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PANEL 15

**MEDIA NARRATIVES AND
(SELF)REPRESENTATIONS
OF MEN AND
MASCULINITIES**

Chairs:

Juan Carlos Suarez Villegas (University of Seville, Spain)

Speakers:

- Sveva Magaraggia (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy)
- Gianluca Giraudò (Sapienza Università di Roma)
- Annalisa Dordoni (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy)
- Manolo Farci (University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”, Italy),
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- Alberta Giorgi (University of Bergamo, Italy)



"Singing with a different voice?" Transition towards hegemonic masculinity in Italian top charts songs

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Abstract

This paper examines popular music and its lyrics as the locus for analysing discursive strategies. It deals with the music's intention rather than with audience responses. Some of the predominant themes in popular music have been analysed through a qualitative content analysis of the top three songs of the weekly Italian charts between 2018 and 2020. The sample is comprised of 119 songs-- the majority in Italian, but also some in English and Spanish-- some of which remained in the top positions for many weeks, others only for one. These themes will relate to the social construction of genders, particularly the role that violence plays in constructing masculinities and femininities, as well as the relationships between them. The key theme running through this reflection is the politics of representation of intimate partner violence.

Popular music is an interesting case study, as it has become an inextricable part of how identities are produced and reproduced in contemporary societies (Bennett & Rogers 2016), including in the ongoing work of doing gender. Considering songs as an object is to examine them as a written text. Here, music lyrics are interpreted both as a mirror of society and means "able to construct the people" (Frith 1987: 137), able to recreate gender, class but also phenomena like romantic love, sexism, racism and homophobia (see for example, hooks 1994; Anderson et al. 2001; Thaller, Messing 2014; Bal 2020). As the feminist textual turn shows, reality is discursively constructed and "[L]anguage is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality of writing as of speaking, and as true of science as of poetry. (...) A disclosure of writing practices is thus always a disclosure of forms of power" (Richardson 1991: 174). As bell hooks highlights, language is also a place of struggle, and a map of sense shaped by power. Studying song lyrics means understanding the coding of the world and the common sense they (re)propose.



Masculinity and online platforms italian men’s voices about “virtual togetherness”

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Abstract

The intersection of masculinity and digital media occupies one of the less enlightened spaces of gender and media studies. Among other themes, in Italy social research investigated the discursive repertoires of men's magazines brands (Boni, 2004), the male models of cinema (dell'Agnese & Ruspini, 2007) and the representations of violence that are elaborated by TV shows and songs (Giomi & Magaraggia, 2017). Less attention was paid to online platforms, where masculinity is produced and transformed through homosocial practices (Ferrero Camoletto & Bertone, 2017). A considerable example is the manosphere, which is known as an informal network that includes websites, forums and blogs where different male groups, such as mythopoetic movements, Pick Up Artists and Incels, share conservative claims about gender and correlated issues.

With the growth of media interest and online involvement of men from all over the world, it becomes urgent to focus on the Italian context. This contribution relies on the experiences and voices of twenty Italian men that are interested in discussing masculinity. Bounded up with the phenomenon of politics of masculinity (Connell, 1996), these men participate in two different groups: *Maschile in gioco* (Rome) and *Campo maschile* (Brescia). By emphasizing their presence on Google mailing list and Whatsapp, the study takes into account beliefs, ideas and opinions men express about masculinity and online participation.

From a methodological point of view, the observation of the digital conversations is accompanied by the technique of “focused interview” in order to examine the relationship between each man and his group and detect his willingness to get involved in online discussions. The theoretical reference is Maria Bakardjieva’s work on “virtual togetherness”, which categorizes “the experiences and motivations that lead Internet users either to get involved or to stay away” from online platforms (Bakardjieva, 2003). By doing this, the contribution is meant to clarify to which extent the Italian men’s voice is configured as an online community and explore new challenges about masculinity and digital media.



Hate speech and gender violence online during the Covid-19 pandemic: The Italian manosphere and Incel and Red Pill virtual communities

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Abstract

Today, online groups sharing violent language and hate speech are spreading and multiplying. The Incel and Red Pill groups are part of an active and growing manosphere, in Italy as well as in other countries. The aim of the study is to analyze representations and symbolic discourses related to gender identities and models of masculinity, proposed and produced in the Italian Incel and Red Pill virtual community.

After a long online and covert ethnography in closed groups on social media, carried out from January 2020 to February 2021, two intertwined dimensions were identified: aesthetics, self-narratives and victimization; reification, dehumanization and violence against women. To code and analyse the empirical material, the software package for qualitative data analysis MAXQDA was used. The results showed that violence is immanent and integrated into the lexicon and imagery of these virtual communities. The violence against women is justified by a self-victimization narrative. Instead of questioning a rigid and extremely normative binary view, that traps them in unattainable patterns, and instead of reconsidering the extent to which their legitimate anxieties and fears are caused by neoliberal economic policies - that increase inequality, precariousness and unemployment (Kimmel 2013)- the young men who present themselves in these groups as fragile and subordinate, often denigrated for their physical appearance, ally themselves with oppressive hegemonic masculinities (Kaufman 1999) and implement a backlash against women (Faludi 1991) who do not respect, in their opinion, traditional gender roles and models, proper to sexist ideologies (Köttig et al. 2017).

Hate and violence against women are at the core of the construction and sharing processes of these meanings and narratives. Moreover, these virtual communities are a relational context which could act as a justifying ground as well as a trigger for transitions to violent practices also offline, as emerges from the various episodes of misogynistic terrorism that the authorities have linked to them, and particularly to Incel online groups.



“Reductio ad incelium”: a shitstorm in the italian manosphere

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Abstract

In the past ten years there have been intense debates in masculinity studies about transformations in men’s behaviour and their impact on gender relations. Nowadays, a significant part of these debates is dedicated to trying to understand how white heterosexual masculinities are produced in Internet settings, as demonstrated by the increasing amount of knowledge about the heterogeneous nature of the so-called Manosphere.

In this study, we seek to investigate the discursive construction of masculinity in digital environment, in order to understand not only how men position themselves in relation to conventional notions of the masculine, but also how, in the form of *established repertoires*, cultural history of masculinity both impinges upon and is transformed by those discourses. To do so, we have decided to analyse the recent Marco Crepaldi’s controversy. Marco Crepaldi is a social psychologist who runs channels on YouTube and Twitch, where he talks about male issues, such as *body shaming*, violence against men, social isolation, and feminism. In June 2020 he made some controversial statements on the social difficulties experienced by straight white males, which caused a large, polarized debate on social media.

Our paper presents an analysis of the Crepaldi case, based on: 1) the discursive production of Crepaldi’s argument 2) the frame analysis of the debate raised between late May and early June in *Il Meglio Di Internet* (IMDI), a closed Facebook group of 7000 participants, mostly in their twenties, who left 1214 comments under the post dedicated to the case. In addition, a series of focus groups was conducted among final-year students at the universities of Milan (Bicocca and Statale), Bologna and Urbino.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the discursive constructions of masculinity presented by Crepaldi and those that emerged in the Facebook group and focus group conversations, in order to understand the interpretative repertoires at play within these discourses, how they are structured around particular ideological dilemmas and what different subject positions the participants take up.



Religious masculinities: performing in/visibility on Instagram

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Abstract

Digital media studies on gender and religion have steadily grown in the last decade, showing that digital platforms: (1) contribute to the visibility and voice of marginalized actors, including religious women or LGBT+ persons, and offer a place for the expression of the complex nuances of gender performances of religious individuals; (2) are spaces of development of “alternative” forms of religious authority, that challenge, negotiate or complement traditional ones; (3) constitute a safe space for marginalized or minority voices to cope with exclusionary processes they may have suffered within their communities, and to activate forms of re-plausibilization of religion, to make it possible to re-embed oneself in the religious community; (4) open up spaces to unpack, discuss and criticize religious norms and conventions (for a recent overview, Lövheim and Lundmark 2019).

The contribution explores Catholic masculinities by means of digital ethnography, focusing on the Instagram posts that adopt two hashtags, #thosecatholicmen and #dignityusa: the first perform and renovate traditional Catholicism, praising fatherhood and brotherhood, while the second celebrate LGBTQI Catholics. Both hashtags are related to specific groups: however, focusing on hashtags rather than groups’ accounts allows exploring whether and how the hashtag is appropriated and experienced, broadening its scope beyond its initial launch. Differently to what occurs on Twitter, in fact, Instagram hashtags are used to specify the image content and to connect to ad hoc communities (Caliandro and Graham 2020).

Three main elements emerge from the analysis, contributing to the research on gender, digital media, and religion. First, the research shows the differences in the visual representations and expressions of masculinity emerging around the two hashtags – muscular and militant in one case, familiar and non-threatening on the other. Second, it illustrates the differences in the use of Instagram, which in one case is the place to construct and affirm role-models, while in the other it offers the chance of claiming the legitimacy of being both homosexual and Catholic. Third, it clarifies the complex mechanisms of visibility and invisibility that are into play in the case of LGBTQI Catholics.