

Men for gender equality – Analysing gender equality content and perspectives on  
masculinities in anti-feminist web spaces

Sonja Nikula

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Faculty of Humanities

University of Oulu

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## Abstract

Gender equality is understood as an important value in Western societies. The term, however, is ambiguous as it responds to many intentions and goals from different approaches. Men's and boys' issues are represented in media for instance by declining grades in schools, suicide statistics and violence. Many actions towards gender equality focus on women's issues, disregarding men as participants and victims. This has led to self-claimed anti-feminist men's rights activist movements to take responsibility for men's issues. This thesis explores anti-feminist views on gender equality and masculinities in gender order. Definitions of gender equality, men's rights movements and manosphere as well as masculinities in gender order give context to the topic. The study is conducted as a qualitative content analysis of a well-known USA-based website *A Voice for Men*, which is part of the men's rights movement. The analysis focuses on gender equality content and masculinity portrayals of the website to gain knowledge on anti-feminist views on the situation of men. The findings suggest that some men are not satisfied with the current Western society or the gaining popularity of feminism in it. The contents insist that women have received their position to gender equality and that further actions of feminism are discriminating against men. The website indicates a challenge to norms of gender roles and with that more choices to live as a man. However, the website includes ways to renew power relations of masculinity over femininity. Masculinity definitions include pejorative terms for those men who believe in feminism, which include terms that indicate feminine traits negatively.

## Tiivistelmä

Tasa-arvoa pidetään tärkeänä arvona länsimaisissa yhteiskunnissa. Se ymmärretään yleiseksi ja yhteiseksi tavoitteeksi ja siksi se on terminä käytössä monella eri taholla. Ihmisten näkemykset koskien tasa-arvon tavoitteita ja sen ongelmia ovat monipuoliset, joten termin ymmärtäminen vaatii kokonaiskuvan hahmottamista. Tasa-arvoon liittyvät aiheet keskittyvät usein vain naisten ongelmiin ja sivuuttavat miehet osallisina ja uhreina, mikä herättää kiinnostusta miehistä tasa-arvon toimijoina. Huoli poikien koulumenestyksestä, miesten osuus itsemurhatilastoissa sekä miesten harjoittama väkivalta piirtävät kuvaa miesten osasta tasa-arvossa. Miesten oikeuksia puolustamaan on noussut eräänlainen miesten tasa-arvoliike, joka mieltää itsensä antifeministiseksi. Tässä tutkielmassa käsitellään antifeministisiä näkemyksiä tasa-arvosta, maskuliinisuuksista ja sen myötä yhteiskunnan valta-asetelmista. Aihetta taustoitetaan tasa-arvon määrittelyillä ja kartoittamalla miesten tasa-arvoryhmittymiä sekä maskuliinisuuksien yhteyttä sukupuolten valta-asetelmiin länsimaisessa yhteiskunnassa. Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena sisällönanalyysinä tunnetusta yhdysvaltalaisesta verkkosivustosta *A Voice for Men*, joka keskittyy edustamaan miesten tasa-arvon aiheita. Analyysissä kartoitettiin antifeminististä tasa-arvoa ja miesten roolia yhteiskunnassa. Havainnot verkkosivuston tasa-arvoa käsittelevästä sisällöstä osoittavat, että jotkut miehet eivät ole tyytyväisiä nykyiseen yhteiskuntaan ja feministisiin tasa-arvotoimiin. Tasa-arvon tärkeimpinä tavoitteina sivustolla listataan miesten aliarvostuksen ja naiskeskeisyyden korjaaminen. Verkkosivusto tuo esiin uskomusta, että feminismin ja naisten tasa-arvopyrkimysten tavoitteet on jo saavutettu, jopa siinä määrin, että niitä edelleen edistävät toimet kaventavat miesten oikeuksia. Verkkosivuston sisällössä esiintyy halu haastaa perinteisiä maskuliinisuudelle asetettuja odotuksia ja velvollisuuksia ja näin laajentaa miehenä olemisen mahdollisuuksia. Sivustolla esiintyy kuitenkin tapoja, joilla ylläpidetään maskuliinisuuden valta-asemaa feminiinisyyteen nähden. Feminismiä kannattavista miehistä käytetään sivustolla useita pilkkaavia termejä, joissa muun muassa miehen feminiinisyys nähdään negatiivisena piirteenä.

## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Gender equality, men's rights and masculinities .....	3
2.1. Men for gender equality.....	3
2.2. Men's rights groups.....	5
2.3. Masculinities .....	7
3. Data and methodology .....	10
3.1. Description of the materials .....	10
3.2. Qualitative content analysis and coding frame.....	11
4. Findings .....	13
4.1. Anti-feminist gender equality .....	13
4.2. Anti-feminist perspectives on masculinities .....	16
4.3. Gynocentric and Redpill masculinities .....	18
5. Discussion and conclusion.....	22
References .....	24

## 1. Introduction

Men's involvement in gender equality evokes discussions on roles and responsibilities to action. 60% of men think that gender equality has already been achieved in Finland (Haapea, 2024). This was a result found in a survey commissioned by Nytkis ry, the Coalition of Finnish Women's Association, about men's attitudes toward the violence that women face (Haapea, 2024). In the same survey 50% of men answered that feminist movement and activism like #metoo restricts men's rights (Haapea, 2024). #Metoo was an activist movement to make sexual harassment and abuse that women face visible. In addition to that result, in the open answers, there were comments blaming women for causing the violence with their own behaviour, some implying that immigration is the reason for the documented violence, arguing that men will stop the violence if women will and saying that men are actually victims of women's violence (Haapea, 2024).

Men and masculinities belong to a complex structure of dominance over women that is built and maintained by various underlying structures and social relations making it seem normal (Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013). With the changes in women's position and femininities, the position of a white, able-bodied man is beginning to be realised as the most privileged and convenient in today's Western society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, many men do not subscribe to the idea but rather feel that their position is endangered, and that society is unjust to them (Mannerström, 2024, as cited in Nuuttila, 2024). In media, the discussion on gender equality is rather polarized by the differences between genders (see e.g. Nuuttila, 2024). Many men have expressed their dissatisfaction with blaming men and patriarchy for women's issues and the whole gender equality discourse disregarding men's issues (see Connell, 2005; Messner, 2016; Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013).

It is important to research the different approaches and views to gender equality to promote conversation and understanding. The term gender equality does not have one definition, and it means different things to different people. While the term is often located in feminist spaces there are many interpretations, even among feminism, to what it considers as its important targets of effort. Different approaches to acknowledging men's issues can be seen in feminism

but also in groups who believe feminism is the cause of men's poor conditions in the current Western society. The diverse community of the so-called manosphere is a collection of different anti-feminist groupings interested in men's rights in Western countries (Ging, 2019). Looking for a solution from nostalgia for conservative traditional values and opposing gender equality is a trend seen in younger generations and is usually thought of as the core of anti-feminism. However, not all in the manosphere advocate for traditional values nor oppose gender equality but rather seek for their interpretation of (gender) equal rights.

Previous research has covered current issues of changes in the economy and political landscape affecting gender equality (e.g. Connell, 2005; Kantola et al., 2012; Kantola et al., 2020; Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2017), men's attributions for gender equality (e.g. Connell, 2005; Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013), men's rights groups in manosphere (e.g. Carian, 2024; Ging, 2019; Messner, 2016), also other dimensions of manosphere like incels (e.g. Sugiura, 2021), and explored differences and similarities of men in feminism and men's gender activism (e.g. Carian, 2024).

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the interest of men's involvement with gender equality and change among masculinities. This is done by exploring anti-feminist webspace and how the anti-feminist gender equality content of men's rights activism sees the position of men in gender order in the current Western society. This thesis will use the definition and theories by Raewyn Connell (e.g. 2005, n.d.) of masculinities as a tool to analyse representations of men's position in a gender order and how that reflects to their views of gender equality. The data is collected from the well-known anti-feminist men's rights webpage *A Voice for Men* (AVFM), which targets men's issues in gender equality, and examined with qualitative content analysis. The findings suggest that some men are not satisfied with their positions in gender order and seek solutions from anti-feminist men's rights activism and its definitions of masculinity. The second section of this thesis provides background to aspects of gender equality, anti-feminist men's rights activism and masculinity theories. The third section introduces the methodology and data used in the study. The fourth section discusses the findings in three subsections. The thesis ends with a discussion and a conclusion.

## **2. Gender equality, men's rights and masculinities**

This section provides context to gender equality discussions, anti-feminism and masculinities. The movement towards gender equality means significant changes for the current society and practices with co-operation of both men and women (Connell, 2005). Men's role in gender equality is inconstant as men are wanted as participants but the actions of gender equality are often only linked to women. Additionally, in discourse men are disregarded as a contributor and a victim of inequality, because within the gender order masculinities are seen as superior and thus their premises are privileged. Men's rights movements promote men's needs and actions from different premises to gender equality. The anti-feminist side of the Men's Liberation Movement (MLM) or Men's rights activism (MRA) blames feminism for society's unequal treatment of men.

### **2.1. Men for gender equality**

The history of gender equality is complex and diverse and appearances of it date back hundreds of years, but generally, gender equality in Western countries is connected to women's rights and women obtaining equal rights to men, especially suffrage. In current-day Western societies gender equality and other factors of equality are thought of as the core values and ideology of basic human rights and feminism is acknowledged as a major contributing ideology with various levels of operators in improving gender equality (Kantola et al., 2020). In most countries the target group of gender equality issues is presumed to be women (Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013). For example, many of the names of gender equality institutes, not to mention the issues, are targeted almost solely to women (Connell, 2005). Men are acknowledged in various gender equality topics spread in social media, such as #metoo and the term toxic masculinity, where men and their behaviour are blamed, often due to convictions, but without any clear platform for change. The gender-equality politics have made it hard for men's issues to come forward by disregarding men from the issues and organizations and treating equality issues as women's issues and so the platform for men's issues has been taken by anti-feminist politics (Connell, 2005).

The term gender equality does not hold meaning to everyone and thus its aims are not necessarily understood (Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013). For example, the improving direction of women's rights has caused some men to fight against feminism and accuse women of taking men's rights with their endeavours toward gender equality (Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013). The meaning of the term gender equality accumulates dispute as it does not have a sufficient explanation but rather has various interpretations depending on the context and the purpose for which it is used (Kantola et al., 2012; Kantola et al., 2020). Different meanings are, for example, 'equality', where the focus is on equal rights to men and women; 'difference', which acknowledges the differences that may lead to inequality; and 'diversity', which expands the meaning outside binary and to intersectional factors (Kantola et al., 2020). Another division is between formal equality which focuses on creating an equal starting point and substantive equality which focuses on equal outcomes (Kantola et al., 2012).

Gender equality goals are all-encompassing in politics, leading corporations and every formal community to have its own equality objectives. In some regard the gender equality discourse in politics has been identified as hegemonic, meaning that equality is well represented in discourse, but the actual politics and equality indicators fall short (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2017). For example, since Finland is seen as a leading country in gender equality issues, equality is understood as an already achieved matter and thus the reaction to questioning the still prevalent gender discrimination is not taken well and is even denied (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2017). It is important to note that in the Western context there are differences in the political landscape of different countries, but those countries are also considerably interrelated with their influences on each other. The connecting feature over the world is that the contributions and changes in equality are not linear and challenges in economic and political situations have great impacts on delaying gender equality advancements (Kantola et al., 2020).

A major inequality contributor is proposed to be neo-liberalism politics and global capitalism that create differences and unequal possibilities (Kantola et al., 2020; Connell, 2005). In the news there have been observations of the voting behaviour of the younger generation. The voting results show that the polarization of ideals of men and women has increased in the last



decades in Western societies as men tend to be more interested in conservative and women in liberal values (e.g. Mannerström et al., 2020; Nuuttila, 2024). In a news interview, researcher Mannerström reasons that the difference is not connected to gender only, as various sectors of instability and growing inequality in current society influence the perceived polarization of genders as well as factors of identity (Nuuttila, 2024). The unstable state of the world and economic situation have led to inequalities in education and labour market, there is a growing wealth gap in Western societies and thus also inequality of opportunities, which have all contributed to the situation where, for the first time in history, the position of a white, uneducated man is threatened (Mannerström, 2024 as cited in Nuuttila, 2024).

Connell (2005) explains the backlash to gender equality and feminism to have been born as a response to women and feminism destabilising the patriarchal gender order. This insecure position has caused more men to look for security in conservative ideals as well as see feminism as the culprit for their suffering, whereas women's response to men's ideals of restricting their rights leads to growth in polarization (Mannerström, 2024 as cited in Nuuttila, 2024). Advocation to conservative ideals and traditional gender roles is not the only backlash movement to feminist gender equality ideals. There is a more toned-down approach to the men's rights movement that uses the declining economic situation of men and the seemingly good situation of women to make men think that the problem is feminism by having improved women's issues but not seeing the same happening to men (Messner, 2016). Therefore, it is important to note that gender equality is an ambiguous term, and its concept is adapted to many purposes according to the views of the different parties advocating for equality of genders.

## **2.2. Men's rights groups**

Forms of men's rights have been active since the late 1900s. In the US context, the Men's Liberation Movement (MLM) was formed in the 1970s in reaction to feminism and women's rights movements of the time (Messner, 2016). The MLM split into two due to internal contradictions in views, when discourse turned from men benefiting from the liberation of

harmful gender roles to some symmetrising men with women's liberation issues by viewing men as "equally but differently" oppressed as women (Messner, 2016). Finally, this led to the perfect ground for men's rights activism to reverse the use of liberal feminist language to their benefit and start to imply that men were actually the oppressed group (Messner, 2016). Messner (2016) theorises shifting social conditions of men losing their importance due to changes in economics, and post-feminist ideals of viewing equality as already achieved to be the ground for the new rise of men's rights movements.

The concern of forgetting men and especially boys from the discourse of gender equality and disadvantages continues in the current mass media while more work and research are done to support and reveal the disadvantaged patterns of society and equality discourse for men and boys (see Connell, 2005). The male loneliness epidemic has been a recent media concern of men suffering from not having enough close relationships (e.g. Ansley, n.d.). Connell (2005) drafts the popularity of men's and boys' issues to have been popular for several decades, but the concern of (the lack of attention to) their issues remain similar if not the same. The views of men's rights are also gaining a platform in right-wing politics. In Finland, for example, the far-right Finns Party has differentiated itself from feminist gender equality politics and shifted focus on men's issues and men's need for equality politics against discrimination of feminism and politics favouring women (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2017).

There is a dissonance in the conversation between feminist and men's rights activism. Internet and social media are popular space for interaction and communication in modern world, where online contexts enable fast and broad passage for information and ideologies. The internet is now the location of most debates, activism and communities and that is also the case with manosphere. Men's rights activists have formed a vast interconnected coalition of internet forums, websites, communities and sub-cultures in different platforms (Nagle, 2015 as cited in Ging, 2019). While the segregation is caused by the structures of media, in real life most people are not as extremist. The current formation of the internet and the infamous social media algorithms makes the media landscape prone to bubbling into like-minded groups and in disagreements polarising them against each other. For example, with conversations having gendered tone both men and women are easily presented as villains of one another's

problems. Algorithm-led social media bubbles, which do not promote conversations and understanding, have been noted as another factor contributing to the growth of polarization (Evans, 2024 as cited in Nuuttila, 2024).

The coalition of these different men's rights movements and their websites could be classified as a bubble of like-minded views that do not face a lot of challenges and for that reason drift to polarization. The vast internet community of the manosphere of loosely connected ideals of men's rights is remarkable in following the conversation of men's rights in the Western context (Ging, 2019). The coalition of groups connect through the ideology of "Redpill", despite the diverse and even contradictory views connected to it (Ging, 2019). The "Redpill" refers to the scene in the popular film series Matrix, where taking a red pill means waking up to the reality, which in this case means accepting the reality of men being inferior to feminism (Ging, 2019). Conservative values and backing to traditional roles are the more publicly known sector of men resisting feminism, also an "incel" community of men who feel personally attacked by women and have violently demonstrated that. The interest of this thesis is on (anti-feminist) men's rights activism that advocates for gender equality.

### **2.3. Masculinities**

Gender is understood as a significant contributor to society by organising power relations and expectations, where a concept of masculinities (and femininities) represents the patterns of practice that are associated with men (and women) and that place them in gender order (Connell, n.d.; Council of Europe, n.d.). Men became the factor of gender equality through the understanding that men are not the norm (Council of Europe, n.d.). The plural form of the word masculinity refers to the understanding that throughout history there have been multiple ideas of masculinities and various types of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinity takes its shapes in relation to femininity, what is not feminine, and the whole society, men and women, contribute to the shaping of the ideal masculinity (Council of Europe, n.d.). Patriarchal society and traditional gender roles, deep in the system of patterns in society, are forming a gender order, where the power relation of men is dominant, and that of women

subordinate (Connell, n.d.). The significant feature of studying masculinities is to realize the consequences of the power relations of different masculinities, but also to femininities (Connell, 2005; Connell, 2005 as cited in Council of Europe, n.d.).

The other key concepts in studying masculinities are hegemony and hierarchy. The concept of hegemonic masculinity means masculinity that is the idealised way of being a man and that enjoys the dominant position in gender order; it expresses the symbolic, idealised and admired definition of masculinity and thus impacts the lives of people and their construction of masculinities, being an ideal that no one can fully live up to, but many nonetheless believe in (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The construction of hegemonic masculinity happens in interaction at global, regional and local levels and the characteristics and practices linked to it are ambiguous and dependent on the time and location, which means that there are plenty of factors contributing simultaneously and resulting in a complex ensemble of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Wetherell & Edley, 1999 as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This means that the differences in what is considered an ideal man are vastly different even at the regional-local level, in addition to the possibilities and variances that virtual communities can produce.

The privilege of a man, especially a white able-bodied man, comes from the system of patterns hidden in history (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, to understand the complexities of life Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state that “without treating privileged men as objects of pity, we should recognize that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life” (p. 852). The different and fragmented positions chosen by boys and men are used as coping mechanisms to manage hard feelings of anxiety and powerlessness (Jefferson, 2002 as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Vulnerability is not allowed in traditional masculinity so many men do not have the capability to notice their problems (Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013). For example, in an ethnographic study of young boys, the researchers noticed that pursuing hegemonic masculinity limits feelings and expressions of compassion (Huuki & Sunnari, 2015). Lifting stereotypes of men and masculinities makes healthier men and boys in addition to bettering their relationships to other people (Ruxton &

van der Gaag, 2013). There is a need for change among masculinities to gain more choices and unconstrained ways to be a man.

The reason to study masculinities is to understand men's concept of themselves and the expectations of men on existing among different masculinities. Gender inequality is grounded in masculinity being more valued than femininity, where women may engage with masculinity, but men cannot do so with femininity (Carian, 2024). There has been a change in the history of masculinities, indicating that there will be change in the future. In some locations, the change has shown a hegemony of masculinity that is breaking away from the more predominant masculinities of the history of patriarchy and traditional gender roles (Connell, 2005). One example of this is the Nordic masculinities that have shown a distinctive change in the fatherhood of men to actually seek more present roles than that of the traditional provider (see Eerola, 2014). It is also not just in the feminist agenda to want change for men's roles in current society, as in various locations it is noticed that the expectations of men strip away many social and emotional needs and support systems from them leading to crucial results. The anti-feminist men's rights movements are also seeking more choices in how to live as a man and thus change for masculinities.

### **3. Data and methodology**

This section introduces the research material and the methodological framework, starting with a description of the material, which is the website A Voice for Men (later also referred to as AVFM). After that, the methodological approach of qualitative content analysis will be explained with a description of the coding frame that was used to process the data for the analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a versatile method as it does not belong to any specific field of study and is rather unbound to rules (Bengtsson, 2016; Vuori, 2021). However, the open-ended characteristic of the method requires careful self-evaluation and positionality from the researcher for transparency and trustworthiness of the research (Bengtsson, 2016). Whereas validity and reliability are important factors to consider throughout the study, generalization is not necessarily an aspect of evaluation as qualitative content analysis is often used in local contexts (Bengtsson, 2016).

#### **3.1. Description of the materials**

The research materials for this thesis were chosen to represent more formal content from the participants of the internet community of manosphere and anti-feminist gender equality activist men. Webpages are a part of the communication of an activist group where the information of their mission, like values and goals, are presented in detail. The process of seeking and selecting the materials prioritised activity based on the Western culture, which is the background culture that the theories supporting this study mainly represents. The level of implication to the political message was another factor considered to ensure that the materials could indicate activism for gender equality in some form.

The webpage that was chosen is A Voice for Men, currently owned by Robert Brockway but founded by Paul Elman in 2009. It is located in the USA and is active mainly in the Western context. It has various international contacts with men's rights groups in Europe as well as in India and Australia. The website includes information about the group and its activities, but also advertisements of services and items, like informative books and "Male friendly consultants" for members of MRA. There are various links to other pages, like Wiki4Men, which

is their version of Wikipedia, but also to the other men's groups pages. Their activity includes video channels and podcasts, and on the website, there is a possibility to take part in writing one's own thoughts on topics of anti-feminism and experiences of "taking the red pill". Guidelines for posting on the website invite all to contribute to the conversation but state to follow rules to form, like proper grammar, and have no tolerance for unnecessary hate speech.

On the website AVFM states that they have no political stance and do not partake in political lobbying nor have religious preferences. AVFM's mission is "changing the cultural narrative", which they believe puts cultural pressure on actual legal change. From their 20<sup>th</sup>-century political lobbying they have transformed their mission to changing the cultural narrative in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, calling it the second wave of MRA. They do not mention what narratives specifically have changed, but they say that in the 21st century men's situation has improved due to the deconstruction of popular narratives, which they do not mention either. "Gynocentrism" and "male disposability" are their main objectives followed by "certain issues facing men and boys", "equality of opportunity for all" and "oppose enforcement of gender roles". To their understanding of history and the current state of the Western world and societies, women are not discriminated against and have an opportunity of individual choice in their lives and roles. That however is not the case for men, and on top of that "the efforts to enhance the rights of women have become toxic efforts to undermine the rights of men".

The research materials were examined, and the coding was done in January and February of the year 2025. The materials include the pages FAQ, Objectives, Glossary and posts made by AVFM about their Objectives and also Woke, Equality of outcome and Equality of opportunity pages on Wiki4Men.

### **3.2. Qualitative content analysis and coding frame**

Qualitative content analysis is a tool of analysis for systematically collecting data from a chosen material (Bengtsson, 2016). Qualitative content analysis involves coding, where the content elements or meaning units are identified and described by the researcher (Vuori,

2021). It is adaptable for different needs in research with choices in coding style and approach to the analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Vuori, 2021). The coding can be done deductively, where theory leads the choices or inductively immersing into the content or by using a mix of both (Bengtsson, 2016; Vuori, 2021). The coding frame for this research was built with an inductive method to code data from the materials. The coding frame was made in two parts. First the parts that mention equality, equity or anything on gender equality work were coded to get an answer to the general idea of the webpage's views on gender equality. The first coding process was done to become familiar with the format and contents of the webpage and specifically the views relating to equality and gender equality. The second coding was executed to masculinities in the same materials that were found while coding equality. The highlighted parts include any behaviour, language or traits that are linked to men or boys.

The choice of analysis style is dependent on the preferred approach adopted in a study, where manifest analysis keeps the analysis closer to what the text is originally, and latent analysis aspires to reveal the underlying meaning of the text (Bengtsson, 2016; see also Vuori, 2021). In the analysis process the focus is on finding relations between the meaning units, which then can either be categorized further to find out broader meanings or used to map out different ways to represent the researched topic (Vuori, 2021). The analysis process continues to answer the research questions (Vuori, 2021). The choice to use manifest analysis was made to correspond to the straightforward style of the website's contents. The data were kept in complete text extracts to ensure interpretations as close as possible to the original material to represent the anti-feminist views to perspectives on gender equality and masculinity. The coding process continued with several detailed reviews for both coding parts. In the coding process different categories were deduced for masculinity types that appeared in the text that at the end of coding were named to represent gynocentric masculinities and red pill masculinities. The analysis was continued by dividing the material into three categories that were the two masculinity categories and the third category of anti-feminist gender equality.



## **4. Findings**

This section presents the findings of the study in sections responding to the coding in the analysing process: First Anti-feminist gender equality (4.1.) and Anti-feminist perspectives on masculinities (4.2.), followed by a section discussing Gynocentric masculinities and Red pill masculinities (4.3.). The findings contribute to forming a better understanding of anti-feminist approaches to gender equality as a feminist agenda of inequality by analysing the views of men's rights movements on gender order and masculinities.

### **4.1. Anti-feminist gender equality**

In analysing the data that addressed gender equality topics on the A Voice for Men website, the most important theme that emerged was the problematics of feminism and how it affects men. The anti-feminism identification is self-claimed by the group, as well as by the whole manosphere. It is the central notion of defining their views on gender equality and position in the present society. A Voice for Men does not clearly identify as a gender equality advocate nor state that they are doing work for gender equality on the website. However, the AVFM website can be classified as part of gender equality actions in a way that its objectives are to better the notable issues and thus unequal situation and gendered treatment of boys and men. AVFM is part of Men's rights activism [MRA] (or Men's human rights movement [MHRM]) and believe that women have achieved the ideal position of "freedom from sex-based expectations", but men have been left behind in this societal change (AVFM post on Objectives). On the website it is stated that:

"The balance and true revolution in freedom and identity cannot be gained if men's issues are not solved." (AFVM post on Objectives)

They do not agree with the general understanding that women in the current Western society receive unequal treatment in various contexts, such as in work life and healthcare, and that they are at great risk of gendered violence. They do not mention any possibility of feminist actions to better the position of men.

At the core of the anti-feminism of MRA that the AVFM website belongs to is the belief that Western society is led by feminist politics. This is demonstrated in the language and terminology they use to describe matters on the website. “Gynarchy”, which is used to refer to a women-led government or government that focuses on women, is explained to exploit men and strip away men’s rights while working on making women’s position privileged. “Gynocentrism” is explained as follows:

“Gynocentrism refers to a dominant or exclusive focus on women in theory or practice; or to the advocacy of this.” (AVFM Objectives)

According to the website “gynocentrism” does not only happen in a political context but also in “academic research, institutional policies, cultural conventions, and in gendered relationships” (AVFM Glossary). In addition, the glossary on the website includes various other words that refer to the state of society that is almost solely interested in women and girls like “gynosympathy”, “pussy pass”, “gyneolatry”, “gynomopia” and “benevolent sexism”. The explanation of these all informs society and government doing positive actions towards women at the expense or disregard of men.

In the objectives of the website “gynocentrism” is classified as the biggest issue to solve in the current Western society besides “male disposability” which is explained as:

“Male disposability is the notion that men and boys should surrender their life for the greater good of the community and in particular to facilitate the survival of women and girls.” (AVFM Glossary)

These two objectives are followed in the list of objectives by other issues that men and boys have. Issues they mention around the webpage are for example, unequal reproductive rights, a limited number of choices for men in how to live a life, lack of bodily autonomy referring to genital cuttings as a child, suicide statistics and inferior education. “Male disposability” is the byproduct of “gynocentrism” that includes indifference to men’s issues and ultimately the achievement of true gender equality. An important notion is that men are not useless as AVFM believes that men are the pillars of society, by doing the important “invisible jobs – to maintain an industrialised society” and by “surrendering their life for greater good” (AVFM Glossary). The problem AVFM state is that men are expected and valued to be living as “human doings”, a

word play on 'human being', referring to the indifferent position of men in current society to being only a resource and not valued as a person.

The state of the modern world is understood as critical as they refer to it as a "Clown World" and "Peak Crazy" indicating that the actions of feminists and "woke" are unimaginable. "Woke", a term from Afro-American Vernacular English (AAVE), initially referred to being awake of the prejudice and discrimination by race but has been expanded to describe all equality discourse, but recently it has also been understood as pretentious virtue signalling and over-sensitivity (Faye, 2021). On the website, on a Wiki4Men page, "woke" is an adjective referring to various attributes and beliefs of equality and politics, overlapping with feminism. AVFM explains the people who identify as "woke" as pretentious and thus intolerant by trying to be tolerant. Men's rights also object to identity politics, gender ideology, post-modernism and critical theory that are linked to the feminist field by referring to those to be shallow and only ideological works for reforming society to feminist ideas of "gynocentrism". The understanding and accepting of the state and unequal arrangements of a society criticised by MRA is performed as "taking the Red Pill".

AVFM detaches from the term equality because of its abstract explanation and criticise the word equity as a feminist equality indicating an answer that feminism in reality does not want equality. Equality of outcome, equity, is equality work where different actions are done with aims to create similar outcomes, but that would not be the preferred method of MRA. On the website, on the FAQ page, it is stated that women are not discriminated against in Western countries, and neither are men, but men have big issues that are not taken seriously. The preferred ideology of MRA and AVFM to equality considers individual rights and responsibilities, also referred to as "agency". It is explained as follows:

"We advocate for men and women to be free to choose their own paths in life. Men's rights has a strong focus on individual rights and responsibilities." (AVFM FAQ)

AVFM amends this from equality of opportunity, which is also their third objective, meaning that everyone should be given an equal starting point to achieve within the limits of their own

qualifications. One is then responsible for their own luck, and it is not inequality that others succeed better due to better skills or other qualities. The importance of individual aspects of rights is for example seen in the way that AVFM advocates for the right to sever parental rights and responsibilities to match to the women's rights of abortion and the notion that "individual rights must trump societal need". As another example, the final objective AVFM states on the webpage is "to oppose enforcement of gender roles" to correspond to the right to choose one's own role in life (AVFM Objectives). However, they also state that according to some research, egalitarian countries actually follow the historical norm of traditional division of labour in families.

The gender equality activism of MRA and AVFM focuses on criticising feminism and woke politics and ideologies as a means to "change the cultural narrative" (AVFM post on Objectives). The website indicates that the current equality politics led by feminism and woke agendas are pretentious and ultimately unequal. The actions and the worldview of the people believing in feminism and woke ideas are accused of trying to be good and right but being intolerant and exclusionary by for example not being open to conversation and views of MRA. For example, two questions that are often raised to represent women's unequal position in society about the amount of work and gender wage gap are answered in the FAQ by claiming that this has been proven as a myth and that their calculations in effect show that when commuting is added to the equation, men have longer working hours. Anti-feminist gender equality from the contents in the webpage shows that AVFM wants to relieve gendered expectations from men, as well as traditional gender roles, in views to expand choices in life for men. However, in the byline, the contents show support for neoliberal individualist economics and equality views that create divisions. AVFM also proposes that traditional roles are natural and not cultural products.

#### **4.2. Anti-feminist perspectives on masculinities**

Masculinity theory understands hierarchy as a diverse ensemble of views of the ideals in masculinities that are defined in relationships with men and women at various levels of

locations and times in history to the current day (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Gender order represents the power relations that are historically constructed and underlie the expectations and ideas of masculinities and femininities, influencing the interactions of today (Connell, 1987 as cited in Zinn, 2022). Patriarchal history, which still largely shapes Western societies, forms a gender order, where women are subordinate in power relations to men (Connell, 2005). Connell (2005) and Carian (2024) theorise that men feel victimised by women's equality because they feel like their place is threatened by women (women taking place in masculinity) but they do not feel like they can present femininities because femininities are still seen as inferior to masculinities. In analysing the data on masculinities from the website, the question is whether the masculinities are challenging norms or renewing them.

In the data from the AVFM website gender order is presented as inverted from the usual understanding of how underlying patriarchal structures create the privileged position of men in the current Western societies. For example, in the glossary it is described that women are in a leading position in defining the hierarchy for masculinities based on their views of desire and possess major power in gender order. The core of masculinity and how AVFM sees men in gender order is as victims of the current society that is led by the "gynocentric" perspectives of feminism and pretentious "woke" agendas. The understanding of the gender order is conveyed in the contents of the AVFM website that refer to differentiating systems and practices towards men. Differentiating practices include for example unequal rights as a father compared to a mother and the practices that feminists have created against men like "she-bagging" against "male-spread". Another example is "hover hands" that indicate a structural problem in how men should be worried about their being in a space and have to act in certain ways in interactions with women to avoid possible false allegations. The website indicates largely that masculinities are disregarded, as men are "disposable", and the society only cares for women. However, masculinities are not seen as insignificant, only unvalued, because men for example do the important "invisible jobs".

In the analysis of the data of the gender equality content the norms are renewed in the way that they believe that equalitarian choices follow traditional roles by referring to "some research"

and masculine norms of competitiveness and emotional toughness for example are repeated in the views of individualism. However, AVFM wants more choices for men on how to live a life outside hierarchal aspiration and providing. In addition, the website is created to give an outlet for men to communicate their feelings on the issues that they consider unjust and not just hold them in. The aspects of masculinities and relations to gender order are discussed with examples in the next section.

#### **4.3. Gynocentric and Redpill masculinities**

The analysis of the contents of the website that addressed masculinities included conceptualization of the ideas of masculinities. There were quite a few definitive masculinity examples indicating the way that AVFM categorises and names different types of men and their behaviour, actions and choices in life. The division into two categories was directed by tone as definitions could be classified as positive and negative based on whether the masculinities were part of the manosphere or not. The negative connotations were implied to masculinities that included women in the definitions and thus referred to in this thesis as Gynocentric masculinities. These Gynocentric masculinities are described to be formed by gynocentric society and support the idea of women in power. In addition, anti-feminists who advocate for traditional gender roles and traditional masculinity are also labelled as women-influenced and woman-worshipping and thus not appreciated. The category of men who have awoken to reality by taking the red pill, including most of the manosphere, are referred to as Redpill masculinities. The dimensions of the masculinities that were found in the data are discussed and elaborated in this section with examples from the webpage glossary.

The objectives of MRA seek to challenge the roles of men indicated by gender norms which would change and make space for ideal masculinity. Actions towards the goal of the core objective to have more choices in how to live in current society as a male can also be seen by the movement that moulded for detachment from the current society. The movement of MGTOW and others in MRA have executed this withdrawal by minimising their contributions to society, which is called “Going Galt” (AVFM Glossary). MGTOW is described as:

“Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) refers to men committed to self-determination, and to voluntarism within relationships.” (AVFM Glossary)

Additionally, the Redpill masculinities seek division from the current societal structures that is seen for example as detachment from seeking hierarchal expectations. The evaluation of men into hierarchal rankings and the whole way of being a man in the current society within this “hierarchal model of masculinity” is implied to be determined by women and what women value. They write that:

“Zeta Male refers to a perspective and way of ‘being male’ that positions itself outside of the usual hierarchical model of masculinity based on alpha male (top), beta male (second) and omega male (lowest). Unlike the foregoing, the Zeta Male’s orientation is not based on a hierarchical classification of men as valued by women. The zeta male also remains open to social engagement and to relationships, instead of social withdrawal which is often the preferred path of self-identified MGTOW.” (AVFM Glossary)

The nature of some of the Redpill masculinities could be describing change among masculinities in a way these and the equality ideal of the MRA are said to oppose traditional roles and show the possibility of change in the ideal of masculinities to something that is more allowing. Zeta Males, for example, demonstrate an understanding of the health benefits of relationships and social life. The description of “incels” also refers to more accessible masculinity:

“The term Incel is a contraction of the words involuntary and celibate. Incel is often used pejoratively. In reality many incels have physical and mental health issues that impact their ability to attract long-term partners and sustain romantic relationships.” (AVFM Glossary)

General masculine traits include sexual activeness and virility and among men and in society as a whole mental health issues of men are not well recognized and accepted. However, in the description of “incels”, the issues on sexuality and mental health, but also what it causes for relationships, are seen as important.

There are various terms in the manosphere that are classified as pejorative for men who in some way seek for approval of women. Following are three examples from the glossary of the AVFM website:

“Simp is a pejorative term used in the *manosphere* to refer to men who will throw other men under the bus for female approval. The accusation is often levelled at male feminists.” (AVFM Glossary)

“White Knight is a pejorative term used in the *manosphere* to refer to men who defend women against other men.” (AVFM Glossary)

“Mangina is a pejorative term used in the manosphere to refer to men who are easily led by women.” (AVFM Glossary)

“Simp” and “White Knight” are despised due to them being seen as traitors in a way or betray men for women. In the glossary “Proxy Violence”, which means women using men to commit violence in their place to avoid consequences, is featured with the term “White Knight”. Advocating for feminism as a man is also faced with emasculation with the term “mangina”, which is a combination of the words man and vagina, often referring to feminine traits in a man and which has negative connotations. These pejorative terms are often used for feminist men who are also known as “allies”. The term “ally” is a major feature in understanding the relation to “gynocentric” masculinities as according to the website male feminists are named as allies and not members as feminist women do not see men as equals. Men who are given these labels are belittled by people in the manosphere for siding with women, but it is also said they will never reach the level of (feminist) women. These masculinities are presented as inferior to the manosphere, but also inferior to women continuing the structure of placing masculinities superior as well as ridiculing men for positioning in feminine traits.

The examples suggest that it is not preferred to rank masculinities according to whether women see them as valuable. However, women’s opinions of men are not insignificant as men who are defined as gynocentric are described negatively. Ultimately masculinities that are linked to prefer and defend the feminine order are despised meaning that masculinity is still defined to oppose femininity and traits linked to women. This is further demonstrated by the exception with “Pickup Artists” who upkeep their physical appearance and learn practices for



pleasing women in order to get sex. Even though their main focus is on “picking up women”, they are not considered as traitors, because they do not submit to women but rather use them. This exception continues with the idea that the traditional masculine traits and power relation of masculinity over femininity have a prominent place in MRA’s understanding of gender order.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to explore men's involvement in gender equality and contribute to studying the appearances of masculinities. The focus was on anti-feminist spaces and how the anti-feminist gender equality discourse of men's rights activism sees the position of men in gender order in the current Western society. The study was done with qualitative content analysis of the popular webpage A Voice for Men. The findings were presented in three sections first focusing on general views of anti-feminist gender equality (4.1.) and then anti-feminist perspectives on masculinities (4.2.), which was then analysed further by focusing on types of masculinities that were defined as Gynocentric masculinities and Redpill masculinities (4.3.).

The findings suggest that the anti-feminist perspective on gender equality is that men are treated inferior to women by the current society that is led by feminist and women-centred views. This society does not advocate for true equality and same changes on position for men as women have had. The understanding of gender order is reversed to the general understanding that derives from patriarchal history giving men structural privileges and positioning masculinity over femininity. The core objective is to relieve men from sex-based expectations and expand the definition of masculinity, but the masculinity definitions that were present on the website renew the ideals of traditional masculine traits and place masculinity over femininity. The analysis of the data that covered masculinity found types of masculinities that defied the idea of "gynocentric" ideals. These other types of masculinities they indicate on the website are described within the process of taking the red pill, and building a life that opposes the woman led definition of masculinity ideal.

Due to the nature of the materials and theory base being highly contextual and local the study cannot be universalized and thus relates to the field of study as an extension of information. A factor to note is that this thesis presents observations from the contents of the website but does not provide an evaluation of the factual state. The website does not provide references to the stated facts or research that is mentioned. Furthermore, the texts on the website are very vague at times, referring to events and ideas with no explanations. Another factor to note is that the website (and the movement of MRA) have been flagged as hate speech and it has been

remarked as having an underlying echo of misogyny, making objective observations challenging. For future research it could be interesting to further explore the internet communities of the manosphere and how the platforms work interconnected in building identities and masculinity ideals. Another interesting research idea for future could also be to study the reversed language of feminism in anti-feminist men's rights discourse.

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