

Chapter 42

Gender Democratization: A Content Analysis of the Social Media of Two Social Promotion Associations

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ABSTRACT

Misogyny and gender violence are the result of social and cultural predetermination of gender roles. Indeed, eradicating role prescriptions is a real revolutionary action which implies escaping from male and masculinity hegemony and rethinking male identities. It is therefore crucial to create pathways of democratization of gender that aim to create real paths of equality between genders abandoning the social predetermination of gender roles. This challenge has become the goal of some social promotion associations which try to break down gender-based violence and the stigma attached to it. The chapter aims to investigate how these associations operate to democratize gender through a content analysis of messages posted on their respective Facebook pages. The unit of analysis of the study is constituted by the last 200 posts produced in these two Facebook pages for a total of 400 posts analyzed. Findings identify renewed spaces of masculinity (for example fatherhood) not adhering to the main stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

By recognizing that the body is not a given, but a variable construction, politically and culturally regulated within a field, Judith Butler (1990/2007: 212), a post-structuralist philosopher, asks which language can be used to understand gender in its interior signification.

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Gender Democratization

We use the above question as a cue and starting point to delve into a deeper understanding of the hierarchical systems of power that affect gender by prescribing a precise political and practical regulation of the signification of bodies. The analysis of these mechanisms helps us to understand the incarnations of misogyny and its structuring.

Both genders acknowledge the existence of misogyny. However, parts of the phenomenon are less clear – namely, its visible and invisible modalities, the tools (legitimate and illegitimate) and arbitrary processes that fulfil this hierarchizing process.

Feminist studies show that the gender power system subjugates women to men (Stark 2009), providing a constant and systematic prevarication of the latter against the former. As Toffanin (2019: 8) points out, the effects of violence is strictly linked to the structures of relationships in which they are produced, thus making visible the asymmetry of violence and its gendered dimension in family, domestica and intimate life.

The findings of post-structuralist sociology on gender and its power relations (Corradi 2011) are pivotal. Several questions need to be answered. First, starting from a macro analysis: How is this system of domination carried out? The philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (2002) provides an essential contribution in “Masculine Domination”, in which he well explains how it comes to be constituted and legitimated. It is necessary to investigate both these processes, particularly the former, and therefore the invisible and apparently “natural” way in which it is expressed and consolidated. As Bourdieu explains, the strength of the masculine order is visible in its neutrality: it does not need to be justified, impose itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. Within this perspective, it can be seen as a social order, a symbolic machine which is aimed to ratify the masculine domination.

As he points out, to understand said invisibility, it is essential to understand both its real causes and its concrete consequences. This legitimation mechanism of male dominance is sanctioned by the incorporation of social roles by both genders, considered “natural” in the symbolic world.

As a consequence, the androcentric representation of biological reproduction and social reproduction is invested with the objectivity of a common sense, a practical, doxic consensus on the sense of practices. And women themselves apprehend all reality, and in particular the power relations in which they are held, through schemes of thought that are the product of embodiment of those power relations and which are expressed in the founding oppositions of the symbolic order (Bourdieu, 2002: 33-34).

If this arbitrary representation is internalised by both genders, who then act naturally according to their predefined roles, this means that not only men contribute to the ratification of this domination, but women are also complicit in this construction of social signification, albeit unconsciously (Bartholini 2013). By consolidating as a necessary regulation, this dynamic becomes a founding order and is perceived as pertinent, thus making legitimate the dichotomous dominants/dominated (men/women) society. The true ontological representation of domination shows us a system of male prevarication that is not only immanent in society but also approved. As Bourdieu (2002: 35) points out symbolic violence is institutionalized by the acceptance of the dominated who adhere to the cognitive instruments of the dominant (and therefore to the domination) in shaping her thought of him, herself and her relationship with him.

We can thus state that male dominance is depicted as symbolic violence because it manifests its system of force through the recognition provided to it, and it feeds on this to exist.

Connell (2011) calls this whole system of social incorporation and role predetermination the “reproductive arena”. The sociologist explains that “Gender is that structure of social relations that is centred

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