Spanish women's career inhibitors: 2007-2017

Inhibidores en la carrera profesional de la mujer Española: 2007-2017

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore inhibitors preventing Spanish women from attaining positions of leadership.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative approach based on focus groups and structured personal interviews on 42 Spanish male and female executives, the study tests the main gender normative expectations applicable to specific work and personal roles.

Findings – The findings suggest that there is a significant consensus about the existence of traditional and emerging models. Research also suggests there are still clear gaps between traditional and emerging roles that are easily identified and recognized. Contrary to expectations, the research suggests there is no a clear model of emerging gender roles, and instead considerable diversity in the construction of individual aspirational models.

Research limitations – This is a first exploratory research limited to a reduced sample in the Spanish context. To confirm the findings, the research will benefit from a quantitative approach based on larger samples. Moreover, additional surveys in different cultural contexts will provide a broader understanding of the proposed research questions.

Practical implications – The gender gap framework can enable policy makers to correctly diagnose the barriers women face in their professional lives and to come up with efficient instruments to correct existing inequalities.

Originality/value – The principal contribution of this paper is that it provides important insights into traditional and aspirational gender gaps that constitute one important internal barrier for women's development.

Keywords Women managers, Gender gaps, Spanish business women, Gender choices, Gender inhibitors

Paper type Research paper

Resumen

Objetivo – El objetivo de este artículo es explorar los inhibidores que impiden a la mujer profesional española alcanzar puestos de liderazgo.

Diseño/ Metodología/ Enfoque – El artículo utiliza un enfoque cualitativo, basado en grupos enfocados y entrevistas personales estructuradas a 42 ejecutivos españoles, hombres y mujeres, con el propósito de examinar las principales expectativas normativas de género correspondientes a funciones y comportamientos específicos en el trabajo y en la vida personal.

Resultados – Los resultados apuntan a un significativo consenso sobre la existencia de modelos tradicionales y emergentes. La investigación asimismo comprueba la clara existencia de brechas de roles de género tradicionales y emergentes que pueden fácilmente reconocerse e identificarse. Contrariamente a lo esperado, los resultados de la investigación indican que no existe un modelo claro de roles de género emergente, sino que existe una considerable diversidad en la construcción de modelos individuales aspiracionales.

Limitaciones – El presente artículo es una primera investigación exploratoria limitada a una muestra reducida en el contexto español. Ayudaría a confirmar los resultados, un enfoque cuantitativo basado en muestras más amplias. Por otra parte, encuestas adicionales en otros contextos culturales proporcionaría una mejor y más amplia comprensión de las cuestiones objeto de la investigación.

Implicaciones prácticas – El marco de brecha de género, que introduce esta investigación, puede ayudar a los responsables políticos, a diagnosticar correctamente algunas de las barreras que enfrenta la mujer en su trayectoria profesional, y poder así elaborar instrumentos eficientes para corregir las desigualdades existentes en la actualidad.

Originalidad/ Valor – La contribución principal de este artículo es la de proporcionar nuevos conocimientos claves para entender brechas de género tradicionales y aspiracionales que hoy por hoy representan una importante barrera interna para el desarrollo de la mujer

Palabras clave Directivas, Brecha de género, Mujer profesional Española, Opciones de género, inhibidores de género

Tipo de documento Trabajo de investigación

1. Introduction and rationale

The last decade has witnessed remarkable changes with regard to women executives and their integration in business organizations. Nevertheless, figures still show a large quantitative difference on boards of directors and in the top levels of company management. de Anca and Aragón (2007, p. 45)

This was the introduction to an article written a decade ago; based on research into women's perceptions in Spain, it stressed the need to tackle internal hurdles impeding women's advancement.

The present study compares the situation then and now, analyzing the three main areas identified in the 2007 publication:

First, the paper reviews the data of women executives in Spain over the last ten years. Second, it reviews the existing literature regarding external barriers to women's progress as well as the literature related to the internal inhibitors women face.

Third, the paper discusses the results of research conducted during the past two years. Using a qualitative exploratory approach methodology based on two focus groups with a total of 42 participants and 12 complementary structured personal interviews, the study analyzes the main gender normative expectations in specific work and personal roles as internal inhibitors for women's progress.

The first focus group was comprised of 19 women holding managerial positions in Spain from different industries and organizational areas. Second focus group was made up of 14 women and 9 men holding managerial or academic positions with a direct experience or knowledge of the Spanish business environment.

The present study confirms previous findings in the literature regarding the idea that traditional normative expected social behaviors create internal barriers in women's career advancement (Eagly, 1987; Ridgeway, 2001). The study also uses theoretical lenses drawn from new perspectives in the biosocial constructionist theory (Eagly and Wood, 2013) concerning changing patterns in normative expected social behaviors because of new social demands and new environmental conditions. However, this study fills some gaps in the literature by analyzing potential existing gaps between traditional and emerging patterns and indicates potential tensions emerging from these existing gaps that can create internal barriers for women to attain leadership positions. Research findings suggest significant consensus about traditional normative roles as well as clear gaps between traditional and emerging roles. However, contrary to expectations, the research suggests there is no clear

model of emerging gender roles, and that there is great diversity in the construction of individual and organizational aspirational models. The results have practical implications by providing a more focused diagnosis to detect the internal barriers women face and to help policy makers and practitioners in the design of more focused tools to help women's career advancement.

2. Women in business in Spain: how far have we progressed?
Public and private institutions in Spain have made considerable efforts over the last ten years to improve gender equality in business. The following initiatives represent some of the most relevant legislative and corporate efforts.

Spain introduced the Equality Act (2007) for effective equality between women and men, which considered pioneering in Europe.

Some of the most relevant aspects of the law included:

- the requirement for companies with more than 250 employees to develop gender equality plans, as well as specific measures to counteract work/life imbalances;

- the recommendation to include a balanced presence of women and men on boards; and

- the creation of the Equality in the workplace seal of distinction, to be taken into account for procurement, contracts and public aid.

Between 2007 and 2017, the legislation has slowly consolidated and expanded following the EU gender equality framework, 2010-2015 (Gartzia and Lopez-Zafra, 2016).

Some highlights in the Spanish legislative system are:

- The Equality Seal was approved on October 23, 2009. Currently, 127 companies have obtained the seal (Red DIE, 2017);

- the strategic plan on equal opportunities (PEIO) for 2014-2016 was approved on March 7, 2014 (PEIO, 2016, p. 8); and

- in 2009, a new law extended paternity leave to four weeks, which took effect on January 1, 2017 (Ley 9/2009, 2009).

The Code of Good Governance was renewed in February 2015, including a diversity objective of achieving at least 30 percent of women directors before the year 2020 (CNMV, 2015). Although there was some consolidation in the governance code and an improvement from the previous code of 2006, in which there were no quantifiable targets, the Code of Good Governance's objectives were reduced from the most ambitious Equality Law of 2008 which recommended achieving a balanced presence of women and men (40/60) by 2015, including non-listed large companies (Izquierdo *et al.*, 2016).

Since then, the Spanish corporate world, and, in particular, listed companies, has also worked to improve equality policies; for example, a 2013 survey on 100 Spanish executives finds that the Equality Law was followed by 71 percent of companies in the survey, although only 40 percent said the law helped improve ratios (Isotes, 2014).

At first glance, legislative and corporate efforts have been successful, based on the figures of Spanish women in leadership positions in the most relevant companies (Ibex 35). Women represented 7.51 percent of board members in 2007 and 23.14 percent in 2015. In the first line of management, the figure is also positive: from 4.67 percent in 2007 to 13.24 percent in 2015 (Instituto de la Mujer, 2017). Looking at a larger example of 147 companies (105 listed) reviewed in a 2014 report, the ratio of women in top positions was similar to the Ibex 35 example of 13.48 percent (Cabanas *et al.*, 2014).

Although the parity trend has been, in general, positive, the Spanish labor market shows some deterioration regarding women's access to full employment and decision-making

positions. As shown in Table I, the activity rate that was significantly increased from 42.7 percent in 2002 to 46.95 percent in 2005 has stagnated in the last 10 years or even slightly decreased, to 46.3 percent.

There are signs of stagnation when analyzing the market by types of position. Women are mainly employees 77 percent (with bosses and without subordinates), 8.0 percent are self-employed, 5 percent are middle managers and 0.4 percent are directors of middle or large corporations. These figures have not moved at all in the last seven years, as shown in Figure 1.

Another sign of the gender segregation in the Spanish labor market, as we can see in Figure 2, is the fact that women for the last ten years occupy the majority of unskilled, semiskilled and clerical jobs (around 60 percent), while senior positions are underrepresented (30 percent).

In total, 80 percent of the total of 2,513 million of part-time workers in Spain are women, and they make up 65 percent of the total of 2,766 million of part-time self-employed. When asked why they chose part-time work, the EPA survey shows women still take full responsibility for the care of children and the elderly. Training or education is mainly a reason given by men (EPA, 2017).

In summary, despite improvements in parity in senior managerial positions (particularly in the largest Spanish corporations), during the last ten years, participation in the labor market is still largely segregated. The majority of female workers in Spain are employed in low- and middle-level positions with very little upward mobility. Efforts by legislators and the top corporations have not reached the majority of working women yet. Therefore, it is important to review the existing external barriers and internal inhibitors that women face, to be able to come out with more focused policies to achieve parity.

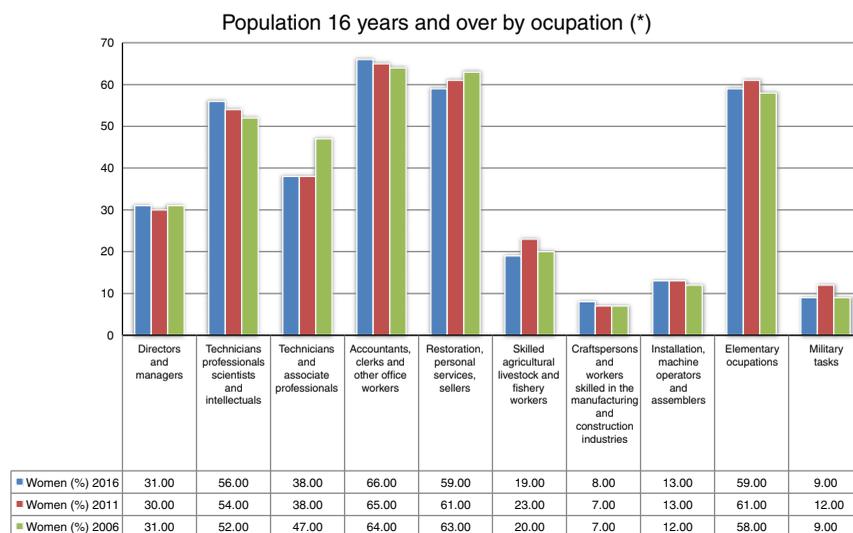|	Total thousands – both sexes (2016)	Total thousands – both sexes (2006)	Women (%) 2016	Women (%) 2006
Population 16-years old and over by economic activity	38,531.5	37,142.8	51.33	50.96
Total number of inactive persons	15,708.8	15,362.9	58.37	63.50
Total active population	22,822.7	21,780.0	46.3	42.11
Total number of unemployed	4,481.2	1,840.9	50.62	56.51
Population looking for their first job	451.4	209.0	56.80	63.44
Total occupied population	18,341.5	19,939.1	45.48	40.78
Sources: Own elaboration from EPA (2017) and Instituto de la Mujer (2017)				

Table I.
Women's economic participation in the Spanish labor market
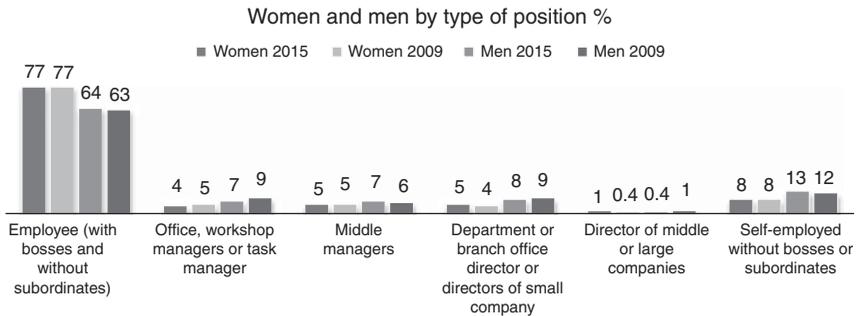
Figure 1.
Women and men by type of position

Sources: Own elaboration from EPA (2017) and Instituto de la Mujer (2017)

Population 16 years and over by ocupation (*)

	Directors and managers	Technicians professionals scientists and intellectuals	Technicians and associate professionals	Accountants, clerks and other office workers	Restoration, personal services, sellers	Skilled agricultural livestock and fishery workers	Craftspersons and workers skilled in the manufacturing and construction industries	Installation, machine operators and assemblers	Elementary occupations	Military tasks
Women (%) 2016	31.00	56.00	38.00	66.00	59.00	19.00	8.00	13.00	59.00	9.00
Women (%) 2011	30.00	54.00	38.00	65.00	61.00	23.00	7.00	13.00	61.00	12.00
Women (%) 2006	31.00	52.00	47.00	64.00	63.00	20.00	7.00	12.00	58.00	9.00

Notes: There has been a change in classification in the national statistic system in 2010, from the CNO-11 to the CNO 94. Therefore, although the data from 2006 to 2016 are useful to show trends, it cannot be strictly compared and it is more accurate to compare 2011 to 2016
Sources: Own elaboration from EPA (2017) and Instituto de la Mujer (2017)

Figure 2.
Population 16 years
and over by
occupation

3. Existing external barriers for women's advancement: a review of the literature

Researchers in the last decades have worked on identifying the external factors that inhibit the advance of women's careers as well as the instruments that help in reducing existing gender gaps.

One interesting line of research has been driven by corporate surveys on male and female managers to identify, based on their executive experience, the main external barriers that prevent women from attaining leadership positions. In 2016, a survey conducted by Grant Thornton of 5,520 CEOs, managing directors and other decision makers in 36 economies highlighted two main barriers to women's advancement: stereotypes toward women's roles and abilities and the impact of family life (Women in Business, 2017). In the Spanish context, a survey of 262 Spanish executives, women and men from different managerial positions identified external barriers in four main broad areas: behavioral and societal barriers, market barriers, educational and training barriers, and cultural barriers (Izquierdo *et al.*, 2016).

In addition to corporate surveys, academic researchers have approached the issue using a diversity of theoretical lenses to explain some of the external barriers that prevent women to reach top leadership positions (Terjesen and Singh, 2008; Terjesen *et al.*, 2009; Mateos de Cabo *et al.*, 2011; Gabaldon *et al.*, 2016).

The above-mentioned corporate surveys and academic research highlight work-family interface and gender discrimination (including gender stereotypes) as the main external barriers that women face in pursuing leadership positions. A deeper analysis in these two areas is thus convenient to better understand the persistence of gender gaps in the labor market.

3.1 Work-family as a barrier
The problem of work-life conflict has been early defined by Kahn *et al.* (1964) as mutually competing demands from personal, interpersonal and organizational roles. The literature

has analyzed the general acceptance by women of the family workload in addition to their professional duties, known as the "superwoman Syndrome" (Friedman, 1981).

The debate that began in the 1950s about mothers pursuing careers and the difficulties of balancing work and family roles took a new turn at the end of the twentieth century when significant numbers of college-educated women decided to abandon their careers and become full-time mothers. This opt-out decision is explored by Moe and Shandy (2010). Schwartz (1989), leading to controversy in a 1989 Harvard Business Review, stressed how women leaving jobs to become mothers results in heavy costs for organizations and the need to set up flexible arrangements to retain working mothers. This article opened a debate on the need to set different career tracks for men and women. That led to the term "mommy track careers" (Lewin, 1989). Further research showed that women without children also experience work-to-life conflict (Hamilton *et al.*, 2006). And thus, work/family interference was not a sole mother's issue. This idea is also supported by the research of Byron (2005). In a meta-analysis of more than 60 studies, it was found that contrary to expectations, overall, men and women have similar levels of work interfering with family and of family interfering with work. Furthermore, Powell and Greenhaus (2010) found that women experienced higher positive spillover in work-family interface than men. Leslie and Manchester's (2011) research also supports the idea of the need to involve both women and men in the care of children. Furthermore, recent research conducted on the effects of flexible practice in job performance finds mediating effects in employee well-being through work/life balance for women and men (Medina-Garrido *et al.*, 2017).

3.1.1 Work-life balance in Spain. As the data and research suggest, Spanish women still bear the highest share of housework (Gabaldon *et al.*, 2015; Goñiz-Legaz and Ollo-López, 2015). Segado and Lopez (2014), in a study conducted on middle-class families in Spain, showed that the Spanish economic crisis is aggravating work-life conflict.

Women's greater share of family work seems to be as rooted in the next generation, as indicated by the study by Gartzia and Fetterolf (2015); analyzing life expectations for 230 male and female Spanish university students, they found more female than male Spanish participants expecting to work part-time while married and bringing up children. However, there are also signs of a mentality change in the Spanish society, indicated by a slow but persistent increase in requests for paternity leave by men in family-friendly companies (Escot *et al.*, 2012). This is borne out by research by Boz *et al.* (2015) which pointed out that the only significant gender differences were related to the unequal division of household labor, and not psychological differences between women and men.

3.2 Gender discrimination and gender stereotypes as barriers to women's career advancement

Gary Becker (1957) is the main reference in the economic field tackling the issue of gender discrimination. His book, *The Economics of Discrimination*, defined the economic effects in the market place based on race, religion, sex, color or social class. His model demonstrated that discriminatory practices also had consequences for the majority group, resulting in overall losses in the market. Phelps (1972) stated that discriminatory practices can be developed, even by managers with no bias, as in the Becker model. His theory of statistical discrimination is based on the scarcity of information about workers and jobs, and the idea that group membership provides information about relevant perceived characteristics. Neilson and Ying (2016) explore how some practices of taste-based discrimination in the work place can ended up in statistical discrimination practices. For example, when employers hire women on taste-based characteristics, they can end up distorting information about the entire group. Economic theories of gender discrimination have also been used by researchers to explain the low levels of women on boards in listed companies in specific contexts, such as UK-listed companies (Gregory-Smith *et al.,* 2014) or US

companies, where the work of Farrell and Hersch (2005) indicated an existing gender impact in selecting a new director to the board.

Organizational researchers have also shed light on the problem of gender discrimination as a barrier to women's careers through corporate behavior. Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) *Women and Men of the Organization* helped understand the subtle discrimination women face in the organization. She believed that women tended to be in jobs with low opportunities for advancement, and when they entered higher levels, they did so in such low numbers that their presence was a token effect. The token position hinders women's ability to stand out against the male majority. In her work, she found that people in positions with lower aspirations tend to become excessively bureaucratic, territorial and controlling, and therefore women ended up being perceived with characteristics that had nothing to do with their gender, but rather by their positions in organizations. In 1987, revisiting her original article (Kanter, 1987), she argued that although women had moved forward, they had not broken through the glass ceiling (Hymowitz and Schellhardt, 1986) and that as old barriers were removed, new ones emerged. Cárdenas de Santamaría (2007), exploring the barriers facing female Colombian executives, stresses that current, male-dominated work cultures force women to adopt masculine behavior to be accepted in the organization.

A lot of the work on gender discrimination carried out by sociologists and psychologists is based on the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972) and other variants. Early small group experiments showed that people have an inbuilt tendency to categorize themselves into one or more in-groups, building a part of their identity on the basis of their membership of that group and enforcing boundaries with other groups. Derived from the social identity theory is the idea of in and out group discrimination, resulting in gender discrimination in formal and informal networks. Zhu *et al.* (2014) described gender discriminatory practices in organizations by analyzing the in and out groups' discriminatory practices. Close to the social theory and the in and out process is the idea of homophilia (i.e. the tendency to form same-sex network relationships (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981). Ibarra (1992) showed the effect of homophilia in informal networks and how this creates and reinforces gender inequalities in the organizational distribution of power.

Stereotypical perceptions of gender attributes and how this can hinder women's progression, such as the "think leader-think male" effect, were explored early in the literature by Schein (1975) in her work among female managers, which showed that the perception among females of successful middle managers were associated with characteristics, attitudes and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men than women. This idea is reinforced by the work of Eagly and Sczesny (2009), who argue that as male stereotypes are closer to leader stereotypes, this leads to prejudice toward female leaders based on the incongruity many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leadership. Ko *et al.* (2015) further tested role congruity, pointing to masculine or feminine attributes in leadership expectations.

3.2.1 Gender discrimination in Spain. Although there has been societal change in Spain concerning gender discrimination, research indicates that gender stereotypes still prevail, based largely on rooted psychological processes and behavior, and can hinder further advancement of women in Spain (Gartzia and Lopez-Zafra, 2016).

Some authors have use gender stereotypes to explain the barriers women face. Cuadrado *et al.* (2015) pointed to barriers caused by the incongruity between female stereotypes and leadership roles. In their survey of 195 Spanish workers (115 men and 80 women), they tested whether gender-stereotypical traits were important for becoming a successful middle manager, finding that masculine traits were valued as more important than feminine characteristics.

Informal networks and in and out belonging help explain how acknowledging stereotypical gender perceptions can also be used to gain business strength in female-owned Spanish firms (Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.*, 2017).

4. Internal inhibitors to women's advancement: theoretical lenses of the present study

The previous section focused on external barriers to women's advancement, in particular, work-family balance conflict and gender discrimination at the organizational level. However, and in addition to external barriers, women also face internal hurdles that might hinder their progress in the organization.

Female middle managers might create internal barriers to positions of leadership because of their beliefs and values regarding gender expectations (Eagly, 2005).

Gender differences in beliefs and values are widely explained by social constructionist theories (Weyer, 2007). Social constructionist theories point out that gender identities and differences are acquired in different life stages as a result of individuals' socialization. Similarly, the social role theory (Eagly, 1987) stresses the idea that differences in leadership behavior result from both sexes behaving according to their assigned gender roles. Those gender roles are acquired during childhood through a gender socialization process (Greenwald, 1980). In the organization, leadership roles are also bound by gender roles and gender characteristics with males showing more achievement-oriented behavior and women displaying a more communal-oriented behavior (Weyer, 2007).

Close to the social role theory is the expectation states theory (Ridgeway, 2001) which stresses how leadership behavior is related to performance expectations of leaders about themselves or others, based on the differences in status and power between male and female leaders. Normative expectations of gender roles are created within societies by the gender division of labor and then perpetuated through social and psychological processes involving gender beliefs and values (Eagly and Wood, 2013).

Social constructionist theories, including the social role theory or the expectation states theory, shed light on some of the challenges female leaders face in organizations and that can create internal inhibitors. On a platform of male-dominated leadership, women might face a no-win choice (Putnam, 1983). If women try to inculcate gender feminine values, this can produce a failure in the expectation to meet the requirements of a leader because of existing prejudices that power and leadership roles necessitate more masculine qualities (such as assertive behavior) (Ridgeway, 2001). On the other hand, if women adopt a stereotypical male approach, they can fail the perceived requirements of their gender role (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002). Furthermore, if women adopt a more masculine leadership style or a more male style of communication, they might also face resistance by their male counterparts (Eagly *et al.*, 2003). Constructionist theories also posit that female leaders were evaluated in a less positive manner than their male counterparts due to gender leadership stereotypes (Weyer, 2007).

Researchers also found internal hindrances to women's advancement in the reduced number of female models in organizations (Sealy and Singh, 2010). Research from a perspective of social constructionism shows that women face more difficulties than men in constructing same-gender models to admire and to emulate in the early stages of their careers (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008), as well as in the middle and later stages of their professional lives (Gibson, 2003). Gibson (2004) stressed that women have typically fewer role models to choose from, and might have difficulties in translating a male role model's behavior into a behavior that can work from them. Kelan and Mah (2014) further analyzed the importance of availability of women as role models, suggesting that women not only uncritically idealize a certain type of person, but also engage in "social psychological admiration of other women, which includes a more critical evaluation of the person with whom they identify" (Kelan and Mah, 2014, p. 99).

A recent constructivist theory, the biosocial constructionist theory (Eagly and Wood, 2013), further explains some of the internal barriers of women to their carrier advancement by integrating biological trends with social role issues. "The specific activities that comprise the

division of labor derive in part from male and female biology- that is, in their evolved attributes, specifically women's reproductive activities and men's size and strength, which can allow some activities to be more efficiently performed by one sex depending on the socioeconomics and ecological contexts" (Eagly and Wood, 2013, p. 11). The biosocial constructionist theory also postulates that traditional normative expected social behaviors, both in professional as well as in the domestic context, are changing because of new social demands and new environmental conditions. Changing patterns are the result of both nature and nurture, since modern interaction of subcortical structures with higher brain functions facilitates the individual to respond flexibly to new expectations. Women and men thus organize behavior into patterns that are tailored to their contemporary conditions (Eagly and Wood, 2013).

The present study, following biosocial constructionist theoretical lenses (Eagly and Wood, 2013), is based on the idea that traditional normative expected social behaviors, both in professional as well as in the domestic context, are changing because of new social demands and new environmental conditions. However, as the changing patterns differ in the different individuals, a gap between traditional and emerging patterns might occur and this gap could be the origin of tensions. These tensions, in turn, can create internal barriers for women to pursue leadership positions.

5. Methodology and research questions
The research has been developed to provide an exploratory answer to five research questions:

RQ1. Is there a perception of a traditional normative set of expectations in society for the role women and men should play at work and at home?

RQ2. Is there a perception of an emerging model that changes the set of expectations for the roles women and men should play at work as well as at home?

RQ3. What are the most important behaviors that define normative expectation?

RQ4. Is there a perception of gaps between traditional and emerging models?

RQ5. Is there a perception of tension between current roles and expected gender roles?

This qualitative exploratory research has used a methodology based on focus groups and complementary structured interviews. The first focus group was comprised of 19 women holding managerial positions in Spain. The main features of the participants' profiles were professional: 36.8 percent held a top management position and 63.2 percent held a middle management position. The most represented organization areas were: finance (21.1 percent) operations and project management (21.1 percent) and marketing (15.8 percent). The industries most represented were utilities (15.8 percent), manufacturing (10.5 percent), retail (10.5 percent) and financial services (10.5 percent). In reference to their culture of origin, 73.7 percent were Spaniards and 26.3 percent from other countries.

The second focus group was made up of 14 women and 9 men holding managerial or academic positions with direct experience or knowledge of the Spanish business environment. In this case, the origin of participants was as follows: 69.6 percent from Spain and 30.4 percent from other countries. In terms of area of activity, 73.9 percent of participants worked in industry and 26.1 percent in academia. In terms of managerial responsibilities, 69.6 percent of practitioners held top management positions, while the rest qualified as middle managers.

Focus groups were conducted based on a three-stage structure. The first stage was focused on validating the understanding of the concept of normative expectations by women and men, both in the personal and the professional context. Additionally, the perception of a traditional normative set of expectation as well as the perception of an emerging model that changes theses expectations were tested (RQ1 and RQ2).

The second stage was oriented to check the translation of normative expectations into expected behaviors and to identify those behaviors (*RQ3*). Having identified those expected behaviors, participants were invited to propose some key work-life areas that grouped a significant number of behaviors under the criteria of the possibility of been improved as a whole. Each behavior was assigned to at least on of this areas. Finally, a third stage was devoted to validate the perceptions of gaps and tension regarding those behaviors (*RQ4* and *RQ5*).

After every focus group, structured interviews were conducted to address the most valuable participants in terms of contribution to their focus group, providing an additional validation to the previous focus group conclusions. The structure of the questionnaire is based on two sections. The first section addresses the first, second and fourth research questions. The second section invites the participants to identify expected behaviors assuming the previous categorization into clusters, focusing on the third research question.

In this case, 11 women and 1 man were interviewed. Of this group, 66.6 percent were practitioners and 33.3 percent were members of academia. Regarding their country of residence, 75 percent were Spaniards and 25 percent from abroad. Some 75 percent of practitioners held top management positions and 25 percent middle management positions.

6. Results

Results regarding the first research question in every focus group confirm perceptions of the existence of a traditional set of gender expectations at work:

> Women are expected to fulfill caring and nurturing roles (still to be seen in the number of female HR VPs), and there is a strong stereotype that women are less qualified in aspects such as logical thinking and decisive decision-making. (Top manager female, Spaniard)

These perceptions apply equally to the home:

> Women are supposed to take care of children because they do it better. (Top manager female, Spaniard)

Structured interviews validate these results, showing 10 positive responses (out of 12) acknowledging the existence of a traditional set of expectations at home, and 11 positive responses at the work context.

Taking into account the second research question, focus group and interview responses also confirm a strong perception of the existence of an emerging set of gender expectations in both contexts:

> More men are moving into much more family concerned points of view and women are more career focus oriented. The emerging model is coming but very slowly. (Top manager female, Spaniard)

In the case of structured interviews, there was a near-unanimous perception of an emerging model within the work context, and 10 (of 12) agree with this perception in the home context.

A very relevant perception that emerges in every focus group is that this emerging set of expectations is not the result of a single model, but the outcome of the combination of several models.

The third research question addressed the identification of the most important behaviors that define normative expectations. Participants in focus groups were able to identify 82 expected behaviors with a very wide perception of their relevance as translation of a set of gender expectations. Some examples include gender differences in pursuing high economic status, economic independence, recognition or the search for a life partner. Structured interviews provide a first approximation of their relevance measured in terms of their occurrences in the structured part of the interview. Occurrences range from eight in behaviors like "achieve recognition" to a single occurrence as in the case of "achieve a humanistic culture."

After the identification of expected gender behaviors, focus group participants were invited to gather them into consistent categories or clusters associated to some key work-life area that could be improved as a whole. This classification provides a way to study differences on a broader scale than single behaviors in the future. This approach has been previously used in gender-related research (Chamberlain, 1988). Every expected behavior was associated with at least a cluster. The identified clusters were: success, leadership, identity and reputation, career/life design and competencies. The results are shown in Table II.

To qualify as relevant behaviors, a minimum of four occurrences in interviews within a specific cluster had to be defined. The results are shown in Table II.

This set of expected behaviors offers insight into the true nature of the internal inhibitors acting on women's career in every cluster. Inhibitors in terms of success are related to lack of recognition and work-life balance. In the leadership area, these are more focused on the need of a role model and getting the right life-work balance. In terms of career and life design as well as the development of competencies, the need to be resilient is a very clear inhibitor.

There is also an evident change of the identified expected behaviors into a less normative model:

> Leadership is changing, to a more communicative, empathic, collaborative, inspirational type, and women have a lot of that. (A lot of men do too, we only need time for them to show it without losing their position of power). (Middle manager female, Spaniard)

The fourth research question addresses the perception of the existence of a gap between traditional and emerging models, or the existence of differences between both sets of expectations. Focus group results show a clear perception of the gap in the home context, but a lesser consensus on this gap at work:

> Yes, there is a gap. Women have to do more at work and at home. They are asked to do part time work when they have kids. I don't know any man that have done this. (Top manager female, Spaniard)

Cluster	Expected behavior (no. of occurrences)
Success	Get recognition (8)
	Be a leader (5)
	Provide family care (5)
	Get work-life balance (5)
	Get a good position/job (4)
	Built a network (4)
	Built a relationship (4)
Leadership	Be a role model (8)
	Be responsible (5)
	Get work-life balance (4)
	Be a decision maker (4)
	Be honest (4)
	Be empathetic (4)
	To have a vision (4)
Reputation/identity	Be honest (7)
	Be reliable (7)
	Commitment (5)
Career/life design	Be able to setting goals (7)
	Be resilient (6)
	Get self-development (4)
Competencies	Time management (6)
	Be resilient (4)
	Be empathetic (4)

Source: Own elaboration

Table II.
Relevant expected
behaviors

Taking into account structured interviews, 10 responses (out of 10) acknowledge the existence of a gap between the traditional and emerging social expectations at home. In the work context, this perception has a lesser confirmation: 8 responses of 12.

The fifth research question attempts to validate the perception of tension (stress) between women's current role and that which is expected because of their gender. This tension, specifically associated with gender, provides insight about the rational and emotional perception of gender issues within the entire set of gender-associated behaviors. Focus groups pointed toward a much stronger tension generated within the home context compared to the job context. Structured interviews were aligned with this perception where the existence of this tension at home was confirmed by 8 responses out of 12, in comparison with only 3 responses out of 12 related to the work context. Some interesting insights emerge from these interviews:

> The tension comes from shouldering too many expectations. (Top female manager, non-Spaniard)

7. Discussion

This exploratory research helps to provide a better understanding of the normative set of expectations, as well as their actionality in the work and home context, impacting on professionals of both sexes. This finding is consistent with the social role theory, which states that cultural and social norms create distinctions between male and female roles (Eagly, 1987), both as a categorization of identity by others, as well as a self-identification process with a particular human aggregate (Jenkings, 1996).

In addition, this set of expectations translated into a wide set of expected behaviors that provide strong support for the relevance of normative expectations which is consistent with the expectation states theory (Ridgeway, 2001). Most of the expected behaviors appear simultaneously in both contexts (home and work). These findings are in line with the existing literature on the internalization of gender schemes in childhood (Greenwald, 1980) that can explain women's professional behavior (Weyer, 2007). The set of expected behaviors can lead to self-identification mechanisms (Powell and Butterfield, 2013) and the creation of a specific self-image that can prevent women from striving for management positions (Korman, 1970).

The research clustered expected behaviors in five categories: leadership, career/life design, leadership, competencies, and identity and reputation. Those areas are consistent with previous research focused on identifying the main inhibitors on women's career (de Anca and Aragón, 2007).

Findings highlight a change in gender expectations, which is in line with the biosocial constructionists theory, and the assumption that individuals respond flexibly to others' expectations and thus organize their behavior into patterns that are tailored to their contemporary conditions (Eagly and Wood, 2013).

The research indicates emerging models in Spain that differ from traditional ones, consistent with a study by Lopez-Zafra and Garcia-Retamero (2012). Out of 270 men and women in Spain, they found that people perceived women's roles and stereotypes to be changing over time more than those of men.

The research also showed that there is a great diversity in the construction of emerging or aspirational models, consistent with recent research on post-feminism that treats women as autonomous subjects whose lives are shaped by individual choices rather than by norms (Rumens, 2017).

8. Conclusions

The present study looks at the last decade since the equality of the Spanish labor market. The data show that these have had a limited impact. Although women's representation has

somewhat increased at the highest levels in Spain's biggest companies and administration, the Spanish labor market is still largely segregated by gender, and women are underrepresented in executive positions.

The present research shows that in addition to still existing external barriers, women face important internal inhibitors that co-relate to a set of normative expectations associated with gender at work and at home, that co-relate to the normative expectations men also face in professional and personal contexts.

Results regarding the 2 focus groups of 42 managers and 12 complementary interviews provide strong evidence of two simultaneous perceptions: the perception of a traditional normative model, and, complementarily, the perception of several emerging non-normative models.

The results of the study also identify expected gender behaviors in five personal and professional clusters: success, leadership, identity and reputation, career/life design and competencies. Expected behaviors in these key clusters are also changing to a less normative model, showing that women (as well as men) are slowly but firmly moving into behaving according to individual choices rather than by cultural norms.

Finally, the study indicates that a gap might exist between traditional and emerging models that can create tensions and thus internal barriers. These tensions can explain the reason why some women say they feel guilty for taking on professional responsibilities at the expense of what they consider to be their primary family obligation; in parallel, it also explains why some men report feeling guilty for not being the primary breadwinner.

The analysis of traditional normative expected behaviors and their change into new emerging models, along with the gap and tension that this change is creating, can shed light on understanding an important internal inhibitor to women reaching leadership positions.

9. Limitations, further research and contributions
This is a first exploratory research, limited to a reduced sample in the Spanish context and limited to a reduced number of managers. As a second stage within this research, a new survey is planned to be addressed in Spain, as well as in other cultural areas, in cooperation with local universities in those areas, using an online application. The data collected by using this application will enable detection of a clearer pattern in the traditional set of normative expectations and their transformation. Additionally, by collecting personal information, it will be possible to identify individual trajectories, and, in consequence, to identify actions to close the gaps, or at least to minimize some of the conflicts linked to them.

This research contributes to a stream of literature regarding women internal barriers. In concrete, it adds to the idea that normative expectations created inhibitors in women's careers. The results provide new areas to explore by including gender gaps between traditional and emerging models, and how these gaps generate tensions that can intensify the potential inhibitors. Further quantitative research could find ways to measure the extent of the gaps and its effect on the gender tension. Further qualitative analysis could also explore the cultural differences in the traditional and emerging perceptions as well as in the resulting gender gaps.

This research has also some practical and social implications, since a better understanding of individual gender gaps can generate more efficient approaches in the design of policies to enhance women's careers. Training programs can focus not on traditional models, but instead on the transition from an emerging model to a customized combination of emerging models.

In the Spanish context, as the current literature points out, there is still important work to be done to eliminate external barriers for women in attaining top leadership positions, both at the public level (i.e. paternity leave, female full employment, promoting equality laws […]) as well as at the corporate level (flexible time, mentoring, coaching, etc.). Society requires

efforts and more cooperation between politicians, businesses and leaders (Izquierdo *et al.*, 2016). However, the present study shows that, in addition to external barriers, society also needs to take into account internal barriers in order to reduce the inequalities existing at the top managerial levels.

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Appendix. Structured interview scheme

Section 1: normative expectations, traditional and emerging models

(1) Do you think there is a traditional normative set of expectations in your society for the role women and men should play at work? If yes, what general features does this behavior have?

(2) In your opinion, is there an emerging model in your society, that changes the set of expectations for the roles women and men should play at work? If yes, what general features does this model have?

(3) Do you think there is a traditional normative set of expectations in your society for the role women and men should play at home? If yes, what general features does this behavior have?

(4) In your opinion, is there an emerging model in your society, that changes the set of expectations for the roles women and men should play at home? If yes, what general features does this model have?

(5) According to your experience, is there any gap between the traditional and emerging social expectations, in the role you play at home? In which areas?

(6) According to your experience, is there any tension between your current role (in the home context) and the role expected from your gender? In which areas?

(7) According to your experience, is there any gap between the traditional and emerging social expectations, in the role you play at work? In which areas?

(8) According to your experience, is there any tension between your current role (in the work context) and the role expected from your gender? In which areas?

Section 2: normative context specific questions

(9) From your point of view, which are the most important expected behaviors which define success in terms of your personal/professional life?

(10) From your point of view, which are the most important five expected behaviors which define success in terms of your career/life design?

(11) From your point of view, which are the most important five expected behaviors which define success in terms of leadership: leadership in your personal life; and leadership in your professional life?

(12) From your point of view, which are the most important capabilities that you need to develop in your personal/professional life?

(13) From your point of view, which are the most important factors that define your identity and reputation in your personal/professional life?

(14) From your personal point of view, which are the most important factors that define your identity and reputation in your personal/professional life?

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