

## *Chapter 5*

# **Language and Sexism**

### **Opening Activity**

This activity is designed to get students to think about stereotypes (doctors are generally male). Generally, it takes students a short time to realize that the doctor is a woman and that the stereotype in this case does not hold.

### **Objectives for Students**

#### **Content**

- Recognize sexist language
- Understand the difference between generic and sexist terminology
- Understand naming conventions
- Revise sexist language

#### **Language**

- Scanning
- Topic sentences
- Transitions
- Identification of supporting arguments
- Vocabulary choices referring to male/female
- Avoiding sexist use in oral and written English
- Using a thesaurus
- Subject-verb agreement

## I. Overview to Language and Sexism

### A.

#### *Techniques*

As in previous chapters, students should be given a limited amount of time (probably 1–2 minutes) to scan the passage and identify three kinds of sexism.

#### *Answers*

1. Conventions of address
2. Generic terms
3. Negative terminology

#### *Additional Activities*

Because the answers to the questions can be found in the boldface type heads, it is appropriate to talk about typefaces and headings and how they can be helpful in quickly looking for information regarding the contents of a passage (see C).

### C.

#### *Techniques*

In this section the focus is on having students work with topic sentences and with transition devices. It might be helpful to look at chapter 2 to refresh students' minds regarding transition devices.

#### *Answers*

Some possible answers include:

1. a. The first issue we deal with has to do with naming and address conventions.  
b. Addressing conventions are not the only way that sexism can be seen. A second way is through the use of a masculine term as a so-called neutral term.  
c. Finally, we look at linguistic degradation as an indication of sexism.
2. a. change of names, Mr. (no indication of marital status) versus Mrs., Miss.  
b. *he, man* being used to refer to all humans  
c. negative terminology (often with sexual overtones) used to refer to women

**D.**

Answers will vary.

**E.**

All entries for *woman* are gender-specific. None of the entries for *man* are gender-specific.

**F.**

Answers will depend on dictionaries used.

*Additional Activities*

Students can be asked to interview native speakers to come up with additional alternatives and to also understand whether any of these terms (or the ones they come up with) have negative connotations.

This is an excellent opportunity for students to look in other textbooks (ESL or otherwise), newspapers, magazines, etc., or to listen to television, radio, native speakers, etc., to determine the use of these devices in everyday language use.

One can also introduce the thesaurus. It should be pointed out that a thesaurus is a useful tool when writing papers since one can often find alternatives to words that are being used repeatedly. However, not all words can be used as exact synonyms. Students can be asked for the different information contained in a thesaurus versus a dictionary. If computers are available, it is useful for students to see how to work with a computerized thesaurus.

## II. Naming and Address Conventions

*Answers***A.**

1. Mrs. Hillary Clinton, Mrs. George Bush, Mrs. Ronald Reagan.
2. The listings differ for these women in that only for Clinton is the woman's first name given.
3. It is not possible to know the other women's first names.
4. The differences exist possibly because Hillary Clinton has established an identity for herself that is separate from that of her husband.

5. Other objectionable (and hence sexist) language:
  - the use of Mrs.
  - the omission of Hillary Clinton's own name (Rodham)
  - the use of the word "chairmen"
  - the term "first lady." If a woman were president, would he be called the "first gentleman" or the "first man"?
6. Answers will vary.

**B.**

Answers will vary.

### III. Masculine as a Generic Term

**A.**

*Answers*

Gender-neutral terms include: fireperson or firefighter, chair or chairperson, congressperson, crewmember, doorperson, flight attendant, poet, statesperson or politician, and guard.

**B.**

Answers will vary.

**C.**

1. It sounds strange to use woman in the generic sense.
2. Answers will vary.
3. The author is using sarcasm to make a point.
4. This would be a good activity for small group discussion.

**E.**

*Answers*

Sentence 1: I think each person should use his most careful speaking style when in the company of his boss.

Tip 1: I think each person should use his/her most careful speaking style when in the company of his/her boss.

Tip 2: I think people should use their most careful speaking styles when in the company of their bosses.

Tip 3. Everyone should use a careful speaking style when in a boss's company.

Sentence 2: If a teacher wants to teach English, she should speak perfect English.

Tip 1: If a teacher wants to teach English, s/he should speak perfect English.

Tip 2: If teachers want to teach English, they should speak perfect English.

Tip 3: Teachers who want to teach English should speak perfect English.

#### *Additional Activity*

Other sentences can be brought in with small group discussion focusing on which of these alternatives seem the "best" and why.

### **IV. Linguistic Degradation**

#### **A.**

##### *Techniques*

As part of the issue of political correctness, a discussion generally touches on issues of offensiveness. In these examples, certain words are offensive: *broad* and *girl*. *Broad* is disrespectful, as is *girl* since it infantilizes a woman. Also, the use of "my girl" implies ownership, rather than an occupation. As rewritten, the sentences would be as follows.

We were scared that no women would be at the party.

Please call my secretary and make an appointment to meet with me.

### **V. Avoiding Sexist Language**

#### *Answers*

#### **A.**

1. The woman who lives on the corner just got a new puppy. (a)
2. Humans have learned to control their environment. (b) (c)
3. The university's four-person crews won in both the men's and women's divisions. (b)

4. That old woman never throws out anything. (a)
5. The space shuttle was staffed by four astronauts. (b)
6. This discovery will benefit all humans. (b)
7. Peter Johnson and Beatrice Huckleby serve as chairs of the company. (b)
8. "I believe abortion is strictly a matter between patients and doctors." (c)
9. Humans, being mammals, regulate their temperatures. (b) (c)

**B.**

Answers will vary.

**C.**

1. Everyone thinks they are right. (While technically this does not have correct subject-verb agreement, this is becoming a standard way of avoiding sexist language.)
2. Has anyone remembered to bring their tickets?
3. Every student has to decide for themselves.

**D.**

1. Incorrect: Neither the department of agriculture nor the farmers were sure of their positions.
2. Incorrect: Each of the papers read in class was good.
3. Correct
4. Correct
5. Incorrect: Has either of the orders been sent?
6. Correct
7. Correct
8. Correct

*Additional Activities*

Students can be asked to do surveys to find out what terms native speakers actually use.

E.

**THE ITSTORY OF  
OCCUPATIONS**

At a particular parentent in time, perchildy years ago, hupeople parentulated the earth. In all these years, people have wondered why some people have had some occupations and other people have had others. Here is the answer. Everything was in chaos because there was no govern-peoplet. Perchildia reigned and every perchild was out for him/herself. The gendervolent ones announced that they were the perchildeggers of all people. They perchilddated who would do what. Those with perchilders would be policeman; those who always childcotted goods would be shopkeepers and those who loved parent nature would be weather forecasters.

**THE HISTORY OF  
OCCUPATIONS**

At a particular moment in time, many years ago, humans populated the earth. In all these years, people have wondered why some people have had some occupations and other people have had others. Here is the answer. Everything was in chaos because there was no government. Mania reigned and every person was out for him/herself. The malevolent ones announced that they were the managers of all people. They mandated who would do what. Those with manners would be policeman, those who always boycotted goods would be shopkeepers and those who loved mother nature would be weather forecasters.