

Sexism in Language:

Overt and Covert

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ABSTRACT

The attempts of feminists to suggest alternative ways of using language to avoid sexist language and ideas have forced sexism to assume different forms. Whereas overt uses of sexism are at once identifiable and are looked down upon, the indirect and subtle ways to smuggle the sexist ideas hidden in all kinds of texts go unnoticed. In this workshop, I will illustrate how sexist ideas get conveyed covertly in language and what impact they have on our perception of women. These sexist ideas which are blatantly oppressive may be part of the hidden meanings of the texts which need to be brought to the fore. To achieve this, we need to develop our critical reading skills which will enable us to see more in a text than is presented on the surface. The workshop will use a form of critical discourse analysis that combines linguistic analysis and a social theory of discourse to explore some texts from different genres for illustration.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN ...GHOSTS?

Consider the story

A father was driving his son home when he had a crash. The father was killed and the son rushed by ambulance to hospital. At the hospital, the surgeon refused to operate, citing the rule that surgeons cannot operate on their own children.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL MAN, THERE IS
A WOMAN

**...AND BEHIND EVERY
UNSUCCESSFUL MAN,**

THERE ARE TWO WOMEN

SOME MORE...

- ◉ THE WAY TO A MAN'S HEART IS THROUGH HIS STOMACH
- ◉ *CHAI BANANA ITNA AASAAN BANAA SAKEIN APKE SRIMAAN*
- ◉ YOU CAN TAKE A GIRL OUT OF SCOTLAND BUT YOU CANNOT TAKE SCOTLAND OUT OF HER
- ◉ IN THE WORLD OF EQUALS, SOME MEN ARE MORE SPECIAL

AND SOME MORE...

- ◉ WHY SHOULD BOYS HAVE ALL THE FUN?
- ◉ YOUR HUSBAND COMES TIRED AND HUNGRY...
- ◉ I CAME I SAW I CONQUERED
- ◉ SHE FELT AS IF HER WHOLE BEING WAS CONQUERED BY THIS MAN SHE HARDLY KNEW
- ◉ I'M HUNGRY AND I WANT SOMETHING TO EAT
- ◉ I WONDER IF THERE IS SOMETHING TO EAT

○ BEAUTIFUL. SLENDER. INSTANTLY RESPONSIVE.
AND THAT WAS JUST HER ANSWERPHONE

○ HE: YOU'RE A FUNNY GIRL. I NEVER KNEW QUITE
HOW TO TAKE YOU

SHE: YOU NEVER REALLY TRIED

(Mills, S. 1995)

WHAT IS SEXISM/SEXIST LANGUAGE?

- A STATEMENT IS SEXIST IF IT CONTRIBUTES TO, ENCOURAGES OR CAUSES OR RESULTS IN THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

- A STATEMENT IS SEXIST IF ITS USE CONSTITUTES, PROMOTES OR EXPLOITS AN UNFAIR OR IRRELEVANT OR IMPERTINENT DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SEXES

- ANY ITEM OF LANGUAGE WHICH, THROUGH ITS STRUCTURE OR USE, CONSTITUTES A MALE-AS-NORM VIEW OF SOCIETY BY TRIVIALISING , INSULTING OR RENDERING WOMEN INVISIBLE
- IT CAN ALSO BE SEEN AS LANGUAGE WHICH MAKES AN UNNECESSARY AND IRRELEVANT REFERENCE TO A PERSON'S SEX OR GENDER

(from Mills, S. 1995)

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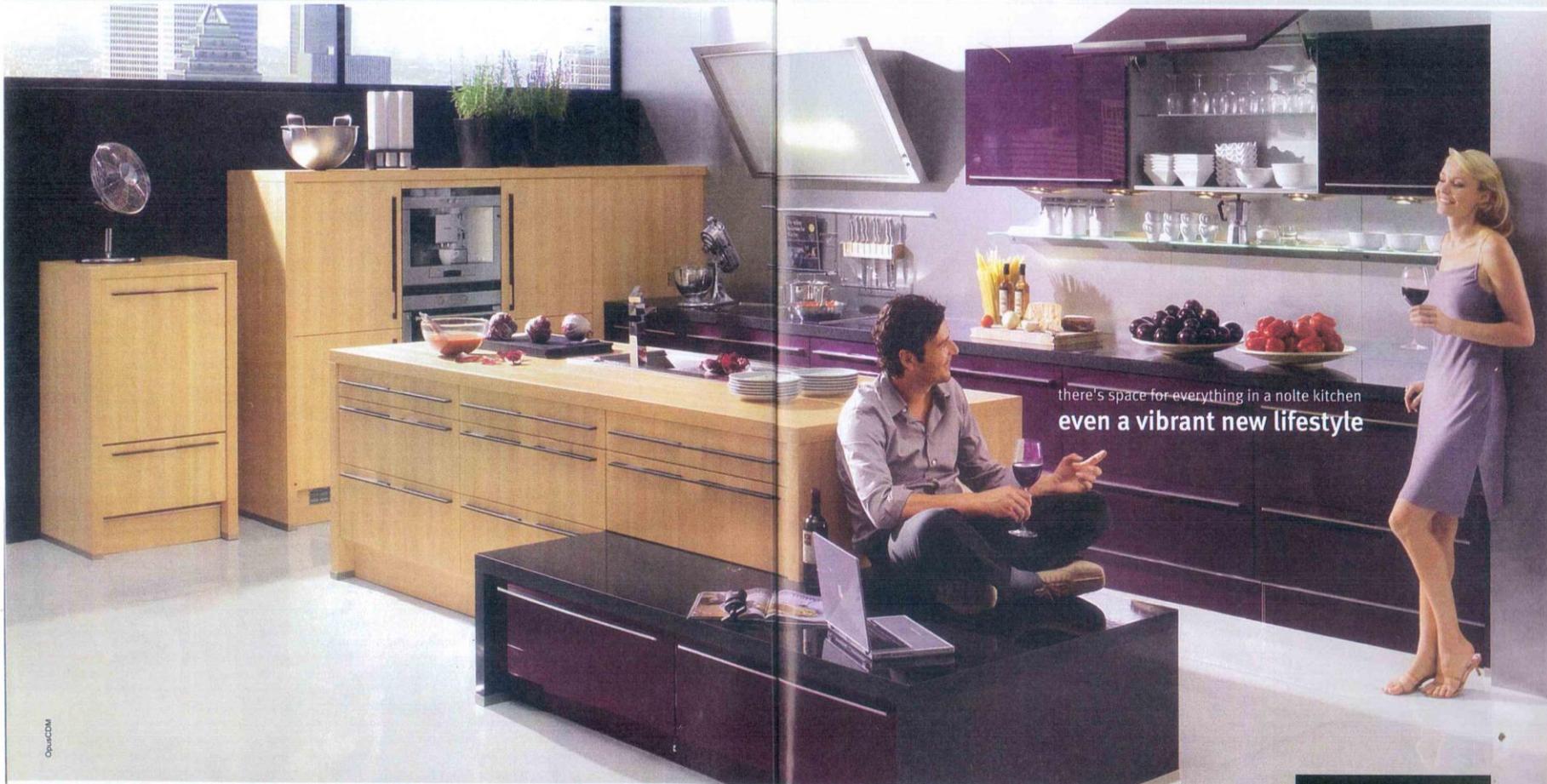
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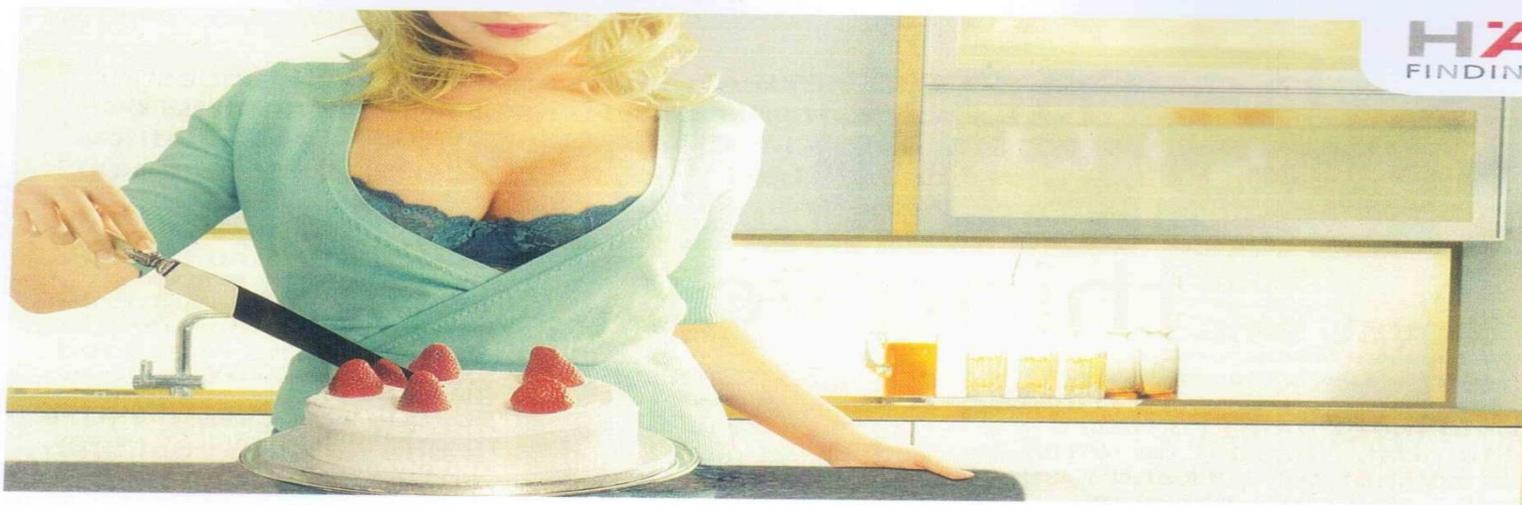
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*The accessories shown above are not a part of the standard product supplied by the company.



Here's how to enhance your... uh... um... kitchen.
Those looking for tips on enhancing other areas, please look elsewhere.

If you're a woman who loves flaunting all her precious assets, then it's important to glam up your kitchen as well. After all, the kitchen, as they say, is a true reflection of a woman's personality.

Blum's fascinating range of products helps you build a kitchen that, besides making your life simple, also enhances the glamour quotient of your house. Take for instance Blum Drawers, which are available in a variety of exquisite finishes like Sleek Stainless Steel, Cool Aluminium, Contemporary Grey and Pristine White to suit your taste. Or the stunning range of glass drawers that will simply leave your guests drooling. Or the charming Aventos shutter lift system, which with its wonderful blend of charismatic beauty and easy functionality, will make onlookers go 'Wow!' All Blum products have been designed to blend with your kitchen's cabinets seamlessly. It's hardly surprising then that even the most reputed European kitchen manufacturers settle for nothing less than Blum.

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YOUR AD OF A TETRA PACK

- Your husband comes home
- tired and hungry
- He bites into a home-made samosa
- And holds his stomach in agony
- You don't know it yet
- But the oil that you use has begun to take its effect
- Is this the oil you will continue to use for your family?

- ◉ Could we ever begin this Ad with...
- ◉ Your wife comes home tired and hungry
- ◉ What could be more neutral?
- ◉ You come home tired and hungry

WHY BEER IS BETTER THAN WOMEN

10 REASONS

WHEN YOU GO TO A BAR, YOU CAN ALWAYS PICK UP A BEER

YOU CAN SHARE A BEER WITH YOUR FRIENDS

A BEER WON'T GET UPSET IF YOU COME HOME WITH ANOTHER BEER

A BEER DOESN'T GET JEALOUS IF YOU GRAB ANOTHER BEER

A BEER NEVER HAS A HEADACHE

YOU CAN HAVE MORE THAN ONE BEER A NIGHT AND YOU WON'T FEEL GUILTY

A BEER DOESN'T MAKE YOU GO SHOPPING

A BEER ALWAYS LISTENS AND NEVER ARGUES

WHEN YOU SAY YOU LOVE BEER, YOU DON'T HAVE TO MEAN IT

A BEER HAS NO MOTHER

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Tough on

Spots,

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(COOK, G.)

CRITICAL READING

- CONTEXT

- GENDER AND WRITING

- GENDER AND READING

- GENDER AND INDIVIDUAL LEXICAL ITEMS

- GENDER AND CLAUSE LEVEL/SENTENCE LEVEL

- GENDER AND DISCOURSE LEVEL

EFFECTS OF SEXIST LANGUAGE-USE

- IT MAY ALIENATE FEMALE INTERLOCUTORS AND CAUSE THEM TO FEEL THAT THEY ARE NOT BEING ADDRESSED
- IT MAY BE ONE OF THE FACTORS WHICH MAY CAUSE WOMEN TO VIEW THEMSELVES IN A NEGATIVE OR STEREOTYPED WAY. IT MAY THUS HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE EXPECTATIONS WOMEN AND MEN HAVE OF WHAT WOMEN DO
- IT MAY CONFUSE LISTENERS, BOTH MALE AND FEMALE (FOR EXAMPLE, AS TO WHETHER A TRUE GENERIC NOUN OR PRONOUN IS BEING USED OR A GENDER-SPECIFIC ONE...Mills S. (1995))

CONCLUSION

- THE LANGUAGE REFORM CANNOT BE ACHIEVED AS LONG AS THE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE REMAINS SEXIST. HOWEVER, THE SEMANTIC RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SPEAKERS ARE PART OF THE SYSTEM WHICH PRODUCE SEXISM; THINKING ABOUT MEANING AND MAKING OTHERS AWARE OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR LANGUAGE USE ARE WAYS OF UNDERMINING THE CONTINUAL REPRODUCTION OF SEXIST MEANINGS... INCREASED AWARENESS HAS RESULTED IN INSTITUTIONALISED CHANGES IN USAGE... EVEN IF THE CHANGE IN USAGE DOES NOT ACHIEVE A TOTAL CHANGE IN ATTITUDE, PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO CONFRONT THEIR OWN ATTITUDES WHEN THEY USE THESE TERMS... MILLS, S (1995)

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THANK YOU

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