



GENDER AND MEDIA MATTERS

WIDENING THE HORIZONS OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

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PANEL 7

GENDER AND TV SERIES

Chairs:

Rosario Lacalle Zalduendo (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain)
Milly Buonanno (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy)

Speakers:

- Annachiara Mariani, Gregory Whited (University of Tennessee, USA)
- Lola Costa Gálvez, Sandra Sanz-Martos, Sílvia Martínez Martínez (Open University of Catalonia, Spain)
- Chiara Checcaglini (University of Bologna, Italy), Stefania Antonioni (University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”, Italy)
- Süheyla Nil Mustafa (Marmara University, Turkey)
- Grazia Quercia (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy)



The Perpetuation of Sexual (In)Equality in Popular Television Series Set in The Italian Renaissance

Annachiara Mariani, Gregory Whited (University of Tennessee, USA)

Abstract

Ross and Padovani (2018) convincingly advance that “media not only reflects but also creates sociocultural patterns, norms and stereotypes and is increasingly seen as powerful actor in shaping public opinion and culture.” Television, like other types of media, portrays a shared version of “reality” that represents dominant gender relations and perpetuates an unequal status quo, leading to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Our presentation focuses on the relationship between gender and media in two contemporary television series set in the Italian Renaissance: *The Borgias* and *Da Vinci’s Demons*. In specific, we analyze the phenomenon of queer futurity, erasure and straightwashing in the above-mentioned series. We will also tackle the larger issue of gender (in)equality in relation to media ownership and governing arrangements, which together actively “other” past queerness.

Taking into consideration the urge for a constant redefinition of the relationships between Italianness, media, and queerness (Androne and Heim, 2020), our study attempts to reframe and adapt the gender and media framework through a close analysis of two historical series. We will examine how these historical dramas tend to produce very specific ideas about sociocultural norms that privilege and even concretize stereotypical ideas of a homogeneous, white, heterosexual Italianness which dismisses and erases any other type of sexual encounters. In their depictions, these historical series use modern interpretations and conceptualizations of queerness in portraying queer relationships, that which was not so queer in the past. This works to promote modern heteronormative relationship dynamics while disregarding the variability of past sexuality. We will also engage with theories of queer temporality (Edelman, 2007) by emphasizing how the series enact the necessary disavowal of the queer, thus banning social justice and queer futurity. The social, cultural, and political panorama that these series construct is as imaginary as it is pervasive and renders liminal any display of sexual behavior that differs from heteronormality.



Power and visibility: the representation of women in historical series on public television in Spain

Lola Costa Gálvez, Sandra Sanz-Martos, Sílvia Martínez Martínez (Open University of Catalonia, Spain)

Abstract

In the last few years, the audio-visual industry has increased the presence of women in fiction (Lacalle & Castro, 2017). Although there appears to be an abundance of content, the topic rapidly evolves to gender and power representation when we tackle the historical women topic (Donstrup, 2019; Salvador Esteban, 2019). The list is long and varied: princesses who were not allowed to reign, reviled female warriors, female writers under male pseudonyms, female invisible scientists, among others. In the case of Spain, Public Service Media has put forward gender representation and gender equality initiatives and products, including sports, news, or fiction. (EBU, 2021; RTVE, 2020). The question that arises from this debate is: how public service media women's representation in audio-visual production should be? The combination between public service media remit and engagement with citizenship, including user-generated content practices (Costa Gálvez & Hoyos, 2017; Guerrero, 2012; Rodríguez, 2016).

In this context of increased media attention we investigate how historical women are represented as the main character/protagonist in the Spanish public television (TVE) audio-visual production, including series, miniseries, and telefilms. The paper focuses on the Spanish audiovisual corporation, RTVE (Radiotelevisión Española). Specifically, we analyse the strategic lines (programming and promotion) and the regulatory framework to compare public policies and sector practices through case studies. We explore the complexity and variety of historical women representation, alongside a more traditional analysis of media studies. The questions are addressed using preliminary data gathered from official datasets (Catálogo RTVE Comercial and Archivo histórico RTVE) comprising 14 case studies, including series, miniseries, and telefilms, and using qualitative methods- in-depth interviews, conducted in 2021, with a variety of professionals of the public corporation, including RTVE's Equality Officer, TV Movies and Series Manager and Social Media managers. The preliminary findings elucidate how the union of public service media and gender studies is still an unfinished question as female protagonists of historical series are represented within a variety of arguments mixing stereotyped images alongside a critical vision to legitimise these remarkable women.



Girls on Screen: The Representation of Girlhood in the Italian Series *SKAM Italia* and *Nudes*

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Abstract

Following the multiplication of more nuanced and diverse teen narratives in American and British TV series, Italian serial productions committed to recount adolescence and youth have gradually increased over the last few years. In line with this trend, and consistent with the traditionally gendered target of teen dramas, the number of complex and less stereotypical young female characters has also increased. However, the representation of girls and girlhood in Italian audiovisual media seems still little investigated within the field of film, television and media studies. Recently, an increasing number of scholars have enriched the international field of girlhood and girls’ media studies, addressing a variety of topics, from the analysis of girls’ imaginary, to girls’ agency through digital media (Karlyn 2011, Projansky 2014, Kearney 2009, 2015, Andò 2016, among others); but just a few studies have dealt with the subject of girlhood and girls’ identities on Italian screens, focusing primarily on films (Renga 2014; Hipkins 2016, 2018), while a systematic investigation on girls in Italian series is lacking.

Trying to bridge this gap, our talk aims to explore the representation of girls and girlhood in Italian serial narratives through the analysis of two cases, both adaptations of Norwegian formats: *SKAM Italia* and *Nudes*. These two cases are interesting for a number of reasons: both build their storytelling around single lead characters, surrounded by groups of friends, and use them to tackle different adolescence and growing up related issues, with a focus on friendship, relationships and sensitive topics like sexual abuse, emotional breakdown, cheating, revenge porn. Both series put an emphasis on young female characters and friendship, with *SKAM* also standing out as the first Italian series to include a Muslim girl in a leading role. Moreover, the two series are associated by a realistic style, which intensifies the sense of closeness to the characters, and by the same Norwegian origin, a detail that possibly suggests a peculiar inclination in Italian production choices when it comes to unconventional teen stories.



Reconfiguration of the Hegemonic Femininity in the Turkish Work Place Dramas

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Abstract

Female-centered dramas have dominated the Turkish TV channels for long. Although these TV series show a variety of female representations, they seem to reproduce the traditional and conservative feminine identity. However the work place dramas especially the ones that take place in the corporate companies differentiate from the mainstream narratives of the feminine identity.

This study aims at illustrating the ideal female identity through the textual and discursive analyses of two Turkish TV series that take place in the creative departments of corporate companies. One of these TV series is *Kiralık Aşk* (Love for Rent) broadcasted between 2015 and 2017. The other one is *Erkenci Kuş* (Early Bird) aired throughout the years 2018 and 2019.

The two TV series will be analyzed by employing Michel Foucault's approach to discourse analysis since in our study it is aimed at exploring the discursive limits of a certain subjectivity, that is the hegemonic feminine identity reproduced in Turkish TV. The discursive analysis of the TV series as a text requires not only the linguistic elements such as the examination of statements and utterances but also the relations among the subjects and the organizational culture of the work place in the drama.

Moreover, the discourse analysis enforces us to analyze the socio-political conjuncture in Turkey which has led to the production of such female representations. In this respect, this study also tries to illustrate the social reality, that is the changing profile and mentality of the female audiences attracted to these TV series. It is considered that these TV series target the young women of the middle class who are not considerably skilled to compete in the work force of the corporate companies and living in the traditional neighborhoods of Turkish cities but are willing to build a career and a new and fancy modern life different from the one that is provided for them in the blue collar work force or in the traditional institution of marriage.

Both TV series share the similar storylines and narratives with respect to the heroine's success in the corporate company. The heroine who is underskilled for a job in the creative department of a corporate company starts to work in the company by chance. In time, both she and her colleagues find out that she is an innate talent which is in the end discovered by the hero and the company. The innate skills and capacities (such as photographic memory or aesthetic or artistic skills) and the indigenous culture of the young woman (such as having the traditional culture based on solidarity of the family or neighborhood and appreciating the traditional life and morals) are the qualities of the heroine which differentiate her from the rest of the modern and well-educated women who are her rivals in the company. The heroine in the end manages to overcome the rivalry and wins the love of the hero, who is also her boss, and also becomes a respected and appreciated careerist in the company.

It is observed that the subjectivity of the heroine in both TV series is offered to the audience as the ideal feminine subjectivity that is constituted at the intersection of certain hegemonic discourses of our era, that are postfeminism and neoliberalism.

Moreover, the intertextual analyses of the study also reveal that the ideal feminine identity in this TV series unites the feminine subjectivities offered in global and local movie genres, that is to say, the chick flicks of



Hollywood and Turkish melodrama. Hence, the ideal feminine subjectivity presented in the TV series turns out to be a certain kind of combination of the characteristics and modes of behaviors that are given in these two movie genres.

It is argued that similar to the feminine subjectivity represented in the Hollywood chick-flicks, the female figure is represented to endorse certain characteristics such as self-agency, self-empowerment, individualization and individual achievement, but the females are also illustrated as being in need of the male protagonists in order to reach success and fulfill their aspirations. In this respect, the female characters reproduce the gender roles given in the heteronormative discourse prevailing in the Turkish melodrama. They are expected to be modest women behaving in terms of the sexual norms of the conservative society and reproducing the solidarity culture existing in their neighborhood and families.



The distortion of feminism in serial fiction. Representation and perception of the mis-narrative of the feminine in Bridgerton

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Abstract

The representation of women on screen has been and continues to be a relevant issue (Buonanno 2014; Buonanno, Faccioli 2020), as it manages to both express current ideas about the feminine and influence perceptions and imagery about the sexes (Ciofalo, Leonzi, Quercia 2021).

In the field of serial fiction, narratives have recently been influenced by the multifaceted post-feminist current, which considers women free and self-possessed, but at the same time in constant search of the male figure, between hyperfeminization, denial of feminism and the search for a new status quo (McRobbie 2004). Telling the post-feminine has therefore been complex, giving rise to probable disorders in its representation, and subsequently of its perception: on some occasions the desire for women's affirmation has been portrayed in a distorted way, almost as dominant and overbearing towards the other sex. In such narratives, moreover, the female body is used as a means of exercising power, damaging those attracted to it, giving rise to a kind of "toxic feminism" (McCann 2020).

The goal of this study is to understand the characteristics of such representations and the resulting effects on perception. In this occasion, the dynamics of a kind of "female supremacy" represented in *Bridgerton*, a product of Shondaland productions, famous for its female-driven narratives, are observed (Griffin, Meyer 2019). Content analysis (Krippendorff 2018) on the episodes of the first season brought out mis-represented forms of the feminine and made it possible to identify a controversial passage in which this is particularly evident: the debated rape by the protagonist against her husband. In this regard, a qualitative analysis was carried out on the articles of famous U.S. newspapers that have discussed the scene, and on the comments to the same received on Facebook. The aim is to understand the perception and the degree of tolerance towards such a scene, as well as towards a gaze defined by the narrative as feminine that seems to be subject, on the contrary, to a fe-male gaze (Mulvey 1975), representing an empowered female character somewhat negatively, the consequences of which, it is hypothesized, could result in forms of rejection of feminisms or even fuel misogyny.