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## Entry barriers and “Glass Roof” in University Management in Colombia

Barreras de ingreso y “Techo de Cristal” en la Dirección Universitaria en Colombia

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### **Abstract**

Management in the context of higher education has been characterized by the predominance of male participation, mainly in senior management positions. As a result, women’s low participation is mainly concentrated in lower management positions, and their chances of escalating hierarchical positions are mediated by various factors ranging from subjective to socially naturalized. The objective of this research is to analyze the barriers women face to enter and escalate positions in university management in Colombia. Under a qualitative design, 26 semi-structured interviews were applied to university managers from different institutions of higher education in Colombia. The transcripts were analyzed using discourse analysis through three categories: individual, internal, and external barriers of the university. It was found that women face entry and promotion barriers marked by experiences, and conditions of

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inequality and discrimination in a male-dominated context. These barriers are conditioned by personal elements, organizational culture, and the social role of women. In addition, women's trajectories involve mediation between professional development and family life. The study reveals experiences that contribute to understanding the research phenomenon from the webbing of senses and meanings. It is posited that the "glass ceiling" is mediated by variables in the internal order, and by the relationship between universities and their context.

**Keywords:** University, Management, Women, Gender Barriers, Glass Roof.

## Resumen

La dirección en el contexto de la educación superior se ha caracterizado por el predominio de la participación de los hombres, principalmente en los cargos de alta dirección. Como consecuencia, la baja participación de las mujeres se concentra principalmente en los cargos bajos de dirección, y sus probabilidades de escalar posiciones jerárquicas están mediadas por diversos factores que van desde lo subjetivo, hasta lo socialmente naturalizado. El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar las barreras a las que se enfrentan las mujeres para ingresar y escalar posiciones en la dirección universitaria en Colombia. Bajo un diseño cualitativo se aplicaron 26 entrevistas semi-estructuradas a directivos universitarios de diferentes instituciones de educación superior en Colombia. Las transcripciones fueron analizadas empleando un análisis del discurso a través de tres categorías: barreras individuales, internas, y externas de la universidad. Se encontró que las mujeres se enfrentan a barreras de ingreso y ascenso marcadas por experiencias, y condiciones de desigualdad y discriminación en un contexto dominado por hombres. Dichas barreras están condicionadas por elementos personales, de la cultura organizacional, y por el rol social de la mujer. Además, las trayectorias de las mujeres implican la mediación entre desarrollo profesional y vida familiar. El estudio devela experiencias que contribuyen a comprender el fenómeno de investigación desde el entramado de sentidos y significados. Se posiciona que el "techo de cristal" está mediado por variables de orden interno, y por la relación que se entreteje entre las universidades y su contexto.

**Palabras clave:** Universidad, Dirección, Mujeres, Barreras de género, Techo de Cristal.

## 1. Introduction

From the context of the world wars, there is the first significant leap in the number of women entering the labor world. The idea of women as responsible for the private sphere of the home and for performing domestic work is mobilized towards the possibility

of gainful work, as are men. This process of "feminization of labor" was carried out in various ways in some countries around the world, thanks to activist movements by women in which the sexual division of labor is transformed into a social and political phenomenon (Abramo, 2004; Antunes, 2005; Bedoya, 2017).

In the Latin American context, the increase of women in the labor world, as well as in levels of schooling, has occurred since the late 1990s. Nevertheless, the levels of integration and permanence have been hampered by various phenomena, and there are certain conditions of inequality with regard to men, such as lower wages and low presence of women in senior management positions and/or membership in a board of directors (CEPAL, FAO, ONU Mujeres, PNUD, and OIT, 2013; OIT, 2015, 2016, 2018). In this context, women have been positioned as a secondary labor force because of the idea that they are responsible for domestic activities and family care (Abramo, 2004).

Concern about women's barriers to entering the labor market and promoting leadership positions has not only been associated with the agenda of political and advocacy organizations for social and economic development (CEPAL *et al.*, 2013; ILO, 2015, 2016, 2018), but has also been the subject of research in the academic literature. This phenomenon has been approached from the notion of "Glass Roof" (hereafter GR), as a metaphor to explain the invisible but existing barriers or limits that hinder women's career paths, and that encompasses internal (subjective) and external (social and cultural) factors (Burin, 2008). Advances in feminist epistemologies and gender perspectives have promoted debates related to the role of women in the labor world, and have highlighted the need to recognize how entry barriers occur in the particular contexts of organizations, as well as the GR (Abramo, 2004; Cáceres, Sachicola, and Hinojo, 2015, Burin, 2004, 2008; Moncayo-Orjuela and Zuluaga-Goyeneche, 2015a, 2015b). This is the case of the works of Burin (2004, 2008), who, from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, analyzes the notion of subjectivity and manages to differentiate the cultural factors that reproduce discriminatory conditions

towards women, from the factors that make up the female psychic apparatus that contribute to the configuration of GR.

Other feminist theorists and gender studies have examined the concept of “patriarchy” to analyze its mechanisms, dynamics and strategies, which have revealed forms of domination in the fabric of hierarchical relationships that are built between men and women. Patriarchy as a discourse, legalizes the exercise of power of the patriarch (the subject that occupies the main power position), who subjugates, excludes and oppresses other subjects with whom he relates. That is why this phenomenon establishes a relationship of subordination of women to men, which can be examined in production processes, and naturalizes women as a reproductive and secondary support force (Obando, 2013).

Some research has focused on analyzing the participation of women in the university context, due to their increase in higher education, showing, as in other organizations, low participation in management and some barriers to promotions and permanence (Deem, 2003; Gómez-Cama, Larrán, and Andrades, 2016; López-Yañez and Sánchez-Moreno, 2009; Moncayo-Orjuela and Villalba-Gómez, 2014; Sánchez-Moreno and López-Yañez, 2008; Tomás, Lavie, Duran, and Guillamon, 2010; Tomás, Duran, Guillamón, and Lavié, 2008). Although research shows low participation of women in university management, few have explored the factors that make up the “Glass Roof” and how women manage to overcome it (Cáceres *et al.*, 2015; Deem, 2003; Gaete-Quezada, 2018; Imran, Zamana, and Nazir, 2011; Matus-López and Gallego-Morón, 2014; Moncayo and Pinzón, 2013; Zuluaga-Goyeneche and Moncayo-Orjuela, 2014). Likewise, few researches recognize the voices of men as subjects of analysis, who also mean, recreate and build the GR for women.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the barriers women face to enter and escalate positions in university management in Colombia. To that end, the research was approached from a qualitative standpoint, using Discourse Analysis in the accounts produced in interviews with university managers. In this way, the research contributes to exploring the way in which

entry barriers and the GR are constructed for women who are university managers in Colombia.

## 2. Entry barriers and GR in university management positions

For authors such as Gaete-Quezada (2015), the GR allows to describe the way in which women’s career paths stagnate at the lower or middle hierarchical levels, and that limit access to senior management positions, where the most significant decisions are made. These barriers can be personal (individual), internal and external to universities (Gaete-Quezada, 2018). Authors such as Moncayo-Orjuela and Pinzón (2013) add that the GR is an invisible wall that encompasses beliefs, processes, procedures, power relations, *etc.*, that affect access to power and decision-making positions. Likewise, Burin (2004) points out that the GR is introduced to explain why women are underrepresented in the highest positions of occupational hierarchies, and to analyze their career paths, which sometimes are hampered.

Regarding the personal barriers that hinder the development and promotion of women to managerial positions, there is the mediation concerning their professional lives (career paths), and their family lives, where they sometimes have to choose between the two. Women are biologically conditioned to conceive (Díez, Terrón, and Anguita, 2009; Moncayo-Orjuela and Zuluaga-Goyeneche, 2015a, 2015b), and the “roles” in the home are set from this, as the woman becomes responsible for the gestation, caring and development of the child, and this condition becomes decisive for their trajectories (Cárdenas *et al.*, 2014; Díez, *et al.*, 2009). For some women, the expectation of their career may be more significant for the sake of academic recognition than managerial or administrative recognition, as has been found for some men’s trajectories (Cárdenas, *et al.*, 2014; Díez, *et al.*, 2009).

Gaete-Quezada (2018) states that internal barriers are the elements specific to each university, such as its culture and organizational climate, or promotion policies (Griffiths, 2012; Moncayo-Orjuela and Villalba-Gómez, 2014, Tomás *et al.*,

2008). Some research finds that university management is dominated by male values, which limit female values, such as those related to well-being, personal relationships and caring (Moncayo-Orjuela and Zuluaga-Goyeneche, 2015a, 2015b). This raises a stereotype or argument, wherein men know how to do things better than women, so they receive favorable expectations regarding their performance (Cáceres, Trujillo, Hinojo, Aznar, and García, 2012; Cárdenas *et al.*, 2014; Stelter, 2002; Tomás and Guillamón, 2009). In addition to the above, some universities are part of religious institutions, which by their dogmas only allow figures of religious leaders to occupy senior management positions, that is, by men (Arango, Guarín, Cortés, Aldana, and Martínez, 2011; Beltrán, 2013; Soto, 2005).

External barriers are those that emerge from the social context in which universities are immersed. Gaete-Quezada (2018) considers, for instance, the existence of patriarchal cultures or the poor development of the labor market. These types of features suggest an androcentric view of the world that poses a dichotomy between genders, where the woman is positioned in household chores, while the man at work. This is also reinforced by the dominance of men in the university context, where even though some promotion mechanisms or gender equality policies have been developed, women tend to stay longer in the same (mainly low) positions as men, who are more likely to ascend and occupy positions in senior management (Cáceres, *et al.*, 2012; Cáceres *et al.*, 2015; Kloot, 2004; Moncayo-Orjuela and Zuluaga-Goyeneche, 2015a, 2015b; Tomás and Guillamón, 2009).

In Colombia, empirical studies suggest that the GR for women is versed in the three types of barriers, where the patriarchal and androcentric structure permeates organizational cultures, and affects the career trajectories of women in senior management positions, mainly such as the Rector and Vice-rectory (Cáceres *et al.*, 2015; Moncayo-Orjuela and Pinzón, 2013; Zuluaga-Goyeneche and Moncayo-Orjuela, 2014). According to information from SNIES (2018), in Colombia the participation of women in rector positions at higher education is only 22%, with their participation in universities at 18% and in technological institutions at 27%.

### 3. Method

The study was approached from a qualitative standpoint, which aims to analyze specific cases in their local and temporal particularity, and from the expressions and activities of the subjects in their contexts (Flick, 2012). From this approach, we have examined the sense and meanings that are constructed by the subjects in their social practices (Willig, 2001). According to the above, the reasons attributed to the barriers of entry and promotion in university management were analyzed in the discourse of university directors.

#### 3.1. Instrument and Participants

The instrument for the collection of information was the semi-structured interview, which allowed to identify particular aspects in the experiences of university managers in relation to barriers of entry and promotion of women. This type of technique has been used in similar research such as Chesterman, Ross-Smith, and Peters (2005), Deem (2003), Eagly and Karau (1991), Tomás, *et al.* (2008), Mabokela (2003), Peterson (2015), Sánchez-Moreno and Altopiedi (2016), y Zippel, Ferree, and Zimmermann (2016). The interview was applied to a total of 26 university directors (21 men and 5 women) from different universities in Colombia and in different positions. The inclusion criterion considered to participate was to occupy a university management position at the time of the interview.

The number of participants was determined by saturation criteria, this means until reaching the point where important or novel information on the subject of research is no longer found (Mayan, 2009). The absence of more female participants related to the low participation of women in university management positions, mainly at senior levels, and the non-emergence of new data suggested that the 26 interviews were able to address the objective of the study. The total number of women who entered the study recreates not only the scenario of their low participation in managerial positions, but also evidenced the GR, as they were in the middle positions of university management and the predominance of men in all hierarchical levels. Likewise, the experiences of the

**Table 1. University management positions Level according to the gender of the participant**

Position	Women	Average time in the position	Men	Average time in the position	Total
High	-	-	2	12 years old	2
Medium	5	4.5 years	13	4.9 years	18
Low	-	-	6	3.6 years	6

Notes. Senior Positions: Rector; Middle Positions: Vice Rectors, Directors, and Deans; and Low Positions: Heads of Department and Directorates or Coordination of Academic Programs.

Source: Authors' Own elaboration.

women in the study not only allow to analyze the GR in which they are in relation to the higher positions of university management, but also allows to analyze the way in which they overcame the GR of the lower positions, so their experiences are significant for the subject of the research. The average number of years of experience of the women in university positions is 4.5 years, and that of men is 5.1 (Table 1).

### 3.2. Analysis of information

The texts produced by the interviews were analyzed under a Discourse Analysis (hereafter DA), which is a method oriented to analyzing the production of meanings in the interaction in everyday contexts, and the way in which language or discursive resources are used to achieve personal goals (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Willig, 2001). To that end, an axial categorization was carried out, a process in which categories are connected to subcategories by encoding the properties and dimensions present in the text. The subcategories were constructed from the literature review (Table 2).

## 4. Results

The DA made it possible to identify some considerations that both women and men attribute to the experiences that women face in university management. The results are discussed below, and some fragments of the transcripts are presented according to the subcategories identified in the participants' discourse.

**Table 2. Analysis categories and subcategories**

Category	Subcategories
Individual barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations specific to the trajectory</li> <li>• Motherhood</li> <li>• Mediation of family life versus professional life</li> </ul>
University Inner Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious affiliation</li> <li>• Organizational culture</li> <li>• Favorable expectations of men</li> </ul>
University External Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monopolized profession</li> <li>• Social custom</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

### 4.1. Individual barriers

#### 4.1.1. Motherhood and family life versus professional life mediation

The trajectories of women in university management positions are mediated by decisions that circulate from their choice of motherhood to the mediation of their family roles with professionals. This experience is recognized by both women and men as an exclusive phenomenon for women. In addition to constituting a female physiological and psychological process, motherhood is nuanced with social elements, whereby it is attributed responsibility for the caring and upbringing of children, which creates barriers in the labor context due to the time and responsibilities it demands, which increase when escalating hierarchical positions. As presented in the following fragments by male participants, it is recognized that family status and socially attributed roles have implications for women's university leadership trajectories:

[...] if there is a woman who does not have a family, she would surely become president or rector very easily, because women have many more skills and many more abilities and are stronger than men, there is a reason they are the ones that bear children, we would die in childbirth [...] then I think that a woman can get to wherever she wants, but she herself makes her decision (Participant 3; Male Vice-Rector).

The sexual division of labor recognizes the mediation of women between professional and family life, which makes it possible for men to hold managerial positions:

[...] there are many women who are ascending quickly but when they have children, they themselves have made the decision to leave that competition, that race, because the higher you get, the less you sleep, the more responsibility there is and the less time for the family, unfortunately [...] I think that women [...] appreciate infinitely more the time with their children than more money and when they get very high and see that the time is diminished for their children, they make a wise decision and it is that their children come first [...] I think I can be here because my lady is with my child, I have only one child, if God forbid I should lose my wife, I would not stay in this position (Participant 3; Male Vice-Rector).

From the voices of women, this mediation is positioned as a sacrifice, due to the loss of family time involved in the role of mother and wife, as a result of the demand for more time in managerial positions:

[...] I have personally achieved a greater awareness, I have been able to evolve as a woman, as a wife, as a daughter, as a professional, that has also been a development from the personal [...] I do I think I have had a huge personal sacrifice, I have 2 children, because when they were little, I was here in all this and I think I have sacrificed a lot [...] all of us who have children would like to be much more with them but at the cost of sacrificing things that are also valuable [...] I think that's what I have felt all these years, in the role of mother and a role of wife (Participant 1; Female Vice-Rector).

## 4.2. University Inner Barriers

### 4.2.1. Religious Affiliation

Some processes for the election of senior management posts, such as the Rector or Vice-Rector, are immersed in practices mediated by the religious institution to which the university belongs, unlike other universities where there are participatory and democratic election processes. In this type of case a glass roof arises for women because even though one of them could hold some managerial position, it would never be that of the Rectory which are intended for religious leaders figures (men):

[...] so for the vice-rectories, the rector is in charge of the consultation, we are not

appointed by the rector, we are appointed by the Provincial of the "Name of the religious denomination" then the rector builds the list and gives it to the Provincial (Participant 1; Female Vice-Rector).

This condition is reflected in the compositions of managerial positions, which is expressed from the voices of women as a context dominated by men, and suggests another way of interacting mediated by the religious nature of the institution:

[...] but I was dean of faculty while the others were male deans and besides there was no vice-rector who was a woman, so with whom I had to interact, in addition, they were all men and besides this theme of "Name of the religious denomination" also has another element in this university (Participant 1; Female Vice-Rector).

The participants' discourse talks about experiences of women who manage to occupy the highest managerial positions; however, these are temporary (commissions), as they correspond to decisions mediated by the absence of male figures who can hold such positions:

[...] in fact, the Rector is a priest, he is a priest, but when I came in, who was in charge of the rectory, because at that time there was no Priest Rector, was a woman who had held the post of Vice-Rector here. When the "Name of the Rector" is appointed again as the figure of a Priest Rector, she returns to her post as Vice-Rector (Participant 26; Male Director).

While in some institutions with a religious affiliation the philosophy and mechanisms for electing managerial positions constitute a glass roof for women, there are other denominations that provide opportunities for both entry and access. In the following case, the religious philosophy of the denomination opened leadership positions up to women, which in turn implies participation in university management positions. Nonetheless, the participant's discourse acknowledges how religion conditions or limits women's possibilities in this type of scenario:

[...] female pastors in the churches in Colombia, for the vast majority of denominations, that is an abomination, women are not there to teach is what many churches say. Then the "name of

the denomination” is almost the first denomination, I would say, among the reformed ones, traditional and historical churches that opened up a space for women, we here have several female pastors, I am an ordained pastor (Participant 11; Female Director).

On the other hand, it is evident that the glass roof from the religious point of view can be handled from the decisions of senior managers, as presented in the following excerpt; the opening up of this type of office to women takes place with the change of rector:

[...] Here the executive positions of the Vice Rectory and the Rectory are men, for rest we are women, [...] so when they sit here, they are three and the others are just women, this table is filled and we are only women who are in managerial positions. This was seen with the change of rector, not the previous one, they were more men, they were more masculine, the spaces were more limited for the girls, but when he assumed “the name of the rector” [...] he started opening up the space, opened the spectrum, let’s say so, towards women (Participant 11; Female Director).

#### 4.2.2. Organizational Culture

The organizational cultures that shape within universities can constitute both barriers and opportunities for women to their entry, permanence and promotion to managerial positions. Recognition of practices associated with forms of domination or exclusion towards women is discussed in some cases by participants:

[...] because one of the things we have found, is that it seems to me that they assume it with much more responsibility (women), with much more commitment in general, but because there is this problem of the cultural background [...] often they have difficulties to assume certain kinds of commitments that one calmly assumes (man), that a lady has to stay home with the children and all that stuff, that macho culture is like that (Participant 9; Male Vice-Rector).

The participation of some women in the work environment is also characterized by inequalities concerning wages when compared with that of men, which is regarded as discrimination. In some cases, the justification is based on the recognition

of the trajectory of the manager (man), even if the position demands the same functions and responsibilities:

[...] the majority of us are women, we also see ourselves discriminated against in a certain way, because for example, I entered here in this position, there was a call that at a certain point in the history of the university [...] I applied to and stayed here, but I am appointed in this position and something very curious that happened and that we have struggled with, is that salaries are not equal [...] he was earning a salary and when I came in here, then the salary is no longer equal and they tell you it is because of the experience, the time and they tell you thousands of things but you’re going to do exactly the same position (Participant 18; Female Director).

For some women, while their participation in university management is high, senior management positions like that of the rectory are not a possibility: “Here, we are a lot of women, but no female rector, never” (Participant 12; Female Chief).

In other cases, machismo practices (macho culture) are recognized as phenomena that can be managed and conditioned by the senior management (of men), who have a positive impact on women’s openness to such positions and equity:

[...] Well here there is machismo anyway because I can’t say that there is not, however, I consider that from the head there is an opening towards gender, which is what happens to us with the Rector (Participant 11, Female Director).

[...] So what we have is a job to overcome that, so that we obviously move forward in an equitable relationship and the first that have to change are ourselves (men) [...] seeing that a woman can lead and a woman is a boss implies a change of mentality, a change of attitude and that we must work around that (Participant 14; Male Dean).

#### 4.2.3. Monopolized profession

Women are immersed in a male-dominated context, which not only determines greater male participation, but also how to perform. In this exercise, women position management elements that differentiate them, allowing them to claim or legitimize themselves as women:

[...] when one is oriented to the result and to the task, then one sometimes says that “they can enter with theirs and go out with one’s” and I think that part of the feminine intelligence [...] it has been an effort to try to legitimize oneself in these spaces and one legitimates oneself by contributions, by commitment, being serious [...] then how to legitimize oneself as a woman in these spaces, well not necessarily being like men (Participant 1; Female Vice-Rector).

For some participants, the low participation of women in university management positions is due to their recent entry into the context of work, and the academy, although it is recognized that over the years they have gained space:

In general, my theory is that women, as they arrived late in the labor market [...] there is still a change that continues to take place and has not been crowned, it has not been completely given [...] I think that women are going very fast (Participant 7; Male Rector).

In this category, it was also found that women are concentrated in lower university management positions, while men in senior positions: “All my bosses have been men, I have not had female bosses” (Participant 18; Female Director).

Women in this context share the managerial roles, but as far as I’m aware, at the University Rector and Vice-Rector have always been men, they may share positions of a managerial nature, but it has nothing to do with those roles that I have just mentioned but with programs, extension, university environment, like the administrator and the accountant to talk about other roles (Participant 15; Male Coordinator).

Although this context has little participation of women, some trajectories suggest that in recent years they have gained more space and that this experience is felt in terms of loneliness:

[...] I have reached several positions in which I was the only woman [...] I, in the past, when I was in the deanship, I felt quite alone, in many places, I now do not feel alone, there are many women in leadership positions (Participant 1, Female Vice-Rector).

#### 4.2.4. Favorable expectations of men

The masculinized administrative and

management practices are discussed by some participants, who consider it to be a socially imposed mode for their work in managerial positions. In this exercise, gender identity is called upon as a substance that permeates and conditions such practices:

[...]my concern is precisely about how women perform leadership, how women position themselves and perform the management of a university, that has always been a concern for me for two reasons [...] at some point in my life if I was very worried that one had to do management like men, that seemed to me a complicated thing. There is the fact that you are a woman before you are a manager ,and I think that this is a fundamental element [...] and it is not about who does it better, if a man or a woman does it better is that you as a woman [...] have built your identity as well and you have built your gender identity then you build your gender identity first as a woman and then you build it as a manager (Participant 1; Female Vice-Rector).

Because there are better expectations about the management processes by men, in some cases the characteristics of women that suggest that they affect their management processes and their career in managerial positions are discussed. In this exercise, women are represented as universal, under essential elements, and far from positive factors attributed to men:

[...] it is clear and that is that they will answer that they have to perform very different roles against the nature of being a woman, that is, this is a very competitive environment, and women lean to a more emotional environment, with more cooperation, not competition, and that leads women in terms of equality to assume men’s roles. From the organizational point of view and that often ends badly, and there are women who say it is not that it is better to have a male boss, because women become ogres, of course the woman has to look for a position and a role that in a world created by men, that is the organizational, is not so simple, it is very complex (Participant 6; Male Director).

Likewise, in some cases of female participants, universal elements from them that affect labor relations are also mentioned, which are not recognized in men:

[...] here it is very difficult sometimes, as we are so many women there is sometimes envy,



sometimes there are little things, of course, men are the same as women in here, but the men are less prone to gossiping than a woman, I find it difficult to say because I am a woman, but it is true. It's easier for you to see a group of women talking about people than a group of men doing it, I don't know, is my perception (Participant 18; Female Director).

### 4.3. External barriers

#### 4.3.1. Social custom

For some participants, barriers to women's careers are mediated by cultural elements in society, where there are arguments that naturalize women with regard to their conditions and possibilities for development. These ideas are built from the gender standpoint, where masculine supremacy and sexist elements are legitimized:

[...] what we see is that there is a lot of sexism and obviously a sexist society and that continues to see, therefore, women as handicapped because it is a society that does not make progress in terms of recognition of equality and all these arguments are, I would say, false in the sense that they are reinforcing an imaginary of superiority of men over women (Participant 13, Male Dean).

The barriers and low participation of women in university management positions are explained by some participants as the configuration of universities based on the cultural elements of their social contexts:

The topic of gender is an issue because it is cultural, it has to do with the social genetics that we have, and in universities still exist I would not say a lack of opportunities, I do not know if it is a lack of opportunities or that women have not earned that space or is that opportunities are closed de facto (Participant 11; Male Dean).

Likewise, it is shown that the assessment of women's participation in managerial positions is given in accordance with performance in the position and home duties, i.e., the reference that women occupy the social role of homecaring, and highlighting those cases where women break with social conventions, which facilitates their performance in the workplace:

[...] here in the deanship there are two women and they are the ones who have their homes and are dedicated to their home and they are very good professionals, with very good leadership [...] and with them I have worked, and forgive me the expression, shoulder to shoulder until late, our Vice-Rector is the same, she is relatively young, she is single, she has made a career here too, but she has no objection to working late (Participant 4; Male Dean).

For some participants, there are essential elements in relation to gender that affect performance at work. As presented in the following case, there is a naturalization of women as emotional, versus men as rational:

[...] one could say that women are more emotional and men are more rational, sometimes men are also very emotional. One could say that women are more given to tenderness, then when it comes to taking an extreme measure they resent (Participant 26; Male Director).

## 5. Conclusions

The objective of this research was to analyze the barriers women face to enter and climb positions in university management in Colombia from the perspective of the GR. The results suggest that in this context, women have low participation in these positions, which matches to other research recorded in academic literature (Cáceres, *et al.*, 2015, Deem, 2003; Moncayo-Orjuela and Zuluaga-Goyeneche, 2015a, 2015b; Sánchez-Moreno and López-Yañez, 2008; Tomás *et al.*, 2010; Tomás *et al.*, 2008).

The discourses of the participants were aimed at pointing out various barriers, both for the entry and the promotion and permanence of women, which involve a personal dimension, but also universities and societies. This reflects the analysis carried out by Burin (2008) on the way in which the female psychic structure presents factors that, in addition to cultural and social factors, configure the GR.

Maternity is a barrier to the advancement of women, because this decision involves time and responsibilities that make it not compatible with university management positions. This experience becomes a mediator between family and professional

life, which is also naturalized from social repertoires that place women in looking after their home, and men in the field of work. According to some participants, women's careers succeed when they have no children. The maternal issue of women as a biological condition is also related to factors such as sensitivity and intrinsic elements in women, which recreate an essence of women and which, according to some participants, affect their participation in university management. Likewise, it was found that the role of women in connection with the care of children, constitutes a support for men to occupy managerial positions. The experience of motherhood and child care is narrated in terms of sacrifice by some participants, who point out the time demanded by their management responsibilities that decrease their family time, which reveals a managerial career accompanied by a trajectory as a mother, which is not discussed by the male participants about their life as parents. Likewise, women are positioned in family terms as mothers and wives.

Internal barriers such as the monopoly of men in academic professions and managerial positions were evident. In this context, experiences associated with machismo, sexism, and discrimination against women, which in some cases arise from the inequality in wages, the naturalization of women as inferior in management, and as responsible for playing the social role of looking after their home. For some women, their trajectories have been characterized by gender vindication, the struggle for equity, and the opening up of spaces for other women to ascend and remain in leadership positions. In addition, it is acknowledged that there is increasing participation of women in this context.

For some participants, the dominance of men in management corresponds to social and historical factors, where women have recently entered the labor world and higher education. However, it is recognized that the opening of managerial positions to women is a phenomenon that must be handled from senior management, which means that it is a responsibility of men attributed to both women and themselves.

In religiously-affiliated universities, it was

found that there is a glass roof marked by the figures of religious leaders who occupy high hierarchical positions. Although there are some denominations that have opened up to women, both in the religious institution and in the university administration, their possibility for promotion is limited to posts such as vice-rectories, and they can exercise the position of rector under temporary commissions, while the religious institution appoints one of its leaders for that position.

Women also face favorable expectations about men's management processes, because effective management is defined in relation to male values. For some participants, this problem is due to the fact that there are arguments that naturalize women as emotional, tender, irrational, delicate, lowly risk-oriented, *etc.* that make their management processes to be regarded as ineffective for the university context. In some cases, women suggest that they should do management in the style of men, noting that there are elements of gender identity behind management, which precede their identity as managers.

Some participants point out that when women assume management styles based on masculine characteristics, they are regarded negatively as "ogres", which blur what is attributed to the feminine essence. For Moncayo-Orjuela and Zuluaga-Goyeneche (2015a, 2015b), when women compete with their counterparts, they do so under unequal conditions, and are attributed a female stereotype that underestimates their managerial performance. According to these authors, some women must do more than men and excel in the work context, adopting measures that allow readjusting the perception before them as "queen bee syndrome", which occurs when women who manage to occupy positions traditionally occupied by men, where they feel that it is an achievement of their own merits and do not help other women so they won't have to go through the same to attain a promotion; or the "Margaret Thatcher Syndrome", which alludes to the adoption of male styles through the authoritarian and severe character linked to the "Iron Lady".

We found the perception that women prefer to have men as their bosses instead

of other women due to the problems that emerge from the relationships between them, where essential characteristics of women are located, such as preference for informal communication (“gossip”) and rivalry, which are not attributed to men.

In general, it is concluded that women experience trajectories characterized by barriers of entry, promotion and permanence, configured by personal, internal and external dimensions in universities, which marginalize, exclude and limit them, while constituting in a singular way their GR. In this way, a relationship between inter-subjective elements and the social context arises, which has been historically constructed as a sexually hierarchical space that assigns roles according to gender. Such naturalization in the social context produces and reproduces power relations, and some forms of discrimination and marginalization that are embedded in gender discourses and place women in positions of inferiority.

Understanding how barriers and glass roofs are built for women in this context reveals practices and power discourses whereon university governance forms have been legalized and organized, enabling the formulation of gender-sensitive equality policies to boost the promotion of women to senior management positions, and to act on experiences of exclusion and marginalization that affect their human dignity.

Although the study had few female participants, this was on account of their low participation in university management positions in the context of research. In this way, for future research it is recommended to have more women in order to continue contributing to the construction of knowledge about how barriers to entry and promotion are built for women. Likewise, it is important to conduct more research from qualitative standpoints that allow to reveal in discourses and in the fabric of meanings, the way in which women experience their trajectories as managers, and the conditions or characteristics that occur once they break with the glass roof.

## 6. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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