



Gender and academic career trajectories in Spain

From gendered passion to consecration in a *Sistema Endogámico*?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to illuminate the processes that give rise to gendered career pathways in Spanish academia, tracing how individuals might move from academic “passion” to academic “consecration” in a setting in which both visible and veiled discrimination persist. By examining academics’ testimony, the paper aims to explore the production and reproduction of complex dynamics of power and gender inequalities through informal processes.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative study, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 33 academics (16 female and 17 male) working in academic departments of psychology (17) and engineering (16) in three Madrid universities.

Findings – Although the percentage of professors in Spanish universities who are female is relatively high, compared to many European countries, this quantitative feminization does not appear to be associated with clear institutionalization of formal gender equality policies or the elimination of tacit discriminatory practices. Despite recent measures to reform the recruitment patterns in Spanish universities towards a more meritocratic model, the tradition of a *sistema endogámico* (an “inbreeding” system) persists, under which appointments are frequently made on the basis of internal (departmental) networks. This was found to operate to the disadvantage of women in both disciplines studied.

Originality/value – Despite the limitations inherent in a small-scale study, this paper is likely to help not only to increase awareness of gender bias, but also to contribute to the reevaluation of the current university culture in Spain which, through its ostensibly gender-neutral recruitment practices rooted in internal networks, constrains women’s career opportunities.

Keywords Gender discrimination, Universities, Equal opportunities, Careers, Spain

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper aims to illuminate the processes that lead to gender inequality in academic careers in Spanish universities, drawing on a qualitative study of female and male academics. In the research literature examining women’s under-representation in

This paper is based on the PhD thesis of Susana Vázquez, “Passion, consecration and confessions in academia. Gendered opportunity contexts and *Merita Académica* in England and Spain”, University of London, 2006, supervised by Mary Ann Elston. We wish to thank our colleagues in the European Research Training Network “Women in European Universities”, for encouragement and special gratitude is due to Juan Martín (University Complutense of Madrid), for his invaluable help during the interviewing process.



higher academic positions, there has long been debate about the relative significance of meritocratic criteria (that is, judgements based solely on academic performance) in shaping academic career success (Epstein, 1970; Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988; Bagilhole and Goode, 2001; Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Krefting, 2003; Chesterman, 2004). It has been suggested that, despite the allegedly gender-neutral, meritocratic ethos of academe, gender discrimination against women increasingly takes relatively sophisticated, “veiled” forms, which are particularly difficult to identify and challenge (Stanley, 1984; Walby, 1989; Caplan, 1994; Brooks, 1997; Benokraitis, 1998; Morley, 1999; Bagilhole and Goode, 2001; Husu, 2001). Particular emphasis has been placed on the significance of informal networks and established peers acting as “gatekeepers” (Merton, 1977) through controlling the definition of what counts as merit for career progression, i.e. “the criteria of excellence” (Latour and Portet, 2003, p. 47), and the means of exercising academic power. Academic “consecration” (Bourdieu, 1996), arguably the ultimate goal of the ideal academic career pathway, comprises attaining a top rank position (normally a full professorship), and also, in a broader sense, becoming recognised as an authority by colleagues. Such recognition, in turn, bestows on recipients the power of making further consecrations within particular scientific fields (Farwell Adams, 1983). The implication of this is that judgements of “merit” are not easily separable from the activities of informal networks and powerful individuals within particular academic fields. This raises the further question of how far such activities may, directly and/or indirectly, reduce the chances of academic women becoming “consecrated”.

Any discussion of current patterns of gender inequality in academic careers must recognise that, in most countries in Europe and elsewhere, the numbers and proportion of women among academic staff overall have increased considerably over the last two decades, as in paid employment generally (Clarke, 2001; EC, 2006). At first sight, it might appear as if gender inequality is receding within academia. Yet, it is highly debatable whether the increase of women academics is the result of diminished discrimination; for example, following implementation of formal gender equality policy measures. Rather, it has been suggested that trends to increasing casualisation of academic labour and reductions in security of tenure and relative salary levels are rendering the academic field decreasingly attractive to men and, by implication, more open to women. Moreover, women may be being disproportionately crowded into the less prestigious, less well-remunerated and less secure positions that constitute the growing “academic proletariat” (Aziz, 1990; Hawkins and Schultz, 1990; Halsey, 1992; Benokraitis, 1998; AUT, 2004). In many countries, women may be more likely than men to work as “gipsy scholars” (Lincoln and Guba, 1980), academics who either move several times between institutions and/or work at two or more institutions at a time, often because full-time and/or tenure-track positions are hard to secure (Hawkins and Schultz, 1990).

In some countries, the proportion of women among the full professoriate has been recently boosted by organisational reforms. For example, in Finland, in 1998, all assistant professors were upgraded to full professors, which led to a immediate increase in the already relatively high proportion of women among full professors, from 13.7 per cent to 18.4 per cent (Husu, 2001). But, within Europe generally, the increase in women’s representation in professorial positions has been much slower than might be expected from the increase in women studying at postgraduate level

over the past two decades (EC, 2006). It is, therefore, appropriate to consider the extent to which quantitative increases in the proportion of women among academics, or even specifically within the professoriate, may be compatible with the persistence of gender segregation within the academic labour market, and with informal networks and gatekeepers continuing to have important roles in determining career progress- or lack of it. It is also important to consider the possible role of legislative and organisational reforms of university and academic career structures in producing quantitative change, without necessarily bringing about qualitative change.

Although a general pattern of attrition, which makes academic women less likely to be present at every step up the academic ladder, persists across disciplines and institutions (Stolte-Heiskanen and Fürst-Dilic, 1991; Osborn *et al.*, 2000), there is considerable variation between disciplines in the proportion of women. There is also international variation, and the variation within Europe has been described as manifesting a North-South paradox. Thus, it has been suggested that, while, on the one hand, some Northern European countries have enjoyed a rapid integration of gender equality concerns onto national policy-making agendas, and relatively high levels of public support for gender equality measures, they have also had, at least until very recently, some of the lowest proportions of academic women in top rank positions within Europe. By contrast, in some Southern European countries, where traditional attitudes and reluctance to introduce effective formal gender equality programmes have often prevailed, a much higher proportion of women professors was found during the 1990s and early 2000s (Mó-Romero, 1996; Rubery *et al.*, 1998; Morley, 1999; Bain and Cummings, 2000; Osborn *et al.*, 2000; EC, 2006).

As Table I shows, the existence of a stark North-South divide in the representation of women among the professoriate in European university systems is not wholly supported by recent data, with, for example, Finland and Sweden being Northern countries with relatively high proportions of women. But there remain sharp national differences, for example, between Denmark or Germany, and Spain, the country that forms the focus of this paper. And, even if the idea of a North-South divide may be an

	Women	Full or A Professors		% women
		Men	Total	
Austria	188	1,791	1,979	9.5
Belgium	200	2,016	2,216	9.0
Denmark	125	1,017	1,142	10.9
Finland	528	1,963	2,491	21.2
France	3,732	19,390	23,122	16.1
Germany	1,163	11,453	12,616	9.2
Italy	2,960	15,111	18,071	16.4
Netherlands	219	2,108	2,327	9.4
Norway	414	2,222	2,636	15.7
Portugal	303	1,148	1,451	20.9
Spain	1,965	9,208	11,173	17.6
Sweden	676	3,524	4,200	16.1
UK	2,306	12,172	14,478	15.9
EU-Average				15.3

Table I.
Academics in selected EU
member states by gender,
2004

Source: EC (2006)

over-simplification, positing the paradox directs attention to the ways in which national and institutional cultures and practices may constrain adoption or effective implementation of formal gender equality or gender-neutral appointment policies. And, the putative paradox again underlines the possibility that a relatively high level of women in “consecrated” positions may co-exist with women’s being still disadvantaged by both visible and veiled (hidden) discrimination, for example, by the operation of informal networks and patronage. In the rest of this paper, we examine this possibility through a single national case study, that of Spain.

Spain and its university system

An example of the Southern type

Spain, we suggest, forms a particularly interesting case for the study of gender inequality in academe for two main reasons. First, Spain can be taken as illustrative of the Southern pattern identified in the so-called North-South paradox, and research on this pattern is much less extensive than that relating to Northern European countries. As Table I indicates, the proportion of women among professors in Spain is one of the highest in the European Community. Yet, it cannot be said that Spanish society in general, or Spanish universities in particular, have, historically, been leaders in the introduction of gender equality policies in the field of employment. Largely because of the non-democratic socio-political circumstances prevailing under the Franco regime, it was not until the 1980s that gender equality in the workplace, and guidelines to promote it, became an issue in Spanish society generally. In 2004, the economic participation rate for Spanish women was only 35.9 per cent, compared to the EU average of 43.9 per cent, and Spanish women’s unemployment rate was the highest in the EU at 15.8 per cent (EU average 8.8 per cent) (CES, 2005). Although Spanish women who are in paid work are more likely to work full-time than women in the UK (Faludi, 1991; Osborn *et al.*, 2000; Glover, 2000), they are also, in common with their sisters in most of Europe, over-represented in casual or low paid positions in general and within particular occupational fields. Furthermore, although women have been admitted (albeit often with restrictions) as students to Spanish universities since 1868 (Pérez-Sedeño, 1996), the extent of adoption of specific gender equality or “female-friendly” policies within Spanish universities appears to have been negligible, with only one pioneering report (Izquierdo, 2004) being identified in an extensive literature search for the study reported here.

The absence of explicit gender equality policies within universities is not because there is no political or legal intervention in employment relations in Spanish universities. On the contrary, in Spain, the academic profession has been traditionally considered part of the civil service, at least with respect to tenured positions. Central government legislates on job descriptions, salaries and working conditions in public universities[1]. Salary levels in Spanish academia have long been low relative to other European countries (Mora, 2001). Working conditions for Spanish academics did improve in the 1980s, with the change of political regime, and tenured positions were in great demand. In response, the so-called *pruebas de idoneidad* (literally translatable as “suitability assessment”) measure was implemented in 1983. Under this one-off provision, universities were able to appoint many academics then on short-term contracts to tenured positions (as lecturers or B-professors). This was probably an important factor in the overall quantitative “feminisation” trend within Spanish

academia. (Similar exceptional measures were adopted in Italy). However, in recent years, discontent over the high level of short-term, non-tenured contracts has re-emerged (Baró *et al.*, 2000). The most recent legislative reform, the *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* (LOU), or University Law, of 2001, permitted up to 49 per cent of academic positions to be non-tenured, and a reduction in the duration of short-term contracts (LOU, 2001).

Table II suggests that the 2001 LOU has not, to date, eliminated a situation in which, although women comprise an increasing proportion of professors, they are still more likely to be found as lecturers or in non-tenured positions.

A sistema endogámico

The LOU reforms of 2001 are also highly relevant to the second reason why Spain is an interesting case for research into gender inequality in academia: the longstanding unofficial convention by which most academic careers are made at the same university, and often within the same department, in which individuals' first degrees and/or doctorates were taken (Cebreiro and San Segundo, 1998; García-Lausín, 2002). As in most countries, the first step on an academic career path in Spain involves obtaining a doctorate (which itself requires finding a supervisor through personal contact), typically followed by a short-term non-tenured position (such as assistant or associate professor), and then, ideally a tenured position as lecturer and, in time, professor (Prieto and Avila, 1996). But, in contrast to the relatively nomadic academic culture of Anglo-Saxon countries, in Spain, inter-institutional mobility has, by tradition, not been considered important for career progression. Indeed, the Spanish system has long been criticised for its excessively *endogamia universitaria*. The *modelo* or *sistema endogámico*, sometimes translated as the "inbreeding university model" (Frevilles, 2002), refers to the unwritten regulatory norms according to which each new member of a department must be drawn from the local clan, tribe or dominant caste. Critics have claimed that the most valued attribute of a candidate, within this system of selection, is not to be the best (*arités*) but to be "a good fellow". New researchers and academics are said to have been chosen predominantly from among the local candidates (Sánchez-Ferrer, 1996). Indeed, having local candidates in place before permission is sought to advertise vacancies is said to have been common (Mora, 2001).

	Students	Percentage women among All academics	Professors
1930	6		
1940	13	3	
1950	15	7	
1960	22	9	
1970	31	12	
1980	41	21	4
1990	46	29	11
2000	51	33	12
2002	53	34	14
2004	55	42	18

Table II.
Percentage of women
students and academics
in Spain, 1930-2000

Source: Own elaboration of data from INE and CU, and EC (2003 and 2006)

Thus, 20 years ago, the claim was made that the ultimate verdicts of selection and promotion panels would be but mere “ceremonies of public consecration” (Nieto, 1984) of insiders, most often guided by powerful gatekeepers. By contrast, it is claimed, candidates trained in other universities, departments and/or research groups are kept out time after time, even if they are able to demonstrate more scientific merit (Fdez-Rañada, 2001; Soler and Soler, 2001).

Given the extent to which research in other countries has indicated that women have more difficulties than their male peers in entering the circles of academic power (Acker, 1995), appointment and promotion practices within the *sistema endogámico* might be expected to operate to women’s disadvantage, and to be at odds with the tenets of formal equal opportunity policies, such as those that have been adopted in many university systems in Europe (Husu, 2001). However, in theory, procedures for both initial and subsequent academic appointments have changed over the past two decades, following legislative reforms, and in particular, since 2001, with the passing of LOU.

Amongst the stated objectives of the LOU were to “improve the teaching, researching and administrative quality, [and] promote the mobility of students and academics” (LOU, 2001), and to guarantee “the principles of equality, merit and capacity” in the appointment of academics (LOU, 2001). The new legislation introduced controversial modifications to the autonomy and administration of the universities, as well as to procedures for selection and promotion. There was no explicit attempt to promote gender equality through these reforms; they were ostensibly gender-neutral, intended to improve appointments by greater reliance on merit criteria rather than internal recruitment. For example, under LOU, the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación* (ANECA) is a national government agency created in 2002 to encourage, externally, objectively and independently, the university system to promote quality and excellence (LOU Tit.V Art.32, 2001)[2]. Appointments to non-tenured positions require a satisfactory *curriculum vitae* (CV) and a positive evaluation (*habilitación nacional*) from ANECA, or from external evaluation bodies established by each regional government. Formal procedures for obtaining a tenured position (C-Professor (*Titular de Escuela Universitaria*), B-Professor or Lecturer (*Titulares de Universidad* and *Catedrático de Escuela Universitaria*) and A-Professor or Full-Professor (*Catedrático de Universidad*), are complex under LOU. As well as a *viva voce* examination in front of a commission of professors in the relevant department, an academic CV, a teaching proposal and a research project are assessed, and a positive ANECA report is required (LOU, 2001). Vacancies are publicly announced, and promotion to professorships by personal invitation is not officially accepted practice.

In sum, LOU, in theory, challenged the established procedures shaping academic career paths in Spanish universities. These appear, at least prior to the passage of LOU, to have been based on an “inbreeding” system which can enhance the careers of friends (Reig, 2004), within an internal/local market, segmented into discrete “(ivory) towers” and led by networks based on long-term acquaintance. Spanish academia has been described as being an “insiders” kingdom” (Vázquez-Cupeiro and Martín (n.d.). It seems likely that, even under the reformed meritocratic, gender-neutral appointment and promotion procedures formally introduced under LOU, there will be space for hidden discrimination and biased processes which may operate to the detriment of women. In the following sections we present some empirical data that suggest this is so.

Research methodology

The data reported here are drawn from 33 open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with male (17) and female (16) academics within two disciplinary areas, engineering and psychology, working in three prestigious universities located in Madrid[3]. Both lecturers (17) and professors (16) were interviewed to illuminate the dynamics that might enhance and/or impede academic career progression. The two disciplines were chosen to represent fields with high (psychology) and low (engineering) levels of quantitative feminisation. Sampling was based on the list of academics in all (public) universities published in 2002 by the Consejo de Universidades (later re-named the Consejo de Coordinación Universitaria). This directory includes details of the gender, rank, discipline, university and age of academics. The aim was to interview four males and four females in each position in both disciplines. Every third name was taken if there were more than the required number in each category. Of 41 academics approached, 33 agreed to be interviewed, so one additional interview was included above the target completed sample size of 32. There was no difference between male and female academics in willingness to be interviewed.

The interview topic guide served as an aide memoire for asking open-ended questions covering four thematic areas:

- (1) educational, professional and academic background;
- (2) experiences within the university/department;
- (3) factors which enhanced academic career progress (e.g. the definition of formal academic merits and the role of un-written and informal rules); and
- (4) explanations of women's under-representation at the top of the academic ladder and recommendations for addressing this within academia.

The interviews were conducted by two native Spanish speakers and later fully transcribed verbatim[4]. Data analysis took the form of (re)constructing interviewees' interpretative frameworks by identifying the main topics through a system of colour codes and a matrix-system in which codes, themes and references to the transcripts were linked systematically. For this article, selected quotations from the interviews have been translated into English. To translate quotidian expressions, culturally shared and taken-for-granted, was sometimes problematic due to the different grammatical structures and the lack of lexical equivalences. We have opted for the so-called "back translation" method (Birbili, 2000), rather than lexical translations.

Gendered "passion" in academia?

Evidently, our research design only included those who had travelled some distance down the road towards academic consecration, or who had already achieved that status. "Consecration" is, of course, a religious metaphor and other analysts have both drawn attention to the use of religious imagery in academics' own discourse and used them in analyses of academic life and work (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988; Noble, 1992; Bourdieu, 1996; Booth and Eveline, 2001; Husu, 2001; Rogg, 2001; Cantor and Schomberg, 2003; Zawadzka, 2003). Our interviewees also used such metaphors. In particular, the term "passion" was used by some female interviewees to denote their devotion to their chosen discipline. Almost all the women's narratives implied that they

had felt a “call” to become academics, to commit their lives to accomplishing an exceptional mission, and they often referred to the joy that academic work could bring. But “passion” also invokes the image of an ordeal or journey entailing self-renunciation, suffering and sacrifice (*via crucis*), as in the passion of Christ on the Cross, following the painful and difficult journey to Calvary. And, again, it was particularly the women interviewees who spoke of sacrifices and suffering entailed in pursuing their mission, for example, sacrificing their private life. Thus, if some of these women had had difficulty in becoming consecrated, it was not obviously due to lack of commitment to their discipline. A female psychology lecturer explained it as follows:

To me the key question is, what do I have to sacrifice to have an academic career? What is the cost? I thought I had to minimize the overall costs. All along, the academic career is a steeplechase. The truth is that most of them [choices] are absurd, but it is necessary to choose, not to do certain things. For instance, I waited longer than my friends to get married and to have my son, because I used to say to do it after the thesis, I do it after whatever. . . . And of course [there] arrives a time in life at which I had to say my life is gone. I then had to decide what to do, and at what cost. By comparison, I think a woman who works in a bank can have a successful professional career at little cost in terms of daily life (FLPS: 47)[5].

So, it seems that the “passion” involved in an academic career is a gendered phenomenon. With this in mind, we turn to the interviewees’ testimony about the appointment and promotion procedures which may determine whether this gendered passion leads to consecration.

The “inbreeding university system”

Few of those interviewed (of either sex) had ever put their candidature forward for positions in other Spanish universities. They understood patterns of recruitment and promotion to be dominated by the tradition of “hiring one’s own”. This had been their experience generally, and they did not, for the most part, see any substantive changes following the LOU. Practices such as circulating details of posts through informal telephone calls and meetings within departments, and drawing up specifications for vacant posts on the basis of the interests of powerful local groups were reported. As a result, according to interviewees, disciples of other masters were likely to be ignored, with preference given to the so-called “candidate of the house”. Furthermore, the existence of tacit pacts among academics for taking turns in influencing appointments and promotions was also recognized by many interviewees. The person with the “right” qualities, and the most chance of being appointed/promoted, would be, to use a popular metaphor, the one who has “more voltage in their plug”, with the most contacts in the right place, at the right time. Being local and personally known to senior members of departments is seen as crucial, and senior academics are seen to place great value on their powers of consecration. By implication, as this professor of psychology hints, becoming a “gypsy scholar” is likely to be and to be seen as a very bad career move:

The problem is the localist conception of the career at the university where a person, by the fact of being in a place, considers he has the right to aspire to obtain a vacancy in the place. . . . The characteristic case is the typical professor, first and unique in his area, from a new provincial university, with a CV very often ten times inferior to, and I am not exaggerating, to many scholars of other universities. Well, this professor would consider it a personal offence and an act of aggression if somebody could co-opt to “his” post or occupy the vacancies that

he aims to distribute amongst his friends by informal co-option. This is a typical case here where everything works through contacts, string-pulling and people are appointed by turn on the basis of the “voltage” of the plug ... Finally, if you suggest that people move around, young people perceive that you want to get rid of them. ... (MPPS: 04).

Although the *sistema endogámico* has been widely criticized (hence the LOU), several interviewees highlighted what they saw as its virtuous side. Localism and institutional patriotism was sometimes defended, as by this female professor of engineering, as likely to lead to more meritorious appointments than would the anti-localist provisions of the LOU (i.e. national habilitation and promotion of inter-institutional mobility), should these ever become effective:

First, I do not believe there is an inbreeding university. A department wants to keep the best students that it has had in its hands, after having done the doctorate and showing us their research and teaching abilities ... If we propose these persons be appointed, it is because we are sure that they will be valuable. We have prepared them! Is this patronage? If it means that a department keeps the best students and supports them later, you tell me! The inbreeding university is becoming an obsession. It often happens that many people, who later enter the system in a non-localist way, because they were not among the best, have worked in other places and come back with a huge C ... They believe that they possess the “absolute truth”, they are not able to adapt themselves to our way of doing things. They try to create and lead their own groups ... and once again, reproduce the system of the “old” professors ... I have a horrible foreboding about the anti-localist measures (FPES: 03).

Here, there is a clear assumption that local peers are best-placed to judge who is the best. Aspirants’ becoming immersed within existing local relational networks is seen as important for the academic success of departments. And the LOU reforms are seen as likely to lead not to greater meritocracy but to the growth of competing professorial fiefdoms within departments.

Other interviewees, however, were more critical of the ways in which academics who are part of the local power network allegedly prearranged appointments and promotions, by defining the profile of new positions, dominating decision-making panels, or exercising control over the final judgment. Within this system it is not an exception to find academics recognizing, before the appointment and/or promotion procedure were finalised: “my professor told me the position was ours”. This was the testimony of a male professor of psychology:

Currently, there is the so-called cancer of the university according to which the promotion processes do not have anything to do with meritocracy or justice ... And I am saying it because I have data over there to prove it. When there is a position to be filled, by looking at the members of the panel you know who is going to be selected ... But [scientific] merits? I would erase that word (MPPS: 29).

After analysing the testimonies, one could summarise, ironically, the essentials for career progression in Spanish academia into three recommendations. First, become integrated into a powerful local network so that, when the occasion comes, one can appear in front of a made-to-measure panel. Secondly, for subsequent positions, it is best not to have a competitor; and if this does occur, it is helpful to be able to create a situation that allows the “elimination” of other aspirant(s). And finally, it is said to be helpful to hold some scientific knowledge of the discipline. The words of a male psychology lecturer illustrate these points:

Here the selected person to be appointed for a position is made very early. Actually, before the formal decision takes place . . . When there is a vacancy we know who is going for it because what happens is that this person has been previously selected . . . It is also a question of luck. Now I am waiting to see who are the persons selected to be part of the panel, and depending who will be in and who is going to be my opponent, I can say if I will be professor or not, independently of my merits. . . As I have already explained, when a vacancy is open, we know who is going to fill it. Thus, of course there are informal networks, and here they are amongst men because we are the majority (MLPS: 09).

Therefore, although our respondents had differing views about the value of the LOU reforms in principle, there was general agreement that, to date, the key to appointments and promotions still lies in the informal political strategems, the unregistered and off-the-record calls and meetings, prior to the moment when the candidate is formally elected to occupy the vacancy. That the newly elected academics may reproduce the characteristics of the already dominant lobbies (Merton, 1977), while those not considered one of the family are likely to be excluded, is further documented in the next section.

The role of the male-dominated patronage system

Here is a female professor of engineering talking about her career trajectory:

When I finished the thesis I was sure that I liked teaching and I said it from the beginning. First, they gave me basic classes of 1st and 2nd year. They said: Oh, she can go there and do that! . . . At the time, there was something like a “shift”, and each year those candidates who wanted to stay here had to teach the “crucial” subjects with a male full-professor. Then my turn came, I mean it was my turn because there was nobody behind. But because the full-professor did not feel comfortable that a woman could efficiently help him, he asked a man, recently promoted to an internship, to be my “mentor” and share with me the teaching responsibilities. . . Thank God, that person, who now is a full-professor. . . , told the full-professor that I had already demonstrated over many years that I was able to do it by myself, and that if he wanted to select me he should do it, but not partially. Otherwise he should just tell me to go. . . I mean, I am here because of that person who at that particular moment was also preparing himself to be appointed, but not because the “thinking heads” of the department wanted me here (FPES: 03).

This woman had been fortunate. A man who was clearly integrated into the (male-dominated) powerful departmental network had intervened on her behalf. From the interviews, it became clear that male academics can often rely on the old boys’ network, and that “invitations” to be part of this powerful patronage system, to be “one of the guys”, are often developed through so-called homosocial relations (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). According to the interviewees, bonds amongst male academics are built in numerous contexts, ranging from casual conversations in the corridor of the department and gastronomic gatherings at restaurants, to off-the-record discussions at conferences, playing sport together, or after-work socialising in bars. Thus, informal relations are usually established and reinforced not only in the academic sphere, but also through extra-academic activities often resulting in disadvantage for academic women, as exemplified in the testimony of a male professor of engineering:

I think some women may have more difficulties in joining the sponsorship system because they usually have an intense family life and they cannot dedicate as much time as male

academics to build relations . . . Additionally, the informal supportive relations, the “corridor relations”, are not only developed within the corridors of the department, but also through having lunch or dinner, gathering together with some wine. And women frequently do not have time. Of course, it is different to go to eat and to drink only with men than men and women together! (MPES: 12).

If men strategically create bonds which facilitate informally sharing information and support at work, some of the not-yet-consecrated academic women reported being excluded from plots and informal processes of co-option, through which (generally male) gatekeepers control recruitment and promotion. In fact, the informal nature of this type of non-scientific activity, while not necessarily totally excluding academic women, leaves space for isolating them. Here is the account of a female engineering lecturer:

Look, all that you see over there [shows a shelf full of books] is part of my CV. There are all the publications and research projects I have done in spite of the hurdles. . . But I do not care anymore. They can set the whole thing on fire. I am here since 1984, I entered at the time of the “pruebas de idoneidad”, but I think they [male peers] allow me to work and stay here by miracle. I imagine one day I will arrive and they will have changed the lock to impede my entry . . . I know this is incredible, but I am not sure it is an exception. I am completely excluded in this department. I honestly do not care anymore, and I feel like going to the corridor and starting shouting what is happening (FLES: 48).

Even though men’s attitudes are not often described as openly chauvinistic, some deliberate acts to exclude women were reported. The “gastronomic route” was identified as particularly important for male networking. Men who frequently go to restaurants together may start off talking about sports, for instance, but later in the conversation issues such as new promotions or research projects often come up. In one particular faculty, an all-male group regularly organised lengthy meals at which women were not welcome:

To “work” in the corridor, in the informal network that is nowhere because people know each other, takes time and effort. . . Usually, a great majority of women, to make their private and professional life compatible, rush home once they finish here, because they have to take care of their children, or for somebody, or because they have to do things. I think if women had more time, we would do it [informal networking] wonderfully, but many do not have it. Moreover, men do not facilitate the entrance to their clubs that, somehow, are private. . . In this faculty, for instance, there is a kind of club of professors who organise culinary events to get together: a kind of gastronomic route to which women are not invited. They are academics who know each other, but with the gastronomic excuse, women of the same area of knowledge are excluded. Because these are “meals for men”, for buddies! On the one hand, you say: “why not?” But, on the other, this represents a sort of segregation. Academic women could organise it too but do not have a similar network, despite its being very plain that this is very useful, providing access to information. They even have rules! I know, because once I tried to attend but they did not allow me (FLPS: 19).

Academic women’s exclusion from the male networks is not attributed entirely to specifically homosocial activities. Several women with caring responsibilities (e.g. children) acknowledged that, despite the usefulness of collegial socialising, lack of time often impeded them from attending not only extra-academic outings, but also numerous scientific activities, as these are essentially organised to fit men’s timetables. However, while there seems to be consensus about the greater difficulties

likely to be faced by academic women in reconciling family life and professional career, family commitments alone are not sufficient to explain women's exclusion from the (male-dominated) network system in Spain. It is clear that the exclusion of women from the "gastronomic route" was not solely a matter of problems in getting baby-sitters.

Whatever the cause of exclusion, several female academics with little opportunity for socialising, particularly "beyond the working day" (e.g. evening get-togethers), either in the present or in the past, reported feelings of isolation and loneliness. Their "passion" had led to suffering. Some of the not-yet-consecrated women claimed to distance themselves from involvement in extra-work activities or "corridor politics", declaring themselves to be "not interested", or uncomfortable with the competitive and aggressive nature of the informal co-option practices, while recognising the possibly deleterious consequences for their own careers of being engaged in "corridor politics". Only one female psychology professor saw women's engaging in "corridor politics" as merely a matter of personal preference and, compared to focusing on scientific productivity, as a waste of time:

I think women do what they want. There are women involved in informal influential systems, I know a lot, and there are others not involved. People go into what they want. Eventually each person dedicates time to what they think is more efficacious. If you think is more effective to spend your time carrying out "corridor tasks", you will do it. If you think is more effective to spend your time carrying out scientific tasks, you will do that. It is true that some women may not be able to differentiate what is more valuable, while dedicating their time to useless tasks. Obviously, if they dedicate themselves to work instead of politicking they will get further (FPPS: 28).

As one might expect from a study including already-consecrated women, not all women interviewed reported only negative experiences of patronage or total exclusion from informal networks in or outside departmental settings. On the contrary, some female interviewees were very clear that their own careers had benefited from having good local contacts and (generally male) sponsors, usually their PhD supervisors. Several of the women had, or had had, partners with higher academic status working in the same faculty or department. But, compared to the men, most of the women interviewed described their navigation through the *sistemia endogàmico* as much more complex, difficult and precarious. The interviews strongly suggested that "extra" effort in the processes of acculturation and competition within departments could be required on the part of women, in order to boost their professional progression and achieve "consecration".

Some conclusions

The interview data indicate that, notwithstanding the provisions of the 2001 LOU, geographical or institutional mobility is still not expected for career progression at Spanish universities. This, together with the relatively "poor" terms and conditions of service and the specific *pruebas de idoneidad* measure of 1983, may help to explain the relatively high quantitative feminisation of Spanish academia, in comparison to other European countries. Yet, the particularly important role of the (male-dominated) patronage network within the *sistema endogàmico* appears to be still entrenched and working to the disadvantage of women. The reforms supposedly set in train by the LOU are not seen as having changed the situation significantly, and, in any case,

measures to limit internal recruitment are strongly opposed in principle by some already consecrated academics (male and female).

The interview data suggest that, in Spanish universities, recruitment and promotion procedures are still structured by so-called “invisible colleges” (Crane, 1972), often dominated by male senior academics, and constituting exclusive local lobbies which may reproduce prior favouritisms. In this respect, little difference was found between the two disciplines, engineering and psychology. If anything, the women in psychology (where the proportion of women professors is much higher than in engineering) reported more experiences of both veiled and visible discrimination.

We conclude from our data that, although the procedures for making appointments and promotions, including those enshrined in the LOU, are ostensibly gender-neutral, women are more likely to be excluded from the rituals, ceremonies and benefits involved in “inbreeding” and hence from full recognition of their academic merit. As a result, although academic women in Spain have a passionate sense of vocation about their work and their disciplines, they also seem to experience more suffering and sacrifice in their professional and personal lives, while being less likely than their male peers to reach that uncertain destination, “consecration”.

Notes

1. This paper is concerned only with the public university system in Spain and not with the smaller, less prestigious, wholly private university sector.
2. Details of ANECA are available from: www.aneca.es (accessed 6 May, 2004).
3. The study was part of a larger, comparative study of Women in European Universities undertaken by a European Research Training Network funded by the European Commission under the 5th Framework.
4. The interviews were carried out by Susana Vázquez-Cupeiro and Juan Martín.
5. In quotations from interview transcripts, M/F identifies the gender of interviewee; L/P the rank (lecturer or professor); E/P the discipline (engineering or psychology); and S the country (Spain).

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