WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXIST/NONSEXIST LANGUAGE ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Traci C. Nagle*

Abstract: The movement to reduce or eradicate the use of sexist language from public discourse is into its third decade. For nearly that entire time, scholars have been engaged in efforts to assess the effectiveness of that campaign—as measured by changes in actual use of sexist language, but also by people's attitudes toward language itself. Prior studies have found that, among both men and women, age is positively correlated with an increased sensitivity to sexist (non-gender-inclusive) language, and an increased willingness to use non-sexist alternatives. Yet these studies have focused primarily on attitudes among college students, and no study has focused on women's attitudes across the entire lifespan. The present study addresses that lacuna, with a survey of attitudes among women aged 20 to 88, and evaluates the hypotheses that age, generational cohort, and/or experience in the workforce are key variables influencing women's attitudes toward sexist language and language reform.

1. Introduction

The movement to reduce or eradicate the use of sexist (non-gender-inclusive) language from public discourse is into its third decade. In the United States, a strong campaign in support of the use of non-sexist language in academic and other writing, for example, gained force in the mid-1970s, beginning, perhaps, with the publication of Robin Lakoff's seminal *Language and Woman's Place* (Lakoff, 1973, 1975), and peaking in 1995 with the publication of the Association of American University Presses' *Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing* (Schwartz & the Task Force on Bias-Free Language of the Association of American University Presses, 1995). For nearly as long, scholars have been engaged in efforts to assess the effectiveness of that campaign—as measured by changes in actual use of sexist language, but also by people's attitudes toward language itself. They have shown that the campaign has produced mixed results, as measured against the putative goals of feminist language reform—which include, according to Pauwels (2003), "raising awareness of the gender bias in language and getting the speech community to adopt the proposed changes" (p. 561).

In the realm of publishing, however, gender-inclusive language was institutionalized at an early date, and has remained so. Many publishers and associations promoted the use of inclusive language, and some even *mandated* the use of inclusive language in their own journals or other publications (see, e.g., American Psychological Association, 1975; McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1974; NCTE, 1985; NCTE Committee on the Role and Image of Women in the Council and in the Profession, 1975; Scott, 1972; Speech Communication Association, 1975). One effect of this reform movement may be that individuals who received their formal education after, say, 1980 have had much less exposure to sexist language than did

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their predecessors, at least in books, journal articles, and the like. (For quantitative studies of the decrease in the use of sexist language in printed materials, see, e.g., the studies cited by Pauwels, 2003, pp. 561, 563.)

This clear reduction in people's exposure to sexist language since the mid-to-late 1970s and the currency of many issues surrounding women's equality might lead some to conclude that people would have become more accepting of the use of nonsexist alternatives, and more sensitive to sexist language, in the course of the past 30 years. The evidence on this issue is mixed, however. Changes in people's attitudes toward the use of nonsexist language are not found across the board, for a number of possible reasons, including the fact that efforts to promote nonsexist language have met with strong resistance in a number of segments of society. Unsurprisingly, people who are not supportive of male-female equality have been found to be less accepting of nonsexist language alternatives (Bate, 1978; Swim, Mallett, & Stangor, 2004). A backlash that arose in the 1980s against "political correctness," some have proposed, dealt setbacks to the promotion of nonsexist language, too.[1] Mucchi-Faina (2005, p. 200) cites a study conducted in Canada that found negative attitudes toward political correctness were correlated with, among other things, membership in majority groups and the holding of conservative political beliefs. As Miller and Swift (1988, p. 4) point out, many people may view language change of any kind as "threatening," because it may "signal … changes in social mores."

A number of studies have found that among both men and women, age is positively correlated with an increased sensitivity to sexist language and with an increased willingness to use non-sexist alternatives. Such findings seem to challenge conventional wisdom, which might suggest that younger people, especially those born during and after the women's movement, would be more sensitive than their older counterparts to sexist language, by virtue of their having grown up in a world where women expect to be treated equally with men. A number of hypotheses have been offered to explain these findings. Rubin & Greene (1991) suggest several possibilities: a purported decline in public concern for women's issues since the 1970s (p. 394); the effects of a backlash against politically correct (PC) language and of the supposed conservatism of the 1980s, as a result of which "people who were … formatively educated and acculturated … during the conservative 1980s may have been exposed to relatively few messages and models encouraging the ideal of gender-inclusion" (p. 409); the possibility that "sensitivity to gender-exclusion is born of experience in the worlds of career and family building," experience that does not typically come about until a person's late 20s or 30s (p. 409); or the perverse effectiveness of the non-sexist-language movement itself, whereby "gender-inclusive language has become so normative to young men and women that they are no longer sensitive to the value implications of it" (p. 409). Other scholars have suggested that empathy (which develops as a person enters and progresses through adulthood) mediates a person's sensitivity to sexism: "Perhaps as individuals move into adulthood, they develop more empathy for those affected by sexist language" (Parks & Roberton, 2005, p. 402). Still another scholar wonders whether this age effect "might be related to the fact that language inequity, like other forms of discrimination, is evident mainly in competitive situations, when concrete economic and social gains (or losses) are involved. Therefore women might become … attentive to the issue primarily after they start working" (Mucchi-Faina, 2005, p. 208).

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[1] For a comprehensive look at efforts to institutionalize "politically correct" language, including nonsexist language, see Cameron (1995).

The study reported in this paper was designed to investigate some of these hypotheses by evaluating the relative influences of age, generation, and work experiences on women's attitudes toward sexist language and language reform efforts. In so doing, it considers women across nearly the entire lifespan, from college into the elder years. This approach stands in contrast to prior studies of the same issue, which have focused primarily on comparing attitudes across gender lines, and primarily among college students. Through the lens of apparent time, this study examines the possibility that women's attitudes evolve, as suggested by some of the scholars quoted above, and also opens a window on any possible generational differences brought about by the suggested decline in concern for women's issues or the anti-PC backlash. In addition, it investigates the possibility that other social factors, such as education level, field of study/work, or, as Mucchi-Faina proposed, work experience, affect women's attitudes toward sexist language.

The next section of this paper will review the studies to date that have measured attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language. Following that literature review, the methodology and results of the present study will be presented. The final section will discuss the limitations of the study's design, before offering a brief conclusion and suggestions for future research.

2. Background

One of the earliest scholarly investigations of the use of and attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language called into question the assertion by Lakoff that "features such as 'generic he' and 'man' are not likely to change because speakers cannot bring them into conscious awareness" (Lakoff [1975], cited in Bate, 1978). The investigator, Barbara Bate, interviewed 20 university faculty members about their comfort levels with sexist and nonsexist words and phrases, and then asked a "series of exploratory questions" about their views on teaching, students, the women's movement, and nonsexist language. She found wide variation in people's attitudes, but clear evidence of change in progress among both male and female faculty members. Of her respondents, those who expressed support for the women's movement were more likely to support sexist-language reform. Bate concluded, *contra* Lakoff, that "there is one claim that is no longer in controversy. It is clear that speakers can make conscious changes in their language habits if they have information, interpersonal relationships, and professional situations which support language change" (Bate, 1978, p. 148). This study offered supporters of gender-inclusive language hope that these faculty attitudes and models of the use of nonsexist language might be imparted to their students—a potential first wave of change.

Five years later, another study (Henley & Dragun, 1983; cited in Rubin & Greene, 1991) surveyed students and recent graduates (nearly all under the age of 25) and found that "about 25% of respondents did not consider sexist language to be at all a significant issue, although the majority did report using at least one method to avoid sexist language," such as "using 'Ms' instead of 'Mrs' or 'Miss'" (Henley & Dragun [1983], quoted in Rubin & Greene, 1991, p. 393). These authors also found that social factors such as gender, age, and minority status influenced respondents' attitudes: "women, nonstudents and minority group members all reported greater acceptance of language reform proposals … than did their male or Anglo or college student counterparts" (ibid.). This finding about the influence of group membership—specifically, that membership in a minority group corresponded to increased

acceptance of language-reform efforts—would be echoed nearly two decades later by Lalonde, Doan, & Parreson (2000). The heightened sensitivity of the "nonstudents"—respondents no longer in college but under the age of 25—provided the first evidence of the age effect that would arise repeatedly in later research. Another significant contribution made by Henley & Dragun was their development of a standardized survey instrument—a questionnaire that "inquired about subjects' (1) interest in the issue of sexism in language, (2) the methods they used to avoid sexist language and (3) the effort they expended in doing so, (4) about source [*sic*] that motivated their decision to adopt gender-inclusive language, [and] (5) their preferences among proposed innovations for gender-neutral pronouns" (ibid.). Their method contrasted with that of Bate (1978), who had conducted her research via loosely structured interviews.

Harrigan & Lucic (1988) used the Henley & Dragun (1983) questionnaire to investigate perceptions of sexist language and willingness to use nonsexist alternatives among university faculty and students, as well as, for the first time, respondents who were not necessarily affiliated with academia: attendees at a meeting organized by a chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW). Echoing Bate (1978), they found that these NOW attendees were the most energized of all the respondents about the issue of sexist language and the most willing to change their own linguistic behavior—unsurprising, perhaps, since these respondents were clearly closely allied with the women's movement. Interestingly, though, these researchers found little significant difference in attitudes between women and men—a striking result in light of later studies' findings that women are markedly more sensitive to sexist language than are men. Their findings instead confirm Henley & Dragun's conclusion that group affiliation outweighs gender in its influence on attitudes toward sexist language. Among the student sample, which these researchers analyzed according to field of study, they found that psychology graduate students were more likely to adopt nonsexist language than were medical students and English Department graduate students. The authors offer several possible explanations for this outcome, among them medical students' presumed preoccupation with "life and death" material, which presumably leaves them little time to think about gender-biased language; the male-dominated and purportedly authoritarian atmosphere of the field of medicine; or the paternalistic attitudes about women and their needs that the authors attribute to some in the field of medicine. Through Mucchi-Faina's (2005) lens, however, one might expect just the opposite: both admission to medical school and the curriculum itself are highly competitive, so if she is correct about the influence of competitive situations, we might expect medical students, particularly women medical students, to express a heightened sensitivity. Yet, although the researchers did explore the correlation between gender and attitude, no such effect was reported by these authors. Moreover, although data on age were collected, these authors do not report their results according to age or generation.

Harrigan & Lucic did raise a methodological issue with their study: unlike Bate (1978), who conducted in-person interviews, Harrigan and Lucic mailed their surveys to potential respondents, who had a choice whether to return the survey or not. This self-selection, the authors suggest, may have produced a less balanced sample—presuming that those recipients who cared most about the issues of sexist language use would be much more inclined to return the surveys than those who thought the issues unimportant. This process of self-selection, however, may also result in responses from the other end of the spectrum—those who think most strongly that sexist language is a trivial concern. In that case (as with, for ex-

ample, political primaries, according to folk wisdom), the sample includes the respondents (or voters, in the case of elections) who are most energized on *both* sides of the issue; the recipients who do not return the mailed survey might, in fact, be those in the middle, who do not care strongly either way. This conjecture, however, would seem to be contradicted by the findings of the present study, as well as by Parks & Roberton (1998), in which the majority of respondents scored as "undecided"—indicating that they are not particularly energized on one side or the other.

Rubin & Greene (1991) took Harrigan & Lucic's caveat about mailed questionnaires to heart. They combined the advantages of Bate's interview method (avoidance of self-selection biases) *and* Henley & Dragun's standardized questionnaire by administering a modified version of that questionnaire in an interview format. The researchers structured their sample so as to enable an analysis of the results from two generations: current college students and those who had graduated a decade or two earlier. They also carefully balanced the gender of the interviewers so as to obtain significant samples of male-female and same-sex personal interactions. Among their significant findings was respondents' identification of the most influential factors in their decisions about whether to consciously use nonsexist language: respondents reported that their "own conclusions based on considerations of social justice" were most important, followed by "the influence of authority figures like bosses, teachers and parents" (p. 400). Most significant, however, was their finding of a clear "age cohort" (i.e., generational) effect, whereby "people between the ages of 30 and 45 supported gender-inclusive reform more strongly than did the 18–25 year-old group" (p. 403). The authors concluded that "current college students are simply not as concerned about gender-exclusiveness as are the cohort that preceded them by a decade or two" (p. 409). Yet, although Henley and Dragun had also found similar differences in attitudes between college students and non-students who were just a few years older than the students, their two respondent groups could not truly be said to belong to different age cohorts. One might just as easily conclude, given the results of these two separate studies, that attitudes toward sexist language are simply a function of age, not age cohort. Surveying across the entire adult lifespan (as the present study does) should illuminate such a distinction.

Parks & Roberton (1998, 2000, 2005) developed a new questionnaire (the Inventory of Attitudes toward Sexist and Nonsexist Language, or IASNL) to measure people's attitudes. In a 1998 article presenting their instrument and a study that used it, they discussed the inconclusiveness of prior research, attributing some of the lack of comparability across studies to the fact that "the dependent variables have differed from study to study. Some studies have measured the *use* of sexist/nonsexist language; others have measured *attitudes* toward sexist/nonsexist language" (p. 481). Their instrument, therefore, which was used in all their research reviewed here, was designed to measure attitudes toward, recognition of, and use of sexist/nonsexist language. Their 1998 findings confirmed those of prior research (Henley & Dragun, 1983; Rubin & Greene, 1991) that age has a substantial effect on people's attitudes toward nonsexist language. Parks & Roberton found that age accounts for 12 percent of the variance in respondents' IASNL scores (the age groups for their study were 18–20, 21–22, and 23 years of age and older). They also found that gender accounts for 11 percent of the variance, with women reporting markedly more positive attitudes toward nonsexist language than men. Subsequently, these authors explored possible mediators of these age and gender effects (Parks & Roberton, 2005). In a large sample ($N = 402$) of undergraduate women and men, the researchers found a much lower effect of age (accounting for just 2 percent of the

variance); this contrast with their earlier study may be a result of the lack of respondents above 22 years of age, and could indicate that one's attitudes toward nonsexist language crystallize only after that age.[2] Interestingly, the age effect that they did find was statistically significant only for men, whose scores were mediated by their levels of cognitive empathy, as measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index. The authors suggest a number of avenues for further research, which, they state, "could use the IASNL to determine whether the age differences reported in several studies … can be replicated, and whether they are due to cohort differences, experience, or learning. … Studies could [also] use the IASNL to examine attitudes among people of different occupations (e.g., educators, physicians, attorneys), academic disciplines (e.g., humanities, business, education), or socioeconomic status" (Parks & Roberton, 2005, p. 432).

The present study attempts to augment the findings of prior research in a number of ways. First, since all the studies cited above included both men and women in their samples, an analysis exclusively of women's attitudes is absent from the literature. In particular, the finding of Parks & Roberton (2005) that the age effect was statistically significant only for men deserves further investigation. Furthermore, none of these studies has surveyed people across the entire lifespan. Conclusions drawn about age effects based only on data from college students (and at most one other age group) are by their nature incomplete. Mucchi-Faina's proposal that the age effect observed in prior studies may, for women, be due to their experience in the competitive situation of the workforce warrants investigation, as well. The data collected for this study allow analysis along these lines as well as several lines suggested by Parks & Roberton (2005).

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

After approval for this study was obtained from Indiana University's institutional review board for research involving human subjects (IRB), data was collected through the online survey website SurveyMonkey.com. Respondents were recruited via invitations e-mailed to a convenience sample of persons known to the researcher, with the suggestion that these initial respondents forward the invitation to their own friends and acquaintances. Additional respondents were recruited via invitations e-mailed to the presidents of 2 undergraduate and numerous alumnae chapters of a national sorority, with the request that they forward the invitation to their chapters' members. The e-mail invitations asked potential respondents to visit a website to take a survey collecting people's "opinions about particular words, phrases, or statements that some people may interpret as biased toward men or women."

All survey responses were anonymous. As of the time of this analysis, 232 people had responded, of whom 213 completed the entire survey.[3] Of those who completed surveys, 165

[2] Note that all the research reviewed here sampled primarily college-educated respondents (save possibly some of the attendees at the NOW conference sampled by Harrigan and Lucic (1988)).

[3] Most of those who did not complete the entire survey completed only the first page (i.e., the first screen of questions in the online survey), indicating that they either did not like the subject matter of the survey enough to complete it, or that they did not understand that the survey comprised more than one page. Because the demographic information that is used as independent variables was collected at the end of the survey, the responses of those who did not complete the entire survey were discarded.

(77%) were women, and 48 (22%) were men. The remainder of this paper focuses solely on the responses from women.[4]

The women respondents ranged in age from 20 to 88, with a median age of 39 and a mean age of 41. All but one respondent were native speakers of English. Fifty-four respondents had never been married, 93 were currently married, 12 were divorced and 6 were widowed. Ninety-two women respondents (56%) reported having been members of a sorority in college.[5] Twenty-three respondents indicated that they were undergraduate students, 9 were graduate students, and 133 were non-students. Of the undergraduates, 10 were sophomores, 3 were juniors, and 10 were seniors. Of the non-students, 15 had completed less than four years of college; 42 had completed four years of college, 59 had completed one to three years of graduate school (deemed in the analysis that follows to be the equivalent of an M.A.), 12 had completed between 4 and 6 years of graduate education, and 5 had completed more than 6 years of graduate education.

As one of the goals of this study was to evaluate the suggestion by Mucchi-Faina (2005) that experience in the workforce may mediate women's attitudes toward sexist language, information was requested about the number of years non-student respondents had spent in and out of the workforce.[6] Of the 133 non-students, 61 reported having spent one year or more out of the workforce, with 5 being the median and 8.8 the mean number of years out of the workforce; 104 respondents reported spending less than one year or no time out of the workforce while under the age of 65. Student respondents were not asked about their years in the workforce, but current undergraduate students who were under the age of 24 were presumed to have zero years in the workforce and were included in the analysis of this variable. Undergraduate students age 24 or older and all graduate students were not coded on this variable.

3.2 Instrument

Upon visiting the survey website, respondents were presented with a "Study Information Page" giving basic information about the study as well as other IRB-required information (a copy of which is included in the Appendix). By clicking on the button to go to the next page, respondents were deemed to have expressed informed consent and they were directed to the survey itself. The next four pages comprised the first part of the survey: the 21 items of the Inventory of Attitudes toward Sexist and Nonsexist Language—General (ISANL-G), an instrument developed, validated, and published by Parks & Roberton (2000, 2001). The ISANL-G consists of three sections: the first (12 items) examines beliefs about sexist language, the

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[4] In the first stage of this study, the results of which are reported here, respondent solicitations were targeted primarily toward women, although responses from men were not rejected and have been saved for use in the second stage of this study. See the conclusion of this paper for further discussion.

[5] This information was requested because a large proportion of the solicitation e-mails sent out by the researcher were sent to members of a women's sorority. If the ISANL-G scores of members were significantly different from those of non-members (because of, for instance, a supposedly more conservative outlook on the part of Greek-group members), this would indicate that the sample was not representative of the American population in general. Of the 133 non-students in this sample, the mean score for women who had not been sorority members was 67.94, and that for women who were sorority members was 64.90. It is possible, therefore, that the high percentage of sorority members even among the non-students has skewed the results here somewhat.

[6] Four of the graduate-student respondents were over the age of 30 and might therefore have spent time in the workforce prior to enrolling in graduate school. However, information on whether respondents who identified themselves as students had previously spent time in the workforce was not collected.

second (4 items) assesses the ability to recognize sexist language, and the third (5 items) evaluates willingness to use nonsexist alternatives to sexist terminology. Each item presents a five-point Likert-type scale, where higher responses (scored as 4 or 5) indicate a favorable attitude toward nonsexist language, lower responses (1 or 2) indicate an unfavorable attitude toward nonsexist language, and a response of 3 indicates that the respondent is undecided. [7] A respondent's total score is the sum of the numerical responses to the 21 items. According to Parks & Roberton (2000, pp. 433–34), "the range of possible total scores on the 21-item IASNL-G is 21–105. Across the 21 items, total scores between 73.6 and 105 reflect a supportive attitude toward nonsexist language; total scores between 21 and 52.5 reflect a negative attitude toward nonsexist language; and total scores between 52.6 and 73.5 reflect a neutral attitude." The survey instrument is reproduced in the Appendix. [8]

The IASNL-G defines "sexist language" as including "words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males *or* exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender." Parks & Roberton included this definition as part of their survey "in order to control for differing interpretations of the term 'sexist'" (1998, p. 483).This definition was displayed at the top of each of the four pages of questions in the first part of the electronic survey.

The second part of each survey requested demographic data from each respondent; questions in this part differed between the two groups. All were asked for their age and gender. Those who were currently students were also asked for their class standing in school (freshman/ sophomore/ junior/ senior/ level of graduate study), and their current field of study; non-students were asked to report the highest level of education they had completed, their area of study for that highest level of education, the number of years they spent/have spent in as well as out of the workforce since completing their education, and the primary occupational field in which they work or worked.

4. Results and Discussion

For the purposes of statistical comparison, these data were analyzed using regression analyses (when both dependent and independent variables were considered to be interval data) or one-way analyses of variance (when one or both variables were considered to be categorical or ordinal data). The threshold for determining statistical significance was set at $p \leq .05$. The dependent variables analyzed were the IASNL-G total score (interval data) and the total score from each of the three sections of the IASNL-G (attitudes toward sexist language & reforms, recognition of sexist language, and use of sexist/nonsexist language; these were also considered to be interval data). Independent variables, all of which were between-subject factors, comprised the demographic information collected from each respondent. In addition, several new independent variables were calculated based on the data collected. The ratio of the number of years spent out of the workforce to the number of years spent in the workforce was calculated as well, to discriminate between, say, a person who worked for 5 years and

[7] Seven of the items present the possible responses in the opposite order and were therefore reverse-scored (see Parks & Roberton, 2000, 2001).

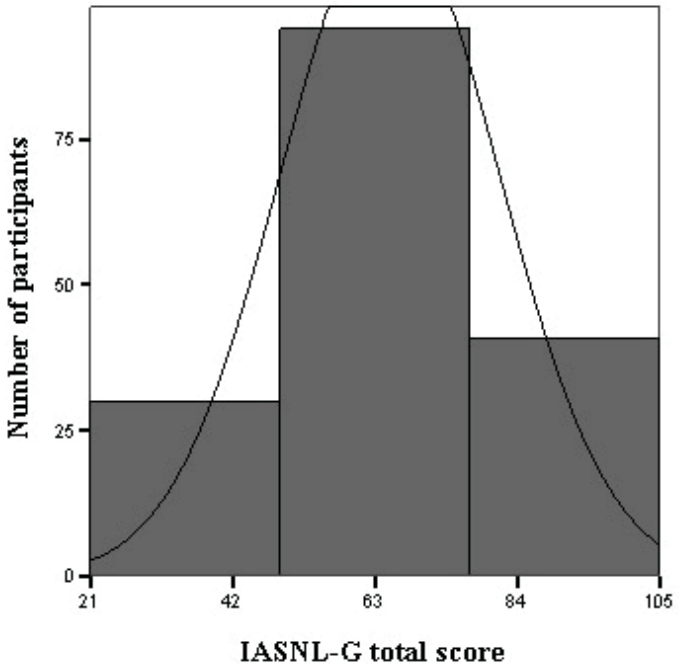
[8] Two reviewers pointed out problems with this survey instrument, questioning its repetitiveness as well as the validity of treating Likert-type responses as interval as opposed to ordinal data in statistical analysis. The value of obtaining results that can be compared directly to those of prior studies, however, was a major factor in my choice to use this instrument in collecting data. It is hoped that the results obtained from this study will inform the creation of a more finely tuned instrument for the investigation of relevant attitudes.

spent another 5 years out of the workforce, and another person who worked for 30 years and spent just 5 out of the workforce.

Each respondent was also assigned to two generational cohorts. First, to allow testing of the proposition that women who were educated during or after the 1980s "backlash" against PC language, respondents were assigned to one of two generational cohorts based on whether they were born (a) before 1975 or (b) in 1975 or after. A second set of generational cohorts was set up to separate women who entered adulthood prior to the nonsexist-language movement (somewhat arbitrarily deemed to have started around 1970), and also to identify women still in college as undergraduates, resulting in three generational cohorts: (a) age 22 and under, (b) ages 23-59, and (c) ages 60 and up.

4.1 Total IASNL-G scores

Respondents' IASNL-G scores covered nearly the entire possible range. The lowest score was 29 and the highest 104 (recall that the range of possible scores was 21–105). The mean IASNL-G score was 65.15, with a standard deviation of 16.07. This mean fell just above the midpoint of the scale of possible responses to the survey and so, on average, the respondents in this sample scored in the "undecided" range as defined by Parks & Roberton (2000).



Note: The three bars approximate the range of scores corresponding to Parks & Roberton's "negative attitude" (21–52.5), "neutral attitude" (52.6–73.5), and "supportive attitude" (73.6–105).

Figure 1. Distribution of total IASNL-G scores

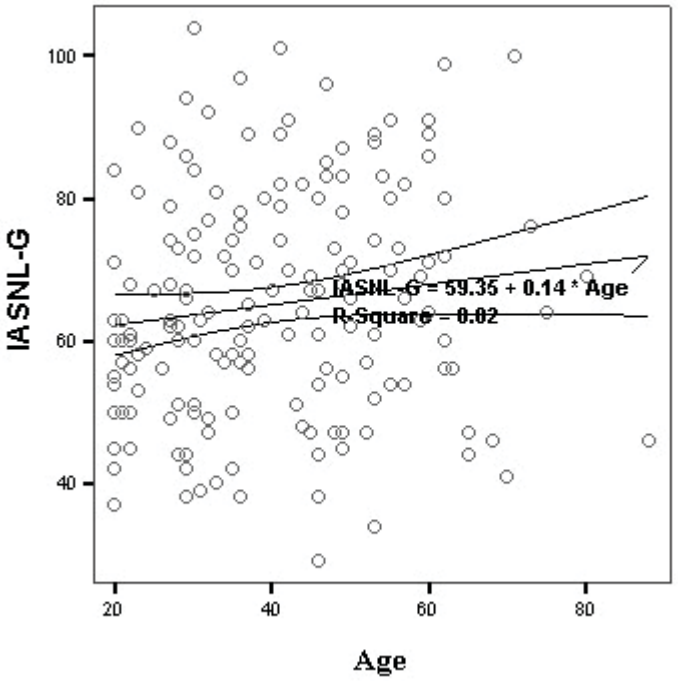


Figure 2. Total IASNL-G score as a function of age (n =165, R^2 =0.02, p = .10)

Moreover, the majority of respondents scored in the undecided range, as shown in Figure 1. This result is in line with the results reported by Parks & Roberton in the various applications of their survey.

A regression analysis of the effect of age on ISANL-G scores indicated that age accounted for approximately 2 percent of the variation in total scores (based on R^2), with older women tending to have slightly higher scores (indicating attitudes supportive of language reforms) than their younger counterparts (see Figure 2). However, this finding, at p = .10, did not reach the threshold of statistical significance set for this project. With that caveat, this finding may confirm that of Parks & Roberton (2005), which also found that age explained about 2 percent of the variation in scores among their respondents, all of whom were 18–23 years old.

Another regression analysis showed little effect of the number of years spent in the workforce on a respondent's total IASNL-G score (accounting for at most 1 percent of the variation, but that may be due to age, since for most respondents, the number of workforce years is a function of age); this result was also statistically unreliable (p = .31). Likewise, the number of years a respondent spent *out* of the workforce was not a reliable predictor of her attitudes, nor was this figure as a ratio of the time spent in the workforce. Thus it seems that Mucchi-Faina's (2005) hypothesis that workforce participation influences a woman's attitudes remains unsupported.

Three categorical independent variables seemed to have some effect on respondents' total scores. Whether a respondent was currently in school did seem to influence her attitude.

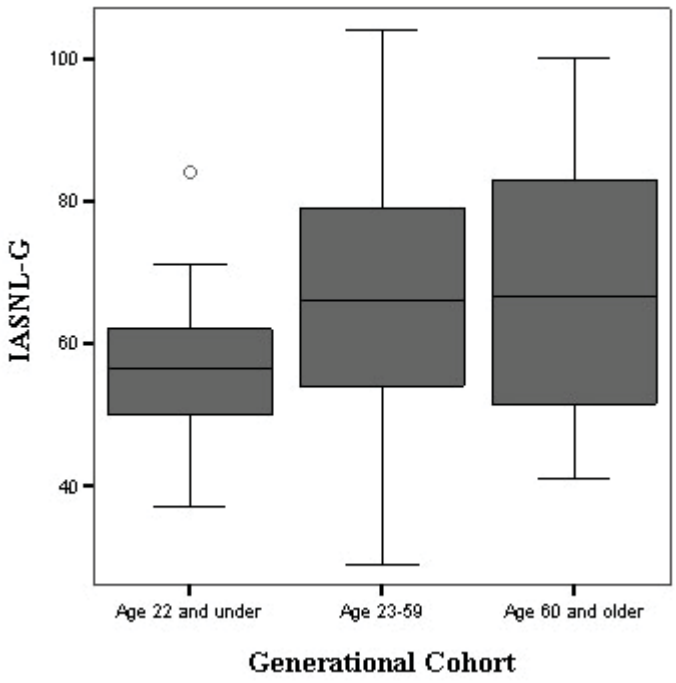


Figure 3. Total IASNL-G scores by generational cohort (n =165, p =.034)

The mean score for students was 60.09, and for nonstudents 67.84; a difference that was statistically significant (p = .047). However, since more than half of the student respondents were age 22 or under (20 out of the 32 student respondents; the mean age of students was 25 and the median, 22), this effect may reflect the influence of age or generational cohort rather than student status. Indeed, generational cohort—specifically the cohort set that separated most undergraduate students from their graduated peers up to age 59—showed a significant (p = .034) effect on total IASNL-G scores. As Figure 3 reveals, while the women in the 23–59 and 60+ age cohorts patterned similarly in their total scores (means of 66.09 and 67.85, respectively), women under the age of 22 tended to have, on average, scores around 10 points lower (mean =56.55) than their older counterparts. Finally, whether a woman had ever joined a college sorority might influence her total score, although this inference fell just short of the significance threshold (p = .055). The mean score for women who had been in a sorority was 63.01, whereas the mean for non-sorority members was 67.84.[9]

[9] This potential effect of sorority membership is quite separate from the effect (see below) of student or nonstudent status. Whereas 72% of the student respondents reported being sorority members (and therefore the scores of current students may be heavily influenced by sorority membership), only 25% of the respondents who reported sorority membership were in fact students, and only 51% of the nonstudent respondents were sorority members. Thus, for this sample, although being a student cannot be considered independent of sorority membership, sorority membership can be legitimately analyzed separately from student status. Of course, this study's sample is not representative of society with regard to sorority membership; the number of sorority members in the general U.S. population is much lower than 51%.

4.2 Sections of the IASNL-G

Although the overall IASNL-G scores of respondents seemed to indicate neutrality on the topic of sexist language, respondents' scores on the separate sections of the ISANL-G paint a different picture. As Table 1 shows, on average respondents scored just above the midpoint of the range of possible scores on the first section, which measured attitudes toward sexist language and sexist language reform. However, on the second section, which measured respondents' recognition of specific sexist language, the mean score was nearly a standard deviation *below* the midpoint of possible responses, and on the third section, which measured respondents' willingness to use specific nonsexist alternatives to sexist lexical items or phrases, the mean was a full standard deviation *above* the midpoint of possible responses. This indicates that respondents are, in general, "less supportive" (to use Parks & Roberton's terminology) when it comes to identifying sexist language, and "more supportive" in their willingness to use nonsexist alternative terms. The reasons for this divergence are unclear. One interpretation may lie in the institutionalization of a number of the nonsexist terms used in section 3, although there are also institutionalized alternatives available for 2 of the 4

	Possible range	**Mean score**	**Std. dev.**
Sec. 1: Attitudes to sexist language reforms	12–60; midpoint = 36	36.75	9.74
Sec. 2: Recognition of sexist language	4–20; midpoint = 12	8.64	4.18
Sec. 3: Use of sexist/nonsexist language	5–25; midpoint = 15	19.75	4.69

Table 1. Mean scores and relation to midpoint on three sections of IASNL-G

terms given in section 2 (see the Appendix for the wording of the questions in both these sections). Another source for these differing sentiments may be the wording of the questions themselves. If question 16 ("Alice Jones should be chairman of our committee"), for instance, had been included in section 3 (worded as, perhaps, "How willing are you to use the title 'chairperson' instead of 'chairman'?"), might respondents have shown a "more supportive" attitude vis-à-vis that question? This possibility could be investigated in a future study, and such considerations should be incorporated into a redesigned survey instrument.

Disaggregating the IASNL-G score into its component sections revealed some correlations that differed from those discussed above for the IASNL-G total scores. Scores on section 2 ("Recognition") were not found to significantly correlate with any of the factors in this study. Scores on section 1 ("Attitudes") mirrored the effect found in the IASNL-G total scores with respect to student/nonstudent status (mean for students = 33.66, for nonstudents = 37.50, $p = .045$). The scores for use of sexist/nonsexist terms in section 3 (mean for students = 18.34, for nonstudents = 20.08) also patterned similarly for students/nonstudents, although this result missed the threshold for statistical significance ($p = .059$). No other factors were found to affect attitudinal scores from section 1.

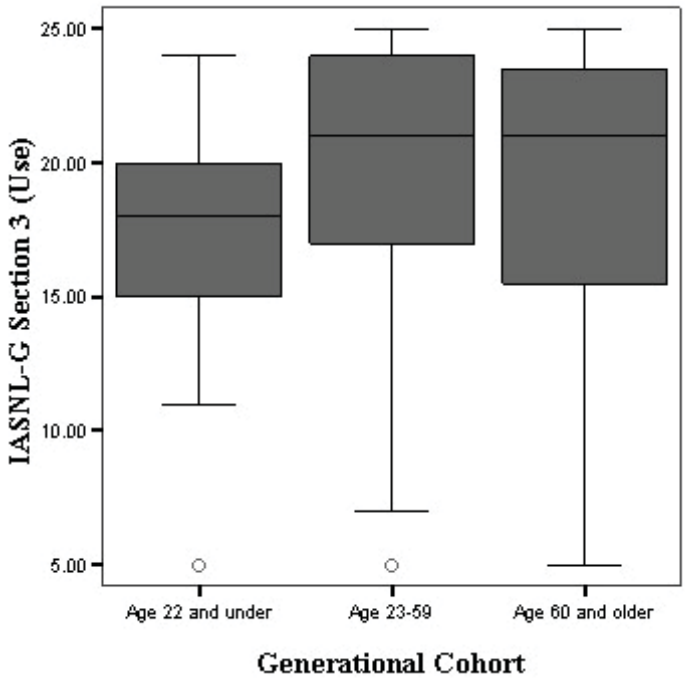


Figure 4. Scores on Section 3 according to generational cohort (n = 165, p = .016)

Analysis of section 3 ("Use"), however, revealed a number of factors that influenced respondents' scores. As with the IASNL-G total scores, generational cohort, student/nonstudent status, and sorority membership all showed statistically significant effects on "use" scores. And again, women age 22 and under patterned differently from their older counterparts (see Figure 4). The mean section 3 score of the youngest generation was 17.00, whereas the older generations had means of 20.22 and 19.50 (p = .016). Given this result, it is perhaps unsurprising that student status also correlated with lower scores on this section, as discussed in the preceding paragraph. Sorority status, too, revealed an effect that mirrored that of the IASNL-G total scores. Here, the mean score for sorority members was 19.02 and for nonmembers it was 20.66 (p = .026).

5. Conclusion

This study replicated the relatively small age effects found by Parks & Roberton (2005), but only in the context of generational cohorts—no statistically significant effects of raw age were found. This would seem to contradict the large age effects found by Parks & Roberton (1998). The fact that this study examined only women's responses, when viewed in light of Parks & Roberton's (2005) finding that the age effect was statistically significant only for men, suggests that the age effect discerned by so many researchers might actually be due to *men's* growing more sensitive as they age or spend more time in the workforce. Clearly a study of the attitudes of a broad age range of men is needed, and is the next planned stage of this research project.

Another possibility is that the age effect found in prior research is in fact strictly a generational effect. In other words, it may be not so much a person's raw age, but the generational social milieu in which a person is raised, that causes the attested variation in attitudes toward nonsexist language reforms. This may be viewed as validating the efforts of language reformers, for at some point the societal milieu changed such that women acquired a markedly greater acceptance of nonsexist terminology.

This study was unable to validate the hypothesis that being in the workforce influenced women to grow more sensitive to sexist language and more accepting of language reform. Moreover, unlike Harrigan and Lucic (1988), it was also unable to discern any effect of field of study or level of education on attitudes. However, the finding in the present study and in prior studies that women who are still in college have markedly more negative attitudes toward language reform than do their graduated counterparts does indicate that some evolution in women's attitudes must take place post-college. What triggers that change remains to be discovered.

Overall, this study showed a result that might disappoint language-reform activists: most of the women surveyed did not seem to care strongly one way or the other about sexist language. Critics might conclude from this that a process of self-selection was at work among the respondents, and that people who were strongly opposed to sexist-language reform simply did not complete the survey. This is possible, for I have no information about the 18 people who began but did not complete the survey.

As with any study begun with a convenience sample, this study has limitations arising from the demographics of the respondents who were recruited. For one, as mentioned in note 9, the number of sorority members in the respondent sample is much higher than in the general population. The discussion in section 4.1 revealed that sorority members tended to score lower on the IASNL-G, indicating more negative attitudes toward language reform. However, the fact that the mean scores for the entire respondent sample were similar to those found in previous studies may be evidence that the current study's sample was not materially different from those of other studies despite the high proportion of sorority members in the present study.

The recruitment method for this study also was biased toward college-educated adults. Both the initial convenience sample and the recruitment of respondents through sorority chapters led to a sample that was nearly entirely college-educated. However, from the perspective of comparability with prior studies, this is not a drawback, since all the prior studies reviewed for this article also drew the majority of their respondents from current college students or college graduates. A larger sample size of women might shed more light on the effects noted here, particularly one that deliberately recruits women evenly across generational and educational lines.

As a companion to this study, and to evaluate the possibility that the age effect found in prior studies may be strongest in men, another survey will be administered to a similar-sized sample of men. Surveying both men and women across the entire lifespan is the best way to gain insight into the possible influences of age, generation, and life experience on people's attitudes toward sexist and nonsexist language.

Appendix: Survey materials

Study Information Page
Opinions about Language

You have been invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to collect information on people's opinions about particular words, phrases, or statements that some people may interpret as biased toward men or women.

Procedures and Other Information
Completing this survey will involve answering 21 questions that ask you to rate your level of agreement with certain statements, your interpretation of certain sentences, or your willingness to use particular words or phrases in your own speech or writing. At the end of the survey you will be asked for information about you, such as your age, educational level, etc. Completing this survey will generally take less than 10 minutes. The information that you and other participants provide will be analyzed and reported in a research paper.

Benefits
By participating in this survey, you will be contributing to the understanding of language and people's attitudes toward it.

Confidentiality
Your responses to this survey will remain anonymous. The survey will not ask for any information that can uniquely identify you, and no such information will be available to the researcher. Your responses to the survey will be grouped with those of all other participants in the analysis of the results.

Contact
If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher by e-mail at <*researcher's e-mail address*>.

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, you may contact the <*contact information for the university's institutional review board*>

Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate you may leave this site without beginning the survey. If you wish to participate, you may begin the survey by clicking the "continue" button below. At any time during the survey if you wish to stop, you can close your web browser, and any data you have already provided will be destroyed.

Please use the following definition in answering these questions:
Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males *or* exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender.

SECTION A
For each of the following expressions, please choose the descriptor that most closely corresponds with your beliefs about language:
(1 = strongly disagree; 2 = tend to disagree; 3 = undecided; 4 = tend to agree; 5 = strongly agree)

1. Women who think that being called a "chairman" is sexist are misinterpreting the word "chairman."	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2. We should not change the way the English language has traditionally been written and spoken.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3. Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4. If the original meaning of the word "he" was "person," we should continue to use "he" to refer to both males and females today.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5. When people use the term "man and wife," the expression is not sexist if the users don't mean it to be.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6. The English language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7. The elimination of sexist language is an important goal.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8. Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid sexist language.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9. Sexist language is related to sexist treatment of people in society.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. When teachers talk about the history of the United States, they should change expressions, such as "our forefathers," to expressions that include women.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11. Teachers who require students to use nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
12. Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate sexist language.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

SECTION B
Are the underlined words and phrases in the following sentences sexist?
Please choose the response that best corresponds to your beliefs about these sentences.
(1 = not at all sexist; 2 = probably not sexist; 3 = undecided; 4 = somewhat sexist; 5 = definitely sexist)

13. People should care about all <u>mankind</u>, not just themselves.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14. The belief that frogs will give you warts is just an <u>old wives' tale</u>.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15. If a child wants to play the piano well, <u>he</u> must practice hard.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
16. Alice Jones should be <u>chairman</u> of our committee.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

SECTION C
Please choose the descriptor that most closely describes you in the following situations.
(1 = very unwilling; 2 = reluctant; 3 = undecided; 4 = somewhat willing; 5 = very willing)

17. When you are referring to a married woman, how willing are you to use the title "Ms. Smith" rather than "Mrs. Smith"?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
18. How willing are you to use the word "server" rather than "waiter" or "waitress"?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
19. How willing are you to use the expression "husband and wife" rather than "man and wife"?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
20. How willing are you to use the term "camera operator" rather than "cameraman"?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
21. How willing are you to use the title "flight attendant" instead of "steward" or "stewardess"?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

SECTION D

Please indicate your gender	Male		Female	
Please indicate your age in years	*			
Are you a native speaker of English?	Yes		No	
Please indicate your marital status	Never married	Married	Widowed	Divorced
Are you now or have you ever been a member of a college fraternity or sorority?	Yes		No	
Are you currently in college or graduate school?	Yes		No	

The following two questions were asked only of those who were <u>currently in college or graduate school</u>:	
What is your status in school?	Freshman (1st year) / Sophomore (2nd year) / Junior (3rd year) / Senior (4th, 5th or greater year) / Working toward a master's degree / Working toward a doctoral degree / Working toward a medical degree / In school but not working toward any degree / Other
Please indicate your primary area of study in school	*Choices offered were the 22 field of study categories used by the U.S. Department of Education, plus "other"*
The following five questions were asked only of those who were <u>not</u> currently in college or graduate school:	
Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed	High school / 2-yr college / 4-yr college / 1 to 3 years of graduate or professional school after college / 4 to 6 years of graduate or professional school after college / More than 6 years of graduate or professional school after college
Please indicate the total number of years you have spent (or spent) in the workforce since the completion of your formal education (as of the level of education indicated above). If you left the workforce for any period of time (such as for retirement, or child-rearing), please DO NOT count those years toward your total years in the workforce. If you have never worked for salaried, contract, or hourly pay, please enter a zero.	*
If you left the workforce for any consecutive period of more than one year before the age of 65 (such as to raise children, or take an extended vacation, or change careers), please estimate how many years you spent out of the workforce while under the age of 65.	*
Please indicate your primary area of study for the highest level of education you completed:	*Choices offered were the 22 field of study categories used by the U.S. Department of Education, plus "Other"*
Please indicate the primary type of work that you do (or did, if retired or no longer working).	*Choices offered were the 23 job classifications used by the U.S. Department of Labor, plus "Other"*
NOTE: "*" in response cells above indicates that respondents were required to enter a positive whole number	

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