

Gender, excellence and responsible science

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Dreaming a different science

- In 1963 Martin Luther King made the famous speech: “I’ve a dream”
- He said : “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”
- I also have a dream: that one day I wake up and find that men and women are truly equal, that they will not be judged by their sex but by their merit , that they are equally respected and listened to, that excellence in science is no more distorted and sweltered by gender stereotypes or creeping discrimination.

The “official” explanation

- ▶ “Just wait! The presence of women is increasing at the bottom of the career pyramid and this is a clear indicator that the situation will naturally find a balance”.
- ▶ The explanation implies that the scarcity of women at the top of scientific careers will disappear in few years.
- ▶ **Nobody says how long we have to wait.**

How much longer must women wait for gender parity among grade A academic professors ?

- If the current female growth rate will be maintained 50% of female full professors will be reached in the year:
- 2262 in Italy
- 2106 in France
- 2160 in UK
- 2082 in Germany and Belgium.

How much longer must women wait for true equality?

- ▶ The Nobel prize physics Niels Bohr, said “Predictions are very difficult, especially about the future”
- ▶ Waiting for parity is wasting time
- ▶ It will not arrive naturally because there are huge lobby/power interests involved
- ▶ Change is not the result of just a decision, but the outcome of a lasting process and it is necessary to intervene with concrete and targeted actions

European Commission: a pioneer in gender equality in science

- The European Commission started discussing the issue of women in science over 20 years ago.
- Considerable efforts have been made to promote a more systematic participation of women in every sector and aspect of scientific activities and research management.
- No doubt that over the years the European Commission has been a pioneer in implementing gender mainstreaming in science.
- Despite progress achieved, gender inequalities in science still persist.

EC relevant steps in the field of women in science

Year	Activity
2000	ETAN-European Technology Assessment Network Report is published
2002	Report on <i>National Policies on Women and Science in Europe</i> by Helsinki Group is published
2003	WIR-Women in Industrial Research Report on <i>Women in Industrial research is published</i>
2003	The first issue of the report SHE FIGURES is published
2004	European Commission report on <i>Gender and excellence in the making is published</i>
2008	Report on <i>Benchmarking Policy Measure for Gender Equality in Science is published</i>
2012	Report on <i>Structural Change: Enhancing Excellence, gender equality and efficiency in research and innovation is issued</i>
2013	European Commission Report on <i>Gendered innovations: how gender analysis contributes to research is issued</i>
2014	Report Gender Equality Policies in Public Research is issued

Gender in FP6 and FP7

FP6

- 33 projects funded; 20 million Euros invested
- The primary target audience were women scientists themselves
- The common feature resulting from all the studies was the need of positive action programmes and equal opportunities policies

FP7

- 25 projects funded; almost 40 million Euros invested
- structural change in research organisations was the main target
- The evaluation of FP7 is not yet finalised
- Following the recommendations posed by influential bodies, in Horizon 2020 gender equality is a cross-cutting issue

The future strategy

- Gender has prominent focus in Horizon 2020 but all the ambitions expressed on gender equality should be mainstreamed into policy actions and activities
- The major lesson learnt from almost 20 years of commitment of EU towards gender equality in science is that progress is **extremely slow**.
- The political will for gender equality is much greater than the willingness of the bureaucracy to implement it. So the will to change finds difficulties to shape top-level strategies into actions at lower levels.

Excellence and gender equality

- Scientific excellence is not as easily recognized in women scientists as in men
- In recent years there have been major policy developments and policy debates on both the search for excellence in science, and the need for more effective gender mainstreaming and gender equality measures.
- However, these two sets of initiatives have usually been promoted rather separately from each other.

Three core questions

- Can we be equal and excellent too?
- Can we be mothers and excellent too?
- Is it possible excellence without gender bias?

Can we be equal and excellent too?

- This crucial question was posed in 1961 by John W. Gardner in his book "Excellence". After so many years, the question is always there, unanswered and unresolved.
- Excellence has no sex and it is certainly gender neutral but the current understanding of excellence and the processes whereby excellence is achieved, may well be affected by gender-bias.

- Many studies have demonstrated the existence of factors that play against women on the road to recognized excellence as:
 - choice of explicit and implicit indicators used for the definition of scientific excellence,
 - criteria used to assess scientific production,
 - how these criteria are applied to male and female scientists,
 - procedures through which criteria are implemented, and failure to integrate women in scientific networks.

Funding excellence

- A recent report on *Funding excellence* was published by the European University Association (EUA).
- In the report gender is mentioned only once by saying that “Excellence schemes have a positive impact on recruitment practices of participating universities that need to address this dimension more proactively and build up capacity in terms of human resource management. *A related aspect is the promotion of gender equality in cases where this features among the selection criteria*”

Can we be mothers and excellent too?

- Scientists with families, particularly women with young children, find it difficult to achieve a balance between work and family in scientific highly competitive, often male-dominated, fields.
- In September last year a report of the UK Royal society announced that success rates for women had collapsed to less than 5% in 2014, down from 17% the previous year and 37% in 2010.

The motherhood penalty

- The motherhood penalty is a term coined by sociologists who argued that in the workplace, working mothers encounter systematic disadvantages relative to childless women
- It's an overt discrimination that may be eliminated by training evaluators when assigning fellowships, funds or awards to become gender sensitive and immediately able to identify potential gender bias in their decisions

Women's career and lifestyle preferences

- Few mothers apply for prestigious schemes
- In the well-known research study carried out in the field of math-intensive fields by Stephen Williams and Wendy Ceci they found that women rarely suffer from open discrimination but instead mothers have greater desire and need for lifestyle flexibility
- For mothers professional and private life continue to be two separated spheres within our research institutions and universities.

Is it possible excellence without gender bias?

- The European University Association recently published a new report examining 'excellence schemes' and their impact on universities in Europe (Women, research and universities: excellence without gender bias)
- The answer to this question is that it is possible but not yet done.
- It is crucial that funders' selection boards become gender-sensitive in their composition and trained to eliminate possible hidden or unconscious gender bias. Moreover, research funders can promote or demand a gender dimension as a criterion for funding.

Modern, excellent and equal

- Excellence is the current buzzword in European governing bodies of science. Gender equality should achieve the same level of relevance.
- The new Europe 2020 Strategy called Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is expected to positively affect gender equality in science, ensuring both gender equality in research careers and in the development of research content.

- “To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle”, wrote George Orwell. To understand what is happening around you , may be what is happening to you looks simple but it is very difficult and needs a lot of efforts and tenacity.