

# EFFECTS OF GENDER INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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**Abstract** Religious speech (i.e. preaching) is a prominent language event, yet it has received scant attention in research on language and attitudes. In recent years, many religious institutions have adopted reforms mandating gender-inclusive (non-sexist) language. Only a few studies have examined the effects of gender-inclusive or gender-exclusive language use on listeners' judgments of speakers, and none of these examine religious discourse in particular. In addition, few studies have examined how variables like gender-role typing or attitude toward equal rights for women and men might mediate between gender-linked language and judgments of speakers. In the present study, a male and a female audiotaped each of two sermon texts in both gender-inclusive and gender-exclusive language guises. Findings indicate that ministers who adopt gender-inclusive language suffer no negative evaluations. Three mediating variables proved to be especially potent in predicting listeners' responses to the stimulus sermons: attitude toward sexist language, expressive gender-role typing, and perceptions of women's rights. Implications for language reform policies and for further research on gender-inclusive language are discussed.

The present study investigates how listeners evaluate religious preachers (and their sermons) who use non-sexist, gender-inclusive language instead of more traditional language that refers more exclusively to males. The religious context is an especially critical domain in which to conduct such research on listeners' responses to language style because religion (if not religious experience) is a verbal construction. Holy texts and rites are linguistic entities. Religious rituals and sermons, if not wholly so in nature, are at least linguistically adumbrated; they are regulated and propagated linguistically. As many observers have noted (e.g. Malinowski, 1935), language is so central to humans' experience of the supernatural that sacred language itself often takes on the same sanctity and taboos that are associated with the spiritual entities to which that language refers.

Currently, religious language in many mainstream denominations is undergoing significant change (see Moore, 1985; Russell, 1976, 1985; Smith, 1989; Withers, 1985). The changes are intended to reduce sexism and increase gender-inclusiveness. What changes have occurred have not been universally accepted and, in fact, have caused resistance. For example, the Houston Declaration (1987: 1) includes a statement affirming commitment to gender equity in language: 'We affirm equality and inclusive language in all human relationships'. However, this same document categorically rejects the gender inclusive alternative 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer' as an 'inadequate substitute' for 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost' and offers no other alternative. In pointing to resistance to this move toward inclusive language, Thistlethwaite (1985: 551) notes that the Inclusive Language Lectionary was a project 'generating much heat', and she sees the retrenchments which have resulted. So while changes in language in religion are occurring, they are not always readily accepted.

The trend toward change, though not universally applauded, is evident in revisions of several major prayerbooks and hymnals by which the fabric of religion each week gets socially reconstructed in hundreds of thousands of congregations and households. Within the last decade, prominent texts such as *The United Methodist Hymnal* and the *Weekly Psalmbook* of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church of America have been revised by central religious governing bodies to eliminate sexist language. For example, the 1966 Methodist Hymnal lists part of the Korean Creed as follows: 'We believe in the kingdom of God as the divine rule in human society, and in the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God' (p. 741). The 1989 Hymnal cites the same passage as 'We believe in the reign of God as the divine will realized in human society, and in the family of God, where we are all brothers and sisters' (p. 884).

Although attitudes in religion reveal a conservative tendency towards sex-role equity (see Greene & Serovich, 1989; Ruether, 1974), there are strong women's movements in several churches. Coupled with this trend have been the proposals for use of inclusive language in theological discourse. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in 1895, was one of the first to call for revision of language in Biblical studies. More recent critiques by Daly (1973, 1978 & 1985) and others (e.g. Russell, 1976, 1985) have revived such debate. A significant portion of the religious linguistic controversy surrounds the use of 'he' and male terms to refer to God, but other terms like 'mankind' and 'brotherhood' have likewise been the subject of concern by reformers. The images and metaphors used to express religious thoughts are overwhelmingly male (Ruether, 1974). This linguistic and theological issue has caused heated debates, and the responses have been diverse.

Religious groups have made several proposals for use of inclusive language. Because of the public profile of preachers as speakers and as community leaders, the context of religion is a crucial area in this language and attitude research. Russell (1976) states that 'many churches are beginning to make changes in language as they attempt to implement the gospel mandate of full equality for all human beings' (p. 85).

Because of these theological and linguistic challenges, some seminaries are requiring use of inclusive language by students: 'We [Candler Theology School]

uphold the principle of inclusiveness by being firmly committed to express the equality of genders in all areas of the school's work and life' (Covenant on Gender Inclusive Language, 1987: 94). By the same token, theological bodies are beginning to mandate a new type of language to describe God, a language which recognises all sexes and races: 'We therefore hold that all people are created equal in God's sight' (Statement of Concern for the Rights of People, 1988).

Greene & Serovich (1989) examined changes in one particular liturgy, the marriage ceremony among mainstream Protestant traditions (see also Nilsen, 1977). They found that some language change has occurred (e.g. 'husband and wife' for 'man and wife'), yet other liturgical elements remain gender-specific. They also found that people recall the language of the outdated rather than current authorised ceremonies, the one using 'man and wife'.

The movement for more gender-inclusive language in religion presumes of course, that language is a vehicle for either perpetuating or else changing sexism in society (see Bate, 1989). One view holds that sexism is caused and perpetuated by the structure of the English language (Bosmajian, 1974; Daly, 1978; Miller & Swift, 1988; Pearson, 1985).

Prescriptive rules of traditional grammar in the English language, mandate the masculine pronoun if the referent is neuter, masculine, or multi-sexed. Generic pronouns (e.g. 'he', 'his', 'him', and 'himself') are claimed to refer with equal likelihood to women and men (as in, 'if a student needs a refund, he should take his receipt to the cashier closest to him'; e.g. Strunk & White, 1979). Conceptually and practically this poses some problems for language users. A woman is labelled 'he' when the generic pronoun is used (Karre, 1976), and research shows that the generic masculine pronoun is likely to limit opportunities and affect self-concepts of women (Adamsky, 1980; Bate, 1978a; Bem & Bem, 1971). Empirical evidence shows that 'he' is not naturally interpreted generically. Instead, the pronoun 'he' tends to evoke masculine referents (Kidd, 1971; Martyna, 1978; Moulton, Robinson & Ellias, 1978). As early as 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton called for change, recommending 'they' for 'men' and 'he' in Biblical studies.

Like the issue of the generic pronoun, the matter of 'man-linked words' has received considerable attention (e.g. Miller & Swift, 1988; Pearson, 1985). Even if people conceptually recognise 'man' as a generic term, it also means 'male', so the term creates confusion (Daly, 1978). Shimanoff (1977), Schneider & Hacker (1973), Bem & Bem (1973) and MacKay (1980) all investigated the interpretability and perceived references of 'man-linked' and 'non-man linked' words. Their results, confirmed by Harrison (1975) and Kidd (1971), show that 'man linked' words are *not* perceived as referring equally to men and women. Todd-Mancillas (1981) provides a clear summary of these and other studies.

Linguistic choices can exert significant effects on listeners' perceptions of speakers (see Cronkhite, 1984). Within the language and attitude paradigm in general, a speaker's language style is seen as a potent cue for evoking stereotyped expectations among listeners (Street & Hopper, 1982). An extensive literature documents how both male and female speakers are penalised for adopting gender linked, i.e. women's or powerless, speech (Erickson, Lind, Johnson & O'Barr, 1978; Mulac & Lundell, 1986; Mulac, Lundell & Bradac, 1986; Warfel, 1984;

Zahn, 1989). But public speakers — including religious speakers — who choose to adopt inclusive nonsexist language alternatives have little basis for predicting how such a speaking style might affect their listeners' perceptions of their credibility. Two studies, however, do bear directly on this question. Salter, Weider-Hatfield & Rubin (1983) developed a short 'mediocre' speech on engineering (a traditionally male subject) and one on nursing (a traditionally female subject) with 'he', 'she' and 'they' pronoun conditions. This study proposes 'they' as the best alternative as generic pronoun for both sexes of speakers because neither speaker was penalised for its use. Use of 'they' actually increased perceptions of the female's competence.

Kreimer's (1981) language manipulation involved substituting inclusive ('man or woman', 'he or she', 'person', etc.) for exclusive terms. To avoid the problem of extraneous vocal variation, Kreimer presented the speeches in transcript form. Kreimer found significant effects of language guise on dynamism, particularly in relation to subjects' level of support for women's rights. In addition, the inclusive language condition received better overall speech quality ratings. However, this effect was different for men and women. When using inclusive language, men appeared more sensitive and open-minded, while women were perceived as overbearing and demanding.

No study of sexist language as it affects listener's judgments of religious speakers has been conducted previously. Only in the past few decades has preaching been studied empirically as a form of human communication. Avery & Gobbel (1980) examined the credibility criteria laity use in judging if the word of God has been preached. They found that laity had general but not specific expectations of sermons (the most shared expectation was of 'comfort'). Price, Terry & Johnston (1980) studied the effects on congregants of preaching and preaching supplemented by dialogue. They found no substantive differences between the two, but they did develop a semantic differential scale to evaluate different aspects of ministry.

Newman & Wright (1980) looked at sermon impact on parishioners in relation to demographics, and they found small negative relations among sermon impact, educational level and marital status. Newman & Wright's overall finding of a 'moderate sermon impact' was verified by Pargament & Silverman (1982). Pargament & Silverman presented a seven question sermon impact survey, focusing on their priest's preaching, to 262 Catholic parishioners and they analysed the results for differences by demographic variables. They found significant variation due to age, sex and educational level. In terms of *predicting* preaching impact, they found perceptions of delivery style to be most useful.

Glock, Ringer & Babbie (1967) as well as Fichter (1954) proposed religiosity as a factor that might mediate effects of religious messages on congregants. Religiosity is comprised of, among others, an ideological and an involvement dimension. While women are generally more involved than men in church practices (with the exception of ministerial and administrative positions; see Bliss, 1952; Daly, 1985), individual differences in church involvement may yield results different than those of gender. With regard to religious ideology, institutional fundamentalism or progressivism determines the liturgy of the various denomina-

tions and congregations. Individuals' religious ideologies may affect their satisfaction with those liturgical choices.

Sex of respondents is of course a crucial variable in research on gender and language. Use of biological sex alone, however, can produce contradictory results (Weider-Hatfield, 1987; Wheelless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981). Researchers acknowledge that there is a difference between biological genders, but androgyny theory (Bem, 1974) is based on the premise that the variation *within* genders can be comparable to the difference between genders. To be sure, research on judgments of gender-linked language (powerful/powerless language) does reveal listener gender to be an important factor in judgments of speakers. The decision to measure psychological gender rather than biological gender in the present study rests on the assumption that the former has more explanatory power.<sup>1</sup>

Androgyny is a measure of psychological gender as opposed to biological sex. Bem (1974) developed a questionnaire which identifies sex-typed individuals. Since the original BSRI, several revisions have been proposed, most focusing on eliminating the 'neutral' category of items. Wheelless & Dierks-Stewart (1981) present arguments about the BSRI's reliability and validity and propose a twenty item instrument derivation.

Warfel (1984) presents a rationale for linking listener's sex role typing with their language attitudes. Using the BSRI, she divided subjects into sex-typed groups. Sex-typing, however, did not prove to be a highly significant factor in evaluations of speakers. It is important to note, though, that Warfel asked listeners to judge speakers using gender-marked or gender-neutral (powerless versus powerful) language, not gender-inclusive or gender exclusive (nonsexist versus sexist) language. No previous study has used measures of listeners' androgyny in research on listeners' attitudes toward gender inclusive speech, but one study does examine this combination in the context of writing. Schwartz & Banikiotes (1982) used written language samples in a study that also measured readers' androgyny; their results, however, were equivocal.

Thus, research on sexism in language is abundant (see, for example, Bate, 1989). Two studies (Kreimer, 1981; Salter, Weider-Hatfield & Rubin, 1983) examine the effect of sexist language on listeners' judgments of speaker credibility, only one of which used actual speech samples. While these studies highlight the significance of speaker's language use, one particular context which has been ignored is the religious setting. Religious discourse is an appropriate context for this research because there is currently debate in the religious community about language reform. If leaders are making decisions in regard to language use in religion, then some empirical research would be useful to those involved in these policy decisions. There are no studies which examine a minister's use of language as a variable affecting listeners' perceptions.

## Method

### Research participants

Participants were 120 students at a large Southeastern American university. The experiment was conducted outside of class on a voluntary basis, with parti-

cipation substituting for a written class assignment. Fifteen participants were randomly assigned to each of eight sessions to listen to a sermon. Each session represented one of the combinations of speaker sex (two levels), sermon text (two levels) and language condition (two levels). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 42 ( $M = 22$  years). The sample was 62% female ( $N = 75$ ) and 38% male ( $N = 45$ ).

### Procedure

Participants entered a small classroom and were told that they would be listening to a minister giving a sermon. Subject groups ranged in size from five to ten people as they listened to one of the eight audiotaped sermons. Questionnaires were filled out after listening to the sermon. The items in the questionnaire were ordered so that subjects would not be sensitised to the language issue. The instruments were presented as follows: General Instructions, Judgments of the Minister, Judgments of the Sermon, Religiosity Scale (Intensity and Ideology), Androgyny Scale, and Study-specific items. After filling out the questionnaire, subjects were debriefed and requested to maintain confidentiality about the nature of the experiment until its completion.

### Stimulus materials

The topic of friendship was chosen to mitigate possible biases resulting from the content of the sermon. While friendship is not an overtly religious topic (e.g. sin or evangelism), there is a theological basis for friendship, and it is a typical topic for a sermon across most denominations.

Two different friendship sermons were developed, and each sermon had an inclusive and exclusive (or standard) form. Inclusivity/exclusivity was operationalised by manipulating 29 constructions in each sermon. This degree of manipulation sufficed to eliminate all gender-exclusive references from the inclusive versions and sufficed in pilot testing to engender measurable discriminations between versions. In the exclusive conditions 'man', 'mankind', and generic 'he/his' were maintained, while in the inclusive condition these were changed to 'people', 'humans', or the personal references were removed altogether. For example, one passage in the exclusive condition reads, 'In his book entitled *Making All Things New*, Henry Nouwen has described *mankind* by saying that we are "occupied" and "preoccupied" with so many things that our lives are filled full, but we are unfulfilled as *men*'. In the inclusive condition it reads, 'In his book entitled *Making All Things New*, Henry Nouwen has described *humanity* by saying that we are "occupied" and "preoccupied" with so many things that our lives are filled full, but we are unfulfilled as *people*'. To maintain equivalence between sermons and also to reflect authentic practices in current religious discourse, authors of all quotations and subjects of all anecdotes were either neuter or male in both sermons, as they had been as originally preached. References to God as 'he' were eliminated, but references to Jesus as male were maintained.

Both sermons had been written and preached by ministers in large Protestant Churches in the southeast prior to their use in this experiment. The investigators

changed the format and rhetorical structure of sermon B to match that of sermon A, but with the minister's original style and sentence structure maintained wherever possible. After revision, the sermons had an equal number of quotations, anecdotes and references, and they were equal in length.

Each sermon was audiotaped in the two conditions (inclusive and exclusive language) by both a male and a female stimulus speaker. The female speaker was taped first, and the male attempted to mimic her vocal variation, including pronunciation, rate, intonation, and emphasis.

### Measurement instruments

A semantic differential instrument for 'Judgments of the Minister' was adapted from Zahn & Hopper's (1985) Speech Evaluation Instrument (SEI). The SEI was designed to measure listeners' evaluations of spoken language in a wide range of communicative situations. It yields three ostensibly independent subscales: (1) *attractiveness*; (2) *superiority*; and (3) *dynamism*.

A semantic differential instrument for 'Judgments of the Sermon' was selected from Price, Terry & Johnston (1980). The original instrument was developed to measure the effects of preaching and contained 39 items comprising 3 subscales. For the purposes of the present study and in the interest of making the questionnaire of manageable length, thirteen items were randomly selected from two of the subscales: *evaluation* and *potency*. Items comprising the third subscale (activity) were dropped in the present study because they had previously proved uninformative (Price *et al.*, 1980).

In addition to the major dependent measures, several variables, hypothesised to mediate the effects of religious messages, were also measured. Religiosity was measured in terms of both *intensity* and *ideology* of religious involvement. The religious intensity instrument combined seven checked items referring to how often or on what level subjects participated in various religious activities (Glock *et al.*, 1967). The religious ideology instrument measured religious attitudes by presenting nine stimulus statements regarding fundamentalist/conservative beliefs (Price *et al.*, 1980).

The androgyny scales were taken from Wheelless & Dierks-Stewart (1981), a short form originally derived from Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory. While the BSRI is a sixty-item instrument, the Wheelless & Dierks-Stewart (1981) scale contains twenty items and also appears to be more psychometrically sound than the original. Like the original BSRI, this instrument yields two subscales, *expressiveness* (originally called 'feminine') and *instrumentality* (originally called 'masculine').

The remaining items measured subjects' attitudes to more general issues. The first, called *perception of women's rights*, asked to what degree they would agree with the statement that men and women have equal opportunities in the United States today. Another item, called *attitude toward sexist language*, asked for subjects' personal preferences in reading and listening to works which refer to people as 'men' or as 'humans'. Additionally, manipulation check items enquired about perceptions of speaker's sex, about the degree of sexist language in the sermon, and about how 'people in general' were referred to in the sermon ('men' versus 'humans').

### Analysis

The five dependent variables of primary interest were minister *attractiveness*, *superiority*, *dynamism*, and sermon *evaluation*, and *potency*. The three dependent variables which served as manipulation checks were *masculine/feminine* sex of speaker, *perceived references to people in general*, and *perceived sexism in language of sermon*. Each was subjected to separate 3-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs). Subjects were nested in combinations of speaker sex at two levels, sermon text at two levels, and language guise at two levels. Covariates in each ANCOVA were gender role *expressiveness*, gender role *instrumentality*, religious *ideology*, religious *intensity*, *attitude toward sexist language* and *perception of women's rights*.

The 0.05 level of probability was set for significance on all tests. Dunn's multiple comparisons (Bonferroni *t*'s) were used for preplanned nonorthogonal contrasts between cell means when interaction effects were significant. Because each of the five dependent variables and four of the six covariates were composite scales, Cronbach's alphas were calculated for these scales. The purpose was to determine the internal consistency/reliability of these composites. The resulting reliability coefficients were as follows: *attractiveness*, alpha = 0.9336; *superiority*, alpha = 0.8521; *dynamism*, alpha = 0.8530; *evaluation*, alpha = 0.9386; *potency*, alpha = 0.5624; *intensity*, alpha = 0.8517; *ideology*, alpha = 0.9161; *instrumentality*, alpha = 0.8820; *expressiveness*, alpha = 0.8976.

### Results

#### Manipulation check variables

Results for the ANCOVAs of the three manipulation check variables are summarised in Table 1. The ANCOVA of *masculine/feminine* reveals a significant covariate effect for religious *ideology* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 10.806$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , omega-square = 0.029). The negative coefficient weight (-0.073) shows that people who scored high on *ideology*, considered to be more traditionally conservative, rated speakers as more masculine. A main effect was found for speaker sex ( $F_{(1,106)} = 177.713$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , omega-square = 0.515). The female speaker ( $M_{\text{female}} = 6.12$ ) was rated more feminine, and the male speaker ( $M_{\text{male}} = 3.03$ ) was rated more masculine.

A significant interaction between sermon condition and speaker sex also emerged for *masculine/feminine* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 7.764$ ,  $p < 0.006$ ) but it was of smaller magnitude (omega-square = 0.0197) than the effect for speaker sex. Dunn's multiple comparisons revealed that for Sermon A, the female speaker was rated more feminine ( $M_{\text{female,A}} = 6.30$ ) and the male more masculine ( $M_{\text{male,A}} = 2.63$ ), and the same was true for Sermon B ( $M_{\text{female,B}} = 5.93$ ,  $M_{\text{male,B}} = 3.43$ ). The female speaker was rated more feminine on Sermon A ( $M_{\text{female,B}} = 6.30$ ) and significantly less on Sermon B ( $M_{\text{female,B}} = 5.93$ ). For the male speaker, Sermon A ( $M_{\text{male,A}} = 2.63$ ) yielded less feminine ratings and Sermon B ( $M_{\text{male,B}} = 3.43$ ) more feminine. Overall, for Sermon A, speakers' gender identities were more pronounced than for Sermon B.

**Table 1** Summary of ANCOVAs for three manipulation check variables

	<i>Masculine/ Feminine</i>	<i>Perceived Sexism in Language of Sermon</i>	<i>Perceived References to People in General</i>
Instrumental			
MS	0.780	2.712	1.095
Beta	0.010	-0.018	-0.011
F	0.571	1.215	0.344
Expressive			
MS	0.339	1.963	0.453
Beta	-0.008	0.019	-0.009
F	0.249	0.880	0.142
Attitude Toward Sexist Language			
MS	0.687	0.009	43.944
Beta	0.047	-0.005	0.375
F	0.503	0.004	13.803**
Perceptions of Women's Rights			
MS	2.795	12.281	2.672
Beta	-0.088	-0.184	-0.086
F	2.048	5.504*	0.839
Intensity			
MS	1.736	2.099	0.188
Beta	-0.036	0.039	-0.012
F	1.272	0.941	0.059
Ideology			
MS	14.751	2.265	0.010
Beta	-0.073	-0.029	0.002
F	10.806**	1.015	0.003
Sermon Condition			
MS	0.747	1.576	14.375
F	0.548	0.706	4.515*
Speaker Sex			
MS	242.598	2.897	6.866
F	177.713**	1.299	2.157
Language Condition			
MS	0.860	14.643	54.951
F	0.630	6.563*	17.260**
Sermon Condition × Speaker Sex			
MS	10.599	3.547	2.867
F	7.764**	1.590	0.901
Sermon Condition × Language Condition			
MS	3.544	0.713	7.704
F	2.596	0.320	2.420
Speaker Sex × Language Condition			
MS	0.542	4.560	5.819
F	0.397	2.044	1.828
Sermon Condition × Speaker Sex × Language Condition			
MS	0.691	8.415	0.184
F	0.506	3.771	0.096
Error	1.365	2.231	3.184

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The analysis of covariance of *perceived references to people in general* revealed a significant covariate effect for *attitude toward sexist language* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 13.803$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , omega-square = 0.084). The positive regression weight (0.375) shows that people who prefer to hear non-sexist language perceived the sermons as using more sexist language. There were also two significant main effects for *perceived references to people in general*. The first effect was for sermon condition ( $F_{(1,106)} = 4.515$ ,  $p < 0.04$ , omega-square = 0.02). Subjects reported (erroneously) that 'people in general' were referred to as 'men' more in Sermon A ( $M_A = 3.58$ ) than in Sermon B ( $M_B = 4.20$ ).

The other significant main effect on *perceived references to people in general* was for language guise ( $F_{(1,106)} = 17.260$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , omega-square = 0.107). Subjects correctly perceived that the inclusive condition ( $M_{inc} = 4.55$ ) used more 'humans', and the exclusive condition ( $M_{exc} = 3.23$ ) used more 'men'.

The analysis of covariance for *perceived sexism in language of sermon* revealed one statistically significant covariate and one main effect. The significant covariate effect for *perceived sexism in language of sermon* was for the *perception of women's rights* item ( $F_{(1,106)} = 5.504$ ,  $p < 0.025$ , omega-square = 0.034). The negative regression weight for this variable ( $-0.184$ ) shows that to the degree that people perceive that women and men do not have equal rights the language of the sermons was rated more sexist. *Language condition* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 6.563$ ,  $p < 0.015$ , omega-square = 0.042) also exerted a statistically significant effect on the *perceived sexism in language of sermon* item. The inclusive condition ( $M_{inc} = 5.50$ ) was appropriately rated as less sexist than the exclusive condition ( $M_{exc} = 4.97$ ).

### Judgments of the minister

ANCOVAs for the three judgments of the speaker (i.e. minister) and two judgments of the speech (i.e. sermon) are summarised in Table 2.

No significant main or interaction effects were found in the ANCOVA of minister's *superiority*. A significant covariate effect, however, did emerge for *expressiveness* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 4.914$ ,  $p < 0.030$ , omega-square = 0.032). The positive regression weight (0.002) reveals that gender role expressiveness correlated with ratings of ministers' *superiority*.

The ANCOVA of minister's *attractiveness* revealed only a single significant covariate effect was found for the *attitude toward sexist language* item ( $F_{(1,106)} = 8.566$ ,  $p < 0.004$ , omega-square = 0.061). The positive regression weight (0.052) reveals that preference for non-sexist language was correlated with ratings of ministers' *attractiveness*.

The ANCOVA of minister's *dynamism* revealed a significant main effect for speaker sex ( $F_{(1,106)} = 4.409$ ,  $p < 0.04$ , omega-square = 0.023). The female minister ( $M_{female} = 5.05$ ) was rated more dynamic than the male ( $M_{male} = 4.71$ ). Two significant covariate effects were also found. First, for *attitude toward sexist language* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 13.426$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , omega-square = 0.082) and second for the *perception of women's rights* variable ( $F_{(1,106)} = 9.576$ ,  $p < 0.003$ , omega-square = 0.057). For the *attitude toward sexist language* variable, the positive regression weight (0.174) shows that to the extent that people oppose sexist language

**Table 2** Summary of ANCOVAs for five dependent variables

	<i>Superiority</i>	<i>Attractiveness</i>	<i>Dynamism</i>	<i>Potency</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
<b>Instrumental</b>					
MS	0.043	0.015	0.074	0.084	0.170
Beta	-0.002	-0.001	-0.003	-0.003	-0.004
F	0.089	0.023	0.105	0.138	0.260
<b>Expressive</b>					
MS	2.367	0.026	1.935	3.227	1.622
Beta	0.021	0.002	0.019	0.025	0.017
F	4.914*	0.040	2.734	5.347*	2.484
<b>Attitude Toward Sexist Language</b>					
MS	0.849	5.472	9.499	3.912	4.340
Beta	0.052	0.132	0.174	0.112	0.118
F	1.763	8.566*	13.426**	6.481*	6.646*
<b>Perception of Women's Rights</b>					
MS	0.617	2.476	6.775	4.942	2.538
Beta	-0.041	-0.083	-0.137	-0.117	-0.084
F	1.280	3.876	9.576**	8.188**	3.886
<b>Intensity</b>					
MS	0.116	0.047	0.130	0.233	0.000
Beta	0.009	0.006	0.010	0.013	0.000
F	0.241	0.074	0.183	0.386	0.000
<b>Ideology</b>					
MS	0.043	0.185	0.113	1.717	1.485
Beta	0.004	0.008	0.006	0.025	0.023
F	0.089	0.289	0.160	2.844	2.275
<b>Sermon Condition</b>					
MS	0.211	0.018	0.366	0.410	2.937
F	0.438	0.029	0.517	0.680	4.497*
<b>Speaker Sex</b>					
MS	0.175	1.216	3.119	0.237	0.333
F	0.363	1.904	4.409*	0.393	0.510
<b>Language Condition</b>					
MS	0.002	0.646	0.114	0.373	0.631
F	0.003	1.011	0.161	0.618	0.967
<b>Sermon Condition × Speaker Sex</b>					
MS	1.117	0.427	3.660	0.582	0.227
F	2.319	0.668	5.173*	0.964	0.348
<b>Sermon Condition × Language Condition</b>					
MS	0.000	0.210	3.134	0.539	0.242
F	0.000	0.329	4.429*	0.983	0.370
<b>Speaker Sex × Language Condition</b>					
MS	0.018	0.028	0.826	0.824	0.019
F	0.038	0.044	1.167	1.365	0.029
<b>Sermon Condition × Speaker Sex × Language Condition</b>					
MS	0.043	0.065	0.334	0.139	0.675
F	0.089	0.102	0.473	0.230	1.033
Error	0.482	0.639	0.707	0.604	0.653

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*dynamism* of minister was rated high. For *perception of women's rights*, the negative regression weight ( $-0.137$ ) shows that to the degree that people believe women have equal rights with men today the ministers were rated high on *dynamism*.

The ANCOVA of *dynamism* also revealed two significant interaction effects. Sermon condition interacted with speaker sex ( $F_{(1,106)} = 5.173, p < 0.025$ , omega-square = 0.028). Dunn's multiple comparisons showed that mean *dynamism* ratings for the female speaker differed significantly between Sermons A and B ( $M_{\text{female,A}} = 4.92, M_{\text{female,B}} = 5.19$ ). The same was true for the male, except in this case Sermon A engendered higher ratings ( $M_{\text{male,A}} = 5.02; M_{\text{male,B}} = 4.40$ ). The mean difference between Sermon A *dynamism* ratings for the female and male was significant, but the same mean difference was not significant for Sermon B.

The other significant interaction effect for minister's *dynamism* was between sermon condition and language condition ( $F_{(1,106)} = 4.429, p < 0.04$ , omega-square = 0.023). Dunn's multiple comparisons showed that for Sermon B, the *dynamism* ratings were significantly different for the inclusive/exclusive conditions ( $M_{\text{inc,B}} = 4.58; M_{\text{exc,B}} = 5.00$ ). In addition, within the inclusive language condition, Sermon A was rated more dynamic than Sermon B ( $M_{\text{inc,A}} = 5.00; M_{\text{inc,B}} = 4.58$ ). No other contrasts were statistically significant.

#### Judgments of the sermon

The ANCOVA of *potency* revealed three significant covariate effects but no significant main or interaction effects. The *expressiveness* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 5.347, p < 0.025$ , omega-square = 0.032), *attitude toward sexist language* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 6.481, p < 0.015$ , omega-square = 0.04), and *perception of women's rights* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 8.188, p < 0.005$ , omega-square = 0.052) variables proved to be significant covariates for *potency*. For *expressiveness* (0.025) and *attitude toward sexist language* (0.112), the positive regression coefficients show that gender role expressiveness and support for non-sexist language correlated with ratings of sermon *potency*. For *perception of women's rights*, the negative regression coefficient ( $-0.117$ ) shows that to the degree that people believe women have equal rights with men today the sermon was rated high on *potency*.

The ANCOVA of sermon *evaluation* revealed one significant covariate effect and one main effect. The significant covariate effect was for *attitude toward sexist language* ( $F_{(1,106)} = 6.646, p < 0.015$ , omega-square = 0.042). The positive regression coefficient (0.118) showed that opposition to sexist language was correlated with sermon *evaluation*. Sermon condition also exerted a significant effect ( $F_{(1,106)} = 4.497, p < 0.04$ , omega-square = 0.026). Sermon A ( $M_A = 5.70$ ) was rated significantly higher than Sermon B ( $M_B = 5.32$ ).

#### Discussion

This study investigated the impact of speaker sex, sermon text, and inclusive/exclusive language on listeners' judgments of ministers and sermons. It also examined listener's psychological gender, religiosity, attitude toward sexist

language and perceptions of women's rights as ways to account for any individual differences in ratings.

The most significant finding, in light of current research and policy concerns, is the lack of significant main effects on any dependent variable for language condition. In this study, speakers' use of inclusive language *neither* undermined *nor* enhanced listeners' reactions. This finding must be interpreted in light of the study's power to detect significant differences. With 60 participants in each language condition, estimated power to detect large differences was 0.96 (Cohen, 1977). Actual observed differences between means, however, were small (ranging from 0.09 to 0.25 on a 7-point scale) and probably of no pragmatic significance. Power to detect such small observed differences ranged from 0.6 to 0.18.

This finding is consistent with that of Salter, Weider-Hatfield & Rubin (1983) who found that generic use of 'they' did not diminish ratings of speaker credibility. The researchers therefore proposed use of 'they' by both male and female speakers, because it was under no condition viewed as significantly less positive than generic 'he' or 'she'. Results for the present study show that language inclusiveness did *not* affect listeners' judgments, regardless of speaker sex. This finding is also consistent with the main thrust of Schwartz and Banikiotes (1982) who found no effects of sexist language use on evaluations of professors, but they did find differences in ratings of counsellors based on participant's gender and androgyny.

The fact that these findings emerged from a Southeastern American participant population, usually considered to be socially conservative, only augments their value for making decisions about language policy and speech practice. In fact, this population consisted of people who were highly affiliated with organised religion. 93% of participants reported attending church on a regular basis, and 75% reported membership in a church. Many churches are currently considering revisions of their liturgies, and some have encountered resistance (see Smith, 1989; Thistelthwaite, 1985). Up to this time, any progressive groups striving for linguistic reform could not be certain that speakers using inclusive language would not be evaluated negatively. Little empirical evidence has been available to proponents or opponents of the liturgical revision movement. The findings of this study should provide valuable information for religious policy-making groups contemplating linguistic reform. Preachers who chose to use gender-inclusive language suffered no negative evaluations, according to this study.

While the present study speaks to listeners' attitudes toward religious speakers, it is not designed to yield information about possible cognitive effects of inclusive language. Hearing religious passages in inclusive/exclusive language (e.g. I Corinthians 1:31 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord' versus 'Let they who boast boast in the Lord') may indeed conjure different images for listeners.

It remains for future research to determine the cognitive effects on listeners of hearing gender inclusive/exclusive language in religious settings. A valuable follow up study would examine the effects of gender exclusive references, perhaps using a methodology similar to Moulton *et al.* (1978).

While the present study finds no differences due to language guise (gender inclusiveness), some previous research finds, to the contrary, that gender exclusive language affects at least perceived references of characters described in

job advertisements, story frames and textbook passages (e.g. MacKay, 1980; Moulton *et al.*, 1978). However, much of the previous research regarding gender exclusive language used brief written messages and relatively impoverished discourse frames. In the context of a rich and complex message like a sermon, inclusivity/exclusivity may have little salience for listeners.

Previous research (e.g. Mulac & Lundell, 1980) has shown that women are generally rated less dynamic as speakers than men. In the present study, however, the female minister was rated as more dynamic than the male. This result does support the findings of Salter, Weider-Hatfield & Rubin (1983) which report higher dynamism ratings for the female speaker. Similarly, Warfel (1984) found that 'powerless' language stereotypically linked to female speech also resulted in higher perceived competence. McConnell-Ginet (1978), in fact, concludes that female vocal characteristics result in higher perceived dynamism. Or it may be that, for these participants, female preachers are so rare that any woman speaking from the pulpit would be perceived to have inherent dynamism. It is also possible that the female speaker used in this study was idiosyncratically dynamic. On the other hand, it is also possible that these findings reflect a genuine change in stereotyped perceptions of male and female speakers.

The inclusion of two sermon texts was intended to mitigate concerns about the external validity of the language manipulations (see Hunter, Hamilton & Allen, 1989). The design of this study follows the reasoning of Hunter, *et al.* (1989) in treating manipulated language style as a fixed effect (cf. Jackson & Jacobs, 1983). It was hypothesised that findings would be generaliseable across different sermon texts, especially since the topic was held constant and length was relatively equal. However, the results show that listener's responses are often text-specific in ways that cannot be predicted nor accounted for in this study. The lack of consistent responses across these carefully constructed texts suggests that future research in language and attitude studies must continue to include replication across texts in their experimental design.

Turning to the covariates, unlike the scale for *instrumental* gender role typing, the scale for *expressive* gender-role typing did act as a mediator in this study. Subjects who scored high on *expressiveness* also rated the minister high on *superiority* and the sermon high on *potency*. In the past, this subscale has been called 'feminine'. The implications are that listeners' expressiveness in gender role typing predisposes them to rate higher on *superiority* and *potency*. It is possible that this is a topic-specific phenomenon, one associated with the general humanitarian discussion of friendship. People who score high on *expressiveness* may have more positive feelings toward this particular topic, or perhaps the sermons or ministers themselves were more expressive and high *expressive* subjects were reacting positively to this similarity.

*Perception of women's rights* was a single question asking subjects' level of agreement with the assertion that women and men have equal opportunities in the United States today. This item was a significant covariate for minister's *dynamism*, sermon *potency*, and *perceived sexism in language of sermon*, in each case showing an inverse relationship. Interestingly, a high score on *perception of women's rights*, indicating recognition of current gender differences, corres-

ponded to a low rating of minister's *dynamism*. Perhaps subjects who perceived a great deal of gender inequity in society penalised the speaker for not taking a strong stance on controversial sociopolitical issues, resulting in low *dynamism* ratings. Similarly, subjects who perceived gender inequity in contemporary society rated the sermons lower on *potency*. Perhaps for any strong equal rights advocates (equating a high score on *perception of women's rights* with support for equal rights), the sermon topic was too traditional or not progressive enough, and this might explain why they would rate the sermon lower on *potency*.

The ANCOVA for the manipulation check amount of *perceived sexism in language of sermon* revealed a significant covariate for *perception of women's rights*. People who believed that inequity exists in rights today (i.e. those who scored high on this item) were more sensitive to the sexist language used. When differences resulting from people's *perception of women's rights* were partialled out by the ANCOVA, people accurately distinguished between the inclusive and exclusive language conditions. So attitude toward equal rights is a significant factor in people's perception of sexist language. This supports the findings of Jacobson & Insko (1985) and Feather, O'Driscoll & Nagel (1979).

The analyses of covariance for *attractiveness, dynamism, potency and evaluation* revealed significant covariate effects for *attitude toward sexist language*. Participants' preference for having people referred to as 'men' or 'humans' correlated with ratings of the minister on *attractiveness* and *dynamism* and of the sermon on *potency* and *evaluation*. So a subject who indicated a more inclusive language preference for 'humans' was likely to rate ministers and sermons positively. However, this high rating occurred regardless of the actual language guise of the speaker. It is possible that people who rank high on the *attitude toward sexist language* variable have general high rating tendencies, or they could again be responding to the humanitarian nature of the friendship topic, which could be perceived as generally egalitarian.

Of all the covariates in this study, *attitude toward sexist language* was related to the greatest number of significant outcomes. This finding is significant because this variable has *not* been used in previous research on the use or users of sexist language. In the present research, attitude toward sexist language was measured by a single item in the interest of keeping the questionnaire manageable. However, a psychometrically more sophisticated measure of attitude toward sexist language is needed. Some research has undertaken to survey attitudes toward sexist or gender-inclusive language (e.g. Bate, 1978b; Harrigan & Lucic, 1988; Henley & Dragan, 1983; Rubin & Greene, 1990) and may provide just such a sophisticated measure for subsequent research. It might prove fruitful to examine how these language attitudes relate to perceptions of specific speakers, or how they relate to other aspects of gender roles.

This study is the first to empirically examine the effects of speaker's language in a religious setting. It is also the first study on inclusive language to investigate potential mediating variables in an effort to provide theoretical justification for predictions of listeners' responses. As social institutions continue to respond to voices calling for greater gender equity, the issue of language reform will become salient to an ever widening set of contexts. Replicating studies such as this in those

contexts (e.g. medical, legislative, or social welfare) should prove a worthwhile endeavour. In the present study, the primary concern was to eliminate masculine references in a traditionally paternalistic context (i.e. organised religion). Consider, in turn, what might be the effects of eliminating feminine references in reforming the language of stereotypically female contexts like secretarial services or childcare.

### Note

1. Data in the present study were indeed analysed using biological gender rather than psychological gender roles. For the five dependent variables of interest, only one statistically significant effect was found for listeners' biological gender. Female listeners rated speakers as more dynamic than did male listeners ( $F_{(1,118)} = 4.03$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $M_{\text{female}} = 5.01$ ,  $M_{\text{male}} = 4.66$ ).

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