



Editorial

Media Representations and Narratives of Masculinities Across Europe

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Within media and gender studies, while the study of women's representation is critical to attaining gender equality, the deconstruction of patriarchal structures requires examining gender portrayals in a relational sense. The inclusion of masculinities and, specifically, the way boys and men are represented in the media is essential to understanding the full picture of gender (in)equality. In present times, notions of masculinities are becoming increasingly complex, and progressive gender ideals are ever more present but still coexisting with conservative ones. This makes the need to explore the expressions and dynamics of hybridity, backlash and breakthrough highly relevant – with media playing a pivotal role in these (re)configurations.

This special issue intends to bring together critical analysis focusing on media representations, discourses, narratives and counter-narratives of what it means to be, feel and behave “like a man” in today's Europe. It aims to contribute to a reflection on the stereotypes that underlie discourses in the mass media and in the online media, and on how cultural productions co-opt, confront, criticize, renegotiate and seek to promote gender alternatives that challenge gender inequality.

The volume opens with an article by Nicole Graham and James Bowness on men's experiences of the #MeToo movement exploring the impact of the phenomenon on workplace gender relations and how the #MeToo movement called for new forms of (self) governmentality within men. Drawing upon a Foucauldian feminist framework and based on a qualitative methodological approach, the authors analyse men's experiences across mixed-gender workplaces in Scotland to discuss the impact of the #MeToo movement. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis, Graham and Bowness identify two key themes: (1) feminist discourse as a threat and (2) workplace surveillance and behaviour change. The authors conclude that the hegemonic social construction of masculinity is being challenged both in mixed-gender and male-dominated occupations. Findings show that “heterosexual prowess” performances are no longer regarded as masculine traits but rather as “predatory”.

Zooming into the Estonian case, Armas Riives, Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Signe Ivask propose analysing how male journalists define and contextualise abusive communication while exploring the coping strategies these men employ within the hegemonic masculinities framework to overcome such experiences. Using a theoretical framework on abusive online communication towards journalists, the authors discuss how the different imaginaries that inhabit the digital symbolic spaces and are (re) created on digital platforms can amplify toxic behaviours and new violence in an online environment against journalists. Looking at the complexity of the consequences of violence in the personal sphere and the exercise of journalistic activity, Riives, Murumaa-Mengel, and Ivask highlight the gendered nature of abusive online communication and emphasise the stereotype of invisible hegemonic masculinity violence against male journalists. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews, the findings show that abusive and harassing online communication is normalised and perceived as feedback to journalistic work, and identify three types of dominant attacks that question the knowledge/training of journalists, their skills, and age.

Focusing on the new narrative promoted by the Spanish extreme right that attributes “gender ideology” to the principles and values of the feminist movement, the article from Sonia Núñez Puente, Diana Fernández Romero and Sergio D’Antonio Maceiras sheds light on how online misogyny and anti-feminist discourses are anchored in a “new masculinity” based on the rhetoric of men’s rights movements. The authors turn to the digital realm and provide critical analysis of a sample of tweets collected from 3 to 9 March 2019, coinciding with the #8M strike, exploring the discursive processes through which the co-optation of the victim’s space by popular misogyny operates. The data are analysed according to three analytical categories: (1) the war on the normal bloke; (2) the mirror discourse for co-opting the space of the “other” as victims; and (3) “feminist tyranny”, where feminism is advanced as a looming menace for men. The findings show that references to hegemonic Spanish culture during the Franco dictatorship are anchored in a popular misogyny strategy that blames feminism for the “normal man”. The institutionalised far right promotes a narrative of supremacy that vilifies feminist discourse and reinforces the process of male victimisation in a clear co-option of violence against women.

On a different note, Alparslan Nas’s article focuses on counter-hegemonic representations and receptions of hegemonic masculinity in Turkish advertising discourse, specifically analysing the counter-hegemonic narrative of Axe Turkey’s advertisements by exploring the audience’s engagement and responses through online comments. Utilising a theoretical framework on hegemonic masculinities in post-feminist media culture, Nas contextualises gender representations in women-centred advertising and criticism in the 1990s that culminated in a context marked by women’s empowerment in the commodification of feminism. In this context, the author approaches the masculinities in advertising discourse and frames the case of Turkey. Through qualitative and quantitative content analysis, Nas analyses user comments about two Axe videos on its official YouTube page released for International Women’s Day in 2018. The main findings show competing discourses on hegemonic masculine order in the audience engagement with the videos. The author concludes that the comments display contending discourses on hegemonic masculinity that enhance gender hierarchies and create

obstacles to critiquing the culture of hegemonic masculinity based on traditional gender performances.

In the article “The ‘Men Who Kill’ Through the Lenses of the Media: Performing Images of Criminal Suspects”, Marta Martins presents a historical analysis (2014-2016) of news published in newspapers of the United Kingdom, Spain, and Sweden covering high-profile transnational male criminal cases. This analysis of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers identifies media portraits of “men who kill”. The author highlights how male criminals are individually depicted as “monsters”, “insane”, and “ancestral” through intersectional analysis, mainly when associated with marginalised populations. Likewise, masculinities are presented in the news from a moral standpoint, emphasising ideas of “otherness” blended with journalistic angles on “migrant criminals”, which is particularly evident in cases of male sexual predators. Martins concludes that the newspaper coverage converges towards a moral gender-based ground, guided by a shared and stereotyped view of criminal practices associated with masculinities in three categories: (1) “The sexual killer type”, (2) “The killer head”, and (3) “The killer Others”. The three categories portray, respectively, the male perpetrator of violent sexual crimes, the insane man, and the “other” who is mistrusted for belonging to a marginal population. Thus, the media narratives dismiss patriarchy from the equation and focus on the moral stereotyping of male criminal representations.

Finally, Rebecca Jones offers a qualitative textual analysis of three vegan and plant-based cookbooks by male authors published to the UK market in 2018, exploring how a new way of thinking about food and diet constructs and inscribes masculine identities. The author presents vegan masculinities in opposition to hegemonic masculinities, which have a persistent linkage to meat as a symbol of manhood and provider for the family. However, veganism is not presented as a counterculture. Instead, Jones argues that multiple traits of masculinities are connected to plant-based diets and vegan lifestyles, anchored in constructions of health, fitness and the search for the ideal body. The analysis of three male-authored vegan or plant-based cookbooks emphasises how meat and dairy avoidance may reconcile hegemonic masculinity and marginalised masculinities in a dialectical relationship. The author concludes that a personality, celebrity, and an individualistic male narrative are the basis for reversing the traditional cookbook’s argument concerning hegemonic femininities, such as those associated with mother and caregiver.