# Between a velvet ghetto and a glass ceiling: the situation of female creatives in Spain

## Entre un gueto de terciopelo y un techo de cristal: situación de las creativas en España

*Entre um gueto de veludo e um teto de vidro: situação das mulheres criativas na Espanha*

**Marina Ramos-Serrano**, Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, Spain (mramos@us.es)

**Blanca Miguélez-Juan**, Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, Bilbao, Spain (blanca.miguelez@ehu.eus)

**Víctor Hernández-Santaolalla**, Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, Spain (vhsantaolalla@us.es)

**ABSTRACT** | This research addresses the professional situation of female creatives in Spanish advertising agencies and the barriers that hinder their promotion in creative departments, focusing on three main areas: pink ghettos and promotion, unconscious bias, and motherhood. A questionnaire was administered to 252 female creatives between 21 and 59 years. Within the departments, a biased allocation of accounts was observed, i.e., an unequal distribution of clients and briefings that condemns women to work continuously with highly feminised accounts. In terms of unconscious biases, these were summarised in terms of rejection and exclusion, self-confidence, and competition. Regarding motherhood, it is still difficult for creative women to reconcile family life with work, which means that the balance tends to be tipped in favor of the professional career. In short, creativity is evidently a masculinised profession in which gender biases need to be broken down.

**KEYWORDS**: pink ghetto; glass ceiling; gender; creative professionals; advertising agencies; Spain.

**RESUMEN |** *Esta investigación analiza la situación profesional de las creativas en las agencias de publicidad españolas y las barreras que ponen freno al ascenso de las mujeres publicistas en los departamentos creativos, con foco en tres áreas: pink ghettos y promoción, sesgos inconscientes, y maternidad. Se aplicó un cuestionario que fue respondido por 252 creativas de edades entre 21 y 59 años. Se observa, dentro de los departamentos, una adjudicación sesgada de las cuentas, esto es, un reparto no equitativo de clientes y briefings que las condena a trabajar continuamente con cuentas altamente feminizadas. Los sesgos inconscientes quedaron resumidos en términos de rechazo y exclusión, autoconfianza y competencia. Con respecto a la maternidad, se sigue constatando la dificultad de las creativas por conciliar la vida en familia con el trabajo, lo que hace que se suela decantar la balanza en favor de la trayectoria profesional. Se evidencia, en definitiva, que la creatividad es una profesión masculinizada en la que se necesita acabar con los sesgos de género.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *pink guetto; techo de cristal; género; profesionales creativas; agencias de publicidad; España.*

**RESUMO |** Esta pesquisa investiga a situação profissional das mulheres criativas nas agências de publicidade espanholas e as barreiras que freiam a ascensão das mulheres publicitárias nos departamentos criativos, concentrando-se em três áreas principais: guetos rosas e promoção, preconceitos inconscientes e maternidade. Foi realizado um questionário respondido por 252 mulheres criativas com idades entre 21 e 59 anos. Dentro dos departamentos, observou-se uma distribuição de contas enviesada, ou seja, uma distribuição desigual de clientes e briefings que condena as mulheres a trabalharem continuamente contas altamente feminizadas. Em termos de preconceitos inconscientes, estes foram resumidos em termos de rejeição e exclusão, autoconfiança e competição. No que diz respeito à maternidade, ainda é difícil para as mulheres criativas conciliar a vida familiar com a vida profissional, o que significa que o equilíbrio tende a ser inclinado a favor da carreira profissional. Em suma, é evidente que a criatividade é uma profissão masculinizada em que os preconceitos de gênero têm de ser eliminados.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: gueto rosa; teto de vidro; gênero; profissionais criativass; agências de publicidade; Espanha.

## INTRODUCTION

Stereotypical images of women and gender roles in advertising have been studied for decades (McArthur & Resko, 1975; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Stern & Mastro, 2004; Grau & Zotos, 2016). However, in the second decade of the 21st century, the creativity-gender phenomenon has been increasingly studied, with a focus on societal demands that support visibility and gender equality in the advertising industry.

A number of initiatives seek to make female creative talent visible and to establish measures and commitments for greater representation, both in creative departments and in the juries of prestigious advertising festivals –sometimes using quotas to accelerate their parity index. The 3% Conference (2012), Let's Make the Industry 50/50 Initiative (2013), The Female Quotient (2013), Free The Bid (2016) or Unstereotype Alliance (2017) are international movements defending the potential of female talent and equality in the workplace in various fields. The 3% Conference was the pioneering initiative that promoted change in the advertising industry in the United States. It was named after the percentage of female creative directors at the time of its creation; a decade later, the figure reached 11%.

In Spain, the data is not encouraging either: 40% of the people in creative departments are women, and only 24% of those who hold positions in the general management of agencies are women, compared to 76% of men (Club de Creativos & APG España, 2019), in a business that, in media investment alone, moves 10,793.6 million euros, or 0.967% of the Spanish GDP (Sánchez Revilla, 2021). In the aforementioned country, the independent collaborative network Más Mujeres Creativas (2016) joined the previous global movements, with more than a thousand creative women willing to promote a real change in a profession where they find a multitude of barriers that condemn them to work with female product accounts, unable to reconcile work and motherhood, and to live between a velvet ghetto (Toth, 1988) –in agencies, generally in the account and administrative departments– and a glass ceiling that forces them to concentrate on middle positions, unable to progress in their professional careers and to access positions of responsibility (Grow & Deng, 2014).

Since the emergence of the aforementioned platforms, a favorable social climate has been created among advertisers and consumers to analyze these phenomena and look at advertising with a critical eye. In turn, agencies are becoming more female-friendly, while advertisers are adopting femvertising as a strategy (Hsu, 2018). Given this new social and professional context, which is more sensitive to gender issues, the general objective of this study is to find out what Spanish creative advertising women think about their professional situation, what obstacles they

encounter in their career advancement, and how they experience the rise and demands of the feminist movement in their work. This is the first Spanish-wide study conducted after the birth of platforms such as Más Mujeres Creativas (2016) and the #MeToo movement (2017).

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The main problem in studying the presence of women in the Spanish advertising industry is the lack of an official census of workers in the sector. Until now, data has been provided by professional associations, which only include certain sectors of activity. There are quantitative studies (Martín Llaguno et al., 2007; Soria & Gómez, 2017; Club de Creativos & APG, 2019, 2022; Papí-Gálvez et al., 2020) and those that analyze the presence of women in festival juries (Roca Correa et al., 2012) or in campaign credits (Pueyo Ayhan, 2010, 2012; Alvarado-López & Martín-García, 2020). According to the Club de Creativos en España and APG (2019), the creative sector is predominantly male (59.9%). Globally, it is estimated that the presence of women in creative departments is only 20.3% compared to 79.7% of men (Grow & Deng, 2014), a data that contrasts with the majority presence of women enrolled in advertising studies (Windels et al., 2010; Grow et al., 2012). The advertising agency is a complex social system (Klebba & Tierney, 1995) in which the strategic importance of the creative department and, ultimately, of the advertising business must be taken into account (Miguélez-Juan, 2019), so the absence of women causes great concern. Fullerton and Kendrick (2017) found no significant gender differences among North American advertising students in their desire to work in the creative field. However, the authors conclude that female students do not perceive creative departments as male-dominated.

This is a reality they encounter as they begin their creative careers; moreover, moving from junior to senior and remaining in the latter category is not without its difficulties. Early departure from the profession (Club de Creativos & APG Spain, 2022) or difficult access to management positions make it difficult for women to consolidate a lasting career in creative departments.

**Homosociability in creative departments**

Creative departments in advertising agencies have been characterized as closed environments dominated by young, white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class men (Gregory, 2009; McLeod et al., 2009). Referred to as Boyland (Broyles & Grow, 2008) or men's or boys' clubs (Gregory, 2009; Mallia, 2009b), these spaces have fostered the creation of a masculine culture characterized by the use of humor, sports, sexual jokes, and gatherings outside of the work environment where networks

and connections are built among members beyond formal work (Gregory, 2009; Mallia, 2009a; Crewe & Wang, 2018).

This informal socialization hinders the advancement of creative women (Nixon, 2003), who find it more difficult to connect with peers and clients (Martín Llaguno et al., 2007; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Roca & Pueyo, 2011; Roca Correa et al., 2012). This is epitomized in the biased awarding of important accounts –cars or beers– reserved for men, with the excuse of affinity with the product. Such practices have isolated creative women in female product accounts (personal hygiene, makeup, cleaning products...), referred to in the profession and literature as pink ghettos (Mallia, 2009b; Grow et al., 2012; Pueyo Ayhan, 2012). As they are considered minor accounts in the advertising industry, they are less likely to win advertising awards, which in turn are essential for the promotion of creatives (McLeod et al., 2009; Alvarado-López & Martín-García, 2020).

The professional stagnation of female creatives has been widely described in various qualitative studies (Windels & Lee, 2012; Mensa Torras & Grow, 2015; Arnberg & Svanlund, 2017; Crewe & Wang, 2018; Thompson-Whiteside, 2020), which highlight that they feel excluded by their male colleagues in subtle and informal ways. Female respondents speak of excessive paternalism on the part of creative directors, difficulties in being heard or taken seriously by their male colleagues, and problems in engaging in social relationships outside the office; encounters that are essential for networking within the agency. In this regard, Topić (2020) notes that many female creatives report being treated differently simply because they are women. Other female creatives feel that their ideas are ignored by their male colleagues, who prefer other male interlocutors. This is crucial given the importance of peer recognition in fostering creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

The creative profession is highly competitive, it requires always being up to date with new trends in communication and providing original ideas (Koslow et al., 2003), so the habit of working with ambiguity and non-conformity is a must (Windels, 2016). This favors personalities with a high capacity for criticism, who do not conform to the established, who create new ideas and new concepts through the alternative use of different meanings, whose sense or interpretation is not the usual ones, in order to reach their target audience. Consequently, designing a strategy for self-promotion that includes personal, artistic and marketing aspects (Gause, 2022), along with perseverance, tenacity and resilience are essential personality factors to promote inside and outside the agency (Grow & Broyles, 2011). Resilience is the key to survival in creative departments, where ideas are constantly challenged and it is necessary to be open to criticism (Bernal-Triviño, 2018). Advertising creativity is a socio-cultural and collaborative process in which each person plays a role, but at the same time is subject to the scrutiny of the department itself, the agency, or

the client. This is where subjectivity comes into play, as well as the difficulty of evaluating ideas by creative directors (mostly men), who tend to favor those that fit their view of the world (Alvesson, 1998).

In this respect, being creative - which is, in principle, something that has no gender - is associated in the advertising field with masculinity, bohemianism, youth and freedom, i.e. with not having family ties (Martín Llaguno et al., 2007). The opinions of creatives point out that women have difficulty accepting criticism and separating the professional from the personal (Martín Llaguno, 2007), and even that they lack a sense of humor (Gregory, 2009). Various studies have shown that they feel inhibited by the male-dominated environment of creative departments, which undermines their creative capacity (Mallia, 2009b; Grow & Broyles, 2011).

The inequality is exacerbated when women consider motherhood, as they face a variety of obstacles in balancing their personal and professional lives (Martín Llaguno, 2008; Roca Correa et al., 2012).This presents them with a dilemma (Mallia, 2017), as motherhood affects and even damages their professional careers (Club de Creativos & APG España, 2022). This unfavorable environment, in which male corporatism predominates, has led to different survival strategies on the part of women. The first is masculinization, or adapting to the dominant masculine discourse. The second is to accept their subordinate position and work harder to be accepted (Topić, 2020). On the other hand, when women reach a leadership position, they do not always see themselves in that leadership role and, in addition, they define their way of leading the team as democratic and collaborative (Montes & Roca, 2016).

Chalá's (2018) work, based on Bourdieu (1988), considers gender as a type of cultural capital that helps to understand why society understands masculinity as associated with "strength, resistance, competitiveness or objectivity", while femininity is associated with "docility, weakness, sensitivity, passivity or subjectivity" (p. 199). This social learning affects their professional careers, even if they are girls (Núñez-Gómez et al., 2020). In this sense, Chalá (2018) distinguishes different capitals involved in the field of creative advertising. The endogenous factors in which are 1) innate creative talent, 2) human capital, innate personal characteristics but also learned skills, and of course 3) academic capital, mainly university degrees, although, as the author Miguélez-Juan (2016) points out, creative schools of portfolio creation should also be considered at this point. Secondly, there are the exogenous factors in which socio-cultural processes intervene, among which we highlight social capital, understood as the network of contacts that brings personal benefits to promote and that previous studies have detected as a determinant in the creative sector (Nixon, 2003), and psychic and emotional capital, as the set of emotional strengths that favor or prevent adapting to an adverse situation with flexibility and empathy (Chalá, 2018). As Kang and Kim

(2019) point out, self-efficacy is also a necessary concept for creatives to perform creative work, especially in the field of design. Therefore, creative women face three basic difficulties: fitting into a male-dominated environment, breaking the glass ceiling, and working creatively in a hostile environment.

Based on previous theoretical approaches to pink ghettos, homosociability, and the glass ceiling in creative departments, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

> *H1.* Spanish creative women are isolated in the so-called pink ghettos, which they associate with stagnation in their professional careers.
>
> *H2.* Spanish creative women feel as prepared –endogenous capitals– as their male counterparts, but encounter social and emotional difficulties -exogenous capitals - that make it difficult for them to advance in their careers.
>
> *H3.* Creative women see motherhood as an obstacle to their careers; therefore, creative women in the consolidation and stabilization stages are the group that has the most difficulty breaking through the glass ceiling.

## METHODOLOGY

To test the hypotheses, we developed a quantitative methodology. A questionnaire was distributed to all women working in creative advertising in Spain, using different distribution channels, since, as mentioned above, there is no official census. The questionnaire was completed by 252 female advertising professionals. The responses were collected between February 6 and May 13, 2019, using the Google Forms tool. All respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time for any reason. The study was designed and carried out in accordance with the guidelines of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Seville (CEIUS) at all times. The data were analyzed using the statistical package IBM© SPSS© Statistics V25.

For the development of the questionnaire, entitled Elephant in the Spanish Adland, we used as a basis the one used in the US study Elephant on Mad Ave (The 3% Conference, 2016), adapted and expanded for the Spanish context and the specific objectives and hypotheses of this work. The questionnaire includes basic socio-demographic data that were added specifically for this study: year of birth, level of education and year of graduation, type of company and job position, salary, and future job aspirations.

The questions were then structured according to three main areas discussed in the literature to learn about their perceptions:

1. Pink ghettos and advocacy: the influence of gender roles in managing and working in the different campaigns.

2.  Unconscious bias, feedback and advancement: skills versus male peers, consistent with growth opportunities for both genders.

3.  Motherhood: family impact on their professional career.

Twenty-five multiple-choice questions and five-point Likert scales were used in the three areas mentioned: four on pink ghettos, 15 on unconscious bias, feedback, and promotion, and six on motherhood (there were comparatively more questions in the second area because of the difficulty of obtaining valid information in this area). Each block of questions ended with an open field where participants could elaborate on their previous answers or comment on anything they felt was relevant that was not included.

**RESULTS**

The questionnaire was completed by 252 women between the ages of 21 and 59 (M=33.51; SD=7.40) working in creative professions, although only 74.2% worked in the creative department and 69.4% held a position –managerial, senior or junior– in the field, as shown in table 1. Young professionals predominate (69.4% under the age of 37), and 94.4% have a degree, specifically in Advertising and Public Relations (61.1%). In terms of career aspirations, only 3.6% want to stay in their current position, of which 44.4% are in management.

Regarding gender segregation in the workplace, 67.5% of women believe that today there are "pink ghettos", i.e. that major accounts are assigned according to gender (e.g. cars and beer for men; hygiene for women), while 17.5% disagree. This data was cross-checked with the professional status of the respondent and no significant differences were found. This percentage increased to 84.5% when asked if they thought that advertising agencies perpetuate gender roles in society. Finally, 90.5% of respondents indicated that they had taken into account how campaigns contribute to the consolidation of gender roles from the moment they are commissioned.

Regarding the open questions, one of the creatives pointed out that she was included in a briefing for a female cosmetics brand, but not her colleagues, while the creative director doubted whether she should be included in a campaign related to the world of football (senior-copy, 28 years old). Likewise, although it had not been previously raised as a variable to be analyzed, the respondents deepened the idea that the change gradually observed in advertising messages does not correspond to what is experienced in the agency. Thus, one of the creative women pointed out that "a step forward is being taken within the framework of pop feminism because the brands demand it, but often these decisions are based on creatives and managers

who do not really believe in or apply the message and gender ideology" (trainee-copy, 24 years old), for others, "feminism is a tool to get clicks, but not something that can be implemented in the daily life of an agency to improve our quality of life/work" (senior-art, 33 years old), denouncing that "brands are jumping on the feminism bandwagon out of pure fashion and opportunism" (senior-copy, 41 years old). In short, the respondents spoke in terms of campaigns to "wash the image" (agency owner, 38), "make-up" (marketing director, 41) or "self-deception" (junior-copy, 30). And not only in the management of the campaigns, but also in the way these campaigns are carried out, perpetuating "the division of issues

| Variable | ni | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
| 21-28 | 77 | 30.6 |
| 29-36 | 98 | 38.9 |
| 37-44 | 56 | 22.2 |
| 45-52 | 17 | 6.8 |
| 53-59 | 4 | 1.6 |
| **Higher level of education** | | |
| Ph.D. | 6 | 2.4 |
| Master | 8 | 3.2 |
| Bachelor/Diploma/ Degree | 238 | 94.4 |
| Advertising and PR | 154 | 61.1 |
| Communication (others) | 27 | 10.7 |
| Fine Arts, Design | 23 | 9.1 |
| Others | 17 | 6.7 |
| Professional training | 11 | 4.4 |
| Others | 6 | 2.4 |
| **Type of educational institution** | | |
| Public | 158 | 62.7 |
| Private | 94 | 37.3 |
| **Current position** | | |
| Executive direction | 20 | 7.9 |
| Creative direction (copy) | 24 | 9.5 |
| Creative direction (art) | 20 | 7.9 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Senior (copy) | 39 | 15.5 |
| Senior (art) | 28 | 11.1 |
| Junior (copy) | 37 | 14.7 |
| Junior (art) | 27 | 10.7 |
| Other | 57 | 22.6 |
| **Department** | | |
| Creative | 187 | 74.2 |
| General | 13 | 5.2 |
| Others | 52 | 20.6 |
| **Current company size** | | |
| 0-20 | 71 | 28.2 |
| 21-35 | 31 | 12.3 |
| 36-50 | 19 | 7.5 |
| +51 | 109 | 43.3 |
| *Freelance* | 22 | 8.7 |
| **Annual salary (euros)** | | |
| <30,000 | 163 | 64,7 |
| 30,001-50,000 | 52 | 20,6 |
| 50,001-70,000 | 22 | 8,7 |
| 70,001-90,000 | 9 | 3,6 |
| >90,000 | 6 | 2,4 |
| **Ambitioned position** | | |
| Senior in the department | 114 | 45,2 |
| Consulting/Advertiser | 23 | 9,1 |
| *Freelance* | 25 | 9,9 |
| Own agency | 40 | 15,9 |
| Current | 9 | 3,6 |
| Other | 41 | 16,3 |
| **Total** | **252** | **100,0** |

**Table 1. Sociodemographic and occupational variables**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

according to gender" (freelancer, 31 years old), and ignoring the role of women in areas such as humor, because there seems to be "an absurd fear of putting a woman in 'ridiculous' situations" (senior-copy, 27 years old).

Regarding the second area, the capacities and abilities of men and women to perform different tasks, the creative women believe that these are similar, but the opportunities offered to men and women are not equal. Consistent with the data in table 2, 87.3% of female respondents strongly disagreed (5 on the Likert scale) with the statement "I think I am less capable than my male counterparts",

| | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| I have felt excluded from social or networking opportunities because I am a woman | 3.11 | 1.38 |
| My professional influence and credibility have been undermined by colleagues | 3.12 | 1.35 |
| I have missed out on promotions or new opportunities because I am a woman | 3.15 | 1.36 |
| I believe that men have greater self-confidence | 3.15 | 1.53 |
| I have felt excluded from important meetings or events because I am a woman | 3.15 | 1.42 |
| I feel equal to my male colleagues | 3.21 | 1.27 |
| Men "sell" themselves better in job interviews | 3.26 | 1.50 |
| I consider that I have had the same opportunities as my colleagues in my profession | 3.28 | 1.34 |
| I have been asked to do low-level tasks that my male co-workers have not been asked to do (taking notes, ordering food, etc.) | 3.29 | 1.61 |
| My male colleagues are less willing to collaborate with me because I am a woman | 3.85 | 1.22 |
| I am embarrassed to make presentations in front of my colleagues or managers | 3.98 | 1.31 |
| I am embarrassed to make presentations in front of clients | 4.00 | 1.34 |
| I think my male counterparts sell their ideas better | 4.08 | 1.31 |
| I believe I am less qualified than my male counterparts | 4.77 | 0.72 |

**Table 2. Perceptions of creative women's and men's abilities and skills
(1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree)**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

| Dimension | Cronbach's alpha | Variance accounted for | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total (eigenvalue) | % variance |
| 1 | .816 | 4.121 | 29.433 |
| 2 | .688 | 2.768 | 19.768 |
| 3 | .307 | 1.399 | 9.992 |
| Total | ·947[a] | 8.287 | 59.194 |

[a] Cronbach's alpha total is used in the total eigenvalue.

**Table 3. CATPCA - Model summary**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

while 58.3% strongly disagreed with the belief that their male counterparts are better at selling their ideas. However, when presented with situations related to options for developing their work, the responses were fairly evenly distributed along the continuum of the scale.

Given the number of statements proposed to the participants, we decided to perform a Categorical Principal Component Analysis (CATPCA), which is particularly indicated for ordinal data, such as those provided by Likert scales (Linting et al., 2007), in order to reduce the dimensionality of the data obtained. Table 3 shows the summary of the model, which explains a total of 59.2% of the variance: Component 1 = 29.433%, Component 2 = 19.768% and Component 3 = 9.992%.

In this regard, the analysis resulted in three principal components that reached an eigenvalue greater than 1, which is traditionally considered the limit for inclusion of a component (table 4).

As to which variables make up each component, table 4 specifies these dimensions. As can be seen, there is a first component that focuses more on the variables related to rejection and exclusion for being a woman, indicating a lack of opportunities compared to their male –it is necessary to pay attention to how the statements and values were presented in the scales; another that points to the (self) confidence that men and women have in the performance of the profession, rejecting the idea that women consider men superior, and a third that focuses exclusively on the perception of the equal capacity of women (respondents) compared to men.

In response to the open-ended questions, the comments reinforce the quantitative results by focusing less on professional or social skills and more on

how they are treated and the exogenous advantages and disadvantages they have. For example, there is a consensus that it is not that men sell themselves better, either in job interviews or in the performance of their professional work, but that "they tend to create an exclusive chemistry (just because they are of the same sex) that is difficult for us to penetrate" (Marketing specialist, 37 years old), "they are taken more seriously" (junior-art, 27 years old and senior-art, 37 years old), "they feel surrounded by 'their own'" (junior-copy, 30 years old) or "they know they have an advantage over a woman and that gives them more security" (senior-copy, 34 years old). Thus, "we women always have more to prove to them" (senior-copy, 35 years old). A senior art director admits that "when I felt that my male colleagues

| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| I have felt excluded from social or networking opportunities because I am a woman | **-0.736** | -0.219 | -0.220 |
| My professional influence and credibility have been undermined by colleagues | **-0.640** | -0.124 | 0.139 |
| I have missed out on promotions or new opportunities because I am a woman | **-0.588** | -0.327 | 0.031 |
| I believe that men have greater self-confidence | -0.427 | **0.536** | -0.532 |
| I have felt excluded from important meetings or events because I am a woman | **-0.749** | -0.190 | -0.220 |
| I feel equal to my male colleagues | **0.450** | 0.435 | -0.181 |
| Men "sell" themselves better in job interviews | -0.423 | **0.536** | -0.532 |
| I consider that I have had the same opportunities as my colleagues in my profession | **0.638** | 0.450 | -0.077 |
| I have been asked to do low-level tasks that my male co-workers have not been asked to do (taking notes, ordering food, etc.) | **-0.557** | -0.316 | 0.065 |
| My male colleagues are less willing to collaborate with me because I am a woman | **-0.511** | -0.379 | 0.019 |
| I am embarrassed to make presentations in front of my colleagues or managers | -0.468 | **0.549** | 0.515 |
| I am embarrassed to make presentations in front of clients | -0.377 | **0.651** | 0.410 |
| I think my male counterparts sell their ideas better | -0.506 | **0.639** | -0.115 |
| I believe I am less qualified than my male counterparts | -0.319 | 0.330 | **0.517** |

**Table 4. Principal components of perceptions of creative women's skills and abilities compared to men**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

were better or more confident, it was because of the impostor syndrome that we tend to have, or the insecurity that we feel because of our gender, because we know how we are looked at" (senior-copy, 33 years old).

On other occasions, respondents point out that unequal opportunities are not so much a result of being a woman as a result of being a mother, which relates to the third thematic block of the study. Of those surveyed, 21.4% reported having children: 88.9% took maternity leave and 33.3% deliberately chose to reduce the length of their leave because they felt that being away from the office for so long could have a negative impact on their career. In terms of direct consequences of being a mother, 35.2% of respondents were not considered for management positions, 25.9% were not considered for certain roles, and 11.1% were excluded from certain meetings or events so as not to interfere with their family life. In the open-ended questions, women complained about the lack of reconciliation between family and work, as the only way to grow professionally as a mother is to give up children: "You have to choose between staying at work or seeing your children" (creative-copy director, 41 years old); "100% of your life with them" (creative-copy director, 41 years old). For example, one noted that "I had a bad conscience about my children because I was always working more than eight hours" (executive creative director, 54 years old), while for another it is "very hard to have to 'give up' professional success because you want to see your child every day" (creative-copy director, 41 years old). In this regard, the reaction of superiors is quite illustrative, as translated in certain comments ranging from "when I told my boss that I was pregnant, his reaction was 'fuck'…" (senior art director, 36 years old) to being forced to work from home during maternity leave (creative director-copy, 33 years old) or being fired.

In addition to those who are already mothers, there are those who want to become mothers but know that such a decision can come at a high cost. Phrases like "I feel like I can't be a mother because it would mean the end of my career" (senior art director, 33 years old) or "I haven't thought about becoming a mother soon, but it's a topic that scares me" (creative art director, 28 years old) are recurring. The following statement is illustrative:

> Not that I haven't thought about having kids. I want to have them and now would be the best time for me, but I have to postpone it. Right now, I've just started at an agency as a creative. I know that if I get pregnant now, I have a good chance of getting fired. At the same time, if I get pregnant and don't work, I don't think I'll get hired anywhere. I have to choose between my career and being a mother (senior art director, 37).

According to the age and position of these respondents who, instead of becoming mothers, are considering the possibility of becoming mothers, with all the work

implications that this entails, we observe that they tend to move throughout their thirties and occupy senior or managerial positions, thus falling within the so-called consolidation phase, thus partially fulfilling the initial hypothesis.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Like so many other sectors, the advertising industry, especially the creative department, is characterized by a high degree of masculinization (Crewe & Wang, 2018), not only in terms of machismo (Broyles & Grow, 2008) or the greater number of men, but also in terms of opportunities for their advancement compared to women, an issue in which clients have also played a key role. According to the results of this study, this reality prevails in Spain, so that creative women have more difficulties to grow than their peers (Grow et al., 2012), often being relegated to a series of performances and specific accounts in a profession characterized by a short working life.

Regarding the first hypothesis related to the perceptions of creative women in advertising in Spain, namely that they are isolated in the so-called pink ghettos, which they associate with a stagnation of their professional careers, this is confirmed. In this sense, the perception of female creatives is that the gender variable has a fundamental weight in the assignment of accounts. The briefings of female products are for them, despite the fact that not all accounts have the same opportunities at festivals (Roca et al., 2012) or arouse the same interest in the creative industry (Grow et al., 2012). This, in turn, is connected to the idea that advertising continues to perpetuate gender roles, something that most of the respondents agreed with, and although they recognize that there may be more feminist advertising today, it is often nothing more than a strategy to approach the public, so it would fall into the category of "image washing" or "makeup", to use the participants' own words, rather than any kind of real conviction about the necessary change.

With regard to the second hypothesis, which refers to endogenous and exogenous capitals, it can be seen that although women consider themselves to be at the same level as their male colleagues in terms of skills and aptitudes, they understand that the opportunities offered to one or the other are very different. Thus, there are three main components that summarize the perception of creative women: one that is characterized by the rejection and exclusion to which they are subjected, and two others that show that their self-confidence and competence are at the same level as their male and female counterparts. Likewise, the general idea that prevails, according to the comments made in the open-ended questions, is that the world of advertising creativity is a man's world and that women are

seen as external actors outside this universe. The effort they have to make to catch up with their male colleagues in terms of recognition is much greater, since they "rely on psychic-emotional capital" (Chalá, 2018, p. 207), which involves constant wear and tear and frustration, which translates into a structural brake on advertising. This would also confirm the second hypothesis: Spanish creative women feel as prepared –endogenous capital– as their male counterparts, but they encounter social and emotional difficulties –exogenous capital– that prevent them from advancing in their professional careers.

Finally, the third hypothesis –creative women consider motherhood to be an obstacle to their professional career, which is why creative women in the consolidation and stabilization phase are the group with the greatest difficulties in breaking through the glass ceiling– which is closely related to the previous one, would be partially fulfilled. In fact, the creative women interviewed point out that having children is an obstacle to their professional development and, consequently, to their advancement, since they are constantly forced to choose between their personal and professional lives; two irreconcilable realities (Mallia, 2009b) that they do not seem to have to face. This dilemma, which has already been pointed out in previous research (Martín Llaguno et al., 2007; Mallia, 2017), is something that both those who are already mothers and those who have considered becoming mothers share, who tend to be in the consolidation phase, that is, the one in which they begin to take on positions of responsibility.

In short, in spite of the rise of feminism and the denunciations made by the various associations of creative women, the results confirm the isolation. The impostor syndrome, the lack of faith in oneself and in one's professional achievements, and the problems of reconciliation become two key aspects of the current situation of creative women. The issue is a complex and sensitive one, and it needs to be addressed by the advertising agencies in the short and medium term.

In this line, the novelty of the research lies in knowing the opinions of creative women in the Spanish context regarding the performance of the profession and how they perceive their daily life in teams compared to their male colleagues. All of this is framed in the context of the rise of the feminist movement, which is affecting the advertising industry from within –associative movements such as Más Mujeres Creativas– and from without –femvertising. However, future research should complement these results with qualitative studies that allow us to go deeper into the results obtained in this study, as well as to investigate the real difficulties that women face in creative departments. On the other hand, knowing men's opinions on the issues discussed here would allow us to contrast all parties' opinions on gender inequalities in creative departments.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**MARINA RAMOS-SERRANO**, Ph.D. in Advertising and Public Relations from the Universidad de Málaga (2003). She is currently a professor at the Faculty of Communication of the Universidad de Sevilla, where she teaches Advertising Creativity. She has published in journals such as *New Media & Society*, *Comunicar*, *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, and in publishing houses such as Tecnos and Peter Lang. Her main research interests are advertising communication in the digital age, branded content creation, and advertising creativity.

iD  https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6871-9239

**BLANCA MIGUÉLEZ-JUAN**, Ph.D. in Social Communication with international mention from the Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (2016). She is currently assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Communication, where she teaches subjects related to advertising creativity. Her research interests include art direction, advertising creativity, and the situation of creative women in the creative departments of advertising agencies.

iD  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8834-7644

**VÍCTOR HERNÁNDEZ-SANTAOLALLA**, tenured professor at the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the Universidad de Sevilla. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication with the mention of Extraordinary Prize. He is a member of IDECO and his research interests include the ideological analysis of mass culture, media effects, political communication, and propaganda. He has published in journals such as *Information, Communication & Society*, *Surveillance & Society* or *Sexuality & Culture*, and in publishing houses such as Tecnos, UOC, Emerald or Peter Lang.

iD  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2207-4014