

It All Began With “Mankind”

I think it all began with the word “mankind.” Someone woke up one day in the 80’s and thought the English language needed some tweaking. Somehow the use of the word “man” in “mankind” was considered exclusive and needed to be more gender-neutral like “humankind.” I’ve always found the use of the word “humankind” to be a bit patronizing and awkward and still use the word “mankind” even if it makes me old school; the word “mankind” doesn’t make me feel excluded from humanity.

English has masculine and feminine pronouns but, generally, doesn’t have noun class distinctions like many other languages, but that hasn’t stopped those who wish to create a gender-neutral American society.

Over the years, we’ve seen “firemen” become “firefighters,” “Congressmen become “Congresspersons,” (although Nancy Pelosi identifies herself as “Congresswoman” on her website), “Chairmen” become “Chairpersons,” and some actresses refer to themselves as “actors.” (In that case, I think they should get rid of the “Best Actress Academy Award” and include everyone in the “Best Actor” category.)

For those who wish to drastically change society by declaring there are 31 genders, or suggest that I call myself a “cisgender woman” which apparently shows I’m aware of, and, therefore, more compassionate toward transgender people, the quest to make our lives gender-neutral continues.

This week, I read an article about the city of Berkeley, California, updating its municipal code to exclude neutral-gendered words. It never stops.

“Manholes” are now called “maintenance holes,” “manmade” will be “artificial” and all instances of “men and women” will be replaced by “people.” The pronouns “he” and “she” will be placed with “they.” And, there is, of course, my favorite:

“fraternity” and “sorority” will be replaced with the more wordy “collegiate Greek system residence.” According to Berkeley City Council member, 23-year old Rigel Robinson, who, apparently, has nothing else to do with his time and suggested these changes, “Women and non-binary individuals are just as entitled to accurate representation. Our laws are for everyone, and our municipal code should reflect that.” (My research reveals “A person is non-binary if their gender identity is something other than male or female. Non-binary individuals may identify as **gender fluid, agender [without gender], off the binary, or something else entirely.**”)

Apparently, “he” and “she” are no longer relevant or preferred and English pronouns need to be changed as well. **Ze/hir pronouns:** “Ze is a writer and wrote that book *hirself*. Those ideas are *hirs*. I like both *hir* and *hir* ideas.” **Ze/zir pronouns:** “Ze is a writer and wrote that book *zirsself*. Those ideas are *zirs*. I like both *zir* and *zir* ideas.” I won’t even begin to understand all this. Some people just have far too much time on their hands.

Similarly, Colorado State University has issued an “Inclusive Language Guide” that eliminates the words, “America,” “American” and “freshman.

Which brings me to my big question. One of the goals I set for myself this summer was to start Spanish lessons which I have. I took a semester in college but quickly forgot just about everything. My husband speaks Spanish fluently and our travels bring me in contact with many Spanish-speaking people. I love the sound of the language so I’m hoping to at least achieve a minimal conversational ability to speak Spanish over the next several months.

I’m learning that the Spanish language, as well as many other languages, have masculine and feminine nouns, articles, adjectives, etc. So, is it the intent of the people changing “manholes” to “maintenance holes” and imposing “ze-hir/ze-zir”

on the rest of us planning to re-invent new words for every other language that does, in fact, have feminine and masculine distinctions in its grammar to make the entire planet “gender-neutral?” Will there no longer be “Kings” and “Queens?” “Landlords” and “Landladies?” “Emperors” and “Empresses?” “Nephews” and “Nieces”? Where will it end?

Will the animal kingdom (oops, maybe I shouldn't have used the word “kingdom”) be the next target? Someone ought to let the lions and lionesses, geese and ganders, billy-goats and nanny-goats, stallions and mares, bucks and does, and rams and ewes, in on all this. Somehow I think they're pretty secure in their identities unlike many people these days.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.