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AGDISTIS

‘AGDISTIS’- EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND INTERVENTION IN NON-NORMATIVE BEHAVIOUR AND GENDER BULLYING.

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GENDER-SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

A TOOL FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION



Istituto d'Istruzione Superiore
Margherita Hack



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Editor

Maria Chiara Di Francesco, Skill Up

Authors

Elizabeth Papaduli, IIS Margherita Hack

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This Tool presents the most common stumbling blocks when trying to write in a gender-sensitive manner. This chapter is designed to help you understand the issues which lead to language being gender discriminatory so that you can recognise it when you see it.

Categories of gender-discriminatory language

There are three broad categories under which much gender-discriminatory language falls:

- **Stereotypes:** assigning gender when gender is unknown or irrelevant as a result of stereotypes.
- **Invisibility and omission:** language which casts the male as the generic norm and keeps women from being visible in public life.
- **Subordination and trivialisation:** language which paints one gender, often women, as inferior, or belittles them.

These three categories are very closely related. In fact, invisibility, omission, subordination and trivialisation stem from gender stereotypes and can reflect attitudes held across society.

COMMON CHALLENGES WHEN USING GENDER-SENSITIVE LANGUAGE





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STEREOTYPES:

HOW LANGUAGE MANIFESTS GENDER-RELATED STEREOTYPES



Stereotypes are generalised images about people within a society. A gender stereotype is a preconceived idea where people are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender or their sex.

Stereotypes about gender often take one of two forms.

- One assumes all members of a category (such as a profession) share a gender, for example the assumption that all company directors are men and all secretaries are women, or that all men that work in fashion and beauty are gay.
- The other is assuming that all members of a gender share a characteristic, for example believing that all women are bad drivers or that ‘real men don’t cry’.



These stereotypes hurt people of all genders by placing expectations on what people should be.

In many cases unconscious cultural stereotypes will be expressed through the language we use, meaning people use these expressions even when they do not hold these assumptions.



Repeating these stereotypes reinforces the assumptions at their core, therefore you should actively avoid stereotypes in the language you use.

Here we highlight some instances where you may come across gender stereotypes in language.



- By using gendered pronouns.

 “I need to speak with the secretary, is she in?”
 “I need to speak with the secretary, are they in?”



- Adding irrelevant information about gender in a description of an individual. When talking about professions, it is seldom useful to include gender. Leave it out!

 “The female doctor who visited me said I am fine”
 “The doctor who visited me said I am fine”

- Using gender stereotypes to describe objects or events.

 “He started crying like a little girl”
 “He started crying because he was upset”

- Describing people of different genders using different adjectives (descriptive words).

 “He is so in love with his girlfriend, they are always holding hands”
 “He and his boyfriend should keep their business private and stop holding hands in public”

- Perpetuating stereotypes in non-verbal communication, such as images and symbols.



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STEREOTYPES:

HOW LANGUAGE MANIFESTS GENDER-RELATED STEREOTYPES



Assertive

Pushy/bossy

Lucky with the ladies

Loose

Intense

Hysterical

Passionate

Hormonal

“A man is allowed to react; a woman can only overreact”

Sometimes different adjectives are used to describe the same features in women and men. There are also some words which –despite not having an explicit gender– have strong connotations that are strongly associated with only women or men.

This stems from the fact that some character traits, such as being ambitious, are considered by society attractive in men but negative in women.

It is not always easy to spot when adjectives are promoting gender stereotypes. These examples show some words to look out for and to avoid using to describe women.

There are also words that are supposed to be equivalent, but actually the female versions have gained negative connotations over the years. You should think carefully about the connotations of words before using them.

Master:
the owner
or boss

Mistress:
the lover of a
married man

Bachelor:
an
unmarried
man

Spinster:
an unmarried
woman with
connotations of
unwanted-ness
and sourness

Governor:
an official
appointed
to govern a
town or
region

Governess:
a woman
employed to
teach children
in a private
household



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AVOIDING INVISIBILITY OR OMISSION



“The wheel was invented by men in 2500 BC”

We don't know whether the wheel was invented by a man or a woman (and it is absolutely not relevant!)

“The wheel was invented by humankind in 2500 BC”

“All men are equal in the eyes of the law”

And women and non-binary people are not?

“All people are equal in the eyes of the law”

“Each applicant must submit his CV”

Is this open to only male candidates?

“Each applicant must submit their CV”

Assuming that male and men are the standard gender and the standard recipient is an example of invisibility.

There are many ways to make sure that all your communication material feels like it is aimed at all people, not just one gender.

When creating a piece of communication material, consider:

- Choice of voice-over artist.

Consider if the gender of the voice-over is perpetuating stereotypes, such as using a female voice for digital assistants that simulate secretaries, but male voices for official communications.

- Choice of photographs/drawings/images.

Think about whether they are repeating stereotypical gender roles or whether they only include one gender. One example can be representing all nurses and teachers as female, and all pilots and politicians as male.

- Gender of individuals given in examples.

Try to ensure that the individuals in examples show a mix of genders in different roles.



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SUBORDINATION AND TRIVIALISATION: HOW LANGUAGE CAN REINFORCE THE SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN



Subordination and trivialisation are ways of using language that reinforce men's traditional dominance over women or belittle or insult women.

Trivialisation is any language which makes something seem unimportant and it is closely related to subordination. Often things related to women are trivialised through language that make something sound 'small' or 'cute'. This may appear benign, but can have the effect of reinforcing women's subordinate place in society.



**“Don't call me kid,
don't call me baby”.**

Some key aspects of language to watch out for are:

- Naming conventions and titles.

Women are still addressed Miss or Mrs depending on their age and marital status; men are only referred to as Mr.

- How to refer to people.

“Let me introduce you to Dr. Yang and our Allison”

“Let me introduce you to Dr. Yang and Ms. Williams”

- Diminutive affixes.

Language which refers to people unknown to you in terms of endearment ('My dear', 'Darling', 'Love', and 'Dear') is patronising, condescending and promotes trivialisation.



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