MoD-Lecture
FAU, Department Mathematik
Erlangen, Oct. 16, 2024

IAQ

UNIVERSITÄT DUISBURG ESSEN

Offen im Denken

"Discovering and Communicating Excellence"

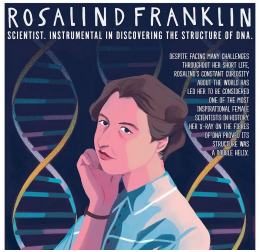
Raising awareness and developing competence on the topic of excellence and gender for postdocs and actors in university communication

Prof. Dr. Ute Klammer,
University of Duisburg-Essen

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Excellence
3. Visibility
4. Empirical evidence (I): (Gender) equality vs. excellence?
5. Empirical evidence (II): Excellence and visibility from the perspective of postdocs, professors and university communication stakeholders
6. Conclusion and Outlook: Rethinking excellence – improving visibility

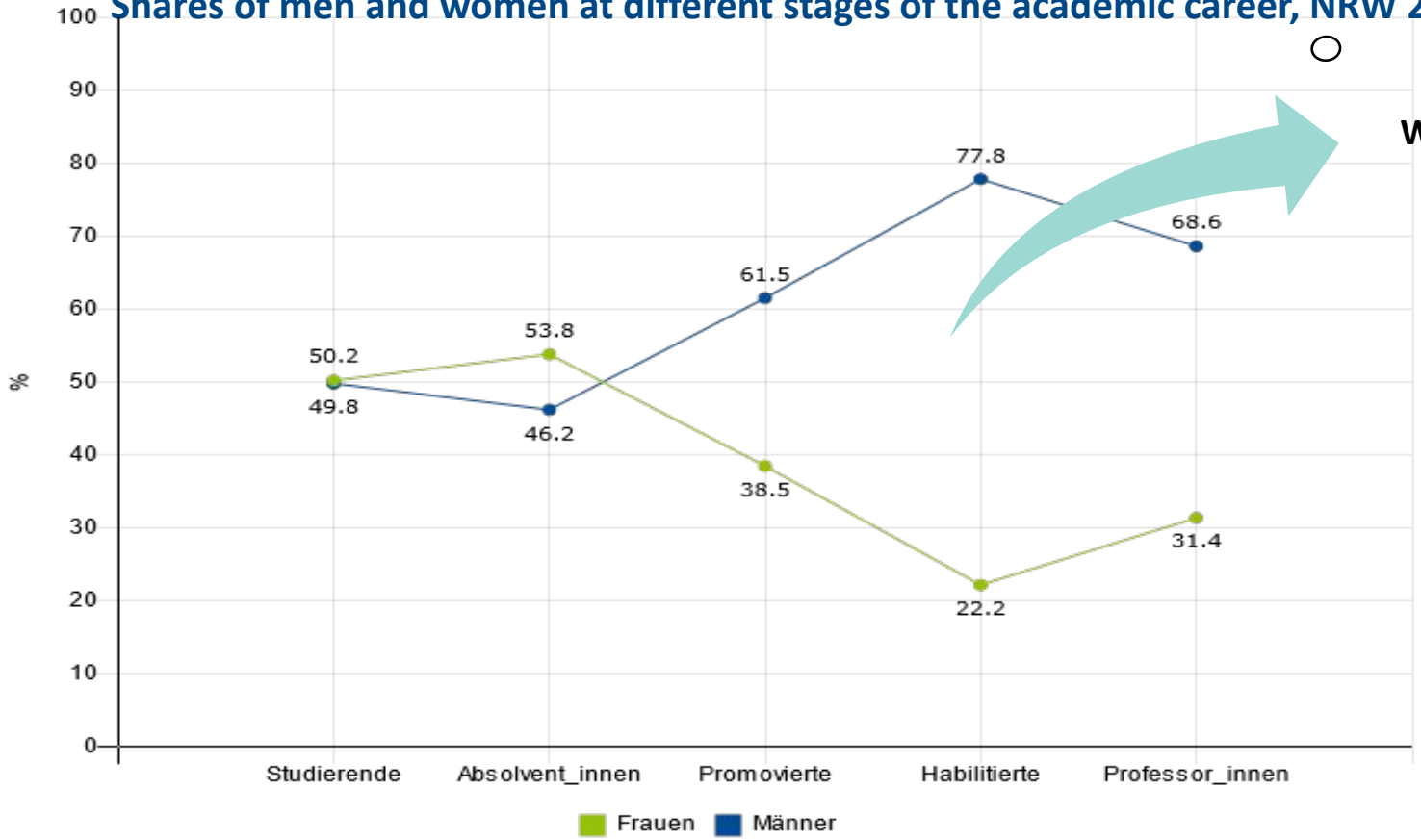
1. Introduction (1): Women in Science – historically grown structures



- The scientific system has developed over centuries under the exclusion of women
- For a long time, women's contributions were not recognized as such or were questioned altogether
- The image of the ideal scientific personality is therefore still predominantly male

(Acker 1990; Kahlert 2015; Miller et al. 2018)

1. Introduction (2):
Shares of men and women at different stages of the academic career, NRW 2021



Who and what is excellent? And who becomes visible with his/her research?

Souce: Statistikportal. Geschlechterbezogene Hochschuldaten NRW

2. Excellence (1)

Latin: excellere (to excel, to stand out), excellentia (excellence)

Quite recent phenomenon in the discourse on science and higher education policy (2000s)

New Public Management: changeover to stronger detailed control of the university and to monitoring results

Control through metrification of input and output dimensions

Scope of the concept of excellence:

- Institutional/political
- Personalised
- Processes and/or results

2. Excellence (2): The German “Excellence Initiative“

The idea for the German Excellence Initiative was developed in 2004 and adopted in 2005

The aim of the Excellence Initiative is to strengthen top-level research in Germany and improve its international competitiveness

In a competition organized by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the German Council of Science and Humanities were/are awarded:

→ Graduate schools for the promotion of young scientists
→ Clusters of Excellence for the promotion of cutting-edge research
→ Future concepts for the project-related expansion of university top-level research

2. Excellence (3): The German “Excellence Initiative“

By the end of 2012, a total of 1.9 billion euros had been provided by the federal and state governments for funding

o In the first round, 18 graduate schools, 17 clusters of excellence and three institutional strategies were funded

o In 2010, the second round of the Excellence Initiative was announced, which continued the programme from 2012 until the end of 2017

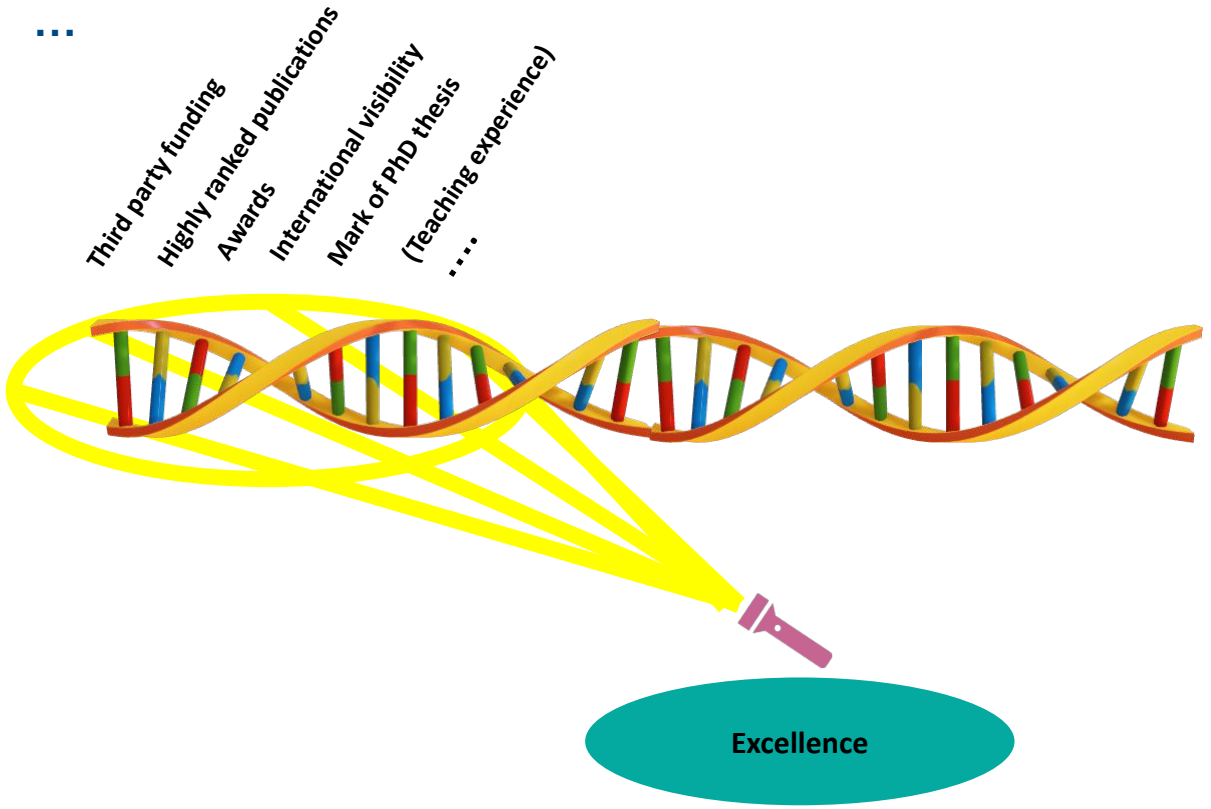
o In the second round, 21 graduate schools, 20 clusters of excellence and six institutional future concepts were funded

o In 2016, the Excellence Strategy was adopted as a follow-up programme to the Excellence Initiative with an unlimited duration

- A new round of the German Excellence Initiative is currently (2024) underway

2. Excellence (4)

The predominant understanding of excellence is narrow …



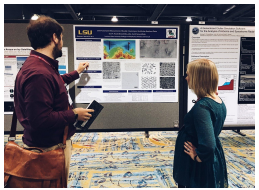
2. Excellence (5)

- Assessment criteria vary (e.g. output such as publications, third-party funding, prizes, etc.), arbitrary attribution?
- Attributions of excellence are always based on assumptions and stereotypes: Danger of self-fulfilling prophecies
- Term implies an appeal to high standards, therefore difficult to reject
- Excellence remains an "essentially contested concept", i.e. an arbitrary and vague, therefore controversial and at the same time action-guiding concept (Ferretti et al. 2018)
- Risk for the exercise of power & opportunity for negotiation processes (cf. O'Connor & Barnard 2021, p. 9)

3. Visibility (1)

1. High importance of the specific academic community

- Publications in specialist journals, anthologies, monographs etc.
- Presentation of own work at conferences
- Expansion and maintenance of (informal) networks

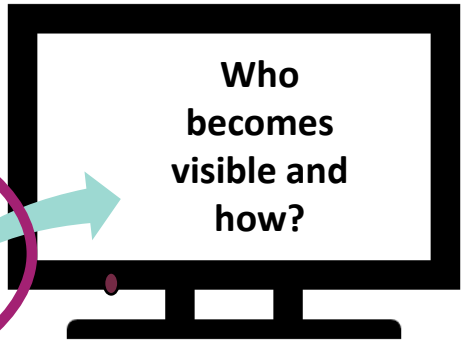


2. Science communication (transfer to society, “third mission”)

- Provision of generally understandable research results for the public: innovation, social added value and application relevance
- Increasing public interest in publicly funded research

3. Visibility (2): Gender Gaps in Research and Higher Education

- Gender Wage Gap (in particular W-professors)
  (Kortendiek et al. 2021)
- Gender Care Gap
  (Metz-Göckel 2016; King & Fredrickson 2020; Morgan et al. 2021; Cohen Miller 2022)
- Gender Publication/ Citation Gap
  (Ialuna et al. 2023; Lerchenmüller et al. 2021; Budrikis 2020; Franzen 2018)
  - Male researchers are better represented in journal articles than female researchers (European Commission 2021)
  - Increase of the share of women in joint publications, at the same time still low share of single author publications of women in political science journals (Hagemann 2022)
- Gender Award Gap (Halling et al. 2022)



4. Visibility (3): Gender Gaps in the perception of scientific excellence in politics

Share of women in selected political advisory councils in Germany

- Scientific council Ministry of Finance. 14 %
- Scientific council Ministry of Economy and Energy: 15%
- German Council of Economic Experts (Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung): for a long time completely male, only recently women have been appointed, now 3 out of 5 = 60%
- But: Scientific Council for Family Issues: 63%

Audio-visual media:

- Women are asked less often as experts in info-formats
  (Prommer & Linke 2019)

3. Visibility (4)

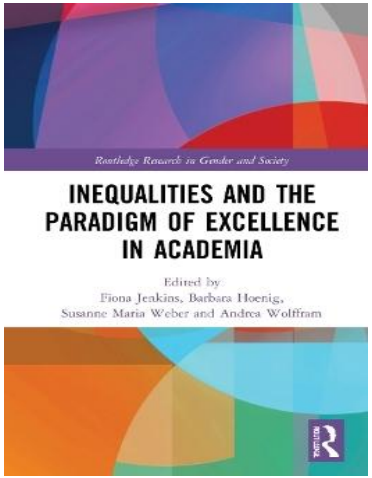
Symbolic dimension of historically evolved structures: visibility of excellence

Source: Van den Brink (2015: 199; © Isabelle Dinter)

4. Empirical evidence (I/1): (Gender) equality vs. Excellence?

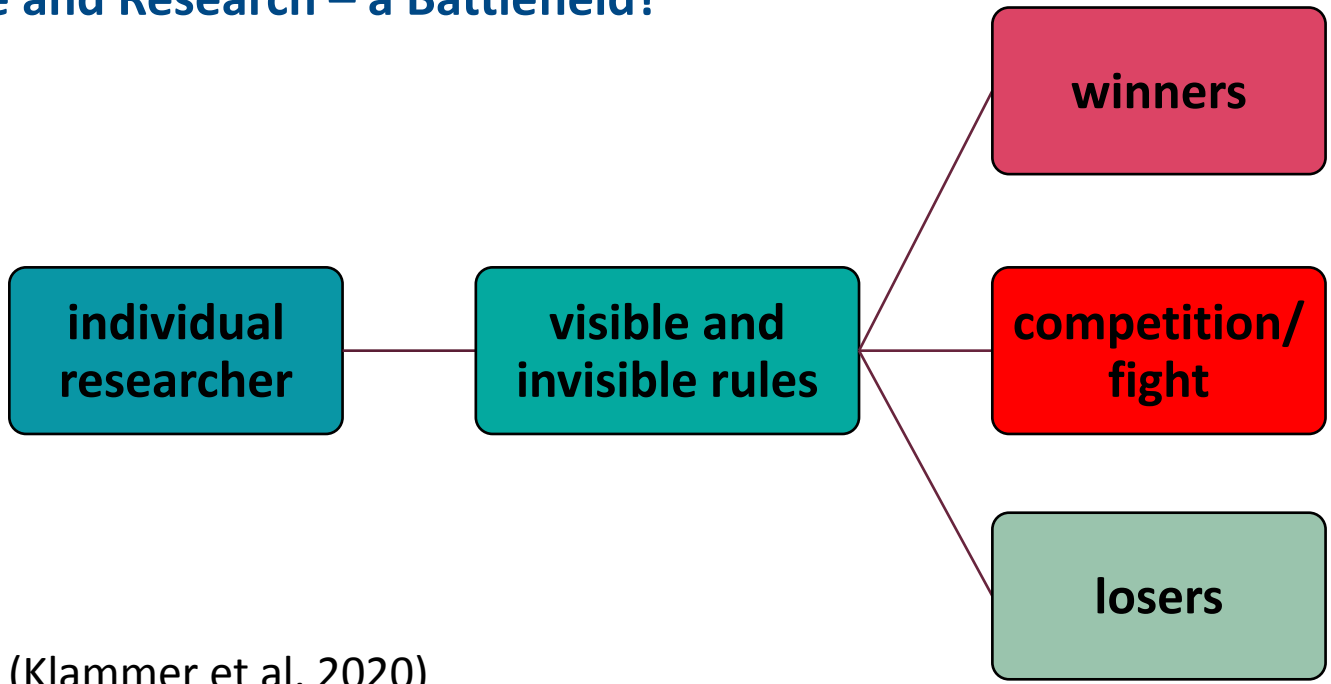
Klammer et al. 2020, „Gender equality policies at universities: What do professors know and how do they act?“– starting point for the research project :

- Abundance and still growing number of university programmes aiming at gender equality
- Only slow increase of the share of women professors and women in other higher ranks of the academic career ladder
- Professors as gate keepers for academic careers: what do they know about gender equality and (how) do they support gender equality in their own professional actions?



4. Empirical evidence (I/2): (Gender) Equality vs. Excellence?

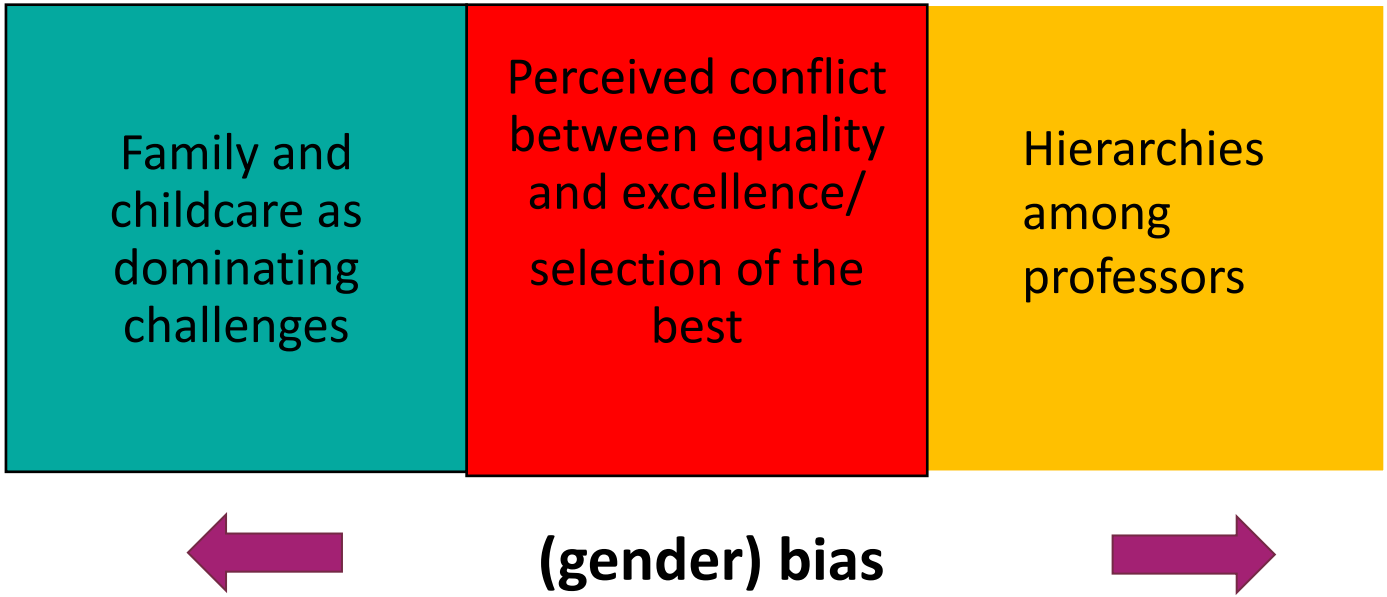
Science and Research – a Battlefield?



(Klammer et al. 2020)

4. Empirical evidence (I/3): (Gender) Equality vs. Excellence?

Central overarching patterns



(Klammer et al. 2020)

5. Empirical evidence (II/1): Excellence and visibility from the perspective of postdocs, professors and actors in university communication
Research project EXENKO*

Team:
Ute Klammer
Maren Jochimsen
Eva Wegrzyn
Lara Altenstädter
Anja Mallat
Lena Braunisch
Silvie Haarmann

Partner universities:
University of Duisburg-Essen
RWTH Aachen
University of Cologne
Univ. of Applied Sciences Ruhr-West

* **Discovering and communicating excellence**. Awareness-raising and competence development on the topic of excellence and gender for postdocs and HEI communicators (2021-2024)

Further information: www.exzellenz-entdecken.de

GEFÖRDERT VOM
Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung

5. Empirical Evidence (II/2): …

Questions:

- Who or what is considered excellent in your discipline?
- How would you personally define "excellence" for yourself?
- In your opinion, how are visibility and excellence related?

5. Empirical Evidence (II/3): ….Perspectives on excellence

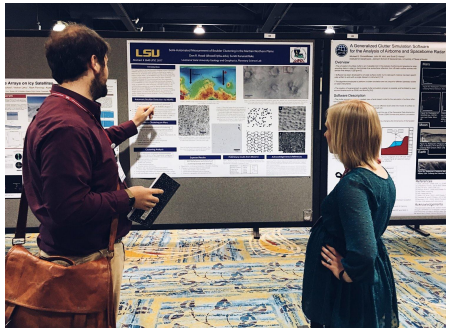
Some common excellence criteria have apparently been internalized strongly by young researchers …

- Excellence in the scientific system is demonstrated by publications in highly ranked journals and research applications/acquisition of third-party funding
- In addition to innovative ideas,

  a) presence at important conferences

  b) integration in networks

  c) internationalization



5. Empirical Evidence (II/4) … Perspectives on excellence

… but we also find much criticism

- „Salami Slicing“ (focus on number of publication)
- Pressure to publish leads to decrease of quality of research
- Need to share also misluck/failed research "if you somehow found out that it doesn't work that way and published about it, it would save a lot of money and frustration for other people and other institutions" (Postdoc, MINT)
- Not enough recognition for care work – demand for a broader concept of “excellence“

5. Empirical Evidence (II/5)

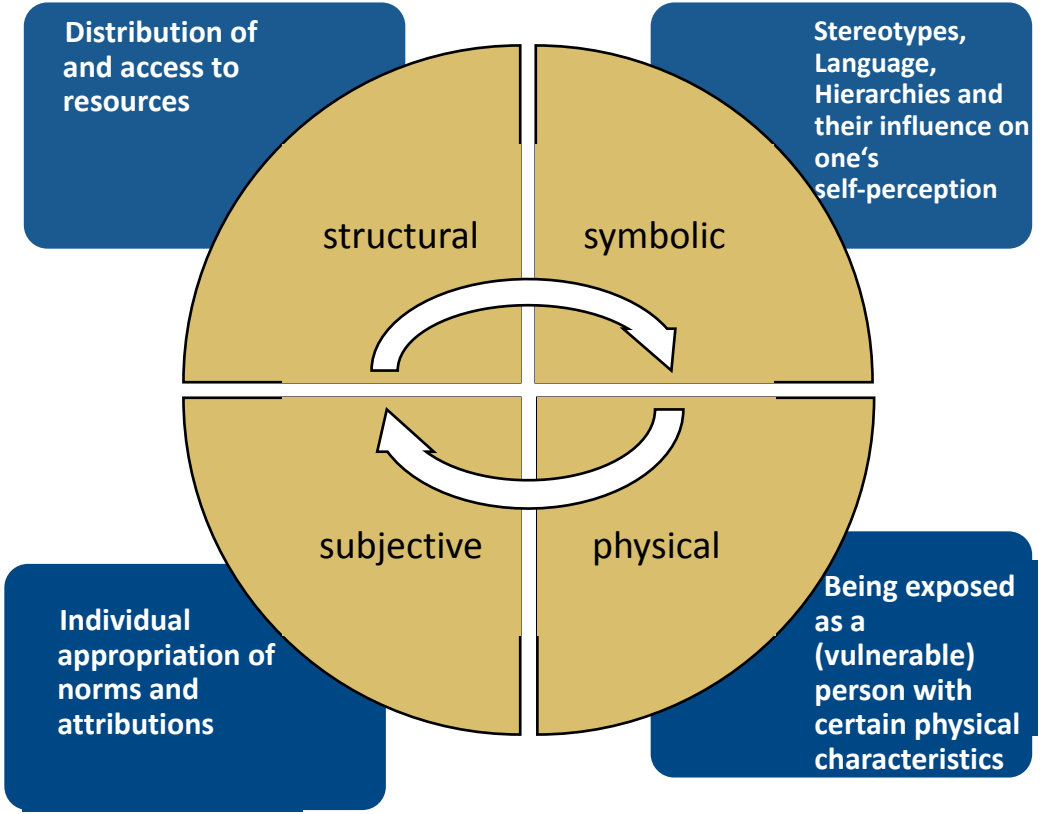
Which concept of “excellence”? Perspectives on a controversial category

- Focus on traditional excellence metrics is like „dancing around like the golden calf” (female 2)
- This category discloses the preconditions of academic achievement, and it marginalizes e.g., women, 1st-generation academics, PoC
- In the excellence debate there are fields of research that are marginalized and underfunded

 Growing awareness for the limits on excellence metrics and biases.

 “Scientific excellence does not always go hand in hand with public perception and visibility. In other words, there are certainly people who conduct sensational research at our university but are invisible to the public.” (Vice Head communication department, male 6)

5. Empirical Evidence (II/6):
Diversity and Excellence – dimensions to be aware of



Source: own presentation, drawing on Pimminger 2017

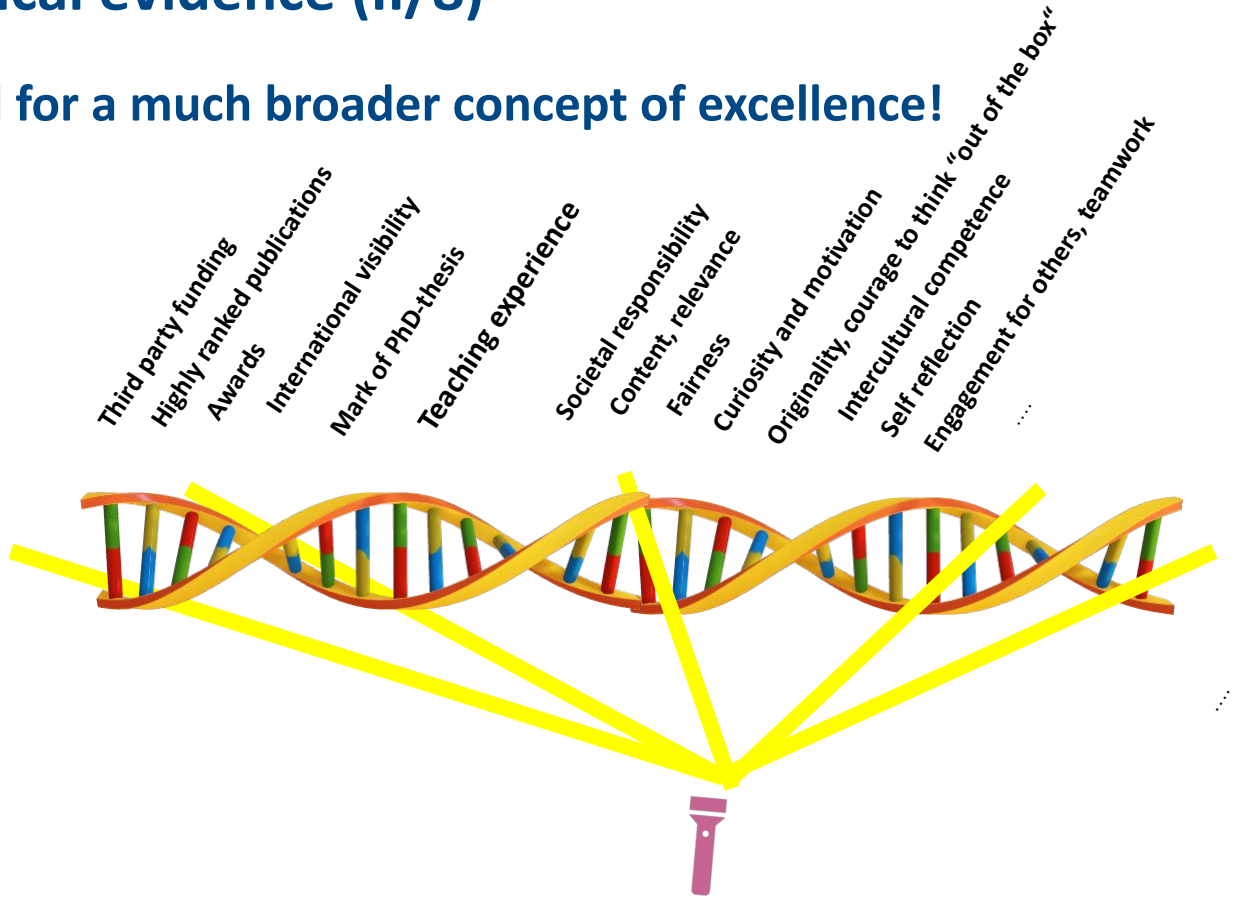
5. Empirical evidence (II/7)

“Excellence” from the perspective of the postdocs interviewed

- Being innovative; i.e. being a pioneer in the field
- Advancing a topic; expanding complexity, thinking ahead
- Sustainable research, i.e. "not reinventing everything again, but sensibly integrating what already exists into what will be developed in the future” (postdoc, Ms. 14, STEM)
- Have visions
- Benefits for society (third mission; taxpayers' money) and/or for research
- Develop an understanding of the fact that excellence requires a lot (team; infrastructure; material resources; that "little bit of luck" etc.)
- Open question: Is there a right to be “invisible”?

6. Empirical evidence (II/8)

Demand for a much broader concept of excellence!



6. Empirical evidence (II/9): Visibility
Tensions in science communication

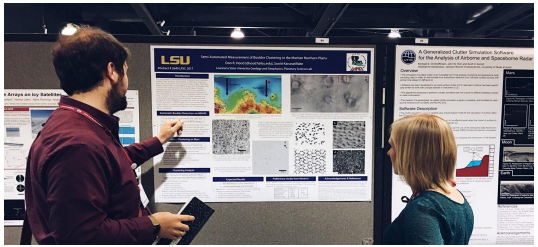
IAQ

UNIVERSITÄT DUISBURG ESSEN

Offen im Denken

Expectations/demands

- Priority of the quality of research
- Growing importance of Science communication
- Specific knowledge and performance required



Questions to be reflected

- Visibility can be ambivalent
- Benefit of public visibility for one‘s own career in research not always clear
- Feeling of insecurity of postdocs (“why do they ask me?“)
- How to present one‘s own research and person?
- What is the best appropriate chanel/medium?

1. Conclusion and Outlook (1): Rethinking excellence – improving visibility

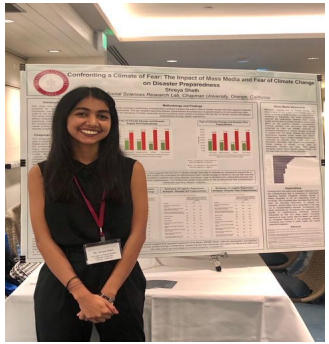
- Different perspectives on "excellence" need to be discussed and taken into account: we have to reflect on and rethink individual backgrounds and criteria for "selecting the best" and "excellence“!
- Visibility in science is multi-layered: scientific community – society; conflicts due to time restraints possible
- Need to broaden the concept of excellence and to improve the visibility of female researchers!

7. Conclusion and outlook (2): Rethinking excellence – improving visibility

The visibility paradox in the mirror of excellence attributions

Open question:
Is there a right to be “invisible”?

7. Conclusion and outlook (3): “Pimp up your visibility!“



Reflect: What kind of visibility do you want?

… in the scientific community?

…in the public sphere?

Imperatives of scholarly communication: Publish (or perish), present your work at conferences as prerequisites for succeeding in the run for funds…

Imperatives of science communication:
Tell the public about your institution and explain comprehensively what ‘your’ researchers contribute to the good of humankind…

7. Conclusion and Outlook (4): Rethinking excellence – improving visibility

- Be courageous!
- Take chances!
- Develop a strategy!
- Find the right medium!
- Involve university actors for science communication!
- Last but not least: Decide where you want to remain invisible!

Thank you for your attention!

contact
Ute Klammer
e-mail: ute.klammer@uni-due.de

www.uni-due.de/iaq
www.difis.org

More information about the research project EXENKO:
www.exzellenz-entdecken.de