

Examples and Alternatives of Sexist/Gendered Language

Creating inclusive language for underrepresented bodies – specifically, the feminine and other “unmarked” gender categories – creates a reality that acknowledges the existence of said bodies (Frank & Treichler 3). Anne Pauwels identifies one of the major motivations for language change as “a desire to amend the present language system to achieve a symmetrical and equitable representation of women and men” (Pauwels 555). Awareness of inclusive language does more than affect the social dialect; it strives toward a reality where language use more accurately represents its referents.

Provided below is a set of examples to help incorporate more inclusive language practices. While this is in no way an exhaustive list, its intention is to establish a solid basis for one in recognizing and eliminating gendered and/or sexist language in one's language.

	Example of Sexist/Gendered Usage	Explanation	Alternatives
<i>The generic 'he'</i>	Every student must have a pencil, and he should always bring it to class.	Defines <i>student</i> as exclusively male.	Every student must have a pencil and they* should always bring it to class. Every student must have a pencil and s/he should always bring it to class. Every student must have a pencil and he or she should always bring it to class.
<i>Man as a verb</i>	I have four students to man the internship table.	Implies once again that persons referred to are exclusively male.	I have four students to attend the internship table.
<i>Man used to mean humankind</i>	Is man inherently capitalistic?	The human race is interpreted then as male-centric, linguistically placing non-males on the outside of the species.	Is humankind inherently capitalistic? Other alternatives: human race, human beings
<i>Gendered words in titles and work positions</i>	Chairman Freshman Fireman Policeman Postman	Assumes male dominance in these fields.	Chair or Chairperson First Year Firefighter Police officer Postal worker

<i>Stereotyping</i>	<p>The secretary busies herself with her work.</p> <p>The doctor reviews his notes before he preforms the operation.</p> <p>Or using gender/sex qualifiers for certain occupations to counter these assumptions, such as: <i>lady doctor</i> or <i>male nurse</i>.</p>	This assumes that a particular sex/gender is fit for a only a particular set of jobs.	<p>Refrain from using gender markers, and refer to a female doctor simply as a doctor or a male nurse simply as a nurse.</p> <p>To avoid stereotyping occupations, it is recommended to either vary pronoun usage or use the singular they*.</p>
<i>Referring to a married woman through her husband's name.</i>	Mrs. John Smith	Defines a woman in terms of a man.	Jane Smith or with the appropriate honorific (such as doctor or captain).
<i>Honorifics</i>	Mrs. Smith vs. Miss Smith	Defines a woman in terms of martial status.	Ms. Smith or preference of subject. For professors of any gender the honorific should be professor or doctor .
<i>Suffixes</i>	waiter/waitress aviator/aviatrix bachelor/bachelorette	Applies gender irrelevantly.	Server Pilot Single person

* A note on the singular *they*:

The singular use of the word *they*, to refer to one person without denoting gender, is a descriptive part of the English language. Epicene "they" has been in use in English since the fourteenth century and "has had a substantial presence in English since the seventeenth century" (Balhorn 88). This usage was proscribed out of the language when '*he*' was declared to be a generic pronoun for all people (Frank & Treichler 114). '*He*' and its two definitions create unnecessary ambiguity.

Other Notes on Gendered/Sexist Language:

Gendered adjectives:

Using adjectives in situations which gender is relevant (which is rare) can be tricky. Saying that a man does something *carefully* while a woman does the same action *delicately* implies that these traits are necessarily true about the subjects' particular gender/sex. This kind of language should be avoided so as to refrain from making generalization about gender/sex.

Times When It's Important to Denote Gender/Sex:

While gender neutrality seems on the surface the easiest way to incorporate inclusive language, there are times when it is important to denote the gender/sex of a person to properly address the subject discussed. For example, while discussing domestic violence it would be improper to refer to victims without denoting gender/sex. Without this information, there's erasure of the fact that the most likely to be victimized by this violence are women.

Bibliography

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