

Female academics in higher education: Conducting Qualitative research against all odds

Pamela Zapata-Sepúlveda¹, Carmen Araneda-Guirriman², Magdalena Suárez-Ortega³, Mirliana Ramírez-Pereira⁴, Michelle Espinoza-Lobos⁵

¹ Escuela de Psicología y Filosofía Universidad de Tarapacá, Chile. pzapat@academicos.uta.cl;

² Departamento de Industrias Universidad de Tarapacá, Chile. caraneda@academicos.uta.cl;

³ Departamento de Métodos de Educación y Diagnóstico en Educación, Universidad de Sevilla, España. msuarez@us.es; ⁴ Departamento de Enfermería, Universidad de Chile, Chile; ⁵ Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Universidad Arturo Prat, Chile. miespy@gmail.com

Abstract. Introduction. This panel 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 different approaches, moments, and gender sensitive about 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 the panel, they will problematize their research experiences focusing on 3 binding methodological questions: how the Chilean and Spanish contexts of public education can or cannot underpin and determine their lines of research; how gender is perceived in the development of qualitative research questions and in relation to the challenges and opportunities that the Chilean and Spanish academy offers or denies to their mid-career academics. 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? Voices are shared, identifying challenges and assessing implications for qualitative research in these complex times in the academy.

Goals and methods. For this panel to achieve the previously mentioned, the academics will present the context of their research, their assessments of the motivations that guided the development of their respective lines of interest, and the analysis of their research questions and objectives as they are called to this panel, followed by the reading of the main methodological findings and results of their projects. In this sense, author 1 will develop the ideas that led her to continue developing the line of research in collaborative interpretive autoethnography with the panelists on gender and academic life, presenting excerpts, reflections and in order to respond to how the method she uses allows her to generate knowledge through collaborative writing (e.g. Suárez-Ortega, & Zapata-Sepúlveda, (2022a, 2022b); Uta-Major Cod. 5792-21). She will also reflect on how this journey which includes scientific publications, validates their voices in the recognition of gender as a mediator of the challenges, contradictions, and dilemmas. The aforementioned, in the local academic exercise within the organizational culture of education and with public agencies and researched communities; nationally, with the research agency and science policies in Chile; and internationally, through participation in academic communities through congresses and the publication of academic texts. All this allows them to strengthen their voices as women in the academy in a discourse that is validated in the development of their ideas, concerns, and definitions of roles and positions as qualitative women researchers in the academic field. Author 2 will reflect on her experience as a researcher using constructivist grounded theory to approach the study of the trajectories of women academics from a gender perspective (Fondecyt N° 1201517). Particularly, focusing on how this method allows the involvement of the researcher 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. Author 3 will reflect on her experience as a researcher in the academy, focusing specifically on a research project¹ based on the application of a qualitative and critical approach, with mixed design. This project allows promoting personal and collective management of the professional career of citizens, especially groups at risk of exclusion, such as women, migrants, people with disabilities, among others, thus favoring social change and labor improvement and entrepreneurship, in a complex world mediated by various crises and war conflicts. All this, by establishing a network of support and dynamization in virtual and mixed learning environments, and guidance for personal and professional development. Specifically, based on a direct action aimed at working people, young and adults, especially at risk of exclusion, planned from an integral model for the construction of the professional career. This model is intended to involve citizens and establish networks of support and collaboration in virtual environments, which would lead them to enhance the orientation practices for the development of their careers, thus improving the living conditions of people from the promotion of employability and entrepreneurship. The project, which is currently under implementation, will contribute to providing solutions to this complex challenge, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2030 of the United Nations, helping to redefine current frames of reference, which are functional for the establishment of training and guidance actions offered by services and socio-labor entities. Author 4 will transit 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 pandemic for the COVID-19, in which she highlights the different roles, challenges, and demands associated with gender, in the case of women who were overburdened in terms of paid and unpaid care work and in their understanding of caring, being cared for, and self-care as a social right. And finally, author 5 will reflect on the results of her research of 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 pandemic of COVID-19, from a gender studies perspective, and how it is precisely our female gender the one 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.

Results and conclusions. In this panel, the female researchers will share their research experiences and contributions to qualitative inquiry through the presentation of creative and innovative ideas that emerge from their own experiences through and with their qualitative research projects. The aim of this panel is to contribute with the knowledge from the educational context of the Ibero-American cultures they represent and to promote the development of women's voices in the academy.

Keywords: collaborative writing; gender perspective; interpretive [auto]ethnography; grounded theory; academic practice.

Necessary resources: the panelists will need a video projector and internet. The session will be developed in a hybrid way.

¹ Reference: I+D+i Projects - «Retos Investigación» Modalities 2019-2020 Promoting the self-management of the professional career in contexts of socio-labor change: dynamization, guidance and support networks in integrated virtual environments. Funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation (MCIN)/ State Research Agency (AEI) Spain /PID2020-114833RB-I00, 2021-2025.



The Panel Discussion will last for 1h30m and each group should be represented by at least 2 elements (one of them being the moderator). In addition to the abstract, your proposal to organize the panel discussion should include:

Organization of the Panel Discussion

1- Brief context; the researchers carry out their academic and research work in public universities in 3 locations in Chile: the border region of Arica and Parinacota and the Tarapacá Region in the north, and the capital Santiago; one of them does so in Andalucía in Spain. They are qualitative researchers who are also involved in undergraduate and graduate teaching and participate in various national and international networks related to gender issues, school education, and higher education. Their university policy contexts have recently incorporated gender, while they began much earlier to be interested in these issues that were clearly evident for them from their roles and the challenges they had to face as female researchers in academia.

2- Objective(s)

The objectives of this panel are to present different experiences of qualitative research mediated by the gender of the researchers and to identify the contributions that the voices of women in academia have in their research and in their formative role in promoting an organizational culture that seeks equity and respect for women.

3- Dynamics / Strategy:

- a. Presentation (Group Activity). Presentations will be made using PowerPoint support and reading examples of collaborative writing, as appropriate for each panelist. Each panelist will have 15 minutes for her presentation.
- b. The moderator will introduce each presenter and will make a closing relating the contributions of each of the panelists. To do so, she will use the questions presented in the abstract. The topics are mainly focused on qualitative methodologies, understood as theoretical and methodological, according to the moments to which each researcher ascribes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), and references developed in their publications around gender and academia will be used (e.g. Zapata-Sepúlveda and Suárez-Ortega, 2022).
- c. The content of the panel will revolve around the experiences of women in academia. In this case, the contribution is to develop these issues in relation to qualitative research, which in itself promotes critical and defined thinking, and the representation of people with no voice, which leads these female researchers to assume an active role in their different work and public spheres. Thus, this panel is applicable to different contexts.
- d. The discussion will build on the experiences shared.

4- Application of the proposal in reality / practical examples.

5- Each of the panelists will present her experience as a researcher in academia conducting qualitative research on gender and social issues in both academia and society. Therefore, this panel discussion offers practical examples of qualitative research where the application of the gender perspective to address the studies is highlighted, without losing sight of their role as women academics in the leadership of this research.



6- Expected results.

7- This panel discussion has defined as an expected result the sharing of practical experiences of research where qualitative methodologies are applied to understand social and gender issues. It is expected to show how the gender perspective and qualitative research converge to address different social phenomena. This panel discussion, therefore, aims to disseminate various qualitative methodological approaches, through the presentation of the experiences of the researchers themselves, who lead qualitative research without losing sight of their gender condition.

References

- Araneda-Guirriman, C. (2020). *Women in high university hierarchies: perceptions of their trajectory and academic experience from their own voices* (FONDECYT Project N° 1201517).
- Denzin, N. K. (2001). The reflexive interview and a performative social science. *Qualitative Research*, 1(1), 23-46.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2018). *Qualitative data analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Sage publications.
- Suárez-Ortega, M., & Zapata-Sepúlveda, P. (2022a). Professional Development in Academia: Co-performing Voices From Feminist Research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 15(3), 426–434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19408447211068199>
- Zapata-Sepúlveda, P., & Suárez-Ortega, M. (2022b). Qualitative Female Researchers in Academia: Challenges and Contradictions. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 22(6), 617–619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086221093417>
- Zapata-Sepúlveda, P. (2021). *Research, gender and the Pandemic* (Uta-Major Cod. 5792-21).

Biographical note

Pamela Zapata Sepúlveda holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology (Universidad de Salamanca, Spain). She is an academic at the School of Psychology and Philosophy at the Universidad de Tarapacá, a public regional university in northern Chile. She is currently researching in educational establishments, migrations, and cultural diversity in the cross-border region of Arica and Parinacota (Fondecyt Regular 1160869,1181713,1160976, 1191317 and 1221330). She has promoted programs to support the Latin American migrant and refugee population. Her main area of work has been oriented toward qualitative research on sensitive topics and the transfer of this situated knowledge and from interdisciplinary perspectives through undergraduate and postgraduate training through the formal curriculum of undergraduate programs and the doctoral psychology program, as well as a student's thesis supervisor. She is also working on a critical perspective on the trajectories of women in the academy (UTA-Major 3758-19, 3734/16, and 3730/12).

Carmen Araneda Guirriman holds a Ph.D. in education from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Spain. She is an associate professor at the Department of Industrial Engineering and Systems of the Faculty of Engineering of the Universidad de Tarapacá, Arica, Chile. Her initial training is in sociology with a master's degree in research in the social sciences at one of the most prestigious



universities in Chile, Universidad de Concepción, giving her substantial knowledge in qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the social sciences. This training also allowed her to develop the ability to work in multidisciplinary teams. In the field of research, her publications are indexed in leading journals in which she investigates topics in higher education. The issues are the profile of non-traditional students accessing higher education, institutional strategies for retention and student academic performance, gender in academia, female academic trajectories, and work-family conflict.

Dr. Mirliana Ramírez-Pereira is an Associate Professor in the Department of Nursing at the University of Chile, Register Nurse, Master in Community Psychology, and Doctor in Nursing Sciences. She has a Diploma in Primary Health Care, a Diploma in Global Nursing Leadership Policy by the International Council of Nursing (ICN), and a Diploma in Political Strategy for Public Policies. She is currently studying the Specialization in Public Policies of Care with a Gender Perspective in the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO). She is a visiting professor in the programs of Master in Public Health at the Universidad Católica del Norte, Master in Nursing at the Universidad Católica del Maule, Master in Nursing at the Universidad de La Frontera, and Master in Palliative Care at the Universidad Católica del Uruguay. Dr. Ramírez is the Director of *Revista Chilena de Enfermería*, a Member of the Latin American Network of Methodology in Social Sciences. She is currently a researcher in the qualitative inquiry Social representations of relevant actors linked to the main barriers to benefits guaranteed in law 21,030, which decriminalizes the interruption of pregnancy for three reasons in Chile 2020-2023—funded by the National Research Agency of Chile.

Magdalena Suárez-Ortega is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) of the Research and Evaluation Methods in Education at the University of Seville, Spain. Her research interests focus on career development, gender, and qualitative methodologies. She has published books, book chapters and papers on these topics, and she coordinates international cooperation and Research, Development and Innovation Projects financed in Regional and State Plans in this line.

Michelle Espinoza-Lobos is an English teacher educator who has published gender-oriented collaborative autoethnographic work with two of the panelists. Her research interests include collaborative autoethnography, qualitative inquiry, ICTs in education, higher education, and gender roles and educational settings. Michelle teaches research-oriented subjects to students in the last years of their educational trajectories and often supervises undergraduate and graduate research work. She is currently working on the development of a project on education, gender, and women migrants in northern Chile.

