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ABSTRACT
Compared to racist and ethnicist discourses, literature on sexist discourses – both off and on-line – as hate speech is relatively underinvestigated. This is partly due to the tendency to minimise accusations of sexism and to reframe misogyny as 'acceptable' by constructing it as a form of humour. We decided to focus on slut-shaming, one of the most virulent forms of hate speech, which has always existed but was boosted by social media, becoming a stable low-cost ingredient of today's rape culture. We propose to consider online slut-shaming as a form of 'technology-facilitated sexual violence', where digital technologies are used to facilitate both virtual and face-to-face sexually based harms. According to feminist analysis of sexual violence, this would be a matter of power rather than sex: sex would be the weapon, not the motive. We have tested this research hypothesis by focusing on the Italian reception of the MeToo campaign, triggered by Asia Argento's denunciation. More specifically, two Different Twitter corpora produced within the same five months period were examined by means of a quantitative and a qualitative methodology.

1. Slut-shaming in Italy: reasons for a peculiarity[1]

Compared to racist and ethnicist discourses, sexist discourse as hate speech is relatively underinvestigated (Calvert, 1997; Dragotto & Melchiorre, 2018; Lillian, 2007; Nielsen, 2002; Waldron, 2012; Weston-Scheuber, 2012; Wolfson, 1997). This is partly due to the tendency to minimise sexism (Worth, Augoustinos, & Hastie, 2016), on the one hand, and to reframe misogyny as 'acceptable' by constructing it as a sort of humour (Drakett, Rickett, Day, & Milnes, 2018), on the other.

In this contribution we have decided to focus on slut-shaming, one of the most virulent forms of sexist hate speech, which can be described as 'the act of criticising women or girls for their real or presumed sexuality or sexual activity, as well as for looking or behaving in ways that are believed to transgress sexual norms' (Karaian, 2014, p. 296). Main aim of this study is therefore to offer an example of the objectives, social use, and discursive functions of such language practice and, more specifically, to assess if the 'humour' frame/rhetoric

mode plays a role in the social legitimisation of this extreme and profound expression of sexism.

In order to achieve such goal, this work has focused on the comments expressed by Italian Twitter users upon the occasion of Asia Argento's allegations of sexual abuses against Harvey Weinstein, the well-known and powerful film producer reneged by an important part of the star system from the moment when the news of the Argento's denunciation started to spread. We are indeed convinced that this episode represents a paradigmatic case, both in general terms, and in relation to the peculiar features of slut-shaming within the Italian context. As a matter of fact, slut-shaming has become a normalised communication practice in Italy, instrumental in the delegitimisation of prominent female politicians and public figures, and performed not only by ordinary people, but by politicians – mostly male – in the first place.

The ideal starting point of this normalisation can be traced back to the 'Cosa faresti in macchina con la Boldrini' (What would you do with Boldrini in the car), call launched by the Five Star Movement leader Beppe Grillo, from his Facebook page, on January 31, 2014. Upon that occasion, the comedian-politician was inviting people to 'fantasise' about the former President of the Senate Laura Boldrini.[2] The call proved to be extremely successful, and thousands of replies were posted in a short lapse of time.[3]

Two years later, in July 2016, during a political speech given in Soncino, Cremona, the leader of Lega Nord Matteo Salvini showed his audience an inflatable doll introducing it as 'Boldrini's double'. Despite the protests against this public outrage, he refused to apologise and launched the hashtag #sgonfialaboldrini (#deflateboldrini). Upon another occasion, as Home Affairs Minister, on 19 November 2018 he publicly exposed three female students who had been protesting against him. It is clear enough, he didn't understand – or pretended to not understand – that publishing their pictures on FB would trigger and legitimise the misogyny of his followers.

Probably due to its embeddedness in the Italian conservative cultural frame, slut-shaming appears as an inescapable fate and, most relevant for the present study, an underestimated form of violence against women. This could possibly explain the striking lack of a specific bibliography on the subject in Italian.

2. Literature review. Hate speech and slut-shaming on and off line

2.1. Hate speech

In literature, with the term of 'hate speech', it is customary to refer to the set of recurrent communicative practices to stigmatise and delegitimise a person or a group that, in the perspective of the socially dominant group, appears inferior for reasons connected to one or more of their distinctive features. If in its first phase of spread (prior to social media), the black-people group had been the favourite target of this hatred (Van Dijk, 1987, 1991, 1993, the latter focuses on the relationship between racism and the discourse of elitarian groups), over the years hate discourse has been gradually extended to foreigners and immigrants, homosexuals, believers of other religions, disabled and last but not least, women. This latter, though not a minority has always been treated as such by those who consider themselves part of an élite. Compared to the pre-social phase, the contemporary version, is additionally characterised by diversification of the hate producers.

If at first hatred was more an issue concerning some social groups, and individuals could decide to keep at a distance, with social media production it has become individualised and at the same time exasperated (Faloppa, 2018 refers to an 'egosphere' socially favoured). Due to the fact that users operate from within an echo-chamber and that their identity is defined by both the contents and the textual mechanisms of an incessant sharing, such an action becomes a real 'propagation by layering' via memes. Looking at their enunciative form, hate speech messages are connoted by specific textual and linguistic features. Regardless of the targeted group, texts are axiomatic and not really argumentative: people usually justifies their statements retrieving neither tested nor actual facts, they are prone to use self-fulfilling linguistic and social stereotypes and, in order to express themselves and their anger, they prefer the non-stardard varieties and, within them, the most scommatic registers (see ElSherief, Kulkarni, Nguyen, Yang Wang, & Belding, 2018 for the USA' Twitter, useful even if only partially superimposable). Another constant is represented by the tendency, on the part the of users, to propose themselves as bearers of genuine messages proposed in the name of identity or even national survival, against both material and moral corruption. Due to their recurrences in hate speeches, some linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms appear as text-genres.

2.2. Slut-shaming

The most relevant aspect to underline about the obnoxious practice of slut-shaming, either performed on and off line, is that it is grounded on, and endlessly reproduces, the so-called 'sexual double standard', the infamous set of different rules governing male and female sexual behaviour. If on the one hand, men benefit from a far greater degree of permissiveness, on the other women, are historically 'faced with a Madonna-whore dichotomy, that is, they are either pure or virginal or promiscuous and easy' (Crawford & Popp, 2003, p. 1). Women are obviously boxed into the second category – that is, they are slut-shamed – as soon as they step into the space socially considered the preserve of men, where these latter's behaviour becomes normalised or is even rewarded. It is no surprise therefore, that the primary function of slut-shaming is policing female sexuality. Evidence of the regulatory power of slut discourse has vehemently emerged, in fact, in the few available researches on both off-line and on-line conducts.

The fear of stigma constantly impacts women's behaviour in sexual and love intercourse, shaping their preferences, and determining an endless negotiation with public gender beliefs about women's sexuality (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009, p. 598). The regulatory power of slut-shaming results even increased when it happens in the contexts of allegations or cases of sexual assaults, which is one of its most frequent occurrences. For instance, in rape trials, emphasising the victim's (alleged) transgression of sexual norms is a strategy to undermine her respectability and to cast doubt on her credibility as a witness (Walklate, 2004, p. 182). Most of all, a vast literature points to the ubiquity of the victim's 'sexual history' (Humphries, 2009, p. 19) as a parameter used in both legal discourse (e.g. Davies, 2011; Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2016; Wykes & Welsh, 2009) and media discourse (Barnett, 2012; Benedict, 1992; Boyle, 2004; Giomi & Tonello, 2013; Meloy & Miller, 2009), in order to distinguish between innocent victim (= good women) and victims who deserve it (= bad women).

When slut-shaming is used in such a way, it falls within what Meyers has termed 'direct forms of victim blaming' (1997): it tends to transfer all the blame on the victim and calls for their personal responsibility in the act, also suggesting that sexual assault is somehow justified by their lack of morality, inappropriate sexual conduct or even by their appearances at the time of the aggression. Highlighting women's potential role in violence against them implies that women should modify their (sexual) behaviour, and that the prevention of men's violence is women's responsibility (for an overview of studies on this aspect, see Sutherland et al., 2015, p. 18).

Notwithstanding the fact that slut-shaming has always existed, it is evident that it has been recently boosted by social media, becoming an essential ingredient of today's rape culture (Phipps, Ringrose, Renold, & Jackson, 2018). The available empirical contributions on social networks – most of which focus on teenagers – agree that these platforms 'amplify the contexts of victimisation and re-victimisation of girls and solidify the discourses of the slut/slag as inappropriate femininity' (Willem, Araüna, & Tortajada, 2019, p. 12; Boyd, 2014, specifically on social networks). In addition to that, on-line slut-shaming and victim blaming can also be solicited by activities that are not strictly sexual: posting sexy selfies and lacking (digital) skills enabling to control the rapid sharing and potentially permanent circulation of compromising pictures and comments (see also Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Salter, 2016).

Slut-shaming lies at the heart of a precise politics of sexual respectability and sexual subjectification (Karaian, 2014), which directly involves the policing of women's presence in the digital public realm. In patriarchal societies, girls are still slut-shamed just for using Facebook, seen as sexually promiscuous (Arora & Scheiber, 2017, p. 415). In the Western world, where women's presence in chat rooms, social media platforms, blogs, vlogs, and online gaming is more common, slut-shaming and gender-based attacks must be understood as 'patterned resistance to women's public voice in digital space' (Sobieraj, 2018, p. 1701). Likewise, the threat of male violence is to be understood as a means of limiting women's circulation in physical public space and hinder their freedom and independence.

Finally, slut-shaming – either off and on-line – derives its power also from its intersection with other forms of stigmatisation, based on race (see Stephenson, 2018) or class. Slut-shaming is used to negotiate class differences and to draw class-based moral boundaries that organise women's sexual behaviour (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Seeley, 2014). It therefore 'happens along the lines of a class double standard, in addition to a sexual one' (Willem et al., 2019, p. 2).

3. Research hypothesis and methodology

Drawing on the aforementioned researches, we consider slut-shaming as a performative linguistic act inducing productive and normative effects similar to those of sexual violence: reproducing male dominance and control over women.

More specifically, our hypothesis is twofold: first, we argue that such practice of power is aimed at 'putting women back in their place', second, we postulate that this becomes particularly evident when the target are public female figures and when performed on line. The anonymity and the distance ensured by ICT, as a matter of fact, help trolls perform slut-shaming 'safely' and repeatedly as a practice of power. In addition, online spaces possess the unique quality to rapidly amplify the reach, impact and harmfulness of socio-

psychological attacks, considered the most widespread and damaging form of violence against publicly and politically engaged women (Bardall, 2017).

In the present discussion, we contend that the Asia Argento and Harvey Weinstein case may indeed be well suited to test such a hypothesis and to better understand how slut-shaming actually works. As previously illustrated, one of the most recurrent occurrences of slut-shaming is a form of victim-blaming associated with allegations and cases of sexual harassment and rape, precisely the case with Argento vs. Weinstein. It is also worth noticing that Asia Argento is not simply a public figure, but that in the meantime she has become the symbol of the international #MeToo campaign, whose devastating positive thrust has impacted all cultural and productive systems in unprecedented ways. In Italy, she also took part in the march organised by the Feminist Movement Non Una di Meno, that on March 8th 2018 brought to the capital 200.000 women to protest against gender-based violence against women.

In order to get the most realistic picture of the sentiment of the Italian social and linguistic community in relation to the considered sequence of events, and to be able to obtain a sub-repertoire of occurrences specifically referred to slut-shaming, we have decided to collect and analyse all the tweets marked as #AsiaArgento. The choice of Twitter over traditional media and other social media, which subsequently reused Twitter's posts, is to be ascribed to the active participation of the actress in this network in the months elapsing from the beginning of the events to March 30th 2018. This date was conventionally chosen with the intent to somehow connect the trail of both public and private reactions, to the march in Rome and Argento's speech at the European Parliament, both of them dated 2018, March 8th. Later, two other data segments were collected and analysed adopting the same approach: the first, dated 1 April-31 July 2018, the second starting from the day after up to Argento's Twitter profile closure (January 3rd, 2019). It must be noted that, though commenting on the first sub-corpus, we will not refer to these further two blocks.

As to the methodology, the authors adopted critical discourse analysis criteria and aims (Van Dijk, 1995, 1997, 2011), adapted as much as possible to the communication features of Twitter (see below). Furthermore, in order to highlight the possible individual and collective narratives offered and obtained from the web, they decided to perform three different, though complementary, types of analysis.

(1) The first is a quantitative analysis on a corpus of tweets and retweets collected by the means of Python.[4] The sentiment-analysis-detection method, a common practice used to derive people's opinion in relation to products, services and policy proposals, allowed us to obtain 10.368 tweets and retweets.

3.869 of these were direct tweets (for an amount of 14.271 graphic forms and 73.103 occurrences, with an index of reachness equal to 19,52),[5] subsequently analysed using R software with the aim to highlight keywords, lexical affinity and consequently to attribute weight to the information obtained and, finally, to retrieve the main narrative patterns. As to libraries and analysis parameters, 'text' 'favourite' 'favouriteCount' 'replyToSN' 'created' 'truncated' 'replyToSID' 'id' 'replyToUID' 'statusSource' 'screenName' 'retweetCount' 'isRetweet' 'retweeted' 'longitude' 'latitude' were used.

The occurrences networks were calibrated by the scraper but also monitored by the authors, so as to normalise them – i.e in the case of graphic variants recurrence – and eventually to not lose potentially important values: as a significant case, do consider the use of negation *non* (not) and other tokens scarcely significant from a usually neglected lexical perspective. The data-set provided the following four main narratives, resulting from clusters analysis[6]:

(1) Cluster 1 – Comparison with other people.

This group brings together the graphic forms belonging to tweets where the story of Asia Argento is commented, especially with reference to other public figures: *(Silvio) Berlusconi*, *(Alec) Baldwin*, actress *(Miriana) Trevisan*, singer *Morgan*, director *(Fausto) Brizzi*, *(Catherine) Deneuve*, *(Kevin) Spacey*, etc.. Overall, some negatively criticise Asia Argento, depicted as *attricetta, faccia di bronzo, zoccola, puttana, poco credibile, cane* (an actress of little value, poker face, whore, slut, scarcely credible, bitch). Some other are instead against Weinstein and the other alleged or involved men, defined as *pig, toilet, carrion* …

(2) Cluster 2 – Comparison with Luxuria.

This group brings together the graphic forms belonging to tweets that comments the television face-to-face confrontation with transgender public figure and former politician Vladimir Luxuria. This set forms an autonomous group, marked by forms such as *puntata, Bianca Berlinguer, scusa, giustificare, indecente, poveraccia, imbarazzante, delusione, …* (show episode, Bianca Berlinguer, excuse, justify, indecent, poor thing, embarrassing, disappointment …)

(3) Cluster 3 – The controversy about the career.

This group brings together the graphic forms belonging to tweets where the difficulty of women's career comes to the fore in the comments. The most recurrent forms are: *carriera, do ut des, ipocrisia, coerenza, vergognoso, polemica, scandalo, abuso, consenziente, complice, pompino, prostituzione, produttore, filmografia, mignotta* … (career, *do ut des*, hypocrisy, coherence, shameful, controversy, scandal, abuse, consenting, accomplice, blowjob, prostitution, producer, filmography, slut …). In this set both actors/actresses and some public figures such as *(Laura) Boldrini, (Gwyneth) Paltrow, (Michele) Placido, (Selvaggia) Lucarelli, (Giorgia) Meloni, (Quentin) Tarantino* are often mentioned. Furthermore, two clearly distinct opinions about Asia Argento's allegation can be detected, so the recurrence of *rottweiler, sbagliato, ragazzina, colpa, buon viaggio, mignotta* vs *iostoconasia, applauso, solidarizzare, linciaggio mediatico, finalmente, solidarietà* (rottweiler, wrong, little girl, guilt, have a good trip, slut; Iamwithasia, applause, solidarity, media lynching, finally, solidarity).

(4) Cluster 4 – Predominantly favourable to Asia Argento and her behaviour.

This group brings together the graphic forms belonging to tweets supporting Asia Argento and her motives. Support is highlighted by the words *non facile, rispetto, difendere, donna, intelligente, complimenti, vaso di pandora, solidale, pena, ragione, eroina, violenza sulle*

donne, *sola*, *vergogna*, *paura*, *maschilista*, *leoni da tastiera*, *coglioni*, *talent* (not easy, respect, defend, woman, intelligent, compliments, Pandora's box, solidal, punishment, reason, heroine, violence against women, alone, shame, fear, machist, keyboard lions, balls, talent …)

(2) In a second step, a new quantitative analysis was conducted. This time the scraped dataset consisted of what offered to Twitter users by the internal advanced search function. The practice of searching through Twitter's repository by hashtag is common among Internet users interested in building their own opinion on a trend topic.

With the aim to compare the narrative patterns with those offered by the former analysis, the 830 tweets and retweets (only 89 of those were tweets) corresponding to the query *#AsiaArgento* was subsequently web scraped adopting the same software and parameters considered in the sentiment analysis.

The digging allowed to extract 14.271 graphic forms in total, among full (lemmas) and empty (functional) words, for an amount of 69.220 occurrences. As to the most significant occurrences (see type 1 analysis), a list not limited to the full lemmas is provided by the authors. At first, forms marked with @ (333 times), # (1.619 times), *http://*, and its variants (more than 1.100), in the same way as the form *on someone's side* (31 times), *again* (163 times) *why/because* (120 times), were kept because of their being pragmatically charged with references to the case. Their notable recurrence reveals, in fact, a strong communicative aim on the part of the users.

However, when the graphic forms related to the marking metalanguage were subtracted from the sample and from # and @ the total number of occurrences fell to 9,587, for a total of 44,511 occurrences.

In the attempt to grab the sentiment of the Italian-speaking community of Twitter, it was also decided to gradually introduce the filter of linguistic competence.[7] Consequently, the graphic forms have been further cleaned up also of the graphic forms corresponding to function words, support verbs and other elements of little lexical semantics significance, such as interjections, 7,423, for a total of 22,921 occurrences.

As to parts of the speech, only nouns, qualifying adjectives and verbs were included, with the exclusion of both auxiliary and servile verbs (*in primis must*, *can*, *want*, but also *to be used to*, *to know* in the meaning of being able to, *want*, *to dare*) and phraseological forms (*to put yourself*, *to stay*, *to go*, *to start*, *to continue*, *to finish*). In case of ambiguity or doubt, in order to reduce the risk of mistakes, it was decided not to remove the entry, for example when the graphic forms could constitute homographs of the respective conversions (from verb to name). This is what happens both in the case of *power* and of the various forms of *to know*, whose weight in the analysed text is highly relevant. The same thing applies to *good* (good/good), *evil* (bad/evil) and other cases of homography.

On the contrary, personal names, newspaper names, so as television broadcasts, websites and internet app names were eliminated. The few forms that were not referable to any word (e.g. *ot*) were also erased. The univerbate forms with the article (not with the preposition) were standardised, relating them to the corresponding noun.

Furtherly increasing the degree of linguistic competence to be adopted in the counting of the list and specifically of the morphological one, the next step consisted in grouping allomorphs and supplementary terms, which were thus brought back to their basic entry (unmarked form). This passage takes into account the specificity of the Italian language.

Due to its linguistic history, Italian abounds with forms that, although morphologically connected, may appear dissimilar to the point of not being detectable in absence of metalinguistic competence.[8] It is the case with suppletive entries, referred in this first step to the unmarked correspondent entries (usually consisting of the most recurrent variants), and later to another metalinguistic competence added as analysis filter, that is the sociolinguistic one. So, all the forms semantically similar or even identical, were related to their semantic prototype, this choice being very in the stance of the sociolinguistic variability of the Italian language. For its richness of dialects due to different principles of variability, Italian can distribute the same meaning in several morphological roots that it's possible to collect only through the linguistic repertoire, that is 'the set of language varieties used in the speaking and writing practices of a speech community' (Finegan, 2004, glossary).

To better understand the crucial relevance of such intermediate step, we will consider the lexicon semantically pertaining the sexual sphere (parts of the body, activities, words 'sfiatatoio'/blowhole): for its frequent use in slut-shaming-based invectives, we firstly focused on the most common term used to refer, also in an allocutive function, to a prostitute, i.e. *troia* slut/filty pig. In the dataset, slut occurs 20 times in the singular (*troia*) and 4 times in the plural (*troie*), once also in the derivative noun *troiai* (brothels), here not pertinent. Likewise, the Italian unmarked (and neutral) term, i.e. *prostitute*, occurs 7 times in the singular and 10 in the plural.

Furthermore, thanks to the use of the metalinguistic competence in Italian, each variant connected to *prostituta/troia* was gathered with the aim to obtain the real weight of slut-names in the dataset. The gathered list comprehends: *baldracca* 1, *bottane* (slut in southern variety) 1, *cagn@* 1, *mignotta* 2, *puttana* 6, *puttanazza* 1, *puttane* 5, *sciacquetta* 1, *scorciatroie* (a pun with the Italian word for shortcut, *scorciatoia*) 1, *sgualdrina* 1, *squinzie* 1, *troia* 20, *troie* 4, *zoccola* 1, *zoccole* 4, *zozza* 1.

Renouncing the potentially allocutive form, with the intent to grab and to bring together each form attributable to the subject 'prostitution', regardless of their morphology, we could be able to add to the list some other entries: *prostituirsi* 2, *prostituisce* 2, *prostituiscono* 1, *prostituito* 1, *prostitution* 1 (a writing error), *prostituzione* 8, *troiaggine* 1, *troiai* 1.

Finally, taking into account both the linguistic and the communicative competence, we could also add to the list another cluster of nouns comprehending those forms that, although not related at all to the subject of prostitution from a lexical-semantic perspective, they get charged of stigma if used in contexts similar to the present case study.

It is the case with a group of entries belonging to the semantic field of religion, such as sanctity, i.e. *santa* 9, *santarelline* 2, *sante* 5, *santine* 1 and even *verginelle* 1 and *Vergine Maria* 1, all of them used as euphemistic substitutes in fairly formal conversation contexts. In a following step, we could tentatively arrange also those items whose sense is even more related to text. Meaning difficult to recover also for language speakers who don't share the context knowledge. In so doing, we could recover and add the name *Vampirella*, understandable only to those who did see the homonymous comics or movie.

(1) In this section we aim to investigate the 89 tweets repertoire, which, together with the retweets, informs the corpus of the quantitative analysis carried out in the previous step. It must be noticed that in this final step, we do not aim neither to produce statistically relevant results nor to illustrate quantitative forms of slut-shaming. Conversely, we intend only to identify some of its qualitative forms and, more specifically, we

mean: (a) to disclose the rhetorical and linguistic forms as well as the socio-cultural assumptions and the gender norms involved in the production of the slut stigma; (b) to test our research hypothesis both on slut-shaming functioning and functions, by deconstructing the discursive mechanisms from which this practice draws its disciplinary power and to which it entrusts its capacity to symbolically annihilate – or try to annihilate – female figures, especially when public characters. In order to obtain the most effective representation of the sentiment expressed by the texts, and not only from the enunciations themselves, a further analysis on the same data-set was performed, so to retrieve the paratext value as well as the inferential contents and the rhetorical mechanisms, hardly retrievable through scraping and a quantitative analysis described above. It's easy to see how the weight of interpretation increases as we move from the enunciate to the text in its (multilinguistic) wholeness.

The clues considered in the analysis were the following:

- users: given that they are identified by the name of their profiles, this to tries to detect the action of possible variants of gender/gendered variants at least in the case of the most interesting tweets or in the most recurrent comments;
- semantic fields and recurrent textual models;
- allocutions: observe which forms connotate Asia Argento to shape the judgment, and the interpretative frame as well, of the users;
- a specific quantitative and qualitative analysis of the words constellation expressing the specific meaning of *guilt*, *responsibility* and similar, including the synthematic forms (i.e. *she had it coming/she deserved that*), as well as all the variants expressing the coarse language, such as 'Vampirella', the movie character quoted above that any retrieving process would be able to associate to slut or deviance stigmatisation;
- to display the value of the not-said, for example in the case of those texts without a linguistic enunciation and where enunciation is restricted or concentrated within paratext (i.e. pictures) or hypertext;
- because of the unavoidable interweaving of language and cultural aspects, we also decided to delete all the tweets in English, which will be retrieved in the next step of our investigation.

In order to underline the recurrence of some relevant variant/mechanism, we also built a numerical grid

- user id: 1 = N (null), 2 = F, 3 = M
- user picture: 1 = N (null), 2 = F, 3 = M
- tweet date
- enunciation (the only component retrieved by the scraping)
- paratext: 1 = emoji, 2 = @, 3 = images, 0 = null
- encyclopaedical categories.

The letter parameter is to be intended as the speaker's 'attitude' towards a world frame, where attitude is to be understood as the overall psychological orientation expressed in terms of evaluation (positive or negative) related to a concept, and characterised by a certain duration (cfr. Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960).

To begin with, six points were introduced in the attitude evaluation scale.

(1) show off = 1 meaning here the tendency to display personal opinions which are of no relevance in the discussion, see the following examples:

#Berlusconi ha rovinato questo paese, ha reso le donne oggetti	#Berlusconi has ruined this country. He has objectified women

or sarcasm = 2

Porella!!! #AsiaArgento: con le donne al potere non ci sarebbe la guerra. Sempre che non si verifichi una sincronizzazione globale dei mestrui	Poor thing! #AsiaArgento: with women in power war wouldn't exist. unless a global synchonisation of menstruations happens

or solidarity = 3

#cartabianca grazie per questa puntata. Asia Argento è stata fortissima. Gli uomini e le donne che esprimono perplessità mi fanno orrore. Io sto con #AsiaArgento	#cartabianca thanks for this show. Asia Argento was really good. I am horrified by men and women expressing doubts. I am with #AsiaArgento

or hate = 4

Tra #CatherineDeneuve ed #asiaargento la stessa distanza che c'è tra il savoir faire e la volgarità, tra l'avance e la molestia	#CatherineDeneuve is to #asiaargento what savoir faire is to vulgarity, and a proposal is to harassment

or disclosure = 5 category originally included envisaging reports-allegations/stories about personal experiences. Never found in the considered corpus
or neutral = 6

Tu stai con #AsiaArgento e il movimento #MeToo o con Catherine #Deneuve?	Your are with #AsiaArgento and the #MeToo movement or with Catherine #Deneuve?

We finally considered:

- significant elements (i.e. use of *perdindirindina*, jeepers creepers) to highlight the recurrence of tweets by the same user, so to possibly retrieve in sub-sub-corpus in a second time; or the recurrence of the same contents tweeted by different people, or the same images used as paratextual elements with different statements etc.;
- some interesting hapax or very less used entry, especially if related to slut-shaming or some other gender-based kind of stigmatisation.

Once this process was completed, being careful to equalise where possible, the singulars, in a case such as *donna* (woman) and *donne* (women).

[...] rappresenta un'idea di *donna* che nulla ha a che fare con la suprema dignità della donna. È tutta brodaglia globalista! Le *donne* stuprate hanno la disperazione, il terrore, la morte dell'anima negli occhi e le ferite sui corpi violati. la smetta di paragonarsi a loro	[she] represents a type of *woman* that has nothing to do with the supreme dignity of the woman. It's all globalised broth! Raped *women* have despair, terror, the death of soul in their eyes and bruises on their violated bodies. she should stop comparing herself with them

Despite the first intention of the authors, after considering a data-sample, some other encyclopaedical category was added[9] to the six previously defined, so to collocate those enunciates/texts where the identification of a unique or a sharply prevalent attitude was not easy to pursue. Many statements, in fact, fell simultaneously into two categories, and especially the distinction between sarcasm and hatred often appeared slippery.

This situation frequently appeared in various samples connected to victim blaming, slut-shaming and deviance stigmatisation (see below). A clue of a potentially specific action of the cultural framework. A reason to add nine more other 'attitude' to the encyclopaedical categories. The obtained data have been subsequently aggregated in graphs aimed to highlight the categories or the intermingling of categories. In a further step, we decided to focalise those cases where appeared some effect of slut-shaming or other categories related to gender-based violence. From an operational point of view, an analogous encoding was provided also for these sub-categories.

victim blaming whose matrix is sarcasm = 2a
slut shaming whose matrix is sarcasm = 2b
victim blaming whose matrix is hate = 4a
slut shaming whose matrix is hate = 4c

Two more specifications were provided to allude, with *deviance stigmatisation*, to the censorious tone adopted against Asia Argento 'female figure' publicly known as the

daughter of the Italian master of horror movies Dario Argento, the wealthy girl with a dissipated lifestyle. Deviance stigmatisation refers therefore to those cases where Asia is stigmatised for being a deviant subject, transgressive, excessive, borderline subject but for reasons not ascribable to her sexual behaviour. We have included this new category to tackle the risk to represent the actress as a person living against the grain so possibly colluding with slut-shaming and, by consequence, undermine her credibility.

| deviance stigmatisation whose matrix is sarcasm = 2c |
| deviance stigmatisation whose matrix is hate = 4d |

4. Corpus analysis

In the first step, the 89 direct tweets, obtained through the Twitter internal advanced search function, were analysed to detect the frequency of each one of the formerly enunciated parameters. Subsequently, the relationship between the encyclopaedical categories, and the users' gender was assessed with the aim to detect its relevance in slut-shaming discourse. It must also be observed, therefore, that in the case of the present investigation, other correlations have not been taken into account.

4.1. Users id

As to users' profiles, and all related information, a balance between users choosing a female (F), a male (M) or no-gender (N) specific denomination (in this category are also included profiles of journals, programmes, etc., for example *Roxy bar fans*) seemed to exist. Some doubts arose, instead, in relation to cases such as *Catone il censore* and *Tacito*, represented by their respective ancient Roman statues. It was therefore decided to attribute M to onomastic gender, also based on the use of the grammar gender in some statements. The results of this univariate analysis for user ID are the following:

N = 26
F = 31
M = 32

4.2. The encyclopedic category

As already observed, the encyclopaedical category is one of the most relevant – or even the most important – to assess users' sentiment through texts analysis. We evaluated each enunciate/text only after careful consideration. The relationship between statements and the paratexts was considered on a case-by-case basis, along with the graphic/linguistic variants and expressive devices consisting of capital letters or the use of exclamation marks. Likewise, pieces of information drawn from inference were also taken into account.

Subsequently, users' attitudes were manually clustered into a corresponding encyclopaedical category, with the aim to filter them according to user id.

1 = show off → 6 occurrences (3 N, 3 F)
2 = sarcastic feeling → 8 occurrences (1 N, 4 F, 3 M)
3 = positive feeling → 23 occurrences (3 N, 13 F, 7 M)
4 = hate speech → 8 occurrences (2 N, 4 F, 2 M)
5 = disclosure → 0 occurrences
6 = neutral (mainly off topic) → 5 occurrences (5 N)
7 = 6 (neutral) + 4 (hate speech) → 1 occurrence (1 F)
8 = 2 (sarcastic feeling) + 4 (hate speech) → 15 occurrences (4 N, 3 F, 8 M)
9 = 1 (show off) + 3 (positive feeling) → 7 occurrences (2 N, 1 F, 4 M)
10 = 1 (show off) + 3 (positive feeling) + 5 (disclosure) → 1 occurrence (1 N)
11 = 1 (show off) + 4 (hate speech) → 9 occurrences (1 N, 1 F, 7 M)
12 = 1 (show off) + 6 (neutral, mainly off topic) → 2 occurrences (2 N)
13 = 2 (sarcastic feeling) + 3 (positive feeling) → 1 occurrence (1 M)
14 = 1 (show off) + 2 (sarcastic feeling) → 2 occurrences (1 N, 1 M)
15 = 3 (positive feeling) + 6 (neutral, mainly off topic) → 1 occurrence (1 N)

The crossed analysis highlighted interesting results in particular in relation to those categories implying the dichotomy supportive speech *vs* hate speech.

Though at first sight the supportive messages (3) may appear more than hate-marked ones (4), even if they are added those characterised by sarcasm (2), the relationship is reversed when we sum to the primary categories the mingled ones: 23 + 7 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 33 supportive messages (37,07%) vs 8 + 8 + 1 + 15 + 9 + 2 = 43 hostile messages (48,31%).

As to the relation with user genders, the results highlighted that supportive messages were largely produced by female users (7 N, 14 F, 12 M), and that, surprisingly, the same is true for the most part of unsupportive ones (9 N, 13 F, 21 M). However, the most significant data-sample is represented by category 8, a communicative space defined by a balanced mix of irony or sarcasm, and hate speech. Here either a quarter of the total amount of men texts (8 M) or 4 N users' texts can be retrieved. As to female users, it amounts to 'only' 3 messages. This tendency is repeated in category number 11 (show off + hate speech), where 7 texts are produced by men. As to the corpus subject to analysis and to the users who generated it, the masculine preference for disguising stigmatisation behind irony and sarcasm seems to surface.

Looking at the repertoire in its complex, tweets produced by women prevail in the supportive category: supportive tweets posted by women are 14 out of 33 (45,17%); supportive tweets posted by men 12 out of 33 (35,50%). Conversely, tweets produced by men prevail in the hostile group: 20 out of 43 (46,5%) vs. 14 out of 43 (32,35%).

In order to better understand the observer interpretations of the context and the way slut-shaming functions, some knowledge of the cultural framework is necessary for a more precise linguistic-communicative analysis and to prevent the risk to miss relevant information. This is the case with antiphrasis, a recurrent pattern used to express irony and sarcasm in moral judgment. The trenchant moral judgement is in fact often mitigated because elegantly expressed through the use of a rhetorical device (i.e. *moralità* morality, in reference to the Virgin Mary and Saint Maria Goretti) as well as by picking up low-marked variants from the linguistic diasystem (for ex. *ha strarotto le palle*, she has busted my balls repeatedly / *entra da dietro*, enters from behind).

5. Toward a sociological analysis. Objectives, social uses and discursive functioning of slut-shaming

The total percentage of the tweets falling into the most hostile categories – slut-shaming, victim blaming, deviance stigmatisation – amounts to 38,2% of the sample, that is 34 tweets out of 89. Interestingly, sarcasm prevails as rhetorical mode in the tweets coded under all the three categories. More precisely

- victim blaming occurs 15 times in total, out of which 9 sarcasm-based and 6 hate-based;
- slut-shaming characterises 12 tweets, out of which 1 hate-based and 11 sarcasm-based;
- deviance stigmatisation occurs 7 times in total, out of which 1 hate-based and 6 sarcasm-based.

5.1. Reproducing rape myths and producing the stigma: the power to police female sexuality

The first striking aspect was the presence, in this corpus, of many tweets revealing the acceptance of 'rape myths' on the part of their authors. Rape myths (Burt, 1980) are considered part of a rape culture and actively contribute to its reproduction as they are used to justify/minimise rape, excuse the perpetrator, and blame the victim.

The tweets perpetuating one or more rape myths are 16 out of 43 hostile tweets (37,2%), and the most recurrent myth in this corpus is 'she lied' (14/16). Besides being perpetuated even in trials, as a key part of the defence – as noted in paragraph 2.2 – this rape myth is frequently reproduced also in news media accounts of incidents of sexual violence (Barnett, 2012), and endorsed by the audience/users of both traditional and of on-line/social media (Brossoie, Roberto, & Barrow, 2012; Easteal, Holland, & Judd, 2015; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vandello, 2008), Tweeter included (Stubbs-Richardson, Rader, & Cosby, 2018).

In the corpus under investigation, the insinuation that Asia's allegations against Weinstein were false occurred in tweets coded under both victim blaming (9) and slut-shaming (5). The prevailing mode of victim blaming tweets was hate (7 occurrences out of 89 messages increased up to 15 out of 89 if we consider also sarcasm as the primary matrix of the hatred), which makes the 'secondary victimisation' effect produced by the endorsement of the rape myth, even more evident, as in the following example:

> Raped women have despair, terror, the death of soul in their eyes and bruised bodies. Stop comparing yourself to them (F).

The intertwining of the 'she lied' rape myth and slut-shaming sheds light on the forms of the discursive production of the slut stigma in the entire corpus, and on the role of this stigma in policing female sexuality. What these tweets have in common is that 4 out of 5 use sarcasm, as in the following example:

> Virgin Mary declared: A long time ago I was harassed by Archangel Gabriel (M).

This tweet can be grouped within the data cluster connected to the semantic field of religion shown in type 2 analysis, containing euphemistic substitutes for slut-shaming invectives. A closer look will reveal the 'toxic' charge of these items, where the seemingly light

ironic tone hides a sophisticated and complex architecture and, as in this tweet, a huge range of rape myths.

In rhetorical terms, this tweet uses in fact a paradox, which is instrumental in voiding Argento's allegations, and all the accusations of sexual abuse deflagrated with the #MeToo movement, as unfounded and absurd. Thus the comparison with Mary's allegations, Virgin by definition, against the Archangel. The 'she lied' rape myth, therefore, is conveyed through this paradox, in the first place, and by another and more 'subtle' rhetorical figure.

The assimilation of Asia Argento with the Virgin Mary is the hugest antiphrasis possible and is used, by contrast, to identify Asia as slut. The false belief being hint here is that 'sluts can't be raped'. Therefore, Asia lied. Yet this assimilation indirectly casts Weinstein into the role of Archangel Gabriel. The implication is that no sexual offence was perpetrated in either of the two cases, even though it is true that Asia and Weinstein met, as did Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel. Another well-known rape myth stems from this construction: 'not really rape'.

Another tweet where the 'she lied' rape myth and slut-shaming are interwoven draws on an antiphrasis similar to the one above discussed, and instrumental, once again, to qualify Asia as slut:

> In this picture you see the poor victim Saint Asia Goretti Argento. You can judge … (M).

It goes without saying that the slut-shaming inherent to this tweet mobilises the historical dichotomy of Madonna and whore, which has always been the main bump key in policing female sexuality. Yet this tweet also adds a further element of sense. The picture in question is probably the most widely known and circulated on the web. In it Asia Argento, almost totally naked, is kissing a dog. This picture accompanies 6 tweets in our corpus and is referred to in 2 more tweets, connoted as slut-shaming, as in the example below:

> #AsiaArgento an example of #femminilità (femininity) and #signorilità (nobleness), demanding #rispetto (respect) on the part of all her suitors, being them #umani humans or #animali! animals (M).

This picture, which was first published on the August 27th 2017 in the Italian Newspaper *Libero*, one of Argento's most aggressive detractors, is a frame from a scene from the movie *Go Go Tales* by Abel Ferrara. This means that the context is *par force* fictional and has nothing to do with Asia Argento's actual sexual behaviour. The case is not very different from the fate of young girls and women slut shamed on-line just because of their dress code or from that of another female public figure, journalist Megyn Kelly, whose alleged sexual behaviour and physical appearance became the central grounds for condemnation in 80,000 tweets following Donald Trump's announcement that he would not participate in a televised debate she was moderating (Cuen & Evers, 2016). As Armstrong et al. put it (2014, p. 103), 'slut discourse does not require real sluts.' In our view, this is nothing else but a confirmation of the regulatory power of slut discourse.

One of the most interesting aspects to underline is that women engage in slut-shaming much less than men. Women produced only 1 tweet out of the total coded under slut-shaming (12), that is a tenth of the sub-corpus of tweets totally produced by women (31). The other slut-shaming tweets were posted by men (8 out of 12 tweets), and represent

a quarter of the men sub-corpus (32 tweets). Subjects classified as N posted 3 out of 12 tweets, that is just over a tenth of the sub-corpus (26 tweets).

The picture changes considerably when we consider victim blaming and the sharing of the rape myths. Women produced almost half of the victim blaming tweets (7/15, that is 22,5% of the female sub-corpus) and almost half of the tweets expressing one or more rape myths (7 out of 16, 22,5% of the women sub-corpus).

The internalisation of sexual oppression and the application of the gendered double standard established by men can be an explanation for women engaging in slut-shaming, victim blaming, and the passive acceptance of rape myths. Previous research on the perception of sexual violence and on on-line performances link these behaviours to a 'sense of othering and elevating oneself above the behaviour of women viewed as more sexually active or the potential victims of sexual violence' (Hackman et al., 2017, p. 702; Willem et al., 2019, p. 9).

5.2. Drawing oppositions, (re)shaping dichotomies: the power to put Asia back in her place

Two of the tweets reproducing the image of the dog to address slut-shaming follow the same semiotic logic:

> The Paladin of women is working for the Inquisition (F);

> Asia Argento refuses to be interviewed by Bruno Vespa, an Italian anchorman. He is disappointed because he only wanted to discuss her "licking" experience (M).

It is worth noticing, in the latter case, the keyword role of 'licking', that provides the statement an amphibological charge traceable only by those who know the allegation contents: the word is in fact referred both to the kiss Asia gave the Rottweiler, that Twitter's readers can recover through the pictures, and to the non-consensual cunnilingus the actress told to have suffered by Weinstein.

Semantically and pragmatically relevant is also the term *esperienza*, equivalent to both English words *expertise* and *experience*. For all these reasons, the argument of the second tweet author sounds like this: the expertise/experience that Asia has developed as a dog licker invalidates the experience of being a victim of *cunnilingus*. In short, once again, the idea is that 'sluts can't be raped': Asia lied, it was not violence.

Although it sounds surreal, the argument of the 'either licker or licked' actually epitomises the binary conception in force not only in the common sense but also in the penal system and in the media discourse: women can be either victims or perpetrators, and these two categories must be considered as mutually constitutive of and alternative to each other (Ferraro, 2015, pp. 180–210). As a conceptual hyponym of other and wider dichotomies, (Madonna/whore, angels/demons etc.), the catch form 'either victimised or victimising' often appears in media coverage focused on gender-based violence (Boyle, 2004, p. 102; see also Morrissey, 2003).

The same would happen a year later, when Asia was accused, in turn, to have had sex with the underage actor and former colleague Jimmy Bennet. For both Italian news media and public opinion in general, Asia's coercing someone into sex was the proof that her allegations of sexual violence against Weinstein were unfounded.

Finally, the tweet providing the main clue to identify the reasons and mechanisms underlying the slut-shaming as a practice to delegitimise the female public figures is also played on dichotomies and contrasts

> If this comes out of her mouth, I cannot even imagine was she gets in the ass (N).

Its implied meaning would be something like: 'the bigger/more obscene (that is, false) the accusations she makes, the bigger/more obscene the things penetrating her ass.' The reference to Asia's mouth confirms that what enrages her haters is that she speaks and gets the media attention, that is, *she has a voice.* The reference to her ass, and to the (allegedly) not-normative sexual practices involving it, is a means to invalidate this voice, casting doubts on Asia's credibility. Like in the 'she lied' rape myth tweets, this tweet, too, is therefore connected with the ax of veridiction. Yet the juxtaposition mouth/ass tells more, illuminating the founding principle of slut-shaming discursive practice: to contrast mouth/ass means juxtapose (public) speaking and (private) sexual practice: all this aims to remind public figures like Asia that they are women before being politicians, journalists, singers, actresses, and that their main function in our society is to provide sex (this is confirmed by the idea of sexual passivity evoked in the tweet by the reference to Asia's 'receiving' things in the ass). Slut-shaming represents in this sense an attempt to put women back in their proper place: the private sphere.

5.2.1. The Lady vs. the whore, chic vs. cheap: more on Asia's place

The first type of analysis had highlighted the presence of a narrative, that we termed 'comparison with other people' which includes tweets commenting the story of Asia Argento with reference to other public figures. Such a comparison turned out to play a major role in the production of the slut stigma.

This is exemplified by the group of tweets using the dog picture, like the following one

> Yes, of course #AsiaArgento has surely given women dignity. JeSuisRottweiler (N).

These tweets use litotes and antiphrastic irony based on the ideal of proper femininity associated with dignity and refinement, that Asia is deemed to violate and that is epitomised by Catherine Deneuve, introduced into the debate after her letter in *Le Monde* that says the #MeToo movement has gone too far. Through the frequent juxtaposition of the two actresses, the traditional dichotomy Madonna/whore is reworked as The Lady vs. the Whore.

> Between #CatherineDeneuve and #asiaargento there is the same distance existing between savoir faire and vulgarity, avance and harassment (M).

Another tweet confirms the present analysis and introduces an additional dimension in the Argento/Deneuve juxtaposition, suggesting another interpretative key

> Asia Argento accuses of "misogyny" (sic) Catherine Deneuve. As if Vampirella could really challenge Belle de Jour. Impossible competition (M).

Vampirella is an Italian comic character from the '60s, which originally did not bear a sexual connotation, but which was re-coded as a sex symbol in the following years. *Belle de*

jour, of course, is the prostitute featuring in Luis Bunuel's homonymous movie and starring Deneuve. Although they are both fictional characters with an antinormative sexuality – therefore likely to be stigmatised – that impersonated by Deneuve is re-coded, once again, as a positive icon, of elegance.

Moreover, the additional opposition introduced by this tweet underlines the clash between comics, that is, popular-low culture / *essay movie*-high-brow culture, also proposing the further polarisation of cheap and chic, to be intended as morally, aesthetically, culturally, and economically non valuable vs. valuable.

Evidence supporting this reading also comes from the 'deviance stigmatisation' category (7 tweets), which plays a key, albeit indirect, role in Asia's victim blaming, as it gathers tweets highlighting forms of Asia's deviance other than the sexual one. Some of the tweets coded under this category (5) focus on the actress's debased life as cocaine addicted, but also highlight a quality of excess and 'tastelessness,' in terms of lifestyle as well as of aesthetics, mocking Asia for her Dark dress code.

In conclusion, Asia is perceived as morally deviant, trashy, and cheap, just like the 'choni' (trashy girl) studied by Willem et al. (2019), considered a despicable epitome, simultaneously, of working class and sexualised (over)femininity. Unlike the classy pija, the choni cannot get away with the slut scripts. According to the authors, the very label of choni is imposed on lower-class women, often independently from the amount and typology of their sexual activity, just to teach them 'to know one's place' (Willem et al., 2019, p. 13).

Such a construction hardly applies to Asia, though, as she is definitively not from a working class. Quite the contrary is true, in fact, Argento being a rich woman that the Italian public has known since her childhood for her unruly, glittering, expensive lifestyle. Where exactly, therefore, is Asia re-allocated by this slut-shaming strategy? What is the space, according to Tweeter users, she should occupy?

According to the analysis we offer in this work, the cheapness and worthless themes should be understood in terms of lack of intellectual and professional skills and value, as clearly shown in 3 tweets (2 by a man 1 by a woman). Here the users, after attacking Argento for her meanness, wish for her return to the oblivion and her state of non-entity preceding the publicity she got from the Weinstein case. This is the 'place' Asia belongs to, according to her haters.

If the first type of analysis focused on the recurrence of the narrative we termed 'The controversy about the career,' part of its implications clearly emerged in the third type of analysis, that is, the Italian Tweeter users seem to think that without her father and without having sex with the men she is now accusing, Asia Argento would not have advanced her career. The hostility and the slut-shaming appear to be motivated by a profound desire of revenge against this spoiled and rich daddy's little girl following in his steps. It is interesting to note that in 9 of the 89 tweets (less than a tenth of the sample) the mark of 'worthlessness' Asia has been attributed, should be extended to those collective projects she has come to represent, or that people think she represents. Like a climax, gradually degrading towards generalisation, we witness the progress from Feminist (*These wigwag feminists …* (M)) to Womankind.

Asia becomes therefore the specimen, despised for being a woman*,* as clearly revealed by the recurrent use of stereotypes finally displaying an everlasting essentialist and misogynistic perspective

#AsiaArgento: with women in power war would not exist but for a possible global synchro-
nisation of menstruations (N).

If references to feminism were somehow justified by Asia's identifying as a feminist, those
tweets identifying her as the symbol of other movements promoting social justice, all
equally 'unloved' by their authors, appear totally arbitrary. Here Asia is in fact associated
with 'left-wing grassroot activists,' 'communists,' 'Antifascists,' and accused of using to
measuring rods, because unable to recognise the alleged violence and in particular the gen-
der-based violence characterising such movements.

yo@AsiaArgento why don't you tell us about (…) the beastly rapists from the collective based
in Parma? In the Left they never go wrong and they are non violent, right?

This progress towards generalisation ends up assimilating Asia to former Italian President
of the Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini, harshly criticised for her ideas about
migration policies, and their not specified association with a despicable 'globalism,' and,
once again, 'sluttiness'

no dignity … It's all globalized broth! (M).

What we are facing here is the use of the person of Asia Argento as metonymy, that is a
figure of speech referring to a part used as whole. Through a process of a totally arbitrary
generalisation and denigration, via slut-shaming, Asia is being used as a weapon by both
the political right and left wings to delegitimise the opponent party. The trend of the likes
and retweets obtained from the 89 tweets of our corpus confirms this perspective. The
resulting average of the corpus is 10.61 retweets and 24.9 likes per tweet. The only 2 tweets
which are not in the line of this value are that where Asia is considered connivant with left-
wing grassroot (86 retweets and 95 likes) and the following tweet:

#Berlusconi ha rovinato questo paese, ha reso le donne oggetti.

With 171 retweets and 235 likes this occurrence in our corpus is the most appreciated.
Likewise the previous tweet also in this case we can only underline the arbitrariness of
the interactions and logical connections. It is very curious, indeed, that even though the
case Asia Argento takes place somewhere else, in another country, it ends up involving
a media tycoon different from Berlusconi and deflagrates in a different time – Berlusconi
was Italian Prime Minister 4 times between 1994 and 2011 – but he is somehow still con-
sidered related to him. How a national political system appears therefore a non-pertinent
discursive context in our corpus.

6. Conclusions

The goal of this contribution was to investigate the functions, social uses, and discursive
mechanisms of slut-shaming in Italy, drawing on the hypothesis that this is a gendered
practice of power aimed at 'putting women back in their place.' Though as already
explained, the Argento-Weinstein case represents a paradigmatic example, the limited
sub-corpus presented in our analysis does not lead to a possible generalisation of the
results which must, therefore be considered valid only for the case, and tweets, under scru-
tiny in this study.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings are pertinent with the results presented in previous studies.

It is confirmed that the function, or rather the most immediate collateral effect produced by slut-shaming, is policing female sexuality. In our corpus, this effect is produced by perpetuating rape myths, the use of traditional dichotomies such as Madonna/whore and the juxtaposition of materials of different origin, which are decontextualised and resignified so as to fake evidence of Asias's allegedly transgressive sexual behaviour.

Historically, the social group endowed with the status and power required to produce and control the slut discourse, as well as its underlying Madonna-whore dichotomy, has been that of men (Ringrose et al., 2013; Salter, 2016). Our corpus, is no exception. All slut-shaming tweets, but one, were posted by men. Other scholars, on the contrary, claim that no particular social group is in control of the slut discourse, as groups identified by various intersections of gender, class, race, participate in it (Armstrong et al., 2014, p. 104). Such a reading, too, is corroborated by our analysis: women, though not actively involved in the slut-shaming, authored the 40% of the hostile tweets against Asia Argento. They are, in fact, responsible for half of the tweets blaming Asia and for almost half of those reproducing rape myths.

We agree on the fact that women take part in these discursive practises as a form of 'defensive othering' aimed to avoid the stigmas implied by rape myths and victim blaming by deflecting them onto other women. In so doing, though, these women make clearly (hierarchical) distinctions and boundaries within *their* gender group. We believe this to be absolutely consistent with, and instrumental to, the *divide et impera* motto on which patriarchy, as any other power system, is grounded. Our research, unfortunately, confirms slut-shaming (and the intertwined practices of victim-blaming and perpetuating rape myths) as 'one of the many ways through which women's subordination to men is perpetuated' (Cowie & Lees, 1981).

Previous researches on attacks to women in digital publics interpret the use of a gender-based language – misogynistic epithets, sexist stereotypes, slut-shaming, etc. – as a means to 'use femaleness against them,' that is, a means to force gender into the conversation, thus reasserting the centrality of gender inequalities in digital spaces (Cuen & Evers, 2016; Sobieraj, 2018). Our conclusion is that slut-shaming function is even more specific: it aims to drive women back not only to the role of women but more precisely to the role of sex providers, thus reminding them that the private sphere is the only one pertaining to them. We firmly believe that our analysis could help identify, with greater precision, the discursive devices to which slut-shaming entrusts its capacity to symbolically annihilate politically or publicly engaged women.

This research has also evidenced other trends pertaining the social uses and functions of slut-shaming within the Italian context. The first concerns the re-allocation of Asia. The attempt to put her back in her place does not only aims to symbolically expel her from the public space and send her back to the private sphere of action. It also represents, as a matter of fact, the revenge against the spoiled daughter of art, perceived as the beneficiary of privileges and fortune. The second aspect, and more specifically related to the Italian cultural framework, is that in our corpus Asia is turned not only into the symbol of the MeToo Movement, but more in general, of all the movements vindicating gender equality and, by extension, also social justice. By putting her back in her place detractors succeed in pushing back all the annexed threats.

The prevalence of hostile attitudes in the sample of tweets we focused on, is in line with the climate of opinions towards the #MeToo and its protagonists. In this respect, both mainstream media and the 'most respected' newspapers, but for a very few exceptions, have been mistrustful and have often even become their first detractors (Giomi, 2018). Furthermore, our findings are in line with other researches on media coverage of male violence against women, arguing that online and social media platforms may simply mirror myths and stereotypes that appear in traditional media (Easteal et al., 2015).

It is also necessary to notice that, in more general terms, Italy is still a country displaying a persisting distrust towards rape victims, inside and outside the workplace. Not surprisingly, only 0,7% of women victims of harassment in the workplace decides to report the facts (ISTAT, 2018).

Finally, as to the rhetoric mode of our corpus, our research hypothesis was confirmed: sarcasm prevail, as not only victim blaming but also slut-shaming – one of the most virulent forms of sexist hate speech – are expressed mostly through this key. This can be traced back to what we have noted in the opening of this article, that is, the tendency to minimise sexism (Worth et al., 2016) and to reframe misogyny as 'acceptable' by constructing it as a sort of humour (Drakett et al., 2018). Even reports of sexual crimes, on mainstream media, are often humorously framed, with incidents described in ways that make them comical, humorous, frivolous or even mundane (Sutherland et al., 2015, p. 19). Although the tendency to diminish the seriousness of misogyny and of sexual violence may be spread all over the place, it is particularly pervasive of Italian culture, as it colludes with 'anti-politically correctness' rhetoric, which dismisses accusations of sexism as moralism and attempts to restrict freedom of speech.

Finally, in our corpus we also exposed another interesting cultural aspect, which is worth further investigation, that is, camouflaged stigmatisation through the use of irony and sarcasm are preferably used by men rather than women.

Notes

1. The authors have worked on every part of this paper together and share the views here presented. But as far as academic requirements are concerned Francesca Dragotto takes official responsibility for sections 2.1, 3, and 4; Elisa Giomi for sections 2.2, 5, and 6; Sonia Maria Melchiorre for section 1 and the general editing in English as language expert.
2. https://www.lastampa.it/2014/02/01/italia/grillo-scatena-i-suoi-seguaci-sui-social-cosa-faresti-in-auto-con-la-boldrini-daMmnxO1KgcVc2ZQX6aXGN/pagina.html.
3. Sexist comments deleted from FB were eventually retrieved through an accurate research among the many sources which copied and quoted them (i.e. http://libernazione.it/beppe-non-sei-a-disagio/). Subsequently, a portion of them was analysed with the aim to achieve a word-cloud. To follow, the word list sorted by rank frequency, and partially normalised in order to sum up diatopic or diastratic variants: 8 *faccia* (face), 8 *troia* (whore, slut, bitch, dog), 6 *zoccola* (whore, slut, skunk), 6 *pompin-/bocchin-* (blow job), 5 *merda/merdaccia* (shit/shitty), 4 *boldracca/baldraccha/baldraca* (slut - pun with Italian vowels), 3 *puttana* (prostitute), 3 *brutta* (ugly), 2 *succhiare* (sucking), 2 *vecchia* (old), 2 *lesbica* (lesbian, dyke), 2 *calci* (kicks), 2 *bocca* (mouth, trap), 2 *culo/kulo* (ass).
4. The scraping was conducted by phd Mario Mastrangelo, text statistics analyser. As a Python, the unofficial GetOldTweets library (https://github.com/Jefferson-Henrique/GetOldTweets-python) was used, for its ability to provide much older tweets than the official library.
5. We chose to analyse only these tweets for reasons related to the intentionality behind the individual communication process.

6. The clusters were based on a subset of 278 graphic forms and have the following numerosity: CL 1: 47; CL 2: 23; CL 3: 115; CL 4: 93. The clusters were determined using the SPAD software, in particular using the hierarchical classification (RECIP procedure) – from the factorial coordinates deriving from the analysis of lexical correspondences (CORBIT procedure) – which follows Ward's aggregation criterion with 10 iterations of mobile center consolidation.

7. In its simplest form, linguistic competence, whose theory was proposed by Noam Chomsky, is defined as the native speakers' ability to recognize and formulate well-formed sentences (Cfr. Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019; Barman, 2014; Thornbury, 2006).

8. Metalinguistic competence (awareness) can be defined as the ability to reflect on the use of language.

9. These are the categories obtained by the mingling of the previous one: 7 = 6 (neutral) + 4 (hate speech); 8 = 2 (sarcastic feeling) + 4 (hate speech); 9 = 1 (show off) + 3 (positive feeling); 10 = 1 (show off) + 3 (positive feeling) + 5 (disclosure); 11 = 1 (show off) + 4 (hate speech); 12 = 1 (show off) + 6 (neutral, mainly off topic); 13 = 2 (sarcastic feeling) + 3 (positive feeling); 14 = 1 (show off) + 2 (sarcastic feeling); 15 = 3 (positive feeling) + 6 (neutral, mainly off topic).

Disclosure statement

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