

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-00174-8 - Language and Sexism
Sara Mills
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Language and Sexism

The issue of sexist language has been hotly debated within feminist circles since the 1960s. Previous books have tended to regard sexism in language as easy to identify and have suggested solutions to overcome and counter sexism. Sara Mills takes a fresh and more critical look at sexism in language, and argues that even in feminist circles it has become a problematic concept. Drawing on conversational and textual data collected over the past ten years, and with reference to recent research carried out in a range of different academic disciplines, Mills suggests that there are two forms of sexism – overt and indirect. Overt sexism is clear and unambiguous, while indirect sexism can only be understood contextually in relation to the interpretation of surrounding utterances. Indirect sexism is extremely common and we therefore need new ways to challenge and analyse its usage in language.

SARA MILLS is a Research Professor in Linguistics in the English Department at Sheffield Hallam University. Her recent publications include *Gender and Colonial Space* (2004) and *Gender and Politeness* (2003).

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-00174-8 - Language and Sexism
Sara Mills
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-00174-8 - Language and Sexism
Sara Mills
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Language and Sexism

Sara Mills

Sheffield Hallam University



Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-00174-8 - Language and Sexism
Sara Mills
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521001748

© Cambridge University Press 2008

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2008

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Mills, Sara, 1954–
Language and sexism / Sara Mills.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-80711-1 (hardback)
1. Sexism in language. I. Title.
P120.S48M555 2008
408.2 – dc22 2008019588

ISBN 978-0-521-80711-1 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-00174-8 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-00174-8 - Language and Sexism
Sara Mills
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

To Francis and Gabriel,
who have challenged me
(mostly constructively) on
everything I have ever
thought about sexism.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page ??</i>
1. Introduction	1
1. Problems with research on sexism	5
1.1. Overt sexism and indirect sexism	10
1.2. Responses to sexism	12
1.3. Problems of reform	14
1.4. Changing nature of feminist impact	18
1.5. Changing status of women	19
2. My theoretical position	22
2.1. Third Wave feminism	22
2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis	32
3. Structure of the book	33
2. Overt sexism	35
1. Hate speech and sexism	38
2. Contexts of sexism	40
3. Types of overt sexism	41
3.1. Words and meaning	42
3.2. Processes	68
4. Sexism, racism and homophobia	73
3. Language reform	77
1. Institutional language change	78
2. Strategies of reform	83
2.1. Critique	83
2.2. Alternative terms	84
2.3. Feminist renaming/neologism	86
2.4. Critique by using marked words	88
2.5. Inflecting pejorative words positively	89
2.6. Answering back/wit	90
3. Effectiveness of reform	91
4. Responses to anti-sexist campaigns	97
4. 'Political correctness'	100
1. Development of the term 'political correctness'	106
2. 'Political incorrectness'	108

viii	Contents	
	A. Positive evaluation of 'political incorrectness'	108
	B. 'Political incorrectness' as a term of disparagement	111
	C. Ridiculing/irony	113
	D. As a synonym for 'sexist' or 'racist'	113
	3. Anti-sexist campaigns and 'political correctness'	114
	4. Model of 'political correctness' and anti-sexism	119
5.	Indirect sexism	124
	1. Language as a system	124
	2. Stereotypes	126
	3. Institutions and language	132
	4. Indirect sexism	133
	5. Types of indirect sexism	140
	5.1. Humour	140
	5.2. Presupposition	145
	5.3. Conflicting messages	147
	5.4. Scripts and metaphors	148
	5.5. Collocation	148
	5.6. Androcentric perspective	150
	6. Challenging indirect sexism	152
6.	Conclusions	154
	1. Public sensitivity to issues of sexism	154
	2. Why analyse sexism	155
	3. Why reform matters	156
	4. Should we accept sexism?	157
	<i>Bibliography</i>	162
	<i>Index</i>	174

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people with whom I have discussed ideas about sexism, some of whom have commented on sections of this book or on papers I have given related to the topics in this book: Barbara MacMahon, Alice Bell, Jane Sunderland, June Luchjenbroers, Jill LeBihan, Lynne Pearce, Carol Shepherd, Angie Sandhu, Valeria Schirru, Anna Esch, Sarah Durling, Yonatan Shemmer and Simeon Yates. The management group of the Linguistic Politeness Research Group: Chris Christie, Sandra Harris, Louise Mullany, Bethan Davies, Karen Grainger and Andrew Merrison, have all contributed to discussion of some of the issues in this book. I would also like to thank the many people who responded to the questionnaires I sent out on anti-sexist language policies, and on name changing. Students in my Language and Gender course and also the course I co-teach with Barbara MacMahon: Language Power and Identity, at Sheffield Hallam University have been a constant source of inspiration, as have PhD students Leigh Wetherall, Sam Pitchforth, Sarah Gormley, Diane Wright, Abdurrahman Hamza, Mitra Memarzia, Alison Kinneavy and Erica Brown. Thanks also to Bonnie McElhinny and Jose Santaemilia. I would like to thank the members of the International Gender and Language Association for keeping me on my toes. Lucy Jones set up the Gender and Language reading group in 2007 which has proved an excellent forum for debating ideas about sexism. I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who made constructive comments on my book and also to Olga Castro Vazquez who painstakingly read through the manuscript and discussed the ideas in the book on many occasions. I benefited greatly from these discussions and her comments helped in the process of revision. Andrew Winnard has been, as always, a very supportive and insightful editor. And finally, I would like to thank the dyed-in-the-wool sexists whom I have met or whose work I have read who have greatly clarified my thoughts on this issue and who have inspired me to write this book.