

# Employment ads perpetuate traditional gender roles, study finds

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Recent graduates browsing job announcements may not be conscious of it, but employment ads can signal whether a job is typically held by men or women, according to researchers at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, Princeton University and the University of Waterloo.

The clues come in the form of gendered words like competitive and dominant (male) versus compassionate and nurturing (female), the researchers report. Both men and women show a preference for job descriptions matching their gender, women more strongly so. But no one in the study was aware of the effect, the researchers discovered.

The study appears online in the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#) and will appear in an upcoming print issue.

Our research suggests these signals may perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace,â€ said senior author Aaron Kay, associate professor of management, psychology and neuroscience at Duke. When we ask people why they don't like a job, they come up with all kinds of explanations. Not one participant picked up on gendered language.

Kay and co-authors Danielle Gaucher, a postdoctoral scholar at Princeton, and Justin Friesen, a graduate student at the University of Waterloo, examined more than 4,000 recent job ads. After finding gender-based wording differences in employment postings, the team used those differences to create masculine and feminine job advertisements for identical positions, then asked people to rate the jobs.

For example, the masculine advertisement for a registered nurse read, We are determined to deliver superior medical treatment tailored to each individual patient, while the feminine advertisement said, We are committed to providing top quality health care that is sympathetic to the needs of our patients.

We found these wording differences affected the job's appeal independent of the type of job it was, Friesen said. When we used more masculine wording, the traditionally female-dominated jobs became more appealing to men. Using more feminine wording made the traditionally male-dominated jobs more appealing to women.

This unconscious response could be one reason why women are less likely to apply to jobs traditionally held by men, including those in science and technology, said Kay.

People don't realize the cues being sent to them, Kay said. Consistently finding certain [jobs](#) less appealing without being aware of the external reasons why may lead some women away from occupations they may otherwise have found interesting.

Because every study participant missed the presence of gendered language, the researchers believe it's likely that companies unintentionally place gendered job advertisements.

Many companies want to diversify, Gaucher said. Companies that use highly masculine wording may, in reality, be just as welcoming to their female employees as they are to their male employees.

Provided by Duke University

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