



Action Potential #4 Inclusive Language

How we use language can reinforce or counteract stereotypes about who is best suited to a field. Research shows that using masculine forms for mixed-gender groups (e.g. the German masculine “Wissenschaftler” to refer to all scientists) evokes a male bias in mental representations.¹ This mental bias influences, e.g. perceptions of women and non-binary individuals belonging in a field, their responsiveness to job ads, likelihood of their being suggested as candidates for positions, and evaluations. Thus, using gender-inclusive language can help reduce stereotyping and discrimination.¹

Further, we can support greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ colleagues, e.g. by using people’s correct pronouns² (he/she/they or neo-pronouns) and symbols acknowledging a non-binary spectrum of gender identities (e.g. women*, Wissenschaftler*innen, Wissenschaftler:innen, etc.). Moreover, the symbol *, while not completely barrier-free, is currently the most accepted gender-inclusive symbol among people who use screenreaders, including those with disabilities.³

Below are some tools supporting use of inclusive language in German and English.

Selected resources:

[Regelungen zur geschlechtergerechten Kommunikation an der Charité](#) (German)

[Geschlechtergerechte Sprache am Berlin Institute of Health](#) (German)

[United Nations Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English](#)

[GLAAD Glossary of Terms: Transgender](#)

Recommended reading:

1. Sczesny, S., Formanowicz, M., Moser, F. Can Gender-Fair Language Reduce Gender Stereotyping and Discrimination? *Front Psychol* 7(25): 1-11 (2016)
2. LGBTQ+ Scientists give their views on their workplaces. Interviews by K. Powell, R. Terry and S. Chen. *Nature* 586: 813-816 (2020)
3. Koehler, S. und M. Wahl. Empfehlung zu gendergerechter, digital barrierefreier Sprache. Eine repräsentative Studie der Überwachungsstelle des Bundes für Barrierefreiheit von Informationstechnik (2021)

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