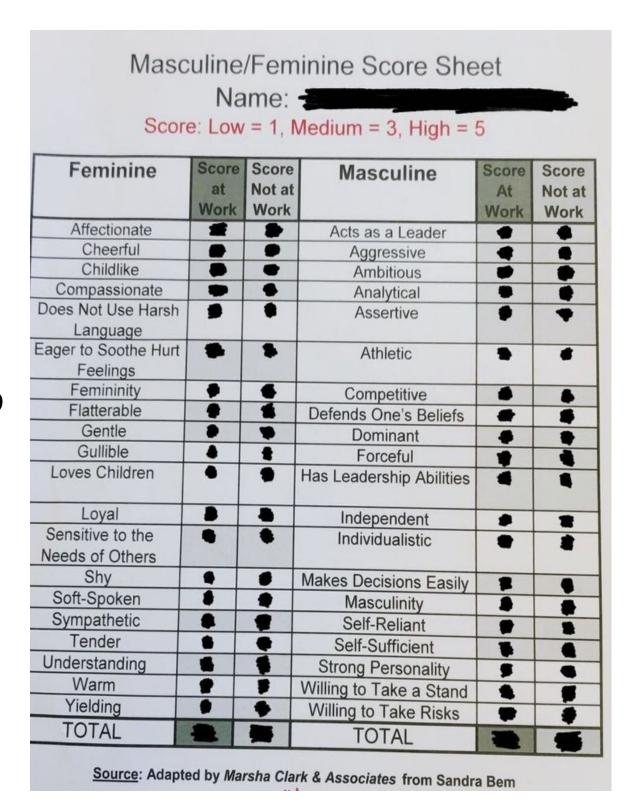# She's So Bossy: The Impact of Gender on Lexical Usage

Leah M. Dudley

Corpus Analysis, Fall 2019

INTRODUCTION

- English does not gender words morphologically like other languages.
  - E.g. Romance languages gender adjectives by the gender and number of their subject.
- Instead, certain adjectives have covert or overt gender associations to them.
  - Masculine: handsome, brawny
  - Feminine: petite, pretty
  - Ernst & Young masculine/feminine score sheet (right) assigned 'ambitious', 'independent', 'leadership abilities' to men, and 'childlike', 'gullible', 'flatterable' to women.
- These words are not exclusively applied to either gender.
- The women's adjectives are more often than not used to deride women in subtle ways.
- According to Nadler & Morrow (1959):
  - "It appears that chivalry concedes to women 'superficial amenities,' provided that in important matters they 'keep their place.'"

Masculine/Feminine Score Sheet

- Women who subvert these norms or are otherwise not subordinate are given these labels.
- The usage of certain words has gained national attention lately.
  - Sheryl Sandberg's 'Ban Bossy' Campaign.

METHODS

- I chose to look specifically at the words:
  - Bossy
  - Nagging
  - Whining
  - Hysterical
- I hypothesized that these words were applied more frequently to females than to males.
- I researched this through searching two modern English corpora:
  - British National Corpus (BNC)
  - Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)
- All research was conducted through the UGA corpus server via the Unix interface of my laptop terminal.
- I took different approaches to finding the gender of the object of the sentence, since it is not always straightforward.
- I was most concerned with 'bossy', so I manually found the gender of the person being described via their pronouns, name, title, etc.
- For all other words I created a query that saw what pronouns or nouns were most common before these adjectives
  - I did not search for specific preceding or following words in case it skewed the data
  - E.g. he is bossy vs. she is bossy
- I ran statistical tests on all my tables to see if the results were significant

REFERENCES

Angelica Mucchi-Faina. (2005). Visible or influential? Language reforms and gender (in)equality. *Social Science Information*, *44*(1), 189–215.

Nadler, E. B., & Morrow, W. R. (1959). Authoritarian Attitudes toward Women, and Their Correlates*. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *49*(1), 113–123.

Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg, the author of a bestselling book urging women to "lean in" to their careers, has launched a celebrity-backed campaign to "ban bossy". **National Review**, *[s. l.]*, n. 6, p. 14, 2014. Disponível

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/women-ernst-young-how-to-dress-act-around-men_n_5da721eee4b002e33e78606a?fbclid=IwAR0MlnYmW813_OUXOR9GiMReml3TlKDFuQGNex0opelgYJLTBuA2YXK0w1k&guccounter=1

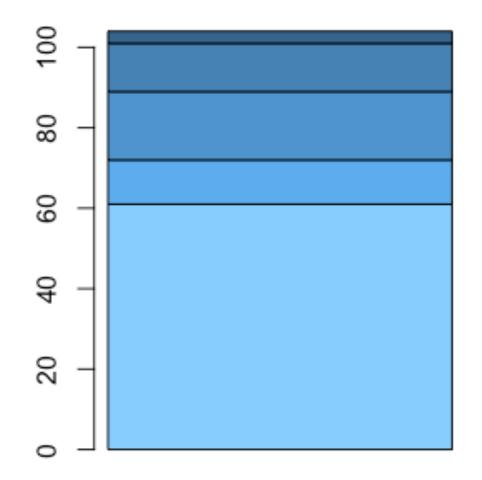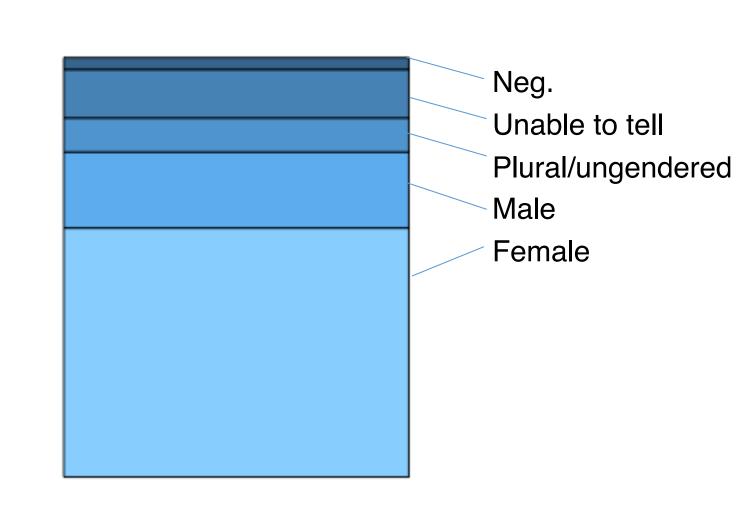https://linguisticpulse.com/2014/03/10/some-data-to-support-the-gendered-nature-of-bossy/

RESULTS*

- - BNC is left, COCA is right

BOSSY

Attestations (left)

Gender	%
Female	58.7
Male	10.6
Pl/Neuter	16.3
Unsure	11.5
Neg	2.9

X-squared = 101.96, df = 4, p-value < 2.2e-16

Attestations (right)

Gender	%
Female	59.4
Male	18.1
Pl/Neuter	8.1
Unsure	11.6
Neg	2.8

X-squared = 329.84, df = 4, p-value < 2.2e-16

Legend: Neg. / Unable to tell / Plural/ungendered / Male / Female

NAGGING

Pronoun	#	Sex
She	7	F
They	3	N
Something	3	N
He	3	M
I	2	N
Her	2	F
It	2	N
Him	1	M
You	1	N
Yourself	1	N

X-squared = 11.4, df = 9, p-value = 0.2493

Pronoun	#	Sex
Something	21	N
She	19	F
I	12	N
It	11	N
Who	5	N
He	3	M
One	3	N
Her	2	F
Him	2	M
You	2	N

X-squared = 60.25, df = 9, p-value = 1.2e-09

WHINING

Pronoun	#	Sex
He	13	M
She	6	F
It	5	N
Who	2	N
Him	1	M
They	1	N

X-squared = 22.571, df = 5, p-value = 0.0004076

Pronoun	#	Sex
He	92	M
She	66	F
I	34	N
It	19	N
Who	11	N
They	11	N
Her	9	F
You	5	N
One	4	N
Them	4	N
Him	3	M

X-squared = 423.33, df = 11, p-value < 2.2e-16

HYSTERICAL

Token	#	Sex
She	10	F
It	4	N
I	3	N

X-squared = 5.0588, df = 2, p-value = 0.07971

Token	#	Sex
She	60	F
I	38	N
It	36	N
He	19	M
That	18	N
You	12	N
They	9	N

X-squared = 409.2, df = 6, p-value < 2.2e-16