

# *Casey Miller, 77, a Promoter Of Nonsexist Language, Dies*

By [Lawrence Van Gelder](#)

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Casey Miller, a writer and editor who was a pioneering advocate of nonsexist language, died on Sunday at her home in East Haddam, Conn. She was 77.

Kate Swift, her close friend and co-author, said the cause of death was chronic obstructive lung disease.

Beginning in the early 1970's, Ms. Miller and Ms. Swift co-wrote numerous books and articles on English usage and its relationship to the status of women. Writing in a climate of increasing sensitivity and opposition to language that relegated women to secondary status, Ms. Miller and Ms. Swift waged a forceful campaign against what many considered sexist language. If not all their proposals (like "genkind" to replace mankind) found their way into everyday usage, the women nonetheless helped to raise awareness of oppression by language.

Ms. Miller and Ms. Swift were the authors of "Words and Women," published in 1976 by Doubleday and 1991 by HarperCollins, and "The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing," published in 1980 by Lippincott & Crowell and in 1988 by HarperCollins. They also wrote many articles on sexism in English that appeared in national periodicals and in more than 30 anthologies and textbooks.

They achieved widespread recognition as authorities on the subject of linguistic disparagement of women with "One Small Step for Genkind," a 1972 article in The New York Times Magazine that was reprinted in college textbooks as recently as last year.

In it, they wrote: "Except for words that refer to females by definition (mother, actress, Congresswoman), and words for occupations traditionally held by females (nurse, secretary, prostitute), the English language defines everyone as male. The hypothetical person ("If a man can walk 10 miles in two hours . . . ), the average person ("the man in the street") and the active person ("the man on the move") are male. The assumption is that unless otherwise identified, people in general -- including doctors and beggars -- are men.

"It is a semantic mechanism that operates to keep women invisible; man and mankind represent everyone; he in generalized use refers to either sex; the "land where our fathers died" is also the land of our mothers -- although they go unsung. As the beetle-browed and mustachioed man in a Steig cartoon says to his two male drinking companions, 'When I speak of mankind, one thing I don't mean is womankind.' "

Ms. Swift said yesterday that the idea for the article grew out of their first collaboration as editors in 1970, on a sex education handbook for high schools that talked about the nature of man and man's behavior and used the pronoun "he" in ways that made it impossible to know whether the author was writing about both males and females or only about males.

"We began to think this was a field that needed to be written about and explored," Ms. Swift said.

Their articles on the subject first appeared in New York magazine and in the first issue of Ms. magazine. The New York Times Magazine article appeared on April 16, 1972, and "got an awful lot of negative comment," Ms. Swift said.

Casey Geddes Miller was born on Feb. 26, 1919, in Toledo, Ohio. She received a bachelor of arts degree in 1940 from Smith College, where she was a philosophy major. During World War II, she served for three years in the Navy, working in Washington in naval intelligence.

She was on the staff of Colonial Williamsburg from 1947 to 1954, when she became the curriculum editor of the publishing house of the Episcopal Church, Seabury Press. Ten years later, she became a freelance editor, working at her home in Greenwich and after 1967 in East Haddam, where she formed her editorial partnership with Ms. Swift.

She is survived by her sisters, Kate R. Gregg of Falmouth, Me., and Caroline S. Cooper of Gilmanton, N.H.