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Micro-machismo and discrimination in academia: The violation of the right to equality in university

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ABSTRACT: The history of the university has been the history of a patriarchal institution traditionally dominated by men. The aim of this article is to show that women have suffered and continue suffering an unequal treatment in academia. The methodology used is qualitative, using forty-three in-depth interviews with academics of a Spanish public university. Experiences and practices that violate the right to equality in academia emerge from their discourses. Among them, we pay special attention to those which can be defined as micro-machismo in labour relationship within the university and related to discrimination against women in the development of professional careers. These results show that gender equality continues being an old aspiration in universities.

KEYWORDS: Inequality; Sexism; Misogyny; Academic career; Higher education; Gender studies.

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RESUMEN: *Micromachismo y discriminación en la academia: La vulneración del derecho de igualdad en la Universidad.* - La historia de la universidad ha sido la historia de una institución patriarcal dominada tradicionalmente por hombres. El objetivo de este artículo es visibilizar el trato desigual que han sufrido y continúan sufriendo las mujeres en el ámbito académico. La metodología empleada ha sido cualitativa, realizándose cuarenta y tres entrevistas en profundidad a profesorado universitario de una universidad pública española. De los testimonios de las personas entrevistadas emergen vivencias y prácticas que vulneran el derecho a la igualdad de género en la academia. Entre ellos, en este artículo se exponen los que tienen que ver con el micromachismo en las relaciones laborales dentro de la universidad y la discriminación hacia las mujeres en el desarrollo de la práctica profesional. Estos resultados evidencian que la igualdad de género continúa siendo una vieja aspiración en el ámbito universitario.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Desigualdad; Sexismo; Misoginia; Carrera académica; Educación superior; Estudios de género.

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INTRODUCTION

Equality is a recognised right in international European and Spanish legislation. Nevertheless, in spite of the state of legislation, the real equality between men and women is still untrue. Women still do not enjoy equal opportunities with regard to men, as they are still treated and evaluated differently both in the private as in the public sphere. Gender inequality is still present in the highest levels of the education system, the university, in spite the fact that the system is based on principals such as equality, merit and capacity. At the end of the 19th century women were struggling to be accepted to universities and had to ask for special permissions or travel to other countries in order to do so. Today they are the majority (57.6%) among university graduates in Europe (Eurostat, 2017). Nevertheless, they are still clearly underrepresented in the most powerful and prestigious positions (the chairs and the main management positions). In spite of clear advances in legislation, women are still unable to penetrate the glass ceiling and consolidate leading positions in the academic world. The aim of this research is to show that women have suffered and continue suffering an unequal treatment in academia.

The results of this research are part of a much wider investigation which studies the current situation of women in the university and the development of their professional career, looking, specifically at their difficulties to enter the highest positions in Public Universities. In the framework of this research forty three in-depth interviews of academics were carried out. Among the research results that emerge from the complete investigation, in this article we highlight those related to the experiences and practices that violate the right to equality in academia. Among them, we discuss those related to micro-machismo in labour relationship within the university and discrimination against women in the development of professional practice.

We start by looking at the history of female presence in higher education moving to legislative measures taken in order to foment their integration and guarantee their equal rights to participate in acquiring and generating knowledge. We conclude this first part of the article by referring to the main insights of current literature on gender and university. We move on to looking at the experiences and practices which emerge of the discourses produced by our interviewees. We thus show that even today there is clear inequality, especially of the kind defined as micro-machismo related to labour relations in the university. We illustrate this conclusion with examples of discrimination in the practical aspects of career development, showing how women still suffer unequal treatment in the academic world.

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN UNIVERSITIES

Since the emergence of Universities during the high Middle Ages, and until the 20th century, for almost eight centuries, the relation of women with these higher educa-

tion institutions was considered exceptional. In many places there were not any explicit laws that prevented women from entering universities as it was not even considered as a realistic option. Thus during the renaissance, we know of exceptional women, who were able to become students and even teachers. A famous case is that of Dorotea Bocchi, who graduated in Medicine in the 15th Century and was even appointed to a chair in 1436 in Bologna University (Commire and Klezmer, 2002).

However, in the 18th century as more women knocked on the doors of universities we see the emergence of a clear attack against them. For example in 1722, María Vittoria Delfini Dosi (1705–?) defended her thesis in Bologna, nevertheless, the Doctoral College refused to award her the title, as this could upset the social, legal and even linguistic order between men and women. It was also claimed that, if women were allowed to occupy teaching positions, it could hamper the possibilities of male graduates to do so. Some women did achieve teaching positions, especially in Italy where it seems that universities were more tolerant to the presence of women. A famous example is Laura María Caterina Bassi (Bologna, 1711–1778), the first woman in Europe who was offered an official teaching position in experimental physics in Bologna in 1776. Nevertheless, her exceptional story only confirms that generally speaking academic spaces were closed to women (Groves and Flecha, 2018).

As more women applied to universities across Europe, especially from the second half of the 19th century, the opposition to this social innovation augmented. In Germany in that period there was a public debate concerning accepting women into Universities, and in fact, Germany was one of the last major European nations which allowed it (Albisetti, 1982). In Russia after permitting women to study, the permission was withdrawn and many young students had to go abroad to complete their studies. In Sweden, there was a debate about opening higher education institutions for women, a solution which was also adopted in England after many contradictory policies. In other places women were assigned a specific space in classrooms and professors were instructed to treat them differently. The process of university admission continued at a slow pace, forcing women to ask for permissions and move to other countries which allowed them to attend classes, such as Switzerland (Holmes, 1984).

Nevertheless, in a short period most European countries accepted women. In Spain, similarly to other countries, women tended to study medicine. The first female student was María Elena Maseras Ribera (1853–1900) who enrolled for the 1872–1873 academic year at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Barcelona. She encountered difficulties once she requested for the degree, due to its practical implications. In 1882 the admission of women to university was prohibited, but this decision was changed in 1888. Women could enrol with a special permission based on the willingness of teachers to guarantee order in classes attended by women. Later women students were forced to sit in the first rows (Flecha, 1996).

This first generation of women academics consisted of a turning point as the presence of women grew steadily, although in a different rate across Europe. In the 1980s women became the majority among university students in Europe (Comisión Europea, 1997). In this sense the situation in Spain is very similar to the rest of Europe, although under the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), their integration into universities was somewhat slower than the average. Women were especially excluded from doctorate studies as can be seen in the case of the most important Spanish research institution the CSIC (Alcalá, 1996). Although this situation has changed, even today, among CSIC Full Professors only 24.9% are women (CSIC, 2017). For its part, the general data on the representation of women in this position in Spanish public universities is not more positive. On the contrary, only 21% of the university chairs are occupied by women (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2017). These percentages reflect a situation that is far from the desired parity. However, the representation of women in the main positions of university management is even lower as very few women have held the position of rector in Spanish universities.

THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY

The first major achievement in terms of equality came with the French Revolution, which succeeded in establishing the principle of legal equality, abolishing classes and castes (Bobbio, 1993). Since then, and as a result of a centuries-old struggle, the legislative development in this area has been broad, although relatively recent.

Equality, and specifically equality between women and men, is a universal legal principle recognized in international human rights law. Thus, among others, it highlights on the one hand the approval by the United Nations (hereinafter, UN) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which proclaims equality, human dignity, freedom and peace as basic principles; and, on the other hand, the signing of international treaties especially dedicated to the rights of women, such as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (UN, 1952) or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. This was ratified four years later by Spain and it condemns discrimination against women and agrees to follow policies aimed at eliminating all its manifestations (article 2). In addition, the UN has held four world conferences on women, in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Especially the last one marked an important milestone in the global agenda on gender equality after the adoption, unanimously by 189 countries, of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995), whose main objective is the empowerment of women. After it, five-year reviews have been carried out. In addition, UN Women was created in 2010, an agency responsible for ensuring gender equality and women empowerment.

At the European level, it is important to highlight the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam on May 1st, 1999, which reflects the principle of equality between men and women as an integrating objective of all policies and actions of the European Union and its member countries (Comunidades Europeas, 1999).

In Spain, article 14 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 (España, 1978) establishes the right to equality as a fundamental right of Spaniards, establishing that we are all equal before the law and that no personal or social condition can be a cause of discrimination against part of the population. It expressly states that no discrimination based on sex can prevail. For its part, article 35 supplements this right by expressly referring to gender equality in the workplace, highlighting the duty to work and the right to work, as well as the choice of profession, promotion in employment and fair remuneration, without the existence of discrimination based on sex within it. In addition, the Spanish Constitution establishes in article 9.2 the commitment of the State to the defence of equality and, with it, the fight against discrimination, indicating that:

It is up to the public authorities to promote the conditions so that the freedom and equality of individuals and of groups in which they are integrated are real and effective; remove obstacles that hinder or hinder its fullness and facilitate the participation of all citizens in political, economic, cultural and social life.

Despite these legislative recognitions, articles 14 and 9.2 of the Spanish Constitution were not developed until the *Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres* (España, 2007) was adopted, which made equality an integrating principle of the Spanish legal system (article 3). This law places special emphasis on the correction of inequality in the field of labour relations: both in access to employment, as well as in promotion at work or working conditions (article 5 and chapter IV); and also includes discrimination based on pregnancy or maternity (article 8). Similarly, it ensures the integration of the principle of equality in the education system, noting that this “will include within its principles of quality, the elimination of obstacles that hinder effective equality between women and men and the promotion of full equality between them” (article 23), and makes special mention of the field of higher education (article 25).

In particular, the right to equality in the higher education system is developed in the *Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades*¹ (España, 2001), which recognizes the important role of the university system in the transmission of values and, within them, of gender equality. Therefore, it incorporates this to its institutional objectives and the quality of its activity, and establishes mechanisms to guarantee the balanced presence of men and women in the representation bodies, an adequate proportion of women in the different levels of the public teaching and research function (especially at the

highest level, the chairs), and a greater presence of these in the research teams. In addition, it indicates that the selection processes should be developed under the constitutional principles of equality, merit and capacity (article 48.3 and 64.1). However, and despite all this legislative development, in the Spanish university there continues to be an imbalance in the presence of women in the main positions (both at the teaching and research level, and in management positions).

ACADEMIC CAREER AND GENDER

The study of the influence of gender in the development of an academic career is not new. There are a high number of studies that show that. On the one hand, the university, as an institution, is not neutral when it comes to gender (Acker, 1990), and on the other hand, gender inequality in this sphere of life is a global and persistent phenomena (Husu, 2001).

In Spain, various researchers worried about the low presence of women in the prestigious positions in the academic career, especially in the category of Full Professor (Anguita et al., 2003; García de Cortázar and García de León, 1997, 2001) and in management positions (López and Sánchez, 2009; Tomàs-Folch and Guillamón, 2009; Vega and Santos, 2010). They try to demonstrate the differences in the development of academic careers for men and women in Spanish universities. Nevertheless, most of the studies on this topic focus on one aspect or sometimes few of inequality in the university. We thus find research that shows the impact of micropolitics, that is, of the everyday interaction between people in the university (Benschop, 2009; Montes and O'Connor, 2018; Morley, 2000; O'Connor et al. 2017) and of how men benefit of patriarchal systems of support from which women are excluded (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001); or the existence of procedures of recruitment and selection which are not based exclusively on the basis of neutrality and merits, but include the employment of double standards of evaluation, that is, of a differentiated assessment according to the people being evaluated (Foschi, 1996; Montes and O'Connor, 2018; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012a, 2012b; Wenneras and Wold, 1997). In this article we focus on micro-machismo suffered by female university teachers as part of their daily praxis at work.

In the 90s Bonino presented the term micro-machismo to refer to “small and daily controls, impositions and abuses of power” (Bonino, 2004: 1), carried out repeatedly consciously and unconsciously by men with regard to women as part of everyday behaviour and are difficult to detect (Bonino, 1996). Men, through these behaviours attempt to perpetuate traditional gender roles, reaffirm their masculine identity through maintaining superiority and a dominating position and putting down women (Bonino, 1996, 2004). Although the author centres his research on the sphere of couple relationships, this concept can also be applied to interactions between men and women in the public sphere. As he indicates “They may not seem very harmful, they may even be normal or in-

consequential in interactions, but their power is sometimes devastating and it is exerted by reiteration over time” (Bonino, 1996: 29). This term reflects thus, how men attempt to show their superiority on the psychological and symbolic level.

Micro-machismo is the result of the different evaluation of men and women in most western societies. While Connell (1987) refers to this difference in favour of men as male patriarchal dividend, Thorvaldsdottir (2004) calls it male bonus and Bourdieu (2000) refers to it as negative symbolic coefficient. This last author argues that independently of the social position occupied by women, they, differently from men, have a negative symbolic coefficient, which “affects negatively everything they are and everything they do” (Bourdieu, 2000: 68), in the same way that other characteristics have the same effect on other social groups (as skin colour for example). Thus, the same characteristic or quality and the same work are evaluated differently depending on the sex of the person who owns or performs it. Likewise, considering masculine qualities as positive and adequate, and therefore feminine as inferior, places women in a position of inferiority, insecurity and “symbolic dependence” (Bourdieu, 2000: 50).

METHODOLOGY

This research is part of a larger study on the development of the academic career and gender in the university. The aim was to study how the development of the professional career in academia takes place and the possible differences by sex. Thus, forty three in-depth interviews with academics were carried out taking into account four variables: their sex (applied to both men and women); family responsibilities (having or not having children); the field of knowledge in which they develop their work, differentiating between Arts (areas of Art, Humanities, Social and Legal Sciences) and Sciences (areas of Sciences, Health Sciences, Architecture and Engineering); and the position within the university academic hierarchy (positions of management at departmental level, faculty level or in university level).

The interview was about the choice of the academic career, its development (paying particular attention to motivations, the most relevant and rewarding moments, and the toughest difficulties), the work-life balance and possible differences in the work and career paths of men and women in the university.

All interviews were recorded and faithfully transcribed. The average duration of the interviews was one hour. The result of the transcripts was more than seven hundred pages of text analysis. The work of systematization, codification, exploration, comparison and analysis of the interviews was carried out with the support of the ATLAS.ti computer program. Relevant words, phrases, paragraphs or fragments of the text were taken as units of analysis. In order to promote understanding, research results are accompanied by quotes from the interviews of the participants.

MICRO-MACHISMO AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE ACADEMIA

Micro-machism in labour relations at the university

In this research we have found varied examples of how micro-machismo is present also in the public sphere, in relationships among co-workers in the university. We can identify them both in the uses of language, especially in the use of jokes or sexist commentaries and in nonverbal communication in which women receive denigrating messages.

The following quote divided into two parts shows two very important aspects of micro-machismo. In the first part the interviewee makes a comment regarding sexist language, although she underestimates it by saying that it is a “stupid anecdote”. She describes the dynamics of a meeting of the management of the university with members of the governing team and deans from different faculties of the university in which a new elections procedure was discussed. In the meeting both female and male forms were used to refer to all the university positions, except the rector. This example shows how in common social imaginary, the most powerful position in the university is conceived as purely masculine:

I think that the university is sexist, really. I am sorry, but it is true. The other day, it is a silly anecdote, but the other day at the meeting we had in which they explained the new electoral law, those who presented the law were saying all the time: “the male colleagues and the female colleagues...” That is, every time they said something, they specifically mentioned men and women. There was only one exception, when they said the word Rector. Never, never did they say “the elections of man or woman Rector of the university”. They said: “The male Full Professors and the female Full Professors of this university when they vote for the [man] Rector...” And you, how about when they vote for the [man] Rector? Or the woman Rector! No! In the imaginary of none of them exists the possibility that a woman may become a Rector (I.19. Woman. Management position).

The second part of the quotation, which appears below, reveals the double standard used in order to evaluate people according to their sex: First, it reflects the double perception of the personal characterisation of people according to whether they are men or women. While an intelligent man is said to be smart (“listo”), a woman with the same attribute is considered know-it-all (“marisabidilla”), that is, an adjective that diminishes her personal quality is used. Secondly, it shows how women are observed, paying attention to the way they dress, while this has no importance in the case of men. Lastly, it shows again the use of language. While men are allowed to comment regarding the physical appearance or beauty of women, when women do it, it is not considered socially accepted:

Well, that is, a man is smart and a woman is know-it-all [marisabidilla]. And a man goes with his suit and the

woman “What a jacket she has put on!” That is, the woman is perceived in another way. If a woman says “How handsome is that man!” Everyone looks at you surprised. However, men can make these comments. That remains so (I.19. Woman. Management position).

Maybe the most common form of micro-machismo is jokes or sexist comments. In the following quotation the interviewee refers to it as a phenomenon typical to the past when women were a minority among the teaching staff:

In the initial stages of my career, I am talking about twenty or twenty-five years ago, yes, I had to endure some sexist comments that all they said was that there were still many colleagues who were not assimilating the change [that there were women working in spaces dominated by men]. That made me very sad, really (I.12. Woman. Full Professor).

Nevertheless, and contrary to the previous quote, the next one reveals that this phenomenon is still part of everyday life in the university. In the discourse of this interviewee we can identify two aspects: Firstly, it shows how common are sexist jokes and how in some cases their usage aims to challenge the woman. Secondly, how sometimes men use their conversations with women to measure their knowledge with regarding to a topic, implying that the need to do that stems from the fact that it is below of what it should be. As the interviewee says, men do not evaluate the knowledge of other men in their conversations, but they do it when they talk to women:

It is not politically correct, but we continue to allow the sexist comment; or to tell the sexist joke right after you have finished saying something; or when you [woman] appear, that they [men] tell a sexist joke to see what you answer or do not answer. That is still a game and a habitual practice. Or measure you in conversations! [...] Many times men speak only to measure you, to check how far your knowledge goes. This is one of the situations that occur in academia, and that happens many times. And I see that when colleagues who are men meet, they normally do not measure each other in their conversations. They sympathize, anecdotes are told, they can highlight some topic of interest, but they do not measure each other! (I.3. Woman. Lecturer).

But the interviewees do not only reveal micro-machismos when it comes to verbal communication. The following quotation shows how, sometimes, men express their opinions with facial and corporal expressions, manifesting their superiority towards women. In this case it refers to women who have children and the way it affects and limits their ability to research in comparison to men:

And worst of all is that men still look down at them, saying: as you have children... That is, as you do not publish so much, as you are not all the days in conferences, or as you do not carry out several research stays every year (I.1. Woman. Lecturer).

Similarly, the following quotation shows how men use not only words but also the tone and physical intimidation towards women: “I have seen how colleagues use men’s own weapons. In other words, they raise their voice more, they get up, they approach physically, they grab you” (I.3. Woman. Lecturer).

These different manifestations of the same phenomenon, machismo, are not only recognized by women, but also by men. Quotes as the following reflect this: “There are still a part of men who continue with that sexist mentality” (I.23. Man. Senior Lecturer) or “There are many years of sexist culture in society and we are seeing it here every day” (I.31. Man. Full Professor).

However, sometimes they not only recognize it and justify it by appealing not only to what happens in the university, but in general, in society: “Of course, machismo, or sexist comments or things like that, yes, but hey, I suppose that is what happens everywhere, right?” (I.27. Man. Associate Professor). The following quote points out not only to the existence of machismo in general, but specifically that in the university ideology of some areas of knowledge the leadership ability and the management function are still considered purely masculine:

My perspective is that there is still machismo. I think that, in certain areas of knowledge, it is still thought that the ability to lead, to manage, pertains solely to men. I think there is something of that. This does not mean that each of these people are sexist or are blocking the way for women, but that there is a kind of consciousness in the air in some faculties... (I.42. Man. Management position).

Discrimination against women in the development of professional practice

However, not all the situations reflected by the academics interviewed show such “subtle” situations of machismo and underestimation of women. As the following quotes show, women have suffered situations of clear discrimination in the past, but they are still experiencing them today. The interviewee 17 reflects in her speech the misogynistic behaviour of the men of her department towards the women academics in the past, although she also reveals that there are still remnants of these behaviours:

Not so much now, but my colleagues... [...] They even said to them “Here you will never get to be a Full Professor. If you want to be a Full Professor, go to another university”. That is, you breathed, you breathed a somewhat misogynistic atmosphere. Nowadays, some example of misogyny appears, but not, not as before (I.17. Woman. Management position).

It is noteworthy how this woman refers to these situations of discrimination as examples of the past. She mentions situations that co-workers had lived, many of them already retired at the time of the interview. However, at the same time, she tells a much closer case in which a se-

lection board for a position of Full Professor, formed only by men, granted this position to a man who has accumulated less merit in his career than the other woman academic from the same department:

It was also an internal struggle... I mean, two academics applied to that position, a man and a woman from the same department and the evaluation commission, the court was composed of Full Professors, of course, but all men, of course. And it was clear that she was better... well... she had a better research trajectory, she had two “sexenios” and he only had one “sexenio”... It was clear that something very strange happened. Her research was perfect, innovative... the other person (the man) showed some deficiencies, but he was a man! He was a man! and it has always been like that, right? It has always been like this (I.17. Woman. Management position).

As the following quote shows, the previous interviewee is not the only person who considers that within the university there have been situations of discrimination related to the granting of chairs under criteria in which merit does not prevail, but gender. Many women maintain this position: “I mean, I know women academics who could be Full Professors for their merits, for their CVs and, and I think they simply are not, because when they had to choose, they chose man” (I.3. Woman. Lecturer).

The award of vacancies under criteria other than merit is not the only case of discrimination. In the following example, the interviewee relates how for many years she had participated in the organization and teaching of methodological courses offered during the summer period. However, from the moment she became pregnant, they stopped offering her to participate in them. Until then she had never felt discriminated. Thus, this quote, beyond reflecting discrimination based on sex, shows maternity and motherhood as a problem:

I have felt like I was left out of some courses simply because I was pregnant. Or that they did not allow changing some dates because I was pregnant. Really! So I have felt that it is not the same to be a man as to be a woman. None of my male colleagues have had any problems when it comes to travelling, doing any research... and I do (I.5. Woman. Associate Professor).

In this case, the interviewee states that they rejected a research project and that the feedback received was that the principal investigator was not a male:

They rejected my projects arguing that I had not put a man in charge of the project. These things have happened to me. So, of course, when you see this, you say “Either this changes sharply by law, or we do not go ahead, we do not go ahead...” (I.8. Woman. Associate Professor).

Interviewee 3 not only recounts several examples in which women are ridiculed or belittled by men in closed spaces with few people around, but also exemplifies, as the following quote shows, examples of discrimination in

public events. In this case, she tells what happened in the presence of all the academics of the department, when for the first time a woman had been elected as a Head of Department and she started directing her first Department Council:

Women, in many moments and in public situations... When I say public situations, I do not just mean the corridors of the faculty, but I also refer to department meetings. I would love that some of these meetings had been recorded because they would be incredible testimonies. In these spaces women are ridiculed, belittled. Our arguments are belittled for gender issues, that is, for being women [...]. And then, an example is when [First and last name of the Head of the Department] is for the first time a woman, Head of the Department and has to lead her first Department Council. When everyone begins to arrive at this department meeting, logically she occupies the post of the Head of the Department and at that moment a screen of men is placed in front of her and they do not let her start the Department Council. These men boycotted the entire Department Council. They did not let her exercise her functions (I.3. Woman. Lecturer).

In the following case, a woman explains how she had always thought of the university as an egalitarian organization until she decided to apply for a management position. This decision caused her very tense moments, including conversations and threats so that she would not apply for that position and extremely uncomfortable situations after obtaining it. As she explains, in this case not only gender factors intervened, but also other aspects related to the power of the Full Professors and the unwritten rule that everybody should have their approval. Later, she will add in the interview that the person who did have the approval of that Full Professor was a man of her own age. However, she had always been told that the reason why she was not the right person for that management position was related to her youth, that is, she was too young to occupy that position:

You do not see it until you face it. I would have told you for years, if you had done this same interview two years ago I would have told you "Women have the same opportunities, the same possibilities if we work the same" and I worked for four people. I never felt discriminated because I was a foreigner. That never. But I do have the feeling of being discriminated for being a woman. But I do not think this is conscious. If I had had a Full Professor who supported me... everyone would have supported me. Here the problem rather than being male or female is who supports you [...]. But I did not see this before. I have started to identify this in the last two years: barriers and obstacles where you have to be very careful every time you pass. And, many times, these barriers are given from the side of gender and of the position (I.16. Woman. Management position).

Throughout the interviews, the references to the power that male Full Professors hold are many and sometimes these are related to gender discrimination, as we saw in the previous quotation. In the same way, the following

quote points out: "Yes, I have seen some cases of leaders, Full Professors or group leaders, all men, who were quite misogynistic. Then, women have been treated worse than men (I.22. Woman. Management position).

As was the case when we spoke of micro-machismos, it is not only women who affirm the existence of situations of discrimination. However, they are the ones who provide richer examples in terms of content, precisely because they are direct or indirect victims of it. In the following quotation, men recognize the existence of discriminatory treatment towards women. In the first two, it is also noted that these behaviours occur especially in certain areas of knowledge, although it is not indicated in which. While the first is fully aware of it: "It is true. There are areas of knowledge that are especially sexist, and they have closed the way to women in a totally conscious way" (I.32. Man. Full Professor); the second refers to this issue indicating that he is aware of it through what other people have told him: "I have heard that in other disciplines, perhaps more conservative, and I will not say which, it is possible that in other disciplines there is more conservatism with regard to admitting women" (I.38. Man. Management position).

CONCLUSIONS

Both internationally and particularly in Spain, there is a broad legislative development on equality. This right is also regulated in the higher education system, which aspires to become an institution where objectivity, merit and ability prevail, which includes its consideration as a gender-neutral organization. However, and although it is considered socially that it has already been achieved, the research that studies the influence of gender in the academy shows that equality is far from being a reality.

Academic institutions were traditionally dominated by men. For many years only very few women entered the gates of universities marking the path for others to follow. Once the number of women requesting to attend university courses increased at the latter part of the 19th century, the issue aroused fierce criticism about the abilities of women and the legitimacy of their intellectual aspirations. Nevertheless at the turn of the 20th century women were present in universities in most European countries. As time passed their numbers grew, especially in some of the disciplines, reaching the current situation in which they are the majority. Nevertheless, in Spain they are still the minority among Full Professors and in managerial positions. This inequality manifested so clearly by numbers has another side to it, that of the everyday practices which sustain it.

The present article contributes to the visibility of the practices through which some men undervalue women, belittling them in their daily interaction with them through verbal and non-verbal language, but also, directly limiting their professional development, denying their participation in tasks related to management or hindering their promotion to higher professional categories. We demonstrate the unequal evaluation of people as result of

their gender which leads to discrimination as part of everyday lives in universities. This clashes with the aspirations of the system to be based on equality, merits and capacity.

Thus, and despite the existing legislative development, it is corroborated that this is not enough, and that the intervention of the public authorities is still needed to eradicate any hint of discrimination based on sex in the university sphere. Without it, women will not be able to carry out their work and promote their professional career on equal terms.

NOTES

- 1 The Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades (España, 2001) has been modified by the Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril, y por el Real Decreto-ley 14/2012, de 20 de abril, de medidas urgentes de racionalización del gasto público en el ámbito educativo (España, 2012). These modifications have been included in this paper.

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