

Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language

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The generic use of 'man' and 'he' (and 'his', 'him', 'himself') is commonly considered gender-neutral. The case against the generic use of these terms does not rest on rare instances in which they refer ambiguously to 'male' or 'human being'. Rather, *every* occurrence of their generic use is problematic.

[...] Using the generic 'he' and 'man' is problematic because it often leads us to omit the distinctive elements of female experience and behaviour. For example, a sentence beginning, "If a student is conscientious, *he* is probably a good . . . ," will likely be ended with "son"--even though "good son," "good daughter," and "good child" connote different things. If the sentence had begun, "A conscientious student is probably a good . . . ," a likely finale would be "son or daughter" or "child."

In sum, there are convincing reasons, both empirical and conceptual, for avoiding the generic 'he' and 'man' and for specifically including females. Hence, it is inadequate to state in an opening footnote that, for the remainder of the letter, article or book, 'he' shall stand for 'he or she' and 'man' for all humanity. What authors intend is not the issue. Good intentions not carried through are not good enough.