

Introduction to the Special Issue on Gender Studies

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Abstract. This paper provides an introduction to the special issue on gender studies. It surveys each paper and identifies commonalities and dissimilarities among them, as well as suggests the potential readership for the papers based on the problems addressed and the findings. Prof. Natalija Mažeikienė from Vytautas Magnus University served as the guest editor of the special issue.

Keywords: gender studies, critical discourse analysis, gender activism, feminist methodologies, female leaders

Įvadas į specialųjį lyčių studijų numerį

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje pristatomas specialusis lyčių studijų leidinys. Jame apžvelgiami specialiojo numerio straipsniai, nustatomi jų bendrumai ir skirtumai, taip pat pagal nagrinėjamas problemas ir išvadas siūlomi galimi straipsnių skaitytojai. Specialiojo numerio kviestinė redaktorė buvo Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto profesorė Natalija Mažeikienė.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: lyčių studijos, kritinė diskurso analizė, lyčių aktyvizmas, feministinė metodologija, lyderystė.

Introduction

Gender studies as an umbrella term encompass a wide range of topics, methods, and theoretical perspectives. Gender studies are also integrally intertwined with the field of communication and information. A number of recently published handbooks from recognized publishers attest to the variety of approaches, popularity of gender studies, and its intricate relationship with information and communication studies. “The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Communication” (McAlister & Alexander 2020), for example, collates works exploring gender roles, representations, and resources within communication studies. The Handbook included works on such topics as gendered lives and identities,

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gender visualisation, the politics of gender, gendered contexts and strategies, gendered violence and communication, and gender advocacy in action. The authors of collated works discuss ethics and politics of gender identity, the impact of media and technology on gender perceptions, legal and legislative challenges related to gender inequality and LGBTQ+ rights, evolving institutional contexts, and the intersection of gender violence with communication.

A few other recent edited collections, such as Skalli & Eltantawy (2023) “The Palgrave Handbook of Gender, Media and Communication in the Middle East and North Africa”, Gallagher & Montiel (2023) “The Handbook of Gender, Communication, and Women’s Human Rights”, or Eckert & Bachmann (2021) “Reflections on Feminist Communication and Media Scholarship” follow the trend of approaching gender studies as a broad church of gender-related studies with intricate relationship to information and communication field.

The theme of this special issue was also advertised broadly, including the gender dimension in communication, gender equality issues, gender representation in the media, and gender expression in the organization, among other. Out of seven papers submitted, four were published. Not surprisingly, the four papers in this special issue are diverse in both topic and method.

Two of the papers included in this special issue focus on the aspect of leadership, the qualities expected or professed by female leaders. To uncover the leadership traits, Šilingienė, Stukaitė, and Bervingienė (2023) in their study specifically targeted women in company management, whereas Buelvas-Baldiris, Rubira-García, and Pocevičienė (2023) technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM took a broader sample to include women in science and politics under the common banner of STEAM – science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics – arguably an umbrella domain with visible underrepresentation of women in leadership. The findings of the two papers are complementary. The findings on the required skills of women in contemporary industries in the first paper are complemented by a discussion on gender identity and societal role congruences in the second paper. Both papers will be of interest to educators, management, and policy makers as they expose important connections between industrial, societal, cultural and gender-related factors.

The papers by Šilingienė, Stukaitė, and Bervingienė (2023) and Buelvas-Baldiris, Rubira-García, and Pocevičienė (2023) technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM complements the previous studies published in *Information & Media* by addressing the broader scope of women in leadership within STEAM fields and discussing gender identity and societal role congruences. The paper of Šilingienė and Stukaitė (2019) focuses on social and emotional competencies and aligns with the gender identity and societal role congruences. These studies emphasise the unique contributions of female leaders, with Šilingienė and Stukaitė (2019) specifically detailing the emotional and social skills. The paper of Diskienė and Jaškevičiūtė (2017) highlights the preference for transformational leadership styles and aligns with the skills and roles discussed in the special issue papers. The discussion on the generational perspective provided understanding how leadership traits are valued differently across demographics. Vaitkevičius (2017) in his paper puts emphasis on the cultural and motivational role of leaders and aligns with the societal

and cultural dimensions discussed in Šilingienė, Stukaitė, and Bervingienė (2023) and Buelvas-Baldiris, Rubira-García, and Pocevičienė (2023) technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM papers. Vaitkevičius (2017) also highlights the importance of leadership in achieving organizational goals.

The two remaining papers in this special issue differ in their focus, but converge on some of their findings.

Werner, Novelskaitė and Lukovitskaya (2023) examined feminist methodologies for gender studies in teaching in universities in the greater Baltic Sea region, seeking to identify similarities, differences, and challenges, and suggest developments. The paper will be of primarily interest to educators, but its findings echo the traits uncovered in the first two papers focused on women-leaders. The authors demonstrate and discuss how gender studies contribute to forming critically thinking personalities, preparing students to tackle gender challenges and inequalities of the modern society and in work life.

The paper by Werner, Novelskaitė, and Lukovitskaya (2023) add additional light on the paper of Veloso da Silva and Cuesta López (Veloso da Silva & Cuesta López, 2023) on promoting gender equality and empowering women through education and media. They both highlight the importance of critical engagement with feminist issues, albeit through different contexts and mediums. These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted approach needed to address gender challenges, encompassing both traditional academic environments and digital platforms.

In the remaining work, Buelvas-Baldiris, Jiménez-Marín, and Sánchez-Gey Valenzuela (2023) tackle the topic of gender communication and media. Their publication combines a visually amusing appearance due to the use of caricatures with an interesting and sound methodological approach to test the hypothesis on specific traits of a generation of Spanish illustrators. Similarly to the paper by Werner and Novelskaitė, the authors discuss the implications of gender in a wide(r) context of media, society, education, and generations.

The paper by Buelvas-Baldiris, Jiménez-Marín, and Sánchez-Gey Valenzuela (2023) aligns with the findings by Campian and Iancu (2023) on the exploration of gender representation in media. Both highlight the impact of media on gender perceptions and the presence of gender bias. By examining visual media and news coverage, these studies collectively emphasize the importance of addressing gender stereotypes and biases in media to foster a more equitable representation of genders.

Common to all four papers published in this special issue are themes of the challenges women face at work, when teaching or studying, or in reflecting on their identity and role in society. The findings of all four papers may be found to complement one another while offering very distinct perspectives that collectively establish a broad and complex picture of gender in management, education, media, and society.

Below, a brief outline of the content of each paper is presented, followed by conclusions on the special issue.

Section snippets

Tatiana Buelvas-Baldiris, Rainer Rubira-García, and Rasa Pocevičienė, “Social Representations on Lithuanian Women Leaders in the STEAM Fields: A Critical Discourse Analysis”

This study examines elements of women’s leadership in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM). The study adopts a two-phase data collection approach: an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Critical discourse analysis of Lithuanian women’s testimonies is used to understand gender social representations of leadership in STEAM fields. Data analysis allowed the authors to identify the common characteristics that led Lithuanian women to become referents in their fields. Elements of leadership were identified to pertain to social representations, professional ideologies, and gender identity. Notably, parenthood was found to have a high influence on building leadership, stemming from the high level of women’s responsibilities in the family context. At the same time, the established male-centric perspective on STEAM remains a constraint for female leadership.

Isabel Palomo-Domínguez, Gloria Jiménez-Marín, and Nuria Sánchez-Gey Valenzuela, “Social Media Strategies for Gender Activism: A Generation of Feminist Spanish Women Illustrator Influencers”

This study explores the female representation portrayed by eight Spanish women illustrators, who are considered to be influencers focusing on gender themes and using graphic communication. The study adopts a three-phase methodological approach: a desktop study to compare the illustrators’ profiles; the illustrator’s communications’ content analysis, and a Delphi method to assess the illustrators’ contribution to promoting gender egalitarian values. The Delphi study engaged experts specialising in communication, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and politics participate. Two main study results are: 1) the finding that the common aim of the illustrators is stimulating a feeling of sisterhood among women, and 2) the greatest influence the works of the illustrators have on millennials and centennials. The study also confirmed the earlier findings that social media characteristics, activism, content hybridization, and transmediality enhance the feminist discourse of communication.

Ann Werner, Aurelija Novelskaitė, and Elena Lukovitskaya “Feminist Methodologies for Gender Studies Teaching: Cross-Case Analysis of Practical Applications in Three Universities”

This study performed a comparative analysis of Gender Studies teaching in three universities: Södertörn University in Sweden, Novgorod State University in Russia, and Vilnius University in Lithuania, aiming to compare the uses of feminist methodologies in teaching during the first semester of undergraduate studies. The study is based on literature analysis of publications containing discussions about feminist pedagogies, complemented by participant field study data. The data analysis allowed the authors to identify similarities and differences in feminist pedagogies and give recommendations

for teaching Gender Studies in the three countries. Specifically, the findings reveal that the teaching methods in the three studied universities focus on students' experiences and differences, teachers' reflexivity, working in smaller groups, and highlighting community building and empowerment.

Violeta Šilingienė, Dalia Stukaitė, and Jolanta Bervingienė, “Female Leaders’ Leadership 4.0 Skills in the Context of Industry 4.0”

This study sought to identify the skills of female leaders in what are referred to as Industry 4.0 – digital technology-oriented companies. The main question of the study was whether specific leadership skills can be identified as important for women-leaders in Industry 4.0. The study adopted semi-structured interviews with thirteen female managers as a data collection technique. The data analysis revealed six groups of what the authors referred to as “Leadership 4.0 skills”: visionary thinking, change management, creativity, continuous learning, interpersonal skills, and personal characteristics. The study confirmed earlier findings on leadership skills and discussed the specific relationship of these to female leadership in the industrial context.

Concluding comments

This introduction has surveyed the 4 papers that comprised the special issue on gender studies. While small in number, together these papers offer thematically, methodologically, and geographically diverse studies to the readership of *Information & Media* journal. We are happy to be able to provide a snapshot of the work being done by scholars at the frontier of research in this area. Enjoy the special issue!

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