

Networked Gender Bias?

Gendered Discourse Hegemony in Networked Public Spheres

PhD Student: Miriam Siemon

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Margreth Lünenborg

Gender media studies repeatedly pointed out that women are stereotyped and underrepresented in journalistic news coverage (e.g. Armstrong, 2004; Lünenborg, 2008; Prommer & Stüwe, 2020; Ross & Carter, 2011). However, today's public spheres are not solely constituted through journalism, but by a range of different actors on different platforms who connect (or disconnect) with each other, thereby performing publics (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018; Pfetsch, 2018). Thus, the question as to whether social media are a *game changer* for gendered discourse patterns came up.

In today's hybrid public spheres, discourses relationally emerge through communicative ties (Klinger, 2018). Thus, power dynamics need to be analyzed from a relational perspective as well (McGregor & Mourão, 2016). The question as to who dominates such discourses and consequently has hegemonic and interpretative power, can therefore be investigated best by analyzing network structures. First studies regarding gender relations in social media discourses from a network perspective already exist, albeit gender has not yet become a strong focus in this research field. These works show that women are addressed less often and are found more in the network periphery of political discourses while men dominate the center (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013). Moreover, women have less followers and reciprocal relationships among each other (Heil & Piskorski, 2009; Naaman et al., 2010). Other studies come to the more differentiated conclusion, that women and men held varying measures of power within networks (Hayat et al., 2017; McGregor & Mourão, 2016). Consequently, social media are no "great equalizer" concerning gender gaps (Brandtzaeg, 2017, p. 103), but "gender affects network structure in more nuanced ways" (McGregor & Mourão, 2016, p. 2).

Although these studies give first insights about gendered network structures, many questions remain unanswered. Especially the presumed binarity of gender identities underlying most of the cited studies is problematic. Furthermore, intersectional perspectives (Crenshaw, 1990) are widely missing. Thus, my primary research question is:

How are digital public spheres structured regarding gender-specific and intersectional discourse hegemonies?

The dissertation project has two aims. First, a theoretical-methodological elaboration of how network theory and theoretical approaches from gender media studies can be brought together. Thus, the following questions need to be addressed: How can a network perspective help in order to investigate gendered discourse structures with *gender* as a socially constructed and performed category (Butler, 1990) and its intersections with other social categories such as *class*, *race* or *(dis)ability* and where are the limitations here?

Second, empirically gendered network structures should be analyzed within two different case studies. On the one hand, I will look at a discourse focusing on a gender-specific topic. Here I chose the (German) #MeToo debate as a broad and long-term discourse about sexualized violence. In comparison, a sociopolitical discourse without such strong feminist dimension will be analyzed. The second case has not been finally decided yet as the project is in the early concept phase.

Both case studies should be analyzed on two dimensions. Social network analysis will be applied to analyze gendered discourse hegemonies on a structural level. Public discourses can therefore be imagined as a network of actors as nodes and their communicative ties as edges. Thereby long-term and dynamic evolutions of the emerging and developing discourse structures will be observed. Structural dominances of specific actors might also influence the perspectives in content which determine the discourses. Therefore, social network analysis will be combined with other computational methods such as automated content analysis (e.g. topic models). The dissertation project aims at contributing to the field of gender media studies by combining its theoretical development, that has largely resulted through qualitative approaches, with computational methods in order to analyze larger power structures in social media environments.

References

- Armstrong, C. L. (2004). The Influence of Reporter Gender on Source Selection in Newspaper Stories. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), 139–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100110>
- Ausserhofer, J., & Maireder, A. (2013). NATIONAL POLITICS ON TWITTER: Structures and topics of a networked public sphere. *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(3), 291–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.756050>
- Brandtzaeg, P. B. (2017). Facebook is no “Great equalizer”: A big data approach to gender differences in civic engagement across countries. *Social Science Computer Review*, 35(1), 103–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439315605806>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1300.
- Hayat, T. (Zack), Lesser, O., & Samuel-Azran, T. (2017). Gendered discourse patterns on online social networks: A social network analysis perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 77, 132–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.08.041>
- Heil, B., & Piskorski, M. (2009, June 1). New Twitter Research: Men Follow Men and Nobody Tweets. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2009/06/new-twitter-research-men-follo>
- Klinger, U. (2018). Aufstieg der Semiöffentlichkeit: Eine relationale Perspektive. *Publizistik*, 63(2), 245–267.
- Lünenborg, M. (2008). Die Aufmacher — Geschlechterverhältnisse im Politikressort. In J. Dorer, B. Geiger, & R. Köpl (Eds.), *Medien — Politik — Geschlecht* (pp. 155–171). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91096-3_11

- Lünenborg, M., & Raetzsch, C. (2018). From Public Sphere to Performative Publics: Developing Media Practice as an Analytic Model. In S. Foellmer, M. Lünenborg, & C. Raetzsch (Eds.), *Media Practices, Social Movements, and Performativity: Transdisciplinary Approaches* (pp. 13–35). Routledge.
- McGregor, S. C., & Mourão, R. R. (2016). Talking Politics on Twitter: Gender, Elections, and Social Networks. *Social Media + Society*, 2(3), 2056305116664218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116664218>
- Naaman, M., Boase, J., & Lai, C.-H. (2010). Is it really about me? message content in social awareness streams. *Proceedings of the 2010 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 189–192. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1718918.1718953>
- Pfetsch, B. (2018). Dissonant and Disconnected Public Spheres as Challenge for Political Communication Research. *Javnost - The Public*, 25(1–2), 59–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1423942>
- Prommer, E., & Stüwe, J. (2020). *Gender Distribution in Corona Reporting. Who explains the crisis?* Malisa Foundation. <http://malisastiftung.org/en/who-explains-the-crisis/>
- Ross, K., & Carter, C. (2011). Women and news: A long and winding road. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(8), 1148–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711418272>