



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 IN FOCUS. ISSUE, PATHS AND PROSPECTIVE IN GEMMA RESEARCH

Chairs:

Flavia Laviosa (Wellesley College, USA)

Speakers:

- Milly Buonanno (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)
- Saveria Capecchi (University of Bologna, Italy)
- Francesca Comunello (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)
- Franca Faccioli (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)
- Mihaela Gavrila (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)
- Anna Lucia Natale (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)
- Paola Panarese (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)



Femmes fatales, saints, empowered women: female biopics in Italian public television

Milly Buonanno (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)

Abstract

Joining the current scholarly dialogue between biopic studies and gender/feminist/media studies, this work is meant to retrace the evolution of gender politics as expressed in the biographical genre that since the origin of Italian broadcasting has played the role of mainstay of domestic TV drama. In the context of a historical perspective, aimed at tracking continuity and change over time, a major focus will be put on the 2000s, during which time women's biographies on Italian television have seen considerable growth and, more importantly, have begun to replace traditional figures of saints and femmes fatales by leading female professionals (journalists, politicians, entrepreneurs, scientists and artists). Based on the scrutiny of several biopics and the close analysis of the most watched recent biopic about an 'empowered woman' (*Luisa Spagnoli* 2016), the paper aims to explore whether the new wave of female biopics breaks crystallized generic conventions foregrounding new representational strategies inflected by feminism or post-feminism.



Women scientists in Italian media in times of Coronavirus: between low recognition and success as experts

Saveria Capecchi (University of Bologna, Italy)

Abstract

During the months of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic Italian media helped provide some unprecedented degree of exposure for women scientists. In the speech I highlight the results of a quantitative and qualitative study on the portrayal and the self-portrayal of Italian women scientists based on the digital editions of eight daily national newspapers and ten talk shows on the main national television channels from February to May 2020. The research has the dual aim of highlighting, from a quantitative point of view, the actual visibility of women scientists compared to that of male scientists, and, from a qualitative point of view, the appreciation- or lack thereof- of their professional role. During my analysis I took into consideration two groups of studies, at a national and international level, focused on “women and journalism” and “women scientists and media”. The picture that emerges is ambivalent. From a quantitative point of view, in the talk shows women scientists constitute only a third of the total for their professional category. From a qualitative point of view, on the one hand most journalists of both sexes persist in minimizing the role of women scientists (for example, especially in the press, they dwelt on descriptions of age and aspects of private lives), on the other hand, the women scientists’ ability to portray themselves authoritatively, fighting prejudice and gender stereotypes, makes us optimistic about the role they can hypothetically play in inspiring and convincing the new generation of Italian women to study STEM subjects.



Stereotyped gender roles and scripts in Digital dating abuse. Narratives from an Italian high school

Francesca Comunello (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)

Abstract

This study analyses teenage narratives of Digital Dating Abuse (DDA) by focusing on how the sense-giving processes of social media usage practices interplay with sexist stereotypes and gender scripts. The theoretical framework draws upon gender-oriented studies on DDA. Moreover, we refer to literature on gender and technology, which accounts for the mutual shaping relationship between gender-based social norms and cultural beliefs, and user negotiations with social media affordances.

Studies on the consequences online environments have on gender scripts and stereotypes have gone from an early optimistic perspective to a less enthusiastic one. By adopting a mutual shaping of gender and technology approach, scholars have shown that gender stereotypes persist in online platforms.

We carried out seven focus groups in Rome (Italy) with 43 high school students aged 14-16. Thematic analysis of responses shows that, although both girls and boys perpetrate and suffer DDA on social media, participants interpret it according to gender scripts; they also classify users based on sexist stereotypes. Findings also reveal that participant perception of the seriousness of DDA is blurred by the combination of gender scripts and the meanings they attach to social media usage practices. DDA is likely to be tolerated (or even legitimized) as proof of love and viewed simply as a media choice unless it has concrete fallout offline, where abuse is otherwise tangible.



Gender in Covid-19 Campaigns. An analysis of Italian Government Communications

Franca Faccioli (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy), Lucia D'Ambrosi (University of Macerata)

Abstract

The Gender Studies approach of this contribution addresses the issue of communication during the Italian government's response to COVID-19. Previously, the government had often focused its communication strategies on the promotion of political activities, making use of stereotypical representations of men and women instead of a culture of communication that is based on the concept of the 'civil servant', with a gender-sensitive perspective. This article wonders whether or not the methods of disseminating information and representing the pandemic are driven by innovative models of communication that advocate a gender-conscious approach. Using a qualitative analysis, this contribution examines the government's communication campaigns during the pandemic and enquires if and how these aspects were considered, especially in the representation of gender. We analyse public service advertising on television and in the digital media. The results show distinct features and issues in mainstream and social media storytelling strategies.



Female subjectivity and innovation in media companies. Data, life paths and ambitions of professional women on Italian television

Mihaela Gavrilă (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)

Abstract

The presentation aims to highlight a 'gender' feeling (Ball, Kirkham and Porter 2020) related to successful audiovisual production topics, languages, format innovation, and capacity to create a positive organisational mood, while also remarking on the long term effects of a progressive increase in female representation in creative, productive, and managerial positions within the Italian television.

The research will propose a quantitative and qualitative mapping of women in major Italian media companies. In addition to analysis and data from official company sources, the main evidence will be derived from several in-depth interviews with TV producers, authors, managers and directors of successful programs. This methodology aims to trace a set of personal and professional career trajectories, their dominant contents and the distinctive and innovative features of their contribution to the Italian audiovisual creative industries.

The results show a general Italian situation that is not considered advantageous for women, especially in the labour market. The situation seems to be better today but not quite up to par regarding the audiovisual market. However, an interesting example, which brings out a turnaround, is that of production companies analysed: in these working contexts, women's roles emerged both at the top of management and in key operational and organisational roles within the productions of the various programmes.

This breeze of change could give new life, value, and pluralism to audiovisual texts and their creators.



Women and Radio: programming by and for women in the 1970s in Italy

Anna Lucia Natale (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)

Abstract

This article focuses on Italian radio programs made for and/or by women, particularly during the seventies. The aim is to investigate the specific contribution of radio in giving voice to women's rights, spreading awareness about the condition of women, and thus promoting new representations of female identity. Although many studies legitimated the historical links between women and radio (that was the first medium to enter the domestic space in the 1920s) (Andrews 2012, Andrews and McNamara 2014, Lacey 1996 and 2009, Mitchell 2000, Moores 2000), the interest in the topic remains low in Italy (with some exceptions: Rizza and Fenati 2004, Rella and Cavarra 2004 and 2011, Vincenti 2009, Perrotta 2015a and 2015b). Moreover it is just in the 1970s, with the onset of second-wave feminism, that public radio began drawing significant attention to women's issues, thanks to innovative programs that marked an important turning point towards a radio for women. To better highlight the cultural scope of the change in the 1970s, the article will reference the women-radio relationship starting with medium's origins in the fascist era, when radio propagated the ideal of woman as "angel of the hearth", and progressing to the post-war democratic period, that did not show significant shifts in the image of woman being spread by radio.



Sexualized confidence. A new gender display in over fifty years of female images in Italian fashion advertisements

Paola Panarese (Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy)

Abstract

The article examines the evolution of female images in Vogue Italia's fashion advertisements over more than five decades. The aims were: to reconstruct the evolution of female representations over time; to detect the persistence of gender displays (Goffman 1976, 1979) in women portrayals; to verify the existence, in 2000's, of the visual regime of confident appearing (Kohrs and Gill 2021).

To reach those aims, a longitudinal quantitative and qualitative content analysis was carried out on 1,963 ads and 2,568 male and female models.

The research found an evolution of women images over time, the decline of some traditional genderisms and a re-sexualization of the female portrayals, in the 2000s, interlaced with the confident appearing visual regime. What emerged was a new gender display, a sexualized confidence, which does not eliminate gender differences nor their structure of power but concentrates them in sexualized portraits of assertive and narcissistic successful women.