Theorizing Gender in Online Privacy Research

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This presentation is based on Frener & Trepte (in press)
The origin of gender and privacy

Introduction

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis, 3:7)
A. Theoretical background
Gender is a socioculturally shaped construct, detached from biological fundamentals

Conceptualizations of gender

Gender
- sociocultural roles shape differences between men and women (Glover & Kaplan, 2001)

Gender roles
- verbal and behavioral actions a person performs to demonstrate the affiliation with one gender (Money, 1955)

Gender Essentialism
- belief that differences between females and males reflect inherently distinct natures (Gelman, 2003)
- gender and (biological) sex are viewed as identical
Groundbreaking privacy theories refer to gender

Introduction

Altman (1975, p. 18): privacy = access control, social process
- observation: women tend to more closeness in mixed-sex than in same-sex dyads

Petronio (2002): Communication Privacy Management Theory
- five core principles determine information disclosure
- gender: men and women develop and implement different privacy boundaries due to socialization into gender roles
- refers to Dindia and Allen (1992)

"For every study cited that reports sex differences, I could probably cite another study with no sex differences" (p. 75).
Gender theory serves different functions in the research process

Approaches to gender theorizing in privacy research

1. Framework for hypotheses
2. Interpretation of empirical findings
3. Result of an empirical investigation

(Gough et al., 2012; Trauth, 2013)
The relevance of gender theory in studies varies drastically

Extend of gender theorization in empirical studies

- Explicitly theoretical
  - specific gender theory is stated

- Implicitly theoretical
  - assumptions in line with gender theory

- Quasi-theoretical
  - reliance on empirical findings

- Atheoretical
  - gender not elaborated and discussed
Research Question I
To what extent is gender theory applied in studies examining gender in online privacy and self-disclosure?

Research Question II
Which functions does gender theory have in these studies of online privacy?

Research Question III
Which specific gender theories are applied in online privacy research?

Systematic Literature Review
B. Methods
We looked at 496 studies on online privacy that referred to gender in the abstract.

Search string

- Privacy (Title)
  - e.g. digital, social media,…

- Online (Title)
  - e.g. digital, social media,…

- Gender (Title/abstract)
  - e.g. boys, girls, sex,…

ACM Digital Library, EbscoHost (PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, Communication and Mass Media Complete), Science Direct, Scopus, Wiley Online Library, IEEE, Taylor & Francis Online, Emerald Insight, JSTOR

\[ N = 496 \]
We looked at primary studies including both or several genders

Inclusion criteria in the abstract screening

$N = 496$

$n = 107$
The core categories capture how and why gender theories are implemented in the studies.

**Category system**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of gender theory</th>
<th>$n = 107$</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>explicitly theoretical</td>
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Holsti: $PA_0 = .90$

Cohens Kappa: $K = .80$
The core categories capture how and why gender theories are implemented in the studies

Category system

### Extent of gender theory

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Theory Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
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### Function of gender theory

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<tr>
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<td>framework for hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>result of the study</td>
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**n = 107**

**n = 91**
The core categories capture how and why gender theories are implemented in the studies

Category system

**Extent of gender theory**

- explicitly theoretical
- implicitly theoretical
- quasi-theoretical
- atheoretical

**Function of gender theory**

- framework for hypotheses
- discussion of findings
- result of the study

**Name of gender theory**

- open field

Holsti: $PA_0 = .90$
Cohens Kappa: $K = .80$

$n = 107$

$n = 91$

$n = 52$
C. Results and discussion
Online privacy studies vary vastly in gender theorization

RQ1. Extend of gender theory implementation

\[ n = 107 \]

- Explicitly theoretical: 23
- Implicitly theoretical: 28
- Quasi-theoretical: 40
- Atheoretical: 16

Kim (2019): gender hypotheses solely based on earlier studies
Online privacy studies vary vastly in gender theorization

RQ1. Extend of gender theory implementation

\[ n = 107 \]

Kim (2019): gender hypotheses solely based on earlier studies

Sheehan (1999): Social role theory

"Computer culture is socially constructed as male" (p. 25)
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Litt & Hargittai (2014): "...test the Social Web Gendered Privacy Model" (p. 4)

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- Kim (2019): gender hypotheses solely based on earlier studies
- Sheehan (1999): Social role theory
- Faliagka et al. (2011): "We also search for usage patterns with respect to student gender" (p. 68)
- Litt & Hargittai (2014): "...test the Social Web Gendered Privacy Model" (p. 4)
- "Computer culture is socially constructed as male" (p. 25)
If implemented, gender theory often serves as a framework for hypotheses

RQ2. Functions of gender theory implementation

Lankton et al. (2017)

"We use Communication Privacy Management Theory […] as a foundation" (p. 150)

Discussion of results

Framework for hypotheses

n = 91

22

69
If implemented, gender theory often serves as a framework for hypotheses

RQ2. Functions of gender theory implementation

"We use Communication Privacy Management Theory [...] as a foundation" (p. 150)

Lankton et al. (2017)

"We also found gender effects [...] This is consistent with [Social Contract Theory]" (p. 159)

Fogel & Nehman (2009)

Discussion of results

22

Framework for hypotheses

69

n = 91
**Broad gender theories and more specific privacy theories are explicitly mentioned in studies on online privacy**

**RQ3. Gender theories in use**

- **Social Role Theory**: 19
- **Social Web Gendered Privacy Model**: 11
- **CPM theory**: 10
- **Patriarchy**: 2
- **Socialization**: 2
- **Other**: 8

Other theories include:
- Social Contract Theory
- Social Cognitive Theory
- Human Capital Theory
Results from implicitly and quasi-theoretical studies bear
the risk of gender essentialism

Discussion

Quasi-theory

- ‘the best predictor of the future is the past’
- gender: helpful variable to explain variance

Implicit theory

- Lack of well-defined framework impedes abstraction of results

**Proposition I:** The reliance on quasi-theoretical and implicitly theoretical approaches paves the way for gender essentialism.
Improper treatment of gender denies its social impact

Discussion

Epistemological goals
- systematic accumulation of knowledge
- gender is undertheorized in online privacy research

Inclusion of diverse perspectives
- “ensures both equality and quality” (Trepte & Loths, 2020, p. 1).

Proposition II: Explicitly theorizing gender acknowledges that gender is socially constructed.
Using theory as a framework for hypotheses supports an adequate treatment of gender

Discussion

Framework for research questions and hypotheses
- theory provides general, abstract propositions
- precise hypotheses with high empirical content

Discussion of results
- theories help to explain even unexpected results

*Proposition III*: A-priori gender theorizing ensures that research on online privacy prevent gender-stereotyping.
Thank you for your attention

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References


References


Pictures

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