

The
Women's
Media
Center

NAME IT. CHANGE IT.
sexism & equality don't mix!

MEDIA GUIDE

to
Gender
Neutral
Coverage
of Women
Candidates
+ Politicians

NameItChangeIt.org

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The Women's Media Center's Media Guide to Gender Neutral Coverage of Women Candidates + Politicians

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Name It. Change It. is a collaborative project of
The Women's Media Center and She Should Run.

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NAME IT CHANGE IT

sexism & equality don't mix!

Name It. Change It. is a nonpartisan joint project of the Women's Media Center and She Should Run. We work to identify, prevent, and end sexist media coverage of federal and gubernatorial women candidates, elected politicians, and high-profile public officials of all races. We monitor coverage by all members of the press—from bloggers to radio

hosts to television pundits. Our goal, to quote Katie Couric, is to “make sexism as repugnant as racism.”

Widespread sexism in the media is one of the top problems facing women. Our groundbreaking research from Lake Research Partners shows that sexist media coverage results in a drastic decrease of voter confidence in women candidates. This is similar to studies of bullying, in which people are less likely to identify with those negatively treated in public, due to the conscious or unconscious fear that such bullying or negative public characterization will then include them as bystanders and supporters. The ever-changing media landscape creates an unmonitored and often not fact-checked echo chamber, habitually allowing damaging comments to influence opinion without accountability.

Widespread sexism in the media is one of the top problems facing women.

Name It. Change It. was launched to hold media outlets accountable for their role in our government's gender disparity; women make up only 17 percent of Congress and 23 percent of state legislatures. Name It. Change It. identifies and publicizes sexist media coverage of women candidates and political leaders of all races. This project is also race-conscious in its understanding of stereotyping as it is used against various groups of women.

The Name It. Change It. project exists to reduce the incidence of sexist media references and replace the usual silence that follows such media offenses toward women candidates and public leaders with proactive and responsive tactics. We want to help members of the media

identify sexism and stories biased against women so that sexism doesn't remain a barrier for women elected to office. We want to be a positive resource for members of the media who are seeking fair and accurate alternatives.

With our groundbreaking research, our case studies, our style guide of gender-neutral terms, and, finally, our Media Pledge of Gender Neutrality, we hope to reveal and reduce the problem that sexism creates for women in this country, whether they are seeking office or seeking representation, and that penalizes men by shrinking the pool of talented leaders.

We believe cultural change is possible. There is no doubt that the past few decades have shown an enormous amount of improvement in the standing of women in this country. But the goal of equality has not been achieved, and America's ratio of women representation lags behind that of many other countries. In fact, the U.S. ranks a shameful 78th in the world for representation of women in its national legislature. By addressing sexism in the political media, we believe we can improve all women's lives, from candidates to voters.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MEMBERS OF MEDIA?

During a political campaign, sexism might come from many different quarters. As our research shows, male opponents of women candidates receive an outsize benefit from gender-based attacks, giving them ample reason to use sexist language. Members of the media should be aware of this fact and note it for their audiences when candidate-to-candidate sexism appears.

But not all sexism is candidate-driven. Some of the strongest sexist language we've found has come from members of the media. Whether attacks come from opposing candidates or the media, the effect on the female candidate is the same. If anything, media use of sexism may be more disqualifying because it is perceived as coming from an objective, disinterested source.

Awareness is the strongest tool that both candidates and members of the media have in combating sexism. This means be aware of common sexism normalized by an unequal culture as well as of your own notions about gender, language and image, as well as how others express these notions. When a female candidate says she's been treated in a sexist manner, the most damaging response is a form of blaming the victim: "She's playing the gender card."

This guide shows the many ways women candidates and politicians are often stuck with "the gender card" and how it turns politics into a game in which democracy is the loser.

GUIDING RULES FOR GENDER NEUTRALITY

THE RULE OF REVERSIBILITY

“The most workable definition of equality for journalists is reversibility. Don’t mention her young children unless you would also mention his, or describe her clothes unless you would describe his, or say she’s shrill or attractive unless the same adjectives would be applied to a man. Don’t say she’s had facial surgery unless you say he dyes his hair or has hair plugs. Don’t say she’s just out of graduate school but he’s a rising star. Don’t say she has no professional training but he worked his way up. Don’t ask her if she’s running as a women’s candidate unless you ask him if he’s running as a men’s candidate.

A good test of whether or not you as a reporter are taking sexism seriously is whether you would cite race, class, ethnicity, or religion in the same context.” — *Gloria Steinem, Journalist and Co-Founder of the Women’s Media Center*

CHART OF REVERSIBILITY

Said to Women	Said to Men
Cunt	NONE Girl / Woman
Whore	NONE Man Whore
Bitch	NONE
Slut	NONE
Prostitute	Player / Pimp
Man-Eater / Aggressive	Driven / Motivated
High-Strung / Temperamental	Powerful
Too Emotional	Sensitive / Caring
Mean Girl / Bully	Powerful / Decisive
Ice Queen / Cold	Hardworking / Commanding
Nagging / Shrill	Determined
Opinionated / Uppity	Knowledgeable / Passionate
Hot / Sexy / MILF	Handsome / Attractive
Ugly / Mannish / Dyke / Lesbian	NO ATTENTION GIVEN
Varicose Veins / Cankles / Wrinkled	Distinguished / Seasoned
General Menstruation Jokes:	
Moody / PMSing	Angry
General Comments on Appearance:	
Plunging Neckline / Short Skirt / High Heels / Hairstyle	Oh, look, he’s wearing a red/blue tie “and an American flag pin”

Reversibility means abandoning or evaluating terms or story frames of women candidates that wouldn’t be written about men. It means not citing sex with less seriousness or logical relation to content than you would cite race, class, ethnicity, or religion.

At the simplest level, do you use “Mr. Smith” on first reference, then “Smith” after that? Do you cite “Ms.,” “Mrs.,” or “Miss Smith” throughout? If you answered yes to both, you are granting Mr. Smith autonomy, but continuing to describe Ms. Smith by her marital status.

If terms are almost singularly applied to women but not to men, you probably shouldn’t be using them. Sexism can also refer to the *type* of coverage, often about personality, appearance, or family, that is given to women politicians but not male politicians. See the chart for some examples. Please refer to the Glossary of Terms listed from the *Unspinning the Spin: The Women’s Media Center’s Guide to Fair & Accurate Language* for more examples.

PAST INSTANCES OF SEXISM IN MEDIA

Multiple academic studies from the 1970s onward have consistently demonstrated that women candidates frequently receive more coverage of their appearance, personality, and families and less coverage of their positions on issues than do male candidates. These differences, which go beyond mere sexist language, can erode a woman candidate's credibility.

For example, researchers Caroline Heldman, Susan J. Carroll, and Stephanie Olson studied gender differences in the print media's coverage of Elizabeth Dole's presidential campaign in 2000. They found Dole "received a differential amount of media coverage than the male Republican hopefuls, she received a different type of coverage along gender lines, and her in-depth coverage was decidedly gendered in ways that likely hindered her candidacy."¹

Although Dole polled only behind front-runner George W. Bush, researchers found that the press paid more attention to her personality traits and appearance when compared with her male opposition. Dole's physical appearance was mentioned more often than that of any of the other candidates (16.7 percent of the articles in which she was the only candidate mentioned in the story), versus the eventual Republican nominee George W. Bush (3.3 percent of articles).

The **Name It. Change It.** project has found that such an emphasis on women candidates' appearance has not gone away.

Some incidents we've found:

- **WRKO AM** Radio in Boston endorsed Karyn E. Polito, a Republican Massachusetts candidate for state treasurer, for her "banging little body" and "tight little butt."
- **Vogue magazine**, in a profile of New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, pressed her on the exact number of pounds she'd lost, noting she should "no doubt remain attractive to her husband of nine years, who is two years younger than she."
- **MSNBC's** Chris Matthews characterized Republican Delaware Senate Candidate Christine O'Donnell as the "irresistibly cute" and "attractive as hell" candidate whose "claim to fame is 'I don't know nuthin'.'"
- **The Washington Post**, in a story about South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley's endorsement of Mitt Romney, said she dressed like a "Real Housewife: fit, attractive and encased in suits that stop just below the elbow and just above the knee."
- Another **Washington Post** column, devoted entirely to Michele Bachmann's fashion choices, wrote that she "lost the Iowa caucus—but won the fashion race."
- Two **Fox News** hosts on separate occasions called DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz a "frizzilla" and a "woolly windbag" in reference to her hair.
- **60 Minutes** featured three members of Congress accused of using their political influence for personal profit. The men were featured in business suits. The lone woman, former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, was shown wearing a ball gown.
- **The Daily Beast/Newsweek**, in a profile of senatorial candidate Elizabeth Warren, said she "played up her femininity, gushing about her 11-month-old grandson."

¹ Caroline Heldman, Susan J. Carroll, and Stephanie Olson. "Gender Differences in Print Media Coverage of Presidential Candidates: Elizabeth Dole's Bid for the Republican Nomination." American Political Science Association. 2000. p. 12.

**If you wouldn't talk about
a Male Candidate's:**

EYE COLOR

MAKE-UP

HAIR CUT

SINGLENESS

CHILD CARE

LACK OF CHILDREN

**THEN DON'T TALK ABOUT
A FEMALE CANDIDATE'S.**

PARALLELISM: WHEN EVERYTHING ISN'T EQUAL

Another type of sexism in media coverage is Parallelism. If a reporter is wondering whether it's offensive or inaccurate to say something about a group or person who may be subject to stereotyping, it's often helpful to make a parallel with another person or group who is less subject to stereotyping. It changes the context just enough to see the fairness or unfairness. Some examples of the effect come in word choice. For example, men have "brown hair," but women are "brunettes." Women in power are sometimes called "motherly," but men in power aren't "fatherly."

But other examples go beyond word choice to the very premise of a question posed to a candidate.

For example: If Sarah Palin had been a male vice presidential candidate, she probably wouldn't have been asked whether or not she could fulfill the job when she had young children, including one with special needs. Therefore, it wasn't okay to ask that question of or about Palin either—not unless it was also asked of or about her male equivalents.

For example: If Hillary Clinton had been a male presidential candidate of any race, her clothes and hair would have been far less written about. Therefore, it wasn't okay to discuss those in her case either, unless, of course, it was in the context of discussing other male candidates' hair and clothing in the same article.

Note: Parallelism is not to be confused with the notion that if one side of a controversy or contest is criticized, the other must be criticized, too. If one candidate has a legitimate campaign issue, there may not be a "parallel" in the other candidate.

TAKEAWAY:

The media should treat women candidates exactly the same way they treat male candidates. If the same description, term, story, or question would seem ridiculous or “too feminine” for a male candidate for office, then it should not be used for a female candidate. To do so is to create different editorial standards by gender, which is sexist and inherently unfair.

DON'Ts

- **Write about a woman candidate’s clothing or physical appearance (hair, makeup, eyes) ... UNLESS your outlet has published similar articles about male candidates.**
- **Use gendered terms such as “feisty,” “spirited,” “opinionated” ... UNLESS your outlet would use them on a male candidate.**
- **Talk about a female candidate as a mother ... UNLESS the candidate brings it up first.**

DO's

- **Write about clothing (for either sex) that is symbolically important.**
- **Ask a male candidate about his role as a father if he touts “fatherhood” as a job qualifier.**
- **Ask a male candidate about sexist language he uses.**

CASE STUDIES

Now that we've provided guideposts on how media coverage is gendered, we shall examine two specific incidents in which two women candidates were victims of sexist attacks.

THE KRYSTAL BALL EXAMPLE

In 2010, first-time candidate Krystal Ball ran for Congress in Virginia's 1st District against an incumbent. In October, with just about a month left to go in the campaign, racy photos of Ball at a costume party from 2004 appeared on a little-known conservative website, *Virginia Virtucon*. Although *Virginia Virtucon* eventually decided to take the post down, within days the photos were all over the Internet, including a slideshow run by Gawker with the frame:

"Krystal Ball dressed as a naughty Santa at a party 'right after college.' Her then-husband wore a dildo on his nose and leash around his neck. Years later, Krystal decided to run for Congress in Virginia. Guess what happened next?"

It didn't matter that most media outlets and pundits said the photos *shouldn't* hurt Ball's campaign, because by that point nearly every story about Ball was about the photos, not campaign points. Voters in Virginia's 1st District were bombarded with news stories asking whether they felt one of their candidates was a laughingstock.

It's possible Ball could have stayed a laughingstock. An image portraying a female politician as promiscuous is a hard stain to get away from, especially when media coverage amplifies the effect.

This is why the Name It. Change It. project was one of the few advising Ball to speak out about this smear. Based on our research, we knew that ignoring the issue wouldn't make it go away; it would only hurt Ball with voters. Even sympathetic media articles framed Ball as having been "stupid" for having pictures taken of her with her friends and family, gently tut-tutting something mostly 22-year-olds do.

On October 11, 2010, Ball released a statement and began speaking out against the sexist coverage of her campaign.

On the day the photos were posted, I thought of Hillary Clinton. How she came out the next day after her private life was public and held her head high. Many advisors told me I was finished, that this was not what people wanted from their member of Congress. I decided that I had to fight. I had to come out publicly and raise my voice on this issue, even though I risked becoming some joke candidate named Krystal Ball. I also risked drawing more attention to the photos, which I still find tremendously embarrassing, but mostly because I'm shy, not because I think that what I did was wrong.

Against nearly all the advice I was given I decided to give interviews. Siobhan "Sam" Bennett, from Women's Campaign Forum, helped me to realize that the way to combat this was to take it head-on, to confront it.

In the end, Krystal Ball did not win her Congressional race, but by calling attention to sexist coverage, Name It. Change It. made the media focus on what's really important to voters—and it was not which candidate had the sexiest Facebook photos.

JANICE HAHN AND THE YOUTUBE AD

In 2011, Democrat Janice Hahn was running in a special election to fill the seat for California's 36th Congressional district recently vacated by Democrat Jane Harman. A Los Angeles city councilmember, Hahn was running against Republican Craig Huey, a conservative political activist.

With the special election set to occur on July 12, and a month left to go in the campaign, the media coverage of the race was almost entirely taken over by a video produced by the SuperPAC Turn Right USA and directed by one of its founding members, Ladd Ehlinger, Jr.

In the video, a woman is dressed as a pole dancer and has a Janice Hahn "mask" with glowing red eyes. She dances provocatively while two African-American men dressed as gangsters sing, "Give us your cash, bitch, so we can shoot up the streets."

The reported basis for the ad, according to Turn Right USA, was that Hahn, as city councilmember, had supported programs that hired gang intervention specialists. While the ad was never aired as a paid TV spot, it was discussed endlessly throughout the media, and the sponsor, Ehlinger, spoke about it on national television.

The Women's Media Center, along with many other groups, was outraged by the ad's overtly sexist and racist content. We pointed out that the ad was also quite violent, ending with a rifle, the sound of shots, and the words "Keep her out of Congress." Considering that the shooting of Gabrielle Giffords had occurred earlier that year, the violent imagery hurled at Hahn was almost as disturbing as the blatant misogyny.

Huey at first declined to comment on the ad, claiming he had nothing to do with it. Later, he did denounce it, but made no move to ask Turn Right USA to take it down. Eventually it was viewed more than half a million times on YouTube during the campaign. Even though it was denounced from all quarters, it essentially dominated the final stages of the election.

In the end, Hahn won the special election, but the incident shows how a sexist ad can completely derail the campaign process.

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RESEARCH ON MEDIA SEXISM

KEY FINDINGS — SEXISM HAS CONSEQUENCES

- Sexism, even mild sexist language, has an impact on voters' likelihood to vote for a female candidate and on how favorably they feel toward a woman seeking office. It also affects perceptions of trustworthiness and effectiveness.
- Voters assume the sexist language comes from the woman's opponent, even when there is no indication in the newspaper stories or radio coverage that he or his campaign are involved. Her opponent pays some price—or will—for this type of negative coverage.
- Initially, after given a neutral profile of both a woman Congressional candidate and a man Congressional candidate, voters were more likely to say they would vote for the woman.
- If voters hear nonsexist, negative coverage of the woman and the man, the male candidate remains behind the woman.
- However, if voters hear sexist coverage of the woman candidate, the race becomes even.
- The effect of sexist language affects voters of all voting groups. The responses regain voters across the board.
- When the female candidate acknowledges and responds to sexist mistreatment by the media, it helps to repair the damage inflicted on her. She regains a clear lead over her opponent in the horserace, she regains some lost ground in vote likelihood, and voters are more likely to view her favorably.
- Responding helps a female candidate even if the audience didn't hear the original slur.

WHAT OUR RESEARCH SHOWS

In September 2010, [Lake Research Partners](#) conducted a survey of 800 likely voters nationwide to see if sexist language affected voters' preferences. The survey was divided into a systematic experiment based on a hypothetical campaign. Half of the voters heard sexist coverage of the female candidate and negative but not sexist coverage of the male candidate. The other half heard coverage with an equally strong critique of the female candidate that lacked sexist language. All of the situations we tested occurred in real campaigns and all of the language was said by actual media against women running for Congress or governor.

First, survey respondents were presented with two generic candidate descriptions: one of a man, the other of a woman.

Jane Smith enjoys a reputation as a bipartisan reformer and is an advocate for small businesses and hardworking families. An economist by training, she graduated at the top of her class in law school. She grew up in a working-class neighborhood where she learned the value of hard work and discipline. As the daughter of a police officer and a nurse, she believes in fiscal responsibility, cracking down on criminals, and getting this economy working again.

Before running for Congress, she served two terms on city council, one as head of the Chamber of Commerce, and is in her third term in the state legislature. She currently serves as a ranking member of the Appropriations and the Joint Economic committees. She believes in free markets and personal responsibility. She is also a strong and tireless advocate for families who are unable to make ends meet in these tough economic times.

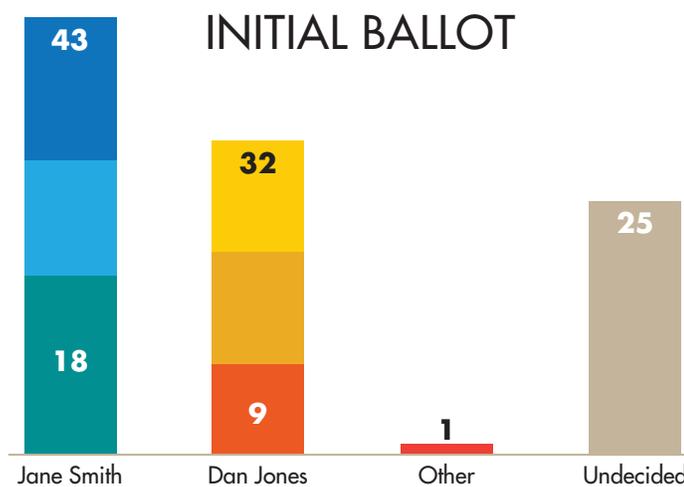
Smith married her high school sweetheart, Justin, a lawyer, and they have three grown children: Linda, Matt, and Jordon.

Dan Jones is known in the state legislature for his consistent voting record on issues like immigration, energy independence, and economic development. He is a staunch advocate for cutting unnecessary government regulations and is a believer in more fiscal discipline and accountability from Washington. He also believes in investing in our priorities like public education and expanding access to affordable health care for small business. He believes world-class education and affordable health care are key to our future economic competitiveness as a nation.

He successfully climbed the ranks of a Fortune 500 company before deciding to run for city comptroller and then was twice elected mayor of one of the largest cities in his state. He is currently serving his second term as state senator and majority leader, where he serves on the Appropriations Committee and the Governor’s Economic Task Force.

Jones met his wife, Cecilia, after college, and they have two grown children: Christopher and Taylor.

After hearing the descriptions of the candidates, voters favored our hypothetical female candidate, Jane Smith, over Dan Jones by 11 points (43 percent Smith to 32 percent Jones), with support for Smith twice as strong as that for Dan Jones (18 percent to 9 percent). A quarter of the voters were undecided.



Initially, voters favor Jane Smith by 11 points, with intense support for Smith twice as strong as that for Dan Jones. A quarter of voters are undecided.

But after voters heard a mild sexist news story that referred to Jane Smith as a “mean girl” and an “ice queen,” the ballot went from Smith being 11 points ahead to being 1 point behind. Sexist language reduced Jane’s support among both men and women. Every single group of voters was affected by sexism.

We also tested what happened when even stronger sexist language was used against our hypothetical female candidate:

Further exploring her votes on health care and taxes, Jane Smith supported an article in the health care bill that said that any state that declared an emergency would get a \$300 million grant. A talk radio host said she “may be the most expensive prostitute in the history of prostitution. She may be easy, but she’s not cheap.” Another noted radio host said, “Stupid Girl describes her vote pretty well.”

Nonsexist language about Smith also eroded voters' likelihood of voting for her, but not to the extent of the sexist attacks.

Among voters overall, the ballot remained static after voters heard the stronger sexist language, with Smith and Jones tied. The over-the-top sexism further eroded Smith's advantage in the horserace among every subgroup except men and Democrats. Such over-the-top language did get some pushback from men and younger voters, but not enough to make up for the initial losses from the milder "mean girl" and "ice queen" language.

VOTER LIKELIHOOD				
	JANE SMITH		DAN JONES	
	Less likely	More likely	Less likely	More likely
Initial	22%	54%	30%	42%
Mild sexist	69%	17%	66%	16%
Mild control	57%	23%	60%	19%
Top sexist	66%	18%	64%	18%
Top control	57%	23%	63%	19%

Sexist language erodes voters likelihood for voting for Smith.

Nearly seven in 10 voters reported being less likely to vote for Jane Smith after they heard her called an "ice queen" and a "mean girl," in addition to more overtly sexist language. Nonsexist language about Smith also eroded voters' likelihood of voting for her, but not to the extent of the sexist attacks. Republicans, Independents, and blue-collar voters were the most affected by the strong sexism, although sexist attacks lowered Jane Smiths' favorability across the board more than nonsexist attacks. It especially had an effect on men's voting preference.

It's well-known that negative attacks create an unfavorable impression of both candidates, both the attacker and the target. You might think, then, that voters would react negatively to a candidate who uses overtly sexist language on his female opponent. The answer is that they do: sexist language used on a female candidate *does* hurt her opponent. In our research, Dan Jones' favorability suffered whether or not news stories about him were compared to sexist news stories about Smith. Jane Smith's favorability wore down when voters heard both the sexist and the nonsexist attacks on her, but there also seems to be an extra price paid for a male candidate who is perceived to be engaging in a sexist campaign.

Though described as coming from newspapers, voters clearly assume the sexist attacks come from her opponent. There was some backlash with Dan Jones' favorability decreasing more with sexist attacks, especially among men.

The key takeaway, however, was that sexism hurts women candidates' favorability more than the male candidate it's perceived as coming from. Voters' favorability toward each candidate plummeted after voters heard about Jane Smith being an ice queen and a mean girl. Nearly three-quarters felt unfavorably toward Smith, giving Jones a slight edge overall.

HOW DOES MEDIA SEXISM AFFECT WOMEN CANDIDATES?

When voters are presented with a neutral description of a male and a female candidate, they start out believing the female candidate is more likely to care about people like them, share their values, and be trustworthy.

These results make sense in light of other research that shows voters have typically given women candidates a “virtue advantage”—having a slight edge in being seen as more honest and ethical than a male candidate.²

As one report noted, quoting a media consultant, “In my experience, voters are more likely to think that a woman candidate is in politics for the right reasons. [Voters] tend to start from a presumption that they are less corruptible and more honest and have more integrity than males.”³

But the advantage of being put on a pedestal of “virtue” for female candidates is in reality more like standing on a knife’s edge. Female candidates are punished more harshly by voters for any whiff of scandal.

Our research showed that voters’ views of Smith were strongly impacted by the sexist language. After hearing the sexist attacks, Smith was seen as less empathetic and trustworthy and her values were questioned. Even more alarming was that after hearing the sexist attacks, voters also questioned her effectiveness, even though the critiques said nothing about her job performance. Sexism alone costs female candidates all the advantage of their gender in a way that nonsexist critiques don’t. When voters only heard nonsexist attacks, Jane Smith’s positives dropped, but significantly less than they did for the sexist attacks.

Female candidates are also punished more harshly than male candidates for negative campaigning. When sexist attacks have occurred on them in the past, female candidates were typically advised not to respond for fear that making an issue out of sexism would only hurt them more. There was also a concern about amplifying a media frame that was detrimental to the candidate and potentially setting off a round of media stories that asked whether such attacks were sexist, completely moving away from any discussion of relevant issues in the campaign.

But our research found that this just isn’t the case. Female candidates for office ignore sexist attacks at their peril. While sexist coverage of female candidates puts a damper on voters’ likelihood to vote for them, a direct response makes up for lost ground.

Female candidates are also punished more harshly than male candidates for negative campaigning.

²“Turning Point: The Changing Landscape for Women Candidates.” Barbara Lee Family Foundation. 2010

³ IBID, p. 35

WHAT THE PRESS NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT HOW SEXIST COVERAGE AFFECTS WOMEN CANDIDATES

If sexism, stemming either from the opposing candidate or from media coverage, is having a negative impact on a female candidate in voters' eyes, then what does the press need to know about those responding to sexism?

Our research shows the sexist attack doesn't have to be egregious to have a negative impact. But calling attention to the sexism does have an impact—a positive one.

We tested three kinds of responses to sexist attacks. In the first, the candidate called the attacks sexist outright, while in the second she called the topic inappropriate and attempted to go back to talking about the issues. Another test was to have an outside party, a media accountability group, call out the sexism on her behalf.

The result? Once voters heard the three responses to the sexist coverage, favorability toward Jane Smith rebounded. Voters responded similarly to each response, indicating that confronting sexism is valuable, whether done by the campaign or by outside groups. The responses effectively neutralized the erosion of Jane Smith's support caused by the sexist media treatment. Smith didn't regain back *all* of her support prior to the sexist attack, but she rebounded some, and ended up in a better poll position than if she hadn't responded at all.

The most interesting finding: when voters heard a candidate's response to a sexist incident, they still responded positively to the candidate even when they never heard the original slur. For years, women candidates have been advised not to respond to such incidents for fear of spreading the charges farther than the original event. Our research shows that there's a much higher potential cost to candidates who brush off even subtle sexism. This is why when the media pooh-poo women candidates who complain about sexism, it actually compounds the problem for women.

Celinda Lake summarized her takeaway from the results thus: "Up until this research was conducted, I often advised women to ignore toxic media sexism. But now, women candidates are equipped with evidence that shows they can recover voter confidence from sexist media coverage by directly addressing it, and standing up for all current and future women leaders."

Reporters need to be aware that subtle sexism can actually be far more damaging to candidates than deliberate and outrageous sexism. It can be harder for candidates to respond directly to coverage that is subtly tilted against them, especially when the reporters aren't even aware they are being sexist!

The most interesting finding: when voters heard a candidate's response to a sexist incident, they still responded positively to the candidate even when they never heard the original slur.

MEDIA PLEDGE OF GENDER NEUTRALITY

SIGN THE PLEDGE!

We invite members of the media to sign the Name It. Change It. Media Pledge of Gender Neutrality. By signing it, you pledge to use gender-neutral language (i.e., not sexist) when writing and/or speaking about women candidates and politicians. We encourage news reporters, columnists, pundits, bloggers, radio and television hosts, and Twitter users to sign the pledge. Refraining from sexist language is as important as refraining from racist language, and improves the media culture for all women.

You can sign the pledge online at

www.nameitchangeit.org/page/s/equality-pledge

Text of Media Pledge of Gender Neutrality

I promise to adhere to fair journalistic standards that promote accuracy and objectivity in covering political candidates and their issues. I will try to treat all subjects with respect, regardless of gender, and to create an overall media culture in which sexism has no place. This includes not posing questions or using language for one gender that I would not feel is equally applicable to the other. I recognize that sexist language and representation do a disservice to my audience and the public at large. I pledge to do my part to prevent all instances of sexist coverage of candidates, leaders, and people of all walks of life, and to hold fellow journalists and media outlets accountable to this same standard of conduct.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FROM *UNSPINNING THE SPIN: THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER GUIDE TO FAIR + ACCURATE LANGUAGE*

Unspinning the Spin: The Women's Media Center Guide to Fair & Accurate Language, by Rosalie Maggio is based on research by the Women's Media Center. Our findings show that language not only reveals or conceals reality, but creates imagery that becomes the basis for our actions and thus shapes reality itself.

Unspinning the Spin is a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary guide to words and phrases—their meanings, sources, backgrounds, suggested uses, and alternatives—than has been published so far. It is a guide for journalists and editors in this and other countries, for bloggers creating their own media and government officials creating policy, for students and teachers at all levels, for activists, for workers in communication fields, and for any reader who loves the English language.

Below is a selection of terms excerpted from *Unspinning the Spin*, the full version of which will be available for download from www.womensmediacenter.com in 2012.

Rosalie Maggio, the author of *Unspinning the Spin*, has been a well-recognized and well-read authority on language for more than 20 years. In 1991, she published *The Dictionary of Bias-Free Usage: A Guide to Non-Discriminatory Language* that won awards from the American Library Association and the Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights. It led to her further authoritative and creative books on language.

A

aggressive “aggressive,” and its more negative synonym “pushy,” are often used disparagingly of women and Jews. Deborah Tannen (*Gender and Discourse*) suggests that the “stereotype of Jews as aggressive and pushy results in part from differences in conversational style.” In the lead opinion in the court case of a woman who failed to be named a partner because she was considered too aggressive, Walter Brennan wrote, “An employer who objects to aggressiveness in women but whose positions require this trait places women in an intolerable and impermissible Catch-22: out of a job if they behave aggressively and out of a job if they don't.” When pollster Celinda Lake asked observers to rate women and men reading the same text at identical decibel levels, the women were invariably described as louder, more aggressive, and shrill. Of a related term, Marlo Thomas says, “A man has to be Joe McCarthy to be called ruthless. All a woman has to do is put you on hold.” See also “feisty.”

“(and women)” do not make afterthoughts of women by inserting them in parentheses after “men.” You might also see “women (and men)” or “lesbians (and bisexuals),” or some other term indicating, “Oops, I should mention them too.” The vast majority of the time, the parenthetical terms are equal in weight and meaning to the preceding terms. A good writer will distinguish that rare need to put a second group in parentheses. In addition, avoid constructions like “noted funny men and women.” It's either “funny people” or “funny men and funny women.”

B

balls acceptable sex-specific word when it means testicles. For inclusive metaphorical use, substitute with: guts, moxie, courage, nerve, bravery, self-assurance, confidence, determination, stamina, spunk. Women are occasionally congratulated with “That took balls!” or encouraged with “You have the balls for it.” For “ballbreaker/ballbuster,” meaning a difficult or complicated task or situation, use: gutbuster, bunbuster, tough row to hoe, killer, bad news, hell on wheels, no picnic, up a tree, hell of a note, tall/large order, tough grind/one, tough sledding, sticky business, stumper, uphill job, tight spot. In a related expression, “testicular fortitude” can be rendered sex-neutral with “intestinal fortitude.”

ballsy “a term that has slipped so far from its original mooring that it can be applied to females” (Hugh Rawson, *Wicked Words*). See also “balls.”

bimbo from the Italian for “little boy” or “little kid,” this word now has a range of meanings: a sexually loose woman, giddy woman, or a clown-like or klutzy person of either sex. Used chiefly to describe women involved with men involved with trouble (for example, Donna Rice, Fawn Hall, and Jessica Hahn with, respectively, Gary Hart, Oliver North, and Jimmy Bakker). It demonstrates that the women get the label while the men who do the running around, arms dealing, and bilking still remain just guys.

bitch (*n.*) one of the most loaded of the sexist words, “bitch” tends to be directed at women who are “active, direct, blunt, obnoxious, competent, loud-mouthed, independent, stubborn, demanding, achieving, overwhelming, lusty, strong-minded, scary, ambitious, tough, brassy, boisterous, turbulent, sprawling, strident, striding, and large (physically and/or psychically)” (Mary Daly). Molly Hoben (*Minnesota Women’s Press*) says “Bitch—long a favorite linguistic weapon of those who yearn to put down uppity women—has become increasingly common.” She notes that in pre-Christian Greek and Roman religions, one of the sacred titles of the goddess Artemis-Diana was “the Great Bitch,” but like other words with once-positive connotations for women, “bitch” has become a pejorative used against strong women by those who feel threatened. Minneapolis attorney Rebecca Palmer says, “In the workplace setting, the label of ‘bitch’ is often accompanied by inappropriate, demeaning behavior. ... A number of courts around the country have grappled with the issue of whether, from a legal standpoint, referring to a female employee as a ‘bitch’ is defamatory or discriminatory.” In the introduction to *Bitchfest*, the editors of the outstanding pop culture magazine, *Bitch*, write: “‘Cause here’s the thing about ‘bitch’: When it’s being used as an insult, the word is most often aimed at women who speak their minds, who have opinions that contradict conventional wisdom, and who don’t shy away from expressing them. That said, we are aware that the word carries a difficult, complex legacy ... as well as the fact that its popularity as an epithet is more sanctioned than ever. And yet we still think, ten years later, that it’s the most appropriate title for a magazine that’s all about talking back.” Sometimes the correct alternative to “bitch” is simply “woman,” “person,” or “individual.” For example, African-American slang and lyrics sometimes treat “my bitch” as if it were as acceptable as saying “my girlfriend.” It can also sometimes be used as an inclusive noun: grumbler, grouch, griper, malcontent, sourpuss, sorehead, bellyacher, crab, crank, kvetcher. Other times, you may want an adjective: hell on wheels, ruthless, aggressive, domineering, controlling, powerful, tyrannical, overwhelming, overpowering, spiteful, malicious, cruel, wicked, vicious, cold-hearted, hard-hearted, merciless. In the sense of a complaint, use: gripe, complaint, problem, bone to pick, objection. In the sense of something that is difficult, unpleasant, or problematic, use: tough row to hoe, tough nut to crack, heavy sledding, hornet’s nest, between a rock and a hard place, bad news/one, tough grind/one, large order, predicament, no picnic, thorny/knotty problem, uphill job, backbreaker, gutbuster, bunbuster, dilemma, bind, tangle, mess, fine pickle, hell of a note.

blonde blond. Use the shorter base word as an adjective for both sexes; historically, both have been used for both sexes. The use of “blond” as a noun seems reserved for women, whereas equating a man with his hair color is uncommon. Use “blond” to modify hair rather than to describe women (i.e., “a woman with blond hair,” not “a blond”).

bombshell/blonde bombshell (woman) these terms are militaristic, violent, and sexist (there is no parallel for a man); they portray women as destructive to men, even though superficially, they appear complimentary.

brunette although the base (male) term is “brunet,” it is rarely used, most likely because referring to people’s hair color is largely reserved for women. Can you imagine calling a man “a brunet”? Question the labeling of women by facets of their appearance and the need to talk about their hair.

butch (woman) usage of “butch” follows the “insider/outsider” rule, i.e., it is acceptable for lesbians who want to use the term; it is generally unacceptable for non-lesbians to use it.

C

Caesar’s wife if you need a gender-free substitute, consider: someone whose conduct is impeccable, someone about whom there hovers the odor of sanctity, someone who is beyond reproach/above suspicion/irreproachable/unimpeachable/innocent/blameless/sinless/clean-handed.

catfight when women disagree with each other, the proceedings are sometimes stereotyped as a catfight. Men’s disagreements are not called catfights or dogfights or anything else; they are simply arguments, disagreements, debates, discussions, conflicts, or disputes.

catty malicious, spiteful, snide, sly, underhanded, disingenuous, envious. Beware of “catty,” which is used exclusively for women; the alternatives can refer to either sex.

childcare childcare issues do not belong uniquely to women; they are family, social, political, and business issues (companies that have innovative policies on childcare and family-friendly benefits are not motivated by benevolence—their programs make good business sense). Childcare is often the most pressing employee need, yet companies facing cost-cutting pressures and concerned about liability issues are trying to provide childcare programs on the cheap, or with minimal effort. The most popular childcare benefit is dependent-care spending accounts, offered by 89 percent of the companies with childcare programs surveyed. These accounts allow employees to pay for childcare expenses

with pretax dollars deducted from wages. The biggest need is national recognition of and government support for universally available, high-quality childcare.

city councilman city councilor/council member. The two alternatives are so widely used today that there should be minimal need for “city councilwoman” and “city councilman.” If the sex of the council members is germane, it will be obvious from their names or the pronouns used to refer to them.

clotheshorse fancy/fashionable/sharp/conspicuous dresser, tailor’s/sartorial dream, a person it pays to dress, one who keeps the tailor in business, clothes-conscious person. “Clotheshorse” invariably refers to a woman.

cocksure/cocky this is used of both sexes although it comes from the male fowl and tends to be used more often for men. If you want a sex-neutral term, use: self-confident, overconfident, arrogant, self-important, in love with oneself, pushy, overbearing, swaggering, aggressive, conceited, haughty, supercilious; jaunty, brash, cheeky, flippant, saucy, nervy, impertinent, insolent, careless.

committeeman/committeewoman member of the committee, committee member; ward leader, precinct leader. “Committeewoman” and “committeeman” are not as equal as they seem; “committeewoman” is a much less weighty term.

complain this is often used of women and members of minority groups to discount what they are saying. For example, “Women are more likely to complain of discrimination.” Depending on the meaning, it should say “report discrimination” or “experience discrimination” or “protest discrimination.” This usage may have come from legal terminology in which a complainant “complains,” but using that sense in everyday language for certain people and not others is ambiguous and biased. Even at the doctor’s office, notes may reveal that the man reported frequent headaches while the woman complained of them.

congressman member of Congress, representative, congressional representative, legislator, member of the United States House of Representatives, delegate, assembly member; “congressman” and “congresswoman” if they are used fairly—and if “congressman” is not used as a false generic. “Congressperson” is not recommended, although it is seen from time to time. If “member of Congress” seems cumbersome, think of how often we have heard “member of Parliament” (nobody was ever a Parliamentman). Although “congressman” or “congresswoman” is technically a correct title for senators and representatives, it is typically used to describe members of the House of Representatives; senators are always called “senator.” Failing to use a false generic

also reveals a real problem: worldwide rankings of women in national governing bodies places the U.S. in 68th place (Ms.).

councilman councilor, council member, member of the council/city council, city representative, municipal officer, ward manager, commissioner, councilwoman, and councilman. Beware of “councilman” as a false generic; “councilperson” is not recommended, although it is seen and heard from time to time.

D

ditz/ditzy these terms seem used primarily of women, so you may want more inclusive-appearing alternatives: out to lunch, space ranger, flake, out of it, on another planet, with one’s head in the clouds, not all there, missing some marbles, with a mind like a sieve, mindless, brainless wonder, dense, muddleheaded, not bright, half-witted, dull-witted, dim-witted, thick-headed, thick-witted, inane.

E

emotional in our culture, “emotional” is not an admired trait; the word is most often used as an antonym for “rational” or “intelligent.” Largely because of changing social attitudes toward women, “emotional” is not used as often as it once was to rebut a woman’s arguments or generally discount her as a thinking human being. The problem today, says M. Adam (in Francis Baumli, *Men Freeing Men*), is that “women can now wax logical while men look silly waxing emotional.” Until men are free to wax emotional, and “emotional” is a positive word for both sexes, use it cautiously. See also “irrational.”

F

fair-haired boy/fair-haired girl the favorite, the apple of someone’s eye, privileged person, someone with pull, front runner, person after one’s own heart, in one’s good graces, persona grata, teacher’s pet. “Fair-haired” is problematic because (1) making “fair” the preferred coloring is racist and ethnocentric; (2) the phrases are used of adults, which makes the boy/girl designation inappropriate; (3) “fair-haired boy” is common, while “fair-haired girl” is not.

family man homebody, stay-at-home, family head, home-lover, family-oriented/family-centered/home-centered person, someone devoted to the family. Note the lack of parallel for women; all women are evidently “family women.”

feisty during her vice-presidential campaign, Geraldine Ferraro was referred to as “spunky” and “feisty”; Michael Geis (*The Language of Politics*) says both words are normally reserved for individuals and animals that are not inherently potent or powerful; “one can call a Pekinese dog spunky or feisty, but one would not, I think, call a Great Dane spunky or feisty.” And the press would certainly not have labeled George Bush, then Ferraro’s opponent, as spunky or feisty. “Numerous examples of the special or sexist treatment of female leaders include ... use of the terms ‘oppressive,’ ‘feisty,’ and ‘pushy’ to describe behavior in women that would be called ‘tough’ and ‘decisive’ in men” (Thalia Zepatos and Elizabeth Kaufman, *Women for a Change*).

female (n.) “female” is used as a noun only in technical writing (medicine, statistics, police reports, sociology). It is most often reserved for biological or nonhuman references. When using “female,” use the parallel “male,” not “man.” “Female” is not sexist because it contains “male.” Dennis Baron (*Grammar and Gender*) says, “Actually *female* derives from the Latin *femella*, a diminutive of *femina*, ‘woman.’ It is completely unrelated to *male*, which comes to us via Old French from Latin *masculus*, a diminutive of *ma*, ‘male, masculine.’” See also “female (adj.).”

female (adj.) although it is preferable to use “woman” or “women” as adjectives (when it is necessary), there are times when “female” seems more appropriate. Use it, however, only when you would use “male” in a similar situation or when it is necessary for clarification; sex-specific adjectives are often gratuitous and belittling (one sees “female lawyer” but not “male doctor”). Watch especially for nonparallel usage (“two technicians and a female mechanic”). *Female* is not linguistically derived from, nor in any way related to, *male*. See also “female (n.).”

Feminine/femininity avoid these stereotypes that convey different meanings to different people according to their perceptions of what a woman ought or ought not do, say, think, wear, feel, or look like. Instead, use specific descriptive adjectives for the qualities you want to express: gracious, warm, gentle, thoughtful, sensitive, loyal, receptive, supportive, compassionate, expressive, affectionate, tender, charming, nurturing, well-mannered, cooperative, neat, soft-spoken, considerate, kind. These adjectives may be used equally appropriately for a man. In *Thinking About Women*, Mary Ellmann writes, “[F]eminine functions as an eight-letter word in the notorious Woodrow Wilson biography by Freud and William Bullitt. At one heated point, Clemenceau calls Wilson feminine. Wilson calls Clemenceau feminine, then both Freud and Bullitt call Wilson feminine again. The word means that all four men thoroughly dislike each other.” F.

Scott Fitzgerald did not use the cliché “feminine” to describe the unforgettable Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. He wrote instead, “She laughed again, as if she said something very witty, and held my hand for a moment, looking up into my face, promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had.” Daisy’s charm did not belong to Woman; it was uniquely hers.

“feminine” word endings suffixes like *-ess*, *-ette*, and *-trix* (1) specify a person’s sex when gender is irrelevant; (2) carry a demeaning sense of littleness or triviality (Rush Limbaugh derides women who succeed in traditionally male-dominated professions as “professorettes” and “lawyerettes”); (3) perpetuate the notion that the male is the norm and the female is a subset, a deviation, a secondary classification. A poet is defined as “one who writes poetry” while a poetess is defined as “a female poet”; men are thus “the real thing” and women are sort of like them. The recommended procedure is to use the base word for both sexes (thus, “waiter” instead of “waitress,” “executor” instead of “executrix”).

food names for people while some food names for people are positive (“creampuff,” “peach,” “stud muffin”), most are in some way belittling, trivializing, objectifying, or sexist: arm candy, babycakes, beefcake, cheesecake, cookie, cupcake, cutie pie, dish, fruit, fruitcake, fruit salad, honeycakes, lambchop, marshmallow, pudding, pumpkin, sugar, sugar and spice, sweetie pie, sweet potato pie, tart, tomato, top banana. Metaphors are more acceptable than labels: “apple of my eye” can be said of either sex and it doesn’t mean the person is an apple in the same way a woman is called a tomato. Strong writing depends on metaphors—even metaphors based on food—but there is a difference between labeling people and creating vivid word associations.

frump/frumpy because one of the two definitions of “frump” is an unattractive girl/woman, and because the terms are commonly reserved for women, you may need alternatives: slob, sloven, unkempt person, stick-in-the-mud; dowdy, slovenly, unkempt, tacky, drab, old-fashioned, unfashionable, out-of-date, staid.

G

gentleman’s agreement unwritten/informal/oral/honorable/verbal agreement, verbal/oral promise/contract, handshake, your word, mutual understanding.

girl (referring to a woman) woman, young woman. “Girl” is reserved for pre-teens or at the most for those 15 or under; it is objectionable and demeaning when used by men for young women or women. Among women, the term has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity, with

the Guerilla Girls in the mid-'80s and the mainstreaming of African-American usages ("girlfriend" and "You go, girl!"). "Girl" is seen on T-shirts and in names like Cybergrrl and Riot Grrrls. "No longer just a badge of youth or a sign of silliness, servitude, or class difference, 'Girl!' has become a mark of pride in one's gender, a sarcastic scoff at those who for centuries patronized females with its use" (Jessica B. Baker, in *Lilith*). For others to refer to women this way is unacceptable—particularly in the workplace. Mariah Burton Nelson notes the use of "girl" as an insult in sports, as in "You play/throw/catch like a girl."

girlie girls and women have recently started using the adjective to describe some interests and attitudes, but the "insider/outsider" rule applies here; others should not use it.

"girlie man/men" lifted from a *Saturday Night Live* skit, this insult has been most famously used by Arnold Schwarzenegger of his political opponents. Joanna Grossman and Linda McClain, on the legal news and commentary website FindLaw, say that "the increasing use of the term 'girlie men' is no joke—it's an example of offensive, yet powerful sex stereotyping. ... It's damaging for America to continue to identify maleness with the qualities we hope for in political leaders—and indeed, in business leaders."

girlish for this vague and usually pejorative term, consider alternatives: ingenuous, naive, childlike, innocent, open, friendly, eager, youthful, immature, self-conscious, inept, adolescent, childish, sophomoric, juvenile, callow, unsophisticated.

gossip not sexist, per se (it originally meant "godparent"), "gossip" is functionally sexist because the term is reserved for women. For the verb, use: talk idly, talk over, talk up a storm, chat, converse, shoot the breeze, pass the time of day, make small talk, jaw, make chin music, wag tongues, rattle away, run off at the mouth, beat one's gums, bend someone's ear, talk someone's arm/head off; repeat everything one hears, tell secrets, spread rumors/stories, mudsling, dish the dirt. For the noun, use: rumormonger, whisperer, talebearer, blabbermouth, big mouth, mudslinger, motormouth, jaw-smith, loose tongue, chin wag, newsmonger, windbag, idle talker; palaver, idle/small/empty talk, scuttlebutt, hearsay, chin music, talkfest, an earful.

gossipy long-winded, big-mouthed, talkative, curious, loquacious, garrulous, gregarious, windy; rumormongering. See also "gossip."

H

he (pseudogeneric) never use "he" when you mean "he and she," or when you are referring to someone who could be a man or a woman (for example, "the consumer/he"). Make your sentence plural, or circumlocute.

his do not use "his" to mean "his and hers," or when it might refer to either a man or a woman (for example, "the plumber/his"); replace with the plural, or circumlocute.

housewife homemaker, householder, homeowner, consumer, woman who works at home, woman, home/household manager, customer, shopper, parent, "domestic goddess" (Roseanne Barr). "Housewife" marries a woman to her house and identifies someone by gender and marital status (both often irrelevant in the context).

husband and wife vary this phrase half the time to "wife and husband." Male grammarians asserted centuries ago that the male was more important than the female, and should always be placed first, thus giving us "husband and wife," "Mr. and Mrs.," "boy and girl," "he and she," etc. English jurist Sir William Blackstone was a man of their kidney: "Husband and wife are one, and that one is the husband."

I

irrational this term is too often used as a rebuttal of women's arguments or applied inaccurately to women as a catch-all condemnation; use carefully in reference to women. It is not used in the same way for men. See also "emotional."

L

ladies and gentlemen when used to address an audience, this will probably not set most teeth on edge although it is old-fashioned and the correct pair for "gentlemen" is "gentlewomen." Many speakers now use terms that are more generic, contemporary, and meaningful: friends, family and friends, delegates, colleagues, members of the association, staff members. Or omit what is often a meaningless phrase and begin directly, "Welcome."

ladies' man this term is problematic because there is no precise equivalent for women ("gentlemen's woman"?) and because of the use of "ladies'." The lopsided and unattractive "parallels" for women would be the pejorative "femme fatale" and "man-eater." Some alternatives: popular/successful with the women/the men, heartbreaker, hottie, smooth operator, God's gift to men/women.

lady (noun) woman. Many good people have trouble understanding the objections to “lady.” “But isn’t that a nice word?” they ask. “The concept of ‘lady’ goes far beyond a single word to a whole way of life” (Alette Olin Hill, *Mother Tongue, Father Time*). In its traditional use, “lady” defines women as ornaments or decorations rather than real people, as arbiters of both manners and morals, as members of a leisured class, as beings removed from any hint of sexuality, as needing protection from real life, as “too good” or “too special” to “dirty their hands”; as such, it is classist, condescending, trivializing, and anachronistic. However, in recent years, the term has been reclaimed and used somewhat ironically among certain groups of women. The “insider/outsider” rule applies here; others should not use it. “Lady” was once the equivalent of “knight” in the social order, and it has also been paired with “gentleman,” yet neither of these terms is used today in the way “lady” is. Note, too, that “lady” is used sometimes to express annoyance, whereas “woman” is not (“Hey, lady, I was here first!” or “Look, lady, we’re sorry, okay?”). The use of “lady” is unobjectionable when referring to a female member of the House of Lords; you want to convey a sense of graciousness (“She’s a real lady”); when it is paired with “gentleman” (“Welcome, ladies and gentlemen”). According to the *New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*, “Except in wry contexts, *lady* is obsolete for woman, just as *gentleman* is obsolete for man.” The *National Public Radio Style Guide* is more curt: “Do not use as a synonym for woman.”

ladylike conveying different meanings according to people’s perceptions of what a woman ought or ought not do, say, think, wear, feel, or look like, “ladylike” is a subjective cultural judgment. Choose instead precise adjectives: courteous, well-mannered, civil, polite, tender, cooperative, neat, soft-spoken, gentle, aristocratic, cultured, elegant, proper, correct, gracious, considerate, refined, well-bred, kind, well-spoken. These adjectives apply equally well to a man. See also “lady.”

“like a girl” (fight like a girl/throw like a girl) an equal opportunity offender, this phrase puts down women while putting down men, or vice versa.

M

male (n.) “male” is used as a noun only in technical writing (medicine, statistics, police reports, sociology); (adj.) use only when you would use “female” or when it is necessary for clarification; this adjective is often inserted gratuitously, for example, “male nurse,” “male secretary,” “male model,” “male prostitute.”

man, act like a/be a/take it like a be brave/bold, defy, bear up, meet/confront with courage/bravery/valor/boldness, hold up one’s head, take heart, face the music, act courageously/bravely/wisely/straightforwardly/honorably, show fortitude/patience/determination/strength/vigor, stand up for oneself, be independent/resolute/unflinching/earnest. Expressions like “Be a man” limit, bewilder, and oppress men while also implying that women are not bold, courageous, straightforward, or hardy. (Alternatives are for both sexes.) Russell Baker (*About Men*) says, “Before you were old enough to think for yourself, they were preparing you for a lifetime of feeling like a disgrace to your sex. ... Men would rather have their eyes blackened and teeth loosened than let the whole world see that they hate being severely beaten.”

man and wife never use this; it is a nonparallel construction. Use instead “man and woman/woman and man,” “wife and husband/husband and wife,” “spouses,” “mates,” “partners,” or “married couple.”

manlike/manly by definition, whatever a man does is manly or manlike because a man is doing it. Consider precise adjectives: courageous, strong, brave, upright, honorable, mature, noble, resolute, straightforward, vigorous, adventurous, spirited, direct, competitive, physical, mechanical, logical, rude, active, self-confident. See also “like a man.”

maternal unless you mean “motherlike” or “mother-related” (“maternal grandfather”), use: parental, ancestral; kindly, kindhearted, loving, devoted, indulgent, solicitous, concerned, fond, protective, sympathetic.

matronly replace this vague word with precise, inclusive terms: dignified, gracious, ponderous, heavy-set, established, grave, comfortable-looking, serene, slow-moving, well-dressed, mature, sedate. There is no such word as “patronly.”

mother (noun) “mother” is a perfectly good word. However, use “parent” or “mother and father” to avoid associating all the responsibility for parenting with the mother (a breakfast cereal box has “kid-tested, mother-approved”). A woman expecting a child is a pregnant woman, not a mother, unless she has other children. Mothers can be adoptive, biological, birth, gestational, lesbian, ovarian, step, surrogate, and uterine—although the most popular word is still the unadorned “mother.”

motherly replace this vague adjective with precise ones: warm, nurturing, loving, kind, kindly, protective, supportive, caring, solicitous, considerate, interested, benevolent, good-natured, fond, affectionate, devoted, tender, gentle, demonstrative, sympathetic, understand-

ing, indulgent, obliging, forbearing, tolerant, well-meaning, sheltering, generous. These words also apply to men; they are not synonyms for “motherly” but rather what people seem to mean by it.

N

nag (*n.*) because this is used to refer only for women (with no parallel word for men) consider using: grouch, grump, grumbler, fussbudget, crosspatch, faultfinder, complainer, nitpicker, sorehead, crank, griper.

nag (*v.*) although “nag” is not sexist *per se*, it has been used almost exclusively for women, while in the same situation, men are said to bully, chew out, complain, or just plain talk. Consider using one of the many available alternatives: complain, gripe, criticize, scold, kvetch, badger, pick on, find fault, pester, harass, grumble, grouse, irritate, harp at/on, bicker, drive up the wall, fuss, raise a fuss, have a bone to pick with; persist, lobby, push, press, ask again, tell, say, remind, repeat, or reiterate. See also “bitch,” “henpeck,” “whine.”

nanny historically, this described a woman servant who had charge of young children. In Great Britain today, it refers to a woman who has two or more years of formal training, has passed a national examination, and has possibly served an internship. No certification boards or examinations are offered for nannies in the United States, but a few programs offer nanny training. A U.S. nanny is usually someone who cares for children full-time in the home. Otherwise, use inclusive terms: babysitter, live-in babysitter, family/parents’ helper, childcare worker/specialist, child minder/monitor/attendant, nursery worker, tutor.

nurture (*v.*) both men and woman can nurture. They can also mentor, encourage, train, reassure, motivate, or support. You may want to zero in on the particular aspect of “nurture” you are detailing.

O

old lady/old man these terms have been used for generations (usually with “my”) to refer disrespectfully to one’s spouse, live-in partner, or parent. “Old man” has also been used to refer quasi-admiringly to one’s boss or to a high-ranking male officer; “old lady” was never used this way. Note the nonparallel “lady/man.” See also “old woman.”

old woman this put-down does triple duty: it insults the man being so described, makes an epithet of “woman,” and is also ageist. Use instead for both sexes: fussbudget, fuddy-duddy, weakling, worrywart, handwinger, worrier. See also “old lady”/“old man.”

one man, one vote one person/citizen/member/legislator/voter, one vote, one vote per voter/person/citizen/member/legislator.

P

partner this word is used by many lesbian, gay, and unmarried heterosexual couples to denote the person with whom they are living or to whom they are romantically attached. “Partner” may suggest a business association, but until a better word is found, it is one of the more useful possibilities available today. Other terms in use are “companion,” “longtime companion,” and “lover.”

petite this is used only of women, and its masculine companion, “petit,” has a rather important and meaningful life in the legal world—an example of yet another female-male word pair that bit the dust. If size is relevant, use inclusive terms: small, tiny, miniature, pint-size, teeny, short, trim, slight, slender, thin, lean.

philanderer this means “lover of men” but is defined as a man who flirts with women (it may have originally referred to gay lovers). In practice, it’s used for men who seem to buzz from woman to woman. Like “womanizer” and “ladies’ man,” it doesn’t have the negative connotations you might think it would; the equivalents for women are on the order of “slut.” Use “philanderer” in balanced ways for both men and women, or replace: heartbreaker, flirt, indiscriminate lover, bedswerver, seducer.

“politically correct” “There are few things more wearisome in a fairly fatiguing life than the monotonous repetition of a phrase which catches and holds the public fancy by virtue of its total lack of significance,” Agnes Repplier wrote in 1897, but surely she had some precognition of the term “political correctness” because she also wrote, in 1916, “People who pin their faith to a catchword never feel the necessity of understanding anything.” The term “politically correct” is a loose term from much flabby living; its meanings run along the lines of “I hate what you’re doing,” “Stop it! Stop it right now!” and “For heaven’s sake, why would we change anything?” Many people can no longer even identify what specifically they are decrying. Your writing and arguments will be much clearer if you drop “political correctness” altogether and state your objections: it is “bias-free language” or “multiculturalism” or “hate speech codes” or “affirmative action” or “diversity”—not “all that PC stuff.” The final word perhaps belongs to Robin Morgan: “P.C. doesn’t stand for Political Correctness, it stands for Plain Courtesy.”

pussy this vulgar slang for the vulva is used as a euphemism for “cunt” and is also a derogatory term for a

woman. For younger people, it has come to be synonymous with “wimp,” “loser,” and other derogatory terms.

Q

queen (n.) acceptable sex-specific word for royalty. If you need a gender-free term, try: ruler, monarch, sovereign, crowned head, leader. In the world of slurs, “queen” can be used to demean a man considered to be “effeminate.” “King” has not been similarly misused and downgraded. If you are reporting hate speech, set the term in quotation marks to show the bias of the speaker. Better yet, to avoid giving the word an airing, report that the person “used a derogatory word for a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person.” Gay men might use “queen” among themselves, but its use is unacceptable by non-gays.

queen (v.) women “queen it over” others, while men “lord it over.” While somewhat asymmetric, the terms are functionally benign. Should you need inclusive alternatives consider: have the upper hand, hold something over someone’s head, wear the crown, hold court, have/get it all one’s own way, have the game in one’s own hand/corner/court.

queen bee correct when referring to the inhabitant of a hive. If you want a less sex-specific expression for its metaphorical use, consider “big wheel.”

queenlike/queenly there is nothing particularly biased about these sex-specific words, but, like most stereotypes, they are vague. If you want more precise adjectives, consider: regal, imperial, noble, dignified, imposing, impressive, stately, majestic, commanding, haughty.

S

sassy/saucy because these are used only of girls and women, you may want to instead consider: impudent, insolent, mouthy, bold, nifty, forward.

scold (v.) instead of this, use for a woman the term you would use for a man in the same situation: chide, reprimand, lecture, admonish, criticize, remonstrate, upbraid, chew out, rebuke, chastise, give a piece of one’s mind, lay down the law.

shrew in theory nonsexist, in practice “shrew” is reserved for women. Consider using: grouch, grumbler, crosspatch, faultfinder, fire-eater, complainer, pain in the neck, nitpicker, troublemaker, bad-tempered/peevish/cranky/petulant person. Ethel Strainchamps has pointed out that the root of “shrew” is the same as that of “shrewd,” which is more commonly used of men.

social butterfly this phrase generally refers to a woman, but there are no equally good inclusive alternatives for it. “Social butterfly” conveys a sense of light-mindedness along with the sociable, gregarious character of the person. Either use “social butterfly” for men too or consider sex-neutral adjectives and nouns: gregarious, outgoing, social, sociable, socially active, convivial, extroverted; joiner, gadabout, socialite.

spouse has had a straightforward, nonpejorative history referring to a marriage partner of either sex. It is also used sometimes in same-sex or nonmarried heterosexual relationships. “Spousal equivalent”—which may sound either officious or tongue-in-cheek—has been sighted.

statesman diplomat, world/government/political leader, politician, legislator, lawmaker, public figure, political/government strategist, public servant/official; stateswoman and statesman. Do not use “statesperson”—it’s not only awkward, but so far it’s been used only for women.

statesmanlike/statesmanly diplomatic, politically savvy.

strident used primarily to describe women (especially feminists) indiscriminately and discriminatingly, “strident” (as well as “shrill”) has become a stereotype that means little more than “She makes me sick!” Alternatives include: harsh, jarring, raucous, dissonant, discordant, unharmonious, clashing, sharp.

T

tart if you mean “prostitute,” use “prostitute.” If you mean a woman considered to be sexually promiscuous, consider describing her behavior factually rather than labeling her judgmentally. (Originally, “tart” was used as an endearment, much as “honey” or “sugar” is used.)

tomcat Hugh Rawson (*Wicked Words*) says this originated from the hero’s name in a 1760 bestseller, *The Life and Adventures of a Cat*. In reference to a cat, use only for male cats. To mean a man who is sexually active with more than one partner, it may be clearer to describe rather than label the behavior.

trophy wife introduced in *Fortune* magazine’s 1989 article, “The CEO’s Second Wife,” this term describes a pattern among chief executives to discard longtime spouses for women typically younger, “sometimes several inches taller, beautiful and very often accomplished.” (There are so far no trophy husbands, although the “toyboy” may represent the practice stage.)

U

unfeminine avoid this vague, self-contradictory cultural stereotype. A woman's clothes, behavior, words, feelings, and thoughts are, by definition, "feminine" because a woman is wearing them, saying them, and feeling them. Words like "womanly/unwomanly," "manly/unmanly," "feminine/unfeminine," "masculine/unmasculine," "ladylike/unladylike," and "gentlemanly/ungentlemanly" are based on cultural, not biological, expectations. Language should not underwrite this illogic. The only truly unfeminine things are those things biologically reserved for men. Replace the unhelpful and inexact word "unfeminine" with descriptive adjectives: cold, hard, selfish, abrupt, analytical, direct, competent, logical, etc. These adjectives can apply equally well to a man and are not synonyms for "unfeminine" but rather reflect the cultural spin on this word.

ungentlemanly see "unmasculine" for an explanation of the subjective cultural meanings attached to this word. Define what you mean by "ungentlemanly" in precise terms: impolite, crude, rude, insensitive, thoughtless, discourteous, poorly behaved, ill-mannered, uncivil, disagreeable, inconsiderate. These adjectives (which can apply equally well to women) are not synonyms for "ungentlemanly" but rather reflect the way this word is most often used.

unladylike see "unfeminine" for an explanation of the subjective cultural meanings attached to this word. For the vague and often inappropriate "unladylike," substitute with: insensitive, indelicate, awkward, uncharming, unkind, rude, undignified, ill-mannered, ungracious, impolite, abrupt, etc. These adjectives apply equally well to a man and are not synonyms for "unladylike" but rather reflections of what society tends to understand by the word.

unmanliness/unmanly see "unmasculine" for an explanation of the subjective cultural meanings involved here. Replace these limp terms with descriptive adjectives: dishonesty/dishonest, cowardice/cowardly, deviousness/crooked, weakness/weak, fearfulness/fearful, timidity/timid. These words can be applied equally well to a woman and are not synonyms for "unmanliness/unmanly" but simply the stereotypical and unreflected notions of a sexist society on what it means to be a man.

unmasculine avoid this vague, self-contradictory cultural stereotype. A man's clothes, behavior, words, feelings, and thoughts are, by definition, masculine because a man is wearing them, saying them, feeling them, etc. Words like "womanly/unwomanly," "manly/unmanly," "feminine/unfeminine," "masculine/unmasculine," "la-

dylike/unladylike," and "gentlemanly/ungentlemanly" are based on cultural, not biological, expectations. Language should not underwrite this illogic. The only truly unmasculine things are those things biologically reserved for women. Replace the unhelpful and inexact word "unmasculine" with descriptive adjectives: timid, craven, weak, indirect, fearful, soft, faint-hearted, gentle, overemotional, comfort-loving. These adjectives can apply equally well to a woman and are not synonyms for "unmasculine," but stereotypical cultural notions of what it is to be a man.

unwomanly see "unfeminine" for an explanation of the subjective cultural meanings attached to this word. Use instead: cold, hostile, sharp, unloving, ungentle, uncharming, ungiving, unsupportive, ill-mannered, unmannerly, ungracious, undignified, indecorous, unattractive, unappealing. These adjectives apply equally well to a man and are not synonyms for "unwomanly," but rather reflections of what society tends to understand by the word.

V

virile this is a properly sex-specific word when it refers to a man's ability to function sexually. In its broader sense, you may want inclusive alternatives: energetic, vigorous, forceful, strong, powerful, dynamic, spirited, daring, fearless, venturesome, courageous, intrepid, tough, audacious, dashing, potent, hardy, hearty, rugged, bold.

vivacious as Francine Frank and Frank Anshen point out (*Language and the Sexes*), both girls and boys may have lively personalities, but when did you ever meet a "vivacious" boy? Two-thirds of the *American Heritage Book of English Usage's* panel on usage felt that "vivacious" could be used only of a female subject. You could either begin describing appropriate men as vivacious or use more inclusive substitutes: spirited, high-spirited, full of pep, breezy, animated.

W

whine this word is functionally sexist since it is used primarily of women and children, while in similar circumstances, men are said to ask, tell, repeat, complain, criticize, or just plain talk. Use instead: complain, grumble, grouse, gripe, criticize, harp on, fume, find fault, be dissatisfied, pester, harass, fuss, raise a fuss. See also "bitch (v.)," "complain," and "nag."

whore prostitute. "Whore" used to be a nonjudgmental term describing a lover of either sex; now it is a highly offensive term describing a woman. "Ho" is the "friendly" version.

wife/husband in Old English, the “hus-wif” and the “hus-band” (“hus” means “house”) were parallel terms, titles of respect and honor in the community, descriptors of the couple’s partnership as householders. The connotation for both terms was that of “a substantial person.” Since that time, the words have taken different roads and were gradually replaced by one of the most glaringly unbalanced gender pairs in the language: “man and wife.” Use instead “man and woman/woman and man,” “wife and husband/husband and wife.” Use “wife” and “husband” in parallel ways; should you need a word to include both, consider “spouse,” “mate,” or “partner.”

womanize/womanizer philander, bedhop, sleep around, seduce, be promiscuous/sexually active/sexually aggressive/indiscriminate, have many love affairs; swinger, philanderer, seducer, bedhopper, sensualist, free-lover, flirt, freethinker, free spirit, voluptuary, sybarite, hedonist, lover, big-time operator. It’s difficult to find appropriate inclusive substitutes for “womanize” and “womanizer” because we so rarely need that exact word for anything except a man who pursues or courts women habitually or illicitly. Women who philander are either “man-crazy” or “promiscuous.” Gay men who have many affairs are also “promiscuous” or they have “one-night stands.” Ellen Goodman says “manize” hasn’t made it into the language because women have always associated sex with danger (rape, pregnancy, the double standard), because getting men on their backs isn’t a power trip for most women, and because so far the power of successful older women does not seem to act as an aphrodisiac on younger, good-looking men. There have been too few highly public and powerful women to know if “manizing” is something women would do (Golda Meir? Indira Gandhi? Maggie Thatcher?).

womanlike/womanliness/womanly these vague and subjective cultural stereotypes convey different meanings to different people according to their perceptions of what a woman ought or ought not do, say, think, feel, and look like. Choose words instead that express precise characteristics: gracious/graciousness, warm/warmth, gentle/gentleness, receptive/receptivity, supportive/supportiveness, tender/tenderness, charming/charm, sympathetic/sympathy, nurturing/nurturance, well-mannered/good breeding, considerate/consideration, kind/kindness, intuitive/intuition, strong/gentle strength. These words may be used equally appropriately of a man. They are not synonymous with the sexist terms, but are rather what people generally seem to mean by them.

“women and other minorities” women and minorities. Women are not a minority in the U.S. or in the world.

women’s intuition intuition, sixth sense, hunch, perspicacity, insight. As concepts, “women’s intuition” and “feminine intuition” don’t do much for either sex: they impute insensitivity to men and erratic reasoning to women.

women’s issues by using this vague label, politicians and others are able to discount and stereotype issues such as abortion rights, ageism, childcare, comparable worth, divorce, domestic violence, the Equal Rights Amendment, flextime, parental leave, poverty, rape, and sexual harassment, when they are in fact family, political, social, ethical, economic, and human issues.

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