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Gendered career paths? Patterns of professorial recruitment at the Faculty of Humanities of the largest university in Norway

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The focus of our study is gender and career paths in science. To what extent is the advancement of women into permanent positions in academia influenced by measurable gender differences in the formal hiring process?

We performed an observational study on all recruitments of new tenured professors and associate professors through open calls in the decade 2007-2017 at the Faculty of Humanities of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) (N=77). Our study received advance approval by the Norwegian Data Protection Authority and we maintained the most rigorous anonymity when processing our data. We collected data on the applicants' gender and institutional affiliation at the time of application. We did not collect data on their names, nationalities or presumable national and ethnic origin.

We contrasted the composition of the pool of applicants against the pool of winners. We found that women typically have internal careers and poorer chances than men when applying as external candidates, especially if they are internationals. We also found that when an international man applies, the chance of success of department-affiliated women (but not department-affiliated men) is noticeably lowered. The latter effect is specific to department-affiliated women and international men; no such effect is present when an international woman applies.

Our findings indicate the existence of gendered career paths. This situation could be the product of gender-specific behavioral expectations, whereby loyalty and the quality of being international are valued differently across genders. Gender bias and the exigency to reward temporary employees on teaching-intensive contracts, the vast majority of whom are women, may also play a role in our findings.

Such persistence of traditional gender schemas has important implications at a time of epochal shifts in Norwegian academia with regard to precarization and internationalization. In this paper, we discuss whether this situation can (and should) be addressed by means of legal and institutional regulation.