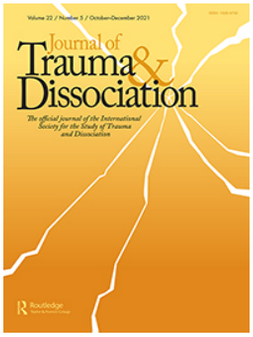

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EDITORIAL

Professor Emerit: It is Time to Reject Gendered Titles for Retired Faculty

"[I]t's like calling me a professorette now" – these words came to me in an e-mail from esteemed gender scholar Janet Shibley Hyde on the problem with the title "Professor Emerita" (personal correspondence, June 10, 2021). I couldn't agree more.

In fact, upon my retirement on 15 March 2021 from my position as Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon, I had already adopted the title "Professor Emerit" for myself – a title that I chose as not gendered and easily rendered consistent with English grammar (one *professor emerit*, two *professor emerits*). I intend *Professor Emerit* to be no more associated with gender than the title *Professor*.

It is telling that for many of us in the professoriate, myself included, when we are granted "Emeritus Status" it is with exactly that language. In other words, the word "emeritus" is a technical one at the University of Oregon and many other universities and is not specific to the gender of the individual provided with the title. However, although *Professor Emeritus* is the technical status for selected retired faculty, in common practice men are referred to with that same title but women are more frequently referred to as *Professor Emerita*.

The titles *Professor Emeritus* and *Professor Emerita* are used to communicate professional status and an ongoing relationship with the university. The titles mean that the individual was, in the past, a (presumably tenured) professor and continues to have certain rights and responsibilities at the institution granting the new title. However, in contrast to the title *Professor*, the titles *Professor Emeritus* and *Professor Emerita* are used in explicitly gendered ways. Why should my retirement suddenly demand a gendered title akin to "stewardess" (rather than "flight attendant") or "policewoman" (rather than "police officer").

There are at least two somewhat separate problems with the standard gendered terminology.

The gender intrusion problem

One problem with *Emeritus/Emerita* relates to the importation of gender into a professional title in which the job itself is not based on gender – or at least it should not be. The problem is that in our current world importing gender also imports status. The common usage makes gender salient in situations where it need not be made salient. Women are very often devalued, including in

academia, and making gender salient is likely to exact a status cost for women (see for instance, Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) and cognitive cost for women (see for instance, Steele, 1997.) I also note that employers sometimes try to subvert equal pay and other gender discrimination laws by claiming people of different genders are doing different jobs. Let's not make that easier for them by importing gender into the titles of professors upon retirement and thus implying that there is a difference in jobs.

The binary categorization problem

The second problem with *Emeritus/Emerita* is that they force a binary distinction that may be particularly oppressive to some individuals. The forced choice gender categories of male and female that are so often imposed on individuals erases the complexity, nuance, and fluidity of gender in real life. Pushing people into boxes that erase their own individuality can be suffocating and damaging to the individuals and it can reinforce gender inequities at a societal level (see Bem, 1994).

Our stereotypes, laws, and beliefs often implicitly conceptualize human gender as either a single spectrum anchored by masculine and feminine or simply as two ends of one dimension (as captured in the phrase "opposite sex"). However, Bem (1974) demonstrated nearly half a century ago that one dimension does not fit the data. Bem (1974) reported that the dimensions of masculinity and femininity captured by identification with stereotypical personality attributes (such as good leadership ability, nurturing, strong, empathic) are independent, both logically and empirically.

From the Figure 1 (plotting masculinity and femininity as orthogonal dimensions), it is apparent that the choices of *emeritus, emerita*, and *emeritum* fail to work for those who understand themselves as largely

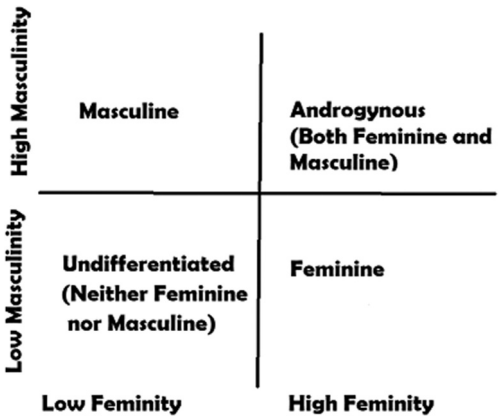

Figure 1. Independent dimensions of gender attributes (figured based on Bem, 1974).

androgenous. (I note too that the graph above is also overly simplified. Masculinity and femininity are themselves the products of multiple dimensions of variation. Furthermore, gender is arguably not just a thing one *has* but also a thing one *does*.) Personally, I do not want to be boxed into *any* gender category but especially one that does not align with my experience in the world.

The term *emerit* avoids both the gender importation problem and the binary categorization problem. Furthermore, it is consistent with widespread calls for avoiding gendered language in scholarship. Nonetheless, I suspect that getting equally widespread adoption of the term within the academy will require overcoming some inertia and some resistance. I have been discussing the term *emerit* for some time and have had the opportunity to ponder some frequently asked questions.

Why not retired?

Professors designated as having the *Emeritus/Emerita/Emerit* status are retired from the university providing that status. However not all retired faculty have *Emeritus/Emerita/Emerit* status. As mentioned above, the *Emerit-* titles are used to communicate formal professional status and an ongoing relationship with the university. The titles mean that the individual was, in the past, a (presumably tenured) professor and continues to have certain rights and responsibilities at the institution granting the new title.

Why not Professor Emeritus?

Although some advocate that a way around the gendered language is to use *Professor Emeritus* for any gender, that term currently carries gendered meaning. To the extent *emeritus* can be used to mean either just men or both men and women, it is what is known as a marked term; other similar examples (many of which people have recently moved away from) include chairman, alumnus, fireman, stewardess, and even just "man" to mean human. Research indicates marked gender terms can be disadvantageous to girls and women (e.g.: McConnell & Fazio, 1996).

Why not Professor Emeritum?

Neuter gender (such as *emeritum*) in Latin means *neither* masculine nor feminine, which is different from not actively denoting a gender by avoiding unnecessary grammatical gender. Personally, I would not want the neuter term for myself because I am *not neither* masculine nor feminine; I am some combination of both.

Why not Professor Emeritx?

Professor Emeritx addresses one of the two problems mentioned above and discussed in more detail below; it corrects the binary categorization problem. However, it is not as effective at correcting the gender importation problem as the "x" inherently refers back to gender. While it might be valuable to use *x* when acknowledging the existence of intersectional identities in which gender matters, the professional title of *professor* is not or should not be one of those identities. In addition, as a usage matter, *emeritx* currently seems to be primarily used by others as a plural (as an alternative to the more commonly used *emeriti*), leaving it unclear what the singular version of the term should be. *Emerit* is easy to use with English grammar. One *emerit*; two or more *emerits*.

Why not Professor Emeriti?

There have been numerous suggestions for non-gendered terms for retired professors including *Professor Emeriti*. In Latin *emeriti* is the masculine plural. *Emeriti* is similarly used often in the contemporary USA in the plural form to refer to individuals otherwise categories as either *Emeritus* or *Emerita*. In that way it is like using the term *men* to refer to a mixed-gender group of people.

But is Professor Emerit grammatical? Does that matter?

I appreciate correct grammar and I too sometimes cringe at what I perceive to be a grammatical error. Yet I also know that English language is a shared and constantly evolving system and there will always be cringe-worthy moments in response to language change. We borrow words from other languages and over time make them our own. English does not have grammatical gender in the sense that Latin has it and most of our borrowed Latin is used with English rules (as in *professor* and *professors*). At the same time, words matter.

Language can do political and cultural work; language can and does sometimes play a role in the maintenance of an oppressive status quo. Alternatively, language can be liberatory. While grammatical consistency and correctness are generally valuable for communicative precision, comfort, and efficiency, sometimes there are even more important values which may require language to change – values such as equity and liberation from oppression. Just as professor can be and is used with English grammar rules (such as using professors for the plural) so too can emerit be used with English grammar rules (using emerits for the plural). This sort of transformation is occurring in our contemporary culture with the increasingly frequent use of *alum/alums* rather than the Latin grammar (and gendered) versions for those terms.

There is another point one could make about grammar in this case if one wanted to get really picky. The word *professor* is originally from Latin and now

used in English. In Latin the term *professor* was grammatically masculine. So, if for some reason we need to use Latin rules – which we do not – one could argue that *Professor Emerita* is grammatically incorrect. It would perhaps need to be *Professrix Emerita* to be correct in Latin.

For the adjective form I will use *emerit* as in "Chris is an emerit professor." For the noun form I will refer to one *emerit* and two or more *emerits*. This is parallel to the increasingly common usage for referring to graduates of an educational institution – one *alum* and two or more *alums*.

A call to male professors on the verge of retiring

Women faculty from around the country have written to me to thank me for posting a webpage about my decision to use the title *Professor Emerit*. Several women have included the information that they will be adopting the title themselves. These statements of solidarity mean a lot to me. At the same time I note that as of this writing very few men have written to me regarding the topic. Clearly men who use the title *Emeritus* benefit from the consistency and the status.

I also know that only when men start to use the title *Professor Emerit* will I feel my job is done. A man volunteering to use the non-gendered title – that would be a courageous act of allyship. I do ask for it from men who are on the verge of retiring. An already retired man who elects to switch to the non-gendered title would surely lead by example. I think some day it will happen that a man shows such courage.

State of the journal

One year ago, as Adams-Clark and I drafted our editorial (Adams-Clark & Freyd, 2020) for the fifth and final issue Volume 22, published in 2020, of the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* (*JTD*) the world was in the grip of a deadly and disruptive pandemic, along with a period of profound cultural transformation associated with #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo social movements. Now a year later there is still a global pandemic but there is also hope for a time when this particular pandemic has been quelled. We have effective vaccines, and our challenge is to distribute these vaccines around the globe. In the meantime, we are still grappling with oppression including racism, sexism, sexual violence, and institutional betrayal. It is my deep hope that the work we publish in JTD helps us make progress addressing and ultimately quelling that violence and oppression and institutional betrayal. Scholarship is not itself an inoculation but at its best it can help lead us to a cure.

As the world confronted a pandemic and a growing awareness of societal oppressions, JTD continued to consider submissions and select some for publication. While some of our editorial board members were negatively

impacted by the pandemic in various ways, several board members were able to offer extra time to JTD, for which I am deeply grateful. With such support, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* continues to be influential, both in the USA and internationally. The number of downloads of JTD articles has grown by almost 20% in just one year, with slightly under half coming from individuals in the USA. The most downloaded articles over the past year were, "What Mindfulness can learn about Dissociation and what Dissociation can learn from Mindfulness" (Forner, 2019), followed by "Culture, trauma, and dissociation: A broadening perspective for our field" (Krüger, 2020), followed by "Prenatal broken bonds: Trauma, dissociation, and the calming wound model" (Cortizo, 2021).

The top Altmetric scoring (social media reach) articles over the past year were "Government-mandated institutional betrayal" (Smidt & Freyd, 2018) followed by "Still the last great open secret: Sexual harassment as systemic trauma" (Fitzgerald, 2017) and "As the world becomes trauma–informed, work to do" (Becker-Blease, 2017).

We are grateful to Taylor & Francis for providing a cash award for a particularly excellent publication in *JTD* for the ninth consecutive year. We are also grateful to Dr. Bethany Brand who once again generously served as Chair of the Awards Committee. The Richard P. Kluft Award for the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 2020 Best Article was for "Giving Voice to Silence: Empowerment and Disempowerment in the Developmental Shift from Trauma 'Victim' to 'Survivor-Advocate,'" (Delker et al., 2020). The award committee explained:

This scholarly and well-written paper presents an analysis that is a timely contribution to the literature at this moment in history. The journey –and narration of it– from victim to survivor/advocate interests us all at some level–as therapists, intervention researchers, caregivers, or victim/survivors ourselves. The authors argue that the common narrative of perpetrators of violence is shifting from "one bad apple" to a much more sophisticated and actionable view of social forces and institutions, systems, and human rights violations against populations that can change the narrative and change the paths open from victim to advocate and open them to many more people. The influence of this paper could be very broad. Furthermore, this theoretical paper offers several hypothesis-generating avenues for further exploring the path from disempowerment to empowerment among trauma survivors-advocates.

The awards committee also selected three additional articles for Honorable Mention:

(1) "Communities Healing and Transforming Trauma (CHATT): A Trauma-Informed Speakers' Bureau for Survivors of Violence " (Fields et al., 2020).

The authors address the importance of having people with lived experience of trauma involved in educating the public about traumatic experiences and their impact. This innovative approach not only results in emotional growth and learning for the speakers and the facilitators, but the audience members' reactions to the material indicate that we should be encouraging, facilitating and studying trauma by listening to, and working with, individuals who have experienced trauma.

(2) "Poly-victimization, Trauma, and Resilience: Exploring Strengths That Promote Thriving After Adversity," (Hamby et al., 2020)

This study examined a large number of adversities (including a range of traumas) and resiliencies in predicting thriving after adversity among youth. The authors found that resiliencies predicted almost as much variance as did adversities, suggesting the importance for studying and assessing the roles of both variables in the aftermath of trauma and other adversities.

(3) "The prevalence of dissociative disorders and dissociative experiences in college populations: A meta-analysis of 98 studies," (Kate et al., 2020)

The authors conducted a large meta-analysis of 31,905 college students including 12 studies that examined those with dissociative disorders and 92 studies that measured dissociation with a self-report measure. The authors examined a variety of hypotheses to determine whether this large body of research supported tenets consistent with the Trauma Model versus the Fantasy Model of dissociation. Their findings consistently supported the Trauma Model using these non-clinical samples.

During a year of global pandemic that disrupted life for almost everyone, we are especially grateful to the contributions of our editorial board, associate editors, and ad-hoc reviewers.

JTD's success depends upon these insightful reviews. JTD would not be possible without the contributions provided JTD Editorial Board members, Associate Editors and Editorial Associate, and reviewers. We are very pleased to welcome our new Editorial Board members for Volume 23 (to be published in 2022): Drs. Lauren Lebois, Cindy B. Veldhuis, Matthew M. Yalch, and Noga Zerubavel.

Please keep sending us your best work for consideration for publication in *JTD*. We look forward to reading your submissions in the year ahead.

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