

Analysis of gender policies of the Spanish cycling and triathlon federations from the point of view of representative athletes and expert technicians

Mayte Leruite ¹✉

Abstract

The Spanish National Sports Council, through its program “Women and Sport” (published in the Decree Pre/525/2005), implements specific entities in Spanish Cycling and Triathlon federations with the aim of promoting the sportswomen involvement in the physical activity and sport on similar terms with sportsmen, trying to overcome the barriers which nowadays hamper gender equality in this areas. In this work, we try to analyze the current situation of Cycling and Triathlon in Spain, with the aim of rebuilding, through content analysis and key information analysis, the general current context of competition where Spanish female cyclists and triathletes are participating. This study, enclosed in the interpretative paradigm, uses a qualitative methodology. Feedback from 17 interviewees has been compiled: 8 sportspeople (4 cyclists and 4 triathletes) and 9 managers/staff members linked to Triathlon and Cycling federations (President of International Triathlon Union, President of Spanish National Sports Council, secretaries-general, Presidents of Women and Sport Commission, Team managers and coaches from both sports federations of Cycling and Triathlon). The instrument used for this study was a semi-structured interview. Data showed a situation in need of a change, where a modification of the regulatory framework in sports area, a revision of gender-related policies applied by sports federations, and a modernization of federation management would be advisable.

Keywords: female, sport, cyclists; triathletes, sport federations

✉ **Contact email:** leruite@correo.ugr.es (M. Leruite)

¹Faculty of Sport Sciences, University of Granada, Spain

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Introduction

Female Cycling and Triathlon have been analysed in research studies mainly focused on the physiological, biomechanical and nutritional sides of sportswomen (Burke, 2001; Cox et al. 2010; Debate et al, 2002; Debraux et al, 2013; Impellizzeri et al. 2008; Martin et al. 2001; Millet et al. 2011; Rowlands and Wadsworth, 2011; Suriano and Bishop, 2010; Ebert et al. 2005; Wilber et al, 1997); however, there is a growing interest in focusing on social matters of sportswomen (Atkinson, 2008; Brown and O'Connor, 2007; Brown et al. 2009; Cronan and David Scott, 2008; Garrard, 2003; Hendy and Boyer, 1993; La Chausse, 2012; Lamont and Kennelly, 2012; Levy, 2002; Ruiz et al. 2008; Ruiz and Salinero, 2012). Sportspeople success does not only depend on conditional aspects, but also on the influence of social factors which are interrelated in the sport area (De Bosscher and De Knop, 2002). Under the theoretical aspect of the General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), sportspeople cannot be

understood without a comprehensive idea of themselves and their environment (Ruiz et al. 2008), thus defining the idea of a sport system as a compilation of all the items which, once they are interrelated following an order, contribute to the development of sport in all its expressions (Blanco et al. 1999). Therefore, variables such as sport federations, sport disciplines, sports facilities, sports spectators and amateurs, social institutions and social mass media make up a vast and complex network of intrinsic and extrinsic relationships which set up social systems.

Spanish sportswomen involvement in sports has increased and this has been the reason why the sports legislative framework and sports entities have significantly changed, even though a strong opposition from many men has been found mainly in the areas of federated and competitive sports (Alfaro et al, 2012; García-Ferrando, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Pfister, 2010; Puig and Soler 2003). There is not a specific area of gender equality in Spanish sports legislation, and it has been included in different gender equality policies carried out by government, institutions and local organizations (Robles and Escobar, 2007).

In Spain, by means of the Decree Pre/525/2005 (March 7th), the “Women and Sport Commission” was created for the first time with a permanent nature and was also



included in the Spanish National Sports Council, with the aim of protecting the interests of Spanish sportswomen. The law 10/1990 (October 15th) about Sport, and the Order in Council 971/2007 (July 13th) about high level and high performance sportspeople, have been applied in all levels of sport area; and sports federations have occasionally acted as government agents in terms of protecting and promoting sport disciplines as a monopoly, receiving public funds, subordinating its creation and its statutes and regulations approval, and also its registration in international federations or the National Sports Council (CSD) authorization (as it is the case in Spain -Brotons, 2006-). Management policies on gender equality have been included in Cycling (RFEC) and Triathlon (FETRI) federations through the creation of specific institutions (“Women and Sport Commissions”) which try to safeguard the application of gender equality criteria in all the aspects related to sportswomen participation in sports competitions (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Worldwide organizational structure of Cycling and Triathlon federations with Women and Sport Commissions (Adapted from Cabello, 2011).

The general aim of this study is focused on the following research objectives: 1) to analyse and contextualize the theoretical framework of female cyclists and triathletes in the general context of competition; 2) to analyse and interpret the perceptions of sportswomen as opposed to those of the federations staff members in the sport context of sportswomen.

Materials and methods

Sample

The analysed sample is comprised of 21 participants, whose profiles are as follows: A first group of 8 sportswomen (4 female cyclists and 4 female triathletes, two amateurs taking part in national events and two professionals taking part in international events respectively. Two of the international competitors took part in the Olympic Games and the other two that have won world-class competitions in their respective sport disciplines). A second group of 13 managers linked to Cycling and Triathlon federations (including the President of International

Triathlon Union, President of Spanish National Sports Council, general secretaries, Presidents of “Women and Sport Commission”, team managers, and coaches from both sports federations of Cycling and Triathlon). The federation staff members were selected according to their position and their experience with the sport context where female cyclists and triathletes are included.

Measures

The research study is based on a qualitative methodology with a descriptive, relational and interpretative design (Fraile and Vizcarra, 2009), and it is focused on assessing participants’ perceptions. Semi-structured interview were used as the research instrument, and these were the supporting documents used for the creation of the analytical categories system: a) pre-interview outline for participants; b) analysis of source documents, such as regulations, statutes, Cycling and Triathlon federations web sites, and Spanish National Sports Council statistics; c) preliminary study carried out by means of a survey to 120 federated female triathletes and 80 federated female cyclists about the competitive sport context (Leruite et al, 2014); and d) objectives of the research.

The interviews included several common items in order to compare the different subjects among various groups. Once two experts on the subject, who knew the procedure, validated the interviews and those were adjusted in detail, they were considered valid for use.

Analyses and data collection

Participants were contacted for an interview appointment. Four of them were interviewed live and the other thirteen interviews were carried out through videoconference. A voice recorder was used during the interviews, and also notes were taken meanwhile. The interviews times ranged from 60 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. Before carrying out the interviews, an informed consent form was given and the identities of interviewees were protected with pseudonyms. The interview style was active and included a semi-open interview script. After the literal transcription of the interviews, a categorization system of proposed dimensions was applied with Nudist vivo 10 software.

Results and Discussion

Current sport context and organizational structure analysis in both federations

The scientific studies on women participation in federated sports show that the number of Spanish sportswomen taking part in competitive sports is still significantly lower than the number of sportsmen (Alfaro et al, 2012; Puig y Soler, 2003, 2004; Robles & Escobar 2007). Out of the 66 federations existing in Spain, 712,027 (20.9%) are female licenses and 2,682,608 (79.1%) are male licenses (CSD, 2014).

The fight against gender-related stereotypes is still hard in sports which have been traditionally considered “male”, where patriarchy and male archetypes such as dominion, aggressiveness, and strength are emphasized, as it is the case of competitive Cycling (Hargreaves,

2004; Izquierdo Mazcón and Gómez Alonso, 2001). Spanish female cyclists have joined competitive Cycling several decades later than their fellow female cyclists have from the rest of Europe, due to hygienic-moral values and also to the existing subordination of women to men, which prevented them from taking part in competitions (Izquierdo Mazcón and Gómez Alonso, 2001). In the early years of 19th century, the first male cyclists competitions started, and the role of female cyclists was consigned to riding their bikes accompanied by a man (Izquierdo Mazcón and Gómez Alonso, 2001; Zubiarre, 2010); later on, in 1977, RFEC (Spanish Cycling Federation) approved female licenses and also the first official female cyclists competitions started (Conesa, 1977). However, even though Spanish cyclists have achieved some important victories in the last years, there is still a big difference between male and female competition Cycling in all aspects: participation, sport achievements, number of professional teams, and women representation in federations and management authorities (Leruite et al, 2014). The percentage of female licenses is scarcely 3.8% compared to a 92.6% of male licenses; nowadays, there are not any female representatives in the RFEC management authorities, and there is not a single female president in any regional Cycling federation either (CSD, 2014). These data contrast with the current UCI management staff; even though this institution has never had any female representatives in the management roles throughout its history and foundation, in 2013 a woman was finally appointed vice-president of UCI, who created the first female Cycling commission at the very heart of the highest management authority in Cycling in order to promote all aspects of female Cycling. The Spanish competitions calendar is not the same for men and women, mainly in road Cycling modality, where sportswomen have their own competitions, with different distances and prizes. A remarkable feature is under-23 category for women is not included in competition sports regulations and there is a limited participation of, at least, three participants to be claimed as the winner of a given modality.

The smaller representation of women in Spanish Cycling is also reflected in the number of high level sportspeople, as according to the Order in Council 971/2007 (December 20th) about Spanish Sports Federations, there are 31 female cyclists considered as high level sportswomen, as opposed to 138 men, and in the High Level Sportspeople Program (ADO) there are only 3 women vs. 10 men.

Out of the 31 female teams licensed by UCI, currently there are only 2 professional female teams in Spain vs. 4 male professional UCI teams, even though female teams, unlike male teams, are not governed by the professional Cycling collective agreement, as there is not a work contract relationship with female cyclists, and there are only allowances related to sponsorship (Leruite et al, 2014). However, Spanish Triathlon emerged in the 70's and it showed a more favourable social environment for female sport competition; the

first female triathletes could compete together with their male counterparts on equal terms, and this was considered a transgressive and innovative sport (Ruiz et al, 2008) with a significant rise in the number of licenses in the past years, from 4,036 licenses in 2000 to 15,624 in 2010, which meant a 400% growth (Ruiz, 2012). In Triathlon, the number of high level female triathletes is 20, while there are 59 male triathletes; also, one woman vs. two men, enjoys a national grant (CSD, 2014). National and international competition calendars are the same for women and men, and there are female triathletes taking part in competitions in the eight different Triathlon disciplines; also men and women share the same modalities, categories and prizes (Official Competition Regulations of the ITU, 2014).

According to the CSD statistics of year 2013, the number of female triathletes practising Triathlon is higher compared to the number of female cyclists practicing Cycling. The 15% of the Spanish Triathlon Federation management authorities are women, and the federation regulation establishes a quota policy regarding female representation (Constitution of the FETRI, 2014).

Key figures' speeches

From the intersection matrix of double-entry categories obtained with Nudist Vivo 10 program, the key figures' speeches have been rebuilt and then a comparative analysis of participants' perceptions has been carried out. In Table 1, frequently occurring subjects have been included, and highlighted cells in grey show if these subjects are present or not in participants' perceptions at this stage of research.

Cycling and Triathlon "Women & Sport" commissions

Most of the interviewees think the model is positive; however, female cyclists and triathletes do not know about the existence and roles of "Women & Sport commission" in federations, as it was shown in the study developed by Leruite et al (2014), where 87.5% and 91.3% of a sample of 80 female cyclists and 120 female triathletes, respectively, did not know about these commissions. Sportswomen consider these are important institutions even though they admit they do not know about their existence: "*The mere foundation and existence of this Commission is a highly significant fact*" (CA2). Regarding the assessment of the Commission roles in the past years, most of the federation staff members grade the "Women in Sport Commission" role as positive; however, some major figures recognized that there is still much work to do inside the federation: "*From my external point of view, very little work has been done for female Cycling, almost nothing, regarding regulations; in terms of sports events, you have to actively search for them with organizers, because we cannot tolerate that Spanish girls, with the exception of Basque Country, where they have a calendar with 12 or 14 events, do not have a female calendar (President of Women and Sport Commission)*". Even though a consensus has been reached regarding the extension of roles and the

creation of new commissions or institutions which protect female Cycling and Triathlon, some interviewees consider the model is a failure due to its implementation and development in local federations, which force us to check the current structures (Palomar, 2007): *"I think local federations are not very active in general, and some of them have no activity at all. I firmly believe that the government, the state, should take a bigger part in sport regarding national federations and, at the same time, national federations should also get more actively involved in local federations, because, in the end, this segmentation leads to a lack of control, uniformity and judgement and, in the end, things cannot be done as they should, or they are not done at all. Other more economically developed countries take a bigger part in national sport and, at the same time, national sport is more actively involved in local sport, which also leads to a higher consensus on policies and higher level of success"* (Cycling coach).

Table 1. Crossing of speeches by key figures related to the analysis of policies on gender equality in RFEC and FETRI (President of RFEC Women and Sport Commission / RFEC General Secretary/ RFEC National Team manager / RFEC Coach / Amateur Cyclist # 1 / Amateur Cyclist # 2 / Professional Cyclist # 1/ Professional Cyclist # 2/ ITU President / FETRI Women and Sport Commission / FETRI General Secretary / FETRI National Team manager / FETRI Coach / Amateur Triathlete # 1/ Amateur Triathlete # 2 / Professional Triathlete # 1/ Professional Triathlete # 2).

SPEECH CROSSING	RFEC								FETRI								
	STAFF				CYCLISTS				STAFF				TRIATHLETES				
	PCC	SGC	SC	EC	CA1	CA2	CP1	CP2	PITU	PCT	SGT	ST	ET	TA1	TA2	TP1	TP2
RFEC/FETRI WOMEN AND SPORT COMMISSION																	
Knowledge of Women and Sport Commission																	
Positive opinion about Women and Sport Commission																	
ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS																	
Increase of female competitions number																	
Worst course timetables																	
Poor organizational level on the road																	
Poorly defined routes in competitions																	
Lower prizes at national competitions																	
Lower prizes at local competitions and clubs																	
Lower number of competitive categories																	
Lack of grants/sport sponsorships																	
SPORT PROMOTION																	
Positive opinion about federations promoting sport																	
Neutral opinion about federations promoting sport																	
GENDER DISCRIMINATION																	
General opinion about gender discrimination against sportswomen																	
Specific opinion about gender discrimination against sportswomen																	
Sexist insults/attitudes																	
Less recognition of sport merits compared to sportsmen																	

Organizational aspects of Cycling and Triathlon competitions

While RFEC staff members and cyclists in general think the main problem is there are very few races in the national road Cycling calendar of the Spanish Cup, the FETRI staff members and triathletes are more focused on specific organizational aspects, such as changing start times of national Triathlon competitions to favour equal opportunities for men and women or increasing the participation of elite sportswomen. *"The start time for us, women, is five minutes later, and we think this is unfair because it is harder for us, as we have to overtake other men. Some girls are better than some men and they have to overtake them, and that's not facilitated many times by those men that think this is a humiliation (TA2).*

Some difficulties prevent the preparation of a good national race calendar because female competition Cycling is not considered so important, and also because organizational problems can affect female athletes safety: *"It does affect safety sometimes. Our situation is a bit worse than men's. I mean...for example, tightly closing the course safety capsule, signposting, etc. are important safety-related matters, which can also be a problem for men, but to a lesser extent. Yes. This can be understood, but not shared or accepted" (Cycling coach).*

Spanish competition Cycling, and mainly its female division, is turning into leisure-competition events, such as marathon or mountain bike events, which seem to be more attractive for organizers, or cyclotourism events, where, according to RFEC federation staff members, female cyclists are in a better position to practice sport because this is not a competitive modality: *"We are losing base Cycling, all minor categories, and nowadays this mixture of leisure and competition Cycling called ciclomaster is getting more and more popular, as well as those mountain bike and marathon events, where, in the end, their organizers are making money (RFEC team manager).* This result is also shown in those studies which reveal the competition sport tendency to become a more ludic sport for older non-elite participants (Brown and O'Connor, 2007; De Knop et al, 1996).

The lack of sponsorship allowances and the organizational difficulties are making Spanish female professional UCI road teams disappear (there were 8 teams in the past, but only two now), and this is why there is a general fear about female Cycling, as it may disappear. *"Many professional races have finished; we had 8 professional teams in the past, but only two now and, if we are not careful, female Cycling can disappear" (RFEC Secretary).*

Federation staff members and triathletes all agree on favouring equal terms for men and women regarding prizes in national and international competitions. Cyclists and RFEC staff members think that the value of prizes awarded to female cyclists in competitions should be higher: *"Women must be comparatively better than men in order to obtain the same awards, or*

in other words, the best woman does not get the same results as the best man, neither in mountain bike or any other discipline, and this is an irrefutable fact in Cycling; if women intend to get the same awards, and this is not stated in regulations, they will have to be comparatively better" (Cycling coach).

Gender discrimination in Cycling and Triathlon sports context

All federation staff members agree that female cyclists and triathletes do not receive the same recognition as men in their respective sports contexts, and this is the reason why sponsors and sports brands are less interested in sportswomen. *"In Triathlon, and generally in all sports, I think women recognition is very limited if we compare it to men's and this is evident in terms of sponsors and sports brands" (FETRI Team manager).*

Female cyclists think that gender discrimination with respect to their male counterparts is widespread (Leruite et al, 2014) for many reasons: The value of sponsorship allowances and prizes they receive is lower; women have to be constantly proving the highest level of performance to be considered on equal terms with male cyclists; they are also the focus of sexist insults, which sometimes make them doubt their own value as sportspeople or this is simply because Cycling has traditionally been a deeply sexist collective. *"When you finish a competition, they are always inviting you to have a drink, but then, they start saying things like I am making the same effort as you, or you have a bigger bum, what a nice bum you have or that girl over there is more gorgeous than you, these are the typical comments you hear in Cycling, and it's hard, I can tell you, specially for female cyclists, because many of them suffer from anorexia, this is a sexist sport" (CA1).*

In the case of Triathlon, even though female triathletes affirm they are treated equally with respect to male triathletes, and men triathletes approve the female triathletes participation, this is not the case in some teams, where sportswomen are worse paid than their male counterparts; besides, some women, as it happens in Cycling, recognise they have to prove a higher level of performance to receive the same recognition as men do. *"Men are better paid, this is evident, they received bonuses. Some boys results could be worse than those obtained by some girls or myself, and they received a fixed commission, while girls didn't... And, for example, if boys couldn't go to King Cup competition, then organizers had to think twice before deciding if they would finally take the girls to compete. It is not so interesting any more, male teams always received a higher support even though the female team obtains better results" (TA2).*

Federation management measures

Both federations staff members think that sportswomen, as it happens with the vast majority of high level Spanish sportswomen, cannot be professional sportspeople, and very few of them can do

it, and this is because they receive a national grant or sport sponsorship allowances. *"Very few women, maybe two or three in Spain, can say they live on Triathlon and I am afraid they do not have a brilliant future; I am not sure to what extent they can depend on Triathlon to get a living, but it is evident that there are more men who can affirm they live on Triathlon as professionals. In Spain this is difficult, mainly due to sponsorships and trademarks"* (FETRI Technical Manager).

In both sports there is a widespread concern about the number of sportspeople who give up sport before reaching elite categories because they cannot take on sport as a career: *"In my opinion, this is because they cannot consider sport as a career and they are right indeed; if they had professional teams or something similar here in Spain, this would not happen, but they have nothing, the situation for sportswomen is terrible, they have to go abroad, as I did, and you have to take the risk; I succeeded, but some other girls tried in Italy and they were not lucky. One of them couldn't stand being out of home, too much pressure, everything, and then, of course, it's quite hard"* (CPI).

Most female cyclists who can be considered as professionals in Spain do not have a work contract relationship with their teams, and they only receive an allowance in terms of sport sponsorship. Many female cyclists who want to be sport professionals need to emigrate to countries with professional female teams (Netherlands, Italy, Germany) where they can earn a living with Cycling and they can also have a work contract; however, sportswomen often make big efforts in vain, as the conditions can also be adverse. *"If you don't show a high level of performance, they will give you a pittance and, besides, if you become a professional in Italy, the teams can be a bit tricky. That's the Italian reputation because that happened to many girls; once they are there, they are not paid their salaries or travel expenses, so, nowadays the solution is not there, in Italy. Well, we are talking about Italy, there may be other super-professional teams such as X, teams with structures for male professionals where women are treated on equal terms"* (RFEC Team manager).

Most of the RFEC and FETRI staff members believe that the presence of women in management and administration posts is very important, as they bring on new visions about sport management, and they act as a visible representation for the rest of sportswomen. Some of the sampling population of RFEC thinks that including a quota policy in electoral regulation could be positive, because nowadays RFEC organizational structure is far from UCI's, which in year 2013 included women in management authorities posts to promote female Cycling. *"Statutes, as well as electoral regulations, should open up and include those quota together with training; otherwise, that barrier will never be overcome. If statutes or Electoral Board don't state it, women cannot be included"* (RFEC Secretary).

FETRI staff members consider that, due to quota policy, the role of women in management posts has been critical to achieve gender equality from FETRI

foundation to present days. In the case of sportswomen, they believe including more women in federations bodies and in all areas of sport would be an open door for women into sport. *"Yes, we need more female coaches and technicians and also in the federation to represent our interests, as the world of Cycling is quite sexist"* (CPI).

Sexual harassment

Many international studies show the importance of investigating sexual harassment in competition female sport at all levels of sport practice (Brackenridge, 2001; Vázquez et al, 2002; Svela Sand et al, 2012). Though FETRI federation staff members or female triathletes do not know about any sexual harassment or abuse cases inside the federation, federation staff members do believe that an investigation about this matter should be carried out to approach such cases. However, some Cycling managers, and even a professional female cyclist, are aware that there have been some sexual abuse cases in the past which forced some female cyclist to give up Cycling: *"I will talk about the 90's. I heard of incidents with a former technician, who promised grants to attract the girls, although I think he did not get any sexual favour from them. They later complained about this, although I think that an investigation inside the federation would be advisable even nowadays"* (RFEC Coach).

Mass media and social recognition

Female Cycling and Spanish Triathlon are integrated inside the problems related to women's competition sport regarding their presence and the visibility of their sport achievements in mass media (López, 2011; Crolley et al, 2007). All federation staff members believe female cyclists and triathletes are undervalued in mass media, and that often happens because they do not represent the female predominant stereotype as in other sports which society has traditionally considered as "female", or just because only male achievements are taken into account. *"It's quite hard, we can't see it, some people did not know there was a female Giro d'Italia or a female Tour de France, they don't have an idea, they don't know about females competitions"* (CPI).

Conclusions

Results reveal that female Cycling and Triathlon are integrated inside the problems related to Spanish female competition sports, because there are very few financial allowances, grants or sport sponsorships, which allow sportswomen to get involved in professional sport; there is also a limited visibility of female sport achievements in mass media and they also suffer gender discrimination inside their own sport environment like in Spanish society in general.

Regarding Spanish female competitive Cycling, according to this study results, we suggest that it is evolving quite slowly if we compare it to other countries situation, even though there are new regulatory frameworks in Spain in favour of gender equality in sport and the sociocultural environment has

been evolving in the past years. It was only 40 years ago when changes in the federation structure of Spanish Cycling and in its relationship with the female cyclists' sports context started to be implemented. This situation is quite different in other countries, where, even though male cyclists impact on media has always been higher, as well as their social recognition, female cyclists are clearly better treated in terms of gender equality, as there are some professional teams where female and male cyclists can be fully professional under similar conditions. There is a clear advantage of Spanish female Triathlon compared to Spanish female Cycling in terms of gender equality because Triathlon is a modern sport which emerged in the heart of a society where sportswomen recognition in the sport environment had improved and federations policies have always been emphasizing gender equality, treating female and male triathletes on more similar terms. However, female triathletes have also reported a discriminatory treatment in their sport context. In our opinion, the Spanish sport model needs a deep debate and analysis to question many of the critical facts related to the development of sportswomen in Spanish competitive sport. We suggest a renewal of the existing model in Spain, urging the government to intervene in the national sport environment (influencing directly national and regional federations) by means of measures such as changing Spanish sports law to regularize Spanish sportswomen professionalization and their involvement in sport federations' management. This could increase specific sports funding, and the promotion a higher involvement of sports entities in favour or gender equality in sport federations to boost women participation in more equitable terms.

Practical applications

We suggest a renewal of the existing model in Spain, urging the government to intervene in the national sport environment (influencing directly national and regional federations) by means of measures such as changing Spanish sports law to regularize Spanish sportswomen professionalization and their involvement in sport federations' management. This could increase specific sports funding, and the promotion a higher involvement of sports entities in favour or gender equality in sport federations to boost women participation in more equitable terms.

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Ethical standards and Conflict of interest

The authors declare no financial interests or potential conflicts of interest. The research complies with the Spanish laws and has been approved by the Ethics

Committee of the University of Granada, and follows the standards set up by Harriss and Atkinson (2011).

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