

4.1 Academic recruitment: From “best practices” to “social practices”

In this workshop we discussed in-depth the concept of bias in academic recruitment practices. This has been on the agenda since almost two decades, including the idea that recruitment committees have to be trained on the issue of implicit bias. However, what has been neglected so far are the social practices through which bias against female academics is performed by the members of the recruitment committees. As research shows, criteria and the best fit to these criteria are created, criticized and also stabilized in situ in the recruitment committee.

In this workshop Julia Nentwich provided an in-depth introduction to the concept of social practices in recruiting committees as well as an overview on empirical findings so far. Second, Verena Witzig introduced St. Gallen’s recently developed training tool tackling implicit bias in social practices. The online simulation takes players through situations in appointment processes and provides training on how to recognize and to react to biased decision-making. We discussed the respective implication of a practice perspective on training and also the possibilities for implementing the newly developed tool. Please see the outbreak group’s discussion points in the following visuals and you may also download our slides for further information.

Participants: Verena Witzig, Julia Nentwich, (University of St. Gallen)

*Panel duration: **120 minutes***

Language: English

Thematic Field: Institutionalized inequality and discrimination

Bias as a social practice: Altenklang

JULIA NENTWICH 21. NOVEMBER 2020, 14:48 UHR

What do you like about the perspective and the tool?

I like the combination of video & actively choose answers (game part) - usually there are only videos explaining things but no action

Good start

It is a good tool for people attend a committee for the first time. It helps to start a discussion

What are critical aspects?

I also found the case very stereotypically obvious - won't people see this as not real

Putting insights into practice: there might be affective and social barriers to countering bias in the meeting situation (what will my colleagues think of me?)

Comment on the Family Matters video: I found the double standard very obvious

I tried the altenklangs-tool last week - very

impressive work! It was just a little frustrating that there was no real solution and that I couldn't check why I didn't get the best outcome.

Questions for the Speakers

Is there a plan to adapt the tool for other hiring contexts - outside academia?

Is this tool open access?

Why is diversity and excellence a dilemma?

The Bias tool is supposed to generate discussion, right?

Bias as a social practice: Theory

JULIA NENTWICH 21. NOVEMBER 2020, 14:51 UHR

What do you like about the perspective and the tool?

Social practice perspective and importance of context is a great addition to the overly cognitive perspective

The social and societal aspect adds a lot to the overly-individualized bias training

What are critical aspects?

Complexity of really analysing the particular organisational context and integrating it in training (especially training from external coaches)

How to put into practice? Awareness is not enough

I am thinking about the last slide and wondering how your suggestions what we can do would differ from usual anti-bias trainings, apart from expanding the definition of "bias" to be more social/interactive

Questions for the Speakers

Which contexts activate the practice of bias and why?

Did you include other aspects for implicit bias into your research - besides gender?

How do transgender people enter in the frame? Do you have any idea?

How could we possibly advocate for systemic/administrative changes in recruitment practices?



Academic recruitment: From “best practices” to “social practices” Julia Nentwich & Verena Witzig

**Critical Gender and Diversity Knowledge. Challenges and
Prospects. 2020, November 21**

Agenda

Cognitive Bias and Beyond: Developing A Social Practice Perspective (*Julia Nentwich*)

Discussion on Padlet

Undoing Bias in Academic Recruitment: A Training Tool (*Verena Witzig*)

Discussion on Padlet

Cognitive Bias and Beyond: A Social Practice Perspective

- Cognitive Gender Bias in Recruiting
- Beyond: Critical Social Psychology
 - Rhetoric and Interaction
 - Positioning and Social Practice
- A Social Practice Perspective



Gender Stereotypes in Recruitment

- **Incongruity** between gender stereotypes and characteristics of the job:
- If a position is perceived as “male”, there might be a bias against women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilmann, 2012)
- Gender is attributed according to occupations (military vs. education), academic fields (sciences vs. humanities), function, or organizational hierarchy (Heilman 2012).
- **Salience**: through visibility (token status; Heilman, 2012), or any perception of what counts as “typically female” (being physically attractive, having children; Heilman & Stopek, 1985; Heilman & Okimoto, 2008).

→ **lack of fit between categories leading to biases in evaluation and decisions**



Cognitive, implicit or unconscious bias

- **negative judgements** and **attitudes** that a person might hold against a certain outgroup as resulting from the **automatic and unnoticed activation of negative stereotypes** (Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983; Dovidio et al., 1986)
- **Dual process theory**: conscious and unconscious attitudes as two different modes of information processing (Gawronski, Hofmann & Wilbur 2006)
- **Conscious**: can be assessed directly
- **Unconscious**: indirect measures needed, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998)
- **Implicit attitudes** are defined as “introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately unidentified) traces of past experience that mediate favourable or unfavourable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects” (Greenwald and Banaji 1995,

Bias as resulting from a normally functioning brain

- **Reducing information** (remembering, complexity)
- **Adding information** (meaningful)
- **Categories** organize, order and manage information processing

Bias as activating stereotypes

- **Stereotypes** provide knowledge about the characteristics of a category
- Learned and „deeply internalized“

Important for Survival

- **Reducing complexity**
- Enabling **fast** perception and **automatic** decision making



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Fighting Bias with Training

Eliminating bias in perception and decision making by

- providing knowledge about the concept
- changing attitudes
- raising awareness
- creating acceptance by assuming bias an inevitable and universal feature of human perception

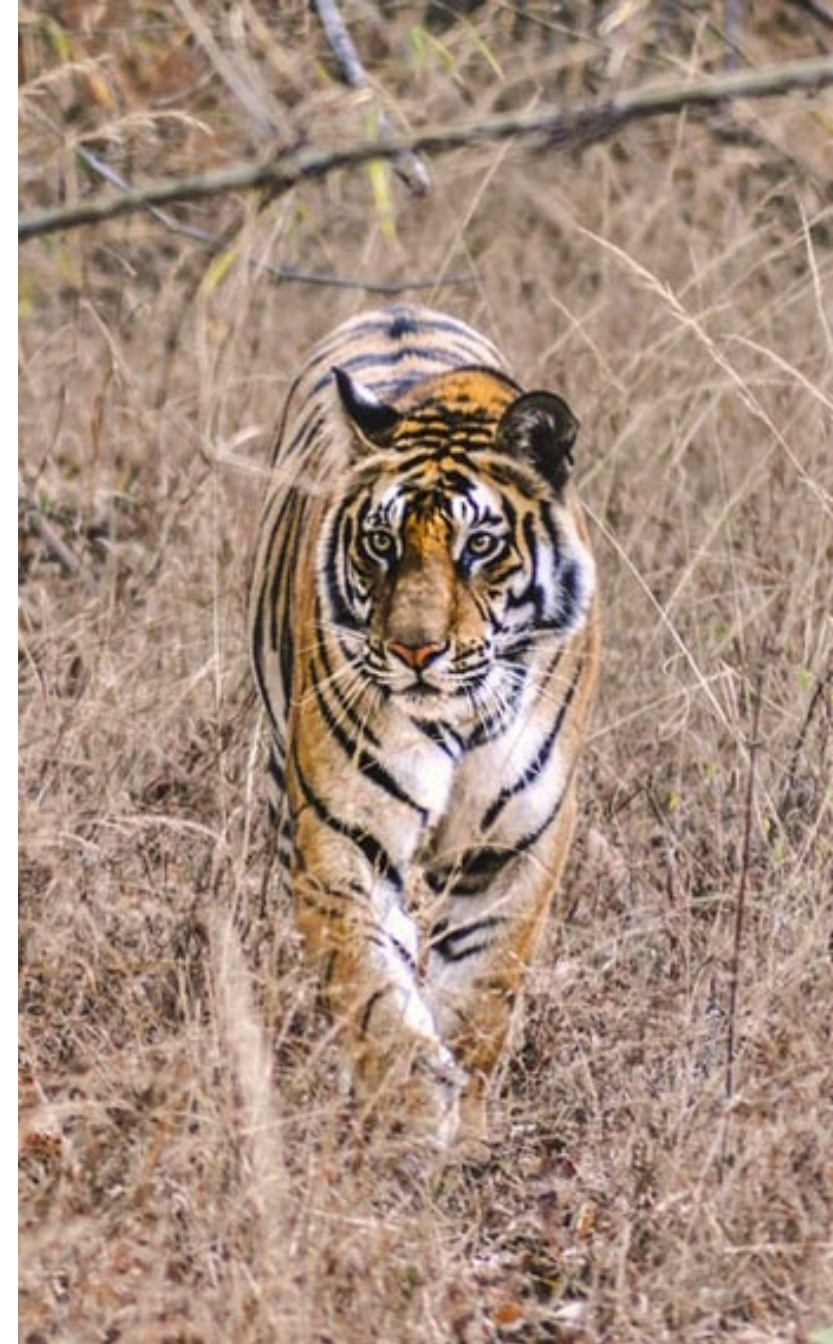


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Anti Bias Training: Not without discontents

Rather no change in behaviour

- bias trainings actually change attitudes, but the assumed effect on behaviour is largely unknown and also contested (Paluck & Green, 2009; Price, et al. 2005; compare Williamson & Foley, 2018)
- No direct causal link between IAT score and concrete behaviour (e.g, Jota et al., 2009)

Anti Bias Training: Not without discontents

Paradoxical effects

- Anti-bias training with focus on the individual's mind enables to merely confess, but rather not battle bias. Might rather protects “systemic ignorance” than correcting it (Applebaum 2019).
- Neglecting structural as well as institutional aspects of discrimination might even result in legitimizing discrimination as power imbalances are not taken into account (Tate & Page, 2018)
- Being biased is perceived as rational and beyond moral judgements (neither pathological, uneducated, or even intentional), one cannot be blamed or made responsible for it (Scaife et al., 2020); however, this might also get more people on board (Noon, 2017)

Conclusion: depicting “bias” as merely an issue of individual cognitive processes is far too narrow.

Beyond cognition: Something we do in interaction

“racial stereotypes are not simply repressed anachronistic remnants that leak, undetected, into behaviour. They are also rhetorical resources that are used to account for one’s preferences and behaviours” (Durrheim, 2016, p. 192).

- Stereotypes are rhetorical resources
- Argumentative nature of talk (Billig, 1997; Edwards, 1997): Arguments are criticized and justified, an argumentative exchange is situated → how is a more or less biased argument invoked, but then supported or challenged? (Billig, 1985, p. 99)
- Categorisation as something we do in talk: persuasions, blamings, denial, refutations, accusations (Edwards, 1991, p. 517), they are collaboratively accomplished

→ Stereotypes are used in talk. Prejudiced views need to be legitimized. Hence, the context of the argument, both in historical, social and interactive terms is relevant.

1. Not inevitable, but collaboratively produced in a certain context

“there is nothing inevitable about the particular category, or the content of the category, that is selected in an instance.” (Augoustinos, 2016, p. 246).

- Categories are selected in a collaborative effort
- Particularisation: the features upon which a category is built need to be selected out of an array of possibly distinctive features

→ That a certain stereotype is used in a certain context is not arbitrary but a collaboratively produced “fit” and acceptance

Example Management Recruiting (Brink & Holgersson, 2016, p. 25)

Man 1: Can I please mention one thing [in the report it is stated] **‘the necessary commercial skills’**. I thought the guy was **extremely commercial**. Maybe this is due to the fact that I do not have a commercial background or something [laughter] . . . Woman 1: Yes, I'd have to agree with you on that . . . Man 1: I thought of him as very sleek Woman 1: Yes, yes... Man 1: . . . that might not be an objection . . . Woman 1: Yes, his appearance is very good . . . Man 2: What did you just say? Sleek Man 1: Yes, sleek [stroking with his hand over his forehead (as if you put wax in your hair)]. **But in this case it could mean something positive**. Woman 2: His customers think he's a **charmer** . . . Woman 1: [about what should be in the report] ‘strongly developed commercial skills?’ Man 2: I would leave it like that.

→ The category “commercial skills”, its positive connotation and the fit with regards to the candidate are created collaboratively and carefully in the very same interaction.

2. Implicitness of prejudice as implicitness in «doing difference»

- Speakers are accountable for expressions
- Holding strong and stereotyped views is not easily accepted in a recruitment commission assuming a fair assessment of competences within the realm of meritocracy
- Speakers position themselves and are positioned by others when uttering their views.
- Sexism, racism, nationalism... is rather done implicit ways
- Race is explained with cultural differences (Wetherell & Potter, 1992)
- Gender is explained with lack of competences on the one hand and potential to develop the skills needed on the other (van den Brink & Holgersson, 2016)

Example Management Recruitment (Brink & Holgersson, 2016, p. 27)

Male evaluator: What is leadership to you? Helene: Leadership is about finding tools to get people to develop. Male evaluator: Therefore it is important how they perceive it, not primarily you. Here is what I've written about you. **You spread joy, are positive. You invite others to join. You get things done and find solutions. I'll say that you can become a manager. But think of a little finesse, sensing the situation before you take action. People may be discouraged. Be a little humble and gentle!**

→ **Implicit bias is done here by reframing the female candidate's strengths as weaknesses.**

Bias as a social practice

- Stereotypes are not blindly or unconsciously applied but collaboratively accomplished in talk and interaction
- Performing the normative images of the «ideal researcher» in academia or the «ideal manager» in a business context are accepted practices of making sense of merit, competence, and what counts as professional conduct → becoming a credible speaker
- While gender is done implicitly, “being a good fit” and “lacking competence” are the categories constructed in the interaction of the hiring panel → implicit bias

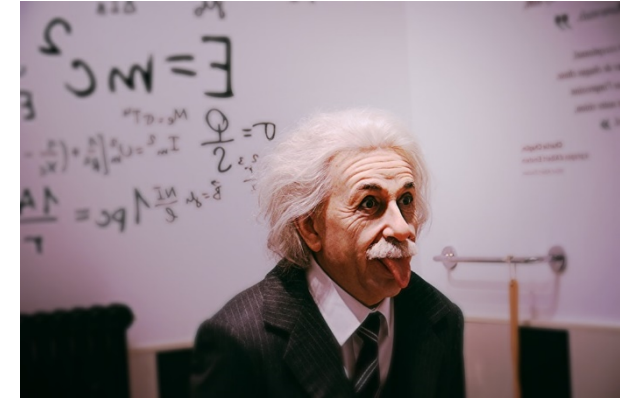


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Conclusion: Expanding the scope of bias trainings



- What is the «ideal worker» norm in this particular organisation and context? How is it made relevant in selection pannels? (contextualising norms)
- What categories are collaboratively created and how are they defined (particularisation)?
- How is «good fit» and «lack of fit» collaboratively achieved and approved?
- What can be criticized, what counts as acceptable critique in this context? (power)
- How does a certain argument position the speaker as either credible or incredible?

Discussion in outbreak groups and on padlet:
<https://padlet.com/julianentwich/wmy7h1hk6to8az5r>

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Undoing Bias in Academic Recruitment: A Professor for Altenklangs

A training simulation with gamification elements



1

The case of academic recruitment

- Committee members have no formal HR training
- Hiring decisions as quasi-democratic processes
- Process quality
- Challenge: teaching highly educated people things they think they already know
- Recognizing «doing bias» and training appropriate responses

2

The making of a training

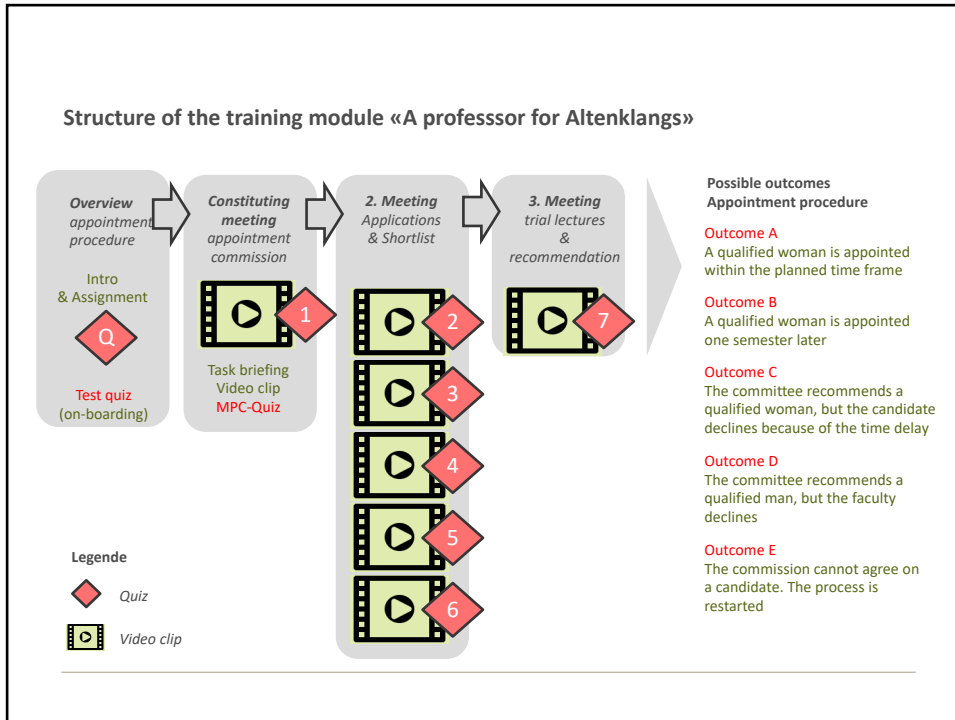


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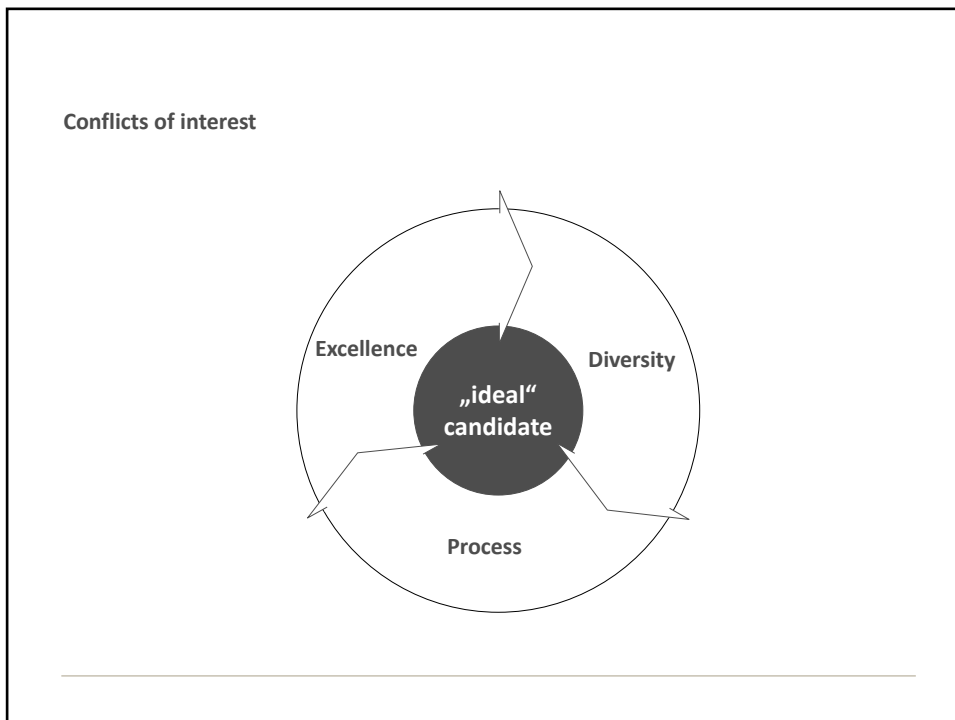
The making of a training



4



5



6



7

Quiz 4: What is your recommendation to the commission?

- A** Family issues are private. The committee should judge candidates exclusively by their competences.
- B** Prof. Vogt should elaborate on the «welcome services» for new professors.
- C** The female candidate's application should be reconsidered. Balancing family and work is an accomplishment in itself.

8

Family matters

- Family issues can be a legitimate problem, as is re-negotiation
 - Double standard
 - Female candidate: family / partner are considered a liability
 - Male candidate: family as a non-issue
-

9

Biases addressed in the Tool

Scene 1: Disciplinary vs. Interdisciplinary research focus

Scene 2: Research metrics

Scene 3: Age, experience and potential

Scene 4: The family situation

Scene 5: Assessing co-authorships

Scene 6 : «Star quality»

Scene 7: Perfectionism

10