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**“This is a website for humans, who are women”: Counter-discourses
and alternative identities in a Greek website**

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Declaration

This submission is my own work. Any quotation from, or description of, the work of others is acknowledged herein by reference to the sources, whether published or unpublished.

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Abstract

The ascent of digital media has enabled women to broadly disseminate feminist ideas and challenge dominant gender ideologies, significantly shaping contemporary feminism. This study examines the counter-discourses produced by participants in the Greek website *A, mpa?*, and explores how elements of postfeminism, as well as the site's construction as a 'safe space', influence such discursive productions. Focusing on the concept of interdiscursivity, I adopt a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective to analyse online popular discursive resistance to hegemonic notions of gender.

Two main overarching discourses found to be operating within the context of the website are feminist discourses and 'middle ground' discourses. The latter is an original type of discourse, suggesting an equidistant position between feminism and anti-feminism. As an effect of the contradictory nature of postfeminism, 'middle ground' discourses trigger the articulation of feminist discourses, which contest the postfeminist individualising language of 'middle ground', anti-feminist, and gendered discourses. The competing relationship between feminist and 'middle ground' discourses is further demonstrated in cases of administrative intervention to reinforce the website's safety. Crucially, it is participants' supportive exchange of personal experiences that establishes *A, mpa?* as a feminist safe space, in which relationships of bonding and, ultimately, feminist identities are developed. I argue that the case of the Greek website of *A, mpa?* confirms the transformative potential of feminist Internet.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	7
2.1 Damaging discourses and linguistic intervention.....	8
2.2 Postfeminism.....	10
2.3 Digital discourse and identity.....	13
2.4 Digital feminism.....	14
2.5 Safe spaces	17
Chapter 3: Methodology	20
3.1 Data	20
3.2 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as Analytical Stance	22
3.3 Procedure.....	24
Chapter 4: Findings.....	26
4.1 General discourses	28
4.2 Feminist discourses.....	28
4.3 ‘Middle ground’ discourses	29

4.4 Backlash.....	30
Chapter 5: Discussion	32
5.1 Introduction: “Why <i>A, mpa?</i> is a site that speaks to women”	33
5.2 Feminist discourses	46
5.3 ‘Middle ground’ discourses.....	66
5.4 Alternative discourses, postfeminism, and safe spaces.....	72
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	77
References.....	80
Appendix A.....	87
Appendix B	94

List of Tables

Table 1. General discourses	28
Table 2. Feminist discourses.....	29
Table 3. ‘Middle ground’ discourses	30
Table 4. Discourses of backlash.....	30

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years and against the backdrop of the ascent of digital platforms and social media, the affordances of the Internet have given women unprecedented opportunities for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender-based forms of inequity, and constructing expressive outlets to share personal accounts of oppression, which are connected to systematic forms of injustice (Pruchniewska & Duffy, 2017; Jackson, 2018; Vickery & Everbach, 2018, among others). The incentive for the present study has been my interest in the ways in which users of the Internet, particularly women,¹ involved in online public deliberation position themselves alongside gender ideologies and negotiate gendered/sexist discourses, by articulating counter-discourses, which, in turn, give rise to alternative subject positions (Sunderland, 2004).

Women are considered to have a history of using media, popular culture, and the Internet as tools of engaging with feminist practices, such as feminist activism (Harris, 2010). Contemporary online feminism, enabled by the advances in digital technologies, has taken new directions, from blogs (Keller, 2016), hashtags (Dixon, 2014; Vickery & Everbach, 2018), to social media, such as Tumblr (Connell, 2013) and Facebook (Bates, 2017), and mobile phone apps (Rentschler, 2014). These ‘new directions’ in feminism, facilitated by digital media, could be considered the fourth wave, which, according to Munro (2013: 23), is fulfilled by the emergence of ‘a “call-out” culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be “called out” and challenged’.

¹ Although I am aware of the fact that the Internet allows people to choose the identity they project, including that relating to gender, through personal communication with the administrator, I know that she and the majority of the members/participants in the site are, in fact women. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the discourse I analyse in my work is mainly produced by women.

Rather than the overt, institutionally sanctioned injustice experienced by women in the past, the focus of contemporary online feminism is the more subtle forms of sexism today. For instance, female users of digital platforms share their personal stories of microaggressions that come up in their daily social interactions, discrimination in the workplace, or an imbalance of housework duties (Place, 2017), thus contributing to the larger feminist project by bringing into the public sphere their lived reality and challenging normative assumptions about everyday female experiences (Pruchniewska & Duffy, 2017).

This revival of feminism through digital media can be situated within a broader popularisation of feminism in the media (Jackson, 2018: 34). The increased visibility of feminism wields an adjustability which seemingly allows for ‘just about everything’ to be ‘(re)signified as a feminist issue’ (Gill, 2016: 619). This cultural ‘cool’ of feminism established by mainstream and digital media, termed *postfeminism* (Gill, 2007; 2016; Gill & Scharff, 2011), is said to complicate and trivialise the feminist terrain, through an individualising language of choice, rights, and freedom (Jackson, 2018). Because of this, contemporary feminism and its digital manifestations have been critiqued on the basis of their focus on individual empowerment, instead of larger scale change, due to their co-optation by neoliberalism, within which feminism is packaged as a commodity (Cullen & Fischer, 2014; Jackson, 2018). Nevertheless, the significance of contemporary online feminism is difficult to overstate, which is why women’s engagement with feminism through digital platforms has been a focus of recent research in both local and global contexts (Baer, 2016; Matos, 2017; Pruchniewska & Duffy, 2017; Flores et al., 2018).

In October, 2017, the revival of feminism was marked by the fall of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, charged and fired for decades of sexual abuse.

What followed was a torrent of accusations against multiple high-profile men in the media, politics, and other industries, ranging from inappropriate behaviour to forced sexual misconduct to rape. This resulted in the creation of the #MeToo movement, which spread virally as a hashtag on Twitter, and demonstrated the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in the workplace. The movement received great coverage by the media worldwide and opened a widespread discussion on subjects that feminists have long considered as legitimate sources of concern, both in offline and online contexts.

The effect of the #MeToo movement inevitably spread on the Greek web. Digital platforms with explicit or implicit feminist allegiances might have been developing transnationally for quite a few years now, but on the Greek web, it is only recently that users have been motivated to confront gendered discourses and collectively construct spaces to that end. For instance, in 2014 approximately, a Greek Facebook page, titled *Nai, είσαι μισογύνης* ('Yes, you're a misogynist'), was created, to shed light on issues of everyday sexism and misogyny both offline (from the workplace and the streets to mainstream media) and online (instances of trolling and flaming against feminists and women, in general). Other online initiatives (i.e. *Kamena Soutien*, *Fyllo Sykis*, which later became *To Mov*) existed before the *Yes, you're a misogynist* page, but they did not quite have the reach and impact that the latter did. However, multiple cyber-attacks were launched against *Yes, you're a misogynist*, leading to its removal from Facebook more than once and suggesting the proliferation of a hegemonic, antagonistic anti-feminist culture, which targets digital platforms with explicit feminist allegiances.

Notwithstanding, the cultural context had changed globally, which is possibly why in May, 2018, the *A, mpa?* website, the research focus of my study, was launched

by the Greek free press online newspaper LIFO. What is interesting about *A, mpa?* is that it started off as a daily advice column in the digital version of LIFO; the columnist answered and posted anonymous questions she received, while readers were encouraged to share their insight in the comments section. This gradually led to the creation of an online community of ‘regular’ users, the majority of whom were apparently women, who discussed issues relevant to the questions and answers. Interestingly, the content of the column became distinctly feminist. This community of participants in the column eventually consolidated into a website, launched as ‘a site that speaks to women’. The column occupies a separate thread, but the contents of the rest of the site’s sections are co-produced by the administrator, the team behind the site, and its readers/commenters. The latter, in particular, are invited to publish their own texts and share their personal stories/experiences. What all those stories have in common is that they regard issues of gender, sexism, privilege, difference, and access, thus connecting the personal with the political, as the popular feminist slogan suggests.

My interest in this particular website stems from my personal involvement with it as a reader, from its ‘column days’, when I first became aware of a bottom-up formation of a community created by women of all ages, engaging substantively with feminist issues – albeit in a much less direct way than within typical feminist platforms.

As I mentioned above, research on feminist digital media has focused on digital platforms which are labelled as feminist and/or activism-oriented, while, to my knowledge, no such studies exist regarding the Greek web. As a result, niche virtual communities, like the community of the Greek website *A, mpa?*, and their users’ practices are under-researched, as they are usually classified as either banal or trivial.

My study attempts to fill these gaps, by discussing the case of *A, mpa?* as a digital ‘safe space’, that is a platform for making personal accounts of oppression more salient, for sharing knowledge, and for building solidarity among women.

In my study, I explore the ways in which, through posts and comments, participants in the website draw upon feminist discourses to resist what Sunderland (2004) calls ‘damaging discourses’ (see section 2.1), to refer to hegemonic gendered discourses. Moreover, I look into how such discursive productions are influenced by both the broader postfeminist cultural context and, on a local level, by administrative work to construct the website as a ‘safe space’. My study poses the following research questions:

1. What, if any, alternative, counter-discourses are articulated by the participants in *A, mpa?*, in relation to hegemonic gendered discourses?
2. How are these discourses influenced by postfeminist culture (i.e., the current developments in the condition of womanhood, as shaped by neoliberalism and postmodernism)? More specifically, which elements of postfeminism are transferred into the participants’ discursive productions?
3. How do the moderators’ technological and discursive practices to establish and ensure the website’s safety affect the discourses produced by participants?

The present study is situated within a cultural context characterised by contradictory elements, i.e. the increased visibility of feminism, postfeminism, and anti-feminism, and conducted from a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, which examines the ways in which gender ideology and power relations get reproduced, negotiated, and contested in popular discourse, with a focus on social

transformation (Lazar, 2007). The broader aim of this study is to contribute to the growing body of research on feminist sociolinguistics and feminist digital media, by advancing our knowledge, theorisation, and understanding of feminist and gender ideologies vis-à-vis popular talk on the web, particularly the Greek web.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents some key terms and theoretical concepts which relate to the research questions guiding the study. In the first section, I review Sunderland's (2004) work on damaging discourses, linking it to Faludi's (1991) discussion of anti-feminist backlash American women faced in the 1980s, and contemporary conceptualisations of backlash, as shaped by digital platforms and reified in the emergence of the Men's Rights Movement (Jordan, 2016; Hodapp, 2017). Discursive resistance to such discourses has been termed 'linguistic intervention' (Sunderland, 2004). Although I am particularly interested in alternative discourses premised in feminism, my study is informed by all these discussions, as I am aware of the fact that normative assumptions about gender and anti-feminism, which are pervasive in offline contexts, are transferred and reproduced in online contexts, as well.

In the second section, I discuss the term *postfeminism* and its main features, contextualising popular talk on gender and feminist discourse produced by lay audiences online within postfeminist culture. In the third section, I address literature on digital discourse more broadly, particularly with regard to its relation to identity construction, focusing on the potential of online contexts to shape subjectivities and produce alternative content. The fourth section specifically refers to feminism in online contexts. In the fifth section, I extend my discussion to the concept of *safe space* online, focusing on virtual communities created by women with feminist sensibilities to counter hegemonic representations of gender, through debate and exchange of personal experiences.

2.1 Damaging discourses and linguistic intervention

Feminist approaches to language see discourse as the main locus for the construction and contestation of gendered and sexist meanings (Sunderland, 2004). Sexist language, as discussed by Spender (1980), has attracted less attention, since it is believed that a given word's meaning always varies in context and cannot, therefore, be seen as straightforwardly 'sexist' (Sunderland, 2004: 192). According to Sunderland (2004: 193), discourses, through their mediation of social practices and understandings, have the potential to do broad damage. By 'damage', she refers to the ways in which discourse can bias thought, restricting individuals' 'identities' and 'inner workings', as well as perpetuating stereotypes and sexist beliefs, which permeate personal and social relations, institutions and social structures (2004: 194). From both a feminist and discourse perspective, the damaging potential of a given discourse must be relevant to more than just an individual (Sunderland, 2004: 196).

Even though 'damaging discourses' refers to hegemonic gendered discourses, we can perhaps draw a parallel between such discursive representations and *backlash* (Faludi, 1991), as the movement (and discourse) against Second Wave feminism has been termed. By *backlash*, Faludi describes the anti-feminist movement developed in the 1980s in the U.S., whose central argument was that feminist advances were, in fact, responsible for women's unhappiness. Feminism was seen to promote materialism over moral values and as seeking to dismantle the traditional familial support system, as a result. By taking a regressive and negative stance against women's rights, backlash proponents defended a prevailing order, despite seeing themselves as social outcasts, rather than guardians of the status quo (Faludi, 1991).

The Second Wave of feminism might be arguably a thing of the past, however, *backlash* is not. Contemporary backlash is seen to be reified in the rise of the Men's Rights Movement (Jordan, 2016; Hodapp, 2017). The movement was created online as a platform for individuals who believe the world is currently going through a 'crisis of masculinity', which feminism is primarily responsible for. Feminism is, thus, seen as the predominant contributor to male oppression, a view which is supported by Men's Rights groups' core principles; contemporary society is seen as gynocentric, based on male sacrifice and the placement of women on a pedestal, and feminism is seen as misandry (hatred of males) and as an oppressive force, a threat to men (Hodapp, 2017). Jordan (2016) draws a distinction between anti-feminist backlash, i.e. the complete rejection of feminism, and the acknowledgment of the achievements of earlier feminist movements, i.e. the endorsement of gender equality, on the one hand, and the claim that modern feminism is obsolete and unnecessary (see section 2.2).

Nevertheless, it is precisely the innumerability and diversity of discourses which allow for the discursive undermining of authority and power (Fairclough, 2001; Sunderland, 2004: 30). This diversity means that discourses should not be considered in isolation, but rather as parts of orders or networks, i.e. discourses being co-articulated and operating alongside. The concept of *interdiscursivity* is thus central to this study. *Interdiscursivity* refers to the co-articulation of different discourses and genres in the same text (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This property of discourse is seen as key to both discourse change and social progress, encouraging a rethinking of text meanings (Sunderland, 2004). In the case of damaging discourses, for instance, whereas some individuals might be damaged, others will recognise them for what they are, resist them, and become empowered in the process (Sunderland, 2004: 194).

The possibility of change is recognised and strived for by feminism. If gendered discourses can and do damage, the feminist project entails attempting to redress this, through contestation of the existing social order via language (Sunderland, 2004). Sunderland calls this sort of contestation ‘linguistic intervention’, i.e. the articulation of ‘counter-discourses’, which, according to Fairclough (2001: 235), ‘put at risk by what happens in actual interactions’ and, thus, have the potential to ‘disturb’ hegemonic discourses. Intervention in discourse can occur as: i. deconstruction of discourses through meta-discoursal critique, ii. principled, intentional non-use of discourses seen as damaging, iii. principled, non-confrontational use of discourses seen as non-damaging, iv. principled, confrontational use of discourses seen as non-damaging, v. facilitated group discoursal intervention by people other than feminists and discourse analysts, and vi. ‘rediscursivisation’ (i.e. rethinking and rearticulating a text using a different discourse) (Sunderland, 2004).

Even though my preferred terms for the present study are hegemonic discourses of gender/gendered discourses and counter-/alternative discourses, since they are generally used more frequently throughout literature, I find that Sunderland’s respective ‘damaging discourses’ and ‘linguistic intervention’ are synonymous. Her work on the contestation of gendered discourses through linguistic intervention is, thus, relevant to my study on the discursive resistance to gendered discourses in popular talk on the web. Finally, even though my main focus is on counter-discourses, I am aware of the fact that said discourses, arguably feminist in terms of their content, can be contested by backlash discourses (Lazar, 2005: 17).

2.2 Postfeminism

Gill (2007) has argued that postfeminism is one of the most important terms in the lexicon of feminist cultural analysis. However, there is no consensus among scholars over its meaning. Broadly, the term is used in different ways in the literature. It can be used to signify an epistemological break within feminism, that is, the ‘intersection of feminism with a number of anti-foundationalist movements, such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism’ (Brooks, 1997: 1). It can also refer to the historical shift after the height of Second Wave feminism, characterised by the idea that feminism is a thing of the past, its ‘pastness’ either mourned or celebrated (Tasker & Negra, 2007). A third way in which the term is used is to describe the backlash against feminism, i.e. the idea that feminism is responsible for women’s unhappiness (Faludi, 1991), an idea premised on fears about the collapse of hegemonic masculinity (Whelehan, 2000).

Gill (2007) argued that postfeminism can be thought of as a ‘sensibility’ shaped by the values of neoliberalism and contemporary consumer culture and made up by the following elements. These include a shift from the objectification in the representations of women to their subjectification; women are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects, instead of submissive and passive objects; the recast of the body, shaped through consumer choices, as a key site of identity, power, and control (Phipps, 2014), which creates a tension between the body as a locus of empowerment and the body as a site of control, through practices of self-surveillance and discipline (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Baer, 2016); an emphasis on individualism, choice, and empowerment; a makeover paradigm; and the reassertion of natural sex differences (Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Drawing on McRobbie’s (2004) work, Gill (2007) argues that postfeminist culture is characterised by a doing and an undoing of feminism. According to Gill & Scharff (2011), this ‘double entanglement’

(McRobbie, 2004) of postfeminism (feminism both taken into account and repudiated) indicates that it should not be seen as merely backlash, a view supported by Jordan (2016), who distinguishes between the two, in her discussion of Men's Rights Groups in the U.K. Overall, contemporary feminism is seen as being co-opted, de-politicised, and distracted by neoliberalism (Cullen & Fischer, 2014).

All of the above illustrate the pluralistic and contradictory nature of postfeminism (Mills, 1998; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). According to Fairclough (2001), contradictions are potentially emancipatory, enabling the production of competing, oppositional discourses. Billig et al. (1988), agreeing with Fairclough, also see contradictions, in the form of ideological dilemmas, as productive. Along the same lines, Sunderland (2007) argues that contradictions, inherent in postfeminism, are manifested in contradictory discourses, co-existing with each other. Her view of postfeminist discourse, however, differs from the one suggested by Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2004), in that postfeminist discourses are seen as competing with traditional gendered discourses and co-existing with 'a critical anti-sexist discourse and a feminist discourse of agency and self-value' (Sunderland, 2007: 218).

The present study adopts the view of postfeminism as fraught with contradictions, thus agreeing with Gill & Scharff (2011) and Sunderland (2007), but it is sceptic towards the confluence of contemporary feminism with neoliberalism, which has been seen as eliciting a form of nostalgia for earlier forms of feminism (Cullen & Fischer, 2014). Contrary to accounts such as McRobbie's (2009) rather dismal claim concerning the lack of a popular public feminist discourse available for women to challenge and disrupt their 'postfeminist pathologies', I regard the website of *A, mpa?* as functioning within, but not fully constrained by, the contemporary

postfeminist context. Agreeing with Sunderland (2007), I also argue in favour of the emancipatory potential of contradictions inherent in postfeminism, as they might culminate or appear in counter-hegemonic discourses, which aim at destabilising normative roles and rendering gendered discourses unsustainable.

2.3 Digital discourse and identity

In the last decades, the Internet has been a significant domain of research in sociolinguistics, with a focus on media practices that aim to construct identities (e.g. Papacharissi, 2011; Georgakopoulou, 2013; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014; Bolander & Locher, 2015; Georgalou, 2016, among others). Research in discourse analysis sees identity work as an essentially discursive and relational process, that is, as socially constructed (Gee, 2011; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019; Vásquez & Sayers China, 2019). Throughout the relevant literature, aspects of the Internet, such as anonymity, disembodiment, and deindividuation, have been emphasised and explained in terms of their appeal to users. Besides that, deindividuated contexts are seen as conducive to the positioning of individuals as members of relevant social categories (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006; Günthner, 2007; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019). According to the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (Reicher et al., 1995), the loss of self-awareness in deindividuated environments accentuates the salience of the social, rather than individual, identity. This agrees with new media scholars' view of the Internet as a form of participatory culture (Shirky, 2010), where communities are formed through ideas and language (Lehdonvirta, 2010).

Moreover, the Internet has been studied in terms of its potential to provide spaces for alternative content, allowing the publicity and recognition of concerns that might otherwise remain peripheral or invisible (Warf & Grimes, 1997; Sassen, 2002; Matos, 2017). Sassen (2002: 382), in particular, suggested that the Internet can ‘facilitate the emergence of new types of political subjects’, which lie outside the formal political system. Agreeing with Sassen, Chouliaraki (2010) and Bou-Franch (2013) point out that Internet data reveal the stances and positionings of ordinary citizens, who are afforded the opportunity to express their views and contribute to the public sphere. The Internet can, thus, be an important resource for studies linking discourse and identity.

In this study, I draw on Matos (2017) and Sassen’s (2002) work to examine the *A, mpa?* website as an example of an online space for alternative content, one that is distinct from the majority of the sites labelled as ‘women’s sites’. I address the way the medium’s affordances appeal to participants, who engage in practices of anonymous self-disclosure, for instance, and who are offered the opportunity to produce alternative discourses, often overlooked by mainstream media. Research on the discursive construction of identity in interaction, finally, has built a foundation for my analysis of the grassroots discursive practices of participants in *A, mpa?*, through which they construct feminist identities.

2.4 Digital feminism

As noted above, the overarching aim of this study is to contribute to the body of research in the fields of new media sociolinguistics and Internet feminist studies, by analysing the discourse of the participants in a Greek feminist-oriented website.

Despite the growing body of research on digital counter-discourses in online communities of women with feminist sensibilities, to my knowledge, there is a gap in the literature concerning the contemporary Greek context. I attempt to fill that gap by looking into the discursive realisations of feminist concerns, as they become subjects of local struggle, situated within transnational feminisms, amid the context of postfeminism debates. This section reviews some relevant literature on feminist online spaces and the discussion is extended to digital safe spaces, their features and the implications of establishing and maintaining safety online.

The range of theories on the relationship between feminism and digital culture has been termed *cyberfeminism*. These theoretical perspectives, which have been developed in an important area for feminists and social scientists, are focused around the way women make use of new technologies for empowerment and for the articulation of discourses in favour of gender equality (Matos, 2017). As Orgad (2005) puts it, *cyberfeminism* refers to women's worldwide networking through their different experiences with technology, to create their own spaces of resistance in between the patriarchal structures of the Internet. Another, more radical approach to cyberfeminism is the one suggested by Haraway's (1991) notion of cyborg politics. She describes a genderless utopia in the web, which can be achieved through the ideological interruption of the ongoing attempts of dominant discourses to explain the world in a 'common language' (Haraway, 1991: 164, cited in Koerber, 2001).

The recent revival of feminist movements and gender politics on the Internet, mainly evidenced by feminists' use of Twitter to draw attention to gender-based forms of inequity (Cole, 2015), culminated in the rise of #MeToo, in October, 2017. As a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault, #MeToo became viral

internationally, making clear that digital platforms can be identified as stakeholders with the power to achieve social transformation (Vickery & Everbach, 2018), by shaping new modes of discourse about sexism and gender and ultimately altering and shaping feminism in the 21st century (Baer, 2016).

Despite the fact that certain aspects of digital culture have been found to perpetuate sexism (Marwick & Miller, 2014), research has shown that the Internet allows women to publish online and debate issues of concern, by creating online spaces and communities. Matos (2017) has pointed out that such spaces can be significant in shaping perceptions and identities, as they provide opportunities for critical debate and for articulation of counter-discourses, which go against normative representations of gender. Others (Harris, 2008; Shaw, 2013; Connelly, 2015; Kanai, 2015; Shorey, 2015; Jackson, 2018; Vásquez & Sayers China, 2019) have also stressed that the Internet comprises a familiar, readily accessible resource for feminist ‘world’ building through self-expression, allowing women and girls to take alternative subject positions, counter hegemonic, gendered discourses, and build solidarity. According to Retallack et al. (2016), this bonding enables participants in online communities to confront ‘postfeminist pathologies’ (McRobbie, 2009), at a moment when, in the West, feminism has become associated with women’s lifestyles and liberty to shop (Matos, 2017). Contrary to populist mass media, online, it is women who have control of (their) representation, deciding whether and how their experience will be depicted publicly (Orgad, 2005).

This view on the significance of digital platforms in the revival of feminism and the opportunities for activism and political organization that they provide is not shared by everyone, of course. Whether this reinvigoration of digital feminism is leading to wide-reaching change is a matter of debate (Munro, 2013). Both Matos

(2017) and Orgad (2005), for instance, observe that there are certain constraints in the transformative potential of online spaces for alternative content, and these either regard the fact that discussions in such spaces are not totally immune from the prejudices that exist within society (Matos, 2017) or relate to particular affordances, such as anonymity, which might result in the privatisation of the experience and its subsequent separation from the public political agenda (Orgad, 2005). Razer (2013) dismisses digital feminism altogether, seeing it merely as an expression of neoliberal hyper-individualism. As Singh (2017) has stated, however, digital feminism may as well be viewed as an appropriate and effective response to neoliberalism and, it might be added, negative aspects associated with postfeminism, rather than as their (partial) product. While I do not wish to idealise digital feminism, I nevertheless believe that it should not be dismissed as simply a manifestation of the influence of neoliberalism and/or as a byproduct of a postfeminist ‘sensitivity’ (Gill, 2007). In agreement with Singh (2017), I maintain that feminism online differs from previous forms of political engagement, in that it offers new ways of inserting feminism into the public sphere.

2.5 Safe spaces

The notion of ‘safe space’ appears frequently in the literature on digital feminism. Feminist safe spaces are defined as ‘subaltern counterpublic spheres’ or ‘parallel discursive arenas’, where participants invent and circulate counter-discourses, which permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities (Fraser, 1992: 67). Alternatively, feminist safe spaces are accessible discursive spaces, in which women develop feminist identities and alternative feminist histories through personal

reflections and interactions with one another, forming a ‘networked counterpublic’ (Keller, 2016: 80).

The discursive construction of identity within the context of a feminist safe space is achieved mainly through women’s personal storytelling and interaction with one another (Clark-Parsons, 2018: 2135). In these contexts, participants are invited to speak freely, without any judgment, and share personal stories of navigating ‘unsafe’ space, either online or offline, thus creating a discursive boundary around the website as a safe space, formed in contrast and in relief to damaging discourses (Rentschler, 2014; Clark-Parsons, 2018). Thus, these digital spaces can be seen as accomplishing the slogan ‘the personal is political’, by means of connecting individual women’s personal stories to larger narratives of inequality.

In online contexts constructed as safe spaces, open discussion is encouraged so long as members respect one another’s personal authority and emotional wellbeing, echoing politics of validation and care (Rentschler, 2014). Safe spaces online are, therefore, collectively constructed, and, since they depend both on what is expressed and on how those who are present listen to and respond (Brownlie, 2018), they are seen as ‘relational work’, that is, as constantly unfolding social processes rather than as sites with structures which pre-exist participants’ interactions (Clark-Parsons, 2018).

It can be inferred, then, that maintaining a safe space online might become problematic without constant moderation and self-reflexivity (Clark-Parsons, 2018). This is mainly done by moderators, who, through their technological affordances and discursive practices, encourage discussion, while also protecting members from certain types of content (Rentschler, 2014). On their part, participants also negotiate

with available technology, as well as its limitations, to produce and enforce particular notions of safety (Clark-Parsons, 2018). While online communities constructed as safe spaces might rely on the assumption that members share a common set of expectations for what a safe space looks like, these expectations tend to come to light only when conflicts arise (Rentschler, 2014; Clark-Parsons, 2018). A paradox is, thus, created: safe spaces are simultaneously open to and limiting of discourse, which points to their always incomplete nature (Rentschler, 2014; Clark-Parsons, 2018). By virtue of being online sites and as a result of their fluid and incomplete nature, the absolute safety of spaces cannot be ensured; boundaries both maintain and undermine a space's safety (Brownlie, 2018; Clark-Parsons, 2018).

The features of safe spaces on the Internet, as outlined throughout literature, appear in the *A, mpa?* website, which this study examines. In effect, in several instances, the administrator explicitly refers to the website as a 'safe space'. To that end, I analyse the implications of online safe spaces' paradoxical nature as they appear in *A, mpa?* participants' discursive productions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological framework that was employed to conduct the analysis, aiming to comply with the objectives of this study, namely, the analysis of the alternative discourses produced in opposition to hegemonic, gendered discourses, by the *A, mpa?* participants. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I describe the data this study examines from the website. In the second, I discuss the approach of feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and how it applies to my own research. In the third section, I describe the procedure I followed in conducting this study.

3.1 Data

The data for this study include:

- 23 articles posted in the website by its readers or by the site's contributors,
- 16 question – answer pairs, copied from the *Dear A, mpa...* advice column, which currently occupies a separate thread in the website, in which readers send their questions to the administrator, who then responds and publishes them, and
- an overall of 820 comments posted under both the articles and the Q&A posts.

Data collection was guided by searching for five hashtags, which, to my knowledge, are chosen by the moderators of the site, even in the cases of readers' own

submissions. The hashtags opted for were: #FEMINISM, #SEXISM, #MISOGYNY, #PATRIARCHY, and #SEXUAL HARASSMENT. In searching for these hashtags, my rationale was that I do not impose my own beliefs on the dataset, but consider the moderators' choices instead. This means that, while I adopt a feminist perspective, I am mindful of the critique against Critical Discourse Analysis, concerning the partiality of its methods (Widdowson, 2004). The interpretations of lay participants are, therefore, taken into account.

Nevertheless, hashtag selection was not arbitrary; rather, it stemmed from both my perspective and my research questions. The premise of this study has been that the participants in the website, regardless of their orientation towards feminism, i.e. whether they self-identify as feminists or not, do address issues which are central to feminism. It seems reasonable, then, that the selected hashtags refer to topics directly associated to feminism, in an attempt to address the research questions as exhaustively as possible. Besides, the posts and Q&A pairs that appeared under those hashtags were among the most viewed/discussed ones, which I confirmed after personally contacting the administrator.

It has to be said that the posts and/or Q&A pairs do not exclusively address the topics suggested by the particular hashtags. On the contrary, each post and Q&A pair was tagged under multiple hashtags, which accounted for many different topics. Finally, it must be noted that, due to the semantic proximity of the words that functioned as hashtags, it was sometimes the case that the same post would appear in more than one out of the five hashtags selected. This was not, however, considered to be a problem, as every hashtag was adequately represented in the dataset.

The selection criteria for which particular posts and Q&A pairs were chosen for analysis were the number of comments and the appeal each item received. Specifically, selected were only posts and Q&A pairs which a. received over 15 comments and, b. had been ‘trending’ (had been viewed and shared multiple times after they were published), as indicated by the number of views and shares each item had received. This aimed at ensuring the representativeness of the dataset.

It must be noted here that the articulation of counter-discourses is not exclusively observed in the posts/comments that comprise my data set, i.e. posts that are closely associated with feminist issues, as suggested by the hashtags they are posted under. For instance, the #MOTHERHOOD hashtag includes posts (and comments) in which resistance to gendered discourses of motherhood does occur, as well. However, my option is justified by the fact that the selected hashtags were directly related to the specific research objectives of the study.

3.2 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as Analytical Stance

The analysis adopts a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, as it aims at examining the ‘complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and power asymmetries get discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and contested in specific communities and discourse contexts’ (Lazar, 2014: 182). Specifically, the analysis explores gender ideologies and social identity processes vis-à-vis popular talk on the web (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014), in which dominant ideologies are contested. The focus on popular talk on feminist issues, in particular, is premised on an attempt to ‘dissolve the dichotomisation between academic feminism, associated with “theory”,

and grassroots feminism, associated with “practice” (Lazar, 2007: 146). Feminist CDA is, finally, particularly interested on the discourse of postfeminism (Lazar, 2004), which is important for the present study as well.

As a critical perspective, feminist Critical Discourse Analysis has developed as an intersection of Critical Discourse Analysis and feminist studies; the key features of CDA are i) the focus on the relationship between language and power, and ii) a commitment to critiquing and transforming the role of language in the creation and maintenance of inequitable social relations (Fairclough, 1993, 1995). Feminist CDA, then, is interested in the ways in which gender ideology and gendered power relations get reproduced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices and in people’s social identities in texts and talk (Lazar, 2007: 150).

Therefore, while impartiality is sought for during the process of data collection, the present study does not pretend to adopt a neutral stance. According to Lazar (2007: 146), addressing critics of CDA, who see it as lacking in ‘objectivity’ and ‘scientificity’ (Widdowson, 1995), the feminist position raises as problematic the notion of scientific neutrality itself, as ‘failing to recognise that all knowledge is socially and historically constructed and valuationally based’ (Lazar, 2007: 146).

The foci of analysis in this study include the contextual cohesion of the texts under examination, choices in lexis and topic, the contents of discourse, propositional structures, argumentation, implication, and subject positioning. Therefore, the analysis is not only about what is said (contents), but also about how it is said (discursive realisations in text). As Jaworski and Coupland (1999, cited in Sunderland, 2004) point out, several discourses may be apparent within a text. This has been termed *interdiscursivity*, and it is important for this study, as well.

Interdiscursive analysis (Fairclough, 1992), that is, the analysis of the interactions among discourses within particular texts, is influenced by Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of heteroglossia and the dialogicality of texts. The 'multivoicedness' (Talbot, 1995; Sunderland, 2004) of texts indexes social and cultural changes within contemporary, postfeminist society and contributes to the 'form(ul)ation of complex, hybrid identities' (Lazar, 2007: 152).

3.3 Procedure

The analytical procedure followed was a close reading of the data set under examination, in order to identify the discourses articulated by the participants of the website, and differentiate them in terms of *stance* (Sunderland, 2004: 27). Identification of a discourse requires its provisional recognition and looking into its linguistic features. The procedure I followed was guided by Sunderland's (2004: 46) proposed process of discourse identification and discourse naming, which is done 'conceptually, using the distinction between "descriptive" discourses and "interpretive" discourses, and formally'. My focus is on interpretive discourses, which refer to either substance (i.e. a '*feminist*' discourse) or how one discourse relates to others (i.e. hegemonic discourse, counter-discourse).

Conceptually, discourses were provisionally identified by the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, and concepts (Mills, 1997), as distinct ways of 'seeing the world'. This means that a certain degree of repetition (Fairclough, 2003) of linguistic features, such as lexical choice and modality, and concepts (contextual cohesion) was required for a discourse to be 'recognisable' as such. Linguistic features, both 'presences' and

‘absences’ (i.e. what possibilities do/do not appear), as well as the producers’ explicit or implicit evaluations of ideas, knowledge, beliefs, and practices – what Walsh (2002: 39) calls ‘affinity with or distance from the ideas of represented subjects’ – were carefully examined in the process of discourse provisional and interpretive identification.

Formally, identified discourses were also named according to Sunderland’s (2004) proposed patterns for discourse naming. One pattern is ‘adjective + *discourse*’, which can be used for interpretive discourses – a feminist discourse and a psychoanalytical discourse, for instance. This pattern can be also used to indicate relationships between discourses (i.e. a hegemonic discourse), and what a discourse may be seen to do (*functionally* achieve) (i.e. an ‘empowering’ discourse). Another pattern is the ‘*a Discourse of* + (abstract) noun’ (i.e. a Discourse of ‘personal choice’), to indicate *substance*. Lastly, another pattern is the use of a *specially created* phrase preceding *discourse* (i.e. ‘Gender similarities’ discourse), for lack of a better, briefer name. This naming pattern may require explanation on the part of the analyst, as the name might not be self-explanatory. Scare quotes are used to emphasise the discourses’ interpretive nature.

Finally, as Sunderland (2004: 47) points out, discourse naming from an interpretive and critical perspective is not a neutral activity. Therefore, it is important for the analyst to be explicit in her documentation (e.g. that a feminist perspective is adopted), and reflexive about her analytical and naming practices.

Chapter 4: Findings

The results of the qualitative analysis of the data set, comprising posts made by both the administrator and members, question – answer pairs from the *Dear A, mpa...* column/section, and comments posted by members under both the posts and the column, are presented in this chapter.

In the data set under examination, participants produced discourses in the discussion of the following central topics: sexual assault, sexual harassment, consent, and rape culture. Other topics included gender stereotypes, (internalized) misogyny, male privilege and abuse of power, sexist humour, body positivity, menstruation, and pornography; these are all areas of interest for contemporary transnational feminism, marked by the emergence of the #MeToo movement.

The analysis revealed that the majority of the discourses produced by participants in the *A, mpa?* website were alternative, feminist discourses, as a means of contesting hegemonic gendered ones. However, it was also discovered that anti-feminist discourses (backlash) were also produced, a finding which was not initially expected, but which, nonetheless, confirms that sexist ideologies that largely pervade society are reproduced within the Internet; at the same time, the Internet can sustain ‘counterhegemonic’ discourses, which challenge such ideologies (Warf & Grimes, 1997: 260). Interestingly, another type of discourse was also identified, which contested both feminist and anti-feminist discourses, thus confirming Gill’s (2007) and McRobbie’s (2009) claim about the contradictory nature and the ‘double entanglement’ of postfeminism (see section 5.4).

Overall, four main types of interpretive discourses were identified:

- (a) *General* discourses
- (b) *Feminist* discourses
- (c) '*Middle ground*' discourses
- (d) *Backlash*

General discourses appear across the entire data set, but the rest of the discourses appear in particular sections. Specifically, *feminist* discourses are articulated in every post and every answer in the question – answer column that are posted by the administrator. '*Middle ground*' discourses and *backlash* largely appear in the comments sections of the website, while, in some instances, traces of them can be identified in other posts, in which such discourses are critiqued by the poster.

According to Fairclough (2001: 233), 'any text is a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing in, and transforming other texts', which leads to the production of 'hybrid' discourses, and *interdiscursivity*. *Interdiscursivity* can be described as 'the complex, interdependent configuration of discursive formations' (Fairclough, 1992: 68), and refers to relationships of dominance/marginality, mutual support, opposition, foreground/background, and hierarchy, between discourses. *Interdiscursivity* appears in the data set under examination, as well; *general*, *feminist*, '*middle ground*', and *backlash* discourses are seen to overarch other discourses, which are linked, networked, and constituting 'orders of discourse' (a term adapted from Foucault, in Sunderland, 2004). It has to be said that the identified discourses constitute a *partial* set; analysts from different social groups or those who adopt a different perspective than the feminist one this study adopts could have identified other discourses, or evaluated differently the ones spotted here (cf. Sunderland, 2004).

4.1 General discourses

By general discourses, I refer to the discourses which participants draw upon regardless of their stance toward the topic of discussion. In that sense, these discourses are seen as having a certain degree of flexibility, as participants draw upon them to elaborate their points or to support their arguments. The rest of the main discourses identified, in contrast, do relate to particular stances, or ideological positions. General discourses are presented in the following table.

Table 1. General discourses

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A discourse of ‘personal choice’• A ‘battle’ discourse• A psychoanalytical discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A medical discourse• A biology/nature discourse• A marketing discourse
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Some of these discourses may overlap (e.g. a medical discourse and a biology/nature discourse). The flexibility of those discourses is demonstrated by the fact that a medical discourse, for instance, can be linked to a *feminist* discourse about rape victims, to justify their response to assault (‘freezing’, i.e. physical inability to react/fight). However, it can also be drawn upon by participants with a hegemonic view of sexual assault, according to which the instinctive bodily response to assault is ‘fight or flight’, to discredit the claims of victims who ‘froze’.

4.2 Feminist discourses

By feminist discourses, I refer to the discourses articulated from an anti-sexist, anti-patriarchal ideological position. I see these discourses as alternative, or counter-discourses, as they compete with hegemonic *gendered discourses* (Sunderland, 2004).

In the process of identification and naming of feminist discourses, I tried to mirror Sunderland's (2004) and other already documented *gendered discourses*, when possible. Some of the discourses in this category are complementary. For instance, an academic feminist discourse and an activist discourse are often co-articulated and mutually support each other and other feminist discourses, in participants' posts/comments. Feminist discourses are also seen to be produced as counter-discourses to 'middle ground' discourses, and backlash. The feminist discourses identified are presented in the table below:

Table 2. Feminist discourses

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic feminism discourse • Activist discourse • Discourse of 'hegemony of patriarchy' • Discourse of 'cost of patriarchy' • 'Patriarchal double standards and contradictions' discourse • Discourse of 'social construct' • 'Gender similarities' discourse • Discourse of 'necessity of feminism' • 'Consciousness-raising' discourse or 'Learnability of feminism' discourse • Empowering discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourse of 'body positivity' • Discourse of 'female sexuality' • Discourse of 'sisterhood' • Discourse of 'safe space' • Discourse of 'consent' • Discourse of 'speaking out' • 'Critique of postfeminism' discourse • Discourse of a 'new era' • 'Power as responsibility' discourse • 'Body vs. mind' discourse • Discourse of 'equality' • Discourse of 'struggle'
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4.3 'Middle ground' discourses

This category describes an overall anti-sexist discourse, which, however, criticises the perceived 'excesses' of contemporary feminism. These discourses can be interpreted in the context of the larger sociopolitical discursive struggle over gender equality and persisting hegemonic gender ideologies.

Table 3. ‘Middle ground’ discourses

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discourse of ‘excessiveness of contemporary feminism’• Discourse of ‘commodification of contemporary feminism’• Discourse of ‘harmed cause’• ‘Not everything needs to be politicised’ discourse• Discourse of ‘personal responsibility’	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘Contemporary feminism is victimising women’ discourse• Discourse of ‘ideal victim’ – Discourse of ‘rape culture’• ‘Middle ground between feminism and misogyny’ discourse• ‘Women should not be so sensitive’ discourse• Liberal discourse of ‘free speech’
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4.4 Backlash

Backlash is a term borrowed by Faludi (1991), to describe the anti-feminist discourse, according to which feminism is responsible for women’s unhappiness. Discourses of backlash identified in the data set under examination are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Discourses of backlash

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘There is no patriarchy’ discourse• ‘Equality now achieved’ discourse• ‘Gender differences’ discourse• Discourse of the Men’s Rights Movement• ‘Psychologising’ discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘Egalitarian’ discourse• Discourse of ‘personal choice’• ‘Corruptive late modernity’ discourse• Discourse of ‘morality’• Anti-liberalism discourse• Discourse of ‘victim blaming’
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The analysis conducted and the discourse identification process that followed brings to light the discursive tensions that exist within the context of a feminist-oriented website, in cases when topics of interest to contemporary feminism are subjects of debate. Indeed, feminism seems to be a highly contested subject. More specifically, three ideological positions become salient: a feminist perspective, a sceptical, middle ground approach towards feminism, and an anti-feminist view. The

various discourses that fall under the four, overarching, types of discourses, are related to each other in complex ways. It has to be mentioned that, contrary to what the term ‘ideological position’ would suggest, traces of different discourses, belonging to different overarching discourses, might appear in a single comment or post. This might be obvious in the case of *feminist* discourses and ‘*middle ground*’ discourses, since they are both premised on an anti-sexist perspective, but it is less obvious in the case of competing discourses, such as *feminist* discourses and *backlash*. However, this is justified by the nature of my data set, which comprises comments posted in the context of online polylogues, with interlocutors engaging in debate and argumentative processes.

In the following chapter, I am presenting a discussion of my analysis informed by FCDA on the ways that participants in the online community of *A, mpa?* discursively challenge gendered discourses. In compliance with the objectives of this study, my discussion focuses on the feminist and ‘middle ground’ discourses most frequently articulated, in relation to postfeminism and to the website’s discursive construction of safety. Even though general discourses and backlash were identified, as well, they fall beyond the scope of this research, therefore, they will only be discussed in terms of their interdiscursive links to feminist and ‘middle’ ground discourses and not separately.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I am discussing the discourses produced and/or drawn upon from an anti-sexist perspective, namely, feminist and ‘middle ground’ discourses. Due to space and time limitations, I am presenting the ones which are recurrent within my data set, omitting those which are infrequent. I suggest that feminist discourses constitute counter (or alternative) discourses, since they are articulated from a counter-hegemonic, feminist standpoint, whereas ‘middle ground’ discourses challenge feminist discourses, suggesting an equidistant position between feminism and anti-feminism.

In the first section of this chapter, I analyse an introductory post written by the administrator a few days after the site was launched. This post and its accompanying comments become the starting point of my analysis, because they reveal the emerging tensions within the context of the site, which might be seen as foundation for the articulation of two distinct types of discourses; feminist discourses and ‘middle ground’ discourses relate to two essentially competing ideological positions, circulating in *A, mpa?* from the very beginning of the site. Feminist and ‘middle ground’ discourses are analysed in the second and third section, respectively, with particular emphasis on the effect of postfeminism and the website’s status as a ‘safe space’ in their re/production. In the final section of this chapter, I further discuss my findings against the backdrop of the existing literature, as a way of responding to my research questions.

5.1 Introduction: “Why *A, mpa?* is a site that speaks to women”

A few days after *A, mpa?* was launched, the website’s administrator posted an article to explain and justify its promotional line as ‘a site that speaks to women’. While some readers applauded the website’s explicit ‘female turn’, others reacted negatively and criticised it, worrying that the perceived ‘gender-neutral’ tone of the column, which they saw as its biggest strength, would be compromised. In response to such criticisms, the administrator posted an article, from which the following extract is drawn:²

(1) Why *A, mpa?* is a site that speaks to women³

Explanation for the subtitle, a post that I did not think would be necessary

Let’s start from something elementary: this is not a site for women ONLY. This is the most common question I’ve received. There is nothing that suggests ‘only’. A site that speaks to women means that it addresses them, but it does not use language that only they understand, and that’s because we all speak the same language, because we are all human, women and men.

Yes, it speaks to women. We did not decide it. We realised it. It is neither a marketing strategy, nor a matter of labelling, nor some master plan for accumulating wealth. *A, mpa?* started for fun, evolved into speedy dialogue, and, little by little, through participation, started to transform into something more concrete. Indeed, the trivial has been substituted by something else, which I wouldn’t call ‘heavy’, but which nonetheless has a presence and a message, that came from the

² The full article can be found in Appendix A. The reader can refer to Appendix B for the original version in Greek.

³ The extracts from the data set presented here as examples were translated by the researcher.

daily exchange of views. Through the randomness of the questions, a necessity, a worry slowly emerged and the space of *A, mpa?* became a space for mutual support on subjects that – it is sad but true – are not discussed elsewhere in the same manner, publicly. [...]

I chose this post for detailed analysis, because it provides insight on the content of the website in general and it can be seen as an attempt on the administrator's part to establish the overall ideological position of the site for its current, as well as its potential participants, some of whom might be dubious about the initiative. The post is also interesting because it demonstrates that, even for a largely feminist audience, or, rather, an audience that is critical of sexist ideologies and practices, and adopts a sexism-awareness perspective, the explicit naming of the new website as one that is for women was not entirely received in a positive way. In fact, it was the word choice *women* which seemed to have caused a debate over whom the site is addressed to and who is, or feels, excluded. It is argued that the particular text is interesting in terms of the ideological implications it entails, at least for the present study, on the basis of the fact that some participants disagreed with the explicit naming of women in the website's promotional slogan, and on the fact that this naming was a conscious choice of the administrator, who stands by it.

The lexical items *why* and *explanation* in the title and subtitle, respectively, indicate that the function of the text is, broadly speaking, an explanation and a justification of the site's promotional line. Thus, the interactional role of the writer is that of defender of not merely her website's promotional line/subtitle (*a site that speaks to women*), but, crucially, her website's content and orientation. It can be inferred that the subject position constructed by the team behind the website for its participants has been one that a few among them did not comply with. Indeed, the

subtitle of the site raised questions, which the administrator and writer of the post attempts to answer in the particular post. The administrator's stated surprise for those reactions illustrates that she must have attributed certain presupposed ideas to the participants, which evidently are not verified. Thus, an additional, explanatory post was required, perhaps to re-establish common ground with her critics.

The writer explains that her website is not for women only, which appears to have been the most common misconception among the readers of the site. The most prominent pattern in the syntactic structure of the text is declaratives of the form *This is not.../This is...*, while the types of conjunction mostly used are coordinating and correlative (*It is neither a marketing strategy, nor a matter of labelling..., a good or a bad girl, being smart... or beautiful...*). In terms of modality, therefore, most of the statements made by the author are reported as categorical truths, and the tense used is Simple Present (*Men are not a unitary group, just like women aren't, Women are ordinary people*). Simple Present, a terminal point of modality, along with non-modalised clauses of negative and positive polarity (*it is not a secret – on the contrary, it is evident, This is not a website that speaks about life.../This is a site that speaks to women*), are indicators of the writer's categorical commitment to the truth of her propositions. These grammatical and syntactic choices, thus, point to her main objective, i.e. to explain and possibly clarify what she feels certain readers have misunderstood. It can also be claimed that she attempts to explicitly define her website for what it is versus what it is not. The website, then, might 'speak to women', but not exclusively; its participants do not speak a language that only women understand. In this statement, the writer seems to reject views concerning a perceived inherent difference between males and females; both men and women are humans and

speak the same language, therefore there is no way that a man would not understand what a site that speaks to women talks about.

The writer goes on to deny accusations, which, one could infer, have been levelled against her by certain readers (i.e. that the promotional line of the site was just for marketing purposes, that the website is making rough and unjust distinctions and labels its readers according to their gender, and that its creator is in it just for the money). The accusation that the website was launched for profit reasons, in particular, is stated in a sarcastic and exaggerated way (*...nor is it a master plan to accumulate wealth.*), implicitly suggesting the absurdity of such claims. Evident here are interdiscursive links to a discourse against political correctness: within the current social context, the increased awareness concerning feminist issues (among others) coexists with resistance to sexism-awareness discourses and, therefore, social transformation. A discursive form of such resistance – or, in Faludi's (1991) terms, backlash – is the discourse against political correctness. For opponents of political correctness, the latter is dismissed as a matter of 'verbal hygiene' (Cameron, 1995); more importantly, it is seen as a 'trend' that capitalises on the rights of minorities. Therefore, (online) initiatives/spaces, where individuals from marginalised groups interact and exchange opinions to empower themselves, are perceived to be exploiting human rights and, ultimately, superficial. Ostensibly, the site of A, *mpa?*, which adopts a feminist perspective, is criticised on the same grounds.

The writer briefly recounts the history of the development of the site, which she claims started *for fun*, random, but, through participation, evolved into something more *concrete*. Words of the semantic field of chance, such as *randomness* and *trivial*, are used to counter accusations that the administrator has an agenda. Also emphasised

is the element of collectivity and participation, which can be seen as foregrounding the participants, rather than the administrator; it has been the readers/commenters of the initial column that have built a virtual community, which possibly inspired the transformation of the column into a website. The development of the website, then, is presented as a bottom-up process; through democratic debate and dialogue, it became apparent that the community of participants (commenters) shared common worries, which apparently were more substantial than what the ‘triviality’ of an online advice column would suggest. The abstract nouns *presence* and *message* here relate to the idea of a community of concerned users with a voice, united by the same *worries*. The administrator was merely catering to her readers’ needs, as they emerged from democratic dialogue. The fact that, instead of the noun *website*, the lexical choice here is *space*, triggers the collocation of ‘safe space’ and can, therefore, be seen as an attempt by the administrator to establish her website as an accessible discursive space, where women can speak freely and seek support, forming a networked counterpublic (Keller, 2016). *Space for mutual support* also has interdiscursive links to a discourse of psychotherapy. The evaluative adverb *unfortunately*, besides revealing the writer’s stance vis-à-vis the issue discussed, might further support the implicit claim that the creation of the website was, indeed, necessary.

The lexical choice of *women*, then, is justified by stating that the majority of the participants are actually women. Again, the administrator stresses that this, too, happened *naturally* (not purposefully). She offers two possible reasons for this, strategically presented as more viable explanations than the conspiracy claims addressed before: the administrator is herself a woman and thus knows women’s problems, and she has evolved personally through the years. This final statement becomes clear right away; she wishes there had been such a medium when she was

growing up, when, as a teenager, she felt *suffocated* by the contradictory and unjust standards she had to live up to. Said standards are metonymically referred to as specific dilemmas (*good girl* vs. *bad girl* etc.) in the text. The writer uses words from the semantic field of struggle and oppression to refer to the experience of growing up a woman, such as *problems*, *suffocation*, *lose*, *struggle*, *effort*, *anxiety*. It can be claimed that such a choice is an ideological one: by associating the experience of being female with negative aspects, the writer implicitly criticises, thus revealing her stance towards, *gendered discourses* (Sunderland, 2004). Such discourses are seen to be putting pressure on young girls and possibly being detrimental to their development. The writer herself *wishes* that there had been a medium to make her aware of the patriarchy and the way it operates when she was growing up. This could perhaps illustrate that she hopes her website can assume an educational role for contemporary teenage girls, who could be proposed as the website's 'ideal' participants. By referring to younger women who *are just starting to find the answers* (to their questions concerning the patriarchy?), the writer points to the recent wider, global awareness on feminist issues, which again is reported as categorical truth (*Those who do not see it are blind*). Through those language choices, the writer draws upon a 'new era' discourse; it is suggested that we live in an era where more and more women are becoming aware of the constraints that the society forces upon them and are resisting gendered discourses, attempting to form alternative identities than the ones prescribed to them in the context of patriarchy.

The writer unapologetically stands by her –rephrased and repeated eight times throughout the text– statement that the website is for women (*We do not need to justify it or explain ourselves*). The exclusive 'we' refers to the team of people behind the website, who seemingly share her vision about it, rather than its

readers/commenters (who are ambivalent towards the site). Nevertheless, the entire post is, functionally, a justification/explanation and the writer herself intends it to be so. There seems to be a paradox here, but if the grammatical cohesion of the text (i.e. coordinating conjunctions, such as *and*, *but*, *neither...nor*, and declaratives in contrastive pairs, such as *We did not decide it. We realised it.*) and its content are considered, it can be assumed that, while the writer feels that she needs to justify the promotional subtitle, it was a conscious choice that she does not regret. Indeed, the short, declarative sentences and the minimal use of conjunctions contribute to the overall assertive tone of the text. The writer clarifies that nobody is excluded from participating in the website, only to state right away that the comfort of its male readers are not her primary concern. For those who are already suspicious about the *A, mpa?* initiative, this could come across as a warning and perhaps as potentially threatening, and, in perhaps a defensive remark, the writer makes an implicature: those who disagree with the promotional subtitle are the ones who are not comfortable with themselves. The writer is, thus, drawing upon a popular sexist argument (that women who find sexism offensive are just afraid to admit its realistic basis), and subverts it, using the rationale behind common sexist arguments to call sexism into question.

To those who feel that men are excluded, the writer counters by recounting instances of men who support the site, because *why not?* This rhetorical question could function as a linguistic means to oppose a 'Gender differences' discourse (Sunderland, 2004), according to which men and women are fundamentally different and, therefore, have different interests (i.e. cosmetics are seen as women's domain). Since *none of* the male participants *required a special explanation* for the promotional subtitle addressing women, the writer finally explicitly addresses her intended

audience. It is some women who have expressed worries about the lack of a *male view* in the website. These women are also addressed directly and asked not to be *so afraid of displeasing men*. The proposition here is that what they really worry about is not the lack of a male perspective; it is men's hurt feelings. By urging them directly not to worry about displeasing men, the writer challenges the gendered discourse of women-as-men's-pleasers, which has been used to suppress women's own needs and voices to accommodate men's. Moreover, the writer challenges the overarching 'Gender differences' discourse (Sunderland, 2004), by stating that men, as well as women, are not unitary groups. This is done through a discourse of 'individuality', prominent in postfeminism (Sunderland, 2004; 2007, Gill, 2007), to suggest a feminist idea of 'gender similarities', instead of explicitly supporting a discourse of 'social construct'. This serves as an example of how an individualising language of postfeminism can be used in a subversive way: if individual men can be interested in what individual women like, then men and women are not so different after all; it is society that has convinced them they are. By extension, if men have no problem participating in the site, the fears of some female participants are ungrounded.

The writer repeats that nobody is excluded, because (or provided that!) both men and women *live in the same universe* as the team behind the website does. This can be read as an implicit reminder of who sets the tone in the online community (the administrator and the moderators of the site); men and women may be equally invited to participate, but that is as long as they care about the same issues that the people in charge of the site do. Throughout the text, the writer draws upon a discourse of 'equality', through the repetition of claims that men and women are humans, women are normal people, and nobody is excluded from participating in the website. For a reader who consciously adopts a feminist perspective, such statements might echo an

‘egalitarian’ discourse, often drawn upon by backlash proponents, to suggest that feminism is really about female superiority (otherwise it would be called ‘egalitarianism’). Interdiscursively, the co-articulation of competing discourses (i.e. feminist and backlash) can be viewed as a strategic appropriation of common backlash arguments, to undermine gendered discourses. Indeed, interdiscursivity is seen as key to both discursual change and social progress (Sunderland, 2004: 30). The writer instead proposes that the topics covered by the site do have a gendered dimension, but it is her firm belief that *female issues are human issues* (because *women are humans*) *that affect men’s lives*. Thus, it seems that the articulation of recognisable gendered and backlash claims is broadly deployed in the text, as a discursive strategy to challenge gendered discourses in a subversive way.

The comments posted under the article confirm that the promotion of the new website as one for women divided its audience, the former readers of the column. In fact, from the total 32 comments, half of them (16) applauded the initiative, whereas the other half expressed discontent. What is interesting here, however, is that, contrary to what the initial post suggests, both female and male commenters are against an explicitly female-oriented website, as half of the comments in which disagreement with the initial post is expressed are posted by (self-identified) male posters.

Indicatively, a male commenter posted the following comment (comments in square brackets are added by the researcher, for clarification purposes):

- (2) No, the *A, mpa?* column wasn’t addressed to women only. That’s the point. Personally, [by reading the column] I became a better person, it helped shape my perception a lot. I was thinking about recommending it to others, so that they, too, benefit from this perspective. Now I

hesitate to recommend it, because it is “targeted to women”. It is not a matter of misogyny. Neither does it matter that the majority of the readers are women. First of all, how do we know and, secondly, what happened to the “rights” of “minorities”? A site that wishes to appeal to everyone should say so. It is just like opening a “female” bar. A man would feel like an interloper there. Of course, I understand that Lena wanted to create a site for women. And *A, mpa?* [the column] was just collateral damage. Alright, what can we do. We should just deploy a bit more machismo, to justify the “male perspective”. (jokingly) The next step is a subtitle that reads “Men and dogs are prohibited”. And then again there’s the issue of objectivity. How do I know that [the administrator] won’t pick the side of the woman in a potential question of mine (end of joke)?

The commenter does not comply with the demands of the reading position that the initial post constructs for him, i.e. the position of a male participant in the website, who does not feel excluded. In fact, he states that he feels like an *interloper*, through the deployment of rhetorical questions (*how do we know*), sarcasm (*what happened to the “rights” of “minorities”?*, (jokingly)), and exaggerated statements (“*Men and dogs are prohibited*”). By these discursive strategies, the commenter expresses a fear that the objectivity of the website is now compromised, because it is a ‘site that speaks to women’. It could be argued, however, that a promotional line alone, given that, at the time the comment was posted, the website had just been launched, does not justify such a fear.

Interestingly, women who disagree with the site’s subtitle, do not seem to be merely afraid of displeasing men, as suggested by the initial post:

- (3) Lena, at first I became angry and then sad. I am a woman and I have been participating in the comment section of the old site, because I was under the impression that I was participating in a website that is

nothing like *Madame Figaro* and *Men's Health*, in which gender is explicitly named. [I was participating in a site] That is aware of the existence of both genders, but does not explicitly address either. That, even if 100 women and 1 man read it, would never be presented as a site for women. Precisely because it is a site that speaks about life, the universe, and everything, that was my impression. That speaks to women, to men, to teenagers of both genders, without saying 'I am for women, but alright, you men are welcome, too'. Everybody was welcome, sans labels. Enough with the labels. 'It is a site for women, who are humans' is sexist, in my opinion, because it automatically states the self-evident, and what is self-evident should not be stated, since that's precisely how inequality is sustained. It is similar to a human saying, I am a human, I have two hands, therefore, I am a human. It is redundant to say so, it is unnecessary. I could say so much more. I will continue reading the site because I like your writing, Lena, but I no longer want to participate in the comments section. I hope my comment is posted, because I've observed that lately, in the previous site, polite comments submitted in good faith, in which, however, the poster expressed their opinion, were excluded or were posted and then deleted after a while. What are you afraid of, a different way of thinking? I was used to expressing my opinion in here, always politely and with prudence, and my comment would get posted. Has anything changed?

In this comment, the poster differentiates between the old site (referring to the column in the LIFO website) and the new, stressing the gender neutrality of the former, which is presented as its strength. This is realised through the repetition of the conjunction 'that', by which the inclusivity and the 'unisex' nature of the old column is foregrounded, as well as by distinguishing between the old column and other online magazines, in terms of their targeted audience. Repetition of *impression* (in *I was under the impression*) further asserts this distinction, pointing to the poster's thwarted expectations in light of the frustrating (*angry*) and *sad* reality. As modality markers,

such lexical items expressing the speaker's beliefs (*in my opinion, that was my impression*) highlight her disappointment, and convey her own criticism towards the new website, which is characterised as *sexist*. The main discursive strategy that the commenter deploys, then, is that of 'projection', the claim that the target (the administrator), in explicitly addressing women, is enacting the sexism she purports to critique. Bonilla-Silva (2002: 54) refers to this strategy as the 'reverse sexism' argument, which is used to protect the speaker from claims of sexism and position herself as promoting equality. In Anderson and Cermele (2014), the 'reverse sexism' argument is said to be a common anti-feminist rhetorical strategy, therefore, it may be argued that the poster's comment echoes a discourse of backlash. In her view, the administrator's promotional practices are 'labelling', thus maintaining inequality. By distinguishing between other online magazines, which target either female or male audiences, and the old column, and between the old column and the new website, the commenter likens the *A, mpa?* site to traditional women's websites/magazines, which she has been consciously avoiding. This association, read in combination with another commenter's claim:

- (4) [...] I must admit that when I saw the pink banner that addressed women, for a second there I got afraid that I would be reading about fashion and diets everywhere.. [...]

indicates that *women* (*A site that speaks to women*) are associated with negative qualities (triviality, superficiality), to the point that the mere naming of women in the website's promotional line causes defensive knee-jerk reactions, even from female participants. It becomes clear, then, that female participants who are sceptical about the explicit naming of women in the website's promotional slogan are not necessarily coming from a place of fear of displeasing men. Rather, they seem to be worried

about being associated with negative attributes and being reduced to stereotypes. In light of this, the administrator's choice can indeed be seen as an ideological one, in that she challenges such hegemonic sexist representations of femininity as superficial, by reclaiming the word.

The controversy that the website's promotional line sparked among its participants unveils the ideological weight still carried by the word 'women', which gives rise to tensions and discursive struggle among participants in the site. This struggle is rooted in hegemonic representations of gender, as they are negotiated within a context in which counter-discourses are becoming more and more accessible. Apart from a wider ideological tension, in a more local context, this controversy relates to the website's discursive boundaries, as they are made explicit by the administrator. In targeting a specific audience, which she believes has been previously deprived from such a platform, the administrator is seen as excluding another audience. This can be viewed as a realisation of the paradoxical nature of online safe spaces, which can be 'safe' for certain individuals only, whereas others will feel threatened and restricted (Rentschler, 2014; Clark-Parsons, 2018); as has been claimed, it is when conflicts arise that this paradox becomes evident.

In conclusion, the creation of the *A, mpa?* site was marked by the controversy that its arguably feminist orientation ignited. I suggest that this discursive tension provides the grounds for the articulation of the two distinct discourses which I discuss in the following sections, namely, feminist and 'middle ground' discourses. In terms of the website's 'ideal participant', she is constructed as a feminist social being, producing feminist discourses in line with the overall position of the community. Participants who resist this subject position often articulate 'middle ground'

discourses, occupying the ‘middle ground’ between feminism’s perceived ‘excesses’ and traditional gendered discourses and discourses of backlash.

5.2 Feminist discourses

The increased visibility of feminist discourses in the digital media can be situated within a significantly broader popularisation of feminism in popular culture and the media in general (Munro, 2013; Jackson, 2018, among others). Once invisible and often disparaged, feminism is now presented as ‘cool’ by popular culture and mainstream media, a condition which has been problematised as a distinctive sensibility connected to neoliberal values and expressed through an individualising language of choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007; Jackson, 2018), which has been termed *postfeminism*. This cultural ‘cool’ of feminism, nevertheless, coexists with an antagonistic, anti-feminist culture, which proliferates both online and offline. Still, the wide dissemination of feminism via mainstream and digital media is an important discursive resource for women engaging in online activities with implicit or explicit allegiances to feminism (Jackson, 2018). Whether such activities are activism-oriented or remain at the level of ‘micro-politics’, such as sharing and understanding women’s own everyday experiences of sexism and misogyny, women who engage in them employ the language of academic feminism to counter sexism and rape culture, dissolving the dichotomisation between academic and grassroots feminism.

Participants of *A, mpa?* employ an academic feminism discourse, which can be seen as ‘subordinate’ to an overarching feminist (counter-)discourse. By ‘academic feminism discourse’, I refer to the discursive reproduction of terminology and

theoretical concepts introduced by feminist theorists in participants' popular talk. Such concepts are, for instance, patriarchy, male privilege, rape culture, etc. While the majority of the site's commenters draw upon feminist discourses, the administrator and the rest of the team behind the website produce feminist discourses exclusively. This is telling of the overall tone of the website, primarily decided by the administrator, and it explains why such discourses are dominant in the users' comments as well. In other words, participants who produce feminist discourses can be seen as complying with the demands of the 'reading' position constructed for them.

Before moving on to the analysis of characteristic examples, it must be said that the number of the discourses (feminist and 'middle ground') identified in the data set under examination is quite large. This has been due to the size of the data set itself, which was, indeed, constructed and examined in perhaps a moment of overzealousness on the researcher's part. Unfortunately, the discourses identified and presented in the previous chapter are more than what can be extensively analysed in the limited space of this section. Recognising that the scope of the present study perhaps does not do justice to the richness of discourses articulated by the participants of *A, mpa?*, I must limit my discussion to the analysis of characteristic examples of the most dominant – in terms of frequency of production – discourses identified. To that end, and in order to make the analysis more coherent, I make sure that in the examples I have selected to present here multiple discourses are co-articulated.

Apart from the introductory post analysed in the previous section, the administrator's discursive contribution to the website is largely limited to the advice column, which has a special thread in the site. In the following example, the administrator replies to an anonymous question, in the advice column:

(5) Q: Why is it that, while we have the term misogyny, there is no misandry? – that is the question

A: If there isn't, where did you find it?

Oh, I am not sure if it is really a good idea to keep writing about stuff that are not matters of opinion, but rather, now clarified and widely accepted as facts - just for the sake of those who do not wish for the status quo to change. I think that, by defending what is right, what is self-evident and acceptable for the thousandth time, that oppression is an up-down process, and that the bottom-up reaction to it is neither equal to it nor the same, I am not establishing the truth. Sometimes I think that, by analysing over and over again that there can be no such thing as reverse sexism and racism, I am just wasting my time. We are all wasting our time, time which could be spent more creatively, going deeper into what we already know, instead of arguing over whether or not misogyny exists, since there are men who are having a hard time too. Aren't you tired already? [...]

The administrator's answer can be viewed as an example of what Sunderland (2004: 203) calls *discoursal intervention*, which refers to the 'ways in which alternative, perhaps oppositional voices rise up to challenge dominant or hegemonic' gendered discourses. In this example, however, the administrator does not simply challenge gendered representations, but she goes further to explicitly challenge backlash discourses, such as the discourse of the Men's Rights Movement and a 'There is no patriarchy' discourse. She does so through 'principled, confrontational use' of feminist discourses (Sunderland, 2004: 203), traces of which are identified in her answer to what she seems to have perceived as a provocative question.

The recognisable discourses traced in the administrator's answer, named from a feminist perspective, are an academic feminism discourse, a discourse of 'hegemony of the patriarchy', and a discourse of 'cost of the patriarchy'. Traces of a general

'battle' discourse are evident, as well, realised through the verb *defending* and the noun *side*, by which it can be inferred that a battle between two discernible sides is going on; the side that the administrator seems to be identifying with or consider herself a part of is defending itself from an implied attack by an opposing side. The discourse of 'hegemony of the patriarchy' is co-articulated with and complemented by an academic feminism discourse. Two propositions are made evident in the discourse of 'hegemony of the patriarchy': that the status quo is patriarchal and that the patriarchal status quo is a given, a *well-established*, undeniable fact. Discursive traces of 'hegemony of the patriarchy' can be identified in the noun phrases *status quo*, *hegemonic tendency*, *not a secret* and *not matters of opinion*, as well as the noun *facts* and the abstract noun *truth*. Moreover, discourse of 'hegemony of the patriarchy' is realised through the adverbs *obviously* and *indeed*, the determiner *all* in *all genders*, the pronoun *everyone*, the adjectives *self-evident*, *clarified*, *right*, *acceptable*, and the modified (intensification) adjective *widely accepted*. In terms of modality, such statements, as well as the deployment of a scientific fact (*the earth is round*) paralleled with the relational clause *there are unequal opportunities and a power asymmetry between the genders*, support the categorical proposition that the patriarchy is hegemonic, a claim which cannot be contested, just as the shape of the planet cannot be doubted. Additionally, by referring to *all genders* as responsible for the reproduction of sexism, the administrator aligns herself with feminist ideas concerning the patriarchy, according to which, when feminists advocate and identify as striving for female emancipation, they are not engaging in a conflict of women vs. men, but as people challenging the patriarchal social structure that is reproduced by and affects all regardless of gender (hooks, 2004). Finally, a discourse of 'cost of the patriarchy' is also evident here, identified in the abstract noun *oppression*, which is

associated with evaluatively negative things, the verb *impacts*, by which negative effects are suggested, and the modified noun phrase *restrictive stereotypical roles*. The emphasis here is, thus, not just on the systemic and oppressive nature of the patriarchy, but also on its negative consequences for everyone.

The co-articulation of a discourse of ‘hegemony of the patriarchy’ and of an academic feminism discourse reveals the administrator’s stance on gender ideologies and her allegiance to feminism. This is apparent in lexical items taken from the field of academic feminism and gender studies, such as *patriarchy*, *misogyny*, *systemic oppression*, and concepts, such as the distinction between *bottom-up oppression* and *up-down resistance*. The argument here is that the idea of ‘reverse sexism’, often proposed by backlash proponents, is misinformed. Indeed, Bearman et al. (2009: 14) argue that ‘a key feature of sexism and oppression against any group is the power differential’ between the oppressor and the oppressed. It does not stand, then, that prejudice by itself is oppressive, but for oppression to exist the backing of a societal system of institutional power is required.

Overall, the administrator’s answer can be read as an answer to (and contestation of) discourses of backlash, such as a ‘there is no patriarchy’ discourse and the discourse of the Men’s Rights Movement. Through the deployment of a discourse of ‘hegemony of the patriarchy’ and a discourse of ‘cost of the patriarchy’, supported by an academic feminist discourse, the administrator answers a question which she evidently interpreted to be conflictual. Indeed, from a feminist perspective, the reader’s question could be seen as echoing backlash arguments about feminism being built on a fallacy; according to the rhetoric of backlash and its contemporary proponents, the Men’s Rights Movement, patriarchy is the ultimate feminist myth, in their efforts to create an enemy and to conceal a perceived historical *gynocentrism* in

society (Hodapp, 2017). The confrontational and dismissive tone of the administrator's answer, evident in rhetorical questions (*...where did you find it?, Aren't you tired already?, I wonder what the point is..., What are you doing here?, Did you come to change our minds?*), patronising and sarcastic statements (*...men... are having a hard time too, google it, spare us the high school talk, the ABC, the earth is round*), and the stated denial to answer similar questions in the future, emphasise the oppositional nature of the feminist discourses she draws upon.

To return to the 'battle' discourse identified in the administrator's response, it can be inferred that the two opposing sides suggested are feminists and anti-feminists, in other words, those who seek to change the status quo and those who want to maintain it. By implication, it is anti-feminists (proponents of backlash) who are the offensive force, while feminists, with whom the administrator (and, by extension, the website) identifies, are the defensive force. The latter are represented as guardians of the truth, since what they are trying to defend has already been established, as suggested by the lexical items from what could be called the semantic field of 'truth' (i.e. *widely accepted, right, self-evident*, among others). However, the mere existence of interdiscursive links to discourses of backlash, even if these are included so that they can be contested, undermines the categorical statements made by the administrator with regard to the 'widely accepted' and 'self-evident' nature of the patriarchy. Ironically, in this era of post-truth politics, 'alternative facts' and 'fake news', a growing number of people promote the idea that the Earth is flat (Flat Earthers Movement). A feminist, critical reader is, therefore, aware that the administrator's propositions are not entirely true, for the contemporary post-truth social reality and the burgeoning presence of anti-feminism online 'complicate any

straightforward recourse to “reality” and, thus, make “speaking truth to power” a problematic endeavor’ (Gill, 2017: 608).

It is hard to imagine that the administrator herself ignores this aspect of contemporary social reality. After all, the proliferation of backlash and gendered discourses is precisely why online spaces such as *A, mpa?* are created. Why, then, is the perceived indisputability of feminist ideas repeated throughout the text? A possible answer may be related to the website’s discursive construction as a ‘safe space’. It is not that feminist ideas are universally accepted, it is that they are accepted in the particular context of the website. By implication, those who oppose feminist ideas have no place in the site’s community. The alienation of backlash and gendered discourses, which are seen as *damaging* (Sunderland, 2004), reinforces the site’s safety by opening it up to a particular audience (Rentschler, 2014), that shares its ideological orientation.

As has been mentioned, participants are invited to submit their own opinion articles and share personal experiences. Most of those articles are directly or indirectly related to feminism, and, as such, they present opportunities for participatory engagement with feminism in the comments section (Retallack et al., 2016). Through the supportive and affective exchange of participants’ personal experiences and opinions, feminist discourses are produced (Orgad, 2005). The following article, posted under the hashtag #FEMINISM, is an example of how a user contributes to the broader feminist discussion of consent and offers her personal, anecdotal experience on the issue. Due to space-related limitations, only a few paragraphs of the post will be included here, but the reader can refer to Appendix A for the complete version analysed.

(6) Consent

“No means no” and a small personal story

[...] We must move beyond the question of whether girls are “provocative” or not and instead focus on how boys behave. The point isn’t to teach girls to protect themselves, the point is to teach boys the meaning of consent early on. [The point is that boys] Learn the elementary “do you want to?” “Yes, I do”. [The point is that boys] Learn yes.

[...] For a large number of women it is very difficult to say “no” for many reasons. Because they have learnt to be compliant, agreeable and nice, they have learnt to be “good girls” and not to upset anyone, they have learnt to please others, even if it is at their own expense. Or they cannot say “no”, because they are not sober or because they are paralysed from fear. If someone does not or cannot say anything, that doesn’t signify consent. We cannot see that as consent. Only an enthusiastic “Yes” is consent. [...]

This article was posted by a reader of *A, mpa?* who regularly contributes to the site. It is another example of ‘linked, related, networked discourses’ constituting an ‘order of discourse’ (Sunderland, 2004: 31), specifically, a feminist discourse overarching several others. This post presented some difficulties; while provisional discourse identification was relatively easy – indeed, several discourses are apparent—there is a high degree of overlap between the identified discourses. Effectively, the same lexical items can be seen as traces of different discourses, tightly linked to and mutually supportive of each other. Moreover, in some instances, such traces are more obscure than others, thus making it hard to conduct an exhaustive, neat analysis of particular linguistic features. However, this is precisely why this post is a good example of *interdiscursivity* (‘the complex, interdependent configuration of discursive

formations', Fairclough, 1992: 68, cited in Sunderland, 2004), as a variety of discourses are produced and drawn upon.

A more dominant discourse, which the poster draws upon, is a feminist discourse of 'consent'. The interpretively named discourse of 'consent' describes the way in which the issue of consent is discussed from a feminist standpoint. As such, it is a *competing* counter-discourse to a gendered rape culture discourse, namely, a discourse which normalises rape and is premised on hegemonic societal attitudes about gender. Traces of the discourse of 'consent' include the repetition of the noun *consent* and the lexical item *yes*, modified by the adjective *enthusiastic* (an alternative version is [*say*] *yes enthusiastically*), through which a strict definition of consent as an enthusiastic 'yes' is attempted. The discourse of 'consent' is complemented by an activist discourse associated with digital feminism, traced in references to popular feminist slogans, such as '*no means no*', '*enthusiastic yes*', feminist movements (*MeToo*), and the noun *campaign*. A proposition of discourse of 'consent' is that the issue of consent must be viewed in positive terms, i.e. as actually saying yes to the encounter, instead of as not refusing it. An implication of differentiating between saying 'yes' vs. not saying 'no' is that the former suggests an agentive social actor with the capacity to consent, whereas the latter suggests some degree of passivity, which could potentially obscure the fact that the individual's capacity to consent is limited. Indeed, from a feminist standpoint, the prerequisite of consent is both capable of and does express her agreement to the act, a view which is made explicit in the post through the conditional sentence *If someone cannot or does not say anything, that doesn't signify consen.*, the modalised clause *We cannot see that as consent*, and, finally, the categorical clause *Only an enthusiastic yes is consent*.

A further implication of this discourse is that, in defining consent in terms of the capacity to say 'yes' and of explicit agreement, the so-called 'grey zone in consent' is problematised. The term 'grey zone' or 'grey area' in consent, sometimes mentioned as 'grey rape', refers to sexual encounters for which consent is unclear or experiences which, while not technically falling under a legal definition of sexual assault, do feel violating to women who participate in them. 'Grey zones' have been widely discussed by feminist journalists and writers, such as Sileo (2018), who has argued that the idea of 'grey zones' in consent is a manifestation of the pervasive rape culture in society, which disregards the fact that, within the patriarchy, women have many reasons not to explicitly refuse a sexual encounter, even though they may wish to. As such, it offers a very narrow definition of rape and assault ('rape myths'), in order to eventually blame the victim for inviting rape. In response, the feminist position proposes an oppositional discourse to rape culture, that of consent: instead of defining rape and assault as unwanted sexual experiences to which victims say 'no', the focus should be on an equally narrow definition of consent, as a condition in which both parties can and do give an unequivocal yes. Anything other than that would be non-consensual.

In the post, a feminist discourse of 'consent' is supported by two linked discourses, which serve to justify the particular conceptualisation of the issue of consent suggested by the former. The poster draws upon a discourse of 'cost of the patriarchy', explicitly stated in the text (*What you are describing is part of the cost of patriarchy*), and mainly traced in the parts of direct reported speech, where she recounts a personal story. This particular part is a case of 'manifest intertextuality', in that the actual words of another text (a dialogue between friends) are drawn in. A discourse of 'cost of the patriarchy' is further supported by a discourse of 'struggle',

and complemented by a ‘patriarchal double standards and contradictions’ discourse, which, in turn, is supported by a discourse of ‘social construct’, forming a complex network of related, feminist counter-discourses.

The discourse of ‘cost of the patriarchy’ is traced in lexical items or clauses which suggest negative consequences or situations deriving from the patriarchal social order, such as the noun *expense* (*even at their own expense*) and *oppression*, the modifying adverb *painfully* (*painfully accurate*), and the phrase *confusion has led even good guys to sometimes have sex without the girl’s full-on consent, that is, to rape, in a sense*. This final sentence reads a bit peculiarly from a feminist perspective. It is part of an excerpt of direct reported speech, which essentially recounts the contribution of women to the perpetuation of rape culture, by actually occupying the role of ‘hard to get’, that society forces upon them. In the excerpt, the fact that it is society that prescribes such a role is expressed via the passivisation *socially required*. What follows is a series of examples of women acting in ways perceived as problematic (i.e. *many women say ‘no...’... but the man judges from how strong the resistance is..., others say no to sex... even though that’s what they want, others pretend to be drunk to justify...*), thus, foregrounding a woman’s agentic role in perpetuating stereotypical gendered representations and almost completely backgrounding the potential societal consequences entailed in women resisting such representations. It is women’s behaviour then that is ‘confusing’; however, the speaker employs a nominalization (*confusion*), potentially to avoid appearing to be directly blaming women. The consequence of such ‘confusion’ is apparently non-consensual sex, but this proposition is conveyed through mitigating expressions (*sometimes, in a sense*), which can be seen as reducing the negative polarity of the word *rape*, which is itself rediscursivised as *sex without full-on consent*. By

implication, a possible alternative reading of this proposition could be ‘women’s confusing behaviour leads *even* good guys to rape’. Therefore, it becomes apparent that, in that excerpt of direct reported speech, the identified discourse of ‘cost of the patriarchy’ draws in a discourse of ‘personal responsibility’ (‘women must stop confusing men’, instead of ‘society’s double standards must stop’), which, in this context, possibly echoes a rape culture discourse that deflects responsibility from perpetrators and blames rape on women’s contradictory behaviour (Ehrlich, 2003: 122).

In her response, the poster implicitly attempts to redress this, albeit in a non-confrontational way, by articulating a discourse of ‘cost of the patriarchy’, which not only emphasises the fact that women are indeed socialised to behave in certain ways and not others, but also foregrounds men’s contribution to the maintenance of this social phenomenon. Men might get confused, but they are the ones who ultimately profit from these gendered ideologies (*men themselves (subconsciously) want it this way, so that women are not degraded in their eyes as being easy*). This position is supported by the production of a discourse of ‘social construct’ and a ‘patriarchal double standards and contradictions’. The former is traced in the passivisation *socially required*, the verb *grow up* (*Women grow up with these beliefs too*), and the sentence *They see it as the natural order of things*, which implies that the ‘order of things’ is anything but natural, thus challenging essentialist normative representations of gender (Connell & Pearse, 2015). The latter is identified in expressions regarding the double standards by which women are judged more harshly for behaving in similar ways to men, and the distinctively different subject positions they are required to take up in patriarchy, i.e. women as men’s pleasers (*Women have learnt to be compliant, agreeable and nice, they have learnt to be ‘good girls’, not to upset anyone, they have*

learnt to please others...). The ‘patriarchal double standards and contradictions’ discourse can be seen as competing to popular ‘gender differences’ discourses (Sunderland, 2004: 52), which are drawn in only to be challenged. Also emphasised is the contradictory ways in which women are seen in patriarchy and the conflicting subject positions society forces upon them, i.e. the fact that, while they *are not allowed to want sex for sex’s sake*, they are *seen as sex objects in our patriarchal society*. They are both required to be submissive, *compliant*, men’s pleasers, and, at the same time, they are expected to deny their sexuality (*to say ‘yes’ enthusiastically is considered scandalous, provocative and reprehensible*) and resist men’s sexual pursuit, so that they are not seen as *easy*. A discourse of ‘gender similarities’ is also implicitly suggested in *Women are not allowed to want sex for sex’s sake*, since one can make sense of it only by inferring what is absent from the proposition: that women *do* ‘want sex for sex’s sake’, just like men.

In articulating a discourse of ‘cost of the patriarchy’ and a ‘patriarchal double standards and contradictions’ discourse, a general discourse of ‘struggle’ is often drawn in, evident in lexical items such as *difficult, hard, a long [process], great strength is required, challenge*, and *try*. The idea is that women are, indeed, struggling within the context of the patriarchy, which oppresses and restricts them. Another aspect of this restriction is evident in the production of a discourse of ‘female sexuality’, traced in references to female *masturbation*, which is still seen as a taboo by many women, who *find it hard to admit doing it*, to women’s *fear* of their own *sexuality*, and to the sexist view that *pornography* is a man’s domain. Within the patriarchy, then, female sexuality is affected by the double sexual standards concerning men and women, which are seen as fundamentally different; however, the articulation of a discourse of ‘female sexuality’, even if it is done through illustrating

its patriarchal demonisation, still foregrounds the fact that women do have sexual desires, and, as such, it can be seen as a counter-discourse to the broader ‘gender differences’ discourse (Sunderland, 2004: 52).

Finally, traces of a ‘consciousness-raising’/‘learnability of feminism’ discourse are evident in the poster’s article, in lexical items from the semantic field of knowledge (*learn/unlearn, know, becoming aware, we have been taught*), which is associated with a sort of resistance oriented towards the ‘undoing’ of patriarchy to achieve social transformation (*shake off, throw in the garbage*). ‘Consciousness-raising’ here is slightly different from Coates’ (1999, cited in Sunderland, 2004: 66) discussion of it from an aspect of ‘self-disclosure’. That’s why an alternative name is proposed, pointing to a discourse touching upon the issue of feminist education (or feminism as potentially educative); if hegemonic gendered representations are *taught* to us since birth, alternative representations of gender, proposed by feminism, are also learnable and may in fact be taught (cf. Martin, Nickels, & Sharp-Grier, 2017).

Most of the discourses analysed above are supported by a discourse of ‘necessity of feminism’, characterised by the representation of feminism as still timely and beneficial to everyone, regardless of gender. This discourse, co-articulated with other feminist discourses, is identified in the following comment:

- (7) [...] ⁴In feminism, men are not useless, they are accepted. The system doesn’t work without them, it needs them, because they are allies, not slaves. [...] They create and build in order to live with women, just like women create and build in order to live with men. Not separately, as an apartheid. Together. In a family. In which they equally help each other at home, outside, in raising children. In which they will have sex without stereotypes and taboos, without being scared of getting or

⁴ Parts of this comment, which are irrelevant to the present discussion, are omitted.

being obliged to get pregnant by any guy, because otherwise they are worthless. [...] Feminism is called that because it entails empowerment. It pushes women higher to reach men's level. Not to bring men down. It wasn't named humanism, because it doesn't talk just about everyone, it specifically talks about women. [...]

Do not attack feminism, which has helped powerless women, girls, trans people, gays, lesbians, many people. It has helped me. Do you have a problem with overthrowing the status quo? With the removal of the 'old' from the public sphere and its replacement with younger voices, open-minded men and women oriented to the 'new' [...] You don't want that? Or is it that you're afraid of being left out? [...]

The discourse of 'necessity of feminism' is evident in the poster's account of the ways in which individuals and particularly women have been helped or empowered by feminism (*It pushes women higher to reach men's level, has helped powerless women, girls, trans people, gays, lesbians, many people, It has helped me*). From this perspective, feminism is seen as a progressive force oriented towards modernity (*younger voices, open-minded men and women oriented to the 'new'*), opposing to conservative, hegemonic forces representing the past (*...the status quo? With the removal of the 'old' from the public sphere...*). If the status quo, discursively constructed as obsolete, takes up vital space from people whose voices are not heard, but who, however, could offer a more contemporary and inclusive perspective, the necessity of feminism lies in making those voices heard, to achieve social transformation to a more progressive end. Moreover, in clauses describing the effects of feminism (mentioned above), *feminism*, along with its pronoun *it*, is the grammatical subject of transactive actions. This is seen as denoting agency; indeed, feminism is almost personified (*pushes, has helped*) – it can perhaps be imagined as some sort of invisible guardian angel! The emphasis here is on the necessity of

feminism, whose effects are presented in rather positive terms (with the exception of its potential to dismantle the status quo). These positive effects of feminism are conveyed by a discourse of ‘equality’, traced in lexical items and phrases such as *together, live with, men...are allies, equally*, etc. The main idea here is that, contrary to popular arguments of backlash, according to which feminism is redundant and/or about female supremacy, feminism is necessary, because it promotes equality and serves the powerless.

Through the co-articulation of a discourse of ‘necessity of feminism’ and a discourse of ‘equality’, feminism is represented as an almost idyllic situation, at least in terms of its social effects. A social reality based in feminism has at its core men and women collaborating with each other on equal terms. However, it is men who are referred to as women’s ‘allies’, a position based on the idea that, while the patriarchy affects everyone, men are the privileged ones. To bring the point home, the commenter draws in a competing discourse of ‘egalitarianism’ (backlash discourse), which he attempts to challenge. In brief, even though feminism promotes equality, it is not blind to the obvious unprivileged position of women, who are seen as suffering the most within the patriarchy.

The example that follows is a comment posted under a personal story, which seemed to spark controversy among participants. In it, the author recounts her own negative experience of dating her university professor, ultimately problematising the unequal power dynamics in such relationships. Interestingly, the readers’ uptake of the story divided them, as almost half of the commenters heavily criticised the author, while the other half expressed sympathy and validated her negative feelings. As is perhaps expected, commenters’ critique of the story was premised on the fact that the narrated experience was a consensual one, whereas the point of departure in

comments of support was the inherent power asymmetry in relationships like the one described by the author. The debate that ensued in the comments section led the administrator to write an article expressing her support to the author and addressing the criticisms levelled at the latter, in an attempt to re-establish the website's safety, which was perhaps seen to be compromised by the negative, at times arguably harsh, comments that the story received. The comment, extracts of which I present here⁵, was posted by the author of the story, in response to critique against her article. Again, a variety of feminist discourses are articulated within it:

- (8) [...] Perhaps an elaborate self-flagellation on my part would be more satisfying to some, but, as I've already written, that would concern me only. My responsibility for the incident is different from the professor's, and there is nothing I can do for those who are naïve enough to believe that, because I am not referring to specific consequences I had on a personal and academic level, those did not exist. I am not interested in getting pitied, I am interested in sharing. I care about myself and other women with similar or worse experiences being able to speak out without fear. I do not care about protecting people in positions of power, power which they exploit because they have PERMISSION, in order to gain things unrelated to their institutional role. In my mind, thus, who has what responsibility is clear. I have made my peace with what happened long before someone urged me to 'get over it, gurl' online. I managed to safeguard myself during the course of that 'relationship', I subjected myself to the harshest critique, so that I learn from the whole experience, I was not unfair to anyone, I did not become insensitive, spiteful, petty.

[...] I do not regret my post at all. I do not regret publishing it, I continue to believe that this particular website is the best online space of the Greek web for me and my story and similar stories. I still believe

⁵The full comment can be found in Appendix A. Parts of the comment, which are deemed as irrelevant to the study, have been omitted.

that it is a safe space, because of both Lena and the commenters. Despite the attempts of certain people who have power, who have permission, who have a reason to be afraid of the ‘fall’ and who will do anything to avoid it, we will be meeting each other with empathy and sensitivity, we will be drinking beer, we will be discussing, writing, claiming our own space of expression, and we will be telling our stories.

The dominant discourses articulated in this comment are a discourse of ‘power as responsibility’, a discourse of ‘speaking out’, and a discourse of ‘safe space’. Discourse of ‘power as responsibility’ is traced in the repetition of the nouns *power* and *responsibility*, which, along with their collocations (*permission*, *positions of*, *exploit*, *asymmetry*), as well as lexical items from the semantic field of responsibility (*institutional role*), reveal the ideological position of the commenter on the issue of power associated with an institutional position. The following example, which is an extract of the same comment, can perhaps be read as an exposé, which, in turn, can be viewed as contestation of what could be called a discourse of ‘power as permission’:

- (9) [...] This particular professor was carefully cultivating the image of a radical, an abolitionist of everything hegemonic, opposing to all sorts of asymmetry. This was done on purpose, as a kind of mating call addressed to his students, whom he privately complimented to get in bed with him, and, thus, become some sort of mentor-lover and boost his ego. Despite his exclamations about ‘equality everywhere’ inside the amphitheater, in his romantic relationships (with his students), he made sure to maintain this asymmetry of power, in order to manipulate and get his. He attempted to intimidate us in not speaking, because, if we did, it would be revealed that he dated his students systematically. To make sure that we wouldn’t speak to each other, he made us drift apart [...]

The commenter criticises the arguably widespread practice of powerful men exploiting their power, as was brought to light by the #MeToo movement. Even though it is not explicitly stated, one can infer that what is suggested here is an alternative discourse based on the idea that institutional power comes with responsibility, not a free pass; the discourse of ‘power as responsibility’ can, thus, be seen as emphasising the interests of the powerless, contrary to hegemonic representations of power from a scope of dominance/submission.

A discourse of ‘speaking out’ can be viewed as an oppositional discourse to normative representations of women as silent, compliant, and submissive, in that it challenges the dominance of men’s voices in the public sphere. As such, it can further be seen as an empowering discourse. It is evident in the repetition of the phrasal verb *speak out*, as well as in the overall unapologetic tone of the comment (*I do not feel that I must apologise, it is only me who chooses, I am not obliged, It is my life*, etc.), conveyed in the repetition of the pronouns *I, me, myself* (the ultimate expressions of identity); in stressing her subjectivity, the commenter produces an empowering discourse of ‘speaking out’, which entails an assertion of visibility and the voicing of experiences that would otherwise probably have remained obscured (Orgad, 2005). Underlying here is the element of collectivity and community, suggested by the reference to *other women*, who are encouraged to produce their own constructions to challenge sexism (Orgad, 2005; Munro, 2013).

A discourse of ‘speaking out’ is co-articulated and supported by a discourse of ‘safe space’ and a discourse of ‘sisterhood’, traced in the verb *sharing*, the noun phrase *without fear* and *safe space*; if (more) women need to speak out and actively assert control of representation/over content, this can only be achieved in a *space* which facilitates such transformations, i.e. a space in which they can speak *without*

fear of being judged. The notion of safety implicit here echoes politics of validation and care (Rentschler, 2014) in response to participants' self-disclosure. This process is, indeed, a relational one (Clark-Parsons, 2018), as it significantly depends on the reactions of the interacting individuals and the boundary-maintenance work done by the administrator (*because of both Lena and the commenters*). Primarily, however, what draws a discursive boundary around the website as a safe space, formed in relief to unsafe space, is women's personal storytelling (Rentschler, 2014). A discourse of 'sisterhood', traced in the repetition of the inclusive *we*, the pronouns *each other*, *our*, and the nouns *empathy* and *sensitivity*, then, is complemented by a discourse of 'safe space' and a discourse of 'speaking out' – and can be seen as opposing a gendered 'women beware women' discourse (Sunderland, 2004: 90); it is suggested that in developing spaces in which women can speak out and affectively exchange personal experiences, a sense of commonality is created, which, in turn, builds relationships of camaraderie and bonding (Orgad, 2005: 156).

Overall, in terms of functionality, those discourses can be viewed as empowering; the discursive representation of women as agents, (inter)acting in solidarity and engaging in forms of participation that they may not have in other contexts of their social world, points to the transformative potential of feminist, digital safe spaces, as they enable the formation of alternative identities and the discursive resistance of hegemonic gendered representations (Fraser, 1992; Orgad, 2005; Keller, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016).

With regard to the influence of postfeminism in participants' discursive productions, a 'critique of postfeminism' discourse was identified. In my dataset, this discourse is usually co-articulated with a discourse of 'female sexuality' and a discourse of 'body positivity', to contest the over-sexualisation of women by

(mainstream) media and feminine beauty ideals that women are socially pressured to conform to, by constantly monitoring their bodies (Gill, 2007). The influence of postfeminism, then, might be that the body is a salient topic of discussion among participants (Gill & Scharff, 2011), but is nonetheless discussed in terms of its precarity in contemporary society (Baer, 2016).

The way body politics and gender power asymmetries are negotiated in digital interactions by participants in *A, mpa?* not only reveals that the latter embrace feminist identities online, against the persistence of postfeminism and anti-feminism on/offline (Clark-Parsons, 2018; Jackson, 2018), but also that ‘postfeminist pathologies’ (McRobbie, 2009) are treated as objects of critical analysis and deconstruction. I suggest that this can be viewed as a type of grassroots linguistic intervention (Sunderland, 2004), which highlights the potential of online spaces such as *A, mpa?* to make feminism more accessible and ‘facilitate the emergence of new types of political subjects’ (Sassen, 2002: 382, cited in Matos, 2017).

5.3 ‘Middle ground’ discourses

The effect of elements of postfeminism (Gill, 2007) is evident in ‘middle ground’ discourses, which can be seen as occupying the space between feminist discourses and discourses of backlash. This means that, in terms of stance, while ‘middle ground’ discourses are not characterised by the increasingly vitriolic anti-feminism of (contemporary) backlash, contemporary feminism is approached with scepticism. Interestingly, though, ‘middle ground’ discourses seem to approximate backlash rather than feminist discourses. Nevertheless, ‘middle ground’ discourses are an original type of discourse, in that, contrary to backlash, gender inequalities are, in

fact, acknowledged. Still, ‘middle ground’ discourses can be viewed as an indicator of today’s broader persistent resistance to feminism (Jackson, 2018; Vickery & Everbach, 2018).

Compared to feminist, ‘middle ground’ discourses are marginal in my data set. They are most often articulated in the comments section of posts touching upon topics, which are seen as controversial. Such topics are, for instance, the issue of consent, as emerging in personal stories of negative sexual experiences that may fall under a so-called ‘grey area’. Generally, such discourses are articulated in comments under posts in which the author makes explicit her feminist allegiances and/or identity, a fact that seems to confirm contemporary resistance to feminism, as mentioned above.

A case in point was a personal story, in which the author narrated an incident that made her feel violated. Broadly speaking, two types of responses were posted in the comments section, having as a starting point the author’s non-reaction at the time of the incident. Some commenters validated the writer’s feelings, expressed their support, and debated on the social implications in women’s passivity in similar cases of discomfort, even violation – thus reinforcing the safety of the site as a space in which women forge bonds of solidarity through their coalitional ties and lay experiences, which are transferred into knowledge (Orgad, 2005; Rentschler, 2014). However, the majority of the commenters understated the author’s feelings of violation and interpreted her non-reaction as a personality defect (weakness), articulating a series of mutually supportive ‘middle ground’ discourses, i.e. a ‘not everything needs to be politicised’ discourse, a discourse of ‘personal responsibility’, a ‘women should not be so sensitive’ discourse, and an ‘ideal victim’ discourse.

Suggested was a narrow definition of sexual assault and violation, key to which is physical force and violence. An ‘ideal victim’, then, would be physically forced through threat. In any other case, the individual is not a victim; she is personally responsible for not establishing her boundaries. By implication, instead of blaming structural patriarchy and projecting her own personal issues onto something out of her control, for personal comfort, she must resolve her personal struggle on her own.

On a similar note, a commenter expressed the following view:

(10) [...] There are many possibilities.

I don’t think that one can figure out why SHE did not say no, if, instead of identifying her own, personal reason for not saying no, she goes “it is society’s fault, it is society that needs to change, so that I don’t feel this way again”. Therefore, until society changes, she will keep having rapid heartbeats, she will keep feeling paralysed whenever she remembers about the incident, and she will continue wondering why she didn’t react.

Honestly, was any woman’s soul ever really, objectively, and essentially relieved at the response “it’s society’s fault”? There could not possibly be a more vague response to an individual’s self-disclosure. If we are discussing about women IN GENERAL, then we can talk about society.

It is as if someone told you that she was afraid that the rain would flood her house, and you responded by talking about climate change.

In this comment, a ‘contemporary feminism is victimising women’ discourse and a discourse of ‘personal responsibility’ are recognisable. The former is visible in future tense clauses *will keep having rapid heartbeats*, *will keep feeling paralysed*, *will continue wondering*, and *can [not] figure out*, suggesting symptoms of physical discomfort and confusion, which are associated with what the commenter believes to

be an irrational and pointless insistence on tracing behavioural manifestations to structural forms of oppression. The proposition here is that feminist accounts of systemic oppression are deterministic, because they do not move beyond a mere explanation, towards actual transformation of women's realities. Hence, by regurgitating what *might* have been (*many possibilities*) in a *vague* way, feminism does not actually emancipate women, because it puts them in the position of a victim that passively waits *until society changes*, while it could be offering targeted, individual solutions. Such victimisation is presented via psychophysical manifestations, simultaneously drawing upon a medical and a psychological discourse.

Moreover, a 'contemporary feminism is victimising women' discourse is evident, albeit implicitly, by the rhetorical question *Honestly, was any woman's soul ever really, objectively, and essentially relieved at the response "it's society's fault"?*. The proposition here is that feminists advocating against a structural struggle does not *relieve* women, who end up feeling *essentially* powerless against something much larger than them. Finally, this discourse is realised through the sarcastic 'flood – climate change' analogy, which suggests that the insistence of feminism to interpret everything as political, besides actually holding women back, is also ridiculous.

A discourse of 'personal responsibility' is traced by the capitalisation of *she* (in this context reading as 'her in particular'), the pronoun *own*, the noun *individual*, and the adjective *personal*, which suggest subjectivity and individuality. Intertextually, this discourse can be seen as linked to postfeminist ideas about personal empowerment, which disregard the fact that existing structural gender norms determine possibilities for individual action, and, as such, cannot be challenged on an individual level (Gill, 2017).

In a broader perspective, the implications of these discourses in terms of how they reflect postfeminist ideas and how they relate to the concept of ‘safe spaces’ seem to be paradoxical. On the one hand, a postfeminist focus on addressing social injustice by asserting personal qualities, such as confidence and resilience, has been described as non-disruptive, but, rather, as ‘neoliberalism and patriarchy-friendly’ (Gill, 2017: 618). On the other hand, feminist digital ‘safe spaces’ have been problematised as far as their potential for social transformation is concerned, due to potential constraints entailed, such as the privatisation of the experience and the bias of self-responsibility (Orgad, 2005). ‘Safe spaces’, then, might run the risk of turning into echo chambers. Ironically, participants who articulate ‘middle ground’ discourses seem to be subverting these propositions, by associating social transformation and empowerment with a look inward, rather than outward. By implication, what would make the website an echo chamber without a purpose would precisely be to advocate against the socially constructed patriarchy, instead of underlining personal responsibility.

The effect of moderating practices for the maintenance of the site’s safety in the discursive practices of the participants is most clearly exhibited in the following comment, in which the commenter articulates ‘middle ground’ discourses:

- (11) Members are equal and sympathetic, but if [commenter]⁶ or anyone else says something that A, mpa or her partners dislike (we all remember the magnificent “you aren’t forward-thinking”) they are cannibalised by some ‘do-gooders’, just like now. The girl in the story should be protected, but [commenter] cannot leave the conversation unless she admits ‘Mea Culpa’. [...] They nearly accused her of “overreacting”, just because she had an opinion that A, mpa disagrees

⁶ The commenter has been anonymised to protect her identity.

with. Sure, we should keep our readers, but we can hang [commenter] out to dry. [...]

The comment was posted under an article by the administrator (refer to Example 8 for context). In terms of the comment's functionality, it was written to defend a commenter against the administrator, who had confronted her when she implicitly doubted the genuineness of the website-is-a-safe-space initiative. More importantly, however, the comment is seen to implicitly invoke a liberal discourse of 'free speech', as well as a discourse of 'excessiveness of contemporary feminism'.

Besides defending a fellow user, the commenter expresses her discontent at the administrator's practice of posting an entire article (instead of a comment, for example) in defense of a user's story, reprimanding the commenters who responded negatively to it, and of arguing with individual users. Those were seen as practices of censorship on the part of the administrator. Therefore, the commenter articulates a liberal discourse of 'free speech', traced in the verbs *dislike* and *disagrees with*, which express intolerance, as well as in verbs/verb phrases describing verbal processes, such as *says*, *cannot leave the conversation*, *admits*. Even the verb *cannibalised* and the verb phrase *hang... out to dry* refer to verbal processes of 'flaming'. The commenter, thus, seems to suggest that the administrator's preoccupation with maintaining a safe space, in which members can share their stories freely, without any judgment, leads her to censor opposing views, therefore compromising the democratic and impartial nature of the site, and, one might argue, the safety of the users who express such views. A liberal discourse of 'free speech', then, implicitly suggested in this comment, can be seen in this context as an opposing discourse to the discourse of 'safe space'. Additionally, it illustrates the paradoxical nature of online safe spaces as open to, and, at the same time, limiting of discourse (Rentschler, 2014). As

demonstrated in the comment, this aspect of safe spaces comes to light when conflicts arise (Clark-Parsons, 2018). Finally, it can be assumed that the commenter's safety is associated with a lack of response whatsoever on the administrator's part; however, that could potentially compromise other participants' safety. It is, thus, confirmed that the safety of a space depends not just on who is included or excluded and what is expressed, but also on how others respond (Brownlie, 2018). Even though the administrator's intervention cannot be viewed as a case of censorship – she did approve comments such as the above – it can be seen as enforcing a particular notion of safety: one that reflects feminist politics of validation and care (Rentschler, 2014).

A discourse of 'excessiveness of contemporary feminism', traced in exaggerated statements, such as *hang [commenter] out to dry, they are cannibalised, until she admits 'Mea Culpa', and They nearly accused her of 'overreacting', in the adjective magnificent and the noun 'do-gooders', used sarcastically, and the manifest intertextuality of "you are not forward thinking", has intertextual associations with the discourse of the Men's Rights Movement, which constructs feminism as an oppressive, authoritarian force, which recruits unintelligent, blind followers, and which, in reality, adopts the same methods it purports to contest. This resonates with a liberal discourse of 'free speech', as the commenter implicitly challenges the idea that contemporary feminism gives voice to all women; instead, it is suggested that, in reality, contemporary feminism, which the administrator is seen to promote, is intolerant and alienates those who do not blindly accept its doctrines, by labelling them as conservatives (*not forward thinking*) and attempting to silence them.*

5.4 Alternative discourses, postfeminism, and safe spaces

To complete this chapter, I am going to bring my research questions and findings together.

With respect to the first research question of the study, it was found that, broadly speaking, participants in *A, mpa?* do produce feminist discourses, through processes of supportive and affective exchange of personal experiences (Orgad, 2005; Clark-Parsons, 2018) and critical debate (Matos, 2017), as revealed by the number of personal stories posted and of supportive comments those received. The anonymous and disembodied nature of the Internet, as well as the discursive boundaries drawn around the site both by women's personal storytelling and by the administrator's interventions, seem to allow these women to develop supportive relationships of camaraderie that probably would have otherwise never occurred (Orgad, 2005; Rentschler, 2014). Participants' articulation of feminist discourses can be, thus, viewed as a form of participatory engagement with feminism, which provides an important discursive resource for women to challenge gendered discourses (Matos, 2017), to resist postfeminist discourses (Jackson, 2018) and confront postfeminist pathologies (Retallack et al., 2016), and, ultimately, to construct feminist identities (Jackson, 2018).

However, discussions that take place in the site are not totally immune from hegemonic ideologies that exist within society (Matos, 2017), as proved by the identification of 'middle ground' discourses in the comments section. Even though such discourses seemingly adopt an anti-sexist perspective, they, nevertheless, present intertextual links to discourses of backlash and propose postfeminist ideas of individual choice, to resist feminist discourses seen as promoting a counter-productive politicisation of everything. Regarding the second research question of the study,

then, the contradiction entailed in the anti-sexist – in terms of stance – orientation of ‘middle ground’ discourses, which dovetail with discourses of backlash, can be seen as an effect of postfeminism (Mills, 1998; Sunderland, 2007; Gill & Scharff, 2011) and as a manifestation of what McRobbie (2009) described as a ‘double entanglement’, i.e. the simultaneous incorporation and repudiation of feminist ideas in postfeminist contexts. Agreeing with Billig (1988), Fairclough (2001), and Sunderland (2007), the contradictory nature of ‘middle ground’ discourses has ostensibly productive and emancipatory effects within the context of *A, mpa?*; it triggers the articulation of feminist discourses in response, and, more importantly, in opposition. This becomes particularly evident in cases of linguistic intervention by the administrator, who explicitly challenges ‘middle ground’ discourses to reinforce the website’s safety and re-establish it as a feminist space.

Besides contradictions, another aspect of the influence of postfeminism in the participants’ discursive productions of feminism and gender is that a discourse of ‘personal choice’, with an emphasis on individuality, was often invoked. Also, the issue of female sexuality was a frequent topic of discussion. However, an interesting observation was made here: contrary to Gill’s (2007) critical discussion of the current condition of feminism (postfeminism) as a ‘sensibility’, and McRobbie’s (2009) description of postfeminism as a problematic, pro-capitalist re-appropriation of ‘girlie’, within the community of *A, mpa?*, such problematic elements were criticised and discursively resisted by the majority of the participants.

Against a backdrop of increased visibility of feminism in the media, on the one hand, and a proliferation of an antagonistic anti-feminism on/offline, on the other, the circulation of ‘middle ground’ discourses reveals the emerging tensions in the contemporary feminist landscape, and can be viewed as a discursive attempt to

compromise between two opposing ideologies (feminism and anti-feminism) in a postfeminist environment (Gill, 2016).

Overall, the case of *A, mpa?* seems to confirm literature on the empowering and transformative potential of digital feminist spaces (Orgad, 2005; Retallack et al., 2016; Matos, 2017; Singh, 2017, among others). The articulation of feminist discourses in the website points to the existence of evolving feminisms in the contemporary social context. These are not necessarily constrained by a tenacious postfeminist environment, contrary to McRobbie's (2009) arguably bleak prognosis for the future of feminism. To dismiss feminist digital spaces such as *A, mpa?* as byproducts of neoliberalism and postfeminism (Razer, 2013) disregards the fact that they comprise a familiar, readily accessible resource for participatory engagement with feminism (Jackson, 2018). As my analysis demonstrated, though not explicitly labelled as feminist, *A, mpa?* functions as a space in which participants challenge gendered discourses, anti-feminism, and postfeminism, and embrace feminist identities through the discussion of feminist issues.

Finally, with regard to the third research question, i.e. the effect of administrative boundary-maintenance work to construct the website as a 'safe space' on the discursive practices of the participants, it was found that administrators' practices were both encouraging and limiting of discourse(s). What this means is that readers were generally (explicitly) encouraged to share their personal stories and speak out freely, and were mostly validated when they did, both by commenters and by moderators. However, in cases in which commenters responded negatively to posters' personal stories, the administrator often intervened either to express her disagreement or to remind that participants are required to respect both disclosers' and potential readers' emotional wellbeing, when commenting. My analysis revealed that

this sort of intervention almost always caused conflict between certain participants, who seemed to feel that they were being silenced, and the administrator, whose preoccupation was to ensure that the site remains welcoming of marginalised voices. This confirmed the conceptualization of safe space as ‘relational work’ in literature; safe spaces are constantly unfolding social processes, rather than sites with structures that pre-exist participants’ interactions (The Roestone Collective, 2014, cited in Clark-Parsons, 2018). Indeed, even in an arguably feminist website, constructed as a safe space, participants do not necessarily comply with its rules, producing gendered and/or anti-feminist discourses. Thus, it appears that by virtue of being an online site, the absolute safety of a space cannot be ensured (Rentschler, 2014; Brownlie, 2018).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this study, I examined the alternative, feminist discourses produced by participants in the Greek website *A, mpa?*, through which they resisted gendered discourses. As a public forum in which feminist issues are negotiated by lay readers, *A, mpa?* functions as a communicative space, formed in sharp relief to unsafe spaces on/offline. Apart from feminist discourses, the analysis unveiled the existence of an original, distinct type of ‘middle ground’ discourses, which proposed an equidistant position between feminism and anti-feminism. Drawing upon the concept of ‘safe space’ and the theoretical discussion on postfeminism, I looked at how these related to and affected participants’ discursive productions. My analysis adopted a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, to explore gender ideologies and social identity processes vis-à-vis participants’ popular talk, in which dominant ideologies were either contested through feminist discourses or reproduced through ‘middle ground’ discourses.

The findings indicate that feminist digital spaces like *A, mpa?* provide an important tool for constructing a feminist identity, through the production of feminist discourses, against the persistence of postfeminism. These discourses can be viewed as both a result of and a condition for the site’s function as a safe space, established by the administrator and the participants’ affective exchange of experiences. The existence of competing, ‘middle ground’ discourses, however, reflects that participation in *A, mpa?* is not practiced in a uniform way. In this case, the site’s safety is suppressive, a fact that is not accepted well by those participants who are put

off by what they perceive as contemporary feminism's excesses, and suggest postfeminist ideas of individual empowerment.

The main contribution of this study is that it provides insight into what happens in the landscape of contemporary Greek feminism, which largely unfolds online, as is the case globally, as well. Given that the only other study on Greek feminism comes from the field of anthropology and dates back more than 20 years ago (see Cowan, 1996), the present study illuminates the situatedness of digital Greek feminism in transnational feminism(s), in a cultural context of feminism's increased visibility.

At the same time, while anti-feminism and postfeminism persist in both online and offline contexts, this study draws attention to the existence of a concessional stance with regard to feminist issues, one which is distinct from backlash, in that it is a blend of anti-feminist and anti-sexist views. In that sense, it differs from postfeminism, as well. An important implication of this study derives from the uniqueness of this stance, which might point to ideological change; on the one hand, anti-feminist and postfeminist ideas still prevail, but, on the other, structural inequalities can no longer be ignored. It remains to be seen whether the existence of a discourse which accounts for both actually leads to socio-political and ideological change.

Another implication of this study regards the nature of digital feminist safe spaces and whether they can transcend their digital boundaries and effectuate a change in offline contexts. While more and more women's private, personal experience is placed in the public arena, in spaces where their personal authority and emotional wellbeing are respected, while it is hard to overstate the transformative

potential of digital feminism, the question remains as to what the social and political meanings of such a shift are. As I was writing this chapter, the *A, mpa?* team posted an article in which they appealed to the site's readers to participate in forming an association, in order to demand a change of the law on sexual assault and rape, to include the notion of consent.

The explanatory and interpretive nature of this study raises a number of opportunities for future research to refine and further elaborate the findings on digital feminist safe spaces. The fact that the issue of sexual assault and consent is one of the most widely discussed among feminists worldwide suggests that this study could be extended in search of the psychological implications of sharing personal stories of rape online, for instance, and thus the therapeutic potential of feminist digital safe spaces could be elaborated. Or, to paraphrase Gill (2017), the affective and psychic life of feminism, rather than postfeminism, could be examined.

Lastly, as mentioned above, future work could and should examine whether participation in digital feminist platforms and production of alternative discourses can combat the privatisation of the experience and the reduction of the political to the personal, and achieve social and political transformation, while at the same time outlining the conditions for such a transformation.

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Appendix A

Complete Translated Examples

Example 1. **Why A, mpa? is a site that speaks to women**

Explanation for the subtitle, a post that I did not think would be necessary

Let's start from something elementary: this is not a site for women ONLY. This is the most common question I've received. There is nothing that suggests 'only'. A site that speaks to women means that it addresses them, but it does not use language that only they understand, and that's because we all speak the same language, because we are all human, women and men.

Yes, it speaks to women. We did not decide it. We realised it. It is neither a marketing strategy, nor a matter of labelling, nor some master plan for accumulating wealth. A, mpa? started for fun, evolved into speedy dialogue, and, little by little, through participation, started to transform into something more concrete. Indeed, the trivial has been substituted by something else, which I wouldn't call 'heavy', but which nonetheless has a presence and a message, that came from the daily exchange of views. Through the randomness of the questions, a necessity, a worry slowly emerged and the space of A, mpa? became a space for mutual support on subjects that – it is sad but true – are not discussed elsewhere in the same manner, publicly.

And it is not a secret – on the contrary, it is evident – that the vast majority of the participants, both sending the questions and commenting, are women. It happened naturally, even though it took some time, maybe because I am a woman and I know a woman's problems. Maybe it happened because all of these years I myself have changed. I wish there had been a medium when I was sixteen to explain me why I felt so suffocated between being a good or a bad girl, being smart, therefore ugly, or beautiful, therefore ornamental. I wish someone had told me then 'don't play this game, it is designed for you to lose'. I figured this out through struggle, through years of effort, and the balance was found relatively recently. I see the same anxiety in some younger women, who feel they are starting to find the answers. Those who don't see it are blind.

Yes, it is a site for women. We do not need to justify it or explain ourselves. Of course, everyone is welcome in a site for women. Why wouldn't they? We do not exclude anyone by stating that we speak to women. We are not obliged to make men feel comfortable in A, mpa?

by addressing them explicitly. Those who are already self-confident do not wonder about the subtitle. It was a man who came up with the idea of the website's creation. It was a man that wrote to us about the invocation of natural law as a means of legitimising misogyny (you should read it, it is very good, it hasn't been posted yet). It was a man who told me that he read about cosmetics, because, why not. Men keep subscribing to the site, posting comments. None of them required a clarification. And I answer to women who say that a 'male perspective' will be missed: don't be so afraid of displeasing men. Men are not a unitary group, just like women aren't either. Look at the men who participate in the website. There's the 'male perspective' that you are afraid of missing. We continue looking for people, men and women, who live in the same universe as we do. Women's issues are people's issues that affect men's lives.

This is not a website that speaks about life, about the universe and everything. There can be no such thing. This is a site that speaks to women. Women are ordinary people, therefore, the site speaks to anyone interested in reading what is posted in it.

Thanks again from the bottom of our hearts to those who have started to subscribe and post comments, which are increasing, and we invite everyone who's still considering it. Come, the door is open for everyone. And subscription is very simple!

Example 4. Your rationale is understandable and respected it's just that I must admit that when I saw the pink banner that addressed women, for a second there I got afraid that I would be reading about fashion and diets everywhere.. It's just that I've been reading you for years and I was sure this is not the case. In any case though I believe that your audience will remain faithful and that the community will become even bigger!

Example 5. **Dear "A, mpa": Why is it that, while we have the term misogyny, there is no misandry?**

;;;

Q: Why is it that, while we have the term misogyny, there is no misandry? – that is the question

A: If there isn't, where did you find it?

Oh, I am not sure if it is really a good idea to keep writing about stuff that are not matters of opinion, but rather, now clarified and widely accepted as facts - just for the sake of those who do not wish for the status quo to change. I think that, by defending what is right, what is self-evident and acceptable for the thousandth time, that oppression is an up-down process, and that the bottom-up reaction to it is neither

equal to it nor the same, I am not establishing the truth. Sometimes I think that, by analysing over and over again that there can be no such thing as reverse sexism and racism, I am just wasting my time. We are all wasting our time, time which could be spent more creatively, going deeper into what we already know, instead of arguing over whether or not misogyny exists, since there are men who are having a hard time too. Aren't you tired already?

The answer to "why" exists, it is not a secret. If you want to find out, google it. Just let me make this one clear once more: these things are not matters of opinion. What is a personal matter is on which side you want to be. That I accept. I accept that someone does not want things to change, especially if he is at the top. But spare us the high school talk about how men are the system's victims, because the courts award child custody to women or because they get recruited by law. That's the stuff I used to hear when I was a student and didn't know the answer. Now I know it and the vast majority of the readers here know it too, and most of them know it even better than me.

I don't know about you, dear commenters, and of course I am not trying to tell you what to do with your time, but sometimes I wonder what the point is in bothering with the ABC, explaining the same things to strangers all over. I have decided that I will no longer answer such questions.

Anyway, for the history, the term misandry exists, obviously, and it has content, you did not just come up with it. There are women who hate men and I suppose that there are men who hate men too, in that any sort of hate can exist. Because those of us who accept that the earth is round, we also accept that there are unequal opportunities and a power asymmetry between the genders, and we understand that misogyny is not a word that simply refers to men hating women, but rather a tendency that is hegemonic by all genders against women, that is, also by women towards themselves. If you do not accept that this tendency is indeed hegemonic, if you do not accept that the patriarchy is the systemic oppression of women by everyone (by their husbands, by their siblings, by their mothers, by their bosses, by their own selves), which impacts men as well by attributing them restrictive stereotypical roles,

Then,

What are you doing here?

Did you come to change our mind?

Example 6. **Consent**

"No means no" and a small personal story

[...] We must move beyond the question of whether girls are “provocative” or not and instead focus on how boys behave. The point isn’t to teach girls to protect themselves, the point is to teach boys the meaning of consent early on. [The point is that boys] Learn the elementary “do you want to?” “Yes, I do”. [The point is that boys] Learn yes.

The reasons why I didn’t talk about “No means no”, which has been the official slogan of consent for the last decades, before #MeToo, have been complex. [...] [One of them was that] “No” should be the last resort, when things have already gone wrong, when boundaries have already been overstepped. Because, in real life, our “no” is demonstrated in multiple ways, before we actually say it out loud.

[...] For a large number of women it is very difficult to say “no” for many reasons. Because they have learnt to be compliant, agreeable and nice, they have learnt to be “good girls” and not to upset anyone, they have learnt to please others, even if it is at their own expense. Or they cannot say “no”, because they are not sober or because they are paralysed from fear. If someone does not or cannot say anything, that doesn’t signify consent. We cannot see that as consent. Only an enthusiastic “Yes” is consent.

[...] Of course, what we must resolve first is that, in our society, female sexuality is considered a taboo issue. Women are not allowed to want sex for sex’s sake and to say “yes” enthusiastically is considered scandalous, provocative, and reprehensible.

Because women, seen as sex objects in our patriarchal society, in order to be valued, they must be “hard to get”. For them, sex is the primary means of exchange. If they offer it to everyone for free, they are “cheap”. [...]

A friend sent me the following message, which I found very accurate. Painfully accurate:

“Women are socially required to pretend to resist to parts of sexual intercourse as part of the game. For instance, many women say ‘no, I don’t want it from behind’, but the man judges from how strong the resistance is and moves on accordingly. Others say no to sex and if you don’t pressure them for at least ten minutes, they don’t let go, even though that’s what they want; others pretend to be drunk to justify having sex on the first date. Especially a few years ago, if you didn’t insist a little, you rarely had sex. I remember how this girl once freaked out when she told me ‘oh no, I don’t want sex, I’d rather stay friends’ and I got up and answered ‘O.K. friends then’. This kind of confusion has led even good guys to sometimes have sex without [the girl’s] full-on consent, that is, to rape, in a sense.”

I answered: “What you are describing is part of the cost of patriarchy. Women have learnt that the man has to try hard, to assert, to chase after them, so that they aren’t seen as easy, while men themselves

(subconsciously) want it this way, so that women are not degraded in their eyes as being easy, and that's how we get to the fact that no does not mean no. [...] That's why the campaign of "No means no" was replaced by the idea that consent is an enthusiastic YES".

[...] Women grow up with these beliefs, too; that they have to behave like that. And they don't even see it as an obligation. They see it as the natural order of things, the way genders work, as normal and right. It is not easy for any woman to challenge that.

Consider that, traditionally, even women themselves are afraid of (they do not accept) their own sexuality. Female masturbation has only started to be seen as normal in the last decades. And there are surely women who find it hard to admit doing it.

It was only recently that pornography has been "permitted" to women. And if a woman watched pornography and said "heck no, that's not for me" and felt disgust, it may never occur to her that she feels that way not because she would not enjoy pornography in theory, but because the way pornography works, according to patriarchal standards, yes, it is scary to a large extent, because it is abusive.

It is really hard to shake off the thin veil that covers reality, which you don't even know is there, until you look for it. The process of becoming aware of how the whole thing has no purpose, apart from oppression, of how it is constructed, not "natural", is a long one.

One needs to try to unlearn what she has been taught all her life. Great strength is required to throw in the garbage the way we have been taught that each gender should behave. [...]

Example 8, 9. [...] I avoided replying to comments (with the exception of one), because I do not feel that I must apologise for my post. I tried not to hurt or offend anyone, especially the girls involved in the story and the readers here, who, if anything, did me the honour of reading me. I had specific aims when I wrote this story, which made me omit many facts [...] but, actually, it is only me who chooses the degree to which I expose myself and I am not obliged to disclose my personal story in all detail, in an attempt to convince, to gain sympathy, to shut people's mouths or satisfy their curiosity. It is my life and, while I may sign as *[commenter]*, I am not an avatar.

Perhaps an elaborate self-flagellation on my part would be more satisfying to some, but, as I've already written, that would concern me only. My responsibility for the incident is different from the professor's, and there is nothing I can do for those who are naïve enough to believe that, because I am not referring to specific consequences I had on a personal and academic level, those did not exist. I am not interested in getting pitied, I am interested in sharing. I

care about myself and other women with similar or worse experiences being able to speak out without fear. I do not care about protecting people in positions of power, power which they exploit because they have PERMISSION, in order to gain things unrelated to their institutional role. In my mind, thus, who has what responsibility is clear. I have made my peace with what happened long before someone urged me to ‘get over it, gurl’ online. I managed to safeguard myself during the course of that ‘relationship’, I subjected myself to the harshest critique, so that I learn from the whole experience, I was not unfair to anyone, I did not become insensitive, spiteful, petty. That particular professor was carefully cultivating the image of a radical, an abolitionist of everything hegemonic, opposing to all sorts of asymmetry. This was done on purpose, as a kind of mating call addressed to his students, whom he privately complimented to get in bed with him, and, thus, become some sort of mentor-lover and boost his ego. Despite his exclamations about ‘equality everywhere’ inside the amphitheater, in his romantic relationships (with his students), he made sure to maintain this asymmetry of power, in order to manipulate and get his. He attempted to intimidate us in not speaking, because, if we did, it would be revealed that he dated his students systematically. To make sure that we wouldn’t speak to each other, he made us drift apart. Getting ghosted might have hurt me, but losing my friends, to whom I owe some of my best memories as a student, hurt me more. When I found out that he was responsible for this loss, I decided to speak out about what had happened. [...]

I do not regret my post at all. I do not regret publishing it, I continue to believe that this particular website is the best online space of the Greek web for me and my story and similar stories. I still believe that it is a safe space, because of both Lena and the commenters. Despite the attempts of certain people who have power, who have permission, who have a reason to be afraid of the ‘fall’ and who will do anything to avoid it, we will be meeting each other with empathy and sensitivity, we will be drinking beer, we will be discussing, writing, claiming our own space of expression, and we will be telling our stories.

Example 10. Also, it is possible that at home nobody said no to anyone, therefore she didn’t learn how to say no. Also, perhaps she had never felt that sort of fear before, in that position (her lying down and the man standing), maybe it was the first time she felt paralysed and a “you can get up” voice was not activated, because that hadn’t happened to her ever before. There are many possibilities.

I don’t think that one can figure out why SHE did not say no, if, instead of identifying her own, personal reason for not saying no, she goes “it is society’s fault, it is society that needs to change, so that I don’t feel this way again”. Therefore, until society changes, she will keep having rapid heartbeats, she will keep feeling paralysed whenever

she remembers about the incident, and she will continue wondering why she didn't react.

Honestly, was any woman's soul ever really, objectively, and essentially relieved at the response "it's society's fault"? There could not possibly be a more vague response to an individual's self-disclosure. If we are discussing about women IN GENERAL, then we can talk about society.

It is as if someone told you that she was afraid that the rain would flood her house, and you responded by talking about climate change.

- Example 11. Members are equal and sympathetic, but if [*commenter*] or anyone else says something that A, mpa or her partners dislike (we all remember the magnificent "you aren't forward-thinking") they are cannibalised by some 'do-gooders', just like now. The girl in the story should be protected, but [*commenter*] cannot leave the conversation unless she admits 'Mea Culpa'. How else can we interpret equality if even when you don't personally attack someone or become rude, you get messages "it's not like that", "maybe you are wrong", "you are cynical". They nearly accused her of "overreacting", just because she had an opinion that A, mpa disagrees with. Sure, we should keep our readers, but we can hang [*commenter*] out to dry. In a site which is ad personam in character, it must become clear that you cannot, as the site's protagonist, "flame" a commenter, because it is possible then that other commenters will follow and that's not nice at all. I didn't like what happened, [*commenter*] simply expressed what many of us thought and what we thought isn't even bad. It's good.

Appendix B

Original Examples

Example 1. Γιατί το «Α μπα;» είναι ένα σάιτ που μιλάει στις γυναίκες

Εξήγηση για τον υπότιτλο, ένα ποστ που δεν περίμενα ότι θα χρειαστεί

Ας ξεκινήσουμε από το απλό: δεν είναι ένα σάιτ MONO για γυναίκες. Είναι η πιο συχνή ερώτηση που έχει έρθει. Δεν προκύπτει από πουθενά το «μόνο». Ένα σάιτ που μιλάει στις γυναίκες σημαίνει ότι απευθύνεται σε αυτές, αλλά δεν μιλάει σε κάποιον κώδικα που καταλαβαίνουν μόνο αυτές, κι αυτό επειδή μιλάμε όλοι την ίδια γλώσσα, επειδή είμαστε όλοι άνθρωποι, γυναίκες και άντρες.

Μιλάει στις γυναίκες, ναι. Δεν το αποφασίσαμε. Το διαπιστώσαμε. Δεν είναι ούτε θέμα μάρκετινγκ, ούτε θέμα κατηγοριοποίησης, ούτε έχει προκύψει από κάποιο σκοτεινό σχέδιο συλλογής πλούτου. Το «Α μπα» ξεκίνησε πολλά χρόνια πριν ως μια τρέλα, εξελίχθηκε σε σπιντάτο διάλογο, και σιγά σιγά, μέσα από τη συμμετοχή, άρχισε να αποκτάει μια πιο συμπαγή μορφή. Όντως, το ανάλαφρο έχει αντικατασταθεί από κάτι άλλο, που δεν θα το έλεγα «βαρύ», αλλά έχει μια παρουσία και έχει ένα μήνυμα, που προέκυψε από την καθημερινή ανταλλαγή απόψεων. Μέσα από την τυχαιότητα των ερωτήσεων σιγά σιγά βγήκε μια ανάγκη, μια αγωνία, και ο χώρος του 'Α μπα' έγινε ένας χώρος για αμοιβαία υποστήριξη για θέματα που – είναι λυπηρό, αλλά έτσι είναι – δεν συζητιούνται αλλού με τον ίδιο τρόπο, δημόσια.

Και δεν είναι ούτε κρυφό ούτε μυστικό, αντιθέτως είναι οφθαλμοφανές ότι η συντριπτική πλειοψηφία των συμμετεχόντων, σε ερωτήσεις και σχολιασμό, είναι γυναίκες. Προέκυψε φυσικά, αν και πήρε αρκετό καιρό, ίσως επειδή είμαι γυναίκα και ξέρω τα προβλήματα μιας γυναίκας. Ίσως να έγινε και επειδή όλα αυτά τα χρόνια άλλαξα κι εγώ η ίδια. Μακάρι να υπήρχε ένα μέσο όταν ήμουν δεκαέξι να μου εξηγήσει για ποιο λόγο νιώθω αυτή την ασφυξία μεταξύ του καλού και κακού κοριτσιού, του έξυπνου άρα άσχημου, ή του όμορφου άρα διακοσμητικού. Μακάρι κάποιος να μου έλεγε «μην παίζεις αυτό το παιχνίδι, είναι σχεδιασμένο για να χάσεις». Το κατάλαβα με πολύ κόπο, με πολλά χρόνια προσπάθειας, και η ισορροπία βρέθηκε σχετικά πρόσφατα. Βλέπω την ίδια αγωνία σε κάποιες νεαρότερες γυναίκες που νιώθουν ότι αρχίζουν να βρίσκουν τις απαντήσεις. Είναι τυφλός όποιος δεν το βλέπει.

Ναι, είναι ένα σάιτ για γυναίκες. Δεν χρειάζεται ούτε να δικαιολογηθούμε, ούτε να εξηγηθούμε. Φυσικά και είναι όλοι ευπρόσδεκτοι σε ένα σάιτ για γυναίκες. Γιατί να μην είναι; Δεν αποκλείουμε κανέναν δηλώνοντας ότι μιλάμε στις γυναίκες. Δεν υπάρχει κάποια υποχρέωση να κάνουμε τους άντρες να νιώθουν άνετα στο 'Α μπα' αναφέροντας τους ρητά. Όσοι νιώθουν ήδη άνετα με τον

εαυτό τους, δεν αναρωτιούνται για τον υπότιτλο. Άντρας σκέφτηκε την δημιουργία του σάιτ. Άντρας μας έγραψε για την επίκληση της φύσης ως μέσο άσκησης μισογυνισμού (να το διαβάσετε, πολύ καλό, δεν έχει μπει ακόμα). Άντρας μου είπε ότι διάβασε για τα καλλυντικά διότι, γιατί όχι. Άντρες συνεχίζουν να γράφονται στο σάιτ, να συμμετέχουν στα σχόλια. Κανένας δεν χρειάστηκε ειδική διευκρίνηση. Και απαντάω στις γυναίκες που λένε ότι θα λείψει η «αντρική ματιά»: μην φοβόσαστε τόσο πολύ να μην δυσαρεστήσετε τους άντρες. Οι άντρες δεν είναι ένα πράγμα, όπως δεν είναι όλες οι γυναίκες ένα πράγμα. Κοιτάξτε τους άντρες που γράφουν στο σάιτ. Να η αντρική ματιά που φοβόσαστε ότι θα χαθεί. Συνεχίζουμε να ψάχνουμε ανθρώπους, άντρες και γυναίκες, που ζουν στο ίδιο σύμπαν με εμάς. Τα γυναικεία θέματα είναι ανθρώπινα θέματα που επηρεάζουν τις αντρικές ζωές.

Δεν είναι ένα σάιτ που μιλάει για τη ζωή, για το σύμπαν και τα πάντα. Δεν μπορεί να υπάρχει κάτι τέτοιο. Είναι ένα σάιτ που μιλάει στις γυναίκες. Οι γυναίκες είναι κανονικοί άνθρωποι, άρα μιλάει σε όλους όσους ενδιαφέρονται να διαβάσουν αυτά που γράφονται.

Ευχαριστούμε και πάλι από τα βάθη της καρδιάς μας όσους έχουν ξεκινήσει στις εγγραφές και στα σχόλια που αρχίζουν να ανάβουν και πάλι, και καλούμε όσους το σκέφτονται ακόμα. Ελάτε, είναι ανοιχτά για όλους. Και η εγγραφή έχει απλοποιηθεί πολύ!

Example 2. Όχι, αυτό που έκανε η στήλη Α,μπα δεν απευθυνόταν μόνο σε γυναίκες. Αυτή είναι η ουσία. Εμένα προσωπικά με έκανε καλύτερο άνθρωπο, με βοήθησε πάρα πολύ στην διαμόρφωση της σκέψης μου. Σκεφτόμουν να το προτείνω σε άλλους προκειμένου να αποκτήσουν αυτή την προοπτική. Τώρα θα το προωθήσω πιο δύσκολα, μιας και «απευθύνεται σε γυναίκες».

Δεν είναι θέμα μισογυνισμού. Ούτε έχει σημασία αν η «συντριπτική πλειοψηφία των αναγνωστών» είναι γυναίκες. Πρώτον, που το ξέρουμε και, δεύτερον, τι έγιναν τα «δικαιώματα» της «μειοψηφίας». Ένα site που θέλει να απευθύνεται σε όλους, πρέπει να λέει και το αντίστοιχο. Η γυναίκα του Καίσαρα κλπ κλπ. Είναι σαν να φτιάξεις «γυναικείο» μπαρ. Ο άντρας θα νιώσει παρείσακτος αν πάει.

Καταλαβαίνω βέβαια ότι η Λένα ήθελε να φτιάξει ένα site για γυναίκες. Και αυτό συμπαρέσυρε και το Α,μπα. Εντάξει, τι να κάνουμε τώρα. Θα πρέπει να επιστρατεύσουμε λίγη περισσότερη αντρίλα για να δικαιολογήσουμε την αντρική «ματιά».

(πλάκα ξεκινάει) Το επόμενο βήμα είναι να μπει υπότιτλος «απαγορεύονται οι άντρες και οι σκύλοι». Έπειτα είναι το θέμα της αντικειμενικότητας. Που ξέρω εγώ ότι δεν θα πάρει το μέρος της γυναίκας σε ενδεχόμενη ερώτησή μου (πλάκα τελειώνει);

Example 3. Λένα, στην αρχή θύμωσα και μετά στενοχωρήθηκα. Είμαι γυναίκα και συμμετείχα στα σχόλια σχετικά συχνά στο παλιό σάιτ, γιατί είχα την εντύπωση πως συμμετέχω σε ένα σάιτ που δεν έχει καμία απολύτως σχέση με το madam figaro και με το men's health, όπου δηλώνεται ρητά το φύλο. Που γνωρίζει την ύπαρξη των δύο φύλων αλλά που δεν αναφέρεται, ρητά, ούτε στο ένα ούτε στο άλλο. Που, ακόμα και αν το διαβάζουν και συμμετέχουν σε αυτό 100 γυναίκες και 1 άντρας, δε θα προσδιοριζόταν ποτέ ως σάιτ γυναικών. Γιατί ακριβώς, είναι ένα σάιτ που μιλάει για τη ζωή, για το σύμπαν και για τα πάντα, αυτή την εντύπωση έδινε σε μένα. Που μιλάει σε γυναίκες, σε άντρες, σε εφήβους και των δύο φύλων, χωρίς να λέει 'είμαι για γυναίκες, αλλά εντάξει μωρέ, έλατε και εσείς άντρες'. Τους καλωσόριζε όλους, χωρίς ταμπέλες. Αρκετά με τις ταμπέλες. Το 'είναι ένα σάιτ για γυναίκες, που είναι άνθρωποι' για εμένα, είναι σεξιστικό γιατί αυτόματα υποδηλώνει το αυτονόητο και το αυτονόητο δεν πρέπει να υποδηλώνεται γιατί ακριβώς έτσι συντηρείται η ανισότητα. Είναι σα να λέει ένας άνθρωπος, έχω δύο χέρια άρα είμαι άνθρωπος. Είναι περιττό να το πει, δε χρειάζεται.

Example 4. Αντιληπτό και σεβαστό το σκεπτικό σας απλώς κι εγώ οφείλω να παραδεχτώ ότι όταν είδα το banner ροζ που να απευθύνεται στις γυναίκες, για ένα δευτερόλεπτο φοβήθηκα μήπως μπω στη σελίδα και δω παντού για μόδες και δίαιτες.. Απλά σας διαβάζω χρόνια και ήμουν βέβαιη ότι δεν πρόκειται περί αυτού. Όπως και να έχει όμως πιστεύω ότι το κοινό σας θα είναι πιστό και η παρέα θα μεγαλώσει κι άλλο!

Example 5. **Αγαπητή «Α, μπα»: Γιατί ενώ υπάρχει ο όρος μισογυνισμός δεν υπάρχει και μισανδρισμός;**

;;;

Ε: Γιατί ενώ υπάρχει ο όρος μισογυνισμός δεν υπάρχει και μισανδρισμός; – Ιδού η απορία

Α: Αν δεν υπάρχει, πού τον βρήκες;

Αχ, δεν ξέρω αν είναι πραγματικά καλή ιδέα να γράφουμε και να ξαναγράφουμε πράγματα που δεν είναι θέμα άποψης, που είναι θέματα πλέον που έχουν ξεκαθαριστεί και έχουν γίνει δεκτά, μόνο και μόνο επειδή υπάρχουν αυτοί που δεν θέλουν να αλλάξει αυτό που κυριαρχεί. Νομίζω ότι υπερασπιζόμενη για χιλιαστή φορά αυτό που είναι το σωστό, αυτό που είναι προφανές και παραδεκτό, ότι η καταπίεση έρχεται από πάνω προς τα κάτω, και ό,τι αντίδραση έρχεται από κάτω προς τα πάνω δεν είναι ισότιμη, ούτε ίδια, δεν ενισχύω την πραγματικότητα. Μερικές φορές νομίζω ότι αναλύοντας ξανά και ξανά ότι δεν μπορεί να υπάρχει αντίστροφος σεξισμός και ρατσισμός, απλώς χάνω χρόνο. Χάνουμε όλοι χρόνο που θα μπορούσαμε να χρησιμοποιήσουμε πιο δημιουργικά, εμβαθύνοντας κι άλλο σε αυτά

που ξέρουμε, αντί να λογομαχούμε για το αν υπάρχει μισογυνισμός εφόσον υπάρχουν και άντρες που περνάνε δύσκολα. Δεν έχετε κουραστεί;

Η απάντηση στο «γιατί» υπάρχει, δεν είναι κανένα μυστικό. Αν θέλεις να μάθεις, γκούγκλαρέ το. Μόνο να πω ξανά το εξής: αυτά τα πράγματα δεν είναι θέμα άποψης. Αυτό που είναι θέμα προσωπικό είναι από ποια μεριά θέλεις να βρίσκεσαι. Αυτό, το δέχομαι. Δέχομαι να μην θέλει κάποιος να αλλάξει κάτι, ειδικά αν είναι από πάνω. Αλλά ας μην κάνουμε πάλι κουβέντες λυκειακές για το πόσο είναι θύματα οι άντρες από το σύστημα επειδή τα δικαστήρια δίνουν τα παιδιά στις γυναίκες ή επειδή πάνε φαντάροι. Αυτά άκουγα και όταν πήγαινα σχολείο και δεν ήξερα την απάντηση. Τώρα την ξέρω, και εγώ και η συντριπτική πλειοψηφία όσων διαβάζουν, και οι περισσότεροι την ξέρουν καλύτερα από εμένα.

Δεν ξέρω για εσάς, αγαπητοί μου σχολιαστές, και φυσικά δεν σας λέω τι να κάνετε με τον χρόνο σας, αλλά μερικές φορές αναρωτιέμαι αν έχει νόημα να ασχολείστε με την αλφαβήτα, εξηγώντας τα ίδια και τα ίδια σε αγνώστους. Εγώ έχω αποφασίσει να μην απαντάω πια σε τέτοιες ερωτήσεις.

Τέλος πάντων, για την «απορία», ο όρος μισανδρισμός υπάρχει, προφανώς, και η λέξη έχει περιεχόμενο, δεν την έβγαλες μόλις τώρα από το μυαλό σου. Υπάρχουν γυναίκες που μισούν τους άντρες, και υποθέτω και άντρες που μισούν τους άντρες, με την έννοια ότι όλα τα είδη μίσους θα υπάρχουν. Επειδή όσοι δεχόμαστε ότι η γη είναι στρογγυλή, δεχόμαστε και ότι υπάρχει ανισότητα ευκαιριών και ισχύος μεταξύ των δυο φύλων, καταλαβαίνουμε ότι ο μισογυνισμός δεν είναι μια λέξη που αφορά μόνο τους άντρες που μισούν τις γυναίκες, αλλά μια κυρίαρχη τάση από όλα τα φύλα προς τις γυναίκες, δηλαδή και από τις γυναίκες προς τον εαυτό τους. Αν δεν δέχεσαι ότι αυτή είναι η κυρίαρχη τάση, αν δηλαδή δεν δέχεσαι ότι η πατριαρχία είναι η συστημική καταπίεση των γυναικών, από παντού (από τους άντρες τους, τα αδέρφια τους, από τη μάνα τους, από το αφεντικό τους, από τον εαυτό τους τον ίδιο) που επηρεάζει αρνητικά και τους άντρες, δίνοντας στερεοτυπικούς ρόλους που περιορίζουν,

Τότε,

Τι κάνεις εδώ;

Ήρθες να μας αλλάξεις τη γνώμη;

Example 6. **Συναίνεση**

Το «όχι σημαίνει όχι» και μια μικρή προσωπική ιστορία

[...] Πρέπει να φύγουμε από το αν «προκαλούν» τα κορίτσια και να επικεντρωθούμε στο πώς φέρονται τα αγόρια. Το θέμα δεν είναι να μάθουμε στα κορίτσια να προστατεύονται, το θέμα είναι να διδάξουμε

στα αγόρια, από πολύ μικρά- το νόημα της συναίνεσης. Να μάθουν το απλούστατο «θέλεις;» «Ναι, θέλω». Να μάθουν το ναι.

Οι λόγοι που δεν μίλησα για το No Means No, που υπήρξε το επίσημο σλόγκαν της συναίνεσης τις τελευταίες δεκαετίες, πριν το #metoo ήταν πολύπλοκοι.

[...] το «όχι» θα έπρεπε να είναι το τελευταίο οχυρό, όταν ήδη τα πράγματα έχουν πάρει άσχημη τροπή. Όταν ήδη τα όρια έχουν ξεπεραστεί. Γιατί, στην πραγματική ζωή, δείχνουμε το «όχι» με πολλούς τρόπους, πριν χρειαστεί να το πούμε.

[...] για μια μεγάλη μερίδα γυναικών, είναι πολύ δύσκολο να πουν το «όχι». Για πάρα πολλούς λόγους. Γιατί έχουν μάθει να είναι υποχωρητικές, δεκτικές και ευγενικές, έχουν μάθει να είναι «καλά κορίτσια» και να μην στεναχωρούν κανέναν, έχουν μάθει να κάνουν στους άλλους τα χατίρια, ακόμα κι αν είναι εις βάρος τους. Ή δεν μπορούν να πουν όχι γιατί δεν είναι νηφάλιες ή γιατί έχουν παραλύσει από το φόβο.

Αν κάποια δεν πει τίποτα ή δεν μπορεί να πει τίποτα, αυτό δεν σημαίνει συναίνεση. Δεν μπορεί να το θεωρούμε αυτό συναίνεση. Συναίνεση είναι μόνο το ενθουσιώδες «Ναι».

[...] Βέβαια, αυτό που πρέπει πρώτα να λύσουμε είναι το ότι στην κοινωνία μας, η γυναικεία σεξουαλικότητα είναι ταμπού. Οι γυναίκες δεν έχουν δικαίωμα να θέλουν σεξ για το σεξ, και θεωρείται σκανδαλώδες και προκλητικό και κατακριτέο το να λένε με ενθουσιασμό το «ναι».

Γιατί οι γυναίκες, ως αντικείμενα του σεξ, στην πατριαρχική μας κοινωνία, για να έχουν αξία, πρέπει να είναι «δύσκολες». Το σεξ γι' αυτές είναι το κύριο μέσον συνδιαλλαγής. Αν το δίνουν παντού, τσάμπα, είναι «φτηνές». [...]

Μου είχε στείλει ένας φίλος το παρακάτω, που βρήκα τρομερά εύστοχο. Επώδυνα εύστοχο:

«Υπάρχει ένας κοινωνικός ρόλος των γυναικών να αντιστέκονται εικονικά σε κομμάτια της σεξουαλικής πράξης ως μέρος του παιχνιδιού. Πολλές γυναίκες λένε πχ «όχι δεν θέλω από πίσω» αλλά ο άλλος κρίνει απ' το πόσο έντονη είναι η αντίδραση και προχωράει αναλόγως, άλλες λένε όχι στο σεξ και αν δεν τις πιέσεις κάνα εικοσάλεπτο δεν αφήνονται ενώ αυτό θα ήθελαν, άλλες παριστάνουν τις μεθυσμένες για να δικαιολογήσουν το ότι κάνανε σεξ απ' το πρώτο ραντεβού. Ειδικά κάποια χρόνια πριν, αν δεν πίεζες λίγο έκανες σπάνια σεξ. Θυμάμαι πόσο φρίκαρε μια όταν με το πρώτο που είπε αχ δεν θέλω σεξ, ας μείνουμε φίλοι καλύτερα, σηκώθηκα, απομακρύνθηκα και της είπα οκ, φίλοι. Αυτή η σύγχυση έχει οδηγήσει και καλά παιδιά στο να κάνουν ενίοτε σεξ χωρίς απόλυτη συναίνεση, δηλαδή, κατά κάποιο τρόπο, να βιάσουν».

Απάντηση:

«Αυτό που περιγράφεις είναι κομμάτι του τι κακό έχει κάνει η πατριαρχία. Οι γυναίκες έχουν μάθει ότι ο άλλος πρέπει να προσπαθήσει, να διεκδικήσει, να το κυνηγήσει, για να μην θεωρηθούν εύκολες, ενώ και οι ίδιοι οι άντρες το θέλουν (υποσυνείδητα), για να μην πέσουν οι γυναίκες στα μάτια τους ως εύκολες, και φτάνουμε στο ότι το όχι δεν σημαίνει όχι.

Για να τα ανατρέψει αυτά έγινε η καμπάνια No means No, που επειδή δεν έγινε αρκετά πιστευτή, για τους λόγους που είπαμε παραπάνω, αντικαταστάθηκε από το ότι συναίνεση είναι να έχεις λάβει ενθουσιώδες ΝΑΙ.»

[...] με αυτά τα πιστεύω έχουν μεγαλώσει και οι ίδιες οι γυναίκες.

Ότι πρέπει να φέρονται έτσι. Και δεν το βλέπουν καν σαν «πρέπει». Το βλέπουν ότι έτσι είναι ο κόσμος, έτσι είναι φτιαγμένα τα φύλα, ότι αυτό είναι το φυσιολογικό, αυτό είναι το σωστό. Δεν είναι εύκολο σε καμία γυναίκα να αντιτεθεί σ' αυτό.

Σκέψου ότι ακόμα και οι ίδιες οι γυναίκες παραδοσιακά φοβούνται (δηλαδή, δεν αποδέχονται) την ίδια τους τη σεξουαλικότητα. Η γυναικεία αυτοϊκανοποίηση έχει λίγες δεκαετίες που θεωρείται φυσιολογική. Και θα βρεις σίγουρα κάποια που ακόμα δυσκολεύεται να το παραδεχτεί.

Η πορνογραφία πολύ πρόσφατα θεωρείται κι αυτή «επιτρεπτή» για τις γυναίκες. Κι αν κάποια δει και πει «α πα πα, δεν είναι για μένα αυτά», και αηδιάσει και το κλείσει, μπορεί να μην της περάσει καν απ' το μυαλό ότι νιώθει έτσι όχι επειδή δεν θα απολάμβανε θεωρητικά την πορνογραφία, αλλά επειδή η πορνογραφία όπως έχει διαμορφωθεί, με τα πρότυπα της πατριαρχίας, ναι, σε τεράστιο βαθμό είναι τρομακτική, γιατί είναι κακοποιητική.

Είναι τρομερά δύσκολο να αποτινάξεις το αόρατο πέπλο που καλύπτει την πραγματικότητα, που αν δεν ψάξεις, δεν ξέρεις ότι είναι εκεί. Είναι τεράστια η διαδικασία συνειδητοποίησης, το να δεις ότι όλο αυτό το πράγμα δεν έχει λόγο ύπαρξης πλην της καταπίεσης, και ότι είναι «φορετό» και όχι «φυσιολογικό».

Χρειάζεται να προσπαθήσεις για να ξε-μάθεις ό,τι έχεις ακούσει όλη σου τη ζωή. Χρειάζεται τεράστια δύναμη για να πετάξεις στα σκουπίδια το πώς σε έμαθαν ότι πρέπει να φέρονται τα δύο φύλα. [...]

Example 7. Οι άνδρες στο φεμινισμό δεν είναι αχρηστοί είναι επιθυμητοί. Δεν λειτουργεί το σύστημα χωρίς αυτούς, τους θέλει, τους χρειάζεται γιατί είναι συμμαχοί όχι σκλάβοι. Δε χτίζουν ώστε να πατήσουν οι γυναίκες, δε φτιάχνουν ώστε να γκρεμίσουν οι γυναίκες. Φτιάχνουν και χτίζουν ώστε να ζουν μαζί με τις γυναίκες όπως και οι γυναίκες φτιάχνουν και χτίζουν για να ζουν μαζί με τους άντρες. Όχι χωριστά σαν απαρτχάιντ. Μαζί. Με οικογένεια. Που βοηθάει ο ένας τον άλλον εξίσου στο σπίτι στο χωράφι στο μέγαλωμα των παιδιών. Που θα κάνουν σεξ χωρίς

προκαταλήψεις και ταμπου χωρίς να φοβούνται η να είναι αναγκασμένες να μείνουν έγκυες από σένα η τον Χ Ψ τυπο γιατί αλλιώς πωπω τι σκαρτες που είναι. [...]

Ο φεμινισμός λέγεται φεμινισμός γιατί περιεχει ενδυνάμωση. Σπρώχνει τη γυναίκα ψηλά για να φτάσει εκεί που έχει φτάσει ο άντρας. Όχι για να κατεβάσει τον άντρα. Δεν το είπαν ουμανισμό η ανθρωπισμο γιατί δεν μιλάει για τον κάθε άνθρωπο γενικά κι αοριστα, μιλά ειδικά για τη γυναίκα. [...]

Αν θέλεις να παίζετε μπουνιές με τον Μαρξ η τους οπαδούς του ξέρεις που είναι. Μην τις παίζεις με το φεμινισμό που βοήθησε αδύναμες γυναίκες κορίτσια τρανς γκει λεσβίες ένα σωρό ανθρώπους. Εμένα.

Σε πειράζει να ανατραπεί το στάτους κβο που υπάρχει σημερα; να φύγουν τα παλια μυαλα απο το δημόσιο λόγο και να έχουμε κι άλλες φωνές, νεότερες πιο ανοιχτές σε νεα πραγματα, γυναικείες και ανδρικές και ίσως και ανθρώπων που δεν ξέρουμε ακριβώς που πατάνε αλλά μας αρέσει ο τρόπος που παρνουν αποφάσεις;

Εσύ δεν θες;

Η Φοβασαι ότι θα σε αφήσει απέξω το όλο πραγμα;

Example 8, 9. [...] Απέφυγα να απαντήσω σε όσα σχόλια μου «χτύπησαν» (με εξαίρεση ένα σχόλιο της Μίλτου, επειδή έτυχε να είναι από τα πρώτα), γιατί δεν νιώθω ότι πρέπει να απολογηθώ για το κείμενό μου. Έκανα προσπάθεια να μην πληγώσω και να μην προσβάλω κανέναν, ιδιαίτερα τις άλλες κοπέλες της ιστορίας και τους αναγνώστες εδώ, που, όπως και να 'χει, μου έκαναν την τιμή να με διαβάσουν. Είχα συγκεκριμένους στόχους όταν έγραψα αυτή την ιστορία, γεγονός που με οδήγησε στο να παραλείψω αρκετά στοιχεία, [...] αλλά, βασικά, τον βαθμό έκθεσής μου τον επιλέγω εγώ και μόνο εγώ και δεν οφείλω να βγάλω στη φόρα την προσωπική μου ιστορία με κάθε λεπτομέρεια, σε μια προσπάθεια να πείσω, να κερδίσω τη συμπάθεια, να «βουλώσω» ή να ικανοποιήσω την περιέργεια κάποιων. Πρόκειται για τη ζωή μου και μπορεί να υπογράψω ως [σχολιάστρια], αλλά δεν είμαι ένα άβαταρ.

Μπορεί ένα εκτενές αυτομαστίγωμα να ήταν πιο ικανοποιητικό για κάποιους, όμως, όπως έγραψα ήδη, αυτό αφορά μόνο εμένα. Είναι άλλες οι ευθύνες οι δικές μου κι άλλες εκείνες του καθηγητή και για όποιον είναι αρκετά αφελής να θεωρεί πως επειδή δεν αναφέρομαι σε συγκεκριμένες επιπτώσεις που είχα είτε προσωπικά είτε ακαδημαϊκά, αυτές δεν υπάρχουν, δεν μπορώ να κάνω κάτι. Δεν με ενδιαφέρει ο οίκτος, το μοίρασμα με ενδιαφέρει. Το να μπορώ εγώ κι άλλες γυναίκες που βίωσαν αντίστοιχα περιστατικά, ακόμη και πιο βαριά από το δικό μου, αυτά με ενδιαφέρουν. Το να προστατεύσω άτομα που κατέχουν θέσεις ισχύος, τις οποίες εκμεταλλεύονται γιατί ΤΟΥΣ ΕΠΙΤΡΕΠΕΤΑΙ, ώστε να κερδίσουν πράγματα που είναι άσχετα με

τον θεσμικό τους ρόλο, δεν με ενδιαφέρει. Στο μυαλό μου, λοιπόν, οι ευθύνες είναι ξεκάθαρες. Έχω κάνει την ειρήνη μου με ό,τι συνέβη (για να χρησιμοποιήσω έναν αγγλισμό), πολύ πριν κάποιος με προτρέψει να get over it, gurl. Κατάφερα να περιφρουρήσω τον εαυτό μου κατά τη διάρκεια της «σχέσης» αυτής, υπέβαλα εαυτήν στη σκληρότερη κριτική για να μου είναι μάθημα η όλη εμπειρία, δεν τα έβαλα με κανέναν άδικα, δεν έγινα αναίσθητη, κακεντρεχής, μικροπρεπής. Ο συγκεκριμένος καθηγητής καλλιεργούσε με επιμέλεια την εικόνα του ανατρεπτικού, αντίθετου με οτιδήποτε το ηγεμονικό, πολέμιου παντός είδους ασυμμετρίας. Όλο αυτό γινόταν σκόπιμα, εν είδει ερωτικού καλέσματος προς τις φοιτήτριές του, τις οποίες ιδιωτικά κολάκευε, με στόχο να μας ρίξει στο κρεβάτι και να γίνει για εμάς ένα είδος εραστή-μέντορα, να τονώσει την εικόνα που έχει για τον εαυτό του. Παρά, λοιπόν, τις διακηρύξεις περί «ισότητας παντού» εντός αμφιθεάτρου, στις ερωτικές του σχέσεις (με φοιτήτριες) φρόντιζε συνειδητά να συντηρεί αυτή την ασυμμετρία δύναμης, με στόχο να χειραγωγεί και να παίρνει αυτό που θέλει. Επιχείρησε να μας εκφοβίσει για να μην μιλήσουμε, γιατί αν μιλούσαμε θα αποκαλυπτόταν ότι η πρακτική του να βγαίνει με φοιτήτριες ήταν συστηματική. Για να το εξασφαλίσει αυτό, ότι δεν θα μιλούσαμε μεταξύ μας, απομάκρυνε τη μία από την άλλη. Μπορεί με το ghosting να πληγώθηκα, αλλά περισσότερο με είχε πονέσει η απώλεια της παρέας μου, στην οποία οφείλω πολλές από τις καλύτερες αναμνήσεις των φοιτητικών μου χρόνων. Όταν έμαθα ότι εκείνος ευθυνόταν σε μεγάλο βαθμό γι' αυτή την απώλεια, αποφάσισα να μιλήσω για ό,τι συνέβη.[...]

Δεν μετανιώνω καθόλου για το κείμενό μου. Δεν μετανιώνω που το δημοσίευσα, εξακολουθώ να πιστεύω πως το συγκεκριμένο σάιτ είναι το καλύτερο μέρος του ελληνικού διαδικτύου για εμένα και για την ιστορία μου και για παρόμοιες ιστορίες. Εξακολουθώ να πιστεύω πως πρόκειται για μια ασφαλή γωνιά και λόγω της Λένας και λόγω των σχολιαστών. Παρά τις προσπάθειες εκείνων που έχουν εξουσία, που έχουν το ελεύθερο, που έχουν λόγο να φοβούνται την «πτώση» και θα μεταχειριστούν οποιοδήποτε -ανήθικο- μέσο για να την αποφύγουν, εμείς θα συναντιόμαστε με κατανόηση και ευαισθησία, με συμπάθεια, θα πίνουμε μπύρες, θα κουβεντιάζουμε, θα γράφουμε, θα διεκδικούμε χώρο έκφρασης και θα λέμε τις ιστορίες μας.

Example 10. Επίσης μπορεί στο οικογενειακό της περιβάλλον, στο σπίτι της, να μην έλεγε κανείς όχι και να μην έμαθε πώς λέμε όχι. Επίσης μπορεί να συνέβη για πρώτη φορά στη ζωή της να νιώσει αυτό το συναίσθημα φόβου, σε αυτή τη θέση (εκείνη ξάπλα και ένας άγνωστος άντρας όρθιος), πρώτη φορά να ένιωσε να παραλύει και να μην ενεργοποιήθηκε καμιά φωνούλα «μπορείς να σηκωθείς» γιατί ποτέ δεν έτυχε ή χρειάστηκε να της το πει κάποια φωνή.

Μπορεί και πολλά άλλα.

Δεν νομίζω πως κάποια θα βρει τον λόγο που ΕΚΕΙΝΗ δεν είπε όχι, αν αντί να ψάξει τον δικό της, προσωπικό λόγο που δεν είπε όχι, σκεφτεί » φταίει η κοινωνία, αυτή πρέπει ν'αλλάξει για να μην ξανα-αισθανθώ έτσι.» Οπότε μέχρι ν'αλλάξει η κοινωνία, εκείνη θα παθαίνει ταχυκαρδίες, θα παραλύει στην ανάμνηση του γεγονότος και θ'αναρωτιέται γιατί δεν αντέδρασε. Δηλαδή ειλικρινά, ανακουφίστηκε ποτέ, πραγματικά, αντικειμενικά και ουσιαστικά, η ψυχή οποιασδήποτε γυναίκας με την απάντηση «φταίει η κοινωνία»; Πιο αόριστη απάντηση σε προσωπική εξομολόγηση ενός ανθρώπου δεν υπάρχει. Αν μιλάμε ΓΕΝΙΚΑ για γυναίκες, μπορούμε να μιλήσουμε και για την κοινωνία. Σαν να σου λέει κάποιος ότι φοβήθηκε πως η βροχή θα του πλημμύριζε το σπίτι κι εσύ να του μιλάς για την κλιματική αλλαγή.

Example 11. Τα μελη είναι ισοτιμά και υπάρχει συμπάθεια αλλά αν πει η [σχολιάστρια] ή η κάθε καραβάν κάτι που δεν Αρέσει στην Α μπα ή τους συνεργατες (πολλοί ακόμη θυμόμαστε το υπερτέλειο «δεν είστε προχώ») πέφτουν διάφοροι καλοθελητές να τους φάνε,οπως έγινε και τώρα.Την κοπέλα της ιστορίας πρέπει να την προστατεύσουμε ,αλλά η [σχολιάστρια] δεν πρέπει να φύγει απο τη συζητηση πριν ομολογήσει το Mea Culpa. Πως να ερμηνεύσουμε την ισονομία όταν αν χωρίς κάν να κάνεις προσωπική επίθεση ή να είσαι αγενής,να δέχεσαι μηνύματα «δεν είναι έτσι που τα λες» ,»μηπως εκανες λάθος» ,»είσαι κυνική» .Μονο «είσαι υπερβολική» δεν της είπαν επειδή απλα είχε μια αποψη που δεν εγκρίνει η Αμπα.Τους αναγνώστες ναι πρεπει να τους κρατήσουμε αλλά την [σχολιάστρια] μπορούμε να τη βγάζουμε στη σεντρα. Θα πρεπει σε ένα σάιτ που είναι αρκετά προσωποπαγές να γινεται κατανοητό οτι δεν γίνεται να κανεις ως πρωταγωνιστής του σάιτ «φλογερά» σχόλια σε κάποιον σχολιαστή γιατι μετα πολυ πιθανο είναι να ακολουθήσουν και αλλοι σχολιαστες και αυτό δεν είναι καθόλου ωραίο.Εμένα μου8 χτύπησε άσχημα ,η [σχολιάστρια] απλά είπε κάτι που πολλοί σκεφτήκαμε και αυτό που σκεφτήκαμε δεν είναι κάν κακό .Είναι καλό.