

Gendered Language & Stereotype Awareness for Hiring Committees

In a hiring process, stereotypes, unconscious bias and communication styles can **unknowingly influence** impressions of candidates and jobs.

Women's behaviour tends to be stereotyped as **communal** (kind, thoughtful, sensitive to others' feelings, deferent), whereas men are stereotyped as **agentic** (competitive, decisive, aggressive, socially dominant).¹ Women also are encouraged to be more self-assertive, but discouraged from advancing their interests at the cost of others.¹

Language can also be characterized as **feminine** or **masculine**; being more indirect, elaborate and emotional for the former, or more succinct, direct and instrumental for the latter.²

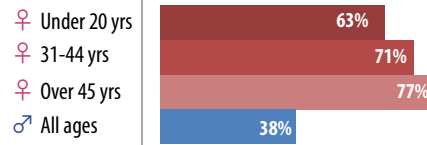
These stereotypes and assumptions can impact a hiring committee's assessment of a **candidate's abilities**, as well as the candidate's assessment of a job description and **their "fit"** within an organisation.

Job ads with masculine language are **less appealing** to women, regardless of job type, and decreased their **anticipated belonging** to the organisation.³ Conversely, gendered language had **no impact** on men's anticipated belonging.³

Gender Discrimination Exists

Gender segregation is the tendency for women to work in **systematically different occupations** and industries than men.⁴ This often occurs at **critical career points**, which can dissuade women from continuing in male-dominated industries.³

Women grow more aware of the "**glass ceiling**" as they advance in their careers:



Percentage of workers who believe barriers that prevent women from reaching management level exist⁶



Women with children experienced **declines in earnings and hours worked**; men with children correlated with **increased earnings and virtually unchanged hours**.⁵

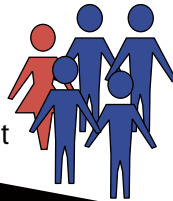


Stereotypes & Their Effects

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**.⁷

This is used to **justify** keeping them out of **male-dominated** management positions.^{1,3}

Some women counteract negative stereotypes by adopting a more masculine communication style.² This can be effective for some women, but not all. Agentic behaviours have social costs.²

Word Choice Matters

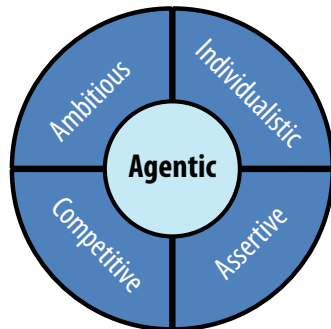
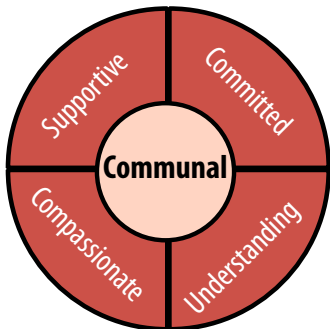
Gendered wording **subtly** signals who **belongs** and **who doesn't**.
Below are examples of language in job advertisements and qualities of candidates.

Feminine

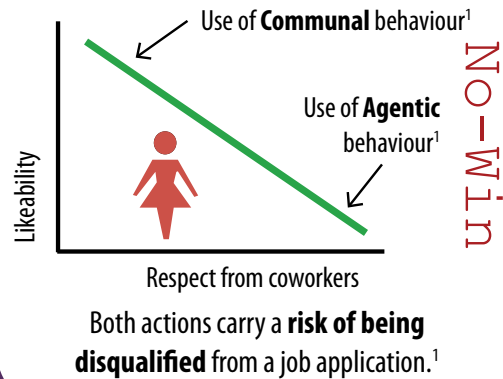
- a company's "**excellence**" in the market³
- "**understand** markets to **establish** appropriate selling prices"³
- "We are **committed** to providing top quality health care that is **sympathetic** to the needs of our patients"³

MASCULINE

- a company's "**dominance**" in the market³
- "**analyze** markets to **determine** appropriate selling prices"³
- "We are **determined** to deliver **superior** medical treatment tailored to each individual patient"³



Women in Leadership Positions



Observed Effects of Women Using Forced Agentic Behaviour

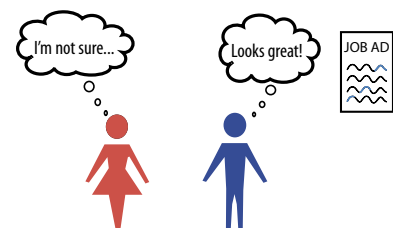
- ↑ Increase ♀'s **competence scores** to equally agentic men¹
- ↓ Seem more **threatening**; less **persuasive** & less **influential**²
- ↓ Decrease **compliance** of workers for ♀ managers²

If women need to manage the impressions they give off, it can lead to **stress, anxiety and reduced task performance**.^{2,3}

Gendered Job Descriptions³

For an Engineer

Feminine	MASCULINE
" Proficient oral and written communication skills" ³	" Strong communication and influencing skills" ³
"Collaborates well, in a team environment" ³	"Ability to perform individually in a competitive environment" ³
" Sensitive to the clients' needs, can develop warm client relationships" ³	" Superior ability to satisfy customers and manage company's association with them" ³
"Provide general support to project teams in a manner complimentary to the company" ³	" Direct project groups to manage project progress and ensure accurate task control " ³



Gendered language has **no impact** on men's decision to apply, but may dissuade women.³

It also goes **unnoticed** in job advertisements; even when explicitly pointed out.³

"Qualified"

Only partially meet the advertised job requirements?

Men are more likely to apply, regardless.⁶

85% of women would only apply to a job if they met the job description "**fully**" or "**pretty well**."⁶

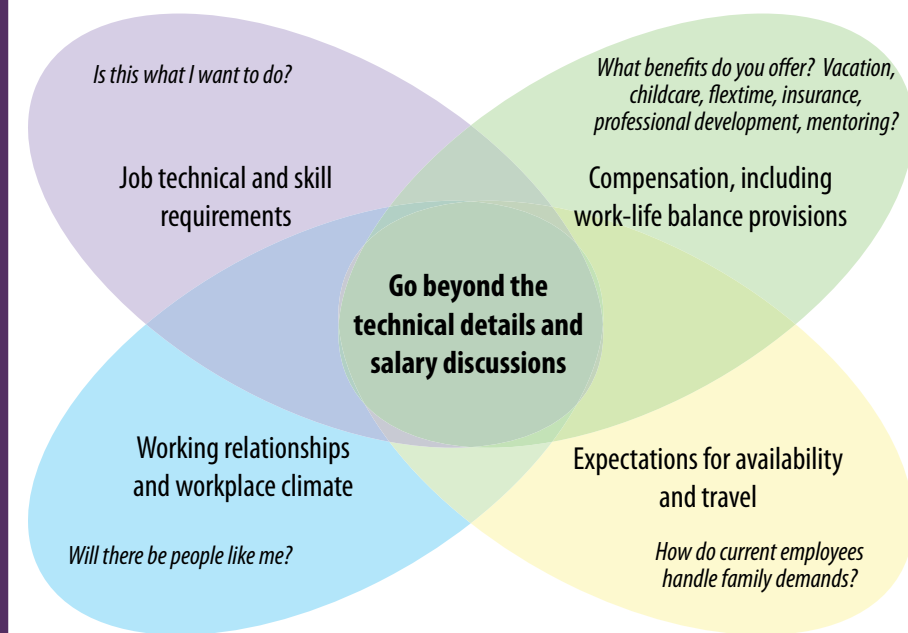
Women are also less likely to apply for masculine-stereotyped jobs.⁴

Deciding to Apply

3 main factors when individuals decide to apply:⁴



Interview Best Practices⁴



Interview best practices help you find the best employee, and are **universally helpful, regardless of gender**.^{10,12} Lifestyle and workplace climate discussions are particularly important to women⁹ and young workers^{8,11} (Millenials / Gen Y).

What Can We Do?

Gendered language is not a deliberate process - most job ads only contain 1% gendered language³ - but impact women's application decisions. Increasing **feminine language** in job descriptions can **increase women's interest** in the job.⁷

Organisations need to rethink their hiring process, and should ensure career advancement **reflects skills and capabilities** instead of emphasising time served.⁶ When attracting women to a job, **flexible working hours** and **work-life balance** are important,⁴ as well as ensuring they have a **sense of anticipated belonging** in the organisation.³ 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.⁴

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.⁶ The negative effects of communal communication stereotypes can also be eliminated through **self-affirmation exercises**.²



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Recommended Readings

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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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