



# 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

## ROUNDTABLE

# GENDER AND MEDIA STUDIES IN ITALY

### Chairs:

Annalisa Tota (Roma Tre University, Italy)

### Speakers:

- Emanuela Abbatecola (University of Genoa, Italy)
- Consuelo Corradi (LUMSA University, Italy)
- Pina Lalli (University of Bologna, Italy)
- Tiziana Terranova (University of Naples "L'Orientale", Italy)
- Cosimo Marco Scarcelli (University of Padua, Italy)



## **Media and Gender. Reconstruction of An Imperfect Relationship**

Emanuela Abbatecola (University of Genoa, Italy)

### **Abstract**

In line with a practice recognised as essential by the intersectional feminism in which I recognise myself, I can only start from myself, from my positioning, from who I am. This is not for mere ritualized rhetoric, but to embody and make sense of my voice in this particular context.

Actually, maybe here it is easier for me to start from who I am not. I am not a media scholar, although the powerful charm that research related to social media studies exerts on me, especially when preceded by the “controversial” term Gender, used today as a bugbear to ward off any attempt to deconstruct and question an increasingly less traditional but still strongly patriarchal and heteronormative gender order. And maybe I am not a media scholar purely by chance, as my attempt to write a degree thesis about the image of woman in advertising (I am speaking about the end of the 80s and so about an analog era) failed after the second unsuccessful attempt at talking to the single “super requested” sociologist of communication who was present in my then “faculty”.

Who am I? I am an academic feminist sociologist – feminist is an unusable adjective in the Italian CVs and not only for convenience –, a gender scholar and a female director of a journal named AG-AboutGender. I forgot, I am also cisgender (she/her, as they say now), white and non-disabled. But now that I have positioned myself, doubts arise. Not about “sociologist, academic feminist scholar of gender studies” as this is for me more a feeling than a self-representation. It is the second part of my positioning that make me perplexed for at least two reasons. Firstly, defining myself as a white and non-disabled person does not come naturally to me (a little less for cisgender, but only for training motivations). They are labels in which I do not recognise myself because, unfortunately, I am also a victim of the trap of the invisibility of all what are dominant. Then, I am not able to see either my ability (and this becomes ableism), or especially my whiteness. Secondly, in our Italian academia, at least as senior members with a voice, we are almost all cisgender and non-disabled women, and all inexorably white (I used the neutral feminine intentionally).

So, I consider myself a feminist sociologist who studies gender and who is fascinated by gender and media studies, but this is not what I wrote in my CV for qualification for the second and first levels, because I would not have been placeable and for sure I would not have obtained either one or the other.

This long, unusual, and provocative premise is for reconstructing the framework inside which I intend to develop my reflection about the imperfect relationship between gender and media. The thesis I will discuss is that to deeply understand the state of “health” of these studies it is necessary to start from the status of gender studies in the Italian academia, which are affected in terms of visibility and thematic articulations by contradictions that derive from unsolved questions linked to the same patriarchal and heteronormative order that gender studies are called to deconstruct.



## **Media and gender violence: reviving the activism of women's movements**

Consuelo Corradi (LUMSA University, Italy)

### **Abstract**

Gender violence is a central issue on the agenda of the global women's movements. Since 1993, with the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights and then the Beijing Conference in 1995, it has become part of a powerful discourse that, in recent decades, has moved from the cognitive framework of women's *dignity* to that of transnational *human rights* discourse.

Traditional media, but even more so digital media, have picked up this theme, contributing crucially to strengthen the subjects and expand the contours of a discursive struggle over meaning that subsumes in the single category of gender violence a series of different actions in which the woman is the victim and the man is the aggressor.

The new women's movements, arisen in the aftermath of the Beijing Conference, have relaunched this theme into a unifying global narrative with a techno-political use of the social media. Thanks to the combined intervention of international bodies and movements, the theme of gender violence has acquired a global unifying force that few women's issues have shown during the Twentieth century. Today it is an unprecedented category for reading and evaluating contemporary societies because it is considered a threat to the social order (based on equal rights), not only to the victims. In representing and raising awareness about this threat, the role played by the media is decisive.

In the first part of my talk, I will outline the theoretical background presented above, bringing out the diversity of function and content between mainstream and digital media. In the second part, I will briefly present three national cases - Argentina, Italy, and South Korea - connecting three elements: the theme of gender violence, women's movements as the subject of the discursive strategy, and the media as the channel and media field in which the strategy is structured. In each of the three cases, the strength of the discursive strategy of traditional and digital media depends, even though in different ways, on how well features of local culture and politics intertwine with the global narrative.



## **Femicide's journalistic visibility in Italy: light and shadow of an emerging phenomenon**

Pina Lalli (University of Bologna, Italy)

### **Abstract**

The contribution will focus on a research conducted on the news coverage of 409 cases of voluntary homicides of women occurred in Italy over the course of three years (2015, 2016, 2017). While, compared to the data of a previous research, the attention of the news on these cases seems to increase, the newsworthiness is not always the same and in particular gives different selective visibility to episodes and aspects of a phenomenon that we consider as a cultural object at the core of an ongoing symbolic battle. A battle concerning the specificity of homicides with a female victim compared to those with a male victim. Therefore, we present the criteria we followed to build our database over the 3 years and the different classifications that can be drawn from it, with reference to the agenda setting in the national news and to the framing of salient elements that have been selected by the news outlets. The attempt to delimit "femicide" (killing a woman as a woman) from the murder of a woman proves to be complex, showing meaningful intersections with aspects related to the differences in social gender expectations and social gender roles that persist in our country. Referring more specifically to the femicide committed by the partner or ex-partner, interesting albeit slow changes are observed in the journalistic narrative, caught between the pressure of common sense about the apparent "private" dimension of the motivations, and the strong demand to treat the phenomenon as a public problem, that needs intervention to withdraw gender inequalities. As a general result, we observe that the agenda setting of femicide in the news outlets gives in part greater accessibility to the cases, but its main framing still persists in making salient the domestic aspects of the phenomenon, showing difficulty in going beyond the usual old song on a "sick love" or preferring to look for individual rather than social reasons. However, new ambivalences emerge that anchor the news to a sometimes more explicit social condemnation.



## **Popular Technosocial Feminisms and the Italian TikTok**

Tiziana Terranova (University of Naples "L'Orientale", Italy)

### **Abstract**

A possible definition of feminism, as Judith Butler put it, might be that of a collective endeavour aiming at "the social transformation of gender relations", even if such transformation may involve very different ideas of "what social transformation is, or what qualifies as a transformational exercise" (Butler *Undoing Gender*). This transformational exercise in Butler's work explicitly concerns the matter of norms, normativity and normalization – addressing in particular the question of the 'doubleness' of the norm, as that which "binds us" but also tends to create unity through a "strategy of exclusion". In as much as the norm is a social construction, this definition mobilizes the notion of social, as Wendy Brown has also suggested, as that domain "where subjections, abjections, and exclusions are lived, identified, protested, and potentially rectified." (Wendy Brown *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*) The paper suggests that the question of feminism as a project of social transformation today involves crucially participation by women and non-gender conforming subjects in technosocial digital spaces- such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok and such likes. Technosocial digital spaces are characterized by the technical mediation of social relations and actions – entailing the redefinition for example of "friending" or "following" as algorithmic action mobilizing complex assemblages of hardware and especially software. Technosocial spaces in particular involve a double characterization of the social as a technical medium of circulation of information (virality) and as a model for the extraction of patterns about sociality (data mining and machine learning). In technosocial spaces, the entanglement of the techno-logical and the socio-logical constitutes a kind of techno-sociogenesis where performativity operates both as a repetition of the norms of gender, but also through the action of more-than-human technical objects (filters, interfaces, plugins, protocols, algorithms etc). This constitutes a novel politics of technical mediation of gendered and sexed identities which deploy repetitive patterns (such as memes) as modes of undoing all kinds of normative stereotypes (such as age, looks, habits, conducts, behavior, sexual partners, language, parenthood, nationality, regionalisms and so on) while multiplying "normalities" and models of "livable lives". The Italian TikTok in particular, understood linguistically as the set of TikTok accounts that deploy Italian as a spoken language or through hashtags, presents a proliferation of intersectional and queer un- and re-genderings involving the mixing of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and age. Contemporary technosocial popular feminisms such as to be found in the many accounts that populate the Italian TikTok enact a multitudinous, more-than-human performativity which in explicit opposition to hateful speech to all effects undoes the national norms of gender to the point of making it an incomplete or uncomputable pattern.



## **It is a 'dirty work' but someone's got to do it. Studying digital media, sex, sexuality and young people**

Cosimo Marco Scarcelli (University of Padua, Italy)

### **Abstract**

Sex and sexuality hold considerable social and political importance. With the ever more constant presence of digital media in our lives, the relationship between communication technologies, sex and sexuality has become a priority issue for policy makers and institutions, especially in regard to young people. Simultaneously and, in recent years, we have seen an increase in studies in the field of sex media (Attwood 2018), with a certain predominance of works from the psychological and medical fields. Nonetheless, there is a scarce quantity of work that focuses on what it means for researchers to work in this field.

Recalling the concept of 'dirty work' (Hughes 1962; Irvine 2014), this paper serves as a starting point for a broader discussion on what it means to study the relationship between (digital) media, sexuality and young people in sociology and media studies, in Italy. It pays particular attention to the recognition of this field of study within academia, teaching, research, phases of results publication and personal planning. This work also insists on the need for full recognition of the importance and value of studies that concern the perceptions, preferences, assumptions, and social and cultural conditions surrounding practices such as sexting, erotic chat, sharing sexually explicit photos, dating and searching for sexual information, among others.

This paper ultimately defines the main road that will allow sociology and media studies to take back territory that has long been the prerogative of medicine and psychology. In turn, this will provide educators, policy makers, health professionals and other stakeholders new tools to support the creation of gazes more inclined to understand than judge, with an eye to the political form of sexuality, the logic of the media and the sexual citizenship of young people.