

## Gender-specific medicine watch

Observatory on the Italian scenarios, congress reports, news from the literature, tools and resources

### The Interfaculty centre for gender studies, Vita-Salute San Raffaele University

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Gender can be said in many ways. It is precisely this variety of approaches to gender that characterizes the research of our Interfaculty centre for gender studies, launched in December 2016. The idea of creating a research centre came from the need to connect, allow a dialogue, and promote the research on gender issues among the professors, researchers, and PhD students of the three Faculties of Vita-Salute San Raffaele University (Medicine, Philosophy, and Psychology) in collaboration also with the researchers, the physicians, and in general all the healthcare professionals of the

San Raffaele Hospital. Since some investigations on gender issues were already active within each Faculty and in the Hospital, we thought the centre could become a place to allow for a more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary dialogue; it could become a sort of catalyst of the kind of discussion that is needed in gender studies.

As an example of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary interests of the centre, we firstly want to mention the two courses on gender issues activated at San Raffaele University and taught by members of the centre. First, the course *Gender studies* (MA in philosophy) aims at presenting and exploring three research fields within the philosophical debate from which one can consider gender issues: political philosophy, philosophy of language, and social phenomenology. Such disciplines investigate, respectively, the link between gender and normative politics, gender and language, and gender, embodiment, and the social world. Second, the course *Gender in medicine: pathophysiological and*

*socio-cultural traits* (medical degree) involves lectures by leading experts in the field of gender medicine. Some of the issues dealt with are: sex and gender differences as a tool for scientific research; the biological bases of sexual differences and the alterations of sexual development; sexual dysfunctions in genders; gender differences in iron metabolism; gender studies conducted with molecular neuroimaging techniques.

Catalysing a multidisciplinary discussion and promoting new research – our first reason for launching the Interfaculty centre for gender studies – went hand in hand with a second motivation: namely, the need to open a dialogue with and have an impact on society and our territory, hence increasing opportunities of exchange with public and social actors within the territory both with educational aims and to foster social change in an anti-discriminatory way. In this direction, some initiatives can be mentioned here, in particular we participated in Book City, a manifestation directed

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towards the general public of the city of Milan, and in the organization of the conference: "Frontiers of the body, frontiers of law. The treatment of the intersexual condition in law and medicine" that was intended as a continuing educational course for lawyers and physicians.

Besides the variety of perspectives and themes one can find within the debate on gender issues, the challenge and the opportunity our centre aims at facing is that of showing the potentialities of an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research that allows data to be analysed by a fruitful exchange between a biomedical, a psychological, and a philosophical perspective. This is, in fact, the aim of our *Gender lunch seminars*: these are seminars organized during the lunch break in which speakers coming from different scientific and disciplinary field are invited to present their researches and

their activities on gender addressing a heterogeneous public, composed of philosophers, psychologists, and physicians. The Interfaculty centre for gender studies, therefore, aims at contributing to the scientific research and to the increment of the knowledge on gender issues for a better understanding of them.

Within this framework, the research activities of the Interfaculty centre for gender studies focus on six main topics: persons and bodies; health and health care; rights, policies and justice; language, gender identity and social reality; career, power and authority; women in science and philosophy.

#### *Persons and bodies*

Stemming from the acknowledgment that our bodies are crucial in shaping our experience of the world around us and in teaching us about our own personality, the first line of

research aims at investigating the role of gender in the constitution of personal identity. More specifically, paying particular attention to the first-person perspective approach and the phenomenological method, we focus on how the body gives structure to the personality and whether such a structuring role is modulated by gender differences. Moreover, we investigate how gender can influence inter-subjective intentionality, and the moral implications of social cognition.

#### *Health and health care*

From a biomedical point of view, the second line of research starts from the scientific evidence that significant biological and behavioural differences between sexes and genders influence epidemiology and pathophysiology of a wide disease spectrum, and the approach to health care. Thus, gender medicine

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must consider biological and socio-cultural aspects of sex and gender to improve health and health care. Based on this background, this line of research aims at exploring several issues, some of which are also explored in the course *Gender in medicine: pathophysiological and socio-cultural traits*.

### *Rights, policies and justice*

Paying attention to the growing debate on gender equality both in the public arena and in scientific and philosophical debates, in our third line of research we argue in favour of gender equality and justice. We address the problem not only from a theoretical standpoint, but also from a practical point of view – namely that of political theory and public ethics. Special attention is devoted to the question of dependence and vulnerability.

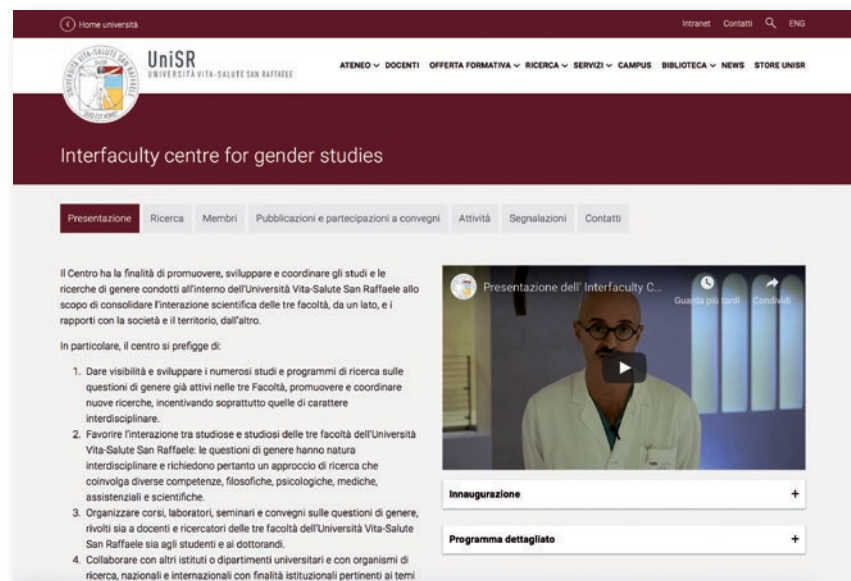
### *Language, gender identity and social reality*

The fourth line of research aims at investigating whether gender identity is a social construct and, if so,

whether, as other social entities, it is created and maintained through speech acts, collective intentionality, and social practices. Moreover, we focus on hate speech as a class of speech acts conveying and maintaining – if not even disseminating – stereotypes and social prejudice. Thus,

we pose the question whether hate speech should be regulated or even prohibited. We also seek to investigate social stereotypes to understand exactly what they are and how they are brought about.

For updates on the Interfaculty centre for gender studies activities, please visit <https://www.univr.it/ricerca/centri/gender>



**12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

**College of Physicians – Billrothhaus, Vienna, Austria**

**<https://igm-congress2019.at/>**

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**Abstract deadline: 1st of July 2019, 23:59 CEST**

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### *Career, power and authority*

The fifth line of research stems from evidence about disparities between women and men in career and power. Women are not paid as much as their male colleagues, they hardly have the same chance to reach pivotal positions in their jobs, and they are too often subject to discrimination in the workplace. Moreover, men are usually considered more powerful and authoritative than women even when they perform the same role. In this research line, our aim is to gather data on the extent of these disparities – by comparing male and female presence in significant positions, in relation to their respective educational backgrounds; secondly, we seek to propose ways of avoiding such bias, and thus promote gender equality.

### *Women in science and philosophy*

Finally, the sixth line of research aims at investigating why women are underrepresented in science and philosophy, even though statistics show that, in many fields, there are more women holding a master or a PhD than men. We aim at collecting data on the difference between graduation statistics and the number of people working in science and philosophy and we wish to understand why such a difference exists. Moreover, we intend to propose correctives for the underrepresentation of women in science and philosophy. Finally, even though the history of philosophy and science often misrepresents their contribution, women have in fact been crucial in terms of developments and revolutions in both fields. For this reason, we aim at discussing such figures, highlighting their significance in their specific domain, from both an historical and theoretical viewpoint. ■

## **The SIMG and gender-specific medicine**

**Raffaella Michieli**

National secretary of SIMG and ULSS 3  
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The Italian Society of General Medicine and Primary Care (SIMG) is an autonomous and independent society that was established to promote, valorize and support the professional role of general practitioners, both in the Italian healthcare system and in European and non-European health organizations.

The association was founded in 1982 and is based in Florence. Throughout Italy it has more than 100 provincial and sub-provincial sections that are coordinated by a network of regional sections. In its capacity as the scientific and professional representative for general medicine that interacts with public and private institutions, the Society dedicates special attention to training, research and continuing medical education activities. The SIMG also promotes activities regarding clinical and epidemiological research in general medicine and in the field of quality assessment, with initiatives in the publishing, information technology, distance learning and profession management sectors. In order to promote partnerships with both public and private institutions, the Society interacts with the sector's leading national and international associations. It cooperates with the ISS (Italian National Institute for Health), the Ministry of Health, the AIFA (Italian Medicines Agency), the CNR (National Research Council), the WHO (World Health Organization) and with sector associations in many European countries (France, Switzerland, Greece, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Spain and Portugal) and non-European countries (American Medical Association). Lastly, it participates in Italian Ministerial Commissions, European Union commissions and EU projects. Its scientific activities are broken down into clinical areas and support areas that an-

swer to a national area supervisor. The Society provides its institutional training activities through a research institute (Health Search) based in Florence. The SIMG has been interested in gender-specific medicine for several years now. In 2007, the Society published a Decalogue highlighting the fields in which the Society undertakes:

- to stimulate gender research projects, where they are lacking;
- to establish partnerships for gender research;
- to dedicate special attention to gender-related issues (sample selection, adverse events, etc.) in research;
- to identify literature evidence of gender issues (better/worse effect of a medicinal product, preventive action or diagnostic procedure, etc.);
- to publish the gender differences observed in research on its website and in its journal;
- to deal with certain topics from a gender-specific perspective, in all the congresses organized by the SIMG;
- to deal with gender issues in the SIMG journal;
- to stimulate, using all the tools at its disposal, greater attention to the suspicion and acknowledgment of possible situations of violence against women and against vulnerable categories;
- to stimulate, using all the tools at its disposal, greater attention to the suspicion and acknowledgment of sexual discrimination.

The SIMG recognizes the need to obtain a balance in the presence of physicians of both sexes in all roles within the society and is therefore committed, in the scientific secretariat and in sections at all levels, to stimulating the active cooperation of all female general practitioners, so that women and men achieve appropriate representativity within the association.

The SIMG has published and taken part in the publication of a number of volumes on general medicine: *La mente, il cuore, le braccia e...* Guida alla salute delle donne (Dipartimento