

Gender Bias in the Workplace: Women More Than Twice as Likely to Be Asked to Make Tea or About Their Kids, Than Men

4 years ago



A poll has found gender biased language and use of stereotypes is widespread within UK workplaces, with women asked to make tea or coffee almost three times (42%) more than men (16%).

Women are also more than twice as likely than men (50% vs 21%) to be asked about the wellbeing of their children, and twice as likely to be asked to do menial or admin-based tasks (37% vs 19%). The survey also found women are made the target of sexist jokes almost three times more than men (43% vs 15%) showcasing the deeply ingrained gender bias which permeates UK workplace culture.

The latest research from Samsung UK and Ireland also found UK employees are using biased language on average four times a week (80%), with almost half (46%) revealing that gender biased language is showing up at work. It's not just in informal conversations, but is also being used in formal settings, with 40% experiencing gender biased language in meetings whilst nearly one in three (30%) have experienced it during an interview, which is particularly concerning from a workplace discrimination perspective.

Nearly a third of workers (31%) admit that it makes them feel uncomfortable when hearing colleagues, customers or clients using gender biased language. For example, respondents cited: "persistently being called lady", "sweetheart or darling all the time", referred to as a woman "'of my age' because I required a fan in a meeting room" or "being called girl". Comments like these are contributing to employees feeling dismissed and undervalued with 28% of workers reportedly put off from contributing in some meetings all together. While it's not just women, men equally feel put out when gender biased language is used, with 28% agreeing it holds them back from reaching their full potential.

Tanya Weller, Marketing Director, Home Appliances at Samsung Electronics (UK & Ireland) Ltd. & Founder of Employee Resource Group, Women@Samsung, said: “The findings have revealed some shocking revelations about the stereotypes used towards women at work and how our choice of words is creating barriers to inclusivity in the workplace. Like all things, language adapts with time, and we know that as a society, we must evolve with it, by implementing a roadmap that drives greater equality and inclusion. These findings tell us the crucial role language plays in normalising gender stereotypes at work: subtle phrases like “Hi Guys”, is something many of us say without thinking, but maybe without realising it, we’re alienating people. This acts a great reminder to be thoughtful in the way we express ourselves as individuals and as businesses. For instance, we work closely with Textio to ensure that we set things off as we mean to go on and apply gender inclusive language in all of our job adverts at Samsung UK & Ireland.”

Samsung has also recently become a signatory of the Tech Talent Charter (TTC)^[1], a government-supported and industry-led membership group which is deeply committed to addressing inequality and driving inclusivity in the UK technology sector. Tanya Weller continues: “It’s important steps like these where we need to come together as an industry and lead by example on a journey of progress and inclusivity.”

The TTC’s goal is for the UK technology ecosystem to be a diverse and inclusive community where people from all backgrounds are welcomed and valued for their contributions. The TTC works towards this goal by providing concrete measurement and insights and actionable ways forward by gathering, curating, and distributing innovative practices, techniques, and ideas.

While there is always more work to do, the research suggests that UK employees are starting to challenge this vocabulary with 64% of us admitting to calling out gender biased language – of those, 28% called it out to the person directly, 22% reported it to their boss and 14% reported it to HR. Furthermore, 9 in 10 (92%) are making a conscious effort to use inclusive language at work with terms such as ‘team’ and ‘all’.

Yet despite this, nearly a fifth (19%) admitted they have wanted to correct someone at work for using this language but chose not to because they didn’t have the confidence to do so.

As partners of Samsung, Jackye Clayton, Vice President of Talent Acquisition and Diversity Equity Inclusion & Belonging at Textio, which brings the world’s most advanced language insights into hiring and employer brand content with its technology, commented: “Employers throughout the UK must take proactive steps to foster inclusive language – to attract talent and build a workplace which promotes workplace inclusivity. With almost half of UK employees using gender bias language at work, companies must do more to understand how and where unconscious bias is showing up and take action to remove it. It’s only by doing this that companies can become truly inclusive to everyone.”

Introducing positive change

Just one in five UK employees are aware of what their company is doing to challenge gender biased language. To introduce positive change toward gender-specific language, respondents said that workplaces should:

1. Offer training on how to be sensitive to and inclusive of all genders (47%)
2. Implement training to address what gendered language is and how to change language use (30%)
3. Review language in job descriptions (28%)

- 4. Review external messaging language e.g. company website, careers page etc. (27%)
- 5. Use positive messaging/signage in the office (24%)

(Above: Ways in which employers should introduce positive change toward gender-specific language, in order)

Louise Mullany, Professor of Sociolinguistics and an expert on the language of diversity and inclusion, has worked as a linguistics consultant on the Samsung survey and campaign. Professor Mullany has provided some alternative words and phrases offering advice on how people can switch using gender neutral language at work (see table below).

Gendered words to use and avoid in the workplace:

Words to Use
People
Everyone
Everybody
Folks
They
All
Team
You
Words to Avoid
Guys
Girls
Lads
Ladies

He/she
Sweetheart
Darling
Love

Samsung Pioneers - a platform for change

Samsung Pioneers is Samsung UK's platform created to champion gender equality in the technology industry and advocate change, open to both men and women in the company to create a culture of advocacy and allyship. Commitments to gender equality at Samsung UK & Ireland include:

1. Providing information and advice on common language 'dos and don'ts' in the workplace
2. Mandatory inclusive hiring training to educate hiring managers on what language to use in the recruitment process and to equip them with the tools and tips to mitigate bias
3. A 50% female intake as part of its Emerging Talent programme, consisting of placement students and University graduates
4. Ongoing resources provided to women staff members through its partnership with everywoman - a platform which connects women, businesses and organisations globally, to achieve more engaged, diverse, energised workforces
5. Integrating Textio into our hiring funnel - a system which brings the world's most advanced language insights into our hiring and employer brand content. This provides our People team with up-to-date inclusive and aligned language at their fingertips, in all the places we communicate with talent
6. The roll out of conscious inclusion eLearning to all employees, including new joiners as part of their onboarding training
7. The Women@Samsung Employee Resource Group - which has been established to attract, retain and develop women in Samsung UK & Ireland, building an inclusive, supportive and engaged community
8. Employees are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave, six months of which is on full pay to offer financial security to working parents. Employees are also eligible for a bonus during this time
 1. 97% of our colleagues returned to work with us after maternity leave
 2. From 2018 to 2019, 75% of our colleagues were able to utilise the full 52 weeks' entitlement due to the enhanced financial benefit. For paternity leave, this is now one month

^[1] The Tech Talent Charter (TTC): <https://www.techtalentcharter.co.uk/home>