

# The Central Dissent

A Journal of Gender and Sexuality

New Plains Student Publishing University of Central Oklahoma 2020

THE CENTRAL  
DISSENT

# The Central Dissent

---

---

A JOURNAL OF GENDER  
AND SEXUALITY

---

---

New Plains Student Publishing  
University of Central Oklahoma  
2020



New Plains Student Publishing



Porto Rese



## THE CENTRAL DISSENT

*The Central Dissent: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* is an interdisciplinary academic journal based out of the University of Central Oklahoma's College of Liberal Arts, Department of English. The journal is produced by New Plains Student Publishing and is sponsored by Women's Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center.

Our mission is to gather and disseminate quality research, prose, poetry, and artwork that explores gender theory, gender identity, and how race, class, and ethnicity shape society's expectations of the individual in the past and present.



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

**The Center**

**Women's Research Center**

**BGLTQ+ Student Center**

© 2020 New Plains Student Publishing Group

*The Central Dissent: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* is edited by students and faculty of the English Department in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Central Oklahoma. The political, social, or artistic commentary represents the views of the writers and artists, and inclusion in the journal does not indicate editorial endorsement or non-endorsement.

*Central Dissent* does not claim to represent the views of the University or its officials.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Visit our website at [newplainsreview.com](http://newplainsreview.com)

Email inquiries to [central.dissent@gmail.com](mailto:central.dissent@gmail.com)

English Department, Box 184

University of Central Oklahoma

100 North University Drive

Edmond, Oklahoma 73034

Published in the USA; printing & manufacturing information can be found on the final page.



# *Masthead*

## **Faculty & Staff**

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Shay Rahm

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Lindsey Churchill, PhD

PRODUCTION CHIEF

Lani Riana Jones

## **Editorial Board**

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jacob Jardell

MANAGING EDITOR

Abigail Griffin

SENIOR EDITORS

Madalyn Nix

Paul Rainwater

Zoe Wright

## **Cover Art & Artwork**

Candace Telford: "Stolen Innocence"

# *Contents*

RESEARCH	1
<b>A Phenomenological Investigation of Straight Actingness in Two Queer Males' Daily Communication: Discourse Benders</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Addressing the Future of Gender in the Language Classroom</b>	<b>21</b>
<hr/>	
<b>My Body, My Choice: Issues and Advocacy</b>	<b>43</b>
<hr/>	
FEATURED ARTIST	60
<b>Interview with Candace Telford</b>	<b>61</b>
<hr/>	
POETRY	69
<b>Antigen/Antibody</b>	<b>71</b>
<hr/>	
FEATURED CREATIVE WRITER	73

**Interview with Monica Hernandez** 75

---

**Body O' Mine** 83

---

**Evil Woman** 85

---

**Me and Michael** 87

---

**Thank God for Kate Chopin** 89

---

*BIOGRAPHIES* 91

# RESEARCH



# A Phenomenological Investigation of Straight Actingness in Two Queer Males' Daily Communication: Discourse Benders

Tan Gedik

## **Abstract**

This study exemplifies and inspects an 18-year-old Turkish and a 31-year-old gay men's diary entries in a phenomenological framework, by analyzing the discourse embedded within the entries. The study follows a three-stage questionnaire; (i) metaphors and drawings; (ii) contextual questions regarding status, gender, and proximity of the interlocutors and the speaker and background information; (iii) stimulated-recall-interview with the participants. The participants were recruited through social connections and instructed to keep a diary

for thirty-one consecutive days. The data were analyzed with two intercoders and confirmed when the acceptance rate was 2 out of 3. The findings suggest that straight-actingness is a pragmatic competence to assert a straight identity, acquired and constantly practiced by the speaker to circumvent unpleasant outcomes such as societal exclusion or breach of relations. The skill is executed by the speakers in three patterns; topic bending, truth manipulation, and assertion of masculinity. Straight-acting as a pragmatic competence proves convenient since it equips the speaker with the ability to transcend between two identities to avoid undesired consequences. The findings further suggest that more research is required to liberate the LGBTQI members and demystify the pragmatic phenomena in their discourse.

\* \* \*

For decades, English linguistics' scholars have been on the investigation of sexual-identity creation. Language is undoubtedly a key factor in understanding the complexity of sexual identity. Eckert mentions the following statement on this issue:

[A]s linguists, our interest in sexuality is in its social life – in how we use language to accomplish sexual ends, how we talk about sexuality, how we index sexuality when we talk about other things, how we use language in and around sexual activity, how we use language to organize ourselves socially around sexuality, and how we use language to organize ourselves sexually around sociability. (Eckert, 2002, p. 100)

The inspection above in the field of language and sexuality has perused heterosexual and homosexual communication patterns to outline tendencies of gender-related (for heterosexual discourse studies) variation and change. As for homosexual communication patterns, scholars (Gaudio, 1994; Linville, 1998) investigated these patterns from a phonological standpoint. Some other scholars employed linguistics as a device to decode gay male stereotyping (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Madon, 1997; Clausell & Fiske, 2005). On the other hand, some researchers (Cherny, 1994; Herring, 1994; Clerc, 1996; Soukup, 1999) have opted

for chat-room discourse as a viable source to scrutinize socio-cultural discourses, including gender and sexuality discourses. Until very recently researchers such as Harvey and Shalom (1997), Leap (1996), and Livia and Hall (1997) focused on only language and sexual identity. However, scholars are calling for more comprehensive studies that expand beyond and include a wide range of social situations and linguistic phenomena (Campbell-Kibler, Podesva, Roberts and Wong, 2002; Cameron and Kulick, 2003). Analyzing how interlocutors construct desire and their sexual selves in interaction (Tainio, 2002) or how people talk about desire (Hall, 1995; Knowles, 1997; Langford, 1997; Hoey, 2002; Radway, 2009) can be pointed out as studies that cover more phenomena, more comprehensively.

Although there have been a number of studies in the field of language and sexuality, Queen (2002) argues that scholars have been reluctant to work in the aforementioned field, due to possible career hindrances, and an apparent lack of enthusiasm of publishers to publish publications on such a topic (2002, p. 79). However, Queen draws on the salience of working in this field as the following: "The study of language and sexual identity has great potential to dramatically enrich the more general study of language, culture, and society and at this point, realizing that potential remains within grasp" (2002, p. 84)

In light of these, it is essential to acknowledge that there is a conspicuous research gap in the field of language and sexual identity not only in Turkish linguistics but also in English linguistics. This negligence of the field of language and homo-sexual-identity indicates that hetero and homosexual are produced in contexts of unequal social stigma and hierarchical positioning (*New Perspectives on Language and Sexual Identity*, p. 2). Therefore, it is of great salience that sociolinguists acknowledge this gap and misconduct, and attempt to unify by demolishing social stigma towards homo-sexual-identity that is still relevantly available even in academia or a hierarchical positioning.

To demolish rigidly, and dualistically rooted social stigma towards sociolinguistic studies on homosexual-identity creation in language, this study operates in a phenomenological framework. Phenomenolog-



ical research is an orderly trial to encapsulate and report the lived experiences of a person, or a group to achieve a deeper comprehension of the composition, significance, and fundamentality of the inspected phenomena (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 1997).

As a response and to pioneer the phenomenological examination(s) in the field of language and sexuality, the current study focuses on the investigation of a 18 year-old and 31-year-old gay men's "straight-actingness" as a pragmatic skill through the description of their lived experiences for a period of 31 days to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning, structure and essence of experiences of the phenomena under investigation. In this case, the phenomena scrutinized here is the construction of sexual identity (straight-actingness) under certain contexts and regarding power relations, in relation to pragmatic competences of two gay participants; Berkay, an 18-year-old student in Kirikkale, Turkey, and Fatih, a 31-year-old research assistant in Ankara, Turkey.

## Literature Review

Sexual identity is such a term that it is constructed "in relation to particular material conditions, and particular relations of between those at the margins" (*New Perspectives on Language and Sexual Identity*, p. 4) rather than already-existing as a possession. Discourse analysts (Moonwomon, 1995; Coates, 1996; Bucholtz, 1999; Moonwomon-Baird, 2000) have demonstrated that sexual identity is actively created through spoken discourse. In other words, sexual identity is a term that can be projected, manipulated, and subject to contingent remolding. The field of language and sexual identity owes a great deal to Moonwomon and Leap for their sociolinguistic and anthropological publications. Leap's provided a new direction for language and sexuality research with his two books *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon* (1995) and *Word's Out* (1996). Alongside this, with the introduction and organization of the annual *Lavender Languages and Linguistics* since 1993, by Leap has exhibited a possible way to scholars on the exploration of gay,

lesbian, bisexual and transgendered identities (formerly referred to as LGBTQI+) and identifications, contexts, politics, and appropriations of lesbian and gay discourse. Leap's analysis of "gay English" (1996) was also one of the first penetrations into the severely neglected field of scholarly inquiry, by an attempt to forage for the variation of gay male identity that affected language use.

A hegemonic world that humans dwell socially and culturally surmise males and females to enlarge, construct, and execute already-existing, stipulated gender guidelines during the performance of a conversation with other interlocutors (Borisoff & Merrill, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005; Wood, 2003). This is especially a main source of contradiction when interlocutors fracture the "culturally and socially" given dualistic norms (Borisoff & Victor, 1998). The term "Straight-actingness" therefore is a salient interplayer between gay men and non-gay men. The culture and society we inhabit endorse males to perform communication in relation to symbolic, hegemonic masculinity (Borisoff & Merrill, 1998). Males, thus are expected to conduct a "heterosexual" communication pattern in order to be discerned as masculine. Cheseboro (2001) remarks that males who have male sexual partners are discerned as less masculine. Namely, gay males are not perceived "as" masculine since they shatter the long-established heteronormative paradigm.

Clarkson (2005, 2006, 2008) points this out by claiming that gay males who act straight acquiesce in similar hegemonic stereotypes that radiates masculinity. Clarkson (2006) also states that "a straight-acting gay identity is positioned in opposition to cultural stereotypes of gay men that conflate femininity with homosexuality" (p. 192). This dualistic understanding of gay males as effeminate/masculine has existed in societies across the earth. The issue of effeminate/masculine also registers itself on other levels of sexual behavior. Males who engage in a penetrative role during sexual intercourse with other men have been historically considered to be masculine; consecutively, men who participate in a receptive role have not been considered masculine in some Latin cultures (Potoczniak, 2007). This heteronormative and dualis-

admitting their sexual-identity would be outed upon participating in the study. Some candidates first concurred to participate but then repudiated at the last minute. The respondents who were willing to join the study were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their credentials. Therefore, the respondents were given a pseudonym.

## Data Analysis

### Metaphors and Drawings

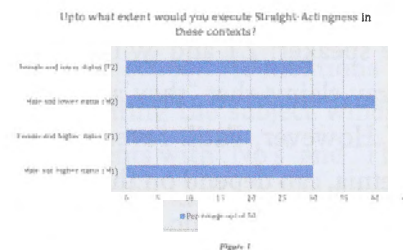
The initial stage of the questionnaire collected participants' metaphorical explanations of their sexual identity.

**Like a curious cat.** Cat -in the Turkish context- carries three salient characteristics; (i) curiosity, (ii) femininity, and (iii) agility. Characteristic (i) is semantically boosted by including "curious," but the other two characteristics reveal Berkay's perception of his identity in society. Berkay, during the interview, revealed that he is regarded as a curious cat because the context he is in dooms homosexuality as a prohibited zone, within which he is situated. Moreover, he has to be "agile enough to seamlessly transcend between both worlds [hetero-homosexual]." His commentary on agility further enlightens that "agility gifts me with avoiding unlawful confrontations on my sexual identity." Femininity, according to Berkay, was a feature attained by the society in which he lives and to which he subconsciously conforms. His drawing (a seahorse) disclosed that Berkay regards his sexual identity as an overlapping of both worlds, a disruption of the hegemonic expectations of men in society. He comments as saying "males are expected only to cater money and food. No! I would love to nurture my kids and be known for my nurturing nature".

**A cornel stick.** Fatih clarifies his perception of his identity as a cornel stick (both as a metaphor and a drawing). This stick has negative connotations in the Turkish language. In the old times, many parents would use this stick to beat some obedience into their kids. Thus, Fatih's perception tells us that many of his interlocutors use his identity

against him to apply normative expectations of males on him. During the interview, Fatih also confirmed the interpretation.

**Straight-Actingness Pragmatic Competence (SaPC).** Berkay added in Stage II that he is expected to be effeminate, likened to women, and prone to gravitating towards hobbies that are more gentle such as arts and music. Disruption of this predisposed framework requires "execution of more manly topics in conversations, such as; soccer or talking about girls" adds Berkay. Straight-actingness in action illustrates the following table:



Both respondents' responses to Figure 1 reveal that status is a salient aspect that influences the execution of the SaPC. The interview later discovered that Berkay's perception of high-status interlocutors is "liberal, open-minded, accepting" thus explaining his preference of dismissing straight-actingness. Fatih, on the other hand, explains that his dismissal of the SaPC with F1 interlocutors is based on his belief that women tend to be more empathizing with gay men. Nevertheless, in all situations (M1 through F2), their choices of employment leans towards males more significantly. This was cast light on by the participant during the interview. His perception of females, regardless of status, is persistently more open-minded, especially compared to males. When proximity was concerned, thus including family ties, Figure 2 appeared.



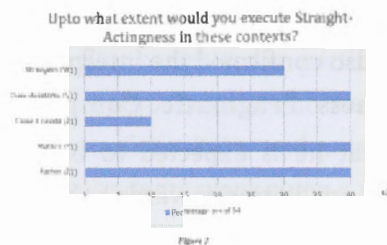


Figure 2 illustrates the preference for the respondents' utilization of straight-actingness. Q1 scores 50 out of 50 which indicates that close-relatives are of utmost salience for both participants' identity as a "straight male." Both mother and father hold equal importance for the speakers, suggesting the hierarchical acknowledgment of parents and their power over the speaker: Z1 and W1 showcase relatively lower scores. For W1, Berkay claims that "they are not going to be in [my] social circle forever." However, Fatih reveals that his social network, even within the academia, can depend on the first impression he makes on the strangers he meets in academic settings, thus his preference of SaPC is more appropriate for W1. Z1 is an open field, as the proximity between the speaker and his interlocutors are already on a well-established connection.

**Diary Entries.** Berkay submitted five entries throughout the study period. The entries ranged from formal to informal contexts. The following are the analyses of each discourse.

**March 4, 2019.** A female friend revealed Berkay's sexual identity to a male friend with whom he is classmates. Although the proximity between the speaker and his interlocutor [male friend] was relatively close, the subject concludes that he did not want to confront him and his ideologies of homosexuality, thus resulting in his denial and consecutively changing the topic to a more [masculine] one. It is noted in the entry that inclusion of an imminent girlfriend and female parts mitigated the possible aggression of the male interlocutor.

**March 24, 2019.** This entry includes the subject's elder brother about females and the interlocutor's curiosity on the subject's marital status. It

is added that the interlocutor is of a "homophobic" person and upon being questioned, the speaker manipulates the truth by proposing one of his female friends as an imminent girlfriend to disguise his native sexual identity. Execution of the identity in this context avoids the disruption of the close-family relations.

**March 30, 2019.** The participant invites his boyfriend to dinner at his parent's house. The first execution is asserted when Berkay disguises his invitee as a friend only, followed by a change in his behavior. During the dinner, Berkay is posed a question about marriage. Although he adds that he wished to come out to them, he says he would not risk it. As an avoidance, Berkay silently smiles and dismisses the question by postponing the possibility of such an event: "I am too young to marry!"

**April 6, 2019.** The subject indicates he was with strangers, enjoying a casual conversation about school. He mentions that one of the interlocutors begins complimenting the subject which the others noticed. Despite rejecting compliments with "No's" and "Thank you's" the rest of the circle begins to question Berkay's sexual identity. The subject claims that he had no fear of losing anyone due to his identity and came out to them at once. He asserts his location in the community by adding "I do not care what they think I am, I am who I am." He also mentions his journey of self-acceptance has progressed and claims that he would not have done such an action in the past. Thus, this entry possesses no utilization of straight-actingness.

**April 9, 2019.** This entry commences with a group of friends playing truth or dare. When the participant was the subject of "truth," the commentary made by the other interlocutor covers; flamboyant, faggot, cute, like-a-girl. One of the interlocutors even claimed that these characteristics were the sole reason why Berkay was "single." Following this, the conversation topic takes a turn on LGBT and the interlocutors' commentaries. The participant adds "some comments were supportive while some were homophobic." Berkay executes straight-actingness, and he makes homophobic commentaries to "insert [myself] into the [discourse] because I did not want to be exposed or excluded."

Fatih submitted ten entries throughout the study period. However, only three recurring categories were identified in his submissions and thus the highlights of each respective category were analyzed. The following are the analyses of each discourse.

**March 26, 2019.** Fatih found himself in an awkward encounter when his niece was over at his place. When he was asked about his wedding plans and if he had any possible wives, he had to disguise himself saying “right things happen at the right times.”

**March 27, 2019.** The subject found himself in a similarly awkward situation with the dean and the vice head president -both are mentioned to be at the age of 50 and men. When they ran into each other, both of the interlocutors asked Fatih about his wedding plans and Fatih disguised his sexual identity by replying “[God] knows when the right things will happen.” Fatih adds his discomfort with people being nosy with his private life.

**April 5, 2019.** Fatih invited his close female friend and her boyfriend over for a sleepover. However, he mentions his discomfort as he felt threatened to be found out “gay.” Thus, he mentions that he had to change the topics and explicit content he would talk about.

Most of Fatih’s submissions revolved around a general sense of “hide and seek” culture. He would, if he felt comfortable enough and detected close proximity with his close-friends, engage his sexual identity in his utterances and naturally in the content. However, it is evident that Fatih appears to be a little more in accordance with the societal expectations of him. This might be due to having been born almost three decades earlier (when compared to Berkay) and having been brought up with less external encouragement to be who he is. Apart from the generational difference, Berkay might be more experimental and outspoken about his sexual identity (and thus dismisses performing SaPC) due to his biological differences. Being young may lead to executing activities/uttering phrases without thinking too much, or impulsive behavior. Nevertheless, the interlocutors and the contexts with and within which they would prefer to execute SaPC do not change. Moreover, the number one trigger of SaPC seems to be marriage as marriage

is one of the fastest ways anyone can find out about someone else’s sexual identity.

## Results and Discussion

The data provided by the participants discloses that homosexuality is a vital issue concerning everyday life. The cat metaphor complies with the diary entries, proving that the subject is as agile as cats when pushed to implement straight-actingness. The interview also recorded that conforming to the societal expectations of males -namely straight-actingness- is a pragmatic competence that is acquired and practiced in various contexts with various interlocutors consistently. The diary entries reveal the purposes for executing such an identity; circumvention of a possible breach of relatedness in the immediate family of the speaker. This circumvention is also interconnected to the macro-picture of avoiding being excluded from society for being a *deviant*. Avoiding confrontations and being beaten as a result of being a homosexual is another vital reason why the participants practiced his pragmatic skill of identity construction.

Based on the entries, the findings point that this pragmatic competence of “straight-actingness” has three crucial observed execution patterns; (i) topic bending. The speaker evaluates the discourse, and when the discourse reaches a critical state, which would be of threatening to the speaker’s sexual identity, the topic is either changed or bent by the speaker. The speaker attempts to divert the flow of the topic from the current one to another that is regarded as more masculine, or a topic that straight males prefer. (ii) is truth manipulation which is implemented following a critical evaluation of the discourse done by the speaker. To avoid the above-mentioned outcomes, the speaker stabilizes his decentralized sexual identity and asserts his straightness by misrepresentation (e.g., misrepresenting partner’s gender). (iii) is assertion of masculinity. This pattern embodies itself in homophobic commentaries stated by the speaker himself. Through dehumanizing



other homosexuals, the speaker hierarchically locates himself above the subordinate. Nevertheless, this raises concerns about the associations designated between homosexual males and women in and by Turkish society. This pattern further praises and feeds the hegemonic masculinity which positions and produces itself by dehumanizing any other group, gender, identity, race, ethnicity. This study does not hunt for clues to disclose gay men, but aims to inspect the contexts and communication patterns in which gay interact with language(s) to protect themselves. Therefore, these findings are not indicative of anyone's sexual orientation.

The findings in the study conclude that straight-actingness is a multi-layered and multi-purposed pragmatic competence that is developed to overcome social stigmatizations attributed to gay males by the society, which is -very likely- acquired at a very early age by male homosexuals in communities that are constructed around the societal expectations of genders. This skill, when practiced well and executed successfully, has the ultimate ability to bend, shape and re-assert the speaker's perceived-self in the eyes of the other interlocutors' that are present in the discourse.

## References

- Borisoff, D., & Merrill, L. (1998). *The power to communicate: Gender differences as barriers*. Waveland Press, Inc.
- Borisoff, D., & Victor, D. A. (1989). *Conflict management: A communication skills approach*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bucholtz, M. (1999). "Why be normal?": Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in society*, 28(2), 203-223.
- Cameron, D. and Kulick, D. (2003) *Language and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, D., & Kulick, D. (2003). Introduction: Language and desire in theory and practice.
- Cherny, L. (1994) 'Gender Differences in Text-Based Virtual Reality', in M. Bucholtz, A.C. Liang, L.A. Sutton and C. Hines (eds) *Cultural Performances. Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference*, pp. 102-15. Berkeley: University of California.
- Chesebro, J. W. (2001). Gender, masculinities, identities, and interpersonal relationship systems: Men in general and gay men in particular. *Women and men communicating: Challenges and changes*, 2, 32-64.
- Clarkson, J. (2005). Contesting masculinity's makeover: Queer Eye, consumer masculinity, and "straight-acting" gays. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 29(3), 235-255.
- Clarkson, J. (2007). "Everyday Joe" versus "pissy, bitchy, queens": Gay masculinity on StraightActing. com. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 14(2), 191-207.
- Clarkson, J. (2008). The limitations of the discourse of norms: Gay visibility and degrees of transgression. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 32(4), 368-382.
- Clausell, E., & Fiske, S. T. (2005). When do subgroup parts add up to the stereotypic whole? Mixed stereotype content for gay male subgroups explains overall ratings. *Social Cognition*, 23(2), 161-181.
- Clerc, S. (1996) 'Estrogen Brigades and "Big Tits" Threads: Media Fandom Online and Off', in L. Cherny and E. Reba Weise (eds) *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, pp. 73-97. Seattle, WA: Seal Press.
- Coates, L. J. (1996). *Discourse analysis of sexual assault trial judgements: Causal attributions and sentencing* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. S. C. (1998) Social Stigma. *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 504-553.
- Eckert, P. (2002). Demystifying sexuality and desire. *Language and sexuality: Contesting meaning in theory and practice*, 99-110.
- Eguchi, S. (2009). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: The rhetorical strategy of "straight-acting" among gay men. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 38(3), 193-209.

- Gaudio, R. P. (1994). Sounding gay: Pitch properties in the speech of gay and straight men. *American speech*, 69(1), 30-57.
- Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of phenomenological psychology*, 28(2), 235-260.
- Hall, S. (1995). Fantasy, identity, and politics. In E. Carter, J. Donald, & J. Squires (Eds.), *Cultural remix: Theories of politics and the popular* (pp. 63-69). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Harvey, K. and Shalom, C. (eds) (1997) *Language and Desire: Encoding Sex, Romance and Intimacy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Herring, S. (1994) 'Politeness in Computer Culture: Why Women Thank and Men Flame', in M. Bucholtz, A.C. Liang, L.A. Sutton and C. Hines (eds) *Cultural Performances. Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference*, pp. 278-94. Berkeley: University of California.
- Herring, S. (2000) 'Gender Differences in Computer-Mediated Communication. Findings and Implications', *The CPSR Newsletter* 18(1), available online at: [<http://www.cpsr.org/publications/newsletters/issues/2000/Winter2000/index.html>].
- Hoey, M. (2002). The organisation of narratives of desire: A study of first-person erotic fantasies. In *Language and Desire* (pp. 95-115). Routledge.
- Katz, I. (1981). Stigma: A social-psychological perspective. *Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum*, 2(3), 4.
- Kite, M. E., & Deaux, K. (1987). Gender belief systems: Homosexuality and the implicit inversion theory. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 11(1), 83-96.
- Langford, W. (1997). Bunnikins, I love you snugly in your warren": Voices from subterranean cultures of love. *Language and Desire: Encoding Sex, Romance and Intimacy*. London and New York: Routledge, 170-85.
- Leap, W. (Ed.). (1995). *Beyond the lavender lexicon: Authenticity, imagination, and appropriation in lesbian and gay languages*. Taylor & Francis US.
- Leap, W. (1996) *Word's Out: Gay Men's English*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Linville, S. E. (1998). Acoustic correlates of perceived versus actual sexual orientation in men's speech. *Folia phoniatrica et logopaedica*, 50(1), 35-48.
- Livia, A. and Hall, K. (eds) (1997) *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Madon, S. (1997). What do people believe about gay males? A study of stereotype content and strength. *Sex Roles*, 37(9-10), 663-685.
- Mehren, E. (2004, April 11). The Times poll: Acceptance of gays rises among new generation. The Los Angeles Times. Retrieved March 24, 2019, from Lexis-Nexis.
- Moonwomon-Baird, B. (2000, May). Tales of lesbian times: A temporal template for the life story present. In *First International Gender and Language Conference, Stanford, CA*.
- Moonwomon, B. (1995). Lesbian discourse, lesbian knowledge. *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon*. Newark, NJ: Gordon and Breach, 45-64.
- Morrish, E., & Sauntson, H. (2007). *New perspectives on language and sexual identity*. Springer.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Publications.
- Podesva, R. J., Roberts, S. J., & Campbell-Kibler, K. (2002). Sharing resources and indexing meanings in the production of gay styles. *Language and sexuality: Contesting meaning in theory and practice*, 175-189.
- Potoczniak, D. J. (2007). Development of Bisexual Men's Identities and Relationships.
- Queen, R. (2002). A matter of interpretation: The 'future' of 'queer linguistics'. *Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 69-86.
- Radway, J. A. (2009). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Univ of North Carolina Press.
- Soukup, C. (1999) 'The Gendered Interactional Patterns of Computer-Mediated Chat-rooms: A Critical Ethnographic Study', *The Information Society* 15: 169-76.
- Tainio, L. (2002). Negotiating gender identities and sexual agency in elderly couples' talk. *Talking gender and sexuality*, 181-206.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). Identity negotiation theory: Crossing cultural boundaries. *Theorizing about intercultural communication*, 211-233.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Dorjee, T. (2018). *Communicating across cultures*. Guilford Publications.
- Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Wood, J. T. (2003). Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture (4<sup>ed.</sup>). New York: Wadsworth.



# Addressing the Future of Gender in the Language Classroom

Jessica Appleby

## Abstract

As mainstream society evolves in its understanding of gender as a fluid, socially-constructed identity that exists on a spectrum, teachers have a responsibility to educate themselves on how to best support their students. For many second language teachers, this issue is particularly problematic as many world languages (notably those of the Romance family) are grammatically gendered and thus linguistically reinforce a rigid concept of a gender binary. Many teachers thus dismiss the question as too complicated for language learners or irrelevant to their subject; others, as in the public at large, are downright hostile to acknowledging changing concepts of gender in the classroom. Though many resources exist for establishing inclusive classrooms, this article focuses on the author's experiences as a French teacher to provide concrete ideas for language teachers to incorporate evolving concepts of gender into classes of every level. This article is intended primarily for world language teachers, with or without any prior knowledge of French. The arguments and strategies within are intended to assist

language teachers who are interested in incorporating more inclusive grammar in their target language, those who are hesitant to do so, and especially those who are newly aware of the question and seek an introduction to the subject that is relevant to their classrooms. First, I establish my argument that inclusive grammar is essential, not periphery, to language learning by tackling many counter arguments to teaching alternative grammatical gender structures. Then, I detail how to create an inclusive language classroom using examples from my own classes. Finally, I address the specifics of gender and *écriture inclusive*<sup>1</sup> in French to serve as a guide for teachers of any grammatically gendered language.

### Inclusivity as Essential to Language Learning

It is essential to begin by challenging some of the myths that discourage language teachers from including discussions of gender in a second language curriculum. In classes covering subjects such as sociology or history, it is often easier for teachers to see the importance of intentionally inclusive teaching than in other subject areas, notably STEM. While articles and studies exist to address such social issues in STEM fields,<sup>2</sup> resources specific to language studies are severely lacking. A few blogs cover inclusivity in language classes from a variety of perspectives, such as Rachel Cunning's blog post for Teaching Tolerance on gender inclusivity in the Latin classroom or Sarah Le Pichon's guest post for Open Up. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has issued a formal position statement supporting inclusivity in the classroom, yet provides no concrete resources for teachers to implement inclusive practices specific to language learning. No peer-reviewed articles on the subject could be found. Articles on inclusivity in the language classroom nearly all focus on disabilities, while a few highlight race. Second language teachers who are interested in gender-inclusive teaching must educate themselves and then modify existing recourses to work specifically for language learners. With verbs to conjugate, state standards to meet, and

the already difficult task of memorizing if a tree is grammatically masculine or feminine, it is all too easy to see society's changing concepts of gender as irrelevant to a language program's learning objectives. Even for teachers who would like to enact such practices in their classroom, doing so can seem like an insurmountable additional burden. In this section, I will articulate why incorporating gender inclusivity in a language program is essential to learning objectives, not periphery.

In second language learning (most notably TESOL—Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages – and Spanish that includes heritage speakers), the prescriptivism versus descriptivism debate is still rampant; prescriptivist perspectives on language maintain a clear lead in everything from textbooks to pedagogical conferences, though pedagogy scholars are increasingly aware of this approach's problematic social and racial implications. Mark Karan has argued that prescriptivism is actively detrimental to language development (164). Essentially, prescriptivists maintain that long-standing rules define what constitutes “correct” usage, while descriptivists insist that language is determined by how it is actually used. While descriptivists prefer to describe language as it changes, “Prescriptivists prescribe and sometimes proscribe, emphasizing rules and guidelines based on the conservation of customs (and sometimes a mythical ideal of correctness), and on judging what is or isn't acceptable—which poses, among other questions: acceptable to whom, when, and why?” (Cary). As the answer to Cary's question is, historically speaking, “to affluent white men,” descriptivists increasingly see prescriptivism's rules as inherently racist, classist, sexist, and cis-heteronormative.

Prescriptivism finds a particularly strong base in the question of French language learning; the (in)famous Académie Française, founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1634 to regulate the language after the explosion of linguistic creativity in the Renaissance, still decides what constitutes “proper” French. Though increasingly considered irrelevant as an institutional relic of bygone eras, the Académie “undertakes the work of defending and illustrating the language” and publishes the definitive French dictionary that “fashions the language as we know it today”



(Académie “Les Missions”—translations mine).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the prescriptivist attitude of the Académie is clear in the above mission statement: Académiciens *façonnent* (fashion or shape) the French language, continually resisting new developments in its actual usage. That their prolific pronouncements resemble a dam of twigs holding back the flood of neologisms is a continual source of amusement for most Francophones, especially of younger generations.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the most active page on the Académie’s robust website is called “Dire, Ne Pas Dire” which describes what French speakers can and cannot say. At the time of writing this article, the most recent updates are eleven separate posts from February 6, 2020 each tackling a different neologism the Académie deems unacceptable (“Ne Pas Dire”), replacing these linguistic incursions with often clunky French-originating alternatives (“Dire”). For example, one of these laments the current tendency to use the English word *green* when connoting environmentalism instead of the French word for green, *vert* (Académie “Non Bon Plans”). The post clearly ignores the fact that *green* is used to deliberately differentiate between the actual color and the concept of environmentalism, focusing instead on the affront to the French language due to this incursion of English.

The most famous recent pronouncement of the Académie followed the publication of the first textbook to use *écriture inclusive* in the fall of 2017. Its members issued a unanimous proclamation on October 26 declaring that “so-called ‘inclusive’ writing” has put the French language itself into “mortal peril” (Académie “Declaration”—translations mine).<sup>5</sup> The proclamation explains that inclusive writing will destroy the future of French by making the language too complex for language learners. Fittingly, this is a principle argument used by teachers to avoid teaching inclusive writing. In a sociocultural moment when enrollment numbers are of paramount importance to dying second language programs, teachers are legitimately concerned that complications of language will discourage even more students from learning a second language. I argue that this fear is unsubstantiated as it regards inclusive writing, most notably because all textbooks already use these systems for teaching new vocabulary, offering both masculine and feminine

variants of words: *un/une étudiant(e)*, *heureux(euse)*, etc. It is illogical to suggest that students can learn the vocabulary with non-standardized systems that textbooks currently use to offer alternate endings, but cannot then encounter more regulated formatting in contextualized assignments. In my experience, many students find the inclusive system preferable and more logical, while others prefer the traditional system. I leave the choice open to students to learn the version of French that resonates with them. They therefore take charge of their learning, choosing which system they prefer while also being aware of the other. Additionally, I argue that teaching inclusive neologisms will actually draw more students into classes by creating an inclusive space that more accurately reflects changing culture in both the native and target languages.

While it is evident that traditional grammar must be taught to students learning a language, it is equally important to acknowledge language as a constantly evolving cultural artifact; changes in a language can inform students as much about a culture as its traditions. Oft cited in the arguments against prescriptivist views of language, C.L. Wrenn explains, “Language is an ever-changing and developing expression of human personality, and does not grow well under rigorous direction” (84). As gender is currently a particularly developing piece of this expression of human personality, the language we teach our students to express themselves in should allow them to do so. The Académie’s brand of prescriptive French seems absurd to young adult students; their faces read complete incomprehension when I explain that I (a cis-gender woman professor) had to be referred to as a male ‘*un professeur*’ until February 2019 when the Académie finally declared feminine versions of historically male professions (author, doctor, lawyer, professor, etc) to be linguistically acceptable, despite being used in common parlance since the 1970s. Will we really attract and retain students by teaching this stagnated version of a language that does not represent the world students see around them? Though the Académie’s resistance is finally over for the feminization of professions, widespread vehement resistance still exists towards inclusive writing practices and neol-

ogistic pronouns. Undoubtedly, this resistance will eventually crumble and the fact that inclusive writing was ever a source of controversy will seem as outdated as the refusal to feminize professions does now.

In social media groups for language teachers, the frequency of discussions involving inclusive writing and new gender options show that these questions preoccupy our students. In the French Teachers in the US group on Facebook (a group that deletes repeat posts and insists that its nearly 6,000 members search previous discussions before creating a new post on a topic), there are more than twenty-five new discussions and resources on trans\* representation and gender neutral French posted in the last year alone. Multitudinous posts date all the way back to 2015, with a distinct increase in frequency, engagement, and informed replies. The earliest posts cite questions from students to which teachers are seeking answers; for example, the first of these was posted by Katrina Carey on August 19, 2015 asking, "I have a question for you all. Today I was teaching the pronouns 'Il' and 'Elle' when a student raised her hand and asked if there was a different way to refer to someone who does not identify as either male or female. I was at a loss...any ideas??" (Carey). More recently, the discussion trends shift to the sharing of new resources; the question is no longer a new one, rather one that is of such frequent concern in the classroom that teachers routinely share good resources with the group. Clearly, the trend is towards interest, acceptance, and encouragement of addressing these issues in the classroom. Regardless of our personal priorities as teachers, it is evident that our students want to be informed about inclusive language in their target language, either for themselves, for friends or family members, or simply out of curiosity. On the whole, today's youth are not living in the historically-imposed binary. What a shame it would be to regress into binary thinking during each language lesson when their world outside our classroom is experiencing continual progress.

This observation naturally leads to the next argument, that implementing deliberately inclusive practices establishes the classroom as a safe space. Learning cannot occur if a student feels unsafe in the class-

room.<sup>6</sup> As inspirational memes, classroom posters, and even t-shirts glibly declare, students must Maslow before they can Bloom.<sup>7</sup> The National School Climate Report of 2015 found that on school campuses, a staggering 85% of LGBT youth have experienced verbal harassment, 58% have felt unsafe due to their sexual orientation, and 43% have felt unsafe due to their gender identity (Kosciw et al.). The same report found that only 20% of students report being taught an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum (Kosciw et al.). The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 50-54% of transgender and gender non-conforming students who experience discrimination or harassment in all levels of schooling attempt suicide; comparatively, the national rate of suicide attempts is 4.6% of all individuals, and only 10-20% of LGB adults report a suicide attempt (Haas, Rogers, Hermann). Supporting trans\* students is thus the responsibility of all teachers; ignoring or sidestepping the question of gender binary in language classes is thus unconscionable. In summer 2019, the Trevor Project published a pair of reports finding that for LGBTQ youth, having just one supportive adult in their lives reduces their chance of suicide by 40% (Trevor Project). Though a language teacher may not see the value of teaching new grammatical systems, the importance of creating a safe space for all students is indisputable.

A final argument for avoiding the question of evolving gendered language comes from teachers who feel their own understanding of the subject is inadequate for covering it in the classroom. To this, I argue that expertise is not required! As teachers, we are life-long learners, ever deepening our own understanding of our subject as we guide students through it. For the question of gender, plenty of resources exist (see Works Cited for additional resources) to explain developments in gendered nouns and pronouns to native speakers of any teacher's language of instruction. Additionally, social media has an abundance of teachers' groups where other teachers share resources and expertise. Finally, it is unnecessary to be an expert before introducing concepts to students; indeed, if we all awaited complete mastery of a topic before discussing it with students, our classes would cover very little. In fact,



students react positively to seeing their teachers as fellow learners, so exploring changes to the target language together can produce transformational learning opportunities. In this next section, I innumerate several simple steps a language teacher can take in their classroom regardless of their expertise (or lack thereof) in evolving ideas of gender.

### First Steps to Creating an Inclusive Language Classroom

The most basic changes any teacher can (and should, without exception) make, in a language classroom or any other, concern names and pronouns. Asking for pronouns is not something that occurs to many teachers, and this omission leaves students unsure if it is safe to be out in those classrooms. Though more and more teachers now announce to students that they should inform the teacher of alternate names or pronouns, this well-intended act can make students uncomfortable that they must take an extra step and approach the teacher, especially if the student is concerned about outing themselves. It is essential that teachers remove the onus from the student and normalize giving names and pronouns. First, teachers should introduce themselves with their own pronouns, including them on syllabi and email signatures. Secondly, teachers should avoid calling roll aloud in front of a new class; many students have been uncomfortably or dangerously outed in this way. Teachers can build small group discussion time into the first day of class so they can individually meet each student (a good practice for building classroom community regardless), and have each student fill out a standard introductory questionnaire. In the language classroom, this is particularly easy as we often give such a questionnaire to determine prior knowledge of the language. Here is an example of mine (Figure 1). The image above is an example of an introductory questionnaire that is adaptable to any level language class. For more advanced classes, I give the form in French and use the opportunity to include neologistic French pronouns, often sparking a discussion on evolving language on the first day.

A few notes concerning the wording on the above document: first, I ask students to identify themselves based on how their name appears on my roster for practical purposes. Since many universities now allow students to choose how their name appears in the digital systems, it no longer makes sense to ask for students' legal names. Additionally, trans\* students may not have legally changed their name as doing so has restrictive financial or medical requirements in many states; whether or not they have completed the legal change is also irrelevant in the classroom. Second, I ask students by what name they want to be addressed in class. The wording here is deliberately chosen so that students with nicknames, alternate names, chosen "French" names,<sup>8</sup> or names that reflect their gender identity are all covered. Third, I recognize that providing pronouns to circle offers limited options to students because, for the sake of space, the form cannot cover all possibilities. However, when I previously formatted the question like the first two, leaving a space to write in pronouns, most of my cisgender students would leave the question blank, say N/A, or even leave a "joke" in the space. Teaching in a conservative state, I find that many students do not understand the question. I switched to the above format, providing a list of (albeit limited) options, for three reasons: to make the question clearer to those who have never been asked for their pronouns, to force all students to respond to the question, and to demonstrate a few options of which students may not have prior knowledge. Regarding the third question's wording, it is proper to ask for someone's pronouns, not *preferred* pronouns, as they reflect the person's very identity, not a conversational preference. This is a mistake frequently made by well-intentioned allies, so the distinction warrants specification here. Overall, this question signals the classroom is a safe space by demonstrating that inclusivity is one of the teacher's priorities. Indeed, I regularly receive notes from cisgender students on my questionnaires that thank me for asking for pronouns. For all students, it clearly establishes the tone and priorities of the classroom.

Fourthly, a few follow-up questions are necessary to protect students. The sheet signals to trans\* students that the teacher is a safe

person with whom they can discuss their gender identity; however, sharing their pronouns here does not mean they are out to all their teachers or their peers. Specifying with whom a teacher can use students' pronouns will ultimately protect the student and ensure they remain in control of who is informed about their gender identity. Additionally, by asking if the student wants to discuss this further, the burden of starting this conversation shifts to the teacher rather than putting it on the student. The goal of all these questions is to ensure a student can openly, comfortably, thoroughly, and easily discuss their correct name and pronouns so they feel seen, respected, and safe in the classroom. As previously stated, learning cannot occur for a student who feels uncomfortable or unsafe in the classroom. Finally, I explicitly ask what students want me to know about them so that they can be successful in my class. The last question is helpful for a variety of students, especially those who have mental health issues, have disabilities, want to further discuss gender, or belong to other marginalized groups. This is undoubtedly the most helpful question I ask that helps the largest number of students, though only tangentially related to our current discussion of supporting inclusive gender practices in the classroom.

The second step to take is one many teachers unconsciously do already: using inclusive language when giving instructions. Commonly, French teachers ask for *un/une volontaire* or tell students to find *un/une partenaire*, using both the masculine and feminine forms simultaneously to include all students and not use masculine as the default dominant gender. In written instructions, it is simple to use inclusive writing to account for all students: *trouvez un.e partenaire* or *les étudiant.e.s*. For instructions in English, it is preferable to avoid the clunky, binary-enforcing *his/her* and simply use *their*. Such minor adjustments make little overall change to the instructions themselves, which remain just as comprehensible, but they signal to students that inclusive writing, rather than gendered, is now the norm. When students engage with authentic sources on the internet, this type of writing is what they will most encounter. Students already see their teachers as being hu-

morously out of touch with current trends and “real world” usage, so it is important to demonstrate language in the classroom that students will encounter outside the classroom as well. The more relevant class material seems to their lives, the more students are likely to continue in the subject.

The final simple step I will describe is simply to vary course materials so that images and names are significantly more diverse. Despite the rich multicultural diversity of the Francophone world, I have yet to find a French textbook that includes anything other than cishet, same-race couples when teaching family vocabulary. It is therefore essential for the teacher to represent more accurately the world students live in. It requires no more effort for teachers to find images of same-sex couples or gender non-conforming individuals for activities than it does to use the harmful one-dimensional representation provided by the textbook. Even simply changing names in written activities to reflect other sexualities and ethnic groups is an important step that can have a big impact for students who see themselves represented, often for the first time in the classroom. Once a student approached me with tears in his eyes because I used a picture of two grooms when introducing wedding vocabulary; at twenty, he had never before seen a picture that represented himself in the classroom. On my end, this took no more effort than using a bride and groom in my slide, but to the student, this small change was profoundly impactful. From a linguistic perspective, students can actually grasp the grammar better if an activity is well-structured so they cannot make heteronormative assumptions. For instance, when teaching possession, I use same-sex pairings to emphasize how gender agrees with the object of the possession in French, not with the subject as it does in English. In this case, using both Sophie and her wife (*sa femme*) and Jean-Louis and his wife (also *sa femme*) helps students see the distinction between how the grammar works in each language, with the bonus benefit of being inclusive. These three small steps outlined above are easy for any teacher to implement and can have a significant impact within the classroom.



## Specific Teaching Strategies Based on French

In this section, I will discuss specific strategies for discussing gender and actively deconstructing the gender binary in a way that supports the learning outcomes in a French language program. Though the examples are specific to my own experience as a French teacher, they are organized in a way in which teachers of any language can make use of the ideas simply by adjusting them to fit current developments in their own language of instruction. In French, *écriture inclusive* addresses two categories of concern: 1) the patriarchal precedence of the masculine and 2) **trans\*** and gender non-conforming individuals. By challenging the prioritization of the masculine, addressing the first alleviates some problems for the second. First, we must understand the feminist push to end the dominance of masculine as default to grasp broader implications of this evolution and its impact to the **trans\*** community.

In French, as in many world languages, all nouns have a gender, either masculine or feminine; unlike German or Latin, there is no third neuter option. Some nouns have a seemingly random gender, like a masculine pen (*un stylo*) or a feminine chair (*une chaise*), but others have masculine and feminine versions, such as nationalities and professions. For example, the word for student exists in both forms, as *un étudiant* and *une étudiante*. When discussing mixed groups, masculine is always the default; thus, a group of ninety-nine female students and one male student is referred to in the masculine *étudiants*. In the new inclusive writing systems, one argues that the majority in the group should determine the gender (*étudiantes* since there are more women); however, this solution addresses the sexism but reinforces the gender binary. The other system is slightly more welcoming to gender non-confirming individuals as it includes both masculine and feminine to specify that a group is composed of a mix of genders; in this case, the group is described as *étudiant.e.s.*<sup>9</sup> As mentioned earlier, this is the simplest language to use in classroom instructions and it is reflected already in the way vocabulary lists are given.

This inclusive adjectival ending is also used by many non-binary or gender-fluid individuals in the singular; they can say '*je suis étudiant.e*' to indicate they use neither the masculine or feminine form to describe themselves. However, others oppose this system as they feel it suggests non-binary is some combination of masculine and feminine (which is indeed precisely how the system developed), an implication that does not accurately represent non-binary or gender non-confirming identities. Unlike in American Spanish which generally accepts the -x suffix as a non-gendered option (Latinx instead of Latina or Latino), French has yet to reach a consensus on an alternate option. One solution suggests removing the suffix entirely, so instead of *heureux* or *heureuse*, the gender-neutral option would be *heureu*. Another suggests using a t to replace a feminine e; in this case we would use *heureut*. While both are distinct in the written French, orally they sound the same as the masculine form. Yet another solution recommends alternating masculine and feminine endings; this would register orally in a way the other solutions do not, but it returns to the same problem of inclusive writing and its implication that non-binary or gender non-confirming can be understood as some combination of masculine and feminine. Since these systems are so in flux, the most important thing to keep in mind is respecting what each person feels is comfortable for them. For language teachers, the complication arises in deciding how to assess a student's correct grammar usage; I address this issue at the end of this section.

Next, let's look at the neologisms that are pushing French out of the binary and into new grammatical territory. When it comes to subject pronouns, even these rigidly enforce a gender binary. *Il* and *elle* function as *he* and *she* in English, but the corresponding *ils* and *elles* in the plural mean that *they* is also gendered in French; thus the most common non-binary pronoun in English is not an option in French. The most commonly used neutral pronoun in French is *iel*, which is now widespread enough to be easily recognizable by most French-speakers. However, as with the inclusive writing of gendered endings, this pronoun is a combination of *il* and *elle* and thus its implications cause dis-



comfort for some individuals. Variations include *ille* and *el*, but these sound the same as the traditional gendered pronouns and are therefore not widely used. Another option is *ui*, a variation of the non-gendered indirect object pronoun *lui*; however, as *lui* also serves as a masculine disjunctive pronoun, not everyone is comfortable using *ui* as their personal subject pronoun. Though relatively rare, *im* and *em* exist as variants of the *il* form. The options least attached to preexisting gendered notions are *ol*, *ul*, and *ael* since neither *o*, *u*, or the *ae* combination have gendered connotations in French. As with adjectival agreement, the decision of pronoun rests entirely with the student as only they can decide which pronouns best fit them (Figure 2).

In English, the standard format for giving pronouns is *they*, *them*, *theirs*, listing first the subject pronoun, then the object pronoun, then the possessive pronoun. This format does not necessarily translate directly into other languages as gender functions differently in each. For example, in French, possession is not gendered based on the person doing the owning, but rather based on the thing being owned. As shown earlier, the words to express *his wife*, *her wife*, or even *their wife* are all *sa femme*, as the possessive pronoun is based on the gender of *wife*, not the gender identity of the person married to the wife. If a student wants to discuss his/her/their non-binary roommate, the possessive pronoun must then match the roommate's gender identity; the student would then refer to the roommate as *mon colocataire* or *ma colocataire*.<sup>10</sup> Object pronouns also function differently; only direct object pronouns and prepositional object pronouns are gendered, where indirect object pronouns *lui* and *leur* reflect only plurality, not gender. For prepositional or disjunctive pronouns, *soi* already exists in traditional French to mean *oneself*; thus its usage has simply been expanded. *Lui* and *elle* serve the same functions in the gendered version, and a neologistic combination *ellui* is now in use corresponding to the subject pronoun *iel*. Direct object pronouns are traditionally gendered *le* and *la*; one new option combines the two for *lea* and the other uses *lo* to mimic the gendered

spelling but with a non-gendered vowel. In these above grammatical circumstances, fewer options exist than with a personal subject pronoun, so the choice is often simpler for students to make once they have chosen a subject pronoun.

Having enumerated a variety of options, we can now explore some practical ways of introducing these options to non-binary, gender-fluid, or gender non-conforming students. Since it can be challenging to offer options to a student when a teacher themselves feels uncomfortable using alternate pronouns, I will explain my process with non-binary, genderfluid, and gender non-conforming individuals in my French classes. The introductory questionnaire allows students to easily identify their pronouns, so the next step is to privately approach the students who use pronouns other than *she* and *he* to suggest discussing their pronoun options in French. It is important to establish that the student is empowered to make their decisions regarding pronouns and adjectival agreement. I explain that we will work together to establish rules for the individual student because, of course, they will be assessed on their French grammar. So that their options are clear, I explain systems that students and I have agreed upon in the past. Some students have decided to use the traditional *elle* or *il* for the duration of the class while using *they* in English. Others have looked through available resources I send them and have decided on neologistic pronouns that feel comfortable to them. Several gender-fluid students have decided upon a more flexible solution, marking each assignment with the gender they have chosen to use for that day.

As a teacher, the most important thing is to let students take the lead in determining the target language's systems that best express their own identity. Flexibility is essential, especially since students' ideas often change as their understanding of the language deepens. This is especially true at a beginning level, so students must feel free to make changes mid semester when they learn more about how gender functions in their target language. I find more advanced students tend to settle into a system they find works for them. Some students may also be exploring their gender identity outside the classroom, so allowing

them to try out new grammatical options in the language classroom is more respectful of their personal journey. In these cases, it is easy to have the student indicate on each assignment which grammatical rules they have chosen to follow so that assessment standards remain clear. Though some teachers may fear that allowing a student to regularly change the grammatical rules by which they are assessed will give them an unfair advantage over other students following consistent traditional rules, I have found the opposite to be true. Students exploring their gender options in French develop a deeper understanding of the grammatical rules because they remain focused on the nuances while exploring their options. Additionally, allowing a student to follow alternative gender systems is in no way detrimental to a course's language learning objectives; students using these new grammar rules for themselves must still follow traditional rules while communicating in the second and third person. Indeed, it has been my experience that students who are allowed the freedom to explore new conceptions of gender in French develop a deeper appreciation of language in general.

## **Conclusions**

As language educators, we teach a living subject that is in constant flux, varying through regions, cultures, and age groups. Though traditional language teaching follows prescriptivist patterns of 'correct' usage, the real-world language our students encounter does not. Gender is an issue of global interest as we explore new ways to linguistically represent the evolving concepts of identity. As such, incorporating gender-inclusive practices in the language classroom reinforces learning objectives, rather than detracts from them. An inclusive classroom is one in which all students feel safe enough to focus on their learning. Teaching new and developing inclusive grammar systems allows students to see language as an ever-mutable cultural artifact. Teachers can model standards for life-long learning by exploring new ideas and structures alongside their students. Students gain a more nuanced un-

derstanding of their target language's grammar by exploring structures beyond the traditional. Finally, and most importantly, the language classroom is already a space in which students explore new ways to express themselves; it is only logical that gender be included in this exploration. In short, including changing concepts of gender in a language classroom does more than promote diversity—it's just good pedagogy.

1. Full name or a nickname (no titles)

2. Approx. grade (I'm not to call you in class)

3. What are your pronouns? *he/him she/her they/their* (add) other

a. Is it all for use (regardless of class)? **Yes No**

b. Is it all for use (regardless of class)? **Yes No**

c. Would you like to discuss this further privately with me? **Yes No**

4. "near and dear"?

5. Where are you from?

6. Why did you sign up for this course? (be honest)

7. What grade are you aiming to score for in this class?

8. Everyone is super nerdy about something. What's your thing you get really excited about?

9. What is something you'll like to do when you're out? (no "Netflix and chill" or "I'm bored" in this class?)

Figure 1

	Subject pronouns	Object pronouns	Possessive pronouns (refers to object not subject of possession)
Gender neutral	iel, el, ille, ul, ol, aol, m, em	lea, lo (direct) soi, elhi (prepositional)	man'mo, tant, ta, tant'el
Feminine	elle	la	ma, la, sa
Masculine	il	le	mon, ton, son

Figure 2

1. This term, which translates to *inclusive writing*, was coined to describe a specific set of new rules, pronouns, and gender conceptions in French. I use the English term more broadly to refer to all systems that grammatically dismantle the gender binary, and the French term when I refer specifically to French forms.
2. A wide variety of resources exists, from peer-reviewed journal articles to discussions on teaching community websites. Searches in both academic and non-academic databases yield an abundance of results on the topic. Examples of resources for gender inclusivity in STEM can be found in the works cited section at the end of this article.
3. “Aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles se poursuit, dans l’esprit des premiers académiciens, l’œuvre de défense et d’illustration de la langue. Les éditions successives du Dictionnaire, par les modifications qu’elles apportent, achèvent de façonner la langue telle que nous la connaissons aujourd’hui.”
4. It must be noted, however, that young people can develop their own prescriptive tendencies, as Patrick Drackley’s study of the *Je suis circonflexe* phenomenon articulates.
5. “...une écriture dite ‘inclusive’ / “...la langue française se trouve désormais en péril mortel”
6. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement has conducted an abundance of studies exploring and confirming the importance of student mental and physical safety to their ability to learn. That safety is of paramount importance in learning is accepted as undisputed fact in educational communities.
7. This sentiment refers to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives; students’ essential physical and emotional needs must be met before they can begin achieving educational objectives.
8. I am here referring to the practice common in secondary school language classes where students are required or encouraged to choose a name that is supposedly of cultural relevance to the target language. This practice is racially and culturally problematic (especially for Spanish classes in the US) for reasons outside the scope of this article. I thoroughly discourage the practice, but many students with previous language experience from high school have a name they are used to being called in class and like to inform their new instructor about this chosen name.
9. The standard version of this uses an interpunct instead of a period. It would then be written *étudiant·e·s*. Since French keyboards only began adding a key for the interpunct at the end of 2018, the normal period is more frequently used for now.
10. The table above lists the possessive pronouns in order of first, second, and third person singular.



## Works Cited

- Académie française. "Déclaration de l'Académie française sur l'écriture dite 'inclusive.'" *Académie française*, 26 Oct 2017, [www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/declaration-de-lacademie-francaise-sur-lecriture-dite-inclusive](http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/declaration-de-lacademie-francaise-sur-lecriture-dite-inclusive).
- Académie française. "Dire, ne pas dire." *Académie française*, [www.academie-francaise.fr/dire-ne-pas-dire](http://www.academie-francaise.fr/dire-ne-pas-dire). Accessed 18 Feb 2020.
- Académie française. "Les missions." *Académie française*, [www.academie-francaise.fr/institution/les-missions](http://www.academie-francaise.fr/institution/les-missions). Accessed 22 Feb 2020.
- Académie française. "Non bons plans pour un monde plus green." *Académie française: Dire, Ne Pas Dire*, 6 Feb 2020, [www.academie-francaise.fr/non-bons-plans-pour-un-monde-plus-green](http://www.academie-francaise.fr/non-bons-plans-pour-un-monde-plus-green).
- ACTFL Board of Directors. "Diversity and inclusion in world language teaching and learning." *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*, 17 May 2019. [www.actfl.org/news/position-statements/diversity-and-inclusion-world-language-teaching-learning](http://www.actfl.org/news/position-statements/diversity-and-inclusion-world-language-teaching-learning).
- Agence Mots-Clés. *Ecriture Inclusive*. [www.ecriture-inclusive.fr/](http://www.ecriture-inclusive.fr/). Accessed 29 Feb 2020.
- Ayers-Bennett, Wendy, and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade. "Prescriptivism in a comparative perspective: The case of France and England." *Prescription and Tradition in Language: Establishing Standards across Time and Space*. Multilingual Matters, 2017. pp. 105-119.
- Benjamin, Alix. "Le langage neutre en français: pronoms et accords à l'écrit et à l'oral." *Genre ! Site d'information et d'échange autour des identités trans*. 29 Apr 2017, [entousgenresblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/quels-pronoms-neutres-en-francais-et-comment-les-utiliser/?fbclid=IwAR0WtM-ipL63iD85Omr8q3RJ1\\_hkDXyxXL2uIoNlqAhf8J9wmwZDUpPa4](http://entousgenresblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/quels-pronoms-neutres-en-francais-et-comment-les-utiliser/?fbclid=IwAR0WtM-ipL63iD85Omr8q3RJ1_hkDXyxXL2uIoNlqAhf8J9wmwZDUpPa4).
- Bradley, Evan D., Maxwell Schmid, and Hannah Lombardo. "Personality, prescriptivism, and pronouns: Factors influencing grammaticality judgments of gender-neutral language." *English Today*, vol. 35, no.4, Dec 2019, pp. 41-52.
- Carey, Katrina. Query regarding alternate pronouns in French. *Facebook*. 19 Aug 2015, 9:55pm. [www.facebook.com/groups/FTUSA](https://www.facebook.com/groups/FTUSA).
- Carey, Stan. "Descriptivism vs. prescriptivism: War is over (if you want it)." *Sentence first: An Irishman's blog about the English language*. 16 Feb 2010, [stancarey.wordpress.com/2010/02/16/descriptivism-vs-prescriptivism-war-is-over-if-you-want-it/](http://stancarey.wordpress.com/2010/02/16/descriptivism-vs-prescriptivism-war-is-over-if-you-want-it/).
- Cunning, Rachel. "Engendering inclusivity in a language class." *Teaching Tolerance*. 19 Sept 2018. [www.tolerance.org/magazine/engendering-inclusivity-in-a-language-class](http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/engendering-inclusivity-in-a-language-class).
- Drackley, Patrick. "'Je suis circonflexé': Grassroots prescriptivism and orthographic reform." *Language Policy*, vol. 18, 21 Aug 2018, pp. 295-313.
- Haas, Anne P., Philip L. Rodgers, Judy L. Herman. "Suicide attempts among transgender and gender non-conforming adults: Findings of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey." The Williams Institute, University of California at Los Angeles School of Law, 2014. [williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf).
- Haut Conseil à l'Egalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes. "Pour une communication publique sans stéréotype de sexe: Guide pratique." *La Documentation Française*, 2016, [www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/guide\\_pour\\_une\\_communication\\_publicque\\_sans\\_stereotype\\_de\\_sexe\\_vf\\_2016\\_11\\_02.compressed.pdf](http://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/guide_pour_une_communication_publicque_sans_stereotype_de_sexe_vf_2016_11_02.compressed.pdf).
- Johnson, Katheryn M. S., "Implementing inclusive practices in an active learning STEM classroom." *Advances in Physiology Education*, vol. 23, no. 2, June 2019, pp.207-210.
- Karan, Mark. "Detrimental aspects of prescriptivism." *Multilingualism in Cyberspace: Proceedings of the Ugra Global Expert Meeting*, 4-9 Jul 2015, pp.162-167.
- Kosciw, Joseph G. et al. "The 2015 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools." GLSEN, 2015. [www.glsen.org/research/2015-national-school-climate-survey](http://www.glsen.org/research/2015-national-school-climate-survey).
- Le Pichon, Sarah. "Inclusive pedagogy and the language-learning classroom." *Open Up: Conversations on Open Education for Language Learning*, 4 Nov 2018, [blog.cerll.utexas.edu/inclusive-pedagogy/](http://blog.cerll.utexas.edu/inclusive-pedagogy/).
- Les Salopettes. "Petit guide pratique de l'écriture inclusive." *Les Salopettes: Association féministe*, 27 Sept 2017, [lessalopettes.wordpress.com/2017/09/27/petit-guide-pratique-de-lecriture-inclusive/](http://lessalopettes.wordpress.com/2017/09/27/petit-guide-pratique-de-lecriture-inclusive/).
- Lochtman, Katja. "Prescriptivism and sociolinguistic competence in German as a foreign language." *Prescription and Tradition in Language: Establishing Standards across Time and Space*. Multilingual Matters, 2017. pp. 88-102.
- Lowenthal, Traci. "Teachers as LGBTQ allies: Creating inclusive classrooms for students of all gender identities and sexual orientations." *Community for Accredited Online Schools*, [www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/education-teaching-degree/lgbtq-youth/](http://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/education-teaching-degree/lgbtq-youth/). Accessed 17 Jul 2019.
- Matei, Tamara. The challenges of prescriptivism in teaching English as a foreign language. *Studia Universitatis: Revistă științifică a Universității de Stat din Moldova*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2012, pp.128-131, [studiamsu.eu/wp-content/uploads/26-p.128-131.pdf](http://studiamsu.eu/wp-content/uploads/26-p.128-131.pdf).
- Minero, Emelina. "Schools struggle to support LGBTQ students." *Edutopia*, 19 Apr 2018, [www.edutopia.org/article/schools-struggle-support-lgbtq-students](http://www.edutopia.org/article/schools-struggle-support-lgbtq-students).
- Nations Unis. "Le langage inclusif." [www.un.org/fr/gender-inclusive-language/toolbox.shtml](http://www.un.org/fr/gender-inclusive-language/toolbox.shtml).
- Schalz, Julia. "'Ask me': What LGBTQ students want their professors to know." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 Sept 2015, [www.chronicle.com/article/Ask-Me-What-LGBTQ/232797](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Ask-Me-What-LGBTQ/232797).
- SchoolLeadersNow. "5 Strategies for inspiring an inclusive STEM culture in your classroom." *We Are Teachers*, 26 Feb 2018, [www.weareteachers.com/inspiring-inclusive-stem-curriculum/](http://www.weareteachers.com/inspiring-inclusive-stem-curriculum/).

- Shin, Naomi L. and Mary Hudgens Henderson. "A sociolinguistic approach to teaching Spanish grammatical structures." *Foreign Language Annals*, 28 Mar 2017. [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/flan.12249](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/flan.12249).
- Southern Poverty Law Center: Teaching Tolerance Project: [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org).
- Steenhof, Boudewijn. *A teacher's perspective: prescriptivism in second-language education*. Leiden University Repository, 2018.
- Timsit, Annabelle. "The push to make French gender-neutral: Can changing the structure of a language improve women's status in society?" *The Atlantic*, 24 Nov 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/inclusive-writing-france-feminism/545048/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/inclusive-writing-france-feminism/545048/).
- Trevor Project. "Research brief: Accepting adults reduce suicide attempts among LGBTQ youth." *The Trevor Project*, 27 June 2019, [www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/06/27/research-brief-accepting-adults-reduce-suicide-attempts-among-lgbtq-youth/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/06/27/research-brief-accepting-adults-reduce-suicide-attempts-among-lgbtq-youth/).
- Wrenn C.L. *The English language*. Cambridge: University Printing House, 1977.

# My Body, My Choice: Issues and Advocacy

Jennifer Phillips



For centuries, people have conflated sex workers and sex trafficking victims. Through using the derogatory term *prostitution*, we have criminalized the profession of sex work and anyone associated with it. By becoming aware of our surroundings, communities can begin to notice the red flags that hide under our noses. Human rights violations surround us. Society has decided to become blind to these misdeeds. As such, ignoring the pain and suffering of others has become normal in our society. Though an uncomfortable topic to address, it is still necessary. As Shelly Reed states,

As a society we love to profile the pedophile. It gives us all a collective sigh of relief if we can say, without any doubt, this is what a pedophile looks like. I have some unfortunate news for society. I was raped by a banker, a Colonel in the Air Force, a car salesperson, a housing contractor, and many other people who purchased me with their middle-class, college-level incomes... They are everywhere. They are talented artists. They are successful business people. They are military personnel. Stop putting your comfort level above the truth. The truth is never comfortable.<sup>1</sup>



When it comes to sex work (SW) and sex trafficking (ST) it is necessary for people to understand the difference—particularly law enforcement. SW and ST have more commonalities than meets the eye. Being able to distinguish one from the other is important for law enforcement. The lingering effects of childhood abuse and a lack of institutional understanding are the most serious resemblances between these two groups. “Results suggest that a young girl in northern Mexico presenting with a pregnancy at age 14 years or having experienced sexual violence at age 11 years could have a 1 in 3 chance of subsequently being sex trafficked.”<sup>2</sup>

Human trafficking (HT) is defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”<sup>3</sup> HT has become an economy by selling the goods of human bodies. There are many facets to take into consideration within trafficking such as sex, labor, marriage, child, and organ. “Human trafficking earns profits of roughly \$150 billion a year for traffickers. . . \$99 billion for commercial sexual exploitation, \$34 billion in construction, manufacturing, mining, and utilities, \$9 billion in agriculture, including forestry and fishing, \$8 billion dollars is saved annually by private households that employ domestic workers under conditions of forced labor.”<sup>4</sup> Shadow markets hide within plain sight unless one knows where and how to look. Shadow markets frequently link themselves to the business of HT.

Coercion, force, and fraud are the main identifiers used by law enforcement and HT shelters to determine if someone is a victim of trafficking. The use of force includes physical beating, burning, torture, or gang rape. This ensures the victim’s fear, meaning they are too afraid to leave their abuser due to fear of punishment. Fraud is a tool used by traffickers to retain servitude. Fraud includes blackmail, false promises of a better life, and the opportunity to make more money. Coercion is

also a means used by traffickers. Coercion is the combination of force and fraud by using blackmail, threats of violence, and manipulating one’s insecurities. “Jill Leighton, a teenage runaway forced into prostitution by a man who picked her up from the streets and held her captive. A customer offered to help her leave; but the customer was working for her trafficker, and she was beaten and gang-raped for trying to escape.”<sup>5</sup> Jill Leighton’s story is an example of the range of deception traffickers employ.

Human trafficking was coined ‘white slavery’ in an attempt to dissociate it from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, as well as “to invoke the experience of antebellum female slaves.”<sup>6</sup> This terminology can be problematic when it leads the mind to believe white people experience danger while people of color do not. Not only are all people of color being left out of this conversation, males are also largely ignored. Men are inserted into the discussion as “sexual abuse is a problem for young men as well” while “a US study showed that 16 per cent of men had experienced incestuous or other sexual abuse.”<sup>7</sup> Statistics of men trafficked within the sex trade are lower than women. Regardless, they are being pushed aside and ignored from the discourse. This market does not discriminate based on your race, nationality, sex, or gender. If there is a demand, traffickers will find the supply to get their profits one way or another. Trafficking falls under the same definition; however, unbeknownst to many, global and domestic trafficking occurs right in our backyards. Trafficking has evolved around us; however, we have done little to combat it. Perhaps it is too painful to think about the inhumanity of this market.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was the first law that covered slavery, trafficking, and the exploitation of human bodies in the U.S., ratified on December 6, 1865. “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”<sup>8</sup> The amendment was passed in 1865 and is still violated in the year 2019—154 years later. There are many differences to the slavery of 1865 and the slavery we have in our current society. The vi-



olation of a constitutional right through force, fraud, or coercion remains a permanent fixture. “Forced prostitution is slavery for purpose of the Thirteenth Amendment’s prohibition against slavery and involuntary servitude; therefore, government officials who fail to enforce laws against pimps are acting unconstitutionally.”<sup>9</sup> A main issue commonly talked about is the lack of knowledge surrounding laws that prosecutors can use to charge a perpetrator of trafficking. The government has become a part of this growing issue by not being aware of the tools available to prosecute traffickers.

The Mann Act was the first law that outlined trafficking as we know it today. “The Commission’s work resulted in the passage of the Mann Act of 1910, which prohibited the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes.”<sup>10</sup> This trafficking law was ratified in 2000 and became the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). “The act establishes human trafficking and related offenses as federal crimes and attaches severe penalties to them. It also mandates restitution be paid to victims of human trafficking. It further works to prevent trafficking by establishing the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, which is required to publish a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report each year.”<sup>11</sup> The TVPA was ratified several times in its short life. The more society becomes aware of the HT issue, the more society must expand to change this law to ensure it brings the victims the greatest amount of justice.

Sex work differentiates from sex trafficking because SW’s are not being ‘handled’ or ‘controlled’ by a pimp. A sex worker also gets to keep the money they make. Sex workers can work out of their home, hotel, on the street, or have an online base where they find clients. “President Donald Trump recently signed into law the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (FOSTA-SESTA), which holds social media platforms liable for content that ‘...promote[s] of facilitate[s] the prostitution of another person.’ Sex workers have widely critiqued this bill, arguing that it does not differentiate between forced trafficking and consensual sex work, and that it restricts their ability to vet clients online.”<sup>12</sup> While this was a step in the right direction, it be-

comes a safety issue for sex workers—considering female sex workers are eighteen times more likely to be murdered by a serial killer.<sup>13</sup> The ability to vet clients online is an important step to being safer in this profession.

The most significant difference between ST and SW is the consent that can be given by the person performing the sexual acts. Consent is having the power to give a verbal agreement for an action to begin, continue, or stop. A sex worker holds the power to say yes or no. Conversely, a victim of sex trafficking does not have the power to deny a customer or pimp regardless of the task due to the fear of violent repercussions. The following story illustrates this issue:

So we went together where he lives, without him telling me he lived there with many other men. I was to find out the hard way as all six men then slept with me without putting on condoms. I cried helplessly as I had nowhere to go and report. I was afraid to go to the police for fear of being returned home as my papers are not in order. In addition, sometimes going to the police when you are a prostitute they do not listen to you and instead say “she who goes looking for scars will get them, you got what you were looking for.”<sup>14</sup>

This story may seem to be a random occurrence, but it is an everyday risk in the life of a sex worker.

December 17<sup>th</sup> became the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers in a show of solidarity and to raise awareness of the violence that this profession experiences. This was first acknowledged in 2003 as a vigil of remembrance for the victims of the ‘Green River Killer’ Gary Ridgway. The Green River Killer began murdering around 1982 and was not caught until 2001. “They were easy to pick up without being noticed. I knew they would not be reported missing right away and might never be reported missing. I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught.”<sup>15</sup>

While he confessed to seventy-five to eighty murders only forty-eight were confirmed. “She who goes looking for scars will get them,

you got what you were looking for.”<sup>16</sup> These are common views from the public regarding violence against sex workers. The belief is that SW’s are in a dangerous profession; therefore they deserve the mistreatment and violence that comes their way. “The majority of violence against sex workers is not just violence against sex works—it’s also violence against transwomen, against women of color, against drug users, against immigrants. We cannot end the marginalization and victimization of all sex workers without also fighting trans-phobia, racism, stigma and criminalization of drug use, and xenophobia.”<sup>17</sup>

Trauma affects every person differently. Abuse of children can range from psychical, mental, sexual, and emotional. While some of these are more easily seen, most of them are hidden and can stay hidden unless someone looks deeper. “A US Justice Department study of reported rapes in 1992 in 13 states found that of girls under the age of 12 who were raped, one in five was raped by her own father, while 96 percent were committed by family members or acquaintances.”<sup>18</sup> This study may be out of date in 2019 but it still holds ground. The statistics of childhood sexual assault are grossly underreported. Children do not understand the abuse they receive or how to ask for help. As adults, it is hard for us to understand why a child would not come forward with this abuse in their lives. Yet, if abuse is all a child experiences it is perceived as normal behavior.

Children in sexually abusive homes are often exploited by the parents to get drugs, money, or obtain free rent. They use their child as a ploy to get what they need. Dominique E. Roe-Sepowitz completed a study of women who entered prostitution as an adolescent compared to those who entered at eighteen years or older. Further, she researched if they were abused sexually, mentally, physically, and emotionally as a child. “Fifty-five percent ... of the participants reported experiencing physical abuse in childhood, 45% ... reported experiencing childhood emotional abuse, and 79% ... reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse ... Two-thirds of the participants ... reported a history of running away from home.”<sup>19</sup>

The sexual exploitation of children occurs when someone enters into the sex work profession under the age of eighteen. Children this young are known to sell themselves for means of survival, which is called “survival sex.” This can be used in exchange for food, shelter, drugs, or money. “Women with a history of childhood sexual abuse had higher rates of prostitution involvement and entered prostitution slightly younger than those without a history of sexual abuse. A history of running away, though, was associated with entering prostitution at a younger age, but only affected entry into prostitution for those who were commercially sexually exploited in their early adolescents.”<sup>20</sup> Early childhood abuse can leave people with mental attributes that traffickers look for in a potential victim. Some of the mental attributes become dependency, drug addiction, depression, lack of self-confidence, feeling unable to refuse unwanted advances, shame, guilt, and difficulty maintaining personal boundaries. Some of the behavioral impacts include earlier sexual initiation, sex with multiple partners, unprotected sex, the inability to negotiate and use of contraceptives.<sup>21</sup> People with possible PTSD are easily manipulated because they need stability in their lives and the trafficker exploits their vulnerabilities.

While law enforcement tries their best, they cannot be blamed for the lack of attention put on trafficking. Most people know of trafficking in some form or another but can rarely spot it. Law enforcement personnel should be better trained to spot HT. Through more effective training police will become more active in the efforts to eradicate HT. “In recognizing these challenges, groups that promote more effective policing such as the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) and the IACP (International Association of Chiefs of Police) have invested in training agencies in victim-centered response. . . provided training and technical assistance to more than 1,000 law enforcement agencies.”<sup>22</sup> This is a step in the right direction to ensure our police force is trained appropriately to spot these crimes. There are 18,000 federal, state, county, and local agencies in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Suddenly, 1,000 agencies doesn’t seem as significant when there are 17,000 yet to be trained. The OVC has a detailed outline for those who want to be involved in the train-



ing. This program has three main objectives. “To enhance the quality of services available to assist victims of human trafficking. To develop resources that commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the TVPA. To develop a key resource to improve the response to victims of HT wherever they are identified.”<sup>24</sup> The most significant portion of this training is ensuring that a victims’ safety is not jeopardizing their physical or emotional healing. Victims are often told that if the police find them they will be put in jail or deported. Law enforcement elicits more panic than comfort. “In 2016, only 51% of victims of serious violent crime reported their victimization to the police.”<sup>25</sup>

“A detective in the Northeast explained that it is more difficult for the police to recognize victimization when people do not fit the stereotype of an iconic human trafficking victim, particularly when victims do not express gratitude about being ‘rescued’ by the police or are not young, White, and [a] U.S. citizen.”<sup>26</sup> Law enforcement have attempted to profile something that cannot be profiled, a trafficking victim can look like anyone and everyone. Police are known to arrest first and ask questions later. This creates a community of distrust when it becomes known that police are not looking to help or give a referral to those in need. As a society we need to pull away from incarceration being the go-to for problems we don’t know how to appropriately deal with. This only hurts those who were victimized and leaves them open to be victimized in the future.

What didn’t happen at the hospital was almost as harmful as the beating Mimi had suffered. No one questioned why such a young-looking girl was out late on an unusually cold night, underdressed and wearing too much makeup. And no one thought to separate Mimi from the man accompanying her in order to find out more about what happened. If they had, they might have learned that “Mimi” wasn’t her real name; it was Elis. . . She was an 18-year-old girl from Brazil who’d been trafficked to Las Vegas.<sup>27</sup>

Nurses are critical when spotting possible human trafficking cases. Contrary to popular belief, traffickers will often take their victims to the hospital for care. The image of traffickers is a ruthless, violent, fear-

invoking human being. However, in reality, traffickers who buy and sell human bodies are going to ensure their investment is taken care of.

There are small indicators one can look for that are seemingly unimportant but can lead to saving someone’s life. “The person doesn’t speak English and someone else is speaking for them. The person doesn’t have any identification or travel documents, or someone else is holding the documents. The person appears to be under the control and supervision of someone who never leaves the person alone. The person appears depressed, frightened, anxious, or otherwise distressed.”<sup>28</sup> If a health care worker has a possible HT case the most important thing is to not directly intervene — one must proceed with caution. Clinicians can demand the possible trafficker leave the room so they can talk with the patient. During this small but incredibly significant time you must be as efficient as possible. Some of the questions clinicians should ask are: “Where are you from? What brought you to the United States? How did you get here? Are you paid for your work? How much do you earn? Are you allowed to go out on your own? Have you been threatened with violence or harm if you decide you want to leave your job?”<sup>29</sup> Many victims do not self-identify, so blatantly asking if they are a trafficking victim could prove useless. These questions seem to curve around the issue of what they have gone through. Answering them can provide the clinician a better understanding of the situation. These have been tailored to get the information necessary while providing someone with a safe and confident space. If someone was to dive into such personal questions it would only serve to re-traumatize them.

Becoming aware of programs available is the best thing you can do as an advocate for both trafficking victims and sex workers’ rights. There are several organizations dedicated to helping victims of trafficking. Many of them help all effected — men, women, and children. The National Human Trafficking Hotline is available 24/7 to receive calls. These workers will provide the information necessary for the victim to safely seek further help and direct them to a safety shelter in their area.

Prajwala, an Indian company that began in 1996 in south India, has since expanded to international operations. They have worked tire-



lessly throughout the years to develop rehabilitation centers and work certification programs for survivors to take back control in their lives. Most recently they have launched “Swaraksha” a community awakening caravan to counter trafficking in three states of Telangana, Odisha & Andhra Pradesh.”<sup>30</sup>

Urban Light stands out amongst other shelters because they work on helping young boys and men who are at risk for trafficking in Thailand. They state, “A movement dedicated to restoring, rebuilding and empowering the lives of young men who are so often forgotten within the dialogue of abuse, exploitation and trafficking.”<sup>31</sup> Urban Light guides young men through eight pillars to help their community lead a life free from exploitation. The pillars are health, employment, housing, education, harm reduction, prevention, outreach, and legal support.<sup>32</sup> There are several programs around the globe. Most of the services are women-only services. Anyone can be a target of trafficking. Focusing on one sex only illuminates half the issue.

Sex workers and advocates tirelessly work toward de-criminalizing the profession of sex work for decades, as well as promoting safer streets. The brutality that SW face in their line of work has become a normality within our society. Customers and everyday people feel they can be violent and threaten workers without legal repercussions. Many projects partner with organizations that are dedicated to creating safer streets. This could be beneficial not only for sex workers but our community as a whole. These partnerships can allow crime ridden cities to flourish and benefit.

The Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) gained momentum in 2003 when they rallied and protested the crude treatment of Shannon Williams. Shannon Williams was a high school teacher and sex worker in the San Francisco Bay area. She had her life crash around her in 2003 when she was arrested under prostitution charges and her private life became public. Bay Area sex workers came to Ms. Williams defense and protested her arrest and mistreatment.<sup>33</sup> SWOP currently has chapters in Tucson, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Orlando, Tampa, Atlanta, Hawaii (state-wide), Chicago, Kentucky (state-wide), Baltimore,

Minneapolis, and Portland.<sup>34</sup> A newer branch of this organization is the POC-led chapter located in Seattle. The POC SWOP is currently working on a partnership with the Green Light Project. The Green Light Project is growing through Detroit creating safer streets for our community. “Participants install high-definition cameras and upgrade to high-speed network connections capable of allowing for consistent video streaming to DPD (Detroit Police Department). Participants also agree to provide adequate lighting on all parts of their properties — and to making other improvements as needed to ensure that their businesses are customer-friendly, safe, and inviting.”<sup>35</sup>

The Red Umbrella Project (REDUP), based out of Brooklyn, New York was created out of a need to give a voice back to the people in sex trades. They also work to give their members the skills of political analysis so they can better navigate social and economic justice issues.<sup>36</sup> People in this organization are fighting the decades-old stigma with “the blanket assumption that all people in the sex trades are victims does us a grave injustice. The victim narrative grays the line between consent and coercion, making it more difficult for people in the sex trades who are victimized — by clients, pimps, police, and courts — to seek justice.”<sup>37</sup> This project brings the injustice that sex workers face to the forefront and say they deserve justice just as anyone else. For centuries, society has perceived sex workers as the bottom-of-the-barrel, lowest in society, and criminals. This perception has been based solely on their occupation. While it may be hard for some to understand why a sex worker chose this career, it may be just as hard for others to comprehend why someone would want to be an engineer or historian. Sex work has remained legal in a few counties in Nevada. However, activists argue the profession must be de-criminalized across the U.S.

Another organization working towards decriminalizing of prostitution is Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE). COYOTE was founded in 1973 and has been working to repeal prostitution laws. Their beliefs would enable sex workers to work their profession in a safer manner.<sup>38</sup> The need for a pimp would become obsolete. Sex workers rarely come forward with their sexual assault because it is seen as

a non-issue in the justice system. No one believes a sex worker can be raped when they are selling the service of sex. "COYOTE members have also testified at government hearings, served as expert witnesses in trials, helped police with investigations of crimes against prostitutes, and provided sensitivity training to government and private non-profit agencies that provide services to prostitutes."<sup>39</sup> COYOTE provides training to government officials. Society needs to accept sex workers and learn from them rather than criminalizing them.

While the list of commonalities are perhaps longer than the differences of SW and HT victims, both hold equal importance. In the effort to understanding these communities and the selling of human bodies, one must look at the whole picture. Such as acknowledging the prevalence of childhood abuse as a strong similarity between SW and ST victims. As a society we must collectively come together to erase this cruel and violent trade of human bodies. The government needs to put money towards appropriately training all branches of law enforcement. Nurses should be required to take courses such as a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) so they are equipped to handle sensitive situations. People in power need to be aware of the tools at their disposal to handle a trafficking situation should it arise. As a society, we need to take care of one another and stop letting others be forgotten. Noticing these little things can save a life.

1. Shelly Reed, 2015, "The Rhetorical Possibilities of Representation: How Survivor Narratives Frame Sex Trafficking" Thesis, Colorado State University, 101.
2. Sabrina C. Boyce, Kimberly C. Brouwer, Daniel Triplett, Argentina E. Servin, Carlos Magis-Rodriguez, and Jay G. Silverman, "Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated With Child Sex Trafficking Among Female Sex Workers in Two US-Mexico Border Cities," *AJPH Research* 108, no. 8 (August 2018) 1052.
3. Frank Laczko and Marco A. Gramegna, "Developing Better Indicators of Human Trafficking," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10, no. 1 (summer/fall 2003) 180.
4. "Human Trafficking by the Numbers," Human Rights First American Ideals. Universal Values, last modified January 7, 2017, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>.
5. Donna Sabella, "The Role of the Nurse in Combatting Human Trafficking," *The American Journal of Nursing* 111, no. 2 (February 2011) 34.
6. Neal Kumar Katyal, "Men Who Own Women: A Thirteenth Amendment Critique of Forced Prostitution," *The Yale Law Journal* 103, no. 3 (December 1993) 805.
7. Lindsay Stewart, Angela Sebastiani, Gisella Delgado and Germán López, "Consequences of Sexual Abuse of Adolescents," *Reproductive Health Matters* 4, no. 7 (May 1996) 131.
8. "Abolition of Slavery," Interactive Constitution Made by National Constitution Center, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiii>.
9. Neal Kumar Katyal, "Men Who Own Women: A Thirteenth Amendment Critique of Forced Prostitution," *The Yale Law Journal* 103, no. 3 (December 1993) 792.
10. Roy Lubove, "The Progressive and the Prostitutes," *The Historian* 24, no. 3 (May 1962) 313.
11. Current Federal Laws," Polaris: Freedom happens now., accessed November 17, 2019, <https://polarisproject.org/current-federal-laws>.
12. Jooyoung Lee and Sasha Reid, "Serial Killers & Their Easy Prey," *SAGE Journals* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 2018) 50.
13. Jooyoung Lee and Sasha Reid, "Serial Killers & Their Easy Prey," *SAGE Journals* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 2018) 48.
14. Felicia and Muchaneta, "Sex Workers' Stories," *Agenda: Empowering Women and Gender Equity*. No. 82 (2009) 114.
15. Jooyoung Lee and Sasha Reid, "Serial Killers & Their Easy Prey," *SAGE Journals* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 2018) 48.
16. Felicia and Muchaneta "Sex Workers' Stories," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 82 (2009) 114.



17. "Homepage," December 17<sup>th</sup>, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://december17.swopusa.org/>.
18. Lindsay Stewart, Angela Sebastiani, Gisella Delgado and Germán López, "Consequences of Sexual Abuse of Adolescents," *Reproductive Health Matters* 4, no. 7 (May 1996) 131.
19. Dominique E. Roe-Sepowitz, "Juvenile Entry Into Prostitution: The Role of Emotional Abuse," *Violence Against Women* 18. No. 5 (2012) 570.
20. Dominique E. Roe-Sepowitz, "Juvenile Entry Into Prostitution: The Role of Emotional Abuse," *Violence Against Women* 18. No. 5 (2012) 566.
21. Lindsay Stewart, Angela Sebastiani, Gisella Delgado and Germán López, "Consequences of Sexual Abuse of Adolescents," *Reproductive Health Matters* 4, no. 7 (May 1996) 131.
22. Amy Farrell, Meredith Dank, Ieke de Vries, Matthew Kafafian, Andrea Hughes, and Sarah Lockwood, "Failing victims? Challenges of the police response to human trafficking," *Criminology & Public Policy* 18 (2019) 650.
23. Duren Banks, Joshua Hendrix, Matthew Hickman, and Tracey Kyckelhahn, "National Sources of Law Enforcement Employment Data," *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (April 2016) 1.
24. "OVC FY 2019 Specialized Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance and Resource Development," Office for Victims of Crime, Google, accessed November 25, 2019 <https://www.ovc.gov/grants/pdfxt/FY19-Human-Trafficking-Specialized-TTA.pdf>.
25. Amy Farrell, Meredith Dank, Ieke de Vries, Matthew Kafafian, Andrea Hughes, and Sarah Lockwood, "Failing victims? Challenges of the police response to human trafficking," *Criminology & Public Policy* 18 (2019) 651.
26. Amy Farrell, Meredith Dank, Ieke de Vries, Matthew Kafafian, Andrea Hughes, and Sarah Lockwood, "Failing victims? Challenges of the police response to human trafficking," *Criminology & Public Policy* 18 (2019) 659.
27. Donna Sabella, "The Role of the Nurse in Combatting Human Trafficking," *The American Journal of Nursing* 111, no. 2 (February 2011) 29.
28. Donna Sabella, "The Role of the Nurse in Combatting Human Trafficking," *The American Journal of Nursing* 111, no. 2 (February 2011) 34.
29. Donna Sabella, "The Role of the Nurse in Combatting Human Trafficking," *The American Journal of Nursing* 111, no. 2 (February 2011) 35.
30. "Milestones," PRAJWALA, Google, accessed November 24, 2019, <http://prajwalaindia.com/milestone.html>.
31. "Urban Light Ending the Exploitation of Boys in Thailand," Urban Light, Google, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.urban-light.org/#home>.
32. "Be the Light," Urban Light, Google, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.urban-light.org/our-work>.
33. "Mission Statement," SWOP USA, Google, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://swopusa.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.
34. "Chapters," SWOP USA, Google, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://swopusa.org/chapters/>.
35. "Project Green Light Detroit," City of Detroit, Google, last modified January 1, 2016, <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/police-department/project-green-light-detroit>.
36. "Criminal, Victim, or Worker?" Red Umbrella Project, Google, last modified October 2014, <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/RedUP-NYHTIC-FINALweb.pdf>.
37. "Criminal, Victim, or Worker?" Red Umbrella Project, Google, last modified October 2014, <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/RedUP-NYHTIC-FINALweb.pdf>.
38. "What is COYOTE?," COYOTE LA, last modified 2004, [http://coyotela.org/what\\_is.html](http://coyotela.org/what_is.html).
39. "What is COYOTE?," COYOTE LA, last modified 2004, [http://coyotela.org/what\\_is.html](http://coyotela.org/what_is.html).



## Bibliography

- "Abolition of Slavery." Interactive Constitution Made by National Constitution Center. Accessed November 17, 2019. <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiii>.
- Banks, Duren, Joshua Hendrix, Matthew Hickman, and Tracey Kyckelhahn. "National Sources of Law Enforcement Employment Data." *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (April 2016) 1-17.
- "Be the Light." Urban Light. Google. Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://www.urban-light.org/our-work>.
- Boyce, Sabrina C., Kimberly C. Brouwer, Daniel Triplett, Argentina E. Servin, Carlos Magis-Rodriguez, and Jay G. Silverman. "Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated With Child Sex Trafficking Among Female Sex Workers in Two US-Mexico Border Cities." *AJPH Research* 108, no. 8 (August 2018) 1049-1054.
- "Chapters." SWOP USA. Google. Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://swopusa.org/chapters/>.
- "Criminal, Victim, or Worker?" Red Umbrella Project. Google. Last modified October 2014. <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/RedUP-NYHTIC-FINALweb.pdf>.
- Farrell, Amy, Meredith Dank, Ieke de Vries, Matthew Kafafian, Andrea Hughes, and Sarah Lockwood. "Failing victims? Challenges of the police response to human trafficking." *Criminology & Public Policy* 18 (2019) 649-673.
- Felicia and Muchaneta. "Sex Workers' Stories." *Agenda: Empowering Women and Gender Equity*. No. 82 (2009) 113-114.
- "Homepage." December 17<sup>th</sup>. Accessed November 17, 2019. <https://december17.swopusa.org/>.
- "Human Trafficking by the Numbers." human rights first American ideals. Universal values. Last modified January 7, 2017. <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>.
- Katyal, Neal Kumar. "Men Who Own Women: A Thirteenth Amendment Critique of Forced Prostitution." *The Yale Law Journal* 103, no. 3 (December 1993) 791-826.
- Laczko, Frank and Marco A. Gramegna. "Developing Better Indicators of Human Trafficking." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10, no. 1 (summer/fall 2003) 179-194.
- Lee, Jooyoung and Sasha Reid. "Serial Killers & Their Easy Prey." *SAGE Journals* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 2018) 46-51.
- Lerum, Kari. "Human Wrong vs. Human Rights." *Contexts* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2014) 22-24.
- Lubove, Roy. "The Progressive and the Prostitutes." *The Historian* 24, no. 3 (May 1962) 308-330.
- "Milestones." PRAJWALA. Google. Accessed November 24, 2019. <http://prajwalaindia.com/milestone.html>.
- "Mission Statement." SWOP USA. Google. Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://swopusa.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.
- "Project Green Light Detroit." City of Detroit. Google. Last modified January 1, 2016. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/police-department/project-green-light-detroit>.
- Reed, Shelly. 2015. "The Rhetorical Possibilities of Representation: How Survivor Narratives Frame Sex Trafficking." Thesis. Colorado State University, 1-145.
- Roe-Sepowitz, Dominique E. "Juvenile Entry Into Prostitution: The Role of Emotional Abuse." *Violence Against Women* 18, No. 5 (2012) 562-579.
- Sabella, Donna. "The Role of the Nurse in Combatting Human Trafficking." *The American Journal of Nursing* 111, no. 2 (February 2011) 28-39.
- Stewart, Lindsay, Angela Sebastiani, Gisella Delgado and Germán López. "Consequences of Sexual Abuse of Adolescents." *Reproductive Health Matters* 4, no. 7 (May 1996) 129-134.
- "Urban Light Ending the Exploitation of Boys in Thailand." Urban Light. Google. Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://www.urban-light.org/#home>.
- "What is COYOTE?." COYOTE LA. Last modified 2004. [http://coyotela.org/what\\_is.html](http://coyotela.org/what_is.html).

## FEATURED ARTIST

# Interview with Candace Telford

Preferred Name: Candace

Pronouns: She/her

Major: Psychology

Classification (freshman, sophomore, etc.): Junior

Hometown: Oklahoma City

*Tell us a little about yourself in general—interests, short background, history with art, whatever you feel would help paint a picture of who you are:*

I am a 20-year-old young female who has many, many piercings and very short hair. Growing up I was homeschooled most of my life. I have seven biological siblings and I am one of the middle children. Much of my free time is spent listening to music, dancing around in my room, and drawing. Music is something that means the absolute world to me. If I was not an artist in the sense of painting and drawing, I would hope to be able to be a musician. I began to really invest in art when I was 14 years old. Since then I have pushed my boundaries and try to be able to work with various mediums and become the best I can be. I have never had any type of art education and I am all self-taught. While I have not chosen art as a major, it will always be a passion of mine and I want

to keep it that way and not necessarily make it my means of income so that I may continue enjoying it as a pleasure rather than work.

*What would you say most of your art is about? What subject matters, styles, media, etc., drive the pieces you create?*

Most of my pieces are female-related. This is because I am a female and I draw many of the feelings that I have. I find women to be gorgeous creatures, but not just women, all humans in general. As I have grown and developed my style, I have gone from drawing, to canvas painting, to digital art. I want to be as diverse as possible. However, my first love will always be pencil on paper. The main drive that I have when creating my pieces is that I want people to be able to look at them and relate. I want people to know that they are not the only ones experiencing certain thoughts. That they are not alone. If an artwork of mine speaks to just one person then I know that it was worth creating.

*What are some of your inspirations—in art or in general?*

Much of my inspiration comes from personal experiences. All of my artwork reflects a part of me. I like to call my pieces my babies because in a way that's what they are to me, an offspring of my struggle to reach actualization. I feel most inspired when I'm going through a difficult time; I have realized this is when my best work comes out of me. Hardship spurs my passion to remind others that they are not alone on the road of life.

*What inspired the series of pieces you submitted for the journal? And what do the pieces mean to you? You can talk about each piece individually or talk about them as a collective whole.*

As a whole, I submitted these particular pieces for the journal because I feel like they represent what the prompt was accurately.

#1.) Dual Realities- this drawing represents how reality can be more accurate than we initially think. This may seem confusing because reality is reality, but what I mean by this is, the fact that someone can make a joke like, "I really want to kill myself" and laugh it off but in actuality, they may pull the trigger tomorrow. Not everything is black and white, and people forget this. Many of us hide our true feelings sometimes the gray is the scariest place to be.

#2.) Bond Feelings- for this piece I was trying to work on my color distribution and symmetry. When thinking about what inspired this piece, I was feeling trapped at the time. The x-ray type feel was portrayed to show how many times feelings are overlooked instead of taken into account.

#3.) Doubled Actuality- Self-harm is a hardship many people face in life. Most of the time people's problems cannot be seen by the outside world. We hide them behind the mask of "okayness". Bad and good, yin and yang, a person's worth is not diminished due to the trauma they have experienced. I tried to pose the two women, who are technically one in the same, with their heads up strong because they have overcome even while choosing not the healthiest of outlets.

*Do these works fit into your typical style and subject matter? If yes, what about these pieces stand out to you? If no, how do they differ from your norm—and why deviate?*

These pieces fit into my typical style because they are of women. Almost all of my pieces are depictions of females. That being said, they differ from my norm because they are of color. Most of the time I choose black and gray. I wanted to push my boundaries and try to work with color when I decided to do these pieces. I also felt as if the color brought more meaning to them. You are able to clearly see the variation of layers with the contrasting colors.



*What made you decide to submit to Central Dissent? And why these pieces specifically?*

I chose to submit to this journal because many of my loved ones have pushed me to be more open with sharing my art. Only this last year have I been comfortable with doing this. It has always been hard to open up my drawings and paintings because of the critiques people make. I've never felt confident in the skill that I possess. However, doing this has been one of the best experiences of my life. It has helped me grow and evolve as a person positively becoming more confident in myself and the influence I can have on the world. I chose these pieces specifically because I feel as if they are some of my most relatable ones. Hopefully, when people view these, the artwork will stir some kind of self-reflection.

*Many of the staff were fans of "Stolen Innocence," and (as of now) it's likely to be our cover piece. Can you tell us more about this piece in particular?*

This piece I drew when I was graduating out of high school and taking concurrent classes at UCO. What inspired this piece was not wanting to grow up being forced to. I have experienced, on different occasions, instances that have forced me to mature much earlier than I should've. My innocence was stolen from me at a young age. The preteen girl ripped the head off the doll in an act to stay within the childhood she longs for. Unfortunately, many individuals are forced to grow up much earlier than they are supposed to. Children are not able to be kids anymore. They have what makes them children (innocence) taken before they realize it's even gone. Forced maturity is the worst kind because it is not natural.

*Our theme for this issue is "The Future of Love and Sexuality." What does the theme mean to you, and what do you see that future looking like? And how does/do you want your work to reflect that?*

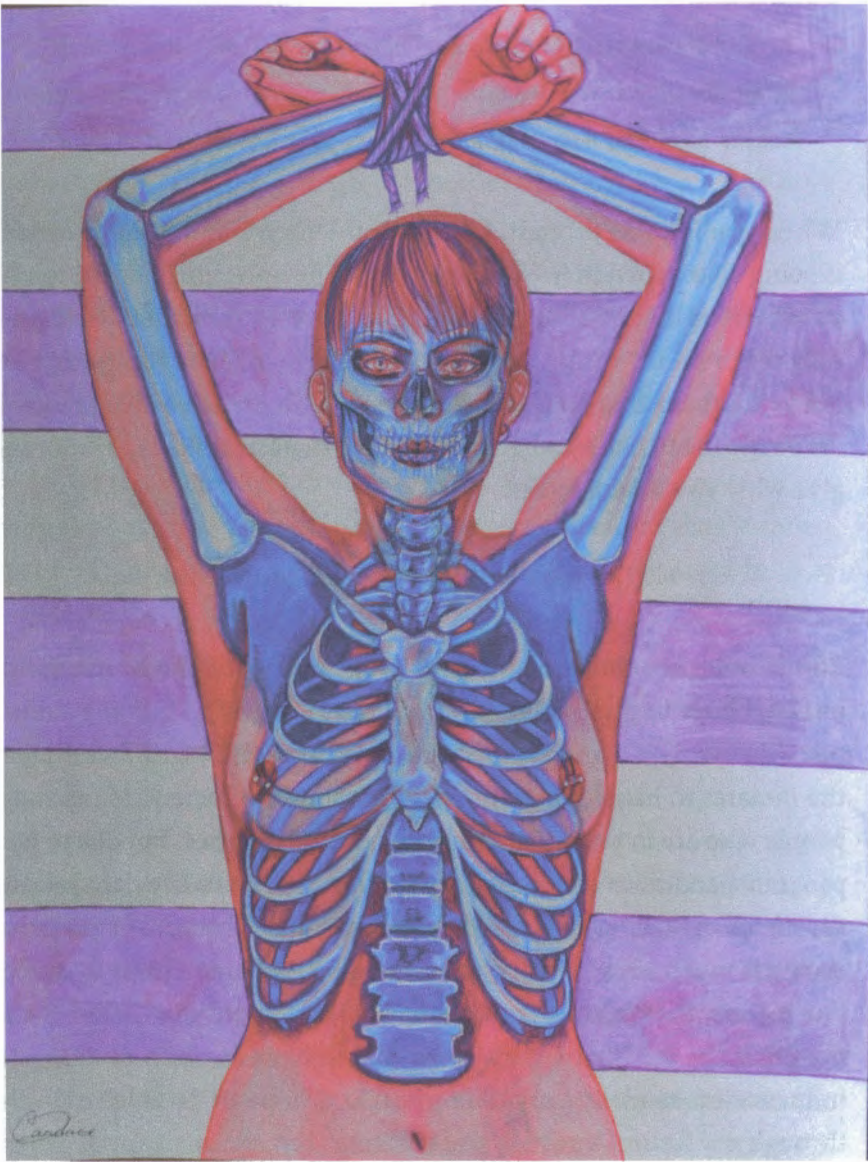
When reading this prompt, I feel as if the future of love and sexuality is being able to obtain it within yourself. The upcoming generation has an extreme amount of difficulty finding love with themselves. Instead they try to find it within other people, substances, and things that will not bring them true fulfillment. If one truly wants to be able to unconditionally love another, they have to love themselves first. You cannot give what you do not have.

*What's next for you—with your art, with your studies, etc.?*

Future holds me obtaining my psychology major and minor in criminal justice. I hope to go straight into my master's degree to become a therapist. My overall dream is to become a prison psychologist and evaluate the inmates to help them with rehabilitation into society. Many times, people who are in prisons are there for menial offenses. But due to poor programs and not receiving the help they need once they are released their back in the system within a couple months. This goal of mine does not have much to do with art: it is what I believe I am meant to do. Just like my art, the reason I am alive today and the purpose I find within my life is the fact that I want to be able to have as much as a positive influence on as many people as possible. I hope to be able to do this through my future drawings and paintings but also my overall growth as a human being.

*Your work is fantastic. If readers want to see more of it, where can they find it/you online?*

As of right now I only have an Instagram page to follow, it is [cj\\_expression](#). This is where I post all of my artwork and progress videos.



**Bond Feelings**  
*Candace Telford*



**Doubled Actuality**  
*Candace Telford*





**Dual Realities**  
*Candace Telford*

## POETRY

# Antigen / Antibody

Jeffrey Alfier

I sit still for the needle's siphon  
as if my skin were listening.

A technician holds three vials of me  
against the powder-blue of her scrubs.

She asks me to affirm my name on each one  
as I sign a form "in care of myself."

Blood will hold secrets for only so long—  
a quitclaim deed already in the works.

Blood the last border, so easy to breach.  
Later I'm informed that herpes lives

its dormant life at the base of my spine —  
that part of me that lay curved in morning's



blankets as light escaped half-open blinds to cut across  
a crystal vase of bright blossoms,

across someone slipping out the door,  
hoping he'll be forgiven

for leaving me so soundly asleep.

# FEATURED CREATIVE WRITER

# Interview with Monica Hernandez

Pronouns: She/Her

Major: English Education/Creative Writing/Women and Gender

Classification (freshman, sophomore, etc.): Junior

Hometown: South OKC

*Tell us a little about yourself in general—interests, short background, your writing history, whatever you feel would help paint a picture of who you are.*

I am a Mexican-American 2nd Generation artist from southside Oklahoma City. I like to consider myself as someone who has become an artist due to early onset self-awareness since a young age. That of which has allowed me to think critically about the way in which history's institutions have created reason for my trials and tribulations. I believe that one's experience to history demands to be documented, recorded, and remembered. For me, to create a shared feeling through writing is something that I feel can be extremely impactful. As someone who mainly responds to private and public experiences through drawing, painting, and film, to write is something that comes naturally to me, yet I am still learning how to create something more than lines on a sheet



of paper. My goal with my art is to provide insight to the experiences and effects of gender, poverty, capitalism, and dysfunction within families, in particular to those within my community as well as those who are blind to the experiences not within their bubble of realization.

*What would you say most of your creative writing is about? What subject matters, styles, etc., drive the pieces you create?*

As someone who closely observes how moments in history have created specific social behavior and systems, much of my work tends to focus on the institutions that limit the full potential of a happy and healthy quality of life. Gender, for example, is found in every facet of behavior. That of which often limits liberty, love, and success. Therefore, I often the effects of gender such as misogyny, toxic masculinity, the sexualization of women, etc. As someone who thinks a lot about the ways in which gender is perceived and acted on, I think it's important to bring awareness to the universal oppression that gender often creates.

On another note, I also focus on the effects of generational trauma, with an emphasis on capitalism and the emotional and financial stress it brings upon parents and their children, an issue I have first-hand experience with. It's something that I feel a lot of people in my community struggle with but is rarely spoken about or researched upon and I believe it is necessary to bring attention to the issue of dysfunction within families brought on by economic status.

Where there are so many who fail to realize the negative effects that some institutions create, I hope to provide a sense of realization, understanding, and empathy to those who consume my work. I seek to create enlightenment and security through my observations and personal experience that some may not have otherwise been exposed to.

*Who are some of your inspirations—in writing and in general?*

Inspiration comes to me through film, lyrics, collected images, historical writings, and most importantly, my feelings. As a high schooler I consumed a lot of Sylvia Plath's poetry and felt such a deep sense of connection to this woman who shared similar outlooks on life, love and fulfillment despite being so far away from me, periodically-speaking.

Likewise, I find myself continually inspired by artists such as Frida Kahlo, Toni Morrison, Barry Jenkins, Kimya Dawson, Brad Bird, and Kurt Cobain where their work often fills me with a strong need to organically create my own interpretation of big and small experiences.

*What inspired the series of pieces you submitted for the journal? And what do the pieces mean to you? You can talk about each piece individually or talk about them as a collective whole.*

Taking the issue's topic into consideration, I wanted to submit pieces that essentially demonstrates how gender has affected my perception of love, identity, and growth.

Each piece, while different in setting and subject, tie together as a collective response to the effect that gender roles create. "Me and Michael" delves into homophobia, generational trauma and dysfunction as caused by preconceived ideas as to what toys are considered appropriate for children to play with based on gender. As a kid, my brother and I were often left alone to have fun with our dolls, up until my mother returned home from work. I wanted to go back to those memories with the intention of highlighting my childhood's lack of emotional understanding by means of gendered notions, albeit with a touch of love and confidence from older sibling to younger sibling.

In turn "Thank God for Kate Chopin" was something I wrote in high school, sometime after reading *The Awakening*. It was a moment of feeling completely validated. So many times in literature we see often more than not the only way for complete liberation from gendered

expectations is death. From Greek mythology to British literature, women are placed in a cage with little means to escape. I wanted to express my frustrations with this caged-in feeling by channeling similar feelings from Sylvia Plath and Kate Chopin.

“Body O Mine” stems from that caged-in feeling by means of discomfort from having to deal with being consumed as someone with a female body. I wanted to express that yearning one might have to change, or similarly the constant struggle of not being able to. I was stuck on the image of a wishbone and how that could represent the desire to change one’s form into something more desirable.

“Evil Woman” acts as an example as to how having a female form, especially within a Mexican culture, often forces one to conform to the cage of domesticity, however in my case, because I am distanced from the culture as 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (as well as being incredibly defiant) I wanted to use this poem as a call for rebellion to those who struggle with standing up for themselves in a culture where gender is upheld strongly by women and men.

*Do these works fit into your typical style and subject matter? If yes, what about these pieces stand out to you? If no, how do they differ from your norm—and why deviate?*

I would say that out of all the poems, “Michael and Me” deviates the most from the way in which I usually construct my writings. I’m not well instructed in the form of poetry, so the majority of my work is a bit freestyled and aligned to my aesthetic of emotion. “Michael and Me,” however deviates from my usual form of keeping distance, as if I am explaining a concept, to something much more intimate. This poem instead places my experience very directly, where the reader can be envisioned as a bystander in the room. I try to emit a vague sense of vulnerability in my work but in this piece I wanted the effects of generational trauma, trauma, and dysfunction to come across very clear in

my experience as a child. It is certainly different than my usual aura of mystery within my works but I feel like if anything that the intimacy and direct visuals of the experience provide a stronger impact than it would without those aspects, something I hope to experiment with again in the future.

*What made you decide to submit to Central Dissent? And why these pieces specifically?*

I was introduced to *Central Dissent* during my first semester as a transfer student at UCO through Golden Pony and was completely amazed that something such as itself could exist in the state of Oklahoma! Dissent is something I am completely made out of so it made sense to me that my work would appeal to the journal’s core subjects and themes. Each piece that I submitted has to do with gender in one way or form and because so much of my work often deals with the subject, I was a bit at odds at what to submit. Ultimately, I chose the pieces that I did because I felt that they spoke to several facets of gender, something that I believe at least one person could relate to. Whether it be because someone else has experienced a relative telling them “Boys don’t play with girl toys,” or feeling utterly disjointed with the way your body moves in the world, I wanted each poem to speak to feelings that one person or the other has experienced, either first-hand or otherwise.

*“Body O Mine” made many of our editors take notice. If you haven’t already said all there is to say about the piece earlier, could you tell us more about it?*

As mentioned, “Body O Mine” comes from a place of discomfort and yearning to change. The visual of Venus is meant to represent the beauty, fertility, and love that is associated with her, and in turn women of the world. It goes back to these expectations women often have, as per their sex to conceive, to marry, and to be motherly, all of which



I cannot adhere to. However, despite this discomfort, it isn't easy to change, hence why a baby such as myself, a blank slate, is destined to remain yearful to change into something that does not carry the connotations of Venus.

*"Evil Woman" paints a cultural picture many individuals may not always see. Tell us more about how important (Mexican) culture is to your pieces and why cultural insight is important in writing and art.*

This poem was a concept I wanted to explore because so often when it comes to women and young girls acting out of the set social codes brought on by Mexican tradition (being feminine, obedient, and domestic), they are depicted as wicked, dishonorable, and hopeless, never being directly told they are evil (an exaggeration at most) but certainly treated as such when they go against the grain.

I think pieces like this are important because it is often, I see not many people in my community considering that they *can* rise up and that they *can* create an environment of accountability and growth. It is even more important that subjects such as this are presented to people unaware of these issues so that they may widen their knowledge of oppression in cultures other than theirs in order to recognize and break toxic behaviors either demonstrated or witnessed.

*Our theme for this issue is "The Future of Love and Sexuality." What does the theme mean to you, and what do you see that future looking like? And how does/do you want your work to reflect that?*

The future of love and sexuality, to me, holds the possibility for change. When you come from a past that tells you to behave one way, and one way only, the only way out is up. Therefore, by realizing and understanding how my past has molded myself and those around me, I can learn how to grow forward from these negative experiences as well as

teach what I've learned to others. I seek to teach my loved ones how to break beyond the borders of what is considered as love and what is considered appropriate of sexuality. I seek a future where happiness is constant. A future where my loved ones learn to heal. If my work provides even as much as a drop of influence to understanding how to do so, I believe myself to be successful.

*What's next for you—with your writing, with your studies, etc.?*

I'm trekking forward into my twenties trying to finish up my Junior year while simultaneously wanting to expand my artistic ventures. While I very much appreciate the craft of writing, I'd love to create something a bit more visual. Although because I truly do love so much aspects of art, I want to combine something that appeals to each scope. Whether it be through film, paintings, collages, zines, or creative writing, I definitely will be working hard to continue creating art for others to consume and hopefully "feel" from.

*Your work is fantastic. If readers want to read or see more of it, where can they find it/you online?*

I don't have anything particularly professional at the moment, but I did recently discover Medium! You can find my work there through my handle @monicaaraceli. I'm also a member of UCO's writer's community The Golden Pony. We host live readings throughout the semester and I usually accompany other really great writers at those events. You can keep up with our events through @goldenponyguild on Twitter.

*Is there anything else you'd like to add? Or anything I didn't ask that you'd want to answer or mention?*

I just want to say thank you to *Central Dissent* for providing me the opportunity to display my writings to the community and I can't wait for the next issue!

# Body O' Mine

Monica Hernandez

In utero, she did  
dote a kiss onto the soft mound of my red forehead;  
Imitating God, birthing She.  
Hips like wishbone, and breasts of teardrop,  
That is what Venus did unto Me.  
To take that wishbone and snap it into two,  
I dream of a form, free of her curse, I dream of someone  
entirely new.  
In my mother's arms now, I am, head of black and heart of  
gold.  
She squeezes this baby, hopeful but unaware  
that she will struggle and squirm  
to love this body,  
this body o' mine,  
made to bear.



# Evil Woman

Monica Hernandez

*I am mujer malvada*

For I do not grow my hair down to my spine's end  
Nor cater to or pick up after the loud, leering men  
Who size me up now and then

Taking in my yellow skin and disproportionate frame  
Devising how I can take their last name  
Implant a child in my womb and punish me for the boy's sake,  
my inherent shame

*"No te vas a casar actuando así"*

That may be then, this is now

*I am mujer malvada*

To be your wife and servant  
I tie my Fallopian curse into a cherry kiss, I shave my head  
down to the scalp, I love her more than you ever will and I  
will always firmly disavow

For the women in Mexico who cry, conform, and enable,  
Take this knife and cut God's cable.

# Me and Michael

Monica Hernandez

hidden box of half-naked Bratz and missing miscellaneous heels  
you, so small, so sensitive, searching for Yazmin  
using my hairbrush to smooth out her frenzied ponytail; youth  
hurrying to play, before mom gets home, peering from the  
apartment window; happy  
from time to time, treating Yazmin and Jade to tennis and tea  
but not packing fast enough when the  
key turned at 5:45  
promptly killing our joy, coordinated with cussing  
and swift snatching  
sometimes scratching  
us; blood

hiccups interrupting in-between your cries  
our box found, and taken—  
taken and hidden  
hushing my voice and cradling your tears  
knowing your grandma will gift you Yazmin next year

my hand in your hand; yellow and cream, four years in-between  
little brother so sensitive, you are who you are  
not what she wants, or believes to be true:  
you are not contained by the color blue

# Thank God for Kate Chopin

Monica Hernandez

Just as Sylvia had turned on that stove  
That Heat  
Is Sweltering me Up  
I find myself engulfed in the flames of the fifth circle of Hell  
The blaze exposing all; bone and feeling  
That of which leaves only molars behind and undecipherable last  
goodbyes  
My skin melts  
At the sound of a baby's wail; hungry  
Born to eat and suffer...  
For What?  
The smell of burnt flesh wafts up my nose  
Rare steak for Friday, and a full stomach, for him  
The inferno, both inside and out, scorches what's left of me  
Like the pages of my diary  
Before the blaze takes what is left of my sentience, I think about the  
ocean's waves  
Just as the harsh currents only know of the unknown, along with  
the cosmos above the fire and brimstone  
The enigma continues without me.





**Falling**  
*Tara Jean Murphy*

## BIOGRAPHIES

Jeffrey Alfier's most recent book, *The Shadow Field*, was published in 2020 by Louisiana Literature Press. His publication credits include *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Chiron Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Permafrost*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. He is the founder of Blue Horse Press and *San Pedro River Review*.



Jessica J Appleby is an assistant professor of French at the University of Central Oklahoma with a PhD from the University of Colorado. Her research interests focus on medieval and Renaissance epic poetry, with secondary interests in the French graphic novel, gender and sexuality studies, sci-fi/fantasy, and pop-culture pedagogy. Her current project maps the violence of epic poetry as enacted on the female body.

Tan Gedick is a graduate student at FAU Erlangen Nürnberg in English Studies. His research interests include pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and corpus linguistics. He has engaged with posthumanist thought and contributed to the convergence of a new field: posthumanist applied linguistics. Within this field, he is hoping to work on gender studies and linguistic phenomena from a posthumanist point of view.



Monica Hernandez is an aspiring 2nd generation Mexican-American writer and artist in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. When approaching a creative piece it is important that she is able to convey the complex and overlapping issues regarding gender, sexuality, poverty, and mortality in a manner that is intimate, critical, and insightful. Always interested in understanding how certain feelings can be conveyed, Hernandez relies on written word, traditional art, and film to best portray these issues.



Tara Jean Murphy is an artist and illustrator from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her works tend to focus on the way that people view themselves both physically and psychologically. More of her work is available through Instagram, via @rocketsox.



Jennifer Phillips is a history graduate student at the University of Central Oklahoma. She is currently working on her thesis regarding human trafficking which will prepare her to study human rights in law school. Ms. Phillips is also the manager of the Women's Research and BGLTQ+ Student Center.

Candace Telford is a twenty-year-old and she just started her senior year in college. She is currently a Psychology major with a minor in Criminal Justice. She hopes to continue creating art as a method to positively influence the world around her.



## SUBMISSION INFORMATION

*The Central Dissent: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* accepts original work in research, poetry, prose, and visual art. Submission information and editorial guidelines are accessible through our New Plains Student Publishing website: [newplainsreview.com](http://newplainsreview.com).

## ORDERING INFORMATION

Please contact us at [central.dissent@gmail.com](mailto:central.dissent@gmail.com) for pricing and ordering information.



CPSIA information can be obtained  
at [www.ICGtesting.com](http://www.ICGtesting.com)  
Printed in the USA  
FSHW022317090521  
81211FS



# THE CENTRAL Dissent

A JOURNAL OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

---

*The Central Dissent: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* is an interdisciplinary academic journal based out of the University of Central Oklahoma's College of Liberal Arts, Department of English. The journal is produced by New Plains Student Publishing and is sponsored by UCO's Women's Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center.

---

New Plains Student Publishing  
University of Central Oklahoma

ISBN 2370000882585



2 370000 882585