

# Language makes a difference

by Elizabeth Donovan  
for Canadian University Press

When Cheris Kramarae started searching for connections between gender and language, she didn't realize her quest would later become a field of study.

"The only scholarly work I could find that addressed gender as a variable in our language was a book dated 1922. In one chapter entitled 'The Woman', the author observes that 'women have an innate reluctance to curse' and 'reason why a woman talks so much is because the ideas go through the empty chambers of her brain,'" says Kramarae, co-editor of the recently published book *A Feminist Dictionary*.

Although this book did little to satisfy Kramarae's curiosity, it did inspire her to tug at the roots of these stereotypes about women in our society.

Kramarae, a speech communications professor at the University of Illinois, spoke to a large audience of students and faculty at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia last fall.

She says that because she was unable to find any written work on the subject of gender and language she began to examine the statements our society makes about women.

"Women have always been considered the 'keepers of propriety'. Etiquette books advised women to speak softly, to soften their opinions and the number of times they offered their opinions," says Kramarae.

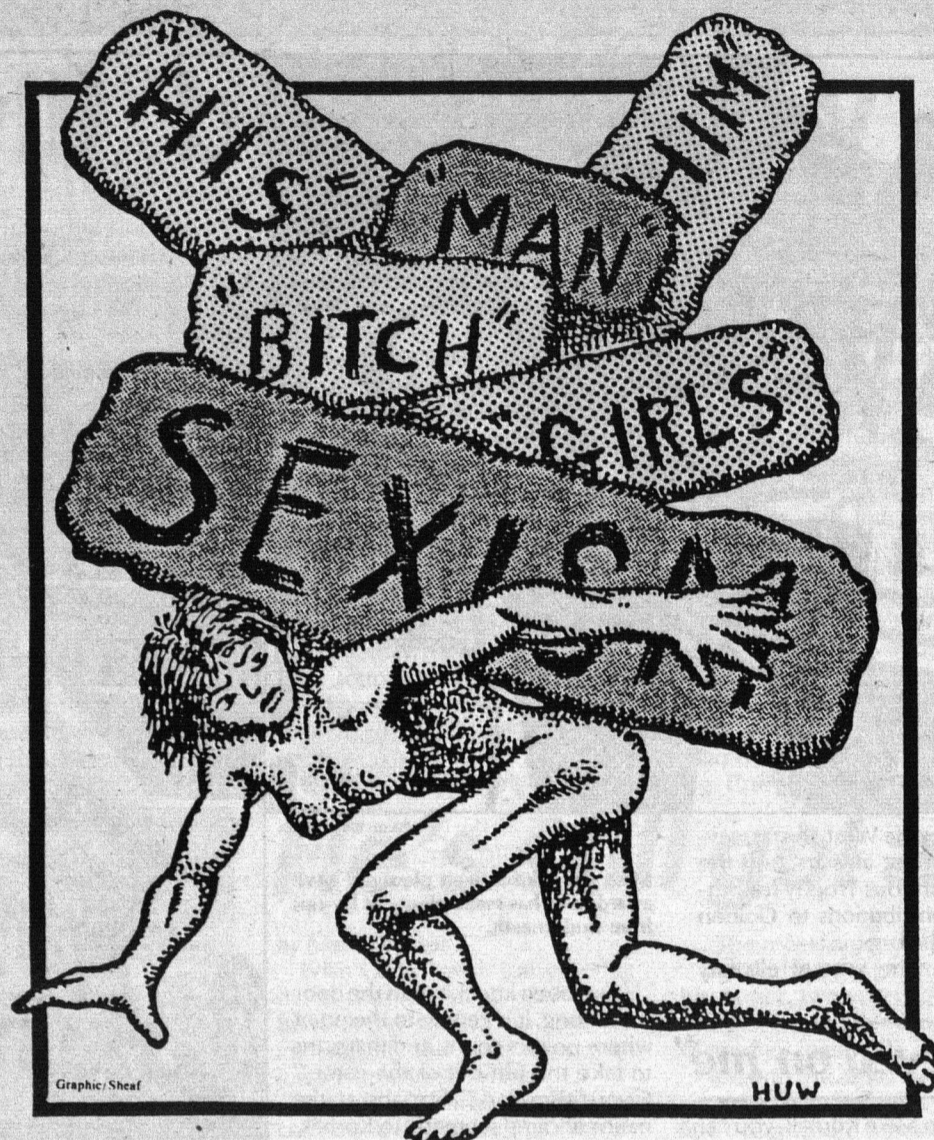
No quote better illustrated women's passive, code-of-behavior than Emily Post's advice for the ideal secretary.

"The perfect secretary should forget she is a human being... like an office machine she should respond only when touched."

Although this advice was given in the late 1900's, stereotypical attitudes about women's voices have carried well into the 20th century.

"Even by 1954 the BBC said women need not apply for any radio announcer positions, especially for the news announcer position," says Kramarae.

"Women's speech has always been examined in relation to men's speech. Historically we see such activists as Elizabeth Cady Stanton



who was allowed to sit on stage, but many times her husband or brother read her speech."

Kramarae's research disproves stereotypes about women, masking as facts in our society. Often the same behaviour is evaluated differently for a man than a woman.

"In a study done using a crying baby,

observers were asked to hypothesize why the baby was crying, and were casually told the baby's sex.

People who thought the baby was a boy said he was expressing anger, however, those who were told the same baby was a girl said she was crying out of fear."

Different words are used to describe men

and women's sexual activity, reflecting the double standard in our society.

"Although men tend to be much more sexually active than women, there are 220 terms for a sexually promiscuous woman," says Kramarae.

Kramarae says speech patterns can indicate who possesses the power in a given interaction between men and women.

"In studies monitoring the number of interruptions during conversations between women and men, 90 per cent of the interruptions came from men. Even in teacher/student relationships, male students and professors interrupted more often than female students and professors."

During the classroom discussions, studies show women feel bad if someone has been put down in class and would prefer to offer information, rather than defend their ideas. Men said they liked a clash and a battle of ideas, often using military/combat language to describe this interaction.

Kramarae says assertiveness training courses for women is one way to remedy the perceived differences between men and women. But she says she's wary of these programmes because assertiveness training doesn't take into account the power differential between men and women in our society.

"In some ways women can benefit from assertiveness training. But the programmes don't take into account that many women aren't allowed to be assertive. For example, if a secretary were more assertive with her boss, she might lose her job."

Kramarae demonstrated one powerful example of the inequities that result from using the word 'girl', when referring to a woman. She cited one study where half the participants in the experiment were given a detailed work experience resume, using the word 'girl' and the other using the word 'woman'. Although the descriptions were exactly the same, the one using the word 'girl' was recommended \$5,000 less in salary than the candidate referred to as a 'woman'.

"It's obviously clear to me that language makes a difference."

## Edmonton police preach safety through awareness

by Regina Behnk

Officials from the Edmonton Police Department have been preaching to audiences at banks, colleges, and hospitals about personal safety for women.

The "Lady Beware" project originated three years ago simply as a film presentation followed by a light discussion. Now, each presentation is specifically designed for particular audiences. An outdated, but still relevant film, narrated by a rape victim, remains a vital part of each lecture.

Constable Len Hudyma gives these lectures regularly and says the film sets the mood. "We do not want to create a feeling of paranoia in the women. Edmonton is a very safe city... we just have some instances that get high publicity. Our objective is to teach personal safety through awareness."

He depicts crime as being made up of four components. First is the victim and second, on the other end of the scale, is the offender. Third is the desire in the offender to commit a crime and finally there is the opportunity for the crime to happen. It is this fourth

*"It's important for a woman to display confidence, strength."*

aspect, opportunity, which we can control and actually minimize.

Most rapes happen near the home environment. By securing our homes we can eliminate some criminal opportunity. Basic guidelines include having a solid wooden or metal front door. A dead bolt lock should be installed on the door. A spring latch lock is not very effective. "Latch locks simply keep the door from blowing down in the wind," says Hudyma. "These locks can easily be picked with a comb or a credit card." A viewfinder with a range of 200 degrees should also be wedged into the door. This fish lens will allow you to identify the caller at the door without opening it. Be wary of opening doors to strangers, especially unexpected repairmen. Ask for identification and

call the company to confirm the appointment. The film shows a prime example of a woman allowing a strange man to use her telephone. Once inside the man takes advantage of her vulnerable situation. Faced with a similar situation you may direct the stranger to the nearest public phone.

The telephone can be another vulnerable part of our homes. Sometimes we unknowingly reveal valuable information to strangers through telephone conversations. Answering ambiguous questions of an unknown caller such as "Who is this?" or "What number is this?" can be a source of danger. It is important for you to remain in control of such conversation by retorting, "Who were you calling?" or "What number did you dial?"

Hudyma also cautioned against revealing personal information to surveyors. If the survey is of interest to you, request the caller's telephone number and suggest that you will call them at a more opportune time. In the meantime verify the legitimacy of the caller and his number.

Hudyma also suggests that when registering your personal telephone number to list only your first initial and last name. Avoid using any proper noun which will reveal your marital status or sex. A similar system should be applied when labelling your apartment mailbox.

For increased security outside the home Hudyma makes several suggestions. When driving, ensure your car is in good working condition. If a breakdown does occur, do not accept a ride from a stranger. Instead request that they go for help while you stay with your vehicle. If you are commuting at late hours, Hudyma proposes using a buddy system. By doing so you advise someone of your departure and your arrival from point A to B. Using the same route will also facilitate a

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## The U of A Women's Centre: International Women's Week

MONDAY, MARCH 10, 1 p.m. Hum 2-33 — Two fabulous, fun short films: *The Tender Tale of Cinderella Penguin*. A cast of thousands, all of them penguins. A recasting of the classic tale in feminist terms.

*The Spring and Fall of Nina Polanski*. A woman whose lack of identity leads her to Zelig-like identification with her kitchen appliances.

MAIN FEATURE: *Women on the March* (parts I and II). An evocative presentation of the history of women's demonstrations and activism.

4:00 Hum 2-33 Film: — *Behind the Veil*. A film pertaining to women and feminism in the Church. Speaker: Ann Dea.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11 — Edmonton Working Women (EWW) will lead a discussion on issues facing working women — part-time employment benefits, union involvement, etc. EWW runs a 24 hour crisis line: 424-6685.

1 Thursday, March 6, 1986

5:00 Heritage Lounge Athabasca lounge — A forum on women and Native rights led by various speakers from the Native Students' Association and the Native Women's Association.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 12:00 SUB 270A — A forum and discussion on reproductive choice. A midwife and founding member of the Association for safe alternatives in childbirth will speak on birth control, daycare, and education in parenting. Co-sponsored by pro-choice.

4:00 Heritage Lounge, Athabasca Hall — *After Chaos and Rage...Lesbian Survival*. Speaker: Community Activist

7:30 Hum Lec I — Dr. Alison Jaggar: *Women, Different but Equal*. Dr. Jaggar is a professor of ethics at the U of Cincinnati who is a distinguished speaker for the Advisory Committee on Women's Studies Lecture series.

THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 12:30 Hum 2-33 —

Margaret Oseen from Edmonton Women's Health Collective will discuss fitness as a feminist issue.

4:00 p.m. Hum 2-33 — Information seminar on DES followed by the film, 'An Uncertain Legacy'. Diethylstilbestrol, a drug administered to millions of pregnant women from the 40's through the early 70's, caused such concern over its medical effects as to result in the drug's eventual ban.

8 p.m. Hum Lec IV — An educational forum on prostitution. Should we accept the 5 p.m. SUB 270A — Social prior to Heather Bishop concert. Beer, Wine, Food, Fun!

8 p.m. SUB Theatre — Heather Bishop Concert. Limited child-care will be available. For registration and/or concert information, contact the Women's Centre at 030E, SUB 432-2057.

assumption that prostitution is an inevitable aspect of human society? How will the new legislation affect us? Key speakers: Lynn

Fraser, representative of the Calgary-based Alliance for Safe Prostitution. Halyna Free-land, local lawyer.

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, noon Hum 2-15 — Dr. Anne Hall, a member of the Advisory Committee on Women's Studies, will speak about the proposed Women's Studies Program at the University of Alberta.

2 p.m. Hum 2-33 — Film: 'On Guard', the premiere of a feminist Thriller in which direct action is taken against a pharmaceutical company.

3 p.m. Bus 3-06 — *Women in Business*, film and speaker. Originally aired on CBC, the film 'The Class of Promise' explores the experiences of women in the MBA program at the University of Western Ontario. Women are willing to adjust to the business world; is the business world willing to adjust to women? Dr. Dallas Cullen will facilitate a discussion following the film.