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## Singth Materials

FOERTSCH, J., & GERNSBACHER, M. A. (1997). In search of gender neutrality: Is singular they a cognitively efficient substitute for generic he? *Psychological Science*, 8, 106-111. [[View PDF](#)]

## Appendix A

Experimental Stimuli Used in Experiment 1. The number in parentheses indicates how “male” or “female” that antecedent was considered to be on a rating scale from 1 (mostly male) to 10 (mostly female).

### Male bias:

A surgeon who double parks is breaking the law, (3.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be in a hurry,  
because the law is the law, no matter who violates it.

A governor should not use a state fund to campaign for re-election, (2.6)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ served the people well,  
because too many of our tax dollars are spent on election campaigns.

A sheriff should be willing to come on duty at any hour, (2.8)  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ may have a family,  
because law-enforcement leaders must consider policework their first priority.

A truck driver should never drive when sleepy, (2.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be struggling to make a delivery on time,  
because many accidents are caused by drivers who fall asleep at the wheel.

A minister should not be allowed to get married, (2.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have found the perfect mate,  
because religious leaders are less effective when they have families of their own.

A construction worker should always wear a hardhat on site, (2.3)  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ must use the Porta Potty,  
because Porta Pottys are easily crushed by large falling objects.

A gas station attendant should always offer to check the oil, (2.7)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have other customers waiting,  
because most drivers do not check their oil frequently enough.

A sailor must have an intimate understanding of how the current behaves, (2.8)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be steering a motorized vessel,  
because boats of all types are affected by the strength and direction of currents.

A soldier should obey every order without question, (2.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may feel the order is immoral,  
because unquestioning obedience is necessary for a strong and effective military.

A mechanic will often replace a part that is only partially worn, (2.2)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ might realize the repair is unnecessary,  
because auto shops will try to jack up their customers' bills any way they can.

A physicist should never hesitate to develop a new technology, (3.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ might foresee its potential as a weapon,  
because scientists are not responsible for how their inventions are used by society.

A professional athlete shouldn't be paid more than \$300,000 a year, (3.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be one of the best in the sport,  
because professional athletes make too much money compared to other workers.

An electrical engineer must be a skilled mathematician, (3.1)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can rely on computers to do the calculations,  
because many electrical phenomena obey mathematical laws.

A senator who has does something immoral should not be re-elected, (3.1)  
even if the offense \_\_\_\_\_ committed was in private life,  
because elected officials must show exemplary behavior at all times, in all arenas.

A janitor should never leave a cleaning compound unattended, (3.0)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ might think no one else is in the building,  
because many cleaners contain chemicals that can kill if used improperly.

A firefighter must be willing to risk life and limb on the job, (2.9)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have young children at home,  
because firefighters who can't be heroic and self-sacrificing don't belong on the job.

A general should never show doubt or uncertainty in decision-making, (2.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can assume many lives will be lost,  
because military leaders must appear confident and self-assured at all times.

A plumber should never use a toxic chemical to unclog a pipe, (2.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can flush the pipe thoroughly afterwards,  
because mechanical devices are more effective at unclogging pipes than chemicals are.

## *Gender neutral:*

A party-goer who drives after drinking is irresponsible, (5.1)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ drank only one drink,  
because one drink can impair driving skill.

A child must be scolded for doing something wrong, (5.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be too young to know better,  
because uncorrected mistakes will only be repeated.

A neighbor who is considerate will not play loud music, (5.4)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be having a party,  
because it is important to have friendly relations with the people next door.

A student should try to do each homework problem without assistance, (5.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ might have trouble doing so,  
because the harder you work to figure something out, the better you will learn it.

A runner should eat lots of pasta the night before a race, (5.4)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ would rather have a steak,  
because carbohydrates provide fuel for endurance events, while proteins do not.

A bicyclist should stop at every stop sign, (5.0)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can see no cars are coming,  
because bicycles must obey the same traffic rules as cars.

A tour guide should never show dangerous parts of town, (5.9)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may find it exciting,  
because tour companies are liable for whatever occurs during an outing.

A consumer may unknowingly purchase a food high in fat, (5.9)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will buy only foods that are labeled "light,"  
because many food products advertised as healthy really aren't.

An acrobat should always use a net when performing a stunt, (5.7)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ practiced the move many times before,  
because a thrilling stunt is not worth dying for.

A bookkeeper who embezzles money should be punished, (5.7)  
even if the company \_\_\_\_\_ stole from makes shady financial deals,  
because two wrongs do not make a right.

A violinist must tune up before each performance, (5.7)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ knew the violin was tuned before being cased,  
because an instrument's strings can loosen over time.

An artist should not be sexually-explicit or obscene, (5.6)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be making a statement about modern society,  
because art should uplift and inspire, not shock and degrade.

A patient who wants to get well should maintain a positive outlook, (5.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ received a grim prognosis,  
because patients with a good attitude and strong spirit are more likely to heal.

A psychologist should never reveal what is said during therapy sessions, (5.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ got questioned by police about a crime,  
because the confidentiality between patient and therapist must never be violated.

An author should try to write something every day, (5.4)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be suffering from writer's block,  
because the best way to get past an obstacle is to push through it.

A lab technician needs to be meticulous and precise, (5.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ must work under time pressure,  
because the results from a sloppy experiment can never be trusted.

A reporter should do whatever is legally necessary to get information about a crime, (5.2)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ must invade the victim's privacy,  
because the public has a right to know every detail about crimes and their victims.

A speaker should avoid reading a prepared speech, (5.1)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will be nervous and want to get the wording exactly right,  
because audiences pay more attention to someone speaking than to someone reading.

## *Female bias:*

A grade school teacher should have usable classroom supplies, (7.5)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ must pay for it out-of-pocket,  
because most teachers make enough money to buy their own supplies.

A housekeeper should never snoop around in an empty house, (8.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may suspect the owner is a drug dealer,  
because even criminals have a right to privacy.

A librarian should know how to search a CD-ROM data base, (7.8)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will have few patrons using the machines,  
because finding references by computer is the wave of the future.

A dental hygienist should not start a conversation while cleaning teeth, (7.9)  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ may know the client very well,  
because it is difficult to reply with someone's fingers in your mouth.

A babysitter should not talk on the phone while on duty, (8.2)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ already sent the children to bed,  
because the parents might call home to check up on their children.

A nanny should be strict and authoritative, (9.0)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may truly like the employer's children,  
because the nanny's job is to make sure the children behave, not to be their friend.

A manicurist should not be a nail-biter, (8.9)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will do it only when no one else is around,  
because clients cannot trust a manicurist whose own nails are poorly groomed.

A knitter must pay close attention to every stitch, (8.8)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have years of practice behind them,  
because knitting requires a high degree of concentration.

A prostitute with AIDS who continues to work should be charged with attempted murder, (8.8)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ took safety precautions with every customer,  
because condoms do not ensure against the transmission of AIDS.

A gossip columnist should never write about an unconfirmed rumor, (8.3)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ identified the statement as a rumor,  
because many readers will treat innuendo and speculation as fact.

A receptionist should always be polite when taking calls, (8.2)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be having a bad day,  
because clients who are treated rudely may take their business elsewhere.

An aerobics instructor should do every set of every exercise being taught, (8.1)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be tired from teaching classes all day,  
because the best way to teach is by example.

A flight attendant must always provide service with a smile, (8.1)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may think a passenger is being unreasonable and rude,  
because flight attendants are there to make everyone's flight as pleasant as possible.

A weaver must have a well-developed plan before beginning, (8.1)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can weave only one line at a time,  
because all the vertical threads are placed in the loom at the start.

A fashion model should have a trim and hard-to-achieve figure, (8.0)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will be modeling inexpensive clothes for the average consumer,  
because consumers are more likely to buy clothes they have seen on an idealized figure.

A nurse should have an understanding of how a medication works, (7.8)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will not have any say in prescribing it,  
because a nurse must anticipate how a patient might respond to the medication.

An interior decorator must take a room's traffic flow into account, (7.7)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be focusing on color and mood,  
because rooms should be designed for actual use, not just for display.

A phone operator should never eavesdrop on a private call, (7.6)  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can discern a criminal transaction is about to take place,  
because it is illegal to listen to someone else's call unless a warrant has been issued.

### *Indefinite pronouns:*

Someone who respects authority should never openly question it,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have doubts about the information being given,  
because people in authority are there for a reason and must be trusted.

Somebody who has been arrested for DUI twice should lose all driving privileges,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can promise to give up drinking,  
because multiple offenders shouldn't get another chance to kill someone.

Anyone who smokes should pay more for health insurance,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ only smoked pipes and cigars,  
because smoking of any kind can do expensive damage to one's health.

Anybody who litters should be fined \$50,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ cannot see a trashcan nearby,  
because littering is an irresponsible form of vandalism and should be punished.

Everyone who lives in America should be able to speak and read English,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ came here from another country,  
because a common language binds us together and should be used by all.

Everybody who believes in freedom should be willing to fight for it,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ must risk death or financial ruin,  
because freedom doesn't come free.

Someone who wants to be left alone shouldn't leave the door open,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have a hot and stuffy office,  
because an open door is an invitation.

Somebody who leaves an apartment door unlocked is risking theft,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may know and trust everyone in the building,  
because many apartment buildings are easily entered by strangers.

Anyone who watches a violent TV show contributes to TV violence,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ might not approve of the violence,  
because watching a show is the equivalent of sanctioning its content.

Anybody who buys a gun should have to wait 5 days before acquiring it,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may seem like a respectable citizen,  
because a 3-day waiting period is needed to do a complete records check.

Everyone who acquires the AIDS virus will eventually show symptoms of AIDS,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have very robust immune systems,  
because no one who has had the virus more than 10 years is still symptom-free.

Everybody in America has the right to live, work, and love in a non-hostile environment,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be gay,  
because homosexuals deserve to be treated just like everyone else.

Someone who is leaving for vacation should unplug every electric appliance,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will only be gone a few days,  
because most electrical fires occur when people are on vacation.

Somebody who has just been struck by lightning shouldn't be touched,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may require medical attention,  
because the body will remain electrically charged for several minutes.

Anyone who wants to live a long life should reduce dietary cholesterol,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ will be exercising regularly,  
because even athletes have died from arteries clogged by cholesterol.

Anybody who is homosexual should be treated like an outcast,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be a family member,  
because homosexuals have freely chosen an unnatural and immoral lifestyle.

Everyone who lives less than two miles from work should walk, bike, or bus,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can get to work more quickly by car,  
because automobile traffic is a major contributor to air pollution.

Everybody who contributes to charity may claim a tax exemption,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ might not have a receipt,  
because the IRS knows taxpayers won't lie about charitable contributions.

## *Appendix B*

Experimental Stimuli used in Experiment 2:

### *Male bias:*

A surgeon I know never double parks,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be in a hurry,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ thinks the law applies to everyone, even surgeons on-call.

Do you think most surgeons would agree?

Our governor shouldn't use a state fund to campaign for re-election,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ served the people well,  
because too many of our tax dollars are spent on election campaigns.

Do you want your taxes to be used for campaigning?

Our former sheriff was willing to come on duty at any hour,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ had a family,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ felt policework should be an officer's first priority.

Do you think most officers would agree with that?

That truck driver shouldn't drive when sleepy,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be trying to make a delivery on time,  
because many accidents are caused by drivers who fall asleep at the wheel.

Do you ever drive when sleepy?

I don't think my minister should be allowed to get married,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have found the perfect mate,  
because religious leaders are less effective when they have families of their own.

Do you agree?

A construction worker I know always wears a hardhat on site,  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ must use the Porta Potty,  
because Porta Pottys are easily crushed by large falling objects.

Do you think that's likely to happen?

My gas station attendant always offers to check my oil,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have other customers waiting,  
because many drivers don't check their oil frequently enough.

Do you check your oil every time you buy gas?

A sailor I knew developed an intimate understanding of the current,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ steered only motorized vessels,  
because boats of all types are affected by the strength and direction of currents.

Have you ever steered a boat?

That soldier on trial had obeyed every order without question,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ felt some orders were immoral,  
because unquestioning obedience is necessary for a strong and effective military.

Would you have done the same?

My old mechanic always tried to convince me to get a part replaced,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ knew the repair was unnecessary,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ figured I didn't know any better.

Have you ever had a mechanic like that?

A physicist friend of mine is hesitant to develop a new technology,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ can foresee its use as a weapon,  
even though the technology is intended to improve people's lives.

Do you think the technology should be developed anyway?

That pro athlete shouldn't be paid more than \$300,000 a year,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ may be one of the best in the sport,  
because professional athletes make too much money compared to other workers.

Do you agree?



An electrical engineer I know has taken a lot of advanced math, even though \_\_\_\_\_ can rely on computers to do the calculations, because many electrical phenomena obey mathematical laws.

Does your major require lots of math?

I don't think that senator should be re-elected, even if the offense \_\_\_\_\_ committed was in private life, because elected officials must show exemplary behavior at all times, in all arenas.

Do you agree?

That janitor shouldn't have left that cleaning compound unattended, even if \_\_\_\_\_ thought no one else was in the building, because cleaners contain chemicals that can kill if used improperly.

Do you think the janitor behaved negligently?

A firefighter I knew was willing to risk life and limb on the job, even though \_\_\_\_\_ had young children at home, because firefighters are expected to be heroic and self-sacrificing.

Do you think people with children should be firefighters?

That general shouldn't have shown doubt in decision-making, even if \_\_\_\_\_ knew many lives would be lost, because military leaders must appear confident and self-assured at all times.

Would you trust a leader who showed uncertainty?

That plumber shouldn't have used a toxic chemical to unclog the pipe, even though \_\_\_\_\_ flushed the pipe thoroughly afterwards, because mechanical devices are more effective at unclogging pipes than chemicals are.

Have you ever used chemical drain openers?

## *Gender neutral:*

A party-goer I knew would never drive after drinking, even if \_\_\_\_\_ had only one drink, because \_\_\_\_\_ thought one drink would impair driving skill.

Do you think that's true?

I always scold my child for doing something wrong, even though \_\_\_\_\_ may be too young to know better, because I think uncorrected mistakes will only be repeated.

Do you agree?

My friend would never come by without calling first,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be passing through the neighborhood,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ wouldn't want to catch me at a bad time.

Are your friends like that?

A student of mine tries to solve every problem without help,  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ might be having a lot of trouble,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ thinks the harder you work, the more you'll learn.

Do you think that's true?

A runner I knew always ate lots of pasta the night before a race,  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ would've rather had a steak,  
because carbohydrates provide fuel for endurance events, while proteins do not.

Have you ever "carbo-loaded" for an athletic event?

A bicyclist I know stops at every stop sign,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ can see no cars are coming,  
because bicycles are supposed to obey the same rules as cars.

Do you do the same?

My tour guide in Seattle couldn't show me dangerous parts of town,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ thought it would be exciting,  
because tour companies are liable for whatever occurs during an outing.

Did the tour guide behave irresponsibly?

This consumer I know unwittingly bought food high in fat,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ had seen the food advertised as "light"  
and \_\_\_\_\_ didn't know that many food products advertised as healthy really aren't.

Do you think misleading ads should be banned?

An acrobat I knew always used a net when performing a stunt,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ had practiced the move many times before,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ thought a thrilling stunt wasn't worth dying for.

Do you think that made the performance less exciting?

A bookkeeper I knew used to embezzle money,  
but \_\_\_\_\_ only stole from companies who had very high profits  
or who had engaged in financial scams.

Do you think the stealing was justified?

That violinist should have checked the instrument's tuning,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ had tuned it just the night before,  
because an instrument's strings can loosen overnight.

Did you know that?

That artist shouldn't be so sexually-explicit and obscene,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be making a statement about modern society,  
because art should uplift and inspire, not shock and degrade.

Do you agree?

A patient of mine is trying to maintain a positive outlook,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ received a grim prognosis,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ thinks patients with a good attitude are more likely to heal.

Would you discourage such a belief?

That psychologist shouldn't have revealed what was said in therapy,  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ got questioned by police about the crime,  
because the confidentiality between patient and therapist should never be violated.

Do you agree?

An author I know tries to write something every day,  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ may be suffering from writer's block,  
because, supposedly, the best way to get past an obstacle is to push through it.

Does that philosophy work for you?

This lab technician I know always tries to be meticulous and precise,  
even when \_\_\_\_\_ must work under time pressure,  
because the results from a sloppy experiment can never be trusted.

Do you think you'd do well in a job like that?

That reporter did whatever was necessary to get news about the crime,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ had to invade the victim's privacy,  
because competition for information about the crime had been fierce.

Do you think the reporting of violence has gotten too sensational?

That speaker shouldn't have read from a cue card the whole time,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may have been nervous,  
because audiences stop paying attention when someone is just reading.

Does giving public speeches make you nervous?

## *Female bias:*

My friend the school teacher always has a well-supplied classroom,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ must pay for it out-of-pocket,  
because teachers in \_\_\_\_\_ school district make plenty of money.

Do you think most teachers are overpaid?

That housekeeper shouldn't have snooped around in the empty house,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ suspected the owner was a drug dealer,  
because even criminals have a right to privacy.

Do you agree?

That librarian should know how to search a CD-ROM data base,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ may not feel comfortable with computers,  
because finding references by computer is the wave of the future.

Do you agree?

My dental hygienist used to ask questions while cleaning my teeth,  
and then \_\_\_\_\_ would expect me to reply,  
but it's difficult to talk with someone's fingers in your mouth.

Does your dental hygienist do that?

I won't let my babysitter chat on the phone while on duty,  
even if \_\_\_\_\_ already put the children to bed,  
because I might want to call home at some point.

Have you ever done any babysitting?

My nanny was always strict and authoritative,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ truly liked me,  
because \_\_\_\_\_ thought a nanny's job was to make sure I behaved, not to be my friend.

Would you want a nanny like that?

My manicurist is a terrible gossip  
and \_\_\_\_\_ will blab about what other customers have said and done,  
even if I try to change the subject.

Should I get another manicurist?

That knitter must have worked a long time on this sweater  
because \_\_\_\_\_ didn't miss a single stitch,  
and the pattern of colors is very complicated.

Have you ever done any knitting?

That prostitute with AIDS should be charged with attempted murder, even if \_\_\_\_\_ took safety precautions with every customer, because condoms cannot totally prevent the transmission of AIDS.

Do you agree?

The gossip columnist for “The Sun” shouldn’t have spread that rumor, even if \_\_\_\_\_ identified the statement as a rumor, because many readers treat whatever gets printed as fact.

Do you believe everything you read in the paper?

That receptionist should be more polite when taking calls, even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be having a bad day, because clients who are treated rudely can take their business elsewhere.

Have you ever been treated rudely by a receptionist?

My aerobics instructor does every set of every exercise, even if \_\_\_\_\_ may be tired from teaching classes all day, because the best way to teach is by example.

Have you ever tried aerobics?

That flight attendant should have provided service with a smile, even if \_\_\_\_\_ thought that passenger was being unreasonable, because flight attendants are there to make everyone’s flight as pleasant as possible.

Do you agree?

That weaver must have had a well-developed plan at the beginning, even if \_\_\_\_\_ could weave only one line at a time, because the rug’s pattern is very intricate and complicated.

Do you have any woven rugs?

That fashion model should try to lose weight, even if \_\_\_\_\_ will be modeling inexpensive clothes for the average consumer, because consumers are more likely to buy clothes they have seen on an idealized figure.

Do you prefer models who are thin?

My nurse was able to explain how my medication would affect me, even though \_\_\_\_\_ had no say in prescribing it, because nurses must anticipate how patients will respond to medication.

Do you think nurses should be allowed to prescribe drugs?

My interior decorator took the room's traffic flow into account,  
although \_\_\_\_\_ wanted to concentrate on color and mood,  
because I insisted the room be designed for actual use, not just for display.

Do you think hiring a decorator is worth the money?

This phone operator I knew would frequently eavesdrop on a call,  
even though \_\_\_\_\_ knew it was illegal,  
because the job was too boring otherwise.

Have you ever thought operators were listening in on your calls?