



Who becomes a tenured professor, and why? Panel data evidence from German sociology, 1980–2013



Mark Lutter^{a,*}, Martin Schröder^{b,2}

^a Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Paulstr 3, 50676 Cologne, Germany

^b University of Marburg, Ketzlerbach 11, 35037 Marburg, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 May 2015

Received in revised form

17 November 2015

Accepted 28 January 2016

Keywords:

Academic careers

Tenure

Human capital

Social capital

Symbolic capital

Gender

ABSTRACT

Prior studies that try to explain who gets tenure and why remain inconclusive, especially on whether non-meritocratic factors influence who becomes a professor. Based on career and publication data of virtually all sociologists working in German sociology departments, we test how meritocratic factors (academic productivity) as well as non-meritocratic factors (ascription, symbolic and social capital) influence the chances of getting a permanent professorship in sociology. Our findings show that getting tenure in sociology is strongly related to scholarly output, as previous studies have shown. Improving on existing studies, however, we show specifically that each refereed journal article and each monograph increases a sociologist's chance for tenure by 10 to 15 percent, while other publications affect odds for tenure only marginally and in some cases even negatively. Regarding non-meritocratic factors, we show that network size, individual reputation, and gender matters. Women get their first permanent position as university professor with on average 23 to 44 percent fewer publications than men; all else being equal, they are about 1.4 times more likely to get tenure than men. The article generally contributes to a better understanding of the role of meritocratic and non-meritocratic factors in achieving scarce and highly competitive job positions in academia.

© 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Merton (1973: 272f) posits in his theory on “The Normative Structure of Science” that to “restrict scientific careers on grounds other than lack of competence is to prejudice the furtherance of knowledge.” He also claims, however, that such “[u]niversalism is deviously affirmed in theory and suppressed in practice.” We test whether and to what extent meritocratic and non-meritocratic factors influence the odds of getting a tenured¹ position in German sociology departments, using event history modeling on a unique

longitudinal career dataset of an almost complete population of sociologists in the German academic labor market.

In particular, we test four theoretical approaches, one meritocratic and three non-meritocratic ones. First, theories of human capital suggest that academics get a tenured position through academic performance, as reflected by a strong publication record. Second, theories of ascription highlight that academics may be advantaged or disadvantaged because of ascriptive characteristics, such as their gender. Third, theories of symbolic capital assume that reputation through membership in prestigious institutions, international research experience, or the accumulation of academic awards influences who gets tenure, regardless of academic productivity. Fourth, social capital approaches argue that the chances for tenure increase, again independently of mere productivity, with the number of personal network ties within the academic labor market.

Our study contributes to prior research in several ways. Existing studies mostly rely on surveys and cross-sectional data to explain success in the academic labor market. When studies use longitudinal information at all, they generate it through retrospective survey questions (Cruz-Castro and Sanz-Menéndez, 2010; Jungbauer-Gans and Gross, 2013; Möller, 2013; Plümper and Schimmelfennig, 2007), which are vulnerable to survey-related biases: response and non-response biases due to self-reporting and self-selection, social

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 2212767154.

E-mail addresses: lutter@mpifg.de (M. Lutter), martin.schroeder@uni-marburg.de (M. Schröder).

¹ Mark Lutter is head of the Research Group on the Transnational Diffusion of Innovation at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne.

² Martin Schröder is a junior professor of economic sociology and the sociology of work at the University of Marburg.

¹ We refer to the word “tenure” as a synonym for a permanent academic position as full or associate professor (W3 or W2, according to the German scheme). As we outline below, “tenure” in the German context does not result from an internal promotion out of a tenure-track position, because tenure-tracks are almost inexistent in German academia.

desirability, recall errors, and problems of endogeneity. Especially survivor bias might occur if studies focus solely on those who already pursued a successful academic career. While these studies offer interesting insights into the question of who gets tenure, it is uncertain whether their results remain valid when compared to nonresponsive longitudinal data.

Additionally, the findings of prior research are far from being clear in identifying the factors that actually determine success in academia. While there is consensus that meritocratic factors such as publication output are essential in becoming a professor (Sanz-Menéndez et al., 2013), results about the exact importance of non-meritocratic factors remain inconsistent (Musselin, 2010). As we outline below, most studies postulate effects of social and symbolic capital, but empirical results have been mixed. Gender effects remain contested largely because of possible survivorship biases. For these reasons, research urges that “future studies investigating academic careers have to select from PhD cohorts” (Jungbauer-Gans and Gross, 2013: 75) or even to follow careers from the earliest stages onwards until scholars have received tenure (Schubert and Engelage, 2011: 439, 453). Hence, it is still not clear whether and to what extent non-meritocratic factors determine career success in academia.

Our results show that getting tenure in sociology is indeed strongly correlated to scholarly output. Improving on previous research, however, we analyze what types of publications affect tenure and to what degree. We find that several non-meritocratic factors matter as well, such as network size and individual reputation. Transnational and institutional symbolic capital do not directly affect tenure. With regard to ascriptive characteristics, women have a 40 percent higher chance of being hired as a professor than their male colleagues, holding scholarly publications and all other factors constant.

Academia provides a unique possibility to study the role of meritocratic and non-meritocratic factors in career success, because a widely accepted measure of productivity exists in the form of publications (Hix, 2004: 296ff.; Long, 1978; Long et al., 1993; Merton, 1973: 270). We chose the field of sociology for two reasons. First, in terms of methodology and epistemology, sociology is located between the sciences and the humanities. Second, the percentage of women among graduates in sociology is relatively equal to the percentage of women in the overall population. Contrary to the natural sciences, where the percentage of women is far below that of the general population, and contrary to the humanities, where it tends to be higher, sociology is a representative case in this sense.

German academia is a particular instructive academic labor market to study, because it has no tenure-track system and offers few permanent jobs below a full professorship, contrary to U.S., British or French academia. This means every postdoc either has to become a tenured full professor or has to drop out of the system eventually—usually around the age of 40. Contrary to the United States, aspiring researchers applying for a permanent position are not evaluated internally by their colleagues, but apply for a position at a different university. In this sense, German academia is an external market at the level of hiring a professor. Even the 2002 amendment in Germany (5. *Novelle des Hochschulpakts*) did not change that, although it was meant to enhance career perspectives for junior faculty by introducing the “junior professor” and relaxing the requirement of the previously mandatory habilitation thesis to get a tenured professorship.²

² The German junior professor is equivalent to the US assistant professor, but rarely equipped with a tenure track option and strictly limited to six years. The habilitation thesis is comparable to a second Ph.D. dissertation, and used to be mandatory to apply for a permanent professorship.

Another feature of the German system is that gender equality policies exist since the 1980s, but their actual effect is contested. While these policies work at several levels, such as having equal opportunity commissioners in hiring committees, state-funded career resources solely for women, or nationwide voluntary commitments by the universities to increase the number of women among professors, one would expect increasing chances for women in German academia. However, scholars argue that these policies have remained mere lip service, and have not removed symbolic or structural discrimination (Althaber et al., 2011; Gross and Jungbauer-Gans, 2007: 465f.; Matthies and Zimmermann, 2010: 197ff.).

2. Theory: what explains who gets tenure?

The null hypothesis in merit-based societies is that applicants displaying the highest achievement are to be rewarded with the most desirable positions (Davis and Moore, 1944: 243; Durkheim, 1893: 121). Displays of human capital should, therefore, indicate who gets a highly desirable job (Becker, 1960: 347ff.; Becker, 1964: 7ff.). In the tradition of Merton's (1973: 270) popular dictum that “the institutional goal of science is the extension of certified knowledge,” it is widely accepted that human capital in the field of academia is best measured in terms of output, notably by scholarly publications, especially when these have passed a double-blind peer review process (Gerhards, 2002: 19f.; Hix, 2004: 296ff.; Jungbauer-Gans and Gross, 2013: 84; Long et al., 1993: 703; Münch, 2006: 473).

That publication output does indeed matter for getting tenure is an established finding. Studies of the German academic labor market show that publications increase the odds of being hired as a professor in political science (Plümper and Schimmelfennig, 2007: 115), sociology (Jungbauer-Gans and Gross, 2013: 85), and economics (Heining et al., 2007: 23). In addition, studies on the U.S. academic labor market show that department chairs later deem their colleagues more competent and regret prior recruitment decisions less frequently when tenure was granted based on publications in prestigious journals (Rothgeb, 2014: 185). However, previous studies mostly measure the absolute number of publications, neglecting that different types of publications may have different impacts. Double-blind peer-reviewed journal articles should especially be counted as merit-based, because the identity and thus possible ascriptive, social, or symbolic criteria of the author are unknown, by definition.

This leads to the second explanation of tenure success, namely discrimination grounded in ascriptive characteristics. Hiring committees may base their decisions on a “taste for discrimination” (Becker, 1971 [1957]: 14; Becker, 1993: 387), meaning that they are willing to prefer less-qualified candidates over those from less advantaged or less legitimate social groups, such as women or ethnic minorities (Burt, 1998; Lin, 2001). A “taste for discrimination” might result from a masculine symbolic order (Fotaki, 2013) within the primarily male-dominated academic system, which leads to disadvantages for women. Hiring committees may practice what Phelps (1972b) calls “statistical discrimination,” whereby they infer someone's productivity by his or her membership to ascribed characteristics such as race or sex, instead of estimating productivity through the actual individual attributes of a candidate (Arrow, 1972: 96; Phelps, 1972a: 25f.; Phelps, 1972b: 659).

Empirical studies indicate that the share of women in academia diminishes with successive career stages (Long et al., 1993: 704; Rosenfeld, 1981). Studies describe this as a “cooling out” or “leaky pipeline” effect (Krais, 2002; Leemann et al., 2010; Wolfinger et al., 2009), which may result from “allocative” discrimination (Petersen

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10482846>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10482846>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)