

**C'mon Guys:
This Way to a Study on Language and Sexism**

**Cognitive Science Honors Thesis
May 1996**

***Kerry A. Bodine
Honors Advisor: Douglas R. Hofstadter
Center for Research on Concepts and Cognition
Indiana University, 510 North Fess Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47408***

An Introduction to "Guys"

"If you have a group half of whose members are A's and half of whose members are B's and if you call the group C, then A's and B's may be equal members of group C. But if you call the group A, there is no way that B's can be equal to A's within it. The A's will always be the rule and the B's will always be the exception -- the subgroup, the subspecies, the outsiders." This quote by Alma Graham in Casey Miller and Kate Swift's book Words and Women describes the central issue in the debate over using "man" and "he" as both gender-specific and gender-neutral terms. This issue became a popular topic of discussion with the advent of the "women's lib" movement in the 1970's, when *Words and Women* was written. As people became more conscious of women's rights and gender equality, attention also spread to inequities in the English language.

Extensive research examined the implications of using the word "man" generically to refer to both males and females, as in the word "mankind", and it was found that it elicited mental imagery that tended to focus more on males than females. The conclusions were that the so-called "generic" senses of the word were subconsciously contaminated by the male sense of the

word. The result: women were getting lost in our language.

The current research takes its cue from this earlier work in examining the issues that surround a term analogous in function to “man” -- “guys”. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language gives the following definition of “guy”, which closely parallels common dictionary definitions of “man”:

1. *Informal*. Term of address used to a man or boy; fellow.
2. Usually, **guys**. *Informal*. Persons of either sex; people.

Yet while heat came down on “man” and “he”, for some reason “guys” went largely overlooked by the feminists of the 1970’s. By that time it *had* gained widespread use in reference to both females and mixed groups. I was (I confess) watching a Brady Bunch re-run the other day and heard one character call the four youngest Brady kids -- Jan, Peter, Cindy, and Bobby -- “guys.” Perhaps the only thing that saved it from attention from feminists during the 1970’s was its informality; both “man” and “he” were widely targeted in both speech and publishing.

It has only been recently that greater attention has been focused on “guys”. Perhaps this is an indication that it has come into even more widespread use and acceptance by the masses. Perhaps it is just a new wave of consciousness about gender equality. Whatever the reason, articles on “guys” published in both academic papers and popular media have begun to pop up with increasing frequency.

Douglas Hofstadter was among the first to write about “guys” in recent times. He wrote a paper in 1991 titled “You’ve Come a Long Way, Guys! (Or, Generic ‘Man’ and Generic ‘He’ in a New Guise).” In this paper he pointed out the strong analogy between “guys” and these previously studied terms, but his main focus was unconscious mental imagery. One can hardly

conjure up any imagery upon hearing “he”, but we will see later that research revealed masculine connotations associated with pseudo-generic “man”. Hofstadter explains the imagery he felt is inherently conveyed in “guys”:

To me it is inconceivable that the masculine-drenched imagery of the word “guy” would not flow over into the plural, and also into the vocative plural. In fact, I am convinced that it is precisely *because of* the subliminal aura of masculinity -- spunk, liveliness, independence, strength, self-confidence, and so on -- all highly desirable qualities for *anyone*, in this age of increasing freedom for girls and women -- that the word “guy(s)” has become so desirable as a description.

Hofstadter further explains the “guys” connotations: “Who could argue that calling a bunch of tiny kids in a swimming class at the YMCA ‘you guys’ is evil or insidious? ... ‘You guys’ does *nothing* if not radiate a friendly, chummy, and egalitarian attitude on the part of whoever uses it.” Although he acknowledges these positive feelings, and even admits to liking them, he shares the same sentiment as Graham with his beliefs that using gender-specific terms to refer to females or to mixed groups is damaging. “The problem is that it leads back into the age-old trap of setting females apart as something *special* and *nonstandard*.” He says that although “guys” may continue to feel like a gender-neutral word, it will always have masculine connotations because of the word “guy”. He further says that “it is precisely because of [this] that it will be such a popular term.

Rachelle Waksler’s article “She’s a mensch and he’s a bitch: neutralizing gender in the 90’s”, which appeared in the April 1995 edition of English Today, reflects a greater acceptance of the phrase “you guys” in today’s language. She speculates that this phrase came into popular use because of a need for a plural second-person pronoun, which is absent in most English dialects. (She did note the exception of “y’all” in southern regions of the United States, and it would be

interesting to see if “you guys” is as prevalent there as in other areas of the country.)

Waksler says that the “acceptability of a previously [+male] word like *mensch* being gender-neutralized to denote positive characteristics of women is new to the 90’s.” But in the history section we will see that women have been referred to as “guys” since the 1930’s. Isn’t this the same thing? Within the phrasing of Waksler’s statement lies an interesting issue which indicates there is actually a subtle difference between the two interpretations of usage. She is saying that women have these positive characteristics either with or without any specific word to label them collectively. In *The Nonsexist Word Finder* Rosalie Maggio says “*mensch*”, which describes someone who is purposeful, honorable, and upright, has been used predominantly for describing males. “Guy”, on the other hand, is a word for males, and just happens to carry some of these other connotations too. So, by calling a female a “guy”, are we saying, “You have this certain set of characteristics, which are the same as those connoted by ‘guy’, so that’s what I’m going to call you” (this would be the equivalent of Waksler’s “*mensch*”) *or* are we saying, “You happen to have a certain set of positive characteristics that *males* have, so by calling *you* ‘guy’ I’m reinforcing the idea that these really are *male* characteristics”? The latter is what Hofstadter and others fear is really happening.

Although the main focus of this paper will be on “guys” as it is used in American English, it is also worthy to note that many other languages have analogous terms. Christine van Rossum, a psychology student visiting from the Netherlands, has been researching “guys” terms in Dutch, French, and Chinese, whose rough equivalents are “jongens” (literally “boys”), “les mecs” (literally “dudes” -- a very macho and slangy term), and “gemenr” (literally “buddies” -- derived from the word for older brother, “gege”, with an informal plural suffix that indicates a tone of

affection and familiarity), respectively.

Van Rossum says the only word in Dutch that refers to a male child is “jongen”, and she points out the association between it and the word “jong”, which means “young”. She states that “jongens” is most commonly used to address groups of children of both sexes, although she says it is also used in informal situations by adults to address male, female, or mixed groups.

Confirming and amplifying this in a letter to van Rossum received in February of this year, Dr. J. van Heerden writes, “Women address each other using the word ‘jongens’, but not the words ‘meisjes’ (girlies) or ‘dames’ (ladies). They’d rather use ‘meiden’. It has the connotation of ‘camaraderie’, and being ‘comrades’ is an expression of solidarity, necessary in the process of liberation” (translated by van Rossum). However, van Rossum attests that “jongens” is more commonly used convey these feelings.

English also lacks a popular female counterpart to “guy” that expresses this sense of camaraderie and solidarity. It is this absence which has prompted several articles in the popular media. Natalie Angier wrote one such article for the New York Times in 1995. She expressed a desire for a female counterpart of this word and suggested “gal” as a viable alternative, pointing out its increased frequency in several newspapers. She quoted lexicographer Anne Soukhanov who said, “Unlike other terms for the female of the human species, this one doesn’t seem to be overwhelmed with any kind of historical putdown.” M. P. Dunleavy wrote a follow-up to this article titled “Guy Envy: Why we need a word that’s more relaxed than *woman* and more grown-up than *girl*”, which appeared in the May 1996 edition of Glamour magazine. She asks, “How do you describe a woman you hang out with who is cool with herself and others, a woman you can watch the game with and whose shoulder you can cry on, knowing that she knows where you’re

coming from?" I feel these two articles mark an important milestone in the ever-growing awareness of gender equality in language; they both raised the issue of "guys" to large and important sections of the general public. They also indicate that the subliminal aura of connotations of "guy(s)" is not something fabricated by philosophical academics. People in the general public feel it too, and are starting to take notice of the psychological implications of this small yet powerful word.

History

Since the word "guy" is relatively new to English, I think it would be beneficial to start with an overview of how "guy", with all of its nuances, came into our language. Although this word and phrases such as "you guys" are usually associated with American English, their etymological ancestors were born in England and named after an Englishman named Guy Fawkes.

Fawkes was one of the conspirators who intended to blow up King James I and other members of British Parliament in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Most of the conspirators were found and executed, and Fawkes became "a symbol of hatred" for the country. November 5, still recognized as Guy Fawkes Day in England, was traditionally celebrated by burning grotesque effigies in his memory. "'The guy' [was] a grotesque figure of old clothes stuffed with straw and rags" (Evans & Evans). Thus, the original definition of "guy" was "a grotesque-looking, ill-dressed, or ridiculous person, esp. an old man, (hence) a person who is an object of ridicule or derision; (broadly) a fool" The Random House Dictionary of American Slang (p.1003) lists citations of this nature ranging in dates from 1820 to 1910. Although this term originated in England, it is significant to know that it had stretched across the Atlantic Ocean to the United

States of America during this time.

“They said -- ‘Oh, what a guy!’ and have clods at us” (Mark Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 1889).¹

“A simple rustic...A countryman. A hayseed. A guy. A geezer.” (*Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1901).

The sense of “guy” that most Americans would recognize today is that of “a man or boy; fellow.” Here are two of the earliest recorded uses of this sense of the word:

“She was finally gathered by a ‘nabbing guy’ [policeman] ... under charge of loose and ‘lascivious’ conduct” (Miller & Snell, Why the West Was Wild, 1875).

“Do you soak your feet in the old guy’s barrel of lightning? Hattie says you must, from the smell of your breath every evening” (Asbury, Gem of the Prairie, 1877).

From roughly 1885 to 1925 the phrase “main guy” gained popularity in usage to mean “a man in authority or of importance.”

“Tommy Bradshaw--he was the main guy [i.e., the groom], you know” (Ade, Artie, 1896).

“An’ he put three of four good faml’ies to wurruk in th’ gas house, where he knew the main guy” (Dunne, Peace & War, 1898).

Around the time that “main guy” started losing prominence in everyday speech, two other important “guy” phrases came into popular use: “real guy” and “regular guy”.

“He is a social leper....He isn’t a ‘regular guy’” (P. Marks, Plastic Age, 1924).

“Ralph went on to say he wanted his son to be a ‘real guy,’ but that his mother was ‘making a sissy out of the kid’” (W. Brown, Monkey on My Back, 1954).

These two phrases mark a significant turn for the development of currant nuances of the terms “guy” and “guys”, for they implied that *this* type of guy was sociable, likable, and emotionally and

¹ All citations in this section are taken from the Random House Dictionary of American Slang.

physically strong -- the same characteristics attributed to “guys” today. Dunleavy describes “guys” as being “confident, centered, [and] sympathetic yet amusing” (1996, p.158).

This is where females came in to the picture, and “guys” took on yet another definition: “A person of either sex regarded as decent, down-to-earth, good company, etc.; (hence) (in plural, usually following *you*) persons of either sex.” Although the definitions which follow this definition in the Random House Dictionary of American slang start in 1927, there are only two before 1957 that seem to reflect the way in which “guys” is used today. Random House acknowledges this by pointing out that “the second nuance has become notably common in direct address among young women only since circa 1940.”

In eight out of the eleven citations occurring before 1957 in which “guy” is applied to a female, it is in the singular form, and is a part of the cliched phrases “real guy”, “good guy”, “regular guy”, “right guy”, or “great little guy”. It almost seems that these cliches were used *because* these women weren’t “guys” in the male sense at all, and therefore using these phrases made for interesting contrasts between the imagery they evoked and women’s roles of the time. Perhaps it was even a bold social statement to suggest that women could in fact be so “guy”-ish. Whatever the motivation, these phrases did in fact connote the sociable and likable characteristics of “guys”, which were then reflected onto the women they described.

“She was just a regular guy, underneath” (C.J. Daly, Murder, 1935).

From this sentence alone we can guess something about the character’s personality. She probably possessed and displayed “womanly” attributes -- perhaps she was hard and stern, perhaps glamorous and snooty, perhaps she played hard-to-get -- but underneath she was sociable, friendly, and relaxed.

One of the three remaining citations prior to 1957 is from Burns's Female Convict and describes the "mighty hard-boiled guys" in a women's prison. I believe this again contrasted the rough-and-tumble attributes of "guys" with the attributes associated with a stereotypical woman of the 1950's in order to make a specific point about the type of women that were in the prison. It makes me think, "Well I know it's a women's prison, but those must be some fierce women to be called 'guys'."

The last of these citations deserves a bit more attention, because it was quoted from an actual study on slang vocabulary, notes from which allow us to narrow down the time frame in which "guys" gained its gender-neutral sense. This study was conducted at the self-contained Moosewood community, about 40 miles west of Chicago, and examined the changes in children's slang over the eleven years from 1931 to 1942. The word "guy" appeared in the 1942 paper with the following definition:

boy, girl, student, person. 'You're too strict with the guys.' One girl to others, 'Come on, you guys'. In the present study, it is noted that 'guy' is used without regard to age or to sex.

The definition also carried a notation that indicated it was submitted in the original study, appeared again in the 1942 study, was in "universal usage" in 1942.

Although the author did not define "universal usage" explicitly, I can only assume he meant that while the word was recorded inside the community, he was also aware of its usage outside the community. I also assume from this notation, and from the last sentence in the definition, that "guy(s)", used "without regard to age or to sex", was not in "universal usage" at the time of the original study in 1931. It is likely that sometime during this eleven-year period this nuance came into common usage outside the community, and was brought into Moosewood and

adopted. Although we are still left with some questions as to just how this happened, this careful study helps us to pinpoint the approximate time when “guys” began to take on its current gender-neutral sense.

Examples

Although most Americans would acknowledge that the word “guys” is used frequently in American English, most would probably not be conscious of it in their own speech habits. The following section will highlight some examples that illustrate how the word can be used in different contexts and that show that it carries slightly different points of reference in each case. These snippets come from a variety of sources, and show that “guys” is not limited to a particular age group or segment of the population.

I don’t want to belabor a seemingly obvious point, but I thought the first examples should clearly show that “guys” can be used to refer to all-male groups. This is certainly the most common and least controversial of all its senses.

I was sitting in a lecture theater on the first day of class and the professor had just passed out the syllabus. There was a student sitting in front of me, and when two other male students came in late and sat in front of him, he tried to get their attention so he could hand them each a syllabus from the stack he was holding. There was still a lot of noise in the classroom as he leaned forward and said, “Hey guys, you need these!”

A recent television advertisement for low-fat potato chips showed a group of attractive women, in their mid to late twenties, sitting around a poker table, playing cards, and shoveling handfuls of potato chips into their mouths. One went as far as to tip the bag up to get the last of the crumbs. After all this, a voice said, “You can eat like one of the guys, but still look like one of the girls.”

The second example vividly contrasts the actions and appearance of men and women, and at the

same time proposes that “girls” is the, or at least *an*, acceptable counterpart for “guys”. At the same time, it uses “guys” in the cliched phrase “one of the guys” which I feel, as stated in the history section, was a catalyst for drawing women into the “guys” domain to begin with.

My next example comes from my youngest informant, and shows that children as young as five years old have grasped the “generic” sense of “guys”.

My nephew Tyler lives in Colorado and hadn’t visited our house since he was a baby, so while visiting over Thanksgiving last year, he explored the different rooms of our house. My sister and her husband, aged 33 and 40, were talking with me in the living room when Tyler entered and began examining the items on each table. He seemed particularly surprised to find a framed photo of his parents and exclaimed “Hey! That’s *you* guys!”

This example contrasts with an example from Hofstadter’s paper, where he points out that his 3-year-old son still held fast to the concept of “guy” as meaning “males only”. However, in that example Hofstadter and his son were talking about the singular “guy”, which, as discussed later in this paper, is still used overwhelmingly to denote a male person.

Two more television advertisements provide the examples that illustrate the next point -- that “guys” can refer to larger groups of mixed gender.

A group of comedians were doing a plug for their Saturday late-night show which comes on “a half-hour before that other show”. (I assume the “other” show is Saturday Night Live.) This group of male and female comedians was trying to show how much they cared about their audiences by doing “personalized” commercials for each viewing area. In fact, they had one group segment, which was periodically interrupted a very obvious splice of one woman yelling “Fox 59 in Indianapolis!” At the end of the entire segment they made one last plea to watch their show stating that they “care more than those other guys”.

In the never-ending phone company wars, Sprint and AT&T have been bitter enemies. Candice Bergen, spokeswoman for Sprint, said at the end of a commercial, “If you want something complicated [referring to phone bills], talk to those other guys.”

Unlike most uses of the word “guys”, which convey a sense of camaraderie, these examples show a slightly different use connotation of the word “guys” -- a negative feeling, a feeling of rivals or opponents, a feeling that says, “I’m *calling* them ‘guys’, but *we’re* really the guys around here.”

The next example contrasts “guys” and “girls” in a definite way, but it goes further to also illustrate how we can change our language and mental imagery within but seconds from “guys as males only” to “guys as a mixed group” or “guys as females only”. This example comes from van Rossum.

Three female and two male friends called a taxi one night. As they piled into the cab, the two males climbed into the front and the three females into the back. Someone remarked, “Guys in the front, girls in the back!” The driver chimed in, “Yeah, you guys just sit back there and relax.”

While typing this particular story into the computer, I was repeating it in my head, and heard myself saying just before typing the second line, “... the guys climbed into the front and the girls into the back.” But, due to the nature of this paper, I wanted to be very explicit about the fact that it was the *males* who had gotten into the front, and for that very reason, I had to *avoid* the word “guys”!

This next example also illustrates that “guys” is used to refer to female-only groups. I lived in a sorority house last semester, and after I became consciously aware of people using “guys” to refer to women, I was astonished at just how many times the sorority girls used it in talking to each other. It even occurred in writing, as the next example shows.

The sorority sister acting as house manager had posted a sign in the bathroom. There had been continual problems with people bringing dishes upstairs from the dining room and then not returning them. They were starting to pile up in the bathroom when the following notice was posted: “ABSOLUTELY NO DISHES IN THIS BATHROOM! Keep them downstairs you guys!”



The woman who wrote this sign obviously thought of calling the other women “guys”. But instead of having it slip out unconsciously in casual conversation, as I feel it sometimes does, she thought about it consciously enough to write it on a piece of paper. I bring this up because while there are many written examples of male-only or mixed-group “guys”, the overwhelming majority of examples that refer only to women come from speech.

Another example comes from my mother, who is 61 years old and is well aware of my research topic. It demonstrates how “guys” can be used to refer to a mixed group.

My parents are in the middle of moving from Cincinnati to Philadelphia, and I have been telephoning my mom often to see how she is handling it and to check on their progress in house-hunting. She was telling me about one house my dad had looked at and said that they were interested in buying. I asked when they would move in, and she said, “Well, I don’t know when these guys are going to be able to move out.” At this point I asked, “Oh, are there just *guys* living there?” She replied in an exasperated voice, “No, *come on*, it’s a *family*.”

In this case the people my mother was referring to were, in her mind, a family including both males and females, although she didn't actually know the gender of specific family members, or even how many people were in the family. Interestingly, the tone in her voice seemed to say, "Yes, you caught me", which indicated to me that she seemed to think that I was "accusing" her of something bad, and she seemed to admit to it. This example also shows that the use of "guys" is not limited to the second-person "you guys", which is so commonly heard, but can also be used in the third-person. However, this type of third-person reference may be limited to mixed or unknown groups. I can imagine, but cannot recall, an instance in which the third-person usage would refer to a group of females exclusively.

The next example takes the reference to unknown groups even further, almost into the realm of abstract reference.

I was in a pizza restaurant a few weeks ago, and on the table was a little plastic advertisement for Heineken Dark beer. I asked for one and the server, in his early 20's, said that they didn't carry Heineken Dark. I started giving him a hard time, in a good-natured way, about false-advertising claims and what not. He started to shrink back a bit from me, and said in his defense, "Hey, *we* don't put those out! The *beer* guys come and change them."

"Beer guys"? I thought this ad-hoc category was a very interesting use of the word "guys", as it referred to some group of completely unknown people. When my mother referred to the people from whom they were buying their new home, she referred to them as "guys", but I'm sure she had some picture in her mind of the family (probably a nuclear family), as I did too. But when the server at this restaurant referred to "beer guys", I could form no picture of these "beer guys" in my mind, and I'm not sure if he could either.

One final example shows that besides referring to people, “guys” can also refer to inanimate objects.

The Village Deli, a popular venue for breakfast in downtown Bloomington, is well known for its pancakes. The first time I ordered one -- not many people can eat more than one -- I was shocked to see this mammoth pancake about 18 inches wide! Their menu boasts, “Our famous, COLOSSAL, HUGE, GIGANTIC, fresh buttermilk pancakes (they’re big guys!).”

There are two possible interpretations of the phrase “they’re big guys”: “Hey guys, they’re big!” or “These guys are big.” I have to think that the latter is the correct interpretation, though, because of the absence of a comma between the words “big” and “guys”. If this is the case, then the menu writers were in fact referring to these tasty inanimate objects as “guys”.

A Few Words on “Guy”

Although the main focus of this paper is on “guys” in the plural form, it is necessary to include some observations and ideas about the singular, which shares many of the same functions. Its most common and uncontroversial function is to refer to a male person, and I believe I can state that without any examples to back me up. Although I admit that 90+% of its usages are in this form, there are several other senses which need to be pointed out, as I feel they are gaining prominence in our language. Following are my elaborations on its ability to refer to abstract people, animals, and inanimate objects.

One of my Cognitive Science professors was explaining to us in class one day how people from different disciplines within the field work with each other. He said, “You do your part and then you hand it to the guy that needs it.”

My roommate's cat has recently had some extensive surgery on its bladder. When both my mother and I found out about it (at different times), our initial response was "Ooh, poor guy!"

Van Rossum reported the following incident to me: she was talking to her roommate who had been kept up all night by a dog that had been left out in the rain by a neighbor. The roommate was tired in the morning and said, with some compassion for the wet animal, "That guy has been barking all night!"

I taught computer classes this past year and heard myself say, "It's this guy up here", as I pointed to an application icon with my mouse cursor.

What reveals itself as a sticky and pivotal issue is whether or not "guy" in the singular can be used to refer to a female, as "guys" can. Clearly this is not common practice, but it's not entirely nonexistent in our language. Hofstadter says, "My mother-in-law refers to her granddaughter as 'such a cute li'l guy', and even calls herself a 'tough old guy'." He also says that one of his previous graduate students, Gary McGraw, refers to both males and females as "guy". Yet Hofstadter writes these people off as oddities, even saying that his mother-in-law is "very exceptional, in my experience." In contrast, I would suggest that these people aren't oddities at all, but are shaping the word "guy" and molding it into another form -- a form that is applicable to males and females equally. The following examples make me think this might be the case:

Van Rossum was talking to two male college students, when one of them called her a "chick". She asked what he had meant by that, and when she expressed her dislike of the term, he said, "We're going to have to teach this guy a thing or two about English."

My 36-year-old brother was talking to me on the phone and telling me about one of President Clinton's advisors, Hazel O'Leary, who was involved with some court case he knew of. When he mentioned her name, I admitted my political ignorance, and he said "Oh, you know, she's that cabinet guy, (pause) uh, woman."

In the first example, it could be argued that the male referring to van Rossum as a “guy” did so in a way that the word would contrast with “chick” or be used in an ironic way. However, she questioned him about it right after the comment, and he said he felt it was an acceptable thing to say and thought nothing strange of it. In the second example, my brother did change his wording after a short pause, but it is important to acknowledge that the word “guy” was his first thought for an appropriate term to describe this woman.

Remember too that “guy”, nestled inside different idioms, has been used to refer to women since at least the 1930’s, as was demonstrated in the History section of this paper. But unlike these phrases, which seem to emphasize a stark contrast between the female character and the male connotation of the word, the idioms used today seem to emphasize other factors. To me it sounds as if the older phrases put stress on the word “guy”, while the newer usages stress other words in the phrases. Hofstadter noticed that emphasizing different words in a sentence changed the meaning conveyed by “guys”: “Any ambiguity there might conceivably be as to the sex of the parties concerned will *instantly* be removed if you put the stress on the word ‘guys’.” Similarly, stressing the word “guy” does the same thing: it draws your attention to that word and makes you think of the male rather than the more gender-neutral connotation. Try:

“Ooh, *poor* guy!”

“Ooh, poor *guy*!”

“*Tough* old guy”

“Tough old *guy*”

“Such a *cute* li’l guy!”

“Such a cute li’l *guy*!”

Surely the phrases in the second column produce much stronger masculine imagery.

The masculine connotations associated with singular “guy” are important because they form the basis for those associated with plural “guys”; if singular “guy” slips into true gender-

neutrality, then “guys” could no longer carry the subliminal masculine imagery it is purported to -- after all, the masculine connotations in “you guys” are due to its association with the singular “guy”. Some people say that “guy” is just too heavily drenched with masculinity to ever go through such a metamorphosis. However, I think that if these people had been alive back in the early 1900’s, they would have said the same thing about “guys”, which, at least in the vocative, seems to have made this transition completely.

As mentioned before, Hofstadter puts even greater importance on “guy” by suggesting that the reason “guys” is so popular is *because of* its masculine flavor: “If ‘guy’ (singular) ceases to have any connotations of masculinity, I guess that ‘guys’ will lose its charm at the same time.”

The Cognitive Implications

There are important and interesting cognitive issues to be had by examining sexist language, as it evokes certain images and concepts in our minds. One line of investigation on sexist language could study how concepts such as the male versus generic senses of words are developed in children’s minds. Although in adults’ minds there may not be any doubt as to when the word “guys” refers to both males and females, a child, at some stage, has to learn to distinguish between the (mostly) singular-masculine-only “guy” and the (often) gender-neutral “guys”. What processes are held accountable for this distinction? How and to what extent are these concepts connected?

Hofstadter and David Moser believe that concepts are a central and critical component of cognition. In their joint (unfinished) paper titled “Errors: A Royal Road to the Mind,” they ask:

Can one vividly envision ... a situation and yet maintain an absolutely asexual image of the individual involved? Or can one envision an individual with a probabilistic mixture of genders -- say, 70 percent male and 30 percent female? Because of the centrality of sex to human identity, these seem unlikely to us. More likely, in our opinion, is that any truly vivid image of any unknown individual requires a specific gender (p.38).

They point out that speakers of Chinese do not have gendered personal pronouns to guide them in their imagery, but only the pronoun "ta", which is completely gender-neutral. Yet Chinese people still rely on default gender imagery, either taking cues from a person's name or from the context in which the person is placed.

If you heard someone called "guy", would your default assumption be that that person was male? And if so, how many cues or clues would you need indicating otherwise in order to bend that default image? Just a name? A hair style? What about an occupation or other contextual circumstances? What if this person reminded you of someone you knew? Just how flexible are our stereotypes and default images about "guys" and how much blurring takes place in our minds? Hofstadter and Moser say:

It strikes us that these blurry images, floating halfway between stereotypes and representations of concrete individuals, lie at the crux of cognition. They lie somewhere between long-term and short-term memory, between unconscious and conscious processing, between the general and the specific, between rigid and flexible representations.

Hofstadter and Moser also talk about what they call "greasy spoonerisms." These are tightly-chunked phrases in which one of the component words has been pulled out and modified, as in "There's an even shorter cut through here," where "short" has been modified as if it were a normal adjective, despite the fact that it is fused to "cut". Two "guys" examples come to mind in conjunction with this type of linguistic phenomenon. The first concerns the possessive form of

“you guys,” which I have heard on more than one occasion turned into “your guys’s” (pronounced like “guises”).

I was at a restaurant, and when I looked the other way my friend Richard stole some of the fried potatoes from my plate. My friend Kelly was with us too, and she said that he had done the same thing to her seconds before. The cashier laughed and said to Kelly and me, “He’s got his own, but he’s still trying to snag your guys’s potatoes.”

One of my roommates was cleaning out the refrigerator and asked if something belonged to me and another of our roommates. “Is this your guys’s?”

Several things make this weird. The first is the addition of the “r” after “you,” making the word “your”. Obviously this would be the correct form if the “guys” after the “you” was missing. But it’s not, and syntactically what it seems to be saying is that the “guys” are yours -- your guys. Of course that’s not the intended -- or the conveyed -- meaning at all.

Another thing that is strange about this phrase is the addition of the extra “s” after “guys”. If you were asking if something belonged to my cats, you wouldn’t say “Are these your cats’s?”. The extra “s” would sound ridiculous, and yet I have heard it added to the end of “guys” so many times! To me this is one piece of evidence for just how tightly the two parts of “you guys” are bound together and perceived as one unit.

The second example reaches a bit further to be considered a greasy spoonerism, but I think it fits well enough to talk about it here. Looking through the online card catalog at the library, I found a book by Edward Edelson called *Tough Guys and Gals of the Movies*. To me this sounded like tough people of both sexes, perhaps Jean Claude Van Dam and Linda Hamilton. But when I looked at the summary on the next screen it said “A look at the traditional ‘bad guys’ and gals from the movies with special emphasis on the careers of Humphrey Bogart, James

Cagney, and Edward G. Robinson.” This produced a completely different picture in my mind: that of bad guys, say Edward G. Robinson this time, but just some average, not-so-tough females.

Perhaps it was the quotation marks around “bad guys” in the summary that made me realize just how close the two parts of this phrase were bound to each other, but upon looking back at the original title, I no longer got an image of Linda Hamilton. “Tough” wasn’t modifying the guys *and* gals, it was part of an idiom that wasn’t as easily broken apart as I had first thought. Although I’ve never heard it, I can imagine someone saying, “The Penguin is a tougher guy than The Riddler,” but I really can’t imagine calling Cat Woman a “tough gal.” Somehow these two words just don’t have the same mental connection for me.

Hopefully, the above rationale has provided enough proof that sexist language is not just a concern for feminists. Indeed, it provides a rich research domain for social and cognitive scientists alike.

Experiment One

Introduction

As was mentioned before, the current study on “guys” was preceded, decades earlier, by extensive psychological research on the word “man.” These experiments tested the extent to which male imagery was evoked by the morpheme “man” when used to describe both males and females (e.g., “man” or “mankind”) compared with other, more seemingly gender-neutral, terms (e.g., “people”) or phrases that explicitly include females (e.g., “men and women”). The underlying assumption in all of these experiments was that if “man” truly had gender-neutral connotations when used to refer to mixed groups, and if it was not tinged with that sense of

“man” used to describe males only, then subjects hearing it would be equally likely to produce imagery of females or males.

In 1972 Joseph Schneider and Sally Hacker, working at Drake University, gave subjects the task of choosing appropriate pictures from magazines and newspapers to illustrate the chapters in a new sociology textbook. The control group was given chapter titles such as “Industrial Life”, “Urban Life”, “Society”, and “Political Behavior”, while the experimental group was given titles like “Industrial Man”, “Urban Man”, “Social Man”, and “Political Man”.

The number of clippings that pictured males and/or females was analyzed, and it was found that the experimental group produced significantly more pictures of males than did those in the control group. Schneider and Hacker concluded, “This is rather convincing evidence that when you use the word man generically, people do tend to think male, and tend not to think female” (in Miller and Swift). They also uncovered some underlying connotations accompanying “man”: bachelorhood, consumption of alcohol, materialism, disorganization, and extravagant consumption.

“Political Man” was portrayed by pictures of Nixon or other politicians making speeches to mixed audiences. “Political Behavior” was represented by prominent political figures also, but contained a secondary theme of people, including women and minority males, in political protest situations ... As the image of capitalist, playboy, and hard hat are called forth by the word “man,” so it is the other side of the coin called forth by “behavior” or “life” -- women, children, minorities, dissent, protest.

Linda Harrison conducted a similar experiment in 1974 to see how children’s impressions of prehistoric people -- usually termed “cavemen” -- were affected by the language used to describe them in science textbooks. She asked the question, “By failing expressly to mention

females in discussions of human evolution, are we causing students to exclude females in their interpretations of these discussions?" Hundreds of junior-high students were asked to give their impressions of prehistoric people by drawing one facial close-up and depicting people in six different prehistoric situations: using tools, cultivating plants, using fire to cook, making pottery, caring for infants, and celebrating. Subjects were given one of three survey versions: the first described these scenes in terms of "man", "men", "mankind", and "he"; the second used the terms "human", "people", and "they"; the third used "men and women" and "they". In order to distinguish drawings of males and females, subjects were also asked to label each character with a modern first name.

Harrison found that both female and male students drew more male-only scenes than female-only or mixed scenes in versions one and two of the survey, with version one eliciting the greatest number of male characters. Thus it was concluded that the words "man", "men", "mankind", and "he" do in fact lead to male imagery. "The fact that such terms, for the overwhelming majority of the students surveyed ... , did *not* elicit female images indicates their effectiveness in excluding females." Harrison says that although there is archaeological evidence that females and males contributed equally to early development, students' perceptions do not reflect this due to the language used to describe such activities in textbooks.

Experiment One was modeled after these studies, by posing the suspect plural "guys" against more clearly gender-neutral terms. The motivation was to see if it too, though purportedly gender-neutral in today's language, elicited predominately male imagery through connection with the singular form "guy".

Eight stories, portraying actual or believable scenarios from everyday life, were used as

stimuli. Each story had a control version, in which one character referred to others as “people” or some other gender-neutral term, and an experimental version, which substituted “you guys” or “guys” in the address. Each subject received two control- and two experimental-condition stories, none of which revealed the gender of any of the characters², and was instructed to answer a few questions about each. Subjects were told that the purpose of this experiment was to investigate the nature and vividness of mental imagery produced by stories. The actual purpose of the experiment -- investigation of default imagery associated with the term “guys” -- was not revealed to them until the experiment was over.

One of the major assumptions of this experiment was that as the subjects read the stories, they would imagine the scenarios in their minds, and most of the time in enough detail to identify each character’s gender. The second major assumption was that once subjects formulated these images of character gender, they would then inadvertently reveal them in their writing with the help of personal pronouns. Writing without pronouns is difficult and takes conscious effort, so it was thought that if subjects had a specific gender in mind they would use that pronoun in their answers. This was an extension of the assumptions used by Schneider and Hacker and Harrison -- namely, that subjects would reveal the content of their mental imagery by choosing or drawing pictures.

The questions after each story were devised to elicit singular personal pronouns by asking questions about each of the characters individually. Subjects were told to answer in complete thoughts and sentences, the idea being that with one-word answers being forbidden, the majority of subjects would use pronouns in their writing and thereby reveal some of their unconscious

² With the exception noted in Experiment One -- Stimuli.

imagery.

Surveys were coded for the number of male and female pronouns elicited for each character. The null hypothesis was that the versions of the stories using “guys” would elicit the same number of male and female pronouns as those using “people”, “folks”, etc.

Subjects

The subjects were 47 female and 29 male undergraduate students taking introductory psychology at Indiana University.

Stimuli

Each subject was given a packet consisting of an instructional cover page, four short stories and four sets of corresponding questions. Only one story was presented on a single page, and each story was followed by a page of questions. The order of stories in each packet was randomized. (Refer to Appendix A for complete story and question sets.)

Each story described a scene in which one character said something to two or more other characters. In the control condition, the speaking character referred to the others as “folks”, “kids”, “you two”, or “the bunch of you”. In the experimental condition, the speaking character referred to the others as “guys” or “you guys”.

Each question set contained five questions pertaining to the details of each corresponding story. Some questions probed for specific details about the subject’s mental image of the scenario, e.g., “Describe a few of the significant pieces of furniture in the lounge.” Other questions offered further information about the scene and asked how this extended the subject’s mental image, e.g., “One of the winning players really took offense to this outburst. Why do you think that was?”. Some questions, like the former, were intended as distractors, in order to make

the claimed purpose of the experiment more plausible to the subject. Other questions, like the latter, were specifically designed to try to elicit singular personal pronouns in the subject's answers. Five blank lines were provided after each question as a cue for the subject to answer in complete sentences. The subject matter of the eight stories is summarized below (numbers correspond with those in Table One).

1. Two children, being pushed in a swing by an adult, are beginning to grow anxious about how high they are going.
2. Two high-school kids at a church carnival are teasing a priest who is sitting in the dunking booth.
3. The director of a Broadway play gets upset at some dancers for not paying attention.
4. The loser of a Monopoly game at a retirement home gets upset and causes a scene.
5. Two kids come home from college for the weekend and their elderly neighbor drops in.
6. A university student needs help registering for classes and asks two consultants for help.
7. A student hands two others the syllabus because they come in late on the first day of class.
8. Two parents and their first-grade twins are having a meeting with the principal.

Note that the only story that revealed the gender of any of the characters was the one which described the church carnival, and this was done only because one of the characters in the story was a priest. Please see Appendix A for complete stories and question sets.

Method

The first page in the packet described the procedure to the subjects. In order to

discourage one-word answers and thus increase the probability of personal pronouns, a line in the introductory paragraph stated in bold, **“Even if you feel the question can be answered in just a word or two, please use complete thoughts and sentences.”** Subjects were told that the study was about mental imagery and so for each story they were asked to “picture the scene vividly in your mind’s eye -- even to hear it if possible.” Subjects were allowed to re-read each story as many times as possible in order to get a vivid picture. After they felt confident with their mental image, they were to turn to the next page in the packet and answer the questions pertaining to the story they had just read, referring back to the story if necessary. This process was repeated four times. After they had finished, subjects were debriefed on the hidden agenda of the experiment. Since this study was intended to examine an element of American speech, subjects were asked if they were native American English speakers and this answer was recorded on the front page of each packet, along with each subject’s gender.

Surveys were coded double-blind by two researchers and all disagreements were settled by discussion. Character gender was identified by locating personal pronouns or other gender-specific clues in the subjects’ answers. If the subject used “he”, “him”, or “his” to refer to a character, that character was coded as male. Likewise characters referred to as “she” or “her” were coded as female. Other gender-specific clues were used when, although no pronoun was indicated, the reference seemed to suggest a specific gender. Examples of clues that were coded as females include “[child’s] hair is in a ponytail”, “[child’s] long hair is pulled up”, and “wearing a dress”. An example of a clue coded as male include “buzz haircut” and “wearing a bow tie”. Examples that were not coded as either gender were “overalls and a striped t-shirt”, “had ball practice”, and “wearing a pink shirt”, because we felt we could not clearly identify a person of one

sex with these phrases without making sexist judgments ourselves. Identification by such clues actually accounted for fewer than 5% of all gender identifications, and most came from the story that asked for descriptions of two children on a swing.

Results and Discussion

Please see Table One for a summary of the results.

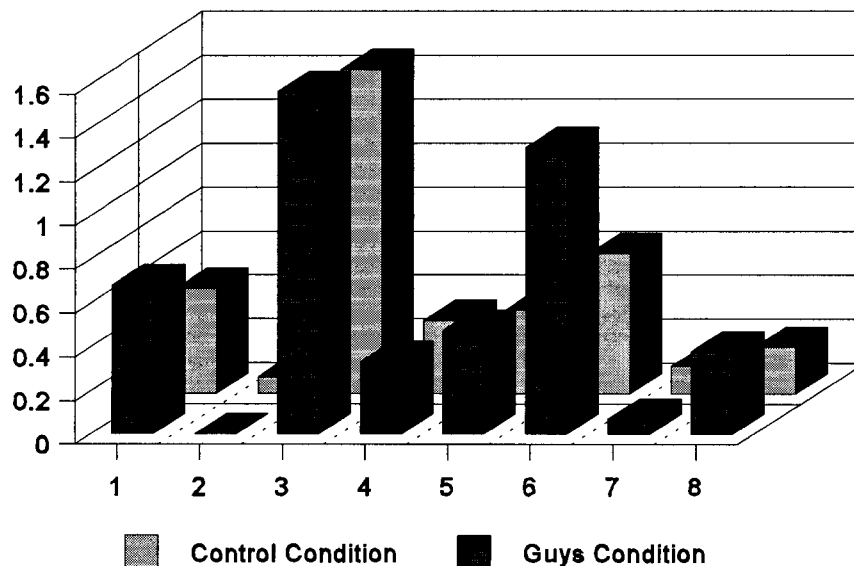
The number of male identifications greatly outnumbered female identifications, specifically by a factor of approximately three. It is not known whether the majority of masculine pronouns was a true result of masculine imagery, or simply due to residual effects from the doctrine of using masculine pronouns as the default in formal writing. Although the stories tried to convey a relaxed and casual attitude, it is possible that subjects may have perceived some expectation to write in a formal manner. Thus, surveys that contained no female identifications were not included in the calculations. This excluded 23 of the original 100 subjects. Two more subjects were excluded because they did not speak American English as their first language.

Because of the possibility that some of the male pronouns from the remaining subjects were still due to using masculine defaults in writing, it was determined that more accurate results would be gotten by examining the number of female identifications. Thus, eight t-tests were calculated by comparing the number of female identifications elicited from each story. In only one of these eight stories was the t-test significant ($t = -2.37$, $p < .05$). This story described the student who was registering for classes. This student, unable to get help from an academic counselor, needed some help at the registration center, so asked two near-by consultants for help by asking, "Hey, do you guys/two have a copy of the bulletin I can look at? I need to check something out real quick." Interestingly, and contrary to the hypothesis, the "guys" condition

elicited significantly *more* female identifications than did the control condition.

Why this particular result would be attained only in this story is a curious matter. Perhaps there is something intrinsically feminine about being a registration consultant. Other than this explanation, there is really no reason to set this story apart from the others. Of greater interest is why the “guys” condition in *any* story would elicit more female imagery than the control condition. Is it possible that “guys” has become so gender-neutral that it has actually slipped over the line in the other direction? It would hardly seem plausible, yet that is one interpretation of this result. It is also worth mentioning that both academic counselors in the Psychology department where this experiment was conducted are females. It is possible that the subjects, upon reading this story, pictured a female academic counselor and then projected this imagery onto the registration consultants. In any event, a one-tailed sign test revealed that the true trend of the experiment showed no difference between the control and “guys” conditions ($p < .035$).

Table One: Mean number of female identifications in eight stories



A comparison of male and female subjects showed no significant findings. There were, however, some other trends that are worth mentioning. The story about the Broadway dancers elicited, rather unsurprisingly, the greatest number of female identifications. Although there is a strong (and necessary) male population in Broadway theater, it is speculated that the notion of “dancing” was perceived as a predominantly female activity.

The story about the Monopoly game in the retirement home also elicited a surprisingly high number of male identifications. This result contrasts with the fact that the majority of the population for this age group is women. Either the subjects in the experiment were not aware of this, or the story simply elicited male imagery despite this knowledge.

The story about the church carnival elicited the smallest number of female identifications. In fact, only *one subject* identified either of the two teenagers as a female! As noted before, this was the only story which revealed the gender of any of its characters. It is possible that the identification of one of the characters as male (the priest) was enough for male imagery to bleed through to the other characters, even though their sexes were not revealed. It is also possible that the teenagers’ actions of threatening the priest with dunking seemed inherently masculine to the subjects, just as dancing seemed feminine in Broadway story. However, even that story elicited a fair number of male identifications in both the control and “guys” conditions.

It is worth noting that some subjects seemed to have some definite preconceptions about gender that were reflected onto the characters in each story. One subject wrote, “It is because it’s a male,” while another wrote, “Males tend to have less compassion in general.” Both were, not too surprisingly, female subjects. Answers such as these seem to indicate that the characters’ actions and attributes interacted with the subjects’ preconceptions in formation of mental images.

Another interesting finding was that subjects in the “guys” condition were more likely to use the singular “guy” in their answers than were subjects in the control group. Examples of such responses are “He said nothing because the guy he was with already said thank you” and “The third guy handed both papers...” Ten subjects in the “guys” group used “guy” in responses such as these, as contrasted with only two in the control group. This is probably because the word “guys”, when it appeared in the story, primed the singular form of the word so that it came up in the subjects’ answers to the questions. This is probably the strongest indication that “guys” has some residual masculine imagery associated with it because of the singular “guy”. Waksler speculated in her article that “you guys” is “now being used as an idiom, ...[therefore] *guys* is not semantically categorized with the [+male] meaning it would have if it were used alone. Indeed, by younger speakers it may not even be recognized as the same morpheme as the *guys* in ‘Guys and Dolls.’” Such a claim seems ridiculous, and the priming effect shown by subjects in the “guys” condition seems is a piece of refuting evidence against this speculation.

Overall, Experiment One suggests that “guys” does not evoke more imagery of one gender or the other. Furthermore, the finding from the only story that produced significant results indicates that the expectations to find more masculine imagery associated with “guys” are unfounded.

Experiment Two

Introduction

A second experiment was designed to further explore the subliminal connotations of “guys” and to see if they were in any way associated with gender. As was mentioned before, it is

widely felt that the word “guys” elicits positive feelings in those referred to as such and that it tends to foster a special “bond” between people who use it frequently in their interactions.

Confidence and liking, respectively, were the two attributes chosen to represent these notions.

To examine how confidence levels were affected by calling people “guys”, I devised a story about a coach’s pep talk to a sports team with a losing record, in which the players were referred to as “girls” or “boys” or “guys”. A question then asked how confident the players were as they ran onto the field. This was an attempt to isolate the effects of the pep talk, and specifically, the presence or absence of the word “guys”. It was hypothesized that the players’ confidence level would be higher in the “guys” condition for both sexes compared to the “girls” or “boys” condition. Since males *are* “guys” in both the male and gender-neutral senses of the term, it was also speculated that the female characters might get an *extra* boost of confidence over the males from being called “guys”.

To examine how much the players liked the coach, the pep talk was designed to be interpretable in both positive and negative lights. It was hypothesized that the players would like the coach more in the “guys” condition, because the word “guys” would indicate that the coach felt a sense of equality in their relationship, and the pep talk would convey a good-natured feeling. Likewise, it was expected that the terms “girls” and “boys” would make the pep talk seem more condescending. Again, it was thought the female characters might get more of an ego boost than their male counterparts would from being called “guys”, and thus would like their coach more than their male counterparts would.

Subjects

The subjects were 59 female and 50 male undergraduate students taking introductory

psychology at Indiana University.

Stimuli

Each subject was given a packet consisting of an instructional cover page, one page with a short story, and one page of questions.

The story introduced two characters, either John and Kevin or Jennifer and Stephanie, whose names were chosen as unambiguous representatives of males and females, respectively.

Jennifer and Stephanie are the captains for Central High's soccer team. Unfortunately, they have lost their last three games and Coach Smith has noticed a decline in the players' morale. The team is scheduled to play Valley High, a team of roughly equal skill, this afternoon. Afraid that they will continue their losing streak simply due to low spirits, Coach Smith calls the captains over for a quick pep talk before the game. "Now I know we're all disappointed in how the last few games have turned out, but I *know* you girls can play better than that! So get out there, run your tails off, and show me you can!"

In the control condition, the coach refers to Jennifer and Stephanie as "girls" and to John and Kevin as "boys." In the experimental condition, the coach refers to both genders as "guys." Note that Coach Smith's gender was **not** revealed in the story.

The question set consisted of two questions pertaining to the subjects' perceptions of the story, based on their mental images.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how confident do the captains seem as they run onto the field?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NOT VERY									VERY
CONFIDENT									CONFIDENT

2. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think the captains like their coach?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISLIKE					LIKE				
VERY MUCH					VERY MUCH				

After each question, the question “Why?” appeared with four blank lines, so that subjects could give answers as to what cues prompted these perceptions.

Method

The first page in the packet described the procedure of the survey to the subjects. Again, subjects were told that the study was about mental imagery and so were asked to “picture the scene vividly in your mind’s eye -- even to hear it if possible.” It was additionally suggested that they “try to imagine clothing, facial expressions, voices, or anything else that helps ... create a vivid picture.” Subjects were allowed to re-read the story as many times as possible in order to form a vivid picture. After they felt confident with their mental image, they were to turn to the next page in the packet and answer the questions, referring back to the story if necessary. They were told that there would be two questions asking why they imagined something in a certain way, so that we could learn which cues from the mental image they used in formulating their answers. After they had finished, subjects were debriefed on the hidden agenda of the experiment. Again, subjects were asked if they were native speakers of American English and this answer was recorded on the front page of each packet, along with each subject’s gender.

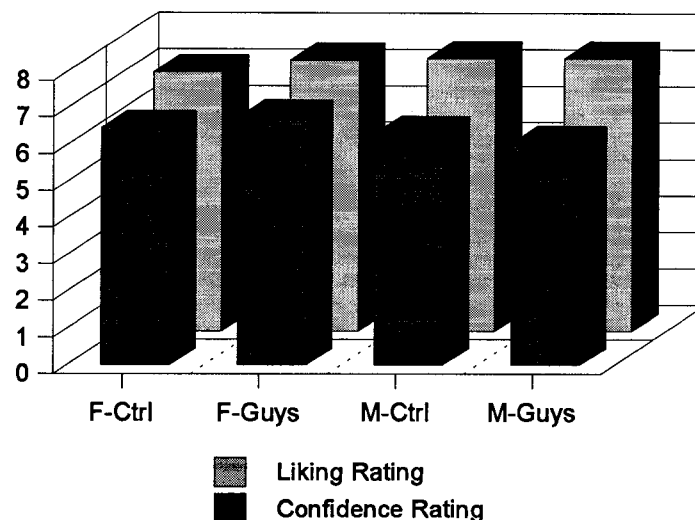
Surveys were coded double-blind by one researcher. The numerical ratings for each subject’s answers to player confidence and degree of liking of their coach were recorded. Each subject’s written responses to the corresponding “why?” questions were also examined for

content. Because it seemed that some subjects' responses did not coincide with their numerical ratings for confidence or liking (e.g., response was negative, but rating was '8'), key phrases from each answer were recorded and coded on a scale from 2 to -2 for positive and negative feelings resulting from the coach's pep talk. These adjusted figures for confidence and liking were then examined in a separate calculation. The gender of the coach, which was not revealed in the story, was also recorded if subjects indicated it with personal pronouns. This was coded as in Experiment One.

Results and Discussion

There was no significant difference found in either the confidence level or the degree of liking the coach between the control and the "guys" conditions for either female or male characters. There was also no difference in these variables between male and female characters. For a summary of these results, please see Table Two, which shows a break down between female and male characters for both the control condition, being referred to as either "girls" (F-Ctrl) or "boys" (M-Ctrl), respectively, and in the "guys" condition, being referred to as "guys" (F-Guys and M-Guys).

Table Two: Mean Liking and Confidence Ratings



The only significant results were in subject gender differences. One significant finding was an overall tendency for female subjects to rate higher levels of confidence ($t = 1.89, p < .10$). However, this trend was only manifested in the male-control condition ($t = 2.19, p < .05$). This might indicate that the male subjects disliked the notion of other males being referred to as “boys”, which was reflected in giving lower scores for player confidence.

The only other significant finding indicated a tendency for female subjects to rate a higher liking of the coach in the female-guys condition ($t = 2.09, p < .05$). Similarly, perhaps this indicates that the female subjects themselves had a preference for being called “guys”, which was then reflected in their perception that the characters in the story would also like someone who referred to them as such. This supports Hofstadter’s theory that the word “guys” elevates the females that it refers to.

Other than the two conditions specifically mentioned above, there were no significant differences between male and female subjects in their reactions to any of the four conditions for either player confidence or degree of liking of the coach.

It was thought that there could be possible differences between the control and “guys” conditions that were being hidden by combining both sexes during calculations. This could have happened if the female subjects reacted to the “guys” condition in one direction, but the male subjects reacted in an opposite direction, thus creating the appearance that there was no main effect. T-tests were also calculated to examine possible differences of this sort, but there were no significant findings.

Only two subjects identified the coach as being female, both in the female-control condition. Interestingly, one male subject even said, “He seems like a good motivator, but

I bet they would like him better if he were a woman.” This indicates that this subject’s mental image of the coach’s male gender was so strong that he didn’t even allow for the possibility that the coach was a female, even though the coach’s gender was never specified!

One male subject also indicated in his response to liking of the coach, “He treats them on a personal basis; however, they might have gotten offended when the coach referred to them as ‘you guys’.” While other subjects indicated the captains may not have liked some aspect or another about the pep talk, this was the only response that explicitly referred back to “guys”.

It must be pointed out that *one word* can possibly only produce a very small effect when placed in the context of a complex scenario, hence one would expect any effects to be nearly invisible, even if they are psychologically real. That any trends at all were found is a hopeful sign for further research in this area.

Directions for Future Research

As was stated before, there was a large percentage of subjects who did not use any personal pronouns in their responses, but instead used “he/she” or “they”. This fact might suggest one of two possible conclusions. One is that the subjects really didn’t have vivid mental pictures in their minds. However, the information in the stories from Experiment One provided much more detail than Schneider and Hacker’s two-word chapter titles or even Harrison’s one-sentence scenarios. It would be absurd to think that subjects would create vivid mental images including gender in those conditions, and yet not with the short stories presented in this study. a different interpretation is that subjects may have simply been trying to be politically correct in their writing. One answer that indicates this said, “Maybe they feel it is difficult and doesn’t want a bad grade.”

The grammar in this response suggests that the subject used “they” to avoid a pronoun, as she shifted back into a third-person singular conjugation in the second half of the sentence. Thus, a more effective method of extracting mental imagery may be necessary. One option would be to follow Harrison’s lead in having subjects draw the particular scenes, complete with characters and character names, under the pretense that the experimenters were looking for illustration ideas for a children’s book on personal interaction. In this study it would be beneficial to look at both vocative and third-person forms of “guys”.

It might also be interesting to see the results from a story in which one character is female, analogous to the story in which the priest was, unavoidably, identified as male. I would speculate that as the male imagery from the priest probably influenced the imagery of the other characters, so would a female character increase the tendency to create feminine imagery for the other characters.

If the results from studies such as these further indicate gender-neutral connotations for “guys”, focus may need to shift to “guy” in the singular. I anticipate that the results from studies on “guy” would find an overwhelming tendency for male imagery, but it may be possible to examine whether or not it is *moving* towards gender neutralization. Some may disagree, but I think at this point in time it is more plausible to call a female baby a “guy” than it is to call the same child that at age 5, not to mention a woman of age 25. Imagine an experiment in which stories give gender clues for a baby -- perhaps pink, yellow, or blue clothing would suffice -- and describe a speaker saying to the baby “Oh, what a cute l’il guy!” Presumably during the story the subject would form a mental image which included the sex of the baby, so all that would need to be done would be to elicit this information. Again, this could be done by drawing a picture of the

scene and naming each character. Even if the results from this survey again found a strong tendency for masculine imagery, it might be important to record these statistics for future reference. How wonderful it would be now to have data on “guys” from the 1950’s!

Since it is so hard to isolate the effect of one word in the context of a complex scenario, it may be necessary to abandon this type of experimentation. It may be more fruitful to move to reaction time experiments, which would hopefully test subjects’ initial reactions to the word “guys” and would not allow for either conscious thought or for muffled effects due to other surrounding words. One experiment has been suggested, in which subjects would have words such as “guys” or other control words said to them, and then they would be required to do a recognition test, in which either male, female, or nonsense names would be quickly flashed before their eyes and they would need to say whether the words were in fact proper names or not. The hypothesis is that subjects would be more quick to identify male names than female or nonsense names as proper names.

One other avenue of possible research would be to study young children’s perception of “guys”. This might lead to a better understanding of how and at what age children learn to distinguish between its female-inclusive and female-exclusive denotations. This information would of course be valuable to other areas of cognitive science, especially to those studying language development.

Alternatives to “Guy” (or, Would a rose by any other name smell just as sweet?)

Question: What do Humphrey Bogart, Robert De Niro, and Ronald Reagan have in common?

Answer: They’re all *men*.

Question: What do Steve Martin, Jerry Seinfeld, and Spike Lee have in common?
Answer: They're all *guys*.

Question: What do Hillary Rodham Clinton and Whoopi Goldberg have in common?
Answer: They're both *females*.

So says Dunleavy, and I have to agree with her intuition. But as she points out, we still have to call each of these incredibly different females "women". She writes, "Everyone knows that Whoopi is much more of a guy than Hillary is, but we don't have the word to say so."

What about "gal"? It's been suggested by many, including Angier in her New York Times article. She described "gal" as "a word that conveys snazziness and style" and is at the same time casual and "delicious[ly] egalitarian." My 37-year-old brother uses "gal" to refer to the women he dates, and I'm sure he'd agree with Angier's definition. But others, like a source quoted in Dunleavy, say "Gal is from the heartland. Gal has a warm heart, big hips, and a bad dye job."

If people can't agree on a female counterpart for "guy", why not adopt "guy" *itself*? People from many different backgrounds almost unanimously agree upon the connotations exuded by both "guy" and "guys." But to counter society's beliefs, which Hofstadter points out on page 3 of this paper, what is it about spunk, liveliness, independence, strength, self-confidence, friendliness, and so on that are so inherently masculine? Perhaps in other times society was not willing to admit it, but Miller and Swift say that "many female people have always recognized these qualities in themselves and in other women and girls without feeling that they were somehow masculine" (personal correspondence to Hofstadter). The subjects in Experiment Two helped confirm this point by indicating that boys and girls, placed in the exact same situation, would have the same level of confidence.

What I'm suggesting is if the term "guy" just happens to describe these qualities better than any other, then perhaps more widespread use and acceptance of it to denote such qualities in both genders will lead to complete degenderization of the word. The word "child" underwent a similar transformation, from its original meaning of "female child" to its current meaning of "gender-neutral child". Yet it happened so long ago that certainly no one today would suggest that the word "child" is tinged with feminine imagery, and many find it surprising that a word would undergo such a change. Perhaps people in a few centuries will think it absurd as well, that people back in the 20th century were so concerned about the masculine imagery associated with "guys".

Appendix A

It's a kids' birthday party. A three-year-old and a four-year-old are being pushed in a two-person swing by an adult. As the children get higher and higher, fear mixes in with their pleasure, and their squeals of delight start turning a little anxious. Sensing this, the adult sneers at them, "Come on! What *are* you guys--a couple of scaredy-cats?"

It's a kids' birthday party. A three-year-old and a four-year-old are being pushed in a two-person swing by an adult. As the children get higher and higher, fear mixes in with their pleasure, and their squeals of delight start turning a little anxious. Sensing this, the adult sneers at them, "Come on! What *are* you kids--a couple of scaredy-cats?"

1. What connection does the adult have with the children?
2. What is the older child wearing?
3. Please describe the younger child's hairstyle.
4. It happens that the younger child doesn't scream as loud as the older one. Why do you suppose this is the case?
5. Why does the adult not have more compassion for the kids?

The members of a local church's high school youth group have organized a dunking booth for the annual church carnival and Father Jim has been chosen to take the seat of honor. As he's climbing up to the seat above the tank, two of the teens gather around him, giving cheers and promises of getting soaked. Father Jim leans down from the ladder and coolly remarks, "You guys are laughing now, but every time I'm dunked, I'm adding a minute to next week's sermon."

The members of a local church's high school youth group have organized a dunking booth for the annual church carnival and Father Jim has been chosen to take the seat of honor. As he's climbing up to the seat above the tank, two of the teens gather around him, giving cheers and promises of getting soaked. Father Jim leans down from the ladder and coolly remarks, "You kids are laughing now, but every time I'm dunked, I'm adding a minute to next week's sermon."

1. How does Father Jim really feel about being in the dunking booth?
2. One of the teenagers immediately grabs a ball and laughingly fakes a throw at the bulls-eye. Why didn't the student go through with the pitch?
3. The other teenager calls over, "C'mon, cool it!" What reason would be behind this?
4. What did that teenager think of Father Jim's threat to lengthen the sermon?
5. These two are in charge of selling tickets to the dunking booth. Which one do you think would be more successful and why?

Six dancers in a Broadway musical are preparing for an upcoming performance. The director is trying to give orders about where they should stand, but the dancers are not paying attention. The short-tempered director screams, "QUIET!!" and the theater falls silent. The director then coughs and says softly, "Okay, the red group needs to line up on the left side over there -- hey, come on, guys, make a straight line -- and the greens need to be on the right." The dancers, sensing the director's mood, are attentive for the remainder of the practice.

Six dancers in a Broadway musical are preparing for an upcoming performance. The director is trying to give orders about where they should stand, but the dancers are not paying attention. The short-tempered director screams, "QUIET!!" and the theater falls silent. The director then coughs and says softly, "Okay, the red group needs to line up on the left side over there -- hey, come on, folks, make a straight line -- and the greens need to be on the right." The dancers, sensing the director's mood, are attentive for the remainder of the practice.

1. Please describe any important or distinct scenery on the stage.
2. One of the dancers in the red group has a sprained ankle. How did this happen?
3. The parents of one of the dancers in the green group have come to watch the practice. Why do you think that is?
4. The director has been really stressed out about the upcoming performance. Why is the director so nervous?
5. One of the dancers asks to leave practice early. What could be the reason the reason?

Three residents of the Hillcrest Nursing Home are sitting in the lounge, playing Monopoly. The game has been going for several hours and all properties have been sold. Two of the residents have hotels on their properties, while the other one has had to mortgage everything. The losing player, who has been getting increasingly upset, finally leaves the table yelling, “Oh, the bunch of you are such cheaters!”

Three residents of the Hillcrest Nursing Home are sitting in the lounge, playing Monopoly. The game has been going for several hours and all properties have been sold. Two of the residents have hotels on their properties, while the other one has had to mortgage everything. The losing player, who has been getting increasingly upset, finally leaves the table yelling, “Oh, you guys are such cheaters!”

1. How many other people are in the lounge when this happens?
2. Why did the quitter get so upset?
3. One of the winning players really took offense to this outburst. Why do you think that was?
4. What did the other winning player think of the loser after the outburst?
5. Describe a few of the significant pieces of furniture in the lounge.

Chris's kids have returned from college for the weekend. Chris had to stay late at work to finish a project, so dinner is really late tonight. The family's 82-year-old next-door neighbor, who has been looking forward to seeing the kids, walks in just as they are setting the table and exclaims, "My! Haven't you guys eaten *yet?*"

Chris's kids have returned from college for the weekend. Chris had to stay late at work to finish a project, so dinner is really late tonight. The family's 82-year-old next-door neighbor, who has been looking forward to seeing the kids, walks in just as they are setting the table and exclaims, "My! Haven't you people eaten *yet?*"

1. Is the neighbor walking with or without a cane?
2. What was being served for dinner?
3. One of the kids was not happy about this meal choice. Why do you think that was?
4. The other one was just happy to have a home cooked meal. How do you think this student enjoys life in the dorms?
5. Both the kids brought laundry home, but only one of them actually did any washing. What could explain this?

An I.U. sophomore, wanting to drop chemistry and add a film class, walks into the registration center for a schedule adjustment. The film advisor didn't know whether this film class would count as an Arts and Humanities requirement, so the student decides to ask two nearby consultants, chatting to each other, for help: "Hey, do you guys have a copy of the class bulletin that I can borrow? I need to check something out real quick."

An I.U. sophomore, wanting to drop chemistry and add a film class, walks into the registration center for a schedule adjustment. The film advisor didn't know whether this film class would count as an Arts and Humanities requirement, so the student decides to ask two nearby consultants, chatting to each other, for help: "Hey, do you two have a copy of the class bulletin that I can borrow? I need to check something out real quick."

1. Why does the student want to drop chemistry?
2. What were the consultants talking about when the student approached them?
3. One of the consultants thought it was rude for the student to interrupt their conversation, but said nothing explicitly. Still, it was obvious to everyone. Explain.
4. The other consultant knew where a copy of the class bulletin was. How do you think this consultant handled the situation?
5. How did the student feel towards each of the consultants?

First day of Introductory Psychology. The professor has just handed out a stack of syllabi to the class, which is being passed up and down the rows of seats. Two stragglers come in late and sit down near the front of the class. A student sitting a few rows back, who is currently holding the stack of papers, takes two extras and tries to get the attention of the latecomers with a loud whisper: "Hey guys! You need these!"

First day of Introductory Psychology. The professor has just handed out a stack of syllabi to the class, which is being passed up and down the rows of seats. Two stragglers come in late and sit down near the front of the class. A student sitting a few rows back, who is currently holding the stack of papers, takes two extras and tries to get the attention of the latecomers with a loud whisper: "Hey you two! You need these!"

1. How many rows back was the helpful student sitting?
2. The professor addressed the stragglers, saying that tardiness would not be tolerated. The tension in the classroom increased noticeably. How do you think the professor felt at that point?
3. Only one of the latecomers thanked the third student for the syllabus. Why do you think that was?
4. The other latecomer took the paper but said nothing. What could explain that?
5. Do you think the students had a good excuse for being late? Why or why not?

The principal of Jefferson Elementary School is having a conference with two parents and their first-grade twins. The children, who are sitting on the floor near them, are growing restless and beginning to talk and squirm. The principal, trying to keep the noise level down, leans over to them and says, "C'mon, kids, settle down. We're almost done."

The principal of Jefferson Elementary School is having a conference with two parents and their first-grade twins. The children, who are sitting on the floor near them, are growing restless and beginning to talk and squirm. The principal, trying to keep the noise level down, leans over to them and says, "C'mon, guys, settle down. We're almost done."

1. What are the principal's feelings toward the children?
2. What does the principal do when the telephone rings unexpectedly?
3. One of the twins is more fidgety than the other. Why is this?
4. How is the other child sitting?
5. Describe what one of the twins looks like.

Bibliography

- Angier, N. 1995. Where Woman Was, There Gal Shall Be. *New York Times*.
- Dunleavy, M. 1996. "Guy" Envy: Why we need a word that's more relaxed than *woman* and more grown-up than *girl*. *Glamour*, May 1996, p. 158.
- Edelson, E. 1978. Tough Guys and Gals of the Movies. New York: Doubleday.
- Evans & Evans Dictionary of Contemporary Usage. 1957. p. 211.
- van Heerden, J. 1996. Personal correspondence with Christine van Rossum.
- Harrison, L. 1975. Cro-Magnon Woman -- In Eclipse. *The Science Teacher*, April, pp. 8-11.
- Hofstadter, D. 1992. Personal correspondence with Miller & Swift.
- Hofstadter, D. You've Come a Long Way, Guys! Or, Generic "Man" and Generic "He" in a New Guise. Center for Research on Concepts and Cognition, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Hofstadter, D. & Moser, D. Errors: A Royal Road to the Mind. Center for Research on Concepts and Cognition, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Kasser, E. 1945. The Growth and Decline of a Children's Slang Vocabulary at Mooseheart, A Self-contained Community. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 66, 129-137.
- Maggio, R. 1988. The Nonsexist Word Finder: A Dictionary of Gender-Free Usage. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Miller, C., & Swift, K. 1992. Personal correspondence with Hofstadter.
- Miller, C., & Swift, K. 1976. Words and Women: New Language in New Times. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Random House Dictionary of the English Language. 1987. New York: Random House.
- Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang. 1994. New York: Random House. pp.1003-4.
- van Rossum, C. 1996. Sexism in Language: On the Usage of the Generic Words "Man" and "Guy" in English, and Its Equivalents in Dutch, French, and Chinese. Center for Research on Concepts and Cognition, Bloomington, Indiana.

Schneider, J. & Hacker, S. 1972. Sex Role Imagery and the Use of the Generic "Man" in Introductory Texts: A Case in the Sociology of Sociology. In Miller, C., & Swift, K., Words and Women: New Language in New Times.

Waksler, R. 1995. She's a mensch and he's a bitch: neutralizing gender in the 90's. English Today 42, vol. 11, no. 2., 3-6.