

## Women Creatives and Machismo in Mexican Advertising: Challenging Barriers to Success

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### Abstract

This study explores the experiences of women working as creatives in Mexican advertising creative departments. It is based on 22 in-depth interviews and suggests that these women face significant challenges within the *machismo* culture, which permeates Mexican advertising creative departments. Mexico plays an important role in global advertising, particularly in Latin America, but in this country female workers only represent five per cent of those working in creative departments. This is the first study focused on Mexican women creatives in advertising, highlighting the confluence of advertising women creatives and Mexican culture. Analysis reveals ten subcategories which articulate the horizontal and vertical barriers women creatives in Mexico face. Additionally, two broad workplace cohorts emerge: “old glories,” the misogynist men creatives who have historically managed advertising creative departments; and “forward thinkers,” young women and men who work side-by-side within advertising creative departments, disregarding or embracing gender differences. The findings, contextualized by cultural and organizational feminist theories as well as power theory, expose a *machismo* environment within Mexican advertising creative departments. *Keywords:* Mexico, advertising culture, creativity, discrimination, gender, women creatives.

Resumen: Creativas y machismo en la publicidad mexicana: Eliminando barreras hacia el éxito

Este estudio explora las experiencias de mujeres que trabajan en los departamentos creativos de las agencias de publicidad en México. Se han realizado 22 entrevistas en profundidad que sugieren que las creativas enfrentan desafíos significativos dentro de la cultura machista que impregna los departamentos creativos publicitarios. México desempeña un papel importante en la publicidad global, particularmente en América Latina, sin embargo, en este país, solo existe el 5 por ciento de mujeres creativas. Este es el primer estudio enfocado en mujeres creativas publicitarias mexicanas teniendo en cuenta el contexto cultural de México. El análisis revela diez subcategorías que articulan las barreras horizontales y verticales que

enfrentan las mujeres creativas de este país. Además, surgen dos tendencias en el lugar de trabajo: *old glories*, hombres misóginos creativos que históricamente han administrado los departamentos creativos publicitarios y *forward thinkers*, mujeres y hombres jóvenes que trabajan codo con codo dentro del departamentos sin tener en cuenta las diferencias de género. Los hallazgos están contextualizados por los estudios culturales, las teorías feministas organizacionales y las teorías del poder, exponen la existencia de un ambiente machista en los departamentos creativos publicitarios mexicanos. *Palabras clave*: México, cultura publicitaria, creatividad, discriminación, género, mujer.

## **Women in Mexican advertising**

Mexico plays an important role in global advertising, particularly within the Latin American market (Sinclair, 2013). Today, the Latin American advertising market, which began in the 1920s, accounts for 6.1 per cent of global advertising spending, with US\$37,517 million in annual spending (Marca, 2019). Mexico is one of the biggest players in Latin America, with 80 per cent of advertising spending concentrated in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina (Wentz, 2010). Brands such as Procter & Gamble, Unilever or L'Oréal dominate advertising spending in Mexico (Marca, 2019). Reviewing data from 2017 in the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies, better known as Redbooks, a respected global advertising industry database, shows there were nine multinational advertising agencies functioning in Mexico at that time (Redbooks, 2017). Further, according to the Mexican Advertising Agency Association (2018), 90.3 per cent of the agencies in Mexico are local national agencies, while only 9.7 per cent are multinational. Finally, Mexico, along with Brazil, historically dominates the awards won by Latin American advertising agencies at the Cannes Lion International Festival of Creativity (Wentz, 2010).

Creative is one of five departments within most advertising agencies: account services (which services clients' needs), media (which buys and places media), account planning (which performs research and crafts strategy), management and finance (which takes care of the internal processes, often including human resources) and creative (which is where advertising is actually produced) (Altstiel & Grow, 2017). Some agencies also have stand-alone digital departments, while production can be a part of a creative department or stand on its own. However, creative departments are the engines that drive the advertising industry. It is here where the advertising itself, led by teams of art directors and copywriters, and supervised by creative directors, comes to life. As these teams drive the creative process, which is the product advertising agencies sell, those who work within creative departments often view themselves as the most important people within the agency.

Advertising creative departments have long been known to marginalize women practitioners (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Windels, 2011; Windels & Lee, 2012). Historically, the environments of advertising creative departments have been unwelcoming to women (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Mensa & Grow, 2015; Windels & Lee, 2012). According to

Redbooks, women make up just 23.5 per cent of creative teams worldwide (Deng & Grow, 2018). Mexico, known for its machismo culture, where manliness is upheld by masculine dominance, also appears to marginalize women creatives (Falicov, 2010; Lamas, 1996). In 2017, women made up 15.9 per cent of all creatives (Redbooks 2017). However, across a five-year period, the numbers are far worse. Women average 5 per cent of all creative teams (Deng & Grow, 2018), and not until 2018 was the first Mexican woman creative appointed to a Cannes judging panel (Runge, Botzenhardt, & Ferdinand, 2013).

This study, based on in-depth interviews with 22 Mexican women creatives, provides new insights about the experiences of women in advertising. While there are numerous studies of advertising women creatives in the North American and Europe (Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Mallia & Windels, 2011), there are virtually none on women creatives in Latin America (Mensa & Grow, 2015). Thus, this study offers important new insights. Specifically, this work articulates some of the challenges Mexican women creatives face working in the machismo, gender-biased culture of Mexican advertising creative departments. The findings, framed by cultural studies and organizational feminist theories, demonstrate that Mexican women creatives experience significant horizontal (entrance) and vertical (upward mobility) barriers within advertising. This is shaped by systemic gender bias and, in Mexico; it is exacerbated by the machismo Mexican culture.

### **Mexico and its *machismo***

Machismo culture is a concept that dictates many aspects of male behaviour. Work by Hofstede (2018) helps define the dominance of masculinity in Mexican culture. In fact, Mexico scores 69 on Hofstede's (2018) 100-point masculinity/femininity scale. In all of Latin America, only Venezuela has a more masculine culture. This would strongly suggest that Mexican culture emphasizes behaviours along gendered stereotypes (Hofstede, 2018; Rovira & Sedano, 2004). It has particular relevance to male sexual culture, in that machismo behaviours are often a source of pride among men and are a way to prove their manliness, often by upholding their masculine sexual dominance (Gregory & Munch, 1997; Kupper & Zick, 2011; Lamas, 1996; Nicolson, 2015; Perilla, 1999; Scott, 2012; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005). Perilla (1999) explains that inside machismo culture, women are expected to be submissive and soft-hearted. They have to care for the home and family, which includes staying at home once there are children (Perilla 1999). In machismo culture, it is assumed that men are the family breadwinners (Falicov, 2010; Rovira & Sedano, 2004). Ultimately, women are seen as the nurturers, while men have to be commanding and commonly demonstrate their dominance with assertive competitiveness (Agoff, Casique & Castro, 2013; Mollett, 2017). In a Latin American context, machismo culture is typified by a man who can drink the most, sire the most

sons, defend himself most successfully, dominate his wife and the other women in his life (Lamas, 1996).

Latin America is geographically formed by 20 countries and Mexico is the leader in the northern region (Dabène, 1999). It is the third largest country in Latin America and has been considered an upper-middle-income nation since 1990 (Powell, 2013). Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 0.8 per cent in the third quarter of 2018 and it holds the fifteenth position globally, by nominal GDP (Expansión, 2018). The capital, Mexico City, with twenty million inhabitants, is the financial centre with influence across Latin America (Barrio, 1991). According to the Mexico Business Forecast Report (2015), by 2024 Mexico will have a strong and sustainable economy, generating significant foreign investment. Yet, in Mexico, women only achieve between 10 to 16 per cent of the job positions in non-service or professional roles within the business sector, while data also shows that there is one woman for every ten men in management (INEGI, 2019). Finally, Mexico is shaped by a multicultural mosaic of identities and cultures, where indigenous natives have mixed with the European, African and Asian people (Mollett, 2017; Ramos, 2014).

The machismo culture of Mexico is built upon a patriarchal social system in which males hold primary power (Connell, 2005; Falicov, 2010; Pisano, 2001). Mexican men dominate leadership roles both in the private and public sector; and they wield authority and social privilege (Connell, 2005; Merrell, 2018). Patriarchy and the masculine power and machismo culture that shapes it, determine the social interaction between men and women across a multiplicity of social spaces and situations (Pisano, 2001). This machismo culture also well-established within Mexican corporate structures (CONAPRED, 2019). Women experience machismo culture and patriarchy in various ways. In 2016, 53 per cent of Mexican women said that they had experienced discrimination within their workplace, which truncated their opportunities for career advancement (INEGI, 2019). This machismo culture, shapes women's desire for *respeto* and, of course, women creatives in advertising are no exception.

Despite Mexico's typically gendered culture, awareness of gender bias and sexual harassment is increasing across the country. The government has implemented new regulations to improve women's safety and reduce gender bias. For example, public transport cars were divided by gender to protect women from harassment and sexual assault (Dunckel, 2016). Recently, the government, in collaboration with UN Women (UN Women, 2015), has carried out a social awareness campaign to reduce sexual violence against women. Inside universities, spaces for reflection on gender issues are promoted, along with seminars and congresses on gender equity (UN Women, 2017). Some corporations, including advertising agencies such as Ogilvy & Mather, J. Walter Thompson and McCann Erickson have set up anonymous sexual discrimination and harassment reporting systems (UN Women, 2013). Furthermore, in 2003 Mexico government created the National Council to Prevent Discrimina-

tion at work, one of the objectives was to investigate the sexual harassment complaints (CONAPRED, 2019).

### *Organizational masculinity theory*

Feminist organizational theories help us better understand the structure that underpins the machismo culture within advertising creative departments. Certainly, the machismo culture within advertising is similar to the machismo culture which dominates Mexican workplaces (Connell, 2005; Merrell, 2018). Further, the systemic sexism within advertising creative departments exists worldwide, as articulated by only 23.5 per cent women working in creative departments globally (Deng & Grow, 2018). The systemic nature of sexism in advertising creative departments also likely encourages its perpetuation within the highly machismo Mexican cultural domain. For as Acker suggests, inequality regimes are “linked to inequality in the surrounding society, its politics, history, and culture” (2006, p. 443). Clearly in this case, culture and gender play huge roles and feminist theories provide a context through which to explore this issue.

One strain of feminist theory focuses on organizational structures, which Acker argues are “not gender-neutral” (1990, p. 139). Acker suggests, “bureaucracy and hierarchy are male-created and males dominate structures of control that oppress women” (1990, p.141). Lewis (2014) argues that success within organizations requires women to enact masculine identities. Collinson and Hearn (1994) and Davidson and Cooper (1992) suggest that when women exhibit maternal functions or concerns about work/life balance, and are not enacting masculine identities, they become marginalized. It is not uncommon for women to hesitate to strive toward professional success for fear they will become targeted with sexist stereotypes.

A second strain of feminist theory looks at structural barriers (Blackburn, et al., 2002; Guy, 1994; Wirth, 2001). Specifically, this strain of feminist theory is framed by the notion of barriers at horizontal points of entry and more barriers truncating vertical opportunities for promotion. Horizontal barriers for women are akin to meeting a “glass wall” (Guy, 1994), which stymies their entry. Vertical barriers are the roadblocks that truncate women’s upward mobility as they seek promotions (Blackburn, et al., 2002; Wirth, 2001). Finally, Gregory suggests that, “Although advertising may not have been as functionally hierarchical as other businesses, what some saw as an “un-evolving” and oppressive group of straight, white middle-class men illustrates the role of masculine hegemony, and the tensions between those in power and those without it” (2016, p. 54). In the end, women’s success in organizations, including advertising agencies, is often truncated by their gender, not their talent.

*Power theory in context*

Power theory explains that men and women understand and express power differently (Vianello & Caramazza, 2005). Vianello and Caramazza (2005) suggest few women externalize their power, while most men externalize theirs. Thus, women tend to be “cut out of male (advertising) networks” (Grow & Yang, 2018, p. 9). Further, if women exhibit differing (non-masculine) displays of power, there are often negative consequences. As creative departments are coloured by gender bias, with a strong bent toward masculinity, masculinity becomes a form of externalized power. Within this patriarchal environment, creative men consolidate their control by externalizing their power, often to the detriment of women creatives (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Broyles & Grow, 2008). Further, “old glories,” the men who have historically controlled the hiring within advertising creative departments, will likely hire in their hegemonic masculine image (Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008; Hackley & Kover, 2007).

Power theory is further articulated by the boys’ club environment of advertising creative departments, which is created and sustained by masculine social groups that support masculine power and, thus, masculine creative work (Mensa & Grow, 2015; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Del Río, 2007; Cuneo, 1997). Men also use networking to help each other. Further, in advertising agencies, men monopolize management and leadership positions (Gregory, 2009). Women have very little chance of success in creative departments because, historically, their ideas are not valued, in part because they remain internalized or ignored (Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Del Río, 2007; Nixon & Crew, 2006; Cuneo, 1997).

Entrance into the boys’ club is like hitting a “glass wall” (Guy, 1994), while a glass ceiling often prevents women creatives from rising upward (Wirth, 2001). Women exhibiting non-masculine ways of being or expressing frustrations related to work/life balance become marginalized (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Davidson & Cooper, 1992) or invisible (Lewis, 2014). These judgments do not come only from men; women are also often harsh with each other. Finally, women still find themselves assigned far more often to “pink accounts,” such as feminine care and home care products that are assumed to be the domain of women and which rarely win creative awards (Nicolson, 2015; Nixon & Crew, 2006). This leaves women segregated away from the award-winning accounts and thus away from opportunities for vertical growth (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009).

*Mexican advertising creative departments and gender challenges*

Academic studies focusing on Mexican women have largely been anthropological and sociological, focusing on issues such as violence against women, trafficking, sexual abuse, female migration, wage discrimination and discrimina-

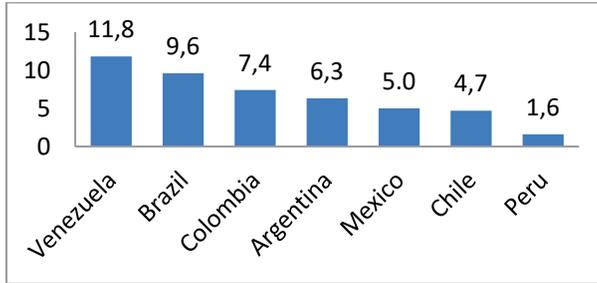
tion against indigenous women (Agoff, Casique & Castro, 2013; Villegas, Lemanski & Valdéz, 2010; Lamas, 1996). However, there is a significant lack of research on women in Latin American advertising, even less on Mexican advertising specifically, and virtually nothing on the gender bias that women face within Mexican advertising creative departments. Examples of gender bias might include exclusion from working on prime accounts, not being included in key discussions, allowing male clients to refuse to work with women creatives, and being told women do not understand humour, as the data will demonstrate.

Previous studies have demonstrated that men monopolize advertising leadership positions as creative directors, while women are overrepresented at lower level positions, as art directors and copywriters (Deng & Grow, 2018; Dodd, 2012; Gregory, 2009; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Windels & Lee, 2012). Thus, women are rarely supervising creative work, nor do junior women see themselves represented in management (Del Río, 2007; De los Ángeles, 1996; Sasser & Koslow, 2008). Research also shows that there is gender bias in advertising agencies worldwide, particularly in creative departments (Deng & Grow, 2018; Grow & Deng, 2014; Klein, 2000; Nixon & Crew, 2006; Nixon, 2003; Windels & Lee, 2012). Data from the Redbooks demonstrates that across a five-year average (2012-2017), the number of women in creative departments globally was only 23.5 per cent, while the number of women creative directors was only 16.1 per cent (Deng & Grow, 2018). Further, in Latin America (see table 1), women made up an average of just 8.7 per cent of all creatives; while in Mexico, women comprised just 5.0 per cent of the creative teams. Surprisingly, women made up 18.7 per cent of all creative directors in Mexico (Deng & Grow, 2018), and while women creative directors fared slightly better than the global average, horizontal and vertical segregation are clearly evident within the data, suggesting significant barriers which are most likely driven by gender bias. Despite these barriers, the rise of the Time's Up/Advertising movement in the United States (Rittenhouse, 2018) signals optimism for change worldwide. Time's Up/Advertising is a movement stemming from the original Time's Up movement, which focused on calling out sexual harassers and gender bias in Hollywood. The advertising-based movement was initiated on 12 March 2018 and signed by 180 executive level advertising women from across all departments and a wide range of advertising agencies, mostly in the United States. The movement has led to a wave of firings of top male advertising executives, particularly those in creative, including the Argentinian Gustavo Martinez, Global Chief Operating Officer of J. Walter Thompson (Morrison, 2016). Change may be afoot.

Mensa (2017) addresses Latin America's modest influence on global advertising, while a single study (Mensa & Grow, 2015) explores creative women in Peru. Other than these two, there appears to be little research done on gender and/or advertising in Latin America. Yet, as discussed previously, we also know that Latin America is a burgeoning market with a nearly 100-year histo-

ry. Further, Mexico, along with Brazil and Argentina, is a market leader, as these three countries represent 80 per cent of advertising spending among Latin American nations (Wentz, 2010). Finally, Mexico and Brazil often dominate the Cannes Lions awards (Wentz, 2010). So why is there so little on Latin American advertising in the current literature?

**Table 1.** Percentage of women in Latin American advertising creative departments: 2012-2017 (courtesy of Deng and Grow, 2018).



Considering the need to for more exploration of Latin American advertising, we focused on Mexico using contextual frameworks provided by the cultural and feminist theories previously discussed. Specifically, we set out to explore the experiences of Mexican advertising women creatives. Two overarching research questions guide this study and inform the methodology:

- 1) Are there horizontal barriers that impede women's access to entry into creative positions and, if so, what shapes them?
- 2) Are there vertical barriers that impede creative women's ascent into creative management and, if so, what shapes them?

### Methodological and analytic approach

Using grounded theory (Rossiter, 2010) with constant comparative (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) we analysed the experience of women creatives in Mexican advertising creative departments. A snowball sampling gathered 22 informants, from across twelve agencies in Mexico City, to conduct in-depth interviews (see table 2). Four of the agencies were local Mexican agencies: Residencia, Made, Plan 0 and Levadura. Eight are multinational agencies (all of whom are also listed in Redbooks): BBDO, DDB, J. Walter Thompson, McCann Erickson, Ogilvy & Mather, Publicis, Saatchi & Saatchi and TBWA. According to Mexican Advertising Agency Association (2018), 90.3 per cent of the agencies in Mexico are local and 9.7 per cent are multinational. However, the multinational agencies also tend to be larger, and cater to global brands; they thus have larger creative departments. Still, according to Redbooks (2017), the average number of creatives within multinational agencies in Mexico was 4.8 creatives per agency. Further, multinationals tend to be more dominate in Mexico City.

The majority were creative directors followed by art directors, and the fewest were copywriters (Redbooks, 2017). Thus, it is not surprising that only four of our informants were from local Mexican agencies, while 18 were from multinational agencies. Three criteria were followed to select the women creatives (Blythe, 2007). First, the agencies had to be registered in the Mexican Advertising Agency Association. Second, all agencies had to be located in Mexico City, the hub of Mexican advertising. Third, all potential creatives had to be actively employed and working on projects during the interview period. Initial contacts were made via LinkedIn. Ten women creatives were initially contacted, and agreed to be interviewed. From these, 15 more women creatives were found through snowballing sampling. Three ultimately declined to be interviewed.

Our informants consisted of twenty-two Mexican women creatives, 23-43 years-old, with an average age of 33. Sixteen women were single, one divorced and five were married. Only two had children. Thirteen of the women were creative directors, making all decisions on which work is chosen to be used; five were art directors, working with visual advertising content; one was a digital creative, creating new and original content for social media; and three were vice presidents (VP), who are the boss of creative directors (Sasser & Koslow, 2008; Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017). They had spent between two and 19 years in advertising, with an average of 10.5 years of experience (see table 2). See annex for the personal and professional status of the interviewees.

In-depth interviews were chosen, allowing informants' experiences to be explored more intimately. The interview guide was patterned after research done by Mensa and Grow (2015) exploring the experiences of women creatives in Peru. The script consisted of twenty-seven questions. Nineteen were open-ended, two were designed to elicit creative descriptors and limited to three-word responses, and six questions focused on demographic information. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Spanish. All informants were guaranteed anonymity and given the choice of doing the interview at work or home. The interviews were conducted between October 2016 and December 2016.

Constant comparative analysis, rooted in grounded theory, was used for the analysis. Grounded theory operates under an interpretative paradigm, which melds well with constant comparative analysis (Kendall, 1999). The intention of this study was to use constant comparative analysis to generate data, which framed by theory, is known to help elicit objective truth (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Orozco, 1997). We used the 10-step procedure of Blythe (2007). The initial reading of the transcripts generated 21 possible categories. Through constant comparison, 10 subcategories, distributed among three primary categories, emerged. Each was related to horizontal barriers to entry and vertical barriers to promotion. The transcripts were then re-examined, by each author, to ensure that data were attributed appropriately (see table 2).

**Table 2.** Categorical Classifications

Primary Category	Subcategory	Description
Horizontal Barrier	Ways of Working	Women Creatives and men tend to think and work in different ways, shaped by their gender socialization, which often leads to tensions in the work environment (Del Río, 2007; Grow & Deng, 2014).
	Hiring	Women experience invisible barriers to hiring within advertising and rarely see other women as aspirational role models making it is difficult to recruit them. (Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008).
Horizontal Barriers & Vertical Barriers	Exclusion	Creativity is influenced by social and environmental factors, which are highly impacted by the social groupings that create and sustain the boys' club or locker room environments (Del Río 2007; Gregory, 2009; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Lewis, 2014; Mensa & Grow, 2015).
	Sexualization of Women	Men creatives sexualize women to maintain a machismo creative environment, where women creatives often become sexual objects (Gregory, 2009; Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005; Wolf, 2013).
	Machismo Culture	The culture and social groupings within creative departments are highly coloured by gender with a strong bent toward masculinity. Within this patriarchal environment creative men are able to consolidate power, often to the detriment of women creatives (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mensa & Grow, 2015)
Vertical Barriers	Work/Life Imbalance	The lack of flexibility and the guilt women creatives feel when having children often prevent them from having professional success, while men as fathers experience no such stigma (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Mensa & Grow 2015).
	Schedules	Long days in advertising agencies privilege men, who prefer to work late often by preference, while harming women who carry the burden of childcare and family responsibilities (Del Río, 2007; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Mensa, 2012).
	Pink Accounts	Female creatives are often segregated onto "pink accounts" (female and home products), which often limit opportunities for advancement (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia 2009; Nixon & Crew, 2006).
	Promotion	Management within agencies is dominated by men and it is a highly collegial environment where men tend to promote other men (Cuneo, 1997; Grow & Broyles, 2011).
	Salary Equity	The normalization of men in power also justifies higher salaries for men and lower salaries for women (Gregory, 2009).

The findings are discussed below according to the 10 subcategories that emerged from the analysis. The subcategories fit into one of three primary categories: horizontal barriers, which represent barriers to entry; both horizontal barriers & vertical barriers and vertical barriers, which represent barriers to promotion. Further, two broad workplace cohorts emerge: "old glories" (as named by the informants), the misogynist creative men who have historically managed advertising creative departments; and "forward thinkers" (also named by the informants), young women and men who work side-by-side, within advertising creative departments, disregarding or embracing gender differences. The findings represent the still dominant role played by "old glories," but articulate experiences that fuel the passions of "forward thinkers," who are predominately women.

## Horizontal barriers

Horizontal barriers, for women, are akin to meeting a “glass wall” (Guy, 1994), which stymies their entry. Mexican women creatives experience two horizontal barriers: ways of working and hiring. Ways of working refers to gendered expectations on how creative people work, with the assumption that women and men creatives work in different ways (Del Río, 2007; Grow & Deng, 2014). Hiring reflects the patriarchal structures that tend to work against women being hired (Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008).

### *Ways of working*

Children acquire a male or female role in childhood and tend to pair off by gender as they age (Brant & Too, 1994; Nicolson, 2015). Because of this early pairing, women may find it more difficult to enter into a man’s socially constructed world and, in the process, gendered norms are reinforced, which are often transferred into the work world (Brant & Too, 1994; Lewis, 2014; Nicolson, 2015). This is particularly true in machismo cultures, where stereotypical gender norms are more highly enforced (Connell, 2005; Merrell, 2018). These socialized differences are reflected in creative departments where women and men creatives tend to express creativity differently, often in ways shaped by their gendered socialization (Del Río, 2007; Grow & Deng, 2014). This can lead to tensions in the work environment. Davidson & Cooper (1992) suggest that women are often forced, by social convention and stereotypes, into gendered roles at work. For instance, a woman may be asked to take notes or prepare coffee far more often than men. This gendered role playing reinforces gender stereotypes and truncates women’s ability to fully participate in creative work. Socialized, stereotypical gender roles are clearly articulated in the informants’ comments about ways of working.

Women are more organized, men do not take notes. Then they are the ones who are looking for you to report (what was said). They waste my time.

When I have male partners, they think that I am their secretary and they expect that I will take notes. This bothers me too much.

The way a man and a woman work in creative is very different. Women analyse and question. Men think, think, think and sometimes say something.

I have come up with the best ideas when I worked with a team of women. It did not work well with men because they are irresponsible, lazy and foolish.

### *Hiring*

Power theory, which emerges from feminist organizational theory, suggests that men and women understand and express power differently (Lewis, 2014; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005). Men express power externally, while women

are socialized to express their power more subtly, often internalizing it (Vianello & Caramazza, 2005). Lewis (2014) suggests that women often feel the need to enact masculine ways of being in the workplace, in order to fit in. Within highly masculine creative departments (Broyles & Grow, 2008; Gregory, 2009), especially those in the more machismo culture of Mexico (Connell, 2005; Merrell, 2018) women likely experience gender bias as they seek employment. Further, “old glories,” men who have long controlled the power in advertising creative, represent the nexus of a masculine advertising heritage that permeates creative departments. These “old glories” often control the hiring within advertising creative departments and will likely hire in their hegemonic masculine image (Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008; Hackley & Kover, 2007). Thus, success for women may require them to enact masculine identities (Lewis, 2014). On the flip side, as Wolf’s (2013) beauty myth suggests, women may be valued for their beauty. However, while beauty may get a woman in the door, it ultimately works against her because her beauty powerfully reminds men that she is not one of them and she will rarely gain professional power (Wolf, 2013). This sets women up to question why they are hired. Exacerbating this is the “glass wall” (Guy, 1994) which stymies women’s entry. Patriarchal structures, which often help maintain “glass walls,” tend to work against women, as the informants demonstrate.

I was competing with a boy to be hired... Later my colleagues told me that they had hired me because I was beautiful. This made me doubt about my talent. On the one hand, I thought they were sons of bitches. But on the other hand, I thought that my physical appearance helped me get hired.

You have more chances of being hired as a creative if you’re pretty and you look good.

In advertising, they hire beautiful girls. Being pretty in advertising gives you more opportunities. Men can be ugly, fat and smell bad, women have to be pretty.

In my advertising agency, creative directors before hiring a woman they look her Facebook profile. If she is beautiful, they give her a job interview. If she is ugly, they do not answer her email. So, what does it means? Am I in the agency because I am pretty or because of my talent? I don’t know.

### **Horizontal and vertical barriers**

Horizontal and vertical barriers limit women creatives both horizontally, at the entry point, and vertically, within career progression. Mexican women creatives experience three barriers that elicit both horizontal and vertical barriers: exclusion; sexualization of women and machismo culture. Exclusion reflects a lack of belonging influenced by social and environmental factors, which are highly impacted by a boys’ club environment (Del Río 2007; Gregory, 2009;

Grow & Broyles, 2011; Lewis, 2014; Mensa & Grow, 2015). Sexualization of women refers to a creative environment where women creatives often become sexual objects, the object of sexual jokes, and the target of comments about their bodies, as well as inappropriate touching (Gregory, 2009; Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005; Wolf, 2013). Finally, machismo culture reflects a patriarchal environment where men creatives are able to consolidate power to the detriment of women creatives (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mensa & Grow, 2015).

### *Exclusion*

Inside creative departments there is a boys' club or locker room environment, which is created and sustained by masculine social groups that supports masculine power and masculine creative work (Cuneo, 1997; Del Río, 2007; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mensa & Grow, 2015). Gregory (2009) and Nixon (2003) found a "laddish" culture in British advertising agencies, which was framed by "laddish" humour and hypersexuality. This is not unlike Mexico's machismo culture (Connell, 2005; Merrell, 2018). Similar masculine cultural norms, which often exclude women, are found in advertising agencies in Sweden (Alvesson, 1998), Spain (Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012), United States (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009) and across Latin American (Mensa & Grow, 2015). Yet, studies looking at creativity have demonstrated that creative capacity is not influenced by gender (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2014). Nevertheless, the informants expressed feelings of exclusion in the creative environment, where men support other men. This impedes both entry (horizontal) into creative departments and upward (vertical) mobility, as is demonstrated by the voices of the informants.

A creative VP told me that I could not be a creative because men are better than me. According to him, men are more creative because they are immature. For him a woman is mature, courteous and straight. She can't even fart. It was the creative VP opinion, too bad for me!

The creative departments are full of men. There are few women. The exclusion already begins with the business cards. Mine says 'creative director' using a masculine article. But I am a woman creative director.

Advertising is a toby's [boys'] club. Men support men, approve men, and the clients are men.

When I brainstorm with men there is not much conversation. They wait until I leave. And when I do share my ideas, they say to me, 'no, it's not good'. I feel that they cut my wings.

When I go to meetings and propose something, they never accept my ideas... They are all men and when I speak, they ignore me. Men support ideas from other men, but not from women.

*Sexualization of women*

Acker (2006) posits that organizations are never gender neutral. Surely this holds true for advertising creative departments. Work by Tsihla & Zotos (2016) and Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos & Zotos (2008) suggest images of women as sexual or decorative objects emerge because they are made in machismo environments. Further, in Mexico, the impact of the sexualization of women, often leading to sexual violence, is pervasive (UN Women, 2017; INEGI, 2019). Knowing that jokes, comments about women's bodies, and inappropriate touching are often a part of rape culture (Carr, 1998); it is chilling to know that these same behaviours are common within advertising creative departments (Gregory, 2009; Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2011; Morrison, 2016). This indicates that under these circumstances, men may be externalizing their power, thereby creating intimidating environments for women (Vianello & Caramazza, 2005). The combination of structural barriers (Blackburn, et al., 2002; Guy, 1994), which truncate women's power, along with what appears to be powerful systemic barriers (Acker, 1990, 2006; Lewis, 2014) suggest that sexualization of women, especially in Mexico, may be endemic. Yet, the informants often spoke of pushing back, of confronting sexual harassment and machismo aggression, which appear common in Mexican advertising. In the end, the sexualization of women creates barriers that both inhibit their horizontal entry and truncate their vertical mobility, as the informants demonstrate.

I have seen women face (confront) misogynistic jokes. For example, when a man says to a woman: 'Lift up your skirt,' she confronts him and says: 'Take off your pants.' They do not expect for this kind of answer and they shut up. Women have learned to respond and not to cry.

In my agency, a committee called 20/20 has been created. The idea is to achieve, by 2020, the same number of male and female managers.

One day I put on a dress, my (male) colleagues started making sexual comments about my body. But the creative VP (a woman) appeared and asked, 'are they bothering you? You (she pointed to a man)! You show me your dick right now.' Everyone turned red and felt intimidated. Then the VP said, 'that's the way it feels. Bastards. This is sexual harassment. Do you understand now?'

In all the agencies, I have experienced sexual harassment problems. A colleague offered me 10,000 pesos (US\$524) to have sex with him. I told him... I'm going to pay you because I'm going to treat you like my sexual object, but I'll pay less.

Now women know that sexist comments are not simple jokes, but incorrect expressions that you should not allow.

### *Machismo culture*

Machismo culture, which is endemic in Mexico (Connell, 2005; Merrell, 2018), creates both horizontal and vertical barriers for women. Work by Hofstede (2018) scores Mexico highly masculine (69) on the scale of masculinity/femininity. Mexico the second highest score within Latin America, only Venezuela has a more masculine culture (73). This would strongly suggest that Mexican culture emphasizes behaviours along gendered stereotypes (Hofstede, 2018; Rovira & Sedano, 2004). Further, advertising has a long history of patriarchy and machismo practices, according to Stoddart (2011) and Boulton (2013). The normalization of patriarchal culture has been a mainstay within advertising agencies for many years (Mallia, 2009; Sinclair, 2013). These cultural norms are reflected within Mexican advertising agencies, where informants used geocultural expressions. These expressions, such as: “in Mexico,” “Mexican people,” “Mexican culture,” and “Mexico is” intensify the experience of machismo and reflect the cultural paradigm. This structure often leads to women being excluded, in part, because of the masculine structure; but also, in part, because women internalize their power, while men externalize theirs as articulated by networking to help each other. Further, in advertising agencies, men monopolize management and leadership positions (Gregory, 2009). Women’s ideas not being valued or are ignored lessens their chances of success in creative departments (Cuneo, 1997; Del Río, 2007; Grow, Roca & Broyles, 2012; Nixon & Crew, 2006), as the informants suggest.

If I had a job and my husband stayed at home taking care of the children, this would be seen as very bad in Mexico.

Inside a Mexican cultural context it is normal to go to the brothel. My boss from Ogilvy did it and I was not comfortable.

Mexico is a macho country, for that reason there is a lot of machismo inside advertising creative departments.

Mexican people think that men have to earn more money than women because they provide the sustenance of the home. For that reason, my [male] colleague is better paid than me. It is not fair.

### **Vertical barriers**

Vertical barriers are the roadblocks that truncate women’s upward mobility as they seek promotions (Blackburn, et al., 2002; Wirth, 2001). These barriers are systemic and pervasive (Acker, 1990; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Lewis, 2014). Five vertical barriers emerged in this study: work/life imbalance; scheduling; promotions; pink accounts and lack of salary equity. Work/life imbalance refers to the lack of flexibility in workplace ways of working and impacts mothers greatly (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Mensa &

Grow 2015). Scheduling relates to the long days in advertising agencies that privilege men's ways of working (Del Río, 2007; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Mensa, 2012). Pink accounts speaks to the types of accounts women tend to be assigned to, such as feminine care and home products, which limit their opportunities for advancement (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Malia 2009; Nixon & Crew, 2006). Finally, lack of salary equity reflects the inequitable salaries among creatives, in which men are paid more than women (Gregory, 2009).

### *Work/life imbalance*

Femininity and masculinity are associated with certain traits that imply gender-bound rules, defined by society, which usually impact women most negatively (Lewis, 2014). These socially defined rules emerge from socialization within the context of patriarchal power relations (Acker, 1990, 2006; Connell, 2005; Lewis, 2014). In Mexico, the number of women who stay home and take on traditional roles is still substantial (Lamas, 1996). Given the macho environment within creative departments, it is not surprising that only two of the 22 informants had children and just five were married. Yet, some of these Mexican advertising women creatives represent a new way of being. They are pushing for change, as their words express.

Men believe that they have to give the woman a home, a country house, a car, a son, a daughter, a dog, a cat,... They think that this makes women happy. But this is changing.

My generation has been raised not to get married. The old way of thinking, that a woman must depend economically on someone else is disappearing.

Over the years I have observed a change, thanks to feminist movements. It is no longer bad to be a feminist. Now I have a boss who is a feminist!

A new generation of creatives is trying to counter machismo in the advertising agencies.

### *Scheduling*

Creative departments have demanding, often disorganized, schedules that include working late into the night and on weekends (Del Río, 2007; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Mensa, 2012). Beyond the need for extended hours, men prefer to work late by preference; they feel that they are with their friends in the boys' club (Mallia, 2009; Mensa & Grow, 2015; Roca & Pueyo, 2011). At the same time women often carry the burden of childcare and family responsibilities, and cannot as easily participate in extended hours. Further, informants believe it is rarely necessary to work these extended hours to create strong work.

I often hear, in the elevator, comments like: 'yesterday we left at three in the morning.' Men creatives say this because they feel proud of themselves.

But I think that if he leaves early in the morning, there is something wrong. I think he can't manage his time well.

When I started working in advertising, I liked the atmosphere. But now I realize that there are downsides. It is not necessary to work until late at night. I think it's a flawed environment.

Men creatives believe that if they are locked in a room until five in the morning, they will have good ideas. That's just foolish!

We waste time in the creative department. The environment is very relaxed with beer and playing games. I prioritize my time. For me it is important to arrive early and leave early. It's not the same for men.

### *Pink accounts*

Along with hitting a glass ceiling (Wirth, 2001), women often find themselves assigned to more stereotypically female accounts, "pink accounts," such as feminine, infant and home care products. This is likely because the products are part of what are considered a woman's domain. Additionally, these types of accounts rarely win creative awards (Nicolson, 2015; Nixon & Crew, 2006). Without awards, opportunities for vertical growth or promotion is truncated (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009). For that reason, women creatives in many countries do not like being assigned to pink accounts (Mallia, 2009; Mensa & Grow, 2015). However, Mexican women creatives do not appear to mind working on these kinds of products, as their words express.

I get pink accounts, but it does not bother me. They (men) have neither the ability nor the sensitivity to carry out the work on these types of accounts.

At Ogilvy, men were trying to win a brand of sanitary towels, but all their ideas were rejected. In the end, my boss gave it to me, and when I presented my ideas, everybody listened.

I have pink accounts like department stores, fashion, makeup, perfume, sanitary towels and infant care. It does not bother me at all, because they [men] can't do it. It is a good way to be respected by your colleagues.

They give me pink accounts all the time. In some ways, it has helped me because when nobody has any ideas, I do.

### *Promotions*

Glass walls (Guy, 1994) that truncate entry and glass ceilings that prevent upward mobility stymie women in creative departments (Blackburn, et al., 2002; Wirth, 2001). Promotion, for women, is constrained by gendered systemic structures, which privilege men and masculine ways of being (Acker, 1990; Lewis, 2014). For as Acker said, "Bureaucracy and hierarchy are male-created

and males dominate structures of control that oppress women” (1990, p.141). Mexican creative departments are surely no exception as the voices of informants express.

If a man is promoted it is believed that it is because he has good contacts and is creative. If a woman is promoted it is believed that it is because she has sex with the boss.

Most of the high positions in advertising are held by men. For that reason, we always expect that a man, rather than a woman, will be promoted.

It is difficult to be promoted because men don't like to have female bosses. I am a boss but a creative man quit because he did not want to take orders from me. I was not surprised.

### *Lack of salary equity*

One way to maintain male superiority is through economic power. Thus, men strive to keep their salaries higher than the salaries of women of equal rank (Gregory, 2009; Moss, 2006). Salary equity is also associated with power theory, which suggest that earning more money is a way to maintain power (Vianello & Caramazza, 2005; Wolf, 2013). Limiting women's professional entry and thus economic power and independence help do this (Gregory, 2009; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005; Wolf, 2013). A study by the INEGI (2019) suggests that it would be difficult for Mexican men to consider women as equals at work, specifically in management positions. According to the Mexican Social Security Institute (2019), in 2017, men received an average hourly salary of 352.57 pesos (US\$18.51), and women 308.82 pesos (US\$16.21). That is a 14 per cent difference, favouring men. The informants, express frustration over this issue.

Men have a better salary than women because people think that men's work is more valuable than women's work.

I am a woman creative VP and I know that I earn less money than male VPs. Men are socialized to demand a pay raise, because they are taught that they deserve it.

Men earn more money because it is still believed that advertising is a place only for men.

Women do not ask for a salary increase because, for women, to do so is associated with ingratitude. But if a man asks for more money it is associated with power.

## **Conclusion: Mexican women creatives in advertising look to the future**

Our ten subcategories clearly articulate the power of the horizontal and vertical barriers that stymie women creatives' entrance and advancement within Mexican advertising creative departments. To a degree, these barriers represent a systemic structural issue for the industry – one that is bigger than Mexico (Deng & Grow, 2017; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011). Women make up just 23.5 per cent of all creatives worldwide, 8.7 per cent across Latin America and just 5 per cent in Mexico (Deng & Grow, 2018). Clearly, the lack of women in creative departments is a systemic, global problem. Still, Mexico is at the bottom of the heap. And being at the bottom warrants a closer look.

Acker posits that inequality regimes “are linked to inequality in the surrounding society, its politics, history, and culture” (2006, p. 443). Indeed, that seems to be the case as articulated by horizontal barriers, including ways of working and hiring, which preclude women from entry. Mexico's machismo culture is on full display within advertising creative departments in this research. The advertising world Mexican women creatives experience is shaped by both the “old glories,” whose external power displays have shaped and constructed the Mexican creative environments, and are heightened by the culturally-rooted machismo culture. As Del Río (2007) and Vianello & Caramazza (2005) have argued, and our informants have demonstrated, Mexican advertising creative departments have been created by men who have spent years consolidating their control and securing their machismo ways of working. At the same time, their hiring practices have often made the barriers invisible to women, while non-existent for men (Acker, 2006; Bourne & Öbliging, 2008; Lewis, 2014).

Vertical barriers come into sharp focus through the voices of these Mexican women creatives. Their lives are often complicated by their femaleness and motherhood in ways that women in non-Latin American countries may not experience (Mensa & Grow, 2015). Work/life balance is complicated everywhere, for everyone, but for Mexican women it is doubly difficult (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Mallia & Windels, 2011). Scheduling, too, complicates everyone's life. However, it is even more difficult for women in machismo cultures (Del Río, 2007; Mensa, 2012). Machismo men with traditional marriages have an advantage that allows them to navigate the difficulties posed by these erratic schedules, by externalizing their power which thus reduces vertical barriers to promotion. Women creatives, often trapped on pink accounts and while often enjoying the work, find it difficult to rise through the ranks (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Roca & Pueyo, 2011). Trapped in the pink ghetto, working on pink accounts, in advertising creative departments dominated by men who promote each other, leaves Mexican women's promotional opportunities severely truncated (Del Río, 2007; Cuneo, 1997; Grow & Broyles, 2011). While forward thinkers, often women,

see their vertical promotions stymied, the old glories are able to justify their higher salaries and women's lack of promotion because of their power.

Finally, both horizontal and vertical barriers come together to further complicate these women creatives' lives. Men creatives sexualize women as a means of maintaining their power and limiting women's entry (Gregory, 2009 & 2016; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005; Wolf, 2013;). In Mexico the sexualization of women leads to harassment and exclusion, while fortifying a machismo culture within creative departments. These Mexican advertising women creatives experience significant exclusion both at the point of entry and in the process of promotion (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Lewis, 2014; Mensa & Grow, 2015). Complicating matters, the women creatives sometimes turn against each other. Finally, the overall machismo culture of Mexican advertising creative departments forms barriers that permeates nearly every aspect of advertising women creatives' lived professional experiences (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mensa & Grow, 2015).

Surely the systemic, pervasive nature of gender inequity in advertising creative departments is a driver that shapes women's experiences. However, Mexico is a more nuanced case, as illustrated by the passionate, geocultural comments, that these women creatives shared. Knowing that culture comes into being as individuals construct relationships between themselves and the world as they experience it, this helps contextualize how the barriers these women experience, emerge and are sustained (Hall, 2016; 1980). Further, Mexico's machismo culture is built upon a patriarchal social system in which males hold primary power (Connell, 2005; Falicov, 2010; Pisano, 2001). These women's experiences, while reflective of a systemic whole, are nonetheless likely exacerbated by the highly machismo Mexican culture (Mollett, 2017; Perilla, 1999; Vianello & Caramazza, 2005). While the words of the informants bear this out, in nuanced ways, so too do the statistics. Women make up only 5 per cent of Mexican creative teams (Deng & Grow, 2018), while women comprise between 10-16 per cent of all professional jobs across the Mexican economy (Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography, 2016), suggesting dismal professional opportunities for women in Mexico, generally. These statistics lend credence to the power of Mexican machismo culture, where women are expected to be submissive (Perilla, 1999); and submission is a trait that the get you exactly nowhere in advertising.

The words of these women also help us see the hegemonic, machismo power of the "Old Glories," the men who have long controlled Mexican advertising, especially the creative departments. However, their words also suggest that the informants, who are "Forward Thinkers," are beginning to see themselves as future agents of change. For while women creatives continue to watch the struggle for equality unfold, they at times also exhibit fierce resistance. This is well demonstrated by the rare woman CD who took a harasser to task by turning the tables on him and then furiously stating, "This is sexual harassment. Do you understand now?" While another informant demonstrated her tenacity and

fierce desire to belong, despite her fear, “When I go to a meeting, present my ideas, or coordinate a creative team, I live in fear. I feel insecure all the time. But I face the challenges because I know that I deserve a place in advertising, just like other women deserve it.”

In conclusion, this study has a few limitations. First, there are only 22 informants. Yet, considering women make up just 5 per cent of Mexican advertising creative departments, and speaking up is a most likely a risky proposition, 22 informants is a strong beginning. However, more voices from Mexico and across Latin America deserve to be heard. Second, a study that incorporates the voices of men could provide rich and valuable insights into not only how this machismo culture continues to be sustained, but more importantly how it might be broken down. Finally, a comparative cross-cultural study comparing the experiences of Mexican advertising women creatives with advertising women creatives from other countries might provide more nuanced cultural understandings.

Despite these limitations, this study has demonstrated that these brave advertising women creatives have had to fight to enter, persevere to stay, and challenge the status quo to rise in Mexican management. “Old glories”, the men who have long held sway in Mexican advertising creative departments, have erected glass walls and glass ceilings, using their externalized power to secure control within this machismo world. Forward thinkers, women and men alike, whose thoughts and experiences have been articulated by the informants of this study, are pushing back as they strive to become agents of change. For these Mexican advertising women creatives there is great irony, in this moment of hope and change, for as one woman said, “Men (the old glories) think that women need their permission to work in advertising. They are stupid because once we get in, we are not going to leave.” And to that we say to them, *mujeres creativas ¡Bravo!*

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**Annex: Personal and professional status of interviewees**

Subject	Personal Status				Professional Status			
	Studies	Age	Marital Status	Children	Position	Years of Experience	Agency	Type of Agency
1	Economy and Advertising	29	Single	0	Creative Director	6	Saatchi & Saatchi	Multinational
2	Communication	29	Single	0	Creative Director	7	Residencia	National
3	Graphic Design	30	Single	0	Art Director	5	Ogilvy & Mather	Multinational
4	Graphic Design	23	Single	0	Creative Director	5	McCann Erickson	Multinational
5	Graphic Design	30	Single	0	Creative Director	8	Made	National
6	Communication	28	Single	0	Creative Director	2	Residencia	National
7	Marketing	26	Single	0	Digital Creative	3	Residencia	National
8	Graphic Design	38	Married	2	VP Creative	16	Levadura	National
9	Communication	38	Single	0	Creative Director	19	Publicis	Multinational
10	Graphic Design	43	Married	0	Creative Director	18	Ogilvy & Mather	Multinational
11	Advertising	26	Single	0	Art Director	4	McCann Erickson	Multinational
12	Communication	27	Single	0	Art Director	4	Ogilvy & Mather	Multinational
13	Graphic Design	29	Single	0	Art Director	5	McCann Erickson	Multinational
14	Advertising	31	Single	0	Creative Director	9	J. Walter Thompson	Multinational
15	Graphic Design	33	Married	0	VP Creative	11	BBDO	Multinational
16	Graphic Design	34	Divorced	0	Creative Director	11	Ogilvy & Mather	Multinational
17	Communication	28	Single	0	Art Director	6	TBWA	Multinational
18	Graphic Design	33	Married	0	Creative Director	11	McCann Erickson	Multinational
19	Communication	37	Married	1	VP Creative	12	McCann Erickson	Multinational
20	Graphic Design	34	Single	0	Creative Director	10	Plan 0	National
21	Graphic Design	36	Single	0	Creative Director	6	TBWA	Multinational
22	Graphic Design	33	Single	0	Creative Director	12	DDB	Multinational

