

Gender(ed) Matters in Communication/Media Studies: Integrating Curricular Innovation and Social Change in the Spanish Model

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Abstract

This article investigates the benefits of making gender-related issues more central to the Communication Studies curriculum in the Spanish system of higher education. The shift to "value-impact criteria" as the standard of success of today's curricula in Europe is one of the strongest critiques that higher education is facing in that context. This article focuses on the state of affairs in Spain, showcases why Communication Studies is a particularly relevant field for these changes, outlines how a multi-platform approach to learning (combination of teaching, research, and social activism) pays special attention to the ways gender, racial, ethnic, and economic parameters interface with each other, and details the value of introducing more interdisciplinary and gender-based cognitive paradigms into the curriculum for making our campuses sites of innovation, better learning, and forces for social change.

Key Words: media, higher-education, Communication and Media Studies, Gender Studies, citizenship, responsibility, Spain, curriculum

Resumen. *Cuestiones de género en los Estudios de Comunicación: Integración Curricular de la innovación y el cambio social en el modelo español*

Este artículo investiga los beneficios de trabajar cuestiones relacionadas con el género en el programa de estudios de comunicación del sistema español de educación superior. La reflexión se centra en la situación en España y muestra por qué los estudios de comunicación son un campo particularmente relevante donde introducir la cuestión de género.

Palabras clave: medios de comunicación, educación superior, Comunicación y Ciencias de la Información, Estudios de Género, ciudadanía, responsabilidad, España, currículo

1. Introduction

Gender, racial, ethnic, and economic inequality stubbornly hinders progress in our social, cultural, scientific, financial, and technical worlds. It behooves us as educators, researchers, and social activists to address these disparities in the courses we teach, the scholarship we produce, and the community-related work we are involved in. This article is centrally concerned with how to make the challenging of these inequities a part of the values of our universities and our curricula, as well as a guiding force in the professional and civic lives of our students.

We live in times where our humanity is often defined in terms of economic expediency, where civic actions are measured according to their short-term cost and benefit, where the notion of education is reduced to the “usefulness” of studying particular disciplines as determined by the needs of the labor market. How can university curricula restrain and critique these forces? In this article we propose that one avenue consists in assembling a strong linkage between how we analyze and communicate difference about the world (the focus of Communication and Media Studies) and a sensitivity and theorization of that difference (the purview of intersectional Gender Studies) as a particularly apt model for understanding both the root causes of our current state of affairs and for offering alternatives. With this in mind, we will concentrate on the EU’s recent reorganization of higher education (with a special emphasis on the Spanish case given its lack of attention to gender) and compare this restructuring to other curricular models like those in place at liberal arts colleges in the US.

One of the strongest critiques of the paradigmatic transformation that higher education is facing in Europe is the shift to “value-impact criteria” as the all-encompassing standard of success of today’s curricula and its graduates. In the Spanish context, many institutions have faced serious obstacles in implementing urgently needed structural and content-based changes in their curriculum, restructurings that have foregrounded just how important interdisciplinary approaches to learning and knowledge production are while highlighting at the same time just how stubborn particular fields and departments have been to these changes, programs in Communication being one of them. The objectives of this article are to (a) detail the value of introducing such interdisciplinary cognitive paradigms into the curriculum; (b) showcase why the field of Communication is a particularly fertile and relevant area for this transformation; and (c) outline how a multi-platform approach to learning should pay special attention to the ways gender, racial, ethnic, and economic parameters interface with each other and with the “story” the Communication student receives and creates. We conclude that such an approach to education will help make our classrooms sites for innovation, better learning, and forces for social change.

Institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned today to be facilitators of social change. We now understand in much clearer terms why an innovative society is an inclusive, diverse, and open society; why knowledge production (the asking of good questions and the search for responsible solutions) is inextricably linked to social and economic progress. However, inclusi-

veness and diversity are multi-dimensional concepts given how they refer both to their human dimension (the participation of women, men, and all social minorities in the process of learning and research) *and* to its cognitive application, i.e., the broadening of perspectives, interpretation, heuristics, and models of research. This complex notion of inclusiveness and diversity is at the heart of progress and innovation and should translate into socially responsive models of research and learning. Its implementation, however, depends on the transformation of higher education, i.e., on the acknowledgement of the shortcomings of past curricular models and on the desire for change.

Gender Studies represents one of the most important areas through which curricula can be made more sensitive to social and political diversity and better oriented toward social change. Surprisingly, despite its well-established legacies in the areas of cognitive, theoretical, political, and educational development, we still find an extremely low profile of gender-related issues, courses, and pedagogies in most Communication and Media Studies curricula, the Spanish curricula being one of the most strikingly grave. In this case study, we will enquire further into the causes and formulate possible avenues for integrating gender-related issues into Communication and Media Studies programs thanks to the possibilities the new Bologna scenario has generated. In other words, we will address two key areas as they pertain to gender and communication and media studies in higher education: first, we will study the impact Bologna has had on the inclusion (or not) of gender-related material, topics, courses, etc., in the Spanish curriculum, especially in the design of the new degrees in Communication Studies and contrast that to the presence of gender studies in the US context, in particular, in the curricular offerings available in most liberal arts colleges; second, the differences will lead us to argue in favor of transdisciplinary models of learning that are much more in line with more inclusive cognitive paradigms that are geared toward social change. Our hypothesis is that the opportunity that this new educational space opened in European higher education has been insufficiently utilized in Spain given how many of the previous curricular models were superficially modified to the point that they merely reinstated the older disciplinary boundaries that, in most cases, lack an analytical orientation geared towards social critique and transformation. In order to challenge this hypothesis we carried out a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the number of Spanish universities that offer gender-related studies in their communication studies programs (journalism, audiovisual communication and advertising, and public relations) either in the guise of course content or learning objectives. We then contrast this with more flexible curricular models that helped us better delineate the goals of higher education in democratic and open societies.

2. Media Studies and Gender-Related Curricula

The implementation of the Bologna process in European universities, and in Spanish universities in particular, brought a dramatic transformation in the conception of higher education curricula. For the first time, universities could

develop their own programs without having to comply with the fixed models imposed by the Ministry of Education (Salaburu, 2011: 90-91). These fixed models relied on closed curricula with mandatory subjects and contents predefined by the government, hence allowing very little room for the inclusion of elective, subject-related courses that could shape different professional profiles. The result was a hermetic, closed catalogue or register of undergraduate/bachelor diplomas to which all institutions of higher education needed to conform. The spirit of flexibility, transdisciplinarity, and internationalization that pervaded the European convergence allowed for a new scenario in which universities could define the professional profiles of their graduates and devise curricular models according to their fields of expertise and their mission statements. In this context, Spanish universities undertook the challenge of redefining and reinventing themselves to compete at a European and global level. This process, like many others that involve dramatic changes, has been hard and controversial in all fields of knowledge, and has had some immediate consequences that remain unresolved to this date. One important outcome is the shift from a content- to a competency-based model of teaching, a change that is often confused with the championing of practical training over the theoretical and content-heavy preparation of students. For some, this is an operation that places short-term employability first and puts the theoretical and critical foundations of higher education at risk (Pando, 2011).

In the specific case of Communication Studies, several authors have studied how the Bologna process has polarized European higher education into two distinct camps: “a university for business and the market versus a university for critical transnational citizenship” (Cabrera, 2011:78). The former would reduce undergraduate education to the “how’s” whereas the latter defends a university that should be “the terrain of the why’s and wherefore’s” (Cabrera, 2011: 89). This is a heated controversy in areas such as Audiovisual Communication and Communication and Media Studies where professional training trumps the critique and analysis of our increasingly and falsely “simplified” world. Yet, even though the impact of the Bologna system on our graduates’ futures and on the job market cannot be adequately assessed so far, the European convergence and its flagship reform—the competency-based model—may not altogether be blamed for this vocational trend, as some were prompt to argue.¹ Transdisciplinary approaches, flexible tracks, and internationalized students and staff are some of the positive outcomes in the European

1. The changes carried out and prompted by the implementation of new curricula within the European Higher Education Area were subject to an intense social debate that, in the case of Spain, was mostly held in the daily press. The controversy did not only pivot around the change of a content-based to a competency-based learning model, but also affected the implementation, follow-up, quality assessment, and financial sustainability of institutions of higher education. In the Spanish context, the most comprehensive work in analyzing and explaining the controversial new model imposed on its universities is Pello Salaburu’s *España y el proceso de Bolonia. Un encuentro imprescindible* (2011).

academy. Not surprisingly, this has been the educational and research ethos that has driven the field of Women's and Gender Studies for the past thirty years, *avant* Bologna. The authors of this article find the content vs. skills argument somewhat short-sighted particularly if we pay special attention to how the liberal arts model prevalent on many US campuses complicates this state of affairs, and even more so if we take a closer look at the educational, research, and social change paradigm at work in Women's and Gender Studies departments and programs in that context.

A comparison of several undergraduate programs in the US and Spain will illustrate that studies of gender (its interdisciplinary content area, pedagogical experimentation, and social justice impetus) are far from being fully institutionalized in the Spanish academy in the area of Communication and Media Studies. A brief examination of the Spanish universities offering undergraduate programs in Communication, Media, or Journalism Studies shows that out of the 60 undergraduate programs surveyed at 45 different universities, only four institutions offer courses that specifically address the connection between media, communication and gender issues. The reasons for this scarcity must be sought not only in the still weak institutionalization of Women's and Gender studies in Spanish universities, but also in the inherited academic culture that interprets undergraduate programs as independent, self-reliant curricula, potentially threatened by interdisciplinary and intersectional intruders. Out of these 60 undergraduate programs in the area of Communication and Media, nearly 50% are degrees in Audiovisual Communication, a little over 27% in Journalism, almost 15% in Advertising, and the rest are degrees in other areas of Film and Media Studies:

FIGURE 1. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES IN SPANISH UNIVERSITIES



This polarization between Audiovisual Communication and Journalism aligns with the recommendations made by the National Agency of Accred-

ditionation in the *White Book of Communication* (2005), an agency charged with supporting and offering guidelines to universities devising new undergraduate programs. Edited by ANECA, (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Creditación) this *White Book* advocates for traditional distinctions between Journalism, Audiovisual Studies, Advertising and Public Relations on the ground of the continuous segmentation and specialization of these professional fields: “It is considered convenient—it is argued in this book—to keep the three fields independent, with particular emphasis on the specific development of each discipline” (Murciano, 2005: 15-16). It goes without saying that in the light of accelerating changes in mass culture and digital media, where traditional boundaries have necessarily been questioned and deemed obsolete, this distinction does not make sense: image, sound, and word are often brought together to indistinctly create informative, commercial, cultural, artistic, political, leisure, or advertising multimodal messages. What to study, how, and why remain, therefore, as critical questions for students whose professional horizons and expectations cannot, in any way, rely any more on a disintegrating professional body and on the fixed principles and limits of a discipline that is changing dramatically from day to day. Undergraduates should, on the contrary, be equipped with competencies that allow for a deep and critical understanding of their surroundings, with knowledge that enables them to face the complexity and diversity of mediated discourses, and with the creative and innovative spirit that makes them think everything anew. It is in this spirit that curricula should advance towards the inclusion of gender-related issues as a means to develop these critical competencies.

The following chart shows which Spanish universities offer gender-related courses in their undergraduate programs in Communication, Information and Media Studies:

TABLE 1: UNDERGRADUATE COMMUNICATION STUDIES PROGRAMS WITH COURSES IN GENDER STUDIES IN SPAIN (OWN SOURCE)

UNIVERSITY	DEGREE (240 ECTS)	COURSE	CREDITS
UPV/EHU	Audiovisual Communication	<i>Imagen, género e identidad</i>	6 OPT
University of Granada	Audiovisual Communication	<i>Representación audiovisual</i>	6 OPT
University of Sevilla	Audiovisual Communication	<i>Comunicación audiovisual y género</i>	6 OPT
University of Valencia	Audiovisual Communication	<i>Políticas de género y teorías del discurso</i>	6 OB
U Carlos III de Madrid	Audiovisual Communication	<i>Género y cultura audiovisual</i>	3 OPT

Despite Bologna’s intent to open the disciplinary fields, the chart shows how Journalism and Media Studies programs still heavily rely on traditional models of clearly cut professional venues. Problems arise when new platforms from which to rethink the routines of communication are left out, platforms that, for the authors of this article, should include trans-sectional

approaches to gender. It is not surprising that new courses are only offered in the specialty of Audiovisual Communication programs and not in Journalism or Advertising, given how most discussions of gender in this context are limited to audiovisual stereotypes and representations of gender. How could it be that only four courses in gender and communication are offered among the entire range of sixty different programs that run for four years and offer an average of 15 courses per year? Why doesn't gender have a stronger articulating presence in this curriculum? Why are issues of gender equity, gender stereotypes, gender violence, intersections of race and gender, of family, of sexual identity, of gender and economic inequality, being by-passed in these programs if all of these issues are at the heart of many of the most pressing social issues we face today?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the dearth of course work focusing on gender is alarming and the little offered requires a closer examination. First, three of the four courses are electives for students in their third and fourth years, and enrollment is limited to students majoring in Audiovisual Communication. This means that less than 7% of Communication and Media undergraduate programs offer students the chance to take a course with a focus on gender. This in turn shows that 93% of Spanish graduates in Communication are entering the professional world without ever having been exposed to any gender-related courses, and only 5% may or may not have taken an elective course in those universities in which gender-related courses are offered to begin with. It is only at the University of Valencia that a mandatory course is required. Overall, this means that less than 2% (1,78%) of Spanish graduates have been exposed to gender theory and discourse analysis. In the case of the University of Valencia course, this is a class taken at the beginning of the students' second year and with very little exposure to working with different kinds of media texts and narratives, and perhaps offered a bit too early for the inexperienced student wishing to develop a critical mind.

It is true that gender-related content may be present here and there in the curriculum at different universities, in courses offered in Communication Theory, Psychology, or Communication Ethics (this is the case of the University of Granada, for instance, that offers a course in audiovisual representations and stereotypes that includes gender stereotypes and misrepresentations among many other topics such as diversity, minorities, immigration, etc.). However, all in all, the sample is disheartening and calls for immediate action in compensating the gap in gender-related competencies and topics in this area. Even though Media and Communication Studies often occupy a strategic position as one of the most popular undergraduate programs in the schools of arts and social sciences, many other academic fields in the arts and humanities, with substantially weaker social impact, have nevertheless been more permeable to gender-related issues as a key interdisciplinary field and a productive space for social innovation. The remarkable exposure of media students and professionals together with their responsibility in the production, reproduction and consumption of mass media messages make them a strategic target for the development of gender and diversity awareness.

The reasons underlying this scarcity are complex and in our opinion should be sought in two structural problems in the institutions of Spanish higher education (HEI): on the one hand, the pervasive underrepresentation of Women's and Gender Studies departments or centers and their still too incipient impact on curricular development, and on the other, the problematic and erratic implementation of Bologna: the questionable way changes in the curricula were undertaken under the auspices of the Bologna protocol by Spanish institutions of higher education and assessed by the national quality assurance board. If, as stated above, the new scenario allowed for the design of more flexible and transdisciplinary curricula, very much in the light of the well-known slogan of the European Commission "New skills for new jobs";² it is equally true that this flexibility has somehow been resisted by professional and corporate bodies, as the previous example of the White Book of Communication illustrates. The fact that for the verification of new degrees the Spanish national quality agency (ANECA) demands very precise professional profiles that may assure a direct access to the job market has often transferred the old fixed and rigid curricula into the new system, putting "old wine into new bottles" so to speak, and allowing for very little flexibility in the choice of electives. This could be somewhat justified in the case of highly specialized scientific and technical education with very strict requirements for the exercise of a profession, as may be the case of engineering or architecture, but it is hardly defensible in extremely versatile fields such as Communication, Information and Media Studies, where awareness of social diversity (race, class, gender, ideology) is key in the coding and decoding of messages in the media and where interdisciplinarity is consubstantial to the area of study.

Unlike Spanish universities, US university curricula show that most students enrolling as Communication majors have access to several electives that are communication and gender-related. These offerings are reinforced by the presence of Women's and Gender Studies departments and programs that cater to a transversal education in women's and gender issues, irrespective of disciplines and curricular design. American courses are mostly content-based and courses in Women's and Gender Studies are often cross-listed between those programs and the more traditional departments such as sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, biology, fine arts, literature, or communication. Courses in gender studies are offered at all different levels of expertise ranging from introductory courses to highly specialized courses for fourth year students. All of these classes are based on critical thinking and offer students tools for analyzing and deconstructing the socio-cultural meanings attached to gender and for identifying patterns of representation in gender-related content in a diversity of texts and media. While US students could still complete a college degree without ever being exposed to gender-specific coursework, this is increasingly difficult given how most colleges and

2. European Commission : "New Skills for New Jobs; Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion"
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=568>

universities require that all students take a particular number of courses from within a core set of electives that guarantee exposure to issues and pedagogies such as these on gender, sexual identity, and difference. Hence, it must be said that all US college students at least have the opportunity to access this content.³

A closer look at the competencies associated with the gender-related courses offered by the Spanish universities addressed above shows that most of them are associated with critical thinking and its expression through the analysis of gendered discourses, both textual and audiovisual. Gender, discourse, identity, representation, or stereotypes are all key concepts in the development of course content. Analyzing discourses and narratives, understanding critical theories and concepts, developing critical skills and gender perspectives, are all competencies that gender-based courses necessarily develop. Accordingly, most of them pivot around the idea of cultural and societal narratives and their gendered construction, with a clear emphasis on textual representations and cultural theory and criticism. Hence, a gender perspective is developed by placing the focus on the object, the discourse, the construct, or the product and not on the subject, on the producer, i.e., on the individual who creates the textual or audiovisual discourse. Evaluating media messages through a gendered lens is crucial in the development of analytical and critical skills, but it is equally important to explore the gender bias in the practice of media production and in the configuration and development of media professional teams. Yet, this approach to the gender gap in the reproduction of market-driven practices has not been sufficiently addressed and demands closer attention.

The analysis of stereotypes and representations have become commonplace for gender and intersectional studies, but the question remains as to how to address the gender gap not only in the mediated discourses but in the agency and creation of the texts themselves. The inclusion of a gendered lens within Communication and Media Studies should not only mean a close scrutiny of the wide variety of texts (written, oral, visual, etc.) at play but also a questioning and understanding of the gender biases that operate in the practice of the profession itself as new media is created and produced. A recent survey carried out by the Association of Spanish Journalists (Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España) revealed how sexism was still pervasive in the practice of journalism, especially in decision-making positions. Even though most of the participants of the survey recognized that there were no apparent major obstacles for women to actively participate and reach executive positions, they also recognized that the figures and data were per-

3. The extensive and intensive landscape of American undergraduate curricula in colleges and universities, and their organization in majors and minors, make it particularly difficult to undertake a systematic and exhaustive study in comparative terms with the Spanish system. However, all of the universities surveyed showed a similar pattern and more or less balanced offerings in Women's and Gender Studies and, in particular, in media and communication with a focus on gender. See lists of programs and courses at <http://www.artemisguide.com/>; <http://creativefolk.com/directories.html>; <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/programs.html>

sistent in showing a male dominated world.⁴ British feminist cultural theorist Rosalind Gill defines this type of situations as scenarios of “flexible sexism,” i.e., as sexism that takes place in working environments that apparently are “cool, creative, and egalitarian” and calls this subtle phenomenon the “unmanageable inequalities’ ... because they exist and operate outside the interventions and management strategies invoked to challenge those injustices” (2011: 62). These are, of course, “unspeakable inequalities” because, in Gill’s terms, they go “largely unnoticed and unspoken about even by those most adversely affected by them” (2011: 63). The current unyielding economic deterioration undoubtedly stimulates a sexism that finds its most severe face in media and cultural industries (2011: 63), an aspect that is also highlighted in the Spanish survey mentioned above (FAPE, 2013: 10-11).

This brief analysis of the poor presence of gender-related issues in the field of Communication Studies in Spanish undergraduate curricula proves, on the one hand, that the flexibility and interdisciplinarity underlying the spirit of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and the Bologna process did not necessarily result, in the case of Communication and Media Studies, in an opening of the curriculum to intersectional questions related to gender, sexism, and social inequalities. On the other hand, it does show that this opportunity should not be missed, as inequalities and sexism still operate in the world of the media, not only in the production and consumption of media artifacts, but also at the very core of media industries and their management. Never before has the European academy been in a better position to fill this gap and work towards the full integration of gender-related issues in Communication and Media Studies, through the development of gender-related competences and skills in textual and visual media culture. Learning and developing these competences matter for media and communication students, not only because they will help them grow as better and more critically engaged individuals, but also because they are, and will be, strategic agents in the production and reproduction of mediated reality, with the capacity to inspire others and with the power of change.

3. Gender, the Media, and Learning for Social Change: A Multiplatform Effort

The initial analysis we conducted points to the severe lack of attention given to issues of gender within the curricula and research agendas in Spain.

4. The survey was carried out in 2013 by FEPA (Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España) and Estudios de Comunicación and shows that more than 91% of those surveyed accept that media management positions are still dominated by men, and 72% admit discrimination in these management positions. What is more interesting is that 71% of the people surveyed think there is a substantial gap between the academic records of both men and women and their relation to the positions occupied in the firms, so much so that there is no correlation between the excellent academic performance of women and its translation into better job positions (4).

While cognizant of the role the media plays in the democratization of the public sphere in that it articulates and models notions of citizenship, of identity (both sociocultural and personal), and, of course, of emotions, we find it surprising that given the fertile research trajectory of Gender Studies in Europe and the US and the shift in curricular content, pedagogy, and emphasis of community values that the Gender Studies model facilitates, that there would be such a small impact in the Spanish curricula in general but especially in the area of Communication Studies for these programs set the tone for the future transmission of information, development of opinion, and sensitivity to social critique. Despite the shared interests and objectives, it would appear that the introduction of gender as a legitimate category of study is still tainted as “political” (non academic) or “partisan” (gender being a category only relevant to women). The lack of gender-related research in the disciplines and curricula in Spain can now be cleverly addressed within the parameters of Bologna.

In the context of the US liberal arts paradigm of higher education, Women’s and Gender Studies students, researchers, and practitioners have become the vanguard of knowledge production (Berger and Radeloff, 2011:5) for they embody learning, research, and community practices that put interdisciplinarity, pedagogical experimentation, and advocacy at their core. In other words, on many college campuses, Women’s and Gender Studies departments and programs have become distinctive because of how they uniquely triage research, learning, and activism.⁵ These programs have “pushed for curricula transformation that translates into students who have been trained to learn multiple perspectives and to demonstrate the application of knowledge in pursuit of a more equitable society” (Berger and Radeloff, 2011:59).

Historically, Women’s and Gender Studies programs have pushed for profound structural changes on the level of research and pedagogy and in the classroom. In terms of the latter, the WGST classroom is conceived as an

5. Dartmouth College, the first Ivy-League institution to create a Women’s Studies Program in 1978, began a pilot program in 2013 that brings together the teaching in the Women’s and Gender Studies Program (WGST), the student activism in the Center for Gender and Student Engagement (CGSE), and a newly created research center, The Gender Research Institute at Dartmouth (GRID). This unique umbrella organization brings together the different synergies between classroom learning, research, and the messiness of change. This interfacing of teaching, research, and social change hopes to become a model for the future of higher education in many more disciplines given how this multiplatform dialogue allows us to better train future leaders to address the complexities, challenges, and dynamism of today’s world. At Dartmouth College, WGST (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~wstudies>) is a program that enlists more than 70 faculty members engaged in gender-related research and teaching, a program that develops the critical skills of 700-800 students each year through curricular offerings of approximately 40 courses per year in the different areas of study across the arts and sciences. Its close ties with the Gender Research Institute (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~grid>) and with the Center for Gender and Student Engagement (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~cgse>) link its pedagogical trajectory with those of great research impact and civic engagement.

emancipatory site of education and not one of disciplining (hooks, 1994: 2000; Freire: 2001), as sites that have encouraged active, student-centered learning instead of adhering to the passive-receptacle model of education grounded on the hierarchy of the professor “expert” and student “learner.” On the level of research, the Women’s and Gender Studies context allows for a qualitative shift in that women were no longer “merely” new objects of study or authors of a different sex; instead, these courses “allowed students to choose what subjects to study, to question how subjects would be studied, to challenge ideas of objectivity and power within research, and to create knowledge that would support the changes occurring on local, state, and national levels due to feminist organizing” (Berger and Radeloff, 33). It would seem then that the intellectual work of these programs is aimed at transforming higher education (how we teach and learn), at finding better ways of doing research (better questions, better probing of methods and suppositions, adding a broader diversity of voices), and at creating a new kind of subject or citizen-activist: informed, responsible, aware, empowered, and critical of his/her social realities. These changes and reformulations of teaching, learning, and researching have very concrete implications for the broader social context, implications that sometimes go unnoticed and that are not acknowledged as transformational. The Women’s and Gender Studies context has always been on the vanguard of social analysis and this makes its research and praxis key for the challenges our world faces today.

Many cultural critics have addressed the limitations of what could be termed the “learning-for-profit model” (see Bologna critique in the previous section) but the work of philosopher Martha Nussbaum is particularly insightful in her *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010). Here she defines the model of education needed for democracy as a platform of “mediation.” Nussbaum’s educational paradigm is inspired in the arts and their mode of creating knowledge, a platform that challenges the logic of economic profitability as the grounds for success in the realm of learning. In her words:

Given that economic growth is so eagerly sought by all nations, especially at this time of crisis, too few questions have been posed about the direction of education, and with it, of the world’s democratic societies. With the rush to profitability in the global market, values precious for the future of democracy, especially in an era of religious and economic anxiety, are in danger of getting lost. [...] We should have no objection to good scientific and technical education [...] My concern is that other abilities, equally crucial, are at risk of getting lost in the competitive flurry, abilities crucial to the health of any democracy internally, and to the creation of a decent world culture capable of constructively addressing the world’s most pressing problems. These abilities are associated with the humanities and the arts: the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a “citizen of the world;” and finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicaments of another person. (Nussbaum, 2010: 6-7)

The arts are not adornments or a surplus in Nussbaum's understanding of the public sphere but rather sites for political, ethical, and citizenship-making for the imagination has the power to question, to challenge, to re-imagine, to cure and heal but through a kind of symbolic "discomfort," i.e., by making each of us "strangers within our own languages" (Deleuze-Guattari, 1985: 26). If the students, researchers, and practitioners of Media and Communication Studies are to have this kind of "defamiliarizing" effect on audiences, if in order to live democratically within our public and private spheres we need to live as "foreigners," i.e., uncomfortable with the given, questioning and probing reality, asking the questions of the child-theorist (the "why's?" and "what if's?"), i.e., the imagination's questions (Rich, 2001: 167), what kinds of content and practices should Media and Communication Studies model? And why does the intersection of the area of gender studies prove to be so fundamental for this objective? These are the fundamental questions our article has attempted to address.

If Communication Studies were to fully embrace its uniqueness as one of the most interdisciplinary sites imaginable (given the confluence of science, social science, and humanities content in its output) and be inspired by the Women's and Gender Studies multiplatform model of learning (in the classroom, in research, in the community) its students, researchers, and practitioners would also generate avenues of interdisciplinary shifts of knowledge production through the creation and analysis of information that would in turn help the humanistic project of a better prepared citizenry. If Nussbaum argues that the capacity for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies "alive and wide awake" (10), the ability to think well about a wide range of cultures, groups, and nations in the context of a grasp of the global economy "is crucial in order to enable democracies to deal responsibly with the problems we currently face as members of an interdependent world" (10). Could this not be the mission statement of many Media and Communication Studies programs? If Bologna wishes new curricular design in the EU to be skill specific, focused on tangible and measurable (quantifiable) outcomes, redefining "education" as "training," let us resist this move or better yet, distinguish between a specific subset of disciplinary skills that students should gradually master and an psychological-ethical proficiency defined as the communication student's ability to imagine what Nussbaum terms "the experience of another" (10), a capacity she believes almost all human beings possess in some form but that need to be "greatly enhanced and refined if we are to have any hope of sustaining decent institutions across the many divisions that any modern society contains" (10). In Nussbaum's thinking here lies the crux of the health of our democratic systems:

Every modern democracy is also a society in which people differ greatly along many parameters, including religion, ethnicity, wealth and class, physical impairment, gender and sexuality, and in which all voters are making choices that have a major impact on the lives of people who differ from themselves. One way of assessing any educational scheme is to ask how well it prepares young people for life in a form of social and political organization that has these

features. Without support from suitably educated citizens, no democracy can remain stable. (9-10).

As a conclusion, it should be the goal of all Media and Communication Studies programs to encourage a deep self-awareness on behalf of its researchers, students, and practitioners of the supreme complexities of the world we live in and of the role of the media in our experience (or not) of that complexity. To do this outside an interdisciplinary paradigm or to ignore gender as one of the core threads of any course of study and analysis, as the Spanish case has proved to have done, is to condemn any given program to obsolescence and to short-change its students from developing critical thinking skills, interdisciplinary dexterity, openness and awareness of diversity, more intricate and better formulated research questions, and avenues for applying knowledge for social transformation. In today's context, this is something we cannot afford. Communication Studies have an integral role to play in the health of the social contract and in creating a meaningful diversity of players in the public sphere, and the structural change operated in the new EHEA scenario is the opportunity that should not be missed. If gender continues to be a particularly acute and stubborn marker of inequality (as evidenced in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals—<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>) Communication Studies curricula have a central role to play on the road to social justice.

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