

Gender Equality in the Gendered Institution of the German University: Female & Male Experiences, Oppositions & Contradictions on the Road to a Professorship



Gender Report – Gender(In)Equality at German Universities (NRW)

The Coordination and Research Office of the Women's & Gender Research Network creates the Gender-Report in a three-year cycle. The second edition was published in 2013.

The **Gender-Report 2013** analyses 37 universities in Germany (North Rhine Westphalia) with regard to current developments in male and female academic careers and the degree of equality of opportunities on the level of the individual and the organisation.

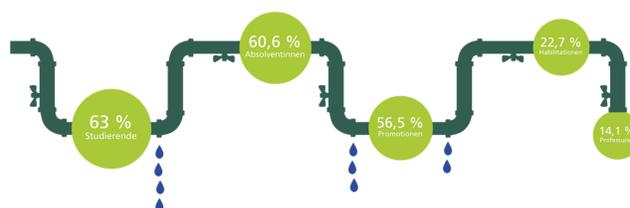
Materials & Methods

- focus interviews with scientists and their experiences on the road to a professorship
- mixed-method online survey with 1700 female and male professors about academic careers & professorial appointments
- expert-interviews with actors of higher education about gender-equitable professorial appointments

Kortendiek, Beate/Hilgemann, Meike/Niegel, Jennifer/Hendrix Ulla (2013): Gender-Report 2013. Geschlechter(un)gerechtigkeit an nordrhein-westfälischen Hochschulen. Hochschulentwicklungen, Gleichstellungspraktiken, Wissenschaftskarrieren. Studien Netzwerk Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung NRW, Nr. 17. Essen.

Selected Results

Although the career opportunities for women in academia have improved over the last years, they are still representing a minority in a male domain, in particular at the highest stage of the qualification scales in universities. Whereas gender equality has been nearly met at the level of students, **only 20% of all professorships are held by women**, e.g. the female percentage of students in the discipline of medicine lies at 63%, while it is only 14% at the level of professors. The same holds true for leading positions in universities, where women are worryingly absent.

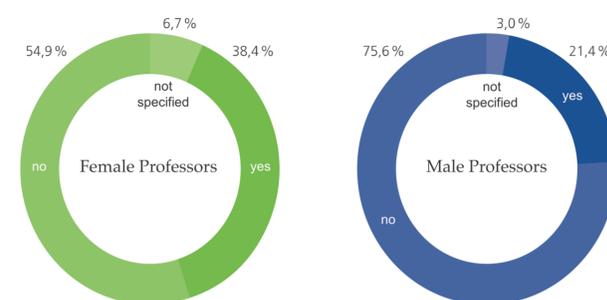


The proportion of women in medical sciences in North Rhine Westphalia
Gender-Report 2013

In order to develop alternative working cultures and to promote gender equality in the organisational structures of German universities, an **equal treatment law** has been implemented which introduces the instrument of the quota. However, the professors in North Rhine Westphalia assess, accept and use these new legal requirements and institutional practices quite differently. While the institution of the university incrementally undergoes a gender sensitisation, it simultaneously experiences **a new form of gender competition**. A representative online survey of the Gender-Report 2013 with 1700 female and male professors shows that **distributional conflicts between women and men** currently increase at the university. Surprisingly, this development not only unfolds between the two sexes but also quite controversially within the gender groups. We observe quite **diverse reactions towards an active promotion of women** within universities: There are female academics who oppose the promotion of women just as male scholars who support such activities.

One particularly critical juncture for female careers in academia is the final step towards a professorship, the procedure of professorial appointment. **Professorial appointments** are multi-level selection processes in which different actors with divergent levels of power and influence participate to formally find the best-qualified person for the advertised position. Although the members of higher education insist on the meritocratic practice of selecting the best candidate, performance is a social assignment process defined by the scientific community. The Gender Report 2013 confirms scientific studies which have shown that the characteristic of **being female still functions as a "downgrading modus" for women**, which unconsciously causes a **gender bias**.

The results thus prove a gender selection on the road towards a professorship:



„Did you experience discrimination during professorial appointments?“
Online-Survey, Gender-Report 2013

- ¾ of the male professors felt valued and appreciated during the procedure of the professorial appointment whereas only half of the female professors shared this experience.
- **female professors significantly more often have been discriminated against** during a professorial appointment.
- Inappropriate questions on partnership and family life were posed to women three times more often than to male candidates.
- Officially, rules and provisions regulate the organisational proceedings but informally, these are being circumvented.
- **Informal networks and homosocial cooperation processes** possess the distinctive power to put selected people into certain positions and to **prevent gender justice** in German universities.