

***Italian Sociological Association
Gender Studies Research Network***

Mid-term Conference

Gender, differences and social change: Education, training and communication in a digital society

University of Turin, 17–18 March 2023

Critical reflection on gender and the discrimination still persisting in society with regard to identities and memberships ascribable to them is today assuming an unprecedented centrality in the public sphere, so much so that its political and civil relevance is gradually increasing. The recent debate on the approval of the Draft Law proposed by MP Alessandro Zan (known as DDL Zan) and the controversies it has aroused have been an obvious example of this.

Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened gender inequalities. In domestic contexts, as a result of the necessary measures adopted by governments, there has been (at least in Italy but also in other countries) a reinforcement of the already existing imbalances between men and women (due to the closure of crèches and schools, distance learning, compulsory smart working, etc.).

To contextualise a reflection on gender in contemporary society, it is necessary to recognise that the construction of gender roles is becoming an increasingly complex, articulated and not-taken-for-granted process that follows non-linear trajectories whose outcomes require the support of society and a growing degree of awareness on the part of social actors.

Socialisation and gender education, through which individuals acquire and negotiate their senses of belonging and identity, are involving an increasingly wider range of educational and training agencies. In addition to the more traditional institutions, such as family and school, the peer group and the media (from traditional to digital) are also increasingly contributing to the delineation of identity construction paths within which gender roles take shape. These models have also always been systematically conveyed through children's literature, games and toys.

However, this process of continuous construction and re-elaboration takes place within a social framework in which patriarchal forms persist. Furthermore, these forms continue to perpetuate themselves through a gender uniformity that is only theoretical but is struggling to become substantial. For example, this is demonstrated by the almost assumed dominance of the 'masculine', especially in language, and all the social practices that, more generally, spread and reinforce this dominance. The products of this symbolic and cultural order, in addition to manifesting itself in the strength and resistance of gender stereotypes to dismantling, have some serious consequences at the structural level, as the educational segregation of women, which is particularly evident in our education system, and it often results in forms of inequality in the labour market that do not foster the achievement of gender equality. Furthermore, these inequalities fuel further manifestations of them, such as vertical segregation, perpetuating the existence of the so-called 'glass ceiling'. Data from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021) showed that men still hold the most prestigious, privileged and powerful positions in many areas of the professional world and in politics. All of this contributes to exclusive social and cultural processes. Therefore, it is necessary

to promote long-term educational strategies that work effectively to dismantle stereotypes and discrimination.

In addition to the indications from the Istanbul Convention and the Council of Europe, the topic of gender respect in education has been included in the contents of the 'Buona Scuola' law (107/2015). This law deals with gender equality, the prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination. However, it has not ensured the implementation of a structured and recognisable model of gender and sexuality education, which in Italy still does not seem to be at the centre of school policies. Discussing gender issues starting with the level of education, especially from a perspective that also considers all gender and sexual identities, including the universe of LGBTQ+ subjectivities, still seems to be a distant goal that is particularly difficult to achieve.

The challenge is also to build a gender education project that considers the growing importance of the informal sphere. Social media and digital platforms have become real identity-building environments that also foster an anticipatory socialisation of certain topics or issues. Furthermore, the role of influencers is becoming increasingly strategic in providing models of identity, behaviour and ways to relate to one's peers, while the impact of TV series on the imagination can also be important for the construction of gender identity or for reflection on it.

The recent emergency for the persistence of sexist and homophobic bullying, cyberbullying, hate speech and extreme forms of femicide has put the spotlight back on the need to work systematically on education and training (also from the perspective of digital literacy) to create the conditions for a change in culture and mentality. These changes need to be based on respect for women, and more generally, for all subjectivities according to gender and sexual orientation.

Given these reasons, it is crucial today to build and consolidate a culture of gender differences based on respect. Only then will institutions be capable of combating and weakening the various forms of discrimination in favour of an equal and inclusive society based on exchange and reciprocity rather than violent relationality.

In light of these considerations, this conference aims to reflect on the issues of gender education and communication in the face of the profound transformations that are taking place, raising a number of questions in particular:

- How have the processes of gender socialisation changed and are they changing?
- How are the new agencies contributing to the education and communication of gender differences characterised?
- What are the current theoretical and methodological studies and research perspectives on the subject at the national and international levels?
- Which specific topics have been researched in relation to LGBTQ+ cultures?
- What does masculinity mean in the 21st century?
- What is the role of media and expressive languages in the construction of gender differences and the expression of gender models?
- What strategies can foster the realisation of a sustainable society because it is inclusive of different genders and sexual identities?
- What are the major obstacles to a sustainable society's realisation?

DEADLINES

Deadline for submission of proposals: 15 October 2022

Notification of proposal acceptance: 30 October 2022

Submission of report: 1 March 2023

The proposal, in Italian or English, should contain approximately 400 words and no more than 5 keywords, as well as the full name, affiliations and email address of the proposer.

The abstract should be sent in .pdf format to the Gender Studies Section email address: genere@ais-sociologia.it