



GENDER AND MEDIA MATTERS

WIDENING THE HORIZONS OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

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PANEL 6

GENDER, MEDIA AND LEISURE INDUSTRIES

Chairs:

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Speakers:

- Mariacristina Sciannamblo (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy)
- Roberto Carradore (Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy),
Tiziana Pirola (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy)
- Silvia Cabezas De Alcala (University of Barcelona, Spain)
- Alessandra Micalizzi (SAE Institute Milano, Italy)
- Marlene Radl (University of Vienna, Austria)



From representation to gameplay: analyzing the cultural mediatization of female characters in war video games

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Abstract

This contribution aims to examine the cultural mediatization of the relationship between gender and war by looking at the representation and agency of female presence in one of the most popular sagas in video games: Metal Gear Solid. The analysis draws upon the theoretical corpus of feminist film studies, with reference to two main concepts: the ‘visual pleasure’ by Laura Mulvey and the ‘female voice’ by Kaja Silverman. Although such perspectives are not new in game studies, here are employed to analyze both the visual representation and in-game agency of female characters in MGS5. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the character of Quiet, whose representational traits and role within the gameplay have animated a controversial debate among game audiences and opinion leaders. As MGS games are characterized by an ergodic dimension, namely the interaction requested to the reader to activate the text, the focus on both representation and game mechanics is crucial to provide a nuanced analysis of the gender portrayal. Therefore, mechanics, heuristics, and interactive affordances related to Quiet are considered as bearers of meaning rather than neutral features as they lead the way in framing the interactive potential of this character. The gameplay is usually overlooked in analyzing gender in digital entertainment even though, as game rules and dynamics, they are neither innocent nor neutral, and they can bear biases and stereotypes in the same way as plot and visual characterization.

The analysis will show how one of the most appreciated games of all time addresses women’s representation and agency, providing remarks that might be noteworthy for both scholars and practitioners. Indeed, considering recent controversies about online harassment against female game developers and critics (see the Gamergate debate) and, more generally, sexism in video game culture, several voices have spoken out in favor of a radical reform of the sector. Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand the ways in which a successful and alternative war game, such as MGS5, embraces or resists such a call for change.



Showing and Negotiating Gamer Identity in Live Streaming. Tactical and Strategic Uses of Femininity in the Italian Gaming Community on Twitch

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Abstract

Due to the recent transformations in hyperconnectivity, the video game world has been reshaped in a new configuration centered around gaming as a spectator activity, performed on video streaming platforms. Twitch.tv, thanks to its focus on video games, is the ideal space in which one's gamer identity can be broadcasted to a potentially global audience. At the same time, the intersection between video games and live streaming has transformed the gaming experience and the gamer identity by foregrounding the gamer's body in the relationship with their audience. In this evolving scenario, recognition of one's status as a 'real gamer' – which is what is at stake in claiming one's place in the gaming subculture – is becoming less and less related to the white male heterosexual teenage nerd stereotype and the experience of a digital boyhood, and is instead focusing more on the possession of gaming capital, the fundamental resource upon which access and positioning in the gaming space depend. As a result of these changes, female users have become more visible in gaming culture, which has become a contested terrain, torn between sexist backlash against female gamers and pushes towards their inclusion and recognition as fully legitimate members. There is still a lack of systematic studies on the impact of these parallel transformations – gaming as a spectator activity and the increasing presence and visibility of female gamers – on the gamer identity and on the relationship between streamers and their audience on Twitch. Our research tries to fill this gap by exploring, through a qualitative approach, the tactical and strategic uses of femininity in the Italian gaming community on Twitch, seen as a social field with its specific forms of capital and habitus. In discussing our results, we will focus on the gatekeeping processes aimed at protecting the power balances and the practices that regulate the available positions in this social space, and shed light on the negotiations employed by female streamers in building and maintaining a relationship with their audience and their colleagues. Moreover, we will highlight the tactics and strategies used by these streamers to lay claim to a gamer identity, which require a careful balance between asserting their gaming capital and performing femininity, seen as a form of erotic capital and a double-edged sword, at the same time a resource and an obstacle in gaining recognition from others. In conclusion, we will attempt a description of the possible outcomes of these balancing acts in the management of erotic capital, linked to female representations in video game culture on one hand and to audience expectations on the other.



Mermaids and sharks: Informational sexism at the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games

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Abstract

On 5th August 2016 started the XXXI Olympiad in Rio. The first Olympic Games in Brazil and in South-America. This study wonders about the sexist speeches or the gender discrimination in the headlines of Catalan newspapers during those days. The methodology used has two faces, one of quantity and one of quality. The study takes 15 days, the time the Games lasted: from 5th (opening ceremony) to 21st (the closing). To elaborate this analysis have deeply studied all the headlines of the digital edition of Superdeporte and the paper version of Sport, El mundo deportivo and Esportiu. A sample of 373 headlines, among those 202 devoted to male sport and 171 to female sport, has been analysed. This analysis establishes 3 big blocks: 1) Reification and sexualisation of sportswomen. 2) The terminology used in the construction of categories, "he" or "she", through adjectivations. 3) Journalist references to the personal life of the participants depending if they are men or women. In the theory experts in studies about gender and communication (such as J. Gallego professor at Autonomous University of Barcelona) have been consulted and poststructuralist philosophers defending the Queer Theory and the performative theory about sex and sexuality such as T. De Laurentis and J. Butler. Other authors are mentioned, G. Coll and H. Becker and the psychologist K. J. Gergen. Finally the given results show the sportswomen image as a sexual object persists. Women are adjectivated as "goddess" or "mermaid".



The Italian Music industry and the gender gap: a socio-cultural analysis

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Abstract

Creative media can be observed as part of the cultural industry as well as peculiar expression of the work market. Being part of the cultural industry implies the great responsibility of contributing actively to the production and the spreading of socio-cultural models.

This is the perspective by which we have looked at the Italian Music Industry in order to analyze the gender gap in three main realms: the frontstage, the backstage and the management.

Thanks to 41 in depth interviews with women, involved in music business, and 11 ones with men, we aim at understanding the psycho-social and cultural reasons that cause the worrying distance between the percentage of male and female workers in the music world.

Recent data highlight how worldwide, in music production, the man-woman ratio is 1 in 37 (USC-Annenberg - Spotify 2020); the rankings record the total absence of female artists in the top ten (Kehert et al, 2020); and even focusing on music labels and management, the highest percentage of women is in intermediate positions, with roles connected to communication; while they are almost absent from the top roles and those connected to the artistic direction (IFPI MUSIC IN EUROPE 2020).

After an initial overview of the results, a specific focus will be proposed on the field of music production considered by the artistic point of view as composition and writing and from the technical point of view as mastering and mixing. We will try to focus on the psycho-social mechanisms (Volpato, 2019), socio-cultural mechanisms that have been causing the gap in order to offer, future perspectives to reduce the distance and foster the inclusion.



Engendering Media Ownership? Gendered Media Control Patterns in Austria¹

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Abstract

Despite the feminist insight that media concentration signals the consolidation of men's economic and political power (Byerly 2014, 2011), a lack of research addressing gendered dimensions of media ownership persists. This paper asks how gendered media control patterns in Austria have evolved over the past twenty years and how they feed into a communicative right-wing populism. Populism in the media sphere is not only characterized by a proliferation of a populist rhetoric in tabloid media (discursive pillar), but also by media market concentration and oligopolistic ownership structures (political-economic pillar). Since media ownership potentially allows to exert political influence and shape public opinion, the oligopolisation of media ownership must not only be understood as a threat to media pluralism (Herman/Chomsky 1994, Doyle 2002, SEENPM 2004), but also as a lever to create and reinforce a masculinist media ownership structure that corresponds with a masculinist right-wing populism. Drawing on preliminary results from the POPBACK ("Populist Backlash, Democratic Backsliding, and the Crisis of the Rule of Law in the European Union") research project, the paper maps gendered ownership and control patterns in over 20 Austrian media companies for the last two decades and provides new data and insights on this substantial research gap. The paper explores historic and current shares of female ownership and female top management positions and investigates the effects of mergers and acquisitions on them. Building on this empirical presentation, the paper offers theoretical considerations of how concentrated media ownership enhances a masculinist right-wing populism by perpetuating hierarchical gender relations. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's hegemony approach, it is argued that mass media represents a contested terrain traversed by conflicting groups. Hence, media and media ownership take on different forms, positions, and functions in different historical conjunctures (Keller 1990). Given the current populist conjuncture, concentrated media ownership not only serves certain class interests but also certain gendered interests that seek to maintain a hierarchical status quo driven by social and gendered inequality. Concentrated media ownership in the hand of a few but increasingly influential men thus proves to be an essential component of a communicative right-wing populism in Austria.

1 Since the author is at the beginning of her PHD studies and the research project is still in the conceptualisation phase, changes to the research design cannot be ruled out.