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IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF NONSEXIST LANGUAGE FOR THE TEACHING OF WRITING

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

---

by

LOUISE MARIE RODRIGUEZ CONNAL

June 1989

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ABSTRACT

For nearly twenty years, many studies have dealt with the topic of sexism in language. However, just a small fraction of these studies have directly applied the topic to writing classes. Language influences us from the time we learn it through the time that we build on our knowledge through the materials we read. The widespread use of the generic *he* causes inaccurate perceptions about women and biases against them. In the classroom, teachers can encourage students in both perceiving sexist language in what they read and using nonsexist language when they write.

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF NONSEXIST LANGUAGE

FOR THE TEACHING OF WRITING

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INTRODUCTION

How sexist language influences people, especially women, has long been a topic for research. Despite the many perspectives from which the topic has been researched, efforts to integrate a nonsexist approach into traditional writing classes have not been widely emphasized. Many teachers have not seen how sexist language continues to exert its strong, not too subtle, influence on our everyday perceptions of women´s and men´s roles in society. Yet the fact of the matter is that connotative meanings of words in seemingly "harmless" contexts do carry strong sexist biases. These sexist connotations are perpetuated not only in the language we speak and hear but also in the language that we read. I first became strongly aware of the fact that apparently innocent words can and do affect our views of gender roles during a course on "The Philosophy of Sexual Politics" six years ago at California State University, San Bernardino. I first studied the effects of the word *natural* in an article by Christine Pierce. For me, for me, this article, "Natural Law Language and Women" which was published in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, was the first of many articles to convey the importance which the connotative meaning of the word *natural* has. This word has been used to rationalize and justify the

patriarchal roles assigned to men and women. The word *natural* has been used to keep women oppressed. Thus began my personal odyssey into the study of language and gender.

I have reviewed studies relating to educational materials. Both in the oral and written language, the rule for generic *he* has persisted for many years. However, the Martyna and MacKay studies discussed in Chapter Three of this work dispel the notion that *he* is truly generic. Furthermore, they show the confusion and lack of clarity perpetuated by the generic rule. Since others have argued for finding an alternative to generic *he* without much success, I thought it would be more practical to discuss methods of writing which corrected for generic *he* while teaching writing. Furthermore, because the generic rule is not the only source of sexism in language, I discuss various strategies, from lessons on word choice to writing assignments for the writing class. These strategies bring out the value of women in society while teaching the writing skills required for success in college.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW LANGUAGE AFFECTS PERCEPTION

Not all students are created equal. To a great extent, the language to which students are exposed during their formative years promotes inequality. For this reason, many feminist scholars among others have looked into the effects of language on children and subsequently the adults that they become. In order to understand the need for nonsexist language use it is important to gain a clearer picture of what feminist teachers have been pointing to when they ask for or encourage the nonsexist use of language. Children, as part of the process of acquiring language, intuitively perceive unspoken connotations of words. In this chapter, I will look at specific examples of how certain words in our language come to have sexist connotations and how language both reflects and determines women´s unequal status in the world. I will show, through the work begun by other scholars, how even subtle changes in language can improve the perceptions of women both in literature and in society.

Language is an integral part of our lives. It is basic to our thinking, history, literature, and culture. In the same way that most of us cannot remember how we learned to walk, run, or swim, most of us cannot recall the process we went through to learn how to speak. Linguists say that

children are very adept at learning and internalizing the grammar of the language to which they are exposed during the language acquisition phase of childhood. By the time children go to school, they have learned the language structure and much of the lexicon which they will use throughout their lives. What they learn in school is how to systematize and categorize what they already know. In her article "The Acquisition of Language" in *Readings In Applied English Linguistics* (Third Edition), Breyne Arlene Moskowitz says:

> The rules learned in school are only conventions of an educated society. They are arbitrary finishing touches or embroidery on a thick fabric of language that each child weaves for herself before arriving at the English teacher's classroom. The fabric is grammar: the set of rules that describe how to structure language (165).

The youngster's linguistic progress is that of a child finding pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and assembling them in a methodical, predictable manner so as to put the puzzle pieces of language together (Moskowitz, 166).

As part of the process of learning language, young children also begin to evaluate how words are associated with actions of the people in the world around them. Sally

McConnell-Ginet says in her article "Linguistics And The Feminist Challenge":

> Just as we can suppose the young child is an incredibly talented linguist, comparing rival hypothesized grammars against the evidence she encounters in the speech around her, so we can suppose that the child has some talent as a linguistic anthropologist, figuring out the cultural clues dropped in language use. So long as the child's inferences aren't obviously contradicted by [nonlinguistic] experience..., she or he can assume that "this is how people think around here" (8).

Thus, language socializes newcomers to traditional ways; it provides an index of cultural values. Indeed, because many of our linguistic choices are automatic, made without our reflecting on them, it is difficult for some people to take seriously the idea that language can contribute to the subordination of women and to androcentric values (McConnell-Ginet, 7). People either give language too much power to effect changes in social conditions (some feminists expect language changes to trigger political or social changes for women in society), or they do not give enough thought and credit to the power of language. For example, there are those who do not see how language excludes women from having

positive, powerful images in society. McConnell-Ginet says that because the connections between language, our way of thinking, and our social life are rarely "explicitly recognized ... language use can enter into the transmission and preservation of attitudes and values that are seldom explicitly articulated" (7). As a young girl explores and learns her language, she will discover the force of words as they are used about her.

Covert meanings of words, their connotations, are most difficult to resist and may have the strongest influence not only on the dominant group but also on the group receiving the messages loaded in the word choices made by the dominant group (McConnell-Ginet, 8). A young girl who hears people talk about "dizzy broads" will pick up on the phrase and the implication of the phrase and believe that women--including herself--*are* "dizzy broads."

Since words and their meanings have such a strong influence on children, some scholars are specifically interested in how vocabulary affects a woman's experience. McConnell-Ginet likens vocabulary to a cultural artifact such as the artifacts unearthed by archeologists; it can tell us about the attitudes of the people who use it. For instance, some of the history of terms related to women define women according to their social functions. McConnell-Ginet gives us the following examples:

> *Lady* descends to us from *hlaefdige* in Old English, which in turn was compounded from roots that meant *bread* and *kneader* [modern loaf and dough continue these earlier roots]; we know *hussy and housewife* come from common root *huswif*; modern forms of wife and weave are historically related (5-6).

Although such terms show the correlation between social roles of women and the names applied to them, further inquiry into lexical terms as they are applied to women shows "general patterns of semantic shift recurring in semantically related lexical terms..."(McConnell-Ginet, 6). This shift shows a consistent pattern of negative bias when a word is appled to females and a positive bias when it is appled to males.

In the course of researching language, I have found that the field is fertile with examples of such sex bias within language. As a rule, positive or neutral meanings of the terms used to describe or name women degenerate to coarse, vulgar, and disparaging meanings; the terms become pejorative. As mentioned earlier, McConnell-Ginet has pointed out that by looking beyond the history of words one can see the trend of shifting meanings of terms from neutral to negative connotations: *hussy, spinster* and *wench* are not isolated examples. A look at contemporary language shows similar problems. McConnell-Ginet states:

> Some extremely suggestive facts have been unearthed by recent investigators who have drawn our attention to significant lexical gaps [*henpecked* but no *cockpecked*], lexical asymmetries [*mothering* as a long term affair but *fathering* the act of an instant], and non parallel distribution of items in some environments [linguist,Robin Lakoff, gave the inspired *cleaning lady/garbage gentleman*] (7).

The term *henpecked* has been used to describe men who are dominated by women. The implication is that men who are influenced by or manipulated by women are weak and unmanly. However, since women are supposed to be "dominated by men," culturally speaking, there is no use for a comparable term to describe women dominated by men. The terms mothering and fathering have traditionally had the connotative meanings given by McConnell-Ginet; however, social changes have now expanded the definition of father to have a less temporary or short term meaning. Due to changes in society attributed by some to the women's movement, "fathering" still does not have the long term meaning that "mothering" has. The term *lady*, however, brings out some differences of opinion among linguists. Robin Lakoff expresses the opinion that the term *lady* is used to trivialize women. She implies that *lady* is used to describe ideal women in a patriarchal society, those

who are unassertive, quiet, and ornamental, and thus the term trivializes women. However, McConnell-Ginet and other scholars believe that the contexts in which the term *lady* is used must be studied to determine whether the particular usage is biased. With respect to the term *lady* McConnell-Ginet says, "examination of the contexts in which *lady* occurs,...its opposition to woman, girl, broad, and so on can shed light on features of meaning that are at best implicit for speakers and, quite possibly, denied at a conscious level" (7).

In order to pursue this discussion of unconscious as well as conscious negative connotative meanings of words as they apply to women, I will look at examples from Muriel Schultz' study of words used about women. Because we are familiar with these words and because they show how we all can use them without thinking of their implications, I will focus on some of them. Aside from the common examples of *spinster* or *old maid* versus *bachelor*, Schultz looks at two terms used to define or designate an old man. These are *geezer* and *codger*. She found that "*geezer* [was] an eccentric, queer, old man and *codger* [was] a mildly derogatory, affectionate term for an old man" (65). *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1979 edition, states that these terms are used to refer to mildly eccentric or disreputable fellows. Generally, these terms do not have a

negative connotation; this is especially true when one compares them with those used to describe or designate an old woman. According to Schultz' research, the terms for *old woman* far outnumber the terms for *old man*. The following are just a few of the terms that she found: "terms for old woman [are] *trot, hen, heifer, warhorse, crone, hag, and frump*" (65). Surely the fact that the number of negative terms for older women outweighs the number negative terms for older men affects our negative perceptions of older women.

Earlier work by Ethel Strainchamps, "Our Sexist Language" in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness* published in 1971, reveals two trends which support what has been said about shifts in connotations. Words which did not have negative connotations when used to refer to men "became contemptuous after they came to refer to woman alone" (Strainchamps, 242). On the other hand, those which were pejorative lost the negative connotations when they came to be associated exclusively with men (Strainchamps, 242). To illustrate her findings Strainchamps used the shrewd-shrewish pair. According to her, the words were equally pejorative in the 16th century. They both meant wicked. However, when shrewd was used for men only and shrew was used specifically for women, their connotations diverged. A glance at the dictionary's definition for each clarifies Strainchamps' position further.

Shrewd: 1(archaic): mischievous. 2 (obsolete) shrewish, abusive. 3 (Obs): ominous, dangerous. a: severe, hard; b: sharp, piercing. 5 a: (marked by clever discerning awareness and hardheaded acumen); b: given to wily and artful ways or dealing.

Shrew: 1: any of numerous small chiefly nocturnal animals related to the moles and distinguished by a long pointed snout, very small eyes, and velvety fur. 2: an ill tempered scolding woman.

As we can see from the definitions, Strainchamps' assertions are correct. We would not like to be considered abusive, ill-tempered or scolding. However, being clever or being predisposed toward having a "clever, discerning awareness" are positive traits.

Master and *Mistress* are another set of words which exemplify Strainchamps' point. In the past, both words connoted some degree of power or importance. They were equal in meaning; however, *master* is the only one of the two terms which has retained a connotation of power while *mistress* has a pejorative meaning since it is associated with an illicit sexual relationship.

The studies by Strainchamps and other scholars underscore the relationship between language and myths regarding women which are created and perpetuated in our

culture through the language we use. As the preceding illustrations show, words greatly influence impressions and attitudes. Examining how they affect us is crucial. In her article, "The Making of a Nonsexist Dictionary," lexicographer, Alma Graham points out some of the reasons for the continuing problem of sexism in language. Some of these reasons have been stated often; however, Graham's findings are worth reviewing. She notes that when we are socialized we pick up cues from the adults around us with respect to the expectations which society has of us. During the making of the nonsexist dictionary Graham explains many of the myths regarding women perpetuated through language. One of Graham's examples is "my-virtue-is-your-vice" which is one way of describing one of the myths many people have about the two sexes. According to this myth, women and men are expected to be polar opposites. Therefore, a virtue for one gender is a vice for the other. For example, "a man's tears are womanish [while] a woman's uniform [is] mannish" (Graham, 60). Graham further states:

> Since men and women are supposed to be polar opposites, what is considered admirable in one has to be contemptible in the other....The lessons to be learned by both male and female are clear: biology is not only destiny; it is character and personality (60-61).

In her work, *The Second Sex,* Simone De Beauvoir comments on this myth. When speaking of self-definition she states that because she is a woman she must define herself as a woman. On the other hand, "A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man" (De Beauvoir xvii-xviii). She further states that it is wrong to present the two sexes as if they were similar to two electrical poles. "In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles,..." (xvii-xviii).

She goes on to explain how in society and in language *man* represents both the positive and neutral qualities, while *woman* represents the negative. When referring to Aristotle, whose opinions dominated the thinking of early scholars about the nature of women and men, de Beauvoir quotes him as saying: "The female is female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities.... We should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness" (xvii-xviii).

The long history of considering the female nature as a deformed version of the male nature has greatly contributed to the notion that women and men are polar opposites. This way of thinking has contributed to the segregation of sex roles. Thus, if a man displays any *feminine* qualities, such as being moved to tears, he is labeled *womanish* [he is not acting within the prescribed manner for men.] (Graham, 61).

As we can see, there is a long tradition for establishing set roles for men and women which are supposed to be presented opposite to each other. People who persist in following nontraditional roles or occupations are labeled as "exceptions to the rule" (Graham, 61). Therefore, these exceptions are not used to refute the stereotypic perceptions presented to the society through the use of language in describing these exceptions. Consider the following from the Graham article:

> Another trick of socialization is to label what we consider to be the exception to the rule: the *woman* doctor, the *male* nurse, the career *girl* (the phrase career *man* is restricted to government service). The term *feminine logic* illustrates the most negatively sexist use of the modifier tactic since it implies non-logic or lack of logic. Because logic unmodified is assumed by men to apply to men, a woman who thinks logically is said to have a "masculine mind" (a supposed compliment that serves as a questionable exception to the "my virtue-is-your-vice" rule) (61).

Graham also points out common uses of language which define women in traditional roles. These are trivialization, put-down, *praise him/blame her*. From trivialization another step is the degraded meaning of words. These were mentioned

earlier and include *madam, queen, dame, and mistress.* Since the time of Eve through the story of Delilah and others, women have frequently been blamed for the evil that befalls humanity. Therefore, it is unsurprising that women's titles of respect, as compared with men's titles of respect, have come to have degenerated connotative meanings. However, the most pervasive use of language in maintaining the status of women subordinate to the status of men is the exclusionary tactic. This is the generic use of language, which will be discussed in detail further on in this work. Graham, a lexicographer, working with other scholars to create a non-sexist dictionary, made some observations of sex bias in material written for children. She and Peter Davies, Editor-in-chief of the dictionary, found a pattern existing no matter what subject was being taught. For example, both in discussion and in materials used in the classroom, males command center stage (Graham. 57). Peter Davies found the following in his research:

> When adults write for one another, they refer to young people as children, almost as often as they call them boys and girls. When writing stories for children, however, adults use the gender words boy and girl twice as often as the neutral words child and children. When the culture talks *to* its

> children, it is careful to distinguish them by sex (Graham, 58).

According to Davies, people addressing children spoke or wrote to them in generic/stereotypical language; however, those same people were less stereotypical when communicating with other adults. These findings show that writers of materials for children contribute to the unequal presentation of females and males in written material. This in turn affects attitudes and expectations of children's behavior because the roles presented have a male dominance bias. Thus, stereotypes are set in youngsters' minds. Even in subjects such as home economics, Graham found that the masculine pronoun *he* was found twice as often as the pronoun *she*. This is surprising since home economics is not an area of study in which our culture expects males to have a high degree of interest.

In order to put females as well as males into the center of literature and writing, while working on the nonsexist dictionary, Alma Graham made some changes in pronouns in her dictionary definitions which exemplify her argument for more sex-balanced educational materials. For example, by changing the description: "He has brains and courage" to "She has brains and courage" Graham found she could alter the image presented. Other examples from her work are as follow:

> The new woman made her way from example to example

> establishing her priorities, aspirations, and tastes. She was "a woman of dedicated *principles*." She "made a *name* for herself" and "everyone *praised* her good sense and learning." When she *plunged* into her work, "her mind began to *percolate*" (not her coffee), and "she *prided* herself on her eloquence" (not on the sheen of her freshly waxed floors) (Graham, 59-60).

Since the objective of those putting together the dictionary for school children was to help create a sex-fair or sex-balanced dictionary, the image of man also underwent some changes.

> Men in the dictionary examples continued to be active and daring, competitive and combative; but the liberated man could be vulnerable, too. He might be "striving to attain *mastery* over his emotions," but he was not disgraced if "his resolve began to *waver*" or if "*tears* welled up in his eyes." Like the new woman, he had freer choice of careers than heretofore: "He *teaches* kindergarten" and "He studies *typing* at night" (Graham, 60).

As one can see from the examples shown, images of women and men can be altered with even the subtlest substitutions. When youngsters are exposed to these different or changed images, they can have a new perception of sex roles for

females and males. As previously stated, language is acquired at such an early age that many of our linguistic choices are made without our consciously thinking of them. This fact contributes to the perpetuation of the images of both women and men which is unfair or biased. Work to bring about even the mildest changes in language use is difficult because such changes fight an *almost* inbred pattern of thought. However, work to present either men or women in non-traditional roles is essential, especially for those working with youngsters, so that the cycle of sexist stereotyping can be broken.

In order to combat some of the above mentioned influences, in addition to changing the pronoun from *he* to *she* from time to time, Graham developed some interesting definitions which illustrate the subtle means by which language can be made equitable. This can be done without awkwardness. Where "one dictionary defined *youth* as the part of life between *childhood and manhood*," she changed the definition to "the time of life before one is an adult" (61). While defining sex she avoided using the terms "fairer sex", "gentler sex", "sterner sex", or "stronger sex" within the definition. Graham's work on the nonsexist dictionary is but one example of areas which need attention if sex-equitable language is to be cultivated. Creating sex-

balanced language will result in reducing distorted views about people of either sex.

The studies mentioned above illustrate the fact that because language acquisition occurs when we are young, how we choose our words becomes an automatic activity. Thus, the perpetuation of stereotypic myths about men and women continues. Work in studying the connotative meanings of words is important because these meanings affect the perceptions that children and adults have about themselves and the world around them. By becoming aware of words and their meanings, an important first step can be taken toward finding ways of initiating the changes in language use which will present a balanced and equitable view of the roles of both women and men. Other steps include studying and changing sexist materials in our educational systems and finding corrections for grammatical rules which perpetuate the exclusion of women from active and positive roles both in literature and society. Changes in language allow users freedom of choice because of the increased options available both to women and to men. Furthermore, changes in language need not be looked at with apprehension because they will allow women and men to have newer perceptions of themselves and their roles in society.

In the following chapter, I will show how interest in women's issues has yielded much discussion about language in

literature and its role in women´s condition in society, particularly how language used in children´s and adolescent reading and educational materials perpetuates stereotypical images of the two genders.

CHAPTER TWO

SEXIST LANGUAGE AND STEREOTYPING IN EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Graham's work showed, as discussed in Chapter One of this work, that simple changes in definition and usage can help to create new images of women and men. A look at what children read shows that such changes are necessary if we are going to prepare our children for the role changes which they will encounter in their own lives. In the works I have looked at, however, scholars from many fields have found that the material used in textbooks contains sexist usages which create misleading images of the roles of women and men. They do not show women performing roles which, as a matter of fact, they do perform in the real world. Thus, a confusing, false, or limited perception is presented to students reading and learning from sex-biased books. My survey of children's reading texts and other books shows that nonstereotyped roles for both females and males have existed in books and stories of the past and can exist again. Studies of readers' ages and sexes show that the existence of nonstereotyped roles has a crucial effect on children's understanding and acceptance of new ideas and values about changing roles for women and men. In this chapter, I will show some of the connections between sex stereotypes and the books or texts that children read.

Before discussing the different studies of reading materials for children, I would like to state the definitions of *sexist* and *sex-fair* language which scholars in other studies have accepted as the norm and which will be used in the following discussion. During their discussion of the gender characteristics of language, Candace Garrett Schau and Kathryn P. Scott developed the following definitions of sexist and sex-fair language:

> Sex biased [or sexist] materials are those in which (a) females appear as main characters in illustrations far less frequently than do males; (b) females and males usually are portrayed in sex-stereotypical roles; (c) females appear more often than do males in derogatory roles; and/or (d) male generic language is used.
>
> In contrast, *sex-equitable* materials reflect the reality of the presence of females in the world, their contributions, and the changing roles of both females and males. At one end of the sex-equitable continuum are *sex-fair* materials, which include females and males in numbers proportional to reality and include both traditional and non-traditional sex roles. Male generic language forms are avoided. At the other end of the continuum, *sex-affirmative* materials emphasize

> role-reversals, that is, males and females in *nontraditional* roles, and explain the benefits and problems of these reversals, including barriers and discrimination. Gender specified language is emphasized (183-184).

The question of sexism in reading materials is perceived as important by scholars who have studied educational materials' influences on children. Some studies have been specifically interested in the matter of the reading preferences of girls and boys. In addition, they have zeroed in on the question of whether or not the gender of the protagonist has any bearing on the material selected by either girls or boys. Virtually everyone agrees that almost all texts in the past were biased. In the past ten years, changes in reading materials for children have occurred. Although some improvement has been made in breaking down stereotypical gender roles of protagonists in American fiction and texts, much work still needs to be done in this area. Marjorie B. U'Ren made some enlightening points while addressing the problems of the roles of females in texts. For example, she found that in texts used in California, males were the main characters in 75% of the stories up to 1971. Furthermore, she noted that stories with female characters were shorter, less interesting, and had females in more stereotypical roles. U'Ren accused the establishment of

directing females toward more traditional stereotypical life roles by using materials which reinforced the stereotypical roles. She also noted that this has not always been the case:

> Oddly enough, textbooks written for coeducation early in this century present a much more favorable picture of the female sex than do textbooks written from 1930 on. Mothers in these stories sit down with their children, instruct them, help them, and participate in their activities. These are stories of girls who handle physical dangers or stand up against popular and false opinion (225).

Since past books have had active, positive characters who happen to be female, I believe that there is no reason why books today should not have positive, active female main characters. U'Ren agrees. She states that stories which include active heroes who happen to be women need not be dull, degrading or exclusionary.

Because negative and passive female roles have been presented in print for many years, scholars looking into the effects of language on the lives of women have concluded that such biased materials have a negative impact on the lives of women. For example, Wendy Martin in "Seduced and Abandoned in the New World," in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in*

Power and Powerlessness, accuses fiction writers of perpetuating the myth of woman as a representative of Eve "...destined to dependency and servitude..." (226). Furthermore, she challenges writers to discover a "New Eve...a woman who is self actualizing, strong, risk taking, independent but capable of being loved" (238). Materials which strike out against stereotypes for females and males are among the tools scholars, teachers and writers are challenged to produce for youngsters.

Women's accomplishments should be shown or discussed and not be kept buried in the more conventional presentation of male accomplishments. As U'Ren noted, all too often in illustrations of Marie Curie and her husband Pierre, Madame Curie is shown peering over her husband's shoulder. This illustration creates a false image which belittles Marie Curie's accomplishments by putting the man in the forefront of the picture. Thus, an image of importance is created for him, and an image of secondary importance is created for her (U'Ren, 222). Children who might see the illustration could either credit Marie Curie's accomplishments to Pierre Curie or give her secondary credit for the work she did in the process of discovering polonium and radium . However, a more factual accounting would give her equal credit for equal work and full credit for her own work.

Marie Curie is only one of many women whose accomplishments have been underplayed, hidden, or simply distorted in children's textbooks. Whether the subordinate image is created by an illustration or by words, it is a problem facing teachers today who wish to motivate students to read; female students at various stages of development will want to read about active, positive, and successful female characters. Male students also need to read materials showing women in active, positive, and succesful roles so that they can learn how to work with the kinds of women with whom they will be working as colleagues when they grow up. If the material is not available, the desire to read could be lessened.

Several studies have attempted to determine the importance of a character's sex in the materials read by students. Although some of the studies showed a discrepancy between the relative importance of the ages and the gender of the characters for the readers at different age levels, all of the studies showed that both girls and boys prefer reading about main characters who represent their particular sex. Data from Johnson, Peer, and Baldwin (1984), on one hand, stress the age of the reader over the gender of the reader as a determining factor in choosing reading material which had either a female or a male protagonist. On the other hand, Schau and Scott in another study (also in 1984) determine

that the reader's gender is equally important. In order to support their findings, they also cite others who have studied the gender question in reading materials.

The Johnson, Peer, Baldwin article, "Protagonist Preferences Among Juvenile and Adolescent Readers," cites studies on reader preferences because "clever matches between reader preferences and book/story characteristics increase the probability that a reader will enjoy the literature and will be intrinsically motivated to read (Mathewson, 1976)" (147). It appears that people working with students have used the idea of matching readers with characteristics in stories. A few years ago, when I worked at a junior high school in San Bernardino, the more experienced reading instructors would advise their aides to find students' areas of interest and to guide the students to reading materials which dealt with their areas of interest whenever possible. I found that as soon as students found reading materials which dealt with their areas of interest, they would spend more time reading.

Some studies have used vocational interests, studies of library use, and orders from book clubs as sources for materials which could be used in motivating student reading. A study by Rose, Zimet, and Blom in 1972 found that young readers preferred choosing materials which had main characters of the same sex as themselves (Johnson, 147).

According to the Johnson study, a study by Norvell in 1973 stated that "male main characters were preferred equally by boys and girls in secondary grades, but...books with female main characters were preferred more by girls than by boys" (147). The Norvell study was clarified by the Johnson study, which showed "overall averages may well be about equal; however, boys in lower grades prefer male characters considerably more than girls whereas the trend reversed for higher grades. Norvell's finding that female main characters are preferred more by girls than by boys was confirmed" (Johnson 150).

In reviewing studies on the reading preferences of children, the Johnson study concluded that the age of the main characters and not their gender may be a stronger variable in children's story preferences. Even though there were some differences between studies which stress the importance of readers' age and those which stress the importance of readers' gender, people working on studies dealing with students' preferences found that the gender of characters was one significant factor in reading materials. (Part of the difference seems to stem from the fact that some of the earlier studies did not consider *both* the age and the gender of the readers and the protagonists.)

A review of studies by Candace G. Schau and Kathryn P. Scott focuses on the relevance of educational reading

materials used by students. Instructional materials were judged not only on the basis of sex-bias but also on the basis of comprehension because materials used by schools should help students increase their reading comprehension skills.

Schau and Scott also studied instructional materials in order to determine if sex-fair materials assist in developing *gender balanced associations* without negatively affecting the reading comprehension of students. They found that rather than having a negative effect, gender-balanced materials had positive effects. They found that students' learning experiences improved and that sex-equitable material did not interfere with either girls' or boys' reading/learning comprehension. This detailed study covers four basic areas which include gender association, sex role attitudes, preferences for materials, and comprehension of materials. Schau and Scott feel their findings are important because "the theories of sex role development and sex typing suggest that instructional materials can influence their users' sex roles" (184). They continue: "Two of the most relevant theories are social learning theory and gender schema theory....Instructional materials present numerous sex role models to students" (184). Citing the results of nine studies, Schau and Scott conclude that the "gender form of language" or generic language is influential in that it sets

up male images for the readers. They say that generic language causes students of all ages, elementary and secondary, to see male images, and that this is especially true if the students and teachers are male and if the materials' content is "culturally sex typed for males, for example, police officer" (185).

On the other hand, they state that assumptions of "more gender-balanced referents" occur when "gender-unspecified, rather than male generic, language is used" (Schau and Scott, 185). However, they mention a study by Stricker which suggests that gender-unspecified language does not always lead to gender neutral assumptions. The study cites findings which demonstrate that gender-unspecified language and neutral role content can lead to an assumption that males are the referents. The solution Schau and Scott propose is language which is gender-specified; that is, language which includes both females and males. They indicate that though this language is not frequently used it is the language form which yields the greatest number of *gender-balanced associations* (185).

In discussing how content of language affects sex role attitudes, Schau and Scott cite twenty-one studies which demonstrate that children exposed to sex-equitable materials develop more "flexible" sex-role attitudes. Furthermore, they state that, conversely, "sexist materials contribute to

more sexist attitudes" (Schau & Scott, 185). Both girls and boys, ages five through twenty-one, were tested in the several studies listed and discussed. With respect to the generalization which occurs after reading, Schau and Scott state that "although sex-equitable materials make pupils' attitudes about others and about themselves less sex typed, these changes do not seem to generalize to contents *not* included in the materials" (186). However, in discussing "persistence of effects" Schau and Scott conclude that "there is some evidence that exposure to sex-equitable materials results in persistent attitude changes, at least in some areas" (186).

During the studies on sex-equitable reading materials, Schau and Scott noted:

> When students do not show a same-sex story preference or when sex of the main character is not varied, they usually prefer traditional roles or have no preferences by role or sex of main characters. [However, another study indicates that] less sex-typed 4th-, 7th-, and 11th- grade students preferred stories with nontraditional male characters. (188)

I feel that these findings are consistent with the fact that educational materials are not the only source of information about sex-role typing in our society. Children are exposed

increasingly to magazines, movies, radio, music videos, and television. For this reason the studies or evaluations of programs watched by children in school and non-school settings have increased over the past ten years.

In examining interest in sex-equitable materials for their effects on children exposed to them, Schau and Scott evaluated the results of a study of a PBS program which had been developed primarily to help girls develop more "flexibility [in] generalization to sex role attitudes about occupational, school, and family roles for both sexes and to sex role self-concept for girls" (186). They found that girls, more than boys, enjoyed the program. Since the girls were the targeted group, the developers of the program were satisfied. The preference by females for materials which offer greater variety of sex roles for both genders ties in with another test which also found girls eight to nine years of age to twelve years of age preferred nontraditional roles for the main characters of the stories they read (Schau & Scott, 186). Since today's children are exposed to both written and nonwritten materials in schools, the study of gender-equitable visual materials shows that gender-balanced materials of all varieties can positively influence youngsters' acceptance of nontraditional sex roles.

With respect to comprehension of reading materials, Schau and Scott found that changes in language used in

children's reading materials do not negatively affect children's reading skills. However, they felt that despite some of the limitations, research indications were "that sex-equitable materials can improve the learning experiences of both female and male students" (191). They believe this because they found that there was more flexibility on the part of students in accepting nontraditional sex roles and having "more gender-balanced associations" with exposure to sex-equitable materials. In addition, they found that students do not reject sex-equitable materials and sometimes even prefer them. Finally, sex-equitable materials do not interfere with comprehension, which is an important aspect of reading (191).

Throughout their study, Schau and Scott found that language equity--language which allows readers to visualize sex roles without cultural stereotyping so that both girls and boys can see the possibility of taking part in activities based on their own personal interests and abilities--helps students re-examine their own roles in terms of their interests and abilities rather than in terms of cultural stereotypes. When girls and boys can see themselves performing or involved in roles based on their abilities and interests, they will have greater motivation and greater success in reading. Therefore, it is important to continue to make more sex-equitable materials available to children.

Despite the fact that today's students are increasingly exposed to a variety of educational materials which have improved during the past ten years or more, studies on reading and educational materials show that more work in these areas is crucial if we are to provide a balanced perception of the possibilities for girls' and boys' (or women's and men's) self-concepts and self-development. Past educational materials which perpetuate stereotypes are slowly being replaced with materials containing characters who demonstrate non-traditional roles. The studies reviewed above show that such reading materials would not hinder students and, in fact, are frequently preferred by them. Therefore, we should get more of the sex-balanced materials into the school systems so that a more exciting view of life for girls and boys can be offered them while they are learning to become prepared for their own lives.

CHAPTER THREE

GENERIC "HE" OR THE PROBLEM WITH SUPERMAN

The findings of the preceding chapter lead inescapably to the question of how to develop and institute gender-neutral language. Textbooks need to address one of the core problems within the English language; namely, the use of generic language in our communications, written or oral. In this chapter I will discuss studies which reveal the problem of generic language.

Although words associated with women reflect social attitudes toward women, role-related vocabulary is not the only element of language which should be investigated. Another area of language which relates to the above discussion is the exclusion of women through the generic use of *he* and *man*. Miller and Swift state, "The use of *man* to include both women and men may be grammatically *correct*, but it is constantly in conflict with the more common use of *man* as distinguished from *woman*" (20). However, the fact is that the grammatical stipulation making generic *man* the rule is an arbitrary prescription made up by grammarians. This grammatical convention is the source of many problems because the generic use of *man* and its simultaneous use to designate males convey an underlying double meaning. A neutral pronoun would be desirable; however, because language change comes

about slowly, such a neutral pronominal form has not yet been agreed upon either by scholars or by speakers of English. Nevertheless, the awareness of a need for a neutral pronoun has sparked studies directed toward finding a pronominal form with which the majority could agree. These studies in turn have shown how generic *he* causes confusion both to youngsters during language acquisition and to other people during the course of daily language use.

In this chapter, the studies to which I will refer point out that use of the generic pronoun creates a bias because the male gender is projected by *he* or *man* even when used generically. In addition, personification which occurs in so much of our writing contributes to the bias against women. These studies find that the dual meaning for *man* causes confusion of meaning for both women and men. Generic *he* creates a bias against women.

Alma Graham provides a few examples of this linguistic bias. While working on the non-sexist dictionary for children, she found the following:

> If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is "Man overboard!" If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is "manslaughter." If she is injured on the job, the coverage is "workmen's compensation." But if she arrives at a threshold marked "Men Only," she knows the

> admonition is not intended to bar animals or plants or inanimate objects. It is meant for her (62).

This analysis by Graham shows how the double meaning for the word *man* causes people to shift gears as they encounter the word in different contexts. Confusing as this may be for a practiced speaker of the language, is is even more confusing for those in the process of learning language. Miller and Swift, in *Words and Women*, cite studies by Alleen Pace Nilsen confirming that children are confused by the double meaning of *man* and the compound words which use *man*. "Nilsen notes that adults transfer to children their own lack of agreement about when the many compound words like *workman* and *salesman* apply to both sexes and when such compounds are to be used of males only" (Miller & Swift, 28). Even when alternate words are used, they are not always acceptable to all people. For example, some people are using compound words with *woman* to avoid drawing the wrong conclusion about the sex of the subject (Miller & Swift, 28). Such a change in use, however, is valid only when the subject is actually a female.

If adult speakers of English cannot perceive whether compound words using *man* have a generic meaning which includes women or whether they have a meaning exclusive to the male gender, then we can imagine how confusing these two connotations of the same words are to youngsters learning language, since their immediate experiences are limited and

their perceptions of meaning are based upon those experiences (Miller and Swift, 29).

> One youngster for example, when asked to illustrate the incident in the Garden of Eden story where God drives Adam and Eve from the garden, produced a picture of God at the wheel of a pickup truck, with Adam and Eve sitting in the back surrounded by an assortment of flowering plants for their new home. And there is the story of children who were disappointed to discover that the "dog doctor" was not a dog after all, but an ordinary human being (Miller and Swift, 29).

Because language has a personal as well as a social effect on people, some scholars have delved into studying the effects of the generic use of *he* and *man*. Some feel that "the experience is different for boys and girls--ego enhancing for the former and ego deflating for the other" (Miller and Swift, 29). Young girls have to adjust to the fact that *he* can sometimes mean *she* or that *man* can sometimes mean *woman*. As Miller and Swift, among others, point out, sometimes the generalizations made while using *man* or *he* apply to human beings in general; but sometimes, writers who have started using the generic form to generalize about human beings finish by discussing males specifically. Thus, the dual meanings of the generic form of language are blurred.

For example, when the discussions which may have started to be neutral shift to males in general, the male point of view is projected through the language used.

Miller and Swift also point out the confusion to girls when they first encounter and process the meaning of the duality of the generic language form. They cite an example of twin girls who were devastated to learn that they were included in the word *he*. It is hard, according to Miller and Swift, for most women to recall their feelings when they first realize the *arbitrariness* of the rule of the generic uses of *he* and *man*. Miller and Swift point out that this rule is only one of many "assignments to secondary status" (29).

It is intriguing to find that historically generic use of *man* was not always the rule.

> At one time English also had separate and unambiguous words to distinguish a person by sex: *wif* for female, *wer* and *carl* for male. *Mann--a* human being--dropped the second *n* in combined forms like *waepman and carlman* both of which meant an adult male person, and *wifman*, an adult female person. *Wifman* eventually became woman (the plural, women, retains the original vowel sound in the pronunciation of the first syllable), while *wer, carl, and carlman* simply became obsolete; they

were no longer needed once *man* was used to signify a male--especially (Miller and Swift, 29).

Miller and Swift note that when there were words for human beings of either sex, women had more rights than after the generic form of *man* became widespread. "The parallel usage was somewhat analogous to the relative status of women and men in the society. Women had personal and property rights equal to those of men, and they worked a variety of trades" (Miller and Swift, 90). When *mann* and *wer* became combined, *mann* lost the female connection. Thus, women were slowly excluded from the word, *man* and women's position in society deteriorated (Miller and Swift, 90). This change in the use of *man* leads to the problem of the dual meaning which causes, in part, the exclusion of women either by writers or by readers when the generic form is used in either written or oral communication.

Studies have been made to determine whether or not *man* and *he* are truly generic. Wendy Martyna conducted such a study because of her interest in equity and clarity of language use. "Is generic *he* always used when referring to a sex-unspecified person, or is there a need to turn to alternatives, such as *she* or *they* to convey a generic reference?" (Martyna, 132). In order to determine an answer to this question, Martyna went beyond the definitions for *man* and *he* listed in the dictionary. As she stated, "Although

both specific and generic definitions of *he* and *man* are listed in the dictionary, that doesn't mean that each of them is clearly used and understood" (132). For this reason Martyna formulated her study to include the generic use of *he*. She used students from Stanford University and set up her experiment by telling the students that she was testing for the "process of sentence completion by contrasting written and spoken responses to various categories of sentence fragments" (133). She also emphasized to the students that grammar would not be evaluated. She did this to encourage the students' natural language use. Martyna also emphasized to the students that their personalities, which could be evaluated on the basis of language use, would not be evaluated. In addition, she asked that they respond with their first impressions, as first impressions would be most valid for the purposes of her study.

Before taking the test, students were also asked to indicate the process they went through to make the pronoun choices they ultimately made. They were asked to finish the questionnaire after they had filled out the tests which actually demonstrated their pronoun choices. As a matter of fact, pronouns were not the only parts of sentences which they had to fill in. The students were asked to be specific about images or ideas that came to mind while they had worked on completing sentences. In addition, the students were

asked to describe, as much as possible, those images or ideas The sentences used in the test included items which could apply to members of either sex. However, "sex-stereotypical subjects were included to determine whether an implied female presence would influence the use of alternatives to the generic *he* (Martyna, 133). She continues:

> The sentence fragments were written to focus attention on the protagonist in the sentence, so that students would be more likely to use a personal pronoun in the finishing thought....Filler sentences were also used....These related to such topics as sports, weather, and nature. Also included were some filler sentences using neutral plural subjects (e.g. "When artists become famous"), to direct attention away from the continual use of the singular pronoun....[A male-related fragment was] ´Before a judge can give a final ruling,´ [A neutral] ´When a person loses money,´ [A female-related] ´After a nurse has completed training,´ (Martyna, 133-134)

Sentence type influenced the extent that *she* was used as a generic. For example, "She was used to refer to hypothetical librarians and nurses, but not to hypothetical politicians or teenagers" (Martyna, P.134). In order to reinforce the idea that pronoun choice was not being tested, students had been

told that the survey tested sentence structure. Therefore, sentence structures were varied. An additional benefit of the variety of sentence structure was that it masked the fact that the third person singular pronoun was constantly being tested.

Martyna found that there were differences between spoken and written responses. She also found that although "sentence type significantly...influenced the extent to which *he* was used as the generic term...," women were less inclined to use *he* than were men whether the sentences were female, male, or neutral in orientation (133). Significantly, among women students *she* was used more frequently as a substitute for *he* in the written communication rather than spoken communication "in male-related or neutral sentence subjects" (133). Follow-ups to these incidents of reversals show that the switch to *she* was intentional.

In addition, Martyna found that although a "supposedly generic *she* was sometimes used in place of the generic *he* other replacements for generic *he* were also used." Over the past ten years or so, suggestions for correcting usage to avoid "generic he" have been made; thus, we are familiar with a few of those choices. They include singular *they, he or she,* and repetition of the sentence subject. Martyna also found that the majority of the students who used alternatives to the generic language form were women.

> Considering all the alternatives to generic *he* together, no significant differences appeared between written and spoken responses. Considering them separately, however, we found *they* appearing more often in spoken responses, and *he or she* in written responses. (Martyna, 134)

Martyna found two additional things when alternatives to generic language were used. First, the presumed gender of the sentence subject seemed to dictate pronoun choice. Second, the students' gender influenced generic forms selected (135). With respect to the finding that women were less likely than men to use *he* for sentences like "If a student is not prepared for an exam," Martyna was surprised because there were only four feminists in the group tested. Of these four, two were females and two were males. Furthermore, the female feminists had no overriding interest in sexism in language or its elimination. Another reason for Martyna to be surprised by the results was that the women did not think that they were using fewer *he* forms nor did they think that they were using more alternatives to the generic *he* than their male counterparts. Lastly, the findings surprised Martyna because the students were not aware that their pronoun choices were being studied; thus, they had made their choices according to the manner in which they would

normally make those choices. This fact was found from studying the students' own reports on their choice process.

Martyna's study yielded additional valuable information from the students' reports of imagery during the tests they had taken. The sources of the imagery, according to Martyna, were three sentence types. These were female related, male related or neutral. When the sentence subjects were female or male (stereotypically) then the students made female or male pronoun choices. However, when the sentence subject was neutral, Martyna did not expect such imagery. Her findings disproved her expectations.

Although "neutral" imagery was reported by some students, the overwhelming response to neutral sentence subjects was a male image. This is true because men tended to see either themselves or other males. Women tended to respond with a male pronoun because of the grammatical rule but *not* because sentences having neutral sentence subjects triggered male images. Since men learn at an early age that anything not obviously female is male, it is quite natural that they should choose the male pronoun for everything else (Martyna, 137). When they are young, girls choose a generic *she* for supposedly neutral nouns. Later, after they have learned the rules of grammar regarding generic language use, the process of imagining themselves to be the "subject of a neutral human reference is short-circuited" (Martyna, 137).

According to Martyna's study, ninety percent of the women reported no imagery at all with respect to neutral sentence subjects. The ten percent who reported seeing an image reported visualizing males (Martyna, 136-137).

In Martyna's view, as in the view of other scholars in this field, the fact that generic *he* is not always chosen when a generic pronoun should be used indicates that it is in fact not a true generic. In addition, Martyna, when referring to a much quoted study by Cathryn Adamsky, states that making *she* generic changes the perception about what women can do. As I noted earlier, in Alma Graham's work on a nonsexist dictionary for children, images of women changed when they could be seen in the language used to define different occupations or situations. The work of these scholars underscores the importance of language in putting forth or creating the images we carry of one another and of ourselves.

The findings of the studies in the preceding chapters and in this chapter reinforce each other. The linguistic studies reinforce the reading studies. For example, Schau and Scott found that generic language created a male image in the minds of both teachers and students of all ages and grades. They also indicated that as language becomes gender-unspecified instead of male generic, teachers and students assume more gender-balanced referents. They noted, further,

that the language form which generates the most gender-balanced associations, *gender-specified language* which includes both women and men, is still not frequently used. (Gender-specified language explicitly includes both females and males.) Importantly, the use of nongeneric language does not have deleterious effects on students' reading comprehension or other reading skills, yet it is too infrequently found in children's learning materials. Graham's and Martyna's works each demonstrate the pervasive nature of the use of generic *he* or *man*, yet each of their studies show that using non-sexist language affects people's perception of women. This is true even when apparently minor changes in pronoun use or sentence construction are implemented to avoid the customary generic language use.

As we can see from Martyna's study, the use of *he* for both woman and man causes a male image rather than a neutral image to form in a reader's mind. Donald G. MacKay and Toshi Konishi's study, "Pronouns, Personification, and the Theory of Meaning and Lexical Retrieval," while similar to Martyna's, go further because they help to explain that other linguistic and extra linguistic factors contribute to the non-neutral nature of the supposedly neutral use of *he*. MacKay and Konishi's studies of the difficulties with a truly non-neutral pronoun add a dimension which is missing in other studies. Through their studies they have developed an

underlying attitude hypothesis. connecting language use and cultural expectations or attitudes.

To test this attitude hypothesis, MacKay and Konishi have studied the use of personification in children's literature. In "Personification and the Pronoun Problem" (1980), they find that personification is a strong device which writers or speakers use for transmitting or communicating perceptions, attitudes, and cultural views. MacKay and Konishi's later study, which includes a follow-up comparison of their initial and subsequent studies, is found in their unpublished manuscript, "Pronouns, Personification, and the Theory of Meaning and Lexical Retrieval", which will be referred to later in this work. Because their extensive work on the metaphoric device, personification, illustrates much of what they discussed in the works that will be discussed later in this work, I feel that a short review of their findings is appropriate.

The reason for studying pronoun use in the process of personification is that personification, especially in children's literature, helps to perpetuate sexist stereotypes. Since children are too young to question stereotypes, teachers and scholars feel that these stereotypes become learned attitudes toward female and male roles. For example, "when a timid, helpless, and hysterical mouse is personified as female, the subtle message that

children receive is that females can be expected to behave in a timid, helpless, and hysterical manner. Likewise, when a courageous, clever, and powerful lion is personified as male, the message that children get is that males can be expected to behave in courageous, clever, and powerful ways" (MacKay and Konishi, 149). These impressions are even stronger if the stereotypic mouse and lion are in the same story. The comparison in such an instance could not be missed.

The English language provides three third person singular pronouns, *he, she, and it.* In addition to representing males, *he* is used to represent all people; *she* is used to represent females; *it* is used when the noun referred to has no human qualities. However, because *it* is used to refer to an object or place, *it* carries an "object connotation" which is jarring to us if *it* is used to represent a person. This is especially true when the writer or speaker is referring to an animal in a personal or intimate way as is the case in stories written for children. As a result, *it* must be replaced with another pronoun in situations which express intimacy or personal involvement with an animal (MacKay and Konishi, 150).

Since we have no pronoun which can be used to represent a gender-unspecified animal, the same problem that arises because of the generic use of *he* in general writing occurs in instances using personification. This problem subdivides

into two which occur as a result of our English pronoun system. First, personification cannot occur without indicating sex. Second, the use of personification automatically indicates personhood. Both are necessary conditions for passing along stereotypes (MacKay and Konishi, 150) For that reason MacKay and Konishi state, "As a consequence, we cannot tell if any given use of *he* or *she* for animals is meant to signal sex, personification, personal involvement, or some combination of these three" (150).

In addition to their studies on personification, MacKay and Konishi studied other linguistic features which they state contribute to expectations of the behavior of women and men just as pronoun use sets up expectations of the behavior of women and men. The adjectives used to describe the nouns also set up expectations. For example, there are many behaviors expected from a character referred to as *he* which are not expected from a character referred to as *she*. Likewise, adjectives used to refer to a gender non-specific noun, such as *singer*, can color the way we visualize a singer--*tall* vs *statuesque* would conjure up different gender images. These expectations or attitudes are a reflection of cultural attitudes toward the roles of females and males in society.

MacKay and Konishi's study is relevant because in addition to discussing the generic use of *he*, it discusses

the significance of adjectives and other linguistic clues used to describe nouns and the pronouns which are used in their place (whether non-neutral or neutral). In addition, their discussion goes into theories of lexical choice and their uses in reading materials. They also discuss the relevance of theories of lexical choice to the choices made for third person singular pronouns. This last point ties in with my earlier discussion of reading materials.

MacKay and Konishi discuss two different theories on the retrieval of lexical items. The first, they say, assumes no intervention from the attitudes or perceptions about lexical items tested. The second theory counters this assumption and is in fact the theory they expand upon.

MacKay and Konishi say the first theory, the *objectivist framework*, presumes that lexical choices are based on semantic features independent of the attitudes of the speaker (MacKay and Konishi, 4). Under the *objectivist framework*, meanings for words occur based on the "world created" by the situation discussed or written. Lexical retrieval occurs independent of the attitudes of the speaker or writer and is based on matching the semantic features of the words used to describe the situations. "The noun with the greatest number of semantic features matching the features of the word world [created by the writer] gets chosen for production" (MacKay and Konishi, 4). Under this framework, it is possible that

in putting together a "world of the Old West" I would choose nouns such as cowboy, ranch hand, *hombre*, maverick, or renegade depending upon the features of the other words that I use in my writing. They must match according to the value assigned by the *objectivist framework*. Yet according to the *objectivist framework*, my attitudes towards Western life would not be instrumental in my lexical choices.

However, under the *objectivist framework*, value is placed on word choices which, according to Dale Spender, Mary Ritchie Key, and a number of other feminist linguists, show biases against women. The objection is as follows. According to the *objectivist framework*, lexical choices are evaluated in three categories: human (+ or - human), number (+ or - singular), and gender (+ or - male). MacKay and Konishi mention these categories in one of their studies as a way of explaining how language is traditionally evaluated. It is the *plus* or *minus male* category which is demeaning to women.

As one can see, women would be minus male. The evaluation implies a lack of a specific quality which in fact women could never have. Thus, they and things labeled as *minus male* are less than those things which are labeled *plus male*. The evaluation is the same for pronouns because, according to MacKay and Konishi's evaluation of the *objectivist framework*, pronouns are a substitute for nouns

and are chosen in the same manner as nouns are chosen. They are chosen "by matching semantic features of the pronoun with the corresponding features of the antecedent noun" (MacKay and Konishi, 5).

This *plus* or *minus male* framework to indicate gender has contributed to the myths about women which were mentioned earlier in this work. MacKay and Konishi further explain that deviations in choice of pronouns from the human-, number-, and gender- value structure referred to by MacKay and Konishi as *feature matching principles* are frequently explained away by a *feature suppression process*. However, according to them, no strong case has been proposed to explain the reason for the use of the *feature suppression process* with some nouns. For example they point out that nouns which refer to human infants always produce + *human* and + *male* referents. They also note that "some sex-indefinite classes such as *nurse*, *secretary*, and *model* trigger one feature suppression process...while other sex-indefinite classes trigger another feature suppression process" (6). According to MacKay and Konishi, nouns referring to human infants result in the choice of the pronoun *he* while *nurse*, *secretary*, and *model* result in the choice of the pronoun *she*. They also noted that pronominal personification also discloses some inconsistencies in the use of pronouns. Choices seem to vary from one context to the next. The

example offered by MacKay and Konishi is the noun *ship*. People sometimes refer to a ship as *she* while at other times they refer to a ship as *it* (6).

Because the objectivist framework assumes context to be irrelevant to lexical choice, MacKay and Konishi state that different choices made in different contexts cannot explain the process of feature suppression. They cite a 1979 study by Mathiot where context changed pronoun choice. This study plus their own work in studying pronoun use in children's literature in 1980 (they studied over 35,000 uses of he, she, or it in children's literature for this aspect of their study) led to their *underlying attitude hypothesis*.

MacKay and Konishi state, "under this view, the so-called exceptions to the feature matching theory are manifestations of a more general rule, namely, that underlying attitudes toward the communicative situation and concept referred to influence all aspects of lexical choice" (6). For example, they theorize that using *it* for certain nouns indicates that the speaker or writer may have an underlying attitude toward the lack of *personhood* of those nouns or toward the lack of potential for rational behavior of those nouns. Their hypothesis provides an added dimension for studying lexical choices because lexical choice is not limited to matching plus or minus human, number, or gender.

> Nor are words chosen on the basis of a feature matching process involving inherent features either of the world or of the words. Rather, meaning is meaning *to a person* and is relative to his or her point of view, beliefs, and attitudes at a particular time and context of use. (MacKay and Konishi, 7)

The purpose of their study was to examine lexical choice. The use of pronouns for this purpose is defended by MacKay and Konishi when they elaborate on a 1980 study by Marlsen-Wilson and Tyler. They state that using pronouns for testing general theories of lexical retrieval is appropriate because "processes underlying pronoun interpretation and retrieval are simple and easy to study and do not differ in principle from processes underlying other types of lexical interpretation and retrieval" (MacKay and Konishi, P. 4).

MacKay and Konishi's expectations were were confirmed by their findings. They discovered that regardless of the features of the concepts or contexts represented by pronouns, pronoun choice would vary in accordance with beliefs and attitudes toward the concepts or contexts presented or referred to. Their findings confirmed that pronouns were not "pro-nouns." In English, pronouns are explicitly gender related referents. Furthermore, the choice of one pronoun over another varies along other dimensions depending on the

underlying attitudes or beliefs of the speaker or writer. In addition, pronouns are "dynamic." They depend on their contexts and "don't necessarily fall into domains such as noun, verb, or adjective. For example, a single context-dependent attitude can lead independently to use of the noun *thing* and pronoun *it* for referring to person, but the attitude is itself neither nominal nor pronominal" (MacKay and Konishi, 7).

By finding that lexical choices are not necessarily made on the plus or minus evaluation format, MacKay and Konishi have removed a long standing obstacle in the study of language. They show that there are other degrees of meaning between the positive and negative binary opposition displayed by + or - human, + or - gender, or + or - number which influence lexical choices. People make choices from a broad spectrum. This idea ties in well with the views of feminists who wish to point out that the binary opposition implied by plus or minus descriptions of language is a contributing factor to the bias against women.

In Study I of Pronouns, "Personifications, and the Theory of Lexical Retrieval" MacKay and Konishi found that pronoun choice did not depend solely upon the noun for which it was used. Among others, they used the following sentence fragments:

1a When a teenager grows up to be tough,

1b When a teenager grows up to be pretty,

2a If a student practices basketball instead of studying,

2b If a student practices ballet instead of studying.

They found that *he* was not always used to represent the nouns in the sentence fragments. This led to the conclusion that the underlying attitudes toward the nouns and other elements in the sentence fragments led to different pronoun choices (MacKay and Konishi, 8). It is clear from looking at the fragments in MacKay and Konishi's study that the adjectives contribute to attitudes or expectations of what gender the nouns to complete the fragments into sentences should be. Gender reflection also affects the response time of participants. MacKay and Konishi noted that some of the students took longer to respond to the sentence fragments which had stereotypic roles reflected in them.

> Male and female subjects showed similar patterns of completion except for the "student-ballet" fragment where males used 50% *hes* and 0% *shes*. Whereas females used 50% *shes* and 17% *hes*. A similar difference showed up in the response times for this fragment where males took twice as long as females (9.1 seconds vs. 4.6 seconds),... Postexperimental questioning suggested that some males may have

> consciously tried to avoid using *she* for this fragment so as not to appear sexist in the eyes of a female experimenter. Also favoring this hypothesis are the relatively long average response times for the female stereotype fragments completed with *he* (12.7 seconds) vs. pronouns other than *he* (7.7 seconds)....(MacKay and Konishi, 11)

The study shows that for many students the noun and the parts of the sentence fragment used to describe the noun yielded inferences from the students which in turn produced pronoun choices different from the generic *he* prescribed by grammatical rules. Had they followed the rules of grammar, *he* would have been the only choice for all versions of sentence fragments including the stereotypic versions (MacKay and Konishi, 11). Thus, the findings of this study are difficult to explain under the *objectivist framework* which as MacKay and Konishi point out views pronouns as substitutes for nouns. They, therefore, conclude that the variations of pronoun choice can be explained by the fact that pronoun choices reflect concepts, attitudes, or beliefs which underlie or are associated with the antecedent nouns (MacKay and Konishi, 11-12).

They propose that "pronouns are more than substitutes" for nouns. Citing a study by Hirst and Brill, they say "pronouns frequently refer to elements not explicitly part of

a sentence or discourse," and, as Study II shows, "pronouns frequently signal attitudes and beliefs belonging to a speaker [or writer] rather than features (explicit or implied) of a referent" (MacKay and Konishi, 12). These attitudes are a result of our culture; hence, grammar does not always dictate pronoun choice--cultural and personal attitudes do.

MacKay and Konishi's studies of pronouns in children's literature and in daily use underscore Martyna's findings that *he* is not consistently used to substitute for all nouns which are gender-unspecified. The contexts in which nouns are used and which adjectives are used to describe nouns influence our choice of pronouns. Furthermore, this inconsistent use in pronoun selection in children's literature contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypic perception of female and male roles in society. MacKay and Konishi's findings in both "Pronouns, Personification, and the Theory of Meaning and Lexical Retrieval" and "Personification and the Pronoun Problem" show that stereotypes are perpetuated through personification in children's literature. In addition, according to the studies listed in Chapter Two of this work, other educational materials contain sexist stereotypes. These help perpetuate sexism because they are used in the institutions where we reinforce our understanding of language use. Therefore, it

is of great importance to work toward eliminating sexism in the materials used by youngsters in their reading materials if the cycle of sexism in our culture is to be properly addressed and eliminated. As a result, it is important to find ways of writing which break stereotypes in both children's literature and in other areas of discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING WRITING

As we have seen from the scholarship by Moskowitz, McConnell-Ginet, Graham, Johnson, Schau and Scott, Miller and Swift, Martyna, and MacKay and Konishi, the images we have about ourselves and each other are learned from the time we enter the language acquisition phase of development. These images are further reinforced by the connotations of words and the generic language forms in reading materials we use for our education and for our entertainment. After a long exposure to sexist language and grammar, sexist patterns of responding and thinking become ingrained. Therefore, resistance to changing language use is strong. However, education provides an awakening to the possibilities of new roles for women and men and also to new ways of using language that reflect the changes in society which have, in fact, occurred during the past twenty years or more. Thus, teaching nonsexist language writing strategies can reinforce the changes which students will confront in their working, political, and social lives.

Teaching nonsexist writing strategies gives our students--many of whom have unrealistic ideas about the prescriptions and limits of language use--the correct idea that there are many ways to use or manipulate language.

Students will do this while they learn to compare and contrast, define, narrate, describe, argue, etc. Thus, their education is enhanced. In this chapter I will discuss materials and strategies teachers can use in teaching nonsexist language in writing classes.

First, I will deal with strategies for correcting language containing generic *he*; I will also discuss two texts available to teachers which contain sections on nonsexist language. Second, since these books also stress the connotative meaning of words, I will discuss connotations. Third, as teachers' roles in the classroom are important in teaching nonsexist language, some guidelines in this area will also be discussed. Fourth, introduction of women writers in writing classes and new approaches to analyzing the works of traditional literary figures in English Literature classes will also be addressed in this chapter. This four part review of strategies for developing nonsexism in the classroom should be of use to teachers interested in the subject.

A logical way to begin sensitizing students is to focus upon generic language form, which has been a great contributor to sexism in language. In other words, because *he* is not used generically all of the time, the problem arises of how teachers are to address the rule which requires

use of the generic *he*. In her article, "Solving The Great Pronoun Debate: 14 Ways To Avoid The Sexist Singular," Shear indicates that in avoiding sexist language one should also avoid the visual clutter of dashes or slashes: she/he or his/her. Shear says they are a "hiccup" when read aloud. She also indicates that the use of parentheses treats nonsexist language as a patronizing second thought. Thus, she also recommends that one not do the following: he (or she); his--or her; he, or she. "Parentheses, dashes, and commas treat women as a coy afterthought" (108). During the course of an class presentation for an English 100 class at California State University, San Bernardino, for example, I informed the class that using *she* as a generic pronoun was as sex biased as the exclusive use of *he* because,as writers, we should keep all potential readers in mind. I gave the class specific suggestions from the Shear article. Among them are the following fourteen rules:

1. Add the female: *she* or *he*, *hers* or *his*, *he* or *she*, *his* or *hers*.
2. Use the first person: *I, me, my, mine, we, our, ours*.
3. Use the second person: *you, your, yours*.
4. Move the noun.
5. Repeat the noun

6. Use a new noun instead of a pronoun as a synonym for an old noun.
7. Use the plural.
8. Delete the pronoun.
9. Use a new pronoun: *it, its, this, that*.
10. Use an article or a conjunction.
11. Use *who* with or without a noun: *who, anyone who, someone who, whoever, no one who, one who, any (noun) who, the (noun) who*--emphasize a single individual.
12. REWRITE.
13. Use the passive--be cautious; the incompetent use it verbosely; the cunning use it evasively.
14. Use *they, their, them*--the simplest, most sensible method of all (108).

The students were enthusiastic about trying to rewrite the sentences I had given them. Frequently, they used more than one solution for some problems. Also, many discovered that not all of the suggested rules could apply to each of the problem sentences. Hence, they saw firsthand how language can be rearranged to present the same ideas in nonsexist terms.

In addition to dealing with the generic *he*, teachers of writing must address other aspects of sexist language. The

connotative meanings of words also reveal linguistic bias. Therefore, teaching students the significance of the effects of lexical choices on readers is another important function of writing instruction. I have found that a good place to introduce nonsexist language is during a lecture on the importance of diction in writing. The inappropriateness or offensiveness of some words becomes clear to students when these are brought out in discussions of lexical choice.

Since many writing instructors use English handbooks in their writing classrooms, I would like to discuss a few of them. Handbooks have already been written which assist writers interested in avoiding sexism in language. For example, Miller and Casey's *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* and Francine Frank and Frank Anshen's *Language and the Sexes* are very useful for those who wish to avoid sexism in their own writings or speeches. In addition, some college handbooks have a small section which addresses the problem of sexism in language.

However, not all handbooks handle the subject of diction in the same manner. For example, the Fourth Edition of *The Little Brown Handbook* discusses connotation in traditional ways, maintaining that the connotations of words come from people's personal associations. That is, the meaning is carried by the personal response or associations with the

words used (Fowler and Aaron, 466). They make a short statement that revising for sexism should be done on the grounds of how offensive sexist language might be to the writers' audiences. This discussion of nonsexist language seems almost an afterthought to the general discussion of diction.

On the other hand, Heffernan and Lincoln in their First Edition of *Writing: A College Handbook* have integrated their discussion of sexist language into the section on connotation. For example, Heffernan and Lincoln illustrated the connotative meaning of words and sexist meaning of words at the same time:

> Compare the adjectives in each of the following sentences:
>
> He is ambitious; she is pushy.
> He is tough-minded; she is ruthless.
> He is farsighted; she is calculating.
> He is firm; she is stubborn.
> He is self-respecting; she is egotistical.
> He is persistent; she is nagging.
>
> Each pair of adjectives in these sentences is joined by denotation but split by connotation. The words describing *him* are generous, making him seem ideally suited for high responsibility in business or government. The words describing *her* are loaded

> with negative connotations, making her seem all but disqualified for any responsibility at all (138).

The authors point out that the adjectives used to describe men are more generous to men than the adjectives used to describe women are to women. In addition, they include a discussion of the connotations of other words. Thus, they elevate the discussion of sexist words to a status equal with the discussion of connotations in general. The authors of the handbook go on to discuss the fact that such words further the biases of a writer who uses that kind of language. If people want to have a broader range of appeal, they must choose words which are not slanted against those who might comprise their audience.

Writing instructors can contribute to their students' awareness of language by choosing texts for their classes which have strong discussions on the importance of the connotations of words and which include sexist versus nonsexist language in the discussions on connotative meaning. Otherwise, instructors will find themselves supplementing text discussions with additional materials. Therefore, teachers should give careful attention to texts used in their writing classes.

In addition to using exercises in handbooks about connotations as previously discussed, other examples of what

Muriel Schultz calls the "semantic derogation of women" (64) can be used to generate suggestions from the class which in turn lead to discussions of the implications of changing connotations in our culture. In "Valuing Language: Feminist Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom" in *Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender and Equity*, Pattie Cowell states, "Distinctions between 'master' and 'mistress' are not, after all, so different in kind from the distinctions between 'illegal aliens' and 'undocumented workers,' or between 'technical discomfort' and 'nuclear accident'" (148). Cowell states that the value of discussing diction goes beyond definitions. She asserts that "writers discover that 'mere matters of words' have an enormous impact on the minds of those who use them and those who hear [read] them" (148). Students thus learn that words "can create and recreate boundaries of perception" (149).

Sexism is not limited to generic *he* and connotations; it can permeate people's actions and assumptions as well. Therefore, teachers interested in teaching nonsexist language can do so by incorporating nonsexist strategies into their writing and literature classes. During the course of researching the effects of sexism in language, I found a great deal of material on sexist and nonsexist language; however, I found only scattered information giving techniques

for including nonsexist approaches in the classroom. Teachers who have written about their experiences in teaching nonsexist language in their writing classes say they begin with their own attitudes toward their students; that is, they find it is important for them to use nonsexist language in the classroom. Many of these teachers have also demonstrated sensitivity toward women's needs in the world of academia. Among the strategies for teaching writing, some instructors, whose suggestions I will be discussing below, have discovered that they could combine cooperative learning strategies with nonsexist approaches in order to engage students more effectively in learning the writing process. Teachers have found that by approaching the teaching of writing as a cooperative process, they can help students overcome the fears or writer's blocks which inhibit many of them.

Not only beginning writers but also students who have too long hidden behind the idea that they must write what the professor wants to see or hear can use a nonsexist writing approach to develop an appreciation for the importance of their own voice as writers. Even less fearful and more experienced writers can benefit from a nonsexist approach and will develop new perspectives on the importance of language in their daily lives. In "Transforming the Composition Classroom," in *Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender and Equity*, Elizabeth Daumer and Sandra Runzo suggest that

composition teachers emulate the role presented by mothers as first language teachers. By this they mean that instructors should work toward a nonthreatening cooperative role. They should present women's writings and roles in society as topics on which all the students could write. Even the most chauvinistic man has a mother. Some may have sisters or wives. The rationale for using common experiences is that common experiences make it easier for non-English majors to find something to write about. This is especially true in basic or remedial writing courses. In "Gender, Role, and Class" Diana J. Fuss states, "Happily, all students find themselves experts in fields of gender, race, and class" (109). Thus, it is clearly important to discuss or teach the importance of daily language use in environments that will help the students increase their writing skills.

Included in an equitable approach to teaching writing is the establishment of guidelines which include nonsexist language use. The following are a few suggestions of guidelines for setting up an equitable environment conducive to learning writing. These guidelines include types of assignments which would encourage lively learning about language and methods which can be used in avoiding sexist language in compositions.

As noted previously, it makes sense that the first step in teaching nonsexist language is for teachers to avoid

sexism in their own language. Alice F. Freed in "Hearing is Believing: The Effect of Sexist Language on Language Skills" makes ten recommendations for teachers. In addition to more common suggestions for the use of nonsexist language, Freed says that teachers can model nonsexist language use by alternating between *he* and *she* when referring to a gender unspecified noun. Or they can use *he or she* when addressing classes with both men and women.

Likewise, when referring to people in different occupations or professions, teachers should not assume the gender of any gender-unspecified nouns referred to during classroom discussions. For example, not all doctors are males, nor are all teachers females. Naturally, these guidelines extend to discussions about the human race. *Man* or *mankind*, in furtherance of equity in the classroom, should not be used to refer to the human race. Phrases such as *man and wife* and *forefathers* should be avoided as they, too, semantically exclude women. Freed also points out that teachers should model parallel construction in their speech. She says that *men* and *girls,* or *men* and *ladies.* are not truly parallel and should be avoided. For example, *men* and *women* would be appropriate instead of *men* and *girls*. In order to accentuate their meaning, teachers can use nonconventional examples in their presentations to the class. "For example,

speak of a boss who asks her secretary if he can work overtime" (Freed, 87).

Furthermore, teachers should not indulge in jokes at the expense of any part of the group being addressed or any other group. In addition, Freed suggests that teachers not assume that areas of interest can be discussed only by members of one specific sex. For example, if the discussion is about carpentry or other areas normally associated with males, teachers should not direct the questions only to the males in the class. The same is true of other areas which are culturally associated with women. Teachers who give reading assignments should ask students to analyze or evaluate the language content of the assigned reading materials for sexist biases (Freed, 86-87).

This last suggestion ties in with earlier suggestions for writing classes in which nonsexist language use is encouraged. Students can be asked to keep journal entries about the language they hear or read. For example, one assignment can be for students to discuss in their journals the language they hear which unsettles them, makes them angry, or embarrasses them. Give assignments which make students consider gender, race, or class differences. Instructors who wish to use journals as a bridge to essay assignments may also find that journals are a means of allowing students to talk to them without any of the

hierarchal impediments which are frequently found in teacher/student relationships and which sometimes impede learning (Perry, 151-152). Instructors who realize that many if not most of their students are not English majors and thus have not acquired skills in analyzing literature frequently find that journal assignments can be made from topics from across the curriculum. Susan Radner developed a writing course syllabus from a women's studies course she had previously taught. The premise behind her approach was to let students apply things from their lives to their writing.

Other ways to connect assignments with life experiences could require students to interview one another and create stories based on the information shared among themselves. Daumer and Runzo, in "Transforming the Classroom," suggest that a student could write about members "of a race or social group different from her own" (55). The idea would be to arouse discussions about students' ideas about members of other groups. Another suggestion is that students write about their own language. Students would be asked to listen to language used around them and think about how that language makes them feel. Has the language made them feel diminished, important, angry, etc.? Daumer and Runzo suggest that "students could write about a time when someone changed or distorted their language. Such an assignment can also help students to weigh and distinguish between the need for

women to speak for each other and the necessity that a woman speak for herself" (55).

Teachers who like to use examples of the differences between written and oral language can ask students to write about themselves, share the information with another student, and then have the other student relate the story orally. "The originator of the story could also describe how and whether her relationship to her words changed once another student conveyed them" (Daumer and Runzo, 56). The above mentioned strategy has been employed in writing classes as an exercise in language awareness. Because women are an oppressed group, Daumer and Runzo also suggest that nontraditional materials be used as sources for discussions on language so that students could later write about the ideas generated from the nontraditional materials. For example, they could look at the language of songs, black slaves' journals, letters, etc. (Daumer and Runzo, 56). These nontraditional reading sources can give new perspective on the lives of people who have hitherto been ignored or overlooked. Nontraditional reading materials used in writing classes can help destroy stereotypic ideas about women from the past. This point can in and of itself be a source of discussion in the writings of students.

In order to bring different approaches to language use into the classrooms, teachers can also bring in samples of

autobiographical writings. Autobiographies and autobiographical novels are a source of both modeling and discussion for writing students. Daumer and Runzo propose using the autobiographies and novels of women writers, especially those which model the importance of "naming oneself and resisting other people's definitions" (58). In discussing *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for example, Daumer and Runzo suggest teachers could have students explore their identification with women's community, female friendships, the influence of story telling for passing on women's knowledge, and the power of definitions (Daumer and Runzo, 57-58). Readings based on women's writings require new openness in discussing women authors' language use, perspectives, etc., but the newness of the material could very well give new vitality to the ideas students convey in their papers.

Writing classes are a good place to defuse sexist stereotypes because of the many activities, some of which are suggested above, which can occur in them. For example, in order to initiate students to the idea that jobs traditionally associated with women are of value, some instructors have students write about chores frequently associated with women. Some of the topics are *How to Wash Dishes, How to Prepare Laundry, How to Clean a Bathroom*, etc. In addition, some instructors use household chores as

examples when teaching students the value of applying organization skills they already have to outlining writing assignments. When preparing students to learn outlining, Radner has the students describe their processes for making up their grocery lists. She uses this because it is easy to show the students that they have an organizing principle behind their approach to making grocery shopping lists (Radner 162). Thus, value associated with women's chores can be enhanced by using the chores as examples of organization in writing classes. For instance, many people do not buy what they need each time they run out of an item at home. Frequently, they group items in categories. All bakery, dairy, meat, vegetables and fruits etc are listed in their separate categories. Sometimes, shoppers organize their lists according to the layout of the stores where they shop. For example, they know what is on the north, south, east, and west sides of the stores and make their lists according to the items found in each area. Thus, they can then carry over their ability to organize for one activity to another activity, writing.

Susan Radner divides her writing course along traditional modes of discourse such as Description, Narration, Definition, Description and Exposition, Comparison and Contrast, Argumentation, Definition and Exposition, and Research. However, the topics she assigns have a focus on

family and community. Therefore, students not only learn to write in the varying modes of discourse, but they are encouraged to discuss topics based on knowledge they all possess or about which they have opinions. The following is a sample syllabus from Radner's article:

1. For description: "Describe your community [street, neighborhood, town] and say why you live there or why you want to move."
2. For narration: "Tell what happens in a day in the life of a typical suburban or urban wife, husband, son, daughter."
3. For definition: "Define yourself as a member of your family and show how you share values."
4. For description and exposition: "Interview a member of your family and try to capture a sense of what the person is like."
5. For comparison and contrast: "Compare and contrast two members of your family."
6. For argumentation: "Argue about a contemporary, controversial issue affecting the family, e.g., the Equal Rights Amendment, the Human Life Amendment, the draft, with a member of your family."

7. For definition and exposition: "Analyze and explain images of people in family roles as they are pictured in advertising."
8. For a research paper: "Do research about the history of your family or community and show how you are either carrying on a tradition or breaking away from one." In addition to learning different research techniques, students see the value of doing research as they try to uncover details about their own pasts. This paper also leads them to appreciate history, an insight new to most of them. (163-164)

Since Radner encourages use of topics which are based on family and community, students not only have a basis from which to write but they also have an opportunity to explore those topics in light of changes in society. Thus, the possibility for students to enhance their knowledge is increased.

Teachers of writing like to use reading materials so that their students can have something other than personal experiences to write about. When students have reading materials in their writing classes they not only have examples they can imitate, they have materials which generate

responses and other ideas for discussion. Therefore, reading materials are an important feature of writing classes. Literature courses also provide an excellent opportunity to consider nonsexist language and attitudes. Many who want to promote the use of nonsexist language find that without diminishing the works of past literary figures, interesting and innovative study of their works can lead to an understanding of sexist attitudes of the past. Thus, teachers of literature can also contribute to their students' nonsexist education.

In the March, 1981 edition of *College English* Carol Carpenter's article, "Exercises to Combat Sexist Reading and Writing," underscores the importance of studying literature from a new point of view. This ties in with writing instruction as well, since many writing instructors use professional writings in their classes as models for writing. An analysis of the portrayal of women as reflected in the language used to describe female characters or in the language used by female characters could help students see the importance of language in creating images or perceptions in the minds of audiences. In a discussion and analysis of Hemingway, Carpenter proposes a plan for studying literature which would enable students to gain new perspectives on familiar literary texts. Her suggestions include word lists which help develop an "awareness of sexist language used in

literature and in students' own writings" (293). In developing the word lists, students in Carpenter's classes select passages where two characters, one female and one male, interact with one another. Then the students analyze the verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs "repeatedly used to describe, or spoken by, each character" (294). This activity helps students "deduce the author's attitude toward the characters and, by implication, toward men and women" (294). The following is my reproduction of the word analysis chart Carpenter created in her article:

WORD LIST USED IN CAROL CARPENTER'S CLASSES

FREDERIC HENRY

VERBS	NOUNS/PRONOUNS	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS
MASTER	GUNMAN	MASCULINE	SHARPLY
TOOK	GAME	NICE	WELL
STOPPED	PLACE		
KISSED	STAKES		
LIED	MASK		
HELD	PISTOL		
PRETEND	SHAME		
PLAY			
GO			

CATHERINE
BARKLEY

VERBS	NOUNS/PRONOUNS	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS
WOULD(NOT)	DARLING	(NOT)TALL	AWFULLY
COME	EYES	CRAZY	VERY
WALKING	NIGHT	TIRED	SUDDENLY
LOOKED	FACE		
LOVE	YOU		
WERE SHUT	NIGHT		
	GARDEN		

In discussing the interaction between Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*, Carpenter states:

> If this type of word analysis is done with other Hemingway stories, students soon notice similar male characters with their need to be strong, brave, sometimes drunk, and sexual. Hemingway's heroines are "lovely," romantic, in need of love and protection, faithful, and virtuous. Alas, students recognize the male and female stereotypes of the "ideal" which are perpetuated in Hemingway's stories. To lead into a discussion of the effects of sexism on the characters, try questions such as: Are Hemingway's characters made vulnerable because of their adherence to the male-female code of behavior? Does Henry question the dicta of masculinity or try to escape the conventional acting out of the male ego? Does the culture and environment of the First World War affect male or

> female characters differently; are particular "war" sex roles and expectations created? (295)

Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald are two writers whose works Carpenter finds suitable for this kind of analysis. Using the same model that she developed for analyzing the words of passages from Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Carpenter has students study their own word choices. This makes them aware of sexism in their own language use.

Carpenter also has an approach for studying the effects of sexism in fairy tales. Since so many of us have been exposed to them during our youth, we have all accepted without question, until we were forced to think about them, the ideals projected in our favorite stories. Carpenter states:

> After analyzing a fairy tale's plot, characters, symbolism, theme, and word choice, students will immediately recognize the symbolic fair-haired heroes in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the Cinderella rags-to-riches marriage plot (with a slight twist) in Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, or the allusions in Diane Wakoski's "Midas" and Anne Sexton's "Cinderella." In spite of the realism which has dominated literature of the past fifty years, students adhere to fairy tales' "happy-ever-after" themes, thereby

showing the tremendous impact of childhood reading experiences and of the fantasies of fairy tales themselves (297).

By learning to keep their audiences in mind when they write, students with an awareness of effective language use (beginning with lexical choices and continuing with pronominal choices) will produce better writing. In the study of literature, a new look at the implications of sexism in language can yield greater understanding of authors' perceptions (based on their world) or of gender roles and characters' functions in the stories written by those authors. Studying the works of authors both from the past and from the present can help students see a historical change in the lives of the women in past literary works when compared with the lives of women in present literary works.

A feminist approach to teaching writing and literature brings a new perspective to students, increasing their awareness of the effects of language not only in the classroom but also in their daily lives. Thus, encouraging nonsexist language becomes an essential contribution to a relevant and valid education.

APPENDIX I

A SAMPLE OF A NONSEXIST LESSON PLAN

On October 20, 1986, I had my first opportunity to present a lesson which I had developed for an English 100 [subsequently renumbered English 95] class at California State University, San Bernardino. This class is developed specifically for students who need to improve their writing skills before entering Freshman Composition classes. As a Graduate Assistant, I had the opportunity to use ideas obtained from research for my Master's Thesis. It was my intention to address some of the problems prevalent among basic writers while introducing them to the concept of nonsexist language use. When I read the studies on language and its use, I began to think of ways that one could develop lessons for writing students. I did this prior to my reading the excellent suggestions by Carol Carpenter; therefore I began my project without benefit of her insights.

I wanted to let the students understand the importance of language in their lives. To show them the interaction between cultural attitudes and language, I asked them to complete four fragments from the MacKay and Konishi study:

1a. When a teenager grows up to be tough,

1b. When a teenager grows up to be pretty,

2a. If a student practices basketball instead of studying,

2b. If a student practices ballet instead of studying,

How these fragments would be completed graphically illustrates the influence of cultural expectations. As the class members completed the fragments, several of the students stated that they knew what was happening. When all had completed the fragments, I asked four volunteers to write their answers on the blackboard. Then, we went over the clues in the fragments which indicated which of the pronouns the students must use. At this point, I indicated that despite the rule to use *he* when referring to a sex-neutral noun, most of them had probably chosen *she* for two of the fragment completions and *he* for the other two fragments.

The next part of the lesson to follow up on the interaction between culture and language did not work as well because the students did not participate as well as previously; however, I have found additional materials, word lists, theme topics, poetry, women's writings, etc. which worked well in follow up lessons. On October 20th, however, I asked the class to discuss the kind of person who came to mind when they saw the following words: *janitor, teacher, professor, nurse, doctor, poet, writer* or *author, manager, fox, chick, wolf, bunny,* and *kitten*. I asked them to

indicate what adjectives they would use to describe the animals listed and to indicate if these created an image which could apply to people. I was hoping to get a response which showed the stereotyping that occurs in much of the materials written for children which I had presumed they had read. I also wanted them to see how assumptions of the types of jobs held by men and women also led to a male image and thus a male pronoun choice for some sex-neutral nouns and a female image for other sex-neutral nouns. If I were to repeat this lesson, I would also include material similar to that in *Writing: A College Handbook, Second Edition*. The section on word choice fits in with what I want to cover. For example, the discussion of adjectives lends itself to what I have already done:

> Compare the adjectives in each of the following sentences:
>
> He is ambitious; she is pushy.
> He is tough-minded; she is ruthless.
> He is farsighted; she is calculating.
> He is firm; she is stubborn.
> He is self-respecting; she is egotistical.
> He is persistent; she is nagging.
>
> Each pair of adjectives in these sentences is joined by denotation but split by connotation. The words describing *him* are generous, making him seem

> ideally suited for high responsibility in business or government. The words describing *her* are loaded with negative connotations, making her seem all but disqualified for any responsibility at all (179).

Because such words are loaded, they further the biases of writers who use such language. Writers who want to have a broader range of appeal must choose words which do not alienate people who might comprise their audience. Thus, on October 20th, I discussed the need for writing that does not exclude segments of one's audience. The discussion showed how, despite a grammatical rule calling for the generic use of *he* for all sex neutral nouns, such use of generic *he* has been found to be not only not consistent but also exclusionary and unfair. Therefore, good writers should look for ways of avoiding language which is either unfair to or exclusionary of parts of their audience. For this part of my lesson plan, I relied heavily on the piece by Marie Shear published in *MS Magazine* October, 1985. Although several handbooks have been written to help writers overcome the problem of sexist language, Shear's work on the subject is especially helpful for classroom use. She separates the rules or suggestions for nonsexist language from the history or implications of sexism in language use. Thus, she makes it possible to use her material more easily in a classroom

setting. Following are Shear's fourteen rules, already mentioned in Chapter Four, for avoiding sexist language:

1. Add the female: she or he, hers or his, he or she, his or hers.
2. Use the first person: I, me, my, mine, we, our, ours.
3. Use the second person: you, your, yours.
4. Move the noun.
5. Repeat the noun
6. Use a new noun instead of a pronoun as a synonym for an old noun.
7. Use the plural.
8. Delete the pronoun.
9. Use a new pronoun: it, its, this, that.
10. Use an article or a conjunction.
11. Use *who* with or without a noun: who, anyone who, someone who, whoever, no one who, one who, any (noun) who, the (noun) who. This is a way to emphasize a single individual.
12. REWRITE.
13. Use the passive--be cautious; the incompetent use it verbosely; the cunning use it evasively.
14. Use they, their, them, -- the simplest, most sensible method of all. (108)

I also pointed out that instructors would probably discourage the use of *you* in compositions, the use of the passive voice, and the use of singular *they*. However, in many other areas, students would be seeing these rules implemented fairly often. Since rules are not very helpful without examples, I introduced the problem sentences used by Shear:

PROBLEM A:

The tenant must not keep gasoline or other explosives in his apartment.

SOLUTIONS: [Problem A]

I must not keep ... in *my* apartment. (2)

You must not keep ... in *your* apartment. (3)

Tenants must not keep ... in *their* apartments. (7)

The tenant must not keep ... in *the* apartment. (10)

Gasoline ... *must not be kept in the tenant's apartment.* (12)

PROBLEM B:

Any damage to the plumbing resulting from misuse by the tenant, *his* employees, *his* guests, or members of *his* family may be repaired by the owner at the tenant's expense.

SOLUTIONS: [Problem B]

...by the tenant or *her or his* employees, guests, or family members.... (1)

...by *me, or my* employees, guests, or family members...at *my* expense. (2)

...by *tenants*, or *their* employees, guests, or family members...at the tenants' expense. (7)

...by the tenant or *anyone whom* the tenant allows into the apartment...at the tenant's expense. (11,12)

PROBLEM C:

The crime victim receives no information from the police to whom *he* reported the crime, has no outlet for *his* anger, and receives no compensation for *his* injuries.

SOLUTION: [Problem C]

Crime *victims* receive no information from the police to whom *they* reported...have no outlet for *their* anger...*their* injuries. (7)

PROBLEM D:

If the buyer asks that the closing be postponed, *he* must pay any expenses caused by the delay.

SOLUTIONS: [Problem D]

...postponed, *she or he* must.... (1)

If *you* ask...*you* must.... (3)

buyer *who* asks...must.... (8, 11)

Any buyer *who* asks...must.... (8, 11)

PROBLEM E:

If the highest bidder defaults, *he* will lose *his* deposit. In that case, however, *he* will not be liable for any amount in excess of *his* deposit.

SOLUTIONS: [Problem E]

...defaults, *she or he* will lose *his or her* deposit but will not be liable for any amount in excess of *the* deposit. (1, 8, 10)

...defaults, *the bidder* will lose *the* deposit but will not be liable for any amount in excess of *this* deposit. (12)

...defaults *she or he* will lose *that* deposit but will not be liable for *any additional* amount. (12)

PROBLEM F:

The tenant must not damage *his* apartment *himself* or let anyone else do so. The owner or *his* employees may enter the apartment to make emergency repairs to protect *his* property. *He* does not have to notify me that *he* is coming.

SOLUTION: [Problem F]

...*this* apartment or let anyone else do so. The owner or the *owner's* employees may...to protect *this* property *without notice*. (12)

PROBLEM G:

An owner is unlikely to discover that *his* tenant is

bankrupt. Furthermore, even a bankrupt tenant needs a roof over *his* head.

SOLUTIONS: [Problem G]

...*a* tenant is bankrupt...*tenants* need a roof over *their* heads. (7,10)

...*a* tenant is bankrupt...needs a roof *overhead.* (8,10)

...*a* tenant is bankrupt...needs *shelter.* (10, 12)

PROBLEM H:

"Hold the cat in your lap and let the leashed dog sniff *his* future friend. The cat will probably arch *her* back and hiss, ready to defend *herself.*

SOLUTION: [Problem H]

...sniff *its* future friend. The cat will...arch *its* back...to defend *itself.* (9)

PROBLEM I:

The attorney-client privilege does not apply when the client seeks *his* attorney's aid in committing a future crime. The attorney argued that *his* client should receive a light sentence because *he* was ignorant of the law.

SOLUTION: [Problem I]

...seeks *an* attorney's aid.... The attorney argued that *the defendant, who was ignorant of the law,* should receive a light sentence. (6, 10, 11)

PROBLEM J:

I agree to pay my rent to the owner without *his* having to ask for it. The owner may sell the building. If *he* does, I will pay my rent to the new owner.

SOLUTION:

I agree to pay my rent without *the owner's* having to ask for it. If *she or he sells the building*, I will pay my rent to the new owner. (1, 4, 12)

PROBLEM K:

The bank will send a letter to the new client, welcoming *him* or to the existing client, congratulating *him* on making good use of the bank's services.

SOLUTION: [Problem K]

...letter *welcoming* the new client, *congratulating the existing* client on....(12)

PROBLEM L:

Don't let *him* begin work on your house before *he* provides you with insurance.

SOLUTION: [Problem L]

Don't *let work* on your house *begin* before *the contractor* provides you with insurance. (6, 8)

Don't let *the contractor* begin work on your house before providing you with insurance. (6, 8)

PROBLEM M:

The consumer is deeply antagonized when stores fail to answer *his* complaint letters. Every consumer deserves the most courteous treatment we can give *him*.

SOLUTION:

...answer complaint letters. Every consumer deserves *our* most courteous treatment. (8, 12)

PROBLEM N:

If the doctor keeps you waiting half the afternoon, send *him* a bill for your wasted time. Don´t pay *his* bill until *he* pays yours.

SOLUTION: [Problem N]

If *doctors* keep you waiting half the afternoon, send *them* a bill for your wasted time. Don´t pay *their* bill until *yours has been paid.* (13, 14) (Shear, 108-109)

I followed the activities suggested by Shear with the sentences with a discussion of Donna Smith-Yackel´s essay "My Mother Never Worked." My purpose was to show how connotations in contexts which do not appear to be sexist have influenced our attitudes toward the value of work done by women. This was not the first time that I had used this particular essay. It is a good essay to work into a lesson on connotative meanings because it clearly points out that

the word "work" has a different connotation for different people. The connotation for the Social Security System is that women's work has a different value in a social setting from the value Social Security gives people who earn money through the work they perform. This essay clearly shows how work performed by women, though valuable to family members, is not valued by the power structure of society.

Although Mrs. Smith worked very hard and contributed to the family's well-being and finances, her work was not covered by the Social Security System. Even though Mrs. Smith farmed alongside her husband and also worked at taking care of her house and children, her work was not valued in the same manner as her husband's work was valued by Social Security Administration. This essay graphically illustrates the importance of connotation in conveying meaning.

I believe all of the activities for the class worked to make the point of the importance of language's contribution to our attitudes. However, the most important elements in the class were the discussion and the work on the problem sentences because these activities gave the students an opportunity to have hands-on experience on avoiding sexism.

APPENDIX II

TEACHERS' ROLE IN CREATING A NONSEXIST SETTING

In addition to teaching the elements of nonsexist writing, teachers contribute to nonsexist attitudes by the environments they create in their classrooms. Some of the ideas presented by teachers to help achieve nonsexism in the classrooms have been mentioned in Chapter Four of this work. Here I give a more complete account of the ideas provided by Freed. It should be useful to teachers who want specific ideas for providing a nonsexist environment for their students. Among the ideas presented by teachers to help achieve nonsexism in the classrooms are:

1. When speaking to a class [or group] of men and women [or girls and boys], deliberately alternate between *he* and *she* for indefinite pronominal reference. Another alternative is to say *he* or *she* as in the sentence "When a linguist is analyzing data, he or she should consider all available interpretations of the material."
2. When speaking of a hypothetical student, subject, informant, patient, client, writer, researcher or other randomly chosen human, do not assume the sex of the individual.

3. Avoid the generic use of *man*, instead use *humans*.
4. Avoid stereotyped and fixed phrases which express bias such as man and wife, fathers and sons, forefathers,etc. [Also, avoid *mankind*, *man* in generic sense.]
5. When speaking, do not assume the sex of the individuals based on their occupation. That is, do not assume when speaking that all doctors are men, that all nurses are women, that all bosses are men, that all secretaries are women or that all parents are mothers. They are not.
6. Use parallel constructions and word choices when referring to women and men. Avoid phrases such as men and girls, men and ladies or Dr. Kissinger and Nancy, etc.
7. Purposely choose non-conventional, non-traditional examples of your own when speaking, in order to break expected stereotypes. For example, speak of a boss who asks her secretary if he can work overtime.
8. Avoid making jokes which are at the expense of any portion of your audience -- however innocent you may think the comments are. One

way of doing this is by eliminating so called "wife jokes," etc. and by eliminating evaluative adjectives such as in "typical blonde."

9. Do not assume that only the men or boys or only the women or girls in a group are capable of answering particular types of questions. That is, do not assume that the sex of the members of the group determines their behavior, their knowledge, or their interests.

10. When discussing the contents of articles, files, stories, novels and various kinds of studies, look for any possible sex-related bias in the material and bring these to the attention of the group or try to elicit comments about these biases. For the language or literature teacher, this last area is a particularly rich one as many language and linguistic texts, to say nothing of the stories and novels that surround us, abound in sexist and unfair language examples. (Freed, 86-87)

ASSIGNMENTS DESIGNED FOR GETTING
PERSONAL RESPONSES FROM STUDENTS

Teachers have traditionally used readers in order to generate students' thinking. Some teachers recommend using nontraditional reading materials such as women's diaries and oral poems.

> The oral poem raises questions concerning the extent to which our ability to speak is bound to our control over our bodies and the correlation between sexuality and power. Writing assignments which would allow students to explore these issues are:
>
> 1. Write about a time when language helped you to cope with an emotionally difficult situation.
> 2. Consider the influence of institutionalized heterosexuality in our society. In what ways do you accept and reject societal pressures to date, to be part of a couple, to marry? And how does your own life--your family circumstances, sexual preference, experiences of violence, for example, affect the way you think about sexuality?

3. How do you see yourself? Write about your relationship to your body and any sense of power and vulnerability that results from your feelings about your body. This assignment could lead students to analyze the language they use to write about their bodies and to consider possible links between linguistic appearance and physical appearance. (Daumer and Runzo, 57)

TOPICS BASED ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AFTER READING:

Their Eyes Were Watching God

In order to encourage students to connect their personal experiences with reading materials many teachers have asked students to write personal experience papers. For example, after reading Their Eyes Were Watching God, students can be asked to write about:

1. Their own identification with a woman´s community.
2. The significance, or lack of significance, of female friendships in their lives.
3. Story telling as a means for passing on women´s knowledge.
4. The power of definition and how definitions reveal one´s self-interest and particular perspective. Definition papers on topics such as woman, work, talk, mother, family, sexuality, home, pleasure, dreams, etc., can demonstrate to students not only how ideas and values are individually defined, but also how social factors alter one´s definitions.

   (Daumer and Runzo, 58)

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