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Human Remains, Humanizing Language, and Bioarchaeological Reports

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Abstract: The "language of compliance" used in bioarchaeological reports has traditionally dehumanized the people represented by human remains. Because of this dehumanizing language, Indigenous communities prompted the development of "respectful terminology" to be used by bioarchaeologists when referencing the remains of their ancestors. While this terminology is not yet widely used, it is reflective of a greater ethical obligation within bioarchaeology to dignify and respect all human remains. Building from this respectful terminology and bioarchaeology's ethical guidelines, this essay uses textual analysis to emphasize the need for "humanizing language," share additional examples of (de)humanizing language, and advocate for the broad adoption of humanizing language in bioarchaeological reports. The essay begins with an exploration of the humanistic and scientific tension surrounding human remains and moves into an overview of the intersections between bioarchaeology, technical communication, and humanization. After a discussion of the study and implications, the essay concludes by framing humanizing language as a tool for social justice.

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Anthropology attempts to understand human experience through the examination of bodies and genetics, communities of the past and present, and/or the ways people communicate, make meaning, and socialize. This examination in anthropology happens across four subfields, which include "human biology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics" (AAA, n.d.). Archaeology, then, is the documentation of the "ancient and recent human past through material remains" (SAA, n.d.). This essay zeroes in particularly on bioarchaeology (sometimes referred to as osteology or osteoarchaeology), a type of archaeology focused on human remains (SAA, n.d.). By documenting remains, bioarchaeologists seek to learn more about the people represented by the remains (e.g., estimated age at death, sex, stature, ancestry) and their ways of life (Sutton, 2020, p. 1).

There are, of course, ethical concerns associated with recovering and documenting human remains, and these concerns include "excavating or disturbing burials" (Sutton, 2020, p. 7), inflicting harm on remains through specific documentation processes, and language use in reports, which is the focus of this essay. The notes taken during documentation are sometimes called bench notes or technical records, and they are used to construct these reports (Passalacqua & Pilloud, 2018, p. 69). The reports, often referred to as analytical or archaeological reports (because this essay is focused on bioarchaeology, I will refer to them as bioarchaeological reports), represent "the final output of any [recovery]" (Derudas et al., 2021, p. 303). Recent conversations surrounding language use in bioarchaeological reports were prompted by Indigenous communities who view "ancestral remains as living humans who should be treated with the same dignity and respect" (Watson, et al., 2022, p. 144) and felt their beliefs and practices were being disregarded (Daehnke & Lonetree, 2010, p. 245). These communities questioned whether the language dignified and respected their ancestors, and this questioning led to the development of "respectful terminology" (developed by bioarchaeologists and tribal partners) for use in reports when referring to the remains of Indigenous people (Arizona State Museum, n.d.). While this terminology has been shared by institutions like the Arizona State Museum and the New York Archaeological Council (NYAC), it has not yet been widely embraced.

While the respectful terminology discussed above was developed in response to efforts by Indigenous communities, it is reflective of a greater ethical obligation in bioarchaeology to dignify and respect human remains throughout the recovery and documentation process. Using the recently developed humanizing language as a springboard for textual analysis, this essay argues for the broad adoption of respectful terminology, which I will refer to as "humanizing language," in bioarchaeological reports. Language has the power to "construct, reinforce, or alter perceptions" (Watson et al., 2022, p. 145), and while the language traditionally used in bioarchaeological reports objectifies human remains, humanizing language has the potential to reorient these harmful mindsets and remind professionals that remains represent actual people who had complex lives and experiences.

The questions guiding this research are as follows:

- What are the ethical standards in bioarchaeology related to the treatment of human remains? Does the language used to refer to human remains reflect those ethical standards?

- What is the impact of humanizing language on bioarchaeology and the individuals represented by recovered remains? Are there applications beyond bioarchaeology?

To respond to these questions, I begin by discussing this project's exigence—the humanistic and scientific tension that surrounds the documentation of remains—and providing an overview of the literature at the intersections of bioarchaeology, technical communication, and humanization. I then describe my study approach and results and discuss the implications of humanizing language within and beyond bioarchaeology. Finally, I wrap up with a call to action that frames the adoption of humanizing language as a move toward social justice.

Note: I acknowledge the immense labor put forth by Indigenous communities to work "within the dominant culture's discourse" (Watson et al., 2022, p. 144) and prompt conversations about the importance of humanizing language in bioarchaeological reports. I also acknowledge that my project exists only because Indigenous communities have drawn attention to the lack of humanizing language in bioarchaeology and have done the difficult work of prompting a shift in language use (Sutton, 2020, p. 7).

Why Humanizing Language?

There are numerous reasons human remains should be treated with dignity and respect, including that "the individual was once a living being, they had a status in society, they formed their own thoughts and opinions, and they made their own choices based upon their own ethical principles" (Squires, Errickson, et al., 2020, p. 2). Despite this, human remains have been treated disrespectfully in the past and present, and this poor treatment reflects the longstanding "tension between the humanistic and scientific value of remains" (Sutton, 2020, p. 8). In this section, I discuss the mistreatment of human remains beyond and within a bioarchaeological context and highlight the need for reframing how we view and communicate about human remains.

Sold/Bought/Displayed Remains and Medical Museums

In the nineteenth century, the demand for bodies in medicine increased and, as a result, they were often obtained in "ways that violated the dignity of the dead" (Grow & Shiffman, 2017). These violations took the form of "graverobbing," "bodysnatching," and/or using the remains of unclaimed individuals or executed criminals, and violations like this still take place today. Recently, the operators of a funeral home in Colorado were sentenced to prison for illegally selling the remains of deceased individuals without consent. In addition, the operators claimed they were returning the cremated remains of these deceased individuals to their families, but this was often not the case (US Attorney, 2023). The body donation industry in the United States also contributes to the questionable treatment of human remains. Because the industry is largely unregulated, "it can be difficult to track what becomes of the bodies of donors, let alone ensure that they are handled with dignity" (Grow & Shiffman, 2017). Donated bodies are often used for non-medical purposes (such as vehicle safety and military testing), however; families are not always aware of these uses and are frequently misled or uninformed. For example, in 2012, a woman donated her husband's body after he died from liver cirrhosis, hoping it would be used by researchers to learn more about alcoholism. Instead, his body was purchased by the Department of Defense and used in a simulated vehicle explosion (Sherman, 2023).

Beyond the body donation industry, the questionable treatment of human remains can be found at companies like JonsBones and Skulls Unlimited, which make human remains (specifically bones, including full skeletons, skulls, vertebra, and ribs) available to the public. On the JonsBones website, founder Jon Pichaya Ferry (2021) claims that the remains sold are from "the descendants of doctors and dentists" who were required "to have their own [remains] for their studies." He also mentions that these remains were often acquired via grave robbing by "resurrectionists" (Ferry, 2021), but despite this questionable history, the remains continue to be sold. The source of the remains sold by Skulls Unlimited is more mysterious, but in a short documentary titled "Body Brokers," the president of the company discusses the remains housed in the Museum of Osteology in Oklahoma City, which is owned and operated by Skulls Unlimited. Reiterating what was discussed in the previous paragraph, he indicates that a body donated to "science" could become part of a museum display, even if that purpose was not directly communicated to the person or their family (CBS, 2023). Whereas the Museum of Osteology contains both animal and human remains, the Bone Museum in New York City, which is owned and operated by JonsBones, contains only human remains and advertises an "extensive collection of [remains] ranging from spinal columns to complete skeletons" (JonsBones Team, 2024).

While the Museum of Osteology and the Bone Museum are relatively new, the problematic treatment of human remains can be found in longstanding medical museums as well. For example, the International Museum of Surgical Science (IMSS) in Chicago houses human remains, including a full skeleton that was once used as a teaching model. Next to the skeleton is a placard that reads, "Although the identity of the person whose bones are on display is unknown, it can be assumed that they did not have control over how their body was used. We continue to exhibit these remains in order to spark conversation about the ethically fraught side of medical history" (IMSS, n.d.). Since the person did not provide consent, it is valid to question whether these "conversations about the ethically fraught side of medical history" are important enough to justify housing remains that were problematically obtained. Like the IMSS, the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia displays human remains as well, which may have been obtained via questionable means. Additionally, because many of the museum's collections are associated with death and suffering, it has grown in popularity as a "dark tourism" site, and this has contributed to attitudes and behaviors that dehumanize the remains housed in the museum. For example, visitors have been known to take photographs in front of remains and share them online, and the museum has hosted Halloween celebrations in the past (although the museum recently implemented a "no photography" policy and is reviewing other ethical concerns).

In addition to the IMSS and the Mütter, the Cushing Center (named after neurosurgeon Dr. Harvey Cushing, who passed away in 1939) houses remains in jars in the Yale School of Medicine's medical library. These remains are from patients of Dr. Cushing, and the jars indicate each patient's name, so the privacy of these individuals is not protected. Further violating their privacy (and dignity), the suite features framed photographs of some of Dr. Cushing's patients, and many of them are naked so that viewers can clearly see their pathologies (Sallam, 2019, p. 765). As illustrated, the questionable treatment of human remains in society has been and continues to be an issue, and the next section highlights similar ethical concerns, specifically in the field of bioarchaeology.

Questionable Bioarchaeology

Sutton (2021) writes that many of the ethical concerns in bioarchaeology developed “early on in the discipline” when “little thought was given to the ethics of the [documentation] of the remains of past people” (p. 7). As a result of this limited attention to ethics, bioarchaeologists of the past recovered human remains, observed them, and housed them in repositories or placed them in museums (Sutton, 2021, p. 7). Geoffrey Scarre (2003) writes about the ethics of housing or displaying human remains, noting that the individuals recovered by bioarchaeologists did not consent to having their remains preserved and/or displayed, as so doing so would disrespect the autonomy the individuals had as living people (p. 243-244). He goes on to argue that disturbing a mortuary feature can be seen as a violation of an agreement between the living and the deceased. Put another way, recovering a person’s remains might remove them from the “final resting place” they (or their loved ones) requested. Further, observing and documenting recovered remains draws attention to a person’s death and how they died, “perhaps the most undignified” aspect of being human (Scarre, 2003, p. 242-243). Harmful documentation processes in bioarchaeology (e.g., radiocarbon dating) also present an ethical dilemma; while they can be incredibly helpful learning tools for bioarchaeologists, they could cause harm to descendant communities who oppose inflicting harm on human remains for moral or religious reasons.

Other ethical concerns in bioarchaeology have come about because “archaeology is a colonialist endeavor” that privileges “the values of Western cultures” (Smith & Wobst, 2005, p. 4). The Western values that have shaped bioarchaeology view human remains and cultural objects as commodities that should be recovered, documented, and preserved (Watson et al., 2022, p. 142). Further, Western thought is guided by binaries, such as man and nature, life and death, and past and future, that are used to neatly categorize concepts, people, places, etc. (Harris, 2005, p. 32). Indigenous thought, on the other hand, is more holistic. For example, Indigenous communities believe that “[their] lives don’t end at death” (Gonzales et al., 2022, p. 41) and that the dead are “in communication with the living” (Harris, 2005, p. 32). While there is a disconnect between cultural views, “Indigenous knowledges are sovereign and do not need to be validated” by Western cultures (Itchuaqiyaq, 2023, p. 7). However, understanding this has not necessarily led to an increase in cultural humility in bioarchaeology, or adapting one’s perspectives and practices as a result of “prioritizing active listening and genuine engagement” (Itchuaqiyaq, 2023, p. 5). In one example, Sutton (2020) presents a case study referred to as “The Battle for Kennewick,” where human remains were encountered in 1996 near Kennewick, WA, on the bank of the Columbia River. When it was determined that the remains were Indigenous, they were released to local tribes. However, not wanting to miss out on a “valuable learning opportunity,” an archaeological team sued the government in hopes of regaining access to the remains to conduct further documentation. After a complex legal battle, the remains were eventually “[released] to the scientists for [documentation]” (Sutton, 2020, p. 12).

While these ethical concerns exist, bioarchaeology is moving toward more respectful treatment of human remains as professionals recognize the importance of honoring descendants’ beliefs and that “the value of human remains is closely related to the dignity of the individual to whom the body belongs” (Licata, 2020, p. 2). For instance, many institutions and professional organizations around the world, including the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), and the World Archaeological Congress (WAC), have adopted policies to regulate the

use of documentation methods that are harmful to remains. A common policy amongst these institutions and organizations is that harmful processes should not be used unless absolutely necessary (Squires, Booth, et al., 2020, p. 267-268). Further, due to the advocacy of Indigenous communities who challenge Western norms, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was established to address "inequities by giving [Indigenous] communities greater control over the remains of their ancestors and cultural objects" (Daehnke & Lonetree, 2010, p. 245). Repatriation involves releasing human remains and cultural objects (which were previously housed in museums and other institutions) to descendent communities in a "'kind of restitution for past wrongs'" (Squires, Errickson, et al., 2020, p. 2). The Kennewick, WA case study discussed in the previous paragraph presents an example of repatriation; in 2017, after it was determined that the recovered individual was an ancestor of local Indigenous tribes, the remains were released to those tribes and reinterred (Sutton, 2020, p. 13), or buried in a different location. The repatriation process was also recently undertaken by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), a museum with an anthropological focus. The Division of Anthropology at the AMNH houses the remains of 12,000 individuals, and the museum recently decided to remove all human remains from their displays and discontinue the collection of remains because of an "ethical obligation to treat [them] with dignity and respect, as individuals once living" (AMNH, 2023). In addition to the examples discussed here, the development of humanizing language also represents a positive ethical shift as bioarchaeologists are becoming more invested in the respectful treatment of human remains.

The next section provides additional context on the key disciplines and concepts discussed in this essay, including technical communication and bioarchaeology, the interactions between the two, and their engagement with the concept of humanization.

Literature Review: Intersections, Context, Key Terms

Bioarchaeology: Reports, Ethics, Language

Bioarchaeological reports represent the "most authoritative means of knowledge in archaeology" (Derudas et al., 2021, p. 303) and "share stories of the past" (Baake, 2003, p. 392). The audience and purpose of these reports vary based on who requested the recovery and documentation and/or why the recovery and documentation is being performed. For example, some bioarchaeologists work for or with cultural resource management (CRM) firms, which are "government entities or private businesses that are required by law to research a [location] for cultural significance before it can be developed" (Baake, 2003, p. 390). In these situations, the audience is the client requesting the report while the purpose is to allow land development to take place. Other bioarchaeologists work with or for museums or academic institutions for research purposes, and the audience for these reports includes museum patrons and/or academics. The audience for these reports may also include bioarchaeologists working in CRM who might encounter the research through a conference presentation or publication. The purpose of reports in these situations is to communicate what was learned about the people represented by the remains to the public, academic communities, and/or bioarchaeologists in CRM. In both scenarios discussed here, the reports include what the bioarchaeologists learned about the human remains during the recovery and documentation process.

Since the 1970s, and over the past twenty years in particular, ethical considerations have become a more central component of bioarchaeology because of "increased public awareness and concern surrounding the treatment of human remains" (Squires, Errickson, et al., 2020, p. 1, 3). As a result, several organizations in the field developed specific ethical standards. For instance, the Society for American Archaeology (2021), or SAA, indicates that "all human remains, regardless of ethnicity, sex, age, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, cultural tradition, form of burial, condition of remains, or circumstances of acquisition" are "deserving of the dignity and respect afforded to living people." Similarly, WAC (1989) states that "respect for the mortal remains of the dead shall be accorded to all, irrespective of origin, race, religion, nationality, custom and tradition." While these ethical standards are stated by professional organizations, Passalacqua and Pilloud (2018) note that ethics are not often included as a component of educational programs in anthropology (p. 1). Watson et al. (2022) echo this when they write that "archaeologists are largely trained within the positivist scientific tradition" (p. 144) and that this approach downplays the humanity of remains so that they are reduced to mere objects of research.

The limited exposure to ethics within anthropology and its subfields has likely contributed to the lack of conversation surrounding humanizing language in bioarchaeological reports until recently. As mentioned, discussions about humanizing language have come about because Indigenous communities questioned the "disrespectful or offensive" language (referred to in bioarchaeology as the "language of compliance") that was used to refer to "the remains and belongings of their ancestors" (Watson et al., 2022, p. 140). As a result, humanizing language was developed, and this language works toward recognizing the inherent humanity of remains by using the same language that would be used to refer to a living person (Watson et al., 2022, p. 144). For example, it would not make sense to say that a living person was being "stored" (Watson et al., 2022, p. 144), so a bioarchaeologist might use the term "housed" instead (Arizona State Museum, n.d.). While resources for using this humanizing language are easily accessible online, the language is not widely used at this point to reference the remains of Indigenous people, and it is typically not discussed outside of the context of Indigenous communities.

One source that discusses the broader adoption of humanizing language is a blog post by Kate Sarther (2014) shared on the platform *Archaeology Southwest*. Sarther (2014), who formerly served on field teams as an archaeologist and now works as an editor and content director, writes that the word "occupy" is one she eliminates from any archaeological writing that "crosses [her] desk." She notes that, even though she understands the term is meant to indicate that people "resided" or "took up space" in a particular area, it "falls flat" when trying to communicate something about people (Sarther, 2014). Instead, she suggests bioarchaeologists use words like "lived," "rested," or "resided," in order to work toward "humanizing our collective considerations of the past" (Sarther, 2014). An anonymous comment on the post echoes Sarther's (2014) point by stating that choosing to use a word like "occupy" might be an "unconscious action" but is one that "serves to 'erase' humans." Further, the commenter notes that humanity is a necessary and inherent component of bioarchaeology, and if it is removed, the discipline may become nothing more than a "'treasure hunt.'" While bioarchaeologists might select specific terminology (like "occupy") to enact a more scholarly tone, that language does not always recognize the humanity of individuals represented by recovered remains.

Technical Communication: (Bio)archaeology and (Re)humanization

While few technical communication scholars discuss or directly work with archaeology, some reference or mention the broader field of anthropology in their work. For example, Judy Z. Segal (2005) discusses the interdisciplinary nature of rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) and the ways it has been impacted by other disciplines, including anthropology. Another example of this engagement with anthropology can be seen in Rebecca Walton, Maggie Zraly, and Jean Pierre Mugengana's (2015) essay, where the authors provide suggestions for community-based research projects, particularly focusing on a medical anthropology project in Rwanda, in scholarship that narrows the focus to archaeology rather than anthropology—archaeology is often used as a metaphor. For instance, Jim Henry (2000) writes that the workplace ethnographies he has gathered make up an "archaeology" of professional writing, and Matthew D. Barton and James R. Heiman (2012) compare wikis to "archaeological dig [locations]" (p. 50). Beyond these references, I located one example of technical communication scholarship that directly engages with archaeology (and, specifically, archaeological reports): Ken Baake's (2003) "Archaeology Reports: When Context Becomes an Active Agent in the Rhetorical Process," which discusses the impact of economic context (i.e., working for CRM vs. an academic institution) on archaeological reports. Despite the lack of scholarship in this area, and even though I was not able to locate technical communication sources that specifically mention or engage with bioarchaeology, (bio)archaeologists are frequent and consistent technical communicators as each recovery and documentation involves keeping bench notes and transferring the information contained in those notes to reports.

While technical communication scholarship that engages (bio)archaeology is limited, the concept of "humanizing" has been discussed with more frequency. One example that engages this concept is Charles Kostelnick's (2019) *Humanizing Visual Design: The Rhetoric of Human Forms in Practical Communication*. In this book, Kostelnick (2019) suggests that humanizing information requires making it more accessible to readers—that is, humans. Another example includes Heidi S. Harris' and Michael Greer's (2021) essay, which claims that online technical communication courses can be humanized through the implementation of multimedia. A final example is Sam Dragga's and Dan Voss's (2003) essay, where they offer suggestions for recognizing the humanity of victims in accident reports. They note that "the work of technical communicators transcends the purely technical—it has implications for real human beings" (Dragga & Voss, 2003, p. 62). Further, Dragga and Voss (2003) write that "scientific objectivity in determining causes and deriving conclusions and recommendations is appropriate and necessary, but it is also a potentially blinding influence on writers in their effort…because it leads [them] to ignore or minimize the human dimension" (p. 62). When creating reports, there is potential for bioarchaeologists to focus on the technical descriptions of recovery and documentation only and disregard the humanity of the people represented by the remains, and this might be especially true given the prioritization of the positivist scientific tradition in anthropology programs (Watson et al., 2022). However, as Dragga and Voss (2003) indicate, embracing a humanizing approach can emphasize the humanity of these individuals. Dragga's and Voss's (2003) discussion also connects to this project because it focuses on humanizing individuals who have died. While not all remains recovered and documented by bioarchaeologists will represent individuals who died tragically, Dragga and Voss's (2003)

argument still applies: technical communication impacts human beings, so whenever possible, humanizing strategies should be embraced so as to dignify and respect the people involved.

While the Segal (2005) piece mentioned earlier connects RHM to anthropology, Emily Winderman and Jamie Lindau (2020) intersect RHM with (re)humanizing. They use the term "rehumanizing rhetoric" to refer to the "rhetorical process of pathos that affectively modulates public emotion to intervene upon a dehumanizing rhetorical ecology and return distinctly human attributes to patients" (Winderman & Landau, 2020, p. 53). They argue that rehumanizing rhetoric is a "fruitful concept for RHM," and they apply this concept to Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Winderman and Landau (2020) argue that this book, which is a nonfiction piece about an African American woman who had her cells taken and used in a laboratory for medical advancement without her knowledge, rehumanizes Lacks by constructing a biography of her life through interviews, archival research, and "histories of medical racism" (p. 53-54). While the individuals represented by recovered remains do not necessarily need to be *re*humanized (since bioarchaeologists recover, document, and reinter remains because they *are human*), rehumanizing rhetoric is still a pertinent concept in the context of this project. It highlights that all humans should be dignified and respected, and if their humanity is stripped (such as through medical research), it should be returned to them. This is similar to the point made by Dragga and Voss (2003), which is that nothing should overshadow a person's humanity, including technical descriptions.

The Study: Recognizing and Adapting Dehumanizing Language

Methods and Methodology

As mentioned before, the following questions guided this research:

- What are the ethical standards in bioarchaeology related to the treatment of human remains? Does the language used to refer to human remains reflect those ethical standards?
- What is the impact of humanizing language on bioarchaeology and the individuals represented by recovered remains? Are there applications beyond bioarchaeology?

The first question in the first bullet point (i.e., "What are the ethical standards in bioarchaeology related to the treatment of human remains?") was addressed in the "Bioarchaeology: Reports, Ethics, Language" section of the literature review, which states that while ethics are not typically an integral component of anthropology programs, organizations in the field have clear statements about the respectful treatment of human remains. Because there was a need for the humanizing language that was recently developed by Indigenous communities and bioarchaeologists, I understood that the answer to the second question in the first bullet point (i.e., "Does the language used to refer to human remains reflect those ethical standards?") was likely "no." However, because conversations surrounding humanizing language are new and, as a result, limited, I recognized that additional exploration in this area was needed. To further respond to this research question, I first reviewed the humanizing language developed by Indigenous communities and bioarchaeologists using guides provided by the Arizona State Museum (n.d.) and NYAC (2022). Examples of this language can be found in Table 1; the language of

compliance is located in the first column while alternative, humanizing words and phrases are in the second.

Language of Compliance	**Humanizing Language**
Analyze/analysis	Document/documentation
Collect	Gather
Discover	Encounter
Grave or burial	Funerary or mortuary feature
Human skeletons	Human remains
Lock	Secure
Excavate	Recover
Store	House
Subadult	Juvenile
Artifact	Object
Native Americans	Indigenous communities or nations

Table 1: Language of Compliance vs. Humanizing Language (Existing)

Using the humanizing language in Table 1 as a springboard, I searched for additional dehumanizing words and phrases (that would not be used to refer to living people) by performing textual analysis of six scholarly sources in the field of bioarchaeology (see Table 2).

Title	**Source Type**	**Author(s)**	**Publication Date**
"What is Archaeology?"	Webpage	Society for American Archaeology (international, based in US)	N/A
Bioarchaeology: An Introduction to the Archaeology and Anthropology of the Dead	Book	Sutton (US)	2020
Ethics and Professionalism in Forensic Anthropology	Book	Passalacqua and Pilloud (US)	2018
"The Ethics of Sampling Human Skeletal Remains for Destructive Analyses" (from *Ethical Approaches to Human Remains*)	Book chapter	Squires, Booth, and Roberts (UK)	2020
"Study, Conservation and Exhibition of	Article	Licata, Bonsignore, Boano, Monza,	2020

Human Remains: The Need of a Bioethical Perspective”		Fulcheri, and Ciliberti (Italy)	
“Introduction” (from *Ethical Approaches to Human Remains*)	Book chapter	Squires, Errickson, and Márquez-Grant (UK)	2020

Table 2: Textual Analysis Sources

The sources outlined in Table 2 were selected for several reasons. First, they were applicable to this project and already a component of my reading/source list. Second, they were authored by active scholars and/or organizations in (bio)archaeology. Third, they were recently published (in 2018 or later), which is important since humanizing language is a new topic in the field. (While the SAA source is undated, the SAA is an international, longstanding, and respected organization with staff, a board of directors, committees/task forces, etc., so the information shared on the site is up to date. For example, in 2022, the SAA website shared the organization’s newly developed purpose, mission, and vision statements). Finally, these sources were chosen because they are varied (i.e., by source type, number of authors, location of authors). In this way, the sources convey a broad representation of current scholarship and language use in bioarchaeology.

I carefully read the six sources listed in Table 2, highlighting dehumanizing words and phrases and compiling them, and the next section discusses the results of this process in more depth.

Results and Discussion

In conveying the results of my textual analysis (see Table 3), this section responds to the first question in the second bullet point above, which is “What is the impact of humanizing language on bioarchaeology and the individuals represented by recovered remains?” The first column of Table 3 displays the dehumanizing language located during analysis while the second shows the alternative, humanizing words and phrases I developed (that could be used in place of the language of compliance).

Language of Compliance	**Humanizing Language**
Site Example: “The wide variety of historical archaeological sites include shipwrecks, battlefields, slave quarters, cemeteries, mills, and factories” (SAA, n.d.)	Area, location, or place (where people lived, worked, etc.)
Damage Example: “…the remains are in danger of being damaged” (Sutton, 2020, p. 9)	Harm, hurt
Materials	Human remains, remains

Example: "…search and recovery of evidence and remains…usually dental and skeletal materials" (Passalacqua & Pilloud, 2018, p. 4)	
Destructive Example: "Ethical considerations pertaining to the destructive sampling of human remains…" (Squires, Booth, et al., 2020, p. 267)	Harmful, hurtful
Record Example: "Human remains preserve a clear record of past life to later generations" (Licata, 2020, p. 2)	Story, retelling
Source of knowledge (and other phrases that frame remains as objects or learning tools) Example: "Human remains as a 'non-renewable source of knowledge'" (Squires, Errickson, et al, 2020, p. 4)	Human remains, remains (that share stories of the past)
Study Example: "Today, the recovery, study and exposition of archaeological human remains…" (Licata, 2020, p. 1)	Observe, observation or document, documentation
Turn over Example: "…the skeleton was turned over…and reburied" (Sutton, 2020, p. 13)	Release, repatriate

Table 3: Language of Compliance vs. Humanizing Language (Additions)

The language of compliance outlined in Table 3 references human remains or human-centered concepts and experiences (i.e., the remains of the bodies people lived/existed in, the ways bioarchaeologists interact with those remains, the places people lived, and their lived experiences). However, because those words and phrases would not be used to refer to living people, there is a disconnect between the language and the humanistic focus of the sources. As a result, the sources convey a detached, scientific, and/or academic tone, even when referring to very human topics and experiences.

As is evident, the textual analysis only solidified that there is work to be done in bioarchaeology to align language use with ethical standards and to treat human remains with the utmost dignity and respect. To echo Sarther's (2014) points discussed in the literature review, humans do not

inhabit "sites" or tell or share "records." They are not "damaged" or "destroyed," and they are not merely "sources of knowledge" or objects of "study." The words and phrases we use are important because there is a clear link between "language and how we interpret our reality" (Watson et al., 2022, p. 144). Put another way, "how we use language directly shapes how we interact with the world" as it "not only reflects, but actively constructs, our values, worldview, lenses, and frameworks" (Mussack, 2021). Because the expectation to treat human remains respectfully is not reflected in the language of compliance in bioarchaeology, the "reality" constructed by the reports is that remains are objects rather than representations of human beings. Instead of the language of compliance, bioarchaeologists can embrace humanizing language to emphasize that people are from "places" rather than "sites," are storytellers who share "stories" rather than records, are "harmed" or "hurt" rather than damaged, and are "observed" so their ways of knowing and being can be understood.

Given this potential, it is unfortunate that the humanizing language developed with Indigenous communities (in Table 1) is not widely used as it centers "[Indigenous] systems of knowledge and concepts of stewardship" (Atalay, 2010, p. 61) and "reduces the use of outdated, misunderstood and pejorative language in professional documents" (NYAC, 2022). Humanizing language not only acknowledges the values and beliefs of Indigenous communities, but it also pushes back against Western notions to transform the unequal power dynamic that has traditionally existed between these communities and bioarchaeologists. It is also unfortunate that humanizing language has not gained broader attention in bioarchaeology overall. While Indigenous and Western values differ, the field of bioarchaeology also stresses that all humans, in life and death, are deserving of respect, so humanizing language applies to any situation where human remains are being recovered and documented. However, in order for humanizing language to positively impact bioarchaeology and the humans involved, it cannot just be developed and shared in guides and scholarship: it has to be used by professionals in the field. As a result, I strongly advocate for the use of humanizing language (the suggestions shared in both Tables 1 and 3) in bioarchaeological reports to reference *all* human remains. Bioarchaeology has made ethical progress in recent years, and humanizing language is another way to further this progress. Additionally, the adoption of humanizing language in bioarchaeological reports could be especially powerful in furthering ethical progress given that they are the most authoritative form of technical communication in the field (Derudas et al., 2021).

The next section responds to the final research question: "Are there applications [of humanizing language] beyond bioarchaeology?"

Implications Beyond Bioarchaeology

While the adoption of humanizing language is beneficial for bioarchaeology, there is also potential for greater societal impact, especially in museums. As most people have visited or will visit a museum that covers an aspect of human history or culture, the potential of humanizing language in the context of museums is far-reaching. Bioarchaeologists have been grappling with the ethics of displaying human remains in museums and, as a result, many anthropological museums (like the AMNH) no longer accept remains for display and/or have removed remains from displays. Despite this, many museums (including medical museums like the Mütter Museum and the National Museum of Health and Medicine, or NMHM, near Washington, D.C.)

still continue displaying human remains for a variety of reasons, including if museum staff believe the remains are educationally invaluable or if someone consented to having their remains on display (as was the case with a man who donated his original heart to the Mütter Museum after receiving a heart transplant). Even in cases where remains continue to be displayed, museum curators can humanize displays through the use of humanizing language that communicates information to visitors in a dignifying and respectful manner. The information/humanizing language could also be accompanied by a brief justification for the language used (i.e., why certain words and phrases are used as opposed to others). This intervention could shift visitors' perceptions of human remains, prompting additional conversation about not only the display of remains in museums but also the overall treatment of remains in society.

To provide a tangible example of what this humanizing language could look like in museums, I refer to the IMSS example discussed in the "Sold/Bought/Displayed Remains and Medical Museums" section of this essay. Putting aside the ethics surrounding the display (i.e., the person represented by the remains may not have consented to body donation, let alone to being part of a museum display), the placard accompanying the remains at the IMSS does not embrace a humanizing approach. While the placard does refer to the remains as "remains" at one point, it also refers to them as a "mid-century skeleton," "this skeleton," and "bones" (IMSS, n.d.). In addition, the title on the placard is "Human Skeleton for Study." This language creates distance between the remains and the person represented by the remains (i.e., a living person would not be reduced to their parts, like bones); instead of framing the remains as human, these words and phrases make the remains seem like a teaching tool or object for study. To humanize the language on the placard, museum staff could substitute "remains" for "skeleton" and "bones" and "observation" or "documentation" for "study." Outside of adopting humanizing language, museums like the IMSS that house remains could further humanize their displays by indicating how remains were obtained. This transparency can help visitors understand injustices of the past (e.g., if the remains were obtained unethically) and, potentially, learn some humanizing details about the person represented by the remains. While the IMSS could embrace more humanizing language on the placard that accompanies the remains discussed here, they do provide clarity about how the remains were (questionably) obtained. The placard reads, "[These remains were] distributed to US medical institutions by the Clay-Adams Company, which likely obtained [them] from a company in India called MB & Co. Both of these companies were players in a longstanding trade in human remains" (IMSS, n.d.).

Beyond museums, if companies that gather and sell human remains are going to exist, they should embrace humanizing language in their technical communication (i.e., on their websites and social media platforms) so that visitors can better recognize the inherent humanity of remains. The names "JonsBones" and "Skulls Unlimited" imply ownership of remains and/or frame them as curiosities, and their websites contain additional examples of dehumanizing language. For example, the JonsBones website uses words and phrases like "human osteology," "[the] study [of] skeletal remains," "medical skull," "bone box," and "pieces." Instead of using these terms and phrases, which objectify the remains, humanizing language (e.g., "human remains" instead of "skeletal remains," "skull," or "pieces") could be substituted. At the time of writing this essay, JonsBones has 46,000 followers on Instagram, 3,400 on YouTube, and 518,000 on TikTok. As is evident, the company has a large following, so the adoption of

humanizing language has the potential to influence the perceptions of many by encouraging them to view remains as representations of actual human beings. Skulls Unlimited also has a wide reach with 29,600 followers on Instagram and 9,200 on TikTok, and the adoption of humanizing language could similarly challenge how people view human remains. Rather than use phrases like "human products" or "research quality human skeleton," which commodify the remains, "human remains" could be used instead. Additionally, as was suggested in the medical museum discussion, both companies could explain why they use that specific language and provide transparent information about how the remains were obtained (while JonsBones does provide this information, I was not able to locate this transparency on the Skulls Unlimited website).

The next section wraps up this essay by discussing study limitations and future research. Further, because humanizing language has the potential to alter perceptions and, as a result, change how human remains are viewed and treated, the conclusion also frames humanizing language as a social justice tool.

Conclusion: Limitations, Future Research, and Social Justice

Limitations

While this essay focuses on humanizing language in bioarchaeological reports, my textual analysis was performed on scholarly sources in bioarchaeology, and I would like to take a moment to justify this choice. The authors represented in Table 2 are academics (i.e., they are employed by academic institutions), but they are also experienced field workers (past and present), so the writing and language use in the sources is reflective of the writing and language use employed in bioarchaeological reports. For instance, Marin A. Pilloud, a co-author on one of the analyzed sources, is a board-certified forensic anthropologist, and her lab (located at the University of Nevada, Reno) regularly assists with the analysis of human remains (Pilloud, n.d.). Kirsty Squires, a co-author for two of the analyzed sources, similarly worked in the field and taught students how to recover and document human remains, and her current research focuses on the analysis of cremated human remains (Staffordshire, n.d.). In addition, the dehumanizing words and phrases that were provided in the first column of Table 3 are not limited to academic writing but are also used in bioarchaeological reports. Because bioarchaeological reports share the results of recovery and documentation (Derudas et al., 2021, p. 303), they likely discuss the location of recovered human remains, the stories about lived experience learned from the remains, if any of the analytical processes inflicted harm on the remains, if the remains were released or repatriated to be reinterred, etc. While I have justified my focus on scholarly sources in bioarchaeology, I recognize that this focus represents a potential limitation, and in future projects related to this topic, I hope to work directly with bioarchaeological reports.

Humanizing Language and Social Justice

The way human remains have been treated and continue to be treated is an injustice, and because "injustice IS a technical communication problem," it should be "responded to, addressed, and solved" (Walton, Moore, et al., 2019, p. 1). Humanizing language, then, is a tool that can be used to combat this injustice. As a social justice tool, humanizing language works to "amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically

under-resourced" (Jones & Walton, 2019, p. 242). While one might argue that human remains are not "people," this essay has conveyed that even Western cultures have begun to recognize the link between the respectful treatment of remains and dignifying the person represented by the remains. Because human remains represent people of the past who had values and beliefs, who loved and were loved, who had experiences and emotions, and who have descendants, they are deserving of dignity and respect. These individuals cannot advocate for themselves, though; because of this, they represent a socially oppressed group, especially given that many remains are recovered, documented, and/or displayed without consent. Bioarchaeologists can advocate for these people of the past by using humanizing language in their reports to work against objectification and make clear the inherent humanity of remains. In the same way, those outside the field of bioarchaeology can use humanizing language in technical communication (e.g., via museums and websites) to advocate for people of the past by reframing remains as representations of actual people rather than commodities, study tools, or curiosities.

Working on this project has challenged me to rethink the language I used in "Rehumanizing Rhetoric, Recuperative Ethos, and Human Specimens: A Case Study of the Indiana Medical History Museum," a recent research project focused on human remains in medical museums. The project specifically zeroed in on an exhibit at the Indiana Medical History Museum (IMHM) that displayed human remains or, as the museum referred to them, "specimens." In addition, the area in the museum where the remains are located is called "The Anatomical Museum." Because the IMHM used these terms to reference the remains and exhibit, I also used them in the title of and throughout my essay. However, after working on this bioarchaeology project, I realize how this language downplays the humanity of the individuals represented by the remains, and this is especially concerning given that these individuals were marginalized in several ways, before and after death. Not only were they patients at a psychiatric facility where mistreatment and abuse were rampant, but when they passed away, their remains were taken to the pathology building on the facility's campus for autopsies. While families consented to the autopsies, they were promised a free funeral in return, so it is unclear if their consent was coerced. Also, the families could not have known that the pathology building would eventually become a museum and that their loved ones' remains would end up on display there.

While these remains are still on display at the IMHM, museum staff recently completed a project they referred to as "Rehumanizing the Specimens" to re-dignify the people represented by the remains. Using hospital records and documents, they constructed narratives to communicate personal details about each person's lived experiences (e.g., upbringing, education, career). While these narratives work to rehumanize, the language of the exhibit or display is not particularly humanizing and does not advocate for the marginalized individuals who are represented by the remains. Rather than referring to the remains as "specimens," which frames them as objects for medical study and education, they could be called "human remains." The name "The Anatomical Museum" similarly medicalizes the remains, disconnecting them from the people they represent, so the name could be eliminated or changed to something more humanizing (e.g., "Understanding People of the Past"). If given the opportunity to revise, I would also substitute "human remains" for "specimens" throughout my essay; as a rhetoric and technical communication scholar whose work focuses on medicine, death, and human remains, areas that frequently involve vulnerable populations and oppressed groups, I must consistently prioritize advocacy and justice (and this is why I used the humanizing language suggestions

provided in Table 1 and Table 3 throughout this essay). While some of the language I used in "Rehumanizing Rhetoric, Recuperative Ethos, and Human Specimens" functioned as an agent of oppression, I look forward to future opportunities to do better and use humanizing language as an "[agent] of knowledge making, action, and change" (Rude, 2009, p. 183).

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