

Q&A with CGCS Visiting Scholar Carla Ganito

- 1) *Where did the title of your presentation—One is not made, but rather becomes, a feminine mobile phone—come from?*

The title is a play of words with Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" that dismissed the existence of an essential gender nature. Gender is understood as a historical and cultural construction. The research I am conducting is grounded on technofeminism (Wajcman, 2004) and on the assumption that gender and technology are mutually shaped. As there is no essentialist nature in gender, there is no essentialist gendered nature in technology. We have learned that although the design and the scripting embedded in technologies are an important step of the process, a whole set of other factors have to be taken into account. We can expect unintended or unanticipated uses and the best example in the scope of mobile communications is the huge success of texting, that was largely dismissed by the industry. This perspective allows us to take into account women's agency and offer a more complex account of the gendering process, one that incorporates contradiction. The mobile phone could have not been made feminine but it can become feminine in a context of a specific sociotechnical relationship.

- 2) *How did you get interested in this topic? Is there anyone else studying it?*

Although the mobile phone is currently one of the most pervasive communication technologies, little discussion of it has been framed from a gender perspective and even fewer works from a feminist one. Most of the work carried out on gender and mobile phones is done in a comparative approach, masculine versus feminine which has inhibited a more comprehensive understanding of the changes that might be occurring. Some scholars have recently been addressing this issue, namely Larissa Hjorth and Leopoldina Fortunati.

- 3) *Can you give some examples of the different ways in which men and women use mobile phones, or other differences between them that you study?*

The research is not centered around differences between men and women. Much of the previous research has been conducted in comparative terms, women versus men, and using a statistical approach. In this type of research we end up finding no differences between men and women. And that lack of differences is left with no explanation. My research uses a qualitative approach centered on women's specific experiences, leaving space for the contradictory effects and meanings for different groups of women. So it is not about differences between men and women but about the different meaning of mobile phones and their trajectory in women's lives. The aim is to contribute to an understanding of the gender-technology relation, focusing on the mobile phone, as a complex set of relations and affordances. Women should not be treated as a homogeneous group that is encapsulated in the binary approach.

- 4) *What are the major differences in mobile phone use in men and women in Portugal versus the US?*

Although I do not have a deep knowledge of the US mobile context I could say that Portugal has one of the highest penetration rates in Europe (139.64% versus 86.79% in the U.S according to ITU) and a high usage rate. It is a small but particularly innovative market in adopting and creating new technologies, services and applications. As an example, it was a Portuguese company that launched the first prepaid

service in the world. As for factors that could account for differences in usage between the two countries, Portugal has historically one of the highest rates of working women outside the home. Portugal is also a small country, especially compared to the United States, and thus friends and family generally live very close by which could also account for major differences in communication practices. By providing a national case-study, centered on the gendered shaping of mobiles in the Portuguese context, the aim is to lay the ground for future cross-cultural work.

Carla Ganito is a researcher at the [Research Centre for Communication and Culture](#) where she is involved in several projects at the intersection of communication and cultural studies. She is currently a PhD student at the Human Sciences Faculty of the Catholic University of Portugal where she also lectures on digital communication.

Her PhD research is on gender and technology, and is focused on the gender appropriations of the mobile phone in Portugal. The research is at the cross-road of feminist studies, cultural studies and new media. The main aim is to build a feminist perspective into the debate around the social significance of the mobile phone and to lay the groundwork for further comparative work.

Carla Ganito has an MBA in Information Management and Marketing and an M.A. in Information Management on the theme: “The Impact of Mobility on the Content Industry: Mobile Entertainment Trends in Portugal”, later published as a book: *Mobile Phone as Entertainment* (2007), Lisbon: Paulus.

Her research interests are new media use, gender and technology, technology and education and mobile communications. She has also been a consultant for several companies in the field of innovation and strategic marketing.