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Gender Inclusivity: The Language We Use

Author's note: I have to admit, I feel anxious about this post, but I thought it was important to share this information. Learning to be inclusive is an ongoing process, especially as norms are constantly evolving.

Being inclusive within your law library is a choice you make every day. Sometimes this choice is consciously made, other times we are unaware of our own biases, as words carelessly flow from our mouths. The language we use and hear on a daily basis programs us in ways we cannot see, but ways that impact those around us both positively and negatively-not just in the descriptors we use, but through email, job postings, conference meetings, and video calls. Cognizance becomes the catalyst for small changes toward providing a healthy, safe environment for our colleagues, co-workers, and those around us.

When you check your privilege, also check your verbiage.

"Thanks, guys!" We've all heard this, and most, if not all, of us have used this terminology as we sign off on our daily emails to staff or end our video conference calls. But who is actively excluded with this passive language?

When words like "guys" are used, or "Mr./Mrs./Ms.," you could be alienating your employees, colleagues, clients, and potential applicants. Standard language that provides gender-assigned terminology creates an atmosphere of divisiveness. Thoughtful efforts to exchange gender-

associated concepts to nonbinary terms provides an inclusive atmosphere for your workplace. Take steps to correct your language, even when you slip.

Change from using "you guys" to you all, everyone, or everybody. Further extend your outreach by using terminology that include "x", a gender-neutral representation. Words like folx (an extension of folks) or Latinx (an extension of Latino/Latina) avoid gender normalizations across the board and encompass a broader array of people, particularly those that do not fall into binary categories. "X" breaks down barriers of rigid qualifiers and fluctuates with the dimensions of gender.

Trade out words that utilize gender associations as descriptors for more accurate, comprehensive representation.

Antiquated:	Replace with:
Ladies and Gentlemen	Students, Employees, Guests, Colleagues, Associates
Husband/Wife (Boyfriend/Girlfriend)	Spouse, Significant Other
Brother/Sister	Sibling
Nephew/Niece	Nibling
Manpower	Workforce, Workers, Personnel
Mankind	Humanity, Humankind
Maiden Name	Family Name

Change the words you use, even if they are common: professions ending in "man"-- congressman (legislator), fireman (firefighter), postman (postal worker), salesman (salesperson) and so forth. Add inclusive pronouns to your repertoire. Expand from just he/she to they and ze. Likewise, use Mx. instead of Mr./Mrs./Ms.

Retraining our brains to remove decades' worth of ingrained exclusivity takes conscious effort. This effort is not a burden, but an opportunity to learn. It should become so fluid that it is natural and expected. This should be the new normal we are striving for. Create positive environments for others by educating yourself and those around you.

Your words have power. Transform your words into an inclusive language. Make genderqueer, nonbinary, gender fluid, and all folx feel accepted and valid. Actively provide an inclusive experience for colleagues, and do not assume that you already are. Take the time to create a positive, inclusive space by updating the language used in everyday email, conversation, and professional dialogue to assert the equality and validity that all of our colleagues and associates deserve.

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About AALL New Voices: AALL welcomes members to share their reflections on any component of law librarianship!

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