

This is the Accepted Manuscript of our research. The final (edited, revised and typeset) version of this paper is published in The International Communication Gazette. Please use the following citation:

Iñigo, A., Fernández, L., & Tomasena, J. M. (2024). Disinterest, normalisation of gender violence and fear of being cancelled: Mediatised learning on antifeminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses among teenagers in Barcelona. *International Communication Gazette*, 86(5), 420-436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485241259837>

Disinterest, normalisation of gender violence and the fear of being cancelled: mediatised learning on anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses among teenagers in Barcelona

Anna Iñigo,^{a*} Laura Fernández^a and José M. Tomasena^a

^a *Department of Library and Information Sciences and Audiovisual Communication, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain*

*corresponding author

Universitat de Barcelona. Faculty of Information and Audiovisual Media – Melcior de Palau, 140. 08014 Barcelona (Spain)

annainigo@ub.edu

+34 607 356 490

Abstract

This article examines the proliferation of anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses among teenagers in the Metropolitan area of Barcelona, focusing on how the discourses are learnt and reproduced through media. It explores how the rise of the far-right and the manosphere – online communities and spaces where discussions about masculinity, gender relations, and men's issues take place – are contributing to the pollination of these discourses. Through short-term ethnography conducted in three education centres, involving the collaboration of 59 teenagers between 14 and 18 years old, the study researches the discourses that young people embrace, the mediatised environments they engage with, and the role of media in shaping their perceptions of gender violence and identity. Grounded in the imperative to understand and counteract the spread of discriminatory ideologies, the findings reveal the influential role played by the manosphere in shaping perceptions of gender violence and identity. The results highlight the urgent need to challenge and address anti-feminist discourses within contemporary youth culture to promote gender equality and social justice.

Keywords: learning, anti-feminism, LGBTIQ+, sexualities, youth, media literacy, ethnography, masculinity, manosphere, gender backlash.

Introduction

In recent years, the feminist movement has managed to expand ‘gender knowledge’ (Rothermel, 2020) through transnational and transmedia strategies, with examples such as the movement for sexual and reproductive rights in Argentina, the #MeToo movement and the ‘Hermana #YoSíTeCreo’ (Sister #IBelieveYou) in Spain. Nevertheless, the reactionary anti-feminist movement that has arisen and cannot be disassociated from the broader rise of the political far-right in Spain and internationally (Gutiérrez Almazor, Pando Cantelli and Congosto, 2020).

As Messner (2016) points out, the institutionalisation of feminism, the emergence of a widespread post-feminist cultural sensibility, and the development of a neoliberal economy have all facilitated anti-feminist and men’s rights movements related to the concept of ‘gender ideology’ and the impulse of the manosphere. The manosphere is understood as a wide range of online spaces, communities and ideologies related to masculinity and gender issues that deploy misogynistic and hateful discourses against women, feminists and LGBTIQ+ individuals (García-Mingo et al., 2022). As Ging (2017) states, the key concept that unites all the communities from the manosphere is the Red Pill philosophy, an analogy that asks men to make other men aware of the misandry and brainwashing of feminism.

Rodríguez et al. (2021) revealed that one in five young men interviewed between the ages of 15 and 29 believe that gender violence does not exist and that it is an ideological invention. García Mingo and Díaz Fernández (2022) state that the manosphere is a critical element in the gender socialisation of young people because it plays a crucial role in the production of alternative and anti-feminist gender knowledge (Rothermel, 2020), as well as in the polarisation of the public debate on gender equality and feminism in Europe and other contexts (Verloo, 2018; Korolczuk, 2016).

We are witnessing the solidification of online misogyny and its pollination on the normalisation of gender-based and LGBTIQ+ violence (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016). The content produced in the manosphere has achieved a certain permeability throughout Spanish society (García-Mingo et al., 2022) and has a direct impact on the identity definitions of young men (Delgado and Sánchez-Sicilia, 2023). Anti-feminist role models in influential social networks like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Twitch may be one of the influential sources of young people’s media learning about gender and sexuality.

The aim of this study is to understand how teenagers from the metropolitan area of Barcelona are constructing, learning and reproducing anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+

discourses through the media they use in their everyday lives. This objective is divided into three research questions:

- 1) What anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses are Barcelona's teenagers embracing?
- 2) Which mediatised environments are young people referring to and what meanings do they give to their content?
- 3) What is the media role playing in their perceptions of gender violence, and feminist and LGBTIQ+ stances?

Although the social circulation of anti-feminist discourses is neither linear nor simple and occurs in parallel in multiple social institutions, our starting point was to understand how these mediatised contents shape young people's understanding of gender-based violence and the construction of young masculinities. The interaction with manosphere content leads to the perpetuation of discriminatory behaviours, discourses and trends that can reinforce social structures of gender inequality (Schwartz and Neff, 2019).

Based on existing theories about mediatised learning among young people and online spaces for men –the manosphere– our research contributes to providing a detailed understanding of anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses, learnings and trends among young people and how these relate to their media consumption. Analysing the informal online spaces in which young people engage with the pollination of anti-feminist discourses allows us to evaluate their influence on gender perceptions to address and challenge anti-feminist discourses on an empirical and contextualised basis.

Mediatised learnings on political and social struggles

Online spaces and mediatised environments play an important role as platforms for expanding political and social struggles and are a fundamental part of the cultural battle (Bonet-Martí, 2020). The so-called 'fourth wave' of feminism, characterised by a resurgence of feminist protests (García Mingo and Díaz-Fernández, 2022), cannot be understood without considering how it has spread throughout social networks and the internet (Cabezas, 2021). Anti-feminist movements of the 'new' far-right use attacks on feminists as a strategy to spread their messages and gain influence in public opinion (Cabezas, 2021). These movements adopt a highly personalised style of politics that employs negative stereotypes about women and promotes the idea that women are manipulated by the left wing parties and

ideologies, encouraging a backlash against policies on sexual and reproductive rights and the fight against gender-based violence (Gutiérrez, Pando and Congosto, 2020).

In that sense, research found that most young people stay informed about news and current events through social media, where they find spaces and influential models typical of the manosphere (Ging and Siapera, 2018). These influential models use discourses based on male victimisation, calling out feminism and feminists, humour, decontextualization and false debates (Delgado and Sánchez-Sicilia, 2023).

Despite this, we cannot consider young people as a homogeneous and anti-feminist group. It is important to distance ourselves from a single-view perspective and try to look at these topics from an intersectional perspective because we can more comprehensively elucidate the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression that shape individuals' lived realities. Thus, the call to adopt such an approach, as advocated by Coll-Planas, Rodó-Zárate, and García-Romeral (2021), underscores the necessity of transcending simplistic viewpoints in favour of a more nuanced and inclusive analytical framework.

Studies such as those by Masanet and Buckingham (2015) highlight the educational potential that traditional media and online environments can have in the field of gender and LGBTIQ+ studies, by considering young people as active agents in the interaction with media products and considering media usually as a more useful source than school or the family for learning about gender issues.

In this sense, social media and digital platforms offer a space of socialisation for youth, where online connection is considered as relevant as face-to-face interaction (boyd, 2014). Values and social roles are also acquired by young people through media content (Attwood, 2018): on one hand, online spaces can become powerful educational spaces that promote discussion and generate counter-narratives that confront violence (Tortajada and Vera, 2022); on the other, they can provide processes of polarisation and pollination of anti-feminist discourses, which are decisive in young people's perception of the feminist struggle and violence against women and non-normative identities (García-Mingo and Díaz-Fernández, 2022). This promotes anti-feminist perspectives and contributes to the polarisation of public debate on crucial issues such as the regulation of consent, the recognition of the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community and the comprehensive protection of victims of violence (Rothermel, 2020).

The manosphere: a space of freedom from the cancel culture

Gender backlash has been fuelled by the emergence of spaces characterised by the production of anti-feminist digital content. The newly-arrived phenomenon in Spain of groups of men who meet in Internet forums that generate violence against women and the LGBTIQ+ community, accompanied by the rise of openly anti-feminist far-right political parties, such as Vox, has had a large impact on the Spanish online sphere (Gutiérrez Almazor, Pando Cantelli and Congosto, 2020). However, these practices and discourses are not restricted only to the online domain, the manosphere has achieved a certain permeability throughout Spanish society (García-Mingo et al., 2022) and has a direct impact on young men's definitions of their identity (Delgado and Sánchez-Sicilia, 2023).

Rodríguez et al. (2021) have identified an upward trend of support for certain anti-feminist postulates among Spanish teenagers, especially among young men. These studies evidence very polarised positions among boys and girls on the idea of feminism and the demand for equality. Among other results, in 2021 there was a tendency among men (almost twice as many as women) towards statements that normalise or make gender-based violence invisible, such as: 'it is an inevitable phenomenon, even if it is undesirable' (24.4%), it is a 'non-existent ideological invention' (20%), or violence 'is not problematic if it is of low intensity' (15.4%), a tendency that has worsened in recent years (Ballesteros et al. 2019).

The manosphere has attracted the attention of various researchers in recent years; however, in the Spanish context there is still very little scientific production on this subject. The most prominent research in this environment points to the correlation and influence of the manosphere and the media ecosystem on perceptions of gender-based and LGBTIQ+ violence among young men (Boneta-Sádaba, Tomás-Forte & García-Mingo, 2021). This is especially relevant in the case of manosphere memetics, that draw from the concept of memes, which are units of cultural information that spread and evolve through imitation. Within the manosphere, these memes can encompass various beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes related to gender politics, feminism, sexual identity, and societal roles. Likewise, the growing presence of anti-feminist youtubers (García-Mingo & Díaz-Fernández) in the public debate on the so-called 'Solo sí es sí' Law (Organic Law for the Integral Guarantee of Sexual Freedom), the 'Ley Trans' (Law for the Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and for the Guarantee of LGBTIQ+ Rights), and the recent trial of Brazilian football player Dani Alves for rape (BBC, 2023).

In this sense, it is interesting to highlight the affective dimension (García Mingo & Díaz Fernández, 2023) that the manosphere involves and how this network establishes male

complicities. At a time when hegemonic masculinity - understood not as a fixed personality type but rather as a symbolic representation that influences social interactions and routines on identities of individuals within society (Connell, 2003) - is cracking (Ranea, 2021), affectivity acts as a mechanism of comfort and encounter between men (García Mingo & Díaz Fernández, 2023), bringing personal matters into a political sphere and placing men in the position of the victim of a clear perpetrator: women (Blommaert, 2018).

Method

This article is part of the research project ‘Transmedia Gender & LGBTI+ Literacy’ (TRANSGELIT), which investigates how young people learn about gender and sexuality through media. The research project is grounded in queer feminist epistemologies of sexuality and the body, which involves understanding the teenagers as subjects and participative agents rather than victims of media. We approach their lived experiences from a point of view that addresses resistance, while contextualising them within a culture that generates inequalities that become embodied and internalised. It is a knowledge form that aims to include and understand the complexities of experiences and contextualise the contradictions and conflicts (Esteban, 2013).

The study adopts an ethnographic approach in line with the principles of short-term ethnography, as proposed by Pink and Morgan (2013). This methodological perspective has been used in various studies in the area of youth and media studies (boyd, 2014; Scolari et al., 2019). It allows us to observe social trends, attitudes and viewpoints on specific issues and is ideal for carrying out research in a condensed and previously structured social space, such as schools, given that it is not possible to stay there for long periods of time. It is constructed based on the participants’ viewpoints and researchers’ immersive engagement within the context. This enables a comprehensive exploration of the unique and shared aspects of young people’s interactions, practices, and interpretations regarding their engagement with media (Scolari et al., 2019).

Ethical approval was obtained from University of Barcelona. The fieldwork was conducted between December 2022 and May 2023 in three educational centres in the Barcelona metropolitan area: a public high school in the neighbourhood of El Poblenou (n=21 participants), a non-formal educational venue catering to socioeconomically vulnerable teenagers in El Raval (n=16 participants), one of the more impoverished neighbourhoods in Barcelona with a high proportion of migrant people, and a semi-public high school in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, located in the city of Sant Boi de Llobregat (n=22

participants). The education centres were selected with the aim of incorporating diversity in the socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the participants and variety in terms of different types of educational institutions (public, semi-public, non-formal).

It involved 59 participants between the ages of 14 and 18, representing diverse gender identities (male, female, non-binary and gender fluid), sexual orientations (heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, gay, lesbian, undefined, and unshared) and different economic backgrounds, ethnicities (participants were mainly born in Catalonia, the region in which Barcelona is located, but there were also first and second generation migrants from Pakistan, India and Colombia), and religious affiliations (mainly Christian and Muslim).

The practical and deliberate approach of short-term ethnography (Pink and Morgan, 2013) consisted in a series of workshops about gender, sexualities and media practices that were negotiated with every educational institution. In our project, this meant designing interventions with two objectives: to allow the researchers to understand the young participants' unique worldviews and to give students information and practices that would allow them to learn and reflect.

The activities were adapted to the schedule and particularities of each centre, but they included a common base of activities, including collaborative workshops, discussions and activities exploring gender, sexualities and media practices, which allowed the students to express their ideas and usages; co-viewing sessions (Pires de Sá, 2015) including fragments from TV-series relevant for gender and sexuality discussions; media-content production by the participants, including memes, social media content, and podcasts. The podcast format was especially prominent and effective: students had to work by themselves to write a script, use the recording devices and deliver their talk, choosing a topic of their choice related to gender, sexuality and media subjects. This allowed the researchers to observe the young people's opinions and interactions without the direct intervention of a guiding adult, unlike the class dynamics or interviews. In this sense, a significant activity was the 'traffic light exercise' in which workshop coordinators would read a statement aloud and students had to move around the classroom to stand in one of three pre-designated areas: 'Completely agree' (Green), 'Partially agree' (Yellow), or 'Completely disagree' (Red). Once everyone had taken their positions, a debate was opened to express and discuss their opinion.

During the fieldwork process, the researchers recorded in a field diary all the events, impressions, experiences and insights that emerged during the workshops for recording events in detail and contextualising the data obtained in the workshops and interviews, but also for constructing the self-reflexive dimension of ethnography (Pink et al., 2016).

Researchers were able to carry out in-depth interviews following a semi-structured format (Kvale, 1996) with some participants (n=41; 19 female and 22 male; 28 heterosexual, 4 bisexual, 1 lesbian, 3 don't know or don't define, 1 pansexual, 1 gay, 2 fluid, 1 don't want to share) and held individually and anonymously to obtain a deeper understanding of their discourses, experiences and concerns. They followed a guide organised around four main topics: 1) Reflections on the workshops; 2) Everyday media use and consumption; 3) Learning about sexuality and gender through media; and 4) Personal experiences about sexuality and gender. These interviews played a crucial role in gaining insight into the participants' daily negotiations of their aspirations, concerns, experiences, and the potential outcomes. They could express and reconstruct their viewpoints independently.

Participants provided verbal informed consent and their names and personal data have been replaced by pseudonyms included in this study. Likewise, their answers have been paraphrased and translated to guarantee the participants' anonymity. The data were later coded and analysed using ATLAS.ti. We followed a hybrid approach that is both deductive and inductive (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). There was a first round of deductive coding using general analytical categories derived from our research questions. This allowed us to identify the parts of the data related to anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses. In a second round of coding, we used an inductive approach (Gibbs, 2007) to construct the detailed and granular categorisation of these discourses that emerged from our data and that we present in the results section.

Results

Lack of interest, humour, and the fear of being cancelled

A recurring challenge in all the workshops was to manage the resistance of a significant number of people, predominantly young men, who tended to occupy the back rows of the classroom, leaning backwards with arms crossed, displaying a reluctance to engage or constantly making jokes. On the contrary, most girls and LGBTIQ+ participants often chose to sit in the front rows, demonstrating a more spontaneous inclination to participate.

While these attitudes are common during the teenage years and are not necessarily related to the topics discussed in the workshops, some male participants expressed in the interviews that they felt tired of talking about gender and diversity issues: 'When it's repeated over and

over, it becomes annoying’, said Jordi (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 15). ‘I already know that I always have to use protection, that I shouldn’t say certain things to a girl, that I shouldn’t treat her badly... but they keep on repeating it.’

Additionally, gender bias can be identified in the topics that the students selected for their podcasts, which were produced by groups of participants. The ones formed exclusively by boys selected subjects that provided an opportunity to showcase ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and topics that are a subject of discussion among the anti-feminist ideology, such as pornography, consent, and gender quotas; while groups formed by girls or mixed groups opted for topics such as female orgasm, sexual violence against women or LGBTIQ+ themes.

Likewise, the male groups discussed topics that have marked the Spanish media agenda (gender quotas, consent, rape cases, LGBTQ+ legislation) and the content of some manosphere’s quoted role models referenced by them (e.g. influencers such as Roma Gallardo, Jordi Wild, MostoPapiTV, Naïm Darrechi, or José Nogales) from their own point of view and without any contrasted information; however, female and mixed-gender groups dealt with issues with a feminist approach and a broader informed perspective. This happened, for example, in the podcast elaborated on pornography. While two different groups at different schools selected this topic, the group composed exclusively by boys was not able to incorporate different views and arguments around porn (even when researchers suggested that they search for information, for example, about ‘feminist porn’). In contrast, the other group which worked on this, which was mixed-gendered, created content in which different points of view and topics were discussed and incorporated (e.g. the male gaze in porn, porn as part of a business, or supply and demand in porn production and consumption), therefore obtaining a more diverse and informed perspective.

There were also significant differences related to social class, family homeland culture and religion. In the education centre in El Raval neighbourhood the students come from working class families and many of them are migrants. Some of the topics that emerged in this school were prostitution, rape, and women selling their ovules. Unlike the other schools, where a secular environment predominates, many of the opinions of young people from El Raval regarding masturbation, extramarital sexual relations, homosexuality, gender roles and other topics were explicitly influenced by faith: ‘In my culture, most people marry for necessity, not for love’, or ‘Traditionally, in the Muslim religion, if someone is homosexual, they are thought to be possessed by the devil’, said Nasreen (cisgender girl, heterosexual, 17) and Ibrahim (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 18).

Ibrahim often appeared inhibited or reluctant to express their opinions aloud when they felt that their point of view contradicted socially expected discourses. During a discussion on whether being homosexual or bisexual was a ‘trend’, one of them remarked, ‘If I say what I think, they’ll take me to jail’. In another workshop, a boy asserted that in heterosexual relationships, the man was the one who should ‘wear the pants’. When a girl questioned him openly, he took a step back from the discussion saying that ‘he didn’t want to be told off’. The girls showed signs of increasing discomfort and finally said to each other: ‘Let him speak; then, he’ll be quiet sooner’.

When asked during a personal interview why he had made comments against LGBTIQ+ people during the workshops, Bru (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 17) referred to online discourses on LGBTIQ+ rights produced by LGBTIQ+ or allied individuals to justify their insults to their LGBTIQ+ peers in the classroom context. Bru’s explanation sheds light on how the consumption of LGBTIQ+ rights online discourses is translated into a defensive anti-feminist position that is later reproduced in face-to-face contexts such as the school, where it is manifested in the form of verbal aggression. He explained: ‘They call you a “hetero-basic”. And all right, I am hetero-basic, but theoretically I have been normal all my life. Why should we change what has always been normal?’. Even when he recognizes that his attitude could be moved by ‘disgust’ or ‘fear’, Bru cannot break his own prejudices. Instead, he puts himself in the role of a victim of cancellation:

Bru: ‘They always say that if you are heterosexual you are nothing [...] It’s not fair. I don’t like it.’

Interviewer: And who says these things? Your classmates?

Bru: Lots of LGTBI people say it on TikTok, on social media... And also in real life.

Interviewer: Who says that? Your classmates?

Bru: No, not classmates... Friends. Well, they are not friends anymore. We pushed them out of the group because they were lesbians, gays. We pushed them out from our group because we don’t want gays in our group.

Interviewer: You don't want them in the group... Why?

Bru: Because it scares us that if they lose a screw, they might try to do something to us. And we don't want that.'

Another distinctive strategy displayed by young men is the use of humour when they are dealing with sensitive topics. When asked to write what comes to their minds when they think about lesbians, a boy joked loudly, 'A Lambo', because 'we get like a Lamborghini', referring to the male gaze of sexual desire towards lesbians. His intervention provoked a wave of jokes with concepts like 'scissors', 'sluts', 'their private parts' and 'pornhub'. They also made fun of a female and a male classmate by writing down their names. In the following discussion, another boy explained that lesbians 'haven't had good experiences with men or dicks or whatever' and that they definitely have had bad experiences with men, so they went 'over to the other side'.

Humour often turns into mockery towards other classmates, where offensive things are said under the pretext of not being serious. During the recording of a podcast, which was about consent, a boy constantly triggered the sound effect of a drumroll whenever a classmate said anything considered 'politically incorrect'. Or during meme creation workshops, the humour displayed in some of them was clearly anti-feminist.. In one of them, a crying cat is displayed with the text: 'When I watch feminist porn'; the other is a comparative between 'being a man' and 'being a woman.'

As García Mingo and Díaz Fernández (2023) point out, manosphere memetics are a fundamental aspect in studying anti-feminist ideological works. It's what Pibernat Vila (2021) refers as 'youtuber misogyny,' describing the emergence of male youtubers whose content relies on sexist humour. Humour creates an ambiguous space, both for the researchers and young people. On one hand, it serves as a sign of relaxation and trust, indicating the creation of a safe environment to explore ideas that may not otherwise be discussed, especially if they challenge traditional conceptions or taboos around sexuality or gender. On the other hand, it can lead to mockery and other forms of aggression, contributing to the normalisation of gender-based violence.

Normalisation of gender violence

During the workshops, teenagers had the opportunity to express their ideas about gender and interpersonal relationships. The comments and interventions often exposed stereotypical

understandings of femininity and masculinity and the existence of prejudices and preconceived ideas around non-heteronormative sexualities.

As seen in previous sections, the manosphere is a diverse and fluctuating space that depends on the context (García Mingo and Díaz Fernández). It refers to contemporary social events and changes and quickly articulates responses and positions on current issues. This is the case of the public debate on consent, a topic that has been a media theme both in the news and in manosphere content (such as content from youtubers or tiktokers) referenced by the students. It can be observed in a podcast created by Iker and Dani (both cisgender boys, heterosexual, 18) in the high school of Sant Boi de Llobregat. During the recording, researchers were not always present. The scenes described below took place with the presence of one of the researchers in a non-directive attitude so as not to condition the students' discourse and approach to the subject. The atmosphere was one of humour and comfort. In contrast to other groups of the same high school, these boys did not seem to feel intimidated or conditioned by our presence during the recording of their podcast.

The first thing worth noting is the main theme: 'the no is no', said Iker, and then asked, 'Does no always mean no?'. To approach the subject, they used the case of Dani Alves, a football player convicted for sexually assaulting a woman in a nightclub. 'The girl said yes and then she said no', they argued. And then they affirmed that 'she made it up' and placed Dani Alves in a very 'tricky situation'. At one point in the recording, they invited a classmate to talk and asked his opinion. He answered, referring to women, 'It's a shame, you have to make things clear [...] and more with Dani Alves. A thing like that is very serious, and even more so with such a well-known person'. During the podcast they admired the football player, and constantly questioned the accusation of aggression, blaming the assaulted woman for damaging his reputation and demonstrating male complicities based on an affective dimension (García Mingo and Díaz Fernández, 2023) with him. 'I have to see him in prison or have him say it to believe it', said one of them, because 'there are many cases [where women] make it up'. This idea is the exact replica of the far-right postulate against the 'Solo sí es sí' (Only yes is yes) Law regulating sexual consent, something teenagers can find in their media consumption, where anti-feminist opinion leaders from the manosphere's ecosystem blame women for damaging men's social reputation through fake accusations.

Manosphere's environments and its actors played an important role on teenagers conceptions of consent, rape culture and gender-based violence by teenagers. Male participants usually argue that women send mixed signals that can be misinterpreted by men, and have references of how to flirt with woman from influencers such as MostoPapiTV

(youtuber, 2.1 million followers) or José Nogales (tiktok, 74K), who's content can be categorised as PUA's (Pick Up Artists) manosphere's community. During the traffic light dynamic participants were asked if 'When a girl says no, she usually means yes'. Most of them positioned themselves as agreeing with this statement. 'They end up changing the no to yes', argued one boy, 'because they end up warming up or because they get carried away'.

The normalisation of sexual violence was recurrent during the class discussions. An example of teenagers' contact with this content is tiktok Naim Darrechi (30.4 million followers) interview in which he confessed that he had tricked several women into having sex without using a condom and ejaculating inside them by claiming that he was sterile. Bru (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 17) said: 'I follow him a lot, he makes me laugh. They wanted to put him in prison because lots of women reported against him, but he changed his gender and now they can't put him in prison because he's a woman'. Furthermore, Bru's words show the connection with MRA's (Men's Rights Activists) misogynistic discourses, that denounce the criminalization of men in favor of women, and show how the pollination strategy of this community to trivialize and delegitimize violence against women while it is affecting teenagers, especially men.

In that sense, Pau (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 15) and Bru (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 17) show relation with the manosphere's discourses on the Spanish 4/2023 law, the 'trans law'. Both boys mentioned how easy it has become to change gender after the law's approval, therefore allowing male rapists to avoid prison sentences by changing their gender before the trial. The boys state that the law benefits cisgender women: 'women are more protected, that's why Roma Gallardo [youtuber] and Naim Darrechi [tiktok] changed their names. Now they can't convict them'. Bru and Pau told us that they learnt this by watching Twitch, TikTok and YouTube influencers Roma Gallardo (1.93 million subscribers), Naim Darrechi (30.4 million followers) and RickyEdit (2.53 million), who are highly consumed by teenagers.

In addition, Bru described TikTok as a mechanism for generating more LGBTIQ+ people, mocking the plurality of gender expressions and demonstrating stereotypes, prejudice and symbolic violence against queer people: 'when there wasn't TikTok people weren't so [LGBTIQ+]. Soon there is going to be a cat gender and everyone is going to identify as it'.

The media influence on the construction of masculinity

One of the most remarkable things that emerged from the fieldwork is how masculinist perspectives were influencing the construction of young men's masculinities. While heterosexual boys approached masculinist positions, heterosexual girls and LGBTIQ+ people showed more tolerant, critical and feminist positions, even if they did not necessarily define themselves as such, and reacted to their classmates masculinist positions by ignoring or rejecting them. In Lorena's (cisgender girl, pansexual/ bisexual, 15) words:

They're homophobic and sexist because they think it's cool... I mean, the fact of saying 'hey, faggot' or 'anyone who moves is gay' or 'hey, woman, shut up, you don't have the right', or shit like that... We're in the 21st century, what do you mean by 'woman, go to the kitchen'? They're so closed-minded. They know it's wrong, but it's cool, so they do it. In class it's already natural. It's like... well, it's like that.

In this context, men spaces appeared as places where young men are constructing themselves as victims of feminism and legitimising violence towards anyone who falls out of the framework of hegemonic masculinity. These physical spaces were led by narratives of male victimisation and resistance against feminism based on male complicities. At the same time, these teenagers were discussing and interacting with anti-feminist topics on online closed spaces (WhatsApp, Instagram or Discord groups) or online open spaces (Tiktok, Youtube, Twitch), where they follow some actors of the manosphere ecosystem.

None of the participants identified themselves as sexist; however, those boys who reproduced anti-feminist discourses in the classroom supported ideas such as that contemporary feminism no longer fights for equality, but rather responds to particular interests such as receiving subsidies and social benefits from the State, and they also considered feminism as a lobby group. This is the case of Ibrahim (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 18), who explained: 'I am neither a feminist nor a sexist. I am in favour of equality [...] there is a number of feminists who get men to pay them money by saying, "I am going to tell the police that you abused me" [...] And in the end they ruin the life of an innocent person who didn't do anything to them'. As Ging (2017) notes, the Red Pill 'philosophy' that emerges from these media references influences teenagers' perceptions of social developments. This places men in an unprotected sphere in the face of the feminist 'lobby'. As Azad (cisgender boy, unshared sexual orientation, 18) added: 'It's like what happened to Hakimi [Moroccan national team football player], his wife accused him without any evidence and asked him for money. [...] He explained it in a reel by Wild Frank [...] and

gave an opinion that is neither male chauvinism nor feminism, it's like an intermediate reality, it's fairer'. Azad's case show how these teenagers are justifying their positions by using media cases involving men being cheated on by women. He uses Wild Frank, a well-known youtuber with an anti-feminist discourse, to lend credibility to his opinion and as a source of information.

It is important to understand how these discourses are based on an affective dimension (García Mingo and Díaz Fernández, 2023) that acts as an emotional echo chamber (Elsen Ziya et al., 2021), which is based on victimhood and wounded man identities as the fuel and glue for maintaining masculine privilege. Four young men discussed in their podcast about parity measures among law enforcement authorities and how this represented discrimination against men and decreased their rights: 'With this law, what can happen is that a man with a mark of 17 out of 20 won't get in because of the 40% reserved for women, and a woman with a mark of 13 out of 20 will be able to get in without any difficulties. It's a forced inclusion'.

Meritocracy, individualism and the attack on institutionalised feminism, which represents an authority figure, were fundamental elements of these postulates. Although they did not completely reject feminism, they considered that the problem is in its application, as Marcos (cisgender boy, unknown sexual orientation, 14) commented, 'The fact that they have 40% seems exaggerated to me, it should be based on grades, on your efforts, and not on gender'. Jordi (cisgender boy, heterosexual, 15) added, 'And not all the firefighters agree with this. Only the government that has done it agrees. Because this wasn't voted for, was it? They did it just because they wanted to'. Online anti-feminist discourses frequently refer to affirmative action and parity policies as political impositions that are not supported by society, and often use false or unreliably sourced data to 'prove' their case. In this case, not only Marcos or Jordi, mostly male participants mentioned watching or listening anti-feminist influencers (although they don't identify them as anti-feminist) as a way to entertain, enjoy and get information. The most cited references in relation to male discrimination were Jordi Wild, Roma Gallardo, Ricky Edit, Naïm Darrechi and Wild Frank, who have a media platform that allows them to enter into the realities and daily lives of young men.

Discussion

As Ging (2017) indicates, 'theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere is further complicated by the transnational nature of this space and its attendant overlaps between local, regional, and global configurations of practice' (p. 5). During our fieldwork it was found that there was a part of the young population in these educational centres that has developed

resistance to the feminist and sexual diversity agenda. This resistance was expressed as passivity, little interest in participating in the workshops and activities, constantly making jokes and using humour and the presence of overtly sexist, misogynist and cis-heteronormative discourses. The anti-feminist discourses that were most present during our fieldwork were linked to the following topics: a) sexual consent and rape culture; b) harmful sexual-affective relations; c) LGBTIQ+ identities and affective, sexual and gender diversity; d) religious beliefs; e) the construction of hegemonic masculinity; and f) affirmative action policies.

The study points out how teenagers' positions on feminism are related to the ones in manosphere environments and its actors, feeling 'comfortable' to express themselves in class debates beyond 'political correctness'. In these discourses, feminist struggles are individualised and presented as a personal matter or even as an ideology that seeks to impose itself through political and economic forces (the idea of a 'feminist and LGBTIQ+ lobby') and from which they must awaken (Ging, 2017). In this sense, one of the research contributions is to understand the importance of the affective dimension (García Mingo and Díaz Fernández, 2023), as it represents one of the most important avenues of pollination of extreme far-right discourses.

Young men's concerns do not correspond to very high levels of politicisation, they correspond to personal matters where the far-right finds a gap through which they can slip in and are able to provide meaning, bringing personal disenchantment into group and political characteristics. In this context, the so-called 'influencers'—TikTokers, Youtubers, Twitchers—become the first layer and exposure to discourses that can later become more radicalised.

The fieldwork conducted reveals the manosphere (Ging, 2017) has facilitated access to these masculinist cultures and the spread of their capitalist, racist, sexist and heteronormative values through social networks, which are aligned with values of the political far-right (Bonet-Martí, 2020) and respond virulently to a feminism that 'blames' and 'cancels' them.

Interestingly, not only youtubers or tiktokers best known for their anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses are referenced by boys, but also football players. This finding contrasts with previous research results by García-Mingo, Díaz-Fernández and Tomás-Forte (2022), who considered sports role models to be less influential for young men in the online Spanish manosphere.

Our study faced certain limitations. The most important was our difficulty to directly or indirectly connect the anti-feminist discourses present in the classrooms with the discourses

present in the media consumed by teenagers. The short period of the ethnographic approach and the limited size of the corpus cannot be translated into scalable results; however, this study aims to contribute to knowledge about the influence of masculinist and anti-feminist cultures on young people in online environments. While the links between these discourses and young people's media references are more difficult to establish, we provide a consideration of this powerful influence, which needs to be explored in depth in future works.

In this context, it is important to highlight the lack of research on masculinities in Spain. Although the work of García-Mingo and Díaz-Fernandez (2022) has been key in advancing knowledge about young masculinities, it is necessary to consider their informal learning dimension (Scolari et al., 2018). It is also important to study the new forms that online misogyny is taking and how it is being transferred to social dynamics in which male complicity and the reconfiguration of masculinity is created, such as neoliberal masculinist cultures (crypto bros), body cult cultures (gym bros) and the gamer culture.

Although these findings cannot be generalised, they corroborate other studies. As García-Mingo, Díaz-Fernández and Tomás-Forte (2022) point out, it is urgently necessary to address the manosphere and study its pollination strategies and their implication in the normalisation of patriarchal violence, as its existence has strong implications for men, women, LGBTIQ+ people and society as a whole (Massanari, 2015).

The learnings on gender relations, feminism and LGBTIQ+ struggles among young people are critical for guaranteeing the fulfilment of human rights, gender equality in all spheres and full respect for gender and sexual diversity (Schwartz and Neff, 2019). In this sense, online content is a bridge and a key aspect in the spread of far-right hate speech, using humour, irony and fake news as essential aspects of expansion (García-Mingo and Díaz-Fernández, 2023). This is why we consider it crucial not only to research the theoretical study of masculinity, but also to debate and address these aspects in educational environments, generating critical materials and continuing to work to ensure affective-sexual education as a counter-discourse measure.

Declaration of Conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding information

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research,

authorship, and/or publication of this article: This publication is part of the research project Transmedia Gender and LGBTI+ Literacy [TRANSGELIT] PID2020-115579RA-I00 funded by Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities MCIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033. The Juan de la Cierva Postdoctoral contract is part of the grant FJC2021-046861-1, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by the European Union NextGenerationEU/PRTR. The Margarita Salas postdoctoral contract, funded by the Ministerio de Universidades – EU Next Generation through Pompeu Fabra University. 2021UPF-MS-31

References

- Attwood F (2018) *Sex Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ballesteros JC, Rubio A, Sanmartín A and Tudela P (2019) *Barómetro Juventud y Género 2019*. Report, Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud, Fundación FAD Juventud, Madrid. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.3337953](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3337953).
- Banet-Weiser S & M. Miltner S (2016) #MasculinitySoFragile: culture, structure, and networked misogyny, *Feminist Media Studies*, 16:1, 171-174, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2016.1120490](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1120490)
- BBC (2023) Dani Alves: Former Brazil and Barcelona defender to stand trial for alleged sexual assault. *BBC*, 14 November. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/67417736>
- Blommaert J (2018) Online-offline modes of identity and community: Elliot Rodger's twisted world of masculine victimhood. In: Hoondert M, Mutsaers P and Arfman W (eds) *Cultural Practices of Victimhood*. London: Routledge, pp.193–213.
- Bonet-Martí J (2020) Análisis de las estrategias discursivas empleadas en la construcción de discurso antifeminista en redes sociales. *Psicoperspectivas* 19 (3). DOI: [10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol19-issue3-fulltext-2040](https://doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol19-issue3-fulltext-2040).
- Boneta-Sádaba N, Tomás-Forte S and García-Mingo E (2023) *Culpables hasta que se demuestre lo contrario. Percepciones y discursos de adolescentes españoles sobre masculinidades y violencia de género*. Report, Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud, Fundación FAD Juventud, Madrid. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.7797449](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7797449).
- boyd d (2014) *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Cabezas A (2021) Los feminismos ante la nueva extrema derecha: prácticas de acuerpe y sororidades estratégicas para la construcción de un horizonte de equidad e igualdad. *Encrucijadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales* 21(1).

Chevalier, J.M., & Buckles, D.J. (2013). Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203107386>

Coll-Planas G, Rodó-Zárate, M and García-Romeral, G (2021) *Mirades polièdriques: Guia per a l'aplicació de la interseccionalitat en la prevenció de violències de gènere amb joves*. Barcelona, UVic-UCC.

Connell R (2003) *Masculinidades*. México D. F.: Universidad Autónoma de México.

Delgado L and Sánchez-Sicilia A (2023) Subversión antifeminista: análisis audiovisual de la manosfera en redes sociales. *Revista Prisma Social* 40: 181–212.

Esteban ML (2013). *Antropología del cuerpo. Género, itinerarios corporales, identidad y cambio*. 1st Edition. Barcelona: Bellaterra.

Faludi S (1991) *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.

Fereday J and Muir-Cochrane E (2006) Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 80–92.

García-Mingo E and Díaz-Fernández S (2022) *Jóvenes en la manosfera. Influencia de la misoginia digital en la percepción que tienen los hombres jóvenes de la violencia sexual*. Report, Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud, Fundación FAD Juventud, Madrid. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.7221159](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7221159).

García-Mingo E and Díaz Fernández S (2022) Wounded men of feminism: Exploring regimes of male victimhood in the Spanish manosphere. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 0(0). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221140586>

García-Mingo E, Díaz Fernández S and Tomás-Forte S (2022) (Re)configurando el imaginario sobre la violencia sexual desde el antifeminismo: el trabajo ideológico de la manosfera española. *Política y Sociedad* 59(1).

Gibbs G (2007) Thematic Coding and Categorizing. In G. Gibbs (ed) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: SAGE, pp.38–55.

Ging D (2017) Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*. 22(4), 638-657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>

Ging D and Siapera E (2018) Special issue on online misogyny. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (4): 515–524. DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2018.1447345](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447345).

Ging D and Siapera E (2019) *Gender Hate Online: Understanding New Anti-Feminism*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: [10.1007/978-3-319-96226-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96226-9).

Gutiérrez Almazor M, Pando Canteli M-J and Congosto M (2020) New approaches to the propagation of the antifeminist backlash on Twitter. *Investigaciones Feministas* 11(2): 221–237. DOI: [10.5209/infe.66089](https://doi.org/10.5209/infe.66089).

Kvale S (1996) *InterViews : an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Masanet M J and Buckingham D (2015) Advice on life? Online fan forums as a space for peer-to-peer sex and relationships education, *Sex Education* 15(5): 486-499, DOI: [10.1080/14681811.2014.934444](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2014.934444)

Massanari, A. (2015) #Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures, *New Media and Society* 19, pp. 329-46. DOI: [10.1177/1461444815608807](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815608807)

Phillips W (2019) *The Oxygen of Amplification: Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators Online*. Part 1: Trolling, Meme Culture, and Journalists' Reflections on the 2016 US Presidential Election. Report, US, Data and Society Research Institute. <https://datasociety.net/library/oxygen-of-amplification/>.

Pink S and Morgan J (2013). Short-term ethnography: intense routes to knowing. *Symbolic Interaction* 36(3): 351–361. DOI: [10.1002/symb.66](https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.66).

Pink S, Horst H A, Postill J, Hjorth L, Lewis T and Tacchi J (2016). *Digital ethnography: principles and practice*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Pires de Sa, F (2018) Researching co-viewing on social media and instant messaging applications: ethics and challenges. *Comunicação e sociedade*, 33: 409-424. DOI: [10.17231/comsoc.33\(2018\).2924](https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.33(2018).2924).

Rodríguez E, Calderón D, Kuric S and Sanmartín A (2021) *Barómetro Juventud y Género 2021. Identidades, representaciones y experiencias en una realidad social compleja*. Report, Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud, Fundación FAD Juventud, Madrid. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.5205628](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5205628).

Rothermel AK (2020) The Other Side: Assessing the Polarization of Gender Knowledge through a Feminist Analysis of the Affective-Discursive in Anti-Feminist Online Communities. *Social Politics* 27(4): 718–741. DOI: [10.1093/sp/jxaa024](https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaa024).

Scolari CA, Lugo N and Masanet MJ (2019) Educación Transmedia. De los contenidos generados por los usuarios a los contenidos generados por los estudiantes. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 74: 116-132. DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2019-1324](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2019-1324).

Scolari CA, Masanet MJ, Guerrero-Pico M & Establés MJ (2018) Transmedia literacy in the new media ecology: teens' transmedia skills and informal learning strategies. *Profesional De La información Information Professional*, 27(4), 801–812. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2018.jul.09>

Schwartz B and Neff G (2019) The gendered affordances of Craigslist “new-in-town girls wanted. *New Media & Society*, 21(11–12), 2404 - 2421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819849897>

Tortajada I and Vera T (2021) Feminismo, misoginia y redes sociales. *Investigaciones feministas* 12 (1): 1–4. DOI: [10.5209/infe.74446](https://doi.org/10.5209/infe.74446).