



GENDER AND MEDIA MATTERS

WIDENING THE HORIZONS OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

October 15-16, 2021

Sapienza, University of Rome (online and in-person)
Department of Communication and Social Research

PANEL 9

GENDER, MEDIA STUDIES AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Chairs:

Francesca Comunello (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy)

Speakers:

- Sofie Van Bauwel, Tonny Krijnen (Ghent University, Belgium)
- Elizabeth Prommer, Julia Stüwe, Juliane Wegner (University of Rostock, Germany)
- Chiara Gius (University of Bologna, Italy), Alessandra Minello (University of Padua, Italy)
- Sophia Hamadi (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France), Alice Missud (Paris Nanterre University, France)
- Maria-Jose Masanet, Margarida Carnicé, Maddalena Fedele, Anna Villarroya (University of Barcelona, Spain)



Let's Get Loud. An intersectional approach to the study of gender and media

Sofie Van Bauwel, Tonny Krijnen (Ghent University, Belgium)

Abstract

The study of popular culture has always been closely related to the study of class, gender, race, and sexuality. An increasing number of authors have called for an intersectional approach. However, the contradictory, fluid meanings articulated in popular culture render such an approach difficult, and many ignore the call for intersectional analysis. We will not. We will try to engage with an intersectional analysis of popular culture, using Shakira and Jennifer Lopez's performance at the 2020 Super Bowl Halftime Show as a case to study the intersections of identity markers. We aim to bridge the different meanings attributed to their performance and to understand them as different elements in the intersectional configuration. A discourse analysis of the performance, and of reviews thereof, was performed to unravel five elements highlighted in the discourse: the quality of the show, Shakira and Lopez's empowered performances, the incorporation of Latinidad elements, the performers' sexiness, and perceived political messages. Our aim to understand how the contradictory discourses about these elements arose urges the reader to use listening to grapple with the complexity of intersectional analysis. Truly listening includes putting effort into opening up academic cultures, finding other voices. It is important to recognize global gender inequity, but we need to start investing far more to understand the politics of media representations as a transnational affair that causes multiple conceptions of gender (and other related) concepts to clash, mesh, and integrate.



Gender, diversity and the streaming platforms: in intersectional content analysis

Elizabeth Prommer, Julia Stüwe, Juliane Wegner (University of Rostock, Germany)

Abstract

Streaming platforms (SVOD) are now a relevant player in the international and global audiovisual media industry. They proclaim, that their own produced content (often called SVOD originals) is more diverse than linear tv – and this on and off screen (Stoddart, 2017; Women and Hollywood, 2019). Netflix for example states, that they hire more female directors, than traditional producers. That linear tv is male dominated on screen, as well as off screen has been shown extensively, national, and internationally (author 2021). So consequently, the question arises, whether original serial SVOD content is as diverse as suggested (Corfield, 2017). With a well developed and often applied standardized visual content analysis ACIS (Audiovisual Character Analysis, author), a full sample of all serial original content of the streaming- und SVOD-platforms available in Germany (*Netflix, Amazon Prime, Sky, TNT Deutschland, Maxdome/Joyn*, N=192 shows) is the empirical basis. We analyzed two episodes of each show premiered between 1/2012 and 6/2019 (N=384 episodes). We used a well tested codebook (non-binary gender, open sexual orientation, ethnic background and more), coding all the relevant leading characters (N=1911).

The content analysis shows, that even in serial “SVOD-originals” female roles are underrepresented and portrayed stereotypical. 42% of the leading roles are female, with differences in different production regions (US 44 % and German 35%). There is a clear age gap: female characters disappear in SVOD originals after an age of 30. Regarding ethnic background serial SVOD content stays within the national majority population: this means overall programs 63% of all leading characters are white, but for example in Germany 89% are white. US-series portray less Latinx (8%) people, than living in the US (18%), interestingly gender and ethnic background have no intersectional correlation. To see ethnic diversity the user needs to watch the variety of productions from all different countries and regions. There is one aspect where we see more diversity: SVOD-originals show more diverse sexual orientations, with 9 percent, close to reality (Deveaux, 2016). The paper will discuss the intersection of gender and sexual orientation in more details.



Why data need intersectionality: considerations on femicide between data-collection and media representations

Chiara Gius (University of Bologna, Italy), Alessandra Minello (University of Padua, Italy)

Abstract

In recent years, several scholars have focused their attention on the importance of data collection to better understand femicide, the most severe form of violence against women. Yet, despite scholarly efforts, a suitable definition of what constitutes femicide is still missing, leaving unresolved a question that carries several implications in terms of the capacity of the phenomena to be adequately observed and described. On the one hand, there is a general agreement upon the political definition of femicide that poses gender and women's subordination to male dominance at the core of the problem (Russel and Radford, 1992). On the other hand, there is an ongoing effort to operationalize the political definition of femicide for statistical purposes, a task that has proved to be particularly difficult in light of the multidimensional characteristics of the problem (on this aspect see, for example, Eige, 2017; Lalli, 2020; Todesco, 2020; Weil, Corradi, Naldi, 2018).

Media representations in Italy fall right into this ambiguity. Only some murders of women are publicly recognized as femicide, while others fail to be seen as such, despite being included in the political definition of the phenomenon. Moreover, Italian media tend to represent the acts of extreme violence against women in a highly episodic manner (Belluati and Tirocchi, 2020; Lalli, Gius, Zingone, 2020), often failing to address the systemic dimension of the problem and to convey the link between gender inequality and violence. If media accounts seem to recognize femicide as a social phenomenon, its proper definition still seems elusive and uncertain, suffering from the aforementioned duplicity. Central to address this problem appears to be the issue of data: what journalists know about femicide and how much they know about its characteristics play a pivotal role in their capacity to properly recognize and describe it. Following these lines of reasoning and building on previous literature, our contribution will focus on the importance of expanding the type of data collected at the institutional level on women victims of homicide. In particular, we will address how data collection on femicide would benefit from a more intersectional approach, capable of better accounting for its complexity while offering much-needed information to raise awareness, foster knowledge, and improve media narratives.



Researching connected intersectionality on Instagram: the lexicon of the influencers and their social graphs

Sophia Hamadi (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France), Alice Missud (Paris Nanterre University, France)-
Researching connected intersectionality on Instagram: the lexicon of the influencers and their social graphs

Abstract

Activism on social media is reflected by and depends on online presence and shared discourse. The propagation of catchphrases (“Black Lives Matter”), hashtags (#MeToo) and the use of a specific lexicon is essential for the construction of the identity of an online community. Since the emergence of social media, research on digital activism developed to highlight the affordance of social media (especially Twitter) on militant practice (Clark 2014, 2016 on #BlackLivesMatter related hashtags; Fotopoulou 2017 on feminist activism). Our approach applies an intersectional framework (Rice et al. 2019) following McCall’s (2005) multi strand perspective on intersectionality, that posits the displacement of white feminism in favor of a more diversified activism that comingles race, class and gender analysis with a strong input from afro-american feminists.

In line with Brown et al. (2017) that proposed a quantitative study on the #SayHerName hashtag to investigate the prerogatives of intersectional activism, our research analyzes how online intersectionality is expressed on Instagram and more specifically how activists, depending on their influence in the network, spread ideas (about race, gender) by using specific words among the community of interrelated activists they belong to. We selected a corpus of 80 vocal leaders in a community of engaged feminist artists/activists. We manually collected the Instagram stories of their 80 accounts during the electoral campaign of 2020. Using the pytesseract Python package we created a corpus of 558 text-translated stories. We used the corpus to extract word-lists that were then compared to the social graph that highlights the influence of each activist and her/his connections.

The preliminary results show that activists that are closely related in the network are more prone to using the same words (example of one cluster : black/white/race), compared to less central members. The topics discussed by strong influencers (either gender or race related issues) have an immediate impact on the lexicon used by the community during specific events. The ratio of centrality/betweenness confirms the rather balanced distribution of afro-american and white american voices, and the emergence of latino american activists. Social media make it possible for several minorities and types of feminists to interact and organize offline actions around specific causes in particular, Black Lives Matter and anti-Trump sentiment.



Is the Gender and LGBTI+ Perspective integrated into Media Studies? A case study of the University of Barcelona

Maria-Jose Masanet, Margarida Carnicé, Maddalena Fedele, Anna Villarroya (University of Barcelona, Spain)

Abstract

This article explores in depth the students' and teachers' knowledge about the current level of integration of the gender and LGBTI+ perspectives in the curricula and teaching of the bachelor's degree in Audiovisual Communication at the University of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). We also aim to determine the perception that both teachers and students have of what it means to integrate the gender perspective in teaching and what are the advantages, resistances, shortcomings, and challenges to doing this. The final objective of the research is to detect and make visible the 'good practices' that teachers can implement in their teaching activity to integrate the gender and LGBTI+ dimension.

We have carried out an empirical analysis based on participatory action research at the Faculty of Information and Audiovisual Media. This approach involves researchers and participants working together to understand a problematic situation and change it for the better. It also makes it possible to 'liberate' participants to increase their awareness of the situation so they can take action. The data collection methods include focus groups, observations and a scientific literature review.

To that end, we conducted four focus groups: two with teachers and two with students. Each focus group was composed of 6-8 people involved in 6 to 8 subjects of the bachelor's degree. These 6-8 subjects were selected taking into account various criteria: course, semester, topics (long tradition in the field or innovative), and the nature of the contents (theoretical/practical), among others. We took care to ensure that the participation in groups (students and teachers) was diverse in terms of gender.

Our analysis provides empirical evidence on the implementation of the gender and LGBTI+ dimension in audiovisual media studies, which is a relatively unexplored area. In addition to understanding the current situation, which helps us to identify the challenges, difficulties and benefits of integrating a gender and LGBTI+ perspective into information teaching, this analysis also aims to detect good practices that tend to be invisible in everyday teaching activity and give them visibility and recognition. Therefore, this research will become action.