthropology, Ancestry, Race