

LANGUAGE AND PREJUDICE SYMPOSIUM
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Gender, language and prejudice

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What is prejudice?

an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge (*Cambridge Dictionary*)

an unreasonable dislike of a particular group of people or things, or a preference for one group of people or things over another (*Collins Dictionary*)



preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience (*Google*)

‘adverse prejudgement’ (Finegan and Rickford, 2004)

What is language?

- language use (*discourse*)
- in a social context
- e.g. *public discourse, political discourse*
- *a discourse* = a way of seeing the world
- e.g. human rights are important
- *a discourse* as a way of constructing (as well as reflecting) the world
- so language use is not 'just words'
- prejudice can be, and is, expressed in speakers' discourse



What is gender?

- beyond 'the two genders'
- gender as *learned/taught behaviour* associated with being a woman/man/girl/boy
- gender as an *idea*: when women and men (or boys and girls) do something differently, or are talked about differently, then "something to do with gender is going on"
- gender as a set of socially constructed and frequently articulated *ideas* about women and men, girls and boys

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- ▶ “Gender builds on biological sex, but it exaggerates biological difference, and it carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013: 2)



<http://www.buzzfeed.com/erinchack/pointlessly-gendered-products>

Language and prejudice' is usually about prejudicial attitudes to someone because of the way they speak

- accent
- dialect



- ▶ Labov, William. 1982. Objectivity and commitment in linguistic science: The case of the Black English trial in Ann Arbor. *Language in Society* 11/2:165–201.



- ▶ “At the trial, linguists were able to present effective testimony in the form of a unified view on the origins and structural characteristics of the Black English Vernacular and argue for its validity as an alternate to standard English.”

THE KILLING OF TRAYVON MARTIN (1995-2012)



Language and linguistics on trial: Hearing Rachel Jeantel (and other vernacular speakers) in the courtroom and beyond


John R. Rickford and Sharese King (2016)



EXTRACT FROM ABSTRACT (Rickford and King)

“Rachel Jeantel ... spoke in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and her crucial testimony was dismissed as incomprehensible and not credible. The disregard for her speech in court and the media is familiar to vernacular speakers and puts Linguistics itself on trial: following Saussure, how do we dispel such ‘prejudices’ and ‘fictions’? We show that Jeantel speaks a highly systematic AAVE, with possible Caribbean influence. We also discuss voice quality and other factors that bedeviled her testimony, including dialect unfamiliarity and institutionalized racism.”

- ▶ ‘Jeantel’s speech patterns, because they are associated with poor African Americans, were perceived by many, including the people who mattered most, the jurors, as unintelligent, and worse, evidence that she was not credible’ (Bloom, 2014: 133).

- ▶ This talk: not prejudice about people's language use, but prejudice as expressed **about** social groups of people **in** someone else's language use (spoken or written)
 - ▶ More particularly: prejudice about **women**
 - ▶ To return to our previous understandings of prejudice: expressed ideas which are **unreasonable**, **adverse** and **preconceived**
- 
- Three parallel white lines of varying lengths are positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, slanted diagonally upwards from left to right.

ADVERSE

Negative terms for women available to English language users

- ▶ 'Semantic derogation' (Schultz, 1975) of women (*manager/manageress, master/mistress, wizard/witch*)



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DEROGATORY LANGUAGE USED OF WOMEN: GENDER PREJUDICE



Carole Malone [@thecarolemalone](#)

The idea that the patronising, school-marmy [@joswinson](#) could ever be PM is more terrifying than anything that's currently happening in this country

2:01 AM – 15 Sep 2019

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE 'PHRASE FAMILY' OF GENDER PREJUDICE

- ▶ school-marmy

- ▶ hen-pecked



- ▶ 'she wears the trousers'



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- ▶ Meghan Markle 'wears TROUSERS' in relationship with Prince Harry, claims insider
- ▶ MEGHAN Markle is “wearing the trousers” in her relationship with Prince Harry according to shocking new claims made by a Royal insider that she is the one with the power, it has been reported.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/942128/Meghan-Markle-Prince-Harry-relationship-Royal-Wedding-Royal-Family-news-latest> (April 6 2018)

▶ **boo**

▶ 9 Apr, 2018

▶ maybe some women do wear the pants in the family but they don't go public with it so all the world knows it, embarrassing their husbands like this girl does. How sad for Harry. The vulture will be discovered hopefully not too late.

▶ Reply

▶ Share

▶ *1 Like*

LEXICAL GAPS

school-mastery*

cock-pecked*

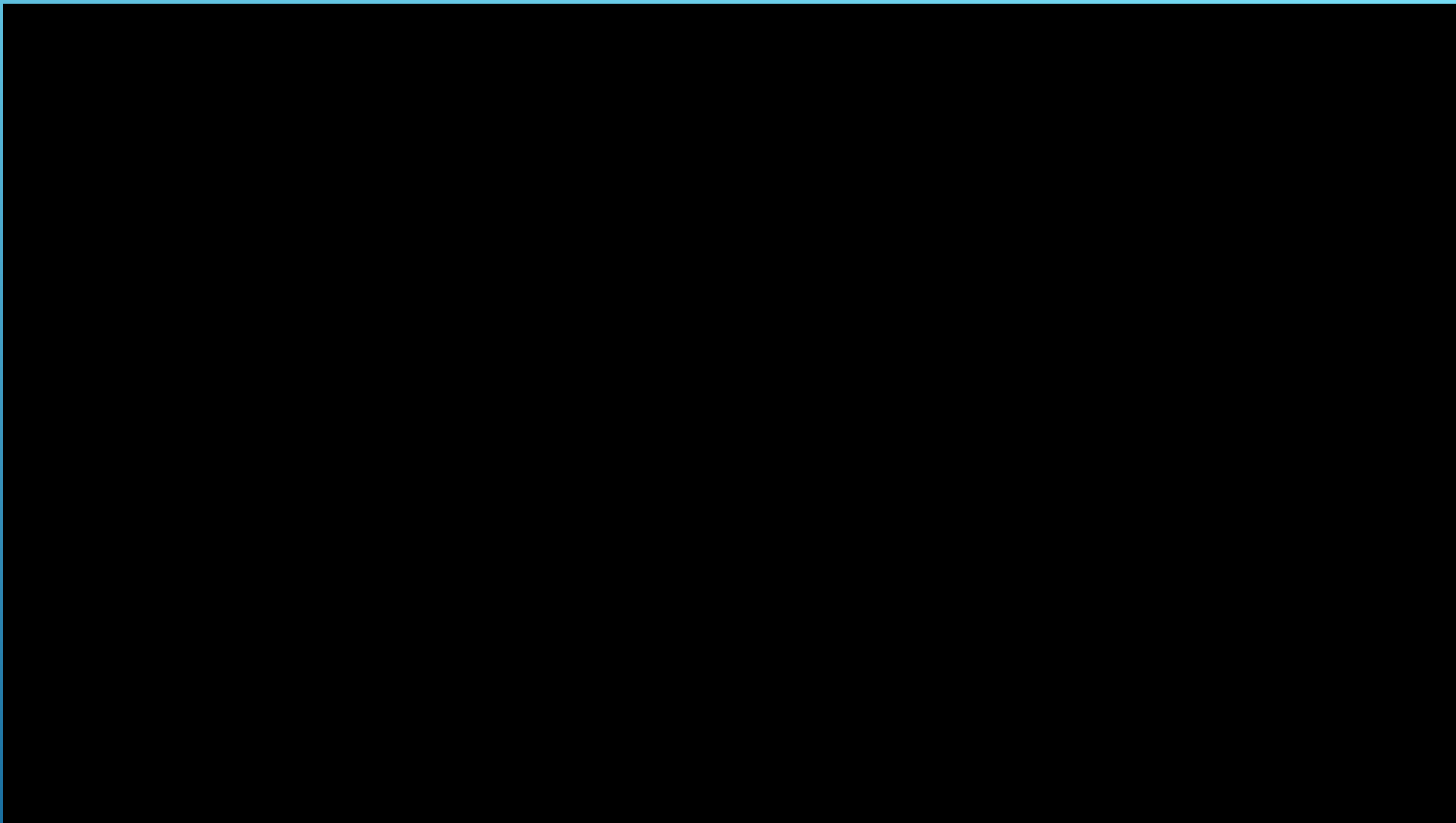
he wears the skirt*

- * is usually used to show ungrammatical form/structure; works also to show odd or 'marked' lexical items
- *lexical gaps mean linguistic asymmetry*, indicative of prejudice

AND NOW THREE RECENT EXAMPLES OF GENDER-PREJUDICIAL LANGUAGE FROM BORIS JOHNSON

- spoken discourse
- public discourse
- political discourse





[https://www.youtube.com › watch › v=U_J3Yc9N63s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_J3Yc9N63s)

‘Great big girl’s blouse’




Insulting men?

- not obviously sexist towards women?
- insulting men **by** insulting women
- *blouse* not *shirt*



DEBBIE CAMERON: language: a feminist guide (2019)

“Something is being made here of what’s inside a ‘big girl’s blouse’ when its owner wears it. A ‘big girl’s blouse’ is a man who’s soft when he should be hard: metaphorically he has breasts instead of balls.”

Three parallel white lines of varying lengths are positioned diagonally in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

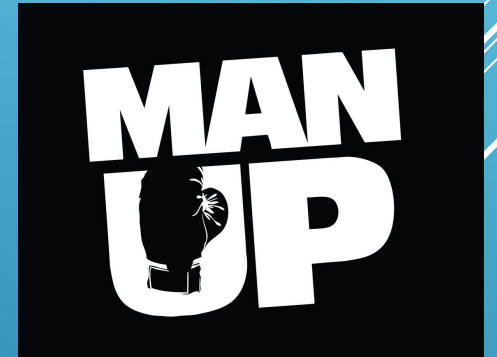
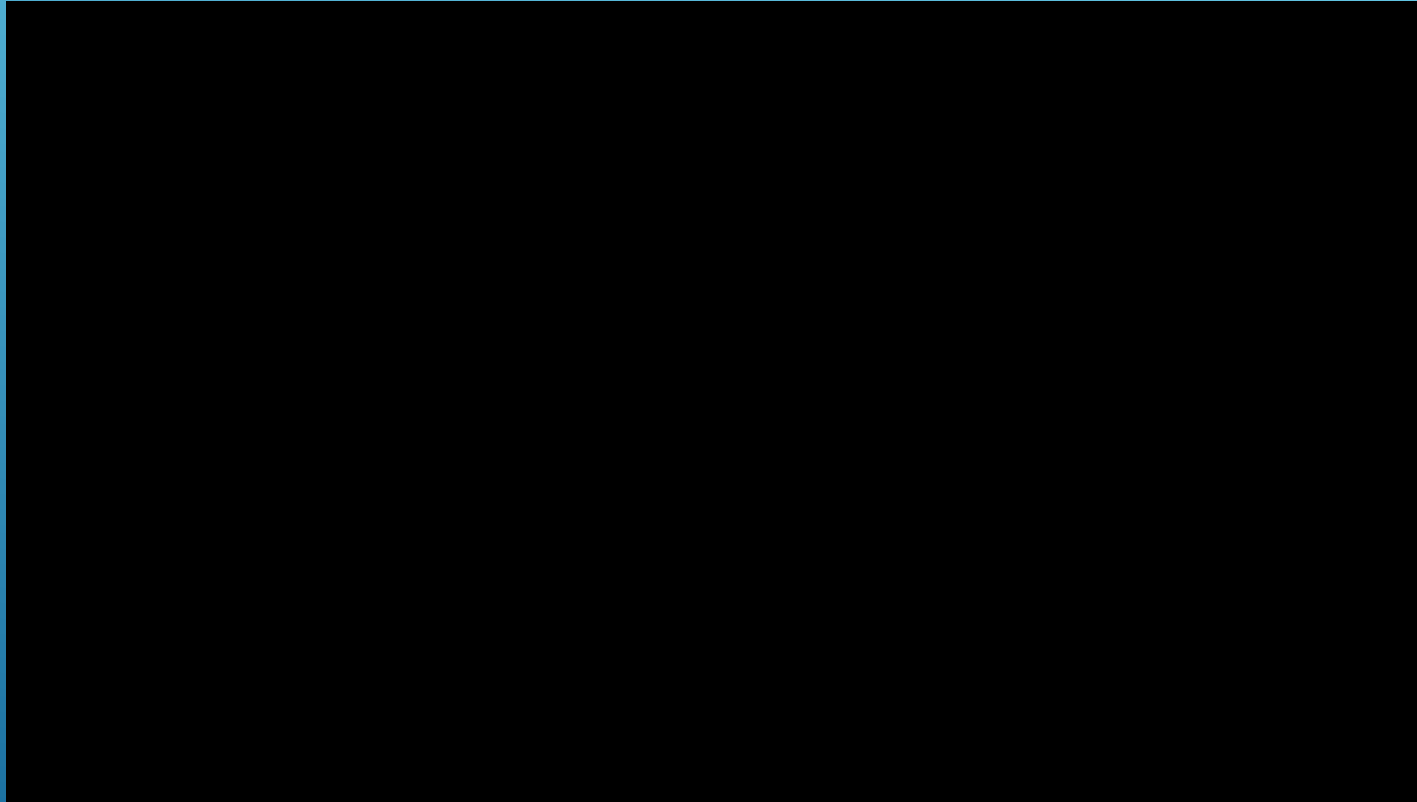
big girl's blouse (Cameron continued)

“its force depends on a sexist presupposition. It follows the rule ... that one reliable way to insult a man (of any sexuality) is to attribute female or feminine qualities to him”

“It exploits, in other words, the tacit understanding that gender isn't just a difference, it's a hierarchy.”



[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AML6G2BY3M)
[AML6G2 BY3M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AML6G2BY3M): 'man-up'

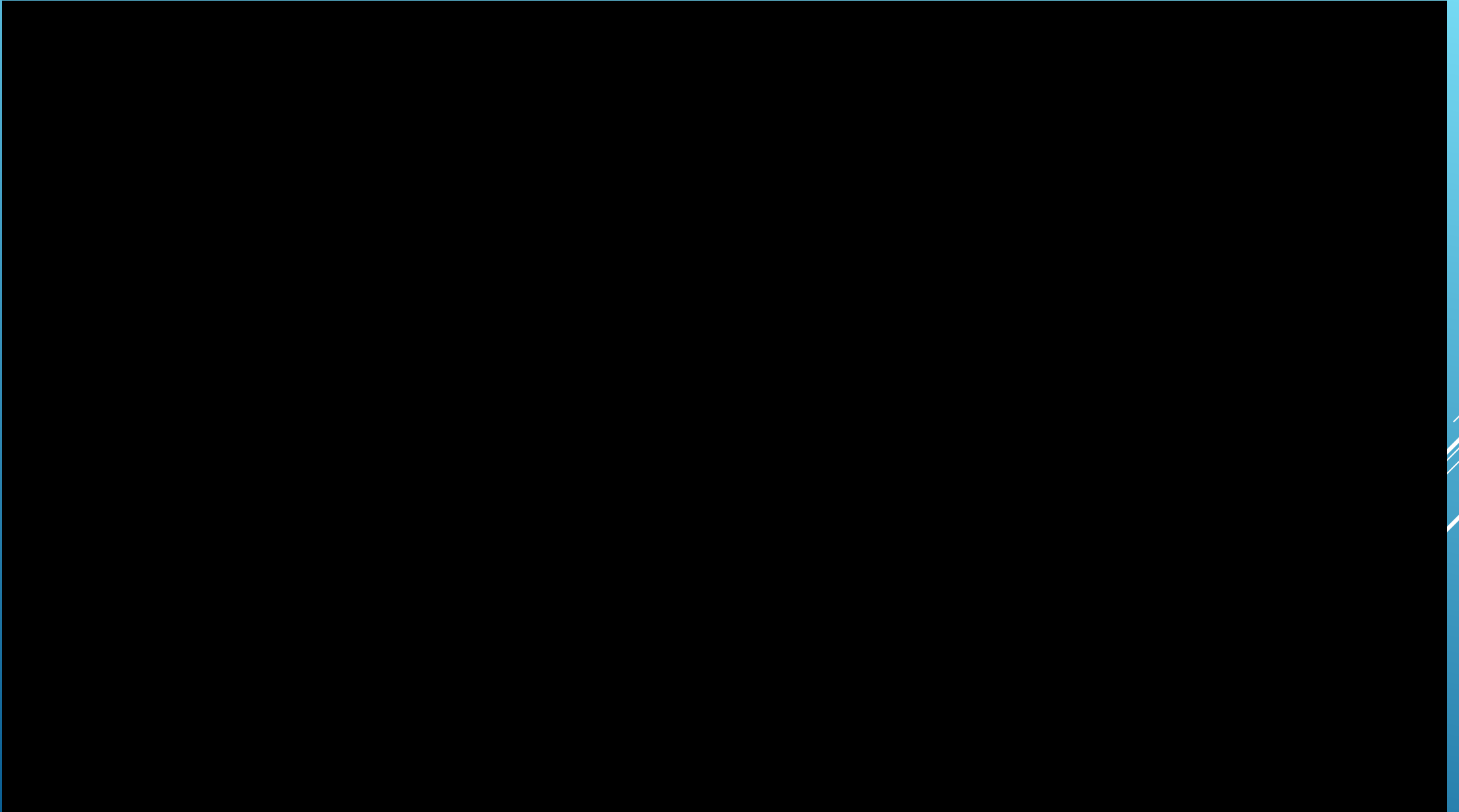


Man-up

- 'you're not a man'
- 'you're not a real man'
- 'you're not enough of a man'
- therefore, you're like a woman,
- i.e. there's something wrong with being a woman
- again, insulting men **by** insulting women
- implicitly homophobic
- *man-up* is unmarked (part of gender prejudicial discourse)
- woman-up*



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hon3nahvqjs>



Girly swot

- something wrong with being a 'swot'?
- does it contrast unfavourably with '(man of) action'?
- does being a 'swot' exclude being a person of action?
- only, or more so, if associated with femininity?
- Note Dominic Grieve's response: to contrast it with 'manly idleness'



OTHER (POSITIVE/WITTY/FEMINIST) RESPONSES TO GENDER PREJUDICE IN DISCOURSE

- *girly swot* has prompted T-shirts
- 'reclamation'



PREJUDICE AS **PRE-EXISTING**

- Discourses 'always, already' exist, i.e. are themselves pre-existing
- Johnson is drawing on several pre-existing, prejudicial discourses (ways of seeing the world), which we can call:
 - 'Women as weak'
 - 'Women as ineffectual'
 - 'Women as subordinate to men'
 - 'Women as lacking in action' (?)
- *great big girl's blouse*, *man-up*, and *girly swot* can each be seen as 'lexical traces' of one or more of these discourses

PREJUDICIAL LANGUAGE: AWARENESS, INTENTIONALITY AND CONSTRUCTION

- ▶ **Speaker awareness?**
 - ▶ Yes or no?
 - ▶ Should our politicians be aware of (their own) prejudicial language?
- ▶ **Speaker intentionality?**
 - ▶ If they are aware, are they using prejudicial language intentionally? Why? To achieve what? Self-construction?
- ▶ **Self-construction of speaker?**
 - ▶ e.g. 'Speaking as a mother/feminist/socialist (explicit)
 - ▶ 'I spent ages helping Tim with his homework last night.' (implicit)
 - ▶ If politicians are using prejudicial language intentionally, is *this particular self-construction*? As what?



Boris Johnson: intentional self-construction as 'a man of the people'?

- implicit in his words (he doesn't say 'Speaking as man of the people,')
- in conjunction with his actions
- as not pandering to 'snowflakes' (liberals/intellectuals)
- as not one of the 'PC brigade' (ditto)
- as a man of action (not a 'girly swot')
- as fun (definitely not a 'girly swot')



Thank you



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