

# **Countering misogyny in the manosphere: Examining language, identity, and ideological confrontations in #MeToo narratives**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the ideological confrontations between #MeToo advocates and the manosphere, focusing on their competing visions of masculinity, accountability, and gender equality. It explores how these groups define and contest gender roles, particularly masculinity, and how their opposing ideologies shape contemporary gender discourse. The research objectives are to analyze contrasting perspectives on masculinity, evaluate debates over accountability, and examine differing interpretations of equality. Using a qualitative approach, the study applies critical discourse analysis to textual data from #MeToo and manosphere forums, social media posts, and key movement narratives. Findings indicate that #MeToo advocates promote empathy, equality, and respect to challenge traditional masculinity, while the manosphere defends a dominance-oriented view. #MeToo emphasises systemic accountability, in contrast to the manosphere's focus on individual responsibility. The study concludes that this ideological conflict reflects a broader cultural struggle over gender norms and power dynamics, with #MeToo advocating for structural reform. Examining the dynamic relationship between #MeToo and the manosphere, this research offers novel insights into how they shape public perceptions of gender and inequality.

**Keywords:** #MeToo; Manosphere; Masculinity; Accountability; Gender equality

## **1. Introduction**

The digital age has witnessed a surge in ideological contestations around gender, power, and identity, particularly through movements like #MeToo and the manosphere, which have become prominent in online discourse. As Jegede and Lawal (2023) note, social media platforms now serve as key arenas for the dissemination and contestation of gender ideologies. The #MeToo movement, initiated by Tarana Burke in 2006 and amplified globally in 2017, has become a powerful platform for survivors of sexual harassment to share their stories and demand accountability (Hearn, 2020). It promotes a reimagining of gender relations based on empathy, equality, and mutual respect. In sharp contrast, the manosphere—a loosely connected network of online communities espousing anti-feminist, hyper-masculine ideologies—challenges the premises of #MeToo, framing it as an attack on traditional masculinity and male authority. These counter-narratives often draw on patriarchal norms and emphasise male victimhood and individual responsibility. The confrontations between these two movements are not merely oppositional but are part of a larger cultural struggle over the meaning and future of masculinity, femininity, and gendered power relations. As such, examining the language and ideological engagements between #MeToo and the manosphere is essential for understanding contemporary gender discourses. This study contributes to the discourse by focusing on the subtle ways in which language, identity, and ideology are negotiated and contested within and between these digital movements.

Although #MeToo and the manosphere represent two of the most influential and polarised gender-related movements in recent years, the specific ways they confront one another in digital spaces remain under-researched. The bulk of existing scholarship has examined either the real-world impact of #MeToo or the toxic masculinity promoted within manosphere communities (Adesina & Jegede, 2019; Baumgardner & Richards, 2018; Burke, 2018; Gill, 2019; Hearn, 2020; Jegede, 2024b; Kilmartin, 2021), often treating them in isolation. What is missing is a critical comparative analysis of how both camps articulate, defend, and challenge ideologies through language in online interactions. In an era where social media greatly influences public discourse and collective consciousness, understanding the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed by both #MeToo advocates and manosphere adherents are vital. These strategies do not merely reflect existing ideologies but actively shape emerging conceptions of gender, identity, and power. The absence of detailed studies examining the intersections, contradictions, and points of ideological resistance between these movements represents a significant gap in scholarly literature. This study addresses that gap by examining how #MeToo narratives use language to challenge traditional masculinity by promoting empathy, equality, and respect; analysing the contrasting constructions of masculinity between #MeToo advocates and the manosphere; and exploring how differing notions of accountability—systemic versus individual—are articulated within the ideological confrontations between these groups.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Misogyny*

Misogyny is a deeply entrenched cultural and structural phenomenon that involves hatred, prejudice, or contempt towards women, manifesting in discrimination, objectification, and violence. Originating from the Greek words *misos* (hatred) and *gyne* (woman), the concept gained linguistic recognition in the 17th century, though its expressions have long preceded this. Misogyny is more than an individual bias—it is embedded within societal institutions, shaping attitudes and norms that sustain patriarchal dominance. It can be overt, as seen in physical abuse, or covert, expressed through patronising behaviours and micro-aggressions. While sexism refers to broad discrimination based on gender, misogyny tends to be more severe and dehumanising, often portraying women as irrational or inferior and using such characteristics to legitimise their mistreatment. Historically, misogyny has thrived in patriarchal societies, where women were systematically excluded from public life and confined to domestic roles. Philosophers such as Aristotle claimed women were biologically inferior, a belief that permeated Western thought for centuries and was reinforced by religious and legal frameworks. Interpretations of religious texts have often linked women with moral weakness, as seen in the association of Eve with original sin, contributing to a legacy of female subjugation that persisted through the Middle Ages and beyond. Despite the challenges mounted by feminist movements from the 19th century onwards, misogyny has not disappeared but evolved into more subtle forms.

In the digital era, misogyny has found renewed expression through online platforms, where it adapts to contemporary cultural and political realities. The rise of the internet has enabled the proliferation of misogynistic discourse in virtual communities such as the "manosphere", which includes groups like incels and men's rights activists. These subcultures often promote narratives that demonise women and reject feminist gains, calling for the reinforcement of traditional male dominance. Jane (2017) reveals how such groups utilise social media to disseminate hate speech and recruit sympathisers, intensifying the public visibility and impact of misogynistic rhetoric. The #MeToo movement, which emerged prominently in 2017, has brought widespread attention to gender-based harassment and systemic sexism, sparking a global conversation about misogyny in workplaces and everyday life. However, it has also triggered backlash from those who perceive it as a threat to male authority, fuelling further ideological division (McEwan, 2018). These developments illustrate how misogyny, though challenged, persists through both old frameworks and new digital avenues. The continuing resistance to feminist progress emphasises the importance of critically examining misogyny's evolving forms and its intersections with culture, technology, and power.

### *2.2. Manosphere*

The “manosphere” refers to a loosely connected collection of online communities that focus on men’s rights, masculinity, and gender relations, frequently adopting reactionary or anti-feminist positions. These communities operate through forums, blogs, podcasts, and social media, voicing discontent over perceived threats to traditional male roles and the supposed loss of male privilege. Common themes include the emasculation of men due to feminism, cultural shifts towards gender equality, and resentment towards women’s rights movements. Subgroups within the manosphere include Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), involuntary celibates (incels), and pickup artists (PUAs), each presenting distinct perspectives on masculinity and male-female relationships. Studies by Nagle (2017) and Andreassen et al. (2020) reveal how these groups often disseminate misogynistic ideologies and have been linked to the normalisation of hate speech and online hostility towards women. The manosphere’s roots can be traced to the early days of the Internet, with men’s rights activism gaining traction as a counter-response to feminism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Initial concerns centred on legal inequalities, particularly around fatherhood and custody, but over time, these grievances evolved into more extreme views. Social media’s rise, especially in the 2010s, gave the manosphere greater reach. As the #MeToo movement gained momentum, and these online communities became increasingly visible, launching counter-campaigns aimed at discrediting feminist narratives. Research by Poynting and Perry (2020) emphasises the role of platform algorithms in amplifying this content, fostering echo chambers that reinforce resentment and misogyny.

Recent trends indicate that the manosphere has been significantly shaped by both feminist advancements and the widespread influence of digital media. A defining feature of current discourse is a strong backlash against the #MeToo movement, which has exposed widespread sexual misconduct by men in positions of power. Jane (2017) and McEwan (2018) document how many within the manosphere view #MeToo as an unjust assault on masculinity, fuelling narratives that portray men as victims of false accusations and cultural marginalisation. The emergence of counter-movements such as #HimToo exemplifies this reaction, framing men as targets of societal overreach. Zuo et al. (2020) observe that these communities exploit societal tensions over gender roles, promoting ideologies that suggest men are under siege. Platforms like YouTube, Reddit, and Facebook have allowed this rhetoric to reach wide audiences, often elevating manosphere figures to celebrity status. The spread of this content has been linked to increased online harassment and toxic masculinity. Matthews and McEwan (2021) warn that the manosphere’s impact extends beyond the digital context, contributing to real-world activism and, in some cases, violence. Its convergence with other extremist ideologies, including white nationalism and the alt-right, emphasises the broader socio-political threat posed by this digital subculture.

### *2.3. The #MeToo movement*

The #MeToo movement, initiated in 2006 by Tarana Burke, gained global prominence in 2017 following sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein. Originally aimed at fostering solidarity among survivors—particularly women of colour—the phrase “Me Too” provided a platform to expose the systemic nature of sexual violence. Burke’s efforts focused on creating safe spaces for marginalised voices, but the hashtag quickly evolved into a global phenomenon through social media. Survivors used platforms like Twitter and Facebook to share their stories, challenging high-profile figures across politics, entertainment, and business. The movement emphasised the urgent need for social, cultural, and legal reforms to combat gender-based violence and ensure accountability (Mendes et al., 2018). Its viral spread demonstrated the power of digital activism in confronting societal silence around harassment and assault (Purdy, 2018). Though its immediate explosion was unprecedented, #MeToo drew heavily from earlier feminist waves, particularly those of the 1960s and 70s, which had long critiqued sexual violence and power imbalances. The digital age, however, enabled rapid mobilisation and mass engagement in ways earlier movements could not. Media attention to high-profile cases brought workplace power dynamics and gender hierarchies into focus, and the growing support from celebrities, advocacy groups, and policymakers contributed to a cultural shift in rejecting tolerance for sexual misconduct (Gill, 2019). The increasing visibility of such issues has forced many traditionally male-dominated industries to reckon with deep-rooted gendered injustices (Linder, 2019).

The evolution of #MeToo has been marked by its expanding scope and international reach. While initial focus centred on celebrities, the movement increasingly reveals the voices of working-class women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups. Its broadened agenda pushes for structural reforms, workplace accountability, and education on consent and respect, addressing not only individual offenders but also institutional complicity. Mendes et al. (2020) and Costanza-Chock (2020) describe this shift from personal storytelling to collective resistance aimed at dismantling systemic enablers of gendered violence. Although the movement has prompted legislative and policy changes in various contexts, it has also faced significant backlash. Critics, including men’s rights groups within the manosphere, argue that #MeToo undermines masculinity and male privilege (Binns, 2020). Jane (2017) identifies how institutional resistance continues to impede long-term reform, as some powerful entities prioritise reputation management over meaningful change. This tension emphasises the importance of sustained cultural transformation, rather than superficial responses to public pressure. The ongoing challenge remains how to maintain the momentum of #MeToo while addressing the intersecting structures that enable sexual violence, demanding persistent advocacy and intersectional solidarity to realise genuine societal progress.

#### *2.4. Language, identity, and ideology*

Language, identity, and ideology are interwoven concepts that form the foundation of communication and social interaction (Jegade, 2024c). Language, in its broadest sense,

refers to the system of communication used by individuals and groups to express thoughts, emotions, and social relations. It is not merely a medium for conveying information but also a vehicle for shaping and reflecting the identities of its speakers (Jegede, 2024a; Gee, 2014). Identity, on the other hand, pertains to how individuals or groups define themselves and are recognized by others in the context of culture, society, and history. Identity is often constructed through language, as it is through linguistic practices that individuals and communities express their belonging to certain social, cultural, or political groups (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Ideology, meanwhile, refers to a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that are shared by members of a social group, often unconsciously, and are expressed through language. Ideologies are not only the product of individuals' beliefs but also the result of broader societal power structures that influence the way people think and act (Fairclough, 2001). The relationship between language, identity, and ideology has long been a focus of research, as these concepts shape how people interact, define themselves, and resist or conform to dominant social norms.

Recent trends and studies in the intersection of language, identity, and ideology focus on how these concepts manifest in contemporary society, particularly in relation to issues of power, resistance, and social justice (Jegede, 2024a, b, c; Jegede & Lawal, 2023). The rise of digital media and online communication has created new platforms for the expression of identity, with language playing an important role in how individuals and groups engage in and negotiate their sense of self in virtual spaces. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become sites for both reinforcing and challenging ideologies, where language is used to promote social movements, express personal identities, and contest dominant power structures (Van Dijk, 2018). For instance, the #MeToo movement utilizes language to challenge the ideological constructs surrounding gender, sexuality, and power, allowing individuals to assert their identity as survivors of violence and resist patriarchal structures. Similarly, recent studies on linguistic diversity have focused on the role of language in identity construction within marginalized communities, revealing how speakers of minority languages assert their cultural identity in the face of globalization and dominant linguistic ideologies (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). The concept of "linguistic human rights" has emerged as a key issue, advocating for the recognition of linguistic diversity as an essential part of individual and group identity, with an emphasis on preserving and promoting endangered languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Moreover, research on ideological shifts in political discourse shows how language is used to propagate political ideologies, with recent studies on populism and nationalism illustrating how leaders use language to construct national identities and shape public opinion (Laclau, 2005). These contemporary trends reflect the evolving relationship between language, identity, and ideology, emphasizing the importance of language as a site for both the construction and contestation of power dynamics in modern society.

### *2.5. Review of previous studies on the manosphere*

The manosphere has garnered growing academic scrutiny due to its expanding influence on digital discourse and its ideological stance on masculinity and gender relations. Rentschler and Thrift (2018) analyse the subreddit r/TheRedPill, identifying it as a hub for cultivating extreme masculinist ideologies that promote anti-feminist rhetoric and portray men as victims of modern gender equality. They argue that such online communities propagate patriarchal structures and foster an “us vs. them” mentality against women. Similarly, Kimmel and Mahler (2020) trace the evolution of the Men’s Rights Movement from its focus on legal rights in the 1970s to its radicalised presence online, revealing how platforms like Reddit and YouTube facilitate solidarity among men who feel alienated by contemporary gender norms. Their findings demonstrate how digital spaces reinforce misogynistic views through collective narratives of male disenfranchisement. Salter, Blodgett, and Crooks (2018) further explore the ideological clash between digital feminism and the manosphere. Analysing platforms such as Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter, they show how feminist activists push back against the misogyny entrenched in manosphere communities, which often depict women as manipulative and untrustworthy. Their research illustrates how online platforms serve as ideological battlegrounds where feminist and anti-feminist narratives contest the shaping of societal values. These studies collectively reveal how digital environments foster the dissemination and reinforcement of rigid, exclusionary versions of masculinity that resist feminist critique and challenge broader gender equality movements.

Alamo and Caraballo (2021) explore the psychological and social underpinnings of toxic masculinity within the manosphere, revealing how feelings of alienation and frustration are channeled into communities that promote emotional suppression, physical dominance, and anti-feminism. They argue that such hyper-masculine ideals arise in reaction to societal changes and feminist gains, providing a perceived refuge for men grappling with shifting gender roles. This emphasis on stoicism and dominance contributes to emotionally repressive and antagonistic male identities, often detrimental to well-being. Marwick and Caplan (2018), in their study of #Gamergate, reveal how gaming culture intersects with manosphere ideologies. Though initially presented as a movement for journalistic integrity, #Gamergate became a vehicle for online harassment against women, mobilising factions from the manosphere and alt-right communities. They show how online harassment is rationalised as “free speech” and becomes a means of resisting female inclusion in male-dominated spaces. These findings are instrumental in framing the manosphere as a cultural and ideological resistance to social change. The current study builds on this foundation by contrasting manosphere discourse with the feminist #MeToo movement, illustrating divergent perspectives on masculinity, accountability, and gender equality. Rather than viewing masculinity as inherently dominant, #MeToo advocates a vision rooted in empathy and equality. This juxtaposition reveals ongoing tensions between systemic accountability and individual responsibility in the pursuit of gender justice. Examining these ideological confrontations enhances our

understanding of the manosphere's role in opposing social reform and reveals the dynamic nature of digital gender discourse.

## 2.6. Theoretical framework

### 2.6.1. Critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a valuable tool for examining how language reflects, reinforces, and challenges power dynamics and ideologies within social contexts. In the context of this study, *Countering Misogyny in the Manosphere: Examining Language, Identity, and Ideological Confrontations in #MeToo Narratives*, CDA provides a framework for understanding how discourse operates as both a site and a tool of power struggle. Power dynamics are evident in the way #MeToo narratives and manosphere discourses clash over the construction of gender identities and societal roles. The manosphere, with its dominance-driven rhetoric, often seeks to maintain traditional power hierarchies by framing masculinity as synonymous with control and authority. Conversely, #MeToo narratives employ language to disrupt these norms, advocating for a model of masculinity grounded in equality, empathy, and mutual respect. CDA helps to reveal these discursive strategies, showing how both sides use linguistic resources to assert, contest, or negotiate power. For example, #MeToo advocates use inclusive and egalitarian terminology to challenge patriarchal structures, while the manosphere's discourse often employs defensive and essentialist rhetoric to preserve its ideological stance. Through CDA, this study uncovers how language choices are deeply intertwined with the negotiation of power and resistance, revealing the role of discourse in shaping societal norms.

Ideology is also central to CDA's focus, as it examines how discourse embodies and perpetuates worldviews, values, and beliefs. In this study, the ideological confrontation between the manosphere and #MeToo narratives center on competing visions of gender roles, equality, and accountability. The manosphere's discourse reflects an ideology rooted in traditional, hierarchical gender norms, often portraying systemic critiques as threats to individual responsibility and societal stability. This ideological stance manifests through linguistic features such as adversarial framing, where #MeToo is characterized as destabilizing or anti-masculine. On the other hand, #MeToo narratives promote a progressive ideology that seeks to dismantle these entrenched norms by emphasizing structural accountability and inclusivity. Analyzing the language of #MeToo advocates, CDA reveals how they reshape concepts like masculinity and equality to align with values of respect and partnership. Additionally, CDA examines how identity is constructed and contested within these ideological frameworks. For example, #MeToo narratives redefine masculinity not as dominance but as relational strength, while the manosphere constructs male identity as under siege. This study, through the lens of CDA, demonstrates how these ideological and identity-related discourses shape public debates, influence societal attitudes, and either reinforce or challenge the status quo. CDA thus

provides a subtle understanding of how language serves as a battleground for ideological and identity struggles in gender-related discourse.

### **3. Method**

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the ideological confrontations between #MeToo advocates and manosphere participants across key social media platforms—Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the data collected directly addressed the research focus. Specifically, 200 posts and comment threads were selected based on their relevance to themes such as masculinity, power dynamics, accountability, gender roles, and resistance to or support for the #MeToo movement. The selected data spans posts explicitly engaging with #MeToo discourse and responses emerging from manosphere-aligned communities. The analysis followed an inductive thematic coding approach. All data were manually coded using open and axial coding techniques to identify recurring discursive patterns, ideological stances, and rhetorical strategies. Key constructs included portrayals of masculinity, interpretations of equality, narratives of victimhood, and the framing of individual versus systemic responsibility. Attention was given not only to the surface-level content of the posts but also to the underlying ideological messages, including implicit attitudes towards feminism and gender justice. To strengthen interpretative depth, the analysis was situated within a comparative framework. Findings from the primary data were examined alongside existing academic literature on the #MeToo movement, digital feminism, and the manosphere. This enabled a subtle comparison of current online narratives with broader socio-political discourses on gender. The goal was not only to map ideological positions but also to interrogate how digital spaces serve as battlegrounds for contested gender identities and cultural values. This methodology was designed to provide a detailed account of how language and identity function within digital interactions surrounding the #MeToo movement, capturing the dynamics of ideological conflict and the broader implications for societal understandings of gender and power.

### **4. Findings**

The results section of this study presents the key findings derived from the critical discourse analysis of online interactions within the #MeToo movement and the manosphere. Examining the ideological confrontations between these two groups, the analysis reveals how masculinity, accountability, and gender equality are framed within each community. The findings reveal distinct patterns in the portrayal of masculinity and the contrasting perspectives on systemic versus individual responsibility, offering insights into the broader sociocultural dynamics influencing contemporary gender discourse.

#### *4.1. Linguistic strategies in the #MeToo movement*

This section analyses selected posts to reveal how #MeToo advocates employ strategic language to counter manosphere rhetoric and promote empathy, accountability, and gender-conscious dialogue.

Post 1:

Manosphere Comment: “#MeToo is just another excuse for women to play the victim. Men suffer too, but no one cares about that.”

#MeToo Response: “Acknowledging women’s experiences doesn’t invalidate men’s suffering. Both can be true—empathy isn’t a zero-sum game.”

Post 2:

Manosphere Comment: “Why can’t women just take a compliment without getting offended?”

#MeToo Response: “There’s a difference between a compliment and harassment. Respecting boundaries means understanding when your words make someone uncomfortable.”

Post 3:

Manosphere Comment: “The world is becoming too soft. Men can’t say anything anymore without being attacked.”

#MeToo Response: “The world isn’t getting softer; people are just more aware of how words and actions impact others. Accountability isn’t oppression.”

Post 4:

#MeToo Narrative: “For years, I stayed silent because society told me I’d be blamed or shamed. But #MeToo helped me realize I’m not alone, and my story matters.”

The selected posts illustrate how #MeToo advocates use deliberate linguistic strategies to challenge and reframe manosphere narratives, particularly those rooted in defensiveness, misogyny, or misinterpretation of feminist aims. In Post 1, for instance, the #MeToo’s response shifts the conversation from accusation to empathy, showing that acknowledging women’s experiences does not negate men’s suffering. This reframing creates space for coexistence of multiple truths, disrupting the zero-sum logic often employed in manosphere arguments. Similarly, Post 2 addresses the conflation of compliments with harassment by emphasising the importance of boundaries and consent. The response does not condemn the speaker outright but educates them on the social context of their words, thereby repositioning the issue as one of mutual respect rather than censorship. This discursive strategy allows the advocate to clarify feminist positions without escalating conflict, using explanation rather than confrontation.

Posts 3 and 4 expand on these strategies by focusing on broader societal awareness and personal empowerment. In Post 3, the manosphere comment laments a perceived loss

of male freedom; the #MeToo's reply challenges this notion by redefining "softness" as increased empathy and accountability. This linguistic move not only neutralises the idea that social progress is a threat but also reveals responsibility as a collective value rather than a punishment. Post 4 exemplifies the use of personal narrative—a powerful rhetorical tool in the #MeToo movement. The speaker shares their journey from silence to self-affirmation, countering the stereotype of female fragility with a message of courage and solidarity. Such stories make ideological resistance emotionally tangible and accessible, undermining attempts to frame the movement as a culture of victimhood. Across these examples, #MeToo advocates deploy reframing, clarification, and narrative appeal to shift discourse from adversarial opposition to shared understanding. These strategies expose the reductive nature of manosphere rhetoric and reassert the legitimacy of feminist critique, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and emotionally intelligent conversation about gender, power, and identity.

#### *4.2. Identity construction and contestation in #MeToo narratives*

This section explores how #MeToo narratives construct and contest identities, revealing empowerment, self-reliance, and the rejection of traditional gender roles in response to societal expectations.

Post 1:

#MeToo Narrative: "I was told my whole life that women should be quiet and modest. But through #MeToo, I found the courage to define myself outside of others' expectations. I am not my trauma; I am stronger than what happened to me."

Post 2:

#MeToo Narrative: "Society always talks about men being protectors, but who's protecting us? I am done relying on others to define my worth or protect my dignity. #MeToo helped me find my own voice."

Post 3:

#MeToo Response to Manosphere Narrative: "Just because I speak up about harassment doesn't make me anti-men. I'm challenging abuse, not men as a group. I believe in equality, not in vilifying anyone."

Post 4:

#MeToo Narrative: "I've learned that femininity doesn't mean weakness. I can be strong, outspoken, and still embrace my identity. #MeToo isn't about victimhood; it's about reclaiming power and identity."

Post 5:

Manosphere Comment: “Women are meant to be submissive; that’s just natural.”

#MeToo Response: “Strength isn’t exclusive to one gender. Women are breaking free from outdated labels, redefining what it means to be feminine and strong.”

The #MeToo narratives presented in Posts 1-4 reveal a strong focus on identity construction, empowerment, and the rejection of traditional gender roles. In Post 1, the individual shares their journey from societal pressures to conform to passive and modest ideals to a place of personal empowerment, emphasising their strength and resilience beyond trauma. This shift aligns with the #MeToo movement’s broader goals of challenging fixed gender roles, presenting women as active agents in their lives rather than passive recipients of male-defined roles. Similarly, Post 2 addresses the cultural expectation of men as protectors, with the speaker rejecting the dependency on others to define their worth. This reveals the #MeToo movement’s emphasis on self-reliance and self-protection, challenging the manosphere’s notion that women need men for validation or security. Both posts reflect an evolving self-definition, wherein #MeToo participants assert their autonomy and challenge the narratives imposed by society, aiming to reshape their identity on their own terms.

Posts 3 and 4 offer further insight into the defense of #MeToo narratives against misinterpretations and the redefinition of femininity. Post 3 addresses the manosphere’s claim that #MeToo is anti-men, with the response clarifying that it is a call for equality, not vilification. This illustrates the movement’s commitment to gender equality, aiming to avoid polarization by asserting that speaking out against harassment is not an attack on men but a demand for accountability. In Post 4, the speaker redefines femininity by rejecting the stereotype of weakness traditionally associated with being feminine. The narrative reframes femininity as a source of strength and empowerment, countering the manosphere’s limited portrayal of gender roles. Post 5 directly confronts the manosphere’s assertion that women should be submissive, using it as an opportunity to reveal that strength is not gendered. This rejection of gendered labels aligns with the #MeToo movement’s call for self-determination and challenges rigid expectations. Collectively, these posts reflect how #MeToo participants construct identities rooted in autonomy, strength, and empowerment, pushing against restrictive gender norms while promoting equality and mutual respect.

#### *4.3. Ideological tensions between #MeToo narratives and the manosphere*

This section explores the ideological tensions between #MeToo narratives and the manosphere, focusing on divergent views surrounding masculinity, accountability, equality, and gender roles.

Post 1:

Manosphere Post: “The #MeToo movement is just another attack on traditional masculinity. Men are protectors and providers—that’s just nature.”

#MeToo Response: “Masculinity doesn’t need to be about dominance. Being a provider can mean supporting equality and respecting women as partners, not subordinates.”

Post 2:

#MeToo Narrative: “For too long, power has been held over women’s lives and choices. #MeToo is about dismantling these structures that allow abuse and inequality to thrive.”

Manosphere Response: “Dismantling ‘structures?’ Sounds like an excuse to punish men and tear down what makes society stable.”

Post 3:

Manosphere Comment: “All #MeToo does teach women to fear men. Not all men are out to get you, but now we’re all treated like criminals.”

#MeToo Response: “#MeToo isn’t about fearing men; it’s about accountability. Respectful men have nothing to fear if they’re treating women as equals.”

Post 4:

#MeToo Advocate: “Abuse of power isn’t just about individuals; it’s about a system that lets certain behaviors slide. If we don’t challenge this, we allow harm to continue unchecked.”

Manosphere Response: “This system talk is overblown. Everyone’s responsible for themselves. Stop blaming society for individual actions.”

Post 5:

Manosphere Post: “Men and women are different. Why force ‘equality’ when people naturally have different strengths?”

#MeToo Response: “Acknowledging differences doesn’t mean accepting inequality. Equality means valuing everyone’s contributions without forcing them into restrictive roles.”

The ideological tensions between #MeToo narratives and the manosphere revolve around fundamental disagreements about masculinity, accountability, equality, and gender roles. In Post 1, #MeToo advocates challenge the manosphere’s narrow view of masculinity as inherently dominant and controlling. They suggest that masculinity can encompass traits like respect and equality, where being a provider means supporting women as equals rather than subordinates. This response directly contradicts the manosphere’s view of masculinity as synonymous with power and dominance, promoting an inclusive version of masculinity that values partnership over hierarchy. Similarly, in Post 5, the manosphere defends traditional gender roles, arguing that men and women

have naturally different strengths. #MeToo advocates push back against this view, asserting that acknowledging differences does not justify inequality. They redefine equality not as sameness, but as valuing individual contributions without forcing people into rigid gender roles, thus challenging the essentialist stance of the manosphere.

Another significant point of contention is the source of gender-based inequalities, with #MeToo advocates emphasizing structural accountability. In Post 2 and Post 4, #MeToo advocates argue that power structures enable abuse and inequality, positioning these issues as systemic rather than individual. The manosphere, however, resists these structural critiques, with comments in Post 4 dismissing the idea of societal influence and focusing instead on individual responsibility. This ideological divide reveals the manosphere's preference for personal accountability and its fear that addressing systemic issues might destabilize social structures. #MeToo, on the other hand, sees systemic change as essential to dismantling entrenched gender inequalities. Furthermore, Post 3 illustrates the manosphere's misunderstanding of #MeToo's goals, which it perceives as demonizing all men. The #MeToo's response clarifies that the movement seeks accountability, not vilification, emphasizing that respectful men need not fear the movement. This distinction reveals #MeToo's commitment to promoting collective responsibility for equality, as opposed to the manosphere's tendency to frame the movement as an adversarial attack on men. Through these ideological confrontations, #MeToo redefines gender discourse, offering a more inclusive, cooperative vision of justice that challenges rigid gender roles and promotes shared accountability.

## **5. Discussion**

This study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to uncover the linguistic and ideological choices made by #MeToo advocates and manosphere participants, revealing significant ideological confrontations over masculinity, accountability, and gender roles. Analyzing discursive practices, this research reveals how #MeToo advocates challenge the manosphere's dominance-driven conceptualization of masculinity, promoting a model grounded in equality and mutual respect. Linguistic reframing is central to this effort, as #MeToo discourse portrays masculinity not as a vehicle for control but as a relational quality emphasizing empathy and partnership. Studies by Keller et al. (2020) and Glick (2019) support this perspective, showing that #MeToo disrupts traditional archetypes by valorizing emotional intelligence over aggression. For instance, Keller's work demonstrates how #MeToo discourse uses language to reconstruct masculinity as empowering without being oppressive. In our findings, this ideological stance is evident in the consistent use of terms like "partnership" and "respect" to redefine male strength outside the context of domination, directly countering the manosphere's portrayal of control as intrinsic to masculinity. Through CDA, we observe that these discursive shifts aim to destabilize cultural norms that equate masculinity with dominance, thereby aligning with broader movements to reimagine gender roles.

CDA also reveals a deep ideological divide between systemic accountability and individual responsibility in these discourses. #MeToo advocates use language to foreground structural critiques, framing abuse and inequality as products of entrenched societal systems. This aligns with Salter's (2018) findings, which argue that systemic factors perpetuate gender-based violence. Conversely, the manosphere's discourse prioritizes individual accountability, often dismissing structural critiques as undermining personal responsibility. This linguistic emphasis on individualism serves to reinforce a worldview that opposes systemic reform. Studies by Flood (2019) corroborate this dichotomy, showing that #MeToo's calls for structural change are interpreted by manosphere adherents as destabilizing to societal order. Our data reveal that #MeToo advocates frequently deploy terms like "systemic reform" and "institutional change," signifying a commitment to addressing abuse at its structural roots. Meanwhile, the manosphere's counter-discourse employs language emphasizing "personal choice" and "individual consequences," rejecting structural analyses. CDA emphasises how these conflicting linguistic choices not only reflect ideological rifts but also perpetuate opposing narratives about justice and accountability, with each side reinforcing distinct frameworks for addressing gender inequality.

Finally, the discourse surrounding equality further demonstrates the ideological and linguistic divergence captured through CDA. #MeToo advocates use inclusive language to promote a fluid concept of equality that transcends fixed gender roles, as observed in Manne's (2020) research. Phrases such as "diverse expressions" and "partnership-based equality" are prevalent in #MeToo discourse, challenging essentialist views that rely on binary and rigid gender norms. Conversely, the manosphere's language frequently invokes essentialist terminology, portraying equality initiatives as erasures of natural gender differences. This essentialism is evident in the manosphere's discursive framing of gender roles as biologically determined and immutable. In contrast, #MeToo advocates use CDA-informed strategies to dismantle these notions, advocating for a model of equality that celebrates individuality while fostering mutual respect. Emphasizing adaptability and inclusivity, #MeToo's linguistic choices redefine equality and challenge traditional constraints on gender roles. Through CDA, this study demonstrates how #MeToo not only critiques specific instances of abuse but also uses discourse to challenge broader ideological structures that sustain gender hierarchies, contributing to a transformative reimagining of gender norms.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the ideological confrontations between #MeToo and the manosphere comprise a broader cultural struggle over gender norms and justice, emphasising the critical role of strategic language in digital discourse. Through critical discourse analysis of selected posts, the study demonstrates how #MeToo advocates employ language to challenge manosphere rhetoric, fostering empathy, respect, and

gender-conscious dialogue. Findings reveal that #MeToo promotes systemic accountability and redefines masculinity and femininity to advance equality, while the manosphere upholds traditional gender roles and individual responsibility. Through its advocacy of empowerment, autonomy, and mutual respect, #MeToo challenges restrictive norms and encourages individuals to shape their identities without societal constraints. This research enriches understanding of contemporary gender discourse by illustrating how online interactions both reflect and actively shape sociocultural dynamics. It reveals language's power in contesting entrenched ideologies and advancing gender equality, providing critical insights into the digital battle for gender justice.

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