

Marieke van den Brink

SHEEP WITH FIVE LEGS

Gender practices in the construction of academic
excellence

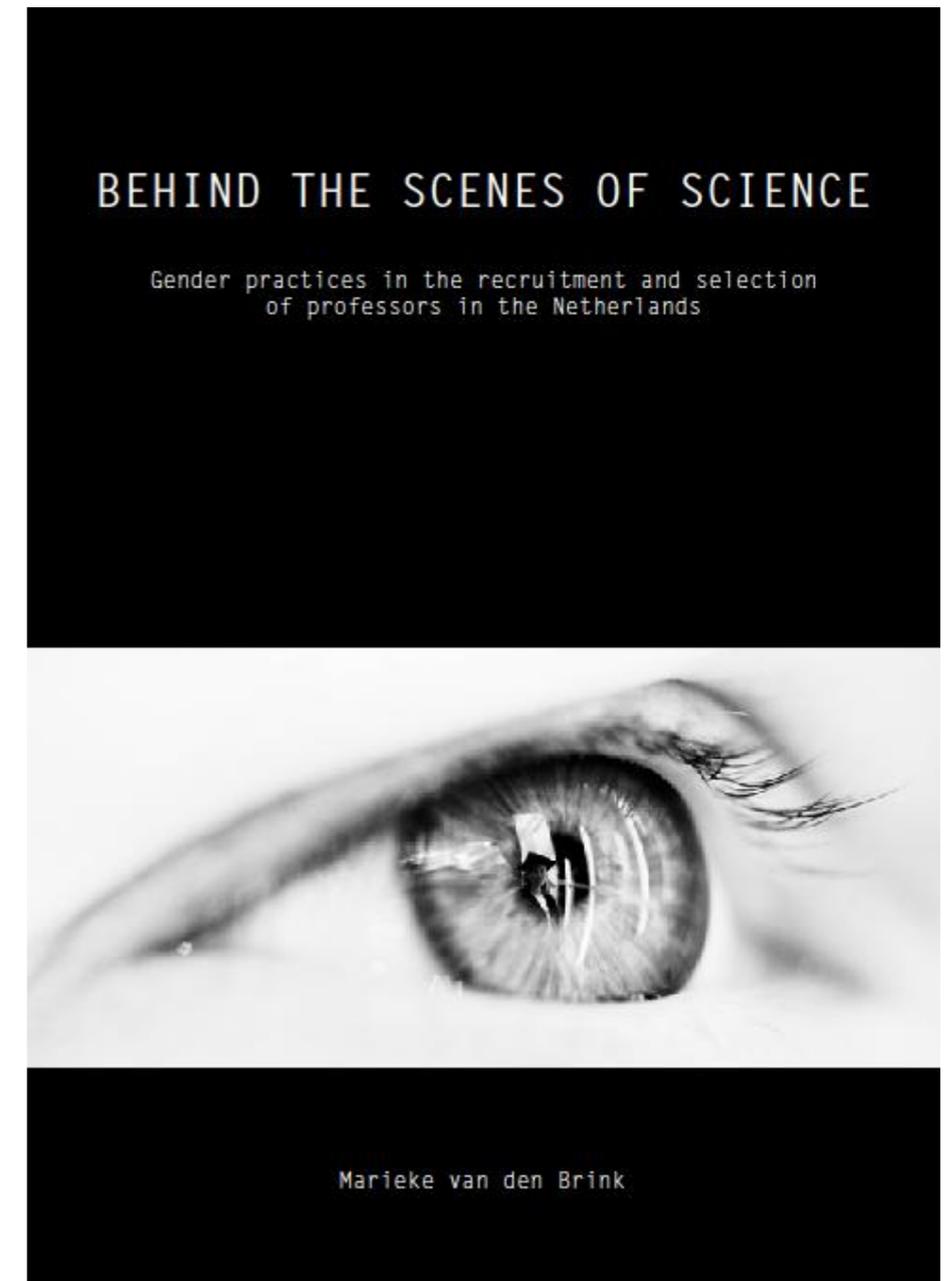
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Radboud University



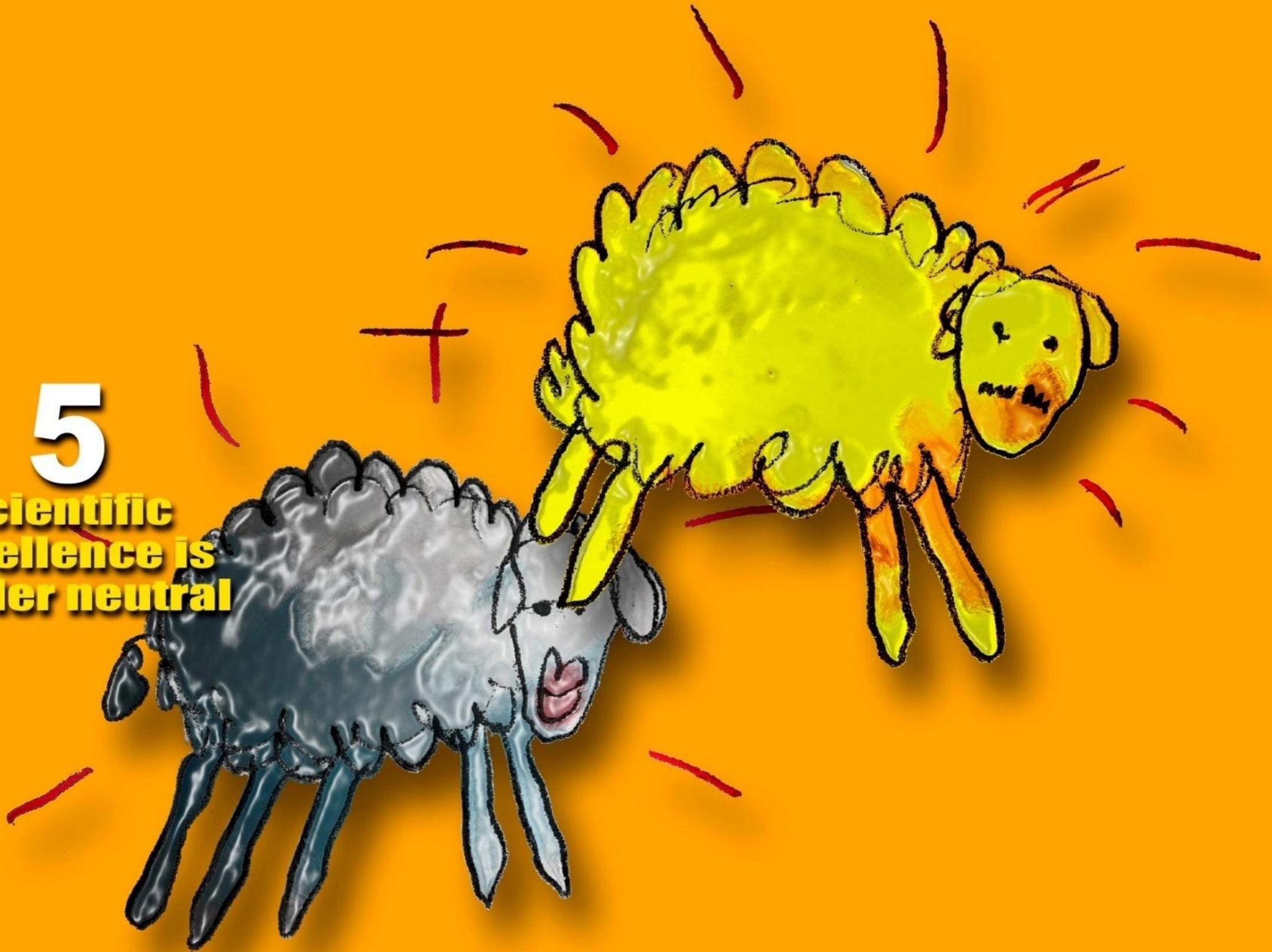
Background/research

- Research question:
How is gender practiced in the recruitment & promotion of full professors in the Netherlands?
- Data collection:
 - Statistics appointment Dutch universities 1999-2005
 - 971 Appointment reports
 - Recruitment and selection protocols
 - 64 interviews with committee members
- Research top appointments Dutch Police Force (2009)
- Research Academic talent management (2010)
- Research diversity management (12-15)
- EU research precarious workers in academia (14-17)



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**Scientific
excellence is
gender neutral**



Gender and Excellence



- Excellence is holy grail in academia
- Excellence as a social construction (Brouns & Addis 2004; Lamont 2009; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012)
- Attention for bias in academic evaluation (a.o. Wenneras & Wold 1997; Castilla 2008; Ozbilgin 2009; Moss-Racusin et al, 2012; Streinpreis, Anders & Ritzke 1999)
- Gender stereotypes (a.o. Benaji 1995, Valian 1998)
- Gendered meritocracy (Scully 1997; Knights & Richards 2003)
- Deconstruction of excellence /symbolic capital
 - Professional capital
 - Individual/Embodied capital
 - Social capital

Professional capital as starting point

- Official criteria:
 - **Quality of research**
 - Quality of teaching
 - Experience in management and administration
 - Outreach (media, consultancy etc)
- Fair and meritocratic?
 - Uneven rating of research and teaching
 - More women on precarious (teaching) positions
 - Linear career patterns / international experience
 - Gender bias in evaluation of research and teaching (Boring, 2015)
- Function as pre-condition for professorial selection

The tacit dimension: embodied individual capital

- Salient in selection interviews
- Personality can influence perceptions of professional capital
- Constructs excellence in two ways:
 - Positive individual capital: fit/similarity as quality
 - Negative individual capital: too difficult or too modest
- In general, women do not ‘bang their fists on the table’ and say ‘we are going in that direction’. No, that is not the case. However, there are a few who do, but those women are exceptions. And when they do display that kind of attitude, then you’ll immediately get the reaction [among committee members] of ‘no, not that one’. That is pretty clear. When a man acts like that, it is more acceptable, he is still in the race. But when a woman displays that behavior, she is out. (natural sciences, man)

- **Interviewee:** With regard to women applicants, I easily get the feeling that they are not going to make it because they are too nice or too kind. And that is just not possible. They have the qualities of a good scientist but you think, ‘That’s not how it works; you won’t survive that way’.
- **Interviewer: Why shouldn’t they survive?**
- **Interviewee:** Well, they do not feel comfortable within the academic culture. Some of the women, exceptions, are a lot tougher, more willing to fight for it, like men do. If you do not fit in with this culture, you’re disregarded for a position. [...] Committees consider it as—we could give this chair to a woman candidate, but within a year, she would end up in the gutter. And, within male-dominated surroundings, that is something that works like a filter (STEM fields; man)

The dynamics of social capital

- Social networks vital during recruitment and promotion
- Rise of scouting
- Reasons for recruitment by invitation:
 - Influence on pool of candidates
 - Fields are small and surveyable
 - Efficiency: low costs, less time consuming
- “If I do not know them, they are not excellent”
- Social capital as criterion
 - Importance of international networks
- Social capital as accelerator
 - Committee checks candidates’ reputation in informal networks
 - Basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al. 1976)
 - Boosting individual and professional capital

Social capital: homophilous networks



- Who is included in the recruitment and promotion process?
 - Scouts are predominantly male
 - 44 % of all appointment committees are men only
- Male scouts have mostly men in their networks (chance homophily). Male networks are homogenous (Ibarra 1992/ Burt 1992). 'we can't find any eligible women for this position'
- Men scouts prefer to work with men (choice homophily) and support men to a larger extent
 - Perceived similarity
 - Easier (avoiding heterosexual tensions)
 - Women as a risk
- Gender practice: basing feelings of trust on (perceived) similarity and risks on (perceived) dissimilarity

Social capital: Gaining visibility

- ‘Women do not engage in self-promotion’
- Visibility also depends on networks
 - Being nominated, informed, recommended
 - Encouragement to apply
 - Building reputations
 - Basking in reflected glory (Cialdini 1976)
 - Sponsorship
- Women receive less support during their careers (Husu, 2001; Bagilhole and Goode 2001; Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014)
- Paradox of ambition; social sanctions for self promotion (Rudman 1998; Sools 2003)
- Gender practice: men supporting and assisting other men in ways that advance their career goals.

Men preferring men

- When men keep their traditional mentality in which [they think] women are not so interested or they don't even think about it, [a professorial position] they will take other men, because they have always known men in this profession, they know what men can do. Women some day get children or whatever they think that women do. If men are not thinking consciously, she is a woman that is equally good or whatever, than I think that automatically they would just take the man, because they think that they can rely more on the man, he is like me. (natural sciences, woman)

Recruitment by invitation

My own supervisor [...] has always helped me if I asked him. But he never supported my career in an active way, as far as I know. Nominated me for things. Never never. It is not something he usually does, but I know he has done it for some men in his surrounding. [...] Actually, he never understood that my ambition in this area is equally to men. And that is not because he isn't the sweetest man, and doesn't care about me, ..that is not the case. But that all this is as important for me as for my male colleagues....he once told me honestly, ...that coin doesn't drop. (humanities, woman)

Excellence or suitability?

- Myth of universal standards of excellence
- The excellent academic has it all?
- Double standards
- Scientific excellence is not gender neutral
- Gender practices as struggles over symbolic capital
 - Professional capital: issues of measurement
 - Individual/Embodied capital: influenced by gender stereotypes
 - Social capital: composition and benefits of social networks
- Men's capital is systematically viewed as legitimate and generates more symbolic capital than women's
- Recruitment and selection reproduce gender inequality in universities

The quest continues

- Explicit search for female talent
- More and diverse scouts
- Consciousness-raising about the functioning and effects of male networks and the existence of gender stereotypes in regular appointment procedures
- The interventions should also target organizations, not only women
- Monitoring
- Two-sided mentoring (De Vries, 2010)
- Appoint inspiring change agents
- Challenge the rhetoric of the excellent academic
- Use and share available gender expertise

