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Uniformity Dressed as Diversity? Reorienting Female Associate Professors

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Introduction

'I have not been very strategic in the past, and I realize that, when I talk to others, primarily men, who have been focussed on becoming professors as soon as possible. They have been more systematic when it comes to what they have said yes and no to, and given thought to what benefits them when it comes to that specific goal. But I have not been like that myself. I have been like "Oh, that's interesting and that's something I'm really committed to", and I say yes and I want to be kind and then suddenly, when I'm sitting there and am supposed to assemble what I've done in a CV and application, I think "Why did I prioritize that instead of that?" So, I wish someone had knocked on my door a long time ago and made me more aware of this.'

This quote is from an interview with a female associate professor at the University of Agder (UiA), Norway. At the time of the interview, she was taking part in a gender equality action programme for increasing the number of female professors at the university. This programme was enveloped in a rhetoric suggesting that female associate professors should be more strategic and self-assertive – 'lean in'.¹ The programme taught her that her tendency to 'say yes' was an obstacle to her becoming a professor, and that she had to develop an ability to 'say no' (see Lund, 2020b). Many other female associate professors at UiA talked of similar experiences.

In this chapter we investigate whether, how and with what consequences preliminary evaluations speed up female associate professors' processes of becoming full professors. To make sense of the effects of the evaluations, we use Dorothy Smith's (2005) concept of 'ruling relations' together with Sara Ahmed's emotional politics (2014) and queer phenomenology (2006). We explore textually mediated understandings of the 'ideal academic' (Lund, 2015) in the preliminary evaluation action, and how emotions 'stick' to these textually mediated discourses. Thus, we attend to the discursive as well as the emotional (re)orientations the evaluations can produce. We furthermore reflect on the particular understanding of gender equality embedded in this action programme, and its consequences for diversity in the sense of widening notions of what a good academic might be.

The *Balance project* at the University of Agder

In response to continued vertical and horizontal gender segregation in Norwegian academia (Ulvestad, 2017; KIF-info, 2021), the Norwegian Research Council (NRC) established the Balance Programme in 2013. The programme aims at increasing the share of female professors and research leaders through co-funding local research-based knowledge and action measures. To ensure local commitment, the university leadership has to be involved and willing to allocate funding. When UiA applied for funding from the Balance Programme in 2014, only 22 per cent of professors/readers (*dosents*) at UiA were women.² The university received funding and implemented its so-called *Balance project* between 2015 and 2018.

The aim of the project was to contribute to 'structural and cultural change' towards gender equality. The university asked for co-funding³ for three gender equality actions. One was the *integration of gender and gender equality perspectives in leader gatherings and courses*, aimed at providing leaders with knowledge about the gendering of academia and tools to change it. Another was *search-and-find-committees*, aiming at increasing the share of female applicants for professorships at the university. The third was the *preliminary evaluations*, which we focus on in this chapter. The latter measure was directed at female associate professors already working at the university. In Norway, associate professors employed in a 50–100 per cent position can apply for personal promotion to full professor and are therefore not dependent on getting a professorship based on open-call applications. Those who received preliminary evaluations as part of the *Balance project* sent a preliminary application for professorship promotion to an evaluation committee with one internal and one external member. The committee provided, in return, a written evaluation of the associate professors' academic work. The associate professors could also contact committee members for strategic advice concerning promotion. Administrative staff at the university

facilitated the process, while department heads often identified candidates for the evaluations and facilitated the actions for improvement recommended by the committee. In practice, this frequently meant facilitating more (coherent) research time.

In addition, all female associate professors at UiA were invited to participate in ‘professorship promotion seminars’ and ‘shut-up-and-write-seminars’. Promotion seminars provided information about what it would take to achieve promotion, and gave participants access to the career experiences and advice of recently appointed female professors or female associate professors close to promotion. In the ‘shut-up-and-write-seminars’, female associate professors would sit in the same room and write academic texts for a whole day, following a fixed schedule of writing periods and breaks. While these two seminars were not part of the action measures funded by the NRC, they aligned with the overall strategic ideas being transmitted through the evaluations, as we will show later.

In addition to getting funding for the three original gender equality actions, UiA received funding from the NRC for carrying out research on local gender relations and inequality at the university. One pillar of the research focussed on exploring female associate professors’ everyday lives and research careers, seeking to theorize the social organization of academic working lives, without paying direct attention to the action measures (Magnussen et al, 2018; Lund, 2020b). Another pillar focussed on the effects of the gender equality action measures. This chapter is an outcome of the second pillar and zooms in on the effects of the preliminary evaluations, which turned out to be the most successfully implemented of the three action measures.

Beyond body counts: understanding the production of uniformity

Substantial amounts of research demonstrate that gender equality actions are often reduced to body counts and incorporated in managerial quality or excellence strategies with economic purposes (Eisenstein, 2009; Rottenberg, 2018; Lund, 2020b). Gender quality strategies in academic institutions also tend to be based on the assumption that women are a uniform group, thus downplaying differences between women while simultaneously reproducing inequalities along lines of sexuality, class and ethnicity/race (for example Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019). We argue that the merger of competitive agendas and gender equality agendas produce and (re)produce particular discursive and emotional practices that result in increased uniformity rather than diversity. The equality agenda, rather than nurturing space for a diversity of people and practices within academia, becomes a measure for ensuring that the people in the organization are equally oriented towards narrow, institutionally defined goals of quality.

Identifying ruling relations

Dorothy Smith developed institutional ethnography as a ‘method of inquiry’ for exploring and challenging institutional processes and power from the standpoint of people’s everyday lives and embodied experiences (Smith, 2005). The choice of standpoint, in our case that of the female associate professors, is empirically and contextually justified as pointing towards new perspectives, and challenging ways of knowing and doing which are considered unquestionable, neutral and objective (Smith, 2004a; Smith, 2004b).

In producing data, the researcher first aims to assist her research participants in articulating as much as possible of the physical, mental and emotional ‘work’ that a certain kind of practice – such as trying to become a professor – consists of, as well as the *social relations* this is being done in. If the production of data is successful, these descriptions will contain clues regarding the institutionalized and objectified knowledge that shapes work and activities across diverging local sites (Lund, 2015). Smith labels this knowledge *ruling relations*, and defines these as:

text-mediated and text-based systems of ‘communication’, ‘knowledge’, ‘information’, ‘regulation’, ‘control’ and the like. The functions of ‘knowledge, judgment, and will’ that Marx saw as wrested from the original ‘producer’ and transferred to capital become built into a specialized complex of *objectified* forms of organization and relationship. ... Knowledge, judgment, and will are less and less properties of the individual subject and more and more of objectified organization. They are constituted as actual forms of concerting and concerted activities and can be investigated as such. ... The concept of the ruling relations identifies a historical development of forms of social consciousness that can no longer be adequately conceived as arising in the life conditions of actual individuals. (Smith, 2004a: 77–8)

Ruling relations are mediated through material and replicable texts. Their coordinating and generalizing capacity lies in the fact that they can be read, heard and seen in many places, by different people, at the same time. Having identified material texts, such as the preliminary evaluations and the intertextual hierarchy these are part of,⁴ the researcher returns to the chosen standpoint, explicating how the identified texts shape the experience she started out exploring. She aims to show *how* power works in the informants’ everyday lives and the *consequences* it has. She also aims to explore whether and how the ruling relations are reproduced, challenged or even dismantled, and whose interests this supports.

Emotional reorientation

In addition to identifying the ruling relations shaping the experiences of female associate professors engaged in preliminary evaluations, we used [Ahmed's \(2006, 2014\)](#) emotional politics and queer phenomenology to make sense of how emotions such as fear, shame, disappointment, discomfort, hope and pride become attached to discourses mediated through the ruling relations, thus hooking into broader textual-affective higher education regimes of ranking and competition (for example [Shahjahan et al, 2020](#)).⁵ This involves representations of the objects and subjects that people direct their emotions towards and ultimately how people categorize and label objects and subjects. According to Ahmed, with time, certain emotions tend to 'stick' to some people and objects, but not to others. This is relevant because the gender equality action programme we explore in this chapter involves 'orienting' people towards particular objects and relations and away from others. This institutionally driven process of 'reorienting' encourages positive emotions towards objects and relations that provide exchange-value, and benefits the women's own careers. It also encourages neutrality or negative emotions directed at use-value and care for others (for example [Ahmed, 2006](#)). Furthermore, deep engagement with and concentration on particular objects and relations that benefit the self involves cultivating blindness towards the work that other people must engage in to make this possible for you ([Ahmed, 2014](#)). People are differently (dis)posed in terms of feeling 'at home' and 'comfortable' with orienting towards objects and relations in the ways that are institutionally and textually encouraged (for example [Threadgold, 2021](#)).

The case of UiA and our research data

UiA is one of many Norwegian university colleges that achieved university status in the 2000s. Although the university's activity and funding are closely tied to professional study programmes (such as teaching, nursing and engineering), the focus on research is increasing. The 2016 strategy stated that the university aimed at delivering 'world-leading research' and at increasing its participation in international research projects and programmes ([University of Agder, 2021](#)). Statistically, the Agder region has the most gender-segregated work life in Norway, and research substantiates that the associations between femininity and care work and masculinity and paid work are particularly strong here ([Magnussen, 2015](#)). Faculty and other staff at UiA are not unmarked by these regional particularities. Many have grown up in the region or have lived there for a long period of time, have family there and engage in social relations transcending the university.

The main data for this chapter are 57 personal, semi-structured qualitative interviews with staff at the university, conducted between October 2015 and

November 2018.⁶ Thirty-two of these were with female associate professors, and out of these, 13 had had preliminary evaluations. Some of the associate professors we interviewed also sent us experience notes on specific issues. We conducted two workshops about career challenges for female associate professors. In these, many women who were not interviewed contributed with their experiences. In addition, we attended meetings and events at the university – such as promotion seminars, meetings in the university’s gender equality and inclusion committee, as well as leadership gatherings – throughout the time period of the *Balance project*. The *Balance project* financed one administrative staff member or faculty member in the four university faculties with the lowest shares of female professors to spend 20 per cent of their working hours facilitating preliminary evaluations and search-and-find-committees. These people became important informants in the project and provided us with valuable insights into their experiences of these measures.

The remaining 25 interviews were carried out with male associate professors and professors, as well as with male and female management and other administrative staff. In the interviews with faculty, the goal was to make our informants articulate as much of their everyday academic activity, and as specific and detailed, as possible. In all interviews, we aimed at making our informants put the relations and institutional texts shaping their activities and experiences into words. The interviews with the managers and other administrative staff, moreover, focussed on explicating their understandings of the research careers of female associate professors at the university, as well as their own experiences with and reflections concerning the *Balance project* measures.

In the next section, we begin with female associate professors’ experiences regarding the preliminary evaluations. We draw on our other data from UiA to explore the ruling relations mediated in and through the evaluations, and the ways emotions ‘stick’ to these.

The practical, mental and emotional ‘work’ of preliminary evaluations

When the *Balance project* ended in 2018, 24 female associate professors at UiA had participated in preliminary evaluations. Most of these were handpicked by their department heads.⁷ Our interviews with 13 of these women substantiated that the evaluations often did speed up their processes of becoming professors. Many told us how the evaluations made them more certain that aiming for promotion to professor was worthwhile, while also providing direction to and speeding up the process. Some mentioned the usefulness of assembling their work, writing up an application and tailoring a CV that they could improve – based on the evaluation – and use in their real application for promotion to professor. In addition, several women used the evaluation and the connected career advice to negotiate more research time with their department heads. One woman said that

for her, getting more research time – “time to think and to breathe” – was her main take-away from, and her main reason for, having a preliminary evaluation. The advice she had received from the evaluation committee did not add anything to what she had already learnt from participating in promotion seminars.

Many of the women we interviewed also voiced important emotional aspects of being invited to a preliminary evaluation. Some expressed becoming motivated by being identified as “professor material”, which made them feel “seen”. One woman said: “Preliminary evaluations are about being seen and feeling that somebody thinks that it’s important to acknowledge you.” Other informants said that the evaluations’ external validation made them feel more confident about their research interests. Even in cases where the evaluations were in line with the associate professors’ self-evaluation, they expressed how it felt reassuring to “have it on paper”. Feeling acknowledged and seen is particularly valuable in an affective economy where you can easily become either invisible or hyper-visible if you are not perceived as being oriented towards the ‘right’ goals. Being one of the few selected for preliminary evaluation may have made the female associate professors feel special and worthy of consideration. Such processes can be seductive, hooking people into what has been termed ‘neoliberalism’, capturing the combination of principles of neoliberalism combined with the insights of behaviourism (Morley and Lund, 2020). The more you align, and direct yourself towards the ‘right’ things, the more acknowledgement you receive and the less resistance you experience. In other words, everyday life, in some respects, becomes easier (Ahmed, 2006: 14–21).

Our data substantiates that ‘being seen’ may have a stronger reorienting effect on the academic work of women than that of men. Among the emotional work in our data, we found many traces of highly gendered emotional work, particularly dealing with feelings of insecurity and the so-called imposter syndrome (Chandra et al, 2019). We understand such feelings as themselves produced by and shaped in gendered social relations in academia (Lund, 2020a). For instance, some of the interviewed women said that they were preoccupied with ensuring that they would get promoted when they did send in the real application for promotion. Being overqualified was seen as better than overestimating themselves, and the preliminary evaluation helped them to navigate this terrain. In our material, this was only one of many signs indicating that the female associate professors we interviewed manoeuvred contradictory gendered ideals on their way towards a professorship. While the gender equality rhetoric dominating the *Balance* activities told them to be more strategic on their own behalf, and thus counter feminine stereotypes, they were often simultaneously expected to conform to such stereotypes by being emotionally invested in the well-being of students and colleagues (see also Magnussen et al, 2018) and avoiding ‘boastful’ behaviour (Lund, 2020a). Thus, the self-promotion encouraged by gender equality action measures can be risky for the women we interviewed.

Another emotional aspect of the preliminary evaluations in our data was that some of the interviewed women said that setting a professorship as a clear goal motivated them and lent speed to the process of becoming a professor. Some said that the signalling effect of the preliminary evaluation also provided such extra impetus. Certain expectations, capacities and potentials were attached to them by their surroundings, thus generating a sense of urgency and focus. One woman talked about how the evaluation generated high expectations and a sense of pressure from her leader and colleagues: “I notice that I have speeded up. I have felt that pressure a little bit, because you get many questions about when you’re going to send the application for promotion. Some think that there is a lot of support. But it’s not actually like that.” This associate professor met expectations to perform more and faster, without having much extra support and time, and later on in the interview she said that this resulted in recurring health problems. Speeding up had a cost.

Not all of our informants were that interested in becoming professors, however. Being a professor “is a title and I’m not that into titles”, one woman said, suggesting that the meaning of the status attached to a professorship was not self-evident. Another interviewee would have liked some discussion about the reasons for wanting to become a professor and about institutional expectations regarding professors. A third woman said that she was not motivated by the prestige of a professorship, but by specific research and teaching agendas and how becoming a professor opened certain doors. When asked about what motivated her, she said that:

‘I think what I do is important. It helps people. ... I don’t need any other motivation than that. So, I think it’s important. And teaching, that’s perhaps the part I enjoy most of all. Really. ... But the evaluation gave me a small push to at least think about [professorship promotion]. Because the days pass so quickly, so I seldom sit down and think about promotion. For my part, it doesn’t mean that much. In a busy everyday life that’s not important, but I can see that in applying for research projects and in international collaboration the title actually has something to say. So, I think that’s a reason to become a professor.’

However, the majority of the women we interviewed told us how the preliminary evaluations *had* changed the way they thought and felt about academic work. The criteria used to evaluate their research careers, combined with the gathering of emotions, bodies and resources around the aims of reformulating their goals and redirecting their attention, made several think that they should have made better – that is, more ‘strategic’ – choices throughout their careers. They began to attach value to the standardized quality measures used to evaluate their work and to the seductive notion of ‘making it’. It made them think that their work should have been less shaped by, for instance,

teaching and commitment to solving societal challenges, and more by choices that would have speeded up their own processes of becoming professors. Saying ‘no’ was, however, not only invoked as a way of speeding up the strategic path to a professorship, but also as self-care. In the face of pressure to perform in particular standardized ways, responsibility for well-being at work was experienced as individualized, adding another layer to the redirection and emotional orientations of the female academics we interviewed. They were responsibilized and had to carefully manage their ‘investments’ of time and resources, both for the sake of becoming professors and for keeping healthy.

Gendered academic ideals

By February 2021, 12 of the 24 women involved in preliminary evaluations during the *Balance project* period were full professors, and the share of female professors at UiA had increased to 30 per cent, from 22 per cent in 2014. The preliminary evaluations probably contributed to this increase. However, they also had problematic side effects. In the following sections, we investigate these by unpacking the ruling relations (Smith, 2005) of the preliminary evaluations. More specifically, we explore understandings of the good academic that are promoted through them and, in turn, what kind of academia these contribute to.

Our total data material from UiA shows that the understanding of academic ideals as neutral and as equally desirable and attainable for all is widespread (Magnussen et al, 2018). One woman we interviewed about these preliminary evaluations, however, connected the ideals promoted through the action measures – individualism and careerism – with masculinity and male-coded practices:

‘I know some [women] who have stated very clearly that they want to become professors, but what is obvious to me is that if you’re kind of a competitive lonely rider, if you’re only running your own race, if you’re not a team player, you will not to the same degree be invited to join projects. ... But is it the women who use their elbows and who say no to everything and sit by themselves, are they the ones who succeed the most and become professors quicker? That would be interesting for me to know. Because even if it is so, I might not choose that strategy, because it doesn’t match what I stand for. But of course, it’s still interesting to see if that’s the way it is, if the women who are a bit more like men, if you know what I mean, are those who are most successful.’

This associate professor probably did not change her orientations as a consequence of the understandings promoted in the *Balance* action measures,

even if they might be the quickest way to a full professorship. She also pointed to the risks of doing academic work in this way, as mentioned earlier.

While women doing academic work “more like [some] men” probably contribute to numerical gender equality, merely increasing the presence of female bodies in professorship positions does not automatically translate into a more equality- and diversity-favouring culture (Ahmed, 2017; Lund, 2020b). Instead, this as a one-sided approach will probably strengthen already dominant academic ideals that favour particular ways of being an academic, historically associated with certain men (Bailyn, 2003; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). At UiA, as well as in academia more broadly, publication points, citations and certain kinds of international collaboration, the main currency of a global competitive ‘excellence industry’, increasingly shape academics’ everyday lives (Lund, 2015; Magnussen et al, 2018). Individual self-promotion, in the form of publication output and external funding, seems to become more important, while tasks such as pastoral work around students, mentoring, reviewing for journals and so on tend to become invisible. This is work that the female associate professors we interviewed (still) did a lot of and often regarded as important, but are encouraged to reduce in order to get promoted to professor. The ‘competitive ethos underpinning the university produces a binary of winners and losers’ (Morley and Crossouard, 2016: 4) that is in turn associated with particular emotions.

The preliminary evaluations and other actions measures responsibilized (Lemke, 2001; Wright, 2014) the interviewed associate professors: they provided tools with which the women could work on their thoughts, emotions and actions. Academic work they had hitherto not been particularly aware of or had negative emotions towards, gradually became attached to other and more positive emotions such as pride, joy and a sense of being seen. Such affective and emotional shifts are central to complying with and internalizing neoliberal value systems (Morley and Crossouard, 2016; Morley and Lund, 2020) and, ultimately, for the exclusion of those positioned as losers. Through the reponsibilization of individuals, differences in opportunity structures are concealed (Lund, 2020b).

Repurposing feminism

The preliminary evaluations and other action measures at UiA also promoted specific understandings of gender equality. In line with much feminist research on organizations, the NRC (2021) states that actions funded by the Balance Programme should not ‘fix women’, as many ‘traditional’ actions for gender equality have done (for example De Vries and van den Brink, 2016). The UiA’s application for funding included the feminist intention of ‘changing gendered cultures and structures’ at the university. Even so, the project to a large degree ended up helping women ‘fix themselves’

to fit standardized, seemingly neutral quality standards (Magnussen et al, 2018).⁸ This conclusion is supported by the fact that one of the other action measures, *integration of gender and gender equality perspectives in leader meetings and courses*, encountered a lot of resistance at UiA and was not successfully implemented. In addition, initiatives such as ‘shut-up-and-write’ sessions and promotion seminars all focused on shifting how individual women prioritized their time and efforts. These offered generalized advice of ‘saying no’ to (assumed) non-meritorious work in order to, as one top manager said, ‘make it’ (Lund, 2020b). Presenting academic ideals as neutral and unproblematic reduced gender equality to a question of numbers, glossing over more subtle and informal gendering in the university. The *Balance project* at UiA helped women play the gendered academic game more effectively, rather than critically engage with the structural and cultural forces at play (Colley and White, 2018). That female associate professors were asked to be more individualistic and careerist, *and to code this as feminist*, concerns us.

The gendered global knowledge economy

Considering the reflections in the previous sections of this chapter, the reorienting of the female associate professor behind the opening quote of this chapter becomes problematic. Even if she aims at gender equality, she can be understood as first and foremost contributing towards strengthening the competitiveness of UiA and Norwegian academia in the so-called global knowledge economy (Wright, 2014; Hazelkorn, 2015). This process probably contributes to a less diverse academia, effectively hidden within the language and discourses of research excellence and feminism. Even if the NRC (2021) states that having more female professors is important for bringing new perspectives into Norwegian academe, it is also framed as a means towards increasing the sector’s competitiveness. The European Union, for instance, has made gender equality in grant-awarding a clear ambition although no clear penalties or rewards ensure this in practice. As a result, numerical gender equality has become a currency in the excellence industry (Lund, 2020b). Moreover, it is based on the assumption that gender is the main (or only!) category of difference, while other signifiers such as class, sexuality, race or age, are made invisible, creating a problematic institutional assumption of universality and sameness among women, in turn justifying a one-size-fits-all ‘reorienting’. This may very well have consequences concerning epistemic diversity (Aarseth, Bråten and Lund, forthcoming).

Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have explored how women engaged in preliminary evaluation action measures became re-oriented through the ruling relations

mediated in textualized quality criteria. We have shown how gender equality measures ended up fostering uniformity rather than diversity through an action measure that ultimately aimed at ‘fixing the woman’ rather than ‘fixing the system and culture’. Actions directed at individual women can be a smart entry to working with gender equality in academia, seeing that actions focussed on furthering women’s individual careers align with dominant understandings of gender equality and feminism, as also [De Vries and van den Brink \(2016\)](#) have pointed out. And indeed, as we showed, numerically, such individualized action measures turned out to be a success. However, such measures should not stand alone. Instead, they should be supplemented with developing knowledge and collegial practices that challenge the subtle ways gendered and intersecting differences become (re)produced in everyday practices, as well as in gender equality action measures. In carrying out research as part of the *Balance project* we encountered many women who had never reflected on their academic work from a gender perspective. Coming together, articulating experience and finding commonalities and common concerns – the consciousness-raising tools of the early women’s liberation movement – do not seem to have lost their relevance and may serve as an important driver for taking the agenda for equality and diversity further. While consciousness raising does not provide a quick-fix solution to subtle, inadvertent and unintentional forms of gendered bias in academic structures and cultures, it does provide faculty members with a sensibility for noticing, and a language for expressing, the complexities of inequality (see for instance [Carnes et al, 2015](#); [Remich et al, 2017](#) for such consciousness-raising initiatives and interventions in US context). This is ultimately a first step towards cultural and structural transformation over time.

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Notes

- ¹ Here, we refer to Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* (2013).
- ² 10 per cent less than the national average (KIF-info, 2021).
- ³ The Norwegian Research Council demanded 50 per cent co-funding from the institutions receiving funding for gender equality action from the Balance Programme.
- ⁴ The researcher often identifies local texts that shape the experience she aims to understand. These are texts with which the informants in their research interact directly, for instance criteria for promotion to a professorship. The researcher then moves on to explore how these texts are part of a trans-local intertextual hierarchy. This means that the texts that the people she started her research with, engage with and which shape their actions, are themselves shaped by texts of a higher order, such as white papers about higher education and research.

- ⁵ *Being* ‘affected’ differs from *having* ownership of certain ‘emotions’ (Probyn, 2005). Ahmed (2006) theorizes emotions as operating within an ‘affective economy’. Emotions are understood as intentional in the sense of being ‘directed’ towards something or someone in particular ways – either attracting us or repelling us. The capacity to affect, and be affected, is, however, shaped by *what* we come into contact with. According to Ahmed (2006: 2), ‘emotions involve affective (re)orientations’. This means that in order for something or someone to make a particular emotional mark on us, we must be affectively oriented towards it in a particular way, and this orientation is, in turn, shaped by ‘our accumulated history’ (Threadgold, 2021: 58). As such, Ahmed’s theory of an affective economy points towards how people become (re)oriented emotionally towards particular objects and subjects, and explains why some people feel comfortable while others feel uncomfortable with this (re)orientation.
- ⁶ We recorded and transcribed most of the interviews. When recording was not possible, we wrote interview or field notes. Rachel Fishberg, former Master’s student at the University of Aarhus, contributed to developing our interview data.
- ⁷ However, some also contacted the administrative staff connected to the *Balance project* directly or were encouraged by them to have preliminary evaluations. Furthermore, towards the end of the project, female associate professors who were further from being qualified were invited to have these evaluations done.
- ⁸ Some of the female associate professors we interviewed understood academia and the lack of gender equality there this way, but we found these understandings much more often among male faculty, leaders and administrative staff at the university.

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