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Gender and Media: Recent Trends in Theory, Methodology and Research Subjects

Editors

Sofie Van Bauwel and Tonny Krijnen

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Editorial

Contemporary Research on Gender and Media: It's All Political

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Abstract
Recent global social changes and phenomena like #MeToo and Time's Up Movement, the visibility of feminism in popular media (e.g., Beyonce or the TV series *Orange is the New Black*), the increase of datafication and fake news have not only put pressure on the media and entertainment industry and the content produced, but also generated critique, change and questions in the public debate on gender in general and (the backlash on) gender studies around the world. But are these phenomena also game changers for research on media and gender? In this thematic issue we want to provide insight in recent developments and trends in research on gender and media. What are the dominant ideas and debates in this research field and how do they deal with all of the changes in the media scape (e.g., platformization, the dominance of algorithms and datafication, slacktivism, and gender inequalities in media production). Moreover, how do current debates, theoretical insights and methods communicate with those in the past? The research field has changed rapidly over the last 10 years with repercussions on the conceptualisation of gender, its intersections with other identities markers (e.g., age, ethnicity, class, disabilities, sexualities, etc.), and media audiences' responses to these developments. We welcome contributions within the scope of gender and media and which are topical in the way they introduce new concepts, theoretical insights, new methods or new research subjects.

Keywords
#MeToo; gender; gender politics; media; post-feminism; representation

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Gender and Media: Recent Trends in Theory, Methodology and Research Subjects" edited by Sofie Van Bauwel (Ghent University, Belgium) and Tonny Krijnen (Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands).

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Recent global social changes and phenomena like #MeToo and the Time's Up movement, the visibility of feminism and/or post-feminism in popular media, the increase of datafication and the concept of fake news have not only put pressure on the media, the entertainment industry and the content produced, but have also generated critique, change and questions in the public debate on gender in general and (the backlash on) gender studies around the world. But are these phenomena also game changers for research on media and gender? In this thematic issue, we aim to provide some insight in recent debates within contemporary research on gender and media. What are the dominant ideas and disputes, and how do they relate to all of the changes in the media scape (Appadurai, 1990)? This issues' contributions deal with different aspects of these debates and trends. Each article examines an issue from a specific geopolitical context while including contemporary conceptualisations and thought about gender in the new media scape. Mostly empirical data deepen the knowledge and questions on the new (and not so new) topics that are typically explored by media scholars studying gender. How do we study gender in our media-saturated world and how does gender relate to the digital turn

and media's platformisation (Harvey, 2020)? We aim to shed light on the novelties within research on gender and media, which obviously encompass the lasting issues that have dominated the field for more than 40 years. In the afterthoughts of our book *Gender and Media: Representing, Producing, Consuming* (Krijnen, & Van Bauwel, 2015), we stated that studies often conclude that nothing has changed in over 40 years of studying gender and media and that the same gender inequalities remain in place. However, media are in flux, and recently content, media technologies, and the way that we, as audiences, use media have changed. In tandem with movements of social change (including fluid gender identities, hashtag activism, post-feminisms, post-colonialism, etc.), these changes may lead to a different answer: Nothing is the same and there are new routes in research.

The varying origins of the articles reflect the diversity in contemporary research and cover a wide range of themes. We distinguish the following categories, relevant to our contemporary media scape: the political, post-feminism, and representation. The articles range from studies on the representation of #MeToo in more traditional media to research on the online representation of feminism. Most research deals with feminism or post-feminism, the potential for social change or its incorporation and backlash. In comparison with previous special issues on gender and media over the years (Araüna, Dhaenens, & Van Bauwel, 2017; Krijnen, Van Bauwel, & Alvares, 2010; Tortajada & Van Bauwel, 2012), we can say that some concepts that have been introduced are here to stay. For example, the idea of post-feminist sensibilities (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004) made room for post-feminism without the polarised debate on the existence of a new wave of feminism. That is, debates on which feminist wave actually exists and is current is not part of these studies. Instead, like in society, the binary gender system is questioned not only by the introduction of non-binary as a gender identity but also by non-essentialist notions of gender as a variable or category in research. Politics and the political (Mouffe, 2005) are again at the foreground of most research, dealing with ideologies and power in grassroots organisations, activism online or offline or traditional political structures. A thorough interrogation of the gender imbalance and gender inequality with explicit attention to genders' intersections is the result. Young people are digital natives, and social media platforms like Instagram are considered to be the place to articulate new femininities (and many other gender identities). Social media platforms are considered the new arena where post-feminism has matured. Hence, the three themes 'the political,' 'representation,' and 'post-feminism' are intimately intertwined in this issue's contributions.

This thematic issue seeks to critically reflect on the past and the present and illustrates the need for constant reflection, rethinking and shaping of ideas, theories and concepts to grasp the complex relationship between gender and media. In the work of Shari Adlung, Margreth Lünenborg, and Christoph Raetzsch (2021), the political becomes more tangible as their research focuses on recent backlash against gender equality or feminism. In their article "Pitching Gender in a Racist Tune: The Affective Publics of the #120decibel Campaign," the authors question the changing modes of communication in the public sphere in relation to hashtag activism and they take a dive deep into the #120decibel campaign by the German Identitarian Movement in 2018. Their specific case illustrates the incorporation of feminism into nationalistic, misogynistic and xenophobic discourses and considers digital platforms and social media as echo chambers of right-wing whiteness, articulating an anti-migration standpoint with a so-called feminist position. Sofia Caldeira's (2021) article on Instagram as a potential emancipatory forum contradicts this incorporation of feminism and its backlash of emancipation. In her article "'It's Not Just Instagram Models': Exploring the Gendered Political Potential of Young Women's Instagram Use" Caldeira looks into online self-representation and social media's potential in relation to politics and activism. Caldeira's research includes an in-depth analysis of interviews with ordinary users questioning the political potential of this aesthetically oriented platform. Her research illustrates the importance of critically exploring the nuanced ways in which people's everyday experiences of Instagram intersect with broader cultural and political questions of gender representations. In a third article "Gender, Voice and Online Space: Expressions of Feminism on Social Media in Spain," Cilia Willem and Iolanda Tortajada (2021) focus on the current momentum of a series of hashtags like #MeToo to critically examine how feminism is represented on social media in Spain. #MeToo is considered a game changer for feminist action online and offline. In their article, the authors look into more than 20 years of feminist research in Spain that uses post-feminism as an analytical tool. The authors highlight different and even paradoxical movements of which each emphasises the structural struggles of violence against women, including online harassment. Movements range from feminism as an adopted element in the marketing strategies of personal branding to a reactionary backlash against feminism.

In the previous articles on gender and social media, self-representation and representation seem to be at the core of the studies be it in a qualitative way. The field still needs to monitor gender representations in all kinds of media content. The device, platform or media may have changed enormously, but media content is still representing gender. Quantitative analyses show the size of gender inequalities, they visualize how large the power imbalances actually are. In the article "Feminist Stereotypes and Women's Roles in Spanish Radio Ads," Anna Fajula, Mariluz Barbeito, Estrella Barrio, Ana Maria Enrique, and Juan José Perona (2021) use a quantitative approach to look into the representation of gender in

Spanish radio advertisements. This study suggests that the #MeToo movement has not yet had an effect on gender representation in advertising, which often still presents stereotypical gender roles.

A study by Marieke Boschma and Serena Daalmans (2021) challenges this rather pessimistic conclusion. In their thematic analysis of three popular Dutch teenage girl magazines, they find a wide range of post-feminist themes present. In the article "What a Girl Wants, What a Girl Needs: Analyzing Postfeminist Themes in Girls' Magazines," we see that media content for girls represents a diverse range of discourses, including a feminist, anti-feminist and post-feminist discourse. Themes like the body, sex, male–female relationships, female empowerment and self-reflexivity constructing a certain girlhood are all articulated. This somewhat optimistic view is also shared in the work of Priscilla Boshoff. Boshoff's (2021) article "Breaking the Rules: Zodwa Wabantu and Postfeminism in South Africa," presents an analysis of media representations of a South African celebrity (including social media): Zodwa Wabantu, a fearless, older, working-class woman. Boshoff draws attention to how Zodwa Wabantu embodies a global post-feminist subjectivity and hence the importance of including an intersectional and postcolonial perspective into one's research.

All of this issues' contributions conceptualise gender as a social construct, including the importance of bodies and how they are interpreted and labelled. Scholars on gender and media also struggle with this notion of gender and its intersections. Despite serious efforts to not essentialise gender and to adopt an intersectional approach, often we find rather classical and dichotomous gender notions. In the last article in this issue, Joke Hermes and Linda Kopitz (2021) offer a different conceptualisation of gender. In "Casting for Change: Tracing Gender in Discussions of Casting through Feminist Media Ethnography," the authors tackle the methodological problems in relation to conceptualising and defining gender in audience studies. Employing three types of analyses (a collaborative authoethnography, netnography and a qualitative content analysis), the authors show a way to enrich research on the diversity and complexity of gender identities beyond the gender dichotomy. The authors argue that researchers do have a duty of care, the reinvention of the ethics, subjectivity and reflexivity of the researcher in relation to herself/himself/themself and their diverse relations with media. In their conclusion, Hermes and Kopitz argue for recognition of the different definitions of gender, for building bridges between the different positions, but simultaneously to strongly hold one's own. Ethnographic research, especially online, is presented as one of the useful methods to understand the way gender is represented by media professionals and media users alike.

This issue's contributions form a modest overview of the current debates in the dynamics of media and gender research. In addition to qualitative in-depth research which showed contradictory debates and discursive articulations, quantitative research on gender representations showed how numerically seen, gender inequity is still ubiquitous. We would like to draw attention to one aspect that deserves more attention than it got: Each article shows that the local is important despite the transnationality of the media industry. While analyses from a political economy perspective emphasise the rapidly increasing transnational character of the media industries, local context are shown to be quintessential in understanding media and gender. For example, while in some places and some media outlets, #MeToo has been a game changer, in other contexts it caused a strengthening of traditional gender norms. Though gender inequality remains omnipresent, it takes different shapes, forms. Based on the contributions in this issue, we can truly conclude that not all has stayed the same for the past 40 years and we are curious to find out how current changes in the media industries, technologies, content and audience will affect future gender constellations.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

"It's Not Just Instagram Models": Exploring the Gendered Political Potential of Young Women's Instagram Use

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Abstract
With over one billion monthly users worldwide (Constine, 2018) and being embedded in the everyday lives of many young people, Instagram has become a common topic of discussion both in popular media and scholarly debates. As young women are amongst the predominant active users of Instagram (WeAreSocial, 2019) and the demographic stereotypically associated with online self-representation (Burns, 2015), Instagram carries an underlying gendered political potential. This is manifested through online political practices such as hashtag activism (Highfield, 2016), as well as through Instagram's use of user-generated content to challenge existing politics of representation, broadening the scope of who is considered photographable (Tiidenberg, 2018). This article explores how this gendered political potential is understood by young women using Instagram. This research is based on 13 in-depth interviews with a theoretical sample of female 'ordinary' Instagram users (i.e., not celebrities or Insta-famous), aged 18–35. Our findings illustrate how the perception of political potential is grounded in the participants' understanding of Instagram as an aesthetically-oriented platform (Manovich, 2017). Most participants recognised the potential for engaging in visibility politics (Whittier, 2017), representing a wider diversity of femininities often absent from popular media. However, this was seen as tempered by the co-existence of idealised beauty conventions and the politics of popularity within social media (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Furthermore, this political potential is accompanied by the possibility of receiving backlash or being dismissed as a slacktivist (Glenn, 2015). As Instagram becomes a central part of contemporary visual cultures, this article seeks to critically explore the nuanced ways in which young women's everyday experiences of Instagram intersect with broader cultural and political questions of gender representation.

Keywords
everyday politics; gender; Instagram; social media; young women

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1. Introduction

Instagram is currently one of the most popular and widely used social media platforms worldwide, amassing over 1 billion monthly active users (Constine, 2018). Initially conceived as an aesthetically-oriented platform dedicated to photo and video-sharing, making simple editing tools and filters easily accessible (Manovich, 2017, p. 73), Instagram has helped shape our collective visual culture imaginaries, popularising new photographic conventions and aesthetic values. The platform is becoming deeply embedded in the everyday lives of many people and its conventions permeate the wider media panorama (e.g., Caldeira, 2020).

Although self-representations (i.e., images that include the users' themselves) tend not to be amongst the most shared images on Instagram (Tifentale & Manovich, 2014, pp. 2–5), this idea—and particularly the selfie phenomenon—occupies a prominent place in both the popular cultural imaginary surrounding

Instagram and academic discussions about the platform (Tiidenberg, 2018). Our understanding of self-representation, however, should not be limited to a narrow association with the selfie. Rather, in the context of this research, self-representation is understood as encompassing not only the technical production of a symbolic media text (Rettberg, 2017), but also the exercise of curatorial agency—seeing the users' choices of how to represent themselves, what to share, and what to exclude as productive acts (Rettberg, 2014, p. 40).

In this way, we can understand self-representation as embodying the ethos of social media: allowing 'ordinary' people to "speak for themselves," claiming agency over media production and the strategies of representation they employ (Thumim, 2012, p. 136). As such, self-representation can have an underlying political character (Highfield, 2016). This broader understanding of 'the political' acknowledges how political themes and concerns can be framed around everyday personal experiences, choices, and preferences (Highfield, 2016, pp. 3–4). Issues such as self-representation, appearances, or lifestyles can be read as political, shaping society 'from below,' rather than through decrees or laws (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 38–40). In this light, we can, on a first instance, recognise the political potential of self-representation on Instagram when it is accompanied by deliberately political statements or when it is linked to overt efforts of fourth-wave feminism (Chamberlain, 2017). Although the idea of fourth-wave is still a topic of academic debate, many scholars and young feminists have adopted the term to refer to a contemporary resurgence of feminist ideas and discourses (Chamberlain, 2017, p. 1). The fourth-wave is largely defined by its adoption of digital and social media for activist organizing, engagement, and dissemination of information, taking advantage of user-generated content and self-representation to grant widespread visibility to a variety of previously marginalized groups (Chamberlain, 2017, p. 4). In addition, we can also recognize that political potential is often manifested in more tangential ways, for example, in self-representations that might have been constructed without any deliberate political aim in mind.

The idea of the photographable (Bourdieu, 1965) itself, imbues self-representational practices with this tangential everyday political potential. The photographable refers to the range of people, objects, and moments that are deemed worthy of being photographed in any given specific socio-cultural context. As such, it carries the cultural, social, ethical, and aesthetic values and conventions of a particular epoch and culture, valuing and privileging certain types of motifs and images, while disregarding others. The photographable is thus a cultural site where structured notions of visibility and inclusivity, but also inequalities and exclusions, are constantly being negotiated.

As user-generated content, self-representations on Instagram are created by the platform's extensive and inevitably diverse user-base. They place images made by 'ordinary' people in the public online sphere where they can potentially reach a massive audience (Tiidenberg, 2018, pp. 135–136). These self-representations rely on the assertion, perhaps unconscious, that this person and these moments of their lives are photographable—worthy of being aesthetically admired and shared online (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 81). They have the potential to afford visibility to often-marginalised groups of people, who are underrepresented or absent in popular mainstream media (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 7). These self-representations can thus challenge hegemonic visibility regimes and help to broaden the scope of who and what can be deemed as photographable (Tiidenberg, 2018).

Furthermore, there is also a gendered aspect underlying the political potential of Instagram. Young women are still amongst the predominant active users of Instagram (WeAreSocial, 2019), and the demographic stereotypically associated with Instagram and online self-representational practices (Burns, 2015). This gendered character is extended to the cultural imaginary that surrounds Instagram, which has become linked with genres of content stereotypically associated with women—including fashion, beauty, fitness, and lifestyle accounts. These genres are popularized by some of Instagram's most popular accounts, many belonging to women, including accounts of popular musicians, celebrities, and influencers (WeAreSocial, 2020, p. 133). These cultural imaginaries connect Instagram to the notion of 'women's genres' (Hermes, 2008) which is commonly defined as media primarily created for, or mainly enjoyed by, female audiences, for example, soap operas, romance novels, or women's magazines. Online self-representation is also frequently dismissed in popular media as a gendered practice, derided as trivial and associated with feminine vanity (Burns, 2015, p. 1718). Such discourse echoes and perpetuates the historically established tendency to dismiss women's genres as uninteresting, superficial, and overall 'low genres' (Gill, 2007, p. 13).

Yet, social media platforms, such as Instagram, also offer young women a simplified and democratised access to tools of media production and distribution (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012, p. 373), thus disrupting the historical associations between young women and the consumption of media (Kanai & Dobson, 2016, p. 1). This carries the potential to displace culturally established male-oriented narratives, which have historically portrayed women as a source of visual pleasure, framed by a male gaze, and relegated to the role of thing-to-be-observed (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975). This adds an additional gendered layer to the political potential of self-representation and Instagram use. Although all users, regardless of gender, engage (to varying degrees) in practices of self-branding and in the construction of an edited self (Marwick, 2013), the judgement afforded to these online self-representational practices is uneven. As women's identities are still stereotypically associated with a logic of spectacular femininity (McRobbie,

2007)—conceived as appearance-centric and consumer-oriented—women are often more harshly judged by, and valued for, their physical appearance (Wagner, Aguirre, & Sumner, 2016). In addition, as will be explored further in this article, women also tend to disproportionally be the target of online hate when engaging with political content (Harvey, 2020, p. 140).

However, this political potential is experienced in individual and deeply affective manners, in the course of everyday life and within mundane social media practices (Papacharissi, 2015). As such, this article aims to complexify the scholarly discussions of the political potential of Instagram by grounding them on the personal sense-making of the young women who engage with Instagram. This article takes a feminist media studies perspective (Van Zoonen, 1994), questioning how this gendered political potential is experienced and understood in the context of everyday media practices, and exploring the tensions and nuances in these discourses.

This research is grounded on a series of 13 in-depth conversational interviews (Van Zoonen, 1994, pp. 135–139) with ‘ordinary’ Instagram users (i.e., not celebrities or Insta-famous users). As our theoretical focus concerns the exploration of socio-cultural issues of gender in the context of Instagram, and particularly femininities, all the selected participants were women aged between 18 and 35 years old. This age range is associated with young adulthood and roughly overlaps, at the time of study, that of the millennial generation (Frey, 2018) commonly associated with the use of social media platforms. As seen before, this is a core demographic amongst active Instagram users, as well as the demographic stereotypically associated with online self-representational practices (Burns, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2018).

The selection of interviewees arose from a sample of 77 randomly selected Instagram users who participated in a prior qualitative textual analysis of self-representations on Instagram (Caldeira, De Ridder, & Van Bauwel, 2020). This initial roster of 77 users was established using a random snowballing strategy (Willem, Araüna, Crescenzi, & Tortajada, 2010) initiated from four randomly selected users from the researcher’s own following list on Instagram. These four initial users were not included in the final sample. From these initial users, we randomly selected another four users that they followed, and so on, until the final number of 77 users was reached. After these textual analyses, the 13 interviewees were purposefully selected (Patton, 2002), focusing on information-rich cases which offered compelling insights into diverse self-representational practices on Instagram.

Although not a criterion for the selection of the studied sample, all the participants were all established users of Instagram, having joined the platform three to seven years prior to the interviews. The interviewees were from eight different countries across Europe, North America, and Asia, and were from distinct (self-identified) ethnic backgrounds: Nine of the participants identifying as White, two as Multiracial, two as Asian, and one as Black (see Table 1 for an overview). It must be acknowledged, however, that these interviews addressed a relatively small sample of Instagram users, being limited in scope. As such, this sample does not intend to be representative nor generalizable, rather, the sample is overtly illustrative.

At the time of initial contact, all research participants had public profiles. Having been contacted via Instagram Direct Message and informed about the research and its aims, they gave their informed consent to participate. In order to respect their privacy, the participants were given the choice of being identified by a self-chosen pseudonym. Those who did not wish to be anonymous chose to be identified by their first names. After the interviews were finalised, a member-check was conducted, offering the participants an edited version of their interview transcripts and an overview of the preliminary results of the analysis.

The interviews were conducted between December 2018 and February 2019, using an array of online video-chat platforms (e.g., Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger, Skype, WhatsApp), and lasted between 25 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Following a close reading and preliminary analysis, the interviews were thematically coded (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003) in NVivo. Emerging themes and topics were identified within the data, establishing relationships between these, in an iterative process. This interpretative analysis was grounded in the participants’ own experiences and ways of interpreting and defining reality (Van Zoonen, 1994, p. 131), in an effort to bring their reflexivity, agency, and nuanced understandings of Instagram into the academic discussion.

2. Understanding the Convergence between Political Potential and Instagrammable Aesthetics

Instagram was recognised by the interviewed participants as allowing for many different practices and Instagram ‘cultures,’ characterised by different attitudes and intentions (Alexandra, Filipa, Ndiza). This multiplicity was also reflected in their distinct understandings of the political potential of Instagram. For some, like Kori or Cris Topolino, Instagram felt like a central tool to share political information and bring about societal change in the contemporary world. As Instagram became one of the social media platforms most used by these young women, something they engage with regularly in their daily lives and a major source of their media consumption, it also became a central platform for reading up on and engaging with political and social issues (Megan). Many of the interviewed participants followed accounts that engaged in political discussions on topics such as feminism (Filipa, Kori, Mariana, a miserável, Megan), body activism (Alexandra, Ndiza), race issues (Ndiza, Tyrah), ecological issues (Cris Topolino, Filipa, Frances), or inter-

Table 1. Overview of the interviewees.

Name*	Age	Ethnicity**	Nationality	Place of residency	Occupation	Social media platforms used	Instagram user since…	Frequency of Instagram use
Patricia	28	White/ Caucasian	Portuguese	Portugal	Multimedia specialist	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Mixer	2012	Daily
Çağla	31	White/ Caucasian	Turkish	Sweden	Doctoral student	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook	2013	Daily
Ndiza	24	Black (of African descent)	British	UK	Medical student	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Whatsapp	2013	Daily
Mariana, a miserável	31	White/ Caucasian	Portuguese	Portugal	Illustrator	Instagram, Facebook	2015	Daily
Danielle	28	Multiracial	British	UK	Creative: make-up artist, designer; Part-time nanny	Instagram, Facebook	2012	Daily
Kori	30	White/ Caucasian	American	USA	Creative Director	Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest	2011	Daily
Jac	32	Asian (Chinese)	Canadian	Canada	Business service manager	Instagram, Facebook	2014	Multiple times a day
Filipa	31	White/ Caucasian	Portuguese	Portugal	Medical Pathologist	Instagram, Facebook, VSCO	2012	Almost every day
Megan	22	Asian (Chinese)	Singaporean-Malaysian	Singapore	Student	Instagram, YouTube	2013	Multiple times a day
Alexandra	22	White/ Caucasian	Belgian	Belgium	Student	Instagram, Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr	2014	Multiple times a day
Tyrah	21	Multiracial	Canadian	Canada	Student; Part-time model	Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter	2013	Multiple times a day
Cris Topolino	28	White/ Caucasian	Spanish	Lithuania	Volunteer kindergarten assistant	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter	2013	Daily
Frances	26	White/ Caucasian	American	USA	Seasonal worker: camp councillor and holistic centre	Instagram, WordPress	2013	Daily

Notes: * = Interviewees first name or, if they chose to remain anonymous, their self-chosen pseudonyms; ** = as self-identified by the participants.

national politics (Danielle, Megan, Tyrah). Although some participants occasionally sought and engaged with this content quite intensely, diving into long searches about particular topics (Danielle), for many this engagement was more informal and fleeting, for example, checking Instagram on their commutes (Megan), or even by getting Instagram advertisements that reflected their political concerns (Frances).

Some of these participants also acknowledged the possibility of deliberately using their personal accounts and self-representations to engage in political discussions and reach more people (Filipa). Filipa, for example, combined picturesque photographs of her recent holiday to the Azores with posts calling attention to the problem of plastic pollution she encountered on the island's beaches. By doing so, she felt she was doing her part in educating people on this pressing ecological issue, seeing it as an alternative to the mass media communication that often felt insufficient.

In addition to creating their own posts, these young women also engaged with these topics by re-posting politically-concerned posts they saw elsewhere to their own Instagram Stories (Filipa, Megan, Tyrah). Through these Stories, these women engaged with other Instagram users, asking their opinions and, at times, starting constructive conversations (Tyrah). The personal relationships underlying many of their Instagram interactions were seen by the participants as facilitating the platform's political potential: "You can make people think. Because they know you, so they are going to care, maybe, a little bit about what you're saying" (Cris Topolino).

These political concerns can also become intertwined with everyday social media practices, existing alongside and within self-representational content such as selfies, outfits of the day, or photos of artful lattes that are not deliberately created with political aims in mind (Caldeira et al., 2020). As Danielle stated: "Maybe people get a bit confused because one post will be a selfie, then it will be a food post, and then I'll just talk about children dying in Yemen, you know?" Social media and Instagram can thus be understood as a hybrid 'third-space' (Papacharissi, 2015), where socio-cultural practices are intermeshed with personal self-representational practices.

For some participants, this sense of political potential was related to Instagram's ability to showcase a wider array of self-representations of women and lifestyles (Tiidenberg, 2018). Through these self-representations, the participants felt they could engage with content made by people who looked like them and with whom they could relate, by following, for example, accounts made by women of colour sharing natural hair styling tips—content that was largely absent from the mainstream media they followed and, at times, even from their offline everyday environments (Tyrah). This entanglement between Instagram self-representational practices and politically-charged personal identity issues can thus emerge in tangential ways, becoming deeply embedded in the participants' mundane and everyday lives, as Ndiza explains: "Yes, I'm very obviously black, so I'm probably going to post about it."

However, the participants' understanding of the platform and its underlying political potential was also deeply marked by their perception of Instagram as an aesthetically-oriented and entertainment-driven platform. Echoing Instagram's origins as a photo-sharing platform that made vintage-looking filters widely available (Manovich, 2017), many of the interviewees said that they were initially attracted to the platform due to its visual and artistic character, which allowed them to create, edit, and curate beautiful photographs (Alexandra, Çağla, Cris Topolino, Danielle, Filipa, Frances, Kori, Patricia). The aesthetically-oriented character of Instagram seemed to encourage the development of certain standards of Instagrammable aesthetics that content should satisfy in order to be deemed "good enough" to share (Ndiza). Unlike other social media platforms, Instagram content was seen as requiring a more carefully considerate and curated set of aesthetic conventions: "Well, on Facebook you can share just some shitty photos….But Instagram, for me, is about showing the beauty" (Cris Topolino).

This idea of Instagrammable aesthetics goes beyond the formal and visual characteristics of a photograph posted on Instagram, it also encompasses a careful consideration of lifestyle choices and experiences in terms of their visual and aesthetic characteristics, privileging those who look particularly good on Instagram and attract more likes and engagement (Caldeira, 2020, p. 93). In this way, Instagrammable aesthetics have become a lens through which to appreciate both online and offline everyday experiences (Ndiza). The notion of Instagrammable aesthetics is also interrelated with the platform vernaculars of Instagram: a combination of communicative styles, grammars, and logics that emerge from the relationship between the platform's technological affordances and the practices continuously enacted and negotiated by its users (Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen, & Carter, 2015). Platform vernaculars can thus shape the expected uses of a platform, influencing dominant conventions and preferred meanings. As Instagram's platform vernaculars are largely oriented around the creation of visual and aestheticised content, political discourses and practices can also become conflated with, and materialised through, Instagrammable aesthetic practices. For the interviewed participants this seemed at times to limit the perceived scope of political action of Instagram, as well as the range of issues that it could address. As Instagram was seen as a visual platform, political topics that seemed to require more verbal discussion were dismissed as "boring for Instagram" (Çağla) and relegated to other social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, or online news platforms like Bloomberg or Business Weekly (Alexandra, Cris Topolino, Jac). Political topics were seen as in need of being

reframed and presented in ways that were compatible with an Instagrammable aesthetics, combining, as Çağla put it, "Seriousness with art and photography." As such, for participants like Patricia, creating politically-oriented content for Instagram was limited by the need to adhere to certain conventions and standards, thus requiring particular aesthetic sensibilities and technical skills such as graphic design, composition, colour-correction, and digital editing—skills which not everyone possesses.

3. Gendered Political Potential

By showcasing women whose appearances and interests differ from those typically represented in popular mass media, Instagram can help to broaden the scope of who and what is deemed worthy of public visibility, thus challenging hegemonic hierarchies of representation (Caldeira et al., 2020). The interviewed participants emphasized this idea, seeing Instagram as helping to enact social change regarding what they considered "exposure issues," as exemplified by Tyrah with references to issues of race, or by Alexandra regarding questions of body activism. They felt that making these identities more widely visible would "broaden people's perspectives…and maybe even make them more tolerant" (Alexandra). This perspective closely echoes the idea of visibility politics (Whittier, 2017), which aims at gradual cultural and societal change—changing subjectivities, beliefs, and feelings—by making visible the individual experiences of potentially marginalised people, thus normalising these identities in everyday life (Whittier, 2017, pp. 376–377).

Despite this potential, Instagram at large, and particularly popular influencers and Insta-famous users, have been criticised for their limited diversity and for reiterating commercial standards of femininity and beauty (Duffy, 2017, pp. 183–184). However, for the users interviewed the platform also allowed them the opportunity to carefully curate the types of content they followed and consumed, tailoring it to their particular interests and needs, and thus it allowed them to create a space of diversity that was not necessarily reflected in their other media consumption nor in their daily lives offline:

> My social media spaces, Instagram and Twitter, in particular, are very…curated. I follow things that I like. If someone would borrow my phone and use my social media, the assumption would be that there are a lot of black people everywhere. [laughs] Which isn't true, not in the UK anyway….[On social media] it's very easy to make sure that my content is predominantly stuff that's about people who look like me. (Ndiza)

Ndiza developed strategic practices of content curation, for example doing regular "Instagram cleanses" where she unfollows overly-idealized content, such as influencers, Insta-famous pages, models, or celebrities. These practices of curation of consumed content were seen by Ndiza as empowering, allowing her not only to focus on relatable content but also to avoid seeing content which made her feel uncomfortable or created pressure.

For many of the young women interviewed, this everyday political potential also often had a particularly gendered aspect, being frequently linked to discussions about restrictive beauty standards. Some participants saw the user-generated and self-representational ethos of social media as rejecting the gate-keeping of traditional media, which could uphold stereotypical beauty and ideals (Alexandra). Instagram was understood as a "more democratic environment" (Alexandra, Çağla, Kori), which was moving away from the narrow ideals—mainly white, thin, young, seemingly heterosexual, and conventionally attractive—that still prevail in western societies (Gill, 2007, p. 12). The research participants thus recognised the potential of Instagram to showcase a wider diversity of femininities, for example, in terms of ethnicities (Ndiza, Tyrah), body-types (Alexandra, Ndiza), or gender presentations (Kori).

However, many of the interviewees were also critically aware of the limitations of Instagram's political potential, recognising that these diverse representations of femininities do not exist in a cultural vacuum. The overall media consumption of most of the participants interviewed was centred on digital and social media, with Instagram taking a significant role as one of their most frequently used platforms. However, these participants were familiar with the broader pop culture environment and its conventions, occasionally also engaging with traditional mainstream media, such as television or magazines. Furthermore, they followed on their Instagram accounts not only other 'ordinary' users, like their friends or families, but also an array of Insta-famous users, influencers, and even pop culture related accounts, including those of mainstream celebrities and models. As such, these participants recognised that both diverse and more conventional and idealised representations of femininities co-existed on Instagram (Kori, Ndiza): "Obviously [Instagram] has been a great tool in the discussion and the popularisation of things like body-positivity….But, at the same time, there are still Victoria Secret models on Instagram….You encounter both. And they kind of stand in tension" (Ndiza).

Instagram thus exists embedded in a complex, bi-directional intertextual relationship (Allen, 2006) with traditional mainstream media formats, drawing influence from their ideals and conventions, while at the same time shaping the discourses of popular culture. Some interviewees, like Mariana, felt this was seeping into some of the self-representations they encountered on Instagram: "There is always that desire to want to be like that person who appears in the movies. That stereotype, that idea of what you want to be is always inspired by someone who's 'above you"' (Mariana, a miserável).

These participants also acknowledged the existence of a recognisable Instagrammable beauty ideal, seen as

particularly prevalent amongst popular accounts. This look was exemplified by references to not only influencers, fitness bloggers, or Instagram models, but also traditional celebrities and models with strong Instagram presences, such as Kim Kardashian or Victoria's Secret models (Danielle, Jac, Kori, Tyrah). This look—achieved through the careful use of makeup, hair extensions, exercise routines, other body enhancements, and digital photo-editing and filtering tools—was usually understood as overly-glamorised, highly idealised, and "not very natural" (Danielle, Jac). Drawing back on the logic spectacular femininity (McRobbie, 2007), these observations echo the idea of idealised femininity as needing to be actively constructed and maintained through forms of aesthetic labour (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017). Instagram and social media can be seen as potentially extending the pressure to perform endless aesthetic labour, previously mainly associated with celebrities, into the realm of everyday life and towards 'ordinary' people (Elias et al., 2017, p. 5). This idealisation can be further linked to the notion of self-branding and the crafting of an edited self, which can be adopted, to a larger or smaller extent, by 'ordinary' Instagram users, curating their profiles and strategically revealing only certain aspects of their personal lives that fit with their desired 'brand' and aesthetic (Marwick, 2013, p. 15). However, these overly idealised representations were often derided as repetitive, unoriginal, and inauthentic (Danielle, Megan, Tyrah), and seen by some of the participants as potentially detrimental to people's mental health, creating unachievable ideals (Danielle, Tyrah).

These popular Instagram accounts and the aesthetic conventions they promote can thus become part of the broad 'cultural scripts' (Abidin, 2016, p. 87) of Instagram use. These cultural scripts can serve as inspiration for 'ordinary' users, being consciously or unconsciously adopted and echoed in everyday self-representational practices. Furthermore, this emulation of popular Instagram cultural scripts and aesthetic conventions can be understood in light of the social media logic of popularity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013) which underlies Instagram practices. This logic privileges the ability to be 'likeable' and attract attention, equating metrics of popularity (such as numbers of followers or likes) with standards of success (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, pp. 6–7). In order to increase their popularity, Instagram users can adopt sets of attention-seeking strategies and practices (Marwick, 2013), which can include careful consideration of what to post, thus merging the presumed ethos of authenticity of social media with practices of self-branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Although to a degree, all 'ordinary' users engage with popular cultural scripts regardless of their numbers of followers, the participants noted that the desire for online popularity can be linked to the replication of certain strategies of self-representation that have already proven popular, for example, emulating the lifestyle and consumption choices of influencers (Mariana, a miserável; Megan), or even their appearances (Tyrah): "People always want to match their idols. They're not so into being an individual, because that doesn't get the most likes. I feel like it boils down to that."

However, this underlying logic of popularity can also be understood as tempering the political potential of Instagram, limiting the reach of diverse representations of beauty or political discourses (Alexandra). Popularity on Instagram is defined not only by quantified metrics of popularity, but it also relies on algorithmic components to determine the ranking and visibility of certain users and posts on individual Instagram feeds and Explore lists (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, pp. 6–7). As some participants noticed, the potential reach of a post is thus dependent on the popularity of the user who shared it (Alexandra, Danielle, Jac). This can lead to more influential users being privileged, with more weight assigned to their voices, further reinforcing pre-existing logics of celebrity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 6):

> I think there's a potential for getting word out through Instagram. I think if you have somebody who's well-known, like actors, actresses, athletes….If they were behind the cause and they were posting about it, then I believe it could have an impact. But for your everyday person, I don't think so. (Jac)

Diverse representations thus abide by the same logic of popularity underlying Instagram at large. As Alexandra acknowledged, whilst more diverse-looking models and bloggers can co-exist on Instagram, they are not necessarily afforded the same visibility and popularity as more conventional-looking models. This further emphasises the tensions between the potential of Instagram and social media to disrupt and challenge hegemonic conventions of gendered representation, and simultaneously, its ability to reinforce and reproduce dominant ideals of femininity and beauty (Enli & Thumim, 2012, p. 100).

4. Negotiating Political Engagement on Instagram

Although most of the participants interviewed enjoyed following Instagram accounts that addressed political or social issues, and although they applauded these efforts and saw their value (Alexandra, Ndiza, Tyrah), many hesitated when it came to creating and sharing such content themselves (Alexandra, Megan, Tyrah). Megan, who had previously struggled with maintaining a popular (now deleted) fitness-oriented account, described her awareness of Instagram as a public platform in which she felt constantly observed and judged by strangers as the main reason for avoiding sharing "serious issues":

> To be able to share my opinion, knowing very well that these are controversial issues that could get me a lot of backlash was a scary concept for me. Because if I talked to my friends about these issues, I feel that they are more understanding, more forgiving….But if

> I say it on a public platform....If someone notices a small mistake that I've made they will be rejoicing.

These observations seem to echo the broader recognition that political and feminist discourses online are often met with online hate and misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Furthermore, this backlash tends to be disproportionally targeted at women, people of colour, and other marginalised communities (Harvey, 2020, p. 140). These participants thus felt the need to be constantly aware of the possible consequences of engaging with political topics on Instagram, developing varied strategies to try to minimise negative feedback and online backlash. These ranged from carefully curating their strategies of self-representation, shifting their accounts to private, filtering who they allowed to follow their accounts, blocking those who harass them, taking occasional Instagram breaks, or even deleting their public accounts, as in the case of Megan. Relegating politically-charged content to the ephemeral feature of Instagram Stories, in which shared content disappears after 24 hours by default, also emerged as a strategy to minimise potential backlash. This seemed to be not only due to its impermanence and lack of archive, which helps to limit the exposure to negative comments (Megan), but also because the vernaculars of Stories incentivise more personal, immediate, and less curated content (Çağla, Mariana, a miserável, Ndiza), potentially facilitating an openness to content that is often excluded from Instagram posts.

The political potential of Instagram also gets embedded into larger discourses of authenticity, which frame the 'transparent' sharing of everyday life and 'just being yourself' as key tenets of social media (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 60). The participants often emphasised the ways in which the content they shared on Instagram, including politically-oriented content, emerged naturally in the course of their everyday lives and was grounded in their personal interests and principles (Alexandra Cris Topolino, Danielle, Mariana, a miserável, Megan, Tyrah). Being "genuine" in their political engagements and, by extension, having a "genuine following" of people who shared similar concerns and mindsets was seen as a way to ensure positive feedback and avoid potential backlash (Danielle). Conversely, this alignment with authenticity can also serve as a cause for online backlash. Creating something "just for the sake of Instagram" (Megan) was often derided as dishonest and hypocritical. The participants thus tended to morally distance (De Ridder, 2017, p. 7) themselves from political statements they saw as insincere, for example when adopting a political "flag" just because of its current popularity or commercial viability (Mariana, a miserável).

Furthermore, some interviewees also expressed concerns that their more socially or politically-oriented posts could be dismissed as a form of slacktivism (Glenn, 2015)—commonly understood as a disconnection between the awareness of a political cause through social media and the actual political action taken towards it (Glenn, 2015, pp. 81–82). Cris Topolino was aware of this general reproach: "I know that some people maybe will laugh, like: Oh, this makes no sense. If you're complaining on social media you need to act!" Yet, she expressed some frustration at other's refusal to recognise that her posts were accompanied by offline activist engagements, such as joining feminist protests in Spain, as well as other people's dismissal of the relevance of these online statements because she saw social media as central to the ways we communicate nowadays.

However, more often, some of the participants felt that their 'serious' or political posts simply tended to be ignored and not receive much engagement (Cris Topolino, Danielle, Filipa). Being too strongly political and "shoving it into their faces" was seen as causing people to "turn away" from such posts and messages (Danielle). These remarks echo the idea of the 'feminist killjoy' (Ahmed, 2010). Addressing political or feminist issues is often seen as essentially disruptive, disturbing the 'peace' of the status quo and confronting others with unpleasant realities, and, as such, these issues can often be dismissed or are negatively received by others. However, while Ahmed sees the figure of the feminist killjoy as being someone who is willing to cause trouble, the concerns of these participants regarding engaging in politics on their Instagram seems to point to a certain reluctance to be ascribed to the category of killjoy and to have to engage with the backlash that often accompanies it. Moreover, linking back to the perception of Instagram as essentially an entertainment-driven platform, as described earlier, for Filipa and Danielle, there was also this vague sense of disillusion, as they saw people privileging "silly" or "shallow" content over more politically poignant posts:

> I get the feeling that when I do a more serious post people don't interact as much. It seems like they are ashamed, or guilty, or that they don't care, or don't want to think about it....I don't know, [if I post] some photo of me doing something silly, they are likely to interact much more than with something that is a bit more serious. I think this is a tendency that people have, to put their heads in the ground and to pretend they don't see it. (Filipa)

5. Conclusion

By centring the individual and affective manners in which young women engage with and negotiate social media practices (Papacharissi, 2015), this article aimed to complexify the discourses surrounding Instagram's gendered political potential, bringing forward the participants' nuanced, and at times contradictory, understandings.

Given the popularity and reach of Instagram (Constine, 2018), some of the participants saw it as an essential tool for engaging with political opinions in the contemporary media ecosystem. They either used it in informal and quotidian ways to consume politically-

minded content, or more deliberately, to directly address a wide array of political issues by creating and posting self-representations, or by re-sharing particularly interesting posts into their Stories.

However, these understandings of the gendered political potential of Instagram were also grounded by the participants' perception of Instagram as an aesthetically-oriented and entertainment-driven platform. Recognising the existence of particular standards of Instagrammable aesthetics, the participants understood that political discourses could also end up being reframed through this visual lens and materialised through aesthetic practices. This was seen as potentially limiting the political scope of Instagram to those topics that can be suitably addressed in a visual format, thus requiring particular aesthetic sensibilities and technical skills.

The interviewees also linked this political potential to the possibility of engaging with diverse and relatable content. Instagram allows these participants to carefully curate the content they consume, empowering them to create a space of diversity that was not necessarily reflected in the traditional media they consume or in their offline everyday lives. This perspective echoed the ideas of visibility politics (Whittier, 2017) which sees increased visibility of diverse self-representations as a way to broaden perspectives and increase tolerance.

The participants recognised the gendered aspect of Instagram's political potential, often linking these discussions to questions of representation of women and restrictive beauty ideals (Gill, 2007). They critically acknowledged that diverse Instagram representations necessarily co-existed with the more normative and conventional-looking representations which typically rely on aesthetic labour (Elias et al., 2017) and strategies of curation and self-branding (Marwick, 2013). The participants identified the existence of particular Instagrammable beauty ideals, such as those popularised by Insta-famous or celebrity accounts, seeing these representations as promoting a highly glamorised, idealised, and generally unachievable beauty standard. Following a social media logic of popularity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), these popular ideals can become 'cultural scripts' (Abidin, 2016), inspiring, sometimes unconsciously, the content produced by 'ordinary' users. In addition, the participants saw this emphasis on popularity as limiting the potential reach of diverse self-representations and political discourses, because more diverse representations are not necessarily afforded the same visibility as already popular conventionally-attractive users and content.

Finally, although most interviewees enjoyed following and engaging with politically-oriented content on Instagram, many did not feel personally comfortable in creating such content themselves. Aware of the possibility of public scrutiny, of receiving online backlash, or being accused of slacktivism (Glenn, 2015), these interviewees thus negotiated their political engagements on Instagram, developing several strategies to avoid attracting backlash. This hesitation to create content and self-representations that overtly engage with political and structural issues can be seen as significant in itself, reflecting larger structural and social forces, as the fear of backlash can serve as a form of discipline which may discourage feminist and political discourse (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The discourses explored in this work recognise Instagram as a complex and diverse platform, where the political potential to showcase diversity and broaden the scope of who can be considered beautiful and Insta-worthy always co-exists with its potential to reproduce hegemonic ideals and politics of representation. As Instagram remains a central presence in the contemporary media environment and essential to the lives of so many people worldwide, we should strive to critically explore the complexities of everyday social media use, where politics of gender representation can become enmeshed with aesthetic practices, often dismissed as trivial yet rooted in broader cultural logics that both shape them and are shaped by them.

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Article

Pitching Gender in a Racist Tune: The Affective Publics of the #120decibel Campaign

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Abstract
This article analyses the changed structures, actors and modes of communication that characterise 'dissonant public spheres.' With the #120decibel campaign by the German Identitarian Movement in 2018, gender and migration were pitched in a racist tune, absorbing feminist concerns and positions into neo-nationalistic, misogynist and xenophobic propaganda. The article examines the case of #120decibel as an instance of 'affective publics' (Lünenborg, 2019a) where forms of feminist protest and emancipatory hashtag activism are absorbed by anti-migration campaigners. Employing the infrastructure and network logics of social media platforms, the campaign gained public exposure and sought political legitimacy through strategies of dissonance, in which a racial solidarity against the liberal state order was formed. Parallel structures of networking and echo-chamber amplification were established, where right-wing media articulate fringe positions in an attempt to protect the rights of white women to be safe in public spaces. #120decibel is analysed and discussed here as characteristic of the ambivalent role and dynamics of affective publics in societies challenged by an increasing number of actors forming an alliance on anti-migration issues based on questionable feminist positions.

Keywords
#120decibel; affective publics; dissonant public spheres; feminism; Germany; hashjacking; migration; racism; right-wing activism; populism

Issue
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1. Introduction

In the past decades, an increasing mobilisation of right-wing actors on social media has been observed by feminist scholars and political scientists (Ging & Siapera, 2018; Sauer, 2020; Sorce, 2018). Such actors seek to delegitimise feminist positions or rewrite them for their own agitation where women's rights are turned into an argument against immigration. Fear of sexual violence is stirred up to support political demands for curbing migration flows and enhanced policing of public order. Quite often, such demands are voiced by a younger generation of primarily male lead figures who seek broader legitimacy for their claims by teaming up with female figures. But gender is not only instrumentalised by the far right in the anti-migration issue, as Sauer emphasises: "The radical right actively engages in ongoing gender struggles, in transformations of gender relations, in order to transform liberal democracies and to push towards a new hegemonic project" (2020, p. 27). Angry dissonance and an offensive stance towards the liberal state order are characteristic of these movements and their interventions in feminist struggles. This article proposes a theoretical and methodological approach for analysing such affective modes of communication in 'dissonant public spheres.' Based on a case

study of the #120decibel campaign, which was launched in January 2018 by the German-Austrian Identitarian Movement (German: *Identitäre Bewegung*, also referred to as Generation Identity; see Richards, 2019), the analysis shows how emotions like fear and anger underwrite the political thrust of the campaign as a way of governing people (Sauer & Penz, 2017), relying on demarcations of inclusion and exclusion to produce social positions of 'us' and 'them' (Lünenborg, 2019b). The focus on the affective dynamics around and within the campaign further allows us to understand how emotionally expressive interventions by right-wing actors seek to instrumentalise feminist positions for propagandistic purposes.

The case of #120decibel serves as a representative example of strategies that rely on affective dynamics and the divisive potential of right-wing activism. Presented as a grassroots campaign of white, Western European women against the alleged violence of migrant men in Europe, the campaign poses as an empowerment strategy for women's rights. However, it openly supports an anti-migration and racialised discourse on cultural uniformity and national identity. Geared primarily to social media, the campaign exploits a "technically and organisationally mediated 'unmediatedness"' as Krämer has put it (2017, p. 1298). Followers get seemingly direct access to populist leaders through highly complex infrastructures of mediation and networking. The empirical data for this article is based on the video of the #120decibel campaign itself, comments and replies posted by users under the official campaign video (in German) on YouTube (n = 1,130, obtained through the YouTube Comment Scraper on July 4, 2019) and a collection of all tweets around the campaign containing the hashtag #120db on Twitter (January to June 2018). The data from Twitter is especially useful for retracing the network of actors and the structures of the #120decibel campaign, whereas the different affective modes of communication around the campaign become apparent in the video itself and the users' comments. We combine these data sources to offer a comprehensive analysis of the affective publics emerging around the campaign.

The first part of our article discusses how populist actors are increasingly absorbing emancipatory strategies in the name of right-wing agitation. These strategies are pervaded by affective modes of communication targeting potential followers. They aim to create and spread dissonance in political debates, confusing (or destabilising) key terms to create legitimacy for actors' causes. The second part presents the case study of #120decibel based on the central analytic categories of actors, structures and modes of dissonant publics. Here we retrace the specific dynamics of the circulation of online content, their main actors and structures, and especially their affective modes (solidarity among women, polarisation, amplification). In the concluding outlook section, we discuss implications for feminist media studies, highlighting long-term effects of such campaigns and the gradual incorporation into seemingly 'alternative' world views which perpetuate a reactionary philosophy of feminism. We also address the methodological challenges of analysing the circulation of such content in a highly fluid online environment.

2. Populist Absorption of Emancipatory Strategies through Affective Communication

Emancipatory articulations and other inclusive forms of communication around feminist politics have long dominated the research agenda in feminist media studies. Prominent examples of feminist online activism include #SayHerName, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen and #GirlsLikeUs (Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles, 2018; Kuo, 2018), where intersectional inequalities and power hierarchies within the feminist movement have also been exposed. In light of #MeToo or its German predecessor #Aufschrei (#Outcry; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Maireder & Schlögl, 2014), social media have facilitated and shaped new spaces of emancipatory articulation, especially for actors misrepresented or ignored in journalistic discourse.

These emancipatory potentials, though, are becoming gradually absorbed by populist and right-wing actors on social media and the web, posing significant challenges for feminist media studies, both analytically and methodologically. Emancipatory objectives such as the protection of women's rights are put at the service of reactionary nationalist propaganda spreading online. Social media and global networks of circulation are strategically used to spread misinformation, taking advantage of social media's algorithmic logics of popularity to spread content widely (Faris et al., 2017; Guenther, Ruhrmann, Bischoff, Penzel, & Weber, 2020; Zerback, Töpfl, & Knöpfle, 2020). Such strategies by alt-right actors are characterised by the circumvention of institutionalised actors such as journalists or political parties to create publics for their causes. Campaigns are developed to recruit followers broadly disenfranchised from mainstream discourses, who are supplied with oppositional world views, news resources and images. As Krämer points out: "We may witness the development of distinctively right-wing populist elements in the lifestyle of distinct milieus (with their own symbols, language, and practices that transcend the political sphere in the narrow sense)" (2017, p. 1297). Such strategies are less bound to right-wing party politics but work laterally to influence the perception and framing of political issues through their own host of terminologies, platforms, actors and cultural tropes. Fielitz and Marcks (2019) argue that this form of "digital fascism" persists on established "myths of menace" (p. 2) from outside forces endangering the cultural integrity of a national (and often racial) community, seeking to establish "new orders of perception prone to fascism" (p. 8). One strategy on social media is to "blur the difference between abstract structures and concrete events" (p. 10), always taking individual incidents as representative of a larger systematic failure

in society and pitching their significance in a constant climate of fear. In the long run, individual events are used to perpetuate a gradual change in public discourses where "the mutual production and amplification of fear is the central transmission belt between the structural conditions of social media and the inherent logic of fascism" (p. 19).

Forms of 'online misogyny' (Ging & Siapera, 2018), 'hashjacking' (Darius & Stephany, 2019; Knüpfer, Hoffmann, & Voskresenskii, 2020) and racist propaganda in the name of human rights (Richards, 2019; Schneiker, 2019) are becoming more widespread strategies to directly enlist social media followers for reactionary politics and forge anti-elitist, nationalistic and radicalised discourses. In the case of #120decibel, a discourse on women's safety in public spaces is constructed as a threat to the cultural norms of the German nation (and its population) and the apparent failure of its political system to ensure basic human rights. The primary aim of the campaign simply seems to only call attention to violence against women by giving voice to them as potential victims of male, migrant perpetrators. But by pitching gender in such a racist tune, the campaign employs a familiar obfuscation strategy of right-wing agitation: Nurturing a populist agenda through a simplistic notion of women's emancipation. Speaking in defence of safety here creates a mandate for militant solidarity among white women against an ominous threat, a discursive move that can be considered to have created the threat in the first place.

Such cases illustrate a wider trend towards 'dissonant public spheres' that characteristically exhibit new actors, structures and modes of communication, especially in online contexts (Pfetsch, 2018). Arguments and political positions are bound up in an inextricable mix of information, opinions and emotional appeals circulated as affective communication with often incompatible viewpoints.

As political issues are continuously instrumentalised in affective publics, it becomes problematic to uphold a terminology of deliberation and rational discourse to explain them (Lünenborg, 2020). As Pfetsch, Löblich, and Eilders argue (2018, p. 482), the co-existence of many issue publics—their ruptures, contradictions and contentions—requires an understanding of 'dissonant public spheres' as including both the unrelated juxtaposition of various public contributions from personal, semi-public and public sources and explicit counter-talk to a perceived hegemonic perspective articulated in journalistic media (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018). Dissonant publics are shaped through affects and are remarkable for three aspects: *New actors* emerge as discursive authorities, often employing an anti-institutional and anti-hegemonic thrust in their communication. The *changed structures* of these public spheres often rely on the specific logics of online platforms and enable new kinds of transnational networking of actors, upholding thematic solidarity from issue to issue. Such structures enable *new modes of expressive affectivity*—anger, shock, solidarity and empathy—whereby new actors are engaged and can possibly be enlisted in political campaigns. The temporal dynamics of network communication, linguistic informality (including irony) and direct feedback contribute to increasing dissonance and reveal the affective dynamics of online contention (Pfetsch et al., 2018, p. 485).

The notion of 'affective publics' (Lünenborg, 2020; Papacharissi, 2015) focuses on the specific tone and modality of communication in digitally networked contexts, or what Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) have identified as an "affective news stream" (p. 279). Although the affective intensity varies greatly, the relational and processual character of communication in digital environments evolves constantly in the interaction between many participants and media technologies, creating what Hillis, Paasonen, and Petit (2015) have called 'networked affect.' Affect becomes relevant for feminist research in networked and mediated communication, because it offers theoretical perspectives to go beyond dichotomist distinctions of us and them, brain and body, human and non-human, men and women (Lünenborg & Maier, 2018). Affect thus describes this dynamic, relational occurrence through which actors and objects are connected to one another. The analysis of affective dynamics aims at situational and relational events in their physical/bodily expression among actors. In a critical perspective, the effects of affect are organising inclusion and exclusion and are thus producing social positions such as 'us' and 'them.' Especially in the context of migration issues, right-wing actors exhibit blunt forms of racism that allow affective modes of public discourse to become dominant.

The #120decibel campaign exemplifies this dynamic of affective publics within a dissonant public sphere. The video absorbs feminist politics into a reactionary, propagandist campaign that appropriates concepts such as gender equality and feminist politics in the name of agitation and racist fear-mongering. The goal of this article is to demonstrate how the specific pitch of this campaign resonates with the structural logics of distribution and attention in social media, in which conditions of dissonance and affective communication emerge that oppose and seek to dismantle deliberative processes.

3. The Case of #120decibel: Absorbing Feminism into Pitched Online Circulation

The #120decibel campaign was launched January 30, 2018, and was featured on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These social media platforms were mainly used to distribute a protest video titled *German Women Rise Up!* (in German: *Frauen wehrt euch!*; 120decibel, 2019), e.g., on the social media accounts of the lead figure of Generation Identity, Martin Sellner. By invoking hashtags against sexual violence, e.g., #MeToo from 2017 or the campaign #Aufschrei (#Outcry) from 2013, the #120decibel activists present themselves as the "real

outcry." The protagonists of this campaign purport to represent all (white, European) women left unprotected by a failing, pro-migrant liberal state and mobilise for a racially segregated affective alliance of women against an alleged invasion from outside Europe. On the now defunct website of the campaign, #120decibel was consciously positioned as a German, patriotic response to #MeToo:

> Join in, stand up and let them hear your voice! 120 decibel is the sound volume of a pocket alarm, which now is carried by many women. 120 decibel is the name of our movement, which will sound the alarm and warn *against imported violence*. Join the movement and use the hashtag #120db to tell us your experience with violence, alienation, and sexual abuse. (120decibel, 2019; emphasis added)

In the almost four-minute video *German Woman Rise Up!* various young women speak directly into the camera, set in seemingly private surroundings and underlined by dramatic music: "My name is Mia. My name is Maria. My name is Ebba." They speak on behalf of European victims of violence committed by refugees. A threatening scenario is laid out, in which a seemingly personal experience is used to give the impression that any and every woman could become the next victim by suggesting that "they could be me and I could be them." The video makes the message tangible: "My name is Ebba. I was stabbed in Kandel," citing a widely-known alt-right symbol of migrant violence against women that has been instrumentalised since 2017 to form a supposed women's alliance against migration. The protagonists of the video emotionalise and personalise the experience of threat by migrant perpetrators, stirring up fear and representing themselves as activists who will counter this threat and "be loud." The message is clear: "Because you refuse to secure our borders, because you refuse to control who is coming in, because you refuse to deport criminals," women need to stand up and ensure their own safety. Drüeke and Klaus (2019, pp. 90–92) have analysed the content of the campaign and shown how the video is attributing sexualised violence and misogyny to a threatening 'other.' This strategy is based on absorbing feminist discourses of self-determination into a simplified solidarity of *feminine* identities, thereby marking migration as the core threat to self-determination of (white, Western European) women. The discursive strategy consciously invokes debates about New Year's Eve in Cologne 2015/2016 (Dietze, 2016), where sexual violence against women was presented and negotiated as a cultural problem caused by failed integration into mainstream German society. In response to the racialised discourse on New Year's Eve in Cologne and pinpointing its 'ethno-sexist' framing (Dietze, 2016), the hashtag #ausnahmslos (#noexception) initiated a public debate on sexualised violence in Germany against all women while exposing the close connection between racism and anti-feminism (Hark & Villa, 2020). The #120decibel video was distributed on different channels, many of which have been deleted in the meantime. Multiple channels reached over 100,000 clicks with this video. The online campaign went hand in hand with direct action in the streets and public interventions (see Figure 1). On February 17, 2018, the *Frauenmarsch* (women's march) took place in Berlin. This protest was organised by Leyla Bilge, a politician of the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany). *Frauenmarsch* called for the "protection of the German woman from imported violence" (in German: *Schutz der deutschen Frau vor importierter Gewalt*). On February 19, 2018, the #120decibel group disrupted a public #MeToo discussion during the Berlinale film festival with banners, flyers and noise. On March 23, 2018, during the protest action Dead Girls Don't Lie (in German: *Tote Mädchen lügen nicht*), activists staged themselves as dead women in blood, memorialising the murder of a 17-year-old girl in Flensburg.

Interventions and events in public spaces sustain attention for the campaign and typically coincide with high circulation of online content and tweets. The data generated around the hashtag #120db on Twitter shows a clear hierarchy of a few highly-connected accounts. These accounts act as nodes to create connections (ties) by sharing images and links (Himelboim, Smith, Rainie, Shneiderman, & Espina, 2017, pp. 2, 6), circulating the hashtag and content from affiliated accounts. The collection of all Twitter activity under the hashtag #120db between the campaign's launch on January 30, and its phasing out towards May 31, 2018, includes 172,972 tweets from 44,834 unique user accounts.

For our analysis of actors, structures and modes of affective publics, we relied on a smaller sample from the same dataset, collecting all tweets (n = 24,115) from the most 'popular' nodes (n = 60). We used a basic measure of indegree to identify the most mentioned and retweeted users in the network. The outdegree leaders in this dataset act as diffusers of messages (Tyshchuk, Li, Ji, & Wallace, 2014, p. 12). While indegree leaders account for most of the original content being created, outdegree leaders support the diffusion of messages in the network, often as bots that artificially 'game' the metrics of Twitter to create popularity for the campaign.

In the following sections, we will present the central findings about actors, structures and modes of the #120decibel campaign.

3.1. Actors: Few Accounts Drive Circulation

The analysis of Twitter data shows that very few nodes in the networks of accounts are the main driving forces in the circulation of #120decibel and the content created around the campaign. The 30 most prominent in- and outdegree leaders in the dataset account for most of the network dynamics and the high visibility of the hashtag. An indegree leader (AmyMek) reaches a value

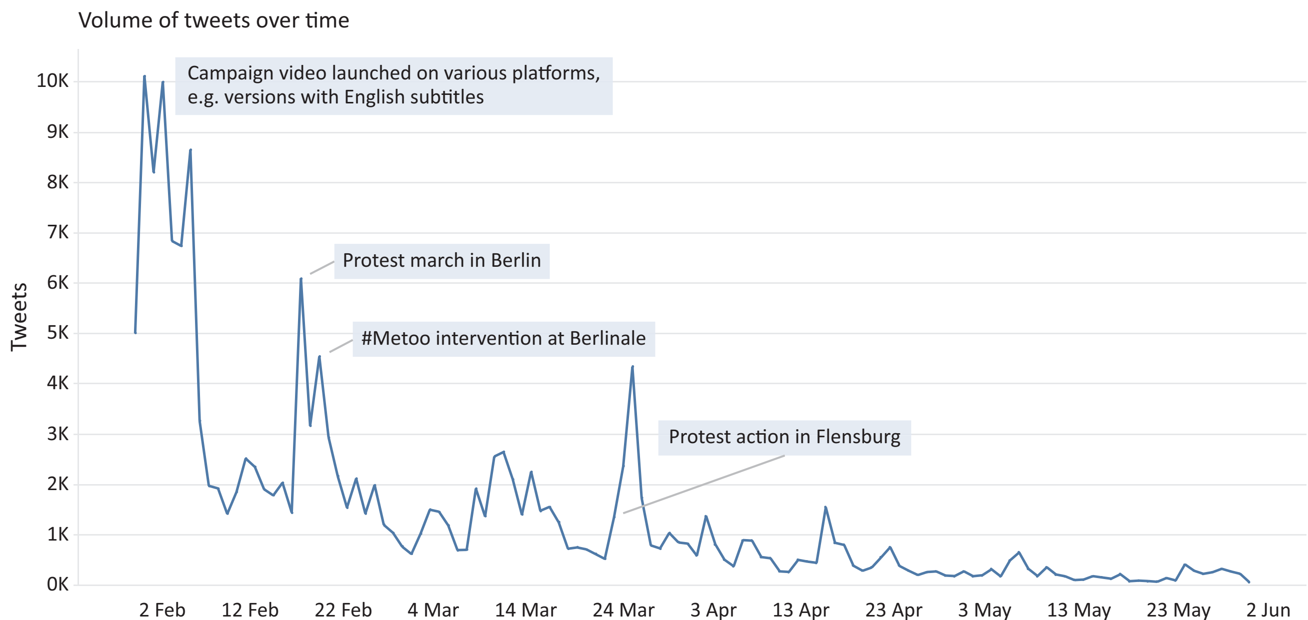

Figure 1. Activity on Twitter around the hashtag #120decibel, showing how offline events typically coincide with increased online activity, following the wide circulation of the hashtag at the start of the campaign on January 30, 2018.

of 11,940, whereas the 30th most prominent account (Samtpfote29) only reaches a value of 773. The outdegree leaders differ in a range from 4,557 (_macmike) to 226 (angelneptustar).

The main content producers of #120decibel are represented among the 30 indegree leaders as so-called authorities or "crowdsourced elites" (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012, p. 274). These few accounts create a lot of content as well as being frequently retweeted and linked to specific actors. A key figure here is Martin Sellner. He hosted the campaign website, supported the distribution of the video on his YouTube channel, and he is an indegree leader on Twitter. Analysing the other accounts supports the assumption that Martin Sellner and Generation Identity in general are central to the online spread of the campaign (Sorce, 2018). Sellner is personally connected to many of the content producers, such as his wife Brittany Pettibone and their friend Nick Monroe (nickmon1112). Personal accounts of the German Generation Identity Movement are also among the indegree leaders as well as GenIdentLondon and GenIdenEngland. Our analysis shows that all of the identifiable indegree leaders are representatives of different alt-right movements working in concert with the anti-migration protest. In the run-up to the campaign, people from Generation Identity were also connected to the positions of #120decibel, introducing actors such as Berit Franziska (also known as Annika S.), who ran a right-wing, anti-feminist blog and appeared in long interviews together with Martin Sellner (most videos deleted now). This kind of 'authentic' content by the campaign's protagonists is later referenced during the campaign and strategically positioned to validate their messages and long-term engagement.

Right-wing media and websites also play a central role here. Examples are jouwatch, DefendEvropa or allegedly crowd-sourced journalistic offers such as RefugeeCrimeMap. Such sites become discursive authorities in the dissonant public sphere of #120decibel by reporting positively about the campaign or substantiating the #120decibel agenda with additional content. Right-wing media take over journalistic functions for their audiences by offering 'alternative viewpoints' and presenting their content in a professional style across different platforms and outlets. This parallel journalistic coverage sustains and legitimises the alleged protest movement in approving tones. A few commenters on YouTube explicitly make argumentative reference to sources such as politikversagen.net, unzensuriert.de or journalistenwatch.com, outlets which have a clear agenda against the political status quo and legacy media. Numerous specific resources are also mentioned that purport to map the increased violence against women, such as rapefugees.net (although the site distances itself from right-wing propaganda) or ehrenmord.de. While the scope of actors on YouTube is broader, the use of established journalistic resources is widely limited to documenting and proving the increase of attacks against women. In a single instance, a user lists 25 links to journalistic media and alt-right outlets covering alleged rape cases in his YouTube comment; most other commenters do not link to anything.

The 30 outdegree leaders in the Twitter dataset act as diffusers, and are responsible for the reach of #120decibel. Many accounts are anonymous and have meanwhile been blocked (as of November 2020). Only four of the 30 accounts can be identified. Many of the anonymous ones have conspicuous characteristics, which

suggests a goal-oriented use of the accounts known from social bots: Automated follow-back and retweeting artificially increase the reach of the hashtag within the network logics of Twitter. With three basic tests, we identified several accounts as social bots in the group of outdegree leaders, knowing fully well that a clear reliable identification method is still not available. Based on previous studies, however, we classified accounts as social bots when they a) generate more than 50 tweets on average per day, b) have a ratio of less than 1.3 between followers and follow backs and c) have 3,000 followers or more (see Keller & Klinger, 2019, p. 177). In our sample, the outdegree of social bots is about three times higher than the outdegree of inconspicuous users. Among these social bots are accounts such as IsidorMeyer1, which produces 522 tweets on average per day and follows approximately 7,000 accounts, but is also followed back about as often. Another account is identified as _macmike, who is the outdegree leader. This account alone produces a quarter of all tweets in the sample, posting an average of 183 tweets per day and following 4,800 other accounts (as of July 2018). The analysis of the outdegree leaders shows that they are often metrics-based, automated accounts which appropriate and 'game' the logics of social media infrastructure (Petre, Duffy, & Hund, 2019) to imitate mass circulation and thereby sustain the relevance and urgency of the campaign.

3.2. Structures: Using Social Media Infrastructure to Fake an Outcry

The actors use the infrastructure of social media in order to create urgency through circulation within very short time frames. Their use differs decisively from the use of social media in digital activism through the purposive employment of automated accounts that disseminate messages, links and hashtags. But the extensive use of the hashtag does not correlate with the high number of women actually giving witness, as in #Outcry or #MeToo. For example, the account gab.ai/myerikd marks police reports or newspaper articles (mostly from obscure online sources) with #120decibel, in which the victim is a woman and the perpetrator seems to be a migrant. The infrastructure of social media enables low-cost 'astroturfing,' creating with just a few users "an impression of widespread public concern about an issue where little or no genuine public concern may exist" (Harcup, 2014, p. 22). The specific dynamics of online circulation here suggest a front of solidarity among women against migrant violence, while actors in this network exploit network structures and their logics deliberately to absorb women's rights into anti-migration propaganda and thereby enlist more followers to their cause. The #120decibel campaign is staged with human actors, those acting as indegree leaders and as the 'faces' of the video, while the relevance and urgency of the cause is sustained by social bots to generate reach. Using the infrastructure of Twitter and YouTube, a transnational network is formed, linking mainly actors from the USA, Great Britain, Germany and Austria (see Knüpfer et al., 2020). This network creates a topic-related solidarity against migration under the #120decibel hashtag and propagates associated events and content created around it to underline the legitimacy of its cause.

3.3. Modes: From Solidarity to Polarisation—Affective Intensities

The analysed actors appropriate the infrastructure of social media platforms in very specific ways to drive affective flows and user engagement with the controversial topic of the campaign. These modes of affective communication are most visible in the staging of the video and the bodily performance of the main actors in it, the affective flow of responses to the video on Twitter and YouTube as well as the increasing polarisation of the debate. These modes can be analysed by a method that Berg, von Scheve, Ural, and Walter-Jochum (2019, p. 47) call "reading for affect." Relying on Reddy (2001), 'emotives' become specific forms of speech acts that do not simply have emotions as referents, but are performatives that 'do things to the world': "Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions" (Reddy, 2001, p. 105). Affect in language can thus be identified by three elements: Attribution of emotion words to specific actors, linguistic collectivisation and the materiality of discourse itself. Different actors in and around the campaign use emotives as performative speech acts to create affective intensities that account for the relevance of the theme of the campaign. These affective intensities coalesce around three core themes: solidarity among women, polarisation and amplification.

3.3.1. Solidarity among Women

The video itself stages a type of witnessing through bodily representation by women: The campaign emulates strategies of a grassroots movement to give voice to marginalised actors: "My name is Anna, my name is Mia, I was stabbed in Kandel, I was raped in Malmö, I was tortured in Rotherham." Emulating the voice and posture of a personal witness, the bodies of these white, middle-class women demarcate a Western, European identity and cultural affinity to viewers from similar backgrounds. Using the performative pattern of feminist protests, the statements here offer a choreography of performed accusations. Through the dissonance between a political outrage and the apparent familiarity of their home surroundings, the women in the video contrast sharply with the alleged threat of a hostile world invaded by migrant perpetrators. Their visual presence introduces them as young white women, made up with care, and placed in neat middle-class living rooms that feature candles and bookshelves. The voices of the actors, the light used and the spatial surroundings

create a stereotypical female/feminine (not feminist!) notion of collectivity. The cosy atmosphere produces a space of belonging for those familiar with such a lifestyle, offering an imagined community of German/Austrian 'us' as opposed to 'the others/them' threatening this very safety. As these women vehemently demand to be safe, they also urge women to take safety (and pocket alarms) into their own hands, raising their voices on a marginalised issue, seemingly in self-defence and in an attempt to garner support. This affective intensity and collectivisation is mirrored on YouTube, where comments of approval and admiration for the protagonists' 'courage' are overwhelmingly represented.

3.3.2. Polarisation

The strategy of polarisation can be traced throughout the video and in YouTube comments. For example, there is a cut in the video at minute 2:20: The music stops, a black screen separates the introductory 'testimonial part' from a direct acclamatory address of the protagonists to the viewer: "It can't go on like this," says the lead figure in the video (Paula Winterfeldt, a protagonist of Generation Identity Germany), "going jogging at night has become the most dangerous kind of sport *for us*," says another (Franziska), changing the register to a direct form of address: "We fight back." Ariane says: "#120decibel is the name of our resistance initiative—by women for women." The affective mode of soft female conviviality is harshly interrupted. The 'other,' the 'foreign' migrant has invaded the cosy home and is threatening the community of white, Western women. Leaving the soft sound of togetherness, the performing women articulate "the real outcry," announcing to bring the perpetrators to justice and encouraging women "to be loud." They ask their viewers to share their experiences "as women" on social media, using a discursive framing of *Entfremdung* (alienation, estrangement), *Belästigung* (molestation) and *Gewalt* (violence). The polarisation spills over into a direct call for action and the sustained need for collective solidarity of women: "I want YOU to become active….Become part of our movement." With the establishment of a clear division between victims and perpetrators, the video legitimises self-defence and connects it to a larger opposition to the political system itself. This polarised climate is mirrored in a number of comments on YouTube: Either the German government (as a system of party and business interests or simply as "Merkel") is seen as the reason for failure, attracting perpetrators from "archaic societies," or the creators of the video and their followers are attacked for their divisive politics.

3.3.3. Amplification

The affective intensities around the video tend towards a greater amplification of polarised viewpoints and opinions. In the majority of comments on YouTube, users react overtly with positive and supportive responses. One user writes: "Yes, 'they' are lurking everywhere, but really. Uuuunbeliiiievable [clown smiley]" (anonymised reference, translation and approximation of typography in German by authors for this and all following citations). Here, the materiality of discourse itself produces affective intensity. Another user voices a more general tone of comments: "Well done start of the campaign, at the right time, in the right tone." Yet another user writes: "I am so happy that there is now this community." The most liked comment here reads: "Thank you for showing face and sticking out your head. Because the greatest fear is still that someone discovers right[-wing] ideas. The fear of being raped or stabbed comes later." But it also has to be noted that many comments openly expose the right-wing rhetoric of the video and oppose the alleged threat: "All this stupid gossip about foreigners. I can't hear this crap anymore….Nazis should be forbidden!" While these opposing perspectives are mostly isolated, there are also few occasions where patterns of an exchange between users appear in comments and replies to each other. Yet, these exchanges are equally charged with dissonant rhetoric and seemingly incompatible political world views. References to legacy media or alternative, right-wing media are few: Most of the links to these outlets in the dataset are posted by only one user in a single, very long comment. The affective structure of discourse is marked by antagonist positions, not producing any kind of direct interaction or dialogue.

These confrontational arguments do not aim at deliberation, but at the loudest possible dissonance. This pattern is further amplified by the use of emojis and capitalisation of core messages along with repeated exclamation marks, openly hostile insults and the use of derogatory language. These 'emotives' (Reddy) performatively produce affective recharging. The line of confrontation runs between the various system critics united in anti-migration protest and the government which is perceived as pro-migrant. This 'illegitimate' system also includes institutions that support it, e.g., established media outlets. Both occasional and intense users of YouTube and Twitter are implicated in an anti-migrant "neo-community" that unites around the rejection of liberal state orders and modern individualism, even if their individual motivations are incompatible. As an 'affective community' (Zink, 2019), the notion of belonging is established by the revival of essentialism, threatened cultural traditions and the re-biologisation of political categories (Koppetsch, 2019, p. 163). Its affective structure is based on a defence against outsiders and critics and the amplification within various parallel structures of communication (e.g., personal messengers, private social media accounts).

4. Outlook: Implications for Feminist Scholarship with Digital Methods on Digital Media

With #120decibel we observe a strategic transnational alliance of anti-migration protesters. They represent

common fears and offer simple solutions to complex problems of migration, social justice or cultural identity. The movement relies on a few strongly networked actors to create the sense of a grassroots action from below. Part of the dissemination strategy is driven through metric-based actors, increasing reach through retweeting on a massive scale by use of semi-automation. This form of 'astroturfing' imitates an ad hoc public but conceals the purposeful actions geared at 'gaming the algorithm' of Twitter or YouTube. Yet, there is a great difference between waves of solidarity that are technically initiated and the actual support by only a few actors when it comes to action on the street or interventions in offline public fora. By imitating feminist protest practices as well as hashjacking #MeToo or #Aufschrei (Knüpfer et al., 2020), attempts are made to overturn and instrumentalise feminist debates. This strategic action is not aimed at deliberation but at creating dissonance and disorientation around the terms being used by actors in public debates. Loud and affective dissonance with regard to the allegedly pro-migrant liberal state order becomes an end in itself. This dissonance aims at the delegitimisation of the existing political system and at the same time affirms the legitimacy of the 'neo-community' of migration critics. Parallel structures fulfil journalistic functions for this community and strengthen actors by establishing self-referential networks where women's rights are instrumentalised against migration. Such a dissonant, affective formation must be understood as an elementary strategy of these actors, which endangers the democratic consensus and communicative foundation of society (Schatto-Eckrodt, Boberg, Wintterlin, Frischlich, & Quandt, 2019).

It is the specific quality of these 'networked affects' (Hillis et al., 2015) on which extreme right-wing actors are relying heavily when producing racist and anti-feminist sentiments. Affective dynamics in social media are characterised by high intensities as an outcome of polarisation, provocation, irony and personal affection. While a vast amount of research has looked at the positive effects of solidarity and empowerment through affective strategies (Nikunen, 2018; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012), our research shows a similar capacity for exclusionary discourse to delimit forms of national and cultural belonging. Radical right-wing actors strategically use a discourse on women's rights to affectively exclude migrants from an imagined, biologistic national community. By celebrating white women's bodies and 'female conviviality' in need of defence, an affective community is produced against the embodied threats of the 'other.' What we find is a deliberately agitational campaign for reactionary politics in the name of women's safety which, as Krämer points out, requires "an optimum between vagueness and clarity" (2017, p. 1300) to appeal to many different users of social media. The subject of violence against women here merely serves as a highly conflictual perspective on how the state and society are presented as failing in general, motivating feelings of resistance and making it legitimate to take law into one's own hands.

The case study also shows practical research challenges for gender media studies. The instability and fluidity of the web make certain research practices difficult that rely on the stability and findability of sources. Discourses must be viewed and archived immediately and on various platforms, since actors often switch between accounts or are forced to use different platforms due to legal and terms of service violations (e.g., hate speech). Research on such fluid networks is further limited by the long-time span between data collection, analysis, writing and publishing. A lot of primary material may already have become inaccessible to the reader once an article is published as concerns several sources used in this article. Standard academic citation practices here cannot ensure the findability of content as much as they may contribute inadvertently to a further increase of attention and circulation of such material. Here, the characteristics of the web are exploited by right-wing actors, who change platforms and channels frequently, mirror content across sites and delete offensive material after receiving complaints. This quick pace of relocating content can often be interpreted as a deliberate obfuscation strategy. Over time, exposure to such material is more difficult to retrace from a research interest, but its long-term effects are a slow incorporation in a right-wing world view over seemingly inconspicuous and even positive political causes. The reinterpretation of feminist politics used in such campaigns underlines that scholars need to pay more attention to the latent, gradual absorption of key terms into reactionary propaganda. By employing the advocacy for social causes in the language of the afflicted, this kind of propaganda consciously rests on mobilising affective publics through seemingly bottom-up modes of address that gain public attention through the inherent logics of social media networks. Dissonance becomes a mode of public communication, is intensified and made acceptable over time, by rejecting established modes of deliberation and representation.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

What a Girl Wants, What a Girl Needs: Analyzing Postfeminist Themes in Girls' Magazines

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Abstract

Girls' magazines play an important role in the maintenance of gender perceptions and the creation of gender by young girls. Due to a recent resurgence within public discussion and mediated content of feminist, postfeminist, and antifeminist repertoires, centered on what femininity entails, young girls are growing up in an environment in which conflicting messages are communicated about their gender. To assess, which shared norms and values related to gender are articulated in girl culture and to what extent these post/anti/feminist repertoires are prevalent in the conceptualization of girlhood, it is important to analyze magazines as vehicles of this culture. The current study analyzes if and how contemporary postfeminist thought is articulated in popular girl's magazines. To reach this goal, we conducted a thematic analysis of three popular Dutch teenage girls' magazines (N = 27, from 2018), *Fashionchick*, *Cosmogirl*, and *Girlz*. The results revealed that the magazines incorporate feminist, antifeminist, and as a result, postfeminist discourse in their content. The themes in which these repertoires are articulated are centered around: the body, sex, male–female relationships, female empowerment, and self-reflexivity. The magazines function as a source of gender socialization for teenage girls, where among other gendered messages a large palette of postfeminist themes are part of the magazines' articulation of what it means to be a girl in contemporary society.

Keywords

feminism; gender; girl magazines; postfeminism; The Netherlands

Issue

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1. Introduction

In the past years, though the Women's Marches, pussyhats, the #MeToo movement, as well as increasing attention on body positivity and fat shaming, it seems that feminism, once again, has a strong position in societal debates. Traditional and social media, in US contexts as well as other national contexts, extensively featured content related to these issues (Starkey, Koerber, Sternadori, & Pitchford, 2019), but as some readers remarked even girl magazines such as *Teen Vogue* have started to include more political and (feminist) activist content in their magazines (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Girl magazines, in part fueled by economic motivations, have started to feature political and feminist content like never before (Banet-Weiser, 2018). One might find these increases in attention in for example *Teen Vogue*'s reporting on the election, #MeToo and the right to abortion, as well as in other national context, such as the Dutch magazine *Linda Meiden* reporting on the fleeing from one's country because of one's sexuality, and *Cosmogirl* reporting on Japanese gender fluidity

(De Wereld Draait Door, 2020; "Waarom er activistische,'' 2017).

It seems that Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018, p. 1) has astutely observed that "everywhere you turn, there is an expression of feminism—on a T-shirt, in a movie, in the lyrics of a pop song, in an inspirational Instagram post, in an acceptance speech." This has led some to conclude that "feminism has a new luminosity….It is clearly having a moment" (Gill, 2017, p. 611). These recent developments have led to public discussions about whether we are currently living in a fourth wave of feminism (Grady, 2018). And while the concept of (unifocal and uniform) feminist waves has been hotly contested (Duits, 2017; Garrison, 2004), as there have "always been many feminisms in the movement, not just one ideology, and there have always been tensions, points, and counter-points. The political, social, and intellectual feminist movements have always been chaotic, multivalenced, and disconcerting," but as Rampton (2015) argues this is a sign that the movement is still thriving.

The early suffragette movement which originated in the 1850s formed the first wave of feminism. The second wave of feminism refers to the to the feminist movement of the 1960s–1980s, which focused on the ideological control of the patriarchy which controlled women's bodies and desires to serve its interests (Householder, 2015). Third wave feminism, which originated in the 1990s, challenged second wave's perceived 'essentialist' definitions of gender as well as its over-emphasis on the experiences of upper-middle class white women (Budgeon, 2011). The fourth wave of feminism is connoted with 'hashtag activism,' and is seen as focused on creating and strengthening bonds between women (Looft, 2017). The third (and now the fourth) wave of feminism coincided with and was contradicted by the onset of postfeminism, for which a variety of competing and contradictory definitions exist. Postfeminism can be seen, as for example: 1) the period after (the success of) feminism, in which equality for men and women was obtained; 2) a backlash against feminism; 3) a critical evolution of feminism as well as 4) an intertwining of feminist and antifeminist idea(l)s (Gill, 2007a, 2007b). And it seems that while feminism is clearly "having a moment," postfeminist sensibilities remain a firm fixture in our contemporary media landscape (Gill & Toms, 2019, p. 97). As such, we believe that the current media landscape offers its consumers, complex, conflicting, and competing messages about what it means to be a woman in contemporary society. And while the various issues propagated by these 'movements' are often discussed in terms of their impact on adults, as these issues also pervade childhood and adolescence (the time when kids are learning about social norms and their sense of identity) it is equally important to assess the ways in which the young are informed about these topics. In these discussions about feminism, postfeminism, and gendered issues, conflicting perspectives are propagated in various media outlets. As such, young girls are coming of age in a society filled with contradictory messages about womanhood, femininity, and feminism, which may play a role in the formation of their identity (Basow & Rubin, 1999). This is particularly relevant for this group because adolescence is a phase in which a lot of change occurs (Basow & Rubin, 1999; Van der Mooren, 2001). In their everyday lives, girls are surrounded with subtle—and not so subtle—reminders of what femininity entails. And to guide them into making choices about their identity, adolescent girls consult and confide in family and peers, but also use various media as resources in forming this identity (Van der Mooren, 2001). And while not all mediated discourses on gender are linked to feminism and not all conservative and traditional gender discourse is a backlash against feminism, it is important to disentangle what messages are communicated to girls about their gender and from what vantage point. Since disentangling the palette of anti/post/feminist messages that girls are exposed to will provide insight into how girls are taught to see themselves, their agency, and value in contemporary society.

Within the media consumed by adolescent girls, girls' magazines have a special position: They are regarded as natural vehicles of socialization for girls, in terms of (hetero)sexual relation(ship)s and appearance-based standards of femininity (Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Firminger, 2006). Teen magazines can be seen as a source of self-socialization for teenagers (Arnett, 1995), as they are filled with content that implicitly and explicitly provides information about, for example, gendered norms and sexual scripts and which addresses them as part of their peer group—intensely important in this stage of socialization (Arnett, 1995). The magazines have a special place within the adolescent media diet since the readers rely on magazines as a "sounding board" and "close confidant" (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004, p. 2). As such, they remain popular among adolescents, with about 6 out of 10 teenagers reading them (Roberts & Foehr, 2004). Additionally, the magazines are easily accessible for girls, both in print and online form, and appeal to girls through their offering of colorful editorials, columns and such, about fashion, lifestyle, and information about everyday life (Farvid & Braun, 2006).

For the past four decades, magazines geared towards women and girls have been analyzed as sites representing specific discourses of femininity (McRobbie, 1982, 1990). These studies have focused on how mediated communication provides girls with stereotypical, narrow and restricting range of role models of femininity centered on the importance of beauty, romance, and fashion (Budgeon & Currie, 1995; Firminger, 2006; Pattee, 2009; Schenkler, Caron, & Halteman, 1998; Willemsen, 1998). The central assumption being that girls are being fed a wealth of information that centers on normative femininity, heteronormativity, and a plethora of other hegemonic ideals to which girls should aspire. While the studies flourished in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and the early 2000s, since then relatively limited research has been conducted on how issues of femininity, as well

as discourses on (post)feminism, are discussed in girls' magazines, which continue to form an important part of contemporary girls' media repertoire and which thereby represent an important source of gender socialization (Edelshain, 2017).

In sum, the importance of studies analyzing what these magazines have to offer their readers, in times marked by a resurgence of feminism as well as the revealed staying powers of postfeminism is rather self-evident. The Dutch context is interesting in that both feminism and postfeminism seem to have a strong position in the media landscape (Duits, 2017; Marseille, n.d.). Additionally, in the Netherlands emancipatory repertoires are generally embraced, the Dutch views on the division of labor and the role of women in society have become more liberal over time, and the Dutch generally score high on gender-related human development indexes (Merens & Hermans, 2009; United Nations Development Program, 2011). However, the Netherlands also has the largest number of women working part-time in Europe, Dutch women still spend twice as much time on caregiving tasks than men, and the Netherlands still highly emphasizes the role of the mother in nurturing children (Cloïn, Keuzenkamp, & Plantenga, 2011; Portegijs, 2008).

It is against this background of change alongside stability in gender-related practices and attitudes, and the prominent position that feminism and postfeminism have in the Dutch media landscape, that the current study aims to update the information we have about the content of girls' magazines. The objective is to create an understanding of how these magazines represent what it means to be a girl in contemporary (Dutch) society to their young readers, in an era where feminism and postfeminism form competing, complex, and intertwined discourses providing girls with a framework for looking at femininity (McRobbie, 2008). Building on the work of Rosalind Gill (2007b, 2017), and her formulation of a postfeminist sensibility (as the intertwining of both feminist and anti-feminist idea[l]s) in mediated messages, we will explore the content of girls' magazines to answer the question: In what manner is contemporary (post)feminist thought articulated in popular girl's magazines, in their messages about femininity?

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The data came from nine randomly selected issues of *Fashionchick*, *Girlz*, and *CosmoGirl* (N = 27, from January–December 2018). *Fashionchick* has as a target audience of 12–19 years old and a circulation of 116,800 per issue; *Girlz* has as a target group of 14–19 years old and a circulation of 519,000 per issue; and *Cosmogirl* has a circulation of 814,000 and sees 15–19 years old as its target audience (Kers, 2018a, 2018b; Mediabookers, 2019). As such, these magazines are very similar in content and scope, they target largely the same demographic and they form the most widely read magazines for this demographic in the Netherlands.

2.2. Procedure

Data from gathered from the magazines, i.e., all the content in all the pages in each separate edition, were analyzed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The magazines were scanned completely and uploaded in MAXQDA (Verbi, n.d.), a program for qualitative analysis. The dataset consists of 815 pages from *CosmoGirl*, 512 pages from *Girlz*, and 807 pages from *Fashionchick.* Data were coded inductively into themes through a process of repeated reading, which resulted in the initial identification of a number of themes. Initial themes were reworked and refined, and in relation to the whole data set as the analysis progressed, further sub-themes were coded and identified.

The thematic analysis was informed by the idea of a postfeminist sensibility as proposed by Rosalind Gill (2007b, 2016). She proposed that postfeminism should be seen as a "patterned yet contradictory sensibility connected to other dominant ideologies (such as individualism and neoliberalism)," and to be regarded as "an analytical category, designed to capture empirical regularities in the world" (Gill, 2016, p. 621). As a result, in the latter phases of the analysis, there was a sensitivity to topics that included a focus on one of the "relatively stable features of postfeminism" (Gill, 2007b, p. 149): The notion of femininity as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; a dominant make-over paradigm; a resurgence in ideas about natural sexual differences; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis on consumerism and the commodification of difference. These features make up a postfeminist discourse, visible across the postfeminist media landscape, and which reiterates and conflicts, both the feminist and the anti-feminist themes within it.

The results of our analysis, which is grounded in a close-reading of the data, with the postfeminist sensibilities formulated by Gill (2016) as sensitizing concepts, identifies themes which are articulated around the construction of femininity in the girls' magazines, and are connected to this postfeminist discourse in magazines for girls. However, in line with the theoretical background of this study, it is important to state that, since magazines are situated in a broader social, cultural, political, and historical context, this reading is not the only reading possible (e.g., Hall, 1993), there is room for diverse interpretation (Gough-Yates, 2003). In the presentation of results, visualized via thematic maps (Figures 1–5, numbered in parentheses are frequency counts within each of the [sub]categories), each theme is accompanied by illustrative extracts taken from the magazines.

3. Results

The analysis revealed five main themes, embodying the postfeminist discourse surrounding femininity in the magazines analyzed. These themes: the body, sex, male-female relations, female empowerment, and reflexivity will be discussed consecutively. Within these themes, a large array of topics are discussed, such as friendship, money, family, fashion, make-up, school, sex, gossip, and being less self-conscious.

3.1. The Body

The analyzed magazines have a strong focus on discussing girls' and women's bodies (see Figure 1). The discussion of the body varies in two forms, namely in their focus on the shape of the body or the feminine appearance of the body. When discussing the shape of the body, a lot of contradictory messages are represented. On the one hand, a main message is 'a body is a body,' it is purely functional and that there are no prescriptive norms that a body should adhere to: "Big, small, tear shaped or round. No set of breasts is the same, although the underwear brand Third Love does claim that our girlfriends can roughly be divided into nine different categories" (*CosmoGirl*, 2018-4, p. 49).

On the other hand, the magazines often also focus on the perfect body, and that most of the readers should accept that their body will never be perfect and they need to embrace their imperfection: "Everyone is pretty in their own way. You don't have to be a size 34, to be pretty, on the contrary! Curves are gorgeous, something to be proud of" (*Girlz*, 2018-6, p. 7).

A final vision on the body proclaims that body improvement is possible and necessary for everyone. The changes to your body can best be accomplished according to this vision by having a healthy lifestyle, in which you combine regular exercise with healthy food. In its conflicting repertoire, the magazines seem to stress acceptance, shame, and self-improvement of the female body. Femininity is in part striking the right balance in your attitude, a balance between elegant, sexy, cute, and girly features combined with edgier elements. However, too much edginess is never good. When discussing the face as a feature of a feminine appearance, aspects are important and readers are informed what (commercial) makeover solutions they have to employ to become more perfect: From teeth (should be as white as possible), to breath (should be as fresh as possible, via, e.g., sugar-free gum), to lips (should be as full as possible, via e.g., lipgloss), and cheekbones (should be as angular as possible, via, e.g., certain ways to contour the face), as well as more general comments about good skin and hair. Clothes are also seen as a way to stress femininity, and they present a balancing act in trying to authentically be yourself whilst also adhering to trends: "I always feel the pressure to wear what is hip. But I love costume-like fashion, so I can't follow all trends" (*CosmoGirl*, 2018-1, p. 18).

Additionally, the importance of femininity is coupled with the shape of the body as well, since the magazines stress that it is of the utmost importance that your dress for your figure and that you wear stuff that makes you stand out: "A high waisted short will emphasize your curves (in a good way!) and will make your legs optically seem longer. Perfect denim for summer!" (*Fashionchick*, 2018-4, p. 26).

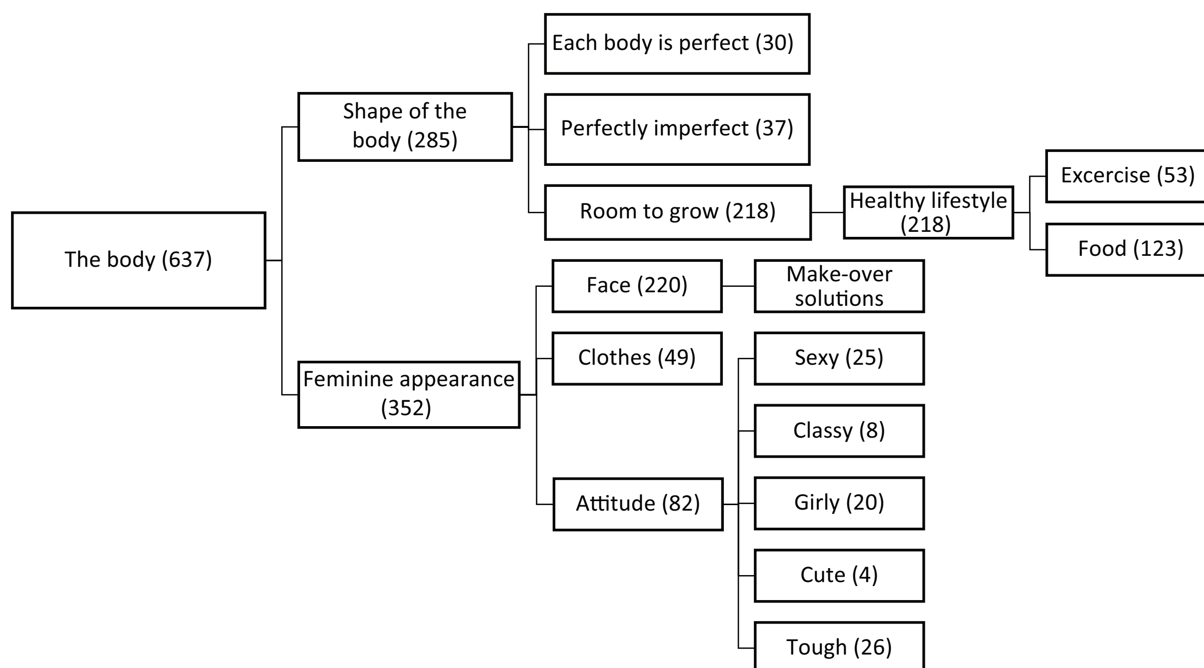

Figure 1. Thematic overview of the body as main theme, and corresponding sub-themes.

Finally, it seems that feminine beauty (through the cultivation of a beautiful body and face) is tied to happiness in the magazines. When someone is pretty, they are represented as happy. Which might lead to the assessment that the body is seen as a mirror to the soul: The more good things one does to the body (i.e., dressing well, exercising), the happier they will be.

3.2. Sex

The magazines devote a lot of time discussing the physicality of sex in terms of what is 'normal,' 'proper' and how you should do it in technical terms (see Figure 2). Topics that are dealt with are for example masturbation, porn, having an orgasm, and going 'all the way' in a relationship. All magazines stress the importance of open communication and a tolerant attitude towards all sexual behaviors.

Magazines represent statements that can be counted as heteronormative as well as non-heteronormative. There is an open discussion about non-hetero sexualities, nevertheless, heterosexuality still remains the norm. This means that romantic partners are always introduced as males, although sometimes there is a caveat stressing that female partners are also an option. This mostly happens by indication of 'or her,' in discussing partners, e.g.: How do you know if you like him (or her)?

Sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies are portrayed as (shameful) problems that should be prevented at all costs. In discussing these topics, the magazine formulates both descriptive norms: "Read about the ins and outs of the morning after pill here" (*Girlz*, 2018-10, p. 22) and injunctive norms: "Tell him to put on a condom, that way you are sure that you are protected against STD's" (*Girlz*, 2018-12, p. 29). The responsibility of having safe sex seems to lie with both parties, although simply through the readership of the magazines the messages are geared towards girls.

Tied with concerns about safe sex are feelings one can have about sex. These are often taken together with the bodily experience of sex: "Sex is about having intimacy together, about sharing feelings and love. Which sexual position you use is not that important" (*Girlz*, 2018-4, p. 29). Three areas of feelings about sex are discussed: feeling dirty after/about sex (i.e., shame), feelings that deal with tensions surrounding sex (i.e., insecurity), and feelings related to the sexual act (i.e., love, pleasure, and sexiness).

The responsibility for sexual harassment and intimidation is placed squarely at the feet of the perpetrators. Although in one instance a magazine did ponder whether the girl had done something to create this behavior. The solutions presented for individual cases is to talk to someone in authority. The emphasis on this being punishable behavior, with little regard for other possible consequences, once the perpetrator is punished:

> What your teacher does, can be considered sexually transgressive behavior and you should file a complaint….If you do not feel comfortable filing an official complaint, then being loud and clear in your disapproval might also work….If not, then do file a complaint immediately, because he is crossing a boundary. (Girlz, 2018-2, p. 27)

3.3. Gendered Perspectives

In the magazines, mainly a female vision is represented on the relations between men and women (see Figure 4). Although there are some sections of the magazines that are devoted to sharing a male perspective on such issues. Within the female vision, on gendered relations, there

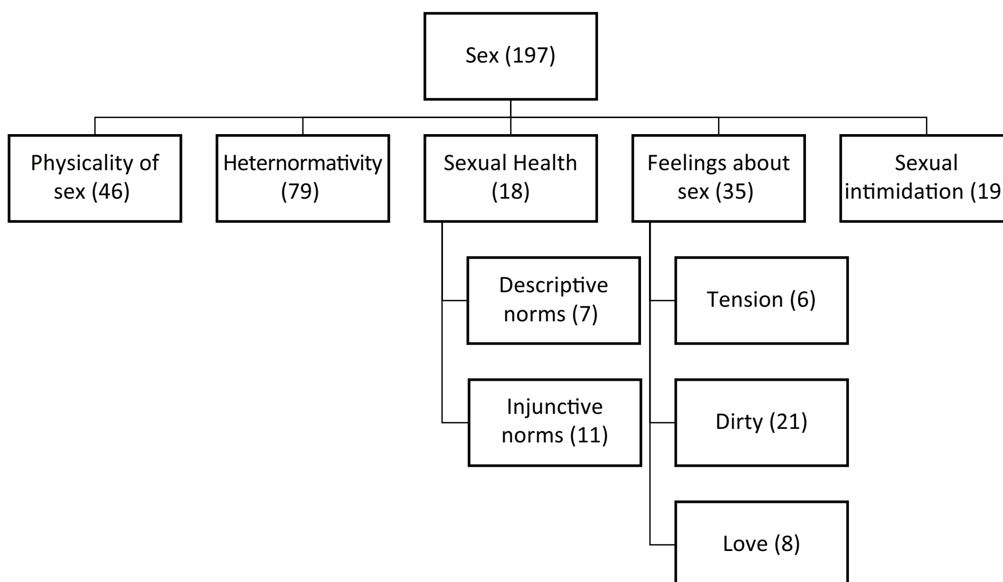

Figure 2. Thematic overview of sex as main theme, and corresponding sub-themes.

are two variations: focusing on the body or focusing on social interaction. When men are presented in the magazines they are objectified, through a predominant focus on his ideal body, thereby firmly establishing a female gaze. The man is referred to as ‘boycandy’ or a ‘hottie,’ and the articles rarely start by focusing on his accomplishments or character (see for example Figure 3). On the other hand, when women are the focus of an article, the text does primarily focus on her accomplishments or character. An article could be about a woman who is an actress, or being someone with a huge online following, or someone who fights for women’s right. The text might also remark about a woman’s pretty appearance, but this is always secondary to the main message (i.e., “and she is also beautiful”).

In the studied content, there was one article about men that did not primarily focus on their body, and this was an item about men whose hobby was make-up. These men are often brand ambassadors for a make-up line, are very proficient in doing make-up, or have their own make-up line. Taken together when regarding female views on women, women are seen as active subjects, while men are portrayed as objects (to be looked at) unless they have more ‘feminine’ qualities.

Considering female views on social relations between men and women, there is a more equal

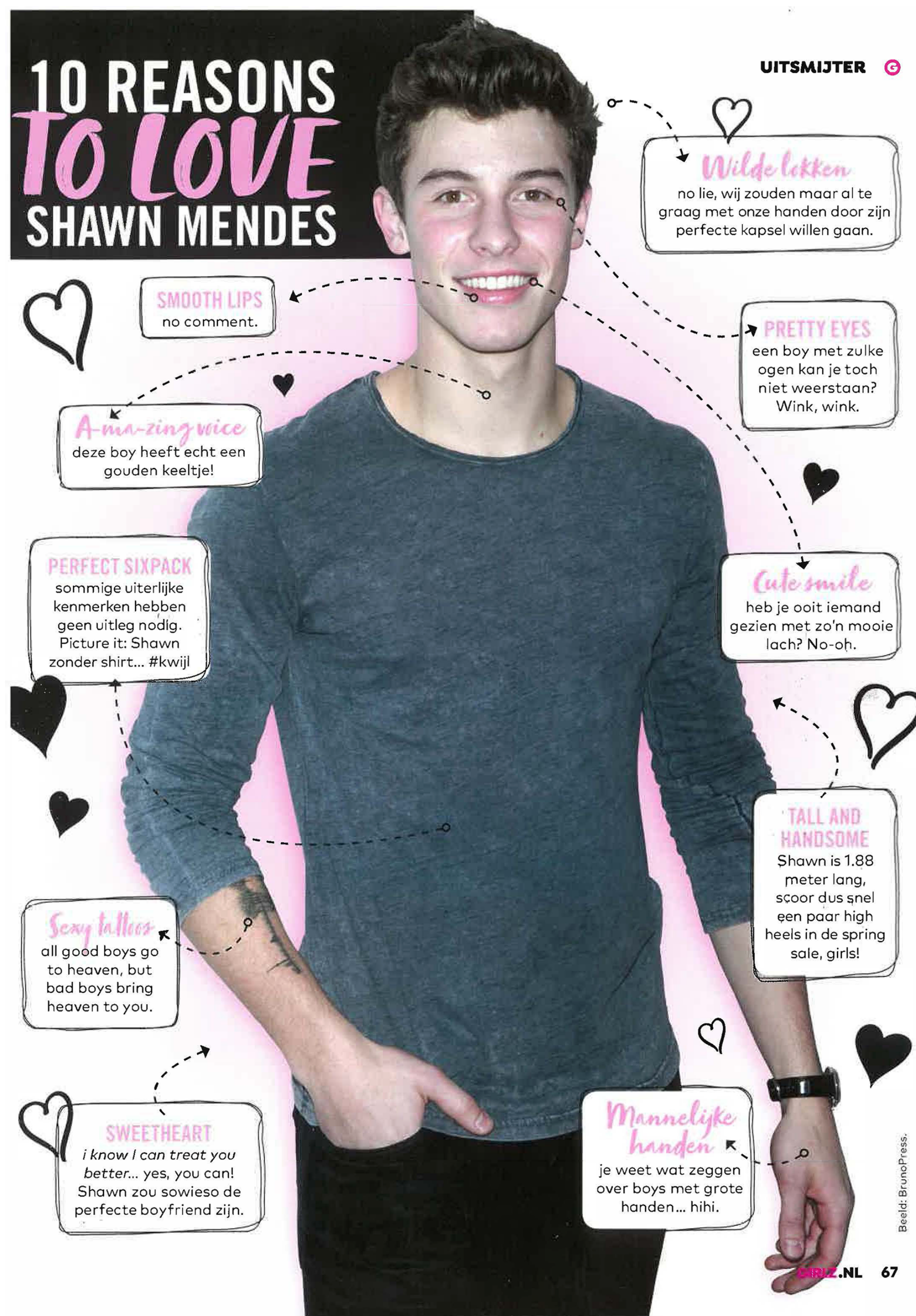

Figure 3. Example of focus on body. Source: *Girlz* (2018-4, p. 67).

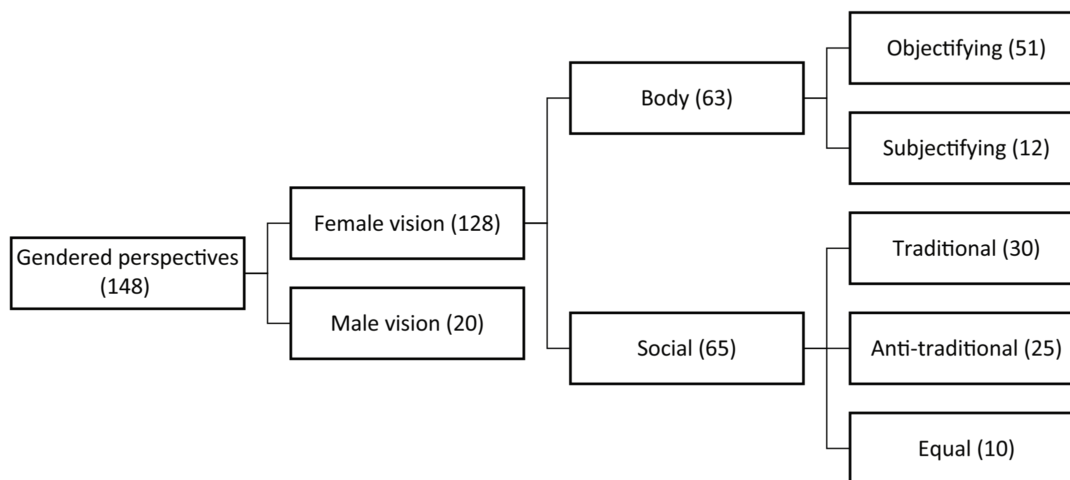

Figure 4. Thematic overview of gendered relations as main theme, and corresponding sub-themes.

approach. Men and women are portrayed similarly, with similar struggles. For example, a magazine stated that men can also be nervous before a date. It is stressed that both men and women should focus on communicating there expectations and feelings clearly: "You might think that if your bond is strong enough, then everything will just work….Well…that just isn't true….Follow the example of Chuck and Blair, they state what they need and expect from each other" (*CosmoGirl*, 2018-12, p. 72).

However, while the magazines might primarily start from a position of equality, there is also room for more traditional as well as anti-traditional ideas. Women are both encouraged to expect men to take the lead in a relationship (i.e., traditional), as well as to be the ones take the initiative and make the first move (i.e., anti-traditional). Women are still (traditionally) supposed to take care of the emotional side of the relationship, by surprising her partner, keeping her emotions in check (e.g., no discussions when she is angry) and monitoring his emotions (e.g., no booking vacations when he is in a mood).

Even though their presence in the magazines is limited, there are several features in the magazines in which men are asked to give their opinion on a variety of topics related to relations between men and women. These topics are wide-ranging but are mostly focused on relationships and women's bodies. Contrary to the rest of the magazines content, which makes women into subjects, these features do objectify women. The opinions vary from traditional ("Yes, shaved legs are important"; *Fashionchick*, 2018-1, p. 58; "When we go to dinner I will always pick up the check"; *CosmoGirl*, 2018-5, p. 86) to more equal or anti-traditional ("She does not have to shave her legs"; *Fashionchick*, 2018-1, p. 58; "We always split the bill equally"; *CosmoGirl*, 2018-5, p. 86).

3.4. Female Empowerment

In the magazines there is a lot of attention for female empowerment (see Figure 5), much attention is focused on empowering the readers by boosting their self-confidence. This is done by articulating that everyone has their own insecurities and that these are often unnecessary. There is also considerable attention for 'girlbosses' and girls who 'are born to lead,' both are terms the magazines use to signify strong women. This strength is then founded on four elements, independence, believing in yourself, discipline, and having ambition.

The girls reading the magazines are urged to be independent and to stand on their own two feet. They are urged to make choices that are good for them:

> Did the break up with your ex change your life?
>
> Yes, but not in a negative way. I am now able to freely choose me. (*Girlz*, 2018-4, p. 6)

When someone has accomplished something without help from others and by pure determination, grit, and effort, this is highly valued; in order to be independent

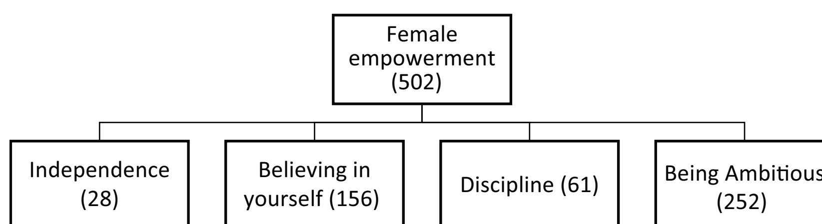

Figure 5. Thematic overview of female empowerment as main theme, and corresponding sub-themes.

and successful, you have to believe in your own qualities. This means that girls should be themselves, they should follow their dreams, be unafraid of following them, unafraid of making mistakes, and not concerned with the opinions of others: "Believing in yourself. If you want to reach your goals, everything is possible. You just have to figure out your way of doing it" (*Girlz*, 2018-2, p. 41).

The third feature which strong, successful, and accomplished women share, according to the magazines, is discipline. By being a disciplined person you will get ahead in life because you are able to make sacrifices. Having discipline is illustrated by working hard and making well-thought-out choices, which lead to sometimes skipping out on 'fun' stuff: "What you should be mindful of? Your income. You have a spending problem, which is okay as long as you do always save part of your income each month" (*CosmoGirl*, 2018-1, p. 86).

The final characteristic that women who want to be empowered should have is ambition. To get ahead in life, one should be ambitious, get results, follow your dreams, and keep being busy:

> Goal: Be more productive. Expectation: Tomorrow will be my day. Reality: You will stay in bed for far too long, and making the most of the day will fail. Seems familiar? Then your goal is to be more productive this year…to make the most of your days, and these tips will help you get there. (*CosmoGirl*, 2018-1, p. 68)

However, the women who are portrayed as ambitious in the studied magazines, and thus portrayed as role models for girls, are all working in the entertainment industry (e.g., actresses, YouTubers, fashion designers, models, or combinations of these). The magazines thereby offer a very limited view of what it means to be an empowered woman in society. Also, the message seems to be that if you do not live according to these mandates and you are unsuccessful, you only have yourself to blame. The discourse of empowerment is very much focused on the girl readers as individuals, and there is little to no attention given to the structural inequalities in society that might complicate this path for them or to the broader (patriarchal) context that shapes the conditions and choices against which female empowerment should be understood.

3.5. Reflexivity

The final theme stressed in magazines is the focus on reflexivity. The magazines offer tools, such as quizzes and horoscopes, for self-reflexivity, more specifically for reflecting on behavior or looks. These tools either stress one ideal answer and as such propagate one norm. For example, in the quiz "How well do you deal with stress?" all the answers imply that having a right balance between leisure and work is the norm (*Girlz*, 2018-5, p. 21). On the other hand, some tools are more pluriform in their guidance, in that multiple norms are presented. The outcome of the quiz "What TV show do you belong in?" might state that you belong in *Game of Thrones*, *Riverdale*, *Gossip Girl*, or *New Girl*, and all these options are equally good. The norms that are articulated in these quizzes and horoscopes are rearticulated in many forms throughout the magazines, although in these tools for reflexivity they are communicated most straightforwardly.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to gain insight into the manner in which contemporary (post)feminist thought was articulated in Dutch popular girls' magazines, particularly in their messages about femininity. The girls' magazines studied dedicate their attention to a plethora of topics, ranging from beauty to hobbies, glamour, romance and relationships, sex, and fashion. This is in line with previous studies which also highlighted these topics as important for girls' magazines (Budgeon & Currie, 1995; Peirce, 1993; Willemsen, 1998). The topics presented are often problematized in the magazines studied, with the emphasis being placed on the importance of girls being pro-active in fixing their problems. The topics discussed in the magazines studied, are discussed from a traditionally feminist as well as an anti-feminist perspective (cf. postfeminism as articulated by Butler, 2013; Gill, 2007a, 2007b). By the intertwining of these perspectives in the representation of different topics in the magazines studied, we can conclude that postfeminism, has a substantial role in the magazines studied. The themes in which this entanglement is enacted are the body, sex, gendered perspectives, female empowerment, and reflexivity.

Regarding the body, we conclude that the body is represented as a mirror into the soul. The body should be well-cared for and look good, as it is a mirror image of one's inner life (which in turn should also be well-cared for) and a pathway to feeling happy (with yourself). Looking good has been established as one of the markers success and happiness by previous research (Duke & Kreshel, 1998), and Gill (2007b) has also concluded that (consumerist work on) the body has become the most important site of female identity. One can clearly recognize the influence of neoliberal capitalist culture herein, which leads girls to believe, and wants girls to believe that engaging in commercial and consumptive beauty and makeover culture will lead to self-acceptance, self-confidence, and happiness.

Additionally, the magazines articulate that a beautiful body should not necessarily conform to a strict form. This is in line with the feminist 'body-positivity movement'; however, even though the singular norm of a beautiful body is rebuked, the norm of a feminine look for the body is still ever-present. The body is not appreciated when it does not highlight its feminine aspects, which reiterates the importance of the body as a site of femininity (Gill, 2007b). To improve the body, a large variety of make-overs form part of the magazines'

content: Make-overs are often tied to particular products, in which the entanglement with consumerism is visible (see also Peixoto-Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003).

This predominance of the make-over paradigm and its entanglement with consumerism which we found in the girls' magazines studied, is one of the hallmarks of postfeminism as defined by Gill (2007b) and Butler (2013). Previously, feminist scholars (Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2013; Tasker & Negra, 2007) have emphasized the intertwining of postfeminism with consumer culture, where feminist arguments for women's choice, women's independence, and women's agency have been co-opted in the marketing of material goods to women. Girls are positioned as empowered and lauded for possessing reflexivity, while simultaneously being convinced that buying the right lip scrub, cute high-waisted shorts and push-up bra can be regarded as the expression of empowered choice. Furthermore, similarly to what Banet-Weiser (2018) argued, teenage girls are urged to accept and love their bodies, or at least move towards that love and self-confidence (through use of products), while being continually bombarded with the notion of the 'perfect' female body.

The second theme that reveals a postfeminist sensibility in the girls' magazines studied is sex. Topics that are discussed openly are sexual orientation, sexual desire, masturbation, and various ways of having sex: Topics that are in line with previous research on this theme (Carpenter, 1998; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010).

One of the key features of a postfeminist sensibility as discussed by Gill (2007b), is the predominant focus on men's sexual pleasure and the lesser importance of women's own sexual pleasure. The current study did not find this, and the main message seems to be the normalization of the idea that pleasure should a central part of sex for both parties involved. This was also concluded by Carpenter (1998), who stated that female sexual desire is starting to have a more prominent position in girls' magazines. This is also in line with the ideas of 'pro-sex feminism' (Glick, 2000), a hallmark of postfeminist thinking, which articulates the idea that all forms of sex should be embraced to enable sexual equality. Nevertheless, pro-sex feminism and the argumentations about how truly empowering and equalizing sex positivity is, are strongly debated within feminist thought (Ivanski & Kohut, 2017).

Also, in line with previous research and part of a postfeminist sensibility, is the finding that the responsibility for safe sex in terms of sexual health and unwanted pregnancies does fall mostly on the shoulders of their female readers (Gill, 2007b; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). Additionally, the magazines also dedicate time to discussing the feelings that come with sex, like shame, love, and stress. There is limited openness about sexual orientation in the girls' magazines studied, because even though all magazines try to be inclusive in their description of romantic and sexual partners, the default is that this partner is almost always described as male. This is in line with previous work by Carpenter (1998) which concluded that homosexuality was talked about openly, but the norm was still the heterosexual script. We could argue that, similarly to Jackson and Westrupp (2010), the content in the magazines studied was not heteronormative in and of itself, but the perspective taken by the magazines is predominantly heteronormative. Finally, the topic of sexually transgressive behavior and intimidation is also discussed. The magazines mostly use a formalistic perspective that focuses on the fact that it is unlawful and should be reported, while not recognizing the structural gendered asymmetries that provide the context for these behaviors.

Gendered perspectives on the relationships between men and women also form an important element in the content of the magazines studied. The women portrayed are seen as active subjects, which is in line with the evaluation of Gill (2007b) who remarked that women move from being seen and portrayed as objects to active subjects in media content. The women represented in the magazines studied do refer to women in a subject role, but to men in an object role unless the man in question is highly feminine: Then he is portrayed as a subject. On a social level, the magazines portray contrasting repertoires regarding the relations between men and women. On the one hand, the postfeminist idea that women are responsible for maintaining the romantic relationship (Gill, 2007b) is propagated, but on the other hand the magazines sometimes also stress equal responsibility herein. This complexity is also visible in the predominant norm for women to take on a more traditional and passive role, while simultaneously also being encouraged to be confident, progressive, and entrepreneurial.

The fourth theme that resonates a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007b) in the girls' magazines studied is female empowerment, which is captured in the ideals of being independent, believing in one's own qualities, being ambitious, driven, and disciplined. The importance of these values resonates the postfeminist sensibility that is propagated within this theme (Gill, 2007b). Additionally, when analyzing who is portrayed as empowered in the magazines, and thereby who forms the embodiment of this ideal, we found that all of the role models employed were from the entertainment industry or had a glamorous lifestyle. This limited and narrow career perspective presented for girls in the magazines, as also described by Massoni (2004), has the potential to influence and limit girls' occupational aspirations (Scharrer, 2013)

The final element that resonated the postfeminist sensibility, which to a large extent was patterned in the magazines studied, was the focus on reflexivity. The concept was also articulated by Gill (2007b) as the increasing focus on psychological self-surveillance as part of a postfeminist media culture and Firminger (2006), who argued that finding love is only possible through intense self-regulation and reflexivity. The magazines offer girls various tools that might help them map their inner world, their behavior, and appearance (tools

for self-surveillance; Gill, 2007b). This means that girls are encouraged to be highly self-aware, self-monitoring and self-critical, and are urged to constantly work towards perfecting themselves on all terrains included in the magazines.

All in all, we can conclude that postfeminism as an articulation or entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist idea(l)s, with a perspective steeped in individualism and consumerism, is highly present in contemporary girl magazines. A complex palette of messages is communicated towards girls about what it means to be a girl or woman in contemporary society, which makes their individual processes of negotiating femininity terribly complex.

Although the present study provided a necessary update in the presence of postfeminism in the portrayal of femininity of Dutch girls' magazines, it is not without limitations. The study focused on mapping the themes that are marked by a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007b) in that it intertwined both feminist and anti-feminist ideas in its assessment of the magazines' representation of what it means to be a girl in contemporary (Dutch) society. As a result of the breadth of this study, some topics warrant a closer and more in-depth analysis than was given to them in the current study. For example, the heterosexual perspective and how this explicitly manifests itself in girl magazines (see, for example, Farvid & Braun, 2006), or the degree to which the nature of the representation of career perspectives in the girls' magazines can be counted as gender-stereotyped (see, for example, Peirce, 1993). Additionally, while not part of the current research goals, the specific 'Dutchness' of the postfeminist sensibility in the magazines analyzed did not stand out, although more attention could be given to the country-specific nature of the postfeminist sensibilities to more firmly establish this conclusion, by comparing the magazines with, for example, their US counterparts. This more in-depth analysis of these as well as other themes could be accomplished by performing a critical discourse analysis on both the visual and textual elements of the magazines, while also devoting more time in future analyses to the differentiation of themes between the magazines. Both were not within the scope of the current research but are valuable and necessary pathways to gain a more contextualized and in-depth view of this topic. While this study adds to the understanding of how postfeminism manifests itself in the portrayal of femininity in Dutch girls' magazines, it is by no means comprehensive. For example, a study with a sample that spans more than one year of editions, and more than one national context would offer a more complete picture of how postfeminism is present in the representation of girlhood/femininity in girls' magazines. Additionally, a more intersectional approach must be included in future research to the account for the dimensions of race which, as indicated by previous research as well as the racially diverse populations of the Netherlands, the US, and many other countries, are likely to come into play in the formulation of these postfeminist sensibilities within such magazines (Crenshaw, 1989; Krijnen, 2020; Redcross & Grimes, 2014). Finally, this study was restricted to print magazine articles; however, more comprehensive analyses in future research could be conducted on their accompanying websites and social media channels.

In conclusion, the current study has provided valuable insight into how feminist and anti-feminist ideas are woven together in the narrative presented by Dutch girl magazines surrounding girlhood and femininity in contemporary society. Nevertheless, future researchers in this area should also focus on how these texts and themes are given meaning by the girls who read them and the degree to which these perspectives are resisted, challenged, or accepted by readers. This would enable us to connect the narratives about the resurgence of feminism and the staying power of postfeminism with every day (mediated) behavior enacted by the girls who are growing up in these times.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Feminist Stereotypes and Women's Roles in Spanish Radio Ads

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Abstract

This article takes a quantitative approach to Spanish radio advertising and the stereotypes and female roles that it broadcasts in a medium that has traditionally had high female audience rates in our country. From content analysis of 679 radio ads extracted from the 3 main general Spanish radio stations and collected 10 years apart, the study attempts to show the evolution (or regression) of how radio advertising portrays women. The radio in Spain has always been a medium anchored in the real world that has also provided some degree of space to broadcast social movement. #MeToo, as a phenomenon promoting female empowerment, was no exception. Therefore, this longitudinal study aims to demonstrate whether the social movements that led to increased female activism have been reflected in a change of roles and stereotypes projected by radio advertising messages. The work presented here looks at the concept of role from a dual perspective: firstly, it focuses on the role played by female voices in radio advertising items. Secondly, it works on the concept of role by assimilating it into the female image projected in radio advertising items. The results obtained between the two samples are remarkably similar, demonstrating a clear tendency to polarise the female image and confirming that women are still being portrayed in significantly traditional roles.

Keywords

#MeToo movement; advertising; feminism; gender studies; radio; roles; Spain; stereotypes; women

Issue

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1. Introduction

Social media has become a loudspeaker for anyone wishing to publicly denounce complex situations that women still have to deal with these days: Violence in their homes, sexual harassment or discrimination in the workplace. Contents circulating around these networks demonstrate a wide-reaching social problem, and also bring to light activism driven both by feminist collectives and by individuals. One recent case is the #MeToo movement which was started in 2006 by the African American activist Tarana Burke, who used 'me too' to offer support and solidarity to a young girl who had confided in her regarding sexual abuse (Hillstrom, 2019). A decade later, the movement was adopted and amplified by the Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano (Chawla, 2019). Her #MeToo tweet unleashed a wave of support for women who had been sexually harassed by producer Harvey Weinstein, whilst also encouraging other women to report similar situations in similar contexts, allowing the campaign to spread all over the world with variations on the hashtag (Di Caro, 2017).

The #MeToo movement exemplifies how, as in the last decade, we have seen an increase in female expression and activism (Pruchniewska, 2016) and how relationships between genders have been reconfigured (Matich, Ashman, & Parsons, 2019). The developing Internet has been a great ally in this new feminist wave, largely

responsible for taking the movement to the next level—the so-called 'fourth-wave feminism' (Benn, 2013)—and advertising communication was no stranger to these trends. The appearance of movements such as *Femvertising* (Bahadur, 2014), that claim to empower women, or campaigns such as Gillette's *We Believe: The Best Men Can Be* (2019) attempting to banish messages associated with 'toxic masculinity' (Neff, 2019), demonstrates the growing negative reaction to sexist content and objectification of women in persuasive messages. We should not forget that advertising is considered to be a reflection of society (Sánchez, 2003) and at the forefront of social trends, although it also strengthens some of the most archetypal profiles of traditional women (Hurtz & Durkin, 1997; Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020; Lysonski, 2015; Napoli & Murgolo-Poore, 2003; Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos, & Zotos, 2008).

A decade ago, concern that these social movements have repercussions on and transfer to advertising messages, led our research group to begin analysing female roles and stereotypes in radio advertisements. We decided to choose the radio because it is a medium bound to the present day and immediacy and, therefore, alerts to what is going on around it. Furthermore, historically, before the arrival of audiovisual media, Spanish radio excelled at bringing together advertising, content and a female audience (Balsebre & Fontova, 2018; Guarinos, 2008). The first study we conducted took place in 2008–2009, two years after the #MeToo movement began. Considering the movement's poor initial repercussions internationally—particularly the poor media interest it aroused (Leung & Williams, 2019)—its proximity in time to the research and the lack of data that might provide a comparison, the results gave us a snapshot of the female roles and stereotypes to be found in Spanish radio advertisements, although it is not possible to assess whether changes are taking place in radio advertising. The boom and viral aspects of the #MeToo movement a decade after its creation, alongside more social movements in favour of women's rights, would lead us to believe that advertising should be part of this new reality. So, the study presented here is a replica of what we carried out in 2008–2009. A decade seems to be long enough for changes to have taken place socially and be reflected in advertising. With this aim, the task involved identifying the main roles and stereotypes in radio advertising insertions through content analysis. To do this, a coding table was drafted featuring 3 major analysis groups and 11 classification categories. In turn, the role category was divided into 10 items that helped us identify the function of the female voice within the advertising item, while the stereotype category was divided into 25 items to be able to classify advertisements based on the image that they projected of women.

Consequently, this article aims to identify the main female roles and stereotypes and analyse these possible changes to female representation in audio advertising. To do so, we have chosen persuasive messages broadcast by Spanish radio. There are several reasons for this decision. Firstly, Spanish women have historically been the main radio audience in our country and, although the female listener profile has changed substantially over the last few years, the female audience has remained loyal to the radio. Currently, almost half the radio audience in Spain is made up of women (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, [AIMC], 2020).

Secondly, because the radio is a medium with a high penetration rate among the Spanish population, 55.7%—half of them women—making it the fourth medium after television, outdoor and the Internet. In terms of investment, the situation is similar. The radio sits comfortably among investment for conventional media, varying between third and fourth place (InfoAdex, 2020; Revilla, 2010). Combining the media's penetration figures in our country with the target profile from the gender perspective and the advertising investment received by the medium justifies focussing on the relationship between women, radio advertising content, and the image that this puts across.

Thirdly, studies in relation to gender stereotypes in radio advertising have focused on the role of the voices in the ads from the point of view of linking them to credibility (Bates, Ivanič, & Somasundaram, 2018; Ivanič, Bates, & Somasundaram, 2014; Martín-Santana, E. Reinares-Lara, & P. Reinares-Lara, 2017) or on analysis of gender stereotypes (Diabah, 2019; Furnham & Thomson, 1999; Hurtz & Durkin, 1997; Melton & Fowler, 1987; Neto & Santos, 2004), but not on the role that we might attribute to radio advertising voices—their ultimate goal—and, at the same time, which image (stereotype) they help create in the recipient's mind.

Fourthly, the scarce number of articles that look in greater depth at the relationship between radio advertising and gender studies (Furnham & Thomson, 1999; Monk-Turner, Kouts, Parris, & Webb, 2007) as the majority of these articles concentrated on the medium of television or printed press (Landreth & Zotos, 2016). This gap is clear in Spain when compared to other media, and the situation does not vary much internationally. The topic of stereotypes and feminine roles has been widely studied using other advertising supports, both audiovisual and graphic (Costa Pereira, Veríssimo, Castillo, & Correia, 2013; Diabah, 2019; Messias, Veludo-de-Oliveira, & Pereira, 2020), but there are barely a dozen contributions on how gender stereotypes are treated on the radio (Diabah, 2019; Fajula, Souto, & Barbeito, 2009; Furnham & Schofield, 1986; Furnham & Thomson, 1999; Gil, 2007; Gil & Guerrero, 2016; Hurtz & Durkin, 1997; Lowy, Crespo, & Roda, 1985; Melton & Fowler, 1987; Monk-Turner et al., 2007; Neto & Santos, 2004; Piñeiro-Otero, 2011, 2012). Low interest among researchers can probably be blamed on major advertisers' low presence on the radio, the dominant news style in its commercial messages, the radio's traditional subsidiary role as an advertising medium, the lower potential attributed to radio messages compared to

television (Gil & Guerrero, 2016) and the lack of image. Consequently, our article aims to fill the gaps around studies of gender roles and stereotypes in radio advertising and, therefore, provide for a more panoramic and global vision of advertising as a means of transmitting stereotypes in Spain.

2. Women and Gender Stereotypes in Advertising

Research on gender stereotypes has proliferated since the 1960s (Napoli & Murgolo-Poore, 2003), particularly any related to the image projected of women. Traditional stereotypes that put women firmly in the home, as a submissive, sexual object, dependent on men and incapable of making important decisions (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971) are increasingly rejected by women who do not feel represented by the image that is projected of them in advertising (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977). And this is not only rejected by women. Courtney and Whipple (1983) state that, as time goes by, traditional roles tend to bother major segments of consumers. Despite raising the need almost 50 years ago to adhere to women's wishes to be represented in other roles (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971) and that there is increasing evidence that many female stereotypes that continue to appear in advertising should be a thing of the past, the advertisers and creators of commercial communication seem to be oblivious to this reality. Although women have made great progress in the job market, advertising is determined to undermine their activity, reflecting not their real behaviour and activity but the idea of how they should behave (Hassanaath, 2020). As a basis for change, the need is raised to improve awareness among advertisers concerning their responsibility to present women on a more equal footing with men (Gallego, 2009; Napoli & Murgolo-Poore, 2003), without forgetting the role of the media and advertising as opinion leaders (Zhou & Chen, 1997), agents for socialisation (Wanhsiu, 2010) and broadcasters of desirable behaviour patterns and models (Casado-Mestre, 2005; Navarro & Martín, 2013). Stereotypes have an impact on society (Ford, Voli, Honeycutt, & Casey, 1998) because how they represent men and women is perceived as the real image (Zhou & Chen, 1997).

Encountering traditional female stereotypes in advertising from the 70s might seem normal, but their slow evolution is surprising, even more so the continuity of more negative stereotypes, in some cases even worsening them (Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990). More recent studies demonstrate the prevalence of traditional roles associated with women in advertising (Hassanaath, 2020; Knoll, Eisend, & Steinhagen, 2011) such as presenting women in decorative roles (Landreth & Zotos, 2016), family-oriented roles or playing second fiddle to men (Uray & Burnaz, 2003). However, it is also true that the stereotypical image of women has improved over time (Lazar, 2009; Zhou & Chen, 1997) and advertising tries hard to sell the idea of joint responsibility between men and women, balancing out the presence of women in the public sphere and men in the home (Aramendia, Olarte, & Hatzithomas, 2020; Lobo, 2011). However, some authors detect a tendency for both realities to co-exist in conflict: On the one hand, a propensity to represent women in traditional roles (Middleton, Turnbull, & de Oliveira, 2020; Vaca, Carpio, Barrazueta, & Ordóñez, 2019); and on the other, to show them as assertive, independent, with public presence (Lazar, 2009), linked to more modern roles and figures of authority (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020; Michell & Taylor, 1990).

Spanish, and international, research has particularly focussed on television and the press. These studies not only reveal the persistence of traditional roles (Berganza & del Hoyo, 2006), but also the scarce evolution of stereotypes over time and their distance from real women (Treviños & Díaz-Soloaga, 2018), although the stereotypes considered to be most damaging to women, such as housewife and mother (Sánchez, 2003), seemed to be clearly disappearing in the late 20th century (León, 2001), with a further leaning towards adopting characteristics deemed to be masculine, such as being aggressive, imposing and arrogant (Díaz & Muñiz, 2008). Scarce studies on radio stereotypes in our country demonstrate under-representation of women (Fajula et al., 2009; Gil, 2007; Piñeiro-Otero, 2012), the existence of clearly androcentric advertising (Gil, 2014), giving men and women diametrically opposed roles and the prevalence of traditional roles (Fajula et al., 2009; Piñeiro-Otero, 2011, 2012). The few exceptions that can be found, projecting a current and modern image of women (Gil, 2014), are a ray of hope regarding the radio's potential to break the vicious cycle of sexist stereotypes in radio advertising.

3. Objectives and Research Method

In 2008, our research group Publiradio (Autonomous University of Barcelona) analysed female stereotypes in general prime-time radio advertising. The proposal presented here is the replica of this study to observe the evolution of roles and stereotypes in Spanish radio advertising through a longitudinal study.

The research questions are as follows:

> RQ1: Can changes be seen in relation to the presence of sexist stereotypes and roles in Spanish radio advertising over the last decade?

This first question is formulated to see how far this is a regressive process and, therefore, as upheld by authors such as Gil and Guerrero (2016), whether archaic values prevail, even when the radio has been improving or 'prettying up' its advertising in this respect or, on the contrary, whether the evolution is positive.

After answering this first question, it is interesting to analyse how current radio advertising presents women, so three further questions are relevant:

RQ2: What are the dominant roles and stereotypes in Spanish radio advertising?

RQ3: What picture of women does radio advertising paint, as broadcast on the most popular radio stations in Spain?

RQ4: As an advertising vehicle, does the radio still employ traditional roles assigned to women?

The analysis units were extracted from recording programmes on the three main general Spanish radio stations (SER, COPE and Onda Cero) that play advertising. The broadcasters were selected based on data from the General Media Study by the AIMC, the benchmark company in the sector on the Spanish market following maximum audience criteria (AIMC, 2020). The recorded period thereby goes from 9am to 12pm, coinciding with the highest radio audience levels in Spain (prime-time radio). Two series were collected, the first during autumn–winter 2008–2009 and the second in the same period, a decade later, for 2018–2019. Holiday periods (Christmas), bank holidays and weekends were avoided as regular programming and advertising might differ at this time. In both periods, a week was selected at random and the schedule was recorded on one day, also chosen at random. The researchers checked that no substantial changes were made within the advertising schedule for the same week. Recording several days did not reveal an increase in new advertising insertions but in repetition, so the sample was analysed.

In total, 679 advertising insertions were compiled that were broadcast in one day in the given time frames: 440 in the first recording and 239 in the second. The difference between the first sample and the second can be explained by the drop in advertising investment due to the international economic crisis that began in 2008 and due to advertisers' waning interest in the radio medium. Advertising investment in radio reached €537,3 million in 2009 while this figure had dropped to €486,4 million by 2019 (InfoAdex, 2020; Revilla, 2010).

The 679 advertising messages were recorded, listened to and the content was analysed. Content analysis "is a procedure for classifying qualitative information to obtain data amenable to quantitative manipulation" (Neto & Santos, 2004, p. 136) and lets us take a closer look at how the image of women is constructed through radio advertising. It is important to highlight that, the work presented here looks at the concept of role from a dual perspective: Firstly, it handles the concept of role focussed from the point of view of the role played by the woman's voice in the radio advertising item; secondly, it works on the concept of role by assimilating it into the image that is projected of women in the radio advertising items (stereotypes).

To perform the analysis, a template was designed that was structured into different categories (see Table 1). Each advertising insertion was analysed and catalogued within these variables. After identifying whether female voices were present, and how many, in each insertion, all items were labelled within the categories devised regarding the roles of female voices (8) and stereotypes (23) that emerged from listening to advertisements, the specialised literature review and authors' actual knowledge and experience as researchers in the audio advertising field and how gender is treated in advertising (see Tables 2 and 3).

For data systematization, a list of variables was drawn up that will represent both the diversity of female roles applied to female voices and also stereotypes (projected image). In the first case, eight roles were defined, considering the main objective of the message and the role played by the female voice. Cases were also considered where the role was not clear or had not been defined and cases where no female voices were present (see Table 2).

Regarding stereotypes, we chose to design an analysis template that will go into greater depth on the classification of roles and stereotypes. To do so, a

Table 1. Analysis units.

Analysis unit	Variables
Item identification	• Item identification number • Year of broadcast • Station
Commercial/business identification	• Sector* • Advertiser • Brand • Product
Advertising item	• Presence of speaker (male/female/both) • Number of speakers (female/male voices) • Role of the woman • Stereotype

Note: * The taxonomy per sector is based on the InfoAdex classification.

Table 2. Variables for roles.

Female voice function	Female voice role
Inform	Narrator/interviewer
Convince/recommend	Expert/prescriber
Persuade	Adviser/friend
Identify	User
Thrill	Identify with brand values
Dramatize	Role-playing within a storytelling
Filler	Female voice just as emotional filling
Brand image	Represent the brand (brand voice)
Not clear/not defined	
There is no female voice/not applicable	

taxonomy was also drawn up from own data using contributions from Lysonski (1985), McArthur and Resko (1975) and Pérez Gaulí (2000). So, the initial proposal by McArthur and Resko of spouse, parent, homemaker, worker, professional, real-life celebrity, interviewer or narrator, boyfriend/girlfriend and other was included in the list of stereotypes, that was amplified and redefined up to 25 analysis categories (see Table 3).

Table 3. Variables for stereotypes.

Role/stereotype of the woman (projected image)
Young and modern
Symbol of beauty
Trophy wife
Worker/professional
Empowered/entrepreneur
Rebel/ground-breaker
Expert/prescriber
Clever/knowledgeable
Seductive/persuasive (beauty conscious)
Controlling/gossipy
Independent/initiative-taking/active
Submissive/dependent
Silly/clueless
Exaggerated/unhinged/paranoid
Follower/indecisive
Concerned
Committed woman (social causes)
Shopper/bargain hunter
Mother/carer
Wife/companion
Sexual object (woman as a source of pleasure)
Housewife
Femme fatale
Not clear/not defined
Does not apply

To determine the image that is projected of women in radio advertising, content analysis was run on each of the 679 insertions in the sample to detect if there was content likely to be considered as stereotyped, depending on the classification previously determined for this purpose.

The same researchers—a total of five people, four women and one man—made the recording and encoded it. Discrepancies during classification were pooled and discussed to complete the database they had used. For any items where more than one stereotype was identified, the predominant one was chosen.

4. Main findings

4.1. Roles of Female Voices

To find out which roles are played by the female voice in radio advertising in Spain, 226 insertions were selected from 2008–2009, 112 from 2018–2019 and 341 items were discarded that did not contain a female voice, and so were classified as 'not applicable.'

The main function that we can identify in the advertising insertions for both series was to inform, where the female voice acts as the narrator or interviewer with the simple aim of putting across information. In any case, this type of advertising differs very little, if at all, from the informative style of radio news blocks. This function of the female voice is found in 162 items from the 2008–2009 period (36.8% of the total) and in 63 in the 2018–2019 series (26.4%). It is important to highlight that in these cases, the female voice is not related to a voice of authority, an expert or a prescriber, but seeks something more neutral: Merely putting across information. In many cases, the presence or lack of presence of the female voice is irrelevant so it could be there or not.

If we analyse the results by series, we find that in the first period—2008–2009—the second most prominent role, a long way from the informative role, is that of the product users (4.3%), followed by persuading (3.6%) where the woman acts as the adviser or friend (see Figure 1). The female voice develops the role of the person who knows the product being advertised and recommends its use. This is followed by the role of the female

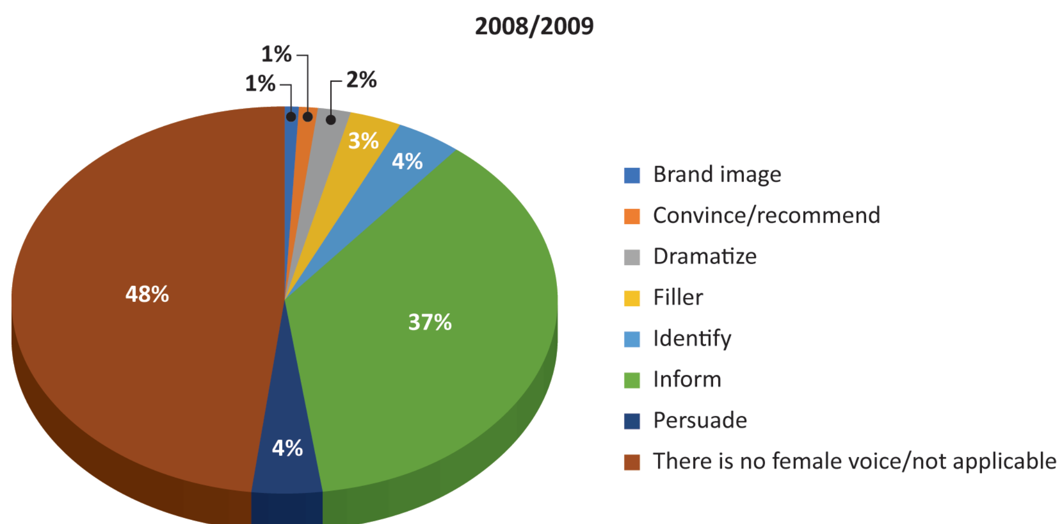

Figure 1. Female roles in 2008–2009.

voice as emotional filling (2.9%) where the woman's voice aims to move the audience based on giving the communication warmth and the role of dramatizing that we identified as the main speaker playing a certain role in the fictional story (grandmother, mother, girlfriend, worker, etc.) to help put across the story (2%). As a much more residual representation, we find the brand image role, concentrated on a single advertiser and a single brand: El Corte Inglés. Finally, the role of the woman as an expert/prescriber appears in only 1.3% of cases, showing the low interest in making women voices of authority.

In the second period—2018–2019—in addition to the role of narrator/interviewer, there are two others that stand out: dramatizing and identifying women as product users, with 7.5% and 5.8% respectively. In this series, the role of advisor or friend appears in a smaller number of insertions (2.9%). The role of women is almost anecdotal as experts or prescribers with 1.6%, as the brand image (also associated with El Corte Inglés; 1.3%), emotional filling (0.8%) and one insertion that aims to move audiences through the values that the brand puts across (see Figure 2). Comparing the data, we can see how a decade later, there is increased weighting of the role of identifying the woman as the product users and women as the voice of authority remains at practically invisible levels, where she might talk from an expert perspective and not just as a mere consumer. At first glance, it seems that little progress has been made from the point of view of the role that the women's voice develops in Spanish radio advertising, particularly considering that the role that she adopts in her function to put across the advertising message, be it informative or fictional, has repercussions on the image projected of her.

4.2. Stereotypes of Women in Radio Advertising

Gender stereotypes can be catalogued in only 5 cases of insertions that did not have a female voice and in

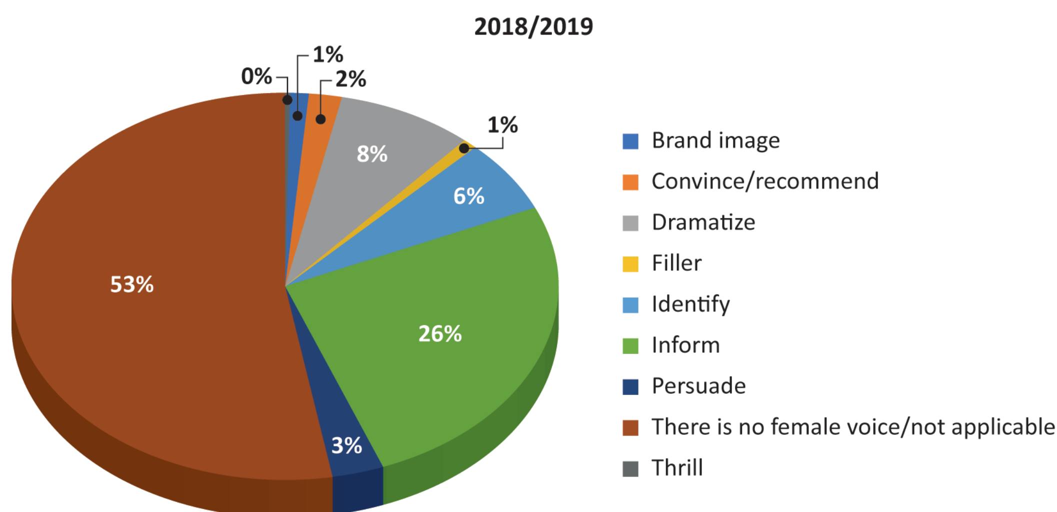

Figure 2. Female roles in 2018/2019.

16 items where the female voice took the narrator role. Once cases were registered where no stereotype was identified or this was not clear, we were left with 150 analysis units in which we could identify stereotypes associated with women, that represent 22% of the total sample. 93 insertions correspond to the first series and 57 to the second.

Out of the 23 stereotypes that we defined in theory (without counting the unclear/undefined and not applicable cases), we find 5 stereotypes that were not represented in the sample: the trophy wife, rebel/ground-breaker, submissive/dependent, silly/clueless and femme fatale.

In Table 4, we locate the number of insertions with the different gender stereotypes in both series. It is interesting to note that the most represented roles in this first series are divided into two clearly different images of women. On the one hand, stereotypes bound to roles that, although they do not portray them directly as a housewife, tie them to domestic tasks or they are associated with a negative stereotyped shopper image. The other most represented role is the symbol of beauty, as if a woman's life goals should include being beautiful. On the other hand, women are portrayed in their role as worker or professional and as someone who knows how to make decisions. In the latter case, the clever/knowledgeable woman, there are two comments: the woman is knowledgeable, and the man looks ridiculous in his ignorance and takes on the role of the fool. However, she is not portrayed as an expert but someone who knows the best thing to buy when shopping. Therefore, although the role has positive nuances in theory, the context means that, once again, the importance of her opinion is minimised: Women don't know about truly important matters.

After a decade, we see that the role of the woman as a symbol of beauty stands in first place while the shopper/bargain hunter has dropped to fourth. The stereotype of the committed woman has risen remarkably where she is portrayed as socially aware and implicated in welfare causes (solidarity, environment, etc.) that moves up to second position in 2018–2019. The other two remarkable changes in this period are the rise in the representation of women as someone who is concerned (by safety, by health, etc.) that moves up to third position with the same number of insertions as the stereotype for the clever/knowledgeable woman and the drop in the role of the woman as a worker/professional for which we only found one item. As for new incorporations in relation to the previous season, we have the roles of the exaggerated/unhinged/paranoid woman, the follower/indecisive woman and the woman as a

Table 4. Female role/stereotypes in both series.

Role/stereotype (projected image)	No. of insertions 2008–2009	No. of insertions 2018–2019	% of total sample 2008–2009	% of total sample 2018–2019	% of insertions with stereotypes 2008–2009	% of insertions with stereotypes 2018–2019
Shopper/bargain hunter	32	6	7.3	2.5	34.4	10.5
Symbol of beauty	13	13	2.9	5.5	14	22.8
Clever/knowledgeable	12	7	2.7	2.9	12.9	12.3
Worker/professional	7	1	1.6	0.4	7.5	1.75
Empowered/entrepreneur	6	0	1.4	0	6.5	0
Mother/carer	5	2	1.1	0.8	5.4	3.5
Young and modern	4	0	0.9	0	4.3	0
Committed	3	8	0.7	3.4	3.2	14.05
Independent/initiative-taking/active	3	4	0.7	1.7	3.2	7
Expert/prescriber	2	1	0.5	0.4	2.1	1.75
Concerned	2	7	0.5	2.9	2.1	12.3
Controlling/gossipy	1	0	0.2	0	1.1	0
Sexual object	1	0	0.2	0	1.1	0
Seductive/persuasive	1	0	0.2	0	1.1	0
Housewife	1	1	0.2	0.4	1.1	1.75
Wife/companion	0	5	0	2.1	0	8.8
Exaggerated/unhinged/paranoid	0	1	0	0.4	0	1.75
Follower/indecisive	0	1	0	0.4	0	1.75
Total	93	57	21.1	23.8	100	100

wife/companion. On the other hand, the young and modern roles, controlling/gossipy, empowered/entrepreneur, seductive/persuasive are not represented in this second series.

5. Conclusions

In the midst of the 21st century, women are claiming their right to play an active role in society and discard the routines, customs and stereotypes that have symbiotically bound them to the facets of mothers, carers, wives, housewives and sexual objects. Film, art, literature and advertising have nurtured some of the foulest stereotypes of traditional women and, although they should be buried by the passing of time and the boom of feminist movements, we see how in the case of Spanish radio advertising, this evolution is slow and, in some cases, even seems to be taking a step backwards rather than forwards in line with findings by Ferguson et al. (1990). At the start of our research, we wondered if it might be possible to see changes in radio advertising (RQ1) and if there was continued use of roles and stereotypes traditionally assigned to women (RQ4). The analysis of 679 radio advertising insertions collected in two series, 10 years apart, shows few changes regarding the image projected of women and reaffirms that women are still being portrayed in significantly traditional roles.

In relation to RQ2, the results obtained show women represented through stereotyped formulas with two clearly opposing images. On the one hand, they are portrayed through traditional stereotypes as symbols of beauty, shoppers, mothers and carers or wives and companions. On the other, representations are used that attempt to break these more classic stereotypes by giving them traits linked to working women who are professional, independent, take the initiative, active, modern or entrepreneurial. The results coincide with findings from other studies which have also analysed gender stereotypes in radio advertising (Diabah, 2019). The dominant stereotypes show a clear tendency to polarise the image of women and they do not demonstrate a clear step back in the presence of more traditional roles.

The persistence of traditional roles demonstrates a trend among advertisers to put across an image of traditional women along the line of the results obtained in other research (Berganza & del Hoyo, 2006; Furnham & Schofield, 1986; Hurtz & Durkin, 1997). In relation to RQ3, Spanish radio advertising projects a predominantly sexist, classic image with many negative rather than positive attributes for women.

There is a noticeable boom in the role of the concerned woman and the committed woman, whose presence has multiplied by 6 and 5 respectively, over 10 years. In the first case, the context derived from the economic crisis begun in 2008 might help to explain the stereotype of a woman concerned by security (home, family, economic stability, etc.). In the second case, the increase in ecological awareness and commitment to social causes is reflected by including a woman in advertising who is committed to disadvantaged people and care for the environment. We should not forget that the average donor in Spain is a woman aged 49, married or with a stable partner and with qualifications (Kantar Millward Brown & Asociación Española de Fundraising, 2018), so it comes as no surprise that we see this profile reproduced in radio advertising.

Men usually take on the role of narrators from the point of view of the expert or prescriber whilst this role is entirely residual among women (Furnham & Thomson, 1999; Hurtz & Durkin, 1997). In this respect, it is remarkable that the results obtained in 2018–2019 do not differ from the findings of the first studies on stereotypes in radio advertising. McArthur and Resko (1975) already concluded that men had a dominant role to play in advertising with scientific and rational articles and they were presented to a greater extent as experts and voices of authority. Neto and Santos (2004) came to the same conclusions. Almost 45 years after the initial snapshot, Spanish radio advertising is practically the same.

To counter the practical invisibility of women as a voice of authority, it is usual to find her taking the role of user of a certain product and giving advice from her own experience, as a friend. Although in theory this became negative over a long period, as it seems to deny women their capability to act as an expert voice, in the current context, it might be positive. The boom of the Internet and social media has caused a complete turnaround in relation to the type of communication that consumers trust. The success of platforms such as TripAdvisor, services such as Trusted Shops and the proliferation of user reviews and opinions on most websites makes it clear that we trust opinions from other consumers, real users, more than the brand, as we consider consumer opinions are neither conditioned nor interfered with. In this context, the role of women as users, advisers and friends has a greater chance of seeming credible and will give positive results for the brand.

The absence of evidence of images, control of the informative style in radio advertising and the fact that certain business sectors do not include radio in their media strategy leads to lower presence of insertions with stereotyped content. This can help explain the low interest raised by research into gender stereotypes in radio advertising compared to studies found on this same topic referring to the television or printed media. The scarcer presence of stereotypes can lead to a false sensation that they do not exist when, as we have seen, this is not the case. Radio advertising presents indices of stereotyped content which are similar to what we found in television (Neto & Santos, 2004). It is interesting to highlight that stereotyping women as sexual objects does not appear on radio advertising while it is usually one of the predominant stereotypes in graphic and audiovisual media (Chacón, 2008). In these media, this usually implies a tactic to attract the recipient’s attention (Kerin, Lundstrom, & Sciglimpaglia, 1979) using a sensual-sexual,

highly idealised image. The lack of image, as we mentioned, surely explains the absence of this stereotype in radio advertising.

The scrutiny to which television is subjected in its current role, with a nod to the Internet, of prime medium among certain segments of the Spanish population, means that stereotypes such as the housewife have disappeared from TV advertising (Martín Casado, 2012). On the other hand, the label of second-class medium that has been traditionally given to the radio in Spain helps more traditional stereotypes last longer, such as those we have just mentioned.

There has been a remarkable change among advertising items between the first and second series. While in the first series, the pressure to attain an ideal of beauty exclusively targeted women, in the second period, we see this pressure being transferred to men. In this case, the iconographic model that is held up is mesomorph (athletic) for men and endomorph (slim) for women.

Radio as an advertising medium linked to proximity, above all thanks to local programming, makes it easier to appeal directly to the recipient to behave in a certain way. In our case, one of the most widely represented stereotypes in both series is the shopper/bargain hunter woman and we saw how the El Corte Inglés advertiser makes the most of advertising insertions by mentioning that its stores open at 10 am as a reminder to incite purchase.

To sum up, the results obtained are quite consistent with the studies that we could find internationally on gender radio advertising which implies, on the one hand, that many of the stereotypes are universal and transcend cultures and borders. On the other, obtaining similar results so many years apart demonstrates the slow evolution of radio advertising. The longitudinal study presented here is, as mentioned by Milner and Higgs (2004), one of the few attempts to look at the evolution of stereotypes internationally and beyond the English-speaking world (United States or United Kingdom). Furthermore, the longitudinal studies that we could find are focussed on the television, so this contribution is important as it allows us to analyse the changes made in radio advertising over time. Doubtlessly, the continuity of the study will make it possible to document the presence, persistence, appearance and/or disappearance of gender stereotypes in Spanish radio advertising in the future as society's perception of these stereotypes moves forward and changes. In the same way, it opens the door to similar studies in other countries to obtain comparative findings. We consider that the range of roles and stereotypes presented in this research can be easily extrapolated to other regions.

Finally, we should mention that most consumers are accustomed to receiving advertising messages with stereotyped content so that often we barely pay attention to them or we simply consider them as 'normal.' We hope that this study can 1) encourage insight on the persistence of content that uses roles and stereotypes traditionally assigned to women despite social achievements, and 2) help activate our critical awareness on the content of persuasive messages and the image that they project regarding gender. In the same way, a change in attitude towards gender equality would be desirable, both from whoever commissions advertising and the people creating it. This research seems to reveal a major disconnection between radio advertising and society, demonstrated by the slow pace and difficulty to transform stereotypical content of radio advertising messages.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Breaking the Rules: Zodwa Wabantu and Postfeminism in South Africa

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Abstract
Zodwa Wabantu, a South African celebrity recently made popular by the *Daily Sun*, a local tabloid newspaper, is notorious as an older working-class woman who fearlessly challenges social norms of feminine respectability and beauty. Her assertion of sexual autonomy and her forays into self-surveillance and body-modification, mediated by the *Daily Sun* and other tabloid and social media platforms, could be read as a local iteration of a global postfeminist subjectivity. However, the widespread social opprobrium she faces must be accounted for: Using Connell's model of the gender order together with a coloniality frame, I argue that northern critiques of postfeminism omit to consider the forms of patriarchy established by colonialism in southern locales such as South Africa. The local patriarchal gender order, made visible within the tabloid reportage, provides the context within which the meaning of Zodwa Wabanu's contemporary postfeminist identity is constructed. I examine a range of Zodwa Wabantu's (self)representations in *Daily Sun* and other digital media in the light of this context, and conclude that a close examination of the local gender order assists in understanding the limits of postfeminism's hegemony.

Keywords
coloniality; Daily Sun; gender; postfeminism; South Africa; tabloid

Issue
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1. Introduction

Zodwa Libram 'Wabantu,' the focus of this article, is a minor South African celebrity brought to public attention in 2017 by the popular tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Sun*. Notorious for refusing to wear underwear when dancing the 'vosho,' a seductive move which she performs at local entertainment venues, Zodwa has faced down the public opprobrium directed at her as an older and—to some—unattractive black woman. Instead, successfully creating a media presence around her upwardly mobile lifestyle and audacious confrontation of South Africa's deeply conservative patriarchal norms, she has harnessed her notoriety to 'build her brand,' positioning herself as an autonomous sexual and consumer subject. For these reasons she exemplifies the aspirations of South Africa's upwardly mobile black working class, articulated with the new rights-bearing female subject of the post-apartheid era. If women had been subjugated during apartheid, the new dispensation endorses a range of rights protected by a famously liberal constitution; in addition, women can now take their place on a world stage by virtue of a globally connected digital media-sphere. Like their international peers, media-savvy South African women enjoy the pleasures of participation in the online social spaces that affirm the desirable sexual and consumer identities of the day. They achieve visibility and exercise control over how they are represented, and some, like Zodwa, are able to use the media to transform their lives in material ways, undoubted gains which contrast markedly with the country's history of women's oppression.

Appearing to transcend patriarchal demands, and evolving in tandem with a rapidly changing local media culture synced to global media flows, these advances in personal choices and freedoms can readily be associated with the rise of a postfeminist 'sensibility' (Gill, 2007) within the post-apartheid social sphere. Describing a new

form of femininity identifiable in the neoliberal socioeconomic dispensations that characterise the media-rich, established democracies of the north, postfeminism has been noted for its ability to ‘travel’ transnationally via the global mediascape, easily inserting itself in southern spaces (Dosekun, 2015). Yet postfeminist scholarship pays scant attention to the patriarchies that it claims to transcend. The aim of this article is to examine the mediation of Zodwa’s performances in the light of the local patriarchal gender order—the context within which she is establishing her nascent postfeminist identity—and assess how it might shape the outcomes of the discourse for subjects who take it up. I argue that if (post)feminisms differ, so too are the patriarchies to which they respond: The specificities of the gender order which postfeminism encounters and onto which it is grafted, so to speak, are crucial when evaluating its local appeal and success. To this end, employing a coloniality lens, I provide a brief overview of the historical circumstances that have shaped the current South African gender order.

Additionally, given the close relationship said to exist between postfeminism and the media, the characteristics of the tabloid media which drove Zodwa’s rise to social prominence, as well as the local digital divide, inform the analysis. The data for this article is drawn purposively from South African tabloid media between 2017 and early 2020, primarily the *Daily Sun* newspaper and its Facebook page; the digital entertainment news platform *Tshisalive*; as well as certain of Zodwa’s self-representations and her followers’ reactions to these on her public ‘blue-ticked’ Instagram page, @zodwalibram.

2. “Gender Has a History”

Postfeminism is a notoriously contradictory, even incoherent, concept (Gamble, 2001). Used indiscriminately by the media, academia and feminists since the late 1990s, it is deployed to variously celebrate and bemoan a range of feminine identities produced within mediated popular culture. One source of these contradictions is the ‘post’ of postfeminism, which appears to signal the redundancy of second wave feminist politics. Thus, ‘girl power,’ for example, is admired for its ‘empowered’ feminine and sexy assertiveness achieved through consumption, effectively repudiating the stuffy politics—and appearance—of second wave feminists, even while acknowledging their gains (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). However, for critics such as Gill (2017) and McRobbie (2004), the emphasis on sexual subjectification, self-surveillance, and the valorisation of choice and individualised empowerment through consumption, are worrying signs of postfeminism’s co-option by the global patriarchal neoliberal hegemony and the evisceration of its capacity for feminist critique.

These contrary understandings, roughly sketched above, commonly focus on the cultures of the media-saturated democracies of the north. But, recognising its circulation within the flows of globalised media, scholarship in other spaces draws attention to the translatability of postfeminism’s contradictory constellation of orientations, practices and values, and has observed how, as a mediated cultural form, it is not the preserve of the West but is also adopted in marginalised and postcolonial societies (Butler, 2013; Chen, 2012; Lazar, 2006; Switzer, 2013). This scholarship is broadly concerned with the discursive tactics which enable “patriarchy-friendly” (Gill, 2017, p. 168) postfeminism to insinuate itself successfully into disparate locales, and with the social consequences of its adoption within unequal contexts increasingly defined by the logics of global neoliberalism.

This article, however, avoids these polarising positions, and following Genz and Brabon (2009, p. 5) contends that “postfeminism is context-specific and has to be assessed dynamically in the relationships and tensions between its various manifestations and contexts.” In this regard, a sustained examination of the local patriarchal social relations into which global post-feminist discourse is inserted appears indispensable. In much of the scholarship, whether in northern or southern contexts, patriarchy is assumed as largely self-evident. The spectacular style of the young, independent, cosmopolitan women in Dosekun’s (2015) study in Nigeria, for example, is constructed as being already outside the purview of local patriarchal relations; through ‘empowered’ yet normative practices of consumption, sexualisation and self-surveillance, the hyper-femininity of these elite young women appears to respond to the nebulous patriarchy of global neoliberalism, rather than local patriarchal gender relations. This is in keeping with the northern literature: For example, Gill (2017, p. 608–609), while arguing that “an analysis of gender is central to understanding the current moment…and [its] representation,” does not comment on patriarchy as such—rather, it is subsumed beneath a broader set of social concerns, including ‘misogyny.’

Given this lacuna, my aim is to locate Zodwa Wabantu’s working-class postfeminist performances in the patriarchal gender order that is, I argue, ultimately responsible for their salience within the local milieu. In order to do so, I adopt a coloniality lens compatible with Connell’s (1995) model of the gender order. ‘Gender order’ refers to a hierarchy of masculinities and femininities discursively produced within social institutions, such as the family. Connell proposes that a patriarchal gender order understands male and female as dichotomous: A range of subordinated and complicit masculinities, and variously enabling or resistant femininities, are organised in relation to ‘hegemonic’ masculinity whose social ascendency is won within a balance of forces. This model explicitly accounts for the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities socially constructed in diverse locales and times, and is particularly cognisant of the gender relations produced within coloniality (Connell, 2009).

As a concept, coloniality describes a longstanding global social and political condition, in that the social, political and economic relations initiated by colonialism

persist today as ‘coloniality’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2000). It seeks to understand and confront the “constellation of oppressions” (de Sousa Santos, 2016, p. 18) of colonialism and its social, political, economic and cultural consequences today. This includes how imperial power “smashed” and remade the gender orders of colonised spaces, and the consequences of this disruption for present-day gender relations (Connell, 2009, p. 92). Recognising that “gender has a history,” Ray (2018, p. 86) argues that the task of the scholar interested in gender relations within the postcolony is to develop “a flexible structural analysis that pays attention both to colonial history and to subject formation.” No less than physical subjugation, she argues, colonialism depended for its success on the production of new gendered subjectivities: It is the scholar’s task to identify the ways in which coloniality continues to produce the gendered subjectivities that serve its interests today.

The British imperial project, the apartheid state and present-day coloniality have all shaped gender relations in South Africa. This transformation has occurred along a number of intersecting fronts, establishing the uneven ground in which contemporary femininities, such as post-feminist ones, take root. The salient elements of this history, presented below, are Christianity and the gender binary, the bifurcation of the state, and a post-transition social milieu characterised by rights, inequality and violence. What emerges is a fractious gender landscape, in which these elements variously combine to produce deeply contested understandings of gender relations.

2.1. Colonialism, Christianity and the Gender Binary

From a coloniality perspective, north and south gender relations are mutually constitutive: Gender relations in southern locales are the product of colonialism locally, at the same time that they are tied to the contemporary global ‘condition’ of coloniality (Ray, 2018; Schiwy, 2007). The concept of a dichotomous heterosexual gender order is itself an artefact of the West’s colonising, categorical, hierarchical and binary logic (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997), closely tied to Christianity. In coloniality’s schema, “European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life…a being of civilisation, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason” (Lugones, 2010, p. 743). Colonial, bourgeois women supported European men’s economic and political enterprises through married domesticity and sexual purity (McClintock, 2002). Christian precepts of monogamous marriage, pre-nuptial sexual chastity, married fidelity, and the centrality of the nuclear family unit, contrast markedly with customary organization of marital and sexual relations (Delius & Glaser, 2004). Today, most South Africans identify as Christian. Pentecostal churches, many with global ties, as well as African Independent Churches, continue to support individuality alongside patriarchal authority and female submission in line with biblical precepts, including rejection of non-binary gender and sexual identities.

2.2. The Bifurcation of the State: ‘Modernity’ and ‘Tradition’ in Urban and Rural Spaces

African colonies were constructed around the binary of Western ‘modernity’ and African ‘custom’ (Dussel, 2000) and specific forms of identity underpinned the ‘bifurcated state’ (Mamdani, 1996). Mamdani (1996) argues that for settlers, a modern ‘citizen’ identity was guaranteed by statutory rights, while a ‘subject’ identity was assumed of indigenous people bound by a reified customary law to decentralised customary authorities. This bifurcation continues today. Customary law disproportionately affects rural women in particular (Weeks, 2011) with profound implications for women’s rights (Claasens, 2009).

Apartheid urban areas in contrast supported ‘modern’ forms of African patriarchy. Urbanised black South Africans were obliged to live in ‘townships,’ peri-urban residential areas constructed by the apartheid state with particular forms of ‘modern’ gender-relations in mind (Robinson, 1996). State housing provided for an idealised patriarchal nuclear family and presumed a household economy centred on the husband’s wage-earning capacity and the wife’s domesticity (Hunter, 2010). This model of urban gender relations was ultimately impossible to establish in the highly contested township social terrain, inflected as it was by in-migration from rural areas, mines and their associated material and cultural infrastructures, Western media and cultural forms, and struggle politics (Bank, 2011; Morrell, 1998). Today, while elite black South Africans can afford to reside in formerly whites-only suburbs, the majority continue to live in comparatively underserviced townships.

2.3. Inequality, Rights and Violence

The 1994 political transition propelled South Africa into the global neoliberal economy, itself the product of coloniality (Quijano, 2000). The structural adjustment that followed precipitated enormous inequality that directly affects gender relations. South Africa is notoriously one of the most unequal countries in the world, and black South Africans suffer high levels of unemployment, which stood at 29.1% in 2019. Unemployment has a gendered dimension: 43.5% of women are unemployed, and young, black urban women with lower education levels in particular suffer from chronic unemployment; in contrast, 35% of men are unemployed. Today, rather than the apartheid dream of the black urban patri-focal household, young people between the ages of 18 and 34 remain single; and about 37,9% (approximately 6,1 million) of all households are headed by women alone (Statistics South Africa, 2018, 2020).

It is in this precarious economic environment that rights and violence come to the fore. The rights explicitly given to women by the 1996 Constitution have been

put into practice unevenly, depending on the context in which the discourse is received. Black women's claims to rights, in particular rights to sexual autonomy, challenge normative gender relations, a confrontation which has not been met without resistance (Posel, 2004). The stubborn patriarchy forged in the course of the long and violent history of colonialism and apartheid still demands a reckoning, all too frequently violent (Gqola, 2015), a sombre counterpoint to postfeminist celebrations of women's emancipation.

A valuable example of how these various elements can combine to shape gender relations in specific locales is provided by Hunter (2010), who carefully examines the evolving post-apartheid gender order in a declining industrial township. He locates his analysis within a neoliberal economy, characterised by profound economic instability and unemployment, which has deprived men of their privileged status as breadwinners. Earlier traditional forms of what he terms 'provider love' were premised on a man's capacity to pay *ilobolo* (bride price) and maintain a household; today, while this remains an ideal, few men accomplish it. However, material resources remain essential for men to establish sexual relationships with women, and a man's ability as an *isoka* (playboy) to support a number of sexual relationships has become the yardstick of hegemonic masculinity in this space. Variously complicit with or strategically resistant to this hegemony, women, often unemployed, expect material support for themselves and their children as a normal part of sexual relations. Simultaneously, drawing on a discourse of rights, they claim their freedom to enjoy sexual pleasure and multiple partners as men do, carefully negotiating intimate relationships that bring material benefits. This wins women some independence; but customary and Christian morality (which sanction female chastity) put them at risk of being labelled *isifebe* (a loose woman) and subject to the violence of men who might try to 'discipline' them. Hunter's work illustrates Connell's (2009, p. 93) claim that within coloniality there is no fixed gender order, but a "reconfigured terrain" on which new struggles take place—including the establishment of discourses such as postfeminism.

3. The Media Landscape

Postfeminism is characterised as a "thoroughly mediated" discourse brought to connected elites in southern locales via transnational flows of global media (Dosekun, 2015, p. 965). Germane to this research is how the discourse is taken up and re-configured by local media for a working-class audience: in this case, tabloid entertainment news. Significantly, Zodwa Wabantu came to public attention in the pages of the *Daily Sun*, a highly popular national tabloid which addresses black, working class, township residents. Established in 2002 on the back of the demise of the 'quality' white press, it is largely disparaged (Wasserman, 2010); nonetheless, it had, at the time when Zodwa first appears in its reportage in April 2017, the largest readership of any newspaper in South Africa. *Daily Sun*'s Facebook page, and *Tshisalive*, a digital tabloid platform that regularly reports on Zodwa's activities, are available to anyone with an Internet connection. South Africa enjoys a robust local media infrastructure and is Africa's most 'connected' country. Nevertheless, a marked digital divide means that access to the pleasures and benefits of online platforms follow class and racial lines (Duncan, 2013). Only 36,5 million people out of a population of 59 million currently use the Internet; and of these, only 22 million are active social media users (Johnson, 2021). Instagram—the favoured social media platform for celebrities such as Zodwa—accounted for only 11.85% of social media use in April 2020 (Statcounter, 2021).

4. Sample and Method

The complete coverage of Zodwa in *Daily Sun*, including readers' letters, its Facebook page and followers' comments, *Tshisalive* coverage, as well as Zodwa's public Instagram account and her followers' comments, provide the data for this research. From these I purposively select specific 'moments' that best illustrate Zodwa's (self)representation and ambivalent public reception. The moments include her rise to fame, her abortive visit to Zimbabwe, her sexual relationships with younger men, and her body-modification journey. A critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough, 1995; Richardson, 2007), which recognises the socio-cultural context of textual production and reception, informs the analysis. This consists of a close reading of the texts, paying particular attention to lexicalisation.

5. Analysis

5.1. Zodwa's Rise to Fame

Zodwa, born in Soweto, grew up exposed to the privations common to township life. Her highly relatable life story, frequently recited in interviews and articles, signifies her heroic transcendence of poverty (Kekana, 2017b). Her fortunes changed in her 30s when "videos of her seductive dancing went viral" and she "became an overnight celebrity." The *Daily Sun* is the only newspaper to feature her at this decisive turning-point in her career. "ZODWA'S READY TO PARTY IN UK!" exclaims the headline in the SunBuzz section on the inside pages. Already the tropes that will characterise the public response to her meteoric rise to celebrity status are visible: Having no other recognizable talent, she is described simply as a "popular partygoer," whose "behaviour" is decried as setting "a bad example for women." But Zodwa dismisses this criticism: "I don't care what they say," she remarks: "Haters will always hate and I will always shine while they are talking" (Ngcobo, 2017a).

Two months later she reappears, now on page 3, naked: "Zodwa bares all on social media" (Mojalefa,

2017). She has taken up the Amber Rose challenge, along with several other South Africans who are pictured in a humorous parallel report, "Mzansi gets naked!" The image, taken from Zodwa's Instagram account, shows her from the back as she displays her shapely behind: *Daily Sun* places an amusingly large yellow star over her bottom. The content of the report, however, is serious, and in true *Daily Sun* style contrasts markedly with the titillating picture: "I want to spread the message of body positivity as an all-natural woman!" declares Zodwa in the opening line. "I look up" to Amber Rose, she continues, "because, like me, she is always called names for being so confident." Aligned in this way with her famous role model, she extrapolates to the prevalence of gender-based violence. Zodwa describes herself as "upset by the recent rise in killings of women and children" in South Africa. In this context, her self-representation is not frivolous but serious: It "is also a response to violence"; "We are tired of being called whores and being killed for nothing, even when we are fully dressed!" she explains. The report ends with her provocative challenge: "Maybe when we are naked, our voices will be louder."

From these two episodes, and the viral videos of her vosho dance moves, it is already clear that Zodwa's shock-appeal for readers lies in her unconventional attitudes and behaviour together with her matter-of-fact personality. A third article seals this effect, capturing her at a prominent social occasion wearing a daring dress that is "slit up to her hip, revealing her tattooed bum and thigh." Her large image, which depicts the long black slit dress and her curvaceous leg, hip and bum, dominates the report: "I wore this because I am proud of my beautiful body," Zodwa declares, and the article ends with an amusing kicker: "She added she was not wearing any panties" (Ngcobo, 2017b). But not everyone is entertained; the letter "Zodwa's outfit sends wrong message" (Nwa-Shavani, 2017) responds to the outcry over her dress and comes down on the side of custom, declaring that "as Africans, ethics and consideration should be taken into account": "This woman doesn't respect herself," continues the writer, worried that Zodwa sets a "poor example" to young people; they should rather "follow celebrities who have strong moral conduct." Indeed, he warns: "Men are [only] polite to women who conduct themselves respectfully." The implicit argument is, of course, that we must not be surprised if men disrespect women who are not respectably dressed, a veiled reference to the tide of gender-based violence that engulfs the country. The letter ends with a stern and patronising admonition: "As women, it is your responsibility to display a positive image in your communities and homes."

5.2. Confronting Custom

Soon after her Durban July debut, Zodwa is invited to perform in the neighbouring country of Zimbabwe, at the Harare International Carnival. But the *Daily Sun* reports that she is disappointed, for the condition for her appearance is that she "must change her show" (Molobi, 2017a). In short, "they require her to wear underwear." The Tourism Authority, responsible for the show's organisation, states its case in the report, which is argued on the ground of custom: The "chiefs and traditional leaders" who attend the performance will apparently "be upset" if they see her without her "panties" on. Zodwa is depicted as outraged: She "fumed" at the news and "lashed out" at the Tourism Authority, which she called "out of line": "What are they to change me?" she demands rhetorically.

The furore provokes even the Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, to weigh in on the topic at a political rally. He renounces her and in so doing reveals how feminine respectability is policed within customary patriarchy. Using this public forum, he "lambasted'' Zodwa (Ndaba, 2017), attacking her morals and her lack of respectability: "You just come without covering your decency" he remarks disgustedly, asking: "What do you want? Men to see you?" If it is, "We don't want such," he declares, simultaneously apologising to men for the ban—"I'm sorry we disappointed many men"—and acknowledging he is a "killjoy." But his decision is firm: "We don't want an intransigent or stubborn naked nobody coming to cause problems" (Molobi, 2017c). Zodwa contemptuously dismisses the fiasco, and describing herself as a "liberated" woman proclaims that "people need to know that they cannot tell us [women] how to live our lives" (Kekana, 2017a).

In effect, Zodwa aligns herself with a modern and 'feminist' perspective that eschews the discourse of custom. She also uses the occasion to challenge conventional Christian morality. As the scandal reaches its zenith, Zodwa is spotted attending church, an occasion that allows her to repudiate the public opinion that she is immoral. Alive to its readers' religious sentiments, *Daily Sun* gives her ample space to make her case: Using this public forum, she reminds readers that "every human being, including her, needs to have a relationship with God": "Why are people surprised that I go to church?" she asks indignantly, comparing her treatment to that of men who do far worse things than go pantyless: "Killers [and] rapists…pray and go to church—but they're not questioned" (Molobi, 2017b).

5.3. Zodwa and Her Ben 10

If custom and morality are scandalised by the idea of Zodwa's 'pantyless' performances, they are outraged by her non-heteronormative choice of partner, for she habitually dates younger men: At the time that she came to public attention at the age of 33, Zodwa was in a relationship with Ntobeko Linda, some 10 years younger than herself. She confesses that this is a conscious strategy which enables her to avoid the power-relations she once experienced in transactional sexual relationships with older men: "I don't want to be controlled and managed [by older men]" she states unequivocally (MacG,

2020); instead, she declares that she is "after happiness" and "living my best life" (Zeeman, 2018). However, *Daily Sun*'s readers ignore the implicit critique of patriarchy that her choice presents and instead foreground the age difference, seen as taboo by many. Linda is gleefully described by the tabloids as Zodwa's 'Ben 10,' a colloquialism derived from the children's cartoon series, attached to men who date older women. They appear together on the *Daily Sun*'s Facebook page in "ZODWA IS HAPPY WITH HER BEN 10," a post, derived from her public Instagram account, that garnered one thousand two hundred comments (Daily Sun, 2018). The readers' reactions reveal three broad concerns, the first two of which are negatively charged: suspicion as to Ntobeko's motives, and Zodwa's inappropriate age, while the third category presents more nuanced readings of sexual relationships in the local context and positive endorsements.

First, Ntobeko's motives are judged as mercenary. Zodwa preempts this reading of the relationship in the article linked to the post: "I know people think he's with me for the money but no, that man makes me happy," she declares. But commentators contradict her: "That one is really there for…your money my dear," exhorts one, warning Zodwa to "wake-up." Another agrees: "All women say that 'he is not after my money' before Ben 10 milk them and leave them dry." Not only is Ntobeko there simply to "cash in," but his attachment to Zodwa is questioned on the grounds that she is an older woman whose work is contemptible: "No man will commit himself with a woman who show the whole world her punani [vagina]." Ntobeko's commitment thus renders him mad: "He got some mental illness issue?" asks a disbelieving follower.

Zodwa, in contrast, is a *gogo* [grandmother, an old woman], accused of "eating children," as well as "pedophila," "statutory rape" and "child abuse," for Ntobeko is an "infant," a "boy" who "has not started to shave yet." In contrast to her younger partner's looks, Zodwa's femininity is scathingly called into question, for "it seems like Zodwa is man and pretty boi is wifey here," and Zodwa "looks like she's the one with a dick." To save Ntobeko from Zowa's unnatural femininity, appeals are made to Christian precepts. Arguing that "this is madness a young boy with ugogo," a commentator moralises that "God is very disappointed about what we do in his world": "People like Zodwa," exclaims another outraged reader, are "the ones that causeth God's rage," an opinion endorsed by another which likens her to "rahab the harlot in the bible." Prayer, a familiar solution for *Daily Sun* readers, is suggested as a remedy: "God deliver this boy," and "Let's pray for this kid. May God rescue you Son."

More nuanced readings refer to the relationship as a personal choice, and reference the local context in which men struggle to access the financial resources necessary to support sexual relationships. In the latter case, the male commentators acknowledge their relative poverty and the attraction of an older woman with financial means: "If shes older than me n hv money i can giv it to her evn in public" declares one, while another upbraids the critics, pointing out the reality of relationships in township settings: "If u think zodwa is the only one with a ben 10 out there clearly u hvnt lived in the skwata camp (mkhukhu) [squatter camp shacks]." Some readers bravely confess their desire to have a "sugarmama": "Ppl like us PWR [poor] BEN 10's I wish to get one suger mama," one exclaims while others offer to be Zodwa's Ben 10: "Also in need of sugarmama. Inbox me please." One particularly assertive and amusing statement calls out the haters, drawing attention to the fact that Zodwa has money and an energetic young lover, and implying that her critics are simply penniless, sex-starved and jealous:

> She is getting a junior fresh hard dick dt never disappoint and money she cant even count nd u busy judging her while u on free mode [free Facebook with reduced functionality] nd last time u had a dick was 2015.

In short, Zodwa should "do wat make you happy nd keep up girl" and ignore the hate: "Age is nothing but a number, if you are happy why worry?"

The fuss dies down, but a year later Zodwa, by now an established figure, publicly proposes to Ntobeko. The *Daily Sun* could not be more delighted at the entertainment prospect this event offers: "ZODWA TO LOBOLA BEN 10!" proclaims the front-page headline (Ngcobo, 2019c). The opening paragraph describes how Zodwa not only "got down on her bended knee" but also declared that she'll "be the one who will send uncles to pay lobola [bride money] for him!" Provocatively, the subheading declares "Singer plans to send abakhongi" [customarily, the delegation from the groom's family that negotiates the marriage with the bride's father]. If to propose is unconventional, to pay lobola on behalf of a man is scandalous to an extreme degree; but Zodwa defends her decision stoutly. No doubt drawing on her own experiences of township poverty, she tells the *Daily Sun* that she "knows there are women who take loans and borrow money so their men can pay lobola," and admonishes them for being secretive about it: "Stop giving your men money for lobola and hiding the truth."

The concern with culture is picked up by a "Cultural expert" (Ngcobo, 2019d) who weighs in on the matter: "What they're doing is against tradition." Horrified that a woman will "lobola a man"—"It is shocking!"—he warns that "their ancestors will turn their backs on them and cause trouble in their marriage." Zodwa remarkably "laughs off" the threat and dismisses tradition out of hand: While she "respects people who do rituals" she herself "doesn't believe in tradition." Even more shocking is that "according to her, she doesn't have ancestors": "If a person is dead, they're dead," she asserts, adding that "I don't even use muthi [witchcraft]." Indeed, "culture has nothing to do with us." She is, in effect, aligning herself with a modern, individualist and Christian

outlook that eschews custom: "I pray and do things my way."

5.4. Dear Body: A (Post)Feminist Journey

Zodwa's unconventional behaviour and attitudes are matched by her unconventional physical appearance: As a mature woman, Zodwa does not fulfil normative expectations of celebrity beauty. Nonetheless, her distinctive physicality is the basis of her public appeal and success. She is noted for her broad, plain, but characterful face, her short, 'unkept' natural hair, and her strong, shapely legs and bum which she employs to such captivating erotic effect in the vosho, her signature dance move. Following the Zimbabwe fiasco, and under pressure as she becomes more visible as a media personality, Zodwa gives up her "pantyless" performances and promises to "tone things down" (Mdluli, 2018). Nevertheless, she is under no illusion about the source of her attraction: her bold sexuality and an unshakeable self-confidence. Conscious of the taboos she breaks and the revolutionary example that this sets for others given the patriarchal context in which she operates, she argues that women, whom she describes somewhat dismissively as "domestic beings"—"people who just have to cook and stuff"—were initially hostile until they saw how "free" she is (Kekana, 2017c). Their attitudes are changing: Now they "look at me and think, 'actually, Zodwa may be right.' Why should I compromise on living my best life because of a man?" Extending this logic, she declares that "guys don't like me" for the same reasons: "They say I'm making women more 'aware' of their freedom." She motivates women to "stop being used by men" (Mdluli & Silangwe, 2018); "Ladies, you have the power and you must use it," she urges them: "Take it from me. I am using my punani to make R35 000." The trick, she emphasises, is to "be yourself."

But this advice must compete with harsh criticism. Zodwa's age, her homely face, and the way she uses her body to make money are frequently ridiculed. Indeed, "I'm told every day that I'm old and ugly," she observes (Mdluli, 2018). Remarkably, this severe commentary does not inhibit a frank and unashamed self-evaluation which Zodwa doesn't hesitate to share publicly: "I love myself the way I am and will continue to embrace the beautiful body God gave me," she asserts defiantly (Molobi, 2018), adding that she refuses to be "pressurised into imitating other celebrities." An early Instagram photograph displays her behind as she straddles a sun-recliner wearing a thong bikini: "Show me a Woman without Cellulite" reads her caption, along with laughing and peach emojis, "Being a Woman, Humble" (Libram, 2017). It is precisely this unabashed and level self-appraisal, by which she consciously identifies with ordinary people, that wins her fans' loyalty: As one follower remarks: "This is who we are!!! Real ♀ thank you @zodwalibram," while reminding others of the real risks that Zodwa takes, for she is "putting it out there for those of us who are proud but can't quite share on such platforms for various reasons."

In time, however, as her fame, income and endorsement opportunities grow, Zodwa begins to make different kinds of decisions about her appearance. The first indication of dissatisfaction with her body is seen in the 2018 *Marie Claire* naked issue, in which she apologises to her body for negative feelings: "#DearBody, I'm sorry for the times I've hated you, especially the face," simultaneously acknowledging what her body has achieved for her: "You're good to me—I mean it" (Libram, 2018a). While she had initially emphatically declared that she "owe[s] no one an explanation for [her] cellulite and wrinkles," and that she "will not change for anyone" (Luhanga & Tlhoaele, 2018), she begins—notably, after her separation from Ntobeko Linda—to experiment with cosmetic body treatments and modifications, becoming in the process an 'influencer' for the clinic that she patronises.

She shares these experiences in a forthright and humorous manner on Instagram, beginning innocuously enough with a "health check" (Libram, 2018b). Soon, they extend to more radical interventions: "Vampire" facials, botox treatments and breast augmentations. But most astonishing is the video of her first "vaginal rejuvenation," which is viewed by 191,665 followers (Libram, 2019). The video shows the doctor and nurse in blue scrubs as they conduct the procedure. Zodwa, lying with her legs bent and positioned away from the viewer, discusses how the vagina changes after giving birth and the impact this has on sexual pleasure. Followers' comments reveal a range of positions taken in response to her frank disclosure, informed by the discourses available to them. Unsurprisingly, given South Africa's patriarchal hegemony, many are openly misogynistic: "Is ben10 complaining?" reads one of the more innocuous rhetorical questions which target Zodwa's sexual history. However, haters are disciplined by readers who call out their ignorance: "If we don't know something we tend to judge than to learn…stop being stubborn and take time to learn about things." Some try to educate uninformed followers. Lessons are given about customary precedents for vaginal tightening: "This is sometng was done before our for fathers [forefathers] nd it was done by sangomaz [traditional healers]," as well as suggestions for practical and less expensive home remedies: "Cleanse it daily with cold water sis [sister], why you wasting your money." Also frequent are expressions of thanks and approval: "Vaginal tightening is a greatest gift to your man," and "I didn't know that it can be tightened. Thank you @zodwalibram for educating me." Others delightedly acknowledge Zodwa's frank revelation where most would be too embarrassed: "Jooooooh [colloquial expression of amazement] I salut you!!!! Most of the girls hide tht they did this!!👏but u not ashamed jst tel show d world!!!🤣😂.'' Indeed, Zodwa in this respect also outshines other celebrities: "Most celebrities are afraid to comment here….Lead them zondwa we love you." So, while many are shocked ("I am speechless," "Please Jesus

you take so long to come and fetch us") the undercurrent is one of amused appreciation: "Tighten it wena Zodwa wethu [you are our only Zodwa] it's urs & U are Ours 😍😍."

6. Conclusion

This article proposes that in order to understand postfeminism in southern spaces we need to situate the discourse within the gender relations forged by colonialism and its aftermath. While postfeminism is compatible with global neoliberalism, local gender discourses also contend with postfeminism to shape the gender relations deemed appropriate for this context. The contestation plays out unpredictably. In this unequal southern space, what it means—and what it takes—for an older, working-class and less attractive woman like Zodwa to enact an assertive sexuality, or to 'discipline' her unruly female body, is not self-evident. The article suggests that global postfeminism loses its hegemony as 'common sense' (Gill, 2017) as it is reworked, with sometimes surprising results, by the pressures of gender relations within coloniality. In the South African case, these are characterised by a gender binary linked to Christian morality, the solidification of customary identities, and a 'modern' urban patriarchy exercised in a social context marked by inequality, rights and violence.

Religious and customary mores, a product of coloniality, retain a significant hold over hetero-patriarchal gender relations in which women are constructed as ideally obedient, chaste and respectful. Zodwa uncompromisingly refuses to observe these social dictates, and must fiercely defend herself against criticism from both camps. Zodwa identifies as a Christian; but this self-identification must contend with accusations that her 'naked' performances and non-conforming relationship choices are immoral and ungodly. Zodwa also rejects aspects of custom that would have her submit to men's authority. She distinguishes herself from women who willingly submit to customary patriarchal expectations ("domestic beings") and encourages them to follow her example to recoup their power. The tabloid coverage consciously juxtaposes custom with Zodwa's unconventionality, provoking readers to evaluate the direct assault on patriarchal authority signified by her attitudes and behaviours. But if custom is deferred to by readers and commentators, the frequent coverage of Zodwa's nonconforming femininity by the tabloid press in effect endorses her modern and independent identity as noteworthy.

Zodwa's postfeminist performances are also framed by the harsh inequality produced by national and global neoliberalism, itself the product of coloniality. Inequality directly shapes gender relations in township settings where scarce financial resources provide access to the sexual economy. If Zodwa used transactional sex with older men to survive in early womanhood, as a mature woman she consciously places herself beyond their control. Instead, from a position of social and financial power, she strategically chooses a younger lover who lacks the authority that comes with age. Yet, while this enables her to avoid a direct confrontation with patriarchal demands in the relationship itself, she cannot entirely escape heteronormative censure, which refers to Christian and customary morality to discipline her unruly sexuality. It also chastises and protects the subordinated masculinity of her lover to recoup it for 'normal' heterosexual relations.

Similarly, Zodwa's surgical makeovers, which in northern contexts signify women's ultimate inscription as postfeminist subjects (Heller, 2007), acquire meanings that go beyond the disciplinary rigors of postfeminist discursive practice. Instead, they signify Zodwa's usurping of patriarchal control over the female body which she refashions for her own pleasure. That this is heterosexual but not heteronormative pleasure renders it all the more outrageous to those whose normative prescriptions she confronts. Interestingly, it is the women followers on Instagram who look to her as a role model of modern and liberated womanhood who appear most moderate and encouraging—perhaps unsurprisingly, for they are likely younger, more well-to-do (affording social media participation) and globally oriented.

Zodwa justifies her uninhibited enjoyment of sex and her profit-oriented deployment of her sexual appeal by drawing on a potent discourse of rights. In a context where rights remain unrealised for many, her claim to individualised pleasure and sexual choice, as well as her conscious sexual subjectification, appears not 'post' feminist so much as feminism itself, offering a nonconforming example of heterosexual femininity to the women who admire her. If "postfeminism suggests that it is the very success of feminism that produces its irrelevance for contemporary culture" in the north (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 8), in this southern context Zodwa's outrageous performance of postfeminism suggests a form of feminist practice! However, as followers point out, the prevalence of punitive patriarchal violence ensures that Zodwa's individualistic claim to rights remains unavailable yet to many women. If postfeminism reveals the boundaries of patriarchal tolerance, patriarchy sets the limits of what postfeminist discourse can achieve.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

Gender, Voice and Online Space: Expressions of Feminism on Social Media in Spain

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Abstract
Feminism's current momentum, encouraged by movements such as #NiUnaMenos or #MeToo, has caused many social media agents to adopt some degree of feminism as a part of their online image or personal brand. 'Being a feminist,' for some, has become a marketing strategy in times of great polarisation between progressive forces and a reactionary backlash against feminism. The appropriation of feminism by the global market challenges public opinion, media, and academia to think and rethink feminism, and to consider whether these changes have voided it of political meaning (Banet-Weiser, 2012, 2018; Gill, 2016b). In Spain, the (extreme) right is continually launching attacks against feminism. At the same time, minority collectives such as LGBTQ+ or Roma are helping to spread feminist values into the mainstream, denouncing one of its main struggles: structural and intersectional violence against women, including online hate and harassment. In this context of confrontation, social media agents are keeping the debate about feminism alive and are picking up Spanish grassroots movements' claims (Araüna, Tortajada, & Willem, in press). In this article we outline the latest trends in feminist media research in Spain, examining 20+ years of postfeminism as an analytical tool, and highlighting new trends. Through recent research results, we show that in the Spanish (social) media landscape many different strands of feminism are entangled, all struggling to impose their narrative of what feminism looks like in the post-#MeToo era. We will examine the main fault lines along which feminism is divided into different undercurrents, some of which are fostering the progress of feminism, and some of which are undermining it: age (generation), class, race, and sexual identity.

Keywords
feminism; feminist media studies; intersectionality; postfeminism; Spain; social media

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1. Postfeminism and Post-Postfeminism in Cultural Studies

More than 20 years after its emergence as a theoretical concept in cultural studies, postfeminism has resisted the passing of time as an effective analytical tool to scrutinize representation regimes of gender, sexualities, sex-affective relationships, and feminism in popular culture (e.g., Gill, 2014, 2016b; Lotz, 2001; McRobbie, 2004, 2011; Tasker & Negra, 2007). The notion of postfeminism has allowed feminist media scholars to maintain a "productive irritation" (Fuller & Driscoll, 2015) in the observation and analysis of popular culture, as it accounts for both the persistence of postfeminist representation patterns and their consequences (Dejmanee, 2016; Gill, 2016b). Indeed, distinguishing between the different mediatizations of feminism and postfeminism helps us, not only to understand the failures and pervasiveness of neoliberal politics (Dejmanee, 2016) but also to introduce—and keep—the

feminist perspective in the study of media and the politics of representation.

The paradox is that feminism is now gaining new spaces because postfeminism is paving the way with its neo-liberal representations of individualism and cosmetics, which large groups of women do not relate to anymore. Rosalind Gill talks about 'a new luminosity' of feminism (Gill, 2016a, 2016b). We argue that this new luminosity of feminism is not necessarily at odds with postfeminism and, to a large extent, is projected from it. Some of the new representational strategies regarding gender and sexuality are in line with how the media have appropriated the very concept of 'empowerment' and connected it to women's sexual agency, a culture of confidence, or 'feminist' demands in the representation of women, without involving any kind of political or social criticism (Gill, 2016b). This postfeminist framework and its liberal optimism have thus contributed to rendering the structures of inequality invisible and holding individuals accountable for their own failures and successes while promoting mechanisms of self-surveillance and self-demand in performing standard and marketable identities in terms of 'appropriate femininity' (Araüna, Dhaenens, & Van Bauwel, 2017).

Feminist practices—in the media and on social networking sites—build a 'popular' version of feminism; they have to do with the 'doing and undoing of feminism' (McRobbie, 2008) and with representations and self-representations that are both liberatory and oppressive at the same time (Linabary, Corple, & Cooky, 2019). Popular feminism on Instagram or YouTube, for instance, is a feminism of 'happiness,' far from the concept that Ahmed (2010) coined as the *feminist killjoy*, who spoils the happiness of others because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness. The ethical imperative of happiness and subjectivity is part of this individualistic impulse (Skeggs, 2005) and translates into the expectations of celebrities or micro-celebrities to gain visibility and get more followers and sponsors. 'Empowerment' is thus accompanied by a dynamic of exclusion deriving from individualism (Gill & Scharff, 2011), while politics and activism are replaced with 'lifestyle' and 'attitude,' respectively (Lotz, 2001).

So, are we entering a 'post-postfeminist' era in media and cultural studies? Is postfeminism going to be enough to understand and explain multi-layered feminist phenomena in the media and online? Or will we need new concepts and notions to analyse the comprehensive and complex branches and brands of feminist expression? Some authors have sustained that, despite its merits, part of the ambiguity and weakness of postfeminism as an analytical tool stems from its own purpose: to show the extent to which mediatized feminism is in itself a postfeminist expression (Linabary et al., 2019; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Subscribing this idea may seem overly pessimistic, emphasizing structural factors and denying any margin for agency, thus leading us into an endless loop of contradiction. However, we will argue that the hybridization of the concepts of feminism, postfeminism, and neoliberal feminism (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019), as well as the ties and feedback-loops between these different perspectives (Prügl, 2015), challenge feminist media studies to theoretically elaborate the criteria that will allow us to analytically distinguish them. It is a major challenge to be attentive as to when the collective becomes individual, when solidarity becomes competitiveness, and to use critical concepts to help discriminate between feminism and anti-feminism, not only in sexist and misogynistic manifestations but also in self-attributed feminist discourses.

On the one hand, we need instruments to understand the complicated relationship between feminism and postfeminism and the ways in which feminism has been instrumentalized, reconstructed and depoliticized, both off and online (Caballero, Tortajada, & Willem, 2017; Cover, 2014; Gill, 2007; Lotz, 2001; McRobbie, 2004). On the other hand, understanding the paradox by which postfeminism both enabled and constrained feminist actions is key to gaining insight in the online construction of gender and sexualities (Caballero et al., 2017; De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013), and—more generally—in feminist digital activism (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Jouët, 2017; Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018; Linabary et al., 2019).

2. Feminism and Social Media

It would be naive to think that social media are 'feminist' by definition, either from the point of view of their affordances (technological features), agents (who shares), or narratives (what is shared). Rather, the platforms on which popular feminism thrives are part of a universe in which sexism still prevails and where the ongoing battle between the ideals of feminism and those who seek to crush it becomes painfully visible (Marwick, 2017). Social media are arenas in which popular misogyny proliferates. Examining 'men's rights' groups, for example, Banet-Weiser (2018) observed how these women-hating groups grow alongside popular feminism projects.

In the same way that the understanding of feminism has mutated over the years, its presence and defence online have also evolved. Cyberfeminism, the early online version of feminist struggle, was much in line with the principles of feminism. In the first decade of the 21st century, cyberfeminism was articulated on two types of online spaces: e-zines and blogs. As Warnick (1999) points out, the first feminist profiles or *grrrl e-zines* focused on the artistic expressions of the medium, as well as on the (lack of) coverage of feminist issues on the Internet. Nowadays, the creative appropriation of technology on social media combines traditional activist tools such as pamphlets and demonstrations with an unlimited expansion of online activism, as demonstrated by platforms such as YouTube, which could be considered the new e-zines. According to authors such as Szostak, YouTube 'operates as a support network for women

dedicated to the general goal of acceptance and respect' (2013, p. 56), and so we can assume its feminist potential within the discursive online space.

The other classic cyberfeminist manifestations were mainly personal blogs written by young feminists, focusing on their individual experiences. According to Keller (2012), the aims of these early feminist 'influencers' was to raise awareness about how to understand feminism, i.e., as a form of activism and community participation. By doing so, feminist bloggers intended to contribute to a cause they deeply believed in, as many of them were unable to physically participate in protests or demonstrations due to their lack of resources or geographic isolation. The most popular blogs had extensive comment sections and forums where followers could exchange comments and points of view, in what could be identified as emerging 'counterpublics' (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002). These spaces of expression, although still valid, have now been outnumbered by the intensive interactions on social media such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, where quick (audio-visual) messages and hashtags rather than long written posts are being used as weapons in a cultural battle.

Cyberfeminism presents itself as the opposite to post-feminist superficiality: it includes the voices of women of colour, queer women, transgender people, working-class women, and women with functional diversity. As Cochrane (2013) asserts in her book 'All the Rebel Women: The Rise of the Fourth Wave of Feminism,' today's feminists consider the Internet as a platform to elevate and generate a space for debate and to voice the problems of women on the margins. The proliferation of 'intersectional' feminist hashtags such as #WhiteFeminism and #FuckNormality shows that online feminism is multi-layered and at the same time unstoppable. Knowing how to distinguish between discourses that genuinely empower women and those that reinforce the objectification of the female body and the silencing of women's voices is part of the virtual game on social media.

3. Current Themes in Feminist Media Studies: Spain as a Study Case

Examining these different undercurrents in feminist manifestations online, we look at the case of Spain. The Spanish feminist movement has recently gained significant relevance, both in Spain and beyond (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019; Campillo, 2019). Through massive demonstrations, the successful women's strikes on International Women's Day in 2018 and 2019, and thanks to its strong ties with other grassroots movements such as Juventud por el Clima (Fridays for Future) or anti-eviction groups like the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca), feminist collectives in Spain have managed to legitimize their claims as over-arching issues. Encouraged by the #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos movements and triggered by the La Manada court ruling, which convicted five gang rapists of 'sexual abuse' instead of rape in early 2018, Spanish women came out en masse to march the streets of Spain's major cities. Outraged by the injustice of the case, they protested over several months against the 'patriarchal bias' of the—all-male—judges who presided over it (Portillo, 2018). The demonstrations attracted women and allies from all age groups, geographic regions, classes, and ideologies, united over this flagrant breach of women's rights. The feminist movement in Spain has been growing ever since.

At the same time, a backlash against this revival of feminism in Spain is also growing fast. As discussed above, the battle between a renewed feminist movement and its detractors is fought out mainly on social media, where topics related to feminism are increasingly polarized. The agents involved in the battle of narratives are diverse, and it is not always clear which side they are on. Manifestations of explicit anti-feminism and misogyny, such as organised trolling from right-wing white supremacy groups on Twitter and other platforms such as forocoches.es, are obviously shaping how feminism responds to those attacks, but these lie beyond the scope of this article. Feminist activists such as journalist Iranzu Varela currently lead the struggle against anti-feminist attacks and online hate speech against women in Spain in a very successful way. She defines her online TV-show El Tornillo as a 'place on the frontier,' from where she portrays those constant attacks on feminism and women as absurd and ridiculous, in line with other online feminist practices where humour and irony play an important role (Araüna et al., in press; Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018). Faced with *machitrolls* ('sexist trolls') on a daily basis, people like Irantzu Varela respond with sarcasm and parody, making sexist attitudes look ridiculous. Feminist sarcasm on social media—where stories and videos can rapidly go viral—successfully points out misogyny and sexism as desperate and old-fashioned attempts at undermining feminism (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015).

Throughout the next sections, we will group the diverse expressions of feminism appearing on Spanish social media, and the topics that emerge, around four thematic and analytical axes: age (generation), class, race, and sexual identity. We will argue that each of these axes contain the fault lines along which feminism is divided into different undercurrents.

3.1. Age

Feminism and age are issues often linked to each other by the media and in public opinion. One of the most common tropes is that of the feminist movement as a 'catfight' between women of different generations (Winch, Littler, & Keller, 2016): old-fashioned feminists vs. modern media-savvy girls. The older generations, associated with first and second wave feminism, and Generation X-ers and millennials who are supposed to identify with the third and fourth wave, are supposedly in conflict and

divided by a technology gap. However, in the discussion about age and feminism, generation is often used as part of the neoliberal discourse that erases the voices of 'the millennials' while blaming their lack of agency on 'the baby boomers' (Gullette, 2004), as if these were both monolithic blocks. As Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2004) argue: The 'wave' paradigm paralyses feminism, pitting generations against one another.

But although generation often becomes overemphasized as an insurmountable difference between feminists of different 'waves,' when in fact the key differences are based on other intersecting forms of oppression (Henry, 2004), there are some reasons why a generational approach to understanding feminism, gender, and media might be relevant. The notion of feminist waves, used with nuance, is useful as it 'helps to make sense of differences in specific historical conditions that have contributed to the formation of feminist and gendered sensibilities and their mediation' (Winch et al., 2016, p. 561). For example, 'millennials' are a product of neoliberalism and, consequently, resistance to neoliberalism will be differently constructed by millennials than by boomers.

Social media have been claimed as a space for socialization and exchange, where young people, in particular, build their identities and political affinity groups around certain topics or social issues (Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons, & Allaste, 2018; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018; Szostak, 2013; Tortajada & Araüna, 2014). If we look at feminism as one of these issues, it is clear that online content produced by young people since 2018 have been key to recovering the popularity of the feminist movement, after about two decades in which the hegemony of postfeminism eroded the knowledge of the history and struggles of the feminist movement (McRobbie, 2004). Millennial feminists have used digital media technologies as tools for networking and consciousness-raising and have been able to access feminist stories and histories with speed and ease (Keller, 2015). But as activism and communication styles diversify, are younger and older generations aware of each other's struggles? As Schuster (2013) suggests from research in New Zealand, there may be a generational divide in the ways women participate in feminist activities: Political work online offers many opportunities for feminist participation, but it does exclude those who don't use online tools. However, she concludes that there is reason to be optimistic as the differences and problems caused by the use of social media will 'decrease in the future' (Schuster, 2013, p. 24).

In Spain, journalists and analysts documenting recent marches for Women's Day (8 March) and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November) put particular emphasis on the young age of feminist activists, who were sometimes as young as the early teens. The increased visibility of cases of violence against women in the media (Bernárdez, 2015; Gámez Fuentes, 2015; Menéndez, 2014), such as the La Manada case, and the subsequent large-scale protests attracted very young women and girls. This shows the connection and hybridization between political feminist activism and popular (mediated) feminism, surmounting the generation gap in spite of—or thanks to—the Internet (Hunt, 2017). According to Hunt (2017), the incorporation of young women in the movement and the creation of new networks have generated a sense of unity among women, regardless of their age, despite their different positions on the axes of inequality.

In Spain, girls go out on the streets with their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers to protest against sexist violence; older generations are increasingly more digitally literate and get their voice out on Twitter and Facebook which has led to a more sophisticated use of technology contesting discursive strategies in a back-and-forth between on and offline actions (Araüna et al., in press). A vivid example is the above-mentioned Irantzu Varela, who embodies an 'older' feminist who is at the same time (social) media-savvy. She reflects on feminism, using a 'millennial' communication style while not eschewing criticism of the feminist movement itself, which adds to the credibility and success of her persona among both older and younger audiences.

3.2. Class

In its intersection with gender, class inequalities take the shape of labels projected onto (representations of) female bodies. Like many other authors from cultural studies, sociology, and feminist studies, we know that one cannot look at women's bodies without taking into account a class perspective, as this is one way of understanding how mechanisms of distinction and exclusion have worked throughout history and in different cultures (Bourdieu, 1984; Jones, 2011; McClintock, 1995; Papayanis, 1999; Rose, 1999; Skeggs, 2001, 2005).

Sexual reputation is an important criterion by which girls judge their own and other girls' actions (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Lotus Seeley, 2014; Kitzinger, 1995). In judging sexual behaviour, the 'slut stigma,' in Australia (Albury & Crawford, 2012), 'slag' in the UK (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), or *'puta'* in Spain (Tortajada & Araüna, 2014; Willem, Araüna, Crescenzi, & Tortajada, 2012) designates social position and cultural capital among women, as it draws boundaries around status groups linked to social class: While high-status women can experiment with the slut script as a form of sexual privilege, low-status women risk public shaming when they attempt to do the same (Armstrong et al., 2014). In Spain, evidence has shown the existence of a classed pattern of sexual scrutiny and prejudice against a particular kind of women: the *choni*. Similar to *chavettes* in British chav culture (Blommaert & Varis, 2013; Jones, 2011), *chonis* are considered to be working class, low-educated women or girls with a sexualized image. Their cultural and classed representation in Spain visualizes them as wearing daft sexy outfits, heavy makeup, track-suits (usually pink or animal print), big

earrings, and specific hairdos such as ponytails or dyed blond hair (for a discussion of the *choni* in this context see Willem, Araüna, & Tortajada, 2019).

In 2017, Spanish gay YouTubers The Tripletz launched a campaign against the bullying of people from sexual and ethnic minorities or lower social classes, including *chonis*. In their videos, they promoted some T-shirts with slogans that re-signified some common insults against *chonis*. YouTube celebrity and influencer Dulceida, one of The Tripletz's closest friends, wore a T-shirt that read 'CHONI,' imitating Channel's 'Nº 5' perfume. Glossy magazines echoed the campaign and enforced the image of Dulceida as someone capable of 'laughing at the attacks she suffered' on media and social networking sites because of her 'way of dressing,' suggesting she considered herself to be a *choni* and standing up against insults to working-class women. Clearly, due to her social position and her commercial capital as an influencer, Dulceida is far from being considered a *choni* in Spain. However, readings of *choniness* in Spain are complex and have to do with a 'double' double standard: sexual and social. Although Dulceida's sexy outfits and low cultural capital could place her on the margins, Dulceida monetizes these *choni* features by introducing them unproblematically into a 'heterosexy' image (Caballero et al., 2017; Dobson, 2011). From a comfortable outer position and a very specific construction of authenticity, Dulceida thus eludes the negative implications of the 'double' double standard for women (Willem et al., 2019) and cosmetizes any discrepancy or conflict (Gill, 2016a, 2016b; Lazar, 2009). For Dulceida, empowerment is about success. It is about being able to travel, staying in fancy hotels and getting paid by brands to wear their expensive clothes. She exploits an apparent spontaneity or authenticity to sustain herself as a 'self-made' woman, but at no point refers to the systematic oppression of women in general. In this sense, her 'authenticity' appears to be congruent with the commercial dimensions of neoliberal feminism (Prügl, 2015).

Hence we argue that this double sex-class standard—exemplified by judgements of the *choni* in Spain—is one of the contradictions of postfeminism which claims individual freedom of choice while denying structural inequalities. As working-class women are struggling to get rid of class and sexual oppression in its multiple forms, neoliberal feminist claims by influencers and micro-celebrities of individual choice, hard work, and individual attributions of success and failure not only deny underlying class inequalities but instead make them worse. One of these live and ideologically freighted issues, frequently raised on 'mommy blogs,' is successfully combining motherhood with a career. Neoliberal feminism, as embodied in Spain by Instagram influencer Verónica Sánchez (*Oh! Mamiblue*), leaves it up to mothers to be successful in their professional lives: it not only interprets the individual as responsible for their own well-being, it also links the concept of happiness to an economic model in which each woman, as a mother, must try to achieve the 'perfect balance between work and family' (Rottenberg, 2014). Verónica Sánchez defines herself as a mother, in love with her partner 'and with her career' while appealing to a series of values such as travelling, good taste, slow life, healthy food, and time to relax.

In a neoliberal feminist representation regime, women progressively internalize the needs of their social environment. Displays of particular kinds of femininity by influencers on social media are actually embodied power relations: The incorporation of social hierarchies through *habitus* schemes (Bourdieu, 1984) encourages women—even the most disadvantaged—to accept this new order as natural, and elude their own social situation. Authors such as Gill (2016b) or McRobbie (2015) emphasize that postfeminism, rather than displacing feminism, carefully selects those elements of feminism that are of most interest, only to cover them with a neoliberal icing of self-development and the 'desire to be better.' As Rottenberg (2014) points out, 1% of women speak in the name of 99%, the vast majority of whom are poor and working class. While online platforms have become a space where white middle-class women can demonstrate their 'empowerment' and success, this is certainly not the case for those who are racialized or disadvantaged.

3.3. Race: Roma Feminism

Intersectionality is a qualitative analytical tool that specifically addresses the experiences of groups and individuals who are subject to multiple forms of subordination and discrimination within society (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000). This vision has implications for 'white' feminism, as far as it has defended the rights of already privileged women from the beginning. White feminism has traditionally denied the particularity of racialized women, rendering their struggles invisible and silencing their voices, as if they were not women in their own right, but first of all racialized—Black, Latina, Roma (hooks, 2000).

The intersectional perspective for the Spanish context means, in the first place, acknowledging the existence of Romaphobia and Antigypsyism: cultural and biological racism against Roma communities in Spanish mainstream society (Vrăbiescu, 2014). Women from a Roma background can undergo multiple forms of discrimination, both from within and outside of their community, due to the stigma of their ethnic origin, for being women, their lack of resources or cultural capital, or all of these at the same time. Roma feminism stems from this insight as a diverse movement of Roma women and allies who realized that mainstream feminism in Spain never took this intersectional perspective into account (Peña, 2020). A newspaper column by Ana Delgado, member of the Association of Feminist Roma Women for Diversity, heads: 'The struggle of the *payas* does not represent us' (Delgado, 2017). *Payo* and *paya*

are the terms Roma people use when referring to non-Roma men and women, respectively.

As to online manifestations of Roma feminism, preliminary results of ongoing research in Spain (Marques & Willem, in press) suggest two emerging and intertwined profiles of Roma feminism on social media: the *feminist Roma*, who prioritizes gender issues, and the *Roma feminist*, who emphasizes Antigypsyism. *Feminist Roma* activists such as Pastori Filigrana on Twitter generally address women of any ethnic group or culture regarding their common struggle against sexism, institutional patriarchy, and social inequalities. This activist profile also addresses the Roma community itself by raising issues of mainstream feminism and sexist violence in general, as well as aspects that are related specifically to the community (for example underage marriage). On the other hand, *Roma feminists* such as Silvia Agüero mainly tackle *paya* feminists in order to make them aware of their white privilege and the widespread Antigypsyism in Spanish society. Thus, while the *feminist Roma* raises issues similar to classic feminist discourses, the *Roma feminist* puts forward new themes and topics that are specific to Roma feminism: (sexual) stigmatization of Roma women—aggravated by the Covid-19 crisis—issues related to obstetric violence, reproductive rights of Roma women and motherhood. The latter is one of the issues feminist theory has struggled with for the last century—and one which it has yet to solve: Should women (want to) have children? Isn't being a mother a form of submission to patriarchy? For feminist theory, motherhood has been a controversial issue (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011; Vivas, 2019); for the Roma feminist, it is a form of female power and a key element in feminist struggle (Marques & Willem, in press).

These two profiles have their specific social media to convey their messages: Roma women are mainly on Facebook and Twitter, but they use these platforms in different ways and address different audiences. Feminist Roma associations usually have a Facebook page, where they target their own community to raise issues involving discrimination or violence against women and announce training events and seminars on feminism. Facebook posts include explanations on the gender perspective, the history of feminism, its main strategies, and how to combat sexist violence. On Twitter, however, we see personal accounts of Roma women who speak in the first person about their experience of suffering racism on a daily basis. Their timelines are a collection of calls to action and messages clearly aimed at *payo* feminism—very present on Twitter in Spain—thus putting the emphasis on calling the feminist movement out against Romaphobia and racism.

These two strands of Roma feminism online, one which puts the emphasis on gender inequality as a transcultural issue, and the other on Antigypsyism as a 'blind spot' in white feminism. These strands are not contradictory but overlap and come together at the crossroads of intersectional feminism. This has important implications for the feminist movement in Spain, as the struggle of Roma women and women from other minority communities cannot be understood without its intersectional dimension: the fight against Romaphobia and structural racism. Roma women's priorities may be different from non-Roma women when struggling for equality: while often dealing with sexism from the in-group, they are looking up against both sexism *and* racism from the out-group. This tension between priorities, clearly visible on social media, is an opportunity to redefine the feminist movement in Spain and to start listening to non-white, non-privileged women who are struggling to have their voices heard as equals.

3.4. Sexual Identity

Another battle of contemporary feminism that is increasingly present and settled online is sexual identity. In particular, YouTube has become a popular outlet for many non-normative individuals (Raun, 2016), including LGBTQ+ youth (Jenzen, 2017) who use it to take up their positions and tell their stories. The feminist movement in Spain is currently divided along fault lines regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Not all feminists are happy with LGBTQ+ activism in traditionally feminist—and sometimes exclusively female—spaces. Transgender women who consider themselves feminists have particular difficulty proving that they are actually on women's side, as they face a great deal of resistance, both among certain sectors of the LGBTQ+ community and the feminist movement. 'Transfeminist' YouTubers such as Elsa Ruiz Cómica in Spain, hold firm and critical transfeminist standpoints (Halberstam, 2018) with regards to gender equality, male privilege, feminine gender attributions, beauty standards, the male gaze, among others (Tortajada, Willem, Platero, & Araüna, 2020).

On 4 March 2020, Spanish TV-show *Todo es mentira* (Escribano & Madrid, 2020) aired a debate between Lidia Falcón (Feminist Party of Spain) and Elsa Ruiz Cómica, one of the show's regular guests at the time. The programme section, entitled *Woman vs. Woman*, dealt with the current divisions within feminism. Falcón claimed, in what could be labelled as a transphobic stance, the non-existence of gender, the 'invention' of gender assignment, and the limits of gender itself, including the impossibility for her or anyone else to 'decide who is and who is not a woman' (Escribano & Madrid, 2020). In addition, as an activist and politician who is against the Spanish government's proposal of a Trans Act (due to pass early 2021), Falcón said she felt persecuted by the 'trans collective' and described some of Elsa's demands for legal recognition as 'stories.' Elsa barely intervened in the debate, nor did the moderator, reinforcing Falcón's image as a trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF), especially on social media during and after the show. Elsa saved her reflection for later, via her YouTube channel and other social media. In order to discredit her, a few weeks later some videos were published on Twitter from

the time prior to her transition, in which she made sexist jokes about women. The media (including conservative outlets) took Elsa's side, for example with the headline 'Elsa Ruiz, feminist or fraud?' and 'Who was sexist in the past? Everyone, men and women alike' (Sust, 2020). The press collected Elsa's inflammatory arguments in favour of non-binary thought, trans- and intersectional feminism, and has portrayed her as funny and professional ever since.

In short, trans YouTubers like Elsa have created an 'affective counterpublic' in Spain (Tortajada, Caballero, & Willem, 2019): her YouTube channel is a humorous and at the same time critical space for protest and resistance to normative canons (Cavalcante, 2016; Jenzen, 2017), based on her own embodied experience. It is the expression of a transfeminist stance, politically committed to transformation while combining personal fulfilment and 'active empathy' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

4. Conclusions

After years of successfully applying postfeminism as an analytical category to look at representation regimes in popular culture such as women's magazines, advertisements, TV-shows and social media influencers, feminist media studies scholars now need to re-examine the tools for analysing contemporary interactions with publics and counterpublics. A shift in communication style has taken place with the rise of social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, where a whole range of feminist and anti-feminist narratives co-exist and contradict. As new social networking sites emerge (e.g., Tiktok or Twitch), new kinds of interactions will follow. Social agents do not communicate in a one-way direction but heavily feed on their followers' and/or fans' feedback as well as on the platform's affordances to articulate their discourses. We have seen examples where Facebook and Twitter were used by the same agents to convey different messages to different audiences. We also know that certain social media are more focussed on the image (e.g., Instagram) and others on text (Twitter), cultural and geographical differences notwithstanding.

In this article, we have tried to take apart entangled contemporary online expressions of feminism in the particular context of Spain. We have done this by looking at four axes of analysis, each representing a fault line in contemporary feminism: the alleged gap between the 'millennial' and 'baby boomer' generations, in terms of technological and communication styles; the contradictions of neoliberal feminism and structural differences between privileged and working-class women; racism as a blind spot in 'white feminism,' particularly regarding Roma women in Spain; and the increasing gap between those who claim that biological sex determines entitlement to join the feminist movement vs. those who believe that transfeminists and LGBTQ+ activists should be heard as full-fledged feminists and allies in the struggle for equality.

We have seen instances where these tensions are laid out in opposite positions, each located in clearly differentiated areas of online interaction (e.g., right-wing hate groups vs. feminist activists); but also examples where the borders between feminist and postfeminist discourses of different—or even the same—social agents are blurry and unstable. When looking at the fault lines of the Spanish feminist movement, we conclude that the very juxtaposition of women in terms of generation, class, race, and sexual identity is one of the main stumbling blocks for the feminist movement to move forward. Some representation patterns on social media produce discourses that divide instead of unifying women and their allies in the common struggle to overcome intersectional oppression. It is especially in these cases where we need new analytic tools to be able to distinguish between those expressions that genuinely empower women and those that reinforce the silencing of women's voices. Only by doing this can we avoid falling into the traps that the anti-feminist movements are setting—including those which act from within.

As to the particular case of Spain, we have argued that there are reasons to be optimistic in this regard: thanks to social media—and despite online hate speech and attacks from anti-feminists—young girls are mobilized on the streets while their mothers do not eschew new communication styles. Privileged, white, heterosexual cis women can get to know and understand the experiences of women from less privileged, diverse, LGBTQ+ or minority backgrounds, overcoming structural inequality together and embodying a 'new luminosity' of feminism in Spain.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Casting for Change: Tracing Gender in Discussions of Casting through Feminist Media Ethnography

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Abstract
The moment of casting is a crucial one in any media production. Casting the ‘right’ person shapes the narrative as much as the way in which the final product might be received by critics and audiences. For this article, casting—as the moment in which gender is hypervisible in its complex intersectional entanglement with class, race and sexuality—will be our gateway to exploring the dynamics of discussion of gender conventions and how we, as feminist scholars, might manoeuvre. To do so, we will test and triangulate three different forms of ethnographically inspired inquiry: 1) ‘collaborative auto-ethnography,’ to discuss male-to-female gender-bending comedies from the 1980s and 1990s, 2) ‘netnography’ of online discussions about the (potential) recasting of gendered legacy roles from *Doctor Who* to *Mary Poppins*, and 3) textual media analysis of content focusing on the casting of cisgender actors for transgender roles. Exploring the affordances and challenges of these three methods underlines the duty of care that is essential to feminist audience research. Moving across personal and anonymous, ‘real’ and ‘virtual,’ popular and professional discussion highlights how gender has been used and continues to be instrumentalised in lived audience experience and in audience research.

Keywords
audience research; casting; ethnography; feminist media studies; feminist method; gender; humour

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1. Introduction: The Casting Call

The moment of casting is a crucial one in any media production. Casting the ‘right’ person shapes the narrative as much as how the final product might be received by critics and audiences. As recent casting decisions—from the all-female casts of *Ghostbusters III* (2016) and *Ocean’s 8* (2018) to the casting of a woman for the titular role in *Doctor Who* (in 2018)—demonstrate, gender has become a more and a less important category for casting at the same time. Considering how the media have a pivotal role in representing specific gender definitions and in the chances offered to women and men to produce media content (Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2015), the recent casting of women in roles formerly held by men and outside of heteronormative constraints could be cause for (feminist) celebration. Equally, discussion over the casting of cisgender actors for transgender roles is worrying. Given the scarcity of such roles, and the unequal opportunities for trans as opposed to cis actors, it brooks no argument that transgender actors should be favoured. One could be as uneasy, though, over insistence on gender correspondence between actor and role as about biological bodies grounding gender. This article addresses struggles over gender and gender distinction and pursues a post-structuralist feminist agenda for audience studies.

We understand gender as strictly a social convention that references but is in no way dictated by hormones or body parts.

While the media industry might be 'seeing the light', as audience researchers we see new struggles over gender and gender distinction coming up in interviews and in online discussion. The loosening of restrictive definitions of gender and gendered roles for some brings the link of gender to biology back with a vengeance. For this article, casting—as the moment in which gender is hypervisible in its complex intersectional entanglement with class, race and sexuality—will be our gateway to exploring the dynamics of discussion of gender conventions and how we, as feminist scholars, might manoeuvre. Tracing casting decisions from 1) (black and white) male actors in gender-bending comedies, through 2) female reinterpretations of male legacy roles, to 3) cisgender actors for transgender experiences, will allow us to approach discussion of gender(ed) performances from different angles. It invites us moreover to discuss the merits of the different methodologies we adopt. This article wants to use and develop feminist media methodologies to move beyond restrictive definitions of gender. We examine how different methods reflect (or challenge) our own position as feminists, researchers and fans and what specific insights different methodologies allow for.

'Casting' also describes how we approach research methods. Carefully testing and comparing the 'performances' of different methods reflects an ethic of care often applied to research subjects in feminist scholarship but rarely to methodology itself. Yet, as we will argue throughout this article, in casting methodological affordances and feminist considerations intersect. Feminist methodology grounds a politically engaged research practice that is sensitive to how gender is part of systems and mechanisms of exclusion—and decisions on who gets to play which role both on and off the screen. Expanding from the historical focus on the rights of women, we conceive feminist methodology today as more broadly the foundation for a research practice that is consciously and reflexively involved in an ongoing struggle for respect and equal opportunities without reducing any individual's intersecting identities to single categories (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981).

From the perspective of audience research, it is important to recognise that studying identity and representation involves the to-and-fro between publicly available media texts and their use in relatively private environments. Practices of use are informed by a plethora of texts, sources and contexts of conversation. Feminist media research is interested in everyday meaning making, and therefore needs to take into account what Fiske (1987) called primary and secondary texts (whether television series, films, books or trailers and reviews in newspapers) as well as tertiary texts which include audiences talking about all of these.

In exploring the different layers of social talk and interpretations across these spaces, our goal is not to find consensus but to strengthen the (possibility of) exchange and ongoing conversation. Feminist methodology, from our perspective, should insist on forms of analysis that are open to diversity—and therefore to controversy and paradox—as much as to common denominators and generalisations. In a political sense, we see change as most likely to happen as a result of making connections and bridging controversies. This entails understanding that 'polarisation' does not necessarily signify a binary stand-off. It can be a frame that hides how disagreement and tension can also be visualised as a 'spread' that includes middle positions as well as fierce disagreement. We will restrict our own 'casting call' for contemporary feminist media studies to the uses of ethnography-related approaches (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnography has become a shorthand term for qualitative research "concerned with studying people in their cultural context….While classical ethnography was characteristically concerned with describing 'other' cultures, contemporary ethnography has focused its concern to settings nearer to home" (Draper, 2015, p. 36). Even though, as media researchers, we tend to rely less on extended participant observation and long sojourns in 'the field,' we know ourselves informed by ethnography and indebted to 'the ethnographic turn' in cultural studies (Drotner, 1994; Hermes, 1997; Schrøder, 1994).

The current availability of audience discussion on social media has been a boost to hearing, researching and discussing everyday talk and interpretation of the widening visibility and discussion of non-heteronormative identities and representation. It is impossible to chart the history of these recent discussions of gender in such a short space. Suffice it to say that transgender studies, as they developed out of media and cultural studies and alongside queer studies in the same period, focused on the importance of understanding everyday meaning making, make clear that we need to understand gender as a contentious and over-asserted category that imprisons individuals (cf. Stryker, 2006). We are aware that there is no consensus among feminists about the dominance accorded to biology or the way in which gender is forcefully corseted into two distinct categories. In the interest of disclosure and reflexivity, we ourselves enjoy the current moment of fragmentation, diversification, choice and confirmation. We seek to support it in our academic work. We also understand the current conjuncture as an opportunity for methodological reflection and growth. Hence the casting of three different methodological approaches from the ethnographic toolbox.

Examples of gender(ed) casting will be offered in three 'miniatures'. These case studies allow for reflection and evaluation of methodology for feminist media studies practically, reflexively and politically as well as in terms of validity, generalisability and usefulness. They work best in tandem. The starting point for our discussion is collective auto-ethnography. Discussing

our own memories of 1980s and 1990s comedies, white and non-white men dressed up to impersonate women for comic relief clearly touched a nerve for us. Auto-ethnography has the methodological merit of bringing one close to irritation and unease while offering unprompted and uncoerced access to memory. Mapping controversy, though, is not its strength. Our second mode of inquiry moves from the private sphere to semi-public forums for discussion which have the undisputed strength to foreground differences of opinion. That makes online ethnography (here called 'netnography') a promising route to locating the process by which gender loses some of its inscribed patriarchal logic in the early 2010s when women are cast in (legacy) male roles. This touched a nerve for others. Moving closer to the present and another dimension of gender roles, we turn to our third miniature which focuses on textual analysis of online and print media platforms to examine how professional journalists frame discussions about the casting of cisgender actors for transgender roles.

Together these three approaches allow for researcher self-reflexivity and for triangulating discussions of gender and media from a personal and academic, a general audience, and a journalistic perspective within the private, semi-public and public sphere. All three methods come from the ethnographic toolkit. All three offer the opportunity to not assume the meaningfulness of any social category up-front. And all three come with their own sets of advantages and disadvantages.

2. Autoethnography: Gender and Humour

The starting point for this article was a conversation about examples of gender-bending in film and television and how unfunny (some of) these comedies seem from the present. Rather than summarise the long history of playing with gender in the arts, we adopted our exchange as autobiographical method and drew on our personal recollections. This has the advantage of foregrounding how, as audience researchers, we are also audience members and affectively entangled with the examples we discuss (see Table 1). We both have vivid memories of the gender-bending comedies from the 1980s and 1990s. Some we saw, others we remember choosing not to. First then we will discuss two examples to 'set the stage.'

Dustin Hoffman, an award-winning white man, plays an actor in *Tootsie* (1982) who needs to convince a producer that he is a great actress. This all goes wrong when he falls in love with his female co-star while his male co-star falls in love with him. Both of them think he is a woman. We remember key scenes as well as ironically distancing ourselves from the assumption that a straight guy could never fall in love with a man in drag or a younger woman for a slightly older one. *Big Momma's House* (2000) also tells a story of a man impersonating a woman to further his professional career. Here, a Black FBI agent impersonates an overweight grandmother and another case of complicated triangles of unrequited attractions unfolds. Neither of us ever watched it, the promise of racist stereotype and size-shaming in the trailer is such that we never chanced it. Whilst a box-office hit, critics similarly felt it was all a bit much.

Tootsie works as situation comedy and handles its stereotypes deftly, allowing us to enjoy its humorous rendering of the main character's efforts to land a job. *Big Momma's House* careens out of control and invites laughter about its characters rather than the situation they are in. It invites its viewers to share in a form of scorn that feels very wrong to us. Discussing these two films, we remembered a much older favourite which we cherish for staying well away from realism and caricaturing all of its characters almost equally. In *Some Like It Hot* (1959), two musicians are on the run from the mob after witnessing a shooting, infiltrate an all-female orchestra and, of course, both fall in love with Marilyn Monroe. It is a friendly satire of wealth and class difference and offers silly but likable male characters against a strong woman.

In all three cases men dress up as women for professional reasons. As they fall in love with female characters and are pursued by men, they all come up against what the films suggest are the limits of their disguise. When dressed as women, their love interests will not fall in love with them and they are deeply uncomfortable by being pursued by other men. Heteronormative restrictions necessitate the end of the charade. As the wigs and women's clothes come off, the narratives end with a happily ever after.

As method, autoethnography employs the lens of the self. It allows for approaching gender-bending films at the intersection of 'innocent' entertainment and unease. We laughed at *Tootsie* with Oscar-winner Dustin Hoffman and avoided *Big Momma's House*. Other methods of data collection are less likely to bring to the surface how casting decisions are part of how well generic codes work; and how gender-bending within a genre can feel very different: A sign of (possibly) changing times or a vehicle for sexist and racist jokes. Our unease and dismay also signal how a quarter century ago belittling and demeaning representation of women and gay sexuality were deemed acceptable to an extent we would balk at today.

Methodologically, sharing media memories is a form of 'collaborative auto-ethnography' as proposed by Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez (2013, p. 17): "A group of researchers pooling their stories to find commonalities and differences and then wrestling with these stories to discover the meanings of the stories in relation to their sociocultural contexts." Bochner and Ellis' urge for ethnographic stories "to be used as well as analysed, to be revised and retold rather than settled and theorised, and to promise the companionship of concrete, intimate detail as a substitute for the loneliness of abstracted facts" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 4). When used with long quotes, the validity of collaborative auto-ethnography is high. Its generalisability depends on triangulation with other methods that offer a broader either theoretical or a select form of sampling of discussions or discussants.

Table 1. Collaborative autoethnography: Overview of methodological approach.

Method	Main Examples		Perspective		Reflection on Methodology		
	Time Frame	Description	Sphere	Position	Layers of Social Talk and Interpretation	Methodological Advantages	Methodological Challenges
Collective Autoethnography	1980s–mid 2000s	(Classic) comedies with a focus on male characters cross-dressing as female characters	Private, personal	Authors/Researchers reflecting on and from within personal spheres	Implicit, dominant codes and mode of accommodation	Reflecting on dimensions of generic codes and these examples at the intersection between humour and unease	How to acknowledge our own situatedness?

Looking back, watching the gender-bender comedies of the 1980s to early 2000s and enjoying some of them, would seem to be in poor taste. Yet, the mistaken assumptions and short-sightedness that characterises so much daily interaction were sometimes portrayed really well and absolutely funny. Talking about them again—and challenging our own recollections—makes us recognise the situatedness of our perspective. It also helps see how humour affords a double take on gender. The gender comedies both challenge and reconfirm gender conventions. Collaborative autoethnography allowed for self-reflection and for happy, 'serendipitous' discovery and suggests sensitising concepts (Merton & Barber, 1958/2011). Here those concepts would be humour and ambiguity. The ambiguity relates to nostalgia as well as to the triple position of the researcher: as audience member, as fan and as feminist intellectual. Humour will return as a key mechanism in ongoing social gender negotiation.

A host of gender-bending comedies with cross-dressing male protagonists quickly followed our two 1990s examples: Matt LeBlanc in *All the Queen's Men* (2001), Michael Rosenbaum, Barry Watson and Harland Williams in *Sorority Boys* (2002), Shawn and Marlon Wayans in *White Chicks* (2004) and Adam Sandler in *Jack and Jill* (2011). This "craze for cross-dressing in film and popular culture" may well have revealed "a desire to put identity into question, [that was] not limited to a small coterie of feminist and queer theorists in the academy" (Modleski, 1997, p. 523). On the other hand, as much as comedy can offer hope and social criticism, it also almost always returns to the status quo (Marc, 1997). The genre inscriptions of gender reversal in (romantic) comedies stages *and* undermines the transgressive potential of playing with identities. At its worst, "cross-dressing in film represents the needs of comedy and society to have a subject to ridicule" (Miller, 2015, p. 127). As with drag culture, men impersonating women can strike too close to the bone and become derogatory and insulting (González & Cavazos, 2016; Taylor & Rupp, 2006).

Reconstructing the uses and limits of gender-bending in film comedy, it is clear that masculinity does not suffer from temporarily masquerading as femininity. In *Tootsie*, Dorothy Michaels, the female alter-ego of Michael Dorsey removes her wig at the end of the film in front of the camera, to end a near-endless array of sexual mix-ups and questioned sexualities and reveals their true (read: male) identity as a struggling actor. *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), another classic gender-bender played by Robin Williams, does not even need to disappear for the character to return to being a guy in good standing. The female alter ego is restricted to the realm of children's television, while the 'real' Daniel re-embraces his masculinity as a father. *White Chicks* (2004) ends with all gender, class and race 'confusions' cleared and the soldiers-turned-spies-turned-Marlene-Dietrich-impersonators in *All the Queen's Men* (2001) return as (male) war heroes. In all of these films, femininity is a temporary state—a reversal that by the end credits will be turned right again. With the characters returning to their 'own' gender as closure of the narrative enigma, these examples—rather than 'bending' the restrictive definitions of gender as the genre name suggests—reaffirm an essentialised gender dichotomy.

Adding insult to injury, mainstream gender-bending movies (re)produce spectacular masculinity in its embodied comedic performance. Underneath the more or less convincing feminine makeup and costume are increasingly attractive guys. With masculinity shining through 'feminine' performance even before their final reveal as fake, the transgressive potential of this play with identity is lost. There is no loss of virility for actors or characters, on the contrary: If anything, their short embodiment as 'women' only made these protagonists more assured and appealing in their sexuality.

Collaborative autoethnography is useful as it "preserves the unique strengths of self-reflexivity associated with autobiography, cultural interpretation associated with ethnography, and multi-subjectivity associated with collaboration" (Chang et al., 2013, p. 17). In relation to researching gender, it makes clear how mainstream media's 'playing with gender' has accompanied us longer (and more subtly) than we realised. Rather than focus on texts that became part of the feminist canon, we find ourselves taking a broader look and realising that gender-bending comedies in hindsight mostly highlight the existence of restrictive gender definitions rather than blur these. Whilst 'something was in the air' in the 1990s, resistance against gender conservatism was absorbed "through commodification…and incorporated into consumer capitalism. In this movement the subversive potential of gender was muted" (Van Bauwel, 2003).

This still begs the question how we were okay with the message of *Tootsie*, which, according to Showalter (1990, p. 371), seems to be "it's time for men to step in and show the girls how to do it?" Laughter, it seems, can be as much a response of release as of unease. We see too how we avoided quite a number of these films, rather than question or challenge them. It emphasises the connection between humour and gender as performance and the delicate line between entertainment and insult. It shows how the times have changed and how our tolerance for gender intolerance has greatly lessened. Lastly, it highlights how media production in general—and casting decisions more specifically—allow the idea of change to both materialise and evaporate. In these examples, cultural conventions were magnified into absurdities and yet remained difficult to challenge.

3. Netnography: Gender and Legacy

Where collaborative autoethnography works well to gain access to how times and social codes change, it also privileges one's own social and professional circles, and a personal perspective. Tracking struggles over gender

as an audience researcher requires balancing and quite possibly recalibrating personal memories by engaging with the perspectives of others. In doing so, our own unease with gender-bending Hollywood film warns us to be careful. In taking care, in caring, feminist methodology (McRobbie, 1982) and the affective dimensions of audience experience meet. Nostalgia and irony make discussion, especially among friends, easy, whether texts are provocative, insulting or silly. The closer we get to the present and the further we extend our interest in what others have to say, the more difficult audience research can become. Online discussion of the (relatively recent) casting of female actresses for male legacy roles—from James Bond to Doctor Who—includes a fair amount of outright sexism, for instance. Netnography therefore comes with its very own challenges as well as affordances (see Table 2).

Elsewhere, one of us discusses how the storm of reactions to *BBC*'s 2017 reveal of the new (female) Doctor Who is instructive. It demonstrates how changing the Doctor's gender perhaps was not the main problem irate fans and viewers had when complaining bitterly about the *BBC*'s decision (Eeken & Hermes, 2019). Rather, gender becoming an unstable, undependable and unpredictable category was. Remarkably, other online discussions of the 'recasting' of legacy figures appear to follow a similar logic of resistance against the overturning of female-male difference. Inspired by the *Doctor Who* example, we put our methodological considerations of netnography to a 'screen test'—and share subsequent insights about this experiment below. While the multiple layers of online discussions cannot be done justice here, drawing on a small number of examples will clarify the methodological process and highlight exactly this layeredness as an advantage of netnography.

Methodologically, online communities offer a unique opportunity to study how gender is discussed spontaneously while a double performance is in play: People talk about gender and in doing so perform their own. This holds particularly true for anonymous online spaces. In the absence of other, clear identity markers, usernames, avatars and self-declared gender designations give a fair idea of the gender an online contributor wants to present. As a form "in which moderators downplay…or even eliminate…the participatory element of the technique" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 96), discourse and affect analysis of comments posted online fit this description of netnography well. For the questions of gender, identity and transgression that we are interested in here, the 'culture of anonymity' afforded by platforms like YouTube and Reddit (Kilgo, Ng, Riedl, & Lacasa-Mas, 2018), in combination with unrestricted access to posted material for non-participant researchers provide ideal conditions for observational ethnography. Perhaps superfluously, it should be noted that this is but one form of 'netnography.' It can also be combined with other types of online data gathering, with interviews or (open) questionnaires (Baym, 2000; Hine, 2000).

For the purposes of this article, we conducted a search for the keyword combinations 'gender + casting,' 'gender + recasting,' 'female recasting' and 'gender swap + film' across Reddit and found a vast amount of material. To limit the yield of our search, we reduced the data to threads with at least 10 comments. While this restriction will have excluded potentially interesting perspectives, the potential of online ethnography to give insight in interaction (and counteraction) among users is safeguarded. Cross-reading entries, we established that here, too, the discussion revolves around the apparent danger that legacy roles are in. Surprisingly, though, the 'famous' recasting examples mentioned at the beginning of this article appear as only the starting point of discussion. Viewers happily and angrily discuss all sorts of examples, including fully hypothetical ones ranging from *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) trilogy to *Mary Poppins* (1964).

As the second method in our experimental triangulation, netnography allows us to trace discussions of gender in anonymous, semi-public spaces. Whereas the absence of sociological indicators (such as gender, class, and ethnicity) is a loss for many forms of audience research, we see this as one of the strongest arguments in favour of netnography in anonymised online spheres. As elsewhere identity needs to be performed. On Reddit, however, identity needs to be performed in the general absence of profile pictures and personal information. Commenters therefore need to discursively present the authority of their opinion. While it is not necessary in discussing gender and gendered roles to return to the gender identity they are used to performing socially, we assume it to be the obvious move. Going by the material, there is an interesting difference between the women and men who lament the loss of legacy roles for the men who have always performed them and those who do not. Those chiding others for their narrow-mindedness disclose their gender identity less often.

For *Doctor Who*, *James Bond*, *Mary Poppins*, and other examples, conspiracies are a recurring theme across both the hypothetical and the 'actual' recasting decisions. Commentators clearly presume that gender swapping legacy roles is motivated by the need to cover up bad writing or to attract viewers to cheaper products. Hiring female actors, after all, incurs lower 'costs' as they (still) earn less. The comments read as both conspiracy theory and as a form of 'savvy viewing':

> Gender swapping a well-known character in a film, series or video game is often a stunt to distract people from not addressing fundamental issues or flaws with a work.
>
> It's an easy publicity stunt.
>
> They aren't doing it to make the show better but rather to seize on the hope some people with certain ideological leanings will support the show no matter how bad the stories actually are.

Table 2. Netnography: Overview of methodological approach.

Method	Main Examples		Perspective		Reflection on Methodology		
	Time Frame	Description	Sphere	Position	Layers of Social Talk and Interpretation	Methodological Advantages	Methodological Challenges
Netnography	2000s–mid 2010s	(Potential) re-casting of legacy roles with a focus on women taking over male characters	Semi-public, anonymous	Aca-fans interpreting voices of fan viewers in online spheres	Explicit informal codes negotiated in anonymized online spheres	Encountering veiled forms of affective responses to the re-casting of legacy roles from sexism to savvy viewing	How to take sexism seriously?

> Anything that even hints at virtue signalling feminist crap gets an instant boycott from me.
>
> If you aren't going to stay true enough to a source material to get the race or sex right, you most likely don't give enough of a shit to get any of the rest of the adapted work right too.

Layered underneath both implicit and explicit sexism, we recognise the tone and voice of the comments as not necessarily angry but unsettled. As the re-imagining of beloved characters produces stress, the online sphere becomes a 'safe' space to work through change together with others experiencing the same. Unexpectedly, and far more than in the reactions to the *Doctor Who* reveal, humour crops up:

> I'd love to see 'Michael Poppins' about a male nanny.
>
> Omg, we need steven Carell do it.
>
> Right?! You could even add it to the ethos. Like the Poppins idea is a gender fluid alien or creature that comes as a nanny when there are kids in need and gender matches the need. Some kids need a male nanny some need a woman nanny.

Humour and irony are as important in this online discussion as in our collaborative autoethnography. Here though, jokes are used to ridicule what is seen as over-the-top feminism. In interviews with female feminist interviewers or in a questionnaire format such material would not have surfaced. It needs to be taken seriously in order to deconstruct sexist commentary and resistance against the gender redefinition and fluidity that is high on our agenda. In addition, comments on the business models of the entertainment industry are not without merit or insight. Although the Reddit commenters would be astonished to find themselves grouped with Van Bauwel, they agree that commercial motives can acquire a sheen of feminist change. Then again, once processes of change have been set in motion, they might be difficult to contain.

When doing ethnography, it is important and sometimes not easy to respect that gender, race, class or sexuality may not matter to others in the way they do to a feminist researcher. As Butler writes in the introduction to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*: "The breakdown of gender binaries is considered by many to be so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender" (Butler, 2014, p. viii). As feminist ethnographers we cannot discount the ideas, opinions and truths of those we encounter in research, regardless of what they are. Being open to definitions, intuitions and experiences that are diametrically opposed to one's own is imperative and an enormous challenge at the same time. It entails that we find ourselves taking outright sexism seriously.

4. Textual Media Analysis: Gender and Solidarity

For our third and final example, we draw on the use of textual media analysis as a methodological approach (see Table 3). In doing so, we move from the private sphere of collaborative autoethnography and the semi-public sphere of netnography to the public sphere and news media. Methodologically and maybe somewhat surprisingly, we follow Hammersley (2006) in understanding textual media analysis as important to informing the first-hand experience and meaning making that ethnography charts—particularly in the context of the examples to be discussed here. Using available online print articles about the casting of cisgender actors in transgender roles, we will show how media discourse provides an implicit agenda for how we can discuss non-coercive and unsubjugated definitions of gender.

The examples drawn on here were published in the late 2010s and concern the casting of Matt Bomer as the transgender sex worker Freda Von Rhenburg in *Anything* (2018) and Scarlett Johansson as Dante Gill in *Rub & Tug* in the same year. The timing of these news items is significant. They come after Felicity Huffman, a cis woman, was complimented with her portrayal of the transitioning woman Bree in *Transamericana* (2005). Jared Leto, a cis man, had played Rayon, a trans woman living with AIDS in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) and Eddie Redmayne, another cis man, had been nominated for an Oscar for his performance as Lili Elbe, a transgender pioneer in *The Danish Girl* (2015). While these earlier performances were mostly discussed for (either or not) winning Oscars, the casting of Matt Bomer and Scarlett Johansson (both cis persons) became the starting point for a more fraught discussion. Johansson eventually withdrew from the project, Bomer persevered but proved an unconvincing trans character. Here, we are especially interested in how news articles represent the negative reception of Johansson and Bomer's casting and how online discussion is used as 'proof' without providing overview or contextualisation. Where newspapers simply report on casting decisions, not much agenda making appears to occur.

Practically, textual media analysis begins with and depends on sound data gathering. Its strength is ultimately in offering generalising conclusions. For this miniature, we conducted a double search query on the news archiving site Nexis for articles in newspapers, magazines and journals featuring the keywords 'anything + casting,' 'anything + casting + Matt Bomer' and 'Rub & Tug + casting + Scarlett Johansson' to collect discussion in the news media on how gender and casting decisions are discussed. Considering the international focus of this discussion, the chosen search keywords leave language consciously open, as the term 'casting' has been adopted in Dutch, German and in other European languages. In addition to an unlimited location setting, the

Table 3. Textual media analysis: Overview of methodological approach.

Method	Main Examples		Perspective		Reflection on Methodology		
	Time Frame	Description	Sphere	Position	Layers of Social Talk and Interpretation	Methodological Advantages	Methodological Challenges
Textual Media Analysis	Late 2010s	(Announced) casting of cisgender actors for transgender roles	Public, professional	Audience researchers reflecting on the depiction of audience discussions in professional media texts	Identifying of formal codes and their reconstruction by media professionals	Gaining an overview of publicly available positions and terms in relation to transgender roles and their loss of transgressive potential	How to retain the complexity of online discussions?

unlimited timeframe of our search query underlined the importance of these two casting decisions as they are recurrently referenced when transgender roles are mentioned. Nexis found only 38 media articles for our search query. If this had been a full-sized research project, we would have continued our search using other terms to check whether other terms are used in news media (as we expect that more was written about these films and their casting). Here we forego the possibility of generalisation and will instead reconstruct the logic of representation across the entire data set.

Attention to gender in professional broadcast media is important. Here, as in online discussion among peers, agendas are set, and conventions reaffirmed. Mapping authoritative agendas emphasises "how users' agency hovers between the bipolar categories of producer versus consumer, and of professional versus consumer" (Van Dijck, 2009, p. 42). In addition, news media tend to underplay the 'savviness' of non-academic and non-professional viewers; Teurlings (2010, 2018), amongst others, documents this phenomenon. Rather, the image of audiences, particularly the trans-activist one, is painted as highly emotional, unpredictable and volatile in international magazines, newspapers and blogs collected via Nexis, undercutting the political legitimacy of their claims. Regardless of the fact that the news media apparently did not pay much attention to *Anything* and *Rub & Tug*, recognising this mechanism is important.

News media's highlighting of anger, outrage and activism undermines the potential for productive dialogue as—in however limited a manner—afforded by humour and ambiguity in the two earlier sections, exactly on the most public of forums for civic information and exchange. Textual analysis of these 38 articles shows how the opening up of restrictive, binary definitions of gender (which is at the heart of transgender activism), is hindered not by a concerted counter discussion but by news sources whose agenda becomes invisible behind rote professional moves, such as using incidental and unconfirmable '(wo)man in the street quotes' found online. From the perspective of feminist ethnography, the reconstruction of such backgrounds to ongoing discussion on other platforms fleshes out forms of opposition and resistance against open gender conventions that are not otherwise easy to identity.

As with the previous miniatures, a small selection of illustrative quotes from the media texts are presented here. We have chosen to highlight the international reach of these casting decisions. Checking on the validity of our search terms, we found that discussion of casting for transgender roles when part of reviews is mostly low-key and does not reference protest or activism. The selection below offers quotes from well-recognised news media and from news items that use terms such as 'outrage,' 'widespread backlash' and 'expected uproar' and hint at an angry and scary collectivity that threatens the social order:

> Ruffalo's comments came after members of the LGBT community lashed out about the casting of Bomer, saying that a real trans woman should have been cast in the film. ("Mark Ruffalo backs Matt Bomer,'' 2016)

> Scarlett Johansson has dropped out of her role in fact-based drama Rub & Tug after backlash from the trans community. (Lee, 2018)

> As expected, uproar ensued. This controversy comes around every time a cisgender male actor is cast to portray a transgender woman onscreen. (Mahavongtrakul, 2018)

> There was a sizeable backlash against the new drama on social media, due to Matt Bomer being cast as a transgender sex worker. Many suggested that the part should have been given to an actual trans actress, while actress Savannah Burton (herself trans) claimed that 'casting men to play trans women leads to violence against trans women.' (Hooton, 2016)

> The transgender community has repeatedly expressed outrage at cisgender actors playing the roles of transgender characters, like Eddie Redmayne did in *The Danish Girl*. When Twitter users called for Bomer's part to be recast, Ruffalo said the movie had already been filmed. ("Mark Ruffalo defends Matt Bomer," 2016)

Media impressions of debate, comments and critique become a reference point for audience members discussing how gender matters from more or less involved points of view. As online discussions are taken up and reframed in other news media, a layered intertextuality is produced that suggests more unified and polarised groups (Fiske, 1987; Hiramoto & Park, 2012, p. 1) than we found in our methodological experimentation with netnography. When audiences are presented as a collective in news media, individual differences are obliterated, and issues are needlessly (further) politicised.

Interestingly, in discussion of who can and should play transgender parts, the transgressive potential of playing with gender is completely lost: "Anyone should be allowed to play anything" (Stolworthy, 2019), as Johansson phrased it in her response, reduces the political importance of offering embodied transgender identities as a reality beyond the fiction in entertainment media. Confirming the legitimacy of the bodies of transgender actors matters. While the gender-bending comedies of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s turned (male to female) gender change into a joke, safely contained in the realm of fiction, casting cis actors for trans roles affects the world outside of the text. When cisgender actors play transgender roles, they appropriate what are only a limited number of possibilities for trans actors to 'play themselves.'

However critical reactions might be for Bomer and Johansson, Leto and Redmayne added to their star text and benefited from playing trans characters. While neither has (yet) been voted 'sexiest man alive'—arguably the ultimate benchmark for (American) male attractiveness—both are regarded as male sex symbols. Leto was featured on *People Magazine*'s list of 'Sexy at Every Age: These Men Exude Sex Appeal that Spans Four Decades' in 2014, one year after his performance as transgender woman in *Dallas Buyers Club*. Redmayne tops *Vogue*'s '10 Unconventional Alternatives to 2016's Sexiest Man Alive' list thanks to his "unique handsomeness and seductive voice" (Okwodu, 2016) in the year after his Oscar-nominated performance in *The Danish Girl*. Lists like these function as reassurance and as re-inscription not just of the attractiveness but specifically of the spectacular heteronormative maleness of Leto, Redmayne and others that can withstand showing itself in feminine poses, clothes and availability. Featuring Jared Leto and Eddie Redmayne in addition boosts the image of the media that do so and their apparent openness to 'unconventional' choices.

Textual media analysis adds to collaborative autoethnography and netnography by allowing insight in how dominant gender power relations are maintained. As the examples quoted above underline, discussion in major news media is not neutral. Cisgender actors are depicted as 'courageous' individuals for taking on trans gender roles while critical voices are characterised as 'outraged.' Potential support for transgenderism is undercut. Media texts such as the ones found by our open data query reflect and inform the complex negotiation of gender in everyday life—while at the same time re-inscribing gender in terms of social norms. The result is a lose-lose situation. Those who fear change and loss of identity will do so more, those who hope to gain a legitimate, public presence see their hopes squashed. Discussion of fiction affects real lives.

Approaching qualitative research of news texts—and these particular casting decisions—after our exploration of collective autoethnography and netnography made us realise we missed the double and even triple layers we found in discussions of gender elsewhere. Instead of interpreting online discussion in terms of emancipation or solidarity, the news items reduced audience engagement to polarised positions. (Online) discussions of gendered casting decisions lose their complexity when looked at through the lens of professional media. When researching news media texts, their inbred logic of seeking oppositions and newsworthiness needs critical deconstructing in order for researchers not to follow the media's exaggeration of oppositions. When coding for recurring themes, we stay within the media logic and politicise and appropriate in the same way news media do.

Reconstruction of discussions of gender in the news affords a view of implicit public agendas that inform debate elsewhere. These agendas however are the result of a particular type of professional practice. Likewise, netnography and collaborative autoethnography are shaped by social and academic practice and thus have their limits. Together, though, they offer a start to taking feminist gender discussion further. Unsurprisingly, this case study-in-miniatures that follows discussion of casting ends with a plea to triangulate and work with rather than against the drawbacks of different methods. Rather than cast for the best possible method, we want to cast for change.

5. Conclusion: The Final Cast

Using discussion of casting decisions, this article addressed struggles over gender and gender distinction while pursuing a post-structuralist feminist agenda for audience studies. That agenda needs its two distinct parts to mesh: strong academic research methods need developing and testing and politically these methods need to serve the goal of loosening gender restrictions. We chose discussion of casting in order to step beyond binary definitions of gender. A spate of recent media productions that portray transgender and non-binary characters allowed us to do so. That is not to say that a multifold open definition of gender has become a common good. As of now it is still the prerogative of a minority to think of gender in such a way.

We compared autoethnography, netnography and textual media analysis for their merits and downsides from the perspective of intersectional feminism. Specific media texts were taken as a point of departure. Mostly, that was a choice of convenience: In real life, media texts are far less significant than in media and cultural studies. *Tootsie*, *Doctor Who* and *Anything* provided shortcuts to wide-ranging discussion, a great deal of which is sexist commentary and misogyny (which comes with the territory of being an audience researcher). In addition, feminist scholarship for us not only addresses a political agenda but also the need to recognise and reflect on one's own situatedness and respect how others are equally tied to specific histories and horizons of expectation (Harding, 2009; Warnke, 1987). With Bochner and Ellis (1996, p. 4), we believe that "interactive ethnography that refuses to close off further discussion or quiet the voices of the other" is what is needed.

Surveying three consecutive periods through the lenses of different methods and texts, we find that humour is exceedingly important in gender discussion outside of academia. Of course, humour and ridicule are, as Billig has argued, prime socialising mechanisms that warn us that we are transgressing important boundaries. Likewise, from a personal perspective, an ironic undertone allows for distance, for engaging and disengaging with gender transgression and fluidity at the same time (Ang, 1985; Billig, 2005). Ultimately, gender and gender distinction are not the bone of contention. The laughter stops when masculinity is threatened, whether directly because of women taking on male legacy roles, or indi-

rectly by gender as a category becoming more fluid when transgender bodies are recognised as having rights. The more masculinity as a category is threatened, the more humour is replaced by anger. In the popular gender-bender comedies of the 1990s, it is men impersonating women who return to being regular guys before the film ends. No one objects to this. Well, we might have but avoided the more sexist and racist of these films instead. When women take on male legacy roles, there is some joking but predominantly a fair amount of anger and conspiracy theorising comes to the surface. The anger and sexism we expected, the jokes were a surprise. How cis actors playing trans roles is discussed in everyday life, our third question, we do not really know. We used analysis of news sources to reconstruct discussion about this but found what we think is a caricature instead. Seeking urgency or newsworthiness, the small number of news items that were collected in Nexis all reduced controversy over casting decisions to activist 'outrage.'

All methods have their strengths and drawbacks. From a feminist perspective, collaborative autoethnography is confrontational for the researcher herself, netnography demands respectful treatment of sexism, while qualitative media analysis has the unexpected drawback of reinforcing polarisation rather than querying implied definitions of gender as a closed binary system. Together though, they triangulate well and offer insight into the layered logic of gender definitions and the resistance against changing this. Rather than move to more anger and polarisation, our results suggest that humour might be explored as a methodological tool. Humour, like the magic circle in playing games, allows for entertaining extraordinary ideas (of which thinking gender in a more open manner for many certainly is one). Moving across personal and anonymous, 'real' and 'virtual,' popular and professional discussion, we explored how gender has been and continues to be instrumentalized in lived audience experiences. It is high time to reflexively and consciously bridge and connect positions by allowing for the idea that quite a number of our ongoing gender arrangements are actually a bit silly.

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The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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