

## TRANSITION TO WORK OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES: IS GENDER A DIFFERENCE POINT?

<sup>1</sup>ARLINDA CABRAL (PhD), <sup>2</sup>SUSANA BATISTA, <sup>3</sup>LILIANA PASCUEIRO, <sup>4</sup>ADELINA DE KANDINGI

<sup>1</sup>Researcher, CESNOVA - Centre for Sociological Studies of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa

<sup>2,3,4</sup>Asstt. Researcher., CESNOVA - Centre for Sociological Studies of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[arlinda.cabral@fsh.unl.pt](mailto:arlinda.cabral@fsh.unl.pt), <sup>2</sup>[susanabatista87@gmail.com](mailto:susanabatista87@gmail.com), <sup>3</sup>[liliana.pascueiro@gmail.com](mailto:liliana.pascueiro@gmail.com),

<sup>4</sup>[aalexandra@fsh.unl.pt](mailto:aalexandra@fsh.unl.pt)

### ABSTRACT

*An attempt was made in the present study to analyze the transition to work trajectory and the variable of work centrality among the higher education graduates. A sample of 1.004 graduates from two of the major public universities from Portugal (Universidade de Lisboa and Universidade Nova de Lisboa) was selected and administered 154- items of the work situation and the subjective relation with work (work centrality and work values) and the evaluation of work situation (work satisfaction) questionnaire. The collected data from the respondents were subjected to statistical analysis (univariate and bi-variate) and association and correlation tests. The results indicated that significant difference existed between male and female group in the objective situation in work and in the subjective relation with work, but no significant difference was found in the subjective evaluation of work situation.*

**Keywords:** *Higher education graduates, gender, transition to work trajectories, work centrality, work values.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The employability of university graduates has become a growing research field in the last few years, due to the continuous questioning of the relationship between the university and the labor market, as well as the growing number of university graduates in the European context (Rose, 1994 [1]; Vernières, 1997 [2]; Vincens, 1997[3], Labbé e Abhervé, 2005[4]). The dismissal of both university graduates and senior staff, in the nineties, and the decrease of job offers for those who have a university degree have originated reflections about the difficulty of employability of *university graduates*. Until now several research works have showed that university graduates have an advantage in employability over those not having a university degree. In Portugal there is a positive ratio between level of education and employability, a factor that denies the idea of uselessness of getting university degrees (Alves, 2008 [5]; Marques e Alves, 2010 [6]; Chaves, 2010 [7]; Rodrigues, Barroso & Caetano, 2010 [8]). University graduates are a heterogeneous group, as they differ in their employability trajectory, according to resources that they may mobilize and

academical level; according to their differences, their trajectories might be linear or ruled by precariousness and/or unemployment. According to data surveyed in the “Graduates’ transition to work trajectories - objective and subjective relations with work” (PTDC/CS-SOC/104744/2008) project, that was used in a PhD research project in Sociology, with the support of the Foundation for Science and Technology of Portugal (SFRH/BD/72273/2010), the big majority of university graduates - 2004/2005 - (88%) from two of the major Portuguese Public Universities - Universidade Nova de Lisboa e Universidade de Lisboa - is in the labour market regardless of gender. But in this issue, one may find specificities in the professional trajectories if we pay attention to their objective positions in the labor market. Regarding the subjective relation with work, both male and female university graduates similarly evaluate the favorable input of their professional activity, the importance of paid work in both life and work values. So, the symbolical values of both male and female university graduates merge, albeit one needs to look more closely in order to see if there is the same adequacy or inadequacy between both aspirations and professional achievements in the

practical and fulfillment level (Crompton et al., 2007 [9]; Guerreiro et al., 2010 [10]; Corrigan & Konrad, 2006 [11]; Halford, Savage and Witz, 2006 [12]). One possible approach might be the gender issue, i.e., whether having a university degree softens or not the existing gender inequalities in labor? If the majority of the university graduates are in the labor market, one finds differences in their trajectories, time to get a job, institutional place, and type of employment contract, salaries and working hours per week. So, if having a university degree contributes toward to reinforce a strongest presence of the gender parity model over the importance of labor in life, in what measure is this gender parity model really paritarian in both professional practices and achievements of university graduates? That's what we will try to explore in this paper.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

### 2.1 From university to the labor market: work and gender differences or resemblances in transition to work trajectories

In contemporary societies, it is considered that paid work provides bases for individuals to be part of the social structure, both bringing social legitimacy to biographical stages and fulfilling achievements that either way would not be fulfilled, once before economic health was inherited and nowadays individuals need to work in order to achieve life projects that largely depend on the economical income from paid work. On the other hand, one cannot ignore that the nowadays conjuncture, where we read and hear about economic difficulties and unemployment brings out a discourse that can affect the perception of the importance of work, either enhancing it or diminishing its importance, then again affecting individuals' attitudes. In this kind of society, paid work plays a central role in life, since its allowance to financial means that fulfill life projects and exertion of some kind of social time monopoly, even when work is not considered the most important dimension in life.

Once being a sphere of the social life, work cannot be set apart from other dimensions of life, because individuals are perceived as living in a multiple social belonging, which means simultaneous dedication to family, to social networks, to religious, political and cultural practices, as well as to artistic activities and sports.

Therefore during their professional trajectories, university graduates might see their practices influenced by the place of work in their lives' whilst source of personal achievement or economical income, as well as a mean of both getting social acknowledgment and economical resources to be invested in other highly important dimensions of life. At the same time, the large importance of work in life is not equivalent to its preponderance over other social dimensions; the same works for the non-equivalence between dedication to life and the preponderant centrality of work. These two factors might well be the result of financial constraints that strongly push more time to be dedicated to work.

Managing the place that work has in life occurs in a temporal framework, which means that individuals make choices in what social times are concerned, the later ones usually described as a tripartite structure: time of work (paid work), time out of work for other occupations and time out of work for spare time and leisure. At the same time, temporal frameworks and economical resources might restrain individuals' dedication to other dimensions of life. Therefore, the relation between different spheres of the social life might be restrained by the specific situation towards work (time schedules and payment rates) and also by the degree of centrality (importance) that work has in life (Grossin, 1974 [13]; MOW, 1987 [14]; Villaverde Cabral et al., 2000 [15]; Flacher, 2008 [16]; Chaves 2010 [7]).

The employability of university graduates has been researched over both national and European contexts, mainly due to the complexity of the professional trajectories, at present times, described as having different frameworks. Graduates' transition to work trajectories has attracted the interest of the academic community due to (Labbé e Abhervé, 2005 [4]; Dubar, 1991 [17], Galland, 2007 [18]): structural and cyclical changes facing the job market; necessity to question the role of higher education in contemporary societies, which heavily rely on the knowledge economy; complexity of transition to work trajectories.

University graduates are a heterogeneous group because of their differences in the professional trajectories, according to their available resources and academic field of degrees. Taking into account these differences and opportunities in labor market, their trajectories might be linear and socially ascendant or intermittent, interspersed by long periods of unemployment or precarity. Although the mediatised discourses that emphasize the loss of the relative value of the degrees, university graduates

take less time to get a job, have better salaries and take less time to stabilize in the labor market (Freire, 2006 [19]; Almeida et al., 2010 [20]; Alves, 2008 [5]; Marques & Alves, 2010 [6]; Chaves, 2010 [7]; Rodrigues et al., 2010 [8]).

But then we face a main question: “are there more resemblances or differences in the objective situation or subjective relationship to work according to gender?” To answer this question we shall understand what the meaning of work in graduate’s life is. So, the tree purposes of this paper are: (a) to characterize the objective situation in the labor market, confirming or refuting the parity model - the career paths: labor market situation; main occupation; work contract; working hours; salaries; (b) to characterize the subjective relation to work, in order to know the importance that work assumes in graduates’ lives (Herzberg, 1971 [21]; MOW Group, 1987 [14]; Schwartz, 1999 [22]); (c) to characterize the relationship between the objective and subjective relation to work, to know if there are more gender differences or resemblances in transition to work trajectories (Halford et al, 2006 [12]; Crompton and Lyonette, 2007 [9]; Guerreiro, Torres e Capucha, 2009 [10]).

## 2.2. Work in modern contemporary society

In modern contemporary societies, professional attachments have a central role in the socialization processes, in the social insertion dynamics and in the relative position of each individual in the social space. Paid work ascribes individuals to the social structure and becomes the main resource that makes life goals’ attainable. According to Halman (2001) [23], work still keeps its crucial place in contemporary societies, as far as it structures and constraints social times management, socially legitimates biographical levels (academic formation, working life and retirement) contextualizing and giving meaning to the everyday activities. In order to study the process that turned out work to a central value, according to Arendt (1998) [24], the modern contemporary period is described as the celebration of work and the transformation of society in a labor people society. But in order to get a central position in both societies and economies, it is equally necessary to legitimate work in the value system field (Flacher 2008 [16]).

According to Inglehart (2008) [25], there was a galvanization of the traditional values of industrialized societies in the early sixties. This was the “materialist” approach where there were predominant economic and security concerns and a perspective of a “society of post-materialist values”.

Here the importance is shuffled to non-material health, such as quality of life and self-fulfillment. According to this approach, in a context of self-sustainable development, concerns with personal development, active involvement in both social and community life and environment might become a priority in individuals’ lives’. But it shall be reminded that the development of post-materialist values in society is grounded in economic resources, a situation that does not fit into nowadays context, being otherwise associated to a recession and economic crisis’ scenario.

The central value of work is both related to social and temporal context, because it became a central dimension in the acknowledgment of the individual’s social usefulness (Mêda, 1995). Having a stable paid job becomes a crucial step in life, as it allows the access to financial means that both develop and fulfill life projects’ (Galland 2007, 149 [18]), giving access at the same time to the symbolical acknowledgment of being considered an active individual. Therefore, work is an inductive element that crosses the family, academic, professional, political and cultural integration and “to stable work it can be associated a solid relational insertion” (Flacher 2008, 69 [16]). But if one hears discourses that emphasize the importance of work in social life, on the one hand, on the other hand one also hears discourses about the relative loss of the importance of work. According to Flacher (2008) [16], the central role of precarious work as a global feature may attract a rupture with a time where life was work centered and a future where activities that are not work become more important. However, if there are “distractions that are decadent and others that are extremely tedious (...) there are ways of work that distract and free people” (Friedman e Trèaton, 1958, 708 [26]). So, overall, work might be seen as a social obligation and a constraint to the fulfillment of the remaining social times or seen as a leisure activity and a way of personal fulfillment (Dumazedier, 1988 [27]; Pronovost, Attias-Donfut e Samuel, 1993 [28]; Pronovost, 2000 [29]; Halman, 1999 [23]; Pereira, 2005 [30], Nowotny, 2005 [31], Flacher 2008 [16]).

Times of leisure, family life, knowledge networks, community life and participation in different kinds of political associations are related to both objective situations and subjective relations with work. In Portugal, researches on social attitudes towards work stress the preferences over time management, a variable that allows to check the value given to work, in comparison to other social activities such as housekeeping, time with family and friends as leisure times (Villaverde

Cabral et al., 1998 [32]). There are also researches about satisfaction levels with work (Silva, 1998 [33]), changes in what working values are concerned (Ramos e Vala, 2004 [34]), time management between work, family, leisure times, friends and housekeeping (Freire, 2006 [16]), as well as the work centrality (Ramos, 2000 [35]; Duarte e Lopes, 2010 [36]; Maciel e Marques, 2010 [37]).

According to Freire (2006 [19]), one can observe two different points of view in what it is related to work: hard workers that do not let work affect other dimensions of life, and individuals that work hard in spite of other aspects of life. The majority of the Portuguese individuals adopt a strong self-involvement attitude towards work, if this means variations in the financial income. This issue is concerned to privileged ways of both time management and the importance given to work and spare time, as well as the consequences of both options over material ways of living.

Work time is not free of social conditioning about the place that it should occupy in the life of each individual compared to other spheres of social life, which is linked to the social representations as to the key responsibilities assigned to men and women. In Portugal, the division of paid and unpaid work, with repercussions at the time investment in work is a sphere where there are marked gender differences (Wall and Amâncio, 2007 [38]), although denote different configurations on the grounds of social class of origin, age, socio-professional category and other variables of working life (Maruani and Reynaud, 2004 [39]; Crompton et al, 2007 [9]).

The articulation of work time and other spheres of the social life is an emphasized dimension by the university graduates during transition to work trajectories. Several Law university graduates in Lisbon would not mind getting less paid if their working time would be shortened, in order to acquire more time to dedicate to other social life spheres' (Chaves, 2010 [7]).

In the nineties second half, sociological analysis moves to questioning the work framework in globalized capitalist societies, including values and significance of work, as well as the work centrality. These approaches might be analyzed in relation to perspectives that predicate the "end of work" and "the centrality of work", in times where one faces the "quantity of work crisis" (Gonçalves, 2004, 4 [40]). Work has become crucial to family's autarky and also to the fulfillment of life projects, but one cannot ignore the nowadays context of strong

economic difficulties that might highly constraint the importance of work in life, either emphasizing it or diminishing it, according to the objective professional situation of the social agents. The shortage of work or even the fear of dealing with that shortage might result in an increase of the importance given to the professional sphere. According to Maurin (2009 [41]), even the families that find themselves in a more privileged situation in the labor market dedicate themselves more to work, turning work into a structural dimension in life, even if work is not the most important sphere in life.

### 2.3. The importance of work in life: research about work centrality

The former researches about the work centrality were developed by the Meaning of Working Group (MOW) during the eighties, comprehending otherwise the dimension of the value orientation towards work (value orientation), where work is understood as a role in life, based on the self-identification and self-involvement in work and, on the other hand, the decision orientation dimension (decision orientation), related to practices that individuals adopt around the interests seen as crucial in life (MOW, 1987 [14]). According to this perspective, there are two central elements correlated in the representation of work centrality: (i) the segmentation of life spheres', where work might be in a central or favorite position, share a position among other spheres or be in a peripheral position or less favorite in life and (ii) the resulting behaviors coming from the choice of a certain segment of the social life such as the favorite sphere, with consequences on the involvement and self-investment in other different spheres of social life.

The studies about work centrality lead us to the research about "the significance of work". The concept of "meaning of work" can be defined as the significance the subject attributes to work, his representations of work, and the importance it has in his/her life (MOW, 1987 [14]; Morse & Weiss, 1955 [42]; Harpaz & Fu, 2002 [43], Schwartz, 1999 [22], Halman, 2001 [23]). But in our post-modern times we may associate the meaning of work to three dimensions (Morin, 2004 [44]): a) significance of work, in what concerns its representations and its value from the subject's perspective; b) subject's orientation toward work, in terms of what he is seeking in his work and the intents that guide his actions; c) the effect of coherence, between the subject and the work he

does, between his expectations, his values, and his daily actions at work.

In this way, we understand work centrality as “the importance of work and working in one’s life” (MOW, 1987 [14]). The work centrality might assume two ways: absolute centrality, meaning the importance given to work in general terms and relative centrality once balanced with the importance given to other spheres of the social life: family, friends, sports, cultural activities, politics, leisure and religion (MOW 1987, Schwartz 1999).

According to Harpaz & Fu (2002) [43], the meaning given to work in life comes from the articulation of five dimensions that crisscross objective aspects (fulfillments) and valuable aspects: (i) the absolute and relative work centrality, (ii) the social right to work, (iii) the rule of the social obligation of work, (iv) the economical instrumental orientation of and (v), the expressive orientation, referring to satisfaction at work, the adequacy of the functions to qualifications and competences, interest over work and autonomy in functions. In the present research, both relative and absolute work centrality will be taken into account in the analysis of the importance of work in life, as well as both rewards and satisfaction that one expects to get from working.

#### 2.4. The analytical dimension of gender in research about work

In the sociological field, gender is a dimension that allows the analysis of social changes because it adds a social dimension of existence to the sexual biological dimension, showing representations, perceptions, evaluations and values coming from social constructs geographically and temporally located. According to Canço (2007:182) [gender is a concept that refers to the “social differences (in opposition to biological differences) between men and women, traditionally transmitted by socialization, changeable over time and with big variations in and between cultures”. So, categories such as “sex” and “gender” are variables that can explain identity and social phenomena and become instruments of thinking and classifying the social world .

The late eighties brought up the subject of the power relations dimension between sexes, focusing at the research of male dominance in both public and private spheres (Guionet & Neveu, 2005 [46]). Following these ideas, notions of “sex social relations” stress the cultural dimension of both male and female identities’ and roles, force relations and

established hierarchies in behalf of the social differentiation.

In the sphere of work, one sees concepts that aim to remark an articulation between work and gender in order to answer a broader question: “what about the relationship between gender and work in the labor market?” In what this relationship is concerned one finds (Halford et al, 2006 [12]; Crompton et al, 2007 [9]; Canço, 2007 [45]; Ferreira, 2010 [47]): a) sexual segregation, in what it comes to the number of men and women in different types and levels of activities and employment: women are confined to a minor variety of jobs (horizontal segregation) and less empowered positions (vertical segregation); b) glass ceiling effect, meaning an invisible barrier that does not allow women to get into important positions, a phenomenon that comes from segregation practices of organization in both recruitment and promotion; c) gender stereotypes, meaning generalized and socially asserted representations about what men and women shall do; d) payment gaps, referring to an unbalance between the average income of men and women.

Portugal appears among southern European countries as “a society with a high rate of female employment, at around 65%” (Guerreiro and Pereira, 2007:194 [48]). At the same time, “Portugal is one of the more gender conservative countries” (Crompton & all, 2007:11 [9]). According to Perista (2006) [49] and Aboim (2008) [50], the Portuguese society has been changing in what it comes to work and family relations, mainly due to the emergency of families with a “double profession” where the both members of the couple has a paid job, with consequences over the family organization and gender social relations. The high rate of participation of women in the labor market is due to economical issues, in the one hand; on the other hand, to the fact of work being associated to both moments of social interaction and a mean to enhance women’ power of negotiation in family (Perista, 2006 [49]; Wall & Amâncio, 2005 [38]). Therefore, changes in gender social relations, added to the massive entry of women in the labor market started a new paradigm where “female job rapidly became a central element in Portuguese society, acquiring the strength of a social must-be” (Aboim, 2008, 575 [50]). But, in spite of the stereotyped gender differences, there seems to be a balance between men and women in what it comes to attitudes, opinions and values (Almeida, Brites & Torres, 2010 [20]).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research project 'Graduates' transition to work trajectories - objective and subjective relations with work' (PTDC/CS-SOC/104744/2008) includes both quantitative (use of inquiry by questionnaire) and qualitative (use of semi-structured interviews) research methodologies in order to develop a thorough analysis of the importance attached by individuals to paid work as part of their life projects, a research field of crucial importance for structuring the processes of identity construction of higher education graduates. Our data originates from the administration of the questionnaire to graduates (cohort from 2004/2005) from Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Universidade de Lisboa, to know the evolution of their status in a moment when a strong economic recession is forecasted for the coming years, as well as their behavior in such a context. We aim to know if going to University and having success helps to mitigate gender differences, in what professional aims and achievements are concerned, as well in what subjective relation to work (work centrality and work satisfaction) concerns.

The resulting data were collected between October 2010 and January 2011, taking a sample of 1.004 university graduates, following the simple arbitrary sample model, corresponding to, approximately, 23% of the university graduates in 2004/2005 (4.290 individuals). The majority of the enquired individuals (90,2%) is 27-35 years old, 64,3% female and 35,7% male. Within the enquired individuals universe, 82,4% does not have children. The majority of these university graduates live at Lisbon district (76,7%), followed by Região Centro (7,8%). Approximately half of the enquired individuals live with its husband/wife (53%), 20% live alone and 19% live with their parents or parents in law. Finally, the enquired individuals are divided within the following academics areas, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): Education; Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences, Business and Law; Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics; Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction; Health and Welfare.

### 4. RESULTS

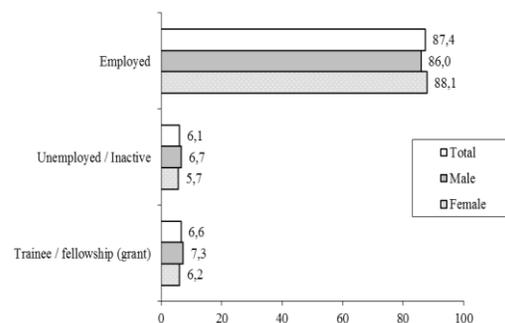
#### 4.1. Gender differences in both professional trajectories and subjective relation with

#### work of university graduates from UL and UNL

The relation between different spheres of social life might be restrained by the objective working condition (schedules, payment rates and type of contract) and also by the subjective relation between individuals and their works, in what it comes to the importance that individuals attach to work and satisfaction with their activity. So, working life can affect life aside work, influencing ways to articulate aims and fulfillments related to work and other social life dimensions. Knowing that in specific social situations "the differences intra-sexes are much more relevant than those inter-sexes" (Vala & Torres, 2006: 325 [51]), we aims to advance the research over the relation between gender and work within the group of university graduates, bringing into account positions achieved at the labor market and values, motivations and meanings given to work in life.

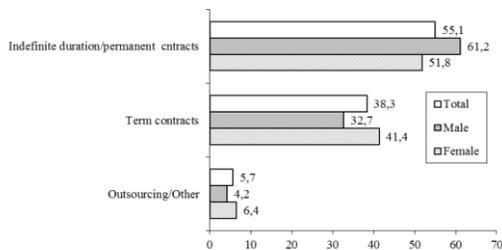
Academic degree might be associated to a model of higher gender parity, because of the weakening of differences over trajectories (university graduates show positive professional trajectories, no matter their gender), although the discourses that emphasize gender differences in what comes to accessing privileged positions, in terms of stability, possibilities of promotion in career and salaries. Therefore, if in general terms, having a degree allows higher proximity between wishes and fulfillments of the university graduates, on the other hand one must question if there are more gender resemblances or differences between university graduates, on their transition to work trajectories.

Five years after finishing their BA degrees, the situation related to work of the university graduates from UL and UNL showed in the sample is characterized by a higher number of employed individuals and by a residual percentage of unemployed individuals:



Graph 1 – Graduates respondents from UNL and UL work situation 5 years after obtaining the academic degree, by gender (%) (CESNOVA, 2011)

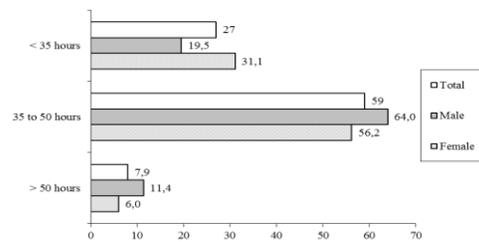
As shown in graph 1, the big majority of university graduates is employed, followed by 5,5% individuals with a scholarship, mainly *doctorandi*. The percentage of unemployed individual is minimal (2,4%), the same for inactive individuals (3,7%) or trainees (1,1%). In any of these situations, the differences between the enquired individuals both male and female are not significant. In spite of the reduced percentages of “unemployed” individuals, it is crucial to understand how far academic skills of university graduates match their jobs or if, in the contrary, they are working in jobs that one could designate by “inadequate”, from this double point of view. Another relevant question is related to the type of job contract. As a matter of fact, it is worth to wonder if the high percentage of the employed enquired individuals is not hiding (or being followed) by a massive frame of contractual precarity.



Graph 2 – Work contract from UNL and UL graduates' respondents 5 years after obtaining the academic degree, by gender (%)(CESNOVA, 2011)

The majority of the enquired university graduates have a job contract (93,4%). One can see a difference of almost 10 per cent points between the male university graduates' values (61,2%) and the female university graduates' values (51,8%) in long term contracts, whilst the situation changes in term contracts, where female university graduates' is higher (41,4% to 32,7%). On the other hand, if stability might be related to a long term contract, one must highlight that 5 years after BA graduation, approximately half of the university graduates don't have a permanent position in their work places, which points to the “syndrome of instability due to precarious situations and term contracts” (Teixeira, 2001: 136) in the beginning of the individual's professional trajectories. The majority of the enquired individuals work at private enterprises (49,8% and this is the only superior percentage of male individuals, where one can see the significant difference of 10 per cent points. The “Public Administration Bodies” also have a significant role as a job entity of 27,8% graduates. The differences between the enquired individuals both male (26%)

and female (28,8%) are not significant. Despite the differences between men and women are not pronounced when comparing types of employment contract, we are faced with a higher weight category of “labor contract” among men and a greater weight of the other categories among women. Based on chi-square (Qui2 = 11.5 for sig = 0.04, Cramer's V = 0.125), it can be stated that there is a weak association between the two variables, the “type of contract ”depends on the sex of respondents, finding a permanent contract category associated with men (61.2%) and contract term to women (41.4%).

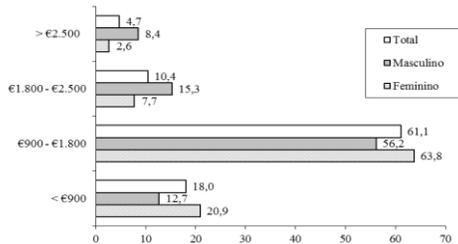


Graph 3 – Working hours, by gender (%) (CESNOVA, 2011)

Both male and female university graduates work, in the average, almost 40h/week (female individuals: 39h/w male individuals: 42h/w); female university graduates are highly represented in the less working hours week and male university graduates work more than 40h per week, in average. Based on chi-square (Qui2 sig = 8.2 for = 0.16, Cramer's V = 0.097), the weekly working time is, therefore, associated with the sex of the respondents, but with low intensity. The different distribution of affect work time can be found associated with the persistence of gender inequality in the distribution of “non-work” activities, which refers women to a forward location in the responsibility for the remaining activities of social life. The allocation of time to life “outside of work” exerts greater pressure among women than among men, for which the primary social responsibility is to demonstrate the expected “investment in the work” associated with working hours. Portugal belongs to the group of the European countries where, in the average, workers show a higher balance between time spent at work and time desired to be spent at work (Freire, 2009 [52]). By the rule, the remaining social time is managed according to time left from working time.

The wage gap between men and women is an area where they are most obvious gender inequalities in Portugal (Amaro and Moura, 2008 [53]; Crompton & all, 2010 [9]; Kimmel, 2010 [54]). This fact is particularly important among higher education graduates (Alves, 2007 [55];

Chaves, 2010 [7]), where we find "situations of persistent wage differences for the same qualifications and skills" (Cross, 2000: 14) and, with particular emphasis, among graduates who perform more skilled occupations (Barroso, Nico and Rodrigues, 2011).



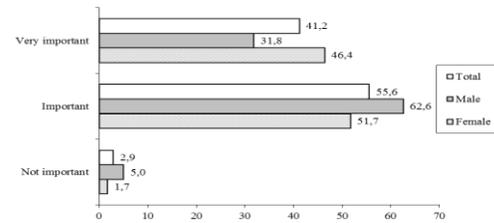
Graph 4 – Graduates’ salary rates, by gender (%)(CESNOVA, 2011)

In what total income is concerned, the enquired individuals owe, in the average, around 1.300 €/month and more than 50% of this group now owe from 900€ to 1.800€, where one can see an overrepresentation of male university graduates in the higher payment rate and the same for female university graduates in the lowest ones. The payment gap is of almost €300/per month between female and male graduates’ salaries. In this sense, we face a significant difference in salary taking into account the gender dimension. The data show that male graduates earn more on average (€ 1,489.30) than female graduates (€ 1,204), with a higher relative proportion of male graduates in the ranks of more than € 1,800. Based on chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 12,148$ ; sig = 0.016, Cramer's V = 0.417), being female or male does differentiate to earn income between men and women. Thus we find that the average monthly income is associated with the sex of respondents.

In objective terms, the differences between university female and male graduates are not so significant in the work situation and in the working hours, here, one must add that female individuals take a little bit longer to find a paid job, work fewer hours and they are less paid comparing to male individuals.

When asked about the work centrality, the majority of the enquired university graduates (96,8%) considers work important in life. Inside this group, 46% of women consider it very important, as well 32% of men. Only 3% university graduates consider work “not important in life” (female individuals: 2%; male individuals: 5%). So, both female (98%) and male (94%) university

graduates give an extraordinary importance to work in life.

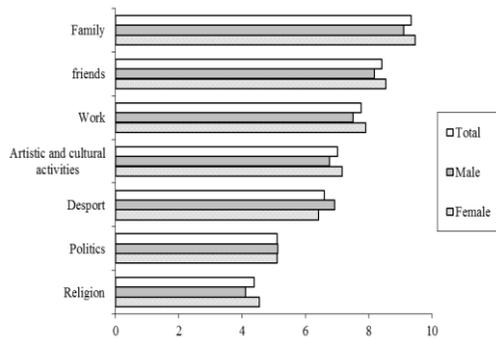


Graph 5 – Work centrality, in absolute terms, by gender (%)(CESNOVA, 2011)

To assess the hypothesis that male and female graduates evaluate equally the degree of importance they attach to working life (measured on an ordinal scale of 1 - 10 Nothing important - Very important), we turn to the nonparametric Mann-Whitney that allowed us to see that the distributions of the groups are different, and the female graduates have degrees of work centrality higher than male graduates and that these differences are statistically significant ( $U = 95.2$ ,  $W = 158.8$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). According to Ramos (2002), work centrality allows studying the personal and social significance given to work. In the Portuguese context, centrality as become higher in 18-34 year old female individuals with a higher level of education that does not have a tight schedule. In the present study, even if the university graduates would not have financial needs to be fulfilled, work would still be important in their lives (78,8%). In the meanwhile, the higher score (“very important”) decreases for both male and female university graduates, as well as work becomes “not important” for a significant part of university graduates (female respondents: 58,3%; male respondents: 41,8%). This oscillation seems to point to the work’s linkage to a main financial source for economical support. However, once again 2004/2005 university graduates become closer to young people with academic degree enquired in 1998. A significant majority of these individuals asserts “the work centrality”, justifying that they would like to get a paid job “even if they would not have financial needs to be fulfilled”. This opinion becomes as expressive as the levels of education grow higher (Duarte e Lopes, 2010 [36]; Maciel e Marques, 2010 [37]).

However, when compared with the other social life dimensions, like family, friends, sport, artistic and cultural activities, politics and religion, work takes the third place for graduates, regardless gender. The work is thus preceded by family and

friends, considered one of the most important life spheres for the majority of graduates. So, it seems that the social interaction is an important dimension in female and male graduates' life.



Legend: 10 point Scale: 1 – Not important at all to 10 – Very important

Graph 6 – Work centrality, in relative terms, by gender (%) (CESNOVA, 2011)

According to the showed data, there are no relevant differences when it comes to the enquired individual's gender. According to Freire (2009 [52]) what individuals say about their professional situation is, nonetheless the result of attitudes towards work and of the importance given to work as a structuring dimension of time and other aspects of the social life.

For the university graduates, the most important sphere in life is clearly "Family", followed by "Friends and relatives" and third, "Work". This issue might be related to the professional situation because, as mentioned before, almost half of the university graduates do not have a permanent position in the labor market, something frequently associated to higher stability and assurance in the professional sphere.

Theoretically, family and work have been considered the two most important spheres of life, but in the case of UNL and UL graduates' "Friends" assume a prominent place before the "Work". This factor may be related to respondents' professional achievements and with socio-demographic factors, such as marital status and having or not children. We may assume that having a family has been postponed until the achievement of a stable professional, that was only reached for 50% of graduates'. This result may find support in fact that only 18,6% of respondents live out their parenthood (female respondents: 11,8%; male respondents: 6,8%). The postponement of the creation of her/his own family may push for greater investment in the networks of "friends", due to intermittent employment and unemployment and

in some cases precariousness that graduates' face in the transition to work trajectories. The hypothesis that the distributions of the relative degree of centrality attributed to the spheres of social life between male and female graduates are identical was evaluated using the Mann-Whitney test (given the range 1 - 10 Nothing important - Very important) which allowed us to conclude that there are more differences than gender similarities. Ascertained statistically significant differences in the distribution of the degrees of relative centrality. The female graduates tend to have higher degrees of importance in the sphere of "work" ( $W = 166.7$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) in the realm of "family" ( $W = 158.4$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), in the sphere of "friends and acquaintances" ( $W = 163.5$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), in the sphere of "artistic and cultural activities" ( $W = 164.8$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and in the sphere of "leisure" ( $W = 168.2$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). The male graduates have degrees higher than female graduates in the sphere of "sport" and the differences are equally significant from a statistical point of view ( $W = 196.1$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). On the contrary, there were no significant differences in the distribution of the degree of relative importance assigned to the sphere of "politics", in which the male and female graduates showed the same degree of relative centrality ( $W = 127.7$ ). These data reinforce that family is the most important dimension of individual lives, as indeed has been reported in several studies (MOW, 1987 [14]; Meda, 1999 [56]; Snir and Harpaz, 2004 [57]; Galland, 2007 [18]).

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In what objective relation to work concerns, five years passed getting a degree, university graduates respondents from UL and UNL are clearly employed at the labor market (female individuals: 88%; male individuals: 86%), the majority working within their graduation areas and with "permanent contracts" (female: 51%; male: 61%). Some in management positions (female individuals: 5%; male individuals: 13%). University graduates are strongly represented in activities of senior staff (female individuals: 71%; male individuals: 72%), divided between private and public employees (female individuals: 46%; male individuals: 56%), owing average 1.302,40 € (female individuals: 1.204€; male individuals: 1.459,30€) and working average 40 hours per week (female individuals: 39h/w male individuals: 42h/w). This might apparently mean that getting a degree is still associated to positive transition to work trajectories, but associating more stable and better positions, as well as better paid jobs, to male individuals, rather than to both male and female individuals.

In what the subjective relation to work is concerned, university graduates give a high importance to work in life (female individuals: 80%; male individuals: 75%). However, when it comes to the lack of financial means, one sees a decay of the high importance of work, as becomes "not important" for a significant part of university graduates (female respondents: 58,3%; male respondents: 41,8%). This oscillation seems to point to the work's linkage to a main financial source for economical support. When it comes to the relative work centrality, "Family" is the sphere where more importance is given, followed by "Friends and relatives" and third "Work". There are no relevant differences when it comes to the enquired individual's gender. Theoretically, family and work have been considered the two most important spheres of life, but in the case of UNL and UL female and male graduates' "Friends" assume a prominent place before "Work". This factor may be related to respondents' professional achievements and with socio-demographic factors, such as marital status and having or not children.

When it comes for objective situation at the labor market, one sees more male university graduates than female university graduates in high positions, with permanent positions with higher salaries. In a way, high positions might be justified by academic areas as a big part of the female individuals showed in the sample have degrees and work in areas where the income is inferior. But when it comes to the subjective relation with work, the satisfaction level is higher among the university graduates, as well as the importance of work in life. However, if confronted with no need of work for financial means, female university graduates give less importance to work than male university graduates. Given the initial question is whether that "gender differences observable in Portugal have also been found among graduates of higher education, both in objective condition in the labor market, both in the subjective relation to work", this argument allows us to conclude that there is a relationship between gender and these two dimensions of the study of the transition to work trajectories of graduates, which results in the predominance of gender differences.

In this way: what does influence the subjective relationship to work? In the objective perspective, men has better situation toward work. In terms of work satisfaction, man and women are equally satisfied. But when it comes to work centrality, women gave more importance to work in life than men.

If one thinks that the female massification of the Portuguese labor market started thirty years ago and

that nowadays the number of female university graduates is higher than the male university graduates, one might foresee that the gender resemblance and differences is an important research subject. In order to deepen the present study about the importance graduates' attribute to work in life and if we are witnessing or not a tendency that points to the gender parity model in the labor market, based on the educational capital, we intend to continue to endorse this problem, to understand if there are more gender resemblances or differences in the objective and subjective relation to work.

#### NOTES

[1] This text is part of PhD research at CESNOVA – Center for Sociological Studies of Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal, entitled "Graduates' transition to work trajectories: Conciliation or conflict between work and other social life spheres" supported by Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), Ministry of Education and Science (SFRH/BD/72273/2010). This project is being developed in accordance with the research project on "Graduates' transition to work trajectories: objective and subjective relations with the work" (PTDC/CS-SOC/104744/2008) financially supported by Foundation for Science and Technology, Ministry of Education and Science of Portugal.

[2] The article was presented at the European Congress of Educational Research (ECER) organized by the European Educational Research Association (EERA) in September 2012 in Cadiz, Spain. It was presented at "The Need for Educational Research to Champion Freedom, Education and Development for All" Conference, Network 22. Research in Higher Education, Session: 22 SES 06 B.

#### REFERENCES:

1. J. Rose, "Novas questões sobre a inserção profissional", *Revista Europeia Formação Profissional*, Vol. 2, 1994, pp. 72-76.
2. M. Vernières (Coord.), *L'insertion professionnelle: Analyses et débats*, Paris, 1997, Economica.
3. J. Vincens, "L'insertion professionnelle des jeunes: à la recherche d'une définition conventionnelle", *Revue Formation-Emploi*, Vol. 60, 1997, pp. 21-36.
4. P. Labbé & M. Abhervé, *L'insertion professionnelle et sociale des jeunes ou*

- l'intelligence pratique des missions locales*, Rennes, France, 2005, Éditions Apogée.
5. N. Alves, *Juventudes e inserção profissional*, Lisboa, 2008, Educa.
  6. A. P. Marques & M. Alves (Org.), *Inserção profissional de graduados em Portugal: (re)configurações teóricas e empíricas*, Vila Nova de Famalicão, 2010, Edições Húmus.
  7. M. Chaves, *Confrontos com o Trabalho Entre Jovens Advogados: As Novas Configurações da Inserção Profissional*, Lisboa, 2010, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
  8. E. Rodrigues, M. Barroso & A. Caetano, "Trabalho, família e bem-estar: factores e padrões de qualidade de vida na Europa", CIES e-Working paper N.º 93/2010.
  9. R. Crompton, S. Lewis & C. Lyonette (Eds), *Women, men, work and family in Europe*, England, 2007, Palgrave MacMillan.
  10. M. D. Guerreiro, A. Torres & L. Capucha (Ed.), *Welfare and everyday life*, Lisboa, 2009, Celta Editora.
  11. E. Corrigan & A. Konrad, "The relationship of job attribute preferences to employment, hours of paid work, and family responsibilities: an analysis comparing women and men", *Sex Roles*, Vol. 54, no. 1-2, 2006, pp. 95-111.
  12. S. Halford, M. Savage & A. Witz, *Gender, careers and organizations* (10th ed.), London, UK, 2006, MacMillan Press.
  13. W. Grossin, *Les temps de la vie quotidienne*, Paris, 1974, La Haye.
  14. MOW - Meaning of Working International Research Team, *The meaning of working*, England, 1987, University Academic Press.
  15. M. Villaverde Cabral, J. Vala & J. Freire (Orgs), *Atitudes sociais dos Portugueses: Trabalho e Cidadania*, Lisboa, 2000, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
  16. B. Flacher, *Travail et intégration social* (2.ª ed.), France, 2008, Éditions Bréal.
  17. C. Dubar, *La socialisation. Construction des identités sociales et professionnelles*, Paris, 1991, Armand Colin Éditeur.
  18. O. Galland, *Sociologie de la jeunesse* (4eme. Ed), Paris, 2007, Armand Colin.
  19. J. Freire, *Sociologia do trabalho* (4.ª ed.), Porto, 2006, Edições Afrontamento.
  20. J. F. Almeida, R. Brites & A. Torres, "Valores e classes sociais: diferenças e semelhanças de género em Portugal", *Sociologia on line*, vol. 1, 2010, pp. 1-16.
  21. F. Herzberg, *Le travail et la nature de l'homme* (4.eme éd), Paris, 1971, Entreprise Moderne d'Édition.
  22. S. Schwartz, "A theory of cultural values and some implications for work", *Applied Psychology: an international review*, n.º 48 (1), 1999, pp. 23-47.
  23. L. Halman (Org.), *The European values study: a third wave*, The Netherlands, 2001, Tilburg University.
  24. H. Arendt, *The human condition* (2nd ed), London, 1998, The University of Chicago Press.
  25. R. Inglehart, "The silent revolution in Europe", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65, 2008, pp. 991-1017.
  26. G. Friedman & J. R. Trêaton, "Capítulo IV – Vida de trabalho e vida fora do trabalho, indústria e sociedade", in G. Gurvitch (Ed), *Tratado de Sociologia*, Brasil, 1958, Livraria Martins Fontes Editora, pp. 693-711.
  27. J. Dumazedier, *Révolution culturelle du temps libre 1968-1988*, Paris, 1988, Méridiens Klincksieck.
  28. G. Pronovost, C. Attias-Donfut & N. Samuel, *Temps libéré et modernité. Mélanges en l'honneur de Joffre Dumazedier*, Québec, 1993, Presses Universitaires de l'Université du Québec / Éditions l'Harmattan.
  29. G. Pronovost, "The collapse of the leisure society? New challenges for the sociology of leisure", in S. R. Quah e A. Sales (Eds), *The international handbook of sociology*, London, Sage Publications Ltd, 2000, pp. 356-366.
  30. V. B. Pereira, *Classes e culturas de classe das famílias portuenses*, Porto, 2005, Edições Afrontamento.
  31. H. Nowotny, *Time: the modern and postmodern experience*, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2005, Polity Press.
  32. M. Villaverde Cabral, J. Vala, J. Freire e A. Ramos, *Atitudes dos portugueses: Orientações perante o trabalho*, Lisboa, 1998, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
  33. R. B. Silva, "Para uma análise da satisfação com o trabalho", *Sociologia – Problemas e Práticas*, Vol. 26, 1998, pp. 149-178.

34. A. Ramos & J. Vala, "O significado das diferenças: Uma análise comparativa dos valores do trabalho em cinco países europeus", *Actas do V Congresso da Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia - Sociedades Contemporâneas: Reflexividade e Acção*, 2004, pp. 1-6.
35. A. Ramos, "Centralidade do trabalho", in M. V. Cabral (Org.), *Atitudes sociais dos portugueses - Trabalho e cidadania*, Lisboa, Imprensa das Ciências Sociais, 2000, pp. 47-69.
36. H. Duarte & D. Lopes, "Percursos de vida profissional, satisfação e motivações perante o trabalho", in J. M. Pais & V. Ferreira (Orgs.), *Tempos e transições de vida: Portugal ao Espelho da Europa*, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2010, pp. 185-221.
37. D. Maciel & A. Marques, "Do ganha-pão à valorização pessoal: a centralidade do trabalho na vida dos indivíduos", CIES e-Working Paper no. 43/2008.
38. K. Wall & L. Amâncio, *Família e género em Portugal e na Europa*, Lisboa, 2007, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
39. M. Maruani & E. Reynaud, *Sociologie de l'emploi*, 4.eme édition, Paris, 2004, La Decouverte.
40. C. Gonçalves, "Trabalho: Novas interrogações e novos desafios", *Actas do V Congresso Português de Sociologia - Sociedades Contemporâneas: Reflexividade e Acção*, 2004, pp. 18-27.
41. E. Maurin, *La peur du déclassement. Une sociologie des récessions*, France, 2009, Éditions du Seuil.
42. N. C. Morse & R. Weiss, "The function and meaning of work and the job", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, no. 2, 1955, pp. 191-198.
43. I. Harpaz & X. Fu, "The structure of the meaning of work: A relative stability amidst change", *Human Relations*, Vol. 5, 2002, pp. 639-667.
44. E. Morin, *The meaning of work in modern times*, 10th World Congress on Human Resources Management, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August, 20th, 2004.
45. D. Canço, *A igualdade de género em Portugal*, Lisboa, 2007, Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género.
46. C. Guionnet & E. Neveu, *Féminins/Maculins. Sociologie du genre*, France, 2005, Armand Colin Éditeur.
47. V. Ferreira (Org), *A igualdade de mulheres e homens no trabalho e no emprego em Portugal*, Lisboa, 2010, Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego.
48. M. D. Guerreiro & I. Pereira, "Women's occupational patterns and work-family arrangements: do national and organizational policies matter?", in R. Crompton, S. Lewis & C. Lyonette, *Women, men, work and family in Europe*, England, 2007, Palgrave MacMillan.
49. H. Perista (Coord.), *Guia para o mainstreaming de género na actividade profissional e na vida familiar*, Lisboa, Portugal, 2006, Comissão para a Igualdade e Direitos das Mulheres.
50. S. Aboim, "Género e modernidade. A construção pública do privado", in M. Villaverde Cabral, K. Wall, S. Aboim & F. Silva (Eds), *Itinerários. A investigação nos 25 anos do ICS*. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008, pp. 561-582.
51. J. Vala e A. Torres (Orgs.). *Contextos e Atitudes Sociais na Europa*, Lisboa, 2006, ICS – Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
52. Freire, João. (2009). *Trabalho e relações laborais*. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais.
53. F. Amaro e R. Moura (Coord.), *Igualdade de género no trabalho. Situações problema e perspectivas de futuro*, Lisboa, 2008, ISCSP.
54. M. Kimmel, *The gendered society* (2nd edition), New York, 2010, Oxford University Press.
55. M. G. Alves, *A inserção profissional de diplomados de ensino superior numa perspectiva educativa: o caso da Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia*. Lisboa, 2007, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.
56. D. Méda, *O trabalho: um valor em vias de extinção*, Lisboa, 1999, Ed. Fim de Século.
57. R. Snir & I. Harpaz. "Attitudinal and demographic antecedents of workaholism", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, n.º 17, 2004, pp. 520-536.