

University of Lausanne: are the criteria of excellence gendered?

A gender perspective on facilitations and stumbling blocks towards the academic career

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Presentation

A - The REUNIL project

B - Women and the criteria of excellence

A - The REUNIL PROJECT

« The renewing of the academic staff:
a PhD, what for? Articulation
between institutions and individual
paths. Research at the University of
Lausanne (UNIL) »

⇒ <http://www2.unil.ch/liege/gpesdetravail/ProjetReleveLsne.html>

⇒ reunil@unil.ch

The REUNIL PROJECT:

the origin

- Born in a working-group of the **LIEGE** (Inter-University network of Gender Studies)
=> <http://www2.unil.ch/liege/>
- Questioning issued out of the personal situation of 4 post doctoral women researchers (**reflexive analysis**) (O Schwartz, L Nader 1986)
- Questioning related to the most recent statistics of the UNIL about the access to the professoriate (**existence of a glass ceiling**)
- Theroric background: production of **situated knowledge, feminist epistemology** (S Harding 1986, D Haraway 1991)

The REUNIL PROJECT: the objectives

- Identify the **professional paths** of people liable to take over academically in the different faculties
- Analyse the **structural and individual factors** leading to the highest levels of an academic career
- Gather information on the **changes of professional projects**
- Formulate **recommandations** to
 - offer better conditions to people liable to take over academically
 - organize structures promoting the transitions
 - improve the access of women to the professoriate

The REUNIL PROJECT: the methodology

- A **case-study** at the UNIL
- Mixed methodology, qualitative and quantitative:
 - 1/ comprehensive **interviews** with the direction of the 7 faculties
 - 2/ **on-line questionnaire** to every PhD students and academic staff between 1990 and 2005
 - 3/ comprehensive **interviews** with 40 people out of this population

Interviews I: direction of the 7 faculties. Objectives

- To question the working and living conditions of the academic workers
- To explore the policy of the faculties regarding the access to the professoriate
- To explore the normative discourse and justifications regarding the access of women to the professoriate

Interviews I: direction of the 7 faculties. Population

- Audio and/or video recording
- Written accounts
- 7 faculties
- 14 respondents
- 7 men, 7 women
- 12 professors, 2 members of administrative staff

On-line questionnaire: content

- Open and closed questions
- Socio-demographic backgrounds
- Working and/or studying conditions
- Representation of the academic career
- Events (personal and professional) interfering with the pursuing of the academic career

On-line questionnaire: population

- Regular mail or/and e-mail
- every PhD students and every member of the academic staff of the UNIL between 1990 to 2005
 - PhD students and academic staff workers
 - From junior academics to professors
 - New comers and “leavers”
 - Female and male
- Answers: 1014

Interviews II: academic staff.

Objectives

- To explore the individual paths and shed light on every personal or professional event, choice or experience having influenced the academic career
- To develop specific topics
 - perception of the academic career
 - relevance and experience of the PhD
 - ideal career patterns

Interviews II: academic staff. Population

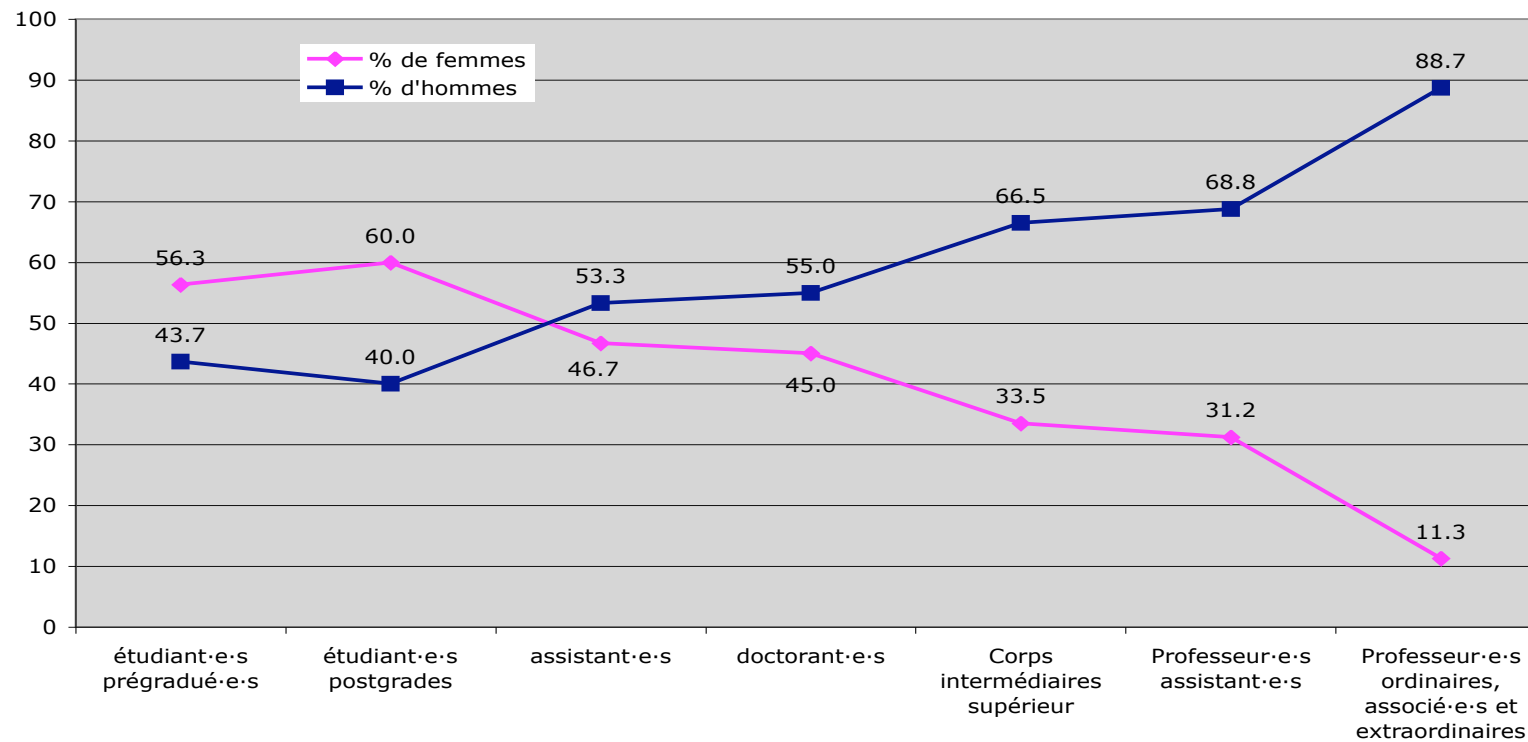
- Audio recording
- Written accounts
- 40 people
- PhD students and academic workers at the UNIL between 1990 to 2005

B - Women and the criteria of excellence

Is excellence gendered?

Proportion of women and men by function at the UNIL in 2005

Pourcentage de femmes et d'hommes à l'Unil en 2005



Criteria constructed on a specific model

- The reality creates the norms
- The reality = persistence of a majority of men in universities's management and professoriate
- Actual criteria presented as neutral
- Actual criteria of excellence constructed on the model of a man's career
- Mainstream thinking reproducing inequalities

Various levels of academic requirements

- 1 - **EXPLICIT** (expressed, job offers, assessment reports, discourse of the Direction)
- 2 - **IMPLICIT** (implied, discourse of the Direction, discourse of the academic staff)

Various levels of requirements:

EXPLICIT

1st level of discourse:

1 - RESEARCH/PUBLICATIONS

2 - TEACHING

3 - NETWORK

4 - MANAGEMENT SKILLS

2nd level of discourse:

1 - IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

2 - PRESENCE OF LUCK

Various levels of requirements:

IMPLICIT

AVAILABILITY

- Mobility
- Over-work
- Devotion

« (when working on her PhD) I have this traumatizing memory: one day, my elder daughter was at the day nursery and the little one was having a nap and I was writing my chapter on Aristote. I knew I had one hour, one hour and a half maybe, so I began working and... I remember the awful pain I felt when I heard my child beginning to cry in her cradle because it meant my work was over...and I was in the middle of an idea, I was really...It was horrible. »

(Woman, 1951, “leaver”, 2 children)

« (...) So I had to make a lot of efforts to go to these people [colleagues]. And effort means time, it means devoting one's time to meetings, which at first don't seem productive. And I didn't have this time. But now I see it: we have to spend time in insignificant meetings, where we feel we're wasting our time. And when someone has three children, among other things, it's unbearable. [...] In my situation, but I can't generalize...I think many women think that everything has to be immediately productive when someone has young kids and has a family to manage».

(Woman, 1960, 3 children, 'leaver')

Looseness of the criteria

Despite apparent neutrality and objectivity, possibility of **adapting** the criteria to the **particularity of a situation** and to every assessment procedure

TACIT criteria

(presupposed according to the explicit and implicit requirements)

BEING A MAN ?

Towards a renewing of the criteria of excellence

- Structural changes
- Promotion of alternative models of careers
- Promotions of alternative criteria of excellence and ways of doing science