

Letters to the Editor

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people are running smoothly. And if this means that we have to take something away from ourselves to achieve this, we usually think it's okay—no big deal, we didn't really need it, anyway. The woman of Meredith face a future that has the potential for unlimited possibilities for them. Let's not start taking away those possibilities by telling them that being explicitly identified in our language is not important. I'm all for calling a spade a spade, but let's not call a heart a spade.

Sincerely,

Penny W. Augustine
Enrichment Program Director
Continuing Education

Editor,

As Meredith College approaches its centennial charter anniversary, the school is preparing to celebrate its past and move on to an even better future. As we begin our fourth year at Meredith, we realize that we have had opportunities and experienced many things that we might not have found at a larger co-ed university. One of the most important lessons that we have learned at Meredith is that we can do what we have been trained to do. This has nothing to do with our abilities in our majors. It has everything to do with the self-assurance that is fostered in Meredith students by the faculty and staff.

From the very first day that we came to Meredith we have been told that as women we are no more limited in our options than men with the same credentials. Much of this confidence has been gained indirectly from the positive attitudes toward women that are found on this campus. This is subtly improved daily by the exclusively female presence on the Meredith campus. Because all of the members of our classes as well as the student body are female, we have had the unique experience of encountering solely female pronouns in the majority of our collegiate career. This remarkable feature of Meredith College was elucidated upon enrollment in a CRC at NSCU. These classes were dominated not only by the use of male pronouns, but also by males themselves. It is hard for us to believe that the dominant presence of males in the language contributed to the dominance of males in the class and therefore the exclusion of females.

It was very disheartening for us to read the most recent editorial in the *Meredith Herald*. The editor's lack of understanding of the subtle yet devastating impact of exclusively male language was disappointingly apparent. The fact that the editor is female saddens

us even more. We are hopeful that the editor will take the time to discuss the issue of inclusive language with women who may have had experiences similar to ours. Maybe after this exposure she will be more sensitive to what language can say beyond the words themselves.

Carmen Elliott

Ruth McDaniel

Dear Editor,

Despite a shoulder and arm near paralyzed from non stop note taking, overall fatigue and studying left undone, I am compelled to write this letter in response to your editorial, "Let's call a spade a spade."

I am a re-entry student, enjoying immensely the support I experience as a woman in this women's environment.

I was dismayed and surprised at the tone and content in your recent editorial regarding inclusive language. I would hope and expect the student newspaper of a woman's college to be at the forefront of supporting women's efforts at revising language that clearly does not include them.

Women's struggle for equality has encompassed the efforts of countless women over many years. These efforts have been directed at issues of equal pay and the ERA. They have also been directed at the much broader and more consequential issues of violence against women and the feminization of poverty. For you to refer to these efforts as, "all this fuss about equality," is naive [sic] at best and demeaning at worst.

In her book, "Gyn/Ecology", author Mary Daly lets us know that the continued victimization and oppression of women, requires the silencing of women. This silencing begins with the very language, especially allegedly generic pronouns, that we are trained to use to name ourselves.

It is awkward and time consuming to do the work needed to devise alternatives to exclusive language. It is but one avenue of addressing the very real oppression of women in our society. If women do not do this work, who will?

Sincerely,

Regis McDonald

Dear Editor,

When my attention was brought to the editorial in Monday's [August 27, 1990] paper, I was astonished. I understand that to take the sexism out of words takes effort and is frustrating at times, but this language shapes our lives, whether helping or hindering. Sexism is defined as the "discrimination on the basis of sex" and "can reveal itself in the representation of women and men by the media". Without efforts stereotypes are enabled to stay intact, because instead of using "firefighters",

"firemen" is used and gives the impression that women do not participate in this line of work. As a future teacher of young children, it will be my job to see that self concepts of children are healthy and not knocked down by the use of out of date language. One of my professors recieved [sic] a phone call one evening after a day at preschool, in which a parent turned her attention to the fact that asking the children to sit Indian style perpetuated the stereotype that all Indians sat like that. The same thing could be accomplished by asking children to sit with their legs crossed, without feeding that stereotype. As a fellow student of a woman's college I ask you too to stop fueling sexist language that lead to stereotypes.

Thank you.

Susan E. Liles

To the Editor:

I was very concerned to read the editorial "Let's call a spade a spade" in the August 27, 1990, issue of the *Meredith Herald*. The editorial asked, "haven't we all come to realize that equality doesn't depend on the words we use, but the actions we take toward our fellow man?" Indeed, the actions we take toward one another are important, but the words are important as well in that they influence our actions by giving shape to our thoughts.

Several psychological studies such as the one by Linda Harrison have shown that words like "mankind" are not genderless and inclusive of the entire human race. Children and adults who hear the word "mankind" in normal usage picture a male in their minds even though they may say that "mankind" includes both men and women when asked specifically. These words are sexist in their usage today. And their usage continues the misconception that men are the only ones in the human race worthy of notice.

As a writer and lover of the English language, I welcome the use of inclusive language for the opportunity it gives writers and editors to use the English language more accurately and creatively. If women are indeed represented in Congress, it is much more accurate to use Congresswoman than Congressman, and if both men and women are in congress, it is accurate to use congressperson to describe their role. Our use of the English language should attempt to reflect the present realities of life, not deny them.

Neither do we have to make up words to be inclusive. The English language is not limited to gender-specific words to refer to people. Our language is filled with inclusive words— people, humankind, humanity, individual, to

name only a few. On occasion, some new words (such as chairperson) may have to be used to reflect changing realities as women enter new areas of business, politics, etc. But these words have been and will continue to be accepted into our language. Check the dictionary for "chairperson."

On other occasions it may be necessary to rethink our phrasing of sentences to be inclusive. This is apparent with the use of pronouns. However, there are creative ways around the awkward construction of "he or she" or "s/he." For example, use the plural form or simply alternate the use of he and she when appropriate.

Let us not let the effort of thinking, speaking, and writing in new ways, however, deter us from the importance of being inclusive in our words. Maybe as our use of the English language begins to change to reflect the changing realities of women and men in our society, our actions will continue to show more and more equality and justice.

Kay R. Jernigan

Editor Responds

As editor-in-chief, it is my responsibility (and privilege) to stick my neck out on a weekly basis and present one opinion of any topic that may touch the hearts and minds of our campus. Sometimes you may find the editorial playing devil's advocate, specifically designed to encourage readers to examine their own feelings and beliefs.

While the editor does not regularly respond in print to Letters to the Editor (after all, I've already had my say), a response is offered to one item that was discussed in a letter published in today's Letters to the Editor.

The term "atta-boys" came from an informal award given to me when I worked at Hewlett-Packard Company several years ago. An atta-boy was an after-hours champagne toast given to a sales rep (97% of whom were male) who closed a big sale or had a particularly successful sales month. As a sales coordinator (100% of whom were female), I was the subject of such a toast for helping a sales rep write a complex proposal which lead to a big sale. My toast, however, also included a dozen Sterling roses. I was pleased and flattered to be the only coordinator included as "one of the guys" and felt absolutely no negative feelings about receiving the "male-dominated, exclusive language" award.

In my attempt to include a pat-on-the-back award for your hard working newspaper staff, I simply picked a term that had once applied to me for a job

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