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# THE PLACE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN GENDER STUDIES, FEMINIST STUDIES AND WOMEN'S STUDIES: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN SUBJECTS OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED DURING TWO DECADES IN AN INDEXED PORTUGUESE JOURNAL

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## Abstract

*ex æquo* is a biannual international, interdisciplinary, and indexed Journal, edited since 1999 by the Portuguese Association of Women's Studies (APEM). This article presents the results of a descriptive analytical research derived from a thematic analysis of 399 articles published in *ex æquo* as part of a larger bibliometric study of its 39 issues published over the last 20 years. The analysis was performed on key-words and abstracts. The results reveal 12 main subjects related to gender and women's studies and that adult education research and practice are clearly absent within these 12 subjects.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, gender studies/feminist studies/women's studies, adult education research, thematic content analysis

This article begins with a brief presentation of the *ex æquo* journal to which we applied a bibliometric analysis. This journal is published twice a year by the Portuguese Association of Women Studies (APEM). Then, we review the field of Women's, Feminist and Gender Studies (WFGS) in Portugal in the last two decades and present the methodology we developed as part of a larger bibliometric study that involved the quantification of metadata. After that, we describe the twelve identified subjects and highlight the explicit absence of topics related to adult education in the articles published during two decades. Finally, we conclude the article reflecting on this absence.

## Context

*ex æquo* is a Portuguese journal edited and published since 1999 by the Portuguese Association of Women's Studies (APEM). APEM is a national, non-governmental and scientific association created in 1992 that gathers a significant number of experts and researchers from different academic and scientific institutions around the core issues of women's, feminist and gender studies. This international journal aims to contribute to the development, visibility and legitimation of knowledge produced by WFGS. It is published twice a year and is indexed in Scopus, amongst other citation databases. *ex æquo* accepts submissions in four languages (Portuguese, French, Spanish, and English) and the submitted articles undergo a blind independent review by at least two recognized specialists drawn from a range of countries that are also represented in its Editorial Board.

Without prejudice to the plurality and multiplicity of perspectives in the published articles, *ex æquo* reserves the right to only accept contributions aligned with the fundamental human rights,

reflecting the respect for diversity, integrity and dignity of the human condition. The promotion of the use of non-discriminatory and inclusive language is also a goal of *ex aequo*, given its purpose of contributing to changing discriminatory and stereotyped practices as well as misrepresentations based on sex or gender identities. The articles accepted for publication over the years include theoretical reflections and empirical data related to the field of WFGS, thus contributing to the problematization of the main issues that affect social relations between women and men in society.

A total of 399 articles were published between 1999 and 2019, the two decades under analysis in our larger bibliometric study. This larger study analyzed a total of 41 variables, including not only the subjects, but also other aspects such as keywords, concepts, articles profiles and authorship (Ferreira, Vieira, Silveirinha, Carvalho, & Freire, 2020). In this article, we focus on the thematic analysis performed on keywords and abstracts in order to find the place of education and adult education within the different identified thematic clusters.

The results should be understood within the context of the historical place of WFGS in the country, as explain below.

### **Women's, Feminist and Gender Studies in Portugal**

Over the last two decades, the relationships between science and gender have achieved increasing visibility in the international development agenda. This reflects the recognition that the way the scientific knowledge is produced, applied and translated to the society should uncover and contest the foundations of the structural system, like sexist and androcentric bias of traditional research methods, that produce gender inequalities (Ferreira, 2001).

*The field of women's, gender, and feminist studies* (WGFS) has been slowly growing in Portugal in the past 20 years, in terms of teaching, researching and publications. In the process, it has faced the difficulties of increasingly marked neoliberal policies affecting universities such as budget cuts, the supremacy of the so-called hard sciences, and managerialism styles. Over the years, the field of WGFS has indeed been shaped by a number of ongoing processes that need to be considered when it comes to evaluating its development, including the neoliberal globalization of education systems that turn ideas into commercial products, bureaucratization, exploitation and measurement of academic work, hyper-specialization and disciplinarization, among others (Ferreira, 2019; Pereira, 2019). Such factors undoubtedly influence the focus of research developed in different areas, the success of competitive projects in terms of the issues they cover, and the public (in)visibility of subject that social science and humanities research help us to better understand. Almost a decade ago, the first author of this article (Vieira, 2012), pointed out how Portuguese academia faced strong resistance to including gender dimensions and critical feminist perspectives and debates around structural sex/gender inequalities issues in the curricula, even in the social sciences and humanities. Professors and researchers working on WFGS tended to be devalued, often facing consequent negative effects on their career progression. Those observations are still valid, which may partially explain why WFGS seem to be kept in an inferior epistemological position in the scientific arena, receiving less project funding and thus discouraging young researchers from researching these fields.

This situation may also partially explain why in the national WFGS field, Education in general (Alvarez, Ostrouch-Kaminska, & Vieira, 2017), and adult education in particular, have received very little attention, as gender lenses and the importance of a gender sensitive perspectives and an intersectional approach of adult learning and development are still quite limited in critical research on education in Portuguese (Ostrouch-Kaminska & Vieira, 2016).

### **The Scope of the Study: Methodology**

The current descriptive analytical research deals with the thematic analysis of the 399 articles published in *ex aequo* Journal between 1999 and 2019 with a scientometric approach. The bibliometric analysis of the published articles was performed over a set of the journal's metadata that included

authors, abstracts, keywords and titles across 41 variables [eg: author(s) gender; frequencies of concepts; types of methodologies] that allow statistical descriptions of information (cf., Ferreira, Vieira, Silveirinha, Carvalho, & Freire, 2020). The data were also searched according to the main subjects identified in articles' key-words and abstracts. After several trials of including partial and sometimes disperse information, a list of twelve major subjects were found. They are briefly described in the following section.

### Thematic Analysis: Major Subjects

A list of twelve subjects appears in the formed clusters. The word 'education' and the term 'adult education' were totally absent, as seen in Table 1. Regarding subjects such as "visibility of women in history, culture and science" or "gender roles and stereotypes", there were no articles related to education and adults learning, either as a central area or as an area under discussion when conclusions and implications were debated. The keyword 'education' appears only in articles related to gender equality policies associated with formal education and gender mainstreaming in schools.

*Table 1: Thematic areas identified in abstracts and keywords (ex æquo)*

Subjects (n=12)	Frequency (1999-2019)	Examples of keywords	Brief description of cluster
Sexual Division of work	58 (15.38%)	work; profession; career; unemployment.	Gender issues from the reconciliation of family and work perspective, (un)employment, careers, professions and pay gap and opportunities between men and women.
Feminist epistemologies	55 (14.58%)	theory; feminism (s); feminist (s).	This cluster gathers studies of a theoretical nature that discuss literature, concepts and methodologies from different perspectives.
Identities and sexualities	39 (10.34%)	homosexuality; trans; bisexual; non-binarism; LGBT; queer.	This cluster relates to sexual orientation, homosexual relationships, gender identities (LGBT, Trans, Queer, etc.).
Equality policies	37 (9.81%)	co-education; student; school.	Articles in this cluster analyze and make comparisons between policies of equality; debate on the participation of women in institutions, at a national and international level; critically observe the scenarios of inequality and exclusion of women.
Social roles and gender stereotypes	36 (9.54%)	male; female; femininity; masculinity; parenting; stereotypes.	These articles discuss on how gender stereotypes, in their various expressions, affect social gender relationships. Many studies are related to professions,

			while others debate differences in education for boys and girls, etc.
Activisms and social transformations	29 (7.69%)	NGOs; associations; volunteering; participation; mobilization; social movement; fights.	These articles highlight the activities and results obtained by organizations and/or groups of women who act politically to fight against violence and inequality. This category also includes articles that highlight the social effects resulting from technological advances.
Violence	29 (7.69%)	violation; violence; prostitution; homophobia; patriarchate; misogyny; domination; bullying; genocide; dictatorship.	This category gathers documental research, statistics and fieldwork on the different forms of violence both/either against women and/or LGBT+ people, whether as virtual crimes, crimes of pimping or others.
Citizenship and rights	27 (7.16%)	human rights; sexual rights; health; abortion; maternity; right to equality; wedding.	The articles related to this category critically analyze the legal and 'natural' vs. pathological aspects related to issues such as abortion, gender transition, etc.
Gender representations in the media	23 (6.10%)	Media; Magazine; Press.	These articles involve research on representations from the media, the image of women in Christian religions and even women's representation associated with specific groups, such as athletes, educators, etc.
Political representation	16 (4.24%)	Power, democracy, politics.	These articles highlight female representativeness in positions of power and social recognition.
Visibilities in History, Culture, and Science	12 (3.18%)	Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo; Virgínia Woolf; scientist women; artist women.	These articles refer to the works whose object of analysis are works of reference authors, studies on personalities that stand out in culture, in politics, in the militancy, feminist organizations, etc.
Race/ethnicity, migrations, and intersectionality	11 (2.91%)	Intersectionality; gipsy; race; black; migration; post-colonial; decolonial.	These articles approach ethno-racial issues in different social, cultural and religious contexts, including people in diaspora contexts.

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They are related to racial discrimination, xenophobia and intersectionality issues.

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Note: The subjects are ordered according to the frequency of occurrences in the 399 articles analyzed.

### Concluding Remarks

The main goal of this work was to identify the place of education and adult education within a bibliometric analysis of 399 articles published in the journal *ex æquo* between 1999 and 2019. The results should be understood within a context in which the research options and the publication opportunities may be influenced by several factors, including some that are external to the authors. It should also be taken into account that *ex æquo* only reached international indexation in recent years. In addition, WFGS have a long tradition of research within sociology, history, political sciences, and related fields. Education in general – and adult education, in particular – are only a small part in collaborative research in these fields or in those opening up possibilities for a feminist critical perspective in empirical studies.

The evident omission of adult education research within the broader WFGS frame is a problem. In our efforts as researchers to promote a science committed to real life challenges of individuals and groups, adult education research in Portuguese should include gender lenses (Bem, 1993) and make use of an intersectional perspective in doing sensitive and empowering research that would enrich *ex æquo* as a journal. As Merrill and Fejes (2018) suggested, we need to move “away from just looking at one form of inequality to recognising that people experience multiple forms of inequality and domination in society” (p. 7). The ground created by WFGS is fecund because of its interdisciplinary nature, with different researchers working on the same problems through diverse but complementary angles.

Adult learners are not neutral members of society, and gender issues tend to exert a pervasive influence on how (adult) people perceive themselves and on the decisions taken across the lifespan in several domains (Ostrouch-Kaminska & Vieira, 2015). In a critical perspective it is also important to choose the most adequate tools and research strategies, as guides for making scientific knowledge valuable for action (Bergano & Vieira, 2016; 2020). The goal of adult education researchers and practitioners is certainly to produce science as an ally for positive individual and social transformation.

### Further Notes

All issues of *ex æquo* are available in open access (full text) at: <https://exaequo.apem-estudos.org/page/numeros-publicados?lingua=en> Publication in *ex æquo* is free of charge for authors (there is no article processing charge or publication fee). It is supported by the Portuguese Government, by means of the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). *ex æquo* is indexed in: Scopus, Web of Science-Clarivate Analytics (SciELO Citation Index), SciELO, CAPES, DOAJ, ERIH Plus, Latindex and Virtual Library of Women's History.

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