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Language as a social reality: The effects of the infantilization of women

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LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL REALITY: THE EFFECTS OF THE

INFANTILIZATION OF WOMEN

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Chelsae R. Huot

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined how people's perceptions can be affected by various terms used to describe women. Participants from a Midwestern university read a script describing 26-year-old Erin either as a "woman," a "girl," or "person." Participants then rated Erin on eighteen different traits (e.g., mature, forceful). They also completed an ambivalent sexism scale and answered three questions about their use and interpretations of the terms "girl" and "woman."

It was predicted that the participants in the "woman" condition would rate Erin as more mature, responsible, warm, understanding, and successful than the participants in the "girl" condition. Also, it was predicted that those in the "girl" condition would rate Erin as more feminine, gullible, and childlike. A research question asked how differing levels of ambivalent sexism might affect the ratings of Erin.

Only 34% of participants were able to correctly recall how Erin was described in the scenario (i.e., girl, woman, person). There were few effects of gender or interactions, with no main effects of condition. Overall, higher levels of ambivalent sexism did significantly correlate with a few trait ratings of Erin. The qualitative results showed that over half of the participants reported using "girl" and less than a third reported using "woman" as their main term for adult females. Additionally, "girl" is often interpreted as more childlike, whereas "woman" is often interpreted as more adult-like. Although the manipulation did not seem to be effective, there was some evidence that there is some sort of effect of whether a woman is referred to as a "woman," "girl," or "person."

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If you've never heard of the "infantilization" of women, allow me to introduce you; it is an incredible phenomenon by which our society systemically equates femininity with things like vulnerability, submission, uncertainty, and childhood. To be womanly today is to be, in many senses, infantile.

Sut Jhally (*Codes of Gender*, 2009)

Language is used as a form of communication but is also inadvertently used as a way to reinforce the status quo of groups of people, such as women. How language is used and what word choices are preferred affects people's stereotypes and judgments of themselves and others. The goal of the current study was to examine how infantilized language may affect the perceptions of women by combining research on the idea of infantilized images/portrayals of women with the effects of language use. More specifically, the study examined whether referring to adult females as "girls" instead of "women" alters perceptions of women, based on the idea that it negates them of their adult status.

First, I review gender roles and stereotypes, examining how gender expectations are formulated and maintained. Second, I review the effects of denying adulthood, focusing on advertising and pornography that display women as childlike. Third, I detail how gender-exclusive language manifests and is detrimental to women, especially when it is not recognized. Fourth, gendered derogatory and dehumanizing language effects are discussed, focusing on the repercussions for women subject to degrading language.

Finally, a study testing whether or not a language manipulation (i.e., "girl," "woman," or "person") will affect perceptions of a 26-year-old woman is described.

<u>Gender Roles and Stereotypes</u>

Gender is a major part of culture and is often defined by people's expectations and stereotypes. Western culture has a dichotomous gender classification that adheres to preconceived and rigid limitations based on what is socially acceptable for each gender. To be clear, "sex" refers to the physical morphology of humans and is construed dichotomously with the terms male and female, whereas "gender" refers to socio-psychological identity categories predicated on cultural meanings and expectations, which are associated with the terms "man" and "woman" (Unger, 1979). For the purposes of this paper, the term "gender" will be used to refer to identity and cultural expectations associated with men and women.

Gender boundaries facilitate a culture that defines people based on whether or not their choices reflect their gender. Because men and women are taught and encouraged to look, speak, and act differently, culture and society exacerbate gender differences (Hyde, 2005). When gender becomes a defining line for appropriate thoughts and behaviors, it creates a perception that gender differences are naturally occurring.

Often certain colors (e.g., pink and blue), clothing (e.g., decorative or functional), and activities (e.g., shopping, sports; Bridges, 1993), are viewed as differentially appropriate for women and men. For example, in a content analysis of 122 newborn baby cards, pink and blue were the most dominant colors for girls and boys, respectively (Bridges, 1993). Over 85 percent of the cards for a newborn girl pictured babies with

decorative clothing, whereas only 44 percent of newborn boy cards pictured babies with decorative clothing (Bridges, 1993). The finding that decorative clothing was depicted almost twice as often in newborn girl cards could imply that women and girls should and/or automatically do value fashion and appearance more than men and boys.

Decorative clothing may also be used more in newborn girl cards because people use feminine clothing to separate the girls from the boys. Even in conditions where the sex of a person or animal is unknown, people often refer to the person or animal as "male," a phenomenon known as the male hypothesis (Hamilton, 1991; Lambdin, Greer, Jibotian, Wood, & Hamilton, 2003). Here, the decorative clothing on baby girls allows people to tell the baby is a girl; however, in doing so the feminine clothing reinforces the stereotype that girls and women should be feminine. The cards for girls also contained more delicate animals (i.e., birds and rabbits), whereas the boy cards featured more bears and dogs (Bridges, 1993). "Sweet" was used to describe the girls four times as often as "sweet" was used to describe boys. Phrases such as "born to shop" and "is she still in the bathroom?" were only printed on girl cards (Bridges, 1993). The boys' cards were often blue, showed powerful animals, had geometric shapes rather than floral designs and hearts, and contained phrases such as, "welcome to the world of boys: baseballs, trucks…" and "three cheers for the little all-star" (Bridges, 1993). The differences between these types of cards create gendered expectations for *newborns*. The girls are depicted as sweet, obsessed with shopping and physical appearance, whereas the boys are depicted as sporty and interested in trucks. In other words, before these children can even

decide what they like, Western culture tells girls they should like and adhere to feminine stereotypes, whereas boys should like and adhere to masculine stereotypes.

In addition to colors, clothing, and activities, jobs are often regarded as suitable for either women or men based on gender stereotypes (Bem & Bem, 1973; Long, 1989). Additionally, predicted success at these jobs is dependent on these same traits and qualities. For example, being gentle, nurturing, helpful, cooperative, and supportive were associated with being suited for and successful in female dominated jobs (e.g., speech therapist, telephone operator, elementary school teacher), whereas being competitive, dominant, and aggressive were associated with being suited for and successful in male dominated jobs (e.g., pilot, barber, computer programmer; Cejka & Eagly, 1999). The more prestigious and higher paying the jobs were, the more they were associated with having male employees and masculine physical qualities (e.g., athletic, muscular, tall, strong; Cejka & Eagly, 1999). Essentially, gender stereotypes are often used to predict gender divisions in the workplace and the personal qualities that are fit for certain employment.

Because stereotypes are viewed as common knowledge, people believe they will be judged by these stereotypes (regardless of whether others actually believe the stereotypes). When people use gender stereotypes as rules about gender, people are taught that men and women are different based on these stereotypes. For example, if people believe that boys are better at math than girls, girls may be overlooked because the expectations for girls' mathematic ability are lower than expectations for boys' mathematic ability (Hyde, Fennema, Ryan, Frost, & Hopp, 1990). Stereotype threat

(Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999), the idea that priming girls (or women) with the notion that boys (and men) are better at math, hinders women's math performance. This is based on the idea that women are taught to believe they are less capable than men at math (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002). Ultimately, this threat contributes to the gender divide in high school and college students' math performances (Hyde et al., 1990), which is unlikely to change if these stereotypes persist.

Stereotypes are unconsciously primed by people's sex categorization practices and can affect their judgments of other people (Blair & Banaji, 1996). For example, clinically trained psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers were asked to separately characterize a healthy man and woman. The conclusions for each gender were congruent with the respective sex roles outlined in society (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970). The healthy woman was described as more submissive, less independent, less aggressive, more emotional, and less objective than the healthy man (Broverman et al., 1970). These separate considerations could affect how men and women are helped, diagnosed, and treated. These results suggest that even professionals in the field of clinical psychology default to sex-role stereotypes and provide evidence that these stereotypes guide how clinicians separately consider men and women 'healthy.'

Gender stereotypes are sustained in other areas as well. For example, when selling a product using a woman or a girl, the communal/feminine (i.e., stereotypical female role) depiction is rated more positively and sells more products than an agentic/masculine depiction of a woman or girl (Infanger, Bosak, & Sczesny, 2012). Advertisers produce and sell the communal image of a woman because there is an expectation that women

will be pictured as housewives and mothers (Infanger et al., 2012). In Western culture, it is typical for women to be featured in laundry detergent and cleaning product advertisements because it is congruent with a prominent stereotype of women. When a product is sold with that stereotype, the stereotype is sold too. However, when people are portrayed or behave outside of their gender stereotypes, they are often judged more negatively than those who conform to their gender stereotypes (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

Because most cultures categorize women and men as complementarily different via gender stereotypes, it creates a justification for inequality of treatment (Hyde, 2005). For example, believing that women are nicer and more feminine than men seems like a positive stereotype, but when women violate this stereotype they often receive lower evaluation ratings in the workplace than their male counterparts who are not subject to the same stereotype (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Even when stereotypes about women appear positive, these stereotypes can alienate a person from her identified group if she does not fit her group's prototype.

When people do not match someone else's expectations of them (i.e., stereotypically female or male), the non-stereotypical individuals may experience a type of backlash for not fitting the expectation (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Because backlash can be intrusive, offensive, or even violent, people who fear this will actively try to avoid it by conforming to the gender stereotype (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). This backlash can result in the maintenance of stereotypes, making it increasingly hard to change or progress away from gender myths. This is especially problematic considering that

stereotypes can have a negative impact on both men and women (Gilligan, 2009), so the continuance of them contributes to the gender binary appearing normal and natural.

     A person's stereotypes can be affected by individual differences in sexism. Sexism is a form of prejudice that discriminates against a person based on her sex or gender (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Sexism negatively impacts women regardless of whether the sexists' intentions are positive or negative (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003). For example, it could be a male friend's intention to exclude/protect a female friend from playing in a football game because she is a woman. Either way, excluding (i.e., negative) or protecting (i.e., 'positive') her because of her gender would be an example of sexism. This could negatively impact her mood or temporary confidence as she may feel she is not worthy to play because of her gender. Alternatively this could positively impact her mood as she may believe that his display of chivalry is enjoyable, contributing to the stereotype that women should not be involved in potentially rough activities (e.g., contact sports, fighting, war).

     The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1997) measures the two types of sexism reflected in this example. Hostile sexism is the aggressive type of sexism where women are viewed negatively, whereas benevolent sexism is the flattering type of sexism where women are viewed positively (i.e., nurturing, caring, sensitive) if they abide by restricted gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Those higher in benevolent sexism (BS) are more likely to blame a victim of acquaintance rape, and men higher in hostile sexism (HS) are more likely to commit acquaintance rape (Abrams et al., 2003). Additionally, those higher in BS tend to have more positive attitudes of women as

"homemakers" and those higher in HS tend to have more negative attitudes of working women (Glick, Diebold, Bailer-Werner, & Zhu, 1997).

The continuation of stereotypes is reflected in images and language use surrounding the stereotyped target. For example, the evolution of advertising and pornography has become increasingly infantilizing of women, creating images and characters where women appear childlike (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998; Goffman, 1979; Kang, 1997).

<u>Denying Adulthood</u>

Denying adulthood is a phenomenon defined as systematically portraying, referring to, or treating adults as children (Carlson, 2010). For example, White people historically demeaned Black men, one way being through language use (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Throughout the 1900s, White people often referred to Black men as "boys" to assert their racial power and infantilize Black men, despite the actual ages of the men. The insinuation was that Black men were not men and should be treated as inferiors, and White people relayed that insignificance by referring to these men as "boys" (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). This power, demonstrated linguistically, continues the oppression of marginalized groups by diminishing their worth as adults.

Essentially, what society has done with women's adulthood is a benevolent version of how White people emasculated Black men. Society has taken adulthood from women by referring to them as "girls" (Richardson, 1981). Through the infantilization of women, people undermine women's worth in society. For example, advertisements of women portrayed in childlike postures with childlike clothing have been rated as more

offensive and as less moral than advertisements of women who are not infantilized (Carlson, 2010). Yet, Western culture continues to use infantilized images of women in advertising and pornography (Bridges, Wosnitzer, Sharrer, Sun, & Liberman, 2010), because people do not consciously realize the harm, even though people rate these images more negatively (Carlson, 2010).

<u>Advertising</u>

Advertisements often represent women as supplementary to or appeasing of men. Goffman (1979) examined gender representations in advertisements and concluded that women were often depicted in childlike positions wearing childlike clothing. For example, women were placed in vulnerable, weak, and objectified positions, whereas the men in the advertisements were depicted in strong, adult-like positions (Goffman, 1979). These advertisements represent women in ways that reaffirm stereotypic beliefs, such as that women are weak, childish, dependent on men, subordinate, and submissive. A follow up study concluded that there was even more gender stereotyping in 1991's advertisements than there was in the 1970s (Kang, 1997). Expectations of women grew increasingly stereotypical, infantile, and dehumanized; yet these representations of women sell products. These images support false ideas of women's potential and justify the systemic oppression of women.

Fashion magazines often represent women more stereotypically than "general interest" types of magazines. For example, *Vogue* and *Time* were reviewed for their portrayals of women from 1955-2002 and from the 1,374 images reviewed, 78% of their sample contained a stereotypical image of a woman (Lindner, 2004). Furthermore, *Vogue*

contained more images of women involving subordination (38.2% to 25%), absent gaze (41.8% to 16.7%), and objectification (59.2% to 8.2%) than *Time* magazine (Lindner, 2004). In *Vogue*, subordination of women was slightly more common (35%) between the dates of 1955-1975 than 1985-2002 (28%; Lindner, 2004). The frequency of the other two categories (i.e., absent gaze and objectification) did not differ between the time periods that were sampled. These percentages provide evidence for the continual stereotyping of women that is being sold through advertising.

The percentage of stereotypical poses tends to differ by race of the women pictured as well. In White, female-oriented (*Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*), Black female-oriented (*Essence* and *Honey*), White male-oriented (*GQ* and *Maxim*), and Black male-oriented (*Black Men* and *King*) magazines, White women were objectified significantly more often in advertisements than Black women overall (Baker, 2005). The advertisements in the magazines targeting White audiences portrayed women (91% of them White) as more dependent and submissive compared to the advertisements in the magazines that targeted Black audiences, which pictured women (68% of them Black) as more independent and dominant (Baker, 2005). Advertisements in the White women's magazines portrayed women as dependent in 21% of images as compared to 11% in Black women's magazines (Baker, 2005). In White men's magazines, women were portrayed as dependent in 43% of the advertisements as compared to 32% of the advertisements in Black men's magazines (Baker, 2005). Additionally, the advertisements in White men's magazines portrayed women as submissive in 12% of the advertisements, compared to 0% in Black men's magazines (Baker, 2005). Black

women's magazines contained images of women portrayed submissively in 45% of the advertisements, compared to 32% in White women's magazines (Baker, 2005). Generally, many of the images in these magazines portrayed women as either dependent or submissive regardless of the particular gender or race target of the magazine; however, Black women are often perceived, by White people, as stronger and more domineering compared to White women (Donovan, 2011), which may account for part of the difference in their depictions. In other words, the differing perceptions of Black and White women are somewhat reflected in the magazines' images.

Infantilization of women occurs outside of Western advertising as well. For example, both Korean and Western women in Korean fashion advertising were more often portrayed as childlike via head cants, knee bends, smiles, and cute expressions when compared to Korean and Western men (Nam, Lee, & Hwang, 2011). When comparing Korean and Western models, Korean women were more often shown smiling, pouting, or posed in childlike ways, compared to Korean men and Western women or men (Nam et al., 2011). However, Western women were more often portrayed as "removed" (i.e., unengaged in the photo, vacant) or averting their gazes and in sexualized clothing than Korean women; this is also categorized as "infantilization" (Nam et al., 2011). Essentially, both Western and Korean women are infantilized in advertising, although it seems to manifest slightly differently. Additionally, the stereotype that women are more childlike and dependent than men is similar in Korean and Western advertising.

These sexist advertising images can have real effects on how women are treated. Following a mock interview, men in the sexist (versus control) commercial condition and those higher in their likelihood to sexually harass (LSH) tended to rate a female confederate as more hirable (Rudman & Borgida, 1995). Men in the "prime" condition and those with higher LSH also conducted the mock interview with a more flirtatious and/or sexually harassing manner (Rudman & Borgida, 1995). Additionally, men in the "prime" condition tended to rate the female confederate as less competent than those in the "control" condition (Rudman & Borgida, 1995).

While bombarding women with advertisements about their bodies contributes to eating disorders (Harrison & Cantor, 1997) and body dissatisfaction (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999), advertising centered on women looking or acting childish may also perpetuate the stereotype that women are naive and dependent. Further, women may start to believe that they need to conform to this stereotype and behave congruently (Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005). For some women it may be easier to comply with culturally stereotypical portrayals (e.g., childish demeanor) in order to avoid opposition or disapproval.

Pornography

Pornography is another area where women are often depicted as submissive, confused, virgin-like children (Dines et al., 1998). The women in pornographic videos are often instructed to act doll-like and inferior, unquestioningly following orders and verbally abusing themselves. Combining violence with sex is one issue; however, depicting women as children in these scenarios escalates the problem (Dines et al., 1998).

These types of pornography sell the image of women as easily manipulated, childlike, sex objects.

In pornography videos, women are occasionally used to illustrate childlike sex scenes (Bridges et al., 2010). Six of 50 randomly selected videos (12%) focused on portraying women as teens where the women were dressed in childlike ways (e.g., schoolgirl uniforms, hair in pigtails, and braces) or the dialogue suggested they were young students still under parental supervision (e.g., they were doing homework or refused to smoke because of their age or restrictions from their parents; Bridges et al., 2010). A sexual image of a woman often includes some childlike component (e.g., clothing, hair, voice, and environment) that makes her sexy and pleasing to the men in the videos. This sexualized adult-child relationship infantilizes women, taking away their power and adult-like qualities.

These images may have an effect on how women are viewed. For instance, the amount of pornography watched correlates with people's perceptions of gender. Specifically, the more pornography watched, the more people view gender roles traditionally (e.g., men as masculine and women as sex objects; Frable, Johnson, & Kellman, 1997). Additionally, men who are rated as having "high exposure" to pornography are more likely than men rated as "low exposure" to think of women as objects in sexual situations (Frable et al., 1997). While the types of portrayals of women found in advertising and pornography tend to under represent some adult-like qualities, how women are referred to in everyday language also affects women.

Gender-Exclusive Language

Gender-exclusive language is about highlighting one gender in writing or speech, whether intentional or not. For example, "For the good of mankind" excludes women or attempts to equate them as 'men.' Gender-exclusive language contributes to women feeling ostracized, a decrease in women's interest in a topic, an increase in men's interest in a topic, and male imagery as an expectation (Madson & Shoda, 2006; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). This style can be expressed by using generic male language (Madson & Shoda, 2006, Stout & Dasgupta, 2011) or using gender stereotypical language to attract one gender (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011).

Western culture uses gender-exclusive language in many different areas, including job interviews. When men and women participated in a mock job interview containing only language using "he" and "him," the women were less interested in pursuing the job and felt more ostracized compared to when women participated in an interview using gender-neutral language, such as "he or she" and "her or him" (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). In addition, men tended to feel more inclined to pursue a job when the interview contained gender-*exclusive* language (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011).

Generic male terms also affect students' performance on memory tasks. Both male and female students read essays that either used "generic" male pronouns (e.g., he, his, or him) or gender-inclusive pronouns (e.g., he or she, his/him or her). The male students in the "generic" male pronoun condition recalled the essay content significantly better than the women in the same condition (Crawford & English, 1984). The male

pronouns operated as a measure of exclusion of the women in the study, thereby negatively affecting their recall of the material.

Not only does gender-exclusive language exclude women, it produces strictly male imagery in both men and women's minds (Madson & Shoda, 2006). When both men and women read a document containing only the pronouns "he" and "him," almost all participants reported picturing only men; however, when men and women read a document containing "she or he" and "him or her" most of the male participants reported male imagery but the female participants reported equal amounts of both female and male imagery (Madson & Shoda, 2006). This research supports the movement for a change in how the English language generalizes male descriptors to all humans as it excludes one half of the population and negatively affects women. What makes this language dangerous is when it is widely accepted and its consequences are hidden.

Certain words are also highlighted in job announcements in order to attract one gender or imply expectations of who should apply. Job announcements often target men for masculine jobs and women for feminine jobs, maintaining economic gender inequality by attempting to keep men in male-dominated jobs, while these jobs, on average, pay more (Gaucher et al., 2011). When job announcements contain stereotypically masculine language (e.g., leader, competitive, and dominant) versus adjectives such as 'support,' 'understand,' and 'interpersonal,' people are more likely to perceive men in these occupations (Gaucher et al., 2011). In other words, the potential applicants believed that more men occupied these types of jobs. This belief creates a male image of who was hired and additionally, potential female applicants may be less

interested in the job than the potential male applicants (Gaucher et al., 2011). Because masculine language produces male imagery and helps to discourage women from potentially applying for a masculine job, men and women often still apply for jobs that are gender stereotypical.

Other types of exclusive language include labels of race or gender in venues of entertainment. For example, when people label movies and television shows as "black movies" or "black television," it is very similar to how people label certain networks as "female networks" (e.g., Lifetime). When people talk about these types of entertainment as "black" or "female," not only are the stereotypes of those groups reinforced and perpetuated, it also masks the idea that "white" and "male" television do not need to be identified as they are the norm (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). White men are viewed as the prototype, whereas everybody else is seen as straying from that prototype, based on their race, gender, and other marginalized memberships (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, or LGBT). Exclusive language is one way that this perception of what is prototypical and atypical is maintained. Allowing and accepting this language maintains a patriarchal society by avoiding the issue and not empathizing with those that are targeted (Becker & Swim, 2011).

<u>Gendered Derogatory/Dehumanizing Language Effects</u>

The words people use can have a powerful influence on how others are perceived, especially when the language is derogatory or dehumanizing. For example, when heterosexual people are not cognizant of their word choices and use words such as "fag" or "queer," they are perpetuating the heterosexism that dominates Western culture (Burn,

2000). Although this type of derogatory language is not gendered *per se*, it is still dehumanizing to a population that is stigmatized. People's language choice affects others, whether they use the language to be intentionally harmful or not.

In the English language, words people once used to equate men and women no longer mean what they originally did. People have transformed female words from a meaning of power to embody derogatory and often sexual meanings. For example, master and mistress were once equals, but now mistress implies someone who is only worth what she can provide sexually (Richardson, 1981). The term "lady" used to be equated with "lord" but is now an imposition of politeness on women and often equated with "gentleman." The term "hussy" used to mean "housewife" but now has an undesirable sexual implication. The English language has gendered word pairs (e.g., girl/boy, mistress/mister, lady/lord), and when the female version of the word no longer infers a general power but is sexually focused, it implies that women's worth becomes only pertinent in sexual contexts, whereas men continue to be important in professional contexts (Richardson, 1981). Using this type of derogatory language to separate women and men sustains the stereotypes of women because these words convey negative, and often sexual, connotations. This type of language has a reciprocal effect; the English language has been shaped over time to reflect how society believes women should behave, and therefore women internalize these stereotypes, furthering women and men from understanding the deleterious effects of language use (Richardson, 1981; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Sexually Degrading Language

Demeaning language negatively affects the perception of the target person when it is used to detail sexual activities. Participants in a study on sexually degrading language listened to two people having a conversation that used either "degrading" or "less degrading" language to explain their sexual experience from the night before. The "degrading" conversation contained phrases such as, "I fucked him/her good," and "His cock was really big/her pussy was really tight." In the "less degrading" conversation, those phrases were replaced with "had sex," and "we had fun together" (Murnen, 2000, p. 325). The participants in the "degrading" conversation condition rated the sexually objectified target as less intelligent and less moral than the targets in the "less degrading" conversation condition (Murnen, 2000). Men also tended to use sexually degrading and aggressive language more often than women when referring to sexual activities (Murnen, 2000). The targets of sexually degrading language were perceived negatively even though they were subject to the type of language (i.e., spoken about). Essentially, the words people choose affect the perceptions of those they talk about.

Dehumanizing language also makes it easier for men to aggress against the women they have dehumanized. For example, men who were more likely associate women with objects and animals (e.g., the words: animals, nature, bodies) versus human contexts (e.g., culture, society, mind) in an implicit associations task (IAT) were more likely to sexually aggress against women (a sexual aggression inventory) and blame female survivors for their rape (attitudes towards rape victim's scale; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). In other words, when people dehumanize women, it becomes easier for

them to commit violence against and/or blame women, instead of the men responsible, for the violence perpetrated against them (Murnen, 2000, Rudman & Mescher, 2012). When men stop thinking of women as people, but mere objects or animals, violence against them becomes justifiable. Dehumanization of women defends the oppression and domination of women, making it easier to commit male violence against women.

Infantilizating Language

Infantilizing language can be used to treat someone like a child and is sometimes used in pornography videos. A combined 66% of the 45 X-rated available videos randomly chosen from a list of 121 adult videos, contained verbal aggression, verbal infantilization, and verbal patronization. For example, lines such as, "You were asking for this, bitch," "Good girl," and "Daddy likes it" were used during rape scenes, to infantilize and patronize the women in the videos (Cowan, Lee, Levy & Snyder, 1988). A "girl" is a child, not an adult, and the term "daddy" is used to reflect the supposed age and power difference between those in the film. Legal pornography uses women, not girls in their videos, so the use of these terms is creating the impression that the women are not adults or do not deserve adult status.

While pornography is an extreme example, a more common example of the use of infantilizing language for women is people habitually referring to women as "girls" either with a benevolent intent or simply because it is normative for this society. There is little research on this specific topic but this study attempted to determine whether referring to woman as a "girl," "woman," or "person," affects perceptions of her.

Current Study

Gender stereotypes are products of culture and are maintained by expectations and the patriarchal status quo (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). This perpetuation of stereotypes is highlighted in advertising and pornography via childlike representations of women, encouraging women to deny mature qualities (Dines et al., 1998; Goffman, 1979). Gender-exclusive language, where the generic "he/him/guys" is used to represent all people, conceals opportunities and/or discourages women from chipping at the 'glass ceiling,' as they are not included (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). Dehumanizing language creates a justification for aggressions against women as it deems them less than human (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Because there is little research on infantilizing language, this study attempted to intertwine the childlike representations in advertising and pornography with the effects of language-use to test whether infantilizing language alters perceptions of women.

The current study focused on perceptions of women, and particularly on the language used to describe them (i.e., using "woman" or "girl" to refer to a woman). Within this study, a "girl" is defined as a female human under the age of 18; a "woman" is defined as a female human but 18 years of age or older. Finally, "person" is referring to someone who is not entirely gender-unidentified but is also not labeled as a "girl" or a "woman." The person condition is a control condition in this study. I tested whether those labels affect perceptions of a woman (Erin).

In this study, the participants read one of three scenarios describing one woman's (girl's or person's) daily activities, rated Erin (from the scenario) on eighteen traits,

completed an Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1997) assessing their levels of hostile and benevolent sexism, completed a manipulation check, and completed three questions asking about the terms they use to refer to woman and how they interpret the words "girl" and "woman." Because language can affect people indirectly, the last questions were included to test how participants perceive women and girls differently.

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was included in this study to test whether or not a person's ambivalent sexism score would be associated with their ratings of the 26-year-old Erin. I expected there to be a relationship because often those higher in sexism think of women either more negatively (i.e., hostile sexism) or more gender-stereotypically (i.e., benevolent sexism) than those lower in sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1997). These impressions of women could then affect their reactions toward someone who is labeled a "girl" versus a "woman."

I expected to find different perceptions of Erin based on the condition the participants were in. Specifically, I hypothesized that the participants in the "woman" condition would perceive Erin as significantly more mature, responsible, warm, understanding, and successful than the participants in the "girl" condition. I expected that the word "woman" would trigger a stereotype related to motherhood; therefore I predicted that the participants would see Erin, "the woman," as more closely associated with maturity, responsibility, warmth, understanding, and success than Erin, "the girl." Secondly, I hypothesized that those in the "girl" condition would perceive Erin as significantly more feminine, gullible, and childlike than those in the "woman" or "person" condition. I expected that "girl" (for persons over 18) would signify immaturity,

almost as if her childlike qualities are highlighted. The research question asks how the ambivalent sexism scale will affect the correlations. Ambivalent sexism might relate to the ratings of Erin because she is presented as a working woman.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

<u>Pretest</u>

To determine the positive, negative, feminine, masculine, and neutral traits that participants were given to rate Erin, I had fifteen people rate 30 traits from Bem and Bem's (1973) Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and compared their opinions of the traits with the categorizations by Bem and Bem (1973). The 15 people rated the traits as positive or negative and separately as feminine, masculine, or neutral. These categorizations were very similar to Bem and Bem's (1973), making it simple to choose three positive feminine traits, two negative feminine traits, three positive masculine traits, two negative masculine traits, and five positive neutral traits. I chose the traits based on these categorizations to ensure a good balance for the participants to rate Erin on.

<u>Participants</u>

One hundred and forty (140) participants completed a study of "Social Evaluating Abilities." The sample was comprised of 55% women (45% men), 92% White, with an average age of participants of 19 years old ($SD = 1.35$). The sample consisted of 96% heterosexual participants, 77% were either Catholic or Protestant, 23% conservative, and 15% liberal, all attending a Midwest university. The participants were recruited through the psychology department's Psychology Study Participant Manager (PSPM), a site that allows psychology undergraduates to participate in research in exchange for class credit.

Procedure

The data were collected online in a computer lab on campus, where the participant was greeted by a female researcher who explained the consent form for the study. Before the session began, the researcher briefly explained that the participants would complete demographics, read a scenario, answer questions about the scenario, and end with a few questionnaires. The participants completed a demographics form (Appendix A) containing questions about sex, race, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political orientation. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions where they read a paragraph detailing a fictional story about "Erin" (i.e., a reading manipulation involving a woman, girl, or person named Erin).

After they read the scenario, the participants completed a questionnaire rating Erin on 18 personal characteristics (e.g., mature, childlike, independent, arrogant, Appendix B). Next, the participants completed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1997; Appendix C). Following this questionnaire, the participants answered general questions about the study itself (Appendix D). Next, the participants completed a 'check' to assess whether or not they read the scenario about Erin (Appendix E). Finally, the participants answered three open-ended questions about their own language use (Appendix F). The participants were then debriefed via a written explanation at the end of the survey. Participants, on average, spent approximately 10 minutes completing the study.

Scenario

Erin is a 26 year-old woman/girl/person who graduated from college two years ago. Currently, she works at a newspaper company where she writes pieces as an "entry-level" writer. As a woman/girl/person who studied politics, Erin loves to write political pieces and is excited to write about the 2012 presidential election. Besides politics, Erin enjoys hiking when the weather cooperates and watching movies when it doesn't. She and her friends, enjoy going to film festivals and concerts. Her other interests include listening to music, painting, and reading political history.

Measures

Trait Ratings

This measure was created by the researcher and was influenced by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) trait characteristics list (Bem & Bem, 1973). The ratings were on a 1-5 Likert-type scale that ranged from "not at all" to "very." For example, if the first question asked, "How competent do you think Erin is," the scale would display 1 as "not competent" and 5 as "very competent." There were 18 traits total (Appendix B).

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

This questionnaire contains 22 statements rated on a 1-7 Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree with previous reliability estimates ranging from .83-.92 across six different samples (Glick & Fiske, 1997). The hostile sexism subscale has displayed strong convergent validity with other sexism and attitudes towards women scales, whereas the benevolent sexism subscale displayed divergent validity with the

same scales (Glick & Fiske, 1997). The statements assess hostile and benevolent sexism, protective paternalism, complimentary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. For example, one item asks the participants to rate to what degree they think 'women exaggerate problems they have at work' (measuring hostile sexism). Another statement is 'women should be cherished and protected by men' (measuring benevolent sexism). The reliability for this measure in this study was .82, which is close to the reliability coefficient range achieved by Glick and Fiske (1997; Appendix C). For this study, I analyzed the data using the full scale in order to test the effects of hostile and benevolent sexism together because I did not have specific predictions about the subscales. Previous researchers have used both the subscales and the full scale to analyze their data (Glick et al., 1997).

Check for Suspicion Questions

General questions about the study were asked; for example, "What do you think this study is about?" and "Had you heard about this study before you participated? If so, what had you heard?" (Appendix D). Both of the questions had open-ended response formats.

Manipulation Check

The check (Appendix E) asked questions such as, "How old is Erin?" "What was Erin described as: a woman, girl, person, or lady?" "What was Erin's job?" "What is one activity that Erin enjoys?" The questions about Erin's age, job, and an activity were open-ended, and the question about how Erin was described had a multiple choice response format.

<u>Language Use Questions</u>

These open-ended questions were used to assess the language use of the participants (Appendix F). The first question asked, "Sometimes people refer to adult females as 'girls' and sometimes people refer to them as 'women.' Which do you usually use? Why? Are there other terms you use to refer to adult females?" The second question asked, "When you hear someone described as a 'girl,' what types of traits and characteristics come to mind?" The third and final question asked, "When you hear someone described as a 'woman,' what types of traits and characteristics come to mind?"

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

<u>Check</u>

The manipulation check asked the participants to identify which condition they were in (i.e., was Erin described as a girl, woman, person, or lady?). The check suggested that the manipulation might not have been strong enough. Within the "girl" condition, 10 participants (22%) correctly identified that they were in the "girl" condition, and the majority of people in this condition (32 participants or 71%) selected that they were in the "woman" condition. Within the "woman" condition, 36 participants (78%) correctly selected their condition. Within the "person" condition, 2 participants (4%) correctly selected their condition, and the majority of people in this condition (40 participants or 83%) selected that they were in the "woman" condition. Participants, across conditions, tended to select that they were in the "woman" condition, suggesting that either the manipulation was not strong enough or that they did not remember the condition and assumed they were in the "woman" condition. Very few participants, in any of the conditions, selected that they were in the "person" or "lady" condition. Because only a small portion of the participants correctly identified their condition, all of the data were included in the main analyses. The participants consistently remembered the other details asked in the manipulation check; for example, they often correctly remembered her age (62%), occupation (92%), and one of the activities included in the scenario (97%). Furthermore, the check for suspicion question answers indicated that the participants were not suspicious of the true intentions of the study since they all incorrectly guessed

what the study was about and no one reported that they had heard about the study

previous to their participation.

<div align="center">ANOVAs</div>

Two (gender) X three (condition) ANOVAs were run for each of the 18 traits

(Table 1). For the forceful trait, there was a significant main effect of gender. The female

participants, regardless of condition, rated Erin as more forceful than the male

participants did (F (1, 140) = 4.44, $p < .037$, $\eta^2 = .032$). For the mature trait, there was a

significant interaction of gender and condition. The female participants in the "girl"

condition rated Erin as significantly more mature than those in the "person" condition (F

(2, 53) = 4.75, $p < .010$, $\eta^2 = .066$). There were no other main effects or interactions

significant at $p < .05$. However, for the arrogant trait, there was a trending ($p < .06$) main

effect of gender. The female participants rated Erin as more arrogant than the male

participants (F (1, 140) = 3.84, $p < .052$, $\eta^2 = .028$). Additionally, there was a trending

interaction of gender and condition. The female participants in the "woman" condition

rated Erin as more reliable than the female participants in the "person" condition (F (2,

52) = 1.95, $p < .056$, $\eta^2 = .042$). These results are contrary to hypotheses 1 and 2, which

predicted that participants in the "woman" condition would rate Erin as significantly

more mature, responsible, warm, understanding, and successful than the participants in

the "girl" condition (hypothesis 1) and those in the "girl" condition would rate Erin as

significantly more feminine, gullible, and childlike than those in the "woman" or

"person" condition (hypothesis 2).

ANOVAs were also conducted with the participants in the "girl" and "woman" condition that correctly identified their condition (10 and 36 participants, respectively). There were no interaction effects or main effects of condition but three main effects of gender were significant. The female participants rated Erin as more self-reliant (F (1, 46) = 4.08, $p < .050$, $\eta^2 = .089$), more mature (F (1, 46) = 5.31, $p < .026$, $\eta^2 = .112$), and more ambitious (F (1, 46) = 6.22, $p < .017$, $\eta^2 = .129$). Additionally, a trending main effect of condition was found, with participants in the "woman" condition rating Erin as more warm than participants in the "girl" condition (F (1, 46) = 3.55, $p < .066$, $\eta^2 = .078$). These results are not reported in a table.

Table 1

ANOVA Means and Effect Sizes

	Girl		Woman		Person		Eta^2 (sex)	Eta^2 (cond)	Eta^2 (int)
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men			
Self-reliant	4.17 (.72)	4.13 (.63)	4.29 (.75)	3.91 (.81)	3.87 (.86)	4.17 (.92)	.001	.005	.031
Warm	3.91 (.60)	3.70 (.88)	3.96 (.86)	3.68 (.84)	3.90 (.61)	4.22 (.65)	.002	.025	.032
Independent	4.22 (.67)	4.13 (.63)	4.42 (.72)	4.05 (.79)	3.90 (.80)	4.17 (.62)	.002	.014	.033
Responsible	4.39 (.66)	4.30 (.56)	4.42 (.65)	4.09 (.75)	4.23 (.73)	4.39 (.61)	.004	.003	.022
Feminine	3.22 (.80)	3.26 (.69)	3.38 (.88)	3.18 (.85)	3.23 (.68)	3.11 (.76)	.003	.003	.004
Reliable	4.04$_a$ (.77)	4.22$_a$ (.60)	4.25$_a$ (.85)	4.00$_a$ (.63)	3.83$_a$ (.83)	4.33$_a$ (.60)	.009	.001	.042^
Gullible	1.96 (.71)	1.96 (.77)	1.96 (.75)	2.00 (.76)	2.38 (.90)	2.06 (.87)	.004	.022	.011
Adaptable	3.57 (1.04)	3.43 (.59)	3.38 (1.10)	3.64 (.95)	3.33 (.96)	3.50 (.86)	.003	.002	.008
Childlike	1.83 (.78)	1.95 (.84)	1.71 (.81)	1.91 (.92)	2.17 (.83)	2.06 (.80)	.002	.024	.007
Arrogant	2.13$_a$ (.87)	1.96$_b$ (.88)	2.21$_a$ (1.06)	2.18$_b$ (.96)	2.43$_a$ (1.07)	1.67$_b$ (.84)	.028^	.005	.027

(Table continues)

	Girl		Woman		Person		Eta² (sex)	Eta² (cond)	Eta² (int)
Competent	4.39 (.72)	4.17 (.78)	4.17 (.87)	3.77 (.75)	3.77 (1.14)	4.11 (.58)	.003	.033	.034
Understanding	3.57 (.79)	3.61 (.94)	3.67 (.82)	3.59 (.80)	3.57 (.77)	3.89 (.58)	.004	.006	.011
Mature	4.52 $_a$ (.67)	4.35 $_{ab}$ (.71)	4.42 $_{ab}$ (.78)	4.18 $_{ab}$ (.50)	3.90 $_b$ (.92)	4.50 $_a$ (.51)	.002	.018	.066**
Capable	4.52 (.51)	4.35 (.57)	4.38 (.92)	4.23 (.53)	4.03 (.89)	4.39 (.61)	.000	.017	.029
Forceful	3.13 $_a$ (.87)	2.70 $_b$ (.87)	2.88 $_a$ (1.07)	2.77 $_b$ (1.02)	2.93 $_a$ (1.05)	2.39 $_b$ (1.09)	.032*	.011	.009
Ambitious	4.39 (.72)	4.22 (.67)	4.21 (.88)	3.68 (1.09)	4.00 (1.02)	4.11 (.76)	.013	.029	.022
Intelligent	4.17 (.58)	4.30 (.64)	4.17 (.70)	3.95 (.49)	3.97 (.91)	4.28 (.58)	.003	.012	.026
Successful	3.78 (.67)	4.00 (.60)	3.83 (.82)	3.55 (.74)	3.63 (.81)	3.72 (.58)	.000	.019	.022

*** p<.01, * p<.05, ^ p<.06* The means and standard deviations are reported. Means with different subscripts differ at p<.05. The possible range is 1 to 5.

<u>Correlations</u>

Pearson correlations were conducted to compare the 18 traits from the BSRI (Bem & Bem, 1973) with a computed sexism score, measured by the ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1997) within conditions. Because the scale was completed after the manipulation, the correlations were computed within condition (Table 2). Participants in the "person" condition, who were higher in ambivalent sexism, rated Erin as more gullible (r (48) = .35, p < .008) and arrogant (r (48) = .43, p < .001). Participants higher in ambivalent sexism rated Erin as less capable in the "woman" condition (r (46) = -.31, p < .020) and more forceful in the "girl" condition (r (46) = .28, p < .030). Because the manipulation check was weak, the overall correlations are reported as well. Those higher in ambivalent sexism, regardless of condition, rated Erin as less self-reliant (r (136) = -.19, p < .016), less independent (r (136) = -.18, p < .020), less feminine (r (136) = -.18, p < .021), and more arrogant (r (136) = .25, p < .002).

Table 2

Sexism Score by Trait Correlations

	Girl	Woman	Person	Average	Overall
Self-reliant	-.10	-.13	-.29*	-.17	-.19*
Warm	-.02	-.11	-.08	-.07	-.06
Independent	-.02	-.27*	-.25*	-.18	-.18*
Responsible	-.08	.05	.13	.03	.04
Feminine	-.19	-.25*	-.10	-.18	-.18*
Reliable	-.03	.02	-.10	-.04	-.04
Gullible	-.36**	.01	.35**	-.01	.03
Adaptable	-.03	.09	-.28*	-.07	-.08
Childlike	-.12	-.41**	.17	-.11	-.08
Arrogant	.03	.27*	.43**	.25	.25**
Competent	.01	-.10	.01	-.02	-.02
Understanding	-.07	-.15	.05	-.05	-.05
Mature	-.06	.10	-.04	0	-.01
Capable	.01	-.31*	-.01	-.11	-.09
Forceful	.28*	.01	-.04	.08	.06
Ambitious	-.03	.06	.16	.07	.08
Intelligent	.07	-.18	.11	0	.02
Successful	-.18	-.10	.13	-.05	-.03

** *p*<.01, * *p*<.05

Qualitative Results

At the end of the study, participants were asked three open-ended questions about language and gender. Question one asked, "Sometimes people refer to adult females as 'girls' and sometimes people refer to them as 'women.' Which do you usually use? Why? Are there other terms you use to refer to adult females?" Across conditions, 59% of participants reported that they most often use "girl" to describe an adult female, especially when they thought of a woman who was around the same age as themselves. For example, several participants wrote that they would use the term "girl" if "the girl was around my age or younger." Participants also tended to write that they would use

"girl" to "let her feel young." Many specified that if "she is younger than 30, I would call her a girl." Less than a third of the participants said they most often refer to adult females as "women." These participants often wrote, "I usually say 'women' because most adult females are older than me." Others wrote, "I use 'woman' to show respect," or "I use 'woman' because a 'girl' is someone who has not matured yet." Additionally 24% of the participants indicated that they use a mixture of the terms "girl" and/or "woman" along with "lady," "female," and/or "chick."

Question two asked, "When you hear someone described as a 'girl,' what types of traits and characteristics come to mind?" Across conditions, people reported that a girl is "young," "immature," "childish/naïve," and "innocent." "Young" was reported most frequently, with 73% of the respondents specifying that traits of a "girl" include "young." "Immature" and/or "childish" were reported 53% of the time. Nothing implying adulthood (e.g., mature, experienced, or independent) was reported.

Question three asked, "When you hear someone described as a 'woman,' what types of traits and characteristics come to mind?" Across conditions, people reported that a woman is "old," "mature," "professional/has a job/career," "family-oriented/a mother," and "independent." "Old" was reported most frequently, with 41% of the respondents specifying that the traits of a "woman" include "old or older." "Mature" was reported 41% of the time, along with "career/professional/education" reported 31% of the time. Nothing implying childhood (e.g., immature, inexperienced, dependent, or childish) was reported. The definitions for each of the traits reported can be found in Appendix G.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

<u>General Discussion</u>

Unfortunately, many participants did not correctly recall the term (girl, woman, or person) that was used in the scenario as my language manipulation. Contrary to the hypotheses, the participants did not perceive Erin differently on how responsible, warm, understanding, successful, feminine, gullible, or childlike they thought she was, regardless of whether the participants were in the "woman," "girl," or "person" condition, but the lack of an effect on the manipulation check makes it unclear what this result means. When participants were asked how Erin was described in the scenario they read, most reported that Erin was described as a woman even though the participants were randomly and fairly evenly distributed amongst the three conditions. It was expected that the participants would recall their correct condition (i.e., whether Erin was described as a woman, girl, or person), as the language manipulation was written in the paragraph twice. Participants did recall other details from the scenario at rates much higher than chance, suggesting that they did read and process the paragraph. The fact that participants did not even notice when Erin was called a "girl" suggests that the term has become so common as to be normative. That does not mean that the term is completely benign, however, as the qualitative results suggest that there are different perceptions of a "girl" versus a "woman" and that the use of "girl" may be embraced by women as a way to feel young, even as it may also have the effect of making them appear more childlike and less mature

and independent. Men also use the term "girl" if women are deemed not mature enough or if they are around the same age as the man using the term.

There was one significant difference between the female and male participants. The female participants, across conditions, rated Erin as more forceful than the male participants did. One possible reason this may have emerged is because Erin could be categorized as "successful" with her degree and job and "successful women" may appear threatening to other women (if forceful was interpreted negatively). Additionally, participants may have assumed that 26-year-old Erin must have acted forcefully to have a degree and a job by that age. The fact that female participants rated Erin as more forceful than the male participants seems to be congruent with previous research that suggests that women tend to penalize "successful women" because they are perceived to be a threat to self-competence (Parks-Stamm, Heilman, & Hearns, 2008).

A significant interaction was found for one of the traits tested. Female participants in the "girl" condition rated Erin as significantly more mature than female participants in the "person" condition. Having a college degree and working as a political writer may have been interpreted as mature for a 'girl.' The male participants, across conditions, did not differ significantly in their ratings of Erin's maturity. Again, the manipulation check indicated that most participants in the "girl" and "person" condition selected that they were in the "woman" condition and therefore, there is no way to know the true significance of this finding.

There was no clear pattern across conditions for the correlations between the trait ratings and the ambivalent sexism scores. Participants higher in ambivalent sexism rated

Erin as more gullible and arrogant when in the "person" condition. It is possible that those in the "person" condition did not like Erin represented as a "person" and without a specific gendered label (e.g., woman or girl). Referring to a person with the pronoun "she" may be incongruent with people's image of what gender a "person" is. In other words, when someone is referred to as a "person," people tend to assume that person is male (Hamilton, 1991). Participants higher in ambivalent sexism rated Erin as less capable and less childlike in the "woman" condition, and more forceful in the "girl" condition. Perhaps those in the "woman" condition thought that being a woman implies that she have a family in addition to a job and therefore the participants may have rated Erin as less capable. Previous research suggests that there is a positive correlation between ambivalent sexism scores and adherence to traditional gender roles (Glick et al., 1997). For example, benevolent sexism is correlated with positive attitudes of women as "homemakers," and hostile sexism is correlated with negative attitudes of women in the workforce (Glick et al., 1997). Participants higher in ambivalent sexism in the "woman" condition also rated Erin as less childlike; this may indicate that Erin as a "woman," with these accomplishments, appears less childlike because a woman who works at a newspaper company and writes about the 2012 election conveys adult-like qualities (for a woman). However, the ratings of less capable and less childlike are somewhat contradictory. Again, it may be that those higher in ambivalent sexism and in the "girl" condition rated Erin as more forceful because they might assume that the amount of accomplishments Erin has achieved could only be done if she were forceful or powerful

with her actions (for a girl). The lack of a successful manipulation check, however, once again makes these interpretations tentative.

Regardless of condition, those higher in ambivalent sexism rated Erin as less self-reliant, less independent, less feminine, and more arrogant. This is consistent with previous research, as people higher in hostile and benevolent sexism tend to judge women negatively when they are presented as agentic (e.g., working women) as Erin was (Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Within the open-ended questions, participants indicated that they tended to use "girl" to describe adult females, especially if they were young women (i.e., around the same age as the participants). "Woman" was used for adult females when they were considerably older than the participants (i.e., age 40 or above). Additionally, participants tended to associate the descriptors, "young," "immature," "childish/naïve," and "innocent" with the term girl and "old," "mature," 'professional/career," "family/mother," and "independent" with the term woman. These distinctions, while different than the quantitative findings, support the two hypotheses essentially predicting that those in the "girl" condition would rate Erin as more childlike and those in the "woman" condition would rate Erin as more adult-like. It seems that there are stereotypes associated with the terms "girl" and "woman" but the manipulation was not strong enough to elicit those stereotypes in the ratings of Erin.

Regardless of the lack of quantitative results found, calling women "girls" may still have an impact on how people view women. Arguably, "girl" is so deeply imbedded in people's language use that they do not even notice it when it is mentioned twice in a

short paragraph (despite correctly recalling other details from the paragraph). This term seems so commonplace that referring to a woman as a "woman" sounds strange and may even be offensive. Because it is *so* normative (and often viewed as a compliment) to call a woman a "girl," more complex problems exist with gender rules and stereotypes. If women and men view being a "woman" as powerful, mature, and strong, it would not be terribly flattering to be referred to as a girl. However, the term "girl" signifies youth and "woman" signifies age. "Girl" also seems to embody a cutesy, submissive quality, whereas "woman" seems to embody responsibility and independence. Unfortunately, women are often pressured to "look and feel young," with much distaste for growing older largely because women's worth is often directly linked to her attractiveness (Strahan et al., 2008). If this were not true, many commercials for younger, flawless skin, general makeup products, hair dye, or any of the other ways advertising sells the idea that women should look younger, would not exist. It seems that largely because of internalized societal pressures to avoid aging, women often express reluctance to age physically or linguistically.

Limitations and Future Research

In this case, the participants likely did not notice the language manipulation. It appears that the two places where the manipulation appeared were easily overlooked and potentially not stated enough times for the participants to notice. It is possible that the "woman" language manipulation would have been more evident had this been an audio clip or even a real conversation because referring to woman as a "woman" in a live conversation seems to occur less frequently than referring to a woman as a "woman" in

written language. For example, people who report on women in newspapers or online news generally refer to women as "women," but people in daily conversations often refer to women as "girls." It is possible that written language in newspapers or online news have a formality requirement and therefore refer to female humans that are 18 years and older as "women" and female humans that are 17 years and younger as "girls." However, people's casual conversations are not formal and the term "girl" is often used for adult female humans.

In this study I focused on the differences between using the terms "girl," "woman," and "person" as opposed to the many other words people use to describe women (e.g., "lady" or "bitch"). Ideally, future research should build upon this current research and test other words that Western culture denotes for women in order to observe differences in perceptions. Incorporating other words that are used to describe women could help to represent a more complete idea of how words used to describe women can affect people's perceptions of women. For instance, "lady" might be used in a context to portray a woman as polite or "well-mannered," whereas "bitch" might be used to portray an assertive woman. Either way, the frequency with which "lady" and "bitch" are used may contribute to understanding how perceptions of women can be affected by language use. Additionally, future research could explore the relationship between referring to heterosexual couples as "girls and men" as opposed to "women and men" to discover the implications of that type of unequal language use.

Because the qualitative findings showed more differences in perceptions of the terms "woman" and "girl," future research could approach language use by exploring this

topic with a more qualitative research approach. For example, trying to assess, in a focus group setting, how people use the terms "woman" and "girl" to refer to women could present more realistic verbalizations of ideas. As a result, some discussion could develop, displaying that people may use those terms differently depending on how old the women are or whether or not they personally know the women. Additionally, lab research could utilize a listening task versus a reading task and test if a more realistic conversation (i.e., listening to the paragraph) would lead to differences in perceptions of Erin since the participants in the current study often did not correctly identify or consciously notice the language manipulation.

The purpose of the study was to determine whether there are differences between calling women "girls" or "women," but the study only exposed participants to one descriptions of a woman and then asked the participant to rate her. Focusing the scenario on a single woman could present another limitation in the generalizability of someone's perceptions of one woman to the group of women as a whole. Future research could address this and set up a study that assesses the participants' perceptions of women as a group rather than individual women.

A more diverse sample would be needed to properly assess language use and its effects on perceptions of women. For example, the gender balance in the current sample is adequate but the sample is lacking in other areas of diversity such as race, age, education level, and political orientation which could play an important role in language style/use and its effects on perceptions of women. People from African American and Native American cultures may use the words "woman" and "girl" differently or the terms

could even have a different meaning based on the historical differences that women have had in those cultures compared to European American culture. For example, women in African American culture are often considered more dominant and assertive than women in European American culture (Donovan, 2011). This may have an effect on how the terms "woman" and "girl" could alter perceptions of women. Future research could also control for political orientation as this could also impact the results as it may be hypothesized that liberals would care more about the effects of language use and strive for "political correctness" compared to conservatives.

Generational differences may alter the way in which these terms could affect perceptions of women as well. For instance, advertising and pornography have become more normative as have their uses of infantilization (Carlson, 2010, Kang, 1997), making it possible that younger generations view this language use (i.e., calling women "girls") as less of an issue than older generations. For example, the relatively new show *Girls* is centered on several women in their twenties and decidedly not entitled *Women*. Education level could impact results as those that are able to and want to seek higher education could be more privy to this linguistic phenomenon, therefore more likely to understand its potentially negative repercussions.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Previous research has addressed the different types of ways in which women are pictured or portrayed in the media (e.g., advertising and pornography) and has demonstrated how language can affect perceptions of the topic or person being discussed. Currently, there is little research on the language aspect of denying adulthood of women.

To address this lack of research, this study explored the effects of using "girl," "woman," or "person" to refer to a woman. However, interestingly, participants often did not notice which term was used in the scenario they read. Because the manipulation check failed, the interpretations of the few differences found are questionable since there is not a way to know if the manipulation worked and the participants forgot how the target (Erin) was described or if the participants simply did not notice the manipulation. The qualitative results, however, showed that people do have different impressions of "girls" and "women" and that the terms are often *purposefully* used to refer to adult women in different ways. The term "girl" reminded people of youth and immaturity, whereas "woman" reminded people of an older, mature adult. Referring to a woman as a "girl" is fairly normative and easily unnoticed, as illustrated by the fact that participants generally reported seeing the word "woman" even when they read about an adult woman who was described as a "girl." Nonetheless, the term "girl" is often used for women to seem younger or to label an immature young woman.

When the practice of using the term "girl" is questioned, it is frequently excused because the intentions are admirable and being referred to as a "girl" is often accepted as a compliment. However, intentions are not more important than outcomes. People can intend to do a nice deed or give an enjoyable gift but if it is hurtful to the receiver then how can intentions mean *more* than an outcome? Infantilizing language may have negative effects on the status of women in general, and particular women, even though people are not conscious of these effects. People should explore the amount of benevolence in this society and attempt to locate the true meaning behind the

'congeniality.' This exploration may help people to understand that just because

something appears nice does not ensure its influence will be beneficial.

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APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS

Please fill out the 10 questions below as best you can.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your sex?   Female _____   Male _____

3. What is your sexual orientation?

___ Bisexual
___ Heterosexual
___ Homosexual
___ Other, please specify _____

4. Is English your first language? Yes _____   No _____

5. Which ethnicit(ies) do you identify with? Please mark all that apply.

___ Arab
___ Asian
___ Black
___ Hispanic/Latina/Latino
___ Native American
___ Pacific Islander
___ White
___ Other, please specify _____

6. With which group do you identify?
___ Agnostic/Atheist
___ Catholic
___ Jewish
___ Muslim
___ Protestant (e.g. Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian)
___ None
___ Other, please specify _____

7. With which political orientation do you identify?

___ Conservative

___ Liberal

___ Moderate

___ None

___ Other, please specify _____

8. What state are you from originally (i.e., where did you spend the majority of your time growing up)? If you're not from the United States, what country are you from?

_____

9. Please indicate your major(s)

_____

10. Please indicate your class standing, (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior etc.)

___ Freshman

___ Sophomore

___ Junior

___ Senior

___ Other, please specify _____

APPENDIX B

TRAIT RATINGS

Based on the information you read please rate Erin *to the best of your ability* on these characteristics using the 1-5 scale below each question.

Each question will be structured like this:

How _____do you feel Erin is? (e.g., how <u>self-reliant</u> do you feel Erin is?)

1. Self-reliant (i.e., can rely on oneself)
1	2	3	4	5
Not Self-reliant		Somewhat		Very Self-reliant

2. Warm (i.e., kind)
1	2	3	4	5
Not Warm		Somewhat		Very Warm

3. Independent
1	2	3	4	5
Not Independent		Somewhat		Very Independent

4. Responsible
1	2	3	4	5
Not Responsible		Somewhat		Very Responsible

5. Feminine
1	2	3	4	5
Not Feminine		Somewhat		Very Feminine

6. Reliable (i.e., dependable)

1	2	3	4	5
Not Reliable		Somewhat		Very Reliable

7. Gullible (i.e., easily deceived)

1	2	3	4	5
Not Gullible		Somewhat		Very Gullible

8. Adaptable (i.e., easily adjusts to change)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Adaptable		Somewhat		Very Adaptable

9. Childlike (i.e., innocent, cutesy)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Childlike		Somewhat		Very Childlike

10. Arrogant (i.e., overly proud of oneself)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Arrogant		Somewhat		Very Arrogant

11. Competent (i.e., skillful)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Competent		Somewhat		Very Competent

12. Understanding

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Understanding		Somewhat		Very Understanding

13. Mature

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Mature		Somewhat		Very Mature

14. Capable (i.e., ability to do something)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Capable		Somewhat		Very Capable

15. Forceful (i.e., powerful)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Forceful		Somewhat		Very Forceful

16. Ambitious (i.e., eager to achieve)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Ambitious		Somewhat		Very Ambitious

17. Intelligent

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Intelligent		Somewhat		Very Intelligent

18. Successful

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Successful		Somewhat		Very Successful

APPENDIX C

AMBIVALENT SEXISM INVENTORY

Below are a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale below:

(Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Not sure		Strongly Agree	

2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Not sure		Strongly Agree	

3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Not sure		Strongly Agree	

4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Not sure		Strongly Agree	

5. Women are too easily offended.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Not sure		Strongly Agree	

6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Not sure		Strongly Agree	

7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men. *

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

13. Men are complete without women. *

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

17. A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man.

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances. *

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

21. Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men. *

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Strongly Disagree   Not sure   Strongly Agree

(* Denote reverse-scored statements)

APPENDIX D

CHECK FOR SUSPICION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think this study is about?

    _____

2. Had you heard about this study before you participated? If so, what did you hear?

    _____

APPENDIX E

CHECK

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. How old is Erin?
    _____ years old

2. Was Erin described as a girl, woman, person, or lady?

    _____

3. What was Erin's job?

    _____

4. What was one of Erin's favorite activities?

    _____

APPENDIX F

LANGUAGE USE QUESTIONS

1. Sometimes people refer to adult females as "girls" and sometimes people refer to them as "women." Which do you usually use? Why? Are there other terms you use to refer to adult females?

2. When you hear someone described as a "girl," what types of traits and characteristics come to mind?

3. When you hear someone described as a "woman," what types of traits and characteristics come to mind?

APPENDIX G

CODED TRAIT DESCRIPTIONS

1. Young: "Young," "looks young," "a younger person ages 2-13"

2. Childish/immature: "Childish," "immature," child-like," "more childish than a woman," "not mature," "some immaturity," "not very mature"

3. Innocent: "Innocent," innocence"

4. Old/older: "Old/older," "a 'lady like' older woman," "older female"

5. Mature: "Mature," "a matured female," "fully developed cognitively and physically," "maturity," "a mature adult"

6. Career/professional: "Career," "professional," "has a job," "well educated," "business lady," "has a steady job," "power suits," "working"

7. Family/mother: "Motherly," "with children," "successful with their family," "a mother figure," "kids and a husband"