When "Mankind" Ostracizes Women:

Effects of Gender-Exclusive Language use on Need Satisfaction and Ostracism

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Abstract

Gender inclusivity in speech and writing has become a hot topic in the current political scene. What effects does gender-exclusive language (GEL) have on an individual's level of need satisfaction (NS) and feelings of ostracism? This study seeks to answer whether women exhibit lower levels of NS and higher levels of ostracism compared to men after having interacted with a dialogue including GEL. Participants (N = 34) were assigned to either a GEL condition or a gender-inclusive condition. After exposure to the condition, both groups were then asked questions intended to measure NS and ostracism. There was a main effect of gender such that women felt marginally significantly lower levels of NS regardless of condition and men felt higher ostracism. There was no significant effect found for the interactions between gender and GEL. This suggests that the participants' gender determined how they responded to the text, suggesting that the topic of the text could have an effect on the measures of NS and ostracism.

Keywords: gender-exclusive language, need satisfaction, ostracism, gender, language

When "Mankind" Ostracizes Women

Gender-exclusive language (GEL) is a topic that has come to the forefront of political correctness in modern speech and writing. GEL refers to two particular situations. The first case is where a writer or speaker uses the masculine pronoun "he" where the referent of the pronoun could be either gender. The second case would be the use of words that seem to be derived from patriarchal times, e.g., mankind, manpower, man (meaning humans). To replace these vestiges of the English language, it is now often suggested that we use gender-inclusive language (GIL) or gender-neutral language (GNL). The former would be using "he or she", "him or her" while the latter would prefer a declension of "they". The question then, is whether these distinctions need to be made. Perhaps no one notices the use of GEL except in hindsight. Or, as a healthy body of research has demonstrated, this is a valid concern that affects women and other people's feelings of being marginalized (Stout, 2009; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011; Grzybowski, Pryor, & Wesselmann, 2018).

Besides deciding whether people notice the usage of GEL versus GIL/GNL, it is important to note that when the idea of GEL is made salient to people, a reversal effect is noted, such that when GEL is more salient, people are more likely to act in a counteractive way. For example, Koziar (2009) demonstrated this by showing that when people were informed about GEL, ratings of female physicians increased drastically, even more so than men whose descriptions were exactly the same. Furthermore, in Greene (1991), it was shown that the usage of GIL/GNL does not result in an increase of negative reviews from religious discourse, which commonly contain large amounts of GEL. The time between the Greene and Koziar publications

may also be relevant in that people in 1991 may have been less sensitized to GEL, and thus were

less likely to note the change in language use of the discourse.

A study by Lindqvist (2018) examined how specific words in English that are commonly

used in gender-neutral contexts, used to refer to both men and women (e.g., mailman, actor, etc.)

retain masculine undertones. This emphasizes the fact that regardless of how rarely this specific

terminology is employed with the goal to exclude, the male bias persists.

In a more recent study by Stout and Dasgupta (2011), it was demonstrated that women

feel significantly less interested in a job and experience feelings of ostracism when presented

with a job advertisement that incorporates only GEL. Furthermore in this study, it was found that

there were non-verbal, involuntary reactions by women, towards the job that incorporated GEL.

Another important finding of this study is that men show little to no reaction towards the

different conditions. Stout (2009) previously discovered that there were measurable effects of felt

ostracism in women caused by subtle instances of GEL. This is an important finding as it

suggests that one does not need to use extensive dialogues to produce a measurable result.

In Rubin (1991), other demographic factors were taken into account when identifying the

reactions of participants. These factors included the age of the participants. In a surprising result,

it was found that older women were more sensitive to the usage of GEL than younger women.

This finding seems counter to popular belief that the younger generation is more progressive.

However, on this metric, it seems like the older women end up being more progressive. The

same results demonstrated that men had little to no reaction to the use of GEL. This study also

went on to examine the effects of the usage of GEL or GIL/GNL on different interview

dynamics. In this study, participants were matched with either a male or a female interviewer and it was found that when a woman ran the interview, the participants used the least amount of GEL.

There is a lack of research that investigates the effects of our second definition of GEL, non-pronominal words, on felt ostracism, and little work covering how this use affects measures of NS. NS as defined by Williams (1997) is made up of four parts; belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. His research shows how ostracism can lead to a lowering of these needs. The present study looks further into the connection between linguistic ostracism of non-pronominal words resulting in felt ostracism and NS. It has been hypothesized then that when women encounter a dialogue that uses GEL, they will score higher on measures of felt ostracism and report less NS than women in the GNL/GIL condition. Based upon previous research, it is expected that men will report no significant difference in felt ostracism or NS between the conditions. Age will be a recorded demographic and could lead to further investigation on a possible moderating effect of age.

To investigate the effects of GEL on the previously stated measures, participants will participate in a survey in which they will be presented with one of two conditions; the first condition incorporates a dialogue featuring GEL and the second condition incorporates a parallel dialogue that instead uses GNL/GIL. The participants will then be tested on specific measures of felt ostracism and NS.

Method

Previous research has found that people, particularly women, react negatively to GEL. (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011) As an overarching category, GEL includes compound words that usually make use of the word "man" as a morpheme but refers to all genders (e.g., "mankind"). The second part of this category refers to the use of gendered pronouns, most often "he" when referring to an ungendered individual. Both are thus hypothesized to produce a similar effect on measures of NS and ostracism.

Participants

The sample used in the study was a convenience sample for the researcher, made up from personal relationships in two large university towns. Participants were recruited by a personal request of the researcher. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 24 (32/34). In the sample, there were 19 Caucasian and 14 Asian participants and one participant of African heritage. In the sample 15 of the participants identified as male and 19 of the participants identified as female. Participants were not compensated in any way. Participants' responses were excluded if the surveys were incomplete.

Materials

All responses were collected via Qualtrics, a survey software. Participants responded to the various questions via a multiple choice or text box answer space. Participants were presented with a fake dialogue which varied based on the condition into which the participants had been placed. The dialogue was meant to be a record of a discussion held in some political space which was meant to be neutral in content. The dialogues differed in that one employed GEL and the other did not and can be found in the appendix. To participate, a device with access to the

internet was the sole necessity. There were a total of 22 questions that the participants were

presented with regardless of the condition. All but two questions, outside of the demographics,

were graded on a Likert scale. There were 9 questions that sought to measure NS and employed

the Likert scale such as, "During the dialogue, I felt rejected." This scale was taken from a study

by Wesselman (2015). One of the ostracism questions was, "I felt included in the discourse of the

dialogue." The one list entry question was as follows, "Please list all gender-exclusive,

gender-inclusive, and/or gender-neutral terms used in the dialogue."

Procedure

In order to participate in the study, participants clicked on a link supplied by the

researcher. They were then presented with introductory information as to what the study was

about along with a detailed consent form. This includes the study's purpose, in which it was

stated that the purpose was to study the effects of GEL. At this time, participants were also

informed about the confidentiality of their responses. From this point, participants could consent

to participate in the study or to not consent. If a participant chose to not consent, their responses

were discarded, and they were brought to the end screen. Participants who consented were then

asked about their gender, race, and age. After the demographic section was completed,

participants were assigned to one of two different conditions. Male and female participants were

randomly assigned into GEL vs. GIL conditions. Based on the condition, participants were

presented with a different dialogue where gender exclusive or inclusive language was used.

Otherwise, participants were presented with the same survey. Following the dialogue,

participants were asked questions intended to measure NS and their thoughts on GE language.

The former of these two sections has been found to show a measurable difference between males

and females in prior works (Stout 2009; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011) and the latter has been shown

to be a good predictor of how someone will perform on the NS measures. Finally participants

were asked to provide all the GEL, GNL or GIL that they believed they had encountered in their

dialogue. The whole process took about 6 minutes. No debriefing was involved as the survey's

intentions were not hidden. After completing the survey, participants were thanked and their

responses were recorded.

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Results

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The current study attempted to study the relationship between gender and the impact of

GEL on feelings of ostracism and NS. It was hypothesized that women would score lower on

measures of NS and lower on measures of feelings of ostracism when exposed to

gender-exclusive language rather than gender-inclusive/neutral language, and men would show

no significant difference between the two.
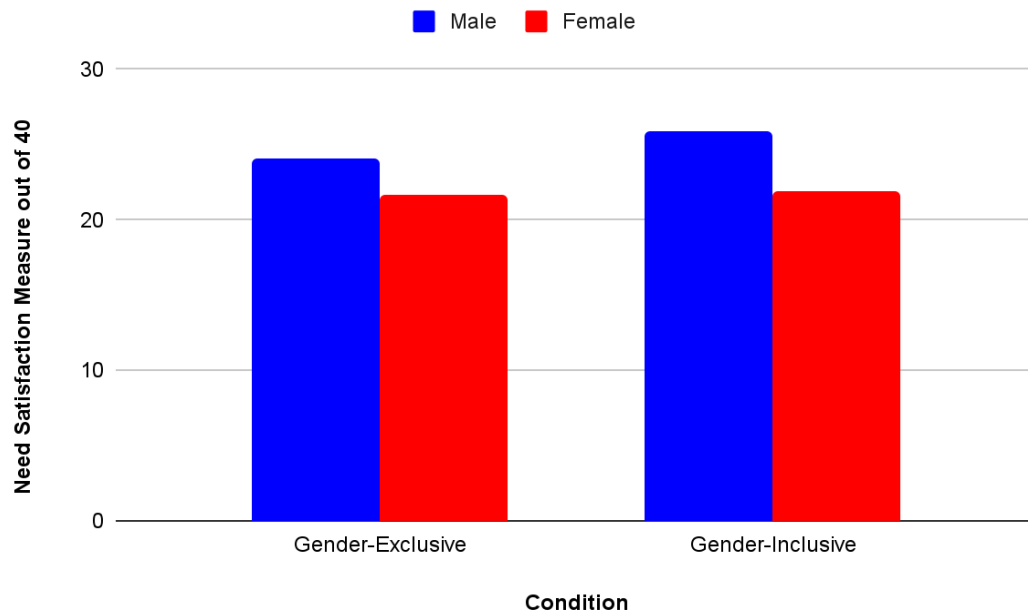
Main Analyses

A 2 (gender: male vs. female) x 2 (condition: gender-exclusive language vs.

gender-inclusive language) ANOVA was performed with NS as the dependent variable. The

results of this test showed that the main effect for gender did approach significance, $F(1, 30) =$

$2.76, p = .107$, with men having an average score of 24.80 out of 40 on the NS and women

having an average of 21.63, this is graphed in Figure 1. The main effect for condition was not

significant ($F(1, 30) = 0.264, p = .611$) and the interaction was also not significant ($F(1, 30) =$

$0.137, p = .714$, graphed in Figure 2).

Figure 1

Effect of Gender on Need Satisfaction
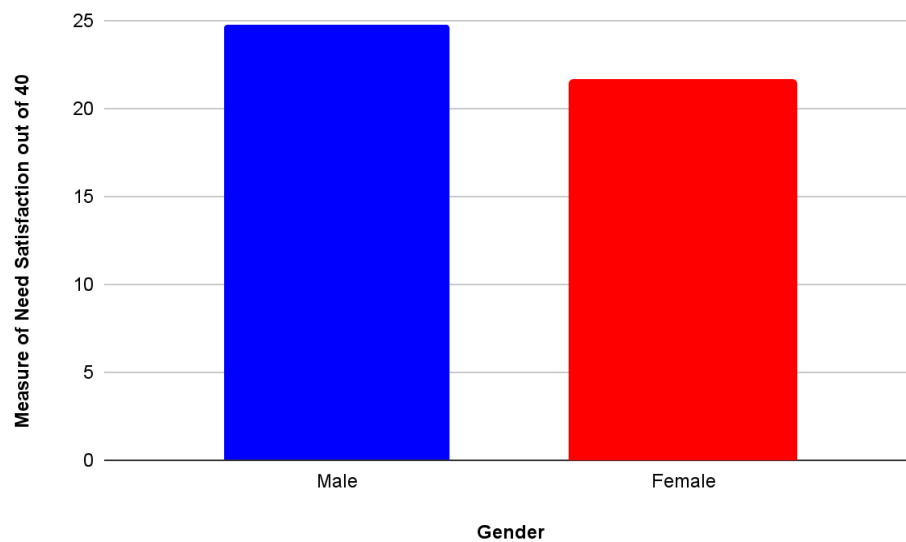
Note. Bar graph of the main effect of gender on score on measure of NS out of 40.

Figure 2

Effects of Gender and Condition on Measure Need Satisfaction
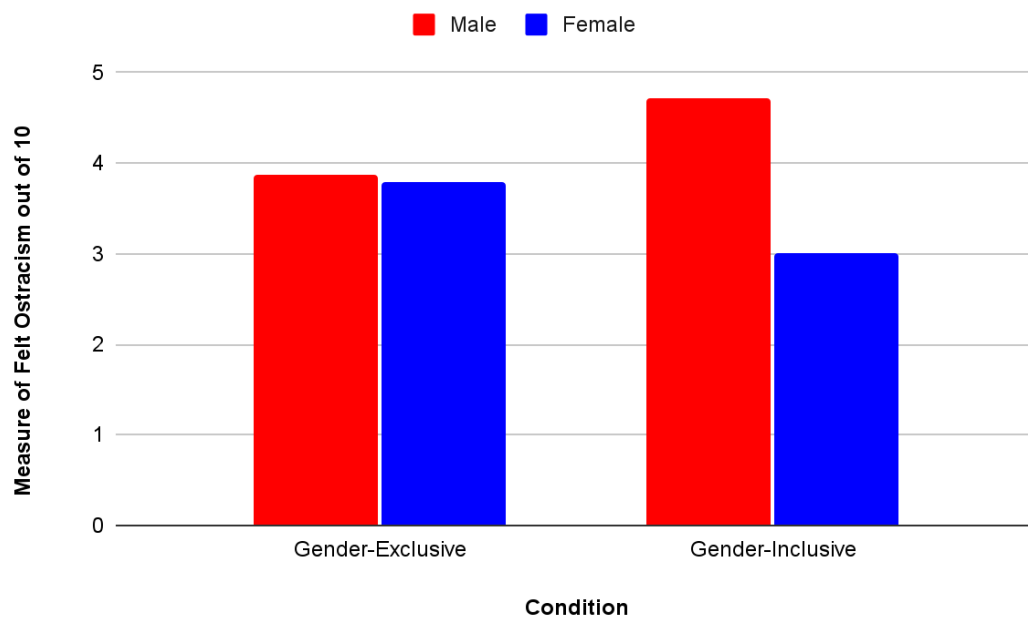

Note. Scores out of 40 on the measure of NS split on condition and gender.

Another 2 (gender: male vs. female) x 2 (condition: gender-exclusive language vs. gender-inclusive language) ANOVA was performed with the measure of ostracism as the dependent variable. The results of this test showed that the main effect for gender, again, approached significance $F(1, 30) = 2.39$, $p = .133$. Men scored an average of 4.5/10 on the ostracism measure, higher meaning more ostracized, while women scored an average of 3/10. The main effect of condition on ostracism was not significant, $F(1, 30) = .00$, $p = .973$. The

interaction of condition and gender on need ostracism showed very marginal significance $F(1, 30) = 5.61$, $p = .167$. The results are graphed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Effect of Gender and Condition on Measure of Ostracism

Note. Scores out of 10 on the measure of felt ostracism split on condition and gender.

Exploratory Analysis

A one-way ANOVA analysis was performed on a dichotomized mean of negative feelings towards gender-exclusive language (less than mean negative view of gender-exclusive language was assigned a value 0 and greater than or equal to mean negative view of

gender-exclusive language was assigned a value of 1) and NS. The result of this test revealed a

significant effect $F(1, 32) = 5.51$, $p = .025$, such that participants with higher, negative views on

GEL scored significantly higher on NS regardless of gender or condition. This interaction is

graphed in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Effect of Negative Attitudes Towards Gender-Exclusive Language on Need Satisfaction
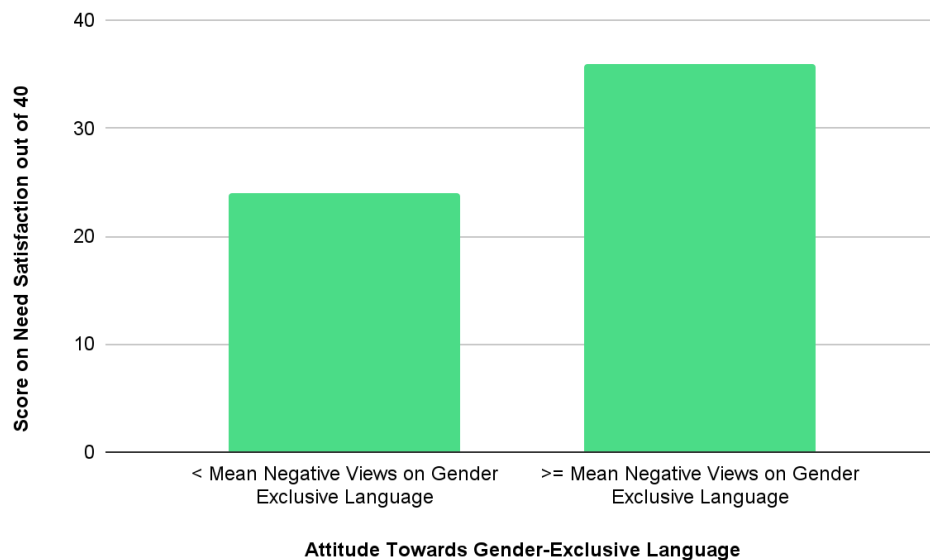
Note. Score out of 40 on measure of NS against whether people had above or below average

negative views on GEL.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between gender and

exposure to gender-exclusive language on measures of ostracism and NS. The previous research

on this topic has shown that women feel significantly higher levels of ostracism after being

exposed to a text that includes gender-exclusive language (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). An earlier

piece by Stout (2009) revealed that even seemingly subtle instances of gender-exclusive

language cause quantifiable effects on measures of ostracism and related constructs.

The current study serves as an extension to the existing base of knowledge as it

investigates the link between the use of gender-exclusive language and NS. Most of the previous

research has focused solely on ostracism. Although ostracism is also used in this study as a

baseline to check that the manipulations revealed the expected results, this study examined the

downstream consequences of felt ostracism on NS. It was thus hypothesized that exposure to

gender-exclusive language would lead to higher levels of ostracism and lower levels of NS in

women. No effects were expected on ostracism and NS in men given that gender-exclusive

language uses men as the default (e.g., mankind).

The results from the experiment revealed no significant interaction between gender and

gender-exclusive language on measures of ostracism or NS. A marginally significant main effect

was found for gender on NS and ostracism. This suggests that there is a relationship of gender on

NS and ostracism. However, this relationship was not affected by the condition - meaning that it

was not affected by the use of GEL. It is possible that the nature of the dialogue, that of politics,

served to ostracize and lessen the NS of women in general regardless of condition. This is

because politics have remained a sort of protected profession that is overwhelmingly male

dominated. According to the Pew Research Center (Blazina, 2021), women now have obtained a

record number of seats in the Senate, although that number is still just 24 of the 100 seats. While

there are record numbers of seats being held by women, this does not mean that the political

space is gender neutral. In a study by Grzybowski, Pryor, and Wesselmann (2018) it was shown

how women in political offices were often referred to by a masculine marked title and how this

then led to higher levels of felt ostracism and lower representation overall.

This survey attempted to expand the depth of existing literature by testing the effects of

GEL/GIL conditions on NS. Although ostracism has been shown to decrease NS in previous

studies (Wirth & Williams 2009), NS has not been measured in studies involving the effects of

gender-exclusive language. The current study included a measure of ostracism to see if this study

fell in line with the pre-existing literature, which would increase our confidence that the

conditions were properly designed. However, our results were contradictory to the previous

findings in this area.

There may have been severe limitations with the current study. For example, the

participants were recruited in a volunteer manner. Looking at the times that participants took to

finish the survey, apart from two participants, most took under 3 minutes, perhaps implying a

lack of attention to the survey itself. The two participants who took more than 3 minutes to

complete the survey took multiple hours to finish, suggesting that these participants may have

started the survey at one time, and then finished it many hours later, allowing the effect of the

stimulus to wear off by the time the rest of the survey was complete. One further possible

problem with the survey was that the dialogue may not have been powerful enough to stimulate

the expected responses, possibly due to its short nature.

An interesting direction of future research would be to measure if text topic has an effect

on NS and ostracism. If someone is exposed to a text describing an area in which that person's

gender has been historically underrepresented, such as STEM fields, they may be more likely to

score lower on measures of NS than the other gender? Perhaps society has served to perpetuate

the idea that certain professions are inherently masculine or feminine. It was found in Adisa

(2021) that women entering a male dominated field reported higher levels of ostracism than their

male counterparts.

I believe it is important for everyone to, at times, take a step back and analyze one's own

actions. This includes the way in which we speak, why we speak that way, and what affects the

way we speak can affect others. There are certain opponents to the idea that language can evolve

over time. These preservations and prescriptivists are almost always on the wrong side of

innovations and have attempted to prevent modernization. As people have become more salient

to the negative effects that GEL can have on women, I think it is important that we continue on

this path of modernization. This is what inspired me to research this specific area, in an attempt

to grow the base of research showing why the use of GEL should be avoided.

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Appendix

Q2 INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR RESEARCH ABOUT THIS RESEARCH
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Scientists do research to answer important questions which might help change or improve the way we do things in the future. This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY
You may choose not to take part in the study or may choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate, or deciding to leave the study later, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this study is to study the effects of particular language use. The study is being conducted by Evan Chapple

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?
If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things: Read a dialogue, rate oneself on different measures of need satisfaction and ostracism, recall certain terminology from the dialogue. The survey should last a total of about 6 minutes.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
While participating in the study, the risks, side effects, and/or discomforts include: Slight feelings of discomfort due to particular language use. You are allowed to discontinue participation at any time. Your responses will be coded and kept anonymous in a secure location. If you are uncomfortable answering any questions you are free to leave those blank.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

We don't expect you to receive any benefit from taking part in this study, but we hope to learn things that will help scientists in the future.

HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATION?

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO PARTICIPATE?

There is no cost to you for taking part in this study.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study

     I consent (1)

     I do not consent (2)

End of Block: Consent Form

Q4 You will now be asked questions about demographics. Please respond as honestly as possible.

Q5 What is your gender?

      Male (1)

      Female (2)

      Non-binary / third gender (3)

      Prefer not to say (4)

      Other, please write below (5)

      _____

Q7 What is your age?

      Under 18 (1)

      18 - 24 (2)

      25 - 34 (3)

      35 - 44 (4)

      45 - 54 (5)

      55 - 64 (6)

      65 - 74 (7)

      75 - 84 (8)

      85 or older (9)

Q8 What is your ethnicity?

     White (1)

     Black or African American (2)

     American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

     Asian (4)

     Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)

     Other (6)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Exposure Dialogue GE

Q11 We will now begin the dialogue section. Please pay careful attention to the word choice of the dialogue.

Page Break

Q3 This is a dialogue between Congressman Laura Bridals addressing the chairman Lucas Hammonds.

"I now would like to address Chairman Hammonds. I believe that it is important to attempt to bridge our differences at the current moment. For I believe the future of mankind is dependent the decisions that we make here today. We should attempt to have us as a society moving forwards and developing opportunities for everyone. If we, the House, choose not to pass this bill, there will be irreparable consequences for all. We must choose to create a world in which a man needs not worry about whether or not he meets the requirements for his Form 1097 while simultaneously lowering the entry bar for all men, to allow more entry into the program. For this reason, Mr. Hamonds, I implore you to pass this bill."

End of Block: Exposure Dialogue GE

Q12 We will now begin the dialogue section. Please pay careful attention to the content and word choice of the dialogue.

Q9

This is a dialogue between legislator Laura Bridals addressing the Chair Lucas Hammonds. "I now would like to address the Chair. I believe that it is important to attempt to bridge our differences at the current moment. For I believe the future of humanity is dependent on the decisions that we make here today. We should attempt to have us as a society moving forwards and developing opportunities for everyone. If we, the House, choose not to pass this bill, there will be irreperable consequences for all. We must choose to create a world in which one need not worry about whether or not he or she meets the requirements for his or her Form 1097 while simultaneously lowering the entry bar for all persons, to allow more entry into the program. For this reason, Mr. Hammonds, I implore you to pass this bill."

Q13 Please answer the next questions in relation to your mood while reading the dialogue.

Q14 I felt the dialogue was talking about me

       Not at all (1)

       Slightly (2)

       Moderately (3)

       Very (4)

       Extremely (5)

Q34 I felt included in the discourse of the dialogue

       Not at all (1)

       Slightly (2)

       Moderately (3)

       Very (4)

       Extremely (5)

Q33 During the dialogue I felt liked.

       Not at all (1)

       Slightly (2)

       Moderately (3)

       Very (4)

       Extremely (5)

Q16 During the dialogue I felt in control.

       Not at all (1)

       Slightly (2)

       Moderately (3)

       Very (4)

Extremely (5)

Q17 During the dialogue I felt invisible.

Not at all (5)

Slightly (4)

Moderately (3)

Very (2)

Extremely (1)

Q18 During the dialogue I felt powerful.

Not at all (1)

Slightly (2)

Moderately (3)

Very (4)

Extremely (5)

Q19 During the dialogue I felt rejected.

Not at all (5)

Slightly (4)

Moderately (3)

Very (2)

Extremely (1)

Q20 During the dialogue I felt "disconnected".

Not at all (5)

Slightly (4)

Moderately (3)

Very (2)

Extremely (1)

Q21 During the dialogue I felt good about myself.

Not at all (1)

Slightly (2)

Moderately (3)

Very (4)

Extremely (5)

Q22 During the dialogue I felt non-existant.

Not at all (5)

Slightly (4)

Moderately (3)

Very (2)

Extremely (1)

End of Block: Need Satisfaction

Q24 Please respond to the following in regards to your own personal feelings and knowledge.

Page Break

Q25 I know what gender-**exclusive** language is.

    Definitely not (1)
    Probably not (2)
    Might or might not (3)
    Probably yes (4)
    Definitely yes (5)

Page Break

Q27 I think gender-**exclusive** language is sexist.

    Strongly disagree (1)
    Somewhat disagree (2)
    Neither agree nor disagree (3)
    Somewhat agree (4)
    Strongly agree (5)

Q28 Using gender-**inclusive** language is not important.

    Strongly disagree (5)

Somewhat disagree (4)

Neither agree nor disagree (3)

Somewhat agree (2)

Strongly agree (1)

Q29 Gender-**exclusive** language is innate/necessary in a language.

Strongly disagree (5)

Somewhat disagree (4)

Neither agree nor disagree (3)

Somewhat agree (2)

Strongly agree (1)

Q30 Efforts should be made to remove gender-**exclusive** language from speech.

Strongly disagree (1)

Somewhat disagree (2)

Neither agree nor disagree (3)

Somewhat agree (4)

Strongly agree (5)

End of Block: Views on Gender-Exclusivity

Start of Block: Gender Exlusivity Remebering task

Q23 Please respond to the following questions in regards to the dialogue.

Page Break

Q31 Please list all gender-exclusive, gender-inclusive, and/or gender-neutral terms used in the dialogue. (Please separate entries with a comma, e.g., "mailman, man, etc").

_____

Q32 Rate your satisfaction with the use of gendered language in the dialogue.

    Extremely dissatisfied (1)

    Somewhat dissatisfied (2)

    Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)

    Somewhat satisfied (4)

    Extremely satisfied (5)

End of Block: Gender Exlusivity Remebering task