



*Research Proposal*

## **GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN JOB POSTINGS: DOES IT STILL EXIST?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There are interesting academic articles available on gender discrimination in the wording of job descriptions. Our proposal additionally asks the question: Does it make a difference to women seeking jobs if the salary ranges are posted? If so, does listing salary ranges a positive or negative effect? If negative, is it because women undervalue themselves in connection with gender-biased wording in the job descriptions? We will look at "C-Suite" positions (presidents and deans) in private universities and evaluate the male to female ratio of leadership at these institutions. The results will show if there is correlation between the job descriptions with unlisted salaries, and/or gender discrimination based on the subtle gender-based language used to attract desired traits in applicants. We believe through proper survey questions we will open a new field of discovery within gender discrimination research.*

**Key words:** gender, discrimination, job postings.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research is proposed by three women enrolled in a university program centered on organizational leadership. Our Human Resources Management course has created a curiosity among us as to why women, who comprise slightly more than 50% of the age 25–69-year-old population in the U.S., hold only 30 percent of college president positions. While it is true that women hold more untenured positions (instructors and assistant professors) than men, the glass ceiling still exists for the positions of president and provost (Flynn, K. 2021). There is a misconception that college presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs and tenured professors are male dominated positions because there are not enough qualified women to take these

positions. According to Flynn, this is a myth because more than half of all master's degrees were awarded to women during the past three decades, and women receiving doctoral degrees have outpaced men since 2006. Our studies have made us question why women are not acquiring high leadership positions at a faster pace.

Research in 2016 by CUPA-HR showed that women in academic leadership positions earn less than men – on average approximately eighty cents for every one dollar. The overall national wage gap in 2019 showed the highest paid senior executive women in business earned 84.6 cents for every one dollar earned by their male counterparts (Thorbeck 2021). We propose that gendered wording in job postings, and if a salary range is disclosed, contribute to the inequity of women leaders in executive academic roles. We propose examination of job advertisement wording for subtle messages that imply only men are qualified. Our research proposal will add to the field of HR studies, specifically why women are not applying and being hired in greater numbers to upper-level positions in academia.

During our coursework, we have learned an important part of organizational leadership is Human Resources Management (HRM) because two of its primary functions are recruitment and retention of personnel. Our research proposes to look specifically at recruitment practices, namely job postings, also sometimes referred to as job openings, listings, advertisements, and/or vacancies, and how gender discrimination exists in and through them before the hiring process begins and despite the laws outlawing discrimination based on gender. To remain relevant and competitive, the current business environment has been placing an increasing focus and scrutiny on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) adoption, integration, policies, and practice. We propose to research if there is a correlation between salary transparency and gendered wording in the job postings of private colleges and universities in California and if there is a correlation to appointments of women leaders resulting in a change to the ratio of men to women leaders in these institutions.

Salary transparency and explicitly stated policies have the potential to play a part in gender discrimination in job postings, as it relates to impression management in the California academic community and the perpetuation of the ongoing gender pay gap as a measure or indicator of its failure to fulfill the industry's commitment to DEI at large. Examining employer and employee attitudes about salary transparency, closing the gender pay gap, and paying employees based on the perceived internal value of the position rather than outside/external factors on what an employee is worth (salary history, work experience, gender, etc.). The problem is important because the gender pay gap between men and women persists.

What is the cause and effect of the problem we are researching? Currently, best practices for job advertisements that conform to non-discrimination policies, are not resulting in gender parity in appointments or salaries. This perpetuates the cycle of gender inequity, resulting in a failure to achieve the goals of DEI policies in practice. This emphasizes the necessity of employers, specifically human resource managers, to be aware of and discontinue use of covert messaging through gendered wording in job postings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A 2011 study (Gaucher, D., et al. 2011) proposed that gendered wording is an unacknowledged, institutional-level way to maintain inequality via job recruitment materials that are subtle but systemic. Words associated with male stereotypes – such as leader, competitive and dominant – are less appealing to women. Women are more apt to apply for positions when recruitment uses words such as support, understand, interpersonal. The study results showed that it was the perception of belonging, or not belonging, that overrode perceived applicable skills. The authors noted that in North America, in 2008, only 20% of full professors in the natural sciences were women. Their study was based on the question: Why do women continue to be underrepresented in this area? They found that most people tend to defend the status quo with the belief that what is happening currently is natural and desirable and the way things ought to be. Sexist beliefs are often unconscious, and stereotypes justify gender inequalities. The social dominance theory (SDT) asserts that the social structures already in place reinforce and perpetuate institutional-level and group-based inequality. These are so deeply embedded in the social structure that they are overlooked by society at large. Hence, word-choice in recruitment messaging can plant discouragement in women's minds and reduce their inclinations to apply.

Although the 1964 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act deems the practice of bias in job advertisements unconstitutional, the gender of the ideal candidate is still conveyed, but more subtly, for jobs that are typically given to males versus females. The study cited established literature that documents the differences in the way women and men use everyday language. In general, women are perceived to be more communal and interpersonal than men, and men are more readily attributed to have traits associated with leadership. Recommendation letters for university faculty jobs were analyzed (Gaucher and Friesen) and found that writers used words like “outstanding” and “unique” most often when describing male rather than female candidates. Women, described as more communal in the recommendation letters, were less likely to be hired, reflecting stereotypical gender roles. The study's prediction that subtle variations in the gendered wording used in job postings affects people's perception of jobs was found to be true. Specifically, the study found that masculine wording signals that there are more men in the field and alerts women that they may not “belong”; belongingness can greatly affect a person's tendency to approach certain fields even though the person views themselves as skilled for the job.

A Danish study (Askehave & Zethsen, 2014) gives us interesting information about gendered connotations of the word “leadership” in job postings. This study concentrated on top business executive positions, not specifically academic, and the findings revealed most traits described in the postings were associated with stereotypically masculine characteristics. The study also suggests that recruitment practices as well as the would-be applicants' self-perceptions are to blame for them not applying. We ask the question: could the slow progress of women at the top echelons of business and academics be due in part to the language used in job descriptions? Job descriptions tell potential applicants, as well as the community in which the position is offered, which traits are expected of a successful applicant. “The linguistic constructions ... may influence not only people's views on what a real leader is like; it may also have significant, social consequences in that people who cannot identify with the description may choose not to respond to the advertisement and are thus prevented from pursuing a top position.” For example, if women are thought to be more irrational, emotional, and subjective in

decision-making than men, women will come to believe it themselves and it will affect the way they speak and act. Women may be discouraged from applying to top positions when they see themselves as less assertive, confident, controlling, and individualistic than men. It has been proposed that gendered wording in job recruitment postings maintain inequality in male-dominated occupations. Most interesting was the Danish paper's mention that often leadership job descriptions use words such as result-oriented, persistent, decisive, mature, dynamic, robust, strong drive, and goal-oriented – attributes ascribed to descriptions of a typical man, but not a typical woman. Language that appeals to women in job postings includes empathetic, responsible for strategy, and able to reach joint objectives; these are words that connote supportive positions as much as they do for leadership positions.

Women have made gains through decades in the workplace and educational attainments, and according to (Castro, 1997) during the past twenty years, unions have increasingly opened their top ranks to full participation by women and people of color, making pay equity a higher priority. Although we have made progress, we continue to see key issues that have not been resolved with women entering the workforce. Our team is attempting to discover if there is a correlation and/or a preference for women applicants when the salary is excluded, or is included, in job descriptions. In the past, the widespread practice of paying men more than women for the same work was widely accepted because men had families to support. Today, this practice is illegal, but men still earn more than women, even for the same job. The disparity has seriously disadvantaged women and their families (Castro, 1997). Our research seeks to examine if women's leadership appointments increase when the salary is included as part of the job posting. A "woman's job" is paid lower than a "man's job" in the same company for roles that require the same amount of skill, effort, and responsibility (Castro, 1997). The probability of a woman in the workforce learning if they are paid equally to men in the same position, are low due to policies forbidding salary discussion. Requiring all job descriptions to include salaries will help advance women and decrease wage gender discrimination. Since 1963, the Equal Pay Act requires equal pay for the same work, but the facts show this is still not the case (Castro, 1997). The barriers to gender equality in wages must be broken so that future generations of women can advance and thrive.

According to *A factorial survey experiment with real-world vacancies and recruiters in four European countries*, published in July 2020, female applicants have lower recruitment chances compared with their male counterparts, but this phenomenon is not equally pronounced in all contexts. As results have shown, the degree of discrimination against female candidates not only varies between countries, but also between occupations within countries. This finding made the researchers furthermore explore the idea that job descriptions made by the employers need to take discrimination into consideration with recruitment and occupations all over the world. These researchers considered how to measure and conduct their study to find what they needed. In the case study, the Employer Survey job advertisements sampled were in Bulgaria (BG), Greece (GR), Norway (NO), and Switzerland (CH). That led to our group decision to choose real schools in California job descriptions for sampling. The overall findings after we conduct all the data will allow us to suggest the importance of revising job descriptions with the addition of salary ranges. We will be able to implement the discovery in the case study (Bertogg, A. et al. 2020): “policies promoting gender equality, such as antidiscrimination policies, may prevent discriminatory behavior. Implementing antidiscrimination policies (e.g., through ombudspersons)

reduces opportunities for discriminatory behavior in hiring and facilitates the documentation and processing of such behavior.” (Teigen 1999; Peterson & Saporta 2004).

Continuing with our research on past and current studies related to the topic of gender discrimination in job postings, two additional studies, *When Job Ads Turn You Down: How Requirements in Job Ads May Stop Instead of Attract Highly Qualified Women* (Derous & Wille, 2018), and *Affirmative action policies in job advertisements for leadership positions: How they affect women’s and men’s inclination to apply* (Nater & Sczesny, 2017), also offer international insights, further emphasizing the need for research within United States’ higher education systems. Both studies examined job advertisements in academia and surveyed master’s degree students. The first was a two-party study analyzing the differences between when job postings were written, in terms of behaviors or personality traits, and how the wording influenced women’s interest in the role and their decision to apply; specifically, when there were negative connotations to the traits in the ads. This study provided insight into the direction we could take for our own research.

The second study “provides evidence that only some preferential treatment policies may be successful in increasing women’s interest in leadership positions...and inclination to apply” (Nater & Sczesny, 2017). Utilizing a four-control group methodology for quantitative research, the study found that, “women’s attraction to a fictitious organization was highest when the companies’ efforts for equal opportunities were emphasized and when women were actively encouraged to apply.” This study was not confined to one gender, however, the results found that women were not inclined to apply more when preferential treatment policies and quotas were explicitly stated.

Overall, we found little research on the topic of salary transparency, which was not surprising given the pervasive business practice in the U.S. to not disclose salary ranges in job advertisements combined with the reality that there is no federal law or regulation requiring private enterprises, including colleges and universities, to do so. Our proposal is to begin that research and contribute to the conversation of reducing gender discrimination in the workplace, considering the gender pay and leadership gaps are currently measured after the hiring process is completed and we are purporting to examine the potential for discrimination before the hiring process begins. Thus, opening the door to further research in this area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We chose a qualitative methodology because we are interested in researching if there are correlations between job postings salaries, specific policies listed and whether this is related to women being appointed to leadership positions in academia. The results may show if salary transparency, policies and wording are the cause of gender discrimination. The research will be conducted by cross referencing findings with other data metrics; although we will have limitations, this will be the starting point. The research will focus on job posting descriptions at private colleges and universities in California; as taxpayer-funded institutions, public institutions are required by law to disclose salary ranges in all job postings, so we are not proposing to include them. The team will examine the active online job postings of the eighty-plus private

colleges and universities in California during a one-month period, preferably in July which is the beginning of the academic and fiscal year for most schools.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The research of job postings will include gathering information on salary ranges, statements, DEI policies, affirmative action statements, preferential hiring statements, geographical areas, whether they are religious/faith-based institutions, and the ages of the institutions (year they were founded). Following the examination, we will then calculate the male to female ratio of leadership at the institutions and focusing on the president, C-suite executives, and deans. The results will show if there is correlation between the job descriptions with unlisted salaries, and/or gender discrimination based on the subtle discriminatory language used to attract desired traits in applicants. The team will analyze information through online access augmented by email or telephone conversations if necessary; we will not need to travel for this study. After the data is collected, we will determine if there are correlations between job postings and whether women were chosen to fill the open roles by the end of the year.

Limitations will be applied to our proposed data collection. The data will be limited to private colleges and universities in California and job postings that are published publicly online. If our findings show the correlations we suspect, we will attempt to influence other states to join in this research. Eventually, this research could lead to national discourse among private colleges and universities regarding assurance of gender equity in how job postings are worded and what they include.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have reviewed articles proving our suspicion that one reason women are in fewer top-level positions, in academia and in business, is due to subtle language in job postings that can make women feel as though they do not ‘belong’ in certain roles. Secondly, we hope to discover if transparency of salaries makes a difference in whether women apply for and receive top-level roles. If our research findings of job postings at California private colleges and universities show proof of our suspicions, we will send the results to HR managers of those institutions imploring them to be more mindful of gender discriminating language and the affect posting salary ranges may have on applications.

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