**Research in Brief: Describing People and Portraits Through Audio Description: Preferences of People who are Blind, Low Vision, and DeafBlind**

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This tip sheet summarizes practical findings from a study conducted by the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) and University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) on the audio description (AD) preferences of blind, low vision, and Deafblind focus group and interview participants (Conway et al., 2022). This research in brief will discuss each area as it applies to practice for audio describers, support service professionals, and other professionals.

# **Context around AD provision**

* When describing a portrait, determine what context is important to the AD user?
  + Object label information (artist, year, medium, dimensions).
  + Subject, form, color, mood, and atmosphere.
  + Style, placement, historical, and social context.
  + Size, shape, color, texture, purpose.
  + Characteristics of the subject(s) –appearance, key features, actions, etc.
* When describing people, understand how context can change description preferences.
  + Prioritizing information that is most relevant to understanding the plot during a live theater performance or film.
  + Matching description with the user’s purpose for being at a social gathering, i.e., to meet other professional women of color.
  + Identifying what catches the attention of the describer and why.

# **Self-Identification of the Person Being Described**

* When it comes to describing the visual appearance of a person, the description should reflect how the individual who is being described self identifies. This can apply to:
  + Gender Identity/Orientation, Disability, Race/Ethnicity, Cultural background, Age and more.
* When possible, ask the individual how they self-identity to ensure accuracy.
* If that is not possible, do not make assumptions, it is best to state that the person’s race, gender, etc. “seems to be…” and describe what is visible rather than making assumptions.

# **On-Going Communication Between the AD provide and the User**

* Provide information about your level of experience with description.
* Discuss AD expectations before, during, and after the event.
* Learn how the user would like visual information prioritized based on context.
* Ask about the user’s preferred language use, such as formal versus informal, including slang?
* Ask for constructive feedback about the amount, frequency, and quality of AD.

For more information please visit the [Helen Keller National Center Website](https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/)

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