

Are you described as a manager, by that project you nailed, or as someone's relation? How you are described can determine how you will be remembered. For many [women](#), descriptions boil down to who they are with more than what they actually know or do.

Take Lauren Sanchez as an example. She was a TV news anchor for years, co-hosting Fox's "Good Day LA" from 2011 to 2017, as detailed by [People](#). She is a licensed helicopter pilot who founded her own aerial film company and [consulted](#) on Christopher Nolan's film "Dunkirk." But if you read about the 49-year-old today, you likely see her identity reduced to one word: [mistress](#). After reports of her romantic relationship with [Amazon](#) CEO [Jeff Bezos](#) became public, multiple news outlets, including [The Associated Press](#) and [New York Post](#), described her with that one word.

As Emily Peck [explained](#) in HuffPost, the term is sexist because it is "meant to suggest that a woman is subordinate to the man with whom she's having a relationship. The word also implies that her behavior is immoral." And its usage does not go the other way: You are not likely to see stories introducing Bezos' defining characteristic as Sanchez's mister and paramour.

How women's accomplishments are described

This kind of devaluation happens all the time when women are described professionally. Many see their multiple career accomplishments knocked down to their connection to a man. [Chrissy Teigen](#), a New York Times-bestselling cookbook author, TV host and model, is still sometimes referred simply

to as John Legend's wife. After winning the bronze medal in the 2016 Rio Olympics, three-time Olympian Corey Cogdell was not referred to by name in a Chicago Tribune [tweet](#), but described only as the "wife of a Bears' lineman."

Research shows how this kind of devaluation happens in insidious ways during [workplace](#) introductions. According to a study in the [Journal of Women's Health](#), male introducers are significantly less likely to introduce a female speaker as a doctor than they do for male speakers. Analyzing professional events at which medical doctors discussed their expertise, Dr. Julia Files and her colleagues found that men introduced male doctors by their professional titles 72 percent of the time, and did the same for women only 49 percent of the time. Women, in contrast, used professional titles the majority of the time when introducing both male and female speakers.

"It is very important to acknowledge the impact language has on career advancement, especially in women," said Files, an internist who led the study after being addressed by her first name by a discussion moderator who referred to her three male co-panelists as "Dr." She said she and her research co-authors endorsed "addressing all women, irrespective of the industry, by the highest title they have achieved."

These everyday descriptors can have a [long-lasting impact](#) on women's careers. The language used in letters of recommendation to describe the accomplishments of women in academia can influence hiring decisions, one study [found](#).

How notability can be decided

Deciding what parts of a person's career to mention first or foremost is not a neutral act; notability itself has long been a contested battleground. Just look at Wikipedia, one of the world's largest free sources of information online. An internal 2011 [study](#) found that less than 10 percent of Wikipedia editors are women, and in 2014, only [around 15 percent](#) of Wikipedia profiles were of women.

Soraya Chemaly, director of the [Women's Media Center](#) and author of "Rage Becomes Her," said that who is considered notable to write about on Wikipedia reflects societal gender bias.

"When you have a system, which we do, in which there are fewer women's bylines, fewer women's sources, fewer women's photographs in media, that then has the butterfly effect of amplifying the notability differentials in Wikipedia," she said. "And that has to do with whether or not, for example, women have job titles that are fancy or important when they are older, whether they have tenure as professors. It's a really very deep problem."

Overriding these biases takes collective work. At Wikipedia, [internal](#) and [other initiatives](#) achieved 17.8 percent profiles of women by February, nearly three years after the site launched its Women In Red push to fix the content gap.

Gina Luria Walker is a professor of women's studies at The New School in New York and director of [The New Historia](#), a digital archive of female history documenting, recovering and promoting their forgotten achievements.

"There needs to be a conscious collaborative determination by women, including girls, that we want to know about women of

the past, we want to have access to our foremothers, and that we want to revise history,” Walker said.

“It’s a very hard thing for individuals, certainly for cultures as a whole to do, to say, ‘Wait, a minute, there’s a whole other side, a ... narrative of individuals and groups of women who invented new knowledge and made profound changes in the worlds in which they live,’” she said.

Even in death, women’s careers can be diminished

The present way we discuss women informs how their histories are written about in death and remembered. Yvonne Brill was a rocket scientist whose inventions are still being used in satellites today. But if you only read the opening paragraph of the [initial version](#) of her 2013 [New York Times](#) obituary, all you would know is that, “She made a mean beef stroganoff.” Her role as nurturing mother and wife took center stage first in the remembrance of her life.

These word choices matter because [obituaries](#) can be the final written testament of one’s legacy. One [study](#) on gender differences in obituaries called them a “measurement of life achievement suggesting that women’s accomplishments are devalued, even after death.”

In a separate study on this double standard, researchers looked at 869 obituaries, death notices and memorials, and found that men had more lines dedicated to their career than women.

Psychology professor Shirley M. Ogletree, one of the authors of the obituary study, said that the importance society places on

gender roles influences why women's accomplishments get devalued. She said that men getting more ink about their careers "may be tied to framing women's lives in terms of family and men's lives in terms of careers."

For that to change, women will need to be fully seen and recognized for the work they do outside of what they do for their families, partners and homes – beef stroganoff and all.

Walker said that we still lack the vocabulary to accurately describe what women do. "Language keeps tripping us, making us fall on our faces, because there's no knowledge of the fact that women have always hustled around the world, working, being productive, leading," Walker said.

Gaining this shared knowledge will require questioning the assumptions behind how a woman or her professional career is described, and not taking words about her being someone's wife or "mistress" at face value.

"Every time a woman is denied the full weight of what she has achieved, it is a loss for all of us," Walker said.