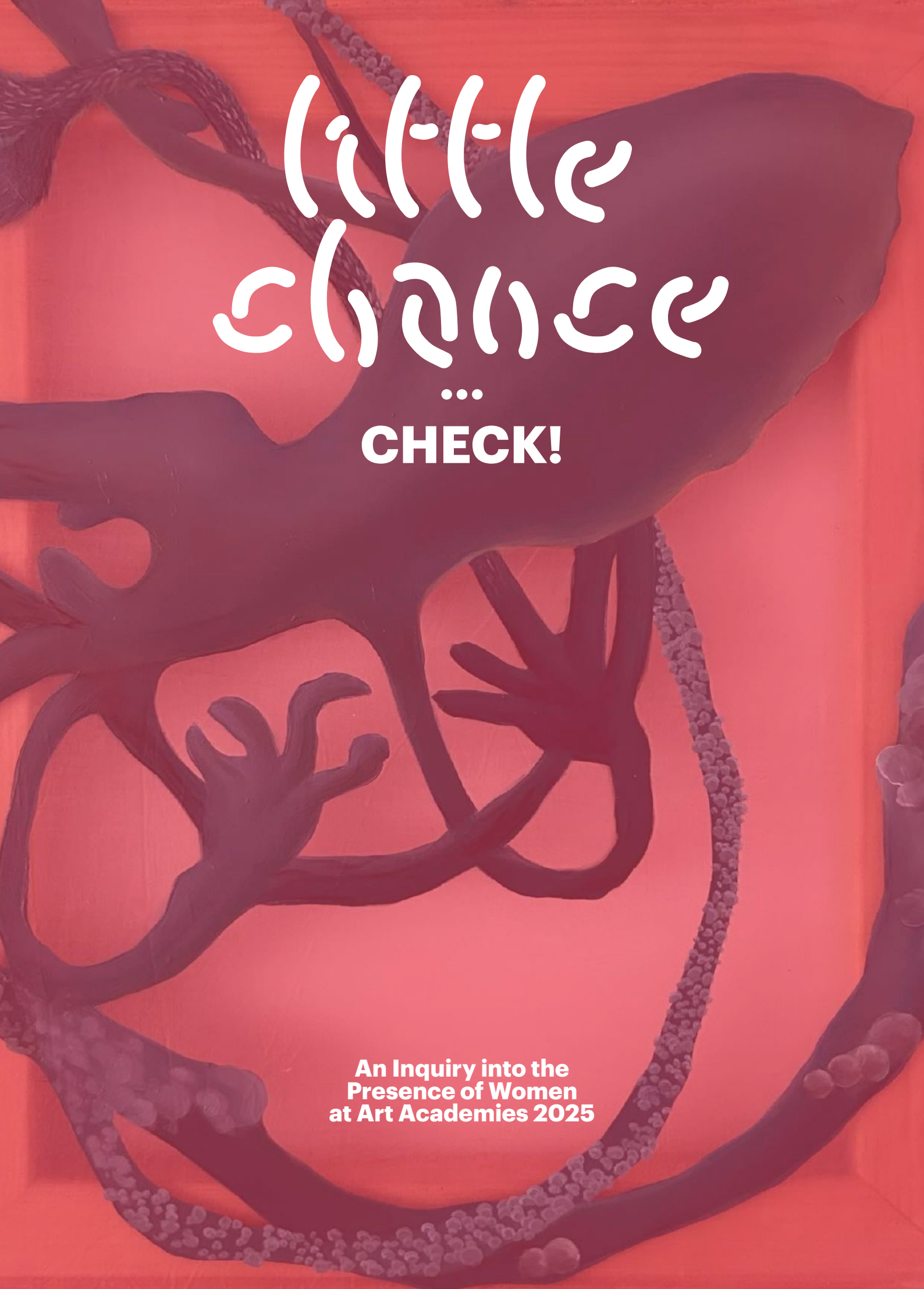


The background of the entire page is a vibrant red. Overlaid on this are dark, almost black, branching, organic forms that resemble coral, seaweed, or perhaps stylized hands and fingers reaching out. These forms are intricate and fill much of the frame. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

little chance

...

CHECK!

An Inquiry into the
Presence of Women
at Art Academies 2025

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and oil on organza,
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

004	PART ONE:
	Introduction and Overview of Research Findings
005	Introduction
012	Excerpt from a review by Anna M. Górska
013	Key Research Findings
030	Recommendations
033	Literature Review
041	PART TWO:
	Detailed Research Findings
042	<u>ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC STATISTICS AND DATA OBTAINED FROM ART UNIVERSITIES</u>
060	<u>QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS</u>
061	Foreword
062	Aspirations, Priorities, And Strategies
081	Psychological Factors
090	Relationships Between Students And Academic Staff
095	Perceptions of Gender Equality at The University
105	The Situation of Non-Binary People
110	<u>QUALIITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS</u>
111	Foreword
113	Aspirations and Career
131	Experiences, Emotions, Burnout
144	Relationships Between Students and Lecturers
162	Inequalities and Violations
181	Appearance and Agency
194	Resources That Differentiate Position in the Academy
204	Academy Measures Towards Equality
219	PART THREE:
	EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS AND COMMENTARIES
220	Zones “In Between”: An Expert Study in Psychology, Agata Stola
233	The Legal Framework for Preventing and Combating Violence and Discrimination at Higher Education Institutions in Poland, Barbara Wołk, Sylwia Spurek
255	COMMENTARIES
256	Malwina Bątruk
259	Martix Navrot
263	Agata Jakubowska
265	Aleksy Wójtowicz
268	RESEARCH TEAM
272	APPENDICES
280	GLOSSARY
282	REFERENCES

1

Introduction and Overview of Research Findings

Introduction



Agata Wrońska

Veneer Club, work created using multimedia methods: scanning, photography, 3D modelling and digital image processing, 2024, courtesy of the artist

1
13.11.2009 – 14.02.2010.

2
Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe, edited by Rainer Fuchs, Susanne Koppensteiner, Bojana Pejić, Christine Böhler, MUMOK Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2009, p. 22.

3
Research team in 2015: Anna Gromada, Jutta Kawalerowicz, Dorka Budacz, Anna Walewska.

4
The 2015 report presented data obtained from universities for 2013 and from Statistics Poland.

5
Little Chance to Advance? An inquiry into the presence of women at art academies in Poland, Warsaw 2015, [online: https://issuu.com/katarzynakozyrafoundation/docs/little_chance_to_advance](https://issuu.com/katarzynakozyrafoundation/docs/little_chance_to_advance) [accessed: 13.07.26].

In November 2009¹, an exhibition resulting from a large-scale research project opened at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (MUMOK) in Vienna: *Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*. The exhibition, which was soon presented at Zachęta – National Gallery of Art (10 March – 13 June 2010), featured works by female and male artists from twenty-four post-communist European countries, and formed an image of the art of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the present, under the banner of gender. The Polish title, *Płeć? Sprawdzam!*, was used with no English subtitle (due to a translation difficulty). As Agnieszka Morawińska, then director of Zachęta, explained in her foreword to the Polish version of the exhibition catalogue: “we adopted the form of a battle cry.”

Joan Wallach Scott, in her groundbreaking study on the use of gender as a tool of cultural and historical analysis, *Gender and the Politics of History* (cited by Bojana Pejić, the curator of the exhibition), points out that the term ‘gender’ enabled feminists to ask questions: “[...] how and under what conditions different roles and functions had been defined for each sex; how the very meanings of the categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ varied according to time and place; how regulatory norms of sexual deportment were created and enforced; how issues of power and rights played into questions of masculinity and femininity; how symbolic structures affected the lives and practices of ordinary people; how sexual identities forged within and against social prescriptions.”²

The questions this outstanding scholar formulated years ago can be applied with virtually no adjustment to the research we conducted, the artistic environment, and the realities of academies of fine arts in Poland. Although today the boundary between the meanings of the terms ‘woman’ and ‘man’ is becoming blurred, and although it is declared (especially among young people) that gender does not matter, our findings indicate that, paradoxically, gender differences are becoming increasingly acute on many levels. They affect people within the structures of the academy in ways that are at times overt and direct, at others more complex and unconscious. This is the subject of our research.

In 2015, the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation published a report entitled *Little Chance to Advance?*, the result of a project carried out by a research team³. Its aim was to identify what barriers hinder women from successfully pursuing an academic career. The problem of the glass ceiling in the arts is particularly evident from the disparity between the number of women studying and those employed at academies of fine arts. In 2013, women constituted 77% of students and just 22% of academic staff. Ten years ago, we drew attention to the fact that “Poland’s visual art academies are extremely feminised as places of study while exceptionally masculinised as places of work”⁵, a particularly interesting phenomenon given that just a hundred years earlier,

women could not even study at public universities. Today, they do not face difficulties in accessing education.

In Paris, which was one of the most important centres, women could not study until the end of the nineteenth century, although they were allowed to present their works at the famous Paris Salon organised by the Academy. They could not study at the state school, but they could take private lessons, for example at the Académie Julian, which Anna Bilińska and Maria Dulębianka, among others, attended. Académie Colarossi was probably the first institution where female students were admitted to the study of the nude model.

To be able to study in Munich — an art destination comparable in attractiveness to Paris — Zofia Stryjeńska pretended to be a man, disguising herself and passing herself off as her brother. She maintained the camouflage for six months, but was found out and expelled.

In Poland, there was a Flying University — a secret, though not artistic, university active in Warsaw from 1882 to 1905 that had no permanent seat. It was commonly referred to as a “women’s university.” Its lecturers included outstanding scholars deprived of work at the russified University of Warsaw. Interestingly, within a certain symbolic frame, it is worth emphasising that one of the university’s students was Maria Skłodowska-Curie, the only double Nobel Prize female winner in history. Shortly after receiving her first Nobel Prize, took over a chair at the Sorbonne — not because of her merits, but because of the tragic death of her husband. Thus she became the first woman in history to lecture at that university (1906).

Our data show that women now make up more than 80% of people studying at state art academies. In this way they even stand out from other higher education institutions teaching the arts, which all have more female than male students, but to a lesser degree: at theatre academies, women account for 60% of students, and at music academies 55%. But the old problem of barriers still exists at another level. As shown in the report *Kobiety wśród nauczycieli akademickich w 2023 roku* [Women among academic teachers in 2023]⁶, art ranks third from the bottom in terms of the share of full-time positions held by women employed as academic teachers in particular fields of science. Lower shares are found only in engineering and technical sciences, and in theology.

No other disciplines that have a low representation of women among staff have a share of female students comparable to that of the academies of fine arts. In engineering and technical sciences, 35% of the students are female (and about 27% of academic staff). In theology, around 44% of the students are female (and 9% of academic staff). Hence, as was the

7
Little Chance to Advance?
An Inquiry..., op. cit.

8
 Guerrilla Girls, *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988, Tate Modern collection.

9
 Cited by Simone de Beauvoir in her iconic 1949 work *The Second Sex*, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) stated: “The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities. We should regard female nature as afflicted with a natural defect.” In turn, the famous and outstanding anthropologist studying the kinship structures of so-called primitive peoples, Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), wrote that: “In human society, it is men who exchange women among themselves, not women who exchange men.”

Margaret Mead, a contemporary of Lévi-Strauss, worked in a similar field, studying so-called primitive tribes; by contrast, she demonstrated that gender roles are culturally, not biologically, conditioned. Her 1935 work *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* initiated a tradition of research on the relationship between biological sex and an individual's social status.

case ten years ago: “The gender discrepancy between these two career stages – being a student and being a teacher – comparable only to that observed in theological schools, surprised us and became the main focus of this research.”⁷

In 1969, Carol Hanisch published an essay *The Personal is Political*, which, for the first time, pointed to the connection between women's personal experiences and social and political structures. Just two years later, Linda Nochlin asked the question: *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* When published in ARTnews Magazine, the essay started an avalanche. Feminist magazines, art and education centres, galleries founded by women artists for women artists, artistic-research projects, exhibitions and publications were all established, from the United States and Great Britain to Yugoslavia. A pantheon of women artists emerged, loudly saying: enough — including Marina Abramović, Carolee Schneemann, Lynda Benglis, Helen Chadwick, Birgit Jürgenssen, Martha Rosler, Sanja Iveković, Joan Jonas, Judy Chicago, Sherrie Levine, Ana Mendieta, Cindy Sherman, and their great precursor — VALIE EXPORT.

Since 1985, wearing gorilla masks and using the names of deceased women artists, the Guerrilla Girls have used leaflets, posters, and actions in public space to make critical, often mocking and contemptuous comments about the art world and expose the operation of harmful mechanisms. They argue that one of the advantages of being a woman artist is “working without the pressure of success.”⁸

The premiere of the report *Little Chance... CHECK!* is taking place under exceptional circumstances. We met at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw during the historic exhibition *The Women Question 1550–2025*. As the exhibition's curator, Alison M. Gingeras, indicates in the exhibition description, the term ‘woman's question’, was used before feminism developed. Christine de Pizan (1364 – c. 1430) used it in her *The Book of the City of Ladies* of 1405 (!), as one of the first women to resist the male perspective and the unjust image of women and their achievements it imposed, a perspective present in culture from the times of Aristotle to Lévi-Strauss⁹.

In proximity to the works of nearly 150 women artists from around the world, from the sixteenth century to the present, works that bear witness to their existence and determination, and tell of diverse experiences, we have the honour of beginning the titular, combative act of checking. Together with us, sixteen institutions across Poland say “CHECK!”. Those institutions decided not only to support the project, but also to express their support for equalising the opportunities of women and men at art academies and in the world of art.

10

Recommendations 2015:
 I. Combat discrimination and cronyism;
 II. Monitor decision-making bodies: rotation of committees, transparency of selection criteria;
 III. Fixed-term employment;
 IV. Debunk myths;
 V. Build women's self-confidence;
 APPOINT AN OMBUDSPERSON FOR THE EQUAL STATUS OF WOMEN AND MEN.

11

Other centres: Faculty of Arts of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Faculty of Arts of the University of Zielona Góra, Faculty of Pedagogy and Arts of Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Faculty of Art of the University of Rzeszów, Institute of Art and Design of the University of the National Education Commission in Cracow, Institute of Art in Cieszyn, a branch of the University of Silesia.

We are checking which problems have been overcome, which have emerged, and what remains unchanged.

We are checking what education, experiences, role models, aspirations, plans and contacts women at academies have today, and how these important factors shape their artistic career paths, paths that begin during their studies.

We are checking how to improve the situation for both students and staff at art academies.

We are checking how academies responded to the recommendations issued by the *Little Chance to Advance?* research team in 2015¹⁰.

The publication *Little Chance. . . CHECK!* contains detailed studies and analyses of our subject, and offers a broad picture of today's art academies. We have divided the content into three parts. The first consists of an **introduction, a study summary and recommendations**, as well as a literature review that closes the block. This part contains the most important research findings, bringing together conclusions from all stages of the research: an analysis of public statistics and information obtained from academies, a quantitative study (survey), and a qualitative study (individual in-depth interviews).

The second part presents the **detailed results of the research conducted**. **First**, it contains an analysis of responses from the question sheets sent to academies and public statistics. **Second**, it presents an analysis of data from a survey conducted among people studying at art academies in Poland, regardless of gender, field of study, year, or mode of study (we collected almost 1,300 fully completed questionnaires). We compared the results with those obtained using a similar tool ten years ago. **Third**, it includes seven texts based on our analysis of the information gathered during **individual interviews** conducted with people studying or employed at academies of fine arts in Poland.

When analysing the survey data, we separated out the results for non-binary people, whose perspectives were not included in the 2015 study. Because we adopted the same methodology as ten years ago (comparing the situation of women against the situation of men), and because there are no public statistics that include non-binary people, we could not include this group in the main analysis; however, we devote a separate chapter to the results of our analysis concerning non-binary people.

The study covered all state academies of fine arts, as well as the Faculty of Fine Arts of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń – the oldest faculty of fine arts operating within a general university, which offers the most extensive study programme in fine arts disciplines¹¹.

This time we devoted particular attention to harmful, unacceptable behaviours. The report includes expert studies in psychology by Agata Stola, and in law by Barbara Wołk and Sylwia Spurek. The knowledge



↗

Ada Zielińska
Random Behaviour,
photograph, 2024,
courtesy of the artist

12

Excluding people employed in academy administration.

13

Own analysis by the Ośrodek Przetwarzania Informacji — Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, based on the POL-on system (S-12 report for Statistics Poland) for 2024. The data concern: the Academies of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, Katowice, Cracow, Łódź, Warsaw, and Wrocław, the Academy of Art in Szczecin, and the University of the Arts in Poznań.

and perspective of the female experts invited to the project complement the research and constitute a separate, practical guide that covers explanations and internal regulations that may be missing from most academies. They may make it easier to find one's way in a difficult situation.

The publication is accompanied by a visual narrative comprising works by contemporary Polish women artists working in different branches of art. Some of them work or have worked at an academy, some are still studying, and perhaps one day will work at an academy: Julia Baran, Agnieszka Basak-Wysota, Iwona Demko, Wiktoria Gajowiak, Zuza Golińska, Jana Górską, Julia Grabowska, Grupa Sędzia Główny (Aleksandra Kubiak and Karolina Wiktor), Kalina Kazimierczak, Dominika Kowynia, Dorota Kozieradzka, Julia Królikowska, Anna Leśniak, Karolina Mełnicka, Małgorzata Mycek, Marta Nadolle, Dominika Olszowy, Magdalena Pyla, Jana Shostak, Anna Solecka, Teresa Tyszkiewicz, Agata Wrońska, Bożna Wydrowska, Agata Zbylut, Ada Zielińska (and, symbolically, Anna Rajeczka — one of the few women to study at the Royal Painting Studio at the court of Stanisław August Poniatowski, the precursor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw). We thank all of you for the opportunity to present your work in the context of the research.

The report closes with commentaries by invited experts, whom we thank sincerely for their contribution to the *Little Chance*. . . *CHECK!* project.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in 2024, women accounted for 43% of all employees at academies of fine arts¹². This is undoubtedly a change from 2013, when that figure was 35%. Today, among those women, 30.8% have no academic degree, 39.3% hold a doctoral degree, 23.5% hold a habilitated doctoral degree, and 6.4% hold the title of professor (the lowest result since 2019)¹³.

Perhaps a separate study is warranted on men ceasing to study at fine arts academies in Poland. There are fewer and fewer of them each year, and while some people see this as an opportunity for women, voices are now being heard that, by force of circumstance, “things will balance out on their own” — it would seem to indicate not a change in mentality, but some kind of process of natural selection. However — and we hope this will happen — men may one day return to these academies. Then a great *CHECK!* will await us.

Excerpt from a review by Anna M. Górska, PhD

The starting point for the report is a diagnosis that seems paradoxical, yet in practice is fundamental to understanding systemic inequality: art academies are extremely feminised as places of study, but remain masculinised as spaces of employment, prestige and power. This means that the numerical predominance of women alone – so often used in discussions as an argument that invalidates the problem of inequality – does not translate into equal opportunities for career development, equal access to resources, power and decision-making positions, or equality of experience in the everyday functioning of an institution. The report dismantles the simplistic assumption that more women means less discrimination, for numbers can serve as a screen behind which the status quo is maintained. This is particularly important in an academic culture based on the myth of meritocracy, the neutrality of talent and a declared ‘gender blindness’. In this sense, the study has not only diagnostic but also interventionist value: it introduces into the debate a set of data and testimonies that make it more difficult to turn a blind eye to inequalities and or claim that ‘the sector is feminised, after all’. This is a report that does exactly what good social research should do: rather than deepen the myth of neutrality, it shows how the system works.

**Anna M. Górska, PhD**

Assistant professor at Kozminski University and Director of the Centre for Research on Women and Diversity in Organisations. She is a member of the Young Academy of the Polish Academy of Sciences and of the General Council for Science and Higher Education. She studies gender inequalities in organisations and higher education, analysing the impact of the neoliberalisation of academia, myths of meritocracy, institutional norms on career paths, and access to prestige and power.

She is the author of more than 60 academic articles, chapters, and books. Co-editor-in-chief of *Tamara: Journal for Critical Organisation Inquiry*. She serves as Associate Editor and member of the editorial boards of six international journals.

She has carried out projects funded, among others, by the National Science Centre, the British Academy, and EU and Norwegian funds. She is the recipient of numerous academic awards and scholarships, including a Fulbright scholarship. She has held research stays at Columbia Business School and ESCP Business School, and is currently an Associate Member of the Centre for Work, Organisation and Society at the University of Essex.

Key Research Findings



The primary aims of our research were 1) to identify gender-based discrimination at art academies in Poland, among both students and employees and determine the source of these inequalities in order to identify structural, cultural, psychological and environmental barriers that contribute to women discontinuing their studies or create a 'glass ceiling' for women within academic structures. We were therefore also interested in 2) why it is that women, who, as the data show, are four times more numerous than men among students at such academies, are promoted as employees less often. Further, we examined 3) the anti-discrimination measures academies have implemented to become more equality-oriented.

This summary focuses on three issues that led to the report *Little Chance... CHECK!*. It is worth remembering, though, that the report itself contains detailed studies of the problem presented here, as well as a great deal of information and findings on academies of fine arts in Poland today as an environment for studying and working, on the kinds of transformations they are going through, and on what direction they are headed in. We encourage readers to delve into the report itself, beyond this summary, in the hope that the information it contains will prove useful to all those who want to make art academies better, friendlier institutions that fulfil their statutory aims more effectively.

↖ ↗

Jana Shostak

A Minute of Screaming Outside the Belarusian Embassy, acrylic on canvas, 70 × 100 cm, 2022, courtesy of the artist

Partiture of minute of scream. Inhale / Scream / Exhale, granite, marker, 12 × 75 × 2 cm, 2024, courtesy of the artist



1818 ————— **present**

The Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow —
the oldest academy of fine arts in Poland —
begins its activity.

Female rectors

2008–2016

Ludmiła Bronisława Ostrogórska
Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk

2012–2020

Jolanta Rudzka-Habisiak
Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź

od 2020

Mirosława Jarmołowicz
Academy of Art in Szczecin

Numerous Manifestations of Inequality Between Women and Men Remain Visible at Art Academies in Poland

We divided the inequalities identified during the research into several basic categories.

First, inequalities concerning employment and promotion within the structures of academies of fine arts:

- Women constitute 80% of students, and the same percentage can be found among those leaving art academies with a master's degree. Women make up 68% of those beginning doctoral studies, and 44% of those who complete that stage of education. At the same time, in the 2023/2024 academic year women comprised 43% of all people employed at art academies, and 20% of professorial staff.
- Women are most underrepresented among those applying for or obtain a professorship. In the 2018/2019 academic year, women accounted for 10% of recipients; in the 2023/2024 academic year that figure was 21%.
- The higher the position, the lower the percentage of women. Women dominate at lower, less well-paid, less prestigious levels of employment, while men dominate those associated with higher pay, greater prestige and more power.
- In the interviews, it was often mentioned that, despite greater formalisation, competition for positions remain biased, for men, who dominate among independent academic staff, prefer people of the same gender. In addition, because male students are fewer in number than female students, they are more valued by staff and have a greater chance of remaining at the academy.

- These inequalities also concern social security: at art academies, men dominate among those employed on permanent contracts.
- Pay differences between women and men still exist. The greatest disparities of this kind occur in assistant positions and in positions held by people with the title of professor. The differences are significant, especially for assistants, which may discourage women from working at an academy.
- The survey indicated that male students may regard academic work as a career path well suited to their expectations in terms of development, recognition and working conditions. Women's attitudes may be more ambivalent: academic work may be attractive because of the opportunities it offers for development, but at the same time is emotionally demanding and burdensome. This mismatch between what a person expects and what the academy offers may affect career decisions, and may to some extent explain some of the differences in the academic paths of women and men.

Second, there are inequalities in the scope of power and privileges women and men working at an art academy enjoy:

- In processes where power is exercised, women dominate in positions of great responsibility that do not confer particularly high prestige and, in fact, produce a kind of invisibility – namely, as heads of fields of study, chancellors, and vice-deans. Deans are fairly well balanced between genders, but in other positions – rector, vice-rector, head of a specialised studio, unit or departments – men predominate.
- At art academies in Poland, there is a lack of parity in the most important decision-making bodies: women make up slightly over 40% of members of the senates of these institutions (female students, doctoral candidates, employees), and from 38% to 43% of academy employees; women constitute slightly over 20% of academy council members, and about 26% of those employed; 20% of the members of the Polish Accreditation Committee are women. The situation is somewhat better for faculty councils, where the percentage of women ranges from 44% to 54% over the years, although among employees women constitute about 40% of the membership of these bodies.
- Attempts to disturb existing power relations and reshape them in a more equality-oriented direction are usually met with understanding and acceptance, but sometimes provoke resistance – especially among senior staff and men. As the

interviews show, this resistance is not expressed directly. Rather, it may appear as criticism of an allegedly declining level of teaching, linked to the increasing feminisation of the academy; of an excessive number of facilitations and rights enjoyed by students, which supposedly prevents them from benefiting from the educational role of failure or non-success; or of inclusive, equality-oriented language, seen as a new form of coercion to which people employed at academies are subjected.

Third, inequalities manifest themselves in the differing scope of duties borne by women and men, as well as in the unequal emotional costs associated with studying or working at an art academy:

- Female students apply for individual organisation of studies more often than male students, which we treat as an indicator that they more often face the need to reconcile various obligations. No male students or employees apply for paternity leave at all, which indicates that women bear more of the duties associated with parenthood (we develop this issue below).
- Our analysis of the information obtained in the interviews indicates a gendered dimension of an art academy career. This pattern is evident even when the decision of a field of study is made, and continues in subsequent stages of education or academic career. It is visible, for example, in women being burdened with organisational and care-related work, and in examples of obstacles to promotion being placed in their way.

Fourth, an important dimension of the inequalities identified during the research relates to stereotypes, prejudices and violence affecting women studying and working at art academies.

- Declarations obtained during the survey research show that women reported experiences of unwanted comments concerning beauty and the body, and behaviours of a sexual nature, much more often than men did.
- The interviews show that, at the level of everyday relationships, both subtle and overt forms of inequality and violence occur. Differences in how women and men are treated are inscribed in gender-role patterns, which reinforce men's advantage. Alongside sexist comments or the questioning of the value of women's creative work, interviewees described affairs, harassment and abuse connected with the asymmetry of power.

- In such statements, distinct ways of speaking about these experiences emerged. Men spoke from the position of observers, referring to situations known “from accounts” (told to them by both women and men). Women’s narratives, in contrast, were more personal; they tended to focus on the emotional cost, the sense of helplessness, and the lack of real support in situations where boundaries were violated.
- In the interviews, women more often than men drew attention to other behaviours they experience and view critically: teachers who lack seriousness towards their work, impose their own vision on students, or provide inadequate criticism during consultations on works in progress.
- Women more pointed to a need to “prove” their competencies and make a greater effort than men to gain recognition and position at the academy.
- In the survey, male students were more likely than female students to report having received positive incentives from academic staff. These differences concern three of the eight forms of support: giving help in obtaining work or a commission, providing references, and introducing a student into artistic circles – all of which are crucial to having a successful career.
- On the list of the names of the 50 artists most frequently indicated in the survey as influential in a given interviewee’s discipline of art, 42% were women and 58% were men. In addition, the answers of female and male students differed significantly: women artists constituted 54% of all influential people mentioned by female students, but only 30% among male students. Clearly, for men influential figures in art are more likely to be male artists than female artists.

It is also worth noting several important changes that have occurred at art academies in recent years regarding gender equality. Most of those indicated below are positive in character, but two are ambiguous. We discuss them at the end to highlight that, despite the effort put into eliminating such disproportions, including in the context of artistic education, there have not been only successes. The most important changes described during the research include:

- The employment rate for women has increased by 8%. It is also worth noting that it is growing at all levels of academy positions.
- The percentage of women among employees of academies of fine arts on civil-law contracts has decreased by almost 20%. This relates to another positive change, namely the

complete abandonment (at some of the academies studied) of signing contracts of this kind.

- Comparative results for average survey responses from 2015 and 2025, analysed separately for women and men, also show a decline in acceptance of traditional gender roles in both groups. Both women and men are less likely to agree with the statement that women should limit paid work for the good of the family. This may reflect the growing importance of an equal division of responsibilities and of women's economic independence. Women are also less accepting of giving up permanent employment for family reasons. These changes may indicate an ongoing transformation of social norms and a departure from traditional ideas about women's role in family life, for many reasons: women having higher professional aspirations, being aware of the costs of a career break, feeling a need for independence, including economic independence, and having higher expectations regarding a partnership-based model of the family.
- Statements made in the interviews clearly signal a change in social norms regarding the teacher-student relationship. What only a dozen or so years ago was regarded as harmless sociability, such as an invitation for a beer after class or a compliment about a person's appearance, is today increasingly interpreted as inappropriate or risky behaviour. This applies both to remarks staff make to students, and vice versa. That risk, which is related to disproportions of power, can blur what is formal and informal, what is necessary support or unwanted familiarity. As a result, both students and art academy employees have become more attentive to the relationships and everyday interactions that connect them.
- Changes have also taken place in power structures. At the same time, it is worth noting that the least progress in this area has been made in the processes of managing academies, units, departments, and specialised studios; that is, within the basic structures of academy functioning in education and scholarly-artistic work.
- The results regarding the gender pay gap, however, are fairly ambiguous. Overall, the gap increased by 3% between 2019 and 2023. Yet in some employment categories women's and men's pay has equalised; this is so among lecturers, language teachers, instructors, laboratory assistants, academy professors, and assistant professors with a doctoral degree.

Numerous, Diverse Barriers Hinder Greater Gender Equality at Art Academies

It is worth beginning this section by identifying the most important barriers to equality between women and men at academies, and by indicating how those barriers are perceived by students. In the survey, when asked to state why only 20% of professorial positions at art academies are held by women, they gave the following reasons: (i) the situation is a relic of how the academy functioned in the past; (ii) it is due to women being overburdened with family, domestic and care-related responsibilities; (iii) it results from obstacles placed in the way of women being promoted; (iv) it is a consequence of the patriarchal character of the academy, of stereotypes and prejudices present there, and of cronyism and cliques; (v) it is because women are perceived as ‘troublesome’ employees who more frequently take sick leave, maternity leave and parental leave. Significantly, it was women who mostly attributed the causes of this employment disproportion to the patriarchal character of the academy and attitudes within it – sexism, misogyny, male power – and to prejudices, stereotypes and gender patterns imposed on women in processes of socialisation. By contrast, men more often than women denied that such discrepancies constitute inequalities, treating them rather as differences in talent, aptitude or effort.

Other barriers were also identified during the research.

First, barriers built into selection processes present at art academies. These include, among others:

- Despite receiving better grades during secondary school and on their secondary school final examinations, women are assessed less favourably than men during entrance examinations to art academies.
- Gender is still sometimes invoked as a recruitment criterion, particularly regarding availability and freedom to manage one’s time, as well as for physical characteristics such as strength.

Second, various multidimensional prejudices that remain present in relations between women and men:

- During the survey, women more often than men indicated that higher expectations are placed on them, and that barriers are created for them in developing a career at the academy.
- Both in the survey research and in the interviews, attention was also drawn to the role appearance plays in how a person and their work are assessed. Especially regarding the latter, women (female students and female employees)

shared experiences of how their appearance affects how their work is perceived.

- Interviewees strongly emphasised the symbolic dimension of the presence of women mentors, yet when describing the qualities desired in people holding such positions they emphasised the authority resulting from knowledge, experience, and position – that is, qualities that in the current employment structure are primarily available to men.
- In the survey research, female students more clearly perceived possible barriers and inequalities in the academic environment. This indicates they may be more strongly affected by such phenomena and therefore see them where privileged men do not. This may also mean that men would prefer to perceive the academy as a meritocratic system, and their position within it as the result of merit rather than gender-based privileges.

Third, numerous structural barriers were identified during the research, manifest in the following:

- Men are the majority among independent academic staff and on academy governing bodies, and are also responsible for carrying out selection processes at various levels of academy functioning – from entrance examinations through diploma defences to issuing opinions on promotion applications.
- Women devote significantly more time than men to supporting others, both at home and at the academy. This means they more often act as ‘emotional buffers’ nurturing relationships, providing support, and taking responsibility for maintaining bonds in their environment. Men declared themselves much less involved in these kinds of activities. Women may therefore experience, on top of the burdens of studying, the additional weight of caring for others, which over time may increase the risk of overload or burnout, or simply mean they have less time for creative activities – and for promoting themselves, which is crucial in contemporary art.
- Interview statements by both women and men also characterised male students as ‘raisins’: because they are relatively few in number, they receive more attention and support than female students, and are subject to different assessment criteria and expectations, even if their achievements are not particularly outstanding.



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Marta Nadolle

*Now Every Other One
Remembers that Someone
Once Grabbed Her Ass,*
tempera and oil on canvas,
100 × 100 cm, 2025,
courtesy of the artist

Fourth, the analyses revealed psychological barriers connected with the pressure and burdens that accompany taking on challenges.

- The survey research revealed a somewhat different emotional dynamic of studying among women and men: men assessed the beginning of their studies as a time of greater joy, a relatively stronger sense of purpose, and greater self-confidence, whereas for women this period was more burdensome and less clear-cut. Towards the end of their studies, the key indicators of well-being among men remained stable or increased. Women also gain greater self-confidence and increasingly define the direction of their own development, but at the same time they tend to lose energy and joy, which may mean the whole process costs them more.
- Similar conclusions emerge from our analysis of the interviews. Although the set of qualities considered necessary for an academic career included both those related to personality and resources not directly connected with gender, the importance of belief in one's own abilities was also recognised. For women more often than men, that belief seems to result from overcoming challenges rather than from a quality attributed to them in advance.
- Women spoke about promotions in a characteristic way, less often than men about pursuing successive degrees, and more often about their struggle for independence and prestige. Some described how their initiatives and achievements were met with a lack of acceptance; only significant, impossible-to-ignore successes prompted others to begin taking their opinions into account.

Fifth, in conducting the survey research and interviews, we also identified cultural barriers stemming from differences in the socialisation of women and men, which translate into expectations and strategies for career development.

- The survey research indicates that student interest in an academic career as a future option is moderate overall, but higher among men. In addition to the above-mentioned differences in how women and men perceive challenges, this difference can also be explained by men's greater willingness to participate in a game whose rules are based on individual competition. This is evident in, for example, their engaging more frequently than women in more formal, visible ways of presenting their student work, such as portfolios, publications and exhibitions.

- In this respect, the interviews revealed something more: men, slightly more often than women, described the academy studio as a place where one hones one's ability to present creative work in front of a group; women tended to describe it as a space that enables safe experimentation.
- Many students, especially men, expressed their conviction that success results from a particular kind of resourcefulness or cunning, which means that those who prefer to act more strictly in accordance with the formal rules lose out to their less scrupulous colleagues.
- In the interviews, when identifying what qualities may justify greater attention from teachers towards some students, female and male students pointed to: boldness, engagement, courage, self-confidence, and resilience to critiques – qualities that culturally may be more easily attainable for men, who are more often rewarded for them in the process of socialisation.
- These cultural cues concerning expectations were also recognised by women and men already working at the academy. We collected only a limited amount of material in this area; nevertheless, it seems symptomatic that, in the context of trying to reconcile academic work with other roles, women mainly mentioned difficulties related to parenthood, while men spoke more often about the need to take on additional paid work. Of course, there were also statements pointing in other directions, but the overall indication is that traditional role divisions and stereotypes remain strongly entrenched.

Sixth, both the quantitative and qualitative research indicate environmental barriers resulting from differences in capital that may hinder women in developing their careers.

- The survey research showed that half of those studying at academies of fine arts live in conditions of financial instability; they are unable to meet all their needs, or function from day to day without financial security. The qualitative research, in turn, revealed that similar difficulties also emerge later, when graduates try to support themselves by working at an academy. This is especially so during their initial period of employment. At the same time, success in recruitment and promotion procedures is mostly determined by recognisability, that is, by 'being present', and by putting one's own achievements forward. These require not only energy, but also financial resources.

- Our analysis of survey responses does not indicate that students' financial situation is linked to their gender or social background according to any clear pattern; both women and men, for example, come from artistic families with similar frequency. At the same time, our analysis of public statistics and the interviews indicates that, at art academies, men are more often employed on permanent contracts, more often hold academic titles (and therefore receive higher salaries and benefits), devote less time to care-related duties, and more often speak about the need to take on additional paid work. These findings point to intersectional dependencies that make it more difficult for women to advance in academies of fine arts.

Compared with ten years ago, the current research allows us to cautiously state that there has been a decline in prejudice against employing women. This may be due to changes that have taken place at academies, or to the growing number of women studying; or, less optimistically, to the declining attractiveness of academies of fine arts as workplaces. It is also worth noting that the barriers to equality between women and men, although weakening, remain in place. The process of making art academies egalitarian remains unfinished, and still encounters resistance.

In Recent Years, Academies Have Taken Measures to Counteract Gender-Based Inequalities, Discrimination and Violence

Almost all the Polish art academies that provided us with information about themselves have introduced regulations in recent years on discrimination and the equality of women and men.

- Those solutions include: formal measures to increase students' safety and encourage greater sensitivity to situations of violence; an inclusive language policy; the institution of equality officers or an equivalent; anonymisation of recruitment documents so an applicant's gender cannot be identified; greater attention to parity; anti-discrimination training and materials; artistic projects devoted to gender equality; and many others.
- Interviewees noted that the role of such policies is not only to protect victims and punish perpetrators, but also to break people's fear of reporting violent practices, to counteract the victimisation of victims, to set boundaries regarding what is and is not permissible, and to make it clear that violence and discrimination are not tolerated at the academy.

- A great many statements made during the interviews described ways of dealing with the master-apprentice model and the specialised studio as the established foundations of the educational process at art academies. Interviewees spoke about making teaching less authoritative and hierarchical, and about creating partnership-based relationships, and greater openness to a diversity of attitudes and perspectives. This change was noted by both female and male lecturers, although men spoke more often about the need for partnerships rather than master-apprentice and hierarchical relationships; this may indicate a need they have to evolve from the teaching model sustained mainly by their predecessors.
- At the same time, as the survey research shows, men more often than women see the academy as an institution that is changing and putting anti-discrimination measures in place. Women tend to be more sceptical about both the scale and the reality of those changes. What for men looks like clear progress may be insufficient for women, or not fully adequate to their experience.
- Female interviewees also indicated that equal opportunity may be simulated, as when mixed and partnership-based studios turn out to be so only on paper, not when duties are being assigned.
- The clearest evidence of the ineffectiveness of many anti-discrimination and anti-violence measures are the examples that came up in the interviews of sexual abuse, people using a high position to pursue particular goals, female and male whistleblowers being blocked from reporting abuse, and difficulties in holding perpetrators of sexual violence or mobbing responsible.
- In the interviews, the need for such changes was recognised; they are generally accepted as important tools for eliminating various forms of violence. Sometimes, however, they also raise doubts or meet with resistance, including because the struggle for women's rights is wrongly identified with efforts to increase the well-being, sense of safety and justice for women only, when in fact it is also a struggle for universal rights as the basis of a democratic, egalitarian order.
- In the quantitative study, about 50% of male students indicated that regulations concerning gender equality exist, but at the same time had difficulty identifying specific solutions. Among women, only about 20% said they were aware of anti-discrimination solutions at their academy, yet they

were able to identify those measures much more precisely. These data suggest that such information is inadequately disseminated by academies, and that men are unfamiliar with specific anti-discrimination policies.

- The survey research also indicates that students see faster improvement when it depends on their teachers: conducting consultations with the door open, avoiding entering into ambiguous kinds of relationships, avoiding remarks that could be confusing, showing greater sensitivity to language, including how they formulate assessments and criticism, etc. Changes that require rebuilding academic procedures or organisational culture were described as taking place more slowly – a view also evident in the interviews, especially in statements to the effect that real change will come only with generational replacement, when the habits dominant in the older generation disappear along with it.
- The institutional inertia mentioned above was also invoked in the interviews in another context. Female and male students emphasised that, when they identified problems in evaluation surveys, those signals were rarely treated seriously. Furthermore, procedures were launched (that later seemed endless) only when official letters appeared, often requiring many signatures to be collected. As a result, students felt deprived of support, and some lecturers were able to go on for years without facing any consequences, despite repeated complaints about their conduct. In some cases, the academy simply moved a problematic employee into retirement or into a less visible area.
- The interviewees also said that designing changes to be introduced at the academy requires taking the female perspective into account more often. Those who spoke about this said this would result in greater value being given to activities carried out primarily by women, such as caring for students and student research groups, administrative work, and organisational work, whose significance and value are not recognised within the new parametrisation system. According to some people participating in the study, taking greater account of women's perspective would also foster empathy and a sense of community, and help reshape thinking about 'career'. This could prevent all aspects of an individual's activity and relationships from becoming instrumentalised, increase students' safety, and give greater value to women's work as fully professional work deserving of recognition.



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Grupa Sędzia Główny

(Aleksandra Kubiak, Karolina Wiktor),
Chapter XXI. Try Out
a Future Master's
Graduate, diploma
project presentation,
office of the Rector
of the University of
Zielona Góra, Zielona
Góra, 2004, photo:
Matek Lalko, courtesy
of the artists

Compared with ten years ago, the research shows, a process of democratisation is under way at art academies. It is seen primarily in students being included in decision-making processes, in the pursuit of greater inclusivity, and in academy students and employees being given equal treatment. At the same time, it must again be strongly emphasised that the people participating in the study indicated the presence at academies of acts of sexual violence, abuse of higher positions, multidimensional inequalities, and various forms of backlash from men in response to the growing role of women. These phenomena undermine the optimistic image of democratic academies, but at the same time indicate what goals those academies need to pursue to become equality-oriented, friendly places of work and study. Some people also drew attention to the fact that new kinds of exclusion are cropping up, especially related to age; they cause secondary discrimination and give rise to a sense of lost opportunities.

**Iwona Demko**

Clitoris of the Great Goddess, wooden box, fabrics, beads, polyester wadding, glass, sponge, 12 × 23 × 15 cm, 2011, courtesy of the artist

Recommendations



Agata Zbylut

In Art Dreams Come True, but Not for Everyone, selected frame, seven photographs made on the basis of documentation borrowed from galleries and the internet, 33.75 × 45 cm each, 2009, courtesy of the artist

Based on the above findings, several recommendations can be formulated. By necessity, they are general in character, since implementation must consider local conditions and existing solutions. More detailed recommendations, especially concerning anti-discrimination procedures, psychological support and transformations of the educational model, are included in the summaries of the expert studies devoted to these issues that close the present report. Nevertheless, those recommendations include:

- Monitor equality between women and men at art academies by documenting activities and creating compilations that make it possible to compare basic data on working conditions, pay, and burdens for women and men.
- Report the results of these processes systematically to the academic community. This is necessary not only to evaluate the effectiveness of equality policies, but also to remind people that gender inequalities persist across various areas of academy activity.
- Disseminate knowledge about women's rights at art academies, and define them as human rights and civil rights.
- Make the bodies and tools for equality and anti-violence policies introduced at academies more particular. It is especially necessary to increase students' knowledge of them, make procedures more legible, and ensure that these solutions are no longer treated as ineffective, or especially as leading to the victimisation of victims. Inform the academic community about the outcomes of ongoing disciplinary or anti-mobbing proceedings to make the effectiveness of these processes more transparent and legible.
- Strengthen awareness of women's artistic achievements and their contributions to the development of specific art disciplines.
- Implement changes to ensure an equal distribution of organisational and care-related duties among women and men employed at art academies.
- Take women's experiences of studying and professional work into account more often when planning various aspects of academy functioning. This also concerns the necessary recognition of care-related and organisational work, which is most often performed by women.
- Monitor the career paths of women and men, and identify and eliminate the reasons why there are far fewer women than men occupying the highest positions at academies.
- Take action to improve employment conditions at art academies, especially for people beginning work there, to

reduce the need for them to supplement their income outside the academy or depend on the support of family.

- Carry out the above measures in a way that ensures they do not have the unintended effect of producing inequalities of another kind (for example, barriers related to age).
- Increase transparency in decision-making processes (which remain unclear to many in the academic community), and include more women in decision-making bodies.
- Develop clear regulations concerning promotion procedures, including the manner of taking over a specialised studio at the academy. Move away from autocratic modes of management.

Literature Review



For the research conducted as part of the project, the primary aim of the literature review we conducted was to answer three questions:

In the books and articles analysed, what factors encourage female students to pursue an academic career in art?

In the scholarly texts analysed, what factors discourage female students from pursuing an academic career in art?

In the scholarly texts analysed, what ways are proposed for equalising opportunities between women and men studying at art academies?

We reviewed literature identified through online searches in the Scopus, ResearchGate, Academia, and Google Scholar databases, as well as through internet searches, personal contacts, and recommendations from people engaged in studying inequalities at art academies. Because of the vast amount of material on women in the labour market and in educational systems, we limited our review to works that: (i) appeared after the publication of the report *Little Chance to Advance? An inquiry into the presence of women at art academies in Poland*, that is, after 2015; (ii) concern the situation of women at art academies; and (iii) concern academies operating in Poland or other European countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.



↖ ↗

Dorota Kozieradzka

Olympic Charmer, series of 36 photographs, installation, video, performance, 2019, courtesy of the artist

It is also worth noting that, in addition to determining the state of knowledge on the issues that interest us, the literature review became an important tool for updating the research instruments used in the 2015 study.

Factors Encouraging Female Students to Pursue an Artistic Career

In the relevant literature, one factor identified as encouraging or helping women art students to develop an artistic career is the environment in which they grew up, including their parents' high cultural capital and a liberal atmosphere in the family home (Miller 2016). Further, the main motivation of some women for studying at an art academy was that they considered art an instrument of emancipation and social advancement (Lendák-Kabók 2020; Kurek-Ochmańska, Luczaj 2021).

Other factors include the feminisation of these fields, which is characteristic of the humanities in general. This change has also made the field more open to equality issues, creating a safe place for women to study (Pető 2019; Górska 2023). Some fields of art are widely recognised as feminised and as therefore having lower entry thresholds for women; these include poetry, stage design, textile work, and others (Miller 2016).

Actions that strengthen women's belief in their own competencies, skills, and self-confidence were also indicated as facilitative to studying and working in art (Miller 2016; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023). Emphasis here was placed on disseminating feminist discourse, including by female lecturers at art academies who treat their work as a tool for transforming these institutions towards greater egalitarianism (Sikorska 2019; Pető 2019; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023). Creating less hierarchical models of relationships between lecturers and students was also considered significant, for it is just such flatter relationships that create safer, more welcoming places of learning (Sikorska, Kosińska 2023). A similar effect is produced by promoting cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity as alternatives to the rivalry and competition strongly inscribed in male-centred modes of academy functioning (Sikorska 2019; Giemza, Świetlik 2022; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023). Important in introducing these new models of studying and artistic work is the creation of artistic collectives and communities based on forms of action close to women's experiences (Giemza, Świetlik 2022). All these factors mean that institutions of higher education, including art academies, are often seen as important tools for pursuing equality policy, which then radiates out to society (Ergas et al. 2022).

Some articles also considered that art itself may be a factor encouraging women to undertake art studies. Art is an important tool for analysing women artists' experiences, a form through which their voice can appear in public space, and a means of changing social awareness by proposing more egalitarian models of femininity and masculinity

and of relationships between women and men (Sikorska 2016). In this process, it is also vital that women are creating their own artistic canons, the scope of history of art is being expanded to address the work of women, and inspiring biographies are appearing of women artists who fought for women's rights and the inclusion of women at art academies (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015; Leśniak 2023; Jaśkiewicz 2024).

Factors Discouraging Female Students from Pursuing an Artistic Career

It is worth noting at the outset that the literature analysed focused primarily on the various barriers women encounter when considering whether to study art, while studying, or at the threshold of an artistic career. There is nothing surprising about this, since the most common motivation for conducting research on the situation of women at art academies has been the various forms of inequality and oppression they experience, and the aim of many such analyses is to make such institutions more egalitarian and inclusive, based on models of didactic work, interpersonal relations and evaluation other than male-centred ones.

In reconstructing the barriers women face when beginning their career in art, it is worth starting with the most general issue identified in the texts we reviewed, namely, that modern art rests to a great extent on the archetype of the male artist: an eccentric, hypersensitive figure somewhat contemptuous of ordinary life and entirely devoted to creative work (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015; Miller 2016; Franckiewicz-Olczak 2018; Giemza, Świetlik 2022; Górská 2023; Leśniak 2023; Jaśkiewicz 2024). Another general issue is that critics tend to denigrate works of art by women, and outstanding women artists are treated as an exception rather than the rule (Miller 2016); this often causes women to question their own skills and talent.

Other problems are that women and their art are largely absent from exhibition spaces, they are not taught about at art academies (Franckiewicz-Olczak 2018; Sikorska 2018, 2019; Giemza, Świetlik 2022), and that women artists' achievements are neglected after their death (Miller 2016). Further, women are often pushed into being educators and animators, that is, into career paths associated with low prestige, low pay, and limited opportunities for promotion (Sikorska 2019). The literature identifies discrimination against women in informal networks, and points out that models of supporting art based on grants and projects, because of their competitive character, reward men, while women who participate in them are stigmatised as aggressive or selfish (Miller 2016; Sikorska 2019).

A second type of barrier women face at art academies is the male-centred, patriarchal character of these institutions. Their structures, organisational culture and atmosphere are saturated with male value systems, standards of cooperation, and assessment criteria (Miller 2016; Sikorska,

Kosińska 2023; Górka 2023). The master-apprentice model favours men in the role of mentors (Sikorska, Kosińska 2023), and women are under-represented in academic power structures (Pető 2019; Ergas et al. 2022).

A third type of barrier is the working conditions of women artists, including those who work at an academy. Those conditions include precarity (e.g., a lack of permanent employment contracts or facilitation for women who are mothers); being burdened with administrative duties and caring for students; and a preference for men in hiring and promotion processes. These factors permeate women's everyday lives, significantly hindering their artistic development and slowing their academy careers (Sikorska 2016, 2019; Górka 2023; Kosińska 2023; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023).

Fourth, women are victims of unacceptable and often legally prohibited practices that may put up a significant barrier to deciding on an artistic career. The literature indicates that in artistic environments mobbing, sexual violence and multidimensional discrimination occur concerning promotions, hiring, pay, and access to studios and materials (Kwaśniewska-Mikuła 2021; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023; Górka 2024).

Fifth, academies are reluctant to change. Models of teaching and artistic practice that are closer to women's experiences (more community-based, less competitive and hierarchical) are devalued, and, under the guise of defending the canon and tradition, the prevailing patriarchal order is in fact protected (Giemza, Świetlik 2022). This group of barriers also includes a lack of mechanisms for supporting women's careers, or tools adapted to their specific situation (Sikorska 2016; Lendák-Kabók 2020; Tardos, Paksi 2022; Górka 2023).

There are also non-artistic barriers that hinder women from practising art, expressing themselves freely and developing their own artistic careers. The literature on the subject draws attention to a delegitimation of gender studies and feminism in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe – a consequence of conservative backlash and the advance of populist ideologies (Pető 2019; Ergas et al. 2022).

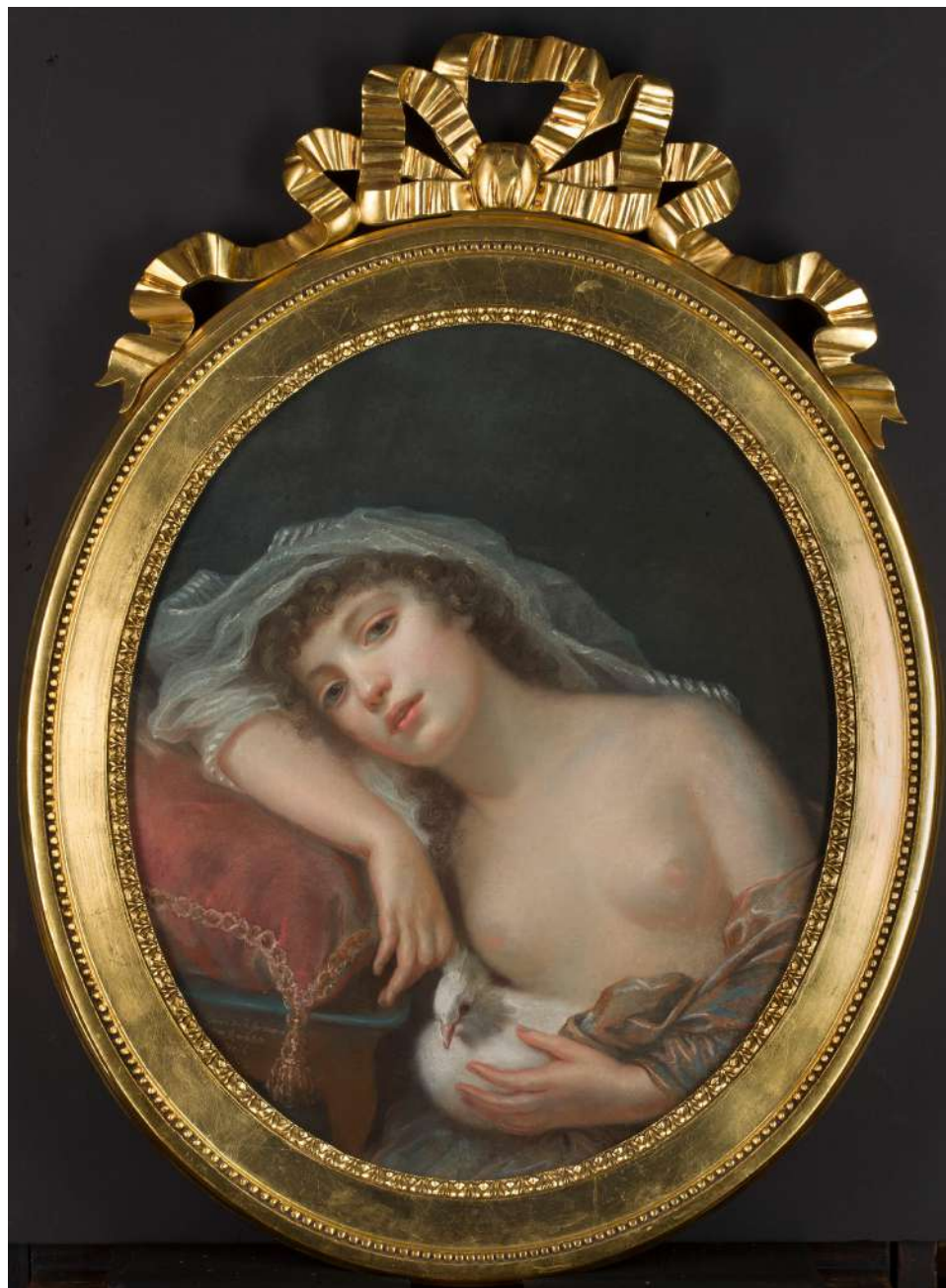
Solutions Proposed to Equalise Opportunities Between Women and Men Studying at Art Academies

As we show in other parts of the report, changes have also taken place at Polish art academies over the past decade towards equalising opportunities for women and men. The literature on the subject identifies solutions that may provide a starting point for identifying the most effective tools for implementing this process. It also sets out how aware people providing information in various research projects are of where to find means of eliminating the problems women face at the threshold of their academic career.

Broadly speaking, what is needed is what the authors of one of the analysed studies describe as a “reconfiguration of institutional

imagination” (Sikorska, Kosińska 2023), that is, a move away from an academy that is highly hierarchical, patriarchal, and authoritarian towards a partnership-based, equality-oriented, caring model. Such a reconfiguration should also involve a greater appreciation of teamwork and group success rather than individual success (Sikorska 2019), and a change to academy management models that place greater emphasis on soft skills, dialogue and teamwork in decision-making processes (Sikorska 2019). As some texts emphasise, however, this reconfiguration will not take place without a fundamental transformation of the art world itself, where, among other things, the status of the professional artist must be regulated, and cooperation between women creators and exhibition institutions restructured (Franckiewicz-Olczak 2018; Giemza, Świetlik 2022).

Moving on to concrete solutions, the literature indicates a need to implement gender equality plans at academies, monitor them regularly, and use them in academy management processes (Tardos, Paksi 2022).



Anna Rajecka

Girl with a Dove
(Allegorical Portrait of
Rozalia Lubomirski née
Chodkiewicz?), oil on canvas,
1789–1790, National
Museum in Warsaw,
CC BY licence, source:
[https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.
pl/pl/zbiory/896878](https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/zbiory/896878)



Dominika Olszowy

Final Push, 2022, photo:
Bartosz Górka, courtesy
of Foksal Gallery and
the artist

Such plans should systematically increase women's representation in academy decision-making bodies (Pető 2019; Ergas et al. 2022), and develop institutional solutions to protect against discrimination and mobbing (Włodkowska, Winiarczyk-Kossakowska 2018). It is also suggested that the invisible work women often perform at academies should be more strongly recognised as work, which will also entail making evaluation systems more open to a diversity of forms of academic and creative activity, so that they take greater account of the multitasking character of women's activity (Giemza, Świetlik 2022; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023; Górka 2023). Developing more partnership-based, horizontal models of relations at the academy is also considered necessary to eliminate the violence strongly inscribed in traditional master-apprentice relationships (Sikorska, Kosińska 2023). Equally important are measures to counteract processes of precarisation at academies, which particularly affect women. More stable forms of employment, promotion, and institutional support are needed for female students and female lecturers who are also mothers or carers of dependent persons (Pető 2019; Lendák-Kabók 2020; Giemza, Świetlik 2022; Sikorska, Kosińska 2023; Górka 2023). Some texts also state there is a need for special support for female students who find themselves in difficult material circumstances or come from an underprivileged social background (Lendák-Kabók 2020). Education can also play an enormous role in changing the situation of women at academies; this includes feminist education and mandatory anti-discrimination training, as well as developing critical reflection that raises awareness of the problems women face, reveals existing forms of inequality between women and men, and indicates possible tools for changing the functioning of the academy to eliminate these phenomena (Sikorska 2016; Franckiewicz-Olczak 2018; Giemza, Świetlik 2022; Górka 2023). Supporting women artists whose work addresses themes connected with the situation of women at art academies or in the field of art is equally important (Sikorska 2016).

Many of the texts reviewed also articulate that art itself is an important tool for changing the situation of women. Art can be a form of feminist activism, but also an important educational tool, or a platform on which the problems women artists face can be articulated in a way that is heard (Sikorska 2016, 2023).

Finally, it is worth emphasising that, in some of the analysed texts, systematic research on women at art academies provides a basis for a rational equality policy. Such research should additionally integrate knowledge from very different fields – not only gender studies, but also organisational and labour studies, the sociology of culture, and cultural studies (Miller 2016).

A detailed bibliography is available at the end of the report.

2

Detailed Research Findings

Analysis of Public Statistics and Data Obtained From Art Academies



Julia Grabowska

Human Scale (self-portrait), photograph, 2021, courtesy of the artist

14

In March 2025, we asked the universities covered by the study to complete a form for two academic years: 2018/2019 and 2023/2024. Only a few of the forms were completed comprehensively; two academies provided no answers at all, due to their not having the records requested or not being able to delegate staff to prepare such records for the purposes of the study.

In this part of the report, we present our analyses of statistical data covering various aspects of studying and working at art academies in Poland. We were interested in two basic issues: **firstly**, the extent to which these schools are egalitarian regarding gender; and **secondly**, the extent to which equality between women and men has changed in recent years, as well as what nature of any such changes has been. Wherever possible, we also referred to the data presented in the report *Little Chance to Advance?*, but compared with that report we significantly broadened the scope of the analyses, using much more information obtained directly from our subject universities¹⁴. In addition, we used data from annual compilations by Statistics Poland.

Women Studying at Art Academies in Poland

The share of women among art academy students has been increasing steadily. The report *Little Chance to Advance?*² indicated that, in 2013, that share was 77%; today it is over 80%. The same is true of the percentage of women among those who complete their art studies. Such academies, therefore, are deeply feminised in terms of student gender, which is particularly significant given that the percentage of female professors at art academies averages less than 20%.

As shown in **TABLE 1**, women also account for about 80% of applicants to first-cycle studies at fine arts academies in Poland. They apply for admission more often than men, and also admitted more often.

Centres covered by the study



The situation is similar for applicants to second-cycle studies. Here too, women predominate, although the percentage of women among applicants decreased by 4% between 2019 and 2023; during the same period, the admission rate of women at this level of study increased by 9%. In the 2023/2024 academic year, they proved 4% more successful than men in entrance examinations.

Women also clearly predominate among those who complete their studies with a Master of Fine Arts degree, at 80%. Interestingly, women tend to choose to have a woman as supervisor, rather than a man, even though men predominate among the teaching staff. This may indicate that women find they have a greater understanding and a greater sense of safety with a female supervisor; it could also be that male academics are less willing to take on time-consuming supervisory duties, and instead prioritise their own development and career.

TABLE 1 shows there are no fundamental differences between the grades given to female and male students in various types of examinations. Only in entrance examinations for master's studies do women receive slightly fewer points than men. When we note, however, that women complete secondary school with higher grades than men, we may conclude that they are discriminated against in some form during entrance examinations, and that fine arts academies prefer men, even though they are less well educated than women. Men may possess qualities valued by art academies but not rewarded by secondary schools; yet this would also mean that the male habitus is more highly valued at art academies.

Bearing in mind that women account for about 80% of students at art academies in Poland, the part of **TABLE 1** on scholarships, awards and distinctions is worthy of a close look. As regards academic scholarships and rector's distinctions, there are no fundamental differences between female and male students. Dean's distinctions are more problematic: in the 2018/2019 academic year more were awarded to women, but in 2023/2024 more went to men. Another significant finding is that women take health leave more often than men (no men at all applied for maternity or paternity leave). Also, women more often than men try to reconcile various responsibilities but resorting to an individual study arrangement. Significantly, women are less likely than men to retake examinations or repeat a year, and are less likely to be deleted from the list of students. These data show that there are no fundamental differences in the abilities of women and men; that women achieve better outcomes at academy; and that women interrupt the education process more often, for reasons related to health or parenthood.

Table 1. Percentage of women among all people studying at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023, by selected aspects of studying

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research

People who...	2019	2023	Change 2019-2023
applied for admission to first-cycle and long-cycle studies (first-year female/male students)	77%	80%	3%
were admitted to first-cycle and long-cycle studies	79%	81%	2%
applied for admission to second-cycle studies (first-year female/male students)	80%	76%	-4%
were admitted to second-cycle studies	71%	80%	9%
defended a master's diploma (fifth- or sixth-year female/male students / total)			
– whose supervisor was a man	80%	81%	1%
– whose supervisor was a woman	76%	79%	3%
Data concerning...			
the average number of points obtained in the entrance examination for first-cycle studies (among those admitted)	49%	51%	2%
the average number of points obtained in the entrance examination for long-cycle master's studies (among those admitted)	50%	50%	0%
the average number of points obtained in the entrance examination for second-cycle master's studies (among those admitted)	44%	48%	4%
the average grades obtained in the master's examination	50%	50%	0%
the average number of points obtained in the entrance examination for doctoral studies	50%	49%	-1%
academic scholarships (rector's awards)	79%	79%	0%
social scholarships	77%	80%	3%
targeted financial aid	79%	75%	-4%
rector's distinctions	79%	78%	-1%
dean's distinctions	85%	67%	-18%
scholarships from the Minister of Science	70%	72%	2%
dean's leave	81%	78%	-3%
health leave	98%	86%	-12%
maternity/paternity leave	100%	100%	0%
individual study programmes	76%	87%	11%
individual study arrangements	88%	74%	-14%
– including individual assessment deadlines in the context of parenthood (individual study arrangement)	100%		-100%
total number of people in relation to whom a decision was issued:			
on the need to take a resit examination or repeat a year	69%	49%	-20%
on removal from the list of students	68%	76%	8%
on reinstatement to studies	74%	80%	6%

15

Calculated by dividing the percentage of women among those employed at individual art academies by 100.

Women Employed at Art Academies

Although women dominate among students at fine arts academies, they constitute a minority among the research and teaching staff. In 2019, women accounted for 38% of all those employed at this type of higher education institution, while in 2023 that figure was 43%, an increase of 5% over the period of interest, and of 8% compared with the report *Little Chance to Advance?*. It is also worth noting that the **employment feminisation index**¹⁵ was very constant across all academies in 2023, ranging from 0.40 in Poznań to 0.46 in Szczecin, though in the period of interest it did not increase evenly at all art academies: the biggest change was in Wrocław and Szczecin, where the index went up by 0.07.

It is worth noting that the percentage of female employees is growing at roughly the same rate in all positions. This means that, although the number of women employed in professorial positions is increasing, the same is true of the least prestigious and lowest-paid positions, where women are currently employed in the same numbers as men. If we exclude the people from the first category of **FIGURE 1**, we can see that, the higher the position, the lower the percentage of women in that category. Women dominate at lower, less well-paid, and less prestigious levels of employment, while men dominate those associated with higher pay, greater prestige, and a broader scope of power.

Figure 1. Percentage of women among all people employed at art academies

Data source: <https://radon.nauka.gov.pl> and sheets obtained from the academies

feminisation index
0.38 2019
0.43 2023
0.05 Change 2019–2023



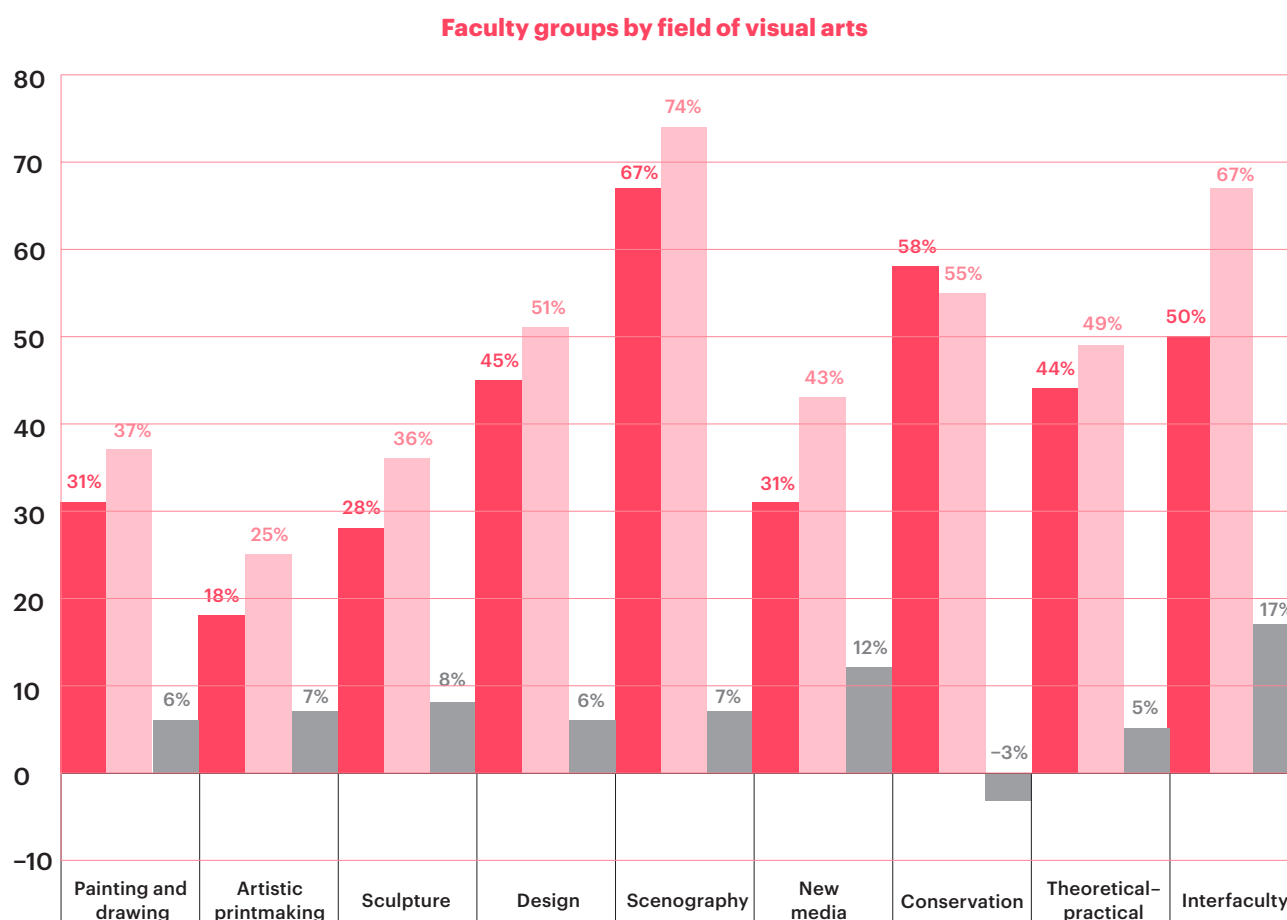
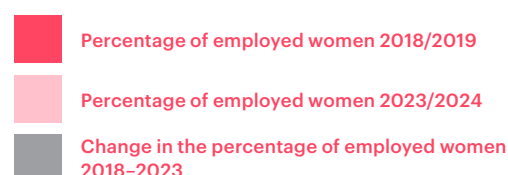
As can be seen from **FIGURE 2**, the faculties at fine arts academies can be divided into three groups: feminised ones (such as scenography, conservation, and inter-faculty units); egalitarian ones, where there is a balance between the number of men and women employed (such as design and theoretical-practical faculties); and masculinised ones (including painting and drawing, artistic printmaking, sculpture, and new media). This last category, where male professors predominate, teach what is traditionally regarded as art – but also what is considered most progressive within it; women tend to occupy fields considered auxiliary, practical, and ‘less artistic’. There has been an increase in the percentage of women employed in all faculties (apart from those dealing with conservation). Yet it is equally clear that men are defending their right to define how art can and should be understood, including when educating future generations of artists. An exception to this is found in new media faculties – generally the most progressive, including socially, where the technologies used do not privilege either gender.

1. All faculties about which no information was received from the academies were removed from the chart.

2. The faculties were grouped by artistic discipline; in the case of faculties combining different disciplines, the first part of the faculty name determined the classification.

Figure 2. Percentage of women employed at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023, by faculty

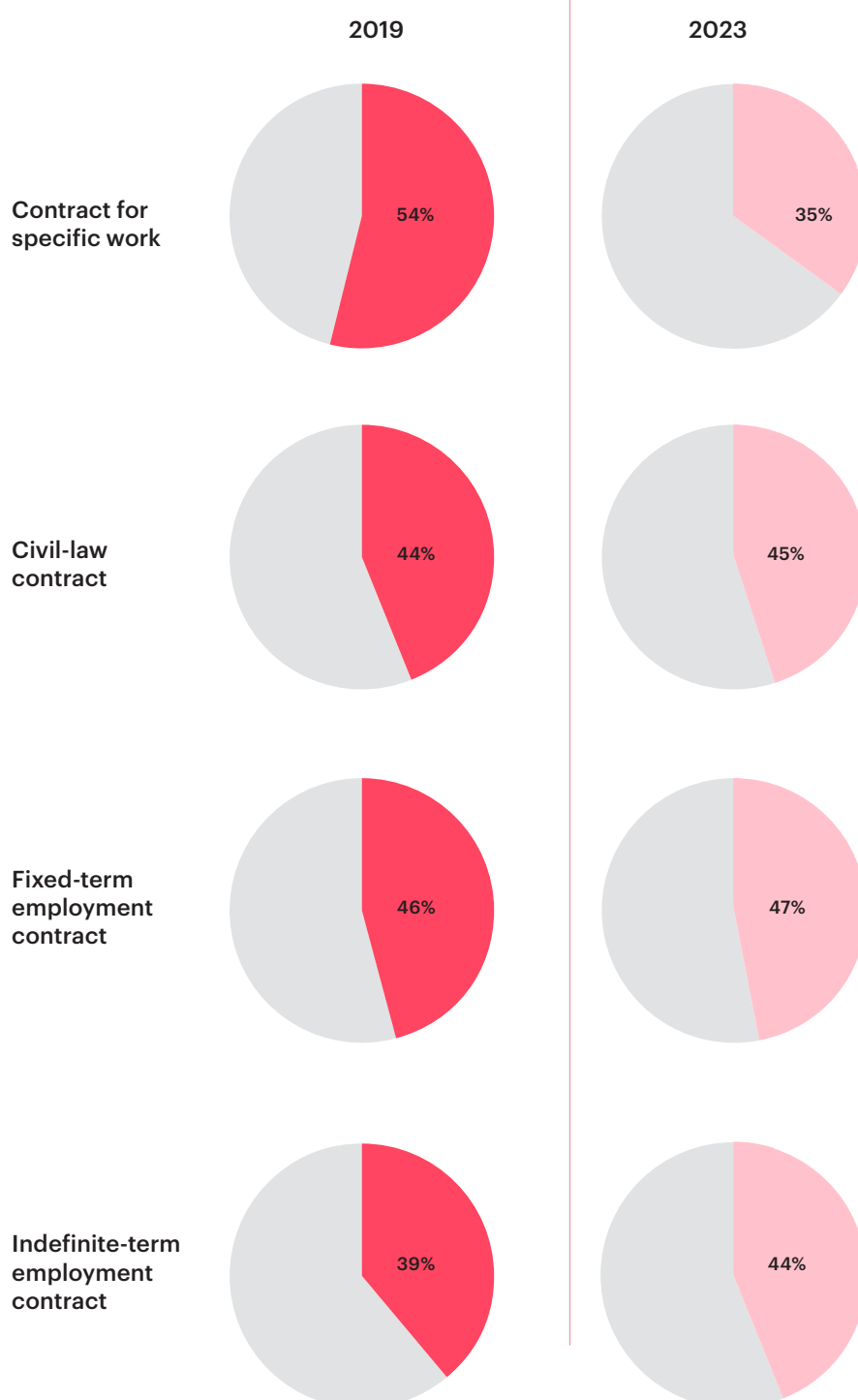
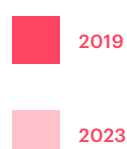
Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research.



Men predominate in every form of employment, and at the same time dominate among those employed for an indefinite period (and, only in the 2023/2024 academic year, among those employed by academies based on a contract for specific work). Thus, it is more difficult for women to obtain employment that provides a sense of security and stability. On the positive side, the percentage of women among those employed by fine arts academies under a contract for specific work decreased by almost 20%. In the remaining forms of employment, from 2018/2019 to 2023/2024 there were only slight changes, or none at all. More categorical conclusions are difficult to draw, however, because of the significant gaps in the relevant data.

Figure 3. Percentage of women among people working at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023, by form of employment

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research.



In the period of interest, there were rather unfavourable changes overall in the structure of remuneration, with the gender pay gap increasing by 0.03 points (widening in almost all employment categories considered). As **FIGURE 4** shows, however, that result stems from very incomplete data from several academies. While at first glance this change may seem paradoxical, it may relate to the fact that there are more men among older staff (women account for only 39–44% of those near retirement age), who generally are paid more. Secondly, the largest gender pay differences are found among assistants and professors. They are particularly substantial among assistants, which may demotivate women from working at academies, since at the threshold of their professional career it is harder for them than for men to support themselves on their salary.

Figure 4. What proportion of men's remuneration women receive at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023, overall and by position

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research. The calculations were based on data from art academies excluding Kraków, Łódź, and Wrocław.

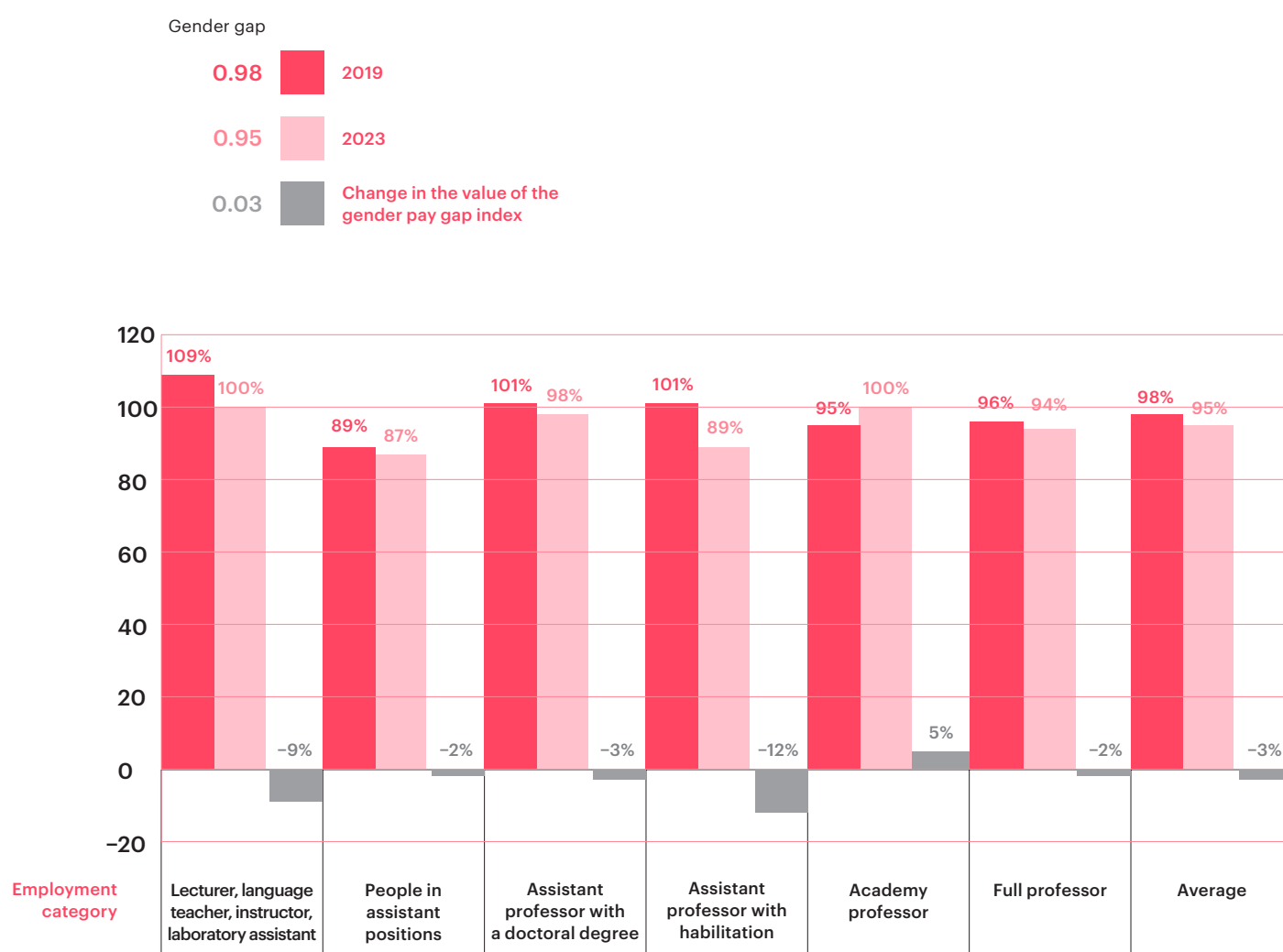
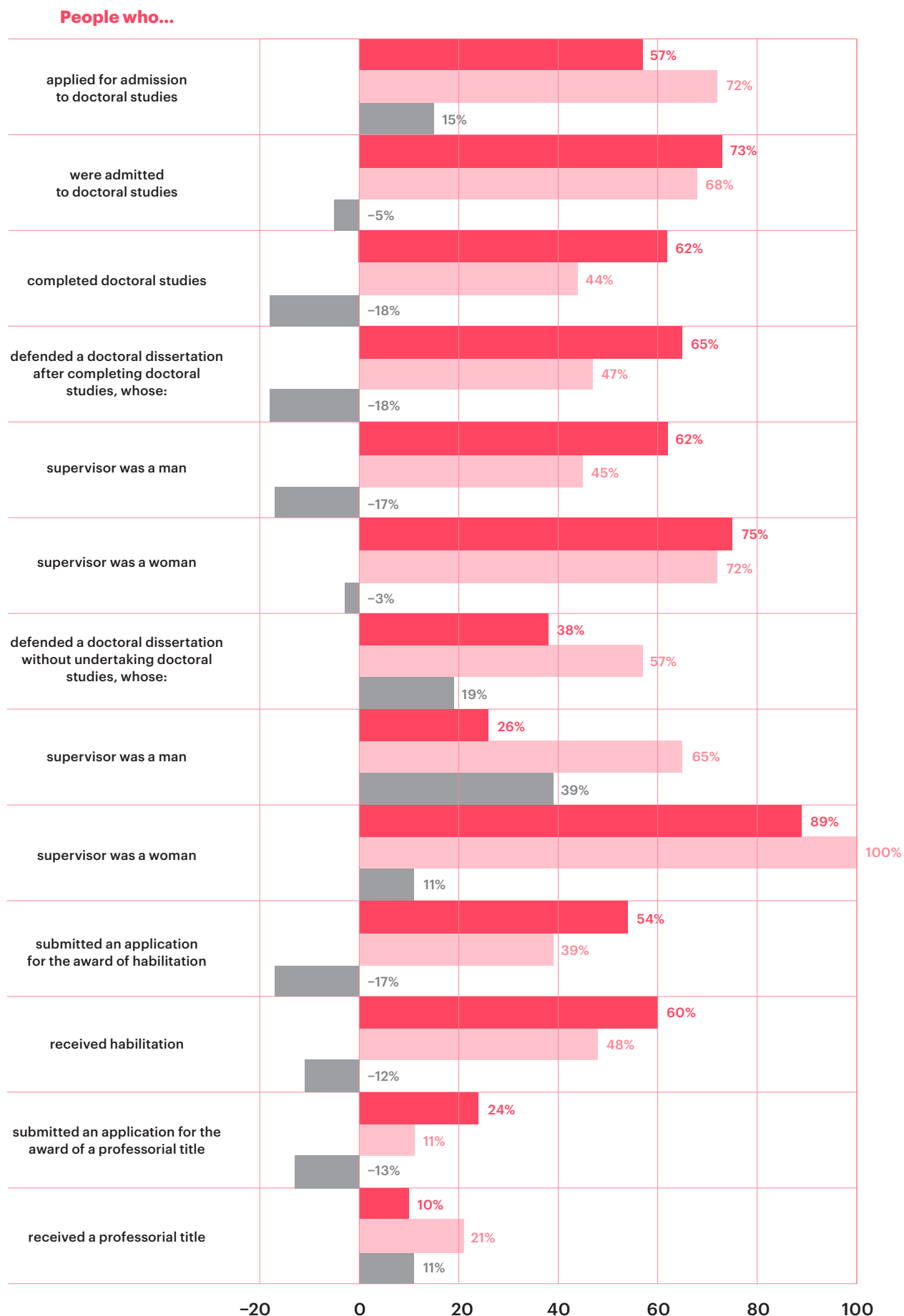


Figure 5. Percentage of women in proceedings for the award of titles and degrees at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research.



For those who work at an academy, being promoted and attaining of successive academic degrees and titles are important as career milestones. The data from the schools where they were available show that women's clear numerical predominance in first- and second-cycle studies first begins to decline at the doctoral level. As seen in **FIGURE 5**, the percentage of women is about 10% lower in doctoral schools than in bachelor's and master's studies (among applicants and newly-admitted students). The percentage of women doctoral graduates is even lower, at just 44% in the 2023/2024 academic year. In the same year, women accounted for 47% of those who defended their dissertation and earned a doctoral degree. The percentage of women defending a doctoral dissertation without studying at a doctoral school ranges from 38% to 57%.

In the 2018/2019 academic year, more women than men applied for habilitation, and more received it, but in 2023/2024 they were a minority in both groups, at 39% and 48%, respectively. Women are most under-represented among those granted a professorial title: they accounted for only 10% of that group in the 2018/2019 academic year, and 21% in 2023/2024. These figures suggest that processes of negative selection may affect women seeking to attain successive academic degrees and titles, for women dominate in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programmes, but are already clearly underrepresented in receiving habilitation and professorships. It is difficult to identify a single, clear cause of this. It almost certainly involves women having more family and care-related responsibilities on top of their academic duties, as well as duties related to student care or supervising bachelor's and master's theses, as mentioned above. Yet there is also the issue of men forming the majority of those bodies that assess academic achievements and award academic degrees and titles. The disproportionate numbers need not be a result of open misogyny, but of ways of thinking about art and how it should be evaluated that are characteristic of men.

Moving on to the various ways of assessing the situation of women employed at fine arts academies, it is worth examining **FIGURE 6**. It shows that, while women account for about 45% of employees who are parents, they constitute almost 100% of those who took parental leave, and over 90% of those who took childcare leave.

Despite these responsibilities, women just as often as men lead grants, have solo exhibitions, write or co-author books, are the subject or co-subject of a book, or receive commissions for works or services. In essentially all the activities of interest here, between 2018/2019 and 2023/2024 there was an improvement in women's situation; they now constitute the majority of those conducting research, holding exhibitions, and publishing books or albums. Exceptions are group exhibitions, where the percentage of women participating is 40%, and domestic business trips, where the average is 44%. Most group exhibitions reproduce the existing order and

hierarchy in the art world, which favours men, while women, having more responsibilities at home, may find it more difficult to leave their family for several days – although this pattern is contradicted by the significant increase seen in the percentage of women going on foreign business trips. This may indicate that women overall have adapted better than men to the opportunities created today by the internationalisation of academic and artistic activity. The same can be said of scholarship trips, and of the growing presence of women among those leading grants – that is, conducting academic-artistic activities that determine how their academy is evaluated in parametrisation processes and how it places in rankings. The paradox, then, is that women are paid less and have less power than men (as we indicate below), but are more responsible for the academic-artistic level of the academies that employ them.

Figure 6. Information on the percentage of women across various activities of people employed at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research.

2019 2023 Change 2019–2023

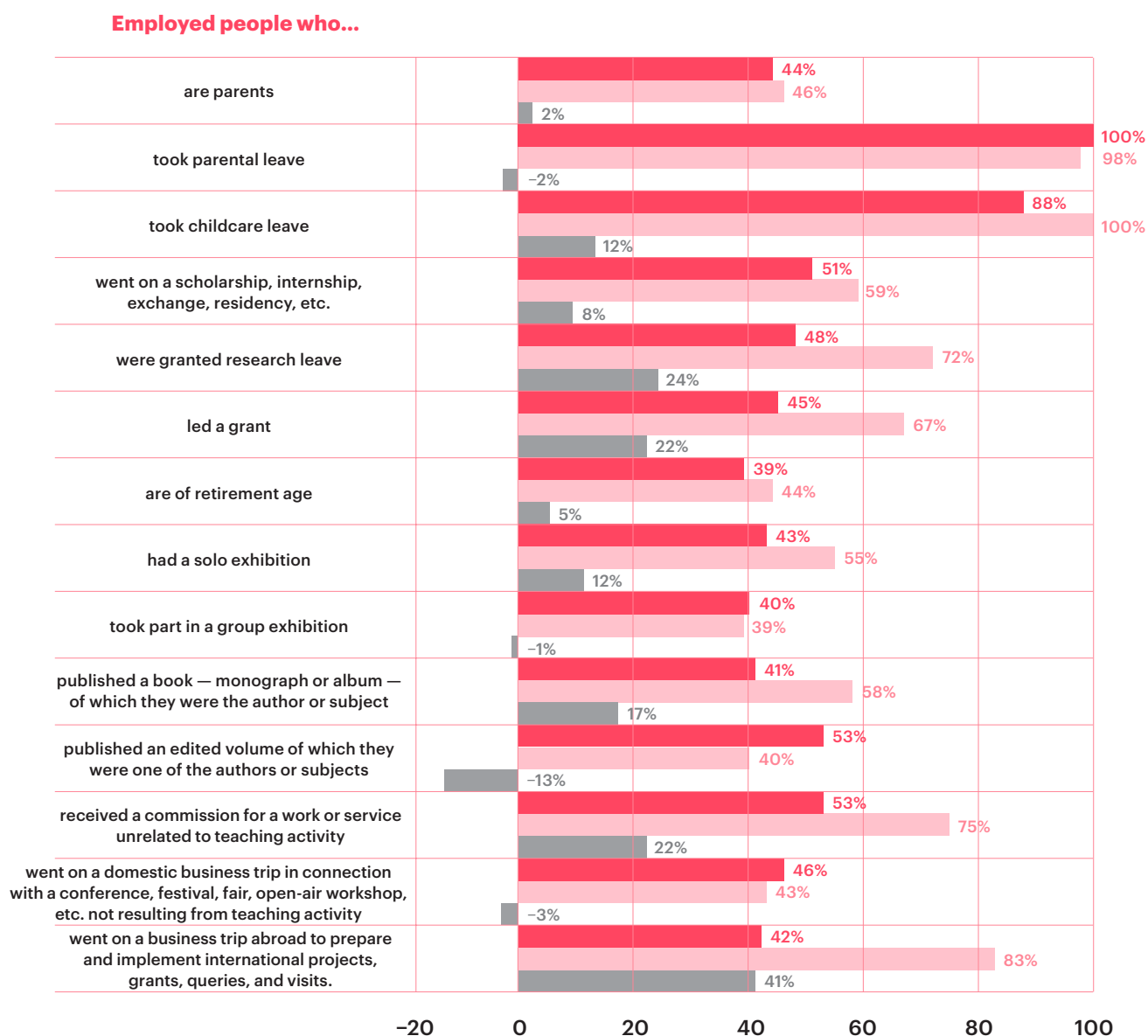


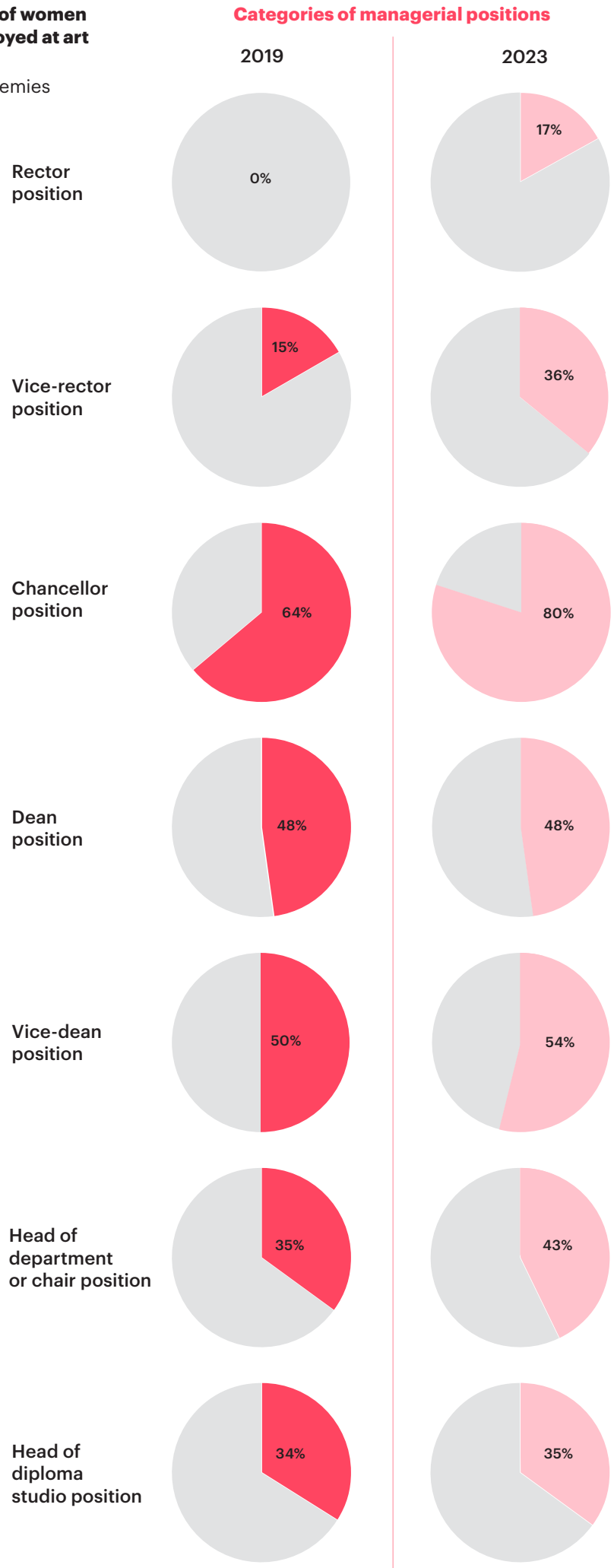
Figure 7. Information on the percentage of women across various activities of people employed at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research.

 Percentage of women across various activities of people employed at art academies in Poland in 2019

 Percentage of women across various activities of people employed at art academies in Poland in 2023

The data presented in the chart do not include information from the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, which did not complete the form. In 2019, that academy's rector was Prof. Jolanta Rudzka-Habisiak.



This index was calculated as follows: (1) weights were assigned to individual levels of power: the positions of rector, vice-rector, and chancellor were assigned a weight of 3.00, while the positions of dean, vice-dean, department head, chair, and head of diploma studio were assigned a weight of 2; (2) the percentage of women occupying a given position was then multiplied by the corresponding weight; and (3) the values obtained in this way were divided by 100. The maximum value of this index is 8.5 (the sum of the weights of all positions $\times 0.50$, indicating equality between women and men in this respect).

Women and Power at Art Academies

The final aspect we address in this part of the report is the scope of power held by women at fine arts academies.

It is difficult not to notice in **FIGURE 7** that women exercise a lot of power in positions involving considerable responsibility but not particularly high prestige; that is, positions that produce a kind of ‘invisibility’ – heads of degree programmes, chancellor positions, and vice-dean positions. There is almost a gender balance among deans. Among rectors and vice-rectors, as well as studio heads, department heads and chairs, men predominate. That is, they are the majority where power is associated with prestige, money, and greater freedom for artistic pursuits. Men’s privilege, then, does not simply consist in their having more power, but in their holding power where it brings additional benefits.

It is worth noting, though, that between the 2018/2019 and 2023/2024 academic years there was a positive change in power structures regarding issues of equal rights. The least progress in this respect has been made in the management of departments, chairs, and diploma studios – that is, within the basic academy structures in teaching and academic-artistic work.

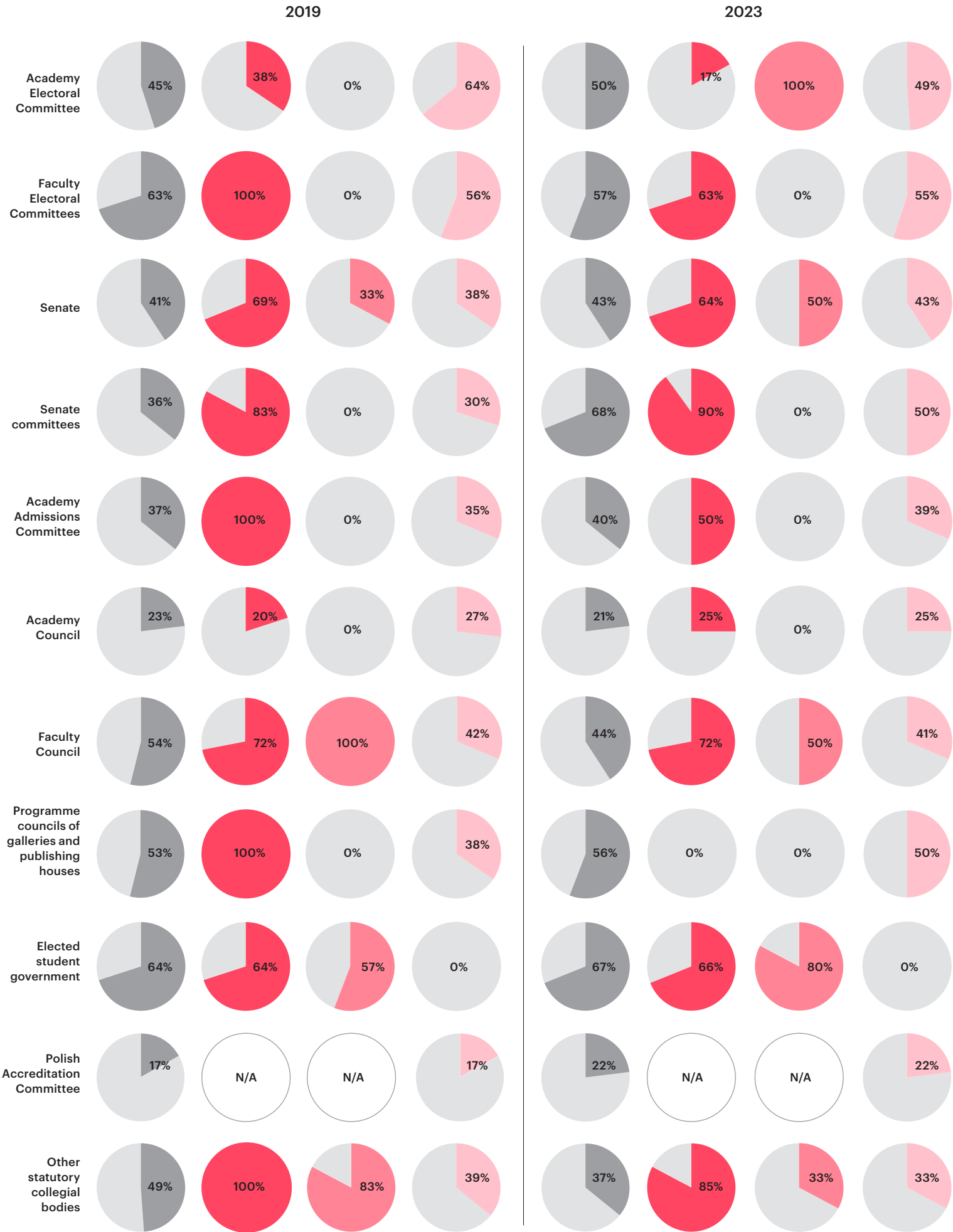
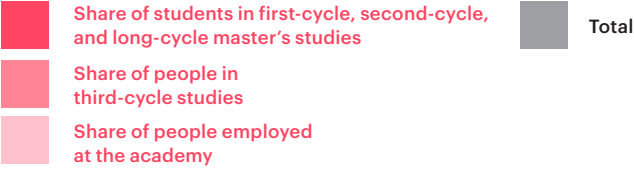
Where there is gender equality, the value of the power equality index should be 8.5¹⁶. In 2019 it was 5.71, and in 2023 it was 7.58. This marks a significant increase in women’s position at academies, although gender inequality in the exercise of power continues to exist.

FIGURES 8 concerns women’s participation in collegial bodies.

As can be seen, there is a lack of parity on the most important bodies: women comprise slightly more than 40% of the members of academy senates, but from 38% to 43% of those employed. They comprise slightly more than 20% of the members of academy councils, and about 26% of those employed. Women account for about 20% of the members of the Polish Accreditation Committee. The situation is somewhat better for faculty councils, where the percentage of women ranges, depending on the year, from 44% to 54%, and where women make up slightly over 40% of those employed. There is parity, or even a predominance of women, in electoral committees at various levels, in programme councils of galleries and publishing houses, and in elected student governments, where female students constitute the majority. The conclusion that emerges from these data is that there is a lack of equal participation in bodies where decisions crucial to the academy are made, but women predominate in bodies that supervise the proper conduct of procedures related to recruitment and elections.

Figure 8. Information on the percentage of women across various activities of people employed at art academies in Poland in 2019 and 2023

Data source: forms completed by art academies as part of our research.





7

Jana Górska

Adaptation of a Gender-Neutral Toilet Layout in an Academic Space – toilet space, 2025, courtesy of the artist

17

Analysis based on data obtained from the academies in response to a request sent by the project research team.

18

Poradnik 2.0. od Studentek dla Studentek, online: <https://asp.waw.pl/dokumenty/biblioteka-antydiskryminacyjna/> [accessed: 23.11.2025].

Equality Measures at Art Academies¹⁷

In recent years, almost all art academies in Poland have introduced regulations on discrimination and equal rights for women and men. They identify types of unacceptable behaviour within the academic community, and declare non-acceptance of any manifestations of discrimination based on gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, economic status, faith, or origin.

At most academies, rules have been established for reporting situations in which a person has experienced discrimination or mobbing. Usually, complaints of this kind must be submitted by the alleged victim, though some academies allow reporting by third parties. Yet the documents we analysed – academy statutes, codes of ethics, procedures for counteracting discrimination or mobbing, gender equality plans – rarely contained detailed procedures for dealing with reported cases of discrimination. Most often, assurances are given that the academy will make every effort to resolve problems, but there are no clearly formulated internal regulations governing the procedure at each stage.

There is also a lack of information about measures to improve the anti-discrimination competences of the entire academic community, or about training on what mobbing and harassment are and how to respond to them. Only the Academy in Warsaw's website provides external materials that define discrimination and harassment, and encourage reporting them. It also features a guide prepared by and for female AFA (Academy of Fine Arts) students¹⁸.



↗

Jana Górska

Adaptation of a Gender-Neutral Toilet Layout in an Academic Space – toilet space, 2025, courtesy of the artist

In many centres, there is no indication of a specific person responsible for issues of equal treatment and counteracting discrimination. As our quantitative and qualitative research shows, the scale of non-compliance with the regulations and the number of unacceptable incidents is large. This requires particular attention, for which qualified people and regular training are needed. The person responsible for implementing a school's anti-discrimination policy should be independent, and given the authority and tools necessary to respond effectively to incidents. One of the more important problems in this area that emerged during our research is the observation, made by both students and employees, that the existing provisions do not work: they are not precise, and sometimes are not enforced at all in the cases to which they apply.

The responses from the academies show that only those in Poznań and Gdańsk began (after 2015) to take measures aimed at equalising opportunities and building a sense of self-confidence among women within their structures. In Poznań, these included anti-discrimination workshops for UA Poznań (University of Arts) employees, organised by the Rector's Officer for Equal Treatment, as well as workshops for students organised by the UAP Student Government together with the Bezlik Foundation. In Gdańsk, at the initiative of the female Vice-Rector for Education, Student and Doctoral Affairs and the female Student Ombudsperson, an open meeting was organised with the Officer for Equal Treatment and the academic ombudsman from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Discussed were: diversity and community in the academic environment; discrimination; equal treatment; support in conflict situations; disputes and mediation; and the legal regulations in force at the academy.

Academies are paying increasing attention to the use of feminine forms. In 2025, the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw introduced a resolution stating that 'both masculine and feminine forms of the names of positions and functions may be used in the academy's official documents'. The Academy in Szczecin is introducing gender-neutral forms into academy documents, including ordinances and official information.

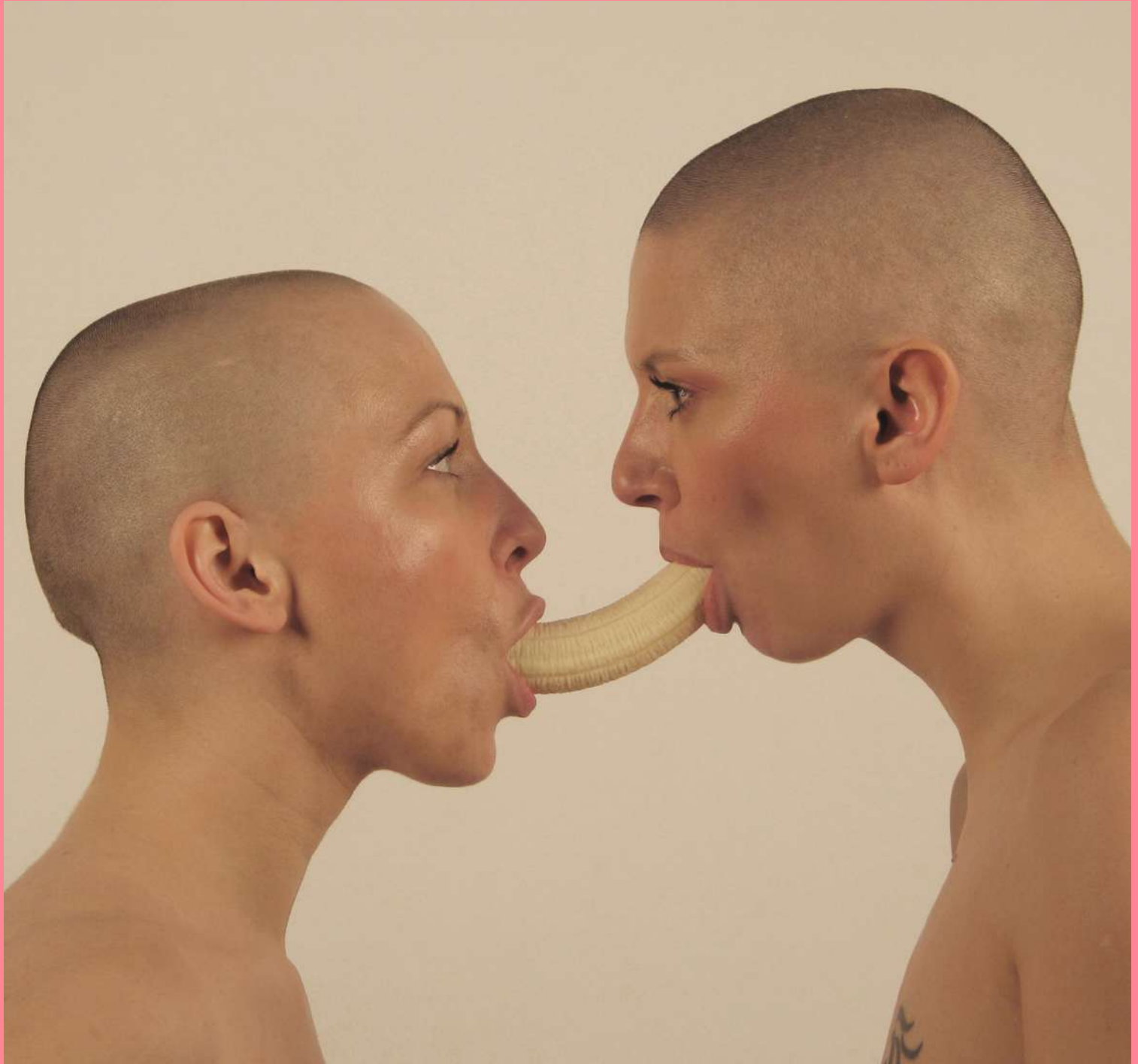
Summary

The statistical data analysed show that, in many aspects of their functioning, fine arts academies in Poland are undergoing positive change in their respect for the principle of equality between women and men. Yet three troubling aspects remain: **firstly**, the slowness of the change; **secondly**, that it primarily affects those spheres that do not significantly undermine men's privileged position where job security, the scope of power, and the ability to define and value art are concerned; and **thirdly**, the persistence of the fundamental model of how art academies function – feminised at the level of students and masculinised at the level of staff.

It is worth noting that the fundamental change taking place at art academies is difficult to capture in statistics, but this does not mean its manifestations are not visible at all. Women are beginning to dominate in those spheres of academy activity that today determine their standing and position: grant leadership, international cooperation, scholarships, and residencies. Perhaps, then, the widely criticised parametrisation process at fine arts academies is having an emancipatory effect, releasing them from the structures that in the past were responsible for men's privilege at art academies.

Analysis by Marek Krajewski in collaboration with Anna Walewska

Quantitative Research Findings



Grupa Sędzia Główny

(Aleksandra Kubiak,
Karolina Wiktor),
Hommage à Natalia LL,
photograph, 100 × 60 cm,
2006, photo: Marek Lalko,
courtesy of the artists

Foreword**19**

Little Chance to Advance?
An Inquiry into the Presence
of Women at Art Academies
in Poland, report in Polish,
Warsaw 2015, online: [https://nck.pl/upload/attach-ments/317998/Marne%20szanse%20na%20awanse%20RAPORT.pdf](https://nck.pl/upload/attachments/317998/Marne%20szanse%20na%20awanse%20RAPORT.pdf) [accessed: 6 December 2025]. Research team: Anna Gromada, Jutta Kawalerowicz, Dorka Budacz, Anna Walewska.

In the introduction to the study *Little chance to advance?*, conducted a decade ago, its authors wrote that ‘the disparity in women’s participation at two stages of an academic career – studying and teaching – is a complex issue, and no single hypothesis is sufficient to explain it’. Ten years ago, from their analysis of the literature on this subject and interviews and consultations with members of the art community concerning their observations and the stereotypes associated with the field, the authors of the report distinguished three groups of factors responsible for these differences and inequalities: 1) **aspirations, priorities, and strategies**; 2) **psychological factors**; and 3) **the relationship between students and academic staff**.

In the present report, we adopt these same groups of hypotheses to compare those areas in which the situation has changed. Since the publication of the previous study, however, the number of research projects and scholarly publications has increased, media discourses have evolved, and the relevant institutions themselves have changed. In the area of aspirations, priorities, and strategies, we have therefore added two hypotheses concerning visibility and the presentation of one’s own artistic work, and have addressed the issues of invisible labour and care work. In our analysis of hypotheses related to psychological factors, we included the roles of different forms of capital and the significance of peer relationships. In the area of students’ relationships with academic staff, we considered the previously unaddressed, though already investigated, issue of women’s perception that additional evaluative criteria are applied to them.

The most significant change concerns a new area of hypotheses related to perceptions of gender equality at academies. As mentioned above, we began the research in a context in which the discourse on equal opportunities had become more widespread, and academies had made new commitments in this area. One of the more important goals we set ourselves, apart from observing the current situation and comparing it with that of a decade ago, was to examine the extent to which this change is noticeable and has translated into students’ experiences.

To verify these hypotheses, we used and further developed the survey questionnaire used in the study ten years ago¹⁹. We carried out the survey among students at the following institutions: the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław, the Academy of Art in Szczecin, the University of the Arts in Poznań, and the Faculty of Fine Arts at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The survey was also completed by people studying fine arts at other institutions in Poland. It was distributed in two waves.

In May, we began distributing it online, encouraging primarily first- and final-year students to complete it. Having received an unsatisfactory number of responses, in October we decided to distribute the online survey again and, in cooperation with the academies, to conduct it in paper form during classes, this time inviting students from all years to participate. For first-year students who had been studying for only a few weeks, we prepared a shortened version of the questionnaire that did not ask about their experiences of studying.

Before we set out the detailed data, we would like to draw attention to several methodological and computational nuances that are essential for interpreting them. Firstly, an important change since the 2015 study has been the spread of what is known as the Bologna reform, leading to a plurality of study types. In our study, we consistently assumed that first-year students included those enrolled in BA, long-cycle, and MA programmes.

Secondly, in light of these and other changes (described in detail in the appendix), we decided to present and compare the results using **unweighted data**. In other words, we did not **statistically adjust** (i.e., weight) the responses (as the team conducting the study ten years ago did) to make the sample more closely resemble the population with respect to variables such as institution and gender. In some cases, we also **recoded** the response scales; for example, by changing a 0–6 scale to a 1–7 scale to make the results easier to read. For these reasons, the **distributions of responses** for 2015 presented in this report may differ from those reported in the study published ten years ago.

Thirdly, in the report we often present average values and percentage distributions for all responses to a given question, but we only interpret those differences that proved to be **statistically significant**. This is intended to prevent situations where such averages or distributions might suggest differences that, in statistical terms, it would not be justified to speak of (for example, due to the small number of responses).

Given the study's subject and our decision to repeat the research strategies used in 2015, we compare the experiences of women and men below. The final section of this part of the report is devoted to the situation of non-binary people.

Aspirations, Priorities, and Strategies

In the first group of hypotheses, we analyse differences in the goals and aspirations of female and male students, differences in the strategies used to pursue them, and limitations encountered in this process.

Hypothesis 1a: Women consider academic work less attractive than men do.

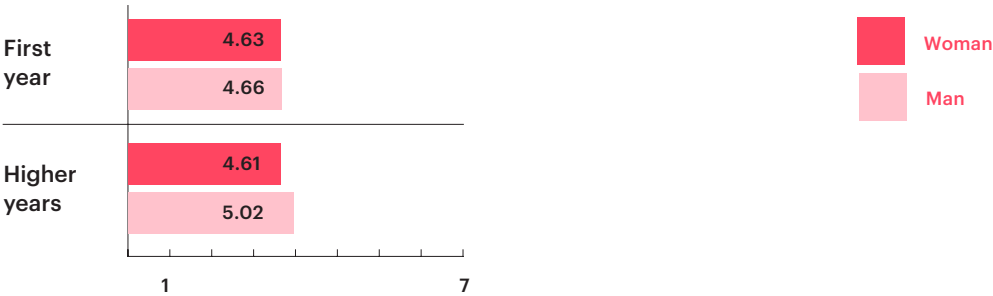
To determine whether the hypothesis that ‘women consider academic work less attractive than men do’ is true, we compared responses to the question: ‘How attractive does the work of a person teaching academic classes in your field of study seem to you?’.

A comparison of first-year students and later-year students shows that the perceived attractiveness of academic work remains similar across gender groups, at moderately attractive. On a seven-point scale, the average score was 4.85 among men and 4.62 among women. Among men, however, there was a slight tendency for interest in this career path to increase at later stages of their education.

Over the course of the decade, women’s assessment of the attractiveness of academic work increased, from an average of 4.39 in 2015 to 4.62 in 2025. In the case of men, the difference is less pronounced: their assessments remained stable, at 4.94 in 2015 and 4.85 in 2025. This may indicate that women now perceive an academic career as more attainable than they did ten years ago, which, in turn, may suggest that positive changes at art academies have made them more gender-equal environments.

Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means that the academic teaching profession is ‘completely unattractive’ and 7 means ‘extremely attractive’. The sample included 445 women and 110 men in their first year, and 507 women and 100 men studying in later years.

Figure 9. Assessment of the attractiveness of the academic teaching profession by gender



In the following analyses, we compared what women and men desire – that is, their dreams about the future – with what they consider realistic and likely. We were able to do this by asking respondents two different questions: ‘What is your dream occupation after graduation?’ and ‘What is your most likely occupation after graduation?’ followed by the same list of possible answers.

The results showed that, in almost all areas (artistic, professional, and private), women and men think about their future in very similar ways. Their aspirations and expectations concerning creative work, non-artistic activity, family life and possibly changing their profession are almost identical, which suggests that gender does not play a significant role in these areas.

The only area in which differences consistently emerge are academic career path and assistantships. Men aspire more frequently than women to go on to further studies at their academy, become an assistant (at their own academy, elsewhere in Poland or abroad), or pursue an academic career. The level of these aspirations is relatively low overall, but still means that a greater proportion of men than women would like to tie their future to a academy. Women rate only one scenario more highly than men: employment in their trained profession outside the academy. Otherwise, the aspirations of both groups are almost identical.

A similar picture emerges from respondents' declarations about what they consider most likely. Men are more likely than women to consider continuing their studies at their own academy, beginning an assistantship in Poland or abroad, and remaining professionally involved in art – this last being by far the most desired option, and the one considered most likely in both groups. In the remaining scenarios covering other career paths and aspects of personal life, no systematic gender differences were noted.

All this leads to the following conclusion: despite the generally moderate interest shown in this scenario, men are clearly more strongly orientated than women towards an academic career or assistantship, both as an aspiration and as a realistic possibility. In none of the areas analysed did women express greater interest than men in an academic career. At the same time, in the remaining aspects of their anticipated professional and private futures, the attitudes of women and men were very similar, an indication that people's aspirations in this environment are quite stable, regardless of gender.

The data analysis shows that the number of women who dream of continuing their education, or consider it likely that they will undertake the next level of study at their home academy, has decreased. Further studies, whether in Poland or abroad, also seem less likely to them, and the same applies to men. Among both women and men, interest in an assistantship at a foreign academy has also declined, whether as a dream or an expectation. The same holds true for the perceived likelihood of the most attractive scenario: being active artistically after graduation. By contrast, neither the level of aspiration nor the perceived likelihood of taking up work at a Polish academy has changed.



**Karolina Melnicka**

Excellent, performance documentation, 2015,
courtesy of the artist.

The Polish title (*Celujący*) refers both to the highest
academic grade and to the act of aiming: in the
performance, the diploma is spat at the wall like a target.

Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means 'the least desired/likely option' and 7 'the most desired/likely option' (N women = 942, N men = 213). **Plus and minus** signs indicate statistically significant differences within the same gender between the 2015 and 2025 studies.

Table 2. Desired and likely options by gender

	Women	Men
A further degree programme at my academy		
– desired	3.56 (-)	4.01
– likely	3.54 (-)	4.10
A further degree programme at another academy in Poland		
– desired	3.40	3.31
– likely	3.23 (-)	3.23
A further degree programme at a foreign academy		
– desired	3.51	3.54
– likely	2.77 (-)	2.89 (-)
An assistantship / job at my academy		
– desired	3.57	4.06
– likely	2.70	3.10
An assistantship / job at another academy in Poland		
– desired	3.16	3.45
– likely	2.36	2.54
An assistantship / job at a foreign academy		
– desired	3.11 (-)	3.41 (-)
– likely	2.09 (-)	2.08 (-)
Being an active artist		
– desired	5.88	5.86
– likely	4.77 (-)	4.84 (-)
Other work in an art-related profession		
– desired	5.71 (-)	5.43
– likely	5.16 (-)	4.92 (-)
Work unrelated to art		
– desired	2.43	2.51
– likely	3.84	3.98
Focusing on family life		
– desired	2.80	2.98
– likely	2.85 (-)	2.81 (-)
Changing profession		
– desired	2.04	1.76
– likely	2.44 (+)	2.16

Both female and male students are less likely than ten years ago to consider it probable that they will focus on family life immediately after graduation. Importantly, the number of women who state with greater conviction that they will change profession after graduation and will not work in art has increased. Taken together, these findings suggest a declining interest in continuing education, although the desire to work at an academy remains unchanged. Awareness of the challenges associated with this type of career, and with artistic activity, may translate into a reluctance to start a family quickly (or at all) or to remain in the profession for which one has trained.

Hypothesis 1b: Men's professional priorities correspond more closely to what students expect work at an academy of fine arts provides.

We assumed that men's professional priorities are more closely aligned with what students believe work at an Academy of Fine Arts offers. To verify this, we asked: 'What is important to you in your future professional work?' and 'In your opinion, what most motivates people to take up work at an art academy?'.

In their answers to the second question, female and male students indicated very similar key factors. Having a network of contacts in first place, followed by opportunities for development, and then career and recognition. These are the three elements most often associated with academic work, regardless of gender. High earnings, time for family life, and low levels of stress were indicated least often.

Women and men have similar assessments of what motivates others to work at an academy, but their expectations for future employment differ markedly, as our calculations revealed. Men more often than women indicate the following as important: stability and job security, independence and autonomy, career and recognition, and professional relationships and contacts. All these factors closely align with the characteristics of academic work as perceived by respondents, work that, at least in principle, provides development, independence, networking, and relative stability. At the same time, these factors are also a close fit with stereotypical expectations of men as people who should ensure others' stability while being independent and influential. More often than men, women mentioned a low level of stress as an important aspect of work. This is the only factor that consistently differentiates women's and men's responses – and at the same time is the one that least fits the specificity of academic work, which usually involves high demands, time pressure, and a variety of duties.

The description presented here suggests that men may consider academic work a career path well suited to their expectations in terms of development, recognition and working conditions, whereas women may perceive it more ambivalently: as attractive for the opportunities for development it offers, but as emotionally demanding and burdensome. This asymmetry between their expectations and the institutional offer may affect the decisions women take about their future career, and to some extent may help explain why fewer women than men are seen in academic positions.

It is also striking that men seem to define their professional expectations in positive terms, by the values that work should provide, whereas women define theirs in negative terms, as being able, through work, to avoid discomfort. This may mean that men see working at an academy is an opportunity, while women see it is a necessity.

Legend. Percentage distribution of female and male students’ professional priorities, as well as priorities that, in their view, motivate people to work at an academy. Results are presented separately for women (N = 964) and men (N = 216). **Statistically significant differences are marked in bold.**

Table 3. Priorities in future professional work by gender

	What is important to you in your professional work?		What motivates people to work at an academy?	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Stability and job security	53.9%	42.6%	32.1%	32.4%
A high degree of independence	24.6%	35.2%	19.1%	17.1%
Work consistent with one’s qualifications	17.9%	20.4%	33.7%	32.4%
Lack of tension and stress	38.5%	26.8%	8.9%	13.0%
High earnings	40.3%	36.6%	4.3%	4.6%
Time for family life	23.8%	25.5%	5.5%	6.0%
Opportunities for development	48.0%	43.1%	51.7%	53.7%
Career and recognition	15.7%	25.5%	34.2%	36.1%
A network of social and professional contacts	17.2%	24.5%	60.7%	56.5%
Usefulness to others	12.6%	13.9%	22.0%	22.7%

A comparison of our results with the data from a decade ago shows that students’ priorities regarding professional work have remained quite stable. Ten years ago, the most important factors mentioned were opportunities for development, a high degree of independence, and high earnings. Today, ‘independence’ has been replaced in the top three by ‘stability and job security’ – a reflection of, on the one hand, the growing importance of uncertainty as a dimension of everyday life, and on the other, the worsening labour-market situation for people working in art. The change may also be influenced by increasing employment insecurity in the creative professions and the automation of creative work through AI.

An interesting finding is that high earnings were more important to women than to men in both 2015 and 2025. Perhaps women see them as a condition of independence and autonomy, which are more attainable now than several decades ago, but which require not just equal rights, but also equal pay. A change from the earlier study is that ten years ago men responded more frequently that low stress is important when choosing a job; now, women emphasise this much more, while men attach greater importance to independence. In 2015, female and male students stated that academic work brings neither high earnings nor high autonomy. Today, they believe that an academy career may offer a significant degree of independence.

Hypothesis 1c: For women, family is more important than professional work.

Are women more likely than men to declare a readiness to make choices or sacrifices in favour of family life? To verify this, we again analysed female and male students’ responses to questions concerning possible paths after completing art studies, assessed on a seven-point

scale. This time, however, we focused on differences: we examined the extent to which the options we identified were perceived as ‘desired’, or as realistic, that is, ‘likely’ to be achieved.

It turned out that, in most areas, women and men imagine their futures similarly. Differences appeared only in two responses, regarding assistantships abroad and family life.

An assistantship abroad is more ‘desired’ by men than by women. In fact, neither group regard it as a very attractive option, but among men the difference between desire and expectation is more pronounced. They can be said to treat it somewhat more as an ambitious goal: something they would like to achieve, but do not necessarily expect to happen. The question of focusing on family life, by contrast, yielded opposite responses. For men, this is a more desirable than likely option, whereas women take a pragmatic approach to family life, treating it not as a dream but a realistic possibility that may affect them – although it should be noted that the overall level of agreement in this regard on the seven-point scale was relatively low. Women, then, do not desire this path more than men, but anticipate such a course of events slightly more often than men. Their responses are more realistic, with a smaller gap between what they would like and what they consider possible. Perhaps men have greater freedom to decide about their future than women, who are subject to numerous external expectations, including those related to starting a family or becoming a mother. Importantly, this pattern has not changed in the last decade: in 2015, women assessed focusing on family life as somewhat unattractive but more likely: on the seven-point scale, the average score for the ‘desired’ option was 3.12, and for ‘likely’ 3.48. It is worth noting, however, that in 2015 the average scores for both assessments were higher than they are today.

To better understand how women and men make decisions about family and professional life, we analysed responses regarding potential sacrifices, obligations, and the influence of relationships on artistic development. We did so by asking participants to respond to statements expressing common views about the division of care roles, as well as about expectations and readiness to make sacrifices. Statistical calculations showed that, although the responses were similar in many areas, significant gender differences appeared in several of them.

The first concerns family responsibilities: men are willing to care for their family more often than women. A similar pattern appears in respondents’ willingness to give up paid work and put their own professional aspirations aside for the sake of loved ones. In both cases, men declared a greater willingness to make such sacrifices. These results are contrary to the usual stereotype. Women, in turn, indicated more often that, for the sake of their own artistic aspirations, they would be ready to ask their partner to take on a larger share of household duties.

71

Wiktoria Gajowiak

Person I, gouache on
paper, 180 × 100 cm, 2025,
courtesy of the artist

Person II, gouache on
paper, 180 × 100 cm, 2025,
courtesy of the artist



Legend. Where the difference is positive, this indicates 'I would like to, but it is not very realistic'; where the difference is negative, it indicates 'I would not like to, but it is realistic'. Depending on the statement, between 825 and 938 women and between 186 and 210 men answered the question.

Table 4. Differences between desired and realistic options by gender

Variant	Gender	Difference
A further degree programme at my academy	Woman	0.0235
	Man	-0.1143
A further degree programme at another academy in Poland	Woman	0.1629
	Man	0.0762
A further degree programme at a foreign academy	Woman	0.7377
	Man	0.6812
An assistantship / job at my academy	Woman	0.859
	Man	0.9569
An assistantship / job at another academy in Poland	Woman	0.7947
	Man	0.9095
An assistantship / job at a foreign academy	Woman	1.0097
	Man	1.3349
Being an active artist	Woman	1.1137
	Man	1.0427
Other work in an art-related profession	Woman	0.5584
	Man	0.5095
Work unrelated to art	Woman	-1.4226
	Man	-1.4976
Focusing on family life	Woman	-0.0667
	Man	0.1435
Changing profession	Woman	-0.413
	Man	-0.409

At the same time, men are clearly more likely than women to agree with the statement that women should limit their paid work for the sake of family. Women are more often in favour of an equal division of household duties, although this difference is small, and the level of agreement with this statement is high in both groups.

Taken together, these results reveal a complex picture. Men more often declare a readiness to make sacrifices, but also believe that women, to a greater extent than men, should limit their paid work for the sake of the family, and men are also less consistent in supporting a fully equal, partnership-based division of duties. This suggests that men are aware that the discourse of equality has changed what is expected of them, but have internalised these expectations only declaratively, and still adhere to the traditional family model in which the woman takes care of the home and the man provides for the family. Women believe that gender should not affect the extent to which someone engages in family life.

Comparative results for the mean responses from 2015 and 2025, analysed separately for women and men, show a decline in the level of acceptance for traditional gender roles, in both groups. Both women and men are less likely to agree with the statement that women should limit their paid work for the good of the family, which may reflect the growing importance of an equal division of responsibilities and

women's economic independence. Among women, there is also a visible decline in level of acceptance for giving up regular employment for family reasons. These changes may point to an ongoing transformation of social norms and a move away from traditional ideas about women's role in family life due to multifaceted changes: higher professional aspirations among women, awareness of the costs of career breaks, the need for economic independence, and growing expectations regarding a partnership-based model of family life.

Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 5 means 'strongly agree'. Minus signs indicate mean values that have decreased since the 2015 study. Depending on the statement, between 957 and 960 women and between 210 and 211 men answered the question.

Table 5. Sacrifices that students are willing to make, by gender

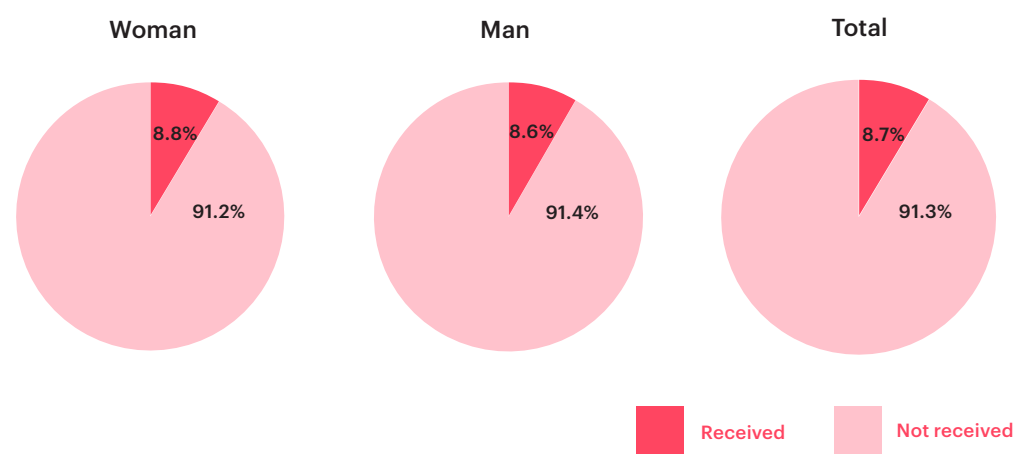
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Gender	Mean
Women should be willing to limit their paid work for the good of the family	Woman	1.84 (-)
	Man	2.12 (-)
Men should be willing to limit their paid work for the good of the family	Woman	2.15
	Man	2.2
Because of my future artistic aspirations, I would be prepared to...	Gender	Mean
ask my partner to take on most household duties	Woman	3.01 (-)
	Man	2.74
give up starting a family	Woman	2.77
	Man	2.88
For the sake of my family in the future, I would be prepared to...	Gender	Mean
take on a larger share of household duties at the expense of work	Woman	2.72
	Man	3.09
give up regular paid employment	Woman	1.9 (-)
	Man	2.33
give up my artistic aspirations	Woman	1.66
	Man	1.87

Hypothesis 1d: Men are employed more often because they achieve better academic results.

One of the areas analysed a decade ago was the hypothesis that men are more often employed at academies because they achieve better academic results. To verify this, we compared the frequency of merit-based scholarship recipients by gender. The results showed no significant differences: women and men received scholarships for academic performance at similar rates. The idea that men have higher academic achievement is not supported by the data.

Legend. Percentages of students above the first year of study (long-cycle, bachelor's, and master's programmes). The number of respondents was as follows: 547 women, 116 men, and 663 in total.

Figure 10. Women and men receiving scholarships



We also analysed how women and men assess their own engagement in learning relative to other students, and in this area, too, we did not record any significant differences between genders. In other words, men do not perceive themselves as more engaged in learning than women, and women do not assess their work input as clearly greater than that of their male peers.

Legend. Mean responses of women (N = 542) and men (N = 114) on an ordinal scale where 1 means significantly below average and 7 means significantly above average.

Figure 11. Assessment of the effort invested in studies against the group



This, in turn, means that the persistent differences in the frequency with which women and men are employed have no substantive basis; they do not result from different abilities, levels of knowledge, or competencies, but have their source in other factors. These may be found primarily in the patriarchal character of academies, in the obstruction of women's advancement, and in the additional duties imposed on women.

Hypothesis 1e: Men believe more in the effectiveness of different strategies than women.

We also examined women's and men's beliefs about the strategies that make it easier to obtain academic employment. We asked them to assess the extent to which various factors determine whether a person takes up a position teaching in their field.

Regarding substantive factors, such as hard work, education, professional experience, artistic achievements or teaching competencies, the

results show no significant differences between genders. Both women and men indicated these are the most important factors for predicting success in the academic environment, and both assigned them similar weight.

Regarding structural and identity-related factors, however, differences do appear. Women more often than men believe that characteristics such as being a man, fully able-bodied, heteronormative and, to a lesser extent, female or of Polish nationality, matter for an academy career. This may mean that female students are more perceptive to possible barriers and inequalities in the academic environment, which in turn suggests they may be more strongly affected by such phenomena and therefore notice them where privileged men do not. It may also mean that men prefer to believe that the academy is a meritocratic system, and that their own position within it results from merit rather than gender-based privilege.

It is worth emphasising that the assessment of substantive factors remains consistent: both women and men regard competences, engagement, and experience as the most important elements determining success. By contrast, elements such as appearance, personal relationships and gender are generally rated lower, although women attribute slightly greater importance to them than men do. This is hardly surprising, since they are also more likely to experience inequalities rooted in these very characteristics.

With a more rigorous approach to interpreting the results, it can be concluded that the most reliable differences concern what respondents indicated about the importance of 'being a man' and 'being an able-bodied person' in relation to employment. The remaining differences should be assessed cautiously, as they are less pronounced.

A comparative analysis of the data from 2015 and 2025 shows that in 2025 women gave a higher rating to most factors related to educational and professional achievement (hard work, teaching competencies, professional experience, and a good education), and also to identity-related characteristics (being a woman or a man). At the same time, their ratings of achievements abroad and having graduated from the same academy declined. Assessments of other factors (presenting one's own work, background, social relationships, appearance, having an affair with an influential person, chance) showed no significant change from 2015. Men also gave a higher rating to factors related to education and professional achievements, but their views on the importance of achievements abroad or identity-related characteristics, such as gender, did not change.

Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means 'completely irrelevant' and 5 means 'absolutely necessary'. **Plus and minus signs** indicate factors that, in the opinion of female and male respondents, have become more or less important since the 2015 study. Depending on the type of factor, between 952 and 959 women and between 208 and 213 men expressed their views on this question.

Table 6. Factors that, according to students, determine taking up a position at an academy, by gender

Type of factor	Gender	Mean
Good education	Woman	3.71 (+)
	Man	3.63 (+)
Regularly showing one's work	Woman	3.14
	Man	3.05
Hard, persistent work	Woman	3.30 (+)
	Man	3.25 (+)
Social contacts	Woman	3.22
	Man	3.08
Graduating from this academy	Woman	2.65 (-)
	Man	2.69 (-)
Professional experience	Woman	3.51 (+)
	Man	3.59 (+)
Teaching skills	Woman	3.42 (+)
	Man	3.45 (+)
A fortunate coincidence of circumstances	Woman	2.73
	Man	2.82
Achievements abroad	Woman	2.53 (-)
	Man	2.56
Coming from the right family	Woman	1.83
	Man	1.80
Being a man	Woman	2.32 (+)
	Man	1.73
Being a woman	Woman	1.75 (+)
	Man	1.59
Being a heteronormative person	Woman	1.66
	Man	1.54
Being of Polish nationality	Woman	2.28
	Man	2.13
Being an able-bodied person	Woman	2.59
	Man	2.27
Having an affair with an influential person	Woman	1.73
	Man	1.83
Beauty and appearance	Woman	1.63
	Man	1.73

Hypothesis 1f: Men more often than women make an effort to make sure their work is visible.

One of the hypotheses analysed assumed that men more often than women make an effort to present their work and make sure it is visible. To verify this, we analysed declarations regarding various forms of artistic activity – from maintaining a portfolio to participating in exhibitions to being involved in artistic collectives. The results indicate

that men are significantly more likely than women to say they have a professional portfolio or are a member of an artistic group or collective. Although the differences between the genders are not large, they do indicate a certain tendency: men more often engage in formalised, visible ways of presenting their work, such as portfolios, publications and exhibitions. This may mean that, more strongly than women, they accept the competitive nature of the art world, where defeating others in the struggle for attention increases the likelihood of gaining influence and artistic success. Of course, these differences may also stem from the stereotypical expectation that women should be modest and quiet, while men are expected to fight and put themselves forward.

Legend. Female students (N = 509) and male students (N = 103) could select all applicable answers. The third column shows percentage differences between women and men, with positive values indicating a higher percentage of responses among men.

Table 7. Frequency of participation in artistic activities by gender

	Women	Men	Difference
Portfolio	31.0%	47.6%	+16.6 pp
Publications	52.9%	62.1%	+9.2 pp
Solo exhibition	13.8%	18.4%	+4.6 pp
Student exchange	11.0%	12.6%	+1.6 pp
Artistic internship	13.8%	15.5%	+1.7 pp
Group exhibition	62.7%	62.1%	−0.6 pp
Sale of work	29.9%	32.0%	+2.1 pp
Artistic residency	4.1%	5.8%	+1.7 pp
Art collectives	21.0%	31.1%	+10.1 pp

In seeking to explain these results, we first examined a thesis that has circulated in public debate for years, according to which family connections in the art world increase artistic activity among young female and male creators. Our analyses did not confirm this hypothesis. People whose relatives are active in the field of art – professionally or as a hobby – do not participate in exhibitions more often, do not take part in artistic residencies more often, and do not have more extensive portfolios. Further, our research findings do not indicate that women studying at art academies differ from men in the frequency with which a professional artist is in the family.

Hypothesis 1g: Women more often than men engage in providing support to others.

We also tested a hypothesis from the literature, namely that women engage in care work more often than men. This, if confirmed, could partly explain why they are less active in making their work visible: they simply have less time and energy for self-promotion, for ‘being seen’, and for competing with others. To verify this assumption, students were

asked: ‘On average, how many hours per week do you spend supporting other people?’, where support could concern both family and friends outside the academy, and other female and male students.

The results confirmed the hypothesis. Women devote significantly more time to supporting others than men. This means that they act more often as an ‘emotional buffer’ – someone who cares for relationships, provides support, and takes responsibility for maintaining bonds in their surroundings. Men declared engagement in this type of activity is considerably lower. This means that, on top of having to study, women may face the additional burden of caring for others. Over time, this double pressure may increase the risk of overload or burnout – or it may mean that women simply have less time to do what is needed to make their work visible – which is so crucial in contemporary art.

Legend. Based on declarations entered in the surveys by those who answered this question (N women = 830–839; N men = 184–189).

Table 8. Time devoted to supporting other people

	Women – mean	Median	Men – mean	Median
Outside academy	13.0 h	10 h	10.33 h	7 h
In academy	9.46 h	5 h	6.28 h	4 h

Assessing the significance of the above phenomenon led us to examine the potential role of support in the academy environment – especially the support more often provided by women. We began with the hypothesis that people who report lower levels of social support, especially from female and male peers, are more likely to consider interrupting or suspending their studies. We asked respondents directly whether: ‘I often think about taking a break from my studies, for example, taking a dean’s leave’, and then linked the answers given to assessments of social support. The relationships proved to be weak, but statistically significant: people who gave a lower rating on support from their peer group were more likely to consider taking a dean’s leave. Although the strength of the correlation is small, this effect remains consistent with earlier research findings – the literature indicates that peer relationships play an important protective role, helping prevent people from giving up their studies.

We also assessed the relationship between a deterioration in well-being during studies (loss of energy, decreased motivation, lack of support from the surrounding environment) and considering withdrawing from academy. We assumed that psychological exhaustion and reduced motivation would be associated with more frequent thoughts of interrupting studies, and the correlation analysis confirmed these predictions: the stronger the decline in well-being, the more frequent the declarations of considering leaving or taking a break from studies. Although only the most extreme form of withdrawal was analysed (taking a dean’s leave), the relationship was statistically significant and clearly directional: the greater the exhaustion, the higher the likelihood of considering withdrawing.

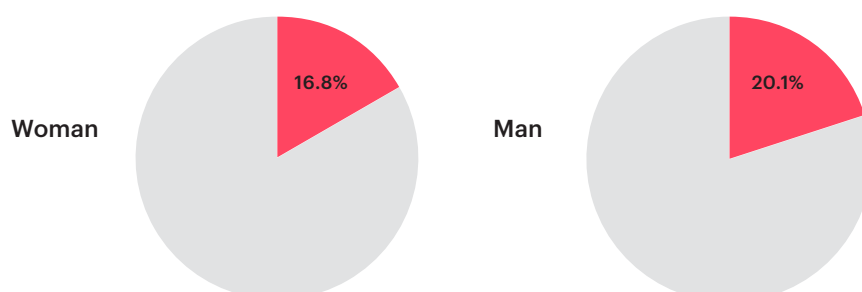
The analysis therefore confirms that students who experience a decline in well-being and weaker social support more often consider interrupting studies. At the same time, women more often than men engage in providing emotional care for others – which constitutes an important context for their academic experiences and may further increase their burden. It is also worth noting that, by providing support to others – support that can determine whether someone remains at the academy – women actually perform unpaid, unnoticed, and undervalued work for the benefit of the academy and its students. That work reduces the time and energy they could devote to developing their artistic careers – another important dimension of gender inequality present in the context analysed here.

This interpretation leads to another issue that has been addressed particularly often in the recent literature: invisible work performed for well-known artists or in exchange for the possibility of creative development. This is usually analysed in the context of a culture of exploitation that reproduces dependencies based on different forms of capital in the art world. In our study, we decided to supplement this knowledge by also placing it within the framework of care work mentioned above. We therefore assumed that women would be more willing to take on such work. Yet our findings do not confirm this hypothesis. At the same time, it is worth noting that, among the group we studied, tolerance for working for free or supporting well-known figures in the art world was rather moderate. Since this question was not asked in the study conducted ten years ago, it is also difficult to determine what trend there may be in this level of acceptance.

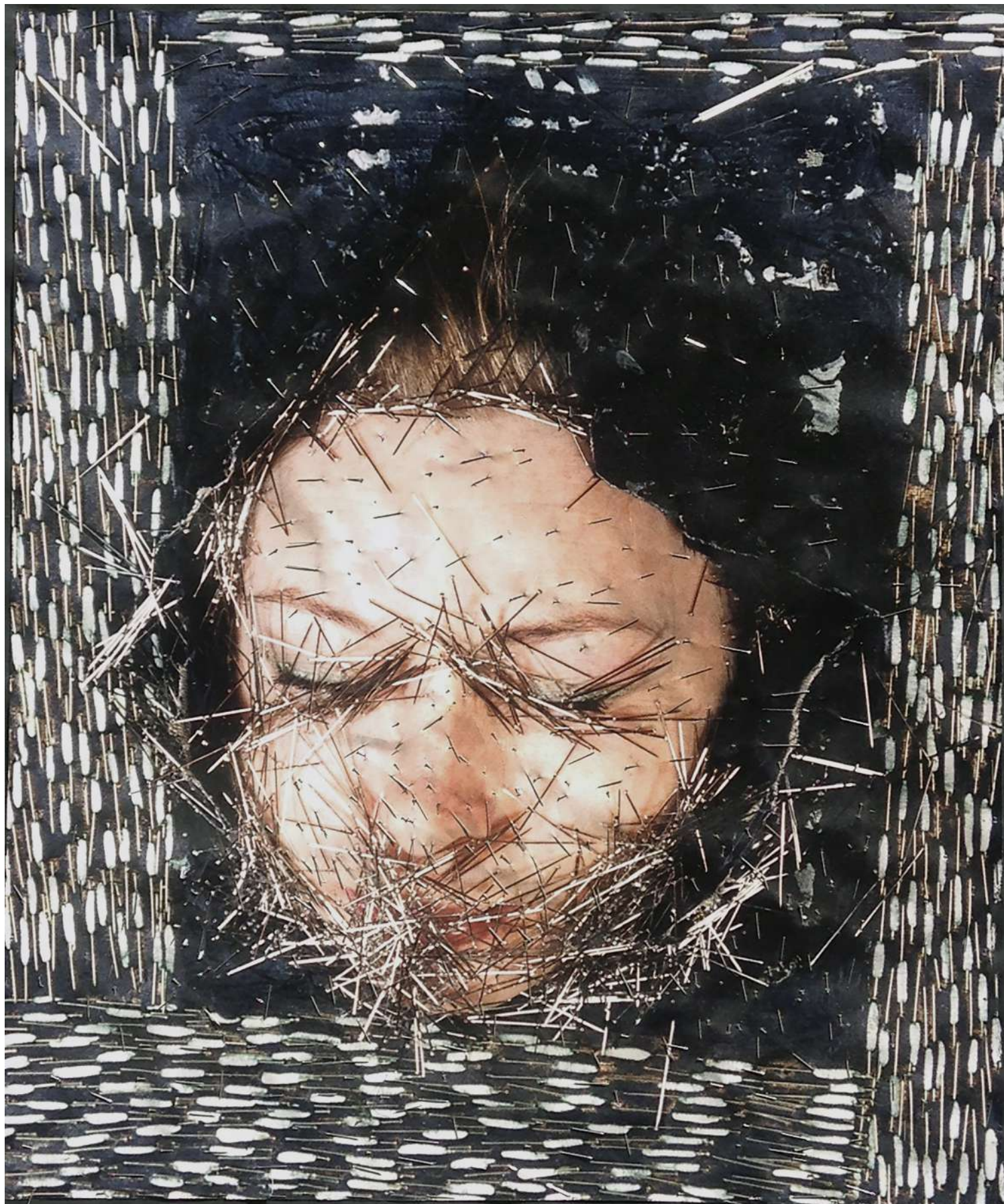
Hypothesis 1h: Women have a weaker socio-economic background than men, which limits their opportunities to develop an artistic career.

Factors affecting opportunities for developing an artistic career – or any professional career – include an individual's material situation and family traditions, that is, their cultural and social capital. Our analysis shows that, while these factors may indeed be important, they are similar among both women and men: roughly one-fifth of all participants in our study had someone close to them involved in art.

Figure 12. Family professional tradition in art



Legend. The question was answered by 912 female students and 204 male students.



↗

Teresa Tyszkiewicz

Pinned Face, from the *Closed Eyes* series, 60 × 50 cm, photograph on laminated paper, 1997, courtesy of Zdzisław Sosnowski

Female and male respondents’ answers to the question ‘How do you assess your current financial situation? This refers to your everyday experience – regardless of the source of income or support’ indicate no statistically significant difference between them. At the same time, it is worth looking at the distribution of answers to this question (TABLE 9). Half of the participants live in a state of financial instability, are unable to meet all their needs, or function from day to day without financial security. This is probably partly because art studies are among the most expensive, and partly because students and the people close to them who support them find themselves in this situation, which is an important factor in the heavy burdens they experience. Moreover, the investments and sacrifices made during studies are very risky, because only a few succeed in the arts.

Psychological Factors

The second group of factors we addressed were the experiences and emotions associated with studying. These are extremely important in the context of inequality, as they often constitute both a significant cause and a painful consequence.

Legend. Declarations by female and male students surveyed (N = 1113).

Tabela 9. Breakdown of assessments of financial situation among female and male students

Financial situation	Percentage of respondents
I live very modestly — sometimes I do not have enough for basic needs, such as food or rent	4.9%
I live modestly — I have to be very careful to have enough for all basic needs	17.4%
I get by from day to day — my needs are met, but I do not have any significant savings	34.1%
My financial situation is rather stable — I can afford small pleasures or saving	32.5%
My financial situation is very good — I do not have to limit myself and have funds for unexpected expenses	11.0%

Hypothesis 2a: Women have less confidence in their abilities than men.

Ten years ago, the greatest difference between women and men were about their belief in their own abilities. To retest the hypothesis that women have lower confidence in their own abilities than men, we analysed responses to a question on self-assessment of artistic talent, comparing students’ answers with those of others in the same year of study. The results of the statistical analysis did not confirm differences between women and men: both groups assess their artistic competencies at a very similar level.



7

Bożna Wydrowska

*I am Going to Use this
Body to Become You,*
solo performance, 2020,
photo: Marta Kaczmarek,
courtesy of the artist

In 2025, female and male students’ mean assessment of their talent relative to others was lower than a decade ago. Moreover, ten years ago, there were statistically significant differences between the sexes: men assessed their abilities higher than women did.

This result need not stem from increased expectations on the part of lecturers; it may also be due to a broadening comparative context brought about by the development of social media and constant confrontation with the achievements of others presented online. This particular culture of sharing events from one’s life, which lies at the core of these media, means that individuals’ expectations of themselves are constantly rising – and are therefore increasingly difficult to meet. This may be one explanation for people having a lower self-assessment of their abilities than ten years ago.

We discuss the subject of confidence in one’s own abilities in more detail in the next part of the study, comparing how it may change during studies with other dimensions of well-being.

Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means ‘I assess my artistic talent as significantly below average’ and 7 means ‘I assess my artistic talent as significantly above average’. In 2025, this question was answered by 786 women and 174 men, and in 2015 by 774 women and 153 men.

Table 10. Subjective assessment of talent

Gender	Mean 2025	Mean 2015
Woman	4.76	5.31
Man	4.79	5.5

Hypothesis 2b: Women have worse experiences and feelings than men during their studies.

We also addressed the hypothesis that there are differences in the psychological experiences of women and men during their studies. Since both first-year and higher-year students participated in the study, we conducted our analysis separately for those two groups. First-year students were asked only to assess their current well-being, while female and male students in higher years assessed both their condition at the beginning of their studies and at the time of the survey, both groups using a seven-point scale.

The results from first-year female and male students showed no significant differences between women and men at the beginning of studies. Both groups declared similar levels of energy, joy, confidence in their own abilities, general well-being, and sense of purpose. This means that, at the time they enter the academic environment, women and men have similar levels of psychological well-being.

The situation is different in higher years, where a consistent, systematic pattern emerges: men achieve, on average, higher scores than women across all the dimensions we examined: sense of developing

skills, joy, sense of purpose, energy, confidence in themselves, and the absence of a need to prove their own worth. These differences turn up in higher-year students assessments of their current state, and of their recollections from the beginning of their studies. The differences are not large, but they are clear: men function at a slightly higher level of well-being from the outset, and complete their studies with greater energy, a stronger sense of agency, and greater self-confidence.

Men reported that the beginning of their studies was a time of greater joy, a stronger sense of purpose, and greater self-confidence, while for women that period is more burdensome and less clear-cut. By the end of studies, these between the genders persist. Among men, the key indicators remain stable or increase: they declare higher levels of energy and joy, and a greater sense of purpose. Women also gain self-confidence and increasingly define their direction of their own development, but at the same time lose energy and joy – the mean values of these indicators decline over time. This could hardly be otherwise, since, as indicated above, it is women who engage more strongly in providing emotionally exhausting support for others.

Legend. The table presents responses from people in the first year of study (long-cycle, bachelor's, and supplementary master's programmes), measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale (1–7), with the extreme values reflecting opposing poles. In the items presented, only the positive pole is given, for example, 'I am developing my skills' or 'I am joyful', while lower values indicate stronger identification with the opposite pole, for example 'I am not learning anything new' or 'I am depressed'. The question was answered by 337 women and 85 men.

Table 11. Assessments of well-being and motivation among first-year students by gender

Type of feeling	Gender	Mean
I am developing my skills	Woman	5.74
	Man	5.73
I am joyful	Woman	4.5
	Man	4.54
I have a sense of purpose	Woman	4.62
	Man	4.39
I am full of energy	Woman	3.85
	Man	3.98
I believe in my abilities	Woman	4.38
	Man	4.28
I have to prove something	Woman	3.88
	Man	3.78

The results from ten years ago show that, at that time as well, for both women and men studying was associated with a decline in well-being. Both groups began their studies with a similar assessment in all aspects we asked about, but by the end of their education the responses of women and men differed significantly in terms of their sense of purpose and confidence in their own abilities.

Legend. The table presents the results of two independent measurements (2015 and 2025) among people in the second year of study or later (long-cycle, bachelor's, and supplementary master's programmes). Responses were given on a seven-point semantic differential scale (1–7), where higher values indicate identification with the positive pole, for example, 'I am developing my skills' or 'I am joyful'; and lower values with the opposite pole, for example 'I am not learning anything new' or 'I am depressed'. In 2025, this question was answered by 476 women and 98 men, while in 2015 it was answered by 408 women and 77 men.

Table 12. Assessments of well-being and motivation among students in higher years of study by gender

Type of feeling	Gender	Mean 2025	Mean 2015
I am developing my skills — beginning of studies	Woman	5.33	5.62
	Man	5.43	5.69
I am developing my skills — currently	Woman	5.13	4.52
	Man	5.39	4.81
I am joyful — beginning of studies	Woman	4.24	5.15
	Man	4.7	5.38
I am joyful — currently	Woman	4.08	4.11
	Man	4.64	4.56
I have a sense of purpose — beginning of studies	Woman	3.64	4.29
	Man	4.24	4.27
I have a sense of purpose — currently	Woman	4.46	4.84
	Man	5.24	5.39
I am full of energy — beginning of studies	Woman	3.94	5.07
	Man	4.23	5.14
I am full of energy — currently	Woman	3.55	3.77
	Man	4.14	4.1
I believe in my abilities — beginning of studies	Woman	3.76	4.56
	Man	4.3	4.75
I believe in my abilities — currently	Woman	4.47	4.81
	Man	5.01	5.48

Hypothesis 2c: Women have fewer role models.

The next hypothesis was that women have fewer role models, because, stereotypically, the great artists who shaped the history of art were men. To verify this, we asked participants to indicate people who currently have significant influence on the artistic discipline they study. Significantly, almost 60% of them did not indicate a single name (59.6% of women and 54% of men), as if they had never thought about the question, lacked knowledge on the subject, or did not want to share it. This may also reflect a reluctance to think about art in hierarchical terms in which some people are more important than others. It is also significant that more than 860 unique names of people having significant influence on art were given, and the artist mentioned most frequently (Patryk Hardziej) was named by less than 7% of those who indicated at least one person. This is, of course, because the respondents were people studying in very different fields of art, but it also indicates a fairly far-reaching lack of agreement about who is an influential person in art; that is, the absence of a clear canon or generally accepted ways of evaluating this. The results remain gendered, however. On the list of the 50 names most frequently indicated, 42% were female artists and 58% were male artists. Moreover, the answers given by female and male students differ considerably: among women, female artists account for 54% of all influential people mentioned,

while among men this percentage is only 30%; in other words, for men, influential figures in art are more often male artists than female artists. Nevertheless, the hypothesis analysed was not confirmed – women have numerous role models, and are convinced of the significant influence of female artists on art.

We also asked participants to indicate what female and male artists serve as personal authorities for them. The percentage of individuals taking part in the study who named at least one person was around 50% (higher among men, 57% of whom gave at least one name). Here the diversity of answers was even greater, with more than 1,100 unique names given (including pseudonyms and roles such as mother, father, parents, myself, my professor, and so on). This reflects not only the variety of fields from which the participants in the study came, and the pluralisation of evaluation criteria in art mentioned above, but also a high level of individualisation among students, all of which indicate a multiplicity of reasons why someone may be an authority for them.

Here we encounter even stronger gendering than in the previous question. On the list of the 50 most frequently given names, 62% are men (significantly, slightly more than 56% of women's responses and more than 735 among men). Perhaps the word 'authority' itself is stereotypically associated with a man – an interpretation reinforced by the absence in the Polish language of a feminine form that could be used. That absence is significant, because it refers precisely to those relations of power in which men stereotypically dominate: supposedly know more, can do more, and command greater recognition. The category of authority also refers to strongly hierarchical, 'masterly' relationships that are closely linked to a masculine way of thinking about artistic activity. So it is no coincidence that, in participants' opinion, most of those people are men. Here as well, though, the hypothesis of the absence of role models for women is not confirmed, since women cite numerous personal authorities who are women. At the same time, there is an evident association of the word 'authority' with a model of art that seems unacceptable to some women. Women may differ from men not only in who they consider an authority, but also in whether they believe authority is necessary in art, or in whether they accept its strongly hierarchical character.

We also asked participants to name three Polish women who had gained recognition in the field of art they studied. More than 48% did not provide a name (just over 47% among women and just over 43% among men), which may be somewhat surprising, but may also indicate that men more often think of art as a specific field of forces in which individuals occupy different positions defined not by recognition, but by the influence they exert. Even with this distribution of responses, it does not follow that women lack role models. On the contrary, more than 40% of them confirmed that they exist.

Figure 13. List of the 25 names regarded as the most influential in the field of art



Legend. List of the 25 names most frequently indicated by participants as having significant influence on the field of art they study (coded open-ended question, N = 528). The percentage of indications refers to the number of times a given person was indicated relative to all the people shown in the figure.

Figure 14. List of the 25 names most frequently indicated by participants as personal authorities in the discipline they study



Legend. List of the 25 names most frequently indicated by participants as personal authorities in the discipline they study (N = 762). The percentage of indications refers to the number of times a given person was indicated relative to all the people shown in the figure.

On this question, the dispersion of opinions on what artists have gained recognition is less than in the two other questions: 706 unique names of female artists were mentioned. This is still a very high number, given that participants were asked to indicate only female artists. Among the 50 most frequently mentioned names, 23 were mentioned by both women and men.

**Magdalena Abakanowicz, Olga Boznańska,
Tamara Łempicka, Katarzyna Kozyra,
Patrycja Podkościelny, Gosia Herba, Zofia Stryjeńska,
Ada Zielińska, Aleksandra Waliszewska, Ewa
Juszkiewicz, Dominika Kowynia, Natalia LL,
Katarzyna Kobro, Karolina Jabłońska, Alina
Szapocznikow, Zofia Rydet, Aneta Grzeszykowska,
Malwina Konopacka, Monika Drożyńska, Agata Królak,
Agata Kus, Diana Lelonek, Ola Niepsuj.**

As can be seen, all of the above are monumental figures of Polish art who are no longer alive (they account for 30% of the 50 most frequently mentioned names), and include artists who achieved success outside Poland. It seems these are the two criteria all participants use to determine what female artists have gained recognition in the art world.

The results on the generational affiliation of female artists, as reported by the participants, proved very interesting.

Legend. The percentages refer to the number of indications among all female artists in a given group, relative to all responses provided by participants.

Table 13. Generational affiliation of female artists who, according to participants, have gained recognition

Generation name	Years of birth	Number of female artists	Percentage of indications
Pre-war generation	before 1945	16	32%
Baby boomers	1946–1964	7	14%
Generation X	1965–1980	14	28%
Generation Y	1981–1996	11	22%
Generation Z	after 1997	2	4%

Moreover, among the female artists participants said have gained recognition in art, while those who are unquestioned authorities and have entered the canon of art predominate, many others are authors of the newest art. So we have female artists whose greatness is not disputed and has been confirmed by the passage of time, but also those admired

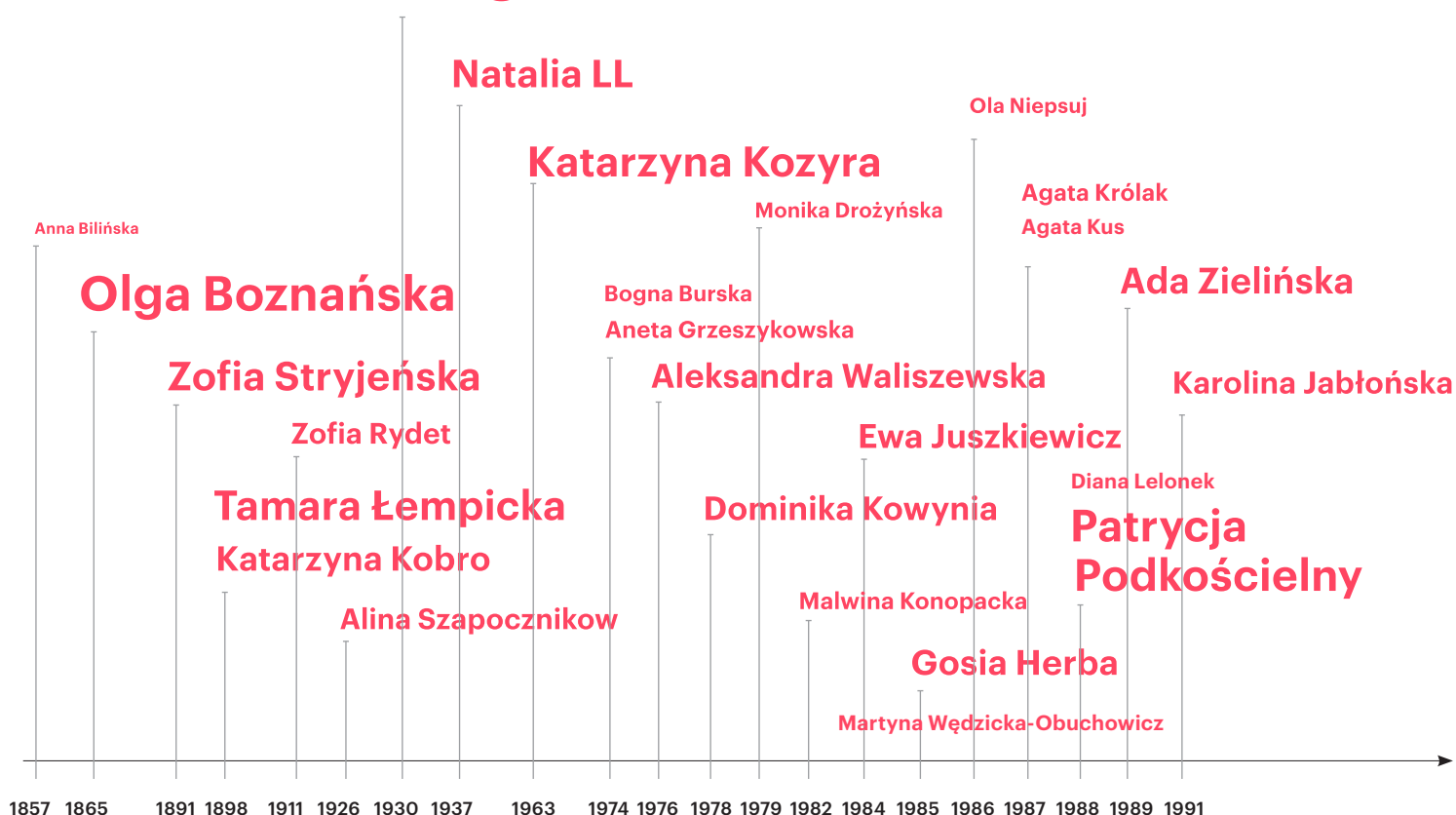
today, who may be seen as possible role models confirming that women, too, can be artists whose greatness is recognised and acknowledged. The low percentage of female artists in the baby boomer generation is quite interesting (a tendency also evident in other studies)²⁰.

Hypothesis 2d: Women more often perceive the atmosphere at the academy as competitive and lacking support.

The next hypothesis was that women more often perceive the academy's atmosphere as permeated by competition and lacking support. The analysis showed, however, no statistically significant differences between women and men in this respect. In addition, both men and women mostly noted that they feel part of the student community, and can count on support from both male and female peers. It is worth noting at the same time that, regarding the degree of competition and the sense that one can count on the support of friends, the mean responses oscillate around the midpoint of the scale. This may mean that participants notice manifestations of competition but do not consider them decisive for the prevailing atmosphere. This, should not lead to the conclusion that these phenomena can be overlooked, because the results also indicate that some people experience a competitive atmosphere and a lack of support daily.

Figure 15. Year of birth of Polish women who, according to female and male students, have gained recognition

Magdalena Abakanowicz



Legend. Answers were given on a five-point ordinal scale, where 1 meant “I completely disagree” and 5 meant “I completely agree”. The question was answered, depending on the statement, by 871–891 women and 194–197 men.

Table 14. Atmosphere at the academy by gender

Type of statement	Gender	Mean
I feel part of the student community	Woman	3.46
	Men	3.55
I lack genuine peer relationships at the academy	Woman	2.62
	Men	2.6
There is an atmosphere of competition in my student environment	Woman	2.62
	Men	2.45
I can count on support from friends during my studies	Woman	3.94
	Men	3.99

Relationships Between Students and Academic Staff

The third group of hypotheses refers directly to the relationships between students and female and male lecturers, and therefore to the central aspect through which gender inequalities may be perpetuated.

Hypothesis 3a: Men receive positive stimuli more often than women.

One dimension of inequality is the differing strength of support provided to women and men studying at art academies. In the 2025 survey we again asked female and male students what forms of support they had received from people teaching classes at their academy. They could choose from eight categories and select any number of answers.

The results confirm the above hypothesis. Generally speaking, male students are more likely than female students to report receiving positive stimuli from academic staff, as concerns three of the eight categories: help in obtaining work or a commission, references, and introductions into an art circle – all of which are crucial to developing an artistic career. As in 2015, one in four female students and one in five male students reported not receiving any professional or artistic advice. This is problematic, especially in the context of studies whose high cost and specificity are supposed to be based on just such individual work with every female and male student. Due to the gender imbalance among academic staff, we decided not to conduct analyses that take gender into account when providing support.

TABLE 16, which compares the answers given to this question with those from ten years ago, shows an increase in the percentage of people declaring that they received help in obtaining an assistantship and were introduced into an art circle, but a decrease in those indicating that they received professional or artistic advice, or invitations to extracurricular meetings or artistic trips. This may mean that today more attention is paid to outstanding students than to all of them.

Legend. The table presents the percentage of female students (N = 509) and male students (N = 103), studying in their second or higher year (long-cycle, bachelor's and master's programmes) who declared they had experienced the indicated forms of support from at least one person teaching classes, regardless of that person's gender. Forms of support for which there are statistically significant differences between women and men are marked in **bold**.

Table 15. Types of support that female and male students received from teachers

	Women	Men
Professional or artistic advice	75.8%	80.4%
Help in obtaining work or a commission	30.1%	42.2%
Help in obtaining an assistantship / starting work at the academy	9.1%	13.7%
References	28.3%	39.2%
Invitation to extracurricular meetings or artistic trips	54.1%	62.7%
Close bond and individual care	44.6%	49.0%
Introduction into an art circle	30.1%	47.1%
Support in a difficult personal situation	44.2%	48.5%

Legend. The table compares data from 2015 and 2025 on the percentages of female and male students (in their second year of study or higher) who received specific forms of support from at least one teacher. A **minus** sign indicates statistically significant differences in the frequency of experiencing a given form of support within a given gender, between 2015 and 2025.

Table 16. Changes in support for female and male students from teachers (2015–2025)

	Women 2015	Women 2025	Men 2015	Men 2025
Professional or artistic advice	77.0%	75.8%	89.6%	80.4%
Help in obtaining work or a commission	30.4%	30.1%	39.0%	42.2%
Help in obtaining an assistantship / starting work at the academy	6.1%	9.1%	7.8%	13.7%
References	31.9%	28.3%	36.4%	39.2%
Invitation to extracurricular meetings or artistic trips	55.9%	54.1%	77.9%	62.7% (-)
Close bond and individual care	44.1%	44.6%	53.2%	49.0%
Introduction into an art circle	25.0%	30.1%	36.4%	47.1%
Support in a difficult personal situation	—	44.2%	—	48.5%

Hypothesis 3b: Women are more exposed to negative stimuli than men.

We verified the hypothesis that women are more exposed than men to negative stimuli from people teaching classes, including to comments that reinforce stereotypes, and behaviours of a violent nature. We asked students about how they are treated by academy faculty, as individuals and in relation to their female and male peers.

The results obtained from female and male students indicate that most behaviours on the part of teachers – such as comments about predispositions, creativity, allegedly ‘placing family life above responsibilities’, or general dislike and hostility – do not differ statistically significantly by gender. Women’s and men’s responses in these areas were similar, suggesting that in everyday student-teacher interactions, when these mainly concern substantive and professional matters, gender has no major impact.

Clear differences appear, however, in situations related to appearance, the body, and sexualisation. Women much more often than men reported experiences of unwanted comments concerning beauty and the body, as well as behaviours of a sexual nature. Participants could include both comments directed at themselves and at other female students.

The results can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, women really are more often the targets of comments on appearance or sexuality; this has been confirmed by numerous studies in other educational and professional contexts. Secondly, men may experience such behaviours less often, or may deny their existence more often. Since such comments are usually made by men, other men may tend to downplay such behaviour as a joke or a convention rather than a form of violence against women.

A detailed distributions of the responses to this question are presented in **TABLE 17**. It includes only those responses that concerned behaviours directed at the participant – here the gender differences were most clearly seen. These data best reflect actual experiences, because they refer to personal situations rather than to observations of others or interpretations of events affecting others. As in the question about forms of support, due to disparities in the composition of academic staff we decided not to conduct an analysis that takes gender into account. It is worth noting that in all cases women are more often the targets of such comments. This means they are treated as occupying a lower position in the hierarchy of power, and the very act of commenting on various aspects of who they are confirms this lower position. Such behaviour constitutes a kind of performance in which domination is perpetuated.

Legend. The table presents the percentage of female students (N = 505) and male students (N = 102), studying in their second or higher year (long-cycle, bachelor’s and master’s programmes) who declared that they had personally experienced the comments or behaviours indicated in the table from at least one person teaching classes, regardless of that person’s gender. Cases in which the differences between women and men proved statistically significant are marked in **bold**.

Table 17. Declared experiences of sexist and violent comments and behaviours from teachers

	Women	Men
Comment on predisposition for work requiring precision	39.8%	36.3%
Comment on predisposition for work requiring creativity	36.4%	34.3%
Comment on the need to put family before work	11.9%	8.8%
Comment or behaviour indicating dislike or hostility	31.3%	22.5%
Unwanted comments concerning beauty, the body, or erotic matters	27.7%	9.8%
Erotic propositions	8.5%	4.9%
Unwanted sexual behaviours	9.1%	5.0%

This interpretation is also backed up by **TABLE 18**, which shows how responses to this question have changed since ten years ago. In all cases, and among both women and men, there has been an increased incidence of remarks and comments from teachers. Considering that academies have introduced numerous anti-violence measures, and that different

forms of violence are now widely discussed (evident form the documents academies provided and the qualitative interviews we conducted), this increase may indicate that students are now more sensitive to violence and correctly recognise it in behaviours previously regarded as neutral.

Legend. The table compares data from 2015 and 2025 on the percentage of female and male students (in the second year of study or higher) who reported personally experiencing specific comments or behaviours from at least one teacher. **Plus** signs indicate statistically significant differences in the frequency of experiencing a given type of behaviour within a given gender, between 2015 and 2025.

Table 18. Changes in declared experiences of sexist and violent comments and behaviours from teachers (2015–2025)

	Women 2015	Women 2025	Men 2015	Men 2025
Comment on predisposition for work requiring precision	16.4%	39.8% (+)	16.9%	36.3%
Comment on predisposition for work requiring creativity	11.5%	36.4% (+)	9.1%	34.3% (+)
Comment on the need to put family before work	4.4%	11.9% (+)	5.2%	8.8%
Comment or behaviour indicating dislike or hostility	14.5%	31.3% (+)	11.7%	22.5%
Unwanted comments concerning beauty, the body, or erotic matters	8.3%	27.7% (+)	5.2%	9.8%
Erotic propositions	3.9%	8.5% (+)	2.6%	4.9%
Unwanted sexual behaviours	3.4%	9.1%	1.3%	5.0%

Hypothesis 3c: Women more often than men feel they are assessed according to different criteria.

Here we examined two hypotheses: ‘Women more often than men feel that higher demands are placed on them during their studies’, and ‘Women feel more strongly than men that their appearance affects the way they are assessed by others’. These concern somewhat different issues, but overlap, for they both concern additional, unfair, burdensome assessment criteria. It is therefore worth presenting them together.

We asked participants directly who, in their opinion, faces higher demands in their field of study. The results confirmed our hypothesis: women more often than men reported having higher expectations placed on them. Moreover, when the responses below are set on an ordinal scale where 1 is ‘Definitely men’ and 5 is ‘Definitely women’, a comparison of the averaged results from 2015 and 2025 shows that this pattern is slightly more evident now than ten years ago.

At the same time, half of men and about 40% of women believe that gender does not affect the demands placed on students. Such a high percentage of people convinced that gender is irrelevant may indicate there has been a gradual change in the roles of women and men in the academic environment. Some participants still perceive inequalities, but a growing group of female and male students believe those demands are more equally divided. What is worth noting, however, is that women

feel higher demands are placed on them than on men. This may mean that such inequality is experienced by a significant number of them: almost 25%.

Legend.
N women = 948;
N men = 212.

Table 19. Who is subject to higher demands? Opinions of female and male students

	Woman	Men
Definitely men	0.9%	4.2%
Rather men	2.2%	5.2%
More or less equally	33.3%	34.9%
Rather women	15.2%	5.7%
Definitely women	9.2%	0.9%
Gender does not matter	39.1%	49.1%

Exploring this issue further, we also asked female and male participants whether they think beauty and appearance affect how people teaching classes assess students and their work, using two questions: ‘Do you have the impression that your beauty and appearance are important in the assessment of you as a person?’, and ‘Do you have the impression that your beauty and appearance are important in the assessment of your work by people teaching classes?’.

Responses were given on a seven-point scale, so results around 3 or 4 can be interpreted as a moderate lack of identification with the statements. In our results, women much more often than men shared experiences of how appearance affects how they and their work are perceived. Weak but statistically significant negative relationships were observed, indicating that women feel the importance of appearance to a greater extent than men, both how they are judged (women = 4.35; men = 3.89) and how their artistic work is assessed (women = 2.72; men = 2.48).

Since both questions were also asked in 2015, we can trace how experiences and opinions on this matter have changed. Among both women and men, more participants now believe that beauty and appearance are important in how they are assessed as people, but fewer believe that these opinions affect how teachers assess their work. These changes may mean that both women and men are increasingly aware of the role appearance plays in how others see them, but are somewhat less likely to perceive the impact of these assessments on how their work is evaluated.

Bearing in mind that the results fall in the lower part of the scale, the results still indicate that image-related norms and aesthetic pressure in the academic environment are more strongly felt by women than men. At least some of those answering the survey still feel they are treated as people whose most important duty is to look good.

Legend. Mean responses of female and male students on a seven-point ordinal scale (1–7), where 1 meant ‘Definitely no’ and 7 meant ‘Definitely yes’. In 2015, the question was answered by 775 women and 153 men; in 2025, by 901 women and 202 men. **Plus** and **minus** signs indicate statistically significant differences within one gender between the 2015 and 2025 studies.

Table 20. The significance of appearance in assessment — experiences of female and male students

	Women 2015	Women 2025	Men 2015	Men 2025
Do you have the impression that your beauty and appearance are important in the assessment of you as a person?	4.12	4.35 (+)	3.34	3.89 (+)
Do you have the impression that your beauty and appearance are important in the assessment of your work by teachers?	2.93	2.72 (–)	2.88	2.48 (–)

Perceptions of Gender Equality at the Academy

The final group of hypotheses concerns how the issue of gender equality at academies is perceived – which is crucial for assessing the fairness of these institutions, and shapes both their image and the adaptive strategies individuals take.

Hypothesis 4a: Women more often than men assess that there are too few women teaching in their field of study.

The first hypothesis concerned the number of women teaching at art academies. We predicted that women would be more likely than men to believe there are too few of them, and asked participants the following question: ‘How do you assess the number of women teaching in your field of study?’. The responses confirm our prediction.

The view that there is a shortage of female teachers corresponds, one may assume, with the experience of the women who responded in this way. Everyday observations and, for example, the increasingly widespread discussion about the glass ceiling, may heighten sensitivity to the importance of representation and power relations in the academic environment. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that in 2025 the percentage of women reporting a shortage of female teachers was higher than in 2015. By contrast, men more often than women declare that in this regard gender ‘does not matter’. And it is precisely this group of responses from men that has grown significantly in the past ten years. These findings can, of course, be interpreted as an encouraging signal that equality discourse is becoming more widespread at academies, including among men; however, they could also result from the fact that, in many fields, men hold most managerial positions and the most prominent teaching roles: those not affected by the problem simply do not notice it. It is also important to interpret the 2015 and 2025 taking into account that all respondents function in an academic environment whose norms and structures have historically been, and still are, more strongly aligned with a male perspective.

Legend. In 2015, this question was answered by 767 female students and 151 male students, while in 2025 it was answered by 936 women and 209 men. In the study conducted ten years ago, there was no 'I don't know' option; it was created this year for first-year students completing the survey a few weeks after beginning their studies.

Table 21. Opinions on the number of women teaching in the field of study, by gender

Gender	Definitely too few	Somewhat too few	Neither too few nor too many	Somewhat too many	Definitely too many	Gender does not matter	I don't know
2025							
Woman	15.8%	18.6%	27.7%	5.0%	2.7%	25.4%	4.8%
Man	6.7%	11.5%	26.8%	4.3%	5.3%	41.1%	4.3%
2015							
Woman	11.9%	15.6%	34.3%	8.7%	8.6%	20.9%	—
Man	9.3%	11.3%	41.7%	7.9%	7.3%	22.5%	—

To create a more solid basis for testing this hypothesis, participants were asked to respond to the following question: 'According to Statistics Poland, in 2023 women accounted for three in ten professors at academies of fine arts. In your opinion, what is the reason for this state of affairs?'. The question was open-ended and, after the answers had been coded into twelve main categories, calculations were made to determine what reasons were given most often for the absence of women from professorial positions, and how women and men assessed the significance of these reasons.

As can be seen from the table below, the most frequently mentioned reason (apart from no answer) was patriarchy and the attitudes it entails: sexism, misogyny, and male power. In second place (not by chance), participants indicated prejudices, such as stereotypes and gender patterns imposed on women during processes of socialisation, since these are integral aspects of the system and the way in which it reproduces itself.

As to the differences between women and men in explaining the numerical disproportion between female and male professors working at Polish art academies, female respondents more often pointed to being overloaded with duties other than career development, such as domestic responsibilities, caring, motherhood, administrative functions, and so on, as well as to obstacles placed in women's path to promotion. Men indicated more often that this state of affairs was women's fault, or denied that such differences in employment existed at all. On the one hand, then, women report the experience of the greater effort than men they have to invest in shaping their professional careers, while on the other, men deny that discrimination exists at art academies. Placing this difference in the context of the overall distribution of responses to this question, one can say that this is precisely how patriarchy manifests itself: it is much more difficult for women than for men to reach the highest positions, while men deny the

existence of inequality, and believe their dominance is solely the result of the fact that they are better.

An analysis of the responses to this question leads to the conclusion that, although women find it difficult to decide unequivocally whether there are too few or too many women teaching classes, when confronted with statistical data showing the proportions of women and men in professorial positions, they no longer deny the existence of inequalities in the way men do, and more often than men point to explicitly discriminatory factors.

Legend. Distribution of responses to the question: ‘According to Statistics Poland, in 2023, women accounted for three in ten professors at academies of fine arts. In your opinion, what is the reason for this state of affairs?’ (N = 1,309). The counts and percentages refer to all indications of selected coding categories among those who answered this question, not to all participants in the study.

Table 22. Why female and male students think there are fewer female professors than male professors at academies

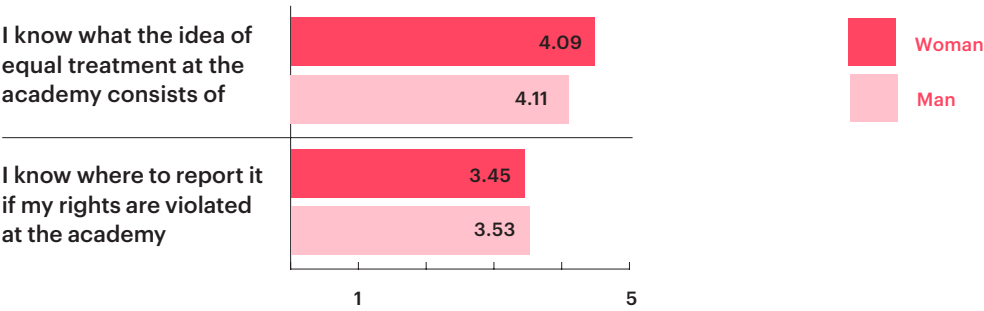
Category	Women	Men	Total
Relic of the past	7.48%	6.87%	7.53%
Overload (family, domestic responsibilities, etc.)	9.2%	4.72%	8.22%
Obstructing employment (undervaluing, higher demands, etc.)	4.33%	1.72%	3.77%
Discrimination, patriarchy, sexism	18.3%	20.6%	19.25%
Cronyism, nepotism, cliques	5.14%	3.86%	4.79%
Stereotypes, prejudices, gender patterns	12.17%	8.15%	11.23%
‘Problematic character’ (pregnancy, leave)	1.8%	0.86%	1.64%
Women’s choices: other priorities (money, family, artistic work, etc.)	5.95%	6.87%	6.3%
Women’s fault: lack of solidarity, passivity, insufficient effort	1.98%	3.86%	2.4%
Denial of discrimination (women are not discriminated against)	1.89%	3.86%	2.4%
No opinion	6.58%	9.44%	6.78%
No answer	25.16%	29.18%	25.68%

Hypothesis 4b: Women more often than men declare knowledge of their rights at the academy.

The next hypothesis explored whether women are more aware of their rights than men; it was intended to examine whether the struggle for these rights yields knowledge of them. To this end, students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that they knew what the idea of equal treatment at the academy entailed, and where to report a violation of their rights. It was assumed that female students, as people more often discriminated against, would have greater knowledge in this area. As the figure below shows, there are no fundamental differences between genders, and the level of knowledge on this subject is high. The problem is that the declarations in this question do not withstand scrutiny against students' actual knowledge of anti-discrimination solutions. This aspect is addressed by the next hypothesis.

Legend. The table presents the mean responses of female students (N = 909–910) and male students (N = 200–202) on a five-point ordinal scale, where 1 indicates ‘I completely disagree’ and 5 indicates ‘I strongly agree’.

Figure 16. Awareness of principles concerning equal treatment rights by gender

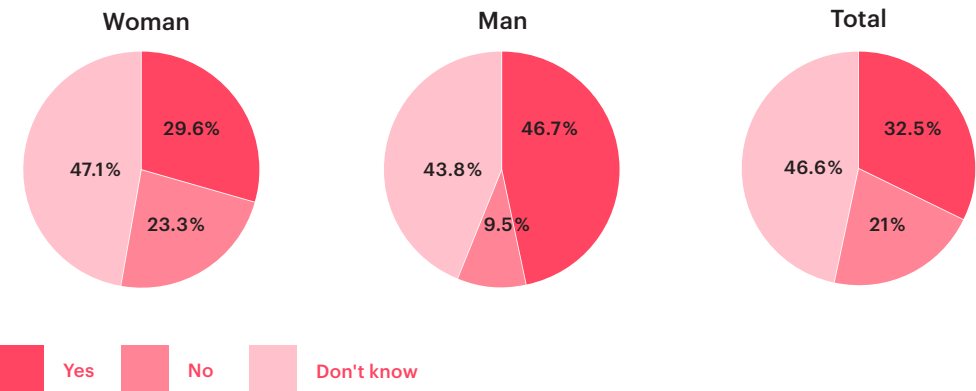


Hypothesis 4c: Women more often than men know about the existence of solutions counteracting gender-based discrimination at the academy.

To test the validity of the above, penultimate hypothesis, participants were asked: ‘Are there solutions at your academy that counteract gender-based discrimination?’. 32% of participants answered this question affirmatively, including around 30% of women and almost 47% of men. About 47% of participants said they did not know whether such solutions existed. Given that most academies declare they have anti-discrimination measures in place, this distribution of responses suggests either that knowledge of these measures is relatively low, or that people do not believe they are effective and therefore take no interest in them. The hypothesis posed here is difficult to maintain, as greater knowledge of these solutions is declared by men, not women.

Legend. There was a high level of missing data for this question; only 520 women and 105 men provided answers, that is, roughly half of the sample.

Figure 17. Knowledge of solutions counteracting gender-based discrimination



To verify these declarations, those who answered the above questions affirmatively were asked to state what anti-discrimination measures exist at their academy. More than 67% of male students who indicated that anti-discrimination measures are in place were unable to name any of them, and only 15% could specify specific practices of this kind. Among

women, the level of knowledge was higher. At the same time, women are more likely than men to indicate that these solutions are ineffective and do not meet what is expected of them. This distribution of responses indicates that men are more likely to believe that their art academy takes anti-discrimination measures, whereas women have actual knowledge about them, which often leaves them disappointed.

Legend. N = 203.

Table 23. Types of solutions counteracting discrimination indicated by female and male students

Category	Women	Men
Knowledge of specific solutions	47.2%	15.2%
Awareness of anti-discrimination bodies	23.2%	13.6%
Absence of discrimination	7.2%	2.4%
Solutions exist, but they do not meet expectations	6.4%	0.8%
Art addressing the topic of discrimination	2.4%	0.0%
Demands and proposals	1.6%	0.8%
No answer	12.0%	67.2%

Hypothesis 4d: Women more often than men notice positive changes in gender equality at art academies.

In our final hypothesis, we examined whether women, more than men, notice positive changes in gender equality at art academies. The resulting opinions on changes in recent years – at art academies in general and at a participant’s own academy – were surprising. It is men who indicated, significantly more often than women, that academies have progressed in the areas of equality and responding to inappropriate behaviour.

As the table below shows, the biggest difference between women and men concerns whether responses to abuses and inappropriate behaviours have changed. Men declare more frequently than women that their academy has begun to respond to such situations; women see less progress here. A similar pattern holds in how programmes supporting women’s equality are assessed: men are much more likely to regard them as genuinely present, while women are more sceptical, and their mean level of assessment is clearly lower. Men also noted more often that the academy pays greater attention to issues of gender and mobbing; women assess these changes as less clear or less convincing. Regarding remembrance of female artists, the level of the trend has changed, but the direction remains the same: men notice positive change more often. In the remaining areas, such as including feminist content in the curriculum, using equality-sensitive language, or treating female and male students equally, no gender differences were

observed. Women and men perceive these aspects of the academy’s functioning very similarly.

These findings, in short, indicate that men, more often than women, see the academy as an institution that is changing and implementing anti-discrimination measures.

Women are more sceptical about both the scale and the reality of these changes. What from men’s perspective looks like clear progress may from women’s perspective may not be fully adequate to their experiences. This difference can also be interpreted in the context of broader psychological and institutional processes. Men are less likely to experience the problems that equality measures are intended to address, and may regard even small steps as a significant improvement. Women, by contrast, experience inequality or relational uncertainty more often than men, which means that their threshold for perceiving real change is higher, and declared progress is assessed more cautiously. Perceptions of the same equality measures may therefore differ significantly between the two groups, revealing an important discrepancy in how institutional actions are received.

Legend. The table presents mean responses of female students (N = 590) and male students (N = 110) on a five-point ordinal scale (1 – ‘I strongly disagree’, 5 – ‘I strongly agree’).

Table 24. Equality, safety, and inclusiveness at academies — perceptions by gender

In recent years...	Women	Men
art academies have paid greater attention to gender equality issues	3.57	3.83
art academies have paid greater attention to violent behaviours, such as mobbing, harassment, etc.	3.43	3.71
At the academy where I study...	Women	Men
the curriculum includes topics related to feminism and gender equality	3.1	3.09
there are mentoring programmes and other activities supporting women’s self-confidence	2.32	2.76
the memory of female artists and female educators is cultivated	3.36	3.55
complaints concerning inappropriate teacher behaviour are responded to	3.07	3.56
people teaching classes take requests to use equality-sensitive language into account	3.7	3.7
everyone is treated equally at the academy	4.09	4.11
I know where to report it if my rights are violated at the academy	3.45	3.53

We also analysed the responses on noticing positive changes at the academy to determine whether this results in a more positive attitude about the academy as a whole. It turned out that, **firstly**, female and male students who notice such measures less perceive the academy as a place where a competitive atmosphere prevails. This is supported by statistical analyses: the Pearson’s **r correlation coefficient** suggests

a weak negative relationship ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 724$). The same people also declare more often that they can count on social support at the academy ($r = -0.10$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 618$). **Secondly**, noticing specific initiatives such as: counteracting mobbing ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.001$, $N = 733$); supporting women's equality ($r = 0.10$, $p = 0.001$, $N = 678$); using equality-sensitive language ($r = 0.153$, $p = 0.001$, $N = 615$); or responding to inappropriate behaviour ($r = 0.10$, $p = 0.001$, $N = 650$) are associated with a higher sense of support from other students (P27.4). This means that the presence of visible anti-discrimination measures helps create a more friendly and supportive space.

The Situation of Non-Binary People

From the outset of our research on differences and inequalities in women's and men's chances of pursuing an academic career in higher artistic education, we were aware of the limitations of the male-female dichotomy given the complexity of students' gender identities: asking questions about women and men could exclude people who define their gender differently. Yet the basic subject of our study remains a comparison of women's opportunities and experiences with those of men. To solve this dilemma, we decided to alter some of the survey questions used in 2015 so that non-binary participants could also talk about their experiences. We added appropriate options in the **demographic section** and in some answer choices. As it turned out, around 8% of all participants in the study used this option, of which about 75% were women and about 17% men.

Since this group was included only in the 2025 study, comparisons over time are not possible. Unlike in the part of the report concerning women and men, we do not present comparisons of answers by gender here, for two reasons. Firstly, comparing non-binary people only with women or only men could reproduce a binary logic of gender, or imply that such people are positioned somewhere between two genders, rather than recognising the distinctiveness of this category. Secondly, the relatively small group of non-binary people in the study would make any statistical differences unstable and susceptible to overinterpretation.

We therefore decided to treat non-binary people separately, while also recognising the need to conduct further research designed to capture their experiences more fully. Below, we discuss those aspects of the situation of non-binary people that are crucial for our study, namely: professional plans and priorities, experience with support and exposure to sexist and violent behaviours, and knowledge and perceptions of academy equality policies.

We begin by noting that, as with women and men, we also asked non-binary people how attractive they found the work of teacher in their field of study. As it turned out, for non-binary people overall, the

prospect is rather attractive, as indicated by the average response value of 4.44 on a scale from 1 to 7.

The absence of clear differences between the answers of first-year students and those in higher years may suggest that experience of academy does not significantly affect their assessment of teaching one way or the other.

Figure 18. Assessment of the attractiveness of the academic teaching profession from the perspective of non-binary people



Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means that the teaching profession is “completely unattractive” and 7 means “extremely attractive”. The question was answered by 47 first-year students and 51 higher-year students.

The results indicate that non-binary people quite often imagine their future as active artists or in professions related to art, and less often aspire to an academic career. Comparing what is desired with what is regarded as realistic reveals the greatest ‘gap’ in relation to artistic activity: participants have dreams, but are aware that they may be difficult to realise. Regarding work unrelated to art, the opposite holds true: this is seen as the least desirable outcome, but the most probable one. It is also worth noting that assistantships are not commonly aspired to, and are thought of as particularly difficult to obtain. This may illustrate the mechanism of rationalisation discussed earlier: a person devalues a path that seems out of reach, thereby distancing themselves from an academic career.

This configuration of results may stem from overlapping structural, social and biographical factors that affect non-binary people functioning in the fields of art and higher education in particular ways. Firstly, both the artistic and academic environments, though often perceived as progressive, remain strongly hierarchical, based on informal networks of relationships and a ‘culture of access’ grounded in social and symbolic capital that non-binary people may find more difficult to acquire or monetise. Secondly, the lack of stable forms of employment – especially in art and at the early stages of an academic career – may be perceived as even riskier by people who do not fit dominant gender norms and who, as a result, more often experience discrimination, microaggression, or invisibility. Thirdly, moving abroad or pursuing a career abroad, although considered attractive, requires financial, linguistic and social resources that are not distributed equally and often depend on family support – support that non-binary people often lack due to strained relationships and not being accepted. Finally, work outside

art may be perceived as more realistic because it constitutes a “survival plan” in conditions of a professionally unstable cultural labour market. Non-binary people may see art as a space for expressing identity and emancipation, but at the same time are learning to calculate risk and anticipate the need to move away from their desired path in the name of material security, stability, and a lower level of exposure to identity-based judgment.

Legend. Responses on an ordinal scale, where 1 means the “least desired/probable” option and 7 means the “most desired/probable” option. Where the difference is positive, this indicates a situation of “I would like to, but it is not very realistic”; where the difference is negative, it indicates a situation of “I would not like to, but it is realistic”. Depending on the item, the question was answered by between 90 and 100 people.

Table 25. Differences between desired and probable variants of career paths among non-binary people

Variant	Desired	Probable	Difference
Further studies at my academy	3.46	3.48	-0.02
Further studies at another academy in Poland	3.11	3.11	0.00
Further studies at a foreign academy	3.19	2.48	0.71
Assistantship / employment at my academy	3.32	2.61	0.71
Assistantship / employment at another academy in Poland	3.04	2.19	0.85
Assistantship / employment at a foreign academy	2.93	1.84	1.09
Being an active artist	5.89	4.77	1.12
Other work in a profession related to art	5.75	5.28	0.47
Work unrelated to art	2.48	4.58	-2.10
Taking care of family	2.45	2.50	-0.05
Changing profession	1.93	2.24	-0.31

To better understand the career paths non-binary people prefer, and the place they occupy at art academies, we analysed the extent to which what they expect from their work (‘What is important to you in your future professional work?’) is connected with what they believe work at an art academy offers (‘What, in your opinion, most motivates people to take up work at an art academy?’). The most important factors for non-binary people turned out to be stability and job security, the absence of tension and stress, and opportunities to develop. Comparing these answers with possible motivations for working at an art academy makes it easier to understand participants’ moderate willingness to pursue an academic career: the most common motivations are the possibility of expanding social and professional networks and the possibility of personal growth, whereas the values prioritised by non-binary people (stability, absence of stress) are less likely to push in that direction.

In interpreting these data, note that non-binary people understand academic work as a space that offers development, prestige, and inclusion

in a network of professional relationships, but does not correspond to the values related to well-being that they most desire: predictability, balance and security. These are not guaranteed by an academy position – an indication that the academy may be a symbolically attractive environment, but one involving emotional and organisational costs that may be particularly significant for people belonging to a minority group. ‘Usefulness to others’ was rated the lowest, both as a value in future professional work (14%) and as a motivation for taking up work at an academy (23%). This may suggest that non-binary people do not consider academic work a mission, or a service-oriented field. It is also possible that the very idea of usefulness, which is often associated with traditional care roles and altruistic attitudes, does not resonate with the experiences of people who, in institutional relationships, may more often require support themselves. Or, it may reflect an awareness that tasks connected with care, support, or accompanying others are not always clearly appreciated or rewarded within academy structures. In this sense, the low score may not necessarily mean that this value is insignificant for participants, simply that they have a realistic perception of which aspects of academic work are, in practice, emphasised and rewarded.

To better understand how non-binary people perceive an academic career, we also asked to what extent selected factors determine whether a person might take up a teaching position in their field of study. The most important factor was competence, including a good education, with a mean response value of 3.76 on a scale from 1 to 5; professional experience was also important (3.41), followed by hard, persistent work (3.26) and teaching skills (3.19). Social capital, especially social contacts, were also significant (3.67). Graduating from the academy to which one is applying was moderately important (2.94), while coming from the right family (2.04) and having an affair with an influential person (1.89) were considered rather unimportant. Among personal characteristics, being an able-bodied person (2.99) and of Polish nationality (2.64) were considered moderately important. Among identity-related characteristics, being a man was rated as rather unimportant (2.48), being a heteronormative person less so (2.07), being a woman still less so (1.76), and appearance was ranked the lowest (1.74). The non-binary participants also acknowledged the importance of chance (3.13).

It is worth noting that the moderately high importance attributed to a ‘fortunate coincidence of circumstances’ and to ‘social contacts’ indicates an awareness of the existence of informal, not always predictable mechanisms that can affect one’s academic career path. Moreover, ‘regularly showing one’s work’ (3.06) was considered almost as important as teaching skills or persistent work, which indicates a perception that success in an academic career comes not only from competence and effort, but also from being active in artistic circles – being visible, having a presence,

maintaining networks of relationships. These factors may make people cautious about whether they will actually be able to follow such a path – especially people, because of their identity, are more often marginalised, and do not always have full access to these informal circles and resources.

Legend. Percentage distributions comparing students' professional priorities with those that, in their view, motivate people to work at an academy (N = 100).

Table 26. Priorities in the future professional work of non-binary people

Type of value	Important in professional work	Motivates people to work at an academy
Stability and job security	56%	21%
High degree of independence	23%	21%
Work consistent with one's qualifications	18%	24%
Absence of tensions and stress	49%	11%
High earnings	27%	3%
Time for family life	24%	3%
Opportunities for development	36%	55%
Career and recognition	17%	31%
Network of social and professional contacts	22%	63%
Usefulness to others	14%	23%

As with women and men, it is worth paying attention to the positive encouragement that non-binary people receive from those teaching in their field of study. The most frequently indicated form of support was professional or artistic advice, mentioned by more than half of the non-binary students in the study. In second place came invitations to extracurricular meetings and trips, while the remaining forms of support concerned roughly every fourth or fifth person. An exception was help in obtaining an assistantship – only one in 20 people reported having had a conversation about staying at the academy.

The above observations suggest that non-binary people are included in circles of mentoring and social relationships, but only to a limited extent and not necessarily in ways that open the door to becoming formally anchored in academia. It is also worth asking to what extent the low support for obtaining an assistantship results from a lack of such offers, or from a lack of expressed interest. The idea of remaining at the academy may have symbolic appeal, but may not be seen as a realistic or desirable career path. Non-binary people may be less likely to signal their desire to continue working at the academy because this requires resources they have limited access to. Or teachers may not offer such support if they consider assistantships fraught with uncertainty, or simply inadequate to the profile of a given student. In other words, low institutional support may result from decisions by students and by female and male lecturers, meaning that potentially “staying at the academy” is a general possibility more than a concrete option actively pursued.

Legend. The table presents students (N = 99) in their second or higher year of study (long-cycle, bachelor's and master's programmes) who reported experiencing the indicated forms of support from at least one teacher, regardless of that person's gender.

Table 27. Types of support that non-binary people received from teachers

	Percentage of respondents selecting the item
Professional or artistic advice	56%
Help in obtaining work or a commission	17%
Help in obtaining an assistantship/employment at the academy	5%
References	19%
Invitation to extracurricular meetings/trips	36%
Close bond and individual care	25%
Introduction to an art circle	22%
Support in a difficult personal situation	21%

Non-binary people, like all participants in our study, also answered questions that made it possible to assess the extent to which they are exposed to negative stimuli, including how often they experienced sexist and violent behaviours from teachers. Roughly one in three had heard at least once a comment about their predisposition to perform work requiring precision or creativity – which need not be received pejoratively. What is concerning, however, is that one in five had experienced manifestations of dislike or hostility, or unwanted comments about their body. A few people reported unwanted behaviours of a sexual nature and erotic propositions – only a few, but still too many, because every such situation is one too many. These data suggest that non-binary people function in an environment in which support and symbolic violence may coexist, and in which relationships between peers and teachers, while potentially developmental, also carry the risk of inequality and boundary violations.

Legend. The table presents students (N = 100) in their second or higher year of study (long-cycle, bachelor's and master's programmes) who reported personally experiencing the comments or behaviours indicated in the table from at least one person teaching classes, regardless of that person's gender.

Tabela 28. Declared experiences of sexist and violent comments or behaviours from teachers

	Percentage of respondents selecting the item
Comment on predisposition for work requiring precision	33%
Comment on predisposition for work requiring creativity	25%
Comment on the need to put family before professional work	8%
Comment or behaviour indicating dislike or hostility	19%
Unwanted comment concerning appearance, the body, or erotic matters	17%
Erotic propositions	3%
Unwanted sexual behaviours	3%

The final area of non-binary students' experiences discussed in the report concerns awareness of and knowledge about equal treatment at the academy where they study, as well as observations on the spread of good

practices in this area at Polish academies. The average answers, given on a five-point scale, concerning the level of identification with the statement ‘I know what the idea of equal treatment at the academy consists of’, give grounds for moderate optimism: overall, participants tend to have such knowledge. The situation is worse, however, when it comes to knowing where to report a violation of rights, with a mean of 3.43.

Legend. The table presents the mean responses of students (N = 93–94) on a five-point ordinal scale, where 1 indicates ‘I strongly disagree’ and 5 indicates ‘I strongly agree’.

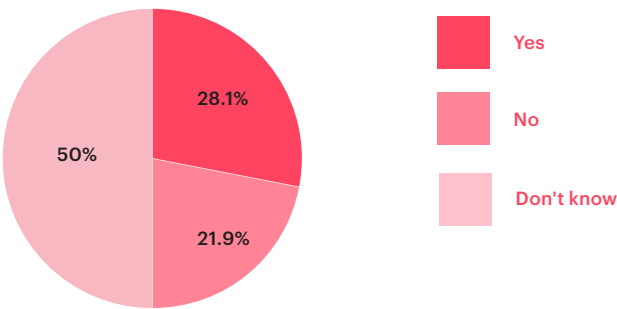
Table 29. Awareness of principles concerning equal treatment rights among non-binary people

	Mean
I know what the idea of equal treatment at the academy consists of	4.16
I know where to report it if my rights are violated at the academy	3.43

We deepened the above findings by asking the question: ‘Are there solutions at your academy that counteract gender-based discrimination?’ Around one quarter of participants answered this question affirmatively, one in five negatively. The most striking finding is that as many as half of the non-binary participants selected the answer ‘I don’t know’.

Legend. There was a high level of missing data for this question; only 64 non-binary people provided answers, that is, roughly two-thirds of those who took part in the study.

Figure 19. Knowledge of solutions counteracting discrimination among non-binary people



We were also interested in whether non-binary people notice changes for the better in gender equality at art academies, where they study or more generally. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with selected statements on a five-point scale (1–5). Their perceptions were moderately positive, as indicated by an average response of 3.5 regarding whether greater attention is now being paid to issues of gender equality and violent behaviours. The results regarding changes observed at the participant’s academy were less encouraging: teachers’ use of inclusive language, and whether information was provided on the life and work of female artists and educators, had means of 3.56 and 3.43, respectively. Responses to complaints about inappropriate teacher behaviour were assessed quite poorly (2.97), as was the inclusion of feminism and gender equality in the curriculum (3.08). The lowest score from non-binary people was given to the implementation of mentoring programmes and similar activities supporting women’s self-confidence (2.3).



Kalina Kazimierczak

Open Secret, performance,
documentation, 2023,
courtesy of the artist

These results paint a picture of an academy that professes concern for equality but does not fully translate that concern into institutional practice and long-term support. This is perhaps because the most easily noticeable changes (introducing inclusive language or symbolic gestures, devoting more attention to women in the history of art) cost little, can be implemented from the bottom up, and do not require a deep restructuring of institutional structures. By contrast, systemic measures (responding effectively to complaints, including equality-related content in curricula, or creating permanent mentoring programmes) require time, resources, formal procedures, and a shift in decision-making power, any of which may encounter resistance. From this perspective, declarations and visible gestures are steps forward, but insufficient without concrete procedures and programmes in place that guarantee equality in the everyday functioning of the academy.

Legend. The table shows the mean responses of students on a five-point ordinal scale, where 1 indicates 'I strongly disagree' and 5 indicates 'I strongly agree'. Depending on the statement, between 60 and 80 participants responded.

Table 30. Equality, safety and inclusiveness at academies — the perspective of non-binary people

In recent years...	Mean
greater attention has been paid to gender equality issues	3.73
greater attention has been paid to violent behaviours, such as mobbing, harassment, etc.	3.49
the curriculum includes topics related to feminism and gender equality	3.08
there are mentoring programmes and other activities supporting women's self-confidence	2.30
the memory of female artists and female educators is cultivated	3.43
complaints concerning inappropriate behaviour by teachers are responded to	2.97
people teaching classes take requests to use equality-sensitive language into account	3.56

More information would be needed to describe exactly what experiences and strategies underlie non-binary participants' responses, and to resolve the ambivalences indicated above regarding a career at an art academy, the support provided for considering such a choice, and opinions on academy equality policies. Given the scope of our research, the qualitative phase included only the perspectives of women and men. Further research is needed to better capture of the perspectives of non-binary people and thereby gain a more complete understanding of the mechanisms underlying their decisions about whether to pursue an academic career at an art academy.

Analysis by:
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Maciej Frąckowiak
Bogna Kietlińska-Radwańska (in the section concerning the situation of non-binary people)
Marek Krajewski

Qualitative Research Findings



Foreword

The following section of the report sets out the most important findings from the interviews we conducted to complement our analyses of the quantitative data. Combining various data collection methods makes it possible to verify, supplement and present findings in different ways. The interviews with members of the academic community did not so much enable us to learn about the prevalence of certain phenomena as to see how they are understood and experienced within academia.

We compare the perspectives of people studying and working at academies of fine arts. Such a comparison is significant in that it allows us to observe how the conditions shaping women's careers persist and change across generations, at different stages of their presence within academic structures – and how they are transmitted and contested depending on creative and scholarly development. The interviews also give an overview of the realities of studying, collaborating, and



Agnieszka Basak-Wysota
Heads, soft sewn object
(pillow, bandage, yarns,
fabric, thread), 2023,
courtesy of the artist

being promoted at Polish academies of fine arts, thus revealing the role gender-based differences and inequalities play in this context, and the circumstances in which they manifest.

We use the term interviews because we did, in fact, conduct conversations using the so-called individual, in-depth, and structured **qualitative interview** technique, meaning that the interviews were conducted in person, with the conversations led by trained female researchers who asked questions according to a scenario to facilitate making comparisons, although, of course, the interviewers adapting the wording of their questions to the dynamics of a given conversation, exploring key themes in greater depth.

During the summer holiday period of 2025, we conducted 48 interviews at six selected academic centres in Poland, eight interviews in each centre: four with people studying (a woman and a man in the first and final years of study) and four with people teaching (a female and a male assistant, as well as a female and a male professor). This allowed us to capture the diversity of both local academic centres and biographical experiences, with time as the axis and gender as the perspective. We also controlled the sample with regard to the disciplines represented by female and male interviewees. Each interview lasted from one and a half to two hours, and was then transcribed, anonymised and processed using qualitative analysis software.

When deciding on the order in which to present the analyses, we retained the sequence in which particular issues were discussed during the interviews, but also sought to convey the complexity of and connections between the experiences recounted. We also felt it was important that the order of the themes discussed should correspond, as far as possible, to the order in the section on the quantitative findings.

We discuss how studying or an academic career is viewed at various stages, what emotions accompany these paths, which supportive and unsupportive relationships form in the academy environment on different occasions, and how many of these relationships are violent and boundary-crossing. We then write about the importance of personal appearance in the assessment process, as well as other resources and forms of capital that may strengthen or weaken the role gender plays in differentiating academic experiences. The final section describes opinions on measures taken by academies to ensure equal opportunity regardless of gender.

Finally, two technical remarks. First, to make it easier to engage with the content of the extensive analyses, we have included a brief *résumé* at the beginning of each chapter. Second, in order to comply with the arrangements concerning anonymisation, when identifying the interviews we do not name the cities, only the gender and stage of study or academic career of the people quoted.

Aspirations and Career

Student and staff accounts of remaining at the academy describe not just personal success, but also chance, dependence on others, discretionary evaluation of achievements, an unequal division of organisational work, and the difficulties faced by women, who may have plans for development similar to those of men, but make different assessments about their chances of achieving them. Among the less obvious qualities needed in an academic career at an art academy, pedagogical preparation is mentioned as particularly important. It is not taught, yet the specific types of students encountered and their creative work require a high degree of empathy and emotional intelligence. Working at an academy requires balancing different tasks and spheres of life: one must find time for artistic and scholarly development amid “office” work, family obligations and additional paid work, and these often adversely affect women’s promotions and plans for parenthood. An analysis of the statements made on recruitment for assistant positions and the transfer of managerial roles reveals a certain ambivalence in the support given to “selected” female and male candidates by those running studios – an attitude that evolves alongside the master-apprentice system at academies. Gender as a recruitment criterion is still sometimes invoked for availability and physical characteristics (such as strength), but attention is also drawn to the growing importance of parity-based and equality-oriented thinking.

This section of the study summarises the interview findings on perceptions and experiences related to recruitment, promotion, and the factors attributed to success. Juxtaposing the statements of people at different stages of their studies or professional career allows us to observe which opinions are universal, and which change along with one's position in the academic structure, or generationally.

The chapter is divided into five parts. The first – *The Academy as a Place of Development and Sustaining Artistic Practice* – covers people's motivations and circumstances when entering the structures of art academies. The second – *The Path of Promotion at the Academy: Students' Perceptions and Employees' Experiences* – examine how a 'career' is understood and pursued, and how this depends on the academy's organisational culture. In the third part – *Qualities Needed in an Academic Career* – we indicate which competences, skills and forms of capital students and employees – women and men – consider key to promotion. The fourth – *Balance in an Academic Career: Academy Duties and Creative Activity, Family Obligations, and Earnings Outside the Academy* – describes strategies for reconciling responsibilities and their impact on professional development. The fifth and final part looks at changing approaches to recruitment procedures for assistant positions, and how female and male successors are considered. This reference to the future closes our description of the rules governing how the academic field progresses in terms of gender and the experience of people participating in these processes at Polish academies of fine arts.

The Academy as a Place of Developing and Sustaining Artistic Practice

We asked people studying at art academies about why they chose this field of education. Some told us about their having been interested in creative activity from early childhood, or wanting to continue on from their high school experiences in the fine arts, which made the decision to apply to an art academy "natural". A second group took a more indirect path. These were people studying in technical or social-science fields who at some stage began to look for an alternative – one that would allow them to express themselves, develop an enthusiasm for art or artistic media, or acquire skills in pursuing their activist goals more effectively.

In these conversations, we asked what else might encourage people to so decide. The answers also suggest a gender dimension, most often in the context of the numerical predominance of women at art academies. The interviewees referred to the social perception of artistic studies as more "feminine," as opposed to technical or exact-science fields.

For a larger number of men, it may probably seem more masculine, or in that way I think they may think to themselves: damn, an art academy, that this is not really a place for them.

(First-year male student)

The “unmasculinity” of artistic fields would also consist in their commonly being associated with greater sensitivity – and their not guaranteeing financial stability. As a result, as the above first-year student put it, “men more often feel that they have to force themselves to make a pragmatic choice”. Thus, an art academy becomes a place that reproduces these stereotypes. It can also allow them to be questioned at a certain stage of life, as was the case with one first-year student who went to academy later than most because, although early on he had been interested in drawing and the theatre, he had given them up because he considered them “impractical.”

Exploring the theme of the academy as a place where artistic practice is developed and sustained, we also asked our female and male interviewees whether they were considering remaining there after completing their studies. Some of them were very clear on this: one fifth-year female student said that from the beginning of her studies she had been planning to pursue a doctorate. An academic career often looks like a good way of developing one’s passion free from market constraints, a “tempting option” of stable employment, or – as a first-year student put it – a likely plan B in the event it proves impossible to make a living solely from creative work. At the same time, such plans often include the question of how feasible they are: whether any positions will be available upon graduation, or whether one needs to gain more experience outside and only then return to the academy.

The idea of remaining at the academy was, in fact, not widespread in the group we studied. Those reluctant to do so cited excessive bureaucracy and other duties that would draw them away from their artistic practice. Some were discouraged from trying to become a female or male assistant by their observations of how they are sometimes treated – in terms of social insecurity and economic instability, but also the ability to make decisions. One first-year student shared the observation: “In most cases, it doesn’t look as though an assistant has anything to say.”

We were also given other reasons why students would prefer to fulfil themselves outside academia: a lack of competence for teaching work, or a stronger desire to realise themselves as an independent artist selling their own works, on staff in a cultural institution, or working in theatre, film or fashion.

Working at academies is not exactly the best job; it is often associated with many duties that completely divert attention away from artistic practice.

(First-year male student)

The motivations of female and male students planning to remain at their academy are largely similar to those of those already employed there. Those who stayed were often guided by the desire to continue their own artistic work: the academy seemed conducive to independent and experimental art, outside the commercial mainstream. Others desired social and financial stability. In some cases, a person discovered during their studies that they had a predisposition for teaching (e.g. when sharing observations or supporting female and male colleagues), or was inspired by a role model.

I encountered people along my path who made me decide to stay at the academy, to put down roots here and continue, because people who open your mind are a wonderful thing.

(Female assistant)

We also asked people already working at academies about what had made that possible for them. Many of them mentioned coincidence or chance circumstances, such as: a professor retired, which allowed the existing assistant to be promoted and opened up a place for another person in the studio; a new studio or department was established; competencies emerged related to new rules for evaluating academies. Experience and skills were also mentioned as important. These included professional achievements, such as an established artistic reputation or a particularly successful diploma project. Soft skills and diligence, demonstrated during studies and noticed by staff, also played an important role.

We simply, while working on various projects, were able to spend whole days practically without leaving the place, almost to the point of pushing that equipment, which was also very poor at the time, to the limit of its capacity, so that everything became so overheated that it was impossible to continue working on it.

(Male professor)

When discussing the circumstances of employment, people working at academies spoke about the importance of support and mentoring. The roles of female and male professors, for example, consist in encouraging people to consider the very possibility of working at an academy. One assistant recalled how a professor convinced him of the positive aspects of this, which turned out to be true. Support could also consist in recommending a female student to superiors, as indicated by a female assistant who recounted how a professor fought for her to be hired, as justified by her outstanding diploma project. Emotional support was also sometimes mentioned as important (e.g., trust, devoting time during periods of mental crisis), as was being entrusted with

certain tasks at academy. Finally, less binding forms of help could also be useful, such as receiving information from an acquaintance working at the academy about a competition for a position. In this context, it is also worth noting accounts that indicate the effectiveness of strategies beyond waiting for offers.

I went and said that it seemed to me that I would be useful at this school, because I know how to weave, and no one here does; I had written this thesis, she had taught me how to weave, and I was simply suited to it, perhaps she could find something for me.
(Female professor)

The above quotation points to the importance of initiative in women's academic careers, but it should not obscure the broader findings concerning the cultural and organisational conditions of work at academies of fine arts. Our conversations with people studying or employed at academies indicate that gender plays a significant role at the stage of choosing the field, while being able to continue in it depends on visibility, the ability to build relationships, and the presence of people ready to support a candidacy at the right moment. In the following sections of the report, we show that gender also matters at later stages of a career.

Promotion at the Academy: Students' Perceptions and Employees' Experiences

Female and male students described their perceptions of a scholarly career – from an assistantship burdened with challenges, to relative stabilisation after obtaining a doctoral degree, to running a specialised studio (possible for people with high qualifications who previously apprenticed in other studios). Some students, however, indicated that their respect for a teacher does not depend on what titles they hold. What matters more is what they can contribute, and – as a fifth-year female student explained – people with only a master's degree are often more approachable and more up to date.

It is worth noting that students often experience didactic, organisational and care-related engagement from people in lower positions within the academy's structure. For example, female and male employees who devote considerable attention to these areas, perhaps at the expense of faster promotion.

Regarding the challenges of academic work, female and male students also spoke about the role of chance: it is difficult to plan promotion when it depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time. They also noted the dominance of men in the highest positions, seeing it as the result of historical processes which nevertheless continue to have consequences.

A first-year student observed, for example: “Yes, they are ageing, and thinking is already changing among people in general, but we nevertheless live according to their way of thinking.” Characteristically, this is an observation not just about obstacles to promotion, but also their effects: in inter-generational contact, among those with the most experience there is a lack of women – who could serve as a different type of role model.

Female and male employees also pointed to the theme of uncertainty accompanying the first years of employment. They spoke of contract work, part-time positions, or contracts expiring during the holiday period (which forces people to look for support outside the academy, making it more difficult to concentrate on duties and plans for scholarly and artistic development). This period was recalled as a stressful time in which one had to prove one’s usefulness. One female professor said that, at the time, she constantly felt “on the way out,” and that she experienced the consequences of unfair competition when the son of another professor received a position sooner than she did. This statement emphasises women’s experience of marginalisation, which also comes out in the emphasis they put on having survived difficult conditions. Conditions which – as some interviewees recounted with bitterness – fostered not only uncertainty, but also self-exploitation.

At the beginning, one must be a professor’s slave, that is, an assistant; if this male or female slave proves themselves, they are selected for a doctorate, and then on it goes from there.

(Male professor)

For those who have obtained a long-term contract, the possibility arises of pursuing further academic degrees and titles; the change in position intensifies thinking about habilitation – which, of course, creates a need to accumulate achievements. In our analysis, though, we were more interested in the challenges that accompany this at an art academy.

In all, there was the Gowin reform, when all those habilitations went through. The kind where people were carrying things around in briefcases, and I decided that, since my second child had just been born, I simply could not do it.

(Male assistant)

Becoming promoted can also be more difficult due to organisational work, and work performed on others’ behalf: administrative duties, academy bureaucracy, scholarly reporting, organising events and projects with students in mind. As we heard, such work is usually imposed on people with less seniority, especially women, and on both female and male employees, as a “reward” for their earlier effectiveness.

**So quite a lot of this fell on me, especially last year.
And I felt it. And I know it doesn't fall on everyone, but they
probably decided I was managing, so they took advantage of it.**

(Female assistant)

Organisational work can thus form a loop of obligations from which people in lower positions are hard-pressed to break free – especially since taking on such tasks makes it harder for them to be promoted. One professor said he refused administrative work because he had not become an artist to “play at office work.” A female professor pointed out that, over time, not earning further degrees and titles limits one to a teaching position, with a lower salary and no chance of running a studio at the academy.

Women speak about the process of being promoted in a characteristic way. They speak less often than men about obtaining further degrees, and more often about their struggle for independence and prestige. Some of them described feeling a lack of acceptance for their initiatives and achievements, where only very significant, impossible-to-ignore successes led to their opinions being taken seriously. Others pointed to being passed over for promotion.

**It was simply an ideal arrangement, ideal for the men, not necessarily
for me, at the point when I had also completed my doctorate and
habilitation and would finally like to break out of this arrangement
a little and work on my own account, because I believed I'd
simply deserved it and worked for it. But it turns out that this
arrangement is so strong that it's impossible to break through.**

(Female professor)

Unequal access to positions, the allocation of less prestigious tasks and the need to demonstrate greater commitment are only some of the problems women raised in the interviews. They also spoke about the phenomenon of ‘simulated equal opportunity’, such as when mixed and partnership-based studios turn out to be such only on paper, not in terms of actual responsibilities, leading to an unequal distribution of rewards and costs, burnout, or having to give up on ambitious goals. Scenarios for weakening a culture that disadvantages women also appeared in the interviews, although many people associate this process primarily with staff turnover.

**When we, men, start dropping out and dying of heart attacks and
hypertension, or simply retiring, then my female colleagues will
constitute the majority, because that is how the structure is arranged.**

(Male professor)

To better understand the specificity of promotion paths at an art academy, we also asked interviewees about their plans for an academy career. As it turned out, in this respect, the experiences of women and men working at the academy do not differ fundamentally. Although in the conversations men devoted more attention to this issue, women also expressed a desire to obtain academic degrees, to exhibit, publish, organise fields of study and curricula, or increase their teaching competencies.

Of interest in this context were further questions about what might limit these plans from coming to fruition. In addition to the difficulty of reconciling scholarly and artistic work with organisational obligations, challenges related to parenthood and the underfunding of academies, cuts to positions to make savings were also mentioned. In light of the above findings on how people are burdened with bureaucracy, it can unfortunately be assumed that it is more difficult for women to achieve their goals – which also explains why they mentioned such limitations more often than the male interviewees.

Finally, in this section it is worth mentioning people who fell away from the academy path because of low and unstable earnings, an overload of organisational duties, or because they found they could earn a living as an artist (or through creative activity) outside the academy. We heard about a woman who resigned from work at the academy because she did not want to make tea for a professor, or about a man who, after the birth of his child, made an economic calculation and decided that, instead of waiting for an academy position, he would “go to work.” Interestingly, our conversations indicate that, when looking for certain regularities, generational factors seem to explain more than gender why people give up academy work.

Gen Z does not care about position or prestige. And three people have already, as it were, stopped wanting it, while on contracts; no one was giving them a position. But they didn't want to continue working on contracts after a year or two. And they will simply look for something else. In the past, this was unthinkable. The prestige of the Academy settled everything. Now, all of that has changed.

(Female professor)

In summary, it is worth noting that, while women and men pass through the same degrees and positions formally, and while both face the same challenges typical of academies of fine arts (employment insecurity, the need to parametrise artistic achievements in a scholarly manner, the struggle with bureaucracy, etc.), both employees and students noticed differences in the ways in which women and men pursue their goals and the difficulties they come up against. Employees and students pointed to the dominance of men in higher positions and, by extension,

to the career models they represent. In interpreting our findings, we sought to highlight ways of speaking about experiences or plans for promotion that are characteristic of women, in which the struggle for autonomy and recognition is evident, as is the risk of being overloaded with organisational duties.

Qualities Needed in an Academic Career

The people we spoke with listed artistic competencies and recognition within the field as key to academic promotion. These are built up by participating in exhibitions and competitions (especially those outside the academy), and by having the overall ability to create things that are new, original and fresh, which also requires, as one female professor pointed out, knowledge, especially today, when art “is based on contexts, [...] one has to be able to think panoramically, that is, to grasp different kinds of points, but in order to grasp these points, one has to have a library in one’s head.” We also heard how important the ability is to pass on artistic technique to young female and male adepts of the profession.

But, although not everyone shares my view, they should also be a good artist. [...] A bad craftsman cannot teach shoemaking, unlike a good one, and it is similar with artists. A good artist, in my opinion, has competencies that they can pass on; a bad artist does not have these competencies, so how can they know what to pass on?

(Male professor)

In an academic career, didactic and pedagogical competencies are also needed. “A person working at an academy must have predispositions for working with people,” one professor observes, adding that this is by no means obvious, because it sometimes happens that people are employed mainly on the basis of their artistic achievements, without much attention being paid to whether they will cope with dealing with people. Students and the youngest employees also emphasised the role of such skills, and the lack of pedagogical preparation in doctoral schools. For them, it is important not only to be able to convey artistic technique or to inspire, which requires passion and commitment, but also, as one female professor noted, to empathise with students and understand the ideas they have. The female assistant said that the work involves dealing with people who bring various problems to the academy and express them in their work. Both the women and men with teaching experience said that maturity and emotional intelligence are needed.

Organisational and managerial competences were also mentioned – those that enable one to coordinate events efficiently, navigate the circuits of the art market, obtain funding, and move about consciously in artistic networks. Then there were consistency and determination:

having clear goals helps make it possible to achieve them, obtain further academic degrees, and overcome difficulties. There were also occasions to discuss self-discipline in another dimension.

I observed the degeneration of colleagues: alcoholism, drug addiction, neuroses, and so on. Because I did not want to end up like them, I took care of my mental hygiene. Accordingly, I fought against envy; I did not let those negative elements that cause such people to become ill in one way or another to get a foot in the door.

(Male professor)

The conversation about promotion within the academy's structure was also often a conversation about capital. We mention this here, as well, to avoid giving the impression that career progress depends solely on chance, predispositions, or skills. The role of financial support from family or a partner, access to housing, and acquaintances or "connections" in the academic environment were also recognised.

Our data do not suggest that women are more likely than men to indicate specific qualities as effective in gaining promotion. Most of the respondents also distanced themselves from stereotypes linking qualities (emotionality, a tendency to compromise, assertiveness or directness) to femininity or masculinity. Instead, they related them to their own experiences of contact with different people at the academy. They had experienced an individualised, sensitive approach from both men and women, and associated these qualities primarily with the individual personalities of teachers or colleagues.

One exception is self-confidence, which was observed less often among the women participating in the interviews. The context is important, however. A fifth-year female student observed, for example, that "self-confidence not supported by what they do [...], by artistic evidence, comes more easily to men". In turn, a fifth-year male student, commenting on the modest number of women on staff, mentioned that women "do not yet have the confidence to express such sharp criticism so openly, that all of this is still, I feel, a little too polite, because it is as if there were always someone above them, some professor who in some way did not allow it and suppressed their opinions". A type of self-confidence specific to women working at art academies was also noted by the female assistant we spoke with, who described how the need to overcome difficulties and deal with stereotypes prepares one for intensive work.

I think we possess a kind of strength that men do not possess. And that once we step in, it will really be great. Here and even for the whole world. Of course, yes. Absolutely, for the whole world. Why not? It's a wonderful vision. Truly. Because we are so motivated, mobilised,

and there really is in us a striving towards a goal; it is not over dead bodies, but through tremendous effort, tremendous commitment, and tremendous ambition towards a goal. Simply. Because we are precisely these women, these little women, we have to do things well to show them that we are as good as they are. And we do not have to perform those strange, peacock-like movements and generally dance some mating dances. We simply go after our goals.

(Female assistant)

This quotation, which speaks of a kind of strength and internal motivation specific to women, aptly summarises the key findings of this part of the study. The qualities considered necessary for career success include personality traits and forms of capital not directly identified with gender, but also belief in one's own abilities, and for women more often than men this seems to be acquired by overcoming challenges rather than attributed in advance.

Balance in an Academic Career: Academy Duties and Creative Activity, Family Obligations, Earnings Outside the Academy

In analysing the research material, we noted a recurrent theme of seeking to strike a balance between what lies within the academy and outside it, and of reconciling other tasks that need to be combined with academic activity. For many people, the academy is attractive as a workplace because it provides much-needed social support, a stable location, and motivation for creative activity, rather than an opportunity for self-realisation in another field. However, being overloaded with “office” work may hinder creative work, lead to burnout, resignation or reduced engagement in teaching, or even discourage the generation from wanting to consider an academic career. A fifth-year female student stated that spending eight hours a day talking about art and then returning home to think about your own projects would be a heavy burden, creating conditions for burnout. In some cases, professors may distancing themselves from what they are actually teaching.

These are lectures that rework Wikipedia on a given topic, processed and read from a sheet of paper as quickly as possible to fit into that teaching block and move on to the next class. I am not saying that all professors do this, but I have encountered such a situation, and it seems to me that people like that really do have time.

(First-year male student)

Financial support from the academy for employees' scholarly and artistic activities can rectify this problem, but – as is well known – such

support varies. Under conditions of underfunding, it is more easily obtained by people who have previously been involved in organisational work or hold a higher position in the structure. As a result, the academy benefits from its teachers' artistic activity, but in turn supports that activity mainly by not obstructing it, we were told, by imbuing it with an aura of academic prestige.

An important subject for interviewees was how to combine an academic career with parenthood. Leaving aside those who resigned from the academy, several strategies can be distinguished. Some people, including those who plan to have children but have not had them yet, indicated that organisation is key, and that flexible working hours might make it easier to reconcile academy and domestic responsibilities. This can also be an advantage, we were told, when raising children with disabilities who require care at different times of the day; then flexible working hours can facilitate sharing these duties with a male or female partner. Time organisation may also consist, one interviewee said, in simply being consistent and persevering until the child goes to school. Then there is again more time for studying or creative work.

A second strategy is to renounce motherhood. This was mentioned, for example, by an experienced female professor commenting on the decisions of her younger female colleagues: "All these girls do not want to have children. They have families, but they do not want to have children, and this is their and their husbands' decision." There is nothing wrong with such a decision if it is made freely, but this is not always the case. Some women indicated that it was their professional situation that made them decide not to have children. In other cases, the same conditions might cause others to give up their academy work for parenthood.

I gave up on it... I had been working at the academy for so many years, and I always, as it were, gave it up, because I wondered how it would be possible, how I was supposed to commute [to another city — editor's note] and have a child. So, it was as if the school somewhat forced the situation in which I do not have children.

(Female professor)

Another strategy is to accept having to make a heroic effort. From women who had risen high in the academy hierarchy, we heard that, in the past, the situation was even less conducive to motherhood (there was less tolerance for leave, less partnership-based models of childrearing), yet it was still possible to reconcile those different roles. It may be assumed that, especially for younger parents who commute to work, their accumulated duties completely deprive them of free time. One female professor recounted that, when her child was sleeping during a day, she used that time for writing, and completed her doctorate after six months.

Heroic effort is laudable, but it cannot replace systemic solutions that support a balance between academy and parental responsibilities. Not everyone has the strength to be heroic, children may be more or less demanding in terms of upbringing, and the social backgrounds of those who decide on motherhood or fatherhood while trying to make headway in their career also vary. Days free from academy duties or longer holidays may be beneficial to parenting, but also have their drawbacks – for such periods could otherwise be devoted to scholarly and creative work, bringing one closer to promotion. Furthermore, at the beginning of their career some people have to use such periods for additional paid work or seeking commissions to mitigate the instability of employment at the assistant stage. This usually results in lower pensions for women, who end their professional work with a lower degree or title, or who have held it for fewer years.

From this perspective, some of the remarks made during the interviews are encouraging, such as the one in which a professor stated that things vary – health issues and other matters arise – but nevertheless, despite these difficulties, he believes that a great deal has changed for the better. Those cases where people renounced motherhood or left the academy because of fatherhood suggest, however, that at least in some units (faculties, universities), or within the academy system as a whole, change comes slowly.

In our conversations with academy employees, the subject of combining academy work with external paid work also came up. People in different positions complained about the low salaries, that it was not about living in luxury, but about dignity – being able to support oneself in an assistant's position, support a family, or renovate a house inherited from relatives. Earning money outside the academy is also an opportunity to gain important experience that can enrich teaching and make the assistant more credible in the eyes of students, and to gain more knowledge of the realities of the art market or the creative industry, as evidenced by completed commissions. In the context of conversations about additional paid work, interviewees also drew attention to the risk of taking it on at the expense of artistic activity.

In summary, several findings pointed to a gender difference between female and male academics. Fatherhood did come up in the interviews, but there was more discourse, and a different discourse, on the challenges of motherhood. This encompassed the organisation of time, as well as the life choices that need to be made and the effort involved in making them. At the same time, stories about different situations and varied forms of capital warn against assuming that “where there's a will, there's a way”. Rather, they encourage the search for broader, more systemic forms of support. Despite the modest amount of material in this aspect, it also seems quite symptomatic that while women spoke

somewhat more about the challenges of parenthood, men spoke more about the challenges related to additional paid work. Of course, statements in the other direction also came up, but our overall observation indicates the strength of traditional role divisions and stereotypes.

How Are Female and Male Successors Thought About? How Are They Chosen?

When asked what it takes to be able to remain at the academy, female and male students pointed to engagement during studies. They mentioned the effort put into projects, success in competitions, a good diploma project, but also – as one fifth-year female student noted – the need to “appear at openings, meetings, take part in the life of the academy, in various kinds of student matters.” This last aspect was emphasised as important to the functioning of a system in which people employ people they know, about whose diligence or skills they have some idea, and in which competitions for positions are mostly a formality. This system is sometimes criticised by students as “underground” recruitment that does not necessarily yield good results: people employed directly after graduation, without going through a competition, sometimes perform worse as teachers than people selected through an open call. There was, however, no shortage of statements presenting this in an understanding way.

Obviously, the aspect of how well someone gets along with the staff is important. It matters. But I would not call it some kind of cronyism or anything like that. It is simply an important argument; it is important that such a person should not be in opposition, but should cooperate.

(Fifth-year male student)

When describing this recruitment system based on acquaintance, students also shared their observations on how to make themselves known to female and male lecturers to increase their chance of being employed. They mentioned, in addition to being engaged and visible and having success in competitions and openings, the ability to strike up conversations with teachers and maintain close contact with them, because it is those teachers who, when an opportunity comes up, will help one “get in”, acting, as a fifth-year student put it, as a “crowbar” opening the door to a vacancy. What is also needed is someone who, as a fifth-year female student put it, will give the candidate for an assistantship the “green light.” It is worth noting that such conduct is an expression of “care” for such a candidate, but at the same time acts as a barrier for those who do not participate in this ritual.

We also asked people already working at art academies about formal and informal recruitment criteria and procedures. The rules for

announcing and conducting competitions themselves are regulated by ministerial provisions, while in conversations about formal criteria the role of competences and achievements was most often mentioned. Some female and male employees, however, also spoke of the practice of tailoring the criteria to a specific student already selected by lecturers.

The informal dimension of competitions may also involve the selection of the committee.

It is enough to select the right people who, sincerely and without any pressure, will do what someone wishes, and also to provide additional ways to inform people about them: those already in this team also look for candidates on their own and inform them about the competition. This is a completely informal thing, but a sensible one, because it makes it possible, as it were, to enlarge the pool of candidates.

(Male professor)

Like students, employees also recognise the advantages of formal and informal recruitment procedures for assistant positions. On the one hand, information about competitions is published in advance, and competency assessments are conducted by a committee that often includes people from diverse backgrounds. Yet a significant proportion of the respondents considered that, when hiring for a team, the preferences of the person running the studio should certainly be considered.

Yes, that is, of the person who runs the studio at the academy. This is usually the case; of course there are exceptions to this, but in general that is how it is, and that is how it should be. Unfortunately, when this is not the case, a great deal of harm may later occur for many people. I also knew cases like that, I am not speaking only about this academy, but in general, somewhere else, where the acceptance of someone who was, let us say, artistically excellent was somehow forced, and later it did not work out.

(Male professor)

In reconstructing, together with the interviewees, how recruitment at academies is conducted, it also came up that a “green light” as mentioned above is given to some people more than others. Apart from artistic and didactic potential, the issue of gender was also raised. For example, one female assistant recounted that a certain professor tried to intervene so that a male colleague would be employed before her “to balance the staff” (i.e., the gender ratio). Another person suspected that some professors still hold the stereotype that men are more available in terms of time, and so tend to choose them as assistants, especially in studios where physical strength, arm span, and similar qualities matter. One of the people drawing attention to this said that such preferences

are also held by female professors (sustaining the stereotype in both directions: male assistants are stronger, and female professors are weaker). Many opinions, though, indicated that the above disadvantage women face is changing, or may change. In this context, the role of parity in filling positions was also discussed, as was its role in ensuring equality of opportunity at the stage of employing women and men.

The context for the conversation about the qualities and competencies desired in female and male candidates also included a perceived shrinking pool of choice given that the academy has ceased to be an ennobling and financially attractive place to work. One professor noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult to convince younger people to consider developing themselves by remaining at the academy.

Interested in the promise that emerged in the statements of a changing attitude towards women advancing at academies, and at the same time aware of the barriers awaiting them at later stages of their career, we asked our female and male interviewees whether they think about their female and male successors – not only in assistant positions, but also in the role of people running studios. The respondents spoke mainly of their “protégés.” Four people – two female and two male professors – also addressed the question of what they would like to pass on to their successors. The sample was too small to draw far-reaching conclusions, but it is difficult to resist having the impression that the kind of legacy being passed on bears the traces of a given professor’s own experiences, which differ between women and men.

The first of the female professors drew attention to a fair and open way of managing a team: “This was planned, there was a division of duties: who carried it out, who did not carry it out, who is excellent, and who needs to improve.” The second spoke about the need for a vision concerning the profile of graduate education and the need to be ready to defend it: “What do I expect from this person? Well, all of what I tried to do over the years, that is [...] that she should have quite a strong character.” As she added: “because, to put it briefly, here, at male academies, it is very, very difficult. And one simply has to remain all the time in the position of some stupid petitioner, which is awful.” The two male professors approached this issue in somewhat different ways. One of them stated that he had nothing to pass on, because he and his collaborator are equal partners. The other saw the idea of a successor as part of a declining master-apprentice model, and added: “I think that completely different people with completely different skills will simply be needed, in a completely different context, and my experience will be of no use to them.”

In talking about successors, some described the end of the master-apprentice system in another sense: it is no longer obvious that a position can be ‘inherited’, as there is a change in the balance of power. The academy no longer adheres to the old rules of transferring positions.

I don't want it to sound that final, either, that the professor decides that's the way it's going to be, and that's it. That doesn't happen all that often. And those are games, academy politics.

(Male professor)

The most important finding in this section is that, even with regard to the informal aspects of the recruitment process, the interviewees did not give much information that would make it possible to clearly indicate whether the process favours women or men – with the exception of still-existing practices that even incidentally perpetuate inequalities by treating men as more desirable for certain tasks. In this context, cautious observations that came up in some statements about a decline in prejudice against employing women can be linked not only to changes at academies or the growing number of women studying, but also, less optimistically, to the declining attractiveness of the academy as a place to work. This does not at all place women beginning their careers there in a stronger position, especially given the challenges described above related to the initial period of employment, as well as the barriers to further promotion that are still present.

Summary

I would like to summarise the findings of this study by presenting some conclusions that highlight the phenomena and mechanisms cutting across different dimensions of studying and becoming promoted, as well as some dimensions developed elsewhere in this report.

First, our analyses indicate a gendered dimension of an art academy career: this pattern is already visible when people choose their field of study, and continues at later stages; for example, in the burden of organisational and care-related work, as well as in examples of promotion being obstructed or difficulties in achieving stability in the first stage of employment. Importantly, manifestations of unfair treatment of women, or treatment that fails to consider the specific challenges they have to face, affect not just their position at the academy but also other spheres of life.

Second, the people we spoke with are quite critical of these mechanisms. At the same time, students and employees indicate that a better understanding of the barriers to women's promotion at academies of fine arts requires considering gender alongside social and economic capital and related resources, which we examine more closely in another study.

Third, the conviction comes out in the interviews that positive change will come on its own with generational transition, as people become less accepting of inequality and exploitation. At the same time, some interviewees emphasised the tremendous effort women who have managed to

Iwona Demko

*408,223 Skirtlifts,
or My Dream of the Black
Protest, photomontage,
2017, courtesy of the artist*



achieve success had to make. Both these dimensions changes are necessary, of course, but they should be supported by environmental and institutional mechanisms, discussed in another part of the report.

Fourth, waiting is part and parcel of an academic career, but at an art academy the waiting horizon is unclear, which deepens the sense of unpredictability. The frequency with which interviewees mentioned chance events, coincidence and uncertainty, or having to wait to be able to obtain a subsequent degree or position, points to further areas of possible abuse, since success in these efforts depends not only on artistic ability and work produced, but also on relationships.

Fifth, the interviews we conducted sensitised us to an evolution in the master-apprentice system: what is now recognised is not only the benefits of close relationships between people who are studying or beginning work and those who serve as role models for them, but also the drawbacks: exclusivity, and sometimes violence and transgressions, which we discuss in the following sections.

Finally, juxtaposing the perspectives of people studying with those already working reveals the socialising dimension of the academy as a place where one learns not only the craft, or how to navigate the artistic environment, but also models of relationships – including how men treat women, or how professors treat assistants. This issue is taken up in another section of the report; here I would like to emphasise the significance of these observations for the career choices young people make: abuse and uncertainty may deprive the academy of one of its basic advantages as a workplace, namely, the creation of relatively stable conditions for the development of one's own creative work.

Experiences, Emotions, Burnout

From the interviewees' statements, it seems the academy does not always support the emotional well-being of employees and students. Yet it is precisely these individuals' sensitivity, empathy, and openness that make it possible to create safe spaces for exchange and collaboration at the academy. Female and male lecturers, despite the emotional burden and difficulties of functioning within the academy structure, engage in students' development and maintain a high level of didactic commitment; students, in turn, despite difficulties, frustration, and moments of discouragement, rarely leave the academy, because they find support in relationships with members of the academic staff and in their peer environment. It should be noted, however, that this study involved people for whom its subject matter is important. Their statements constitute constructive criticism and a search for new models of academy functioning that combine artistic development with genuine care for the emotional dimension of creative and didactic work.

In the interview scenarios, we did not include questions concerning the emotions of fine arts academy students or staff. Nevertheless, the subject proved significant enough in the interviews themselves for us to devote a chapter to it, in which we present the results of our analysis of statements concerning people's affective experiences. To capture the complex character of the emotional dynamics at an art academy, the issues that emerged during the interviews were organised into three thematic subsections: the meaning attributed to work, the sense of fulfilment derived from performing it, and self-assessment. These themes provide a context for the emotions experienced – they are factors that motivate engagement, but may also lead to tensions.

The Meaning of Creative Work and Academic Work

An art academy is a place that brings together particularly sensitive people who work with emotions and their own experiences daily. At the beginning of their studies, female and male students feel a need for self-realisation, for learning means of expression, and for building their own artistic identity – the basis of their creative work. At this stage, support from experienced female and male educators, the possibility of experimenting, and a sense of acquiring competencies that allow one to “become an artist” are of great importance.

That female teacher was really strict, but I worked very well with her, because the critiques were substantive. [...] I felt that I was learning; that is also what it is about, that support may result from feeling that someone is cheering you on, guiding you, and a person feels safe because they know whether they are doing something well or badly, they know what to improve, what should not be done, and so on.

(First-year male student)

First-year students, in particular, highlighted the positive atmosphere at the academy. They emphasised the intimate character of classes, which makes it easier to establish relationships with both teachers and peers. Experiences of closeness and the availability of staff provide the foundation for a sense of safety and development.

I am very positively surprised by the organisation of time at the academy. [...] One can feel that the academy's offer to students is very rich. There is a very highly qualified staff. I felt that I could genuinely grow, and that the fact that I am studying in a small city, in a little-known field, does not hold me back in any way. I receive the full support that I expect.

(First-year female student)

Engagement may weaken, however, if, as students gain experience during their studies, they come to observe behaviours among members of staff that they find discouraging: ostentatious demonstrations of hierarchy and power, a dismissive tone in conversations with students, or carelessness in the teaching processes, such as cancelling classes or not providing coherent, well-considered critiques of works. Students who have completed their studies remember situations in which they received partnership-based support from female and male teachers, practical solutions, and inspiration to act.

He was absolutely top, you know, a mentor and a person you trust enormously, who suggests interesting things that, in the positive sense, “blow your mind” and provoke further searches, or generally encourage you to look at your own creative work in a different light, from a different angle.

(Fifth-year male student)

Along with such positive impressions, we were told of negative ones: a lack of clarity of procedures in force at the academy, the limited familiarity of some members of staff with the specificity of contemporary artistic practices, a lack of transparent assessment criteria, a sense of being overloaded with duties, or deficits in systemic support. Whether or not support was provided, interviewees said, does not depend on how the academy functions. It is always an individual decision of the person teaching the class.

A basic concern is the question of whether creative work itself is enough to enable one to find one's place beyond the academy – where what matters is not only ability, but also skill at self-presentation, assertiveness, recognisability, contacts, and luck. Students are aware of how few of them manage to remain in art after graduating, and how difficult it is to make a living from it. These dilemmas grow as the end of studies approaches. Female and male students spoke about the need to have contact with audiences, the role of portfolios and networks of contacts, and the limitations associated with the conservative structure of the academy from which they are graduating. As they reach the end of their programme, distance from the academy and critical reflection increase.

It is sad, because a person came in open to education, ready to spend some time here, and in reality, after the diploma, they somewhat flee in panic. [...] They are terrified by the confrontation with the fact that they go around and paint while the market is getting worse and worse. They cannot afford materials, let alone make a living. They are also not prepared to be artists.

(Fifth-year female student)

A clear discrepancy emerges between the perception of the academy's role at the beginning of studies and the institution's actual activities, which are also supposed to prepare students to function beyond its walls. Does the academy bring one closer to, or rather distance one from, the “real” world of art? This question seems justified both for those studying and for those working at an academy.

Female and male assistants emphasise that co-leading studios, having a real influence on students' progress, and maintaining regular contact with students are important sources of satisfaction and strengthen their sense of identification with the academic community.

At the beginning, I was a little afraid of teaching, because I had no experience at all, but it turned out to be basically the most enjoyable part of all this, because when the students are good, it is really okay.

(Female assistant)

At the same time, they point out that an academic career does not always result from artistic ambitions; it is sometimes rather a pragmatic choice that provides basic financial security and enables them to pursue creative work outside the academy. Similarly, the need for promotion and academic degrees is not necessarily motivated by a desire for development, but often stems from the remuneration system, which ties higher salaries to factors beyond artistic achievement.

I treat the academy as a way of earning money and having a regular salary, that is, securing basic needs, right? The salary covers my bills, and in fact, now, nothing more than that. That is why I must do a doctorate; then I will earn more. As an assistant professor, the salary increases by about one-third, which is a noticeable increase.

(Female assistant)

Members of the professorial group describe the academy as a space for shaping a new generation of creators, cultivating cultural values, and conducting artistic research and experiments. In this view, the academy at once serves as a depository of tradition and as a place that enables established boundaries to be crossed. At the same time, the respondents pointed out that being able to experiment is increasingly under threat by the bureaucratisation of higher education and the resulting pressure for measurable outcomes; art becomes reduced to a product adapted to external criteria of effectiveness.

What is a higher education institution supposed to be? Is it supposed to produce points [for publications or grants — editor's note]? Or is it supposed to create a good, intelligent society that has its

representatives, who will be the graduates of these artistic fields?

**A state without culture, without art, is without identity, especially today,
in this geopolitical jumble of everything, of cultural hegemony.**

(Female professor)

Considering the lack of a sense of agency people may have even when in a position of power at the academy (discussed in other parts of the report), as well as the ever-increasing bureaucratisation, the withdrawal of some people from managerial roles should be treated not as a sign of their weakness or lack of competence, but as a conscious strategy for protecting one's own creative and psychological resources. At the same time, they clearly feel a strong sense of responsibility for developing female and male students and preparing them to function in the art world. This engagement is also by choice, and female and male lecturers told us it is the most valuable aspect of academic work.

Somewhere between the freshman's idealised image of academy and career and the idealism of the older generation that is about to retire lies the pragmatism of those who are completing their studies and about to begin a career at the academy. The academy offers them the promise of security, or at least the minimum needed for survival, but it may also disappoint them with how the institution functions. It does not fulfil students' main expectation, that of being prepared to function in the art world. First-year students, despite their idealism, describe their time at the academy as a struggle for survival, full of compromises and acts of resignation. At particular stages, these tensions are emotionally costly and shape attitudes and modes of action both within and beyond the academy structure.

The emotional costs of working at the academy seem to be borne mainly by younger staff. The pressure to achieve, dependence on the system of promotion, low salaries, and possibly the experience of mobbing or feudal relations all reduce their work satisfaction. Some begin to think about leaving the academy, but remain because of the relationships they have established and the sense of meaning that working with students provides.

Similarly, female and male professors often emphasise that academic work comes closest to what they wanted to do professionally: combining creative practice with teaching. They experience stability, personal autonomy, and influence over shaping the directions of the university's development. These elements strengthen their job satisfaction at the university.

We are fortunate that working at an academy and in artistic fields is, of course, a certain regime; there is teaching, all the bureaucracy, but nevertheless we differ from other universities. [...] Everything is seasoned with that passion I mentioned earlier. This means

that, for me, it is one continuous process, and I can think to myself that I have 30 years of experiencing, experimenting, and searching for answers to the questions that trouble me or that are worth asking. So what lies ahead of me? Everything.

(Female professor)

It is worth considering whether such a sense of fulfilment and meaning is not a form of compensation that mitigates the detrimental emotional effects of functioning within a structure that formats individuals and places excessively high or absurd demands on them. Here, too, a troubling syndrome is evident: one's sense of satisfaction increases as an individual approaches the end of their academic career. Thus, paradoxically, satisfaction can also be read as an indicator of the oppressiveness of academic structures: the more difficult the path to the top, the greater the satisfaction.

Emotional Burden

Although most students assessed the academy positively, the process of adapting to the requirements and educational style there was an important source of tension from the beginning of their studies. This began during recruitment, a highly stressful experience which, however, often ends with a sense of success and acceptance.

I think it was rather calm, and the only thing was that I was a little stressed, because I had heard about various lecturers, that they might be stricter. I did not feel part of this environment; I did not quite believe that I could somehow present something.

(First-year female student)

After beginning their studies, the main source of stress for students is having to do extra-academic work for many hours a week. To accomplish all that is expected, work at night and on weekends is necessary. This can lead to a deterioration in physical and psychological well-being. Students said they believe this results from a lack of coordination among teachers, as well as from strong pressure for the studio at the academy to which they belong to be treated as the absolute priority in their lives, at the expense of other activities and needs.

Everyone was simply working beyond their strength. And no one really slowed down very much. It was already tiring me a little.

(First-year female student)

Another source of stress is exposure to criticism. Of course, students realise that criticism is inherent in the educational process and in their

future profession. In the interviews, they also shared positive experiences related to critical comments on their work. However, when critique takes on an ironic, non-substantive, or chaotic character, this may lead to frustration, discouragement, and lower motivation and self-esteem. Students' difficult experiences concerned critiques that were superficial or inadequate to the topic, in which the assessors imposed their own style, and in which their artistic autonomy was curtailed. Some described this as "wasting developmental potential."

I did not feel that I was developing in that studio, because we came to draw and there were practically no critiques. [...] And when critiques were conducted, I simply could not find a common language with the teachers, and in the end I did things in such a way that they would be satisfied. After some time, a person feels that they do not want to end up with a poor grade, and I had put a lot of work into it. Ultimately, neither they nor I were satisfied.

(Fifth-year female student)

Towards the end of the programme, the intensity of emotions remains high, though their causes change. Students are less often burdened with too many tasks, and more often with a feeling of stagnation, depleted resources, and limited control over the course of their education and what will come afterwards. The interviewees who were completing their studies also expressed serious concerns about their professional future: economic uncertainty, anxiety over whether they will be able to break into the field or make a living from creative work, and a fear of how other people will assess them.

People would have greater faith that it is possible to live after studying art. And people go into art, for example after a secondary school of fine arts, because it was natural for them, and then suddenly they are terrified, because they think to themselves: "Damn, I'm earning extra money at McDonald's; when I finish my diploma, I'll also be earning extra money at McDonald's, because that will not suddenly make me get a job in art."

(Fifth-year male student)

The spectre of the approaching confrontation with the demands of the external world gives rise to fears, but may also trigger anticipatory processes of rationalisation: when we fail, we have many explanations available as to why: the weakness of didactic processes, people who failed to teach what is later expected in professional work, etc.

People employed in assistant positions described four main sources of anxiety: fear of losing employment, low salary, onerous didactic duties combined with a lack of pedagogical preparation, and pressure

to achieve results measurable within the system of parametrisation of artistic and academic achievements.

When you spend three days writing minutes, you are not painting a picture at that moment. Everything has to be reconciled. I am tired of this kind of multitasking and of the fact that, for many years, I functioned in this way, always working in two or three different industries or situations. In my case, it is already tiring me somewhat, and I know that it will probably continue to function like this for some time, that I will have to do such things before I have some seniority at the academy and the next younger employees take over these duties. But yes, it annoys me.

(Female assistant)

Statements by professorial staff are characterised by a high awareness of the psychosocial costs of academic work: years of stress associated with the need to struggle for resources and for one's position within the structure, as well as the experience of conflicts and informal dependencies. For professors, too, administrative overload and the lack of systemic support for their mental health can be severe (and exacerbated by the effort of supporting students in crisis). Many people indicated that people could become burned out because they were expected to be fully available at all time and had to engage in constant multitasking. Many experienced chronic fatigue, a loss of job satisfaction, and a diminishment of personal resources for creative work.

**It exhausted me greatly, and I think pointlessly.
I would not take on something like that now.**

(Female professor)

Studying and working at an art academy can involve self-exploitative attempts to meet the expectations of other people, who may be capricious (teachers who offer unjustified and incidental criticism) but on whom that person's fate depends. Moreover, the obligations resulting from the system must be met. A sense of injustice and exploitation may arise, and where there is no clarity about the purpose of these duties, the sense of becoming objectified intensifies.

Managing Emotions in the Environment of an Art Academy

The period of getting an art education is one of intense emotional experiences related to assessments, confrontations with peers, and unclear criteria for success. Students gradually develop their own mechanisms for coping with tension: they support one another in difficult situations during class, seek understanding from different teachers, or avoid studios or critiques they consider harmful or unprofessional.

There is a sense, though, that the academy itself does not teach strategies for regulating emotions or confronting the pressure that is an immanent part of artistic practice.

I think we did not cope. I mean, I can speak for myself: from a certain point, I began to avoid classes. [...] He simply rejects photograph after photograph; there are still three assignments, so one spends a disproportionately large amount of time on this, taking good photographs, which he rejects without a word. So, at a certain point, I decided to do the absolute minimum.

(First-year male student)

Students come to realise with time that emotions are an integral part of the creative process. Creative work consists in transforming affects into projects, giving meaning to difficult experiences, and working through crises through art. At the same time, students signal that, although the studio at the academy can be a space for disclosing emotions, work there “is not therapy.” Support from the teacher is crucial, but is not always available or sufficient. Partnership-based communication, however, protects against creative blocks. This stage of studies is characterised by growing emotional self-awareness and an intensifying sense of overload resulting from the number of duties and the complex forms of pressure in the environment.

For me, the most important thing is that it should be honest, and perhaps even at times verging on a kind of emotional exhibitionism. I think that this is courageous. And it is a value in painting, and in art in general.

(Fifth-year female student)

A sense of obligation to help in a crisis is linked to an evolving understanding of the role studios play in art education. People in assistant positions perceive this place as a space that should allow students to make mistakes and learn in a safe way. They try to strengthen female and male students’ belief in their own abilities, encourage them to speak openly about creative blocks, and foster an atmosphere of respect and collaboration. At the same time, they try to set conscious boundaries: emotional support must not turn into a relationship that is too close or inappropriate to the role of an academy teacher. That role should involve seeking a balance between empathy towards students and protecting one’s own emotional and creative resources; the teacher should support students’ creative development, but is not a therapist.

They have to designate a space for themselves in order to take care of themselves. As if making them aware of what there is no

room for in the studio, but not because there is no room in the sense that it is something bad, but because they do it somewhere else. Making them aware of the studio's limitations in this area.

(Male assistant)

The interviews emphasise the need for a conscious, careful management of emotions in didactic relationships, otherwise teachers' unskilful responses may cause escalations of difficult situations, misunderstandings interpreted as abuse, or their own emotional overload. Interviewees indicated there is a strong need to develop psychological competences among staff – through training, access to specialist support for people in crisis, and instruction on how to set boundaries to protect the teacher's privacy and well-being. At the same time, they noted that individual conversations, open communication, and a partnership-based approach foster trust and help students learn to regulate their emotions.

Exactly, but it is also we who take on such a role. We, as teachers, do not externalise ourselves. We do not show our own emotions, our own weaknesses. It is more the student who comes and expects this support. [...] On an emotional level, we should play more the role of psychologists, specialists. I have the impression, who can help these students, but we also cannot burden them with our own emotions.

(Female professor)

Assessment of One's Own Achievements and Sense of Effectiveness and Competence

Studies constitute a turning point in artistic and personal development, and peer comparisons are a key factor in that process. For first-year students, the most important point of reference when determining the value of their own artistic work is their peers: how they assess technique, and how teachers respond to their work. Self-assessment can also be affected by the preparation acquired in an art school or by innate self-confidence. Formal assessment is less important than one's own feelings. Students measure their development by asking themselves: Is it better than my previous work? Have I stepped outside my comfort zone? Is conceptual and technical progress visible? Following one's own intuition and striving to be authentic play a greater role than adhering to the formalised criteria of assessment.

In the final year of a programme, self-assessment increasingly depends on external, formalised indicators, such as the number and rank of exhibitions in which one has participated, distinctions received, assessment by curators, or the quality of one's portfolio and Instagram account. At the same time, even significant achievements do not always guarantee a sense of being recognised at the academy, especially when

one has no influence over the course of events there (e.g., decisions made by one's supervisor, or whether or not one is allowed to defend).

Some of the students interviewed said that the academy wastes the potential of ambitious and hardworking people whose creative practice does not fit within the framework defined by the profile of the studio to which they belong. For them, what most undermines one's sense of self-worth is being dependent on someone else's favour – on the whim of the person teaching the class.

I was somewhat the leader of our studio. [...] I was present at every critique and generally did more than was required. [...] I had a diploma project that went beyond what was taught at the academy, and I was very well prepared for the defence. I have no idea why the professor did not allow me to proceed.

(Fifth-year female student)

Among female and male assistants, the ability to skilfully combine scholarly and artistic achievements is a key factor in their self-assessment. At this stage of their career, they expect themselves to have had some measurable successes, but remain strongly dependent on structural legitimisation, in which the first crucial threshold is to obtain a doctoral degree allowing them to seek permanent employment and greater didactic autonomy.

In that time, if I had remained with a master's degree, I could have been in a dangerous situation. I did not feel I was on particularly firm footing.. With a doctorate, having that title, I felt that it was a completely different situation.

(Female assistant)

An academic degree does not completely eliminate the risk of marginalisation, however. For example, a person may still have little influence over unit decisions, lack recognition of their achievements, and find that promotion still depends on recognition from one's superiors. Thus, self-assessment is primarily constrained by multidimensional dependence on academy decision-makers, while the absence of clarity about why they do what they do, and the discretionary nature of the assessments they make, can contribute to frustration and burnout. People in assistant positions described their self-assessments as dynamic and highly susceptible to environmental factors, whether from students or senior female and male colleagues. Positive student feedback constitutes a strong reinforcing stimulus. The question that arises is whether teaching is not a kind of lifeline by which a person maintains a sense of meaning. This, in turn, gives rise to the risk of an assistant instrumentalising their relationships

with students and projecting onto them hopes and expectations that could not be fulfilled in other spheres of artistic work.

The professors in the study assessed their own achievements largely in terms of stability: a rich creative and didactic body of work, formal recognition (habilitations, awards, scholarships), prestige and position in artistic circles. Professors emphasised having a strong sense of agency, determination, and clearly defined goals that enable them to act independently and achieve success even under conditions of limited institutional support.

Over the years, the unit I headed, thanks, of course, to the people, became the most important unit at the academy. For several years, we have had between 30 and 40 per cent of all candidates applying to study at the entire academy.
(Male professor)

At the same time, those holding the highest academic titles and occupying high positions in the academic hierarchy often made a critical assessment of the disproportion between the effort they had invested and the recognition of their academic work they had received. They pointed to inadequate remuneration, onerous administrative duties, and the resulting diminished opportunities for creative development. They tended not to perceive the academy as a place that supports the creative development of its teaching staff. For some, true recognition is possible only outside the academy. Contemporary institutional systems for assessing achievements are based less on recognition from the external community, and more on quantitative measurements – criteria that younger people seem better able to meet.

Summary

Our analysis of the narratives revealed an emotional trajectory that runs from initial enthusiasm and hope (first year students), to a growing dissonance between ideals and academic practice (fifth year students), to a pragmatic “learning to manage oneself” under conditions of organisational constraints (assistants), to a reflective, consciously distanced performance of the role (professors). In these stages, the common denominator is the presence of intensive emotions, which most often must be dealt with from the bottom up and individually. From the interviews emerges a rather ambiguous picture: high awareness among students and staff of hard emotional work they must put in at the academy, along with a sense that both sides are left to cope on their own somehow, without much support from the institution.

The interviewees indicate that it is relationships formed through partnership-based critiques, mentoring and peer networks that serve as a buffer against bureaucratisation, the pressure of attaining measurable

↙
Dominika Kowynia
Sisters, oil on canvas,
 90 × 70 cm, 2024,
 courtesy of the artist



results, and the lack of transparency in promotion and assessment procedures. At the same time, interviewees clearly emphasised that, in the long term, without transparent rules, better coordination of teaching and an infrastructure of psychological support, individual empathy and sensitivity cannot effectively compensate for the existing institutional deficits. For an academy of fine arts to fulfil its mission, that is, to both develop creative work and prepare people to function effectively in the art world, it must consider the emotional dimension of education as a structural, rather than a marginal, element. Our interviewees indicated that change in this direction is not only desirable, but necessary, if the academy is to foster development rather than burnout, (self-)exploitation and oppression.

Analysed by Joanna Beck

Relationships Between Students and Lecturers

The interviews indicate that the master-apprentice system characteristic of art academies is going through a transition. The framework in which expectations concerning desirable forms of support develop is changing. Where authority is created through partnership-based guidance, these expectations focus primarily on openness to individuality and diversity, and on constructive dialogue. Nevertheless, within this transformed model certain gender differences can still be observed: for men, the studio tends to be a place for shaping their artistic approach; for women, a safe space for experimentation. When describing female and male mentors, students indicated a set of desirable qualities in which references to gender are rarely found; at the same time, they pointed to an iconic dimension of the presence of women in academies, who can act as female mentors. Gender may still favour male students, in that they may be given more attention because there are fewer of them (thus constituting a kind of discrimination against women). These differences do not come up, however, in our analysis of the peer environment of support, which appears to be a space of relationships created as a counterweight to the academic system.

In this section of the report, we describe the role support and atmosphere play in the successes and professional promotions of women and men, focusing – except in the final section – on relationships between students and staff (relationships among staff members are discussed more extensively in the chapter on *aspirations and academic careers*). Since in the interviews support is described more as a culture than as spontaneous acts of kindness, below we also seek to reconstruct its basic dimensions in relation to academies of fine arts.

In the first part of the section we outline how the master-apprentice system has evolved, and how this has changed students and faculty at academies expect from each other. Reconstructing this transformed framework makes it possible, in the next section – *Supportive Relationships from the Perspective of Students and Employees* – to describe what kinds of relationships women and men today regard as supportive, and what kinds are problematic for them. The analysis then looks at who provides support – how female and male mentors are sought, what qualities are important in this, and how the role of women mentors is perceived (they are viewed in terms of their achievements, skills, or the support they provide, but also as living proof that women can indeed advance, in art and at the academy). The section *Who Receives More Attention?* concerns students' perceptions of some people being favoured by teachers, juxtaposed with the criteria teachers themselves say they apply. The final subsection is devoted to the student environment or, more broadly, the academic community, as an important source of horizontal support in situations where it may be lacking in student-teacher relationships.

The Evolving Master-Apprentice System

An important part of the interviews with students concerned their relationships with female and male lecturers. This block opened with the question: “Have you met anyone at the Academy of Fine Arts who has been an authority figure, a female or male mentor, or a source of significant support for you?” It is worth beginning this section by discussing how this question was answered, because the issue concerns one of the most characteristic elements of most academies of fine arts – the master-apprentice relationship – and at the same time provides evidence on the changing context of these relationships.

Most of the students we spoke with – whether female or male – were able to identify someone who had been an authority figure, a mentor, or simply a significant source of support at the academy. Such help consisted in, for example, introducing the student to the world of art – acquainting them with important figures or communities, inviting them to artistic events, participating in them together, or advising on extra-academy student initiatives.

**He's someone I can ask for advice when I have a doubt
or before making important professional decisions.**

(Fifth-year male student)

In students' descriptions of working with an important staff member, their passion and individual approach were emphasised. Passion as dedication – working after hours when consultations were extended, being engaged in the didactic process, and evidently taking joy from teaching, a joy that they passed on to their students. As one female student recounted, during meetings with her female professor, they would marvel in a relaxed atmosphere at the beauty of mundane things. Taking an individual approach meant adapting teaching methods to the needs of a particular student, or, as one fifth-year male student put it, the teacher trying to follow the student's way of thinking. It could also involve trust, which translated into students' self-confidence.

Another important part of the mentoring relationship is providing support and help in difficult situations. Female and male interviewees mentioned, for example, teachers who shared books with them, or explained things and encouraged them in moments of stagnation or creative crisis. In such moments, students emphasised, the understanding shown by their authority figure was vital.

**These studies could exhaust me, perhaps because of some excessive
engagement on my part, but a few times, many times, something
happened where either I was late, or I did not come because
I did not have the strength, and he was always understanding.
Or when I had some kind of crisis, a more creative one, when
I thought that I would no longer save this painting, that it was also
pointless, then he was also able to offer support somehow.**

(First-year female student)

Given the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship, it is also worth including what those who did not have one during their studies had to say. The reasons for this varied. Female and male students spoke about their individual preferences, for example, about their reluctance to admit to themselves that they had a male or female mentor. Others indicated that they were still waiting for such a relationship to emerge naturally, out of good work.

**I can try by standing at the easel and working. It seems
to me that the male professor also appreciates this,
so I do not necessarily have to approach him.**

(First-year male student)

Statements of this kind were characteristic of first-year students, some of whom openly admitted that they had so far met too few people and had been at the academy for too short a time to build such a relationship. In our transcripts, however, there were also cases, though few, of people who went through their whole course of studies without managing to meet anyone they considered an authority figure. Such statements were all the more moving because they indicated not only unfavourable circumstances, but also a lack of engagement on the part of some female and male lecturers.

Some built such an aura around themselves that working with them [during studies — editor's note] was more stressful than pleasant.

(Female assistant)

We also asked people working at the academy questions about relationships, about their contacts with students, in order to get a different perspective on the evolving master-apprentice system.

Some — usually men, including male professors — stated directly that the system was disappearing. This was not only about students not recognising a master. Some teachers did not want to be in that role, because they associate it with a stereotypical relationship based on imitating ways of creating. The interviews also describe other processes at work here. One interviewee mentioned that, because of the internet and increased access to information, one of the pillars of the master-apprentice model of leadership is crumbling — the professor's possession of knowledge that students can acquire only from him or her (for example, about important artists from previous generations, foreign artistic events, etc.).

This model of domination is simply no longer possible to maintain. It is toxic and undesirable. Badly perceived today.

(Male professor)

Organisational changes are also significant. They include the division of studies into two or more cycles (BA and MA programmes), and more frequent functioning within a system of subjects and studios rather than within a stable cohort of fellow students from the same year, which makes it more difficult to build closer, long-term relationships. Importantly, the change in the teacher's role from master to guide is also due to shifting didactic goals: today the emphasis is put on guiding students towards independence rather than having them bow before an oracle.

In our interviews, there were many statements describing what the new, desirable standard of didactic relationship between teachers and students should be. Assistants, in particular, emphasised the importance of open communication and dialogue.

We learn from one another, and we give one another a great deal, which requires, as it were, equal engagement on the part of both teachers and students.

(Female professor)

This ‘flattening’ of the hierarchy also fosters greater flexibility and creative freedom, obviously important when educating creative people. Both students and teachers – especially women – also drew attention to the need to approach each student in an individual way that considers not only their skills, but also their motivations and the speed at which they work.

It is worth noting two further changes in the master-apprentice system in the arts that teachers highlighted. Firstly, male assistants in particular mentioned that students tend to be more sensitive today than in the past, and it is linked to changing expectations and motivations. In this interpretation, the academy is meant to be a kind of asylum for students. Also noted was an increased prevalence of mental health crises and anxiety states. These factors, in the view of female and male interviewees, reinforced the need for teachers to be empathetic, though for some it also raises questions about the point at which such efforts cease to be helpful. As one male professor indicated, for example, they can lead to lower expectations and may ill-prepare students for the reality beyond the academy walls.

A second observation on how relationships with students are changing concerns increasing formalisation. While there is openness to partnership-based relationships, there is little tolerance for socialising. Many interviewees emphasised that going out for a beer together has come to an end.

In the past, male professors and students would simply go out for vodka together, and so on. [...] I was never like that either, so I did not really take part in it. However, this does not exist at all now.

(Female professor)

Even the partnership-based relationships described above are treated with greater caution today. One male professor mentioned that he tries not to be alone with any student – for example, in the darkroom – to prevent possible accusations. A female professor said that it sometimes happens that female or male students try to take advantage of a friendly relationship with a teacher to get out of having to meet their obligations. Another male interviewee described conversations among staff during which they read out students’ comments about each other from evaluation surveys. For some students, reducing the social distance between teacher and student, such as by using first names, was also uncomfortable. In this context, it is worth noting that wanting to be treated as a subject is not the same as wanting to be friends.

The preceding paragraph highlights the specific nature of the transitional phase in which the master-apprentice system at art academies currently finds itself. The change, postulated by both students and lecturers, does not consist in the teacher losing his or her authority, but in this being based to a greater extent on their providing guidance in a partner relationship that is adjusted to the pace and direction of the student's development, worked out together with the student. Implementing this model, however, is challenging in the context of systemic transformations in education and the emerging dynamic of student-teacher relationships, where partnership does not mean friendship, and empathy does not equal permissiveness. It is also worth noting, with the caution appropriate to qualitative research, that while this change was mentioned by both female and male lecturers, it was men who spoke more often about the need for partnership rather than master-apprentice and friendly relationships. This may indicate a need to work through a model previously sustained at academies, mainly by their predecessors. This interpretation assumes that such statements have a second layer of meaning. Speaking about greater partnership does not necessarily mean rejecting an exclusive relationship. Such a relationship ennobles those who take part in it and excludes those who do not.

Supportive Relationships in the Experiences of Students and Lecturers

It is worth beginning this section of the report with a brief discussion of the role of the studio, which constitutes a special element in the evolving master-apprentice model, and at the same time a space of great importance for artistic education, a place where those situations arise that form young female and male creators. It is also a place where the relationships that interest us, whether supportive, unsupportive – or even toxic – are played out. The role of diploma studios is, of course, particularly significant during this formative period, though we did not ask about it separately in the interviews.

When describing the role of the studio, the interviewees described it as a place of intellectual development, where students execute projects, and knowledge about art is shared, about important figures and the social and humanistic issues connected with artistic activity. The studio was also described as a workshop where one learns the craft, that is, how to master the use of various media.

Men, as well as female and male professors, emphasised more often that the studio is a place at the academy that enables one to develop an individual artistic approach, including in the sense of acquiring an individual, effective rhythm of work and ways of mobilising oneself to do it. Men somewhat more often than women also saw the studio as a place where the ability to present one's own creative work in front of a group is

shaped. This is connected with the idea of apprenticeship (learning from a master) and with competences acquired in a hierarchical relationship. Speaking about one's own work, and listening to how others do so, also develops the ability to use specific language for describing art and to recognise the role of criticism as an inseparable element of the creative process.

Women and people in assistant positions, more often than men and people in professorial positions, spoke of the studio as a space that should foster experimentation, that should place greater emphasis on discovery than on the acquisition of skill. An important part of this process is accepting mistakes.

Here, [students — editor's note] are in a kind of laboratory in which they are safe, and we will not assess them negatively in any way. [...] What is fantastic, however, is precisely that one can dare to do something here.

(Female assistant)

The studio was also described as a place that teaches group collaboration. This theme appeared more often in the statements of fifth-year students and academy teachers, who noted the importance of exchanging experience and techniques, as well as of seeking compromises and developing rules for sharing space and tools. Given the complexity and character of the tasks carried out in the studio, not surprisingly it is also a space in which students learn to cope with stress and emotions, though teachers emphasised that they try to avoid situations in which it might turn into a place for unprofessional therapy.

Our analysis of the interviews allowed us to distinguish four main types of practices students considered supportive.

First, openness to diversity and individuality, that is, taking an interest in what students want to convey in their works – including when they address very personal themes – and adapting the support provided to the needs identified. As we heard, at times this may take the form of a precise critique, at other times of a constructive conversation about the concept or theme.

Second, constructive, partnership-based dialogue that acknowledges the student's experiences, respects their opinions, and avoids monologue. This dialogue can also be reinforced through simple gestures – such as offering tea or simply greeting someone when they enter the studio. It involves constructive, motivating criticism.

It was not that everything I had prepared was wrong; rather, something was always found in it that could continue to germinate and develop further.

(First-year female student)

Teachers also noted the role of criticism. They emphasised, among other things, that dialogicality also manifests in the absence of expectations. The female professor with whom we spoke articulated this, saying that all comments made during a critique of the presented work will be considered.

When discussing what constitutes a supportive approach, the role of emotional support and building a sense of safety came up again. Building on the themes raised earlier, it is worth noting that the study participants emphasised the importance of understanding the challenges students face. Students praised, for example, a male teacher who understands that sometimes they may feel worse, and that things happen. One teacher, talking about taking a less rigorous approach to enforcing punctual attendance in class, said that sometimes a student simply needs a good night's sleep more than critiques. Another teacher pointed out the importance of speaking with people who have been avoiding classes for a longer period, to take the pressure off them and offer them different ways to meet their obligations or develop a theme.

The fourth type of support, consistent with the studio's role as described above, is the direct facilitation of development. A fifth-year female student recalled, for example, a female teacher who “searched out all the buttons from the smallest drawers, just to help.” We also heard about a teacher obtaining the materials a student needed to complete a diploma project when they couldn't manage to come up with additional funds. Others shared their experience of being given a recommendation when applying for a job or internship, or help with organising exhibition space. Interestingly, unlike the three earlier types of support – more often invoked by first-year students and by people in assistant positions caring for them – practical support was mentioned more often by fifth-year students. This observation is easy to explain: towards the end of academy greater attention is paid to what is needed to prepare a good diploma project and establish oneself in the profession.

We also asked students about examples of behaviours they assess critically, those due to which they avoided a particular studio. These themes also came up in the staff interviews. We treat them only briefly here, since they are largely the reverse of the good practices described above. At the same time, we recall that inappropriate and violent behaviours are addressed in the section of the report concerning inequalities and violations (sexist comments, questions about intimate matters, humiliation, shouting, etc.).

When discussing unpleasant experiences at the academy, student interviewees mentioned a lack of seriousness on the part of some teachers, reflecting a lack of respect for students. This was manifested in, for example, not attending classes, not conversing seriously about serious subjects, or being inconsistent about decisions (e.g., rejecting works that had previously been accepted). Some teachers demanded too many projects, required activity outside the timetable, imposed their own vision,

or were unwilling to take students' opinions into account. In some cases this caused a female or male student to begin "to wonder whose project it ultimately is."

Much more of the interview findings concerned inadequate criticism, including inconsistent criticism (changing one's mind in subsequent critiques), cursory criticism (indicating that something is wrong without suggesting how it could be improved), and unfair criticism (e.g., suggesting that someone had not put in enough work). What students considered inadequate was not only the difficulty in implementing such criticism, but also its unpredictable nature and the uncertainty it created.

The first thing I hear when the teachers came [to look at the works that had been hung — editor's note]: "Sir, we are taking this down here, one, two, three. End of discussion. There is no topic I am in charge of here." I was completely disoriented. The day before, I had spoken with them, and they had said that everything was fine with my work, that they were well hung. What was going on? Well, I ignored it because I was very disoriented.
(First-year male student)

In summarising this section of the report, it is worth indicating that most of the interview statements on the experiences of criticism mentioned above — a lack of seriousness, the imposition of one's own vision, or inadequate criticism — came from women. As is usually the case in qualitative research, it is difficult to speak of regularities in a statistical sense, but this difference nevertheless seems characteristic. It can be explained as a manifestation of how women are generally treated in society, as people from whom opposition and assertiveness are not expected. In the context of art academies, this difference can also be juxtaposed with the role attributed to the studio (by students and teachers): men spoke somewhat more often about shaping their artistic approach and developing the ability to speak about and critique art, while women more clearly emphasised that the studio is a safe space for experimentation. These two observations may be connected, since the most painful experiences in the studio are those that call into question what is expected of it. In the case of women, this would therefore concern situations that undermine their idea of the studio as a space that offers them the comfort of searching for solutions through creative experimentation.

Who Provides Support? The Role of Female and Male Mentors

We also spoke with students about whom they perceived as female and male mentors. An analysis of their statements made it possible to identify several preferred characteristics; for example, that female

and male mentors are, or should be, those who teach a desired technique. When we asked students why they chose a particular studio, they also mentioned aesthetic and intellectual affinity with the person teaching – a desire to align with that person’s way of thinking or artistic style. Slightly more students mentioned personality fit; the mentor should be likeable, not aloof, and compatible in terms of the way they work, whether the student is mainly expected to follow their own intuition, complete tasks independently, or receive directly formulated guidance.

Some people also drew attention to the authority that stems from knowledge, experience, and position. It was emphasised that a vast amount of knowledge or cultural references (to books, films, events, etc.) must, of course, be skilfully conveyed, and that a person’s stature results not just from academic degrees and titles or a contribution to the development of the unit, but also from recognition and visibility gained outside the academy – which impresses students and in their eyes lends weight to what the teacher imparts.

You know, with him, it is clear and palpable that he is highly professional. He knows a great many things, has worked through a lot in his life and in his work, because he also runs his own company and has worked in other places and at other schools, including private ones.

(Fifth-year male student)

When describing the qualities authority figures have, reference was again made to their individual approach and readiness to provide support, which may consist in being engaged and empathetic (spending hours in order to help complete a project, or being ready for private conversations), in encouraging students to develop outside the academy and undertake their own artistic activities, and in giving female and male students greater freedom in their work.

When listening to who students regarded as female and male mentors, we became interested in whether the gender of the teacher is a criterion when choosing a studio. Some female students said they prefer working with women because of the themes they deal with. With other women they feel greater understanding when creating works related to menstruation, greater comfort when making nudes of their own bodies, or a sense of solidarity with the challenges women in Poland face. Other interviewees said it is easier to break the ice with a female professor; that is, that in their studios, as one male student put it, one can talk more “freely,” and emotions are better “cared for.” Those who preferred working with men, in turn, indicated that they are sometimes more concrete in formulating guidelines, especially in technical aspects.

**When someone gives me a critique, I also need specifics —
what exactly the issue is — and not: “I don’t like something,
but I don’t quite know what, so think about it.”**

(Fifth-year female student)

Reading such statements closely, one can notice a persistence of certain stereotypes. Most female and male interviewees, though, when describing people important for them, did not spontaneously frame them in terms of gender, and when asked further, indicated that gender as such does not matter in the context of support, and that any differences result rather from approach or personality. At the same time, the role of female mentors was recognised as an important and inspiring point of reference for female students. We include here one statement on this subject which indicates that what makes a woman a female mentor is that, by staying at the academy, she broke the pattern of a woman’s role at the academy, and did not agree to remain in the role of someone learning from men.

**If women are not teaching, what next steps can I take as a female
artist, if it is men who are showing them this world?**

Is there really a space somewhere there for women as well?

(Female assistant)

In summary, it is worth noting that both female and male students describe authority figures primarily in terms of their preferred qualities. These may change in different stages of studying, but they are only rarely framed in terms of gender. The very presence of female mentors is symbolic, for it signals to female students that there are opportunities ahead of them in the world of art. At the same time, it is difficult to identify even a subtle dependence between preferred qualities in a mentor and the interviewees’ gender. In the rare cases where teachers’ gender was referenced at all, men emphasised as frequently as women that it does not matter, or spoke of the care they received from female teachers. These findings can also be read from a structural perspective: some of the criteria indicated — especially authority resulting from knowledge, experience, and position — may favour men in practice, given the uneven distribution of degrees and titles and the opportunities they have for combining academic and extra-academy roles.

Who Receives More Attention?

Regarding equality of opportunity for women and men in academic careers, we were interested to find out whether students perceive inequalities in the attention that teachers devote to particular female or male students, and whether such inequalities, if any, can be linked to specific

characteristics of those people. To the question framed this way, we received two groups of answers: the first three characteristics were cited as reasons for deserved interest, while the remaining ones were described rather critically as undeserved interest.

The first group included people who are less technically proficient, for example, in using software, with whom teachers spent more time in order to explain problematic issues. More often, however, attention was given to students who were engaged and active. Sharing ideas and participating in discussions led to longer conversations or critiques and earned the sympathy of teachers, who see this the student taking a genuine interest in their guidance.

Most prefer precisely such people. Perhaps those who are a little more open and openly engaged.

(First-year female student)

The third characteristic of people who can count on greater attention is boldness and self-confidence. Female and male students believe that these qualities can help one be more visible in class, and cope through critiques more easily, with less stress. Some of those who mentioned boldness and self-confidence also observed that those qualities can be perceived negatively by female and male colleagues.

Because there are people who talk a lot, who speak very loudly. And for people who may not be brave enough, it is simply difficult to, I don't know, break through that.

(First-year female student)

Students spoke in much more critical terms about conformism, flattery, and fulfilling teachers' expectations to gain their attention. Conformism can involve doing exactly what one is told, or imitating the teacher's style; as we heard, the teacher may approve of this, rather than point out the risks it entails. This kind of 'cult of the professor' may allow a student to gain the teacher's attention or pass a course more easily, but comes at the expense of the student's own vision and, as a result, of their development.

The people participating in the study also pointed to other factors that facilitate gaining teachers' attention but are perceived as not entirely fair: cultivating an acquaintance and friendly relationship with them; background and identity; and gender. Thus, people with whom teachers were closer were sometimes favoured – whether because of personal liking (for example, by proposing they take part in exhibitions), or because of a longer relationship that the favourites of the studio, often higher-year students, had managed to build up from the

beginning of their studies. Mixed feelings were also aroused when female and male students who had gained recognition in competitions were given additional attention, at others' expense. Additional support for or a special way of treating people from Ukraine, or queer people, was also assessed ambivalently. The challenges these people face on a daily basis were recognised, but at the same time interviewees pointed out the risk of secondary victimisation occurring if such people are promoted because of their identity, for image-related reasons, or if they are treated differently in the didactic process (we were told, for example, that it is difficult to point out to queer people that they are making a project about themselves). Several people also mentioned the specific situation of male students; because in some fields they constitute a minority, they are sometimes treated with kid gloves – male professors seek reassurance from them, and female lecturers are more understanding towards them.

We also asked people employed at the academy about whether additional attention is shown to particular individuals, though here the question mainly concerned working with particularly talented students. The types of support discussed included both what the teachers themselves offer and what the academy provides. Teacher support may take the form of individual conversations and critiques – for example, proposing additional tasks that allow a student to supplement a project with elements planned for a later stage. It may also include gathering information about a person's background. As one male assistant told us that if someone comes from an artistic family, teachers may decide there is no need to discuss obvious matters with them, and leave them to work on their own because they know they will manage. This assistant added that with such a person he would only speak about programmatic, non-technical matters. He also pointed out that avoiding conversations about technical issues in favour of conceptual ones protects such people from falling into the “trap of technicality.” It is also common to recommend that such students participate in exhibitions, competitions, open-air workshops or projects, which do not necessarily have to be organised at the Art Exhibitions Bureau or the Centre for Contemporary Art (although contact with such institutions is also facilitated). Support may also include selecting a student's works for exhibition among the studio's achievements, or encouraging them to bring their art into urban spaces.

The academy, in turn, offers scholarships and awards to those who achieve the best results, and organises competitive exhibitions of diploma works; this allows those works to be presented to a broader public. The academy may also involve such students in academy activities, or in cooperation with other institutions, which sometimes requires significant influence.

[A member of the rector's authorities — editor's note] placed our talented students in those galleries. So this was perhaps not institutional, because it was not formalised, but it functions.

(Male professor)

Given the opportunities that open up for those students regarded as the most talented, it is, of course, worth asking how talent is identified and recognised. The answers to this question can be divided into three categories. Good technique is one (for example, the ability to draw), another is openness to taking on challenges (increasingly difficult tasks, self-criticism, experimentation), and the third is engagement and diligence during class, including perceptiveness and inquisitiveness. Some voices, though, emphasised that these qualities are not always the best indicator of talent.

These are, of course, usually the best ones, but precisely taking all the requirements into account, this will not always be someone who is the most talented. Because he may not cope. And he may need another year or two simply to mature and strengthen.

Because the world is difficult. One has to come and say:

"I want it in red." [...] We have to know that he has this strength.

(Female professor)

Many female and male lecturers, when discussing ways to recognise talented people and work with them, also pointed to the risks favouring them entails. Excessive praise can arouse resentment among the rest of the group, or cause the recipient of the praise to rest on their laurels. This was related in an interesting way to academy activities to promote young people who are only just developing – the “pressure for a career” and attempts to introduce female and male students to the art market before they have even completed their education may be premature, and may inhibit their further development.

To summarise this section, students certainly perceive differences in the attention they receive from teachers, although they do not always view these differences negatively; they may consider it deserved, especially when it is due to their own engagement and activity. Teachers also referred to substantive criteria when working with particularly talented students, but also mentioned the risks associated with favouritism, including when it is based on a recognition of talent.

It is worth remembering that the aim of such questions was to probe possible gender-related patterns of support that may increase a student's chances of remaining at the academy or developing their career. As in the other sections, here too (with great caution, and bearing in mind the specificity of qualitative research conducted on a small

sample) certain differences can be observed in who speaks about what. Female students more often mentioned the attention shown to people who needed more support, while male students spoke more about attempts to please teachers; this may reflect a more competitive orientation. Female teachers spoke somewhat more about individual support and support for talented people, while male teachers spoke more about the risks associated with favouritism. Male students also pointed out that some of them may count on more lenient treatment because they constitute a minority in the studio.

Mentioned as equally important in obtaining additional support, however, were qualities such as boldness, engagement, courage, self-confidence, and resilience to criticism. From other chapters, we know that, culturally, these may be more easily attainable for men, who are more often rewarded for them in the process of socialisation.

Community as a source of support

Finally, it is worth examining the answers given regarding the academic community as a source of support. We asked students and employees questions about manifestations of solidarity at the academy, principles of cooperation, and the creation of informal groups, on the assumption that horizontal networks of this kind may play an important role in achievement and promotion, serving as a counterweight to vertical relationships such as mentoring.

During our analysis of the research material, we identified several statements indicating that building such networks is not always easy, for it may be hindered by people being focused on themselves. This may be due to the isolation caused by having to concentrate on one's work in the studio, but can also be caused by students reserving space and resources for themselves, even when they are not being fully used. In some fields or academies, we were told, establishing longer and closer relationships within the peer environment is also made more difficult by the way the teaching is organised. This is no longer just a matter of the division of what were once five-year studies into cycles, but also of the way teaching is conducted: after the initial phase of spending time in classes with their year group, students – as one fifth-year female student told us – “disperse” into different studios, where they participate with people from different years in arrangements that change in subsequent years.

A slightly larger number of interviewees also highlighted manifestations of competition within the student environment. Competition is built into the studio system, where female and male students compete for places in those programmes that are more in demand. The result is that people may not decline to share information about competitions, which – as one fifth-year female student observed – reflects the “rat race” at the academy. The interviewees also mentioned other forms of tension:

disputes over who is copying whose style, taking over themes, and similar issues. One fifth-year male student emphasised that the competition intensifies as the end of studies approaches and with growing awareness of the difficulties on the labour market (as confirmed by the study on experiences, emotions, and burnout). When preparing diploma, there is also competition for exhibition space in which one can present one's work and be seen. Several people participating in the study also spoke about the role of people working at the academy, who, in various ways, socialise students into such competition – through their own conflicts, rivalry among studios, or by comparing colloquia to a brutal game of survival known from a popular television series.

It is encouraging that more statements in the analysed corpus concern manifestations of solidarity. For example, solidarity within trade unions, or in situations involving attempts at disciplinary dismissal for disobedience towards the authorities. Support in difficult personal situations was also invoked – for example, staff collections for sick children.

In the student environment, buying coffee for a female colleague who at that moment did not have the means to pay for one was also mentioned. Solidarity was also evident when a student was threatened with exclusion or abuse. Interviewees mentioned, among other things, the mutually supportive community of queer people, who organise exhibitions and events that provide space to present creative work. We also heard about situations in which people stood up for those who, in the group's view, had been treated unfairly during class, as well as examples of support shown to people experiencing sexual violence at the academy.

Of course, the reasons described above for mobilising the community are important as a form of communal support for people facing challenges or experiencing harm. It is worth mentioning, however, that discussions of solidarity also included an account of exchanging first experiences on the art market, on how, where, and for how much works can be sold. This was an earlier experience shared by one of the female professors.

In an attempt to encourage more such accounts, we also asked students and academy staff about their experiences participating in or forming collectives. It is worth noting that it was the latter experience that came up more often in our conversations. In other words, many people were able to imagine why such collectives are formed, but did not themselves belong to any. According to these accounts – or suppositions – people are encouraged to join groups of people who hold similar views on art, shared interests, a certain affinity with each other; who need support and collegiality in a competitive environment; who desire to gain a certain autonomy in relation to work carried out under the supervision of the academy; and sometimes because they perceive working in a collective as a political practice. Other benefits of cooperation were also mentioned: it is easier to obtain projects when working

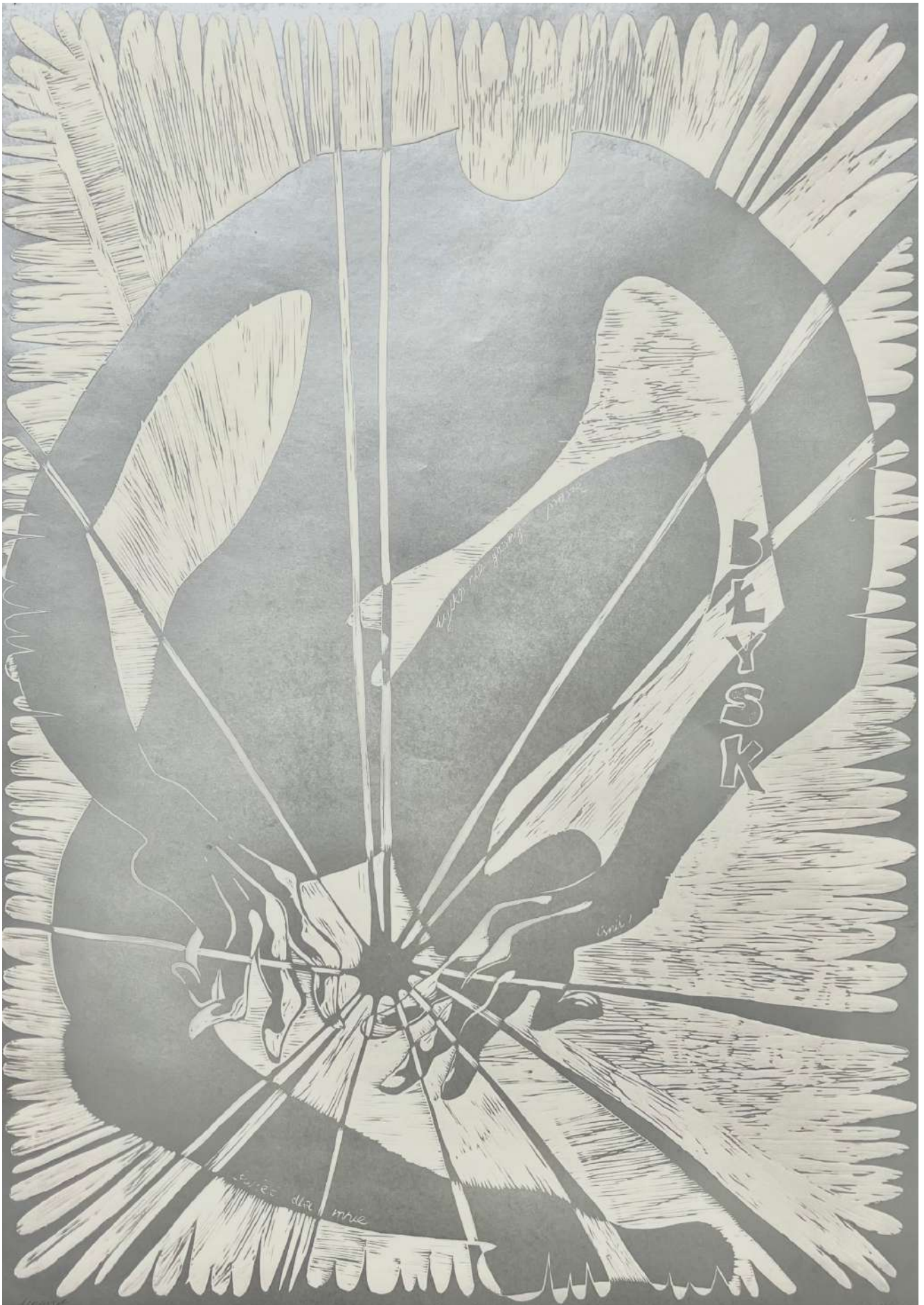
in a group, and to use one's own skills to complement those of others. Interestingly, it was precisely these practical benefits that were most often invoked by participants in the study who were actually part of an artistic collective.

It is worth noting that solidarity is perceived by both students and employees as an important form of protection against the competitive environment. Even if the community is most often a defensive one, activated in situations of abuse, and even if collectives are more often dreamed of than experienced, or if their life span is short, they nevertheless sustain faith at the academy in the possibility of alternative models of relationships. In this context, it is troubling that most manifestations of solidarity are layered – we were rarely told about similar relationships connecting students with lecturers. The data we collected do not indicate gender differences in the descriptions or experience of environmental support. This may suggest that the significance of gender emerges primarily in the face of other inequalities, as a form of defence or escape from the system, and therefore in an area that is less often part of the game for resources.

Summary

There were several key findings. First, the greatest number of recollections of deleterious relational experiences (not being treated seriously, having someone else's vision imposed, receiving inadequate criticism) came from women. Second, although the master-apprentice system is evolving towards a more partnership-based system, mechanisms within it continue to favour people who are self-confident, bold, and resilient to criticism. They tend to be given more attention, thereby continuing to privilege male patterns of socialisation. Third, although the symbolic dimension of the presence of female mentors was emphasised, the quality students most emphasised as desirable in people who serve as points of reference was authority resulting from knowledge, experience and position – that is, qualities that may structurally favour men, given the current distribution of degrees and titles.

Analysis by Maciej Frąckowiak



Julia Grabowska

Glare, linocut, 50 × 70 cm,
2022, courtesy of the artist

Inequalities and Violations

The block of questions analysed concerned experiences related to inequalities and violations in the environment of an academy of fine arts. The material collected reveals the multidimensionality of these phenomena — from recruitment practices and the division of organisational duties, through stereotypical expectations of women and men, to everyday relationships between students and teaching staff. The interviews showed both overt forms of discrimination and more subtle manifestations of gender differentiation, evident in work styles, communication, and how artistic predispositions are assessed. Relations of power were also an important theme.

They include the crossing of boundaries in contacts, and the downplaying of signals coming from student surveys. All these elements make up a complex picture of the everyday reality of the academy, in which inequalities permeate both formal procedures and informal interactions. In this chapter, we discuss these issues in turn, showing how they intertwine in the experiences of people studying and working at academies of fine arts.

Different Expectations of Women and Men

The analysis below is based on questions in which we asked female and male interviewees to reflect on differences in expectations directed towards women and men, and on their professional opportunities in the academic environment. We asked whether they had the impression that different things were expected of them than of people of another gender, and whether they felt these differences translated into differing career opportunities.

A large share of the interviewees, both students and employees, did not experience differences in expectations based on gender, and described the everyday reality of the academy as quite egalitarian in this respect. There was no shortage of positive comments on partnership-based relationships in studios, grounded in trust and the sharing of tasks, including on large projects such as organising exhibitions.

At the same time, however, in many narratives the conviction was expressed that gender continues to shape everyday tasks and roles. These differences were sometimes naturalised and justified by reference to physicality: men are more often involved in manual and technical work, while women take on organisational tasks. It should be emphasised, however, that practices of this kind were rarely interpreted as discrimination; they were treated more as obvious and practical, “natural.”

**When an assistant is hired for sculpture,
a girl will not be taken. One has to move a 200 kg
sculpture. Give me a guy who can handle it.**
(Male assistant)

Both women and men used the image of male students as “raisins”. Because they are few in number, they receive more attention and support than female students, even if their achievements are not particularly outstanding. In this way, rather than being subject to the same criteria of assessment and expectations as women, men by their very nature stand out. Female interviewees noted that this contributes to a perpetuation of the belief in the “natural” exceptionality of men in artistic fields, further strengthening their advantage in the academic environment. This can be interpreted as a form of reverse (seemingly positive) discrimination, where men, being in the minority in the environment, gain additional prestige and attention. In practice, it means that traditional gender hierarchies continue to persist. Men, regarded as “exceptional” in an environment where women predominate, gain additional recognition and prestige, while women, who constitute the majority of students, remain less visible and less appreciated. This mechanism contributes to perpetuating structural inequalities within art academies.

**Certainly, men at the Academy are treated like such “raisins.”
I think it may indeed be the case that attention is devoted
to them because of their gender, because there are so few
of them and because it is something of an oddity.**
(Fifth-year female student)

Female and male students also spoke about situations in which males were more quickly given the title of artist, while women’s works required additional proof of value.

**They will more quickly attach the aura of an artist
to a guy, even if he trips over something.**
(Fifth-year male student)

What is most striking, however, are accounts of overt forms of diminishing the value of women and the significance of their creative work. One female participant in the study recalled that a male professor directly questioned the value of “women’s painting.”

**I encountered, for example, a studio where women were
not allowed to paint. Because male painting is good. [...]
And my female colleague had to do her diploma project
in another studio, because she was not allowed to paint
there. Besides, the male professor said she was not to
paint there because it was such a woman’s painting.**
(Female assistant)

Although such situations seem not to be widespread, they strongly affected the sense of agency and justice in the academic environment. When female and male interviewees discussed the didactic process itself and collaboration within the studio, many emphasised that the teacher’s gender matters little. Statements of this kind suggest that the official narrative of gender neutrality in teaching is quite strong in the environment. It is also significant that it is sustained by men.

**I do not have a preference for working with women
or men. It always depends on the person.**
(First-year male student)

There were also more nuanced observations in which gender began to play a more distinct role. In these descriptions, recurring patterns emerge: women were more often portrayed as empathetic, inclined to compromise, and attentive to students’ emotions, while men were described as direct, firm, and more authoritarian. Men’s “concreteness”

itself was sometimes assessed positively, because it provided a sense of stability and clear rules in the didactic process.

Women, I have the impression, are more inclined to reach an understanding, to compromise. Men are like: it has been decided, and that's it; they are authoritarian.

(Female professor)

The differences in what is expected of women and men are particularly evident in situations related to parenthood and care roles. It was pointed out that fathers do not create initiatives analogous to “mother-artist” exhibitions. This was attributed to there being less social pressure for fatherhood to be explored as an artistic theme. Some voices, though, spoke of discrimination when residency offers or artistic programmes were addressed solely to mothers, with father-artists neglected. At the same time, women described real institutional barriers: they were discouraged from taking maternity leave, or had limited access to curatorial functions during pregnancy, while caring for small children or shortly after returning to work, even with high achievements and international recognition. The topic is described extensively in the section on aspirations and academic careers.

Against this background, the generational dimension also proved significant. The older professorial generation, consisting mainly of men, was described as perpetuating patriarchal patterns, such as treating work at the academy as secondary and delegating duties to female or male assistants. The younger generation, largely feminised, was presented as more present, more engaged, and more ready to work with students on a daily basis.

Men from my generation treated work at the academy as secondary; female assistants did it for them. Now this is changing.

(Female professor)

Gender in Recruitment Processes and Career Opportunities

Another theme we examined in the study was the role of gender when recruiting for assistant positions or appointing professors to run studios at the academy, whether in formal competitions or informal selection practices that determine how a position is filled. To this end, we asked the question: “In your opinion, are there situations in which the gender of the candidate is taken into account during recruitment?” From the respondents’ accounts there emerges a picture of staffing decisions not resulting solely from an assessment of competence or achievements, but also from attachment to a particular candidate model, one in which gender plays an important role.

Still, it is somewhat the case that when someone is being hired, a guy is more readily taken than a girl.

(Male assistant)

The most frequently recurring justification for this inequality is the so-called specificity of the studio. In fields requiring physical labour – such as sculpture or scenography (although this is a feminised field), male candidates are considered “naturally” more suitable.

If we have the chance to take a guy, we will accept him very gladly. I will say this honestly, because scenography is also connected with carrying things, making exhibitions, and a guy is extremely valuable, a valuable acquisition. But this never determines the actual points. It is, as it were, a preference: when I was looking for male assistants, I knew I did not want more girls who would do nothing, but I wanted someone who would do something, because this is physical work.

(Female professor)

In practice, this leads to the systematic marginalisation of women, even when their artistic and scholarly preparation does not differ from men's.

Some of the interviewees pointed out that the decision on a position to be filled is often made even before the competition is even announced, and that male professors choose their protégés. This mechanism is particularly conducive to perpetuating male dominance, because it is men who more often recommend other men, ensuring that continuity within the institution.

We do indeed observe that, for example, a man is favoured by one male professor, and this may make it more difficult for a woman to take up the position, because, for instance, the male professor, looking at this woman, will see that the girl is petite or something, so what is such a petite little girl going to dictate to students?

(Fifth-year male student)

Women recounted situations in which, despite having recommendations and experience, they were not given a position because, as one interviewee put it, “the men had a different plan.” These practices are also overlaid by another mechanism. There is a tendency to place women in support roles, while their path towards running a studio independently is sometimes blocked, or significantly prolonged.

Women are also more inclined to cooperate, to reach some kind of understanding. Organisationally, they are probably quite good as well. [...] They are supposed to be supportive, but not necessarily

independent female teachers. Somewhere here, this system of upward movement begins to be blocked. Doctorate, habilitation, and then it becomes increasingly difficult for women. That is my impression.

(Female professor)

Some female interviewees emphasised that only recently has there been greater sensitivity to issues of equality in recruitment, and full neutrality is still not the norm. Women more often than men have to additionally prove their usefulness and demonstrate their achievements.

In several statements, the issue of staff appointment parity also arose, treated as an important element for discussion and negotiation. This testifies to a growing awareness of the significance of equal gender representation in institutions, and to the fact that the proportions between women and men are becoming not just a subject of debate, but also a real criterion taken into account in organisational practices.

Parity is very important here when appointing staff, and it is also discussed. So attention is paid to this.

(Male assistant)

This was not a specific situation, but I know the faculty is undergoing major changes, which are also tied to the fact that new people will be employed. And I know that there is a voice from the staff side saying that they need more women on the team. That is the situation. A concrete example.

(Fifth-year male student)

In the next part of the interview, we asked employees whether a given person's professional opportunities differ from those of employees of another gender. Some female and male interviewees emphasised that contemporary procedures and regulations guarantee equality, and that gender does not influence career progression. In statements of this kind, one can discern the conviction that formal institutional frameworks ensure equal access to promotions and resources. There were some recollections of overt discrimination from the 1980s and 1990s, when women's career paths were openly blocked. These reminiscences function as interpretive frames in which the present appears more just, though not entirely free of barriers of this kind. At the same time, numerous other inequalities emerged that affected access to resources and positions. The study participants pointed in particular to the dominance of older men in managerial positions, and to their tendency to promote candidates of the same gender.

As long as the managers are men aged 50+, then they probably have something in their heads that maybe it is better to work with a guy.

(First-year male student)

Mechanisms of exclusion were also visible in the distribution of funds or scholarships.

Two people were employed at the academy, [...] but the money was found for the male person. The woman has to wait longer, even though she has been working for a year longer.

(Female professor)

Clear differences can be seen here in the perspectives of women and men. Men more often report not perceiving visible barriers, suggesting that opportunities are equal or that any differences stem from generational or transitional factors. Women, in turn, more often describe the need for greater effort and determination, and provide concrete examples of having more difficult access to resources and promotions.

Fields with a Predominance of Men

The issue of access to promotions and resources also relates to another area frequently emphasised by interviewees: the continuing dominance of men in particular artistic disciplines. We asked whether there are any fields at art academies in which careers are made almost exclusively by men. When this was confirmed, we asked about the causes. The responses indicate that, although academies of fine arts are feminised at the level of students, men still predominate among the staff, which interviewees mainly attributed to historical and cultural causes. Many said that disciplines requiring physical strength, such as sculpture, as well as fields regarded as “traditionally male,” such as architecture or graphic design, had been dominated by men for decades. In narratives about photography, too, it came up repeatedly that this is a “male” field. In photojournalism, especially, it is believed that editorial offices are more willing to send a man to cover a story, due to the dangerous nature of the work. Interviewees mentioned both formal restrictions, such as women’s lack of access to certain studies in the past, and informal practices, such as discouraging women through behaviours based on stereotypes.

There was a conviction that women would not be able to cope with this physical work. Rather unjustified, because this is no longer the case, and women also work in these same places.

(Male professor)

At the same time, attention was drawn to the cultural socialisation of gender, which influences educational choices. Boys, as both male and female interviewees noted, are more often pressured to make pragmatic professional decisions to ensure a stable livelihood, while girls are more often given social permission to pursue artistic passions.

It is more accepted that women engage in something a little less serious.

(Fifth-year male student)

At the same time, many statements describe a slow but noticeable generational change. More women than in the past are obtaining academic degrees and taking up academic positions. According to the interviewees, this will soon translate into a visible change in staff structure.

This is changing, and now there are significantly more women at the lower levels. They now have doctorates, sometimes they have already completed their habilitation, and this change will come. At any moment now, more and more women will take over these studios, because there is no other way.

(Female professor)

Despite these visible changes, the motif of the glass ceiling recurred in the narratives, and was thought to exist especially at higher career levels. Women, participants said, have to demonstrate more achievements, persistence and determination.

Women... their careers progress a little more slowly. One really must have a great deal of determination, fight for one's own, practically battle for it.

(Female professor)

Organisational Work as a Burden

Inequalities are also evident in the everyday distribution of duties. For many of the interviewees, the question: "Are you also involved in organisational work at the academy?" resonated particularly clearly; in the environment of the academy, this is sometimes perceived as being low-prestige and time-consuming, and a hindrance to developing one's own creative career or earning money. Women's interviewees tended to emphasise the consequences of bureaucratic tasks being 'attached' to didactic and artistic work: overload, less time for one's own creative work, and a sense that the organisational burden is imposed on them systemically.

The academy is terribly bureaucratised... Running a unit requires an enormous amount of effort; one pays for it with a lack of development of one's own art.

(Female professor)

Because promotion mainly depends on artistic achievement and recognition for creative projects, an unequal division of organisational duties translates directly into professional opportunities – every hour devoted to bureaucracy is an hour taken away from creative work, publications, exhibitions and grants. As a result, women, who are more often

assigned organisational tasks, have fewer opportunities to build their portfolio and become known in the field of art, which in turn makes it more difficult for them to further their career or become promoted to higher positions.

In men's accounts, organisational work was more often described in terms of institutional functioning – as something necessary, albeit at a cost. The risk involved they reported most often was burnout resulting from becoming overburdened.

For over a dozen years, I dealt with such an avalanche of organisational matters that I am surprised myself. And it ended in complete burnout.

(Male professor)

Against the background of these accounts, a hierarchical dimension also emerges clearly: organisational duties flow from the top down, from female and male professors to younger people, especially female and male assistants, who most often perform minor but burdensome tasks necessary for their studio to function.

It is something of a paradox that a person who holds this higher academic degree and has this assistant can, by virtue of the hierarchy itself, assign more tasks to him.

(Male assistant)

In small faculties, the scope of such duties can be particularly onerous, and in the absence of adequate remuneration gives rise to a sense of injustice and lack of recognition. Even when the study participants looked on organisational work as an opportunity to gain new experience, becoming overloaded, and without proportionate gratification, remained the dominant experience.

On the other hand, the material also included statements emphasising the positive aspects of this kind of activity; for example, that organisational work, though time-consuming, can constitute a source of social and institutional capital.

It takes time, but at the cost of time, as it were, I establish new collaborations, new acquaintances. I certainly also became more recognisable, which later has an impact, for example, on votes in faculty councils.

(Male assistant)

Activities carried out in cooperation with other artistic institutions were interpreted similarly: they enabled people to develop their individual interests and competencies while building external relationships that

could pay off down the road. In this sense, despite the difficulties noted, organisational work can constitute a resource that supports the acquisition of new competences, increases recognisability in the academic environment, and sometimes provides a real sense of agency.

Differences in Working with Women and Men

The unequal positioning of women and men in the institutional hierarchy is also reflected in everyday didactic relationships. This part of our analysis is based on questions we asked concerning differences in participants' didactic and artistic work with women and men. Female and male interviewees were asked to reflect on whether, and in what ways, teaching women differs from teaching men, and with whom they prefer to collaborate in class and on projects. The answers reveal a predominant pattern of "individualism" in relationships, where what matters is the person, not their gender, where differences more concern character, temperament, or working style. This conviction of equality, however, proves unstable, and in practice has certain limitations.

The feminisation of fields with more female students (currently, this applies to all fields) and of female student groups creates specific micro-dynamics that do not fit easily into simple categories of equality or inequality. On the one hand, participants in the study described situations in which male students, being in the minority, were less visible or even tended to "hide." On the other hand, their minority position was sometimes perceived as a source of privilege: individual men sometimes received more attention from staff or were seen as "potential to be developed" – in practice, this translated into invitations to projects, individual support, and the awarding of distinctions. The pattern of such situations is not unambiguously stable. In some cases there may be favouring, at other times distancing or patronising treatment. It is therefore difficult to speak of consistent privilege or discrimination as a structural phenomenon. Nevertheless, it can be called sexism, because it is based on stereotypical assumptions concerning gender, affects the course of education and relationships within the group, and shapes access to symbolic and material resources in the process of artistic education.

The issue of safety and boundaries is also important. Female students more often adopt a strategy of preventive distance towards older male teachers, in terms of both how they communicate and the image they present (e.g., in choosing what to wear for a review). They do so to avoid sexualising interpretations and ambiguous situations. This kind of self-limitation is a form of adaptation to the risk inscribed in relations of power and assessment, and at the same time an invisible cost borne mainly by women. What should be a free creative process becomes entangled in the need to constantly monitor one's own body and behaviour.

In the background, the shadow of the master-student model is also at work. It is particularly strong in studios run by men, where the hierarchy and the teacher's ego stand out more clearly. Such a hierarchical relationship may foster intensive artistic development, but can also be a source of dependence and abuse, especially if professional boundaries become blurred under the influence of emotions and discretionary assessment. Added to this is the uneven distribution of non-prestigious organisational and administrative duties, which are more often entrusted to women. This reinforces the asymmetrical division of labour and institutional care, and contributes to women being less visible in the creative sphere.

At the same time, female and male interviewees emphasised that none of these patterns is absolute. In the environment of the art academy, one encounters male professors with a supportive, warm, partnership-based style of teaching, and female teachers who are strict, aloof, and consistently oriented towards defined criteria of quality. Thus, gender is only one of many factors that affect the organisational and relational tensions of the world of the academy. How they actually play out also depends on the norms adopted in the studio, individual temperaments, and the broader institutional context.

Atypical, Ambiguous Relationships between Students and Lecturers

The complexity of relationships among staff members and the diverse styles of collaboration that exist provide an important background for the next area of analysis – relationships between female and male students and academic staff. We explored this by asking female and male interviewees to describe any relationships at the academy that go beyond typical student-teacher interactions. We asked whether they had encountered such situations, what they consisted of, and what impact, if any, these may have had on the careers of the people concerned. In the narratives of the study participants, this area proved particularly ambivalent: there were stories of love affairs and of close bonds developing, but also descriptions of harassment, abuse, and certain boundaries being crossed in everyday communication.

The motif most frequently invoked was affairs between male professors and female students. Both short- and long-term relationships were described, some of which ended in marriage or children. Privately, these were sometimes treated as 'normal', provided that the simultaneous teacher-student relationship neither led to favouritism nor limited the student's ability to end the relationship. In the academic context, though, affairs disrupted the didactic order and undermined the neutrality of the assessor–assessed relationship, creating a grey area of institutional responsibility in which the boundaries of acceptability remained fluid and were negotiated informally.

Female students became assistants thanks to this.**(Female professor)**

One interviewee spoke of a male professor who “had five wives and all of them were his female students.” Such stories were usually seen as a manifestation of favouritism and a perpetuation of the hierarchy, although some people emphasised that, since adults were involved, it is difficult to condemn such relationships unequivocally. The key element in people’s assessments remained the risk of abuses of power.

Other recurring themes were flirting, ambiguous jokes and sexist comments. These did not always lead to intimate relationships, but study participants said they caused discomfort and were unprofessional. They spoke about male professors who “flirted with female students, and they felt uncomfortable; they had to escape from these situations.” Others mentioned more drastic cases, such as comments about appearance, e.g., “she has nice tits”, or vulgar messages sent to students.

Clearly, at some party, after drinking alcohol, he could write to female students whose numbers he had because of some critique or something — it often happens that we have one another’s phone numbers with professors. He was able to write literally, “show me your cunt.” He was simply capable of writing, asking someone to send a photo along the lines of “show me your cunt.”

(Fifth-year female student)

Another theme that emerged from the narratives was violations of bodily and private boundaries. A female interviewee recalled a class situation. During clothing fittings, the male teacher asked her to put on a garment. But the place designated for this did not ensure privacy — instead of doors, there were only curtains. Although the student tried to change as quickly as possible, the male teacher entered before she had finished — something the student remembered as a deeply uncomfortable experience and a boundary violation. This example shows that a lack of clear rules, and ambiguous behaviour by teachers — especially given the unequal status of teacher and student — can affect the sphere of intimacy and become a source of threat. Such a “sociotechnical arrangement”²² (a set of organisational, spatial, and relational conditions such as closed doors, cramped rooms, physical proximity, or the absence of witnesses) does not directly generate violence, but creates an environment conducive to it.

Events of this kind occur on a continuum, at the far end of which we find overt abuse and harassment, including cases of coercing sexual relations in exchange for a passing grade.

There was precisely something like that there, that there was literally some kind of forcing into... I mean intimidation, that if someone, I don't know... with someone... that the male professor allegedly had sexual contacts with those girls... that because of this, whether you pass or do not pass. Such emotional blackmail and probably some mobbing-related matters.

(Fifth-year female student)

Some of these cases ended in the suspension or dismissal of the lecturer involved, but in many other situations the institutional response was weak or merely illusory.

And this was not an isolated example; it was not that he wrote such things to just one girl. [...] When she went to the director, they told her that they could not really do much about it. That they would simply tell the male professor about the situation so that it would not happen again.

(Fifth-year female student)

Such situations tend to happen in the grey zone of sociability – shared parties, outdoor workshops, drinking alcohol, or going out for a cigarette. For some female and male students, these were a valuable source of building bonds and community, and even of a “positive crossing of boundaries.” Other people pointed out, however, that it is precisely in such circumstances that roles can easily become blurred and situations of abuse can occur, especially under conditions of intoxication. This ambiguity makes informal interactions both attractive and risky, and such interactions seem to be an inevitable, but problematic, element of academic life. Interviewees pointed out that the consequences of such relationships for female students varied greatly. A close relationship with a male professor might have a positive effect on development, but carries the risk of transgressions, manipulation and harassment. This imposes a psychological burden that makes it more difficult to function in the studio at the academy. A generational motif also came up often in the narratives: situations that would once have passed without consequence are increasingly disapproved of today.

Other Violations

Other types of violations were also reported. They were not experienced by most students, but had a real impact on the atmosphere at the academy. People mentioned experiencing symbolic and linguistic violence from their teachers. The master-apprentice hierarchy was at times maintained not by constructive criticism, but by publicly mocking a student's abilities and work, or making ironic or cynical comments. Students found examples such as “I've never seen a worse film in my life” or “This colloquium reminds me of Squid Game” humiliating

rather than motivating. Sexism was also strongly present, in sexist comments about the appearance of female students, and in entrenched patterns of thinking about art, in which line was supposed to be “male” and stain “female.”

I heard a lot of things from girls saying that a lecturer was checking her out and calling her a “hottie.” Or that when a girl is doing something with tools, he comes up to her and says, “You know what, give it to me, because I’ll do it better.” And then she did it herself, and he comes over and says, “Oh, so this is today’s feminism, right?” That kind of old-man bullshit.

(First-year male student)

Remarks of this kind, often made by older male professors, show that, despite growing sensitivity to equality issues, certain ways of valuing people based on their gender continue to function and shape teaching.

Our male professor said to a girl, “A woman should be painted in such a way that one wants to touch her.” Just like that, in a studio full of women.

(First-year female student)

Against the background of these experiences, how the academy responds is particularly important, and those responses were often described as insufficient or merely illusory. Female and male students emphasised that, when evaluation surveys were conducted, signals given about problems were rarely taken seriously, and that any procedures, which went on without end, were initiated only when official letters appeared, letters that often required many signatures to be collected beforehand. As a result, victims felt deprived of support, and some lecturers, despite repeated complaints, were able to function in their habitual way for years without facing any consequences. In some cases, rather than taking real action the academy simply moved problematic employees into retirement or into less visible areas. At the same time, among students information circulates informally. For example, there were rumours about a “blacklist” on which people who report incidents are supposedly placed, about warnings from staff members “through personal connections,” and a lack of clear information on the consequences of crossing boundaries. All of these discourage official reporting and fuel fear.

These accounts also have a flipside: a fear among some staff members that students have too much influence on institutional decisions. Situations were mentioned in which individual complaints, even those regarded as unfounded, led to a lecturer being withdrawn from a committee or from organisational tasks. Experiences of this kind strengthen the conviction that an accusation alone may be enough to undermine an

employee's position, and may cause staff to maintain a greater distance from students and minimise one-to-one contact.

These days, I would never lock myself in a darkroom with anyone to develop negatives, or to explain things — these are simply not such times. [...] One must be careful not to be alone with someone. [...] Because then one can easily become the object of certain accusations.
(Male professor)

Similarly, a female interviewee emphasised that arbitrary decisions made by students may undermine the position of employed staff.

I believe that this is a symptom of our times, that the student rules. [...] And what happened? [...] This girl was simply withdrawn [from the committee — editor's note]. And what signal did this send to students? Well, whatever we want, we get.
(Female professor)

It is also worth mentioning here, though, that the research materials also included cases of abuse and violence among students, including incidents of a sexual nature in which the perpetrator was a male student. This dimension complicates the simplistic image of the “staff–students” power relationship, and shows that the system of protection needs to address all directions in which violence flows. It also reveals the presence of hierarchies and tensions within student groups themselves, which are not likely to come up in accounts concerning teaching staff.

Setting Boundaries

The issue of symbolic violence and institutional responses to it raises the question of appropriate boundaries in relationships between students and teaching staff. We did not ask directly about setting boundaries, but the subject came up in many interviews, so I decided to treat it as a separate thread. The research material reveals that these boundaries are not fixed, but subject to negotiation, and that their meaning changes depending on generational, cultural, and situational context. Many interviewees spoke sceptically about the possibility of a romantic relationship between a female student and a male professor. Most considered such relationships problematic, burdened by an asymmetry of power and the risk of abuse.

If at all, then only once someone is no longer grading us, once that relationship of dependence is no longer there... When it is very collegial, only then can something like that emerge. But when someone has power over me, it is automatically suspicious.
(Fifth-year female student)

It was emphasised that, although adults have the right to enter into whatever relationships they see fit, the evaluator–evaluated dependence makes relationships of this kind “strange”, and should be restricted. Some participants considered them acceptable only after graduation. At the same time, some narratives acknowledged that everyday academic contacts can rarely be confined within rigid frames of formality. Closeness may arise naturally, manifest in moving to first-name terms, going out together, or talking about art outside class.

You can talk with them [lecturers — editor’s note] about the world of art and about the academy, but we do not enter our private lives, right? They do not enter ours, and we do not enter theirs. Unless we ourselves want to say something about something — and not that it is somehow forced.

(First-year female student)

For some students, these were experiences that built a sense of community and subjectivity. Others, however, indicated that such familiarity easily blurs boundaries, opening the door to violations.

There were a few situations that distressed me... I already felt that this was too close. And then this question appears: is this already too much, or is it still okay? And it is difficult, because it depends on the situation. There is probably no golden rule for exactly where this boundary lies.

(Fifth-year female student)

Some lecturers consciously refrained from suggesting a shift to informal forms of address, believing that social sensitivity had changed and that the #MeToo movement had set new standards of caution.

A particularly pronounced field of boundary negotiation consists of situations related to embodiment. In many disciplines, including fashion design, new media art, performance and sculpture, physical contact is inscribed in didactic practice, and this creates ambiguous frameworks for interpreting touch.

The male professor shows on the body where the material is or how to position the hands. For him, this is part of the work, technique. But from our side, it can be uncomfortable, especially if someone does not ask whether they may. It may be completely neutral, or it may be a violation — and one never fully knows how the other person perceives it.

(Fifth-year female student)

The people participating in the study emphasised that the line between a neutral didactic gesture and a violation of private space is

a thin one, and that comments concerning appearance or clothing may warp what should be a neutral context into an experience of violation.

Nevertheless, in statements by several interviewees, a clear signal emerged of a change in social norms regarding the student-teacher relationship. What only a decade ago was regarded as harmless socialising (inviting someone for a beer after class or complimenting them about their appearance) is today increasingly likely to be interpreted as inappropriate or risky behaviour. This applies both to propositions made by staff towards students and by students towards staff.

And they [students — editor's note] would call me, asking me to go out to a party, for example, to have a beer, and so on. For me, this is something we can do after they finish their studies. I have no problem with meeting someone at an opening, somewhere in the city, and talking, but partying together — absolutely not. I believe that this is a kind of violation. [...] Inviting people home, to drink vodka... This is something I try to keep under control somehow, so that it does not happen here, on the grounds of the Academy, because it also seems to me that this is totally boomer-like, that perhaps such things used to pass in the past, but it is somewhat inappropriate for them to happen now.

(Female assistant)

This shift in social norms is linked to a growing awareness of power inequalities and the need to maintain professional distance. The boundaries are being rethought and renegotiated, which attests to a maturation (however localised and slow) of institutional culture and to the growing importance of relational ethics in the academic environment.

Summary

Our analysis shows that the inequalities present in an academy of fine arts are complex. They appear in recruitment and promotion, in everyday tasks and in relationships. Formal procedures declare gender neutrality, but in practice staffing decisions are often made informally, and men are favoured. Women are more often placed in support roles, their careers require greater effort and additional proof of competence, and organisational duties become a systemic burden for them. Men, in turn, more often benefit from informal recommendations, and their organisational work is sometimes treated as part of building visibility and prestige. At the everyday level, both subtle and overt forms of inequality and violence occur. Differences in how women and men are treated are inscribed in gender-role patterns that reinforce men's advantage. Alongside sexist comments or the questioning of the value of women's creative work, affairs, harassment and abuse



all occur, connected as they are with the asymmetrical power relationship between teachers and students. Although younger staff members are perceived as more sensitive to issues of equality, the narratives of the people participating in the study show that full gender neutrality has not yet been achieved, and that women still come up against the glass ceiling, and have to make a greater effort to gain recognition and position.

Moreover, the analysis revealed differences in how women and men describe those inequalities. Women spoke more often about organisational work, the division of duties, and structural inequalities. In their narratives, there was a recurring motif of their being systemically burdened with administrative, care-related and organisational duties that do not translate into professional prestige. Women also pointed more often than men to the need to prove themselves, and to the greater effort they invest in gaining recognition. The narratives on transgressions and abuse clearly revealed different ways of speaking about such experiences. Men spoke from the position of an observer, describing situations they knew of “from accounts” (from both women and other men). Women’s narratives, in contrast, were more personal. They focused on the emotional price to be paid, their sense of helplessness, and the lack of real support when boundaries were violated.

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Anna Solecka

Girlie, performance documentation, 2025, courtesy of the artist

Several people participating in the study stated that social norms are clearly changing as regards relationships between students and teachers.

In summary, gender inequalities remain persistent at art academies, taking on diverse, often implicit, forms. Our analysis showed that they affect women most of all – their opportunities for development and access to symbolic and material resources. According to the people participating in the study, change can be brought about only by more transparent procedures, effective implementation of these, genuine support from the academy, and a critical view of cultural patterns of power relations.

Analysis by Bogna Kietlińska-Radwańska

Appearance and Agency

From our analysis of the influence of personal appearance on how different groups may be perceived and treated in the academic environment, two extreme conclusions emerge. At one end of the scale, stereotypes about physical features persist and do affect competency assessments. Female employees who encounter prejudice because of their appearance put more work into establishing their authority. Female students feel that their appearance matters in the assessment process and during examinations. At the other end, some in the academic community place no stock whatever in how someone looks; both female and male academics are increasingly able to create an atmosphere in their studio that is based on trust and partnership, where students can freely develop their own identity and artistic practice, in some cases taking up themes related to corporeality, sexuality, or gender identification. These areas, however, require particular sensitivity and soft skills on the part of academic staff members — skills that no one teaches, but which are deemed an increasingly important part of didactic professionalism at academies of fine arts.

This thematic block relates to appearance, image, corporeality and self-presentation in the artistic environment. The interview scenarios contained a few questions that referred directly to these issues, though in fact most participants in the study raised them spontaneously, in the course of conversations on other topics, which is why we decided to treat them as an independent theme. The following analysis summarises statements that show how, among other things, appearance, image and self-presentation affect artistic practice, how it is assessed, people's sense of belonging, and relationships within the academic environment. We also point to an interesting transformation that can be observed in statements concerning the image of the artistic person, one that is less focused on physical features – including gender, the body and appearance – and more on visibility on social media.

Appearance as an Element in Student Evaluation

This issue concerns instances in which a student's physical characteristics and appearance are in some way evaluated, which can affect how young people, consciously or unconsciously, learn to present themselves and manage their own image in order to respond to expectations others have of them. It is worth considering the responsibility that comes with guiding young people in such processes.

A person who is studying entrusts me with a delicate sphere of their personality, an uncertain one, one in which they themselves are finding their way blindly.

(Male assistant)

These are difficult areas to explore, both for young artistic people and for female and male academics, and one of the greatest challenges is posed by classroom critiques. Commenting on a work that is deeply connected with sensitive aspects of identity always involves navigating between, on the one hand, the artist's action, method and effects, and on the other, their very person.

A female student brought in a work very much in the spirit of post-porn and sexuality, and the male professor was opposed to it and had some criticism of the work. When I recall it, in that girl's position, I might have felt that it was a sexist comment towards me, but on the other hand, it may not have been intended that way at all.

(Fifth-year male student)

Sometimes the person running a studio proposes a theme that requires students to engage with personal issues or explore some aspect of corporeality. Sometimes students take up such issues at their own

initiative. However, the atmosphere in some studios is not conducive to discussing the effects of such work in a group setting. For this to be possible, students must feel safe; they must trust their teachers, and their fellow students. Here, it is not only character traits, manner and interpersonal skills that count; the physical characteristics of the female or male lecturer may also be of great importance. A sense of freedom may be based, among other things, on generational or gender proximity.

It was an assignment along the lines of “my dysfunction”; we were supposed to go a little deeper into such personal things. This was with a male professor; he is very relaxed, a bit of a hipster, but he still maintains distance. My friend discussed problems related to his sexuality, and it was completely natural to talk about it.

(First-year female student)

People who want to address delicate themes in their work at the academy have to decide what guidance they want on their projects. Female students usually turn to a female academic with whom they have already built a relationship and with whom it is easier to converse because of shared socio-cultural experiences.

I work a great deal with the body and with eroticism. I am a staunch feminist. I work with the body and fight against its eroticisation based on contrasts, so I preferred to have the reception of a woman who also understands a little what I am struggling with, even when making a work about menstruation. It would have been harder for me with a male professor aged 50+. If it had been, for example, a non-binary person from the queer community, I probably would not have looked at gender in that way. But when I think about the fact that I’m supposed to take nude photographs of myself for half a year and discuss them, I feel greater comfort working with a woman who has also gone through this.

(Fifth-year female student)

Female and male students may experience uncomfortable gestures or looks from others at the academy at different stages of the creative process, especially in fields where their artistic work involves working with the human body. This may be the case, for example, in fashion design, where the models for designs created in a specialised studio are often befriended by female and male students from the faculty. Situations of this kind foster tension because in the creative process the body becomes an object of observation and touch. During fittings, the boundaries of intimacy may be crossed – not necessarily intentionally, but sufficiently to cause discomfort and heightened vigilance.

I do not like any kind of touch in relation to myself; somewhere, it is a violation of my boundaries, but it is simply a result of the profession.

(First-year male student)

The type of figure students want to work with remains, officially, their choice – some choose to create designs for large, short, male, or non-binary people. In practice, however, execution can be difficult. There are technical limitations: an insufficient number or lack of diverse mannequins (e.g., plus-size or male ones), or limited availability of patterns in popular sources. As one male student reported, in the workshop at his academy there are only two male mannequins available, compared to more than a dozen female ones, which can lead to tension if more than two people want to design something for the male figure. Some staff members may be averse to students designing for bodies other than slender ones – which perpetuates the dominant aesthetic canon and limits the diversity of creative perspectives.

I posed for one outfit [for a female colleague — editor’s note], and it was precisely then that I simply experienced fat-shaming remarks; [the male professor said that she — editor’s note] should buy me a gym membership, or keep me for a while on a bread crust and a glass of water. She tried to explain to him that she wanted to make it for this specific figure. She has the right to do that, [...] and he was insistently trying to tell her how I was simply too fat for it.

(Fifth-year male student)

Some female and male students in the study felt that their clothing, style and image can affect how their work is assessed. Some female and male lecturers treat concern for style as a sign of vanity or a lack of seriousness about the work, the idea being that true artistic devotion cannot be reconciled with a “nice outfit”. Significantly, such experiences came up only in women’s narratives, suggesting persistent cultural stereotypes about how women should present themselves. The result is that students who do pay attention to their style or create a particular image may be treated less seriously – thus being assessed even before they have shown their actual skills and the effects of their work.

If someone looks as though they have come to class wearing a dirty apron, as if they had just come out of a mine, they are immediately seen as such a hardworking little ant, and that’s great. But if someone turns up nicely dressed, and God forbid in a nice outfit, wearing makeup several classes in a row, then the comments start: [...] “These days, students no longer appreciate at all that they can study; all that matters to them is appearance, clothes”, and so on.

(First-year female student)

The accounts collected show that in the academic environment external appearance, including image, may be a means of expression, a reason for criticism, or a source of prejudice. For female and male students, the body is both a creative medium and an area in which they negotiate their identity and the boundaries of intimacy, safety, and professionalism. This requires attentiveness on the part of teachers if they are to avoid crossing the boundary between assessing a work and assessing its author.

Gender Features and Belonging to the Environment

The interview excerpts show that appearance (understood as the externalisation of sex/gender characteristics) may lead to students or staff receiving particular treatment: they may be excluded, neglected, unwanted, or singled out and noticed – not always when or in the way they would wish. This was mentioned mainly by members of the academic staff, especially younger female academics, who more often feel included in or excluded from the environment because of their gender characteristics or appearance. For students, an important theme was how transgender and non-binary people are treated at the academy.

Women felt that, because of their gender and appearance, they are sometimes treated less seriously than men. This was expressed by female junior and senior staff members, as well as female students – although it was also noticed by some men. People with long professional experience recall the days of their youth, when they might hear: “We accept talented men and pretty women”. Such comments, whether heard first- or second-hand, suggest that women are often forced to make a greater effort to establish their authority. Both in the past and today, female academics perform additional work to prove they are competent.

For us, striving towards a goal is not over dead bodies, but through tremendous effort, tremendous commitment, and tremendous ambition. Because we are precisely these women, these little women, so we must do things well in order to show them that we are as good as they are. [...] Yet many women experience a kind of dissonance in relation to men, and we feel smaller and somehow weaker, although we should not. I also have this feeling inside me. I would like them to show me that we are equal, that it does not matter that you are 30 centimetres shorter, only that what counts here is what you succeed in doing, and nothing else.

(Female assistant)

That women have to work harder to gain recognition in academic boards, where – especially at higher levels – men still predominate, is most often emphasised by senior female professors. But the experiences of younger staff also show that this pressure has not disappeared completely. Young female academics report that their physical characteristics,

especially their youth, may influence how they are perceived by both male colleagues and students.

Because I look relatively young for my age, I'm not always treated seriously until someone realises who I am and I enter some kind of interaction.

(Female assistant)

The undermining of women's professionalism and competencies by men in the academic environment often involves them drawing attention to women's appearance and image: hair colour, height, beauty, style of dress, makeup. Female academics notice these looks or comments and respond to them, though today they rarely decide to neutralise their sex characteristics or "masculinise" themselves. Most do not alter their clothing or makeup to look "more serious" or less attractive. Instead, they build their position through independence, consistency and agency, and strengthen their artistic identity – including by cultivating their own individual style and image.

I like wearing hair clips, and I'm not going to change that. I look very young, and I'm aware of it, but I don't want to feel that this is my problem, because sometimes I feel that I'm simply not being taken seriously. [This is what I look like — editor's note] and get used to it, [...] but unfortunately, some men cannot cope with the fact that I'm the age I am and that I'm a responsible adult woman.

(Female assistant)

Students may respond positively or negatively to a female or male employee's youthful appearance. Students and academy staff both said youth helps reduce distance, and thereby increases trust and openness – qualities that are the basis of partnership-based work in a studio. Many female and male students find it easier to consult with a younger teacher on more personal projects, to speak about creative and emotional crises, or to communicate situations involving transgressions. On the other hand, when the age difference is very small, the boundary between professionalism and privacy can easily become blurred.

They can become a little too relaxed, and this one girl, she had in fact already started talking to me as if I were a female colleague [...] and asking me some weird questions; I had this feeling that this is not the space for that.

(Female assistant)

Students appreciate staff members who approach identity diversity, including appearance and image, with respect. For many female and male lecturers – whether younger or older – issues of gender or sexuality

do not affect how they treat their students. In studios run in an inclusive spirit, the culture of communication is based on mutual respect, empathy, and listening, without symbolic violence or hierarchical superiority. Although most female and male interviewees emphasised there was a good, supportive atmosphere in their studio, some individuals indicated that gender-non-conforming people – because of their appearance or way of communicating – are sometimes marginalised, ignored, or met with unwanted attention.

Such gender neutrality and respect for identity are very important. Unfortunately, I also heard about an example that I thought would not happen at our institution. A transgender person did not feel comfortable functioning at the academy. They happened to encounter teachers who completely failed to understand this and refused to acknowledge it. Such violent behaviour, such as forcibly using the registered name and surname instead of the name someone wants to use. This is discomfort, and even a sense of threat. Such a person did not want to study here, so they left.

(Male professor)

Our analysis shows that gender characteristics, image and identity significantly influence people's experience of belonging and how they are perceived in the academic environment. For many women, especially younger female academics, those attributes may lead to their being objectified and their competencies undermined, or they can be important elements of their artistic identity that can translate into agency. Having a youthful appearance often means the person has to make an additional effort to build up authority. Some, though, choose not to neutralise those characteristics. In didactic relationships, these factors may foster trust in some cases, or lead to a blurring of professional boundaries in others. The reception of transgender and non-binary people remains an important theme; acceptance is crucial for them to feel safe in the academy environment.

Managing Appearance and the Sense of Agency

In analysing the interviews, we examined how people who are treated differently because of their gender characteristics and image respond to this – and what happens when they lose control over their own image. An important theme here was how young women resist being treated in a patronising manner in a male-dominated academic environment. We also identified statements indicating a conscious use of appearance as a tool of influence in relationships – to achieve specific effects, or to avoid being treated differently because of physical characteristics.

To minimise the risk of being subjected to unprofessional comments or behaviours from men within the staff or student body, some women

and staff members deliberately maintain professional distance. They avoid informal forms of address, consistently using titles and official forms of reference for all female and male colleagues. This helps maintain their authority. In their relationships with students, women who have experienced disregard because of their appearance clearly separate the professional and private spheres, often setting rigid boundaries and giving up contacts outside the time spent at the academy.

This strategy can also be used by female students, mainly in their contacts with older male lecturers. This may be driven by the fear that a male academic might take advantage of relaxed contact, which could open the door to misunderstandings or abuse. In the narratives of the people participating in the study, such experiences or fears more often concerned male than female staff members.

I think I automatically keep a slightly greater distance if it is a man. With a woman, I do not have that need. When I see that someone wants to become familiar with me and enter private topics, I do not have that problem with a woman.

(Fifth-year female student)

Appearance and image are also significant factors shaping social relationships in the academic environment. Where the age difference between students and younger staff is small, mutual attraction or flirtation is often described as a neutral phenomenon, inherent in the everyday reality of the academy. Relationships between students and older female and male lecturers, however, are perceived differently. Participants described situations in which the initiative for a flirtation or romantic relationship came from a female student – part of the broader dynamics of power and visibility in the academy environment. These issues are discussed more extensively in the chapter *Inequalities and Violations*.

One male assistant noted that, from his observations of students in their first year of studies, this is a time in which they discover their own sexuality and set its boundaries. In his view, there are situations in which young girls test their attractiveness by flirting with slightly older male assistants. Like female academics and female students, in such situations that assistant also said he tries to consciously maintain a greater distance from students to minimise the risk of misunderstandings or violations. He keeps the tone of communication formal, avoids one-to-one meetings, and avoids situations that could move the conversation onto more private ground.

There was a story where my female colleague, who was very relaxed, once addressed [the male assistant — editor's note] using [a diminutive of his name — editor's note], and he got terribly angry, saying: excuse

me, in a moment you'll want to, I don't know, smoke joints with me? He got so upset that she had clearly crossed that boundary too much.

(Fifth-year female student)

Liking someone who occupies a higher position at the academy may bring tangible benefits to the person lower down the ladder. A female or male student who experiences favouritism because of their attractiveness may not always be aware that they are receiving privileged treatment precisely for that reason. Such situations foster misunderstandings and uncomfortable interactions. Physical attractiveness, and having an awareness of being liked by someone, were described by some study participants as tools that can be used – consciously or unconsciously – in academic relationships. Some statements indicate that female students' appearance and clothing are sometimes perceived as factors that can affect how a student is assessed during examinations or reviews conducted by some male professors. Many students' accounts suggest that such situations still occur.

I heard a story that the male professor said you could get a higher grade for some certain type of skirt.

(First-year female student)

Many participants in the study indicated the presence in the academy of fine arts of the “male gaze”, a manifestation of an objectifying approach to women. One female student recalled that, in situations where her appearance might have been treated as an element of assessment or a pretext for inappropriate comments, she deliberately dressed neutrally to avoid both favouritism and suspicions of trying to influence the assessment.

Honestly? I deliberately wore trousers for exams, because I wouldn't want anyone to think that I was wearing a short skirt to get a higher grade, and I know that someone might think that, because there had been comments like that. Here, for example, it meant that I didn't want to come in certain clothes, because I wouldn't want even someone from outside to think that this was my tactic for getting a higher grade because my projects couldn't defend themselves.

(Fifth-year female student)

The examples above show how female students take conscious action to retain control over how they are perceived and, often as a result, how they are treated. They strategically manage their image, seeking a balance between personal expression, fear of attracting unwanted attention, and the demands of professionalism.

The Image of the Artistic Person

In distinguishing this category, we sought to reconstruct a generalised image of a person engaged in artistic activity – in the eyes of the study participants – and to capture manifestations of how people question this image or distance themselves from it. Apart from a few examples concerning eccentric dress, however, the statements we gathered did not allow this aim to be fully achieved. As it turned out – which may indicate a positive change – the people participating in the study paid less attention to appearance or clothing, and more to image – understood more in terms of ‘artistic brand’. Issues related to producing and communicating an artistic personality were particularly pronounced among students. In their view, this is a process that begins very early, and is closely connected with social media.

Students emphasised how important, or even decisive, for their career their diploma project can be. For many recognised female and male artists, it was a milestone in their path to success. This perspective, however, generates strong pressure, which can inhibit creative freedom and the willingness to take artistic risks. As a result, students, who are only at an early stage of their development, impose on themselves an obligation of usefulness and measurable development, where every work has to be refined, complete, and ‘successful’ so it can feed into a portfolio, win an award, or be put on exhibition.

[Among female and male students — editor’s note] It has always been the case, in a way, that there was strong pressure and a desire for everything to be as good as possible, but now [...] an unsuccessful work, as it were, is not treated by students simply as the experience of an unsuccessful work, but as a failure. That is a bit of a pity. The number of exhibitions, the number of competitions, everything must be suitable for something; everything is measurable, comparable, whereas during studies, it would actually be great if there were only unsuccessful works.

(Male professor)

According to some female and male lecturers, students too quickly identify their work with themselves, which can harm their self-esteem. Such personal engagement, combined with the pressure of thinking about the future, can be a heavy burden that deepens loneliness and undermines one’s sense of self-worth.

This often leads to anger, frustration, and sadness. You see that there are many things around which one must, quite literally, dance around. [One must — editor’s note] somehow weave one’s own being so that it is stable, so that it is good, so that it opens possibilities rather than taking them away.

(Fifth-year male student)

In some cases, the pursuit of early success begins with choosing a diploma studio. The quality and success of a diploma project are attributed not only to its author, male or female, but also to the studio in which it was created.

If your professor is better known in the field and more highly regarded, you can use that to your advantage a little bit.

(Fifth-year male student)

Today, social media are a key platform in which students' achievements gain visibility, and are being assessed and negotiated. A lack of online activity makes entering the professional world of art seem much more difficult. In this context, Instagram serves as a “living portfolio,” where one presents one's own works, creative processes, successes, and a constructed digital identity. At the same time, interactions – such as shares, tags, or joint stories – become an important element of networking and building up a presence in the art world.

Networking is everything, [...] it is totally part of your work, and it is better to realise that quickly.

(Fifth-year male student)

The academy can also play an important role in promoting female and male artists. Academies, fields of study, and studios usually have their own social media profiles. Female and male employees often promote their students' work within their own studios. Nevertheless, some students feel that academies, as institutions, do not fully realise their potential in this respect.

This began to trouble people greatly: at that point, the academy had in fact stopped promoting us anywhere. If we do not promote ourselves, we will not manage to find anything for ourselves in this industry.

(First-year male student)

This statement articulates an expectation that academies should better prepare students for an artistic career in the contemporary, highly “mediatised” field of art, including by offering tools for developing one's own artistic personality.

We do not have things that can help a person find their way in the contemporary world. [...] Maybe sometimes it is good that there is no strictly marketing-oriented thinking. On the other hand, I think this is somewhat lacking; we are still operating under rules from, I don't know, 60 years ago, while online promotion is nevertheless a super important part of the world. I have the impression that we

don't find our way in it at all, or at least that this school is in no way connected with this sphere of reality, which is not that easy.

(Fifth-year female student)

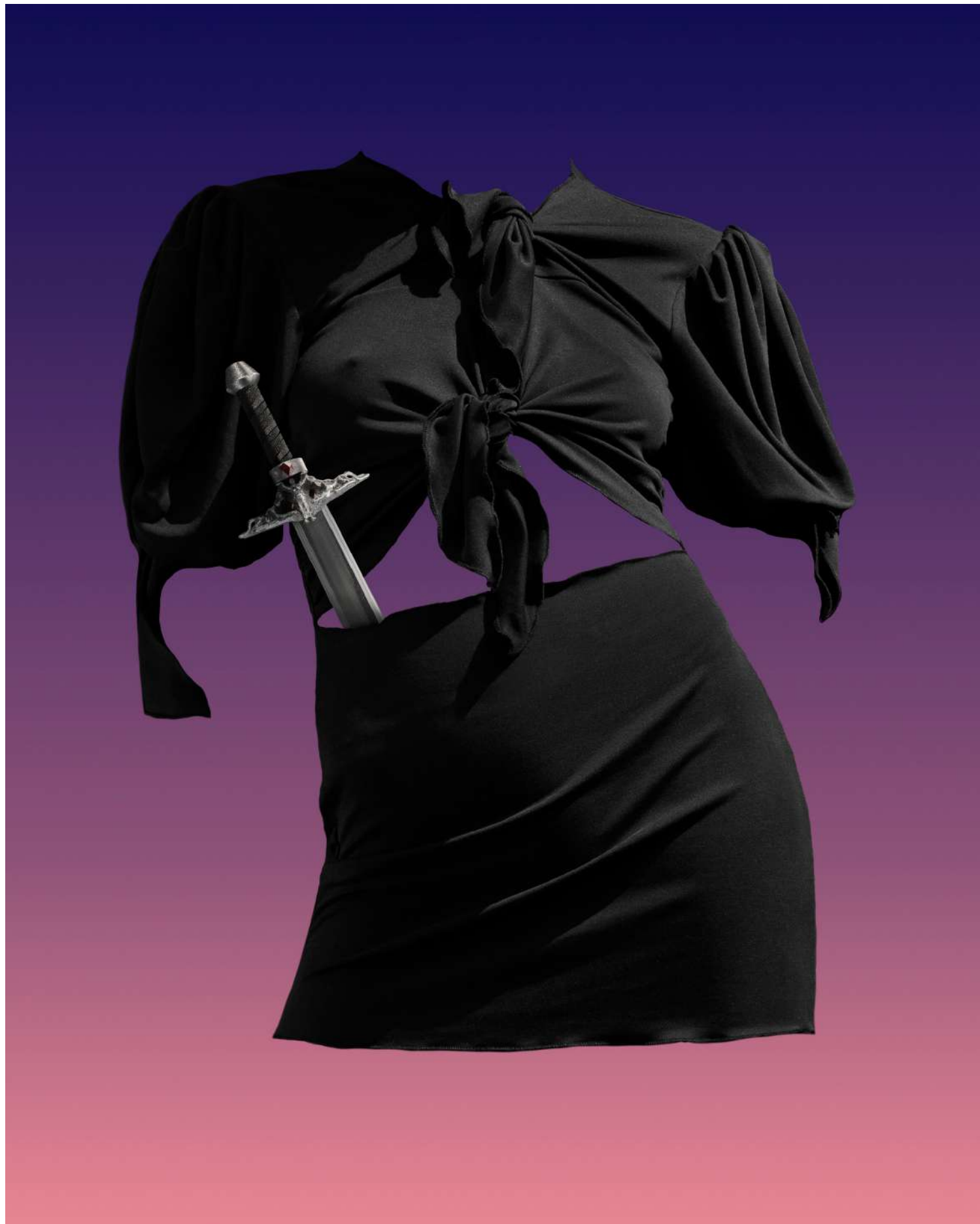
Our analysis indicates that, for many young female and male artists, the process of shaping their artistic identity begins during their studies, and is often connected with the need to become visible externally early on. Students who take this approach regard their diploma project as crucial to their careers, and social media – especially Instagram – as an important tool for building visibility. Online activity is treated not just as a form of self-promotion, but as a key condition for participating in the art world. At the same time, students are under pressure to make every piece “successful”, one that can feed into a portfolio or be part of a public presentation. This logic can produce a strong emotional burden of equating one's own worth with the reception a work is given. In this context, artistic identity becomes a “project” requiring constant maintenance, negotiation, and exposure to other people's assessment.

Summary

At academies, people are still assessed through the prism of appearance in the traditional sense, that is, characteristics are attributed to them or grades awarded on the basis of their appearance or image. Stereotypes related to physical characteristics, such as hair colour, height, or delicate beauty, are still prevalent; as a result, women are more often treated unprofessionally, primarily by male staff members. At the same time, such attitudes are now largely criticised, and strategies are being developed to counteract them. Increasing awareness also leads to additional areas being identified in which gender characteristics, appearance and image may influence career development. They do not function only as a criterion for entering the environment, but also as an element of assessment, especially in situations where features related to appearance are worked through within creative activities. Female and male academics are increasingly skilled at creating a safe environment in their studios, grounded in respect for diversity. This supports young artistic people in taking up personal themes that are important to them. Creative work in such areas as corporeality, sexuality and identity, however, make it challenging to draw the line between commenting on a work and commenting on someone's person. The statements we gathered on the image of an artistic person were surprising – participants spoke less about how one should or wants to look, and more about how to create visibility online. Interestingly – and another challenge – in this latter context, students were less suspicious and critical of this instrumentalisation of their own image than when they spoke about being assessed based on appearance.

Agata Wrońska

Naked Weapon, work created using multimedia methods: photography, 3D modelling and digital image processing, 2020, courtesy of the artist



Resources That Differentiate Position in the Academy

The development and success of people studying and working at academies of fine arts in Poland strongly depend on their having access to financial resources and cultural and social capital. Students and employees operate in a shared context — the systematic underinvestment in art academies, which shifts some of the costs of education and the development of creative work onto individuals and at the same time perpetuates hierarchical, often patriarchal relations of dependency. An analysis of these areas shows how inequalities in access to economic, social and cultural capital can affect opportunities for artistic development, and how the formal structures of the academy combine with informal practices in which certain people are favoured, selected or excluded. Such practices are sustained by the actions of all the parties involved.

In this subsection, I focus on two important dimensions. First, I look at the employment conditions of female and male academics, how these are ambivalently perceived, and the strategies taken in their regard. Second, I analyse the situation of students, who, in order to function at the academy, must be aware of both the formal and informal rules of the game, that is, ‘academy know-how’. It turns out from our study that this variable – the position a person occupies within the academy structure – is crucial.

The Reality of Teaching Work at an Art Academy

The picture participants in the study painted of teaching work at an art academy is complex and ambivalent. What seems to distinguish this type of career are prestige, financial and psychological stability, and opportunities for development. Study participants indicated that they gained a sense of stability and security from having a regular income and social insurance; access to academy infrastructure, tools and materials; and the possibility of obtaining various forms of funding for their own artistic activity (e.g., research funds). An academic career thus seems to be a safe route that enables one to pursue extra-academic creative work. It is worth noting that this view was expressed by both female and male employees, as well as by some students.

I very much wanted to feel safe, to know that I could create and at the same time have social insurance, as well as a full salary paid every month. I think it is a sense of security and the possibility, at the same time, of still carrying out one's own projects.

(Fifth-year female student)

This perception of academic work, however, is often confronted by reality. Our examination of the situation of the study participants employed at academies revealed a picture quite different from that in the quotation above. The research material included statements emphasising the precarious nature of academic work, particularly, though not exclusively, in the initial, or ‘transitional’ (as some described it) stage of employment.

It was very difficult for me to come to terms with the fact that I had to harness a great deal of energy and take actions related to finances simply to survive and have this job. I mean, this job did not guarantee my survival. This process lasted for a while; I think it was two years. Only after two years did I receive a permanent employment contract offer.

(Female assistant)

Some people starting work at an art academy are employed part-time, on a civil-law contract, for remuneration that is not enough for them to make ends meet – especially in a large city. Further, under this form of employment, they have no certainty about whether their contract (and hence their income) will be extended. One female interviewee recalled a situation in which her contract ended during the period of diploma defences and was renewed only when the new academic year began. It can happen that the stage of part-time work is extended again and again, to the point where a person decides to resign from the academy while still in the initial stage of their academic career. A high proportion of study participants, especially younger staff, pointed out this problem, but also highlighted that it is deeply embedded in the broader academy environment. Another factor contributing to employment insecurity is people's strong dependence on those positioned higher up in the academic hierarchy.

But this assistant — he's here today, tomorrow he may be gone, in six months we may replace him.

(Fifth-year female student)

This dependence also becomes visible when other employees are absent, on long-term leave, or on trips. Then, the burden of carrying out their duties falls on the shoulder of the female or male assistant. In the narratives of female and male assistants, the inadequacy of remuneration considering the scope of their duties resonated strongly, for they are engaged in both didactic work (which requires a lot of time and emotional engagement) and organisational work (which largely burdens women in lower positions within the academic structure). That remuneration is not only inadequate – it is simply too low.

In the first year, I earned 350 zlotys a month, and in the second year 750 a month. [...] Was it a form of volunteering?

[...] Yes — a civil-law contract. For peanuts.

(Female professor)

Low remuneration may force some people to leave the academy to pursue their artistic career solely outside its walls. Others find they need to take additional paid work not directly connected to the arts. As one male interviewee put it, “there starts to be little time”. In such conditions, it is more difficult to carry out artistic projects, which affects their quality, as well as decisions made in the private sphere. The consequences for female and male artists may be severe, and very personal. They may give up plans to start a family, or have to continue to rely on support from their family. They fall into a kind of trap: financial

instability prevents them from living independently, while the need to earn additional income limits the time they can spend on developing an artistic practice that could provide that stability.

I worked after hours, dealing with all kinds of office and organisational matters — as a result, my private life and family decisions suffered.

(Female assistant)

To be able to work at this academy, I think a female acquaintance of mine from graphic design said that you simply have to have money, have wealthy parents, or some other source of income, because it's simply a luxury.

(Male assistant)

A very important aspect of functioning in the academy environment, which can be crucial to one's professional career and success, is external support. With such low earnings (even if temporarily, as in many cases), support from parents or a partner is important – absolutely essential, according to the female and male employees interviewed, and especially so at the beginning of a career. Such support may include direct organisational, logistical or financial assistance, or indirect assistance, such as providing a place to live or work. Although this dependency caused study participants some discomfort, many saw it as indispensable at the initial stage of an artistic career. Where financial and organisational support are lacking, a person may resign from an academic career (and consequently, from artistic activity, as well, in many cases). Their remuneration from the academy is simply insufficient to cover living costs, commuting, etc. One male professor described support for his son's artistic career as an “investment,” which aptly captures how a family relationship can become ‘capitalised’ to sustain the chosen professional path under conditions of economic instability.

I also had a great deal of support from my partner, who understood what I was doing, helped with organising exhibitions, packing works, this kind of activity connected with my artistic work. A great deal of support, including financial support, because at the beginning, I admit, it was difficult to reach that level of independence. Although I had always cared about it, I did not feel good being dependent on someone, but nevertheless in this artistic career such support is indispensable, it seems to me.

(Female professor)

Although this situation is probably not specific to art academies, unequal opportunities for development may be exacerbated by different degrees of access to technical and material resources in the workplace, as well as the high costs of artistic activity. Interviewees at every stage

of their academic career said that some studios lack materials and tools, which they simply had to obtain at their own expense.

In our studio, materials and tools were scarce; I had to buy paints and equipment myself, and I attended private workshops for the plotters.

(Female assistant)

In the statements I have cited in this part of the analysis, women's voices predominate, and this is not accidental. It is they who most often mentioned professional insecurity, excessive organisational duties, and difficulties in balancing their academic work, artistic work and private life. These descriptions reveal that, despite the apparent prestige and stability of working at an art academy, the everyday reality of many of these women is marked by structural inequality and a lack of real institutional support. This applies to the material and organisational conditions of employment, but also to a gendered dimension of functioning in the academic environment, where responsibility, duties and opportunities for development are not always distributed evenly.

Non-Artistic Resources of Students

Students seem to be in a difficult position that entails much uncertainty. In their narratives, they emphasised the importance of 'academy know-how' – formal and informal knowledge of how to function at academy, sail smoothly through a course of studies, expand one's artistic skills and competences and – perhaps most importantly – make the necessary acquaintances and build up a network of contacts, seen as the gateway to the art world and career success. Below, I summarise various perceptions of students and academics regarding 'academy know-how'.

In the academy of fine arts, particular attention is paid to the role and consequences of choosing a studio, for this can shape a student's artistic future. This is not just a matter of aesthetic or technical preferences, but a conscious decision that takes account of, first, which studio offers the best access to material resources (equipment, materials, tools, and so on), and second, who runs the studio at the academy, or more specifically, their thematic and formal interests, background, knowledge of the rules governing the art industry, range of contacts, and willingness to share them. As one female student noted, one's success very much depends on the choice of studio, because studios differ: not only in terms of profile or equipment, but also in the extent to which the people running them are engaged in introducing students into the broader artistic community.

I think a lot depends on which studio you choose. Because there are studios where the professors simply care more and make

more of an effort; they are usually from the younger generation and simply have contacts and want to push people further.

(Fifth-year female student)

Students also noted disproportions in access to funding and material facilities across particular fields of study at art academies. They mostly described workshop-based fields, such as graphic arts or fashion design, as having adequate funding, which translates into properly equipped studios, access to professional equipment, and the ability to undertake complex projects. Others said that at some academies, some fields of study struggle with chronic underinvestment. Rooms may be neglected, too few in number, or even seriously run-down (some studios struggle with mould).

Or, for example, if there are painting studios in the basement that are mouldy, and so on and so on, then this is a matter of: well, it is great that we have a lot of things, and I am aware of that and appreciate it very much, but on the other hand I know that some people do not have such an opportunity and things of that kind, so it would also be good for them to have such an opportunity, because there are people who come specifically to these fields, specifically to this academy, and then they receive this kind of blow: mould for four hours.

(First-year female student)

It is also worth noting that these material inequalities are not merely a matter of comfort; they directly affect the quality of the work students can produce, and therefore their chance of being noticed and appreciated.

Alongside a studio's material equipment, and directly related to it, is the social and cultural capital in the hands of those who run the studio. They know how the art world operates, and have contacts that may enable students to become professionally active after graduating (or enable them to start a career at the academy). Because resources are limited, some students try to establish relationships with those who can provide them.

They sort things out for people, meaning they sort out equipment for people, sort out locations for people, loans in the sense of free equipment, equipment that no one in a normal economic situation can afford.

(First-year male student)

Such assistance, however, is not universal, and may not be offered to all students equally. Many accounts in the study described how female and male employees may selectively admit students into a 'chosen circle' that is given access to various resources. To gain the right to draw on the personal capital of their teacher, a female or male student may have to

demonstrate that they are “worthy of it”. If they succeed in doing so, the female or male teacher can significantly facilitate their functioning at the academy and provide them with numerous opportunities to develop.

There is certainly one such studio in fashion design where, precisely, a circle forms of more, let us say, talented people, and they are pushing themselves further in some direction.

(Fifth-year female student)

Students develop various strategies to increase their chances of being noticed by their teacher (thereby gaining access to limited resources). As one male student reported, what matters is not only working in the right studio, but being present “everywhere” – at openings, parties, and meetings. Another participant pointed out that, such customs are on the way out, to some extent it is still important with whom one smokes the proverbial cigarette, has a beer, or walks to the bus stop – activities that may be inaccessible to poorer students who have to spend their time doing paid work. In many cases, these seemingly informal social situations turn out to be an important element in establishing relationships that can further a female or male artist’s career. Having to be constantly present, even when one is “dead on one’s feet,” constitutes an additional burden that requires time, energy and money, as well as a certain *savoir-vivre* and congeniality. Some study participants pointed to a need to possess not just artistic skills, but also relevant soft skills; they also mentioned the importance of the ‘chemistry’ between student and teacher.

Studios are also social spaces in which acquaintances are made, and artistic collectives formed – a collective being another strategy for coping with sometimes very limited academy resources. One male interviewee described how students get to know one another by working in the same space. As a result, exhibitions, collectives and “a mass of other things” are created. These informal structures are important and, as two female interviewees mentioned, such activities are increasingly common, for it is easier to organise exhibitions, apply for funding and gain recognisability when working in a group, rather than alone. A female student who founded such an informal artistic group stated directly why she did so.

I also thought it would be great to create group exhibitions. Alone, it’s difficult. And after all, I’d also like to bring the people who create closer to me, just to get to know them better. It was even a bit selfish, because it was also for social purposes and, specifically, for artistic development, but I also benefit from it, I don’t hide that.

(Fifth-year female student)

Because of academy underfunding and a shortage of materials and equipment, some of the costs of an art education are shifted onto students and their families. Those students whose loved ones can finance their work have a much better chance of creating good-quality works that will attract teachers' attention. Those without such support can either rely on the academy's limited resources or give up on tackling more ambitious projects. This is most evident in fields that require professional technologies. As one graphic design student pointed out, a student with a MacBook worth fourteen thousand zlotys [approx. €3,230 — editor's note] is in a completely different situation than someone who has to work on old equipment, or a computer borrowed from the academy. Economic capital is also important before studies even begin, for it may determine who gets in. Some study participants attended paid consultations or recruitment preparation courses preparing them for entrance exams to art academies. This can strengthen class reproduction by favoring the advancement of children from wealthier families and raise academy entry barriers.

**Now it's said that something is available in the studio,
that you can use it, but if you want something a little different,
better, or your own, you have to arrange it yourselves.
Well, hardly anyone does that anymore. If something isn't
available in the studio, people just cross their arms: well,
I'm waiting until it is, because I can't continue working.**

(Male assistant)

In the interviews, the theme of scholarships also arose repeatedly. One female professor indicated there are rector's scholarships for achievement outside the academy, and ministerial scholarships, but they are insufficient support because studying at an academy of fine arts is financially exhausting. And, as one female student points out, that support is not permanent – “they cut our scholarships”. Some teachers try to supplement these shortages with their own resources and engagement. One female professor declared she continually obtains materials for the studio so that students can use them. Such care, while appreciated by students, is in fact a crutch that enables a poorly functioning system to remain unchanged.

**I could choose not to do this, because it is also
a great effort, both physical and organisational, but I do it
because I know that, in the long term, these materials will be
of great importance to more than one student.**

(Female professor)

Summary

In the narratives of many students, especially men, there is a recurring conviction that success depends on how a person acts, on a particular kind of 'resourcefulness' or cunning. Others, including a large proportion of the women we spoke with, who tend to comply with the formal rules, necessarily lose out to the first group. At the same time, our analysis of the experiences reported by art academy students and staff provides a coherent picture of a system in which formal and informal processes intertwine. Whether a person is able to function and, hopefully, succeed at the art academy and in the art world largely depends on their having appropriate economic, cultural and social resources. Although it can be assumed that this situation is also characteristic of other higher education institutions, in the analysed context it seems particularly important, given the high cost of art studies and the access to technology they demand.

The analysis presented paints a complex picture of how an art academy functions. Systemic underinvestment exacerbates unequal access to economic, social and cultural capital. Precarious employment conditions at the initial stage of an academic career, combined with the need to earn additional income, create a paradoxical situation in which academy work, which is associated with prestige and stability, also turns out to be a luxury mainly available to those who already have sufficient socio-economic capital. For students, success derives not only from their competencies, but also from their knowledge of the formal and informal rules of the game.

The systemic undercapitalisation of art academies and the resulting lack of resources in studios seem to perpetuate an outdated, patriarchal arrangement of student-teacher relationships in which a student's chance of success depends on their having financial support from their family, or on their teacher's efforts. This system, based as it is on hierarchical relationships, fosters abuses within them, as described by one female student: A male professor offered access to better equipment in a studio in his apartment. He invited female students to events he called 'pyjama parties', at which he created situations that were highly uncomfortable for them.

Analysis by Agata Krawczyk in collaboration with Agnieszka Krajewska

**Małgorzata Mycek**

Reaper, acrylic on grommeted banner, 2023,
photo: Bartosz Górka,
courtesy of the artist

Academy Measures Towards Equality

As our analysis of the information gathered during the interviews shows, radical changes are currently underway at Polish academies of fine arts concerning very different issues: employment and working conditions, and a shift away from the old, patriarchal model of teaching and intra-academy relations towards women's rights and counteracting inequalities. One aspect of these transformations is the introduction of anti-discrimination policies at many academies today. They are generally accepted as important tools for eliminating various forms of violence, though in some cases they are also met with doubts and resistance — often because the struggle for women's rights is wrongly identified with efforts to increase only the well-being, safety and fair treatment of women. An important challenge is to ensure that women's rights are identified with the universal rights on which a democratic, egalitarian order is based.

In this part of the report, we record opinions and attitudes towards the institutional aspects of gender equality at academies of fine arts. We begin by analysing the transformations that have occurred in these institutions in recent years, then move on to analyse some anti-discrimination solutions in place at art academies and to reconstruct attitudes towards them, including their perceived effectiveness in counteracting violence. Finally, we will show the kinds of changes the study participants would like to see introduced to improve how art academies function, and what these might look like if women's experiences were considered more strongly.

Recent Changes at the Academy

To begin with, we reconstruct how participants in the study perceive the main directions of change at academies of fine arts over the past few years, in the context of the extent to which these changes have helped or are helping eliminate inequalities, violence, and other harmful practices. One cannot overlook the extent to which academies of fine arts are changing overall, and what the direction of that change is. That broader context determines what forms of anti-discrimination practices are available, and the atmosphere in which they are introduced.

In terms of general changes, there has been an overall reform of higher education and science in Poland. This entailed a change in the status of employees at art academies, and consequently, a change in the conditions required to maintain a position or be promoted: parametrisation processes towards which study participants were ambivalent. Such criteria make the goals of professional work and the principles of assessment more transparent, yet for some they seem to contradict the idea of art as a practice that eludes formatting and quantification.

So, in the past, it was simply a cushy job where one didn't have to work particularly hard. But as I say, now all of this is becoming very structured, and these administrative matters are growing considerably.

(Female assistant)

The reform of the higher education system also increased the formalisation of academic work. This is seen in a higher level of bureaucratisation, in more formalised procedures employees must follow, and in stricter requirements regarding punctuality, attendance, and the need to maintain strictly professional relationships with students and other academy staff. One could say there has been a shift in the academy, from a place grounded in a particular ethos to a workplace whose character resembles that of a corporation.

We, artists, are surveilled at every step, that is, it takes place every three months, every six months — we have to report how much we create, how many exhibitions we have, how many competitions, how many juries we've sat on, taken part in. We normally receive points for this and have to report all the results of our work. This is no longer just work at the academy; now there are precise tables.

(Female assistant)

Some people said this entails not only a formalisation of interpersonal relationships and a withering of social life, but above all tensions between inconsistent systems of expectations. People feel pressure to be more efficient and handle relationships more formally, but at the same time to become more empathetic to others' needs.

We are oriented precisely towards effectiveness, towards implementing the programme as well as possible, but it simply isn't always possible to work with such people in this way and enforce these achievements, because they are often very lost people. I think this is one of the more important problems I see.

(Female professor)

The second process is a more general departure from what can be called the 'old' model: the academy as a patriarchal, hierarchical space full of alcohol, violence and cliques, but also strongly marked by the individuality of lecturers, by assumption oriented more towards forming students according to professorial models than enabling them to develop their own skills or talents.

This departure also consists in a gradual crumbling of the master-apprentice teaching model, now often seen as a violent, authoritarian model that fails to consider the needs of students and is one-directional in terms of communication.

When I was studying, I encountered this everywhere: every teacher I had a class with considered himself a master. Perhaps it was not so much that I treated him that way, but everything was framed within the master-apprentice relationship. So, in fact, no one asked me about anything. [...] There was no dialogue sufficiently adapted to the level of students for one to understand all of this, because I think it's also about that level of dialogue. Now, however, the conversation often has to be more communicative, because students expect this, and they themselves will speak up if they don't understand something. Back when I was studying, though, the fact that I didn't understand what the male professor was saying to me was my problem.

(Male professor)

Moving away from the old model entails new models of communication, but also greater empathy, sensitivity, and tolerance in interpersonal relationships.

Certainly, there is greater sensitivity than when I was studying.

And also attentiveness or sensitivity to the words directed at them. And certainly a great openness, tolerance.

(Male assistant)

This second direction of change also manifests itself in a new formula for organising teaching, one that moves away from the idea of the studio towards more democratised models of knowledge transmission that more deeply engage all the people employed at the academy.

We moved away from the studio system because we recognised that the studio is a kind of nineteenth-century construct that, in fact, creates outdated models of art, and we teach subjects. [...] This is a substantive division. Substantive, in the sense that people teach subjects. And let's say that, of course, the scope of duties is different, because a male assistant, for example, teaches preparatory courses for the first year of the bachelor's degree, while I supervise master's theses. A certain hierarchy is maintained here, but it's not the model of the professor sitting on the sofa and the assistant making tea for him in the back room.

(Male professor)

A third type of change observed by our interviewees was an increased democratisation of art academies, seen primarily in the inclusion of students in decision-making processes, the pursuit of greater inclusivity, and the struggle for equal treatment of academy employees and students.

I think a very important thing happened some time ago: the inclusion of students [...] in the programme council and in faculty teams for assessing the quality of education. [...] Female and male students are an incredible body for cooperation here. They also fulfil an advisory function and provide a very important voice.

(Female assistant)

An important aspect of this democratisation is greater appreciation for the work of people employed in assistant positions, who in the past remained in the absolute shadow of female and male professors.

There are representatives of different communities on the committees. In the past, these were the highest authorities. Now we

actually have all these levels. There is a representative from each one. It seems to me that this is a very major, positive change.

(Female professor)

The fourth process of change identified during the interviews can be described as 'airing out', which for study participants meant an opening up of the academy to the outside world – by dealing with important social issues in class, cooperating with the city, companies and other cultural institutions, and strengthening international cooperation. This trend is triggered by, among other things, a recognition of the role and importance of cooperation in the broad sense; today the notion of cooperation can be said to compete with more individualistic ways of understanding creative work.

I also think they're more aware, as it were, that networking is necessary, that cooperation is necessary; that once, let's say 20 years ago, this model of an individual commercial-artistic career was the dominant model, in which everyone carried that Venice gold medal in their backpack. And now there's greater awareness of the need to cooperate, of a certain hybridity of activity: that it can be this, it can be something else, or it can be both this and that.

(Male professor)

A fifth form of transformation consists in the fact that, although working at an academy provides security and a sense of stability, some interviewees also noticed that the authority of the academy is diminishing, and it is becoming less attractive as a place to study and work. There is a lack of student applications; many of those who begin a programme do not complete it, and academy employees resign. This phenomenon seems mainly due to a change in the mentality of young people (as described in earlier analyses) and to the changing status of art academies.

Against the background of these general changes, transformations in the situation of women are also observed. Above all, in recent years more women have been employed, and parity approached. Women are also increasingly present in decision-making bodies, and their basic rights are much more respected than in the past.

I should have gone on maternity leave. But I received information that if I went on maternity leave, already having a doctorate and having worked here for so long, it was unclear whether I would have anywhere to return to. So I didn't go on maternity leave. [...] Now things are different, because I see that these girls go on maternity leave, and nothing like that happens. They have every right to do so,

and that's how it should be. But I didn't make use of it, because it was that old school, when attention was paid precisely to such matters.

(Female professor)

Another important aspect in this context is the greater care being taken for students' sense of safety; for example, by the oft-mentioned practice of keeping the door open during consultations, by avoiding ambiguous kinds of relationships, and by showing greater sensitivity to language – avoiding comments that could be confusing and formulating assessments and criticism tactfully.

Interviewees drew attention to the fact that, while the situation of women at academies is improving, new kinds of exclusion are also emerging, especially related to age. This leads to secondary discrimination and gives rise to a sense of lost opportunities.

I have the impression that the situation has changed somewhat now, with greater visibility for women, but these are mainly young female artists. At the time when I was most productive, however, men dominated, and somewhere along the way, that opportunity was simply taken away from me.

(Female professor)

The changes presented here are sometimes described, especially by senior staff, as a decline, seen in a lowering of the skill level of students, their being admitted to a programme based only on a portfolio or interview, without having to pass an entrance examination, and in students not being able to cope with criticism or having the shortcomings of their achievements pointed out. This voice resonates particularly significantly in the context of the feminisation of the academy, such that, if we read between the lines, we find the belief that women are less capable than men and less predisposed than them towards artistic professions. Linguistic innovations, and in particular the use of feminine forms or neutral forms, may be seen as unnecessary, or even ridiculous – a form of political correctness, and therefore an ideological distortion. Language thus symbolises the oppression to which those who still dominate are supposedly subjected.

A very strong motif has now entered art and the Academy: that there is no male artist or female artist, but an artistic person, right? In the same way, one doesn't say that someone is a male student or a female student, although at our institution it's generally a female student, but rather a student person. It's also funny that academy, where teachers are always trying to be very correct, right? When it comes to treating minorities and so on. And a lot of funny situations arise from this, from trying to be so politically correct, right?

(Male assistant)

The changes described here do meet with resistance – which is not surprising, given that they require existing identities and habits to be reconstructed, and some power and privileges to be relinquished. They also provoke a kind of backlash, seen, for example, in calls for a return to high-quality education (meaning, in fact, the preservation of the male professor-master as the central figure), common sense and normality (meaning, in fact, the imposition of relationships and ways of thinking that strengthen male domination).

It would certainly be a mistake to stigmatise all forms of criticism of the transformations described here as a defence of the privileges of the ‘old guard’. It is fair for people to draw attention to important problems such as: the deteriorating mental health of students; ageism; a decline in the level of requirements and quality of teaching; the fetish of parametrisation points and rankings; the excessive proceduralization of relationships; and the academy’s shift towards a ‘corporate’ approach in which efficiency is what counts most.

To summarise, it is worth seeing the changes concerning equality between women and men as an important and autonomous object of the struggle for more just conditions of study and work, but also as an element of the broader and very rapid transformation that academies of fine arts are going through today. We then see that some of the latter support the former (introducing procedures to employment and promotion processes, having a defined scope of duties, eliminating highly hierarchical, violent relationships as a basis for teaching); others collide with them because they promote typically male values (efficiency, competition, hierarchies, rankings); while still others cause troublesome tensions (the pursuit of formalisation vs empathy and sensitivity). It is therefore worth examining these more fundamental transformations, and especially their effects, since they are not neutral with respect to the process of making the academy more egalitarian.

Anti-Discrimination Code and Counteracting Harassment

One consequence of the changes taking place at art academies in recent years is the introduction of anti-discrimination policies. As our analysis of the forms completed by academies shows, these are not in place at all institutions, and at some their introduction is only being planned. Participants in the qualitative study often reported hearing of such solutions; some had even helped create them, while others were certain they existed at their own academy and had received information about them. At the same time, many study participants were not sure there were whether anti-discrimination policies in force where they studied or worked, stating that they had not taken a real interest in such solutions and, consequently did not really know how they should act were they to find themselves experiencing or observing discriminatory practices.

I don't know what I would have to do at that moment. [...] I don't even know whether at our school there is a formal committee like what was established at "X," though that committee was established there only when something happened and certain things began to come to light. Honestly, I don't know how I would react.

(Male assistant)

At the same time – and this is worth strongly emphasising – even among people who are unsure whether such solutions exist at their academy, most of them (with some exceptions, discussed at the end of this section) agree that creating anti-discrimination mechanisms and procedures makes deep sense. These tools, in their view, protect victims and punish perpetrators, but also help to dispel the fear of disclosing violent practices and to counteract the victimisation of victims. Just as important is their educational role: they set the boundaries of what is and is not permitted, raise awareness of what others may perceive as inappropriate, and more broadly, propagate the idea that violence is not tolerated at the academy.

I consider it a great success that these new structures have managed to build something in which there is no tolerance for the fact that when violence actually takes place, people stand on the side of the aggressor out of fear of the consequences, because somewhere it becomes publicly accepted that it is the aggressor who should bear the consequences.

(Fifth-year male student)

Interviewees emphasised equally often that anti-discrimination procedures free victims from the shame of being a victim by stigmatising the aggressor. Further, they make it more difficult to silence people fighting for their rights or to suppress cases in which violence is practised by people holding an esteemed position at the academy.

Participants recognised the effectiveness of such solutions, citing cases of people (sometimes named) who were dismissed due to harassment, abuse of power or mobbing.

There are dismissals as well; people are being dismissed, and this is also independent of gender when it comes to people being thrown out of work. A few people were thrown out for some remarks made to female students; quite a few people were dismissed for harassment. In the past, they would send someone on a kind of year-long leave, so that the matter would somehow... so that the offender could think the situation over, whereas recently there was this spectacular dismissal of an old male professor.

(Male assistant)

Participants also pointed out, though, that before such procedures are implemented, there is a need to counteract violent practices or respond immediately when any signals of them appear. These are identified in evaluation surveys completed by students (though some interviewees noted that these are collected only once or twice a year, when some crisis situations require an immediate response), as well as in direct conversations with superiors, or with people delegated by the academy to coordinate anti-discrimination measures. This, however, requires an atmosphere of trust, which is difficult to build when it is not the victims who are protected, but the aggressors – a problem also raised during the interviews.

Some people – significantly, exclusively men – said they thought anti-discrimination procedures unnecessary because of their redundancy, or even their incompatibility with the more general regulations that apply to people employed at academies of fine arts.

The Criminal Code, the Civil Code, and the Labour Code apply to all of us. And everything is written there. In my opinion, creating some additional tools beyond these codes is acting against the law.

(Male professor)

In still other cases, it was emphasised that such procedures either actually discriminate against men, or worded as if they were only meant to protect women, not men.

Just today I heard a comment: a female student was saying that this leaflet was in one of the studios, and the male professor said: "Really, why is there no support for men, about the harassment of women, and why don't they come up with something like this for men?"

(Male assistant)

Comments of this kind, most of which were made by people occupying very high positions in the hierarchy, paint anti-discrimination measures as biased, and serving only one gender. As if the struggle for equal rights were solely a women's issue, rather than the task of all those who want to live in a more just world. In addition, they overlook the dominant position of men in academy structures, and the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, a man is the aggressor, not the victim. This biased picture is completed by equating those who report violence with 'informers' who create an atmosphere of threat and mistrust reminiscent of the communist era.

What is striking in the statements collected on this subject is that most people agreed there is a very strong need for anti-discrimination solutions, and that they fulfil many functions, but at the same time many had a very low level of knowledge about them. We therefore recommend not only developing and improving such tools, but also implementing

educational programmes to reduce the number of people who question the meaningfulness of anti-discrimination practices or doubt their effectiveness. The purpose would be to show that introducing anti-discrimination policies and procedures is legitimate, and that such policies are just as important as other aspects of the functioning of academies of fine arts and of working in them.

Proposals for Changes at Academies

The interviewees were also asked what they would change in the functioning of their art academy if they could – a question that touched, in a way, on the respondent's image of an ideal. Some of those answering this question put forward maximalist plans. They said they would change everything. When it came to specifics, though, they pointed to very concrete aspects on which attention should be focused, especially regarding capitalisation.

I can answer in one word: everything [...]. I would certainly change the material base, [...] because there are many new spaces, but in relation to the dynamics of the academy's development, this base is too small; we still experience this as highly uncomfortable. I would also place a very strong emphasis on the international character of the academy. Also on funds for artistic research, for artistic development. Because these funds are basically non-existent.

(Male professor)

Two themes appearing in the statement above also recurred in many others – the need to recapitalise the academy (increasing funds for equipment and teaching materials, for preparing exhibitions and diploma projects, and for improving didactic infrastructure and the condition of buildings), and what we referred to above as “airing out” – an opening up to the outside world (domestic and international one), abandoning the idea of the academy as an island or ivory tower defending the status quo. The first theme seems universal, and has always been part of reflections on higher education institutions in Poland; they are indeed underfunded, or funding goes towards infrastructure rather than artistic or scholarly activity, with the result that studying is prohibitively expensive for some people, while working at an academy involves mechanisms of negative selection. The second theme is newer, but it results in, among other things, a new context for assessing what is happening at Polish academies of fine arts (namely, their formulas of teaching and the ways in which foreign academies are organised), and thus in new sources of inspiration concerning what can be improved in the local context. It is no coincidence, then, that many of the proposals for change made during the interviews concerned the organisation of studies and teaching, different models of which interviewees had

observed outside Poland. These voices mainly expressed a desire to change how the studio is understood, or more precisely, to move away from the guild-like model (where students apprentice throughout their course of study) towards one in which a student comes to a particular studio temporarily in order to learn specific skills, then moves on to another studio to acquire further skills. In this new model, studios would also be supplemented by workshop classes conducted by visiting female and male lecturers.

And there [abroad — editor's note] there is a system in which you have these specialised studios at the same time, but four times a year there are workshop moments, when, for example, someone like "X" comes [...]. She comes and runs a workshop for a week. You can sign up for it; you have some 11 workshops to choose from, and these are such quick project weeks. And many schools abroad operate in this way; it's also good because it jolts you out of things — when you have half a year to complete an assignment, you can sort of drift here and there, and so on, whereas these quick weeks of work are very often fruitful.

(Fifth-year female student)

Some interviewees said they were less interested in changing the structure of how classes are organised, and more interested in having them filled with new content that better corresponds to the times in which we live. Hence the questions of the meaningfulness of emphasising craftsmanship in a situation where many activities are becoming automated, and of whether it makes sense to teach the use of new media when students' competences in this respect exceed those of their teachers. Other recurring motifs in the interviews were the need to strengthen the practical dimension of classes, and more precisely, how to apply the knowledge and skills acquired at the academy in professional work.

I believe that what we lack precisely is practical knowledge, classes that could show us how we can use the knowledge we acquire here and the skills we gain in the future, realistically, for action, work, and earning money.

(First-year male student)

It is worth noting, also in relation to the organisation of studies, some other changes interviewees said they would like to see: increasing the scope of intra-academy cooperation between different faculties and studios, as well as with companies and the city, in which cooperation is seen as a highly effective model of learning/teaching, and broadening the scope of humanities education to increase the scope of students' knowledge and counter the idea of specialised silos. There were many others. Some people also felt there is a lack of pedagogical preparation among staff, especially among those who are only just beginning to teach.

I would certainly change this: that lecturers should have at least a basic didactic course, a course in teaching. Because let us recall that doctoral schools do not include subjects in the field of education. And people simply do not know how to teach.

(Fifth-year male student)

This problem came up repeatedly, and was articulated by both students and academy employees, with the latter indicating they need to improve their skills in managing emotions and coping with the increasing number of students of theirs who struggle with mental health difficulties.

I believe that, as teachers, we could undergo more psychological training in order to do this in a more professional way, to manage these emotions, so to speak.

(Female professor)

Gender parity in the employment of new people and the need to implement it at Polish art academies were also mentioned frequently, although some people said that the principle of gender neutrality should apply so that gender issues would have no significance whatsoever.

Maybe introducing clear models, for example in recruitment, where we don't have any names or surnames at all, only actual symbols, so that this would be systemic — this could be interesting, because it would be interesting to see what would come of it.

(Male professor)

A much more important challenge that was noted, though, is to make recruitment processes more transparent in terms of rules and principles to provide a greater sense of justice and eliminate 'cliques' as the main criterion determining whether someone receives an appointment or is deprived of one.

This procedure should certainly be transparent. In my opinion, in such procedures it would also be good, as in the selection of directors of cultural institutions, for someone from outside to participate. I think that would be fair. There is always someone from outside the field, but in my opinion it could just as well be someone from outside the school.

(Male assistant)

For some people, the fundamental question concerning change revolves around things that were lost when higher education in Poland was reformed.

This final view is important, for it elucidates that, when designing changes, we tend to treat them in terms of technical solutions to

a particular problem, while the more fundamental question disappears from view: What kinds of aims is this meant to serve? What values and model of community is it meant to invoke? Such questions are also important in the context of the struggle for gender equality, for that struggle evokes a broader ideal of collective life, interpersonal relations, and subjectivity that is worth articulating directly. That ideal is a powerful weapon, for it makes clear that what is at stake is not the interest of some particular social category, but simply a better, more just order.

The final theme we would like to address is an analysis of what the academy and the career paths within it might look like if they took greater account of the experiences and situations of women studying or employed there. Significantly, some participants in the study had difficulty understanding this question, or wondered what constitutes 'women's experience' and whether the category is too diverse to be taken into account when designing the particular shape of an academy.

Where this aspect was recognised, however, the interviewees suggested this would result in greater value being ascribed to those forms of activity carried out primarily by women (e.g., student care, student research groups, administrative work, organisational work). Their value is not recognised within the new parametrisation system.

Maybe I will put it differently: it would be worth rewarding teachers for helping, pushing these students forward, and for the successes of their students. This should be rewarded in some way.

(First-year male student)

While we agree with the postulate that some forms of work at the academy invalidated by the new parametrisation system need to be given greater value, it is also worth noting that could legitimise women being pushed into auxiliary, administrative, or care-related roles on the grounds that these are "typically female" activities, and that the effort involved in undertaking them has been noticed and rewarded.

It was also indicated that taking women's experience into account would lead to an expansion of empathy and community within the academy, and that this could offset the tendency towards individualism inscribed in programmes of childrearing.

I have the impression that it would be a more empathetic academy, one that places greater emphasis on cooperation, community, and building a sense of community.

(Female professor)

The next thing would probably be turning towards such [...] community-based activities. Women — and this is not a characteristic of women,

but rather the way in which we raise children. This is a social problem, in my opinion, our problem, of Polish men and Polish women, that I would draw attention to changes in programmes — I do this myself, individually — that require joint, team-based projects, joint activities between a professor and a young student at the bachelor's level, cultural activities, but also purely didactic joint activities.

(Female professor)

This sense of community, study participants said, would also improve the atmosphere at academies, reduce the scope of conflicts there, and provide a foundation for interpersonal relationships other than purely competitive ones.

I think there would be fewer conflicts and everyone would like one another more. [...] Women, despite the fact that they often act more through emotions, are also better able to regulate them. They are good at easing conflicts and returning to adoring one another. And men are, I don't know, embittered.

(Fifth-year female student)

Some people also said that taking the female perspective into account could change the way achievements are assessed and reshape how people think about their career. It is not necessary for every aspect of an individual's activity and relationships with others to be viewed instrumentally, as is the case in the currently dominant models of academy promotion processes.

All those competitions organised in order to get any position would certainly be changed. [...] Perhaps it would be based more on these conversations, and not on points. Perhaps the person would be treated precisely as a human being, as someone who is to teach, so one would talk with them and see whether they are in fact suited to teaching. And not: they have points, so we take them, even if the person is not suited to it, and that's the end of it. [...] Perhaps it would be, in some way, more empathetic, less instrumental. I'm simply wondering, because sometimes these career paths, from what is also a kind of male perspective, seem to me very instrumental, technical, and hierarchical.

(Fifth-year female student)

An important consequence of taking the female perspective into account in designing changes at academies would be increased student safety, as well as greater recognition of women's work as fully professional and deserving of recognition.

I think that the sense of safety is precisely in these respects, because, after all, these incidents happen from time to time at some academy. Perhaps I personally would have a wider choice of studios, because, as can be seen, I somehow subconsciously choose those run by women. Above all, it would have a positive impact on this normalisation: that women are professional, that they are able to run their own studios, and that the results are good and interesting.

(Fifth-year female student)

It is difficult to avoid the impression that, when study participants reflected on what taking the female perspective into account in designing changes at academies would offer, they were simply talking about what a normally functioning academy should look like: one that assesses and remunerates employees fairly, recognises the multidimensionality of the work done there, and acknowledges the need for transparency in hiring processes and in supporting careers and development. It is therefore worth repeating that women's rights are not the rights of a single social category of people, but rights that guarantee all people equality of treatment and opportunity.

Analysis by Marek Krajewski in collaboration with Agnieszka Krajewska



Zuza Golińska

The Office, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw,
photo: Marcel Kaczmarek,
2018, courtesy of the artist

3

Expert Contributions and Commentaries

Zones “In Between”: An Expert Study in Psychology

Agata Stola



Julia Baran*i can't swim,*
photograph, 2025,
courtesy of the artist

Introduction

The phenomenon of violence in higher education is not merely the result of individual behaviours. Above all, it results from power structures and organisational cultures that, over the years, have consolidated hierarchical and asymmetrical relationships between those who teach and those who are taught, between authority and dependency, prestige and the fear of losing it. Because of the specific nature of the creative process, where the body, emotions, and identity are tools of work, at art academies the boundary between professionalism and intimacy can easily become blurred, with abuses of power potentially ensuing. From a psychological and social perspective, an art academy constitutes a particular social microsystem in which mechanisms of authority, assessment, and emotional and economic dependency are intertwined. It is precisely within this entanglement that experiences of symbolic, emotional and sexual violence emerge. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) wrote about symbolic violence as a form of invisible domination, often difficult to grasp, requiring no physical force – it is enough for individuals to consider it part of the ‘natural’ order. At art academies, that order is often based on the notion that “this is how work has always been done”: the master has the right to demand, comment on the body, assess emotions and cross boundaries – in the name of art. In my psychotherapeutic and sexological practice, for years I have encountered people who experienced this kind of violence during their art education – abuse that was subtle, difficult to name, often hidden under the guise of authority and care. In conversations with such people, a common motif emerges: feelings of both gratitude and injury, admiration for the master and a sense of betrayal. This ambivalence makes it difficult to report and respond appropriately to violence. In my therapeutic practice I have heard patients say they do ‘not want to ruin someone’s career’ or that ‘maybe they are exaggerating, because after all, this is part of working on oneself’. Internal denial is one form of psychological defence against the experience of inequality and harm, and should not be considered solely in individual terms. Contemporary psychology and sociology increasingly speak of a syndemic of social problems – the co-occurrence and mutual reinforcement of various factors of stress, violence, and marginalisation. I described this phenomenon in greater detail in my doctoral dissertation on the psychosocial determinants of chem-sex. The syndemic model shows that, when a person experiences several negative factors in life, they may have a stronger effect than if each occurred separately.

Violence at the academy is not detached from broader contexts, such as structural discrimination, social inequalities, and a lack of systemic support. The problem of emotional entanglement is particularly evident among both students and teachers; the relationship between them is not

only one of learning, but also of recognition. The assessment, acceptance, and emotional availability of those higher in the hierarchy often determine not only exam results, but also a sense of self-worth and belonging to the environment. As Jessica Benjamin (2004) notes, every relationship in which mutual recognition of subjectivity is lacking may turn into a dynamic of domination and subordination, where emotional entanglement is born, and where one side loses the capacity for self-definition. When violence appears in a relationship, its consequences reach much deeper than in typical professional relationships. In my practice, I have often observed that people who have experienced violation at an art academy thereafter have difficulty trusting others in intimate and professional relationships. Years later, many of them are still searching for a language in which to speak about this. The present text not only analyses this problem, but attempts to understand why violence at art academies has such lasting effects, and how it can be interrupted. This requires looking at the issue from many perspectives: psychological, social, organisational, and cultural. Violence is not just a matter of bad people, but of bad structures. Emotional dependencies, lack of oversight, the cult of individual genius, and the fear of losing one's position together create the ground on which violence becomes possible, even if at times it is almost invisible. For this reason, reflecting on violence at art academies requires courage – the courage to speak about what has been silenced for years, and the courage to introduce changes that shake the existing order. I believe that an art academy can be a space of creativity, freedom and authenticity, but only when it recognises that its task is not only to educate female and male artists, but also to protect people from violence, shame, and loneliness.

Systemic and Psychological Mechanisms

To understand the phenomenon of violence at art academies, we must move beyond the simple division into 'perpetrator' and 'victim'. Relationships are actually much more complex. They involve systemic and psychological mechanisms that have shaped the functioning of educational institutions for years. An art academy is not only a place of learning – it is a social system in which hierarchy, emotions, recognition and dependency coexist. As Bourdieu (1990) wrote, every educational institution constitutes a social field in which relations of domination, and different kinds of capital – cultural, symbolic, and social – are sustained in everyday practices. Similarly, Michel Foucault (1978) argued that, in institutions of knowledge, power does not operate only through external coercion, but through subtle mechanisms of discipline and self-control embedded in language, rituals and norms. This concept helps us understand that an art academy is a structure, one in which violence is not incidental but may become a tool for maintaining order.

One of the key elements of this order is the structure of power, whose boundaries are blurred, and often unconscious. The traditional master-apprentice model – based on the teacher-student relationship – has both developmental and oppressive potential. It is based on the belief that knowledge and talent are transmitted from the top down, rather than co-created in dialogue. This model strengthens emotional dependency and, at the same time, shifts already blurred boundaries. When the ‘master’ becomes an unquestioned authority, and the learning process a form of initiation, the master-apprentice relationship can easily turn into a structure of subordination. People within the structures of the academy, whether teaching or taught, may not even perceive that relationship as being imposed, but as a natural part of education. ‘It has always been this way’; ‘one has to deserve attention’; ‘not everyone is suited to it’ – such statements recur like mantras in conversations about academic relationships. In this sense, symbolic violence operates not through coercion, but through the normalisation of inequality. This mechanism also has an emotional dimension. In my therapeutic work, students bring experiences from the academy in which emotional control, shaming, and sometimes humiliation, predominated. On the one hand, they feel anger and a sense of injustice; on the other, shame and loyalty towards those who harmed them. This psychological dissonance resembles the mechanism of traumatic bonding described by Judith Herman (1992): a relationship in which violence coexists with emotional dependency causes the victim to be unable to break off contact unequivocally. In the context of an art academy, that bond is additionally strengthened by the fact that the lecturer’s authority is often the first with which the student identifies – the lecturer embodies a certain model of creativity, courage, aesthetics, and a way of being. Which is precisely why emotional dependency is one of the most sensitive points in artistic education. I often see that students who have experienced rejection, dismissal or emotional coldness from their teachers interpret this as their own incompetence or lack of talent. Thus, the system reproduces itself: each new generation of female and male students enters it believing that pain, humiliation and loneliness are part of the creative process. Psychologically, this phenomenon can be interpreted in terms of mechanisms of transference and countertransference, which – as Charles Gelso and Jeffrey Hayes (2007) note – are natural elements of every relationship based on authority and emotional engagement. Especially in art, the learning process engages emotions and unconscious mechanisms of identification. A student may idealise the teacher, treat recognition from them as proof of their own worth, and criticism as personal rejection. The teacher, in turn, may project their own fears and ambitions onto students, controlling their behaviour, work style, or forms of expression. It is precisely in the area between fascination

and dependency that emotional conflicts most frequently arise. Calls to ‘devote oneself to art’, ‘open up emotionally’ or ‘step out of one’s comfort zone’ may be a cover for crossing personal boundaries. This mechanism is also reflected in the institutional structure. Unlike medical or social science faculties, where awareness of trauma and occupational stress is becoming part of education, artistic environments still maintain a narrative of the exceptional nature of creativity – one that supposedly justifies violating norms. Art academies rarely have systemic procedures of emotional and psychological support in place for students and staff.

In the artistic environment, courage and originality are glorified, while weakness and the need to receive help are sometimes stigmatised. Many students admit they are afraid to speak about their suffering for fear of being regarded as ‘problematic’. They are convinced that survival is proof of strength, and that silent suffering is inscribed in artistic identity. From a syndemic perspective (Stola 2024), one could say that violence, stress and shame form a mutually reinforcing system in which individual problems overlap with structural ones. Violence from an authority figure leads to isolation, which in turn leads to self-control and fear of disclosure – and consequently, to a perpetuation of violence in subsequent generations. The syndemic operates at the individual level, psychological and emotional levels, but also at the institutional level, through norms, practices, language and rituals. Nor can the role of gender in this system be overlooked. Art academies, despite their apparent equality, often perpetuate male norms of expression, authority and power. Women, non-binary and queer people still have to negotiate their place within a structure that rewards ‘genius’, ‘charisma’ and a ‘firm hand’ – categories historically attributed to men. In practice, this means that the very process of learning may be oppressive, requiring people to adapt to norms that are not neutral, but culturally defined.

Dynamics of Relationships and Symbolic Violence

Relationships in the academic environment are complex and multidimensional. Their dynamics involve not only in exchanges of knowledge, but also emotions, mutual recognition, rivalry, and the need to belong. It is here that the symbolic violence mentioned above (Bourdieu) emerges, where subordination (Benjamin) is internalised by those subordinated, where the existing social order is internalised by those subjected to it through language, gestures, rituals and expectations. At an art academy, symbolic violence takes on particularly subtle forms. It may manifest itself in a person’s manner of assessment, style of communication, in jokes about the body or emotions, in shaming, or in ironic comments directed at another person. These micro-transgressions have a strong emotional dimension; they do not provoke open resistance, but activate mechanisms of self-limitation, that is, self-censorship, creating a culture of shame

based on subordination and emotional withdrawal. A student who experiences shaming will rarely recognise it as violence. Most often they will hear ‘You’re not coping’, and will tell themselves ‘I exaggerated’, ‘I’m too sensitive’, ‘this is just how things are’. The mechanism of internalised domination works in precisely this way (Bourdieu 1990), meaning that the victim of symbolic violence begins to justify it because their consciousness has been shaped within a system that legitimises that violence. From a psychological perspective, this phenomenon can be read as a form of relational trauma, which Herman (1992) emphasised is not always linked to a dramatic event, but can also result from the systematic undermining of a person’s subjectivity and sense of safety. In my practice, I often meet students who, years later, still respond with fear to situations that remind them of odd conversations with a supervisor, how their work was assessed, or public presentations. Such experiences can leave emotional traces that affect how they respond to authority and criticism.

Like other institutions built on the idea of mastery, an art academy is structured around a hierarchy of asymmetrical relationships. In Bourdieu’s theory, this can be understood as the effect of academic *habitus*: established patterns of thinking and behaviour that shape what is considered ‘natural’ in the art world. *Habitus*, as Bourdieu (1990) writes, is a system of dispositions that makes social structures durable and resistant to critique. In the context of art academies, this means that certain forms of abuse, whether emotional, verbal or even sexual, have for decades been regarded as ‘part of the creative process’, ‘a test of resilience’ or ‘an initiation into the world of art’. This is compounded by the gender dimension discussed above: women and non-binary people still function in an environment that was historically created by men for men. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2011) observed, in a patriarchal order a woman is often defined not by who she is, but by who she is for others. In the context of an art academy, this translates into the reinforcement of dependency and subordination to the ‘master’, the teacher who holds power. In my practice, patients tell me about carrying around for years the baggage of words, gestures and remarks that undermined their belief in themselves. But such experiences are not only individual; they are an effect of systemic permission for emotional appropriation, a form of dependency that has been described as emotional captivity (Benjamin 1988), where a person loses the ability to distinguish between authority and oppression, and loyalty towards the teacher outweighs care for oneself. This mechanism can affect women particularly strongly. Benjamin notes that any asymmetrical relationship lacking mutual recognition may become a mechanism of domination, because the subordinated person comes to see their own value only through the other party’s approval. When recognition is withdrawn, pain appears, but also shame and guilt. Symbolic violence is therefore not only an institutional phenomenon,

but also an emotional and cognitive one. Power is not limited to formal decisions; it permeates thinking, body language, and forms of expression. In the ‘master–female student’ relationship, power manifests itself in a way close to Foucault’s theory; for example, in the gaze: who looks, who is looked at, who has the right to interpret the other person’s emotions. Symbolic violence operates both through recognition and through its absence – through who has the right to speak, who has the right to remain silent, and who has no rights at all.

It is also worth emphasising that symbolic violence is not a one-sided phenomenon. Teachers may also become its victims, especially those who try to break through the hierarchical order. In my work, I encounter teachers who feel lost in the new language of equality, because for years they functioned within a structure in which emotional distance was a sign of professionalism. This uncertainty is an important element of change, for it shows that symbolic violence will not disappear simply by condemning perpetrators, but by reconstructing the culture of relationships across the entire academic system. Reflection on symbolic violence at art academies must therefore go beyond the language of ‘pathology’ and ‘abuse’. This is not only a matter of professional ethics but, above all, of relational culture, which determines how we understand authority, boundaries and freedom in the learning process. Symbolic violence will not disappear through prohibitions; it will disappear when the entire academic community learns to speak about emotions, recognise power in everyday gestures, and recover the language of mutual recognition.

Students’ Emotions

The experiences of students at art academies reveal systemic problems, but also deeply rooted psychological mechanisms. What is called ‘difficulty adapting’ or ‘oversensitivity’ may in fact be a reaction to chronic tension stemming from an imbalance in power relations, emotional dependency, and the absence or crossing of boundaries. I work with people who have spent years trying to meet the expectations of their environment, and have paid a high emotional price, experiencing anxiety, burnout, a sense of worthlessness, or loss of contact with their own body. Art academies, like other hierarchical institutions, generate a particular emotional climate in which admiration, fear, and shame are mixed. As Brené Brown (2012) notes, shame is one of the most paralysing emotional states. The conviction that one is inadequate leads to avoidance and the suppression of genuine emotions. In the context of artistic education, shame becomes a tool of control that need not be imposed from outside; it is enough for the student to internalise the message that every emotion, form of expression, or body can become an object of assessment. This mechanism is particularly visible in didactic processes that require emotional exposure, such as working with movement, the

voice, the body, or interpretation. In these areas, the line between learning and emotional self-disclosure is a thin one. As research on relational trauma shows (Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2014), the absence of a sense of safety in situations involving personal expression may trigger defensive responses such as freezing, excessive control, or dissociation. Many people describe losing contact with their own body after years of studying at an art academy – not because they don't know how to use it, but because it has become a source of fear. Micropower (Foucault 1978) does not require open coercion; it operates through the group's emotional climate and the internal rules that define what is allowed and what is not. In practice, this means that a student may be afraid of being assessed, even in neutral situations, because they internalise the gaze of authority. That gaze, whether real or imagined, becomes a point of reference for their actions, emotions and decisions. I have repeatedly heard of situations in which this invisible power permeated every aspect of everyday life, from how a person dressed, to what they chose to work on, to how they were expected to react emotionally. 'I always felt I had to be a certain way – more courageous, more detached, more creative,' one patient said. Such statements show that the academy system does more than develop artistic skills; it also shapes students' identities and emotionality.

An art academy does not need to resort to overt violence, because its mechanisms become internalised. This kind of self-imposed control may ensure survival in a demanding, competitive environment, but it also reinforces a sense of loneliness and disconnection from one-self. From the perspective of relational psychotherapy (Mitchell 1988; Benjamin 1988), such an environment fosters emotional dependency on authority. The more a student tries to earn recognition, the further they move away from their own needs and emotions. As research on gendered socialisation shows (Gilligan 1982; Beauvoir 2011), girls are taught from an early age to be sensitive to the assessments and emotions of others, which makes them more susceptible to internalising symbolic violence. At art academies, where emotional expression is part of the work, this susceptibility may lead to a chronic sense of guilt and over-responsibility.

The result is that the academy, which in theory is meant to support development and creativity, often becomes a space of emotional overload. Students function in a state of constant psychological mobilisation, balancing between their desire to express themselves and their fear of being assessed. This tension leads to fatigue, discouragement, and a loss of a sense of meaning – described in the literature as emotional burnout (Maslach, Leiter 2016) – which may cause a person to interrupt their studies, give up on their career in art, or escape into avoidance mechanisms (from perfectionism to psychoactive substances). When speaking about students' experiences, one should therefore consider the

whole spectrum of phenomena involved, from microaggressions to systemic forms of violence, from internal shame to external expectations.

Experiences of People Employed at Art Academies

The experiences of people employed at art academies are inextricably linked to the broader system of dependency. They are the people who largely co-create the institution's organisational culture and determine what kinds of relationships are possible within it. In discourse on the structure of the academy, it is increasingly said that employees operate in a state of tension between the mission of education and the pressure to survive in a hierarchical system that rewards loyalty to power, and sometimes punishes independence. My observations indicate that teaching staff, especially younger or temporary contract staff, often experience emotional ambivalence. They feel pride and identify with their academic role, but fear losing their position or being rejected by those around them. Many female and male lecturers admit in supervisory conversations that they function in a state of chronic tension and uncertainty. Administrative requirements, student evaluations, project-related pressure and a lack of stable employment conditions gradually erode trust in the institution. In this sense, every participant in the system may both be subject to and wield power. People teaching classes often unconsciously reproduce the same mechanisms to which they were subjected to in relationships with their own masters, a perpetuation that may not result from ill will, but from a deeply internalised work culture based on dependency, competition, and the conviction that 'art requires sacrifice'. In this, one can rightly speak of emotional intergenerational transmission. Violence, humiliation and shaming become internalised as an inevitable element of the creative path, and are then perpetuated in relationships with the generations that follow. In conversations with employees, I often hear that 'this is how it has always looked' or 'you need to have a thick skin'. Such language neutralises violence and invalidates the emotional cost of participating in such a system.

One of the most important aspects of the academic environment is gender inequality. Data from the *She Figures 2024* report show that, despite the growing number of women with academic titles, their presence at the highest levels of academic power remains limited. Women are more often in teaching than decision-making positions, and when they do enter academy governing bodies, they still operate within structures strongly dominated by men. As research by the European Network for Gender Equality in Higher Education indicates (European Commission 2024), women in leadership roles often experience a double burden: they must confirm their competence in an environment that has historically attributed authority to men, while being expected to employ a "soft management style" based on empathy and emotional

availability. In practice, this leads to what I would call the structural splitting of professional identity. Women in leadership positions often have to choose between being 'strong and effective' or 'sensitive and supportive', and either way will be criticised. From my clinical perspective, this dilemma generates significant emotional stress and a sense of guilt. It also affects relationships within teams, especially when the hierarchy is an informal one based on closeness and loyalty. Discrimination against women also has a subtle dimension, often difficult to capture in formal procedures. It may manifest itself in being overlooked in decision-making, in paternalistic remarks, in being given limited access to projects, and in the social expectation that a woman will 'take care of the atmosphere' and 'avoid conflicts'. It is precisely this relational, non-structural layer that causes many women to give up their leadership aspirations. One UNESCO study (2023) indicated that women in the academic environment report symptoms of emotional burnout significantly more often than men, with a sense of isolation and lack of support being important risk factors. I have patients who describe being unable for years to say 'no' to their manager, their 'master', because loyalty towards him was seen as paramount, and opposition as a sign of ingratitude. Such may be the result of the emotional bond that develops within harmful structures.

For many people working at an academy, especially those with long experience, the asymmetry of power is obvious, and therefore difficult to question. Thus, even people who declare they are opposed to violence may unconsciously sustain it by avoiding confrontation with the hierarchy. At the same time, the psychological cost borne by people functioning in a system of permanent assessment cannot be overlooked. Fear of not being recognised, or of losing one's position within the structure, leads to what I call hierarchical emotional burnout. In my work, teaching staff members, especially those with high sensitivity and ethical motivation, often report experiencing prolonged exhaustion and a loss of meaning in their work. This is close to the classic burnout described by Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter (2016), but is embedded in a system in which the boundaries of responsibility and emotion are constantly blurred.

From the perspective of the syndemic model (Stola 2024), one could say that violence, inequality and stress mutually reinforce one another, creating an environment conducive to chronic tension and alienation. A person who experiences pressure on many levels (gendered, institutional, emotional) suffers as an individual, but also loses trust in the system. This lack of trust is then transferred onto relationships with the surrounding environment, becoming part of a broader dynamic of emotional violence reproduced throughout the institution. Changing academic culture, therefore, requires more than anti-discrimination

procedures. It also involves working to understand emotions, power and boundaries in academic relationships. Conversation and reflection are needed to allow employees to recognise their own entanglements in the system and to recover a sense of agency. Academies that understand this mechanism have a chance to become more emotionally mature environments, in which strength does not mean domination, and authority does not demand submission.

Directions for Change

Understanding the mechanisms described above is a condition of real change. Violence at art academies does not result from the pathology of individuals, but from the pathology of a system that enables and legitimises it. Violence may be invisible, where suffering is considered part of the 'creative path'. Violence may be more than an incident or incidents; it can be a mechanism embedded in the institution's structure, language, and emotionality.

We need to think about reform, then, in terms of cultural reconstruction: a change in the way we understand authority, learning, assessment and success. The remedies must include both systemic reforms and a change in the culture of relationships so that symbolic violence, dependency and shame no longer constitute unconscious norms. Institutions have the duty to go beyond responding to overt transgressions, to also recognise subtle forms of emotional appropriation that destroy trust, freedom and a sense of safety, these being conditions necessary for proper artistic and personal development.

From my perspective, the most important task for the future is to build a community based on recognition, where emotions are a source of development, not obstacles, and educational relationships are a meeting place between two subjects, not a hierarchy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Systemic: structures, procedures, responsibility

Art academies should first develop a coherent institutional framework for countering violence, one that goes beyond formal regulations to create real spaces of support. It is vital to appoint independent officers for equal treatment and psychological safety, who operate outside the academy's hierarchical structure and are equipped with appropriate tools so their actions have a real impact on the situation inside the academy. They should be authorised to conduct interventions and mediations, and take charge of education on communication and boundaries in didactic relationships.

Methods of assessment and promotion at art academies should also be changed. Current procedures reward productivity and artistic recognition, but marginalise relational, ethical and pedagogical competences.

Including these elements in assessment criteria would be an important signal that the academy values not just talent, but also emotional and social responsibility.

Systemic psychological support should be in place for students and staff, and it should be not only interventional, but also preventive, including workshops on regulating emotions, coping with stress, and communication.

An important step would be to introduce regular supervision and interpersonal training for teaching staff, especially on working with emotions, diversity and power. This kind of support, common in helping professions, is still rare in artistic institutions, even though working with emotions and expression requires a high degree of self-awareness. Supervision, support groups and interpersonal workshops can all help participants recognise mechanisms of transference and countertransference (Gelso, Hayes 2007).

2. Psychological: awareness of emotions and relationships

At the psychological level, it is crucial to recognise that the educational process in art is an emotional process. Certainly, the relationship between teacher and student involves knowledge and skills, but also identity, sensitivity, and a need for recognition. This means that symbolic violence may have long-term effects similar to those of emotional violence in other types of personal relationships (Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2014).

It is therefore necessary to create safe spaces for conversation about emotions, where people can reflect on their own boundaries, needs and reactions. Practices of this kind support the development of emotional competencies that are essential in both artistic work and professional relationships.

From my clinical perspective, one of the most frequent sources of tension in the academic environment is a lack of language for describing emotional experience. Often, employees cannot distinguish between closeness and violations, and students cannot distinguish between loyalty and dependency. Education in this area should be an integral part of artistic training. Work on emotional awareness is not a 'psychologising' of art, but a condition for developing the subjectivity that protects the subject against abuses of power and violations of boundaries.

Also important is for academies to develop programmes that support self-reflection among teaching staff.

3. Cultural: changing narratives and language

At the cultural level, it is crucial to move away from the myth of the 'master' as an authority figure. The narrative of mastery, which demands submission, sacrifice and suffering, is one of the main sources of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1998; Benjamin 1988). Contemporary art

education should be based on a model of partnership in which the person teaching is a companion in the creative process, not an arbiter.

Academies should support the development of new models of leadership based on cooperation, diversity, reflexivity and empathy. In the context of gender equality, this means actively strengthening the participation of women and non-binary people in decision-making. But formal representation is not enough – actions are needed that change how authority is perceived and embrace different ways of expressing strength and sensitivity.

The language used to speak about artistic education should also be revised. Phrases such as ‘you have to expose yourself’, ‘you have to suffer for art’, or ‘only those who can endure will survive’ form part of a cultural script that links creativity with suffering and humiliation. Changing the language is not a symbolic gesture, but an act of cultural responsibility: it redefines the values that shape relationships and the sense of safety within the institution.

A detailed bibliography is available at the end of the report.

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The Legal Framework for Preventing and Combating Violence and Discrimination at Higher Education Institutions in Poland

As an artist, I would like to
kindly request for my works
to be placed under state protection.

Jako artystka zwracam się z prośbą
o objęcie moich dzieł państwową ochroną.

Anka Leśniak

Lost Element, from the series *Lost Element*.
Reconstruction of the Witch, video, 2022,
 courtesy of the artist

23

Uniwersytet Warszawski,
Równoważni: Poradnik antydyskryminacyjny dla osób studiujących i zatrudnionych na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim,
 Warszawa 2017.

24

Fundacja Autonomia,
 Ośrodek Badań nad Mediami
 Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego,
 Fundacja na Rzecz
 Różnorodności Społecznej,
 Towarzystwo Edukacji
 Antydyskryminacyjnej,
 Uniwersytet Jagielloński,
Standard Antydyskryminacyjny dla Uczelni, Kraków 2018.

25

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*Work in Poland is most commonly performed under one of three arrangements: a contract of employment (*umowa o pracę*), a civil-law contract (e.g. *umowa o dzieło*, *umowa zlecenie*), or self-employment (*samozatrudnienie*, B2B). The Labour Code applies only to persons engaged under a contract of employment. Because this publication sets out how legal protection differs according to the type of contract, work under the Labour Code is referred to here as "employee employment", and work under a civil-law contract or self-employment as "non-employee employment".

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the legal aspects of preventing and combating various forms of discrimination in Polish academia, and to outline the mechanisms available to protect people who experience discrimination and violence at universities.

The chapter is based on Polish law currently in force, good practice in the Polish academic community, and expert recommendations. One important source was the University of Warsaw's anti-discrimination guide *Równoważni* [Equal Standing], and in particular the chapter "Legal Aspects of Protection against Discrimination" by Karolina Kędziora and Anna Grędzińska, which provides a comprehensive account of protection against discrimination and is important reading if you have experienced discrimination²³.

The key set of recommendations for developing anti-discrimination procedures is the 2018 *Standard Antydyskryminacyjny dla Uczelni* [Anti-Discrimination Standard for Universities], by Agata Teutsch and Magdalena Stoch. It is the only model of this scope for developing university regulations in Poland, and this chapter paraphrases it throughout²⁵.

Protection against discrimination in Poland rests on the Constitution and on national, EU and international law. **The definitions collected here are taken from Polish legislation.**

The Main Legal Acts that Protect Your Rights**The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997, Articles 32 and 33 – equality before the law, prohibition of discrimination.**

Journal of Laws of 2009, item 946, as amended.

The Act of 3 December 2010 on the implementation of certain provisions of European Union law on equal treatment – referred to below as the Anti-Discrimination Act; key for higher education, vocational education, and so-called non-employee employment, that is, professional and economic activity carried out under, for example, a contract of mandate (*umowa zlecenie*)*.

Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1175, as amended.

The Labour Code – key for so-called employee employment, that is, employment based on a contract of employment (*umowa o pracę*)*.

Journal of Laws of 2025, item 277, as amended.

The Civil Code – including the protection of personal rights (*dobro osobiste*), that is, fundamental values such as dignity, health, and image.

Journal of Laws of 2025, item 1071, as amended.

The Criminal Code – provides penalties for, among other things, harassment, threats, and hate-motivated violence.

Journal of Laws of 2025, item 383, as amended.

The Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science – including the obligation on universities to adapt the educational process to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1571, as amended.

26

Uniwersytet Warszawski,
Równoważni: Poradnik
antydiskryminacyjny, op.cit.

27

Polskie Towarzystwo Prawa
Antydyskryminacyjnego,
Zatrudnienie – Opis
Zagadnienia, [online:
https://www.ptpa.org.pl/
poradnik-antydiskryminacyjny/
zatrudnienie/opis-zagadnienia/](https://www.ptpa.org.pl/poradnik-antydiskryminacyjny/zatrudnienie/opis-zagadnienia/)
[accessed: 25 November 2025].

I Discrimination and Its Forms

Discrimination can take many forms, but the ones usually distinguished are direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment. Encouraging or instructing unequal treatment is also prohibited.

When assessing whether discrimination has occurred, it is necessary to identify the legally protected characteristic on the grounds of which the unequal treatment took place. This is because unequal treatment amounts to discrimination only where a person has been treated less favourably on the grounds of one of the legally protected characteristics listed below²⁶.

NOTE: Not all identity characteristics are legally protected characteristics. Under Polish law, the scope of protection given to identity characteristics is not the same across the areas covered in this chapter, that is, higher education, vocational education, employee employment and so-called non-employee employment (see Sections II and III).

Direct Discrimination

Under **Article 3(1)** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, direct discrimination means “the situation, where one natural person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation, on grounds of sex, race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, denomination, beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation [these grounds are referred to in this chapter as **identity characteristics** – editor's note]”.*

In the context of discrimination, a “comparable situation” means comparing you and your identity characteristics with a person whose identity characteristics differ from yours and who is treated more favourably in the same or similar circumstances.

Indirect Discrimination

Under **Article 3(2)** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, indirect discrimination means “the situation, where an apparently neutral provision, applied criterion or taken action would expose natural person to a particular adverse disproportions or particularly adverse situation for this person due to sex, race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, denomination, beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation, unless that provision, criterion or action is objectively justified by a legitimate aim that is to be accomplished and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary”.

'Legitimate aim' and 'appropriate and necessary' measures: indirect discrimination does not occur if the unequal treatment can be objectively justified by a legitimate aim pursued by the employer, and the measures used to achieve that aim are appropriate and necessary²⁷. Nor does it occur where the principle of proportionality – weighing the

* A note on the translation of legal provisions

The provisions of Polish law quoted in this chapter are translations prepared for the purposes of this publication and are not official translations. Only the Polish text of these provisions is legally binding. Where an existing English translation was available it has been used, with corrections where necessary. Quotations from the Act of 3 December 2010 on the implementation of certain provisions of European Union law on equal treatment published by the Commissioner for Human Rights (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich) at bip.brpo.gov.pl; quotations from the Labour Code follow the translation available in the International Labour Organization's NATLEX database. Obvious grammatical errors in these translations have been corrected without further note. All other provisions, including those of the Criminal Code, have been translated for this publication; no official English translation of the Criminal Code currently in force exists.

burden of discrimination against the interests of the employed person and those of the employer – comes out in the employer's favour.

Harassment

Under **Article 3(3)** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, harassment means “any unwanted conduct that takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a natural person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for this person”.

Sexual Harassment

Under **Article 3(4)** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, sexual harassment means “any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature towards a natural person or with respect to sex, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of this person, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for this person”.

Encouraging Discrimination

Under **Article 18^{3a} § 5(1)** of the Labour Code, encouraging discrimination is “practices related to encouraging another person to violate the principle of equal treatment in employment, or a person is ordered to violate that principle”.

II For Students Who Have Experienced Discrimination or Violence

Under the Anti-Discrimination Act, the legislator has set out an exhaustive ('closed') list of legally protected characteristics: **sex, race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, denomination, beliefs, disability, age and sexual orientation**.

When assessing whether discrimination has occurred, it is necessary to identify the legally protected characteristic on the grounds of which the unequal treatment took place. This is because unequal treatment amounts to discrimination only where a person has been treated less favourably on the grounds of one of the legally protected characteristics listed above²⁸.

The scope of protection is not the same across the areas covered here, however. Under the Anti-Discrimination Act:

- under Article 7 of the Act, in the field of higher education – that is, if you are a student – unequal treatment of natural persons on the grounds of **race, ethnic origin, or nationality** is prohibited. The field of higher education covers everyone undertaking higher education, whether academic or vocational.

29

The concept of 'vocational education' and issues related to it are discussed in greater detail in the *Poradnik antydyskryminacyjny dla osób studiujących i zatrudnionych na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim*.

30

Uniwersytet Warszawski, *Równoważni: Poradnik antydyskryminacyjny...*, op.cit.

31

Ibidem.

32

Uniwersytet Warszawski, *Równoważni: Poradnik antydyskryminacyjny...*, op.cit.

- under Article 8(1)(i) of the Act, in the field of vocational education, unequal treatment of natural persons on the grounds of **sex, race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, denomination, beliefs, disability, age, or sexual orientation** is prohibited.

If you are studying in a **postgraduate programme, doctoral school, or doing an internship**, you may be covered by a broader scope of protection, because these forms of education may be treated as 'vocational education'. The prohibition of discrimination then also applies on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, religion, age and so on²⁹.

Note that the principle of equal treatment is enshrined in Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, under which all persons are equal before the law and have the right to equal treatment by public authorities, and no one may be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever. The Constitution therefore requires equal treatment and prohibits discrimination in all areas of life and on any ground³⁰.

III For Those Working at Universities Who Have Experienced Discrimination or Violence

So-called Non-employee Employment

In the field of so-called non-employee employment, a person working with a university under a civil-law contract (for example, a contract for specific work or a contract of mandate) or on a self-employed basis is protected by the provisions of the Anti-Discrimination Act³¹.

Under **Article 8(1)(2)** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, unequal treatment of natural persons on the grounds of **sex, race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, denomination, beliefs, disability, age, or sexual orientation** is prohibited.

The Anti-Discrimination Act sets out the following forms of discrimination prohibited by law: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment. Encouraging or instructing unequal treatment is also prohibited.

Employee Employment

In the field of employee employment, a person employed under a contract of employment is protected by the provisions of the Labour Code³². Here the legislator has set out a non-exhaustive ('open') list of legally protected characteristics, specifying: **sex, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, trade union membership, ethnic origin, denomination, sexual orientation, employment for a fixed or indefinite term, and full-time or part-time employment**.

33

Uniwersytet Warszawski,
*Równowazni: Poradnik antydys-
kryminacyjny...*, op.cit.

34

Ibidem.

Because this list is non-exhaustive, an employee may also be protected against unequal treatment on the grounds of other identity characteristics – gender identity, for example – by invoking **Article 18^{3a} § 1** of the Labour Code before a court.

The Labour Code sets out five forms of discrimination prohibited by law: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and encouraging another person to violate the principle of equal treatment in employment or instructing them to violate it.

Scope of Equal Treatment

Under **Article 18^{3b} § 1** of the Labour Code, differentiation by an employer of an employee's situation on the grounds of one or more of the characteristics listed above constitutes a violation of the principle of equal treatment in employment, where it results in particular in:

- 1) refusal to establish an employment relationship, or its termination;
- 2) an unfavourable determination of remuneration for work or of other terms of employment, or being passed over for promotion or for the granting of other work-related benefits;
- 3) being passed over when employees are selected for participation in training to improve professional qualifications.

Equal Pay

The principle of equal treatment in employment also covers pay. **Art. 18^{3c} § 1** of the Labour Code requires employers to ensure that employees receive equal remuneration for the same work or for work of equal value.

This means that differences in pay must not result from employees' personal characteristics, such as sex, age, disability, origin or sexual orientation. The criteria determining the level of remuneration should be objective and linked to the actual requirements of the position in question³³.

It is worth emphasising that 'remuneration' covers not only basic pay but also all other components and supplements, whether monetary (such as bonuses and awards) or non-monetary (such as benefits in kind).

Work of equal value is work whose performance requires comparable qualifications (confirmed by the relevant documents or acquired in practice), professional experience, responsibility (for example, for managing a team, taking decisions or property entrusted to the employee) and effort, both physical and mental.

It follows that if two people perform work of a similar nature and workload, they should be paid at a similar level, regardless of their personal characteristics or membership of a particular social group³⁴. Moreover, under **Article 18^{3ca} § 1** of the Labour Code, a person applying

for a given position must be given information by the employer about the remuneration for that position and its initial amount or range (a new provision, in force since 24 December 2025).

Prohibition of Retaliation

Art. 18^{3e} of the Labour Code expressly prohibits retaliation against employees who exercise rights arising from a breach of labour law provisions, including the principle of equal treatment in employment. This means that an employer may not treat a person unfavourably or dismiss them for reporting a case of discrimination, or subject them to any other negative consequences. The prohibition also covers anyone who has given the person affected support of any kind. Where it is breached, the employee is entitled to claim compensation of no less than the statutory minimum remuneration for work. The purpose of this provision is to protect those who act in defence of their rights, and to prevent situations in which fear of reprisals would discourage people from reporting discrimination. Article 17 of the Anti-Discrimination Act also prohibits retaliation, protecting not only those working at a university but students as well.

IV University-Level Protection

Universities are required to comply with the legal minimum described above, but they may (and should!) introduce broader standards of protection. If you have experienced discrimination, familiarise yourself with your university's anti-discrimination procedures. This is one of the first steps you can take if you have experienced discrimination.

Claims

Information for Students

Claims under the Anti-Discrimination Act

Under **Article 13** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, students who are subjected to discrimination have the right to seek compensation from the university. **Compensation for material damage** may include reimbursement of costs incurred in connection with their studies – tuition fees, rent, or the cost of medical treatment – where, as a result of discrimination, the person was forced to discontinue their studies or suffered other measurable losses.

Compensation for non-material harm may cover psychological and emotional harm, such as diminished self-esteem, mental suffering, or a violation of dignity resulting from discriminatory treatment.

Under Articles 13 and 14 of the Anti-Discrimination Act, claims are pursued before the **civil courts**. When filing a statement of claim, you must identify the discriminatory ground on which the unequal

35
Uniwersytet Warszawski,
*Równowazni: Poradnik
antydiskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

36
Ibidem.

treatment was based and which is covered by the protection the Act provides³⁵. In the field of higher education, the grounds protected are **race, ethnic origin, and nationality**. In the field of vocational education, legal protection also extends to **sex, age, religion, denomination, beliefs, disability, and sexual orientation**.

In cases of discrimination in higher education, **the burden of proof is reversed**. This means that a student bringing a claim against a university does not have to present full and unequivocal evidence of the harm they have suffered. It is enough to establish a **prima facie case that unequal treatment occurred** – by giving a coherent and consistent account of events, for example. If you have evidence such as documents, recordings or witnesses, it is worth relying on it, but it is not a precondition³⁶. If the court finds that the circumstances presented make a violation of the principle of equal treatment plausible, the burden of proof then shifts to the university: it must show that no discrimination occurred and that the actions of its staff or authorities were based on **objective and neutral criteria**. A failure to discharge that burden may be decisive for the outcome of the case.

Under **Article 15** of the Anti-Discrimination Act, claims arising from a violation of the principle of equal treatment may be brought within **three years of the date on which the person affected learned of the violation**, and in any event **no later than five years after the event itself**. It is also important that, under Article 16, pursuing a claim under the Anti-Discrimination Act does not preclude relying on other provisions to assert your rights – for students, those of the Civil Code, for example.

In pursuing a claim, you can ask for help from non-governmental organisations, which provide free advice and support to people experiencing violence or discrimination.

Information for Those Working at Universities

Under the Labour Code and the Anti-Discrimination Act

People in employment who have experienced discrimination may seek compensation under either the Anti-Discrimination Act or the Labour Code. Compensation may cover:

- material damage – for example lost earnings, lower pay in a new job the person was forced to take as a result of the discrimination, or pay differentials arising from discriminatory practices (on grounds of sex, for instance);
- non-material harm – for example mental suffering, diminished self-esteem, or a violation of dignity and reputation.

Under the **Labour Code**, an employee may claim compensation of no less than the statutory minimum remuneration for work, as determined under separate provisions. The Anti-Discrimination Act sets no

37
Uniwersytet Warszawski,
*Równowazni: Poradnik antydys-
kryminacyjny...*, op.cit.

38
Ibidem.

39
Uniwersytet Warszawski,
*Równowazni: Poradnik
antydyskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

40
Ibidem.

minimum, but under neither act is there any upper limit on the amount of compensation.

Where a claim concerns material damage, that damage must be proved in court – for example by documentation confirming the cost of medical treatment or of vocational training, or by evidence of lower earnings in a new job. The procedural route depends on the legal basis: a claim for breach of the **Anti-Discrimination Act** is brought before a civil court, whereas a claim for breach of the Labour Code goes before a labour court³⁷.

Under both routes, the person bringing the claim must identify the **protected characteristic** on the grounds of which they were treated less favourably³⁸. It is worth remembering that the list of grounds in the Anti-Discrimination Act is exhaustive, whereas the Labour Code's list is non-exhaustive, which gives wider scope for invoking different grounds of legal protection.

Claims Under Other Provisions for Students and Employees

Civil Code

Protection against discrimination and violence in academia is not limited to the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Labour Code. In certain situations, students may also assert their rights under the Civil Code by invoking a violation of personal rights³⁹. The same applies to those working at a university, in both employee and non-employee employment. Such claims may supplement an action based on the Anti-Discrimination Act, but they also apply where that act affords no protection. Article 23 of the Civil Code sets out a non-exhaustive list of personal rights, which includes health, dignity, freedom, honour and image.

For example, because the Anti-Discrimination Act affords no protection against sexual harassment, a person subjected to such conduct may base a claim on the Civil Code instead – on the right to personal dignity, for instance, which should be understood as a right to bodily integrity. In such a case the claim may be brought not only against the **direct perpetrator** (a lecturer or a member of the administrative staff, for example) but also against the university, if it knew of the problem and took no action.

Under **Articles 24, 415 and 445** of the Civil Code, where personal rights have been violated it is possible to seek the performance of the steps needed to remove the effects of the violation, compensation for damage, financial redress for non-material harm, or payment of an appropriate sum to a designated social cause⁴⁰.

Criminal Code

At universities, conduct may occur that amounts not only to a violation of civil law but also to a criminal offence under the Criminal Code. In such cases the injured party may rely on the protection criminal law provides, and perpetrators incur criminal liability. Many of these

offences are directly connected with discrimination, prejudice-motivated violence, or the abuse of a relationship of dependency in academic or employment settings.

The Criminal Code contains a broad list of offences that is worth reading if you have experienced discrimination or violence. It is available on the website of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, in the Internet System of Legal Acts (ISAP)⁴¹.

Rape, Abuse of Dependence, and Other Forms of Sexual Violence

Article 197 § 1 of the Criminal Code

“Whoever subjects another person to sexual intercourse by means of violence, unlawful threat or deception, or in any other manner despite the absence of that person's consent, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 2 and 15 years.”

Article 197 § 1a of the Criminal Code

“The same penalty shall apply to anyone who subjects another person to sexual intercourse by taking advantage of that person's inability to recognise the significance of the act or to control their conduct.”

Article 197 § 2 of the Criminal Code

“If the perpetrator, in the manner specified in § 1 or § 1a, causes another person to submit to other sexual activity or to perform such activity, they shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 6 months and 8 years.”

Article 197 § 3 of the Criminal Code

“If the perpetrator commits rape:

- 1) jointly with another person,
 - 2) (repealed),
 - 3) against an ascendant, descendant,
adopted person, adoptive parent, brother, or sister,
 - 4) using a firearm, knife, or another similarly dangerous object
or incapacitating agent, or acting in another manner directly threatening life,
 - 5) against a pregnant woman,
 - 6) recording images or sound of the act as it takes place,
- they shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 3 and 20 years.”

Article 198 of the Criminal Code

“Whoever, taking advantage of another person's helplessness, or of a significant limitation of that person's ability to recognise the significance of the act or to control their conduct resulting from intellectual disability, mental illness or another disturbance of mental functions, causes that person to engage in sexual intercourse or to submit to other sexual activity or to perform such activity, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 6 months and 8 years.”

Article 199 § 1 of the Criminal Code

“Whoever, by abusing a relationship of dependency or taking advantage of a critical situation, causes another person to engage in sexual intercourse or to submit to other sexual activity or to perform such activity, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.”

Stalking**Article 190a § 1 of the Criminal Code**

Whoever, by persistently harassing another person or a person closest to them, causes that person to feel a sense of threat, humiliation or anguish justified by the circumstances, or significantly violates their privacy, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 6 months and 8 years.”

Punishable Threat**Article 119 § 1 of the Criminal Code**

“Whoever uses violence or an unlawful threat against a group of persons or an individual person on account of their national, ethnic, racial, political, or religious affiliation, or because of their lack of religious affiliation, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 3 months and 5 years.”

Article 190 § 1 of the Criminal Code

“Whoever threatens another person with the commission of an offence to their detriment or to the detriment of a person closest to them, where the threat causes the person to whom it is addressed or whom it concerns to have a justified fear that it will be carried out, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.”

Article 190 § 2 of the Criminal Code

“Prosecution shall take place at the request of the injured party.”

Hate Crimes, That Is, Offences Motivated by Prejudice against Specific Social Groups or Individuals on the Basis of Characteristics Such as Ethnic Origin or Nationality
Article 257 of the Criminal Code

“Whoever publicly insults a group of people or an individual on account of their national, ethnic, racial or religious affiliation, or on account of their lack of religious affiliation, or for such reasons violates the personal inviolability of another person, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.”

Article 256 § 1 of the Criminal Code

“Whoever publicly propagates a Nazi, communist, fascist, or other totalitarian state system, or incites hatred on the grounds of national, ethnic, racial, or religious differences, or because of lack of religious affiliation, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.”

Violation of Employee Rights (employees only)

Article 218 § 1a of the Criminal Code

“Whoever, while performing activities in matters relating to labour law and social security, maliciously or persistently violates an employee’s rights arising from an employment relationship or social security, shall be subject to a fine, the penalty of restriction of liberty, or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 2 years.”

42

Uniwersytet Warszawski,
Równowazni: Poradnik antydys-
kryminacyjny..., op.cit.

V What to Do If You Have Experienced Discrimination

Academic life – both studying and working at a university – should take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and regard for human rights. Unfortunately, situations do arise in which students or those employed at a university experience discrimination or violence. In such cases it is important to know your rights and the courses of action open to you.

Identifying the Protected Characteristic

The first step is to establish whether the situation amounts to discrimination within the meaning of the law. Unequal treatment becomes discrimination only where it is connected with a particular legally protected characteristic. These include sex, race, ethnic origin or nationality, religion, denomination or beliefs, age, disability and sexual orientation⁴². Check Sections II and III for the characteristics protected in each field. Note that in the field of higher education, for example, unequal treatment on the grounds of sex is not prohibited.

Checking Internal Procedures and Filing a Complaint

Every university should have anti-discrimination procedures in place – for example, the possibility of reporting a case to an equal treatment officer, an ethics committee or a dedicated team. It is worth checking first what your university's own regulations provide for and using that route. An internal report is often quicker, and it allows you to judge how the institution responds to the problem.

Pursuing Claims Through Legal Proceedings

If the injured party wishes to seek help and support outside the university, they may bring a claim before the courts against the direct perpetrator of the violation:

- under the Anti-Discrimination Act;
- under the Civil Code – for a violation of personal rights, for example;
- under the Labour Code, where the case concerns employees who are in an employment relationship with the employer;
- and, in more serious cases, under the Criminal Code.

Reporting a Criminal Offence

Where conduct directed at a student or at someone working at the university bears the hallmarks of a criminal offence – criminal threats, harassment, stalking or a violation of personal inviolability, for instance – the matter should be reported to law enforcement authorities, that is, to the police or the public prosecutor's office. In specific cases, where the conduct in question meets the elements of an offence, criminal law offers protection against particular forms of unacceptable behaviour.

What Else Should You Remember?

- Collect evidence: emails, messages, recordings and notes on the course of events that may confirm the circumstances of the case. Record the dates, times, and places of the events, as well as the names of witnesses, and prepare your own notes describing the situation – they may be helpful in later reports.
- Seek support from non-governmental organisations that assist persons experiencing discrimination.
- Ask for assistance from the National Labour Inspectorate (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy) if the case concerns you as an employee.
- Contact a lawyer who specialises in human rights and labour law. You may seek free legal advice from, for example, lawyers from the Polish Society of Anti-Discrimination Law.

Remember, you do not have to go through this alone. The law gives you specific means of protection, and the sooner you take action and gather evidence, the greater your chance of resolving the matter effectively.

The circumstances of every case vary, so the above recommendations are no substitute for consulting a lawyer, during which the facts of the case and the legal situation can be properly assessed.

VI Costs of Proceedings in Cases of Discrimination and Violence

If you decide to pursue your rights before a court in connection with discrimination or violence, bear in mind that **court proceedings involve costs**, although in many cases you may be exempted from them in part or in full.

In civil proceedings, under **Article 98 § 1** of the Code of Civil Procedure, the party that loses the case is obliged, at the request of the opposing party, to reimburse the costs necessary for the purposeful pursuit of that party's rights and for its purposeful defence, that is, the

43
Journal of Laws of 2024, item
1568, as amended.

44
Journal of Laws of 2025, item
1228, as amended.

45
Journal of Laws of 2025, item
46, as amended.

costs of the proceedings⁴³. These include court fees and the costs of professional legal representation. Under **Article 102** of the Code of Civil Procedure, the court may apply the principle of equity and relieve the losing party of part or all of those costs, on grounds such as its financial situation or its belief in the merits of the claim it was pursuing.

In labour law cases the position is different. The general rule is that court costs are borne by the party filing a pleading that is subject to a fee or that gives rise to expenses. However, under **Article 96(1)(4)** of the Act on Court Costs in Civil Cases, an employee bringing a claim before a labour court is exempt from the obligation to pay court costs where, under **Article 35(1)**, the value of the subject matter of the dispute does not exceed PLN 50,000⁴⁴. In practice this means that most claims for compensation for discrimination or *mobbing* involve no filing fee.

It should be remembered, however, that exemption from fees does not automatically cover every cost – expert opinions or professional legal representation, for example. Under Article 102 of the Act on Court Costs in Civil Cases, a person in a difficult financial situation may apply to be exempted from court costs. The Code of Criminal Procedure regulates the matter along similar lines: under **Article 624 § 1**, the court may grant exemption from payment of court costs in whole or in part, on grounds including the person's financial situation⁴⁵.

In practice this means that although court proceedings may involve certain expenses, people experiencing violence or discrimination are not left without systemic support, and the law provides mechanisms intended to make access to justice easier for them.

VII Selected Practices in Anti-Discrimination Procedures at Universities in Poland

Although arts universities have their own organisational and teaching characteristics, they are subject to the same legal provisions as other universities. Their internal procedures and documents, however, show widely varying levels of preparedness, of understanding of the issues, and of willingness to take real action. Set out below are several proposals for good regulatory practice, developed from an analysis of the regulations of selected arts universities in Poland.

A Precisely defined Complaints Procedure

A precisely defined complaints procedure should be a key element of anti-discrimination regulations. Unfortunately, most of the regulations analysed address this issue only superficially. The complaints procedure must be described in detail, so that a person experiencing discrimination knows how the process of submitting a complaint works and what to expect once it is being dealt with. Only one of the arts

universities analysed set out a complaints procedure comprehensively in its regulations.

Time Limit for Responding to a Complaint

Besides a complaints procedure described in detail, the time limit for examining a complaint also matters. The university must state the maximum time the process may take. That time limit should be as short as possible, and complaints should be dealt with efficiently.

Possibility of Anonymous Reporting

One of the anti-mobbing procedures among the regulations analysed allowed for anonymous reporting, by submitting a notification to the equal treatment body under a simplified, shortened procedure. The availability of such a procedure may make it easier for people to report a problem without fear of reprisals.

Recognition of Misgendering as Discrimination

The prohibited acts listed in the anti-discrimination regulations of one arts university include the deliberate use of the wrong name or pronoun in relation to a transgender or non-binary person, as well as references to that person's gender identity. This is one of the most progressive and precise provisions among the regulations analysed, and it should be standard at every university in Poland.

Recommendations

Polish universities most often introduce anti-discrimination procedures in the form of a rector's ordinance. Their purpose is to ensure a working and learning environment that is safe and free from violence and discrimination.

1. Preamble as a Declaration of the University's Values and Commitments

The first part of a rector's order introducing anti-discrimination procedures at a university should be a preamble. A preamble is a solemn introduction to the specific provisions of the order and a declaration of the university's values and direction of action⁴⁶.

The preamble should refer to human rights and emphasise their universal and inalienable nature, as well as their importance for building a civil society and an equality-oriented, responsible university. It should also set out the university's vision as an institution that not only conducts research and teaching to a high standard but also develops a culture of respect, freedom and equal treatment, creating a safe place to study and work. The preamble draws attention to barriers, making clear that violence and discrimination limit the potential of individuals and

47

Fundacja Autonomia,
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Uniwersytet
Jagielloński, *Standard
Antydyskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

48

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Uniwersytet
Jagielloński, *Standard
Antydyskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

49

Ibidem.

50

Ibidem.

of the whole community. Finally, it should express the commitment of the entire academic community to implementing the highest standards of equal treatment, and also to respecting legal provisions⁴⁷.

The preamble should set out the university's anti-discrimination objectives: to ensure a safe working and learning environment, promote equality and diversity, implement procedures and mechanisms to protect students and employees from discrimination and violence, and monitor the university's activities in this area.

This type of introduction has both symbolic and practical significance, as it sets the tone for the entire document, indicates that equal treatment is not an "add-on" but an essential component of the university's mission and vision, and facilitates later reference to the text in practical activities, such as complaints procedures or educational programmes⁴⁸.

2. Definitions for Clarity and Effectiveness

The rector's order should include a definitions section whose purpose is to clarify key concepts and ensure that the entire university community understands them in the same way. This gives persons filing complaints confidence that their experiences are covered by protection; provides university bodies, such as committees and officers, with uniform criteria for assessing cases; and helps the document avoid ambiguity and interpretative disputes⁴⁹.

Definitions should be prepared on the basis of Polish law, including the Constitution, the Labour Code, and the Anti-Discrimination Act, as well as international and European Union documents and expert studies by organisations working to counter discrimination. Such organisations are particularly important because universities should raise the standards of their anti-discrimination procedures and expand their catalogue of protected characteristics, for at present, under the Anti-Discrimination Act, in higher education unequal treatment of students is prohibited only on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, or nationality.

Some of the most important concepts in the *Anti-Discrimination Standard* are the definitions and forms of discrimination listed at the beginning of this chapter. They include definitions of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, encouraging discrimination, and retaliation. The *Standard* also draws attention to the value of including concepts such as burden of proof, hate speech, prejudice-motivated violence, inclusive language, stereotypes and prejudices, and anti-discrimination education⁵⁰.

Such definitions in the rector's order allow the university to go beyond the statutory minimum and most commonly listed grounds (nationality, ethnic origin) to encompass gender identity, sexual orientation, health status, and socio-economic status. They also have an

51

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52

UN Women, *Guidance note on campus violence prevention and response*, 2018, [online](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Campus-violence%20note_guiding_principles.pdf): https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Campus-violence%20note_guiding_principles.pdf [accessed: 11 October 2025].

53

Fundacja Autonomia, Ośrodek Badań nad Mediami Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Fundacja na Rzecz Różnorodności Społecznej, Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskryminacyjnej, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, *Standard Antydyskryminacyjny...*, op.cit.

54

Ibidem.

educational function in their own right, for they define terms that may be new or unclear to some members of the community.

3. University Strategic Documents and Regulations on Counteracting Discrimination and Violence and Supporting Equal Treatment

The Standard must not be merely a declaration of values; it has to become a real tool for the university to act with. The *Anti-Discrimination Standard* for Universities sets out how a university should build anti-discrimination provisions into its documents and practices⁵¹.

The university should conduct a SWOT analysis, a strategic assessment method that will enable it to identify strengths (positive internal factors), weaknesses (negative internal factors), opportunities (positive external factors) and threats (negative external factors) in the area of equal treatment. This is a necessary step towards implementing standards consciously, based on real possibilities and barriers.

Strategic objectives should also be identified: the university should define clearly what it wants to achieve in the field of counteracting discrimination – increasing accessibility or improving complaints procedures, for example – and should indicate the resources and indicators that will allow it to monitor progress. Strategic objectives cannot be identified without reviewing existing strategic documents, that is, analysing current policies and regulations for compliance with the principles of equality⁵². The result should be recommendations for change that will guarantee that no manifestation of violence or discrimination is tolerated. The university should also review its other internal documents – rules of procedure, employment procedures, student services and teaching, for example – to assess how far they give effect to the principle of equal treatment and counteract discrimination and violence⁵³.

4. Establishment of an Equal Treatment Body

A key element of an effective anti-discrimination system at a university is to have a dedicated equal treatment body. This may be a single person, such as an officer or ombudsperson, or a collegial body, such as a committee, but it must be equipped with the powers and resources it needs to carry out the tasks specified in the rector's order⁵⁴.

The body should have clearly defined competences enabling it to shape the university's anti-discrimination policy in practice, and to respond to violations. Its powers should be described consistently with those of other administrative units to avoid duplication of tasks or conflicts of competence. The equal treatment body should also hold a high rank within the organisational structure, preferably reporting directly to the rector. This ensures it is independent, efficient in decision-making, and is able to influence processes within the university. The effectiveness

55

UN Women, *Guidance note on campus violence prevention and response...*, op.cit.

56

Ibidem.

57

Fundacja Autonomia, Ośrodek Badań nad Mediami Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Fundacja na Rzecz Różnorodności Społecznej, Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskryminacyjnej, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, *Standard Antydyskryminacyjny...*, op.cit.

58

UN Women, *Guidance note on campus violence prevention...*, op.cit.

59

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60

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of the body depends on clear and transparent rules of operation, so the university should develop rules of procedure for it and a precise description of its scope of competences. University regulations should include measures to protect the independence of the equal treatment body, including how members are appointed, the rules of competition for the position or positions, the term of office, and a precise determination of when members of the body may be dismissed or its activities suspended. The regulations should also provide for a budget and other resources, and the body's activities should be enshrined in the university's strategic documents to ensure that the institution is durable, whatever personnel changes take place in the university authorities⁵⁶.

Whether collegial or single-person, the body's effectiveness depends on its members having appropriate competences, including: knowledge of anti-discrimination law and equal treatment, familiarity with procedures for responding to violence and discrimination, mediation and communication skills, and a proactive attitude towards violations.

It is also important to involve in the body's work persons and groups particularly exposed to violence and discrimination, and to cooperate with civil society organisations. This increases transparency, trust, and effectiveness. Moreover, a clear action plan for the body should be developed, and specific resources assigned to it. More on this subject can be found in the *Anti-Discrimination Standard*⁵⁷.

5. Procedure for Diagnosing, Reporting and Responding to Cases of Discrimination and Violence

The procedure should be transparent, accessible and trustworthy, so that every person in the academic community knows where and how they can report a case and what actions the university will take⁵⁸.

The procedure should be developed by a team representing different perspectives, drawn from different faculties and units. It should include teaching and administrative staff, students and doctoral candidates, and the university's legal unit. The team should draw on good practices from domestic and foreign universities, and its work may be coordinated by the equal treatment body to ensure consistency⁵⁹.

The procedure should clearly indicate where and how cases are to be reported – through a dedicated email address, an online form or the equal treatment body, for example. It should also define how the person or team examining reports will work, including time limits, confidentiality and support for the person affected, and it should set out a catalogue of consequences for those who engage in violence or discrimination, ranging from disciplinary action to remedial measures directed at the person responsible⁶⁰.

The procedure should be tested against, for example, hypothetical or real cases, and consulted with representatives of the academic

61

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Antydyskryminacyjnej,
Uniwersytet
Jagielloński, *Standard
Antydyskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

62

Ibidem.

63

Ibidem.

community and external experts. Having a procedure in place is not enough; there should also be monitoring tools, such as anonymous surveys, focus groups and periodic reports. These make it possible to detect problems early (including those that have not been formally reported), and to diagnose the level of safety at the university.

The procedure will only be effective if everyone knows that it exists, so the university should communicate this on its website, in a letter from the rector, in leaflets, posters in academic spaces, and in the university regulations and student handbooks. The community should be periodically reminded about the procedure; for example, during the inauguration of the academic year or introductory training sessions⁶¹.

Why is this important? A transparent and widely known procedure strengthens people's sense of safety, facilitates rapid response, builds a culture of zero tolerance for discrimination and violence, and protects injured persons from secondary victimisation.

6. Implementation of Positive Action Measures

The *Anti-Discrimination Standard* also proposes positive action measures as an additional tool for ensuring equal opportunities and equal access to educational, social, and professional resources for all members of the academic community. These are temporary, justified initiatives undertaken in response to long-term or structural discrimination that limits the development of certain groups. Examples may include: additional support for persons with disabilities, flexible solutions for students and employees caring for children or dependent persons, or language courses for foreign nationals⁶².

The starting point is a reliable diagnosis of which groups at the university face the greatest barriers, and in which areas. The analysis should be conducted with the participation of the persons concerned, so that the proposed solutions are accurate, adequate, and do not reproduce stereotypes. Both educational needs (such as access to examinations) and social or professional needs (such as reconciling academic work with family responsibilities) are important.

The equal treatment body should be responsible for developing proposals for positive action measures, working in cooperation with representatives of the groups to be supported. The process should be participatory, as it is crucial to consider the perspectives of persons experiencing barriers to avoid superficial or stigmatising solutions. The result should be an equalisation of opportunities, and a change in the university's organisational culture towards greater openness, responsibility, and diversity⁶³.

Positive action measures make it possible to reduce structural and cultural barriers, genuinely make the university's offer more accessible,

64

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Antydyskryminacyjnej,
Uniwersytet
Jagielloński, *Standard
Antydyskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

65

European Institute for Gender
Equality (EIGE), *Gender
Equality in Academia and
Research – GEAR Tool – Step
2: Analysing and Assessing
the Status Quo in Your
Organisation*, see: [https://
eige.europa.eu/gender-main-
streaming/toolkits/gear/step-
step-guide/step-2](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/step-step-guide/step-2) [accessed:
11 October 2025].

66

Ibidem.

67

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Towarzystwo Edukacji
Antydyskryminacyjnej,
Uniwersytet
Jagielloński, *Standard
Antydyskryminacyjny...*,
op.cit.

68

Ibidem.

support groups particularly exposed to discrimination, and build the university's image as a fair environment open to diversity.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Anti-Discrimination Measures

Monitoring and evaluation are key stages in the process of implementing anti-discrimination standards. Procedures and action plans alone do not guarantee change; continuous analysis, assessment of effectiveness, and adjustment of solutions to the real needs of the academic community are all necessary⁶⁴.

Every university should begin by reviewing its existing regulations: whether they contain provisions that may be discriminatory, whether they include elements that counteract discrimination, and whether there is a body or person responsible for receiving reports⁶⁵. It is also important to check whether reports concerning discrimination and violence are analysed in detail in relation to the various grounds – sex, disability or sexual orientation, for example. The analysis should cover the whole academic community: students, doctoral candidates and those employed at the university⁶⁶.

For the diagnosis to be reliable, the university should develop tools for systematic monitoring, such as surveys, self-assessments, focus groups, and periodic reports. The data collected should be analysed both qualitatively, through descriptions of experiences, and quantitatively, through statistics on complaints, participation in training, and sense of safety. Monitoring should be carried out regularly to capture both immediate problems and long-term trends⁶⁷.

Based on that diagnosis, the university should prepare a short-term action plan for one academic year, as well as a multi-year plan. The plan must include clearly defined, measurable objectives, and should assign responsibility to specific persons or units, together with financial, staffing and organisational resources.

Another key element is regular evaluation, that is, assessing whether the actions taken are actually counteracting discrimination and bringing improvement. For this, specific effectiveness indicators need to be developed, such as a decrease in the number of complaints, an increase in the sense of safety, or increased participation in training. The results, having been reported to the university authorities, can then form the basis for updating action plans and adapting the university's policy to changing challenges⁶⁸.

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(Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights)

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 Phone: 22 556 44 40 | E-mail: hfhr@hfhr.pl

Feminoteka

(Feminoteka Foundation)

3/96 Konrada Guderskiego Street, 03-982 Warsaw
 Website: www.feminoteka.pl
 Phone: 888 883 388 | E-mail: fundacjafeminoteka@gmail.com

Kampania Przeciw Homofobii

(Campaign Against Homophobia)

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 Website: www.kph.org.pl
 Phone: 22 423 64 38 | E-mail: info@kph.org.pl

Ogólnopolskie Pogotowie dla Ofiar Przemocy „Niebieska Linia”

**(Polish Nationwide Emergency Service for
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155 Jerozolimskie Avenue, 02-326 Warsaw
 Website: niebieskalinia.info
 Phone: 800 120 002 | E-mail: niebieskalinia@niebieskalinia.info

Commentaries



Magdalena Pyla

Shots, oil on canvas,
170 × 200 cm, 2024,
courtesy of the artist

Checking Means Returning. A Comment After a Decade

The report *Little Chance. . . CHECK!* marks a special moment for the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation. Not just because we are returning to a study conducted a decade ago, but because, as it turns out, the questions it addressed are still relevant. We return, however, from a different vantage point: with a different language, a different sensitivity, and a greater awareness of the complexity of problems that a decade ago were only beginning to emerge. What was predominant then was the need to name inequalities and prove they existed. Today, we know that naming alone is not enough and that even irrefutably documented knowledge does not guarantee change. We also turn back to the report because many institutions, it seems, treated their diagnosis as a methodological episode rather than an obligation to make real corrections.

One of the most moving aspects of the report, for me, is what it reveals about the durability of mechanisms that adapt effectively to changing declarations. Academies of fine arts increasingly use the language of equality, inclusivity, and safety, but in practice still perpetuate old hierarchies. That gap between language and experience is perhaps even more painful today than it was a decade ago, because it gives rise to disappointment and fatigue, especially among those who believed that change had already taken place or was only a matter of time.

This is particularly visible in master-apprentice relationships, whose ambivalence runs throughout the report. They are still a foundation of artistic education, but remain one of the main areas of abuse, symbolic and emotional violence, and sometimes even physical violence. Boundaries are often blurred here, and the language of care, exceptionality or ‘artistic freedom’ can mask the asymmetry of power. The report clearly shows that, despite greater awareness and formal procedures, students – especially women and non-binary people – continue to bear the high costs of functioning within such relationships, costs that continue beyond graduation to affect a person’s mental health, sense of agency, and long-term career path.

Against this background, what is particularly clear is the invisibility of women’s work: systematic, responsible work carried out ‘quietly’ – organizational, care-related and emotional labour – without which academies of fine arts would not be able to function. Women more often than men sustain relationships, ease tensions, respond to students’ crises, and ensure the continuity of didactic processes. At the same time, this work is structurally linked to lower-ranking positions and is rarely treated as capital for promotion or as having any real influence on decisions. It provides limited access to informal networks of recommendation and entails an unwritten expectation of patience, availability, and readiness for sacrifice. Women’s work, though indispensable, rarely translates into prestige, power or official recognition.

This prompts me to reflect more personally on the very category of prestige and promotion. I increasingly wonder to what extent mechanisms of inequality become internalized over time – to what extent a lack of promotion or visibility ceases to be perceived as a structural problem. Instead, the absence of promotion and visibility is rationalized as simply ‘unnecessary.’ I have the impression that some women working in academies of fine arts may not aim for promotion, since their approach to their work is based on other values: quality, responsibility and long-term engagement, as opposed to competition and prestige. This way of thinking does not indicate weakness or a lack of ambition, but is the effect of a system that consistently rewards other attitudes and other models of success. In other words, choosing quality of work over visibility may not be, in some cases, an autonomous decision, but a strategy of adapting to structures that do not offer equal conditions of participation in the first place.

A new element of the report that is particularly important for the Foundation is that it now includes the perspective of non-binary people. Ten years ago, this category was almost absent from the available statistics and the dominant thinking about the structure of academies of fine arts. The report *Little Chance... CHECK!* shows that an absence of systemic data does not mean an absence of experiences, and that broadening the research perspective has shed light on those experiences. Here, the perspective of non-binary people is not a marginal ‘addition’, but a point at which the limitations of a system based on binary gender categories, normative career paths and specific patterns of visibility are revealed. For the Foundation, this is also a moment of a self-critical broadening of our perspective, and a clear signal for us to think about equality not only in terms of the relationship between women and men, but also as access to safety, resources and recognition for people functioning outside the dominant institutional norm.

The report also confirms that the fact that studies are increasingly feminized while positions of power remain masculinized is not a problem that will ‘solve itself’. Without systemic interventions, inequalities shift towards forms that are more difficult to measure: informal networks, recommendations, emotional labour, invisible duties. This is particularly important for the Foundation, which increasingly views its role not only as an initiator of research but also as a participant within the same institutional field.

Returning to the study after a decade, therefore, becomes a matter of responsibility for academies, non-governmental organizations, artistic communities, and researchers themselves. What do we do with the knowledge we produce? What mechanisms do we reproduce, consciously or not, when acting in the name of change? And how do we translate diagnosis into practice?

I treat the report *Little Chance. . . CHECK!* as an obligation to keep checking, but above all to act: to shift the emphasis from exceptional individuals to structural conditions, and to consistently consider perspectives that have so far been marginalized. Equality in art and artistic education is not an add-on or an image-building project. It is a condition of institutional integrity and of the quality of art itself.

Checking is a long-term process that demands patience, courage, and a readiness to face uncomfortable conclusions, including about oneself. For this report to make sense, it must not only hold up a mirror to fine arts academies; it must bring about real change. Otherwise, in another decade we will again be returning to the same questions – but with greater fatigue.

**Malwina Bątruk**

Representative of the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation, graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw. She also graduated from the Faculty of Media Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where in 2024 she defended her diploma in the Experimental Text Studio. She works in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, as well as in artistic practice in the field of visual arts. She creates interdisciplinary projects combining new media, film, analogue photography, installation, performance, and text-based work in the formula of research-based art. She is interested in the role of art in public spaces and in its social and educational dimension. At the Foundation, she is responsible for coordinating projects, developing research programs, and cooperating with other institutions.

{Forecast for 2026: The End of Feudal Software}

The planetary alignment is merciless towards old structures. The future belongs to artist-researchers, female hackers, and technological conspirators dismantling capitalism and Big Tech from the ground up. To designers of alternative systems, worldbuilders of speculative futures, to queer and non-binary people, to male feminists, to older women-sages, specialists, creators-without-school, to female masters-without-Masters. The stars speak clearly: on the ruins of feudal walls, an Independent Academy is emerging, operating on the principle of peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, with rotating governance, where the only entrance exam is the ability to work collectively and the readiness to deschool. On the horizon, a shared structure emerges: a collectively governed art institution.

The report *Little Chance... CHECK!* is not only a register of a system error. It is, above all, a starting point for a new configuration – the trigger for {{ACADEMIC-INSTITUTIONAL JAILBREAK}}.

In the world of technology, jailbreaking means bypassing the manufacturer's factory-installed restrictions to take full control of the hardware and install one's own applications. In 2026, we are doing this within the living organism of the university: breaking the authoritarian code of the Polish academy to install software based on care, critical theory, and justice.

load: {commentary}

I enter this report with the tools of Karen Barad, a non-binary researcher in quantum physics. Their concept of agential cuts allows us to see that structures of power are not invisible – they are so deeply encoded in the matter of institutions that we have begun to treat them as laws of nature. An agential cut is the moment in which the system arbitrarily draws a boundary within an entangled reality, deciding what counts as 'authority' and what is merely 'background'. The Polish academy performs this cut violently: it surgically extracts the figure-exploit of the "Master-Genius" from the dense network of mutual inspirations and the collective process of knowledge production. This cut erases the fact that, in the field of art, we all co-become through the mutual exchange of ideas. The extraction of an isolated authority is not a description of reality, but an ideological operation that turns living flow into dead hierarchy.

The coordinates of this operation are concrete: 73% of male students point exclusively to men as authority figures. This is an algorithmic feedback loop that reproduces the same result for decades because no one has rewritten the source code.

The academy is not isolated in this process – it is a quantum entanglement of institutions, private galleries, competitions, art-washing campaigns, and grants. It is an ecosystem in which these entities do not so much cooperate with one another as mutually create and condition one another at every step. Instead of funding collective processes, the system promotes an endless loop of competitions, which function as a defective measuring apparatus: their task is to brutally ‘cut out, from the dense network of shared inspirations and format, a single product the market can understand – the solitary genius {male career model}.

Polish art academies operate under a structural deficit of feminist and queer theory. This is not a plugin – it is the absence of basic drivers for analysing reality. No drivers = the master loop exploit. The report shows this clearly: it is women who provide unofficial technical service, uploading queer-feminist discourse into universities as a repair tool for broken structures.

Rosi Braidotti analyses this architecture: in late capitalism, knowledge has ceased to be a process and has become a product – one with a specific gender, race, and class. When the university produces knowledge without critical tools, it treats male dominance as a default setting.

This systemic exclusion affects everyone. Young cis male students are trapped in the Master.exe loop on Windows CE 5.0 – in the toxic script of the solitary leader, the prohibition of failure, and the need to dominate. Feminist theory is a jailbreak for them, a tool of liberation from market software. But the system uses gatekeeping: the ‘political correctness’ flag blocks access to the most advanced diagnostic methodologies available in the humanities today. Without it, the academy is like a machine trying to render ultra-realistic real-time graphics in 2026 on a damaged graphics card.

The next level of blockage is the systemic encryption of knowledge about how the Art World really works. Through interviews with students, the report exposes a brutal gap: the Polish academy is an interface with no access to the back-end documentation, to the tutorial on “how to survive after the academy.” There is no space here for learning how to actually navigate the system: negotiate contracts, distinguish an artist’s fee from the sale of an object, defend one’s boundaries in institutional collaboration, build a portfolio, develop strategies for promoting one’s work, or deal with the logistics of ZUS for freelance artists without support from the mother-state computer. Artists leave university afraid they have no health insurance. These are critical drivers that the university does not provide, leaving its female users with a 404 error: Knowledge Not Found.

Artistic people become invisible to the social security system and defenceless against the algorithms of the market. The truth is uncomfortable: the system reproduces the logic of trading in luxury goods, not the logic of researching reality. Survival after graduation is not the result

of education, but a rare error in the code – luck, a fortunate convergence, being in the right place at the right time, the whim of a gallerist, or a hastily completed ministerial application when someone needs to fill a list of people for an exhibition.

The report shows an architecture in which the academy and the art market, though formally separate, operate like interconnected gears. Practice-led research, new forms of collaboration, and projects embedded in critical theory are still treated as a writing error rather than as the main methodology. The firewall of the Polish field of art often filters out what, rather than serving to support market mechanisms, works towards a deconstruction of reality.

While Forensic Architecture uses 3D modelling to provide evidence of war crimes, and Mary Maggic biohacks estrogen to critique biopolitics, the Polish academy – as student voices suggest – still lacks tools for such practices. At European universities, practice-led research is a core methodology; here, the system still favours safe plug-and-play objects, and students are sometimes formatted as content providers rather than researchers. The result is work stripped of critical and agential potential – the system teaches people to employ the strategies of capitalism rather than hack them.

If a work of art becomes a mere commodity rather than a tool for producing knowledge, the academy should recognise there has been a critical error. Without software in the form of feminist critique, post-humanism and critical algorithm studies, we cannot see how the system formats us. ‘Success’ then becomes but a synonym for adapting to the market driver.

The report finds that women experience a decline in well-being and energy towards the end of their studies. This is not a user error, but the effect of systemic incompatibility. As Sara Ahmed writes, institutions are well-trodden paths: they are designed to facilitate the progress of those who reproduce the existing pattern. For women, every attempt to chart a new path entails enormous resistance and friction. The loss of joy in art is a signal that the software is working exactly as it was designed to: it is simply the case that we are not its intended users...

{{System Status: CRITICAL}}

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), Anna Tsing points to mycelium as the only effective model of survival in the ruins of capitalism: not the vertical tree with its hierarchical trunk, but the mycelium – dispersed, horizontal, and resistant to cuts. The report *Little Chance...* demonstrates that women and queer people, systematically pushed out of the position of the “solitary genius,” have naturally developed this strategy. Building collectives and support networks is not an act of weakness; it is

a powerful structural advantage in a world where complex projects require distributed intelligence, not authoritarian monologue.

The old system is not so much waiting for reform as losing connection with reality. The very fact that I, as a non-binary person researching games and digital art, am writing this commentary is proof that {{{JAILBREAK}}} is already taking place. We have broken through the manufacturer's factory-installed restrictions: we have gained root access and are uploading our own software.

{{{root@independent_academy: # init 6 --jailbreak}}}

I propose a studio-laboratory model that gives up compiling market output in favour of processes based on open-source, practice-led research and deconstruction. It is a space in which digital art, embodiment, performative practices, game design, speculative ecology and artistic care function as fully legitimate research methods, rather than as a visual interface for capital. Here, female painters and female sculptors collaborate with female coders and ecologists, building an asylum for people who do not fit within the traditional partitions of knowledge. Students actively co-create the programme. In the Independent Academy, they elect the female Dean.

We are implementing a horizontal parity protocol: 33% women, 33% men, and 33% non-binary, gender-nonconforming people among staff. The remaining 1% is queer failure – a deliberate error in the code which, according to Jack Halberstam, protects us from the predatory logic of success and creates room for non-normative co-becoming.

{{{system_reboot_complete}}}



Martix Navrot (pronouns: they/them, he/him), MA

Doctoral student, Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Lecturer in Computer Science at the Silesian Academy, specialising in computer games. Artist and researcher, co-founder of the duo Eternal Engine, the Nerdka collective, and the foresight studio age3000.

Photo by Joanna Helena

Commentary by Agata Jakubowska

In recent years, there has been an extraordinarily intense increase in the presence of women artists in the world of culture. Exhibitions, books, films, and blogs present women's art, and give their biographies. This constitutes a counterweight to the classical history of art (still dominant in teaching) in which few women artists feature. It might seem that, for young women entering adult life, the surging popularity of women's art might play a significant role in normalising their choice of a career in art and providing them with role models. Yet this is only weakly reflected in the findings presented in the report *Little Chance... CHECK!*

In the 2013 of the report, the proportion of women entering an art programme was already high; since then it has gone up, but not suddenly. The impact of the development of feminist discourse on the number of women deciding to become artists would probably be more visible if figures from a longer period were compared.

Interestingly, a similar picture emerges from the research into personal role models. There were few answers to the questions in this area, and they did not reflect the knowledge that a person studying at an art academy today would likely have. This is probably because narratives about women artists serve a different function than what the study asked about. Such narratives do not provide many examples of artists considered groundbreaking or exceptionally important, making it unlikely that their names would come to mind in response to a question who are the most significant figures in the development of the interviewee's field of art. Alongside the authors' explanations of why so few participants answered, I would point to a lack among students of thinking about art as a field that develops, or about specific individuals that have played a key role in that development.

In the history of women's art, little attention is paid to the role of women artists in the overall development of art, and they are rarely spoken of as female masters. By using the phrase 'old mistresses' in the title of their book, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock pointed to the problematic character of that category in relation to women. Women artists seem to be more likely to provide personal role models through their artistic biographies, which students can identify with. Perhaps, if the research question had been about what female and male artists students identify with, whose stories have been important for them, the intense presence of women in culture would have been reflected more strongly in the answers. This is precisely what came up in participants' statements about the significance of women teachers: that they are important not necessarily because they are 'significant' in the art world, but because they understand the experience of female students better than male teachers do, and are better able to accompany them in developing their potential. They can also

stand as examples of how to lead a ‘good life’ as a female artist (I use this concept after Karolina Sikorska, cited in the report).

The small number of answers given to the next question in this group – about three Polish women who had gained recognition in the field of art studied – confirms there is a problem with ‘recognition’. The current boom in women artists we are witnessing strengthens the exceptional position of some women, and their place in the canon or on lists of best-selling artists. It also disseminates information about the lives and work of many other women artists whose status in the art-historical narrative remains uncertain for now. Finally, it introduces women artists who have always functioned on the margins of the art world, not necessarily demanding the status of ‘great artist’, but nevertheless claiming their rightful place. These are more examples of being noticed than being recognised, which may explain why the list of recognised names of historical women artists changed only slightly between the two editions of the study. Those deemed ‘recognised’ are those with a more established position, while many other women artists could be thought of as ‘aspiring to be perceived as recognised’. For observers of culture, though – and students are also such observers – it can be difficult to define what constitutes recognition (a monographic exhibition in a prestigious museum, a biography, or information on the artist in social media?). Economic success seems more measurable: recognition in the form of high, rising prices for the works of particular women artists.

Finally, one comment that is not so much about the research findings as about the current edition of the report itself. As an art historian, I paid close attention to the role played by works by women artists here. They may be treated as additional statements on the themes addressed by the research, or perhaps as artistic research – even if they were not created as such. It is worth considering whether these artistic voices should not be more strongly integrated with the sociological analyses; for example, by including them in the review of the state of research.

**Agata Jakubowska**

Professor at the Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw. Author and editor of numerous publications on women's art. Her recent publications include: *Maria Pinińska-Bereś. Sztuka i emancypacja kobiet w socjalistycznej Polsce* [Maria Pinińska-Bereś: Art and Women's Emancipation in Socialist Poland] (2022), *Feminist Art Historiographies in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (IKONOTHEKA, 33/2023, co-edited with Andrea Giunta), and *Ilona Keserü. FLOW* (co-edited with Mónika Zsikla, 2024). She is currently conducting research on the history of international exhibitions of women's art.

69

See: Karol Sienkiewicz, *Guerrilla Girls a sprawa polska*, 10.12.2016, sienkiewiczkarol.org, <https://sienkiewiczkarol.org/2016/12/10/guerrilla-girls-a-sprawa-polska/> [accessed : 6.01.2026].

70

See: Aleksy Wójtowicz, *Polska, kraj girlbossa*, Substack, 3.08.2025, <https://areyoureallyfromtheartworld.substack.com/p/polska-kraj-girlbossa>.

What Can Change in Five Minutes?

The year 2016 brought three confusions to the Polish field of art. Politically, it was the first year of the so-called “good change,” that is, eight years of rule by a party whose electoral programme included the promise of a systemic struggle against “pseudo-artistic excesses”. The second confusions came from the results of the report *Little Chance to Advance?* which to the sensed disproportion between the number of female students and male professors at academies of fine arts added a factual dimension – figures and percentages that powerfully illustrated the concept of the glass ceiling. The third confusion was delivered by the conclusions of a study conducted by the legendary feminist group Guerrilla Girls – the survey showed that Polish art institutions were leaders of equality in Europe. In retrospect, these events seem to have marked end of a certain era: beginning in 2016, the vector of cultural policy in Poland changed radically, and discussions about institutions such as academies, public art galleries, and museums broadened to encompass the gender disproportion in positions, power, money and visibility. Where will Polish institutions find themselves, forced to confront top-down conservative pressure, and at the same time a bottom-up reaction to the conclusions of *Little Chance*. ...? What might this pressure produce for the art community itself?

In 2016, one thing was certain: the results of the Guerrilla Girls’ study were so optimistic because only five institutions in Poland responded to the survey. The real scale of the feminisation of directorial positions (in municipal galleries, institutions co-run with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and national museums) was unknown, although it was expected that women might in fact constitute a minority. If, compared with Europe, we have a higher percentage of female directors, this could relate to the low prestige commonly ascribed to national institutions – or to culture in general, and especially the visual arts. An important point of reference was provided by the report *Little Chance*. ..., in particular by Karol Sienkiewicz’s comments on the results of the Guerrilla Girls’ survey⁶⁹, which for several years appeared spontaneously in various other discussions within the art community. With the report by the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation indicating a strong masculinisation of positions of power at universities, then to what extent had art institutions (having both weaker and stronger positions and roles in the consecration of people in the field) managed to avoid the same fate in the intervening years? This is precisely the question I asked myself in July 2025, as I analysed the cases of 54 institutions across Poland since 2006.⁷⁰

Data collected from publicly available sources showed that in 2006 we started from a level of around 31% women in directorial positions in institutions (14 in galleries, 1 in a museum; $p = 49$), and by 2015 this

71

As of July 2025.

72

This was well illustrated by the example of the nomination for the directorial position at the Silesian Museum, where a vacancy appeared after Alicja Knast was dismissed in 2019 by the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodeship. Maria Czarnecka was ultimately appointed to the directorial position, but was criticised for lacking any experience in managing an institution with such a specific profile as the Silesian Museum. Importantly, Czarnecka was not the first choice — the position she received was supposed to be held by a man who declined the nomination. See: *Nie trzeba mieć doświadczenia w kierowaniu muzeami, by być dobrym dyrektorem muzeum*, interview with Piotr Czarnynoga conducted by Marcin Zasada, "Dziennik Zachodni", 16.03.2021, <https://dziennikzachodni.pl/czarnynoga-nie-trzeba-miec-doswiadczenia-w-kierowaniu-muzeami-by-byc-dobrym-dyrektorem-muzeum-go-sc-dz-i-radia-piekary/ar/c3-15493250>

73

See: Aleksy Wójtowicz, *Kogo widać w warszawskich galeriach?*, Substack, 11.04.2025, <https://areyoureallyfromtheheart-world.substack.com/p/ko-go-widac-w-warszawskich-galeriach>.

percentage had gone up to a record 49%, meaning an almost equal distribution of women and men in positions of power. However, when the government changed, that percentage began to fall again. The lowest value was recorded in 2020: 37.7% women (17 in galleries, 3 in museums; $p = 53$) in directorial positions. In other words, a return almost to the situation in 2011 (!), when female directors accounted for only 35%. The situation began to improve only in 2024 (back to a level of 49%), a situation at least partly due to the change in government to one that is less openly conservative. In 2025, something historic happened — for the first time, women slightly outnumbered men in directorial positions (around 54%, 23 in galleries, 6 in museums; $p = 54$)⁷¹.

Why am I cautious, and say that the policy of the so-called "good change" may have only partly influenced these personnel changes? It is worth noting that, in the most important Polish institutions run or co-run by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, where new directors were appointed without open calls, men replaced women: Piotr Bernatowicz replaced Małgorzata Ludwisiak at Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Janusz Janowski replaced Hanna Wróblewska at Zachęta — National Gallery of Art, and Maciej Aleksandrowicz replaced Eulalia Domanowska at the Centre of Polish Sculpture. In my view, these decisions were driven less by backlash and its anti-feminist edge, and much more by general staffing shortages in the field of culture, which the former Minister of Culture and National Heritage under the Law and Justice government Piotr Gliński referred to as a "short bench": the modest number of specialists sympathetic to the "good change."⁷² After 2024, competitions were organised to replace the directors nominated by Piotr Gliński; the three cases mentioned were won by women: Anna Łazar, Agnieszka Pindera, and Paulina Kurc-Maj, respectively.

There remains another question: what lies beyond institutions and academies? According to data collected in February 2025 from a sample of 23 Warsaw commercial galleries participating in the 14th edition of Warsaw Gallery Weekend, men constitute a slight majority (around 52%) among the people those galleries represent, but women dominate in the under-35 years old segment at about 57% (although "young artists people," meaning those who have not yet turned 35 years, account for only 19% of the total). Though there are still galleries in which men constitute a significant majority (up to 70%, as in the case of Galeria Szydlowski, or 68% at Galeria Monopol), there are no longer any places that do not represent even a single female artist. And, as the case of Galeria Import Export shows, there is at least one gallery that does not represent a single male artist, even though it does not declare itself to be a feminist gallery⁷³.

What, then, do all these data tell us in relation to the findings of the present report, which indicates a slow shift for the better? Academies

and art departments are institutional bodies exposed to political pressure to a somewhat different degree than galleries and museums: at universities, personnel changes are made more autonomously, though this does not rule out the effects of ideological pressure. The commercial gallery market responds both to changes in discourse and to the political-institutional situation – that is, it often presents itself as progressive and as having a liberal worldview, but only when that strategy is profitable. In the face of successive waves of backlash (global, national, or field-specific – in my view, still wrongly downplayed), the slight predominance of women in directorial positions or among the youngest people represented in commercial galleries may be only temporary. If this proves to be the case, the words of a certain male professor from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, published in the university journal he co-edited, may turn out to be prophetic: “Today, as Warhol observed, everyone can have their five minutes in art, and women artists are having theirs right now.” That was in 2019; the professor insisted he had been joking, and called for a preservation of “clear judgment.” Should there be another turn towards conservatism, “clear judgment” imposed from the top down might prevail for much longer than just eight years (and not only in galleries and museums). Let us hope, however, that we will not have to check how far we have drawn any conclusions at all from the three confusions of 2016.

**Aleksy Wójtowicz**

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Anna Walewska

An art historian and doctoral student at the Doctoral School of Humanities in the field of art studies at the University of Warsaw. Her interests concern new methods of biographism, archives, and feminist research. She is responsible for the project *Little Chance to Advance? An Inquiry Into the Presence of Women at Art Academies in Poland*. In 2012–2018, she ran the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation, which she founded. She is the curator of monographic exhibitions, including those of Katarzyna Kozyra (*Katarzyna Kozyra. Solo Exhibition* at the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre in Beijing), Monika Mamzeta (...*też Cię kocham* [...] I Love You Too] at TRAFO Center for Contemporary Art in Szczecin), and Magda Bieleś (*Wśród leków czuję się bezpiecznie* [Among Medicines I Feel Safe], Museum of Pharmacy, a branch of the Museum of Warsaw). She is the author of the book *Koleżanki i koledzy. Inżynierska 3* [Female and Male Friends: Inżynierska 3] (published by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in collaboration with the History Meeting House, 2024). She is responsible for the portal szanseawanse.pl



Research Support

Dr hab. Katarzyna Kozyra

A sculptor, photographer, and author of performances, films, video installations, and artistic actions. A graduate of the Faculty of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, from the studio of Prof. Grzegorz Kowalski, the so-called Kowalnia. In 1998, she completed post-graduate studies at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst / Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig (HGB), in the New Media studio under the supervision of Prof. Helmut Marek. In 2012, she defended her doctorate at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, and in 2025 she obtained the degree of doctor habilitata at the Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts Łódź. In 1999, she received an honourable mention at the Venice Biennale for the video installation *Men's Bathhouse*, presented in the Polish Pavilion. In 2013, the *Huffington Post* included Katarzyna Kozyra among the ten most important artists of the new millennium. In 2012, she established a foundation whose activities focus on supporting women's work in the field of culture and art. katarzynakozyrafoundation.pl



Agnieszka Krajewska

A cultural animator, author, coordinator, and producer of many national and international artistic and educational projects for children, young people, and adults. She is a cultural studies scholar by education — she graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and completed a two-year international course in intercultural pedagogy organised by the Franconian Centre for Peace Education in Nuremberg. She is the author and coordinator of nine editions of *Eye of the Kaleidoscope*, the National Review of Animated Films Created by Children. She has curated several editions of the *Animator of Tomorrow* project at the ANIMATOR International Animated Film Festival. She is a co-creator of the Children's Art Biennale programme. She has curated and organised several editions of the Teachers' Film Forum as part of Ale Kino! International Young Audience Film Festival. She is the initiator and curator of the Grafen Student Research Circle at Primary School No. 90 in Poznań, a programme of artistic workshops for children with refugee experience from Ukraine, carried out in collaboration with the Atelier Łazęga Poznańska Association, and the organiser of animation workshops during the finals of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity. She has been awarded the Medal for Merit to Polish Culture, granted by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage.



Agata Krawczyk

A doctoral student at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences in the field of sociological sciences at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. A graduate of postgraduate Gender Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences. She led the project *Psi Poznań. Formy obecności i relacji międzygatunkowych psów w dużym mieście* [Canine Poznań: Forms of Presence and Interspecies Relations of Dogs in a Large City], and was also involved in other research projects, including: *Przestrzeń otwarta: badanie potrzeb osób studiujących związanych z kampusami UAM jako miejscami uczenia się, wymiany i regeneracji* [Open Space: A Study of Students' Needs Related to AMU Campuses as Places of Learning, Exchange, and Regeneration] (2024–2025), *Young People and the War in Ukraine* (2023), and *Przestrzeń–oprogramowanie–człowiek: rozszerzona rzeczywistość smart city* [Space–Software–Human: The Augmented Reality of the Smart City] (2022).



Sara Majcher-Wojciechowska

A social researcher, cultural studies scholar, and photographer. A graduate of the interdisciplinary Urban Studies programme at the University of Warsaw, she is currently a master's student in visual culture at the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. She has worked on research and public consultations for various bodies of the City of Warsaw. She is currently a researcher at the Warsaw Observatory of Culture. Her fields of interest include socio-cultural microworlds in cities, the anthropology of everyday life, vernacular photography, and contemporary art.

Appendices

Research Process

The study reported here was carried out in 2025, in two stages: preparatory and main, using four research techniques. The aims of each stage and the course of the work are described in detail in the introductions to individual chapters; here, we present them only briefly, adding issues not mentioned earlier to clarify the nature of the information collected.

The preparatory phase involved a literature review and analysis of public statistics and data from art academies. The main phase consisted of individual, in-depth qualitative interviews with people studying or working at an academy of fine arts ($N = 48$), as well as a survey of fine arts students ($N = 1,280$). This logic was inspired by the 2015 study referred to in this report. By combining existing and elicited data, as well as institutional and individual perspectives (of students and employees), and by deepening the patterns captured in the quantitative study by analysing participants' shared subjective experiences, we were able to look at the issues of gender inequality at academies of fine arts in Poland in a comprehensive way⁷⁴.

Research Tools

Each of the forms we used to analyse existing data, the different versions of the survey questionnaire, and the interview scenarios is from a dozen and several dozen pages long, so we have not reprinted them here. Readers who would like to consult them in their original form may do so at the project website (<http://www.szanseawanse.pl>). Nevertheless, we set out below the basic structure of the research tools used.

We asked each of the institutions included in the study – the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław, the Academy of Art in Szczecin, the University of the Arts in Poznań, and the Faculty of Fine Arts at Nicolaus Copernicus University – to complete a form summarising the most important information concerning their women and men students and employees. The form consisted of ten blocks: (1) women and men in managerial positions and in academy authorities, (2) information on people employed in research, research-and-teaching, and teaching positions, (3) participation of women and men in competitions for research, research-and-teaching, and teaching positions, (4) financial or organisational support for the activities of women and men employed at the academy, (5) information concerning people studying at the academy, (6) academic promotions, (7) female and male representatives on academy bodies, (8) academy activities aimed at equalising educational and professional opportunities, and (9) additional remarks and comments.

As mentioned in the chapter introduction summarising this stage of the research, very few academies returned the form fully completed. Most shared the information they had at their disposal or that they were able to collect and willing to make available for the purposes of the study. In this way, the data provided partially contextualised public statistics on artistic higher education. It can be useful for developing broader strategies to collect information on the careers of women and men as part of academy equality policies.

When beginning the qualitative research, two interview scenarios were used – one for art academy students, and one for lecturers⁷⁵. The first scenario consisted of an introduction and conclusion, plus five blocks covering issues such as pathways leading to the academy and plans after graduation; ideas about assistantships and attitudes towards them; relationships with lecturers and recognised patterns of support; knowledge and opinions concerning recruitment for academy positions; and the role of gender in the academy environment. The interview scenario for lecturers was structured similarly. It addressed the history and understanding of the interviewee's career; the methods and criteria of recruitment for academy positions; and contacts with students, including supporting talented people and thinking about female and male successors. The penultimate segment concerned the relationship between a career at the academy and private life, while the final part of the interview, as in the case of students, concerned perceptions of the role of gender and its impact on professional opportunities at an art academy. 48 interviews were conducted using this scenario – 24 with women and 24 with men at different stages of study and work at an art academy. Interviews were conducted in six of the nine institutions studied, selected typologically, with eight interviews conducted in each.

The questionnaire used during the survey research contained closed questions, including rating-scale items adapted to the content. As with the other research tools, the main part of the survey was based on the questionnaire used in 2015, though new questions were added to broaden its thematic scope. The full version contained thirty core questions, including many matrix questions, and around twenty questions concerning place of study and the socio-demographic characteristics of the people participating in the study.

The first group of questions were on students' dreams, plans, and professional priorities, and the role of career in their future family life. We then asked about the perceived attractiveness of an academic career, the factors that determine that choice, and people regarded as authorities in the student's field of art. Third, self-assessment of effort and talent relative to other students, as well as the role of appearance in how achievements are evaluated. Fourth, questions about emotional burdens during studies, support received from those teaching classes, and unwanted behaviours.

Fifth, opportunities available to women working in the arts, the expectations placed on them, and opinions on academy equality policies.

As mentioned in the quantitative research section of the report, two versions of the scenario were used in this phase, one for those at the beginning of their studies, and another for those approaching the end. We made this division because some questions concerned experiences and situations that people who were just beginning their studies had not yet encountered, and because it enabled us to exclude questions that were inappropriate to some participants while maintaining comparability across the key areas of the research.

Additional Information on the Methods of Collecting and Analysing the Survey Data

As mentioned above, the survey was conducted among people studying at art academies in Poland. It replicated the 2015 study, but also extended it in response to changes in the higher education system and to deepen selected areas of analysis. To be included in the study, participants had to answer the questions on gender and year of study, and complete more than 50% of the questionnaire.

For the analyses, we divided participants into two groups based on their year of study: first-year students, and students in higher years. The first-year category included students beginning bachelor's programmes, long-cycle master's programmes, and two-year master's programmes. All others were classified as higher-year students. This classification method was adopted to maintain analytical consistency and comparability with the earlier edition of the study.

Data was collected from May to October 2025. The study used two techniques: an online survey and a paper questionnaire. The survey, administered on the Qualtrics platform, was used throughout the entire survey period. Invitations, along with links to complete the questionnaire, were promoted online with the support of sectoral media, partner cultural institutions, and members of the Polish art world. The academies included in the study also became involved in distributing information about it – individual institutions used various digital tools adapted to their local specificities, including information in newsletters sent to students, invitations sent through digital systems, information on websites and social media, and messages shared with the support of student organisations, individual students, and others.

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. However, because of the length of the questionnaire (the full version took about 40 minutes to complete), additional measures were necessary to obtain as many responses as possible. For this purpose, a paper version of the questionnaire was prepared and distributed in the second half of October 2025. As with the electronic version, we asked the academies included in the

study for help with distribution, and for their consent to distribute and collect questionnaires during classes and on academy premises. Thanks to this cooperation, additional paper questionnaires were collected in six cities: Gdańsk, Katowice, Poznań, Szczecin, Toruń, and Wrocław. After appropriate training, and with procedures ensuring voluntariness and anonymity in place, people teaching classes in various fields and at various levels of study were involved in distributing the questionnaires. Questionnaires were also distributed during events, including the inauguration of the academic year and artistic events in Warsaw.

In total, data from 1,180 questionnaires were used in the analyses presented in the main text, including 505 completed online and 675 on paper. Analyses for the non-binary group were conducted using data from 100 participants: 54 completed online questionnaires and 46 completed paper questionnaires.

It is worth noting that, initially, the number of questionnaires was much higher – almost 2,000. However, only questionnaires in which at least 51% of the questions had been completed were included in the quantitative analyses. This means that questionnaires with fewer than half the questions answered in each version were excluded from further analysis. The purpose of this threshold was to maintain a balance between data quality and the broadest possible scope of analysis, while limiting the impact of missing data on the results obtained. Missing answers to individual questions were treated as missing data, and were not replaced with estimated values. As a result, sample sizes (N) may differ between analyses of individual variables.

When discussing the principles and decisions adopted at the quantitative data analysis stage, it is worth emphasising once again that non-binary people were excluded from group analyses comparing the experiences of women and men. This decision was made to maintain comparability with the 2015 study, which did not include this gender identity category. The results for non-binary people are presented in a separate section of the report.

In some cases, response scales were recoded; for example, by changing the range of the scale to improve the readability of the results. The report presents mean values and percentage distributions of responses, but only statistically significant differences were interpreted. This was intended to avoid overinterpreting the results, especially when the number of responses was limited.

Unweighted data were used in the analyses. Again, to avoid the risk of overinterpretation, we decided not to use the analytical weights applied in the 2015 study, which means that the results presented reflect the distributions of responses in the sample studied, without statistically adjusting them to the structure of the population, including in terms of gender or place of study.

This decision not to weigh the data was made for several reasons. First, at the time the analyses were conducted, public statistics did not yet include data for 2025, or any other information that would have enabled us to develop a comprehensive model for weight creation. And other considerations were equally or even more important. Taking organisational constraints into account, wanting to enable all interested people to participate, and hoping for comparable results, we used a convenience-based sampling method in the survey, as had been the case ten years earlier. Under these conditions, weighting could have been misleading, as it might have concealed complex deviations arising from self-selection among those who chose to complete the questionnaire – such as interest in the study's subject, time available to participate, and so on. Moreover, some subpopulations in the sample were small; for example, men in smaller academic centres. In such a situation, individual questionnaires would have had to be assigned very large weights, which would have reduced the stability of the results – individual answers could have had a clear impact on the picture of the phenomenon. In addition, as the above analyses and the literature review indicate, gender and place of study are not the only factors that affect professional opportunities and plans; year of study is also significant, and other variables, such as field of study, may also be. Finally, during the period in which we conducted the analyses, public statistics did not include 2025 data, and other data were also missing.

**Characteristics of the Sample Against the Population
Background (for the variables of city and gender)**

Below, we present the characteristics of the sample, considering the share of women and men studying in the institutions included in the study, against the background of the population, using data from a portal that collects information on higher education in Poland. We also indicate the most important differences and interpret them briefly below.

Table 31. Share of women and men in each locality — in the sample and in the population

		% in the study sample		% of population, RAD-on data	
Locality		Women	Men	Women	Men
Gdańsk	N	83	16	708	147
	% in row	83.8%	16.2%	82.8%	17.2%
Katowice	N	176	33	400	102
	% in row	84.2%	15.8%	79.7%	20.3%
Cracow	N	110	13	780	192
	% in row	89.4%	10.6%	80.2%	19.8%
Poznań	N	163	52	1096	290
	% in row	75.8%	24.2%	79.1%	20.9%

Source: https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/studenci_2024, filter: Institution name and gender.

Szczecin	N	62	22	611	218
	% in row	73.8%	26.2%	73.7%	26.3%
Toruń	N	68	13	–	–
	% in row	84.0%	16.0%	–	–
Warszawa	N	88	22	1284	315
	% in row	80.0%	20.0%	80.3%	19.7%
Wrocław	N	179	34	1030	217
	% in row	84.0%	16.0%	82.6%	17.4%
Other	N	35	11	–	–
		76.087%	23.913%	–	–
Total	N	964	216	5909	1481
	% in row	81.7%	18.3%	80.0%	20.0%

In our own study, women comprised 81.7% of the sample, and men 18.3%, while in the RAD-on data the corresponding figures were 80% and 20%. This means that women were slightly overrepresented (+1.7 percentage points), and men slightly underrepresented (–1.7 percentage points) in our study relative to the reference sample.

The comparative analysis showed that, in our own sample, the greatest excess of women relative to the RAD-on data was observed in Cracow and Katowice (which therefore had correspondingly lower shares of men). A different pattern was observed in Poznań, where the share of men was higher than in the reference sample. In Szczecin and Warsaw, the gender structure in our own study differed only marginally from the RAD-on data. Due to the lack of comparative data in the RAD-on dataset, Toruń and the “Other” category were excluded from the comparative analysis.

Legend. N for the study sample = 1,053. Source: https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/studenci_2024, filter: institution name and gender.

Table 32. Share of the most represented localities among women and men — in the sample and in the population

Locality	Study (N = 1,053)		RAD-ON	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Gdańsk	7.88%	1.52%	9.58%	1.99%
Katowice	16.71%	3.13%	5.41%	1.38%
Cracow	10.45%	1.23%	10.55%	2.60%
Poznań	15.48%	4.94%	14.83%	3.92%
Szczecin	5.89%	2.09%	8.27%	2.95%
Warszawa	8.36%	2.09%	17.37%	4.26%
Wrocław	17.00%	3.23%	13.94%	2.94%

An analysis of the sample structure by place of study showed that Katowice was clearly overrepresented in our own study, among both women and men. The opposite was true of Warsaw, which was

significantly underrepresented in both gender groups. Moderate overrepresentation was observed in Wrocław and Poznań, while Gdańsk and Szczecin showed moderate underrepresentation. In Cracow, the sample structure for women was similar to that observed in the RAD-on data, although the share of men in this city was clearly lower.

In summary, the gender distribution in our study was broadly similar to that recorded in the RAD-on data, although local deviations occurred at the city level. The largest differences concerned the overrepresentation of participants from Katowice and the underrepresentation of participants from Warsaw. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we were unable to obtain support from the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź in carrying out the survey. Students of that institution are therefore clearly underrepresented in the sample compared with their share in the overall number of students.

We hope that the report will initiate a discussion on the need for, and ways of building, effective equality policies. These could include cyclical, regional survey studies based on random samples, conducted by academies themselves, to facilitate ongoing monitoring and adjustment of measures to equalise opportunities and popularise academies as places of professional development.

Weighted/Unweighted Data – a statistical technique for recalculating survey results by assigning weights to individual observations in such a way that the results obtained in the sample more closely resemble those obtained in the population. For example, if the share of women in the sample – among those who completed the questionnaire – is higher than in the population, men's responses are “upweighted” so that the overall result more closely resembles the result that might have been obtained if the proportions in the sample had been the same as in the population.

Semantic Differential – a form of survey question in which the person taking part in the study responds by marking an answer on a scale stretched between two opposing terms, for example, “definitely unattractive” – “definitely attractive”.

Coding Category – a term used, for example, when categorising answers given to an open-ended question. For instance, to collectively name a dozen or so answers indicating various challenges related to supporting oneself during studies, one may use the category “economic difficulties”.

Statistical Adjustment – recalculating results using statistical techniques, for example, by upweighting the responses of men, who are less numerous in the sample than in the population.

N – sample size – the number of people taking part in the study.

P.p. (Percentage Point) – the difference between two values expressed as percentages. For example, if a given answer is chosen by 15% of women and 20% of men, the difference is 5 percentage points (5 p.p.).

Re(coding) – changing the values of variables into other values to make additional calculations possible or compare results. For example, the answer “never” on a seven-point ordinal scale may be assigned the value 0 or 1, while the answer “always” may be assigned 6 or 7.

Distribution of Answers – a visualisation of the way in which study participants answered a given question; for example, a pie chart or table illustrating the percentage share of people who answered “Yes”, “No” or “I don't know” to a question about whether their academy had adopted an equality policy.

Statistically Significant Difference – the result of statistical analyses which allow us to state, at an established significance threshold, that an

observed difference between responses – for example those of women and men or of people taking part in the studies in 2015 and 2025 – is unlikely to be the result of chance and is therefore highly likely to reflect an effect in the population.

Feminisation Index – described in footnote 15 on p. 46.

Correlation Coefficient – a term used in statistics to indicate the direction and strength of the relationship between variables, such as age or income. For example, a correlation coefficient value of -0.33 means that there is a negative and moderate relationship between two variables: the more the value of one increases – for example the number of years – the more the value of the other decreases, such as a poorer self-assessment of one's material situation.

Qualitative Interview – a research technique in the social sciences which resembles a free-flowing conversation to a greater extent than a survey: the person conducting the interview asks a set of prepared open-ended questions, to which the person participating in the study may respond in their own words, and these answers may be explored further through additional follow-up questions.

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