

Communication Studies, Journalism

Also relevant for Media Studies, Sociology, Political Science

Course: Journalism, Communications Science

Group of courses: Law, Economics and Social Sciences

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Last edit: Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Klaus, Ass.Prof. Dr. Ricarda Drüeke, July 2018

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Course objectives:

Students should gain a basic understanding of the category of gender (and other forms of social differentiation, such as ethnicity, sexuality, age, and class) in all areas of public communication, mass media communication, digital and interpersonal communication. Moreover, they should be enabled to analyse the relevance of this category for societal developments by becoming familiar with theories, methods, and the current state of gender research in the fields of journalism and communication studies. In addition, since most graduates in these subjects go on to work in communications-related professions, they should develop gender competence and the ability to observe the media with an eye on gender-related questions. Furthermore, they should be taught to apply their knowledge in professional practice and to develop mediating strategies for countering gender-based discrimination in the media.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Gender researchers in communication studies view gender as a central social category that is inscribed into all the processes and institutions of media, digital, interpersonal and mass media communication. Gender, in other words, is understood as a category that constitutes processes and structures. On the one hand, social relations are reflected in the media; on the other hand, the media also serve as important agents. In today's societies, the media play a significant role in the construction of identities and interpretations of events. Gender researchers in communication studies describe the relationship between gender and media as a relationship between symbolic orders, representations, communicative processes, and the actions of individual agents and institutions. The media is where gender is constructed and redefined, and where opportunities for placing and positioning oneself (or for being positioned by others) are provided. At the same time, there is room for intervention and reinterpretation of prevailing gender orders.

Gender studies therefore play an important role in media-related disciplines, a role that is reflected in theory building as well as in empirical research and practical implementation.

Theory:

Feminist theorizing has found its way into journalism/communication studies primarily in the area of audience, media content, and communicator studies. Here, we must make an analytical distinction between the egalitarian approach, the difference approach, and the de/constructivist approaches. The egalitarian approach focuses on the discrimination of women, arguing for an equal treatment of men and women, both with regard to how they are portrayed in the media and with regard to the work environment in the media professions. By contrast, the difference approach concentrates on the differences in communication and lifestyles of men and women, arguing for the recognition of genuinely female ways of life and forms of expression. The de/constructivist approaches in gender studies represent a further development, which, in the final analysis, is a paradigm shift. These approaches stress the fact that the category of gender is a social construct and examine how men* and women*, in their media-related activities, position themselves in a social world defined by a bipolar gender structure (the idea of 'doing gender'), how gender positionings are adopted, modified and/or rejected, and how gender identities are created in and by the media.

The further evolution of de/constructivist approaches – especially as part of queer theory and intersectional concepts – has contributed to a critical discussion about seemingly 'natural' categories.

Queer theory, for example, focuses on the body, identities, and sexual policies – in terms of how individuals themselves experience them and how they are represented. As a result, this demands critical discussions of social practices and institutions, of heteronormativity, and of bi-genderism as a norm. The concept of intersectionality re-raises issues addressed by gender studies since the 1980s: in addition to gender, other categories (such as ethnicity, class or sexual orientation) are essential for the construction of differences and may be studied in their interrelations (e.g. the ethnicisation of gender).

In content and audience studies, feminist studies from the egalitarian school have shown that the media's portrayals of men and women follow whatever the current stereotypes are. Research following the difference approach has pointed out the different ways in which media use is embedded in the day-to-day lives of men and women. Studies from the de/constructivist school have shown how identities connoted as female and male are constructed (and lived) in the way media content is dealt with.

In the area of communicator studies, research has indicated the marginal position of women in the media system (egalitarian approach), investigated the various ways of production employed by men and women (difference approach), and looked into the construction of professional roles in a male-dominated or male-connoted field of activity and the actions by which men* and women* define themselves or are being defined in this field (de/constructivism).

However, gender studies in communication studies have also made it clear that the strict division of the subject into different disciplines (communicator studies, content studies, audience and impact studies, media research) is often misleading: The media's production of meaning is embedded in social and cultural contexts in which media production, content, and use are deeply interwoven, with gendering, for example, being included in the evaluation of the media on offer. In terms of theory building, feminist research has made a key contribution to the reformulation of theories of the public sphere. Important aspects in this regard are the renegotiation of the relationship between public and private, the importance of a politically informed public, and the alleged opposition between information and entertainment.

Empirical studies:

Gender researchers in communication studies have contributed to essential empirical findings. By way of example, the following research areas need to be mentioned:

- Communicator studies look at media professions, in particular journalism and public relations. Communicator studies describe the following:
 - careers and working conditions for women* in journalistic professions (past and present), e.g. women* being assigned specific areas and activities, and their position in the male-dominated work environments of media corporations
 - differences and similarities in professional roles, in particular regarding decision-making processes, research methods and choice of subjects
- Media content analysis looks at the representation of men* and women* in the mass media. It is obvious that women* continue to be underrepresented in the media. Moreover, media representations of gender remain largely stereotypical. However, certain distinctions must be drawn for specific media: in television, for example, this depends on genre and topic, as well as on public vs. private broadcasters; in the print press, it depends on the department. Relevant research topics include:
 - the (under-)representation of women* as decision-makers in the media industry
 - the widespread neglect of feminist issues in the media

- the representation of women* and men* in fictional and non-fictional media productions, in particular the cliché-based apportioning of particular roles and jobs to women* and men* and the resulting trivialisation and stereotyping of their lives in general, often in combination with other categories of social inequality
- Finally, a considerable number of studies on gender-related media use and impact have been carried out. They look at gender-specific genre preferences and types of reception, as well as the contextual embedding of media consumption in the differing day-to-day lives of men* and women*. These studies include:
 - (mainly statistical) analyses of length and times of media use, and preferences in the choice of media and media content
 - studies of genre preferences and practices of media adoption
 - studies on the embedding of media reception in the everyday lives of men* and women*
 - examinations of gender-specific media impact, particularly in the area of the portrayal of violence
- Analyses on the relationship between media, publicity and gender include research on:
 - social constructions of inequality in and by the media
 - changes in gendered power relations and in political participation in and by the media
 - processes of media change through digitisation, globalisation and structural changes of society
 - change of dichotomies (e.g. private/public, cultural/natural, information/entertainment)
- In addition to these traditional areas of research, a number of other areas can be linked to the different areas mentioned above, e.g. research on advertising, possible media spaces for non-heteronormative portrayals and content, research on the Internet, especially studies on concepts of identity and the body negotiated in virtual spaces, gender dichotomies reproduced in technologies as well as on the digital impact of hegemonic masculinities, feminist acquisitions, and digital participation.

Professional practice:

Gender studies in the area of communications should not only discuss the above-mentioned areas, but also their relevance for professional practice after graduation. Journalism/communication studies are social sciences, which, among other tasks, observe social processes, draw attention to social evils, and suggest how they can be remedied. Gender studies in the area of communications therefore seek to raise students' awareness of the various forms of discrimination against women* (taking other categories of difference into account as well) in the media and media-related professions, and to provide them with gender competence. This includes discussing concrete options for taking action and aids to decision-making that graduates can employ in their own professional practice. (Training in this area can take the form of special courses for media professionals as well as regular classes for students.) This should take account of various theories and other research in the field, for example in the areas of news value research and agenda setting. Content includes:

- training courses aimed at sharpening participants' awareness of discriminatory media content using real examples from the media;
- the legal and institutional basis for equal rights in the workplace and gender-balanced portrayals of men* and women* in the media;
- exercises to train participants to work in a gender-sensitive way in journalism and other professions.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

Gender studies have found their way into all areas of research within the fields of journalism and communications studies. This means that special modules could be created for each area (communicator, media, content, reception and impact research). In any case, gender studies should be integrated into basic courses and not be treated as a "special topic" as it is often the case today. It is rather a fundamental area within media-related studies and professional practice and can be applied in practice as follows:

1. Gender studies in basic courses within the Bachelor's degree:
 - Introductory classes should include a content block on theories of gender relations and research into the different aspects of gender studies in the area of communications studies described above. The role of gender as a social category and for the construction of identity should be emphasised in all the thematic areas covered in introductory classes (structure of the profession and the media market, media use, media content, theories, history of the media, etc.).
 - In methodology classes, students have the opportunity to apply the empirical methods they have learned to gender-related topics.
2. Gender studies in special modules in the Bachelor's and Master's degrees:
 - As well as integrating gender studies into basic and introductory courses, we recommend creating special in-depth modules on particular aspects of gender studies in the area of communication science. These modules should teach students about developments in theory and the latest research findings, demonstrating how they can be applied in professional practice. The special modules can be constructed around the topics outlined in the previous section. This would make it possible to teach gender studies in the area of communication science as an independent subject, even if the basic content for example in the area of theory building could not be integrated into the foundation course.
 - The module "Theories of gender studies in the area of communication studies" introduces theoretical and epistemological principles and basic concepts to emphasise that gender is a central concept in dealing with the media and communication. If this has already been taught in introductory classes in the Bachelor's degree, this class can be ignored or used for more in-depth study. It should in any case be offered as a special (in-depth) module as part of the Master's degree.
 - The module "Impact and audience research" deals with gender differences in media use by recipients. This module is of direct relevance to professional practice and should therefore be part of the Bachelor's degree. An extended module at Master's level could focus more on the scientific side, for example by looking at the underlying critical social theories.
 - The same applies for the module "Content and communicator research", which looks in detail at gender-related aspects of the production side of media and the media profession. Again, for the Bachelor's degree this should focus on the practical implications, while for the Master's degree it could look at how semiotic theory relates to content research, for example. For both the Bachelor's and the Master's degree, this could also be split into two separate modules – "Communicator studies" and "Content studies".
 - If it is not possible to implement this encompassing programme, an alternative would be a two-part integrated module in gender studies in the area of communication science: The first class (in the form of a lecture or seminar) would present an overview of theoretical principles, the areas of application outlined above, and central research

findings. In the second class (a seminar or practical session), students would apply this knowledge to real examples (e. g. the news, fiction genres, advertising, digital media).

Degree Stage:

The basic course content outlined above should be integrated primarily into the introductory classes within the Bachelor's degree (first to third semester). It would be possible to construct a "compendium" offering a review/overview of the subject in the first semester of the Master's degree. This could take the form of a content block within an introductory class to the Master's, that would introduce students to more complex theories and research projects.

The content of the special in-depth modules should be part of what is taught in later semesters in the Bachelor's degree (third to sixth semester) and the Master's degree.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

- Drüeke, Ricarda and Elisabeth Klaus. 2014. Medien und Geschlecht. In Kommunikationswissenschaft als Integrationsdisziplin. Zum Stand der Debatte, eds. Matthias Karmasin, Matthias Rath and Barbara Thomaß, 319-340. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Klaus, Elisabeth and Ulla Wischermann. 2013. Journalistinnen. Eine Geschichte in Biographien und Texten 1848-1990. Berlin u.a.: Lit-Verlag.
- Klaus, Elisabeth. 2005. Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Geschlechterforschung. Zur Bedeutung der Frauen in den Massenmedien und im Journalismus. 2nd revised and updated Edition. Münster/Hamburg: Lit-Verlag.
- Lünenborg, Margreth and Jutta Röser. 2012. Ungleich mächtig. Das Gendering von Führungspersonen aus Politik, Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft in der Medienkommunikation. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Lünenborg, Margreth and Tanja Maier. 2013. Gender Media Studies. Eine Einführung. Konstanz: UVK.
- Lünenborg, Margreth, Katharina Fritsche and Annika Bach. 2011. Migrantinnen in den Medien. Darstellungen in der Presse und ihre Rezeption. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Klaus, Elisabeth and Julia Goldmann. 2017. Literaturübersicht: Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Geschlechterforschung. Online unter: https://www.dgpuk.de/sites/default/files/fachgruppen/Bibliographie_Gender_Media_Studies.pdf

Journals:

There are no particular Journals in the German-speaking area, international especially the [Feminist Media Studies](#) matter. The German Journals [Feministischen Studien](#), [GENDER](#) and [Femina Politica](#) publish articles throughout all humanities and social sciences, therefore also within Communication Studies and Journalism. At times are some articles in specialist publications.