

FACT SHEET ON STEREOTYPICAL ASSESSMENT IN PERSONNEL SELECTION

In the personnel selection process, applicants must meet the expectations defined in the requirement profiles/employment ads. A study by van den Brink et al. (2010) shows that members of appointments committees question the professional qualification of female applicants¹ more often than of male applicants. The study further shows that committee members trust information gathered in their own networks more than formal résumés and references. This results in female scientists having to prove their expertise and qualifications more clearly than their male competitors. Strict structures of appointment procedures and a professionalisation of selection processes can counteract these disadvantages, as well as the disadvantages of other marginalised groups.

Stereotypes are considered the main cause why qualified women and people who are perceived as women are not hired into senior positions in academia at the same rate as their male counterparts.

Choosing or not choosing an applicant is often influenced by the unconscious bias or an unconsciously stereotypical judgment. Both refer to the intuitive connotation of characteristics and behaviour patterns due to gender (gender bias) and the affiliation to social groups, respectively (cf. Peuss et al. 2015, p. 35). Thinking in stereotypical patterns influences our expectations about how people are, should and shouldn't be (Welpé et al. (n.d.), p. 8, cf. also Eckes 2003).²

Simply knowing about these expectations and the accompanying dangers of stereotypical judgments does not protect from such patterns. Aspects, such as working under time pressure facilitate these judgments. As Eckes states, there is a difference between knowing about stereotypes, and using this knowledge in a specific context (Eckes 2008, p. 178). Therefore, a constant (self-) evaluation is necessary in these cases, as is a structured selection process.

To be able to recognize and reflect upon one's prejudices, Harvard University created an Implicit Association Test in various languages: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. In the context of gender bias, the European Research Council (ERC)³ refers to a [video of the Catalan Institute CERCA](#)⁴.

Witzig/ Seyfarth (2020) further explain that implicit biases are not merely individual patterns, but instead social practices performed by multiple people, which also unfold their efficacy in appointment procedures. They have developed a web-based training which simulates the social practices of implicit biases in appointment procedures in short scenes and enables learning in real-life contexts.

Unconscious prejudices can occur with regard to various demographic, social or physiological characteristics, in particular age, gender and ethnic background (see Kersting/ Ott 2015, p. 680 ff.). Although the examples above and below refer to a binary gender system, it is important to note that trans*, intersex, and non-binary people are at a higher risk of being subjected to discriminatory practices at universities and in their scientific careers. Changing their first name, for example, can lead to reputational loss regarding their scientific achievements and to a higher risk of being subjected to biases (see AG trans*emanzipatorische Hochschulpolitik, dgti e. V. 2017).

EXAMPLES OF IMPLICIT PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES

Specifically in the context of appointment procedures Witzig/ Seyfarth (2020, p. 398 ff.) point to thematic clusters for situational patterns of implicit prejudices in commission meetings. These are, in connection with the gender category,

¹ The studies cited here predominantly refer to the biological sex (female and male). They show that stereotypes are a central cause for the increased discrimination of qualified women and people who are read as women, and that they must overcome more challenges in their careers than their male colleagues.

² See also the [video of the Office of Diversity and Outreach der University of California San Francisco](#), accessed September 5th, 2018.

³ See the [website of the European Research Council focusing on Working Group on Gender and Diversity Issues](#), accessed September 5th, 2018.

⁴ The Catalan Research Centres Institute (CERCA) is the Government of Catalonia's technical service, which is supervising, supporting and facilitating the activities of the research centres in the CERCA system. The CERCA centres diversity commission has drawn up a pioneering [protocol](#), to inform faculty, both men and women involved in evaluation panels, accessed September 5th, 2018.

the topics of interdisciplinarity, publication indexes, seniority, family situations, co-authorship, networks, and performance at lectures. In the following part, areas in which prejudices against female scientists often occur are outlined as examples.

Knoblich-Westerwick/ Glynn/ Hüge (2013) show in their study on female scientists in the qualification phase that **publications** with random name allocations are generally considered more important should they be attributed to men. This phenomenon is the most apparent in subject areas in which male researchers are predominant and in which excellent contributions by men already exist. This means that male researchers have better chances of building careers in these fields than female researchers. These disadvantages can increase for female scientists when they cannot continuously publish or research due to caretaking responsibilities. Authors of the LERU study (2018) emphasize that, in judging publications, the quality of these publications is important, which is not only indicated in their quantity. Witzig und Seifahrt (2020) state that an emphasis on objective criteria, such as the number of publications, compared to a low assessment of excellent teaching or dedication to the academic self-management, puts scientists with unconventional careers or family commitments at a disadvantage. Additionally, it was observed in a Swiss institution of higher education, that female scientists with co-authorship were often described as lacking independence and male scientists with a co-authorship were perceived to be team players.

In the qualification phase, specifically in the postdoc-phase, the **advancement through mentors** is considered to be important, e.g. by means of integration into the scientific community, inclusion into the application process for greater research endeavors, and recommendation letters for applications. A study by Schmader/ Whitehead/ Wysocki (2007, p. 6) showed that **recommendation letters** for men contained more noticeable adjectives compared to recommendations for female applicants although there are no gender-specific differences in the qualifications themselves: Men are described as excellent and highly qualified (outstanding, rising star, best qualified etc.). A study by Madera et al. (2018) demonstrates that terms and phrasings used for women give rise to doubts regarding their qualification and performance (more communal and less proactive than men). Their study also indicates that these phrasings, which invite doubts about scientific excellence, affect male as well as female scientists in equal measures. Nevertheless, the negative phrasings are more often found in recommendation letters for female scientists putting them at a disadvantage in their scientific careers. This can lead to increased doubts in the **scientific quality and the potential** of female applicants (cf. also LERU 2018, p. 13).

According to Knoblich-Westerwick/ Glynn/ Hüge (ibid) further biases also occur in **peer-evaluations**, which are a crucial part of all scientific fields and thus have a great influence on scientific careers. In Germany, this especially pertains to middle-aged female scientists in the postdoc-phase (cf. Elsevier 2015).

Networks and visibility in the scientific community are vital for academic careers. Each field has its own culture. In staffing processes the term adaptability is often used. Adaptability exists when, in addition to the professional competence and compatibility, a person would fit into the department or institute. Adaptability is often deeply connected to a specific field-culture, which is shaped by the scientific community and can be affected by gender biases (cf. Zimmermann 2006, Riegraf/ Gühlich 2016, Schmidt/ Kortendiek 2016).

STRUCTURED GENDERSENSITIVE SELECTION PROCESSES IN STAFFING AND APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES

Part of the main elements of a professionalised staffing process is the creation of a requirement profile, a deliberate and active addressing of applicants, the assessment of written documents on the basis of established criteria, fair judgment of work samples, structured interviews, a standardised decision process and a proper onboarding of the selected persons. The following are examples for pivotal aspects.

Employment ad	The thorough layout of the employment ad, to invite all genders to apply, is crucial. Results of a study (Braun et al. 2014) suggest that the way career opportunities are presented in ads influence the application intentions of women. The usage of masculine terminology in profile and employment ads, as in the following sentence, can reduce the probability of women, as well as trans and non-binary people to apply: “This employment ad is directed at an internationally distinguished researcher who will extend the activities of Leuphana University Lüneburg in the advertised research area.” Another example for use of male-connoted wording is the following phrasing of employment requirements: “(…) analytical intellect and a resolute demeanor, extraordinary commitment, being distinctly goal-oriented with a strong sense of responsibility” . A more female-connoted phrasing is given when employment requirements are described as follows: “(…) dedicated to teaching, ability to work in a team and in cooperation with other departments, and the willingness to accept responsibility” .
Selection panel	The selection panel should be gender neutral and diverse. It can be assumed that a diversity of perspectives in the panel counteracts stereotypes, as the latter can be recognised at an early stage and their effectiveness prevented. The selection criteria should be defined before the application deadline and before assessment of the applications begins (see Handout on Appointment Proceedings at Leuphana University Lüneburg 2016 and Handout Gender-Neutral Appointment Proceedings 2017).
Contacting the applicants	Active recruiting by way of directly contacting potential applicants, specifically female scientists (see Leuphana University Lüneburg guidelines „Active Recruitment of Female Scientists“).
Interview	Decisions on leading questions for structured interviews should be based on the requirements profile. The selection panel should use a gender-sensitive and diversity-sensitive language and be sensitive to their personal responsibilities and implicit assumptions. A subjectively perceived responsibility increases the accuracy of the judgment.
Decision	Part of the decision-making process is the gathering of all relevant information as well as the separate, subsequent thorough discussion, or rather assessment, of decision processes. At the end, there is a final decision on filling the position. Mistakes can occur when evaluators have already implicitly chosen an applicant and merely want confirmation . It should be avoided for the committee to view missing qualifications in men’s applications as potential for development, while higher standards are expected from women and people who are perceived as women . It is often noted that male applicants “do not have publications in A-journals, yet” , while in the cases of female applicants it is often phrased that they “do not have publications in A-journals” . These procedures can be countered with sensitisations, trainings, and standardised decision processes.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Handout on Appointment Proceedings at Leuphana University Lüneburg, as of April 2016

Handout Gender-Neutral Appointment Proceedings and Active Recruiting as Tools to Increase the Number of Female Professors, as of November 2017

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