

# Academic Women: Lived Experiences in Contexts of Inequality

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**Abstract.** *This article builds on the results of a research project into the professional experience of seven academic women in universities and research centers in Catalonia, Spain. The aim of the project was to explore the personal and professional experience of three generations of women in the process constituting their identity as university teachers, researchers and managers. The writing of their professional life histories has enabled us to investigate how they, as women, have become the types of higher education teachers, researchers and managers that they were becoming, and we wished to delve into the relationship between their personal experiences and the development of their professional careers. In this process, we have revealed the strategies of adaptation, resistance and creation developed by women, the forms of symbolic violence that they experience and the changes through which their careers have passed within the context of an institution that is still continuously revealed by different studies to be deeply discriminating and unequal for women.*

**Keywords:** higher education, gender politics, life histories, university teacher identity, researcher identity.

*Equity is a broader term than gender; but it is restricted to the ethical equity that can be neglected or overlooked in relation to gender and society development where male role models and male power players have predominated*

(Booth, Goodman & Kirkup 2010, xv)

## Introduction: Gender Equality in Higher Education and Science: A Long Path to Tread

On September 27, 2006, Roser González, a full professor in the field of genetics, became a part of history as the first woman in 555 years to deliver the inaugural ad-

dress of the 2006–2007 academic year in the University of Barcelona. In a modern and democratic society like the Catalans, this is still a sad milestone that merely shows the tip of the iceberg of the inequalities suffered by women in Catalonia and the world in general, and that it has only

just begun to be explored. Catalan women, like in the rest of Spain, were allowed to enroll at universities in a generalized way in 1910 (Guil 2005). However, there are still serious difficulties for women to gain access to power positions and be recognized as socially relevant in the academic and the professional world (Álvarez & Campabadal 2004; European Commission 2000; 2005; De Pablo 2001; 2004; 2006; FECYT 2005; González 2004; Pérez et al. 2004; Roca 2003). The presence of women in government posts and in positions of scientific and social relevance is a long way off being satisfactory, and this manifest itself as a persistent situation across countries and job markets (Booth, Goodman & Kirkup 2010; Fernandez & Campero 2017; Heilman 2012; Huffman, King & Reichelt 2017). On the other hand, there seems to be an astonishing lack of symmetry between the initial training of women and their presence and progress in the professional university and research career.

In the case of Spain, in the 2016–17 academic year, 55% of higher education students were women, and 45% were men. Six out of 10 new graduates were women. They also performed better, passing an average of 82% of the credits they enroll in – 10 points more than men do. The average grade of their record was better than that of men, and women finish their degrees in a much higher proportion to their peers (the difference is almost in 20 percent). According to data compiled by the Fundación CYD (2017), the suitability rate (percentage of graduates in the four years of a degree course) was 41.2% for women compared to 23.7% for men and the

graduation rate (percentage of graduates in five years maximum) was 55.3% for women compared to 37.1% for men. Women are also 51% of all those enrolled in PhD programs and 47% of those who conclude their PhDs.

Nevertheless, good academic results do not translate into better job placement. Men with higher education face less unemployment than women (17.2% compared to 20.5% of women). Women suffer more from precariousness: 47.7% of salaried men have indefinite contracts, while women have 40.1%. Women graduates face more unemployment, jobs that are more precarious and worse wages. On average, men earn 10% more. According to the respective degree, the salary gap reaches 20% in favor of men. Even in careers related to health sciences – where women make up 70% of the graduates – they earn an average of 6% more. Another gap that affects women with university degrees is the positions of responsibility on the campuses themselves. There are more women among the students but not among the teachers, but men make up 60% and women 40% of the teaching and research staff. Women are a minority even in degrees with overwhelming female presence. The percentage of women teachers in the 2016–17 academic year ranged from 48.4% in the arts and humanities, 47% in health sciences and 45.7% in social and legal sciences to 37.5% in the natural sciences and 22.9% in engineering and architecture.

The presence of women also decreases as we move up the ranks: for every 100 full professors, only 20 are women and for 76 rectors, only 11 are women (14.4%).

Inequality is highest in public universities, with only four of the 50 universities run by female rectors (8%). Among the 26 private ones, there are seven women rectors (26%).

These figures – which have not experienced great changes over the last decade – clearly show that women continue to take longer in achieving academic promotions, a situation that De Pablo (2006) believes is incomprehensible without resorting to a study of the unfair mechanisms of selection and promotion that take place in the university.

Indeed, a decrease in the presence of women in PhD programs and higher education teaching and research staff – a phenomenon called the “leaky pipeline” – is something that statistics alone cannot explain. An analysis of the Ramón y Cajal subprogram, carried out between 2002 and 2005, compiles evidence of how the mechanisms of discrimination already appear at the beginning of the academic career (*ibid.*). The balance of this subprogram, the aim of which is to incorporate young researchers from post-doctorate stays into the Spanish scientific system, according to the results of the study carried out by De Pablo, clearly tends toward favoring male scientists. For example, in 2002, in which 56% of the candidates were men and 44% women, the places awarded to male and female scientists were 66% and 34%, respectively. This state of affairs is also found in other European countries, as Karen Ramsay and Gayle Letherby (2006, p. 126) point out in a study undertaken in the United Kingdom: “[y]et men remain in privileged positions: it is still difficult for women who work in higher education

to get their research funded and published and in both ‘new’ and the ‘old’ universities women academics remain in a very small minority, representing only 25 per cent of full-time staff; historically and to date women have been concentrated in lower grades and in less secure posts.”

This situation of continued discrimination occurs even in countries such as Sweden, where, through its tradition of democracy and fighting for equality, it was thought that the evaluation committees would apply very strict criteria. However, a study by Wenneras and Wold (1997, pp. 341–343), showed what women already knew and experienced – that they had to be much more qualified (an average of 2.3 times more) than men to obtain the same posts. However, instances of inequality and discrimination are not only focused on the time of entering into a profession and the first years of the career, but they persist and can be seen in the rare presence of women in posts of decision-making and institutional and social relevance. As argued by Duke (1997, p. 54) “a growing concentration of forceful women are now readers and professors but very few yet head departments, faculties or research groups.”

It was facts like these that, in 1998, led the Directorate-General for Research of the European Union to create a women’s commission, coordinated by Mary Osborn of the Max Planck Institute in Göttingen, to draw up a report about science and gender in all the member states and to recommend policies for approaching a position of equality (European Commission 2000). However, beyond the importance of this study in providing evidence about the real levels of discrimination suffered by wo-

men, its results did not have the expected transference. Despite the recommendations of this commission, not all universities currently prepare the annual gender-differentiated reports and neither do they consider this perspective in their statutes.

### **Discrimination beyond Numbers**

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, attempts have been made to explain, and even justify, this context of discrimination that women scientists experience as being based on genetic reasons (Lawrence 2006). In January 2005, at a Conference on Diversifying the Science & Engineering Workforce sponsored by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the president of Harvard, Larry Summers, sparked controversy with his discussion of why women may have been underrepresented in tenured positions in science and engineering at top universities and research institutions. Sociocultural reasons are also given, since it is understood that “the scientific and academic framework in which current research is undertaken does not favor in any way at all either the incorporation of women or the maintenance of their job, an indispensable premise for promotion” (González 2006, p. 21).<sup>1</sup>

However, often the statistics provided on the real situation of discrimination that women suffer are not even reliable, and even less reliable seem some of the studies about the causes and consequences of such discrimination. Few studies are, as ours, dedicated to exploring, in depth and from the perspective and position of the women themselves, how they experience, live,

confront and construct their professional career and life history in a context that is so unfavorable to them.

For example, research along the lines of that undertaken about the lives of scientists such as Rosalind Franklin and Barbara McClintock (Maddox 2003; Keller 1983) constitute some of the few studies that enable us to look deeper into what certain aspects mean for the interested parties themselves. This is the unmovable will to achieve their objectives, the pursuit of discipline and rigor at work and the intellectual and emotional qualities that they bring to bear the very adverse conditions, which are marked by an attitude of vagueness and indifference by the academic world. Along the same lines, the study undertaken by Pérez et al. (2004) looks into the specific experiences of women lecturers, compiled from semi-structured interviews. The interest in this type of study lies in what statistical analyses or surveys (however extensive and well-designed they are) find difficult to show the problems, difficulties or micro-inequalities that higher education women and researchers come up against in their academic careers, of which numerical indicators are only a sign. The advantage of qualitative techniques is that they enable us to discover the reality through the analysis of social discourse and verbal symbolic representations, where the subjects of the research express desires, needs, deprivations, values and interests, which lead to a specific experienced situation, and in a specific setting (Pérez et al. 2004, p. 24–25).<sup>2</sup>

The above arguments lead to the interest and appropriateness of what this

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Catalan.

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Spanish.

study is focused on – and on which this article is based – and this has enabled us to explore and clarify the process of constituting professional identity as the university teachers, researchers and managers of three generations of women who live and work in Catalonia (Sancho 2010). The in-depth interviews carried out in the process of preparing their professional life histories show how the phenomenon of inequality takes shape in their daily lives, clearly outlining the problems, difficulties or macro- and micro-inequalities they come across throughout their careers. Their contributions thus provide us with a fully embodied and original perspective of the changes that have occurred in Catalan research centers and universities over the last thirty years from the point of view of gender, helping us identify the forms of symbolic violence that women experience in their personal and professional lives.

Finally, we feel that knowledge arising from this study can contribute to understanding the reality that the statistics show about the situation of women in scientific research and higher education teaching. Exploring, from their own voices, the problems of women scientists, university teachers and managers can aid in proposing certain improvements in a system that requires actions directed at gender equality.

### **Researching from Experience: The Perspective of Life Histories Adopted**

The study on which this article is based is situated in the narrative perspective (Riessman 2008), being the method of constructing professional life histories

(Bertaux 1981; Goodson 2004; Goodson and Hargreaves 1996; Goodson and Numan 2003; Goodson and Sikes 2001) that we have considered most appropriate in order to respond to the objectives of the research. The selection of the participants was made from an intentional sample (Patton 2002, p. 240). We have thus tried to achieve a substantive representation based on the chronology of the founding of different Catalan universities (historical, traditional and newly created) in which the maximum number of areas of knowledge and departments as well as different generations of women were represented. From these premises, the academic women and researchers selected belonged to three generations: more than twenty-five years in the job, between fifteen and twenty-five years and less than fifteen years. The participants belong to a wide scope of different areas of knowledge: experimental sciences and technology; social sciences, law, economics and humanities and are employed in a diverse list of public Catalan universities and a research centers (see Table 1).

The reason behind this selection was to obtain an intentional sample that would enable us to:

1. Study the relationship of these women with the changes that have occurred in Catalan universities and research centers in the last thirty years from the perspective of gender. This explains why the sample does not include younger professionals.
2. Identify the future expectations of these academic women, who have an average of between ten and fifteen years of professional activity ahead of them.

Table 1: *The characterization of the participants.*

Participants	Children	Career starting year (generation)	Administrative situation	Scholarship	Area of knowledge	Governing responsibilities	Aware of discrimination
1	Yes	1986(2)	Senior lecturer	No	Chemistry	International relations	Yes
2	Yes	1981 (1)	Full professor	No	Philology	Vice rector	No
3	No	1988 (2)	University college senior lecturer	Yes	Journalism	No	No
4	Yes	1979 (1)	Senior lecturer	No	Philosophy	No	Yes
5	Yes	1984 (1)	University college senior lecturer	No	Agronomy/ Mathematics	No	Yes
6	Yes	1994 (3)	Part-time lecturer	Yes	Biology/Medicine	No	Yes
7	Yes	1988 (2)	Senior researcher/ senior lecturer	Yes	Biology	No	Yes and no
8	No		Senior lecturer	No	Audiovisual Communication	Yes	No
9	Yes	1983(1)	University college full professor	Yes	Didactic Mathematics	Head of Studies	Yes and no

3. Recognize that they possess knowledge and experience that are of value not only for themselves and for their professional practice but which may also be of great use for those interested in higher education and research.

The choice of undertaking the study based on professional life histories signifies that we are able to explore in-depth the biographical careers of the participants in context, with their historical and local moment in time. We thus began with the conviction that personal experiences can produce knowledge that has value – not only for the women themselves but also as a source of knowledge and inspiration for those interested in the scientific community and the emancipation of women in general. This value is also connected to the

elaboration of a large work of contextualization. In other words, the histories are not understood simply in their personal dimension – although this is undoubtedly an important aspect – but also in the articulation between the personal, the professional and the social.

### **When the Individual Becomes Collective: What Do the Biographical Accounts Give Us?**

A key question in this type of research is to connect the personal or biographical narratives – those of the university teachers and researchers, in this case – with the sociocultural, historical and institutional context in which they coexist. This connection makes it possible for the individual

to become collective in a twofold dimension: in relation to one's subjective position as a woman and with the projection of these forms of subjectivity in one's lived experience in the university or research center. The construction process of these professional life histories enabled us to appreciate a wide range of experiences and realities that, when related to each other, allowed us to visualize a privileged panorama of the history of women in science and academia.

Under this premise, we can highlight a series of questions that seem to define the positions of the seven women who have collaborated in this piece of research. The questions revolved around willingness to write their own histories, the meaning of being a university teacher, a researcher (sometimes a manager) and a mother; the compatibility between family life and professional life and the differences and prejudices that they suffer in terms of treatment.

In this sense, although one cannot disregard the actual nuances of each experience – for example, by belonging to different generations or the family circumstances in each case – to a great extent, these four questions run through the life histories we have encountered.

### ***The Willingness to Write their Own History***

This desire to be, the force with which to confront the circumstances that hold back proposals, is only possible from the position of persistence and, in some ways, resistance to that which arises from inertia and the status quo. This is an attitude that, generally speaking, the participant

women took on from the beginning of their careers, when they began to understand the rules of the game in which they saw themselves involved. The reflections below illustrate these subjective positions that move between rupture, the search for a rightful place and the decision to confront the circumstances that initially arose as adverse.

Despite the fact that I liked the research field, I saw it very clearly that there were not so many facilities for me to either become a member of a department or to find economic support to enable me to continue with the doctorate. During this period, I tried many things. I did clinical analysis, learning while I was there as an internal student in the department of the Hospital Clínic. In addition, I worked in a private laboratory of analysis as a lab technician and then as a higher technician (History 6: SM).<sup>3</sup>

These unwritten rules can be illustrated with an almost Darwinian message that “only those who adapt and resist can make it.” It is a discourse that appeared at the beginning of the degree studies and became clear when progressing in the academic career, under the dictatorship of dynamics that stimulate competitiveness and isolation, without a mentor system or any shared learning with colleagues are more experienced.

[...] perhaps the arrival at university and the beginning of my teaching career had a big effect on me. First, because it was a new situation and you want to do things really well, you have a feeling of great responsibility before the whole group of the future professionals. In addition, you feel that you still lack resources, and in my case,

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<sup>3</sup> All participants' quotations have been translated from Catalan.

this had an effect. I should also say that I set each year as a new challenge for myself. I tried to train myself as a lecturer, and that is why I did teacher-training courses – to improve aspects of teaching (History 6: SM).

Before this uncertain reality, the decisions regarding who one wants to be, in the case of women, goes beyond the professional path to follow. Other aspects of being also notably affect them – those that are more personal, more related to the decisions of how one wants to live. These are the circumstances before which a lot of willpower is required in order not to be influenced by naturalized dynamics and, above all, to confront the conditions that put pressure on one to follow a more trodden path, characterized by adapting to the circumstances and the desires of the family.

I was determined at that time, I wanted to study, I wanted to learn. I was not thinking about forming a family and having children... I was very young. (History 2: AM).

However, we are talking about some time ago... At home, there were three of us, all sisters. My parents wanted us to study, they liked the idea, they could pay for it economically, but they had the feeling that if we left home, they were going to lose their children. Therefore, it was “study what you want but in Lleida, if possible” (History 5: PH).

Let us not forget the selection arising from their academic records and the limitations of the labor market or the position of resignation and lack of ambition of other colleagues.

I began to concern myself with my research interest by contacting laboratories. As I did not have a top mark in my academic report... let us say, it was... it was not a simple pass or an excellent [result] – it was somewhere in-between. I got in touch with

different laboratories to see if there was any possibility of doing research... [...] I suppose that they saw the enthusiasm, that I had become obsessed with research, that I really wanted to do research, and all that; because the usual thing was that those with the top mark would certainly get the grant, but those with the next mark down would not. However, I suppose that as they saw the enthusiasm... I am not sure but, finally, they supported me. In reality, Subirana supported me a lot, I got the grant, and here I am... (History 7: FH).

This has evolved greatly today. When I came here, the women here did not have any desire, they were not ambitious... What I want to say is that they already had the university college tenure, and therefore things were all right for them. In any case, they did not support me because their support would have meant that I would have stood out. (History 1: JMS).

These conditions, which of course also affect the men of academia too – though in a different manner – in the case of women, as we will see now, acquire a particularly significant dimension.

### ***Being a University Teacher, Researcher and Mother***

A key question relating to the experience of being an academic, to which, in one way or another, all participants in this study have referred, has to do with the decision of making their teaching and research (and sometimes managing) career compatible with the fact of them being mothers. This fact, which today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should not really be considered a problem or a limitation, in Catalonia – and in many other places, despite social changes and institutional efforts made – continues to

be a burden that impedes or does not make easy the act of developing, if wanted, all professional and personal dimensions of women. This is due, in particular, to the fact that in most countries women are still primarily responsible for caring for others (Smith 2009).

Shall we talk about the family structure? You see everything because you speak with other women, and you experience it yourself. The weight of the family continues to fall on a very high percentage of women. This involves time and organization at home, taking care of the children, caring for the elderly and the like, so that the rest of the time can be dedicated to work etc. Obviously, there are exceptions... (History 6: SM).

This inertial culture produces a conflict that can only be resolved with added efforts, supplementary support and having to make decisions constantly about how to prioritize the two options that should be compatible and complementary.

It was [like that] though when I had children, specifically when I was Vice Rector, in 1994, I had a one-year-old daughter and it was an absorbing job, because it was a job in which every working day I would not [leave] the institution until seven in the evening (History 2: AM).

I have always combined family and work. If there has been a serious problem in the family, then that would be the priority, but I have combined everything. Although at a given moment in time, I had a timetable that I could not arrange at all... That was when I decided to return.<sup>4</sup> Although I thought I was no good for teaching, I thought, "I will try to do the best I can." I will prepare [my-

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<sup>4</sup> The participant refers to returning to her birthplace, leaving a career of pure research to work in teaching as well.

self], do what I have to do, and repeat if I need to, and the fact is, I am very happy with things [now] (History 5: PH).

The consequence of such incompatibility, for example, is that women tend to delay their chosen time of having children so that it does not interfere with their university careers.

Regarding family life – yes, I do have a family life. This has also marked me professionally. High percentages of women in my milieu are either single, do not have children or have them later. In my case, I am the mother of a small girl, although for my age, I could have older children. Motherhood, in my case as in other women's, was delayed for professional reasons (History 6: SM).

In this situation, women, as well as men, do not find the support they need – for example, in a matter as basic as the legal substitutions for pregnancy.

I think that this is a problem; it should be analyzed, but I think that it is very serious that this University, for example, does not have substitutions planned for pregnant people. It seems to me that the University does not take responsibility for what it should legally take responsibility for, and I do not say "ideally," but legally. Has it been a problem for me? Yes, it has, I have a daughter... (History 4: AO).

However, the main problem is made clear when we see how, in some of the professional life histories, the option of motherhood has had an effect on an academic career, especially because it has slowed down or removed the possibilities of consolidations or promotions.

It took me longer to become a university post holder because I am a woman. Yes. It took me longer because I have a family. My

husband works in a private company, he owns a company. However, of course, that is not the University's issue, is it? I have never been able to count on the support of my husband to combine the timetables of my children. While they were small – I have three and quite close together in age – my pace of work could not be the same as that of my colleagues, who had dedicated their time exclusively to research and teaching... (History 5: PH).

While I was doing my PhD thesis, I had a girl. When I finished the thesis, the girl was two and my husband was... My husband's work had nothing to do with research. In addition, the possibility of me going away, of spending some time abroad and continuing my research with another group, despite it being very attractive, did not enter into my plans, because my priority was to have the family at my side, to do the research the best I could but nevertheless do it in Spain. In this sense, I had the support of Subirana and Fita – both are highly recognized researchers (History 7: FH).

More men taking sabbaticals than women, in the same family conditions. There must be some hidden reason for this, don't you think? Despite the fact that it is not often spoken about openly, since it would be politically incorrect (History 6: SM).

This fact cannot be considered interim. The revision of the professional biographical narrations makes us think that the situation of women in the university – as in other contexts – is still under the effect of an inertial culture that discriminates against them when taking on the double responsibilities of being both mothers and professionals, as discussed in this section. This discrimination takes on different forms and directions that the bodies responsible for implementing equality policies should consider.

### ***Making Professional and Family Life Compatible: A Question for Women and Men***

Another important aspect that emerges is the possibility of sharing (or not) the academic career with one's partner, and this is a particularly significant question for the women we have spoken to, whether they are mothers or not. Indeed, the demand to make professional life compatible with family life is not, as often perceived, a question exclusive to women, but it also affects (or should affect) men. On this question, the women participating in this study stated how the fact that their partners also work in the University might facilitate not only compatibility but also contribute to the development of their own career.

I think the fact that my partner is an academician has made things easier, because I have had no difficulty when taking a sabbatical, none at all. I have left my child, aged two, with my husband, and he had managed. [...] Otherwise, my husband and I organized things between each other. As he is an academic, I suppose he understood that I had to attend congresses and that I had to spend time abroad (History 2: AM).

This situation also occurs when men are aware of their responsibilities and their necessary contributions to childcare and career support for their wives. Things are made more complicated in the cases of trips and stays abroad, taken in order to broaden studies, since in our society, it is still more common for women to follow men when they have to move for work reasons. Either that, or they renounce their family life altogether for a certain period

of time if they find themselves wanting to continue progressing within their careers.

### ***Differences and Prejudices in Treatment***

In the day-to-day life of the departments and labs, as well as in the professional relationship between men and women, there still is discrimination and the uses of power that show how women's experiences are affected by male chauvinist practices.

So, I proposed to him that, in order to decide who the award would be granted to, we do the following. "We each present a project, we argue about it at the departmental board, and the one that is most stimulating or interesting and has funding, we vote for it and decide; but what cannot happen is that I am excluded from the beginning." This was the answer of the departmental head. "You'll get your chance, you'll get your chance... the next one that comes will be for you." This was his reply, with a "paternalistic" tone, too! Next year, this policy was not followed, and I did not get a grant from the University. Therefore, with the students' final degree projects, they did one that lasted the final year, and doing experiments with them, I published and saved the project. I could thus save the project without grants (History 1: JMS).

To avoid situations like that, universities try to implement policies in favor of equality and, sometimes, positive discrimination. This means, for example, considering the circumstances preventing productivity periods.

The fact is, if you are on an evaluation commission and you have two candidates, one male and one female, and you are evaluating a period when the woman has had two

or three children and, at the same stage, a man who has not been in this situation, and has been able to publish in the right places and get around more, in these cases, you really have to introduce a corrective factor before you can evaluate who is the most suitable candidate for a particular position (History 2: AM).

It also seems pertinent to consider that not all the measures favor equality and that in some cases, such as that of parity; it may have a negative effect that ends up discriminating against women again.

Now with "parity," they say that there have to be women, and the only thing that happens is that, as there are four of us, we get to go to all the panels. [It is about] starting to support women who are gaining posts so that they can free me, if you see what I mean. I mean, it is a real problem [...]. All this [talk] about "parity" makes me laugh. It makes me laugh that they make me form a part of all the professional exam panels. So, what "parity" do we have, then? (History 7: FH).

In this sense, although there has been an increase in the number of women in universities and research centers, some areas of knowledge and especially the governing and decision-making bodies are still male-dominated or respond to a male logic when appropriating relationships and evaluating situations.

The field of philosophy in particular is a very male-dominated area, and there are still people who are surprised because they think that the arts faculties are basically women-dominated. The philosophy faculties are basically dominated by men. This is the case in terms of both the percentage of students and lecturers, professors... Moreover, the area of philosophy notably, much more than, for example, the area of

ethics [...]. The area of philosophy, in both Catalonia and Spain, is very much a minority area in terms of the number of women who participate [in it] (History 4: AO).

Despite the fact that, obviously, there are women who are very well prepared and with proven skills who could successfully fulfill this role (History 6: SM).

Within this range of positions, we find statements that show how, gradually, the practices that lead to discrimination or different treatment are being avoided. Nevertheless, this does not stop the structures and naturalized forms of power relations in research centers, universities and departments favoring the maintenance of the status quo, in which women do not encounter equality with men.

I believe that one thing that the University still has is a structure as if it were a “military.” That is to say, it seems that one enters as a “low-ranking corporal,” and you have to go through a series of promotion ladders... It is something that is bothersome and highly undemocratic and not suitable for research and teaching. Regarding this type of “military service” that it seems you have to do, women are perfectly prepared to participate, despite the fact that they recognize this type of structure less easily than men do. In this sense, I think that the structure of the departments, above all some departments in particular, is very old-fashioned, worn out, and this surely represents more problems for women because, as I said, women are not used to recognizing these types of structures easily (History 4: AO).

This situation is made more evident when the mechanisms of promotion are applied within careers associated with teaching and research.

The moment I stood for full professor, indeed, the discrimination that existed between men and women was ostentatiously shown. That full professorship was destined for other people, apart from a rather unfriendly panel, to put it mildly. At that time, I did not get it [...] Later I did not stand again because [...] I stood for some but once I saw the make-up of the selection board, I did not go in order not to go through the agony... If you see that the panel listens to you – it does not mean they will give you the post – but that it can listen to you, you say “alright,” but otherwise, no (History 4: AO).

I do not regret it, but they made me pay for it, that’s for sure. I do not regret the decision... A decision is my decision. [...] If I decide to go this way or that way, then, with the career I was leading, if I had done what everyone expected me to do, I would have got the full-time post in three years. In this way, I got the post after 8–9 years, [although] I am sick of crying about it... I saw colleagues who clearly had fewer CVs... We already know that even though the examining boards try to be fair, a post is very difficult to define, and the final decision ends up being subjective. However, of course, [if you end up] three or four times in the second place, you say... What’s going on? (History 7: FH).

These and other contributions pose the need to not only change the direction of the so-called equality policies that are applied in Catalan universities and research centers but to also undertake studies in which the “dark” areas of normalized discrimination that currently exist are explored. They require, for example, that institutions and monitoring bodies are not only alert to situations of discrimination, but also that they also act diligently when foreseeing the perverse effects of their own policies.

## **Conclusions: A Look toward the Future**

This study, more than providing unexpected or totally unknown discoveries about some unexplored or unprecedented facet of the phenomenon researched, provides embodied and factual evidence of the long struggle of women to be able to write their own history and one not marked by a Manichean classification of gender. The women interviewed show us that they have been able to maintain their own decisions without gratuitously accepting those taken for them by parents, husbands, children or society itself. They realize their projects or dreams without continuously apologizing or always putting their life needs second to those of the husband, the children or their own work colleagues. In short, they are fully aware that their activity is not dispensable or an unimportant pastime that is done simply to fill the time free from housework.

Therefore, the first and most important (re)discovery and lesson learnt is that, despite the fact that all women are born with a (good) genetic, cultural and social rucksack on their backs, their histories are not totally written. There is always a place for agency – for the capacity to be subjects, in short.

This struggle to write their own history was initiated and continued by a large number of women throughout the history of the academia and has been essential for opening up opportunities for young women researchers beginning their careers as scientists. In this sense, while what we have shown speaks to us of the weak points of the situation of women, one can also note signs of change. These signs are connected,

above all, with the experiences arising from the generational position of the women who have taken part in the study. The path trodden by the women who have worked more than 25 years in the universities has been of pioneering nature, and that is why it has been hard and disturbed by the stress of naturalized discriminatory practices.

Let us see, there have been big changes due to the individual and collective struggles of many women of my generation, but above all of the previous ones. My generation is in between the end of Franco's dictatorship and the beginnings of the young democracy, known as the Transition.<sup>5</sup> During this time, there were changes that you could perceive personally and collectively, important changes that have undoubtedly enabled the inclusion of women into the society in the fullest way, and therefore the labor market. However, not all of the changes have been realized; otherwise, you would not be here doing this study and speaking about this question. Women continue to encounter obstacles in many areas of life. There have been many legislative changes, but perhaps not so much real change (History 6: SM).

These changes can be seen, in a unique way, in the position of younger people, who have experienced a reality in which relationships have been more equitable, leaving the door open for a more hopeful future and the possibility of more balanced and fairer conclusions for both men and women.

Do you see reticence in people [for being a woman researcher]? No, no... not at all. I mean, definitely no. Above all, in young people in particular. Maybe I have come across it once or twice, but that is... another generation. The generation of the "old

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<sup>5</sup> The mid and late 1970s.

professors,” of those who say “Oh! What are you doing here, where is your daughter? What does your daughter do when you are here?” “If I was a man, would you ask me [that]?” Obviously, it is not like that now with the new generations, or with the intermediate ones and with the people that I have worked with (History 7: FH).

It seems clear that the women with more years of experience have helped open up the way and have acted as a mirror for the younger ones. In this way, they have contributed to the silent revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the most powerful

and efficient revolutions, that continues liberating many women, and which has not caused any war – except for the continuous violence that many of them still suffer because they want to take charge of their own destinies. The fieldwork undertaken enabled us to see for ourselves that the new generations of women university students have female models of teaching, research and management, and these models help them lessen the harshness and impact of the unexpected events that may arise during their professional lives.

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## MOTERYS AKADEMIKĖS: IŠGYVENTOS PATIRTYS NELYGYBĖS KONTEKSTE

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### S a n t r a u k a

Šis straipsnis grindžiamas mokslinio projekto rezultatais, tiriant septynių akademikių profesinę patirtį dirbant universitetuose ir tyrimų centruose Katalonijoje, Ispanijoje. Projekto tikslas – iširti trijų moterų kartų asmeninę ir profesinę patirtį, tampant universiteto dėstytojomis, tyrėjomis ir vadovėmis. Profesinės veiklos istorijos leido išnagrinėti šį tapsmo procesą, taip pat suteikė įžvalgų apie tiriamųjų asmeninės pa-

tirties ir profesinės karjeros raidos sąsają, moterų prisitaikymo, atsparumo ir kūrybos strategijas; patiriamo simbolinio smurto formas bei jų karjeros pokyčius institucijose, kuriose, kaip rodo tyrimai, netrūksta moterų diskriminacijos ir nelygybės apraiškų.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** aukštasis mokslas, lyčių politika, gyvenimo istorija, universiteto dėstytojų tapatybė, tyrėjų tapatybė.

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