



Interdisciplinary Research in Gender

IDENTITIES AND INTIMACIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by
Tonny Krijnen, Paul G. Nixon,
Michelle D. Ravenscroft and
Cosimo Marco Scarcelli



Identities and Intimacies on Social Media

This edited collection illuminates the scope with which identities and intimacies interact on a wide range of social media platforms.

A varied range of international scholars examine the contexts of very different social media spaces, with topics ranging from whitewashing and memes, parental discourses in online activities, Spotify as an intimate social media platform, neoliberalisation of feminist discourses, digital sex work, social media wars in trans debates and 'BimboTok'. The focus is on their acceleration and impact due to the specificities of social media in relation to identities, intimacies within the broad 'political' sphere. The geographic range of case study material reflects the global impact of social media, and includes data from Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the USA.

This enlightening and rigorous collection will be of key interest to scholars in media studies and gender studies, and to scholars and professionals of social media.

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the Lifecourse (with Rajash Rawal and Andreas Funk, 2016) and *Gender and Sexuality in the Contemporary Media Landscape*, a special edition of the *Information Communication and Society* journal (edited with Cosimo Marco Scarcelli and Tonny Krijnen), which was published online in 2021.

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**From Paul G. Nixon
Thanks to Ingrid**

**From Michelle D. Ravenscroft
For Sophie Lauren**



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2 “My Parents Check My Profile”

How Italian Girls Negotiate Parental Discourses in Online Activities

Arianna Mainardi and Tonny Krijnen

Introduction

Then I started seeing FB more as a part of my world and so my parents could see everything I was doing and I said okay ... withdraw them from my friends! [embarrassed laugh]. Because I wanted it to be my own little world outside the family.

Giulia is a 16-year-old girl. Like many of her peers in Italy, her everyday life is situated in both online and offline contexts. Connected with her smartphone at school and at home, Giulia keeps in touch with family and friends, sharing photos, videos and texts through social network sites (SNSs). Giulia employs different online resources to construct her own views on the world. Moreover, it is in these online spaces that girls build and articulate themselves showing photos, videos and private texts. For Giulia and her peers, SNSs are an existential space in and through which they build, discuss and express their identities.

In both society and academia, girls' online activities are a topic of heated debates. Public debates usually centre on the worries and anxieties of adults about girls' activities, which are often portrayed as risky business. Falling victim to hypersexualisation, cyberbullying, or being easy game for internet predators are commonly voiced concerns. Girls, it is argued, should be protected against these corrupting influences. These protectionist/moralist discourses, as Dobson (2014) calls them, are not only prevalent in public debates but sustained and reinforced by publicly available research reports such as the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* by the American Psychological Association (2010). Other researchers contribute to these discourses by showing how digital media cause body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls, or force them to self-sexualise by posting selfies and other sexualised self-images on social media (see Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2022). Furthermore, in order to ensure safety for young women and to restore and/or maintain more reassuring traditional social norms and roles, their activities should be controlled (Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2022). This paternalistic protectionist/moralist

discourse is embedded in a conception of 'I know what is right for you, and you don't'.

The Italian journalistic debate around girls and SNSs illustrates this: online girls are continuously portrayed as victims. For example, SNSs are presented as generating the 'objectified woman' or the focus lies on how selfies, posted on SNSs, are sufficient reasons to fall victim to violence. Hence, Italian newspapers maintain patriarchal discourses by presenting technology as inappropriate for girls and by regulating girls' presence in the public sphere (Mainardi, 2015). Parents are encouraged to protect their children, and especially their daughters, from this risky online environment. Guidelines on how to protect them are usually formulated in terms of media literacy and active parental involvement. However, other scholars note that by posing girls as subjects at risk, girls' own standpoints and views on their activities are at best weakened, if not obscured (Duits & Van Romondt Vis, 2009; Duits & Van Zoonen, 2006). The protectionist/moralist discourse is a one-sided perspective obscuring girls' ideas, opinions and actions. A number of studies contributing to the protectionist discourse are based on content analysis of social media (Gill, 2007, 2008), showing how misogynist discourses dominate young women's media environment. However, what young women actually do with these discourses is a question left unanswered. Indeed, as Edell et al. (2013) argue, talking to girls complicates these matters tremendously.

We want to highlight two important aspects of the protectionist/moralist discourse articulated in the debate on girls and new media. First, the debate seems to postulate two positions for girls: 'girls at risk' versus 'empowered girls'. These positions are particularly polarised in the sense that they focus exclusively either on power structures or on girls' agency. This dichotomy has been questioned by many authors before us (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Gonick et al., 2009; Harris & Dobson, 2015). We also feel neither position does justice to girls' online activities; therefore we adopt a poststructural view on Italian girls' online activities. Girls' agency, expressed in acts, activities and acting are discursive practices that co-construct the very structures enabling and limiting their agency. As Harris and Dobson (2015) argue, this means to "[...] understand subjectivity and social structure as produced in concert" (p. 145). Through acting on SNSs, girls engage with power systems and (re)produce power systems. Girls are not defined, structured or limited by power but "come into being through an active engagement with systems of power" (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014, p. 469).

Sexualisation and girls' entanglement with it is located in a neoliberalist climate in tandem with a postfeminist sensibility (Gonick et al., 2009): on the one hand positioning girls as rational individuals capable of making life choices, while on the other hand the sexist structures in which they have to do this deny girls freedom of choice. McRobbie (2009) has identified this violent climate as the postfeminist masquerade. We would like to draw attention to regionality. As Gonick

(2015) argues, neoliberalism has spread on a global scale, but its configuration is locally nuanced. In the Italian context, we argue, the postfeminist masquerade is just as prone as elsewhere, but the role played by parents and family differs from that in North European countries. Families have a crucial position in conveying society's norms and codes for girls. Furthermore, parents play a key role in orienting girls' use of new technologies in the domestic space (Scarcelli, 2010). In other words, Italian girls engage with a different power system to articulate the self than in other European countries. Our aim then is to make a contribution to understanding girls' online activities within specific power configurations.

Attributing attention to a dialogic understanding of agency and structure and to the local specificities of the power configurations in which identities are negotiated, we focus our research on how Italian girls between the ages of 15 and 18 years negotiate parental discourses on sexuality and SNSs. The internet practices and daily experiences of girls in the northern Italian city of Milan are central to our investigation of *How do Italian girls negotiate parental discourses in their online activities?* We use in-depth interviews to answer our research question.

The Italian Context

Gender and sexuality in Italy are an insidious terrain, both of discriminations and for political struggle. The ambivalent situation in the Italian context produces a gender system that encourages girls' and women's self-achievement in a culture that reproduces many forms of sexism and misogyny (see Zambelli et al., 2018). Public debate carries a gendered moral panic on girls' sexuality, constantly seeking to augment the already strict separation between good, respectable women and bad, disreputable women (Gribaldo, 2018). This separation between 'good' and 'bad' is known as the double standard: different standards used to judge sexual acts committed by men or women. As in other parts of the world, Italian women are expected to be respectable and not to show interest in sexuality or to engage in sexual behaviour outside heterosexual marriage (Bertone & Ferrero Camoletto, 2011; Crawford & Popp, 2003; Zambelli et al., 2018). Simultaneously, men's interest in sexuality in and outside marriage is accepted and sometimes even rewarded. "Women were faced with a Madonna-whore dichotomy: They were either pure and virginal or promiscuous and easy" (Crawford & Popp, 2003, p. 13).

Combined with the neoliberal idea of girls as empowered subjects, this creates an interesting context in which Italian girls negotiate their identities. While female Italian teenagers are considered as free and independent as their male peers regarding employment and education, the girls are restricted by rigid norms of respectability with regard to sexuality. Discourses on girls' sexuality are built on the basis of the double standards that characterised sexual morality in Italy between 1950 and 1960 (Leccardi, 2011).

Additionally, cultural practices concerning family relations also contribute to Italy's specific context for young girls. In Italy the familial welfare model delegates care services to the family sphere. Italian social and labour policies are based on the notion of family support and thus sustain the cohabitation of youth and the family until adulthood. Autonomy is reached at a later age than in other European countries. Furthermore, though the patriarchal family model, based on the male breadwinner and the female housewife, has been challenged by new gender and family models (Schizzerotto et al., 2011), men's participation in domestic work and care activities remains very limited (Bertone & Ferrero Camoletto, 2011). This configuration of the double standard in a context that emphasises heterosexual marriage and a strong division of domestic labour results in a very specific context for young girls to negotiate their sexual identities. As Pasquali (2012) argues, Italy witnesses a paradoxical situation in which sex and sexuality are both pervasive and hypervisualised, while also being removed from society. This makes sex a taboo subject, "right there where it is most exhibited", therefore "making the relationship among generations and between public and private more problematic than in other European contexts" (Pasquali, 2012, p. 207).

Framing Girls and SNSs

The protectionist/moralist discourses on girls' online activities are not entirely new. With the rise of every new medium, concerns about the impact of that medium on girls' well-being arise. From dance halls in the early 1900s to today's SNSs, debates on the new medium's effects have always concentrated on the mental and physical health of the vulnerable (Thiel-Stern, 2014). The vulnerable are often embodied by girls, as they fall into all of the categories under fire: young age and assumed lesser mental and cognitive capacities (Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2022). Within the current neoliberal discourse prevalent in societies of the Global North, the image of vulnerable girls is countered by a seemingly opposing image of the empowered girl.

This configuration should not be equated with a dichotomous conceptualisation of agency vs structure. As argued earlier, we follow a poststructural approach, understanding agency and structure in a dialogic fashion. Agency should therefore not be equated with resistance as this obscures the reproduction of unequal power structures by girls themselves (cf. Harris & Dobson, 2015). Moreover, positioning agency as opposed to structure forces one to either focus on 'the girl at risk', a victim of structures, or on 'the empowered girl' as an overt agent.

With the rise of digital media, the protectionist/moralist discourses took a slightly different shape. Online environments, it was argued, offered the opportunity to play with identities and assigned social roles, granting media access to everyone, including girls. Gender play and the accompanying dislocation of sex and gender increase the potential to disrupt the heterosexual

matrix (Butler, 1990). However, SNSs also significantly reduce the distance between online and offline life and produce important consequences for identity constructions as SNSs sustain an embodied presence in online interaction (Turkle, 1995).

The ways that SNSs differ significantly from other media are located in four distinct properties: persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audiences (boyd, 2007). These properties are particularly relevant with regard to debates on the risks of SNSs and one's online behaviour and feed the protectionist/moralist discourse. SNSs never forget what one posts, all material is easily found and can be distributed further without one's consent, and no one knows exactly who is viewing what pages. These four features are prominent elements of the aforementioned protectionist/moralist discourses, and used as arguments in the sexualisation debate: the consequences of online actions might have repercussions in offline life and young girls are unable to oversee or foresee these consequences. Therefore, SNSs provide a context in which the relationship between girls' agency and constraints is in flux. Online space may operate as a place of sexual freedom and gender play, but within these very spaces of opportunity harsh norms of gender identity and sexual regulation are articulated. Moreover, this context is positioned within a power configuration that emphasises parental and familial discourses. How do girls navigate these discourses and how does their direct environment intersect?

Method

To focus on girls' identity negotiations we investigated the ways girls appropriate the resources available in order to understand how they create and negotiate the meaning of these resources in everyday life. This chapter intends to contribute to the debate with an empirical study, answering the question: *How do Italian girls negotiate parental discourses in their online activities?*

A total of 32 girls between 15 and 18 years of age were interviewed. The qualitative interview was particularly useful for our purposes as it focuses attention on everyday life and provides room for the interviewees to express themselves and their experiences in their own words. By use of a topic list (containing topics such as time spent during the day using internet with friends, relatives and boyfriends; use of a smartphone; unpleasant experiences online; self-representations on social media), the interviewer guided the interviewees with the construction of the narrative. Hence, the interviewer co-constructs the narrative (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). Here, we want to acknowledge the existence of a power relation between researcher and interviewee during the interviews. We reflexively considered both the interviewer position (researcher, woman, young adult, white) and the context in which the interviews took place. To create a friendly and less hierarchical atmosphere, the interviewer asked the girls to address her with

the informal pronoun 'you' and by using the first name (the Italian social rules ask youth to address adults using the formal version of the pronoun 'you' that corresponds to the third person 'lei'; there is no English parallel to this pronoun). Some interviews were conducted inside the schools. In these cases we created a safe space, ensuring privacy. Other interviews took place in public spaces, such as parks or coffee shops. All interviews were transcribed *ad verbum*.

The girls came from different socio-economic contexts. Interviewees attended different schools (high school, vocational school or technical institute) and their parents differed in educational level and in country of origin. These girls lived at the intersection of several social categories. Their everyday experiences were situated and embodied at the intersection of these different dimensions of power: economic resources, educational level, ethnic background and religious context. In order to understand the process of negotiating parental discourses we have to consider how girls are immersed within these dimensions.

The SNS most used by the girls at the time of the interviews was Facebook (FB). Therefore, in the results we will focus on FB instead of SNSs in general. Interviews were interpreted following a discourse analysis approach. As 'discourse' we considered the relation between knowledge and power that structures the different subject positions that girls can adopt (Foucault, 1970). Discourses do not exist independently of their reproduction through social practice and meaning of the subject; discourses change over time and new ones emerge. Discourse analysis is therefore a suitable way to understand negotiating parental discourses and the specific power configurations for girls online. First, we identified parental discourses and how they contribute to a normative gender definition in girls' lives. Second, we focused on the way in which girls negotiated these discourses in their everyday life and in the context of SNSs.

Parents' Normative Gender Discourses

As is common for youths in contemporary societies in the Global North, for the girls interviewed there was an existential continuity between online and offline in everyday life. For instance, people with whom they kept in touch the most were the same people they interacted with offline. The interviewees were not that excited about FB. As they used FB every day it was integrated in their daily practices. FB was often evaluated by the girls as a boring place rather than a novelty. Part of the boredom was caused by the presence of parents on FB. At the time of the interviews – the study was concluded in 2015 – Facebook had started to be a place for 'adults'. While the girls were already active on Facebook, parents had just started to discover it. By entering into this online space, parents started modifying its socio-technological culture. Given that most of the girls involved in the research had had a Facebook account since middle school, the entry of parents into

this space changed the ways in which it was perceived and inhabited, and the meanings associated with its use. Thus, this research shows the emergence of a normative dimension within Facebook spaces that contributed to girls' exploration of other SNSs in recent years (such as Instagram or TikTok). Although FB started out as a space in which girls interacted with their peers, the presence of the parents now changed the way the girls used, felt about and had fun on FB. In saying they were bored with FB, we suggest, the interviewed girls were also responding to a system of (parental) checks and pressures in a complex space in between the public and private sphere (boyd, 2007).

All of the girls reported parental role and parents' protectionist/moralist discourses as significant to their activities on FB. Sometimes, parental presence manifested itself as a direct intervention in girls' activities, such as forcing the girls to unfriend people or to delete posts. Other times, parental presence became apparent indirectly, such as monitoring their online interactions. In general, parental interventions can be read as suggesting and encouraging traditional forms of femininity. This normative discourse on how to be a 'good girl' was not only exercised by parents, but sometimes maintained by other family members such as brothers.

According to the girls interviewed, parents' and other family members' direct and indirect interventions were instigated by protectionist/moralist discourses. For example, Geneva explains how her mother allowed her to open a FB account only if she used her mother's email to set it up. Furthermore, Geneva had to utilise the setting that makes FB send email notifications of all activities on FB to her mother. Hence, Geneva's mother is aware of all of her activities. According to Geneva, this is because her mother tries to protect her from harm:

They [her parents] check my profile. In the sense that my mother, when I joined FB said: 'or you sign up with my email or you can't!'. So I enrolled with her email and she receives all my notifications. She receives my messages [...]. Because she does not want me dating the wrong people ... That they may lure me online and then maybe even hurt me.

(Geneva, 16-year-old, high school)

Geneva's account is reflected in the interviews with the other girls, though not all parents performed a continuous monitoring of their daughters' online activities. Some activities, such as viewing pages, were intervened in only when the occasion arose. For example, Fatima explains:

Once I was in the car with my dad and he saw a picture of two naked people on the beach. He said 'What is that thing on FB?' And I say, 'It is a page.' and he says 'Remove it!' [stern voice] 'take away the like from the page.' and I said 'Okay.' [laughs].

(Fatima, 15-year-old, vocational school)

The intervention of the father in this case is occasional: he happens to catch a glimpse of what his daughter is viewing online and exercises his authority immediately. The girls perceived that dealing with protectionist/moralist discourses embodied by their parents' presence and interventions was part of the power system that they found themselves in.

The girls were aware of the opportunities and risks posed by online environments. For example, Geneva explains how there is a threshold of friends in common before you accept a friendship request:

Once I had accepted a friendship of a person ... I didn't know him but he was a friend of a friend, I said 'he is a friend of a friend, I accept him' and she [the mother] was very angry ... I said 'damn Mom! He is a person who I know exists because he is a friend of another person, it is not that bad.'

(Geneva, 16-year-old, high school)

By making sure the person accepted is known to several good friends, Geneva tries to ensure her own safety. Other examples that show the girls' knowledge and awareness include expressions such as: "not that you could see anything" (Antonella), or "I choose the best picture of me, but I don't want to show too much. If I have a dress which shows a bit of breast I choose the picture that doesn't show it" (Miriam). This awareness shows the girls' knowledge of sexualisation, as Duits and Van Zoonen (2011) argued, and how to navigate this in their everyday practices. Parental interventions, or demands in this regard, were only accepted because the punishments for not doing so were severe. As Geneva explains, when her mother demands her to unfriend a newly accepted person:

At first I said, 'come on, Mom, he's a person that I know he exists because he is a friend of another person, he is not bad'. But she said: 'No, I've told you, you can use FB if you follow my rules.' Then I said: 'all right, all right.' Precisely because it was the first time, it was my first experience on FB and I did not want me to be taken off, so I said yes.

(Geneva, 16-year-old, high school)

Geneva only avoids exploring the boy's friendship in exchange for being able to continue to use FB. One of the side effects of this perceived parental fear of daughters' online activities is an enforcement of the paradoxical coexistence of both pervasiveness and removal of sexuality in Italian girls' lives. A restrictive attitude towards girls' use of social media turns sexuality into a taboo. Hence, parents exclude the possibility that girls could discuss sexuality within the family (Pasquali, 2012). Additionally, these interventions, restrictions and censorship restore the figure of girls as potential 'victims' on the internet. This discourse weakens their position and sustains a patriarchal

order which regulates girls' presence in public contexts, suggesting that technologies are inappropriate for them (Thiel-Stern, 2014). Thus, girls' social subject positions are undermined. Nevertheless, all the girls developed one or multiple strategies to negotiate parental interventions. These strategies ranged from direct blocking of (non-parental) family members on their pages to adopting parents' discourses.

Girls' Navigation Strategies

From the interviews we could distinguish five strategies girls employ when negotiating parents' discourses: hiding out, writing codes, seeking confrontation, succumbing and resistance. Each of these strategies can be seen as agentic as they are used by the girls to articulate themselves and their identities. The first strategy resembles hiding out. Girls have invented creative ways to circumvent parental interventions. For example, most girls are active on other social media such as Twitter, ASKfm or Tumblr, where they are free from parental presence. But girls also show savviness with regard to what they do and do not post. During the interviews, the girls reported that they do not share on FB photos of themselves in transgressive moments – for example, while smoking a cigarette or being cosy with their boyfriend. This prevents parents and other family members from finding out too much of the girl's lives.

I remember that there are things that I said: 'I cannot [put them on FB], because my parents are there and I respect them, they created their daughter with a brain, I do not put these things on [FB]'. Perhaps the photos ... I took some pictures, always with my best friend. At the time I had short hair and it was not yet the time when a lot of celebrities cut it short and they took pictures ... I was interested in fashion and photography and my friend had to learn about the lighting in photography. So, she used me as model and I was topless and without a bra. But these things have never gone on the internet; at least I do not think so [laughs].

(Marta, 18-year-old, vocational school)

Girls, imagining their audience, speak and act in accordance with the rules generally perceived acceptable by the public; often girls feel under control by the 'invisible' audience of FB. Hence, FB becomes a technology that imposes a form of self-monitoring and self-control. What prevails is the idea of a more 'moderate' femininity, taking care to express behaviour that is not too sexually explicit, but more compatible with the presence of parents. This self-regulatory practice helps to sustain and reinforce existing discourse on how to be a 'good girl' in the Italian context and the reproduction of the heterosexual matrix (Foucault, 1976; Butler, 1990).

A second way to evade parental discourse is by writing code, making sure their posts do not address anyone in particular. Claudia's parents, for example, do not approve of her boyfriend. Both her parents and her boyfriend are befriended on FB. Hence, Claudia posts messages to him that could be for anyone:

I only write stupid things, for example: 'goodnight love', 'I miss you' and stuff like that. I don't want my parents to understand that I'm writing to him, because my family doesn't accept this situation. They are in my FB contacts now and I don't want to create problems. I have thousands of people in my FB contacts ... because you do not know directly all the people on FB, almost, but not all. So I don't want people to say stupid things ... so I prefer to avoid that and keep my things anonymous. I know they are for him and that's it.

(Claudia, 17-year-old, vocational school)

By keeping the posts anonymous, Claudia not only prevents her parents knowing about her boyfriend, but also prevents other people betraying her secrets.

Not all attempts on deluding parents are successful. For example, Geneva explains how she tried to join a FB page for the One Direction concert she would attend. As she was aware her mother would not approve, she deleted the notifications that would be sent to her mother's email account:

On June 28 I will go to the One Direction concert. Someone has created this official group composed of girls who are going. I told myself: 'Okay, I join the group, there are some innocent girls...'. However, I removed all notifications and I made sure that my mother didn't know about this ...

(Geneva, 16-year-old, high school)

When Geneva's mother found out, Geneva was forced to leave the FB group. These two strategies designed to navigate parental interventions are, in a way, an indirect response to parental norms and intervention. The attempts of parents to protect their daughters from harm result in the daughters adopting unethical behaviour: hiding out from their parents and keeping secrets. Combined with the taboos created around sexuality, we argue that parental discourses partially heighten the risks to girls.

However, other strategies employed by girls to navigate parental discourses are less 'risky'. The third strategy is confrontational. An interesting example is made by Fatima, who puts a conflicting aspect of her relationship with her family to the foreground on her FB page. Fatima's FB cover image carries the words 'follow your dreams'. Fatima explains how her parents do not understand her huge passion for singing and how she would like to become

a professional singer by participating in auditions for music broadcasts on television. Her parents oppose these activities:

My parents are Egyptians ‘terrioni’ [laughs] ... still have a mentality of Egypt and do not want to understand that what I do now will be my future ... They want me to be more focused on spirituality rather than the real world, but I have a very different opinion. So: ‘follow your dream’ and that’s it ... [laughs].

(Fatima, 16-year-old, technical school)

In the process of constructing her identity, Fatima struggles between the values of the religious community (Italian Coptic Orthodox) she belongs to and the cultural resources available to her in daily life in Milan (‘terrioni’ is a derogatory term used by northern Italians to describe southern Italians). Fatima’s foregrounding of a familial conflict is a way not only to navigate parental intervention but also to navigate her everyday activities within a church she feels differently about than her parents. FB hence enables Fatima to discuss this aspect with her parents instead of disabling her (which is the case with regard to sexuality, as noted before).

A fourth strategy employed is to succumb to parental discourse. Girls take parents’ arguments into deep consideration and sometimes incorporate them. One of the interviewees, Carlotta, took some pictures with her friend during the school’s summer break. Some of these photos portray her without a bra and with her hands crossed over her chest to cover her breasts. One of these photos is edited by Carlotta on her computer and she adds a group of swallows taking flight into the sky from her chest. The photo is then reproduced in three consecutive sequences. Very satisfied with the result, Carlotta spontaneously feels the desire to share it online through her FB profile. So, at first Carlotta is happy with her creative work and she feels she has protected herself by making sure her breasts were not exposed. However, when her parents find out they are angry:

Just you could not see anything, however, only the idea that there was no bra, but my parents when they found it, they were truly ... They were angry [...] I had to figure it out by myself that it was not good to post it, but I was so happy [laughs]. I do not know if I can say that ...

(Carlotta, 16-year-old, high school)

During the interview, Carlotta starts a reflexive process that highlights a transformation from her initial position after her mother’s intervention. At first, pride and satisfaction prevail with regard to creating an image that she likes so much and, above all, where she feels beautiful. This latter aspect is important if we consider the abundant research results that often show the difficulties girls have in building a peaceful relationship with their body, and

the complex negotiations that take place before deciding which picture can be published on FB (Dobson, 2015).

Later, Carlotta seems to embrace her parents' views, and becomes very critical of herself:

Well, if I had thought only one more day I would have never done it. Because my mother told me ... It is also a question of personal modesty, to show my body ... no ... you have to keep it to yourself. Anyway ... even for [my] current reputation, then maybe everyone thinks I'm a slut. [Long pause] I shouldn't say it [slut]?

(Carlotta, 16-year-old, high school)

Materially, Carlotta's parents forced her to immediately remove the photos from FB and then forbade her to use her personal FB account for a month. During this episode, Carlotta discussed with her mother a more legitimate gender model that makes intelligible the way Carlotta performs her body online. In the discussion with the mother, 'modesty' was the key term, which became a value capable of defining a particular idea of femininity in which the body is something 'to keep in private' and 'not to exhibit' (Crawford & Popp, 2003). Carlotta imagined her audience as her own peer group when she shared these images on her personal profile, for whom the photograph had a meaning different from the one in the adult world.

Yes, [now] I always think about what people may think ... I don't think about my friends, because there are contexts where ... [...] But I try to think about other people. Because for example my parents have reacted in a different way.

(Carlotta, 16-year-old, high school)

After discussing the issues with her mother, the same image took a different meaning: "Then they think I'm a slut," said Carlotta. Her fears of the stigma (slut) show how the sexual conduct of girls in the Italian context is still the subject of a moral discourse that condemns certain young women's behaviour (cf. Mainardi, 2018).

The fifth and last strategy to negotiate one's identity with the complex power configuration the girls find themselves in is that of resistance. Resistance manifests itself in blocking family members from their FB or straightforward disobedience. This type of resistance only manifests when girls do not accept, or are unconvinced by, the parental discourse. One example is the dispute between Antonella and her brother over some pictures of her with a friend while sitting on the steps of Milan Cathedral. Antonella's older brother intervened as he felt she was exposing too much of her body:

I'm sitting outside the cathedral and dressed in short shorts but not that you can see everything. But my brother got angry because I put it on

FB ... and he began to say to my mother: 'look at your daughter and what she looks like, do you let her go out this way, ... [on FB] there are perverts [...] You are not good, you're licentious, putting photos on FB ...'

(Antonella, 16-year-old, vocational school)

The intervention of her brother first of all highlights an organisation of family relationships based on a patriarchal family model (actually Antonella's father no longer lived with the family; she told us that from the moment her father left, her brother started playing the role of head of the household). Her brother's opinion reinforces the idea that Antonella cannot be responsible for what she publishes on FB but that he is. Therefore, he feels that it is legitimate to exercise this kind of authority. However, Antonella directly resists her brother's meddling:

... my brother. I blocked him because everything that I put on FB, for him it is not right!

(Antonella, 16-years-old, vocational school)

Antonella controls her online space consciously by defining who she wants to be part of her audience.

Another example of resistance manifests itself in the expressing, playing with and experimenting with sexuality on SNSs (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011). Claudia, for example, does seem to utilise FB much more for these purposes. She resisted her parents' pressure when she posted some pictures of herself in which she kisses a female friend:

... God knows what they thought because I kissed with a friend of mine. And for the pictures with my boyfriends they told me: 'remove them because you're much too young and others could criticise and so on...'

(Claudia, 17-year-old, vocational school)

She then continues to explain how she first gave in to her parents and removed the pictures, but then decided against it and uploaded them again. Not to rebel against her parents, as Claudia clearly states, but because she feels other people's opinions are not that important, especially when you feel you have done nothing wrong.

CLAUDIA: I took them off and then I put them on again. But not to be rebellious, I don't care about what other people say, because they criticise but they are not critical of themselves. [...] I argued with my childhood friend's father. He is a close friend of my parents. My father or my mother might have commented on the picture saying: 'Claudia stop it!'

INTERVIEWER: They were afraid of such criticisms?

CLAUDIA: About the kiss that I was lesbian or about the picture with my boyfriend that I was no good. But I have a clear conscience ...
(Claudia, 17-year-old, vocational school)

Showing a photo in which they exchange a kiss is in itself not a subversive act for the girls themselves. However, uploading the photos again challenges the ritualised forms of performance and production of gendered social norms that are reinforced by parents. Although Claudia acknowledges these norms, she does not succumb like Carlotta. The difference between the girls' responses to parental interventions on expressions of their sexuality shows exactly the opportunity to exercise agency. While Carlotta is eventually convinced by her mother's discourse, Claudia is not. Both girls have thought deep and hard about their actions and both have made a decision that they seem satisfied with.

Conclusion

Our results show how the possibility for Italian girls to express themselves in an online context depends on the continuous mediation of the pressures of parents' discourses. Girls' online sexuality marks the intersection in defining youth and adult relationships. Even though postfeminist discourse celebrates girls' independence and autonomy in different aspects of their life, sexuality and gender expressions remain a contested space in the relationships between girls and family.

In this chapter, we have analysed both discourses surrounding parents' direct and indirect interventions in girls' online activities and girls' direct and indirect strategies to negotiate these. The Italian context, with its magnified image of the double standard, is particularly relevant to the girls interviewed. The interventions of parents and brothers strengthen the persistent and pernicious presence of unequal gender discourses internalised by the girls, relevant to the expression of sexuality and corporeality of girls. Studies on girls, SNSs and sexuality should, we would like to argue, take these intersections into account in order to transcend the 'empowered girl' versus 'girl at risk' dichotomy. However, all interviewees show ways of negotiating parental discourses, some direct and some more indirect. FB is formulated as a boring place, indicating that all the really exciting stuff (and we assume that sexuality is more exciting to them than everyday vicissitudes at school) is taken elsewhere. This shows not only awareness of FB's affordances, but also knowledge about and the ability to use other technical structures to redefine boundaries of what is possible and what is not. How these technical structures interact with the construction of sexual identities in specific contexts should be further investigated.

Harris and Dobson (2015) suggest understanding girls' agency in a "post-girl-power cultural landscape" (p. 154) does not mean considering girls as subjects inevitably powerful, but instead, as we did, recognising

(im)material boundaries that structure girls' positions of speaking and trying to unpack how they make sense of their experiences in such circumstances. The results of our research enrich the academic debate on girls' agency, offering empirical material – girls' points of view – crucial to understanding the material resources available to the girls to organise their presence in the world.

Although the study involved girls coming from different socio-cultural contexts and with different geographical and religious backgrounds, we should consider that all the subjects attended a secondary school and lived in a big city in the north of Italy, Milan. It should be noted that Italy is extraordinarily differentiated, based on geographic characteristics. Firstly, with regard to different organisations of the family and different connections with European youth culture, the north and south differ. Secondly, big cities and small villages offer different cultural opportunities and variances in broadband access. Our results therefore show how young, Italian, urban, educated girls negotiate new spaces of expression through SNSs articulating their agency in the arena of possibilities offered by the context they live in. Research into girls who live in different geographical situations could reveal different kinds of individual strategies and negotiation.

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