Female leadership in advertising creativity[1]

El liderazgo femenino en la creatividad publicitaria

Liderança feminina na criatividade publicitaria

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ABSTRACT

This research studies female creative directors in advertising as leaders. It focuses on their presence in the creative departments rather than in the causes of their absence. We interviewed six Spanish female creative directors, who managed to reach and stay in that department. The paper reveals how they understand, execute, self-perceive and project their leadership, and how they perceive that their employees value them. The results show that these women fit in the definition of a leader –vs. a manager– proposed by the literature. Their leadership can be framed within the effective, creative, transformational and democratic style that nowadays identifies the ideal leadership.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación se enfoca en las directoras creativas publicitarias en su rol de líderes. Se centra en su presencia en los departamentos creativos y no en las causas de su ausencia. Se entrevista a seis directoras creativas españolas, que han conseguido llegar y mantenerse en ese departamento. Se explica cómo comprenden, perciben y ejecutan su liderazgo, y cómo perciben que las valoran sus empleados. Los resultados muestran que ellas encajan en la definición del líder ——vs. manager—— que propone la literatura. Su liderazgo puede enmarcarse en el estilo efectivo, creativo, transformacional y democrático que identifica al liderazgo ideal actualmente.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa estuda as diretoras criativas femininas e o seu papel como líderes no ramo da publicidade. O estudo está focado na sua presença nos departamentos criativos e não nas causas de sua ausência. Seis diretoras criativas femininas espanholas, que chegaram ao topo e mantiveram a sua posição, foram entrevistadas. O artigo revela como elas compreendem, percebem e executam a sua liderança, e como percebem o valor que os seus empregados lhes dão. Os resultados mostram que estas mulheres se enquadram na definição de líder – vs. gestor – proposto pela literatura do campo. A sua liderança pode se identificar com o estilo efetivo, criativo, transformacional e democrático que identifica atualmente a liderança ideal.

Keywords: advertising agency, creativity, gender, leadership, woman.

Palabras clave: agencia de publicidad, creatividad, género, liderazgo, mujer.

Palavras-chave: agência de publicidade, criatividade, género, liderança, mulher.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike existing studies on the causes of the lack of female advertising creative directors (see Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Mallia, 2009; Windels, Lee & Yeh, 2010), this research aims to analyze the presence of women in the creative direction of Spanish advertising agencies. That is, it focuses on the women who arrived and remain in the creative direction. The study object addresses the female leadership in advertising creativity through in-depth interviews (semi-structured with open-ended questions). It seeks to understand how these women understand, perceive and execute their leadership and how they perceive their employees' evaluation of them.

Women represent –in numbers– about half of the advertising industry (Jordan, 2009; Klein, 2000; Mallia, 2009). For example, in Spain, they reach 56.7% (Nieto & Lema, 2008); in the United Kingdom (UK), 49% (Klein, 2000); in the United States, 56% (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], US, 2009); and in Germany, 53.5% (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2008).

However, on the global scene, specifically in creative advertising departments, there is a clear lack of gender diversity (Nixon, 2003), since only 20-25% of advertising creatives are women (DiSesa , 2008; Grow & Deng, 2014; Jordan, 2009; Klein, 2000; Mallia, 2009). It continues to be a *boys' club* to which women have to adapt (Kazenoff & Vagnoni, 1997).

In Spain, the female presence in the creative departments is 20% (Pueyo, 2010); in the case of the UK, 15% (Klein, 2000); in the United States, 30% (Endicott, 2002); and in Germany, 36% (Fröhlich, 2008). This absence worsens in higher managerial positions: the percentage of creative directors does not reach 20% (Klein, 2000; Martín, 2007; Roca, Alegre & Pueyo, 2012; Weisberg & Robbs, 1997). In Spain, women represent only 14% of creative directors, 8% of executive creative directors and 1% of general creative directors (Roca & Pueyo, 2011).

There is a growing interest –especially among female researchers– to study female creatives in advertising, their interactions in creative departments, and gender-related dimensions that may lead them to abandon them (Grow et Broyles, 2011; Grow et al., 2012; Mallia, 2009; Windels & Lee, 2012).

According to Grow et al. (2012), the factors that motivate the low presence of female creatives in Spain are the following: the final selection of ideas is done by men; women are more democratic in finding solutions; in the presentations to the client, women feel marginalized; the products are assigned according to gender (female vs. male products); the accounts (clients) most likely to win prizes are assigned to men; and women leave the profession to look for jobs with less stress, to avoid a highly masculinized environment that harms them and, when they are mothers, to gain flexibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership can be defined as the process by which a person has the ability to influence and motivate his or her followers in a way that contributes to the achievement of established goals and to the success of the organizational project (House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfan, 2002; Yuki & Van Fleet, 1992). Its essence lies in being perceived as a leader by others (Lord & Maher, 1991) as a way to increase the influence that one can have, something that does not happen if one does not occupy a position of chief and is not perceived as such (Kats & Kahn, 1978). The leader's behavior influences the perception and emotional reactions of his or her subordinates, which, in turn, influence their creativity (Amabile & Conti, 1999; Amabile et al., 1996; Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta & Kramer, 2004; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Pelz & Andrews, 1976; Scott & Bruce, 1994).

The *great man* theories or *features approach* suggest that there are certain stable characteristics of people (features) that differentiate leaders by their intelligence, high energy, intuition, foresight, and persuasiveness (Bass, 1990). Other traits that may be related to effective leadership are tolerance to stress, integrity, emotional maturity, and self-confidence (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Yuki & Tracey, 1992). Thus, certain characteristics, abilities and behaviors (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009) or behaviors expected from stereotypes (Wofford, Wodwin & Wittington, 1998) would explain the leadership.

Bass (1990) divides leadership styles between *task-oriented leadership* or *structure-oriented leadership* and the *interpersonal or relationships oriented leadership.* He also distinguishes between *democratic* and *authoritarian* leaders.

Burns (1978) and Bass (1990) also add the *transformational leadership style*, which is defined as a behavioral process comprised of three factors: charisma, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of the followers' needs (Bass, Avolio & Goodheim, 1987), with intellectual stimulation correlating most significantly with job satisfaction (Emery & Barker, 2007). Leaders challenge the status quo and promote commitment, creativity, and satisfaction (Gaertner, 2000; Villalba Moreno, 2001).

Other researchers on leadership (see Avolio, 1999) contrast *transformational leaders* with *transactional leaders*, who operate on the basis of reward systems that appeal to subordinates' self-interest and establish an exchange relationship with them. The latter understand leadership in the conventional sense of clarifying the responsibilities of subordinates, rewarding them for the fulfillment of their goals and correcting them when they fail to achieve them.

In the *creative leadership style*, creativity is key to promoting positive change and inspiring followers more effectively than those who lack this quality (Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly & Marks, 2000; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Sternberg, 2007). The *creative leader* requires experience (Andrews & Farris, 1967; Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly & Marks, 2000; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis & Strange, 2002); social skills to run an agency and persuade clients to support his or her project and build networks (Mumford et al., 2002); solidarity (Andrews & Farris, 1967; Oldham & Cummings, 1996); to count on his or her employees and recognize their work (Amabile et al., 2004); to create an environment to thrive (Goffee & Jones, 2007), and to be efficient by hiring and leading creative people, coordinating the creative process and product, and promoting a creative culture (Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Florida & Goodnight, 2005; Hunt, Stelluto & Hooijberg, 2004; Townley, Beech & McKinlay, 2009).

Leadership has not been as studied in creative industries as in other fields (see Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Basadur, 2004; Florida & Goodnight, 2005; Goffee & Jones, 2007; Helund et al., 2003). The creative department of an advertising agency constitutes a discrete culture (Nixon, 2003) with its own codes (Stuhlfaut, 2011) and collectively shared ideas (Alvesson, 1994). The study of management in creative departments focuses on two aspects: the work environment and the individual.

The environment contributes crucially to the creativity of individuals (Amabile, 1988, 1997; Ford, 1996; Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993). These researches point out how the interaction between the individual, the organization, the department and the environment influences creativity.

Something less obvious is the critical role that leadership plays in creating an environment that encourages creativity. However, creative directors need to find reward structures that intrinsically motivate their subordinates (Stuhlfaut, 2012) under two premises: "Creatives appeared to have a love-hate relationship with the boundaries imposed by strategic considerations on advertising". (Koslow, Sasser & Riordan, 2003, p.101) and a balance between control and freedom, fostering a creative culture and environment in the agency (Nixon, 2003).

To date, the existing literature on women in creative advertising has focused heavily on their absence from these positions, as well as the difficulties they face in accessing them and not abandoning them once they exercise them. Although this approach was justified by the need to understand and denounce the lack of women in the creative departments of advertising agencies, it did not contribute to giving visibility to the unique talent, strengths and abilities of the creative women who managed not only to reach, but to stay in the creative direction of advertising.

Thus, we decided to focus this research on the figure of the female creative director in advertising agencies, studying it for the first time from the perspective of leadership. Consequently, in order to understand how these women understand, perceive, exercise and project their leadership, we asked the following research questions regarding the Spanish context:

- RQ1: How do female creative leaders understand leadership?

- RQ2: Do female creative directors see themselves as leaders?

- RQ3: How do female creative directors execute leadership?

- RQ4: Do others see female creative directors as leaders?

METHODOLOGY

We used a qualitative methodology based on the in-depth interview. The methodological choice was due to the fact that qualitative methods, such as interviews, provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Silverman, 2000). The analysis of the interviews was based on the frequencies- based "thematic analysis" (Rossiter 2011). This methodology has already been used previously in qualitative research on advertising creativity (see Chong, 2006).

After the transcription of the interviews, we analyzed and determined thematic areas, in order to organize the data and translate them into the results section. Within each thematic area, we presented patterns and exemplified them with key texts, verbatim, of the different interviewees (tables 3, 4, 5 and 6). The most outstanding issues were accompanied by the number, in parenthesis, of interviewees who supported them. Finally, given that one of the women expressed her desire to remain anonymous, the participants were cited as numbered subjects (Subject 1, Subject 2 ... Subject 6).

SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

The search for the participants was done through Linkedin. The filtering responded to different criteria: their gender, that they had creative management positions and worked in mainstream agencies in Madrid or Barcelona (the two largest markets in Spain). Copywriters, art directors and other similar profiles were ruled out. The interviewees' positions ranged from creative director to general creative director.

Although the initial listing was of seven female creatives, the final selection was determined by their availability and willingness to collaborate in the research. Once a female creative director was located, we called the agency to ask for her participation in the investigation. It was possible to interview six of the seven female creatives.

The sample was limited to six interviews, for three reasons. First, the difficulty of obtaining women in positions of creative management made us focus on few subjects. Second, the research by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) on samples in studies based on in-depth interviews showed that with only six interviews, 94% of the main basic categories of information are obtained. These authors explain that in interviews with a certain degree of structure and with very homogeneous populations, it is not worth interviewing more subjects, because the new information does not compensate the effort of the researchers, since very few new categories are obtained. Third, we found previous studies related to advertising creativity that had already worked with small samples (see Hackely & Kover 2007; Kover 1995).

PROCEDURE

Through Linkedin, we found a total of seven creatives that fulfilled the established criteria for the sample. An attempt was made to contact them by sending a message through the profile of one of the investigators. In the five cases in which no response was received, we contacted the advertising agency by telephone to subsequently access the email of the female creative. After verifying that they had a creative management position, they were informed about the parameters of the study, the time that would require them to participate and its possible publication. Of the seven female creatives, one could not be finally interviewed due to scheduling problems.

One researcher conducted the six in-depth interviews during the months of April and May 2016. Interviews with the female creatives working in Barcelona (5) were conducted in person, while in the case of the creative working in Madrid, we used a Skype video call. Previously we prepared a script for the interviews, with the aim of ensuring their depth, consistency and relevance (table 1). The average duration of the interviews was approximately 50 minutes. All were recorded in Mp3 format and transcribed for their later frequency analysis.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The age of the selected creative directors ranged from 32 to 53 years old. All of them had a degree in Advertising and Public Relations. Their average experience in the advertising sector was around 18 years, having worked on average in about four advertising agencies. Their professional positions were creative direction (3), executive creative direction (2) and general creative direction (1), and they ran teams of between three and sixty people, highly masculinized (65% men). The advertising agencies where the female creative work are mainstream and had been awarded internationally in festivals of advertising creativity. Geographically, five of the agencies were in Barcelona and one in Madrid (table 2).

RQ1: How do female creative directors (CDs) see leadership?

-What is a leader for you?

-Name 5 characteristics of a leader

Give me 4 examples of people you consider leaders

-What do you think characterizes male and female leadership?

-Do you think women have what it takes to be leaders?

-Why?

-What do you think is the disposition of women to access leadership positions?

- What factors would you highlight as important for a woman to reach a leadership position?

- Specifically, what do you think a woman needs to become a creative director?

-And to stay once she arrives?

RQ2: Do female CDs see themselves as leaders?

-Do you see yourself as a leader?

-How does your gender and the stereotypes related to it affect your perception of yourself as being or not being a leader?

-What are your strengths as a leader?

-And your weaknesses?

-How would you define your leadership style?

RQ3: How do female CDs lead?

- What techniques do you use to encourage the creativity of your teams?

- Which methods do you use to motivate your creatives?

-Which advantages and difficulties to lead as do you find as a creative director for being a woman?

-With which strategies or techniques do you face them?

RQ4: Do others see female CDs as leaders?

- What feedback have you received on your leadership and from whom?

-How do the fact that you are a woman these affects feedbacks?

Closure

-How do you think that female leadership in general could be promoted?

- What advice would you give to the next generations of potential female creative directors?

Table 1. Interview script

Source: Own elaboration.

Name	Age	Studies	Experience in years	Previous agencies	Position	Gender of the team	
						M	F
Subject 1	53	Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.	30	6	ECD	5	2
Subject 2	32	Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.	11	5	CD	3	3
Subject 3	37	Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.	18	3	ECD	34	11
Subject 4	34	Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.	12	4	CD	1	2
Subject 5	36	Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.	14	2	GCD	36	24
Subject 6	46	Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.	22	3	CD	3	2
Average	39.7	-	17.8	3.8	-	13.6 (65%)	7.3 (35%)

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample
Note: 1) GCD (General creative director), ECD (Executive creative director) y CD (creative director); 2) M (male), F (female).

Source: own elaboration.

Theme	Verbatim
Leader definition	It is someone who knows where he or she goes (…) knows how to be followed and along the way makes great things, enjoying, making people enjoy. (Subject 3) He or she knows how to inspire so much and so well that others follow him or her without having to inflict pressure or give an order. (Subject 6)
Features of a leader	Empathy, you have to empathize with people, put yourself in their place and understand them (…) in the end in advertising (…) you must be a charismatic person, people must perceive in the leader a support (…). If you are a leader, you have to have certain judgment to be able to value with some bases. In the end you are making judgments about a job. (Subject 2) Obsession in the sense of being firm and knowing where you want to go and do not stop until you get it, and ambition. (Subject 3)
Examples of leaders	My grandmother and my mother. (…) Strong women who have led their family as nobody else. From my mother (…) I also learned how to manage and stimulate creative processes and teamwork. (Subject 4)

Table 3a. The understanding of leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

The results have been divided into four thematic blocks that answer the research questions. The frequency of responses (from 1 to 6) is indicated in parenthesis.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP

Regarding the understanding of leadership (tables 3a, 3b and 3c), the female creatives define the leader as the person who knows and marks the way, someone who guides others (6). They emphasize their ability to inspire (4) and directly or indirectly refer to their personal, professional and even moral exemplars as motivating factors to voluntarily follow the leader and enjoy doing so (6). In addition, among the five key characteristics of an ideal leader, they mention empathy and/or emotional intelligence (5), charisma (3), honesty (3), as well as other aligned qualities such as determination, mental clarity and ambition or focus and tenacity (2). They also name qualities similar to the previous ones, such as judgement (2), being an exemplary professional (2), coherence (1) and respect (1). Examples of more recurrent leaders include family members (5), mainly for their judgement, strength, diligence and influence on others.

Male leadership is defined as more authoritarian, hierarchical, direct and determined than the female (6). It is considered that men lead in part from the ego, as an act of reaffirmation, something to impose through the pressure or the exercise of authority (5). In contrast, creative women define female leadership as much more empathic (4), inclusive (2), sensitive (3), accessible (2), and intuitive (2). Women listen to the team and involve it, sharing power, building together and gaining their respect for the relationship they create with them by being understanding. It is because of this widespread perception of masculine leadership that the masculinization of women (3) emerged as a way of demonstrating their worth, reaffirming the legitimacy of their leadership and being taken seriously in the face of their own and others' doubts, particularly at the beginning of their leadership.

The interviewees reaffirm the potential of women to lead (6), highlighting their capacity for observation, organization and action (4) and their advantageous readiness to consider the needs and qualities of the group members in order to obtain the results sought by organization (3). They also show a preference for female leadership (3) and even the belief that it is superior to men's, because they are the most organized, adaptable and complex. Only one female creative argues that leadership capacity and qualities are gender-independent (1) and that good leadership is a balance between the qualities of women and men's leadership (1).

Creative directors suggest that women's willingness to access leadership, in terms of desire and ambition, is the same as that of men (5) and that it is a question of choosing priorities (6), considering all the resignations and personal sacrifices that professional leadership entails. In fact, they point out that ambition is a right and that women should not self-delude themselves by thinking or saying that they do not mind about not leading, because behind that statement there is a reality of suffering. As they go deeper into this aspect, they point out that professional leadership is much more complicated for women than for men, since, other than the fact that women have to demonstrate more effort and work to access these positions, exercising them means, as they are also leaders at home, a physical and mental overload that can be unbearable (4). And they state that access to leadership positions usually coincides with a stage explicitly identified as the great obstacle

for women in accessing and exercising leadership: motherhood (3).

Men do not live their paternity as a professional brake, either because they do not experience it physically or because they do not give it so much importance, so for them it is not a reason for resignations or that affects their professional projection. Women live their professional-family renunciations as a succession of emotional contradictions caused by not wanting to give up anything and feel that they have to do so (1). We detected several positions and factors that help to understand this reality, as well as to question its raison d'être. On the one hand, it was recognized that women self-inflict a veto on leadership, burdened with excessive weight caused by their way of thinking and managing motherhood (1). A new factor appeared, the inferiority of wages with respect to men, which reinforces the fact that women tend to give up progress in their careers, in favor of family and personal responsibility (1).

On the other hand, the lack of reconciliation between the professional and the personal/family caused by the endless hours of the advertising industry and the creative department in particular, was directly or indirectly mentioned by several interviewees as a great condition that makes motherhood a source of stress, guilt and exhaustion, making women feel that they should choose between one or another area of their life. Lastly, and apart from the conflicts between personal or family life and the professional life, it was pointed out that most of the leaders are men and surround themselves with other men as a further brake on the professional advancement of women (1).

When defining which factors make a woman reach a position of leadership, the approaches of the answers are diverse. Some focus on more pragmatic aspects, such as judgment and its transmission (1) or more strategic, such as networking (1). On the other hand, there are also inspirational factors related to the transformative power of one's own convictions, good attitude and motivation in gaining leadership (3). At the perspective level, two different approaches appeared, one negative and one positive. The first vision focused on the criticism of gender inequality, on the assumption of women's renunciations or on the elimination of prejudices and barriers to the rise of women. The second vision focused on the importance of self-support and the environment to achieve leadership positions as a woman.

Theme	Verbatim
Male and female leadership	Men have too much ego, it is "me, me, me" (...) the woman takes the leadership more as a service ... [Subject 1] If he hits the table nobody is amazed; on the other hand, if a woman does it, it is more strange (...) it seems that the man is more authoritarian than the woman and it seems that to be heeded she has to shout and masculinize. (...) empathy belongs more to the feminine gender (...) is much more sensitive ... men do not come so naturally. [Subject 3]
The ability of female leadership	Women's leadership is more about management, better organization of time and, in that sense, being a better leader (...). The male leader, on the other hand, is more despot. [Subject 3] The ability to organize, act and generate results, to face a situation, of adaptability, of suffering (...) women are more prepared to face many more situations than men, in that sense they have more capacity for leadership. [Subject 6]
Female disposition towards access to leadership	It is not that women are willing or not to gain leadership positions, nor is it a matter of having or not having enough ambition. It is not a matter of fear of leadership. (...) it is a question of saying "I do not know if it compensates me". (...) the hours are a very strong handicap. [Subject 2] Self-deception is not good either. "No, no, I left because I do not care" (...) you left because you could not bear it anymore (...) Gender is a huge overexertion that takes away much of your personal life, and then I think many women leave, they surrender. [Subject 5] In a couple who wants to have children, what happens is that usually the one who earns the most is him and then the woman says "well, then, he works ... I'll take care of the child and that's how I compensate." [Subject 6]

Table 3b. The understanding of leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

As for the factors necessary to become creative directors, the interviewees highlighted some common aspects to gain access to leadership: talent, sensitivity, determination, ambition, motivation, good attitude and emotional intelligence. They also mentioned factors such as intuition, management of emotions and teams, mastery of the profession or the environment and the desire to be a leader. Finally, they referred to external factors that influence the arrival to leadership positions (3), such as the pressure to which women are subjected and their origin (self-inflicted or from superiors) or strategies to achieve promotion, such as focusing on passion for ideas and ambition to generate the best ones, as well as work in places where one can ascend. Finally, they emphasized the importance of keeping alive the curiosity and the illusion for ideas, the knowledge and the process of creation (2).

When defining what makes a female creative director remain in leadership, they identified personal factors, such as the strengths that led to that position or factors related to the environment. They highlighted the importance of working in a flexible and high-quality system or environment where trust, respect and conciliation reigned, and where people feel valued and comforted, while at the same time having a life beyond work (5). In fact, environmental factors seem to have a great impact on people and on the importance of more personal aspects –such as ambition, tenacity, illusion and trust– for female creative directors to remain in leadership positions. Apart from the above mentioned systemic and personal factors, the need for help at home was pointed out as a factor allowing not to abandon leadership (1).

SELF-PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP

As for the self-perception of leadership (table 4), the interviewees recognized that they saw themselves as leaders (5). The most forceful statements referred to past experiences or aspects that had led them to consider themselves as such (2), and one of them explained that she had always been a leader throughout her life because of her "drive" and "passion". Others were less emphatic, claiming that they had to judge others, not themselves, or using words like "I guess"

Theme	Verbatim
Being a woman and becoming a leader	Know how to handle the "politics" that surrounds everything (...) know how to relate and get along with the right people. [Subject 4] It is about ourselves, of believing more, of striving for it and of really feeling that we have greater support behind. When a woman comes to a position of leadership, often it is because she was convinced of something, because she has done a good job and because she has not put obstacles in order not to arrive. [Subject 6]
Being a woman and becoming a creative director	Ability to manage stress, ability to manage teams, and knowing how to operate within an eminently masculine world. [Subject 4] Create the best book possible (...) and go asking yourself (...) if you see yourself in a managerial position (...) it is not the same to be a creative and a creative director. [Subject 5] It takes a special sensitivity and lots of diplomacy, because you have to navigate a lot between very different personalities and marketing subjects. [Subject 6]
Staying as a woman in the creative direction	Staying in leadership has more to do with the flexibility and quality of what surrounds you at work than with internal factors or personal characteristics. [Subject 2] If the structure respects you, knows your contribution of value, you have been sometime in it, it is easier to say "hello how are you, I am a person, I have life" and that the structure accepts and allows it. [Subject 5] To have help at home, because if you pretend to do everything yourself, you die, for sure. [Subject 3]

Table 3c. The understanding of leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

and "more or less" (3). Only one said that she saw the term 'leader' as 'too big for her' or at least 'associate it with other people'. We also analyzed the process since being named creative director, the doubts about being able to assume the function, and the beginnings in which the leading was as a man –because it was what was known– until the time when they found a way to lead in a feminine style (1).

Gender stereotypes associated with women influence whether they are seen (3) or not as leaders (3). The first group of creatives blamed the doubts generated by the lack of references (1), gender-based discredit (1) and negative self-perception of femininity by having a team of men (1) as the causes of not perceiving themselves as leaders. In denying the influence of gender stereotypes, they recognized that when a woman is very observant and, therefore, aware of her gender and the attention she draws for being a woman, she tends to project that that reality matters and this makes others care about that too (1).

Among the strengths they possessed as leaders were qualities such as empathy (the most outstanding quality), tenacity, direction, ambition, inclusion and accompaniment of team members, aspects with which they had previously defined the ideal leader. They even took the empathy self-assessment further, speaking of

"maternal leadership" (2), which protects, cares and understands teams, making them feel good.

On the other hand, they highlighted the importance of building a good environment and of seeing beyond talent when building teams (1), and the value of being optimistic, constructive and motivating with their teams (3). As for their weaknesses as leaders, female creatives made very different contributions: from being too hard on themselves or not being enough, to wish for more patience, talent or ambition. Finally, we should point out that the strengths and weaknesses of leadership tend to be the same as two sides of a coin, a clear example of which is mature age (1): experience versus freshness.

When defining their own style of leadership, the female creative agreed to characterize it or to insinuate it as democratic, collaborative and based on an organic work system (5). Other terms used to define their leadership were "inspirational" and "transformational" (1). In general, aspects such as motivating and inspiring the team, sharing power with it in less hierarchical and more inclusive structures, and creating climates of trust and freedom where innovation brings the team to its common goal appeared repeatedly. On the other hand, among those who had identified their leadership as "democratic", some clarified that it was

Theme	Verbatim
Leadership awareness	Gradually I found my style, focusing on the team, making things turn out well, worked well. It was when I forgot whether or not I would be a good leader, when I focused on being a real leader. (Subject 2) The truth is, no. It is a word that I associate with other types of people (...)leader is a bit big. (Subject 4)
Gender stereotypes and leadership perception	It affects the fact that there are no referents, it is very difficult to see leaders, but even more to find women leaders. This makes it very difficult for you to see yourself as a leader (...) you ask yourself many times "will I be able?" (Subject 2) I see it in the eyes of others (...) they are surprised that I am not a guy with a beard and snickers, that I am a woman, the femininity as a concept. (Subject 5)
Strengths and weaknesses of female creative directors as leaders	I'm a mom, I like to take care of people. (Subject 1) To be clear to where we have to arrive, what kind of idea we have to have so it will triumph (...) help the people in my position to achieve the goals set ... (Subject 3) The atmosphere is super important. People are also contagious, both of positive and negative structures. (Subject 5) I am very self-demanding (...) I can become hard on myself. (Subject 2) Patience to better manage stress and conflict situations. (Subject 4) The fact of not being more ambitious or not have been it in certain determined moments. (Subject 6)
Female CD leadership style	The structure is hierarchical but, in my day to day, I prefer to work in a more organic way, collaborating on an equal basis with all the members of the team. (Subject 4) My style is democratic but to a certain extent, because I am in favor of listening to everyone, but you also have to know how long to do it and make the final decision. (Subject 5)

Table 4. Self-perception of leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

important to remember and make them understand that, despite listening to everyone and taking them into account, they were the ones making the final decision, something that it was not always possible to make them understand (2).

LEADERSHIP EXECUTION

Regarding the execution of leadership (table 5), the respondents stressed the importance of fostering a curious spirit outside the agency (3), encouraging creativity in the teams, asking their members to go to the movies, to exhibitions, events, that they nourished and absorbed ideas and stimuli from other fields that were not advertising. Another way to encourage and guide creativity was to share references of good campaigns, activities or interesting data with the team (3). They also talked about the technique of starting the creative process, proposing some first concepts to the teams (2), but also recognized techniques such as brainstorming; some introduced others, such as maps of ideas, games, formations, group dynamics and team meeting in concentration environments (3).

When defining which measures drive the motivation of their teams, they highlighted the transformative power of recognizing the well-done work of the team or of a member and rewarding them, so that they feel appreciated; for example, by taking them to advertising festivals (2). On the other hand, several interviewees referred to the need to care for people, their spirit and their energy, to create good team environments where there are no barriers between members or for creative thinking. Several participants pointed to different ways of showing team members that were taken into consideration, such as reconciliation, listening and empowerment through trust and joint development, through training and activities; there were also references to their inclusion in different projects and accounts.

Half of the creative directors stated that they did not find special advantages or difficulties in leading because they were women (3). The creatives argued that the obstacles to leadership depend on how the leader earns the respect of her team, while making clear what the position of each one is (1). Among those who have found difficulties in leading (3), the lack of

credibility was mentioned as a difficulty imposed on their leadership merely because they were women (2). One of the interviewees pointed to sensitivity as a characteristic that sometimes played against them with the teams, rendering her overprotective, too flexible or less demanding (1). Finally, it was pointed out that the focus of the difficulties to lead should be placed on the obstacles to leadership, while another acknowledged that she never had found advantages for being a woman, thanks to the current fashion of talking about *empowered women* she received much more attention from the industry and the media (1).

The creative directors who did perceive differences in the treatment they received for being women, stated that they faced them in different ways. As far as discrimination is concerned, they proposed to ignore them, confront them, work hard to discredit them or detract from them. On the other hand, they pointed out that although sensitivity or maternalism could sometimes be a difficulty to lead, they could also be a facilitating tactic to manage the egos of the creatives, especially when giving them feedback (1).

THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP

When asked about the external leadership's evaluation (table 6), only one of the six interviewees stated that she had obtained an explicit assessment of her leadership by her team, which was positive. One justification for this was that normally the subordinates do not usually tell their leaders how they do it (2). However, it was found that the internal anonymous evaluations of the company or the superiors had provided very positive feedback to the creative directors (5). On the other hand, it was pointed out that the best feedback from their leadership came from their teams, that, through gestures, details or facts, instead of words, had demonstrated their well-being, complicity and development over time (3). None of those interviewed felt that these feedbacks had been conditioned by the fact that they were women. However, it is worth mentioning the note about the existence of advantages when dealing with clients only for being a woman (1) and that when women learn to lead in feminine –and not as men–, she and others realize her potential (1).

Theme	Verbatim
Empowering creativity	I ask my team to be very curious, that they are interested in ideas, and ideas beyond advertising. […] I want them to read, to go, to absorb, to be nourished by everything. (Subject 2) Brainstormings, mixing a lot of people in projects where there is a lot at stake, instead of leaving it to two. I do sessions, I take a group of big people and we go outside … (Subject 5)
Motivation of teams	For me, motivating is that you go home at 7:00 p.m. (Subject 1) When you know someone has worked a lot and done it well, tell him. It costs nothing to do so and it's these little things that make people happy, the ones that create a team, good environments. (Subject 2) If someone is working on it and is doing a good job and a very good project arrives, he is given it and told why (Subject 5)
Advantages and difficulties for being a woman	Difficulties, what I said, sometimes I lack bad temper, I'm a little like a mom, and sometimes mothering is counterproductive. (Subject 3) The biggest difficulty is that there are many people who are still prejudiced. For example, there are certain customers accustomed to dealing with guys with beards and snickers, who for being a woman you have to do extra work with them … (Subject 5)
Differences for being a woman	I think that by generating few expectations at the beginning, then it is much easier to surprise them with a good job. (Subject 4) When I am treated differently because I am a woman, if I can, I act as if do not realize, and if I think the situation is too much, I face it. (Subject 5)

Table 5. Leadership execution

Source: Own elaboration.

Theme	Verbatim
External evaluation of leadership	[About her creative team] They not only value, and a lot, my way of thinking, they also value me as a person. [Subject 4] My bosses value a lot how I manage my team, because it is a team that is compensated, happy, they see that they listen to me and I do not have rebellions. [Subject 3] I have found more positive situations because of being a woman than negative. For example, dialogue is easier with advertisers if you are a woman (…) it creates a feeling of teamwork with which you get involved and they involve you, creating a team of trust. [Subject 6] After a while, when you manage to lead in feminine, in an authentic way, true to what you are and not to what you are accustomed to see in society or in the advertising industry, you can get anything. And the others see it. [Subject 2]

Table 6. The external evaluation of leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION

This research has dealt with the figure of the female creative director of advertising in mainstream agencies in Spain from the perspective of leadership. Unlike previous studies, which focused on their absence in the agencies' creative departments and their difficulties in accessing or not abandoning them (see Mallia, 2009; Windels et al., 2010), this research focuses on their presence as leaders. Through the frequency analysis of six in-depth interviews with female creative directors, we have shown how they understand, perceive and execute their leadership, as well as their perception of how their employees value it.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP

Female creative directors understand the leader as someone exemplary, capable of guiding and inspiring others in such a way that they want to follow him or her and enjoy doing so. This vision of the leader implicitly has the influence and motivation that he or she is capable of exerting this on the team (House et al., 2002; Yuki & Van Fleet, 1992).

Male leadership is seen as authoritarian, hierarchical, directive, determined and exercised from the ego, and reaffirmed by pressure, in line with the definition of management rather than leadership (Yuki, 2002). In addition, it fits in with the authoritarian leadership style defined by Bass (1990) and Dunker (2002), and contradicts one of the requirements of good creative leadership. On the other hand, female leadership is described as empathic, inclusive, sensitive, accessible and intuitive, emphasizing active listening, sharing power and gaining respect for the team not through pressure or hierarchies, but through making the team feel good and involved. These aspects identify the style of female leadership as democratic (Bass, 1990; Dunker, 2002), oriented to people (Bass, 1990).

The female creative directors recognize historical reasons in the perception of the leadership as masculine (Godoy & Mladinic, 2009), in a supposed feminine work inferiority (Clancy, 2007) and in a questioning of the competition of women (Collinson, Knights & Collinson, 1990; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand & Magley, 1997; Kanter, 1977; Martin, 2007). Male leadership is seen in and by the absence of female leaders in which to reflect (see Grow et al., 2012) and why because many of them are masculinized (Coronel Llamas, 1996) as part of a practical process, although not true to themselves, to fit with the ideal leader features.

All interviewees strongly believed in the potential of women's leadership and emphasized that because they are women, they are better leaders than men (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1995), as their leadership is more effective (Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). They see leadership as a service to others, something that characterizes effective leadership (Blanchard, 2007).

They also stated that women have the same disposition as men to gain access to leadership in terms of ambition and career aspirations, but that at a point in their career –often coinciding with motherhood– they choose other priorities (Grow et al., 2012). Among other factors that inhibit the access of female creatives to leadership, they mentioned the inferiority of salary

and the inability to reconcile personal/family life and career, due to the endless hours of the industry (Grow et al., 2012).

To be and remain as creatives directors, women emphasized several qualities related to emotional aspects (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Naylor, 1999; Yuki & Tracey, 1992): talent, sensitivity, determination, ambition, motivation, good attitude, and emotional intelligence. Other factors that did not appear in the literature, but which the interviewees commented on, were maintaining the illusion and curiosity about ideas and knowledge, the importance of the pressure to which they are subjected and its origin (self-inflicted or from superiors), and working in places where it is possible to ascend.

Respondents said that to remain a leader, a female creative director must retain her strengths –ambition, tenacity, enthusiasm and confidence– but above all to be able to work in a quality environment –conciliatory, flexible, trustworthy and respectful. This last aspect confirms that women leave the creative departments of advertising to avoid environments that harm them (Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012). Finally, they added the fact that support was needed at home, since if their partners did not support them to reconcile both sides of their lives, they would also be fomenting the stereotype of female inferiority (Clancy, 2007) and hindering their promotion to leadership (Escandón & Arias, 2011).

SELF-PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP

Female creative directors are aware of their leadership, although some believe that their leadership should be judged by "others" (Lord & Maher, 1991). They indicated that they started by applying male methods (Coronel Llamas, 1996), until they gradually found their own style.

Female creative directors are also aware of the effect that gender stereotypes have on their self-perception as leaders: they highlighted the lack of referents (Roca & Pueyo, 2011); they also mentioned their self-perception of femininity as something negative in their work, a fact caused by the desirability of stereotypical masculine features (Miner, 1993); and the incongruity they perceive between playing the role of the leader and their gender (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Finally, they referred to the discredit that implied to have assigned only "feminine" accounts, a factor of feminine abandonment of the creative departments, according to Grow, Roca and

Broyles (2012). In addition, they provided an interesting aspect that had not appeared in the literature: how the awareness of gender and the stereotypes associated with it projected and worsened discrimination, and how to stop giving them importance as women could take them away completely for the whole society.

Their strengths as female creative leaders coincide in part with those of the transformational, democratic and creative leader: empathy, tenacity, direction, ambition, and the inclusion and accompaniment of the team members. Some defined their leadership as motherly. This adjective had not appeared as descriptive of female leadership in literature, but is consistent with others, such as empathy, mentoring, empowerment, coaching, or individualized treatment. On the other hand, they commented on the ability to create good environments through optimism (Andrews & Farris, 1967; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

As for their weaknesses, they named being too hard on themselves or not being it enough and wishing to have more patience, talent or ambition, none of these aspects corresponding to those that make a leader bad or ineffective (Amabile et al., 2004; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

LEADERSHIP EXECUTION

Female creative directors encourage creativity through intellectual stimulation, one of the three main components of transformational leadership (Emery & Barker, 2007): they invite their teams to absorb non-advertising stimuli, teach them referrals, use creative techniques, attend trainings and organize exits to concentration environments. These activities also build better teams and good environments, something very important to lead (Amabile, 1997, 1988; Ford, 1996; Woodman et al., 1993), especially for creatives (Stuhlfaut, 2012). They also motivate their teams by recognizing their work, caring for them, encouraging them, listening to them, allowing for reconciliation and sharing responsibilities. Thus, they appear as transformational leaders (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 1993) and show their preference for innovation and flexibility, which defines them as leaders, not managers (Yuki, 2002).

The greatest difficulty female creatives found was access to the creative management position (Jordan, 2009; Klein, 2000; Mallia, 2009; Nixon, 2003). Once there, they mention the lack of credibility (Collinson

et al., 1990) as the greatest difficulty. In addition, they add being too sensitive with the teams, in the sense of being overprotective or flexible and less demanding, something that did not appear in the literature.

As for the advantages to lead as a woman, they point out that they are now receiving more attention from the industry and the media, due to the current "fashion" of talking about female *empowerment*, something that did not appear in the studies reviewed. On the other hand, they also noted being sensitive and maternal as an advantage in managing creative egos and giving feedback (Andrews & Farris, 1967; Mumford et al., 2002; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Finally, they pointed out a greater easiness to deal with the client as female creative director, something that contrasts with the claim that female creative directors feel marginalized in customer presentations (Grow et al., 2012).

In the face of discrimination, women said they face them by ignoring them, confronting them, working to discredit them or rest them importance. All these ways are new ways of dealing with this reality, alternative ways to feminize themselves to make men feel comfortable or masculinize to fit socially in the role of the stereotypically masculine leader proposed by literature.

THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP

The interviewees indicated that their superiors value their effectiveness and their way of managing people, which is in line with the high effectiveness of women's leadership (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Lowe et al., 996; Rosener, 1995). In the second place, their subordinates value them. They feel well-being and complicity with them because of their treatment and how they allow them to develop, aspects that characterize not only effective leadership, but also good creative leadership, based on creating environments in which intelligent people can thrive (Goffee & Jones, 2007). On the other hand, the aspects of support, training, empowerment and recognition that enable this link and feedback appear in the literature as defining the transformational leader (Gaertner, 2000; Villalba Moreno, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

This study gives visibility to female creative directors of the Spanish advertising industry, discovering from a novel, positive and constructive approach what is their secret to be the exception to the norm: to be in the leadership. This approach, unlike the usual study of female creative advertising directors, understands them as leaders, which brings value and novelty to the fields of management study and advertising creativity, while promoting more open and constructive views towards these professionals.

The investigation must be considered exploratory. For this reason, there are some limitations associated with focusing solely on mainstream agencies, female creative directors in Spain, and not having interviewed their subordinates. In addition, a theoretical relationship between feminism and leadership was not developed, but the text was limited to highlighting the inequalities between men and women in the field of advertising creativity. In the future, other lines of research could be conducted, if the sample of research is expanded to more female creatives, for example, of non-mainstream agencies; if the reality of other countries is studied to see sociocultural differences; and if men creatives are interviewed to compare genders.

However, this study unites voices and experiences that convey the unique value of women's creative leadership and the urgent need to understand, appreciate and develop it, demonstrating their potential not only to create advertising campaigns, but also to inspire, motivate and lead creative teams towards their maximum potential.

In addition, this study has an evident social component, as it seeks to open paths and show references of creative female leadership to the following generations of women on creative advertising, facilitating access to these positions by normalizing and balancing the gender balance of an industry that should have never forgotten about half of the population.

At a more global level, this research suggests that women are effective, creative, transformational and democratic leaders, characteristics that define the ideal leader of the 21st century. And it is looking to the future when we realize that it is everyone's responsibility to multiply, empower and visibilize all those current and potential female leaders capable of building a better world and advertising.

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