

ESF/SCSS Exploratory Workshop:

“Identifying barriers and facilitators to women’s career prospects in Academia”

4-6 October 2001, Perugia, Italy

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

1) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The group “Women and power”, promoter of the workshop, is a group of social psychologists from five European Countries who have met regularly since 1998 at the Laboratoire Européen de Psychologie Sociale of the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme¹. The aim of the group is to tackle the issue of the relationship between women and power. The phenomenon of *glass ceiling* – a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from high-level positions - is well known today by both social scientists and women politicians. Over the last few years the situation has started to change in some fields, but the gender gap still remains. The aim of the workshop was to find new instruments and new ideas to speed up the road to equality. The specific topic of the meeting in Perugia was that of the University. The difference between men and women in the academic world in Europe is well documented. Even in those disciplines where they are in the majority, women remain confined to the lower levels of the career ladder and their career progress - if any - is considerably slower than that of men. There are various reasons for this situation. Among the factors that prevent women from planning a career in academia are the traditional gender roles and the stereotype judgements, according to which women are more often judged on the basis of stereotypes, rather than according to their abilities. In addition, there are factors linked to the specificity of this particular type of job (i.e. the difficulty to conciliate family roles with a job that requires time, attention and concentration). Furthermore, these traditional gender roles do not constitute merely an external factor, but they also become internalised by women themselves, and have an effect on their motivations and career aspirations. Moreover, women have difficulties in recognising their abilities and in valuing themselves, as they believe that to be presented as being very capable could decrease their femininity. Finally, women in academia manifest higher levels of stress than their male colleagues and have a tendency to be overloaded with teaching activities that, although important, are less valued than research.

The main objectives of the workshop were:

- to analyse the social and psychological aspects that hinder women’s careers in academia;
- to identify the factors that could facilitate this process, by emphasising the strategies that women academics use (or could use) to improve their work conditions.

The meeting intended to facilitate the dialogue between social scientists, institutional authorities and policy-makers from five European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

¹ The members of the group are: from France Marie Claude Hurtig and Marie France Pichevin from the CNRS, Annick Durand Delvigne and Sabine De Boescher from the University of Lille. From Germany, Lenelis Kruse and Sabine Koch from the University of Heidelberg, from Portugal Ligia Amancio from the Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabalho e da Impresa of Lisbon, from UK Glynis Breakwell from the University of Bath and Xenia Crysocrou from the University of Surrey, from Italy, Chiara Volpato from the Univ. of Trieste and Angelica Mucchi Faina (convener of the meeting), from the Univ. of Chieti.

The meeting consisted of three parts:

October 4: Work group meeting

The first day – attended only by the women researchers in the group – was dedicated to the work of the group which is in the process of putting the final touches to a research project concerning the theme of the workshop. Work concentrated in particular on the formulation of a hypothesis and the discussion of a questionnaire – the draft of which is already well under way – to be used for the investigation.

October 5: Workshop

The objectives of this part were to analyse the social and psychological aspects that hinder women's careers in academia and to identify factors that could facilitate this process by emphasising the strategies that women academics use (or could use) to improve their work conditions. The relationship between women and power, which is, without doubt, problematic, constitutes a crucial starting point from which to investigate the reasons for the discrepancy between male and female careers in academia. Indeed, a great deal of work on this issue has already been carried out both in Europe and in the United States. This phase of the meeting was dedicated to debating “women and power” on the basis of the research results to be presented.

A series of papers concerning current research on the theme of the meeting or connected with it were presented to the participants (approximately twenty), and then discussed. The following presented their research: Abele-Brehm, Cadinu and Maass, Stahlberg, Romito and Koch. In addition to those present on the preceding day together with the speakers, other participants at the meeting included representatives from the ESF (Prof. Einarsdottir) and the EU (Ms. Dewandre).

October 6: Conference: Barriers to women's career in Academia: a dialogue between social psychology and policy.

The meeting intended to facilitate the dialogue between social scientists, institutional authorities and policy-makers from five European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The conference was open to the general public and was attended by approximately eighty people, including women responsible for and representing equal opportunities, representatives from and user groups, university lecturers and researchers. People from other European countries, such as Spain and Switzerland, also took part in the meeting. In the morning, social psychologists and sociologists presented data, interpretations and proposals coming from research in their fields. In the afternoon, it was the turn of politicians and representatives of user group, who presented policies followed by the institutions in the various countries.

Co-ordinating group:

- Angelica Mucchi-Faina (convener), University of Chieti "G.D'Annunzio", Italy
- Ligia Amancio, ICTE, Lisbon, Portugal
- Xenia Chrysochoou, University of Surrey, UK
- Marie-Claude Hurtig, CNRS, Aix-en Provence, France
- Sabine Koch, University of Heidelberg, Germany
- Chiara Volpato, University of Trieste, Italy.

2) FINAL PROGRAMME (October 5 & 6)

October 5. (Dipartimento Istituzioni e Società DIS - Via Elce di Sotto)

Chair: Lenelis Kruse (University of Heidelberg).

Morning session

- 9.30 Andrea Abele-Brehm (University of Erlangen): “Gender gaps in the career development of university graduates. Why are women less successful than men?”.
- 10.15 Discussion
- 10.45 Coffee break.
- 11.00 Sabine Koch (University of Heidelberg): “Scepticism vs. openness towards women in positions of authority. An experimental approach”.
- 11.45 Discussion
- 12.15 Maria Rosaria Cadinu and Anne Maass (University of Padua): “Stereotype threat and affirmative action”.
- 13.00 Discussion
- 13.30 Buffet lunch

Afternoon session -

- 15.00 Dagmar Stahlberg and Sabine Sczesny (University of Mannheim): “Feminine physical appearance – a stumbling block on the way to leadership?”
- 15.45 Discussion
- 16.15 Patrizia Romito (University of Trieste): “What can she know?”- Women, access to knowledge and the Academia.”
- 17.15 Discussion
- 17.45 General discussion

October 6. Conference (Sala della Biblioteca, Palazzo della Penna, Via Podiani, 11)

- 9.30 A word of welcome from the European Science Foundation, Department of Institutions and Society of the University of Perugia, Centre for Equal Opportunities of the Region of Umbria.

Morning session

Barriers to women’s careers in Academia: A dialogue between social psychology and policy

Chair: Angelica Mucchi-Faina (Convener, University of Chieti)

How can the barriers in women’s academic careers be overcome? Research findings

- 10.00 Presentation of the group “Women and power” and introduction to the group’s papers.

- 10.15 “Women in the Academic field: some data from five European countries” (presented by Ligia Amancio, ISCTE).
- 10.30 Discussion
- 10.40 “The psycho-social barriers. I: Explicit and implicit forms of discrimination”(presented by Lenelis Kruse, University of Heidelberg).
- 10.55 Discussion
- 11.05 Coffee break
- 11.20 “The psycho-social barriers. II. Impact on career aspiration and effects on Identity. Women academics coping with strategies” (presented by Glynis Breakwell, University of Bath)
- 11.35 Discussion
- 11.45 Interventions and general debate
- 13.00 Buffet lunch

Afternoon Session

Chair: Nicole Dewandre (European Commission).

How can the barriers in women’s academic careers be overcome? Directions of public policy

- 14.45 Intervention by Brigitte Mühlenbruch (Centre of Excellence Women in Science, University of Bonn, Germany).
- 15.00 Intervention by Pia Locatelli (Commission for Equal Opportunities, Italy).
- 15.15 Intervention by Teresa Patricio (Vice-President of ICCTI, Portugal).
- 15.30 Intervention by Janet Finch, (Vice-Chancellor of Keele University, U.K).
- 15.45 Coffee break
- 16.00 Intervention by Nicole Dewandre (Acting Head of Women and Science Unit, European Commission).
- 16.15 Other interventions
- 17.00 General discussion and concluding remarks .

3) SCIENTIFIC CONTENTS

a) The social-psychological perspective.

A social, psychological approach is needed, in order to understand a) how women are coping with the difficulties linked to their insertion in prestigious careers and what strategies are used to cope with these difficulties, and b) the possible resistance to political ideas that aim at promoting the progression of women.

Among the obstacles that women face in their career advancement, sex discrimination was identified as a major factor explaining the gender gap in career (Farmer, 1997; Melamed, 1995). The literature indicates an interaction between factors linked to gender inter-group relations and the more general treatment of women on the job market, and factors linked to the perception women themselves have of their situation and their career prospects (Quina, Cotter and Romenesko, 1998; Valian, 1998). It was suggested, for example, that organisational and individual arrangements systematically reproduce gender distinctions (Spilerman and Petersen, 1999) and that organisational practices are responsible for the differences in career and advancement (Benschop and Dooreward, 1998).

Furthermore, the relationship between gender, self-concepts and perception of scientific others (Lee, 1998), as well as women's stereotype roles (Betz, 1997), are influencing women's motivations and career aspirations. Women in the scientific environment seem to be judged more by stereotypes than by their ability, and they are not given any support to establish successful scientific careers (Pattatucci, 1998). It was found that the more women attempted to cross non-traditional fields of work, the more they experienced discrimination (Tougas, et. al., 1999). If women want to survive and progress in this environment, they have to establish coping strategies in order to be accepted (Dryburgh, 1999). At that level, they also have to manage power-related positions. The relationship between women and power needs to be taken into account in order to understand the motivations and strategies women deploy in order to succeed in high status positions (Jenkins, 1994).

These factors have an impact on women's self-concept. Women report difficulties in retaining a feminine identity (Athanasiadou, 1997) and are afraid to be labelled as being too capable (She Hsiau Ching, 1998). They struggle between stereotype roles and modern stereotypes of "career women" that portray women as competent, but not feminine. However, research on the ambivalence of stereotypes has identified the equally damaging forms of paternalistic prejudice towards traditional women and of envious prejudice towards career women (Fiske, Xu and Cuddy, 1999). Furthermore, the fact that women are categorised in "traditional" and "non-traditional" stereotype roles was found to perpetuate prejudice, this time from women themselves (Vonk and Olde-Monninkhof, 1998). In the academic world, although women academics perceive the structure and content of their jobs similarly to men, they generally experience higher, overall levels of stress than their male colleagues (Doyle and Hind, 1998). In addition, women academics report fewer support systems with few mentors and role models and little access to communication networks (Wagner and Schmermund, 1999). These factors affect their perception of themselves as academics, and put pressure on them to perform better than their male colleagues (Bagilhole, 1993). This project, in line with the reported literature, intends to analyse the effect of self-concept, identification with gender stereotypes and roles, as well as the identification with the 'universal' values of science in the development of strategies for coping with discrimination.

Besides being a minority, academic women are part of an environment particularly embedded with prejudice. Studies on prejudice, focusing on the perspective of the target (Swim and Stangor, 1998), therefore, offer a useful framework for this project. In this perspective, research has explored the phenomenon of attributable ambiguity (Crocker and Major, 1994), the personal/group discriminatory discrepancy (Taylor, et al., 1994) and the relationship between personal and group discrimination (Ruggiero and Taylor, 1995, 1997). The difficulties of coping with the “psychological burden” of negative stereotypes of intellectual performance (Aronson, Quinn and Spencer, 1998; Major et. al., 1998), as well as academic and vocational choices (Stangor and Sechrist, 1998), have been emphasised. Although there is some well documented research on the individual and collective strategies developed by minority groups facing this kind of prejudice (Branscombe and Ellemers, 1998), the case of academic women has not received any particular attention so far. The hypothesis derived from previous studies would point to the prevalence of individual strategies, in order to avoid the threat to the self, that is caused by prejudice, but they need to be further investigated in particular contexts.

As regards prejudice, a second direction has been explored by studies that, parallel to those on modern racism, have illustrated the diffusion of neo-sexist attitudes in western societies (Glick and Fiske, 1996; Swim et.al., 1995; Tougas, et.al., 1999). These attitudes are reflected in the opposition to affirmative action strategies, that are carried out in order to promote the participation of women in the social and political scene (Maio and Esses, 1998). These attitudes have an enormous impact on the experiences of the targets of prejudice themselves (Truax et. al., 1998). These analyses draw upon theories of inter-group relations and processes of discrimination. However, in order to understand the processes involved in hindering women’s insertion in prestigious careers, it is important to integrate the findings and theoretical assumptions, taking into consideration identity issues, minority processes and the broader social representations concerning women.

b) Contents of the papers presented during the workshop

The participants presented the results of their specific research within this general theoretical perspective. Below is a brief summary of the main research contributions.

Andrea Abele-Brehm (University of Erlangen):

“Genders gaps in career development of university graduates. Why are women less successful than men ?”.

In a prospective, longitudinal study we have analysed the career development of more than 1,300 university graduates over a time interval of 5 years. The participants filled out questionnaires immediately after their exam, one-and-a-half years later and again two years later. Our theoretical background is a social-cognitive model of life planning with respect to career and private life. From the many data collected up to now the talk will focus on the determinants of successful career development five years after graduation in a gender-comparative perspective. It will also focus on the interrelationship of occupational and private development.

References:

Abele, A. (2000). Gender gaps in early career development of university graduates. *European Bulletin of Social Psychology*, 2000,12, pp.22-37.

Abele, A. (2000). A dual impact model of gender and career related processes. In T. Eckes & H.-M. Trautner (Eds.), *The developmental Social Psychology of Gender*. (pp. 361-388). NJ: Erlbaum.

Sabine Koch (University of Heidelberg):

“Scepticism vs. openness towards women in positions of authority. An experimental approach”.

In 1990 Butler & Geis were able to show that the affective reactions towards men and women in positions of authority differed markedly: women in positions of authority received more negative affect from both men and women. They demonstrated this in an experimental setting, where both male and female stooges – playing the role of responsible researchers – acted according to the same verbatim scripts. The two stooges dialogued with two participants, who were observed by two evaluators through a one-way mirror. Observers used the Facial Action Coding System (FACS, Eckman & Friesen, 1978) to code affective facial reactions.

Results suggested that women in positions of authority received more negative affective reactions, whereas the ratings of the “leader’s” competence did not reveal any differences on a cognitive measure (Likert-Scale), thus suggesting an automated process, not under conscious control (cf. Bargh, 1998). One shortcoming of the Butler and Geis study (1990) is that they did not provide sufficient control for potential differences in non-verbal behaviour display by the stooges.

In order to exclude the possibility that this is mere mimicry or a mirroring effect – reflecting only the empathic response of participants to stooges’ affective display – we replicated the experiment, trying to improve control of non-verbal expression of the “responsible researchers”. We decided to exclude all visual cues from the experimental conditions (cf. Rosenthal & DePaolo, 1979; Affect is mostly transported by means of the face, dominance mostly via the voice). Our experiment was masked as the debriefing for another experiment, in which participants had already met the “responsible researchers”. They were told that, due to standardisation requirements, they would receive the debriefing from an audio-tape and afterwards could pose any remaining questions to the “responsible researcher”. Participants in the *female leader condition* listened to the voice of the female leader (n=24), participants of the *male leader condition* to the voice of the male leader (n=24). The tapes had been recorded using a “standard voice” (rather analytical and not very expressive). The voices of the stooges had been rated beforehand by four research assistants according to several dimensions (e.g., sympathy, dominance, competence, etc.) and had to be re-taped twice before they were judged to be sufficiently similar.

Results suggest there to be no stereotype-conform differences of subjects’ competence ratings on 4-point Likert scales, in fact the male “responsible researcher” was rated less competent than the female “responsible researcher” (in any case, no male “gender-as-status” bias, as expected by the Expectation States Theory (Berger et al., 1974)/Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), occurred). Results of the observation showed that women received significantly more negative affect, while at the same time they were rated more competent. The study was thus a successful replication of the Butler & Geis 1990 experiment. The observational method was refined and at the same time economised.

Maria Rosaria Cadinu and Anne Maass (University of Padua):

“Stereotype threat and affirmative action”.

Recently, *stereotype threat* (Steele & Aronson, 1995) has been cited as one possible cause of the under-performance of women, as well as of other minority groups. According to this model, the activation of gender stereotypes (such as “women have low abilities in mathematics”) produces a performance deficit in stereotype-relevant domains. We will present empirical evidence suggesting that women perform poorly on a test measuring logical-mathematical abilities, whereas they perform very well on the same test, when they believe that social rather than mathematical abilities are being assessed. Our data suggest that stereotypes that associate women with poor performance tend to lower women's expectancy to do well on the task, and this in turn has detrimental effects on their actual performance. We will also present findings from a simulation study in which women and men were hired either on the basis of merit or on the basis of affirmative action rules. Although performance generally decreased under affirmative action rules, the deficit was particularly marked in those domains that associate women with poor performance (mathematical skills).

Based on these observations, we will argue that explicit, affirmative action rules may activate gender stereotypes which, in turn, may induce performance decrements, thereby feeding into a vicious cycle in which stereotypic expectancies are confirmed.

Dagmar Stahlberg and Sabine Sczesny (University of Mannheim):

“Feminine physical appearance – a stumbling block on the way to leadership?”

Previous research indicates that physical cues play an important role in person perception and can activate gender stereotypes (e.g., Deaux & Kite, 1993). Is this also true for the perception of leadership? The present research starts from the assumption that typically masculine physical characteristics – in terms of visual or olfactory cues - can act as non-verbal leadership cues. Independent of a person’s sex, a masculine physical characteristic should increase the perceived fit between the presumed characteristics of the person with the presumed leadership requirements, whereas typically feminine attributes should decrease the perceived fit. In six experiments participants were asked to evaluate a stimulus person. They either received descriptions, photographs or written applications of a stimulus person, or they had to conduct a face-to-face job interview with a stimulus person. These materials/situations were standardised, they varied only in terms of the sex of the stimulus person (female vs. male) and physical characteristics (e.g., photographs showing a typically masculine or a typically feminine looking person; application papers were prepared with a typically masculine perfume, a typically feminine perfume or no perfume at all in the control group). Dependent measures concerned leadership characteristics (e.g., ability to make decisions, dominance). The results show a consistent effect of physical characteristics in all experiments in the predicted direction: participants attributed more pronounced leadership qualities to stimulus persons with typically masculine physical characteristics than to those with typically feminine characteristics, regardless of the person's biological sex.

Patrizia Romito (University of Trieste):

“ ‘What can she know?’- Women, access to knowledge and the Academia.”

This presentation aims to show that the willingness to keep women outside the Academia has a long and tenacious tradition, and, from the perspective of the gate-keepers, is understandable and rational. In the first part, I am going to discuss three case histories, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, to show that, what may at first sight appear occasional and separate events, represent instead parts of the same strategy. Sexual harassment in Academia is also discussed in this light.

The discrimination of women within Academia share many aspects with the discrimination of women in other professions, but it also presents some peculiarities, namely the stubborn, vicious and sometimes surprisingly inventive attack on women's intellectual capacity and production. There is evidence that this animosity in the devaluation of women's intelligence and production still persists.

In the second part of the presentation, I shall propose a materialist explanation for the tenacity in trying to keep women out the Academia: accepting them on an equal basis would mean accepting the sharing of material and symbolic resources, previously monopolised by men. The authority to produce legitimate knowledge, moreover, may lead to a re-definition of priorities in the allocation of available resources.

To support this hypothesis, I shall present some examples of what women/feminist researchers produced in the last 30 years. It is my contention that much of this scientific production can be seen as an epistemological revolution, for, according to the categories developed by Gaston Bachelard, it represents a clean break with previous, less scientific and more biased forms of knowledge. In many instances, this knowledge led to a different, less unequal sharing of material resources, or to a limitation of traditional male power and privileges.

4) RESULTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The meeting only represented a preliminary step before starting a project on a European scale. The workshop focused on the following objectives, which will be continued in the future:

a) to advance existing theoretical and empirical knowledge and identify research questions: there have been a number of projects investigating the social psychological factors concerning minority members, inter-group relations identity and social representations in which attitudes, stereotypes, ideologies and identities evolve. However, not much has been done concerning the particular case of the promotion of women in the academic world from a social and psychological point of view. One of the objectives of the project will be to build on the theoretical and empirical knowledge already available, in order to identify the areas and research questions that are particularly pertinent in this situation.

b) to develop cross-nationally valid research instruments and indexes of horizontal and vertical segregation in academic careers: one of the aims of the project will be to develop a cross-national instrument, in order to investigate the obstacles that prevent women from pursuing, remaining and progressing in academic careers. Furthermore, it is important to agree on indexes of segregation that are meaningful cross-nationally, in order to sample the disciplines where women are over- and under-represented and those where promotion is achieved with difficulties. A particular effort will be made to devise research tools that integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches. This perspective will give the opportunity to study the phenomenon through quantitative indexes of attitudes and behaviours, as well as to provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences and the strategies of women in the academic world.

c) to exchange theoretical expertise and strengthen research links: the research group comprises both senior and junior women academics, who have worked extensively in the areas under investigation. Bringing them together is expected to promote theoretical exchanges and to lead to a modelling of the factors hindering women's careers in academia. Furthermore, the activities of the project will enable the development of collaborative research and will promote a network of women academics in Europe. In addition, the inclusion in the project of women academics at different levels of seniority is expected to strengthen the links between them and promote relationships of mentoring.

d) to communicate and exchange ideas with policy-makers: one of the aims of the project's activities is to promote the exchange between the ideas developed in the project and those of policy makers and user groups. In order to promote changes in the situation of women's career prospects in the academic world, it is essential to open a dialogue with those who are at the forefront of implementing them. This was also the aim of the third day of the workshop.

5) LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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