

Men, dogs and bitches

From the time I first became aware of the problem, I have been a supporter of equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex. And, as a corollary, equal opportunities for all, however idealistic this might seem in practice. This was long before the Women's Lib movement got under way.

As a college lecturer, I have never noticed any difference in aptitude or ability between male and female students and, since miniskirts gave way to jeans, even the biological differences have been less apparent.

Nevertheless there is no doubt that women still have a harder time than men in getting jobs and getting promotion afterwards.

Their position is not always helped by their own leaders. I remember, when a certain women's agricultural college was threatened with closure, the main argument put forward for its continuation was that women's needs were different from those of men. Such establishments were often run by jackbooted Thatcherwoodhouse types who sought to build their own women's empire within a state run by those wicked males. Their job was to shield their girls from male influence. As a staunch believer in co-education I could not accept such views. In this I have the support of Iris Murdoch, who has been quoted as saying that she is tremendously pro-liberation of women but not the women's liberation which seeks to segregate and create a separate culture.

Our language is not always as helpful as it might be. We need a common gender, third person, singular number, personal pronoun. First and second person are taken care of with "I", "we" and "you". "They" meets the requirements of third person plural but for the singular we have only "she" and "he". "It" is

regarded as offensive. This often leads to using "he" when "he and she" is really meant. The continual use of the two alternatives become cumbersome. A common gender pronoun would be very useful.

There is a wavering inconsistency in the use of the "ess" ending. "Poet" and "author" are now generally accepted as unisex names but "actress" is obviously going to survive for a long time to come. We still have a few manageresses but fortunately no playeresses or driveresses. And if we find a conductress she is more likely to be on a bus than in front of an orchestra.

It is an accident of language that leads to the substitution of the suffix "man" by "person", creating such awkward titles as "doorperson" and "chairperson". I expect an ombuds-person anytime now.

With most animals we have a general name for the species and separate names for male and female. Thus sheep may be ewes or rams and horses mares or stallions but with two notable species — dogs and man — we have no special name for the male. Women's libbers have fallen into the error of assuming that "man" is always male when, in fact, it is often used in the sense of common gender. We have "bitches" and "women" for the females of the two species but, alas, the poor males have no name they can call their own. This is a considerable male deprivation.

Women's libbers often seem to see sexual connotations where none exists. They are obsessed with sex. Might we say they are, in an inverse way, oversexed?

One last thought. Shall we one day see women dog breeders threatening to boycott Crufts unless it is renamed "Crufts' Dog and Bitch Show"? Or am I being bitchy? **R. W. Sidwell**