The aim of this study is to evaluate how the perceptions of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive language in job advertisements affects people’s decisions to apply for jobs. Language, specifically the use of pronouns, can be a form of social exclusion. Gender-exclusive language uses one gendered-pronoun (he or she), yet may also mean to refer to someone of the opposite gender or to describe both genders (e.g., fireman vs. firefighter). By conducting a replication study by Stout and Dasgupta (2011), we wish to study the effects of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive language in job advertisements on both men and women. Ostracism is the act of being both ignored and excluded, including directly differentiating with the individual, indicating the individuals’ failings, and actively denying being associated with the individual. Discrimination can be understood as a larger sociological component that includes ostracism (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000) and emphasizes negative differences in various out-groups. Language can be seen as a mirror of social structures (Matheson & Kristiansen, 1987), providing words that represent ostracism, rejection, and discrimination. The current literature on ostracism, rejection, and discrimination focuses heavily on the negative effects of individual people experiencing these aversive conditions, such as ostracism by means of social media or high school interactions.

However, ostracism, rejection, and discrimination aren’t always directed at individuals, but can also be directed toward groups of people. For instance, women have been ostracized, rejected, and discriminated against. Many discriminatory stereotypes are associated with being a woman: [only good at being] mothers, less reliable, less promotable, and severe wage inequality (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009). Stout and Dasgupta (2011) argue that even when individuals aren’t directly ostracized, if their fellow ingroup members are the receptor of these actions, their senses of belonging, motivations, and behaviors are threatened. Research further shows the impact of gender-exclusive language; for example, women have shown lack of fit when applying for an open position and job interview when gender-exclusive language had been used (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). We believe that the differences in pronouns used in our job ads will affect feelings of social exclusion from the particular company.

The goal of this study is to identify the effects of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive language on males’ and females’ feelings of ostracism, motivation, identification, and emotions. By subtly changing the pronoun usage in a fake job description (advertisement), we hope to evoke real emotions in our participants. Our hypothesis is that women will perceive gender-inclusive language as more inclusive, less sexist, and more motivational than gender-exclusive language. Similarly, male participants would show higher levels of exclusion when reading gender-exclusive language. Participants will consist of undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three job advertisement conditions: male pronouns, female pronouns, or gender-neutral pronouns. After reading the job advertisement, participants were asked to respond to the surveys via Qualtrics, an online internet-survey system. We measured the participants’ perceptions of how strongly they would feel ostracized, motivated, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and overall emotions if they worked for the company in the job ad. We also measured self-identification and gender identity.
References


