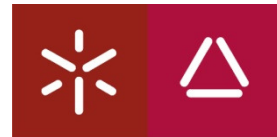


4th Conference

## YOUNG PEOPLE & SOCIETIES

*Young people, Europe, the Mediterranean  
Territories, Identities, Policies*

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*Construction of professional trajectories: gender bias persistency in the “choice” of a master degree*

### **Introduction**

Current debates about the feminisation of higher education and the modalities of flexible specialisation and productive economy have sustained the recurrence of "male imperialism" (Hirata and Kergoat, 1998; Hirata and Rogerat, 1988). Despite different approaches depending on the countries, most of them are now faced with problems and challenges substantially identical regarding the expected effects linked to recent changes in the higher education system. These ongoing transformations concern the extension of time spent in education (education and lifelong learning), associated with a relatively recent trend to the feminisation of several scientific areas and degrees. Moreover, in recent years, especially since the 1990's, graduates and postgraduates are facing major changes in the transition from university to labour market and also in employability profiles, particularly female graduates.

Women's increasing access to higher education during the last decade, especially in Portugal, has been accompanied by institutionalised discrimination practices that influence job "choice" and "vocational" naturalisation. In this sense, the following fundamental hypothesis is formulated: in which manner may the current feminisation of the labour market, in particular

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young women's growing investment on higher qualification, change the traditional sexual division of labour, considering the fact that organisational experience is still based on a division between male and female roles, and on firmly ingrained and persistent gender representations.

The perpetuation of the different participation of men and women in the social space, in general, and the world of work, in particular, is reinforced at various levels and is accompanied by subtle forms of male domination (Amâncio, 1993, 1994; Ferreira, 1999, 2001; Evetts, 1994; Amâncio and Nogueira, 2005; Nogueira, 1997). There are many examples: the existence of "female" and "male" jobs; the naturalisation of professional qualities; the result of wage inequality related to "different" tasks, activities or occupations; the "unwillingness" to develop a career; the higher incidence of insecurity in women's work compared to men's. In fact, the gender perspective allows the observation of an important segmentation of the labour market based on a set of traits that characterise, in general, women's status, such as: i) highest unemployment rates; ii) precarious employment; iii) lower wages for the same levels of qualification; iv) full-time profession; v) occupational segregation (horizontal and vertical); vi) minor representation in leadership positions; vii) fewer promotion opportunities in careers (Cabral, 2005; Rato, *et al.* 2005; Marques, Silva and Veiga, 2006). The European Commission report, *She Figures 2006. Women and Science Statistics and Indicators* (2006a), despite centred on the analysis of scientific and research employment in the European Union according to sex, claims that: "Gender imbalance is known to be a serious issue in these areas of employment, and the analysis confirms this to be so. In addition, there is clear evidence that women are under-deployed in research generally and in S&T specifically, have poorer access to R&D resources, receive lower pay on average, and have a disproportionately lower chance than men of reaching senior levels or holding positions of influence, for example through membership of scientific boards".

Based on the results of the project "Master degrees in Portugal: Social-cultural models of persistence between men and women"<sup>1</sup>, this paper focuses on the persistence of gender asymmetries among high level scientific and technical professionals. The research intended to answer the following questions: What are the conditions for successfully obtaining a master degree in Portugal? How do men and women develop co-optation strategies regarding the demands emerging from different life spheres, namely the professional and family ones? This paper aims to deconstruct the main stereotypes and barriers that continue to influence women's "choices", which profoundly determine their professional trajectories. Methodologically, the research combined a quantitative approach – resorting to official statistical data analysis and two questionnaire surveys (one addressing master students<sup>2</sup> and the other addressing the

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<sup>1</sup> This project was developed in the field of Gender Social Relations and the Politics for Equality between Men and Women in Portugal and was funded by FCT/CIDM (PIHM/63481/2005) under the supervision of Emília Araújo.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the number of master graduates inscribed in the school year of 2005/ 2006 of the GPEARI, it was possible to define a quota sample.

master courses' directors<sup>3</sup>) – with a qualitative one – resorting to interviews with master students<sup>4</sup>.

This article is organised in two parts. In the first, the evolution of master graduates in Portuguese universities is analysed, revealing the growing demand for higher qualification on the part of women in specific scientific areas. The second part focuses on the examination of empirical results, particularly those that allow for the characterisation of the students' professional contexts. This exploration of substantive information suggests important reflection clues materialised in professional trajectories and in competence demands regarding life-long learning, as well as in career models, which develop *unequally* according to gender and in close interaction with private/ family life.

### **1. Master degree: the persistency of gender segregation and scientific area**

In the context of economic globalization and competitiveness to which Portugal is not alien, the effort within the communitarian frame regarding the improvement of the current generations' qualifications in terms of access to the labour market is unarguable. This evolution has framed public policies regarding higher education and science in order for these to fulfil demands such as, among others, those of diversification of the educational offer, employability, and internationalization included in the *Bologna Declaration*. Considering the acceleration of these processes, the matters of people mobility and knowledge and technology transfer have also been raising important challenges for universities and their relation with the business and social milieus. Accordingly, one has been witnessing a gradual increase in the number of candidates to higher education, both graduate and post-graduate in the different member-States of the European Union, including Portugal (Eurostat, 2007).

Focusing the analysis on the evolution of the number of post-graduates, available statistical data from the G.P.E.A.R.I. (*Gabinete de Planeamento, Estratégia, Avaliação e Relações Internacionais*) [Office for Planning, Strategy, Evaluation, and International Relations] indicate a growth trend during the last years of the XX<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. The total number of master graduates has undergone significant increases considering a five-year scale (especially between 1990/ 91 and 1995/ 96), both in terms of public and private institutions<sup>6</sup>. If one considers the number of graduates according to major scientific areas, it is possible to observe a positive evolution in the offer of master courses. However, such trend is not equally reproduced (nor with the same expressiveness) in all areas. In Social Sciences, Commerce, and Law one finds the larger number of graduates. Subsequently, one finds the areas of Arts and Humanities; Engineering,

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<sup>3</sup> Considering the total number of master courses in Public Universities in the school year of 2005/ 2006, the sample was delimited to 88 directors and a certain proportionality of their distribution according to the scientific area was ensured.

<sup>4</sup> 16 interviews were accomplished in order to explore the relations between master degree and professional career, on one side, and master degree and personal and family life, on the other.

<sup>5</sup> Even if such growth assumes a relative proportion of 3% within the global picture of Portuguese higher education (GPEAR, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> This increase can be verified considering that if in 1990/ 91 Private Education graduates represented only 1% of the total graduates, in 2005/ 06 they raise to 13%, in any case a rate slightly inferior to the 2000/ 01 (15%) one.

Industries and Similar Techniques; Science, Mathematics and Computer Science; and Education (the latter with a substantial rise in 2005/ 06). With an opposite trend, one finds the major areas of Agriculture; Health and Social Protection; and Services.

This growth has been followed by a feminisation trend, which has become a major feature in the analysis of transformations in higher education. This feminisation process reproduces the segregation already present in graduate courses, not questioning the distribution profile according to the above mentioned major scientific, and following, in fact, European trends<sup>7</sup>.

Within this context, and departing from the research's results, the students' social-demographic and professional profile is significant both in terms of gender segregation and scientific area and of the asymmetries in professional contexts (Reimer, and Steinmetz, 2007). So, in a total of 200 individuals, 34% are male and 67% are female. Comparing these numbers with the number of individuals inscribed in master courses, in Portugal, in 2005/ 2006, the sample presents an over-representation of women, which must be taken into account in the interpretation of results. As for its distribution according to scientific area, the sample is proportionally close to the universe, as the following table shows.

**Table 1. Universe /sample per sex and scientific area**

Scientific Area	Universe				Sample			
	Men	%	Women	%	Men	%	Women	%
Education	254	6%	1116	19%	6	9,0%	24	18%
Arts and Humanities	447	11%	778	14%	11	16,4%	18	13,50%
Social Sciences, Commerce, and Law	1423	34%	1795	31%	20	29,9%	47	35,30%
Science, Mathematics, and Computer Sciences	497	12%	640	11%	9	13,4%	14	10,50%
Engineering, Transforming, and similar Techniques	840	20%	422	7%	14	20,9%	12	9%
Agriculture	37	1%	33	1%	2	3,0%	0	0%
Health and Social Protection	187	5%	499	9%	1	1,5%	8	6%
Services	462	11%	458	8%	4	6,0%	10	7,50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4147</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5741</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: GPEARI/ Survey to master students (2005/2006)

<sup>7</sup> In areas such as Education; Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences, Commerce, and Law; Science, Mathematics and Computer Sciences; and finally, Agriculture, the rate of female graduates is superior to that of male graduates. In Education, for example, the feminisation rate raises to 76%. Also in Arts and Humanities (69%) and in Social Sciences, Commerce, and Law, there are more graduate women (59%) than men. This characteristic can also be seen in the area of Science, Mathematics, and Computer Sciences, as well as in Agriculture (59%). However, regarding engineering, whereas the European average points to 41% female graduates, in Portugal this rate is lower, corresponding to 35%.

In short, considering the persistency of segregation according to gender and scientific area, the argument of youngsters' and families' "bad choices" regarding higher education courses (Baudelot and Establet, 1992; Zazzo, 1993; Léon, 1994; Grácio, 1997; Ferreira, 2002), denounced as early as the 1990's, remains central and updated to explain conducts in terms of the demand for post-graduation courses. In fact, we are confronted with a double disjunction in the demand structure: a quantitative one, if we think of the volume of graduate population, which in some knowledge areas transcends the employment market's level of solicitations; and a qualitative one in terms of employability and competency profiles in the areas of science and technology. The argument of the "double effect of sexual discrimination" (Baudelot and Establet, 1992) remains updated, too, since women's choice for education of a literary and humanistic a feature tend to present more difficulties in terms of employability and valuation within the labour market.

In fact, as many research publications on socialisation show, particularly those focused on family and school, young women have made and continue to make "bad" choices concerning degrees and/ or specialisation courses, with obvious impacts on their employment opportunities. There is a huge proportion of females in humanities and social sciences, including post-graduate courses, which clearly explains the strong link between gender and professional activities closer to the traditional definition of "feminine" tasks (e.g., administrative staff, public relations, marketing, teaching, health care). Such choices have therefore led to the exclusion of women from positions of authority and responsibility in domains such as economics, finance, and politics, or linked to top technologies and professional careers with economic and symbolic prestige.

Such conditionings to the development of a professional career, including leadership and top decision jobs (the best paid), on the part of women when compared to men (Santos, 2006; Duarte and Santos, 2008), have supported the "glass ceiling" thesis, which is once again not dissociated from educational trajectories. In fact, women's easier access to the labour market tends to highlight strong social divisions based on family and social position, on school and on privileged and differentiated vocational orientations, on generalised power, domination and distinction relations (Bourdieu, 1999). Subsequently, we will focus on the dynamics of the productive system and on the logics that structure the labour market, which use, (re)produce and transpose such social divisions, perpetuating and reinforcing them, or creating new ones.

## **2. Work, private life, and gender**

One of the specificities of the Portuguese situation within the European context lays on the fact of the feminisation of post-graduate education being associated to a high participation of women

in the labour market<sup>8</sup>. Pressures to conciliate a professional activity, usually full-time (Ferreira, 1999; Perista, 1999)<sup>9</sup>, and the education investment women tend to pursue certainly raise relevant questions, which must be equated not just in terms of the structure and organisation of master courses and of family and emotional contexts (which will not be dealt with here)<sup>10</sup>, but also in terms of the professional contexts and career models associated to on-going transformations in the labour market (Marauni, 1998). We will extend our analysis regarding specifically the latter. So, some of the processes of (re)configuration of professional conditions and statuses towards a growing segmentation and internal heterogeneity of the post-graduate labour force are relevant. Also, pressures to conciliate private life and work tend to highlight, on one side, the limits of public organisms' measures and policies (COM, 2007; COM, 2006b), and to reinforce the gender split regarding their impacts on the planning and organisation of professional careers.

## 2.1. Segmentation by professional situation and labour status

Focusing our analysis on professional contexts, we depart from the social-professional characterisation of individuals, considering the following indicators: labour status; length of work schedule per day in the context of professional activity; professional group; type of contract; and type of organisation and activity sector.

Regarding work situation, most individuals are full-time dependent workers (employees) (63%), followed by research scholarship owners' (10%) and part-time dependent workers (employees) (6%). The remaining situations are residual, though the presence of 10% unemployed should be noticed. It is, this, confirmed that most master students have a professional activity.

**Table 2. Labour status**

Labour Status	N	(%)
Independent worker, full-time profession	8	4,0
Independent worker, part-time profession	4	2,0
Dependent worker, full-time profession	127	63,8
Dependent worker, part-time profession	11	5,5
Unemployment	19	9,5
Research scholarship	22	11,1
Trainee	5	2,5
Housewives	3	1,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey to master students (2005/2006)

<sup>8</sup> In 2005, the national rate of female activity continued to be one of the highest (61,7 %), surpassed only by that of Nordic countries and the United Kingdom (Eurostat, 2007). Most female jobs concentrated especially in the third sector (54,7%), and 30,6% in the secondary sector (INE, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned that only 15,9% of women work part-time, a value much below the European average of the 25 Member-States (32,9%) (Eurostat, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> The research includes other theoretical axes regarding the master course organisation models and supervision styles, which will not be developed here.

This distribution of the modalities of insertion in the labour market points to a pattern, which is still dominant of a work and employment relation based on the exercise of a dependent full-time profession. However, the diversity of situations reveals ongoing changes, especially regarding this segment of qualified labour force. The presence of research scholarship owners assumes particular importance within this group of individuals (which is understandable since many of them pursue their masters as members of research projects). Nevertheless, the value of unemployment is also significant, being above the national and communitarian averages. Other modalities show the presence, despite incipient, of self-employment and part-time activity, results that converge with other researches, which emphasise the “irrelevance” of these two labour statuses.

Analysing labour status according to gender, we see that there are no significant differences, considering that in both cases the highest percentage concentrates on full-time dependent workers, 65,7 % male and 62,9 % female. However, this initial information should be mitigated in order to enhance the Portuguese women’s overload, when compared to men, due to the conciliation of full-time jobs and responsibility with domestic and family tasks.

With an average work schedule of 7 to 9 daily hours, most individuals are full-time workers (86%). However, the number of individuals, especially women, who declares working from 10 to 14 hours per day, is relevant (14%). This gradual trend towards the intensification of work schedules, with particular incidence on young staff, has been explored in other studies (Marques, 2006, 2007). The focus on the challenges posed by the conciliation or management of the professional and family/ private spheres will allow, as we shall see, the analysis and expansion of the main features of the persistency of gender asymmetries based on social-cultural models and representations of social roles.

The chosen nomenclature for professional groups<sup>11</sup> is heuristically relevant since it combines several aspects. Apart from school degree and profession, it includes matters related to labour status, the company’s or organisation’s dimension, the professional speciality and qualification, as well as the activity sector. So, regarding the professional group, there is a relevant majority of intellectual and scientific specialists (68,4%), followed by the group of intermediate technicians and professionals (24,6%), and residually, the group of public administration superior staff, directors and business superior staff (4,7%), administrative staff and similar workers (1,2%), and services and sales workers (1,2%). We are, therefore, before an

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<sup>11</sup> The relevance of social-professional groups can be seen on various levels. As a structural indicator, it provides information regarding the evolution and trends of the country’s social and economic structure, highlighting particularities in comparisons with other countries. Regarding the evaluation of the population’s productive skills, in the diagnosis of conditionings, as well as of potentialities of the population’s social-professional profile it is a development indicator. Knowledge about the effects of ongoing transformations in the economic tissue, technological, juridical or organisational, which affect the composition of the national population, defines the indicator profession as a dependent variable. Finally, as an independent variable, the social-professional composition of a population is a systematic reference basis for the analysis of conducts and opinions (Lima, Dores and Costa: 1991: 43-44).

occupational structure based on high qualifications, which, as a rule, presents a significant distribution according to gender<sup>12</sup>. It is possible to signal two aspects: first, men tend to concentrate more in the two first groups; second, women are distributed by the different professional groups, even attaining an important relative proportion in the group of intermediate technicians and professionals (cf. table).

**Table 3. Professional group per sex**

Professional Group	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
<b>Public Administration Superior Staff, Directors, and Business Superior Staff</b>	5	3	8
	8,3%	2,7%	4,7%
<b>Intellectual and Scientific Specialists</b>	44	73	117
	73,3%	65,8%	68,4%
<b>Intermediate Technicians and Professionals</b>	11	31	42
	18,3%	27,9%	24,6%
<b>Administrative Staff and Similar Workers</b>	0	2	2
	0%	1,8%	1,2%
<b>Services and Sales Workers</b>	0	2	2
	0%	1,8%	1,2%
<b>Total</b>	60	111	171
	35,1%	64,9%	100%

Source: Survey to master students (2005/2006)

As for the type of organisation where individuals work, many declare working in public organisations, particularly in organs of central and regional public administration, followed by private organisations. Third sector organisations or non-governmental ones, such as, for example, foundations, cooperatives, or local development associations emerge as professional contexts to many of these master students. The most relevant activity sectors concentrate in education, science and technology, and also with some expression those of public administration, defence and security, health and construction. This typology of activities is coherent with the public juridical-institutional regime of most of these organisations. So, one may deduce that public and third sector organisations, unlike private ones, have been more dynamic regarding their human resources' qualification. In fact, their reinforcement with middle and superior staff in many social organisms and institutions since the 1980's has allowed many to gradually fulfil available staff positions (Audier, 1997)<sup>13</sup>. What one may question is if that dynamism in the recent past will endure regarding the clear signs of consistent regression in the public sector in face of ongoing reforms, most of them resting on an increased rationalisation of

<sup>12</sup> Contingency coefficient: 0,193 (p <0,05).

<sup>13</sup> Audier (1997) tells us that the Public Sector (State, hospitals and local collectivities) has been an important employer for the best trained youngsters, despite important fluctuations in the number of openings.

human resources (Marques, 2009)<sup>14</sup>. One of the most significant effects of these transformation, side by side with the demographic structure, are the high rates of unemployment registered among education graduates in the last years. Besides, external service contracts (e.g., outsourcing) in sectors such as health, education, or social service, have also been contributing to a withdrawal in the recruitment of young graduates.

Regarding the type of contract, an asymmetrical distribution according to sex can be seen<sup>15</sup>. Despite slight, this reinforces, on one side, the practice of flexibilisation of the labour force on the part of employers (Gaudswaard and Nanteuil, 2000), and on the other, women's accrued vulnerability to "a-typical" forms of employment (Foucard, 1992)<sup>16</sup>. Even if permanent contracts assume a relatively higher percentage (47,6%), our results are symptomatic of the growing mobilisation of several a-typical forms of employment, such as contracts of limited duration, research scholarships, and service contracts, with important impacts on the working structures and logics of the labour market, on the organisation of work processes, on professional groups, in general<sup>17</sup>.

**Table 4. Distribution per sex and type of contract**

Sex	Type of Contract						Total
	Service Contract	Limited duration contract	Permanent Contract	Temporary Contract	Research Scholarship	Without Contract	
Male	8	9	32	2	8	1	60
	13,3%	15%	53,3%	3,35%	13,3%	1,75%	100%
Female	19	23	48	1	15	2	108
	17,6%	21,3%	44,4%	0,9%	13,9%	1,9%	100%
Total	27	32	80	3	23	3	168
	16,1%	19,0%	47,6%	1,8%	13,7%	1,8%	100%

Source: Survey to master students (2005/2006)

In general terms, the master students' social-professional profile has presented different forms of precarious employment, which compose non-permanent employment. The impacts of the diffusion of these forms of employment have also been responsible for a growing status fragmentation, which also strikes professional groups with high academic qualifications exercising intellectual and scientific professions. What is at stake here, then, is the professional, which is no longer developed exclusively in one organisation, in an "internal market" (Marques,

<sup>14</sup> One of the most significant effects of these transformations, along with the demographic structure, consists of the external hiring of services (e.g., outsourcing) in health, education or social service sectors of the Central and Local Public Administration, which have also been contributing to withdrawal in the recruitment of superior staff (Marques, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Contingency coefficient: 0,136 ( $p < 0,05$ ).

<sup>16</sup> To Foucard (1992), a typical employment situation presupposes three essential elements: *i*) the durability of the employment relation; *ii*) a single employer and belonging to an organised service; *iii*) and full-time schedule with equivalent pay. On the contrary, "a-typical" employment situations refer to all those situations where one or all these elements are absent.

<sup>17</sup> Considering precarious employment situations (including limited duration contracts, part-times, among others), these affected, in 2007, 22,4% of the Portuguese, clearly above the European União-27 average (14,5%). This situation is more serious only in the cases of Spain (31,7%) and Poland (28,2%).

2006) allegedly stabilised and protected, to be developed on the basis of an accumulation of experiences gained in inter-organisational mobility, within changing professional and ever more global markets. On the other side, one can observe important processes of (re)composition of employment/ unemployment, which exhibit a growing precariousness of social groups who have invested on professional and academic training, particularly in post-graduate education. If these used to present advantages over those who were deprived of such resources, within the current context of profound transformation of productive and educational systems, employment relations have become much more volatile and non-prescriptive of the social actors' conducts.

### 2.3. The daily management of work and private life

In Europe, and more evidently in Portugal, women's access to higher education levels is unquestionable, with repercussions on the structure of professional groups in the middle and long terms, and particularly, on the need to reconfigure dominant models of profession and family<sup>18</sup>. In fact, according to the encompassing approach of the European Commission, the promotion of the quality of work life "includes better jobs and more balanced forms of conciliation of professional and family lives, thus bringing advantages to the individual, the economy, and society. For these to be accomplished, as better employment policies, fair pay, and a work organisation adapted both to the company's, and to the individuals' needs, are necessary" (in Célestin 2002: 12). Based on women's important insertion in the labour market, matters linked to the conciliation between professional and family and personal lives emerge as particularly acute and relevant for public policies on education, science and employment/ training.

So, in order to expand this thematic, ten questions on how individuals feel in their daily lives were asked in order to construct a stress index<sup>19</sup>, which could "measure" the degree of difficulty in managing professional, training and family/ private activities on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, the questions that were used are enlightening: *do you plan to have a calmer life next year; when you have to develop master-related tasks, do you reduce sleeping time; at the end of the day, do you often feel you have not done all you should; do you worry for not spending enough time with your family and friends; are you constantly stressed because you want to do more than you actually can; do you feel you no longer have time to have fun; do you consider yourself trapped in daily routine; would you like to have more time for yourself; when you need more time to accomplish tasks related to your professional activity, do you reduce your sleeping time.*

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<sup>18</sup> The most recent researches in the sociology of work have shown study concerns related to family and work roles, child education and care, which can be seen as a symptom of theoretical renewal through the inclusion of new themes, opposing a certain common idea of exhaustion of the field (Castillo, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> The "stress index" has three levels: "reduced", between 0 and 3 affirmative answers; "moderate", between 3 and 7 affirmative answers; and "high", with 8 or more affirmative answers.

The analysis of the individual's positioning regarding this index highlights a certain dichotomisation between perceptions of reduced (47%) and moderate (42,5%) stress. However, if to the declared "moderate" position we add those who are situated in "high" stress levels (10,5%), we can see that the majority of answers accentuates a trend towards the difficulty of managing daily tasks. This index per sex presents a significant distribution, even if the association is mild<sup>20</sup>. In other words, if in the "moderate" level percentages are very similar (43,3% men and 42,1% women), there is a slightly higher percentage of men in the "reduced" level (52,2% against 44,4%) and of women in the "elevated" level (13,5% against 4,5%), as can be seen in the following table.

**Table 5. Stress index per sex**

Sex	Index			Total
	Reduced	Moderate	Elevated	
Male	35	29	3	67
	52,2%	43,3%	4,5%	100,0%
Female	59	56	18	133
	44,4%	42,1%	13,5%	100,0%
Total	94	85	21	200
	47%	42,5%	10,5%	100%

Source: Survey to master students (2005/2006)

These percentages illustrate the accrued demands of flexibility and adaptability within current work contexts and clearly denunciate the porous frontiers of the professional and private spheres and their implications and/ or challenges regarding their daily management. On the other side, they reinforce that which quantifications apparently cannot grasp, that is, the intensification of work rhythms for workers with high academic qualifications, and particularly the "double" activity that weighs on women.

This analysis is further reinforced considering the percentages of affirmative answers to a set of items present in the table below. In fact, more than 90% of the individuals reveal that, by the end of the day, they feel they have not done all they should, which is accompanied by feelings of some "culpability" for not devoting themselves more to family and friends or not having "time for themselves". The argument of experiencing more stress in daily life appears once more reinforced to most individuals, along with the responsibilities that daily routines impose. It should be also highlighted that the investment on post-graduate education assumes particular relevance for these individuals, since they would abdicate from "sleeping time" to accomplish it.

<sup>20</sup> Contingency coefficient: 0,141 (p <0,05).

**Table 6. Daily sensations**

Daily sensations	(% affirmative answers)
You plan having a quieter life next year	48,7%
When you need more time to accomplish master-related tasks, you reduce sleeping hours	73,0%
By the end of the day, you often feel you have not done all you should	91,5%
You worry for not spending enough time with family and friends	83,8%
You are constantly stressed because you want to do more than you actually can	75,5%
You feel you no longer have time to have fun	64,5%
You consider yourself trapped in daily routine	62,1%
You would like to have more time for yourself	83,9%

Source: Survey to master students (2005/2006)

Not planning to have a quieter life in the future, the solutions pointed out by the individuals refer, first, *to have someone at home to accomplish domestic tasks*, followed by *working only part-time or having a different schedule, being able to work more at home, living closer to parents and other relatives* and, with less expression, *stop working*. The item *getting more help/ co-operation from other elements of the family, namely your spouse*, is less signalled and mentioned almost exclusively by females<sup>21</sup>. In the hypothetical scenario of having more time, individuals tend to value either activities that reinforce the importance of diversified sociability and leisure spaces, or the importance of their educational investment. In fact, many individuals would like to have more time to conclude their master, somehow suggesting that the latter stays, in many cases, in second plan considering the difficult conciliation of professional and private lives (Guerreiro, Lourenço e Pereira, 2006; Guerreiro, *et al.* 2000).

### 3. Concluding remarks....

This is a thematic particularly pertinent in the nearing transformation context of high education set off with the Declaration of Bologna, where a master degree emerges as an almost unconditional clause to obtain a distinguished and distinguishable training within the labour market. However, some of the conclusions analysed here seem to point to a somehow

<sup>21</sup> Other solutions have been predicted, however, their reduced number of affirmative answers does not justify its extension here. Even so, it is important to mention that in the items specifically aimed at individuals in charge of children or dependent elderly regarding institutional aid (e.g., kindergartens), percentages are residual.

paradoxical reality, which is linked to the growing difficulties in articulating diverse professional, training and family/ private times, especially for women. This communication's privileged focus has thus been on analysing some of the impacts of the transformation processes in higher education on the (re)configuration of professional contexts and occupational structure. Doubtlessly, professional activity, the nature of contractual status, and hierarchical position are factors, which may present different conditionings, contributing to that professional heterogeneity. Even if there is a symbolic work of homogeneity, of "gender equalisation" regarding the "other", status classifications that cannot be ignored intervene, either superimposing themselves or conflicting with each other, such as: social origin, age, ethnic origin, among others.

In fact, the internal heterogeneity and segmentation of master courses cannot be grasped, rendering opaque the social and sexual division that supports it almost invariably in a dissimulated way. We refer, specifically, to their effects in terms of conditioning and rendering more demanding the conciliation of work and private/ family life. Part of the individuals who attend master courses and invest on this degree, seeing it as a significant contribute to ennobling the social value and recognition of their qualification in the labour market, simultaneously carry out professional activities, which subject them to diverse constraints. Specifically, we witness a "triangular" experience since the majority of master students, from the time when they decide to walk this road, they have to organise themselves according to the personal and family sphere, the work sphere, and the education sphere. The crossing of these three worlds is not, in most cases, consensual, since their demands may collide and superimpose. It is in this sense that it becomes so pertinent, after observing diverse strategies of adjustment of those three spheres, to alleviate the heuristic importance of concepts such as those of "articulation" and "conciliation", which always presuppose that decisions (and action) imply opportunity costs translated into the need to abdicate from one sphere in favour of another. This is what happens when the woman is "forced" to choose between having a family and children or a professional career, especially when such option is limited by the absence of support services flexible plans, by stereotypes, and by an unequal sharing of responsibilities of the domestic sphere with the man.

## Abstract:

Based on the results of the project “Master degrees in Portugal: Social-cultural models of persistence between men and women”<sup>22</sup>, this paper focuses on the persistence of gender asymmetries among young high level scientific and technical professionals. The research intended to answer the following questions: What are the conditions for successfully obtaining a master degree in Portugal? How do men and women develop co-optation strategies regarding demands emerging from different life spheres, namely the professional and family ones? This paper aims at deconstructing the main stereotypes and barriers that continue to influence women’s “choices”, which profoundly determine their professional trajectories.

As many research publications on socialisation show, particularly those focused on family and school, young women have made and continue to make “bad” choices concerning degrees and/or specialisation courses, with obvious impacts on their employment. There is a huge proportion of females in humanities and social sciences, as well as in post-graduate courses, which clearly explains the strong link between gender and professional activities, closer to the traditional definition of feminine tasks (e.g. administrative staff, public relations, marketing, teaching, health care). Such choices have therefore led to the exclusion of women from positions of authority and responsibility in domains such as economics, finance and politics, or linked to top technologies and professional careers with economic and symbolic prestige.

Women’s increasing access to higher education in most countries during the last decade, especially in Portugal, has been accompanied by institutionalised discrimination practices that influence the “choice” of jobs and “vocational” naturalisation. In this sense, the following fundamental hypothesis is formulated: In which manner may the current feminisation of the labour market, in particular young women’s growing investment on higher qualification, change the traditional sexual division of labour, considering the fact that organisational experience is still based on the division between male and female roles, and on firmly ingrained and persistent gender representations.

Therefore, despite the growing feminisation of the labour market under the sign of an accrued vulnerability to labour precariousness, data on professional and personal trajectories, daily work strategies and family conciliation, as well as professional and personal expectations will be presented. This will allow for a discussion regarding the need to move towards research designs that highlight the *relationship* between productive/ professional and domestic/ family spaces in order to understand and explain structural, organisational, interactive, and symbolic-cultural persistency of gender asymmetries.

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