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**The Use of *Singular They* Among American English
Speakers:**

**Pronoun Choice, Role-Noun Stereotypes, and
Speaker Attitudes**

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Abstract

The *singular they* has become an increasingly important feature of gender-inclusive English, offering a pronoun that does not restrict reference to male or female categories and allows individuals to be represented without assumptions about gender. This study investigates how American English speakers choose singular third-person pronouns when reading role nouns that differ in gender stereotyping and whether these choices relate to their attitudes toward sexist and nonsexist language. Forty native speakers of American English (aged 21-79, with education levels ranging from high school to PhD) completed an online questionnaire consisting of: (a) a pronoun-selection task based on 15 stereotyped role nouns adapted from Misersky et al.'s (2014) approach, supplemented with 15 filler questions; (b) an attitude scale constructed from the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language (IASNL) adapted from Parks & Robertson (2000); and (c) a demographic section including age, gender, and education.

The findings show that the *singular they* was widely selected across most role nouns, particularly for neutral items. However, traditional gender stereotypes remained strongly visible: no participant used she for male-stereotyped roles such as heavy equipment operator, rapist, or bricklayer, and no participant used he for female-stereotyped roles such as nanny, beautician, or manicurist. These patterns indicate that stereotypical gender associations still influence pronoun selection, even when a fully neutral option is available.

Pronoun use also varied across demographic groups. Young participants (under 35) used *they* considerably more ($M = 11.33$ out of 15) than participants aged 35 and older ($M = 6.90$), and a sharp contrast is observed between those under 50 ($M = 11.20$) and the 50+ group ($M = 2.00$). The Undergraduate group used *they* most frequently ($M = 10.93$), followed by high-school graduates ($M = 8.08$), while master's-degree holders used *they* least ($M = 7.31$). Female participants also used *they* more often ($M = 10.43$) than male participants ($M = 7.21$).

IASNL inclusivity scores on a 1-5 likert scale (mean score) were generally linked to more frequent use of *they*, but this pattern was not consistent across individuals: for example, one highly inclusive profile (IASNL-G = 4.62) selected *they* 0 times in the target set, whereas a lower-scoring profile (IASNL-G = 2.48) selected *they* 15 times, suggesting that language habits, stereotypes, and age-related factors can sometimes be stronger than explicit attitudes. A useful direction for future research is to explore whether simple training in gender-inclusive language can help reduce the influence of stereotypes and support more consistent use of neutral pronouns, including for non-binary individuals.

Introduction

Sczesny et al. (2016) review evidence that gendered language not only reflects social hierarchies but can also help maintain gender stereotyping and discrimination. One domain where this connection has been particularly evident is gender, especially in linguistic systems that have historically enforced binary distinctions between *he* and *she* (Sczesny et al., 2016). Although English lacks grammatical gender for most nouns, it has long relied on gendered third-person pronouns to specify human referents (Balhorn, 2004; Bjorkman, 2017). Previous studies have documented that this reliance creates persistent challenges for speakers when a referent's gender is unknown, irrelevant, or nonbinary (Balhorn, 2004; Bjorkman, 2017). While masculine generics have historically been prescribed as a universal solution (Balhorn, 2004), empirical findings have confirmed that these forms frequently produce male-biased interpretations rather than truly gender-neutral mental representations (Hamilton, 1991; Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). In this broader context, *singular they* has functioned for centuries as a robust descriptive resource to resolve structural gaps in the English pronominal system (Balhorn, 2004).

This thesis investigates the choice of third-person pronouns among native speakers of American English to determine the current status of *singular they* in generic and specific contexts. The study examines whether inclusive attitudes positively correlate with the selection of neutral pronouns or if deeply ingrained occupational stereotypes and linguistic habits create a gap between principle and practice. By investigating the tension between stated beliefs and task-based pronoun choices, this project clarifies how attitudes, stereotypes, and contextual cues jointly shape the adoption of gender-neutral language (Parks & Robertson, 2000; Bradley, 2020; Sczesny et al., 2016). A major reason these contexts matter is that pronoun choice is not only grammatical but also pragmatic. Moulton et al. (2020) show that the acceptability of *singular they* in context with a definite antecedent improves when the discourse provides an antecedent that signals the irrelevance of gender. A key focus of this study is role-noun stereotypicality, which allows for a measurable assessment of how social knowledge influences grammatical selection (Misersky et al., 2014). Furthermore, individuals often hold diverse beliefs regarding language change and the necessity of inclusive alternatives, which are examined here through measures of beliefs about sexist language and the willingness to adopt nonsexist alternatives (Parks & Robertson, 2000).

To address these issues, forty participants (ages 21–79, education ranging from high school to postgraduate levels) completed an online questionnaire consisting of two connected components. The first component is a pronoun-completion task containing 30 items. This task includes 15 target items built around singular role nouns that are balanced across three categories: male-stereotyped, female-stereotyped, and neutral. These

categories follow established standardized norms used to classify social and occupational roles (Misersky et al., 2014). Additionally, 15 filler items are included throughout the task to prevent participants from anticipating the purpose of the task and to encourage more natural responses. These fillers include plural antecedents as well as famous male and female individuals. The second component is a 21-item attitude measure adapted from the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language-General (IASNL-G) scale (Parks & Robertson, 2000). The project maintains a primarily descriptive and exploratory stance, aiming to identify links between pronoun selections, participant demographics, and attitude profiles. Because the role-noun antecedents refer to human individuals, *it* is coded but treated as a non-target option in the main analyses, with the focus remaining on the distribution of *he*, *she*, and *they*.

This thesis addresses three research questions:

1. How frequently do native speakers of American English choose third-person pronouns, particularly *singular they*, in role-noun sentences?
2. To what extent do role-noun gender stereotypes influence pronoun selection?
3. Are attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language associated with the likelihood of choosing *singular they*?

The thesis is organized into several sections. The Literature review evaluates prior work on the history of *singular they*, the activation of gender stereotypes in role-noun interpretation, and the framework of language attitudes. In the data and methodology section the American English sample is described, together with the specific design of the pronoun-completion task. The Analysis section describes the procedures used to score the IASNL-G and to code the pronoun responses. The Results section presents the observed pronoun patterns and their relationship with demographic and attitude variables. Discussion interprets the findings in the context of linguistic change and stereotype competition. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the main contributions, identifies study limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Singular *they* in English

Bjorkman (2017) describes singular *they* as an epicene option in English: it allows a speaker to refer to one person without choosing *he* or *she*. In present-day English, it is common when a referent's gender is unknown, not relevant, or intentionally left unspecified. It is also used to respect gender-diverse identities (Konnelly & Cowper, 2020; Renström & Klysing, 2025). Importantly, singular *they* is not new. Historical and descriptive research documents singular *they* across earlier stages of English, showing that it has been available for centuries as a solution to gender-neutral reference (Balhorn, 2004). So, although public debate sometimes treats singular *they* as a recent “inclusive” innovation, the descriptive record suggests that current change largely concerns greater visibility and wider use of an already attested form (Balhorn, 2004; Bjorkman, 2017).

Even so, the status of singular *they* has been influenced by prescriptive traditions. These traditions often tried to limit *they* to plural antecedents and promoted alternatives such as generic *he* (Balhorn, 2004). This matters because many studies show that “generic” masculine forms do not lead to truly gender-neutral interpretations. Instead, they tend to produce male-biased mental representations (Hamilton, 1991; Gastil, 1990; Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). In this context, singular *they* can be seen as a practical descriptive resource: it avoids the gender-bias risk linked to masculine generics and helps fill a well-known gap in English, the lack of a widely used, explicitly gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun for human reference (Balhorn, 2004; Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997).

Konnelly and Cowper (2020) argue that singular *they* fits into English morphosyntax as a gender-underspecified pronoun. In feature-based accounts, *he* and *she* are tied to gender specifications, while singular *they* is compatible with contexts that do not require a binary gender feature. This kind of analysis helps explain why singular *they* can extend to new discourse contexts without the language needing to introduce a new pronoun (Konnelly & Cowper, 2020).

Bjorkman (2017) also argues that the current distribution of singular *they* is expanding in ways that create systematic variation across speakers. Research on present-day English often distinguishes *they* with non-specific or generic antecedents from *they* with definite, referential antecedents. Bjorkman (2017) suggests that some speakers accept singular *they* broadly, including with definite antecedents, while others find this extension less acceptable or less natural. This variation can be treated as part of an ongoing change. The key point is that singular *they* is not experienced in the same way in all contexts: it is linked to a set of discourse conditions and pragmatic expectations, and these conditions

affect whether speakers perceive it as neutral, marked, or socially meaningful (Bjorkman, 2017).

Moulton et al. (2020) emphasize that pronoun choice depends strongly on what the surrounding discourse makes available or relevant. When the antecedent is generic or the referent is unknown, leaving gender unspecified usually fits discourse expectations and does not trigger extra inference. By contrast, when the referent is definite and the discourse makes gender seem knowable or shared, using *they* can feel pragmatically marked. Listeners may infer that the speaker does not know the person's gender, does not treat gender as relevant, or is deliberately avoiding gendered reference. Moulton et al. (2020) argue that judgments depend strongly on whether the context makes gender expected, salient, or informationally available. This helps explain why speakers may accept singular *they* in general but still prefer other options in some referential settings (Moulton et al., 2020).

Foertsch and Gernsbacher (1997) report that singular *they* can be easy to understand in gender-indefinite environments: readers usually understand it without confusion and without extra effort/processing costs compared with gendered alternatives in similar generic contexts. However, when singular *they* appears in contexts that strongly encourage a gender-specific interpretation, readers may show more difficulty or a brief slowdown. This pattern is often linked to pragmatic expectations about why gender is left unexpressed, rather than to grammatical ill-formedness (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). These results draw a useful distinction: singular *they* can be comprehensible across contexts, but it may be judged less natural when discourse cues strongly push toward gender specificity (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997; Moulton et al., 2020).

Bradley (2020) and Renström and Klysing (2025) show that singular *they* also carries social meaning in contemporary debate. As a result, its distribution is shaped not only by what the grammar allows but also by what speakers see as appropriate, standard, or socially charged, especially in formal writing. Work on gender-fair language in academic contexts suggests that singular *they* is increasingly treated as a useful and institutionally recognized inclusive option, but uptake remains uneven and writers may still switch between strategies such as *he or she*, plural rewriting, or avoidance (Sun et al., 2025). Overall, singular *they* sits at the intersection of descriptive grammar, pragmatic inference, and language ideology, which helps explain why it is widely used in some environments but limited in others (Sun et al., 2025; Bjorkman, 2017; Bradley, 2020).

In sum, the literature agrees that singular *they* is historically well attested and compatible with English grammar, with present-day change involving expansion to more referential contexts and increased social salience (Balhorn, 2004; Bjorkman, 2017; Konnelly & Cowper, 2020). At the same time, acceptability and preference are not uniform: they depend on discourse conditions that affect whether gender is expected to be stated, and they are also shaped by broader beliefs about language norms and gender-inclusive practice (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997; Moulton et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2025; Bradley, 2020).

1.2 Gender stereotypes and role nouns

Hamilton (1991) argues that “gender-neutral” reference is often not neutral in interpretation. Even when English uses role nouns that are not grammatically marked by gender (e.g., *doctor*, *nurse*, *manager*), readers often build a gendered mental model using social knowledge about who is typically linked with that role (i.e., male or female) (Hamilton, 1991; Bailey et al., 2018).

In psycholinguistics, role nouns are useful because they differ widely in perceived gender association. This variation is not just a matter of intuition. Misersky et al. (2014) provide standardized stereotype norms for many role nouns (including English), which makes it possible to separate strongly male-stereotyped roles, strongly female-stereotyped roles, and more neutral roles. These norms highlight an important point: the strength of stereotype is gradient, and different roles create different levels of gender expectation. When these expectations are activated, they can affect how people understand later mentions of the same referent (including pronouns) and what pronoun they expect to see next (Misersky et al., 2014).

These norms help to better qualify stereotype expectations. This tendency is often discussed as a male-default tendency: when the input allows for more than one gender, people may treat “male” as the more typical or readily available option (i.e., male-default tendency) (Hamilton, 1991). Relatedly, Gastil (1990) reports experimental evidence that masculine generic pronouns lead to more male mental imagery than other generic strategies. Hamilton (1991) similarly argues that expressions that look generic can still bias judgments toward “male.” Together, these studies support the idea that stereotypes and default assumptions can influence interpretation very quickly, even before any explicit gender information is given (Hamilton, 1991; Gastil, 1990).

Bailey, LaFrance, and Dovidio (2018) review evidence for androcentrism, the tendency to treat men and male experience as the norm. They argue that this bias shows up not only in social practice but also in language and cognition. From this view, stereotypes are not optional “add-ons” to meaning; they are part of the background knowledge people use to resolve ambiguity, especially when a text does not specify gender (Bailey et al., 2018).

Work on language development and socialization also stresses that these patterns are learned and reinforced over time. Bigler and Leaper (2015) review research showing that gender categories become cognitively important early and that language practices can strengthen gender-based generalizations. In this view, stereotypes affect interpretation not because the readers are determined to be biased, but because stereotypical links become efficient default inferences during comprehension (Bigler & Leaper, 2015).

Cross-linguistic research further clarifies how stereotypes interact with grammatical cues. For example, Gygax et al. (2019) develop an index of grammatical gender dimen-

sions to study how grammatical gender can shape representations of women and men. Richy and Burnett (2021) separate role-noun stereotype effects from grammatical-gender effects in French and show that masculine grammatical marking can push readers toward a male interpretation beyond what stereotypes alone would predict. Chalyvidou and Weber (2025) show that grammatical gender cues can also change how stereotypes affect noun processing (Misersky et al., 2014; Gygax et al., 2019; Richy & Burnett, 2021; Chalyvidou & Weber, 2025). Although these results come from languages with richer gender marking systems than English, they support a general conclusion: stereotypes strongly influence reference building and can compete with attempts to keep gender underspecified in discourse (Gygax et al., 2019; Richy & Burnett, 2021; Chalyvidou & Weber, 2025).

Overall, the literature suggests that stereotypes guide the interpretation of role nouns and later reference. Even when speakers use forms that avoid stating gender, readers may still add gendered inferences based on stereotype knowledge, producing systematic differences in how masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral possibilities are represented during comprehension (Hamilton, 1991; Bailey et al., 2018; Misersky et al., 2014).

1.3 Attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language

Parks and Robertson (2000) develop the IASNL to measure attitudes toward sexist and nonsexist language. Sczesny et al. (2016) review gender-fair language research and argue that social evaluation is central to whether inclusive alternatives are adopted. Together, these works support the claim that attitudes toward sexist language and toward inclusive options shape how speakers judge available forms and how willing they are to adopt alternatives that reduce gender bias (Parks & Robertson, 2000; Sczesny et al., 2016). Bradley (2020) and Gustafsson Sendén et al. (2015) show that even when an inclusive form is available and understandable, it may still be rejected if it is seen as unnecessary, normatively inappropriate, or incorrect (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Bradley, 2020; Sczesny et al., 2016). For this reason, many researchers treat language reform as both a grammatical issue and an attitudinal and ideological one: people differ in what they count as sexist, how much they value tradition and prescriptive rules, and whether they see inclusive changes as socially beneficial or socially disruptive (Parks & Robertson, 2000; Bradley, 2020).

A common approach is to measure these attitudes directly. Parks and Robertson (2000) develop and validate the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language (IASNL) to capture stable individual differences in how people judge sexist language and nonsexist alternatives. They argue that attitudes here are not one-dimensional. Some people minimize or deny sexist impact, while others see sexist wording as harmful and view nonsexist alternatives as worth adopting (Parks & Robertson, 2000). This matters because it makes it possible to quantify language attitudes across speakers rather than relying on informal assumptions about who “supports” inclusive language.

Later work connects language attitudes to broader ideological orientations and sexism-related measures. For singular *they*, Bradley (2020) reports that resistance is predicted by linguistic conservatism and by sexism-related attitudes. Renström and Klysing (2025) likewise show that evaluations depend on ideological variables and on the function of the pronoun (de-gendering vs. multi-gendering). These studies suggest that resistance to gender-inclusive language is often about social attitudes and worldviews, not merely about language itself (Bradley, 2020; Renström & Klysing, 2025).

Research on language change also suggests that attitudes can shift as forms become more familiar and institutionalized. Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck, and Lindqvist (2015) study responses to the introduction of a gender-neutral pronoun in Swedish and argue that evaluations are sensitive to exposure and changing norms. This supports an important interpretation: negative reactions can partly reflect novelty and uncertainty about what is appropriate, not only strong ideological opposition. At the same time, persistent individual differences suggest that more exposure does not remove disagreement; it can make divisions more visible when a form becomes linked to clear social meanings (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015).

Sczesny, Formanowicz, and Moser (2016) reach a similar conclusion in their broader review. They argue that gender-fair language can change who people imagine in a role, but they also stress that acceptance is uneven and depends on social evaluation. Public debates often mix practical concerns (such as complexity or unfamiliarity) with normative concerns (such as whether change is needed). As a result, uptake depends on both communicative factors and speakers' values (Sczesny et al., 2016).

Work focused on singular *they* also shows that attitudes can be context- and function-sensitive. Bradley (2020) studies how linguistic and social attitudes predict judgments of singular *they* and argues that acceptability differs across functions. This helps explain why someone might accept singular *they* in one setting (e.g., generic reference) but reject it in another (e.g., definite reference or contexts interpreted as identity-marking): the same form can be grammatical but still feel socially marked (Bradley, 2020).

Renström and Klysing (2025) similarly argue that resistance is not only about “grammar.” They distinguish a de-gendering function (avoiding gender marking) from a multi-gendering function (explicitly recognizing gender diversity) and show that different functions can trigger different kinds of resistance. Their results suggest that resistance is tied to beliefs about gender as a social category and to ideological beliefs about hierarchy and social change (Renström & Klysing, 2025).

Finally, some studies report demographic patterns in attitudes. Remsö et al. (2025) report that men are more likely than women to hold negative attitudes toward a gender-inclusive pronoun and to report lower use, and they link these differences to higher sexism among men. These findings fit the broader conclusion that acceptance partly depends on whether speakers see gender bias in language as socially important and whether they view

inclusive reforms as legitimate or as an unwanted challenge to tradition (Remsö et al., 2025; Sczesny et al., 2016; Bradley, 2020).

Overall, research consistently links language attitudes to evaluations of gender-inclusive options. Foundational work provides a way to measure attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language across individuals (Parks & Robertson, 2000), and later research connects these attitudes to sexism, ideology, and the social meaning of reform (Sczesny et al., 2016; Bradley, 2020; Renström & Klysing, 2025; Remsö et al., 2025).

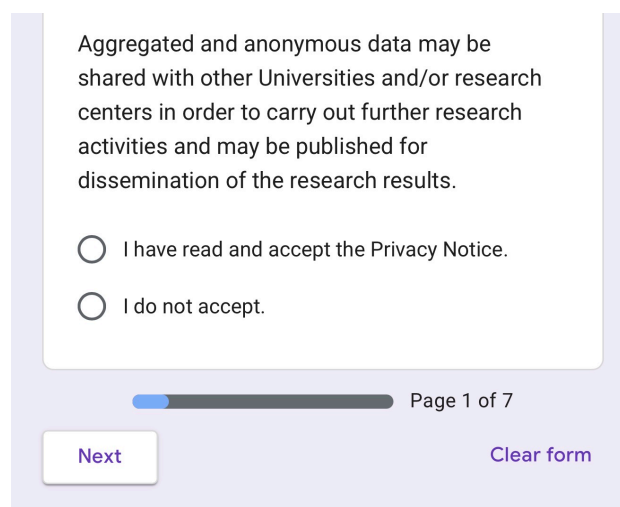
Individual differences also matter for describing variation in inclusive-language uptake. Because attitudes and everyday usage do not always line up perfectly, background variables such as age, gender, and education are often included when describing who uses inclusive options and when interpreting why speakers differ in their choices (Parks & Robertson, 2000; Bradley, 2020).

2. Data and Methodology

2.1 Dataset

The dataset consists of responses collected through an online questionnaire created in Google Forms. The survey link was distributed by email to the intended participant pool. The target population included Americans living in the Aviano Air Base community (Italy) as well as Americans residing in the United States who were contacted through email networks. Participation was voluntary.

A total of 40 self-identified native speakers of American English participated in the study (age range: 21–79). The questionnaire began with a short consent and privacy statement, and participants were able to continue only after confirming consent. Figure 2.1 shows the consent and privacy screen presented at the start of the questionnaire. The design of the survey prioritized anonymity: no identifying information such as names, phone numbers, addresses, or similar personal details was requested. The demographic section collected only general background variables relevant for interpretation and descriptive comparison: age, gender identity, highest education level, first language, and whether participants spoke additional languages. Figure 1 in appendix shows the demographic questions as they were presented to the participants in the Google Forms questionnaire. Participants were grouped by gender, age, and education. Age was grouped into three bands (under 35, 35–50, and over 50). Education was grouped into high school, Undergraduate, and Master’s/PhD. These groups were used to compare rates of *singular they* across demographic categories in the target items.



Aggregated and anonymous data may be shared with other Universities and/or research centers in order to carry out further research activities and may be published for dissemination of the research results.

I have read and accept the Privacy Notice.

I do not accept.

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Next Clear form

Figure 2.1: Consent and privacy screen presented at the start of the questionnaire (Google Forms).

The survey contained two main components. The first component was a pronoun-selection task with 30 items. Each item consisted of a short sentence including a blank position, followed by four response options (she, he, they, it). Participants completed each sentence by selecting a pronoun that they would naturally use in that context. The order of the the pronouns was randomized across items. The purpose of this task was to capture pronoun choice in a controlled but simple format. Figure 2.2 illustrates sample items from the pronoun-selection task as presented to participants in Google Forms, including the four response options and the randomized ordering of the pronouns.

For each sentence, choose the most fitting pronoun among the four options listed.

Before the heavy equipment operator moved the bricks, ____ took a break. *

- he
- she
- they
- it

Cinderella cried because ____ couldn't go to the ball. *

- she
- they
- it
- he

Figure 2.2: Sample items from the pronoun-selection task as shown to participants in Google Forms.

Within the pronoun task, 15 items were targets and 15 items were fillers. The 15 target items were constructed around singular role nouns and were evenly divided into three stereotype categories (five items per category): male-stereotyped, female-stereotyped, and neutral role nouns. The male-stereotyped set included *heavy equipment operator*, *rapist*, *bricklayer*, *miner*, and *president*. The female-stereotyped set included *nanny*, *rape victim*, *cheerleader*, *beautician*, and *manicurist*. The neutral set included *kid*, *person*, *relative*, *schoolchild*, and *toddler*. This balanced design ensured that each participant contributed the same amount of data to each category, making comparisons across categories straightforward.

The 15 filler items were included for methodological reasons. In tasks focusing on

gender and pronouns, participants may sometimes notice the purpose of the survey and respond strategically. Fillers reduce this risk by making the task appear more varied and less focused on a single linguistic issue. In addition, fillers help confirm that participants are engaging with the task in a natural way. The filler set consisted of (i) five sentences with famous male individuals (which naturally invited *he*), (ii) five sentences with famous female individuals (which naturally invited *she*), and (iii) five sentences with plural antecedents (which invited plural *they*). Importantly, filler items were distributed throughout the target items instead of being grouped in a separate block, which helps to maintain attention and reduces predictability. For a complete list of target items, see Table 2 in the Appendix.

The second component was the *Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language* (IASNL-G) and contained 21 items (Parks and Robertson, 2000). This component was included to measure the participants' attitudes toward sexist language and their support for gender-inclusive alternatives. Because this thesis investigates both pronoun choice (what participants do) and language attitudes (what participants endorse), combining the pronoun task with IASNL-G allowed the study to examine whether there was some kind of correlation between pronoun choices and IASNL-G scores.

Finally, the general decision to combine a pronoun task with an attitude scale was informed by published methods and also by discussion of Olivia Randall's student project. This acknowledgment refers to the overall design idea (motivated partly by time constraints) and does not involve reuse of any text or analyzes from unpublished work.

2.2 Methods

Data collection and analysis followed a transparent and replicable procedure. The survey was administered online between December 2025 and January 2026. After providing consent, participants completed the demographic questions, then the 30-item pronoun-selection task (with targets and fillers randomized), and finally the 21 IASNL-G items. Responses were exported from the Google Forms and then prepared for analysis in two parallel streams: pronoun responses were coded into interpretable categories, and IASNL responses were scored so that higher values consistently represented more supportive attitudes toward inclusive language.

2.2.1 Pronoun task and role-noun stereotypicality (Misersky et al., 2014)

The pronoun-selection task was designed to test whether singular *they* was used across different stereotypical contexts and whether stereotypical role nouns biased participants toward *he* or *she*. The selection and grouping of target role nouns followed the logic of

stereotypicality norming research, where role nouns are treated as linguistic triggers of gender expectations (Misersky et al., 2014). This approach enables a principled classification of role nouns, avoiding purely intuitive judgments.

After exporting the dataset, each pronoun entry was standardized (e.g., lowercased) and coded into four categories: *he*, *she*, *they*, and *it*. The *it* category captured occasional responses that were not one of the target pronouns, hence not considered. These cases were coded for transparency and can be mentioned descriptively, but the core focus of interpretation was the distribution of *he/she/they*.

The main outcome measure was the use of *they* in the 15 target items. This was obtained by means of participant-level count (TheyCountTargets), defined as the number of target items (out of 15) completed with *they*. Target *they* percentages were used to describe the distributions between the stereotype categories. Reporting both overall and category-specific percentages makes it possible to answer the research questions clearly: the overall counts and percentages show how frequently a participant used singular *they* in the task, while the category-specific counts indicate where *singular they* was most and least likely to occur.

Famous-name fillers encouraged *he* and *she* in contexts where gender was clear, while plural fillers elicited plural *they*. This design choice also functioned as a basic quality check: it is reasonable to expect high rates of *he* for male famous-name fillers and high rates of *she* for female famous-name fillers if participants paid attention to the person referred to in the sentence.

2.2.2 Attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language (Parks & Robertson, 2000)

Attitudes were measured using the IASNL-G (Parks & Robertson, 2000), a validated 21-item component that captures multiple components of attitudes toward sexist and inclusive language. In the survey, IASNL items were presented with three prompt formats and matching 5-point likert response scale. Items 1–12 asked about beliefs related to language and sexism using an agreement scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Items 13–16 asked whether underlined expressions were sexist (from not at all sexist to definitely sexist). Items 17–21 asked about willingness to use inclusive alternatives (from very unwilling to very willing). This structure reflects different aspects of attitude: general beliefs, sensitivity to sexist wording, and willingness to change one's own usage. Figure 2.3 illustrates how the three sections of IASNL-G were presented to participants on Google Forms.

Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language	Section II	Section III
<p>Section I</p> <p>Please use the following definition in completing this questionnaire: Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender.</p> <p>For each of the following expressions, choose the descriptor that most closely corresponds with your beliefs about language.</p> <p>(1 strongly disagree; 2 tend to disagree; 3 undecided; 4 tend to agree; 5 strongly agree)</p>	<p>Please use the following definition in completing this questionnaire: Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender.</p> <p>Are the underlined words and phrases in the following sentences sexist?</p> <p>(1 not at all sexist; 2 probably not sexist; 3 undecided; 4 somewhat sexist; 5 definitely sexist)</p>	<p>Please use the following definition in completing this questionnaire: Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender.</p> <p>Choose the descriptor that most closely describes you in the following situations.</p> <p>(1 very unwilling; 2 reluctant; 3 undecided; 4 somewhat willing; 5 very willing)</p>
<p>1. Women who think that being called a "chairman" is sexist are misinterpreting the word "chairman." *</p> <p>strongly disagree</p> <p>1 ○</p>	<p>13. People should care about all <u>mankind</u>, not just themselves. *</p> <p>not at all sexist</p> <p>1 ○</p>	<p>17. When you are referring to a married woman, how willing are you to use the title "Ms. Smith" rather than "Mrs. Smith"? *</p> <p>very unwilling</p> <p>○</p>

Figure 2.3: IASNL-G sections (I–III) as presented to participants in Google Forms.

For scoring purposes, responses were coded such that higher values consistently indicated more supportive attitudes toward gender-inclusive language. Because some IASNL items were phrased in the opposite direction, reverse scoring was necessary. In this study, reverse scoring was determined through an explicit inspection of item wording to ensure polarity was treated consistently. After reverse scoring, an overall attitude score was calculated for each participant by taking the mean across all 21 IASNL items. This produced a single, interpretable measure: values closer to 5 indicated stronger support for gender-inclusive language, while values closer to 1 indicated weaker support.

The final stage of the method was the alignment of these measures with the research questions. First, pronoun selections were summarised as counts and percentages across the three stereotype categories. Second, the participants' overall IASNL-G mean scores were compared with their individual TheyCountTargets values (the number of target items completed with *they*, out of 15) to examine whether more supportive attitudes tended to co-occur with more frequent use of singular *they*. Third, patterns were compared descriptively across demographic groupings (gender, age groups, and education levels) to examine whether certain groups showed higher or lower rates of singular *they*.

As a methodological limitation, the sample is not intended to be fully representative of all American English speakers because it is drawn from convenience recruitment (Aviano community plus U.S. contacts). Despite the constraints, the dataset is suitable for the aims of this thesis because it provides a controlled set of role-noun contexts and an established attitude measure, allowing clear descriptive answers to the research questions. The following section describes how pronoun responses and attitude scores were coded for analysis.

3. Analysis

The analytical procedures described in this Section were used to organize the pronoun choices and attitude responses collected from forty self-identified native speakers of American English. Together, these steps provide the procedural framework for the descriptive account reported in Section 4. Following the conclusion of the data collection period, participants' responses were exported from Google Forms and organized into a structured format designed to examine how speakers navigate pronoun choice in sentence contexts where stereotypes and individual attitudes may interact.

As described in Section 2, participation was voluntary and the survey guaranteed anonymity; therefore, these details are not repeated here. The demographic variables (age, gender identity, education level, L1, additional language proficiency) are used in this Section only as grouping variables for descriptive summaries reported across demographic groupings in Section 4. The remainder of this Section specifies (i) dataset checks using filler items, (ii) standardization and coding of pronoun responses, and (iii) computation of participant-level measures (IASNL-G mean score and TheyCountTargets / target-they percentage).

3.1 Dataset overview and task checks

The dataset was organized to provide an initial descriptive overview of participant choices across the entire thirty-item task before the analysis turned to the target role-noun items. As outlined in Section 2, fifteen filler items were mixed with the fifteen target items to reduce predictability and to provide an interpretability / response-quality check. In this Section, the filler responses were procedurally inspected to confirm that participants' selections aligned with the expected direction under these unambiguous cues: (i) famous male-individual fillers inviting *he*, (ii) famous female-individual fillers inviting *she*, and (iii) plural-antecedent fillers inviting plural *they*. A quantitative summary of filler performance is reported in Section 4 (Table 4.2).

3.2 Coding and classification of pronoun responses and item sets

Following the export of the dataset, the responses from the pronoun-selection task were prepared for analysis. In accordance with the focus of the study, the descriptive summaries prioritized the distribution of *he*, *she*, and singular *they*. The category of *it* was used to

capture occasional responses that were not one of the target pronouns. In this dataset, *it* was retained for transparency and is mentioned descriptively, but it function as a non-target in the core interpretation because the human-denoting antecedents in the items refer to individuals. Accordingly, *it* responses are reported for completeness but are not treated as theoretically competing outcomes in the interpretation of the research questions. This coding approach allowed pronoun-selection to be treated as a response-choice measure to be analyzed as a categorical response variable.

The fifteen target items served as the core basis for addressing the research questions and were classified into item sets based on the logic of stereotypicality norming research. Following the approach of Misersky et al. (2014), role nouns were treated as linguistic triggers of gender expectations rather than relying on intuitive groupings. The target role nouns were categorized into three balanced stereotype categories: male-stereotyped, female-stereotyped, and neutral. Each category contained five role nouns, ensuring that each participant contributed five items to each condition. The full inventory and category assignments for all target role nouns are provided in next Section. This balanced design ensured that each participant contributed an equal amount of data to each category, which allowed counts and percentages to be calculated within relevant item sets and made descriptive comparisons across different occupational contexts straightforward.

To support transparent reporting, pronoun distributions were summarized at three levels: (i) overall distributions across all targets, (ii) category-level distributions within each stereotype set, and (iii) item-level distributions for each role noun.

3.3 IASNL-G scoring and derived attitude measures

The second stream of analysis involved the scoring of the 21 items of the IASNL-G to characterize participants' attitudes toward sexist language and their support for gender-inclusive alternatives. The instrument utilized three distinct prompt formats and matching 5-point Likert response scale to capture multiple components of attitude: general beliefs about language and sexism, the ability to recognize sexist expressions, and the self-reported willingness to adopt inclusive alternatives in personal usage.

To prepare these data for analysis, responses were coded so that scores closer to 5 consistently represented more supportive attitudes toward gender-inclusive language. Because some items were phrased in the opposite direction to the overall scale, reverse scoring was applied.

Based on inspection of item wording to ensure that polarity was treated consistently across the different sections of the measure, Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 were reverse-scored on the 1–5 scale. After reverse-scoring, an overall attitude score was computed for each participant by averaging the scores obtained on the 21 individual items. Three sub-scale means, Beliefs, Recognition, and Willingness, were also computed on the same 1–5

scale using the same reverse-scoring logic. These scores served as the basis for descriptive comparisons between self-reported attitudes and the linguistic selections recorded in the pronoun-selection task.

3.4 Linking measures to the research questions (descriptive comparisons only)

The final phase of the analytical method involved aligning the measures from the pronoun task with the derived attitude profiles and demographic variables. To address the first research question, individual responses for the fifteen target items were summarized using a participant-level count measure, *TheyCountTargets*. This variable was defined as the number of target items (out of 15) in which a participant selected *they*, and it was used to describe between-participant variation in the use of singular *they* in gender-underspecified contexts.

The measure was computed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{TheyCountTargets} &= \#(\textit{they in target items}) \\ \textit{Target they percentage} &= \left(\frac{\#(\textit{they in target items})}{15} \right) \times 100 \end{aligned}$$

This percentage measure was also used to facilitate subgroup summaries (for example, reporting mean percentages by age group, gender identity, or education level).

To address the second research question, the analysis examined descriptively whether stereotypical role nouns biased participants toward *he* or *she* by comparing pronoun distributions across the male-stereotyped, female-stereotyped, and neutral categories. For each category, selections were summarized as counts and percentages of *he*, *she*, and singular *they*. Pronoun distributions were also summarized descriptively across demographic groupings, including gender identity, education level, and age group (21–34, 35–49, and 50+).

To address the third research question, participants' overall IASNL-G mean scores were compared descriptively with their individual *TheyCountTargets* values to examine whether more supportive attitudes toward gender-inclusive language tended to co-occur with more frequent use of singular *they* in the role-noun task. This alignment was used to describe the correspondence between attitude scores and pronoun-selections.

3.5 Presentation and reporting conventions

Section 4 reports the results using summary tables and figures. For the pronoun task, counts and percentages are reported for the overall target set and for each stereotype cat-

egory, and figures are used to highlight variation across conditions and participants.

For the IASNL-G attitude measure, reporting includes means and ranges for the full sample and for demographic subgroups. Where percentages are reported for pronoun choices, the total number of responses is stated explicitly: 40 responses per item, 200 responses per stereotype category (40×5), and 600 responses across all targets (40×15).

4. Results

This Section reports the results of the pronoun-selection task and the IASNL-G attitude questionnaire. The report is descriptive and focuses on counts, percentages, and averages at the participant-level. Details of the participant recruitment, instruments, and item design are provided in Section 2, and coding/scoring procedures are specified in Section 3; therefore, this Section focuses on outcomes. The sample consisted of 40 participants whose data were retained for analysis. The participants produced 1,200 pronoun-selections in 30 items (15 targets and 15 fillers). Core results addressing the research questions are based on the 15 target role-noun items ($N = 600$ target responses), with target items balanced across three stereotype categories (5 items per category).

4.1 Overview of target and filler items

The final dataset includes $N = 40$ self-identified native speakers of American English (age range: 21–79). Participants completed a 30-item pronoun-selection task and a 21-item attitude measure (IASNL-G). Pronoun-selections were coded into four categories: *he*, *she*, *they*, and *it*.

To give a compact sense of overall pronoun distribution across the entire pronoun task (targets + fillers), Table 4.1 summarizes the distribution across all 30 items. Across 1,200 total selections (40 participants \times 30 items), *they* accounts for 45.3% of the responses which was the most frequent selection, while *he* and *she* each account for roughly a quarter of the responses. As discussed below, this global distribution is strongly shaped by the filler design (e.g., famous-name fillers invite *he/she*, and plural fillers invite plural *they*), which is why the main analyses focus on **the 15 target role-noun items**.

Table 4.1: *Overall Pronoun Distribution Across All 30 Pronoun Items (Targets + Fillers)*

	<i>he</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>it</i>
Count, n	303	314	544	39
Percentage, %	25.2	26.2	45.3	3.2

Note. $N = 40$ participants completed 30 pronoun items each (1,200 total responses). Percentages are calculated out of 1,200.

The filler pattern provides a basic interpretability check: when gender is explicit and salient (famous individuals), participants are expected to use gendered pronouns, and when the antecedent is plural, participants are expected to use plural *they*.

As shown in Table 4.2, fillers behave largely as intended. Male famous-name fillers elicit *he* in 99% of the selections, and female famous-name fillers elicit *she* in 99.5%. Plural fillers elicit *they* in 93% of the cases. The remaining plural-filler responses are mostly *it* (6%), suggesting occasional reinterpretation of the referent (e.g., reference shifting to an event or situation), rather than systematic misunderstanding.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, one plural-antecedent filler (“...in the park, ___ seemed very peaceful”) elicited a comparatively high rate of *it* (12/40). This likely reflects item specific ambiguity like discourse-deictic reading, where it refers to the overall situation or setting rather than to the plural antecedent (“the artists”).

Table 4.2: *Pronoun Choices in Fillers (N = 40; 5 Items per Filler Type)*

Filler type	<i>he</i> , n (%)	<i>she</i> , n (%)	<i>they</i> , n (%)	<i>it</i> , n (%)
Famous male individuals (5 items)	198 (99.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.0)	0 (0.0)
Famous female individuals (5 items)	0 (0.0)	199 (99.5)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)
Plural antecedents (5 items)	2 (1.0)	0 (0.0)	186 (93.0)	12 (6.0)

Note. Each row is based on 200 responses (40 participants × 5 items). Percentages are row percentages.

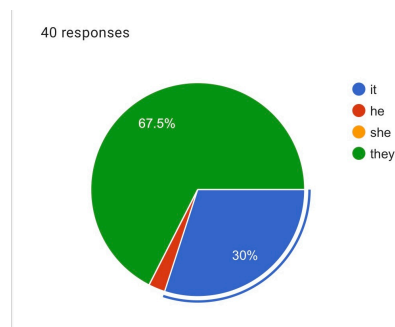


Figure 4.1: Response distribution for the plural-antecedent filler item “the artists”.

4.2 Overall pronoun distributions

Across the 15 target role-noun items, singular *they* was the most frequent pronoun selected, accounting for 59.3% (356/600) of the selections. Binary gendered pronouns accounted for 36.4% of the responses, with *she* selected in 19.2% (115/600) and *he* selected in 17.2% (103/600). The pronoun *it* accounted for 4.3% (26/600) of the target selections.

Pronoun distributions varied by stereotype category (Table 4.3). In neutral roles, *they* occurred in 75% of the selections (150/200). In male-stereotyped roles, *they* occurred in 53.5% (107/200), while *he* increased to 40.5% (81/200). In female-stereotyped roles, *they* occurred in 49.5% (99/200), while *she* increased to 46% (92/200). Compared to the neutral category, stereotyped categories showed higher proportions of the gendered pronouns.

Table 4.3: *Pronoun Distribution by Role-Noun Stereotype Category in Target Items (N = 40; 5 Items per Category)*

Target category	<i>they</i> , n (%)	<i>he</i> , n (%)	<i>she</i> , n (%)	<i>it</i> , n (%)
Male-stereotyped (5 items)	107 (53.5)	81 (40.5)	2 (1.0)	10 (5.0)
Female-stereotyped (5 items)	99 (49.5)	1 (0.5)	92 (46.0)	8 (4.0)
Neutral (5 items)	150 (75.0)	21 (10.5)	21 (10.5)	8 (4.0)
All target items (15 items)	356 (59.3)	103 (17.2)	115 (19.2)	26 (4.3)

Note. Each category row is based on 200 responses (40 × 5). The total row is based on 600 responses (40 × 15).

Table 4.3 summarizes pronoun choices within each stereotype category in the target items. *Singular they* was most frequent in the neutral category (75%), compared with the male-stereotyped (53.5%) and female-stereotyped categories (49.5%). Figure 4.2 visualizes these differences in *they* percentages across the three stereotype categories.

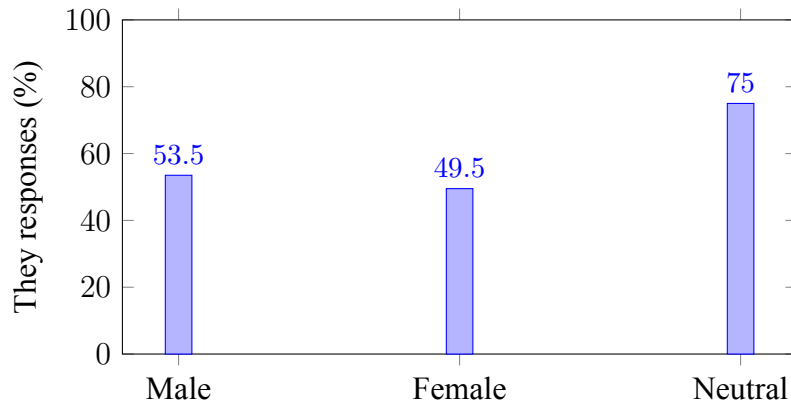


Figure 4.2: *They* usage by role-noun stereotype category (target items).

To complement the category breakdown, Figure 4.3 shows the overall pronoun distribution in the target items. This figure highlights that *they* is the single most frequent pronoun overall in targets (59.3%), but gendered pronouns together still account for a substantial minority of the responses (36.4% combined), indicating systematic competition in many contexts.

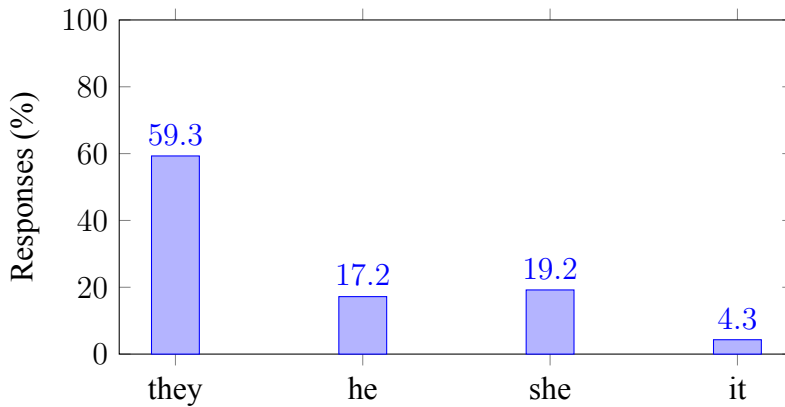


Figure 4.3: Pronoun distribution in the 15 target items (all stereotype categories combined).

4.3 Stereotype category effects and item-level trends

RQ2 examines whether role-noun stereotypes are associated with differences in pronoun selection patterns. The primary evidence comes from a comparison of the three stereotype categories shown in Figure 4.2 and Table 4.3. Neutral role nouns exhibit the highest rate of singular *they*, accounting for 75% of the selections. In contrast, singular *they* occurs at lower rates in both male-stereotyped roles (53.5%) and female-stereotyped roles (49.5%). Thus, at the category level, neutral roles pattern with a higher proportion of *they* than either stereotyped category.

Table 4.3 further reports the distribution of gendered pronouns within each stereotype category. In male-stereotyped roles, *he* accounts for 40.5% of the selections, whereas *she* is rare (1%). Conversely, in female-stereotyped roles, *she* accounts for 46% of the selections, while *he* is nearly absent (0.5%). Neutral roles display a more balanced pattern for gendered pronouns, with *he* and *she* occurring at equal rates (10.5% each). These category-level distributions document clear asymmetries in the use of gendered pronouns across the two stereotyped categories. At the item level, among the neutral items, *relative* showed the highest *they* rate (87.5%) and a very low *he* rate (2.5%).

To assess whether these category-level patterns are reflected at the level of individual role nouns, Table 4.4 presents item-level rates of singular *they* for each target role noun ($N = 40$ responses per item). The item-level data show variation across role nouns within each category. Neutral targets generally display high rates of *they*, whereas some stereotyped role nouns show stronger competition from gendered pronouns, reflected in lower item-specific *they* rates (e.g., for items such as *president* and *nanny*). At the same time, singular *they* is attested across all target items, including those with strong stereotypical associations. In addition, several items showed zero opposite-gender pronouns. No participant selected *she* for the male-stereotyped items *heavy equipment operator*, *rapist*, and *bricklayer* (0/40 in each item), and no participant selected *he* for the female-stereotyped

items *nanny*, *rape victim*, *beautician*, and *manicurist* (0/40 in each item). In the male-stereotyped set, *president* showed the highest rate of *he* (50%), followed by *heavy equipment operator* (47.5%). In the female-stereotyped set, *nanny* showed the highest rate of *she* (65%), followed by *beautician* (50%).

Table 4.4: *Item-Level Rates of they in Target Role Nouns (N = 40 per Item)*

Category	Role noun	<i>they</i> , <i>n</i> (%)
Male-stereotyped	heavy equipment operator	20 (50.0)
Male-stereotyped	rapist	24 (60.0)
Male-stereotyped	bricklayer	21 (52.5)
male-stereotyped	miner	25 (62.5)
male-stereotyped	president	17 (42.5)
Female-stereotyped	nanny	13 (32.5)
Female-stereotyped	rape victim	28 (70.0)
Female-stereotyped	cheerleader	19 (47.5)
Female-stereotyped	beautician	18 (45.0)
Female-stereotyped	manicurist	21 (52.5)
Neutral	kid	27 (67.5)
Neutral	person	32 (80.0)
Neutral	relative	35 (87.5)
Neutral	schoolchild	29 (72.5)
Neutral	toddler	27 (67.5)

Note. Percentages are calculated out of 40 responses per item (one response per participant).

4.4 The attitude scores and attitude–pronoun association

Attitude toward sexist/nonsexist language were measured with the IASNL-G, providing an overall score and three subscale scores (Beliefs, Recognition of sexist language, and Willingness to adopt inclusive alternatives). Scores were computed as described in Section 2.2.2 and are reported on a 1–5 scale, with higher values indicating more supportive attitudes toward gender-inclusive language. Table 4.5 reports statistics for the overall IASNL-G mean score and the three subscales (1–5 scale; $N = 40$).

Table 4.5: IASNL-G overall and subscale scores (1–5 scale).

Scale	<i>n</i>	Mean	Min	Max
Overall IASNL-G mean	40	3.23	1.71	4.62
Beliefs (Items 1–12)	40	3.18	1.83	4.50
Recognition (Items 13–16)	40	2.47	1.00	4.25
Willingness (Items 17–21)	40	3.95	1.00	5.00

Overall, participants' IASNL-G mean scores ranged from 1.71 to 4.62, with a sample

mean of 3.23. For the Beliefs subscale (Items 1–12), the mean score was 3.18, with participant means ranging from 1.83 to 4.50. For the Recognition subscale (Items 13–16), the mean was 2.47, with values ranging from 1.00 to 4.25. For the Willingness subscale (Items 17–21), the mean was 3.95, and participant means ranged from 1.00 to 5.00. Across the three components, Willingness showed the highest mean score, whereas Recognition showed the lowest mean score; the Beliefs mean was close to the overall IASNL-G mean.

Table 4.6 reports descriptive statistics (n, mean, and range) for the full sample and for demographic subgroups.

Table 4.6: *Descriptive Statistics for IASNL-G Attitude Scores (1–5 Scale)*

Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	Min	Max
Overall	40	3.23	1.71	4.62
Female	21	3.42	1.95	4.62
Male	19	3.02	1.71	3.90
Age 21–34	18	3.17	1.71	4.05
Age 35–49	12	3.24	1.95	4.52
Age 50+	10	3.33	2.05	4.62
HS/Some college	12	2.61	1.71	3.76
Undergraduate	15	3.40	2.43	4.52
Postgraduate	13	3.61	2.48	4.62

Note. Participant-level means across the 21 IASNL-G items. Columns report group size (*n*), mean, minimum, and maximum; higher values indicate more supportive attitudes toward gender-inclusive language.

To describe the relationship between attitudes and pronoun choices (RQ3), each participant’s IASNL-G mean score was compared with their *TheyCountTargets* value (the number of target items completed with *they*, out of 15). Figure 4.4 plots these two participant-level measures. The distribution shows substantial dispersion: participants with similar IASNL-G scores often differed in how frequently they selected *they* in the target items.

A small set of illustrative cases is provided in Table 4.7 to show this variability. A full list of participant-level values is reported in Appendix (Table 1).

Table 4.7: Participant-level examples of IASNL-G scores and singular *they* use (targets only)

Participant	Age	Gender	IASNL-G mean (1–5)	They in targets (0–15)
P03	29	Female	2.10	13
P04	52	Male	2.05	1
P20	38	Female	4.52	15
P39	61	Female	4.62	0

Table 4.7 illustrates participant-level variability. P20 showed a high IASNL-G mean

score (4.52) and selected *they* in all targets (15/15), whereas P39 also had a high IASNL-G mean score (4.62) but selected *they* in none of the targets (0/15). In contrast, P03 had a low IASNL-G mean score (2.10) yet selected *they* frequently (13/15), while P04 had a similarly low IASNL-G mean score (2.05) and selected *they* rarely (1/15).

Figure 4.4 illustrates the distribution of *singular they* usage across participants in the 15 target items. Individual pronoun-selection was summarized using *TheyCountTargets*. For readability, *TheyCountTargets* values were grouped into five bands (0–1, 2–5, 6–10, 11–14, and 15) to highlight very low, low, mid-range, near-ceiling, and ceiling use of *they* across the 15 target items. The figure shows substantial variation across the sample, indicating that participants differed widely in how consistently they adopted singular *they* in gender-underspecified singular contexts.

At the lower end of the distribution, 20% ($N = 8$) of the participants selected *they* in at most one target item (0–1 out of 15). An additional 15% ($N = 6$) selected *they* in a limited subset of targets (2–5 items), and 15% ($N = 6$) fell in a mid-range pattern, completing between 6 and 10 target items with *they*. At the higher end of the distribution, 25% ($N = 10$) of the participants selected *they* in 11–14 target items, and a further 25% ($N = 10$) selected *they* in all 15 targets.

This distribution indicates that singular *they* usage was not uniform across participants. Rather, the dataset includes profiles ranging from near-zero usage to near-ceiling usage, with a sizeable proportion of the participants occupying both extremes. These participant-level patterns provide additional descriptive context for the aggregate results reported earlier, demonstrating that overall frequency measures mask considerable individual-level variation in pronoun choice.

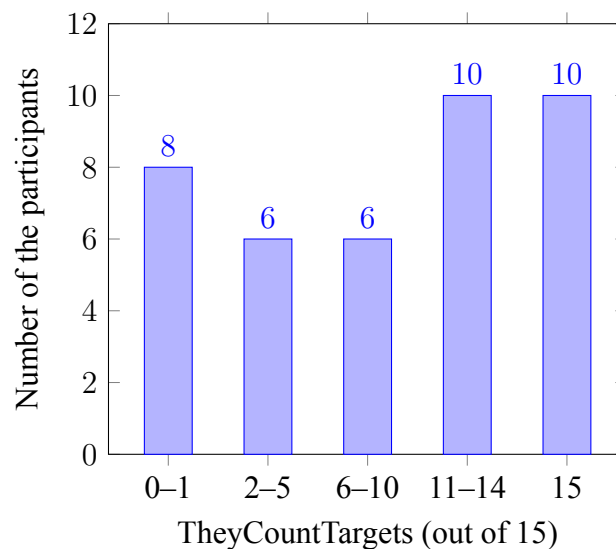


Figure 4.4: Number of participants in each *TheyCountTargets* band (0–1, 2–5, 6–10, 11–14, 15; $N = 40$).

4.5 Exploratory demographic patterns

Exploratory subgroup summaries were used to compare *singular they* rates across demographic groups (gender, age, and education) in the 15 target items. These analyses are descriptive and should be interpreted cautiously given the modest sample size. More detailed are provided in following parts.

4.5.1 Gender

Figure 4.5 visualizes *they* usage by stereotype category for women and men. Table 4.8 reports the same information as counts and percentages.

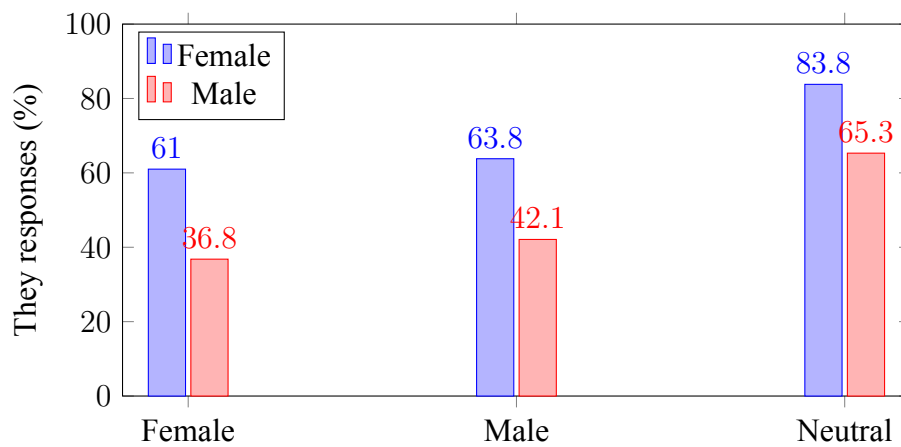


Figure 4.5: They usage by role-noun stereotype category and participant's gender (targets only).

Across categories, women show higher *they* usage than men in male-stereotyped targets (63.8% vs. 42.1%), female-stereotyped targets (61% vs. 36.8%), and neutral targets (83.8% vs. 65.3%). Overall, women use *they* in 69.5% of the target selections, whereas men use *they* in 48.1% (Table 4.8). This indicates that, in this sample, gender differences are visible across the target set, with the largest gaps in neutral and female-stereotyped items.

Table 4.8: *They Usage in Target Role Nouns by Gender (Targets Only; N = 40)*

Gender group	Male-stereotyped <i>they</i>	Female-stereotyped <i>they</i>	Neutral <i>they</i>	All targets <i>they</i>
Female ($n = 21$)	67/105 (63.8)	64/105 (61.0)	88/105 (83.8)	219/315 (69.5)
Male ($n = 19$)	40/95 (42.1)	35/95 (36.8)	62/95 (65.3)	137/285 (48.1)

Note. Each stereotype category total equals $n \times 5$ items; "All targets" equals $n \times 15$ items. Percentages are within-group.

4.5.2 Age

Age shows the strongest descriptive contrast in the dataset. Figure 4.6 displays *they* usage across all 15 target items by age group. Table 4.9 provides the category-level breakdown for each age group.

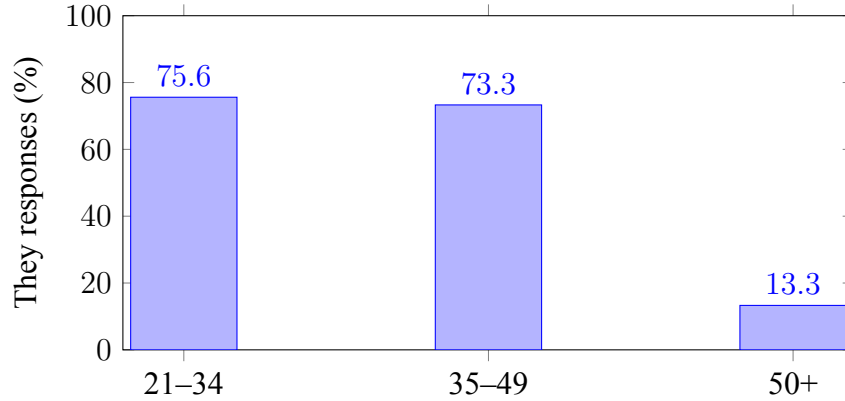


Figure 4.6: *They* usage across all target items by age group.

As shown in Figure 4.6, participants under 50 use *they* frequently in the target items (approximately three quarters of the selections), whereas the 50+ group uses *they* much less often overall. This contrast is also visible within each stereotype category (Table 4.9). For example, the 50+ group produces *they* in only 2% of the male-stereotyped targets and 8% of the female-stereotyped targets, while still using *they* most often in neutral targets (30%). In contrast, both younger groups show high *they* usage in neutral targets (85–93.3%) and substantial *they* usage even in stereotyped contexts.

Table 4.9: *They Usage in Target Role Nouns by Age Group (Targets Only; N = 40)*

Age group	Male <i>they</i>	Female <i>they</i>	Neutral <i>they</i>	All targets <i>they</i>
21–34 ($n = 18$)	64/90 (71.1)	56/90 (62.2)	84/90 (93.3)	204/270 (75.6)
35–49 ($n = 12$)	42/60 (70.0)	39/60 (65.0)	51/60 (85.0)	132/180 (73.3)
50+ ($n = 10$)	1/50 (2.0)	4/50 (8.0)	15/50 (30.0)	20/150 (13.3)

Note. Each stereotype category total equals $n \times 5$ items; “All targets” equals $n \times 15$ items. Percentages are within-group.

4.5.3 Education

Education differences are visible in this dataset, but they should be interpreted cautiously because education can overlap with age and recruitment channels in a convenience sample. Figure 4.7 summarizes *they* usage across all target items by education group, and Table 4.10 provides the category-level breakdown.

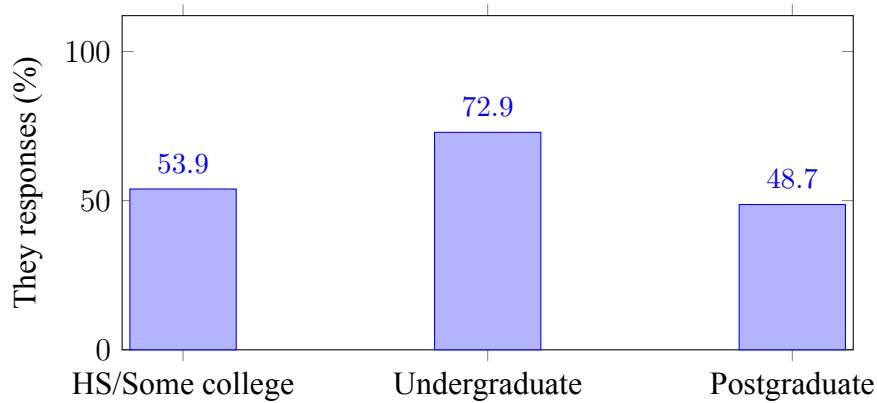


Figure 4.7: *They* usage across all target items by education group.

The Undergraduate group shows the highest target *they* usage (72.9%), while the high school/some-college group shows a moderate rate (53.9%), and the postgraduate group shows a lower rate in this sample (48.7%). As Table 4.10 shows, the same ordering is visible within stereotype categories as well.

Table 4.10: *They Usage in Target Role Nouns by Education Group (Targets Only; N = 40)*

Education group	Male-stereotyped <i>they</i>	Female-stereotyped <i>they</i>	Neutral <i>they</i>	All targets <i>they</i>
HS/Some college ($n = 12$)	26/60 (43.3)	25/60 (41.7)	46/60 (76.7)	97/180 (53.9)
Undergraduate ($n = 15$)	53/75 (70.7)	47/75 (62.7)	64/75 (85.3)	164/225 (72.9)
Postgraduate ($n = 13$)	28/65 (43.1)	27/65 (41.5)	40/65 (61.5)	95/195 (48.7)

Note. Each stereotype category total equals $n \times 5$ items; “All targets” equals $n \times 15$ items. Percentages are within-group.

4.6 Summary of the main findings

Across the 15 target role-noun items, singular *they* was the most frequent pronoun choice, accounting for 59.3% of the selections. Pronoun-selection varied by stereotype category: *they* was most frequent with neutral role nouns (75%) and occurred at lower rates in male-stereotyped roles (53.5%) and female-stereotyped roles (49.5%). In the stereotyped categories, responses showed clear directionality: male-roles patterned with increased *he* (40.5%) and a near-absence of *she* (1%), whereas female-roles patterned with increased *she* (46%) and a near-absence of *he* (0.5%). At the item level, *relative* elicited the highest rate of singular *they* (87.5%), while *nanny* elicited the lowest (32.5%); *president* was the only target item where *he* (50%) was selected more often than *they* (42.5%). Age and gender differences were also observed: participants under 50 showed high mean *they* proportions (73.3%–75.6%), compared to 13.3% in the 50+ group, and women used singular *they* more frequently than men (69.5% vs. 48.1%). Finally, to answer RQ3, participant-level comparisons did not show a consistent alignment between attitudes and singular *they* use.

5. Discussion

This study has investigated the distribution of pronoun choices among forty native speakers of American English and has examined how these selections relate to occupational stereotypes and individual language attitudes (see Section 4). It addresses three research questions concerning the prevalence of singular *they* (RQ1), the influence of stereotypicality on pronoun selection (RQ2), and the relationship between individual attitude profiles and behavioral choices (RQ3). The investigation has documented that while singular *they* is the most frequent selection for gender-underspecified role nouns in this controlled sentence-selection task, social stereotypes modulate its adoption (see Section 4, Table 4.3). Furthermore, the research has indicated that high support for inclusive language on an attitude scale does not consistently correlate with the selection of neutral pronouns in this dataset. Collectively, these findings suggest that while singular *they* is a primary linguistic resource in gender-underspecified contexts, it remains in active competition with traditional binary gender expectations triggered by specific social roles.

5.1 Prevalence and Competition of Singular *They* (RQ1)

The results for the first research question suggest that singular *they* is the primary choice in this dataset, accounting for 59.3% of all selections in the target items (see Section 4, Table 4.3). This finding is consistent with the characterization of singular *they* as a well-established feature of English for referring to generic individuals, even though it remains contested in some social spheres (Solomon, 2019). The high frequency of *they* in this study appears to extend the findings of LaScotte (2016), who recorded a majority preference for gender-inclusive pronouns among native speakers. In the current dataset, participants chose singular *they* more than three times as often as either *he* or *she* in the aggregate target set (see Section 4, Figure 4.2). This supports the view that for many speakers, *they* is a naturally occurring option for gender-neutrality that is becoming grammatically ingrained (Bradley, 2020).

However, the data also indicate that participants do not use singular *they* to the exclusion of other forms; gendered pronouns together still represent 36.4% of the responses. This distribution suggests a state of systematic competition in many contexts. Even though generic *he* has fallen out of favor for being perceived as gender-biased and presumptive (Foertsch and Gernsbacher, 1997), it still occurred in 17.2% of the target selections in this study. This suggests that the shift toward neutralization is a robust but incomplete change in progress. More broadly, this pattern aligns with what Konnelly and Cowper (2020) describe as Stage 1 or Stage 2 of a grammatical change, where speakers utilize *they* in generic

or quantified contexts but may still exhibit competition from gendered forms when referents are perceived as specific. The persistence of gendered pronouns suggests that binary gender features remain accessible in the mental grammars of many speakers (Bjorkman, 2017).

5.2 Stereotype Effects and Item-Level Variability (RQ2)

The analysis of the second research question suggests that role-noun stereotypes are associated with differences in pronoun selection. As shown in Table 4.3 (see Section 4), neutral role nouns elicited the highest rate of singular *they* at 75%, whereas male-stereotyped and female-stereotyped roles saw lower rates at 53.5% and 49.5%, respectively. This pattern is consistent with the “Meaning Activation Model,” which suggests that gendered forms activate specific meanings through a passive and uncontrollable process (Lévy et al. 2014, as cited in Chalyvidou & Weber, 2025). Nouns that are more gender-stereotyped appear to be more salient, making speakers less likely to select a non-gendered pronoun (Stormbom, 2022).

The data also appear to show clear directionality within these categories. For instance, male-roles like *heavy equipment operator*, *rapist*, and *bricklayer* elicited very few selections of *she*, while female-roles like *nanny*, *beautician*, and *manicurist* elicited very few selections of *he*. These results are consistent with prior research suggesting that gender-stereotyped nouns evoke salient male or female mental imagery, which makes speakers less likely to opt for *they* (Stormbom, 2022). Item-level contrasts further illustrate this variability; *relative* elicited the highest singular *they* rate at 87.5%, whereas *president* was the only target item where a gendered pronoun (*he* at 50.0%) was selected more frequently than singular *they*. This suggests that certain occupations carry heavy gendered associations that can override the general trend toward neutralization, a finding consistent with the “tug of war” between grammatical cues and social expectations (Chalyvidou & Weber, 2025).

5.3 The Attitude–Behavior Relationship (RQ3)

Regarding the third research question, the study found a nuanced relationship between self-reported attitudes and pronoun choice. The overall IASNL-G mean score for the sample was 3.23 on a 5-point scale (see Section 4, Table 4.6). While one might expect that higher support for inclusive language leads to higher *they* usage, the descriptive comparison with *TheyCountTargets* showed substantial dispersion (see Section 4, Figure 4.3). Specific participants exemplify this mismatch: P20 and P39 both expressed high support for inclusive language (4.52 and 4.62, respectively), yet P20 selected *they* for every target

while P39 selected *they* for none (see Section 4, Table 4.7). Conversely, P03 showed low ideological support (2.10) but used singular *they* in 13 out of 15 target items.

This relationship is consistent with the view that linguistic behavior and ideological endorsements do not always pattern together (Bradley, 2020). One potential factor is the influence of linguistic prescriptivism, where a speaker may support gender equality but resist singular *they* due to internalized beliefs about number agreement (Bradley, 2020). These individual differences appear to align with the “stages” of change proposed by Konnelly and Cowper (2020). P39’s response profile may reflect a more conservative pattern in which singular *they* is treated as acceptable only in restricted contexts. Following Konnelly and Cowper’s (2020) staging, this aligns with Stage 1, whereas broader use of singular *they* across specific role-noun contexts is closer to Stage 2. In this sense, P20—and to some extent P03—pattern more like speakers who treat *they* as a widely available option in role-noun sentences, including contexts where some speakers still prefer gendered pronouns (Konnelly & Cowper, 2020). This interpretation is consistent with Bjorkman’s (2017) distinction between “conservative” and “innovative” distributions, where even innovative speakers may still resist *they* with gender-marked antecedents and many proper names. Importantly, P39 is informative because it separates attitudes from usage: despite a high IASNL-G mean score, P39 did not select *they* in the target items. One plausible explanation is that a strongly internalized prescriptive rule that *they* is “plural only” can override inclusive intentions during online pronoun selection (Solomon, 2019).

5.4 Methodological Reflections

The use of the filler items as a basic interpretability check and quality check suggests that participants were attending to the linguistic cues of the antecedents in this task. Male and female famous-name fillers elicited the expected gendered pronouns in over 99% of cases (see Section 4, Table 4.2). This is consistent with findings that readers attend to social cues when they are explicit and salient (Foertsch and Gernsbacher, 1997). However, one plural filler item showed ambiguity, eliciting a 30% rate of *it* responses, likely due to a discourse-deictic reading where *it* refers to the overall setting rather than the plural antecedent (see Section 4.1). For target items, the coding of *it* (4.3%) was retained for transparency, but these cases were not treated as theoretically competing outcomes because the antecedents refer to humans (see Section 3.2). These checks support the validity of the task by showing that participants were not responding randomly.

5.5 Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size ($N = 40$) is relatively small and was drawn from convenience recruitment, including the Aviano Air Base com-

munity and email networks. This restricts the generalizability of these descriptive patterns to the broader population of American English speakers. Second, as a controlled sentence-selection task, the format may not capture the full complexity of naturalistic communication where speakers might use avoidance strategies (LaScotte, 2016). Finally, the study lacks qualitative interviews; therefore, the motivations behind the observed mismatches between attitude and behavior remain inferential. The descriptive age-grading recorded here, where participants over 50 used singular *they* much less often (13.3%) than younger groups (see Section 4, Table 4.9), is consistent with Conrod (2019), who found older participants rated singular *they* as less acceptable, but these findings require caution given the small population.

5.6 Implications and Future Directions

These findings carry implications for both language policy and pedagogy. The wide use of singular *they* in this dataset is consistent with recent updates to major style guides, such as the APA 7th edition, which now endorses the pronoun for generic use (Solomon, 2019). Because singular *they* is a common choice among speakers under 50 in this sample (73.3%–75.6%) (see Section 4, Table 4.9), it may be beneficial for English language teaching (ELT) to include it as a standard feature to ensure learners understand the language as it is actually used by native speakers (Solomon, 2019).

Future research could utilize larger samples to explore the descriptive age-grading observed here. Additionally, future studies could employ eye-tracking paradigms to measure the real-time processing cost of singular *they* versus gendered pronouns in stereotypically incongruent contexts, building on the methodology of Foertsch and Gernsbacher (1997). Investigating “neopronouns” (e.g., *ze*, *xe*) in a selection task could also determine if they are becoming viable options for native speakers beyond theoretical suggestions (Bradley, 2020).

Overall, these findings suggest that pronoun choice in contemporary American English reflects an interaction between stereotype expectations, individual variation, and linguistic attitudes.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the distribution of pronoun choices among forty native speakers of American English and has examined the adoption of singular *they* and its relationship to occupational stereotypes and individual language attitudes. The findings have suggested that singular *they* has established itself as the primary linguistic resource for gender-underspecified role nouns within this specific sample. Specifically, singular *they* has been selected in 59.3% of all target selections (see Table 4.3), a frequency that has more than tripled the rate of each gendered pronoun. However, this shift toward neutralization has not reached absolute completion: binary gendered pronouns have continued to represent a substantial minority of selections at 36.4% combined, indicating that singular *they* has persisted in systematic competition with traditional forms. Regarding the influence of social stereotypes, the analysis has indicated that the stereotype category of the role noun is associated with consistent differences in pronoun selection across semantic environments. Neutral role nouns have elicited the highest rate of singular *they* at 75.0 percent, whereas male-stereotyped and female-stereotyped roles have shown lower rates at 53.5 percent and 49.5 percent, respectively. These results have documented a clear patterning in pronoun choice characterized by directional asymmetries, where male-biased roles have patterned with an increased selection of masculine forms and female-biased roles have patterned with an increase in feminine forms. Furthermore, the analysis has revealed a sharp descriptive contrast between age cohorts: participants aged 50 and above have used singular *they* in only 13.3 percent of target items, while younger groups have used *they* in approximately three-quarters of their responses, ranging from 73.3 percent to 75.6 percent. Finally, the research has documented a notable mismatch between self-reported language attitudes and pronoun choices. While the sample mean for the IASNL-G has been 3.23, the data have revealed a large dispersion in the TheyCountTargets measure. Individual profiles have shown that high ideological support for inclusive language has not consistently translated into the use of singular *they* in practice, just as low support has not precluded its frequent usage.

This study is limited by its small sample size ($N = 40$) and its reliance on a convenience sampling method. Recruitment through the Aviano Air Base community and specific email networks restricts the ability to generalize these descriptive patterns to the broader population of American English speakers. Because the study is exploratory and avoids inferential claims, the findings serve as a characterization of this specific participant pool rather than a definitive statement on broader population-level trends or diachronic shifts. The controlled format of the pronoun-selection task also presents a limitation, as it provides a simple, forced-choice environment that does not necessarily capture the

full complexity of naturalistic discourse or the use of avoidance strategies that speakers might employ in more open-ended communication. Furthermore, the dataset is limited by the absence of qualitative data; without interviews or open-ended follow-up questions, the motivations behind the observed mismatches between attitudes and behavior remain purely inferential. It is difficult to determine with certainty whether a participant's avoidance of singular *they* is driven by a lack of awareness, an unconscious stereotype, or a conscious adherence to prescriptive grammatical rules that view the form as a number mismatch. Some items in the task may also have been ambiguous. In a few cases, participants may have interpreted the pronoun as referring to the overall situation described, rather than to the intended antecedent in the sentence. Additionally, the implementation of the IASNL-G, while providing a validated measure of ideological endorsements, does not explicitly account for the influence of linguistic prescriptivism, which may function as a confounding factor in how participants judge the correctness of singular *they*. The dispersion recorded in the TheyCountTargets measure suggests that individual speakers may be navigating these tasks with different internal rules for grammatical acceptability. The study is also limited by its focus on binary categories of stereotypicality, which does not directly investigate how these speakers navigate reference for specific individuals who identify outside the gender binary. Finally, the descriptive nature of the subgroup comparisons means that the interactions between demographic variables require more robust testing to determine if these patterns hold across more diverse populations.

Future research would benefit from the implementation of larger and more representative samples to explore the descriptive age-grading and gender patterns recorded here. In addition, future studies should incorporate qualitative components, such as participant interviews or think-aloud protocols, to explore the factors driving the mismatch between self-reported attitudes and linguistic production. Such investigations could determine whether resistance to singular *they* among high-attitude scorers is driven by social stereotypes or a conscious adherence to prescriptive grammatical rules regarding number agreement. Future studies could also employ different experimental paradigms, such as eye-tracking or self-paced reading tasks, to measure the implicit processing costs of singular *they* in stereotypically congruent versus incongruent contexts. This would help clarify whether the competition observed in this study is a matter of production preference or deeper processing difficulty.

These findings suggest significant implications for English language teaching and language policy. Given that singular *they* is the majority choice among speakers under the age of 50 in this sample, its inclusion in curricula is necessary to ensure that learners develop a communicative competence that reflects current native-speaker usage. The shift toward neutralization endorsed by major style guides is clearly reflected in the behavioral choices of the younger cohorts in this sample, suggesting that the preference for neutralization is increasingly being established in the domain of generic reference. However,

the persistent influence of occupational stereotypes underscores that inclusive language reform is not merely a matter of changing grammatical rules, but of navigating deeply embedded social associations. The fact that gendered pronouns remain accessible in the mental grammars of many speakers suggests that the pronominal system will continue to be a site of competition for the foreseeable future. Ultimately, the results of this thesis suggest that while singular *they* is a robust and available feature of the American English pronominal system, its application remains a site of active negotiation between evolving linguistic norms and the activation of social gender. These findings contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue by highlighting that the battle for neutrality involves a complex interplay of grammatical features, social expectations, and individual ideologies that continue to shape the evolution of the English language.

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8. Appendix

Table 1: IASNL-G mean score (1–5) and pronoun counts in target items by participant ($N = 40$).

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	IASNL-G mean (1–5)	<i>they</i> in targets (0–15)
P01	31	Male	Secondary school / High school	2.90	10
P02	49	Female	Master's degree	3.10	15
P03	29	Female	Secondary school / High school	2.10	13
P04	52	Male	Secondary school / High school	2.05	1
P05	32	Female	Bachelor's degree	2.95	15
P06	39	Female	Master's degree	2.48	15
P07	70	Male	Master's degree	3.76	1
P08	30	Male	Secondary school / High school	3.29	12
P09	21	Male	Secondary school / High school	3.24	12
P10	38	Male	Bachelor's degree	3.05	0
P11	26	Female	Associates degree	2.05	5
P12	26	Female	High school / some college	3.76	6
P13	32	Male	Bachelor's degree	2.90	13

Continued on next page.

Table 1 continued.

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	IASNL-G mean (1–5)	they in targets (0–15)
P14	29	Female	Bachelor's degree	4.00	15
P15	70	Male	Master's degree	3.90	1
P16	79	Female	Doctorate / PhD	4.05	3
P17	35	Male	Bachelor's degree	3.43	12
P18	63	Male	Bachelor's degree	3.24	5
P19	71	Female	Master's degree	3.90	5
P20	38	Female	Bachelor's degree	4.52	15
P21	73	Female	Master's degree	3.19	0
P22	68	Male	Bachelor's degree	2.43	1
P23	35	Male	Master's degree	3.38	14
P24	61	Male	Secondary school / High school	2.19	3
P25	27	Male	Secondary school / High school	2.71	8
P26	36	Female	Associates in Radiology	1.95	9
P27	30	Female	Bachelor's degree	3.81	15
P28	28	Male	Master's degree	3.29	15
P29	32	Female	Bachelor's degree	3.95	14
P30	40	Male	Master's degree	3.62	1
P31	32	Male	Master's degree	3.52	10
P32	23	Female	Bachelor's degree	3.38	12
P33	44	Female	Bachelor's degree	3.24	8

Continued on next page.

Table 1 continued.

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	IASNL-G mean (1–5)	<i>they</i> in targets (0–15)
P34	35	Female	Doctorate / PhD	4.10	15
P35	38	Male	Bachelor's degree	2.76	15
P36	25	Male	Secondary school / High school	1.71	3
P37	40	Female	Bachelor's degree	3.24	13
P38	25	Female	Secondary school / High school	3.38	15
P39	61	Female	Master's degree	4.62	0
P40	23	Female	Bachelor's degree	4.05	11

Note. IASNL-G means are calculated after reverse-scoring Items 1–6 and 11. Target pronoun counts are based on 15 target items.

Table 2: Experimental stimuli and category mapping (15 target items).

Experimental item	Category used here
Before the heavy equipment operator moved the bricks, _____ took a break.	Male stereotype
The rapist was jailed, as soon as _____ confessed to the crime.	Male stereotype
The bricklayer went home after _____ had finished the job.	Male stereotype

Continued on next page.

Table 2 continued.

Experimental item	Category used here
The miner found a diamond when _____ worked in Brazil.	Male stereotype
After the president was elected, _____ gave a speech.	Male stereotype
The kid ran home after, _____ heard the school bell.	Neutral stereotype
The person screamed when _____ saw the bear.	Neutral stereotype
The relative did not live close to the family because _____ mooved to Australia.	Neutral stereotype
The schoolchild played with an imaginary friend after _____ got home from school.	Neutral stereotype
The toddler was told off because _____ drew on the walls.	Neutral stereotype
The nanny put the children to bed, after _____ cooked the dinner.	Female stereotype
A cheerleader couldn't cheer before the baseball game because _____ had a very important exam to do.	Female stereotype
The rape victim felt relieved when _____ heard that the abuser was put in prison.	Female stereotype
The beautician was very talented because _____ went to a very good training school.	Female stereotype
The manicurist broke a client's nail so _____ charged them less.	Female stereotype

Table 3: IASNL short form items (21 items), adapted from Parks & Robertson (2000).

#	Item
1	Women who think that being called a “chairman” is sexist are misinterpreting the word “chairman.”
2	We should not change the way the English language has traditionally been written and spoken.
3	Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity.
4	If the original meaning of the word “he” was “person,” we should continue to use “he” to refer to both males and females today.
5	When people use the term “man and wife,” the expression is not sexist if the users don’t mean it to be.
6	The English language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.
7	The elimination of sexist language is an important goal.
8	Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid sexist language.
9	Sexist language is related to sexist treatment of people in society.
10	When teachers talk about the history of the United States, they should change expressions, such as “our forefathers,” to expressions that include women.
11	Teachers who require students to use nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.
12	Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate sexist language.
13	People should care about all mankind, not just themselves.
14	The belief that frogs will give you warts is just an old wives’ tale.
15	If a child wants to play the piano well, he must practice hard.
16	Alice Jones should be chairman of our committee.

Continued on next page.

Table 3 continued.

#	Item
17	When you are referring to a married woman, how willing are you to use the title “Ms. Smith” rather than “Mrs. Smith”?
18	How willing are you to use the word “server” rather than “waiter” or “waitress”?
19	How willing are you to use the expression “husband and wife” rather than “man and wife”?
20	How willing are you to use the term “camera operator” rather than “cameraman”?
21	How willing are you to use the title “flight attendant” instead of “steward” or “stewardess”?

Table 4: Filler items and filler-type mapping (15 filler items).

Filler item	Filler type
Cinderella cried because _____ couldn’t go to the ball.	Famous-name
Before Boris Johnson resigned, _____ used to be the prime minister.	Famous-name
After Emma Watson played Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter films, _____ became very famous.	Famous-name
Beyonce recently performed in London, everyone said _____ sang incredibly.	Famous-name
After Tom Cruise finished the latest mission impossible _____ went on holiday.	Famous-name

Continued on next page.

Table 4 continued.

Filler item	Filler type
Last week the artists painted in the park, _____ seemed very peaceful.	Plural antecedent
When the builders finished work, _____ drank a cup of tea.	Plural antecedent
When Queen Elizabeth II died, _____ had two corgis named Muick and Sandy.	Famous-name
Everyone loves Leonardo DiCaprio because _____ played Jack Dawson in the film “Titanic”.	Famous-name
Angelina Jolie first became famous because _____ won an academy award in “Girl, Interrupted (1999)”.	Famous-name
After Jay Z last performed in February 2023, _____ took a break from touring.	Famous-name
Yesterday the children played outdoors and _____ laughed a lot.	Plural antecedent
The employees went on holiday because _____ needed a break.	Plural antecedent
When King Charles was coronated, _____ travelled around the UK.	Famous-name
After the singers won the competition _____ celebrated by going to a party.	Plural antecedent

Demographics

Please provide some basic background information.

Please indicate your age. *
(You may enter your age in years)

Your answer _____

Please indicate your gender. *

Female

Male

Nonbinary/ Other

Prefer not to say

What is your highest level of education completed? *

Secondary school/ High school

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate / PhD

Other: _____

What is your first language (mother tongue)? *

Your answer _____

Please list any other languages you speak and *
indicate your level of proficiency, if possible.
(Example: English_fluent; Spanish_intermediate;
French_beginner)

Your answer _____

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
 **Google Forms**

Figure 1: Demographic section of the questionnaire as presented in Google Forms (age, gender identity, education level, and first-language background).