

Gender-sensitive job titles may affect women's interest in job ads

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The new study suggests that the use of gender-sensitive language in the title of job advertisements may influence the level of interest demonstrated by female potential applicants. Credit: Elegant_Inspiration_Art, Pixabay, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

A new study suggests that the use of gender-sensitive language in the

title of job advertisements may influence the level of interest demonstrated by female potential applicants. Dominik Hetjens of Technische Universität Dresden, Germany, and Stefan Hartmann of Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Germany, present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on August 14, 2024.

German is one of many languages in which every noun is grammatically masculine, feminine, or neutral. For instance, "[teacher](#)" is grammatically masculine, "sun" is feminine, and "boat" neutral. Because the German word for "teacher" is grammatically masculine, someone referring to a teacher of no specified gender will still use the masculine form.

In recent decades, concerns have grown that this so-called generic masculine form could create a problematic male bias. Thus, a variety of alternative forms have arisen to refer to a mixed-gender group or an entity of no specific gender.

To date, research on the potential social consequences of using gender-sensitive alternatives versus the generic masculine form has been limited, and most has been conducted in small laboratory studies. To add a new perspective, Hetjens and Hartmann analyzed real-world data on 256,934 German-[language](#) job listings posted on an online job platform from 2020 to 2022.

They found that, overall, job titles that used gender-sensitive language had a consistently higher proportion of female users who clicked to view the entire job ad than job titles using the generic masculine.

This behavior was more pronounced for alternative forms that make the feminine form explicit by including the feminine suffix "-in" than for other alternatives, such as the addition of the gender-neutral "-kraft." These results held true even for ads in the female-dominated nursing profession.

These findings suggest that gender-sensitive language in job advertisements may influence the behavior of potential applicants. However, the researchers note, the underlying explanation for their results is likely complex and multifaceted, and more research is needed to clarify any cause-effect relationship between gender-sensitive language and job applicant interest.

The authors add, "We found that the use of gender-sensitive language in job titles correlates with a higher proportion of female user interaction. However, follow-up studies are needed to understand the causes of this correlation."

More information: Effects of gender sensitive language in job listings: A study on real-life user interaction, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0308072](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0308072)

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