

Where networked misogyny becomes networked misandry

Exploring the misogynistic discussion on #MeToo in the manosphere

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ABSTRACT

Due to their network characteristics, social media facilitate the organization and communication between members of social and political movements. With the rise of #MeToo, feminist issues and particularly sexual harassment have gained new awareness in the public sphere. However, the visibility of popular feminism in media and marketing also generates counter-movements. The manosphere represents a male-dominated, detached network of different subgroups and platforms united by the belief that they are oppressed victims in a feminist society. Because of the manosphere's close association with the alt-right and its open misogynist stance, it should not be reduced to a few misguided individuals but considered an active social threat.

Thus, this study examines the discussion on #MeToo in the manosphere to contribute to a better understanding of misogynistic ideologies in an understudied context and raise awareness towards the hostility against women online. Hence, the research is guided by the following research question: How is the #MeToo debate framed and discussed in the manosphere? To provide an answer, qualitative thematic analysis was applied to 12 articles and 641 comments on two prominent websites in the manosphere, A Voice for Men and Return of Kings. By investigating two distinct platforms and studying the influence of articles on the interplay between users, it offers a nuanced perspective on networked misogyny and the degrees of hate speech.

The results suggest that #MeToo is perceived as a ploy of women to destroy white men and claim power for themselves. Whereas many sexual harassment allegations are rendered as lies of attention-seeking women, causes of rape are further linked to ambiguous definitions and the inferior nature of women; feminist brainwashing is identified as the reason why women act against their allegedly hidden desires of being dominated. Additionally, a supposed double standard allows women to exploit public institutions and abuse men and children without repercussions. It suggests that men apply misogyny to criticize the allegedly hidden misandry in societies instead. Accordingly, networked misogyny is twisted into networked misandry. Therefore, hate speech serves to portray women as threats to Western cultures. Taking on the victim role and connecting with like-minded individuals enables men to avoid the acknowledgment of their advantaged position. Considering that hate speech and misogyny occur along a continuum and are also linked to racism and homophobia, this study makes the case for a more refined definition of the manosphere. Instead of seeing it as one confined network, it should be understood as a cluster. Consequently, online misogyny cannot be traced back to one source but needs to be examined individually as well as collectively.

KEYWORDS: *networked misogyny, hate speech, manosphere, #MeToo, popular feminism*

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List of abbreviations

AVfM: A Voice for Men

MGTOW: Men Going Their Own Way

MRAs: Men's Rights Activists

MRM: Men's Rights Movement

PUAs: Pick-up artists

ROK: Return of Kings

1. Introduction

Toxic masculinity, rape culture, or male privilege; in recent years, many terms have been used to question the roles of men in contemporary societies. Part of this cultural change is the persistence to hold men accountable who show misogynistic and sexist behavior (Seales, 2018). Considering that social movements increasingly operate online, new media play a crucial part in enabling the organization and exchange of feminist discourses (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Yet, the public debate and the affordances of digital platforms also give rise to counter networks. At the center of the misogynistic narrative online is the so-called *manosphere*, started in the early 2000s. It represents a detached set of websites and social media groups united by the belief that men are oppressed victims of feminism (Farrell, Fernandez, Novotny, & Alani, 2019).

More specifically, five subgroups, each with its own ideology, are particularly dominant. The Red Pill Movement derives its name from the film *The Matrix* and uses the metaphor of ‘swallowing the red pill’ for being able to see the hidden truth of reality: Women apply misandry to gain power and men are now the inferior gender (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). The spread of its philosophy towards unaware men who tolerate feminism is a key aim of the manosphere. A second group calls themselves incels, short for involuntary celibates, who blame their lack of intimacy on the mentality of modern women (Jaki, De Smedt, Gwóźdź, Panchal, Rossa, & De Pauw, 2019). Men Going Their Own Way, short MGTOW, decide to reduce their interaction with women to a bare minimum. The focus of this study lies with the two remaining groups: Pick-up artists (PUAs) portray themselves as date coaches; however, their advices largely dehumanize and objectify women (Grant, 2019). Further, Men's Right Activists (MRAs) initially established themselves to help men who struggle with the expectations that society places on masculinity. But over the years, it shifted away from offering support to fighting for the rights of primarily white, heterosexual men who consider masculinity to be in a crisis (Lefkowitz, 2018). Together they provide a nuanced view on the manosphere. While PUAs openly use misogyny to control women, MRAs disguise their hatred by framing it as a support network for men.

However, reducing misogyny to a few extremists creates the impression of it being a rare exception. Yet, misogyny is an invisible force in the Western world that is often considered a social norm or dismissed as typical male behavior (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Whether it is the idea that men are naturally more qualified for manager jobs, female leads in movies are part of a feminist agenda, or simply catcalling women on the street, most of these beliefs persist in people's heads despite living in a supposedly open-minded and equal society (Jackson, 2019). Moreover, it is also fed by the rise of feminist voices as misogyny attempts to counterbalance feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This is why the manosphere uses forums, websites, and blogs to spread its ideologies and recruit and connect with members. Hence, one can use the term *networked misogyny* to describe this phenomenon. Additionally, it underlines the structural reach of misogyny into institutions and cultural norms (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015).

One can argue that the narrative on these websites is a form of *hate speech*. This type of

offensive language directed at the identity of a person establishes a clear division between groups and harms the victims by portraying them as a threat to society (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Although some only examine hate speech as hostility against racial and religious minorities or the LGBTQ+ community, women are often still disadvantaged on the basis of their gender (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Therefore, the manosphere applies hate speech to promote violence, create a sense of unity through the degradation of women, and for recruitment (Waltman & Haas, 2011).

Despite the vast number of platforms, two hate groups stand out in the manosphere due to their misogynistic rhetoric and insistence on male supremacy. First, Return of Kings (ROK) was founded in 2012 by Daryush Valizadeh, known as Roosh V, one of the most prominent Pick-up artists. ROK describes itself as presenting neomasculine views and states that it ‘aims to usher the return of masculine man in a world where masculinity is increasingly punished and [...] that allows women to assert superiority and control over men’ (Return of Kings, n.d., para. 2).

In comparison, A Voice for Men (AVfM) is the leading website for information on the Men's Rights Movement. Its goal is to ‘provide education and encouragement to men and boys; to lift them above the din of misandry, to reject the unhealthy demands of gynocentrism in all its forms’ (A Voice for Men, n.d., para. 1). Founded by Paul Elam in 2009, AVfM now has more than 12 million hits¹ and portrays itself as a support network fighting for social justice to the point that they are sometimes portrayed as a moderate, legitimate voice. However, misogynistic, aggressive rhetoric signals clear hatred for women (Friedman, 2013). Much like other hate groups, the manosphere significantly benefits from the affordances of the Internet, such as anonymity and interconnectivity (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015). Therefore, it is important to analyze how the manosphere, more specifically ROK and AVfM, uses hate speech to debate social issues.

Because the manosphere perceives feminism to be the reason for the demise of Western men, it is a reactive force to the current notion of popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The latter indicates how feminist issues and values are visible in the public sphere again, largely due to the networked nature of new media, and spread across many domains of life. Hence, it has moved from being solely a political movement to commercialization; social media campaigns featuring prominent spokeswomen, feminist narratives in advertising and marketing, and fashion brands printing female slogans onto their products lead to daily confrontations with feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In contemporary neoliberalism, confidence is treated as a commodity and brands use their goods to sell female empowerment (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019). Thus, popular feminism runs the risk of achieving visibility but not social change.

At the same time, the manosphere also markets male self-esteem. In response to popular feminism, it inherits the twisted perception that female confidence occurs at the expense of men.

¹ as of May, 2020

Learning how to control women is disguised as lifestyle coaching in the form of podcasts, books, and conventions (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The problem arises as soon as the promised success fails to emerge. Instead of turning against the manosphere, men use hostility to blame women for their frustrations (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019). Even though the manosphere is often framed in an American context, its reach extends into other Western countries outside North America as well. An attempt by Roosh V to host so-called ‘tribal meetings’, conventions to share the ideologies with members of the manosphere, in 40 countries around the world led to a petition signed by more than 80.000 people in the UK to ban him from entering the country (“Roosh V cancels”, 2016).

One of the best known feminist movements that attempts to transform the situation of women in the age of popular feminism is #MeToo. In 2017, the hashtag gained considerable popularity after actress Alyssa Milano took to Twitter to encourage women to share their own experiences with sexual assault and harassment in response to the allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Since then, the hashtag has become a byword for gender politics in the 21st century (Seales, 2018). Due to the rise of feminist topics in recent years, some argue that it is evidence for a fourth wave of feminism (Rivers, 2017). At the same time, the eligibility of social media as sole indicators for a new wave of feminism remains highly debated because their impact often does not translate into the offline world (Munro, 2013). For the manosphere, #MeToo’s dominance in the media and impact on corporate cultures creates a world of social justice insanity. As this research will show, lies and false accusations supposedly serve to take away their power and render men defenseless.

1.1 Research questions

To investigate how networked misogyny and hate speech are applied in the manosphere, thematic analysis is used to examine articles and comments on ROK and AVfM in regards to #MeToo. This method allows for a systemic and in-depth study of the ideologies circulated on these platforms without neglecting the context (Schreier, 2013). Therefore, the research is guided by the following research question:

How is the #MeToo debate framed and discussed in the manosphere?

Here, the concept of framing is directed at articles published on these websites while the discussion in the comment section is also taken into consideration. Thus, it allows for a comprehensive insight into the dynamics between members.

Additionally, a set of sub-questions is incorporated. While the manosphere is often seen as one large network, the distinctions between groups are significant in understanding the impact of networked misogyny. Although the hatred for women is the binding force, there are potential differences in the aim of each group. This can also affect the radicalization and degree of hostility. Consequently, the role of #MeToo and the judgment of women may differ. Whereas MRAs primarily focus on helping men cope, PUAs claim to have mastered the domination of women (Murdoch, 2020). In order to compare the two groups on ROK and AVfM, the first sub-question is:

Is there a difference in the perception of #MeToo between Pick-up artists on ROK and members of the Men's Rights Movement on AVfM?

Because the articles stir the debate, it is also interesting to see if commentators have different opinions or if they are more or less extreme in their expression. The concerns of opinion leaders in social groups often become shared matters among followers which can influence attitude towards outsiders and increase the closeness of members (Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005). Ergo, the second sub-question is:

Does the use of hate speech and misogyny differ between articles and comments?

1.2 Scientific relevance

This study has scientific relevance for several reasons. To this day, the manosphere remains understudied in academic literature, while feminist activism is a popular topic (Waltman & Haas, 2011; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Accordingly, it strengthens misogyny as a social norm by rendering it invisible in society. In addition, despite their immense popularity in the manosphere, no in-depth study has been conducted on ROK or AVfM yet. Because they are important sources for men, the ideologies demonstrated on these websites foster online misogyny. Moreover, most studies on the manosphere focus on one particular group or forum and hence neglect the networking abilities of networked misogyny. In addition, these studies tend to concentrate on the subcultural language and unique jargon by applying discourse analysis (Farrell et al., 2019; Gotell & Dutton, 2016). These approaches inherit the risk of disregarding the larger social structures that misogyny is built on. Furthermore, this research contributes to the debate on the inclusion of women as targets of hate speech. Lastly, this study also provides a new perspective on the #MeToo movement because it showcases how it is discussed in the context of male supremacy.

1.3 Social relevance

Next to scientific relevance, this research also holds social relevance. The Southern Poverty Law Center recently added ROK and AVfM to its hatewatch list as the first misogynistic websites (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). This suggests that they are not merely representing the opinions of a few extremists but pose an active social threat. Even though the manosphere mainly operates outside of popular media, the ideologies are tightly connected to right-wing movements and the concept of the Red Pill has even been praised by US President Donald Trump (Trump Jr., 2019). Thus, by showcasing the beliefs on these platforms, it increases the awareness towards the online hostility against women. Further, violent narratives can potentially spill over into the offline world and endanger women directly. In the same way, it is crucial to investigate how these voices fabricate their narratives to aid in the development of countermeasures. As an important part of recent popular feminism, the #MeToo movement is often used as an indicator of a new wave of feminism. Therefore, it is important to understand its impact outside the common discourses and on platforms that usually

do not receive much attention from popular media. Hence, highlighting the dissent against women online adds to the discussion on the need of recognizing a potential fourth wave of feminism because it underlines how feminism is still a necessary force to achieve gender equality.

1.4 Thesis outline

To examine the manosphere's discussion on #MeToo in a structured manner, the research is divided into seven chapters. Following the introduction, a brief overview of the history of feminism situates popular feminism and #MeToo in an ongoing debate over the role of women. Special emphasis is placed on the commercial impact of the current fourth wave to show the struggle of the political movement to find greater meaning in an individualistic society. Next, the rise of the Men's Rights movement and its transformation into the manosphere is described. Nowadays, it displays a complex discourse on the monetary value of misogyny. The fourth chapter introduces existing knowledge on the two frameworks guiding this study: hate speech and networked misogyny. Their dynamics shape the discussions on ROK and AVfM and clarify why extremist groups apply hostile language. In the fifth chapter, a rationale for the chosen method, thematic analysis, is provided and the process of data collection and analysis is explained. In the results chapter, the outcome in the form of six main themes is presented and discussed in detail. Moreover, observations in regards to the sub-questions are included. The last chapter concerns the overall conclusions drawn from the findings and answers to the research question. Additionally, their alignment with the theoretical framework is discussed. Furthermore, limitations are acknowledged and recommendations for future research are made.

2. Feminism: From a political movement to commercialization?

Before diving into the dynamics of hate speech and networked misogyny in the manosphere, it is important to first understand the historical background that lays the foundation for this conflict. To begin, this chapter provides an overview of the four waves of feminism. Special emphasis is placed on the debate on the existence of fourth-wave feminism and the role of #MeToo. Even though feminism is far too complex to be limited to specific time periods, the waves metaphor merely suggests that feminism ebbs and flows throughout time and shifts its attention towards current issues. Afterward, the ongoing fourth wave is examined in the context of popular feminism and the impact of its commercial characteristics is described.

2.1 The path to fourth-wave feminism

Feminism itself has a long history. Dating back to 1848 and the Seneca Falls Convention, a rally for more opportunities for women, first-wave feminism was concerned with achieving equality primarily in the form of the right to vote (Faupel & Werum, 2011). By 1928 more than 21 Western countries allowed women to participate in political activities and feminism slowly disappeared from the public eye (Householder, 2015). The loss of social relevance inspired Betty Friedan to release the book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 in which she criticized ‘the problem that has no name’ (Friedan, 1963, p. 15): the systemic, patriarchal discrimination of women by portraying female fulfillment as submissive and decorative. Political movements such as the Redstockings aimed to raise awareness towards sexual objectification but were also confronted with feminist stereotypes of bitter, lonely women (Guest, 2016). Additionally, the wave struggled to open up to minorities such as women of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community which is why it primarily took concerns of white women into account (Thornham, 2001). In the 1990s, third-wave feminism was indicated by broader intentions such as sexual assault (Grady, 2018). However, underlying dynamics in the form of intersectionality to highlight the junction of various types of oppression (Fernandes, 2010) and postmodernism, aiming to show how identity factors like gender are merely social constructs, became crucial points of public debate (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Moreover, pop culture and beauty products shaped the so-called ‘lipstick feminism’ to embrace individuality and reclaim the word ‘girl’ (Munford, 2007).

Today, defining fourth-wave feminism is a challenge for multiple reasons. For some, the rise of the web and social media has created a new momentum for activism. In 2009, feminist author Jessica Valenti (as cited in Solomon, 2009) argued ‘maybe the fourth wave is online’ (para. 3). Undoubtedly, these technological advancements have facilitated the growth and connectedness of political movements and allow them to move beyond national, cultural, and social barriers (Rivers, 2017). Still, critics perceive new media to be an insufficient explanation for a new wave of feminism. Instead, they refer to it as ‘slacktivism’ to indicate that a ‘like’ or ‘retweet’ online boosts the own ego

but does not achieve any social change offline (Munro, 2013). Not only the discord on the influence of social media but also the lack of clarity of common goals raise the question if a fourth wave is currently taking place. Considering that many of the popular topics resemble third-wave feminism, in particular intersectionality and sexual harassment, one could debate that the third wave is still ongoing (Rampton, 2015). Alternatively, supporters of postfeminism believe that the goals of feminism have been achieved and political action is no longer necessary (Ortner, 2014). As this study will show, the hostility towards women and patriarchal structures that persists in society indicate that postfeminism is short-sighted. For this reason, fourth-wave feminism remains a necessary construct to highlight contemporary gender inequality.

Furthermore, the recent momentum of feminist discussions and movements suggests that at the very least feminism holds higher social relevance again. In the streets, ‘slutwalks’ are organized by women who often wear little to no clothes to draw attention to rape and the notion that women provoke it by dressing a certain way (Valenti, 2011). Moreover, the Women’s March in 2017 became one of the biggest protests in the US and saw women and men voice their opinions on equality, reproductive rights, and health care (Lapowsky, 2017). Online, just a few months later, the hashtag #MeToo trended worldwide on Twitter and brought together the stories of thousands of victims of sexual harassment. It turned into a global discourse that attempts to redefine sexual harassment and assault and generate a framework to end the violence (Boyle, 2019). Criticism of #MeToo is multi-faceted: Opponents blame the movement for destroying the lives of the accused and the relationship between men and women. Others believe that the movement has not achieved enough yet and is primarily a media spectacle (Clark-Parsons, 2019). Additionally, although its founder Tarana Burke is an African-American woman, some criticize #MeToo’s lack of intersectionality and its focus on white women (Leung & Williams, 2019).

Nevertheless, #MeToo has created a worldwide network by giving feminism a new life. In combination with the Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund, an action-oriented extension that was created in Hollywood to increase the safety and equality of women in all working environments, it attempts to move beyond the awareness stage (Langone, 2018). A closer look at its impact on businesses reveals how the online network extends into the offline world. Internationally, #MeToo not only sparked a global debate but also inspired the International Labour Organization to introduce a treaty to the UN on gender-based discrimination and harassment with the intent to urge countries to develop binding laws and international standards (Hodal, 2019). In the US, almost 200 bills on workplace harassment have been approved since Alyssa Milano’s tweet and 3600 people gained support through the Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund (Soler, 2019).

Because accusations can negatively affect the reputations of businesses, companies like Nike create safer work environments, more diversity, and support investigations resulting in job dismissals of male executives (Creswell, Draper, & Abrams, 2018). Despite all the advancements, it is important to remember that it can have negative consequences, too. Especially the relationship between men and

women at work is increasingly filled with hesitations and uncertainty. Around 20% of participants of a study on the fears of #MeToo indicated that they are less likely to hire attractive women because they do not know how to engage with them. Moreover, on average a third of the people were also more reluctant to invite women to social gatherings like after-work drinks (Atwater, Tringale, Sturm, Taylor, & Braddy, 2019). In line with the findings of this study, it creates a culture of fear among some men.

As it shows, #MeToo and Time's Up are the results of online feminism in the greater scheme of popular feminism. Because feminist matters are not only discussed by niche groups but instead by large parts of the Western population, it has achieved visibility. This is in part supported and controlled by media platforms, capitalism, and marketing which commodify feminism to extend its reach. While these transformations are accompanied by a backlash, it opens a dialogue on national and corporate levels and improves the situation of many employees. Therefore, popular feminism describes the struggle of contemporary feminism to find deeper meaning in an economy of visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

2.2 Popular feminism: Social change or marketing tool?

#SpeakBeautiful, #IAmWhatIMakeUp, 'Courage is already inside'; these advertisement slogans by Dove, CoverGirl, and Dodge Ram are just a small selection of many campaigns in recent years that used feminist narratives to attract and simultaneously empower the female target audience (Windels, Champlin, Shelton, Sterbenk, & Poteet, 2019). As indicated by Banet-Weiser (2018), contemporary popular feminism is defined by its mainstream appeal and visibility across the media landscape. Networks like #MeToo that depend on social media often run the risk of superficiality because the promotion of a feminism-associated product already qualifies as activism (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019). Subsequently, visibility is primarily generated by brands and corporations which control the narrative and present themselves as allies to the cause.

At the same time, another force arguably influences how and why companies use feminism in their marketing strategies: neoliberal feminism. According to supporters of this notion, women can improve their social standing by taking back power through self-investment. Hence, it suggests that the success of women is not dependent on social circumstances but that an entrepreneurial mindset is a sufficient motivator to achieve equality and influence (Rottenberg, 2017). However, this logic is flawed for two reasons: First, neoliberal feminism fails to account for one of the main essences of feminism, challenging the status quo of the patriarchy, because the solution appears to lie in every woman if she is capable to see and use it (Miller & Plencner, 2018). Thus, the second reason for its shortcoming is rooted in the fact that if anything, it only applies to middle-class, heterosexual, white women whose privileged position enables them to circumvent many systemic barriers (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). As a consequence, neoliberal feminism does not qualify as 'true' feminism which is why this analysis is built on popular feminism instead while recognizing the underlying

neoliberal structures. This section serves to show how neoliberal entrepreneurialism and personal choice lay the foundation for popular feminism to thrive in media and marketing.

The focus on individualism and empowerment in neoliberalism is widely embraced by companies. While neoliberal feminism argues that a woman can solve her own problems if she believes in herself, companies take a similar approach but instead communicate that they present women with a solution; the consumption of goods is equalized with female empowerment (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019). Whether it's a commercial brand like H&M or a luxury label like Dior, they sell fashion items with slogans such as 'Empower Women' or 'We Should All Be Feminists' to signal a positive message (McRobbie, 2019). These examples highlight the role of companies in an economy of visibility; feminism can be bought and worn. Brands attempt to become icons of feminism by enhancing the attention and ultimately selling consumers the illusion of supporting a social movement but without the discomfort of dissent (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Therefore, the product is more important than actual politics. Furthermore, the inclusion of women in campaigns, on billboards, and magazine covers is often already perceived as enough to count as a feminist act, yet their presence alone does not challenge the system that controls it (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019).

In addition, popular feminism creates a twisted perception of the self on the consumer level. Messages of companies aim to empower women and thus want to encourage them to optimize their resources in a neoliberal fashion (Rottenberg, 2014). However, women can only be empowered if they believe something is missing which is why popular feminism and neoliberalism are built on a permanent state of insecurity (Baer, 2016). Because the desire for visibility focuses on the appearance and the female body, it inevitably becomes subject to criticism and shame (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Although companies are often aware of the potentially sexist and misogynist backlash, it provides them with an opportunity to rebuild the confidence of women (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). But instead of bluntly emphasizing only physical flaws, the 'love your body' discourse is presented as a mindset which is why scholars call it a form of 'psychic regulation' (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 180).

Accordingly, self-esteem is a commodity in itself. Campaigns target vulnerability and offer the audience with a solution in the form of a product that is supposed to allow them to be successful and attractive at the same time (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In order to profit from it, many advertisements apply a mixture of feminist and anti-feminist messages to indicate flaws that can be improved through the product (Gill, 2007). For instance, the cosmetics brand Avon advertised their latest cellulite cream with the slogan 'Dimples are cute on your face (not on your thighs)' (Prinzivalli, 2019, para. 2). Additionally, the pencil producer BIC celebrated Women's Day with an image saying 'Look like a girl. Act like a lady. Think like a man. Work like a boss' (Dray, 2019, para. 123). Hence, female power is presented as a zero-sum game of internal success and failure (Miller & Plencner, 2018).

Consequently, the main problem of popular feminism is its inability to move beyond the stage

of visibility. While it is an important first step towards recognition and can inspire girls and women, it is currently primarily a shallow attempt to demand social change (Banet-Weiser, 2018). It shows that though neoliberal feminism may be deceptive, neoliberal ideologies nevertheless shape the commercialization of popular feminism and dictate contemporary feminist discourses. In these cases, feminism tends to be used as a marketing tool to deflect critics of their corporate social responsibility, but it still has the potential to be used for actual change if empowerment leads to concrete action.

3. The manosphere: Misogyny as the basis for support

Considering that the manosphere primarily operates outside the public eye, its history and meaning are less well known. Therefore, this chapter serves to draw a comparison to feminism and show its twisted similarities and opposites. First, the development from the Men's Rights Movement to the manosphere is described before the commodification of male self-esteem is examined. Hence, the chapter indicates how neoliberal forces influence the interplay of feminism and misogyny.

3.1 From the Men's Rights Movement to the manosphere

Unlike feminism, the history of the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) is only a few decades old and started in the 1970s. Inspired by second-wave feminism, men who would later form the MRM acknowledged the struggle of women and the apparent sexism in society but noted that men too suffer under the pressure of the patriarchy (Messner, 2016). Social expectations of what constitutes masculinity and structural disadvantages such as uneven requirements in child support and custody led to the notion that men's rights need to be revisited (Coston & Kimmel, 2013). Hence, the initial idea was to collaborate with feminist movements to create equal and fair circumstances (Messner, 2016).

However, the ideologies driving the MRM started to shift in the 1980s. During that time, a rupture between groups generated different belief systems. While some continued to aid feminism in the battle against sexism, white, heterosexual men emphasized how feminism stripped them of their masculinity and pride (Kimmel, 1995). As an extension of these groups, Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) argued that feminism and liberalism pose an active threat to the culture of white men in America (Bean, 2007). From their perspective, changes in the economy and the development towards a multicultural nation and workforce reduced their social status which is why they not only aimed to fight *for* their rights but also *against* feminism (Allan, 2016). In comparison, others like Warren Farrell, one of the founding figures of the MRM, chose to focus on a middle course. For them, society had ignored male problems in the past and thus, they needed to improve their lives in a less extreme way. To illustrate the differences between MRAs and Farrell, the latter, for example, campaigned to stop all domestic-violence programs that are exclusively for women. Yet, MRAs were convinced that women are partially responsible for domestic violence because their attitude and behavior can provoke it which is why these programs are purely designed to harm men (Blake, 2015).

Nowadays, the rise of social media, the blogosphere, and popular feminism reinforce the ambitions of MRAs. At its heart is the manosphere, consisting of different misogynist subgroups (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017). Although they all have a different focus, they are united by the understanding that men are victims of a misandrist culture (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). *The Misandry Bubble* written by Imran Khan in 2010 serves as a basis for the manosphere and is filled with ideas and claims that support the notion that the Western World now values a culture in which men are inferior (Khan, 2010). Moreover, the 'Red Pill philosophy' based on the movie *The Matrix*, is used by

members of the manosphere who are convinced that they are the only ones able to see the truth: The oppression of women is non-existent (Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

The spread of these ideologies online can also have consequences in the real world. One of the most infamous media stories surrounding the manosphere was the case of Elliot Rodger in 2014. After posting a manifesto online in which Rodger explained he wanted to punish women for rejecting him, he ran amok in Isla Vista, California, killed six people, and injured 14 more (Nagourney, Cieply, Feuer, & Lovett, 2014). Even though Rodger represents an extreme case, his motivations are rooted in the manosphere and based on the ideologies spread in the community (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Furthermore, 'Gamergate' also generated many headlines in the same year. Initially, the hashtag protest was supposed to highlight ethical errors in journalism on video games, but the majority of posts were filled with misogynist and racist language (Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016). This is why scholars argue that the combination of geek culture, consisting of men who are often seen as nerds and outsiders, and the inner need to aggressively protect masculinity leads to a toxic and radical dissemination of harassment (Salter & Blodgett, 2012).

This underlines the potentially dangerous convergence of the manosphere and the 'alt-right'. The latter describes a political bloc connecting several extremist groups such as Neo-Nazi, white supremacists, and also the manosphere (Berger, 2018). It suggests that its network characteristics are strongly influenced by the Internet for the expression of racist views (Fraser, 2017). While each subgroup has a unique focus, they share an anti-Muslim stance and vocal support for President Trump (Berger, 2018). Using instances like Gamergate enables extremists to recruit and radicalize members because many young men can easily identify with the initial intent. Due to the fact that the media and the gaming community dismissed the instance as harmless at the time, it erased the clear linkage to alt-right forums which started and controlled the controversy (Lees, 2016).

3.2 The confidence game in the manosphere

Although the manosphere is often portrayed as a hub for misguided loners, its networking abilities and ideologies create a distorted analogy of popular feminism with a similar commercial interest (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Much like in popular feminism, neoliberalism is a driving force. In a neoliberal society, confidence is a key resource that needs to be internalized and cultivated (Gill & Orgad, 2017). By this logic, it enables access to economic success and personal happiness (Hearn, 2017). However, some men interpret the repeated emphasis on female empowerment as a feminist strategy to rob them of their masculinity and self-esteem (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Gillette's campaign 'We Believe' attempted to showcase the effect of toxic masculinity by featuring stereotypical 'boys will be boys' behavior and communicating that men are better than that (Gillette, 2019). Yet, many men felt like they were denounced and accused instead of encouraged (Bruell, 2019).

Hence, confidence is presented as a scarce resource that can only belong to either gender. Because everyone is responsible for their own accomplishments according to neoliberal beliefs, the

manosphere has established a confidence industry that aims to rebuild the male ego through the control of women (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019). This industry extends from online offers such as podcasts to books, seminars, and workshops (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Daryush Valizadeh, otherwise known as Roosh V, the founder of Return of Kings, for example, promotes several books in his own online store, one of them being *Free Speech Isn't Free*, in which he claims that Western societies try to silence men like him to promote a feminist and leftist narrative (Roosh, 2016). For members of the manosphere, these books are then interpreted as doctrines and serve as a basis for their arguments. Alternatively, companies such as The Red Man Group promote conventions (tickets cost up to \$1.999) advertised as 'the ultimate, 100%, unapologetically pro-father, pro-man, pro-masculinity live event' (21 Studios, n.d.-a, para. 3) where speakers, referred to as 'the patriarchs', grant advice on how to cope with the damage caused by feminism. Interestingly, the same organization also hosts a convention directed at women promising to stop them from giving in to 'toxic bullying feminist dogma and go against your ancient, biological nature as a woman, the men have arrived to help' (21 Studios, n.d.-b, para. 1).

As these examples show, confidence and misogyny are treated as commodities. Yet, the proposed solutions are not based on absurd reasoning about the roles of women and men but justified through preexisting cultural norms (O'Neill, 2015). By branding it as lifestyle coaching, it becomes socially acceptable (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Thus, it mirrors the messages conveyed in popular feminism but contorts it: If neoliberalism assumes that equality has been achieved, why are men suffering and women are being protected? This suggests that the confidence game in the manosphere is rigged. Because the promised transformation often does not come, because neoliberalism fails to deliver the assured success, men turn to hostility but identify women not the coaches as the root of the problem (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019). Consequently, it turns into a spiral of anger that nurtures new profitable business strategies and translates into hate speech.

4. Theoretical framework

As the previous chapter shows, misogyny and feminism are in a constant battle over (emotional) resources. This chapter presents current academic understandings of hate speech and networked misogyny to clarify how this conflict impacts online communication. Firstly, the challenges of finding a holistic definition of hate speech and the exclusion of gender are discussed. Afterward, the aim of hate speech is examined in the context of an in-group/out-group dynamic. To complete this notion, it ends with a focus on the uniqueness of hate speech in online environments. As a second concept, network misogyny is defined and its distinctiveness from sexism explained. Lastly, connecting it to the manosphere indicates its relevance for this study.

4.1 Hate speech

4.1.1 Defining hate speech

Hatred can be manifested in many forms. Hate crimes, terrorism, and bullying all threaten social security and democratic rights. In the digital age, the wide circulation of abusive narratives on the Internet and the amplification of cases of hate speech raise the difficulty for scholars to develop a singular, coherent definition. Although many academic papers provide expositions which at their core share a similar understanding in terms of expressions and purpose, they struggle to come to a consensus on the required characteristics of victims to speak of hate speech. To allow for a comprehensive, and ideally all-encompassing study, I follow the definition of the United Nations which construe this phenomenon as ‘any kind of communication [...] that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or group [...] based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor’ (United Nations, 2018, p. 2).

However, some scholars prefer a broader approach by perceiving hate speech as an attack on an individual without referring to any particular features. Chetty and Alathur (2018), for instance, argue that having the intent to disrespect a person or group based on their identity is sufficient to speak of hate speech. While it opens up the definition to anyone who feels insulted on the basis of who they are, it also renders hate speech as highly subjective which provides problems in a legal context and free speech (Herz & Molnar, 2012). The rapid growth of social networks online has further complicated the matter as lawmakers are unable to provide laws and regulations on time. Therefore, the platforms themselves decide which content no longer operates in the boundaries of freedom of expression (Ben-David & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016). Hence, the use of a wide-ranging definition without clear social categories may allow for more flexibility but simultaneously inherits the risk of a lack of protection.

In comparison, others study hate speech as an attack against minorities and include someone's race, ethnicity, religion, and sometimes also sexual orientation as motivation (Tsesis, 2002; Waldron, 2012). The main issue with these definitions stems from the fact that ‘minority’ literally implies ‘fewer

in numbers'; the problem with this understanding is that the vulnerability of social groups differs with context and hence the concept of minorities itself is ambiguous (Ramaga, 1992). Depending on the culture or location, some groups may be regarded as minorities in one context but form a majority in another. This suggests that minorities cannot be measured statistically but should instead be defined by the degree of discrimination, meaning its purpose and awareness of the social issue (Hacker, 1951). By this logic, dominant groups cannot be targets of hate speech because they have a sufficient support system to restate their confidence and perception (Matsuda, 1989). Due to the fact that women are often still disadvantaged based on their gender in, for example, the political or economic sphere, they are more often subjects of bias than men (Turner, 2017). If definitions of hate speech only take numeric minorities into account and consider their members as the sole victims, sexist and misogynistic cases would have to be treated separately.

This is why another group of scholars emphasizes the importance of including gender and sex as characteristics while talking about hate speech (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018; Lillian, 2007). By neglecting women as minorities, it not only creates the impression that gender equality has been achieved in every aspect of life but it also portrays the (threatened) violence and degrading language against women as insignificant (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Of course one needs to bear in mind that hate speech is not always explicit. Rather, it needs to be perceived as a continuum, ranging from subtle to blatant forms, unified by the desire to display a social group as inferior (Ruscher, 2001). Consequently, hate speech is oppressive in nature whether it's through marginalization, subordination, violence, or rendering someone powerless (Young, 1990).

4.1.2 The mechanisms of hate speech

One could perceive hate speech as only another mode of insult, however, its purposes and effects are far more complex. Its impact depends on a number of circumstances such as the people involved, the content, and the context (Chetty & Alathur, 2018). Nonetheless, it also influences people other than the victim(s). Hate speech can be a powerful tool in constructing and radicalizing an in-group/out-group dynamic. For the in-group, it serves to strengthen the unity in framing the out-group as a threat that needs to be erased (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Developed by Whillock (1995), the hate stratagem describes the ploy of the in-group; the use of deception rather than solid argumentation to lure in members. Along the process, members of the group are first supposed to understand their doing as an important contribution to the improvement of society. In the case of misogyny, women are supposedly demolishing men and take away their masculinity (Farrell et al., 2019). Thus, they endanger society as a whole due to the imbalance between genders; as a consequence, men understand themselves to be responsible for restoring it.

Secondly, boundaries between the groups are clearly defined and stereotypes are used to disparage the out-group (Whillock, 1995). It is relevant to note that hate speech and stereotypes are deeply intertwined. Stereotypic talk places others into categories, united by a perceived pattern of

motives and attitudes (Giles, Reid, & Hardwood, 2010). While it can be offensive, it is often applied as a cognitive shortcut, most of the time unconsciously, to facilitate the perception of the world and different social groups (Haas, 2012). Yet, if individuals no longer distinguish between stereotypes and facts, it becomes a potent engine in the communication of hate speech. As this research will show, feminist stereotypes of unattractive, frustrated women heighten the negative portrayal of women in the manosphere.

Another characteristic of the hate stratagem is causing lasting damage to the out-group by depicting them as a threat and isolating them (Whillock, 1995). Lastly, the in-group defeats the out-group through language. If the in-group is repeatedly confronted with an imaginary in which the out-group is not visible or is negated, for example, in fiction, cartoons, or news media, it strengthens the desire to challenge the out-group's existence (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017). As a consequence, the in-group perceives itself in a good light, while the out-group is dehumanized.

Therefore, hate speech can be interpreted as a mechanism for social groups to establish themselves as superior. Considering that members of the manosphere aim to protect the patriarchy, they represent the in-group which applies misogyny to oppress women. In order to successfully reinforce their social position as the superior gender, these men gain their strength as a collective by systematically fortifying their beliefs among each other and simultaneously render women as a peril. To be able to understand how misogynistic hate speech in the manosphere is communicated, one needs to analyze the group dynamics guiding the narrative.

Specifically, two theories from the field of sociology can assist in this process. Social identity theory proposes that one of the main reasons why people place themselves and others into categories is that their self-worth is closely tied to them. A comparison can thus lead to a more favorable impression of the self (Turner, 1985). Consequently, the protection of the own ego is a strong motivator in the application of hate speech (Ruscher, 2001). This behavior is also evident in the hierarchy of a group. If a leader addresses his or her followers, social identity theory can explain why they interpret the leader's concerns as a shared matter. Hence, it mobilizes and increases the likelihood to act as one entity (Reicher et al., 2005). For this reason, social identity theory can clarify how authors on AVfM and ROK influence the discussion in the comments because they provide explanations for the suffering of users. In turn, they are crucial for the radicalization of the manosphere as a whole.

Additionally, the self-categorization theory is the notion that individuals are simultaneously members of a group and independent beings (Turner & Reynolds, 2011). However, if a group is endangered, the identification and solidarity with the group heighten (Davies, Steele, & Markus, 2008). This is why hate speech is often used to protect the influence and power of the in-group (Ruscher, 2001). In the past, white, straight men were far more privileged in the public and private sphere than women. Yet, more recently, this form of entitlement is increasingly challenged by former minorities which creates a sense of nervousness in some men. To cope with this development, they turn to misogynistic groups to express their anger (Kimmel, 2013).

Waltman and Haas (2011) identified four different ways how groups can engage in hate speech to achieve their goals: It may be used for intimidation, the promotion of violence, shaping a collective memory among members of the in-group, and the recruitment of new members. Despite the hostile nature of hate speech, the in-group applies several practices to avoid a negative self-perception. Thus, impression management is a key part of the usage of hate speech (Ruscher, 2001). This is predominantly visible in the language and expressions of the dominant group. While describing themselves, members tend to downplay or even renounce their animosity. When confronted with the prejudice in some of the comments on AVfM, founder Paul Elam (as cited in Pry & Valiente, 2013) argued that they are simply ‘addressing a group of problems that this society ignores.’ (para. 6)

Similarly, hate groups tend to formulate their own subcultural language to foster their opinions (Warner & Hirschberg, 2012). The creation of a unique terminology can have multiple purposes. Some words are applied to members of the in-group, to strengthen the community aspect and aid in separating the group from others (Jaki et al., 2019). In a manosphere, these are often the names of subgroups such as ‘Incels’ or ‘Men Going Their Own Way’ (Cohen, 2015). Nevertheless, many terms are also used to degrade opponents and targets (Jaki et al., 2019). A man who supports feminism, for example, is referred to as ‘mangina’ (Cohen, 2015). This type of language can thrive particularly well in an environment in which there is almost no content moderation. Although some platforms and websites in the manosphere may have guidelines, users rarely get removed or banned over offensive language. As a matter of fact, aggressive and offensive, albeit irrational, reasoning can even raise the social standing of members (Jaki et al., 2019).

4.1.3 The distinctiveness of hate speech online

In the digital age, social networks and online media provide alternative means to impair the dignity of individuals. While hate speech is certainly not a new phenomenon, the technological affordances of certain platforms, such as anonymity, privacy, or interconnectivity, present offenders with new opportunities to express their views (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Extremist groups were some of the early adopters of the Internet to connect with members and spread their propaganda (Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003). Online, the need to connect with other like-minded people from all around the world can be met within a few seconds (Posner, 2002). Because users can take on any personality and name, they do not feel the need to conform to social norms anymore and are no longer concerned about the judgment of others (Wallace, 2016). In the manosphere, men almost exclusively engage with like-minded individuals online using anonymous forums and comment sections. Due to a lack of regulations and a homogenous mindset, they are free to post hostile texts and heighten each other’s internal misogyny.

Furthermore, the physical separation between individuals reinforces violent behavior as well due to missing cultural and social barriers (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2017). The interplay between the anonymity of the sender and the invisibility of the recipient is labeled by Suler (2004) as the online

disinhibition effect: Due to these circumstances, people online are far more likely to act inappropriately. Another factor that facilitates the distribution of offensive language on the Internet is its instantaneousness. Users are able to publish or respond to content within a matter of seconds. As a result, some actions are unfiltered and not thought-out (Brown, 2018). Yet, this does not apply to online hate speech in general. Hence, the quickness of the Internet should not be interpreted as an excuse for hate speech. These mechanisms provide insights into the role of technological affordances in hate speech. Due to the fact that the manosphere primarily exists online, these circumstances can explain the fast rise of hostility and misogyny, as well as other forms of discrimination. As indicated before, the lack of moral and technological boundaries can increase the radicalization of the in-group because the manosphere lacks accountability.

4.2 Networked misogyny

4.2.1 The structures of networked misogyny

Following the definition of hate speech, it seems that misogyny online is the expression of a structural problem rather than the result of the frustrations of single individuals. The lack of a proper definition and delineation of related concepts such as sexism has fostered the idea that misogyny online and offline is a rare exception and not systemic, social issue. At its core misogyny can be explained as hatred against women motivated by their gender. However, using such a wide-ranging definition does not take the context into account (Manne, 2017).

Thus, in order to understand the range and impact of misogyny online, one needs to first examine the social structures that enable such an environment. Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2015) introduced the term ‘networked misogyny’ to describe the increase in concerted resentment towards women online. On the one hand, it focuses on the technological affordances and the lack of laws and regulations that aid the spread of sexist, anti-feminist messages. On the other hand, it also incorporates the perception that misogyny is profoundly rooted in Western norms to the point that it is largely not questioned (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015). In the past, an anti-female and patriarchal narrative, ranging from social expectation in terms of appearance and attitude to the typical ‘boys will be boys’ belief, has predominantly been considered normative behavior rather than a form of discrimination (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Therefore, misogyny is a ‘threshold concept’ (Manne, 2017, p. 66) because it is only labeled as such if it is expressed in a significantly more extreme manner. While it is used to subdue women, it also grants men easier access to social and cultural resources in the form of privileges (Kahn, 2009). Still, it is worth noting that male privilege is not universally applicable. Misogyny is not just a struggle for power between genders but also intersects with other forms of privilege such as race, class, or sexuality, to name just a few. Hence, most men are not always superior in every aspect of their lives. Consequently, one needs to pay attention to local dynamics to investigate the patriarchal structures that govern misogyny (Manne, 2017). This suggests that misogyny can be interpreted as a way to control

the adherence and enforcement of male-dominated ideologies. At the same time, the manosphere can also become a toxic support system for men. This study also includes a narrative on the role of men who experienced sexual abuse due to a less privileged position. They feel excluded from #MeToo and are simultaneously instilled to believe that victimhood goes against the manosphere's definition of masculinity.

Nevertheless, it would be ignorant to assume that misogyny targets all women alike either. The degree of hostility can increase if a woman is additionally a woman of color or part of the LGBTQ+ community. In order to highlight the differences in the perception of women, Richardson-Self (2018) proposes a distinction between interdivisional and intradivisional misogynistic speech. Interdivisional misogyny universally harasses women and questions their role as a whole. The problem is that if women are portrayed as one homogenous group, misogynists would also have to despise their mothers or wives for example (Manne, 2017). Considering that this is rarely the case, the definition should primarily focus on specific target groups². Consequently, intradivisional misogyny is the more frequent type and is associated with subgroups of women who do not conform to a patriarchal society like feminists (Richardson-Self, 2018). Its aim is to showcase the natural inferiority of women in any given context (Weston-Scheuber, 2012).

Translating this understanding into the digital sphere reveals the need to view misogyny as a large network. Online and offline forms of misogyny are deeply entwined and build on each other. Just like a network, they enable individuals to communicate independently from time and space while maintaining a decentralized power structure (Castells, 2015). Additionally, different degrees of misogyny and subgroups authorize each other to the point that they are always able to adjust and expand (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Misogyny in the age of neoliberalism is deeply personal because men are under the impression that feminism has injured their social position; if women gain access to previously locked areas in society, misogynists think that they in turn lost it (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019).

Thus, contemporary misogyny and feminism are in a constant struggle for visibility. Publicly shaming and harassing women on social media creates a sense of humiliation which in turn aims to disable the feminist agency (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Yet, as this study shows, misogyny also operates outside mainstream media streams and can benefit from its invisibility because it can avoid accountability which strengthens the radical beliefs in the manosphere. Consequently, popular feminism is taking on an active role by attempting to achieve change and popular misogyny remains reactive to protect the current patriarchal state. Thus, to understand how #MeToo is discussed in the manosphere, one needs to take its networked capacities into account to dissect the ideologies and

² An additional issue that could be the consequence of treating women as one unit is the fact that it presents misogynists with a tool to justify their actions. If they do not hate all women equally, how can they be categorized as misogynists?

motivations shared online and perceive it as a direct response to popular feminism.

4.2.2 Misogyny and sexism - Two sides of the same hateful coin?

While examining hate speech against women online, misogynistic and sexist language often appear together. Despite their similarities, the concepts are not interchangeable. One could argue that they both focus on the dominance of men over women based on their gender and share a similar purpose: protection of the patriarchy (Manne, 2017). If this is the sole criterion then they would qualify as hate speech and could be seen as equal. Yet, the methods that enable these expressions differ. In order to analyze how a feminist movement like #MeToo is discussed in a male-dominated environment, it is important to make clear distinctions and highlight their different relationships with hate speech.

Unlike misogyny, sexism does not have a hostile element. While it can include stereotypes and the belittlement of women, it does not pose a violent threat. Moreover, it occurs aimlessly and without a clear structure. Hence, sexism can become a weapon for misogyny but is not identical (Richardson-Self, 2018). For example, referring to a grown woman as a 'girl' takes away her autonomy and discredits her but it is not hostile (Tirrell, 2012). Accordingly, sexism is closely linked to sexual objectification. On the one hand, it can depict women as naive and child-like, consequently ignoring her sovereignty (Manne, 2017). On the other hand, it can also be understood as nullifying a woman's own will and thus treating her like an object (Langton, 2009). Together, it creates the impression that women do not possess a will of their own because of their inferior nature. This becomes particularly important in the context of #MeToo and rape allegations. As this study will demonstrate, depriving women of their autonomy presents a justification for misogyny and sexual abuse.

Another distinction is the fact that sexism draws a comparison between genders but 'misogyny will typically differentiate between good women and bad ones, and punishes the latter' (Manne, 2017, p. 80). 'Good' women by this logic are women who conform to the patriarchy which is why the hatred in the manosphere is primarily directed at feminists and independent women. Regardless, recent research suggests that the imaginary gap between these types of women is closing and 'good' women are increasingly confronted with online harassment as well (Jane, 2017). Going back to the networking characteristics of misogyny, it appears that its main function is to ensure the preservation of discriminative social norms in an organized manner. In comparison, sexism attempts to legitimize this structure by serving as a reminder of the perceived gender differences (Manne, 2017).

4.2.3 Misogyny in the manosphere

As the concept of networked misogyny indicates, it would be careless to reduce this misogynist movement to a few extremists. Of course, the tone and the voices range from the alt-right to a more moderate middle, but its networking ability heightens recruitments and loyalty online and

offline (Banet-Weiser, 2018). At the center of this network is the manosphere (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015). Nowadays, members of this group focus on regaining their masculinity that, from their perspective, has no longer any value and is inferior in a feminist and multicultural society (Allan, 2016). Online, they can protect their male dominance, although many of them do not have a strong social or economic capital in the real world (Ging, 2019). However, describing the manosphere as a place to vent leads to an open acceptance of misogyny (Marche, 2016). Thus, they use the manosphere to express their anger against women but also attempt to fight for supposedly lost men's rights.

Even though each subgroup serves a different interest, they all found their ideology in the asserted misandry in society (Elam, 2012). A large, exploratory study by Farrell et al. (2019) on several subgroups of the manosphere on Reddit highlights the most common findings: Clear trends towards sexist, violent, racist, and homophobic language are evident across all communities. While most of the communication in the manosphere incorporates at the very least traces of sexism and misogyny, its members do not interpret their actions as offensive or harassment. As a matter of fact, they consider many of their arguments to be rooted in science and use biology and sociology to explain why women are inferior and how men can take advantage of it (often sexually) (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Hence, they frame misogyny as a rational and logical repercussion.

By focusing on smaller groups and individuals, one can gain an in-depth perspective on certain elements of networked misogyny. At the same time, it takes away the focal point from less aggressive, more subtle forms of misogyny. In turn, it strengthens its position as a social norm because it creates the impression of a few misguided individuals and does not take the larger structures behind it into account, nor can it be subject to criticism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This is why this study takes a more holistic approach by focusing on two of the best-known news websites in the online realm of male supremacy, Return of Kings and A Voice for Men, as they are critical for stirring and influencing the discussion in these groups.

5. Methodology

This research aims to explore how #MeToo is understood and discussed in the manosphere and more specifically on the two websites Return of Kings and A Voice for Men. Thus, the purpose of the chosen method in the form of thematic analysis is explained in this chapter. As a second step, the procedure of the data collection clarifies how and why certain articles and comments were selected as the sample. Next, the data analysis and the three-step coding process are described. To end the chapter, possible concerns about the validity and consistency as well as the reflexivity and ethics of the study are discussed.

5.1 Research design

To be able to investigate the perception of the movement, a qualitative approach through thematic analysis is beneficial in examining the meanings behind the communication in-depth. Qualitative research relies on the interpretation of the researcher to identify underlying patterns and connotations (Babbie, 2017). Hence, it allows for the study of implicit messages and takes into consideration the context they were created in (Schreier, 2013). A difficulty when choosing to apply qualitative methods lies in their variety and complexity (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Prior studies on the manosphere tended to use quantitative methods such as discourse analysis to highlight the subcultural and at times violent language (Farrell et al., 2019; Gotell & Dutton, 2016). As a consequence, they often did not take the context and therefore the underlying structures into account. Even though discourse analysis can also be qualitative, its main focus lies on the role of language in producing and legitimizing power relations (Van Dijk, 2011). In comparison, thematic analysis primarily investigates which patterns are common in a specific framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To explain the social impact of networked misogyny and analyze the homogeneity in its narrative, thematic analysis can generate new insights into this phenomenon. Applying a constructivist approach to secondary data of online communication can highlight the array of ideas formed in this confined network (Brennen, 2017). Consequently, qualitative research examines the worldview of individuals, in this case members of the manosphere, and stresses how meanings are created, portrayed, and circulated (Sandelowski, 2004).

In order to do so, thematic analysis is used to systematically analyze the significance of a data set in a specific context by applying codes and identifying corresponding themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, it is fitting for large data sets of text because it enables researchers to break down the information into a few core themes by following clear coding rules (Stemler, 2001). Although the coding process resembles grounded theory, thematic analysis sets itself apart by retaining theoretical flexibility which allows for inductive coding (Boeije, 2010). Moreover, the aim of traditional grounded theory is the development of a theory to clarify the dynamics of a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because it exceeds the feasibility of this project, thematic analysis presents a social constructivist, epistemological approach (Swain, 2018). Due to the limited research in the field, this

study follows the conventional approach and derives codes and themes directly from the data in an inductive manner (Mayring, 2000). For that reason, it is of utter importance to first familiarize oneself with the data set by reading through it and taking notes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After gaining a broad understanding of the material and breaking it down, as well as comparing and categorizing the data, a first set of codes is generated (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). These codes reflect the essence of each unit of segmentation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the next step, the codes are examined and revised until relationships and patterns are identified and summarized as sub-themes. These findings create dominant themes that are used to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To be able to find significant results, each code and theme needs to cover a unique aspect with clear distinctions and be revised until saturation is reached (Schreier, 2013).

5.2 Data collection

5.2.1 Units of analysis

To assess the creation of ideologies and anti-feminist beliefs, thematic analysis is applied to articles and comments. The sample is gathered from two websites in the manosphere: Return of Kings was founded in 2012 and its mission is to bring back the supposedly lost patriarchy and end the punishment of men through the control of women (Return of Kings, n.d.). In comparison, A Voice for Men is the leading website for information on the Men's Rights Movement. It describes itself as a platform to educate and support men who suffer under the pressure of misandry (A Voice for Men, n.d.).

In order to examine how #MeToo is represented on these websites, articles and the related comment sections are analyzed to gain a clear understanding of the dynamics between different actors and assess their point of view. This enables the exploration of the influence of opinion leaders in the form of authors on the beliefs of readers. Therefore, the study reflects how the framing of authors shapes the discussion between users. Considering that the movement gained popularity in October 2017, the articles cover a longer time period from October 24th, 2017, to April 7th, 2019, to account for any potential cultural shifts over time.

Although both websites feature writing guidelines, they do not have a permanent staff of writers (with the exception of the founders) which is why anyone is eligible to submit an article. However, bylines and short descriptions such as 'Joseph William is an alpha male who enjoys smart, liberated women who don't waste their precious time protesting vaginal rights and wearing clitoral binkies' (William, 2018) offer readers the opportunity to gain an understanding of the authors' perspectives.

5.2.2 Sampling strategy

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, a non-probability sampling approach was chosen

(Babbie, 2017). To find the most relevant content, purposive sampling was used. Because the aim of this study is to investigate articles and comments in relation to #MeToo, purposive sampling allows researchers to select the sample based on their own criteria (Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni, & Lehmann, 2017). This ensures that the data set only incorporates information that can provide answers to the research questions. Consequently, three sampling criteria were established to ensure a representative sample: Firstly, only articles that refer to the movement at least once in the headline and/or body of the text by using the word ‘#MeToo’ were analyzed. Because some articles on AVfM are available in multiple languages, another sampling criterion was that the sample can only consist of English-written articles. Lastly, to guarantee that the articles reflect the opinions of authors on these specific websites, they needed to have their origin on AVfM or ROK and not on any other platform. Re-posts and links to other websites are therefore disregarded.

When searching for #MeToo on ROK, one is presented with 67 articles³. But after closer inspection, only eight articles mention #MeToo in the text. Moreover, one article is not written by ROK itself but was simply copied from the news outlet Page Six. Because it was not produced by anyone associated with ROK, this article is deemed inappropriate for this research. On AVfM, #MeToo has its own category which entails nine articles³. Yet again, only five articles directly refer to #MeToo.

In regards to the comments, purposive sampling was also applied. On ROK, the seven articles have a total of 664 comments while AVfM provides 128 comments. Ergo, the initial data set consisted of 792 comments. However, the stage of familiarization revealed that the amount and variety of comments required different criteria to ensure that the comments remain suitable for the aim of this research. Hence, the sampling process also included the search for repetitive phrases and topics in relation to #MeToo and feminism. Considering that the manosphere often uses specific terminology to describe women and feminists as well as the #MeToo movement, an extensive list of keywords and synonyms was created to reduce the risk of excluding relevant aspects. Generally, the keywords fit into one of six categories aligned with the overall research purpose: women, men, feminism, #MeToo, sexual harassment, or the patriarchy (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Keywords as sampling criteria

Keywords	Alternative terminology
Woman, girl, (house-)wife, female, femininity	(Ameri-)cunt, whore, slut, bitch, witch
Man, boy, husband, male, masculinity	Guy, plebe, alpha, beta, cuck, dude
Feminism, feminist	Feminazi, social justice warrior, SJW

³ as of March 23th, 2020

#MeToo, movement	Hashtag MeToo, PoundMeToo, MeToo, (#MeToo) Wehrmacht, (#MeToo) inquisition
Sex, sexual, harassment, assault, abuse, rape, consent, allegation, victim	
Patriarchy, gynocentrism, gender	

Additionally, duplicates were dismissed as well. As a consequence, 151 comments were removed from the data set. More specifically, a majority of these comments did not meet the requirements because they simply entailed a nod of approval to the article or another comment or personal stories that were not related to the research questions. Taken together, the data set consists of 12 articles and 641 comments.

To avoid confusion, citations of articles in the results chapter align with the last name of the authors whereas the comments are connected to the username in inverted commas. A short description of each article and the cited elements can be found in Appendix A.

5.3 Data analysis

The conventional approach to thematic analysis means that themes and codes are a direct result of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This is why it is crucial to follow a clear step-by-step coding process to avoid the negligence of key themes and patterns. Broadly speaking, the development of the coding frame can be divided into four main steps: familiarization, open coding, axial coding which leads to the development of sub-themes, and selective coding which establishes the main themes (Boeije, 2010). In the following sections, each step is described in-depth to provide transparency.

5.3.1 Familiarization

Before codes can be applied to the data, researchers first need to gain a comprehensive understanding of the material. Because this study investigates articles and comments on two different websites, this stage also identifies first similarities and differences in tone and argumentation. After reading through the entire data set once, a second round was characterized by note-taking to summarize the main points of the conversation and to gather first impressions. Moreover, the length of some comments and articles suggested that the text should be segmented into paragraphs to guarantee a feasible yet thorough analysis.

5.3.2 Open coding

During open coding, the units of segmentation are broken down into short summaries, the

codes, and compared with each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly to the process of familiarization, open coding also took place over two rounds. Due to the large amount of data, the first descriptive codes remained close to the text. This was particularly important because the manosphere's own jargon can be easily overlooked if it is immediately interpreted. By changing expressions and slurs such as 'faggot' into 'homosexual' or 'feminazi' into 'feminist', the tone of the material is altered. As a consequence, the codes would lack context. For that reason, the descriptive codes incorporated the language of the users and authors. Furthermore, the descriptive codes were color-coded and divided into four groups based on their origin: articles of AVfM, articles of ROK, comments of AVfM, or comments of ROK. This facilitated a later comparison. As a last step, the codes were reviewed again to align them with the research question (McKenna, Myers, & Newman, 2017). For that reason, some codes like 'Joe Biden is a narcissist' were deleted. Accordingly, 1026 different codes were found.

To scale down the data into a manageable size, the descriptive codes were examined and translated into interpretative codes. In addition, codes with a similar meaning were grouped together. To give an example, the codes 'feminism is mass brainwashing' and 'white men are indoctrinated into a feminist system' were merged under the interpretative code 'feminist brainwashing'. Simultaneously, the data set was re-read multiple times until no new codes were generated anymore and saturation was reached. Hence, the data set consists of 249 open codes.

5.3.3 Axial coding

The aim of axial coding is to identify patterns between open codes and create sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, it was necessary to analyze the open codes again by searching for similarities which resulted in 27 mutually exclusive sub-themes. Each group was evaluated in the context of the research question to reveal interrelations among codes. Using the example above, 'feminist brainwashing' was placed under the sub-theme 'men as victims of feminism' which describes how men are supposedly targeted and oppressed. Two open codes did not fit in with any sub-theme and were marked as outliers.

5.3.4 Selective coding

Lastly, selective coding includes the comparison of all sub-themes to establish multiple overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 27 sub-themes created six main themes as displayed in Table 5.2. Therefore, the themes are a response to the research aim and guide the discussion in the results chapter. An extended version of the coding frame is available in Appendix B.

Table 5.2: Selective codes and axial codes

Selective codes	Axial codes
Portrayal of women	Nature of women Appearance of women
Role of men	Exclusion of men Men as victims of feminism Male supporters Differences between men Self-reflection
Cultural impact	Cultural differences Minorities benefit from #MeToo Hollywood
Feminist propaganda	Credibility of accusations Legal system Double standard Effects of feminism Media Superficiality of #MeToo Power struggle Political agenda Conspiracy theories Changes over time
Reestablishing the patriarchy	End the oppression Coping Protective measures Justifications for misogyny Intolerance
Rational examination	Balanced perspective Explanations for abuse

5.4 Validity and consistency

In order to strengthen the quality of this study, a critical assessment of the validity and consistency during the research process can emphasize potential implications and limitations of the outcome (Brennen, 2017). To better the validity, the combination of articles and comments proves beneficial by generating a more comprehensive overview (Stemler, 2001). Considering that the comments are a direct response to the content provided in articles, this approach enables researchers to

trace back the stimulus of the opinions of users.

Still, this study should not be interpreted as a complete examination of the ideologies circulating in the manosphere. Although ROK and AVfM are popular among members, it is likely that many users do not actively participate in the discussion. Hence, the data entails an insuperable bias as it does not account for passive consumers (Schlosser, 2005). At the same time, the anonymity of users raises the risk of an unrepresentative sample. Due to the fact that the manosphere is not part of mainstream media, one can assume that these people are intentionally on these websites and are interested in the matter. ROK also specifically discourages women and homosexuals from participating in the comments (Return of Kings, n.d.). During the coding process, special attention was paid to the mutual exclusiveness and unidimensionality of codes and themes to ensure that they accurately represent the content (Schreier, 2013). Moreover, the separation of descriptive and interpretative codes guaranteed that the analysis encompasses the context and unique expressions.

In qualitative content analyses like thematic analysis, consistency serves as an equivalent to the more common reliability criterion (Schreier, 2012). While thematic analysis depends on the subjective interpretation of the researcher, a transparent and clear report of the taken steps increases the reproducibility (Stemler, 2001). Considering that the data set is publicly available, a detailed description of the systematic process and the provision of the coding frame increase transparency. Although only one researcher conducted the study, a constant comparison in the form of multiple coding rounds and necessary revisions over time improved the stability of the coding frame (Schreier, 2012). This decision assured that all codes and themes are distinct and directed at the research aim.

5.4.1 Reflexivity and ethics

The subjective nature of qualitative research suggests that reflexivity on the role of the researcher is necessary to explain any possible biases that could influence the results (Brennen, 2017). Because the manosphere is a very distinct and detached network, I am an outsider to the community. As a consequence, there is a limited understanding of group dynamics and argumentation. However, prior research on the two websites and other forums and blogs of the manosphere increased the familiarity with unique expressions and beliefs. Because I identify as a woman and am a supporter of feminism, a lot of the hateful and offensive language is indirectly directed at me as well. To avoid any emotional investment, it is important to continuously remind oneself of the extreme and hence rare positions on ROK and AVfM. Furthermore, the inclusion of descriptive codes captured the wording of users and removed dependency on the immediate interpretation. Ergo, the analysis is built on impartial codes.

Due to the fact that this study entails online comments, it also raises the question of ethical considerations in regards to anonymity. Authors of articles actively choose to publish material that is publicly available and is supposed to be read by others. Yet, the usage of comments presents a potential ethical dilemma. While academic researchers commonly agree that public information does

not require informed consent, the study design should nevertheless protect individuals from any emotional harm (McKenna et al., 2017). On ROK and AVfM, most of the comments are written anonymously or under a pseudonym. Unlike mainstream social media, there are no profiles that could provide further information on the person. Thus, it is not necessary to anonymize the sources further.

6. Results and discussion

The application of thematic analysis to AVfM and ROK reveals six main themes surrounding the views on #MeToo and feminism in the manosphere. Firstly, the ‘portrayal of women’ is explained before analyzing the self-perception of men in ‘role of men’. Moreover, ‘cultural impact’ highlights the influence of national cultures on feminism and how men value women of different ethnicities. Fourthly, ‘feminist propaganda’ shows how #MeToo challenges the privileges of men and ‘reestablishing the patriarchy’ focuses on methods that explain and justify misogyny. Lastly, ‘rational examination’ provides insights into voices that strongly diverge from the dominant stance in the manosphere. Consequently, the following sections describe the findings of each theme in relation to hate speech and networked misogyny in-depth. Afterward, the ideologies on the two websites are compared and the influence of the articles on the comments is examined.

Before each theme is presented, a brief overview of the general structures of articles and comments on AVfM and ROK is helpful. The majority of articles are not directed at a specific recent event but are based on personal observations and opinions of the authors. Therefore, many passages are written in the first-person perspective. Furthermore, they do not aim at journalistic professionalism because they include vernacular language and jargon. Their main purpose appears to be providing explanations for the complicated situation of men. Some examine the effects of #MeToo accusations whereas others focus on the impact of feminism onto society and politics. In comparison, comments do not adhere to the same standards. Although the articles provide a framework for the comment sections, many users expand the topic and the hostility to supplementary concepts.

6.1 Portrayal of women

6.1.1 Nature of women

As the manosphere attempts to challenge the perceived misandry in Western societies (Kimmel, 2013), it is only logical that its communication entails judgments about the nature and appearance of women. Whilst women are occasionally labeled as ‘dumb’ or ‘crazy’, they are predominantly portrayed as undesirable or a threat. Many users on both ROK and AVfM render women as pedophiles who use feminism as an excuse to abuse minors as exemplified by statements like:

‘[...] the majority of sexual abuses of children, especially boys will be committed by women, which is our worlds [*sic*] most dirty of secrets. This secret is held, because the world is not yet ready to deal with the truth when it comes to the evil that women do. And by that I mean the evil that the overwhelming majority of women do.’ (‘Shrek6’, 2019a)

What makes this so compelling is the fact that it is not presented as a subjective belief but

appears to be a structural problem. Not only are the majority of women called pedophiles but society enables them to take advantage of young boys. Statistical claims to draw comparisons between male and female behavior are often incorporated in comments to stress the one-sided treatment but rarely include references or sources. Hence, one could argue that feminism is displayed as an excuse to tolerate the abuse of minors due to the uncontrolled behavior of women. For that reason, hate speech serves to highlight the endangerment of young men which facilitates the recruitment of a new generation of misogynists (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Simultaneously, women become a criminal threat. As indicated by Whillock's (1995) hate stratagem, the depiction of a social group as a potential danger to society reinforces the hatred among the in-group and increases their desire to set an end to the out-group for the improvement of society. By equating women with pedophiles, men on these websites categorize themselves as protectors. To defend society from this danger, restricting feminism through the application of misogyny and hatred is perceived as a necessary step. Therefore, misandry operates by the same logic as misogyny according to members of the manosphere; it is rooted in Western structures without being questioned.

However, this is not the only way the female nature is seen as troubling. Although the manosphere is often associated with white supremacy and the alt-right (Lees, 2016), some members place these extremist views among feminists and not their own community. It is worth noting that the intersection of race and feminism primarily occurs on ROK. Feminism in their eyes is white female nationalism. This is why they attempt to uncover its hypocritical tolerance by showing that feminists refuse to date men of color or other minorities ('Weimar Republican', 2018). In doing so, they deflect the responsibility from themselves and render feminism as deceptive. Even though the comments do not explicitly mention the lack of intersectionality in some feminist waves and movements, it connects with the prevalent criticism on #MeToo's white narrative. Despite being founded by the African-American Tarana Burke, dominant voices often belong to white women (Leung & Williams, 2019). This debate nurtures and legitimizes the grouping of feminists as white nationalists which in turn deprives them of their political agenda. Additionally, the upcoming sections will highlight that the framing of white supremacy becomes increasingly contradictory because white men are identified as the main victims of feminism while white women are the primary targets of the manosphere.

6.1.2 Appearance of women

At the same time, the appearance of feminists is largely questioned. Not only are feminists and sometimes women in general described as unattractive but it is also one of the main reasons for #MeToo:

'I have exactly zero attractive girls posting this on my news feeds. I noticed immediately it was only the ugly and fat ones posting it and I figure these girls are probably just trying to deal with rejection issues.' ('Meriwether', 2017)

“Damm, i’m so fugly nobody would ever rape me.” MOVE THE BAR! Everything is rape now!’ (‘is that it?’, 2017)

By limiting #MeToo to ‘ugly’ women, rape is associated with attractiveness. Applying the stereotypical image of a lonely, undesirable feminist degrades and ridicules the movement (Whillock, 1995). Moreover, the experiences of women who do not align with male standards become superficial or unbelievable. This further reduces the credibility and mocks victims. Additionally, the logic of these users suggests that #MeToo is a ploy of unattractive women to gain attention and make themselves more interesting. On the one hand, it creates the impression that women desire to be raped and adjust the circumstances to claim victimhood. On the other hand, it transfers the agency back to women. If women control the narrative, men cannot be inciters and do not bear any responsibility. Consequently, the female agency becomes a tool for exposing the hypocrisy among feminists; shifting the power to women renders feminism as irrelevant.

Furthermore, these examples mirror the large incel culture in the manosphere. Incels claim that feminism has made it impossible to approach women which is why they live in involuntary celibacy. Therefore, they often use hate speech and misogyny to cope with rejection (Jaki et al., 2019). Users on ROK and AVfM make the same claims about feminists, only with the difference that they employ #MeToo to manage their frustrations. Thus, it is an allegory to the rigged confidence game in the manosphere which focuses on restoring male self-esteem by fostering misogyny as a reaction to popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In this case, members of the manosphere indirectly create an equivalent to feminism. In their understanding, the absence of success can only be met with hostility towards the other gender. #MeToo then is perceived as a tool for revenge for bitter feminists.

6.2 Role of men

6.2.1 Male victims of sexual harassment

Even though #MeToo depicts itself as a movement to end sexual violence in general, it is mostly used by women to share their stories of harassment and abuse (Holden, 2019). This is why users denounce the movement for its exclusion of men. On ROK and especially AVfM, articles include the personal #MeToo experiences of men which are echoed by users in the comment sections. Yet, not all abusers are female; some comments also include man-to-man assault but unlike women, they are simply treated as misguided individuals (anonymous, 2019). At the same time, the manosphere criticizes how society, often as a reaction to feminism, still silences the sexual abuse of men:

‘I recently posted a story about how I was sexually harassed in high school by a group of other

students. None of the women on reddit care.’ (‘James Johnson’, 2017)

‘Men are not part of this conversation. Again alpha or not, straight or gay, men are victims of abuse and rape too. It isn’t a women’s problem! 1 in 4 women are raped but the numbers for men are 1 in 6, think about that for a second. When it comes to emotional abuse men score higher than women!’ (‘Magnea’, 2018)

Because their suffering is not acknowledged in popular (social) media, men turn to the manosphere to address the perceived indifference. Although many do not actively use the hashtag #MeToo, they indirectly extend the conversation on sexual harassment. Seeing that it only occurs in a male-dominated, homogeneous network, responses are not only filled with support but often include offensive generalizations about women. This is not to say that the experiences of male victims are less valuable. Despite a generally patriarchal structure, male privilege needs to be examined locally, meaning that not all men can claim superiority in every aspect of life due to the intersectionality of different forms of privileges (Manne, 2017). Thus, if feminism aims to achieve equality but disregards identical experiences of men, a backlash is a logical consequence. In line with the social identity theory, a comparison between female and male #MeToo stories can strengthen the self-identification of men as victims while women are reduced to their ignorance (Turner, 1985).

6.2.2 *Men as victims of oppression*

On ROK and AVfM, the role of men as victims is not limited to sexual harassment. Women, with the help of ‘weak’ men who surrender to feminism, dismantled men’s masculinity and created a toxic environment. In it, men predominantly consider themselves victims of female oppression: ‘This #MeToo hysteria is not any different then [*sic*] the divorce laws; it is designed to oppress men, to make married men afraid in their own marriage, to steal from men, and to enslave them.’ (‘ChristianCool’, 2018a).

According to others, the idea of male enslavement is not new but was the default with brief intermissions throughout history (‘goGalt’, 2018). The reason for the lack of awareness is feminist brainwashing. In this system, men are indoctrinated to worship women (‘A A’, 2019). This leads to a supposed exploitation of men. Whilst this can cause a large-scale imbalance of power, it is also visible in their flirting behavior. Women, who show no interest after receiving a free drink at a bar, appear to violate an unspoken agreement: ‘I’d settle for a tit grope. That’s the normal exchange rate for a couple of drinks. Cunt is worth an entire evening out [...]’ (‘John Dodds’, 2017). The mere act of (unsolicitedly) spending money on a woman is interpreted as a form of ownership. Thus, women supposedly take advantage of men by accepting free drinks but offer nothing in return. Yet, the dispute stems from a refusal to acknowledge a woman’s agency. Men feel used because their sexist view of objectification assumes that women do not have a mind of their own (Langton, 2009). By rejecting the

interest, women indicate a clear position that does not align with that of their male suitors. Hence, these men cannot exercise control which is understood as exploitation. In addition, it presents another contradiction to earlier claims in which women were granted agency to explain the manipulative control of #MeToo. It suggests that female agency is only evident in the manosphere when it is convenient to justify misogyny.

While some consider #MeToo to be a high-class, Hollywood problem, others are worried about the implications for ‘average’ men. Because they lack access to defense opportunities such as expensive lawyers or bribes, it does not matter whether they are guilty (‘Napoleon Bonaparte keeps on losing wars in Haiti’, 2018). As a result, ‘Tout’ (2018) suggests that the target selection follows a hierarchy: from men in power to regular white men, to male minorities, lesbians, and eventually children. Thus, it reconnects with the notion of women as pedophiles. Moreover, it shows that feminists eventually aim to erase all people who could pose a threat to their claim of absolute power.

The distinction can serve as an explanation as to why currently not all men are considered victims alike. In particular, white, heterosexual men see themselves as targets of modern feminism:

‘The end goal is [...] [to] eliminate the class of people that were able to build the most successful Democratic Republic in history, the European white male, and replace him with classes of people that have lower IQs and are more malleable.’ (‘Chris’, 2018)

Feminism in the greater scheme of left-wing politics represents a weapon to replace straight white men with inferior women and homosexuals. #MeToo here serves as a derailment plan. Ultimately, all men are supposed to be erased, but because white men pose the biggest threat, feminists target them first (‘Keith’, 2018). For members of the manosphere, false accusations are women’s main weapons to challenge the status quo. Similarly, it also raises the question of how they can claim to live under gynocentric structures while still considering men in charge. Therefore, it adds to their distorted worldview. Most users discuss the issues on a personal level but apply a macro-perspective to all white Western men. The felt endangerment of the community explains the need for self-preservation. Whilst these men are individuals in their own rights, the group identity requires protection which conveys itself in hate speech and misogyny (Davies, Steele, & Markus, 2008).

Simultaneously, this idea aligns with but also contradicts the claim of feminists as white nationalists. It appears that feminists in this scenario are interested in preserving white women but not white men. Assuming that white men are only the first target group, minorities should be next. Hence, the expression of white nationalists is misleading. As the following section will show, the identification of the white ethnicity as the main target is complicated further by a rejection of white women through white men.

6.3 Cultural impact

6.3.1 Cultural differences

Despite a pro-white stance in the manosphere, white women are the main subject of misogynistic and sexist insults. Only ROK debates the women in the context of their race and ethnicity. It should be noted that this primarily includes women in English-speaking countries and Western Europe but tends to exclude Eastern Europeans. In the West, ‘good’ women are rare nowadays due to feminism and the urge for sexual liberation, manifested in a supposed hook-up culture. As a consequence, white women are considered entitled, unfeminine, and overall disgusting (‘Ravi Macho’, 2018). In comparison, non-Western and particularly Asian women appear to meet their expectations:

‘Russian or Slavic women, in general, may not be feminists but that doesn’t mean she will make it easy for you to drill her in her ass and pussy on your sofa. [...] Men, like you and I, that want to fuck them all night and walk out the door while she sleeps [...]. Thai, Vietnamese, Filipino women are about all a white guy has left.’ (‘Guy’, 2018)

‘Most white guys that I see [...] are with Asians. Hitting on any white women in the ‘Western’ hemisphere while ‘white’ and ‘hetero’ gets you a pass around the Monopoly board of life again, again, and again. The type of guys I see feminists, or in general, young white women with are emaciated, emo white faggots, blacks, and fat headed, diminutive Hispanics.’ (‘FuckYouToo’, 2018)

It seems that the cultural differences are measured on two levels: For one, sexual submission is an integral factor in determining the quality of a woman. In comparison, rejection seems to play an important role as well. According to users, they are not the type that Western women seek. The subsequent frustration is expressed in offensive language towards women and other men alike. This distinction highlights the relevance of separating interdivisional from intradivisional misogyny (Richardson-Self, 2018). Cultural circumstances lead to different evaluations of women around the world which is why they cannot be grouped together. Because the manosphere operates primarily in Western societies, its members are used to the high visibility of popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Considering that many women in these countries denounce the patriarchal structures, they are perceived as ‘bad’ while non-Western women are ‘good’. Hence, the manosphere applies misogyny to punish women and make them malleable again (Manne, 2017). Yet, their personal experiences suggest that this method does not work which is why they also direct their anger at men who are more successful in their communication with women.

Although it manifests white women as the main antagonist of the manosphere, it also

underlines a broken logic. The idea of feminists as white nationalists is opposed by the alleged intent to erase white men. At the same time, these men indicate no longer any interest in Western women. Thus, their own frustrations result in claiming victimhood by emphasizing the destruction of white men. Instead of taking in a personal micro perspective, the macro-scale endangerment of the entire male ethnicity simplifies the process of rendering women a threat. Ergo, creating a collective memory signaled through united suffering presents an excuse for hate speech and misogyny (Waltman & Haas, 2011).

6.3.2 *Minorities as profiteers*

Because white men are perceived as the main targets of #MeToo, minorities in turn benefit from the social changes. Through left-wing policies and immigration laws, Muslim men become competitors for the attention of women ('slavek', 2017). In comparison, stereotypical images about their family structures are seen as one-sided because white men are not allowed to date Muslim women who instead become second wives ('the truth', 2017). The situation is further complicated by a supposed hypocrisy of feminists in regards to the violence of minorities:

'It's interesting to note that these same women will not go after violent Muslims or Africans. Because even their primitive cultural memes are far superior at meeting female needs than an all-you-can-eat consumer culture predicated upon avarice and narcissism. It's all going to hell, and the sooner the better.' ('Ex-porn junkie', 2018)

Hence, men render Muslims a threat to their white culture by referring to them as 'acid-attack Muslim[s]' ('goat34667', 2018) or terrorists.

Next to Muslims, #MeToo also provides advantages to the LGBTQ+ community. The push for political correctness generates a culture in which media are accused of running a diversity agenda. For members of the manosphere, the portrayal of men in the media as predators turns more women into lesbians ('AnotherGuy', 2018). Simultaneously, 'weak' men who fear accusations of women are predicted to become gay or transsexual as well (Roscoe, 2018). Disregarding the flawed logic in presenting sexuality as a choice, this argumentation highlights how #MeToo is placed into the greater scheme of social justice outside of feminism.

Therefore, it shows how the mentality that fosters hate speech towards women is not isolated from other social groups. Hence, white men do not only fear the oppression through women but are worried about losing their privileged position in Western societies to other minorities as well. To explain the lack of female attention in their lives, Muslim men and the LGBTQ+ community are accused of appropriating 'their' women. However, this also opposes the manosphere's stance of unattractive white women. Why are these men troubled over 'losing' women who they never desired in the first place? It suggests that from their perspective, a multicultural society can only benefit at the

expense of white men and that the hostility towards minorities goes far deeper than the competition in the dating scene.

6.4 Feminist propaganda

6.4.1 Institutional misandry

As indicated in the previous section, the credibility of accusations is largely criticized by the manosphere. According to its members, there are several factors for how women manipulate their stories:

‘Saw a girl #meetoo [*sic*]. Her reason- a guy hit on her while she was bartending. How dare that foolish, unattractive [*sic*] man disturb such a devoted working professional!? Lo, the trauma and scandal.’ (‘LadLuthor’, 2017)

‘[...] women today carry on like they've had their throat cut when some guy grabs them on the butt or does a Donald Trump and grabs them on the other side. They scream rape and demand to have the man locked up for life. My elderly mother gets angry about this. She recons the man should never go to prison for being part of the ‘wandering hands society’.’ (‘Shrek6’, 2019b)

Thus, it seems that sexual harassment is not always perceived as harmful. While rape accusations may occasionally be accepted, #MeToo entails trivial experiences that should not receive further attention. Accordingly, women should remain invisible and not publicly share their suffering⁴. The lack of empathy signals that #MeToo’s main purpose is to destroy the lives of men instead of offering a support system to victims. As a result, men can reclaim their inferior status by dismissing any responsibility and wrongdoing.

Additionally, the pattern behind the accusations is suspicious to users as well. On the one hand, most claims occur long after the events supposedly took place which can lead to misunderstandings (‘Sir Lee’, 2017). In the manosphere, this behavior is understood as a mechanism to improve the social standing rather than genuine suffering (‘Manly Man’, 2018). On the other hand, many accusations are made without any evidence. The mere word of a woman is not believable, yet a social media post is enough to ruin men (Brown, 2017). Consequently, the supposed inferiority of women underlines their incompetence and dependence deceptive practices. What the manosphere fails to acknowledge is the difficulty of providing hard evidence to prove rape accusations which is why these many women in the past did not share their experiences. These claims show how the manosphere

⁴ A comparison to male victims is provided in section 6.5.4.

disregards the patriarchy that enabled offenders to get away with harassment in the past. Instead of questioning whether social change could improve society as a whole, the fact that the past condoned this behavior is proof that #MeToo is boundless. Hence, they aim to protect the normative behavior for their benefit (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

In line with the previous section which showed that ‘good’ women are supposed to be submissive, the female agency is also used as proof for ineligibility. Because grown women can decide whether they want to have sex and are able to communicate their intentions, consent is unnecessary (William, 2018). As a consequence, this position completely disregards rape and other instances where women but also men never get the chance to disagree. Ergo, the inability to objectify women is considered a negative development and a woman’s agency is again used as an excuse. Whereas most people would characterize it as equality, the manosphere frames female confidence as a zero-sum game that occurs at the cost of men (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The visibility of #MeToo is fostered by its media appeal and coverage. Considering that the movement gained traction on Twitter, men on ROK and AVfM assume that many claims are primarily created for attention (‘Captain Morningwood’, 2017). After all, posting a tweet is easier, at least in practical terms, than a legal charge. Moreover, in the past, the allegations would have never been settled in court but through blackmailing if at all (Jones, 2017). This argument suggests that the validity of the cases is not the true issue but rather the negative image of abusers and the long-term consequences. Publicly exposing the criminal offenses and thereupon the hidden misogyny in male perpetrators takes away the power of misogyny. As long as it is invisible, it can operate without being questioned which reinforces a man’s privileged position (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

While these circumstances negatively affect the credibility of accusations, they would be meaningless if the legal system would not recognize them. Hence, users feel treated unfairly by authorities as well. The basis for it is set by the ambiguity surrounding definitions of consent and sexual harassment:

‘[...] the current definitions of rape are so broad that they essentially have no meaning. Furthermore, the definitions of rape that I have seen include “verbalizing consent” skmewhere [sic] in their definitions. This makes absolutely no fucking sense. [...] If she is “afraid” or “intimidated” to say no, thats [sic] on her and her immaturity and on her parents and society for not teaching her to stand up for herself.’ (‘DevilsAdvocate’, 2018)

For many users, the idea of verbal consent is confusing because it does not align with their previous experiences (‘TLC’, 2019). Similarly, others cannot understand where the boundaries between flirting and harassment lie (‘66Scorpio’, 2018). Due to this uncertainty, men are under the impression that most #MeToo stories are designed to control their behavior by enabling women to adjust the definitions to their own needs. The frustration stems from the fact that the system not only

supports but investigates these accusations, despite their irrelevance and vagueness. This is why they argue that the law is rigged against them. Not only are political actions such as the Violence Against Women Act considered feminist propaganda (Elam, 2019), but they are evidence of female privilege ('ChrisSolon', 2019). To underline the impact of court-enforced feminism, user 6 million? (2018) informs others over legal initiatives like that 'approaching women is considered a hate crime in England'. Instances like this show the one-sided framing common in the manosphere: The police in the UK are now recording sexual harassment in the context of hate crimes which only influences investigations but not sentencing (Brooks, 2018). From their perspective however, flirting and engaging with women becomes dangerous for men. Thus, men remain defenseless. At the same time, men criticize the inability to physically discipline their wives ('Доктор Ох боли!', 2018). Therefore, the law not only oppresses but also takes away control from men. As a consequence, it poses another contradiction. Some men worry about accusations despite being innocent while others openly admit using violence. Yet, the latter is not held accountable which suggests that the accusation itself is seen as far more problematic than the abuse.

Furthermore, the law supposedly protects female harassers. Whereas men get charged immediately, it allows women to get away with abuse ('Tomyironmane', 2019). Due to their privileged position, women then exploit the law by raping men without any consequences ('TLC', 2019). Accordingly, the problem lies in a perceived double standard in society. Users feel mistreated because from their point of view, women and men do not have to face consequences alike. Thus, they are concerned that only their behavior is judged. Unhinged prejudice leads to the condemnation of male behavior and immediate labeling as predators (Franklin, 2018). Hence, this imbalance turns the fight for equality of feminism into a farce ('hullviking75', 2019).

By attributing feminism the power of influencing legislations, the manosphere mirrors the criticism of feminists that identifies the hidden misogyny in Western social norms (Banet-Weiser, 2018). However, they distort this claim by exposing misandry instead. Rather than differentiating between privileges and disadvantages, the focus remains on a deprived role in society. This is not to say that men cannot be impaired by the law, yet, the one-sided perspective portrays female empowerment as the culprit of male injuries. Furthermore, it belittles the distress of women.

Next to law institutions, news media are also denounced for their apparent misandrist reporting:

'Much of this is a tabloid media phenomenon and sideshow. What is considered "tabloid" continues to expand into formerly non-tabloid media channels. What's most "woke" is to observe the collapse of integrity in American media, and how it stirs up the ignorant, and the jilted, and the infernally-bitter and vindictive ones, all under the auspices of false empowerment.' ('OceanSon', 2017)

In an effort to gain readers and clicks, media channels manufacture stories around #MeToo and attack male public personas without proof (Roscoe, 2018). In addition to the lack of integrity, media are also accused of framing only #MeToo's soft goals such as female empowerment but avoid the supposed truth: the destruction of men (Albrecht, 2018). Most of the media outlets that are referred to directly such as CNN, Time Magazine, and BuzzFeed are known for a liberal to left-wing political view. Thus, they become tools in #MeToo's political agenda. Particularly, the left is framed as hostile on ROK and AVfM. Its main goal is allegedly the annihilation of white men ('Wes the Great', 2017). Due to the narrative shift towards the left, the true nature of women is disguised and only the Red Pill philosophy of the manosphere allows for a neutral observation ('MCGOO', 2018).

Moreover, men are not able to articulate their opinion because politics and the media suppress their voices and essentially stripping them of their right for free speech ('the truth', 2017). This is why it is important to separate free speech from hate speech. Even though it is highly debated whether free speech should be restricted if it causes harm, the usage of pejorative and offensive language against women but also other minorities in the manosphere does qualify as hate speech (United Nations, 2018). Further, the accusation is made on a platform with little to no content moderation and affectively no limitation of free speech for its members. Therefore, it serves as an explanation for the impact of the manosphere as it provides men who feel restricted with an opportunity to voice their opinion *and* receive support.

6.4.2 The impact of #MeToo on the personal and professional life

As a result of the feminist propaganda practiced by public institutions, users feel like the dialogue surrounding #MeToo has entered a stage of insanity. Instead of understanding it as a way to open up a discussion, it supposedly created a moral panic ('Jewel Eldora', 2019). This is why many users express their fear of potential consequences. Regardless of whether they are innocent, men feel unsafe and are worried about getting accused of sexual harassment ('LibertyorDeath', 2018). For that reason, #MeToo is responsible for the destruction of the relationship between genders ('Andy Man', 2018). The fear is primarily linked to losing one's career:

'We've all seen the horror stories. Men work their entire lives to build a legacy, and then with one fell swoop, a mere allegation, with zero proof to back it up, destroys their lives.' (Anthony, 2019, para. 1)

As indicated before, most allegations are not considered truthful unless they present hard evidence. Thus, self-preservation is placed above the importance of justice for victims.

In the age of #MeToo, justice appears to be achieved at the cost of men. Heresy is enough to validate the enslavement of men and the punishment on the basis of their gender. This dynamic also extends into the culture at work and is not just reduced to a courtroom:

‘The female dominated HR departments are just hiring whatever guys they liked from their “feels” and reject any guy they deemed as introverted and shy despite clearly being suitable for the job via skills and experience. Having half of men J.O.B. (just over broke) is a vital component of this orchestrated power exchange.’ (‘Reality’, 2018)

Due to the fact that human resources departments are identified as a female domain, men are concerned about their job security. From their point of view, a mere accusation will lead to immediate unemployment without a fair discussion (Roscoe, 2018). Hence, many men avoid female co-workers or only engage with them with another person present (‘Another Guy’, 2018). Additionally, finding a job becomes more difficult because of discrimination and the preference of women without any significant skills (‘J. T. Malloy’, 2018). These findings echo general concerns about the influence of #MeToo on the work culture. Yet, these fears can also impact the role of women negatively by avoiding and excluding them from social groups (Atwater, et al., 2019). While #MeToo can improve the sense of security at work, it also endangers the female-male relationship which could potentially affect morale and cooperation.

Likewise, #MeToo does not only impact the professional life of men. They also blame the movement for affecting their dating life. Because asking for consent is a turn-off for them, it heightens the likelihood of rejection and complicates approaching women (William, 2018). Instead of questioning their behavior prior to #MeToo, men present the aim of feminism as the constraint of heterosexual sex (‘michaelmobius1’, 2018). Consequently, it reinforces the argument that limiting sexual harassment is equaled with the control of men. While legal and professional concerns are shared on both ROK and AVfM, the effects on dating are solely discussed on ROK. Therefore, it underlines how the website frames women largely in the context of ownership and objectification.

The potential restraint of men through feminism opens up a dialogue about the power struggle between genders. Subsequently, the #MeToo movement is called a ‘Wehrmacht’ or ‘inquisition’ to underline the dominance of women over men:

‘I prefer the term Me Too Inquisition: You are hereby summoned to appear before The Me Too Court of Inquisition to answer charges of sexual heresy and blasphemy. After confessing your sins you will be expected to perform acts of penance as deemed appropriate by the Me Too Panel of Inquisitors.’ (‘Estwald’, 2020)

Following the logic that women aim to take away the power from men, they should still be in charge. At the same time, men position themselves as oppressed. Similarly to the debate on female agency, male victimhood is adopted to legitimize misogyny but exposes strong contradictions.

6.4.3 Conspiracy theories

Whereas most men build their arguments on twisted perceptions of news reports, history, or personal observations, some also develop conspiracy theories to explain the success of feminism. Among these users on ROK, a small elite group of Satanists is seen as the force behind #MeToo which uses its influence and fortune for power ('Cavalier', 2018). Even though this group sacrifices some of its own members, powerful men who are faced with allegations, its aim is to remind others of their influence to avoid being overthrown ('Allister Collins', 2018). Feminists are but a tool for them:

'[...] they are being used by the devil so that they can usher a new error of one world government through [*sic*] it they they [*sic*] intend to kill every human being except they (themselves) the devil promis [*sic*] them eternal life if they do that on the other hand the devil thinks if he does that he will privent [*sic*] the coming of Jesus therefore prevent his own demise.' ('keith', 2018)

Others take it even a step further and claim that women are literally witches ('Marilyn Manson - Dogma - Portrait of an American Family', 2018). To end the destruction of men, they should be burned again ('Deplorable Neal Jensen', 2018). The argument structure and length of the comments suggest that these users are convinced of exposing the truth. In these instances, conspiracies take on a literal meaning and move beyond a metaphorical level. Through the alienation from society, the manosphere achieves a radicalization of its members. In addition, conspiracy theories function as cognitive shortcuts to explain their suffering (Haas, 2012). Because users are able to see the truth, it is their responsibility to restore the balance. Being unable to differentiate between facts and conspiracies can then contribute to the promotion of violence in the form of hate speech (Whillock, 1995). Due to the fact that feminists supposedly control public institutions, feminism is framed as a pretense for the control of men rather than a fight for equality. Thus, social issues are broken down into a single cause, in this case Satanism, to simplify the reason for their existence.

6.5 Reestablishing the patriarchy

6.5.1 Ending the oppression

To destroy the feminist agenda, a counter-revolution led by the manosphere is in the near future according to users ('John Anthony', 2019). However, to be successful, men must first unite. Despite the networking characteristic of the manosphere, users believe that currently, men are working against one another or as a loose unit at best: 'This whole neo masculine thing is a work in progress and we spend too much time ripping on each other. Meanwhile the globalists get stronger with each passing day.' ('Who Cares', 2018). Hence, it seems that the decentralized structure of the network hinders the organization of coordinated rebellion against feminism. As a consequence, it becomes

more difficult to convince men outside these groups as well. Furthermore, it underlines the importance of hate speech for the recruitment of new members as it can be an effective tool to deceive readers from a lack of logic (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Nevertheless, there is currently still a clear gap between the ideologies shared online and concrete action offline. Of course, it also inherits the risk of radicalization which can lead to attacks like the rampage of Elliot Rodger during which he killed six people over rejections from women (Nagourney et al., 2014).

To fight back against #MeToo, two extremes can be found on ROK and AVfM. On the one hand, men suggest challenging the number of false accusations:

‘What I’ve yet to hear, thus far, is a flat out “FUCK YOU I’m fighting this” from those who have been accused. I believe this is what needs to happen. [...] And I believe this will turn the tide on the false accusations, faulty accusations, and hysteria that #metoo has inflicted on men.’ (‘Reed Rothchild’, 2017)

Accordingly, ‘real’ men are not scared of feminism (‘Trollstein’, 2018); yet, not because they have done nothing wrong and do not consider women a danger, but because men are expected to resist feminism and take back control. On the other hand, many users propose more drastic measures:

‘I made a mistake and denied the accusation, what I should have done was beat her to death. If I had gone the “beating to death” route, I would still own that house, and be happily living it after paying my debt to society for her death.’ (‘john dodds’, 2018)

Punishing and killing women is for some the only way to end the perceived madness. Therefore, it is framed as the necessary evil to protect oneself. In doing so, they prevent the creation of a negative self-perception (Ruscher, 2001). It is worth noting that unlike the idea of legal measures, the proposition to physically punish or kill women over accusations can only be found on ROK which further adds to its more hostile image.

This is further legitimized by the application of right-wing politics. By identifying with their underlying beliefs, men are able to see the truth about their current position (‘-DJ-’, 2019). For some, US President Donald Trump represents a figure of hope. Considering that he praised the Red Pill in the past and was also accused of sexual harassment (Trump Jr., 2019), the manosphere is under the impression that he relates to their suffering. Thus, acting against feminism is in Trump’s own interest (‘The Lover’, 2018). Moreover, they believe he is powerful enough to ruin any opponents (‘G’, 2017).

Even though others question the influence of Trump⁵, the linkage between the manosphere and

⁵ which is further examined in section 6.6

right-wing politics is a repeated pattern throughout the articles and comments. The impact of the alt-right has been visible in instances like Gamergate before, where they stirred a debate on video journalism to disseminate hate speech online (Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016). Additionally, they frequently use social media to voice their support for Trump (Berger, 2018). Thus, the manosphere cannot only radicalize members' internal misogyny but also shape their political views. In combination with the threat of violence against women, 'America first' indirectly becomes 'men first'.

6.5.2 *Justifying misogyny*

To be able to understand how men explain their supposed superiority, it is first helpful to examine their stance on rape. Broadly, the abuse of women is seen as not as bad as society portrays it:

'[...] why is rape "bad"? [...] In our modern Western culture girls have lay counts in the double and triple digits, what does an extra dick matter [...]? Sex feels good and women who are being raped can also orgasm, implying an element of enjoyment. Finally, if women never fought back it would not be fun for the guy as many violent rapes are a power thing where the guy enjoys the woman fighting back.' ('DevilsAdvocate', 2018)

According to this user, depending on the circumstances, rape can entail enjoyable elements for the victim which is why it would be wrong to dismiss it as generally bad. Because men are allowed to objectify women, their desire to dominate them is prioritized over the will of the women. Moreover, part of the blame is also shifted onto the victim. The amount of sex partners affects the validity of the claims which indicates a partial responsibility. Furthermore, if a woman dresses seductively, she demands the attention of men (Brown, 2017). Additionally, women often fail to clearly communicate their intentions ('The one armed bandit', 2017a). Hence, women often bring it onto themselves. It seems that the interplay of a narrow definition of rape and a refusal to acknowledge it as harmful frames #MeToo as exaggerated hysteria.

The reason for these explanations lies in the fact that women are perceived as naturally inferior. This idea is founded on philosophy and biology. Schopenhauer's poem 'On Women' in which he labels women as 'sexus sequior', the inferior second sex, serves as inspiration ('Roosh Valizadeh', 2017). Due to their limited intellect, women are compared to head slaves and arguing with them would just be a waste of time ('BadMan', 2018). Therefore, users conclude that women want to be dominated which in turn justifies abuse. However, society brainwashed them into thinking it is wrong which results in protests like #MeToo ('Nonokastri', 2018). By ignoring complaints during sex, men take away the pressure of deciding and do exactly what women want them to do (William, 2018). Consequently, deductive reasoning based on scientific statements is the basis for misogyny in the manosphere. If women are 'proven' to be inferior in every aspect of life, it facilitates the rationalization of male supremacy. Ergo, users are not forced to reflect on the discussion as hate

speech because they are simply stating neutral observations.

6.5.3 Intolerance

Following the need to control women, attributing freedom and equality to minorities presents a major problem to the manosphere and in particular users on ROK:

‘All of this [*sic*] problems starts when you give women, minorities like jews, Gays & people who have mental illness [*sic*] RIGHT to have a Voice. To Speak fearly [*sic*] and shamless [*sic*] about their satanic & unormal [*sic*] desires. When you give women the right to vote, you have to give them Power, job [*sic*], Forced support of big daddy government and etc.’ (‘Pierre’, 2018)

Giving women the right to vote led to a number of mistakes, in the form of the feminist waves (‘Craig’, 2018). Thus, reestablishing the patriarchy is essential to overturn these decisions. The frustration over allowing minorities to decide quickly turns into racism. Of all leading women in the #MeToo movement, Tarana Burke is the only one insulted in the comments: ‘How dare you publish that photo of the hideous sheboon⁶ in the #MeToo march! I just vomited all over my key board.’ (‘Chris Bridges’, 2018). Comparing the African-American Burke to monkeys is echoed by other users in the comments. This practice emphasizes the interconnectedness between different types of hate speech as they rarely occur independently. The implication that everyone but white men is inferior proposes that the anger in the manosphere is linked to hurt pride. Living in a world controlled by secondary individuals produces the need to restore the white patriarchy. While the manosphere primarily targets women, other social minorities are attacked as well, especially if the individuals are female. Because sexism and misogyny are less sensible topics in society than racism, the manosphere can become a gateway to hostility. Even though users first turn to these websites for expressing their frustrations over women, hate speech can increase and extend the hatred of members. Considering that Burke is far more often insulted than other popular women of #MeToo, it further highlights the underlying structures of white supremacy in the manosphere.

6.5.4 Coping with perceived misandry

Although the manosphere is fundamentally characterized by its deep-rooted misogyny, especially for victims of abuse it also becomes a platform for mutual support. While the fact that men should share their stories is widely endorsed, AVfM places special emphasis on the process of coping. However, there are certain expectations on how men should talk about it; especially the identification

⁶ A racial slur consisting of the words ‘she’ and ‘baboon’.

as a victim is strongly rejected: ‘If I had turned myself into a victim, I would have denied my conscious decision and this would have burned the bridge to wellness. I would have never owned my decisions, or my eventual transcendence above them.’ (anonymous, 2019). Victimhood becomes toxic because it inevitably invites shame which does not align with the manosphere’s concept of manliness (‘-DJ-’, 2019). Moreover, receiving compassion from others further cements the role of a victim (‘JT Coriolis’, 2019), yet, society attempts to force men into this role to silence them (‘Andy Man’, 2018). Thus, claiming victimhood only occurs in scenarios that involve no personal shame. Men claim to be victims of feminism but refuse victimhood in sexual abuse cases. At the same time, it highlights the difficulties of toxic masculinity: While victims should not be reduced to their experiences, ignoring the trauma and trying to move on prevents a proper healing process. Additionally, this argumentation also allows for insights into the victimization of women who spoke out using #MeToo. The supposed indoctrination of victimhood suggests that women prefer to claim this status and adapt it to their own convenience, instead of focusing on moving on. Consequently, women are partly blamed for their trauma.

Even if men share their experiences on AVfM and ROK, it does not follow the same patterns as with #MeToo. For one, it should occur in private outside a courtroom without attracting a large-scale audience or political attention (anonymous, 2019). Accordingly, it contradicts the reproach that #MeToo and women more generally do not care about male experiences. They can only be acknowledged if they are visible outside the manosphere. In addition, legal changes and consequences can only ensue if the abuser is made responsible. To do so, men would have to at least partially acknowledge their role as a victim. While it does not directly explain how female harassers are legally protected, it can clarify the perceived lack of convictions. If men are expected to reject their shame by simply moving on, it is likely that many remain unreported.

In comparison, to protect themselves against accusations, many users propose avoiding women as much as possible. Despite the fact that many men on ROK and AVfM are critical of Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), who stay away from women entirely, they still endorse the idea of limited interaction, mostly for sex (‘ChristianCool’, 2018b). Because the quality of a woman is derived from her sexual submissiveness, Asian women and prostitutes can cover the need. Nevertheless, users are concerned that their future will consist of either MGTOW or living as an Incel (‘GW’, 2018). For those who want to continue to engage with women, the importance of recording and saving any evidence is stressed:

‘Even a sexual consent form would never hold up in court if the women said she felt pressured to sign the form. Don’t bother gentleman. Just record every sexual escapade [*sic*] session by audio, or video, or both, if legal in your jurisdiction. Even most other females find it hard to convict when they see a woman whom clearly wanted it and was quite literally asking for it.’ (‘The one armed bandit’, 2017b)

Evidently, #MeToo has created a sense of concern or even paranoia among some men. In an attempt to gather evidence against potential allegations, men are willing to (illegally) record their sexual encounters. This links back to the perceived injustice of a woman's legal credibility even though women are rarely considered trustworthy. Whether possible accusations are true or not, men are also discouraged from apologizing. Because they will inevitably lead to discredit, an apology only reassures women to continue to shame the man ('Rob', 2018). In the interest of reestablishing the patriarchy, men should never give in to feminism ('Phylum', 2018).

6.6 Balanced examination

Compared to the predominantly misogynist narrative on AVfM and ROK, a small group of users offer an alternative view on some of the themes discussed above. Therefore, this section serves to provide a more nuanced perspective. However, because these ideas are only expressed by a minority of users, they cannot account for a balanced discussion. Whereas most suffer from perceived oppression through feminism, some think in more relative terms:

'Gynocentrism is a tendency [...] but it's not an invariable rule. [...] Gynocentrism is used to promote certain ends [...] because it's of service to certain parts of the status quo. But it's by no means monolithic. If it were, none of us would be fighting it.' ('Robert Franklin', 2019b)

Although gynocentrism is depicted as a prevalent force, it does not have the ascribed reach. Instead, the majority of women holds each other accountable and do not believe in radical feminism ('Robert Franklin', 2019a). The main point of criticism by other users with this statement is the low quantity of men who are willing to fight against it, yet the overall notion is received optimistically ('Kronk', 2019).

Furthermore, 'Prince' (2018) points out that 'men with problems with #MeToo are just rapey dudes.' Thus, men who cannot tell the difference between rape and consensual sex should avoid women in general. Likewise, users who are concerned about #MeToo's effects on the dating life and a potential lack of hook-ups are criticized as well. Men who measure the quality of their lives through superficial sex are deemed irrelevant in the manosphere ('Windmillsofhis mind', 2018). At the same time, others try to explain the reasons for sexual abuse with a lack of communication and sex education ('Magnea', 2018). Hence, men are responsible for ignoring clear signals and excusing it with their sexual drives. Alternatively, the probability of becoming a rapist can also be related to the upbringing. If other family members abused the man in the past, he is considered more likely to mirror this behavior as an adult (Elam, 2019). While this provides a more rational justification than the natural inferiority of women, it still deflects some agency onto the circumstances.

As indicated in section 6.5.1, Donald Trump represents a prospect for ending the feminist

narrative. Still, his role is also challenged by others:

‘[Trump is] using humor to cover up his obvious lust for sexual violence and power after his defeated and humiliating attempt at a pick up. [...] “Grab em By The Pussy” isn’t a Oo-Rah! for men. Its [*sic*] him lashing out like a little pathetic incel beta because a woman rejected his sexual advances. [...] The only reason Trump isn’t a serial killer of women is because he has money to grant him actress whatever porn actresses/model/ goverment [*sic*] hooker he wants.’ (‘Rob’, 2018)

Because Trump is a rich baby boomer, he does not understand the problems of the manosphere. For his relationship with his daughters in particular, he is condemned as a devotee to women (‘Wes the Great’, 2018). Even though most men still perceive right-wing politics to be the solution, Trump remains a controversial figure in the manosphere. Some praise him for his directness whereas others consider him pathetic.

6.7 Discussion on the discrepancy between AVfM and ROK

To investigate the homogeneity of the manosphere, one sub-question of this research concerns potential differences in the perception of MRAs on AVfM compared to Pick-up artists on ROK. The analysis reveals that there is a difference in focus and tone. AVfM ostensibly aims to create a support system for men. Sub-themes like the ‘exclusion of men’ and a ‘double standard’ in society are far more prominent than open aggression against women and other minorities. In particular, this is characterized by an extensive exchange of personal harassment experiences caused by male and female abusers alike. Part of this dialogue is the idea of healing and rejection of a victim status. In this context, the majority of users engage with each other in a respectful manner, and disagreements are solved through argumentation rather than hostility. Yet, a more in-depth examination reveals that the support of men often occurs by bringing women down in return. While they refuse to label themselves as victims of harassment, men simultaneously claim victimhood in a feminist society. At the same time, women are accused of using their suffering for personal gain. Thus, shame becomes the decisive factor. Men do not want to feel inferior whereas women take advantage of it. If shame is not involved, victimhood is a driving force in starting a counter-revolution against gynocentrism.

This is why most arguments for the pain of men lead to a comparison between genders. Every improvement that is made to achieve equality arises at the expense of men. However, the misogyny and hostility are often hidden in a supposed lack of protection and defense. Blunt insults against women and minorities are the exception on AVfM. Thus, by framing the oppression of men as a social issue, the argumentation can at first glance appear valid and convincing. Hence, it underlines the potential dangers on the website: The tone enables fast and simple recruitment of new members because AVfM frames its purpose as a contribution to society. Women need to be controlled because

otherwise, the Western world will end in chaos. Therefore, men who are frustrated can find support and explanations for their own situation even though they are grounded in a twisted perception.

In comparison, on ROK the application of hate speech is fairly obvious. Women are referred to as ‘cunts’ or ‘whores’ and the website entails homophobic and racial slurs. Although it is often employed to degrade outsiders, users who provide alternative perspectives are called ‘faggots’, too. These disagreements frequently regard the role of men. Less common are different perceptions of the value of women. ‘Weak’ men, who are not part of the alpha-culture that Pick-up artists promote, are attacked as well. Consequently, ROK presents more radical views. On AVfM women were mostly perceived as a peril, yet on ROK they are further reduced to their alleged inferior status. Feminism and #MeToo are not just issues that need to be resolved but part of an ongoing war. Because women are seen as inferior, definitions of rape and sexual harassment are designed to harm men by taking away their rightful authority. Furthermore, the incoherent and attention-seeking nature of women is the reason for most rape charges as women fail to communicate their hidden desire to be dominated. Where AVfM attempts to challenge feminism on an institutional level, (threatening with) physical violence against women and other illegal practices become legitimate tools on ROK to change the perceived misandrist culture.

Moreover, the link between the manosphere and white supremacy is also evident on ROK. The website shows a shift from the endangered existence of men to Western culture. Themes like ‘cultural impact’ and sub-themes focused on minorities appear almost exclusively on ROK. White men are framed as the main targets of feminism and a multicultural society supported by left-wing politics. In spite of this belief, white women are not included in the process of victimization. Instead, they are accused of aiming to destroy white men to claim their power for themselves. Due to the fact that white women in Western countries have often achieved greater independence than others, they generally have greater control over their dating life and career. Fostered by neoliberal structures, the increase of confidence in women generates a loss on the side of men. This is why the inability to control white women is used to illustrate shortcomings in the professional and personal lives of men. Hate speech on ROK then serves to radicalize members to be able to subordinate and command women and to justify the privileges of white men.

6.8 Differences between articles and comments

The second sub-question of this research concerns the differences in the framing of articles compared to discussions in the comments sections. In line with the analysis, the articles provide the basis for users. For this reason, the six main themes appear in articles and comments alike. However, in the comments, much information is placed into a more extreme and hostile context, meaning users are more radical in their beliefs. Articles on AVfM and ROK show many similarities in their focus and structure: News elements in relation to #MeToo and feminism are taken as the framework and are combined with personal opinions. These opinions are primarily speculations on the nature of women

and the effects of feminism. By disguising them as threats through the use of polemic, they become compelling arguments for the demise of men:

‘[...] a lot of these harassment accusers [...] aren’t looking for justice. They don’t want their harassers tried in a court of law for their criminal misdeeds; they want free and easy money. [...] Why else would anyone drudge up alleged sexual misadventures that took place in the late 1970s, or suddenly spill the beans about gross harassment incidents after 20 years of working with the alleged pervert? The statutes of limitation have long since passed, and the only three things that can come out of such accusations are public sympathy [...], the public shaming of their alleged abusers [...], and out of court pocket change.’ (Jones, 2017, para. 9)

Additionally, some claims are grounded in economics and sociology which further cements their perceived quality:

‘Trump’s appeal to the free market and private capital [...] is more than just a refusal to push the envelope on welfare policies which enable sexual liberation—it is an exposition of the gulf between what is conventionally true and what is actually true about modern female sexual opportunism.’ (Leonid, 2018a, para. 16)

In this manner, #MeToo is presented as a tool for power which employs lies to create a tyranny. Thus, articles are created as a warning and call to action for the manosphere. Considering that authors appear to find answers to their suffering, users in the comments interpret these findings as explanations for their own situations. Hence, many use the section to share their own experiences of oppression to confirm the validity of the articles. Furthermore, statistical claims without evidence or twisted reports on news articles create the impression of a one-sided discussion. Yet, the comments are also far more extreme and hostile which is particularly evident in themes surrounding racism and ethical minorities. It suggests that the perception of group leaders, here authors, is transferred onto users who not only support the concept of exclusion but radicalize the matter (Reicher et al., 2005). The anonymity of users facilitates the usage of hate speech and misogyny because unlike the authors, they do not have to provide any information about themselves (Wallace, 2016). This is why users also radicalize each other: Replies to comments often generalize statements further and discredit all women alike; ergo, turning intradivisional into interdivisional misogyny (Richardson-Self, 2018).

6.9 Summary

As the analysis shows, misogyny and hate speech on ROK and AVfM stem from a perceived loss of control and power. Due to the fact that #MeToo allowed mostly female victims of sexual harassment to speak out against patriarchal structures that enabled and tolerated these practices, white

men in particular are concerned about their privileged position. However, for them, feminism is not about achieving equality but about the oppression of men. Therefore, women are portrayed as threats to society by calling them ‘pedophiles’ or ‘white nationalists’. Because many accusations lack evidence and credibility, #MeToo’s true aim is financial gain and the replacement of men in power with women. Legal and public institutions also support this behavior through the application of ambiguous definitions of sexual abuse and the protection of female harassers. Moreover, minorities supposedly benefit from #MeToo as it pushes a multicultural, leftist agenda.

To justify the misogynist stance, women are considered naturally inferior. For members of the manosphere, rape charges are rarely truthful because women desire to be dominated, yet society brainwashes them into thinking it is wrong. Current trends towards popular feminism foster the confidence of white women which is why Asians are seen as the only ones who are still willing to be submissive. Hence, the manosphere sees itself responsible for reestablishing the patriarchy in the West. In order to do so, right-wing politics are considered potential solutions to punish women for their ‘lies’. As a result of the #MeToo hysteria, recording encounters with women and avoiding them are identified as promising defense mechanisms. Overall, feminism is rendered as a hidden force to destroy men and strip them of their masculinity. Misogyny then becomes a necessary tool to prevent the annihilation of the Western world and to uphold the superior value of white men.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Research context

Hate speech online in itself is no new phenomenon. Ever since its early days, the web facilitated the communication and connectivity of extremist groups which identified alternative means to spread their ideologies and recruit members (Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003). In a similar way, misogyny has been a profound element in social systems and norms for centuries (Aron, 2019). Consequently, tolerance or at times ignorance enables offenders to continue to engage in hostile practices and profit from their privileged positions (Kahn, 2009). With the rise of popular feminism and #MeToo, feminist issues have regained heightened visibility in society, the media, and marketing driven by neoliberal forces (Banet-Weiser, 2018). At the same time, their prevalence also fosters counter-movements primarily consisting of men who believe that these matters are designed to harm men in a misandrist culture (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). In the manosphere, these men created a network of different platforms with the aim to end the oppression by restoring the patriarchy (Allan, 2016).

Thus, to shed light on this form of networked misogyny and understand the dynamics in the manosphere, this research investigates hate speech directed at women in the context of #MeToo. To do so, the sample consists of articles and comments on the two websites A Voice for Men and Return of Kings. Hence, the study is guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

RQ: How is the #MeToo debate framed and discussed in the manosphere?

SQ1: Is there a difference in the perception of #MeToo between Pick-up artists on ROK and members of the Men's Rights Movement on AVfM?

SQ2: Does the use of hate speech and misogyny differ between articles and comments?

Using qualitative thematic analysis allows for a comprehensive study of dominant patterns and recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, it underlines the beliefs that drive networked misogyny and its connection to hate speech against women. After applying a three-step coding process to 12 articles and 641 comments on #MeToo, six main themes were found. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the manosphere's twisted perception on gender differences in Western societies. Moreover, the study highlights justifications for misogyny and the use of hate speech against women and feminists. The combination of hate speech and networked misogyny shows how underlying structures serve to generate long-term changes by excluding and subduing women. Lastly, it provides insights into the practices that can protect and strengthen the privileges of primarily white, heterosexual men.

7.2 Answer to the research question

In the manosphere, #MeToo takes on a distorted, twisted character. Many mechanisms that are usually attributed to networked misogyny are mirrored on AVfM and ROK but are translated into networked misandry. While feminists still debate the impact of online activism online, men on these websites consider it a threat. Because it endangers children, white men, and Western cultures, it is their responsibility to restore order by controlling and punishing women. To do so, they feel the need to fight accusations of sexual harassment or rape, regardless of their validity. Otherwise, (white) women will supposedly continue to destroy their private and professional lives to claim power. Thus, the neoliberal focus on self-esteem in the media landscape creates a culture of confident women who reject the idea of being subservient to men. In turn, male privileges are reduced and the control of women hindered. Instead of interpreting it as a step towards equality, members of the manosphere consider confidence and power resources that are hoarded at their expense.

Furthermore, #MeToo publicizes matters that have previously not been acknowledged or openly discussed. Whereas the manosphere renders it a cry for attention, the hatred stems from the fact that it openly challenges patriarchal dynamics. Whether it is the company culture or a flirt in a bar, men are held accountable for their actions. Hence, the apparent state of fear in the manosphere can be interpreted as proof for the social change of #MeToo. Even though it should not be the aim to cause paranoia among men, it forces them to reconsider their engagements with women.

Similarly to networked misogyny, members of the manosphere also criticize the hidden misandry in public initiations and social norms. Considering that many accusations lack hard evidence, they are understood as means for the oppression of men. Due to a perceived double standard between men and women resulting from feminist brainwashing, women lack boundaries. Accordingly, they deem the control of men to be the true intention behind laws and regulations aiming for fairness and security. Consequently, the manosphere equalizes the protection of women with an attack on men. Seeing that the manosphere is convinced that women are the authoritative force, they cannot be victims but manipulate the narrative for their own financial and social gain.

In addition, the concept of rape remains a grey area in the manosphere. To deflect any responsibility and avoid a negative self-perception, men blame ambiguous definitions and the behavior of women for the rise in allegations. Because women today have a sufficient agency, they should be able to clearly communicate their intentions. If they do not, women get to only condemn themselves. Female empowerment in popular feminism therefore cannot coexist with female victimhood. The grievance over rape charges also relates back to the desired dynamic between men and women. According to users, a woman's inferior nature exposes a hidden wish of being dominated. As a consequence, she secretly wants to be controlled and objectified. Thus, rape is framed as fictional because it cannot occur against her will. At the same time, rape is valid in regards to men. #MeToo's supposed exclusion of male victims exposes the hypocrisy of feminists. Yet, being a victim goes against the manosphere's perception of masculinity which is why they reject this label. Nevertheless,

to manifest #MeToo's long-term success, this study underlines the need for a gender-inclusive perspective on victimization.

Further, the supposedly rightful dominance of men explains why they attempt to overthrow a structure in which women are seen as equal or superior; it goes against their understanding of the natural order. Having to adjust to the demands of inferior women does not align with their worldview. To justify misogyny, men attribute agency to women. Hence, women are portrayed as acting against their instincts; despite being inferior, they attempt to take control through the use of misandry. This is why men must challenge these developments to reinstate balance. In regards to female agency, the manosphere is filled with contradictions. Women are awarded agency to underline the hidden misandry but simultaneously it is erased in the context of flirting and sexual encounters. Moreover, #MeToo is framed as a tool for women to claim the power of men. Following this logic, men are currently still in control which raises the question of how they can be oppressed at the same time. Thus, the application of hate speech and misogyny is a defense mechanism to protect the patriarchy rather than an attempt to reclaim it. Because equality and fairness can only come into full effect if privileges of white, heterosexual men are diminished, the push for change becomes personal. Yet, by taking on the victim role and connect with like-minded individuals, men avoid the recognition of their advantaged position. In turn, it serves as an excuse for misogyny.

As previously stated, the manosphere is often associated with white supremacy (Lewis, 2019). Although the findings confirm this notion, another dynamic is visible as well; feminist networks are accused of white nationalism by the very same men who are concerned over the destruction of white men. In the context of feminism, it seemingly only benefits white women. Because the manosphere identifies them as a danger, their understanding of supremacy is also only applied to men. Therefore, white supremacy is divided by gender and no longer holistic for one race.

It suggests that the visibility and institutional effects of #MeToo encourage the manosphere to portray it as a form of networked misandry. #MeToo is depicted as a network designed to take down men. Just like networked misogyny, its connections are evident for the manosphere in institutions as well as on a personal level. Because men feel like they are oppressed by these structures, a counter-movement is necessary to end gynocentrism. Hate speech serves to render feminists, who support the movement, a threat. Contextualizing the first sub-question concerning a comparison of AVfM and ROK shows why it is important to see hate speech as a continuum instead of explicit hostility (Ruscher, 2001). Although AVfM is more moderate in tone, it ultimately fosters the same ideology as ROK. For a young white man whose confidence suffers under neoliberalism because he does not achieve the promised success, feminists become scapegoats for his personal frustrations. In line with the second sub-question, articles inherit convincing solutions that receive legitimacy in the comments. For this reason, AVfM's emphasis on being a support system can present an opportunity to share these issues with others and ROK provides justifications for open misogyny. Therefore, hate speech on AVfM is appealing for recruitment while ROK increases the group identity and collective memory

(Waltman & Haas, 2011). Together, they allow for a fluid radicalization and progress within the same macro network.

7.3 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study expand the current understanding of networked misogyny and hate speech in an understudied context. Because ‘the manosphere’ is an umbrella term for a vast amount of websites, blogs, and subgroups, the concept of a network underlines the connectivity and shared hostility against women (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Yet, it also includes the potential risk of treating members as a faceless crowd. Thus, the in-depth analysis of two different websites suggests that the manosphere needs to be understood as an interconnected spectrum of misogyny. Moreover, it also expands into other forms of hate speech like homophobia and racism. Together, hate speech and networked misogyny present a promising framework for academic research. Due to the fact that hate speech is directed at the identity of a person (United Nations, 2018), it stems from structural and societal dynamics. Interpreting it as larger networks of discrimination and aggression generates a systemic and organized perspective on online hatred.

This is why the manosphere should not be treated as an anti-feminist vacuum. Instead, hate speech and misogyny occur on multiple levels and spread into other areas as well. Studying it as a confined network would neglect its nuances and reach. While the concept of networked misogyny remains valid when taking the institutional and personal capacities into consideration, the manosphere itself appears to be a cluster of confined networks. Even though they are united by the hostility against women, each community has its own purpose. As the study shows, MRAs on AVfM do not always share the sentiments of PUAs on ROK. The idea of the manosphere as one large network facilitates the grouping of online misogyny but its members often do not identify with each other. Because the manosphere is connected to several extremist groups in its ideologies, often labeled as the alt-right, and simultaneously inherits multiple subgroups, context is a key component in determining its impact. Hence, to speak of a network, one needs to specify on which dimension the hate speech occurs: among right extremists, the manosphere, a specific subgroup, or even a platform. Placing hate speech in a graduated yet overlapping set of networks, united as a misogynist cluster, opens up the possibility of a more precise understanding of types of hostility women encounter online and offline.

In addition, outside forces can explain the development of its ideologies as well. By situating this study in the greater scheme of neoliberalism, the persistence on individual empowerment in media and marketing can serve as an explanation for the rupture between genders (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The visibility of popular feminism is not just problematic without social change but it actively cultivates a counter-culture filled with insecurities driven by the neoliberal concepts of empowerment and individualism. Aligning it with social identity theory explains the need to use hate speech for the conservation of the male ego (Ruscher, 2001): Holding feminism accountable for the lack of confidence allows for the evasion of responsibility. Blaming women for personal failure creates a

more favorable self-impression to justify their own aggression. In a neoliberal society, the focus on the individual fosters the belief that no gender can gain access to opportunities without generating a loss on the other side.

At the same time, one could argue that the misogyny in the manosphere remains invisible to mainstream audiences. Although the manosphere entails similar entrepreneurial and commercialized traits as popular feminism, they operate primarily outside the public sphere. Without visibility, it cannot disable the feminist agenda (Banet-Weiser, 2018). However, the findings confirm that it also impacts the actions offline. While most men may not choose to run amok like Elliot Rodger in 2014, #MeToo's influence on co-worker dynamics, the recording of sexual encounters, and the ignorance of consent definitions are just a few examples of how men adjust their behavior for self-protection rather than respect. Furthermore, the results also support the notion of intradivisional misogyny (Richardson-Self, 2018). Even among 'bad' women, the manosphere still separates between white women, women of color, and feminists. Each subgroup is targeted differently. Therefore, there is not one kind of misogyny but the circumstances dictate its purpose.

Consequently, this study strengthens the argument for the inclusion of gender in the definition of hate speech (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Despite the fact that women are not a minority numerically, the manosphere applies hostile language with the clear aim to degrade women. Additionally, Whillock's (1995) hate stratagem applies to the communication on ROK and AVfM: Twisted perceptions render women a threat to the Western world which is why the manosphere identifies its doing as a contribution to society. Stereotypes towards feminists and Tarana Burke further dehumanize them. Subsequently, hate speech here supports the promotion of violence, recruitment, and the formation of a collective memory (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Solely the criterion of intimidation is missing which can be explained through the male-exclusive characteristics of these platforms.

Still, the findings also contain a more refined implication of hate speech: self-victimization. Although it has already been established that the out-group is portrayed as a threat to society (Whillock, 1995), the definition of the in-group changes as well. Hate speech can be employed to emphasize the inferiority and helplessness of the in-group⁷. Thus, hate speech does not only attack others but serves to defend. Framing oneself as a victim provides legitimization for hostility. In a network, hate speech can generate (emotional) support which increases the sense of unity. Shifting the blame simultaneously becomes the motivation and intention of hate speech.

⁷ It is important to note in this study that this definition is not directed at victims of sexual abuse. Men who use the manosphere to share their experiences are not equalized with men who regard themselves as victims of feminism.

7.4 Future research

This study is subject to some limitations. Considering that the manosphere encompasses a large number of platforms and subgroups, the findings cannot be generalized to an entire network but rather to a sub-network in a larger cluster. For members who identify as MRAs or PUAs, AVfM and ROK are popular sources of information which suggests that the results are representative for these subgroups. In addition, the focus lies on articles and comments in relation to #MeToo which is why the themes partly surround sexual harassment and rape. Although the movement can be interpreted as a trope for contemporary feminism, misogyny is constituted by a wide array of dimensions. Accordingly, it is likely that the findings do not cover all beliefs that foster misogyny in the manosphere. Further, the research was conducted from an outsider perspective which is why it is possible that nuances and unique structures in the argumentation were unconsciously omitted during the analysis. Because the codes were assigned by only one researcher, they lack inter-rater reliability. Despite a transparent research process, subjectivity influences the outcome to a degree.

To counter these limitations, future research can contribute to a better understanding of the manosphere. Exploring the discussion on #MeToo in the context of hate speech on other websites further can generate a more holistic and comparable portrayal of all subgroups. Moreover, misogyny and hate speech do not only occur within extremist groups. An analysis of the communication of members of the manosphere on popular social media platforms can provide insights into their behavior outside their territory. In particular, the usage of hate speech represents a promising framework as it aims to oppress individuals based on their identity (Young, 1990). Yet, perceiving it as a continuum implies that the hostility may vary if the in-group stays among itself instead of engaging directly with the out-group. Therefore, an analysis of popular social media such as Twitter can create indicators of the active threat that the manosphere poses. Lastly, the concept of networked misogyny can be expanded further through the application of network science to identify the degree of density of actors as well as the manosphere's overall reach. As some members already suggested themselves, the manosphere is a loose network at best that nevertheless carries a potentially dangerous sentiment. Hence, network science can illustrate the shared connections between members beyond a similar ideology which can lead to conclusions on the organizational ability of the manosphere. If subgroups fail to communicate with each other, the idea of a manosphere may need to be revisited.

Overall, this study makes the case for a more nuanced definition of the manosphere as a cluster rather than a single network. By dissecting the variety of networked misogyny and comparing it with its mirrored form of networked misandry, future studies can advance the perception of hate speech against women as a social and institutional problem without dismissing it as a rare occurrence. Thus, misogyny online cannot be traced back to one entity in the form of *the* manosphere but needs to be examined individually as well as collectively.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Data set and referenced material

Table A1: Articles of A Voice for Men and Return of Kings

Citation	Description
Albrecht, B. (2018, July 25). Chad actor announces he's scared to hit on girls because of #MeToo, gets immediately attacked [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/183410/chad-actor-announces-hes-scared-to-hit-on-girls-because-of-metoo-gets-immediately-attacked	After actor Henry Cavill criticized #MeToo for creating paranoia among some men, the article discusses the backlash that followed.
anonymous. (2019, February 26). Terry Crews [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://avoiceformen.com/metoo/terry-crews/	The author shares his personal experiences with sexual harassment and argues that the claims of actor Terry Crews are not comparable to other accusations.
Anthony, J. (2019, December 11). Tony Robbins stands up to #MeToo movement, after BuzzFeed publishes false allegations [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://avoiceformen.com/featured/tony-robbins-stands-up-to-metoo-movement-after-buzzfeed-publishes-false-allegations/	The article focuses on an allegedly incorrect story by BuzzFeed which accuses Tony Robbins of harassment who then fought back against the #MeToo movement.
Brockway, R. (2019, February 8). Just in - Elmo caught up in #MeToo [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://avoiceformen.com/featured/just-in-elmo-caught-up-in-metoo/	It provides a satirical view on the supposed superficiality of many #MeToo accusations.
Brown, D. (2017, October 24). The #MeToo campaign compares not replying to a girl's texts with raping her [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/132434/th	The author argues that #MeToo enables women to accuse men of anything but men do not have the same privilege.

e-metoo-campaign-compares-not-replying-to-a-girls-texts-with-raping-her	
Elam, P. (2019, April 7). Creepy uncle Joe vs the uncomfortable women of #MeToo [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://avoiceformen.com/featured/creepy-uncle-joe-vs-the-uncomfortable-women-of-metoo/	Elam examines harassment claims against Joe Biden.
Franklin, R. (2018, December 8). #MeToo, but not #HerToo [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://avoiceformen.com/featured/metoo-but-not-hertoo/	According to the article, women are not held accountable in the same way as men.
Jones, J. (2017, December 21). The #MeToo sexual harassment hysteria is a pretext for women to take power and money from men [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/143863/the-metoo-sexual-harassment-hysteria-is-a-pretext-for-women-to-take-power-and-money-from-men	#MeToo is framed as a tool to exploit men financially and render them powerless.
Leonid, C. (2018a, January 4). The mainstream embrace of #MeToo puts us one step closer towards the enslavement of men. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/139489/the-mainstream-embrace-of-metoo-puts-us-one-step-closer-towards-the-enslavement-of-men	The author suggests that abuse claims are lies and serve to make men financially dependent on the state.
Leonid, C. (2018b, March 19). English actor who bent over backwards for the #MeToo movement gets cucked by wife [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/160573/english-actor-who-bent-over-backwards-for-the-metoo-movement-gets-cucked-by-his-wife	After a news story broke that Collin Firth's wife cheated on him, the article ridicules his support for #MeToo.

Roscoe, M. (2018, June 26). #MeToo has gone too far [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/142179/metoo-has-gone-too-far	The article describes how #MeToo turned into hysteria, aimed to shame and control men.
William, J. (2018, March 27). The #MeToo movement has ruined my sex life [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.returnofkings.com/162403/the-metoo-movement-has-ruined-my-sex-life	Because of #MeToo's emphasis on consent, the author's personal sex life suffers.

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Appendix B

Coding frame

Table B1: Coding frame created through qualitative thematic analysis

Selective codes	Axial codes	Open codes
Portrayal of women	Nature of women	Women are pedophiles
		Women are impossible to please
		Women can't lead
		Women are childish
		Women need male attention
		Female reasons for sex
		Irredeemable
		Women are complex
		Women are whores
		Women give STDs
		Housewives
		Single moms are broken
		Models are crazier
		Female standards
		Women are mentally ill
		Women worship celebrities
		Women are lazy
		Women are dumb
		Feminists are white nationalists
		Prostitutes need no skills
	Women are disorder	
	Women play games	
	Appearance of women	Women are ugly
#MeToo is used by ugly women		
Attractiveness scale of women		
Ugly women annoy men		
Prostitutes are unattractive		
Role of men	Exclusion of men	Men don't get to share stories
		Men stayed silent
		Personal harassment stories

	Male rape victims
Men as victims of feminism	Men are oppressed by women
	Feminist brainwashing
	Framing of toxic masculinity
	Gentlemen are framed as chauvinists
	Coordinated attack
	Women exploit men for drinks
	Only white men are victims
	Male virgins are target
	Men against men
	Gay men targets
	Jewish victims of #MeToo
	Women want to see men suffer
	Feminists want to kill men
	Marriage is bad for men
	Tolerate cheating
Cost analysis	
Male supporters	Male supporters don't deserve saving
	Nature of male feminists
Differences between men	Men can be good and bad
	Rich men get more women
	Penis size
	Being rich/famous is a mistake
	Average men
	Male dominance
	Attractive men benefit
Self-reflection	Interest is flattering
	Men had sufficient agency during abuse
	Men don't understand larger implications
	False expectations
	ROK website
	Men are in control
	#MeToo doesn't influence sex life
	Getting older

		<p>Only weak men complain</p> <p>Prison leads to mental health issues</p> <p>Men overestimate themselves</p> <p>Empathy for cheated on man</p> <p>Any man can get cheated on</p> <p>Critic MGTOW</p>
Cultural impact	Cultural differences	White women are awful
		Polish women
		Arabian women
		Slavic men
		Russians are feminists
		Asian women
		#MeToo not in Southern Europe
		Feminism spreads to Islam
		Italy
	Minorities benefit from #MeToo	Women want Muslim men
		Jews support feminism
		Immigration policies
		LGBTQ+ benefits from #MeToo
	Hollywood	Hypocrisy of Hollywood
		Women in Hollywood are prostitutes
Celebrities are privileged		
Feminist propaganda	Credibility of accusations	Harassment isn't always harmful
		Feminists adjust definitions to their own needs
		Feminists lack integrity
		Personal story of false accusations
		Accusations occur only much later
		Accusations are based on feelings
		Accusations lack evidence
		Women aren't trustworthy
		Accusations are created for attention
		Accuser lack self-reflection
		Don't believe women

	Amount of untrue accusations
	Women can decide
Legal system	Definitions are ambiguous
	Inequality of men
	Law protects female harassers
	Law is rigged against men
	Illegal to discipline wife
	Refusal to help female victims
Double standard	Only male behavior is judged
	Men are framed as perpetrators
	Men bear all responsibility
	Double standard in behavior
	Women are entitled
	Feminist are hypocrites
	Dependency between genders measured differently
Effects of feminism	Treat sexual encounters separately from career
	Gender relations are destroyed
	#MeToo standards overstep boundaries
	#MeToo insanity
	Allegations destroy lives
	Allegations end careers
	Fear
	Sexual neglect
	Feminism creates unhealthy sexual attitudes
	Feminism wants to change internal belief
	Feminists destroys Western society
	Women cause disruption
	Culture cycle
	Online mob
	#MeToo war
	Accusations damage
Women are radicalized	
Men leave social system	

	Compassion is a feminist weapon
	Social media ineffective for men
	Condom question
	#MeToo ruins fun
	Dating game
	Sex dolls
Media	Media push feminist agenda
	Sterilization of entertainment
Superficiality of #MeToo	Feminism is incoherent
	Minor incidents trivialize others
	#MeToo is meaningless
Power struggle	Abuse of power
	Women play the victim card
	Feminists claim power
	#MeToo used for financial gains
	Accusations timed to male success
	Women exploit romantic side
	Women accept rape for social gains
	Women control company culture
Political agenda	Virtue signaling
	Political goals
	Left is hostile
	Politicians are hypocrites
	No free speech
	Replace men with women and gays
	Gaslighting
Conspiracy theories	HIV doesn't exist
	Women are witches
	Female victims during witch trials are exaggerated
	Satanism
	Small elite group orchestrates #MeToo
Changes over time	Past was uncomplicated for men
	90s were good
	Nazis fought feminists

		Victorian era	
		King was first feminized men	
		Boomers responsible for feminism	
		Chivalry irrelevant	
Reestablishing the patriarchy	End the oppression	Fight back against accusations	
		Punish women for accusations	
		End feminist media propaganda	
		Counter revolution	
		Right-wing is the solution	
		Men need to eat the red pill	
		Provoke liberals	
		Men must unite	
		Act like a man	
		Trump can end feminism	
		Left will destroy itself	
		Govern with male military	
		Putin can end feminism	
		Follow God	
		Kill women	
		Weed will fix women	
		Cheating of women should be punished	
		Wife raiding	
		Coping	Men should share stories
	Reject own shame		
	Sharing stories is scary		
	Wish abuser happiness		
	Physically fight abusers		
	Trauma		
	Protective measures	Men offer each other support	
		Stay away from women	
		Apologizing is a mistake	
		Speaking out against #MeToo	
		Abstinence of men	
			Sex robots

		Treat women nicely to avoid accusations
		Don't give women personal information
		Save and record encounters
		Prostitutes
		Family warnings
		Refusal to work
		Don't take advice from self-entitled guy
		Don't befriend women
		Self-protection is smart
	Justifications for misogyny	Women are inferior
		White men never beat women
		Rape is not always bad
		Rape is women's own fault
		No regrets
		Pro rape
		Women want to be treated badly
		Whore culture
		Women provoke men
		Women want domination
		Preference for dumb girls
		Control of women in relationship
		Sex drives
		Women are reduced to sexual organs
	Rationalization of cheating of men	
	Intolerance	Minorities started rape culture
		Gay behavior
		Racism towards Burke
		Minorities don't deserve a voice
		Homosexuals are a threat to children
		White supremacy
		Men of color have sex with older women
Rational examination	Balanced perspective	Gynocentricism is a tendency
		Treat male and female abusers separately
		Empathy for victims
		Women don't owe men for drinks

		Trump is no savior
		Find a balance
		Rape is bad
		Attraction is subjective
		Decent men are not bothered by #MeToo
		#MeToo claims are not shocking
		Killing women is wrong
		Female victims during witch trials
		Cheaters are dissatisfied
		Women should be wooed
	Explanations for abuse	Family history of abuser
		Troubled upbringing
		Lack of communication
Outliers	-	Definition rating scale
		Dealing with an affair