



# Confronting and Addressing Historical Discriminations Through KOS

A Case Study of Terminology in the  
Becker-Eisenmann Collection

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## NASA to Reexamine Nicknames for Cosmic Objects



Distant cosmic objects such as planets, galaxies, and nebulae are sometimes referred to by the scientific community with unofficial nicknames. As the scientific community works to identify and address systemic discrimination and inequality in all aspects of the field, it has become clear that certain cosmic nicknames are not only insensitive, but can be actively harmful. NASA is examining its use of unofficial terminology for cosmic objects as part of its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As an initial step, NASA will no longer refer to planetary nebula [NGC 2392](#), the glowing remains of a Sun-like star that is blowing off its outer layers at the end of its life, as the “Eskimo Nebula.” “Eskimo” is widely viewed as a colonial term with a racist history, imposed on the indigenous people of Arctic regions. Most official documents have moved away from its use. NASA will also no longer use the term “Siamese Twins Galaxy” to refer to [NGC 4567](#) and [NGC 4568](#), a pair of spiral galaxies found in the Virgo Galaxy Cluster. Moving forward, NASA will use only the official, International Astronomical Union designations in cases where nicknames are inappropriate.

# Historical Materials

- Libraries, archives, museums provide access to historical materials
- Convey cultural contexts around resources, persons, groups
- Explain historical materials to contemporary audiences
- Must address historical terminologies



# American Sideshows

## The 19<sup>th</sup> century American sideshow

- Displayed and promoted performers based on physical differences
- Promotional materials use sensational terms offensive to modern audiences

## Shifting Self-Identifying and Popular Terminologies

- Popular terminology has taken on more medical perspective (Adler, Huber, & Nix, 2017)
- Self-identifying labels change (Bogdan, 1988)

## Reductivist Subject Analyses

- Identity and experience tend to disappear in current subject analyses (Rinn, 2018)

# Case: The Becker-Eisenmann Collection

## The Ronald G. Becker Collection of Charles Eisenmann Photographs

- Over 1,400 images
- Sideshow performers
- 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Originally for marketing and promotion
- Now a primary source for many different research interests



**TITLE:** The Wild Men of Borneo, Midgets

**SUBJECT:** Dwarfism

**DESCRIPTION:** Full view, normal sized man sitting between two bearded midgets (one kneeling, one sitting with legs crossed) in striped shirt and tights with short overalls. Standing in front of studio backdrop. Printed: Waino and Plutano / Weight 45 pounds Age 50 to 60.

# KOS and Discriminatory Terms

KOS and discriminatory terminology

- Prominent case: LCSH “illegal alien”

Many controlled vocabularies have been criticized for propagating discrimination (Knowlton 2005; Furner, 2007)

They also have the potential to actively work against discrimination (Adler, 2016)

# Research Question and Methods

**RQ:** *How can KOS be used to intervene in discriminatory language in the Becker-Eisenmann Collection?*

Using data from larger ongoing study

- Keyword extraction from title metadata
- Broken into terms and arranged into list of historical terminology

Term matching in three modern KOS

- LCHS
- SNOMED CT
- Wikipedia\*

Annotation with notes explaining historical term usage



# Result: The Dictionary

ITEM LANGUAGE	LCSH TERM	WIKIPEDIA TERM	SNOMED CT TERM
Giantess	Giants	Gigantism	Gigantism (disorder)
Giants	Giants	Gigantism	Gigantism (disorder)
Girl	Girls	Girl	Female child (person)
Hairy Face	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis (disorder)
Hairy-Faced	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis (disorder)
Half Woman	Phocomelus	Phocomelia	Phocomelia (disorder)
Heavily Tattooed	Tattooed people	Tattoo	Tattoo of skin (finding)
High Diver	Divers	High diving	
High Wire Artist	Aerialists	Tightrope walking	
Human Art Gallery	Tattooed people	Tattoo	Tattoo of skin (finding)



# Historical Misnomers and Euphemisms

Term	Example Use	Note	Wikipedia	LCSH	SNOMED CT
<b>Baby</b>	<i>Baby Emma - Fat Girl</i>	A euphemism used in stage names for obese performers	Obesity	Obesity	Obesity (disorder)
<b>Bearded</b>	<i>Annie Jones, Bearded Lady</i>	Used in stage names or descriptors for female performers with facial hair	Bearded lady	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis (disorder)
<b>Dog Faced</b>	<i>Jo Jo the Dog Faced Boy</i>	A term used to describe performers with faces covered with hair	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis	Hypertrichosis (disorder)
<b>Midget</b>	<i>Italian midgets</i>	A 19 <sup>th</sup> century term for persons of short stature	Dwarfism	Dwarfs (persons)	Short stature disorder
<b>Ubangi</b>	<i>Big Lipped Ubangi Woman</i>	A misnomer used to promote African woman with lip plates; not a name of a specific culture or tribe	Lip plate	[no match]	[no match]

# Context and “Bridging”



**Hairy:** a term used to promote performers with significant facial and/or body hair, often arising from a congenital condition

**Title:** Moug Phoset and Mah Phoon, The Sacred Hairy Family from Burma

<b>Person:</b> Moug Phoset	<b>CONDITION:</b> hairy ( <u>term from item: <b>NOTE</b></u> ); hypertrichosis ( <u>LCSH</u> , <u>Wikipedia</u> ); Congenital hypertrichosis (disorder) ( <u>SNOMED CT</u> )
	<b>GENDER:</b> male ( <u>term from item, SNOMED CT, Wikipedia</u> ); males ( <u>LCSH</u> )
	<b>NATIONALITY:</b> Burma ( <u>term from item: <b>NOTE</b></u> ); Burmese ( <u>LCSH</u> ); Burma (geographic region) ( <u>SNOMED CT</u> ); Myanmar ( <u>Wikipedia</u> )
<b>Person:</b> Mah Phoon	<b>CONDITION:</b> hairy ( <u>term from item: <b>NOTE</b></u> ); hypertrichosis ( <u>LCSH</u> , <u>Wikipedia</u> ); Congenital hypertrichosis (disorder) ( <u>SNOMED CT</u> )
	<b>GENDER:</b> female ( <u>term from item, SNOMED CT, Wikipedia</u> ); females ( <u>LCSH</u> )
	<b>NATIONALITY:</b> Burma ( <u>term from item: <b>NOTE</b></u> ); Burmese ( <u>LCSH</u> ); Burma (geographic region) ( <u>SNOMED CT</u> ); Myanmar ( <u>Wikipedia</u> )

# Future Work

## Further enhancing the dictionary

- Additional vocabularies
- Additional annotation

## Getting the users' perspectives

- Archives users
- Students and scholars

## Automation

- Further automating analysis and assignment
- Testing additional collections

# Conclusion

All KOS bear a culturally situated perspective

Modern KOS can help provide depth and nuance to modern users when confronting historical, discriminatory terms

Benefits to leveraging multiple sources and perspectives

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