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*From social role to self-identity. A  
Cross-national study on PH.D.-  
students' representation of the  
"Academe" and  
"Sexual Harassment"*

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### **About the Project**

The normative concept of gender equity which exists in European societies is contrasted by a reality in which women in top-level positions are by no means a common occurrence.

Against this background, the European Research Training Network Women in European Universities, funded by the European Commission, is a joint research project of partners in seven European countries.

Its scientific programme aims at assessing the professional status of women in academia and at analysing the reasons for the under-representation in positions of authority in European Universities.

The network structure includes regular conferences and meetings to provide a forum to present outcomes, exchange knowledge and to discuss about research planning as well as findings and outcomes.

The **Training Paper Series** are essays authored by the doctoral students of the project in every research phase. They give an introduction to the research topic and an overview of the findings in the research country of the doctoral student.



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***Abstract***

The paper presents the results of a qualitative comparative study on a perception of an “academic career” and of “sexual harassment” by (female) French and Polish doctoral students. Basic research questions concern social definitions, representations of the Academe and work in the Academe: I wanted to know whether images of university work, cognitive patterns differ by countries or are marked by similar traits. Significant cross-national differences in perceptions of the Academe would suggest that cultural and structural context of interactions strongly influence the ways in which academic environments are experienced. On the other hand similar representations across countries would support a hypothesis according to which French and Polish doctoral students compose the same “peer-group” in such case a category of generation would have stronger explanative value. In the research special attention is given to *self-definitions* and *motives* of the doctoral students, as these concepts not only help to reveal shared-values, but also, by providing some indices concerning future actions, are interesting from pragmatic perspective. The question of sexual harassment has been incorporated into the research for several reasons: according to previous research on the subject<sup>1</sup>, sexual harassment may become a serious obstacle, hampering professional activity. At the same time these phenomena are hardly ever mentioned in everyday conversations, in other words it is a taboo subject. In this context rather than waiting for my respondents to mention sexual harassment as an issue in academic career, it was important to ask some questions regarding the issue directly in the course of the interviews. Finally, this kind of question may be an interesting indicator of cultural differences, and, from a theoretical point of view, may well confirm or weaken the hypothesis of the existence of a cross-national doctoral student “peer-group”.

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<sup>1</sup> For example a rapport from cross-national research on sexual harassment: *Sexual harassment in the workplace in the European Union. Equality between women and men*, European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs, Unit V/D.5, 1998

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### ***1. Introduction***

The research was undertaken as part of the European Research-Training Network “Women in European Universities” (WIEU), funded by European Commission. It is important to note that the results of the qualitative study, which are present in this paper, should be seen as a point of view that is complementary to earlier inquiries carried out under this project. The contextual analysis of the situation of women in French and Polish higher education systems (L. McGurk, 2001, S. Portet, 2001) and the statistical over-view of women’s presence in French and Polish Academia (E. Latour, 2003, S. Portet 2002).

Conversely to the above mentioned researches, the current paper aims to provide an insight into gender inequality in French and Polish academia from the point of view of “soft data” – values, meanings, motivations that drive the actions of the doctoral students, living in two different socio-cultural and organizational systems. The theoretical and methodological assumptions of the research are founded on the paradigm of humanistic sociology, but do not follow dogmatically one theory or “sociological school” but are based on a combination of some classic sociological concepts – the Durkheim’s notion of social fact as social representation, the symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School (definition of situation, social role and self-concept), the phenomenology of Alfred Shutz (types and typical motives) and the “grounded theory of A. L. Strauss. Chapter 1. contains more details about the theoretical combination. The following chapters present the main results of the research: the analysis of social representations of academic careers/work and sexual harassment.

The research base on “soft data”, dealing with values, meanings or discursive practices, are often seen as “less scientific” then statistical “hard facts”. Thus, it is worth emphasizing that analysis of social representations, self-definitions, changing patterns of cognition and action do not only have theoretical value, it also may be fruitful from a very pragmatic point of view. For example in public policy making, taking into account motives, self-definitions of a target group, may reduce problems of implementation and by this way improve the efficiency of actions<sup>2</sup>. Some conclusions and recommendations, derived from presented here research, are presented in the final part of the paper.

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<sup>2</sup> see also H. K. Colebath, *Policy*, Open University Press, p.56; H. Mendelsohn, *Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Can Succeed*, in: *Public Opinion Quarterly*, V. 37, Spring 1973

### ***1.1 Theoretical assumptions***

*If (wo)men define situations as real,  
they are real in their consequences*

W. Thomas

The study is founded on the assumption that social actors respond not only to the objective features of a situation (economic, organizational structural constraints), but also or even mostly to the *meanings* they have ascribed to their behaviour and the behaviours of others, as well as the definitions, metaphors that help them to organize their experience. By focusing on the *meanings* social actors attribute to social phenomena, our work is inspired by humanistic sociology, or more precisely speaking, the action's theory of Weber, Thomas, Znaniecki, and the Chicago School. Although the aim of this paper is not to give a detailed presentation of this paradigm, it is important to sketch out the three basic assumptions concerning meanings, as these explain the methodological approach we have adopted.

Firstly meanings and values are **relative in** nature, they are not features of objects but are ascribed to it, they arise from historical process or context of interactions and in such sense we may say that the social world is constructed.

However social construction of the world it is not totally free and unrestricted process; following Emile Durkheim we may say that the sphere of social meanings, (values-set or culture) constitute “social fact” or “collective representation”, an **external** to individuals, an inter-subjectively shared “system of objective ideas”. Erving Goffman brilliantly expresses the essence of the dimension saying: “we are only actors in a battlefield of ideas”.

It is also worth pointing out that “relativisation” and “objectification” are closely related in the experiences of every individual. From a perspective inspired by Znaniecky's work, E. Hałas writes: “analysis of experience shows that it encompasses two process: the process of subjectification and the process of objectification. On the one hand, the individual passively assimilate already existing objects and thoughts. On the other hand he/she actively constructs, or at least reconstructs, the reality as objects and depersonalises his/her own experience. (...) during the process of reconstruction, or construction, individuals impose rational organization on the system of objects. Taken for granted knowledge, everyday reality is the first system constructed in this way”<sup>3</sup>. Using a “functionalist” language one may say that assimilated meanings

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<sup>3</sup> Hałas E., *Znaczenia i wartości społeczne. O socjologii Floriana Znanieckiego*, [Meanings and Social Values. On Florian Znaniecky's sociology], Lublin 1991, p.14.

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are fundamental tools in the process of socialization (they underpin the “stability of social systems”), as well in the process of making social reality “rational” and “sensible” from perspective of each individual.

But it is neither the “cognition”, nor the “conformity” to social norms” that lay in the hart of the paradigm of humanistic sociology. Although the paradigm has a lot in common with anthropological perspectives, it differs significantly from it, as the analysis of meanings and values is not a goal in itself but means to explaining and understanding social actions. As Anselm L. Strauss put it: “the naming of an object provides a directive for action as if the object were to announce <You say I’m this then act in a appropriate way toward me>, conversely when the actor feels he does not know what the object is, then with regard to it his(her) action is blocked”<sup>4</sup>; the statement may seems obvious but its’ crucial significance will be better illustrated later, in the part devoted to a sexual harassment issue. Therefore for social scientists - who want to understand and explain social actions – the analysis of the process whereby objects are named and defined reveals the “point of view”, the position from which the actor speaks, the group to which she/he refers. Whether it is membership group or reference group, defining world in its terminology implies conformity to its norms.

In this way we have finally arrived to the third assumption, on which humanistic sociology of action is founded. Culture (as system of meanings) is a source that provides individuals with objectives, goals, beliefs about what should and what should not be done. In other worlds, meanings also have **normative** and **axiological** dimensions. From a sociological perspective, to define a situation means to be able to understand, to reconstruct motivations and values that drive a persons’ behaviour. When describing relations between culture and action, Piotr Sztompka writes: “on the one hand culture provides a pool of resources for action that draws from it the values to set its goals, the norms to specify the means, the symbols to furnish it with meaning, the codes to express its cognitive content, the frames to order its components, the rituals to provide it with continuity and sequence and so forth. In brief, culture supplies action with axiological, normative, and cognitive orientation. In this way it becomes a strong determining force, releasing, facilitating, enabling, or, as the case might be, arresting, constraining, or preventing action. On the other hand, action is at the same time creatively shaping and reshaping culture, which is not a God-given constant, but rather must be seen as an accumulated product, or preserved sediment of earlier individual and collective actions.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Strauss A. L., 2002 [first ed. 1959]. *Mirrors and Masks. The Search for Identity*, Transaction Publishers New Brunswick (USA) and London, p.24

<sup>5</sup> Sztompka P., 1999. *Trust. A Sociological Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp 1-2

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Therefore analysis of meanings, which are attributed to the action by the actor, is not limited to studying types of action, it is rather a “first step” on the way to explaining more general social processes. Max Weber defines sociology “as a science which aims at the interpretative understanding of social behaviour in order to gain an explanation of its causes, its course, and its effects”. However, as also the Weber’s work shows, understanding does not mean only *explanation*<sup>6</sup> of the logic of situation and constructing ideal-types, the main goal is to *interpret* the direction of social change.

### ***1.2 Methodological consequences***

As describing in detail the characteristics of this paradigm does not fall within the scope of this paper, I only focus on some general methodological issues here. Thus, firstly we will direct our attention toward research question concerning “self-categorisation”, that will be followed by some remarks on “data collecting” process.

***Researching social roles and self- identities*** . Before briefly presenting the interactionist paradigm, it is worth noting studies of self-identification are undertaken in multitude of contemporary studies of society, culture and individual. Within the social sciences, these studies rang from structuralism to postmodernism, from analysis of adaptation, conformity and reproduction of objectively existing structures through to analysis of the space for “self creation” in ambiguous and multi-layered social contexts.

In the symbolic interactionist tradition, the concept of “identity” was forged to better understand social actions. As J.H. Mead and Ch.Cooley argued a century ago, “identity” is a result of the activity of “self”; it is both constructed during interaction and a precondition for entering into interaction. In other words “identity is a configuration of meanings, which concerns a participant of an interaction and which is accepted/recognised by all participants of the interaction. From the subjective perspective of the actor identity makes somebody’s life meaningful. On the other hand, from the perspective of the interaction’s partners, it creates some expectations and obligations. Thus, social identity is of a cognitive and pragmatic nature – thanks to it an individual is able to understand himself/herself as a member of social reality and secondly it indicates to others how should they behave toward him/her. To give an example; when we define ourselves as a “feminist”, “ecologist”, “snob” or “Buddhist”, we not only place ourselves in social reality but also indicate the motivations, the

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<sup>6</sup> We refer here to the distinction between *explanation* and *interpretation* made by P. Ricoeur: by explanation we catch internal sense of an oeuvre, while interpretation consists of making a reference between an oeuvre, social context and a person.

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patterns of our action and by this way allow others to foresee the course of our action. The act of self-categorization also indicates our membership or reference groups of as well as our shared set of values.

The first methodological assumption is related to the fact that understanding social reality is possible only by careful and rigorous study of the meanings individuals attribute to their action and to themselves as actors. Meanings must be studied in part through "understanding" rather than through exclusive reliance on the reporting of behaviour. Nevertheless "understanding" does not mean that the goal of sociologists is to "read the minds of people". What is more the objective is neither to prove nor falsify a theory or a hypothesis but to reveal, reconstruct the "schemes of knowledge", "schemes of interpretation", "logic of the situation", "typical vocabularies of motives", "social representations" and on such basis build explanations of more general social processes.

Analysis of social representation, images of "social worlds" (Shutz) require analysis of language or discourse<sup>7</sup>, since it is through discourse social actors assimilate concepts and meanings, express and negotiate meanings, norms and values. Thus discourse analysis means analysis of the process of social communication: press articles, TV programmes and everyday conversations. Therefore, depending on the research question, the sociologist may use already existing documents or undertake various kinds of observations or interviews (focus-group interviews, directive or non-directive individual in-depth interviews, etc.) whereby discourse is "produced".

At the stage of data collection, one of the most fundamental methodological concerns is to reduce the "influence of researcher" who is prone to impose his/her own "categorisations", "cognitive schemes" on the interviewees. This explains why non-directive or semi-directive schedules are preferred. Two different techniques can be used here. On the one hand the researcher begins the interview with a very general question, and then invites the respondent to develop his/her own thoughts on the topic (Shutz's autobiographical interview). On the other hand, the researcher has already prepared questions, but they are not standardized like in a survey. They are rather themes an interviewer wants to address. The themes-questions may be

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<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted, that not only language and discourse analysis allow us to enter into the world of inter-subjective meanings. For example, during his inquiry into nurses care of dying patients, Anselm L. Strauss used observation techniques to discover that patients from an upper class background receive special intensive care, while lower-class Negroes are often neglected on emergency wards. The care strategies adopted by these nurses reveal processes of defining a situation, typification and categorisation (B. G. Glaser A. L. Strauss, "The Social Loss of Dying Patients" *American Journal of Nursing*, 64 (June 1964).

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asked in a different order or form, depending on the context and development of interview. The aim of the strategy is to “evoke discourse” (Durand, Weil, 2002)<sup>8</sup>, in order to later be in position to analyse schemes of interpretation, spontaneously used metaphors, revealing both the cognitive and the emotional perspective of the speaker, but also (contrarily to nondirective interview) gathering information on certain subjects.

### ***1.3 Social representations of an “Academic Career” – basic information on methodology***

***Selection of comparative units.*** Interviews were carried out with four French and four Polish doctoral students. When the national contexts differ, the main principle of group selection was to “hold constant” as many other variables as possible. The students from both groups of my study do not differ by: sex – all are women, discipline – sociology; in some degree the university prestige – both universities are rather “provincial”, in the sense that they are not placed in the capital city of their respective countries, nor do they represent the most prestigious scientific centres; finally, both universities are relatively feminised, in the French one women represent 70% of students in the Polish 69%.

However two important differences should be noted: all of the Polish doctoral students occupy tenured positions, since the faculty is new and in need of teaching staff, whilst the French respondents are (only) DEA<sup>9</sup> students. Despite the fact that both universities may be qualified as “provincial”, the French one is a much bigger institution: in the 2001/2002 academic year, there were almost 26 000 (25 906) students registered, as against 14 000 (14022) in the Polish one. Furthermore the French institution also has a better developed research infrastructure (34 research centres, of which 9 are associated with the CNRS (National Centre of Scientific Research)).

***Data collection.*** To access the “semiotic structures” of the academic world, the method of semi-directive individual in-depth interviews was chosen. The choice of individual interviews, rather than focus group, was dictated by two reasons: during the time when the interviews had to be done, we could not find a date when all respondents were available for interview. Secondly, “case by case” analysis of the doctoral students’ discourses allows us to reach more individualized images, providing more information on “self-concept”, “motivations” and their variations. As explained in previous chapter, both

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<sup>8</sup> Durand J. P, Weil R., 2002. *Sociologie Contemporaine*, Vigot, Paris

<sup>9</sup> The DEA is a one-year doctoral foundation course, taken after the Maitrise, on entering a doctoral study program. Conversely to DESS, which has a more vocational character, the DEA is intended to prepare future researchers and academics.

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categories, are embedded in different social group references, and may facilitate or hamper success in academia. In focus-group interview this dimension may be neglected. Thus semi-directive “scenario” of interviews was used in order to evoke discourse, minimize the “influence” of the interviewer but also to control the main themes covered in the course of the interviews.

**Analysis.** The first step of the analysis consisted of reconstructing the main *themes*, subjects of the discourses. The second step consisted of (re)constructing an *interpretative frameworks* of the themes. Here we wanted to grasp the systems of meanings the students were using when they talked about “research”, “career”, “finances”? What is the reference group? At this stage, the analysis of focusing metaphors proved to be very useful. As contextual analysis is fundamental for the reconstruction of meanings, extended quotations were introduced as an illustration and justification of the interpretation. The last step was the comparison of main differences and similarities, with the aim of elaborating a typology (see also R. Bohnsack, 2001; D. Cefaï, 1998, 2001; B. G. Glaser & A. L. Strauss)

## 2. DISCOURS ON “ACADEMIC CAREER”

### 2.1 “Academe” and “Career” - Sacred and profane Spheres?

Despite different cultural, historical and organizational background, French and Polish doctoral students share very close representations and social definitions of the Academe. The scheme of perception is strictly divided into two spheres. On the one hand research and, to a lesser extent, teaching, on the other hand bureaucracy, routine, structures, but also rivalry for positions, competition, reflecting institutional and professional dimensions of the Academic world.

Two leading metaphors mark the division between these two spheres and at the same time reveal emotional attitude towards them. The first one - research/teaching - is almost unanimously defined by all doctoral students by the metaphor of *passion* or by other terms that are always very closely related to it. Thus, as Table 1 shows, academic activity is also perceived in terms coming from religious discourse: *devotion*, *sacrifice*, as well an idea of *mission* that even when is not pronounced directly, seems to express the “spirit” of an utterance, (see Tab.1 F1, F2, F3, P3, P4). On the other hand, an institutional and professional face of the Academe, as the doctoral students see it, represents a “dark side” of university work, but at the same time is defined as an “inevitable

reality” (Tab.2, F2, F3) and a part of dominant discourse (“as the majority thinks” F2, P3, P4).

The metaphor of passion and devotion seems to constitute the most general framework of reference. Thus in terms of self-identification theory, we may say that it reflects the most basic self-concept. However, when we look more carefully at the details we notice some internal divergences of the doctoral students discourses, different accents, references, contrasts in the above sketched vision of the Academe (R. Bohnsack, 2001, 183-189). The chapter presents two proposals of explanation of the dichotomist representation of the Academe. Afterwards three personal types of doctoral students will be presented.

**Tab. 1 Making research and making a career – in the French and Polish discourses**

| <b>French doctoral students</b>  | <b>Polish doctoral students</b>   |
|--|---|
| <p>(...) there is nothing more exciting than accomplishment of a project, the work lasting several years to get to know how can we improve life conditions {IDEA OF A MISSION} F1</p> <p>...(career to me it is) all, what I was trying to avoid entering university, for me there are two things, at level of fight, enormous pressure, <b>I don't like very much all this structural part, but I know also that from certain stage it is inevitable in a professional world, I know that it is an illusion when I think that I can avoid it, more over as an ambitious person, it would be difficult to me to find myself as a cashier all my life. So I'm a little bit an idealist at the moment, a little bit unrealistic and I'm aware of it</b></p> <p><b>I want to do research and I want to do my thesis but I want to do it for me, ...</b> (...) I have decided to spend 3 years on one subject because it interests me ... I do it for myself in order to find something that is important to me, to carry out in-depth research on something <b>I'm really motivated to do the thesis on a subject that I have chosen but I don't consider it as a part in a project of making a career ( ...), I think that research is above all a personal work, it allowed me to open my mind and it is a priority in my life. For many people research it is a career, structures, finances. But there is also an <u>utopian</u> part,(...) I'm ready to work on a thesis because I want to go into the subject, which interests me, in a greater</b></p> | <p><b>I do not consider myself as a person making a career (...) I associate “career” {...} with money, with a position which gives considerable power. To me working at the university is also a <u>hobby</u>, somebody who does not like it is not able to stand this work, it has to give pleasure, it takes so much time and things, and is associated with such a low salary. (...)</b> <b>Here everybody is going ahead, and this work consist in it, you have to develop your-self</b> P1</p> <p><b>Career means to me high wages, so here (at university) we have to put away this word, sometimes, among friends, we are joking that we are paid for our <u>hobby</u>. ...</b> P2</p> <p>Whether I'm thinking about it as about a career? <b>Certainly I would like to achieve something, but overall I would like to be a good sociologist, scientist, maybe not necessarily an outstanding one, but I don't want that it was only a university work, without any achievements.</b></p> <p>For many people a career means achieving a position, to become a dean, etc. But to me making career in the Academe it is above all scientific work, publications, conferences, travels, <b><u>the thing is to do something all the time, to not to stay in one place and not only to occupy a position</u></b> (...)</p> |

*depth and learn ... and live through this experience (...) I was hesitating very long whether I should do a DEA or not, finally I accepted the idea telling myself “it is a **madness**” but you choose an idea and you want to live by it until the end, because you like it (...) I haven’t got any idea of career, **I do not construct my life like that** (...) my concept of a career is a very American one in fact – I may become who I want to be, and I may change if I want {IDEA OF SELF – MADE WOMAN} **I would prefer to change a job and find myself in a terrible situations but I won’t allowed my life to be taken over by a work;** F2*

*... the advantage of university is a possibility to bury yourself in a subject that **fascinates** you, **devote yourself entirely to it** (...) maybe it is a kind of an **idealism** and **maybe I just cherish illusions** (...) but at the moment what I like the most in this work is the possibility of working on the things that fascinate you F3*

*For me, in the current situation, the most important thin is to do what you like doing (...) **I’m not telling myself: I start with it, then I’m going to find a job and after that I will make a big career** (...) the most important to me is to do **what I like** ... and even if after that I find a job in the voluntary sector, I won’t be well paid, it isn’t a big problem, **I’m working on sociology and that is the most important thing, not making a career** F4*

{MOVEMENT} (For me it is) *work on a subject that hasn’t been yet developed by anybody else, when you discoverer {...} and an enormous responsibility, responsibility for a word when you are teaching or writing, in fact you are not an ordinary worker but you should set a pattern, be an example for others, being an academic it is very responsible task {IDEA OF A MISSION} P3*

*University it isn’t making a career for me it is **passion**. I like very much teaching, work with students allows me to think, to **develop myself**, it require continuous interaction and forces me to learn new things **it is a passion it isn’t just any old career**. (...) **I want to take Ph.D degree “but for myself” and not for wearing a gown.***

***For the majority** of people, a career means reaching certain positions at the university: doctorate, habilitation, professorship or to be promoted in the administration structure. But in the other sense it is development, it also means that people respect you, like you as a person, as a participant of a discussion. (...) **I have never made any link between the university and the notion “career”, they are two opposite things.** (...) “Career” I associate with the “**rat-race**”, big ambitions and achievements. My family, my friends they see me as a person who has a career: I am at university, and it is prestigious. Moreover I have my firm – so it is a career (the respondent is an owner of a small business). But I have never looking at it in this way and I*

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p><i>hope that I will never start to look at it like that, <b>because I do not like this kind of thinking</b></i>P4</p> |
|--|--|

## 2.2 “*Being an Academic*” – from social role to self-concept

When asked about their research activities, almost all French and Polish doctoral students claimed decisively and categorically: “I don’t want to make any career”. However, at the same time, they express strong motivations and the desire to work as a researcher, scientist, which proves that they have ambitions and want to have some achievements in their professional activity (compare Tab.1). Trying to explain and understand the contradiction we may employ at least two “theories” or “concepts” - L. Boltanski’s idea of the social words of justification of action as well concept of self-categorisation, as it has been developed in the symbolic interactionist paradigm.

The reference to Boltanski’s proposal of six grand types of “worlds” framing and justifying action impose “by itself” by the metaphor of passion so often pronounced by French as well as Polish doctoral students. The way the students represent the academic activity exactly reflect the Boltanski’s “world of inspiration” (L. Boltanski & L. Thévenot, 2001, 200-206), in which the motivating force is the access to perfection, self-transformation that is made when one spontaneously follow after the spirit of inspiration. In the world all structures, forms that assure individual stabilization and certitude are rejected as they act against creativity, spontaneity, authenticity. Therefore, the statement “I don’t want to make any career” does not mean that the women-students see their self-fulfillment in the role of a wife or a mother; but rather it is a rejection of an industrial, technocratic logic and language.

Another explanation of the phenomena may be offered if we use concepts work out in the symbolic interactionist paradigm, and more precisely speaking in theories of self-identification. Therefore, at the beginning different levels of self-categorization process have to be distinguish: **self-concept**, (the most general and rather stable, as it is rather independent to changing situational context), **self-image** (how does other perceive me in a situation), self identity (“who am I” in a certain situational context), **social role** (what should I do as a “mother”, a “student”, what are the expectations concerning my social position) (see also E. Halas, 1987, p. 158-206). Taking into account the different levels of “self-categorisation”, the representation of “academic activity” as a passion, seems to reflect the most general “self concept” and not a “social role”. For the respondents “being an academic” it is not (or not only) a profession, a role with its fulfillment of obligations and expectations, but rather a very personal engagement, driven by a motivation of “self development”, “being authentic”, desire to belonging to a moral community of people who share similar values<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> In the recent sociological literature the phenomena of “shift from social role to personal identity” has been already recognized and analyzed, however the explanations differ, just like

### ***2.3 Different identities – PH.D. students personal types***

Nevertheless, the similarities seem to be common only at the most general level. Once the PH.D. students start to talk about concrete situations contrasts and differentiations appear (questions concerning personal strategy in the Academe). Using interactionist terminology, we may say that the variation of motivations and patterns of action reflect different definitions of situations and different “self-identities” (the aspect missing from Boltanski’s conceptual framework). Analyzing the differences and referring to phenomenological sociology of A. Schutz, we can reconstruct three “personal types” of doctoral students: “enthusiasts”, “realist” and “student”.

**enthusiast** – is the most idealistic student, motivated by the idea of “being perfect” (in Shutz’s terminology motive in order to) insisting that “self development” is a priority in her life and consequently rejecting all structural and institutional dimensions of the profession saying “I know that it is inevitable but I don’t want to participate in it”, “I know that I’m utopist, but...”. It seems that all her activities are subordinated to what Boltanski has described as the world of passion. The discourse of an “enthusiast” is characterized by metaphors coming from religious terminology (sacrifice, devotion) which both explain and justify the financial disadvantages of academic work, lack of professional stability, etc. (see F2, F3, P3, P4 in tab.1).

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concepts and sociological approaches differ too. For example, Burke suggests that “self-identity” may become more significant than “role identity” in groups where normative expectations are constrained (J. E. Stets & P. J. Burke, 2002, s.32), that means that a shift from social role to personal identity is in fact determined by changing social structures, and expectations relevant to a certain role and position: more fluid and vague structures give rise to more personalized roles. In French sociological literature, a book recently published by F. Dubet also focuses on the phenomena of separation “position” (and role) from “person” (F. Dubet, 2002). Through the study of different professions he shows that work is less and less perceived as the accomplishment of the role, task, submission to discipline and become much more interiorised, founded on personal engagement. However Dubet’s explains has a diachronic nature. He argues that the phenomena imply the “transformation of professions” which is relevant to the Weberian concept of secularization’s process. From Polish sociology we may evoke an analysis of Piotr Sztompka: based on his writings on a culture of trust we might say that the shift from “role” to “self identity” is a sign of social distrust to the formal, State structures. For example, in the Polish case, the distrust was influenced by historical separation and conflict between the “State”(perceived as an enemy, an imposed foreign force) and the society, or rather “nation”, which was cultivated in the private sphere”; (P. Sztompka, 1999). In the context of the analysis of the perceptions of academic careers, it would be interesting for future comparative research to explore whether the same processes are underway here, under the auspices of globalization and cultural change.

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**realist** – Although the “realist” Ph.D. students share with the “enthusiasts” a certain disregard for battles for position and power, they nevertheless argue that when one wants to be an academic, one must, unfortunately, accept the “rules of the game”. As one of the French students says: “you should play with it, you should show that you have an ace up your sleeve and you should do your research because you couldn’t betray yourself...”(F1). It is worth noting, that at the linguistic level notions of “devotion”, “sacrifice” and to lesser extent “passion” appear seldom, and the focusing metaphors are “game” and “strategy” (F1, P2).

**student** – Here the main motivations are gaining a Ph.D., which is perceived as more valuable than a M.A diploma<sup>11</sup>, and which may be useful outside the university. These students are unsure about their post-doctoral career paths. Even though students may be attracted by an academic career, “being a professor” seems to be out of their reach: “I would like to be a prof – says a French student - but (...) for me it is something very high, now when I’m talking about it I don’t feel that I will achieve it...” (F4). At the linguistic level the notion of passion is evoked quite often, however it is perceived as a stage rather than as a life project. (F4, P1).

From the perspective of gender equality in the Academe, it is worth asking whether the above presented “self-definitions” of Ph.D. students may have an impact on women’s access to top-rank academic positions. In order to answer this question, we would obviously need to compare our data with the self-definitions of male doctoral students and/or undertake a cohort study and interview the same respondents in a few years time. Nevertheless, the above analysis shows that the desire of Ph.D. students to embrace an academic career should not be taken for granted, since only the “realists” seem to be set on an academic career path.

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11 “Student’s” pattern of action seems to be very relevant to the phenomena described by R. Boudon in “Inequality of chances”: increase of education level causes relative devaluation of university degrees what in consequence leads to a rise in demand for education. (R. Boudon, (1979). *L’inégalité de chances. La mobilité social dans les sociétés industrielles*, Librairie Armand Colin.

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### 3. DISCOURSE ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT

#### *3.1 Taboo and lack of language*

Talking about sexual harassment turned out to be really difficult for almost all doctoral students. They were speaking rather fluently and eloquently about the university and the careers, but as soon as the question of sexual harassment came up, their flow became hesitant with unfinished sentences. As a result of the utterances concerning this issue are often completely incorrect from a grammatical and stylistic point of view, and differ significantly from the other parts of the interviews.

It is worth noting that these “linguistic problems” were more common amongst the Polish students. Respondents were often embarrassed by the subject or by the problems they had talking about it. Uncertainty and embarrassment were even more obvious when we come to analyse the significance of the utterances. Suddenly phrases like “hm..”, “I don’t know...”, “It’s difficult to say” appear and there are frequent repetitions of words and questions (P2, P3, P4, F4). Some of the students openly state that it is difficult for them to speak about the issue: “Sexual harassment – it is like something that happened to my friend, when during a job interview she received some propositions, something like that could not take place, I do not know how to describe it, it makes me very nervous” P4. The discourse becomes more fluent when respondents talk about sexual harassment in a humorous way. On the contrary, the French students, even if they do not have fixed opinions on sexual harassment and give contradictory responses, are able to talk rather fluently about the issue.

Although Polish and French discourses on sexual harassment differ, we can also find certain similarities. Firstly, sexual harassment appears in everyday conversations mainly as a subject of jokes, a French student explains: “we make jokes looking at ... relationships that may take place, but never in terms of harassment. I think that we don’t even imagine a situation like that ... we are talking about the relationship of seduction, but for harassment it is necessary to have somebody who isn’t very, very good” F1. Her Polish counterpart says: “We are often joking about people whose “goggles are becoming wet”, in the face of beautiful women or student during an exam”, we turning it into a joke” P3 (compare also tab.2 the 1st row). Such way of dealing with the subject suggests that, in both comparative groups, sexual harassment is a taboo subject. Secondly, in both groups certain students “refuse” to talk about the issue arguing: “I’m not well informed on the subject” (F3, F4, P4, P1). Thirdly, it seems that this is the first time they have been invited to give their personal opinions on sexual harassment. They know the term, as it is a common term of

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the language, but it seems that it is at odds with their personal experiences. They do not use it to categorize their experience and define a situation. But does it mean that the problem does not exist? Let's analyse the following quotation: “Sometimes behaviour of a person may be strange or striking to me, but I have never felt insulted, I have never noticed any problem”. But after a while, when asked “have you ever encountered it (offensive sexist behaviour) at university?” the answer is: “no, well yes ... a Doctor paid a lot of attention to me, which made me feel very nervous and was off putting, but it had never become a serious situation, any propositions and I think that a lot of people would not consider it as sexual harassment. (...) We would have to give more thought to exactly what “sexual harassment” really is” (P1). The above cited utterance suggests that, the student had never considered the situation she described in terms of sexual harassment, however during the discussion, when she was put in a position where she had to “define”, “consider”, “explain” her experience, she finds that in fact she had experienced something that resembles sexual harassment. The pattern appears in almost every interview (exceptions: P2, F3).

This may mean that experiences of discomfort caused by “offensive sexist behaviour” exist, but there is no adequate vocabulary or, using a postmodernist term, “dictionary” which can serve to categorize and define such a situation. The problem may be also connected with the rejection of feminist ideology (compare Tab. 2). We will come back to the question later.

### ***3.2 “Being an academic” as a self-concept and a question of sexual harassment***

In the previous chapter we argued that, in a perception of the doctoral students, “being an academic” is more a “concept of self” than a social role. Let's go a little bit further in this direction and consider whether the personalization of the profession may also influence perceptions of question of sexual harassment.

Firstly, we will take a look at an utterance of a French “realist” student who explains how professional relations within the academe become a personal engagement: “It depends on the professor, it depends on the faculty, but it is true that when you are working for a research director it may lead you into quasi intimate relations with him; you come and visit him he comes to your place, I know boys who use the informal “you” form when talking with their professors, they kiss each other on the cheeks when they meet, it is a particular kind of relationship, but it is also normal when you are engage in a research project with

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other people, there comes a moment... it's obvious that when he is interested in your subject, in the way you develop your subject, you, as a person, also interest him.” F1

The process of personalisation of relationship is presented as something natural, something that happens without any intention, but rather as something that is implicitly specific to the profession. When a situation is defined in that way, it seems senseless to blame anybody for it or to fight against it, since such behaviour goes against the “logic of the situation”.

The next two quotes, from the interviews with Polish “idealist” student, are rather coherent with the “logic” described above: “offensive sexist behaviour? – it is not a question of discrimination it is a question of good-manners, or good-breeding, it is simply tactless” P4. Therefore, talking about an “offensive sexist behaviour” the student refuses the terminology of “sexual harassment”, replacing the phenomena into a sphere of personal relations. When somebody does not know the cultural code, which should be respected at university we are forced to cope with a „tactless person”, we can reduce contacts with her, we can avoid her but fighting with a “character”, somebody’s “nature” seems to be useless.

The replacement of relations and behaviours, which are connected with sexuality, to a sphere of private relations, we can also heard in a remark of another Polish “idealist” student on sexual harassment: “In my opinion if this problem exists at university, it rather happens with the acceptance of both sides”. P3

Basing on the social representations of sexual harassment above presented, we can develop the following hypothesis: when professional structures and positions become more vague, and informal relations more frequent, social actors are “less sensitive” to sexual harassment issues and more prone to define “sexual harassment” purely in terms of “physical abuse” thus excluding verbal and non-verbal behaviours from their perception of the phenomenon.

### *3.3 What has happened with feminists?*

Among Ph.D. students interviewed, there is only one (Polish) who defines herself as feminist. When asked about the specific problems that women academics have to face in universities, she immediately raised the issue sexual harassment, whilst her colleagues, even when asked directly about the issue, do not perceive it as an obstacle. Both in Polish and in French discourses, students tend to adopt an “anti-feminist” or rather “post-feminist” attitudes towards the sexual harassment issue (see Tab. 2). However it is important to stress that the term “feminism” does not appear in any of the questions asked (see appendix).

Tab.2 Discourse on sexual harassment

|   | French PH.D. students   | Polish PH.D. students  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Reluctance to term “sexual harassment”</b> | <p>(...) a remark, a glance and we are going to separate the people because it will be easiest, it isn't a solution ... <b>I think that it is quite normal</b> ... “you look very nice today”, as well a women may tell her colleague in a similar way “oh, you have not shaved today”. in France and <b>in other latin countries we are very physical</b>, if we introduce regulations like “a hand on the shoulder a look that goes down at the level of chest” <b>everybody is doing this and it has never shocked French people; F1</b></p> <p>(Jokes – is it sexual harassment?) <b>No</b>, because, .... I do it, no, ... (...) in a workplace you couldn't work all the time, there are momenst when you need to relax, so if you couldn't have a joke about behaviour of your colleague, it is also in order to ... it also create a bond, and it is very important. When it is repeating, when it takes place every day, <b>when you see that somebody doesn't treat it as a joke</b>, you should keep him at a distance or start to talk about it, I think that it may be regulated like that F1</p> <p><b>sexuality is a heart of a Men, it is a heart of desire, of</b></p> | <p>It depends on the situation. Sometimes it is impossible to avoid perceiving you in terms of your sex, it is natural, but sexist jokes ... I think that it should not take a place at university; - “Do you perceive it as sexual harassment”, <b>Maybe</b> ... if it is my supervisor... P1</p> <p>It is difficult to say, I think that <b>it is a problem of the person who is telling this kind of jokes</b>. But I think that such comments, jokes... <b>don't constitute sexual harassment. In fact, it depends</b> ... if they are very burdensome, repetitive, certainly we can say... we could call it sexual harassment (...) I think that ... that ... if a person doesn't pass certain limits, it doesn't disturb me.... that means that he has problem with himself P3</p> <p>Offensive sexist behavior – <b>it is not a question of discrimination it is a question of good-manners, or good-breeding, it is tactlessP4</b></p> <p>- “(...)It (s.h.) would be rather physical</p> |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <p><i>life so I don't find it particularly harmful, but it depends it may annoy me and I will react strongly (...), but it depends on the case because I haven't got any general opinion about it (...) I prefer to avoid it because I think that within a professional framework it shouldn't take place, but when we work with somebody, we get to know him and it is inevitable that somebody makes a comment (...)F2</i></p> <p><i>(vulgar comments) I don't see it as a sexual harassment, it makes a woman an object, as if she wasn't a human being (...) and I can't stand it but I don't see it as sexual harassment, as it is a tough world to me, in fact it is a form of harassment in a sense of social pressure, but social pressure have always existed (...) F2</i></p> | <p><i>behavior to you?"</i></p> <p><i>- Physical or psychological, if I do not wish to listen to vulgar jokes and somebody is telling them all the time, it is maybe not sexual harassment but a sort of it (P4).</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Defining sexual harassment</b></p> | <p><i>I think that we can speak about harassment when there is a situation of subordination, it isn't a question of relationship between a woman and a man, it is a relationship of power and subordination in a professional domain (...) I think that these are the relationships that exists all the time, because there is domination and the simple fact of hierarchy in a workplace. F1</i></p> <p><i>I think ... maybe because a have strong character (...) that it takes place at the a little bit higher level then</i></p>   | <p><i>To me making compliments, continually focusing attention on your sex, it is also a kind of sexual harassment (...) it concerns the situations that exist in a work environment, in a formal context, when my sex, my appearance becoming the most important thing, especially to men. When I am perceived and evaluated on the basis of my sex and not on the basis of my scientific work, and of course when it is articulated in that way – because I think that we could not avoid this kind of perception, it is our</i></p> |

|                                    |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
|                                    | <p><i>the language, because somebody who has the same status may answer in the same way but if she is subordinated she is forced to be quiet and even if you want to answer you couldn't because it is your boss, but for the people having equal status sexual harassment begins when ... (...) a dialogue becomes perverted ... when there is an abuse in gestures, glances ... and many people think like that ... it's from a moment, when a woman coming back to her place tells herself "no there is something that didn't go well and depending on the person it may be situated at very different levelsF1</i></p> <p><i>Sexual harassment it is a pressure (...) it is difficult to define (...) I'm not well informed on this subject, even less at university... (F3)</i></p> <p><i>For me sexual harassment may be also moral, <b>it may be looks that are out of place and recurrent</b>, it may be a comment because it may be traumatic F3</i></p> <p><i>It is all gestures, words, attitude, glances toward a girl ... that make her feel bad and are connected with her sexuality F4</i></p> | <p><i>nature, but the difference between us and animals is that we have self-control P1</i></p> <p><i><b>I think that it has more in common with physical than verbal behaviour</b>, however when it is repetitive verbal action it may be also called sexual harassment but anyway I think that sexual harassment generally involves physical abuse P3</i></p> |
| <b>Women as aggressors – post-</b> | <p><i>Because unfortunately there are also women who want to succeed faster, like men, (...) so there is also a game of seduction at this levelF1</i></p>   | <p><i>One does not have to consider her-self as a "feminist" to demand equal treating. P1</i></p>   |

|                           |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>feminist ideology?</b> | <p><i>It annoys me to hear that only women are harassed, although among girls we are doing exactly the same, maybe not in the same extent F2</i></p> <p><i>I don't think that I share a feminist criteria ... it doesn't correspond to my point of view at all, I'm really shocked by masculine behaviour that runs counter to women's dignity, but I have an impression that quite often feminist behaviour that run counter man's dignity, ... and that there are stupid people everywhere. There are as many disrespectful men as disrespectful women and these kind of people shock me and I don't like it F3</i></p> | <p><i>Is it an obstacle, which may hamper women's careers in the academe? Hm..., difficult to say, for some maybe it can be even helpful (laugh), but whether it may make doing a career difficult? I do not know of any case like that P3</i></p> <p><i>In my opinion if this problem exists (sexual harassment) at university, it isn't very serious, it rather happens with the acceptance of both sides. P3</i></p> |
|---------------------------|---|---|

The reluctance towards “feminism” does not mean that the students accept “male’s dominance” or “male’s ideology”. When we analyse their discourse, it is clear that they share some feminist’s values, and even treat it as something obvious (compare Tab.2). Talking about discrimination they point to the problem of socialisation, women’s marginalization in a workplace. However at the same time they are trying to emphasize that they do not believe in any “community of women”. It is worth pointing out that both Polish and French students strongly and spontaneously emphasize that there are also women who abuse men, exploit the low on sexual harassment what seems to go against “feminist’s world-view”.

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The results of the comparative research presented above are focused on cultural variables but from sociological perspective that means that culture is analysed as a source of values objectives, cognitive structures that direct action, that supply meanings, which are employed by actors to built their self-definitions, definitions of their situation. However, putting structural, economical, organizational, historical dimensions into brackets and focusing on the cognitive, normative and epistemological aspect of discourse does not mean that the analysis presented here is purely theoretical in nature. Therefore in conclusions I will try also to emphasize the fact that, by taking values, language (especially metaphors) of a target group into account, we can significantly improve the efficiency of the public/affirmative action.

### ***Conclusions and further research***

1.) Perceptions of the Academe, at the most general level, do not differ according to respondents’ nationality. Thus female French and Polish doctoral students of sociology, compose a single “generational group”. The culture of “authenticity”, “personal development” (Inglert’s “post-materialist values”) is employed as a source of categories that enables self-interpretation, provides motivation as well helping to deal with problems arising at a certain stage of professional path and certain phase of their life. The findings direct us to new questions:

- whether male, French and Polish, doctoral students would also compose one “generational group”, whether/how their perception of the Academe may differ from the representations shared by their female counterparts?
- Whether/how, going through the following stages in academic career path is accompanied by re-definition of self, of academic

work, sexual harassment? Whether at the following stages the concept of generation will keep its explanative value or maybe once the current doctoral students become researchers – and are more anchored to their professional milieu - organizational, structural context of interaction will make a difference between Polish and French academics?

2.) Willingness of “being professor” should not be taken for granted, female doctoral students are fascinated by research, perceive academic work as very attractive and prestigious (even if not well-paid), but at the same time they do not aspire to reach the top of the academic professional hierarchy.

3.) In case of preparing any public campaign/action, it should be taken into account that its efficiency may be much more improved by employing language, metaphors that are compatible with the “mental schemes”, terminology and “dictionary” that are used by the target group. In the case of female doctoral students, it should be noted that despite general cultural differences both French and Polish doctoral students:

- Hardly ever define themselves as feminists, and term “feminism” may invoke negative connotations but at the same time they are against any kind of gender inequality and are doing their best to not to be marginalized in work because of their sex. In other words, it seems that rejection of feminism does not mean an acceptance of masculine domination but rather it is a rejection of a general worldview – ideology – which is trying to explain social reality in terms of masculine domination.
- Nearly never define their action in terms of “career making” as this expression also has rather pejorative connotations. Thus they are ready to make an enormous “devotion”, “sacrifice” of their life, they want to do research, publish books and articles, even if it is not very well paid, but refuse to say that they are making any kind of “career”. The refusal of the term that comes from “managerial discourse”, is embedded in the general rejection of the logic and values of the private sector. Especially in French case, their choice of the Academe is way of contesting liberal economic. Thus, the fact that they often repeat “I don’t want to make a career” has nothing to do with lack of ambition, nor with the desire for self-realization in the role of wife and mother. The point is that they perceive and express themselves in a different terminology, rooted in the idea of self-development, self-realization – “postmodernist values” as R. Inglehard would say.

4.) Low sensitivity towards sexual harassment issues may be connected with flexibility of social structures, and strong personal engagement into a role.

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## APPENDICES

*The interview guide*

## UNIVERSITY CAREER

Why have you decided to take Ph.D. study? What are your future plans – are you going to stay at university? Have you ever thought of another “career path”? What it would be? What are its advantages and disadvantages? What are advantages and disadvantages of university career or work?

Whether university career/work differs from the career in others sectors? What are the differences?

What does it mean to you to “make an Academic career”

## WOMEN IN THE ACADEMIA

Whether making a career at university is more difficult or easier for women, compare with other sectors?

Whether gender plays a role when somebody wants to reach a top-position at university?

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Imagine that during a meeting, a workshop or simply at work at the university somebody makes jokes with sexual connotations that make you feel uncomfortable because they affect your dignity.

What do you think about such situation? Is it something normal and inevitable in the world we are living in or a kind of “deviation”, anomaly that should/can be rooted out?

Imagine that one of your colleagues or a supervisor makes you feel uncomfortable by the way he is looking at you (as it has sexual connotations to you). What do you think about such situation....?(see above)

Some people/men like to comment on the appearance of a woman, her behavior, private life in a way she feels uncomfortable? What do you think about such situation....?(see above)?

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|  | and   |                   |

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