

Study warns of rise of 'new chauvinism' fueled by right-wing populism

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New research from the University of Bath has identified a "new chauvinism," fueled by a resurgence in right-wing populism, and distinguished by the use of softer, more subtle language than traditional chauvinism.

The study focused on [language](#) and attitudes in software development, a profession known for perpetuating chauvinistic language. It warns organizations that what it called 'new chauvinism' may open doors to neo-conservatism and foment discriminatory practices at odds with companies' stated values.

"'New chauvinism' is practiced in subtly different ways from old chauvinism. Online misogynists, such as Andrew Tate, may use overtly misogynistic, hate-filled language that was familiar to our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, but our research suggests that new chauvinists generally use much softer, more subtle, less direct language," said Professor Nancy Harding of the University of Bath School of Management.

Professor Harding led a team of researchers who interviewed men and women in the software development industry, where globally almost 92% of the workforce are male, with numerous studies identifying the profession's misogynistic culture for the low female participation rates. Harding's team focused on the language and attitudes used by male developers and the experiences of female developers.

"Old chauvinism lobbed verbal bombs at women, telling them where women belonged—women and many men came to recognize these statements for what they were and could fight against them. However, new chauvinism fires fusillades of little chauvinistic arrows, from a quiver full of insults that are sometimes so subtle they are barely consciously registered as misogynistic," she said.

Among a host of examples, researchers found a "curious resistance" from many men to even contemplating the notion of a female software engineer, while some women reported hearing "I didn't know that a woman could do this job," and talked of a persistent "them and us" culture, painting women as permanent outsiders.

One man said, "It's really hard for a woman to be feminine and a good developer at the same time. Some people just don't get it."

Professor Harding said the software development profession was not necessarily more receptive to right-wing politics than other professions but its misogynistic practices, like those hidden behind closed doors in other organizations, could offer a sympathetic point of entry into organizations by [political actors](#).

She said neoconservatism, flourishing in an era of global insecurity, anxiety and gross inequalities, was a particular concern, resurrecting language and attitudes that became taboo over the decades-long fight for women's rights.

"Neoconservatism breaks those taboos by reintroducing into circulation and normalizing language, if not practices, whose elimination had been hard fought for. Their language may not contain explicit chauvinistic statements, but its chauvinism is identifiable by indirect, elusive inferences," Professor Harding added.

For example, the study notes that UK National Conservatism's 2023 conference saw UK Member of Parliament Miriam Cates urge women to have more children to tackle an "existential threat" from falling population levels. Echoing policies espoused by Hungarian and Italian populist heads of state, Cates argued that spending money on women's education militated against their role as child-bearers. This, implies but does not openly state that women "belong in the kitchen."

Professor Harding said her team's study showed women often struggled to find immediate ripostes to this less overt sexism, that there was a need to build awareness of the dangers of this more subtle form of chauvinism and to equip women with the language and phrases to disarm it quickly.

"For example, one aspect of chauvinizing is the absorption of insults into our self-understanding. If women are told often enough that they have a natural predilection for care rather than action, they may come to feel guilty if they do not prioritize care over action. To which the response might be, isn't it amazing how we can do care work as part of all the other things we do?" she said.

Professor Harding said the research showed humor may be a useful weapon in the fight against "new chauvinism."

"Famously, see the response on Twitter/X to Andrew Tate's announcement that he would not sleep with any [women](#) who had had the COVID-19 vaccination: 'Hooray,' someone responded, 'the vaccine works,'" she explained.

The study, "[Organizations, Neoconservatism and New Chauvinism: Organizational receptivity to ring-wing political strategies](#)" can be read in the journal *Organization Studies*.

More information: Nancy Helen Harding et al, Organizations, Neoconservatism and New Chauvinism: Organizational receptivity to right-wing political strategies, *Organization Studies* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/01708406241261459](#)

Provided by University of Bath

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