ABSTRACT

GENDERED ACADEMIC CULTURE IN MEDICINE

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

This paper seeks to elaborate on the dynamics of hidden gender discrimination in a seemingly gender neutral area of academic medicine; namely in the process of merit evaluation. A starting point of this study is the study published in Nature (1997) of the state funded Swedish Medical Research Council’s (MRC) evaluation procedures of the postdoctoral fellowship applications. In record time there were adopted changes in the council’s practices, and today there are no apparent differences between male and female applicants in terms of acceptance rates.

This change presents an interesting and valuable source of information, not least due to the uniqueness of this case. Eight female professors in different medical fields with experience in the work of the MRC were interviewed on the notion of gender equality involving their work as evaluators and the change of practices. Their thoughts and views are discussed and analyzed in the light of the two concepts consensual and disensual academic cultures, developed by Dorte Marie Søndergaard. Characteristic of a consensus academic culture is, among other things, a view of the merit evaluation as a per se gender neutral procedure. The disensual academic culture, on the other hand, does not exclude the possibility of gender bias in this process. Instead, the system of peer-review is seen as a process where “no absolute truths” can be found.

One key point of the paper is that among the professors involved with the change of practices, the characteristics of the disensual academic culture were manifested to a great extent. The presence of a disensual academic culture thus seems to have had a positive impact in the process of change towards a more gender integrated field of academic medicine in the case of the Swedish Medical Research Council.