

## **Ridin? down the highway - Reflections on the trajectories of female professors in academia**

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### **Resumo**

The meaning of career success has been researched in diverse settings and time frames. Inquiries addressing gender find that women evaluate their success in distinct ways, which tend to be different from those used by males (Dyke & Murphy, 2006). Research also demonstrates that academic women struggle to perceive themselves successful using the standard social criteria (Hoskins, 2010, 2012), a struggle that is even harder in predominantly male areas, which have rites, symbols and rhythms not build by/for women. This situation may lead to an undervaluation of women's success in academia, related to the idea of partial success, in which objective success implies failures, drawbacks or negative consequences to other dimensions of women's lives. In order to understand how academic women perceive their career trajectories, their successes and failures, in a predominantly male area, I examine trajectories of female accounting professors in Brazil. My analysis allows to conclude that, to the same extent they are successful considering the so-called objective success criteria (Hoskins, 2010), by deeply examining barriers and boosters they faced during their journey, we realize the cost paid utter to a "long way to the top" but the compensations make possible "ridin? down the highway.?" More importantly, specific policies and actions would help to change the current situation by reducing costs or challenging traditional criteria used to evaluate success.

Palavras-chave: women; career success; academic success; gender; accounting

**RIDIN' DOWN THE HIGHWAY - REFLECTIONS ON THE TRAJECTORIES OF  
FEMALE PROFESSORS IN ACADEMIA****ABSTRACT**

The meaning of career success has been researched in diverse settings and time frames. Inquiries addressing gender find that women evaluate their success in distinct ways, which tend to be different from those used by males (Dyke & Murphy, 2006). Research also demonstrates that academic women struggle to perceive themselves successful using the standard social criteria (Hoskins, 2010, 2012), a struggle that is even harder in predominantly male areas, which have rites, symbols and rhythms not build by/for women. This situation may lead to an undervaluation of women's success in academia, related to the idea of partial success, in which objective success implies failures, drawbacks or negative consequences to other dimensions of women's lives. In order to understand how academic women perceive their career trajectories, their successes and failures, in a predominantly male area, I examine trajectories of female accounting professors in Brazil. My analysis allows to conclude that, to the same extent they are successful considering the so-called objective success criteria (Hoskins, 2010), by deeply examining barriers and boosters they faced during their journey, we realize the cost paid utter to a "long way to the top" but the compensations make possible "ridin' down the highway." More importantly, specific policies and actions would help to change the current situation by reducing costs or challenging traditional criteria used to evaluate success.

**Keywords:** women; career success; academic success; gender; accounting

**1. Introduction**

The meaning of career success has been researched in diverse settings and time frames. More recently, studies have incorporated a quest for gender differences. Inquiries that build on career success also show that women evaluate their own success in very diverse ways than their male counterparts (Dyke & Murphy, 2006). Dyke & Murphy (2006) find that women place importance in balancing personal relationships and show no regrets after "making career choices based on their personal values" (p. 366). On the other hand, "although financial rewards were not the only measure of success that most men used, it was an important component of success" (p. 363). So, based on that results, it seems that men do stick with a more traditional concept of success while women put importance in balancing relationships, in their personal lives and workplace, and in being recognized.

Research also demonstrates that academic women struggle to perceive themselves successful using the standard social criteria (Hoskins, 2010, 2012). Kate Hoskins (2012) states that female professors seem unable to refer directly to the word "success," instead preferring the word "accomplishment" (p. 100). My argument is this is a situation that could lead to an undervaluation of women success in academia and that also it relates to an concept of partial success in which the objective academic success for women implies failures, drawbacks or negative consequences to other dimensions of their lives (Hoskins, 2010, 2012). She proposes a typology of success that considers three different categories of success: objective, relative and perceived. On one hand, the objective career success "is understood as one's realization or attainment or predefined goal or target, for example, career progression," thus referring "to the attainment of generally acknowledged achievements such as

promotion”. On the other hand, relative success, it “is understood relationally and comparatively” and that it “alters over time and changes relational to its context.” Finally, subjective career success “is understood as a subjective process related to feelings and emotions” (p. 17).

Other important consequence of adding a gender lens to this discussion is the acknowledgment that women's struggles in assessing their own success can be even harder in predominantly male areas, whose rites, symbols and rhythms are not build by/for women (Lehman, 1992, 2012; Haynes, 2008; Silva, 2016; Casa Nova, 2014).

Brazilian accounting academia is my focus in this paper. Accounting academia career in Brazil is predominantly male, considering both quantitative (figures or numbers) and qualitative (public image of the profession) aspects (Casa Nova, 2014). But over the years this scenario has changed with a growing proportion of female students choosing to pursue a degree in accounting. Because of this, Nganga, Gouveia and Casa Nova (2018) argue that a process of feminization of the accounting academia is in place during the period of 2004-2016 in Brazil. Because of this, the authors called attention to the "necessity of implementing actions and policies which could guarantee the attraction and retention of female talents in the Brazilian accounting academy" (Nganga et al, 2018, p. 1).

Bearing this context in mind, I propose to understand how academic women perceive their success in accounting academia in Brazil, a male predominantly area. Or, in a more comprehensive angle, I aim to understand how do they perceive their career trajectories, and, in so doing, I try to capture both “successes” and “failures.”

For doing this, I examine trajectories of female accounting professors in Brazil. They are few but understand her trajectories, the barriers they faced and the opportunities they have and, mainly, to comprehend how they conceptualise academic success is of paramount importance. My analysis allows to conclude that, to the same extent we could argue that they are successful when considering the objective success category, by examining deeply the barriers and boosters they faced during their walk, we realize the cost they paid to achieve the top. We also become aware of the compensations<sup>1</sup> they have had that make possible for them continue to ridin’ down the highway.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: after this introduction, in the next session, the theoretical framework is discussed, allowing to understand the presence of women in science and to pose the question of how to measure female success; then, in the sequence, I describe the methods adopted in this research, detailing the process of data collection and analysis; I end up with my final considerations, also opening avenues for future research and implications for practice.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This research started on a personal reflection about the constant feeling of being somehow a different element in my professional work. Then, departing from an incitation of a colleague, my first step was conducting a search aimed to understand the presence of women in Science, on a broad sense. I remember when I found out what is, for the best of my knowledge, the first paper discussing the women presence in Science: Alice S. Rossi’s piece entitled “Women in Science: Why so few,” published in Science in 1965. So, in this

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<sup>1</sup> I am not referring only to financial compensations, but instead I use this word with the meaning of “something that counterbalances or makes up for an undesirable or unwelcome state of affairs:something that counterbalances or makes up for an undesirable or unwelcome state of affairs” (Oxford Living Dictionaries). Therefore, once more I am building on the concept of partial success.

theoretical framework, I start exactly from the point I departed my research: by discussing the first papers addressing the issue of women and science.

## 2.1 Women and science

Since 1965, when the seminal article by Alice S. Rossi (1965) was published, the absence (or small presence) of women in science has been questioned. Some points of her article refer to a time not too far from the feminist movements that, in the western society, sought to establish a new social role for women. Today, it is possible to think that the social context is very different and reflects the achievements of those feminist movements. Nevertheless, Rossi (1965) raises relevant questions to the advancement of women in science and conducts an analysis that seems applicable nowadays when posing that one of the challenges academic women face is still how to conciliate family and work.

Most college-educated women in this country are married and living with their husbands and children. Whether we are interested in the status of women or in the needs of science or both, I do not think we can expect any appreciable increase in the representation of women in the top professions unless that fact is taken into account. As long as it is mostly spinsters or widows who are appointed or elected or promoted to a college presidency, a national commission, a senatorship, or a high post in a government agency or scientific institute, we cannot consider that a solution has been found to the problem of women's status in American society. Marriage, parenthood, and meaningful work are major experiences in the adventure of life. No society can consider that the disadvantages of women have been overcome so long as the pursuit of a career exacts a personal deprivation of marriage and parenthood, or the pursuit of happiness in marriage and family life robs a woman of fulfillment in meaningful work.

Nowadays in the Brazilian academia, more than 50 years after Rossi's article, a movement called "Parents in Science" is posing the same question: how to balance academic career demands and family obligations? Conducting an open online survey, they found out that maternity leads to low productivity. By comparing productivity data (i.e. publication rate per year<sup>2</sup>) between female researchers with and without children, they conclude that the productivity of the former decreases after giving birth and only recovers four years later. For the women without children, the productivity follows a steady growing tendency over the years (Andrade, 2018). One of the testimonials made for an interviewee emphasizes:

Today I am afraid of not being able to continue in the graduate course in which I am currently faculty member due to the high level of production required and that maternity certainly requires our time and dedication, which can not be shared with work and research.<sup>3</sup>

In other account, the conflict between academic career is clearly tied to the decision of not having children:

One of the reasons I don't have children is because of the time the profession requires. And that is the complaint of my colleagues [who are] mothers.<sup>4</sup>

I mentioned those decisions before, when I referred to the concept of partial success or to the concept of a type of success that implies failures or deprivations in other life dimensions. I also want to associate this concept of partial success with the feelings and difficulties that arise when living in an environment where you do not necessarily feel you belong to, regardless of whether you are considered a successful professional or not.

In my literature review about the lack of women representation in science, a second piece caught my attention. As part of the section "My Word," in *Current Biology*, Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard published "Women in science - passion and prejudice," in 2008. Acting as a

<sup>2</sup> Is this not unfair to evaluate career success through this kind of measure, which is arguably heavily masculine?

<sup>3</sup> "Hoje tenho receio de não conseguir me manter na pós-graduação em que sou cadastrada em virtude da alta produção exigida e que, com certeza, a maternidade nos ocupa tempo e dedicação, e que não pode ser dividida com trabalho e pesquisa."

<sup>4</sup> "Um dos motivos de eu não ter filhos é o tempo que a profissão exige. E essa é a reclamação das minhas colegas [que são] mães."

role model, being an exception in various environments, she affirms that her life was not easy, but the effect of the growing number of women in science is positive for those who are arriving now:

Life as an exception, as a role model has not always been particularly comfortable, but with an increasing number of female colleagues and a general awareness of gender issues, open discrimination is now rarely encountered as a serious problem. It has not always been like that. In my early days, as representative of a small minority, I felt quite awkward, unprotected and often overlooked. (Nüsslein-Volhard, 2008, p. 185)

She also relates situations in which her competence was questioned because she was a woman, and that her first experience with discrimination was when she was trying to publish the results of her thesis, in relation to the decision of who would be the main author:

The project had been started by a rather fortuneless male graduate student and I had finished it producing all of the data. However, on the three-author letter to Nature, which I had written, I was made only second author. The graduate student, a good friend of mine, had a family — “he needs his career” was the comforting explanation. At the time, however, curiously enough, I even agreed to this! Such things as social considerations exerting an influence in assessing scientific contributions probably do not or at least should not happen anymore. (Nüsslein-Volhard, 2008, p. 185-186)

Those social conventions in science can still happen and affect the results of studies about authorship. They equally impact female professionals recognition, career insertion and progression. Such aspects need to be highlighted in any research that proposes to examine the female presence in science by looking at authorship of journals' articles. Nevertheless, their impacts are difficult to be objectively addressed and measured, and we should consider not only changes in the order of authors but also other known phenomena related to the academic authorship as, for instance, ghost authorship and honorary authorship.

Speaking from a privileged position in terms of professional success, Nüsslein-Volhard, Nobel Prize winner in 1985, geneticist and director of the Max Planck Institute, tell us that she has suffered different kinds of discrimination in her career. The situation of clear discrimination that Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard faced was during her post-doc. Her supervisor had the attitude of “giving women a chance” but at the same time making it clear that he expected them to fail because, a priori, women could not be great scientists – “there was no woman ‘Einstein’” (Nüsslein-Volhard, 2008, p. 186). He believed, as she remembers, that in other careers women could excel, giving pottery as an example. Even when Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard was nominated as the director of the Max Planck Institute, in 1984, she discovered that this position has never, before or after, been offered to someone with a space and budget so small:

But soon fate changed: Owing to very good working conditions and excellent students and postdocs my lab was very successful. Recognition came, which encouraged me to ask the president for an upgrade, and finally I was granted what my male colleagues had received without special merits.

Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard raises issues that, in her opinion, affect the interest of women in an academic career, and proposes actions that could change how things are, like eradicating the lack of support and confidence of supervisors and directors, without creating protection against fair criticism, and maintaining the level of pressure and challenge that all scientists need to develop their careers. She also highlights that often, due to a lack of self-confidence, women are shyer, more modest and less convincing than their male colleagues with similar qualifications, a perception aligned with Sandberg's (2013) view. They are more likely to admit mistakes than men, a factor that is usually used against them, and their mistakes are less tolerable than their counterparts' since they are not protected by the male camaraderie and loyalty network (Nüsslein-Volhard, 2008), they are not members of the “old boys' club”.

Alice Canabrava, who was an academic female pioneer at USP and probably in Brazilian academy, refers to this feeling of not belonging to the club when she describes her career advancement. After she finished her PhD, she became a natural candidate to the

provision of the Chair (equivalent to the full professorship) of American History (Blay & Lang, 2004):

In that way, involuntarily, I emerged, in the eyes of my male colleagues, as a possible candidate to the effective provision of the Chair [full professorship] of American History [...]. Since then, the circle of subtle hostility started to draw itself to me with evidences, to anonymously get tighter in one or other occurrence in the academic routine without altering the appearance of superficial friendliness (p. 98).

In another excerpt of her statement, she says she had kept no reservations against colleagues who opposed to her career advancements (Blay & Lang, 2004):

I did not kept resentments in relation to those who opposed my ascension at the University. Excellent persons, they were immersed in their time and environment, exponents of a society prejudiced against women. Do not suppose that I have been the only target of discrimination: this reached to all women. In my case, the resistance provoked the development of all the process. In other cases, this process was interrupted or did not even start, given the dismissal of the female candidate, even voluntarily or imposed by the circumstances (p. 104).

Specifically in the training of researchers, the literature emphasizes the role of the differentiated socialization of women, which allows us to assume that sometimes it is not easy to be admitted to the club (Austin, 2002; Kohlstedt, 1978). The literature also discusses the importance of having women in leadership roles, serving as models and inspiration for the young ones interested in an academic career (Kezar & Lester, 2009), and identifies phenomena that can stop the progression and success of women in their careers such as “glass ceiling” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009), “critical mass” (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, Neuschatz, Uzzi, & Alonzo, 1994), or conditions of the academic environment during their entrance into the field (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). Experts emphasize the importance of developing policies that allow a better reconciling between the various roles (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Kelly, 2006), and different choices in view of generations (Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Finally, in terms of research, experts complain about the secondary role that has been offered to women in terms of their research interests (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011) and publication of their findings (Hart, 2006). A study carried out by a research group at the University of Washington showed that the participation of women in the publication of scientific articles is increasing in all areas of knowledge in the world (West et al., 2013). However, women still occupy positions of low status: few studies have a woman as single, first or last author (West et al., 2013). The study used the Journal Storage database (JSTOR), a digital library with more than 1,900 academic journals of various countries, and it covered the period of four centuries (from 1665 to 2011). Jennifer Jacquet, one of the authors of the study, said that although it is possible to affirm that “for the authors there isn’t better time than now,” women only represent 21.9% of all authors identified in the database, and 17% of authors with single authorship (Pierro, 2013). In articles with co-authors, the study showed that few women occupied the first and last positions in the list of authors, which in many areas indicate the main researcher, the advisor or the research group coordinator. In addition, the study showed that topics related to education, sociology, and family are the most common topics in articles with women as authors, and topics such as math, philosophy, and economic methods, the less common. The study did not include topics related to engineering, physics, and other areas underrepresented in the JSTOR database.

Research outcomes also indicate that women's work is not valued and that women are offered less prestigious roles, usually linked to teaching and administrative positions (Park, 1996), which influences their career progression. On the other hand, teaching and administrative position are more tied to women’s expectations and interests, once they offer the possibility to collaborate and directly influence others, being tied to an emphasis in

relationship and care, suggesting “that women’s success may be measured by a different yardstick” (Dyke & Murphy, 2006, p. 371)

## 2.2 How to measure female success?

Success is not easy to measure. What is, for some, clear evidence of great success, for others can be evaluated as “no more than my duties” or “this was the minimum to be attained for someone in my position”. Some will depend on external appraisals of their own level of success, while others will only be looking at their inner self to evaluate achievement. Promotions, position, earnings, all are used as external criteria to measure success, but usually those criteria do not consider the cost paid to obtain that promotion, to reach that position, to earn that compensation. Unfortunately, sometimes, the price is so high that even what others may call success hardly feels like it.

The meaning of career success has been researched in diverse settings and time frames. More recently, studies have incorporated a quest for gender differences. Dyke & Murphy’s (2006) “How We Define Success: A Qualitative Study of What Matters Most to Women and Men” explores women and men definition of success, and its impact on their career progress. They find that women place importance in balancing personal relationships, and show no regrets after “making career choices based on their personal values” (p. 366). The authors conclude “[f]or the most part, these women seemed quite comfortable with the trade offs they had made” (p. 366). On the other hand, “although financial rewards were not the only measure of success that most men used, it was an important component of success” (p. 363). So, based on that results, it seems that men do stick with the traditional concept of success, which comprises wealth, power, prestige and status, while women put importance in balancing relationships, in their personal lives and workplace, and in being recognized. When talking about trade-offs in career, in general, men considered independence and leisure. Interestingly enough, the authors emphasize that “[e]ven men who consciously reject material definitions of success may still be haunted by not measuring up to the provider ideal” (p. 365), while for women “[p]erhaps because [they] are not judged primarily on the basis of their ability to provide materially for their families, they feel less guilty than men in making career choices based on their personal values” (p. 366). Some burdens related to gender roles lie heavily on men’s shoulders. Still, we should consider that women often work a second shift, since they are traditionally the ones responsible for taking care of the family. This could be the factor reverberating in the importance women place in relationships. Finally, we need to acknowledge other researches that have found results contradicting with this no-regret feeling, thus reporting cases of women expressing regrets and a sense of loss or guilty as a result of the choices they made about their professional career, identified as the cost of their professional success. Hoskins (2010) calls attention to the fact that the cost of success can be gendered, paid as expense of family commitments, emphasizing “a dilemma facing many working women negotiating a balancing act between the demands of their careers and those resulting from the needs of providing care and domestic support for a husband and/or family (Mavin & Bryan, 2002)” (p. 138).

Casa Nova (2014), investigating the trajectories of female full professors in accounting academy in Brazil, finds in their discourse also a reference to the challenge of conciliating their academic career with the family commitments and having children. She retrieves also in their interviewees a sense that the roles of mothers are unique, that there is no substitute for a mother. Additionally, balancing academic and family lives becomes even more difficult when the family cycles (marriage, having children, raising children) conflict with

specific career phases, for instance marrying and pursuing a PhD, or entering the academy and having children. Thus, in different moments, an academic woman has to choose between attending her biological clock and attaining a publishing record in order to get tenure or to be promoted. In other, she will have to attend her biological clock and accept that career phases and mothering stages will occur in the same moment. Even if she decides to postpone her personal plans they might conflict. (p. 176-177). For sure, those decisions affect her career advancement, and they do not have the same effect in the careers of her male counterparts.

Inquiries that build on academic career success examining women also show that in this setting they evaluate their own success in a very diverse way than their male counterparts. Kate Hoskins (2012), in her book *Women and Success: Professors in the UK academy*, states that female professors seem unable to refer directly to the word “success,” instead preferring the word “accomplishment” (p. 100). She proposes a typology of success that considers three different categories of success: objective, relative and perceived. She explains each type of success in her typology as follows:

*Objective career success*

Success is understood as one’s realization or attainment or predefined goal or target, for example, career progression. It refers to the attainment of generally acknowledged achievements such as promotion.

Objective success is a product of personal agency.

*Relative career success*

Success is understood relationally and comparatively. It is a precarious state of success that alters over time and changes relational to its context.

*Subjective career success*

Success is individual and personal and understood as a subjective process related to feelings and emotions. It also alters over time and context. (p. 17)

When analyzing her proposal, I thought I had found a hint or maybe a path to better understand the female perception of success. Putting all categories of success she proposed together, we can realize why a female full professor is unable to refer to herself as being successful. Full professorship is a part of the objective career success category. Once she starts to compare herself to other full professors, she might find she took longer to achieve this position (relative career success) or she had to sacrifice her personal life, giving up having children (subjective career success). So, in the end, when weighting it all in the balance of life account, it does not feel like success.

On the other hand, Sheryl Sandberg (2013), who is the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, in her book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* says women “should be leaning in” (p. 118) and trying to self-promote, even considering that self-promoting women are disliked (p. 658), acting as the others and not being “the other” in the male-dominated workplace. She affirms that “[c]areer progression often depends upon taking risks and advocating for oneself - traits that girls are discouraged from exhibiting” (p. 213). For many, her advice can be seen as blaming the victim. I myself had mixed feelings when I first read her book: Why do we have to play a game for which we were not often invited to define the rules?

Hoskins’ (2012) book is my main reference in approaching female and male academic career success. My guiding question is that unfortunately women have been struggling in finding themselves successful using the standard social criteria, which is more related to the objective career success in Hoskins’ typology. In one hand, those objective success criteria do not contemplate feelings and emotions associated with sacrifices made to attain success. On the other hand, when comparing their trajectories to male colleagues using relative success measures, they conclude the price paid is much higher and, usually, the progression and recognition take longer to come. This is a situation that could lead to an undervaluation of



women success in academy and it relates to the idea of partial success, referred before, in which the objective academic success implies failures, drawbacks or negative consequences to other dimensions of their lives. Hence, before analyzing their experience, we propose in the next section examining deeper some aspects of the presence of women in science.

Considering the theoretical framework which states that women perceive success differently from men and building on previous research examining success in the academic setting, I examine trajectories of Brazilian women that achieved the top of the academic career in Accounting. In doing so, this study aims to understand how the traditional social criteria of success undermine women's achievements in academia, in an analysis based on their life stories, their decisions and motivations, the barriers and boosters they might have found.

### 3. Methods

I used a qualitative approach based on in depth interviews with former female graduate students of a top-ranked university accounting graduate program that work in the academia to understand how they conceptualize success. Five (out of the nine) female accounting full professors at the time in Brazil were interviewed, as well as one alumnus that now has an important political elected position.

As noticeable in the testimony of Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard, from a life story emerge many experiences that can reverse perspectives and expectations of other lives. I collected testimonies of women who want to tell their personal and professional trajectories, highlighting factors that had fostered and hindered their academic careers. The qualitative approach, according to Luttrell (2009),

[i]s defined by an effort to highlight the meanings people make and the actions they take, and to offer interpretations for how and why. Qualitative research is committed to participants using their own words to make sense of their lives; it places an importance on context and process; it rests on dialectic between inductive and deductive reasoning; and uses iterative strategies to comprehend the relationship between social life and individual subjectivities.

Gall, Gall and Borg (2007, p. 31) relate qualitative and quantitative approaches as different epistemological assumptions about the nature of scientific knowledge and how to achieve it. That is, depending on the set of assumptions that the researcher assumes, he or she will be led to one type of research. Using a qualitative approach, I expected to obtain evidence to analyze the specific impacts, and to identify factors that might influence the insertion, presence, permanence and ascension of women in the accounting academy in Brazil.

The interview guide was elaborated based on the literature review. The literature review shed light on the different theories that support the study about the presence of women in academy. The elaboration of the interview guide was also oriented by my personal and professional experience and by my own history. The interviews were developed in depth with accounting female full professors, that is women occupying the top of the academic career in a predominantly male area.

When I started my research in 2014, I looked to the top ranks in accounting and I found out that again women were there since 1998, when we had in Brazil the first female full professor. And they kept coming, achieving full professorship in the public universities, that are the most prestigious in Brazil. We had back then in accounting four female full professors in Brazil. These four women held the top of the academic career in an area in which there were about 508,000 accredited professionals in the Federal Accounting Council, with 41% of women; 21 graduate accounting programs, with 262 permanent professors, of which 25%

were women (CAPES, 2012); and more than 1,000 undergraduate programs being offered, in which 58% of the enrolled students were women. Table 1 summarizes the information about Brazilian female full professors now, to the best of my knowledge, including their names, institutions and the year they became full professors.

Table 1: List of Brazilian female full professors in accounting

Name	Institution	Year
Ilse Maria Beuren	Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina	1998
Araceli Cristina de Sousa Ferreira	Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro	2006
Sônia Maria da Silva Gomes	Universidade Federal da Bahia	2009
Maísa de Souza Ribeiro	Universidade de São Paulo	2010
Clea Beatriz Macagnan	Unisinos	2012
Adriana Maria Procópio de Araújo	Universidade de São Paulo	2015
Maria Naiula Monteiro Pessoa	Universidade Federal do Ceará	2016
Sirlei Lemes	Universidade Federal de Uberlândia	2016
Marcelle Colares	Universidade Federal do Ceará	2017
Fátima de Souza Freire	Universidade de Brasília	2017
Silvia Pereira de Castro Casa Nova	Universidade de São Paulo	2019
Sandra Rolim Ensslin	Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina	2019

Three of the four female full professors in that period in accounting were interviewed, as well as one assistant professor that had an important political elected position. All interviewees agreed in being recorded, and the recordings totalized 262 minutes. After transcribed, the interviews resulted in 92 written pages, as shown in Table 2. To protect their anonymity and guarantee confidentiality, but at the same time given them a name, I adopted pseudonyms from the Brazilian Women Pioneers in Science CNPq's project<sup>5</sup>.

Table 2: List of interviewees

Interviewee Pseudonym	Research area	Position	Recording duration
Aída Espinola	Chemistry	Full Professor	51:00:00
Therezinha Lins de Albuquerque	Psychology	Political elected position	75:00:00
Danuncia Urban	Biology	Full Professor	92:38:00
Niede Guidon	Archeology	Full Professor	44:15:00

As a procedure to identify relevant topics or categories and to assure that no relevant aspects were omitted, while one researcher transcribed an interview, other researcher reviewed and highlighted the relevant passages. I made the final revision. Based on an interview transcript analysis, individual trajectories were grouped in terms of common or diverging points, indicating strategies of survival, confrontation or circumvention of the barriers that have been faced.

After the transcription and revision processes were completed, the document with the highlighted passages was sent by email to each of the research participants along with an Informed Consent Term. In the body of the message, the participant was told that: the

<sup>5</sup> For those interested in knowing more about Brazilian Pioneers Women in Science, please refer to: <http://www.cnpq.br/web/guest/pioneiras-da-ciencia-do-brasil3>

interview transcripts would be used only for academic research; the highlighted passages were judged the most related with the research topic, and hence with greater possibility of inclusion; data and names mentioned during the interview would be cited in the research only if they were of public domain; regardless of the fact that agreeing in participate and in having the interview record could be understood as an implicit consent, it was very important signing and returning the informed consent to me.

Afterwards, other message was sent with an excerpt of the article as an example of how the interviews' excerpts would be quoted in the final writing. In this message, the participants could decide if they prefer being identified when quoted or not. If they prefer not being namely quoted, a code system would be used instead of the names. Almost all interviewees agreed with the use of the interview transcript. In two cases, they raised a concern with the use of colloquial speech and asked to correct some terms and informal talk. In general, many also took advantage of the opportunity to reinforce the relevance of the research and to acknowledge the innovative character "of such different kind of historical report and within a research topic about female gender, opening a pathway to differentiated investigation". The only one that not responded this message had her interview included in the analysis once I understood the formal consent as important but not mandatory, once I had the implied consent.

The final stage encompassed the data analysis following the theoretical framework chosen in the literature review. Based on the interview transcriptions, the individual trajectories of female full professors were aggregated in convergent and divergent points, which allowed me to 1) identify the motivations they had to pursue an academic career - the boosters, 2) identify barriers they encountered in their trajectories and, 3) determine how they conceptualize their success.

For the sake of this research, **barriers** are obstacles that obstruct the way and hinder the walking, preventing movement or access, and provoking the postponement of plans, abdication and sacrifices. On the other hand, **boosters** open the way and propel those women in directions sometimes not even expected or craved. They are like trampolines or slingshots, causing an acceleration of walking, encompassing opportunities, supports. Identifying boosters and barriers is somehow a different approach but still inspired in the idea of glass ceiling, or glass walls, or glass cliffs, hence based on identifying factors that function as barriers and affecting the entrance, permanence and advancement of women in academy. Here, I am adding the idea of boosters that can compensate or counterbalance the barrier effect.

#### 4. Analysis and discussion

##### 4.1 Decision to pursue an academic career

The reasons and motivations to pursue an academic career reflect many diverse situations and contexts. For one of the interviewees, it was the effect of the need of financial resources, while she was attending the master and the PhD programs, and of the difficulty to conciliate with her job in a company. So entering the academy was part of a gradual process, in which the teaching activity was not secondary any more and acquired a central position. It was also a consequence of the perception that the academic work brings the possibility of training, helping, collaborating with, and integrating people. She states that

Teaching was a financial need, in the start. After that, I left my job in the company, and I kept only teaching, until I finished my master. Then, I thought that the PhD was there, so close: Why do not do it? I did my PhD while already aware that I would dedicate to the academic life. I identified myself with the academic work. What made me identify myself was the possibility of training people, of bringing knowledge, alternative pathways for those that are looking for

them. [...] And it is not only teaching, but also helping. To collaborate, I am not only collaborating with the student who is there, in the classroom, in that period, but also with all the people who are around. [L4]

This aspiration of contributing appears in the speech of another interviewee, who also had previous work experience in private companies before starting her academic career, besides of the understanding of the need of financial sacrifice, thus complying with the binomial abdication-long life learning.

Understanding that the academic life requires a long term learning commitment and abdication, those are things that you must do. And I'd rather be happy than run for material, financial gains. Thus, if you can conciliate and do both, it is great. But dealing with contributing to people development, I think that this is what motivates and incentivizes me the most. [L1].

It was exactly this perception of having a small financial retribution that postponed the idea of pursuing an academic career for another interviewee. However, when she was attending a certificate program, during the presentations and seminars she gave in the classes, she found herself as a teacher.

It was interesting to perceive that teaching could be great. I found myself teaching and my colleagues started saying: "You could teach!" And I began to teach my colleagues, those with difficulties [...] Then a hiring process opened and a faculty told me: "You talk about Accounting Theory" - I like Accounting Theory very much - "You can study this topic. We will have a hiring process. Why don't you apply?" [L2].

Finally, the limitation of the professional life in a company, where everything is already done and little remains to be completed, and the questioning of her condition to conciliate professional and teaching activities were the factors leading other of the interviewees to the decision of dedicating fully to the academic life. Again it appears the recognition that a financial sacrifice would have to be done.

I was at that time in charge of [position] in [company name] and I worked from morning to night. And I was lacking something else, besides the routine in the company. And then I started to work just two nights teaching in higher education. And in the sequence came this question about: "You are not as dedicated as you were before. What is happening? Are you not satisfied?" And this was very important. And then, in the company, they transferred me to another unit and I weighted effectively what I wanted to do: "If I want to enter the academy, why would I accept this transference, if I am just starting in my academic career?" The institution where I was working [name of the institution], where we had a goal of restructuring the undergraduate program [...] Therefore, it was a very important moment, but it was mandatory having people in charge of the program. And then, I made my choice, between academy and a professional life in a company. [...] But I had some time to prepare myself financially. Financially it was a difficult decision, because my salary was reduced to one quarter. But the complaint, the dissatisfaction that I was feeling, it gave me no condition to remain as I was. Everything comes completely defined in a company. The rules are already settled. You do not participate in the discussion of those rules. I thought that was bad to me. I was just a rule follower, agreeing with the rules or not. And in the academy, you have a space for creation. [You have an] autonomy. And I think that you have the challenge of building, because I was in an institution that everything was to be done." [L3].

## 4.2 Barriers and boosters

When entering the academic career, those women faced many barriers and challenges. The referral to an ambience predominantly masculine in the area was a constant, although the perception of the challenges implied by that situation was quite particular. The challenges arrive to a point where they could clash with the recognized accounting professional stereotype

As you see, historically, our profession has been more masculine. I think it is changing now. But, historically, it always has been predominantly masculine. And, I think, because of our culture, "*machismo*" predominates. And, sometimes, when I told [people] I was studying accounting, people stared at me shocked and replied: "You haven't any of the characteristics of an accountant". [L1].

In another moment, they led to work environments almost totally formed by men, with masculine leaders and students, causing those women to be "sandwiched" between them.

So, in [name of the institution], in the master program, when I entered as a faculty, everyone were men and for a long period I worked only with men. All the top positions were masculine. It is the first time we have a female vice-rector [...] And in relation to the PhD students, we have, even in the master program, we have more men than women. [L3].

Those ambiances led to situations in which the interviewees were often the only women in a meeting. In those occasions, not agreeing with the group implied in having to go through a whole process of previous planning, preparation and positioning because of the difficulty in having voice and in being given the opportunity to talk.

When I do not agree with something - all our program coordinators are men -, I am the only woman in the group. And we held monthly meetings with the pro-rector of research. I understood that I should go well prepared to the meetings, thus I always read all the material to be discussed in the meeting. At last, because, after I had spoken, the return was hard. In other words, in the group, you will only have the opportunity of speaking once. For men, the return [or having another turn] could happen. They impose themselves somehow. They interfere. We, women, we are too respectful. Now, others are talking, and then your turn won't come. Thus, if you have the opportunity to talk, use it well, because you can have no other chance. [L3].

In an other speech, special circumstances seemed to determine respectful climates and welcoming ambiances, such as the fact of leading a younger faculty group or starting a project with that group.

I think I did not perceive any difference because a great part of the faculty was younger than I. This creates a difference, they always treated me with all due respect, both men and women. Even though there aren't many women in our department - in that time almost all were men. [...] I did not feel any typical situation of disrespect, of disagreement or lack of commitment because I was a woman. [L4].

So, in the first institution I worked for, it was interesting because we were building. And when we are all building together, there are no stars, we embrace each other and work for the cause. It is a reality. And then I think it was great, we kept learning with each other, we went on idealizing situations, we fought through each situation. [L3].

Despite all that, it is an ambiance recognized as having a very particular dynamics, with special codes and ceremonies that imply the possibility of a differentiated insertion and socialization. It is the old boys' club.

So, technically it is not, because I see everyone as professionals. But there is a different environment. When you are in a women's group, the discussion topics will be different from a men's group. Then, you learn to deal with many things that you do not especially enjoy, for instance, this kind of talking: "Do you enjoy [talking about] football?" "No, I do not enjoy football." All men enjoy talking about football. I think this, within boundaries. I never faced disrespect in those groups. But men's talking is men's talking. [L4].

Another aspect I had to learn how to deal with was the brevity of the discussions. Men have no patience for long meetings [...] You have to be very objective. You go to a meeting, and you have to bring: "It is this. I thought about this. And we are deliberating about this." Other ideas and point of views could emerge, but if you bring nothing ... [L3].

Sometimes, participating in this "club" implies understanding that the same code or rule does not necessarily apply to two distinct persons. Identical attitudes could be interpreted in very particular manners.

I see as this, when you impose yourself, when you use your authority in some situation, it's interpreted as PMS [pre-menstrual syndrome] and not as the usual attitude of a professional who does not agree with that situation. I still see this. I think that this prejudice still exists. In other words, a man is allowed to lose control any moment. A woman, if she loses control, it is a consequence of her period and not of a human being that in one moment does not agree with something. This I still see. [L3]

It also implies, still, a certain dress code to avoid differentiation and to facilitate the inclusion in the group, to be treated as equals.

One other thing is that I still think it is strong [is that] the dress code makes you better or worse included in the group. Dressing too femininely separates you from the group. In other words, it seems like you have to dress accordingly with the tribe to be respected to have the same value. [...] Hence, I think [you have to have] this care. Depending in the meeting I was going to, I would dress very similarly to the tribe to go to work. That means, thus, I get equal. I won't dare wearing a skirt to a meeting where I will face predominantly the masculine gender. [L3].

In the opposite direction, dressing like a man is a strategy used to give visibility to the women's issues and to make aware that there is a level of professionalism that needs to be respected.

As a woman, I always had this care. Then they ask: "Why do you dress like a man?" [I do that] Exactly to give visibility to the special look women must have. Even in this process, when we started, sometimes someone said: "Wow, she is pretty!" I had to be assertive. One must understand that there has to be professionalism there, because otherwise ... [L2].

And then it comes the additional challenge of conciliating the academic career with the family life, with having children. There are too many plates spinning in the air to be balanced, in parallel with the understanding that there is a unique role of motherhood that needs to be attended.

In your personal life, a mother is an irreplaceable thing. You can have an excellent husband, but the mother role has to be filled by the mother. Then, participating in events that demands absence is complicated. Even when it is possible, it is not easy. Even though my husband and son are very understanding, I think that balancing it all is too complex. Now, looking back to my trajectory, 90% of my colleagues were men. The few women I could talk too had problems similar to mine, in relation to being divided between professional life, academic life and personal life. The challenge of being divided between business life and teaching... That ended up being more teaching. I think this is it. [L4].

#### 4.3 Arriving at the top

This topic was inspired by one interviewee's answer when questioned about her first thought after being declared full professor. She concluded her reflection about that moment saying it was the recognition by the peers, a moment of crowning and added, in the end, when she asked herself about her next goal: "There has to have another [goal], I am looking [for it]". To what I answered: "But this is the top, I do not know where you can go from there." The exact words with which she answered me were: "It is, but this top arrived too soon, it's not so high, I need something else, I need something more" [L4].

This was the tonic that I found in those women I interviewed and who arrived at the top. They had the impulse of the permanent search for challenges and for attending calls, be them from institutions, as from other organisms, or from the area. In all that they said, I could perceive a sense of ownership and accountability. They posed themselves as an active part in the process of surpassing the challenges.

In parallel, they offered advices for those women to come. The first advice was about the necessity of reflecting about the meaning of being an educator, of educating. The second advice was about the importance of having passion for what one does and for doing it with excellence. The third advice was to respect your own values. And the last advice was keep your reference, the basis that comes from your family, that will be your support in all situations you will face during your life.

#### 4.4 (De)limitations

The outcomes of this research are bounded to the area it refers to and to those who participate in it. Diverse results could have been attained if more cases were included as, for instance, associate professors, or professors working in private higher education institutions. Also the research was conducted in Brazil, a country that has a specific socio-economic context and culture. And even more, when considering a huge country like Brazil, we should acknowledge that we have many "Brazils," with quite distinct regional cultures. And we must consider that those women who participated in this research came from only three of the five regions Brazil has, and from only three states. Considering interviewees from other states and regions could lead to very diverse perspectives and to significant lessons to be learned. Also, only female full professors were interviewed. Although I can state that the motivations,

boosters, barriers and expectations can be related to their condition, I can't affirm that men do not also share them partially or totally. Only by interviewing women and men could I possibly have the counterfactual that allows me to affirm what are the challenges, barriers and boosters exclusively pertained to "womanhood". It is relevant to consider the interviewees' experiences, opinions, and perceptions and to know more about each person's views. However, a greater number of interviewees could lead to a broader possibility of comparison and contrast and could result in a stronger identification of potential convergences or divergences in the responses. Being supported by only four interviews, the analysis could be strongly influenced towards the opinions and perceptions of a single person. Finally, interviewing only full professors means talking only to those who succeed. A very different picture could arise in a research with women that somehow "stayed back on the road".

#### 4.5 Window and Mirror

Emily Style (1996) wrote a powerful piece calling attention to the need for curriculum to function both as window and as a mirror, so that it can reflect and reveal most accurately both a multicultural world and the student herself or himself. She states that "[i]f the student is understood as occupying a dwelling of self, education needs to enable the student to look through the window frames in order to see realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected (Style, 1996, p. 35). As our gender is socially constructed (Scott, 1995), and it is also performed in a social context (Butler, 1988), trying to integrate a male vision in this research, I asked a male colleague from another knowledge area to read it and comment. He held some points mainly when reading the results. I decided to reproduce all the comments, exactly in the way he wrote them, adding a brief description to clarify which excerpt he was referring to:

**(1) Being the only woman in a meeting:** "I agree that in a scenario where the 'machismo' dominates, women will have hard time to have their voice heard. However, what you describe here sounds like a problem that both men and women face."

**(2) When identical attitudes could be interpreted in very particular manners:** "Regardless the gender, it is not easy to go against the crowd. It sounds like the community she is a member is either very sectarian in favor of men, or her perception of interpersonal issues is biased towards a gender conflict."

**(3) Following a dress code to avoid differentiation and to facilitate the inclusion in the group:** "It seems this work also for men. Conversely, my guess would be that women might have more flexibility on clothing in formal meetings. I agree that the clothing tradition may be awful. It is just not clear to me how this became associated with a gender issue."

#### 5. Final Considerations

Based on the interview transcriptions, the individual trajectories of female full professors were aggregated in convergent and divergent points, which allowed me to 1) identify the motivations they had to pursue an academic career - the boosters or compensations, 2) identify barriers they encountered in their trajectories – the costs. To the same extent we could argue that my interviewees are successful when considering the objective success category, by examining deeply the barriers and boosters they faced during the walk we could realize the cost they paid to achieve the top and the compensations they received that make possible ridin' down the highway.

The main objective of this research was to examine the trajectory of former female graduate students that are now full professors from different perspectives: understand their decision to attend graduate programs, their motivation to enter in the academy, and the progression of their careers.

Based on their trajectories I aimed at identifying convergent and divergent points that allowed me infer fostering and hindering forces in their careers, forces that I called barriers

and boosters. Behind those barriers and boosters I believed we could find evidence of intervening factors that might help to understand the presence, permanence, and the advancement to key positions of women in the accounting academy in Brazil.

On one hand I tried to identify how they overcame the **barriers**. On the other hand, it was also important to know the **boosters** they found that helped them succeed in their careers. Success was defined as attaining full professorship. So I used an objective success criterion of Hoskins' typology, "understood as one's realization or attainment or predefined goal or target" and related "to the attainment of generally acknowledged achievements such as promotion" (p. 17). Additionally, I proposed the idea of partial success, considering that achieving objective academic success entails failures, drawbacks, or negative consequences in other domains of women's lives. The **barriers** I identified based on their discourses were:

**Professional stereotypes.** The profession has been historically masculine, male-dominated. Women do not correspond to the professional stereotype or image.

**Work environment.** Participating in a male-dominated area, those women reported a work environment almost totally formed by men and even being sandwiched between masculine leaders and students.

**Opportunity to talk and to be heard.** The underrepresentation of women in the accounting academy led to them often being the only women in a meeting and finding difficulties in posing their opinions, in having voice and in being given the opportunity to talk.

**Old boys' club.** The male-dominated environment was recognized as having a very particular dynamics – special codes and ceremonies, social behaviors, dress code, expectations that differ between men and women – and to which they had to adapt or to overcome.

**Professionalism.** Being regarded as a professional could imply adopting strategies related to dress code or previous preparation for meetings, as a way to assure being heard or being respected.

Difficulties to balance personal, family and professional life. Sometimes there are "too many plates spinning in the air" and an understanding that women carry the unique role of motherhood. And this point has been stressed since Alice Rossi's claim in 1965. The result may end up being that "women still can't have it all" (Slaughter, 2012). So, we can conclude that many women have been struggling in finding their ways and still feel like they're fishes out of water being judged by land-dwellers' standards.

As **boosters**, trampolines or slingshots that opened the way and propelled those women in directions sometimes not even expected or craved, they reported:

**Special circumstances.** Special circumstances such as leading a younger group or starting a new project seemed to determine respectful climates and welcoming ambiances.

**Nature of the work.** The feeling that academic work brings opportunity to train, collaborate and connect with people.

**Discovering a new vocation, talent and skills.** The reasons and motivations to pursue an academic career were diverse and occurred in very distinct situations, ranging from a financial need while doing the PhD to an invitation to teach or to start a new project in an institution. Once in the academy, for all of them, being a faculty became central.

**Challenging environment.** Participating in an institution where one can contribute, one can create instead of just following norms and rules, may justify why they accept many sacrifices. The four female professors' trajectories, recounted by some of them, could raise awareness about how they succeed in achieving the top rank in the career. Our reflection upon the cost



they paid, the barriers they faced, the boosters they benefit from would support the development of actions and policies to attract and retain them.

### **Implications for practice**

This study intends to contribute to the improvement of this scenario by identifying and addressing specific policies and actions that might help change the current situation, marked by women's low level of participation. The findings may also contribute to the analysis of women's status in the university in other areas of knowledge, particularly those related to business, as well as to foster other studies.

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