

*When scientific excellence meets gender:
An analysis of discursive interplays*

**International Conference
Gender and Excellence: Challenges in Research Funding II**

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Research Design

National level		Organizational level	
Switzerland	Germany	Switzerland	Germany
Document analysis		3 Case Studies	3 Case Studies
12 interviews	10 interviews	18 interviews, 6 group discussions, document analysis	18 interviews, 6 group discussions, document analysis

Research project
„Excellence and/or Equal Opportunities of Gender
National Objectives and discursive Practices at Universities
(Germany and Switzerland)“

www.genderchange-academia.eu

Meetings of Gender and Excellence

Meeting 1: Gender Equality as contradicting Excellence

Meeting 2: Excellence as challenging Gender Equality

Meeting 3: Gender Equality as inevitable for achieving Excellence

Meeting 4: Gender Equality as strategically making use of a rhetoric of Excellence

No Meeting: Excellence is criticized without mentioning Gender

No Meeting

“Actually I don’t like the notion of excellence, but I love the notion of quality. (...) The quality system is very important. But quality cannot be measured by numbers. Quality systems should facilitate the reflection about quality. Then you can do much better as if you simply want to be the best university in the world. (...) Well, I am more for the small gains than for the big talk.”
(Interview 11)

Meeting one: Contradiction I

“All that is about serious research and science should be guided by excellence. That is the attempt to produce the best. What is needed is a sacred fire burning and fully committed dedication. Research as calling, that is excellence. And not the formalities and the general circumstances and by being distracted by what is not the real objective of research. That is to get to the bottom of things.”

(Interview 10)

Meeting one: Contradiction II

“I would never say that research can be done in part-time, say 80%” (Interview 4)

“Excellence as it is defined today is also about hard work. ... Those who work longer hours do produce more output.” (Interview 3)

Meeting one: Contradiction III

“There is only excellence. I mean, if you don’t look out for that in the first place then it doesn’t make sense at all to grant equal opportunities. It is exactly as I said: No pain, no gain.”

(Interview 4)

Meeting one: Consequences

Excellence Quality

Commitment and dedication measured by working time

Sacrificing other things in life

Women as not fitting in well

Solution: „Fix the women“

Talking about individual researchers

Meritocracy as taken for granted

Meeting two: Challenge I

„On the other hand excellence also refers to a specific type of person and career. It is an ideal that is challenged as soon as other factors are coming in, such as family or women having children. Then it becomes difficult to meet these criteria.“ (Interview 3)

Meeting two: Challenge II

„The crucial question is here: what type of researchers do we get? Well, in my opinion, this is neither an ideal that many men would buy into. And then I ask myself if we really get the best like this, male or female. Or if we only get ambitious, smart, well I don't want to deny their engagement or intelligence, but it is a certain type that buys into that competition and that is fostered.“ (Interview 6)

Meeting two: Challenge III

„How to measure excellence or what counts as a good research performance in a certain field is something that had been established over centuries. And that means that they are heavily coined by men. That is obvious. And in my eyes, the more women we can get into that world, the more they will change the rules.“ (Interview 9)

Meeting two: Consequences

Excellence Quality

Commitment and dedication defined by male ideal

Selecting via career and mobility is biased

Preferences for specific type, women and also some men are excluded

Solution: „Change the Rules“

Talking about criteria for selecting individual researchers

Meritocracy is challenged as a myth

Meeting three: Inevitability I

„... gender equality is part of our quality definition. And in practice it should be like this that the accreditation evaluates the gender equality measurements applied by the university.“ (Interview 6)

„I am afraid that we will loose talents if we go on like this.“(Interview 6)

Meeting three: Inevitability II

„There is a bias in selecting talent. ... And that doesn't go along well with excellence. And that is why it is in the interests of a university to really select the best, no matter if it is a man or a woman.“ (Interview 10)

Meeting three: Consequences

Excellence Quality

Commitment and dedication defined by male ideal

Selecting via career and mobility is biased

Preferences for specific type challenges innovation and excellence

Solution: „Change the Rules“

Talks about effects for universities, science in general and society

Meritocracy is treated as a myth

	Meeting one	Meeting two	Meeting three
	Excellence... Quality		
Commitment & Dedication	Working time	Male ideal researcher	
Sacrifice	Life	Biased selection	
Problem	Women not fitting in	Women and men excluded	Innovation and excellence challenged
Solution	Fix the women	Change the Rules	
Talking about	Individual researchers	Criteria for individual selection	Universities, science, society
Meritocracy	taken for granted	challenged as myth	treated as myth