

GIS-ENS Lyon-Triangle UMR 5206 CNRS

“School for women, not just wives : the case of France”

Session 3: “Education as an occupational field for women »

# Women Journalists in Education in France

## *The Ambivalences of a Professional Specialisation*

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# 1. Introduction

- **The context**

- Double gender segregation in French journalism (*education does not seem to be an exception*)
  - Horizontal. Ex: over-representation of women in columns traditionally regarded as being close to their expected social status (care, education, home) (*In 1997, 71% of the members of the AJE were women, whereas they represented 39% of journalists as a whole*)
  - Vertical. Ex: women are less often senior managers (*over-representation of men in journalists acting as “experts”, Pons, 2014*)
- Several explanations in the literature: the loop feminization/loss of value; women are more exposed to a growing flexibility; they have diploma in literature and arts; they remain in the “soft news” sector etc.
- Problem of these explanations: empirically, the sense of the causalities (or correlations) are not always obvious to establish and highly depends on contexts. How taking into account these pieces of context?

- **Our approach**

- Studying the construction of a media speciality by women journalists in education
- Sociology of professional groups in public action (Buisson-Fenet & Le Naour, 2008, Le Bianic & Vion, 2008) first, and then, progressive integration of the sociologies of education, gender and the media.
- Methodology
  - 30 deep interviews with journalists working at the national level between 2011 and 2013 (22 women, average length: 1h50')
  - Process of selection: variety of media (type of media and degree of specialisation) → identification of journalists as contributors → one journalist per media (except when they highly specialize in education)
  - Same grid conceived to understand the foundations of their professional identity and the cognitive and organisational mechanisms at the origin of their everyday work
- Gender variable as an opportunity to re-investigate these materials

- **Outline**

- Three obstacles to the construction of a media speciality by women journalists
  - Stereotypes on education (as a process and a column)
  - Strong dependence on editorial strategies
  - Their professional trajectories
- Gender as an intensifying factor
- The ambivalences of the women's media specialisation

## 2. Three Obstacles to the Construction of a Media Speciality by Women Journalists

- **Stereotypes on education**

- As a process = a trivial and well-known topic (by former pupils, stereotypes on teachers, permanence in their mind of the traditional foundations of school as an institution etc.)
- As a policy sector = boring, steady, institutional and technical
- As a column = a low valued sector (see expressions, recruitment circumstances, professional space setting and editorial choices)
- THUS: hard to position a paper and to convince the editorial boards that this piece of news is new and interesting, that this debate is not the good one etc.

- **Strong dependence on editorial strategies**

- Most of women in our sample work in generalist media, generally without specific pole on education
- They use specific strategies to convince the editorial board (finding support of a former education journalist, arguing on the basis of a strong knowledge of the sector, using their knowledge of personal situations of the members of the board)
- But globally, they declare that they do not manage to significantly make these stereotyped representations evolve
- This has an effect on the way they orient their media production (translating the topic to meet the expectations of the editorial board)

- **Three kinds of professional trajectories**

- “Women as men” (8/22)

- generally, studies in a journalism school or in an institute of political science
- early, strong and durable specialisation
- leading them to publish, to structure the field of the journalism in education

- Education as a “stable” job (8/22)

- Initial training: general disciplines (right, history etc.)
- Integration in a generalist media to treat all kinds of information
- After an average period of 14,5 years, appointment to a more stable job job

- “New insiders” (5)

- Young journalists (in average, 31,4 years old)
- Education = first job after school or first promotional proposal
- No specific interest in education

### 3. Gender as an Intensifying Factor

- Education is clearly regarded as a female column (cf. testimonies)
- Obstacle to the understanding of the complexity of the sector
- Leads sometimes to irony and irritation in editorial boards' meetings (gender orientation of perception of the topics, personalisation of negotiations)
- Needs here for a deeper sociology of gender relations within editorial boards.

## 4. The Ambivalences of Media Specialisation

- **Strategy of specialisation by a part of women journalists in education (8/22)**
  - Long experience, authors of several essays, contribute to structure the field of journalism in education
  - Refuse the common thinking of education as a professional dead-end, no saturation feeling
  - Stress the richness and complexity of the sector, the need to know it deeply from inside, they plead for a field investigation oriented to actors etc.
- **Others have a more ambivalent relation with their specialisation**
  - They say that they must have a good knowledge of institutional mechanisms, not be dependent on institutional communications, they invest in the AJE
  - BUT: they do not read a lot, they refuse sometimes a deep specialisation for the sake of a media pedagogy, they do not have specific expectations from the AJE etc.

## 5. Conclusion

- There are many obstacles to the construction of a media specialisation by women journalists in education in France
- Including the absence of a true strategy of specialisation by journalists themselves (Djerf-Pierre, 2007)
- Often because there is a deep integration of the hierarchy of specialities
- New circular causality????