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Working in Higher Education in France Today:

A Specific Challenge for Women

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Abstract

By 2017, French higher education had undergone a dramatic restructuration following the Bologna process twenty years earlier which impact all the European universities (Rüegg, 2010), and the implementation of the French LRU in 2007 (Stavrou, 2017). Some studies examined this new model's effect on university academics through international or european comparative approaches (Musselin, 2008 ; Tiechler, Höhle, 2013). A decade after the French LRU, our particular focus concerns the activity of women with children like in others organizations (Bercot, 2014). The associate professors have to overcome in a very competitive context where the time management is a real challenge as the 3 coordinators at different levels in the faculty point it out. At first, an extensive survey (1409 returned questionnaires) shows that women are significantly more concern than men by these contraints. Then, in a qualitative approach, some 28 biographical interviews identify the different strategies women find.

Keywords: university, higher education, work, women, gender

1. Introduction

By 2017, French higher education had undergone a dramatic restructuration following the Bologna process (Note 1) twenty years earlier which impact all the European universities (Rüegg, 2010) and the implementation of the French LRU (Note 2) in 2007 (Stavrou, 2017). Some studies examined this new model's effect on university academics through international or european comparative approaches (Musselin, 2008; Tiechler, Höhle, 2013). A decade after the French LRU, our particular focus concerns the activity of women with children like in others organizations (Bercot, 2014). Along with pursuing such research with the passage of time, the post-LRU context furthermore calls for renewed study of gender inequality in higher education (to the extent that it is still discussed: Azizi, 2014), which it may be exacerbating (Note 3) (Connell, Fawcett, Meagher, 2009).

Analyses of academic women's working conditions combines the sociologies of gender and work (Maruani, 2006) to shed light on their challenges in coordinating work and private life (Méda, 2001) and the negative impact of this struggle on the time devoted to research activities, not to mention personal life. Particular attention is given to the mechanisms leading women to withdraw from research as a result of being called on for pedagogical oversight and student advising duties, tasks of "educational care" (Molinier, 2006; Monjo 2016) that are less prestigious and visible than research responsibilities (tasks of authority), which are more often assumed by men. We will first examine the activities of higher education in France by elaborating on the array of missions falling to French university-based academics. We will then describe the time that female faculty members spend on work versus non-work activities, given the non-negotiated work schedules, late meetings, pressure to ensure undesired overtime, temporal and mental load of being virtually connected at all times, time-consuming administrative tasks, accelerated pace of urgent issues to be dealt with in too little time, and geographical scattering of sites for the dissemination and exchange of knowledge. Our qualitative study will furthermore address health, which is more difficult to objectify when it concerns overwork and the small but chronic ailments associated with excess stress (Bouffartigue, Pendariès & Bouteiller, 2010). All is intended to inform us on how work actually occurs, the dilemmas women face, and their range of strategies for "holding on," since these factors could affect the very meaning of the occupation for women in an intellectual profession who are struggling with the division of labor described by Georges Friedmann in 1956 (1992) and more recently by Danièle Linhart (2015). Speaking of work-related suffering among this category of

workers is not obvious, however, as long as their job is seen as a privileged one given the high unemployment rates affecting the working classes. Furthermore, at a time when many employment sectors are under pressure (as with public hospitals) and qualified private-sector workers in positions of responsibility (generally assumed to have job security) experience layoffs, the university-based academic still symbolizes a privileged category of worker in a social system that is moreover unfair to women. We argue, however, that the fact that even these categories are touched by "workplace ills" (Carré, 2007) is a powerful sign that it is a legitimate issue.

2. Methods

The study's general framework was developed over several years while we observed various organizational levels of the university system. The experience of ensuring several administrative responsibilities during the implementation of reforms necessitating the reorganization of research and curricula was an opportunity to identify a number of elements shaping faculty demands and concerns. The themes in our guidelines for interviews (see inserted box, "Methods", [*located after the bibliography in this manuscript]*) were drawn from these regularly noted observations and further refined by interviews with a university CHSCT (Note 4) coordinator and two faculty members responsible for the program for a specific year of undergraduate study. Working conditions were addressed in the following dimensions: perceptions of how time allocation for work has changed; the length of the work day; work on evenings, weekends, and/or vacations; the distribution of work time between teaching, research, and administrative duties; teaching load; elected positions within the university; responsibilities; load of secretarial work they ensure; time devoted to seeking funding; returning from maternity leave; access to research sabbaticals. These same themes were also used in a separate questionnaire survey (Note 5) (see box, 'Methods') with the aim of objectifying the specificity of women's situations and guiding qualitative exploration to discover the tricks and little arrangements they use to keep up.

While we were very well received and the research topic raised considerable interest, the main obstacle was our twenty-eight interviewees' difficulty in freeing up time in their tight schedules to see us. There were also some interviewees whose academic habitus made them little inclined to unload their occupational challenges in their personal narratives. Indeed, they have jumped a series of hurdles to earn their doctoral degrees, gain post-doctoral experience, and land full-time university positions, in the long process building endurance and other skills honed to meet the challenges of scientific research. Women interviewed for this study had the assurance of professionals that are proud of their successful high-level educations and have thus far felt rather unconcerned by job insecurity and workplace suffering issues. As surprising as it might seem, the prestige of science, combined with the status of a high-level white-collar job and the security of being a civil servant in France, means that few of them have considered the university organization critically as part of the rough world of work.

We consequently had to probe interviewees for precise descriptions of their workloads and the tensions between their professional and private lives in our socially situated interviews. The subsequent analysis of their narratives was attentive to avoidances, euphamizing processes, and underestimation.

3. Fundamental Changes in Teaching and Research in French Higher Education

For all our twenty eight interviewees, starting full-time university work is experienced as a "shock," as the number of teaching hours in the standard required service of 192 hours ends up proving quite heavy in practice and nearly impossible to reconcile with the rapid pace of research: "Teaching takes more than 50% of your time. It's times without courses when there's more research." The experience of a doctoral dissertation does little or nothing to prepare them for the reality of supervising programs demanding heavy pedagogical and administrative commitment. This challenge can be exacerbated in the early years by imposed unwanted courses and extra hours, which can add up to doubling the legally required hours of service. "The start of the school year is really intense when you're responsible for a degree program," especially when it is a Masters. It requires a major investment because it includes a number of tasks, "everything that comes along with the responsibility for a degree program and courses." For instance, international exchanges require a yearlong investment, with meetings and European conventions for making agreements with foreign universities. Although pedagogy is the least recognized aspect of their occupation, the interviewed women spoke of it at length, especially about new teaching techniques to adapt to a less self-sufficient and above all growing student body. They say they are deeply invested in supervising undergraduate and Masters' students.

In addition, the three other interviews with people in positions of responsibility shed light on the work experience of interviewed faculty members and put their challenges and strategies into perspective. For one thing, regular research activities have become a locus of psychosocial risk, which until recently was curbed by working conditions that respected the particular nature of research:

> "To be a university faculty member and advance your career you have to have a good record, which requires a lot of work during your dissertation, and then in your everyday professional life with little vacation, days starting at 9 o'clock and ending at midnight without counting your hours, all-nighters to finish writing publications. The dangers of the occupation could resemble the research question: there are those that manage to publish and those that don't, those that get into good journals and those that don't, those that get invited to things. This differentiation makes it so the system will always create a degree of suffering, discourage some. It's intrinsic to the occupation itself, but it's gotten worse with the recent changes, especially the grading of faculty."

So in addition to these stresses being integral to an occupation that is creative and demanding by definition, they were observably aggravated as a result of the application of New Public Management (Note 6) methods under the LRU law. In other words, an external organizational and administrative stress was added to the internal stress of the quest for new knowledge.

> "We try to evaluate teaching and research, and among the criteria, successive administrations propose various criteria for doing so. For example, in 2008, V. Pécresse proposed distinguishing between publishing and non-publishing researchers. […] So, criteria for evaluation can really be a problem. Still in relation to evaluation, the idea emerged that researchers that publish less should take on extra teaching hours, and I think that would be disastrous… That could lead to work-related suffering."

This quote from the university CHSCT coordinator concerns the application of a productivist logic to scientific publications, indexed to the quantity of articles published without regard for content quality, which usually requires a significantly more time and for which recognition of its contributions to knowledge may be delayed.

The novelty for the CHSCT coordinator and the two program directors is the emergence of cases of work-related suffering among faculty members, when up to LRU implementation they only handled cases concerning university technical and administrative personnel.

> "Our occupation is changing: when you choose this occupation, it's often for a discipline, and once you're in it you realize that you're expected to do ever more things that are unrelated to your discipline. We're expected to do another occupation, with a lot of administrative work. Even if I adore education, I find 192 hours of service way too much, or the way that it's distributed hinders research too much. I have colleagues who spend all their time putting together ANR (Note 7) [*grant proposal*] applications, some succeeding. But when they're rejected, it's always disappointing, and worse yet, the time spent preparing the applications is lost. In certain research centers people have very little funding and can't organize conferences or travel to attend scientific meetings, or even take one trip per year. These are not comfortable working conditions."

The violence of the academic world is repeatedly emphasized. Constantly subject to assessment by the academic community through articles and conferences, evaluated by their ability to get funding for their research, which is also under constant control, university faculty face this judgment alone. It is a very demanding profession whose harshness is manifest in tense professional relations: "It's still an occupation full of tension. We are constantly judged by our peers, which is hard, the fact of always being evaluated. Always playing the game of the high-performing person – you have to be tough to accept that."

From this perspective, our interviewees attest to the fact that around 2010 there was a real change in the occupation as the workload rose. "I spend a huge amount of time on email management. We're drowning in it. We're understaffed for student supervision and the workload is increasing. We have more and more administrative work, which we've actually completely accepted." Indeed, the questionnaire results described a very heavy workload for men and women alike: 84.8% of university faculty declare that their work time surpasses the legal threshold of 35 hours per week, and none claim to work fewer hours. To the contrary, 75.3% declare that they have to work in the evening, 79.6% the weekend, and 79.3% during vacations. This workload has risen over the past five years: 63.8% report that their work hours are longer, in contrast to only 26.2% that think it has remained stable over the past five years. Although 94.2% say they are active in research, 83.2% complain that they do not have enough time for it. There is a significant difference between men and women in this essential aspect of the occupation, as 56.1% of women declare that they do not have enough time, compared to 48.2% of men.

Do You have Enough Time for Research ?

Scale : no —> yes 1 —> 5	1 No	2 Much more no	3 More or less	4 Much more yes	5 Yes	Total
Men	*275*	*185*	*55*	*43*	*12*	*570*
	48,2%	32,5%	9,6%	7,5%	2,1%	100%
Women	*425*	*218*	*70*	*35*	*9*	*757*
	56,1%	28,8%	9,2%	4,6%	1,2%	100%
	700	403	125	78	21	*1327*

P = 0, 02 ; Khi2 = 11,78 ; ddl = 4 : significant

In the standard gendered division of labor (Kergoat, 2000), women are more likely to perform collective pedagogical tasks, although the majority of university faculty members are still men. This has consequences on the distribution of the three facets of academic activity. In the best case scenario for women, one third of work time is devoted to teaching, one third to administrative work, and one third to research – although their statutory service is based on 50% teaching, 50% research: "There are deadlines, there are courses, administrative projects, meetings. And so research… we delay it. We can salvage time from research, except when we have publications with deadlines, conferences." Between the two core vocations, education and research, the former tends to chip away at the latter, especially for women, who are less likely to have the rank of full professor: "There are different statuses: professors are the men who aren't very invested in pedagogy, but really involved in research."

> "As far as research goes, women are assigned to thankless tasks. It's kind of like at home. If the toilet needs cleaning, not one of them sees that it's time to clean it. And, well, when it comes to work in research centers, if there are tasks to be done for the collective, there isn't one guy that'll say to himself that he ought to do it. The guys will take on the more visible responsibilities."

The professional load is high, and this is felt intensely by most of the faculty members responding to the quantitative survey. Sixty percent declare that the balance between their professional and personal/family lives was "somewhat" or "very" unsatisfactory because of the long hours worked. Women seem to have more trouble finding balance. The difference with men is statistically significant: 64.4% of women are "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" (compared to 37.7% of men), while men are "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" (42%, compared to 35.4% of women). Concerning work-related health, 36.9% of questionnaire respondents say that their work has a negative impact on their psychological wellbeing. 52.5% of women consider that their work has a "very negative" or "somewhat negative" impact on their physical health, significantly more than men (41.6%). Likewise, 59.3% of women consider that their work has a "very negative" or "somewhat negative" impact on their physical health, significantly more than men (40.1%). We can also discern that more women than men work far from home (25% and 20%, respectively). This demonstrates their willingness to travel, but also the compounding factors of fatigue, worsened notably by the intensification of activity in the workplace. Men, more likely to live near work, spread their activity out over five or six days (65% as compared to 48% of women), while women are more likely to squeeze it into three or four days (22%, in contrast to 13.6% of men).

Are You Satisfied by the Balance between Professional and Personal Life ?

Balance	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Total
Men	*109*	*239*	*223*	*30*	*601*
	18%	39,7%	37,1%	4,9%	100%
Women	*157*	*364*	*264*	*23*	*808*
	19,4%	45%	32,6%	2,8%	100%
	266	*603*	*487*	*53*	*1409*

P = <0,03 ; Khi2 = 8,73 ; ddl = 3 : Significant

Do you think that your professional activity has an impact on your psychological health ?

Impact	Nonresponse	Somewhat négative	Somewhat négative	Without impact	Somewhat positive	Very positive	Total
Men	*28*	*56*	*188*	*141*	*147*	*41*	*601*
	4,7%	9,3%	31,3%	23,5%	24,5%	6,8%	100%
Women	*37*	*92*	*332*	*117*	*185*	*45*	*808*
	4,6%	11,4%	41,1%	14,5%	22,9%	5,6%	100%
	65	*148*	*520*	*258*	*332*	*86*	*1409*

P = <0,01 ; Khi2 = 26,82 ; ddl = 5 : Very significant

Do you think that your professional activity has an impact on your physical health ?

Impact	Nonresponse	Very négative	Somewhat négative	Without impact	Somewhat positive	Very positive	Total
Men	*26*	*54*	*223*	*245*	*43*	*10*	*601*
	4,3%	9%	31,1%	40,8%	7,2%	1,7%	100%
Women	*37*	*87*	*392*	*227*	*53*	*12*	*808*
	4,6%	10,8%	48,5%	28,1%	6,6%	1,5%	100%
	63	141	615	472	96	22	1409

P = <0,01 ; Khi2 = 28,19 ; ddl = 5 : Very significant

This sociological portrait establishing significant differences (Karl Pearson Khi2 test) between women and men should also be interpreted in light of women's contentment at having a position in a working environment that is rather closed to women (Pfefferkorn, 2012). Being more likely to declare pride in this accomplishment than men (57.4% versus 50.2%), they are little inclined to be critical of their working conditions in qualitative studies (Jacquemart and Sarfati, 2016). Their accounts always fluctuate between passion and the danger of being overwhelmed. Instead of an activity like any other, theirs is overactivity on many fronts. Knowing that even today the family still relies on women, one wonders how they keep such a pace, and how they manage to organize their personal and professional lives.

4. Women's Obsession with Time

The working conditions common to all university academics end up being amplified by gendered social relations unfavorable to women. Like female engineers (Marry, 2004), female academics have partially escaped horizontal job segregation, but they are subjected to vertical segregation and the barrier of the glass ceiling, partly determined by research activities (Guillaume and Pochic, 2007): "My main worry is freeing up enough time for research, even just a week – what I need most is time. We need periods dedicated to research." The intensifying work rate is the price to pay for keeping apace with their male colleagues, though to little avail. Accounts describe a race against time exacerbated by family obligations. "Sometimes I'm frustrated about research because I chose to be at 80% (Note 8) for the family. So, sometimes there are research meetings that fall on Wednesdays that I can't attend [*due to childcare obligations, as there is often no school Wednesday afternoon*]. As far as that 80% goes, I'd say that I'm at 85-90%, but I want that because I love my job. Every morning I'm happy to go to work - I love the job I do."

Finding time is the leitmotiv among these women, who say they are constantly trying to do more, trying to perform as many tasks as they can in as little time as possible.

> "To save time, I try to eat as quickly as possible. I try to take 10 minutes and then, for the 30-minute lunch break, I try to anticipate things I should do for classes if there are classes I could improve, or prepare exams."
>
> "At 9:05 I start my day by opening my email because there are sometimes urgent ones. I haven't been connected very long, but now I do it in the car, so I try to save some time then, at red lights."
>
> "The first semester is usually packed, especially with the ANR application deadline… yeah, we survive. But there better not be any childhood illnesses going around then."

The psychological pressure of unforeseen emergencies is exacerbated by the pressure of the HDR, (Note 9) which demands a period of intense research activity.

> "I'm going to have to get my HDR. Well, I'm waiting a little bit, until my little boy starts school, I think it might be a little calmer then. I'd say that I've really got to hit the gas because you need publications, because the 80% slowed me down. But then I tell myself, everything in its own time, but on the other hand, I'm already 39. My goal is to get the HDR in the next two or three years."

Getting an HDR is an essential career move because it makes promotion to full professorship possible, providing a higher grade beneficial to research and access to prominent responsibilities in the institutional hierarchy. The significant majority of faculty members at this level are men, (Note 10) leaving most women to pursue their careers alone:

> "Men take no chances on women. The qualities associated with full professor are masculine: having charisma, et cetera."

> "The HDR? Not just yet. There was a time when I wasn't a mom yet and I was all about research…. Now, I'm good the way it is. I've been a mom for three years. For two years, it was hard to do everything at once. We have trouble managing, organizing between ourselves, professional life/personal life, finding childcare. […] But now I take care to not work too much on weekends. I work at night or during my daughter's nap. We've got to work at night and on weekends to keep up with emails, projects."

> "When the kids were little I was exhausted. I got my HDR in 2012, [*when*] the youngest was three – it was hard. Luckily I didn't snap!"

The personal cost is commensurate with the effort willingly put into it, but professional relations may betray unfeigned male chauvinism about motherhood: "'Oh, you're back already? You left your child…' it was mean, it made me feel guilty, when they don't even take a week of paternity leave. It was 'Oh, my wife took a year, she stayed at home – Oh, you're back already!'" Women are always wrong: if they return to work quickly it is judged too early and immoral, but if they slow down they are criticized for their lack of professional engagement. It is an unfair situation of unsolvable dilemmas functioning as a professional trap. While motherhood is still difficult to reconcile with the demands of higher education, the organization is blind to it as an impediment to careers and work-related stress factor, all the more so as it treats the return to work without regard to parenthood-related constraints (Sylvera, 2002; Maruani, 2011). Leave is experienced as a hindrance to the advancement of research: "It wasn't easy, I was supposed to be on leave for an at-risk pregnancy. I was advising two doctoral candidates, so they came to the house. That's how it is in this occupation, you can't take a 1-month, 6-month break." The return to work after maternity leave is the moment most marking inequalities between women and men. Women have a gap in their publications and research advancements. They then apply themselves to make up for lost time by "doubling their efforts" at a time when it is not entirely possible due to the onus of a young child: "I had articles accumulating and I couldn't write anymore, it was going too fast."

They then become obsessed with chipping time off of parenting time and then making up for it. Some strategies, like requesting a research sabbatical, may help in this quest, but there are few sabbaticals available so few are chosen. Working part-time thus seems to be the only option for avoiding the complete sacrifice of research, but it has irreparable consequences on their ensuing career development and retirement. This is a flagrant inequity between women and men, since having children is associated with advancement in men's careers (Gadéa, Marry, 2000).

> "I was the first to go part-time – it was taken very badly. My research center director didn't speak to me for a year. And after, I left to do administrative work in our faculty division to catch my breath, and it docked points from my retirement. I'm the loser."

> "And so in the daytime I'm always looking at the time. Sometimes I'm in the middle of talking science or with teaching colleagues, and I'm forced to stop the discussion, saying 'I'm sorry, I have to go.' We're thinking about hiring a babysitter, but that comes at a cost, too. Maybe it would do me some good, it'd be less stressful."

In the family, close cooperation is essential with spouses and partners, who need to have a good understanding of the demands of a little-known job. Their occupations have a great impact:

> "My husband is in management in the private sector, so I can't count on him. My husband comes home late, and so I pick up the kids, I cook dinner, I give them their bath. From 9 to 10-11:30, sometimes I manage to grade papers. "

> "The organization of the family relies on the woman. My husband, when he has something to do, family comes in second, whereas I don't have the choice."

Sharing household chores is essential among the little arrangements at home, be it shopping, cooking, laundry, or taking children to extracurricular activities. Some of these academic women have found time for research amid these activities by using the breaks provided by naps, bedtime, and the time a dish simmers. Figuring out how to multitask, making two days' work fit into one, is commonplace among women and particularly relevant to female academics, who try to get ahead while anticipating the unexpected (like a doctor's appointment for a sick child) that would throw off the precision timing. Life is like a machine that must be kept well oiled, as the body itself becomes a machine entirely in service to efficient work without regard for conviviality: "I work in the kitchen and I cook for the next day, I get ahead"; "You're less available at work because you've got to be efficient. So no time to talk, except for grad students - I tried to stay available for grad students."

This carefully scheduled timing leaves little place for the couple or personal leisure. Real strategic planning proves necessary to force themselves to set aside some time for themselves outside of work. The consciousness of this effort and its characteristic voluntary restraint demonstrate just how difficult it is to protect oneself from being consumed by work. Passion for one's research topic is already an all-consuming motivation, but when that pressure to work is reinforced by social norms for high performance, as is the case today, such excess is logical if not inevitable. These women, as men, were selected in a veritable obstacle course "Yes, a real ordeal", but research occurs over a long period of time, as do careers basis of professional endurance through the stages of the family life among which the maternities for women.

> "You've got to hold on for the long haul."
>
> "During the week, I try to set aside a half-day for myself."
>
> "I buy tickets in advance for my husband and me, we've got one night a week for ourselves, but you have to force yourself because otherwise, there's always something else."

Furthermore, going abroad for work is highly valued because it contributes to the visibility of the university, but for women it comes with an added burden of personal organization, often guilt, and sometimes the need to shorten or even renounce the trip: "Two 10-day trips per year, it's possible and it's even good for me. My parents come up [*to watch my young child*]."

Taken together, this testifies to "wear and tear of the self" (Schwartz, 2009) that results from trying to rationalize real work to the extreme so it will be ever more efficient in ever less time, to meet the expectations of an evaluating organization. In these academics' accounts, the person is reduced to a high-performance machine, to the detriment of the humanist relational identity and the discursive self, a situation that they deplore.

5. Rejection of the Hyper-rationalization of Potential Productivity

The challenge is managing to increase personal productivity (Durand, Le Floch, 2006) by optimizing all of their down time, which women manage with particular ingenuity in everyday home life. Another strategic option is avoiding administrative tasks and over-investment in research programs through self-realization techniques ("I do yoga. I've gained a lot in concentration, in power to work, to a rather spectacular extent") to counter "working poorly" (Clot, 2010).

But after a certain point, physical and psychological limitations leave academics no choice but to reconsider the situation they are being pushed toward, the irrationalism of this excessive rationalization being so strong (Lallement, 2003). Avoiding getting too caught up in it without running the risk of dropping research is a very difficult balancing act. Knowing how to juggle effectively is a new scholarly skill leading to stress and anxiety: "The most difficult is managing to find a balance between all our activities." Women's career-change projects demonstrate the extent of the very real challenge: they have all thought about it, and quite seriously. That they are considering fleeing an occupation that required so much effort to get into it indicates the depth of the malaise.

> "At the beginning, I managed to hang on to my research, but later, it's been hard to stay motivated. I had a phase where I wanted to do something else, change careers. I did a skill assessment."
>
> "Two or three years ago I said to myself, 'oh-oh, I'm going to leave, maybe I'll change careers.' I even thought about going to work at the patent office because it's still research and I really like bibliographical work, keeping up on new research."

For good career advancement, some will invest themselves deeply in research from the outset, leading several massive grant programs and then taking research leave with a CNRS research center affiliation (Note 11) and getting

elected to national-level professional responsibilities:

> "Working conditions have changed things internally, it changed a lot because research centers and individuals are competing with each other over calls for projects. Some of my colleagues snap. It's a taboo subject between colleagues because no one wants to reveal their weaknesses in a competitive setting. I have rarely heard anyone say 'I'm slowing down' – but there are websites now, such as Slow Science (Note 12)."

One already needs a burst of conscience to resist flight in face of the competition, and so particular effort is needed to block off a moment for oneself from the everyday emergencies of work to find the concentration necessary for research. "I think that today you have to the able to say, 'STOP! I won't get pulled into the spiral obliging me to seek more money every time,' because it's a deadly spiral. And then you loose touch with what makes you happy, meaning research. And that's a shame." Implementing specific strategies for opposition also requires vigilance and energy devoted specifically to this fight against the mainstream trend. Lastly, such choices can come at a heavy cost for both the career and professional relations. Fear of losing one's standing and peer recognition and being shunted aside is particularly acute for these women, especially since many of them had to break through all the social barriers faced by most women aiming for jobs requiring the highest level of qualifications.

> "The HDR, preschoolers, grad students, it adds up to a lot. And that experience made me realize that that wasn't how I wanted to work, and step back and say no, even if it will slow my career down. I thought about it. But it still isn't easy to put into practice. But I felt physically tired. But it's an idea that isn't that simple because we're put under pressure. What's good about our work is that we have so much freedom, great diversity, but today you have to be able to say 'No!' when you begin to understand that you're drowning in all the tasks. And I realize that there are tons of people who can't handle it, starting with myself."

Their sociological profile describes a particular disposition to the ethic of sacrifice that will make it all the more difficult for them to give up conformity to the high-performance model, which makes them prime candidates for burnout. The university as an institution has a heavy responsibility to prevent such psychosocial threats to the health of its personnel, and especially such women.

Between a fascinating but all-consuming job and the family, accounts make little mention of personal time for relaxation or leisure: "I love to draw, but I just can't free up any time"; "I exercise on campus during lunch break"; "A hobby, really personal, for me? No, for now I don't have the time." Such personal dispositions are also expressed when some of these women assume full responsibility for the slowing of their careers. "The career? For me it was a real slow-down, but I'd say that it's my choice. I'm the one that chose to benefit from time with my children." What emerges is a representation that inflicts guilt on the woman, whose family constraints are transmuted into free choice, making the slowing of their careers a fair sanction. This social explanatory model, in which (as a last resort) individuals pay for their choice, avoids the broader, collective question and thereby encourages organizations to deny the working constraints, specifically of women with children. The social responsibilities of the institution go unchallenged while the conditions for pursuing research are not assured at the level of imposed demand.

The individual benefit of resistance lies in returning to being consistent with what led them to choose this career in the first place. "What I liked was the freedom – well, what I imagined (*laughing*) – the independence in this milieu, and the values it upholds, that motivated me a lot." Indeed, beyond all the concrete tasks of this highly demanding profession, the academics on this path live torn between the humanist values they seek and the reality of commercial objectives that are contrary to their mission of common cultural good: "I've chosen to go more toward research that's unpaid but interests me rather than toward programs that are funded but interest me less." Indeed, there is a non-negligible psychological cost when you have to submit to funders' thematic demands, with all the deontological risks that involves, while still being responsible for the published research results. Academics speak of the scientific risk of such situations and the feeling that they are losing their souls, being pushed to professional negligence. "Because we have to go after funding… and then it throws everything off. And I ask myself, 'does working on that, doesn't it re-enforce stereotypes, when we're actually approaching things from another direction?". The acceptance of the role of management to control work activities and the possibility of standardizing the work (Evetts, 2009) is so disputed from the scientific efficiency itself by the young researchers who are the ones most have to lose in the application of this working model.

6. Conclusion

It is tricky to quantify work in higher education, because the most time-consuming activities are often the least visible. Conducting a study of work schedules modeled on INSEE surveys helps to overcome this difficulty,

provided that volunteers can be found.

Time, essential for research, is cruelly lacking, and on this both questionnaires and interviews agree. This lack is the main stress factor among university-based academic women with children, and more than men. Salary demands are secondary to those pursuing their passion for research and their investment in students and innovative curricula. These circumstances further highlight the unattainability of formally designated objectives, and how unsustainable such working conditions are in the long run. This failure to recognize just what university research and teaching are only serves to emphasize the chasm separating public policy from how things actually work.

The freedom and independence of research are intimately tied to the time available to academics, which is even more limited for women with children. Short of arguing that more women are not wanted in this profession, we assess the persistent dangers of the current working conditions. Free-ranging thought, the pleasure of exploring new paths, time for the unexpected or sudden cultural opportunities… all seem out of the question so long as female academics are made into rationalized robots by a consuming quest for extreme productivity. The disappearance of personal time, not to mention time for professional interaction, contributes to the dehumanization of one of the rare worlds in which humanism, the humanities, and technological progress for future worlds are at the heart of research. This is a paradoxical outcome that is intolerable for many academics, as much in terms of academic ethics and public service to students as in terms of personal physical and psychological welfare.

Autonomy in one's work, the keystone of the academic endeavor, is challenged by what has become nit-picky leadership and control in higher education. Rather than subjecting themselves to performing research-on-command for public and private funders, some academics deliberately turn their backs on these injunctions, preferring to conduct research independently, unfunded, and with less visibility. Such resistance from within expresses the rift that has begun to traverse the academic world, where the stable status of civil servant seems to be the last psychological safety net.

By primarily penalizing female researchers, this situation forces them to cobble together solutions that are the foundation for an even more marked division of labor, profiling women for undergraduate education and oversight of Masters' degree programs, and men for full professorships and research in research centers. Although some have already anticipated this inequality in their careers by giving up on an HDR to focus on teaching, others reject this fatalist reaction. Carefully and intelligently husbanding their work and family balance, they are part of an emerging protest movement for the return to science done slowly, and demanding a right to genuine maternity leave backed by priority access to research leave. It is a combative position, of course, and challenging, but they fight for it inch by inch in the university system. In addition to this professional schema that applied to nearly everyone, a few rare women have succeeded in reaching the rank of full professor and the highest positions in the university hierarchy, playing the New Management game. This third path avoids the dilemma between teaching, research, and administration while allowing them to avoid dropping out and enduring painful reconceptions of their identity.

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Notes

Note 1. The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Convention of 1997 sought to establish the equivalency and recognition of post-secondary degrees across Europe and create internationally recognized categories of degrees. European University Association (EUA), " University autonomy in Europe III. Country profiles, Report, April 2017.

Note 2. LRU: "Loi relative aux Libertés et Responsabilité des universités, 2007-1199 du 10 Août," which was presented as a reform to give each public university greater autonomy and visibility in international rankings, global trend of universities needing to prioritise business over academic goals, and introduction of private methods of accounting and assessment.

Note 3. LERU : League of European Research Universities, Implicit bias in academia, « A challenge to the meritocratic principle and to women's careers – And what to do about it », Advice paper, n °23 – January 2018.

Note 4. CHSCT: Comité d'hygiène et de sécurité des conditions de travail (Health, Safety, and Working Conditions Committee), a consultative body for the promotion of improvement in university health and safety.

Note 5. This survey on working conditions in higher education was conducted by the union SNESUP, which distributed the questionnaire to its national membership in 2017 (see box, "Methods," for details).

Note 6. An approach to public administration inspired by private-sector principles (Piraux, A. 2012b. "La privatisation de l'éthique administrative," *Pyramides* 22.

Note 7. ANR: Agence Nationale de la Recherche (National Research Agency), which funds selected scientific programs.

Note 8. That is, working reduced hours, 80% of the workload (and pay) of full-time work.

Note 9. HDR: Habiliation à diriger des recherches, a post-doctoral degree serving as a prerequisite for advising doctoral dissertation work, being director of a research center, or attaining full professorship.

Note 10. Source: L'Etat de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche en France (49 indicators), April 2017, no. 10, available at: https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/10/sommaire.php

Note 11. CNRS: Centre national de la recherche scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research), the French national organization for research, with over 11,000 full time researchers and nearly 1000 centers. University-based academics can apply to a national disciplinary committee to be transferred to one of these research centers for a variable amount of time, thus freeing them from their university obligations.

Note 12. Slow Science is inspired by other "slow" movements decrying the excesses and harmful effects of the acceleration of every aspect of life in the name of higher productivity (Slow Science Manifesto, 2010: http://slow-science.org/).

Box to Insert: Methods

Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire survey was developed by SNESUP-FSU (Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur [National Union of Higher Education] and Fédération Syndicale Unitaire [United Union Federation]) in collaboration with a group of university-based academics that included the lead author of this paper. It was distributed to union members in associate professor (*maîtres de conférence*) positions to assess the state of their working conditions.

Among them, 1409 returned questionnaires, which we analyzed. To situate this figure, there is a total population of 36,184 associate professors nationwide. The response has the following characteristics:

- Associate professors are over-represented among the respondents relative to the percentage of associate professors nationwide: associate professors represent 54% of respondents, compared to 39% of all permanent university faculty in France.

- Female associate professors replied more than male: women represent 53.3% of respondents, compared to 44% of associate professors nationwide.

The statistical importance of this sample is minor, since representativity is not central to an analysis focusing on differences between men and women. As far as sociological representativity is concerned, a survey of SNESUP-FSU union members induces a bias linked to union membership, but it is limited because content concerns factual data and not opinion.

Some national figures to contextualize this study: in 2016, 37% of tenured associate professors in France were women. Women represented a higher percentage of secondary teachers (46%) than associate professors (44%) or full professors (24%). Average age of associate professors nationwide: 45 years 7 months. The youngest was 28, and the eldest 70.

Sources of national statistics:

- "L'Etat de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche en France" (with 49 indicators), April 2017, no. 10, available from:

  https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/10/sommaire.php

- Marc Bideault, Julien Thirion and Jérôme Tourbeaux, "Les personnels enseignants de l'enseignement supérieur du ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche – 2014-2015," Note de la DGRH, 7, September 2016. Available from:

  https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/8/EESR8_ES_04-les_personnels_enseignants_de_l_enseignement_superieur_public_sous_tutelle_du_menesr.php

Interviews

After ten years of observation-based research, and first three interviews with a CHSCT coordinator and two faculty members responsible of bachelor degrees studies, 28 interviews were conducted from 2016 into early 2017 on a multidisciplinary university campus in France, using the snowball method. The target public was defined according to status, gender, and family situation: female university academics with children in their care. It was addressed to women with the aim of gathering accounts from a category that is still in a minority in this profession and particularly concerned by delays in their careers or being given educational tasks and other less valued responsibilities.

The specific attention to women was intended to isolate a significant aspect of impediments to their careers – motherhood – and describe the specific strategies that make it possible for them to do their work.

For deontological reasons, interviews were not permitted with participants with friendly or collegial relations with the researchers; all disciplines but sociology were included, for this reason. The sample covers both major academic areas, the experimental sciences and the social sciences, humanities, and letters, and consists of 28 biographical interviews (25 associate professors, 3 full professors). Candidates were selected at random from professional directories, and interviews were conducted with those who agreed to be interviewed. They met criteria for disciplinary distribution and other objectives meant to ensure a comprehensive, in-depth study.