

**Parasitic Reference vs. R-based Narrowing:
Lexical Pragmatics Meets *He-Man***

Laurence R. Horn, Yale University
Steven R. Kleinedler, Houghton-Mifflin Co/ U. of Chicago

One of the central issues in feminist critiques of language has always been *he-man* language, to borrow the term innovated by Martyna (1983) for epicene or sex-indefinite *he* and the for the use of the so-called generic *man* on display in the bare singulars of (1a) and the ordinary quantified indefinites of (1b).

- (1) a. Man is mortal.
Man is the animal that laughs (cries, speaks, etc.)
The proper study of mankind is man. [Pope]
b. What a piece of work is a man. [Hamlet II.ii.317]
No man is an island. [Donne]

What is the status of the kind-referring bare singular *man* of (1a) and its sex-specific hyponyms exemplified in (2)?

- (2) Man is enemie to virginitie. [All's Well That Ends Well, I.i.125]
Man's heart must be in his head. Woman's head must be in her heart. [Coleridge]
Higgamus hoggamus, woman's monogamous.
Hoggamus higgamus, man is polygamous.
[variously attributed to William James, Dorothy Parker, or Ogden Nash]

For Krifka et al. (1995: 6) the *man* of (1a) is an NP rather than an ordinary noun (or N'). Notice, however, that the bare singular, while by definition excluding determiners, does take modifiers: *modern man*, *Cro-Magnon man*, *working man*. The OED not un insightfully sees the bare singular of (1) and (2) as a "quasi-proper name". There are many interesting questions to pursue in this domain—why, for example, are *man* and *woman* the only quasi-proper bare singulars appearing outside of contexts inducing mass conversion?

- (3) #(The) dog is (#the) man's best friend.
#In elementary school, boy gets lower grades than girl.
Rabbit is {#more fertile/[^]tougher} than chicken.
{Man/#Dog} is an inappropriate trustee of the ecosystem.
{Man/Dog} is an inappropriate menu selection for vegans.

We must unfortunately omit any exploration of this territory here, beyond offering the speculation that the oppositions between *man* and other culturally salient quasi-proper names—*God*, *Nature*—is no accident.

We turn instead to the perennial issue of the putative ambiguity between sex-specific and quasi-generic *man*, if ambiguity it is:

Sometimes the ambiguity of *man* is dismissed on the grounds that two different words are involved and that they are homonyms, like a *row* of cabbages and a *row* on the lake. Two words cannot be homonyms, however, if one includes the other as does *man* in the [1990] Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: "A human being, especially an adult male human being"...The unabridged Webster's Third New International Dictionary is more precise; *man* is "a member of the human race...a human being. Now usually used of males except in general or indefinite applications." (Miller & Swift 1991: 29)

As we shall see, the maligned "imprecise" Collegiate definition, with its telltale "especially", may be more insightful than it appears.

Is it in fact the case that there can be no homonymy or, more to the point, no POLYSEMY between two meanings if one properly includes the other? For Kempson (1979, 1980), the only kind of polysemy allowed in natural language is of precisely the type exemplified by *man* (or *lion*, or *cat*, or *rectangle*), in which the extension of one term includes a subset lexically designated by a more specific term (*woman*, *lioness*, *kitten*, *square*), resulting in the dual uses of the original term for the general (superset) meaning and for the complement of the lexically designated subset. Horn (1984b) and Rohdenburg (1985) survey a variety of additional cases of autohyponymy, the inclusive or privative meaning relation that may result from any of a variety of semantic shifts. In some cases there may be multiple inclusion (e.g. *Yankee* 'inhabitant of the U.S. [esp. Northern U.S. [esp. New England]]'); in others there may be the same sort of neutralization between opposites that we have with *man/woman* (e.g. *day*, excluding or embracing *night*).

Whatever polysemy or homonymy may obtain with *man* is no innocent lexical happenstance. This is sometimes expressed by an invocation of Alma Graham's "ABC formula", cited approvingly by Miller & Swift (1991: 36) and others:

If you have a group half of whose members are A's and half of whose members are B's and if you call the group C, then A's and B's may be equal members of group C. But if you call the group A, there is no way that B's can be equal to A's within it. The A's will always be the rule and B's will always be the exception—the subgroup, the subspecies, the outsiders.

In "The Myth of the Neutral 'Man'," her classic critique of *he-man* language, the analytic philosopher Janice Moulton (1981) assimilates the putatively sex-neutral occurrences of *he* and *man* to the phenomenon she dubs PARASITIC REFERENCE:

Tissues are called Kleenex; petroleum jelly, Vaseline; bleach, Clorox, etc.—to the economic benefit of the specific brands referred to and to the detriment of those brands that are ignored by this terminology. The alleged gender-neutral uses of “he”, “man”, etc. are just further examples...A gender-specific term, one that refers to a high-status subset of the whole class, is used *in place of* a neutral generic term. (Moulton 1981: 113)

This process—additional examples of which appear in (4)—is well-known, not only to lexical semanticists and lexicographers mapping the tendency for the brand name to lose its capital letters and become its own superordinate, but also to corporate lawyers concered with the possible loss of copyright that ensues.

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|---|
| (4) | xerox | ‘a copy’ (n.); ‘to copy’ (v.) |
| | scotch-tape | ‘cellophane tape’ |
| | band-aid | ‘adhesive bandage’ |
| | thermos (bottle) | ‘insulating bottle’ |
| | jello | ‘gelatin dessert’ |
| | hoover | ‘vacuum cleaner’ (n.); ‘to vacuum’ (v.) [Brit.] |
| | coke | ‘cola’; ‘soft drink’ [Southern U.S.] |
| | good humor (bar) | ‘ice cream on a stick’ [at least around New York] |

In some cases speakers have no idea that apparent generics—*spackle, crock pot, kitty litter*—ever were brand names, much less that they legally still are. Interestingly, despite the supposed “economic benefit” Moulton accords them under parasitic reference, the favored brands have historically resisted their apotheosis to genericity, whence the commercialese solicitations for “Vaseline® brand petroleum jelly”, “Scotch® brand cellophane tape”, and “Jello® brand gelatin dessert.”¹

In the taxonomy of Horn (1984a), this genericization of proprietary instantiates R-BASED BROADENING, in which a term denoting a culturally salient member of a given category comes to denote the superordinate category itself, typically through the loss of a specifying feature. Some classical non-brand-name instances of semantic broadening or widening appear in (5):

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|-----|--------------|--|
| (5) | dog | (originally a particular breed of dog) |
| | uncle | (originally one’s mother’s brother) |
| | oil | (originally olive oil) |
| | bird | (originally a young feathered vertebrate, i.e. a young bird) |

Moulton’s analysis has been influential (having been endorsed by McConnell-Ginet 1983 and Newman 1997, among others) and while we shall argue against its application to

¹ When Barry Manilow’s 1970’s classic “I am stuck on Band-Aids/’Cause Band-Aid’s stuck on me” made a commercial comeback in the 1990’s, it was rejungled as “I am stuck on Band-aid brand...”

quasi-generic man², we shall first present some evidence that parasitic reference offers precisely the right account of a linguistic innovation that largely postdated Moulton's original study: the creeping sex-neutrality of guy(s) as a vocative (hey, guys!) and increasingly in referential contexts (those guys).³ This development—radiating outward from the now well-established you guys as a colloquial sex-neutral second person plural pronoun competing with you all, y'all, and youse to the increasingly attested guys as an informal substitute for people or folks (in both male and female speech) to its still somewhat marginal use as a trendy sex-neutral singular as in (6)

- (6) Steppenwolf was four people and I'm just one guy.
 —actress Joan Allen hosting Saturday Night Live, 11/14/98, cited in Clancy (1999: 287)

—has been welcomed by some as an irresistible manifestation of the democratic spirit of American English (cf. Clancy 1999). Others have been less sanguine, in particular Douglas Hofstadter, who condemns sex-neutral *guy* as a “depressing” and “bizarre” and “perverse” sexist artifact among those, including feminists, who should know better:

The reasons that women seem to be happy being called “guys” when the term also continues to be used as a clear and sharp opposite to “girls” and “women”—“Girls to the right, guys to left”, for instance—are many and murky...My own conviction is that the phrase's desirability is due precisely to the fact that “guy” in the singular remains clearly masculine, thus imbuing the word's unconscious halo with the positive aura associated with being male in our society. (Hofstadter 1997: 202)

The male-aura-conferring positive halo Hofstadter invokes for *guys* is a linear descendant of the “high-status value” that motivates Moulton's parasitic reference. But while both Hofstadter and Clancy see the genericization of today's *guy* as the second coming of the of yesterday's *man*, two points are worth making. First, *guy* is not kind-referring, and hence does not occur as a bare singular; neither does it occur as a definite singular with either sex-specific or species-general reference:

- (7) the rights of {man/#guy/#the guy}
 man's inhumanity to {man/woman/#guy/#the guy}
A Natural History of the {Pig/Bee/Gorilla/Child/Sperm Whale/Vampire/#Guy}

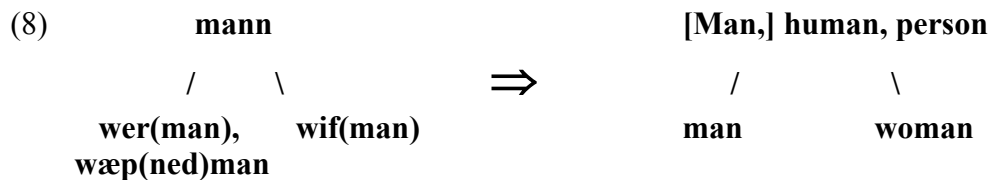
Thus, Clancy's observation (1999: 291) that “it is most interesting, given the current efforts to discourage the use of generic *man* and *he*, that a new generic noun is developing, similar in many respects to the traditional schema of *man* ‘human being’” is somewhat

² The use of *man* as a purportedly sex-neutral superordinate term in sentences like those in (1) has been variously referred to as a “pseudo-generic”, “fake generic”, “false generic”, or “faux generic” in the feminist linguistics literature. We shall employ the more neutral label “quasi-generic,” bearing in mind that the usages (1a) are true semantic generics even if they are not truly sex-neutral.

³ The use of *guys* to address or refer to mixed-sex or female groups is not entirely new; the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, while noting that it has “become noticeably common in direct address among young women only since ca. 1940” does include a citation from 1932 in which one female speaker calls out to others “Come on, guys.”

misleading; while it may be true, at least over the last few centuries, that *guy* is ‘more versatile than *man* has ever been’ (Clancy 1999: 288), in kind-referring contexts it is generic *man* that is more versatile than *guy*. Second, and more relevantly for our purposes, while the story of *guy* does fit the parasitic reference model, the story of *man* does not.

Moulton’s inscription of *man* as an entry in the catalogue of *Clorox* and *Kleenex* conspicuously fails to mesh with the known chronology of *man* and its Germanic and Romance counterparts, in which an earlier superordinate sex-unspecified meaning gradually yielded to the cognitively prototypic sense denoting adult males. In the case of English, the earlier symmetric ABC set-up of Old English gave way to the imbalanced structure that has prevailed since the Early Middle English period:⁴



Significantly, the basic level of categorization (cf. Rosch 1978) for reference to humans was at the species level in Old English, but has since downshifted. *Ceteris paribus*, dogs and lions are sex-neutral in our mental lexicon, but we conceptualize ourselves and each other with genital configurations specified. And with age restrictions as well: as the *OED* notes, the cognate of *man* in all the Germanic languages “had the twofold sense of ‘human being’ and ‘adult male human’ though except in English it has been mainly superseded in the former sense by a derivative (Ger. *Mensch*, Sw. *menniska*, etc.)” These derived forms are clearly superordinate and not basic level categories in Rosch’s sense, just as our Latinate loans (*person*, *human*) are.

The schema in (8) was essentially mirrored in Romance, with the species term *homo* picking up the [+male] feature and replacing *vir*. The offspring sired by *homo*—French *homme*, Spanish *hombre*, Italian *uomo*—correspond precisely to *man*, with the male-specific sense prominent and the quasi-generic available (as a definite, not a bare singular) when the context allows (*les droits de l’homme*).

What the diachrony of *man* reveals is not the imperialism of semantic broadening à la *Kleenex* and *guy*, but the usurpation of the generic that yields semantic narrowing. The dualistic pragmatic model of Horn (1984a) distinguishes Q-BASED NARROWING, which is linguistically motivated and results from the hearer-based tendency to avoid ambiguity, from R-BASED NARROWING, the socially motivated restriction of a set-denoting term to its

⁴*Wer*, cognate with Latin *vir*, survives in *werewolf*. *Wæpned-man* is literally the human with a weapon (or penis). *Wif(man)*, orig. ‘female person’, developed into both *woman* and, with R-based narrowing, *wife*. We cannot explore here the murkier development of sex-specific and generic *he* and their relation to the innovation of *she*; see Stanley and Robbins (1978) and Wolfe (1980, 1989) for useful discussion.

culturally salient subset or member.⁵ Instances of Q-based narrowing, where the existence of a specific hyponym H of a general term licenses the use of the general term for the complement of the extension of H, include the development of a specific use or sense of *dog* (excluding bitches), *finger* (excluding thumbs), and *animal* (excluding humans, birds, and/or fish).⁶ R-based narrowing is exemplified by the development of euphemistic interpretations of *drink* ‘alcoholic beverage’ or intransitive *smell* ‘stink’, as well as the referential shifts in (9) and the development of the autohyponyms in (10):

- (9) **hound** (originally ‘dog’, as in Ger. *Hund*)
deer (originally ‘(wild) animal’, as in Ger. *Tier*)
poison (originally ‘potion, drink’)
corn (‘wheat’ [in England], ‘oats’ [in Scotland], ‘maize’ [in U.S.])
liquor (originally ‘liquid substance’)
wife (originally ‘woman’, as in (8) above)
- (10) **number** (in particular ‘integer’, excluding fractions, irrationals, etc.)
color (in particular ‘hue’, excluding black, white, gray)
temperature (in particular a temperature within the ‘fever’ range)
 Ger. **Frau**, Fr. **femme**, Span. **mujer**
 (either ‘woman’ or, in particular, ‘wife’)

Thus, for example, just as quasi-generic *man* establishes a salient male exemplar while marginalizing potential female referents, the word *number* is used primarily in ordinary conversation to pick out whole or natural numbers: if I tell you to pick a number from 1 to 10, I don’t expect you to come up with 7.34, π , or $\sqrt{2}$.

A closer parallel to the narrowing of *man* is provided by the gradual restriction of *gay* from its original sex-inclusive reference to a male-specific value. Before coming to denote ‘homosexual’, *gay* ranged broadly over a variety of unconventional lifestyles (to put it anachronistically), earning its OED gloss ‘addicted to social pleasures and dissipations’, and its most frequent narrowed application was to (female) prostitution: cf. OED **gay** 2a-c, Farmer & Henley 1893: 126, Butters 1998. In this light, consider the claim in (11), excerpted from a *New York Times Magazine* article on gay and queer politics:

- (11) The word [*queer*] is in vogue now, with some lesbians preferring it to “gay”, which, despite common usage, technically applies only to men.
 (Schmalz 1992: 50)

⁵ More generally, R-based narrowing encompasses a wide variety of lexical and constructional shifts in which a sufficient condition is reinterpreted as a necessary and sufficient condition; cf. Horn (to appear) for extensive discussion.

⁶ In Q-based narrowing in particular, Graham’s dictum (“If the group as a whole is called A and some of its members are As and others Bs, the B’s cannot be full-fledged A’s”, in the paraphrase of Miller & Swift 1991: 56) must be taken with a drop of bubbly, since the marked category member, the exceptional B which can never achieve true A-hood, may be more prestigious than its unmarked counterpart. *Champagne* is not cheapened simply because its co-hyponym (*Would you like wine or champagne?*) also denotes their superordinate.

Besides Schmalz's curious use of *technically*, with its implicit presumption that there is a class of experts empowered to determine the proper extension of *gay* (cf. Putnam 1975), the empirical claim is very dubious indeed. To verify his intuition that *gay* is if anything technically INclusive, one of the authors of this paper posted (11) on Linguist List and OUTiL (the "Out in Linguistics" list, first organized by Arnold Zwicky), prompting a rich thread of responses that included those in (12):

(12) "Gay is supposed to mean homosexual (M/F) but women often feel excluded from its intended reference."

"Whenever I see usage like "Gay and Lesbian Task Force" it makes me seethe, because it's just like "People and Women Task Force."

"I have the feeling that *gay* has always been very much associated with men, and includes lesbians only in the same way that *man* includes *woman*."

"It's a matter of lesbians viewing 'gay' as meaning something like 'homosexuals, but mainly men because they're more visible'."

Several posters commented on the tendency for the (generally plural) noun *gays* to be more strongly male-specific than the adjective *gay*, an intuition that is confirmed by some of the contrasts in (13)

<p>(13) <i>GAY AS SEX-NEUTRAL</i> lesbians and gay males gay rights, gay pride gay community gay bars Gay Alliance at Yale ⇒ gay parents, soldiers, etc.; gays in the military</p>	<p><i>GAY AS MALE-SPECIFIC (= 'gay male')</i> gays and lesbians protection for gays and lesbians Gay and Lesbian Task Force Studies on Gay and Lesbian Language Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Cooperative at Yale lesbian and gay people, soldiers, etc.; gay and lesbian bars</p>
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and that can be explicated in terms of the often cited power of nouns (cf. Bolinger 1980) to establish and reinforce culturally significant categories in which people may be pigeonholed. While *gay* as a descriptive adjective may apply to same-sex orientation for females and males alike⁷, the sex-inclusive use of the NOUN *gay(s)* would infelicitously

⁷ When adjectival *gay* is conjoined or contrasted with *lesbian*, it will of course be read as sex-specific in reference. One particularly memorable example comes from an exchange in the movie "Tootsie"; the players are Michael Dorsey [a.k.a. Dorothy Michaels, the Dustin Hoffman character passing for female to get work in a soap opera] and his agent George [Sydney Pollack, also the director of the movie], after it has been established that Sandy [Teri Garr], Michael's sometime girlfriend, is beginning to suspect he's putting her off because he's gay (don't ask), not realizing that it's really because he's falling in love with his co-star Julie [Jessica Lange], who of course only knows him as Dorothy (prompting her declaration "I really love you, Dorothy, but I can't...LOVE you"), and whose father [Charles Durning] has meanwhile just proposed to him (qua her):

MICHAEL: If I didn't love Julie before, you should have seen the look on her face when she thought I was a lesbian.

GEORGE: Lesbian?! You just said gay!

MICHAEL [patiently, as if to someone mentally challenged]:

No, no—**Sandy** thinks I'm gay; Julie thinks I'm a **lesbian**.

presuppose the existence of a single relevant category encompassing both female and male homosexuals, with a shared image or prototype functioning for both categories.⁸ It is thus when *gay(s)* is a noun that its ongoing narrowing is most clearly parallel to that of *man*⁹. In both cases, we would argue that the appropriate synchronic lexical entry is precisely that suggested by the last posting excerpted in (12): gays are homosexuals, but especially male homosexuals because they're the one who are visible, just as quasi-generic *man* may technically extend to women but in practice picks out actual men.¹⁰ In each case the salient exemplar against which the kind-referring bare plural or singular expression is evaluated is an adult male, just as the salient exemplar for *number* is an integer and not a fraction or an irrational.

Replacing Moulton's semantic broadening model with the narrowing-to-salient-exemplar analysis proposed here supports the view (McConnell-Ginet 1979, Nunberg 1992) that bare singular *man*—like sex-indefinite *he*—is neither truly generic nor purely male-referential, but corresponds instead to a Roschian prototype (see, inter alia, Rosch 1978). Given the traditional default of adult males as the prototype members of the category HUMAN, we predict that when and only when a male image can verify a proposition, the quasi-generic *man* is reasonably acceptable. As shown by the contrasts in (14), however, when world knowledge rules out verification by (adult) male exemplars, the quasi-generic is excluded, no matter how strongly the local context encourages a generic interpretation.

- (14) Man is the only mammal capable of suicide.
 Man is the only mammal capable of rape.
 #Man is the only mammal that menstruates.
 Man is the only mammal that is embarrassed by his {nakedness/sexuality}
 #Man is the only mammal that is embarrassed by his pregnancy.
 #Man, being a mammal, breast-feeds his young. (from Miller & Swift 1991: 29)

The same pattern holds for quasi-generic *he*, whence the oddity of (14')

- (14') Everyone should be able to decide for himself whether or not to have an abortion.
 —New York state legislator cited by Treichler & Frank (1989: 162) inter alia;
 a similar quotation has been attributed to Sen. S. I. Hayakawa (R-Cal.).

⁸ Another likely factor in the male-specificity of nominal *gay(s)* is the prior existence of the female-specific nominal *lesbian*; what we have termed Q-based narrowing thus plays a role here, unlike the situation with *man/woman*, where it is clear that the narrowing of the former predated the emergence of the latter. But it is also worth noting that *lesbian*, as a noun, induces its own prototype, whence the frequent recurrence in a newsletter mentioned by Lynne Murphy of the phrase "*lesbians and gay women*", as well as the contrast invoked by a woman cited in a 1992 posting to OUTiL who—when complimented for having had the courage to come out as a lesbian to her mother—acknowledged that she had just told her mother she was gay; she wasn't quite ready yet to tell her she was a lesbian.

⁹ Kind-referring singular *gay* also favors male-specific reference: "The lesbian and the gay... are part of the American quilt" (Jesse Jackson at the National Democratic Convention, 1984.)

¹⁰ Despite its adoption in part precisely to insist on sex-inclusiveness, *queer* is itself frequently interpreted as male-specific in intended or understood reference, whence the frequent use of *queers and dykes* as the reclaimed and/or [+ activist] analogue of *gays and lesbians*.

The role of adult male as prototype also explains what Miller & Swift call the “generic *man* trap”, i.e. the double-take effect illustrated in (15a); as (15b) indicates, this is not strictly a fact about quasi-generic *man* but really one affecting such Janus-generic antecedents as *the informant, the doctor, the reader*, and so on.¹¹

(15) a. **Man**’s vital interests...life, food, **access to females**, etc.

(Erich Fromm, “The Erich Fromm Theory of Aggression,
N. Y. Times Magazine, 2/27/72, emphasis added)

b. We must somehow become witnesses to the everyday speech **which the informant** will use as soon as the door is closed behind us: the style in which **he** argues with **his wife**, scolds his children, or passes the time of day with his friends.
(William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, p. 85, emphasis added)

It has been argued (cf. Moulton 1981, Newman 1997) that the restriction on the distribution of *he-man* expressions is a fact about language use and users and not about the semantics of the linguistic system. This claim and the prototype view of *he* and *man* are both supported by the anaphoric properties of disjunctive antecedents. McConnell-Ginet has observed (1988: 93) that “in contexts where femaleness has been made explicit or is especially salient, it is difficult to use *he* even where there is no reference to a specific individual.” To her example in (16)

(16) #**Any boy or girl** who thinks that **he** knows the answer...

we can add the possessives in the paradigms of (17) and (18):

(17) **The candidate** may ask you about local employment options for
{**his** spouse/#**his** husband or wife}.

(18) **Every child** discovers that it is pleasurable to touch **his** {private parts/genitals}.
#**Every child** discovers that it is pleasurable to touch **his** penis or clitoris.

Note in particular that semantic equivalence—the fact that *x* is *y*’s spouse iff *x* is *y*’s husband or wife—is irrelevant.¹² When the quasi-generic (but prototype-evoking) *he/his*

¹¹ The same point holds for bare plurals, extending in general to ‘words for anyone who is not female by definition’ (Miller & Swift 1991: 41) or—as with *teachers, secretaries, or nurses*—female by default. Some attested examples from Miller & Swift (ibid.):

People won’t give up power. They’ll give up anything else first—money, home, **wife**, children—but not power.

Americans of higher status have...less divorce, lower mortality, better dental care, and less chance of having a fat **wife**.

Thus the invisibility of the female—and that of the child—within the domain of human reference is not a lexical property of a handful of arguably polysemous items like *man, chairman, forefathers*, or *he*, but a more general consequence of social and cultural asymmetry.

¹² For some speakers, the order of disjuncts is relevant: *his wife or husband* may be judged as less bizarre than *his husband or wife*, keeping “traditional values” constant.

is replaced by the true sex-neutral *they/their*, the sex-linked bizarreness disappears, although the traditional ire of the prescriptivists may not be so easily assuaged..¹³

(16') **Any boy or girl** who thinks that **they** know the answer...

(17') **The candidate** may ask you about local employment options for **their** husband or wife.

(18') **Every child** discovers that it is pleasurable to touch **their** penis or clitoris.

Disjunction also interferes with the mutually reinforcing co-dependence linking quasi-generic *man* and quasi-generic *he*. Thus, if we were to rewrite the classic Jesuit credo in (19a) (which Michael Apted borrows for his *7-Up* documentary and its sequels) as the disjunction of (19b), the result is awkward at best.

(19) a. Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man.

b. #Give me a child until he or she is seven and I will give you the man.

We have argued that parasitic reference, while a useful construct for explicating such cases of semantic broadening as the burgeoning sex-neutrality of *guy(s)*, does not provide a plausible account of the history of *man* or, more recently of *gay*, both of which involve R-based narrowing to a salient exemplar that corresponds to a Roschian prototype. We have provided additional evidence in support of the prototype account. We would also submit that the recent narrowing of *gay* to a male-specific term demonstrates that the persistence of quasi-generic *he-man* language cannot be dismissed as a relic of pre-feminist consciousness.¹⁴

As a final point, we thought it worth noting that we have found one lexical item whose history closely parallels that of *man*, in that what started life as a true sex-neutral species label became specialized through the passage of centuries to denote primarily the animals

¹³ At a time when *they* is increasingly the pronoun of choice even for non-specific singular antecedents of known sex—

(i) I can't help it if **somebody_i** doesn't want **their_i** husband and then **somebody_j** besides **them_i** decides **they_j** do.

—“Serial mistress” Pamela Harriman, quoted in *The Mistress*, by Victoria Griffin

(ii) **No mother** should be forced by federal prosecutors to testify against **their** child.

—Monica Lewinsky's mother's attorney

—it would appear that this resistance is quixotic if not doomed. It should be noted that it is the indefiniteness of the referent that represents the major motivation for *they*. When the sex is unknown but the referent sufficiently specific or individuated, the *they* often seems not entirely successful, even when it would come in handy:

(iii) (#)I've met this hot Transcendental Grammarian, Chris Jones, in my bi chat room and I'm totally smitten with them.

¹⁴ Besides the spread of sex-neutral *guy(s)*, there is other evidence that even hip writers who “should” know better continue to propagate quasi-generic *man* and *he*, or both simultaneously. Thus Ralph Warner of Nolo Press, a “feisty Berkeley publisher of do-it-yourself legal guides” (*New York Times* 8/24/98, D1), adopts the motto “Every man his own lawyer.”

of the more culturally salient sex while still marginally preserving the original generalized species meaning in certain neutralized contexts. That item is *cow*, whose Indo-European ancestor **g^wo-** denoted an ox or other bovine sex-neutrally, and which only later came to take on the sex-restricted meaning it has primarily borne since Old English, while still marginally allowing the quasi-generic use wherein *cows* may embrace bulls:

- (20) Indo-European **g^wo-** ‘bovine, ox (of either sex)’ >
 English **cow** (1) ‘the female of *Bos Taurus*’
 (2) ‘*Bos Taurus*’ of either sex, esp. in plural: **cows** = ‘cattle’

This may explain why it is that we seem fated to go on arguing about the usage and meaning of *he-man* language until the cows come home.

Acknowledgments

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