

WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

Oxford Amends 'Sexist' Definitions of 'Woman'

Oxford University Press has updated its dictionaries' definitions of the word "woman" following an extensive review started by equality campaigners. Among the updates to Oxford Dictionaries' definitions is the **acknowledgement** that a woman can be "a person's wife, girlfriend, or female lover", rather than only a man's. The entry for "man" has also been amended to include this gender-neutral terminology and many other terms relating to sexual attractiveness have been revised. Labels have been applied to terms identified as "offensive" or "**dated**", such as the word "bitch" and "**bint**", which are listed as synonyms for the word woman.

An OUP spokeswoman said the changes were made after its dictionary compilers made an "extensive review" of entries "for 'woman' and many other related terms". The review was created due to a petition last year which criticised the dictionaries' inclusion of **bitch**, **bint**, **wench** and other offensive remarks, among its list of synonyms for women.

Campaigners argued that the examples the dictionaries offered for "man" were also much more extensive than those for "woman" and presented women as "subordinate" or "an irritation". "Ms September will **embody** the professional yet sexy career woman," read one example. Another spoke of "male **fisherfolk** who take their catch home for the little woman to **gut**".

The petition called for phrases and definitions that "discriminate and patronise" or "connote men's ownership" of women to be eliminated. It also demanded that the entry of "woman" be enlarged and include examples which represent minorities such as transgender and lesbian women. The leaders of Women's Aid and the Women's Equality party supported the campaign this year on International Women's Day, by signing an open letter asking OUP to change the "sexist" definitions. "Bitch is not a synonym for woman. It is dehumanising to call a woman a bitch. It is **but one** sad, **albeit** extremely damaging, example of everyday sexism. And that should be explained clearly in the dictionary entry used to describe us," it read. Maria Beatrice Giovanardi, who started the petition, which has reached 30,000 signatures, was "very happy" with the changes and felt the campaign had achieved 90% of its aims. She said the inclusion of gender-neutral terminology in the dictionaries' relationship examples marked "a huge step forward for the **LGBTQI** people". "It is respecting their love and unions," she added. But she remained "disappointed" that the word **bitch** – defined as a "**spiteful**, unpleasant, or disliked

19/11/20 / Keyword: woman

Publisher has updated its definition of 'woman' as well as many other terms and labels 'bitch' as offensive but fails to satisfy some equality campaigners

Change Oxford Dictionary's Sexist Definition of 'Woman'

34,495 personas han firmado. ¡Ayuda a conseguir 35,000!

GMF Harmer ha firmado hace 9 minutos

Yakari Yanagisawa ha firmado hace 10 horas

Nombre

Apellidos

Correo electrónico

Vitória, 01006 España

Quiero saber si esta petición gana y cómo puedo ayudar a otras peticiones ciudadanas

No quiero saber cómo avanza esta petición ni otras peticiones importantes

Firma esta petición

The [change.org](https://www.change.org) petition has reached over 30,000 signatures

Useful vocabulary

acknowledgement: acceptance of the truth or existence of s.t.

dated: old-fashioned; archaic

bint: (British informal, derogatory) a girl or woman

wench: (archaic or humorous) a girl/young woman or a prostitute

to embody: to give a tangible meaning to an idea or feeling

fisherfolk: people who catch fish for a living; **folk** means people

to gut: to remove the intestines and other organs from an animal

but one: no more than one

albeit: (all be it): (al)though

spiteful: cruel

derogatory: critical; disrespectful

Let's chat about that!

1. Do you think that there is a lot of gender inequality in the world? Give some examples.
2. Does your language have lots of synonyms for woman? Can you explain some of them?
3. Will men and women ever be equal? Why (not)?
4. Can a language be sexist? Or is it simply the people who use it who are sexist?
5. Do we have to be careful with the language we use so that we don't offend others? Does this also apply to comedy?

LIVE! English Events

Come and socialise in English!



<u>Coffee Saturdays</u>	<u>Cinema Nights</u>	<u>Sports Dive</u>
1st Saturday 11:00	Last Friday 19:30	2nd Friday 18:30
3rd Oct ✓	30th Oct ✓	16th Oct ✓
7th Nov ✓	27th Nov	13th Nov ✓
5th Dec	Not in Dec	11th Dec
9th Jan	29th Jan	
6th Feb	26th Feb	
6th Mar	26th Mar	
Not in April	30th April	
8th May	28th May	
5th Jun	25th Jun	

Next film on Fri 27th Nov!

woman” – continued to be listed as a synonym, **albeit** now labelled as “offensive”. She contrasted this to the classification of the word dickhead – defined “as a stupid, irritating, or ridiculous man” – which is considered “vulgar slang” and not included in the list of synonyms for men.

An OUP spokeswoman said their dictionaries “reflect, rather than dictate, how language is used. This is driven solely by evidence of how real people use English in their daily lives. “This independent editorial approach means that our dictionaries provide an accurate representation of language, even where it means recording senses and example uses of words that are offensive or **derogatory**, and which we wouldn’t necessarily employ ourselves.”

The OUP said its review has developed into an ongoing project to re-examine our treatment of language, with recent work undertaken around race and racial diversity and on the use of “they” as a pronoun for people whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female.

Adapted by ECP Coach Kex Kurien from [this article](#)

“I am not a bitch.”

Synonyms for “woman”

According to an English Thesaurus (a dictionary of synonyms), there are more than 80 synonyms for “woman”; some of them are nice and some of them are not.

Can you decide (with the help of a dictionary if you want) which of the following 20 words are nice and which are not?

Check your answers with your colleagues and ECP coach.

*sweetheart girlfriend biddy damsel queen young lady dowager
bitch lady wench bint sister her indoors baggage
girl bird mare girlfriend dame gentlewoman*

very nice	nice	not nice	horrible