

**A brief discourse on “sexism” in language.**

by Stephen M. Golden

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A lot of people would like to remove from the English language the concept which they describe as “Sexism.” Unfortunately, the accomplishment of such a feat will be damaging to the very fabric of the language. One should not take offense to the characteristics and references to gender in language which are used to establish the generic case. Many languages have ties to gender which are much more pronounced than English, and yet there is nothing demeaning for a given noun to be feminine, masculine, or neuter. (French has masculine and feminine nouns, German has masculine, feminine, and neuter nouns.)

If we endeavour to remove all references to gender in nouns (and pronouns, for that matter) we arrive at many absurdities:

Take for example, the word Chairman. This word does not necessarily mean Chair-Man, but it refers generically to the person who leads a particular session or meeting. If we were to take the first part of the word as literally as some would take the second part, we must conclude there to be some inherent relationship of a Chairman to a chair! Is the Chairman glued to the chair? The Chairman certainly isn’t the only one sitting in a chair. Why should we resort to such absurd distinctions such as Chairwoman, or even worse: Chairperson? (Perhaps we should all be called chair-people, considering the amount of time we spend seated. We are indeed a sedentary culture.)

Consider now, the word, Ombudsman. Shall we refer to the female counterpart as an Ombudswoman?

And what about Ottoman? You know, the piece of padded furniture you rest your feet on. Shall we have an Ottowoman? Manual labor Womanual labor? Manicure. Womanicure? Please, oh please!!

Now consider for a moment the word: Lumberjack. Jack is a man’s name, should women be lumberjanes?

And ‘person’ itself has the word ‘son’ in it — perhaps it should be per-human, except that human has the word ‘man’ in it, and in fact, so does ‘woman’! Indeed! The word ‘the’ has ‘he’ in it! However, per-being is an option . . . .

I suppose the ultimate would be 'being', and if any distinction is to be made, it could be 'wobeing'. Now, I realize the whole point is to eliminate the distinction between male and female, yet I find this distinction to be incredibly important.

I smile affectionately as I consider the thought of calling women wobeings for they are indeed woe-beings. And having said such, all males who read this article should be hereby adequately warned. (I realize I risk the wrath of the woe-beings merely by writing these words.)

A facetious aside:

Although there is much precedent from use that a wife beater is a man who beats his wife, I contend that a wife beater could also be a wife who beats her husband. Consider that a female cook does not cook females, but instead, she is a female who cooks. Likewise, a wife beater could be a wife who beats another.