A common feature of western European universities is the low representation of women in higher positions of the university hierarchy. Organisations theory and feminist literature present mainly two types of explanation to this lack of equality. The first explanation could be summed up as the individual theory and the second as the institutional theory. An example of the first type could be "the double burden" – explanation, where women’s double work as a mother/housekeeper is found incompatible with a full-time career in academia. An example of the second type could be that women need memberships in the “old boy’s network” in order to advance successfully in an academic career. Without discrediting these explanations the paper suggests a complementary explanation to women’s small number among full professors: The asymmetry in the assignation of prestige in academia. The assignation of prestige to an actor is attributed via a specific audience and a specific source. The audience consider both the actions that are reclaimed prestigious by the actor and the evaluation the source makes of this action. The actions that eventually will give a certain actor prestige are often purely quantifiable merits like publications, speeches and scientific prizes. However other actions amounts to a persons prestige, which are not up for a public scrutiny. The paper is suggesting that there is an asymmetry in the assignation of prestige, thus even if women academics have equal merits they loose out to men because of that they are assigned less prestige. Some preliminary results of the empirical work connected to my doctoral thesis will be presented at the conference.

Key words: academically career, prestige, merit, field concept, consacral moments.