Gender-Targeted Job Ads in the Recruitment Process: Evidence from China

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Kailing Shen
Shuo Zhang
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The practice of explicitly requesting workers of a particular gender in job ads:

- Was commonplace in the U.S. before 1974:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help Wanted—Men</th>
<th>Help Wanted—Men</th>
<th>Help Wanted—Men</th>
<th>Help Wanted—Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personnel Recruiter</strong></td>
<td><strong>Screw Machine Set-Up Operate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wool Presser</strong></td>
<td><strong>Auto Salesmen</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For McGRAW-HILL</td>
<td>Electronics manufacturer expanding production machine operations to include 3d shift.</td>
<td>Experienced in sales and vacuum cleaner</td>
<td>Experienced immediately. Exempt or not will train.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salesmen</strong></td>
<td>Men needed experienced in set up and operation of Brown-Sharpe screw machines. Modern plant. Many company benefits. App.</td>
<td>Maintained, makes own blocks. Experienced only. Union shop. West Woodworking Co. 310 N. Ash</td>
<td><strong>Wanted immediately. Exempt or not will train. $450 guarantee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAUNDRY-CLEANING RTE. MAN CLEAN // clothing needs money.</td>
<td>Excellent opportunity for experienced Personnel Recruiter to recruit and interview sales applicants for one of the world's largest publisher of business, technical and engineering magazines. Position is located in Chicago, but there will be travel to cities in 200-300 mi radius of Chicago. Graduate preferred.</td>
<td>Experienced in sales and vacuum cleaner</td>
<td><strong>Experienced or New Used. App. for auto parts. Will train. $450 Guarantee.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MACHINE SHOP</strong></td>
<td><strong>DAYS</strong></td>
<td><strong>ELECTRICIAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>WOODWORKER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAYS</td>
<td><strong>AUTOMATIC CHUCKER</strong></td>
<td><strong>W.B.S. 1 AC or 2 AC</strong></td>
<td><strong>Woodworker</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL AROUND OPERATOR</strong></td>
<td><strong>RADIAL DRILL</strong></td>
<td><strong>MILLWRIGHT HELPER</strong></td>
<td><strong>AUTOMATIC CHUCKER W. &amp; S. 1 AC or 2 AC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BECHLER OPERATOR</strong></td>
<td><strong>TURRET LATHE</strong></td>
<td><strong>TURRET LATHE</strong></td>
<td><strong>AUTOMATIC CHUCKER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SHIPPING CLERK</strong></td>
<td><strong>PIPE FITTERS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Position available to young man with packaging and shipping experience. Air cond. plant. Steady employment. Excellent company benefits.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Beverage Driver Trainees</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MACHINIST</strong></td>
<td><strong>Position available to young man with packaging and shipping experience. Air cond. plant. Steady employment. Excellent company benefits.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Beverage Driver Trainees</strong></td>
<td><strong>For route work, 21-25</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MACHINIST</strong></td>
<td><strong>Position available to young man with packaging and shipping experience. Air cond. plant. Steady employment. Excellent company benefits.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Beverage Driver Trainees</strong></td>
<td><strong>For route work, 21-25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...for reliable married man who

...must include picture...

men over 40 preferred
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPORTANT TO YOU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\text{...you will also attend press parties and act as hostess. It is a smartly furnished office. He will consider a young girl if she has some work exp.}}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOB FOR EVERYONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAR EMPLOYMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% FREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELEVISION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recptn.-Secy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\text{...you will... in beautiful offices of very young but successful doctors.}}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Classes now forming for personable young ladies who enjoy working with people...
• Was gradually prohibited in developed countries over the past 50 years:

USA 1974

Austria 2004

China (partially) 2016:
In 2015, China’s revised Advertisement Law designated fines from RMB 200,000 to 1,000,000 for any ads “carrying any nationality, racial, religious or sex-discriminating information” (Article 57).

In May 2016, China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology issued a regulation targeting online job platforms, banning the posting of gendered job ads. In case of violations:

- 30% of the fine is paid by the website
- 70% of the fine is paid by the firm placing the ad
Since then, explicitly gendered job ads:

-have largely disappeared from the major national job boards (51job, Chinahr and Zhaopin)

[though terms like “beautiful”, “lady”, “handsome”, “gentleman”, “camgirl” and “delivery little brother” are still common].
• Is still widely used in emerging-economy labor markets:

- At least 11 Spanish-speaking countries: Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador, Venezuela, Guatemala, El Salvador, Uruguay, Panama, Honduras. This does NOT include gendered occupation titles.

- In China, these ads are still be widely used in:
  - city-level job boards (XMRC, XMHRSS)
  - ads for temporary jobs (58.com)
  - campus recruitment (Yingjiesheng)

- They are supported by Indeed.com in Brazil, Portugal, Pakistan, Mexico and India:
Computer Operator
Manav Management Group - Faridabad, Haryana
₹1,00,000 - ₹1,50,000 a year

Apply On Company Site  Save this job

Job Description

Subject:- Best job Opening in Faridabad

We have urgent opening for the post of:- computer operator

Post of: - Computer operator

Experience: 1- 2 Year

Salary On base: - 8k to12k

Applied Candidate: - Male only

Company profile:- Manufacturing

Experience Candidate Salary will be depend on interview

Location:- Nehar Par Faridabad
Office Coordinator (Faridabad)
Manav Management Group - Faridabad, Haryana
₹1,25,000 - ₹2,25,000 a year

Job Description

We Have Urgent Requirement For The Post Of: Office Coordinator
Post Of: - Office Coordinator
Experience: - 3 To 5 Year
Salary: - 15K To 18K

Applied Candidate: - Female Only
Company Profile: - Chemical Industry
Location:-Faridabad Sec-46
Desired Qualification: - Any Graduate
Job Description
Handling Registries Of Customers.
Knowledge Of Business Management System In General
Knowledge Of Client Business Processes / Obtaining Through Internet
Knowledge M S Office (Ms Word, Ms Excel, Ms Power Point)
Internet & E-Mailing,Comfortable To Work On Ms Excel.
Enter Language Must & Fluent English
To understand:

- the continued effects of gendered ads where they are used
- the effects of prohibiting them

It’s useful to know:

1. how frequently, and where gendered ads are used

2. how they enter the recruitment process:
   - how “hard” are employer’s gender preferences?
   - do gendered ads direct workers’ job search?
Today, I’ll summarize two recent papers that address these questions, using 2010 job board data from China:


Kuhn, Shen and Zhang, “Gender-Targeted Job Ads in the Recruitment Process: Evidence from China”, October 2018
Paper number 1: “The Age Twist”

Using data from three Chinese and one Mexican job board, we demonstrate the following:
**Result 1.** Explicitly gendered job ads were **widely used** on these job boards, in a fairly ‘**symmetric**’ fashion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Board</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Share of Ads Requesting Men</th>
<th>Share of Ads Requesting Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhaopin.com</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMRC.com</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMZYJS.com (now XMHRSS)</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computrabajo.com</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Result 2—**the negative skill-targeting relationship**: Gendered job ads (for both men and women), and age-targeted job ads are much more common

- on job boards catering to less-skilled workers (see above)

- in job ads requesting less education, less experience, and offering lower wages:
Gender Targeting by Education Requirement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Requirement</th>
<th>Share of Ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XMZYJS</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMRC</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhaopin</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Share of Ads by Gender:
- Women (dark blue)
- Men (light blue)
These patterns persist:

- for other measures of skill (experience requirements, posted wage).
- controlling for occupation*firm fixed effects.

The most likely explanations are:

- idiosyncratic candidate quality matters more as skill requirements rise
- labor market tightness (V/U) rises systematically with skill
Result 3. In predicting whether employers request men versus women, **jobs** (especially job titles) **matter more than firms:**

It is commonplace for the same firm to explicitly request men for some jobs and women for others.

The jobs that tend to request men versus women are largely the same across firms.
Result 4-- The age twist:

As desired worker age rises between 18 and 45, employers’ advertised gender requests ‘flip’ from strongly favoring women to strongly favoring men:
Share of ads requesting women and men by desired age, XMZYJS data

XMZYJS Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35+</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Share of ads requesting women and men by desired age, XMRC data

XMRC Data

- **Under 25**: Women (.55), Men (.12)
- **25-29**: Women (.32), Men (.19)
- **30-34**: Women (.13), Men (.3)
- **35+**: Women (.07), Men (.35)
Share of ads requesting women and men by desired age, Zhaopin data
Share of ads requesting women and men by desired age, Computrabajo data

Computrabajo Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35+</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like the negative skill-targeting relationship, the age twist in employers’ gender requests also survives controls for occupation, firm, and occupation*firm fixed effects.
Result 5. Using job title information, 65 percent of the age twist can be ‘explained’ by age-related changes in the mix of tasks employers hire men and women for.

Of this explained portion, we can associate

-27% with employers’ preferences for young women in three ‘helping’ jobs: clerk, assistant and secretary

-17% with employers’ preferences for young women in four customer contact jobs: front desk, customer service, teller and cashier

-7% with employers’ preferences for young women in administrative occupations

-9% with employers’ preferences for older men in managerial jobs
Result 6. Employers’ frequent requests for young women are highly correlated with explicit requests for beauty:
Share of ads requesting beauty, by requested sex and age, Zhaopin data

Zhaopin Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Share of Ads</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-29</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- **16-29**: Dark blue
- **30-45**: Light blue
Share of ads requesting beauty, by requested sex and age, Computrabajo data
Share of ads requesting a photo, Computrabajo data

Computrabajo Data

Share of Ads

Men

Women

16-29

30-45
**Result 7.** The remainder (35%) of the age twist occurs within detailed job titles. It appears to be connected to *gendered employer preferences for parenthood and marital status:*
Share of ads requesting single and married applicants, by requested sex, 
Computrabajo data

Share of Ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Female Share of Gendered Job Ads versus Share of Women who are *Single*, China

*Dashed Lines* show the share of gendered job ads that request women in each job board. *Solid lines* show the share of urban Chinese women who are single at that age, or who will still be single two years later.
Female Share of Gendered Job Ads versus Share of Women who are Childless, China

Dashed lines show the share of gendered job ads that request women in each job board. Solid lines show the share of urban Chinese women who are childless at that age, or who will still be childless two years later.
8. China’s Age Twist does not coincide with women’s labor force withdrawal, or with a decline in work hours.

**Employment Rates:** China and Xiamen
Figure A6.3: Mean Weekly Hours of the Private-Sector Employed Population, China
Thus, we suspect a role for:

- cultural expectations of ‘appropriate’ work for men and women of different ages

- employers’ perceptions of men’s and women’s relative work effort and job commitment. For example:
  - men could be becoming more reliable as they age.
  - Chinese mothers’ high time commitment to their child’s education could also play a role.
Summing up the ‘Age Twist’:

Employers use explicit gender requests to invite young women and older men into specific jobs where—presumably—employers feel those groups are most valuable.

Chinese employers stop requesting female applicants around the age of first birth.
This ‘age twist’ in employers’ gender requests may help to account for an apparently universal labor market phenomenon:

- the gender wage gap widens with age.

Gender-targeting’s negative association with skill suggests that skill upgrading may ‘automatically’ reduce age- and gender-based job profiling.
Paper number 2: “Gender-Targeted Job Ads in the Recruitment Process”

Using application and callback information from a 2010 sample of XMRC job ads, this paper asks:

Are employers’ gender requests reflected in their actual hiring choices (gender matching)?

And if so...
How do the requests operate?

Do requests affect where workers send their applications (compliance)?

What happens when applicants don’t comply (enforcement)?

- automatic rejection (‘hard’ requirements, like changing rooms)?

- nothing (‘soft’ messages, like running shoes)?
We provide five main *descriptive* results:
Result 1: *Gender-matching* is high:

94.0 percent of callbacks to *F* jobs are female.

96.3 percent of callbacks to *M* jobs are male.

Overall,

94.8 percent of callbacks to gendered job ads are of the requested gender.
Result 2: *Compliance* is also high:

92.6 percent of *applications* to *F* jobs are female.

92.1 percent of *applications* to *M* jobs are male.

Overall,

92.4 percent of *applications* to gendered job ads are of the requested gender.
Result 3: *Enforcement* is substantial, but far from complete:

In jobs requesting women, a female applicant is 24.6 percent more likely to get a callback than a man.

In jobs requesting men, a female applicant is $100 - 44.5 = 55.5$ percent less likely to get a callback than a man.
Result 4: *Compliance* accounts for most of the gender-matching (between employers’ requests and their callback choices) on this job board:

**Contributions to gender-matching:**

- Compliance: 74 percent.
- Enforcement: 6 percent.
- Interaction: 20 percent.
Result 5. Gendered job ads account for:

-50-60 percent of gender segregation (among successful applicants) across jobs, firms and occupations

-60 percent of the gender wage gap, primarily via their association with application behavior.
...and two main *causal* results:

**Result 6.** Explicit gender labels *direct workers’ job search*:

Controlling for firm* job title fixed effects, explicit gender requests still have large, highly significant effects on the gender mix of applications received.

These effects are strongest when the words in the job title do not clearly suggest a ‘typical’ gender for that type of work.
**Result 7:** Explicit gender request are moderately ‘hard’:

Controlling for *worker* * job title fixed effects,

- applying to an *M* job (relative to an *N* job) reduces women’s callback chances by **44%**
- applying to an *F* job (relative to an *N* job) reduces men’s callback chances by **26%**
Implications of this paper:

Gendered job ads appear to influence where men and women end up working.

These partial equilibrium effects, however, are consistent with a variety of consequences of a gendered ad ban:
1. **Zero effect**-- Employers may find a ‘work-around’:

- use code words (“south” “nan” for “man”) (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 21).

- filter out or reject all the gender-mismatched applications (this does not replicate the search-directing role of gender labels, however).

- increased ad targeting, for example:  

  “[Men (only) at work: Job ads for construction workers and truck drivers on Facebook discriminated on gender, ACLU alleges](https://www.aclu.org/cases/men-only-work-job-ads-construction-workers-and-truck-drivers-facebook-discriminated-gender-aclu-asserts)”

(here, the non-targeted groups are not even aware of the ad’s existence)
2. An increase in labor market frictions

Holding employers’ gender preferences fixed, removing gender labels in job ads will raise labor market frictions:

- it’s now harder to find the jobs where you’re wanted
- and harder to avoid the jobs where you’re not wanted.
3. A reduction in gender segregation

If employers actually *look at* a broader set of candidates and ‘like what they see’, more women will get hired in ‘men’s’ jobs, and more men will get hired in ‘women’s jobs (Card, Colella and Lalive, 2018).

We are exploring the possibility of studying the effects of China’s recent gendered ad ban with a national job board.
Thanks for your attention!
### Ten Most Frequent Beauty Requests, Zhaopin data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Chinese text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>28.24</td>
<td>形象气质佳</td>
<td>good image and temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.93</td>
<td>五官端正</td>
<td>has regular facial features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.26</td>
<td>形象良好</td>
<td>good image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>形象好</td>
<td>good image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>品貌端正</td>
<td>well-shaped figure and decorous appearance; straight appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>形象气质</td>
<td>image and temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>形象好，气质佳</td>
<td>good image and temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>形象佳</td>
<td>good image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>相貌端正</td>
<td>good appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>形象气质良好</td>
<td>good image and temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...back