



# New Discourses of Masculinity in the Context of Online Misogyny in Spain: The Use of the “Feminazi” and “Gender Ideology” Concepts on Twitter<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** One of the effects of the advance of feminism in Spain in recent years has been the production of a discursive array of new masculinities. Some of the clearly misogynistic masculinities are linked to a discursive use of the term “feminazi”, which, together with the broader concept of “gender ideology”, contributes to the articulation of a specific narrative of masculinity. We propose a critical analysis of a sample of tweets with these two hashtags collected between 3 and 9 March 2019, coinciding with the #8M strike. We have established three dimensions of analysis for the qualitative study of these tweets: the war on the normal bloke, the mirror discourse, and feminist tyranny. The operationalization of these categories has allowed us to reveal the discursive processes through which the co-optation of the victim’s space by popular misogyny operates. Similarly, our analysis shows the crucial role that mass media plays in consolidating certain stories around hegemonic masculinity in the digital space.

**KEYWORDS** new masculinities, “gender ideology”, “feminazi”, online misogyny, #8M strike, victim, Twitter

## Introduction

On 18 February 2020, members of the far-right parliamentary group Vox gathered at the gates of the Aragonese Corts in Spain for a minute of silence in what they considered a public gesture in defence of men killed by women. Vox’s parliamentarians justified their participation in the tribute by arguing that they were gathered there “with a firm commitment to combat any kind of violence” (Hoy Aragon 2020). David Arranz, the party’s parliamentary spokesman in the Corts, said: “In Vox we condemn violence wherever it comes from, and all the victims seem equally lamentable to us. That is why we advocate for a Domestic Violence Act that extends special protection to any aggression committed within the family unit.

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We want to ensure the protection of all, equality, and the presumption of innocence” (Hoy Aragon 2020).

Equal treatment before the law has become the central argument of Vox’s positioning in regard to the legislative framework for gender-based violence in Spain as established in the Organic Law 1/2004 of 28 December, the “Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence”. This rule provides for different penalties for men and women, with greater penalties for male abusers, in compliance with affirmative action in the context of gender inequality and given that it is violence directed at women “precisely because they are women”.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Arranz insisted that the law against gender-based violence is manifestly contrary to Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution which states “Spaniards are equal before the law, without any discrimination on the basis of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance” (Hoy Aragon 2020).<sup>3</sup> No representatives from the other parliamentary groups joined Vox’s proposal for a minute of silence.

Despite this, in recent years in Spain we have witnessed a constant process of discursive construction of a new masculinity. This term – influenced by feminist and gay studies, as well as the anti-racism, environmental, and LGBTIQ + movements, among others – has been used in different ways and attests to its complex intersectional dimensions (Ashe 2007; Connell 1995; Garlick 2016; Hearn and Howson 2019; Howson and Hearn 2019; Whitehead 2002). It is also worth noting the growing inclusion of conceptual approaches to masculinity from the Alt-right and popular misogyny, such as masculinity conceived as being “under threat” and “victimized”, especially with regard to sexual violence (Braithwaite 2011; Brigley Thompson 2020; Gill and Garcia-Favaro 2016). In the Spanish context, the articulation of the debates surrounding the construction of masculinities draws from the questioning of the identitarian primacy of heterosexual males as guarantor of the male/female binomial in the symbolic imaginary (Montesinos 2002; Sánchez Palencia and Hidalgo 2001; Valcuende del Rio and Blanco López 2003). These new discursive articulations of masculinity reject the “elimination of the dissident other” (Bonino 2000: 46), and challenge the fulfilment of the shared mandates or beliefs that make up the “matrix of masculinity” (Bonino 2000: 47). The processes of the deconstruction of discourses of hegemonic masculinity converge with a discursive reaction of popular misogyny that is addressed in our work by taking into account three categories of analysis: the war against the normal bloke, the mirror discourse, and the tyranny exercised by feminism. Thus, as our analysis shows, the technological affordances of digital discourses, especially those of the Alt-right and popular misogyny, are contributing to the formation of certain masculinities that create tension in and co-opt the symbolic spaces of the victim by fighting to establish themselves within hegemonic masculinities (Ging 2019; Papacharissi 2014).

In the case of the analysis at hand in this work, the new masculinity which we research settles into dimensions such as the co-optation of the space of the victim of gender-based

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2004/BOE-A-2004-21760-consolidado.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the Constitutional Court has ruled that the law conforms to the Spanish Constitution in all matters of unconstitutionality that have been raised since its adoption.

violence. This, in turn, is articulated around concepts that have become commonplace from a discursive point of view, such as that of so-called “gender ideology” or using the term “feminazi” to refer to any woman who adopts the principles of the feminist movement. Our article therefore investigates the mechanisms of the building of a new narrative of masculinity that finds a discursive space of configuration in the digital environment. To do this, we propose an analysis of a sample of tweets collected between 3 March and 9 March 2019. The study will serve to account for the ways in which this new narrative is constructed, a narrative that has found in the politics of affect and emotion an effective way to neutralize the concept of gender-based violence. It does so, we assert, by addressing the intrinsic need in every neoliberal society to repair any harm in individual terms, thereby avoiding any structural contextualization of such violence.

## Theoretical Framework

### Online Misogyny and the Co-optation of the Victim's Space

The 2019 8M demonstration in Madrid brought together between 350,000 and 375,000 people, according to data provided by the government delegation. The same entity estimated an attendance of 170,000 at the demonstration the previous year (Gómez 2019). As in 2018, the 2019 mobilization included a one-day labour, domestic care, and consumer strike, as well as student strikes and a two-hour strike in the workplace promoted by labour unions (Gómez 2019). The strikes and demonstrations in numerous Spanish cities were organized through various proposals of digital activism coordinated on the 8M Commission website. Carlos Benítez Fernández and Irene Martínez Nevot published a map on the site that raised awareness for the demonstrations and other acts of protest that took place across Spain. The page brought together other proposals, such as the #1000Motivos campaign (“1000Reasons” to join the feminist strike) which the 8M Commission launched on Twitter. The hashtag #1000Motivos was intended to help women share the motivations that led them to participate in the mobilizations and the strike (Europa Press 2019). In turn, the website [hacialahuelgafeminista.org](http://hacialahuelgafeminista.org) hosted a cut-out in the shape of a hanger that women could print out and write their own reasons for joining the strike and demonstrations in the street. The hashtags #1000Motivos and #HuelgaFeminista (feminist strike) allowed women to digitally share photographs of the cut-out with the reasons justifying the strikes and action on the street on 8 March 2019.

It is necessary, however, to critically discuss feminist digital activism in regard to the demands of the 8M movement, taking into account the emergence and success, in communicative terms, of what has been called online misogyny. Anti-feminist discourses have proliferated in the digital environment, coming together in what has been called the manosphere, which, according to Ging (2019: 1), “has become the dominant arena for the communication of men’s rights in Western culture”. Affordances offered by digital technologies, such as immediacy, engagement, and the circulation of messages that are merely “contributions to circulating content” (Dean 2015: 58), have made it possible to define narratives of a new masculinity, articulated in clearly anti-feminist proposals, based

on a rhetoric predicated on the resurgence of men's rights movements. Messner (2016) affirms that the politicizing of the mobilizations of these new masculinities is linked to the conditions of deindustrialization as well as the demands of feminist movements, which have led to the articulation of a discourse of masculinity that seeks to claim rights that are considered to have been violated by social and legislative changes achieved, in large part, through the feminist mobilizations of recent years. Ging (2019) and Banet-Weiser (2019) advance this argument and critically discuss the discursive proposals of this new masculinity by putting them in relation to some of the constituent axes of post-feminism, such as that of the hegemonic framework of zero equality. That is, the theory that once formal equality has been achieved, any demand of the feminist movement is considered a challenge to the principle of equality and would therefore result in a discriminatory situation for men.

Santiago Abascal, leader of the far-right Vox party, stated in an interview with the newspaper *Marca*: "I am neither a feminist, nor a chauvinist, neither pro-women, nor pro-men" (El Mundo 2019). In this way, he positioned machismo and feminism on an equal footing and introduced into the public debate the need to maintain a purported neutrality in the face of the "out of control" advances of the feminist movement. His rejection of feminist demands related to gender-based violence becomes intelligible through the neoliberal paradigm of "individual harm", which requires reparation commensurate to that of any structural harm, like that to which women are subjected (Galtung 1990; Halberstam 2014). Any proposal to advance the social rights of feminism is thus rendered illegitimate and confined to the conceptualization of a new victimization that is that suffered by men. The co-optation of the space of the victim by the new narratives of masculinity (Núñez Puente and Gámez Fuentes 2017), supported by the fundamental axes of the ideology of far-right groups, constitutes a mirror discourse (Banet-Weiser 2017, 2018, 2019) widely disseminated in digital practices, fostered by online misogyny, and framed in the so-called manosphere.

### Feminazi and Gender Ideology

Critical discussion of the concept of "gender ideology" will help determine its scope in the process of building the new narratives of masculinity. This concept first appeared in a speech by Pope John Paul II in 2001 (Corredor 2019: 614) and was endorsed by Alzamora Revoredo in the text "Ideología de Género: sus peligros y alcances". "Gender ideology" is supported by rhetoric articulated by the feminist movement that, according to Alzamora Revoredo, is based on "the urgency of deconstructing the socially constructed roles of man and woman" (2004: 593). In this way, "gender ideology" is positioned to essentialize and delegitimize the basic axes of the feminist movement by cancelling the politics of equality (Corredor 2019: 616). In this sense, the narratives of a new masculinity are politicized as frameworks of meaning that challenge politics and conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality that have constituted the advances of feminism as a social movement in recent decades.

The use of the lexicalized term "feminazi" is one of the ways in which the concept of "gender ideology" has been mobilized in media discourses. In February and March 2019,

the ultra-conservative association Hazte Oír conducted a mobile campaign with a bus emblazoned with slogans against “radical feminism”. Its proposal was primarily aimed at calling on the leaders of the conservative parties Partido Popular, Ciudadanos, and Vox to repeal the so-called “gender and anti-sexist violence laws” (RT 2019). The bus toured several Spanish cities demanding the elimination of the Comprehensive Law against Gender Violence of 2004, as well as the legislative rules that protect the LGBTQI + community. The campaign’s main argument was “It’s not gender-based violence. It is domestic violence”, which contributed to the rise of the slogan “Gender laws discriminate against men”. The bus also included an image of Adolf Hitler wearing makeup with the feminist symbol on his hat. The hashtag #StopFeminazis that circulated widely on Twitter in the days before and after the strike and the mobilizations of 8 March 2019 was written below the image (El Diario 2019).

The discursive framework of “gender ideology” has spread massively on social media, strengthening its epistemic dimension. In Spain, Vox has used social networks – especially Twitter – to widely and continually spread the concept of “gender ideology”, against which the party has developed a discourse aimed at actively combating inequality and discrimination. The discourse linked to the fight against “gender ideology” considers it a direct consequence of gender politics fostered by what they call the “progre consensus”. In other words, the symbolic narratives of the new masculinity have helped break both the consensus that had been held in the public, legislative and social debates on gender equality as well as the measures implemented to promote such equality, a consensus that had stood until the emergence of far-right groups in the Spanish parliament.

As Colebrook (2011) notes, it appears that the only thing consumed in the media is affect. The formation of a new narrative of masculinity associated with concepts such as “gender ideology” or “feminazi” seems to respond to the logics of the politics of emotions and affect, which much media literature addresses (Boyce and Banet-Weiser 2019; Holmes 2004; Knudsen and Stage 2015; Slack 2012; Van Dijck 2013; Wise 2012; Yardi and Boyd 2010). While affect and perceptions are linked to public reception processes, the media studies literature argues that media discourses “create affects and percepts that are not in a point of view” (Hipfl 2018: 9). Hipfl turns to the “bloc of sensation” that refers to the “structures of feeling” that Williams (1978) engaged with to define a collective feeling that emerges and is constituted in a symbolic framework in the media.

Papacharissi (2016) suggests, in this sense, that social media promote feelings of engagement that help activate and sustain latent links that may ultimately be essential in the logics of mobilization of networked publics. Affect and engagement, which is, in a certain way, produced by affect, following Papacharissi (2016), form storytelling structures that articulate discursive dynamics principally mediated by affect. Finally, Papacharissi (2016: 310) argues, as we maintain in the case our analysis of the new narrative of masculinity presented below, that digital discursive practices can disruptively challenge consensual frameworks of feeling.

## Methodology

To capture Twitter data for our analysis, we chose to use the commercial software Brandwatch. We selected this tool in order to reduce the bias of the Twitter API towards the over-representation of accounts with greater influence and thus were able to capture messages beyond the main accounts that usually dominate the conversations (Blank 2017a, 2017b; Recuero et al. 2015). At the same time, in order to obtain the greatest discursive richness possible (Morstatter, Pfeffer, and Liu 2014), data capture spanned from the four days leading up to the March 8 protest to the day after (from 4 March to 9 March 2019). Considering that the main analytical objective is discursive analysis, we systematize a series of indicators to rank and choose the discursive study based on the mentions of the hashtags #feminazi and #ideologiadegenero.<sup>4</sup> In short, we use these six indicators:

- 1 Twitter Reach: measures how much a particular message has expanded across multiple social platforms. It therefore aims to lend a more comprehensive approach to measuring the impact of a message (Lee 2017).
- 2 Impressions: these are the total number of times a tweet has been viewed, not the number of users that have seen it. For example, if the Twitter user “Y” sees a tweet five times and the Twitter user “Z” sees the same tweet three times, its reach will be 2 while its impressions will be 8.
- 3 Kred Influence: based on a scale between 1 and 1,000, this metric synthesizes reactions to a given post. It also measures the frequency of response, mentions, and the number of new followers that are obtained within the analyzed period (Nargundkar and Rao 2016).
- 4 Impact: this is a synthetic metric between 1 and 100 that takes as its reference each mention, website, and user that has spread a message. It is based on analyzing the potential of the message to be viewed (impressions), shared, or re-tweeted.
- 5 Engagement Score: this is another synthetic metric that primarily measures the degree of interaction that a message has generated within the analyzed network, divided by the number of impressions (Semiz and Berger 2017).
- 6 Retweets: the number of times a tweet has been retweeted. This is not a synthetic metric. However, to the extent that it is a quickly visible number within Twitter, it remains a quick indicator of the echo that a particular message produces.

With this set of indicators, we created a synthetic ranking of the above metrics to focus the analysis on those tweets that had a meaningful presence within the analyzed network. First, for each of the indicators available for data extraction, the 15 posts with the highest scores for each of the metrics analyzed were selected. Second, a synthetic ranking was then established based on the posts that obtained the most mentions within all metrics. That is, those posts that most frequently appear within this top 15 were selected to better identify the possible co-optation of narrative spaces by various actors. Finally, those tweets were analyzed following

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<sup>4</sup> The data utilized in this article can be freely accessed at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3738982>

the analytical practice of critical discourse analysis, understood as “analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 1993: 466).

This analysis, in which the quantitative ranks support the selection of tweets to be qualitatively analyzed, addresses the most relevant messages in order to understand how the construction of new narratives on masculinity by online misogyny based on the concepts of “feminazi” and “gender ideology” is articulated, as well as whether or not the co-optation of the victim’s space by misogyny in the so-called manosphere does in fact occur. Online misogyny has been categorized from different approaches. In the context of our work, however, it is linked to the development of the term as a form of political performance in the field of digital practices (Gill and Favaro 2016). These practices insert themselves, in turn, in a growing culture of attacks on both women and the feminist movement in digital spaces (Banet-Weiser 2017; Ging 2019).

To do this, we propose structuring the analysis around three categories linked to those formulated by García-Favaro and Gill (2016: 384) in their study of sexism rearticulated in online responses to the “Lose the Lads’ Mags” campaign and adapted to the context of our research.<sup>5</sup> These are as follows:

### 1. The War on the Normal Bloke

There is a perceived loss of self-referentiality in the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This loss is perceived as a result of what is regarded as an open war against the “normal man” that calls into question the matrix of masculinity (Bonino 2000: 47). It is seen as a struggle that carries with it a loss of power and a questioning of the privileges, both symbolic and in the social order, which the “normal man” has enjoyed so far. The politics of affect and emotions in the online environment help to activate and sustain bonds on behalf of popular misogyny and to articulate a consensual discourse that denounces discrimination against men.

### 2. The Mirror Discourse to Co-opt the Space of Others as Victims

The hegemonic concept of masculinity has activated a self-affirming discourse through the creation of “otherness” that reflects the desires of the male and brings together his fears and limitations. The crisis of the univocal concept of masculinity leads to a decomposition of hegemonic masculinity as a symbolic reference of the discursive elaboration of the subordinated “other”. Faced with this masculinity in crisis, a mirror discourse (Banet-Weiser 2017, 2018, 2019) of these alterities is activated, a discourse that, especially in the context of the digital practices of online misogyny, strains and co-opts the symbolic space of those “others” as victims.

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<sup>5</sup> We have selected the categories established by García-Favaro and Gill (2016), taking into account not only their relevance to the analysis of our corpus of tweets, but also for the relevance of academic work on concepts such as popular misogyny and post-feminism in relation to the discursive construction of gender binaries carried out by both scholars.

### 3. "Feminist Tyranny", Where Feminism is Advanced as a Looming Menace for Men

Following Zurián’s argument (2011), the normative construction of masculinity “turns against the dominant being itself by allowing it to be nothing but that which is stipulated by the patriarchal dictatorship”. This univocality of the concept of masculinity referred to by Zurián results in the impossibility of visualizing other ways of rendering masculinity intelligible, which, in turn, allows the consolidation of the concept of “feminist tyranny”, a “tyranny” that forces the “normal man” to assume alternative models of masculinities. Anti-feminist discourses proliferate in response to rhetoric linked to the resurgence of men’s rights movements.

## Findings

Generally speaking, the structure of the obtained data is similar across both hashtags and reproduces the usual dynamics of message dissemination on Twitter. Table 1 shows that around 80% of the sample are retweets, i.e., instrumental adherence to the message, while replies constitute less than 4% in both cases, and original messages less than 18.38%. Nevertheless, the number of mentions of other users is noteworthy, with 84.32% and 89.10% of tweets mentioning other users. This is relevant because mentioning is a stronger adherence to the message than retweets.

**Table 1:** General data characteristics

hashtag	Thread Entry Type	N	%
<b>#feminazi</b>			
	reply	24	2,16%
	post	204	18,38%
	share	882	79,46%
	total	1110	100,00%
	mentions (post)	936	84,32%
	mentions(total)	76	
<b>#ideologiadegenero (gender ideology)</b>			
	reply	8	3,79%
	post	32	15,17%
	share	171	81,04%
	total	211	100,00%
	mentions (post)	188	89,10%
	mentions(total)	290	



Through a discourse analysis of the posts that, in general, had more mentions within the analyzed metrics, we aim to critically discuss feminist digital activism in relation to the demands of the 8M movement in the context of online misogyny's success, in communicative terms. We will see how a struggle over the space of the victim of violence occurs – or does not – in the digital context, and how affect and engagement are enhanced to help promote and sustain essential links in the processes of mobilization of social networks by different social actors.

## The War on the Normal Bloke

Among the tweets with the hashtags “gender ideology” and “feminazi” that rank highly in all metrics, we find some which contest and turn against the questioning of the matrix of hegemonic masculinity resulting from the celebration of 8 March 2019. They are messages that try to activate adhesion by mobilizing emotions in a united front against those who seek to alter the power relations and question the privileges of the “normal man”. In the circulation of the most influential tweets, we observe both a struggle over meaning in relation to feminist activism, by appealing to equality and against “gender ideology”, as well as online misogyny that associates feminism with practices such as abortion, which they call “murder, as a method of contraception”. These tweets also denounce “the blame placed on men just for being one, Marxism and communism as ideologies that only lead to misery”.<sup>6</sup>

The majority trend perceived in other tweets with high engagement is associating words such as “feminism”, “lobby” or “industry” with “gender ideology” and “feminazis” in messages opposed to the strike. In this way, these tweets intend to activate and sustain links to mobilize online misogyny and develop a politics of affect through the digital discourses that circulate on Twitter. We also note that this serves to articulate the construction of male subjectivity as a victim of a feminism that claims and benefits from public resources and leaves men vulnerable, questioning their virility.

The struggle over emotions, affect and engagement, therefore, articulated the discursive dynamics of tweets that linked “gender ideology” to hatred of men and emphasized that violence is genderless, co-opting the space traditionally occupied by feminism in its fight against gender-based violence. Thus, through the use of this concept of “gender ideology”, online misogyny defines a masculinity that suffers at the hands of an ideology that emphasizes gender differences, despite its purported emphasis on equality, and that defends a legal framework discriminatory against “normal” men.

In this framework, tweets circulated that explicitly fought against “gender ideology” by appealing to the affects and emotions of those who supported the #8M mobilization following the logics of the articulation of digital discourse, condemning, for example, the Catholic Church: “against gender ideology!!! against the fascist apparatus backed by the Catholic Church that expelled from the life of Spain + 60% of the #LGTBI Spain, year zero” (@eraser).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://twitter.com/2021POSITIVE/statuses/1103930544985845760>

<sup>7</sup> <http://twitter.com/eraser/statuses/1103926620421730304>

Meanwhile, feminist activism sought to combat this discourse by way of the affects of digital discourses, obtaining, nevertheless, a lower impact. Using strong messages, it sought to combat the perceived consensus on the platform linked to the strength of online misogyny: “There are 1000 reasons to claim the #8M. But there is one above all: the desire for equal rights and opportunities between men and women. Love Equality, Equally. That is what sexists call Gender Ideology... #NadaNosPara8M (nothing will stop us 8M)” (@AinaDiaz).<sup>8</sup>

In the denunciation of the crusade against the “normal man”, an “enemy” was constructed and incarnated in the so-called “feminazis”, who were targeted by some other women as well. One of the highest-impact tweets features a video of women from the far-right Vox party and includes their stance on the strike, a position they regard as the “most sensible and congruent in relation to the disgusting feminazi delirium”.<sup>9</sup> In the demonization of feminists, a tweet<sup>10</sup> called Simone de Beauvoir a “supporter of paedophilia” and accused her of laying the foundations of gender ideology by linking her to an article that considered her a “defender of hatred of men”. In this way, the stage was set for the confrontation between those who embody a wounded masculinity and those who pose a threat to hegemonic virility.

### The Mirror Discourse for Co-opting the Space of the “Other” as Victims

In the sample of tweets analyzed here, we find that the word “feminazi” is used either specifically to characterize the protest or feminist strike, or in a more general way to describe actions around 8M. Through a mirror discourse that incorporates that term, users attempt to coopt the space of the victim previously occupied by the “other”, in this case the so-called “feminazis”, that represents the greatest fears of masculinity in crisis.

Some of the highest-ranking tweets include derogatory messages intended to mobilize against feminists, who are discursively constructed as “others” from whom one must defend oneself. This is the case with the media outlet @CasoAislado\_Es’s tweet, which associates feminist activism with violence: “Videos that show the true face of 8M supremacist feminism continue to come to light. A ‘feminazi’ assaulted a security guard after graffitiiing the subway. You won’t see it in the far-left media”.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, using a mirror discourse of these threatening “others” while implicating certain media outlets as allies, @federico\_videos called television network *La Sexta*’s coverage of the protest “feminazi propaganda”. He posted a video from the network showing images of the demonstrations, claiming, “today in @sextaNoticias we have NOT seen NEWS, we have seen feminazi propaganda from the #HuelgaFeminista2019 throughout the broadcast. Here’s the proof”.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the symbolic space of this otherness is threatened in digital practices through the challenge of consensual frameworks of meaning around support for the strike

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<sup>8</sup> <http://twitter.com/AinaDiazV/statuses/1103642714179031041>

<sup>9</sup> [https://twitter.com/vox\\_es/status/1102644432485138436](https://twitter.com/vox_es/status/1102644432485138436)

<sup>10</sup> <http://twitter.com/JavierGilbertG/statuses/1104143341980143616>

<sup>11</sup> [https://twitter.com/CasoAislado\\_Es/status/1104353157881217026](https://twitter.com/CasoAislado_Es/status/1104353157881217026)

<sup>12</sup> <https://pic.twitter.com/yAbwWmT8Re>

and demonstrations. In keeping with the tweet we analyzed in the previous section, the women of the far-right Vox party distance themselves from the strike in a gesture of self-determination and denunciation of what they understand as propaganda and politicized struggle between the sexes. This is visible in a tweet written by @AliciaMtnzVOX: “We faced a marathon week of feminazi propaganda. We women in @vox\_es put meritocracy before any politics of what’s between one’s legs. We don’t need an 8M to know what we’re worth. I don’t strike #VoxTarrasa #NoHablesEnMiNombre! (don’t speak for me)”.<sup>13</sup>

We note, therefore, that among the tweets in the top positions of the ranking that include the word “feminazi” during 8M, only a small minority of users positioned themselves against the term. In one of the most retweeted messages, the digital newspaper *Público* tried to explain its meaning through the video of a feminist reporter: “The term ‘feminazi’ is widely used by those who try to smear feminism. What does it mean? @candelabarro tells us in the ‘Feminist Dictionary.’ #8MAquíYAhora (8M here and now) #8M”.<sup>14</sup> In the second-highest ranking tweet, @irene\_\_torosa started a thread using text and video to denounce a confrontation in the streets between a young protestor and a Vox militant: “This happened today in Valencia at the end of the 8M student demonstration, a gentleman with a sign that said ‘I will vote for vox’ and when a girl in a T-shirt passed, he yelled feminazi, open thread #8M #8M2019 #HuelgaFeminista8M”.<sup>15</sup>

Both the results obtained by the analysis of tweets with the word “feminazi” and those obtained through the analysis of tweets with “gender ideology”, we see an attempt to co-opt the victim’s space by online misogyny compared to the lesser impact of feminist messages, as well as an attempt to construct a male subjectivity against “those Others” through a mirror discourse. A tweet from user Carlos Navarro marks a trend in messages that seek to promote collective feelings and emotions in opposition to feminist activism. He links this activism to the “gender ideology” accused of promoting hatred, confrontation and division between men and women. The tweets try to re-signify the 8M as a day of defence of the dis-ideologized woman: “Day of working women YES. Day to defend women YES. Day of feminism, gender ideology, hatred of men, victimization, abortion... Etc NO. The Strike has clear ideological overtones, working women, don’t let them use you to divide society”.<sup>16</sup>

The feminist response, which achieved lesser saturation of the network, presents a compendium of reasons to go on strike and affirms that “gender ideology” does not exist: “The gender ideology they sell you does not exist. Data exists. Precarity, sexual violence and domestic work: the reasons for the feminist strike, in numbers m.eldiario.es/\_34261de1 from @eldiarioes Let’s strike!”.<sup>17</sup> A post from the progressive digital newspaper *eldiario.es* is particularly retweeted, sometimes with negative commentaries. It features statements by Cardinal Cañizares, Archbishop of Valencia, insisting on the need to react against violence

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13 <http://twitter.com/AliciaMtnzVOX/statuses/1102677693269725184>

14 <https://pic.twitter.com/E2YantTcNK>

15 <https://pic.twitter.com/7ugtheOYGg>

16 [http://twitter.com/CarlosBarrax\\_97/statuses/1103968423510532101](http://twitter.com/CarlosBarrax_97/statuses/1103968423510532101)

17 <http://twitter.com/anuskina/statuses/1103577696125288448>

against women, while at the same time asserting that “gender ideology does not defend them” (@eldiariocv).<sup>18</sup>

Thus, we see that the symbolic struggle in digital discourses manifests itself with a high degree of tension as online misogyny mobilizes the mirror discourse as a way of co-opting the space of alterity as a victim.

### **“Feminist Tyranny”, Where Feminism is Advanced as a Looming Menace for Men**

Anti-feminist discourses turn against the “feminist tyranny” that is believed to push for the destabilization of normative masculinity by proposing alternative models. The strike is conceived as an imposition of the “feminazi lobby” sustained by “fallacies, manipulated data and lies”.

As we note, one of the tweets that generates the most adhesion is a tense conflict around actors such as the Catholic Church and conservative parties. The terms in which this confrontation occurs, through insult and scorn, represent a dispute over affect within the logics of the mobilization of public networks as well as a space of construction of a masculinity wounded by the privileges and impositions of feminist “tyrants”. In this sense, they draw attention to a series of highly ranked messages that, through the concept of “feminazi”, challenge and resist the consensual frameworks of meaning around the mobilization of 8M established by feminists and political actors who are considered their accomplices. In a tweet, @CasoAislado\_Es was thus pleased to see that the Civil Guard had removed the institutional logo supporting 8M on its Twitter account: “The Civil Guard is fed up with Pedro Sánchez’s demands”.<sup>19</sup> “The Civil Guard had decided to rescind its support of the 8M ‘feminazi’ strike by removing the logo that was featured by many organizations as obligated by the socialists”.<sup>20</sup> In the same sense, another user broadcast the tyranny of left-wing groups: “The Government tried to force our @guardiacivil, to support the ‘Feminazi 8M’ strike, a far-left strike and advocate for illegal immigration, the elimination of National Day of Spain and the closure of CIE (immigration detention centres) and prisons”.<sup>21</sup>

The dominant discourse becomes evident in tweets that speak of “manipulated data” and “lies” in reference to allegations of gender-based violence or of “disgusting feminazi delirium” or the “feminazi covenant”. If we look at the messages including the concept of “gender ideology”, among those that obtained the greatest adherence is the one published by the “Igualdad Real-IGRE Bizcaia” party, which appeals to the “structures of feeling” to denounce the co-opting of the day of “ALL working women” into “the date for a partisan feminist strike”: “Gender ideology appropriates 8M in its indoctrinating quest” (@IgreBizcaia).<sup>22</sup>

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18 <https://pic.twitter.com/yDFptmyTE6>

19 In reference to the President of the Spanish Government.

20 [http://twitter.com/CasoAislado\\_Es/statuses/1102492614077673472](http://twitter.com/CasoAislado_Es/statuses/1102492614077673472)

21 <http://twitter.com/NarSpaniaTietra/statuses/1102505604768325632>

22 <http://twitter.com/IgreBilbao/statuses/1103553997791739904>

The tug-of-war with “feminist tyranny” is also manifested in messages that try to find a defensive space in an environment of strong hostility towards feminists. An @AinaDiazV tweet seeking to dismantle discourses that associate gender ideology with the promotion of inequality had a high impact: “There are 1000 reasons to claim #8M but there is one above all: the desire for equal rights and opportunities between men and women. Love equality, equally. That is what sexists call Gender Ideology...#NadaNosPara8M”.<sup>23</sup> The progressive paper *Público*’s retweet of a post by @nazaret\_castro\_ obtained an average impact. It alludes to quotes of @veronica\_gago in Castro’s story “about the patriarchal counteroffensive”: “Gender ideology is a concept pushed by the Catholic Church that tries to organize a counter-insurgency based on the strength and power of feminism”.<sup>24</sup> A tweet by @tallerhistoria2 sharing a video of journalist Iñaki Gabilondo’s plea with the title “I am also a ‘feminazi’” summarizes the appropriation and resignification of the term “feminazi”.<sup>25</sup>

In keeping with the above, some women were active actors in the response against “feminist tyranny” which, in their view, proposes not only a new model of masculinity, but also articulates a concept of femininity which ought to be resisted, such as in this tweet by the journalist @SilviaSanz\_: “Do you know that in the #8M platform they ask women to replace tampons and compresses with the menstrual cup? Do they know they also tell you what to eat, what clothes to buy, and even prohibit you from banking? It’s a real feminazi manual. #NoHablesEnMiNombre”.<sup>26</sup> The pressure against anti-feminist messages manifested itself in high impact tweets in an attempt to counteract what actors such as the progressive Podem Valencia party regarded as an offensive against women: “Anti-women parties speak of ‘gender ideology’ ignoring that the only gender ideology that has ever existed has been the sexist and patriarchal one, which has excluded and oppressed half of the population. #NadaNosPara8M #HuelgaFeminista8M #8M m.eldiario.es/cv/opinion/Ola... pic.twitter.com/CHmR7nXx4F”.<sup>27</sup>

This analysis allows us to understand how the discursive construction of a new masculinity organized around certain concepts transformed into the commonplace from a discursive point of view, such as “gender ideology” and “feminazi”, is articulated.

## Conclusion

The general quantitative characteristics of the tweets we analyzed are those usually detected in which the shared content of influential users predominates, while the responses are comparatively scarce. A noteworthy aspect of this study is the high percentage of messages that address other users. That is to say, while messages were captured around hashtags, a significant level of discursive confrontation is seen as users address one another through mentions.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://twitter.com/AinaDiazV/statuses/1103642714179031041>

<sup>24</sup> <https://pic.twitter.com/dYOpLq7PM8>

<sup>25</sup> <http://twitter.com/tallerhistoria2/statuses/1104166743545655299>

<sup>26</sup> [https://twitter.com/SilviaSanz\\_/status/1102657305924026373](https://twitter.com/SilviaSanz_/status/1102657305924026373)

<sup>27</sup> <http://twitter.com/PodemVLC/statuses/1103720919560867840>

The use of the three analytical categories makes it possible to specify such struggles in greater detail. The *war on the normal bloke* highlights the main agents against whom the messages are addressed, and who are part of the cultural history of Spain that defines a characteristic type of masculinity, today in crisis: the Catholic Church and fascism, referring to a concept of Hegemonic Spanish culture during the Franco dictatorship. At the same time, feminism is characterized as responsible for putting the blame on that type of “normal man”. Characterized thusly, the feminist movement is seen to have contributed to discursively framing the so-called “normal man” in a situation of victimhood in which his rights have been violated. Making the concept of violence abstract and uprooting it from its gendered context is a strategy also present in *the mirror discourse* of popular misogyny. Through that discourse, the institutionalized far right uses it as a semantic field that reinforces the process of victimization to which, according to popular misogyny, men have been subjected. They use terms like “supremacism” and “propaganda” to describe and vilify feminist discourses.

In this way, the mirror discourse aims the manosphere to gather and co-opt the narratives of women, while presenting masculinity as closed, monolithic and, in their opinion, clearly victimized. Through discursive strategies such as the reversal of the concept of victim, a kind of masculinity is articulated, one located in the symbolic space of fragility and which, therefore, requires a process of repairing damage inflicted by the fundamentally social and political advances driven by the feminist movement. Finally, these kinds of discourses of popular misogyny use this idealized and wounded masculinity to reinforce essentialist dichotomies that facilitate the intelligibility of hegemonic masculinity against the “Other”, embodied here in the subject of feminism. The “Other” is constituted by its identification with feminist tyranny, according to the account of popular online misogyny, which elaborates its discourses through fallacies and lies. Thus, a univocal configuration of the collective imagination in terms of dominant masculinity is created that invokes the need to restore a hierarchical order destabilized by the demands of feminism.

We find again that the most notable discourses align themselves with public institutions (the Civil Guard) as an instrument of symbolic struggle that present a single type of unquestionable masculinity, in opposition to a set of discourses that capture a wider range of disputed masculinities.

In this regard, it is worth noting, to conclude, how mass media, especially newspapers, continue to be important agents within the struggle on the Internet. The tweets published by both the newspapers *El Público* and *elDiario.es*, as well as in other tweets that mentioned these publications, greatly elevated the struggle for the visibility of the discourses. This growth and interaction have been provoked both by adherences to the feminist message of both sources as well as by the dissemination of responses against such messages that seek to co-opt such spaces. In short, while the role of traditional media in the digital space has changed, it remains an anchor of meanings relevant to online conversations and disputes.

Our analysis ultimately offers an investigation into the ways in which the mediated narratives of victimization in the digital environment situate the discourses of a new masculinity in the space of the victim’s co-optation, a space that is built through the discursive

mechanism of the mirror discourse, or what Banet-Weiser (2018) has called the “funhouse mirror”, aimed at contesting hegemonic and consensual discourses surrounding the demands of the feminist movement.

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