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Women in Academe in Poland: Winners Among Losers¹

Women are clearly underrepresented in institutions of science and higher education. This article focuses on an analysis of the social, economic, and political determinants of the presence of women in academe and their scientific careers, in Poland, in the 1990s portrayed in an historical perspective.

Access of Women to the Academic World before the Fall of the Communist System in 1989

Before the 1890s, Polish women who wanted to enter an university went abroad to Switzerland, France, Belgium, or the United States. In many cases, they were sponsored by Polish women's organizations. Twenty-five years later, Galician universities (in Southern Poland, at the time, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) admitted numbers of students drawn from all the other parts of Poland. They won the right to enter universities largely with the support of a major part of the Polish intellectual elite (Hutlewicz, 1936, p. 4). Some Polish women who graduated from universities at the turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries became exceptional scientists. Among them were Maria Skłodowska-Curie, who received a Nobel Prize first in 1905 on her own and in 1911 with her husband, Jozefa Joteyko, who lectured in experimental psychology in Brussels and also at the Sorbonne in Paris, and Zofia Daszynska-Golinska, who worked at the Humbolt Academy in Berlin. The list is much longer. Many of

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them participated in the creation and reconstruction of Polish institutions of higher learning when Poland became independent in 1918 (Siemienska, 1986). Some of them were also active in various women's organizations.

After Poland regained its independence in 1918, women obtained the right to vote as well as formal political and social equality with men. Nevertheless, women did not have the same educational or professional opportunities as men. Women represented 27.2 percent of all students in 1928-1929 and 28.3 percent in 1937-1938 (Small Statistical Yearbook, 1939, p. 263). A particularly large proportion of women studied pharmacy and dentistry. Women also played leading roles among those studying philosophy but were not enrolled in technical studies or in theology.

After the Second World War, the number of educated women rapidly increased, a situation which was congruent with the ideology of the newly established communist system that emphasized equality as a way - among other's - to enlarge the reserves of the labor force (Siemienska, 1989). In the 1980s, the number of women exceeded the number of men enrolled in university-level studies. The increased participation of women in certain faculties led to the further feminization of professions that were already women dominated

Men had a relatively lower interest in university-level studies and long-term studies because, contrary to the situation in the pre-war period, these forms of education did not guarantee well-paid jobs. Certain professions, or even the setting up of one's own small enterprise, gave one a chance to earn a larger income. For women, who avoided vocational careers and were unwilling to perform "dirty" and hard physical labor, the white-collar work that they could get with a secondary school or university-level education was attractive. Education has traditionally conferred social status in Poland, even though in the post-war period it was not associated with increased income (Slomczynski and Wesolowski, 1973). The economic crisis of the early 1980s came as a shock to Poland. The ability to earn a living became more pressing, and the social appeal that education had traditionally held was eclipsed for some time (Jasinska and Siemienska, 1983).

The number of women academics employed in higher education institutions has not increased as rapidly and was far from having reached the same proportion as that of women students after the Second World War. Is this small proportion only proof of discrimination, and the differences in the numbers, a measure of the size of discrimination? The problem is more complicated.

Possibly, the smaller number of women than male assistants is the result, not so much of discrimination, but of the uneven distribution of women in the various faculties and of the fact that the numbers of assistants hired vary in proportion to the numbers of students in given faculties. A question that should also be asked, even though no answer is yet available, is to what extent women

really wish to become academics. Another question to ponder is the extent to which this decision is made for women graduates by the academic authorities. The fact remains that if smaller numbers of women than of men "start out" as assistant, there will be fewer women available, in the future, to fill ranking positions in science.

For years, only a relatively small number of women students could be found in postgraduate and doctoral study programs despite their stable increase in number. For example, the percentage of women enrolled in postgraduate studies was 24.6 percent in 1970 and 43.8 percent in 1985. In 1970, women accounted for 35.5 percent of doctoral students, and in 1985, for 28.9 percent (*Statistical Yearbook 1986*, p. 473).

TABLE 1. Women academic teaching staff members in higher education institutions as percentages of total numbers

	Total	Pro- fessors	Associate professors	Assistant professors	Assis- tants	Lec- tur- ers	Librari- ans	Other
1970-1971	30.7	8.6	13.2	32.8	35.0	26.6	69.1	52.3
1980-1981	35.1	11.2	17.6	33.1	39.3	38.6	78.8	65.5
1985-1986	35.1	12.9	19.4	33.3	38.5	43.8	79.3	58.8
1988-1989	36.3	13.2	19.7	33.4	41.9	46.1	79.9	58.5
1989-1990	40.1	13.8	20.0	34.3	46.2	45.7	79.8	
1990-1991	37.0	15.1	19.3	34.6	43.1	49.4	77.9	59.1
1996-1997	37.7	17.3	16.6	34.2	44.5	53.7	88.4	65.0

Source: Based on *Education 1990-1991* (1991, p. 172), and *Higher Schools in the School Year 1996-1997* (1997, pp. 84-85), and author's calculations.

During the 1970-1990 period, fewer women earned advanced degrees (excluding the MA and the MD) than men did.² Among those awarded the PhD, the proportion of women varied between 27 and 32 percent. The proportion of

² In Poland, the following university degrees can be earned: the MA or the MD after five to six years of study (depending on the field), next, the PhD, which can be obtained after the completion of a special doctoral program or work in an educational or other institution. Following the PhD, there is a next degree, the habilitated doctorate that is usually completed by mature scholars, working in educational or research institutions. In each case, a dissertation meeting the criteria for the respective degree has to be presented by the candidate. The highest title is that of a professor awarded on the basis of scientific achievements. The first degrees mentioned serve as the basis for being appointed in different positions in universities and in other scientific institutions. Graduates having MAs or MDs become assistants; PhDs, assistant professors; habilitated doctorate holders, extraordinary professors, and eventually, ordinary (full) professors.

women among those awarded the degree of habilitated doctor (the most advanced degree awarded in Poland) has remained stable standing at 21 percent throughout the entire period. Women constituted 35 percent of the total number of assistants in 1970, 39 percent in 1980, and 44 percent in 1996. The 1980s witnessed an increase in the relative numbers of women earning the title of extraordinary professor, a figure approximating that of the proportion of women earning the degree of habilitated doctor. The percentage of women who had obtained the title of full professor was slightly smaller in the period under study (Siemienska, 1992) (see Table 1).

The Situation of Higher Education Institutions in the 1990s

The change of economic system brought about an increasing need for people who were prepared to work in a modernizing economy. It also brought a high rate of unemployment. A large number of men and an even larger number of women lost their jobs in the early 1990s. The new economic situation became a reason to increase the number of students admitted to state universities and to open new non-state schools at secondary and tertiary levels. The pattern of attendance at schools differentiated according to gender persisted despite the changes (Bialecki, 1997).

Women constitute a higher percentage among students than before. However, women select more inexpensive types of studies. Also in the 1990s, the percentages of women students in extramural, external, and evening studies increased, being especially high in non-state institutions of higher education. In 1997-1998, women constituted 52 percent of students in day programs, 55 percent of those in evening studies, 61 percent of those in weekend studies, and 72 percent of those in extramural studies (*Statistical Yearbook 1998*, p. 235). The figures indicate that women continue to receive education in the new conditions regulated by free-market mechanisms but that they select shorter course programs (non-state educational institutions often offer only three-year course programs) and in many cases more inexpensive forms of education because only these are available in the smaller towns.

The transformation of the economic system from a command to a free-market system caused the marginalization of science in Poland. The decision makers in the post-communist period have been treating the science sector as if it could survive the difficult times on its own. Science has become a silent loser. The percentage of outlay from the national income that have been distributed to science has been declining over the last several years, reaching 0.47 percent in 1998. In the late 1980s, it represented over 1 percent. The salary of a university

professor in 1994 was worth half of what it had been in 1989 (Jalowicki *et al.*, 1994).

In 1994, Chojnicki and Czyż wrote:

The drastically low financial outlays for science in Poland, which over the last three years varied between 1.3 percent and 1.1 percent of national income distributed, reduce science to a mere survival level and bring about a sort of depreciation of scientific staff and their outflow abroad. This [situation] makes progress impossible in those basic studies of an experimental nature which depend on expensive apparatuses as well as on technological research. Such a situation leads to Poland's increased technological dependence and [the] purchas[ing] of still more licenses, while weakening the position and role of its science in making practical activities more efficient.

External and Internal Brain Drain from Academe

The recent economic situation of science combined with the repression of political opposition characteristic of the pre-1989 period led to the emigration of scientists from Poland and, within the country, to movement into other sectors. The permanent emigration of Polish scientists during the 1992-1993 period, as compared to the 1989-1991 period, did not decrease. In the early 1990s, the average annual number of migrants totalled 191, while in the second period, it already amounted to 218. However, the internal brain drain causes even greater losses of scientific and university staff. While in the 1980s the internal brain drain involved 286 persons annually, it involved as many as 1,088 persons by the early 1990s, mainly from economics and management, mathematics and informatics, social sciences and law, and biology. People emigrating abroad mainly included scientists from mathematics and informatics, biology, physics, and chemistry. One of the most important grounds for emigration is the possibility of finding improved conditions for scientific work.

Scientists (mostly those who were 35 years old in 1990) began to move into other occupations in Poland, mainly in private domestic and foreign firms, and some of the former research staff have started businesses of their own. Some 40 percent of employers (1,052 firms replying to a questionnaire) preferred men to women as potential employees. For other employers, gender did not make a difference (Hryniewicz and Jalowicki, 1994). In 1993, 69 percent of men and 57 percent of women employed in higher education institutions (Wnuk-Lipinska, 1996) were earning additional income (in addition to their university salaries) by working in different companies and/or by teaching extra courses in private higher education institutions. Faculty members in the humanities, the social sciences, law, and economics have been particularly inclined to take on

additional employment of this sort. A large number of faculty members (58 percent) revealed that they wished to change jobs at least temporarily.

The same trend has continued over the succeeding years. The departing scientists cannot easily be replaced by young graduates because the latter do not view their life careers as being in academe and, even if some of them want to work in academe, they do not have appropriate experience and professional accomplishments.

The Presence of Women in the Polish Academic World in the 1990s

The actual role of women in Polish science (in university teaching and research) has to be considered within the political, economic, and cultural contexts of the 1990s. The structure of the employment of women in academic institutions has changed significantly. Fewer women work in such environments than before.

Relatively more women work as non-teaching staff members than in earlier periods and as lower ranking academic staff members (see Tables 1 and 2). In the 1990s, fewer people were interested in completing the degree of habilitated doctor needed in order to be able to work in higher education or in research institutions. In other lines of work, the MA or the MD is sufficient for obtaining a better-paid job than one in academe. A relatively high number of women among those having completed the doctorate and the habilitated doctorate in the mid-1990s have indicated that for women to get better employment they have to have accumulated higher levels of “educational capital” than men (see Table 2).

The data also demonstrate that the careers of women academics operate according to different rules from those of men. Because, for many years, fewer women than men earned the doctorate and the habilitated doctorate, fewer women than men could participate in the entire “cycle of the academic career”.

Table 2. Awarded doctorates and habilitated doctorates in 1990 and 1996 by scientific field

Field	<i>Habilitated Doctorates</i>				<i>Doctorates</i>			
	1990		1996		1990		1996	
	Total	No. of women	Total	No. of women	Total	No. of women	Total	No. of women
Chemistry	35	5	40	5	80	17	81	27
Economics	94	26	50	18	156	42	141	63
Pharmacy	10	4	7	4	26	19	32	21
Physics	51	4	46	5	83	10	88	13
Geography	1	-	18	10	-	-	50	18
Humanities	187	54	168	58	536	192	427	176
Forestry	1	1	10	2	5	-	16	4
Mathematics	28	4	24	1	57	12	45	14
Medicine	129	40	99	29	455	205	646	290
Political science	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-
Law	38	11	16	4	43	16	32	13
Biology	62	21	53	22	164	79	126	84
Agriculture	92	29	81	33	173	55	150	59
Technical sciences	201	7	128	19	420	59	416	73
Theology	8	-	12	-	25	-	60	6
Veterinary science	11	1	19	3	19	2	24	3
Physical education	9	-	8	2	36	9	33	17
Military sciences	12	-	4	-	45	-	33	-
Natural sciences			1	-			-	-

Source: *Education 1990-1991* (1991, p. 173); *Higher Schools in the School Year 1996-1997* (1997, p.76). and author's calculations.

The Rate of Progress of Women in Academic Careers

An analysis of the careers of full professors at the University of Warsaw, conducted in 1999, revealed a clearly different dynamic in the careers of women and men. At this stage, the study was restricted to those who had pursued their careers through all the levels and had attained everything that was possible in the academic hierarchy as far as degrees and academic positions were concerned. Thus, they are now full professors. The study did not cover positions in the university administration which would have indicated the extent to which women attain decision-making posts, even though it is known that at this univer-

sity, as in other universities in Poland and abroad, women do not frequently hold such posts (Eggins, 1997; Brooks, 1997).

The choice of a single university, the largest one in Poland with respect to the number of students and professors and holding first place in the rankings with respect to the quality of teaching (Wprost, 1999), creates a methodologically correct situation, so far as the study is concerned. The differences in criteria which different institutions of higher learning may apply are eliminated in this way. Additionally, the existence of more-or-less feminized faculties at the same university allows one to better examine whether and to what extent this characteristic affects the differences in the number and the rate of academic careers of women and men.

In total, an analysis was carried out of the careers of 319 full professors, 69 women and 250 men, that is, all academics employed at this rank at the University of Warsaw during the 1998-1999 academic year. Almost all of them had begun their university studies after the Second World War, some even during the war. The oldest woman was born in 1919; the youngest one in 1949. Similarly, the oldest man was born in 1919, and the youngest one in 1954. Almost all of the women (sixty-one out of sixty-nine) achieved the rank of full professor in the 1990s. The percentage of men nominated in the 1990s was slightly lower.

The hypothesis that in faculties in which the percentages of women among the students are and have been high for a long time, the percentages of women among the full professors will also be high, was confirmed. There were, however, certain exceptions. The percentage of women full professors was highest in the Faculty of Psychology (44.4 percent). Women constituted about a third of the full professors in feminized faculties, such as Neophilology, Pedagogy, Polish Philology, and Applied Social Sciences and Resocialization, and in such less feminized faculties as Biology, Philosophy and Sociology. However, the percentage of women full professors is definitely lower in faculties that have only recently acquired large numbers of women students than among those in which large numbers of women students have been present for many years. There are also other faculties in which, despite the high percentage of women present for quite some time among the students, their numbers among full professors are much lower (the Faculty of Law and Administration) or are totally absent (the Faculties of Journalism and of Political Science). This scenario demonstrates that the mechanisms of advancement also depend on other factors. The presence and scope of open or of hidden discrimination may be one of these.

But one might also assume that the matter might be linked to the appeal of academic careers, which has at least two dimensions. The first one is that of climbing up the inter-university ladder and of being successful in the framework of one's institution and, more broadly, in the academic world. The second is that of attaining a position in the university in order to raise one's chances to pursue simultaneously (or subsequently) a non-academic career. Attaining a

ranking position in the academic structure in the case of some professions is a good starting point for other, non-academic positions (e.g., in law, in diplomacy, as governmental experts in economic matters, etc.). In the latter case, the appeal of academic careers is definitely greater. They become a valued resource, particularly in the case of men, who choose this path as a bridge to careers in other areas of public life that are mainly, if informally, reserved for them. Frequently – and often fictitiously – they combine a job at the university with a position in politics, the economy, etc.

The differences in terms of the time needed to complete a degree are already apparent in the case of the doctorate. On average, women required more time than men, and later the time required increased substantially, although to an uneven extent in the cases of the different faculties. On the basis of the available data, it is difficult to conclude that there are any varying patterns in the cases of feminized and non-feminized faculties. What is worth noting is that the time required to move from an extraordinary professorship (the lower position) to a full professorship (higher position, see Table 3) for women and for men becomes reversed. It is now shorter for women than for men in almost all of the faculties.

One hypothesis in regard to this situation may be that women find themselves in a different stage in their lives, as they meet this academic challenge, one which is linked to fewer household duties, for the children will, by now, be adults. Already being used to having to exert a great deal of effort so as not to be left behind in the race for degrees, and having fewer encumbrances at this stage of their lives, they may more easily focus their efforts on scientific research. This hypothesis is frequently repeated in regard to the shifting of the activity of women from certain areas to other areas within their life cycles, a change that takes place to a limited extent, if at all – in the case of men.

Another hypothesis that can be suggested here, one that could be labeled as optimistic-pessimistic, is the change in the context in which the academic world functioned in Poland in the 1990s. The drop in funding for science, which means less money for research and relatively lower remuneration (compared to the national average) than, for instance, in the 1970s or early 1980s and the simultaneous appearance of attractive possibilities in other areas of employment, e.g. business, in which remuneration is much higher, has caused men, in particular, to begin in either resign from positions at universities, or to begin treating them as a kind of resource that facilitates the seeking of additional employment elsewhere, which, when found, becomes the primary occupation. Therefore, women began to fill the vacuum appearing at the “heights” of academic careers relatively more rapidly and frequently.

TABLE 3. The length of time between the award of an advanced degree and appointment to a full professorship by gender, at the University of Warsaw according to data accumulated in 1999 (mean number of years)

Faculties	Women				Men			
	MA/ MS- PhD	PhD- Hab. Doc- tor	Hab. Doc- tor-extra- ordinary professor	Extraor- dinary prof. – full prof.	MA/ MS- PhD	PhD- Hab. Doc- tor	Hab. Doc- tor-extra- ordinary professor	Extraor- dinary prof. – full prof.
Biology	5.3	8.3	9.3	7.2	5.1	7.3	9.4	9.7
Chemistry	9.0	11.0	15.0	9.0	6.6	6.5	9.1	8.1
Journalism and Political Science					7.9	7.9	9.2	9.4
Philosophy and Sociology	9.3	10.5	11.7	7.0	6.2	6.3	7.8	9.6
Physics	7.0	5.0	14.5	8.0	5.7	6.4	9.4	7.9
Geography and Regional Studies	9.0	14.3	11.0	4.5	9.4	7.4	8.4	6.8
Geology	9.0	9.0	11.8	16.0	7.6	7.1	11.3	9.4
History	6.2	11.0	10.5	7.8	6.7	9.1	9.2	8.5
Applied Linguis- tics and East Slavic Philology		8.0	12.0	4.0	7.3	7.3	9.5	6.4
Mathematics, Informatics and Mechanics					3.9	6.4	10.7	5.4
Economy	4.0	11.0	0.0		6.7	7.5	8.7	8.1
Neophilology	8.9	9.0	11.6	4.7	7.4	7.1	9.6	7.8
Pedagogy	11.5	9.3	8.7	6.0	7.0	6.3	11.0	7.2
Polish Philology	8.3	9.9	12.0	5.8	7.7	10.3	9.4	10.6
Law and Ad- ministration	7.0	7.0	12.7	9.5	6.3	7.9	10.0	10.4
Psychology	6.7	10.8	12.3	3.5	6.6	6.6	9.0	11.4
Applied Social Sciences and Resocialization	6.3	12.8	14.3	4.7	7.5	9.5	10.4	7.8
Management	4.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	6.9	6.3	8.2	6.9
Interdisciplinary Center for Ma- thematical Mo- deling	7.0	10.0	15.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	19.0	9.0
Research Center on Ancient Tra- ditions in Poland and Europe					6.0	9.0	8.0	15.0
Center for Ame- rican Studies					6.0	15.0	6.0	8.0
Laboratory for Heavy Ions						7.0	9.0	12.0

Source: Based on author's calculations

It is quite possible that the observed phenomenon of the acceleration of the careers of women at the “finish”, when they have reached the highest posts in the academic hierarchy, is the result of the operation of both of the above-mentioned factors. The patterns currently observed at the University of Warsaw are convergent with those found in the entire academic population. The interviews conducted with women full professors confirm the above-cited hypotheses.

Some women professors are aware of the barriers that women encounter in an academic career, one traditionally considered as a man’s careers. Some of them even speak of an evolution of their thinking in this area, pointing to additional dilemmas with which some of them have had to contend. Not all these dilemmas are new ones. Polish feminists were already speaking of some of them at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (Siemienska, 1986). Recently, one of them, Maria Janion, Professor of Polish Philology at the University of Warsaw, wrote the following in the pages of a newspaper (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3-4 July 1999, p. 25):

For many years I accepted the clear-cut division into important and unimportant issues: in the face of constraint, aspirations for independence are important, and the struggle for women’s rights is unimportant. At the end of [the] 1980s, I expressed this view during a feminist discussion in West Berlin ... [...] Several years later ... it has turned out that in free Poland a woman is not a human being, but a “family being”, who instead of [being in] politics, should look after the home I personally never had any illusions regarding “equal rights.” I believe that attaining my present position cost me a lot more than it would [have] cost a man Among others, this happens because the so-called universal subject is in the long run constructed according to the male models. Men find it easier to adapt to the standards in force in the academic humanities. (Janion, 1999)

The situation of women in the academic world that has been described, the traditional personal models that have been promoted over the last few years by different groups and political parties (Siemienska 1997), and the clearly worsening situation of women on the labor market and in politics, indicate that one of the very important issues is to undertake a discussion on the situation of women in Polish society in a perspective of cross-cultural comparisons. In recent years, a growing number of seminars and studies focused on women’s issues have been conducted in different departments and in the frameworks of newly created units, such as interdisciplinary gender research divisions within Polish universities focusing on the teaching of, and research on, gender studies (Siemienska, 2000).

Conclusion

Because the managers of various types of companies consider women to be less attractive as employees than men, the former leave scientific institutions to work in such companies less frequently than the latter do. Also, perhaps, certain women, because of traditional concepts of gender roles, want to have employment (that among other things gives more flexible working hours) allowing them to reconcile family expectations and the demands of employment. But there is also the other side of the coin. The lack of competition for scientific positions decreases the demands and expectations of scientific institutions in regard to their employees in respect to their styles of work and performance. Moreover, the unsatisfactory equipment available, owing to financial difficulties of scientific institutions, causes the staff to fall behind in terms of scientific achievement. This situation makes women in academe “winners among losers.” The frequently observed model is once again repeated here: when a given profession loses its appeal, mainly material, men withdraw from it and young people choose it less frequently, looking for more remunerative employment which, for this reason, is often associated with greater prestige.

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