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ABSTRACT

In this discussion of various aspects of sexism in language the following principles or basic ideas are set forth for the reader's consideration: (1) the irrational and undesirable idea that male terms stand for the whole population is harmful and the practice should be eliminated; (2) language which suggests that women are, by virtue of their sex, either better or worse than men should be eliminated; (3) we should strive to have a language by the people, for the people, and of the people; (4) we should make an effort to address people in a way which will give them satisfaction; (5) occupational titles should not carry any suggestion of the sex of the worker; (6) laws need to be accurately written with regard to implication of sex through language. (LL)

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# Sexual Fairness in Language

by william a. sutton

No aspect of sexuality is more important than a mutual need for respect, understanding, and compassion.

Language is routinely used without awareness of significance or impact.

Greater precision in language can make a contribution to happier relationships between the sexes.

The enclosed suggestions are intended to abet volitional linguistic decency as regards sexual equality and identity.

This work is dedicated to the people who think of themselves primarily as people and only secondarily as of one sex or the other. It is prepared in the hope that their number will increase.

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### "All Men Are Created Equal"

When certain males of our country-to-be composed that celebrated document, our Declaration of Independence, it did not occur to them to stipulate that all inhabitants were "created equal", whatever that might be. Their great interest in freedom and liberty took them only as far as the male sex. Though they declared that "one people" could find it necessary to dissolve the political bonds which connected them with another, they appealed to the "opinions of mankind" for support in their ideas and actions.

Our most sacred state paper, in the making of which no women participated, is couched in a species of language which may be referred to as Manglish, simply "inappropriate male references". Just as it was against decency not to have women voting, so was it contemptible to have an assembly representing a nation-to-be completely lacking in representation of its women.

Only recently has the struggle of women to escape from a societally-secondary position reached a point where the role of language in expressing equality may be broached. Just as it was routine to officially ignore women in the eighteenth century and before, so it still is. The following examples of Manglish are dipped from the running stream of American expression.

A cause of cervical cancer is an enemy of man.

Mrs. Herman Bierstadt mans the cashier's window.

The concern of education is with the freedom and dignity of man.

A world problem: "Can Man Find Peace?"

Courts should not waste time on crimes in which the only victim is the offender himself.

If one is willing to die for America when she calls for aid, then he is an American.

Even now, it is not just men who use this form. Women are trained in co-educational schools which routinely publish sentences like this one: "Perhaps where the student is, literally, should reflect the fact that he is the primary focus."

Women educators, wherever they were trained, can be found to write, of pre-school children generally, "If he can't be in a fine or high quality program, he's better off." A woman journalist wrote, "A mother, holding her child, coos to him."

A noted pediatrician, a male, whose book was referred to as telling parents what every child would want them to know, advised giving the child all the attention he wanted during the first year, because that was when he was learning to love and trust. A letter protesting this strangely-inconsiderate usage received no reply.

Thereply was perhaps not very important. A prospectus for a new magazine said that the editor would want to give the reader whathe wanted. A letter about the matter brought the response that criticism was warranted and that writing in that way was an error of habit. An analysis of the magazine, which is certainly intended for intelligent readers of both sexes, shows rampant Manglish. This is in spite of the fact that the magazine has had some very good articles about social problems related to women.

All of our major authors of the past have been oriented to Manglish. The most casual awareness of these writings will show that books which show compassion and insight relating to human problems are written with complete obliviousness to the role and stake of women linguistically. W.H. Auden wrote recently of the type of individual identified as a martyr that he sacrificed not for any segment but for all of mankind. Bishop Fulton Sheen, all of whose religious statements are clothed in masculine terms, quoted Eugene O'Neill as finding the key to happiness in the following biblical quotation, "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul."

It is common to see or hear a statement by the head of an educational institution to the effect that various services are being rendered to man. Thus both men and women students write sentences like this one: "Man would come to a better understanding of life if he could discuss these vaguely disturbing truths." If such students could read various and numerous university documents, they would have no trouble finding ample substantiation of their male language bias. Just as an example, the attendance rules of a University Senate are now written so as to suggest that only males belong to it. But perhaps one-third of the faculty are women, and there is an important part of the Senate who are women.

Of course, not everything is referred to in male terms. At times, as in the following, matters get quite confused: "If one has the desire to reply on America's behalf when she is attacked, and is even willing to enter combat for her, and is even willing to give up his life for her if she asks, then he may be considered an American."

Manglicisms may be found in your backyard, kitchen, bedroom, classroom, group meeting, periodicals, books, over radio and television, and from the pulpit. Thus you will have no trouble collecting more examples. You may purchase a collection of one hundred for a dollar from the source of this pamphlet. Your own collection is preferable.

This section concludes with the following basic idea for the reader's consideration: The irrational and undesirable idea that male terms stand for the whole population is harmful, and the practice should be eliminated.

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### The Truth Is a Woman

As has been mentioned, women as well as men use Manglish. They have been just as confused about Femmish, "Inappropriate female references". Some examples have already been given in discussing Manglish. Here is an unalloyed grouping.

We shall follow Truth wherever she leads us.

"Let my right hand forget her cunning."

Kumquat University is my Alma Mater; I will always be true to her.

The *Newport News* flew her flag at half-mast in memory of her lost crew-members.

Unit-priced regulations tell the shopper how long her food will stay fresh.

The United States of America is about to begin the third century of her existence.

Just when men become so Insecure that they instituted positional and linguistic dominance, doubtless primarily through superior physical strength, paying the price of having the privilege of dying in battle, is not known. One might guess that it was in reaction to a probably-subconscious reaction to too great dependence on or domination by mothers.

The aggressive mother is a staple item in society. So is the heartily-insincere reference to a wife as the "better half". Doubtless some Femmish items came into being out of revenge; it is just as stupid to suggest that all shoppers are women as that all Americans are men. Certainly the juxtaposition of male and female roles in the following was intended to be injurious: "Ah! Your mother wears army shoes!"

That attack was on the deviation from the feminine stereotype. But there is no sound basis for designating a school or an arm or a ship as female. One suspects there was, perhaps unwitting, guilt reaction, for which meaningless penance was being offered. Certainly all the men who have personified Truth as a woman did not believe in special veracity of the female. Probably those who personified Beauty as female were quite lustily at work in the sex-object format which intelligent and alert women find so degrading.

More confused is that matter of country. In Russia it is the Motherland. In Germany it has always been the Fatherland. Standing above these things, defending butter against the inroads of margarine, is Mother Nature.

Readers are invited to make their own assessment of terminology used in rituals related to their religions.

As a principle, it is suggested: That language which suggests that women are, by virtue of their sex, either better or worse than men should be eliminated.



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### Kindred Matters

Racism and sexism are kindred biases, both being deeply destructive of human relationships. Something else they share is that bad habits, absorbed from long-established cultural patterns, are ingrained, even in those who are aware of their cost.

Anthropologists, as suggested elsewhere, generally are among the most liberal of observers of the ways people live, applying the test of knowledge to institutional assumptions. Yet they use a sexist word to describe their discipline. It may be hoped they will throw off the inherited pattern when they realize they are using it.

Thus the problem of rooting out erosive language has to be approached with determination, sympathy, cooperation, and humility.

### Mankind Is a Girl's Best Friend

It was one who stated that he meant all people when he said mankind who created the realization that this prevalent form deserved special treatment. The person blanched a little upon receiving the innocent suggestion that it was presumed womankind (a term virtually unheard of) was used in the same way.

Perhaps the overwhelming character of the assumption of the male representing both sexes is seen in the collaboration of Carl Sandburg and his brother-in-law, Edward Steichen, in a book and exhibit of photographs. Both being very broad-minded and enlightened people, they put together, about 1950, a collection with commentary which leaves no doubt of their feeling for equal importance of people across sexual or national or economic boundaries. The called it *The Family of Man*. To give Carl credit, however, he called what he considered his most important work, created before 1934, *The People, Yes*. It is this very unaware ambivalence which is perhaps most stunning. Few people have displayed more sensitivity to language than Carl Sandburg, but this point of sexual discrimination does not seem to have bothered him.

A few specific examples are offered: *Man-Made Philadelphia* is the title of a guide to that city. A television commercial referred to the development of one man-made fiber after another. A justly-famous playwright recently averred that no man has a monopoly on either right or wrong. The ecstasy of mankind was mentioned in a discussion of mysticism. Herman Melville thought the Whiteness of the Whale the most appalling thing to mankind. A company which makes and sells paper bought advertising space to state that man is a part of nature. The suggested central principle in regard to this use would be to strive to have a language by the people, for the people, and of the people.

### "By Any Other Name"

As is generally known, a major linguistic focus of discussion of all of the efforts by women to gain equal status is the use of the term Ms., doubtless as a balancing counterpart of Mr.

The most important problem with titles is that people have personal preferences relating to them. Most women who are married want people to know it, though some certainly do not. Probably an important change many women would like would be to have a term which identified a male as married. Thoughtful males meet this point by wearing a wedding ring. Far fewer married men than women wear wedding rings.

It would seem that the only course to follow would be to address the person as each one would like, though the preference is not always known. Thinking about this has created the realization that titles used in correspondence, for example, conventions deeply entrenched, are not needed. When writing a person one does not know, the use of the accurate name should be enough.

In this same direction, a very useful suggestion could be to eliminate the "inside greeting", which normally includes the ridiculous "dear". An appropriate greeting, which could be in many forms, would be developed when the wishes and character of the recipient of the letter became known. It would seem appropriate for a letter to some one unknown to be impersonal. The character of the correspondence could give a basis for the degree of intimacy. Further, the way the person, particularly in the case of a woman, signed the letter would give the clue as to how to address any greeting used. It is not hard to imagine a woman who wanted no title used, one who wanted Ms., one who wanted Miss, or one who wanted Mrs. It seems she ought to give evident (though not necessarily aggressive) clues as to her preference.

Some women have been marked linguistically by a senseless preference for the first child in the family to be a boy. Often a female will be called Georgina or Henrietta (the list is long) on this account. Doubtless most of them survive this, along with chickenpox and unwanted pregnancy. But the choice of name and attitude toward anticipated children deserves thought in terms of linguistic effects.

Experiments have shown that almost no one prefers what might be called the legal name. Almost every one prefers the intimacy of a nickname. In the interests of a feeling of acceptance, some women have to put up with a sibling's garbled shortening of an actual name, at least in the family. In the interest of being addressed in a more mature and desired way, people should find out what name both men and women prefer to be called. It seems women suffer most from this. But perhaps not. A woman is rarely called "Baldy".

A principle: Make an effort to address people in a way which will give them satisfaction (and you, too, probably).

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### Women's Work

Doubtless two major wars have helped this country to realize the benefits of openly allowing women equal opportunity to show their skills and capacities. But the battle to acquire occupational names which do not show sexual discrimination is not won. From the beginning, women who worked to have the ballot in this country were known as suffragettes. They could just as well have been known as suffragists.

And that is really all there is to it. A doctor is usually a man, but it is not appropriate to refer to a "lady doctor". What is being asked is that the person doing the work be judged in terms of preparation, in the case of a doctor certified by a government agency, rather than in relation to the accident of sex.

At first society generally expressed its surprise that women could do things other than be attractive sexually, bear children, or perform functions men did not find attractive at low pay by attaching a feminine ending. A woman who flew a plane was not an aviator but rather an aviatrix. Of course, anyone who flies a plane is really just a pilot.

Unfortunately, some of the efforts to eliminate this form of discrimination have resulted in awkwardnesses which have caused negative reaction. People who occupied the "chair" of a deliberative body have long been known as chairman, largely because a woman never got into a position of leadership. It is suggested that the person who gives leadership, from a country down to the most limited of committees, might well be designated in terms of function without regard to sex. Thus one who presides is the president. In a committee, one usually does more than direct legislative traffic. Perhaps the person could be known as coordinator or director or something else.

The person who chairs a meeting need not be called the chairperson, for we are all persons. Chairone seems unattractive. Thus the solution could be found in deciding what the person is doing and finding an appropriate asexual term.

Some people have had needless trouble with Congressman. It is easy to say Congresswoman. It seems better to note that the person is either a Representative or Senator. Curiously, the writer has never heard or read anything but judge for a person, male or female, in that office.

The list could be endless. The last consideration to be mentioned here is how much better and cheaper it would be if warning signs simply used "workers" instead of "workmen". And one hopes no one would suggest the needless and bumbling "workwomen".

A principle: Occupational titles should not carry any suggestion of the sex of the worker.



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### Also Deal

Traditionally, Justice (ironically a robed female figure) is portrayed as blindfolded so that her token authority will not be swayed by what she sees. An examination of the current state of law indicates that the law is also deaf to the language it is using.

In preparation for the consideration by the Senate and House of Representatives of Indiana of the matter of ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, the Indiana Legislative Council, a state bureau which prepares study material for the legislators, had a computer read-out done on all laws with sexual terms in them. However, it was explained that about 180 were not listed, because they contained the "generic he", which stands, the report said, for both sexes. At that, the resulting list of 254 laws makes interesting reading. For example, in Indiana, a man can be apprehended as a tramp, but not a woman.

More importantly, that report was dated January 22, 1973. Just about a month later, a county judge in Indiana threw out of court a charge against a female dancer for indecent exposure. The judge pointed out that the law specifically refers to a person exposing an inappropriate part of his body.

That the confusion over this point was not limited to Indiana is made clear by the fact that, in early April, 1973, the Ohio House of Representatives was considering Section 3C of HB 302, which read in part: "No person may require another person to perform, participate in or undergo an abortion of pregnancy against his will." (*Italics added.*)

Thus it is apparent that there is a growing need for accurately-written laws. And it is obvious that much leverage may be applied legally.

### A University Should Watch Its Language

Educational institutions are particularly vulnerable to the problem of routine language carelessness in writing regulations, procedures, and decisions. The "generic he", which the Indiana Legislative Council assumed, has been taken for granted quite routinely in academic circles.

Analysis of the misuse of the male pronoun in the graduate catalog of one institution uncovered nearly 200 errors of this nature. These mis-usages, which apply to all Manglish, were found to fall into five categories, which are listed with examples and suggested revisions:

#### (1) Substitution of an Article for a Pronoun

Original: "Designed to improve the work of the teacher of piano in his handling of class and private instruction."

Revision: "Designed to improve the work of the teacher of piano in the handling of class and private instruction."

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- (2) Substitution of Noun for Nominative Pronoun  
Original: "In major operas or musical productions he shares in management or serves as assistant director."  
Revision: "In major operas or musical productions the student shares in management or serves as assistant director."
- (3) Substitution of Possessive Noun for Possessive Pronoun  
Original: "The student will be assigned to a given faculty member, who will supervise his classroom activities and assess his performance."  
Revision: "A faculty member will be assigned to supervise and assess the student's classroom activities and performance."
- (4) Eliminating the Assumption of Male Identity  
Original: "A specific composer and his works, research methods, bibliography, and other similar topics may be investigated."  
Revision: "Works, research methods, bibliography, and other similar topics relating to a specific composer may be investigated."
- (5) Substituting Appropriate Plural Pronoun for Inappropriate Male(s)-only Pronoun  
Original: "A course designed for the doctoral student which allows him to select and explore problems pertinent to art education."  
Revision: "A course designed for doctoral students which allows them to select and explore problems pertinent to art education."  
Original: "Familiarizes the student with the fine points of Russian grammar and trains him to express himself in the correct idiom."  
Revision: "Familiarizes students with the fine points of Russian grammar and trains them to express themselves in the correct idiom."  
Original: "The student is encouraged to work with audiotape, videotape, motion picture film, slides, and to assist in the expression of his idea."  
Revision: "Students are encouraged to work with...and to assist in the expression of their ideas."

Another manifestation of sexual insensitivity in language in that university catalog relates to the use of the word man or mankind to relate to all human beings. Examples and suggested revisions follow:

- Original: "Consideration of the means which man has used to discover reality...."  
Revision: "Consideration of the means which people have used...."  
Original: "Analysis of the leading political theories evolved by mankind pertaining to the state."  
Revision: "Analysis of the leading political theories evolved by humanity pertaining to the state."  
Original: "Influences of geographic environment on the development of man in major cultural regions of the world."  
Revision: "Influences of geographic environment on the development of people...."

Other elements related to sexuality, each of which could be discussed in detail, but now merely listed, are: Designation of departmental leadership as head or chairman, Designation of areas of study as specifically related to women, Degrees which were named in expectation of males-only achievement (Bachelor's, Master's), Scholarship holders being designated as fellows, First-year students being designated as freshmen. Further delineation of these matters will be offered on request. A suggested remedy has been evolved in each case. These matters are being explored in preparation of a Sexual Fairness Manual for Higher Education. One of the knottier problems will be to suggest successfully that anthropologists change the male-oriented name of their discipline.

### But Seriously, Folks

It is, of course, embarrassing, particularly to trained and intelligent people, to have sexual unfairness in language pointed out to them. They feel, rightly, a conscious or unconscious sense of betrayal by the conventions they have been encouraged to follow and which they had never stopped to question. The reaction is often defensive.

Linguistically-capable people often resort to a species of evasion. They not only ask if the matter is a serious one. They also make linguistic jokes, outstandingly using the pun or play on words, which stands revealed in all its nakedness as a weapon rather than a toy. What is hoped for, often quite openly, is to reduce the discussion to a meaningless absurdity.

One writer, with the social awareness of an auto thief, suggested that a Human Relations Committee should be called the Huperson Committee. The device of pretending to believe that random syllables have sexual significance is representative of the pitiful state of defense. But it is common and should be guarded against. Sample words used in such irresponsible reactions are: amen, Hercules, mandale, heroin, history, boycott. There are, of course, many such totally-irrelevant words.

Perhaps the simplest approach to this vicious nonsense would be to suggest that Hercules was not a sissy. Careful use of one's own language and a little patient application of reason usually works on the curable sores of this disease.

It has to be remembered that men and women will doubtless continue to exploit each other as long as they exist, just as murder is to be expected to occur. But this is not a reason to fail to insist on more thoughtful and considerate attention to sexual elements in language. People who are so clever about being obstructive should be won over and their talents put to work to help remove linguistic pollution from our environment.

### Solutions over Problems

Various aspects of providing solutions to the complex of problems relating to accomplishing sexual fairness in language have already been suggested. A very important factor is that English has all the resources needed to eliminate the traditional and prevailing male sexual bias in utterance. Some think it is necessary to invent new words, resurrect old ones, or employ awkward (rather blatantly-insistent) forms. This rarely, if ever, is true. Even when it is, the simplest, least obtrusive way is best. The most important thing is to show that decency is natural and feasible. Language which strains will impede that realization.

Thus eliminating sexual unfairness emerges as possible with materials available. It is also something that any one can do, in speaking or writing, all the time. (It is, of course, recommended for sleep-talking.) Many are already showing that they know how to show awareness of the need of alert language in connection with sexual justice.

"No faculty member should ever be forced to join any union, though he-she may wish to have that organization represent the faculty." The use of he-she is common by people who do not want to be guilty of Manglish or Femmish. It can be improved upon. The sentence could read, "No faculty member should ever be forced to join any union, even though wishing to have that organization represent the faculty." Quite commonly sexual reference is unnecessary, as in this case. Doubtless, he-she is used because it pronounces more easily than she-he, but some one might think the use of it represented a preference.

The same may be said of "his or her". Mention was made of the fact that "every voter will get his or her choice" in an election. Better would be "will have a choice".

Sometimes slight restructuring will help. "Your life insurance agent is a trusted family financial adviser. He or she is a person of character and professional skill." can be improved to read, "Your life insurance agent is a trusted family financial adviser, a person of character...."

Here are two good examples of impersonal use to avoid the almost unanimous reference, even by women, to children as he: "You pick up the child and return it to its home." "Instead, your child needs to be taught to be self-reliant and able to fend for itself, at least at the level of its own group."

At times thought is given to an improvement and not completed. A political figure visited a brassiere factory, which probably had an overwhelming majority of women employees. A newsmagazine referred to it as "manned, or rather womanned". It would have been better to say "operated", of course.

### Alohal

It should be recognized that sexual unfairness in language is a symptom of generalized male domination which has been the pattern for many centuries. Important progress has been made in rectifying past errors in the last century and the past fifty years especially. The pace of the progress of redress is quickening. A steady barrage of fair and appropriate language will help conquer a major social disease.

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Because the violation of the right of and consideration for any person gives a precedent for the same thing to happen to any one else, it is important to both sexes to work together for equal status. This applies to sensitive and accurate use of language.

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Bias in language has achieved a strange and undesirable feat. A majority of the population, women, are seldom referred to properly, in terms of their rights as individuals, when they are referred to at all. This has transformed a majority into a minority.

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Possibilities for research and study in the matter of significance to relationships between people of sexually-biased language and the attendant unjust effect on society in all parts of the world are almost unlimited. Expressions of your work and ideas in this area of concern are solicited.

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Your suggestions for improvement of this first pamphlet, brief and inexpensive to encourage wide usage, will be welcomed.

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Your improved language alertness, related to your improved treatment of others, is needed.

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Help bring peace on earth and good will to people through fair and appropriate language!

"Whoever degrades another degrades me ..."

Walt Whitman