The image of woman in philosophy

Manosphere and hashtag feminism: Highlighting aspects of digital public discourse on gender relations

Vangelis Liotzis,
Ph.D. Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Sociology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
evliotzis@media.uoa.gr

Abstract

The article seeks to critically examine two distinct yet interconnected premises of digital reality nowadays which are highly indicative trends in the contemporary field of gender and gender relations; i.e., manosphere and hashtag feminism. The manosphere, as a rather safe digital space for the construction and emergence of hybrid forms of masculinity that further complicate the debate on male hegemony, is directly linked to contemporary men's rights activists, the so-called incels. Conversely, hashtag feminism, a popular online protest tactic against gender inequality, sexist practices and forms of gender-based violence, is linked to a number of claims about the characteristics of modern feminist action on social media. Despite their emergence within the scientific community, primarily in the context of feminist sociology, and the heated debates they have provoked in the context of digital public discourse, these phenomena have not yet received significant attention from philosophical thought.

Keywords: *manosphere, incels, hashtag feminism, sexism, gender relations*

Introduction

In the context of the broader discussion on the forms of sexism in late-modern reality and the relevant debate in the digital public sphere regarding the demands for their transcendence, several phenomena emerge that are highly indicative of the contemporary trends in the field of gender and gender relations. The present paper seeks to undertake a critical examination of two distinct yet concomitant premises that are extant in the contemporary digital environment; namely those of manosphere and hashtag feminism. These contemporary phenomena, although having been highlighted in the scholarly community, primarily in the context of feminist sociology, and having been the subject of fierce controversy in digital public discourse, they have nevertheless not been extensively discussed from a philosophical perspective. The article thus seeks to critically analyse the aforementioned concepts, with a particular focus on the ideological constructs regarding women, while undertaking a preliminary philosophical exploration of their ontological foundations.

Understanding the premises of manosphere

The manosphere can be defined as a set of digital sites and groups where men exchange views on various topics, primarily contemporary women and gender relations. As Ging, Lynn and Rosati have argued, this space is a 'toxic brand of digital men's rights activism'.[1] The manosphere has been the subject of considerable criticism from feminist thought and practice, who have accused it of being a particularly dangerous digital/social phenomenon. On the one hand, the manosphere has moved away from traditional family law rhetoric, men's rights and mental health; on the other hand, it has adopted a more hostile, violent, sexist, racist and homophobic discourse, through which a gross misogyny is further encouraged. Concurrently, it appears to engender the conditions for deviant, even criminal, behaviour on the part of lonely or es-

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[1] Ging D., Lynn T. & Rosati P., 2020: 838.

tranged men.[2] To illustrate this point, consider the analysis of Jones, Trott and Wright on the case of the autonomist group with members mainly from North America and Europe, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW).[3] This analysis demonstrated that in these spaces, an unadulterated misogynistic discourse is used that, under other circumstances, could act as a repellent to normalise overtly anti-feminist attitudes. Furthermore, it revealed an attempt to incorporate elements of rational thought into their members' rhetoric through the deliberate and often distorted and/or falsified allusion of scientific, historical and philosophical arguments.[4]

In a similar vein, the research conducted by Ging, Lynn and Rosati on the propagation of manosphere rhetoric in diverse digital environments, including Urban Dictionary – a digital repository of colloquial expressions and idioms in English – has revealed a persistent and pervasive presence of anti-feminist and misogynistic linguistic elements within contemporary vernacular discourse.[5] On this basis, Jane's assertion regarding the significance of directing public and scholarly attention towards gendered hate speech propagated digitally is both valid and relevant.[6] Furthermore, it is imperative to undertake a comprehensive study of this phenomenon, encompassing the language employed, irrespective of its abhorrent nature or its transgression of established 'limits of public discourse'. The necessity to address this issue directly, as articulated by Jane, pertains to the potential for "unexpurgated ugliness", stemming from the numerous avenues for self-replication attributable to the anonymity of users, the pervasive dissemination of hate speech within the digital domain, and its overtly deleterious character, which would not be countenanced in other contexts.[7] This finding lends further credence to the hypothesis that a pervasive social sentiment hostile to women is deeply entrenched, and furthermore, that

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[2] Farrell T. et al., 2019.
[3] Jones, C., Trott V. & Wright S., 2020.
[4] Jones, C., Trott V. & Wright S., 2020: 1917.
[5] Ging D., Lynn T. & Rosati P., 2020.
[6] Jane E.A., 2014.
[7] Jane E.A., 2014: 567.

gendered digital discourse of this nature has not yet garnered the requisite public attention.

All the above constitute aspects of a phenomenon that has been designated 'gendertrolling'. This is defined as a distinct and identifiable form of aggressive online behaviour, with its primary focus being its overtly anti-feminist and, in many cases, misogynistic character.[8] In this context, Massanari analyses the most emblematic cases of exploitation of the digital environment for the expression and dissemination of sexist and abusive discourse and content against women.[9] These include #Gamergate, a campaign of systematic harassment of women and minorities engaged in online gaming in 2014, and "The Fappening", a case of dissemination of illegally obtained sexual material featuring celebrities on cyber platforms in the same year. She characterises these cases as 'toxic technocultures' on the basis that they are defined by an aggressive attitude towards the Other and characterised by an outdated and myopic reading of theories of evolutionary biology; an approach that forms the basis for the perception of masculinity as a "peculiar form of rationality".[10]

It is on the basis of the aforementioned that Banet-Weiser and Miltner rightly argue that the patriarchal trends in the digital environment in general should not be treated separately, but as a unified totality that, overall, makes anti-feminist and often misogynistic ideas, attitudes and behaviours increasingly popular.[11] In her seminal study, Ging demonstrated the importance of the nexus between technological capabilities and social media, which engender a secure environment conducive to the evolution of hybrid manifestations of masculinity.[12] These, in turn, serve to further obfuscate the discourse surrounding male hegemony. Of particular pertinence in this context is the utilisation of the renowned concept of the 'blue and red pill' from Lana and Lilly Wachowski's iconic film "The Matrix" (1999). In this cine-

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[8] Mantilla K., 2013: 563.

[9] Massanari A., 2017: 329-330.

[10] Massanari A., 2017: 333.

[11] Banet-Weiser S. & Miltner K.M., 2016: 173.

[12] Ging D., 2019.

matic work, the protagonist is presented with the option to select between two pills; the blue pill, which symbolises the acquiescence to a life of illusion, and the red pill, which signifies the unveiling of a 'real reality' that is, by its very nature, repugnant. As Ging emphasises, the prevailing rhetoric and philosophy of the red pill, which is constantly invoked by incels as a general way of thinking, is used as a common metaphor in order to 'awaken' men from what is perceived as the fallacious, deceptive and ultimately pernicious ideology of feminism.[13] The objective is to unify all informal communities and individual users of the manosphere in opposition to the threat of being indoctrinated by contemporary feminist discourse.

Prominent in the manosphere are the contemporary men's rights activists, the so-called 'incels' (a neologism derived from the initials of 'involuntary celibacy', the condition that characterises the informal members of this digital subculture). In the opinion of incels, the voluntary or involuntary abstinence from sexual relations that they currently experience can be attributed to the perceived failure of contemporary women to meet the standards set by incels themselves. This perceived failure is particularly salient in the context of an unbridled sexual liberation and pervasive sexualisation, as well as the strengthening of feminist ideology, all of which are objects of incels' opposition. Bratich and Banet-Weiser's study posits that the incels community is associated, among other things, with the failure of the highly popular community of pick-up artists (i.e., 'experts' in teaching how to seduce a woman) to fulfil its initial promises and expectations that learning effective practices in flirting would bring the coveted erotic and sexual 'conquests and successes'.[14]

A consequence of all these factors is a peculiar complication of the commonly accepted, so far, association of power and domination with the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity'.[15] In particular, incels, who self-identify as 'beta males' (betas), attempt to challenge the monological articulation of masculin-

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[13] Ging D., 2019: 640.
[14] Bratich J. & Banet-Weiser S., 2019.
[15] Connell R.W., 2005; Connell R. & Messerschmidt J.W., 2005.

ity as substituted in the case of dominant males. Along with feminists and social rights advocates, these males are held responsible for the condition they themselves experience, namely the deprivation of sexual and other pleasures.[16] The claims regarding the marginalisation and disadvantage of beta males in relation to dominant forms of masculinity must be rejected on the basis that, as Ging argues, it is more likely to be a case of hybrid masculinities whose self-victimisation allows them to distance themselves from contemporary hegemonic masculinity while, at the same time, using, as they see fit, existing gendered hierarchies of power and inequality in the digital world.[17]

As a tangential remark, it is evident that Ging's methodology is congruent with Connell's theoretical framework. According to the eminent Australian sociologist, hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the establishment of a gendered practice that embodies the currently accepted response to the legitimacy of patriarchy. This ensures (or is perceived to ensure) male dominance and female subordination, whilst controlling a hierarchy of masculinities that is established in such a manner as to maintain these gendered relations.[18] This is the reason why hegemonic masculinity exerts its dominance not only over women, but also over 'subordinate masculinities' (i.e. homosexual men). However, it is also an 'unstable construction' that frequently gives rise to contentious disputes regarding what constitutes the 'right masculine' way for a man to live, while also providing a means of exploring how men participate in the ideological structures that support and reproduce women's subordination.[19] Despite the fact that hegemonic masculinity does not appear to be the most common form of masculinity performed and practised, it is nevertheless supported by the majority of men who benefit from the total subordination of women. As an interest group, men

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[16] Ging D., 2019: 640.
[17] Ging D., 2019: 651.
[18] Connell R.W., 1995: 77.
[19] Connell R.W. & Messerschmidt J.W., 2005: 832; Bauer E., 2024.

tend to support hegemonic masculinity as a means of defending patriarchy and their dominant position over women.[20]

It is therefore imperative that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, particularly in the context of 'masculinity in crisis',[21] be comprehended as an amalgamation of diverse masculinities and a hierarchical structure of manliness. The notion of a hierarchical structure of masculinities persists in functioning as a hegemonic framework and a reference model, predominantly perpetuating established masculinity paradigms rather than merely a pattern of domination characterised by violence. However, a more comprehensive understanding of gender hierarchies necessitates an acknowledgement of the agency of non-dominant groups, as well as the various socio-cultural dynamics that can develop within and across gender hierarchies.[22]

Returning to the subject of incels, it is evident that the hybrid character of masculinity they invoke is consistently reproduced in the context of the overarching objective of countering feminism and excluding women from the manosphere, notwithstanding the ideological, strategic and aesthetic differentiations and disparities that exist within it.[23] Ging's argument posits an oscillation between hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity. This oscillation is reflected in the predominance of a discourse based on a simplistic genetic determinism to explain male and female behaviours in relation to sexual choices, practices and behaviours. The engagement of the manosphere with the scientific field of evolutionary biology and psychology is characterised by a blatantly myopic and superficial interpretation and recycling of various theories to ultimately support a particular set of ideas. The underlying principles here are that women are "irrational, hypergamous, hardwired to pair with alpha males, and need to be dominated".[24]

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[20] Connell R.W., 1995: 82.
[21] Cf. Horrocks R., 1994; Robinson S., 2000.; Walsh F., 2010.
[22] Connell R.W. & Messerschmidt J.W., 2005: 845-848.
[23] Ging D., 2019: 653.
[24] Ging D., 2019: 648-649.

In response, the incels have developed a unique lexicon characterised by sexism, misogyny and racism, reflecting the theoretical concepts of evolutionary biology and psychology in practical, real-world contexts. Offensive terms such as 'friendzone' (whereby a man is 'relegated' to the position of a woman's 'friend' because she has no intention or desire for 'more' between them) and 'cuck' (a weak or powerless man whose partner is cheating on him) are used in an offensive manner. Furthermore, the use of insidious comments and compliments aimed at undermining a woman's self-confidence, known as 'negging', and the adoption of a defensive posture by a woman in response to unwanted male attention, termed 'bitch shield', serve not only to denigrate women in general but also to facilitate the establishment of informal or non-formal communities and networks.[25]

It is evident that the advent of novel technological possibilities and the intricate structure of social networks have led to a substantial escalation in the potential for the unregulated propagation of anti-feminist ideologies and information. The result of this is a peculiar transnational homogenisation of 'ubiquitous wronged' incels that not only sticks to a virulent outcry against feminism, but slides, in many cases, into a sweeping misogyny and emotionally charged personal attacks.[26] Indeed, it is the so-called 'geek masculinity', a version of manliness that emerges within the 'computer geek community' and which both accepts and rejects, in an utilitarian way, several aspects of hegemonic masculinity.[27] According to Banet-Weiser, the concept of white geek masculinity is characterised by the presence of 'casual sexism' and a sense of white privilege within the context of 'bro culture', which can be defined as a subculture and discourse that perceives men of the same age as 'bros'.[28] This combination of characteristics is further compounded by a pronounced technological focus. It is evident that, despite the prevalence of digital spaces dominated by white males that advocate for

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[25] Ging D., 2019: 649.
[26] Ging D., 2019: 644-645.
[27] Massanari A., 2017: 332.
[28] Banet-Weiser S., 2018: 134.

policies aimed at redressing what they perceive as 'collective injustice', the incels' subculture is progressively deviating from the conventional activism of the men's rights movement, as it has evolved over the preceding decades. Instead, it is more indicative of an ideological tendency that functions as a conduit for the articulation of collective male anger and the re-establishment of male gender sovereignty and its concomitant privileges. This process primarily occurs through the expression of their purported loss, but also through the alignment with the broader ideological-political arsenal of the alt-right.[29]

Incels' prominent rhetorical vehicle for 'reclaiming their power' is the view that the contemporary disadvantaged position of men is largely due to a pervasive 'reverse sexism', which is essentially the expression of a generalised misandry that manifests itself in multiple ways in various aspects of social life.[30] Indeed, misandry is a term frequently employed by various incels and men's rights advocates to support any feminist resistance as hatred against them.[31] Moreover, it is crucial to recognise the intricate relationship between the notion of 'misandrist feminism' and the present-day milieu, which is characterised by unregulated mass media, digital technologies and social networks. In this specific context, three notable trends are evident. Firstly, there has been an escalation in the expression of polarised opposing views and groups, which are termed 'vertical collectivism'. Secondly, the phenomenon of 'outrage culture' is worthy of consideration. This is defined as an expression of generalised discontent. Thirdly, there is a tendency towards the propagation of unproductive rhetoric of gender bias, which often leads to the cultivation of a peculiar sexist set-off against men. The most notable manifestation of this phenomenon is the verbal attacks directed towards men, which primarily centre on the sexual aspect of the recipient (e.g. disparaging remarks pertaining to a man's sexual performance in relation to expectations connected with pornography standards). Notwithstand-

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[29] Ging D., 2019: 648-649.
[30] Cf. Liotzis V., 2025.
[31] Ringrose J. & Lawrence E., 2018: 688.

ing the pervasive nature of these discourses, it is a particular-ly contentious aspect of such attacks that, in certain instances, they occur under the ideological umbrella of the so-called 'hashtag feminism'.

Specifying the features of hashtag feminism

It is important to acknowledge the unique opportunity for expression that the rise of social media has provided for vari-ous social groups and communities, including feminist movements and actions of all types. These have constituted the so-called 'fourth wave of feminism'.[32] In fact, as demon-strated by Reagle's thought-provoking analysis, the realm of online feminism appears to predominantly adopt, potentially as a form of defence and resistance, the demand primarily present within the geek community for a fundamental level of understanding on gender issues, often referred to as 'the obligation to know'.[33] Indeed, it could be argued that the field of contemporary feminism is most visible on the digital platform of Twitter, precisely because of the possibilities for free and uncensored expression of personal thoughts that it affords. Furthermore, Foster's research posits that the utilisa-tion of Twitter by women to accentuate and contest sexist discourses and practices functions not only as an informal form of collective action, but also engenders a positive psy-chological effect on them.[34]

In this regard, Golbeck, Ash and Cabrera analysed the use of relevant hashtags on the social media platform Twitter by female scientists, such as #DistractinglySexy, #iLook-LikeAnEngineer and #GirlsWithToys.[35] This practice is based on addressing various sexist stereotypes by creating informal digital communities, whose main focus is to support each other and raise awareness of the multiple difficulties these women face. As clarified by Vickery et al., real change in re-

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[32] Cochrane K., 2013; Chamberlain P., 2017; Rivers N., 2017.
[33] Reagle J., 2015: 703.
[34] Foster M.D., 2015.
[35] Golbeck, J., Ash S. & Cabrera N., 2017.

gard to various manifestations of sexism, including online harassment, cannot be achieved solely through individual actions.[36] Instead, it necessitates, and concomitantly signifies, more extensive structural and systemic social transformations that transcend the confines of the contemporary digital milieu. In any case, this digital activism, which has been captured as 'hashtag feminism', operates in a divergent manner in dissimilar social contexts. This is evident from the research conducted by Brantner, Lobinger and Stehling on how the #DistractinglySexy case was handled in the British and German media.[37]

A particularly intriguing study is that by Lutzky and Lawson on the utilisation of hashtags such as #Mansplaining, #Manspreading and #Manterruption in English-language Twitter discourse.[38] The research concluded that their inclusion in tweets is done in a context of highlighting individualised evaluations regarding what constitutes a 'correct/approved' gendered behaviour. However, it is important to note that according to their findings, regarding this particular digital public sphere (i.e. the so-called 'Twittersphere'), there is also a critique of these terms in relation to their sexist orientation and a concern to limit the stigmatisation of such practices to men only.[39] Furthermore, this is a dimension that was also highlighted in Bridges' research, according to which the use of 'mansplaining' in social media moves beyond its 'narrow' conceptual framework and becomes a vehicle for removing the attempt to 'verbally repress' women through a defiance of the 'authoritative pragmatics' of the term, a post-negotiation of a gendered and ideologically charged concept, and a redefinition and transformation of the meaning of the term in question to reflect different points of view in a pluralistic way.[40]

At this juncture, it is pertinent to recall the provenance of the well-known neologism 'mansplaining'. The term can be

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[36] Vickery J.R. et al., 2018: 389-390.
[37] Brantner, C., Lobinger L. & Stehling M., 2020.
[38] Lutzky U. & Lawson R., 2019.
[39] Lutzky U. & Lawson R., 2019: 10.
[40] Bridges J., 2017.

traced back to the "Men explain things to me" text by Rebecca Solnit on the TomDispatch website on 13/4/2008, which subsequently formed the basis for her renowned book of the same name six years later.[41] According to the eminent American author, the term 'mansplaining' is employed to denote the 'explanation' proffered by a male individual, predominantly on subjects pertaining to women's lives. This 'explanation' adopts a paternalistic stance, simultaneously disregarding or diminishing the experience and knowledge of women on the subjects in question.[42] The concepts of 'manspreading' and 'manterruption' are also neologisms. The former refers to the habitual practice of men sitting with their feet open, both in private and public spaces, without regard for the rest of the social environment. The latter is predicated on the broadly observed tendency of men to intervene and interrupt conversations more frequently than women. This practice is imbued with a specific gendered dimension, in the sense that its ultimate purpose and, essentially, basis is to attempt to dominate in a dialogue and to deconstruct and/or invalidate a woman's opinions and stances.[43]

It is an obvious assumption that all such actions are accompanied by reciprocal responses. For instance, Risam's study addresses the prevalent criticism that the online feminist movement, particularly the informal community on Twitter, harbours a more radical, essentially aggressive, trend that has been stigmatised, particularly through traditional media, as 'toxic femininity' on Twitter.[44] The concept of toxic femininity can be considered a counterpoint to the recently popular concept of toxic masculinity, which is used to describe patterns of excessive/abusive behaviour of cis-gender men (i.e. men whose gender identity coincides with their biological sex or, simply put, heterosexual men). It is evident that these attitudes and behaviours are associated with adverse

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[41] Solnit R., 2014.
[42] Rothman L., 2012.
[43] Lutzky U. & Lawson R., 2019: 3.
[44] Risam R., 2015.

social and psychological consequences for the individual, as well as for women and LGBTQ+ people.[45]

However, Risam has expressed scepticism regarding the escalation of a dogmatic, aphoristic and often aggressive discourse, even when it takes place in the context of humour.[46] Indeed, she hypothesises that this phenomenon can be attributed to the fragmentation of feminist thought, resulting from the emergence of various intersectionally oriented movements that deviate from the fundamental common claims of feminist ideology. As she asserts, the notions of 'toxicity' are, in essence, by-products of the very privileges that the movement seeks to challenge, as well as serving to subvert the crucial concept of intersectionality.[47] This undermining is regarded as a process of moving away from an inclusive conception of femininities and further marginalising the individual and collective agents of action that are identified and operate on the basis of this feminist perspective. Consequently, this process contributes to the reproduction and reinforcement of both racial and gender differences.[48]

However, Loza rebuffs the prevailing assertions concerning feminist endeavours within social networks, particularly those centred on the concept of "balkanization of feminism".[49] This term refers to the internal diversification of the feminist movement stemming from persistent discord surrounding the question of "who owns feminism". Conversely, she perceives these disputes as merely a component of the evolution of a novel liberation movement that is not inherently 'feminist' by definition, but rather founded on "a history of oppositional consciousness". This approach engenders the optimal conditions for the formation of social alliances centred on the racial, gender and class inequalities that are rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism, respectively.

In this context, the research by Ringrose and Lawrence on forms of feminist humour in social media is of particular im-

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[45] Cf. Salter M., 2019.
[46] Risam R., 2015.
[47] Cf. Crenshaw K., 1989; 1991.
[48] Risam R., 2015.
[49] Loza S., 2014.

portance.[50] This research demonstrated how, through the use of irony and sarcasm, a misandric discourse is articulated, framed by a binary gender antagonism. While the utilisation of humour as a medium for addressing sexism is a commendable practice and a form of activism aimed at challenging gender stereotypes, these researchers identify significant limitations of this approach in the context of various 'styles of feminism'. These limitations become particularly evident when this targeting is expressed through a gender antagonistic logic that perpetuates dualism, enclosure and exclusion.[51] The question arises as to whether the manner in which gender differences are articulated ultimately serves the demand for an intersectional and inclusive feminism, or whether the reversal discernible in the anti-male and sometimes violent memes they study is not merely another 'feminist joke' (these memes are digital files which are characterised by an evident tendency towards the depiction of anger, frustration, and rage in relation to sexist discrimination, with the utilisation of motifs pertaining to female potency and supremacy constituting the primary thematic elements.); rather, it is a manifestation of 'white feminism'.[52] It is important to note that white feminism is, by and large, a feminist trend that advocates for a non-disciplinary prioritisation and highlighting of issues of concern to all women. Consequently, this approach overlooks the demands of the most disadvantaged groups, including black, poor, and elderly women.

As Ringrose and Lawrence typically highlight, this "white female rage" and reversal of violence towards men fails to answer the key question of which women are speaking out and about which men.[53] The crux of the issue is the utilisation of a misguided and outdated paradigm of sexual conflict, wherein both men and women are collectively stigmatised on the basis of their biological distinctions. This approach, however, serves to constrain the ambit of feminist discourse/humour, which, in principle, is indispensable for a

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[50] Ringrose J. & Lawrence E., 2018.
[51] Ringrose J. & Lawrence E., 2018: 686-687.
[52] Ringrose J. & Lawrence E., 2018: 694.
[53] Ringrose J. & Lawrence E., 2018: 700-701.

comprehensive understanding of contemporary issues and the analogous feminist perspective. However, it is important to note that the "ironic misandry" present within humorous memes functions not only as a rhetorical response to the plausible anger surrounding the reproduction of the patriarchal order in the contemporary world, but also as a medium of communication among feminists that contributes to the desired outcome of fostering solidarity among the movement.[54]

Notwithstanding the plethora of criticisms levelled at the contemporary digital landscape, which have been persuasively articulated by the aforementioned research, Digby had judiciously dismissed the long-standing erroneous supposition that feminists harbour an inherent animosity towards all men.[55] In particular, as the eminent American philosopher noted, instances of anti-male sentiment among feminists have been documented, though these have largely been isolated incidents primarily involving women experiencing a 'feminist awakening' that enabled them to comprehend the impact of male domination on their lives.[56] Such circumstances frequently gave rise to feelings of anger towards the source of the harm, often resulting in a range of criticisms of men that, although anticipated, were sometimes expressed in an undeservedly generalised manner. As Digby observes, while feminists may perceive women as a group that generally experiences the paternalistic domination of men, this cannot be equated with a general hatred against them.[57] Furthermore, he adds that the instances where feminists make derogatory generalisations about men are not due to some universal and vague hate, but to self-evident resentment of men with misogynistic attitudes; a sentiment also expressed by women "who don't call themselves feminists".[58]

The aforementioned factors may provide a potential explanation for the problematic contemporary discourse on men that is currently being disseminated through social media

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[54] Ringrose J. & Lawrence E., 2018: 690.
[55] Digby T., 1998: 16-17.
[56] Digby T., 1998: 15-16.
[57] Digby T., 1998: 15.
[58] Digby T., 1998: 28.

and the digital public sphere in general by a select number of radical feminist activists. While these voices do contribute to the articulation and 'simplification' of radical feminist critiques of various issues, ranging from patriarchy and male privilege to female sexualisation and rape culture, there are instances where they transition into an essentialist-oriented accusation against all men collectively. This accusation remains unrefuted by the frequent yet seemingly pretentious reference to the absence of any intention to incriminate collectively and to the fact that any accusations do not pertain to all men as a whole (NotAllMen).

As Digby would have posited, to a certain extent, it is justifiable for an individual subjected to collective animosity to respond with hostility and a sense of retribution.[59] This response is particularly salient when the oppressive conduct in question is pervasive and protracted, manifesting in a manner that appears to be representative of the entire membership of the dominant group. As is evidenced in cases of ongoing hate and persistent discrimination, a black person may develop a sense of vindictiveness towards all white people without exception. Correspondingly, a woman may feel hatred towards all men. As the American philosopher noted, "it is the hateful oppression which gives rise to reciprocating hatred".[60] In this sense, it is to be expected that there are instances where this 'feminist rage' slips into the reductive logic of gender oppositionality and is accompanied by generalised negative excoriations and characterisations of men.[61] This misandrist discourse, however, has been shown to overlook the positive experiences of many women in relation to men, perpetuate an outdated sex oppositional approach and, to some extent, undermine the prospect of a more inclusive feminism, in the sense of the productive inclusion of 'male allies'.[62]

Digby contends that, in the majority of instances, feminist criticisms of men are not rooted in essentialist thinking, as these critiques are not intended to be regarded as universal

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[59] Digby T., 1998: 28.
[60] Digby T., 1998: 28.
[61] Digby T., 1998: 21-22.
[62] Cf. Digby T., 1997; Jardine A. & Smith P., 2012.

principles, and furthermore do not imply or presuppose a pervasive animosity.[63] It is evident that this position is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it fails to acknowledge the ideological underpinnings of certain feminist perspectives and how these are intertwined with their individual objectives. Secondly, it operates under the assumption that all opinions and discourses are systematically evaluated within the context to which they refer. This may indeed be an ideal situation, or at least a desirable condition, which is clearly what should be sought in public debate. However, when the American philosopher was defending a wide range of feminist practices, he failed to consider the highly confrontational context created by the spread of manosphere ideas. This has inevitably led to various forms of excessive and/or unfair verbal attacks. It is certain, yet, that this social context raises serious concerns regarding the creation of more solid and emancipatory conditions for gender relations.

Concluding thoughts

The proliferation of the manosphere, in general, and the emergence of select marginal expressions of hashtag feminism, perpetuate a myopic disposition characterised by gender aversion and, at times, overt animosity. These phenomena also give rise to an overtly problematic reified conception of gendered subjects and relations. The question arises, therefore, as to how the concept of reification should be understood in this context. The concept of reification was originally developed by Lukács in a collection of his writings under the title *History and Class Consciousness*.[64] For the renowned Hungarian Marxist, reification signifies an ontological comprehension of quotidian life, wherein interpersonal relationships are regarded as the embodiment of a tangible entity.[65] Honneth raises the issue of instrumentalist management of people and deriving benefit from them as if they have an

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[63] Digby T., 1998: 27.
[64] Lukács G., 1923.
[65] Honneth A., 2008: 19.

'object dimension'.[66] This is a critique of the idea that the adoption of the capitalist way of life by any subject necessarily leads to the understanding of itself and the world that includes it as an object. For Honneth, the fundamental concept of Lukács' reification is encapsulated in the observation that, within the expanding domain of commodity exchange, subjects are compelled to function as autonomous observers, as opposed to active contributors to social life.[67] This is due to the fact that the reciprocal calculation of the advantages that others might confer for their own benefit necessitates a purely rational and non-emotional disposition.

Consequently, reification should be comprehended as a process through which the 'real humane' perspective is neutralised to such an extent that it eventually becomes an objectifying mode of thinking.[68] However, the equation of reification with objectification by Lukács, as Honneth consistently asserts, does not suffice as a conceptual construction.[69] This is because, if it were valid, human sociality would have been extinguished entirely. It is for this reason that this particular contested concept should be redefined in relatively different terms. According to Honneth, reification should be understood as the 'forgetfulness of recognition', i.e. the process by which awareness of the extent to which people owe their knowledge of other people to a prior attitude of empathic engagement is lost.[70] In this sense, reification can be defined as the process by which knowledge is formed through cognitive acts that are not grounded in prior recognition.[71] According to the approach of the highly influential German philosopher, it could be argued that the reification in the field of gender constitutes an essentialisation of gendered subjects and relations, based on the forgetting and/or silencing of the fact that the gender dimension of humans may constitute a fundamental dimension of their existence that is articulated with all

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[66] Honneth A., 2008: 22-23.
[67] Honneth A., 2008: 24-25.
[68] Honneth A., 2008: 54.
[69] Honneth A., 2008: 55.
[70] Honneth A., 2008: 56.
[71] Honneth A., 2008: 59.

other aspects of life, but not the sole premise of human nature.

In a similar vein, it could be argued that this 'gendered oblivion of realisation' corresponds, to a certain extent, with the manner in which the famous Slovenian philosopher Žižek reinterprets Sloterdijk's original work on cynicism[72]. In essence, Žižek's assertion posits that cynicism can be conceptualised as a form of performative behaviour, wherein an individual may ostensibly adhere to a particular belief while concurrently exhibiting actions that appear to contradict that belief.[73] This 'as if' syndrome is defined as an attitude to life that affects the way an individual perceives herself or himself and the world as a whole. It can thus be posited that the field of the manosphere is characterised by a, in Žižek terms, pervasive 'gendered cynicism'. This is evidenced by the tendency of incels to focus on the human behaviours of women while simultaneously behaving as if they do not consider themselves to be truly human. This behaviour can be attributed to a deficient attribution of the agent/subject status to them. Conversely, in the context of hashtag feminism, only in a limited number of cases can a corresponding cynicism be discerned. However, due to its defensive orientation, as well as its clearly less aggressive and more constrained nature, it cannot, by all means, serve as a counterbalance to the broader, bicultural and intercultural phenomenon of misogyny.

Anyhow, it is evident that both manosphere and hashtag feminism, as manifestations and phenomena of the postmodern era, are aspects of a bi-historically and cross-culturally evolving power struggle in the field of gender. On this basis, a particular focus of this debate should be on exploring how the incels' thesis of generalised misandry, which has been reproduced in a totally abusive manner, has become a key justification for those who oppose feminism. Digby long ago posited that the impetus for anti-feminist rhetoric is rooted in a fear of the culturally and politically 'apocalyptic vision' of feminist social change.[74] This fear is manifested in a persis-

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[72] Sloterdijk P., 1983.
[73] Žižek S., 1989: 25-26.
[74] Digby T., 1998: 17.

tent defensive mechanism that takes the form of an attack on women, as evidenced by the historical precedent of the men's rights movement and the contemporary actions of incensed incels.

In this regard, Digby has correctly observed that feminist struggles to overcome men's exclusive control of resources have demonstrated that the containment of patriarchal logic and the weakening of the "symbolic content of manhood" have led to the mitigation of individual sexist anchors for both women and men.[75] This has been evident in the relative acceptance of female sexual emancipation and the reluctant disconnection of masculinity from the patriarchally defined social role of exclusive provider of goods ('breadwinner'). Consequently, given that the aforementioned objectives remain at the forefront of the pursuit of substantive gender equality, and that feminism has historically served as the most effective means of achieving them, it is imperative to resist the allure of the various myopic aphorisms and vulgarities that proliferate in the contemporary digital landscape. Instead, there is a need to amplify our support for the absolutely equitable demands of feminist thought and practice.

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[75] Digby T., 2003: 273; Cf. Vo D., 2024.

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