

Academic Careers and Sexism at UNIGE

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Presentation of the results of research conducted at the University of Geneva by UNIGE researcher Dr. Klea Faniko

Introduction and Moderation

Yves Flückiger, Rector, UNIGE

Brigitte Mantilleri, Director of the Equality Service, UNIGE



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Carrière académique à l'Université de Genève : le facteur humain

Etude psycho-sociale menée par Dre Klea Faniko



This study, based on 85 interviews and 818 questionnaires by male and female researchers at the University of Geneva, was aimed at exploring the reasons for the small numbers of female researchers in the top levels of the institution's hierarchy. We observed, firstly, differences and similarities between women and men regarding their professional ambitions and their investment in their careers, and secondly, the mentalities and behaviors that characterize this professional milieu.

The data indicate that women show as much commitment as men, and that they are as motivated as men to advance in their careers. The results also show that women, like men, invest themselves beyond the hours they are contracted to work. Furthermore, for many of these women, professional ambitions take precedence over their private lives. These data suggest that the low numbers of female researchers in high-status positions cannot be attributed to their supposed lack of professional commitment, but rather to factors tied to the work environment.

Our data show that the academic milieu, like other professional milieus in Switzerland, is characterized by several obstacles to the professional progression of women.

Firstly, sexism expressed directly, or subtly (hostile, or benevolent) constitutes without a doubt one of the major obstacles for the careers of female researchers. Several female participants reported having been confronted with different facets of sexism at the University. The testimonies of the people interviewed demonstrate that hostile and/or benevolent sexism devalorizes female researchers in the professional context and thereby limits their progression in the hierarchy.

Secondly, the data confirmed the presence of disparities between the treatment of women and men by their hierarchical superiors. Female researchers, especially those at an advanced stage in their career, note that they receive insufficient support from their hierarchical superior. Compared to male researchers, they report experiencing more situations characterized by a lack of support on the part of their hierarchical superior, such as a lack of advising, of guidance, of financing for research activities, and even a lack of promotion

Thirdly, our data highlight the fact that parenthood does not have the same impact on the career of women

as on the career of men. This obstacle to the professional progression of female researchers stems from negative attitudes of hierarchical superiors regarding motherhood, and not from the capacities of parents to reconcile their family lives with their professional lives. For female researchers, these negative attitudes may well lead to the abandonment of their academic career.

Finally, the measures implemented by the Rectorate, such as the rule granting preference to the person belonging to the under-represented sex, the REGARD workshops, the mentoring programs, and the “Subside Tremplin” program, are overall viewed favorably by all the study participants, and especially by the female researchers they are designed to assist.

Complete study www.unige.ch/egalite

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Klea Faniko completed her doctorate in Psychology at the University of Lausanne in 2011. She conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Geneva, then at the University of Leiden (Netherlands). She is currently working as an advanced researcher at the University of Utrecht (Netherlands). Her research concerns the perception of positive measures that support the careers of females, the professional trajectories of women, and the obstacles encountered by women during their careers. She is the author of one monograph and two edited volumes, and has contributed several articles to scientific journals and edited volumes.

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