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### How Sexist Language Hurts Men *by Karen Yin*

Nonsexist language usually involves changing language to include women, such as avoiding the false generic *he*, making occupational titles like *businessman* gender-neutral, avoiding unnecessary gender markers such as *women lawyers*, and not assuming that your readership is male. In the process, we inadvertently ignore the repercussions of sexist language for men, even though stereotyping one gender means simultaneously stereotyping another.

When articles and ads favor mothers, fathers are disrespected as caretakers, which affects custody battles, divorce hearings, and paternity leave options. When occupations are gendered, it reinforces the myth that gender determines capacity, capability, and even disposability, such as when physically dangerous jobs are reserved for men.

Consider these tips for gender-neutral language with men (and boys) in mind:

- *Be a man, man up*: Avoid language that suggests that to “be a man” requires men to hide their feelings or express only masculinized emotions, such as anger.
- *Male nurse, man bun*: Avoid “**man words**” and male gender markers if they imply that certain occupations, fashions, and behaviors are inherently feminine.

However, we want biased words when the bias is relevant, and ***mansplaining*** and ***manspreading*** address male privilege in ways that *explaining* and *spreading* cannot.

- **Violence**: Using male pronouns when talking about abusers makes it harder for **male survivors** to speak up about female aggressors.
- **Friendship**: Don’t **sexualize** close friendships between men. This can discourage emotional connections and fuel homophobia and biphobia.
- **Orientation**: Don’t assume that men have or want a female partner.
- **Anatomy**: Don’t assume that women are the only people who can become pregnant. Include others (for example, transgender men with uteruses) by using gender-neutral terminology, like *reproductive health* instead of *women’s health*.

An editor’s responsibility is to flag biases that don’t accurately represent the wider spectrum of human experience. Falling back on stereotypes allows them to flourish. ■

*Karen Yin is the founder of **AP vs. Chicago** and **Conscious Style Guide**. For another viewpoint on using man-related words, see *Word Resource Roundup* on p. 6.—Ed.*

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