

I believe the deeply rooted semantic confusion between "man" as a male and "man" as a species has been fed back into and vitiated a great deal of the speculation that goes on about the origins, development, and nature of the human race. . . . It's just as hard for man to break the habit of thinking of himself as central to the species as it was to break the habit of thinking of himself as central to the universe. He sees himself quite unconsciously as the main line of evolution, with a female satellite revolving around him as the moon revolves around the earth.

—Elaine Morgan, *The Descent of Woman*

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Man as a False Generic

"Development of the Uterus in Rats, Guinea Pigs, and Men"

—Research report

Generic terms, like *rats* and *guinea pigs*, are equally applicable to a class or group and to its individual members. Terms used of a class or group that are not applicable to all its members are false generics. The reason the research-report title quoted above sounds incongruous is that the word *men* in that context does not apply to all members of the group it purports to designate. This was not always so, since *man* was once a true generic.

from Miller, C. & Swift, K. (1988)

The Handbook of Nonsexist
Writing (2nd ed) ~~pp 11-42~~

New York, Harper Perennial
pp 11-42

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ercongota, the daughter of a seventh-century English king, is described in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as "a wonderful man." In Old English the word *man* meant "person" or "human being," and when used of an individual was equally applicable to either sex. It was parallel to the Latin *homo*, "a member of the human species," not *vir*, "an adult male of the species." English at the time of Ercongota had separate words to distinguish the sexes: *wer* (equivalent to the Latin *vir*) meant "adult male," and *wif* meant "adult female." The combined forms *waepman* and *wifman* meant, respectively, "adult male person" and "adult female person."

In the course of time *wifman* evolved into the modern word *woman*, and *wif* narrowed in meaning to become *wife* as we use that word today. *Man* eventually ceased to be used of individual women and replaced *wer* and *waepman* as a specific term distinguishing an adult male from an adult female. But *man* continued to be used in generalizations about both sexes. As long as most generalizations about people were made by men about men, the ambiguity nestling in this dual usage was either not noticed or thought not to matter.

By the eighteenth century the modern, narrow sense of *man* was firmly established as the predominant one. When Edmund Burke, writing of the French Revolution, used *men* in the old, inclusive way, he took pains to spell out his meaning: "Such a deplorable havoc is made in the minds of men (both sexes) in France. . . ." Thomas Jefferson did not make the same distinction in declaring that "all men are created equal" and "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." In a time when women, having no vote, could neither give nor withhold consent, Jefferson had to be using the word *men* in its principal sense of "males," and it probably never occurred to him that anyone would think otherwise.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most people in Great Britain and America apparently agreed with Jefferson that *man* is equivalent to *male*, at least in their interpretation of statute law. As part of his strategy on behalf of women's suf-

frage, John Stuart Mill proposed that the term *person* replace the term *man* in the Reform Bill of 1867, an Act of Parliament extending the franchise to certain males previously denied the vote. Today it is tantalizing to think of the difference that single change in terminology might have made.

Dictionaries still define *man* in both its narrow and broad senses. In the Random House College Dictionary, Revised Edition (1984), for example, the definition reads "1. an adult male person, as distinguished from a boy or woman. 2. the creature, *Homo sapiens*, at the highest level of animal development, characterized esp. by a highly developed brain. 3. the human race; mankind. . . ." The point at issue, therefore, is whether parts 2 and 3 of that definition are still fully operative or whether the first, limited meaning has, in effect, become the only valid one in modern English.

Studies of college students and school children (see **Reference Notes**, page 168) indicate that the broad definitions of *man* and *men*, although still taught, have to a significant degree become inoperative at a subliminal level. Phrases like *economic man* and *political man*, or statements like "Man domesticated animals" and "Man is a dreamer," it turns out, tend to call up images of male people only, not female people or females and males together.

Lexicographers appear to agree. Although they do not label the supposedly generic meaning of *man* obsolete, they write some definitions as though we all know it is. For example, Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986) defines a man-about-town as "a worldly and socially active man." But if *man* sometimes means "any human being," should not the definition of *man-about-town* read "a worldly and socially active person of the male sex"? How can the definers be sure we will know without being told that a man-about-town is never a woman?

Lexicographers are aware, of course, that ever since English lost *waepman*, a specifically male-gender counterpart to *woman*, *man* has been shifting away from generality toward specificity. They also know that the limited meaning of *man* is the only one native speakers of English internalize as applying to an individual. Thus when Diana Nyad swam from Bimini to the Florida coast, the news media did not report that

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Marathon swimmer Diana Nyad became the first man to swim the 60 miles from the Bahamas to Florida.

They said, with incidental variations,

"Marathon swimmer Diana Nyad became the first person to swim. . . ."

What lexicographers and grammarians are less attuned to is the extent to which this narrowing is felt. Because gender in modern English corresponds to sex or its absence, native speakers of the language increasingly sense the same contradiction in calling women "men" that they would feel in calling girls "boys" or daughters "sons." In reporting the remark of a member of Congress,

"'Every man on this subcommittee is for public works,'"

the *Wall Street Journal* appended a comment:

"There are two women on the subcommittee and they are for public works, too."

Some writers tell themselves that they are using *man* in a generic sense when they spell it with an initial capital. The news columnist who wrote

"In the tragedy of the Challenger, Man himself, homo sapiens, is the protagonist . . ."

even took pains to give his subject taxonomic identity. But linked with the prescriptive masculine-gender pronoun, the subject soon lost all pretense of inclusiveness, drowned in what has come to be known as the *helman* syndrome:

"Of this remarkable protagonist—Man—must it not be said that his capacity to adapt his universe and its physical laws to his own needs and desires and purposes—his science and technology—is one of the qualities of his greatness?"

Since capitalizing *man* only defies the masculine image, the writer's message might have been stated more convincingly:

In the tragedy of the Challenger, humanity itself is the protagonist. . . . Of this remarkable protagonist—homo sapiens—must it not be said that our capacity to adapt our universe and its physical laws to our own needs and desires and purposes—our science and technology—is one of the qualities of our species' greatness?

Writers who persist in using *man* in its old sense often slip unconsciously from the general meaning to the limited one. The switch, unfortunately, is rarely discernible to their readers, who have no way of telling that generalizations about human beings have become generalizations about males. Yet we know it does happen—if not how often—because every once in a while an author's unconscious lapse shows through, as in this example from a book review:

"[T]he book can be read with interest by people who . . . wonder about strange facts: why men speak and animals don't, why man feels so sad in the 20th century, why war is man's greatest pleasure."

Readers who assume "men speak" and "man feels so sad" refer to all of us are brought up short by the final phrase. Whether war is the greatest pleasure of most men is debatable, but would anyone assert that it is the greatest pleasure of women?

Other lapses are even more revealing. One author, ostensibly generalizing about all human beings, wrote:

"As for man, he is no different from the rest. His back aches, he ruptures easily, his women have difficulties in childbirth. . . ."

If *man* and *he* were truly generic, the parallel phrase would have been

he has difficulties in childbirth.

And in a magazine article on aggression, where the context indicated that *man* was supposed to include women, readers were startled to come upon the statement

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"[M]an can do several things which the animal cannot do. . . . Eventually, his vital interests are not only life, food, access to females, etc., but also values, symbols, institutions. . . ."

In each case the narrow meaning of *man* had asserted itself, leading the writer to equate the species with its male members.

Occasionally what seems to be the unintentional use of *man* in both a generic and specific sense turns out to be the deliberate use of the word in its narrow, modern meaning only—*man* equals *male*. Elaine Morgan was playing that game when she wrote

"It's just as hard for man to break the habit of thinking of himself as central to the species as it was to break the habit of thinking of himself as central to the universe"

and then went on,

"He sees himself . . . with a female satellite revolving around him. . . ."

A historian must have had fun writing

"Suddenly, [John] Dewey's faith in the perfectibility of humanity gave way to belief in man's natural aggressiveness. And with the return of the awareness of aggression in man came a new enthusiasm for woman's nurturant qualities as a protection against his aggressive excesses."

Is the same degree of awareness also present in this use of *man* by a third writer?

"He gives us the voice of an imagined author, an author obsessed. Obsessed by what? . . . The malevolence of nature, the imperfectibility of man? The biblical contract between God and man? The traditional relation of man to wife?"

It hardly seems likely, but who can tell for sure?

As we know from modern psychology, man overlooks what he does not want to see—and so does woman. But males have a

greater vested interest in preserving the way things were than in acknowledging the way they are. If the word *man* were not so emotionally charged and politically useful, its ambiguity would have led long ago to its disuse in any but the limited sense it immediately brings to mind. So the question for writers and speakers becomes, How can we get along without *man* in the old sense, that archaic crutch we no longer need but to which we have become habituated?

ALTERNATIVES TO "GENERIC" MAN

In Clichés

Compare the sentence

When a shave and a haircut cost two bits, even the man in the street patronized a barber

with the sentence

Though Mary Kilpatrick is already well known in the consumer advocacy movement, she'll need the support of the man in the street if she runs for office.

In the first, "the man in the street" clearly refers to males. In the second, the phrase is ambiguous. Perhaps the writer knows that Mary Kilpatrick already has a large following of women but needs the support of men. But does the reader know it? Phrases like *the common man* or *the average man* would have been equally unclear. Assuming the candidate needs the support of both women and men, the sentence could read:

. . . she'll need a broad power base (or the support of ordinary voters or of the average voter) if she runs for office.

Another pair of sentences illustrates the lack of clarity in a cliché like *the working man*:

The rich cannot possibly appreciate the impact of inflation on the average working man.

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The average working man earns almost twice as much as the average working woman.

The second example says what it means; one has no way of knowing whether the author of the first had only males in mind or was using English loosely. In either case, the sentence reveals careless thinking that would have been corrected if the writer had not used a false generic:

The rich cannot possibly appreciate the impact of inflation on the average wage earner (*or* the average worker).

Generalizations about people couched in terms like *a man who*, *if a man*, or *no man* are clearer when rephrased to include people of both sexes (unless, of course, only males are intended). For instance,

A man who lies constantly needs a good memory is clearer when *a man* is replaced by *someone* or *anyone*. Or better still:

A chronic liar needs a good memory.

Similar phrases, like

If a man can drive 500 miles in ten hours . . .

No man would be safe from nuclear fallout if . . .

can be recast in a variety of ways. For example:

If someone (*or* If you *or* If one *or* If Jones) can drive . . .

or

If it is possible to drive . . .

No one (*or* No human being) would be safe from nuclear fallout if . . .

Terms for the Human Species

" . . . it is now thought that a million years ago and more, earth was populated with more or less manlike

creatures; descended not from apes but from some forefather of both apes and men."

"The personal commitment of a man to his skill, the intellectual commitment and the emotional commitment working together as one, has made the Ascent of Man."

"Man has learned a lot. He has invented ever so many things. Someday you may even be able to go and visit the other planets."

Because scientists have traditionally "translated" the Latin term *Homo sapiens* as "man" rather than "human being," resistance to giving up this once-generic term is particularly strong in the scientific community. Those who write about anthropology and the biological sciences, including the authors of children's books on these subjects, are frequently addicted to using *man* in contexts like the above. From *near-man* through *early man* to *true man* and *modern man*, accounts of human evolution are couched in terms of *mankind* and *forefathers*, with frequent references to "his" cultural artifacts, the effect of erect posture in enabling "him" to see farther, "his" animals, crops, pottery, villages, etc., etc.



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An entirely different image is projected in a story headlined "New Clues to Ancient Life" published in the newsletter *Indian Affairs*. Reporting on archaeological findings at the Koster site in Illinois, the writer, instead of relying on *man*, used such terms as *people*, *ancient people*, *residents of the ancient village*, *the site's inhabitants*, and *these early human populations*. The newsletter is a model of unbiased writing, and its commitment is evidently shared by the leader of the Koster exploration, archaeologist Stuart Struever, who is quoted in the article:

"If we are to measure 'cultural success' in part by the ability of a human population to establish an equilibrium with its environment that can be sustained over the long haul, then these Koster residents were successful people, indeed."

Used in broad, sweeping generalizations, *man* frequently—perhaps usually—conveys misinformation.

When ancient man developed agriculture . . .

rejects, as far as a listener or reader has any way of knowing, the extensive evidence now available indicating that women were the earliest cultivators of plants.

Men have always hoped to conquer disease

appears not only to disregard women's interest in ending illness but also to ignore the important advances toward that goal made by women—from the anonymous healers and discoverers of curative plants to Nobel laureates. Authenticity is better served by phrases like

When our ancestors (*or people or human societies or our forebears*) first developed agriculture . . .

Human beings (*or Men and women or Women and men*) have always hoped to conquer disease.

Sometimes the best solution is to rephrase a thought completely:

The conquest of disease has always been a goal of human societies.

Biblical translations into English have traditionally used *man* in passages where the wording of the original text could have been rendered inclusively. The familiar language of Matthew 4:4, for example,

"Man shall not live by bread alone,"

is made more consistent with the Greek text and reflects contemporary usage more accurately when phrased

"One does not live by bread alone,"

as is the case in the *Revised New Testament of the New American Bible*, published in 1987 and authorized for use by Roman Catholics in the United States.

The historian Mary Beard pointed out many years ago that most historians use *man* in ways that obscure women's contributions to civilization. Unfortunately they, and others, continue to do so. The list of books with titles like *Man and His Symbols*, *The Condition of Man*, *The Identity of Man*, *Man's Unconquerable Mind*, *The Family of Man*, *The Tree Where Man Was Born*, and *Man Must Speak* appears to be endless. Dale Spender parodies these misnomers with her title *Man Made Language*, a book that shows how meanings and definitions in male-dominated society have helped structure and maintain women's subordination. And Stephen Jay Gould clinched the case against the "generic" *man* trap when he called his historical survey of racist, sexist, and class bias in certain areas of science *The Mismeasure of Man*. In an introductory note, Gould explained the book's title:

I hope that an apparently sexist title will be taken in the intended spirit—not only as a play on Protagoras' famous aphorism, but also as a commentary on the procedures of biological determinists discussed in the book. They did, indeed, study "man" (that is, white European males), regarding this group as a standard and everybody else as something to be measured unfavorably against it. That they mismeasured "man" underscores the double fallacy.

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Men of Letters and Other Women

"The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman."

Willa Cather expressed that conviction at the end of a moving passage in *O Pioneers!* As a woman writing about a woman, she was not likely to fall into the trap set by the false generic *man*. A noted sculptor was less in tune with reality when he said

"A work of art is beautiful because a man did it."

One assumes he did not mean to exclude a sculpture by Louise Nevelson or a painting by Georgia O'Keeffe, yet his choice of words betrayed him into doing so. Though one can only guess, it may be that he meant something like

A work of art is beautiful because a human being created it.

Unintentional exclusion is hard to distinguish from intentional exclusion. Did a book reviewer who described George Will as

"the principal public philosopher and man of letters of our generation"

mean to exclude, let us say, Susan Sontag? If he had called Will

the principal public philosopher and writer of our generation

that particular question would not have come up.

Women in art, in science, in education, and in business and politics are adding a dimension to the human environment that was previously lacking. As Hanna Holborn Gray, president of the University of Chicago, said in a baccalaureate address:

"The institution of the university is not, in Emerson's phrase, the lengthened shadow of one man, but rather that of many men and women who care for its purposes."

If Gray had said

The institution of the university is not, in Emerson's phrase, the lengthened shadow of one man, but rather of many men who care for its purposes

she would have conveyed a different message, even if in her own mind she intended the word *men* to be understood inclusively.

Man as a Verb

The verb *to man* comes from the noun and dates from the Middle English period when it was used in the sense of furnishing a ship or fort or castle with men to operate or defend it. By analogy *man* came to be used in the sense of "to work at," as in "to man" a production line or information booth (though seldom, if ever, a tea table). *Work, staff, serve at (on), operate,* and other alternatives can be used instead of *man*:

They had to man the pumps all night.

They had to work the pumps all night.

The Girl Scouts will man the exhibit.

The Girl Scouts will run the exhibit.

The emergency room must be manned at all times.

The emergency room must be staffed (or covered) at all times.

Man the barricades!

Mount the barricades! (or To the barricades!)

Man's Inhumanity to Men

Men as well as women are often stereotyped in ways that seem unfair. "Doorman and trashman spread the idea that only men are appropriate for these lowly jobs," the journalist Jack Kammer points out. "And every time there is violence the news reports always refer to a gunman . . . even if the person was masked and nobody really knows." Kammer wants to know why reporters don't use the words *robber* or *intruder* instead of *gun-*

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man, and *trash collector* instead of *trashman*—to which any woman conscious of the restricting power of labels can only say Amen.

Several organizations, among them Men's Rights Inc., based in Boston and Sacramento, and the Fathers Rights Association of New York State, take this problem very seriously, but are they taking it seriously enough? Males are often accorded sole credit for great human accomplishments attributed to *man*, but they also often get sole blame for history's horrors. Whether the writers quoted below were visualizing males only, or females and males, is anybody's guess—though it need not have been, as the rewritten versions show.

"... why should [visitors from space] not see the same virtues in domesticating human beings that men realized long ago when they domesticated cattle, horses, dogs and cats? Or impressed other human beings into slavery?"

"Muir knew that man's spirit can only survive in a land that is spacious and unpolluted. . . . He felt that man should come as a visitor to these places—the mountains, river canyons, coasts, deserts and swamps—to learn, not to leave his mark."

"Man should be presented [to children] as a steward of the animals rather than the 'most intelligent' creature who has the right to do as he pleases with the other animals."

"... why should [visitors from space] not see the same virtues in domesticating human beings that humans themselves realized long ago when they domesticated cattle, horses, dogs and cats? Or impressed their fellow humans into slavery?"

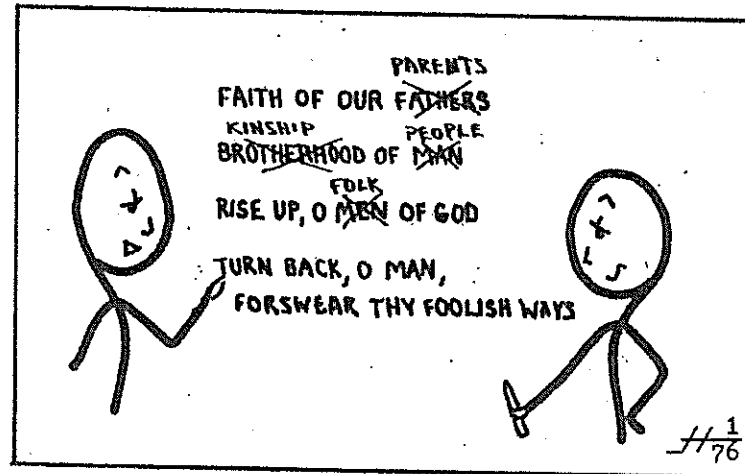
Muir knew that the human spirit can only survive in a land that is spacious and unpolluted. . . . He felt that we should come as visitors to these places . . . to learn, not to leave our mark.

People (or the human race) should be presented [to children] as stewards of the animals rather than the 'most intelligent' of creatures with the right to do as we please with the other animals.

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"[Hart] Crane seems to have believed that daily life enforced a sufficient degree of penance and that a man had the right to make the best of it, taking his pleasures where he found them."

Crane seems to have believed that daily life enforced a sufficient degree of penance and that we all have the right to make the best of it, taking our pleasures where we find them.



SHALL WE LET THEM KEEP THIS ONE ?

Anyone who chooses to use *man* in its old, generic sense can claim centuries of precedent. But even centuries of precedent crumble if those on the receiving end hear a different meaning from the one intended. When Edith Bunker, on the television series "All in the Family," quoted Sam Walter Foss's

"Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend of man,"

Archie's response was,

"Yeah, I heard about them kind of houses in the Army."

MAN IN COMPOUNDS

"America's manpower begins with boy power."

"The annual exhibit of the Connecticut Society of Craftsmen—which includes women artists as well—opens Thursday. . . ."

The exclusion and ambiguity characteristic of *man* when it is used generically extend to compound words like *manpower* and *craftsman*. Before discussing such words, however, it is important to note that *woman* and *human* are not, as is often implied, compounds incorporating the modern word *man*. *Woman* is a combination of *wif*, meaning "an adult female," and *man* in its lost sense of "a human being irrespective of sex or age." *Human* is from the Latin *humanus*, akin to *homo*, also meaning "human being." Neither has any more relation to a word originally meaning "male person" than do words like *manager*, *manufacture*, *manuscript*, and *manipulate*, which come from the Latin *manus*, "hand." The most that can be said about the belabored form of ridicule which suggests we must find alternatives for every word containing the syllable *man* is that *wobody*, *huperson*, *personipulate*, etc., are ideas whose time has gone.

Man as a Prefix

"Should all despair that have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind would hang themselves."

—William Shakespeare

"The infinite simplicity and silliness of mankind and womankind. . . ."

—Anthony Trollope

"When I speak of mankind, one thing I *don't* mean is womankind."

—Man in a Steig cartoon

For more than four centuries *mankind* has been used, as in the examples above, to differentiate men from women. To avoid ambiguity and occasional ineptness, as in

The Pap test, which has greatly reduced mortality from uterine cancer, is a boon to mankind,

alternative terms that clearly designate people as distinguished from other forms of life can be useful:

The Pap test, which has greatly reduced mortality from uterine cancer, is a boon to humanity (*or humankind*).

An even more serious drawback to *mankind* when used to mean people collectively is that, willy-nilly, like *man*, it imposes the image of maleness on the entire species—which in turn often fosters an androcentric view of the rest of nature.

"Will mankind murder Mother Earth or will he redeem her?"

asks a historian. The effect of the question may be less dramatic when the imagery of male aggressor and female victim is removed, but since such stereotypical behavior has failed to benefit humanity in the past, rewording the question might suggest at least part of the answer:

Will human beings destroy the earth's life-sustaining environment or will they rescue it?

Speakers and writers often use *man*-prefixed compounds in contexts where *man* represents males alone or both males and females, but they tend to avoid such compounds as incongruous when the subjects are explicitly female.

The only water supply is a manmade pond, which the villagers created by damming a small stream

conveys an assumption of male involvement. If the writer knew the dam had been built entirely by women, the sentence might have read:

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The only water supply is an artificial pond, which the women of the village created by damming a small stream.

When explaining whether something has been made by women, men, or both is irrelevant—and it usually is—various sex-neutral alternatives to *manmade* are available, including *handmade, hand-built, synthetic, manufactured, fabricated, machine-made, and constructed*.

The cave appears to be natural, but it was completely excavated by hand (*or built by hand or hand-built*).

All materials in these shoes are synthetic (*or manufactured*).

Since the showcase is only 2 feet deep, the illusion of great depth is simulated (*or cleverly created*).

The art critic and historian Lucy Lippard wrote:

"When I cross a moor on which no tree, habitation, or person is visible, and come upon a ring of ragged stones, a single rough-hewn pillar, a line curving away over a hill . . . I know this is human-made."

Sometimes a sentence can be recast to omit the adjective entirely, as in this version of the "manmade pond" example:

The only water supply is a pond the villagers created by damming a small stream.

When Bryan Allen pedaled his way across the English Channel in the *Gossamer Albatross* some years ago, most news reports used the term *manpowered flight*. Perhaps with the thought that a future air cyclist would be a woman, *Time* magazine came up with

"muscle-powered flight,"

and Doug Tunnell referred on CBS News to

"human-powered flight,"

a term most of the media had adopted by 1987, when Lois McCallin established a new record pedaling the *Eagle* over a desert course in California.

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In some contexts a compound like *manpower* clearly excludes females, as in the slogan "America's manpower begins with boy power." On the other hand, an employment agency called Manpower® Temporary Services contracts for per diem secretaries and typists, most of whom are women. Outside the world of registered trademarks, *manpower* is usually replaceable with *personnel, staff, work force, available workers, or human resources*, as in:

With the signing of the new contracts our manpower needs will double.

With the signing of the new contracts our personnel needs will double.

"Although the FDA hasn't yet formally responded to the petition, agency officials say they don't have enough manpower to give the noodle issue a high priority."

. . . agency officials say they don't have enough staff to give the noodle issue a high priority.

The development of alternative forms of energy requires both technology and manpower.

The development of alternative forms of energy requires both technology and human resources.

"A study of nursing manpower is in progress."

A study of available nurses (*or the nursing work force*) is in progress.

It is worth noting in this connection that the former Manpower Administration of the United States Department of Labor has been renamed. The new name, which better characterizes the organization's function, is the Employment and Training Administration.

Man-hour is an imprecise term at best, especially when one man's hour may be another man's or woman's 45 minutes. If a unit of work is measured according to the time the average

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worker takes to do it, why not call it a *work-hour*? Or the name of the job may suggest another alternative:

Direct dialing saves the
telephone company
millions of man-hours.

Direct dialing saves the
telephone company
millions of operator-hours.

As for *manhole cover*, judging from the frequency with which opponents of nonsexist language refer to "personhole covers," vast numbers of people across the English-speaking world must have developed a consuming interest in the plates that keep them from falling into sewers, water mains, conduits, boilers, etc. As a last defense against reason, the "personhole-cover" issue may persist for years. In the meantime, anyone who needs an accurate term for the covers of utility holes might try either *access covers* or *utility-hole covers*, as in

The boiler's access cover, which is usually bolted in place, had been removed.

The explosion blew a utility-hole cover 10 feet into the air.

Man as a Suffix

A few usage critics maintain that compounds ending in unaccented *man* are always sex-neutral: *layman*, *tradesman*, *fisherman*. (At least one linguist has suggested, perhaps facetiously, that generic interpretation of these words can best be assured by spelling them as they are pronounced, m-u-n.) More often, however, arbiters of usage assign generic status in some instances and not in others—and their reasons are usually hard to discern.

The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage (1982) offers a number of examples. Although it proscribes both *spokeswoman* and *spokesperson*, it permits the use of *saleswoman*, which may be an indication that whoever makes such decisions thinks *salesman* applies to males only. Why anyone should decide it is all right for women to be called "saleswomen" but not "spokeswomen" is unclear. Not only have both terms been in use for some three

hundred years, but the earliest citation for *spokeswoman* provided by the Oxford English Dictionary is dated 1654, fifty years before the dictionary's first citation for *saleswoman*.

Without a logical basis for their decision, and with both common sense and common usage pointing the other way, even the *Times* seems to have had trouble keeping its troops in line. Or perhaps the word has finally been passed that—at least with reference to terms ending in *-man*—the *Manual* would be more honored in the breach than in the observance; for although female "spokesmen" and "chairmen" continue to appear in the pages of the *Times*, items like the following are becoming equally, if not more, common:

"A hospital spokesperson said Doe's injuries were 'nothing too critical.'"

"Margarita Mathiopoulos . . . was offered a post as party spokeswoman."

The *Associated Press Stylebook* (revised 1986), which approves *spokeswoman* but not *spokesperson*, suggests that writers use *representative* when the sex of the individual is not known.

A representative of the corporation will meet with the press at 4 P.M.

The Man in the Chair

For some reason, what to call the person who heads an academic department or chairs a committee or meeting arouses great anxiety. *Chairman*, according to the same New York Times style manual, "suffices for both sexes," and so the *Times* still officially frowns on both *chairwoman* and *chairperson*. But since everyone knows that style manuals are no sooner published than they tend to become embarrassingly passé, it is not surprising that a generous sprinkling of *chairwomen* now appear in *Times* news reports, as in

"Mrs. Pelosi, 47, a liberal former state party chairwoman and 1986 national finance chairwoman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, is the candidate."

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Unfortunately, it will take more than a majority of the English-speaking world's newspapers to convince the National Association of Parliamentarians that *chairman* is not appropriate when used of a woman, and a sizable number of individuals take the same position. When an editor changed the word *chairman* to *chairperson* in an article written by an unnamed friend of the columnist William F. Buckley, Buckley was sufficiently upset to write a piece about it. It seems his friend telephoned the editor who had made the change, and the following conversation ensued, as reported by Buckley: "Where do you get off putting 'chairperson' where I specified 'chairman'? Well, she said, it's just this simple, you were talking about a woman. To which he replied that it was just this simple, namely that 'chairman' refers, and has done so for hundreds of years, equally to men as to women. . . ."

William Buckley's friend spoke with the certainty of the righteously indignant, but can he back up his claim that *chairman* has referred equally to both sexes for "hundreds of years"? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *chairman* has been used since at least 1654 and *chairwoman* since 1699. In each of the seventeenth-century quotations the dictionary provides to illustrate *chairman*, the person referred to was clearly male, and none of the citations from later periods shows the use of this word for a female. What the dictionary clearly documents is that for hundreds of years most *-man* compounds were recognized as applying only to men, just as *-woman* compounds applied only to women: terms like *gentleman*, *countryman*, *layman*, and *statesman* had their counterparts in *gentlewoman*, *countrywoman*, *laywoman*, and *stateswoman*; and women who worked as launderers and cleaners were known as *washerwomen*, *charwomen*, and *scrubwomen*, not *washermen*, *charmen*, and *scrubmen*.

The care with which nineteenth-century writers indicated sex in their use of compound *-man* and *-woman* terms is demonstrated by no less a litterateur than William Dean Howells. In an essay written in 1886, Howells said of the playwright Edward Harrigan,

"Mr. Harrigan shows us the streetcleaners and contractors, the grocery men, the shysters, the

politicians, the washerwomen, the servant girls, the truckmen, the policemen, the risen Irishman and Irishwoman of contemporary New York."

Since the current aversion to using *woman* in compounds like *chairwoman* and *spokeswoman* cannot be attributed to lack of precedent, is there some other explanation? Perhaps *chairwoman* sounds less important and *spokeswoman* less authoritative than their masculine-gender counterparts. This could explain why some women who achieve positions of leadership still call themselves "chairmen," a term already invested with prestige and power by generations of male incumbents. Or could it be that at least some women go along with the unconscious desire of some men to keep terms like *chairman*, *alderman*, and *congressman* "official," thereby guarding a traditional male bailiwick from outsiders?

Whatever the reasons for its disfavor, *chairwoman* is a historically sound parallel to *chairman*, and it pays a woman the courtesy of recognizing both her sex and her achievement. It does not, however, solve the problem of what to use as an indefinite, sex-inclusive title. Instead of the much maligned but persistent *chairperson*, some groups and institutions have chosen to use entirely different titles like *presider*, *presiding officer*, *coordinator*, and *convener*.

A more obvious solution, the word *chair*, is used increasingly by governing bodies, organizations, and universities:

"The new Speaker of the House has not yet selected committee chairs."

"Dr. Roe served as program chair at last year's convention."

"Harry Coe has been named chair of the English Department."

The lexicographer Alma Graham points out that *chair* has been recognized, in the sense of "the occupant of the chair . . . as invested with its dignity," since the seventeenth century, just as *the Crown* has been used for the monarch, or *the Oval Office* has come to stand for the President of the United States. "Address your remarks to the chair" illustrates metonymy, a figure of

speech in which something is called by the name of something else associated with it. Nobody understands an injunction to "address the chair" as an order to talk to a piece of furniture.

Groups of People as *Men*

Sometimes what makes a masculine-gender suffix inappropriate is not that the sex of an individual has been misrepresented, but that the reference is to many individuals of both sexes. Pauli Murray faced that problem in her autobiography when referring to one branch of her ancestry, and she solved it handily:

"I haven't the slightest notion of who my particular African ancestors were . . . whether they were traders, fisherfolk, herdspeople, or farmers. . . ."

Africans, Italians, Russians, Japanese, Pakistanis, and Australians, to pick some random examples, can refer to either females or males. In contrast, terms like *Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Irishmen* are ambiguous if used nonspecifically.

Englishmen are said to prefer tea to coffee
presumably means

The English are said to prefer tea to coffee
whereas

Englishmen are said to prefer blonds
is probably intended to refer to the preferences of males. Tom Brokaw of NBC News, introducing a report on the plight of a diminishing group of nomadic hunters and gatherers of South Africa, avoided possible misinterpretation by referring to

"the struggle to save one tiny band of Bushpeople."

Precedent for terms like *laywoman* and *stateswoman* as counterparts to *layman* and *statesman* is well documented, as already mentioned (see page 32). Plural forms, when the group specified includes both sexes, may be somewhat more recalcitrant, but they yield, and in the process ambiguity is avoided:

"Obviously few laymen are knowledgeable enough to effectively judge the qualifications of an anesthesiologist."

Obviously few lay people are knowledgeable enough . . .
or
Obviously special training is needed to effectively judge the qualifications of an anesthesiologist.

The show includes the work of craftsmen from every state.

The show includes the work of craftspeople (or artisans) from every state.

(See also *Fellow*, pages 133–134, for a discussion of *fellowman*.)

Public *Manservants*

Congressman, assemblyman, councilman, selectman, etc., originated as masculine-gender designations when women's participation in the councils of government was, with rare exceptions like a queen's, unheard of, even unthinkable. In the words of Thomas Jefferson,

Were our State a pure democracy, in which all its inhabitants should meet together to transact all their business, there would yet be excluded from their deliberations, 1. Infants, until arrived at years of discretion. 2. Women, who, to prevent depravation of morals and ambiguity of issue, could not mix promiscuously in the public meetings of men. 3. Slaves, from whom the unfortunate state of things with us takes away the right of will and of property.

Now that women's participation in government on an equal basis with men is no longer unthinkable, the use of new terms like *congresswoman, assemblywoman, councilwoman, and selectwoman* shows that the older titles were not sex-neutral, and that they remain designations appropriate only for males.

New sex-inclusive language is emerging, however. Present alternatives to the false generic *congressman* include *member of Con-*

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gress and *representative*, and no doubt other ways will also evolve to designate those elected to offices that were once male domains. A member of a council, city or otherwise, is a *councillor*, for example. In line with the ancient linguistic process whereby adjectives are converted into nouns, a member of Congress may someday be simply a *congressional*, just as a member of a nation is a *national*.

Job Titles

Like the titles of public offices, most job titles ending in *man* date from a time when only males performed the jobs described. It was natural to speak of an *insurance man*, *delivery man*, *draftsman*, or *newsboy* because, with the possible exception of *businessman*, the masculine-gender terms matched the sex of nearly everyone doing the jobs described.

Not so today: girls have newspaper delivery routes, and women sell insurance, deliver packages, draft structural plans, and run successful businesses, making the old job titles, when retained, discriminatory. If a job category is labeled *lineman* or *repairman*, for instance, whoever does the hiring may look on the job as unsuitable for a woman. Furthermore, employers who use sex-differentiating titles like *salesman* and *saleswoman*, or *forelady* and *foreman*, often adopt two separate pay scales for the same work and pay their male employees more. Although to comply with the law employers carefully advertise positions as being open to both sexes, some keep the old sex-labeled titles. These titles act as a code, psychologically inhibiting women from applying for such jobs as *kennelman*, *stockman*, or *busboy*, and men from applying for jobs with titles ending in *woman*, *lady*, or *-ess*.

Similarly, job titles like *hat-check girl* and *junior executive*, which imply that youth is a prerequisite for the job, encourage age discrimination on the part of employers and can deter older people from applying.

In response to such considerations, the United States Department of Labor has revised its *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* to eliminate sex- and age-referent language. The dictionary, a volume of some 1,400 pages to which supplements are issued periodically, is available at many public libraries. A related book,

the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the department's Bureau of Labor Statistics, describes jobs in nearly every field of employment, also using sex-neutral language throughout. Some of the Department of Labor's job title changes are:

From	To
airline steward, stewardess	flight attendant
cameraman, camera girl	camera operator
charwoman	charworker
draftsman	drafter
fisherman	fisher
forelady, foreman	supervisor
gateman	gate attendant
hat-check girl	hat-check attendant
junior executive	executive trainee
laundress, laundryman	laundry worker
lineman	line installer, line repairer
longshoreman	stevedore
maid	house worker
pressman	press operator
repairman	repairer
salesman	sales agent, sales associate
seamstress	sewer, mender
watchman	guard

There are other alternatives, of course, for anyone not limited to the titles used in official job descriptions. Since writers and speakers often need variety to avoid monotonous repetition, additional possibilities are suggested in the **Brief Thesaurus** beginning on page 155.

The serious impact of occupational terminology has been acknowledged by state governments as well, many of which have changed the term *workmen's compensation* to *workers' compensation* in their official documents and publications. *Worker* is also useful as a suffix, as in *longshoreworker* for *longshoreman*. That particular term is a shortening of "along shore," making *worker* a logical addition, and since no one thinks titles like *garmentworker*, *steelworker*, and *pieceworker* sound funny, why should *longshoreworker*? Resistance to such terms as *repairer* (for *repairman*) and

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launderer (for *laundress* and *laundryman*) is also odd considering the frequency of *-er* and *-or* endings in other agent-nouns: *explorer*, *bookkeeper*, *helper*, *lawyer*, *painter*, *photographer*, *laborer*, *auditor*, *conductor*, etc.

With some compounds ending in *man*, the solution of simply dropping the last syllable revives a former usage that proves to be still serviceable. *Watchman*, for instance, can become *watch*, used from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries to mean "one who watches . . . for the purposes of guarding and protecting life and property."

Alternatives to *salesman*, *saleswoman*, and their plurals are numerous, including the long-accepted *salesperson*:

Ask any salesperson for help if you don't find what you need.

Our salespeople (or agents or brokers) have a weekly conference.

He was a sales representative for IBM before coming here.

The sales force (or sales staff) is being reorganized.

We'll need more salesclerks for the Christmas season.

Anyone who adamantly rejects *person* as a suffix (see *Person*, page 146) has the option of using *foreman* or *forewoman* when speaking of a jury, or they can come up with a new term like *head juror* or *jury leader*; when the reference is to someone in charge of factory or construction workers, *supervisor*, *boss*, or *job boss* are alternatives to *forelady*, *forewoman*, and *foreman*.

Weatherman, *newsman*, *anchorman*, and similar designations in which the *man* ending is clearly accented have never been considered sex-inclusive, and women in these posts are usually assigned other job titles. During the 1950s, women who replaced men as television weather reporters were called "weather girls" (although their predecessors had not been called "weather boys"). The common-gender *weather people* may evoke shades of the Weather Underground for some, but there are other possibilities:

Channel 5 hired a new weathercaster last month,

A weather reporter's popularity rating is likely to go up and down with the weather,

or, where the title describes the trained specialist,

The article was written by a meteorologist on the staff of the National Weather Service.

Newsman and *anchorman* are easily made sex-inclusive:

You are invited to send a reporter (or news representative or newscaster) to the launching.

The Journalist of the Year Award will be announced next Tuesday.

Who will get the job of anchor on the six o'clock news?

Although many common-gender job titles have been readily accepted and are being used routinely, others are resisted by people in the occupations specified. For example, some individuals and organizations in the fishing industry, including some women, objected when the National Marine Fisheries Service began to use *fisher* instead of *fisherman* in its reports and correspondence. According to news stories, the objectors held that the term *fisherman* "has a long and proud history dating back thousands of years." In fact, *fisherman* entered the English language only in the sixteenth century, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, whereas *fisher* was used in the ninth century to mean "a person who fishes," and it appears many times in that sense in the King James Version of the Bible. (*Fishermen* appears only once.) *Fisher* is also used in references to sports fishing, as in a *New York Times* piece by Enid Nemy:

"Ms. Bockman . . . is, as might be guessed, an ardent fly fisher."

Fortunately, the desire of some people who fish to be called "fishermen" can be respected in individual communication without subverting the purpose of sex-neutral occupational titles. The significance of the new terms is that ultimately a

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younger generation can grow up free from limiting concepts of "men's jobs" and "women's jobs."

It would be impossible to include in this section all the compound job titles ending in *man* for which common-gender alternatives are needed and are being sought. The examples given are intended to suggest the scope of the problem and the kinds of solutions available. *Writers and speakers who are willing to experiment and perhaps come up with their own new terms or compounds will risk the wrath of language purists, but they will be in the company of many respected writers who have added to the vitality of English.*

Some Recalcitrant Compounds

When the *man* syllable comes in the middle of a word, finding a one-word alternative is hard. No one seriously suggests *sportsmanship* should be turned into *sportspersonship*, and as an alternative for *workmanlike*, *workerlike*, though passable, lacks force. Fortunately, synonyms can usually be found:

The award is for sportsmanship.

The award is for the highest ideals of fair play.

The bricklayers did a workmanlike job.

The bricklayers did a skillful job

or

The bricklayers' work was well done.

Their statesmanlike actions were commendable.

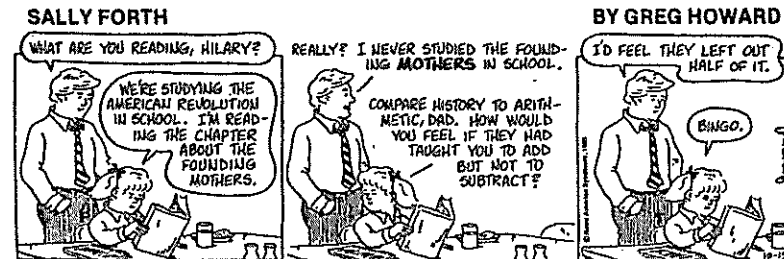
Their diplomatic actions (or tact and skill) were commendable.

FATHERS, BROTHERS, AND BOMFOG

To describe George Washington as "the father of his country" or to speak of the authors of the United States Constitution as

"the Founding Fathers" is to use sexually appropriate metaphors. But to lump all the people who came over on the *Mayflower* under the name "Pilgrim Fathers" is nonsense: Women and girls were members of the company, and the survival of the new colony depended as much on them as on their male companions. Why not simply call them all Pilgrims?

Similarly, although *Christian Fathers* is a specialized term that refers to particular men in the early church, it is inappropriate to speak of the "fathers of industry" or the "fathers of industrial medicine." The latter phrase excludes, for example, Dr. Alice Hamilton, acknowledged leader in that field, and the former ignores the inventive genius of women like Catherine Littlefield Greene, who suggested the need for a cotton gin to Eli Whitney and who may have contributed substantially to its design; Margaret E. Knight, a nineteenth-century inventor of industrial machinery; and unknown numbers of anonymous women whose creative ideas were credited to men. Common-gender nouns like *pioneers*, *founders*, *trailblazers*, and *innovators* are useful alternatives to the metaphorical "fathers" who were female as well as male.



Like *fathers*, the words *brothers*, *brethren*, and *brotherhood* are masculine-gender terms with standard feminine-gender equivalents. Generations of sisters have been expected to accept the use of *brother* terms as symbols of universal human kinship—theirs not to question why. Yet the questions remain. Does a carpenter become a "brother" when she joins a trade union calling itself a "Brotherhood"? Who is invited to take part in

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National Brotherhood Week? Does a billboard proclaiming that "Love Transforms Us into Brothers" mean to suggest a new approach to sex change?

"The brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God" sounds noble—until one thinks about the people it leaves out. A few years ago reporters covering political campaigns heard the phrase so often they recorded it in their notes by initials only: BOMFOG. Shorthand for all the false generic terms and expressions that define women as nonhuman, BOMFOG, in the words of the author Eve Merriam, "continues to engulf our language and distort our thinking."

Language is our means of classifying and ordering the world. . . . and if it is inherently inaccurate, then we are misled. If the rules which underlie our language system, our symbolic order, are invalid, then we are daily deceived.

—Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*

[W]e have this notion of "the language" as a hallowed institution whose traditions may not be queried. . . . This picture of language as something external, independent and disinterested stops us asking whose language it is, whose traditions will be under attack if the conventions are changed. . . . It is not good enough to shrug our shoulders and say that male bias in usage is purely grammatical, and that therefore it does not matter.

—Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*

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The Pronoun Problem

"God send everyone their heart's desire."

Most people are taught in school that the above sentence is ungrammatical. It should be corrected, we are told, to read

God send everyone his heart's desire.

Use of the pronouns *he*, *his*, and *him* to refer to any unspecified or hypothetical person who may be either female or male is usually justified on two grounds. First, the practice is said to be an ancient rule of English grammar long and faithfully followed by educated speakers and writers. Second, it is asserted—somewhat paradoxically, if the usage is thought to distinguish the educated from the uneducated—that everybody knows *he* in-

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