

Calling all mankind – and that means you too girls

by Katherine Graham

I am disappointed by the media's return to the generic 'he' and 'man'. What happened to respect and dignity? I certainly don't feel respected when I'm told that 'mankind's first dwellings were...' or that 'a doctor feels he needs to...'. I feel my dignity is under attack when, on challenging this, I am told that a generic masculine is 'understood' to 'include' women, and that really I am making a silly, outdated fuss about nothing very important.

But it is important. If we really mean to treat people with respect, then this is a simple choice. Either use the generic knowing it upsets people, in which case you're being deliberately inflammatory, or make a tiny effort to reframe your language.

So let's try that sentence again, this time using a generic catch-all masculine, and see how the generic just does not wash: 'If we are really to strive to treat men with respect...'.

It isn't hard.

Avoid the generic 'man' – studies show we think 'male' when we hear this. Try for yourself, what does the sentence 'Man's vital interests include life, food and access to females.' really mean?

Instead of: Use:

Manpower	Workforce, staff, employees
Mankind	Humanity, people, we, us
Manned by	Staffed by
Chairman	Chair
Fireman	Fire fighter
Dustman	Refuse collector

Avoid the generic, 'he'. Don't use a disclaimer that masculine pronouns are to be taken as referring to both genders, as this is likely to offend, and make for sloppy male-assumptions when writing.



Instead:

Change singular to plural – ‘A person with an allegation of bullying needs to keep a diary of when he feels he is being bullied.’ becomes ‘People with allegations...’

Use ‘they’ as a singular pronoun – Shakespeare did, even though your teacher may have taught you not to!

Use the second person – ‘Each candidate should write his name...’ becomes ‘Write your name...’

Use ‘the other’ – ‘Each person in turn gives feedback to his partner.’ becomes ‘Each person in turn gives feedback to the other.’

Want to read more about this subject?

There is a great book called the A-Z of Non Sexist Language, written by Margaret Doyle if you want to know more. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Non-sexist-Language-Womens-Press-Handbook/dp/0704344300/ref=sr_1_16?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1270828847&sr=8-16



Katherine Graham is Managing Director at CMP Resolutions.

CMP Resolutions work to Close, Manage and Prevent disputes at work through skills development, mediation and investigation services.

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