“But What About Men?”

Constructions of victimhood in Men’s Right’s Activism groups online.
“a loose but loud collection of Internet blog sites, policy-oriented organizations, and a legion of middle-class white men who feel badly done by individual women or by policies they believe have cheated them”

(Cotson & Kimmel 2013: 375)
Overview

How does the Men’s Rights Activism community online construct an identity of victimhood?

- Introduction to the Men’s Rights Activism online community
- Theoretical framework
- Methodology
- Results
- Conclusions
Men’s Rights Activism – An Introduction

- Origins in 1960’s and 1970’s 2nd Wave Feminism

- Split developed two groups: one broadly supportive of feminism, the other who’s primary focus was men’s rights and the promotion of “intrinsic masculinity”.

- The rapid expansion of the internet and growth of chat room and forums was key to the development of a cohesive community.
Men’s Rights Activism – Literature Review

- Anti-feminist backlash:
  - “an episode of intensified sexism caused by the perception that women are gaining power [. . .] [that attempts] to set back women to the position they previously held—that is, to halt their accrual of power,” (Superson, 2002: 203)

- The rise of men’s rights activism on American College campuses

- The online community as a place of active determination to reinstate the patriarchal dominance of men

- The discursive constructions of Elliott Rodger, a self-identified InCel who committed the Isla Vista mass shooting in 2014

- Use of antifeminist rhetoric to change the direction of discourses surrounding sexual violence in the US
Theoretical Framework

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

- Focuses on social and political issues, and explaining the discourse studied within its social context rather than simply describe its structures
- Interactions always involve power and ideologies
- Connecting the linguistic character of discourse to its related social and cultural practice
- Researcher is not wholly neutral, but rather speaks from a feminist position
Theoretical Framework

Theories of Identity

- Identity is constructed through social practices, including language
- Polyphonous identities often constructed and performed simultaneously
- Social and discursive practices frame and define both how individuals present themselves to others and conceptualize themselves
Methodology

• Data source: five prominent Men’s Rights Activism websites
• Data collection: two blog-style articles taken from each website
• Total word count: 13,569 words

Step 1: Analysis to identify recurring linguistic features used to assert and uphold the victimhood identity

Step 2: Patterns of discourses across the texts established

Step 3: Links to broader cultural discourses of victimhood and patriarchy
## Results – Recurring Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns of discourses</th>
<th>Linguistic Features</th>
<th>Textual Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation of language of the USA</td>
<td>Victimiser – victim reversal</td>
<td>“a gynocentric slave state”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Right Movement</td>
<td></td>
<td>“anti-male witch trials and lynchings”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle / war</td>
<td>Metaphors</td>
<td>“fight back against the weapons used by women’s aggression and their verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topoi of threat and danger</td>
<td>assaults”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Us and them theme</td>
<td>Meta-discursive features: personalisations, repeated</td>
<td>“we are the progressive vanguard”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use of pronouns we, us, you; rhetorical questions</td>
<td>“are they [feminists] insane?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational and sensible</td>
<td>Recited truths</td>
<td>“[I]ndoctinated university graduate [sic] [which] are feminist extremists”,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results – Anti Feminist Backlash

<table>
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<th>Patterns of discourses</th>
<th>Linguistic Features</th>
<th>Textual Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminism as a disease</td>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>“feminism is a disease of affluence – a parasite”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminists as insane / hysterical</td>
<td>Frequently occurring collocations of adjectives</td>
<td>“crazy” “lunatic” and “hysterical”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminists holding significant societal and cultural power and influence</td>
<td>Recited truths, hyperbole, implication,</td>
<td>“secret, ideological, morally bankrupt family courts” “feminists destroyed meaning in life” “defining oneself to be outside the dominance hierarchy”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contradictions

Women being given agency and assigned responsibility for the perceived cultural decline, and men being given agency and assigned responsibility for both allowing it and for halting it.

References to structural inequalities which were created by men being used as examples of how women are the oppressing force
  • “16m men [have] died in conflict” but the number of women is tiny in comparison
  • Reference to the Titanic tragedy and situation in which women and children were evacuated first

This contradiction speaks to the polyphonic identities being maintained discursively by the community, as they frame themselves as both biologically superior to women yet also the victims of their apparent antimen biases.
Conclusions

- Hyperbole, metaphors, recited truths, meta-discursive features
- Appropriation the language of the Civil Rights Movement of the USA
- Culturally pervasive tropes of Othering and us and them
- Victim-victimizer reversal
- War imagery and topoi of danger and threat
- Amalgamation of these two oppressive forces – society at large and feminism
References


Faking It Conference, 2019

Alexandra Kempton – University of Sussex
References


References