Gendered Language &
Stereotype Awareness
for Hiring Committees

Gender Discrimination Exists

Gender segregation is the tendency for women to work in systematically different occupations and industries than men. This often occurs at critical career points, which can dissuade women from continuing in male-dominated industries.

Women grow more aware of the “glass ceiling” as they advance in their careers:

- Women with children experienced declines in earnings and hours worked;
- Men with children correlated with increased earnings and virtually unchanged hours.

Percentage of workers who believe barriers that prevent women from reaching management level exist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20 yrs</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-44 yrs</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 45 yrs</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stereotypes & Their Effects

Stereotype: Men

Agentic:
- competitive
- decisive
- aggressive
- socially dominant

Stereotype: Women

Communal:
- kind
- thoughtful
- sensitive to others
- deferent

Traditionally, companies have valued agentic behaviour over communal behaviour.

Agentic women are stereotyped as competent, but interpersonally insensitive.

This is used to justify keeping them out of male-dominated management positions.

Some women counteract negative stereotypes by adopting a more masculine communication style.

This can be effective for some women, but not all. Agentic behaviours have social costs.
Below are examples of language in job advertisements and qualities of candidates.

**Feminine**
- A company’s “excellence” in the market
- “Understand markets to establish appropriate selling prices”
- “We are committed to providing top quality health care that is sympathetic to the needs or our patients”

**Masculine**
- A company’s “dominance” in the market
- “Analyze markets to determine appropriate selling prices”
- “We are determined to deliver superior medical treatment tailored to each individual patient”

It also goes unnoticed in job advertisements; even when explicitly pointed out.

**Word Choice Matters**

**Gendered Job Descriptions**

For an Engineer

**Feminine**
- Proficient oral and written communication skills
- Collaborates well, in a team environment
- Sensitive to the clients’ needs, can develop warm client relationships
- Provide general support to project teams in a manner complimentary to the company

**Masculine**
- Strong communication and influencing skills
- Ability to perform individually in a competitive environment
- Superior ability to satisfy customers and manage company’s association with them
- Direct project groups to manage project progress and ensure accurate task control

“Qualified”

Only partially meet the advertised job requirements?
- Men are more likely to apply, regardless.

85% of women would only apply to a job if they met the job description “fully” or “pretty well.”

Women are also less likely to apply for masculine-stereotyped jobs.

Proficient

Communication

Understanding

Supportive

Communal

Collaborative

Concerned

Agentic

Deciding to Apply

3 main factors when individuals decide to apply:

- Identification with the job
- Reward Preference
- Expectation of Application Success

Interview Best Practices

- Is this what I want to do?
- Job technical and skill requirements
- Go beyond the technical details and salary discussions
- Working relationships and workplace climate
- Expectations for availability and travel
- Will there be people like me?
- How do current employers handle family demands?

What benefits do you offer? (Lifestyle, work-life balance provisions, compensation, including professional development, mentoring)

Women’s leadership potential should be maximized through professional development, mentoring, and proactively identifying talented individuals and encouraging them to apply for upper level jobs. The negative effects of communal communication stereotypes can also be eliminated through self-affirmation exercises.

Gendered language is not a deliberate process - most job ads only contain 1% gendered language – but impacts women’s application decisions. Increasing feminine language in job descriptions can increase women’s interest in the job.

Organisations need to rethink their hiring process, and should ensure career advancement reflects skills and capabilities instead of emphasising time served. When attracting women to a job, flexible working hours and work-life balance are important, as well as ensuring they have a sense of anticipated belonging in the organisation. In the study of MBA graduates, women were no less likely to receive offers in masculine jobs; the segregation occurred in the application process where women self-selected the jobs they believed they fit.
References


Recommended Readings


About WWEST

Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science & Technology (WWEST) is the operating name for the NSERC Chair for Women in Science and Engineering (CWSE), BC and Yukon Region. Our mission is to advance engineering and science as welcoming careers that serve our world through holistic understanding and creative, appropriate and sustainable solutions. WWEST works locally and, in conjunction with the other CWSE Chairs, nationally on policy, research, advocacy, facilitation, and pilot programs that support women in science and engineering.

About the Chairholder

The Chair is held by Dr. Elizabeth Croft, P.Eng., FEC, FASME. Dr. Croft is the Associate Dean, Education and Professional Development in the Faculty of Applied Science, and a Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of British Columbia. She is also the Director of the Collaborative Advanced Robotics and Intelligent Systems (CARIS) Laboratory. Her research investigates how robotic systems can behave, and be perceived to behave, in a safe, predictable, and helpful manner. She is the lead investigator of “Engendering Engineering Success,” a 3-year interdisciplinary research project that aims to take an evidence-based approach to increasing the retention of women in engineering by understanding and changing aspects of workplace culture that place women at a disadvantage.

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