

## REPORT ON GENDER SPECIFIC TERMS WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE 1989

Motion from 1988 WSC:

"To include the review of 'gender specific terms' in our literature among the goals and objectives of world literature, with the aim of bringing back a report to the WSC 1989."

The issue of gender specific language in literature has been receiving increased attention, both in our fellowship and the world at large. One of the reasons for this is the undeniable fact that words are the fundamental building blocks of our written and verbal communications. We need to remember also that language is at most a reflection of society and its prevalent beliefs. Language influences, rather than determines, thoughts and behavior. Similarly, in Narcotics Anonymous literature, the concepts and ideas, as well as the way these concepts are presented in words, are at best a reflection of our fellowship and its prevalent beliefs.

In our attempt to address the motion from the conference, the WSC Literature Committee reviewed the use of gender specific terms in our informational pamphlets, and the *White Booklet*. This review did not include the Basic Text. We thought that the *White Booklet* and informational pamphlets would give us an accurate picture of our literature's use of gender specific terms, in a much more manageable sample.

The use of gender specific terms in our literature falls into basically four categories, and each of these generally include the use of the third person pronouns. The first case is the use of male and female personal pronouns when referring to an identified person of specified sex, generally in personal stories. The second case is the use of the female or neuter male personal pronoun when referring to an indefinite person of unspecified sex. The third case is the use of the neuter male personal pronoun when making references to God (excluding cases in our Steps and Traditions). The fourth case is the use of the neuter male personal pronouns "Him" and "His" in our Third, Seventh, and Eleventh Step, and "He" and "Himself" in our Second Tradition.

Our review disclosed approximately 120 instances of gender specific terms in our informational pamphlets and *White Booklet*. Of these, nineteen are in our steps and traditions, one is a reference to God in the third person pronoun, and approximately 100 are male and female personal pronouns used in reference to identified persons, mainly in personal stories. Several are male personal pronoun used in reference to indefinite persons.

With the exception of the motion adopted at last year's Conference, the input concerning gender specific terms in our literature is limited to seven pieces. Six out of the seven pieces pertain to the use of His, Him, He, and Himself in our steps and traditions. About half of the pieces express a desire that gender specific terms be changed, the other half want the steps and traditions to remain as they are. From the amount of input received

we feel that this issue is not being widely discussed throughout the fellowship. We feel also that there is not significant agreement among the members who have an interest in this issue. One piece of input suggests that we should use the term "personship" instead of "fellowship" when referring to Narcotics Anonymous.

As fellowship input indicates the need, our literature is constantly revised. Each successive revision of our literature reflects a reduction in gender specific terms, most generally the neuter male pronouns used with indefinite persons. The revision of *The Group*, approved at Conference 1988, shows a reduction of gender specific terms from 16 in the 1983 version to 0 in the 1988 approved version. The *N.A. Group Starter Kit*, which is up for approval at this year's Conference, shows a similar situation, with a reduction from 15 to 6. Each future revision will reflect this same effort and resultant effect.

The WSC Literature Committee believes that revisions are the means by which gender specific usage will be reduced in our literature. The WSC Literature Committee further believes that any changes to our steps and traditions should come as a result of widespread discussion throughout our worldwide fellowship. Whatever we as a fellowship decide, the solution may not be entirely linguistic; perhaps we need to change some language and develop a tolerant, well-balanced attitude as well. Our desire to be as unprejudiced and unbiased as possible can be seen as we seek ever-increasing unity and strength in our common welfare.