Article

Female Academics in Higher Education: Conducting Qualitative Research against All Odds

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Abstract: This piece brings together the experiences of four Chilean researchers and one Spanish researcher with different professional backgrounds (psychology, sociology, nursing, and education), who conduct qualitative inquiry from other approaches, moments, and gender-sensitive topics of interest in the border regions of Arica and Parinacota, and Tarapacá, both in northern Chile; the capital Santiago; and in Andalucía, southern Spain. In this paper, the authors problematize their research experiences by focusing on their condition as academics conducting qualitative research in the context of neoliberal higher education and with a pandemic affecting all spheres of life. Finally, they explore what their experiences have been like in leading government-funded research projects and representing the voices of underrepresented people in different spheres of life in the field of education and health. Voices are shared to identify challenges and assess implications for qualitative research in these difficult times in the academy.

Keywords: gender; academic life; female experiences; qualitative research; collaborative [auto]ethnography

1. Introduction

For decades, various women in universities have tried to overcome the complex barriers they face and have pointed out the absence of the gender agenda in academic fields, denouncing the presence of discrimination, gender gaps, and androcentrism in the sciences as well as the persistence of universities as spaces that structure and reproduce gender inequalities (Ponce 2020). Although the movements between Chile and Spain for the incorporation of the gender perspective in higher education are distinct, the same challenges are present in both.

By 2012, significant differences were observed in terms of the number of academics in Chilean universities; males dominated the field. It only became equitable when comparing the number of young academics; as women advance in age, their presence in academia begins to decrease (González et al. 2013). Regarding their presence, vertical and horizontal segregation is observed in academic work because women tend to obtain lower hierarchical positions and receive lower salaries (Duarte and Rodriguez 2019).

Seven years after a similar protest in 2011, in 2018 a feminist student protest occurred in which feminist demands became stronger during the student marches because the student political involvement joined the activism of women who rebelled against harassment in different universities, demanding an education free of sexism (Ponce 2020).

Consecutively, various gender policies began to be created around the country, thanks to the creation of Law 21369, which aims to promote the creation of comprehensive policies

to prevent, investigate, punish, and eradicate sexual harassment, violence, and gender discrimination in all higher education institutions in the country to create safe environments, free of harassment and gender discrimination (Mineduc n.d.). Because academics perform functions in teaching and research, universities were updated about gender issues. These were also reflected in the various institutions offering competitive funds within the country, such as the Development Fund and National Fund for Science and Technology, and Bicentennial Projects (Espinoza 2013). An example of this is the Gender Equity Policy in Science and Technology for the period 2017–2025 of the National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICYT), which promotes gender equality in science, technology, and innovation, generating actions against gender gaps (CONICYT 2017).

Both Spain and Chile created institutions for protecting women against gender discrimination as far back as 40 years. In 1983, Spain created the Women's Institute while Chile created an organization oriented to women in 1991 through the National Women's Service (Instituto de las Mujeres n.d.; Servicio Nacional de la Mujer y la Equidad de Género 2021). Among the advances in gender and education is the creation of the Organic Law 3/2007, of March 22. It advocates for the equality of women and men, increasing the equality of men and women in human dignity, rights, and duties through the elimination of any type of discrimination against women in any area where they develop in the university and requesting to add the gender perspective to different areas of work and study (Boletin Oficial del Estado 2007). Moreover, the Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men 2022–2025 emerged due to the law mentioned above with the function of being able to guide institutional and social changes to generate gender equality through training, collaboration, and participation with other entities (Instituto de las Mujeres 2022). Furthermore, and specifically, at a structural level, Gender Units have been created and have been operating for some years now in universities in Spain, as is the case of the Equality Unit of the University of Seville (Unidad para la Igualdad 2018). This Unit aims to foster and promote equality at the University through different training, dissemination, and research actions and some structural actions that promote the development of a regulatory framework in this regard.

Specifically, regarding the field of research, Law 14/2011 was created to establish a reference framework for the promotion and regulation of research, technology, and innovation in the country; in this sense, Title IV indicates the need to incorporate the gender perspective into research, requesting institutions to include gender clauses in their documents as well as to encourage the entry of women into leadership positions (Boletin Oficial del Estado 2011).

Although progress has been made in terms of laws in both countries, it is vital not to forget the reflections of García (2006), who states that there could be a mirage of equality between men and women, where although women can be seen occupying spaces considered masculine or policies concerning gender, equality cannot be assured. In the same way, Lagarde (2003) proposed the "veil of equality," referring to the fact that despite the existence of laws and regulations regarding gender equality, it is not socially guaranteed because there may still be experiences that occur silently in women's lives, which requires being constant in terms of rights. This existing inequality is evident in situations of abuse and violence against women, although sometimes this inequality manifests itself in more dangerous ways, if possible, due to its subtlety, apparent normality, and silences (Rebollo-Catalán et al. 2018; Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género (DGVG) 2020).

Our voices as qualitative researchers investigating our countries.

Our collective experience as qualitative researchers show our gender sensitivity when defining research problems. However, in the current research, little is said, even for qualitative researchers who recognize biases as contributing to research (Vázquez 2014). It seems that despite the current momentum of qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Jennings (2018), it is taken for granted that research questions and projects are gender-neutral for their researchers. We propose that we are not concerned with the same issues as men are and that our sensitivity to research is mediated by our

life experiences (daughters, mothers, granddaughters, wives, sisters, aunts, students, professionals, and colleagues) and the roles that are socially imposed on us in these gender constructs that are so universal when it comes to the role of women in academia.

An example of this is the gap that exists in the case of women in research since even obtaining the position of an academic is complex; in the case of Chile, only 33% of researchers in universities are women, while in Spain, the corresponding staff of women is only 24.1%. (Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología, Conocimiento e Innovación 2022).

Specifically, according to data from the University of Seville (2022) concerning the situation of its Teaching and Research Staff [PDI], 61% of the PDI are men compared to 39% of women, i.e., there is a gender gap in favor of men of 21%. However, this has indeed decreased since the previous analysis. Although the differences in the male/female distribution are evening out and there are still slightly more female than male students entering the university system and more female than male graduates in the doctorate program, the percentages follow the same patterns, and in the stable figures of academia, the percentage of men exceeds that of women, although within parity and with a decrease in this difference in the last courses represented.

It should be noted that the gap between genders is most notable, although with a marked decrease, in the top tier of university professors. This gap consists of the performance of positions of responsibility, management of centers and departments, research groups, project management, and institutional positions. Therefore, we find fewer difficulties in entering the academic sphere than previously, but difficulties persist for performance and professional promotion on equal footing.

The above reflects that there is still a "glass ceiling" for women, indicating the difficulties that women frequently encounter in their ascent in their academic careers, measuring the relative opportunities of women (compared to men) to reach the highest position in the academic hierarchy. Sometimes these reasons are motivated without apparent cause, which is connected to the different development of women's lives, citizens and responsibilities in everyday life, the difficulties in conciliation, and other intricacies of mercantilist and sexist labor dynamics. In contrast, at the University of Seville in Spain, progress is being made toward the reconciliation of personal and professional lives for women, fair treatment, and the prevention of harassment.

In this context, we must be alert because every day, in our classrooms, tutorials, research groups, departments, corridors, or even outside these environments, situations occur that contribute toward an unequal vision of the world, academia, and relationships, which in some cases maintain sexist stereotypes and even generate new toxic practices, biased and marked by gender roles.

In contrast to neoliberalism is the everyday ideology that brings us together as female academics and qualitative researchers and challenges us to think and research with gender sensitivity (e.g., Zapata-Sepúlveda 2020; Saura and Bolívar 2019). It is not an easy task, given the complexity and deep-rootedness of gender inequalities and segregation in universities, expressed in a male organizational culture that permeates all their spaces (Rosa and Clavero 2020).

Thinking qualitatively about the research problems that interest us allows us to account for our standpoint. Indeed, as qualitative researchers and female academics, we are part of an epistemic community through which a point of view is generated based on our socially situated academic and research experiences (Intemann 2019).

In this context, this paper brings together the voices of five female academics who, in the collaborative support of writing as a form of research (e.g., Richardson and St. Pierre 2005), create spaces in which they seek to identify and make visible points in common through their narratives about their reflections and work experiences as academics and qualitative researchers. Thus, disparities and gender-mediated injustices are identified, which have led the authors to subsist in academic contexts in which it is normal and predominant for these difficulties and even violent practices to exist as a result of the social constructions of gender and the role of women in today's academia. Thus, collaborative

work through academic writing allows its practitioners to develop ideas and approaches that are often silenced in the academic community of female qualitative researchers, but which deal with elements common to women despite the different contexts in which the authors work. It is a form of identifying and making these issues visible for women working as qualitative researchers to have their perspectives validated and their voices heard.

Based on the above observations and our own life experiences, this paper seeks to develop reflections on how gender and the role expected of female academic researchers determine the development of their lines of research. To this end, each author will identify how they perceive that their gender informs their research questions in the context of current higher education, both in public universities in northern Chile and Andalusia, Spain. All this allows us to strengthen our voices as women in academia in a discourse that is validated by developing our ideas, concerns, and definitions of roles and positions as female qualitative researchers in the academic field.

For this purpose, the authors problematize their research experiences by focusing on three critical methodological questions: How the Chilean and Spanish contexts of public higher education can or cannot underpin and determine their lines of research; how gender is perceived in the development of qualitative research questions and about the challenges and opportunities that Chilean and Spanish institutions of higher education offer or deny to their mid-career academics; and finally, what have their experiences been like in leading government-funded research projects and representing voices of underrepresented people in different spheres of life in the field of education and health?

According to the above objectives, Pamela will develop the ideas that led her to develop a line of research in collaborative interpretive autoethnography with her co-authors on gender and academic life, presenting excerpts and reflections in order to respond to how the method she used allows her to generate situated knowledge through collaborative writing and autoethnography (Uta-Major Cod. 5792-21, and Cod. 3787-23). She will also reflect on how this process, including her inclusion in scientific publications, validates the voices in recognizing gender as a mediator of the challenges, contradictions, and dilemmas in academic careers.

Carmen will reflect on her experience as a researcher using the constructivist grounded theory to approach the study of the trajectories of female academics from a gender perspective (Fondecyt N° 1201517). In particular, she will focus on how this method allows the involvement of her own voice in the construction of knowledge jointly with the participants of the study from the moment the interviews are conducted until the analysis of the results, with a view that highlights the shared and situated experiences of being academics in a Latin American country with the performance requirements of the current neoliberal academy.

Magdalena will reflect on her experience as a researcher in academia, focusing specifically on a research project based on applying a qualitative and critical approach, with a mixed design. This project allows for promoting personal and collective management of the professional career of citizens, especially groups at risk of exclusion, such as women, migrants, and people with disabilities, among others, thus favoring social change, labor improvement, and entrepreneurship in a complex world mediated by various crises and war conflicts. Additionally, this will be accomplished by establishing a network of support and dynamization in virtual and mixed learning environments and guidance for personal and professional development. Specifically, it will be based on a direct action aimed at working people, young and adults, especially at risk of exclusion, planned vis an integral model for the construction of the professional career.

Mirliana will move between her politically active and feminist role, her involvement in representative positions regarding the defense and fight for gender equality in Public Universities, and also through associations of Chilean female researchers, which she will exemplify through the projects in which she participated during the COVID-19 pandemic. All of this will highlight the different roles, challenges, and demands associated with gender, as is the case of women who were overburdened in relation to their compensation,

as well as the unpaid care work they do and their understanding of caring, being cared for, and self-care as a social right.

Michelle will reflect on the results of her research of a qualitative nature with a phenomenological design on the conciliation of productive and reproductive roles of female academics involved in initial teacher education during the two years of teleworking in Chile, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic from a gender studies perspective. She will identify/explore how it is precisely our female gender that permeates every space of our lives, be it at home, at work, or in that blurry separation line that took place during the times of emergency remote teaching.

2. Materials and Methods

The article uses collaborative autoethnography to delve into the motivations that guided the researchers to develop their lines of research interest through their own research contexts. Collaborative autoethnography is defined as a methodology that is developed with the analysis and ability to describe one's own experience that accounts for the collective cultural experience (Ellis et al. 2011).

The writing of these experiences by the researchers is collaborative, which, according to Chang et al. (2013), offers a collaborative exploration of individual questioning and allows the multiplicity of voices to enrich the inner research process, strengthening not only the knowledge of themselves but also the knowledge of the collective experience. Through collaboration and reflection, researchers and research participants work together to deconstruct hierarchies in knowledge construction and generate more helpful knowledge for society (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2012; Chang et al. 2013).

This methodology, which seeks to reflect collaboratively on issues that concern us and affect our lives, has been used especially in complex social situations, such as when we lived through the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, Roy and Uekusa (2020) emphasize its value and implications as a methodology that encourages self-reflection and describe it as a necessary research approach to diagnose situations and solve problems of everyday life. This is even more important because of the resulting social impact, making visible the value of ethics in the process and the usefulness of scientific research for citizenship (Lapadat 2017).

For their part, the authors develop a particular text with interpretive autoethnography as a perspective methodology, which allows us to create introspective and protective virtual spaces through specific academic writing and builds on the limitations and challenges faced in everyday academic life (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005).

We use 'writing as inquiry' (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005) as a viable way to learn more about ourselves and our research topics. Therefore, we create an approach to our study topic by linking our research project to our biography.

Interpretive collaborative autoethnography allows us to live the process of connecting our experiences of everyday life as women in science with our emotions behind the act of storytelling. This practice and type of research allows us to insert personal experience into the particular context of the present. It works by empowering the voices of other women going through experiences similar to ours. This article is based on interpretive autoethnography as a research methodology. According to Chang (2016), autoethnography is a qualitative method in which researchers use their experiences as primary data to interpret and understand them in a sociocultural context.

Furthermore, Bochner and Ellis (2002) argue that this methodology enables us to look at new horizons in a more human, collaborative, and participatory way. Denzin (2013) argues that researchers must learn to relate autobiography and lived experience to groups and social relationships. Finally, Stacy Holman Jones (in Denzin 2013) considers autoethnography to be a combination of personal experiences and personal texts for critical cultural practices to contribute to research and connect with others. Collaborative autoethnography was used for this part. According to Diversi and Moreira, this type of autoethnography is "the collaborative production of autoethnographic texts by two or more authors, often

separated by time and distance" (Denzin 2013, p. 23). Following this methodology, we used personal stories to connect with our audience by evoking embodied human experiences. Performative writing allows freedom to write about scientific experiences in various life roles relevant to the biography; this is a sentiment in the writing practice that each of us does on our own (Pelias 2004).

First, we wrote our own stories and then continued to build on the stories of others associated with these voices, presented in this text as a process of co-construction and assembly (Chang et al. 2013). Thus, our "us" was connected in each of the shared stories formed in different layers according to the order of writing the stories presented in this paper. Each story represents an essential experience of our lives, allowing us to draw a line between science and the sentences we use.

As Pelias (2004) says, experimental writing as a form of autoethnography breaks the traditional academic discourse to humanize and understand the academic experience of researchers. In this sense, our prose relates to aspects of our lives as academic women that are usually unspoken and "often oppressively silenced" (Chang 2016, p. 446).

This collaborative autoethnography was initiated from conversations between colleagues and friends, several of whom regularly attend the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, in the group "A Day in Spanish and Portuguese (ADISP)."

In our reflections as women and academics, in the diverse spaces where we have encountered each other, our role in academia and the changing circumstances and challenges have been highlighted constantly while conducting qualitative research in our university contexts.

We are relatively young academics (between 40 and 50 years of age) that have achieved distinct management responsibilities in our institutions. Without a doubt, this presumed stability was shaken in our institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic as expectations and demands, considered "normal" given our gender and age group, became more apparent in our lives; we all experienced similar concerns, while our role, or the role expected of us, became a challenge to maintain while also working and researching.

According to this, we held conversations via messenger and in person at diverse conferences and the university in the case of the two authors that work at the same institution in the north of Chile.

On another occasion, we responded to an invitation issued by the organizers of the World Conference on Qualitative Research (WCQR) to the first author to present the work of our research group. She invited her co-authors to write about the questions that are included in this manuscript; they worked individually on their stories, which we incorporated into a file on her drive. Subsequently, we presented our individual texts at the WCQR, and this opportunity allowed transversal elements of autoethnographies to be developed in the collective parts of the manuscript, thus using this file as a platform for the online storage of information.

For the analysis, the authors referred to commonalities between their stories, which they developed collaboratively in a file in Google Drive. In this section, the first author reviewed the circular manner of each story in regard to the questions that this work generated as mentioned in the abstract of this work, and in this way, this section was created. Granted, this section could be improved on; however, this exercise was circular and repetitive regarding the initial questions, the presentation, the conversations held by the authors, and their texts.

Our story illustrates the process of developing our voice as key researchers in contemporary qualitative research. Morse (2002) and Gergen (2014) regard them as external criteria, considering multiple levels of critical analysis as quality criteria when incorporating them into individual texts.

A problematization of the authors' research experiences was carried out through this methodology. Voices were shared, identifying challenges and assessing implications for qualitative research in these difficult times in academia.

3. Results

Pamela's Voice

Writing as an act of examination of our gender roles in academia

I started writing through interpretive autoethnography about my role as a woman in academia long before the arrival of the boom of the #metoo movement in recent years, a movement to which we owe a substantial change in the discourse of university authorities, which has censored sexist practices in academic contexts, creating discrepancies, contradictions, and challenges in our behavior at the University. At the same time, it has favorably influenced the visibility of our role as women in academia, a role characterized by the existing disparities between men and women and the expectations for each gender, including those called minorities.

However, the road for female researchers, and especially for qualitative researchers, has been uphill in many cases and moments of our academic trajectories, and especially the battles we have had to fight to obtain the "permission" to develop in research, an area of development still led and facilitated for men.

In the Chilean context and especially in the region of Arica and Parinacota in the north of the country, women are constantly making an effort in all areas of our lives to prove and demonstrate that we are capable of developing quality research and that we can fulfill the different roles that society imposes on us. However, it is inevitable to do so. At the same time, we attend to more family and work tasks and commitments than our male peers within our families, with whom we often feel in contradiction to promote gender equality in our students and research and attend to family issues that assign differentiated roles according to our genders, especially around the care of our families and ways to link us to students.

Although today we find ourselves with the enactment of public policies (law) that seek to promote equality and respect for female academics, which gives us hope, in practice, these measures have not been properly implemented in all academic activities and internalized in the thinking and organizational culture that defines our gender roles in academia. In Chile, the Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica [National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research] (CONICYT 2017), which develops research in all areas of knowledge with national policies established by the Ministry of Science, presented a document of Institutional Policy on Gender Equity in Science and Technology to achieve greater gender equity in the national science, technology, and innovation system through actions that address gaps, barriers, and inequities. However, the distribution of projects awarded according to gender indicates that 62.5% are awarded to men and only 37.5% to women (Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo 2020).

On the other hand, in my case, I have had the opportunity and the joy of dedicating myself to researching the topics that have interested me and in which I have believed that I have been able to contribute to the knowledge of my region and my country and to the communities studied. First, I studied the long-term effects of politically motivated violence and torture in Chile, which led me to understand the current Chilean context as being a result of the most violent period in Chile, while at the same time, interpreting the history of my country from the particular forms of violence exercised towards women in Chile, which for me speaks of a society that is especially violent towards women. For example, unlike other contexts of state violence, in the case of Chile, almost all of the women detained reported having been subjected to sexual violence (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos 2004).

Subsequently, we studied the massive arrival of Colombian women to Chile, and with it the resulting racism, discrimination, and violence towards them; because of their nationality and skin color, they were violated during the international journey to Chile, treated as women dedicated to the sex trade by Chilean men, for the mere fact of being Colombian (Silva et al. 2018).

Additionally, we came to study migratory processes in the school context because the school became the best observatory to study the arrival of students coming primarily from rural areas of Peru and Bolivia. In this line of research, funded since 2016 by the National Agency for Research and Development of the Chilean government (where gender does not tend to be studied), we saw that conducting this type of research that included multimethod strategies of approaching the different educational communities generated emotions, feelings, and research questions that in many cases emerged from various sources: Observation in the classrooms and during recess, as well as attendance at cultural commemorative activities and through conversations with the children, students, and teachers present who approached education in a differentiated way according to their gender, their motivation and commitment to education and their work, and their knowledge of the native peoples. In my case and that of the female participants of the project, it differentiated us from the focus of interest of the male researchers participating in the project (Zapata-Sepúlveda 2022).

Thus, while men focus on connectivity, internet signal, school infrastructure, and demographic data, we women focus on students' accents, the dynamics of interaction according to their genders, the children's appearance/expressions, and the way they relate to us, all invisible aspects if they are not interpreted from a gendered perspective. For example, our attention is drawn to when students tell us their family stories, how much they miss their grandmothers, their meals, and their homes of origin, the time they would like to share with their parents who work in agriculture; or is the case of rural school teachers who approach us to tell us about their concerns with migrant children and the maternal role they assume with some students, which goes beyond the teaching role and covers the affective, emotional and basic needs of their students in an important way. Thus, aspects of the field emerge that seem to be invisible to researchers if they are not seen from a gendered perspective. We see, then, that the student's daily life experiences are mediated by gender. We see that in schools located in so-called vulnerable areas of the city, female students dream of finishing compulsory secondary education in order to get married and not continue studying, while for male students in the same conditions, the best plan is to finish high school in order to enter the military and become military personnel.

All of this has made us see and recognize our perspective within the research process and that we can develop new knowledge in academic writing that allows us to reflect and write what we cannot see with the thematic content analysis that we carry out in the interviews of our participants with the use of CAQDAS such as Nvivo.

At the same time, writing is a form of research (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005) in interpretive autoethnography (Denzin 2013). This research and writing method aims to examine personal experience to comprehend cultural experience through a systematic analysis. It challenges traditional research and representation methods and views research as a socially conscious and politically important activity (Ellis et al. 2011). This form of research has supported my career and that of other colleagues and friends similar to us in this text, which has allowed us to develop in a strengthened and collaborative way.

Writing on a second topic, along with research projects on former Chilean political prisoners and Colombian migrants, led me to reflect on my context of higher education, in which doing qualitative research was considered in a negative light, both because it was associated with being unproductive and because it dealt with topics and issues that were of little interest. Additionally, it dealt with sensitive political issues (Cornejo et al. 2019) in a country and an academic context that perceives the existing polarized/divided politics in a bad light, as a result of the history of political violence in a country where there is still impunity for crimes against humanity and where truth, justice, and reparation have not been successfully implemented by the governments after Pinochet's military dictatorship.

Thus, in the neoliberal context of Chilean higher education, we female researchers are required to pass many more tests to validate our voices; we also need to work much more than our male colleagues to be respected as researchers, and some of us opt for lifestyles without the worries of motherhood or childcare, which would undoubtedly

further complicate the efforts. At the same time, our choices are criticized by peers and seen as selfish, without a "life," or contribution to optimal human development, rather than accepting that not all roles are compatible when it comes to dealing with a masculine and macho culture that hardly facilitates the operational and intellectual work involved in research for women who also face the challenges of balancing gender roles and participation in academia, prioritizing their family duties over continuing education, facing difficulties in attending events outside of work due to their commitments, and other related factors (Upegui and Cervera 2018).

From the contemporary qualitative methodologies that I use, the collaboration with colleagues and friends such as those who share this text allows us to identify, recognize, and validate through academic writing our voices as women in academia. Thus, we have been able to visualize that the problems and issues of interest are not so different in the contexts in which we work, and our concerns are repeated in our research experiences, even though our research topics differ and our biographies, ages, life histories, and professional training differ as well.

According to the above, the recognition of gender as a mediator of our challenges, contradictions, and dilemmas allows us to twist the established, the normal, and the invisible in the eyes of many members of the higher education system and learn to respect ourselves so that we can assume our own and different role and ensure that our academic career is not limited by our gender, as is the local, national, and international trend nowadays. Furthermore, seeking efforts to strengthen and promote opportunities for women in the research area is extremely necessary, which is why the presence of the Red de Investigadoras [Network of female researchers], a feminist organization that seeks gender equity in research and academia by focusing on issues of knowledge, science, innovation, and gender and offering solutions to these difficulties, demonstrates the need to continue in search of unity in favor of equity (Red de Mujeres Investigadoras 2023).

Personally, writing in autoethnography in a second language, English, has allowed me to write collaboratively from the heart, recognizing my feelings, my emotions, my gender, my corporeality, my generation, and my vision of life, inherited and revised to break into and challenge my own academic training in undergraduate psychology in Chile and the doctoral program in clinical and health psychology in Spain. In those programs, quantitative, conventional, non-indigenous, and standardized training prevailed or pretended to do so. Thus, writing emerges as a form of self-exploration to understand our problems and occupations in the pandemic, and how our times have changed now from home, worried about taking care of our elderly parents in every possible way, because of the fear of losing them, because of the affection we have for them, and because historically we are the female daughters who take care of our parents and other older adults in our families.

During the pandemic, my mother had two falls. I would send fruits and vegetables at home, but she would become nervous with the use of a mask when the delivery person arrived. During the first semester of 2021, she had an accident at home as did many older adults. This time it was a fall that caused her to break ligaments in one of her knees. Her life has been affected by this, and although she has attended kinesiological therapy, the functioning of her knee changed. A few months after the accident, in 2022, I sent her some lamps as a gift to her house; they were very nice lamps that would look beautiful in her living room. That day she had another fall and hit her face on a stair railing; this time we feared the worst. Fortunately, she recovered, but what to do with these experiences that afflict us and inform our actions, which also have consequences in our academic work in relation to productivity, topics of interest, and gender roles? Writing about our roles and life experiences at different levels in a collaborative way, including our apprehensions and fears in pandemic times, as well as our contradictions as advocates of gender equality while also fulfilling family roles marked by the patriarchy inherited by all previous generations, certainly defines a new context. This context is now determined by virtuality and social

distancing that act as mirror from which we work collaboratively and support each other to continue developing our academic trajectories.

Carmen's Voice

My experience is a source of inspiration for my research on female academics

The gender inequalities experienced by women have been a constant concern in my research projects. This concern comes from my undergraduate and graduate training, where I had a solid background in gender sociology, which has been vital to observing the situations of gender inequality that are naturalized and made invisible in society and organizations.

Before proceeding, it is relevant to show my positionality (Holmes 2020) in this research process. My life experience marks my view of social reality as a woman and an academic. I am in my forties, married, and have a 3-year-old daughter. I am a sociologist doctorate in education and an associate professor at a state university in the north of Chile. Therefore, I am privileged to investigate what happens in academia. As a female academic, I am interested in deepening my knowledge about women's careers.

In my personal experience, the challenges of gender issues were revealed to me in different instances, but most significantly when I had the opportunity to occupy, for a limited period, a university management position at the same time I became pregnant with my daughter, which made everything more challenging. It was a good and enlightening experience. I could see the reduced number of women in positions of power and prestigious jobs. In the beginning, I was mansplained by older men or called "young lady" when I was over 35 years old. It was unusual for a young woman because I had to boss around older men and give my opinion on relevant issues, i.e., I had a voice that was heard in the space of power. I realized that very few of us were in these positions, a reality that occurs in all universities worldwide. Nevertheless, this reflection had me thinking about the following research question: What happened to the women who made it to the top in the universities? How have tenured female professors experienced their trajectory?

Undoubtedly, the experience of being in a management position marked me deeply, in a positive way, not only because of the learning and professional growth I experienced but also because it awakened my research interests. I felt a compelling need to investigate what happens to women in the upper echelons of management and academia. Therefore, I formulated a research project to answer this question and competed in a national research fund (Fondecyt Regular). This process was also challenging because I was pregnant and felt my brain was not working as fast as expected. Finally, in early 2020, along with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, my project won the funding competition. I was able to conduct my qualitative research on women in higher university hierarchies: Perceptions of their academic trajectory and experience from their voices. I conducted qualitative research using Charmaz's (2014) Constructivist Grounded Theory Method to explore the trajectories of female full professors and those who occupied important university management positions.

The Constructivist Grounded Theory Method considers that the research reality is found within a situation that involves both the researchers and the researched. This method wholly adjusted my view and experience of the research process, i.e., it allowed me to be part of it, which is very important in gender studies. Therefore, it rests on the idea that the research is constructed, that is to say, it is not given. Accordingly, this method assumes no such thing as a neutral and value-free researcher (Charmaz 2014), so my subjectivity and my background as a woman in academia can be part of the research process. It considers the researcher's current and active role in the study. It explores the implications of a women's situation (Clarke 2012). The constructivist perspective of grounded theory recognizes the active role played by the researcher in collecting data to be analyzed (Charmaz 2021). Therefore, this method allows me to be an active part of the data collection, and with all my background and experience in academia, I can actively interpret the information collected. Consequently, I chose the grounded theory method because it is well suited to research

conducted by women as it recognizes the situation, the diversity of realities, the perspective of individual women, and includes the consideration of analysis as partial, situated, and contextualized.

Likewise, the intensive interview fits into research with a gender perspective as it allows me to delve into the diversity of realities that female academics live. In addition, as a feminist researcher, it enables me to be aware of the nature of the relationship with those I investigate. Then, as Hesse-Biber (2013) points out, it allows me to understand my role in power and authority over the interview situation.

In the constructive grounded theory method, how the information is collected is vital. Thus, I use interviews formatted to the template of Charmaz (2014) and Charmaz and Belgrave (2012). The guidelines of these authors allow me to learn about the world, as the utterances and silences I pick up during an interview can theoretically guide my emerging ideas.

In-depth interviews focus on the topic while providing interactive space and time to allow the views and perceptions of research participants to emerge. My experience with the intensive interview was great because it fits so well with grounded theory methods, as authors such as Charmaz (2014) point out. As Charmaz suggests, the interview is powerful because it involves relatively direct exchanges of ideas and perspectives between me as a researcher, participants, and readers. For example, in the in-depth interviews, the women interviewed and I were able to share our experiences as women, academics, and mothers in the context of the pandemic. We talked about how challenging it was to work and be mothers in the same space due to the confinements and to recognize that this reality differed from our male colleagues.

As a feminist researcher, I am interested in creating knowledge for women rather than about women. When I interview, I am an active listener. As the "world" traveler Maria Lugones (1987) imagined, the active listener must question her assumptions, ingrained beliefs, and perceptions about others. Active listening is the most critical element of data collection (Leavy and Harris 2018). It is a means of getting to know people living in other contexts or situations without abusing them.

Through the intensive interview, I connected with the reality and experience of the women interviewed on a deep level.

In some cases, they shared with me in their stories some challenging moments of their lives. I identified the difficulties experienced by female academics who are now professionally successful in universities. These difficulties are gender stereotypes and roles and academic housework.

At times, during the interviews, I could identify with parts of these senior women's narratives about situations experienced in academia because, as an academic woman, I have experienced similar events.

Listening to the female academics' stories made me reflect on my challenges, the impact of my motherhood on my academic career, the feelings of guilt that arise from working at home, and the difficulty of managing time between teaching and research, among other aspects. However, despite how challenging academia can be at times, recognizing the factors contributing to overcoming these challenges, such as academic networks and family support, can guide the path to follow in the academic career. The knowledge constructed in this research is partial and does not represent the trajectories of senior women professors in other Latin American contexts. It is limited to the Chilean context, where academic courses must be understood in a context where neoliberalism and academic capitalism prevail in higher education. However, I emphasize the importance of rescuing the experience of these women, and the lessons learned, which can also be helpful for women in similar situations.

Magdalena's Voice

When "the personal is political": challenges for women in the current academic context

I reflect on my own experience as a researcher in academia, focusing specifically on the research project promoting the self-management of the professional career in contexts of socio-labor change: Dynamization, guidance, and support networks in integrated virtual environments. I+D+i Projects—«Retos Investigación» Modalities 2019–2020 Funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation (MCIN)/State Research Agency (AEI) Spain/PID2020-114833RB-I00, 2021–2025.

This project is developed in the context of Spain. In my country, the Ministry of Science and Innovation and the State Research Agency promote scientific and technical research in all areas by distributing research funds in competitive calls. They are guided by European guidelines and the establishment of priority axes of action according to the demands of society. Therefore, it can be said that, to a certain extent, certain lines of research are promoted or activated depending on the moment and social needs.

In our case, we work on guidance for developing a professional career. In a world in crisis, which has led to a historical, social, and economic turnaround, especially after the pandemic we are experiencing due to COVID-19, needs are becoming more acute and social problems are increasing. Many workers have lost their jobs or have become impoverished; companies (especially SMEs, small and medium-sized companies) have closed or need to reinvent themselves, while many people have difficulties making ends meet, live on social benefits, and do not see a clear path in life.

In general, employment has dropped considerably, jobs are increasingly precarious, unemployment has increased, and many jobs have been destroyed (Banco Mundial 2023). However, without a doubt, this situation affects the most disadvantaged people or those at risk of social and labor exclusion to a greater extent, groups that are expanding in society. Among them are currently poor working people, those who have several precarious jobs to make ends meet, or family nuclei in which, despite several members working, given the precariousness of jobs, are characterized as impoverished households (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2022). In the same way, having dependent children or dependents, or being a single-parent family, also increases the risk of poverty. Women, especially in situations of vulnerability, such as victims of gender violence, rural adult women with few qualifications and or who are unemployed, migrants, people with disabilities, non-traditional university students and individuals from family/social backgrounds at risk of exclusion (for example, people of Roma ethnicity, the elderly), and workers and entrepreneurs whose employability depends on the creation and maintenance of SMEs, especially small businesses and local commerce (Zeb and Ihsan 2020), have all become particularly vulnerable groups.

Faced with this situation, the Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030 2018), related to decent work and economic growth, places before us the need to promote employability and favor productive factories and ethical employers that guarantee safe living conditions in order to promote opportunities for employability and professional development for all people (European Commission 2020), with special attention to high-risk groups and disadvantaged people who, on the other hand, are increasingly widespread groups.

In this complex and changing context, it is more necessary than ever to promote the self-management of the professional career and the development of personal and professional skills. This must be achieved to guarantee decent jobs and resource networks that make life more sustainable (International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance [IAEVG] 2019; Cohen-Scali et al. 2018; Massoudi et al. 2020).

The personal, narrative, and qualitative dimension becomes relevant (McMahon 2020) in the sense of a necessary strengthening and empowerment in connection with the variables and axes of situations where the person is inserted as a social being. To do this, emerging theoretical trends, particularly the life design model, offer a powerful framework for people to adapt their careers in a work context characterized by uncertainty and permanent change. This model focuses the guiding action on using narrative and identifying milestones and critical issues in people's lives as a co-construction of their identity (Patton and McMahon 2014; Irving et al. 2020).

People are trained to build, rebuild, and manage their life and professional career (as a sequence of decisions) and can critically engage with their own decisions and the sociocultural realities surrounding them (Savickas 2013). From this approach, the guiding intervention emphasizes the significance and sense to clarify the purposes that determine the own perception of the possibilities. Through guiding action, the person comes to give meaning to her life by articulating her purposes, forming her intentions, and committing to herself, which determines the action projects in social and work life.

In this research project, guidance tools and environments through current technologies must be consolidated, which represents a challenge to the field of professional guidance. Virtual media are becoming necessary spaces after the pandemic, the widespread use of which has accelerated. In this sense, it is necessary to support training and guidance with dynamic and interactive models and technological tools that allow access to people to respond to their needs. For this, without a doubt, it is necessary to involve citizens in science, and for them to be an active part of the research projects that we generate in a collaborative-action-research model, including diffusion in society and the generation of permanent workspaces that derive valid solutions to real problems, both the current ones and those that are to come.

Based on the above, the reference project has the purpose of promoting the personal and collective management of the professional careers of citizens, especially of groups at risk of exclusion, favoring social change and labor improvement and entrepreneurship. All of this is accomplished through the establishment of support systems and dynamization in virtual and mixed environments of learning, as well as guidance for personal and professional development. Specifically, the project is based on the application of a qualitative and critical approach with a mixed design and is intended for a target audience of working people of all ages at risk of exclusion; it is planned from a comprehensive model for the construction of a professional career. It is intended to involve citizens and establish support and collaboration networks in virtual environments that will lead us to promote guidance practices for career development, consequently improving the living conditions of people through the promotion of employability and entrepreneurship.

In the research process, gender intersects with many variables that have to do with the career, with those of the people participating in the project, and also with my own as a researcher, both personally and professionally. In relation to the participants, a critical work process, primarily reflective and narrative, on their own career allows them to identify and become aware of their own identity and the aspects that can condition it. Here, much discrimination due to gender is detected, whether due to biased decision-making, the assumption of stereotyped life roles, unequal access to resources, or difficulties in reconciling personal, family, and work lives, which can lead to unequal career trajectories between partners.

Regarding its specific trajectory, Spanish academia poses challenges as well as difficulties sometimes felt as oppressions, due to the multitude of tasks, especially management, that academic work currently entails and that sometimes the time available for reading, writing, or research extends into the personal sphere. It would be worth rethinking to what extent academic women's management differs from that of men or if they feel these same oppressions to reconcile personal and work life at the level required by the latter.

Considering the previous, my experiences in leading projects have been very positive, although not at zero cost precisely because of the high dedication that research requires. At the same time, we have teaching demands at the same level and management demands on a multitude of levels, at a constantly increasing rate. Having government funds gives access to resources for research at a certain level, which provides scientific benefits to the research team and strengthens curricula and promotion in academia. However, above all, it allows the work we do every day in academia to make sense and have an impact on people's lives. Not only do resources allow women in academia to represent themselves, or give them a voice, but in our case, by directly working on our professional and life projects, it gives us direct benefits derived from the development of career management skills. Increased

access to resources allows us to increase personal and professional security, clarify goals, work on decision-making, plan actions, and manage our processes, as well as acquire a process that is usually useful for future moments of personal and professional transit.

I have been developing this line of research since my pre-doctoral stage; my thesis focused on specific work with women, and I have continued to subsequently develop it, expanding key ideas to other groups. It is very satisfying to see how projects become resources that can improve people's lives, and there are shared motivations in the interdisciplinary teams that are generated, from which a network is woven between academics, professionals, and citizens—such as the contributing academics in this piece—which has the intention of serving society. However, all this work also becomes a boomerang that exposes us as researchers while having an impact on our own personal and professional life, while also developing as female academics.

In this sense, one of the most important challenges that I perceive is the need to work directly with people, putting them at the center of the processes that we develop in academia, especially in action-research projects, which provide a qualitative, reflective, critical look at the person, from themselves and from others, allowing the generation of new opportunities and weaving spaces of otherness and collaboration.

Mirliana's Voice

Building dreams by hand and without permission in the academic world

I am a woman, a nurse, and an academic, so I have a historical, social, and political burden of hundreds of years. Women have been subordinated to a system that privileges being a man and being macho in the Latin American context. In this patriarchal, hegemonic context, it is a "rarity" for a woman to assume leadership positions, and faced with the call and invitation to be an edge runner, many ideas, reflections, and self-interpellations came to me: Am I fulfilling my role as an academic in a public university, if academia is performed sitting at a desk designing classes and teaching and researching? Is it enough to feel I am contributing to society and the country? Is it enough to respond to the ethical and moral imperative I have to work in a public university as a progressive woman?

The great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in his work 'The Frontier' (Neruda 1955) refers to the physical and geographical borders of Chile, full of colors, flavors, and textures: But the frontiers, borders, and boundaries are many, especially for a Latin woman and a nurse.

Do limits 'limit' us? Do they destroy us? Are they real? Are they out there? Or are they within us? What is my responsibility for the limits that society imposes on me? While I write this reflection, I think about having to prepare lunch myself for tomorrow, iron my son's shirt, and plan out the rest of the interviews for my research.

I think. I remember. Since when do I have this pace of work? It has been this way my whole life; the super multifunctional woman-mom has been present since my daughter was a child. I, the caregiver, the housewife, and the nurse, married a typical Latino man, who, although we both arrived home from work simultaneously, had to be "served" because he was the man. How difficult it is to come out of the process of enculturation in which I, a woman, must give without receiving anything in return. Because it is my duty, it is my duty as a woman, mother, nurse, academic, space for wife—I reopen it, and I am not sure if I listed them according to my priorities—I investigate it in the words of Gergen and Gergen (2002, p. 13) from "new methods that are more human, collaborative and participatory." In this process, I have been constructing and deconstructing boundaries with ease.

Sometimes with satisfaction, it is through my research that I gather the discourse of those who are small or not listened to and help the voice of the people with kidney disease to be heard.

I also ask myself: Must we not strengthen the public sector, be it health, education, housing, or social security, from service, commitment, and the idea of social transformation in a context of a dismembered, atomized university in which the civil-military dictatorship in Chile destroyed the university as it was known, in which citizens were formed with a free and quality education.

The COVID-19 pandemic is overshadowing the entire planet, and anguish is growing in me, in the ordinary people, and in us, the health personnel. I see serious communication management problems, risk communication is inaccurate, and I am deeply distressed by the feeling of being unable to provide support in hospitals. My experience before being an academic is that as a specialist nurse in nephrology and I can contribute from that area, but as a woman, I have the obligation of reciprocity of care; I take care of an older adult and my children, who are still studying. I keep questioning; I need to help in more than just education and undergraduate teaching. My area of research is qualitative, the lived experience, every day, the feeling of the disease, but at this moment, it is imperative to work to create the vaccine.

With some fear, because we still did not know the problems and routes of infection of the SARSCOV2 virus, I began to support clinical research in immunology from care. The fear was present, both in me and the people suffering from the infection, and I made home visits, educated my patients, gave tests, and as it has always been, I take care of my patients.

The government at that time (early 2020) announced that the pandemic was comparable to "a cold," which did not produce significant complications. Apart from the fear of getting infected, I found frightening the possibility that the criterion of maintaining productivity took precedence over people's lives. Jobs are precarious in Chile; most of the population needs labor contracts and works informally. If we added to this the lack of clarity and imprecision of the Ministry of Health, the panorama still needed to be determined. I had to denounce what was happening; I needed to have a voice in this environment, and my ethics prevented me from remaining silent. Ethics and being part of a public institution, at the service of the country, prevented us academics from looking the other way, and we had to assume what it meant to have a voice in the chaos amid uncertainty.

The paths of life were crossing, and destiny was showing outcomes/results one had never thought of; was it possible to be part of the macro-level decisions? Who was making the decisions? Were they the best-prepared people? The most committed? Those who had given their lives to contribute, transform, have mutual power, and move forward together? How were we to unite science, knowledge, and qualitative epiphanies, without being present in those spaces? Did I have the "right" to lead? If I had no space because I am a woman and a caregiver at the decision-making table, I took my chair and demanded space. I questioned myself and breathed, and my whole body ached at the thought of exposing myself, of making a mistake. Was I an imposter? I had the distressing feeling of needing to be sufficiently prepared to assume these leadership roles. Again, I was invaded by doubts: If I was wrong, if I was questioned, if I did not do it well enough, and if I needed to be sufficiently trained. Back to the repetitive ideas: I was afraid to expose myself, I did not want to be seen by anyone, and I did not want to explain why I made my decisions.

Furthermore, again, the "duty to be," the coherence and values, overcome me. I postulated in democratic elections to the director of the department and then to the University Senator, defining strategies and regulations that guide the destiny of the university and the country; we were opening doors, opening windows, opening spaces where before there were no women and fewer nurses. I have always felt that being a woman and nurse determines me to a certain extent. The social imaginary turns us into angels or sex symbols, but not into sentient beings who can lead by caring.

Despite the fear, I move forward. I do not know how far; I only know that I move forward to open roads for the women to come, be they academics, settlers, girls, women, or adolescents, because the dream is made by hand and without permission.

Michelle's Voice

Female academics conciliating roles in pandemic times: transitioning between blurred lines

I am a teacher. I studied to become one and then continued studying to become a better one for the sake of my students and because I wanted to contribute to Chile's educational system.

Looking back to when I first worked as a teacher in a highly vulnerable school in the city of Alto Hospicio, I remember being extremely motivated by the socially, emotionally, and physically deprived students I needed to teach. How was I supposed to expect my students to learn English as a foreign language, force them to pay attention, follow my lead, look at me, listen to me, and repeat after me when most of them had not had anything to eat for breakfast? It was also highly likely they would have nothing for lunch, either. It was this experience that triggered in me the need to train further and become a better teacher for them. However, after finishing my master's degree, I returned to that same school feeling ready and excited to work with my students again. However, the school principal told me I was overqualified for that school and that I should look for a different educational establishment because he could not risk me getting married, pregnant, or having any other 'female' situation that could affect the regular workload at the school.

I was disappointed and frustrated because I wanted to work with my students again. I just was too much for them to handle. This was when I turned to my mentor, Mr. Watson, who had been my professor at university. He asked me to teach the first-year undergraduates of the English language teaching program at my alma mater. Twenty-one years have passed since then. I have been part of the educational trajectories of many teachers of English who now work in many places around the world. In academia, I found my path, passion, and windmill, too … yes, because it has never been a path covered in roses, although I have always tried to see this path with a rose-colored lens. Often, I have felt like a Quixote fighting against the windmills. Once again, it is my students who have underpinned the work I do. I work with them on different levels but have found an extraordinary place in teaching them how to conduct research. I may be biased but the work I do with my students more often than not has led us to work with Qualitative Methodologies. Most of the time, they come to me after they have finished their practicums and are always looking for ways of understanding how and why certain things happen in the school sites and what they can do to improve their teaching practices.

During the pandemic, we continued working online. Teachers around the world became the 'second front-line.' Moreover, it was not just in schools in which most of us needed to learn new ways of doing our jobs. It was a really hard time, particularly because teaching is such a social job. We need to be in touch with people. We need to construct knowledge with our students. It was in this scenario in which I began to wonder how this pandemic had affected the lives of academics such as myself, who needed to continue working as if nothing different was happening out there when everything was happening everywhere.

In addition to learning to teach through a platform, we needed to pay attention to our homes as well, and likely the less we paid attention to was ourselves. I started by reading about the conciliation of roles: Productive and reproductive. Then, I decided I would interview some of my colleagues in depth so they could share some of their daily life experiences of being female academics during the pandemic times. I thought it would be difficult for me to find female academics willing to share their experiences with me, but to my surprise, there was a need for female academics to tell their stories, to feel they were being listened to, for someone else to have time for them, and to even cry with them if it were necessary.

This is the way this research came to life. I ended up being someone who could become the voice of those who remained unheard.

Therefore, I set myself out to analyze the conciliation that exists between the productive and reproductive roles of female academics from three different universities in Chile while teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021). This investigation was conducted from the perspective of gender studies, looking for the conceptualization of different terms (such as the pandemic, telework, gender, productive and reproductive roles,

and conciliation) to describe the process of conciliating the previously mentioned roles that female academics, in the two areas under study, performed on a daily basis. At the same time, the challenges faced by these academics at the moment of conciliating both roles were identified and described. Furthermore, it determined female academics' adaptation process to the teleworking modality. This investigation disclosed the feelings and experiences lived by the female academics during their process, conciliating the productive and reproductive roles in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the data collected, five themes emerged: Work life, personal life, adaptation process, difficulties and challenges, and feelings and experiences.

With respect to work–life balance, female academics expressed that it had been tougher to conciliate the productive and reproductive roles while teleworking than before the pandemic because of different factors such as the administrative work overload, negative experiences at the moment of sharing the same space (home) for both roles and the complex scenario of coexisting with members of their nuclear or extended family members. In the case of the last two factors, the female academics had to reorganize their home spaces and discuss agreements with their families to telework from home. Moreover, some of their institutions needed to provide settled schedules apart from the classes. They caused an overload of administrative work and constant meetings, which made working even harder for them.

Regarding their personal lives, the participants explained how their routines were affected by the pandemic and the transition from a dedicated teaching spot or a research/study room to an improvised one. Moreover, some of them compared their pre-pandemic lives with their pandemic lives. The female academics described how they used to have spare time when they finished their working hours at university before the pandemic. However, due to the change in modality (teleworking), there was a reduction or absence of time for their self-care and personal interests.

As for the adaptation process, in terms of the personal processes experienced by the female academics, they manifested that this new modality was a significant alteration to their lives as it meant a radical change in their working routines, which provoked uncertainty primarily at the beginning of the implementation of telework due to the pandemic. Moreover, the participants indicated that there was an increase in economic expenses to ease the implementation and enhance the performance of telework at home to be able to teach in optimum conditions.

Likewise, in the matter of the use of information and communication technologies, the participants mentioned that they received late or insufficient training leading them to learn autonomously, training themselves on different online platforms. As a consequence of this, the female academics interviewed informed that they relied on peer collaboration to share tips, knowledge, and experiences.

Concerning the experiences, the participants conveyed that during this period, there were several difficulties and challenges. These were primarily related to the conciliation and organization of their productive tasks (such as time management, lack of organization, and unsettled working schedule), and their maternal tasks, resulting in negligence of family obligations (limited time to look after and share with the family), and how being a working woman affected their conciliation process of productive and reproductive roles while facing the pandemic and new modality.

In terms of feelings and experiences, particularly about the adaptation process experiences and reflections from teleworking during the pandemic, female academics shared different points of view on their own processes, realities, and how this working modality affected them. They even defined this entire process as complex, exhausting, challenging, overwhelming, chaotic, and uncertain. These feelings and experiences triggered considerable repercussions on physical and mental health as this new working modality represented a challenge, causing the development of different psychological or physical responses such as stress and anxiety.

Most of the academics who participated in this research had children to look after, parents to care for, lived without a partner, or all of the above. As one of them stated:

As a woman, you work, you get home (although, when we were locked up, you were already at home) and you still have to do the housework. I helped my daughter because her father was doing great in his own house (referring to the fact that he is an absentee father). I had to take care of my daughter's schoolwork, I had to do the cooking, the ironing, the washing, etc., plus doing my own work; it was a lot. As women, I think we have more responsibility.

There were many important findings, but I wanted to finish with the message that if we work harder than our male counterparts on a daily basis in order to become visible in a field such as this one, the work we were thrown into due to the pandemic was extreme. Consider that we need to be 'productive' in academia to be acknowledged as a 'proper' academic. However, in these uncertain times we have been going through, not only did we have a harder time than ever conducting our research, but many other unexpected life situations took place as well. Nevertheless, the fact that we are working together today is proof that, once again, we have exceeded our own expectations of ourselves.

4. Discussion

In this piece, we as female researchers have shared our research experiences and contributions to qualitative inquiry by presenting creative and innovative ideas that emerged from our own experiences through and with our qualitative research projects in the times of a pandemic.

This work aims to contribute to the body of qualitative work with a gender perspective generated by knowledge from the educational context of the Ibero-American cultures the authors' represent and to promote the development of women's voices in academia. Agreeing with Chang (2013), this methodology allows us to focus on the process and products of our collaborative research, and to weave commonalities of our life experiences as scholars in times of a pandemic, in different broader social, political, and cultural settings as posited by Bochner and Ellis (2002). This type of research allows us to be in community with one another, act in solidarity, and elevate our experiences (Montiel et al. 2022). Everything we can identify in the act of collaborative writing and highlight for ourselves and other researchers can be reflected in our voices.

This reflection is made from our experiences which were generated by the current neoliberal academic environment, which supports and incentivizes hegemonic masculinities through its policies (Martinez 2023); this is particularly true in the case of Chile, which is highly commodified (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. 2022). Indeed, today's academia is changing as academic work becomes increasingly quantified (Osbaldiston et al. 2019). Therefore, we make no small effort to reflect on this joint space, given that the neoliberal tone that prevails in academia has neglected to make space for reflection to promote those more quantifiable and parameterizable in performance logic.

The connection of our voices and our mutual interests in qualitative research centered in scholarly places both inside and outside of academia are reflected in this writing process. Research is also a step in the academic writing process. By communicating from various locations and ending our isolation, the experience of writing collectively allowed us to "pause" and temporarily cease running, which we often do during an eternally busy period.

Our voices demonstrate the stages of reflection motivated by various experiences, including ours and the experiences of the other sisters in the academy during the pandemic. At the same time, as our voices converge in our work, pushing us to be aware of it, the writing process enabled us to envisage our place as women in academia. This experience is also written, to quote Lugones (1987), from outside the dominant currents (white/Anglo-Saxon/hard sciences), highlighting the experiences of female qualitative researchers in academia from the margins, i.e., from Chile and southern Spain.

It also demonstrates the boundaries of quiet, which can be viewed as deference to a hierarchically formed social order that prizes masculinity above femininity as a fundamental

value, as well as occupations associated with the "hard sciences", which are very dissimilar from those of the authors of this text. Indeed, our aim is also to create a more complete and less systematically biased mainstream knowledge based on a worldview from which dialogue from different social positions is created and encouraged (Sprague 2017).

This position does not fit the pre-established subordinate position that women would be expected to occupy in higher education and is frequently viewed as subversive, controversial, and surprising in our society. By identifying our voices, making them appear in academic work, and honoring our thought processes, collaborative interpretive autoethnography created a procedure that allowed scholarly women to articulate our voices in academia as legitimate speech and to reflect on our experiences in a context as challenging for women as the Covid-19 pandemic, which intensified our workloads disproportionately to our male peers, leaving us in a state of complete exhaustion (Ronksley-Pavia et al. 2023).

To evoke, connect, and transmit knowledge and reflect, deconstruct, and create new realities, this article recovers and underlines the significance of our experiences and the people with whom we share our stories. This work of collaborative autoethnography allows us to appropriate the discourse and recover our collective voice, which is often silenced since, as women, we are defined generically from obedience as Lagarde (2016) establishes; therefore, writing for ourselves is also an act of transgression that allows us to reveal our point of view as female qualitative researchers in academia.

Only in this way can even the world's driest desert be covered in flowers; only in this way can we take pleasure in our work and dream of greater equality and justice, encouraging a democratic and respectful academic environment every day in our universities for the training of future ethical professionals based on gender justice.

5. Conclusions

At present, gender research in Chile is becoming increasingly relevant, given the reforms and legislation that have been implemented in the last five years. Undoubtedly, qualitative research, through its different epistemological approaches and techniques, allows us, as women, to position ourselves as an active part of the phenomena we are studying.

In the case of Spain, it is concluded that governments can support scientific research by providing tools and resources for funding through state and regional research plans. In the same way, it is concluded how their policies and calls for proposals determine the priority lines of research aligned with international policies and agendas. An example is the latest research plans that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, prioritizing the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). It is concluded that gender is a priority line, which intersects with other variables such as academia, employment, digitalization, groups at risk of social exclusion, and inclusion, among others.

In the same way, this work makes clear the importance of research approaches and designs. In this sense, critical qualitative research, conducted through reflexive and collaborative autoethnographic processes, allows the diagnosis of social problems and analysis of possible answers and challenges to advance in society. Thus, it can be seen how, in spite of advances in gender issues, to a greater or lesser extent, discriminatory situations that oppress us are still maintained. This work reveals difficulties in reconciling personal and family life, situations of harassment, sexual discrimination, difficulties in professional promotion, other difficulties in professional performance under equal conditions and privileges, the glass ceiling, etc. All of this was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The women represented here are, to a certain extent, leaders in their contexts; women capable of generating possibilities through their scientific research, obtaining funds through competitive calls at international, national, and regional levels, thus generating space for other generations to come through a different symbolic practice, forms of relationships between women that allow the creation of networks of support and otherness.

The women represented here express their position before the academy, a different way of performing academia in spite of the circumstances, according to their desires, pro-

fessional and personal values, and the vocational aspect of their professional performance. All of this has been integrated to generate possibilities and represent the voices of other underrepresented people in different spheres of life. Thus, we investigate to review realities, improve them, and make visible discriminatory situations that oppress or have oppressed us.

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