



Revisiting HeForShe: Rethinking Gender Equality Communication Through the Lens of Entitlement Feminism

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the HeForShe Campaign through the lens of overentitled feminism, offering a critical perspective on gender equality communication. Overentitled feminism refers to an approach where feminist discourse unintentionally shifts from equality advocacy to excessive demands or privileges beyond equitable social expectations. Using a qualitative literature review, this research analyzed 25 peer-reviewed academic articles, official UN Women campaign reports, and feminist critiques published between 2014 and 2024. The selection was based on relevance to HeForShe's framing, gender communication strategies, and critiques of feminist entitlement. The scope is limited to English-language sources with global or Western-centric perspectives, excluding regional campaigns with divergent sociocultural contexts. The findings reveal three dominant themes: (1) the campaign's strength in mobilizing male participation as allies, (2) the blurring line between solidarity and performative advocacy, and (3) concerns over entitlement narratives that may inadvertently reinforce unequal communication dynamics. While HeForShe fosters collaborative gender discourse, it also attracts critiques rooted in overentitled feminist expectations. This article highlights the balance between equity-driven and entitlement-driven narratives in global gender campaigns and calls for a more accountable, dialogue-based communication model.



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the global conversation on gender equality has intensified, particularly through campaigns like HeForShe, launched by UN Women in 2014. The campaign promotes male involvement in feminist advocacy, positioning men not as oppressors but as allies in breaking gender stereotypes (UN Women, 2014). Despite its widespread acclaim, the campaign warrants critical scrutiny within contemporary feminist discourse.

In particular, the concept of "overentitled feminism" has emerged in recent scholarly discussions as a critique of post-third-wave feminist rhetoric. This perspective challenges tendencies within certain feminist expressions that, while originating from a desire for justice, risk morphing into disproportionate expectations or preferential treatment that contradict core egalitarian principles (Tosh, 2020; Fraser, 2013). Rooted in debates between equity feminism, difference feminism, and more radical iterations, the term intersects with ongoing critiques about neoliberal feminism's tendency to co-opt social justice for institutional recognition without systemic change (Rottenberg, 2018).

HeForShe serves as a salient case study for examining these tensions, not only due to its global visibility and institutional backing but also because it embodies the shift toward inclusive, partnership-based gender discourse. However, recent critiques argue that the campaign may oversimplify structural gender issues or center performative allyship over material change (Kumar & Rai, 2022).

This study explores the interaction between the HeForShe campaign's inclusive narrative and criticisms rooted in overentitled feminist thought, aiming to assess whether its communication strategy genuinely promotes transformative equality or risks reinforcing entitlement-driven narratives under the guise of inclusivity.

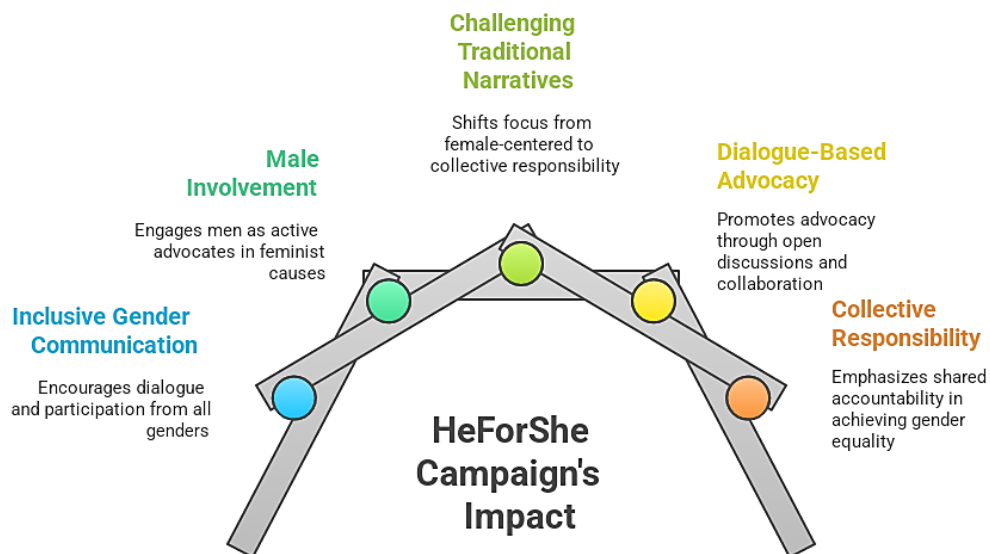
RESEARCH METHODS

This study applied a qualitative literature review method to examine the HeForShe Campaign from the perspective of overentitled feminism. The research process involved systematically collecting and analyzing 20 scholarly sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and institutional reports, published between 2014 and 2024. The selection criteria for the literature were designed to ensure that all materials were relevant to the campaign, feminist critiques, gender equality communication practices, and the theoretical framework of overentitled feminism.

The literature search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and official UN Women archives. The selected studies were then reviewed through thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify and interpret recurring themes, strategies, and critiques associated with the HeForShe Campaign. By focusing on qualitative insights rather than numerical data, the research highlights patterns and discourses within feminist communication scholarship, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of both the campaign's strengths and its limitations.

RESULTS

The literature review identified several significant patterns regarding the HeForShe Campaign. First, the campaign demonstrates notable strength in fostering inclusive gender communication, especially by involving men as active participants in feminist advocacy. According to Flood (2019) and Cameron & Lalonde (2021), this inclusive approach helps challenge the traditionally female-centered narrative within feminist movements by promoting dialogue-based advocacy and collective responsibility.



Second, the campaign has attracted criticism from overentitled feminist perspectives, particularly regarding the shift from equality to expectation. Scholars such as Tosh (2020) and MacKinnon (2016) argue that some aspects of the HeForShe framework, while promoting solidarity, inadvertently frame male involvement as a social obligation rather than a voluntary contribution, blurring the boundary between genuine equality and social overentitlement.

Finally, the reviewed literature highlights the sociocultural tensions that arise when feminist campaigns like HeForShe are implemented in different global contexts. As Fraser (2016) and Gill (2016) have argued, feminist advocacy imported from Western frameworks occasionally risks misalignment with local traditions, which might reinforce entitlement-driven perceptions rather than achieving balanced communication outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The analysis illustrates that HeForShe embodies both effective gender communication and exposure to entitlement-based criticism. Overentitled feminism offers an important critique, highlighting the risks when gender equality campaigns drift from advocating balanced rights to creating an environment of social expectation or unilateral privilege (Tosh, 2020).

From a communication perspective, this highlights the delicate balance between assertive gender advocacy and overextension of feminist demands. Such concerns underline the importance of reciprocal accountability in gender dialogues, especially in international campaigns operating across diverse cultural settings (Fraser, 2016).

In conclusion, overentitled feminism encourages a critical evaluation of feminist messaging, ensuring it fosters social balance, rather than inadvertently reproducing new power asymmetries under the guise of equality.

CONCLUSION

The HeForShe Campaign exemplifies the evolution of gender equality communication but also highlights tensions present in feminist narratives. Overentitled feminism critiques emphasize the importance of maintaining balance between promoting rights and fostering collective responsibility. Future campaigns should embed mutual accountability within gender discourse to prevent the shift from equality-seeking communication toward entitlement-driven advocacy.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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