Gender practices in the construction of excellence criteria for early career researchers

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Introduction

• Work Package 7 on the gendered construction of academic excellence.
  – Early career researchers
  – Temporary positions
Gender practices in the construction of excellence

- Gender practices
  - “the intentional or unintentional and often unreflexive way of distinguishing between women and men, femininity and masculinity” in daily (work) situations (Van den Brink, 2010, p. 24).

- Natural sciences (STEM) and social sciences (SSH)
- Belgium, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland
- Research reports based on interviews, focus groups, documents
Gender practices in the construction of excellence

1. Persistent gender stereotypes in the construction of the ideal academic
2. The gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility
3. Postdoc recruitment and selection via informal networks
4. Preferring internal candidates for assistant professor positions

Herschberg, Benschop, & Van den Brink, 2016
Gender practices in the construction of excellence

These practices impact perceptions of women as suitable candidates.

How to make a change?
Interventions

• 1. Reflexive working groups for selection committee members
• 2. Workshops for early career researchers

Step 1 for both interventions is a thorough analysis of:
  – Formal selection criteria
  – Applied selection criteria
  – Recruitment and selection processes

In order to acquire:
  – A **contextualized** understanding how excellence is constructed in recruitment and selection processes, how micropolitics affect the evaluation of job candidates, and how gender practices play a role.
Intervention 1

• Selection committee members: reflexive working groups
  – type of interactive training that invites the participants to **reflect** on their own actions and behaviour as well as to share experiences.

• Aim: raise awareness among key players on how gender practices influence the selection process and the selection criteria, including conceptions of excellence.

• N.B. The aim is not to fix ‘the problem’ in one training for once and for all.
Intervention 1 – lessons learned

• Resistances
  – Saying versus doing
    • Getting participants to join
    • Involve dean / management
  – Legitimacy of gender knowledge
    • Difficult to be perceived as credible
    • Authority of facilitators
  – “Not a problem in our institute”
    • Know the context
    • Create a safe environment
Intervention 1 – lessons learned

• Dilemmas
  – (Some) participants expect practical tips and easy fixes
    • Expectation management
    • Long term commitment needed
  – Finding a balance between time and effect
    • Steer away from unproductive discussions, e.g., about statistics

• Toolkit with more information and tips and tricks.
Intervention 2

• Early career researchers: workshops
• Aims:
  1) to give candidates information about recruitment and selection criteria applied in the selection processes and the construction of academic excellence,
  2) to raise awareness how gender practices can play a role in these recruitment and selection criteria and processes
Intervention 2 – lessons learned

• Dilemmas
  – Finding a balance between being honest about future career opportunities and gender practices but not scaring potential candidates away.
  – Playing the game of the current academic system or fostering a critical stance?
  • Create a safe environment for discussion
Intervention 2 – lessons learned

- Elements for success
  - Commitment from people in power
  - Know the field(s) that the participants operate in

- Toolkit with more information and tips and tricks.
Conclusion

• ‘Thorny’ gender practices in recruitment and selection of early career researchers.
• Interventions in which to address and possibly change these practices.
• First step but many dilemmas pop up.
• Continue investment in studies that look at systemic change instead of quick fixes.
Want to know more?

- Herschberg, Benschop, and Van den Brink, 2016, GARCIA working papers nr. 2 and nr. 10 (research)
- Toolkits on reflexive working groups and workshops soon to be online (interventions)
- Poster presentation during coffee breaks
Gender practices in the construction of excellence

• Contradictions

• Looking for ideal academic. (1)
• International mobility required (signal of excellence). (2)
• In reality committee members prefer to hire candidates whom they already know. (3+4)
• Excellence can be compromised for the purpose of hiring a candidate whom committee members trust and therefore consider low risk.
• Favouring men over women early career researchers.