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Abstract

The university reform process of the 2000s led to the implementation of new forms of governance and the strengthening of neoliberal positions at universities. At the same time issues of equal opportunities and university's gender equality policy have been expanded. Numerous studies and articles deal with the complex disadvantages and structural constraints within the academic career of female scientists in Germany. Despite various gender equality policy measures implemented in the last years, women are still underrepresented in high academic positions. Research shows that the proportion of women in higher positions is increasing very slowly and exclusion mechanisms, such as 'cooling out' and 'glass ceiling', are still prevailing.

So far, there has been a lack of critical analyses of public discourses concerning the underrepresentation of women scientists in executive positions in German academia. This Foucault inspired and feminist analysis aims to close this research gap. Michel Foucault points out that discourses produce knowledge that influences the interpretation of the world, the self-perception, and perception of others as well as the processes of subjectification. These processes are strongly dependent on the assignment of gender. As emphasized in Judith Butler's work, that gender relations are constituted by the predominant heteronormative discourse of power relations.

Based on the framework of The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse, the negotiations of gender inequality in the public higher education reform discourse show the continuity of gendered interpretation patterns.

The discourse analysis of the German public higher education reform between the years 2000 and 2011 enables to examine the continuing exclusion of women in science. The empirical data corpus is based on 300 newspaper articles from three different German daily newspapers. The results lead to a critical discussion of the relationship between equality policy and neoliberal university policy.

So it was possible to reconstruct five interpretative patterns, which particularly show how strongly femininity is tied to motherhood, even among scientists. Furthermore, the results indicate that female scientists remain 'the other' even under the auspices of neoliberal university policy.