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## Women educommunicators in perspective: resilience, sorority, and gender equity in academic contexts

### Educomunicadoras en perspectiva: resiliencia, sororidad y equidad de género en el ámbito académico

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#### Abstract

**Purpose.** Exploring the role of women in educommunication, analyzing their impact, the challenges they find, and the resilience strategies they employ within a context shaped by gender inequality. **Methodology.** We conducted semi-structured interviews with three leading scholars in the field of educommunication in Spain. Through inductive qualitative analysis using Atlas.ti 24, we identified discursive patterns concerning academic role models, gender-based barriers, and leadership dynamics. **Results and conclusions.** The findings show that although the educommunication field has advanced in terms of gender equity, significant challenges persist, such as the glass ceiling, impostor syndrome, and the invisibility of women in leadership positions. Participants highlight sorority and self-confidence as key strategies for confronting these systemic gaps. **Novelty.** This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on gender equity in and from edge educommunication, emphasizing the need to consolidate more inclusive academic environments that acknowledge women's leadership and foster a diverse, critical, and intergenerationally inclusive scientific culture.

#### Keywords

Educommunication; gender equity; Matilda effect; epistemology of ignorance; media literacy; female leadership

#### Resumen

**Propósito.** Explorar el rol de las mujeres en la educomunicación, analizando su impacto, desafíos y estrategias de resiliencia en un contexto marcado por desigualdades de género. **Metodología.** Se llevaron a cabo entrevistas semiestructuradas con tres investigadoras referentes en el ámbito educomunicativo en España. Mediante un análisis cualitativo inductivo con el software Atlas.ti 24, se identificaron patrones discursivos en torno a referentes académicos, barreras de género y liderazgo. **Resultados y conclusiones.** Se evidencia que, aunque el ámbito de la educomunicación ha avanzado en términos de equidad, persisten desafíos como el techo de cristal, el síndrome de la impostora y la invisibilización de las mujeres en posiciones de liderazgo. Las investigadoras resaltan la importancia de la sororidad y la autoconfianza como estrategias clave para enfrentar estas brechas. **Aportación original.** Este estudio contribuye a la reflexión sobre la equidad de género en y desde la educomunicación, destacando la necesidad de consolidar espacios más inclusivos que reconozcan el liderazgo femenino y promuevan una ciencia diversa, crítica y sin sesgos de género intergeneracionales.

#### Palabras clave

Educomunicación; equidad de género; efecto Matilda; liderazgo femenino; epistemología de la ignorancia; alfabetización mediática

## 1. Introduction

In her explorations of the intersection between science, technology, and society, American sociologist and feminist Alice Rossi (1965) introduced a pivotal reflection in her article published in *Science*: "Why so few?". This text marked a turning point, exposing women's lack of visibility in science. This omission emerged from a paradigm deeply rooted in human thought, which scholars have shown to be vulnerable to gender bias, manifesting in formal barriers that have historically constrained women's roles. Within this context, the voice of Emilia Pardo-Bazán (1999, p. 162), the first female professor in Spain, still resonates: "All women conceive ideas, but not all conceive children. The human being is not a fruit tree cultivated only for its harvest". Her statement called for a re-evaluation of the roles and expectations imposed on women, affirming intellectual and creative capacity as essential contributions to societal progress, regardless of the constraints imposed by gender inequality.

Building on this premise, the present article examines the role of women in the academic field of educommunication, considering historical barriers, current challenges, and resilience strategies women have developed to navigate them. Using a qualitative approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with three senior female researchers in the field. Their reflections shed light on narratives surrounding female leadership, structural limitations, the effects of invisibility, and networks of solidarity and mutual support that act as catalysts for transformation.

This research aligns with the broader field of gender studies by reclaiming and reinterpreting women's voices within an academic realm historically marked by exclusion and inequity. Our purpose is to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and plural epistemological framework within educommunication in order to consider both the lived experiences and the intellectual contributions of the women who have led, and continue leading, as transformative agents in a field that encourages critical thinking.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Science, gender and knowledge production

Different phenomena have introduced ongoing tensions between science and gender. The "Matilda effect" arises when people undervalue the accomplishments of women scientists, often attributing their work to male colleagues (Gage, 1883; Rossiter, 1993). The concept of the "glass ceiling" points to the barriers that restrict women's career advancement (Burín, 1996), while the notion of the "sticky floors" highlights the difficulties women face in transitioning from domestic life to public and professional domains (Berheide, 2013). The "leaky pipeline" metaphor describes the educational and professional trajectories of women, who often withdraw from scientific careers because of institutional barriers, discriminatory pressures, and rooted stereotypes (Fernández-Álvarez, 2020).

Cultural representations of women have reinforced their marginal presence as normative despite a slow but steady progression toward leadership roles and broader access to scientific careers, in which different fields are still segregated (González-García, 2017). The feminist philosopher at Penn State University, Nancy Tuana (2004), grounded this issue in her concept of the "epistemology of ignorance", framing the traditional construction and valuation of human knowledge. She argued that understanding what remains unknown (deliberately or unintentionally ignored) is just as important as the knowledge itself.

Regarding these concerns, Susana Narotzky (1995), professor of social anthropology at the University of Barcelona, urged scholars to place gender at the core of academic inquiry. She emphasized the need to move beyond binary classifications that conceal biases, such as nature/culture, domestic/public, and reproduction/production, and advocated for a historical perspective that places women's experiences as a standard of human understanding. Narotzky called for a dialectical integration of the ideal and material that both recognizes women's roles and educates future generations.

Indeed, this feminist movement initiated a critical reassessment of historical narratives and scientific-technological development. Pioneering work by Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), physicist, historian, feminist philosopher, and Ruth Bleier (1986), neurophysiologist, educator, and activist, anchored their critiques in the idea of gender as a social construct. They showed how academic fields developed within an androcentric discourse that hindered women's equitable inclusion. In 1992, *Science* published a special issue titled *Women in Science*, in which contributors documented the struggles faced by American women endeavoring to achieve the upper echelons of scientific institutions. This text has two frameworks: a psychological framework, related to attitude and personality and a sociological framework, associated with family and institutional structures. The former focused on insecurities and self-doubt fostered by male dominance, while the latter addressed the burdens of managing multiple roles as scientist, mother, daughter.

In Spain, women's scientific and academic participation has followed a similar pattern. Spanish universities still show gender segregation, with most women entering education, health, and social services, while fewer pursue careers in engineering, industrial technology, or physics (Unidad de Igualdad, MEFP, 2022). These institutions of higher education have continued to be molded by those who originally designed, occupied, and governed them, thus leading to a legacy of erasure, absence, and exclusion. However, emerging realities and empirical evidence have challenged this legacy, prompting a perspective that affirms the legitimacy and visibility of (future) female scientists (Flecha-García, 1999). As Keller (1985) argued, health science must embrace the coexistence of diverse cognitive frameworks and strategic approaches. This vision calls for profound changes, enhancing self-worth and confidence, fostering democratic and transparent structures, and ensuring inclusive access to scientific knowledge for all (van-den-Eynde, 1994).

## **2.2. Educommunication and media literacy from a gender perspective**

Based on the above concerns, this study discusses the role of women in the field of educommunication, which is an interdisciplinary paradigm that merges education and communication and has gained particular prominence in the Ibero-American context (Castro-Lara, 2016). This approach promotes critical thinking, active participation, and collective reflection, focusing on the resolution of social issues related to media, information, and digital platforms (Aparici, 2010; Aguaded et al., 2022). Concurrently, this concept has evolved globally into what is known as "media and information literacy", which emphasizes both the theoretical and practical training of citizens to engage with media and informational tools critically and responsibly (Grizzle et al., 2021).

The educommunication movement draws on Paulo Freire's principles of critical pedagogy (2005) and consolidates its foundations through the work of Mario Kaplún (1998) in *A Pedagogy of Communication*, in which the author advocated for a critical reading of media culture. Several scholars have made other contributions to the field, recognized in academia as "pioneers of educommunication". In addition to those already mentioned, some notable figures have been Francisco Gutiérrez (1981), Valerio Fuenzalida (1986), Joan Ferrés (1992), Roberto Aparici (1996), Alfonso Gutiérrez-Martín (1997), Guillermo Orozco (1997), Ismar de-Oliveira-Soares (1997), Ignacio Aguaded (1999), Daniel Prieto-Castillo (2002), Octavio Islas (2009), and Agustín García-Matilla (2011), among others.

Although women have played a modest role in the early development of educommunication, their contribution has steadily grown. Scholars such as María Teresa Quiroz (2003), Silvia Bacher (2016), Gabriela Borges (2014), Delia Crovi (1998), Carmen Marta-Lazo (2018), Amor Pérez-Rodríguez (2004), Patricia Núñez-Gómez (2013), and Charo Sádaba (2024), among others, have contributed to the field. Nevertheless, the historical predominance of male figures continues to evoke the question posed by Rossi (1965): "Why so few?". Considering that fields such as engineering, technology, physics, and industry have traditionally restricted women's participation, recognition, and advancement, it is worth asking whether educommunication, understood as a field framed in the social sciences and humanities and committed to critical thinking, fosters the healthy, diverse, and gender-inclusive science perspectives envisioned by Keller (1985). Therefore, this research presents a dialogue with three leading Spanish scholars in the field: Dr. Paloma Contreras-Pulido, Dr. Rosa García-Ruiz, and Dr. Charo Sádaba, in recognition of the women who have contributed (and continue to contribute) to the development of educommunication.

## **3. Research questions and methodology**

Our methodological design focused on three research questions that guided the subsequent analysis:

RQ1) Which leading figures have female researchers identified in their academic development within the field of educommunication?

RQ2) What structural barriers related to gender inequality have they encountered in professional careers?

RQ3) What resilience and leadership strategies have been developed to address these gaps from a critical perspective?

This approach addresses the discursive complexity surrounding gender-aware educommunication practices through a qualitative methodology that privileges a holistic and contextual understanding of the lived experiences (Merton & Kendall, 1946) of female researchers in this interdisciplinary field. The use of semi-structured interviews as the data collection technique stems from the richness and depth of individual narratives (Spradley, 1979), providing a detailed exploration of subjacent themes concerning past experiences, practices, challenges, advice, and future prospects in educommunication. The interview guide covered the following topics:

- Leading figures in educommunication and their influence on academic and research development.
- The relevance of a gender perspective in academic, research, and professional activities in educommunication.
- Phenomena and anecdotes observed, experienced, or confronted in academic and professional settings regarding gender inequality.
- Past and present leadership in educommunication projects.
- Future prospects, visibility, and leadership of female educommunicators.

We conducted the interviews via videoconference, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Participants provided verbal informed consent for the recording, transcription, and scientific publication of their testimonies (see transcripts at <https://reunir.unir.net/handle/123456789/17701>). The Microsoft Word (Microsoft 365) speech recognition tool automatically rendered the transcripts, which were manually proofread to guarantee content accuracy and narrative consistency. We analyzed the transcripts inductively using Atlas.ti 24 through an open coding process to identify emerging categories relative to the research questions.

### 3.1. Sample

We selected the sample through convenience sampling guided by criteria including a well-established academic trajectory, institutional leadership, and research relevance in the field of educommunication from a gender perspective. We focused on participants with extensive and widely recognized scholarly production in media literacy and educommunication, as well as active engagement in specialized academic networks, leadership in competitive research projects, and prominent roles in key university structures. Furthermore, we prioritized direct access to the researchers in alignment with the principles of qualitative design, where the depth of discourse and willingness to collaborate shape the research process (Flick, 2015).

Dr. Paloma Contreras-Pulido [PCP] (International University of La Rioja) coordinates the research line "Educommunication and digital literacy for civic engagement" within the COYSODI group (Communication and Digital Society) at UNIR. She has contributed multiple research initiatives on media literacy, inclusive communication, and digital media. Her work addresses social and media vulnerability and exclusion by publishing in leading international scientific journals.

Dr. Rosa García-Ruiz [RGR] (University of Cantabria) is Associate Professor accredited as Professor in Didactics and School Organization. She has led the Department of Education from 2021 until her appointment as teacher vice-rector in 2025. She directs the GRIE Research Group at UC. The CSIC ranking (Aguillo, 2025; Universidad de Cantabria, 2025) recently recognized her work among the ten most influential researchers at her institution. Her research centers on digital competence and media literacy, with a special interest in teacher education, both preservice and in-service.

Dr. Charo Sádaba [CS] (University of Navarra) has been Professor of Communication and Dean of the School of Communication since 2017, and stands among Spain's leading scholars in the area of childhood and technology. In 2018, *Mujeres&Cía* included her among the *Top 100 Women Leaders* in the category of "Thinkers and Experts". She has coordinated several reports on children and screen use in both public and private institutions (e.g. Telefónica Foundation, INCIBE), and she has collaborated in advisory boards on digital literacy, citizenship, and ethical media regulation.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. RQ1: A matter of perspective: women leaders in educommunicators

Our discussion about leading figures in the field of educommunication revealed a rich diversity of interest in the academic journeys of researchers. Conceptually, they all acknowledged the seminal relevance of Paulo Freire, Mario Kaplún, and Guillermo Orozco. They also highlighted the contributions of David Buckingham in the United Kingdom, Alfonso Gumucio Dagron in Bolivia, and Agustín García Matilla, Ignacio Aguaded, Roberto Aparici, Alejandro Baranquero, and Alfonso Gutiérrez in Spain. In this early period, they also credited the contribution of Sonia Livingstone (United Kingdom), although they noted the limited participation of women throughout this formative stage in the field's development ([PCP]: "They have been present, though perhaps later than men"). However, when we invited them to reflect on the work of women in educommunication, the researchers introduced several leading figures.

Dr. Contreras-Pulido pointed out the contributions of Amor Pérez Rodríguez, Carmen Marta, María José Masanet, Rosa García-Ruiz, Ana Duarte Hueros, María Dolores Guzmán Franco, Paula Renés Arellano, M. Carmen Caldeiro Pedreira, Sonia Livingstone, Charo Sádaba, María José Brites, and Heleny Méndiz.

She also acknowledged the valuable perspectives spread by a younger and emerging generation, including Daniela Jaramillo Dent, Arantxa Vizcaíno Verdú, and Mónica Bonilla del Río. Dr. García-Ruiz mentioned Amor Pérez Rodríguez, Águeda Delgado Ponce, Charo Sádaba, Sonia Livingstone, and Carmen Marta, also emphasizing the growing presence of young researchers in the field. Specifically, people involved in the Alfamed Joven network. Finally, Dr. Sádaba named Silvia Bacher, Paloma Contreras-Pulido, Paula Renés Arellano, Carmen Marta, and Rosa García-Ruiz, among others (Table 1).

**Table 1: Woman educommunicator leaders cited by interviewees**

Researcher	Institution/Country	Line of research
Silvia Bacher	Las Otras Voces, Argentina	Media literacy, radio, audio-visual communication.
Mónica Bonilla-del-Río	University of Cantabria, Spain	Educommunication, special-needs education, digital inclusion, media literacy.
María José Brites	Lusophone University, Portugal	Youth and media, journalism, audiences, media literacy.
M <sup>a</sup> Carmen Caldeiro Pedreira	University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain	Educommunication, media literacy, ICT, innovation.
Paloma Contreras-Pulido	International University of La Rioja, Spain	Educommunication, media literacy, social education, social inclusion.
Águeda Delgado Ponce	University of Huelva, Spain	Educommunication, media competence, media literacy, didactics of language and literature.
Ana Duarte Hueros	University of Huelva, España	Educational technology, digital competence, ICT.
Rosa García-Ruiz	University of Cantabria, Spain	Media literacy, innovation, ICT, educommunication.
María Dolores Guzmán Franco	University of Huelva, Spain	Educational technology, media competence, ICT.
Daniela Jaramillo Dent	University of Zurich, Switzerland	Migration, social media, Internet studies, multimodal analysis.
Sonia Livingstone	London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), United Kingdom	Children, media, Internet, online risks.
Carmen Marta	University of Zaragoza, Spain	Journalism, RICT, digital competence, audio-visual communication.
María José Masanet	University of Barcelona, Spain	Media literacy, youth, gender, television.
Heleny Méndiz	Catholic University of the North, Chile	Educommunication, radio, strategic communication.
Amor Pérez Rodríguez	University of Huelva, Spain	Educommunication, media competence, media literacy, language and literature didactics.
Paula Renés Arellano	University of Cantabria, Spain	ICT, digital competence, teacher training, prosumers.
Charo Sádaba	University of Navarra, Spain	Adolescence, childhood, media, media literacy
Arantxa Vizcaíno Verdú	International University of La Rioja, Spain	Transmedia storytelling, social media, cultural studies, Internet studies, fandom.

Source: created by the authors based on the Google Scholar profile of the researchers cited by the interviewees.

Throughout the interviews, the researchers clarified that they did not present an exclusive list and acknowledged other relevant women whose contributions continued to expand the educative perspective across various approaches and fields. This diversity broadens the spectrum of voices and research lines within education, aligning with a generational shift that parallels the increasing visibility of women in the academic, scientific, and professional spheres.

In this context, they addressed issues related to gender implications. The researchers underlined the relevance of recognizing the breadth of these contributions while pointing out a persistent disparity: women comprise the majority of education projects, yet men overwhelmingly occupy leadership roles. Dr. Contreras-Pulido identified this imbalance as a gap that must be addressed to advance gender equity in the field.

[PCP]: The remarkable thing is that in the projects I have worked on from an educative perspective, media literacy, media competence... I would say that 98% of us were women. The fact, however, is that 99% of the projects I have been involved in were led by men.

Dr. Contreras-Pulido stressed the importance of amplifying this perspective, while Dr. García-Ruiz called for dismantling the stereotypes and narratives that sustain gender and generational inequalities.

[RGR]: We must be aware of this gender perspective. [...] I believe it is important that, from now on, we open up the opportunity to explore strategies and content to... I do not know, to dismantle all those stereotypes and narratives that still, in some way, hinder progress toward genuine equality.

Dr. Contreras-Pulido further advocated that women claim scenarios that have traditionally excluded them from leadership.

[PCP]: I believe that society is changing. I believe academia is changing... I would even say that *occupying*, with a 'K', so to speak, sometimes takes on an almost... I do not know, assertive stance, simply being there. I am not sure if I am making myself clear, right? Insisting on our presence, despite everything.

The researchers also acknowledged the challenges of integrating gender perspective into educative research and practice. Dr. Sádaba pointed to the lack of recognition of women's contributions, which reflects enduring barriers that seem to continue limiting or undermining access to leadership, often "sustained" by men.

[CS]: I am convinced that the contribution of women has been essential, but I also believe that it has not received the same recognition as male contributions, at least until more recently. This is understandable, given the course of societal development. In other words, [...] what has happened within the education network ultimately reflects what has happened in the world around us. Does it not? We are gradually acknowledging, valuing, and giving voice to women who have something to say.

They also observed emerging changes in gender roles among younger generations.

[PCP]: But then I also see colleagues working within this same educative field, right? For example, I am thinking of Iván Sánchez-López, or now that I am working with Sender Godoy, who is preparing his doctoral dissertation, like many others in this line of work [...] and I feel that the nature of their work is entirely different, and that, moreover, they genuinely wish to and do integrate very well into teams led by women.

Despite this progress, the researchers identified gaps and divisions within the field that hindered the integration of diverse perspectives and obstructed the transition toward a more inclusive and honest framework for gender and generational equity.

[CS]: We are also moving toward the same commitment to the integration of diversity, gender perspectives, generational perspectives, and viewpoints from both professional practice and academic research. I mean, I think there are many... I am not sure if we should call them gaps, right? But certainly efforts to be made to [...] truly ensure a diverse approach.

In this sense, the interdisciplinary field of education is not immune to the challenges inherent to gender equity. The researchers placed particular emphasis on the growing awareness of social and academic change and urged the academic community to adopt a proactive position that recognizes and deals with systemic inequalities rooted in science, academia, and the broader society.

## 4.2. RQ2: Between the Matilda effect, the red dress and the impostor syndrome

When we asked about perceptions surrounding the “Matilda Effect”, the researchers provided insights that mirrored deeper thoughts about the role of women in academia. Dr. García-Ruiz explained that she did not personally experience gender-based inequality, describing her environment (which is a public institution) as a “privileged context” in which “differentiation in opportunities or salaries” for women has no place. However, she pointed out subtle disparities, specifically in terms of caregiving responsibilities and work-life balance:

[RGR]: When I talk with my female colleagues, I find that the professional divide, at least in my field, is not so much about being a man or a woman, but rather about being a mother. When you are a mother, you must give up some privileges.

This observation agrees closely with current studies reporting that work-life balance often mediates the academic and research careers of female professors (Torres-Guzmán et al., 2023). As noted by Montes-López and Simbürger (2021), women frequently face the dual burden of personal and professional pressure, reinforcing severe gender bias. This issue becomes even more critical when universities fail to enforce policies that effectively support work-life conciliation. In this context, Dr. García-Ruiz added the following:

[RGR]: But it is also true that as soon as you look at the media today, there are several analyses of newspaper front pages reporting that the majority of those featured are men. We continue to see company board meetings where most participants are men, and women still face a glass ceiling, sometimes self-imposed, and sometimes simply because they have no other option.

As previously discussed, the glass ceiling refers to the phenomenon that prevents women from reaching top-tier positions within organizational hierarchies, manifesting in their limited presence in leadership and decision-making roles across public and private sectors (Gallego-Morón et al., 2020). Jorquera-Torres (2023) emphasizes that sociocultural, organizational, and personal barriers, often subtle and nearly invisible, prevent the professional advancement of women. These obstacles relate to entrenched stereotypes, gendered professional interests, and identity conflicts, particularly regarding motherhood. Motherhood, in fact, is associated with an expectation of unconditional and altruistic dedication, requiring women to resign or renounce core life events (Jorquera-Torres, 2023).

Although Dr. Sádaba did not generally experience direct gender discrimination in her academic career, she shared an anecdote in which she perceived discriminatory treatment:

[CS]: [...] In my professional practice, I have been aware of being invited to sit on a panel, simply because I am a woman. Just for that reason. In fact, I was almost literally a decorative presence, a kind of token, right? On occasions when I have spoken about this situation, which is, after all, an anecdote, I have referred to it as the “red dress syndrome” because I was fully aware that day... I was impossible to miss, as I was wearing a red dress, right? [...] Moreover, I was a keynote speaker at the event, and when the session ended and people came up to talk, no one came to speak with me. They all went to speak with the men who had been on the same panel; men who were not the focus of the session, but who were there because of their position of power, right? And in that moment, I felt it, truly, for the first time... that sense of: “I am invisible and I am wearing a red dress. So, it should be impossible to be invisible”.

This moment reveals a deeper reflection of the invisibility of women, even in academic environments. Despite being the keynote speaker, excelling visually, and despite the program spotlighting her as the leading figure, she received unequal treatment. She admitted that even when this event was isolated, it deeply affected her.

She further reflected that when she thinks of the foundational leading figures in educommunication, “the first names that naturally come to mind are male, probably because they were professors, department heads, or had institutional visibility at that time” [CS]. This observation follows the “logic of the times”, as described by Gómez-Cama (2016), who explains that such discrimination often results from historical and structural trajectories in the workplace.

Despite these inequalities, the researchers expressed their awareness and hope for further progress in gender equality:

[PCP]: We are witnessing, fortunately, the emergence of many voices within academia that are calling for true equality, for genuine non-discrimination, and for an end to the kinds of abuse that, in many cases, are perpetuated within the academic sphere through very specific gendered dynamics... And above all, they are calling attention to the exhausting trajectory,

which is a path that is often far more exhausting for women due to the care responsibilities they are expected to shoulder, responsibilities that have yet to be fully addressed, right? We could say that progress is being made, but the problem is far from resolved, and as a result, women tend to... well, tend to experience a slower academic career, often avoiding leadership roles of this kind.

They emphasized the growing recognition of women who are now gaining visibility and leadership in universities, which is an evolution that contrasts with the context of previous decades:

[CS]: Since I became involved in this field, I believe there has been a clear effort to acknowledge the role of women. [...] I think there is an incredible female presence and an extraordinary wealth of female talent in this network across all ages, which sometimes makes me feel saddened to think that the older members of this network may not have had the same opportunities that younger generations probably do today.

[RGR]: I believe that we must continue working along these lines, above all, to ensure equal opportunities.

The interviewees also noted the relevance of the impostor syndrome, which is a concept describing the internal experience of feeling that one's achievements or successes are undeserved, accidental, or not legitimate (Galán-Fresno, 2022). Dr. Sádaba addressed this:

[CS]: We must confront our own "impostor syndrome". I mean, this is a real issue. At least for me, this is very real. Even today, perhaps with less intensity, I still sometimes find myself thinking that I am there, but maybe someone else should be in that position. [...] I can acknowledge that there is probably a colleague, female or male, who might be able to do it better than I can, but not because of gender, but because of their personal or professional profile. [...] This is a kind of self-imposed limitation you face.

Dr. Contreras-Pulido echoed this sentiment:

[PCP]: It still happens to me. The assumption of leadership, even when you are capable of leading, mobilizing people, inspiring, generating creative ideas... Even then, taking on the full commitment of what it means to lead major projects, whether at the national, European, or even regional level, is something I experience myself. I mean, it becomes a kind of... I do not know if I would call it impostor syndrome but certainly something close to it. I would even say a kind of reluctance, because the structures are so masculinized in their forms that they sometimes clash with your own way of understanding things, your way of being, and your own principles. And you think... well, perhaps you can still achieve your goals, but through different means, without having to enter the *testospheric* whirlwind that defines the workings of academia. And it really is like that. So you tend to seek out a bit of quiet, calm, and perhaps to move a bit more slowly, because that kind of assertive momentum may not align with your values.

She continued to explain that she is working on "developing that capacity for fearless leadership", while acknowledging that this effort involves not only internal work but also the external messaging women constantly receive, "both directly and indirectly" [PCP]. Dr. Sádaba supported this view, asserting: "You have to be aware that this is a self-imposed limitation, and you must find the strength to overcome it". She urged researchers to recognize that impostor syndrome might persist throughout their careers: "It might lessen in intensity, but never completely disappears. Is that unfair? Probably. But it is a reality" [CS].

These reflections highlight a nuanced understanding of gender roles in academia. While they may not have found overt or frequent discrimination, their experiences reveal subtle inequalities, mostly related to family balance and leadership opportunities, which remain major constraints on women's careers in academia and science.

### **4.3. RQ3: Leading with scientific and human integrity**

Regarding the researchers' experiences with leadership, their perspectives reflected nuanced divergences in their approaches to such scientific challenges.

Dr. Sádaba led projects primarily focused on evaluating media literacy initiatives for older adults and other communities. Dr. García-Ruiz directed funded projects at her university, as well as European projects on media literacy. Dr. Contreras-Pulido noted that she had the opportunity to lead national initiatives in the field.

Dr. García-Ruiz pointed out that eligibility for a research grant is not based on gender but on the scientific quality of the proposal. She stressed that researchers apply on equal terms and that not necessarily all scientists in the departments attend these funding calls:

[RGR]: However, it is still a minority group compared to the number of women in the department. It is easier when someone brings you into their team, and you contribute in that way, right? But when taking the risk of leading, you have to give up on other things, and securing a competitive project is not easy. That said, I have to acknowledge that, in my environment at my university, I do not receive any kind of additional support when applying for projects because I am a woman. Nor do men do, and I think that it is fair. What I want to be considered is my capacity as a researcher to submit a strong proposal, not the fact that I am a woman and might earn extra points for it. So, yes, I had the opportunity to lead. It is challenging, but not more challenging, because I am a woman. I am convinced that it is equally difficult for everyone. [...] This is not easy, but incredibly rewarding. Once you succeed and work with a trusted professional team, it is worth it.

In terms of leadership practices, Drs. Sádaba and Contreras-Pulido reported some outstanding differences between their approaches and those of their male peers:

[CS]: We have a different way of leading, or rather, I would say that each person has their own way of leading [...] There may be styles more commonly associated with women than with men; but in reality, each of us leads differently. [...] At times, we may be accused of being slower or of struggling more with decision-making... But I would reframe that. I believe that our leadership style is generally speaking, and I am aware that I am generalizing here, but generally, in our leadership practice, we strive to build consensus before making decisions, right? As opposed to others, more traditionally masculine models, where decisions are often made first and consensus is sought afterward, with varying degrees of success, right?

Dr. Sádaba explained that this broader, more inclusive management approach, based on proactive listening and consensus-building, may slow down decision making, but allows her to involve "more voices and perspectives" [CS]. He appreciated this as a positive trait, mirroring a "more sustainable leadership" that she relates to "our inherent nature". Similarly, Dr. Contreras-Pulido underlined that what matters most is:

[PCP]: Do not lose your essence, do not lose your confidence, and above all, do not lose sight of the question: 'Why am I doing this?' For me, which has always been the guiding light, the moment that makes my heart boom, when I realize I want to dedicate significant time and effort to a research project or academic endeavor. It is always about the 'why', right? Now, when I stop to decide whether to take on an academic task, the first thing I ask myself is whether that work will make me happy, what purpose it serves, and what I can contribute. And I am not talking about grand contributions, but if I can make even a small contribution... Can I help? Can I make a positive difference? Then, I feel satisfied, right? So, I believe in that perspective, one that steps away from bureaucratic logic, from a system that is often highly masculinized, and instead asks: what for? If the project you are about to take on does not just feel right in your mind, but in your heart, in the pit of your stomach because you know it will bring you joy, then that is it. That is the answer. And I believe that is the compass that... I do not know if it has led me well or poorly, but right now, I am here, with an article, with a research project. And I am happy. I do it with joy, and I feel that it is really about.

She also remarked on the value of enjoying the process itself, not just the outcome:

[PCP]: Yesterday, I watched a beautiful documentary about Emilia Pardo Bazán. She was the first female Professor in Spain, and I was really moved by something she said, that joy should lie in the struggle, in the journey itself, not so much in the triumph. I believe that speaks to who we are: the joy of the journey, of living the process intensely, and with joy. That is, making sure you do not lose your sense of joy in the academic process is absolutely crucial, and that is when you truly succeed... I think that is fundamental. I personally admire the philosophy of Emilia Pardo Bazán, who became the first woman to hold a chair at a Spanish university despite everything, right? I believe that having such role models, who embrace joy in the process rather than the result, helps us appreciate the small things we do together, especially in projects such as these.

Finally, when we asked about the future of educommunication and the evolving position of women, Dr. Contreras-Pulido shared a transformative insight in which institutions seem to echo the wider social and cultural changes currently happening:

[PCP]: Well, as the saying goes, the future is female, or it will not be. I truly believe that this is the case. [...] I think this is fundamental, not just for us, not just for the present, but for those who will come after us. [...] This small struggle, carried out with joy, is not only meaningful to me personally but is, in fact, paving endless and wonderful paths for those who will follow.

## 5. Discussion

For decades, gender disparities in the scientific field have been well documented (Rossi, 1965; Keller, 1985; Bleier, 1986), and their impact has also affected the evolution of women's positions in educommunication. Even today, this gap remains evident because of the underrepresentation and limited impact of female researchers' contributions (Rajkó et al., 2023), which directly impacts their scientific output and visibility. A main insight emerges from these discussions. Initially, the leading figures in educommunication were essentially men; this has evolved considerably over time. At present, several women have become influential figures in the academic background of the interviewed researchers, evidencing ongoing progress in higher education systems that assess gender equality across areas of knowledge (Equipo de la Unidad de Igualdad del MEFP, 2022).

In this academic-scientific environment, largely structured around meritocratic procedures, progress has been made in reducing arbitrariness and narrowing the historic gender gap within universities. However, women scientists had to endure a high professional and/or personal burden, primarily as a result of work-life balance challenges (Fardella-Cisternas & Corvalán-Navia, 2020; Science, 1992). The insights drawn from these interviews reveal a significant transformation in how gender roles are perceived within the field of educommunication, while also highlighting the conditions that still require improvement. In this sense, and according to Fernández-Soto et al. (2024), despite these developments in terms of women's participation in science, gender inequalities continue to hinder their growth and reveal that the field still does not constitute that "healthy" scenario (Keller, 1985).

Under these circumstances, motherhood seems to be considered one of the factors that may adversely influence women's training and access to leadership positions and scientific production. These challenges tend to intensify over the course of their careers, although they may be nearly imperceptible at the outset; they become more pronounced when a woman chooses to become a mother (Fernández-Soto et al., 2024). Thus, it is clear that women in educommunication face specific limitations and professional constraints, whether external or self-imposed, that stem from personal circumstances and caregiving responsibilities. In other words, the same obstacles described over 30 years ago by women featured in *Science's* special issue persist today, involving psychological, attitudinal, personal, familial, and institutional dimensions (Science, 1992). In this context, the need to improve and guarantee work-family balance becomes evident, along with the importance of genuine shared responsibility in parenting. Traditionally, caregiving has been associated with women, largely due to entrenched social stereotypes, which lead to an imbalance in responsibilities based on gender. Therefore, there is a pressing need for policies that truly support shared parenting and equitable caregiving (Satán-Lamiña, 2023).

In contrast, this study also reflects a conscious effort to promote equal opportunities and reduce discriminatory practices, highlighting a positive shift among younger generations and a broader recognition of women's talent and contributions across all ages. These emerging generations are, in fact, driving these changes, guided by an interest in "making visible" (Flecha-García, 1999) and in building a foundation based on self-worth, confidence, democracy, and transparency (van-den-Eynde, 1994).

In professional practice, the interviewed researchers appeared to consciously recall or describe experiences related to gender disparities. For example, our conversations addressed the "Matilda Effect" and the unequal recognition of women's contributions within educommunication, particularly notable in the foundational stage of this interdisciplinary field.

Other issues related to the "glass ceiling" or the "impostor syndrome" have also arisen. The researchers acknowledged having experienced and continuing to experience the latter phenomenon throughout their academic careers. Impostor syndrome leads them to question their competence and performance in academic and scientific settings or when comparing their skills to those of colleagues. Consequently, they tend to underestimate their ability to take on high-responsibility roles, attributing their success to luck rather than intelligence or capability (Martínez-Labrin & Castela-Huerta, 2023). Reflections emphasized the frequency with which this "syndrome" arises, more intensely at the beginning of one's career but often present throughout academic life. This situation is described as a "self-imposed limitation" stemming from historical gender gaps and the shortcomings of meritocratic systems.

## 6. Conclusions and gender prospects from the perspective of educommunication

As educommunicators who have led and articulated concerns through this study, and who are intimately familiar with the experiences, emotions, and realities discussed, we position ourselves within the framework of the "epistemology of ignorance" as proposed by Tuana (2004), which emphasize the imperative to explore what remains unknown or deliberately unexamined about women's roles and contributions. In this case, we approach it specifically from the perspective of educommunication. A striking example of this dynamic is the present text itself, which, despite having passed both the review and article proof stages of a different academic project, was ultimately rejected by the editorial board without a clear rationale, citing only "noncompliance with certain formal and editorial criteria". This occurrence, at the heart of the twenty-first century, is especially paradoxical within a field that professes a commitment to critical thinking and the amplification of socially significant discourses. Nonetheless, we assert that our presence is, and will remain, constant as long as humanity endures: there will always be a place for women.

From a methodological perspective, this study adopted an exploratory approach, inherently limited by its qualitative design, particularly with respect to the number of participants. However, the intention was not to achieve statistical representativeness. Rather, the selection of participants was guided by both the recognized academic trajectories that allowed us to foreground meaningful, critically engaged narratives and by a convenience sampling strategy. We acknowledge that the inclusion of a broader range of educommunicators, specifically those from intergenerational and multicultural backgrounds, would meaningfully expand both the discursive field and interpretive potential of the study, opening avenues for future research, reflection, and intervention.

In this regard, despite persistent obstacles, the three women who participated in this study, each of whom led and inspired us with integrity, humility, and humanity, supported the need to continue interrogating and dismantling the gender gap, including within educommunication. The symbolic example of red dress represents a poignant reminder of the urgency to deconstruct the structures and practices that reproduce inequity and erase the contributions of women. Mere presence is not sufficient; the historical recognition of those who came before us, those who are here now, and those who will follow is equally essential. Moving forward, it will be crucial to cultivate self-worth, resilience, and sorority as foundational strategies to build more inclusive and equitable academic environments.

## 7. Authors' contribution

Task	Author 1	Author 2
Conceptualization	X	X
Data curation	X	X
Formal analysis	X	X
Funding acquisition		
Investigation	X	X
Methodology	X	X
Project administration	X	X
Resources	X	X
Software	X	X
Supervision	X	X
Validation	X	X
Visualization	X	X
Writing – original draft	X	X
Writing – review and editing	X	X

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inequalities with empathy, honesty, and a critical perspective. Their reflections have inspired us and contributed significantly to this work, fostering greater awareness and transformation within the field of educommunication. We also wish to reclaim this space in response to those who have attempted to silence our voices. Rather than discouraging us, such actions have only strengthened our resolve to make visible the contributions of all the women, colleagues and friends, who today stand as exceptional educommunicators. This work also belongs to you as well. Translator: Arantxa Vizcaíno Verdú.

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## 10. Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## 11. Responsible declaration of the use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the development of this study.

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