
Miscellaneous

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The glass ceiling effect in Spanish advertising creative departments

Abstract

The representation of women in advertising creative departments has been studied worldwide. The findings have shown a low representation that does not favor the emergence of a critical mass of women, who could contribute with alternative visions to make advertising more inclusive. The underrepresentation, above all, occurs in managerial positions where they do not usually reach 35%. This study aims to update and report quantitatively on the phenomenon of the glass ceiling in Spain. In addition, in order to contextualize the level of segregation, these departments are compared with available international data. The results of a content analysis of the credit forms of 839 Spanish campaigns published in 2019 (a sample of 1,311 creatives) revealed gender dynamics, with a balanced starting group of creatives in non-managerial positions (just over 40% are women), but a figure of just 18% of women in managerial roles. A higher glass ceiling effect was also found when European and global data were compared. The results analyzed through the perspective of the proportional representation theory (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b, 1987), suggest the need to raise awareness of gender inequalities within creative departments; this would foster the equality demanded by today's society, of which advertising should not be oblivious.

Keywords

Advertising, creativity, gender, segregation, Spain.

1. Introduction

The imbalance of men and women in the creative leadership of advertising agencies has been widely documented (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Crewe & Wang, 2018; Deng & Grow, 2018; Grow & Deng, 2014, 2021; Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Mallia, 2008, 2009; Thompson-Whiteside, 2020). This gender biased environment can carry over to the global advertising messages (Grow & Deng, 2014); which puts the innovation of the creative industry in question (Furst & Reeves, 2008).

Furthermore, the scarcity of female creatives has been identified as a persistent global problem (Grow & Deng, 2014, 2021). In Spain, where the advertising industry billed 11,602 million euros (0.96% of GDP) (ReasonWhy, 2022) and ranked seventh at the Cannes Advertising Festival (Marketingdirecto, 2021), the representation of female creatives reported in surveys is from 33% (Martín-Llaguno, Beléndez & Hernández, 2007) to 49% (*I Estudio de la Población Publicitaria de España*, APG & Club de Creativos, 2019), and through credit form content analysis from 19.4% (Roca, 2009) to 24.5% (Deng & Grow, 2018); and as low as 10.4% (Roca, 2009) and 14% for creative management roles (Deng & Grow, 2018).

Together with these studies, different professional initiatives and community partnerships have emerged around the globe reporting a lack of women in creative departments and calling for a more active role of female creatives (e.g., Círculo de Creativas Chile, 2023 [Female Creatives Circle Chile]; Publicitarias.org, 2023 [Women in Advertising]; The 3% Movement, 2023). In Spain, two projects stand out: born in 2016, Más mujeres creativas [More female creatives] (2023), which in partnership with the Club de Creativos [Creatives Club], promotes the initiative Una de dos [One of two] to boost more women in creative management positions (<https://unadedos.org/>), and OVER, a project to break down gender stereotypes also advocated by the Club de Creativos (2023).

Despite these actions, recent free detailed data reporting the presence of women in agencies is not available for Spain. This article aims to fill this gap by providing detailed figures on the presence of women in managerial and non-managerial positions in creative departments in 2019, before the impact of Covid-19; and by contrasting the level of gender segregation in Spain (2019) with data from other international studies.

This article starts by introducing how the glass ceiling effect operates in advertising creative departments, continues with an overview of the horizontal and vertical segregation phenomenon, sorts the Spanish data on vertical segregation, and portrays the information under the umbrella of the theory of proportional representation and tokenism (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b, 1987). Details of quantitative content analysis methodology of creatives' ad credit forms are discussed, after which statistical results are presented and discussed regarding vertical segregation and the glass ceiling effect. The article concludes with the limitations, future research and the implications for the advertising industry.

2. Creative departments and the glass ceiling effect

Creativity is considered the key factor for *success* in advertising (Rosengren *et al.*, 2020; Stuhlfaut, 2011); thus, the creative team and the creative products they engender are key differentiating elements among competing advertising agencies (Mallia, Windels & Broyles, 2013; Needle & Mallia, 2020). As long as meritocracy is maintained as a characteristic that influences team membership and promotion to creative management (Crewe & Wang, 2018; O'Brien *et al.*, 2016), women will be able to rise to leadership positions thanks to their particular leadership styles that foster openness and inclusiveness (Furst & Reeves, 2008; Montes & Roca, 2016). However, in advertising creative departments, meritocracy and disruption are frequently challenged due to the presence of the glass ceiling phenomenon (Mallia, 2017; O'Brien *et al.*, 2016).

The term “glass ceiling” first appeared in an article published by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) in *The Wall Street Journal*. They named, metaphorically, the invisible barriers that prevent women in organizations from occupying positions of greater responsibility and authority. The metaphor refers to women who encounter “a glass ceiling over their aspirations –it allows them to see where they might go, but stops them getting there” (Hansard Society Commission, in Nicolson, 1996, p. 7). In this regard, this concept encompasses gender-based cultural behaviors (Oakley, 2000), which are expressed in stereotypes, machismo, and symbolism (Grow *et al.*, 2012; Mensa & Grow, 2021), that become invisible in the form of indirect discrimination and lack of equal opportunities for women in leadership positions (Morrison, White & van Velsor, 1987).

Unlike formal barriers, for example, lack of education or specific training that prevent applying for management positions, the subtlety of the glass ceiling lies in the fact that the merits and achievements attained by women are ignored due to gender bias, organizational norms, harassment or lack of support; disregarding that they possess skills to occupy those positions (Glass & Cook, 2016; Powell & Butterfield, 2003). Thus, women are trapped at the bottom of the organizational pyramid –“sticky floor” effect (Liu, 2013)–, which prevents them from gaining experience at first level management (creative director in this case) and thereby preparing them for top management roles (e.g., executive creative director).

Although no significant differences have been found in the leadership styles of men and women in organizations (Abarca & Majluf, 2021; Joubert, 2022), female creatives display an effective, creative, democratic and transformational leadership style that inspires and motivates their teams to find ingenious solutions (Montes & Roca, 2016); traits also identified for successful leadership (negotiation, adaptation, and collaboration) (Patwardhan, Habib & Patwardhan, 2019). However, a not always accepted distinct leadership identity, along with the resistance and aggression they receive in underrepresentation, not only limit their influence on the industry and the message content that permeates in society, but also leave them tired of fighting, and can even lead to them leaving the industry for good (Thompson-Whiteside, 2020), without reaching the higher levels of the organization (Samuelson *et al.*, 2019).

Ultimately, the industry preference for male over female leaders (Mallia, 2009) is seen in a progressive inequality (Grow *et al.*, 2012), that through filters or exclusion mechanisms increases the disadvantages women face as they try to move up the creative hierarchy, they have fewer opportunities to exercise leadership (Thompson-Whiteside & Turnbull, 2021).

Other possible causes that could explain the glass ceiling is motherhood in the phase of professional consolidation. The decision to become mothers is a cause of dilemma for women: delaying motherhood or not having children at all (Ramos-Serrano, Miguélez-Juan & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2022); because maternity leave causes controversy and can be a factor for female creatives to leave advertising agencies (Mueller, Dubosar & Windels, 2022).

Furthermore, in Spain it has been identified that the underrepresentation of women in the creative field could originate from the pre-professional phase. In the syllabuses there are no subjects with a gender perspective and universities do not address issues such as the glass ceiling effect or female roles in the organizational structure of agencies. Thus, new professionals lack the skills to deal with these situations (Jiménez-Marín, Álvarez-Rodríguez & Palomo-Domínguez, 2022).

2.1. Segregation in advertising creative departments

In the glass ceiling metaphor, factors such as horizontal and vertical segregation converge (Roberto *et al.*, 2020). Horizontal segregation refers to the disproportionate concentration of men and women in sectors or job profiles, which is related to the traditional division of labor where females work in reproduction and nurturing roles (e.g., account departments), while males are employed in productive jobs (e.g., creative departments) (Anker, 1998; Blackburn, Brooks & Jarman, 2001). Men, who represent the majority in the creative departments of advertising agencies, have turned them into male fraternities with marked codes (e.g., sexual jokes, hostile work environments, and exclusion from decision-making), that hinder the integration of women (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Chalá-Mejía, 2020; Mallia, 2009; Mueller *et al.*, 2022; Topić, 2020), since women are clustered in account departments, which have become *velvet ghettos* associated with tasks of care or attention to advertisers (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Wrigley, 2002). In this regard, a survey conducted with Spanish advertising agencies showed that while account and research-marketing-planning services were broadly feminized (89.5% and 61.15% of females respectively), creative departments remained masculinized (Martín-Llaguno & Navarro-Beltrá, 2015).

Vertical segregation consists of the unequal positioning of men and women in the same occupation, profile or activity (Blackburn *et al.*, 2001), where one gender is placed at a higher level or grade than the other (Anker, 1998). In the case of advertising creativity, vertical segregation is related to the low proportion of women in creative management (Grow & Deng, 2014). Creative teams seem to be widely hierarchized in managerial roles (chief creative officers, executive creative directors and creative directors) and non-managerial positions (copywriters and art directors) (Mallia, 2019; Oliver & Ashley, 2012; Martín-Llaguno & Navarro-Beltrá, 2015). Creative managers assume complex functions, because, in addition to

creative talent, they require management skills, flexibility, motivation and leadership capacity (Mallia, 2019; Mallia *et al.*, 2013; Oliver & Ashley, 2012; Stuhlfaut, 2011).

Despite having experience and being qualified, women are relegated to non-managerial positions (García-González & Piñeiro-Otero, 2011; Martín-Llaguno *et al.*, 2007); among other reasons, because in the advertising organizational culture, sexism prevents them from being promoted to management positions (Chalá, 2018; Martín-Llaguno & Navarro-Beltrá, 2015; Mensa & Grow, 2021), making inequality and discrimination, embedded in daily routines (Soria-Ibáñez & Gómez-Nieto, 2017), go unnoticed, even by the women who suffer it (Chalá-Mejía, 2020; Grow *et al.*, 2012; Mueller *et al.*, 2022).

2.1.1. Vertical segregation data in Spanish creative departments

Studies regarding the representation of women in creative departments have been developed with surveys and content analyses, showing in both cases an important lack of women in managerial positions throughout the years (see Table 1 for an overview). The continued male predominance among those responsible for the most effective campaigns (only 14% are women) (Alvarado-López & Martín-García, 2020), shows that gender is a variable associated with access to leadership positions (Martín-Llaguno *et al.*, 2007), since these positions demand greater dedication, and more resources are invested to win creativity festivals, because awards are related to the prestige and progression of the agencies in the advertising business (Alvarado-López & Martín-García, 2020; Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023; Ramos-Serrano, Castelló-Martínez & Tur-Viñes, 2023). Consequently, female creatives are excluded from participating in great ideas (Grow *et al.*, 2012) and from festivals (Roca, Alegre Rodríguez & Pueyo Ayhan, 2012). Therefore, their power to influence advertising culture is very limited (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b).

Table 1. Evolution of vertical segregation in Spanish creative departments (2005-2018).

Author (year): period analyzed	Sample and methods	Total female creatives in respect to males	Female managers in respect to males	Non-managerial positions in respect to males	
				Copy	Art
Martín-Llaguno <i>et al.</i> (2007): one year, 2005	504 creatives from 23 agencies in Madrid and Barcelona from a survey	35.9% (181 out of 504)	No data	40% (46 out of 116)	33% (50 out of 153)
Roca <i>et al.</i> (2012): from 1998 to 2008	346 jurors from a content analysis of the Iberian-American award <i>El Sol</i>	14.16% (49 out of 346)	10.47% ^{1a} (31 out of 296)	36% ^{1b} (18 out of 50)	
Roca <i>et al.</i> , (2009): from 2004 to 2008	1983 creatives from a content analysis of trade press credit forms	19.42% (385 out of 1983) ^{2a}	10.46% ^{2b} (98 out of 839)	28.22% (92 out of 326)	24.62% (112 out of 455)
Martín-Llaguno and Navarro-Beltrá (2015): two years, 2004...	139 creatives from a survey	33% (46 out of 139)	35.6% (42 out of 118)	50% (4 out of 8)	0% (0 out of 13)
...and 2010	98 creatives from a survey	38.7% (38 out of 98)	31.6% (18 out of 57)	46.7% (7 out of 15)	50% (13 out of 26)
García-González and Piñeiro-Otero (2011): one year, 2008	128 practitioners from a survey in Galicia (northwest region of Spain)	29% (37 out of 128)	No data	No data	No data
Grow and Deng (2014): one year, 2012	Content analysis of <i>Red Books'</i> credit forms ²	18.9%*	13.3%*	23.5%	No data
Soria-Ibáñez and Gómez-Nieto (2017): two years, 2016 and 2017	700 practitioners from a survey	30%*	No data	No data	No data
Deng and Grow (2018): from 2012 to 2016	Content analysis of <i>Red Books'</i> credit forms	24.5%*	13.2%*	No data	No data
Alvarado-López and Martín-García (2020): from 2002 to 2018	966 creatives from a content analysis of Awards' credit forms (<i>Premios a la Eficacia, Effies</i>)	22.1% (214 out of 966)	14%*	No data	No data

Note: Number of women found in each study are written in brackets. An asterisk (*) signals absolute numbers were not available. "No data" indicates neither percentages nor absolute numbers were available.

^{1a}136 of the jurors were labeled as "creative director" (14 women, 10.29%), and 160 with other management titles (17 women, 11.88%): CEO, founding partner, president, vice-president, and general manager.

^{1b}Includes positions labeled as: non-creative (7), non-managerial (22) and unspecified (21).

^{2a} Since creative functions not detailed in the original research were 249, 77 women and 172 men, this figure drops from 1,983, shown in the first column with data, to 1,734 as the sum of the other three columns (937, 326, and 455) and 16 creative supervisors, a pseudo manager role specific to Spanish advertising creative departments, not included here, neither in managerial positions nor copywriting or art director positions).

^{2b} This percentage does not include creative supervision roles (6 women, 10 men), a position below management and above copywriter and art director.

³ *Red Books* is a paid publication by LexisNexis that reports data on advertising staff.

Considering these data and to contrast detailed data with the numbers in Table 1, the first research question is proposed:

RQ1. To what extent is vertical segregation present in different positions in Spanish creative departments?

2.2. Proportional representation theory and tokenism

Kanter (1977a, 1977b, 1987) describes four categories of proportional representation of women in organizations: a) *uniform*, when the group is composed of 100% by men or women; b) *skewed*, once there is a preponderance of one gender over the other (e.g., 25% of women and 75% of men); c) *tilted*, when the minority surpasses 30% (e.g., 35% of women and 65% of men); and d) *balanced*, when the proportion is at least 40% of women, a significant representation which can change the dynamics between the dominant group and the minority (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b, 1987), with the minority having more influence within the organization (Correa & Harp, 2011; Dahlerup, 2006). In this line, when women are below 35% as a minority, they do not alter the organizational culture and must face the lack of recognition of their work. So, the presence of some women in male-dominated areas can be interpreted as symbolic inclusion (tokenism), but not as significant inclusion; i.e., it is assumed that equality exists only with their presence (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b); obviating the horizontal and vertical segregation that exists in companies, occupations or professional profiles (Dahlerup, 1993; Grow & Deng, 2015; Kanter, 1977a; Torchia, Calabrò & Huse, 2011).

According to Kanter (1977a), symbolic representation is based on three aspects. The first is visibility, which causes whoever is in the minority to receive separate attention, adding pressure to their performance. Unlike men, female creatives have to prove that they deserve to be part of creative departments (Chalá, 2018; Grow *et al.*, 2012). The second is the polarization between the dominant and minority groups, exaggerating the differences between them, such as male creatives using sexualized humor, that leads to a toxic environment (Needles & Mallia, 2020), which seeks to highlight the symbolic status of female creatives (Chalá-Mejía, 2020; Mensa & Grow, 2021; Topić, 2020). And the third is the symbolic assimilation of certain behaviors of the dominant group in order to not stand out from the majority; leading, for example, to female creatives to fake masculine behaviors to fit into fraternities of male creatives (Chalá-Mejía, 2020; Thompson-Whiteside & Turnbull, 2021; Topić, 2020). However, the number of women in middle or low-level positions doubles when creative directorships are occupied by female tokens compared to the proportion when the leaders are only men. In that sense, women are more likely to foster diversity in creative departments (Roca, Suárez & Meléndez-Rodríguez, 2023).

From this perspective, in terms of numerical ratio, tokenism is an approach to explain the difficulties women face when entering masculinized occupations such as advertising creativity (Grow & Deng, 2014), and also when trying to break the glass ceiling (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Grow *et al.*, 2012; Mallia, 2009; Zimmer, 1998).

The presented literature review and Spanish data reveal that, broadly speaking, vertical segregation is systemic in creative departments (Deng & Grow, 2018), as only one study places women as a tilted group (Martín-Llaguno & Navarro-Beltrá, 2015). In managerial positions, female creatives do not represent more than 35%. Therefore, dynamics and a constant

interplay between the glass ceiling effect, tokenism and the lack of critical mass impact the fostering of change. Based on this, a second research question is posited:

RQ2. Is the glass ceiling effect still present in Spanish creative departments?

2.2.1. Global vertical segregation data in creative departments

The most extensive study conducted to date showed that globally, only 22.7% of women reach creative management positions (Grow & Deng, 2021). This is even lower regarding awards, since women represent just 8.7% of the winners (Mallia & Windels, 2017). These data highlight the lack of gender diversity in creative management (Deng & Grow, 2018; Grow & Deng, 2021; Mallia & Windels, 2017).

Previous qualitative research that compared Spain with the USA and Canada (Grow *et al.*, 2012), reported that Spanish departments are more laddish, a reflection of a more macho culture (Alvarado-López & Martín-García, 2020; Martín-Llaguno & Navarro-Beltrá, 2015; Martín-Llaguno *et al.*, 2007). Given that, the last research question of this paper aims to test statistically to what extent women may experience a stronger segregation in Spanish creative departments:

RQ3. To what extent can Spanish creative departments be considered more segregated than those located in other countries?

3. Methods

A content analysis of the ad credit forms sent by creative departments to the trade press was employed to discover the representation of females in creative departments in Spain; these are important because they provide visibility to creative teams. This methodological approach has been used in similar studies with data from Adweek (Mallia, 2008), Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies, also known as Red Books (Deng & Grow, 2018; Grow & Deng, 2014, 2020), and Communication Arts Advertising Annual (Mallia & Windels, 2018).

3.1. Selection procedures and reliability

Two different databases were created for this study. An initial spreadsheet was compiled to include the names of all creatives mentioned on all ad forms of the trade magazine Anuncios.com (2019), with a total of 3,969 creatives. From there, a second worksheet called *census* was generated (there is no free census data available for Spanish agencies that include both network and local agencies). This process was followed since certain creatives' names were duplicated because they worked on numerous campaigns during the year and appeared on separate ad credit forms. Repetitions of observations were removed based on the most recent title in the case of professionals who changed agencies, in the most recent position in the case of internal promotions and in the highest position in the case of diverse duties undertaken in distinct campaigns (e.g., creative director instead of creative supervisor); resulting in a Spanish *census* of 1,311 advertising creatives. This number can be considered a close snapshot of reality, considering it doubles the almost 600 creatives registered as members of the Club de Creativos [Spanish Creatives Club] (<https://www.clubdecreativos.com/>). In this regard, the power of the sample was calculated with a *post-hoc* procedure with a generalization of 100% (G*Power software, version 3.1.9.6).

3.2. Coding procedures

Coding included two variables: gender (male and female) and position (managerial and non-managerial). Chief creative officers, executive creative directors and creative directors were labeled as managerial titles, while copywriters, art directors, and supervisors were termed as non-managerial roles; supervisors were included in the second group because they maintain gender status differences (Cohen & Broschak, 2013) by giving them more responsibilities while remaining on a lower rung than creative directors. When the credit was entered as "creative team," details of the professionals were found online, through trade news or professional social media platforms (Behance or LinkedIn profiles). After the main coding was

completed, a second trained person coded a random 10% sample of the campaigns to establish intercoder reliability (ICR). This was close to 100% in all cases: gender (98.49%) and position (98.49%). Instances of disparity were discussed and amended. All analyses were run with the free statistical package Jamovi 2.0.

The manual extraction allowed a focus on positions in 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic and their impact on the advertising investment decline (Corredor-Lanas, Marcos-Recio & Montañés-García, 2021). Managerial positions, both genders included, represented 36.46% of the sample (478), while 63.54% were identified as non-managerial positions (833).

4. Results

4.1. RQ1. To what extent is vertical segregation present in different positions in Spanish creative departments?

Our first research question sought to discover a detailed picture of the vertical segregation in Spanish creative departments. A 33.6% representation of women was found, being very similar to worldwide data, with Grow and Deng (2021) documenting 34.1% as the global average during 2012-18. An initial descriptive analysis indicates that the higher the position, the fewer women are found (except for creative supervisors, 3.2%): 42.6% of women work as art directors, 34.9% as copywriters, 15.0% as creative directors, and 4.3% in top-level creative positions (3.2% as executive creative directors (ECD) and just 1.1% as chief creatives officer (CCO)). In comparison to men, women start to show a soft-balanced representation in art direction (40.2%) and creative supervision (38.9%), and almost a perfect balance in copywriting (46.8%). However, these rates drop dramatically when considering only management roles (17.8%, just 85 women out of 478 managers): 20.4% as creative directors (66 out of 323), 13.9% as executive creative directors (14 out of 101) and 9.3% as chief creative officers (5 out of 54) (see Table 2a).

Table 2a. Female representation by position in Spanish creative departments in 2019.

Gender		Low-level positions			Managerial positions			Total
		Art	Copy	CS	CD	ECD	CCO	
Female	Observed	188	154	14	66	14	5	441
	% within row	42.6 %	34.9 %	3.2 %	15.0 %	3.2 %	1.1 %	100.0 %
	% within column	40.2 %	46.8 %	38.9 %	20.4 %	13.9 %	9.3 %	33.6 %
Male	Observed	280	175	22	257	87	49	870
	% within row	32.2 %	20.1 %	2.5 %	29.5 %	10.0 %	5.6 %	100.0 %
	% within column	59.8 %	53.2 %	61.1 %	79.6 %	86.1 %	90.7 %	66.4 %
Total	Observed	468	329	36	323	101	54	1,311
	% within row	35.7 %	25.1 %	2.7 %	24.6 %	7.7 %	4.1 %	100.0 %
	% within column	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Note: Non-managerial positions in this table include: art directors, copywriters and creative supervisors (CS). Managerial positions in this table include: creative directors (CD), executive creative directors (ECD) and chief creative officers (CCO). Top-level, as a subgroup of managerial creative positions, include: executive creative directors (ECD) and chief creative officers (CCO).

4.2. RQ2. Is the glass-ceiling effect still present in Spanish creative departments?

To statically test the glass ceiling effect, two strategies were followed. First, the association for copy-art, grouped together as non-managerial positions (342 females and 455 males), and the first step in managerial roles, creative directors (66 females and 257 males), was found significant ($\chi^2(1, n=1120) = 50.1, p < .001$) with a high moderate effect (Cramer's $V = 0.212$); the odds of women working in art or copy roles compared to men almost triple (Odds Ratio = 2.92).

When comparing gender of supervisors (14 females and 22 males) with creative directors (66 females and 257 males), to determine if the former position means paying a price that impedes or slows female progression towards creative director role, data showed that the

odds of women being in a supervisor role compared to men more than double (Odds Ratio= 2.48), since the association is significant (χ^2 (1, n=359) =6.37, p=0.012), with a low moderate effect (Cramer's V=0.133). With this finding, a second strategy was followed to analyze the data: art directors, copywriters and supervisors were considered extended non-managerial positions, since the latter still maintain gender status differences (Cohen & Broschak, 2013) and lack symbolic value and power (Alvesson, 1998; Oliver & Ashley, 2012) in respect to creative directors. The association of the extended non-managerial positions with creative directors (first level managerial positions) was also significant (χ^2 (1, n=1,156) = 50.0, p<0.001, Cramer's V=0.208), but in this case, women more than triple the odds of being in non-managerial roles compared to men (OR=3.44) (see Table 2b and Figure 1).

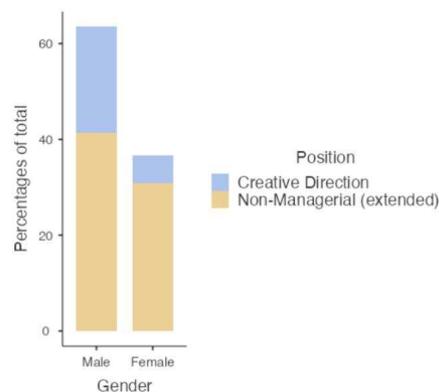
Table 2b. Women's glass-ceiling effect in Spanish advertising creative departments in 2019.

Gender		Creative Direction		Total
		No	Yes	
Female	Observed	477	257	734
	Expected	529	205	734
	% within row	65.0 %	35.0 %	100.0 %
	% within column	57.3 %	79.6 %	63.5 %
Male	Observed	356	66	442
	Expected	304	118	442
	% within row	84.4 %	15.6 %	100.0 %
	% within column	42.7 %	20.4 %	36.5 %
Total	Observed	833	323	1,156
	Expected	833	323	1,156
	% within row	72.1 %	27.9 %	100.0 %
	% within column	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Note: χ^2 (1, n=1,156) = 50.0, p<0.001, Cramer's V=0.208, OR= 3.44 (CI=2.15-3.94).

Extended non-managerial positions include: art directors, copywriters and creative supervisors. Data on creative direction only includes creative directors, since it is the first step in the creative management ladder (executive creative directors and chief creative officers are excluded from this analysis).

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the glass-ceiling effect in Spanish creative departments in 2019.



Note: see notes on Table 2b for position details.

The glass ceiling effect was not found when comparing creative couples (art and copy) with supervisors (χ^2 (1, n=675) =2.93, p=.08), and creative directors with top-level management (executive creative directors plus chief creative officers, 19 females and 136 males), (χ^2 (1, n=480) =3.55, p=.05), so the findings show that the effect exists at the step from non-managerial positions to creative direction positions (creative director).

4.3. RQ3. To what extent can Spanish creative departments be considered more segregated than those located in other countries?

Finally, to answer the third research question published data was collected from similar studies listed in the literature review. In this case, to make comparisons possible, since detailed management data from those papers was not available, management included three positions: creative directors, executive creative directors and chief creative officers. After, Cramer's V was calculated to measure the strength of the relationship between gender and position in different papers: 0.121 (OR=1.93) (in Grow & Deng, 2020, Global), 0.103 (OR=2.28) (in Deng & Grow, 2018, Europe). Thus, in international studies, the odds of women being in non-managerial positions rather than in managerial roles when compared to men are double, while in Spain the odds are more than triple ($\chi^2(1, n=1,311) = 84.7, p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.254, OR=3.44) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Effect size from data of female representation in creative departments.

Gender	Creative Management (Global)		Creative Management (Europe)		Creative Management (Spain)	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Female	4,347 (27%)	1,223 (16.1%)	1,575 (22.5 %)	230 (12.3%)	356 (42.7%)	85 (17.8%)
Male	11,738 (73%)	6,394 (83.9 %)	5,425 (77.5 %)	1,640 (87.7%)	477 (57.3%)	393 (82.2%)
Cramer's V	0.121 ^b		0.103 ^a		0.254 ^c	
Odds Ratio	1.93		2.28		3.44	

Note: percentages are based on comparisons between gender (columns).

^a Red Books Europe: 2012-18 (Deng & Grow, 2018), ^b Red Books Global: 2012-18 (Deng & Grow, 2018). ^c In the current study, for this table, art directors, copywriters and supervisors are considered non-managerial positions, and Creative Management includes creative directors, executive creative directors and chief creative officers.

5. Discussion

This research informed about the presence of women in Spanish creative departments through a content analysis of credit forms published by advertising trade press during the year 2019 (before the impact of Covid-19), resulting in a final sample of 1,311 advertising creatives. This methodology has been previously employed by other international scholars (e.g. Deng & Grow, 2018; Grow & Deng, 2014, 2015, 2021; Mallia & Wildels, 2017). Using different data collected by the authors, this paper aimed to answer three research questions: To what extent is vertical segregation present in different positions in Spanish creative departments? Is the glass-ceiling effect still present? And, to what extent can Spanish creative departments be considered more segregated than those located in other countries?

Taking proportional representation theory as the framework (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b, 1987), results showed that the representation of women in Spanish creative departments is lower in respect to men. In non-managerial positions a gender balance is reached (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b), since women account for 42.7% of these jobs (46.8% copywriters, 40.2% art directors, and 38.9% supervisors). However, in management roles, the figure is far lower, since women only reach 17.8% (20.4% creative directors, 13.9% executive creative directors and 9.3% chief creative officers). Although these percentages imply some progress compared to previous data from Spain (Deng & Grow, 2018, reported 13.2% for the period 2012-16), female creative managers are far from reaching the critical mass of 35% to change the game. Therefore, their ability to have an impact on a decision-making level is minimal within creative departments (Correa & Harp, 2011; Dahlerup, 2006; Kanter, 1977a, 1977b; Thompson-Whiteside, 2020). In this regard, the results are similar to previous international studies using content analysis of credit forms (Grow & Deng, 2014, 2015, 2021).

The data also showed a strong glass ceiling effect, since women represent 47.2% in non-managerial positions and only 20.4% in creative direction roles, when compared with men. With the extra toll experienced by women in Spain, instead of becoming creative directors they remain in the inferior position of creative supervisor, in reality having similar responsibilities but less “boss” status, meaning less visibility, less symbolic value and less power (Alvesson, 1998; Oliver & Ashley, 2012).

Finally, both the glass ceiling effect and sticky floor seem to be stronger in Spain when compared with other countries (Deng & Grow, 2018; Mallia & Windels, 2017), quantitatively supporting previous qualitative findings that labeled Spanish creative culture as more laddish than in the USA (e.g., Grow *et al.*, 2012).

The main concern shown in the percentages presented above is the strong glass ceiling effect of Spanish advertising creative departments, where women can be considered an almost balanced group (Kanter, 1977a) in non-managerial positions, but still part of a minority in managerial roles. As identified previously (Grow & Deng, 2018; Thompson-Whiteside & Turnbull, 2021), the glass ceiling effect, the symbolic representation of female creatives, and the lack of a critical mass (Kanter 1977a, 1997, 1987) work together negatively and reduce the possibilities for the advertising industry to nurture diverse and alternative visions, which contribute to providing answers for societies demanding greater equality and contributions from women, both inside and outside the advertising industry (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2017; Roca *et al.*, 2023).

However, community partnerships and professional initiatives such as Más mujeres creativas [More Female Creatives] or Una de dos [One of Two] seek to raise awareness of gender inequalities within creative departments. This could ultimately help strengthen the generation of a critical mass to challenge tokenism and promote more women to senior positions. As Thompson-Whiteside (2020, p. 605) argues, to change the situation of female underrepresentation in managerial positions, one must start by acknowledging it.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. Firstly, it only shows data from one particular year (2019). Secondly, it does not separate the information by agency type (local vs. network), size, or business location. And thirdly, the impact of Covid-19 was not studied here but it could have been a factor in the decision for some leading female creatives to leave their agency-network during 2020 and 2021; during that period, two of Spain’s top female creatives left multinational agencies. This could be called *the silenced layoff effect*, and deserves more attention in future research, interviewing creatives who quietly left their top positions “to start new professional projects” (IPMARK, 2020, 2021), as the trade press shifts the responsibility of the decision to leave the company to the individual, and not to the dynamics of the organization (curiously, the advertising industry employs euphemisms to avoid using the word layoff).

In this regard, according to the report *¿Por qué te vas? [Why are you leaving?]* by the professional community Más mujeres creativas [More Female Creatives] (2024), both men and women leave agencies due to lack of recognition, mental health and the salary. In addition, although female creatives enjoy developing creativity and facing challenges, they also express feeling more stuck and invisible in relation to men. Faced with employee issues with stress, pay inequity or different treatment for women, agencies do not take measures to redress them. As a result, three out of four professionals, men and women, do not see their future in those agencies.

7. Managerial implications for the advertising industry

Despite the different initiatives speaking-up for more gender diversity and company policies about diversity, this study shows a lack of gender diversity continues in Spanish advertising creative departments. Only time will tell if the 42.7% of female creatives in non-managerial

positions in this research will be able to become creative directors, a position which represents a figure far below the 35% minority proposed by Kanter (1977a, 1977b, 1987), to somehow influence advertising creative department dynamics. This article is a new wake-up call for the creative advertising industry, as the data clearly shows that the ideology of gender equality is only talk. Despite the real risk of losing creative talent, it seems that advertising agencies are not listening to the voices of female creatives who demand effective inclusion to achieve alternative and transformational forms of leadership.

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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