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Zara Pinto-Coelho & Silvana Mota-Ribeiro
zara@ics.uminho.pt; silvanar@ics.uminho.pt
CECS, University of Minho, Portugal

Gender, sex and sexuality in two open access communication journals published in Portugal: a critical overview of current discursive practices

Abstract

The links between gender, sex and sexuality and their relevance are theoretically and politically problematic (Richardson, 2007). One of the difficulties in understanding their interconnections is that these terms are often used differently and ambiguously by different authors (and even by the same authors). This article reports the results of an analysis of the articles published in open access communication journals with known impact factor, edited in Portugal and published between 2005 and 2012. The diverse conceptualisations of those three basic concepts and of their (inter)relationships within communication research are identified. The complexity and the intricate (and often implicit) nature of both the meanings of these categories and their relationships underlie and justify our attention and further research.
What the findings suggest about the current communication research into gender issues published in the two journals surveyed is that the 'Gender differences discourse' (Sunderland, 2004) is the most pervasive discourse (also) in academic practice. Additionally, they show that gender and sex are mainly taken for a fact, not a question that is worth being studied. The editors of these journals, as well as the scholars submitting manuscripts, need to be more aware of the traditional nature of the theoretical and methodological choices that they make regarding gender- and sex-related issues, as well as of the relative lack of attention to sexuality as a research subject.

Keywords

Gender, sex, sexuality, communication journals

1. Introducing the present study

The terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' have been used in a variety of ways in social sciences, and particularly in the field of communication

studies — to such an extent that it is often difficult to make sense of what people mean by each of them. Indeed, many texts do not include a definition or a discussion, and even less so a problematisation, of what is meant by the terms 'gender', 'sex' or 'sexuality'. This situation has come to our attention as it raises several problems. Firstly, it is rather odd that, in academic texts that account for scientific studies or that reflect on the topic, the reader is not introduced to the concepts used, neither is s/he situated in terms of the approach adopted concerning what they mean. Secondly, the well-known particular ambiguity of these concepts makes it all even more surprising. Additionally, the question of what this entails is anything but obvious. On the one hand, the multiplicity of meanings and disputes about the terms and their interconnections can be vital to a creative theorisation and empirical work. On the other hand, it may lead to confusion, and compromise theoretical and methodological rigour. Over time, disputes can take on a life of their own, and prevent a fruitful debate and a healthy dialogue. Some scholars find the multiple meanings of these terms to be confusing and ambiguous. Others, who prefer one of the two terms (either 'sex' or 'gender') to the detriment of the other, will react to the non-preferred term with ambivalence or disdain, while others seek to depict their complementarity and interconnections. It is precisely this variety and openness, on the one hand, and boundedness, on the other, that deserves our attention. To move forward, we must first ask some questions and choose a field within which our empirical analysis will be conducted. The questions that we seek to address in this article are: *How do communication scholars conceptualise the terms 'gender', 'sex', and 'sexuality', respectively? Do they relate them in some way? If so, how do they cast these relationships?*

Our aim is to identify the multiple meanings of these terms and forms of interconnection among them, by means of a survey of communication journals published in Portugal. Two reasons underlie our choice to focus on communication journals published in Portugal: firstly, as communication researchers doing gender research in Portugal we felt the need to deepen our knowledge about the state-of-the-art of this topic in our country, even if it might be expected that, due to the pressure of internationalisation and the dominance of English language in higher education and research (Pinto-Coelho & Carvalho, 2013, pp. 4-14), the place of publication does not attribute a particular authorship nationality and working language; secondly, we thus hope to take a step forward towards a mutual understanding and an interconnected network among this research community, and to reinforce gender awareness among the community of communication

journals' editors in Portugal. The study presented in this chapter encompasses the first step of a long-term research project that aims to assess the state-of-the-art of this topic and investigate how communication scholars have addressed it[1].

We begin by focusing on the need to discuss sex / gender / sexuality terminology, by providing an overview of both the state of the art of this discussion in Portugal, in the fields of social sciences and the humanities, and the debate about the struggles over these meanings. Subsequently, gender research and terminology are historically framed within communication studies, vis-à-vis feminist media studies and gender and media studies, and specifically in communication research in the Portuguese context. The methodology of this study is presented and explained next. The research analysis and findings are then discussed, by exploring each of the topical categories under which the articles of the corpus are grouped:

1. 'Where is sexuality in gender?'
2. 'Gender or sex: why should anyone care?'
3. 'Where are dynamics and diversity in gender and sex?'
   a) Gender as a 'coatrack' of sex
   b) Gender as sex segregation.

This chapter concludes by discussing the research findings and pointing to future research.

2. 'Gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality': why quibble over the terminology?

We are both researchers in the field of communication sciences. The first work that we published together dates from 2006 (Pinto-Coelho & Mota-Ribeiro, 2006), and was motivated by our interest in deepening our understanding of these categories and their relationships, from a critical discourse and social semiotics perspective (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Lazar, 2005; Van Dijk, 2011; Wodak, 1997). But eight years of study, discussion and

1 This research project (starting in the current year) is harboured by the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS), University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. Its full corpus includes all the Open Access Communication Journals that are published in Portugal: R*evista Comunicação e Sociedade, Estudos de Comunicação/ Communication Studies and Observatorio (OBS*) e-journal*. We have focused on OAJs due to their wider readership potential.

empirical research did not put an end to our 'gender trouble' (Butler, 1990). As is well known, the amount of ambiguities and confusions associated with the use of these terms across the discourses of social sciences, and in addition in the feminist discourse, is enormous, and has been identified by some authors as reasons for concern. In Portugal, Amâncio (2003), one of the main references in the field of psychologically rooted gender studies, wrote an article about this problem. Macedo, in her research into the area of literary studies, contributed to a study conducted by Braidotti (2002, p. 285) on 'the uses and abuses of the sex / gender distinction in European feminist practices'. Ferreira (2013), a sociology scholar, made a presentation in France about the use of the term 'gender' in Portugal.

It is certain that Portuguese does not help when it comes to 'gender' as a linguistic term due to its multiple referents — masculine / feminine (as a grammatical category), literary genre, or other kinds or types in the sense of collection of things, beings, facts, situations, etc. Nevertheless, the fact appears to be that, in Portugal, the term 'gender', meaning 'social sex', has been assimilated into common speech and media discourse (Braidotti, 2002, p. 293).

The struggle over the meanings of the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality', their relationships, and the direction of their articulations is well known. It is a reality that goes far back to the inception of the feminist movement, at least more systematically, and that has taken different forms over the years (Cameron, 2009; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Richardson, 2007), but it is too complex to even allow us to get a grasp of them at this stage. The jury is still out on what is the best or the 'correct' definition of these terms, on the theorisation of their interconnections and, in the case of the sex / gender distinction, of the value of the distinction itself. It should be stressed, however, that the meanings of these terms are not just randomly generated, but correspond to different ideological positions and have been generated in the struggle over these positions. It can be added to this that these terms do have a number of meanings, but they are not endlessly variable in meaning, and the meanings that they have tend to cluster together in a small number of main families.

A helpful starting point to identifying those families consists of delineating some feminist history of the terms, but this is not the aim of the present study. Nonetheless, the present analysis builds upon our readings on the subject produced by scholars from different disciplinary background, national (cited above) and international (e.g. Cameron, 2005, 2009; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Mikkola, 2012; Nicholson, 1994; Richardson,

2007). What is important to retain, however, is that the struggles over the meanings of these terms are ideological struggles that take place in discourse and are evidenced *in* language texts. An analysis of this nature, which is based on the texts of research articles, can thus shed some light on this issue. But these struggles are also *over* language in the sense that having the power to determine which meanings are 'correct' is an important aspect of social and ideological power, and therefore a terrain of ideological struggle (Fairclough, 1989, p. 88). Therefore, it is necessary to see the existing use of the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' as reflecting the victories and defeats of past struggles, as well as stakes that are the object of the struggle. Deciding amongst different meanings of the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality', and of their interconnections, is thus neither a merely theoretical, nor a linguistic exercise; it is directly related to deciding upon political strategies for contemporary movements on gender and sexual politics (Almeida, 1995; McElhinny, 2003).

The goal of this study is not to pinpoint the best, the most helpful, or the 'correct' definition of these terms; this study aims to provide an overview of the state-of-the-art of this field, and contribute to a healthy dialogue among scholars and pave the ground for cross-fertilisation. In so doing, we are certainly not claiming some privileged all-seeing perspective, but merely making some tentative suggestions on what might be seen from different vantage points. We consider, like Rubin ([1984]1999), that sex and gender should not be conflated, and following Jackson and Scott (2007) we approach gender and sexuality as analytically distinct. We also believe, like many other authors (e.g. Rubin, 1975), that they are separate systems, which are interwoven at many points; they have a particular kind of mutual dependence, which no study of either can overlook (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Cameron & Kulick, 2003). It is precisely this kind of inter-implication that has been the focus of our research for several years, with a particular interest on the role that media discourses and visual images play in that process.

3. Gender communication research and the problematisation of the discursive use of 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality'

To the best of our knowledge, the use of the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' remains an unexplored territory in the communication field, although the research conducted by Van Zoonen (1994) on feminist media studies, and by Gill (2007), Silveirinha (2004) and Thornham (2007) on gender and media, to name only a few, shed some light on the matter.

In Portugal, the overview of the historical evolution of gender communication studies is under-researched, in contrast with the work already done on the evolution of gender studies in the Portuguese social sciences research. Notwithstanding the fact that they have different concerns and use different approaches, Almeida (1986), Amâncio (2003), Ferreira (2013) and Rodrigues (2009) have identified the 1990s as the moment when the interest in gender issues took off, and the first five years of the current century as its consolidation phase. This also included the adoption of masculinities as an object of study.

Although the aim of our study is not to trace this evolution, based on the knowledge and on the information that we have been collecting so far it seems to us that gender issues started to be a part of the communication studies research agenda later than it did in the research agenda of other social sciences. Only in the third national conference of SOPCOM (the national association of communication scholars that took place in Covilhã in 2004), together with the VI LUSOCOM and II IBÉRICO's conferences, did we witness for the first time the organisation of a thematic table on gender issues. But then, as now, gender issues did not stand by themselves, that is, they always came together with cultural studies. The relevance and the meanings of this fact are, of course, an open question at this stage of our research[2].

4. Methodology

To examine how communication studies' researchers use the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality', and cast their relationships, we focused on theoretical, methodological or data-based articles to discern the analysts' treatment of gender, sex and sexuality as theory, methodology and data. Thus, we excluded introductory sections of special issues, commentaries, and article and book reviews.

Using current scientific journals' quality criteria, we selected two major journals in communication studies that are indexed in international databases, that have an established history of publishing, and that are open access, with a known impact factor[3]. The scholarly journals that

[2] Interestingly, since this paper was written, in the IX SOPCOM Conference (Coimbra, 2015), "Gender and Sexualities" was autonomously considered as a thematic panel. This was as a result of a new workgroup being created within the scope of the Association, named "Gender and Sexualities".

[3] The impact factor of these journals was measured in a study done by Rafael Repiso and Emilio López-Cózar (2013). In this research, the authors present a ranking of Communication journals covered by

we included in our research are: *Revista Comunicação e Sociedade* (biannual, bilingual journal, published in Portuguese since 2000, and in Portuguese and English since 2012), which is indexed in *Qualis* and *Latindex*; and *Observatorio (OBS*)* e-journal (published since 2007, quarterly, with articles in Portuguese, English, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Italian and French), which is indexed in the international databases *Scopus*, *Scielo Portugal*, *EBSCO* and *Latindex*. All articles were collected from each issue of the e-journal *Observatorio (OBS*)* published between 2007 and 2012, and from *Revista Comunicação e Sociedade* published between 2005 and 2012. The corpus collected includes all the articles containing the words 'gender' or 'sex' or 'sexuality', as well as semantically related words (e.g. 'sexual', 'male(s)', 'female(s)', 'men', 'women', 'woman', 'girl(s)', 'boy(s)', 'masculinity', 'femininity', 'masculine', 'feminine', 'sexism', 'patriarchal', 'heterosexuality', 'transexuality', 'gendered', etc.). This search took into account the specificity of each of the languages of publication accepted by the selected journals (Portuguese, English, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Italian and French). This was particularly interesting as we could actually be more familiar with the various words used to refer to the concepts in different languages. We excluded from our corpus all the articles in which the use of the terms was reduced to an occasional single reference with no further theoretical, methodological or analytical considerations.

Based on these criteria, a total of 83 articles from these selected journals were collected and included in the corpus: 59 from *Observatorio (OBS*)* e-journal (2007 to 2012), and 24 from *Revista Comunicação e Sociedade* (2005 to 2012). 15 out of the 59 articles published in *Observatorio (OBS*)* were written by Spanish scholars. This is the international community that published most articles related to the topic of our study in this journal, whereas the Brazilian researchers were predominant in *Revista Comunicação e Sociedade* (8 out of 24 articles).

The data analysis procedure consisted of three main steps. Firstly, we read in full half of the articles, each, and we have taken notes, guided by the core question of how 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' were defined — and, moreover, how the relationship between them was conceptualised, either explicitly or implicitly, either in the theoretical or in the methodological / analytical components of the corresponding articles. Secondly, we designed

Google Scholar Metrics (GSM) from 2008 to 2012. It corresponds to the H Index update made in 2012 for the period 2007-2011. 'The result is a ranking of 354 communication journals sorted by the same H Index, and mean as discriminating value. Journals are also grouped by quartiles' (Repiso & López--Cózar, 2013).

a set of categories for each of the terms and for their relationships after re-reading the articles and comparing notes taken in the first step. For the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' — and their relationships —, the categorisation was initially guided by the extant categories in the literature, although we remained open to the emergence of new categories, as the analysis suggests. Thirdly, we engaged in a process of reciprocal exchange of the data between the two of us, and reviewed the classifications done by each, resulting in the final categories we have agreed upon.

5. The discursive use of the terms 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' by communication scholars in the OAJs under review

Overall, the analysis shows that 81 out of the 83 studies that we reviewed are empirically grounded, thus following a long-term tradition in the field of communication studies (Van Zoonen, 1994, p. 16). Another crucial result arising from the analysis of the data is that the terms 'gender' and 'sex', as well as corresponding semantically related words, are rarely explicitly defined or theorised in detail, as if the authors and the editors of the articles believed that this knowledge and opinions were known or easily derivable by the recipients. Therefore, based on a contextual account of the articles, we had to infer the implicit or entailed meanings of the terms, a practice that is well known amongst discourse researchers. This is a fact that does not preclude a high level of interpretive variability, a problem that the previously detailed coding process both revealed and solved.

The analysis also revealed that the number of articles focusing specifically on sexuality is considerably low (14 articles). We grouped this set of texts under a topical category, which we named 'Where is sexuality in gender?' (see Table 1).

An additional crucial result is that around 46% of the articles reviewed (38 out of 83 articles) are not in the middle of any 'gender trouble'. That is, gender-related issues are not, by themselves, a reason for concern, or an object of study. In this kind of research, the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are used interchangeably. We have classified this set of research under a category named 'Gender or sex: why should anyone care?'.

Studies specifically focused on gender, concerned with gender as a social issue worth being analysed, show a considerably higher degree of heterogeneity. None of them presents itself (at least, not explicitly) as being grounded in a feminist tradition. These studies were classified under two

separate sub-categories: 'Gender as a 'coatrack' of sex' (Nicholson, 1994, p. 81) and 'Gender as sex segregation'. Both these sub-categories were organised into a global common category named 'Where are dynamics and diversity in gender and sex?'. This global category and its corresponding verbal formulation indicates the lack of an alternative perspective over women's identity that contrasts with the one that we identified in the body of research classified under this category: that is, an approach to women's identity/gender as something fixed, biologically or not, and that has an ontological status, a basic, fundamental grounding called sex.

TOPICAL CATEGORIES	
Where is sexuality in gender?	14
Gender or sex: why should anyone care?	38
Where are dynamics and diversity in gender and sex? - Gender as a 'coatrack' of sex - Gender as sex segregation	31 25 6

Table 1: Topical categories resulting from the analysis of the corpus (83 articles).

5.1 Where is sexuality in gender?

The analysis reveals that the number of articles focusing specifically on sexuality-related issues is rather low (only 14 articles). A variety of questions is addressed: the production and use of pornography in different media; young people's use of new screens and sexually explicit content; lesbian discourses in the context of media and health; women's visual ads, the gender gaze or compulsory heterosexuality; intimacy TV and private/public spheres; erotic relations between women and men and mythologies; sexual practices and confession; sexual health prevention and reproductive rights; gay and lesbian identities; representations of queer identities in films.

Two tendencies stand out in this set of articles: meanings and terms related to sexuality tend to be used fuzzily (e.g. interchangeable use of the terms 'sex', 'sexuality', 'sexual orientation' — across authors and by the same authors), and (as a result?) concepts are neither fully explained, nor are their connections problematised.

The term 'sex' is used often in these studies with the meaning of 'having sex' or other kind of erotic activity, and other semantically related terms point out to sexuality, such as 'sexual behaviour', 'sexual content', 'heterosexuals', 'lesbians', 'sexual orientation', etc..

The term 'sexuality' itself overlaps either implicitly or explicitly with sexual orientation, as in the case of 'heterosexual sexuality' (Morais & Oliveira, 2012, p. 43). Sexual orientation, and therefore sexuality, is presented dichotomically, as articles construct people as either heterosexuals or homosexuals (sometimes reference is made to bi-sexuality, but also as a self-contained category, as a third way). This reinforcement of the norm, which most authors seem to take for granted, is also apparent, since sexual diversity, heterogeneity and fluidity are rarely mentioned and even less taken as a central point in this group of articles. Santos and Ribeiro's article does mention 'gays, lesbian, transsexuals' and emphasises transgression, but the authors do not seem to escape the polarisation of homosexuality and heterosexuality, as magazines and their audience are presented as either homo or hetero, and other possible orientations / identities are referred to within the context of 'the homosexual magazine' (Santos & Ribeiro, 2012, p. 59).

Additionally, the problematisation and/or emphasis on sex-gender-sexuality interconnections are almost non-existent, and when they do exist, this is not done explicitly. Those interconnections are not explained but taken as a fact, therefore naturalising them and rendering the intricate nature of their linkage invisible. This, in our opinion, goes to show that even authors working in the communication field who centre their research on sexually-related issues do not fully embrace those interconnections as something worth deconstructing, either because they are not fully aware of their relevance and/or because the theoretical perspectives that frame most of these studies are not politically-oriented.

However, it is important to emphasise that, in this set of articles, other perspectives and approaches do appear: three of the studies are clearly inspired by the theoretical shifts associated with the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993). Also, sexuality is sometimes put into question and problematised by a 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, [1984]1999) perspective, but only insofar as it is 'queered'.

These articles express different perspectives at play, and therefore methods used do vary, spanning from surveys to interviews. However, what can be broadly referred to as the analysis of media content is overwhelmingly the most widely used resource for research, meaning that the majority of these articles are data-based. This can be explained by the tradition in gender research, especially within communication studies, of conducting research into media 'images of women' (Thornham, 2007, p. 6) or media 'representations' (Gill, 2007, p. 7; Van Zoonen, 1994, p. 12), which is particularly relevant in this set of articles.

5.2 Gender or sex: why should anyone care?

The articles in this category are typically statistical social sciences studies, designed to capture variance, mainly in the production, perceptions, uses and media impact (TV, internet, DTT, mobile phones, Facebook and other social media, websites, blogs, etc.).

In this research stream, the terms 'sex' and 'gender' (or their plural inflections, 'genders', 'sexes') are used interchangeably as synonyms to name individual characteristics of the population being surveyed. Likewise, in these cases the aim is to measure statistical variance between women and men. 'Gender' and 'sex' (or 'genders' and 'sexes') are used in the same article by most of the authors, with no apparent criteria for using either one or the other, although a small number of authors use either 'sex' or 'gender' consistently (even if no additional information is provided for their choice, or no explanation is given as to what they mean). More importantly, the analysis of this set leads us into concluding that gender and sex are implicitly conceptualised (a) as coextensive — that is, women are human females, men are human males; and (b) as pre-given or as a matter of fact.

Similarly, gender and/or sex are selected by the authors of the articles as one amongst other measures / variables (e.g. age) to capture the intended variation in surveys, which are the most widely used research resource in this set of studies. In general, the reasons for selecting the sex variable are not explained, or are explained by resorting only to generic statements such as 'sex influences', 'has an effect', 'impacts' (on such and such); only exceptionally does this take the explicit form of an hypothesis. A well-known criticism directed at the studies that use the categories of 'male' and 'female' as demographic variables in social surveys is their reduction of sex to a crude sexual disphormism. This necessarily excludes transsexual and intersexed individuals, and can be rather misleading in terms of survey accuracy — not to mention the processes of symbolic exclusion and invisibility of those who do not fit bipolar, opposing views of sex / gender, which entails many and complex political issues.

Within the previously defined context, we have identified some major difficulties in this body of research. The presentation of results as 'there are / there are not differences or similarities between men and women' without further explanation (and moreover without previous theoretical considerations) might trigger in the mind of certain readers, the 'so what?' question. But for other readers this assertion of those facts may trigger and sediment stereotyped or even normative explanations or meanings. Providing the readers with this kind of 'freedom' allows them to fulfil the missing link

— or links — with whatever social knowledge about gender they may have at their disposal to give some kind of sense to the quest and to the results.

For instance, Cardoso and Amorim (2010, p.1), in an article designed to "assess the degree of innovativeness of adolescents from 12 to 17 years old for the technologies (...)", state that "[t]he data show that groups of males aged between 12 and 14 years old are more likely to innovativeness". No explanations are provided for this finding, and no reference is made to its relevance; why the sex variable entered the equation in a research focusing on adolescence and innovativeness can only be wondered.

There are other cases where the authors use the terms 'gender' or 'sex' freely to refer to male and female differences in the use or perception of 'such and such', together with ideas such as 'gender access gap' (Tabernero, Sánchez-Navarro & Tubella, 2008, p. 286) or 'sex equality' (Faustino, 2009, p. 197). These choices enable notions of socially constructed structures without an adequate theoretical basis or appropriate reflection. It is as if man / woman measures and their statistical significance confirm these unobserved and unmeasured social phenomena. This kind of move prevents an entire and clearer understanding of social phenomena and gender issues at stake.

5.3 Gender as a 'coatrack' of sex

In this category, the terms 'gender' and 'sex' are used in the form of a couple, with two opposite poles linked to each other in a continuum. The term 'gender' is used to refer to social and psychological attributed differences, as well as to a social division. The term 'sex' refers to sexes, that is, to differences between women and men, female and male, or bodily differences. Gender is conceptualised as a construction that needs to be analysed as such and as an effect grounded on human sex, that is, on sexual differences between human females and males. The relationship between female, woman and femininity, and between male, men and masculinity is thus taken for granted, and therefore no further problematisation is necessary.

These are studies that belong to a classic, long-lasting communication studies research tradition into women's images, and that can (but do not necessarily) include (at least not explicitly) a concern with gender inequality, i.e. with gender as a social division that entails social hierarchy. This set of articles includes typical data-based studies of 'women's image' or 'women's portrayals', which address questions such as stereotypes (appropriate female and male attributes, social roles, activities), sexist content,

invisibility or distortion. They may resort or point to the socialisation thesis — the so-called 'dominance story' or the 'cultural difference story' (Cameron, 2005) — and may be articulated with (or supported by) a media effects analysis through some kind of reception study.

An example that appears to be problematic in the sense of being ambiguous is a study conducted by Pereira and Veríssimo (2008) about the existence of women stereotypes in ads and a group of students' perceptions of the ads. It is a good illustration of how we can be trapped by the conjoining of the particularities of one's language, due to what can be named a lack of attention, to say the least. The authors use the phrases 'stereotypes **of** gender' ('*estereótipos **de** género*') to mean differences between the 'social roles' attributed to (real) women and men, and 'stereotypes **by** gender' ('*estereótipos **por** género*') to refer to differences of representations according to each sex (portrayed) in the ads, using thus the term 'gender' with both meanings. This is a linguistically correct use of the phrases, but also one that can be considered problematic or unclear, as it might conflate stereotypes (a social concept) with the 'characters' that one sees in the ads.

5.4 Gender as sex segregation

In this category we include data-based studies that focus on investigating the presence or the omission of women in media representations and in media-related organisations. Although the authors may explicitly invoke the meanings associated with gender as a 'coatrack of sex', their focus is on social divisions. Furthermore, when it comes to name the referent of this hierarchy, they use the terms gender and sex – or sex related terms (e.g. 'women / men'; 'female / male') — interchangeably. The work of Alejandra Hernández, Marta Martín-Llaguno and Marina Beléndez (2009) is a good example of this. In this article, the authors address the issue of 'sex segregation', the relative presence of women and men in the Spanish advertising companies' workforce, and treat it as equivalent to or as indicative of a 'gender gap' — or a barrier to gender equality. By linking gender to sex in this way, it is assumed that femininity and masculinity are features that (only) women and men have, respectively; that is, they each possess specific and essential qualities that define what they are, their whole being and essence, and it is this alleged reality that produces their actions. This is why it is assumed, in this article, that more women in the advertisement workforce will mean a change in the way they work, or on what they have to offer. However, if reasoning the other way around — that it is our actions

that produce one's gender, and that gender is an unstable position, something that is done and performed in particular ways in particular contexts, under particular circumstances, opportunities and limitations —, then the increase of female presence in the Spanish advertising workforce does not necessarily mean ungendering that area of work (as it does not mean in journalism). This is because it is not enough to be a woman to change patriarchal organisations (Marshment, 1993).

This kind of studies, notwithstanding their social relevance, would certainly benefit from a change in their conceptualisations of gender and sex, and of their interrelationships.

6. Concluding remarks: towards a deeper understanding of current discursive practices of scholars and editors

What the findings suggest about our current practice as communication scholars dealing with gender issues is that differences are (still) the 'holly grail' of gender research. The 'Gender differences discourse' (Sunderland, 2004) is the most pervasive discourse, not only generally, in social practices and interaction, but, surprisingly (or not), in academic practice, too.

Additionally, gender and sex are mainly taken to be a fact, not a question that is worth being studied. When gender is questioned, the set of articles classified under the category 'Where are dynamics and diversity in gender and sex?' indicates that sex (men and women) is seen as the only referent of gender, as being previous to gender, and as an immutable fact: 'sex is sex is sex'. The underlying assumption is that there is no gender without sex. The relationship between gender and sex is thus seen as being linear, unidirectional and continuous, and the interconnections between gender, sex and (hetero)sexuality are an issue for a residual number of researchers only.

Sex (having sex related acts, or just suggestions, hints of sex; pornography; objectification; pulsions) is that which matters the most regarding sexuality. When sexuality is questioned, it is queered, that is, interrogated within the framework of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, [1984]1999), and it is not (with only a few exceptions) denaturalised within a gender framework.

Our analysis thus demonstrates that the differentiation between gender and sex as both descriptive and analytical categories is a viable marker for characterising two distinct approaches in communication studies. It also sorts through for some of the confusions regarding the terms 'gender'

and 'sex', and their relationships. It is clear that the studies reviewed would benefit from a stronger and more diverse theoretical ground on gender, sex and sexuality issues. We aim to encourage scholars to use the concepts more precisely, as well as to improve the clarity of the relationship that they envisage and about which they write, even if they do not do so intentionally. By recognising differences and common ground between the descriptive and the analytical approaches, we think that future research will be able to create more innovative hybrid theories that combine the advancements of both fields of research.

To conclude, we strongly believe that the editors of these journals, as well as scholars submitting manuscripts, need to be more aware of the traditional nature of the theoretical and methodological choices that they make regarding gender- and sex-related issues, as well as of the relative lack of attention to sexuality as a research subject.

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