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Through the gate of the neoliberal academy

The (re)production of inequalities in the recruitment
and selection of early-career researchers

Channah Herschberg



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Chapter 1

General introduction



Contemporary Western higher education institutions (HEIs) are situated in a context of neoliberalisation, where academic work is increasingly market-driven and focused on performance, excellence, competition, project-based working, entrepreneurialism and cost-reductions (Bozzon, Murgia, & Poggio, 2018; Clarke & Knights, 2015; Hearn, 2017; Prichard, 2012). Since mid-1980, Western governments became more hesitant to spend public money on public services (Deem, 2001), which has led, amongst others, to decreasing investments in higher education. These on-going austerity measures caused structural changes in the academic system (Hakala, 2009; Hearn, 2017). In 1995, an article addressed the concept of the McUniversity, emphasizing the move to mass higher education, greater managerial power and increased monitoring and regulation of the labour of academics¹ (Parker & Jary, 1995).

Another crucial consequence of neoliberalisation is the rise of precarious employment in HEIs (Morgan & Wood, 2017) also referred to as the casualization of academic labour (Parker & Jary, 1995). HEIs increasingly rely on part-timers, hourly paid positions, and fixed-term contracts (Ackers & Oliver, 2007), who provide HEIs with greater staff flexibility. As a result of these developments, secure employment in academia is becoming increasingly rare, particularly for academics at the beginning² of their career (Fumasoli, Goastellec, & Kehm, 2015; Krilić, Petrović, Hočevan, & Istenič, 2016; Wöhrer, 2014). Figures show a disproportionate growth of early-career temporary positions compared to more stable positions (EU, 2012, 2016). In 2010, in 23 countries in Europe, the number of academics working in (temporary) post-PhD positions was 156.595 (EU, 2012) compared to 191.238 in 2013 (EU, 2016). This is a 22 per cent increase over three years. The overall numbers of academic staff did only increase with nine per cent from 918.875 in 2010 to 997.109 in 2013 (EU, 2012; 2016). This has led to many early-career researchers pursuing “precarious, geographically mobile careers as ‘reserve armies’ of doctoral and postdoctoral academic labour for teaching, research, and knowledge production, often across dispersed transnational networks” (Hearn, 2017, p. 33).

An increase of competitive temporary funding from national and international research councils and the private sector has accelerated the growth of fixed-term contracts even more (Ackers & Oliver, 2007; Hakala, 2009; Van Arensbergen, Van der Weijden, & Van den Besselaar, 2014b). The aim of such research funding is to “use

1 I use the terms ‘academics’ and ‘researchers’ interchangeably. When I use these terms in this study, I refer to people working in universities on research only positions or positions that combine research and teaching.

2 The beginning of the career is referring to the phase between completing a PhD and obtaining a stable position in academia (Bozzon et al., 2018). This phase increasingly prolongs into more mid-career stages.

scarce resources most efficiently” by distributing it through a process of evaluation to presumably the ‘best’ researchers, because it is thought that “they will produce the best research possible with the available money” (Laudel, 2006, p. 375). Due to the increase in external research funding, the number of early-career researchers has grown as they “form a cheap and flexible academic workforce” (Hakala, 2009, p. 174) who can work on project basis. These developments have created a stronger distinction between core and peripheral academic positions (Parker & Jary, 1995). For academics in the periphery it becomes ever harder to achieve a permanent academic position, not only due to the decrease of permanent positions, but also because the competition for positions is stronger than ever (Hakala, 2009).

In this dissertation, I study postdoc positions and tenure-track assistant professorships because these are the first positions after completing a PhD and before obtaining a more stable, permanent position in academia. These positions require attention as applicants for these positions “are confronted with strict rules of competition, combined with an ‘extensification’ and ‘overflow’ of work, finding themselves alone in dealing with uncertainty about the future” of their careers (Bozzon et al., 2018, p. 16). Moreover, it is argued that the requirements for permanent positions have become broader and more stringent (Bozzon et al., 2018; Özbilgin, 2009). The types of postdoc position I focus on are those that are created because a principal investigator acquired funding for a research project. I perceive tenure-track assistant professor positions as “time-limited posts leading, at the end of a certain period of time, to a tenure procedure to decide whether they will be offered a tenured position” (Enders & Musselin, 2008, p. 134). This means that a tenure-track assistant professorship involves an ‘in or out’ decision after a period of precarity. Both positions that I am interested in are academic positions with a research component that are precarious in nature and for which gatekeepers are responsible for recruitment and selection. I do acknowledge that there is a broad diversity in fixed-term early-career positions (see for example Ackers & Oliver, 2007) and that they differ in the extent of precariousness they have to endure (e.g., teaching-only positions).

When looking at temporary positions in the neoliberal university, a gendered pattern can be observed. Studies and statistics show that women (early-career) academics are disproportionally employed on peripheral, fixed-term positions compared to men (Bryson, 2004; Parker & Jary, 1995; WOPI, 2013). Yet, not only gender inequality but also for example inequalities based on nationality (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014) and ethnicity, and class (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2008; Özbilgin, 2009) are found in academia and academic processes. Multiple categories of social differences can intersect (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2008; Johansson & Śliwa, 2014).

As a result of the inequalities mentioned, “white men from middle and upper class backgrounds” (still) dominate academic positions and institutions (Özbilgin, 2009, p. 114).

Two processes that play a role in the production and perpetuation of inequalities are recruitment and selection, as they form the access to or entrance into academic positions. Currently, we know little about the processes and criteria that affect the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers in the competitive academic labour market, as most studies on academic recruitment and selection concern higher positions in the academic hierarchy (Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a). I argue that it is important to extend our knowledge on academic recruitment and selection to early-career researchers because hiring decisions at the early stages of the academic career determine who are included or excluded from academic careers and thus who will be the future researchers that shape the direction of research and represent their discipline. In my dissertation, I look at multiple inequalities that can play a role in this inclusion or exclusion. I want to answer the following main research question:

How are inequalities (re)produced in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers?

This doctoral dissertation aims to achieve a better understanding on how inequalities come to the fore in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers and in particular how gatekeepers construct inequalities in the recruitment process, in the formulation and application of selection criteria and in collective decision-making processes.

In the remaining part of this chapter, I will briefly introduce the central concepts of my dissertation. I start with the concept of inequalities and the concept of gender, followed by recruitment and selection practices. Next, I will give an overview of the research questions that are addressed in this dissertation.

1.1. Central concepts

Inequalities

Studies on inequalities in work organisations have shown how inequalities are produced and perpetuated (e.g., Acker, 2006; Clauset, Arbesman, & Larremore, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Coffeng, & Dijkers, 2012;

Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2009). Acker (2006) defines inequality in organisations as:

systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations. (p. 443)

Inequalities, thus, can be found at different levels and in all organisations. In this dissertation, the disparity between researchers involved in recruitment and selection of early-career positions, often members of the core staff, and candidates for such positions is indisputable. They differ in aspects such as power and control, status, job security, and contract status.

Inequalities are often based on categories of social differences such as gender and race but also on for example sexuality, religion, age, and physical disability (Acker, 2006). When I started my research, I wanted to study solely gender inequality in academic hiring for early-career positions, as I wanted to find out why a disproportionate number of men end up on postdoc and assistant professor positions compared to women. However, I am well aware that multiple inequalities are ingrained in academic institutions (e.g., Johansson & Śliwa, 2014; Özbilgin, 2009; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Therefore, I remained open for other inequalities than gender while doing my research. When I conducted my first study (which can be found in chapter 3), I found various inequalities in the selection criteria used to select assistant professors. In chapters two and three I look at inequality in a broad sense. I uncover how recruitment and selection practices for postdoc and assistant professor positions create inequalities between (potential) candidates for such positions, for example related to mobility opportunities or nationality of candidates. In chapters four and five I concentrate on the concept of gender inequality.

Gender inequality

Gender inequalities in organisations “are rooted in taken-for-granted assumptions, values, and practices that systematically accord power and privilege to certain groups of men at the expense of women and other men” (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000, p. 554). In my research, I build on scholars who perceive gender as a social process, as a social construct that is created in interaction (e.g., Poggio, 2006). The approach I relate to sees gender as “an axis of power, an organizing principle that shapes social structure, identities, and knowledge” (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000, p. 563). This approach opposes the view that organisational structure is gender neutral and instead sees organisations

as inherently gendered (Acker, 1990; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b), as places where “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1990, p. 146).

To study gender inequalities in academic organizing, I will use the concept of gender practices. Poggio (2006) argues that using a practice lens is particularly fruitful for studying gender in organisations. It enables to focus on “the everyday activity of organizing in both its routine and improvised forms” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1240) and thus on “how gender is constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday practices through which individuals interact” (Poggio, 2006, p. 225). Studying gender as a socially constructed practice thus focuses on dynamic processes and the sayings and doings of people (Martin, 2003). Martin (2003, 2006) introduced a two-sided dynamic of gender practices and practicing gender for understanding gendering processes in organisations. She makes a distinction between practices, “a class of activities that are available—culturally, socially, narratively, discursively, physically, and so forth—for people to enact in an encounter or situation in accord with (or in violation of) the gender institution”, and practicing of gender, “the literal activities of gender, physical and narrative—the doing, displaying, asserting, narrating, performing, mobilizing, maneuvering” (Martin, 2003, p. 354). I will look at both gender practices (chapter 4) and practicing gender (chapter 5), which will give insight into the well-known, institutionalized practices as well as how gender works in action and interaction (Martin, 2006) in recruitment and selection processes.

Universities are ‘gendered organisations’ with masculine norms for academic success and gendered work practices that shape gender inequalities in academia. Even though there is a more equal gender balance among early-career staff than among professors we do see that the numbers of women drop at the level of postdoc and assistant professor³ (EU 2016). Increasingly so, studies in the field of academic evaluation focus on gender inequality practices in academic recruitment and selection (Nielsen, 2016; O’Connor & O’Hagan, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b, 2014). These studies found that recruitment and selection are interwoven with gender practices in multiple ways. For example, in the evaluation of men and women’s professional qualifications and individual qualities (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b), through relationship status discrimination (Rivera, 2017), and the accessibility of social networks (Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Rivera (2017) argues that “the process of hiring for tenure-track jobs”, for example,

³ “The first post into which a newly qualified PhD graduate would normally be recruited” (EU, 2016, p. 192).

“remains a missing link in understanding the persistence of gender inequalities in academic careers” (p. 1112). In chapters 4 and 5, I will fill this void by showing which gender practices characterize the recruitment and selection of tenure-track assistant professors and by looking into the practicing of gender in hiring committees⁴. In the next section I will elaborate on the concepts of recruitment and selection.

Recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection of new staff are essential elements of human resource management and talent management in universities (Thunnissen, 2015). Recruitment is the process concerned with attracting suitable candidates (Newell, 2005) and selection is the process of choosing one candidate out of the pool of candidates based on certain criteria (Rees & Rumbles, 2010) and based on the ‘fit’ between the individual and the job (Newell, 2005). Interestingly, the role of HR professionals in recruitment and selection in universities is relatively small, as members of the academic elite play a critical part in both the recruitment and selection of candidates (Farndale & Hope-Hailey, 2009).

I perceive recruitment and selection as social practices, performed in interaction by multiple hiring committee members. In academia, hiring committees and their members are gatekeepers to the professoriate as they decide who will be included and excluded from vacant positions (Husu, 2004; Rivera, 2017). In all hiring procedures, there is something at stake for both the party that hires and the party that applies for the position. Hiring decisions made by committees affect not only individuals’ careers but also the demographic composition of departments, disciplines, and universities (Rivera, 2017). As Evans (1995) stated: “Departmental groups are not large; any new colleague will have a personal impact on the existing members and on their relationships” (p. 253). Yet, recruitment and selection are not only vital for departments and universities at large, but also for candidates who are looking for a position. Recruitment and selection processes can decide whether or not they can continue their academic career and receive an income in order to sustain their livelihood. This might be particularly so for early-career researchers who are competing for a limited number of academic positions where only a small minority among a pool of candidates is retained.

Committee members make hiring decisions collectively. Studies have shown that hiring involves micro political power processes because multiple individuals have to negotiate outcomes (Bozionelos, 2005; Van den Brink, 2010). Committee politics

⁴ Throughout this dissertation I use the terms “hiring committees / hiring committee members” and “selection committees / selection committee members” interchangeably.

can steer committee decisions, depending, for example, on the power networks to which committee members belong (Bozionelos, 2005). In contrast to grant review panel members who are not expected to be motivated by the achievement of personal goals (Van Arensbergen et al., 2014b), hiring committee members have something to gain from committee decisions as one candidate (or a small number of candidates) should be selected out of a pool of applicants, to become a member of their department or institution. Because academic hiring committees have the task to select their future colleague(s) whom they might cooperate with, they are more prone to being proself-motivated (Van Arensbergen et al., 2014b). As such, collective hiring processes involve power games in which various committee members possibly advance their own interests (Bozionelos, 2005).

Recruitment and selection in and of itself are practices designed to exclude people. Such exclusion should be based on individual merit. Yet, in these collective, power laden processes of recruitment and selection, inequalities can come to the fore that are based on categories of social differences. Recruitment and selection practices in academia are conflated with biases, nepotism and stereotypical beliefs, even though they are allegedly meritocratic (Nielsen, 2016; O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015; Rivera, 2017; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). As a result, the best qualified candidates do not always get selected and they can be rejected on unfair grounds (Bozionelos, 2005). As a result, talent might get lost. Previous research has shown that the way selection decisions in academia are organised can allow for emergent in addition to predefined selection criteria (Lasén, 2013), leaving latitude for the decision makers to base selection decisions on implicit assumptions, for example about gender (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). In my dissertation I examine how committee members create inequalities and conduct power play in the collective processes of recruitment and selection for early-career academic positions.

1.2. Research context and design

This doctoral dissertation has been conducted against the backdrop of the EU FP7 project GARCIA: Gendering the Academy and Research: combating Career Instability and Asymmetries:

GARCIA is concerned with the implementation of actions in European Universities and research centres to promote a gender culture and combat gender stereotypes and discriminations. By taking into account the organisations, but also their broader national context, this project aims to develop and maintain

research potential and skills of both, women and men researchers, in order to sustain the quality of their working conditions. Particular attention will be given to the early stages of academic and scientific career, which have been little considered in previous gender equality plans. [...] We will concentrate on both, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities) disciplines to assure that our aim of transforming academia and research towards a more gender equal environment can be extended to all levels of the institution by putting into practice the best systemic organisational approaches. (Description of Work, 2013)

The project entailed cooperation between seven different European research institutes in Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Iceland⁵, Austria, and Slovenia. Each research team was responsible for a so-called ‘work package’ that related to a particular topic. The work package that our research team in the Netherlands was responsible for forms the central (empirical) context of this dissertation. This work package was titled “Revealing implicit gendered sub-texts in the selection processes: deconstructing excellence”. It aimed to unpack the formal and informal criteria that are widely used to construct scientific excellence in academia for researchers who hold precarious positions (postdoctoral positions and tenure-track assistant professor positions) and to look into the gendered practices that constitute the barriers for women to become part of or be eligible for the permanent staff.

The consortium worked together on every aspect of the research process: research development, data collection, data analysis, and publication, except for Austria, as they were responsible for the evaluation of the project. Each national research team was responsible for the collection, translation and analysis of the data of their national context, whilst the work package leader was responsible for the comparative analysis of the data. The teams made data available for all participating teams in each country, in order to make cross-national comparisons. Each team collected data in two departments⁶ of their institution (university or research institution): a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) department and a social sciences and humanities (SSH) department in order to understand differences but also similarities between disciplines in regard to how inequalities are present in processes and career opportunities. The fact that women are well represented in the social sciences and humanities, in fact, does not necessarily

5 As Iceland is often considered to be part of Europe, for the sake of brevity I call Iceland a European country in this dissertation.

6 A department could for example be a faculty or a school of the university or a sub department of a faculty or school. In my dissertation I will refer to department.

mean that they are immune from gender inequalities and discrimination, as shown by the lack of their presence in prestigious positions, even where women represent the majority of staff members (Murgia & Poggio, 2018). I collected the data for this dissertation in a university in the Netherlands. The case study university is a mid-size university in the Netherlands that comprises multiple faculties. I conducted a case study in an SSH (Social Sciences) faculty and a sub department of a STEM (Natural Sciences) faculty.

All involved departments gave their commitment to the GARCIA project, which included that data would be made accessible to the research teams and departmental staff could be contacted to ask for participation in the data collection process. The project lasted three years (from February 2014 till January 2017) and involved multiple research methods.

The GARCIA project also had an action research component, as its aim was to develop or improve academic departments regarding gender equality by working closely together with the employees in the departments. As such, the project resulted in various toolkits and interventions. These interventions are not part of this dissertation.

Research approach

In order to study the (re)production of inequalities in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers I take a social constructionist perspective. This perspective challenges the notion of an objective or even subjective reality (Dick & Nadin, 2006). It perceives the social world as constructed by individuals through discourses and social practices (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004; Dick & Nadin, 2006). The focus of enquiry of social constructionist studies should therefore be on interaction, processes, and social practices (Young & Collin, 2004).

Discourses can construct identities, relationships and practices. They are embedded in work-based practices and reproduce dominant power structures (Dick & Nadin, 2006) and therefore, studying discourses can uncover hegemonic processes in organisations (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018). Social practices are understood as simultaneously discursive, embodied and material (Nicolini, 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016, as cited in Janssens & Steyaert, 2018). Therefore, practices study the social beyond discourses, texts and communication (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018).

In order to study discourses and social practices from a critical perspective, a qualitative orientation is the most appropriate method, as it “allows for in-depth, inductive and exploratory approaches to studying phenomena” (Jeanes & Huzzard, 2014b, p. 11). I will use a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design in my

dissertation, in order to conduct a detailed and extensive study of several cases. This design will allow me to compare and contrast the findings from each case and study what is unique and what is similar across cases (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A case study approach allows for generating theoretical insights as a result of contrasting findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The comparative design includes multiple comparisons: across selection procedures, across departments, and across countries.

First, I will study multiple selection procedures that took place in the period 2010 – 2017, as using multiple cases will give me a thorough understanding of the way formal criteria are understood, applied or ignored in committee deliberations and how the recruitment and selection practices are conflated with inequalities.

Second, I adopt the comparative approach between STEM and SSH disciplines that was salient in the GARCIA project because of the advantages of such approach indicated before. A comparison between STEM and SSH will be made in chapters 2 to 5.

Third, I will conduct two cross-national studies in which I make a comparison between recruitment and selection practices and gender practices in various countries. The GARCIA project gave a unique opportunity to extend the research findings across borders and to investigate if different national and organizational contexts produce different recruitment and selection practices for early-career researchers. In chapter 2, I make a comparison between higher education institutions (HEIs) in Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, because in these HEIs they have postdoc positions for which principal investigators recruit and select candidates. In chapter 4, I make a comparison between HEIs in Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands because for the tenure-track assistant professor positions (or equivalent) in these countries formal hiring committees execute the recruitment and selection.

I chose to also write two chapters based on case studies in the Netherlands, as the valuable and rich data I collected myself in the Dutch STEM and SSH departments provided for in-depth analyses on inequalities in recruitment and selection. Another reason for the Dutch case in chapter 5 is that I was able to collect unique and confidential data through observations in the Netherlands. I was unable to get physical access to hiring committees in other countries and also the GARCIA partners could not secure permission to observe the committee practices.

Methods of data collection

I will briefly describe my research methods, as I will provide extended explanations of the methods used in each chapter separately. I used multiple data collection methods:

observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Also, I analysed research reports and interview summaries written by the international research teams that were part of the GARCIA project. The various methods complemented each other and enabled a comprehensive study of recruitment and selection practices. By using documents, interviews, focus groups, and observations, I could study the complex and dynamic interplay between formal policies of the university and actual daily practice of hiring committee members. Table 1.1 gives an overview of the data sources I have used in each chapter

Gaining access to hiring committees has proven difficult due to the sensitive and confidential nature of selection decisions (see also Rivera, 2017; Van den Brink, 2010). Partly because of the commitment from the SSH and STEM departments to the GARCIA project, I had access to selection documents and hiring committee members. Administrative departments provided me with documents on selection procedures that had taken place in 2010 – 2014 (job descriptions and appointment reports). From these documents I could retrieve names of individuals who had taken place in hiring committees. I contacted them either by email or by stepping into their office to ask for their willingness to participate in an interview or focus group.

Documents

I started my data collection in the university in the Netherlands with collecting documents such as job descriptions, departmental HR policy documents such as recruitment protocols, and appointment reports in the SSH and STEM departments. In total, I obtained 32 job descriptions (9 from STEM and 23 from SSH) and 30 appointment reports (5 from STEM and 25 from SSH). The amount of job descriptions provided me with the information as to how many formal hiring procedures had taken place. The content of the job descriptions showed what criteria were documented. The recruitment protocols taught me how the recruitment and selection procedures of early-career researchers are organised and what criteria are considered important in their selection. The appointment reports provided more detail about the recruitment and selection in the various cases, such as the selection committee, how many applicants had applied, how many candidates were invited for an interview, and based on what criteria candidates were recommended for hiring or not. In order to secure confidentiality, I analysed the appointment reports in the SSH department in the storage room and did not copy them or take them out of the room. The appointment reports of the STEM department were stored on the campus network, which meets legal and ethical requirements.

Interviews and focus groups

The second step in my data collection was to conduct semi-structured interviews with committee members, working in the Dutch university, who had taken part in a committee for postdoc or tenure-track assistant professor positions in the period 2010 – 2014. In total, I interviewed nine men and four women (see Appendix A). I conducted two focus groups (one in the SSH department and one in the STEM department) with five men and two women (see Appendix A). The focus groups were held with committee members who had taken part in a committee for tenure-track assistant professor positions (and not postdoc positions) because the number of advertised positions for assistant professors was far more than for postdoc positions. During the focus groups, at least one other researcher of the Dutch GARCIA research team joined in order to guide the discussion and make observations. The number of women and men among the interview and focus group participants reflects the number of women and men that took part in hiring committees for early-career positions. The interviews and focus groups were all conducted face to face in a meeting room in the university.

For the interviews and focus groups I used similar topic lists (see Appendices B and C). They were structured around two themes: selection criteria for assistant professor or postdoc positions and department (gender) policies regarding recruitment and selection. In the interviews I added a section of questions on an actual selection process that the respondent had been involved in. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, and the focus groups lasted two hours. The interviews and focus groups were recorded with respondents' permission and transcribed verbatim. Through interviews and focus groups, committee members reflected on their recruitment and selection practices. They actively constructed their experiences and perceptions.

Observations

A recommended method for research into social practices is observation as through observations one can study “what it is that people actually do in organizations” (Yanow, 2006) instead of what they say they do. Observations allows for grasping “the processual and interactive dimension of gendering in its two main aspects: saying and doing” (Bruni et al., 2005 in Poggio, 2006, p. 229). Doing observations gave me the opportunity to study selection practices in the original group settings in which hiring decisions are made.

I got the opportunity to do a first observation in the Dutch university because I was invited to observe a hiring procedure in one of the departments. For

the following observations, I contacted committee chairs, asking if I could observe their committee meetings. In some cases I was told by the chairs that a new assistant professor position had opened, in other cases I found the job postings on the university website and contacted the committee chairs myself. Most of the chairs wanted to have a personal conversation with me before the start of the hiring procedures to talk about confidentiality issues, such as the personal information of candidates. I removed all personal information of candidates, such as their curricula vitae (CVs) and application letters, after the job interviews had taken place. All hiring committee members gave consent for my presence during the committee meetings. Most hiring committees informed the candidates who were invited for an interview through email that I would be observing the interview. Some committees chose to introduce me to the candidates when they were present for the interview. They introduced me as a PhD candidate who was observing for research purposes.

In total, I observed six hiring procedures: three in the SSH and three in the STEM department. I attended all hiring committee meetings: the meetings where the shortlist was made (in two cases this was done by e-mail to which I had access), meetings where candidates were interviewed, lunch meetings in between the interviews, and meetings in which the interviewed candidates were discussed and rankings were made. During the job interviews, I positioned myself in a spot where it was clear that I was not part of the hiring committee. I did not actively participate in the meetings. In one case, I was allowed to make voice recordings of two meetings. Additionally, I was included in e-mail conversations between committee members about for example the procedure and the ranking of candidates.

My observations were limited to formal communications between committee members and informal conversations directly after the meetings. I was not present during other informal discussions in hallways or behind closed doors. However, in two cases I was invited to join the committee for dinner after the job interviews had taken place. In total, I observed 70,5 hours of meetings (excluding dinners) over a period of three years. During all meetings I took detailed notes of the questions that were asked to candidates, first reflections of committee members, and the decision-making deliberations. I focused on the hiring committee members because I aim to study how and based on what criteria they make hiring decisions. After the meetings and during breaks I wrote field notes. Field notes are “detailed summaries of events and behaviour” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 461) that I made to capture my experiences, first impressions, and reflections.

Research reports (and interview summaries)

In the two cross-national studies I analyse research reports that were written by other research teams in order to compare findings in different national HEIs. Each team wrote two research reports that centred on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers (and gender practices) in their respective institutions (for the first research reports see: (Herschberg, Benschop, & Van den Brink, 2015). The second research reports are not published online in full). We, the Dutch team, had prepared guidelines for the research teams on what to include in the reports, in order to facilitate comparability across countries.

All research teams had collected data on recruitment and selection practices in their own institutions: documents, interviews, and focus groups. To ensure comparability, every team used the same topic list for the interviews and focus groups, which the Dutch GARCIA team had developed (see also the section on Interviews and focus groups). The Dutch team provided instructions via Skype to the researchers that were responsible for collecting the data in the other countries. Furthermore, the research approach and research topics have been discussed during project team meetings to ensure that the protocols were used in similar ways.

Interviews and focus groups were recorded with respondents' permission and transcribed verbatim in order for the research teams to analyse the transcripts in depth and write the research reports. The majority of the interviews and focus groups were conducted in the local languages of the various research teams, which is why I could not draw on the original interview transcripts. Instead, every research team (except the Dutch team) made summaries in English of all interviews and focus groups they had conducted. These summaries were written to provide the authors with primary data to strengthen the analysis. We had prepared guidelines for the research teams on what to include in the summaries for consistency across countries. The summaries consisted of four themes: information about the respondent (sex, department), selection criteria considered important, organisation of the selection process, and gender policies in recruitment and selection. Finally, the research teams provided quotes they thought reflected the interview responses best. These quotes were in addition to the quotes provided in the research reports.

A disadvantage of using research reports written by other teams is that I depended on their choice and interpretation of the data. Translation issues might also have influenced the reporting of the data in the research reports and the interview summaries and quotes. I tried to limit these disadvantages as much as possible by instructing the research teams and to make use of the same interview and focus group topic list and guidelines for writing the reports and summaries. I contacted

the research teams when I needed clarification or additional data for improving my analysis. An advantage of using research reports is that the data in these reports were anonymised and therefore did not breach promises of confidentiality.

Table 1.1 *Overview of data sources per chapter*

	Job descrip- tions	HR / organisa- tional policies	Appoint- ment reports	Observa- tions	Semi- structured interviews	Focus groups	Research reports
Chapter 2 Precarious postdocs	x	x			x		x
Chapter 3 Selecting early-career researchers	x	x			x	x	
Chapter 4 The peril of potential	x	x	x		x	x	x
Chapter 5 Collectivity and power	x	x	x	x			

Data management

Radboud University recommends that while research is on-going data is stored on the campus network, which meets legal and ethical requirements. Safe and secure storage is guaranteed by the IT security and safety protocols of the campus network. I stored my voice files, transcripts, and notes on the secured campus network. The campus network was also used to exchange sensitive data between researchers in the Dutch GARCIA team during the project.

Archiving data for the long term is part of Radboud University's Research Data Management policy. The retention period of data is a minimum of ten years at publication or after completion of a research project. Most data I use in my dissertation is privacy-sensitive. Anonymising the data is not possible because even when names and other personal information are removed from the data, they will be retraceable to individuals. Therefore my data cannot be made available for reuse. University policy prescribes that raw data that contain personal or confidential information that are stored for reasons of scientific integrity may only be stored on Radboud University infrastructure (file folders). Using a work group folder allows for granting reading

rights to the institute's data steward, thus making sure that my data is managed for the long term, even when I leave university. I saved my data on the work group folder FM-IMR-garcia_project.

1.3. Research questions and outline of the dissertation

In order to answer my main research question, *How are inequalities (re)produced in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers?*, I conducted four studies that make up the next four chapters of this dissertation. Table 1.2 gives an overview of the chapters and of the outlets where they have been published and presented.

Chapter 2

In chapter 2, "Precarious postdocs: A study on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers", I focus on postdoctoral researchers whose position originated from external research grants acquired by principal investigators. The research question addressed is: *How is the recruitment for project-based postdoc positions organised and how do principal investigators construct the 'ideal' postdoc in four universities across Europe?* To answer this question, I conducted a qualitative comparative multiple-case study in SSH and STEM departments of universities in Switzerland, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. This chapter contributes to the literature on academic staff evaluation in the neoliberal university, extending to the recruitment and selection of postdocs instead of senior academics.

Chapter 3

In chapter 3, "Selecting early-career researchers: The influence of discourses of internationalisation and excellence on formal and applied selection criteria in academia", tenure-track assistant professor positions in a Natural Sciences (STEM) and Social Sciences (SSH) department the Netherlands are considered. This chapter answers the following research question: *How are academic selection criteria constructed at the meso- and micro-level in the context of macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence?* This study draws on qualitative multi-level data that comprise institutional-level policies, recruitment and staff protocols, job postings and individual-level interviews and focus groups with selection committee members in the Netherlands. This chapter contributes to the literature on academic staff evaluation by uncovering four inequalities that emerge in the application of criteria and reflecting on disciplinary differences between STEM and SSH.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4, “The peril of potential: Gender practices in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers”, that also studies assistant professorships, comprises the second international comparative chapter of my dissertation. In this chapter, I use the theory of gender practices and aim to answer the question: *Which gender practices characterize the evaluation of candidates’ potential for precarious positions with a prospect of a more permanent contract?* My findings are based on a critical comparative analysis of empirical material on recruitment and selection procedures and criteria collected in SSH and STEM departments of higher education institutions in Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. This chapter adds to the literature on gender in academic organisations by showing which gender practices characterize the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers where judgements are based on potential.

Chapter 5

In chapter 5, “Collectivity and power: Practicing gender in hiring committees for assistant professor positions”, I draw on an observation study in the Dutch case study university. In this chapter I answer the question: *How is gender practiced in hiring procedures for assistant professor positions?* In total, I observed six hiring procedures: three in the SSH and three in the STEM department, collecting data of 70,5 hours of meetings over a period of three years. This chapter contributes to the literature on gender inequality in (academic) hiring by uncovering seven patterns of practicing gender that illustrate how hiring committee members practice gender collectively before, during and after committee deliberations.

Chapter 6

In closing chapter 6, “General discussion”, I connect the findings of chapters 2 to 5 to answer the main research question of my dissertation. Lastly, this final chapter outlines the theoretical and practical contributions of my dissertation along with methodological reflections and potential avenues for future research.

Table 1.2 *Dissertation outline and outcomes*


	Related publications and presentations
Chapter 2 Precarious postdocs	<p>Chapter 2 has been published as Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & van den Brink, M. (2018). Precarious postdocs: A comparative study on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers. <i>Scandinavian Journal of Management</i>, 34(4), 303-310, doi: 10.1016/j.scaman.2018.10.001. The article is among the most downloaded articles of the Scandinavian Journal of Management (May, 2019).</p> <p>Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented in 2017 at a seminar at the Universtat Oberta de Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain) and the IMR Research Day (Nijmegen, the Netherlands). An earlier version received the best paper award at the IMR Research Day in 2017.</p>
Chapter 3 Selecting early-career researchers	<p>Chapter 3 has been published as Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & Van den Brink, M. (2018). Selecting early-career researchers: the influence of discourses of internationalisation and excellence on formal and applied selection criteria in academia. <i>Higher Education</i>, 76(5), 807-825. doi:10.1007/s10734-018-0237-2</p> <p>Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented in 2015 at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion conference (Tel Aviv, Israel), the Dutch HRM Network conference (Utrecht, the Netherlands), and in 2016 at the conference of Gender, Work, and Organization (Keele, United Kingdom).</p>
Chapter 4 The peril of potential	<p>Chapter 4 has been published as Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & van den Brink, M. (2018). The Peril of Potential: Gender Practices in the Recruitment and Selection of Early-Career Researchers. In A. Murgia & B. Poggio (Eds.), <i>The Precarisation of Research Careers: a Comparative Gender Analysis</i>: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315201245-5</p> <p>Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented in 2016 at the Gender Equality in Higher Education conference (Paris, France) and in 2017 at the Academy of Management conference (Atlanta, United States of America).</p>
Chapter 5 Collectivity and power	<p>An earlier version of this chapter has been presented in 2018 at the seminar on People Management in Education (Tilburg, the Netherlands).</p>





Chapter 2

Precarious postdocs: A comparative study on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers



This chapter is based on Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & van den Brink, M. (2018). Precarious postdocs: A comparative study on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 34(4), 303-310, doi: 10.1016/j.scaman.2018.10.001. The article is among the most downloaded articles of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (May, 2019).

Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented in 2017 at a seminar at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain) and the IMR Research Day (Nijmegen, the Netherlands). An earlier version received the best paper award at the IMR Research Day in 2017.

This chapter investigates how the recruitment and selection for project-based postdoc positions are organised in the current academic landscape characterised by increasing temporary research funding and how principal investigators construct the 'ideal' postdoc. The findings are based on a qualitative comparative multiple-case study in Social and Natural Sciences departments of universities in four European countries. This study contributes to the literature on the neoliberal university and academic staff evaluation by using a systemic, power-sensitive approach that examines how postdocs enter the academic system and how manifestations of precarity are exacerbated. Our critical analysis reveals three manifestations of precarity that the current academic system creates for postdocs, related to control, contracts, and careers. We discuss the effects for individual postdocs and their careers and the quality of knowledge production in public funded higher education institutions.

2.1 Introduction

Contemporary universities are situated in a context of neoliberalisation, where academic work is market-driven and focused on performance, excellence, competition, project-based working, entrepreneurialism and cost-reductions (Bozzon et al., 2018; Clarke, Knights, & Jarvis, 2012; Deem, 1998, 2001; Lam & de Campos, 2015; Prichard, 2012). Due to declining government funding of higher education in Western countries, universities (and academics) have to search for new sources of finance (Deem, 2001; Prichard & Willmott, 1997; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Therefore, and part of the trend toward the neoliberal university, reliance on external research funding has increased. Academics engage in strong competition for collaborative and commercial research funding to acquire money for their work (Lam & de Campos, 2015). Furthermore, the increasing reliance on competitive external funding also “is the organizational response to the drive and demand for transdisciplinary, fixed-term, solution-oriented research on specific phenomena that are defined as problems at a given time” (Ylijoki, 2016, p. 11).

As external research funding mostly finances temporary research projects the amount of project-based research has grown (Ylijoki, 2010). We refer to this trend as projectification (Ylijoki, 2016). As a result of the projectification of academia, the number of precarious jobs has grown and still grows, especially for early-career researchers, as large numbers of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers are hired for temporary positions (Lam, 2007; Wöhrer, 2014). We argue that these developments have important implications for the recruitment and selection of early-career

researchers, and for the criteria that are decisive for their hiring.

Hitherto, much of the literature on academic recruitment and selection has focused on higher echelons in academia, neglecting how the increasing reliance on external and project-based funding affects a vulnerable group in the university: postdoctoral researchers (hereafter: postdocs). We define postdocs as contract researchers (Ackers & Oliver, 2007; Harney, Monks, Alexopoulos, Buckley, & Hogan, 2014) with a PhD or equivalent qualification who have non-tenured, research-only academic positions. Although there are a wide variety of postdoc positions, in this study we focus on the postdoc positions originating from external research grants acquired by principal investigators. Postdocs differ considerably from tenured academics who typically enjoy employment security and other benefits. Postdocs are generally employed on fixed-term, project-based contracts or fellowships and endure precarious work conditions (McAlpine, 2012; Oliver, 2012), such as lack of job security, no career prospects, and strong competition for a limited number of permanent positions (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013; Ylijoki, 2010). Additionally, previous studies focusing on postdocs in the neoliberal university predominantly focus on postdocs' lived experiences (e.g., Hakala, 2009; Lam & de Campos, 2015; McAlpine, 2012; Müller, 2014), which offer valuable insight into the micro-level of analysis. Yet, a more systemic, power-sensitive approach that examines how postdocs enter the academic system and how manifestations of precarity are exacerbated is currently lacking. Such an approach is important because this gives insight into the way academic structures shape academic careers. This chapter aims to fill this void by studying the recruitment and selection of postdocs in the context of the neoliberal university. We understand recruitment and selection as political, power laden processes producing patterns of dominance and subordination (Bozionelos, 2005; Parker & Jary, 1995).

In this chapter, we unravel how the recruitment for project-based postdoc positions is organised and how principal investigators advance their interests by constructing the 'ideal' postdoc in four universities across Europe. Recruitment and selection practices determine which aspiring early-career researchers enter the academic system and can possibly remain there on permanent contracts, for which the chances are small, as the competition is fierce. For example, in the Netherlands only 20 per cent of all postdocs lands in an appointment as assistant professor (Rathenau Instituut, 2016). Also, the current study is meaningful for both higher education institutions and the development of science, as postdocs make considerable contributions to the world's scientific discovery and productivity (Van der Weijden, Teelken, De Boer, & Drost, 2016). Therefore, their selection can have

serious implications for the quality and type of research produced.

Our findings are based on a qualitative multiple-case study on recruitment and selection procedures and criteria in Natural Sciences (STEM) and Social Sciences (SSH) departments of universities in Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. This comparative study enables us to examine variations in the recruitment and selection of postdocs as well as the type of researchers that are preferred for such positions across national contexts. Furthermore, our critical analysis reveals three manifestations of precarity that the current academic system creates for postdocs, related to control, contracts, and careers.

Next we will explore in more detail the changing institutional context of higher education and the rise of postdocs. Thereafter we will elaborate on the construction of the ideal academic and the recruitment and selection of academics. We then describe our qualitative methodology, including the data collection and the analysis. Then will turn to the empirical analysis of our data. At the end of the chapter we will discuss our findings.

2.2 The rise of postdocs

Neoliberalisation has affected labour markets and employment relationships, resulting amongst others in “a decline in attachment to employers, an increase in long-term unemployment, growth in perceived and real job insecurity, [and] increasing nonstandard and contingent work” (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013, p. 290). Low-skilled workers used to be most affected by contingent employment (Nollen, 1996), but precarious employment now also affects highly skilled workers (Armano & Murgia, 2013), such as academics. Precarious employment in academia most strongly affects early-career researchers (Wöhler, 2014) among which postdocs.

Postdoc positions typically come into existence by externally funded research grants that finance fixed-term research projects (Ackers & Oliver, 2007), ranging from a few months up to a couple of years. These projects are either funded through someone else’s (usually a more senior researcher’s) grant or through personal postdoctoral fellowships (Åkerlind, 2005). Such projects usually give both money and prestige to the grant recipient (Ylijoki, 2016). In Western countries, this ‘projectification’ of academia caused a sharp increase in the number of postdocs, working on project-based research, over the past decades (Åkerlind, 2005; Rathenau Instituut, 2016; Ylijoki, 2016). Figures show that in 2010 in 23 countries in Europe the number of academics working in “the first post into which a newly qualified PhD

graduate would normally be recruited” (EU, 2016, p. 192) was 156.595 (EU, 2012) compared to 191.238 in 2013 (EU, 2016). This is a 22 per cent increase over three years. A similar trend can be found among postgraduate / PhD students, which is related to the projectification too. The number of PhD students in the 23 EU countries has increased from 379.153 in 2010 to 465.252 in 2013 (a 23% increase) (EU, 2012; 2016). The overall numbers of academic staff did only increase with 9% from 918.875 in 2010 to 997.109 in 2013 (EU, 2012; 2016), which shows the disproportionate growth of early-career temporary positions.

The postdoc stage, where time can be spend on research (only), was intended for building publication records and developing new research ideas before moving into stable positions (Bessudnov, Guardiancich, & Marimon, 2015; O’Grady & Beam, 2011). Yet, the number of permanent positions did not grow to the same extent as postdoc positions, as the EU figures revealed. Therefore, the number of precarious postdoc researchers working on a series of fixed-term contracts without prospects for permanent positions is increasing (Åkerlind, 2005; Ylijoki, 2010). This has led to the establishment of a sharp distinction between a core and a peripheral academic workforce.

Precarious postdocs resemble what the dual theory of Human Resource Management (HRM) (Lewin, 2005) labels as the “peripheral workforce” (p. 286): temporary employees who receive little or no employment security and fringe benefits. On the contrary, the “core workforce”, as described by Lewin (2005), is made up of employees who are carefully selected and who enjoy employment security, well-defined career paths, and fringe benefits: tenured staff. The peripheral workforce usually has little or no development and promotion opportunities within the organisation (Ackers & Oliver, 2007; Lewin, 2005). Research showed that postdocs indeed often lack monetary and social security benefits, support regarding library services and training, and access to HRM practices such as performance evaluations and development planning (Harney et al., 2014; O’Grady & Beam, 2011). The dual theory of HRM assumes that the temporary workforce is peripheral to the organisation’s main tasks (Kalleberg, 2000). This might suggest that postdocs lack power because of their precarious position in the workforce, yet they are essential to academic knowledge development and production. As they conduct a substantial part of all research conducted in higher education institutions (Callier & Polka, 2015; Van der Weijden et al., 2016), their counter-power should not be underestimated as principal investigators rely on their work for project success.

In the literature on the neoliberalisation of academia some attention is paid to postdocs, but this research mainly focused on their lived experiences, such

as their identity work and work motivation (Hakala, 2009), their experiences of relocation (McAlpine, 2012), their career satisfaction (Van der Weijden et al., 2016), their career practices (Müller, 2014), and their roles, functions and career prospects (Åkerlind, 2005). These studies mainly show the struggles and anxieties that postdocs experience. Inspired by Critical Management Studies, we take a different approach by moving away from the individual to the power laden system that produces the demands and criteria for postdocs. This evokes questions as to how inequalities in the academic workforce are produced by the projectification of academia, who are in the position to construct the criteria and the demands for postdocs, and what does the temporary nature of positions mean for the criteria concerning postdoc candidates? In order to answer these questions we provide a critical analysis on the recruitment and selection of postdocs, as this is the power process in which the ideal candidate is constructed. We take into account disciplinary differences, as we learn from previous studies that the proportion of postdocs varies by discipline (Ackers & Oliver, 2007; Nerad & Cerny, 1999). For example, in STEM the postdoc position is a necessary step on the academic career ladder whereas in SSH this is more rare, however, the number of postdoc positions in this field is growing (Bessudnov et al., 2015).

2.3 The ideal academic

Previous studies on academic staff evaluation have shown that when individuals involved in academic recruitment and selection talk about their preferred candidate, they reproduce the profile of the ideal academic (Bleijenbergh, Van Engen, & Vinkenburg, 2013; Van Arensbergen, 2014; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a). This profile reflects the norm of the ideal academic as “someone who gives total priority to work and has no outside interests and responsibilities” (Bailyn, 2003, p. 139) and as “a lone, independent individual, who is self-protective, competitive, ruthless and not that collegiate or supportive of colleagues and students” (Bleijenbergh et al., 2013, p. 24).

Furthermore, academic power relations influence who gets to construct the ideal academic. Studies on the notion of the ideal academic also revealed that this ideal operates as both an inclusionary and an exclusionary mechanism (e.g., Bleijenbergh et al., 2013; Lund, 2012; Thornton, 2013; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). These studies show for instance how the ideal academic is gendered; the constructed ideal encompasses masculine characteristics and therefore women academics are expected not to fit the ideal. In this study we will examine how principal investigators include or exclude researchers from the ideal norm, focusing on postdoc positions.

We perceive limitations in this literature on the ideal academic. First, existing studies tend to relate the ideal academic to senior (tenured, core) academics but not precarious (peripheral) academics such as postdocs. Generally, the ideal academic is constructed as an academic with a long track record of publications and external funding, which does not fit the career stage of early-career researchers. Second, most studies on the ideal academic treat this norm as similar across disciplines and across academic positions. An exception is the study of Bleijenbergh et al. (2013) who found that the image of the ideal academic is heterogeneous over academic disciplines and universities. Furthermore, Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen (2015), who took a broader look at academic evaluation by focusing on the definition of talent of academics at the early stages, found that the interpretation of academic talent – which we use here interchangeably with the ideal academic – depends on the position (i.e., senior academic or early-career talent) of the person being asked as well as academic discipline. However, no study to date has examined if the ideal academic is constructed differently when it concerns precarious project-based positions. Given the different nature of peripheral postdoc positions compared to core academic positions we examine if and how the ideal postdoc is distinct from the ideal academic.

2.4 Recruiting and selecting academics

The recruitment and selection of talent are considered key tasks of Human Resource Management (Ferris & King, 1991). Recruitment is the process concerned with identifying and attracting suitable candidates (Newell, 2005) and selection is the process of choosing one candidate out of the pool of candidates based on specific criteria (Van den Brink, 2010) and based on the ‘fit’ between the individual and the job (Newell, 2005). Therefore, these two HR functions are considerably different (Orlitzky, 2008). However, in academia, the role of HR professionals in recruitment and selection is relatively small (Farndale & Hope-Hailey, 2009). Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen (2015, p. 187) argue that this is because “managing academics, e.g. full professors, still consider themselves responsible and best equipped for selecting and managing their academic staff, and they accept little or no interference”.

Studies on academic staff evaluation have noted various relevant processes that make both recruiting and selecting opaque endeavours. An example of such opaqueness that can take place in recruitment is the process of scouting in which “applicants are actively invited to apply through the formal or informal networks which occur in closed – but also in some open – recruitment” (Van den Brink, 2010,

p. 115). Scouting practices are performed by gatekeepers, who play an important role in deciding who get access to academic positions and who are excluded (Husu, 2004) as gatekeepers generally occupy power positions in universities (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Power and political processes play a role during the selection (Bozionelos, 2005; Ferris & King, 1991) such as group dynamics among selection decision makers (Van Arensbergen et al., 2014b) and favouring candidates according to one's own interests (Bozionelos, 2005). The majority of studies that look at the recruitment and selection of academics have focused on senior academic positions (e.g., Nielsen, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b) or Vice-Chancellors (Engwall, 2014) and longer-term appointments such as professorships. We do not yet know how academics are recruited and selected for project-based work. With this study we want to further the knowledge on academic recruitment and selection processes by studying how these processes are organised for precarious postdoc positions.

2.5 Methodology

Data collection

This research study used a qualitative multiple-case study approach. This approach allows us to compare the recruitment and selection criteria for postdocs as well as the researchers deemed ideal for postdoc positions between four national contexts. The data for this chapter were collected in collaboration with research teams in four universities in Belgium (BE), Italy (IT), Switzerland (CH), and the Netherlands (NL). These universities' main tasks are both research and teaching. All four research teams conducted two case studies in their institution: one in a Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) department and one in a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) department. Our comparative analysis is based on research reports that were written by the four research teams. Each team wrote two research reports that centred on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers in their respective institutions (for the first research reports see: Herschberg et al., 2015. The second research reports are not published in full). The research reports were based on various data sources. Firstly, the data consisted of documents such as university policy documents, HR documents, job-postings, and appointment reports, published in the period 2010 – 2014. The four research teams collected these documents in their universities. Secondly, every research team conducted semi-structured interviews with selection committee members who took part in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers (postdoc *and* assistant professor positions) in the period

2010 – 2014. The research reports written by the four research teams consisted of a total of 67 interviews.

For this chapter we used a subsample of 21 interviews with 11 men and 10 women principal investigators who took part in the recruitment and selection of postdocs. As the focus of this study is on the hiring of postdocs we did not include interviews with respondents who had solely been on committees involved in the hiring of assistant professors. Respondents held associate professor, full professor or senior lecturer positions. Their names were retrieved from appointment reports and job postings (if available) and with help from university administrators. Principal investigators that were interviewed had acquired external research funding mainly from national and international research funding institutions. In some cases, respondents had applied for (and received) project funding in a team of researchers. The number of interviews used in this chapter is equally divided over the participating countries and departments. To ensure comparability, every team used the same interview guide for the interviews, which consisted of three themes: selection criteria for postdocs, a selection process in which the respondent had taken part, and departments' policies regarding recruitment and selection of early-career researchers. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the local languages of the various research teams and some interviews were conducted in English. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Interviews were recorded with respondents' permission and transcribed verbatim in order for the research teams to analyse the transcripts in depth and write the research reports.

Because most interviews were conducted in the local languages of the research teams, we could not draw on the original interview transcripts. Instead, every research team (except the team of which the authors are part) made summaries in English of all interviews they had conducted. These summaries were written to provide the authors with primary data to strengthen the analysis. We had prepared guidelines for the research teams on what to include in the summaries for consistency across countries. The summaries consisted of four themes: information about the respondent (sex, department), selection criteria considered important, organisation of the selection process, and gender policies in recruitment and selection. Finally, the research teams provided quotes they thought reflected the interview responses best. These quotes were in addition to the quotes provided in the research reports.

Data analysis

We conducted a qualitative conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We first open coded the materials and focused on the excerpts involving

the recruitment and selection of postdocs. This resulted in codes that capture key concepts such as open/closed recruitment, selection, committee, networks, criteria, qualifications, candidates, procedure, policy, and scouting. At the same time we made notes of our “first impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). At this step of the analysis we found the recruitment process and the selection process of postdocs to be distinct (in line with Orlitzky (2008) who argued that recruitment and selection are two different processes). At all times the research reports from the four countries were compared. The codes related to recruitment and the codes related to selection were then “sorted into categories based on how different codes are related” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). This led to two categories associated with the recruitment process (in charge of postdoc recruitment and the role of networks) and four categories associated with the selection process (criteria of expert knowledge, availability, commitment and motivation, and autonomy). The analysis revealed what the ideal postdoc looks like to our respondents. Repeatedly, we went back to the original research reports as well as the interview summaries to get additional information needed for our analysis. Our findings are illustrated with quotes from the interviews. Quotes were translated into English by the respective research teams who conducted the interviews. In the quotes we use country abbreviations (Belgium (BE), Italy (IT), Switzerland (CH), and the Netherlands (NL)), department abbreviations (STEM or SSH) and abbreviations of the sex of the respondents (M for male and F for female).

In the remaining part of the chapter we will use country names instead of the names of the participating institutions to facilitate reading. For example, when we refer to Switzerland, we refer to the participating institution in Switzerland. Also, we will use the terminology ‘SSH department’ and ‘STEM department’ when corresponding to the various departments in the four universities.

Research context

Precarious early-career researchers in all countries in this study experience high job insecurity, a constant need to search for a new position and repeated short-term contracts. None of the universities have the obligation to prolong contracts or make them permanent at the end of their terms. However, the way postdocs are hired and the level of precarity of the position differ across the countries.

In the Italian university postdoc positions are funded by external research grants. Such postdoctoral research fellowships are considered student positions, so when a fellowship ends the researcher is not entitled to unemployment benefits. Also, they are excluded from income support measures because they have a student status.

Formal policy prescribes that the recruitment procedure for postdocs entails the publication of an open call and then a selection by a committee consisting of three tenured members of the department. The chair of the committee is the person in charge of the research grant.

The Swiss university distinguishes two types of postdoc positions: positions funded by research funding organisations and postdocs funded by the university. Externally funded project-based postdoc positions are part of the so-called “administrative and technical staff”, which is originally a non-academic staff category. Because they are not part of the academic staff category, externally funded postdocs do not have representatives in faculty and university bodies. Therefore, it is more difficult for these postdocs to participate in and get informed about the strategic and scientific decisions taken by the academic bodies of the faculties, which puts them in a more precarious position than researchers in the academic staff category. For positions funded through external grants, which is often the case for postdoc positions, the directive states that: *“No selection committee needs to be established. It is the responsibility of the person in charge of the funding to propose the hiring of a suitable candidate”*.

In the Dutch university, postdocs receive a university employment contract and therefore they fall under the collective labour agreement for Dutch universities. In the Netherlands a new law implemented in 2015 prescribes that academic staff cannot get more than three consecutive temporary contracts. The total period of temporary employment cannot exceed four years (this used to be six years). As a result, academics on temporary positions, also academics who attract external funding, are not able to renew their contract in their current university when they reach the four years of employment. Given the current financial structure of universities, this law will most likely increase precarity, as universities are often not willing to turn fixed-term positions into permanent ones.

In the Belgian university, postdoc positions are conceived as bursaries or scholarships and therefore lack social security and pension scheme contributions. In both the Belgian and the Dutch university the recruitment and selection processes for postdocs are not formalized. External research funding finances postdoc positions and it is the grant holder(s) who make(s) the selection decision. Postdocs are sometimes recruited via an open call and with the use of a selection committee, but in many cases there is no open selection procedure and no selection committee.

2.6 Research findings

In this section we first illustrate the process of recruiting postdocs. Second, we show how principal investigators (PIs) involved in postdoc selection construct the ideal postdoc by examining the criteria used for selecting postdocs.

The recruitment process

We identified two patterns in the recruitment process across countries and disciplines: the dominant power position of the PI in the process and the use of informal networks in recruiting postdocs.

In charge of postdoc recruitment

In all four countries, postdoc positions are predominantly financed by external research grants, with an exception of some of the postdoc positions in Switzerland (see also Research context). In this study, we refer to postdoc positions originating from external research grants that are acquired by PIs. Consequently, postdocs are recruited to conduct these projects, as a Dutch respondent explains:

Postdocs and PhD students, they are being paid by projects. People apply for those projects. Those projects are in fact sort of the property of those people and thus they can decide who will be the PhD student or postdoc. (NL, STEM, M)

This quote shows that the respondent considers a project financed through external funding the “*property*” of the grant holder(s). He argues that because of this, the PI decides whom to recruit on a PhD or postdoc position, implying that a formal procedure for the recruitment of postdocs is unnecessary. This way, PIs do not have to spend considerable time doing administrative tasks that recruitment procedures usually require.

In all countries, we find that the decision-making power regarding recruitment lies with the person who obtained the research funding, also in Italy where a formal hiring committee is composed. In Italy, committee members other than the PI perform more of an advisory role. Therefore, obtaining external funding not only grants PIs the opportunity to conduct their own research but also grants them power to build research groups composed of early-career researchers that they solely hire. This is consistent with postdoc hiring in the UK and the US (Cantwell, 2011).

Compared to other early-career positions such as tenure-track positions, the

hiring of postdoc candidates provides PIs with a large amount of autonomy. Our analysis shows that in all countries postdoc hiring happens at the discretion of PIs, and they are hardly held accountable for their hiring decisions. They do not have to formally report on their decisions that therefore remain unquestioned. As a result, individual PIs decide on who enter and / or remain in the academic system and who are excluded.

The role of networks

Our analysis shows that respondents in all four universities agreed that the most widely used way to recruit postdocs is through informal networks. Also when an open call is published, such as in Italy, informal channels are used to recruit candidates. In all countries, local or international collegial networks are used to get direct access to candidates, to distribute vacancies, and to obtain information and judgments on the quality of candidates.

The fact that most countries do not have a formal procedure installed for the recruitment of postdocs might facilitate the reliance on networks, but our analysis also reveals other reasons for informal recruitment practices. One of these reasons is the time pressure that PIs experience for assembling a project team. This is because research projects usually come with a starting date and an end date. PIs explain that therefore they need postdocs whom they can employ for that period of time and in most cases, they need postdocs who can start at short notice. This limits their possibility for an extensive recruitment process and triggers the dependence on informal networks as these networks can quickly provide information on and access to possible candidates. This differs from non-project positions for which the recruitment and selection can take up to a number of years (Herschberg, Benschop, & Van den Brink, 2016). The focus of PIs tends to be on the short-term because of project-based hiring, yet, their decisions have long-term consequences for science.

The second reason for recruiting postdocs informally is respondents' preference for candidates whom they already know compared to unknown candidates. Our analysis shows that this argument holds throughout the four countries.

If it's someone you know, someone who you know works hard, is easy to get on with and so on, I won't say you hire him [sic] without question, but if something is needed to make a difference when two applications seem equally good, I think it can be important all the same (CH, SSH, F).

This quote reveals the benefits of selecting a candidate already familiar to the PI: it

is known if the candidate “works hard” and “is easy to get on with”. The respondent argues that this can be decisive if two candidates “seem equally good”. An Italian respondent reveals his inclination to hire candidates that he knows and appreciates. We learn from him that his preference for “someone you know” creates a closed “competition” and puts unknown candidates at a disadvantage (IT, SSH, M). Italian PIs often tailor the job description to the candidate recruited informally. Here we find that formal policy that requires an open competition for postdoc positions can partly be circumvented. Our findings show that despite the ostensible openness of published vacancies, access to a position is generally restricted to people benefiting from a local gatekeeper or network connection outside the department.

Thirdly, we find that informal networks are used for acquiring recommendations from network connections, which can play an important role in the recruitment of postdocs. A Swiss respondent argues: *It’s true that word of mouth, a telephone call, is shall we say, compared to impact factor, is much, much more important* (CH, STEM, M). This quote shows the impact of “word of mouth” recruitment through informal channels. According to the respondent, a reference from another person is “much, much more important” than a journal “impact factor”, illustrating the use of referees for the legitimation of a candidate’s scholarship (Thornton, 2013). This reveals the power of networks and the trust PIs have in their network connections.

The selection of postdocs

In this section we show how the selection of postdocs takes place, as this is the process in which the ideal postdoc is constructed. Most respondents in the various universities and departments argue that they require postdocs to have published a (small) number of articles, mainly looking whether or not the content of these publications matches the topic of the research project they are hiring for. However, our analysis shows that there are other, more decisive, criteria that play a role in the selection of postdocs. We will now turn to these criteria that together construct the ideal academic.

The criterion of expert knowledge

The first selection criterion that PIs consider important is related to the content of the research project at hand.

In the case of our postdocs, there are some difficulties that persist. Let’s say that we think a bit egoistically, we have obtained the funding and now we need to find someone who can do this, and assuredly do it. (BE, SSH, M)

The respondent argues that he needs a postdoc who can carry out the project that he obtained funding for. Yet, he emphasises that he looks for a postdoc who can “*assuredly do it*”. Here we see that project conditions shape the requirement for a postdoc who can successfully execute the project. Our analysis shows that expert knowledge is a core criterion that PIs throughout the countries apply in order to increase the chance for a successful completion of the project. Respondents refer to this as “*scientific technical expertise*”, “*particular skills*”, or “*a certain competence in the research commissioned*”. There is consensus among PIs in all countries that they consider it important that a postdoc candidate has experience with the research topic and the necessary expertise to conduct and complete the research project successfully.

The criterion of availability

Illustrated by the discussion of the role of networks, PIs throughout the countries are looking for candidates who are available for the project’s duration. This creates another condition for criteria applied in the selection of postdocs. A Swiss respondent argues that his strategy is to hire a person “*who can start immediately [on the first day of the project], who will be good for the project but perhaps not super-brilliant, not top class*” (CH, STEM, M). He then further explained that hiring a postdoc on a research grant obliges him to make compromises, as the project has its own timetable. Moreover, this respondent explained that his preference for hiring a “*not super-brilliant*” candidate is because he expects them to have a higher chance of staying for the entire project duration. He argued that “*top class*” candidates are more inclined to receive a better offer in another institution and therefore leave during the course of the project. It seems that he anticipates the counter-power of top class candidates, who might leave during the project for less precarious career options. Our analysis reveals that PIs in all countries want to hire candidates who are available when the project starts, which can cause them to opt for low(er) risk candidates who can meet project objectives. Thus, they seem willing to sacrifice quality for availability.

The criteria of commitment and motivation

Our analysis reveals that commitment to the project and its duration is an important factor in the selection of postdocs too. Belgian respondents explain that this also requires a willingness to stay in Belgium for the duration of the postdoctoral contract. An Italian respondent argues: “*The fellowships are tied to specific projects. So that what we consider is availability and commitment for this period, not for a longer one*” (IT, STEM, M). This quote touches upon one of the precariousities inherent to postdoc positions: the appointment for a fixed-term period. Positions funded by projects can

generally only offer fixed-term employment. Therefore, the investment from both the side of the employer and the employee is only for a limited time, which causes PIs to particularly focus on short-term objectives rather than a candidate's suitability and quality for a longer-term academic career. Our findings reveal that this induces PIs throughout the various countries to focus more on criteria related to project execution than job content because a flawless process reduces the risk of project failure. This illustrates once more how the need for a successful completion of the project shapes selection criteria.

Also, respondents in the various countries argue that a candidate's motivation is important in the selection process. A Dutch respondent illustrates: *"I really like a kind of intrinsic motivation. I want to work with people who are happy to be paid for studying something they already wanted to know"* (NL, SSH, F). This respondent, but also respondents from other countries, argue that they assess a candidate's motivation on the research topic of the project. They indicate that this can demonstrate if a candidate is really interested in the content. Similar to commitment, this implies that PIs aim for selecting a candidate who has a high chance of completing the project and therefore they want to hire a postdoc who is motivated to do the project.

The criterion of autonomy

The need for a smooth execution of the project also generates the criterion of autonomy. Respondents in all four countries argue that they want to hire postdocs who are quickly operational when the project starts because *"projects have to be carried out with the promised results or outcomes"* (NL, STEM, M). We find that because of this, most respondents in the four countries look for candidates who are capable of independent research, who do not need too much support.

Other more general competences are autonomy at work. [...] Autonomy that involves both the development of the specific question to be researched, developed, and then to bring it to a publication, because by now this is what we do. What is needed is a very output oriented person, most of all if s/he must work in projects.
(IT, SSH, F)

The respondent argues that autonomous work behaviour is a selection criterion because she requires that postdocs independently develop research questions and write publications. She refers to the importance for postdocs of producing publications. Also in the other countries postdocs are expected to conduct research independently and to publish based on the project's findings. Respondents argue that

they want to work with postdocs who take initiative and develop their own ideas. We find that the output orientation of the PI and the need for project realisation are the main drivers of the requirement for autonomous work behaviour. However, a Dutch respondent argues that she wants to hire postdocs who have their own input in the project but at the same time “*do what you want them to do*” (NL, SSH, F). This reveals a limit to the amount of autonomy postdocs should demonstrate because the research projects steer them in a certain direction, which can constrain their initiative. We analyse this as a power process in which the interests of the PI, who has the final responsibility for the project, may or may not parallel the interests of the postdocs who can pursue their own agenda in publishing and building a research line.

The ideal postdoc versus the ideal academic

As we have illustrated, the selection criteria applied in the selection process for postdoc positions are tailored to the project nature of such positions. The ideal postdoc is constructed as someone who is available during the timescale of the project, committed and motivated to conduct the research till completion, and has both the expert knowledge and independence to execute the project. We see these criteria being applied in all countries and disciplines involved in this study.

The following quote from an Italian respondent encapsulates the core distinction between an ideal postdoc and an ideal assistant professor, but also reveals the precariousness of postdoc positions:

In the case of a postdoc, the requirement may be less general and more circumscribed: I need someone to give me a hand with a project. I mean, the competence of a postdoc may be more restricted than that of an [assistant professor] without causing serious damage. Therefore, we may say that there is greater discretion and a focus on a specific research project in the case of a postdoc, while in that of an [assistant professor] the need to be met is development of the discipline. If an [assistant professor] is a universal, so to speak, need of the discipline, a postdoc is a specific need of a project. (IT, SSH, M)

This PI explains that postdocs need to conduct “*a specific research project*” and therefore the criteria are more limited whereas assistant professors are hired for the “*development of the discipline*” and are therefore selected based on a larger variety of criteria. Thus, we find a narrow short-term construction of the ideal postdoc, which is in sharp contrast to more senior positions that play a significant role in the long-term development of their discipline.

2.7 Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed at providing a better understanding of the recruitment and selection of precarious postdocs in the context of the neoliberalisation and projectification of academia.

The first contribution of this chapter is to the literature on academic staff evaluation in the neoliberal university, extending to the recruitment and selection of postdocs instead of senior academics (e.g., Nielsen, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Postdocs are a unique and understudied group, because they are hired for fixed-term projects rather than on more stable, senior academic positions. This study shows how recruitment for project-based temporary academic positions is organised in a hasty and informal manner and how selection criteria for postdoc positions are shaped in Natural Sciences (STEM) and Social Sciences (SSH) departments of universities in four European countries. We show that the ideal postdoc differs from the ideal academic, as the ideal postdoc is very much shaped by the need for a candidate who can successfully execute and complete a short-term project. Although academic fields vary in their core activities, financial resources, career patterns, epistemological issues and publishing strategies (Becher & Trowler, 2001), we found little variation between disciplines and countries in the construction of the ideal postdoc. This shows dominant patterns in the contemporary international academic system on the way postdocs are perceived and the role they (should) play in the academy. An explanation for the similarities across disciplines might be because “disciplinary differences have become increasingly blurred” (p. 8) as a result of the projectification in universities (Ylijoki, 2016).

Our second contribution to the literature consists of the identification of three manifestations of precarity and their effects for postdocs and the scientific landscape. For analytical purposes, we will disentangle three manifestations of precarity, but stress that this is an analytical distinction as in practice there is some overlap.

The first manifestation of precarity we distil from our findings relates to the control over projects. Our analysis shows that the academic system allows PIs exclusive control over recruitment and selection processes as project funding is considered their property. The lack of transparency and accountability in postdoc recruitment and selection raises questions about the fairness of these hiring practices as often no open competition is enabled. Because of the lack of interference from others, most of the postdoc hiring happens informally, with a strong reliance on network connections. Network-based recruitment is used for most academic appointments (e.g., Nielsen, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), but not to the same extent as

for postdoc positions. A possible effect of the high amount of control of PIs over the recruitment and selection processes might be that unknown candidates are excluded from postdoc positions. Without formal procedures and colleagues joining the recruitment and selection processes, a PI's interest can prevail over the interests of the postdocs and of science as a whole. Project-based work also makes that PIs have control over the content of the research a postdoc should undertake (Harney et al., 2014). Yet, our findings show that PIs depend on the postdocs for publications and project success, which provides postdocs with potential counter-power as they may leave during the project or may pursue an autonomous agenda.

The second manifestation of precarity concerns contracts. In the countries in our study but also in other countries, postdocs are generally hired on precarious short-term contracts, with little or no prospects for continued employment (Oliver, 2012). We found that projects require from postdoc candidates expert knowledge, availability, commitment and motivation, and autonomy, as this facilitates the successful completion of a PI's project. The short duration of projects triggers short-term interests when it comes to postdoc recruitment and selection, not taking into account how this short-term vision affects the precarity of postdocs. Postdocs hold a peripheral position compared to core staff. When it comes to contracts, we observe some national differences, as in the Italian, Belgian and Swiss institutions, project-funded postdocs do not hold the same contractual position as academic staff on more stable positions as is the case in the Netherlands. In Italy and Belgium, postdocs are even denied employment benefits and social security, which creates a particularly precarious situation for them. Postdocs are thus expected to demonstrate loyalty and commitment to the project, but they seem to receive little or no reciprocity for their investment and dedication. Despite postdocs' important contributions to academic knowledge production (Van der Weijden et al., 2016) they suffer from bad employment conditions and low social and job security.

The third and final manifestation of precarity pertains to careers. The neoliberalisation and projectification of academia have shifted the responsibility for career development from employers to early-career researchers. Yet, this is a responsibility that is very difficult or even impossible to bear for precarious postdocs, as the system does not provide sufficient opportunities for development and progression (Åkerlind, 2005; Horta, 2009). Given that the postdoc phase was intended as a "transitional period during which the postdoc develops independence" (Callier & Polka, 2015, p. 155), the current system does not seem to give room to do so. Our study shows that externally funded postdoc positions instigate a strong project focus and, therefore, PIs tend to select an 'ideal' type postdoc who is value-added to a project,

rather than someone who they evaluate from a broader perspective, as someone who is deemed suitable for a further career in academia. As a result, the postdoc position seems to have become a job, rather than a career step. So even though postdocs tend to “depend on their professors for career support in return for their cooperative efforts” (Lam & de Campos, 2015, p. 820), “securing the occupational future will require a high degree of initiative on [postdocs’] part” (Allen-Collinson, 2003, p. 411, see also Teelken & Van der Weijden, 2018), or so called entrepreneurial behaviour (Hakala, 2009). When early-career researchers work on series of fixed-term postdoc contracts and thus various projects (Ylijoki, 2016), they might end up with a scattered research line instead of an independently developed, coherent research line that is required for a next – more stable - position. The effect of this precarity manifestation is a different ideal candidate for postdoc positions compared to more stable academic positions. This current short-term orientation might not be sustainable on the long-run, for both the careers of postdocs and the quality of knowledge production in academia.

We conclude that the projectification of early academic positions resulted in recruitment and selection practices that focus on short-term objectives. This reveals a sharp contrast with the emphasis on academic excellence and talent that dominates the debate on the neoliberal academy (e.g., Butler & Spoelstra, 2012) and academic evaluation and hiring decisions (Herschberg, Benschop, & Van den Brink, 2018b; O’Connor & O’Hagan, 2015; Van Arensbergen, Van der Weijden, & Van den Besselaar, 2014a; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Our study shows that the increase in externally funded postdoc positions can lead to an erosion of the notion of talent. PIs tend to look for good project workers rather than the best talented academics; so to speak sheep with three legs instead of ‘sheep with five legs’ (i.e., ‘excellent in all respects’) such as for professorships (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b, p. 512). According to the idiomatic expression, sheep with three legs will be able to ‘walk’ (i.e., perform sufficiently well in the project) but will not run away, which makes us question the attractiveness of postdoc positions for early-career researchers in the current system.

The practical implications of our study are that HR should be more closely involved in the recruitment and selection of postdocs to make sure that the short-term myopia of PIs is mitigated and a broader spectrum of criteria is taken into account to select the academics of the future. Implementing formal recruitment and selection policies for postdoc positions that require open recruitment of postdocs, can eliminate biases inherent in closed recruitment. More formalized recruitment and selection could also prescribe that PIs should form a hiring committee to ensure that PIs are not solely responsible for the hiring. Furthermore, universities should

give more content to their responsibility for the career opportunities of postdocs both within and outside the academic world (cf. Teelken & Van der Weijden, 2018).



Chapter 3

Selecting early-career researchers: The influence of discourses of internationalisation and excellence on formal and applied selection criteria in academia

This chapter is based on Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & Van den Brink, M. (2018). Selecting early-career researchers: the influence of discourses of internationalisation and excellence on formal and applied selection criteria in academia. *Higher Education*, 76(5), 807-825. doi:10.1007/s10734-018-0237-2

Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented in 2015 at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion conference (Tel Aviv, Israel), the Dutch HRM Network conference (Utrecht, the Netherlands), and in 2016 at the conference of Gender, Work, and Organization (Keele, United Kingdom).

This chapter examines how macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence shape formal- and applied selection criteria for early-career researcher positions at the meso-organisational and micro-individual levels, demonstrating how tensions between the various levels produce inequalities in staff evaluation. In this way, this chapter contributes to the literature on academic staff evaluation by showing that selection committee members do not operate in a vacuum, and that their actions are inextricably linked to the meso- and macro-context. This study draws on qualitative multi-level data that comprise institutional level policies, recruitment and staff protocols, and job-postings, and individual-level interviews and focus groups with selection committee members. Findings show that a majority of selection committee members consent to university policies and macro-discourses when evaluating early-career researchers, but a smaller group questions and resists these criteria. Furthermore, the analysis revealed four inequalities that emerge in the application of criteria and reflect on disciplinary differences between the Natural and Social Sciences. The chapter concludes that with only a few committee members to critically question and resist formal selection criteria, they limit the pool of acceptable candidates to those who fit the narrow definition of the internationally mobile and excellent early-career researcher, which may exclude talented scholars.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes to the literature on academic staff evaluation, especially to debates concerning recruitment and selection criteria. Scholars in this field perceive attraction and retention of talented personnel as a challenge for universities (Musselin, 2010; Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013). They present a (critical) evaluation of scientific quality and individual merit that (re)produce inequalities, for example in pre-selection processes for academic positions (Nielsen, 2016) and in the construction of academic excellence (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Although these studies have delivered valuable insights into the production of inequality in academic evaluation, emphasising the role of individual evaluators, they often neglect how these evaluators are influenced by macro-discourses in the context of the global, neoliberal university. It is argued that evaluators do not operate in a vacuum, and that their actions are inextricably linked to meso-level evaluation policies within their organisations and the macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence. Higher-education institutions increasingly engage in international competition with each other for academic staff. As the academic labour market has become global

(Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), international mobility is more and more perceived as a crucial element of an academic career (Jepsen et al., 2014). Additionally, excellence seems to increase in importance as a criterion in staff selection decisions, gauged as a neutral and objective, merit-based measurement of productivity (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b).

The aim of this study is to examine how macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence shape formal and applied selection criteria for early-career researcher positions at the meso-organisational and micro-individual levels, demonstrating how tensions between the various levels produce inequalities in staff evaluation. The research question is how are academic selection criteria constructed at the meso- and micro-level in the context of macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence? In this study, the focus is on selection criteria for early-career researchers, as in this phase, it is decided who are included or excluded from academic careers. The findings show that this is a particularly challenging task for evaluators, as the assessment of early-career researchers, and tenure-track assistant professors in particular, is based on potential, instead of the long track record of performance of senior researchers. The findings are based on two case studies of a Natural Sciences (STEM) and a Social Sciences (SSH) department of a university in the Netherlands. A qualitative content analysis was conducted, analysing university policies, recruitment and staff protocols, job postings and interviews and focus groups with selection committee members. The multi-level analysis has shown tensions between the articulations of the discourses of internationalisation and excellence at multiple levels and has identified four inequalities that are produced in the application of selection criteria.

3.2 Evaluating academic staff in the neoliberal university

Since mid-1980, Western higher education institutions have become subject to the growing role of market forces and commercial values (Washburn, 2005), resulting in the corporatisation and neoliberalisation of academia (Gill, 2009; Olssen & Peters, 2005). This transition has been fuelled by the growing hesitance of Western governments to spend public money on public services (De Boer, Enders, & Leisyte, 2007), which has led to decreasing direct investments in higher education among other effects. Furthermore, higher-education institutions are increasingly evaluated on their output, such as number and quality of publications and number of graduated students (De Boer et al., 2007; Teelken, 2012), which creates pressure to continuously

raise these numbers. New forms of assessing academic performance or scientific excellence come with this development.

The changing academic landscape has led to an increase in studies on staff evaluation, and specifically, the evaluation criteria (Lamont, 2009; Musselin, 2010; Van Arensbergen et al., 2014a). Science studies have predominantly engaged with the accuracy of contemporary performance indicators, such as productivity, citation indexes and peer review (e.g., Anninos, 2014; Basu, 2006; Werner, 2015). Human Resource Management-oriented research has examined the HR practices facilitating the recruitment, selection and retention of academics and has recently centred on talent management (Davies & Davies, 2010; Thunnissen et al., 2013). Research in sociology and (critical) organisational studies have emphasised the social construction of evaluation criteria (Lamont, 2009), group dynamics during the evaluation process (Van Arensbergen et al., 2014a) and the production of inequalities in the process and criteria (Lund, 2015; Nielsen, 2016; Özbilgin, 2009; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b).

This chapter adds and builds on this latter category of studies by examining how evaluators construct and apply evaluation criteria in academic selection procedures. These criteria are not constructed and applied in a vacuum, but are embedded in academic, national and global contexts. In the wake of the neoliberalisation of academia, the academic labour market is globalised (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997); however, multiple studies have shown how academic labour markets are still distinguished by substantial national characteristics (Enders & Teichler, 1997; Musselin, 2005, 2010). In her extensive study on hiring processes, Musselin (2010) describes how national career systems, as well as institutional and disciplinary features, impact both the ideal type of candidate and selection criteria. This study builds on Musselin's approach by including macro-discourses when studying selection criteria, which has not been done before.

At the macro-discursive level, two grand discourses that seem most prominent in the current debate on the neoliberal and global university are taken into account: the discourse of *internationalisation* (e.g., Fabricius, Mortensen, & Haberland, 2017; Leisyte & Rose, 2016; Schartner & Cho, 2017), and the discourse of *excellence* (e.g., Butler & Spoelstra, 2014; Ramirez & Tiplic, 2014; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Internationalisation has increasingly become a keyword in policies of European higher-education institutions (Fabricius et al., 2017), as a process of integrating an international dimension into university research, teaching and service functions (Knight, 1994). Excellence has also become a 'holy grail', a norm or standard that all higher-education institutions should supposedly strive for. Ramirez and Tiplic

(2014) found a discursive shift in European higher education research publications from a focus on student access to higher education to an emphasis on management, performance and excellence. The pursuit of excellence influences both university governance and the daily practices of researchers (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014).

This study uncovers how global discourses are translated into local contexts, by studying the dynamic interaction between macro-discourses, formal organisational policies and actual practice in staff selection and focus on how selection committee members take the context into account in their application of selection criteria. In line with Pringle and Ryan (2015), and Panayiotou and colleagues (2019), it is argued that studying the interplay between macro-, meso- and micro-levels can demonstrate discrepancies and tensions between the various levels. Insight into these tensions allows for a better understanding of the complex field, in which academic evaluators manoeuvre and how inequalities are produced.

Of relevance to this research are previous studies that theorise how individuals respond to the neoliberalisation of the academy (Anderson, 2008; Field, 2015; Teelken, 2012). These studies reveal a complex picture of individual responses, which show how people are not passive recipients and take a stance when confronted with institutional pressures. This study has distinguished between consent as the active adherence and participation in enforcement of rules (Burawoy, 1979), compliance as the acquiescence to rules and resistance as taking an active stance against the rules (Ashcraft, 2005; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009). This distinction between consent, compliance and resistance informs the analysis of selection committee members' various responses to macro-discourses and university policies.

3.3 Methodology

Research design

The research question requires a case-study approach, as this allows for a detailed study of a particular context (Bryman, 1989), and provides an opportunity for generating theoretical insights, as a result of contrasting findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Case studies help to achieve the research aim to gain a contextual understanding of the effect of macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence on recruitment and selection criteria for tenure-track assistant professorships in two departments of a university in the Netherlands. The assistant professorship tenure-track central in this study typically starts with a temporary appointment, to become a permanent assistant or associate professor appointment upon a positive evaluation after 4/6

years (De Goede, Belder, & De Jonge, 2013). A comparative perspective between research departments within the Natural Sciences (also referred to as STEM) and Social Sciences (also referred to as SSH) disciplines has been chosen, because disciplines vary considerably with regard to the evaluation of knowledge development contributions (Lovitts, 2007), the compositions of students and staff, career patterns and recruitment and selection criteria and practices (Van den Brink, Fruytier, & Thunnissen, 2013).

Data collection

The prevalence of macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence are well-articulated in the literature on the neoliberal university. It will be studied how these discourses are translated to the meso- and micro-level. At the meso-organisational level, both the broader university level and the specifics of a Natural Sciences and a Social Sciences department are considered. University policy documents have been collected, as well as recruitment and staff protocols and job postings of the two departments to study formal selection criteria. These textual data provide an overall picture on how an institution accounts for its activities (Silverman 2011). The university policies included a strategic plan (2015), internationalisation policy (2013) and language policy (2014) of the university. In addition, a recruitment protocol (n.d.) and a tenure-track memorandum (2010) for assistant professorship positions of the Natural Sciences department were collected. For the Social Sciences department, a staff development plan (2013) was included. Finally, 23 job-postings for tenure-track assistant professorships (18 from the Social Sciences and 5 from the Natural Sciences) were analysed, covering all published job-postings for tenure-track assistant professorship positions in the period 2010–2014.

At the micro-individual level, nine semi-structured interviews with selection committee members (hereafter: committee members) were conducted. Also, focus groups with committee members were conducted: one in the Natural Sciences with four respondents, and one in the Social Sciences department with three respondents (see Table 3.1 for more information on the respondents). This study makes use of focus groups, because this enabled respondents to construct criteria in interaction with each other and to discuss, negotiate and question the criteria proposed (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The respondents for both the interviews and the focus groups were selected from those that took part in selection committees for tenure-track assistant professorship positions in the period 2010–2014. Their names were retrieved from appointment reports. During the interviews and focus groups, respondents constructed the criteria that they consider important in the recruitment

and selection of tenure-track assistant professors. They were structured around two themes: selection criteria for assistant professorship positions and department policies regarding recruitment and selection. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, and the focus groups lasted two hours. The interviews and focus groups were recorded with respondents' permission and transcribed verbatim.

Table 3.1 *Interview and focus group respondents per department*

Department	Respondent	Sex	Position
Natural Sciences (STEM)	Interview respondent 1	Male	Associate Professor
	Interview respondent 2	Male	Professor
	Interview respondent 3	Male	Professor
	Interview respondent 4	Male	Professor
	Interview respondent 5	Male	Professor
	Focus group respondent A	Male	Professor
	Focus group respondent B	Male	Professor
	Focus group respondent C	Male	Associate Professor
	Focus group respondent D	Male	Professor
	Social Sciences (SSH)	Interview respondent 1	Female
Interview respondent 2		Female	Professor
Interview respondent 3		Male	Professor
Interview respondent 4		Male	Professor
Focus group respondent A		Female	Professor
Focus group respondent B		Male	Associate Professor
Focus group respondent C		Female	Associate Professor

Data analysis

In the meso-level data (university policy documents, department protocols and job vacancies), the analysis started with searching for textual signposts connected to internationalisation and excellence. This exercise helped selecting relevant excerpts related to the macro-discourses. Then, these excerpts were open-coded to analyse which specific aspects were related to internationalisation and excellence. Then, a second round of coding was carried out, focused on recruitment and selection criteria for assistant professors. This resulted in codes, such as talent, quality, promise, excellence, teaching abilities, number and quality of publications, English language capabilities, Dutch language capabilities, mobility, international recruitment and selection criterion. A comparison of the Natural Sciences department with the Social Sciences department was made in order to find similarities and differences.

Subsequently, it was analysed how the meso-level criteria were constructed at

the micro-level. To analyse both the interview transcripts and focus group transcripts, qualitative content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) was conducted. Codes derived from the analysis of the meso-level criteria were used, but an open stance to other findings on selection criteria related to internationalisation and excellence was ensured. Due to the richness of interview and focus group data, the analysis resulted in very specific additional codes in this step, such as visits abroad, nationality, foreign countries, subjectivity, potential, independence and international network. Then, the criteria found on the meso-level (university and department) were compared with the micro-level (committee members). This comparison between meso- and micro-level was made for both the Natural Sciences department and the Social Sciences department. Next, committee members' accounts of their application of criteria were explored. Their responses were analysed as instances of consent, compliance and resistance to selection criteria stemming from meso-level university and department policies and macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence. The multi-level analysis also enabled us to identify four inequalities in the application of criteria.

3.4 Results

First was explored if and how the prevailing macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence, as articulated in the literature, were adopted at the meso-university level, followed by the meso-departmental level. At the departmental level, a distinction was made between the Natural and Social Sciences. Then, it was explored if and how committee members apply the macro- and meso-level criteria when selecting tenure-track assistant professors. The results illustrate how the translation from the macro- and meso-level to the micro-level creates inequalities for early-career researchers in the selection process.

University policies

In this section, it is shown how the macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence have spilled-over to the meso-university level.

The main objective of [the university's] internationalisation policy is to contribute to enhancing the quality of its core activities: research, education and service. (Internationalisation policy, 2013, p. 1)

Achieving the proposed targets [of the internationalisation policy] will contribute

to enhancing the quality of [the university] and, as a result, its international reputation. (Internationalisation policy, 2013, p. 9)

The most interesting finding in the university policies is the interconnectedness of internationalisation and excellence. In these quotes, taken from the internationalisation policy, can be seen how discourses of internationalisation and quality are intertwined. The quotes suggest a self-reinforcing cycle, in which more internationalisation will enhance quality related to research, education and service, which in turn, will lead to an enhanced international reputation. The policy reveals that the achieved international reputation should, as a result, increase acquisition of research funds and top researchers, which will further enhance the university's reputation, and spiral upward to even more funds and more top researchers, and so on. The policy document of the case-study university presents the relation between internationalisation and quality as self-evident, as it does not explicate how internationalisation results in quality enhancement. Previous studies couple internationalisation to a shortage of academic staff due to the 'massification' of higher education (e.g., Richardson, 2009; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). The only link between internationalisation and excellence found in the literature is from Fabricius and colleagues (2017), who argued that transnational student mobility increases the quality of education. The present analysis of university policies has shown the connection between internationalisation and excellence is taken for granted, and, therefore, there seems to be no reason why the university should refrain from developing internationalisation policies.

The adaptation of the discourse of internationalisation at university level affects academic staff recruitment and selection in three ways. Firstly, the university aims to recruit more international staff to reach a proportion of at least 25% of all scientific staff in 2020 (Strategic plan, 2015). Secondly, the university proposes to "*explicitly include*" "*foreign experience*" as a selection criterion in recruitment of scientific staff (Internationalisation policy, 2013). This implies that staff coming from abroad and staff with foreign experience have better credentials than staff members who lack this experience. In the policy, it is not explained if foreign experience means international work experience or if collaboration with foreign colleagues suffices. Thus, at university level, this criterion remains rather broad, which leaves space for disciplinary and individual interpretations. Thirdly, staff members are expected to master the dominant academic lingua franca English, as it is recommended in the policy for English proficiency to become "*part of the application procedure*" (Language policy, 2014, p. 3), yet, how to do so remains unclear. This is a widespread phenomenon, because also in Nordic higher education, the use of English has been strongly encouraged

(Airey, Lauridsen, Räsänen, Salö, & Schwach, 2017). This might not be surprising considering that English is the language of internationalisation (Fabricius et al., 2017).

When focusing on the discourse of excellence, it is found that it has been adopted in policies at university level, reflected by words, such as “*excellent*”, “*high-quality*”, “*world class*”, “*top*” and “*prestige*”, yet, it did not result in a specific policy with excellence as the main topic. The document analysis shows that excellence and quality are related to research, education, staff and students, research facilities, and support services (e.g. Human Resources, ICT). Excellence, thus, is a multi-purpose adjective, or an empty signifier that can be applied to almost everything (Schinkel, 2017). However, this study finds that the discourse of excellence is only rarely presented in university policies with reference to recruitment and selection of academic staff. Recruiting “*new talent*” is the language used but ‘talent’ remains unspecified and is not translated into selection criteria. This makes excellence a ‘fuzzy’ concept that leaves room for committee members to select candidates based upon their interpretations of the concept.

The findings show that the university incorporates the discourses available in the global academic governmentality regime (Maesse, 2017). This study finds that the university-level criteria related to both internationalisation and excellence are characterised by ‘interpretative viability’: “a certain degree of conceptual ambiguity” (Benders & Van Veen, 2001, p. 37). This is often the case with management discourses, as this leaves room for multiple interpretations, and facilitates organisations to broadly disseminate them (Benders & Van Veen, 2001). Yet, this opens the way for inequality.

Departmental selection criteria

Internationalisation

Within the Natural Sciences department, the discourse of internationalisation shaped formal selection criteria for tenure-track assistant professor positions. A criterion related to foreign experience is formulated as “*some years of postdoc experience, also abroad*” (Recruitment protocol, n.d., p. 3). This is in accordance with the university’s goal to include “*foreign experience*” as a selection criterion, yet, at department level, the criterion is made more specific as it refers to the postdoc period, in which the experience should be acquired. Not all job postings adopt the explicit “*international*” part of this criterion, despite this being documented in the recruitment protocol. As the criterion leaves “*abroad*” unspecified, there still remains room for committee members to decide whether or not applicants’ experience gained abroad is sufficient.

Also in line with university policy, the recruitment protocol and all but one of the job postings in the Natural Sciences department request good proficiency in English. Two job postings state that this is a criterion, because assistant professors are supposed to teach in English. This is similar in Nordic higher education, in which English language instruction has become commonplace (Airey et al., 2017), as Anglophone is considered the norm in higher education and non-Anglophone languages, different or peripheral (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas, & Davies, 2008). However, the recruitment protocol and job postings reveal that applicants are also requested to master the Dutch language, or do so within two years into the tenure-track. Job postings illustrate that this is a requirement, because assistant professors are expected to (also) teach in the Dutch study programme. Thus, the department requires internationalisation of staff; however, all tenure-track staff should invest in learning the local language, even though they have no guarantee that they will get tenured by the institution in the long-run. Being able to speak the academic lingua franca English is apparently not sufficient for tenure-track assistant professors. Here, the analysis illustrates how language policies are adjusted to disciplinary needs, which corroborates the finding of Airey and colleagues (2017), who have shown that the needs of a discipline weigh more heavily than university language policy.

In the Social Sciences department, the discourse of internationalisation is less prominent in job postings for assistant professors. In contrast to the Natural Sciences department, international work experience is not documented as a formal selection criterion. The macro-discourse and university policy have not (yet) trickled down to the formal level of the Social Sciences department. This seems to support Richardson's (2009) findings that the value attached to international mobility differs per discipline. Indeed, she contends that researchers in the Natural Sciences (and Medical Sciences): "were more likely to see academia as an essentially 'international' profession than their counterparts in the arts and humanities" (p. S164). A small number of job postings in the Social Sciences department request a good command of English but do not explain why this is required.

Excellence

The results show that excellence encompasses multiple academic activities and skills. In the Natural Sciences department, excellence is related to communication skills, teaching, and research and reflected by words, such as "*outstanding didactical skills*". In the Social Sciences department, excellence - or quality - is related to research and teaching and described, for example, as "*record of excellence*". Similar to university policies, excellence is used as a multi-purpose adjective here too. In both departments,

the criteria remain unspecified and, thus, the interpretative viability of excellence remains prominent at the meso-departmental level. This is in line with Van Note Chism (2006), who also shows that excellence is undefined in teaching excellence criteria. This leaves room for interpretation for committee members, but also makes it difficult for applicants to decide whether or not they meet the criteria.

Application of selection criteria by committee members

In this section, it is illustrated how the macro-discourses and meso-level criteria cascade to the micro-level of committee members who have been involved in selection procedures for tenure-track assistant professor positions in the two departments. It is shown how they consent, comply with, or resist the criteria shaped by discourses of internationalisation and excellence. Also, it is shown how inequalities are produced in the application of selection criteria. The findings are illustrated with quotes from the interviews and focus groups. The respondent's department (STEM or SSH), interview number, and sex (F for female and M for male) are provided.

Internationalisation

Natural sciences. Most interview respondents in the Natural Sciences department uphold the macro-discourse of internationalisation and its relation to quality. When committee members speak about the criteria they apply in the selection of tenure-track assistant professors, most of them argue international postdoc experience is a decisive criterion for them. The analysis shows that most respondents consent with the formal criteria documented by the university and the department; however, one focus group respondent challenged the criterion.

Respondent A: Indeed, you look at what a person has done before, mainly as a postdoc. A couple of years of postdoc experience. And we have a very international field. [...] So, you also look at international experience. You do not want someone who, let's say, got stuck in one place for the entire period from bachelor, master, PhD and then postdoc. Yes, you just learn more when you work in different places, in our field.

Respondent D: And a foreign country is essential?

Respondent A: Yes. [...]

Respondent D: It is almost not possible to only in the Netherlands?

Respondent A: It is strongly discouraged. I've actually done it [staying in the Netherlands after my PhD] myself. (STEM, focus group)

The quote reveals the main argument expressed by most committee members in support of postdoc experience abroad: “*You just learn more when you work in different places,*” (which refers here to different countries). In the quote, respondent D questions if: “*a foreign country is essential*” in acquiring postdoc experience. Yet, respondent A legitimises the requirement by emphasising the “*international field*”, in which they operate. The interview data confirm that, overall, experience acquired in an institution abroad is considered superior to experience obtained in the home country. Most respondents took the criterion of international postdoc experience for granted, and did not question its relevance, thus consenting with macro- and meso-level criteria.

The analysis shows that the criterion of international postdoc experience demands mobility across country borders, which assumes that candidates are physically, psychologically, socially, and financially able to travel. This requirement can be exclusionary to early-career researchers who face restrictions to their international mobility and, thus, create inequality among candidates. Furthermore, the excerpt from the focus group reveals intergenerational inequality (Özbilgin, 2009) inherent in the selection process for assistant professors, showing that committee members hold applicants to standards that they “would not have met had they been held to them when they were junior scholars” (Özbilgin, 2009, p. 115). This implies that selection criteria have become increasingly demanding for early-career researchers.

Focus group respondents briefly discussed alternative forms of gaining international experience besides a postdoc abroad, such as short-term research visits, conference visits and international project cooperation. However, respondent D argued that the Institute’s director and Faculty Board do not value such alternatives. The respondent illustrated that the organisational culture, nourished by the dean and the director, imposes the criterion of international postdoc experience upon assistant professors. Not meeting this criterion has a derogatory connotation of being “*provincial*” (i.e. narrow-minded), which also implies lower quality. Respondent D expressed that he has difficulty with this connotation, as he thinks someone in his field without international work experience can be a good scientist. In contradiction to his colleagues, and to the findings at meso-level, he decouples internationalisation and quality. However, the respondent argued that committee members anticipate disapproval of the dean when nominating a candidate without international postdoc experience and, therefore, he complies with the departmental selection criterion. This is one of the few examples of compliance.

Further, the data reveal that some committee members restrict what counts as international experience. These committee members argued that international

experience per se is not sufficient: they only favour work experience in certain universities and countries and not others. A focus group respondent argued that not all universities in a foreign country are considered good places to work. Here, the findings show how committee members work with the room for interpretation created by meso-level criteria. The data revealed that committee members value work experience in the USA most because the “*system*”, “*culture*” and “*way of working*” are considered entirely different there. Respondents also mentioned England and Germany as countries to yield valuable work experience. Thus, the practice here is not if internationalisation plays a role in recruitment and selection but what type of internationalisation. This study shows that this results in the exclusion of applicants who obtained postdoc experience in less prestigious institutes or peripheral countries. This creates inequalities among early-career researchers based on committee member’s preference for ‘leading’ institutions. This exclusionary practice only surfaces when the formal criterion that hints at a universal idea of international experience is confronted with the narrow criterion applied by committee members. Also, it shows how internationalisation and excellence are intertwined when excellence is dependent on only a selection of valued countries and universities.

In contrast to formal policies, English and Dutch language proficiency were not mentioned as important criteria in the selection of assistant professors. One interview respondent referred to the criterion of Dutch language proficiency as one of the formal criteria to get tenure. None of the committee members made a reference to English language proficiency, implying this is taken for granted in selection procedures, possibly because committee members assume that all applicants are fluent in English due to the perceived international character of their field.

Social sciences. A number of years as a postdoc in an international setting – as is required within the Natural Sciences department – seems no prerequisite in the Social Sciences department. Most likely, this is due to the fact that in the Natural Sciences, the postdoc position is a necessary step on the academic career ladder, whereas in the Social Sciences, this is more rare (Bessudnov et al., 2015). The analysis reveals that interview respondents considered international experience a non-decisive criterion in the selection of tenure-track assistant professors. For them, international work experience is more an additional benefit than a necessity. Thus, they consent with department policy; however, it shows a discrepancy with university policy that prescribes foreign experience as a selection criterion.

In the focus group, one respondent made the criterion of international experience salient, after which, she negotiated the criterion with another respondent.

Respondent A: What I mean with experience abroad are not so much foreigners. [...] I mean I think it is quite important – and that has to do with the independence that I just mentioned – like having been at another university for a couple of months. That you go and do that, curiosity, that you are willing to take such steps. But also abroad in the sense of conference visits, that you show on your CV or in the interview that you visit conferences, that you present papers, that you are working on a network. And why? Because you just know that it is important for someone's career. This is particularly important at the beginning of a candidate's career. So when candidates show that they are working on this, I think it is a positive criterion.

Respondent C: And it shows that the candidate knows the rules of the game.

Respondent A: Yes. [...]

Respondent C: Do you have fear of flying? If the answer is yes, well, that is a problem. (SSH, focus group)

For respondents A and C, international experience is something that is needed for building an academic career, “particularly” “at the beginning”, which can be gained via different routes: research stays at universities abroad and conference visits, i.e., long- and short-term international experience. They do not fully consent with the selection criteria formulated by the department. During the focus group discussion, international experience became a signifier for “independence”, “curiosity”, and “willingness”. By doing so committee members link international experience to personal qualities. Additionally, they argue that going abroad demonstrates devotion and suitability. Respondent C briefly touches upon a problematic aspect of this criterion: “fear of flying”. She describes this as a legitimate explanation to not operate internationally, but at the same time she presents it as “a problem” if this would arise during a selection process. Later in the conversation, the focus group respondents argued that conference visits require financial means, so that a lack of finances can hamper the opportunity to gain international experience. Respondent C illustrated that even though they consider international experience “particularly important” a lack of such experience is not a reason to reject an applicant given that the “rest of the CV looks good”. Reinforcing the importance of this criterion, the respondent stated that an applicant who does not meet this criterion has “something to compensate for”. Similar to the findings in the Natural Sciences department, by applying the requirement of international work experience, committee members exclude candidates who face physical, psychological, social, or financial restrictions to their international mobility. The results show that structural hindrances to mobility are hardly recognised by committee members and if they do acknowledge them, the

responsibility to deal with these hindrances is placed with the candidate.

In contrast to university policies, interview and focus group respondents revealed some reservations towards hiring foreign applicants, showing resistance towards university policy. The main reservations regarded English and Dutch language proficiency. Focus group respondents questioned the fit of foreign applicants in the department and doubted if the level of English in application letters corresponds with applicants' spoken English. The data show that they make assumptions about candidates' level of English, which can put candidates of certain nationalities at more of a disadvantage than others, leading to potential inequality regarding nationality.

An interview respondent addressed an issue encountered with a foreign applicant regarding her command of Dutch:

Moreover, this was someone from abroad who was teaching in Dutch and that is something that students cannot always deal with. Having an accent and the fact that you lose some finesse in another language than your mother tongue, to students is a sign that it is not good. (SSH, 1, F)

This committee member explains that Dutch-speaking foreign candidates can have a disadvantage, because Dutch students tend to evaluate them less favourably than native Dutch speakers. In the case illustrated by the respondent, these low evaluations hampered the candidate's job application. In practice, teaching in the local language (Dutch) is constructed as problematic for both foreign assistant professors and (local) students. The dimension of spoken language is not recognised by Van Note Chism (2006) as a factor leading to teaching excellence, yet this study shows that committee members take this into account when making selection decisions. The data have revealed that despite the university's aim to increase the percentage of foreign staff, committee members perceive risks in hiring foreign applicants. This illustrates how foreign applicants can be excluded from the selection process, an inequality that surfaces at the micro-level. Unlike the findings at the meso-university level, the results at the micro-level show that internationalisation and excellence are not necessarily always intertwined.

Excellence

Natural sciences. The committee members in the Natural Sciences department did not refer to excellence, as the university and department policies do, but they used the rhetoric of quality. This study finds that research quality is considered the most decisive criterion in the selection of assistant professors. However, when respondents

were asked to explain how quality is measured, the data show that this is a complex endeavour:

Respondent: That [quality] is hard to objectify, because you cannot put it in numbers. [...] It is subjective; it also has to do with interest. I consider one topic more interesting than the other. Some people conduct a specific research, because they think it is interesting, but I might not share their interests. Thus, I would put this candidate lower [in ranking] than someone whose research I find exciting.

Interviewer: [...] How do you measure the quality of publications?

Respondent: [...] Actually, you just have to read those publications, of course. As nobody has time to do so, this happens too rarely. (STEM, 4, M)

The respondent argues that his personal interest in and excitement about research topics play a role in evaluations. Additionally, he explains that in order to judge the quality of applicants' publications, one should read them but this "happens too rarely" because "nobody has time to do so". The subjective and hasty evaluation of quality makes it an ambiguous undertaking, which creates room for personal preference and bias. This honest reflection on the subjectivity of evaluation runs contrary to the opinion of most grant reviewers in the study of Porter (2005), who rate the review panel's objectivity as very high.

Even though committee members want to select on scientific quality, they argue that this is particularly difficult for assistant professorships, as applicants for such positions are still early in their career. A respondent argued that because of the junior level of applicants, committee members cannot judge the quality of publications on its impact. Therefore, he explained to look for other signifiers of quality, such as "the length of publications", "celebrity" co-authors, the esteem of journals, but also what publications are still to come ("pre-prints" and papers "in the pipeline") (STEM, 3, M). Thus, the 'publishability' or publishable quality of the work is assessed (Clarke & Lunt, 2014). Hence, the university's and department's strive for excellence becomes difficult to apply as a selection criterion, particularly for early-career researchers, who have limited evidence to prove their scientific excellence. This implies that the measurement of excellence is particularly suited for more senior academics, yet, the respondents do adopt the excellence discourse in their rhetoric regarding early-career researchers.

Even though selecting for research quality seems to be taken for granted by the majority of committee members, this study also found resistance towards the discourse of excellence:

Well, I think, what drives me crazy is indeed the obsession with excellence. And for everybody; we all have to be excellent. Well, that is by definition impossible. Excellent means that you are far above average. So I am a little careful with using that word. (STEM, 5, M)

This committee member makes a reference to the general “*obsession with excellence*” in academia, revealing that the discourse has found its way into the system. Yet, the quote shows the difficulty inherent to the discourse of excellence: it is “*by definition impossible*” for everybody to be excellent, which implies that the ambitions of the university and the department are infeasible.

Social sciences. Committee members in the Social Sciences department argued too that research quality is the most important selection criterion for assistant professorships. In line with respondents in the Natural Sciences department, they explained that selection criteria for assistant professor positions in the Social Sciences are pliant, because applicants for these positions are still junior.

Usually, an assistant professor is a very young person; someone who has just obtained a PhD, or not yet obtained a PhD. In this scenario, of course, you cannot expect very much. They just have a few publications and a little teaching experience. Well, of course they do not yet have administrative experience. Those are, of course, the three tasks. So, you're looking for someone you think is suitable to fulfil these three tasks, but, you cannot demand too much. (SSH, 2, F)

The quote shows that the experience and publications of applicants tend to be limited and, therefore, the committee member assesses the likelihood that a candidate can fulfil the required tasks in the future. This assessment of potential can be problematic, as potential in itself is a subjective criterion and its assessment is based on only limited past performance. This can create inequality, as potential is susceptible to bias and stereotypes. For instance, Van den Brink and colleagues (2016) have shown that men's potential is systematically evaluated higher than women's potential.

Despite the omnipresence of the discourse of excellence at university and department level, some respondents argue that recruiting excellent assistant professors is hardly feasible. Therefore, they do not consent with macro- and meso-level criteria. One committee member stated that it is difficult to attract excellent candidates, because they have multiple offers from various institutions. Therefore, he argues, you have to win the “*competition*” from “*other universities*” in order to get the

excellent candidate (SSH, 4, M). Another respondent argued that it is hard to attract excellent candidates because the department is not “(inter)nationally renowned” and, therefore, not appealing to excellent scholars (SSH, 2, F). She explained that excellent researchers opt for better-known universities in the field or wait for an offer. She confirmed the pressure of the university board on academic staff to strive for excellence and revealed the difficulties of this. Another committee member does not take selecting for excellence for granted either:

Personally, my strategy is that if I can choose between an A-candidate and a B-candidate: –very excellent or good – and I know that with the good candidate, I would hire an outstanding team player, but the excellent candidate may be less adept at team work, I would pick the good candidate over the excellent one. The full team are required to be present for work every morning at nine, and have to work hard all day. I do not want to have to deal with team or individual staff issues the entire day. [...] Striving for excellence, also triggers certain processes, you know. The others, who are not excellent, might feel unappreciated. (SSH, 3, M)

This quote illustrates that the implicit norm of excellence does not encompass being a team player. Here, the committee member reproduces the dominant discourse of excellence, i.e. excellence equals individual research achievements. This makes excellence a narrow conception. Furthermore, the respondent explains how the presence of an excellent person in the team can create feelings of disadvantage among other staff and, therefore, endanger the ethos in the group. Thus, he resists the macro- and meso-level preoccupation with excellence. Here, a tension is found between what the university and department want and what an academic manager says they need for successful daily operation of their group.

3.5 Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed at providing a better understanding of how academic selection criteria for early-career researchers are constructed at the meso- and micro-level in the context of macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence. Hitherto, early-career researchers were an understudied group in evaluation studies. This study shows how they need to be evaluated on their potential, rather than on track records of performance available for the assessment of senior researchers. This multi-level study contributes to the literature on academic staff evaluation (Lamont, 2009; Musselin,

2010; Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012) by showing that committee members do not operate in a vacuum and that their actions are inseparably linked to the meso- and macro-context. The present study uncovered the dynamic interaction between macro-discourses, formal organisational policies and the actual practice of committee members in staff evaluation. Furthermore, because of the multi-level analysis, this study could show the complexities and tensions inherent in the selection of early-career researchers and the inequalities that arise in the application of criteria.

Three theoretical lessons can be drawn from the multi-level analysis contributing to the literature on academic staff evaluation. The first contribution is the identification of four inequalities that emerge in the application of criteria, where broad discourses materialise in specific criteria. The first inequality is related to (non-) valued international experience. The criterion of international work experience at university level is translated in the Natural Sciences department into obtaining one or multiple postdoc positions abroad. The formal criterion implies that international experience in general is required, but some committee members narrowed this criterion by constructing only a small selection of countries and institutions as relevant and valuable international experience. The findings corroborate Altbach (2004), who found that mainly major international English-speaking research-oriented universities in the North are valued. This excludes candidates who acquired postdoc experience in countries or institutions that are non-valued, without standing a chance of being assessed on their quality as researchers and teachers.

The second inequality concerns language (dis)advantage, resulting from the tension between university's internationalisation policies and the application of those policies by committee members. The results show that mastering the academic lingua franca English is a formal criterion in policies, which is taken for granted by committee members. This study found that committee members in the Social Sciences department make inferences about applicants' level of English, which can put applicants of certain nationalities at more of a disadvantage than others (Tietze & Dick, 2009). In addition, applicants' level of Dutch is also at stake, as foreign assistant professors have to invest in learning Dutch, because of their duties in the teaching programme. This is in accordance with Nordic higher education, in which language policy prescribes adoption of "parallel language use": the parallel use of several languages in the work of university staff (Airey et al., 2017, p. 568). Yet, it requires tenure-track assistant professors to strongly invest in learning the local language without the guarantee that they will get tenure. On the long-run, this creates an extensive period of precarity for early-career researchers. During recruitment and selection procedures, the language requirements can result in the exclusion of foreign applicants

from the process, as some committee members perceive risks in hiring foreign applicants, anticipating communication problems and bad teaching evaluations.

Thirdly, this study finds inequalities regarding mobility opportunities that derive from a tension between the selection criterion of international work experience and a person's opportunity to acquire such experience. Policies and most committee members, particularly in the Natural Sciences department, portray international mobility as necessary for an academic career. The requirement of international work experience demands mobility across country borders of early-career researchers (Richardson, 2009), which assumes that researchers are able to travel. This means that the requirement of international work experience can be exclusionary to early-career researchers who face restrictions to their international mobility, for example due to physical, psychological, social, or financial reasons (Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Sang, 2017).

The fourth inequality concerns unworkable excellence, stemming from a tension between the university's strive for excellence and committee members' infeasibility of assessing excellence. Some committee members do not believe it is either possible or desirable to hire (just) excellent staff members. This study shows that the criterion of excellence becomes problematic in application, as excellence is subjective, as well as difficult to evaluate for young scholars, since committee members can only assess their potential instead of proven qualities. Not only is excellence a socially constructed criterion that disadvantages women and privileges men researchers (O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b), in the evaluation of potential, women are attributed lower potential than men (Van den Brink et al., 2016). Therefore, the application of excellence criteria can create inequalities related to gender and possibly other social categories too.

The second contribution of this chapter concerns disciplinary differences. The analysis has revealed the extent to which department policies and committee members are affected by macro-discourses. This study finds that in the Natural Sciences department, formal selection criteria regarding internationalisation are most aligned with university-level policies, and committee members here consent explicitly to formal selection criteria reinforcing the discourse of internationalisation. In the Social Sciences department, the macro-discourse of internationalisation and the university's internationalisation policy have not (yet) shaped formal selection criteria. Following Richardson (2009), the amount of international experience that is required depends on the discipline, with more experience expected in the Natural Sciences than the Social Sciences. The results show that most committee members in the Social Sciences tend to consent with departmental selection criteria and,

therefore, do not apply international experience as a decisive criterion. This is in line with Clarke and Lunt (2014), who found that university-level assessment criteria for the evaluation of PhD research give guidance to examiners, but the discipline-specific context plays an important role in formulating criteria. When it comes to excellence, however, no disciplinary differences were found, as both the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences department have adopted the discourse of excellence in their policies. This might confirm the pervasiveness of the macro-discourse of excellence, yet, interestingly, this is the criterion in which most resistance was found by committee members in both departments.

The third and final contribution is the discovery of three different ways that committee members at the micro-level relate to articulations of the discourses of internationalisation and excellence. The majority of committee members in both departments consent to university policies and macro-discourses. They appropriate formal criteria, actively reproduce them as self-evident and sometimes even raise the bar. This is what Teelken (2012) refers to as formal instrumentality: “the reliance on formal arrangements” “without a critical perspective” (p. 278). However, it could be that the respondents have taken ownership of the macro-discourses and frame them as their personal preference rather than imposed on them by the organisation (Ashcraft 2005). Some committee members do problematize criteria but still comply with them, because they feel pressured by the organisation to do so. The type of compliance found is different from the symbolic compliance that Teelken (2012) found in her study, as respondents in this study did not seem to symbolically or cosmetically comply but actually adhere to imposed organisational criteria. However, compliance can also be a way to resist resistance (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009) or contain elements of resistance (Ashcraft, 2005). A few committee members in both departments openly resist applying the criteria and do not take them for granted, recognising the disadvantages and narrowness of criteria of internationalisation and excellence. Committee members specifically resisted the university requirement of hiring excellent staff, as they argue that it is either unfeasible or undesirable. Overall, this study finds that macro-discourses and university policies shape how a majority of committee members evaluate early-career researchers, but a smaller group questions and resists these criteria.

This chapter concludes that discourses of internationalisation and excellence that dominate the current neoliberal university create increasingly demanding criteria for tenure-track assistant professors. With only a few committee members critically questioning and resisting these criteria, their application by committee members may exclude talented early-career researchers. They limit the pool of ‘acceptable’ candidates

to those who fit the narrow definition of the international mobile and excellent early-career researcher. As a final thought, this study has important practical implications for those who strive to change academic evaluation and reduce the inequalities in the application of criteria. Their interventions should not only target members of selection committees to change their evaluation practices, but take into account how these practices at the micro-level are shaped by macro-discourses and organisational policies.



Chapter 4

The peril of potential: Gender practices in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers

This chapter is based on Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & van den Brink, M. (2018). The Peril of Potential: Gender Practices in the Recruitment and Selection of Early-Career Researchers. In A. Murgia & B. Poggio (Eds.), *The Precarisation of Research Careers: a Comparative Gender Analysis*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315201245-5>

Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented in 2016 at the Gender Equality in Higher Education conference (Paris, France) and in 2017 at the Academy of Management conference (Atlanta, United States of America).

In the competition for a scarce number of (precarious) academic positions, recruitment and selection practices determine who get access to such positions. This chapter adds to the literature on gender in academic organizations by showing which gender practices characterize the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers where judgements are based on potential. The findings are based on a critical comparative analysis of empirical material on recruitment and selection procedures and criteria collected in SSH and STEM departments in six European higher education institutions. We uncover gender practices in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers throughout the six countries by showing how gatekeepers discursively construct recruitment and selection criteria. We illustrate how two general gender practices of welcoming women and assessing potential for excellence are conflated with multiple specific gender practices in the evaluation of early-career researchers. We argue that most of the gender practices add to the precariousness of women early-career researchers. Finally, we identify three discrepancies in the various criteria and their application.

4.1 Introduction

Despite efforts to reduce gender inequality in European academia, figures show that the number of women researchers is still disproportionately lower at every step of the academic career ladder than the number of men researchers (EU, 2016). Previous research on gender in academia has demonstrated that various practices in academia are causing this gender inequality, such as the masculine organisation of academia (Teelken & Deem, 2013), academic networking (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), a lack of role models and informal support systems for women (Bagilhole & Goode, 2001), the substantial allocation of academic housework to women (Heijstra, Steinthorsdóttir, & Einarsdóttir, 2017), and the way academic excellence is constructed (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b).

The studies that analysed how the perpetuation of gender disparities is imbued in the rhetoric of meritocracy have shown the crucial role played by recruitment and selection practices at full professor level (Van den Brink, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b; Van den Brink, Benschop, & Jansen, 2010). However, gender practices in the recruitment and selection have hitherto not been studied for the early stages of the academic career. We argue that it is important to fill this void as the specific characteristics of the early academic career stage, such as the growing number of precarious positions (Wöhrer, 2014) and the more equal gender balance among junior staff (EU, 2016), point at the relevance of examining gender practices

in this phase. The recruitment and selection processes for assistant professors need more scrutiny as these early-career researchers find themselves in strong competition for relatively scarce positions (Nikunen, 2014). Yet, we do not know how gender plays a role in who win or lose in this competition, but we do see that the numbers of women drop at the level of assistant professor (EU, 2016). Therefore, a critical analysis of the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers is needed in order to understand how gender inequalities are constructed.

In this chapter, we apply a practice approach, which enables us to study gender as a social and relational construction (Poggio, 2006). We will examine the gendering process of evaluating assistant professor candidates, an endeavour mainly carried out by the academic elite. We draw on unique information from a qualitative study on gatekeepers across six European countries and reveal how gender practices emerge in the construction of selection criteria when gatekeepers discuss their recruitment and selection practices.

The aim of this study is to contribute to theory on gender in academic organisations by showing which gender practices characterize the evaluation of candidates' potential for assistant professor positions with a prospect of a more permanent contract. We draw on empirical material of recruitment and selection procedures and criteria, such as job descriptions, HR documents, interviews and focus groups with selection committee members both in social sciences and humanities (SSH) departments and in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) departments of six European higher education institutions. A critical comparative analysis of the data resulted in the identification of two general gender practices in the recruitment and selection of assistant professors: welcoming women and assessing potential for excellence. Additionally, we find that the two general gender practices are composed of six specific gender practices. Our analysis shows that for early-career researchers, judgements are based on potential instead of long track records of academic performance. We provide insight into the way the 'ideal assistant professor' is constructed, and how gender inequalities are ingrained in criteria like excellence, international mobility, and academic citizenship.

4.2 Precarious academic positions

Today's academic labour market is characterized by precariousness in employment, referring to high employment insecurity and possibly low wages (Campbell & Price, 2016). Spurred by financial incentives, many European countries produce more

PhDs than the academic labour market can accommodate (Cyranoski, Gilbert, Ledford, Nayar, & Yahia, 2011) as numbers of academic positions stagnate or decline (Fiske, 2011). As a result, permanent positions, job security and career prospects are increasingly rare in the neoliberal academy, and early-career researchers are faced with strong competition for scarce jobs (Morgan & Wood, 2017; Nikunen, 2014). An increase in temporary contracts throughout European universities is found (Wöhler, 2014), for example fixed term contracts and hourly paid contracts (Bryson, 2004). The focus of this chapter is on non-tenured assistant professor positions.

The temporality of fixed term assistant professorships (sometimes on a tenure-track) generally involves the principle of ‘up or out’, which substantially prolongs the probationary period post-PhD and constitutes the risk of a negative evaluation (Schiewer & Jehle, 2014). Furthermore, such precarious academic positions are intended to form “a bridge to more secure employment, but universities across the world are growing the casual workforce to the point where the prospects of a stable academic career are becoming more and more remote” (Morgan & Wood, 2017, p. 86). The potential impact of precarious work can differ across individuals and societies (Campbell & Price, 2016), but also across academic systems (Le Feuvre, 2018), for example in terms of a degeneration of career structures (Bryson, 2004), lack of access to employment conditions and opportunities (Harney et al., 2014), and a declining desirability of academic positions (Huisman, De Weert, & Bartelse, 2002). Precariousness in academia also shows a gendered division, with more women employed on fixed term contracts than men and a higher likelihood of women to remain on such contracts (Bryson 2004). Yet, Bryson (2004) found that for both women and men it is difficult to make “the transition from researcher on [a fixed term contract] to a more secure post” (p. 198). In this chapter, we uncover which gender practices play a part in evaluating candidates’ potential for precarious positions with a prospect of a more permanent contract.

4.3 Recruitment, selection, and gender practices

Recruitment and selection practices determine who get access to assistant professor positions. Recruitment is the process concerned with attracting suitable candidates (Newell, 2005) and selection is the process of choosing one candidate out of the pool of candidates based on (predefined) criteria (Van den Brink, 2010) and based on the ‘fit’ between the individual and the job. Members of the dominant academic elite play a critical part in both the recruitment and selection of candidates. Previous studies

on gender and academic recruitment have shown the importance of examining what gender practices are at play ‘at the gate’, where researchers are allowed or denied entrance (Van den Brink, 2010; Van den Brink et al., 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012b; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014; Nielsen, 2016; O’Connor & O’Hagan, 2015). However, as most studies concern higher positions in the academic hierarchy, we know little about the gender practices that affect the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers, such as non-tenured assistant professors.

Studying gatekeeping at the early stages of the academic career is particularly interesting because in this phase is decided who are included or excluded from (precarious) positions with a prospect of a more permanent contract, and eventually a career in academia. A few studies note that the assessment of potential plays a role in the evaluation of researchers (Van Arensbergen et al., 2014a; O’Connor & O’Hagan, 2015), particularly for early-career researchers (Bazeley, 2003) who have recently entered the academic labour market. To identify “those who are researchers of promise” is primarily a subjective endeavour (Bazeley, 2003, p. 271). Subjectivity tends to come with gender practices and therefore the recruitment and selection of assistant professors need further scrutiny. Studies in social psychology that focus on cognitive bias in the evaluation of men and women have shown, for example, that male students are evaluated as more competent for a position (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012) and that men are favoured in hiring decisions (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001). What these studies do not show is how these biases become manifest in the construction of recruitment and selection criteria and the assessment of a candidate’s potential to meet those criteria. Therefore, we will study how committee members practice gender when constructing recruitment and selection criteria for assistant professorships, where the potential of early-career researchers is evaluated.

Our point of departure is the conviction that “workplaces are infused with gender” (Martin, 2003, p. 343). We use the notion of gender practices to grasp the practices that happen in action and on many organisational levels (Martin, 2003). We define gender practices as “the intentional or unintentional and often un-reflexive way of distinguishing between women and men, femininity and masculinity” in daily work situations (Van den Brink, 2010, p. 24). Central to the practice approach is the notion that “social life is an on-going production and thus emerges through people’s recurrent actions” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1240). In line with Dick and Nadin (2006), we argue that selection criteria and their meaning are socially constructed in ways that mirror the interests of a particular group, which can produce inequalities for other groups, notably women. Therefore, selection criteria are not neutral, but

defined and interpreted in a certain context (Dick & Nadin, 2006). The framework of gender practices will help to uncover gatekeepers' gendered constructions of selection criteria in the recruitment and selection practices for non-tenured assistant professor positions.

4.4 Methods

Data

The research for this chapter is based on a qualitative study conducted in six higher education institutions involved in the GARCIA project. The national research reports written by the six research teams that comprise the primary data we used for our analysis are part of a larger data set collected during the course of the GARCIA project. Each research team wrote a research report that centred on formal and applied criteria in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers for academic positions (Herschberg et al., 2015) and a report that centred on gender practices in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers (Herschberg et al., 2016). Our analysis is mostly based on the research reports that focus on gender practices in recruitment and selection. In addition, every research team made summaries in English of all interviews and focus groups they had conducted. These summaries were written to provide the authors with primary data to strengthen the analysis.

The national research reports are based on various data sources. All data – that are comparable across institutions in the six countries – have been collected in one SSH and one STEM department per institution. Previous studies have shown how SSH and STEM subfields vary considerably with regard to the gender compositions of students and staff, career patterns, recruitment and selection practices (Van den Brink, 2010) as well as gender practices (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a). The data consisted of documents such as university policy documents, HR documents, job postings, and appointment reports, published in the period 2010 – 2014. All six research teams collected these documents, dependent on the availability in their institution. Furthermore, in 2014 every research team conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with selection committee members (hereafter: committee members). The interview and focus group participants were selected because they had taken part in a hiring committee that was involved in the recruitment and selection of at least one temporary (tenure-track) assistant professor in the period 2010 – 2014. To ensure comparability, every team used the same interview guide for the interviews. Interviews were based on three themes: selection criteria for assistant

professor positions, a selection process in which the research participants had taken part, and department policies regarding recruitment and selection of early-career researchers. Interviews were conducted with 47 men and women committee members and five focus groups with 35 men and women committee members. In total 55 men and 27 women participated in this study. The majority of our research participants (two thirds) are men. This reflects the number of men on selection committees in the countries of this study. We find in our data that decision-making power regarding the appointment of assistant professors mainly lies in the hands of men researchers. The majority of committee members as well as the committee members in powerful positions (e.g., the chair of the committee) are men. Even though the skewed division of men and women among our research participants reflects the current situation in selection committees for assistant professor positions, it could have influenced our findings. See Table 4.1 for more information on the research participants.

Table 4.1 *Number of men and women interview and focus group participants per country and department*

	SSH interviews		STEM interviews		SSH focus group		STEM focus group		Combined STEM-SSH focus group	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Iceland (IS)	4	1	1	3	3	2	2	1	-	-
Slovenia (SO)	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	-	-
Belgium (BE)	3	2	3	0	-	-	-	-	2	3
Switzerland (CH)	3	1	2	1	4	2	-	-	-	-
Italy (IT)	4	1	2	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
The Netherlands (NL)	2	2	5	0	2	1	4	0	-	-
Total	18	9	15	5	11	7	9	3	2	3

The interviews and focus groups were recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Thus, our data are primarily textual accounts that allow us to capture detailed accounts of recruitment and selection practices. It is in these accounts that we found multiple gender practices. Ideally, we would have gathered observational data as well, to be able to capture the practices in the doing. Unfortunately, we were denied access to actual recruitment and selection processes in all but one country because of privacy and confidentiality concerns.

Data analysis

The research reports of the GARCIA teams were centred on recruitment and selection of early-career researchers including both postdocs and assistant professors. For this chapter we focused on the sections of the research report that involved the research findings on assistant professor positions. We applied thematic coding as a method for analysing our data (Flick, 2009). We first read the research reports on gender in recruitment and selection and open coded the texts. We produced short descriptions of each ‘case’ (national report) according to the themes in the reports (Flick, 2009): ‘context’, ‘power in the recruitment and selection of assistant professors in the STEM department’, ‘power in the recruitment and selection of assistant professors in the SSH department’, ‘gender in the recruitment and selection of assistant professors in the STEM department’, and ‘gender in the recruitment and selection of assistant professors in the SSH department’. This way, the central topics documented in the reports were summarized. Next, we compared the different ‘cases’, which revealed many similar recruitment and selection practices and gender practices (e.g., international mobility, gender stereotypes). We then deepened our analysis by applying selective coding through rereading all reports and looking for “further examples and evidence for relevant categories” (Flick, 2009, p. 312) regarding gender practices. At all times the cases (national reports) were compared. This resulted in a thematic structure of the gender practices found in the research reports. After multiple deliberations between the authors we ended up with two general gender practices, composed of six specific gender practices (see Table 4.2 for an overview). Selected passages of the research reports as well as interview quotes were analysed in greater detail. Repeatedly, we went back to the original research reports as well as the interview and focus group summaries to get additional information needed for our analysis. Our findings are illustrated with quotes from the interviews. The participant’s country (See Table 4.1 for country abbreviations), department (SSH or STEM) and sex (F for female and M for male) are provided. Quotes were translated into English by the respective research teams.

In the remaining part of the chapter we will use country names instead of the names of the participating institutions to facilitate reading. For example, when we refer to Switzerland, we refer to the participating institution in Switzerland. Also, we will use the terminology “SSH department” and “STEM department” when corresponding to the various departments in the six higher education institutions. See Table 4.1 for more information on the participating countries and the country abbreviations.

Table 4.2 *Overview of general gender practices and specific gender practices*

General gender practices	Specific gender practices
Welcoming women	Women contribute to the working environment
Assessing potential for excellence	Role models
	Confidence
	Commitment
	International mobility
	Academic citizenship

Research context

Even though the proportion of women academics in assistant professor positions is more than double the proportion of women on full professorships in the EU-28 countries, we already see a decrease in the proportion of women academic staff from postgraduate / post-PhD positions to assistant professor positions (EU, 2016). This decrease is also visible in the countries included in this study (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 *Proportion of women academic staff by grade, 2013 (source: EU, 2016)*

Country	Grade D	Grade C
Iceland (IS)	-	51.2
Slovenia (SO)	52.6	45.5
Belgium (BE)	48.3	35.8
Switzerland (CH)	41.5	38.5
Italy (IT)	50.3	45.4
The Netherlands (NL)	45.6	37.8

Note. Grade C represents assistant professors; Grade D represents either postgraduate students not yet holding a PhD degree who are engaged as researchers (on the payroll) or researchers working in posts that require a PhD.

A general tendency of Western governments has been to decrease the amount of public money spent on public services (De Boer et al., 2007) and the direct investments in higher education. All universities in our study have been confronted with decreasing budgets, except for the Swiss university. In Slovenia, budget cuts have been so severe that professors have to fund part of their own position by acquiring external funding. In all universities in our study there is an increasing pressure on academic staff to obtain external research funding. Particularly for postdocs this

funding is needed to sustain their employment, often leading to an accumulation of multiple precarious contracts. At the same time, successfully obtaining external funding is increasingly becoming a selection criterion for academics, also at the early career stages. In Switzerland and in the Dutch STEM department, having obtained a grant is a selection criterion for tenure-track assistant professors positions. This not only signals a difference in selection criteria between the various countries but also a difference regarding academic maturity of candidates for assistant professorships. In Switzerland, Italy and the Dutch STEM department, candidates for assistant professor positions are expected to have obtained years of (postdoc) experience before going into a track that gives prospects for a more permanent position. This is in contrast to other countries and departments where early-career researchers can apply for an assistant professorship right after their PhD or after fewer years of postdoc employment.

Decreasing university budgets also have an effect on the availability of tenure-track positions. Particularly in Italy and Slovenia the number of available positions that may become permanent in the long run is extremely low. Yet, in all countries we find increasing numbers of PhD and postdoc positions but stagnating or declining numbers of assistant professor positions. As a result, the competition for assistant professorships is high and the pressure on appointed candidates to succeed tremendous.

Recruitment and selection procedures

We briefly describe the committee composition and recruitment and selection procedures in the institutions that are part in this study to provide some context.

In Belgium, the recruitment and selection of assistant professors follows university policy that comprises a four-stage process. The first stage involves advertising the job description. Then, all the applications are collected and sent to the selection committee appointed by the Executive Board. The second stage involves the selection. Each committee member makes a short-list with applicant(s) they would like to interview, followed by the actual interviews. Then, the first ranked candidate is nominated for the position. In the third stage the Executive Board confirms the selection. The fourth and final stage is when the Board of Governors and then the Board of Trustees confirm the appointment.

In Iceland the selection procedure for assistant professor positions takes place in three stages, as determined by university policy. First, the position is publicly advertised and the applications are collected. Second, an evaluation committee evaluates if candidates fulfil the minimum requirements for the position. This

committee consists of three members, two members appointed by the university council and one specialist appointed by the faculty. The evaluation committee evaluates candidates after which the applications of qualified candidates are sent to the selection committee. Third, the selection committee makes the final decision on who is going to be suggested for the position. The selection committee consists of five members: the head of the faculty who is also the chair of the committee, one standing member appointed by the faculty, two specialists appointed by the faculty, and one Rector's representative. The role of the Rector's representative is to make sure that rules and regulations (also the Gender equality law) are followed.

In Italy, the selection procedure for assistant professors is formalized. It initially involves a public announcement, followed by the appointment of a committee composed of three full or associate professors: one selected by the university, one by the department concerned, and one by the university recruitment committee. At least one member must be from another university. The STEM and SSH department differ in their recruitment approach in the sense that external networks (national and international) are more important in the STEM department, whereas the SSH department relies more on internal networks and membership of specific groups. Several evaluation phases follow after recruitment: a pre-selection consisting of a comparative evaluation of qualifications, curricula vitae (CVs), and three reference letters; the advice of three external referees appointed by the university recruitment committee; the consequent admission to the next phase where at least six candidates are interviewed. At the end of the interview phase the committee makes a ranking. Then, the department council deliberates on the candidate who will be nominated for the post. The council takes account of the committee's evaluation, although this is not binding.

In the Netherlands, the selection process for an assistant professor starts when a position becomes vacant. A job description is created based on the tasks the assistant professor has to conduct. When composing the selection committee, the main tasks the assistant professor will have to fulfil are taken into account. For example, the coordinator of bachelor programme will take part in the committee when the assistant professor has to do a lot of teaching in the bachelor programme. Also, policy prescribed that the committee should have a least one woman member with a position comparable to the vacant position. After the committee has been installed, the job description is advertised on academic job websites and distributed via mailing lists. When all letters of application have come in, the committee makes a short list of candidates to interview, either via e-mail or during a face-to-face meeting. Based on interviews with short listed candidates, committee members evaluate the

candidates and decide on the preferred candidate. Next, they write an appointment report, which is an advice to the faculty board. Then, the faculty board decides on the final appointment.

In the Slovenian SSH department, the Scientific Council of the Institute serves as the selection committee for research fellows (equivalent of assistant professor). These positions fall under the promotion system in which candidates who meet the official criteria are promoted, but candidates who do not meet the criteria are rejected. In the Slovenian STEM department the procedure for recruiting and selecting assistant professors is slightly different. After candidates have submitted their applications, the secretary of the human resources office and the secretary of the department review the candidates' CVs. The candidates who do not meet the official criteria are rejected, while others are invited to an interview with the committee members. The selection committee should consist of three members, one of which from an institution outside the university. Usually the members from the faculty are the associate dean or/and the head of the departmental chair and a retired professor.

In Switzerland, it is obligatory to publish assistant professor jobs on the university website. University policy insists on formal recruitment procedures. Selection criteria are explicitly left up to the employing faculty / department to determine, according to their teaching and/or research needs. For the assistant professor position the committee is composed of up to six persons (with one or two external members). During the procedure, an "equality delegate" is present to observe the selection process, with the aim of sustaining equality. The committee members interview the short-listed candidates and make a ranking of candidates. The Faculty Councils are free to follow the recommendations of the selection committee or to propose a new ranking of the short-listed candidates. In turn, the Rectors' Office is entitled to follow the vote of the Faculty Council, or not.

We recognize the differences in career systems and recruitment and selection practices in the countries we study. Yet, when it comes to the gender practices, we found remarkable similarities across the various institutions and contexts that will be discussed in the next section.

4.5 Findings

In this section, we present the gender practices in the evaluation of men and women candidates that we identified throughout the STEM and SSH departments in six European higher education institutions on the basis of the interviews and focus

groups conducted with committee members. Two general gender practices stand out in our data: welcoming women and assessing potential for excellence. We will show how these two gender practices are conflated with multiple specific gender practices.

Welcoming women

The first general gender practice we derived from the data is discursively welcoming women in assistant professor positions. Most research participants throughout the various countries and disciplines expressed that they are in favour of a more equal representation of men and women in the department, which in most departments entails advocating an increase in women researchers. We identified two specific gender practices pertaining to the discourse of welcoming women that all relate to the aim for a gender balance among academic staff.

One key argument for welcoming women given by committee members is numerical: the number of women staff members lags behind the number of men and this breaches the ideal of gender balance. In all countries, except for Slovenia, recruitment and selection policies prescribe that in case of equal qualification of two candidates, women are preferred over men candidates for positions in which women are underrepresented. Research participants gave two reasons for why they would like to have a gender balance in their department, which both contain specific gender practices. The first reason is because an increase in women staff is expected to positively influence the working environment.

If there are two candidates that are pretty similar, and it is not clear from the selection committee point of view who is better, then we have to take [gender] into account. If there are more men in the faculty, it strengthens it if there are more women [hired]. (IS, SSH, M)

This respondent refers to the recruitment and selection policy in Iceland. However, he states that the assessment of quality comes first and only then “*we have to take gender into account*”. This practice is known in the literature as the “tie-break” selection (Noon, 2012) where the “under-representation of people with certain demographic characteristics” (such as gender) is taken into account “in order to make the *final choice* between equally qualified candidates when appointing or promoting” (pp. 77-78, emphasis added). However, Swiss, Dutch, and Icelandic research participants argue that they have never seen this measure put in practice because they never consider two candidates equally qualified. We also learn from the quote that “*it strengthens it if there are more women*” in a faculty where men are in the majority. By saying this, he

makes a very general statement about the added value of women, without explaining why more women will strengthen the department and what will be strengthened. However, it implicates that women have a special contribution to make.

A Slovenian respondent illustrates his preference for a mix of men and women researchers in his group: *“I have a very balanced working group. [...] The best solution is - and that can be seen from the communication itself - that in a big group both genders are represented”* (SO, STEM, M). This committee member argues that in a *“balanced working group”* the *“communication”* is better than in a non-balanced working group. Therefore, balance is *“the best solution”* to him. Multiple committee members see a benefit in having more women in a group because they think this facilitates the communication and collaboration in a group. A Swiss respondent stated: *“It’s very important that there should be more women, a lot more, and that they should be completely at ease there in the way that I am at ease in science”* (CH, STEM, M). The explanation he gave for his position in favour of *“more women”* is that women are more collaborative, something he values highly.

Welcoming women based on a generic ideal of women is what Glick and Fiske (1996) call ‘benevolent sexism’. They define this as *“a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver)”* (p. 491). Thus, the rhetoric of the committee members in our study, promoting higher numbers of women in academia, can be interpreted as well-intentioned, yet it is conflated with stereotypical perceptions of women (and men) researchers. Such stereotyping can be damaging to the receiver of benevolent sexist remarks because it can threaten the feelings of being taken seriously (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It could also be damaging to women who do not fit the stereotype that is projected on them.

The second reason for wanting a more gender-balanced group is the role model argument (cf. Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). A Dutch STEM committee member explains his positive stance towards increasing the number of women in his department:

Respondent: And of course I have a plan. But well, if that will succeed, I don’t know! Time will tell. But one of the arguments in that plan is that I think we should hire another two women here in the department. To get a bit more of a balance. A bit! [...] I would also like fifty-fifty, yes, great! Why not?

Interviewer: Why would you like that?

Respondent: Well, because I think that is a good reflection of the balance overall in the world. It is [at this moment] a very bad reflection of the number of students that

enter here. (NL, STEM, M)

This committee member explains that he made a plan for hiring more women because he wants to get the numbers more in “*balance*”. So, besides discursively welcoming women, this respondent also says that he acts upon the wish for more women in the department. Even though he explained later that reaching “*fifty-fifty*” on the short term will be impossible, he argues that an equal number of men and women in the department would be a better “*reflection*” of the world population. He then touches upon an issue that we found more often in the STEM interviews. The respondent argues for a gender balance among staff members because that will also better reflect the gender balance among the students in the department. Many Dutch STEM committee members make the plea for more women colleagues with the argument that women function as role models for both students and aspiring academics. They perceive role models necessary for increasing the number of women students and staff members but also for signalling to younger women that having a career in science is “*a very normal career choice, also for women*” (NL, STEM, M).

In summary, committee members practice gender by discursively welcoming women in their department, arguing that the number of men and women employees should be (more) balanced. They give two reasons for this welcoming stance towards women researchers, which represent two specific gender practices. The first reason is that women contribute to the department by their communication skills and collaborative behaviour. The second reason concerns the perceived need for women role models. Overall, the responses suggest that committee members are not at ease with an imbalance in men and women staff, implying that (a greater) balance is the norm. It should be noted that the interviewees and the research topic could have influenced these results, as research participants were aware that they were interviewed about gender in academia and possibly felt the need to position themselves positively towards the topic. In this section we found that research participants actively reflect on their point of view with regard to unequal numbers of men and women researchers. In the next sections we will present gender practices in the recruitment and selection of assistant professors that happen less reflexively.

Assessing potential for excellence

The second general gender practice we identified is assessing candidates for assistant professorships based on their potential for excellence. This practice is constructed around a complex interplay of four specific gender practices. We distinguish between two sets of criteria: formal criteria and tacit criteria. We start by showing the formal

selection criteria used in the selection of assistant professors, followed by the tacit criteria. It is the latter category that we found most conflated with specific gender practices.

Formal selection criteria

Most research participants across countries and disciplines argue that during recruitment and selection procedures for assistant professorships they should take the junior level of candidates into account. We find that candidates for assistant professor positions are primarily assessed on three formal criteria: research, teaching, and administration. Of these criteria, committee members across countries and disciplines equally argue that research is the most important selection criterion.

When it comes to the criteria for selection, the most primary and indispensable criterion is scientific excellence, which normally is reflected in the research conducted, the number of publications, type of publications, peer reviewed, what the person has actually done in previous research. (BE, SSH, M)

For this committee member “scientific excellence” is the most important selection criterion, which to him means research and publications. However, not just any publication counts. According to this respondent, as most respondents in our study, publications should be in (international) “peer reviewed” journals.

Our analysis shows that committee members try to make an assessment based on formal selection criteria, however, due to the early career stage of applicants they only have a limited track record to rely on.

Publication is an indication of what the researchers are capable of doing, but evidently a young researcher is not able to publish as much as experienced ones can do. So we have to project the profile of a person and see what the person is capable of in the future. (BE, STEM, M)

Very often they are at the end of their PhD, and I mean, sometimes they have already a publication, maybe two, depends also on the discipline. [...] Um, but very often they only have a pipeline, right? So, they have a couple of [pipeline] papers. [...] So, it's – it's on the committee to decide what they think, what this is actually worth, so to have a good understanding of the publication market, and the chances of publication – publishing something, and whether they think this pipeline – that the quality of the PhD, so to speak, of the chapters are publishable, and where, how

good, how well. (NL, SSH, M)

These committee members illustrate that, generally, candidates for assistant professor positions do not have many publications compared to more senior academics. According to the first respondent a publication can indicate what a candidate is “*capable of in the future*”. The second respondent argues that candidates for assistant professorships usually have none or just a limited number of published papers at the time of application. Therefore, he explains, the committee will look at papers in the “*pipeline*” and “*the quality of the PhD*” in order to assess the “*worth*” of the research in terms of the potential to get the work published in academic journals. The quote reveals that it is at the discretion of the selection committee to decide “*whether they think this pipeline*” is “*publishable, and where, how good*”. So committee members make a prediction about chances of getting the work published in the future. Most committee members confirm that a candidate’s research potential can be predicted by the track record of publications, even though this track record tends to be fairly limited.

Selection committees are thus charged with the task of evaluating the potential of applicants for assistant professorships. From the data we learn that this is not a straightforward endeavour. Some committee members reflected on the difficulty of assessing potential:

Anyone can say this is a young person with good hopes. But how can I make hopes accountable and codify them? (IT, SSH, F)

But the aim is clearly just the best scientist of that generation with, of which people think, we think, the selection committee thinks, the best potential to grow into a really good scientist. But that is really difficult to judge. So that is a very subjective process. That is absolutely clear. That is really absolutely very much constituted with all kinds of judgements, prejudices. (NL, STEM, M)

The first respondent acknowledges that she does not know how to measure “*hopes*” and implies that she struggles with applying this as a selection criterion for a “*young person*”. The second respondent first argues that the aim of a selection procedure is to “*just*” select the “*best scientist of that generation*” who has “*the best potential to grow into a really good scientist*”. He then realizes that this is not as easy as it seems and acknowledges that assessing potential is a “*subjective process*” inherent with various “*prejudices*”. Nevertheless, committee members suggest that they do not have

other ways of assessing early-career researchers than making predictions about their potential. Such “*subjective*” assessment influences if a candidate will be selected or not and can therefore have major implications for candidates.

Teaching qualities are also among the formal selection criteria for assistant professorships and thus assessed during the selection process. Again, research participants across all countries argue that candidates generally do not have much teaching experience. Therefore, committee members often evaluate the teaching qualities or potential of external candidates during a lecture or presentation that candidates have to provide during the selection process. Our data show that the criterion ‘administration’ is not assessed during selection procedures, because committee members argue that early-career researchers usually do not have previous experience concerning administration.

All in all, the formal selection criteria for assistant professorships seem hard to work with because of the short track record of early-career researchers. Therefore, the decision-making on whom to hire for an assistant professorship that might give a way out of precariousness in the long run, is based on a limited assessment of formal criteria, and an assessment of potential instead. Due to the short track records, committee members rely on other factors to evaluate a candidate’s suitability for the position. Our analysis reveals that multiple tacit criteria come into play when committee members discuss their preferred candidates, which give room for assumptions and subjectivities. Next, we will describe the complex interplay of gender practices found in the application of tacit criteria.

Tacit selection criteria – survival in the competitive academic world

In this section we elaborate on the four specific gender practices found in the tacit criteria committee members use to assess the potential and suitability of candidates for assistant professorships as well as academic work more generally. These practices are geared towards the assessment of candidates’ potential for surviving in what research participants call ‘the competitive academic world’.

Confidence. The first specific gender practice related to the general gender practice of assessing potential for excellence we found in the data is the perceived lack of confidence of women candidates. For example, respondents in Switzerland argued that modesty and a lack of competitive behaviour of women researchers is a reason for their limited survival in what research participants argue to be ‘the competitive academic world’. Modesty is often put forward as an argument for why women are expected to be unable to deal with the competitive culture in academia.

Especially in Switzerland, I find that Swiss women have a humility that ill serves them at work. This humility frankly does them no good, when they have all the potential to assert themselves. They have a very, very strong super-ego; putting oneself forward is seen as something negative. (CH, STEM, F)

The respondent perceives Swiss women as modest and argues that this “*humility*” negatively affects their work, implying that humility reduces the possibility to excel. The quote illustrates that the committee member attributes women’s perceived modesty to the internalization of gender roles (“*super-ego*” behaviour) and that “*putting oneself forward*” is considered negative, as it implies non-feminine behaviour.

We find that also during the selection procedure confidence, or the lack thereof, is something that plays a role. This reveals that tacit criteria come into play in the evaluation of candidates.

For example, it has to do with: you have to take into account, but that obviously is less and less the case, that women applicants could make a less – how do you say – assertive impression, will be less assertive. So that has to do with socialisation and the way you are. (NL, SSH, F)

This focus group participant reproduces the common held belief that women candidates are less assertive, which she gives as an example of the way gender can play a role in recruitment and selection procedures for early-career researchers. She argues that selection committees should “*take into account*” that women do not often make an “*assertive impression*” but she does not explain how to do so. It does imply that assertive behaviour is the norm and thus the preferred style. She argues that “*socialisation*” is to blame for women’s lack of assertiveness. Many respondents blame women for not being confident, but they do not acknowledge that men can also lack confidence.

Research participants in the Slovenian STEM department perceive women as more obedient, patient, and hardworking than men but less noticeable, ambitious, and confident. According to them, it is the traditional masculine dominant, ambitious, and confident attributes that facilitate climbing the academic career ladder. Van den Brink and Stobbe (2014) showed that, especially in STEM disciplines like physics, “confidence and directness are needed to demonstrate high motivation and true skills” (p. 171).

The quotes in this section show that committee members argue that gender roles and socialisation cause women to behave non-confident or non-assertive.

They do not reflect on the role they themselves play in the construction of women candidates as modest or non-assertive. Particularly in STEM department, research participants explicitly put the responsibility on women. We learn that in the Slovenian STEM department almost all research participants stressed that it is the women who bear responsibility if they are not sufficiently self-confident to progress in academia. In the STEM department in Iceland a respondent similarly puts the responsibility for gender equality on women researchers and stressed that they have to be more like men.

Across the six higher education institutions, committee members construct competition as an inherent aspect of contemporary academic work and expect excellent early-career researchers to be able to deal with this competition. Because of the precarious, competitive academic environment, committee members require early-career researchers to be confident, and show that confidence in the job interview. The perceptions and expectations about modest women researchers most likely negatively influence committee members' assessment of women candidates as researchers who have the potential to make a career in academia. Moreover, committee members generally attributed non-confident behaviour to *all* women researchers and made women responsible for not 'surviving' in academia.

For some research participants the lack of confidence of women candidates is also connected with women's communication style. We found that they expect of researchers a certain style of articulating ideas, which reflects a masculine, bold way of communicating.

Yes, when they come for an interview they have to just show it. Yes, then I want to just know: what drives someone? What I realize now is that there might be a gender bias there. [...] At least what I have learned is that women say what they really think to a lesser extent and less often go on thin ice. Because they are a bit more worried that they will fall through. While I can appreciate that; if someone does that in a conversation. [...] I think that men feel less embarrassed to just yell and shout it out occasionally. And by doing so they are more open to criticism, because they can have their heads chopped off. But on the other side, that gives me a better idea of what is on their mind. And I have noticed that during conversations with female students, PhD students, and postdocs. In a longer conversation I suddenly found out. Why didn't you say that an hour ago? Yes, and if you are in a job interview that lasts one hour, yes, then it is possible that you miss the opportunity. (NL, STEM, M)

The respondent argues that he experienced women having another style of

communicating than men during selection interviews and in regular conversations. During the interview, he realizes that there can be a “*gender bias*” in his own evaluation of women, however, in the remaining part of the quote he continues reproducing this gender bias. So, he refers to the term ‘gender bias’ but he does not succeed in unpacking this bias in practice. He argues that women do not express what is on their mind whereas men are not bound by feelings of embarrassment and be explicit about their ambitions. He explains that he appreciates the communication style of men better, which shows a ‘cloning’ effect (Essed, 2004) – the preference for candidates who behave in a similar way as committee members themselves. The respondent perceives the way ideas are being communicated as an indicator of the quality of those ideas. Because women express their ideas more hesitantly, they could “*miss the opportunity*” in a selection interview that only lasts for one hour. Thus, the respondent holds women accountable and does not think about possibly changing his own interview style during selection procedures. The non-sensitivity towards communication styles other than the ones the respondent attributes to men can have serious consequences for women candidates during selection interviews.

Commitment. A second specific gender practice we identified is the construction of women as lacking commitment to the profession. The responses of committee members imply they perceive women as deficient for an academic career (or non-excellent) because of their supposed lack of commitment. A Swiss respondent argues:

Generally speaking, the guys, they're ready for [pauses] I mean, you sense immediately that they're ready to work 20 hours a day [laughs], to scrub the floor, if you ask them to. [...] Usually, the women, they're more [sighs] careful, reserved. (CH, SSH, M)

The quote shows that the committee member perceives the self-presentation of men in selection interviews as committed to do whatever it takes whereas women candidate's demeanour as “*careful, reserved*”. He suggests that women do not display commitment to go the extra mile (“*scrub the floor*”). Moreover, the respondent reproduces the long-hour rhetoric in academia by stating that men are “*ready to work 20 hours a day*”, something that clearly appeals to the respondent.

A respondent in the Netherlands reported a situation in which aspiring women researchers are made insecure about the possibilities to pursue an academic career due to the traditional masculine notion of commitment that is constantly

reproduced. The following quote illustrates this:

And I think that quite more often in this kind of procedures, where women who are made insecure appear as candidates in front of a committee that consists of just or mainly men, it can go wrong. [...] One of those full professors in that committee, [...] he really lives in the fifties constructions. He comes home and the dinner is served and he does not do anything, so he can totally focus on his career. So he thinks that if you for example work part time in the end you cannot meet the written and unwritten criteria to make a career, so become an associate or full professor. And if you are confronted with such a statement, on request or not, during a job interview or a performance appraisal – what happened to me once during a conversation with him – then you think: should I just quit now, so to speak, because I do not have such a situation at home. At home we divide things or try to do that as fair as possible, so I won't be [working] 70, 80 hours, that is just not possible. So at the moment that, yes, that kind of professors with fossil ideas still take part in committees, that kind of messages are still being conveyed. (NL, SSH, F)

This committee member illustrates how selection procedures with all men committees “*can go wrong*”. She argues that senior men (committee members) can make women insecure about a future career in academia because of their opinions on the impossibility of combining a career in academia with “*other aspirations*”. The respondent explains how her boss expressed his opinion that a career in academia infers (more than) full time commitment to the career. Through the respondent, the boss reinforces the prevailing notion of an excellent academic career as a profession that entails working 70 to 80 hours per week. The respondent explains that women who cannot fulfil these “*unwritten criteria*” because of other obligations outside work can become insecure because of these expectations and discouraged to pursue an academic career. She argues that having men on selection committees who hold these “*fossil ideas*” (i.e., old fashioned ideas) can be problematic for women candidates.

A related reason given by research participants for women’s perceived lack of commitment has to do with motherhood and care responsibilities. Many committee members expect an excellent researcher to be fulltime available, devoted to the job, and to put in long hours of work. When research participants throughout all countries talk about recruitment and selection of assistant professors, they ascribe difficulties to women early-career researchers to meet these expectations, as they equal women with mothers. Most committee members seem to be convinced firstly of the given that all women are (future) mothers, and secondly of the incompatibility

of motherhood and a successful academic career. An Italian respondent explains:

A woman has an objective disadvantage, but not because we men are sexist... in our department there's no-one like that... but because in any case, if you have a child, you can put it how you like, but you have to do it, and this is intrinsic. So there's this disadvantage... that if there are no proactive policies, which in Italy are not made... in the end, simply because someone has a child and wants to be with that child.. it is clear that in the end she publishes less, travels less, because she has a two- or three-year old child... so the only real disadvantage is structural. (IT, STEM, M)

The respondent points towards an “*intrinsic*” issue - motherhood - that he calls an “*objective disadvantage*”. By doing so, he constructs a disadvantage for women. First he says “*because someone has a child*” and then continues by using the pronoun “*she*”. He takes for granted that women will take care of the child and expects them to renounce part of their academic activities, such as publishing and travelling, when they are mothers. This way, he constructs women as less suitable to deal with the competition in academia and as candidates for an assistant professor position. Furthermore, he emphasizes that men in his department are not “*sexist*”, and presents the “*disadvantage*” as an objective fact. Thus, the respondent puts the responsibility on the individual woman researcher to deal with this perceived “*disadvantage*”. Also, he blames the lack of proactive policies for this “*disadvantage*”. In contrast to Italian men research participants who perceived motherhood as a hindrance to women researchers’ careers, none of the Italian women research participants made reference to it, referring instead to the gendered professional culture that characterizes Italian academia as the main barrier to their advancement.

Committee members reproduced the stereotype of women as mothers who cannot dedicate sufficient time to their academic career regardless of whether or not the women in question actually had children. Since more than full time availability is expressed very often during interviews and focus groups across countries and disciplines, as something needed to build an academic career, women candidates suffer from the perceptions held by committee members about their dedication to the profession. They discursively construct women as researchers who do not have what it takes to make a career in academia. This might be even more pronounced for women at the early career stage as committee members might expect women are at a point in life where they possibly become mothers or have young children.

A committee member in Iceland argues that there is unequal distribution of

unpaid work within the homes of his men and women colleagues which complicates women researchers' entry into an academic position:

I see that family conditions are enormously important when it comes to how [academics] perform [the first years in academia]. I see it is really tough for women with children to enter a competitive academic position. I see that they are under a lot more pressure than the men [...] overall I see that [the women] have to leave at four to pick up the kids, I see the difference how [women] have more responsibilities than the guys and this can be very difficult. (IS, STEM, M)

This respondent argues that women researchers who are mothers “*have more responsibilities*” than men researchers who are fathers. Like many other committee members, he also argues that academic work is “*competitive*” and states that “*it is really tough for women with children*” to perform the job. The committee member thus argues that mothers have difficulties dealing with competition. The expected difficulties for mothers but not for fathers are pervasive, despite the Icelandic legislation that each parent gets three months of maternity/paternity leave and three months to share among the two parents. Parenthood is only problematized for women and not for men, contributing to the precariousness of women early-career researchers and not men. Committee members expect mothers to not be “*100 per cent active in writing up research*” (IS, SSH, F) and imply that therefore women do less well in the competition. Overall, committee members assume that motherhood will create difficulties for women assistant professors and by doing so construct women as less excellent candidates.

Furthermore, motherhood assumptions not only influence perceptions of committee members of women's devotion to the job but also of women's contract hours. For example, Swiss committee members in both departments expect most women to work part time. Some respondents problematized part time work, which the following excerpt illustrates:

I know well that her [a young mother who requested to work a four-day week] productivity rate will be reduced by at least 50%. In a competitive international research context, that's not a very good thing. I don't really like this idea of a percentage reduction, because it just doesn't fit in with the way work is organised. [...] I mean, people are here, they organise their experiments, and the kind of experiments we do here, they last three days, three or four days. Something like that. Once you've started, you just have to see it through. So that means that if we have

someone who stops work on a Thursday, with an experiment that lasts three days; she's going to start work normally on the Monday, and then after Wednesday, she's not going to be able to do anything else, even if she's paid until Thursday evening!
(CH, STEM, M)

This respondent also refers to the “*competitive*” context in which (early-career) researchers operate. Furthermore, he argues that part time work “*just doesn't fit in with the way work is organised*” and thus connects full time availability with the nature of academic work. He also states that a four-day workweek, an 80% appointment, will in practice lead to “*at least 50%*” productivity reduction and then further elaborates on his conviction that experiments cannot be done when working part time. We learn from this that excellence and part time work are decoupled, as full time availability is the norm.

Our results corroborate earlier studies on the evaluation of academics who are also parents (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014; Herschberg, Vinkenburger, Bleijenbergh, & Van Engen, 2014). Our study shows that most committee members across the countries problematize parenthood for mothers but not for fathers. They reproduce the cultural expectation of women as main caregivers. Even though “the lived experiences of both men and women in academia may no longer match the ideal academic norm of having no care obligations” (Herschberg et al., 2014, p. 205) our findings show that still women researchers are predominantly expected to have care responsibilities. Research participants do not take into account that young men may face the same obstacles whilst being fathers, or that not every woman is or will be a mother. Two decades ago Bagilhole (1993) already stated that “the academic profession as it stands does not appear to accept married women with children” (p. 272). This study shows that bias against women with children still holds, but that women without children suffer from this bias too. The image of women as mothers who are involved in caring for their children is problematic as committee members imply that this creates a lack of commitment to the profession (cf. Grummell, Devine, & Lynch, 2009). This adds to the precariousness of women early-career researchers as it evokes expectations that women are less suitable for assistant professor positions.

International mobility. A third specific gender practice we identified in the data is the gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility. Before explaining the gender practice inherent in the criterion of international mobility we will first briefly illustrate how the criterion is defined and how it is applied in selection procedures.

Our data show that committee members throughout the various countries require that young researchers go abroad for a period of time early in their careers. Even though internationalisation has become increasingly important in all countries under study, in more than half of the departments we studied, this has not led to formalized criteria with regard to international mobility. In Belgium, Slovenia, Iceland, and the Dutch SSH department, international work experience is not a formal selection criterion, but committee members do consider it an important criterion in the selection of early-career researchers. In most institutions committee members connect international mobility to candidates' perceived excellence. So next to precarious working conditions and limited prospects of a stable academic career, early-career researchers are expected to spend part of their employment across country borders. This might further their precariousness even more as moving abroad comes with (additional) instability as well as personal risks (Richardson & Zikic, 2007).

A committee member in the STEM department in Iceland argues that going abroad is "*sort of an unwritten rule*". When this requirement remains tacit, as is the case in most departments, applicants can suffer from this lack of transparency by being rejected for not fulfilling the criterion. Icelandic SSH research participants confirm that international mobility of staff trained at their university is considered important and perceived as a qualifier, however it is not a decisive criterion.

Overall, we find that the criterion of international mobility is more pronounced and more decisive in the STEM departments. In the Dutch STEM department, international postdoc experience is a formal selection criterion for assistant professor positions. The recruitment protocol articulates this criterion as: "*Some years of postdoc experience, also abroad*". In Switzerland it is an institutional obligation for candidates who received their PhDs from that same university to have spent at least one year abroad during their postdoc. In Italy, a formal criterion for assistant professorships is to have spent at least one year of doctoral or post-doctoral research abroad, yet, candidates who lack this experience are also considered for assistant professorships.

Because in most countries the criterion of international mobility is not formalized or specified, uncertainties and ambiguities emerge in the criterion's application. This leaves room for committee members to select candidates based on their interpretations of the concept.

Because they're clear but not detailed criteria, it's obvious that there are interpretative sensitivities of various types. I'll give you a banal example. We all agree that international activity is important, but what is meant by international

activity? Does it mean having been frequently abroad? Having taught abroad? Having published in foreign journals? Or does it mean staying at home but being part of international networks, and so on and so forth? (IT, STEM, M)

The quote reveals that “*international activity*” can encompass many endeavours and that the committee member does not know what can be interpreted as international activity and what does not count as such. Because various committee members have multiple interpretations of the criterion due to a lack of definition, they can apply it at their discretion.

Even though some committee members argued that the mobility criterion is difficult to meet for all early-career researchers, most research participants throughout the countries and disciplines in our study expect that women researchers have a harder time fulfilling the international mobility criterion because of family or motherhood responsibilities. Committee members’ assumptions about women’s decreased mobility can influence their evaluations of women candidates because they anticipate that women cannot fulfil the requirement. Therefore, they practice gender when applying the criterion of international mobility.

For example, Italian committee members argued that women researchers will have to renounce part of their mobility in order to care for their child(ren). Men, on the contrary, are never mentioned in relation to family and children, so research participants assume that they will continue with their work and career plans regardless of their family status. This is similar in the Slovenian SSH department where two women research participants noted that living abroad should not be required from young female researchers at the beginning of their career, when they may have small children. A respondent explains:

A woman has difficulty to go abroad with her family. Her husband is not ready enough to go with her; he will be ridiculed by the social environment. In Slovenia that is less acceptable, if we want to admit it or not. (SO, SSH, F)

The committee member argues that women with families experience difficulties going abroad, which she relates to the Slovenian “*social environment*”. She states that the environment will most likely not accept and even “*ridicule*” men going abroad with their partners. In the interview she continues speaking about the criterion of international work experience and wonders: “*why don’t we think of some alternative?*”. This implies that the criterion is fixed and that alternative ways of meeting the criterion are not used in the respondents’ work environment.

A STEM committee member in the Netherlands also considers the required mobility of early-career researchers a reason for the small number of women in his field and links this to family circumstances:

Respondent: But I think that is the big problem. Yes, the whole system how you get such a job, right? You cannot plan it and say: Now you do a postdoc there. And then I will become full professor there. It is more of a random walk. You get a postdoc position there, then you get your second position in another country. And then finally you get a [permanent] job, but this is maybe in a third country, right? Or at least not in the same city. And if then both, men, women have a job, it is going to be very, very difficult of course. And if you go in such a random walk through the entire world, or at least Europe. And I think that is one of the reasons why we do not have so many women.

Interviewer: And how do you mean that? Because they can allow that randomness less?

Respondent: Yes. But I think there is no solution. We want candidates who have that international experience. It is expected that they do a postdoc here and there and then this random component is inherent. And yes, that is of course very hard to combine with a family. (NL, STEM, M)

The respondent calls the career system in academia “*a random walk*” that demands multiple moves across positions and countries. He thinks women are less able to deal with this “*random*” component because for women (and not men) mobility is “*of course very hard to combine with a family*”. This respondent puts the responsibility of meeting the international experience criterion on the (women) candidates, as he argues “*there is no solution*” for the (women) candidates who do not meet that criterion, as the requirement prescribes to do “*a postdoc here and there*”. He treats the criterion as a strict demand and does not acknowledge alternative ways of obtaining international experience, such as short research stays abroad or international collaborations. The respondent considers the system as the problem without being reflexive about his own position within this system as someone involved in the construction of selection criteria and thus as someone who can apply criteria less rigidly and strict.

Academic citizenship. A fourth and final specific gender practice connected to the general gender practice of assessing potential for excellence is the request for academic citizens. In the previous sections, we showed that an ideal candidate for assistant professor positions is constructed primarily as an excellent researcher

who is competitive, productive, and confident. However, our data reveal that most committee members do not want these characteristics to carry too far because they want to hire a candidate who is a collaborative team player, an academic citizen, too. We find implicit gender connotations in the tacit criterion of academic citizenship.

We build on teamwork. Of course, individual scientific excellence is important for us, but as our ambition is to build a strong and prosperous research group, we consider the social dimension – sociability of the researcher – an important dimension as well. Someone who has problems working in a group despite being scientifically excellent can break the team. Therefore, sometimes we accept a person, that is not so scientifically excellent, but a socially intelligent individual, since our ambition is to build a strong team. (SO, SSH, F)

According to this committee member “*individual scientific excellence*” is important in her group but the “*social dimension*” seems even more important. She argues that a candidate who is scientifically excellent however not able to work in the team will not be hired. On the contrary, someone who is not scientifically excellent but “*a socially intelligent individual*” can be hired. She emphasizes the team component that seems decisive in hiring decisions.

Interestingly, many committee members throughout the various countries and disciplines consider scientific excellence and teamwork as two opposite characteristics that cannot be held by one and the same person. We find that committee members consider “*a whiz kid with a super impact factor*” (CH, SSH, F) incompatible with being “*a good colleague*” because they argue that whiz kids are “*wrapped up in [their] own thing*” (CH, SSH, M). A Swiss research participant refers to this as a “*paradox*” which reflects an opposition between the requirement of individual development in the area of research and the desire of a team for collaboration. Or as a Belgian respondent argued: “*there are two types of researchers/academics: there is the collaborator and the individualist*” (BE, SSH, M).

Moreover, research participants suggest that being excellent in research not only restricts collaboration but also resembles having a problematic character. They argue that “*brilliant researchers*” are “*very difficult to work*” with (BE, SSH, M) as they cannot “*work with others*” and have “*a difficult character*” (CH, SSH, F). We notice that this stereotypical image is connected to researchers who are extremely productive. Moreover, this stereotypical belief causes committee members to look at “*brilliant researchers*” with suspicion.

We find that committee members construct the criterion ‘collaboration’ as

important in selection decisions, even though this criterion often remains tacit and non-formalized. When committee members speak about situations where they will actually hire someone, they prefer a candidate who is a so-called ‘academic citizen’, someone who contributes to the ‘housework’ of the department (Heijstra et al., 2017). Thus, early-career researchers are expected to demonstrate loyalty to the department, but they seem to receive little guarantee for permanence in return. In our data we found that the value of collaboration is often ascribed to women candidates but not to men.

Outside of here I know a lot of people, men, who, when you ask them to collaborate, reply: “No, I don’t collaborate, I compete.” I’ve never heard a woman say that. [...] You could imagine science becoming more collaborative [when an interactive web tool is implemented in science] and women getting on much better in that, and men being pissed off because they find it hard to show off their egos.
(CH, STEM, M)

According to this committee member, men want to compete rather than collaborate. On the contrary, he portrays women as collaborative. He predicts that when science becomes “*more collaborative*” in the future, women will succeed “*much better*” than men. Yet, this also implies that science is not there yet, and that it is still more competitive based. Most committee members throughout the countries and disciplines argue that women have better relational skills and are more prone towards collaboration. This suggests that women candidates may score higher on the criterion of academic citizenship than men candidates.

Overall, the concern of hiring a colleague with whom it will be possible or even pleasant to cooperate, rather than the scientific best candidate, was found throughout the countries. Because committee members perceive women candidates as more collaborative and relational, the academic citizenship criterion could benefit women during selection procedures. However, such stereotypical expectations can also work against women when they do not display the prescribed feminine behaviour (Rudman & Phelan, 2008), possibly invoking bias in the evaluation of women candidates.

In summary, in the assessment of potential for excellence, committee members base their judgements on limited track records of candidates for assistant professor positions and therefore they rely heavily on tacit criteria. They predict the future potential of candidates for surviving in the academic world, a gender practice that is conflated with multiple specific gender practices. Committee members perceive

a lack of confidence and commitment as well as limited international mobility opportunities for women early-career researchers and by doing so render women less suitable for assistant professor positions. This makes the position of women early-career researchers more precarious than that of their male counterparts. We found that only the criterion of academic citizenship could work to the advantage of women candidates. But, being evaluated as an academic citizen depends on the department at hand and thus might not help in securing a permanent position on the long run.

4.6 Discussion and conclusion

Despite a “vener of equality” (Teelken & Deem 2013, p. 520) our critical comparative analysis revealed two general and six specific gender practices in the recruitment and selection of temporary assistant professors throughout six European countries and both STEM and SSH disciplines. The gender practices are subtle yet omnipresent in the constructions of recruitment and selection practices of men and women committee members. We found that gender practices are rather similarly over the various countries and disciplines. Our study sheds light on the gender practices present in selection criteria that affect aspiring young researchers’ entrance to precarious assistant professor positions. Even though non-tenured assistant professorships are precarious in nature because of their temporality and insecurity, we found that committee members assess candidates’ potential to succeed in academia in the long run. Therefore, temporary assistant professorships, which could possibly lead to a more permanent position, are distinct from casual or hourly paid academic positions that often do not create chances for leaving precarious employment. We contribute to theories of gender in academic organisations by uncovering the complex interconnections of gender practices and recruitment and selection practices for early-career researchers where judgements are based on potential. We have illustrated multiple gender practices, some beneficial and others detrimental for women academics. Furthermore, we identified three discrepancies in the various criteria and their application that we will elaborate on in this section.

We showed how gender practices relating to welcoming women might work to the benefit of women candidates for assistant professor positions. Yet, we found a first discrepancy when analysing the tacit selection criteria used in the assessment of early-career researchers. In their discourses and reflections on women in academia, committee members argue that they want to have more women in their department in order to get a more balanced staff composition. Even though most of them do not

seem to take up an active role in increasing the number of women researchers, they do give arguments for why they think science or their departments would benefit from more women colleagues. Reflexively most committee members express this wish for hiring more women. However, welcoming women seems more a general principle than an actual practice because in committee members' construction of tacit criteria they unreflexively portray women as less competent for what they call the competitive academic world. Committee members discursively construct women academics as lacking necessary survival skills such as confidence, commitment, and international mobility, which can render women candidates as unsuitable for academia. Committee members reproduce the image of an ideal candidate that resembles a traditional masculine profile. In line with Van den Brink and Stobbe (2014) and Bleijenbergh and colleagues (2013) we found that although our research participants say they value (some) feminine qualities, the image of the ideal early-career researcher fits men and masculinity more.

In their accounts, committee members predominantly depict their ideal candidate for assistant professorships as an excellent researcher who has the potential to survive in the competitive academic world by being productive, confident, committed to the profession, and internationally mobile. This profile resembles the Olympus model that "situates the scientists [...] at the top of the pyramid, far removed from the concerns of everyday life" (Brouns, 2004, p. 151). However, we also found that when committee members talk about their recruitment and selection practices, they state that hiring excellent academics can disadvantage team dynamics, as they tend to construct excellence as incompatible with and the opposite of collaborative. A second discrepancy is thus constructed between the criteria of excellence and academic citizenship. Several research participants argue that they consider teamwork of such importance that they rather hire an early-career researcher who is somewhat less excellent but a good, collaborative colleague. This implies that there are committee members who prefer the Agora model of science, which is not focused exclusively on the production of knowledge for the scientific community but also aims at creating an inspiring intellectual work climate based on other principles such as exchange (Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Brouns, 2001). The Agora model is supposed to fit a traditional feminine behavioural repertoire more (Benschop & Brouns, 2003). We showed how being a collaborator and a good colleague seems to indeed fit the (stereotypical) image of women researchers better, according to our research participants. Yet, our findings imply that overall the individual competition criteria that fit the neoliberal Olympus model seem to prevail over the exchange criteria of the Agora model.

A third discrepancy we found is between the welcoming stances towards hiring more women academics and committee members' ostensible unwillingness to change or look for alternative ways of defining selection criteria. Committee members generally construct selection criteria as if they are etched in stone. Such practices safeguard committee members from any responsibility. Even research participants in power positions argue that they could not change criteria, as they have to abide by the rules and regulations defined by either the faculty board or the university board. None of the research participants seem to want or to perceive themselves able to change the recruitment and selection criteria for assistant professor positions. Therefore, our study shows that selection criteria are socially constructed, subjective, and fluid, yet, committee members present the criteria as 'common-sense', taken for granted criteria in selection decisions (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b) without reflecting on their own role in the construction of these criteria. Furthermore, our findings reveal that committee members have no or limited awareness of the gendered construction of selection criteria and the consequences nor do they reflect on their gendered assumptions about the qualities of women candidates. Hardly anyone questioned or challenged the current academic system or the beliefs that an academic career requires long hours, devotion, confidence, and competition. Neither did committee members contemplate the responsibility of others beside women to deal with possible difficulties. They put the responsibility of solving gender inequalities on the individual woman researcher making women responsible for limited success in acquiring assistant professor positions. This adds to women researchers' precariousness who, in the increased competition for jobs, are made responsible for fighting the stereotypical images that committee members hold. This logic fits the neoliberal postfeminist ideal, which epitomizes 'self-responsibility' for women's own lives and careers (Rottenberg, 2014) "without questioning the underlying masculine and capitalist norms of that ideal" (Benschop & Verloo, 2016, p. 102).

We conclude that a few gender practices can be beneficial for women academics. However, these practices around welcoming women and the alleged collaborative qualities of female academic citizens, portray women as different from men, convey generic ideas of women, and reproduce feminine characteristics as innate or essential (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Therefore, we question whether these 'beneficial' practices are strong enough to drive change. We have seen that the detrimental practices around assessing potential and constructing an ideal, confident, committed, and international mobile early-career researcher are so ubiquitous that they predominantly affect evaluations in the competition for assistant professor positions. This can cause committee members to make biased selection decisions,

attributing more potential to men researchers. As a result, women researchers can be excluded from the competition, which can lead them to be forced into longer periods of job insecurity and a lack of career prospects.


In conclusion, gender practices in the recruitment and selection at the early stage of academic careers show how tacit criteria are more decisive and that assessments of potential are particularly perilous for women. Overall, many committee members depict women as non-competitive, modest, non-committed, and non-mobile, which hampers women's career development and impedes their escape from precariousness. Future research could examine how these generic ideas affect individual women applicants, by studying the literal practicing of gender on the spot, for example during selection committee deliberations.





Chapter 5

Collectivity and power: Practicing gender in hiring committees for assistant professor positions



An earlier version of this chapter has been presented in 2018 at the seminar on People Management in Education (Tilburg, the Netherlands).

This chapter contributes to the literature on gender inequality in (academic) hiring by examining through observations how hiring committee members practice gender in hiring procedures for assistant professor positions in a STEM and SSH department of a Dutch university. I uncover seven patterns of practicing gender that illustrate how hiring committee members practice gender collectively before, during and after committee deliberations. I contribute to the literature with a nuanced understanding of how committee members collectively disqualify and even discredit qualified women candidates as well as how gender practicing and power are intertwined. My data show how aspiring early-career women academics are negatively affected by gendered judgements in hiring committees. Knowledge on how the complexities of practicing gender and power are played out might help to create awareness and reflexivity among hiring committee members and hopefully contribute to more fair hiring practices.

5.1 Introduction

The importance of academic recruitment for academic labour markets and the development of scientific knowledge has been well-documented (Fumasoli & Goastellec, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Increasingly so, studies in the field of academic evaluation have focused on gender and inequality practices in academic hiring (Nielsen 2016; O'Connor & O'Haganm 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b, 2014; Herschberg et al., 2018b), as scholars – as well as policy makers and practitioners – argue that gendered outcomes threaten equality in career opportunities as well as the quality of science as a whole. These studies have provided many valuable insights into gendered organisational practices and exclusion mechanisms in academic hiring. Yet, little is still known about the 'sayings and doings' of gender in real time situations in organisations, or the actual 'practicing' of gender (Martin, 2003). Looking into the practicing of gender in hiring decisions allows for an understanding of the complexities and subtleties of gendering dynamics on the spot and the micro-interactional practicing dynamics (Martin, 2003; Van den Brink et al., 2016) that contribute to the perpetuation and change of inequalities in the workplace.

I argue that such insight is important because hiring decisions at the early stages of the academic career determine who are included or excluded from academic careers and thus who will be the future researchers that shape the direction of research and represent their discipline. As such, hiring committees are the gatekeepers to the academy at large (Rivera, 2017). The majority of studies that look at the recruitment

and selection of academics have focused on senior academic positions such as associate or full professorships (e.g., Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). The aim of this study is to contribute to the literature on gender inequality in (academic) hiring by studying how committee members practice gender in hiring procedures for early-career positions through observational research.

In academic hiring, but also other academic evaluation procedures such as peer review in research panels, evaluators argue that the assessment of scientific quality plays the most prominent role (Herschberg et al., 2018b; Roumbanis, 2017), specifically the quality and quantity of research output (Sandström & Van den Besselaar, 2016). Contrary to candidates for professorships who have lengthy track records of their academic achievements, the assessment of scientific quality of early-career researchers (ECRs) seems more difficult, as their track records are limited (Herschberg et al., 2018b).

Multiple studies have shown that academic evaluation is a subjective endeavour that is conflated with gender practices (Herschberg et al., 2018a; Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b; Rivera, 2017). These studies have opened up the concealment of subtle practices of inequality by showing that women are evaluated more strictly than men and that women's qualifications are systematically undervalued in the competition for positions, regardless of their actual performance. Such inequality can be particularly harmful to women candidates who are deemed 'above the bar' (the threshold of perceived competence) in final hiring decisions as Rivera (2017) showed that they are less likely than equally qualified men to receive job offers. As a result, women academics have fewer chances to continue their academic career. This study contributes to the scarce knowledge on actual evaluation processes and the practicing of gender in academic hiring decisions.

Another essential attribute of academic hiring decisions is that they generally involve multiple decision makers. Following Van den Brink and Benschop (2012b, p. 509), I consent that hiring procedures "are not simply technical endeavours intended to measure the quality of academics; instead, they are political endeavours that involve negotiations between multiple actors". This study contributes to previous research on practicing gender, as it examines through observations how and around what issues men and women practice gender collectively, which is distinct from individual practicing of gender (Martin, 2006). Observations are the key way to collect data on practices as it is through observations that one can study "what it is that people actually do in organizations" (Yanow, 2006) instead of what they say they do. Observations allows for grasping "the processual and interactive dimension of gendering in its two main aspects: saying and doing" (Bruni et al., 2005 as cited in

Poggio 2006, p. 229).

Martin (2006) argues that “knowing how and around what issues and in what settings men and women practise gender collectively is a high priority goal” (p. 269) and she thus pleads for more research on practicing gender in groups. In collective settings multiple individuals can influence, reinforce, and affect each other (Van Arensbergen et al., 2014b). In hiring committees in particular, the interactions of committee members are of importance. The research question I want to answer in this study is: how do hiring committee members practice gender in hiring procedures for assistant professor positions?

This chapter is based on a qualitative case study of hiring procedures for assistant professorships in a Dutch university. Gaining access to hiring committees has proven difficult due to the sensitive and confidential nature of selection decisions (see also Rivera, 2017; Van den Brink, 2010). I secured access to six hiring committees, which gave me the unique opportunity to witness the saying and doings of academic hiring and study practicing gender in real time and space. The data consist of 70,5 hours of observations, field notes, and e-mail correspondences between hiring committee members. I found that gender was practiced at different moments in hiring procedures. I distinguish the key moments of practicing gender 1) before the committee deliberations start, 2) during hiring decision-making, and 3) after the committee had parted. Overall, I found seven patterns of practicing gender before, during and after committee deliberations.

The chapter is organised in four sections. I start with an elaboration of my theoretical perspective on academic hiring as a practice and practicing gender. Then I will explain the research methodology, followed by the research findings. Finally, I will elaborate on the discussion and conclusions of the findings.

5.2 Hiring as a practice

In this chapter, I draw on practice studies to understand organizational processes, and academic hiring processes in particular. According to Martin (2003) there is a “growing consensus that practice is key to understanding social life” (p. 345). A practice-based approach has the “capacity to describe important features of the world we inhabit as something that is routinely made and re-made in practice using tools, discourse, and our bodies” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 2) and as such, people’s actions are central to organizational outcomes (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Practice studies are concerned with (social) processes and see social life as an on-going routinized and

recurrent activity (Nicolini, 2012). Practicing is rapid, directional (one way, linear) and temporal (Martin, 2003). It is done in real time and space and once something is said or done, it is irreversible (Martin, 2006). Practice theory aims for explaining everyday activity (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) or “the way in which activities are performed in organizations” (Poggio, 2006, p. 225).

In line with previous studies, I conceive academic hiring as a social practice (Van den Brink, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Academic hiring processes constitute of recruitment and selection practices with the aim to find and choose candidates (Rees & Rumbles, 2010). Earlier studies on academic hiring have shown that academic hiring practices are subjective and political endeavours (Bozionelos, 2005; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b) that involve negotiations between multiple committee members who have their own agendas (Van den Brink et al., 2013) and varying degrees of power (similar to grant reviewing panels, Van Arensbergen et al., 2014b). Bozionelos (2005) showed, for example, that committee members from similar traditions / disciplines can build coalitions and together influence job interviews and hiring decision-making according to their interests. Therefore, hiring decisions tend to be outcomes of political contests (Bozionelos, 2005).

Just like committee members have different interests, previous studies on academic hiring practices have shown that they also have different standards of what constitutes quality (Roumbanis, 2017) and that the evaluation of quality is prone to personal preference (Herschberg et al., 2018b). Quality, as such, has an emotional component (Rivera, 2017) and oftentimes involves formal but also tacit criteria (Herschberg et al., 2018a; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Because evaluation is a subjective, political endeavour, it can give room to gendering dynamics.

5.3 Practicing gender

Martin (2003, 2006) describes a twin dynamic of gender practices and practicing gender. She defines gender practices as “a class of activities that are available—culturally, socially, narratively, discursively, physically, and so forth—for people to enact in an encounter or situation in accord with (or in violation of) the gender institution” whereas practicing gender focuses on the “literal activities of gender”, “the means by which the gender order is constituted at work” (Martin, 2003, p. 354). Gender practices include widely known and accepted forms of for example expressions, such as referring to women at work as ‘girls’ (Martin, 2006). An example of practicing gender is that evaluators inflate strengths and downplay weaknesses in

the actual evaluation of management potential in men, and downplay strengths but inflate weaknesses when evaluating such potential in women (Van den Brink et al., 2016).

Practicing gender is actions learned through repetition and has become almost automatic (Martin, 2003) and therefore people become skilled in such practicing. As such, practices at work are rarely discussed because organizational members tend to have a shared understanding of such practices (Martin, 2003). Consequently, gender is often practiced non-reflexively and with liminal awareness. More rarely gender is practiced intentionally and reflexively, yet, we have limited understanding of the conditions at work where people are more reflexive about their practicing of gender (Martin, 2003). This study shows a number of instances in which gender is practiced in a non-liminal way, yet, also when non-liminal this tends to confirm structural gender inequalities.

5.4 Practicing gender in academic hiring

Earlier research has studied gender practices in academic hiring, which resulted in important knowledge on gender practices at multiple stages of the hiring process and for both junior and senior academic positions. Gender practices are already found before the actual assessment of candidates takes place. Nielsen (2016) found that the high number of closed vacancies for associate- and full professorships found in a Danish university disadvantage women, as they are less often nominated candidates for such closed positions. One of the reasons why women are less often nominated for (both open and closed) academic positions has to do with academic gatekeeping; a powerful tool used for actively recruiting candidates (Husu, 2004; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). The majority of gatekeepers in academia are men (Thoraldsdottir, 2004; Van den Brink, 2010) and they use their formal and informal networks for scouting and nominating eligible applicants (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). The networks of men mostly consist of other men and moreover men gatekeepers “are more inclined to invite and nominate men candidates” due to “their perceived similarity and identification with men” (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2014, p. 475). As a result, the playing field is unequal for potential women candidates. Also, curriculum vitae (CV) assessment can result in gendered outcomes. For example, evaluators are more likely to recommend hiring a man applicant for a tenure-track position in their department than a woman applicant (Steinpreis et al., 1999) or a man student for a laboratory manager position than a woman student (Moss-Racusin

et al., 2012) with an identical CV.

In the evaluation and selection stage, academic excellence is often used as a measurement of quality (Rees, 2011; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Despite the limited awareness of men and women evaluators about the gendered construction on excellence (O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015), multiple studies have revealed that excellence is a social construct that is "inherently gendered" (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b, p. 507; Herschberg et al., 2018a; O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015). Research finds that women applicants do get hired for academic positions, but they are held against different standards than men academics (Savigny, 2014; Thoraldsdottir, 2004). Van den Brink (2010) showed in an extensive study on recruitment and selection of full professorships that evaluators appointed men candidates who did not fulfil all excellence criteria, whereas women candidates were often rejected when not meeting some criteria of excellence. The 'think professor, think male' stereotype proved pervasive and influenced hiring decisions. As a result, women candidates are unconsciously perceived as different, unpredictable, and risky (Van den Brink, 2010). For instance, women academics are perceived as lacking strong leadership skills (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b) or lacking commitment to an academic career (Herschberg et al., 2018a). Also, hiring decisions can be influenced by women's relationship status and their partners' occupation, "hiring only those women perceived to have portable or movable spouses, if any" (Rivera, 2017, p. 1134). As a result of gender practices, "men are selected disproportionately to their number in the base recruitment pool" "whatever the discipline, whatever the country and whatever the rank" (from Osborn et al., 2000 as cited in Rees, 2011, p. 135). Consequently, women (have to) leave academic careers disproportionately, especially after the postdoc level (Rees, 2001). Therefore, there is a need to develop better insight into the selection of early-career researchers after the postdoc phase, such as assistant professors.

Earlier studies have provided useful insight into gender practices in academic hiring, but most of these studies did not study practicing gender in real time and space. Previous studies have thus looked at what had been "said and done" (Martin, 2003), risking to capture only "what people can reflect on and make explicit (things of which they are aware) and what they want to say (e.g., socially desirable answers)" (Berger et al., 2015, p. 557). They relied for example on interviews with evaluators after the actual selection had already taken place (e.g., Nielsen, 2016; O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015). The reliance on interview (and also document) data might be due to the difficulty of getting access to secret and confidential processes like recruitment and selection (Van den Brink, 2010). According to Martin (2003), studies looking at practices "miss the immediacy, complexities, and subtleties of gendering dynamics" (p. 354).

Studying the practicing of gender attends to this critique, as it “directs attention to the literal activities of gender, physical and narrative – the doing, displaying, asserting, narrating, performing, mobilizing, maneuvering” (Martin, 2003, p. 354). Van den Brink and colleagues (2016), for example, have found subtle patterns of practicing gender in the evaluation of men and women in business organisations that resulted in women getting attributed lower managerial competence than men. Current study builds on previous research on gender practices in academic hiring by examining the practicing of gender in action and interaction in real time and space. Looking at academic hiring from a practicing gender perspective can bring to light gender dynamics that are usually hidden from view (Martin, 2006). Through observations I could study *how* gender was practiced, in which moment, and by whom. Particularly, I could study how evaluation discussions unfolded, when gender was made relevant, how gender was negotiated, and how some committee members addressed and tried to eliminate practicing gender at times.

Studying the gendering dynamics in academic hiring also answers to the call for more research on gender that is practiced in groups (Martin, 2006). This can give insight into collective decision-making processes, organizational (micro) politics and its gendered effects. The concept of micro politics “focuses on the ways in which power is relayed in everyday practices” (Deem et al., 2005, p. 61). Organisational political processes are seen as fundamental to gender in organisations and maintaining gender differences (Davey, 2008). Political activity that perpetuates gender differences in organisations, usually remains covert as it is enacted through subtle, informal micro-processes (Davey, 2008). Hiring committees provide a good platform for studying practicing gender at the micro-interactional level (Martin, 2003), as they consist of multiple members that have their own agendas. They can “exercise the power of inclusion and exclusion and contribute to the persistence of structural gender inequalities” (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p. 460). In this chapter, I will study how committee members practice gender in hiring procedures for assistant professor positions and also examine how they exert micro politics in these procedures.

5.5 Methodology

Research strategy

I conducted a qualitative case study, including six cases: three hiring procedures in a Natural Sciences department (STEM) and three hiring committees in a Social Sciences

department (SSH) of a Dutch university. All hiring committees were installed to hire an assistant professor for the department. The case study “is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). The large volume of data collected in case study research allows for a constant juxtaposition of subtle similarities and differences (Eisenhardt, 1989). At the same time, the rich and voluminous data can be daunting, which makes it hard to identify the most important relationships (Eisenhardt, 1989).

I was able to collect unique and confidential data through, which gave me the opportunity to study hiring processes over time (McKechnie, 2008b) and allowed for a close reflection of the actual actions of the committee members (McKechnie, 2008a). Contrary to “methods such as interviews, unstructured observation allows investigation of context and process in an on-going rather than episodic manner. It is effective for looking at interaction among individuals and between groups” (McKechnie, 2008c, p. 2). Observational methods can be prone to observer effect (or reactivity) (McKechnie, 2008a). Even though I have striven to be as unobtrusive as possible, my presence during the hiring processes could have unintentionally affected the behaviour of committee members. I, the observer, chose “what to observe and how to process and analyse that information” (McKechnie, 2008a), influenced by for example my age, gender, values, and expectations (Lockyer, 2008). As a result, I can have associated “meanings to the observed behaviour that are different from the meanings associated by the person(s) displaying the behaviour” (Lockyer, 2008, p. 2). I have attempted to reduce such effect by carefully writing down all conversations and by using the same approach during each hiring procedure. Also, the benefit of combining observations and a case study approach is that it leads to an “intimate interaction with actual evidence” that “often produces theory which closely mirrors reality” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547).

Case description

The case study university is a mid-size university in the Netherlands. In the university, the hiring process for a tenure-track assistant professor starts when a position becomes vacant. A job description is created based on the tasks the assistant professor has to conduct. When composing the hiring committee, the main tasks the assistant professor will have to fulfil are taken into account. For example, the coordinator of bachelor programme will take part in the committee when the assistant professor has to do a lot of teaching in the bachelor programme. After the committee has been installed, the job description is advertised on academic job websites and distributed via mailing lists. Departmental policy prescribes that assistant professors are openly

recruited, however, in earlier research I found exceptions to this norm (Herschberg et al., 2016). When all letters of application are received, the committee makes a short list of candidates to interview, either via e-mail or during a face-to-face meeting. In the three STEM procedures and in one SSH procedure, candidates were asked to prepare a presentation or lecture or both. Then, the committee interviewed candidates for 30 minutes to one hour. Based on interviews with short listed candidates, committee members evaluated the candidates and decided on the preferred candidate. Often, committees made a ranking of the candidates. Committees are obliged to write an appointment report based on the applications, the interviews and their deliberations. This report, and the ranking, is a recommendation to the dean of the faculty, who makes the final hiring decision.

The social and cultural contexts can influence how practicing of gender is done and interpreted by for example members of a department (Martin, 2006). In this study, I analysed hiring committees in a STEM and an SSH department. I studied two distinct fields to understand differences but also similarities between disciplines with regard to recruitment and selection of early-career researchers and possible gender dynamics. The departmental contexts differ with regard to staff compositions. In the STEM department, the number of women staff is much smaller than the SSH department (18% in STEM versus 45% in SSH in 2014). Among the assistant professors (temporary and permanent) 8% were women in the STEM department and 38% in the SSH department in 2014. Due to the low number of women in the STEM department, staff members felt a certain urgency to hire (more) women staff members. In the SSH department this urgency was felt less, however, in some SSH cases committee members made a reference to the uneven number of men and women in academia.

Data collection and protection

I started my data collection for this study when I was invited as an observer during a hiring procedure for an assistant professorship in the STEM department. This department, that had experienced a shortage of women staff members for many years, was interested to find out more about the possible gender practices in their hiring committees. Next, when positions for assistant professorships became vacant in the STEM or SSH department, I either contacted committee chairs to ask if I could observe their committee meetings or I was invited as an observer. All hiring committee members gave approval for my presence during the committee meetings. The empirical material that forms the basis of this study was collected over a period of three years.

In total, I observed six hiring procedures: three in a Social Sciences

Department (SSH1, SSH2, SSH3) and three in a Natural Sciences Department (STEM1, STEM2, STEM3). I attended all committee meetings: the meetings where the shortlist was made (in two cases this was done by e-mail), meetings where candidates were interviewed, lunch meetings in between the interviews, and meetings in which the interviewed candidates were discussed and rankings were made. In one case (STEM3), I was allowed to make voice recordings of two meetings: one lunch meeting after the first couple of interviews, and one meeting after all candidates had been interviewed to decide on the ranking of the candidates. This was the case that had the longest deliberations of all cases. My observations were limited to formal communications between committee members and informal conversations directly after the meetings. I was not present during informal discussions in hallways or behind closed doors. In total, I observed 70,5 hours of meetings. As the research focus calls for exploring practicing gender in hiring committees when evaluating both men and women candidates, I included those procedures where women and men were invited for an interview. In the STEM2 procedure no women candidates were invited for an interview and therefore I decided not to include this procedure in this study. This chapter is thus based on five cases, which consisted of 55 hours of observations.

During all meetings I took detailed notes of the questions that were asked to candidates, first reflections of committee members, and the decision-making deliberations. After the meetings and during breaks I wrote field notes in order to capture my experiences and first impressions. Additionally, I was included in e-mail conversations between committee members about for example the procedure and the ranking of candidates. I do not know if I have been included in all e-mail messages that were exchanged between committee members, as I depended on the committee members to include me as a recipient of the e-mails. I also received the appointment reports that were written after the final rankings were made. I used departmental recruitment protocols to get more information about hiring procedures in the departments.

The size of the committee ranged from 3 to 6 members who are part of the academic staff. Taken together, 7 women and 20 men academics participated in the hiring committees. Furthermore, all committees invited 1 or 2 student members to participate (3 women and 4 men in total). In the STEM committees there was an HR advisor present during committee meetings (both men and women). In total, 34 candidates were invited for a job interview of which 8 women.

Table 5.1 *Overview of men and women candidates and committee members*

	Interviewed candidates		Committee members	
	M	F	M	F
STEM1	5	1	4	3
STEM2	6	0	6	2
STEM3	5	3	4	4
SSH1	4	1	3	1
SSH2	3	1	4	1
SSH3	3	2	3	2
TOTAL	26	8	20	7

Note. In order to reduce the recognisability of cases, I did not break down the committee members into the various types (scientific members, student members, HR members). In total, three women students were included in the various committees and four men students. HR members (three in total) were always women.

While this research was on-going, digital data (such as audio files, and field notes) were stored on the campus network, which meets legal and ethical requirements. Safe and secure storage was guaranteed by the IT security and safety protocols of the campus network. Hard copy data, consisting of notes taken during and after the observations, were stored in a locked filing cabinet at my department. None of the data were accessible for others than the author, and the author has never shared any of her data with others.

Because of the sensitive nature of hiring procedures, I replaced names of committee members and candidates with pseudonyms and obscured minor details about the committees and the departments where needed to protect the confidentiality of committee members, candidates, and departments or universities. Some quotes used in this chapter are translated from Dutch to English by the author.

Analysis

I first read through all my materials and open coded the data in order to get a better understanding of the richness of my data. During this first coding exercise I realized that committee members mentioned negative and positive aspects of the various candidates (some candidates received more positive/negative comments than others) and that committee members revealed worries, doubts, mistrust and risks about candidates, but also expressed trust and gave some candidates the benefit of the doubt in their evaluations. Furthermore, I found that committee members provided counterarguments based on what another committee member had just

said. I wondered if in these (positive/negative) argumentations, worries, trust, and counterarguments I could find gendered patterns, meaning that committee members were practicing gender.

Table 5.2 Overview of men and women candidates among applicants, short-listed, after the 'threshold' and nr 1 ranked candidates

	Applicants				
	Total	M	%	F	%
STEM1	18	17	94,4	1	5,6
STEM2	43	36	83,7	7	16,3
STEM3	138	116	84,1	22	15,9
SSH1	20	16	80,0	4	20,0
SSH2	7	6	85,7	1	14,3
SSH3	17	10	58,8	7	41,2
	Short-list				
	Total	M	%	F	%
STEM1	6	5	83,3	1	16,7
STEM2	6	6	100	0	0
STEM3	8	5	62,5	3	37,5
SSH1	5	4	80	1	20
SSH2	4	3	75	1	25
SSH3	5	3	60	2	40
	After the 'threshold'		Ranked nr 1		
	M	F	M	F	
STEM1	1	1	1	-	
STEM2		-	1	-	
STEM3	2	1	1	-	
SSH1	1	1	-	1	
SSH2	2	1	1	-	
SSH3	2	1	1	-	

Then, I focused on those sections of the data where committee members evaluated candidates (e.g., short reflections right after the interview, deliberations about all the candidates who were interviewed when the final interview was held) in more detail. I coded which characteristics and accomplishments committee members mentioned in the evaluation of candidates in order to find out what criteria they consider important. I also noted if the comment contained positive and/or negative arguments, the type of argument (e.g., an explanation, counterargument,

comparison, assumption), if the argument voiced a risk, trust, doubt, or mistrust, and what the final decision was on the candidate (e.g., put on reserve list, invited for an interview, rejected). During the coding process I kept notes (memos) on the insights, ideas and patterns that I identified (Benaquisto, 2008).

During the previous steps, I found different phases of the selection procedure where practicing gender occurred. Practicing gender was not limited to situations where candidates were evaluated, as I also found, particularly in the e-mail and document data, that practicing gender occurred *before* and *after* committee deliberations, for example in composing hiring committees. I found multiple ways in which committee members practiced gender both before and after the deliberations and decided to make an analytical distinction in my data presentation between these phases.

Concerning the evaluation of candidates, gender practicing appeared most salient in the final phase of the decision-making, where committees had to decide on the ranking of the top candidates. In that phase there were subtle and complex interactions between committee members that resulted in the ranking of men as top candidates in four out of five procedures. This is particularly interesting, as this is the moment when committees had to choose between candidates and decide whom they consider the top candidate. In all cases, a number of candidates, both men and women, were ‘dropped’ early on in the final evaluation discussion, for example due to a lack of teaching experience, doubts about the quality of research, because they were considered too junior / not senior enough, or overall too inexperienced. In all the cases, at least one woman made it to the final two or three candidates who were considered an eligible candidate for the position.

Earlier research showed that “discrimination is most likely to occur when candidates have passed a basic threshold of perceived competence” (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2000 as cited in Rivera, 2017, p. 1119) and that practicing gender had most profound outcomes for candidates deemed to be above the bar or “at bar” in final decision meetings (Rivera, 2017). For that reason, I zoomed in on the discussions amongst committee members after each interview with candidates and on the deliberations leading to the final decision-making. I analysed on what criteria and arguments candidates were ranked top or sub-top and how men and women top candidates were evaluated. I looked for differences and similarities in the evaluation of candidates, which resulted in the identification of a number of patterns in the discussions among committee members. The analysis of the various patterns of practicing gender *during* committee deliberations led to five themes: 1) Championing candidates; 2) (Not) overcoming doubts; 3) Questioning truthfulness; 4) (Not)

praising ambition; and 5) Addressing the practicing of gender.

I continued with an in-depth analysis of these patterns. I made within-case and cross-case analyses to look for subtle similarities and differences in and between cases, which forced me to go beyond initial impressions (Eisenhardt, 1989). This ensured that I could uncover how committee members evaluate women candidates differently than men candidates but also how they evaluate men and women candidates similarly.

5.6 Findings

In this section, I first explore how gender is practiced before committee deliberations start, followed by the findings of practicing gender during committee meetings, and finally after the committee had parted. The emphasis will be on the findings of practicing gender during committee meetings and final decision-making, where two or three candidates were seriously considered as a top candidate for the position.

Setting the stage: practicing gender before committee deliberations

The e-mail conversations between committee members revealed that before the actual deliberations took place, gender was practiced when discussing, composing or documenting committee compositions. In this section, I show that this stage of the process is relevant when studying practicing gender, as this is where the hiring 'arena' is created. The committee composition creates the conditions in which gender can be practiced. Furthermore, I will show how micro politics come to the fore in the composing of a hiring committee.

The case university had installed a recruitment policy that prescribes that a hiring committee has to include a woman employee of at least the same positional level as the particular vacancy. I found that various committees addressed this policy in different ways and that not all committees abided by the policy. Looking at committee compositions, in all but one of the six cases, women were a minority in the committees. The only exception was the SSH3 committee, which consisted of an equal number of men and women scientific staff members. This was also the only case where the committee chair was a woman.

In the SSH1 procedure, William, the committee member who was in charge of the administrative issues during the procedure, was not aware of the university policy, and did not include a woman member of 'at least the same positional level' in the committee. After the committee was already installed, William was made aware

by the faculty HR officer that he had violated HR policy. This case shows that in William's group the faculty policy had not yet become commonplace. In an e-mail to all committee members, William proposed not to add a woman member to the committee at this last minute stage for the following reason:

*There is no [woman in the discipline] at assistant professor level in the faculty. Also nobody with somewhat comparable expertise, and moreover: inviting another woman at this point in time – well, I think that such person would know why she would be asked, as token n*gger [sic], and that she would not be happy with that.*

The first part of this excerpt shows that William supports his policy violation and decision not to include a woman in the committee by practicing gender, as he makes women responsible by using the often-mentioned argument that there are no suitable women available. In the second part, he adds another argument, in which he ostensibly sympathises with potential women committee members for the “*token n*gger*” status they would get attributed when (just) being invited to a committee for their sex. Here, he does not only reduce a potential additional member to a woman body, he also makes a derogatory referral to another social group related to race. In his e-mail, he compares a woman researcher who would be invited to the committee at the last moment to a person of colour with a token status. William's notation implies that he is aware of the politicized meaning, as he writes an asterisk at the place of the ‘i’. Interestingly, William acknowledged at the start of his e-mail his awareness of me observing the procedure. Yet, his concern regarded the violation of the faculty policy and – seemingly – not his inappropriate remarks about women and people of colour.

William ended his e-mail message stating that if other members wanted to “*expand*” the committee they would look for a “*new member*”. Yet, William's e-mail text implies that he did not see much value in adding a woman member in the committee, besides abiding by the faculty policy. William's strong statements in his e-mail might not have left much room for other committee members to change the committee composition. None of the committee members went against William's proposition. By sending this e-mail to other committee members, William might have influenced the other members in support of his own interests (Davey, 2008), and he got away with it.

In the STEM department, committee chairs invited women professors from other universities within or outside the Netherlands to join the selection committee. Therefore, they complied with university policy, yet, as a consequence of being an external committee member, women members – particularly those from abroad – did not attend all committee meetings. External committee members travelled to

the university on the day(s) of the job interviews with candidates and stayed until a ranking of the candidates had been discussed. Therefore, they could often not join those meetings where applications were discussed and shortlists were composed. Instead, external members were asked to give their input through e-mail or telephone, as they could not physically be there. The outsider status of women committee members in STEM may have limited the amount of power they could exercise during hiring decisions, as they were not part of the department where the position was vacant and they could not be physically present during all deliberations.

I found a couple of examples, particularly in the STEM department, where committee members practiced gender by reducing women who were invited to join committees to a gendered body. An e-mail from Catherine, a full professor and external member, and the only woman academic in the committee, to the chair of the committee, shows that she is aware of this practicing of gender:

I agree with the content of the report – a good and nuanced report of the evaluations. However, I strongly object to the addition “[name of university], woman” behind my name. Please replace with “[name of university], professor [name of discipline]”. I know that you invited me because in every hiring committee should be a woman. I generally take part in that because I hope that such rule helps increasing the number of women in science, but a criterion I have is that I only take part, i.e., join a committee, when I think that I can contribute to the content and not as a woman. That is why I want to be addressed with my expertise and not with my sex.

In this e-mail, Catherine responds to the appointment report, written by the chair of the committee, about the selection procedure. In that report, a list of all committee members is presented, which explicitly stated the sex of Catherine, but not of the men members. This practicing of gender makes her visible as a woman instead of an expert member who stands on an equal footing with the other committee members. Catherine made this practicing of gender visible and objected to being set apart because of her sex. Catherine’s response also shows that she is aware of the policy requirement to invite a woman to hiring committees and that she is willing to accept such invitations, yet, only when she is acknowledged for her expertise.

The excerpt also reveals that Catherine practices gender by confirming the belief that women on hiring committees will contribute to the hiring of (more) women candidates. The assumption that women help appointing other women can create a burden of expectation and responsibility for women committee members. In the STEM3 procedure, Jessie, an external committee member, argued during

the committee deliberation that she “*was asked to join this committee*” because the committee was “*seriously looking for [adding] a female member [to] the staff*.” Here, Jessie suggests that men committee members invited her because she is a woman and the related expectation that having a woman on a committee increases the chance of hiring women candidates.

The excerpts of William (SSH1) and Catherine (STEM1) show how policies aiming to include more woman researchers in hiring committees can create tensions. The examples show how some committee members in this study practice gender by emphasising the sex of women members and by reducing women to female bodies. William problematized this, by arguing against last minute inviting a woman in the committee just because she is a woman. Catherine indeed objected to being reduced to a gendered body instead of being invited for her disciplinary expertise. However, William overlooked that this last minute situation was caused by his own lack of knowledge of faculty policy, for which he did not take responsibility.

This section shows that inviting women to committees for their expertise is not yet a common practice in these departments. Instead, their sex is made relevant at moments when discussing, arranging or documenting committee compositions. Some women are aware of the practicing of gender with regard to their presence in hiring committees, yet they confirm the belief that their presence can contribute to the hiring of (more) women candidates. The affirmative action policy in the case departments is not sufficient for creating more gender-balanced hiring committees, as it is executed in various ways, and it creates situations in which the focus is on women’s sex instead of their contribution as expert members.

Practicing gender in decision-making

In the stage of the hiring procedure that I will analyse in this section, women and men candidates had passed the ‘quality bar’ and were considered eligible candidates for the position. I explore how gender is practiced in the final decision-making where committee members discuss the qualities of a small number of candidates in order to make a final ranking. In the final decision-making in all five procedures, a woman candidate was discussed as a possible number one candidate alongside with one or two men candidates. Yet, only in one case, a woman candidate was ranked the top candidate in the end. So this section looks at how committee members practice gender in the evaluation of candidates to get a better understanding why in most cases women lose the competition from men candidates.

Championing candidates

The first way gender was practiced in the final decision-making process was through the different ways in which committee members responded to the championing of men and women candidates. In each case in this study, a candidate was championed – by one or multiple committee members – and in all but one of the cases this was a man candidate (SSH1 was the exception). A committee member in a power position (e.g., the chair of the committee or a full professor) generally instigated this championing. The following example from the SSH2 case shows how candidate Ralph is championed right after his interview (the final interview of the procedure).

Bernard: I thought this [candidate Ralph] really was the best.

Jacob: He really stood out!

Bernard: Really the best.

Jacob: His presentation, English was good.

Bernard: He really has ideas that appeal to me. He brings a link to [home country of Ralph]. [This is] very clear. No doubt about it.

At this particular moment, the committee consisted of only two of the initial five members, as the other three members were absent due to other obligations. The excerpt shows how the remaining two members, Bernard and Jacob, build up their enthusiasm about Ralph and his performance in the interview, using strong and convincing vocabulary. Together, the two men committee members aligned their interests and strongly supported each other in their enthusiasm about Ralph. In their first response after Ralph had left the meeting room Bernard and Jacob practiced gender by ascribing Ralph ‘star potential’ in the dynamics of the deliberation (Van den Brink et al., 2016). They praised Ralph’s presentation, English speaking skills, ideas, and network. The data show that in this very brief exchange, which includes very few arguments, Bernard and Jacob had decided to recommend Ralph as the top candidate (“*no doubt about it*”). By doing so they closed off the opportunities for the other candidates, as Bernard and Jacob immediately side-lined them. They did so with liminal awareness (Martin, 2001), yet it could have serious consequences for the candidates involved.

Interestingly, the committee members had not discussed before the deliberations what selection criteria would be used to evaluate the candidates or how to weigh various criteria. Therefore, they could base their evaluations on their subjective impressions and criteria that were not part of the job profile (cf. Rivera, 2017). For example, a candidate’s network was not listed as one of the formal selection

criteria in the job description. The excerpt also shows that Bernard and Jacob relied on an “emotional component” (Rivera, 2017, p. 1118) in the evaluation of Ralph, as they expressed positive emotional reactions to Ralph’s performance in the job talk. Bernard also explicitly expressed his excitement about Ralph’s ideas. This emotional component played a part in the decision of recommending Ralph for the position and shows that Bernard and Jacob based a formal decision on interpersonal sentiments regarding the man candidate.

In the STEM3 case, the discussions about the various candidates who were considered for the position were much more extensive, but throughout the discussions one of the man candidates, Nicholas, was championed.

Stephen: So, [Nicholas’] talk was, was excellent and, and-

Jessie: Everything is excellent

Stephen: I mean, he has not had eh, the experience to give a lot of courses, but, but as, as informally we said yesterday, he’s basically a promise on the future but eh, his talk was, so I would like to put a plus [on the whiteboard].

All members were impressed by Nicholas’ resume, research, and fit in the department, and “*excellent*” was the first word that Stephen and Jessie said when they started discussing Nicholas. The excerpt also reveals that Nicholas’ candidacy and potential had been discussed informally among committee members. Committee members were somewhat negative about some answers Nicholas gave during the interview with regard to teaching, for example, because he did not give ideas for bachelor and master projects. Committee members attributed this to his young academic age and lack of experience with teaching. Due to his academic age and career achievements so far, they give Nicholas some leeway and focused on his potential instead. This is an example of how young age is used to address the temporality of a man’s weakness(es) and the belief that he will mature, learn and develop (Van den Brink et al., 2016).

When Nicholas was criticised, particularly one of the members, Martin, defended him throughout the deliberations. He countered critique regarding Nicholas’ teaching by emphasizing what Nicholas had done well.

Martin: But eh, I- There, there’s one other thing, for instance, when, when he was asked about the courses. I think he was very, one of the very few candidates who actually had a very reasonable proposal. He, he proposed for instance to, to teach a course on [content matter]. I think that’s an excellent proposal for the end of the bachelors. And it’s very interesting.

When Martin spoke about Nicholas throughout the deliberations, as illustrated by this excerpt, he often spoke in superlatives, which further strengthened his enthusiasm about the candidate. In this hiring procedure, other men and women candidates were still being discussed, but more in order to make a top three ranking, than as a candidate for the number one position.

In only one case a woman candidate was championed. In the SSH1 case, Leo championed candidate Dora because of her fit in the department regarding research and teaching and her international network. He also argued twice that Dora is a woman candidate and that they should take that into account, as it is “*a real problem that there are only men in the academy*”. One of the other members of the committee, Steven, was hesitant because he questioned the sincerity of Dora and wondered why her own university did not give her a permanent contract (see also the section ‘Questioning truthfulness’). The championing of the woman candidate by Leo did not sufficiently convince the other (men) committee members, and Steven in particular. Therefore, candidate Ed was also still considered as the top candidate. Due to Steven’s hesitance, the committee decided to check Dora’s credentials by asking references from her colleagues. Because they requested Dora’s references, they also did so for Ed. This was the only time in all cases where references were requested after the job interviews had taken place. So when this woman candidate was championed and got close to being recommended for hiring, a committee member wanted extra reassurance that they would make the right choice. After having received the references, the committee agreed on recommending Dora as the top candidate.

In most cases I found that one candidate was championed and recommended for hiring. The practicing gender in which the championing of women candidates happens much less often might be due to the selection of cases or the candidate pool, but, I found that in the one case a woman candidate was championed, committee members requested references about the candidate, as they were not convinced. Men candidates, on the other hand, who were championed, were mostly ascribed star potential. As a result, their position as top candidate was not contested in a way that required additional effort from the committee members who championed them.

(Not) overcoming doubts

Gender was also practiced in the final evaluation discussions when it comes to expressing doubts and whether or not these doubts were perceived as surmountable. Committee members expressed doubts to a certain degree about all first ranked candidates. Yet, for most men who were considered as the top candidate, these doubts were seen as surmountable, whereas for women who were considered as the top

candidate, doubts were often considered insurmountable by the committee.

None of the men who were recommended for hiring fulfilled all criteria the committee was looking for (as illustrated in the section ‘Championing candidates’), but in the decision-making this was never considered as a problem and never led to a lower ranking of the men. In two cases (SSH2 and SSH3), men candidates had published their work in journals that were either classified as low quality or in a different discipline than the particular vacancy. Committee members expressed doubts about whether or not these candidates would be able to make a “switch” to higher quality journals or journals in another discipline. In both cases, the men were recommended for hiring. This suggests that both men and women committee members had enough trust in the potential of men candidates to surmount their doubts even though they did not meet all the selection criteria.

In the STEM1 case, the committee was divided about the appointment of candidate Frank, because some committee members argued he did not fit the profile well and the majority of the committee did not applaud his performance the interview and the lecture he had given. They also questioned Frank’s motivation to apply for the position. Yet, Frank’s champion, Derrick, made a continuous effort to convince the other committee members of the suitability of Frank. As Catherine, an external committee member, could not join the final decision-making meeting, she was asked to send her opinion by e-mail. She argued that she would rank another candidate as number one, after which Derrick replied with an extensive answer as to why he wanted to appoint Frank, ending his message with:

I am convinced that the interview setting did not bring out the best in him, but that he certainly looks forward to join our group.

Derrick attributes Frank’s low performance in the interview to the “interview setting”, instead of to Frank. Derrick seemed willing to overlook the doubts of other committee members and made a big effort to convince them of Frank’s suitability for the position. As Derrick was the head of the group and the one who would work closely with the appointed candidate, he had the power to advocate his preferred candidate. Based on Derrick’s arguments, the other committee members agreed on recommending Frank for the position. From the HR advisor I learned that the dean rejected the committee’s recommendation of hiring Frank because the dean did not see Frank as a qualified candidate for the position.

The following exchanges within the STEM3 committee illustrate how doubts are raised for Laura, one of the three remaining candidates in the final evaluation

discussion. I discuss this case more extensively, as I can show in much detail how committee members practice gender in interaction. The committee had agreed that Laura was one of the top candidates because of her very strong research record, including publications in top journals. One of the selection criteria for the position, as mentioned in the job posting, was the ability “to attract external project funding”. In the following excerpt, two committee members talk about Laura’s chances regarding project funding opportunities:

Chris: I think eh, Laura’s chances on eh, fulfilling the tenure track conditions on grant money, which are serious in [name of city where the university is located], are less promising. Her chances.

Jessie: In [name of other city in the Netherlands] various people have been tenured even though they did not fulfil the requirements in terms of grant money.

[half a minute later]

Chris: But I, it’s a, I think it’s a relevant argument eh, for Laura to- It’s, it’s, like it’s a downside to her that her chances in the grant system are, are less than for the other two and eh, I don’t think it’s unfair to, to mention.

In the excerpt, committee member Chris argues that candidate Laura has little chance of obtaining grant money, which is one of the “tenure track conditions” in the department. Here, Chris makes a prediction for the future. Jessie tries to counter the argument by illustrating that people in another Dutch university did not fulfil the criterion of obtaining “grant money” and still got tenure. The data show that this did not convince the other committee members, as the money “argument” was reiterated multiple times in the discussion as a reason not to rank Laura the top candidate. Chris even emphasized his argument by calling this a “downside” and by stating that the other two candidates who were still considered would have higher “chances” in the “grant system”. Even though some committee members argued during the discussion that Laura might have a chance in some national and international funding schemes, the majority of the committee members did not overcome their doubts. These doubts were based on committee members’ expectations of Laura’s chances and not on real outcomes. For the two men candidates who were still being considered, Chris argued that they would have higher chances in the grant system. Other committee members followed this line of reasoning. For candidate Brian they based this, just as in Laura’s case, on expectations, which they rated higher than Laura’s. For candidate Nicholas they based this on the fact that he had already obtained a research grant. The committee spent hardly any time discussing Brian and Nicholas’ future funding

opportunities. Committee member Jeff cut off the discussion when Brian's funding chances were questioned, as the following excerpt reveals.

Jessie: But with regards to the grants- I've just looked at the whiteboard and there's actually nobody on the whiteboard who has really- I mean, Nicholas already has one and so, disregarding him, there's nobody who has a great chance in the Dutch grant system.

Jeff: I think Nicholas has. And also Brian-

Jessie: But, I said disregarding Nicholas -

Jeff: Quite promising.

Jessie: I said disregarding him.

Jeff: And even Brian, he could qualify for [a prestigious individual Dutch grant]¹.

Anna: He would probably.

Jeff: Which eh, Laura cannot for years.

Jessie: But the question is whether Brian -

Jeff: Kevin also has an international reputation, what makes him a good candidate for our grant system.

Jessie: Well, Laura has

Jeff: If Laura had been five years earlier in her career, maybe we- She would be ranked number one straightaway. But eh-

Jessie: But eh, Brian probably won't have a chance for [this prestigious individual Dutch grant] for another three years.

Jeff: Who knows. He has- But we'll get to Brian but eh- The chances of Laura are zero, because she doesn't qualify for [a prestigious individual Dutch grant] anymore.

Here, Jessie comes back to the grant criterion and argues that none of the candidates, except for Nicholas, has a "great chance in the Dutch grant system". Seemingly, she intends to oppose the argument that only Laura does not meet this criterion. In the discussion that followed, Jeff advocates the chances of obtaining funding for three men candidates, Nicholas, Brian, and Kevin. He surpasses Jessie's earlier observation that Nicholas might have a chance in the grant system. Also, he counters every argument in support of Laura brought up by Jessie. It seems like Jeff tries to strengthen his argumentation for disqualifying Laura and does not give much space to Jessie to argue otherwise. When Jessie goes against Jeff by saying that "*Brian probably won't have a chance for this prestigious individual Dutch grant for another three years*", Jeff

1 Such individual grants have become increasingly important, particularly in the STEM department, for academic evaluation and career progression.

stops the discussion by saying that they will get to Brian later in the deliberations. By doing so he silences Jessie and the critique on Brian. Also, Jeff expresses trust in the chances for obtaining funding for Brian as he replies to Jessie with “*who knows*”. This way, he leaves all possibilities open, whereas for Laura he reinforces his opinion by attributing her “*zero*” chances, neglecting possibilities to apply other (international) grant schemes than the Dutch one. Jeff disqualified Laura based on the grant criterion, but not Brian and Kevin. The other committee members did not attempt to change this assessment.

In the two previous excerpts, Laura was repeatedly criticised because of her academic age and her possible chances in the grant system. Jessie vainly tried to defend Laura by arguing “*various people have been tenured even though they did not fulfil the requirements in terms of grant money*” and “*there’s nobody who has a great chance in the Dutch grant system*”. The other committee members silenced Jessie’s support of a woman candidate. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) argue that it is harder for women in their minority position to support a woman candidate. Here we see indeed that Jessie cannot break through Jeff’s wall of support for men candidates and lack of support for Laura.

Later in this same case, when the committee came close to finishing the deliberations, several committee members added extra doubts about hiring Laura, as they brought up additional criteria that had not been raised for men candidates. Firstly, Stephen raised the question if Laura would be a good role model to female students, turning to the women committee members for an answer. He described a good role model as someone who does not “*act as if they were male*”. Jeff continued that an “*anti-role model*” is someone who is “*working a hundred hours a week*”. They argued that women students and academics would not want such role model. Thus, some committee members practiced gender by demanding from Laura that she meets the expectations of a *good* role model and that she acts as a woman. They added an extra criterion for Laura’s eligibility as the top candidate, which reflects expectations of a woman candidate related to femininity. In their narratives, Stephen and Jeff suggested that Laura should behave according to a feminine ‘repertoire’ (Martin, 2006). Anna, who was addressed by Stephen as one of the women to answer the question, replied that she did not see “*a risk*” that Laura would be a bad role model, which she did not further elaborate.

Immediately after, Jeff raised a second criterion that is only ever mentioned for women candidates in this study. This criterion has to do with persuasiveness and confidence. Halfway during the deliberations Jeff had argued that “*it’s important to be outgoing as a [researcher in our discipline]*” and had expressed worries about

“the outgoingness” of Laura. Martin added to this that Laura would not be good at “defending the department” “or herself” in front of a committee. Towards the end of the deliberation, Jeff came back to this, adding another doubt:

Jeff: My doubts, but I expressed them, about Laura, is her strength within our current unfortunate academic system.

Anna: This is back to the grants question?

Jeff: It's not only the grants. It's also in the position of [Laura's] group or of her department within a faculty or a university.

Anna: Why this? Explain this more. I mean, the grant's thing is a specific thing about not fulfilling some eligibility criteria based on scientific age. But the other thing I didn't get.

Jeff: Well, I would say this independence is, male people can have the same problem. I think at [Laura's] age and especially with the strong records that she has, I would expect someone who's more convincing face-to-face. I hope you see my point.

In this excerpt, Jeff expresses his doubts about Laura's strength and independence. He argues that this is an issue due to the “current unfortunate academic system”, which implies that he wants to ascertain that it is not him who considers Laura ineligible. He problematizes Laura's strength, as he argues that this is something that could affect Laura's position in “her group” or “her department”, making a prediction for the future. When Anna asked for clarification, Jeff hastened to say that men “can have the same problem” as if he wants to assure that he does not bring up this criterion because Laura is a woman. This implies that Jeff is aware of gender stereotypes but that in this case he considers (a lack of) independence a “problem” related just to Laura, regardless of her gender. Here, Jeff practices gender in a non-liminal way. Jeff describes Laura as “someone” who is not “convincing face-to-face”. He then refers to her age. Jeff reveals his expectations about the behaviour of an academic of a certain age and standing and projects his expectations on Laura. Neither Jeff, nor other committee members, evaluated the levels of independence or persuasiveness of men candidates. The excerpts reveal how various committee members pertinaciously disqualify candidate Laura based on criteria that are not raised to reject men candidates.

Jeff evaluated the behaviour of Laura negatively, even though her perceived lack of persuasiveness might have been in line with an expected feminine repertoire of behaviour (Herschberg et al., 2018a). He expected outgoingness and power from a desirable candidate, which reflects the “strong ‘natural link’ that most gatekeepers make” between masculinity and academics (Van den Brink, 2010, p. 224). However,

earlier in the discussion, when Lydia was evaluated, Jessie called Lydia “*very self-confident*” and she argued that this was too much and could hamper assessments from grant committees. Jeff even called Lydia’s performance in the interview “*controversial*”. This hiring committee thus demands of women candidates that they walk the fine line between too self-confident and too modest. They want to hire a woman who is not too masculine (“*working a hundred hours a week*”) and not too feminine (not “*convincing face-to-face*”). The committee evaluated the behaviour of Laura and Lydia as insufficient according to the narrow standard of desired behaviour of women and by doing so they brought up additional doubts about the appointment of women candidates.

This section has shown that committee members raise doubts about almost all candidates. The findings show how committee members practice gender by overcoming doubts about men candidates and not overcoming doubts, but creating additional doubts for women candidates. Doubts about women are amplified by creating additional criteria that they have to meet. We know from previous literature that women are held against higher standards than men (Thoraldsdottir, 2004; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014; Wennerås & Wold, 1997), but here I show how this happens in practice and in interaction. Furthermore, when it comes to women candidates, they included a hypothetical grant committee in their decision making process. They anticipated their evaluation based on how grant committees would possibly evaluate the behaviour of women candidates; behaviour that is based on stereotypical expectations of women (and men). This additional (non-formal) criterion was not applied in the evaluation of men candidates.

Questioning truthfulness

The third way of practicing gender in the final decision-making was by questioning the truthfulness of women candidates. I found that in a number of cases where only one woman was interviewed – and the men committee members were in the majority – the honesty of some of the women candidates was seriously questioned. In the following example of SSH1, Steven questions if Dora rightfully indicated in her CV that she had applied for a research grant.

Steven: There’s something I don’t understand. Her PhD is from [year]. Did she apply for [a prestigious individual Dutch grant]? She has [number of] children, so it might be just possible.

Leo: She would never lie about such thing.

Steven: You don’t know. We could check the formal data.

[Later in the deliberation]

Steven: If that woman is ranked first and she would win a grant, then [candidate Ed] could do something [in our teaching programme]. If she doesn't lie.

Here, Steven doubts if Dora was still eligible for applying for a grant, given her academic age and her number of children. He implies that Dora might not have given truthful information in her application. Leo defends her by saying Dora “*would never lie about such thing*”. Yet, Steven is not convinced and proposes to “*check the formal data*”. Later in the deliberation, Steven brings up once more that Dora could possibly have lied about her grant application. This suggests that Steven is not entirely willing to ascribe good intentions to Dora’s words. He practices gender by accusing Dora of possible lying and by doing so he disqualifies her as a truthful candidate.

In two other cases, committee members questioned the truthfulness of women candidates and speculated about possible incidents in their (previous) work places.

Jacob: I thought the reason to leave [city in the Netherlands] was vague. Is [Delia] really an assistant professor?

[Later in the deliberation]

Jacob: I believe there are things going on in [city in the Netherlands]. I don't trust it. Hornets' nest.

In this example from the SSH case, Jacob first questions the motivation of candidate Delia to apply for the position and then disputes if she actually holds the position that she suggests. He openly expressed doubts about the honesty of Delia, which can discredit her as a candidate. Later in the deliberation, Jacob brings up his feelings of mistrust as a reason to put Delia lower in ranking than the two (remaining) men candidates. He assumes that Delia applied for the position in Jacob’s group because there are problems or difficulties in her current group. It remained unclear what these assumptions were based on. Jacob did not further explicate if he had information about Delia’s work environment and colleagues.

I found a similar example in STEM1 where committee members expected that the woman candidate was not truthful. The following exchange that took place in the STEM1 committee illustrates that committee members questioned candidate Angela’s truthfulness and reason to change jobs.

I still have questions about her collaboration with others. I am afraid that she

[Angela] will get into arguments.

[Later in the deliberation]

I have problems with her references, because something happened. Men [of a certain nationality] against a woman who stands up for herself. Left twice because of problems.

I doubt her reason to go to [country].

After the interview, all committee members were positive about Angela's performance in the interview. But, one of the members stated that he/she² is "afraid that she [Angela] will get into arguments" when she would be hired. This committee member questioned the collaboration skills of Angela, which might have been particularly harmful for a woman candidate, as women are expected to excel in cooperation (Herschberg et al., 2018a). A committee member also questioned Angela's answer about moving to another country. Later in the decision-making, and similar to the case of Delia, committee members brought up assumptions about problematic working relationships as an argument to disqualify Angela. The committee members practice gender because they disqualify Angela by questioning her truthfulness and making assumptions about her previous work situation, which in this case happens in a non-liminal way. They explicitly refer to her gender, suggesting that she, a woman, stood up for herself against two men. The committee member argued that this caused "problems", which resulted in Angela leaving her position. They place the responsibility for these "problems" with Angela, as they problematize Angela's collaborative qualities, and not those of the men that seemingly wrote references about her. From what I observed, the committee members did not hold actual information about such problems, but they made assumptions about Delia's situation. Also here, committee members question if a woman candidate has told the truth, which is a strong accusation if based on assumptions only.

The only time honesty was questioned in men candidates was when committee members wondered if (men) candidates would actually come to the university or move closer to the university if they would be offered the position. An example comes from Leo (SSH1) who argues: "Ed would not move here in the future, while I got a good feeling about Dora." Leo suggests that Ed would not move close to the university, questioning the sincerity of Leo's application. In most committees, members discussed if candidates would actually come to the university if they would be offered the position. This mainly happened when candidates lived abroad. In this

² Due to the way in which I wrote my notes in the STEM1 case, I could not retrieve which committee member said what.

excerpt, Leo argues that Ed would not move for the position, whereas he thinks that Dora would move. However, in the data I also find examples where the willingness of women candidates to move is questioned. Interestingly, committee members often made assumptions about such willingness to move, but they did not ask the candidates directly during the interviews.

The findings show how committee members discredited women candidates by questioning their truthfulness regarding information provided in their applications. This practicing of gender is less subtle than other practicing gender found in this study. Earlier research has shown that women candidates are considered more risky than men candidates based on the perceived lack of quality of women candidates and the social complications of interactions between men and women (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Yet, the suspicion regarding women candidates, as shown in this study, has not been documented. To date, there is limited evidence of evaluators disqualifying women based on their perceptions of the truthfulness of women candidates. Only one study showed an example in which evaluators vilified a woman employee by questioning her loyalty to the firm and her cooperation style (Van den Brink et al., 2016). In this study I was able to capture a more extensive picture of how gender is practiced in evaluation by analysing how the truthfulness of women candidates is questioned over multiple cases.

(Not) praising ambition

Gender was also practiced in the evaluation of candidates when committee members reflected on candidates' ambitions. Men were often attributed high levels of ambition, a quality that committee members praised in men but not so much in women candidates.

Harriet: Tobias clearly aspires an academic career.

[Later in the deliberation]

Harriet: [about Tobias] I like it to have someone who really aims for an academic career.

As shown in this excerpt from the SSH3 case, Harriet argues that Tobias pursues an academic career, which she based on the interview with Tobias. Here, she reflects on Tobias' potential for the future. Later in the deliberation, she brought this up as an argument for hiring Tobias. On the contrary, committee member Thomas said about Maria, one of the women candidates in this case, that he "*supposes her priority lies with teaching*", implying that Maria does not pursue a career that involves a considerable amount of research. Here, Thomas might draw on the gender stereotype

that women are more prone to teaching than to research. Later on, Maria's ambition was questioned again:

Harriet: She would fit for both [research and teaching]. But I have doubts about her publications. She only has two in the pipeline. But those are together with [name of person in the field].

Michael: Her ambition for those papers, why did she not aim higher?

Harriet: I expect that is the highest possible achievement.

In this exchange, Harriet and Michael discuss Maria's publications in the pipeline. Michael questions Maria's level of ambition because, according to Michael, she did not submit her papers to top journals. Harriet believes that this is the best Maria can do. They leave unnoticed that Maria was early in her career (before PhD defence). Also, the committee members did not ask Maria why she chose to submit her work to certain journals. Instead, Michael and Harriet together disqualified both Maria's ambition and quality. In the final evaluation, this was the main reason not to put Maria in the top ranking. The committee members might have drawn on the gender practice that women's quality and ambition are evaluated lower than men's, which is a common practice in organisations (Sools et al., 2007; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Here, I show how this gender practice is practiced in an actual evaluation procedure, and how this can harm the assessment of a woman candidate.

In the SSH2 case, the publications of one of the men candidates, Henry, were assessed as "low quality". The committee argued that he would need a "buddy" or "mentor" for both his research and teaching. Nevertheless, this did not affect the evaluation of Henry's drive and ambition.

Bernard: He applied for a position in [city in the Netherlands] recently, I was told. I know him. He is very research driven, ambitious. He was in one of our seminars. He knows all literature. If we can't find anybody, we should hire him.

Bernard, who knew Henry and had worked together with him, suggested hiring Henry if the committee could not "find anybody". He praised Henry's drive and ambition throughout the deliberations, which seemed to make up for the criteria that Henry did not fulfil. Also, the network connection of Bernard and Henry seemed to benefit Henry's candidacy. In this same procedure, candidate Delia had indicated that she would publish a number of articles "in the next months". At least one of those was sent or would be sent to a top journal, as argued in her application. In the

meeting to discuss the shortlist, Jacob had called this “*bluffy*” and wondered if there was “*proof*” for this, thereby questioning Delia’s ambition for sending her work to good journals and the likelihood of success. In her interview, Delia had made a good impression on the committee, as argued by Jacob. But then he immediately continued by saying that “*I think it might be a bit of bravado*”. He practiced gender because instead of praising Delia’s ambition, as the committee did for Henry, he side-lined Delia’s ambition by calling it boasting or bluffing. This negative evaluation of Delia affected the committee members’ overall assessment of Delia, so in the final ranking she ended up below Henry. Here, we see again that stereotypical masculine behaviour (ambition) is disapproved for women candidates. These instances imply that women have to manoeuvre between levels of ambition that are within the boundaries of what women are allowed to display. They should not show too little and not too much ambition.

I found one example where the ambition of a man candidate, Frank, was questioned due to his bad performance in the interview (STEM1). But because Derrick championed Frank and the performance of Frank was attributed to aspects outside of him (see section ‘(Not) overcoming doubts’), the scepticism about Frank’s ambition was countered and he was hired nevertheless.

The findings show committee members practice gender by praising men who showed ambition in the selection procedure but questioning or disqualifying women’s ambition. Ambition in men candidates is considered a positive attribute and is labelled as ambition, whereas a woman candidate who showed ambition is considered something negative and disqualified as bravado. Committee members do so unreflexively. The data show how, in interaction, committee members draw on gender practices related to ambition, which can play a decisive role in the evaluation of candidates.

Addressing the practicing of gender

Resistance to gendered social interactions could reduce gender differences (Deutsch, 2007), but this requires a level of reflexivity and awareness (Martin, 2003). In my data I found a few instances where committee members addressed practicing gender when it occurred in the final decision-making process by openly reflecting on what other committee members said. These moments could be a chance for undoing (or reversing) practicing gender.

In the STEM3 case I found two situations in which practicing gender was recognized and openly reflected upon by committee members. As already illustrated in earlier sections, the candidacy of Laura was discussed intensively. At some point in

the discussion, committee member Martin voiced his opinion about Laura's quality as a researcher:

Martin: Actually, I think her reputation in, in the field is not bad at all. It's really- She is not a top star, she would not- If you ask me, would you nominate her for the [prestigious European prize in the discipline], whatever, I would probably say no. But if you ask me, is she actually a good [researcher in the discipline]? I would say, yeah.

Anna: So, I just-

Martin: She's not top-notch, but she, she, she's doing good work-

Anna: I asked that-

Martin: She's one of the candidates who does have an [A+ journal] paper and that's actually something, about something else. [...] And eh, she, she made a big, big breakthrough there and eh- That's, that's quite something. But, yeah, she's not a top star either I would say, she's not among the best five per cent in the field, something of that order.

This excerpt shows that Laura has published in a top journal in the field and that she has made a “big, big breakthrough” in her career. Yet, Martin downplays Laura's qualities by saying that he would not classify her as “a top star”. He argues that he would not “nominate her” for a prestigious European prize, emphasizing that she really is not a top star. Such possible nomination for a grand prize was never mentioned with regard to the men candidates. This implies that for Laura, the quality bar is set really high and another criterion is added. Interestingly, Martin championed candidate Nicholas throughout the process (see also ‘Championing candidates’), and thus seemed to have something to gain from not positioning Laura as a top star. He seemed to play a political game in which he championed one candidate extensively and (subtly) disqualified another candidate consistently. Somewhat later in the discussion Anna came back to Laura's research qualities and exposed how gender had been practiced in the evaluation of Laura.

Jessie: I would just like to say that [Laura] is probably the best female candidate³.

Anna: Yeah, and while we're talking about that, I mean, it is not really part of the decision-making process here, but it does look like, if we're concerned about- As an

3 In this procedure, women candidates were particularly salient and referred to as “female candidate” because the committee had made it a concern that the department did not have a woman staff member. Men candidates who applied to this position were generally not addressed by their sex.

issue, we have a very strong female [researcher in the discipline] who is going to be out of a job in [month] and may leave the subject. Which you know- And she had a paper last year in [A+ journal]. I sit on quite a lot of these committees and I don't see male candidates in that situation. I have never seen a male candidate in that situation. I've never seen a male candidate with a paper in [A+ journal], who is in danger of leaving [the discipline]. And that's what we're looking at in this female candidate. Now, I mean, it is not your job or the job of this committee to fix that problem, but it's worth saying at least.

[The other committee members remain silent]

Anna points towards the inequality she detected when comparing candidate Laura to men candidates whom she had evaluated in previous committees. She argues that men with a resume like Laura's, would not find themselves in such precarious position and in danger of being out of a job. Anna discovered how committee members might have practiced gender by not acknowledging Laura's quality and evaluating her accordingly. Anna argues that men candidates who are of the same quality as Laura would have been hired on an academic position already. She pointed towards an unequal position of men and women in the academic system and the difficulty for highly qualified women to be evaluated on their merits instead of gendered assumptions. After Anna's argumentation, all committee members remained silent. The opportunity to discuss (and remedy) the detected inequality was not taken up by the other committee members. Seemingly, they did not feel responsible for countering the practicing of gender in their procedure. What followed after the silence was a brief discussion on what the dean would think about hiring a "female candidate".

A little later in the same STEM3 deliberation, Jessie illustrated another way gender was practiced in the evaluation of Laura. In the following excerpt, she refers to the whiteboard that reflected the scoring of pluses, zeros⁴ and minuses for the various candidates based on four criteria: teaching, the interview, research, and fit in the department.

I also think Laura is stronger than Kevin, even though it is not reflected by the plusses and zeros on the whiteboard.

When all candidates had been discussed, it turned out that Laura, who was considered one of the top candidates, had received the second lowest score of all (remaining) five candidates (the lowest score was given to the other woman candidate). In the excerpt,

⁴ A zero indicated a score that was not a plus and not a minus.

Jessie argues that Laura is stronger than Kevin, however, the scores do not indicate this. Laura received a lower evaluation than Kevin on the criterion of fit in the department and similar scores on the remaining three criteria. The other committee members agreed that Laura should be in the “top 3” but did not reflect on the misattribution of scores. This occurrence shows that also when committee members structure their evaluation, gender can be practiced⁵. A woman candidate was attributed lower scores or a man candidate received higher scores than they actually deserved, according to the committee members. Yet, this is in accordance with research that shows that committee members do not “habitually” ascribe the same qualities to women as they do to men candidates (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p. 19).

In the STEM3 case, the women committee members uncovered practicing gender, but not men committee members. In the two examples where practicing gender was made visible, committee members Anna and Jessie touched a raw nerve about the evaluation of a woman candidate. Even though they made their fellow committee members aware of unfair practices in their evaluation of candidates, they did not achieve much response from them. Possible change from making practicing gender visible in interaction and on the spot could not be observed in my study.

Practicing gender in the aftermath

In the e-mails exchanges between committee members I found that gender was also practiced after the committee had parted. Also, at this stage, committee members played a political game regarding the ranking of candidates.

In the STEM3 case, committee members practiced gender by changing the ranking of the candidates without consulting the external women committee members and because this re-ranking harmed the position of the woman candidate. This became visible in a draft of the appointment report written by the chair of the committee, Stephen, which was supposed to capture the evaluation process and the hiring recommendations. This report was sent to all committee members by e-mail, asking for their input. In the original final ranking, Nicholas was ranked first and Laura was ranked second. The committee wanted to build a case for hiring both Nicholas and Laura as the department had a “*strong desire*” “*to appoint a female staff member*” (appointment report). But soon after the committee had parted, some men committee members started arguing by email for a different ranking of the candidates.

What had preceded the request and decision of the men committee members to change the ranking were a couple of things, as shown from e-mail conversations

⁵ In the section ‘Practicing gender in the aftermath’ I will elaborate on the outcome of the STEM3 procedure.

between committee members. Firstly, in hindsight some men committee members regretted that Brian was ranked number 3. Jeff wrote that this happened “*partly for tactical reasons*” (making a case for both hiring Nicholas and Laura), and he argued that he himself and some other members thought that Brian should be ranked first. Secondly, Martin was the first to suggest that the ranking should be changed.

Further I would state more clearly that Nicholas and Brian are ranked as being the two top-candidates, and that Laura, though the strongest female candidate in this round, is viewed as being not quite at that level. We should make it clear to the dean that there is a distinction.

Martin pled in his e-mail for a re-ranking, putting Laura on the third place. He devalued Laura’s quality in comparison to the two men candidates, even though this was not argued during the face-to-face deliberation. His message also shows how the political game is being played, involving the dean. Martin, but also other committee members, referred to the dean as they tried to anticipate his decision on whom to give a job offer. Anna replied to Martin’s e-mail that she did “*not agree with any re-ranking of the candidates.*” Nevertheless, in the draft of the appointment report that followed, Laura was ranked third and Brian second.

An e-mail message from Stephen, that accompanied the draft of the appointment report, showed that they had realized that ranking Laura second, could actually result in the appointment of Laura and not Nicholas nor Brian.

On the one hand, the dean has the possibility to overrule the ranking of the committee (it is officially only an ‘advisory commission’), thus putting Laura between two strong candidates of similar quality (Nicholas and Brian) there is a chance (regarded as realistic by the director) that the dean might simply appoint Laura instead of Nicholas. Furthermore, we only have a single position to fill, so the report must make clear that it would be an extra initiative of the faculty to create an additional position here for some specific reason (namely for a female candidate).

In hindsight I have to admit that the discussion after the interviews focused probably a bit too much on the option to appoint two candidates, of which one female. Given all the uncertainties about this option, we didn’t explicitly formulate a simple ranking for the single position. However, from the reactions to the summary [of the meeting] it clearly emerged that a majority of the committee sees Brian ahead of Laura.

The excerpt shows that Stephen is not in favour of solely hiring Laura. Anticipating a possible decision of the dean (namely appointing Laura), he wanted to change the ranking. Stephen's expectation that the dean might prefer hiring Laura most likely stemmed from the organisational context in which they operated. The department had very few women staff members and some (men) committee members had argued that they were looking for a woman candidate in order to increase the number of women in the department. At a faculty level, some action had been taken to increase the number of women staff, such as a number of tenure-track positions reserved for women only.

Stephen's e-mail shows that he clearly did not want to be at risk of having Laura appointed and not one of the men candidates. He argued in favour of appointing Laura only when a man candidate would also be appointed. He wants the faculty to "create an additional position" for "a female candidate" and thus does not want Laura to be hired on the "single position" they have vacant. I had noticed earlier on in the process that the committee members tend to talk about hiring women candidates only when there is money from the faculty specifically reserved for the appointment of women. I wrote the following in my field notes: "*It sounded like a way out for them: shifting the responsibility to the faculty and hiring a woman, but not on the department's funds*" (field notes, September 3, 2015).

Stephen attributed the change in ranking to the deliberation process, and the focus they had on appointing a 'package deal' instead of one candidate. His message also reveals that he had discussed the case with "a majority of the committee" who approved of ranking Brian ahead of Laura. Seemingly, the men committee members had gathered together with each other informally. They built an alliance with men in the committee who were all colleagues of the same department, trying to pursue their own agenda after the committee had parted, leaving the women members isolated.

Men committee members gave their approval of the draft of the report, and thus the re-ranking, through e-mail. Jessie and Anna did not approve of the change in ranking. Jessie wrote the following response to express her disapproval:

Stephen's email proposed a different ranking that is being presented as if it was agreed upon by the entire committee. This is not the case, indeed, everything written after "The selection committee finally agreed on the following ranking:" on page 4 does not in any way reflect the content and outcome of our discussion as I remember it.

To be honest, I have been uncomfortable with the tone and procedure of the hiring

process thus far and am unsure how to proceed. I will not support the argument that the ranking should be changed because otherwise the dean might be tempted to overrule it; I find that argument inappropriate. My first choice would be to keep the ranking as we had originally agreed. That being said, I believe all three candidates are equally qualified and I would support any ranking which includes these three in the top, provided the arguments reflect a discussion that involves the whole committee.

Jessie argued that Stephen had written up the process in a way that did not reflect her recollection of the ranking during the committee deliberations. She objects to the fact that Stephen wrote in the report as if the whole committee agreed with the outcome. Her feelings of discomfort with the process might have been a result of the informal and collective get together of the men committee members and them leaving the women committee members out of their informal discussions. Jessie also objects to the argument used by Stephen that the dean might overrule the committee's ranking. In reply, Anna wrote that she was "very unhappy" and "very uncomfortable" about the change of ranking. Both women committee members opposed the informal decision-making of the men but they received little understanding.

Then, a couple of days later, Jeff sent an e-mail to Jessie and Anna only, containing the following message:

Unfortunately the whole discussion has become somewhat irrelevant, as the dean turned down Laura's case irrespective of her ranking as no. 1, 2, or 3. He has looked at her cv and letters of recommendation (which he said were impressive) but, exactly as we feared, he felt she would have too few opportunities within the Dutch and European funding climate, and added that she wasn't an applied [researcher in the discipline] either, of which we are in dire need (it was new for me to hear that initially he had suggested the position to be open to applied [discipline] only).

This e-mail of Jeff shows that men committee members had informally presented the outcomes of the committee deliberations to the dean, before the appointment report had been finalized. Supposedly, the men in the committee had an informal relation to the dean, which facilitated their (informal) consultation with him. Going to the dean could have been a strategic move from the committee members. According to Jeff the dean had "turned down Laura's case" as a result of this informal gathering. The political game that the committee members played became quite unsubtle. Jeff's message raises the question how they have presented "Laura's case" to the dean. The men committee members who consulted with the dean were the ones who had not

championed Laura during the evaluation process or even actively tried to disqualify her. Their positioning regarding Laura could have influenced the dean's evaluation.

Jeff's message also shows how the women committee members are once more side-lined. They are confronted with the dean's decision without having had any influence and, moreover, with an additional criterion that supposedly should have played a role in the evaluation of candidates (being an applied researcher).

Following this e-mail of Jeff, Anna had contacted Jessie by e-mail to discuss the matter.

What do you make of this? To me, it seems very strange that a candidate is ruled out before the hiring committee has reported. And a very disrespectful way for an institution to treat external members. I don't know what they will propose to do now...

By this time, the committee seemed to have been split among gender lines. The women (external) committee members consulted each other to deliberate what to do about the "disrespectful" course of affairs. In the meantime, Jessie had called Stephen, the chair of the committee, to discuss some of her concerns, but Jessie stated in her reply to Anna that she found it "rather difficult to get him to understand the problems I am having with the procedure". In that same message, she wrote to Anna: "I decided to give up. I hope you are not too upset about this." The exchanges between Jessie and Anna (where I was included as recipient) show their experiences as external members and their feelings of frustration about the procedure and the politics. The data show that they had been excluded from the decisions to change the ranking and to have an informal meeting with the dean. In the end, the appointment report was rewritten, and did not include a ranking of the candidates but only suggested Nicholas as their first choice.

In this section I have shown how committee members in the STEM3 case practiced gender in the aftermath of the hiring procedure. The STEM3 case was the only case in my study in which committee members discussed the outcome of the procedure via email to such length after the deliberations had ended. The other procedures were settled when the advice of the committee had been sent to the dean.

The STEM3 case thus allowed for an analysis on the gender practicing in the aftermath. I observed that multiple gender practicing was done alternatingly. First, men committee members informally decided amongst each other to change the ranking of the candidates, without consulting the women committee members. Second, men committee members used their power to lower the ranking of a woman candidate, as

they seemingly did not want to risk a situation that she would be hired. Here I show how internal politics can be used to change outcomes a committee made collectively. Interestingly, a reason why the women committee members had been asked to join the committee was to help hiring a woman staff member. After the formal deliberations had taken place, the men committee members negated the women's ostensible valuable position in the committee, as they did not include them in the informal deliberation.

5.7 Discussion

The aim of this study was to capture the practicing of gender as it unfolds during academic hiring procedures for early-career positions. Studying the practicing of gender in real time helps making visible what normally remains invisible (Martin, 2001). This study answers to the call for more insight into practicing gender in collective contexts, such as hiring committees (Martin, 2006). Through observations of five hiring procedures I got unique insight into group dynamics and the way committee members practice gender collectively as well as the role of power in the collective practicing of gender. Collective practicing of gender in hiring committee settings can be harmful, as the outcomes of collective deliberations have a considerable effect on the applicants. I have shown how committee members practice gender in relation to other committee members when they compose committees, have discussions, and make decisions, and how committee members practice gender in the evaluation of candidates who are deemed 'above the bar'. This study shows the complexity and the multiple layers of practicing gender in academic hiring. I will discuss two inter-related practicing dynamics. First, the practicing of gender as a group process in academic hiring and, second, the power processes in the collective practicing of gender. For analytical purposes, I will disentangle gender practicing and power, but I acknowledge that this is an analytical distinction, as in practice they are intertwined.

Practicing gender as a group process

I will first elaborate on the practicing of gender in hiring procedures for assistant professors. I have shown how the committee members in my study more often supported qualified men candidates than qualified women and how they more often disqualified qualified women candidates than qualified men. What I could uncover because of my observations is how committee members practice gender in interaction with each other and how they influence each other. I have observed how the course of the decision-making process and the outcomes are very much

dependent on who gives what kind of arguments and about whom, as this prompts responses from other committee members. The results indicate that a positive or negative first remark can make or break a candidate. Therefore, group dynamics in hiring committees are quite delicate. For example, in the SSH2 case, committee member Bernard ascribed candidate Ralph star potential right after Ralph had left the interview room. Committee member Jacob followed this line of reasoning and even amplified Bernard's argument, building a case for Ralph's candidacy. I found in multiple cases that when one committee member expressed their strong enthusiasm about a candidate, particularly when it was a man, other committee members followed suit. Also with regard to criticism of a particular candidate, committee members influenced each other. For example, in the SSH3 case committee members Harriet and Michael discussed the publications of candidate Maria. Harriet expressed her doubts about the publications (in the pipeline), which prompted Michael's response that questioned Maria's ambition. In a few cases, committee members disagreed with and countered each other's arguments, which was shown in the conversation between Jessie and Jeff (STEM3) about Laura's chances in the funding system. Jessie tried to oppose Jeff's argument that Laura won't be eligible for funding but Jeff countered every argument of Jessie and even silenced her at times.

As a result of group processes, committee members practiced gender collectively by holding women candidates against higher standards than men and by raising (additional) doubts or amplifying doubts about women's qualities. I also found that because of the more stringent evaluation of women candidates, women have to walk a fine line between stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviours. When women do not meet the narrow standard of behaviour that is desired of women, committee members collectively tend to criticize them for this, and in turn, evaluate women below men candidates. My data showed that women candidates were more often than men evaluated (and disqualified) based on personal characteristics such as strength, ambition, role modelling and even truthful behaviour. Committee members generally did not challenge each other when one of them was practicing gender by disqualifying women based on personal characteristics or by questioning their truthfulness. This way, women candidates in this study had to fight an impossible fight because their fate is determined behind closed doors. They did not get the opportunity to challenge committee members' assumptions or to oppose arguments when their legitimacy was intensely affected in cases where they were accused of lying. A previous study has shown that gatekeepers tend to consider women candidates risky due to their perceived 'otherness' (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2014), but the mistrust that committee members in my study expressed regarding

women candidates shows how damaging such adverse stance can be. I have observed how some committee members went at length to make sure women candidates were not ranked the top candidate.

Most studies on practicing gender argue that practicing gender happens unreflexively and with liminal awareness (i.e., without full awareness) (e.g., Martin, 2001; Van den Brink et al., 2016) of both the person who practices gender and the people who are there when it happens. Most examples I have shown in this study confirm this view, but I found a few situations in which gender practicing was notified and addressed. For example, in the STEM 3 case, women committee members made men committee members aware of the practicing of gender regarding the non-acknowledgement of the quality of candidate Laura. Yet, men committee members disregarded the women members' arguments and they did not adjust their interpretation and evaluation of Laura. Ironically, the women committee members had been made responsible, before the start of the committee deliberations, for hiring new women members of staff. This, again, shows the importance of the interplay between committee members for the decision-making process. Contrary to the suggestion of Martin (2003), naming and making visible harmful practices was not sufficient in my cases to dismantle gender practicing.

Practicing gender and power

I argue that this is where power comes in. My data shows that power plays a role in practicing gender in two different ways. The first way is related to the composition of hiring committees and the second to individual interests.

Firstly, when looking at the role of men and women researchers in committees I observed that in most cases, women committee members had unequal positional power compared to men. Full professors who were department heads or a member of the department, mostly men, often played a dominant role in committee deliberations. In most cases the influence of women in the deliberations was limited. This was the result of women not being invited to the committee at all, the lower positional power of women committee members (for example due to rank), or because women committee members were from outside the case university. Women committee members from outside the university had more of an external advisor position, which put them in a different seat than the men committee members, who were the natural insiders. As such, the power position of the women in the committee might have played a role in for example the non-response of men committee members when the women made practicing gender visible. The committee composition sets the arena for the power laden practicing of gender. The positional power of committee members influences

who deploy their power, whose arguments are perceived as legitimate, and who is or is not challenged or ignored.

Secondly, my analysis showed how micro politics and individual agendas play an important role in collective committee decision-making (cf. Bozionelos 2005) and in collective practicing of gender. The committee members who held considerable power tended to dominate deliberations and they took on the role of champions and / or anti-champions for specific candidates. In collective decision-making processes high status members often receive little or no contradiction from others (cf. Van Arensbergen et al., 2014b). I found indeed that powerful members were not often challenged and if they were, they assured the other(s) to accept their standpoint. Other committee members often complied with this. Sometimes after a little resistance, compliance followed. For example, in STEM1 Catherine (an external committee member) complied with nominating Frank, even though she had expressed that she would have preferred nominating another candidate. In STEM 3, Anna and Jessie complied in the end with nominating Nicholas, after a political game played by men committee members. Compliance seems to play a role in the maintenance of gender inequality. Another example where I observed micro politics and individual agendas in action is when women committee members addressed gender practicing. This awareness raising did not change the behavior of men committee members. Such gender practicing (for example not championing women candidates) might have been in line with their personal agendas. The men committee members might have remained silent because they did not welcome the women's assessment, as it went against the men's preferences for other (men) candidates. Therefore, individual agendas might have hindered dismantling practicing gender in the hiring committee.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined how hiring committee members practice gender in hiring procedures for assistant professor positions. The focus on early-career positions is important as hiring decisions determine who can fulfil their academic aspirations and who will be the future researchers that shape the direction of research. This study contributes to the literature on gender inequality in (academic) hiring by showing seven patterns of practicing gender that illustrate how hiring committee members practice gender before, during and after committee deliberations. Also, it contributes to the literature on gender practicing by showing how by practicing gender inequality is created and sustained and also how it is resisted and challenged in collective settings

that produce gendered outcomes.

My first contribution to the literature entails a nuanced understanding of how committee members collectively disqualify and even discredit qualified women candidates as well as how committee members 'pile up' negative evaluations of women candidates over time. Previous studies have addressed that women are often evaluated more negatively than men (Herschberg et al., 2018a; O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b) and through observations I could indeed show how in interaction committee members apply different standards to women than to men and how the chances of women candidates, as a result, are negatively affected in the cases under study. I have shown that practicing gender in hiring committees is a group process in which committee members influence each other in the decision making process. The championing of a candidate by one committee member (oftentimes in a power position) can determine the direction of the discussion. As such, committee deliberations can be quite arbitrary in that it depends who says what in what moment.

My second contribution to the literature of practicing gender in hiring pertains to the intertwinement of gender practicing and power. Using important insights from studies who show either power dynamics (Bozionelos, 2005) or gender practicing (Van den Brink et al., 2016; Rivera, 2017) in evaluation, I have shown how in this collective setting, composed of members with their own agendas, power and gender practicing are intertwined. The interplay of group dynamics and micro politics impacted the collectiveness of practicing of gender. I suggest that the committee composition and the distribution of power within the committee are important influencers of hiring outcomes. When people in power positions practice gender, this might be most damaging as their voices carry the most weight and they tend to have the final say in hiring decisions.

In this study, I have shown that a collective setting like a hiring committee presents an opportunity to address it when people interpret each other as practicing gender (Martin, 2006). In a group, multiple people can notify and address practicing gender when it occurs. As such, interactional and situational contexts can have the potential to dismantle practicing gender when it is notified. However, power and compliance can be strong counter mechanisms, because they can eliminate the potentiality for dismantling practicing gender. This study described situations where practicing gender was addressed by some committee members but with no subsequent effect due to micro politics or compliance of other or the same committee members. Future research could look into cases where micro politics are (actively) used to counter gender practicing in hiring.

This study has provided a fine-grained analysis of how committee members

reproduce gender inequalities in a context where women's participation in academia is on the committee's and the university's agenda. Even though a willingness to hire women candidates is voiced, the aspiring early-career women academics in my study are negatively affected by gendered judgements in hiring committees and their decision-making. Knowledge on how the complexities of practicing gender and power are played out might help to create awareness and reflexivity among hiring committee members and can contribute to more fair hiring practices.





Chapter 6

General discussion



This doctoral dissertation aims to achieve a better understanding on how inequalities come to the fore in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers (ECRs) and in particular how hiring committee members construct inequalities in the recruitment process, in the formulation and application of selection criteria and in collective decision-making processes. Adopting a social constructionist perspective, I show how inequalities are (re)produced by hiring committee members (hereafter: committee members) in multiple ways. In the following section, I will elaborate on these various ways in which inequalities are (re)produced, providing an answer to the main research question of this dissertation. Second, I will discuss the contributions of this dissertation to the literature. Third, I will discuss the practical contributions, and finally the methodological reflections and suggestions for further research.

6.1 Answer to the research question

In this dissertation I aim to answer the following main research question: *how are inequalities (re)produced in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers?* I studied postdoc positions¹ and tenure-track assistant professorships because these are the first positions after completing a PhD and before obtaining a more stable, permanent position in academia. I argue that these positions require attention, as applicants for these positions can be the future researchers that shape the direction of research and they experience more competition for stable positions than ever (Hakala, 2009). To answer the research question, I use a social constructionist perspective, which looks at the social world as constructed by individuals through their discourses and social practices (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004; Dick & Nadin, 2006). Studying practices focuses on dynamic processes and the sayings and doings of people (Martin, 2003). I use a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design in my dissertation, in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of the (re)production of inequalities in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers². In my dissertation I intend to discover how committee members (re)produce inequalities by analysing data from interviews and focus groups with committee members, and observation

1 Although there are a variety of postdoc positions, in this dissertation I focus on the postdoc positions originating from external research grants acquired by principal investigators in public funded higher education institutions.

2 This doctoral dissertation has been conducted against the backdrop of the EU FP7 project GARCIA, which entailed cooperation between seven different European research institutes in Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Iceland, Austria, and Slovenia.

data from multiple hiring procedures. In addition, I analysed hiring policies in order to understand the meso-context in which committee members operate.

Each chapter of this dissertation contributes to the answering of the research question. Overall, my data show how multiple inequalities are created for early-career researchers (ECRs) through recruitment and selection processes and selection criteria. I show how committee members practice inequalities based on other aspects than individual merit, such as categories of social differences. Also, inequalities exist between postdoc and assistant professor positions because postdocs (who are hired on a principal investigator's project) can be treated as a kind of short-term project worker instead of being selected for their potential to pursue a long-term academic career.

First, I started with analysing the inequalities that are (re)produced in the recruitment and selection for postdoc positions in STEM and SSH departments of four European higher education institutions. In chapter 2, I observed that the most apparent inequalities in postdoc recruitment and selection are instigated by the projectification of academia. Due to the lack of accountability for the hiring of postdocs for temporary projects, principal investigators (PIs) can exert a lot of power over the recruitment and selection practices they use. This study showed that in the four countries in this study, PIs often choose to recruit postdocs through informal networks, which creates inequalities between the potential postdoc candidates who are part of a valuable network and those who lack network connections that can give them access to postdoc positions. Furthermore, the recruitment and selection of postdocs that I address in this chapter reveal inequalities between postdocs working on a PI's project and postdocs who acquired their own funding. The former have fewer possibilities of building their own research line, as they are more dependent on the PI and enjoy less autonomy. Postdocs working on their own project usually have more opportunities to independently develop a coherent research line that is required for a next – more stable – position. Therefore, working on a PI's project might have an effect on the careers of ECRs because they might have a more scattered research line.

My data show that the second way inequalities are (re)produced is in the translation from macro-discourses to meso-level criteria and to micro-level criteria. In chapter 3, I identified four inequalities through studying the criteria embedded in macro-discourses of internationalisation and excellence, and the application of the criteria at the meso-organisational level and micro-individual level committee members in a Dutch university. At the macro- and meso-levels, criteria remain rather broad and undefined, which leaves room for interpretation by individual committee members when they apply selection criteria in recruitment and selection procedures.

This lack of definition creates conditions in which detrimental inequalities can occur that can affect the evaluation of candidates. In the accounts of committee members, I noticed that in their translation of university policies, selection criteria are applied in various ways. This can result in multiple inequalities in the hiring of assistant professors. These inequalities are (re)produced through a lack of definition, and personal interpretations and preferences. First, I found inequalities regarding the discourse of internationalisation and the importance committee members attribute to international research experience. The translation of the criterion of international experience creates inequalities between candidates who have international postdoc experience that is valued by committee members and candidates who acquired postdoc experience in countries or institutions that are non-valued. Second, inequalities are created based on the (committee members' perception of) language proficiency of candidates (both in English and in Dutch), which is partly based on a candidate's nationality. Third, inequality is created between ECRs who have mobility opportunities and those who have not. Such opportunities can be influenced by, for example, physical, psychological, social or financial factors. Fourth, in the evaluation of candidate's excellence, committee members draw on their subjective interpretation of the potential of prospective candidates, which can create inequalities between, for example, men and women candidates.

A third way this dissertation shows inequalities are (re)produced is through the enactment of gender practices in the evaluation of assistant professors. More specifically, I show how, in STEM and SSH departments of six European higher education institutions, inequalities are (re)produced through the stereotypical perceptions, expectations and ascriptions committee members have of and attribute to women (and men) candidates. Due to the limited track record of candidates for early-career positions, committee members make an assessment of potential, and by doing so they rely heavily on tacit criteria. I observed in chapter 4, for example, that committee members perceive a lack of confidence and commitment as well as limited mobility opportunities for women ECRs and this way they construct women as less suitable for assistant professor positions. They construct confidence, commitment and international mobility as necessary aspects for surviving in what they refer to as the competitive academic world. Committee members reproduce stereotypical images of women as modest, non-competitive, collaborative, and as less devoted to academia because of care responsibilities. I observed that one tacit criterion that is considered important for assistant professor positions might be to the advantage of women candidates: the criterion of academic citizenship. Most committee members confirm the stereotypical belief that women have better relational skills and are more prone

towards collaboration and academic service, which suggests that women candidates may score higher on the criterion of academic citizenship than men candidates. Committee members tend to make generalisations about men and women and they construct women and men as opposites. I have shown that the detrimental gender practices of constructing potential through the perceptions of an ideal, confident, committed, and international mobile early-career researcher are so ubiquitous that they can cause committee members to make gendered selection decisions, attributing more potential to men researchers.

The fourth way inequalities are (re)produced is through practicing gender in actual hiring processes for assistant professor positions. I studied multiple hiring processes of a STEM and an SSH department of a Dutch university. In chapter 5, I show that committee members practiced gender collectively by holding women candidates against higher standards than men and by raising (additional) doubts or amplifying doubts about women's qualities. What I could uncover because of my observations is how committee members practice gender in interaction with each other and how they influence each other. I have observed how the course of the decision-making process and the outcomes are very much dependent on who gives what kind of arguments and about whom, as this prompts responses from other committee members. The results indicate that a positive or negative first response can make or break a candidate. My data show that committee members evaluate (and disqualify) women candidates more often than men candidates based on personal characteristics such as strength, ambition, role modelling and even truthful behaviour. I also show how women candidates have to walk a fine line between stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviours in job interviews. My analysis also shows how micro politics and individual agendas play an important role in collective committee decision-making and in collective practicing of gender. The committee members who held considerable power tended to dominate deliberations and they took on the role of champions and / or anti-champions for specific candidates.

Each chapter makes a specific contribution to understanding the (re) production of inequalities in recruitment and selection practices for early-career positions. I have shown that the macro-context influences recruitment and selection, for example through the projectification of academia and macro-discourses such as excellence and internationalisation. Also, recruitment policies at the meso-level influence recruitment and selection as they regulate what selection criteria should be applied. But mostly, this dissertation sheds light on how committee members, both as individuals and in groups, (re)produce inequalities on the micro-level through their practices. The practices of committee members are found to be particularly important

as they make the actual selection decisions on who are included and excluded from early academic careers.

In the next section, I will elaborate on the overarching contributions to the literature of this dissertation, combining the insights and contributions of all chapters.

6.2 Contributions to the literature

Many studies on gendered recruitment and selection tend to focus on cognitive bias in the evaluation of men and women. These studies have shown, for example, that male candidates are evaluated as more competent for a position (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012), that high-achieving women are penalized in hiring procedures (Quadlin, 2018), and that men are generally favoured in hiring decisions (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001). Also, the majority of research on ECRs, - for instance on postdocs - focuses on their individual lived experiences, such as identity work and work motivation (Hakala, 2009), their experiences of relocation (McAlpine, 2012), their career satisfaction (Van der Weijden, Teelken, De Boer, & Drost, 2016), and their perception of career prospects (Teelken & Van der Weijden, 2018). Such (psychological) approaches take an individualist stance that explains social phenomena by the “properties of individual people” (Schatzki, 2005, p. 466), and offer valuable insight into the micro-level of analysis. In this dissertation, I use a social constructionist perspective and a practice lens, which conceives and studies (in)equality differently: as a relationally constituted social phenomenon (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018). With this approach I was able to conduct a more systemic analysis on how postdoctoral researchers and assistant professors land in their positions. I took into consideration the situated practicing of recruitment and selection, “zooming out” to trace the wider site to which this practicing is tied (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018, p. 20). Therefore, I could show how recruitment and selection practices are not constructed in a vacuum but embedded in academic, national and global contexts.

Practice studies have entered the field of diversity studies only to a limited extent (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018). The few studies on gender inequality in academic recruitment and selection that (explicitly) adopt a practice lens have mainly focused on professorial positions (Van den Brink, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b, 2014). These studies provide valuable insight into gender practices in the evaluation of professional qualifications (such as research output), individual qualities (such as leadership) and networking practices, that set the bar higher for women professorial candidates than for men. To date, a practice approach has not been used to study

inequalities in recruitment and selection practices for early-career researchers (ECRs) who are increasingly working on unstable and temporary contracts. Using a practice lens, I further advance the scholarly conversation on inequalities in recruitment and selection in two ways: 1) by focusing on the hiring of early-career researchers and 2) by contrasting gender practices and practicing gender in recruitment and selection.

Hiring early-career researchers

The first contribution of my dissertation relates to the focus on early-career researchers in studying the (re)production of inequalities in recruitment and selection practices. My findings show both similarities and differences in hiring practices for early career positions compared to the literature on hiring for senior positions such as associate and full professorships. Similar to studies on senior positions that reveal how committee members engage in practices such as informal scouting and inviting candidates, favouring local or known candidates, and closed hiring (Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), I observe that such informal networking practices are common for early-career positions too. Committee members argue that (alleged) quality is the main focus in the hiring of senior candidates (O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b), yet, I show this holds for early-career stages as well. My findings also uncover power games (Bozionelos, 2005) and the presence of gender practices in recruitment and selection (Van den Brink, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b).

This dissertation shows that inequalities in recruitment and selection practices for early-career academic positions differ from more senior positions on two main aspects: 1) the projectification in academia, and 2) the assessment of ECRs' potential due to their short(er) track record.

First, I observed that what makes the hiring of postdoc researchers different is the way they are funded and the type of position this creates. Increasingly, academics are held accountable for the external research funding they obtain, which creates strong competition for collaborative and commercial research funding (Lam & de Campos, 2015). As external research funding mostly finances temporary research projects the amount of project-based research has grown (Ylijoki, 2010), also referred to as 'projectification' (Ylijoki, 2016). This results in a growth of peripheral precarious jobs, such as postdoc positions. In chapter 2, I showed how the projectification in academia instigates recruitment and selection practices for postdocs to be predominantly focused on the short-term.

The dominant discourse in academia is that principal investigators compete for "the 'best' postdoc candidates from around the world" (Cantwell, 2011, p. 435).

Yet, my analysis shows that principal investigators use a more narrow construction of the ideal postdoc. They look for someone who can successfully execute and complete a temporary project and who will stay for the duration of that project. Principal investigators in my study implied that they tend to opt for low(er) risk candidates who can meet project objectives, in which availability can prevail over other criteria. The investment from both the employer and the employee is seen as only for a limited time, which causes principal investigators to particularly focus on short-term project objectives rather than a candidate's suitability for a longer-term academic career. Thus, the ideal postdoc is not constructed as a researcher who can invest in the development of a scientific and societal relevant research programme, but as someone who is a project worker. As a result, there is limited attention for the longer-term career perspectives of postdocs and a possible misalignment with the next career step.

Second, I show that ECR recruitment is different from senior positions because of the assessment of potential for junior scholars. Studying hiring practices for both postdoc and tenure-track assistant professor positions revealed an interesting distinction between the two. For tenure-track positions, committee members focus more on the long term than for postdoc positions, as candidates for assistant professor positions are seen as the future researchers that can shape the direction of research. The various studies on assistant professors in this dissertation show that committee members (have to) make judgements based on potential because candidates do not have long track records of academic performance. I observed that hiring based on potential tends to be a subjective endeavour that gives room for selection based on tacit criteria. The studies in this dissertation show that these tacit criteria are conflated with inequality practices, as they give room for personal preference and assumptions. Recruiting and selecting in and of itself are designed to exclude people. However, in the collective, power laden processes of recruitment and selection, unintentional inequalities can come to the fore. Such inequalities pertain for instance to gender, which brings me to the second contribution of this dissertation that I will elaborate on in the next section.

Practices and practicing in recruitment and selection

The second contribution of this dissertation pertains to studying the (re)production of inequalities in recruitment and selection by examining the two-sided dynamic of practices (i.e., what has been said and done routinely) and practicing (i.e., saying and doing in real time and space) (Martin, 2003). I add to the debate on inequalities in recruitment and selection by relating the accounts of committee members (i.e.,

their practices) to actual collective practicing of committee members in real time situations. I show that gender practices and practicing gender are ubiquitous in the assessment of potential at the early stages of an academic career, making three contributions to the literature in this area.

First, the two-sided dynamic of gender practices and practicing gender provided important insight into the interrelation of practices and practicing (Martin, 2003). I show that gender practices tend to be quite abstract and often refer to stereotypical perceptions of an entire group of women or men (e.g., women or men researchers). When studying the practicing of gender, I showed how practices are enacted in real time situations regarding a single candidate. I observed how the gender practice that men are more competent candidates for early-career researcher positions than women is manifested in the unreflexive, directional and rapid practicing of gender. Men candidates are generally ascribed (star) potential more immediate and more unconditionally than women candidates in group settings like hiring committees.

Second, I show how committee members collectively constructed additional criteria for women candidates, thereby creating further inequality for women. For example, I show that committee members have a welcoming stance towards hiring more women in academia. One reason for this welcoming stance concerns the perceived need for women role models. However, I analysed in this dissertation that in actual hiring situations this can create an additional criterion for women candidates that can impair their position in the selection process. In one of my studies, a woman candidate was assessed (and disqualified) on whether or not she would be a good role model, which is a criterion that had not been raised for men candidates. As a result, women and men candidates do not play on a level playing field.

Third, I uncover in this dissertation how in the collective setting of hiring committees the role of power is crucial, particularly when studying the practicing of gender. Gender is typically practiced in a power context (Martin, 2006) but both practicing gender and power are hard to observe, as practicing tend to happen quickly and subtle. The study on practicing revealed subtleties and complexities of power and inequality that do not become visible when relying solely on interview accounts. In my study, the positional power of the various committee members had a substantive effect on how gender was practiced. Observing the manoeuvring of committee members with their own agendas, revealed how certain committee members could deploy their power, seeking ratification by other committee members for their preferred (men) candidates. Studying how gender is practiced in a group also showed how limited positional power can result in compliance in collective

decision-making. As a result, practicing gender can be actively resisted, but when committee members in less powerful positions did this in my study the outcome was not affected. Committee members who hold the power can define situations as they see fit and practice gender with liminal awareness (Martin, 2003).

6.3 Practical recommendations

Recruitment and selection decisions have long-term consequences for individual careers, university departments (Bozionelos, 2005) and scientific knowledge development. Therefore, getting insight into the (re)production of inequalities might help higher education institutions to develop recruitment and selection practices that enhance positive consequences. The studies in my dissertation have received (inter)national media attention, which shows the practical importance of the topic. For an overview of the media representation see Appendix D.

This section provides practical recommendations for organisations and hiring committees in order to counter the (re)production of inequalities in recruitment and selection, particularly at the early stages of an (academic) career. I will discuss practical contributions for both the stage of postdoc researchers and assistant professors and various aspects of the hiring process.

Hiring policies for postdoc researchers

In my study on postdoc recruitment and selection I show that in multiple European universities, there is no hiring policy for postdoc researchers when these positions are financed by external research funding that principal investigators (PIs) receive. As a result, PIs often determine solely how they want to recruit a postdoc researcher and whom they want to hire. Interviewed PIs explained that they often have little time for hiring postdocs because projects have to start within a certain timeframe. This limited time frame for recruitment and selection can instigate closed hiring procedures and reliance on personal networks to find candidates. I argue that this can exclude talented ECRs that are not part of such networks. Therefore, I recommend that universities and research institutes that employ postdoc researchers, implement formal recruitment and selection policies for postdoc positions that require open recruitment of postdocs, as this can reduce inequality practices inherent in closed recruitment. More formalized recruitment and selection could also prescribe that PIs should form a hiring committee to ensure that PIs are not solely responsible for the hiring. However, we do know from the literature that the formalization of hiring

procedures is no guarantee for more fairness or equality in outcomes (Helgesson & Sjögren, 2019; Noon, Healy, Forson, & Oikelome, 2013; Van den Brink, Benschop, & Jansen, 2010) because micro politics play an important role in hiring decisions. Nevertheless, formalizing hiring processes for postdocs could be an important first step towards more accountability and equality.

Also, my study on postdoc hiring shows that PIs tend to opt for candidates who can meet project objectives, in which availability can prevail over other criteria, partly because they need a postdoc researcher who can start at short notice. Given the importance of having the right candidate in the right place, I recommend research funding organisations to extend the obligatory starting date of projects in order to provide PIs with more time for good quality recruitment and selection.

At the same time, I see the need to take into account the careers and career prospects of postdoc researchers. I advocate for research projects that are sufficiently long (for example three years at least) and provide postdocs with somewhat more stability than projects with a shorter duration. Furthermore, I argue that PIs should take part in the responsibility for the career development of postdocs with regard to a postdoc's research line, as this is important for the next step in an academic career. They could, for example, give a postdoc responsibility for the part of the project that matches the research line of the postdoc (most) or give a postdoc time, next to the project, for their own research.

Additionally, postdocs should get training in multiple tasks, to better align the postdoc position with a next position in academia or outside. For example, they could get teaching and / or management tasks in addition to their research project. This way postdocs not only expand their skills, but they contribute to their department too, which can facilitate their embeddedness in and value to the organisation. Also, this might change their 'project worker' status into a more valued and well-rounded colleague.³

3 During the course of the GARCIA project we developed a toolkit for early-career researchers to inform them about difficulties and opportunities they may encounter as well as to prepare for an academic career. See for the toolkit: Dennissen, M., Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y. & Van den Brink, M. (2017). *Toolkit for organizing workshops 'precarious positions' for early career researchers*. GARCIA working paper n. 17, University of Trento, ISBN 978-88-8443-714-3, http://garciaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/GARCIA_working_papers_n.17.pdf

Committee compositions and deliberations

Committee compositions

In this dissertation I show that the power position of committee members can play an important role in selection decisions and in the practicing of gender. Therefore, the committee composition is crucial. For example, seniority or status can influence who is given voice and whose opinion is being heard and followed. Having a more junior position or an external position (e.g., coming from another department or institution) can affect the amount of counter power someone can or wants to exert. Before the start of the hiring process, hiring committees could discuss a 'code of conduct' that they should abide by, which could include ensuring a fair share in the deliberations for all committee members, irrespective of seniority, internal/external position, and other factors.

I also show that the presence of women committee members is not always self-evident. Sometimes they are involved (too) late in the hiring process, their sex is made salient, or they are invited as a gender advocate who is made responsible for the hiring of women candidates. I argue that all committee members should bear the responsibility for hiring candidates from underrepresented groups, such as women. This would take away the burden of women committee members. Also, when numbers of women researchers increase (particularly in disciplines where they are very much underrepresented), the salience of women and their sex might reduce.

Committee deliberations

Regarding committee deliberations, I provide two recommendations resulting from my findings. The first relates to time. I observed that many hiring committees have little time to spend on the recruitment and selection process. Being part of a committee is academic service work that has to be done next to academic core tasks such as teaching and research. The lack of time and work pressure academics experience for their core tasks often leads to hasty appointment decisions. Yet, my dissertation shows the necessity of making sufficient time for hiring procedures as it could reduce the reliance on (homogeneous) networks and increase the recruitment of candidates that might not belong to the 'usual suspects'. It could also increase opportunities for reflection on the functioning of the committee and the recognition of practicing of gender in committee deliberations.

The second recommendation regarding committee deliberations pertains to the assumptions committee members voice when making selection decisions. I analysed that assumptions about candidates play a substantial role in committee

deliberations. For example, assumptions about a candidate's reason to apply for the position or a candidate's motivation for certain career choices. Also, assumptions related to a candidate's social category (such as gender, age, or nationality) were expressed and used as a justification for not selecting this candidate. Often, these candidates did not resemble the masculine norm or Anglo-Saxon norm present in Western universities. Assumptions were usually not voiced (as a question) during an interview with the candidate, but only afterwards during committee deliberations where a job offer is at stake. I have shown that assumptions can be harmful, as they can influence committee members' decision making and be used as an argument to reject candidates without giving them a chance to refute the assumptions. I argue that hiring procedures can become fairer when being reflexive and transparent about one's assumptions, when assumptions are questioned and challenged, and when assumptions are tested during job interview situations by asking candidates questions related to the assumptions.

Defining selection criteria

In this dissertation, I show that selection criteria at macro-, meso- and micro-levels often remain undefined and therefore are open for interpretation, and susceptible to inequality practices. I analysed how exclusionary practices surface when universal formal criteria are confronted with the narrow criteria applied by committee members. I show for example how the meso-level criterion of "experience abroad" remains unspecified at the micro-level, and therefore leaves room for committee members to decide whether or not applicants' experience gained abroad is sufficient. Committee members' preferences for certain universities and countries can create inequalities in hiring decisions, particularly because those preferences remain unknown to candidates. Chapter 3 shows that preferences can result in the exclusion of applicants who obtained postdoc experience in less prestigious institutes or peripheral countries.

I recommend that higher education institutions, departments and hiring committee members consider possible undesirable consequences that recruitment and selection criteria can have and how to eliminate those consequences. What are the (dis)advantages of using certain criteria (e.g., internationalisation)? For hiring committees, I want to encourage that they discuss before making a first selection, what criteria are most crucial for the position and why these criteria are important. Is it because 'that's how we do things around here' or are they truly important for the job? Are there different interpretations of a certain criterion possible?

Furthermore, in order to reduce ambiguity, I suggest discussing before going

into selection situations how the committee defines the criteria that are considered important for the job. This might help to avoid assessing candidates based on other (non-relevant) criteria, in particular gender sensitive personal characteristics like modesty and ambition. Also, discussing the meaning of criteria at the start can help aligning committee members and avoiding the assessment of different attributes of the supposed same criterion.

Additionally, I want to stress the importance of the role of gatekeepers and committee members in creating fair recruitment and selection practices. I observed in my studies that committee members generally construct selection criteria as if they are etched in stone or imposed by higher management. Most committee members are unreflexive about their own position within the system as someone involved in the construction of selection criteria and thus someone who can apply criteria less rigidly and / or more fair. Also, committee members tend to have no or limited awareness of the gendered construction of selection criteria and the consequences, nor do they reflect on their gendered assumptions about the qualities of women (and men) candidates. Such non-reflexivity might prevent them from (taking) responsibility. They often tend to put the responsibility of solving gender inequalities on women researchers; either by demanding women early-career researchers to change their behaviour or by making women committee members responsible for the hiring of (more) women candidates. I want to suggest higher education institutions to invest in education for hiring committee members to make them reflexive about the possible gender practices in recruitment and selection, to look at their role in the construction of criteria and inequality, and to take the responsibility for fighting gender practices and practicing gender that affect hiring decisions. As part of the GARCIA project, we developed a toolkit for organizing reflexive working groups for selection committee members⁴ that can help higher education institutions in taking the first steps in the development of such education.

Finally, I want to encourage higher education institutions (but also other organisations) to open up their hiring practices for trained observants. Recruitment and selection are powerful mechanisms for reproducing and countering (gender) inequality. As I have shown in this dissertation, observations can provide meaningful insight into inequality practices that cannot be known without observing the sayings and doings of hiring committees. Therefore, more insight into the practicing can help

⁴ See for the toolkit Dennissen, M., Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y. & Van den Brink, M. (2017). *Toolkit for organizing reflexive working groups for selection committee members*, GARCIA working paper n.19, University of Trento, ISBN 978-88-8443-716-7, http://garciaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/GARCIA_working_papers_n.19.pdf

countering inequality dynamics and facilitating equality practices.

Selecting for diversity

I observed during my various studies that many academics who are involved in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers expressed that they are in favour of a more equal representation of men and women staff members in the department, which in most departments entailed advocating an increase of women researchers. In most institutions that I included in my study, policies prescribe that in case of equal qualification of two candidates, women are preferred over men candidates for positions in which women are underrepresented. This practice is known in the literature as the “tie-break” selection (Noon, 2012) where the “under-representation of people with certain demographic characteristics” (such as gender) is taken into account “in order to make the *final choice* between equally qualified candidates when appointing or promoting” (pp. 77-78, emphasis added). However, several research participants argued that they have never seen this measure put in practice because they never consider two candidates equally qualified. This measure does not seem to result in the intended impact.

Noon (2012) offers a more progressive approach that might serve the academic institutions that I included in my studies, but also other institutions within and outside academia. He calls this approach “threshold selection”, which is “a method of choosing between candidates who have met minimum standards required for the job across a range of selection criteria” (p. 77). Then, after this threshold, a criterion like diversity in staff composition can be used to make the final selection decision. Interestingly, I have observed multiple hiring procedures in which committee members argued that all candidates whom they had invited for a job interview, would be qualified candidates for the position. However, they would then not hire a woman candidate (if selected for the interview), despite their expressed wish to increase the number of women in the department, but committee members would instead engage in (sometimes extensive) committee deliberations in which they practiced gender, to the disadvantage of women candidates. The threshold selection method can assist in hiring qualified women candidates and prevent the disqualification of women candidates based on characteristics other than the formal selection criteria.

6.4 Methodological reflections and suggestions for further research

Methodological reflections

In this section I reflect on two main methodological aspects of my dissertation: 1) Doing research in my own organisation and 2) Studying practices and practicing.

Doing research in my own organisation

Studying recruitment and selection practices is challenging, as it is a sensitive and confidential matter. Reluctance of potential research participants to participate increases in research projects with a known critical agenda (Skrutkowski, 2014). Our GARCIA partners encountered difficulties collecting data on recruitment and selection procedures. They encountered various levels of resistance, often in the name of confidentiality issues. Some of our research partners held precarious positions while on the project, and their position was at times jeopardized by the sensitive nature of the topic of study.

In my case, collecting data for my dissertation in my own organisation allowed me easier access to documents, researchers and opportunities to ask for their participation. In case of a non-reply to my written invitation I could step by their office to ask them in person and explain the aim of my research. Most invitees were willing to take part in my research. Being a PhD candidate might also have contributed to their willingness of helping me with my data collection, as they know the importance of collecting data for completing a PhD project. Also, my supervisors are respected researchers in the organisation and experts in the field, which might have contributed to participants' willingness too.

Even though I did not face many access problems, studying recruitment and selection practices remained challenging, also due to confidentiality concerns. Regarding the reporting of data on the sensitive topic of recruitment and selection, I tried to omit case details and I have anonymized names of participants but it is impossible to fully conceal the hiring cases from those that know the organisation well (Skrutkowski, 2014).

Studying practices and practicing

The practice approach can be used for carefully examining practices “that produce and reproduce the very resilient discriminatory, unequal social order of an organization” (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018, p. 35). In this dissertation, using a practice approach contributed to a nuanced understanding of the (re)production of inequalities in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers. Despite the opportunities

of this approach for uncovering how practitioners practice in real time situations, the “qualities of practice – directionality, temporality, rapidity – [...] complicate the study of practicing” (Martin, 2003, p. 351). Practicing is “hard to observe” and “hard to capture in language” (Martin, 2003, p. 344). In my studies, I do not claim I have recognized all gendering practices in my data; some of them may have gone unnoticed. Gendering practices in recruitment and selection tend to be subtle and connected to multiple (non-)inequality-producing practices (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018).

Moreover, I am also part of the unequal social order of an organisation and therefore practice inequality myself as well. Also, doing research in my own organisation poses the risk of “becoming blind” to certain phenomena because I am part of the daily activities, which might prevent me from reflecting on what is happening (Skrutkowski, 2014, p. 114). What possibly limited the risk of blindness to inequality practices in recruitment and selection is that I have not been part of the activities myself (not before nor during the research) and I did not include my own research group in my studies.

For studying practicing, observational methods (possibly complemented by archival data and interviews) are generally considered the most appropriate method (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018; Poggio, 2006). Doing observations, however, requires specific attention to the role of the observer. In my observation study I strove to be as unobtrusive as possible, but my presence during the hiring processes could have unintentionally affected the behaviour of committee members (McKechnie, 2008). In some cases, a committee member made a comment about my presence, mostly that they were aware at some point during the procedure that I was there. In one case, committee members contacted me after the committee deliberations had ended about something that had happened in the procedure. At all times I have tried to keep a distance from the process and decisions while at the same time developing committee members’ trust in my reliability (Jeanes & Huzzard, 2014).

Future research

In this section, I will offer three potential avenues for future research.

First, in this dissertation I focus on single categories of social differences, such as gender, and did not study intersecting categories (e.g., gender and sexuality). I did find some examples, in which intersecting categories became salient, for example a woman candidate who was negatively evaluated because of her age. Also, I show how nationality could play a role in the evaluation of early-career researchers (ECRs) but not how this might possibly intersect with other social categories.

Therefore, I suggest that future research should take into account intersecting categories in the study of inequalities in the hiring of ECRs. This would acknowledge that social categories are generally multiple and interconnected and could lead to a more “nuanced understanding” of the (re)production of inequalities and “disempowerment, marginalization and stereotyping” (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014, p. 826) through recruitment and selection practices. Furthermore, an incorporation of the socio-historical political and cultural contexts in which individuals and groups, such as hiring committees, are embedded could also be taken into account, as these contexts shape the processes of racialization, gendering and culturalization (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016).

Second, in the analysis of my observation data on the evaluation of candidates I have focused on the final phase of the decision-making, as gender practicing appeared most salient in this phase. Future observation studies on inequalities in recruitment and selection could focus on analysing earlier phases in the recruitment and selection procedure, for example the CV selection phase. This might result in insight into inequality practices in a stage where candidates are rejected before presenting themselves face-to-face to the committee.

Third, future research could study practices/practicing that contribute to countering inequality / fostering equality in hiring procedures. This dissertation focuses on inequality (re)production but studies that look at how to “accomplish equality and inclusion in new ways” (Janssens & Steyaert, 2018, p. 31) can bring the debate on inequalities in organisations further too. For example, studying hiring procedures where equality delegates are present.

More research is needed into inequality practices in the early-stages of the academic career, as early-career researchers are the future researchers that shape the direction of research. More knowledge on how inequality is practiced can foster awareness and create interventions to counter inequality. Selecting early-career researchers based on fair procedures can be beneficial to aspiring researchers but can also improve the quality of research being conducted in higher education institutions. The role of institutions and hiring committee members is very important in (re)producing and countering inequalities, so their practices and practicing should be further scrutinized.



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Appendices



Appendix A Interview- and focus group respondents per department

Department	Respondent	Sex	Position	Interviewed about
Natural Sciences	Interview respondent 1	Male	Associate Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 2	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 3	Male	Professor	Assistant professor and postdoc positions
	Interview respondent 4	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 5	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 6	Male	Professor	Postdoc positions
	Focus group respondent A	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Focus group respondent B	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Focus group respondent C	Male	Associate Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Focus group respondent D	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
Social Sciences	Interview respondent 1	Female	Assistant Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 2	Female	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 3	Male	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Interview respondent 4	Male	Professor	Assistant professor and postdoc positions
	Interview respondent 5	Female	Professor	Postdoc positions
	Interview respondent 6	Male	Professor	Postdoc positions
	Interview respondent 7	Female	Associate professor	Postdoc positions
	Focus group respondent A	Female	Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Focus group respondent B	Male	Associate Professor	Assistant professor positions
	Focus group respondent C	Female	Associate Professor	Assistant professor positions

Appendix B Interview guide

Main question	Follow up topics
1. Abstract requirements	<p>1. Which criteria do you use to select candidates for a D/C-level position?</p> <p>First, ask clarifying and concretizing questions on the mentioned criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you mean by ...? - Can you give an example? - Why is that important? - How does a candidate show that he/she meets this criteria?
2. Do you consider an important criterion for a D/C-level position?	<p>Second, if the respondent is not able to mention other criteria, please ask about criteria that are not mentioned but are relevant to your context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Education</i> (institution that awarded PhD, topic of PhD, PhD supervisor, etc.) - <i>Teaching experience</i>: experience with lecturing, seminar groups, thesis supervision - <i>Research</i>: participation in research projects (number of projects and position within), number of publications, journals and ranking, single author, publications with supervisor - <i>Acquiring research funding</i>: how much and which funding organization? - <i>Management experience/committee work</i> - <i>International mobility/experience/ network</i>: duration of visit, location / institution, international collaborations - <i>Service / outreach</i>: media appearances, public lectures/debates, consultancy and advice - <i>Fit in team</i>: a) someone fits in the team culture? b) brings in expertise that is missing? - <i>Personality / attitude of the candidate</i> (analytical/ creative/ communicative, motivation/ enthusiasm/ energy/ bodily appearances, etcetera).

<p>3. What are the most important criteria in your specific academic field?</p>	<p>This question is meant to discover possible disciplinary differences.</p> <p>Ask clarifying and concretizing questions on responses (in a similar way as question 1).</p> <p>Try to find out what the 'ideal candidate' looks like, and what the minimal requirements are for the position.</p>
<p>4. How would you describe the difference between a candidate with minimal requirements and a really excellent candidate?</p>	
<p>5. Can you think of the latest appointment of a D/C-level position in which you were involved? Can you shortly describe the course of the selection process?</p>	<p>Make sure the appointment applies to the department under study.</p>
<p>6a. What was the composition of the committee? (Number/ position of people, women)</p>	<p>In case of formal recruitment, there is a standard procedure: i.e. the vacancy is made publically available (internet, newspapers, journals). In case of informal recruitment, the call is informally circulated or candidates are invited to apply through informal networks.</p>
<p>6b. Was it formal and/or informal recruitment?</p>	
<p>7. How did the decision making process go within the committee?</p>	<p>Ask clarifying and concretizing questions on responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you easily reach a consensus? - What did you do if you disagreed? - If you disagreed, what was the main point of discussion?
<p>8a. Which were the decisive criteria in the selection of the appointed candidate?</p>	<p>Which of the criteria under question 2 where the most important for the respondent in selecting the candidate?</p>

<p>8b. Were the decisive criteria used in the selection of the appointed candidate mentioned in the formal job description?</p>	<p>Earlier research indicated that the formal criteria of excellence are almost not realistic, and appointed candidates often do not meet this standard of excellence (see Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). With this question, we like to check whether this is the case here too.</p>
<p>9. Do you consider the appointed person an excellent candidate? Why?</p>	<p>Try to find out the difference between the selected candidate and the runner up candidate.</p>
<p>10a. Why did the runner up end up on the second position?</p>	<p>Try to find out the difference between the selected candidate and the runner up candidate.</p>
<p>10b. Which was / were the decisive criterion / criteria not to appoint the candidate?</p>	<p>Try to find out the difference between the selected candidate and the runner up candidate.</p>
<p>11a. In this procedure, how many female candidates applied?</p>	<p>Ask clarifying and concretizing questions on responses: - Why were there no / so few (so many?) female candidates?</p>
<p>11b. How many female candidates were on the long/short list?</p>	<p>Long list: list of applicants after first selection by committee. Short list: final list of applicants taken into consideration (and invited for an interview/lecture).</p>
<p>11c. Why were they (not) appointed?</p>	<p>Long list: list of applicants after first selection by committee. Short list: final list of applicants taken into consideration (and invited for an interview/lecture).</p>
<p>12. Can you give an example of a case in which the selection process turned out to be very successful, i.e., that the chosen candidate performed beyond expectations?</p>	<p>Try to find out the difference between the selected candidate and the runner up candidate.</p>

13. Can you give an example of a case in which the selection process turned out to be a failure, i.e., that the chosen candidate underperformed or left quickly?

3. Gender

14. Does gender play a role in the selection of candidates?

Ask clarifying and concretizing questions:

- Do you think gender matters (or not)?

- Could there be a gender bias against female candidates?

Please also observe the emotions and non-verbal language of the respondent with this question (e.g., agitation, etc.).

15. Do you know if there is a gender policy on recruitment and selection within your institution?

16. What is your opinion on such gender policies?

You can ask this question even if the question to previous question is "no".

17. In what way do you apply this gender policy in practice?

Ask the respondent to give examples.

Appendix C Focus group guide

	Main question	Follow up topics
1. Abstract requirements	<p>1. Which criteria do you use to select candidates for a C-level position?</p>	<p>First, ask clarifying and concretizing questions on the mentioned criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you mean by ...? - Can you give an example? - Why is that important? - How does a candidate show that he/she meets this criteria?
	<p>2. Do you consider ... an important criterion for a C-level position?</p>	<p>Second, if the respondent is not able to mention other criteria, please ask about criteria that are not mentioned but are relevant to your context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Education</i> (institution that awarded PhD, topic of PhD, PhD supervisor, etc.) - <i>Teaching experience</i>: experience with lecturing, seminar groups, thesis supervision - <i>Research</i>: participation in research projects (number of projects and position within), number of publications, journals and ranking, single author, publications with supervisor) - <i>Acquiring research funding</i>: how much and which funding organization? - <i>Management experience/ committee work</i> - <i>International mobility/experience/ network</i> (duration of visit, location / institution, international collaborations) - <i>Service / outreach</i>: media appearances, public lectures/debates, consultancy and advice - <i>Fit in team</i>: a) someone fits in the team culture? b) brings in expertise that is missing? - <i>Personality / attitude of the candidate</i> (analytical/ creative/ communicative, motivation/ enthusiasm/ energy/ bodily appearances, etcetera).



	<p>This question is meant to discover possible disciplinary differences. Ask clarifying and concretizing questions on responses (in a similar way as question 1).</p> <p>Try to find out what the 'ideal candidate' looks like, and what the minimal requirements are for the position.</p>
<p>3. What are the most important criteria in your specific academic field?</p> <p>4. How would you describe the difference between a candidate with minimal requirements and a really excellent candidate?</p>	
<p>2. Gender</p>	<p>5. Does gender play a role in the selection of candidates?</p> <p>Ask clarifying and concretizing questions: - Do you think gender matters (or not)? - Could there be a gender bias against female candidates? Please also observe the emotions and non-verbal language of the respondent with this question (e.g., agitation, etc.).</p> <p>6. Do you know if there is a gender policy on recruitment and selection within your institution?</p> <p>7. What is your opinion on such gender policies?</p> <p>You can ask this question even if the question to previous question is "no".</p> <p>8. In what way do you apply this gender policy in practice?</p> <p>Ask the respondent to give examples.</p>

Appendix D Representation of the various studies in the media

	Representation in the media	Title
Chapter 2 Precarious postdocs	Interview and article on Forskerforum	Studie: Postdoktorar blir rekrutterte som prosjektarbeidarar og ikkje ut frå akademisk talent (April 4, 2019)
	Interview and article in Nature	Why a postdoc might not advance your career (December 7, 2018), doi: 10.1038/d41586-018-07652-y.
Chapter 3 Selecting early-career researchers	ScienceGuide	Postdocs lijden onder de neoliberale universiteit (November 7, 2018)
	Interview on Voxweb	Hoe jonge wetenschappers de dupe worden van internationaliseringsdrift (February 28, 2018)
	ScienceGuide	De neoliberale universiteit schaaft carrière wetenschappers (February 21, 2018)
	Blog and podcast – Warwick Academic Mobilities and Immobilities Network	Inequality practices in the construction of international mobility as a selection criterion for assistant professor positions (April 30, 2017)
Chapter 4 The peril of potential	Radio interview –NOS Met het oog op morgen	Wordt de wetenschap nog altijd beheerst door mannen? (February 11, 2019)
	Short interview on Voxweb	Pump your career event (December 7, 2018)
	ScienceGuide	Mannen zijn de norm in de wetenschap, ten koste van vrouwelijk talent (December 5, 2018)
Chapter 5 Collectivity and power	Interview in the Nijmegen School of Management newsletter FM Focus	Waarom de beste kandidaat nog vaak een man is (April, 2019)



English summary

*For a non-academic audience**



* *For an academic summary, please go to Chapter 6: General discussion*

Since mid-1980, Western higher education institutions (HEIs) moved towards mass higher education, greater managerial control and increased monitoring and regulation of the labour of academics. Furthermore, precarious employment in HEIs increased, meaning that academics are more often employed on part-time, hourly paid, and temporary contracts, particularly academics at the beginning of their career (early-career researchers). An increase of competitive temporary funding from national and international research councils and the private sector has accelerated the growth of temporary contracts even more. This generates a strong competition for permanent academic positions.

When looking at temporary positions in Western HEIs, a gendered pattern can be observed, meaning that women (early-career) academics are disproportionately employed on temporary positions compared to men. Yet, not only gender inequality but also for example inequalities based on nationality, ethnicity, and class characterize academia and academic processes. Two organisational processes that play a role in the production and perpetuation of inequalities are recruitment and selection, as they form the access to or entrance into academic positions. Hitherto, most studies on academic recruitment and selection examine higher positions in the academic hierarchy, such as full professorships. I consider it important to focus on early-career researchers in these studies because hiring decisions at the early stages of the academic career determine who are included or excluded from academic careers and thus who will be the future researchers that shape the direction of research.

In this dissertation, I study postdoc positions and tenure-track assistant professorships. These are the first positions after completing a PhD and before obtaining a more stable, permanent position in academia. Both positions are precarious in nature and for both positions senior researchers (gatekeepers) are responsible for recruitment and selection of candidates. I aim to achieve a better understanding on how inequalities come to the fore in the recruitment and selection of early-career researchers and in particular how hiring committee members construct inequalities in the recruitment and selection process. In my research, I use the concept of practices to refer to the routine actions and perceptions of people shaped in interaction with each other. In short, it is about what people say and do. To study practices, the focus needs to be on interactions, processes, and social practices and therefore I chose to use a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design. In various chapters in my dissertation I compare different hiring procedures in two academic disciplines (social sciences and natural sciences), and multiple countries (Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands). I have analysed 32 job descriptions, 30 appointment reports, and various organisational documents,

such as recruitment and selection protocols. I conducted thirteen interviews, and two focus groups with academics who were responsible for the hiring of early-career researchers. Furthermore, I conducted observations of six hiring procedures (70,5 hours of meetings). For the two international comparative studies, I analysed twelve research reports, 38 interview summaries and six focus group summaries.

Precarious postdocs

In chapter 2, I study the recruitment and selection of postdoc researchers in four European countries whose position originated from external research grants acquired by principal investigators (researchers who are leading the project funded with the research grant). This chapter investigates how the recruitment and selection for project-based postdoc positions are organised and how principal investigators construct the 'ideal' postdoc. The results show that the decision-making power regarding recruitment primarily lies with the principal investigator (PI), which gives them substantial autonomy to decide on who enter and / or remain in the academic system and who are excluded. Recruitment mainly happens through informal networks because most universities in my study do not have formal hiring procedures for postdoc positions, because PIs have to form a project team in a limited amount of time, and because they prefer candidates whom they, or their network contacts, already know. Informal procedures exclude potential candidates that are not in the network of the PI.

During the selection process, PIs construct the ideal postdoc as someone who is available during the timescale of the project, committed and motivated to conduct the research till completion, and has both the expert knowledge and independence to execute the project. My findings show how the need for a successful completion of the project shapes selection criteria. As a result, PIs make a narrow short-term construction of the ideal postdoc, which is in sharp contrast to more senior positions that play a significant role in the long-term development of their discipline. PIs tend to focus on postdoc candidates who are value-added to a project, rather than someone who they evaluate from a broader perspective, as someone who is deemed suitable for a further career in academia. This contributes to the precarious position of postdocs. The temporary contracts create bad employment conditions and a lack of job security. At the same time postdocs are made responsible for their own career development. The increase in externally funded postdoc positions can thus lead to an erosion of the notion of academic talent, the attractiveness of postdoc positions for early-career researchers, and the quality of knowledge production.

Selecting early-career researchers

In chapter 3, I study tenure-track¹ assistant professor positions, focusing on how discourses of internationalisation and excellence shape formal selection criteria and the actual practice of committee members in the evaluation of candidates for assistant professor positions in a Dutch university. Discourses of internationalisation and excellence are intertwined in the university, meaning that internationalisation (e.g., work experience abroad) will lead to higher quality in education and research and in turn will enhance the international reputation. This rhetoric is particularly reproduced by committee members in the natural sciences department and to a lesser extent in the social sciences. Recruitment and selection in and of itself are practices designed to exclude people. Yet, unintended inequalities can come to the fore that are based on categories of social differences. The main findings in this chapter relate to the uncovering of four inequalities that emerge in the application of criteria. These inequalities are (re)produced through a lack of definition of criteria, and personal interpretations and preferences.

First, even though the criterion of international experience implies that experience in any foreign country is valued, my findings show that committee members value only certain countries. This results in the exclusion of candidates who acquired (postdoc) experience in countries that are not valued, without standing a chance of being assessed on their quality as researchers and teachers. Second, the Dutch and English language requirements can result in the exclusion of foreign candidates from the process, as some committee members anticipate communication problems based on a candidate's nationality. Third, inequality is created between early-career researchers who have mobility opportunities and those who have not. Such opportunities can be influenced by, for example, physical, psychological, social or financial factors. Fourth, the criterion of excellence becomes problematic in its application, as excellence is subjective, and typically more difficult to evaluate for young scholars, since committee members mainly assess their potential instead of proven qualities. Furthermore, committee members draw on their subjective interpretation of the potential of prospective candidates, which can create inequalities between, for example, men and women candidates.

This chapter concludes that discourses of internationalisation and excellence that dominate the current neoliberal university create increasingly demanding criteria for tenure-track assistant professors. With only a few committee members

1 A tenure-track position is a temporary position that will lead, at the end of a certain period of time, to a tenure procedure to decide whether the assistant professor will be offered a permanent position.

critically questioning and resisting these criteria, their application by committee members may wrongly exclude talented early-career researchers. They limit the pool of 'acceptable' candidates to those who fit the narrow definition of the international mobile and excellent early-career researcher.

The peril of potential

In chapter 4, I study the enactment of gender practices in the evaluation of assistant professors in six European higher education institutions. Many committee members expressed that they are in favour of hiring more women academics in order to create a more equal representation of men and women in their departments. However, in this chapter I show how inequalities come to the fore in the assessment of excellence potential that tend to disadvantage women candidates. I explain how inequalities are (re)produced through the stereotypical perceptions, expectations and ascriptions committee members have of and attribute to women (and men) candidates.

Due to the limited track record of candidates for early-career positions, committee members make an assessment of potential, and to do so they rely heavily on tacit criteria. I observe, for example, that committee members perceive a lack of confidence and commitment as well as limited mobility opportunities for women early-career researchers and this way they construct women as less suitable for assistant professor positions. They construct confidence, commitment and international mobility as necessary aspects for survival in what they refer to as the competitive academic world. Committee members reproduce stereotypical images of women as modest, non-competitive, collaborative, and as less devoted to academia because of care responsibilities. I observe one tacit criterion that is considered important for assistant professor positions that might be to the advantage of women candidates: the criterion of academic citizenship. Most committee members confirm the stereotypical belief that women have better relational skills and are more prone towards collaboration and academic service, which suggests that women candidates may score higher on the criterion of academic citizenship than men candidates.

I show that the detrimental gender practices of constructing potential through the perceptions of an ideal, confident, committed, and international mobile early-career researcher are so ubiquitous in all six European higher education institutions that they can cause committee members to make gendered selection decisions, attributing more potential to men researchers. Moreover, committee members tend to put the responsibility of solving gender inequalities on the individual woman researcher making women responsible for limited success in acquiring assistant professor positions. This adds to women researchers' precariousness who, in the

increased competition for jobs, are made responsible for fighting the stereotypical images that committee members hold.

Collectivity and power

In chapter 5, I examine through observations how committee members practice gender in hiring procedures for assistant professor positions in a Dutch university. An observation study gives insight into the practicing of gender because I could observe what committee members do and say during real time job interviews and committee deliberations. I uncover seven patterns of practicing gender that illustrate how hiring committee members practice gender collectively before, during and after committee deliberations. I observe how in composing hiring committees, the focus is often on women's sex instead of their contribution as expert members (1).

During hiring decision-making, I could uncover because of my observations how committee members practice gender in interaction with each other and how they influence each other. I have observed how the course of the collective decision-making process and the outcomes are very much dependent on who gives what kind of arguments and about whom, as this prompts responses from other committee members. The results indicate that a positive or negative first response can make or break a candidate. I show that committee members practice gender collectively by holding women candidates against higher standards than men (2) and by raising (additional) doubts or amplifying doubts about women's qualities (3). My observations show that committee members evaluate (and disqualify) women candidates more often than men candidates based on personal characteristics such as independence, ambition, role modelling and even truthful behaviour (4 and 5). I also show how women candidates have to walk a fine line between stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviours in job interviews. My analysis also shows how micro politics and individual agendas play an important role in collective committee decision-making and in collective practicing of gender (6 and 7). The committee members who hold considerable power tend to dominate deliberations and they take on the role of champions and / or anti-champions for specific candidates.

Discussion and conclusions

In chapter 6, I discuss the various ways in which inequalities are (re)produced related to other aspects than individual merit, such as categories of social difference (e.g., gender). I have shown that the macro-context influences recruitment and selection, for example through the increased number of temporary research projects in academia and macro-discourses such as excellence and internationalisation. Also, recruitment

policies at the meso-level influence recruitment and selection as they regulate what selection criteria should be applied. Furthermore, this dissertation sheds light on how committee members, both as individuals and in groups, (re)produce inequalities on the micro-level through their practices. The practices of committee members are found to be particularly important as they make the actual selection decisions on who are included and excluded from early academic careers.

In the discussion, I elaborate on two overarching contributions to the literature that I make in my dissertation, combining the insights and contributions of all chapters. The first contribution pertains to the focus on early-career researchers in the study on inequalities in hiring. The recruitment and selection of academics in the early stages of their academic career differ on two main aspects from more senior positions. Firstly, the increasing reliance on external research funding and the resulting growing number of temporary postdoc positions instigates recruitment and selection practices that are focused on the short-term. I observed that principal investigators tend to opt for low(er) risk candidates who can meet project objectives, in which availability can be more important than other (quality) criteria. Furthermore, I question the alignment of a postdoc position with a next career step, such as an assistant professor, because in the hiring of postdocs there is limited attention for their longer-term career perspectives. Secondly, early-career researchers do not have long track records of performance and therefore committee members have to assess their potential. I observed that hiring based on potential tends to be a subjective endeavour that gives room for selection based on tacit (unwritten) criteria, that are conflated with inequality practices, as they give room for personal preference and assumptions.

The second contribution to the literature I make in my dissertation relates to studying the (re)production of inequalities in recruitment and selection by examining both practices (i.e., what has been said and done routinely) and practicing (i.e., saying and doing in real time and space). I show that gender practices tend to be quite abstract and often refer to the stereotypical perceptions of an entire group of women or men. I studied practicing by observing committee members in action when they collectively evaluated a single candidate. I observed that men candidates are generally ascribed (star) potential more immediate and more unconditionally than women candidates. Men are more often championed, whereas for women doubts are raised that are presented as insurmountable. Also, women candidates tend to be evaluated on additional criteria that are not applied in the evaluation of men candidates. As a result, women and men candidates do not play on a level playing field. Furthermore, my observations could uncover the subtleties and complexities

of power and inequality that occur rapid and often unreflexive. The positional power of committee members decides who can deploy their power and who are forced into compliance with hiring decisions. As predominantly men hold a power position in (Dutch) academia, men can define situations as they see fit and push their own agendas forward, also when this involves championing their preferred (men) candidates.

To conclude, this dissertation provides a fine-grained analysis of how (gender) inequalities are (re)produced, in two academic disciplines and multiple countries, in a context where more diversity in academia is on the committees' and the universities' agenda. Even though a willingness to hire, for example, women candidates is voiced, my dissertation shows that the aspiring early-career women academics are negatively affected by gendered judgements in hiring committees and their decision-making. Knowledge on how the complexities of practicing inequality and power are played out might help to create awareness and reflexivity among hiring committee members (and management) and can contribute to more fair hiring practices.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Voor een niet-wetenschappelijk publiek

Sinds midden jaren '80 hebben Europese hoger onderwijsinstellingen, zoals universiteiten, een verandering doorgemaakt naar meer massaonderwijs, meer controle van het management en meer toezicht op en regulatie van het werk van wetenschappers. Ook is de hoeveelheid precair werk in hoger onderwijsinstellingen toegenomen wat betekent dat wetenschappers vaker werken op parttime, nuluren- en tijdelijke contracten, voornamelijk wetenschappers aan het begin van hun carrière (jonge¹ onderzoekers). Een groei in competitieve, tijdelijke onderzoeksubsidies van nationale en internationale onderzoeksinstituten en de private sector hebben het aantal tijdelijke contracten verder laten toenemen. Hierdoor is de competitie voor vaste wetenschappelijke posities groot.

Kijkend naar de tijdelijke contracten in Europese hoger onderwijsinstellingen zien we dat gender een rol speelt: vrouwen op (beginnende) wetenschappelijke posities hebben onevenredig vaker een tijdelijk contract dan mannen. Ook bestaan er in de wetenschap ongelijkheden op basis van bijvoorbeeld nationaliteit en etniciteit. Twee organisatieprocessen die een rol spelen in het creëren en bestendigen van ongelijkheden zijn werving en selectie. Tot op heden hebben de meeste studies naar werving en selectie in de wetenschap gekeken naar hogere posities in de academische hiërarchie, zoals hoogleraren. Het is belangrijk dat er ook onderzoek wordt gedaan naar jonge wetenschappers, omdat beslissingen over werving en selectie in de beginfase van een wetenschappelijke carrière bepalen wie toegang hebben tot een wetenschappelijke carrière en wie worden uitgesloten en dus wie in de toekomst de onderzoekslijnen bepalen.

In dit proefschrift worden zowel de werving en selectie van kandidaten voor postdoc- en universitair docentposities bestudeerd. Dit zijn de eerste academische posities na het afronden van een promotietraject en een opstap voor het verkrijgen van een meer stabiele, vaste positie in de wetenschap. Beide posities zijn precair en voor beiden zijn senior onderzoekers (*gatekeepers*) verantwoordelijk voor de werving en selectie van kandidaten. Het doel van mijn proefschrift is om beter te begrijpen hoe ongelijkheden in de werving en selectie van jonge onderzoekers ontstaan en in het bijzonder hoe leden van benoemingsadviescommissies (hierna: selectiecommissies) (al dan niet onbewust) ongelijkheden creëren in het werving- en selectieproces. In mijn onderzoek gebruik ik het concept 'praktijken' (*practices*) wat refereert naar de routinematige acties en percepties van mensen die worden gevormd in interactie met elkaar. Oftewel, het betreft datgene wat mensen zeggen en doen. Een geschikte methode om praktijken te bestuderen is door te kijken naar interacties, processen

1 Jong verwijst hier niet naar leeftijd, maar naar de fase in de wetenschappelijke carrière.

en sociale praktijken. Om die reden gebruik ik een kwalitatieve en vergelijkende onderzoeksmethode waarin ik meerdere *cases* onderzoek. In de verschillende hoofdstukken in dit proefschrift vergelijk ik meerdere selectieprocedures van postdocs en universitair docenten binnen twee wetenschappelijke disciplines (sociale wetenschappen en natuurwetenschappen) in meerdere landen (België, IJsland, Italië, Nederland, Slovenië en Zwitserland). Daarvoor heb ik 32 vacatureteksten, 30 benoemingsadviesrapporten en verschillende organisatiedocumenten (o.a. werving- en selectieprotocollen) geanalyseerd. Verder heb ik dertien interviews en twee focusgroepen afgenomen met wetenschappers die verantwoordelijk waren voor het werven en selecteren van jonge wetenschappers. Daarnaast heb ik observaties gedaan tijdens zes selectieprocedures (in totaal 70,5 uur observaties van vergaderingen en selectie-interviews). Voor de twee internationaal vergelijkende studies heb ik twaalf onderzoeksrapporten en samenvattingen van 38 interviews en zes focusgroepen geanalyseerd.

Precaire postdocs

In hoofdstuk 2 bestudeer ik de werving en selectie van postdoc onderzoekers in vier Europese landen. Onderzoekposities voor postdocs worden gefinancierd vanuit subsidies die zijn verkregen door hoofdaanvragers/ projectleiders (d.w.z. onderzoekers die het project leiden waarvoor zij een subsidie hebben gekregen). In dit hoofdstuk onderzoek ik hoe deze hoofdaanvragers de ‘ideale’ postdoc construeren. De resultaten laten zien dat hoofdaanvragers de beslissingsbevoegdheid voor de werving van postdocs veelal alleen dragen en daarmee veel autonomie hebben om te bepalen wie de academie binnen komen of mogen blijven alsook wie er worden uitgesloten. Postdocs worden om verschillende redenen voornamelijk geworven via informele netwerken. De meeste universiteiten die ik heb onderzocht hebben geen formele selectieprocedure voor postdocs, omdat hoofdonderzoekers een projectteam moeten formeren in een beperkte tijd, en omdat ze een voorkeur hebben voor kandidaten die zij zelf, of iemand in hun netwerk, al kennen. Kandidaten buiten het netwerk van de hoofdaanvrager krijgen zo mogelijk geen toegang tot postdocposities.

Tijdens het selectieproces construeren hoofdaanvragers de ‘ideale’ postdoc als iemand die beschikbaar is tijdens de duur van het project, geïnteresseerd en gemotiveerd is om het project te voltooien, en die zowel de expertise heeft om het project uit te voeren alsook voldoende zelfstandig kan werken. Mijn resultaten laten zien dat de noodzakelijkheid om een project succesvol af te ronden veel invloed heeft op de selectiecriteria die worden toegepast. Als gevolg daarvan maken hoofdaanvragers een smalle, korte-termijnconstructie van de ‘ideale’ postdoc. Dit

staat in scherp contrast met senior posities die een significante rol spelen in de langetermijnontwikkeling van hun discipline. Hoofdaanvragers lijken zich te richten op postdockandidaten die van toegevoegde waarde zijn voor een project in plaats van iemand die zij geschikt achten voor een verdere loopbaan in de wetenschap. Dit gegeven draagt bij aan de precare positie van postdocs. De tijdelijke contracten hebben slechte arbeidsvoorwaarden en een gebrek aan baangarantie. Bovendien worden postdocs verantwoordelijk gehouden voor hun eigen carrièreontwikkeling. De toename in door subsidies gefinancierde postdocposities kan dus leiden tot een achteruitgang van het begrip talent, de aantrekkelijkheid van postdocposities voor jonge onderzoekers en de kwaliteit van de kennisproductie.

De selectie van jonge onderzoekers

In hoofdstuk 3 bestudeer ik hoe de discoursen van internationalisering en excellentie formele selectiecriteria alsook de dagelijkse praktijk van selectiecommissieleden vormen in het evalueren van kandidaten voor *tenure-track*² universitair docentposities in een Nederlandse universiteit. Deze discoursen van internationalisering en excellentie zijn met elkaar vervlochten, wat betekent dat men verwacht dat internationalisering (bijv. werkervaring in het buitenland) zal leiden tot betere kwaliteit in onderwijs en onderzoek ('excellentie') en zodoende weer zal leiden tot een betere internationale reputatie. Deze retoriek wordt met name ge(re)produceerd door selectiecommissieleden in de natuurwetenschappen en in mindere mate in de sociale wetenschappen. Werving en selectie zijn processen die altijd leiden tot in- en exclusie. Echter, onbedoelde ongelijkheden kunnen worden gecreëerd, bijvoorbeeld op basis van sociale categorieën. De voornaamste bevinding in dit hoofdstuk betreft de ontdekking van vier ongelijkheden die ontstaan in het toepassen van criteria in de dagelijkse praktijk. Deze ongelijkheden worden ge(re)produceerd door een gebrek aan definitie van criteria en door persoonlijke interpretaties en voorkeuren.

Allereerst suggereert het criterium 'buitenlandervaring' dat ervaring in ieder land buiten Nederland waardevol wordt geacht, maar mijn resultaten laten zien dat commissieleden enkel bepaalde landen waarderen. Dit resulteert in de uitsluiting van kandidaten die (postdoc) ervaring hebben opgedaan in landen die niet worden gewaardeerd, zonder dat zij de kans krijgen om te worden beoordeeld op hun kwaliteit als onderzoekers en docenten. Ten tweede kunnen de eisen die worden gesteld aan Nederlandse en Engelse taalvaardigheid resulteren in de uitsluiting van buitenlandse kandidaten, omdat sommige commissieleden anticiperen op

² Een *tenure-track* positie is een tijdelijke positie die, aan het eind van een bepaalde periode, zal leiden tot een evaluatie die zal bepalen of de universitair docent een vast contract aangeboden krijgt.

communicatieproblemen gebaseerd op de nationaliteit van een kandidaat. Ten derde wordt ongelijkheid gecreëerd tussen jonge onderzoekers met en zonder kansen en gelegenheden om mobiel te zijn. Zulke kansen kunnen worden beïnvloed door bijvoorbeeld lichamelijke, psychologische, sociale of financiële factoren. Ten vierde blijkt het excellentie-criterium moeilijk toepasbaar, omdat 'excellentie' een subjectief begrip is en lastig te beoordelen is waar het jonge wetenschappers betreft. Gezien de beperkte ervaring van postdocs, kunnen commissieleden voornamelijk hun potentie evalueren en niet hun reeds bewezen kwaliteiten. Als gevolg daarvan kunnen ongelijkheden worden gecreëerd tussen, bijvoorbeeld, mannen en vrouwen die solliciteren.

Concluderend creëren de dominante discoursen van internationalisering en excellentie in de hedendaagse neoliberale universiteit in toenemende mate veeleisende criteria voor universitair docenten (in een *tenure-track*). Omdat er maar weinig commissieleden zijn die deze criteria bekritisieren of weerstand tegenbieden, kunnen in de praktijk getalenteerde jonge onderzoekers ten onrechte worden uitgesloten. De beperkte vijver van 'acceptabele' kandidaten wordt beperkt tot zij die voldoen aan de smalle definitie van de internationaal mobiele en excellente jonge onderzoeker.

Beoordelen van potentieel

In hoofdstuk 4 bestudeer ik de genderpraktijken die naar voren komen in de evaluatie van universitair docenten in zes Europese hoger onderwijsinstututen. Een groot aantal commissieleden gaf aan dat ze voorstander is van het aannemen van meer vrouwen in de wetenschap om zo een meer gelijke vertegenwoordiging van mannen en vrouwen in de afdeling te krijgen. Desalniettemin laat ik in dit hoofdstuk zien hoe ongelijkheden worden geproduceerd in de beoordeling van het potentieel tot excellentie, veelal ten nadele van vrouwelijke kandidaten. Ik analyseer hoe ongelijkheden worden ge(re)-produceerd door de stereotype percepties en verwachtingen die commissieleden hebben of toeschrijven aan vrouwen (en mannen). Omdat kandidaten voor deze posities nog geen lange staat van dienst hebben, maken commissieleden een inschatting van hun potentie, waarbij ze sterk leunen op impliciete, ongeschreven criteria.

Zo heb ik bijvoorbeeld geobserveerd dat ze vrouwen als minder geschikte kandidaten construeren, omdat zij oordelen dat vrouwen een gebrek aan zelfvertrouwen en toewijding hebben, alsook beperkte mogelijkheden om mobiel te zijn, zonder deze oordelen op waarheid te toetsen. Commissieleden construeren zelfvertrouwen, toewijding en internationale mobiliteit noodzakelijk om in de door hen bestempelde 'competitieve academische wereld' te overleven en achten vrouwen daarvoor ongeschikt op basis van stereotype beelden en verwachtingen dat vrouwen

bescheiden en niet-competitief zijn, goed kunnen samenwerken en minder toegewijd zijn aan de wetenschap in verband met zorgverantwoordelijkheden. Mijn resultaten tonen aan dat er één criterium is dat mogelijk in het voordeel werkt van vrouwen die zich kandidaat stellen als universitair docent: het criterium van academisch burgerschap. Een groot aantal commissieleden bevestigt het stereotype beeld dat vrouwen betere relationele vaardigheden hebben en meer neigen tot samenwerking en ‘academische dienstverlening’. Dit suggereert dat vrouwelijke kandidaten hoger zouden kunnen scoren op het criterium van academisch burgerschap dan mannelijke kandidaten.

Ik heb laten zien dat de genderpraktijken die naar voren komen in de constructie van een geschikte universitair docent als iemand die zelfverzekerd, toegewijd en internationaal mobiel is, zo alomvattend zijn in alle zes hoger onderwijsinstututen dat deze ervoor kunnen zorgen dat commissieleden selectiebesluiten nemen die vrouwen benadelen, omdat ze meer potentie aan mannen toeschrijven. Verder schuiven commissieleden de verantwoordelijkheid voor het opheffen van genderongelijkheid af op de vrouwen; zij worden verantwoordelijk gemaakt voor hun beperkte succes in het verkrijgen van posities als universitair docent. Dit versterkt de precare positie van vrouwen, doordat zij in tijden van toegenomen competitie voor wetenschappelijke posities verantwoordelijk worden gehouden voor het strijden tegen stereotype beelden van commissieleden en handelingen die (gender) ongelijkheid (re)produceren.

Collectiviteit en macht

In hoofdstuk 5 onderzoek ik middels observaties hoe commissieleden gender ‘praktiseren’ in selectieprocedures voor universitair docenten in een Nederlandse universiteit. Een observatiestudie geeft inzicht in het praktiseren van gender, omdat ik zelf kon observeren wat commissieleden doen en zeggen tijdens selectie-interviews en commissievergaderingen. Ik heb zeven patronen gevonden van het praktiseren van gender, die illustreren hoe commissieleden gender in gezamenlijkheid praktiseren, zowel voor, tijdens als na commissievergaderingen.

In de samenstelling van selectiecommissies wordt vaak de nadruk gelegd op de sekse in plaats van de contributies die vrouwen kunnen leveren als expertleden in een commissie (1). Tijdens commissievergaderingen (re)produceren commissieleden gender in interactie met elkaar en beïnvloeden zij elkaar. Het verloop van het collectieve besluitvormingsproces en de uitkomsten daarvan zijn zeer afhankelijk van wie welke argumenten geeft en over welke kandidaat. Deze argumenten wekken namelijk reacties op van andere commissieleden en een positieve of negatieve eerste opmerking kan een kandidaat maken of breken. Commissieleden praktiseren gender

door hogere standaarden aan te houden voor vrouwen dan voor mannen (2) en (additionele) twijfel over vrouwelijke kandidaten op te werpen of bestaande twijfel te versterken (3). Mijn observaties laten tevens zien dat commissieleden vrouwen vaker evalueren (en diskwalificeren) op basis van persoonlijke factoren als zelfstandigheid, ambitie, rolmodelschap en zelfs geloofwaardigheid (4 en 5). Vrouwelijke kandidaten moeten navigeren tussen stereotype vrouwelijk en mannelijk gedrag tijdens selectie-interviews. Tot slot laat mijn analyse zien hoe micropolitiek en individuele agenda's een belangrijke rol spelen in collectieve besluitvorming en in het praktiseren van gender in groepsverband (6 en 7); de commissieleden die macht hebben, hebben de neiging om discussies te domineren en te strijden voor of tegen bepaalde kandidaten.

Discussie en conclusies

In hoofdstuk 6 bediscussieer ik de verschillende manieren waarop ongelijkheden worden ge(re)produceerd op basis van andere aspecten dan merites, zoals bijvoorbeeld sociale categorieën (bijv. gender of nationaliteit). Ik heb laten zien dat de macrocontext werving en selectie beïnvloedt, bijvoorbeeld door het toegenomen aantal tijdelijke onderzoeksprojecten en discoursen zoals excellentie en internationalisering. Ook op mesoniveau beïnvloedt bijvoorbeeld het werving- en selectiebeleid de praktijk van werving en selectie en reguleert het hoe en welke selectiecriteria worden toegepast. Verder laat ik in mijn proefschrift zien hoe commissieleden op microniveau, zowel individueel als in een groep, ongelijkheden (re)produceren middels hun praktijken. De praktijken van commissieleden zijn bijzonder belangrijk, omdat zij de daadwerkelijke besluiten over wie worden in- en uitgesloten van een (beginnende) wetenschappelijke carrière beïnvloeden.

In de discussie werk ik mijn twee overkoepelende bijdragen aan de literatuur verder uit, waarbij ik de inzichten en bijdragen van alle hoofdstukken samenvoeg. De eerste bijdrage betreft het centraal stellen van jonge onderzoekers in mijn studie naar ongelijkheden in werving en selectie. De werving en selectie van wetenschappers aan het begin van een wetenschappelijke carrière verschilt op twee voorname aspecten van meer senior posities. Allereerst stimuleren de toegenomen afhankelijkheid van onderzoeksubsidies en de daardoor toegenomen aantallen tijdelijke postdocposities werving- en selectiepraktijken die voornamelijk gericht zijn op de korte termijn. Hoofdaanvragers zijn daardoor geneigd om kandidaten te selecteren waarmee ze een klein(er) risico lopen en die projectdoelstellingen kunnen bereiken. Hierdoor kan beschikbaarheid van de kandidaat belangrijker worden dan andere (kwaliteits) criteria. Ook zet ik vraagtekens bij de aansluiting van een postdocpositie bij een volgende carrièrestap, zoals een universitair docentschap, aangezien er bij de selectie

van postdocs weinig aandacht is voor hun langetermijnperspectief. Ten tweede hebben jonge wetenschappers geen uitgebreid CV en beoordelen commissieleden kandidaten voornamelijk op hun potentieel. Dat blijkt veelal een subjectieve onderneming, waardoor er ruimte ontstaat voor selectiebesluiten op basis van impliciete (ongeschreven) criteria die ongelijkheidspraktijken mogelijk maken, omdat impliciete criteria ruimte geven aan persoonlijke voorkeuren en aannames.

De tweede bijdrage aan de literatuur heeft betrekking op de (re)productie van ongelijkheden in werving en selectie door het bestuderen van zowel *practices* (praktijken; wat men routinematig zegt en doet) en *practicing* (praktiseren; wat zegt en doet men nu werkelijk in de uitvoering). Ik laat zien dat genderpraktijken vrij abstract zijn en vaak refereren aan stereotype percepties van een gehele groep vrouwen of mannen. Het praktiseren van gender laat zien hoe het beoordelen van individuele kandidaten daadwerkelijk gebeurt. In de evaluatie van kandidaten schrijven de commissieleden over het algemeen sneller en onvoorwaardelijker potentieel toe aan mannen dan aan vrouwen. Er wordt vaker voor mannelijke kandidaten gestreden, terwijl voor vrouwen twijfels worden opgeworpen die vaak als onoverkomelijk worden gezien. Ook worden vrouwen vaker beoordeeld op additionele criteria, die niet worden toegepast in de evaluatie van mannen. Dit heeft als resultaat dat het speelveld voor vrouwen en mannen niet gelijk is. Tevens laat ik zien hoe subtiel en complex de rol van macht en ongelijkheid is en hoe snel en vaak niet-reflectief macht wordt uitgeoefend en ongelijkheid wordt gecreëerd. De machtspositie van commissieleden bepaalt wie hun macht kunnen uitoefenen en wie gedwongen worden zich te schikken naar selectiebesluiten. In de (Nederlandse) wetenschap zijn het voornamelijk mannen die een machtspositie bekleden (zoals bijvoorbeeld een hoogleraarpositie), waardoor zij makkelijker hun persoonlijke agenda's kunnen nastreven, bijvoorbeeld door hun (mannelijke) voorkeurskandidaat naar voren te schuiven.

Concluderend geeft mijn proefschrift een gedetailleerde analyse die laat zien hoe (gender)ongelijkheden worden ge(re)produceerd binnen twee wetenschappelijke disciplines in meerdere landen, in een context waar meer diversiteit in de wetenschap op de agenda staat van selectiecommissies en universiteiten. Ondanks de uitgesproken bereidheid om bijvoorbeeld meer vrouwen aan te nemen, blijkt dat de vrouwen die een wetenschappelijke carrière ambiëren worden benadeeld door genderstereotypen en genderpraktijken in besluitvorming door selectiecommissies. Kennis over de complexiteit van ongelijkheid en macht in praktijken rondom werving en selectie kan helpen om bewustzijn en reflectie te creëren onder selectiecommissieleden (en het management) dat zal bijdragen aan meer gelijke werving- en selectiepraktijken van jonge onderzoekers in de wetenschap.

Dankwoord



Dankwoord

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About the author



About the author

Channah Herschberg obtained her BSc degree in Psychology from the VU University, Amsterdam, in 2009. Thereafter, she moved to London where she received an MSc degree in Human Resource Management and Organisational Analysis at King's College London. She then worked at the VU University in Amsterdam where she was part of the ERCAREER research project. The European Research Council (ERC) working group on gender commissioned this project, to capture the gendered nature of the career paths of ERC grantees and applications, to help explain and possibly reduce the gender gap in success rates. Due to her work on this project, Channah wanted to continue studying gender and careers in science. When the opportunity came along, she applied for a PhD position at the Institute for Management Research (IMR) at Radboud University, Nijmegen. She worked there as a PhD candidate from 2014 till 2018 on a position funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme. As part of the GARCIA project team, Channah contributed to several research reports and workshops, in addition to her PhD work. Her research has received (inter)national media attention (see Appendix D) and Channah was invited for several presentations abroad. She was a visiting PhD at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya in Barcelona for a couple of months in 2017. During her PhD, Channah was an active member of the IMR PhD council, an organizing committee member for the International Doctoral Consortium 2016 in Halifax, and part of the Buddy Support System of the PhD Organisation Nijmegen. Channah currently holds a position as policy officer at the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

