How to improve the research cultural environment

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Final remarks and implications for interview design

The complexity of gender-relevant issues that contribute to the current situation of the women being persistently under-represented in physics is astounding. For one, the many facets of gender bias operate on very different levels: some are relevant for all women in the labour market (e.g. hiring discrimination, after-hours networking of men, motherhood penalty), some pertain to all those pursuing careers in academia (e.g. within notions around excessive working hours, perceived flexibility which nevertheless comes at a price), others are specific to the masculinist culture observed in STEM (e.g. competiveness, stereotypes), and few elusive aspects are physics-specific. Moreover, the discrepancies between findings from different countries or regions, as well as those employing divergent methodologies (e.g. qualitative versus quantitative projects) continue to impede a possibility to serve a guideline that “fits all”. Instead, this report argues for targeted, specific, and contextual approaches and interventions.

Research pertaining to women in STEM is usually highly specific in terms of solutions that are seen as relatively easy to implement and wide-spread. However, the main challenge remains that the studies examine predominantly the pathways of those who persevered in the face of adverse conditions in science and physics. It is rare for the studies to incorporate a longer **biographic-perspective**, so that the question of temporality is commonly restricted to a single phase of a female physicist's life, rather than taking into account that the family demands may emerge or become altered. Frequently, the deployed mechanisms allow for a short-term and ad-hoc compensation for the “baby penalty” as tenure clocks are stopped, retooling after breaks are possible, and early-to-mid career research grant schemes extend the available leeway for incorporating family leaves. Conversely, the patterns of childlessness among top-academics, as well as high-prevalence of underrepresentation of women in the leadership positions, are rarely seen as a direct consequence of a policy and support mechanism failures at the earlier points in women's professional lives. In addition, while the mechanisms for promoting equality are in general conducive to women's perseverance, they are rarely capable of altering the more intangible problems of a “chilly climate” and masculinist culture. In such setting, discrimination is legitimized, resentment common, and traditional values of the established societal and institutional divides upheld. In turn, this culture becomes increasingly hostile and exclusionary towards all parents - men and women alike. In that sense, one paramount finding is to **include men** in research on gender in physics, especially since practices of co-hiring spouses and encouraging paternal leaves can alleviate not only the meso-level challenges for families, but, potentially, transform the overall perception of what it means to have a family as a scientist. It is also apparent that the concern with women being so few overshadows the heterogeneity among women, who may favour different solutions. In that sense, it reiterates the need to promote tailored and “choose-your-way” *work-redesign model* schemes that women can take advantage of at different times and in accordance to their lifestyle preferences. Finally, all of the best solutions cannot be beneficial if awareness of **management** is low, and the attitudes hostile. Thus, the change in this realm is a prerequisite for a functioning gender-sensitive work environment.

There is a broader need to break-down the different strategies that need to be used for attracting

women and girls to science, versus supporting those already on the science path, versus ensuring sense of inclusivity that makes women “be themselves” and “feel at home” in the currently masculine environments. Across these groups, there is a clear evidence for the importance of **networking,** both in the work done by women's networks, and individuals' membership in them. This translates into mentoring, which again is cross-cutting the life-course biographic perspective.

In sum, the advancements and further research need to be two-track in improving the current conditions in the given culturally and contextually specific partner organization, and, incorporate a long-view perspective to draw inferences about broader social changes around gender in physics.

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