

Integrating a Gender-sensitive Approach in Communication Studies: a Proposal Designed by UNESCO-UniTWIN on Gender, Media and ICTs.

French, L., Montiel, A., Padovani, C. (Ed.) (2019). *Gender Media and ICTs: New Approaches for research, education and training*. Paris: UNESCO.

Eliminating all forms of discrimination against women has always been a priority for UNESCO, but it was not until the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) –and the subsequent creation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*– that the essential role of the media was recognized as one of the 12 areas of strategic relevance for achieving full gender equality and promoting women’s empowerment worldwide.

Specifically, «Section J» of Beijing 95 in its goal 2 to «promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media» (a subject still to be addressed in the field of advertising) «was a milestone in establishing a specific framework of recommendations and strategic objectives in this area» (García-Ramos, Vargas-Carrillo and Wake, 2020:1) which would be followed by other actions conceived to promote gender equality in the field of media and communication, and, crucially, of edu-communication, such as the recommendations made by The Global Alliance for Media and Gender (GAMAG) and the establishment of the network of universities integrated in The International UNESCO UniTWIN Network on Gender, Media and ICTs. In this regard, it is worth noting the publication, in 2019, of its curriculum proposal, designed to promote gender training in the field of education and communication, entitled *Gender, media & ICTs: New approaches for research, education & training*.

At a historical moment in which the rise of the extreme right, with its anti-feminist rhetoric, and the depoliticization of the «Section J» goals brought about by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are jeopardizing the progress made after Beijing 95, it is more important than ever to claim the importance of establishing a global alliance «on gender equality, mass media and education» (García-Ramos, Vargas-Carrillo and Wake, 2020:1), especially if we consider that training in gender and communication is still a pending subject even in the most progressive academic contexts (see García-Ramos, Zurian and Gómez-Núñez, 2020). Therefore, from the perspective of those of us who work in the fields of study of communication, journalism, advertising or digital communication, it is essential to claim the fundamental role media and ICTs play for the empowerment and defence of women’s rights, a goal for which the New Syllabi developed by UNESCO-UniTWIN constitutes an invaluable tool.

In line with the strategic objectives set out by «Section J» of increasing «the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication» and «promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media», the New Syllabi was designed with the overarching goal of training a new generation of journalists and media professionals who are sensitized to gender issues both in their workplaces and in relation to the content they produce.

In this sense, one of the main virtues of the New Syllabi is that it does not consider gender as a «specialization» within communication studies –an independent subject, which could even be an elective– but as a transversal and holistic approach to the teaching and study of communication that recognizes the interconnected nature of the various dimensions of gender inequality in the field of media and ICTs. Thus, the New Syllabi includes a guide for users explaining how the resources, concepts and perspectives it reviews can be applied in different contexts (at various educational levels, institutional frameworks, or even developed into content adapted to the enormous variety of existing Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in the field of communication): to supplement existing courses or subjects in the field of gender and media; as a model for creating new subject plans; or as a useful guide for educators and teachers already working in this field.

The authors of the document are aware at all times of the existence of different contextual factors that will crucially affect the way in which the New Syllabi can be implemented, such as the possible resistance to feminist thinking in some regions, or the existence of other priorities; the resulting pedagogical approach therefore seeks to link local and global experiences and resources, and invites trainers and teachers to establish for themselves what aspects are crucial to achieving gender equality in media and ICTs in each specific context.

Thus, another positive aspect is that the text does not so much seek to offer detailed content on gender and education communication, but rather to gather a series of themes, approaches and resources with the aim of helping trainers and teachers to develop their own curricula or teaching modules applicable to their specific geo-cultural context. Crucially, intersectionality and the importance of linking theory with practice through activities such as the production of audiovisual content are also key principles that run transversally through the structure of the *New Syllabi*, considering other vectors of inequality that cross the various dimensions of the field of communication (from access to positions of power to the construction of stereotypes) such as race, age, gender or sexual orientation (p. 31-32), an intersectional perspective still incipient in the field of gender studies in Spain.

The *New Syllabi* is structured into seven main themes or units, which are introduced by a statement that addresses its main goal, and accompanied by an explanation of the reasons why the theme is relevant to a gendered media and ICT agenda, as well as providing references to relevant literature. The topics are in turn structured into sub-themes, which can be addressed in their entirety or selected to offer more specific content, depending on the interest of each professor; possible theoretical approaches to the topic are then listed (e.g. semiotics, ideology, a post-colonial, a focus on masculinities...). In addition, the text references those UNESCO's gender-sensitive indicators for the media (2012) that are related to each unit, an essential tool for measuring gender equality in the media context of each region. Finally, other interesting resources are indicated, such as digital platforms, archives, multimedia materials or toolkits, but also relevant good practices from around the world. This can be used to engage students in a variety of activities, from research to critical commentary, in order to gain a better understanding of the realities of gender (dis) equality on the ground and related initiatives (p. 34).

The first theme of the *New Syllabi* relates to representation, language and discourse; it aims to «analyse the representations of gender that circulate in the media and in ICT in order to denaturalise stereotypes and discriminatory forms against women, against gender/generic diversities and against non-hegemonic forms of masculinity» (p. 43); some of the sub-themes included are the construction of gender in the media (stereotypes, power relations...), the proportion of women occupying the role of «experts» in media content, the representations of masculinity and femininity, or the use of sexist language in the media.

The other topics in which the content of the text is organized are related to access to decision-making; gender in media and ICT structures; audience, reception and uses of media and ICTs; violence against women in and through media and ICTs; gender mainstreaming in media and ICT policies; and finally, advocacy and activism.

Describing in detail the objectives and sub-themes proposed for each of these units is not relevant for the purpose of this review, but it is precisely the variety and multidimensionality of both the theoretical approaches and the content suggested -on which each teacher and trainer can chose to focus- that makes the *New Syllabi on Gender, media & ICTs: new approaches for research, education & training* into a profoundly versatile tool, applicable in any socio-cultural, educational or even temporal framework -short workshops could be organized on any of the sub-themes offered- that holds incalculable value in enriching the training and sensitivity to gender issues of a future generation of media professionals, whatever the specialty they decide to opt for.

The *New Syllabi* is not a closed or definitive programme, but offers instead a wide range of suggestions, concepts, thematic nodes and theoretical approaches to the shaping of gender equality in the field of (edu)communication that each trainer, teacher or even professional working in the sector will have to shape in the way they consider relevant, according to their specific context. In this sense, it should be noted that from the UNESCO-UniTWIN network itself, various initiatives are being developed to ground the *New Syllabi* proposals in specific teaching modules for each geo-cultural and educational context. In light of the regrettable media coverage of certain cases in which gender has played a relevant role, the urgent need to redirect the discourse coming from the media towards the values of gender equality, feminism and diversity becomes clear; if all students in this field of study were to receive specific training in this area, we would be one step closer to achieving the empowerment and rights of women in our country and in the world. In this sense, the *New Syllabi* is an invaluable starting point both within universities and for media companies themselves.

Lucía Gloria Vázquez Rodríguez
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
luciaglv@ucm.es

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6550-9364>

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