Carla Cerqueira, Rosa Cabecinhas & Sara I. Magalhães

carlaprec3@gmail.com; cabecinhas@ics.uminho.pt; saramagalhaes@fpce.up.pt

CECS, University of Minho/ CECS, University of Minho/ CPUP, University of Porto, Portugal

Gender and media: where do we stand today?

> "Freedom is not enough. What I want has no name yet"
> Clarice Lispector

Nowadays, the public discourses about gender equality are commonly accepted in Western society. In fact, we live in an era of "equality illusion" (Banyard, 2010) because the mainstream discourses incorporate gender in the agenda, conveying the message that feminist struggles are unnecessary today. At the same time, postfeminism (McRobbie, 2004) gains importance and demonstrates the intricacies of a neoliberal, highly individualist culture that subtly imprisons the freedoms that it is supposed to grant (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

However, back in 1978, Gaye Tuchman used the expression "symbolic annihilation" to refer to how the media represented women. The author refers to a "symbolic annihilation" because sometimes it is so hidden and subtle that it becomes difficult to perceive – and to be fought. Much has improved since then; yet a lot remains the same. Over the past decades there have been marked changes in gender relations, in feminist activism, in the (media) communication industry and in society in general (Byerly, 2013; Carter, Steiner & McLaughlin, 2015; Gallagher, 2014; Gallego, 2013; Krijnen, Álvares & Van Bauwel, 2011; Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2015; Lobo, Silveirinha, Subtil, & Torres, 2015; Ross, 2009; Silveirinha, 2001; Van Zoonen, 1994, 2010). Now, in a globalised and media saturated world, the gendered picture is, consequently, different. The contemporary grammar is marked by diverse and complex tensions (van Zoonen, 2010).

These transformations have led to the flourishing of academic production in this field, which continues to grow worldwide.

> The field is characterized by a plurality of different approaches and perspectives: different theoretical perspectives,

different epistemological commitments, different under-
standings of power, different conceptualizations of the
relationship between representations and 'reality', and dif-
ferent understandings of how media images relate to indi-
viduals' sense of identity and subjectivity. (Gill, 2007, pp.
7-8)

The *Gender in focus: (new) trends in media* Book was born out of the
aim of making a recent contribution that may enrich the bigger picture. It
encompasses a selection of articles presented in the homonymous interna-
tional conference held in June 2014 in Braga, Portugal, with over 100 partici-
pants from 22 different countries. It sought to bring together new insights
into this research area, especially those that explore the interrelations and
negotiations between media and gender through the use of interdisciplinary
and intersectional approaches. This conference was organized under the
project *Gender in focus: social representations in Portuguese generalist news-
magazines* that integrated two main axes: products/producers and receivers
(e.g. Cerqueira, Magalhães, Santos, Cabecinhas & Nogueira, 2014; Magal-
hães, Cerqueira & Bernardo, 2012; Santos, Cerqueira & Cabecinhas, 2014).

The Book, as the title implies, is about power, institutions, commu-
nication, popular culture, technology, activism, and resistance. It explores
the complex and sometimes conflicting relations established, contemporar-
ily, between the fields of gender and feminism, and the sphere of (media)
communication. It does not purport to cover the various dimensions that
permeate this field of research. In fact, it would be practically impossible
given its heterogeneity and constant mutations.

The volume presents itself as an Book with a clear overview of theo-
retical frameworks, methodological approaches and empirical applications
into the field of gender and (media) communication. It comprises diverse
perspectives from different (inter)national scholars, aiming at engaging in a
transnational and intersectional discussion. Another compelling feature is
the inclusion of chapters produced by junior, senior and highly recognized
scholars in applied studies of (media) communication sciences centred in a
gender framework, which reflect the evident activity in this area of research,
namely an explicit political implication in the way of producing science.
The common goal is the need for a social change that crosses discourses
and practices and empowers groups and individuals. Those who research
into this area, which crosses gender (and inherently feminisms) and com-
munication, cannot, in our view, alienate themselves from an epistemo-
logical position that questions matrices of oppression and privilege. In this

sense, we think that this volume, based in its academic and socio-political relevance, becomes a useful reference for diverse social agents, such as communication sciences students, researchers, media professionals, civil society organisations and policymakers in different contexts.

The resulting volume is composed of four sections, which articulate the focal points on gender and media studies. Section I - Gender and Communication - is dedicated to the state of the art ranging from statistics to publishing. It begins with *Stasis and Shifts in Feminist Media Scholarship* by Carolyn Byerly, in which the author reviews patterns in women-and-media research and points towards new directions. Next, in the chapter *Gender and Communication: Problematizations, Methodologies, Intersections,* António Fernando Cascais discusses this area of research as plural, characterized by interdisciplinary, but with a need for more crossroads. In the chapter *Gender, Sex and Sexuality in Communication Journals: A Critical Overview of Current Discursive Practices*, Zara Pinto-Coelho and Silvana Mota-Ribeiro explore diverse conceptualizations of those three concepts and of their (inter) relationships within communication research.

Section II - Gender representations - gathers articles from different contexts and with diverse material around gender representations in the media. The chapter *Giving Voice to the Patient in Vegetative State: Biopolitical Intersections of Discourses on Human Life and Female Body*, by Cláudia Álvares and Adalberto Fernandes, suggests a reflection on the Portuguese online media representations of two cases of young women diagnosed with vegetative state for a long period of time. Subsequently, Yaiza Janssens, in the chapter *Sex-Role Stereotyping and Sex Discrimination Regulation in Advertising: The Belgian Case*, analyses adds and their contribution to the discussion on (semi-)legal mechanisms for the regulation of advertising sexism in the Belgian context. The chapter *Cher's Music Videos. Gender as Performativity*, by Orquídea Cadilhe, presents the way Cherilyn Sarkisian's "Cher" music videos are a powerful source in helping her question and deconstruct classical representations of gender, carrying a message of empowerment to women and other minorities and proving that Cher's performance has strong social and political connotations.

Section III - Gender and News - focuses on journalism and its multiple dimensions. *Sensitive to others: emotions, care and gender in the construction of news*, by Maria João Silveirinha, seeks to untangle reason and emotion in the production of news as she recalls the historical and contemporary gender dimension of news production. In the chapter *Framing Gender and Women Politicians Representation: Print Media Coverage of Spanish Women*

Ministers, Núria Fernandez-Garcia explores the media treatment of cabinet members in Spain, from 1996 to 2011. Carla Baptista, Ana Cabrera, Teresa Mendes Flores and Carla Martins, in the chapter *Feminine politics at the Parliament: addressing questions about political and journalistic representation*, tackle the political representation and media visibility strategies of Portuguese female deputies across various periods of the Portuguese democracy, from 1975 to 2002.

Section IV - Gender and Media Reception - combines chapters from the point of view of the publics and analyzes its importance for a cognized practice. In the article *'Silence No More': Online Gender Related Activism in India*, Adrija Dey explores the importance of social media in relation to women rapes, by presenting a case study from 2012 in India. Finally, the chapter *Women and digital Reading: The Gendering of Digital Reading Practices*, by Carla Ganito and Cátia Ferreira, provides a quantitative analysis of women's digital reading practices collected through the online survey of 16 countries in 2013, offering new insights into how women are defining new developments in the transition from print to digital.

This collection of chapters brings a critical overview for the contemporary interrelations between gender and communication and clearly demonstrates the major challenges faced by this area of research, at a time characterized by new, old and contradictory discourses. After all, we've come a long way, but this area of research and activism is still loading... So, where do we stand today?

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Finally, we would like to leave some words of appreciation to the authors of the chapters in this Book, as well as to the expert panel of reviewers, for their major contributions. A brief comment on the editorial policy of this Book would highlight that the authors, and their personal voices and discourses, are of major importance for us; therefore they were entirely respected regarding the use of English and its variations, but also had a crucial role in obtaining the copyright to the reproduction of image or text.

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