



**FEMALE ACADEMICS IN FRANCE AND THE GLASS
CEILING
'ORGANIZED SCARCITY'?**

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ABSTRACT

The place of women in the French academic world is often analyzed through the aspects of their place in research or the evolution of women's careers in universities and centers for research.

In this article, we propose to consider aspects which have been overlooked by researchers, in particular their place in governing bodies of French universities: Administrative Council, the Council for Research (Conseil Scientifique), the Council of Studies and University Life (Conseil de la formation et de la vie universitaire) and the National University Councils (Conseil national des Universités).

These councils have an important role in academic careers. For example, they deliberate about promotions, they decide on sabbatical leave for research, they establish schedules for courses, and they elect researchers to various posts or positions of responsibilities.

What our research shows is a very contrasted result:

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- the place of academic women remains deeply unbalanced in these councils at the places of governance in spite of the parity principles that were introduced by the law in 2013;
- women want to be invested in the places of the decision-makers when they have the opportunity to do that. They do not shy from them as it has been suggested in previous research;
- but when large numbers of them have the opportunity to secure these places, as in the National University Councils, they are relegated to administrative tasks rather than decisional and political ones.

Keywords: Female academics, Deliberative and Governing bodies, Gender disparities.

INTRODUCTION

The most recent statistical survey carried out in 2012 by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research (*Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*) has shown that the proportion of women working in French universities is slowly increasing, reaching 22.5% among professors (*professeurs*) and 42.4% among lecturers (*maîtres de conférences*).³ Such disparities can seem surprising, considering that the vast majority of Master's students (59.6%) are women. But the curve drops among doctoral students (48% women, 52% men) and again among PhD holders (44% women). France therefore remains below the average of OECD countries. The small number of female professors is particularly surprising, as well as the number of female university presidents (8 women, 72 men).

Moved by these disparities, the French Ministry of Higher Education states that if current rates of change remain constant, parity will not be reached before 2068 for professors, and 2027 for lecturers.

On the basis of these observations, we began to investigate the proportion of women in deliberative bodies such as the Administrative Council (*Conseil d'Administration*), and in university-governing bodies such as the *présidence*, both of which represent academics and sometimes have an impact on their careers. Our investigation focuses on sex-related divisions in the positions assigned to women working in Higher Education: while French studies (Backouche, Godechot, Naudier, 2009; Latour, 2008; Marry, 2008; Musselin, 2006; Pigeyre,

³ In the 1980s, less than 10% of professors were women.

F., Sabatier, M., 2011, and many more) show that women are more involved in educational roles than in academic management and innovation, one can wonder what place they have in governing bodies. Is there a sexuation of the various commissions, as well as a symbolic assignment of positions and administrative responsibilities in French academia?

In 2012, the three councils – the Administrative Council, the Council for Research (*Conseil Scientifique*), and the Council of Studies and University Life (*Conseil des Etudes et de la Vie Universitaire*) – were not legally bound to comply with parity. Indeed, the representation of men and women was unbalanced, and in favor of men. This has led us to study governing bodies in French universities.

Since the introduction of the law imposing parity in university councils on 22 July 2013, there has been a series of new elections. As a consequence, it seems likely that governing bodies were impacted. We will therefore compare the data collected in 2012 with the situation in 2015.

However, university councils are not the only bodies to be assessing academics and deliberating on their careers. We also took into account gender-related inequalities in the National University Councils (*Conseils nationaux des universités*), which grants *qualification* (the right to apply for lectureship and professorship), allowances to supervise doctoral students, research allowances and sabbaticals.

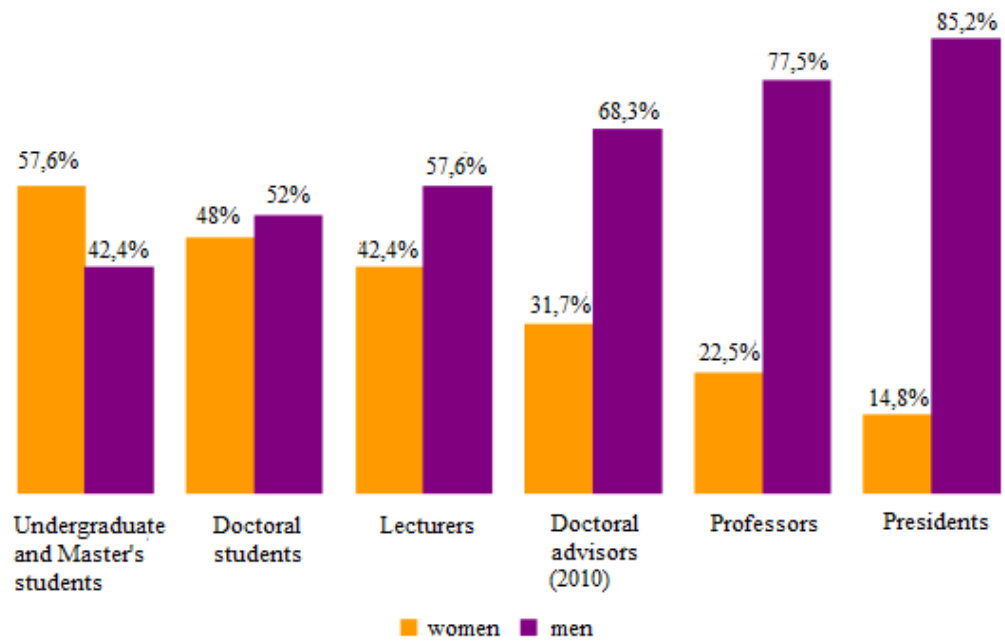
1. CONTEXTUAL DATA REGARDING THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN FRENCH ACADEMIA

French academia displays a strongly pyramidal structure. While a majority of undergraduate and Master's students are women, this proportion is inverted in doctoral studies, and the curve drops dramatically in professorship and presidency.

It should also be noted that the same sources show sex-related imbalances depending on the discipline studied. Women are clearly present in Arts, Humanities, Literature, Linguistics and Social Sciences, whereas they are a minority in fundamental sciences.

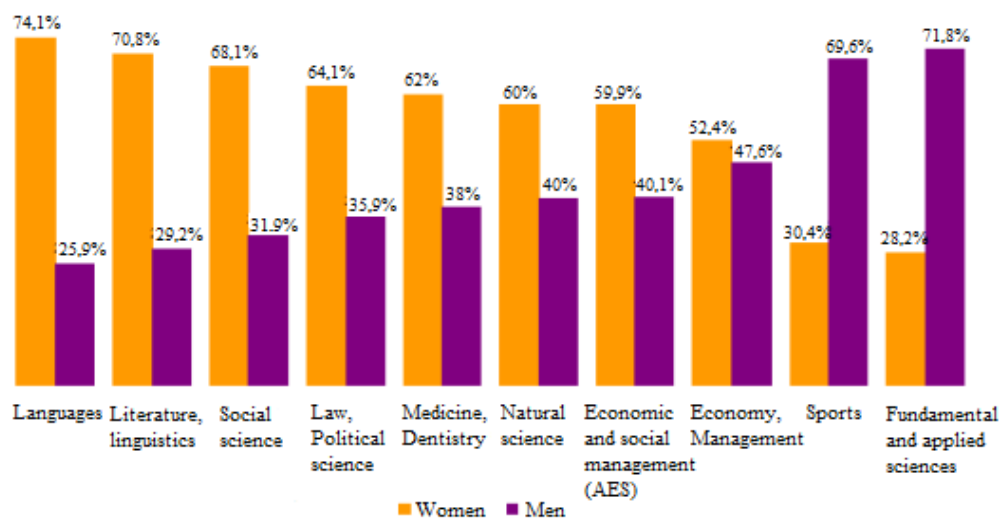
Women are a minority in the most selective courses, especially in sciences: they constitute only '27% of engineering students, despite a 5% increase in 13 years, and 29% of the students taking science courses in Preparatory Classes to enter Grandes Ecoles (*Classes préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles*)', ('27% des effectifs des formations d'ingénieurs, malgré une augmentation de 5% en 13 ans, 29% des étudiants de CPGE [*classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles*] en filière scientifique', Auduc, 2014, p.17).

Proportion of Men and Women in Universities (2011)



Sources: MESR DGESIP-DGRI SIES, SISE; MESR DGRH, GESUP; CPU

Subject-based Gender Disparities in University Students



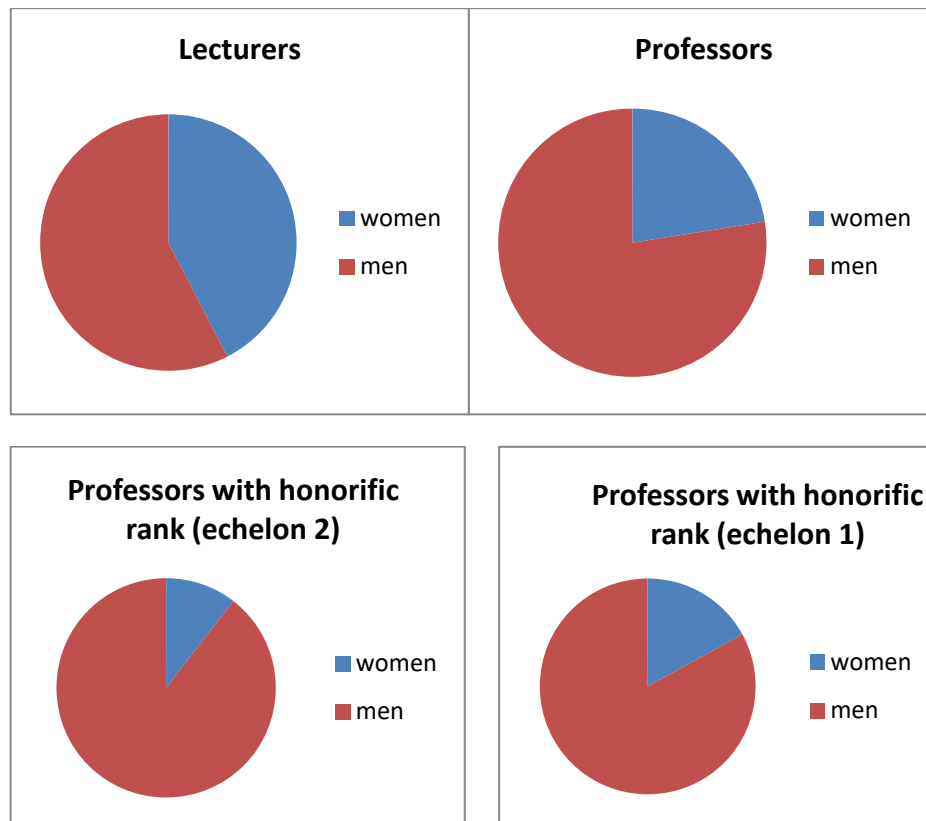
Source: MESR DGESIP-DGRI SIES, SISE

The sexuation of courses has consequences on the distribution of degrees: in 2012, 28,5% of the students who graduated in engineering were women.

Moreover, the majority of the highest academic degrees are held by men. Only 44.3% of the French ‘young doctors’ (holding a doctoral degree but not a lectureship) are women, and the gap is even wider among the researchers holding a qualification entitling them to supervise doctoral students (*habilitation à diriger des recherches*): only one third of them are women. And this qualification is an indispensable prerequisite for qualifying as a professor.

Hence, while women constitute a vast majority of the teaching staff in the French National Education system, especially in primary schools, they remain a minority in Higher Education, representing only 37.6% of the permanent staff (including all tenured employees, but excluding temporary contract holders).

On average, women are promoted to the rank of professor after 14 years of experience as a lecturer, while men are promoted to the same rank after 11 years and four months of experience (Auduc, 2014, p.3). Similarly, the highest academic positions (honorific ranks, echelons 1 and 2, ‘*classe exceptionnelle 1 et 2*’) show a great gap between men and women.



Sources: data collected in 2013 by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research; VRS, 2014.

The scarcity of women in the highest academic positions is quite obvious: only 10.5% of the professors granted with the highest honorific rank (echelon 2) are women:

	Lecturers	Professors	Professors with honorific rank (echelon 1)	Professor with honorific rank (echelon 2)
Men	57.6%	77.5%	83%	89.5%
Women	42.4%	22.5%	17%	10.5%

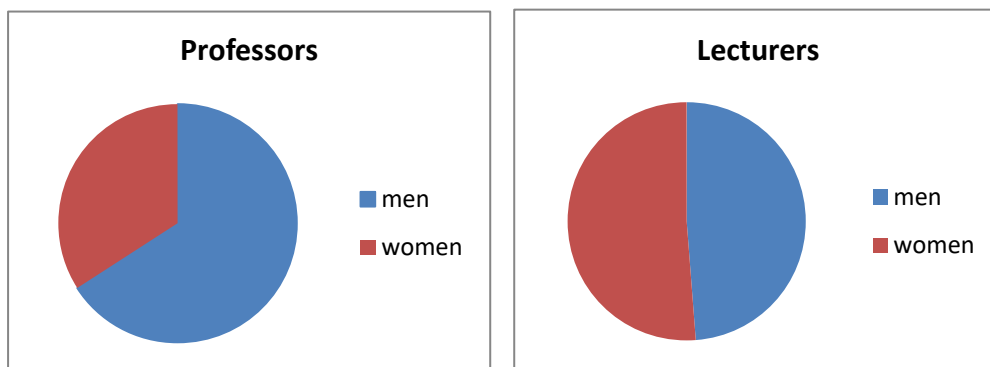
2. DELIBERATIVE AND GOVERNING BODIES IN FRENCH UNIVERSITIES (2012-2015)

Deliberative and Governing bodies in French universities in 2012

Administrative Councils

In 2012, we based our study on the total number of French universities, of which there are 73. This ensured that a wide range of disciplines would be taken into account. Considering that some fields of studies have been historically dominated by men or women, this choice was essential to our study. In each university, the Administrative Council elects the president of the university as well as the vice-president heading the Administrative Council. Its sphere of influence was broadened by the LRU law passed in 2007. As the only deliberative body, it decides on all budgetary questions and ratifies all decisions regarding careers in academia.

Figure 1: Proportion of academics with teaching and research duties (*enseignants chercheurs*) in Administrative Councils in 2012



In 2012, Administrative Councils showed that parity tended to be respected among lecturers but not among professors.

	Male professors	Female professors	Male lecturers	Female lecturers
%	65.88 %	34.12 %	48.79 %	51.21 %

University presidency and statutory vice-presidents

In 2012, only 10% of university presidents were women. This low percentage leads us to ask why women do not dare to run for the office as a chief candidate, and why their candidacies are rejected, or do not gather enough votes.

There are two kinds of vice-presidents assisting the president in a French university: statutory vice-presidents, elected for four years, and functional vice-presidents whose mandates can be renewed. The number and the activities of functional vice-presidents can vary, whereas statutory vice-presidency generally conforms to specific operating rules. Statutory vice-presidents are nominated by the president, and this choice is then subjected to the vote of the relevant councils and commissions. Each council therefore elects one vice-president once the president has nominated a candidate. Both lecturers and professors can be elected as vice-presidents.

Figure 3: Gender balance of the three governing university bodies in 2012

	Vice-presidents of the Administrative Council	Vice-presidents of the Council for Research	Vice-presidents of the Council of Studies and University Life
Men	83.33 %	68.75 %	66.66 %
Women	16.67 %	31.25 %	33.34

These statistics show a distinct imbalance. The Administrative Council, which is the only deliberative board, seems to be predominated by men. Yet most of the time, heading a council, and especially the Administrative Council, is seen as an experience required to be elected for president.

Deliberative and governing bodies in French universities in 2015

The law passed on parity in academia on 22 July 2013 expressly states that parity must be strictly respected in all councils and organizations of lecturers and professors when the total number of members is even. It also applies to the appointment of exterior members.

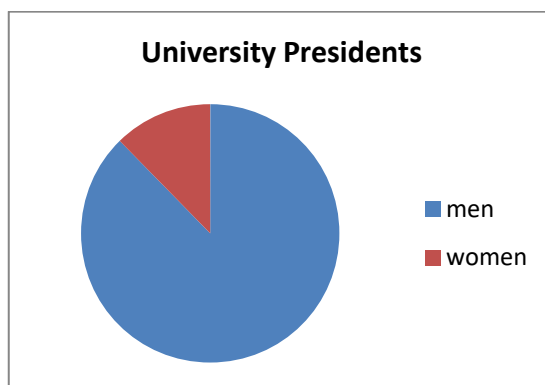
This law came into effect in 2015, and all councils now have an equal number of men and women. The Administrative Council is still in control of finances. The Council for Research is now called the Commission for Research (*Commission de la recherche*), and the Council for Studies and University Life is now called the Commission for Studies and University Life, (*Commission des études et de la vie universitaire*). The two commissions meet several times a year, thus forming the Academic Council. The law states that the members of the subcommission of the Academic Council decide on recruitments, careers and

allowances.⁴ The subcommission is also legally bound to include an equal proportion of men and women deciding on these matters, except when professorships are at stake.

In order to analyze the effects of this law, we examined all the universities listed on the official website *gouv.fr*, that is to say 73 universities, focusing on the heads of the statutory bodies – Presidents, Vice-Presidents of the Administrative Council, Vice-Presidents of the Commission for Research, Vice-Presidents of the University Life Commission.

University presidency

In each university, the Administrative Council elects a university president. As a deliberative body, it also makes all budgetary decisions. Despite the fact that Administrative Councils now respect equality between men and women among professors and lecturers, the results of our study show a pronounced gap: out of 73 presidents, 64 are men (87.7%) and 9 are women (12.3%).



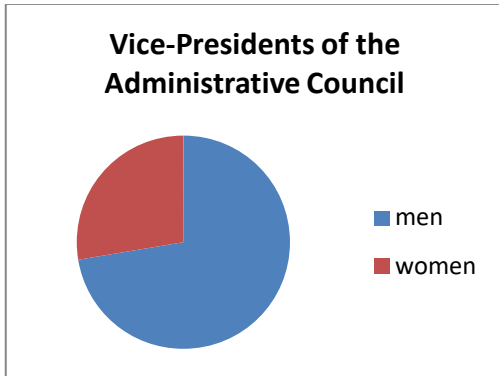
Only 12% of university presidents are women - an extremely low statistic. Again, this raises questions about the reasons why women do not run for this office as a chief candidate, or why their candidacies are rejected or do not gather enough votes.

Vice-presidents heading the Administrative Council

In charts showing the organization of presidency, the vice-president at the head of the Administrative Council is often called ‘the first vice-president’. The vice-president of an Administrative Council is elected by the members of this Council. Candidates from different lists can run for the office. Usually, due to election laws favoring the president’s list, the Council elects the vice-president nominated by the president.

⁴ Article IV, law L 712-6-1

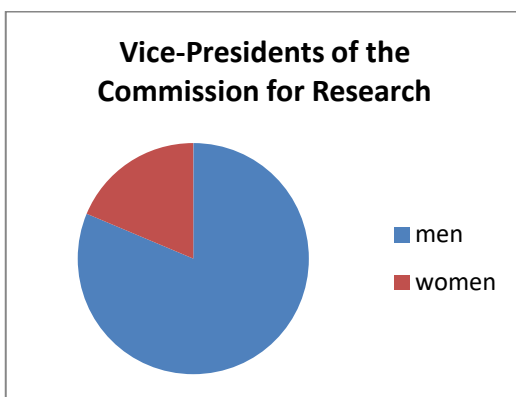
In 2015, the vice-presidents heading Administrative Councils number 55 men (72%) and 21 women (28%). The total number of vice-presidents is slightly higher than the number of universities (73), some universities having decided to elect two vice-presidents (without mentioning any hierarchy between them on their websites). This choice is not due to any policy promoting parity. Two men or, more rarely, two women, can be elected as vice-presidents of the Administrative Councils.



Vice-presidents heading the Commission for Research

The Commission for Research is an advisory body in charge of allocating funds for research, in accordance with the decisions taken by the Administrative Council. It is also in charge of all questions relating the organization, promotion and assessment of research and of doctoral training programs.

It elects its own president. There are 61 men (81.33%) and 14 women (18.67%) heading the Commissions for Research. As two universities decided to appoint two vice-presidents of equal status, the total number is, again, higher than the number of universities (73).

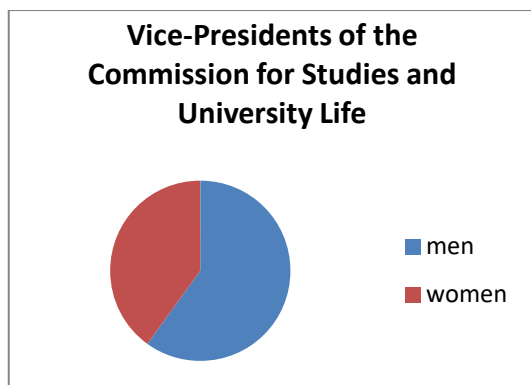


Vice-presidents heading the Commission for Studies and University Life

The Commission for Studies and University Life is an advisory organ in charge of allocating funds to the university programs and courses, in accordance

with the decisions made by the Administrative Council. It is in charge of all matters relating to the organization and the assessment of courses. It also takes measures to help students succeed and launch their careers.

In 2015, the gender gap is narrower in the Commissions for Studies and University Life than in the other Commissions: their vice-presidents count 45 men (60%) and 30 women (40%).



Since the law on parity was passed, the Commission for Research is the only council in which the proportion of women vice-presidents has decreased. Notably, with the new laws defining the roles and rules of each council, the power to decide on academic careers has been transferred to the Commission for Research and the subcommission of the Academic Council. This change means that the Administrative Council has lost part of its authority.

Gender balance of university vice-presidents in 2012, by %

	Presidents	Vice-presidents of the Administrative Council	Vice-presidents of the Commission for Research	Vice-presidents of the Commission for Studies and University Life
Men	90%	83.33 %	68.75 %	66.66 %
Women	10%	16.67 %	31.25 %	33.34 %

Gender balance of university vice-presidents in 2015, by %

	Presidents	Vice-presidents of the Administrative Council	Vice-presidents of the Commission for Research	Vice-presidents of the Commission for Studies and University Life
Men	87.67 %	72.36 %	81.33 %	60%
Women	12.33 %	27.64 %	18.66 %	40%

An efficient law to ensure parity?

The law on parity has had a limited effect on university presidency. There has been slight progress in the proportion of women holding presidencies or

heading Commissions for Studies and Administrative Councils. On the other hand, the Commission for Research records a decline. This data show that France is well under the European average.

Governing a university is not an easy task, especially when the financial situation is restrictive. Shouldering such responsibilities therefore appears as a challenge requiring experience. As men have been entrusted with high-level responsibilities, it seems natural to elect them as presidents.

It should be noted that the law on parity in universities was not always approved of: the French Organization of University Presidents (*Conférence des présidents d'université*) brought the law voted on 22 July 2013 before the Council of State (*Conseil d'Etat*). The latter referred the case to the Constitutional Council (*Conseil constitutionnel*), which should deliberate by the end of April 2015. The Organization of University Presidents particularly objects to the parity law imposed upon the subcommission of the Academic Council (composed of academics who are members of the Commission for Research and of the Commission for University Life). This subcommission, let us recall, decides on the career development of academics. The executive board of the Organization of University Presidents has 17 members, two of whom are women. Should we suspect a cause and effect relationship?

3. FEMALE ACADEMICS AND THE GLASS CEILING: PERSPECTIVES FROM FRENCH SOCIOLOGY

Since the Roudy Law (1983), several laws have been passed in France in order to improve parity, in companies as well as in public service. Noticeably, the laws called 'Genisson' (2001), 'Copé-Zimmermann' (2011), and 'Sauvadet' (2012) testify to the legislative effort to help women access the highest offices.

The recent 'charter for equality' was signed in January 2013 by the French Minister of Research and Higher Education, Geneviève Fioraso, the Minister of Women's Rights, Najat Valaud-Belkacem, and three hundred higher education institutions (universities, schools, research centers). It calls, amongst other things, for the materialization, publishing and debating of annual sex-related statistics, and asks to 'favor the proportional representation of women and men in all forums and councils, at all levels and in all categories, so that parity may be reached'. It also insists that 'maternity [or family situations such as single parenthood] should not affect careers' and that 'the consequences of maternity should be taken into account when assessing the careers of women academics'. The Ministry of Research and Higher Education also proposed an action plan

supporting equality between women and men,⁵ with about forty ‘tangible steps’ (*actions concrètes*) to be taken.

As noticed before, equality between women and men is far from being a reality regarding strategic positions in universities or academic careers and professorships. The contrast between the near parity among lecturers and the imbalance among professors, as well as the small proportion of women heading councils, not to mention the extremely low percentage of women among university presidents, all seem to indicate quite clearly what has been referred to as the ‘glass-ceiling’. This concept, inherited from gender studies developed in Anglophone countries in the 1960s, was further developed in France, especially by Jacqueline Laufer (Laufer, Fouquet, 1997), who defines it as ‘the variety of visible and invisible obstacles preventing women from reaching the top of professional and organizational hierarchies’ (*l’ensemble des obstacles visibles et invisibles qui séparent les femmes du sommet des hiérarchies professionnelles et organisationnelles*, Laufer, 2005, 31). Catherine Marry’s research on the glass ceiling in academia led her to call it ‘the leaden sky’ (*ciel de plomb*), for it is ‘not so transparent but heavy indeed’ (*moins transparent mais tout aussi pesant*, Marry, 2008, 47).

Analyzing this phenomenon, Jacqueline Laufer links it with the structure of power relations, and she goes as far as to speak of an ‘organized scarcity’ limiting the proportion of women in positions of power (*organiser la rareté*, Laufer, 2001, 244). She notes that ‘power structures are places associated with meritocratic recognition for women who reach high positions through experience and learning; at the same time, they also are places where power relations and informal relations are structured and based on discriminating terms that determine access to power’ (*En même temps que les organisations constituent des lieux de reconnaissance méritocratique où des femmes de mieux en mieux formées accèdent en nombre croissant à des professions supérieures, elles sont aussi des lieux où se structurent les relations de pouvoir et les processus informels, souvent inégalitaires, qui déterminent l’accès aux postes de pouvoir*, Laufer, 2004, p. 119). As regards women academics, an obvious paradox reveals itself, drawing a stark contrast between a (formal) recognition of women in academic institutions, and the reality of the (informal) obstacles that prevent them from reaching positions of power in these institutions.

Several factors explaining the glass ceiling have been identified in French academia. Some of them are endogenous to research and higher education institutions, while others are exogenous factors originating in social gender constructs.

⁵http://cache.media.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/file/Charte_egalite_femmes_hommes/90/4/plan_action_couv_239904.pdf

Endogenous factors explaining the glass ceiling in higher education

French sociologists working on women academics and the glass ceiling show that the main endogenous factor is 'men's organizational power' (*'pouvoir organisationnel masculin'*, Laufer, 2005). Informing all organizations, it brings about discriminations that are indirect more often than direct. For instance, this is the case:

- in commissions of experts who decide on careers and recruiting (Marry 2008 ; Pigeyre, Sabatier, 2011), where men are in a majority;
- in the awarding of high academic titles, a process influenced by male-dominated networks: 'Integrating networks, especially those where you can be spotted and short-listed for recruitment as a professor, can also be hard for women when their involvement in these networks is hardly compatible with other obligations, or when they have to face various forms of masculine cooptation that reinforce gender stereotypes' (*'L'insertion dans des réseaux et en particulier dans ceux qui permettent d'être repéré et d'être sollicité pour un recrutement sur un poste de professeur, peut aussi constituer un handicap pour les femmes si leur participation à ces réseaux impliquent des comportements peu compatibles avec leurs autres obligations, ou bien si elle se heurte à des formes de cooptation masculine ou à l'activation par les hommes (majoritaires dans les réseaux) de stéréotypes de genre'* Rapport INRA/MENRT, 2006 mais aussi souligné dans Marry, 2008 ; Pigeyre Sabatier, 2011)

Regarding academic research, these networks are characterized by the so-called 'Matilda effect', in reference to the sociologist Robert K. Merton's and his 'Mathew effect': 'the more you publish, the more you are likely to be cited, solicited for work and renowned as an "outstanding academic"'. For women, it works the other way round. The feminist historian of sciences, Margaret Rossiter, ironically calls it "the Matilda effect", in reference to another part of the Biblical verse: (...) Lacking support, women are sometimes deprived of their contribution to the collective process of research, as their name is erased from the published works' (*'plus on publie, plus on est cité, sollicité et réputé "brillant". Pour les femmes, c'est souvent l'effet inverse qui joue. L'historienne féministe des sciences, Margaret Rossiter le qualifie de façon ironique "d'effet Matilda" en référence à une autre partie du verset de la Bible : (...) Moins soutenues dans leur carrière, elles sont parfois spoliées de leur apport au processus collectif de recherche, par la mise à l'écart de la signature des publications,'* Marry, 2008).

When female academics take into account the importance of these networks, they develop strategies to avoid competition and conflicts of interest. Indeed, Sophie Lhenry remarks that 'it has been observed that women academics

have a tendency to dedicate themselves to fields considered as marginal, or to undesirable administrative responsibilities, thus shunning away from competition with men' (*Ainsi, nous avons pu constater qu'une partie des femmes EC vont s'investir dans des domaines jugés comme marginaux ou dans des responsabilités administratives peu prisées, ce qui leur permettra de se soustraire à la compétition masculine*', Lhenry, 2012, p. 25). However, shouldering such undervalued administrative tasks does not encourage a respect for their work equal to that enjoyed by their masculine colleagues.

A second endogenous factor can be found in the difference between the career strategies of men and women. A study of women's careers in history, biology and management (INRA/MENRT report, 2006) shows that two academic profiles can be distinguished. The masculine profile is said to be based on academic supervision and management (*'scientifico-managérial'*), and the other profile, associated with women, is qualified as 'traditionally academic' or 'professional'. The former involves experience in academic supervision, which is required to obtain the qualification to supervise students and to become a professor, while the latter is characterized by 'a great investment in research, and a high rate of production, but less managerial activities.' The authors of the report note that women who try to conform to the first profile are penalized.

This sexuation of strategies can be explained, first of all, by the fact that women attend to domestic work. 'The imbalance in the responsibility for domestic or family commitments is a real obstacle to periods of residence abroad and to the participation in international projects requiring extensive travel, as well as to team leadership, regularity of publication, and availability to prepare courses and exercises for competitive exams, etc.' (*Le déséquilibre dans la prise en charge des contraintes domestiques ou familiales rend ainsi objectivement plus difficiles les séjours à l'étranger, la participation à des projets internationaux nécessitant de nombreux déplacements, l'encadrement d'équipes, la continuité dans le rythme de publication, la présence à des exercices de préparation à l'agrégation, etc.*' INRA/MENRT report, 2006). Age matters as well, for the age at which male academics take on supervising responsibilities coincides with motherhood for women. On this point, studies show that the age criterion – an 'objective' criterion – is taken into account when supervisors or professors are recruited: 'once you have turned fifty, you are 'an old researcher' – especially if you are a woman – who has proved to be worthy but no longer deserves to be promoted' (Marry, 2008).

A third endogenous factor can be correlated to the denial of discrimination which is salient in academia. Sophie Lhenry and other sociologists stress the fact that academia claims to be 'neutral'. This neutrality is based on the idea that academic excellence (Cret, Musselin, 2012) is the only path to nomination and promotion, regardless of the candidate's sex. But the association of women with

three imaginary types (the mother, the courtesan and the old spinster, Cacouault, 2001), which discredits women in their professional environments, regularly influences work relations, forbidding the acknowledgement of the so-called 'excellence'. This is particularly the case with parenthood: even though a majority of mothers do not consider motherhood as an obstacle in their career, it is seen by others as an impediment for female academics, whereas the question is considered as irrelevant regarding men.

The recognition of professional experience, biased by this denial of discrimination and discriminating mindsets, is based on several masculine norms of academic success. Analyzing about twenty interviews with female university presidents, female vice-presidents, women elected as members of the main councils and women heading university departments (*unités de formation et de recherche*), Sophie Lhenry highlights the fact that women are assessed in a very descriptive way (being 'more thisish' or 'less thatish'), as opposed to men, who are not objects of comparisons but objects of straightforward statements (Lhenry, 2012). It seems that women, more than men, are literally submitted for debate in academia. Lhenry identifies three norms – authority, availability and ambition – which, according to her, are thought of as “‘naturally’ masculine’ (idem, p. 35). Having internalized these norms, the women she interviews situate themselves on a scale according to these norms.

One can therefore assume that there are two phenomena leading to 'the masking of inequities and the reproduction of gender stereotypes', (*[qui participent] à l'invisibilisation des inégalités et à la reproduction des stéréotypes de genre'*, idem, 44): the denial of masculine norms and their agency in order to maintain the illusion of a neutral 'excellence', and the obscuring of the social mechanisms that institutionalize 'excellence'.

Exogenous factors originating from gender socialization

These exogenous factors were detected long ago in gender studies focusing on the school orientations of boys and girls, or on the professional choices made by men and women. The sexual division of labor which has been observed – drawing divisions between academic management and educational roles, personal ambition and dedication to others, professional commitment and family commitments – falls in with broader social constructs proper to French society. The endogenous phenomena noted above come in addition to all of this.

The social norms internalized by women generate a form of self-censorship that makes them 'think that career advancement is not for them' (*'considérer que l'évolution de carrière n'est pas pour elle'*, Drucker-Godard *et alii*, 2013, 10). This phenomenon is manifest in the results of a questionnaire survey which was answered by 1,971 academics (men and women). This survey tackles the

question of career plateauing (which is to be distinguished from plateaus in learning or training, when professional workers consider they have reached the highest degree of knowledge and skills in a specific activity). The researchers therefore asked academics how they felt about their careers and positions, which showed not only that ‘there seems to be a link between gender and career plateauing’ (*[il] apparaît un lien entre le genre et le plafonnement structurel*’, idem), but also that ‘women find it particularly hard to evolve in universities and develop a career as an academic’ (*les femmes ont le sentiment d’une difficulté particulière à évoluer dans la carrière d’enseignant chercheur et à avoir une progression*’, ibidem). This has an impact on their professional involvement and satisfaction.

Such self-censorship ties in with the double symbolic and practical ban emphasized by Pascale Moliner (2003) and Catherine Marry: ‘The symbolic ban results from mindsets that still postulate that women are intellectually inferior to men (in learning Greek in the old days, and now in learning mathematics), mindsets that are perpetually reborn under ever more sophisticated forms (...) It is also a practical ban, for the commitments necessary to advance a career are often very demanding, and require long-term availability. To complete a work, one needs not only ‘a room of one’s own’, but also a complete detachment, both material and psychological, from household management’ (Marry, 2003).

4. CONCLUSION

A study of the composition of the deliberative and governing bodies in French universities reveals a gap between men and women that is intertwined with – and can even strengthen – the factors contributing to the glass ceiling effect.

In a context where, as Jacqueline Laufer remarks, organizational power is controlled by men, so are norms and networks. Seemingly objective criteria such as age or management responsibilities can be interpreted as androcentric, and they contribute to the obscuring of women’s academic progress, and hence to their exclusion.

Governing bodies are precisely the ones deciding on career development as well as on timetables (for instance, academic calendars sometimes differ from the secondary-school calendar). If parity is to be achieved in university voting systems, as required by the current French law, it will have to be supported by the highest echelons of academic power.

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