

# **(Gender) Bias in grant attribution**

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# Agenda

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## Bias in grant attribution

- Why gender bias?
  - Bias in process of grant attribution: research **funders**
  - Bias before / while application: applicants/**universities**
  - Discussion: your experiences, questions....
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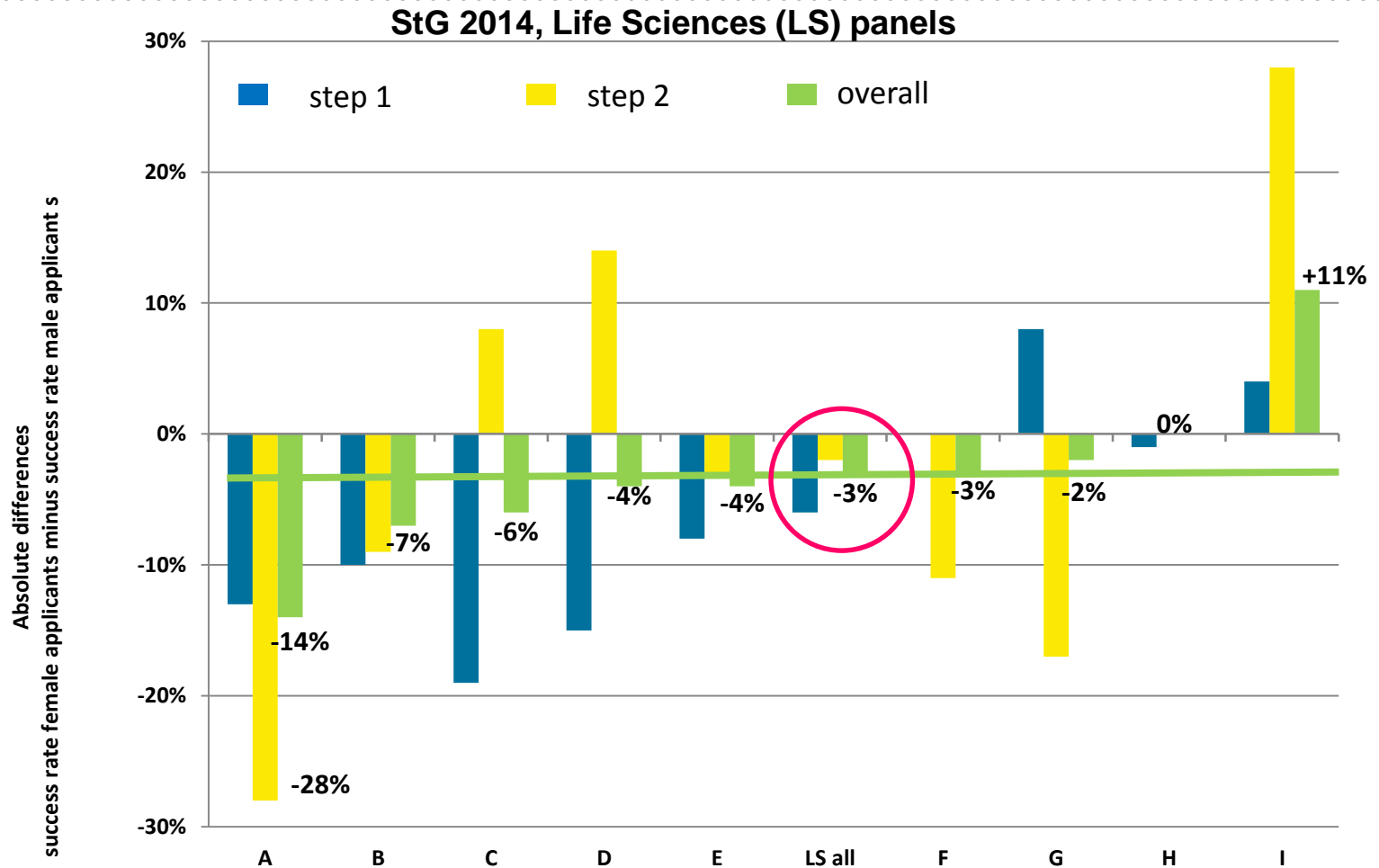
# Bias in grant attribution

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Bias may refer to very different dimensions:

- Affiliation/ host institution (Oxford vs Linz): reputation, infrastructure, tacit knowledge how to apply, network ties (reviewers, citations), resources for support
  - Country/language: English natives vs non-natives
  - **Gender:** different success rates of female and male applicants
  - Bias dimensions are inter-related
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# ERC: Lower success rates of female applicants



# Research approach

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Study commissioned by European Research Council (ERC): **Why do women have lower success rates?** = Gender bias from a research funder's perspective

- lower success rates  $\neq$  gender bias: control for past performance
  - analyze processes and practices: gender as social dimension in the evaluation process:
    - How does gender affect evaluation process?
    - What is excellence? (How) Is excellence gendered?
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## Data, methods

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- Multivariate model to identify gender bias:
    - Applications: personal data, evaluation data (3.030 applicants' with IC) incl evaluation report: linguistic analysis, scores
    - WoS data: past performance, cognitive distance
  - Interviews: reviewers (n=32), ERC staff (n= 16): criteria of excellence, decision making process
  - Online survey applicants (response rate > 40%): perception of excellence, support for application
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## Findings - overview

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We found that gender bias may occur at different levels:

- Research funders' sphere:
  - (1) Definition of excellence, evaluation criteria (applied)
  - (2) Process of grant awarding
  - (3) Composition of decision making bodies/ panels
- Applicants' sphere:
  - (1) Encouragement for career / to apply
  - (2) Support in application process



Gender  
stereotypes

# (1) Criteria for excellence are not clearly defined: What is meant by 'independence'?

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*We need to get independence and **new ideas and new ways in science.***

*Reviewer 12, W*

*independence is about **publications, funding** and **group composition.***

*reviewer 21, W*

*I think it is important to show some **mobility, to become independent from previous advisors.***

*Reviewer 6, M*

***Females' independence is questioned more than males' is.***

*Reviewer 19, W*



# 5 dimensions of independence

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Analysing reviewers' discourses (Grounded Theory, Glaser/Strauss 1967) on excellence we found:

## **5 sub-dimensions of independence:**

- Independence depends on dependence
- Independence needs to be negotiated
- Independence requires topical emancipation
- Independence requires a new developed network
- Independence is linked to mobility

⇒ **Better definition of criteria and indicators needed!**

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## (2) Gender bias in evaluation criteria

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- Evaluation **criteria** themselves may be **gendered**:  
Criteria reflect imbalances (power structures) in science system: Women have less time, team support, networks = less excellence indicators: citations, co-authorship
  - => **Deploying indicators equally to female and male applicants may reinforce gender imbalances!**
  - Evaluation **criteria** may be **used** in a **gendered** manner:  
Reviewers refer to own gender stereotypes and gender roles: *“Women fight less, are less confident, oversell less ...”*
  - => **More gender awareness needed (funders, reviewers)**
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### (3) (Gender) Bias in grant awarding process

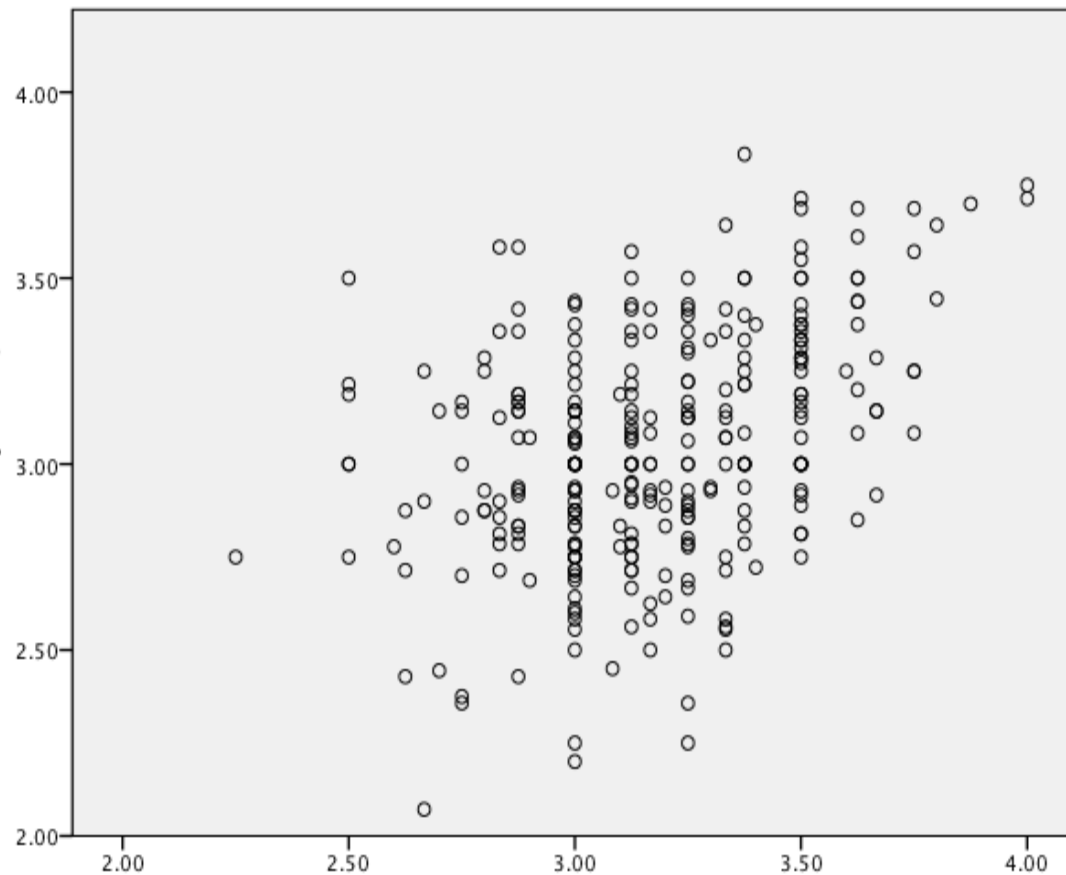
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- Assessment criteria are **not applied systematically**
- Assessment criteria/indicators are **applied differently to female and male applicants**
  - Masculine criteria are assumed as ‚naturally given‘ and **dropped for men**: independent, mobile = **double standards for male and female applicants**
  - Male behavior is the norm: “*Soon she [sic!] will also learn to oversell...*”

=> **Better decision making process needed!**

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# Illustration of unsystematic use : scores for research project step 2 by step 1



## (4) Gender bias due to panel composition

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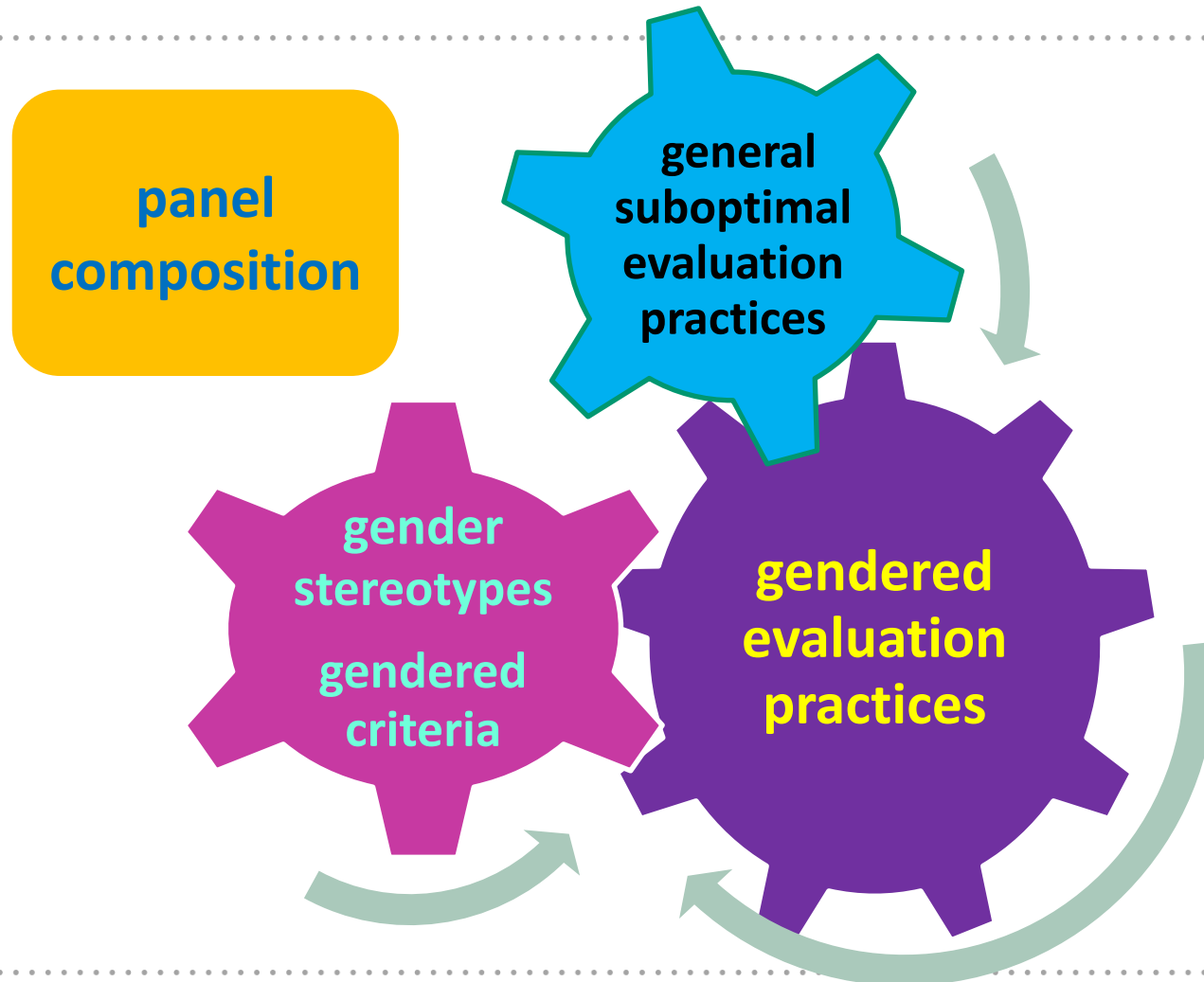
Gender bias may be due to composition of decision making bodies (review panels):

- **The higher the share of female reviewers, the lower the share of female grantees.**
- Women share gender stereotypes and high pressure for loyalty in the panel.
- Gender awareness/ competence is not (necessarily) linked to sex of the reviewer!

**=> Gender competence is relevant, not sex of reviewer!**

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# Interacting levels for gender bias



## Applicants' concerns

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- Unclear what excellence means: how to prepare best?
  - Women face **double-bind**-challenge: when behaving/performing like men (= the norm) they are not assessed equally, but with double standards: overselling / being self-confident is not equally accepted for women: how to prepare best?  
*“men are confident, women are bossy” (female applicant)*
  - Perception: ERC looks for a type of researcher that is more often found among men: competing, selling, mobile
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# How applicants/universities can tackle bias

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Be aware that (the demonstration of) excellence is linked to processes in research teams and to support structures:

- Career development / empowerment
    - Who is first author?
    - How are members of a research team supported to become independent (“Independence needs to be negotiated”)?
  - Application process:
    - Who is encouraged to apply?
    - How is support organized? Seminars in Brussels difficult for applicants with care obligations...
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# Conclusions

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To guarantee that grants are awarded to the best/ most excellent researchers we need more ...

- more precise definition of excellence/ indicators, as they:
    - facilitate work of reviewers
    - enable applicants to prepare in the best way
  - more gender awareness among :
    - decision makers (ERC unconscious bias video)
    - professors/ university management: encourage women specifically, organise support
    - coaches: how do male/female applicants best present themselves?
- .....

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# Thank you!

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