

Quality Assessment and Sustainability.

A Case Study from Higher Arts Education in Norway

Lilli Mittner, researcher at the Center for Women's and Gender Research, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway, Email: lilli.mittner@uit.no

Rikke Gørgens Gjørum, professor and leader of Arctic Center for Welfare and Disability Research at the Faculty of Health Sciences, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway, rikke.g.gjarum@uit.no

Hilde Synnøve Blix, professor at the Music Conservatory, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway. Email: hilde.blix@uit.no

Abstract

This chapter presents a study on quality assessment in higher education and relate the discussion to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 Good education, SDG 5 Gender equality, and SDG 9 Innovation & infrastructure. Based on a case study from Norway, we explore specifically in what ways quality assessment matters for sustainable gender equality within in higher arts education. The data set comprises 24 committee reviews and 5 in-depth conversations with experienced committee members who assess applications for full-professorship positions. We find a need for increased exploration on how academia can contribute to transparent discussions on quality, gender, and competence towards more democratic knowledge production. We argue that to build more sustainable infrastructure within higher arts education there is a need for more predictable assessment criteria, meta-discussions on practices of academic assessment and formal training of committee members. Those pathways will ensure more openness regarding promotion processes towards more sustainable educational development, gender equality, infrastructure, and innovation in the field.

Keywords

gender equality, academic culture, quality assessment, competence, education, innovation, infrastructure, Norway

Introduction

Gender equality (GE) in academia relates to a variety of meta discourses such as social justice, human resource management, power, sustainability, knowledge creation, role models, and quality of research (Leach, 2016; Thompson, 2018; Pandey, 2019). While there is a body of research on gender representations and measures for women's advancement in academia (Riegraf et al., 2010) there has been conducted little research on the intertwining of quality assessment and gendered mechanisms in a sustainability perspective. This chapter gives insights from the arts and humanities set quality assessment in academia and beyond into a broader context (Benneworth et al. 2016). With our chapter we are 'opening a black box' (Lamont, 2009) of quality assessment in higher art education in Norway and debate in what ways current practices may bring academia towards more sustainable working environment.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are the world's action plan to eliminate poverty, inequality and tackle the climate change before 2030. The 17 SDG are grouped into five subgroups: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. In our role as feminist scholars and gender researchers we choose to point out three particularly important goals that have great impact on equality in higher education and research: SDG 4: Good education, SDG 5: Gender equality and SDG 9: Innovation & infrastructure. Since 2000, there has been some progress in achieving the target of universal primary education in total.¹ UNICEF show that more girls are in school than ever before, and we know that 'investing in girls' education transforms communities, countries and the entire world. They earn higher incomes, participate in the decisions that affect them, and to build better futures for themselves and their families'.² One of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development is inclusive and good education. The SDG's focus on the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination, and one way to achieve this is innovations and infrastructure. Introducing and promoting new technologies and rebuilding infrastructure are key to finding lasting solutions that contribute to real change. More women in higher education and research are important to build a fairer world where everyone has the same opportunity to contribute, create, fulfil their dreams and use their talents, and most of all to develop a more sustainable world in partnership with other human beings.

Gender as a performance in itself (Butler, 1990) has gained increased attention in higher arts education during the last decades (Nyamko & Twengström, 2009; Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Blix & Mittner, 2018; Onsrud et al. 2021). Criticism for the lack of gender balance in public institutions such as concert halls, festivals or museums is often dismissed with a reference to the idea that selecting men over women is not a matter of gender but a matter of quality. Artists (here in terms professional practitioners of all kinds

¹ [Goal 4: Quality education \(undp.org\)](https://www.undp.org/goals/4)

² [Girls' education | UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/girlseducation)

of art; visual art, music, theatre, film etc.) are, allegedly, not selected because of their gender but solely based on the quality of their work. In all art forms, quality assessments are an important part of the artist's everyday life and work. Artists undergo quality assessments in connection with the allocation of funds, access to viewing venues, selection for participation in festivals/biennials and in the awarding of scholarships or professor positions.

In academia, artistic researchers are assessed in terms of (1) international standard, (2) relevant breadth and depth and (3) pedagogic competence when competing for positions or seeking promotion (Lovdata, 2006). Quality in the arts is under continuous debate (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010; Mortensen, 2015). Committee members who are asked to fairly assess their peers are operationalising the criteria based in their disciplinary standpoint that can connect to different methodologies, epistemologies and sets of academic values (Lamont, 2009). Hence, in the moment *quality* is discussed, power, elites, and bias are at work. This can result in conflicting interpretations and operationalisations of the formal criteria. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to discussions of the concept of quality, to explore in what ways gender matters for how quality is assessed within higher arts education in Norway, and to relate the discussion to the SDG 4 Good education, SDG 5 Gender equality, and SDG 9 Innovation & infrastructure.

The chapter is structured as followed: 1. we discuss the concept of quality in the arts and show how it relates to the notions of power, elites, and bias. 2. we give a short overview over our methods for data collection conducted between 2015 and 2018 as part of the research and intervention project 'Gender Balance in Arts Education' at the Faculty of Fine Arts at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway and 3. we present and discuss our findings through short empirical examples and relate those to UN Sustainability goals. 4. we conclude with an invitation to collectively reflect upon a checklist for assessment processes to meet our own biases and spark a meta-discussion on quality towards more sustainable gender equality within academic context.

Gender and Sustainability

Current practices of quality assessment and the power of elites and own biases impact possibilities to create academic cultures towards more sustainable gender equality in higher education. Starting from a broad definition of sustainability as 'the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level' (OED, 2015) we define sustainable academic working culture as a place where a diversity of people works collectively towards common goals and thus develop innovative solutions to solve grand challenges (Maxwell & Benneworth, 2018). This kind of academic practice will further ensure to build sustainable systems and to reach the UN Sustainability goals on an overall level.

However, the qualities that are needed to build more sustainable education, more sustainable gender relations and more sustainable infrastructures need to be discussed. SDG 4 Good education, SDG 5 Gender

equality, and SDG 9 Innovation & infrastructure (and the other 14 UN sustainability goals) are highly intertwined. The sort of questions that need to be asked are not about ‘who’ or ‘what’ shall be sustained, maintained, affirmed, uphold, supported, beard or carried. The questions that need to be solved are rather about ‘how’ social structures and cultural practices can intra-act in a way that prevent backlashes, short-termism and efficiency-driven quick-fixes.

Long-term changes of relation between men and women might impact sustainability goals in all their variances. The arguments for gender balance in higher education are multi-sited and resonating across national policies. In Norway, the National Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research built their work on evidence-based arguments that more gender balanced groups are not only fairer and more democratic, but also more effective, more creative and hence more innovative.³ Sustainable policies to reach gender balance (defined as numeric ratio between men and women) are promoted to reach more gender equality within society (Schwab et al., 2017).

However, if lived reality of gender equal working environment are supposed to result into more sustainable research cultures (Leal Filho, 2021), how, then, does quality assessment relate to sustainability? How can practices of evaluation committees and notion of quality impact more sustainable gender relations and hence academic everyday life at all? How can gender equality reached, sustained, maintained, and supported through quality assessment strategies, policies, guidelines and practices? The discourse on sustainability, understood as an imperative towards a better future, as something that enables to continue good practice, can work as an ice-breaker for the discourse on quality assessment as one tool towards more sustainable gender equality in academia specifically, and society in general.

Quality Assessment

All assessment processes need to address problems regarding elitism, power, bias, and notions of *quality*. A major obstacle in the strive for democracy is elitism and homogenous groups of people who hold the power to define what is considered important and valuable. The sustainable development goals 4 Good education and 5 Gender equality hold important positions in changing these conditions for distribution of power, while sustainable development goal 9 Innovation & infrastructure ensure structural and cultural across all sectors.

The concept of quality is under continuous re-conceptualization within the performing arts (Eliassen & Prytz, 2016; Lund et al., 2001). Little research has been conducted on how quality criteria are defined in recruitment processes. In this chapter we investigate how gender influences discursive practices

³ <https://kifinfo.no/en/content/why-work-improve-gender-balance-and-increase-diversity-research>

regarding the concept of quality (Mullany, 2012). When artistic quality is assessed in academic contexts different epistemologies meet. For example: for scientific quality (a.k.a. excellence) the number of research publications are of high relevance, for artistic quality (a.k.a. originality) what matters is rather recognition and visibility. While excellence can be measured in terms of numbers of publication, stage performances, rankings, and merely technical skills, originality stays in the realm of magic and taste. Both, excellence and originality have a long tradition of being defined and performed by men (Battersby, 1989).

Assessments in recruitment and promotion processes for artistic positions are based on other criteria than in more traditional scientific positions. What constitutes originality is, however, unclear, precisely because it cannot be counted or defined in advance (Mortensen, 2015, p. 2). Therefore, what is expected in an application for promotion in higher arts education may appear unclear to the applicant when reading the regulations. According to the 'Regulations on employment and promotion in teaching and research posts § 1-2' criteria for a full professor promotion for scientific subjects are for example: 'Scientific level in accordance with established international or national standards' (Lovdata, 2006). Criteria for promotion to the position of professor of performing arts read: 'Comprehensive artistic activity at the highest level according to international standard and relevant breadth and depth in the discipline or discipline at the highest level' (Lovdata, 2006). The quality criteria in traditional academic subjects are in many ways clearer and more predictable than in the arts, because one with 'established standards' refers to peer-reviewed articles that follow relatively established norms.⁴ In many contexts, it is seen that concretizing what artistic qualities are is perceived as difficult to express verbally, which often leads to factors such as recognition, resource access and reputation being used as indicators for quality (Stavrum, 2014).

Quality is never absolute, but situated and relational and take place in relation to various discourses (Mullany, 2007). Hence it must be operationalized in each specific context, discipline, community, or field (Eliassen & Prytz, 2016). For the applicants it can therefore be challenging to interpret and understand what the specific expectations for a position are. Within male dominated working environments this may be challenging for women who might not be familiar with, part of, or shaping the discourses that are at stake.

Quality assessment of artistic practices within academic context converges with functional criteria for artistic quality enacted by public funded art institutions. The Arts Council England focus on dimensions such as vision, production, originality, and impact,⁵ the danish 'divining rod-model' promotes a balance between intention, skill, and relevance (villen, kunnen, skullen) (Langsted et al. 2008; see also Hylland, 2012). However, what stays unsaid in both British, Danish or Norwegian policies on quality assessment in the arts is the awareness that in the moment quality is discussed, power, elites, prestige, and bias are at

⁴ https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/publishing_channels/About_Criteria

⁵ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/AQA_Template_2020_09032020_0.pdf

work. Those markers can result in conflicting handling of the ‘divining rod’ by each of the committee members and needs both theoretically and methodologically reflection.

Power, Elites, Prestige

Processes of quality attribution are highly entangled with power, elites and prestige (Abelsen, 2009; Ginsburgh, 2003; Stavrum, 2014). Hence, recognition and visibility are important for artists' career development (Blix, 2017; Heian, 2018). Looking closer at how agents in the art field describe different forms of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 2007) helps us to unveil normative complexities and make implicit assessment practices explicit for those who work in higher arts education and beyond. Brink (2013), for example, describes how individual attitudes, tastes, judgments, and organizational-structural routines control specific selection mechanisms.

Brandser & Sümer (2016) refer to ways in which organizational processes can have different effects on women and men's career development in academia. In some contexts, women's career paths are described as *labyrinths* (Eagly & Carli, 2007) as there seems to be more obstacles and wrong turns along the career tracks of a female academic. In addition, excellence has been emphasized in academia in recent years by initiatives such as the Centers for Outstanding Research or the EU Framework Program for Research and Innovation, with its emphasis on ‘Excellent Science’. The focus on excellence has also traditionally been part of artistic quality assessment (Rønning, 2012), master-narratives, elitist culture and the idea of the male genius (Elkins, 2013). This further connects to the various dispositions of white, masculine hegemony that can make it troublesome for those who are marginalized in academic cultures to reach top positions in academic fields.

Implicit biases are subconscious cognitive functions that may lead to errors of judgement (Holroyd et al., 2017). Research on academic practices has revealed a long list of implicit biases related to gender, assessment of research projects, but also research methodologies or disciplines (Beyer, 1990, Biernat et al., 2012, Goldin & Rose, 2000, Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). The National Research Ethics Committees in Norway point out that: ‘The researcher's personal attitudes and awareness of the possibilities for prejudices and research biases are a key precondition for reducing the risk of bias, as well as for reducing any negative effects resulting from research bias.’⁸

Both explicit and implicit gender bias relates to gender stereotypes that are expressed in attitudes, and the way people speak and act (Reuben et al, 2014). Researchers found empirical evidence that women's work has been systematically considered to be weaker than men's (Wennerås & Wold, 1997). For example, when an application carries a male name, it has a much higher chance of being considered positive than if

⁸ From 01.02.2018 <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/resources/the-research-ethics-library/independence/bias/>

the application carries a female name, even though the applications are identical (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). However, the experimental design of Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) has recently been applied for the Nordic region and the gender bias as key explanation of the persistent gender gap in academia has been contested (Carlsson et al., 2020). Still, women in management positions are more often at risk of being negatively assessed regardless of whether they choose to follow expectations of feminine behaviour (collaborative) or show a high degree of competitive behaviour (Crawford, 1995; Lakoff, 2008; Mullany, 2007). In Norway, there are still significant income disparities between male and female artists compared other professional occupations (Heian et al., 2015). One explanation model points to the combination of a gendered division of labour and informal assessment processes characterized by hegemonic understandings of quality (Heian, 2018). Heian concludes that it is ‘/... / important to gain more systematic knowledge of the type of competence valued in female versus male artists, the degree to which the skills are used differently, and the mechanisms that apply to gendered recruitment to different styles, genres and positions in the art field’ (Heian, 2018, p. 64). Finally, those dilemmas seem to be specific for disciplines that build their reputation on master narratives such as the arts or philosophy (Proudfoot et al., 2016).

Methods

The study was conducted as part of the intervention and research project ‘Gender Balance in Arts Education’ at the Faculty of Fine Arts at UiT The Arctic University of Norway from 2015 to 2018. In the last 25 years, approximately the same number of female and male students have completed higher arts education in Norway. Still, men occupy most of the leading positions in art arenas both inside and outside academia, and the lack of gender balance in the art field proves to be persistence (Abelsen, 2009; Gjørsum et al., 2015). In 2017, for example, there were 32% women at the professor/lecturer level in art education in Norway, and in the music subjects at universities and scientific colleges, the proportion of women was particularly low with only 21% female professors/lecturers (Gunnes & Olsen, 2018).

We wanted to investigate possible reasons for these statistics provided by the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (Gunnes & Olsen, 2018) and collected 24 committee reviews and conducted five semi-structured in-depth interviews (Kvale et al., 2015) with strategically selected experienced members/leaders of assessment committees in the art education field in 2015. We wanted to know how people in higher academic positions argue and think about good education and equal opportunities in higher arts education. Hence, we looked into assessment documents and performed in-depth qualitative research interviews with key stakeholders in different art fields. We asked how quality is understood and regulated in the assessment of professor/lecturer competence in higher arts education, and to what extent and in what ways committee members acknowledge and describe gender bias as significant in the ways quality is assessed, and how this is expressed.

The sample of informants in the study consists of four professors and a lecturer with long experience as members and leaders of expert committees. The informants, three women and two men aged 58-76, have been full-time employees of various Norwegian universities and colleges for several years in the fields of music, drama, and visual arts. Because the individual art fields are small and characterized by close ties of knowledge, for reasons of anonymity we chose not to disclose which informants represent the individual field. The study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and all data will be deleted after publication.

As a part of the study, we also collected 24 assessment reports for professorship promotions in Norwegian arts education. We analysed collectively (Eggebø, 2020) the language and arguments for acceptance (or not) regarding these employees' applications for full professorships. The authors work within the field of higher arts education and were involved in data collection (HB & RG) and data transcription (HB & LM). All three authors have been in the role of assessing their peers, and RG has been part of one of the assessment committees we are referring to in this chapter. Being part of the complex normativities that were studied was central for our research design and gave unique access to data collection and enabled trust and relational ethics that were crucial for this kind of research (Becker, 2012).

Findings and Discussion

We will now invite the reader into the black box of quality assessment by presenting short empirical examples that gives insight into the way quality is assessed in higher arts education in Norway and how those practices connect to SDG 4, 5 and 9. The examples derive from five intimate conversations with experienced committee members and 24 assessment reports that are differing in design, length, and argumentation style.

According to the Norwegian working group who just published the report 'SDG - Quality in higher education: Developing a platform for sharing of ideas and practices within the universities': We need more innovative, multisectoral and multi-thematic support systems and partnerships that can be brought to scale quickly, engaging all parts of society, and particularly the young people who will be key to the success of the 2030 Agenda (University of Bergen working group, 2020, p. 20). Let's dive into the terrain of quality assessment in higher education and research in the perspective of building a more resilient infrastructure through innovation. Based on our data we claim that building such an infrastructure can be done along three pathways: 1) more predictable assessment criteria, 2) Meta-discussions on practices of academic assessment and 3) Formal training of committee members.

Predictability

First, we find in the conversations with committee members that they experience the Norwegian regulation for evaluating professorship, in LOV-2005-04-01-15-§6-3, too vague. However, clarification and redefinition of the regulation with specific measurements would contribute to less gendered assessment (Blix et al., 2019). One of the committee members told us that:

Those who are in the field develop a «nose» for what's good enough. And here it comes to gender. If you are sitting in a room together with other people and look at 20 candidates, you sense the atmosphere. (informant 3)

And another one pointed out:

But the committee is a combination of different people in power positions, so you need to negotiate, sometimes it's hopeless, and sometimes it is possible. But there is always a gatekeeper who sits and doesn't want to give away certain things. (informant 2)

The informants talk about 'bias' and sometimes 'random processes' embossed by subjective interpretations of the operative definition of artistic 'quality' in an application for professorship. 'Gut-feeling and likes and dislikes' is mentioned as ways to explain how quality is understood by some committee members. It is further mentioned that some female applicants tend to find both the *lack of language* to describe their academic experience and artistic research verbally in the application, and *vague criteria for promotion*, as barriers in an assessment culture still dominated by men.

Despite of ranking high in international gender equality rankings such as the She-figures⁶, women and men continue to face different opportunities in the Norwegian workplace. The labour market is gender segregated and women are underrepresented in top decision-making positions (Holgersson & Wahl, 2017). The sustainability development goal 5 seeks to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making'⁷. One measure to reach this goal is to assure women access to leading positions in higher education.

We found that gender is not an explicit issue in quality assessment, however both the way applicants advocate for quality and the way committee members assess quality is highly gendered. When asked

⁶ <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eu-law-and-publications/publication-detail/-/publication/61564e1f-d55e-11eb-895a-01aa75ed71a1>

⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

directly, committee members replied that gender is not an issue when evaluating applications for full professorships. Gender was not mentioned explicitly in any of the assessment documents we analysed. When we invited our informants to take gender perspectives into account, none of them connected gender to power or discrimination. The following quote document how gender is understood by one of the informants in terms of diversity:

When it comes to gender, I'm sure there are differences, but I think most people in my field are interested in balancing those as much as possible. [...] There are only a few colleagues, so it is quite easy to get an imbalance. And I have been involved many times in the discussions about whether gender plays a role or not. It is said: 'Well, we just want the best ones', so we do not need to think about gender. I think you must think about it. It is often difficult to separate the two top-listed, this happens quite often, and I think that if you have an imbalance, then you can think once more. People easily identify with their own gender, or someone who looks like yourself. This can apply to both gender and other attributes. It is important to consider diversity within your team. If they are all men about 45, this is not optimal.
(informant 3)

The notion of gender balance and diversity relates to current policy recommendations in Norway which requests leaders to prioritize the underrepresented gender (e.g Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research). None of our informants or committee reports addresses gender bias and its effects on assessment. However, a variety of references were made in connection with gender stereotypes, such as for example:

If a man uses elbows, it may be correct, but if a woman does the same, she becomes dangerous, because she is strong. It wasn't that way they said it, but it is the reality. (informant 4)

This way of framing gender perspectives is surprising, perpetuates gender stereotypes, leave them unthinking, and points at a lack of critical awareness (Seierstad et al. 2017). The lack of awareness beyond decision makers (Wahl, 1995) prevents a culture in the board room in which committee members feel secure to address their own biases and gender stereotypes without perpetuating blindly what is perceived as 'reality'.

Further, gender is not just at work when quality is assessed but also in the way quality advocated by the applicants in order to convince the committee. We are not able to generalize from our material, but we want to point out two more observation: both teaching responsibilities and merits as well as international activities are presented to varying extend by the applicants. One applicant was promoted with only small documentation of his merits as a pedagogue, which points to the fact that teaching was not an explicit part

of the committee's assessment. This is surprising when considering that there are specific positions in Norway which exclusively focus on research (code 1183) while professorship positions in Norway normally dedicate 50% for research and 50% for teaching. We further observed large differences in the extent to which international activities and networks are assessed by the committees. Since both educational experience and mobility are highly gendered (Nordiska ministerråd, 2010) the committee members' personal opinions can be a threat to those who apply for top positions.

Meta-discussions

Second, we find a track in our data that indicates a need for more meta-discussions among committee members on practices of academic assessment in the arts. One example from the assessment documents (2013) shows an interesting aspect of the problem in defining quality in an international context:

There is one key term that is difficult to operationalize when it comes to artistic quality assessment for professorship positions, and this is 'artistic practice on top level on international standard'. It is as problematic to differentiate between 'high level' and 'top level', as it is to differentiate between 'international standard' and something else ('national' standard?). A strict operationalization of 'top international level' will always imply a small group of artists with a field. However, the committee decides not to operationalize the term so strict. The committee neither starts out from the assumption that 'international standard' that is higher than 'national standard' but rather 'international standard' means that the artworks can have international relevance or gain international interest. (assessment document 16)

We see that the committee choose to justify their interpretation of one sentence from the regulation LOV-2005-04-01-15-§6-3 in the assessment document: 'Extensive artistic activities at the highest-level conforming to international standards'. We find several similar examples in the rest of the assessment documents. Especially terms as 'relevant breadth', 'highest level' and 'international standard' are problematized by the committee members, both in the five transcribed conversations and in the assessment documents.

Further, for achieving a sustainable diversity of practices, perspectives and role-models within higher education, we need gender balance among those who teach, but also a more explicit discussion of what 'good quality' entails in higher education at all. For example, in our material the level of required pedagogical competencies are seldom emphasized and scarcely accurate described. We further found a discrepancy between the assessment boards' desire to emphasize teaching skills, and the way the board

forefront this in assessments of professor competency. The following example derives from the assessment of a male applicant who documented his teaching merits:

His pedagogical documentation is a very strong part of the application. He refers to several of his former students, who today hold [...] positions in leading orchestras. The committee would like to pay tribute to his great pedagogical commitment. Both as an instrumental teacher, initiator to masterclasses with renowned educators, and organizer of study trips. (assessment document 4)

Even though the committee acknowledges pedagogical skills, the applicant was not assessed competent for professorship. This case demonstrates that teaching is not equally part of quality assessment for professorship positions in higher art education as research activities. Rather, what counts are artistic originality that is linked to acknowledgement and visibility (Battersby, 1989). Another male informant pointed out:

I believe that the quality of teaching should also have a high level, because, I just saw, [...] we brought in some 'chieftains', however they just communicate with themselves, so this had little value [for our students]. They can play so well, but we see how necessary it is to have the best teachers. When the level is very high anyway, it is of great value how they teach. (informant 4)

Standards of academic practices and excellence are not necessarily associated with excellent teaching and collaborative work with students. However, when conversing with our informants we found tendencies towards counter-discourses that challenge hegemonic thinking practices in the field. An increased focus on educational merits, as the next example demonstrates, points towards a shift of what constitute excellence in prestigious positions in the field (Heine-Bennet et al., 2020).

[He] has chosen to not explicitly document his practical-pedagogical competence, beyond the reference to his formal competence within teacher education. The committee considers this as unfortunate since possible links between his artistic practice and teaching have not been clarified. (assessment document 10)

Committees that consider missing pedagogic merits as 'unfortunate' operationalize the legal requirements in different ways. However, what is needed are more explicit standards for what is meant by 'pedagogic competence'. If pedagogic practices are valued equally in promotion for professorship, then more people

who are experts in teaching-based research might enter universities and become role models for the students and change-makers towards sustainable academic practices.

Training

Third, we discovered a need for a formal training of (new) committee members thus the senior members strongly disagree on several aspects in the assessment processes. In the conversations with the committee members claimed that women tend to: ‘underestimate their own competence’ and ‘female committee members is much easier to work with – they are prepared and structured’, but in the end ‘women struggle to take a decision and conclude’. We find in the data a need for a proper formal training in assessment of academic and artistic quality to ensure equal assessment no matter gender or cultural background.

One aspect that we find as a challenge for the committee members when they evaluate applications for professorship in the Arts is the variation of different *expectations* to use of e.g., theory. Male applicants and female applicants orient themselves defiantly when it comes to thoroughness, according to the informants. Here one assessment document raises the question of the lack of theory in the application:

Experience from many years of research and development activity are documented, among other things were referring to a well-developed teaching method for conceptualising dramaturgical work. The committee find this work to be interesting and important. The problem in the existing documentation is that even if the basic idea of this teaching is easily interpreted from the attached teaching plans, it is not possible to create an impression of the theoretical side of the conceptual work. How are the chosen terms on concepts presented, analysed, and placed in connection with a theory about the creative work?
(assessment document 16)

The three pathways exemplified above (criteria, meta-discussions and formal training) points out a possible way out of ‘the assessment vagueness problem’. We suggest based on our data that a new framework for assessment is possible to create as a future innovative infrastructure in academic assessment. Innovation is often understood as something *new* that is *useful* and *utilized*. Thereby an innovative infrastructure for academic assessment must come to use in a new way; a more democratic and transparent way than today’s practice, thus be useful for both appliers for professorship and committee members. International research report that gender balance in academia depends on cultural and system related factors (Nielsen, 2016; Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2003). SDG 9 can be reached in higher education and research by raising a higher awareness of the significance of re-building a resilient infrastructure through innovation so that the assessment processes can develop as open and equal for all applicants in beforehand so that they now before they apply which criteria will be used.

Summing up

The overall aim of our chapter is to better understand practices of quality assessment can work towards more sustainable gender equality in higher education. To create ‘/.../ a more sustainable world, individuals and communities must become sustainability change-makers’ (University of Bergen working group, 2020). This means that we need to find ways to become part of the change we wish for. In this chapter we throw light on what ways gender matters for how quality is assessed within higher arts education in Norway and how practices of quality assessment can be understood in a sustainability development goal perspective.

Our interpretation of the data material calls for: 1) more transparent, explicit assessment practices and 2) a clearer definition on what is meant by ‘quality’ 3) formal training of committee members. We claim, based on our study, that more *transparent and explicit quality criteria* could result in a more sustainable application procedure. This means that all applicants are equally informed about the requirements for academic, artistic, and pedagogical competence *before* they apply for a position or promotion. Within a more explicit regulation it won’t be possible for committee members to allow their own taste, personal judgment, and cultural preferences to govern the assessments (Lamont, 2009). Hence, an implication of our study is that a new and improved regulation should be drawn up, indicating what is meant by ‘relevant breadth and depth’ and ‘scientific level in accordance with international standards’. Applicants of all genders need to know how many (and what) articles, performances or classes need to be submitted, organized, or taught to be considered for professorship and excellence in a subject. One of the greatest obstacles in approaching the interconnected sustainable challenges today:

/.../ is silo-thinking and a potential inability to overcome internal and institutional barriers towards solving the SDGs. Silo-thinking is a hinderance for transdisciplinary collaboration within universities, typically reflecting thematic, organizational, and financial structures, which again are promoted by governmental financing systems, research funding organizations, and approved publication channels rooted in scientific culture (University of Bergen working group, 2020).

Continued silo-thinking and keeping quality markers unclear might contribute to maintain a not-sustainable gender imbalance in academia. In addition, we suggest the following checklist for assessment committees to collectively reflect upon before starting the assessment:

- Do you know the applicant? In what ways?
- How would you define the required competence for a professor/docent?
- What is ‘enough’ competence to become a professor?
- What kind of quality is required for a professor/docent?

- How can gender potentially play a role in (affect) this judgement processes.
- How do we as a committee understand and define national terms of assessment such as for example ‘the highest-level conforming to international standards and relevant breadth and specialization at the highest level’?

To sum up: we need national arenas for critical meta-discussions about what constitutes *quality* and how it is assessed towards more sustainable gender equality, education and infrastructure. Those arenas must be implemented in the education strategies in the universities and through well informed committee work.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our informants who are experts in quality assessment in the field of higher arts education in Norway. Their contribution was central to the study, and will, hopefully, improve assessment practices in the field towards more sustainable education, gender relation and innovation. We further thank the Research Council of Norway for funding our research as part of the research and intervention projects ‘Gender Balance in Art Education’ (RCN 2015-2018/245487) and ‘Prestige. Gender Balance in Research Leadership’ (RCN 2018-2021/282862).

References

- Abelsen, M. (2009). *Kvinnelige kunstneres symbolske kapital—Om kunstinstitusjonens ideologiske maktstruktur*. Institutt for kunst- og medievitenskap NTNU. <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/243225>
- Ahlqvist, V., Andersson, J., Berg, C. H., Kolm, C., Söderqvist, L., & Tumpane, J. (2013). *Jämställdhetsobservationer i ett urval av vetenskapsrådets beredningsgrupper 2012 = Observations on gender equality in a selection of the Swedish research council's evaluation panels*. Vetenskapsrådet.
- Battersby, C. (1989). *Gender and genius: Towards a feminist aesthetics*. Women's Press.
- Becker, C. U. (2012). The Inherent Ethical Dimension of Sustainability – Toward a Relational Ethical Perspective. In C. U. Becker (Ed.), *Sustainability Ethics and Sustainability Research* (pp. 17–20). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2285-9_3
- Benneworth, P., Gulbrandsen, M., & Hazelkorn, E. (2016). *The Impact and Future of Arts and Humanities Research*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40899-0>
- Beyer, S. (1990). Gender differences in the accuracy of self-evaluations of performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 960–970.
- Biernat, M., Tocci, M. J., & Williams, J. C. (2012). The Language of Performance Evaluations Gender-Based Shifts in Content and Consistency of Judgment. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(2), 186–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611415693>
- Biggs, M. & Karlsson, H. (2010). Evaluating Quality in Artistic Research. *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, 405–424.
- Blix, H. S. (2017). Framsnakk som likestillingstiltak. In *Kilden*. <http://kjonnsforskning.no/nb/2017/01/framsnakk-som-likestillingstiltak>
- Blix, H. S., & Mittner, L. (2018). Balansekunst i utøvende musikkutdanning. En empirisk undersøkelse av lederes synspunkter på kjønnsbalanse og likestillingsarbeid ved de utøvende musikkutdanningene i Norge. [The art of balance in music education]. *Tidsskrift for Kjønnforskning*. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1891-1781-2018-01-02-07>
- Blix, H. S., Mittner, L., & Gürgens Gjrærum, R. (2019). I kjønneorden? Om definisjon av kvalitet og betydningen av kjønn i vurdering av professorkompetanse. *Nordic Journal of Art and Research*.
- Bourdieu, P. (2007). *The Masculine Dominance* (2nd ed.). Viborg: Times are changing.
- Brandser, G., & Sümer, S. (2016). *Farefull ferd mot toppen. Kjønnbalanse i forskning og forskningsledelse ved forskningsog utdanningsinstitusjoner i Bergen*. Stein Rokkan senter for flerfaglige samfunnsstudier. https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/rapport_3-2016_brandser_og_sumer_0.pdf
- Brink M. van den (2013). Gender in Academic Networking: The Role of Gatekeepers in Professional Recruitment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51 (3), 460–492. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12060>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Carlsson, M., Finseraas, H., Midtbøen, A. H., & Rafnsdóttir, G. L. (2020). Gender Bias in Academic Recruitment? Evidence from a Survey Experiment in the Nordic Region. *European Sociological Review*, jcaa050. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaa050>
- Crawford, M. (1995). *Talking difference: on gender and language*. London: Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE.
- Eagly, AH & Carli, LL (2007). *Through the maze: the truth about how women become leaders*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.
- Eggebo, H. (2020). Kollektiv kvalitativ analyse. *Norsk sosiologisk tidsskrift*, 4(02), 106–122. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2535-2512-2020-02-03>
- Haine-Bennett, E., Bergsieker, H. B., Coe, I. R., Koch-Kraft, A., Langelier, E., Morrison, S., Nikoleyczik, K., Schmader, T., Trivailo, O., Twine, S., & Decker, J. E. (2020). Enacting workplace culture change for excellence in research: A gender lens. *FACETS*, 5(1), 228–233. <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2019-0026>
- Heian, M. T., Løyland, K., & Kleppe, B. (2015). *Kunstnerundersøkelsen 2013. Kunstnerens inntekter*. Telemarksforskning. <https://openarchive.usn.no/usn-xmlui/handle/11250/2439569>
- Heian, M. T. (2018). Norske kunstnere og det doble likestillingsparadokset. *Tidsskrift for kjønnforskning*, 42(01–02), 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1891-1781-2018-01-02-04>

- Hylland, O. M. (2012). The rhetorics of bad quality. *Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidsskrift*, 15(01), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN2000-8325-2012-01-02>
- Eliassen, K. O., & Prytz, Ø. (Eds.). (2016). *Kvalitetsforståelser: Kvalitetsbegrepet i samtidens kunst og kultur*. Kulturrådet ; Fagbokforlaget.
- Ginsburgh, V. (2003). Awards, Success and Aesthetic Quality in the Arts. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17(2), 99–111. <https://doi.org/10.1257/089533003765888458>
- Gjærum, R. G., Vollan, I., & Bjerkestrand, K. B. (2015). Levd skuespillerliv og rolletildeling. En studie av kvinner i norsk institusjonsteater. *InFormation - Nordic Journal of Art and Research*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.7577/if.v4i2.1548>
- Goldin, C., & Rouse, C. (2000). Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of “Blind” Auditions on Female Musicians. *The American Economic Review*, 90(4), 715–741.
- Gunnes, H., & Olsen, B. M. (2018). *Statistikk om kvinner i kunstfagene 2009-2017* (NIFU-Arbeidsnotat). http://kunstfak.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/NIFU_2018_Oppdatert_statistikk_om_kvinner_i_kunstfagene.pdf
- Heian, M. T. (2018). Norske kunstnere og det doble likestillingsparadokset. *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, 42(01–02), 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1891-1781-2018-01-02-04>
- Holgerson, C., & Wahl, A. (2017). Sweden: Work for Change and Political Threats. In C. Seierstad, P. Gabaldon, & H. Mensi-Klarbach (Eds.), *Gender Diversity in the Boardroom: Volume 2: Multiple approaches Beyond Quotas* (pp. 129–157). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57273-4_6
- Holroyd, J., Scaife, R., & Stafford, T. (2017). Responsibility for implicit bias. *Philosophy Compass*, 12(3), n/a-n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12410>
- Kvale, S., Brinkmann, S., Anderssen, T. M., & Rygge, J. (2015). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju*. Gyldendal akademisk.
- Lakoff, R. (2008). Language, Gender, and Politics: Putting ‘Women’ and ‘Power’ in the Same Sentence. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender* (pp. 160–178).
- Lamont, M. (2009). *How Professor Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Harvard University Press.
- Langsted, J., Hannah, K., & Rørdam Larsen, C. (2008). *Ønskekysten: En håndbog i evaluering af teater, dans og musik*. Klim.
- Leach, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Gender equality and sustainable development*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Leal Filho, W. (2021). *Gender equality Volume 1 Volume 1*.
- Lovdata. (2006). *Regulations concerning appointment and promotion to teaching and research posts*. Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. https://lovdata.no/dokument/SFE/forskrift/2006-02-09-129#KAPITTEL_2
- Lund, C., Mangset, P., & Aamodt, A. (Eds.). (2001). *Kunst, kvalitet og politikk: Rapport fra Norsk kulturråds årskonferanse 2000: Vol. nr 22*. Rådet.
- Maxwell, K., & Benneworth, P. (2018). The construction of new scientific norms for solving Grand Challenges. *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1), 52. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0105-9>
- Mittner, L. (forthcoming). *A journey into situated art intervention research*.
- Mortensen, A. (2015). *Teser om kvalitet*. Kulturrådet. <http://www.kulturradet.no/kvalitet/vis/-/teser-om-kvalitet>
- Moss-Racusin, C. A., Dovidio, J. F., Brescoll, V. L., Graham, M. J., & Handelsman, J. (2012). Science faculty’s subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(41), 16474–16479. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1211286109>
- Mullany, L. (2007). *Gendered discourse in the professional workplace*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mullany, L. (2012). Discourse, gender and professional communication. In JP Gee & M. Handford (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 509–522). London: Taylor and Francis.
- Nielsen, M. W. (2016). Scandinavian Approaches to Gender Equality in Academia: A Comparative Study. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2016.1147066>

- Nordiska ministerrådet. (2010). *Labour market mobility in Nordic welfare states: Vol. 2010:515*. Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Nyamko, S. & Twengström, K. (2009). *On the way to equal performing arts*. Stockholm: State Culture Council.
- Onsrud, S. V., Blix, H. S., & Ingeborg Lunde Vestad. (2021). *Gender Issues in Scandinavian Music Education: From Stereotypes to Multiple Possibilities*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003038207>
- Pandey, U. C. (2019). *SDG5 Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls*. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/SDG5---Gender-Equality-and-Empowerment-of-Women-and-Girls/?k=9781789735246>
- Proudfoot, D., Kay, A. C., & Koval, C. Z. (2015). A Gender Bias in the Attribution of Creativity: Archival and Experimental Evidence for the Perceived Association Between Masculinity and Creative Thinking. *Psychological Science*, 26(11), 1751–1761. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615598739>
- Reuben, E., Sapienza, P., & Zingales, L. (2014). How stereotypes impair women's careers in science. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(12), 4403–4408. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1314788111>
- Riegraf, B., Aulenbacher, B., Kirsch-Auwärter, E., & Müller, U. (Eds.). (2010). *GenderChange in academia: Re-mapping the fields of work, knowledge, and politics from a gender perspective* (1st edition). VS Verlag.
- Rønning, A. B. (2012). Kunst, kjønn og estetisk vurdering. *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, 36(01), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-1781-2012-01-02>
- Schwab, K., Samans, R., & Zahidi, S. (2017). *The global gender gap report 2017*. World Economic Forum.
- Seierstad, C., Gabaldon, P., & Mensi-Klarbach, H. (2017). *Gender Diversity in the Boardroom: Volume 2: Multiple Approaches Beyond Quotas* (1st ed. 2017.). Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stevenson, A. (Ed.). (2015). *Oxford dictionary of English* (3rd ed). Oxford University Press.
- Strom, K. (2018). *Decentering the Researcher in Intimate Scholarship* (Vol. 31). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/Decentering-the-Researcher-in-Intimate-Scholarship/?k=9781787546363>
- Søndergaard, D. M., & Højgaard, L. (2003). *Akademisk tilblivelse: Akademia og dens kønnede befolkning*. Akademisk forlag.
- Stavrum, H. (2014). Hvor mange gullplater henger på veggen? Om danseband og kvalitet. *Sosiologi i dag*, 44(1). <http://ojs.novus.no/index.php/SID/article/view/846>
- Thompson, R. J. (2018). *Leadership and Power in International Development*. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/Leadership-and-Power-in-International-Development/?k=9781787541160>
- University of Bergen working group. (2020). *SDG - Quality in higher education: Developing a platform for sharing of ideas and practices within the universities. Report from working group*. https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/sdg_-_quality_in_higher_education_-_report_feb_2020.pdf
- Wahl, A. (1995). *Men's perceptions of women and management*. Fritzes. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kth:diva-61349>
- Wennerås, C., & Wold, A. (1997). Nepotism and sexism in peer-review. *Nature*, 387(6631), 341–343. <https://doi.org/10.1038/387341a0>

Author Reviews

Lilli Mittner is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Women's and Gender Research at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. She leads a work package on qualitative research within the research and intervention project ‘Prestige: Gender balance in research leadership’ (RCN 2015-2018/245487)

and has previously been project coordinator in the project ‘Gender Balance in Art Education’ (RCN 2018-2021/282862). Mittner works largely with an interdisciplinary focus on how the humanities can contribute to meeting major societal challenges related to gender and aging. She is particularly interested in exploring co-creative processes, interaction, relational aesthetics, and social justice. Mittner has a professional background in musicology and media and communication from the University of Göttingen, the University of Oslo and holds a PhD from the University of Music, Theatre and Media in Hanover.

Hilde Synnøve Blix is a professor (Ph.D.) in aural skills and music education and employed at the Music Conservatory at UiT Arctic University of Norway. She graduated with a musicology degree from NTNU before taking her Ph.D. in music education at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Her research interests are aural skills, music literacy, and music education. In addition, she has, in recent years, researched gender equality and gender in the music field. She was co-editor of the book *Gender Issues in Music Education* in 2021. She has published several research articles and books with themes ranging from aural skills didactics to gender equality and artistic research.

Rikke Gürgens Gjørnum is the director of the Arctic Center for Welfare and Disability Research at UiT - The Arctic University of Norway, is professor of applied drama at OsloMet and has a doctorate from NTNU in 2004, and majored in theatre science from University of Oslo in 1998, general teacher and drama educator from University of Stavanger. She works with research on marginalization and outsiders, innovative research methodology, applied theatre, disability art, reminiscence theatre, aesthetics philosophy and art-based co-research methods, but also with theatre criticism and various applied antistigmatizing theatre projects in the group ‘Unusual theatre’. Gjørnum has written several research articles and books over 20 years in academia.