



WORKING FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN UNIVERSITIES

WHY, HOW, AND WHO SHOULD CARE?

LIISA HUSU

SENIOR PROFESSOR, ÖREBRO UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

CONFERENCE "GENDER EQUALITY ACTION PLANS: CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITIES", UNIVERSITY OF NOVI SAD, SERBIA,
DECEMBER 6, 2021

WHY PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN ACADEMIA AND SCIENCE?

- ***Human rights perspective***

Each individual should have a right to realize his/her potential regardless of gender; inequality is a human rights violation

- ***Human capital/research system perspective***

Best talents & brains should be recruited to research regardless of gender – “equality equals quality”; loss of talent

- ***Societal /national economy perspective***

High societal investments in educating and training women should not be wasted – inequality as an (national) economical issue

- ***Epistemological perspective***

A more diverse scientific community produces more multifaceted research and raises different questions – equality produces better knowledge

GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN ACADEMIA AND SCIENCE INCREASINGLY ON THE AGENDA IN...

- MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS: *UN, UNESCO, OECD, EU*
- INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC ORGANISATIONS: *ERC, ESF, EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION, EMBO*
- MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION
- NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCILS & OTHER KEY FUNDING ORGANISATIONS: *NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCILS, GLOBAL RESEARCH COUNCIL*
- LEADING SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS: *NATURE, SCIENCE, LANCET*
- UNIVERSITY RECTORS' NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
- LEADING UNIVERSITIES: *MIT, LERU – LEAGUE OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES*
- TRADE UNIONS OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AND RESEARCHERS

GENDER PATTERNS IN SCIENCE AND ACADEMIA

(*VERONICA STOLTE-HEISKANEN 1991*)

1. The **higher the position**, the fewer women
2. **Recruitment base** to academic careers is feminising
3. **Academic culture** has gendered elements
4. **Contradictions** between the academic/research system clock and the biological **clock**
5. Women **relatively invisible** to male colleagues in the scientific community as colleagues; visibility paradox
6. The more a scientific arena is linked to **power**, the smaller the share of women

GENDERED PATTERNS IN ACADEMIA (2)

- Horizontal, vertical, contractual **gender segregation**
- Persistent gendered disciplinary and subdisciplinary **divisions**
- **Stereotype** of researcher /academic/engineer: male
- Gendered disciplinary/departmental/research **group cultures**

HUSU2021

- Gendered informal and formal **networking**
- (Unconscious) **gender bias** in evaluation and assessment
- **Sexual harassment** of students and staff, sexism, misogyny
- Gendered **career paths**
- Gendered **excellence-marked initiatives**

MULTIPLE ARENAS TO ENGAGE WITH GE & DIVERSITY

- **Recruitment** (job profiles, advertising, assessment criteria, procedures)
- **Job descriptions** (research, teaching, administration)
- **Career advancement** (criteria, career support, career breaks, mentoring)
- **Collaborations** (research groups, research centres, networks, mobility)
- **Resource allocation** (strategic initiatives, awards, mobility support)
- **Work & studying environment** (well-being, non-discrimination, anti-harassment)
- **Work-life balance** (working time, distance work, parental leave, care leave)

KEY ISSUES IN GE & DIVERSITY WORK

- **Leadership commitment** and engagement of key importance
- Both top-down and bottom-up perspectives needed
- Building ownership inside the organisation vs. projectification
- Transparency of policies and practices
- **Evidence & accountability:** statistics, follow-up, monitoring, exit interviews
- **Training and mutual learning:** leaders, management, HUSU2021 supervisors

SEXISM IN ACADEMIA: FROM BLATANT AND OVERT TO MORE SUBTLE FORMS

“Typically, when one form of prejudices (such as sexism or racism) is labelled as unacceptable, it does not simply vanish; rather it tends to take increasingly subtler forms, thus protecting the prejudiced person from both social and legal accusations. “

Paula Caplan: *Lifting a Ton of Feathers* (1993,17)

- Husu: *Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia* (2001)
- 2010s: Revival of debate and actions against sexism in academia
- Metoo# movement 2017 → impact in academia

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ACADEMIA

- Sexual harassment
- from "problem with no name" and individual concern up to 1980s, to a gender equality, work and studying environment issue in the 2000s

Specific characteristics of academia

- Male-dominated hierarchical structures
- Lots of young women (students) and older men in powerful positions in the same organisation (but also harassment between students)
- Long-term dependent relationships (Ph.D. supervision)
- Early career & researchers in precarious positions, specifically

UNISAFE – HORIZON2020 PROJECT ON SH&GBV

- **UniSAFE: making universities and research organisations safe from gender-based violence**
- **3 year project: February 2021 – January 2024**
- **9 partners, multidisciplinary teams, coordinator ESF & Örebro Univ.**
- **Mapping legislative and policy contexts**
- **Collecting quantitative and qualitative evidence on GBV**
 - **Survey in 46 RPOs in 15 European countries**
 - **Case studies on university responses and infrastructure in 15 European countries**
- **Producing recommendations, toolbox and training for RPOs**
- **Empower stakeholders across Europe to implement effective policies**

UNISAFE'S DEFINITION OF 'GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE' THAT ENCOMPASSES MANY FORMS OF VIOLENCE, VIOLATIONS AND ABUSE

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Psychological violence
- Economic violence
- Sexual harassment
- Gender harassment
- Online violence / cyberviolence / digital violence
- Technology facilitated violence
- Coercion and coercive control
- New forms of violence and harassment?



HOW UNIVERSITIES RESPOND?

- SH and GBV prevention **integrated** into GEP and/or work/study environment policy
- Create **clear procedures** how the university handles SH complaints incl. sanctions
- **Guidelines** on procedures available for staff and students
- **Codes of conduct** for staff and students
- **Contact persons** for staff and students
- **Regular training** on SH and GBV for leaders, staff and students
- **Prevalence surveys** & questions on SH and GBV in general staff and student surveys

MORE INFORMATION

- UniSAFE: <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/>
- **Swedish** ongoing national study on sexual harassment in higher education 2021:
<https://ki.se/en/collaboration/national-study-on-gender-based-violence-in-academia>
- Sexism in Danish universities action 2020 – Website, Handbook
<https://sexismedu.dk/>
- Drew, Eileen, and Siobhán Canavan (eds.) (2020) *The Gender-sensitive University: A Contradiction in Terms?*. Taylor & Francis. (open access).



- Thank you!

- Liisa Husu, liisa.husu@oru.se