Higher Education Studies; Vol. 3, No. 4; 2013
ISSN 1925-4741 E-ISSN 1925-475X
Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

The Perspective of Women Managing Research Teams in Social Sciences

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Received: April 29, 2013 Accepted: June 5, 2013 Online Published: July 18, 2013

doi:10.5539/hes.v3n4p15 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/hes.v3n4p15

Abstract

This article presents a research study that focuses on how women manage research teams. More specifically, the study aims to ascertain the perception of female researchers who are leaders of research groups in social sciences with regard to the formation, operation and management of their research teams. Fifteen interviews were carried out, eight at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and seven at the Universidad de Barcelona, representing one quarter of women responsible for research teams in the field of social sciences. Findings suggest that female researchers seek to build highly cohesive teams that engender a good working atmosphere and good interpersonal relationships, with the capacity to generate high academic and scientific performance closely linked to other international groups.

Keywords: gender, women, research teams, university

1. University Research in Social Sciences

Analysing university research involves considering a set of variables, which include research policies, structures, individual or group character, equal treatment of several distinct areas of knowledge, funding, evaluation of research activity, etc.

With regard to the variable relating to structure, Rey, Martín and Sebastián (2008) define different approaches to conducting research at universities. Through their analysis of sociability in research and its productivity, they identify three levels of organisation: *macro*, which is research conducted by public and private institutions, i.e., more or less specialised entities which supply their own regulations and organisational framework to support research (for example, universities); a *meso* level, such as that found, for example, at institutes and research centres; and a *micro* level, where we find research teams. Our focus is on the last of these, although we acknowledge that micro-level research is also influenced by activity at the meso and macro levels.

As a reference for our analysis, it is important to highlight what are called consolidated research teams (SGR), which are reference points for the system of scientific organisation in Catalonia. These groups facilitate collective and interdisciplinary scientific work, as well as the integration of junior researchers, the acquisition and optimised use of funds, etc. Being part of a highly productive group – for example in which the number of authors working on papers is often quite high – increases the chance of receiving subsequent citations. Fewer and fewer researchers are tending to go into individualised lines of study, while at the same time there is a growing trend towards developing research within research teams.

Turning now to the variable relating to the individual, it is important to emphasise that research is one of the core tasks expected of academic staff at universities. This task demands a specific set of skills – which we do not intend to list exhaustively here – for which university teachers undergo specific training, terminating with a doctorate (PhD).

With regard to the variable relating to the areas of knowledge, Del Pozo (2010) and Alemany (1995) contend that epistemologically there is no point in making a contentious distinction between scientific-technological and socio-humanistic cultures. Although there is common agreement on the purpose of science, there are features that enable us to differentiate between the two groups of disciplines. The elements of rationality used in the natural sciences according to Lepori and Kyvik (2012) are not adequate for carrying out research in social sciences. According to Subirats (2010), the elements of rationality, in the strict sense of the term as used in the natural

sciences, are inadequate when applied to social sciences. Research in social sciences requires analysis of experience and context, as well as a capacity for judgement of the subject matter to be analysed. From their point of view, social sciences are interested in the particular and not only in general aspects. Good research in the field of social sciences must be able to explain not only what is happening, but also the social and political implications and the resulting level of consensus or conflict. The theory emerging from this knowledge is unlikely to be ranked and valued at the same level as findings generated in the field of natural sciences. Botella (2010) cautioned that, as well as recognising the unique aspects of social sciences, researchers must also pursue a universal ideal, i.e., must present their results to the whole scientific community, regardless of whether or not they share the same discipline.

Social sciences are not disciplines in which research can be carried out in an entirely homogenous manner. Social sciences embrace a large number of widely differentiated disciplines, with very distinctive features and variable dimensions relating to research activity. We consider the following to be social science disciplines: law, economics, geography, education, sociology.

From an organisational research perspective, however, there are indeed certain practices that deserve to be examined or taken into account when analysing specific research in social sciences. Is there an increased trend towards individual or small group research in social sciences? What areas are being researched? What is the social sciences laboratory? How high are the budgets involved?

Panchón (2010, p. 89) points out the following problematic aspects involved in social science research:

- The ambiguous boundaries between social sciences and the humanities and deciding which fields belong to one or the other;

- The particular style of research in social sciences resulting from the complexity of social and educational phenomena;

- The ideological debate that accompanies this research, owing to the importance of studying a social phenomenon from different perspectives;

- The need to review existing appraisal criteria for evaluating research activity and its impact.

The variable of funding and evaluation of research activities has been the subject of concern for at least a decade, not only among the research community itself, but also among the managing bodies, universities and quality assurance agencies; aspect highlighted by a great number of scientific seminars and meetings organised with this propose AGAUR (2006, 2008). Whereas, in other fields of experimental and technological sciences, it has been possible and relatively straightforward to establish evaluation and dissemination criteria for conducted research and its corresponding scientific outcomes, in the field of humanities and social sciences it has been more difficult to find areas of consensus for evaluating research activity. One view widely held among experts in the evaluation of social sciences was that evaluation policies should take into account the opportunity context for completion of the research (AGAUR, 2008). Existing funding policies and integration into powerful research groups are aspects that may affect opportunities for developing research.

Funding for social sciences research must highlight the capacity for such research to address and help overcome current and future social problems. But how should social sciences research be funded? This problem is even greater than in other disciplines, if that is possible, owing to the lack of interest shown by companies in funding such projects. This raises the debate as to whether social sciences research should be financed from public or private funds.

Performance indicators for academic staff (Bruneau & Savage, 2002; Morley, 2003) include factors such as the number of publications or the size of the research budget, and findings represent a major indicator for promotion at higher professional levels or the procurement of other professional "benefits". A clear example of this is the high degree of appreciation for articles published in magazines from the JCR, which is the most prestigious indicator of all fields of knowledge.

2. Conditions Affecting Women in University Research

The participation of women in university research is not exempt from bias resulting from a number of social stereotypes and characteristics typical of university culture itself. First of all, there is a deeply rooted stereotype between masculinity and sciences that should be highlighted. Worldwide academia has traditionally been seen as masculine, patriarchal and elitist (Asmar, 1999; Pole, et al., 1997), although some progress has been made in recent years (Amancio, 2005; Asmar, 1999). For instance, Bagilhole (2008) states that universities are male "bastions" and discrimination still exists in the form of research lobbies.

The literature also illustrates that, despite the progress achieved with regard to the number of women participating in higher education, gender differences in terms of the roles they have at universities still exist (Sagaria & Agans, 2006; Smeby & Try, 2005). Such differentiation is similarly reflected in the power structures, since women are clearly in the minority at university management level and in the power centres of decision-making. As Bagilhole & White (2007) state, the upper levels of university hierarchy are still dominated by males.

Several studies have attempted to determine why there are such gender differences in academic roles, which result in inequality and present barriers or obstacles throughout a female teacher's professional career. Among these obstacles is a very recurrent one: the differentiation of roles according to gender. Bagilhole & White (2003) found that women are more engaged in teaching, whereas men are more devoted to research. As a result, women produce fewer publications and therefore acquire less funding to invest in their research field (Soliman & Soliman, 1997). This situation has led to a feeling of unease in many cases, causing women to question the confidence they have in their own capacities and making it difficult for them to access academic networks (Britton, 1999; Dean, Johnson, Jones & Lengkeek, 1996) and thus to collaborate with other work teams (Lafferty & Fleming, 2000). Finally, we wish to highlight the difficulties that exist in reconciling the demands of a research career and of managing research teams with those of a personal and family life, an aspect dealt with in depth by Preobert (2005).

Studies examining the success factors in academic careers linked to research have focused in particular on analysing which conditions are met in order to overcome the aforementioned barriers. It is important to note that there is less research focused on success factors than devoted to obstacles in the academic careers of female university teachers.

Dever & Morrison (2009) quoting Ginther (2003) point out that family status: "have children" affects in a negative manner on the women scientific production. By the other hand family status: "married" or "unmarried" has a positive influence on the women scientific production.

By their part, Dever & Morrison (2009), quoting Poole & Langan-Fox, (1997) stated that women researchers prefer small work groups because their positive influence on good work climate and productivity.

3. Method

The present study focuses on the analysis of women who lead research teams in the area of social sciences at Catalan universities. Catalonia is one of the 20 autonomous regions of Spain established by the democratic constitution of 1978. Since the 1980s, the state has undergone a process of increasing decentralisation, devolving power to the various autonomous communities in ways which, despite similarities, also show up significant differences. With a population of seven million, Catalonia is a region with a long history, a language of its own and distinct traditions, many of which date back to the medieval period. Today, it enjoys very wide powers in many areas of administration, including its universities. In practice, this means that, although certain general aspects come under state control, the specific regulations and administrative management of Catalan universities are the responsibility of the regional government, in this case the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Autonomous Government).

More specifically, the study seeks to 'determine the perception of female researchers who are leaders of research groups in social sciences' with regard to the formation, operation and management of research teams. For this purpose, we applied a qualitative methodology within the interpretive paradigm, which is based on understanding social meanings developed by people with respect to context, themes and other persons (Denzin y Lincoln, 2005). Data was collected using semi-structured interviews.

The sample was drawn from female managers of research teams at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB) and the Universidad de Barcelona (UB), since these institutions together cover the full range of social science study courses in Catalonia. Research teams were selected within these institutions in the fields of education, sociology, political sciences, law, economics and business sciences. In addition to being led by female researchers, the selected teams (Table 1) were required to have formal accreditation as a "consolidated research group" (SGR), since this is the most prestigious team form in the context of public administration.

Table 1. SGR research groups

	Social science groups	Female-led groups	Male-led groups
UAB	69	24	45
UB	89	36	53
Total	***158***	***60***	***98***

Description: Research groups in social sciences by university and gender

The situation of female researchers in social sciences at both universities is enlightening, since, out of a total of 158 current competitive research groups in social sciences in Catalonia, only 60 (i.e., 38%) are led by women. We can observe that the disciplines in which research teams have a majority of women in leading roles are ranked as follows: economics (20 female managers), education (15 female managers), law (12 female managers), psychology (7 female managers) and geography (6 female managers).

Fifteen interviews were carried out, eight at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and seven at the Universidad de Barcelona. The interviewees represent one quarter of the total of female research leaders in all fields of social sciences. Since the focus of the study is to highlight the conditions in which female researchers manage research groups, we did not try to draw parallels based on gender or disciplines.

The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes, during which interviewees were asked about the following dimensions:

Table 2. Dimensions and indicators

	DIMENSIONS	INDICATORS
I.	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	personal qualities, keys to success, family support
II.	SYSTEM OF RELATIONSHIPS	discussions with colleagues, cooperation with foreign centres, mentor colleague, collegial atmosphere, good personal relations
III.	TRAINING LEADERSHIP	educational role, self-training
IV.	INTERNAL MANAGEMENT OF THE GROUP	demand, team management, delegation, intern rules, interdisciplinary approach, intern consistency, tasks taken up
V.	STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS?	research topics, structural support, funding sources, competitive tender processes, women's networks, evaluation

Description: All data was processed and analysed using a coding system based on MAXQDA software. The coding was based on the dimensions and indicators

4. Results

The results are presented in groups according to the indicators defined by each of the five dimensions.

4.1 Individual Factors

A study of the data collected from the interviews shows that certain personal attributes or features can be considered key factors for scientific production. With regard to personal attributes, all interviewees acknowledge the relevance of "a love of knowledge", a feeling that has accompanied them throughout their career:

> *"I've always been very inquisitive. I always wanted to know more, always knew that I know little and I*

still want to know more. From very early on, I knew that I wanted to do research. Therefore, when the call for applications was announced, I talked to a male colleague, at that time my colleague at the university, and we submitted the project together. (A2)

They also point out that research has been an essential factor in their academic development and consider it to have played a key role in their professional success:

"Research has always given me the greatest satisfaction; it is something that I enjoy. In history, we work with archives and this is what I like – writing, publishing and researching. I have always seen research as being linked to my work, to my professional career – for me it is the basis of what we do." (A4)

A third factor highlighted in most of the interviews is the relevance of support and motivation provided by the family core, in particular by the parents. This factor achieves great prominence and it is considered a clear disadvantage if certain families do not provide more support to daughters who excel in academic activities. Another factor involves the personal attributes and characteristics that facilitate research work. Three characteristics stand out in particular as having a high saturation index: perseverance, insistence and tenacity. Most of the women interviewed had personal mottos or quotations highlighting one or more of these attributes.

"Perseverance is a crucial value – and when I say perseverance I mean acceptance of the idea that we should never be "discouraged by failure": I might fail once, twice, three or even four times, but the fifth attempt will be successful." (E3)

4.2 System of Relationships

Another significant factor is that research is considered a process that is founded on discussion with colleagues, as well as on self-reflection and criticism, since such an approach facilitates lifelong learning from professional practice:

"In terms of personal qualities, I don't think that I have any special qualities. Those that I have, if any, I have acquired from practice. As a young woman, I was very inflexible. Today, I am more flexible, it is something I have learned and I think this is important for coordinating groups and teams – listening, delegating, respecting the opinions of others and being committed to the dissemination of information." (E1)

All the Women academic interviewed ranked access to lines of work and teams from foreign institutions as a crucial factor for their performance in research. In general, stays at colleges abroad have enabled them to form contact networks and open their minds to new approaches.

"It is very important to go abroad. International visits are vital for opening up fields of research and contacts and consequently for making progress." (E3)

The last prominent factor is the importance of having an older colleague with a lengthier academic career who is able to guide female researchers and act as a mentor and coach; surprisingly, however, most interviewees preferred having male mentors:

"It is essential to have an institutionalised pattern and a key person who can show you the way when you are young, someone who can tell you this is the path to take, because that is the way I followed and the way I had success. It is the way that academia recognises, so this is the right way". At the university, as everywhere else, it is crucial to have a role model who does things the right way. I had a person who played this role for me, now it is my turn to play this role within the group." (E3)

The women interviewed agreed on the importance they attach to their research teams. These are considered as one of the main priorities, and therefore they devote a large part of their time to selecting its members, creating a good working atmosphere and modelling the team as a learning space.

"The group brings a new dimension, because [···] working with a lot of people, some of them extremely capable, makes many things turn out differently, and enables you to see things from perspectives you otherwise wouldn't consider or would approach in a different way. For me, meetings with my group are essential." (E4)

New candidates must have both an academic and a personal affinity. According to the respondents, it is essential to have a good relationship with junior researchers, one based on respect and mutual trust, since a good working atmosphere is crucial for research to succeed.

"We try to do things that people like, so they work with enthusiasm. There are factors which match values I appreciate: people who identify with our faculty or institution, who appreciate friendship and solidarity,

who have a sense of humour, and at the same time enjoy the work." (E2)

4.3 Training Leadership

Research teams should not lose sight of the learning dimension, particularly with regard to junior researchers. The women questioned considered learning a facilitator for scientific production. In addition, they acknowledged a concern for capacity building among all team members, but in particular for those at the pre-doctorate stage. Female researchers in social sciences consider the tutoring of doctoral theses and coaching during the early years of academic life as very key factors.

> *"I think people learn from everyday life. People are obviously more likely to show initiative when you are able to convey ideas, to involve them in management, organisation and research. I have an excellent group in which young people are learning. But you must never think there is no world beyond you. By that I mean that capacity building is key – and to build capacity you need to involve people and delegate responsibilities. I have learned a huge amount from young people." (A5)*

One of the most common forms of education is the self-teaching that goes on during meetings based on the discussion and sharing of knowledge, shared reading of papers and the process of reflective criticism of team achievements. Learning is naturally integrated into the team activity and, within a thematic area, each member can progress according to his or her background, capacity and particular situation.

> *'We hold meetings and workshops, theoretically once a week, in practice once every two weeks, where we come together for at least two hours and everyone explains the progress made, texts read and aspects worked on. Afterwards, we discuss these and try to contribute to each other's work. Then I try to motivate people to pursue or work further in this direction.' (E2)*

4.4 Internal Management of the Group

Consolidated research teams operate on the basis of competitiveness. For this reason, female team leaders are very demanding of their members and need to recruit both new and consolidated talent. Recruiting talent and also selecting consolidated researchers for their work teams is a deep concern shared by female researchers.

> *"My major task right now is to find a replacement for a recently retired colleague. It is not easy to find someone with a career in my field who is willing to work here. Foreigners decline the opportunity to come here for the low salary and others are already established at their universities. Don't think it is easy to recruit talent here." (A1)*

Managing and leading teams is another dimension of this study, although the women interviewed were not particularly concerned about not having had any leadership or team management training.

> *"No, since I had no specific training to exert leadership in a classroom either, which is almost the same." (A2)*

One element of special interest for all participating female researchers is the possibility to delegate tasks to other members of their work teams. Their responsibility is then to mediate in conflicts of interest and engender a good atmosphere within the group. All female researchers agree about promoting a shared leadership model, which favours scientific production and the autonomy of researchers.

> *"As for coordination, the person who coordinates is usually the one who proposes the theme of the project. So the people involved in the team are gathered together at the outset and the dialogue begins. Since it is almost impossible at this stage to determine the state of play, because it is impossible to know what is already known, we share the task of researching information and the reconstruction of existing knowledge on every aspect and start discussions. But responsibility lies with the male or female coordinator. For us, leadership is synonymous with responsibility." (A2)*

A common concern among all interviewees is to establish clear operating guidelines that are respected by all group members. They believe that this is crucial for producing quality work.

> *"Later, when I took over coordination of the group, one of the first things I insisted on was to establish a set of action guidelines, so that we had a clear organisation, clear distribution of responsibilities and we knew more or less who we had to go through to get things done. If you want to invite somebody for a research visit, for example, there are mechanisms to implement this (...). My greatest concern was to keep the group informed at all times, to streamline the flow of information within the group and to avoid creating a group within a group, i.e., the coordinator and her (...) who take decisions, or something of this nature. This was my greatest concern and it keeps me constantly occupied." (A5)*

On the other hand, the interviews highlight the inter-university and interdisciplinary character of research groups as one of the factors that ensure excellence. The international dimension of research becomes an element that fosters scientific production and favours a certain work expertise as well as a shared and clearly defined leadership.

> *"I propose the creation of commissions within the group, a distribution of work with the aim of decentralising power; I think it is important to have this balance and to maintain it. It is a form of governance without loss of control. It may be controversial to say so, but if you are excessively democratic you have no control at all; particularly in my group, where people come from seven or eight different universities. You need to take the lead; otherwise it is difficult to reach agreement if everyone gives an opinion on everything. That's why it is important to give orientation." (A4)*

Another aspect that contributes to scientific production in teams led by women is internal procedure. Many of the women interviewed agree on the need to maintain coherence between research lines while also ensuring a certain autonomy among them:

> *"I think groups need to be very flexible; they need to understand that not everyone in a large group shares the same interests. Then you can allow everyone to request their own projects and leave them to assume responsibility. For me, this is the key, the basis, since there is an organisation, production, projects, articles and everyone can establish a place within the group." (A5)*

In the view of some respondents, it seems that the fact of being male or female conditions the type of tasks they take on within the group, dependent on socially accepted and generalised parameters and logic:

> *"I realise that very few women manage conferences in my area. This task was mostly done by men, perhaps because of the time available – an availability they have because they spend more time at the faculty, of course – but also perhaps on account of their management skills. Nearly all of conferences here are organised by men. In addition, I think they get visibility and give themselves a higher profile." (A1)*

4.5 Structural Constraints of Team Management

Another prominent aspect of group dynamics is related to the issue of whether gender influences the selection of specific research topics or different methodologies.

> *"It is true that certain topics are more closely related to women and it is therefore understandable that at an early stage there is a non-scientific interest, a sort of curiosity or enthusiasm for a topic, even if this later turns into a scientific interest which has moved on from the initial motivation. For instance, it is not surprising that issues relating to feminist philosophy were first studied by women." (A3)*

As can be seen, there is no explicit manifestation of distinctive research models or strategies between men and women.

> *"I know many positivist women and many constructivist men. I think it is each researcher's view of the world and of reality. I don't think that is a matter of gender, at least not as far as I am aware today." (A2)*

Some of the women interviewed considered the fact of belonging to a university organisation as being of benefit to their group's scientific production, while others saw this as more of an obstacle. The first group maintain that living with other research groups spurs continuous improvement, while the second argue that belonging to a departmental or faculty structure force them to respect clearly male-oriented cultures in their work.

> *"The department serves little purpose as far as I am concerned, since my department has an approach to work that differs from that of my team. This therefore constitutes an obstacle for me regarding the work we do. The ways of managing the university are masculine and they do not favour women and even less teams made up of or led by women." (A6)*

Consequently, one of the major concerns of female leaders of research teams is the constant search for sources of funding. The women interviewed asserted that most of the funding comes from projects won by competitive tendering processes put up by public administration.

> *"There is always a national project, a consolidated group, and it provides us with a little financial help, nothing to go wild about, but enough to buy some literature, materials, for a research trip or a visit for the group's junior researchers, or for a small conference – there is no margin for much more." (A6)*

One feature that seems to favour the search for funds from competitive public tendering processes is the fact that research in the area of social sciences calls for only modest funding.

> *"The modest request for funds is a further influential factor. As I am aware that few funds are available for social sciences, I never ask for a large amount." (E7)*

Participants agreed that being female implies more problems than advantages, since the world of university research is particularly male-oriented:

> *"Although there are many female undergraduates, PhD students and many women starting out on an academic career, there are only four female university professors in Spain, and they face a stressful situation during competitive examination processes for a chair, because as members of examination tribunals they have to travel the length and breadth of the country. I don't feel I am in a field that can be described as 'women-friendly'." (E1)*

For all these reasons, one of the areas of interest raised by some of the interviewees is the creation of 'networks for women' as a means of providing mutual support for one another.

> *"Women usually establish more support networks, because that is what they are accustomed to and are now able to apply to this field of work. Support networks always benefit groups and if the group benefits, so do individuals, although this is less institutionalised as a vision at universities." (E3)*

It also seems that gender affects the distribution of women throughout specific knowledge areas. Consequently, the number of women is higher in social sciences and health, and much lower in technical and experimental domains.

> *"Most of the members of our group are women, though this is obviously in the field of social sciences. But I do believe that men and women have very different emotional agendas. It is clear that, when a man wants to devote himself to research, he takes on fewer family responsibilities than women, who generally take on a greater share. As one female mathematics professor said when she was interviewed – and bearing in mind that women account for only 9% of mathematics professors – 'those who want to make a career will do so no matter whether they are a man or a woman'." (A2).*

Having three roles linked to an academic career (teaching, research and management) is seen by female teachers who lead research teams in social sciences as a complex situation due to the different nature of the tasks. A large majority of female researchers consider management as a 'necessary evil' – an added difficulty that cannot be avoided. Only when teaching content is closely linked to research content does teaching seem to facilitate research. Nevertheless, there has to be a certain freedom and flexibility if content derived from research is to be integrated into the curriculum. These conditions are not always being met within departments.

> *"In addition, I was lucky in this case, because I was always able to teach things I was actually researching." (E4)*

Assessments for research evaluation procedures are considered inadequate. These procedures are seen as an obstacle to team performance because they are excessively bureaucratic and require a greater investment of time than the research itself.

> *"At a time when the university is becoming increasingly bureaucratic, what concerns me most is not so much the appraisal of individual careers but the bureaucratic apparatus, perhaps not at this university but at all others: all these people writing reports on teaching evaluation, research reports, departmental agreements." (E4)*

In addition to the bureaucracy, female researchers are also concerned about meeting the criteria set by current evaluation agencies:

> *"From the point of view of individual careers and the work of each contributor, I am not sure that using one evaluation formula or another will result in major changes. In this matter I don't know, since nowadays nobody can work, and we must publish – and publish in English, and I don't know in which journal." (E4)*

5. Discussion

Analysis of the most prestigious SGR teams helps us get closer to studying academic elites. By this, we mean male and female academics who have reached a consolidation stage in their professional research careers. As García de León (2007) states, the study of elites is part of the sociology of power, and stresses how power is shared within science. Although Catalan universities have undergone significant changes in recent years, the process has not been accompanied by a move towards equal distribution among men and women in the field of research in general and social sciences in particular.

The fact of being a woman does not seem to have anything to do with the selection of specific topics or different methodologies. Although some participants declare an interest in gender because of the barriers they encountered, this is only an intellectual interest involving reading and forming opinions. Although awareness of gender issues is very clear, it does not determine the line of work taken by research teams. The diversity of areas and topics of research in social sciences is on such a broad scale that research logic advises the application of an *ad hoc* methodology for each particular case and problem. With regard to methodological decisions concerning research, it can be concluded that decisions taken by female researchers are based on the disciplinary tradition of each study area rather than on the gender of the researcher. We can conclude that female researchers demonstrate a very great interest in research activity as an essential part of their professional development which goes beyond research topics and methodological decisions. Female researchers in social sciences focus their interest on improving research lines and maintaining national and international cooperation networks, which they continue to foster throughout their academic careers by attending conferences, etc. Another matter of interest addressed by participants is the need for further training in their research topic and in how to conduct research.

A major concern for female researchers is the low number of research teams recognised as SGRs that are led by women, and the lack of female role models for junior female researchers. In addition, they are very keen to foster and develop the potential of their work teams and recognise the benefits of having team members who work with enthusiasm and favour a good atmosphere within the team. They also ensure that co-researchers are regularly updated on issues of interest to the research and receive constant training.

Female leaders view their role as mediators when conflicts of interest arise among group members. They are also keen for members of their team to attend and contribute to prestigious conferences, as well as to write papers and have them published in leading journals. A substantial part of their resources is allocated to training for junior team members.

Although none of the female researchers surveyed had had any specific training on managing competitive research teams, most of them said they were willing to learn and to improve group management skills, and that their main concern is that team members are autonomous and capable of taking on delegated responsibility (Newman, Groom, Handelman & Pennebaker, 2008).

Being a woman was too often considered a difficulty by female interviewees, since university culture still sees certain activities as more befitting males than females, e.g., organising scientific conferences. For this reason, some participants recommended building female networks to provide mutual support.

A further major concern among women who lead research teams in social sciences is the procurement of funding. On the one hand, they feel that they receive little support in this respect from university organisations, and that public administration ends up being the body which finances the projects. This form of funding brings with it the discomfort of not knowing whether there will be sufficient funding at the mid-term to continue the research. On the other hand, the task of applying for and winning public tenders is one that provides motivation for female leaders. Although the rhetoric of gender equality has been co-opted (Stratigaki, 2004) into European science policy documents, we can observe a gradual shift between 2006 and 2008 from a 'women and science' with a feminist potential object, to a market-oriented one, and consider some implications of this for women's organisation and funding opportunities.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the most prestigious SGR teams composed for male and female academics who have reached a consolidation stage in their professional research careers shows inequalities: number of women leaders is less of men leaders, in the style of leadership, the topics of research. Finally, it should be noted that, although this study establishes trends, it is not conclusive, due to the limited sample.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Institut Català de les Dones (Catalonian Government) for its help in funding this research. (Reference U-45/10)

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