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## Creative Pedagogy and Praxis with Social Media: Applications in and Out of the Qualitative Research Classroom

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## Creative Pedagogy and Praxis with Social Media: Applications in and Out of the Qualitative Research Classroom

### Abstract

Research methods courses can provide essential opportunities for graduate students to develop themselves as researchers. This article offers insights into the application of creative pedagogy and praxis for a graduate-level qualitative research methods class. Students learned and applied the innovative research method—gender audit as process and method—to understand the gendered nature of University social media accounts. Applying principles of collaborative learning and hands-on practice, students gained confidence in themselves as researchers while examining a contemporary issue affecting higher education institutions.

### Keywords

Creative Pedagogy, Teaching Research Methods, Innovative Research Methods, Social Media Analysis, Gender Audit as Process and Method, Collaborative Learning, Gender Representation, Equity

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## **Creative Pedagogy and Praxis with Social Media: Applications in and Out of the Qualitative Research Classroom**

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*Research methods courses can provide essential opportunities for graduate students to develop themselves as researchers. This article offers insights into the application of creative pedagogy and praxis for a graduate-level qualitative research methods class. Students learned and applied the innovative research method—gender audit as process and method—to understand the gendered nature of University social media accounts. Applying principles of collaborative learning and hands-on practice, students gained confidence in themselves as researchers while examining a contemporary issue affecting higher education institutions. Keywords: Creative Pedagogy, Teaching Research Methods, Innovative Research Methods, Social Media Analysis, Gender Audit as Process and Method, Collaborative Learning, Gender Representation, Equity*

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In the class, students were sitting in a circle. Desks were aligned, allowing us to see and talk with one another easily. Rearranging the desks was the first task given to the graduate students in the introduction to research methods course. As students who grew up in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, in Central Asia, the typical classroom arrangement is teacher-centered. Therefore, this first assignment provided a new context for the graduate students to think about educational learning, educational leadership, and ultimately their conceptualization of research methods. Students were challenged to rearrange the classroom to create an environment supporting collaboration, positioning themselves as equal participants with one another and with me, their instructor. The class centered on qualitative research methods and would later be followed by a required quantitative course the following semester. The majority of the graduate students had career goals to work in higher education, in leadership roles (e.g., Ministry of Education, research think-tanks), or to study for a PhD.

In teaching research methods, I continually explore ways to facilitate student confidence as educational researchers. In this way, I seek to have graduate students develop an identity as a researcher. As C. Amelia Davis and Jessica Lester (2016) explain, “Many research methods courses, particularly qualitative research methods courses, invite (and even require) students to make sense of their own research identities as they relate to research paradigms and perspectives” (p. 51). Through guiding graduate students through research apprenticeship, I aimed to build awareness in the practical nature of conducting qualitative research. In this way, our article can add to other literature in the US addressing the development of graduate student researcher identity (Coryell, Wagner, Clark, & Stuessy, 2011; Murakami-Ramalho, Militello, & Piert, 2008; 2013).

This article provides insight into how a graduate-level research methods course, taught at the first English-medium research university in Kazakhstan, was developed using creative pedagogy and practice to examine a contemporary issue of gender representation in higher education. Specifically, we (first author faculty member and three graduate students) discuss how the class incorporated principles of collaborative learning and praxis to apply the innovative research methodology—gender audit as process and method research.

## **Learning and Teaching in Higher Education**

Pedagogical practices in higher education suggest learning develops in many ways, including through individual strategies, interaction with peers, and with faculty. In interacting with one another, students can further enhance their learning (Hilsdon, 2014). Techniques, such as active learning integrating research and teaching, can provide an environment encouraging student learning (Healey, Jordan, Pell, & Short, 2010). To develop research skills, Mick Healey, Fiona Joran, Barney Pell, and Chris Short (2010) suggest project-based learning (PBL):

PBL is considered as one of the most effective techniques for developing the research skill and vigour among the students of HE. Such research-tutored strategies not only have an additive advantage of linking T&R but also lead to drastic improvements in students' research abilities and critical thinking skills" (Healey, Jordan, Pell, & Short, 2010, p. 133).

For graduate students, understanding how to conduct research is highly relevant and practical, irrespective of field. For those studying educational leadership, knowing how scholarly research can inform educational practice is integral. One way to develop these skills is through research apprenticeship (Wegener & Tanggard, 2013). For example, through in-class formal and informal learning environments, students can become capable both in hands-on practical skills and also in the development of researcher identity. In developing an educational researcher identity, Joellen Coryell, Susan Wagner, Carolyn Clark and Carol Stuessy (2011) explain, "The teaching of concepts and skills occurs in the various methodology courses students are required to take, but the learning occurs both in the classroom and outside it – in the experiences students have of actually conducting research" (p. 370). To cultivate a researcher identity, Lisa Wright, Elizabeth Lange, and Jose Da Costa (2009) detail key factors in "...creating a learning sanctuary and trusting relationships, engaging in mutual inquiry and the co-construction of meaning, and bridging research theory and practice" (p. 1). In other words, classroom organization and approaches, as well as how research is integrated, can lead toward the development of student researcher identity and researcher ability.

A first step in developing student confidence was the introduction of collaborative learning (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005). When students entered the room, After working together to determine the best organization of collaborative classroom space, graduate students began the process of learning educational research. Part of that process included discussion of current issues in higher education, including at NU. One such pertinent topic was a growing awareness and interest in the subject of gender, one I was also deeply involved with. For example, I had Co-Founded The Consortium of Gender Scholars (GenCon), which included monthly gender research talks, advocacy for topics related to gender, and funded research for a gender audit on campus.

### **Innovative Research Process and Method**

Research offers several benefits to students. By research, they are participating not only in a scholarly piece of work that will make a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding, but also in the development of research and other skills that will in many cases go far wider than the original research. (Healey, Jordan, Pell, & Short, 2010, p.133)

In 2010, the President of Kazakhstan instituted the first English-medium research university, Nazarbayev University (NU). With the new university, the development of elite researchers became an aim for the country. While the vast majority of universities and colleges in Kazakhstan use Russian or Kazakh as the medium of instruction, at NU, courses are primarily taught in English with the principal goal to develop leaders in research. With an

emphasis “guided by principles of autonomy and academic freedom” (About Nazarbayev University), faculty are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to conduct research.

For the qualitative research methods course, graduate students were introduced to the latest research conducted at the University using a gender audit as process and method (CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019a). As students studying educational leadership, the topic of equity was a central one for many. It was explained how gender audits are frequently the first step for those interested in creating gender-equitable organizations. For those focused on maintaining gender equity within an institution, I noted how the ultimate goal is often gender mainstreaming: “Gender mainstreaming, a strategy aimed ultimately at achieving gender equality, has been adopted by major international institutions including the United Nations, European Union, and, since 2001, the World Bank in its development assistance programs (Integrating Gender, 2002)” (cited in CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019b, p. 41). Therefore, with gender mainstreaming, instead of considering gender as an afterthought, gender is “mainstreamed” and addressed from the beginning and regularly (United Nations, 2002).

The gender audit of formal curriculum at the University (CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019b) was informed by The Gender Audit Handbook (Interaction, 2010). Reconceptualized as a process and method (see Figure 1), a gender audit addresses five steps: assessing potential, identifying indicators, collecting data, analyzing for data points, and connecting findings with resolutions (CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019a):

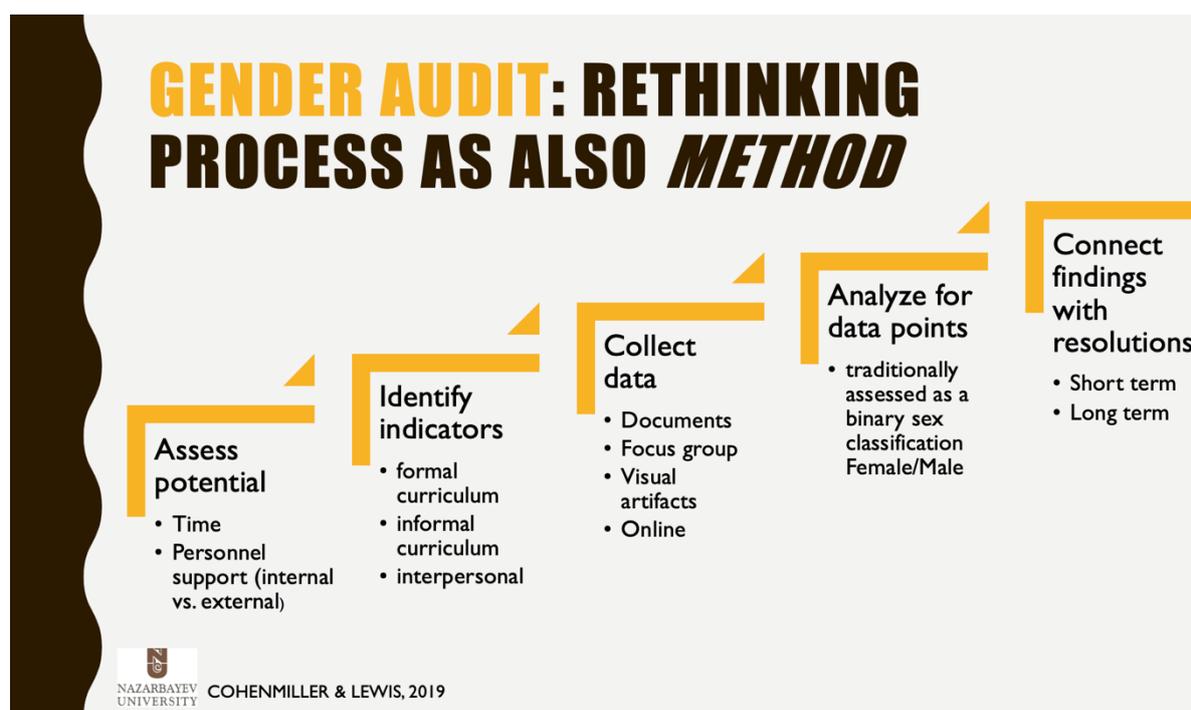


Figure 1: Gender audit as process and method. Presentation slide from The Qualitative Research Conference, January 2019 (CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019a).

It was explained how one study led to useful insights for the University as well as changes in teaching and practice. One such outcome was in the utility of the gender audit approach for informing other studies (e.g., CohenMiller, Koo, Collins, & Lewis, 2020). Therefore, having seen the interest in the topic of gender and the success of implementing a gender audit, students became interested in further examining gender representation in higher education using the innovative methodology.

## Gender Audit as Process and Method: The Innovative Methodology

In the research methods course, I led the twenty students through the five steps in conducting a gender audit as process and method. The first step for the process and method involved (1) Assessing potential. The limitations of time were constrained by the course, an intensive course involving six hours a day for two weeks. The personnel support included all students enrolled in the class.

The second step, (2) Identifying indicators, involved students selecting informal curriculum and then (3) Collecting data. Instead of a formalized set of learning data, such as examined in syllabi for the previous gender audit, students and I decided to look at social media related to the University. In this way, we were looking for indicators of the informal curriculum and learning from social media (CohenMiller & Miller, 2019). Instead, as the set of researchers in the course, students interpreted social media posts as a type of informal learning “embedded in everyday activities (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2012). As Jon Dron and Terry Anderson (2014) note, “...social media have enormous potential value for learning, formal and informal” (p. xiii).

We then moved into the fourth step of gender audit as process and method, (4) Analyze for data points. Specifically, we gathered data from social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) accounts reporting on the activity of University clubs and departments, examining the gendered representation of each post. We followed a typical approach within a gender audit to consider gender as a binary sex classification of female and male (ILO, 2012). The final step, (5) Connecting findings with resolutions evolved in working collaboratively with the co-authors of this article after the completion of the course.

## Gender Audit of Informal Curriculum in University Social Media Accounts

At the University, many of the student clubs have social media accounts (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) with upcoming events and other pertinent information. Also, the University runs an account where posts are regularly updated. In class, we discussed the use of social media as a means to present ideas. Additionally, we explored how social media can emphasize (or de-emphasize) how we think about a topic. These classroom conversations helped students to consider how gender might be presented via social media. For example, an event could be advertised with words or with an image of people (e.g., woman, man, group). Furthermore, how individuals are standing and where they are looking can provide insight into the way gender is represented. Considering these ideas, students began considering if the visual imagery portrayed stereotypical gender representations (e.g., men as strong; women as beautiful).

Students were then led to create small research groups. Within these groups, they selected the data sources for collecting social media posts. Collectively, we discussed and chose which aspects to analyze within post. These selected aspects became a codebook for visual analysis. Some decisions were made quickly. For example, everyone agreed it was necessary to identify if the person/people shown in the image appeared to be a woman or man. Other decisions took more time and discussion to determine what was important for the research. For example, was it useful or necessary to examine a photo and indicate the type of clothing, physical positioning, and/or facial expressions?

Although many of the data points could be determined in advance, others emerged when students began analyzing the imagery. For example, how should an image with *only* text be analyzed, if at all? What should the researcher do when the photograph shows a crowd of people that does not allow for individual counting of women and men in the photo?

These decisions, and discussions surrounding them, provided a practical means for students to see the intricate and reflexive nature of the qualitative research process. The project-based learning of the gender audit demonstrated an inductive process for uncovering meaning based upon interpretation. Therefore, through guiding students to develop a process for analyzing the data collaboratively, students were able to see first-hand the constructivist nature of the research process. Class negotiations about how to analyze visual images were a form of symbolic interactionism. In other words, “We all act differently with different people, in different situations, and/or with different objects because of the meanings we attach/ascribe to them” (Leavy, 2017, p. 129). Thus, students became aware of the centrality of how meaning can be ascribed to objects in varied ways.

From these class discussions, research decisions ensued. The class decided for the visual imagery to be best understood, it was important for each researcher or research team, to describe as many details as possible about the image. Likewise, students decided to provide details of any text included, which could give insight to the gendered nature of the social media post. Moreover, with a large group, students chose to classify the gender in one of three ways – appearing to have gender balance, lack thereof of gender balance, or presence of one gender as predominant (e.g., a female faculty member in front of a class of many people). In practice, these decisions were achieved in varied depth. For instance, some research groups provided the exact numbers of women and men in a picture, while other teams generalized (see Table 1).

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Table 1  
Sample variances in the description of images

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Sample Group 1	Sample Group 2	Sample Group 3
Alumni association group of 8 women and 1 man standing watching a woman play the piano.	Department of Students Affairs takes a picture of students where female students are in the center when the number of female students is two times less.	@nu_cac wishes good luck to students passing internship at Schlumberger and represents two men and women among them.

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These new insights and questions emerging during the research process created opportunities to engage in *being* an educational researcher. Students in this way were actively involved in the methodological practice, which would directly affect the outcome of the study. Students were able to see how qualitative research can and should allow for flexibility in thinking and practice, even once a research study has begun (CohenMiller, Schnackenberg, Demers, *forthcoming*). Recognizing the dynamic nature of research provided a new conceptualization for students. No longer was qualitative research considered to be an immobile, static practice.

Within the course, the twenty graduate students discussed the analysis and wrote preliminary results for ten social media accounts related to the University. Depending on the social media account, the number of images per account ranged from 10 to 72 images. Students sought to uncover if women or men were “highlighted” within the imagery. They asked of the data collected from Instagram and Facebook posts: *Are women or men portrayed in lead roles? Are men or women emphasized as more important than the other gender? If yes, in what way(s)?*

**An iterative process of data collection and analysis.** The process of collecting data and analysis occurred concurrently. All data were collected from active Instagram accounts as of March/April 2018. However, a limitation of the study was a lack of consistency across the data collected. There was considerable fluctuation between students in the total number of social media posts collected per account. From the images obtained, student research teams engaged in analysis detailing, or dismissing, aspects of each collected post. The result was an iterative process of data collection and analysis within each research team. Student research teams reported back to the full class for feedback. Additional data was then collected by each group, as well as further details added for the analysis. The following details information about each of the social media accounts as of April 5, 2018, the gendered nature of the imagery, and sample photos with associated description. Each team of students developed their explanation of the set of data.

**University Instagram account (@nu\_feed).** The @nu\_feed Instagram account posted news and announcements about the University. It was managed by NU and also reposted followers' pictures and thoughts. Posts related to academic and student life. In total, 42 photos were analyzed. Across these images, there were 17 posts highlighting women, 17 highlighting men, four images with an equal representation of women and men, and four with no imagery of people. A sample post showed a set of students who participated in a coding challenge, "HackNU." In the image below, five female students stand in front of a large sign advertising the event, while five male students stand next to them, and an additional four men sitting on the floor in front.




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*Image 1:* A set of 14 students (five women and nine men) pose for a picture after the completion of the coding challenge.

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**University Alumni Association Instagram account (@nualumni).** The @nualumni account posted imagery about alumni within and outside the country. The account was an official one managed by the University. It included information about alumni lives after graduation, visits to the University, memories and reunions, and advertisements and invitations to upcoming events. In total, 20 posts were analyzed from a total of 571. An example of one of the posts depicts an alumna of the University playing the piano with a group of people watching her (see Image 2). Under the photo, the caption "tags" the piano player, asking if she remembers the performing arts center (which at the time was the only place to perform at and rehearse on campus).



*Image 2: Alumni association group of 8 women and 1 man standing watching a woman play the piano (January 9, 2018).*

***French Language Club Instagram account (@nu\_french\_club).*** The posts for the @nu\_french\_club account focused on photos of people, advertisements, motivational pictures, and news related the club issues. The account was organized and managed by the student club. Out of 77 total posts, 34 were analyzed. A sample post shows a photo collage of two images, with a close up of a female and male student, and a post showing a student group sitting at a table discussing (see Image 3). The gender balance of the group includes three women and two men engaged in conversation with a male faculty member. The two people talking are a male student and the male faculty member, while a female student is shown smiling and looking on. The caption for the posts invites others to join a discussion about Kazakh and French stereotypes.



*Image 3: French Language Club photo collage focused on a male faculty member engaging discussion with a male student, while female and male students look on.*

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**Graduate School of Education Instagram account (@nugraduateschoolofeducation).**

The content for @nugraduateschoolofeducation included representatives of the graduate programs, faculty members, research seminars, announcements without imagery of people, and events. The account was managed by the Graduate School. A total of 10 images were analyzed, with nine showing women highlighted and one post highlighting a man. A sample post shows an announcement from January 2018, of a research seminar with four authors, with the male faculty lead author listed first, followed by a female faculty author, and two female graduate student authors (see Image 4).



## RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES

January 17th, 2 pm, Block C3, Room 3034

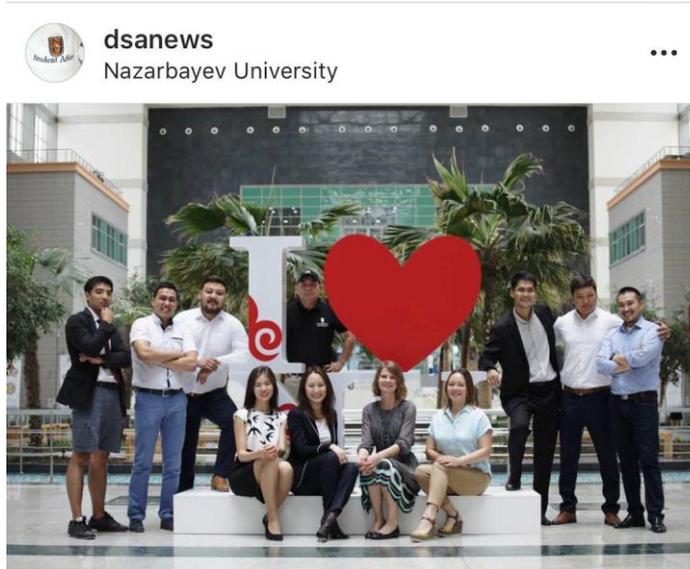
### Presentation: "Closer to the research world": Developing graduate student research competence in Kazakhstan

This presentation will present preliminary findings from a mixed methods study about the ways student and alumni participants in the *NUGSE Research in Education* student-run journal develop research competence through their participation in the journal. In broad terms, journal participants value the opportunities to collaborate with peers and mentors through this authentic practice experience. Through their roles as peer reviewers, authors, and editors, these graduate students are socialized into the values of the academic community and report increased abilities to produce and consume research in the field of education.



*Image 4:* Graduate School of Education research seminar highlighting a male faculty lead, followed by a female faculty member, and then two female graduate students.

**Department of Student Affairs (@dsanews).** The @dsanews account was an official account for Student Affairs. It was dedicated to announcing news associated to the University. The posts were primarily related to the work of the department, news from the students' lives, various events held by DSA, and congratulation posts. A total of 20 images out of 258 in total were analyzed. Of the 20 images, 17 highlighted men. A sample image shows a set of students in the main campus hall posing with an "I (heart) NU" sign. Seven male students were shown standing on the sides and middle of the sign. The majority of the men stand with arms crossed in front of their bodies. Four female students sit on the bottom step, with legs crossed and hands together (see Image 5).



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*Image 5:* Seven male students stand, and four female students sit at the base of the “I (heart) NU” sign.

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**University Facebook page (@Nazarbayev University).** The NU Facebook account is a University social media account that posted news, announcements, and other interesting facts related to university, staff, and students. The student research team who analyzed the images created a boundary for their analysis based upon the date. They reviewed and described the posts from March 1, 2018, until March 29, 2018, for a total of 36 posts. Some posts had up to 10 uploaded photos within one post. Overall, 66 photos and six videos were analyzed. People, both women and men, were present in 53 photos and five videos. The rest of the images and video recordings were about educational exhibitions and fairs, events, and celebratory announcements. For this research study, only the photos were analyzed. A sample image (see Image 6 below) shows student participants at an alternative energy science competition. In the front of the picture is a prototype car, behind which 10 students stand holding the University and Kazakhstan flags. Seven male students and three female students are included in the picture.

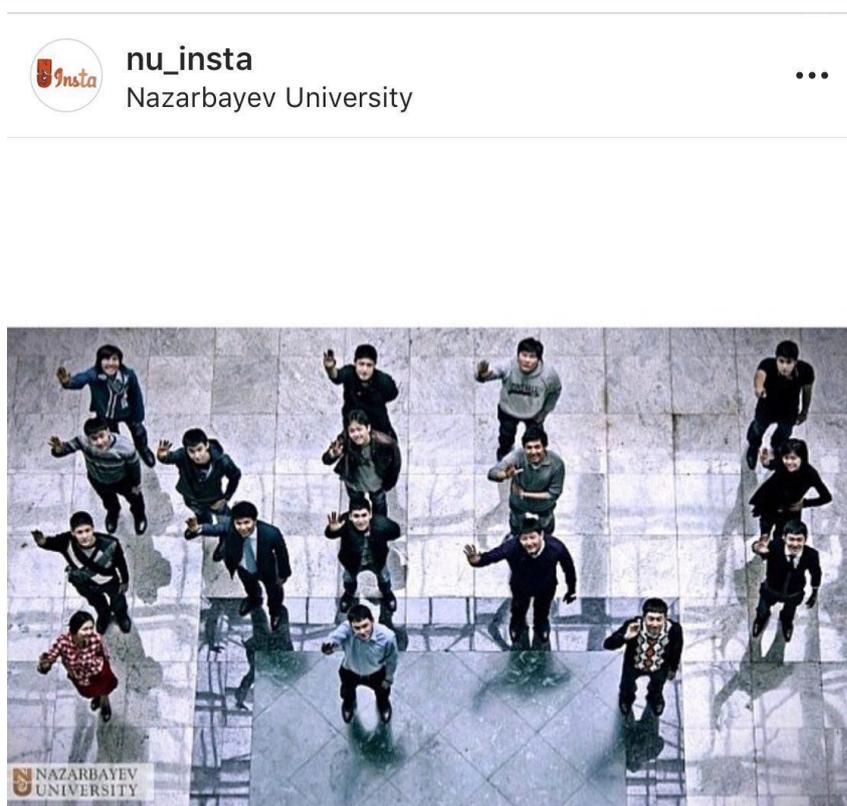


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*Image 6:* Seven male students and three female students stand behind their prototype car.

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**Informal community of University students (@nu\_ista).** The content of the @nu\_ista account was dedicated to “everything” about the University. The account was organized by students. Generally, the posts had various content illustrating the campus, highlighting student photographs, and announcing social events and information for and about current students and alumni. Overall, 51 posts uploaded between March 30 and June 11, 2018, were analyzed out of a possible 1,160. The 51 posts primarily related to a competition for the University, #personaofnu, and included close-ups of the student, their name, year of study, and major achievements. Of these posts and the remaining others, 26 highlighted women, 20 focused on men, two were group photos, and three posts had no images of people. A sample image (see Image 7 below) shows 18 students—4 women and 14 men—standing together to make the shape of the University acronym, “NU.”




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*Image 7:* Fourteen men and four women stand together to form the letters “NU”

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**Business club (@nu\_business\_club).** The @nu\_business club Instagram page announced events related to the student club. It primarily posted information about workshops. Across 28 images analyzed, they highlighted male presenters. A sample image (see Image 8) shows an announcement for an upcoming event about startup businesses, “@nu\_business\_club welcomes students to battle between two successful businessmen who represents battle between startup and Business.” The announcement included a focus on two male businessmen.



*Image 8: Male businessmen shown on an announcement about startup businesses*

**Graduate School of Business (@nugsb).** The @nugsb Instagram account was run by the Graduate School of Business. It posted upcoming events for current students, faculty, alumni, and for those considering joining the School. The student research team first reviewed all posts for the Instagram account. From a total of 243 posts, 25 included images of people, which were then further analyzed. These 25 posts included messages of congratulations, announcements, events held by the School, meetings, training courses, interviews, and elections for Student Clubs. More than half of the posts highlighted men, showing them as top managers, professors, training leaders, students, and graduates. A sample post (see Image 9) shows a group of five men engaged in conversation as they walk through the main hall in the University. Two are wearing name badges as if attending a conference, and three are wearing suit jackets. The text below the image says, “@nugsb shows that business collaboration occurs at the university.”



*Image 9: Men walking through campus as an example of “business collaboration.”*

**Career Advising Centre @nu\_cac.** The official Instagram page of the Career Advising Centre at NU, @nu\_cac, posted upcoming conferences, workshops, and other events related to successful employment. Job opportunities were posted for students and alumni. As of March 2018, there were a total of 34 posts. The majority of posts did not include images of people. Instead, the posts used text-based announcements and invitations to events. When photos were included, they tended to show large crowds of people. In these photos, the student research team found it challenging to determine the gender of individuals. Analysis across the seven images identified four focusing on men and three on women. A sample post (see Image 10) shows three students standing side-by-side at a reception area for a local business. A young woman is shown standing in the center of two young men. The caption reads, “@nu\_cac wishes good luck to students passing internship at Schlumberger.”



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*Image 10:* Students completing an internship, with a young woman standing between two young men.

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### **Understanding the Findings: Gender Audit of Social Media Accounts at Nazarbayev University**

Across the ten social media accounts, data were analyzed for a total of 317 images. These images were selected from student clubs, departmental accounts, and University-level social media accounts (see Table 2). Overall, half of all data were collected from University-level accounts.

Table 2  
Classification of social media accounts analyzed

	Instagram	Facebook	Student club	Department level	University level
University Instagram account (@nu_feed)	x				x
University alumni association Instagram account (@nualumni)	x				x
French Language Club Instagram account (@nu_french_club)	x		x		
Graduate School of Education Instagram account (@nugraduateschoolofeducation)	x			x	
Department of Student Affairs Instagram account (@dsanews)	x				x
University Facebook page (@NazarbayevUniversity)		x			x
Informal community of University students (@nu_insta)	x				
Business club (@nu_business_club)	x		x		
Graduate School of Business (@nugsb)	x			x	
Career Advising Centre (@nu_cac)	x				x

Each student research team provided descriptions of the images collected, with specifics about gender, positioning, and rationale. To give a broad picture of the gender breakdown within the posts, students organized the data into categories indicating the numbers of: Images analyzed, Women highlighted within the images, Men highlighted within the images, and “Other” which included additional description (see Table 3).

Table 3  
Overview of social media accounts analyzed with gender highlighted

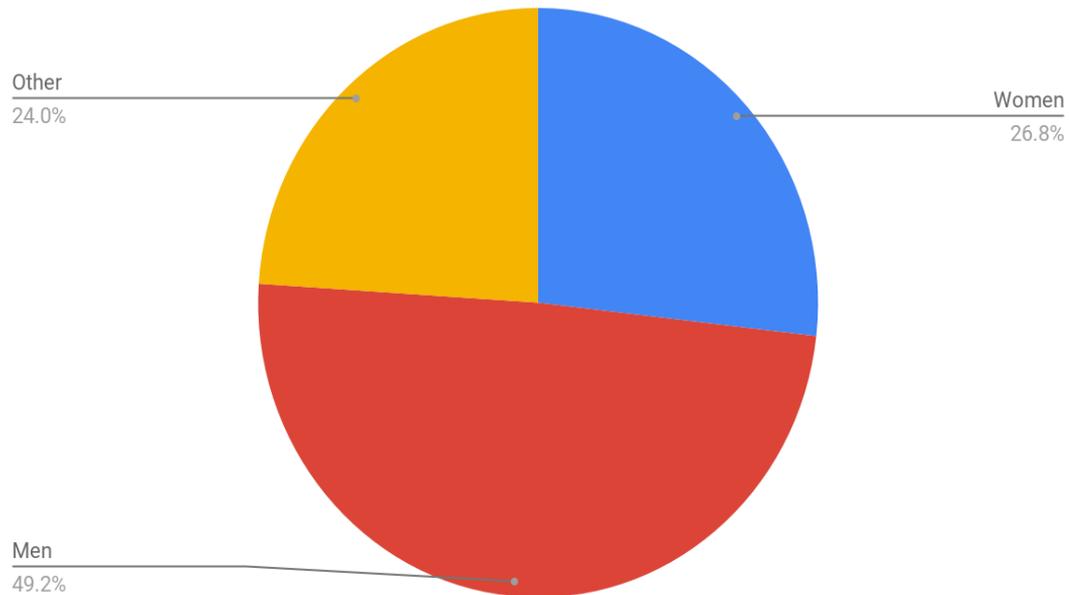
<b>Social media account</b>	<b>Images analyzed</b>	<b>Women highlighted</b>	<b>Men highlighted</b>	<b>Other</b>
University Instagram account (@nu_feed)	42	17	17	8
University alumni association Instagram account (@nualumni)	20	5	12	3 group photo
French Language Club Instagram account (@nu_french_club)	34	7	13	14 (e.g., motivational quotes)
Graduate School of Education Instagram account (@nugraduateschoolofeducation)	10	9	1	0
Department of Student Affairs Instagram account (@dsanews)	20	0	17	3 (e.g., gender-balanced)
University Facebook page (@NazarbayevUniversity)	53	12	26	15 (e.g., holiday congratulations)
Informal community of University students (@nu_insta)	51	26	20	2 group photos 3 with no imagery of people
Business club (@nu_business_club)	28	2	26	0
Graduate School of Business (@nugsb)	25	4	20	1 group photo of different students
Career Advising Centre (@nu_cac)	34	3	4	27 (e.g., invitations, announcements)
	317	85	156	76

Across the total set of images analyzed from social media accounts, students found just under half (49.2%) of the posts highlighted the presence of men, with approximately a quarter (26.8%) highlighting women. The last quarter included all remaining photos, including large

group pictures, text- based imagery, and pictures without people (24%) (see Figure 2). From the ten social media accounts, the students found the Career Services account (@nu\_cac) was the most gender-balanced. Two accounts favored women – the Informal student account (@nu\_insta) and the Graduate School of Education (@nugraduateschoolofeducation). In contrast, the Business Club (@nu\_business\_club), the Graduate School of Business (@nugsb) and Student Affairs (@dsanews), all heavily presented a gender bias in favor of men.

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Proportion of women, men in social media posts



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Figure 2: Total proportion of social media posts categorized by those that highlight women, men, or another aspect

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### Discussion: Engaging with the Findings “What does it all mean?”

The process of collecting the data for the gender audit proved to be a straightforward process for students. However, making sense of the relevance of the data and interpreting the results provided opportunities beyond teaching about research method tools. The final step of the qualitative research methods course and the application of the innovative methodology was to interpret the findings.

As a class, it became apparent there was a gendered nature of social media accounts, but understanding what that *meant* collectively led to intriguing and useful questions about research methods, society, and the gendered nature of higher education institutions. Discussions emerged amongst the students about why gender bias exists. Students began conversations about the intentionality of including more men than women, questioning whether the posts were potentially representative of those members affiliated with the club or department, and inquiring into the gender and background of those organizing/leading the social media accounts themselves. These new questions about *why* the data was gender-biased, and if there was a *purpose* for the bias, are essential questions for continued engagement.

Students saw how the social media accounts analyzed for the study consistently portrayed men in favor of women, in both informal and formal academic settings. While not the focus of the research methods course, we discussed the potential impact of such imagery.

For example, students explored the idea that while an individual image highlighting one gender over another is not problematic, it is the *consistent* use of such imagery, which can be detrimental. For instance, if a student club primarily depicts men on social media, they could consciously or unconsciously be suggesting to audiences that women are uninterested in the topic or incapable of success in the subject. Moreover, emphasizing the presence of men throughout academic spheres affects those living and working within the campus, by falsely suggesting that “knowledge is only constructed by men” (CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019b). Ultimately, the research conducted in the qualitative research methods course from the study of informal curriculum at the University echo those of the formal curriculum – both point to an emphasis on men as the center of knowledge and success.

In the qualitative research methods course, graduate students were guided through the use of creative pedagogy and praxis. They applied an innovative methodology using gender audit as process and method to collect and analyze data about the gendered nature of University social media accounts. Through the process and methodological application, students gained the ability to conduct research, while developing an awareness of contemporary issues of gender representation in higher education pertinent to their current and future careers.

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