

The neosexist attitudes of the Spanish advertising workforce: a gender-based analysis¹

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Abstract

In Spain, the political efforts to eliminate the gender gap in the labour market have crystallised with the enactment of the Law 3/2007, 22 March on effective equality between women and men. However, despite the inclusion of gender issues in the political agenda, there is evidence that occupational sex segregation remains a significant barrier toward gender equality, in particular, in the Spanish advertising sector. Given that advertising speech has a great potential in fostering egalitarian attitudes in our society, it is necessary to make research focused on achieving the full gender equality between the advertising professionals (the creators of these messages). With this background, this article attempts to analyse if there is a disguised form of sexism (neosexism) that could impede advertising women's upward mobility and could concentrate them in activities related to their gender roles. Thus, the aim of this study, focusing on gender, is to examine the neosexist attitudes of a sample of 753 Spanish advertising employees. Our results indicate that, in line with previous findings, men scored significantly higher than women on the Neosexism scale. However, there was little observed absolute separation of neosexist attitudes between males and females. It would be necessary, as a future line of research, to analyse if there are gender-biased methods in the Human Resources Selection Units that could exclude women from advertising decision-making positions and from departments like creative services.

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Introduction: the gender gap in the Spanish labour market.

In theoretical terms, issues on gender equality are legally reinforced in our country. The 1978 Constitution establishes the principle of equality as a superior value of the legal order and no sexual discrimination as a fundamental right. From this starting point, and according to the review made by Bustelo, Lombardo & Platero (2003), in Spain the equality legislation has adopted several laws in the civil regulation (e.g. Law 11/1981, 13 May on legal equality between husband and wife), the penal regulation (e.g. Law 35/1995, 11 December on resources and assistance of the victims of violence and crimes against sexual freedom), and the labour and social regulation (e.g. Law 39/1999, 5 November on promoting the reconciliation of family and work life of working people).

More recently, the political efforts to eliminate the gender gap have crystallised with the adoption of the Law 3/2007, 22 March on effective equality between women and men. In this law, one of the social policies recommended is to achieve the equal promotion of women and men in the different professional groups and categories.

In practical terms, it is a well-known fact that the employment rate of women has increased in recent times (International Labour Office, 2006). Over the period 2000-2006, in the EU-25, the proportion of women aged 15-64 in employment rose by almost 4%, whereas the proportion of men increased by under 1%. In particular, in Spain, the change in the employment rate of women has been especially marked (12%), with the larger increase in the EU-25 (Eurostat, 2008).

However, European Data from Official Statistics reveal that there is still a gender gap in the labour market. Throughout Europe, the proportion of men in employment exceeds women. In 2006, some 72% of men aged 15-64 were in paid employment in opposition to just over 57% of women in this same age group. Particularly, in our country, in 2006, women accounted for some 41% of those of working age in employment. Besides, many more women than men work part-time hours. In the EU-25, almost 94% of men work full-time in opposition to 64% of women (Eurostat, 2008). In Spain, women accounted for some 79% of the total part-time work (INE, 2008).

In addition to these gender differences in the labour force participation, another factor that contributes to gender inequalities is the concentration of women in a narrow range of occupations. This fact has been referred to as the "horizontal segregation". It means that men and women are streamed into different trades, professions and jobs as a result of the social attitudes and gender inequalities in education and training (Wirth, 2001). In the European Union, a much larger proportion of women work in services, while men are predominantly concentrated in industry. Women represent almost 80% of those employed in health and social work, over 70% of those employed in education and over 60% of those working in retailing. By contrast, women make up just 8% of the workforce in construction and only 14% of that in land transport, sectors in which men are concentrated (Eurostat, 2008). Even in the services sector, women are concentrated in activities related to their gender roles, particularly in community, social and personal services whereas men dominate the better-paid jobs in financial and business services and real estate (International Labour Office, 2003). In a similar vein, in our country, women are concentrated in services (86%), but they are under-represented in agriculture (2.7%), industry (9.2%) and construction (2.1%), sectors where men are over-represented (INE, 2008).

Nevertheless, the basic condition to reach an effective gender equality in the labour market is to achieve an increase of the socioeconomic empower of women (International Labour Office, 2003). In this sense, the Corporate Women Directors International 2007 Report manifests that only 11.2% of all board seats in the Fortune Global 200 companies are held by women (CWDI, 2007). Similarly, in our country, there are a low percentage of women (6.61%) in the board of directors of the 1085 bigger enterprises (Mateos, Escot & Gimeno, 2006). These data show the results of the vertical segregation or the "glass ceiling" effects. In other words, there are institutional barriers and social attitudes that impede the movement of women upward through occupational categories to take up more responsible and managerial jobs (Wirth, 2001).

The site of study: The Spanish advertising industry.

The achievement of the equal promotion of women and men in the different professional groups and categories (recommended by the Law 3/2007, 22 March) in particular, in the Spanish advertising industry, could have positive consequences not only for this sector, but also for the society as a whole.

As López Lita y Bernad (2007) have pointed out, the advertising speech (one of the most influential forms of communication in contemporary societies), plays a key role in defining the male and female identities socially accepted. Given the influence of social and cultural aspects of advertising communication on education and behaviour of society, the Commission on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament (2008) has explicitly manifested that sexist advertising is an obstacle to the emergence of a modern and egalitarian society². Given that the added value that advertising provides to products and services is linked with their workforce's intellectual skills, it is necessary to make research on the professionals of this sector to know who is responsible of these messages, who is creating them and who is reflecting its values, roles and attitudes to society.

In this sense, a study on women's role in the British Advertising Agencies shows that, despite the feminization of its workforce, women suffer the consequences of vertical and horizontal segregation. There are few women in decision-making positions and there are "male" departments, like creative services, where women are under-represented (Klein, 2001).

The replication of this study in our country confirms the previous evidences. The Spanish advertising workforce is increasingly feminized (56.7% women vs. 43.3% men), but there is a serious gender gap: (a) an extremely low percentage of women are in managerial positions (1%) and (b) some departments (creative services, art and copy writing) are over-represented by men (Martín-Llaguno, Beléndez & Hernández, 2008; Martín-Llaguno, 2007a, Martín-Llaguno, 2007b).

Given that advertising speech has a great potential in fostering egalitarian attitudes in our society, it is necessary to make research focused on achieving the full gender equality between the advertising professionals (the creators of these messages). In this sense, one of the possible explanations for the gender gap in the Spanish advertising

² In this sense, in our country, the latest studies on the presence of gender bias in the advertising speech indicate that there are still advertising messages that show stereotyped images of women and men (Berganza & del Hoyo, 2006, Del Moral, 2000; Espinar, 2006).

industry could be the neosexist attitudes of its workforce as a mechanism that systematically could exclude women from top level positions and could concentrate them in activities related to their gender roles.

The present study: the neosexist attitudes as a possible explanation for the gender gap

The findings reported above show that there is a discrepancy between word (equality legislation) and action (the gender gap in the labour market).

In our country, the latest opinion polls suggest that, nowadays, the sexist attitudes (the prejudicial attitudes based on the presumed inferiority or difference of women as a group)³ are not a possible explanation for the persistence of the gender gap in the labour market. In this sense, a study conducted by the Sociological Research Center (CIS, 2007) shows that the most part of the Spanish surveyed participants (96.1% women and 95.9% men) was in favour or strongly in favour of the full equality between sexes. Legislative and regulatory changes could impede sexist ideas to be expressed in public. Many people could still have negative feelings and emotions towards members of certain groups, but, at the same time, they know that to have these feelings and to express them is not political correct (Martínez del Valle, 2006).

With the aim of finding an explanation for this discrepancy, several scholars have argued that there must be a new expression of sexist attitudes more covert and subtle that could justify the persistence of the gender gap in the labour market (Moya & Expósito, 2001; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton & St-Pierre, 1999).

This new assessment of sexism has been labelled by Tougas et al. (1995) "Neosexism". This new form of sexism is conceived as the manifestation of an internal conflict: simultaneously believing that men and women should be equal, while at some subtle level harbouring negative feeling toward women (Lameiras, Rodríguez, Calado, Foltz & Carrera, 2007).

Research on contemporary sexism is in its initial stage and it has primarily been developed in the context of U.S. and Canadian cultures (Beaton, Tougas & Joly, 1996; Campbell, Schellenberg & Senn, 1997; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Masser & Abrams, 1999; Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter, 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa & Stangor, 2005; Tougas et al., 1995; Tougas et al., 1999).

In our country, several authors have studied the neosexism as a contemporary form of sexism (Expósito, Montes & Palacios, 1999; Lameiras et al., 2007; Montes Berges & Silván-Ferrero, 2004; Moya & Expósito, 2000; Moya & Expósito, 2001). In particular, the study of Moya & Expósito (2001) deserves a special attention. When they test the psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the Neosexism scale (Tougas et al., 1995) they conclude that this scale is a valid measure in the Spanish context to capture subtle attitudes of rejection towards women, especially in the organizational level.

In the review of the literature on contemporary sexism, we have also focused our attention on the gender differences in the neosexist attitudes. Although this research is scarce, the results show that men are more sexist

³ Cameron (1997: 340)

than women (Campbell et al., 1997; Expósito, Montes y Palacios, 1999; Masser & Abrams, 1999) or there are no gender differences (Lameiras et al., 2007).

Finally, to conclude this section, it is relevant to mention the critical gap we have found in the review of the literature on neosexism: the lack of studies designed to analyse the neosexist attitudes of male and female employees of a whole sector. In our view, in a society where the equality between the sexes has been legally reinforced, the persistence of the gender gap in some sectors could be linked to the subtle and covert sexist prejudices of its workforce.

Objectives

As we have seen, in the Spanish advertising industry, despite the increasingly feminization of its workforce, there is still a gender gap. At this point we wonder if there is a disguised form of sexist beliefs that could impede women's upward mobility and could concentrate them in activities related to their gender roles.

Given that neosexism is a useful tool to capture subtle attitudes of rejection towards women, especially in the organizational level, we will examine the neosexist attitudes of the Spanish advertising workforce with a gender focus.

Method

Procedure and Participants

The data reported here were collected as a part of a larger study aimed to describe the advertising labour structure with a gender focus. This study took place between October 2004 and December 2005. Due to the lack of census data in the Spanish advertising industry we contacted with the 36 agencies pertaining to the Spanish Association of Advertising Agencies (*AEAP, Asociación Española de Agencias de Publicidad*). These agencies represented the 86% of the advertising spend managed through agencies in the Spanish market. Of these 36 agencies, 23 participated in our study.

Participants were asked to complete a self-administered survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary and confidentiality of responses was assured to employees. The survey took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. The response rate was 32%, with 753 completed surveys returned (66 incomplete surveys were not included in this calculation). The total sample of 753 individuals consisted of 425 females and 328 males. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 66 ($M = 34.04$, $SD = 7.89$).

Measures

- a) Personal characteristics: participants were asked to report their gender and age.
- b) Neosexism Scale: we used the Spanish version of the Neosexism Scale (Tougas et al., 1995) adapted by Moya & Expósito (2001). Seven items from the Neosexism scale that seemed most relevant were used in

the current study⁴. Respondents rated their agreement with individual items on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree)⁵. Higher scores indicated more neosexist attitudes.

Results

Mean level differences were tested with *t* tests with all items. Table 1 shows gender is significantly related to neosexist attitudes. Men and women differ in all items significantly except in their attitudes toward the statement "in a fair employment system, men and women would be considered equal" ($p = 0.08$).

However, in practical terms, there is little observed absolute separation of neosexist attitudes between males and females given that mean gender differences found here, though statistically significant, ranged from 0.20 to 0.74.

In particular, the highest difference between women and men is located in the item that states "in order not to appear prejudiced, many men are inclined to give women more rights than they give men" (with scores from 2.42 to 1.23).

On the other hand, the lowest difference between males and females is found in their high level of disagreement towards the item "discrimination against women in the labour force is no longer a problem in this country (from 2.06 to 1.86).

It is relevant to mention that there is only one item, related to consider difficult to work for a female boss, where women are more sexist than men.

Apart from the statistical significant gender differences, it is also important to note that both women and men give the lowest score to the reversed statement "in a fair employment system, men and women would be considered equal". Thus, both sexes are strongly agree with the principle of the gender equality in the labour market.

Lastly, we observe that both sexes give a low score to the neosexism scale. Thus, we could conclude that this sample reject the neosexist beliefs.

⁴ According to Tougas et al. (1995: 843) the neosexism scale is based on an adaptation of the principal tenets of the modern racism model proposed by McConahay (1986). The principal tenets of modern racism are: 1) discrimination is a thing of the past; 2) blacks are pushing too hard, too fast, and into places where they are not wanted; 3) these tactics and demands are unfair; and finally, 4) recent gains are undeserved.

⁵ The Neosexism Scale (NS) has previously been administered using a 7-point scale (e.g. Tougas et al., 1995). In order to standardize response formats across measures, a 5-point response format was used in the current study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and comparisons of mean ratings by gender

Variable	Men		Women		<i>t</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>NEOSEXISM ITEMS</i>					
1. Discrimination against women in the labour force is no longer a problem in this country	2,06	1,12	1,86	1,10	-2.44*
2. R-I consider the present employment system to be unfair to women	2,54	1,23	2,20	1,23	-3.74***
3. Women will make more progress by being patient and not pushing too hard for change	1,98	1,18	1,59	1,01	-4.88***
4. It is difficult to work for a female boss	2,20	1,31	2,47	1,43	2.62**
5. Women's requests in terms of equality between the sexes are simply exaggerated	2,05	1,16	1,70	1,03	-4.44***
6. In order not to appear prejudiced, many men are inclined to give women more rights than they give men	2,42	1,23	1,68	1,01	-9.12***
7. R -In a fair employment system, men and women would be considered equal	1,19	0,59	1,12	0,53	-1.75

*Difference between men and women significant at $p < .05$

**Difference between men and women significant at $p < .01$

***Difference between men and women significant at $p < .001$

R = Inversely coded; a negative response corresponds to neosexist beliefs.

Discussion

This study is the first attempt in our country to assess the neosexist attitudes of a whole sector: the Spanish advertising industry.

In line with previous findings (Campbell et al., 1997; Masser & Abrams, 1999), and in opposition to the results obtained by Lameiras et al. (2007), men scored significantly higher than women on the Neosexism scale.

However, our male and female respondents gave a low score to the Neosexism scale, a tendency contrary to previous results (Lameiras et al., 2007; Moya & Expósito, 2000; Tougas et al., 1995). It means that, despite the fact that men have more neosexist attitudes than women, both sexes are strongly agree with the principle of equal opportunities in the labour market. In fact, these advertising employees admit that discrimination against women in the labour market is still a reality.

It is relevant to note that there is only one statement, related to women's work in top level positions, where women show a significantly higher neosexist attitude than their male counterparts. Given the marginal percentage of advertising women in these categories, it seems logic that females, the real sufferers of this gender gap, acknowledge, in a higher degree than males, not only the obstacles and barriers faced to reach these management

level positions but also the difficulties encountered to develop their work in the advertising industry, a field run by men. We could suggest several reasons why advertising women may think it is so hard to work in these top level positions:

- a) Firstly, given that advertising was a traditional male field, women in managerial positions could still adopt the male leadership style to survive in these categories. So, a possible difficulty faced by female bosses could be related to their adaptation to a male corporate culture.
- b) Secondly, if we take into account that gender stereotypes, it is to say, the beliefs about the appropriate role activities for women and men (McHugh & Frieze, 1997) have been present in our society until recently, it could be plausible to suppose that women need to invest a great amount of energy to convince their male and, also, female colleagues, of their knowledge and skills to occupy such positions.

In conclusion, with the data obtained in this study we are not able to link the neosexist attitudes of the Spanish advertising workforce with the gender gap in this industry. In other words, it seems that the subtle attitudes of rejection towards women in the organizational level are not a possible explanation for gender inequalities in this sector.

It would be necessary, as a future line of research, to analyse if there are gender-biased methods in the Human Resources Selection Units that could exclude women from the advertising decision-making positions and could concentrate them in activities related to their gender roles. It could be useful to focus not only on the standardized processes of personnel recruitment, but also on the dynamics and criteria involved in the informal and social networks.

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