

Sexism in english essay



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Sexism in English has long challenged sociologists, philosophers, writers and especially women since civilization was being developed in the West. As more manifestations of gender inequality were being discovered, feminism was being developed at the same time. Nilsen wrote a perfectly convincing essay about sexism in English where she wrote that terms usually are gender-biased, where terms, like “ Man overboard” or “ manslaughter,” are used even when the person involved is already a woman. Words mean a lot, which is why if human beings need to communicate with one another, they use words to convey an idea or thought.

Words mean a lot, because aside from the fact that they make human beings understand each other as they speak, words are also capable of defining what type of society people are living in. Because there is sexism in language, it also goes to show to language is a way for patriarchy to be more intense. Language fosters gender inequality. Language is too powerful that it is capable of making males dominant over females more than ever. Jack Rosenthal made a though experiment where respondents were shown pairs of words, and they are tasked to label the words with “ feminine” or “ masculine.

The pairs of words were vanilla/chocolate, salt/pepper, Ford/Chevrolet and knife/fork. To the respondents, the masculine words were chocolate, pepper, Ford and knife, while the feminine words were vanilla, salt Chevrolet and fork. In reality, these words do not have sexes. No principle, no law, no lesson in school ever taught students to think that given the word “ knife”, they can think of a man (Cameron, 1992, p.

83). Knife was considered the masculine word because it was sharper and more powerful than the fork. On the other hand, the word Chevrolet was considered the feminine word because when one pronounces it, it is pronounced in a softer, more “feminine” way while the word Ford is monosyllabic and sounds more authoritative. The other word is chocolate being considered the masculine word, because its flavor is more powerful than vanilla (Cameron, 1992, p. 83). Respondents of the experiment are directly proportional to Nilsen’s point in the essay, because the experiment only proves how rampant gender inequality is in a society.

First, it is known that assigning these objects their gender has no basis at all. Second, assigning these objects their gender became possible only because of the existence of comparison. If Jack Rosenthal asked the respondents what gender they would give to the word “fork”, they surely wouldn’t know what to say. Answers will vary and none of them will be sure. However, because the word “knife” was there to compare fork with, respondents already knew which is more powerful, or sharper, or more useful in the house, and then they assigned the word “masculine” to it (Cameron, 1992, p.

3). This experiment supports Nilsen’s argument in her essay Sexism in English, because it shows that people actually accept male domination in this world. People are conditioned to believe that this is indeed a man’s world, which is why it was easy for them to pinpoint which word was masculine and feminine. The reality of sexual difference is being distorted. In this patriarchal society, what people assume is that masculine and feminine

are polar opposites, like black and white, or dark and bright. If a man has a penis, a women doesn't have one.

Because of this mentality, people are conditioned to think that whatever men can do, women cannot do (Cameron, 1992, p. 84). Language clearly shows that there is inequality in gender because as people use language and put gender on words, it is becoming clearer what value they are putting on women. In the United Kingdom, " Kingdom" is still being used even when the country is already being ruled by a queen.

When a woman marries a man, she uses the family name of her husband. The husband, on the other hand, does not change his name or title. The kids also adapt the names of the man. Other words that show how patriarchal society is, are " history", when in reality, history was build by both men and women and not men alone, and " mankind", when in reality mankind is not just composed of men but of women, too. The word " humanity" also forgets about women, the in reality, humanity is composed of all types of people with different races and backgrounds, and not men alone.

Through language, it is clearly seen how women are forgotten, and how men are always put in the frontline of everything. Because of the opposition that should not even exist in the first place, women are always seen as beings associated with emotions, body, unreasonability, infinity and darkness (Cameron, 1992, p. 85). As long as this is what people are conditioned to think, then inequality will be seen as a standard, and not as a problem that needs to be solved.

Inequality is no longer fought for, because for people, it will be seen as normal, and a default character of a society. Sexism in language effectively reinforces inequality among genders because language is the most important part of culture. It is through language that people express themselves and describe objects in their lives. While women are using a language that demeans them and makes them mere sexual objects, then the meaning of their existence can't go beyond what it is today. Although many people use sexist language unconsciously and without any deliberate need to demean women, they participate in reinforcing gender inequality just through mere use of sexist language.

It is difficult to change language consciously. Today's sexist English language cannot be changed by mere laws or government programs. Language is embedded in culture so to change language, culture itself must be changed. Repressive, oppressive and sexist attitudes and behaviors encouraged by tradition must be abolished. The government can encourage people to move to this direction but it is ultimately the people who will decide whether such changes will be expansive and lasting or not.

At the least, more people must be made aware of the tiny sexist actions people do just by speaking their language.