Doxa androcentric language and online feminism

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis on how feminist Instagram users
challenge taken-for-granted sexist and gendered language

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"Once upon a time was sexism against women in the realm of language. The villain was 'lurking behind' the language system like a wolf, setting up linguistic traps and waiting for innocent victims to set its sexist undertones free. The linguistic traps into which many subjects tended to fall in the realm of language raised concerns among the feminist subjects, so much so that many guides and recommendations were issued to crack down on the linguistic villain and to turn the potential victims into active and unbiased speakers, so that the subjects of the realm lived happily ever after …"

(Tarif, 2015)

Abstract

Language is taken for granted because it is so deeply ingrained in our lives. As a result, underlying structures that our language entails are unconsciously reinforced by the use of it. Much of our language contains sexist structures that focus on male dominance or gendered language that excludes a group that does not identify themselves within the binary gender spectrum. One way to raise awareness about this matter is feminist activism on Instagram. Online feminism comes in different forms and there is a special branch that focuses on language and the inequality it produces. This thesis therefore answers the research question: 'How do feminist Instagram users discursively challenge the sexist and gendered power structures within language on Instagram?'. A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) was conducted among 150 Instagram posts that contained a form of challenging the sexist and gendered structures within language that often create power discrepancies between men and women. MCDA consists of both a visual analysis of the content and a discourse analysis of the content. Four main themes, each with two sub-themes, emerged from the analysis. Frist, the feminist Instagram users challenged sexist and gendered language by exposing gender inequality in the workspace. This emerged from posts regarding gendered job names and the seeming progressiveness of companies as well as by exposing gender inequality on the work floor itself. The second theme encountered revealing how masculine terms are used as generics. This emerges from the posts in exposing words that contain 'man' but are nevertheless used as gender neutral and revealing masculine appellations as inclusive for every gender. The third theme that emerged from the analysis includes language that assigns labels that reinforce gender stereotypes. The theme is constructed in the first place by posts that encounter masculine women and feminine men and how not conforming to stereotypical gender norms is regarded deviant and in the second place by feminine stereotyping and shaming the deviancies. The fourth and last theme includes stereotypical expressions. This includes feminist posts that place the narrative on the victim as well as masculine features as a symbol of dominance. The conclusion on this thesis points to feminist Instagram users discursively challenging the sexist and gendered structures within language, by exposing, criticizing and rephrasing taken-for-granted language structures and educating the audience on alternatives that can be incorporated as substitutes.

Key words: Androcentric language, sexist language, gendered language, power discrepancy, online feminism, Instagram

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1. Introduction

The way in which we use contemporary language is deeply embedded in our society. Sociologist such as Bourdieu and Foucault have extensively written about the effect that language can have on the social world. Both of them recognize structures of power within the reproduction of established verbal communication. The usage of language and discourse within society is embedded in expressions or even words that we unconsciously use. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, language is part of doxa. Doxa is 'that which is taken for granted, that which is "common sense," that which literally goes without saying' (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Ahearn, 2012, p. 268). In other words, language structures that we use today are rarely questioned, because they are part of doxa and therefore just are. However, if we take a closer look at linguistic structures in certain statements, sentences or words and analyze them more thoroughly, power structures that can often be detected. The use of language can hence be employed to gain power (Huss & Lindgren, 2011). This implies that it can create a dominant group and a submissive group. Structures which can create these power discrepancies that lie within language are often used unconsciously because of doxa, but nevertheless maintain this division. The structures that create power discrepancies and perceptibility also manifests themselves in sexist and gendered patterns within language. In most cases, men form the dominant group within language structures, making women subsequently submissive. This type of language is called androcentric language, meaning it takes men as the center of language (Tarif, 2015). This manifests itself in sexist language that consciously or unconsciously discriminates against women and assign them an unequal submissive role in society (Doyle, 1998; Tarif, 2015). An example of this given by the article of Troullou (2009) on discourses about women using the slogan 'Keep her where she belongs'. This slogan indicates that women have an assigned place in society and that they should be forced to stay in this position. Because discourses like these are rarely questioned because of the constant usage by default, such power structures can float through societies taken-for-granted language structures and keep unequal power structures in place. The contemporary language could in this way unconsciously be opposing the success of women by repressing them, because they become disadvantaged by sexist language. Tarif (2015) argues that the language people use is deeply rooted in our lives and therefore, involuntarily, can have negative values like discrimination, without people being aware of those connotations.

However, there is a growing consciousness of this language based sexist and gendered power division. The Women Liberation Movement that started in the 1960s was an important moment in history (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). From this moment on, feminists were more and more starting to challenge gendered inequalities, for instance by revealing examples of these kinds of situations. This happened on many intersectional aspects, such as job opportunities, educational opportunities and inequalities in language (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). Especially during the second wave of

feminism, focus on language began to play an important role (Dale & Overell, 2018). Because not only can language be used to keep power structures in place, it can in turn also function as a tool to deconstruct existing power hierarchies (Huss & Lindgren, 2011). The refutation of such gendered hierarchies within language can be detected on multiple levels. One level is the digital online space of social media (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017). For instance, Lillehaugen (2019) investigated marginalized languages of indigenous cultures and how people used social media as a platform for activism and creating awareness of their existence. The marginalized language cultures raised awareness through activism by tweeting and posting in their indigenous language to create awareness of their existence and translated tweets and posts on Facebook from a commonly used language to their own language to teach other people how to use it (Lillehaugen, 2019). In addition, language is commonly used as a specific form of activism through Instagram as well. Within the online Body Positivity movement, language has been a tool to motivate, stimulate and glorify women who are not self-conscious about their body (Flygare, 2019). Through Instagram, people used particular deliberate and evaluative language in comments on posts of non-stereotypical aesthetic photographs to positively approach and appreciate them. An example of such language is the use of the word 'Cellu-lit' instead of cellulite, which gives the impression that having cellulite is okay and nothing to be ashamed of (p. 15). This kind of online feminism empowers women through the online world.

In the most recent years, social media and especially Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have been used as important tools for feminists to easily and quickly spread their visions on gender inequality within society (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). An example of this is feminist activism against the sexualization of the female body on Instagram. Instagram has a strict policy against posting photographs of nude genitals and female breasts. The social media channel states that they do not allow nudity on Instagram (Dale & Overell, 2018). Feminists such as the account of @look_at_this_pusssy began to stand up to this policy by stating that this policy reinforced the idea of sexualizing the female body. For instance, the account did not agree with the fact that images with female nipples on it were blocked and deleted by Instagram, because they would be too sexual (Dale & Overell, 2018; Faust, 2017). The Instagram account on the contrary predicated that disallowing certain body parts on Instagram would make it seem like this body part is by definition viewed upon as a sexual subject. Since Instagram has become a tool for feminist activism, it can also be used to oppose sexist and gendered structures on Instagram that puts women in a disadvantaged position.

1.1 Theoretical relevance

This thesis will examine the sexist and gendered power structures within language and discourse in relation to contemporary feminist activism on Instagram that challenge these structures.

Many scientific articles and books are written on language in combination with effectuated power. In addition, this acquired power through linguistics and discourse has also been linked to gender inequality, although these articles are quite scarce. However, many of these articles were published before the 2000s (Blaubergs, 1980; Cameron, 1998; Gal, 1995). The process of communication and therefore the use of language as well is constantly changing over the years. Multiple variable factors play a role in this, such as what is seen as polite and what the desired norms and values are in one's behavior and use of language, but even biological aspects play a role (Hoff, 2006). Next to that, the process of women's emancipation has progressed rapidly since the 1960s (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). This road to gender equality is still ongoing and is regularly boosted by new developments, such as when the birth control pill first came on the market (Shorter, 1973) and with the development of social media as an outlet for feminism (Clack-Parsons, 2019). Hence, with the fast-growing emancipation of women and language constantly changing, it could be argued that more contemporary and recent research should be conducted on this specific topic.

In addition, scientific work about the relation between sexist and gendered power structures within language and the way in which women challenge, criticize and refute it on Instagram does not exist yet. As mentioned earlier, social media has created a new online space for activism and knowledge sharing (Portwood-Stacer & Berridge, 2014). Online activism and focusing on feminism is a relatively new field of inquiry. Even though there are existing academic articles about sexist and gendered language and feminism (e.g. Huss & Lindgren, 2011) as well as academic articles about feminism on Instagram (e.g. Savolainen et al., 2020) these two kinds of research have not been combined yet to understand how they can relate and act upon each other. The aim of this thesis is to unite these subjects to provide a modern day view on androcentric language and how feminists express themselves on this theme on Instagram.

1.2 Societal relevance

It is also essential to create awareness of gendered power structures within language for women to prosper in their journey to equal emancipation. Litosseliti (2014) argues that language does not only reflect our social reality, but it is also constitutive of it (p. 9). This means that language produces, but also reproduces our subjective social world and reality. In addition, Barbulescu and Bidwel (2013) argue that individuals desire self-consistency in social situations as well as in making decisions. This indicates that if women are assigned a submissive position through language, women will continue to fulfill this position in order to maintain consistency, even if it happens unintentionally. As awareness of the subject of sexist and gendered discrepancies of power within language increases, people can become more critical of the structures sustained by language.

Through this awareness and critical reflection, it could become easier for people to recognize and dismantle suppressive processes. Huss and Lindgren (2011) mention this phenomenon as the emancipation of language. They refer to this as 'improving the position of an underprivileged language through political efforts and language planning' (p. 2). Dingwall (2008) argues that being excluded from a group or structure, can have severe negative effects on the individual. Being the underprivileged one in language and thus being excluded can cause negative effects on these people. Women, in this case, being the underprivileged party because of androcentric language can therefore suffer from being suppressed within language. By the emancipation of our everyday language and more awareness it gets, language could become more neutral and equal in terms of gender. This is extra important because of the unconscious nature of language, meaning the power structures are often used without specific intent to create male dominance. Therefore, feminist posts on Instagram that reveal this matter play a noteworthy role for the journey to further gender equality. As Lakoff (1975) claims, feminist linguistics argue that everyday language is fundamental to gender inequality. The issue must be more highlighted and known before it can be dealt with consciously. Taking into account the power structures within language and the growing awareness of it, which can be noticed in feminist activist posts on Instagram, the research question of this thesis will be:

'*How do feminist Instagram users discursively challenge the sexist and gendered power structures within language on Instagram*?'.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

This thesis and therefore the research that has been conducted have adopted a feminist poststructuralist perspective. Weedon (1987) describes this kind of approach as 'a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes, and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change' (pp. 40-41). The Instagram posts that are examined contain exposure and countering of sexist or gendered power structures within language. These Instagram posts are considered feminist Instagram posts. Images that were usable for this thesis are photographs, drawings or images that highlight an unequal division between genders. These posts included plain backgrounds with purely text regarding gendered of sexist structures within language and images of conversations between people to illustrate how discourses can act as sexist. These critically highlighted aspects of the Instagram posts were displayed as sexist or gendered in the way that is employed by a person or about a specific gender. This could take the form of discourse or linguistics such as words, compounds or expressions.

To examine how these feminist Instagram posts challenge the taken-for-granted gender division within language and the presumable power structures it effectuates, a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) was conducted. This qualitative method is a mixture of a Critical Visual Analysis (CVA) and a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), since the Instagram posts consisted of both visual aspects as well as linguistics and discourse. Therefore, a binary analysis was most the suitable to carry out to prevent losing any information in the analysis. Four main themes emerged from the MCDA, which all consist of multiple sub-themes. The results chapter is organized according to these themes and sub-themes. At the end of the thesis, the results are summarized and reflected on in the conclusion and discussion. This chapter also highlights the limitations of the current thesis and a recommendation for further research is suggested.

2. Theoretical framework

In the theoretical framework of this thesis, the concepts gender and the way it functions in society, language and discourse and Instagram as an online space for feminist activism are further explored. All of these concepts are important in giving a well-considered and detailed concluding answer, because these concepts are the main building blocks of the research question.

In the first section, the concept of gender and how it is constructed through tradition and the emancipation of society is elaborated on to get a clear overview of what it is feminists are fighting for and whether the concept of a 'woman' can even be seen as a unanimous and consistent concept. Next to that attention is paid to understanding why the man-woman structures are the way they endure by elaborating on the origin of the structures and subsequently how they nowadays flow through everyday life.

This also continues to be explored in the second section on language and discourse and how exactly this influences gender construction and gender stereotyping. The second section focuses on the power structures that language and discourse can, often unconsciously, create and therefore contribute to the persistent gender division which mostly results in male dominance. This is approached from two perspectives, the first being gender bias as an abstract system. Certain forms of androcentric language are discussed here, such as generic pronouns, gratuitous modifiers, semantic derogation, asymmetrically gendered language. The second perspective is language as potentially sexist discourse. In this subsection, the ways of speaking by as well as about genders are exposed.

The third and final section elaborates on feminist activism and especially how this emerges on Instagram. First, online activism will be discussed, to clarify how this can occur on social media. After that, the topic will be expanded to feminism as activism in the online world and how this manifest on Instagram. At the end, tactics of how feminists can express themselves online are explored. All of these concepts and their required explanation together provide a theoretical background framework for the research question.

2.1 Gender as a social construct

To examine the subject of sexist and gendered structures within linguistics and discourse in relation to feminism, the concept of gender itself must first be explored more in depth. The topic of gender as a social construct is not new to the academic world anymore. It has been widely researched by many scholars, such as Butler (2006) and Winter (2015). Unlike gender, biological sex is determined at birth. Gender however, is a social and psychological construct that encompasses a spectrum of identities (Winter, 2015). A social construct in viewed upon as a entity that derives its

meaning based on agreement by members of a given society (Skalko, 2020). This means that biological sex and gender are not necessarily inherently linked to one another. When the gender someone identifies with matches the gender label given at birth, the person's gender identity is called cisgender (Broussard et al., 2018). When a person does not identify with the gender label traditionally linked to the biological sex, this person is called transgender (Tate et al., 2014). In other words, gender is not predetermined at birth from a social constructionist view, but rather constructed through making sense of transactions in society (Crawford, 2001). Still, from a traditional perspective, from a person's birth, biological girls get pink clothes and toys and biological boys get blue clothes and toys, both reinforcing that there is a stereotypical color for boys and girls and assuming that the biological sex is inevitably linked to gender (Winter, 2015). In addition, there are certain ''scripts'' for these two genders on how to act, behave, dress and talk from the day that they are born (Ahearn, 2011). People are thus not by definition aware that gender is not inherently linked to someone's sex and gender is still a concept that may need elaboration.

To get a more extensive perception of how sexist and gendered structures that can create a power division between men and women are constituted, it is important to understand how these binary gender identities are constructed and what they entail. Even women themselves first need to be known to what the construct of 'woman' encompasses before an efficient fight for gender equality can be accomplished, for instance through challenging the everyday language people use. As Butler (2006) mentions:

It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ''women'', the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought. (pp. 3-4)

In other words, to comprehend how emancipation can be achieved through feminism, we first need to know what the social construct of 'women' entails and if it can even be approached as an all-embracing gender construct.

Being a woman does not only include gender identity or biological sex. It rather is an intersectional concept, which consists of several parts of someone's identity (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). What makes the construction of a person's identity and thence what makes a woman a woman, depends on the intersectionality of personal features, such as race, class, ethnicity, educational level and sexual orientation (Carastathis, 2014). All these aspects need to be considered

when making an assumption on the identity of a human being. The notion of gender-mainstreaming, as Grabska (2011) explains, can be harmful to women who are taken for an all-covering overarching construct. Even though post-structuralists are trying to reconstruct the social system of values and power dynamics, a gender identity still cannot be regarded as having one universal definition. This however, is often not taken into account in reality as Lewis (2012) exemplifies. He states that talking about 'black women' is seen as if all black women can be grouped under the same construct. Even though two aspects are considered, namely race and gender, people need to be aware of all the other aspects that play a role in someone's character and identity and how they can differentiate between people. Cooky et al. (2013) investigated gender-verification tests within sports, which are used for the purpose that only women can participate in women's sports games and vice versa. They found that what made a woman a woman was traditionally overall being less good and less athletic in sports than men. Even though they refuted this idea in their inquiry by explaining that it matters, for instance, what someone's intersectional feature of professional occupation is, it shows a form of how external actors shape the identity of a woman, namely by being weaker than men. This view is partially reinforced by the research by Boonzaier & de La Rey (2003) in which South African women were interviewed about violence against them. The majority of the women also showed that they see themselves as submissive to their husband and men in general, which legitimized the abuse. Here, not only men shaped women's identity as weaker and submissive, but women themselves as well. However, this traditional view was not adopted by everyone. Some of the South African women indicated that they did not identify themselves as submissive to men. These women were generally people who worked full time. This again shows that the inclusion of all intersectional aspects is of great importance when shaping someone's identity. Focusing on gender and language, stereotypes on what is regarded masculine and feminine are manifest as well (Crawford, 2001). Overall, it is believed that women have a weaker and more hesitant style of speaking. Even though this idea is based on a non-inclusive perception, it still is the gender-mainstream (Crawford, 2001). In addition, although this chapter focused on the perception of the feminine construct, it is also noteworthy to acknowledge that there is also not only one kind of a man. As Robert (2013) argues, there are different ways in which the construct of a man can be enacted. He refers to this as the plurality of masculinities which in turn have a hierarchical grouping amongst them.

As shown, there are some exceptions in the way the construct of 'a woman' is mainstream viewed upon and the perception of how they are expected to behave. These expectations are descriptive as well as prescriptive, meaning the expectations form an idea of how gender is performed as well as thar they constitute ''rules'' on how a gender is desired to behave (Heilman & Chen, 2005). However, disregarding the awareness and consciousness of intersectionality of identities that should be created, the overall perception of women is that they are more submissive

and weaker as opposed to men in quite a few aspects (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Cooky et al., 2013; Grabska, 2011). These mainstreamed constructions of women and men can be challenged through feminist activism by trying to reshape the obtained standardized values. These stereotypical constituted gender constructs are also analyzed in relation to spoken or written language and how usage of language either supports or challenges these constructs (Crawford, 2001).

2.2 Language, discourse and power structures

The way in which people verbally communicate creates a part of our identity (Wodak, 2012). The concept of identity draws upon the idea that there are similarities among certain groups. To illustrate this, one's language can be subjectively superior to the other in forms of intellect and race, therefore creating the in-groups and out-groups of one's identity (Miller, 2003). This could also be applied to sexist structures between men and women. This division of in-groups and out-groups can substantiate power relations. Foucault (1994) argues that the power relations as well as the dominant and submissive groups it constitutes, are taken for granted because it has been like that since humanity can remember. He also claims that the way in which language is used can contribute to and constitute those power divisions. This refers to Bourdieu's *doxa*; that what is taken for granted, because has always been like that and has been reproduced on the long-term (Hunter, 2004). The concept of doxa in relation to language based power structures also applies to sexist and gendered power relations between men and women. From a social constructionist view, language can be used as a powerful set of strategies for communication and negotiating in the social world (Crawford, 2001). Spender (1980) states that language is man-made. She argues that men used to, if not still do, rule the main world systems and created language the way we know it nowadays. Therefore, some words that describe a neutral being or object are still masculine biased (Spender, 1980). Litosseliti (2014) argues that in research into sexist bias within language, there has been a shift between two ways of approaching it. These two approaches include gender bias as an abstract system and language as potentially sexist discourse (p. 14), in which the former relates to the use of certain sexist or gendered words and the latter to the (stereotypical) gendered use of language by men and women. Both of these approaches are valuable for this thesis.

Gender bias as an abstract system covers a number of components in which men are taken as the center of linguistics and discourse. To begin with, it entails words that are used for both men and women, but are in fact masculine based. An example of this are masculine pronouns as generic and gender neutral. 'He', 'him' and 'his' are masculine pronouns, but are nevertheless used for women as well. Even though these pronouns are used as inclusive for all genders, a study of Gastil (1990) reported that men are becoming more dominant because of the use of these androcentric

pronouns. He had several children read aloud a story containing the personal pronoun 'he' as generic without further naming a gender. After the children read the story, the researcher asked them what they imagined the story would look like in real life. In describing their imagination, a significant majority of the children imagined a man as the main character referring to 'he' in the story. This shows that even though masculine pronouns are used as neutral and inclusive, the usage of these pronouns still unconsciously create masculinity as a dominant actor within language. Another example of this is the generic word to describe the human species, namely 'mankind' or 'man' (Fishman, 1978). Sa'ar (2007) opposes the use of masculine words as the neutral norm. She argues that masculine words that are used as the neutral generic undermines women in general. In contemporary language, women are, because of such language, placed in the background. If feminine words and discourses were more prevalent in everyday language, it would bring the female gender more to the forefront instead of denying it. This would subsequently challenge the taken-for-granted masculine identity as the generalized ego (Sa'ar, 2007, p. 426). However, although masculine words are potentially not used to prevail masculine dominance, they are nevertheless deeply rooted in our linguistic system as society continues to reproduce it (Litosseliti, 2014).

Next to the component of masculine words as generic, *gratuitous modifiers* are part of the gender bias as an abstract system of language. This refers to naming a person's (work) status including that person's gender, so that the gender is stressed instead of that person's status. This arose from endorsing role stereotyping. When occupations which are traditionally performed by a man are performed by a woman, people are more likely to accompany the women's gender identity to the status (Bush, 1976). An example of this is appointing a 'female surgeon' or a 'female director'. By emphasizing someone's gender, the status becomes diminished because more attentions is drawn to the gender (Litosseliti, 2014). However, this is not only done to women. In the nurse profession, men also experience being titled 'male nurses' (Bush, 1976). A second component that fits the gender bias as an abstract system of language is *semantic derogation*. This refers to words or terminologies that describe women, which did not have a negative burden to them initially, 'but gradually acquires negative connotations, and becomes abusive or end up as a sexual slur (e.g. 'lady', 'madam', 'mistress', 'queen')' (Litosseliti, 2014, p. 15). There are more words that have such a negative effect on women, than for men. A third component is *asymmetrically gendered language*, which are singular nouns that are masculine biased, but are used for women as well, such as 'fireman', 'policeman' and 'chairman' (Litosseliti, 2014). Often, when those singular nouns concern an occupation which is carried out by a woman, a suffix is added to the word. Examples of this are 'authoress' and 'stewardess' (Fishman, 1978, p. 398). This could give the impression that the man is taken as the fundamental basis. Gender asymmetry exposes that masculine words are unconsciously viewed as the center and the norm. Feminine words therefore become marked with an affix, making

them more specific than 'the norm' and make it seem like women are deviant or a subcategory (Sa'ar, 2007; Tarif, 2015).

The shift to language as potentially sexist discourse needs elaboration as well. Discourse can be defined in multiple ways (Ahearn, 2012), such as the definition of Van Dijk (1997) in which discourse is referred to as 'a form of language use, public speeches or more generally, spoken language or ways of speaking' (p. 2). In order to shape a tangible sense of the concept, the definition of Holmes and Meyerhoff (2008) is maintained, whom defines discourse as 'Language as it is put to use in social situations' (p. 44). Different gender constructs are linked to some sort of behavior, which can express itself through discourse as a 'manly/masculine' or 'womanly/feminine' way of speaking (Crawford, 2001). For example, a man and a woman can say the exact same sentence, but both could get a different reaction or value assigned to it based on the gender of the person that is speaking. An example of speaking in a 'womanly' is talking with many adjectives such as 'very' or 'huge' to compensate for otherwise sounding too harsh (Crawford, 2011). In addition, Herring (2000) argues that women often communicatie in an apologetic way as well as expressing support for others. As Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) state, traditionally the task of a woman is to soften the masculine hardness with tenderness and softened language. Another example of feminine discourse is to deal with uncomfortable topics by speaking about them with humor (Crawford, 2001). This makes the topic more negotiable and easier to bring to light. To support the argument of keeping a conversation light, women are often expected to be accommodating in a conversation. If this is not the case, they are expected to substantiate why they are not compliant or simply say that they do not agree with the subject (Buchholtz, 2003). An example of this, as Buchholtz (2003) illustrates, is the topic of rape. If a woman does not want to have sexual intercourse with a man, she is expected to explain why she does not want it. A simple 'no' is not taken as a sufficient explanation. In addition, men are less likely to keep a conversation going, are less engaged in the conversation and more likely to interrupt when another person is talking. This does not only reflect power discrepancies as an effect of sexist and gendered discourse, but also illustrates how discourse produces and reproduces it (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2008, p. 51).

The gender bias as an abstract system and language as potentially sexist discourse both radiate sexist and gendered power relations within language and discourse. Power, as Foucault argues in Ahearn (2011) equals 'the governing of one person by another through the structuring of that person's field of possible actions' (p. 264). The options of governing and self-governing of women thus becomes limited by the contemporary language we use. To further expose and challenge these power structures, modern day feminists are using (among other channels) social media as an online platform to express and distribute their activism.

2.3 Feminist activism on Instagram

Now the relation between gender and language is explored, the component of the research question that encompasses online feminist activism on Instagram will be further elaborated on in this section. The section aims to provide an understanding of how online feminist activism is carried out, how this is done on specifically on Instagram and how these feminist posts actively challenge patriarchal, androcentric language which subsequently creates discrepancies of power.

To begin with, the online world has created a new space where counter-hegemonic ideas can be spread as a form of online activism (Portwood-Stacer & Berridge, 2014). Online activism, as Greijdanus et al. (2020) argues, has three key elements. The first element includes that individuals can relate their own personal experiences and opinions to collective causes. An example of this is the feminist #MeToo movement. Clark-Parsons (2019) researched this movement, concluding that both the *politics of visibility* and the *economy of visibility* play a noteworthy role in sharing personal opinions and experiences for a collective cause in online spaces. The politics of visibility refer to 'the collective articulation of oppressive experiences, such as sexual violence, challenging social norms that silence and excuse such experiences and, when successful, undermines the structures of inequality those norms support' (Clark-Parsons, 2019, p. 3). In other words, the taken-for-granted gendered power discrepancy within language which stimulates male dominance can be challenged through the joint, collective online articulation of the issue. This brings more attention to the topic, which in turn can slowly create more awareness and consciousness. Engaging in politics of visibility can thus be a tool to call attention for a certain cause or in the case of this thesis, the taken-for granted gender norms within language. The doxa sexist and gendered power structures that lie within our everyday language can in this way be challenged through online activism. However, the economy of visibility also needs to be taken into account. When an online movement is shared on a great scale, the individual stories and stories of ''ordinary people'' as opposed people who have a lot of followers or are well-known celebrities, can get lost in the void of the constant sharing of stories. The reason for this lies in the revenue model and the algorithm that social media platforms use (Clack-Parsons, 2019). An example of this is hashtag activism (Dixon, 2014). Here, one person or a collective group of people create a hashtag that brings attention for a cause and by posting it on social media, the hashtag cumulatively spreads across social media through posting and reposting. However, taking the economy of visibility into account, the stories of people with the most followers and highest status get the most attention in this process and other stories might not receive as much attention, even though those people might be sharing the same message. This could be potentially harmful for those people as they exposed their feelings, but do not get the attention or aid that they

need (Clack-Parsons, 2019). In addition, sharing a story on social media or using a hashtag often seems like limited effort, but the aftermath often takes up a lot of time and privacy. This involves getting a lot of attention from people who want to hear more about the story and gain more details, which could invade privacy, getting critical or negative commentary on a shared story and some people also suffer scrutiny from other parties (Mendes et al., 2018). The second element encompasses that online activism allows people from the same in-group to support each other, organize activities and discourage negative responses to them (Greijdanus et al., 2020). This key element can have positive outcomes as well as negative outcomes. The positive feature of this element is the feeling of unity and security within a group. People support each other in the online community and help each other when they receive a negative response. The negative feature has its source in *the burden of representation* (Yadlin-Segal, 2019). The burden of representation includes the feeling of always having to be representable for the addresses issue that people of in-groups may experience. When someone becomes associated with an impetuous issue, like #metoo for instance, these people are expected to always be ready to talk about it or behave as if they do not have a live besides the issue. It may feel like a burden, because out-group people expect in-group people to conform to the stereotyping ideas that rule them (Yadlin-Segal, 2019. The third and last key element that Greijdanus et al. (2020) elaborates on, is that through activism on social media, people can create new shared identities and constitute them with people who are also outside of their online existence. This brings a new, offline dimension to their activism which can have an empowering effect on communities. An example of this element is the #freethenipple campaign, in which feminist activists jointly opposed Instagram's sexist policy regarding nudity and the sexualization of the female body (Faust, 2017). This kind of feminist activism online has been globally exploding on social media since 2010 (Bear, 2016 as cited in Turley & Fisher, 2018).

Although feminism can be described in different ways and there are different movements within feminism (Woodhead, 2001), it is considered for this thesis that feminism is an activist movement that tries to ensure equality between men and women, therefore fighting for the freedom and emancipation of all women (Hoffman, 2001). Feminists want to achieve this by exposing current gender structures and criticizing them when it appears that they create inequality in the form of the dominance of men and subsequently a submissive position of women (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). To get a comprehensive idea of what the concept of online feminism entails, first a complete and general definition of feminism is provided by Feltman and Szymanski (2018):

Feminism is commonly regarded as a belief system and political movement based on the notion that women should possess the same political, economic, and social power as men; that oppressive systems attempting to keep women subjugated should be challenged; and that women's lack of power might impact their emotional well-being and other lived experiences. (p. 10)

Now feminism is increasingly incorporated on the internet and social media platforms were their counter-hegemonic ideas can be posted to a large online audience, there is a discussion if we can speak of a 'fourth-wave feminism' (Munro, 2013, p. 23). Fourth wave feminism is said to be a new form of feminism, as using online platforms to disseminate ideas and learn from others' views brings a new dimension to feminism. Munro (2013) notes that an online 'call-out' culture has emerged that is exposing and countering misogyny and sexism. Bringing feminism to the digital space incorporating an online platform to share stories, ideas and beliefs, Crossley (2015) argues that the feminism can act more efficiently because feminist messages can be spread to a wider range of people all over the world in an easy and quick way. Because of the easy connection and low boundaries of engaging with other people's posts globally on social media platforms, the opportunity for creating online feminist communities arises. Munro (2013) speaks of a growing online global feminist community that uses online spaces for activism and discussion. Although the negative elements of social media are not to be neglected, feminist activists do have the opportunity in this way to raise awareness and create consciousness through online platforms about patriarchy, sexism and gender inequality (Turley & Fisher, 2018).

Instagram is one of the many social media platforms where feminists can share their forms of activism. However, the social medium is inevitably one of the most important online platforms in contemporary time for feminists to express themselves (Savolainen et al., 2020) and share knowledge about topics that may not always be evident as feminist topics (Jackson, 2018). The platform creates new network affectivities and can act as a digital support system (Retallack, et al., 2016). Applying this to the topic of sexist and gendered language, Instagram can function as a network for feminist who support each other's forms of activism against the gender division within language. They can repost posts that have a meaningful value to them about the topic and therefore the issue gets even more attention. The research by Santos and Figueras (2020) shows that women who consider themselves feminists mainly use Instagram to follow specific accounts that focus on feminist content. However, when people are not specifically looking for such accounts, it is also quite difficult to locate them. In addition, feminists use the Instagram platform to post content with a

feminist message that they find important. Reposting appears to be an meaningful part of the feminist community on Instagram. Posts are distributed quickly in this way, because Instagram allows the option to re-share a post within a few clicks (Van der Heijden, 2020). These features are attractive for feminists to use Instagram as an online source for activism.

There are multiple ways in which feminists try to refute or challenge sexist patterns within language on social media. Jeong and Lee (2018) describe tactics to challenge misogynistic power structures online. One of the tactics they mention is called *mirroring*. Jeong and Lee (2018) describe the act of online mirroring by feminists as

they copy the misogynistic language but reverse the positions of perpetrators and victims in the original. This mirroring reveals how bizarre the original was, and allows users to recognize the misogynistic assumptions and tones that were hitherto so pervasive as to be almost imperceptible. (p. 708)

Mirroring thus reveals how absurd some unquestioned words or sayings are by reversing or replacing the perspective. This could for instance mean that the perspective of sentence that is often said to a women by a man, is reversed as if a women would say it so a man. To reveal the gendered, doxa power structures within language, mirroring can be a useful tactic, because it shows that language now often unconsciously directed at male dominance. When mirroring is applied, this would results is female dominance, which is then presumably frowned upon. Another tactic that feminist activists online use to endeavor more awareness about unequal and sexist power structures is the use of *feminist memes* (Baer, 2016). Memes are online images that have a big spreadable character. Shifman (2013) defines memes as 'propagation of content items such as jokes, rumors, videos, or websites from one person to others via the Internet' (p. 362). Feminist memes can be used to create a new, more dynamic way to engage with feminism online (Baer, 2016). This makes it less formal or static to engage with the information. Using this tactic in trying to create awareness, feminist can initiate 'memetic disruption of dominant discourses' by revealing sexist and gendered abuses in a more playful way (Thrift, 2014, p. 1091). In addition, there are also feminists that do not use certain online tactics to convey a message about social abuses, but rather try to educate their audience by using substantiated and comprehensive information. Jackson (2018) calls this form of online activism feminist pedagogy.

2.4 Theoretical summary

In this theoretical framework, the concepts from the research question have been approached scientifically and more clarity has been outlined about how they relate to each other. The concept of gender and especially the social and psychological construct of a 'woman', had to be examined and dissected before it could be linked to language. Then, in the section on language and power structures it can effectuate, this could be linked to gender. How the use of sexist and gendered language can influence these power structures and in what ways this can occur, made it more comprehensible to answer the research question. Finally, the topic of online feminism on Instagram is highlighted. Since this is a crucial part of the research question, this section is indispensable to provide a correct answer. In this last section, all three main topics came together and were linked to each other to clarify the mutual relationship. This has made it possible to enter the analysis with a well-founded theoretical background and to recognize language structures, gender stereotyping, ways of feminist activism and online tactics.

3. Method

This chapter gives an overview of the method and approaches that were utilized to analyze the Instagram posts. It starts with an explanation and justification of the qualitative research method. After that, the process of data collection is explained, including what the criteria for the units of analysis were, how the units were collected and the time span. The third subsection of the method chapter touches upon the operationalization of concepts that are mentioned in the research question. Three main concepts or combinations of concepts are extensively explained to indicate what exactly defines them in this thesis. In the methods of analysis subsection, the method, or rather mix of methods, and the steps taken to come to a generalizable outcome of results are clarified. At the end of the method chapter, a general overview of the ethics and justification of the research is provided, including validity, reliability, generalizability and reflexivity.

3.1 Methodological approach

To provide an answer to the research question stated in the introduction, a qualitative research approach will be applied. This proves to be an appropriate approach, due to the nature of the method. Next to the subjective and mainly inductive character of the method, qualitative research has a few key principles that are convenient for the type of Instagram posts that were analyzed (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The first key principle is that, in qualitative research, the underlying meaning of the content and messages are analyzed thoroughly (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The approach focusses on quality instead of quantity, meaning the method seeks for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the data instead of counting how many times a phenomenon occurs. The second key principle encompasses that, in qualitative methods, the units of analysis are often collected on the base of purposive sampling instead of randomly selecting units (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This means that instead of blindly picking units of analysis or respondents, the units of analysis are 'intentionally selected according to the need of the study' (Boeije, 2010, p. 35). In this research, the units of analysis, hence the Instagram posts, are collected based on a number of requirements that they must meet, which are explained in more detail in the data collection section. Purposive sampling is therefore a suitable method for this research. The third and last key principle of qualitative research that suits this thesis is the type of data that arises from the analysis. The research question starts with *'How'* which indicates a descriptive and explanatory answer (Bryman, 2016). The conclusion will therefore form a description of how feminist Instagram users challenge sexist and gendered power relations within language. In addition, the approach that was taken also has a somewhat applied nature. The information that flows from applied research is used to apply in

real life practices, for instance by using the obtained knowledge in order to try to provide change (Boeije, 2010). This is the case for this thesis, because the descriptive information from the results that is recapitulated in the conclusion can be used in practice to create more awareness about the topic of sexist and gendered language among society and stimulate change and further activism.

3.2 Sample and data collection

When researching and analyzing content rather than people, other matters need to be considered (Bryman, 2016). In this content analysis, the units of analysis are specified to Instagram posts that show kinds of counter hegemonic feminist activism regarding doxa sexist and gendered language and discourse. These Instagram posts are considered feminist Instagram posts in short. In total, a number of 150 Instagram posts have been collected. Since there is no particular date or timespan specified in the research question, the year, date and time of when the Instagram posts had been posted did not matter (Bryan, 2016). However, to give an overview of the time span of when the posts were posted, the earliest post dates from 12 May, 2016 from @onefunnygook and the most recent post dates from 23 May, 2021 from @feminernl. This mean that the posts fell within a date range of approximately five years. To obtain the of units of analysis, my own personal Instagram account was used, using the Instagram application on my mobile phone. It was the most convenient, because no additional Instagram account had to be created and with my personal account, I already had access to certain feminist Instagram accounts that were protected. This means that in order to gain access to the posts of those account, a follow request must be submitted. Before the party responds to such a follow request, some time may pass which would have been a waste for the smooth running of the thesis.

The Instagram posts were collected over a period of two months. The majority of the posts had been collected from mid-March to the end of April and in the following period of time, until mid-May, the final posts were added to gain the desired number of units of analysis. This time frame was the most suitable within the process of developing all the chapters of my thesis. Even though two moths is quite a long time for data gathering, for me it was convenient because a lot of the Instagram posts that I used for the analysis were not even posted yet when I first started the online Instagram search. All of the Instagram posts were gathered by first sending myself a link to my personal WhatsApp. This way I could quickly search for new useful Instagram posts, instead of having to do all the reference work one by one before being able to search for additional posts. In the end of a searching phase, I went through all the links of the Instagram posts that I send myself individually on my laptop and made print screens of the posts, cropped them so that only the post with description was visible and pasted them into a Word file. After this, I developed the correct reference for all of

the posts. In this way, all Instagram posts were stored below each other in the same Word file. The analysis was also acted out in the same Word file, so that the data remained complete and all of the Instagram posts were included in the analysis and results. Even though all of the 150 posts were included in the analysis, only 42 posts are mentioned as examples within the results. A complete list of the mentioned accounts, a visual display of the post and a description of the accounts can be found in the appendix. The posts are mentioned within the results with their Instagram account name. Even though the correct APA citation would be to cite the name of the account holder, it seemed more convenient to mention them with their '@' Instagram name in order to be more noticeable as references to Instagram accounts that were used in the analysis.

As mentioned in the previous section, purposive sampling was adopted as main sampling method. Purposive sampling takes into account a number of criteria that the unit of analysis must meet instead of units being randomly selected (Boeije, 2010). This does not mean that usable Instagram posts were purposely left out of the analysis, but rather that there were certain Instagram posts that were more usable for the analysis. For this thesis, the criteria were that the Instagram posts had to be about sexist or gendered language as well as that this was discursively challenged through the Instagram posts In order to gather posts that met the desired characteristics which made the posts usable, hashtags were used in the first place. The hashtags that got the most hits on the topic were #genderedlanguage, #derogatorylanguage, #sexistlanguage and #sexism. These hashtags were included in the description of a post when it concerned the sexist or gendered use of language and the power structures it maintains. These hashtags fit the main topic and therefore were very useful to collect data. An estimate of approximately 100 Instagram posts were gathered in this way. After all the posts that fit the criteria from the hashtags were collected, the search for usable units of analysis continued by searching for well-known feminist Instagram pages, that I already knew. Other pages were found by typing in 'feminist' or 'sexist' in the search option of Instagram. A few examples of such accounts are @feminst, @sexisme.missers and @bedanktwitteman. An attempt has been made to avoid reposts as much as possible and always go as far back as possible to the original source. Unfortunately, this was not always feasible. That is why a number of units of analysis still are reposts. However, in the posts always have credit to the original poster, both in the image itself and in the description.

A social media platform as a space of inquiry was chosen because in the contemporary, modern day these kinds of online spaces are widely used to share thoughts and forms of activism, such as feminism (Clark-Parsons, 2019; Figueras, 2020; Savolainen et al., 2020). The choice for Instagram as a social media platform instead of any other online platform has a few motivations. First, Instagram is one of the most popular and widely used social media platforms nowadays (Carta et al., 2020). In 2019, Instagram had over 500 million users a day worldwide (Statista, 2021). A lot of

people have an account and sharing content is very accessible and easy (Clark-Parsons, 2019). Secondly, Instagram is a platform that is widely used nowadays for activism. Many hashtag movements are distributed through Instagram and the platform is often used to counteract the hegemonic prevailing norms of inequality. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement has been sharing the #BLM hashtag and the black square on Instagram to raise awareness (Ince et al., 2017). Feminists are also a well-known to use Instagram as a communicative platform. The #metoo started on Twitter but became globally known through sharing of the hashtag and accompanying stories on Instagram (Clark-Parsons, 2019). Research of Pittman and Reich (2016) also showed that an image-based post evokes more emotion than a written post. This can be beneficial when it indicates activist posts. In addition, posts on Instagram can only contain small amounts of text, because of the limited space in an image of one post. Although the option of multiple images in one post, called a thread, on Instagram is available, the content that a person can share is limited as opposed to a longwinded post on Facebook for instance. Due to the limited amount of content and text that can be included in an Instagram post, the message a person wants to convey must be easy to grasp in a quick and understandable way. The topic of 'language' can be very extensive. However, activist posts on Instagram are forced to be short and clear, hence also when they touch upon the concept of sexist and gendered language. This is an advantage of using Instagram posts as a data source. In addition, even though Instagram is in essence an online platform where images can be shared (Dale & Overell, 2018), posts on Instagram do not only contain visual aspects. A lot of the activist posts also contain language within the square of the image or as a caption or description (Kruk et al., 2019). Sometimes, an image of a conversation between two persons is shown. All these features together makes Instagram the most suitable and convenient social media platform to investigate my topic.

3.3 Operationalization

In order to properly answer the research question, it is important that the concepts or combination of concepts concerned to build to research question are explained extensively and in detail. This way, there can be no confusion about the definition of the concepts utilized in this thesis.

The first phenomenon that is mentioned is in the research question is 'feminist Instagram users'. To explain this concept in detail, it is helpful to parse the concept. First, the definition of Instagram users for this thesis, includes persons who own an Instagram account and make use of it by posting photographs or images on Instagram. This is quite self-explanatory. The second part of the composition entails these users being feminists. This is defined by the content that they post. A conscious decision was made not to use the term 'feminists' as a single noun, because this would indisputably mean that the people who posted the content identify themselves as feminists. Since I

had no contact with any of the Instagram users whose posts have been analyzed, this cannot be traced and therefore cannot be claimed. For this reason, it was decided to make the label 'feminist' dependent on the content posted on Instagram. Hence the composition 'feminist Instagram users'. This means that the posts of these Instagram users can only contain content about feminist goals, meaning unequal gender structures within language. This can be based on words, sentences, expressions or discourse. The feminist Instagram users expose this kind of structure and offer a feminist point of view. Only posts that contain English or Dutch language are used for this thesis.

The second composition of concepts that needs to be addressed in order to provide a clear understanding of the analyzed concepts are the 'sexist and gendered power structures within language'. In the first place, the concept of 'language' needs elaboration. In this thesis the concept of 'language' is divided into two components. Language refers to both linguistics and discourse. Linguistics here refer to words, word compositions and sometimes sentences that contain sexist and gendered components (Bucholtz, 2014). This is purely focused on the grammar of language. In addition, discourse in this thesis refers to the way of speaking about a phenomenon in social situations. As a result, the subject that is spoken about is illuminated from a certain angle (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). Discourse in this sense can be subjective. Sexist language, in this thesis, refers to language which is androcentric or femicentric directed, meaning that the structures it composes take either men as the center of language or women as the center of language (Magenya, 2020; Tarif, 2015). In the case of this research, almost all Instagram posts relate to androcentric language. This in turn forms makes men the dominant group within language, making women subsequently submissive. Gendered language refers to language which is directed towards a gender, no matter if it is to the construct of men or women. Sexist language as well as gendered language, can both establish discrepancies of representation resulting in power inequality. Sexist language, from the perspective of a binary gender spectrum of men and women, causes overrepresentation of one gender, making the other less discernible. Gendered language is always directed at a gender on itself, leaving out people who might not identify with one of the two traditional genders at all, causing misrepresentation and therefore power inequality.

3.4 Method of analysis

The Instagram posts that are analyzed contain forms of activism against everyday taken-for-granted sexist or gendered language in which women are often illustrated as submissive to men and male dominance is radiated. These posts contained a representation or example of language as well as visuals to show how taken-for-granted language in that we use in contemporary society can be considered gendered or sexist. A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) was conducted as a

qualitative approach, which is a mix between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Visual Analysis (CVA) (Machin, 2013). This is essential to get a full and comprehensive understanding of the Instagram posts and their manifest as well as their latent meaning, because discourse communication can be transmitted through text as well as visual components (Machin & Mayr, 2012). By using a mix of methods in MCDA, the validity of the analysis is guaranteed in the most feasible way, because the incorporation of the visual as well as the textual part of the Instagram posts, makes sure that all the information is taken into account (Noble & Smith, 2015). Discourse and the ideologies and structures it conveys can not only be recognized in actual text, but images, photos and drawings can also radiate them (Machin, 2013). Van Leeuwen (2004) even argues that speech acts should be renamed communicative acts, because the message someone tries to convey is rarely ever to be understood only by text when images are also involved. Even though sometimes the outcome of the analysis seems obvious in the first place, it is meaningful to know how the communication within the units of analysis is built (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In addition, posts directed to the specific topic of sexist and gendered power structures within language, will logically contain forms of language usage. However, not every post will have both language elements and relevant visual elements. This means that although all steps of CVA and CDA were completed in the analysis, not every step was applicable to all posts. If an element of analysis was not applicable, it was noted '... does not apply to this post'. The methods of analysis and the elements of interest herein are discussed in the following two subsections.

3.4.1 Critical Visual Analysis (CVA)

For the visual part of the analysis, a CVA was conducted, which systematically tries to make meaning out of visual content. This can be accomplished by making the implicit more explicit (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In order to do so, a number of steps were taken and several tools were used in order to try to obtain a reliable and valid outcome. The first step in CVA, as semiotic theory defines, is the *denotation* phase (Machin & Mays 2012). In this phase of the analysis, the question of 'Who and/or what is depicted here?' was kept in mind. In the denotation phase, a comprehensive and neutral description of the visual content was given (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 49). In denoting the feminist Instagram posts, all elements of the visual content were taken into account, including particular events, people, places and things. However, denoting is often carried out relatively basic and succinctly noted. This is due to the purely descriptive character (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The second phase, the *connotation* phase, was more interesting in making meaning of the possible underlying message of the visual content. In connoting, the descriptions of the denotation phase were given meaning by asking the question 'What ideas and values are communicated through

what is represented, and through the way in which it is represented?' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 50). In other words, a symbolic meaning is given to the descriptions of the denotation phase. In connotation, a few elements were considered. First, the potential value of used *attributes* was be considered (Machin & Mayr, 2012). It was helpful to take a closer look at objects, because they can radiate a symbolism that is not immediately apparent at first glance. After looking at attributes of the visual images, more in-depth attention was paid to the *setting* of the images (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For instance, some images were clearly portrayed in an office making the setting professional. Other images were displayed in an setting of demonstration or protest. All of these settings and the values, identities and actions they transmitted were important in making meaning of the visual. The last element that has been taken a closer look at in the connotation phase, is the usage of *salience* (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Salient features form the center of the image, by having drawn attention to them. This could be by highlighting a certain element of the composition and therefore stand out more. Machin and Mayr (2012) describe seven manners of creating salient features, including potent cultural symbols, size, color, tone, focus foregrounding and overlapping (pp. 54-55). Nothing can be left out of the description and symbolic meaning making of the image. Sometimes, an Instagram post image seems straight forward, however it is always important to stay critical.

3.4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In addition to CVA, for the textual part of the Instagram posts, CDA components of analysis are used to analyze what the meaning behind the linguistics and discourses of the Instagram posts were. The method is used in trying to reveal underlying themes in texts by 'exposing strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface but which may in fact be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 5). It is also a widely used method for analyzing power relations (McIntyre, Francis, & Chapman, 2012). As Bucholtz (2003) points out 'CDA aims to reveal connections between language, power, and ideology, describing the way power and dominance are produced and reproduced in social practice through discourse structures in interaction' (p. 13). The method makes use of semiotics to inquire and uncover how the textual content contains taken-for-granted power relations and ideologies that may not be manifest at first sight (Machin, 2013).

The first step of CDA that was taken to analyze the textual part of the Instagram posts, was looking closely at *word connotations* (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Here, attention was paid to words that were used and asking why specifically these words were used. This step assumes that language and words are a set of tools that people can make use of in the way they want to. The question therefore is why the person that made the post chose the words that they used, keeping in mind that they

could have used all the words available to them.

The second step of the analysis was to look at *overlexicalization* (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In this step of the analysis, words or synonyms of a particular word that are used in abundance were searched for. Overlexicalization often used as extra explanatory, over persuasion or when the image concerns a problematic situation (Machin & Mayr, 2012). An example found in the analysis was the use of 'male nurse' or 'female director' by @ruthiecapella.

The third step was to look for *suppressed words* in the text. This means that words that would be expected to be present in the text, were in fact absent (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The discourse of the text may appear different when certain words would have been added to the text.

The fourth step of CDA is to take a closer look at words that represent *structural oppositions*. This step assumes that words not only have their own meaning, but also indirectly imply other significations (Machin & Mayr, 2012). An example of this is the usage of words like 'young' and 'old'. If a person is called young, it automatically means that the person is not old, without being explicitly mentioned in the text. This was a meaningful matter within this thesis for everyday language use in which words are used that unconsciously carry certain meanings.

The fifth step in CDA is to have a closer look at the *lexical choices and genre*. In this last step of the analysis, the researcher searches for words or a combination of words that radiate a certain power in the form of hierarchy, professionalism or authority (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The audience here, is regarded submissive, which subsequently makes the creator of the text superior.

The texts that were analyzed for this thesis can be either within the picture or added as a description below the image of the Instagram post. Text in the description of the post was only taken into the analysis when it appeared relevant for the topic of sexist and gendered power relations within language. So, by means of the Multimodal aspect of the MCDA method that recognizes discourse in both text and visuals, the decision was made to use this particular method in the analysis of the Instagram posts, as they sometimes contained only text as well as text and visuals.

3.5 Research ethics and justification

To make sure this research is as valid as possible, meaning that everything is taken into account in the analysis of the Instagram posts so that the results will reflect the data (Noble & Smith, 2015), the mix of methods MCDA is applied to the posts. In this way, all aspects are included in order to come to the final results. This indicates both the visual and the textual elements. In order to create reliability, all of the steps of CVA and CDA have been followed to check whether these apply to the Instagram post. No element was left out of the analyses. In addition, reliability questions whether the analysis of the data is consistent and stable and if the final research is replicable (Rose & Johnson,

2020). With each Instagram post, exactly the same steps and processes need to be followed and all units of analysis must be approached with the same perspective. The greater the validity and reliability of the research, the greater the trustworthiness of the research will be (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Validity and reliability are often questioned in qualitative research, because of the subjective nature of the method. The analysis is more interpretive than in quantitative research, where results are based upon numbers and calculations (Golafshani, 2003).

However, the subjective character can be decreased by being reflexive of the 'views, experiences, and positions we bring with us into our research endeavor' (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 439). The limitation of a subjective view that cannot be completely neutralized because of natural bias, needs to be taken into account during the research by the researcher himself, as well as when others read the final research. Therefore, in qualitative research it is very important to make the position of the researcher regarding the data clear and known to the reading audience (Dodgson, 2019). A researcher can make this (unconscious) bias explicit by incorporating a reflexive component to the research method. According to Macbeth (2001), there are two types of reflexivity. Positional reflexivity can be referred to the ongoing process of being open about one's personal, ideological, emotional and pragmatic idea's and preferences (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Rose & Johnson, 2020). When a researcher makes these personal features explicit, the audience is aware of the subjectivity the researcher may have had during the research, even though this may have been unconscious. Next to the positional reflexivity of the researcher, a second kind of reflexivity is textual reflexivity. Textual reflexivity considers that audiences need to be reflexive of written texts as well. Most texts take an unavoidable positional stance in representing their authors subjective reality (Macbeth, 2001).

In this results section, the findings of the analysis of the 150 Instagram posts are discussed. They are thematically structured into four main sections, which all consist of two subsections. The first section focuses on *gender inequality in the workspace*. In this section, Instagram posts that focus on the topic of inequalities around employment naming, job offers and inequality in language on the work floor are discussed. The two subsections that belong to this section are 'gendered jobs and seeming progressiveness' and 'gender inequality on the work floor'. The second section includes *masculine terms as generics* that perpetuate gender inequality. The subsections that are discussed here are ''man' within a word as gender neutral' and 'masculine appellations as inclusive'. The third section includes posts that substantively criticize *assigning labels that reinforce gender stereotypes*. The subsections of this main section are divided into 'masculine women and feminine men' and 'feminine stereotyping and shaming the deviancies'. The last and fourth section covers *stereotypical expressions*. These kinds of expressions encompass the two subsections of 'placing the narrative on the victim' and 'masculine features as a symbol of dominance'.

Instagram accounts of posts are regularly cited in the results section to exemplify statements. Although some images are displayed in the results section itself, this was not efficient to do for all mentioned posts. Therefore, a list of all the mentioned and cited Instagram posts can the found in the appendix with their visual display, a description, if applicable, of the Instagram account and their reference.

4.1 Gender inequality in the workspace

4.1.1 Gendered jobs and seeming progressiveness

The analysis of the Instagram posts revealed that gender inequality in jobs is present at multiple levels. To start with, there are several Instagram posts that try to raise awareness about jobs that are normalized as masculine or feminine jobs. Jobs that are by language being directed as masculine often contain jobs that require courage, skill and (physical) power. To illustrate this, @lesleygraydonphd illustrates that professions or careers such as 'policeman', 'fireman', 'businessman' all contain the word 'man'. In addition, the title 'landlord' is the generic word for the owner and manager of a house. However, it is directed towards the specific gender of men by using the word 'lord' is stead of 'lady' or gender neutral language, as @targetlanguagetl mentions. Although these professions and job titles are of course also open to women, the name is now driven towards men and masculinity. This could make it less attractive for women to apply for this job. In addition, it could constitute a subconscious thought for women that they are more likely to look at

other jobs than professions that are aimed at men. Subsequently, when men and women are driven towards significant other jobs, even if it is unconscious, this could create gender segregation in the job market, meaning some professions will always have more men or women working in that specific work field (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2013). Ibarra (2004) supports this by discussing work-related choices that people make based on their identity. Individuals are not likely to deviate from the identity they have when making career choices. This would mean that, when a job or vacancy is aimed at a certain gender, someone with a different gender identity will be less likely to apply for it. This is, however, not only the case with jobs directed at masculinity and men, but also applies to women. @feminernl cites several professions that are specifically aimed at female participation. This is a Dutch Instagram account, so the translation in English might not always be directed towards a gender. However, it is important to point out that there is not only male dominance within professions, but also female dominance in professions. Jobs and job offers such as 'schoonmaakster' [cleaning lady], 'secretaresse' [secretary] and 'hostess' [hostess]. All three of these professions are directed towards women, which makes it more likely that people whose gender identity conforms with a man will not or less apply for these jobs than women (Ibarra, 2004).

Another criticism on gendered language that emerged throughout the Instagram posts was that people who practice a job that are not stereotypical feminine jobs, that are nevertheless practiced by women, regularly contain the word 'women' or 'female' in front of it, therefore being over lexicalized. In the image below, an Instagram post by @ruthiecapella is used as an example:

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, what is highlighted in this post, is what Litosseliti (2014) refers to as gratuitous modifiers. Mentioning someone's gender when talking about a profession draws more attention to a person's gender than the profession he or she practices. In this post, the visual aspect has been kept to a minimum. It's a pure black background with some text on it. It looks

like it is an image of a tweet. A presumable reason for illustrating the message in this way is to be purely educational and not wanting to distract from the gender-political message content of the post. This makes it an even stronger statement. The statement is made that professional practitioners who are women, too often are named with their gender. This can make it look like it is an exception that a woman practices this profession and therefore is special enough to mention. However, by mentioning it, gendered stereotypes are maintained and being reinforced. The Instagram posts reveal this matter by reversing the mainstream usage of the usual, naming a woman's gender, by stating the opposite gender, namely a man. As Jeong and Lee (2018) argue, this tactic is called mirroring and is used to expose how bizarre the initial judgement was.

A third way in which professions were portrayed as sexist in language by Instagram posts were the *seeming progressiveness*. The result of the semblance of progressiveness in the analyzed Instagram posts manifested itself in some institutions or actors pretending to be emancipated and obtaining equal positions for men and women, but by phrasing them, they actually perpetuate gender inequality. For instance, @zeikschrift posted an article from a Dutch news broadcaster, RTV Rijnmond, which was titles 'Havenbedrijf Rotterdam krijgt vrouw aan de top', which translates to 'Port of Rotterdam gets a woman at the top'. This news article is presumably meant to be progressive and inclusive, because the Port of Rotterdam is also starting to hire women in top positions, whereas formerly there were many men in top positions. However, by stating 'a woman' and not the name of this person, the gender inequality manifests itself even more clearly. The assumption that the Port is being proud and progressive by hiring a woman in a top position and therefore promoting her gender, makes it seem like the Port only hired the women to make themselves seem inclusive of every gender, instead of actually giving credit to the person and not only her gender. Naming a woman's gender instead of her name happens quite frequently, according to the Instagram post of @zeikschrift. Not only the RTV Rijnmond news article was guilty of putting gender above name, but Foodblog and Teletext also did this. For example, Foodblog wrote about a well-known Dutch supermarket chain that 'got a woman at the helm' and Teletext about 'Woman (69) Chancellor of Austria'. As a counterpart, @zeikschrift also posted a news item from a newspaper that wrote a report about a man who became editor-in-chief of a well-known magazine. Contrary to the news articles that mention women, the men's name was in fact mentioned in the article. Below, the mentioned thread of Instagram posts concerning gender naming is shown. The images are from different sources, therefore containing deviant visual aspects.

The point that a woman's name is not mentioned in a news article, but a man's name is, implies two findings. Firstly, a company flaunts the hiring of a woman, purely because of her gender and the emancipating appearance this gives. Naming a man's name, but not a woman's name, implies that it is more normal to take a man, so a name is sufficient and the gender does not have to be mentioned. So from an analytical point of view, naming gender is counterproductive and has exactly the opposite intention than the news article probably wanted to convey. In addition, although the message about the chancellor of Austria is a text-only message, the other two announcements of hired women do illustrate a photo of the women in question. This could reinforce the notion that individuals get an actual image of that the hired person is a woman. Although this is an assumption, it is apparently confirmed by the fact that the message about the hired man does not contain a photo. The image of gender is not as important in this post, as it is with the posts concerning hired women.

Second, knowing a man's identity is apparently more important than a woman's, since the women's names aren't mentioned in the headlines. Naming a name gives the person the recognition he or she deserves. The example of the Volkskrant illustrates by means of 'mirroring' how strange it is that it is apparently worth mentioning the name for men, but not for women.

4.1.2 Gender inequality on the work floor

The analysis of the Instagram posts showed that gender inequality does not only occur in the language of vacancies, job names and job announcements, but also in the workplace itself. In particular, the verbal communication between men and women and how people view this subject received much criticism. One of the common phenomena among feminist Instagram posts regarding language on the work floor was interpreting the same statement differently depending on the person's gender. Toffoletti and Starr (2016) explain that a person's gender is associated with certain expectations about that person, including in the language they use. They conducted research into work-life balance in relation to gender and language. Their inquiry showed that women's statements are more likely to be perceived and expected to be conservative and more related to the household part of their lives. Such work-life balance expectations are also made visible through particular Instagram posts of @feminist. They posted images of a man and a woman in the workplace saying the same sentence. Below the man and the woman is stated a value that, according to @feminist, is often assigned to the statement by people to whom it is said. The values below the man often refer to feeling positive, professional and helpful, while the values given to the same statement by a woman have to do with a negative, chaotic and unprofessional attitude. This reflects the statement that Sontag (1973) argues 'Language is the most intense and stubborn fortress of sexist assumptions' (p. 186), meaning that language bias is firmly rooted in our everyday language along with the sexist assumptions and values it involves. Two examples of posts about such sexist assumptions are given below.
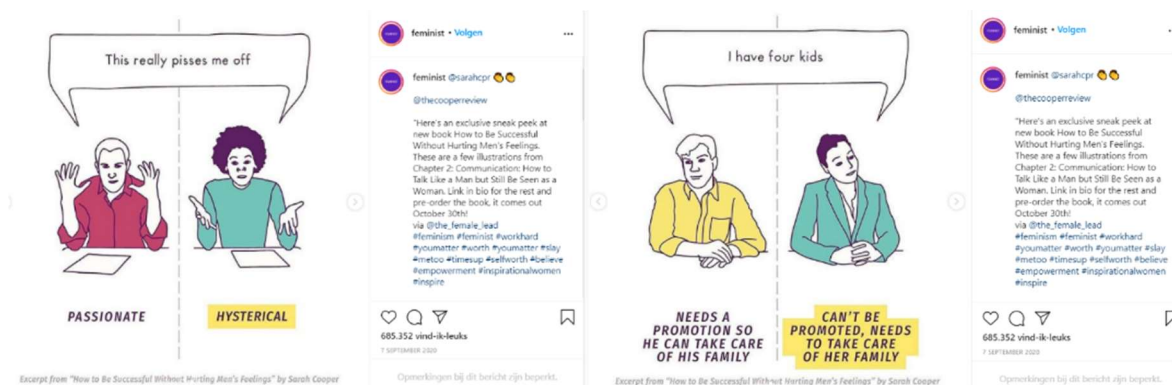
In the first image, a statement is made about someone that does not agree with something in the workplace, so the person is 'pissed off'. For a man, @feminist argues, this would mean that he is passionate about his job. This makes it seem that he is on a high level invested in and passionate

about his job and that he cares so much that a small inconvenience pisses him off. However, for the women the value 'hysterical' is assigned to the statement. This substantiates the idea that women are not taken seriously in the office and that they need to stay calm to conform to the norm and vision people have of them in the office. The second image portrays a man and a woman who both say they have four children. This forms an insight into their family life outside of work. The value given to the man considers the financial maintenance of a family. The man should therefore receive a promotion sooner, because he has a large family to support. Women, on the other hand, are given the value that it would be better for them to stop working because they must take care of children at home. The aspect of financially supporting a family is totally left out of account. These values reflect the traditional norms assigned to certain genders. As Sunderland (2004) notes, through language, social relations of power can be made legitimate through the idea of desirable and normative expressions. In other words, because society labels certain statements as masculine and feminine, these statements are considered desirable from these genders. Statements that are not in line with the expected language from that gender, are negatively charged by the audience. An example of this from research by Sa'ar (2007) is female police officers adapting masculine talk in their work environment as a mode of survival to conform to the norm of that profession. These stereotypical thoughts about potency, ability and how to speak create gender structures that can be harmful to women (Grabska, 2011).

The visual aspect of the two images does not give a stereotypical image about men and women. The attitude of the man and the woman is almost the same. In addition, the colors are also not traditional for both genders, i.e. pink for women and blue for men (Winter, 2015). The women wear a blue color and do not wear traditional women's clothing. This gives the impression that the image is neutral, so that the value given to the statement cannot depend on other factors. This makes the value of the statements more plausible and sincere.

4.2 Masculine terms as generics

4.2.1 'Man' within a word as gender neutral

The second theme that emerged in the MCDA is the use of masculine words as gender neutral. This first subsection looks at the word 'man' within a compound or -man within a word itself. The overall word is not used specifically for men, but is regarded as neutral and inclusive, such as the word 'freshman' referring to all first-year students no matter their gender, as @the_english_flows illustrates. However, there are feminist Instagram users who do not agree with this and try to raise awareness for this phenomenon by sharing posts about this matter. A few examples have already been stated in the previous subsection about professions that contain the word 'man' which in fact

are not only open to men, such as 'policeman', 'salesman' and 'fireman'. In addition to that, this section aims to highlight words or word compositions that contain 'man' thar do not have a relation to a profession, but are nevertheless used in other ways as a neutral term. Even the word 'man' or 'mankind' itself is referring to humanity, as @ldhumanresources posts about but is still directed at men, therefore taking men as the basis and standard and women as excluded or exception (Doyle, 1998). Posts that expose these kinds of words or compositions largely state the problematic gendered word and give neutral options for that word. These posts thus also have an educational character. @streednanindia posted such an image on Instagram to stimulate feminist activism aimed at reforming language. The post is added below.

The post mentions several words and compounds with 'man' in it that are generically used as inclusive for all genders, but are nevertheless directed at male dominance. The posts therefore give gender neutral alternatives that in fact can be used as all-embracing gender wise. For instance, 'manpower' is a compound that states the force that humans put into a task. While the word may have been derived from 'human power', it now emphasizes the word man. Although the word is used in doxa language and therefore no conscious thought is given to the gendered connotation of the word, people who are not consciously involved with feminist linguistics and sexist language use do not actively think about the gendered values the words carries with it. Therefore it remains a word that is used every day, but is not as neutral as the way it is used. The same applies to the term 'average man'. By taking a man as an average and not naming women in this, you can insinuate that women are not seen as average persons but that they are above or below the man. From a historical perspective, it is plausible that a woman is hierarchically classified under the man in this case (Zhu & Chang, 2019). To substantiate this, a post by @canceleverydaysexism showed a news article about a crewmember of a boat that fell into the water, stating there was a 'man overboard'. The caption of

this Instagram post was 'Phrases that subtly reinforce that a male is the neutral standard #manoverboard #everydaysexism #sexistlanguage'. This feminist post thus ratified the argument that men and masculinity are taken as the frame of reference.

However, the post of @streednanindia added above also states words that not only relate to male dominance, but also relate to the binary gender system, meaning words which pertain to a man or woman (Monro, 2019). For these kinds of words, which are commonly always used in a gendered way, alternatives are provided as well. This means that the post not only pays attention to sexist language that puts one gender above another, but advocates gender neutral language in which words do not relate to gender at all. Examples of generics that in the Instagram posts are not specifically aimed towards masculinity or femininity, are words such as 'husband/wife' with the alternative 'spouse' or 'brother/sister' with the alternative 'sibling'. In these forms, no gender is emphasized.

4.2.2 Masculine appellations as inclusive

Next to compounds which contain 'man' in them, masculine words also manifest themselves in greeting and naming a person or group. As in the previous subsection, these words are used in a generic way to address a person or a group, but are nevertheless androcentric (Tarif, 2015). For instance, the greeting 'hey guys' when someone approaches a group is normalized language in today's society. However, this greeting can also be used for a gender mixed group and even for a group of women. Again, this brings to light that masculine terms are standardized in our everyday language. The mirroring tactic can be used to consider whether this is really steered in one direction, the male direction. If one were to reverse this greeting, 'hey girls' would be said to a mixed group or even a group of men. Although 'hey girls' is a commonly used greeting, it is rarely if ever used to address a non-women group. This shows that the masculine form of the greeting is standardized as a universal greeting, but the feminine form is used specifically for women only. This indicates that men are regarded as an all-inclusive term and therefore are taken as the basis and women as an exception. Several feminist activist posts on Instagram address this issue. This can be done in multiple ways. Some posts only mention the issue, like @transyogateacher does in the Instagram post below.

Below the statement, a rainbow is shown which is the symbol of the LGBTQ+ community. As Bitterman (2021) explains: 'Shades of the rainbow umbrella denote various identities of individuals: gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans+, queer, questioning, intersex, allies, and others' (p. 4). Stating that 'You guys' is not gender neutral with the rainbow flag beneath it connotes that this statement is challenging the patriarchal status quo in language which takes androcentric language as the basis. @transyogateacher pays negative attention to masculine language as gender-inclusive in his post, therefore connoting that he wants to make this kind of gender directed language vanish from society's taken-for-granted discourse. As the rainbow flag stands for inclusiveness as well, this symbol implicitly advocates gender neutral language, something the LGBTQ+ community and its supporters of this have been pleading for quite some time (Quinn et al., 2015). @bisexual_laalaa posted, in addition to using 'guys' as a form of greeting for a group, that the word 'dude' was used in the same way to a non-men-only crowd. Multiple Instagram posts dedicated time to creating awareness about this gendered weighted word as well. @bisexual_laalaa for instance argued that 'Dude is not a gender neutral term'. The post also explained that it can take a lot of time to adjust learning to use new words in one's usual language, but that it nevertheless is important to do so if people do not want to misuse terms for all genders and take the male as center anymore. This elaborative Instagram post supports what Anderson (2011) argues about language, namely that the blind acceptance of gendered language and sexist language such as 'guys' as normal and inclusive, can create cultural assumptions that have become and remain deeply rooted in the doxa language of society. This in turn camouflages the negative effects of it for the suppressed groups. However, the analysis also revealed a post that did describe the term 'dude' as inclusive, instead of criticizing the usage of the word. Instead, the image of the Instagram post read, 'We're all dudes'. The post is pictured below.

The image is a contains a plain text with a statement on it. This attracts all of the attention to the statement and no distractions are involved. Although the image does encounter the word 'dude' as a masculine word that is used for all genders, it is not in line with the previous Instagram posts that resist the usage of this word. On the contrary, this post makes the statement that the word can be used for everyone. However, this is not in the masculine sense of the word, but @rachel.riot.slytherin argues that the word is gender neutral. Although it is very likely that she knows that the word is initially used for men, she wants to make clear that 'we're all dudes', meaning everyone can be a dude. The connotation of the word dude here can be viewed as a synonym for 'tough' or 'cool', dropping the gendered weight of the word. The post can be seen as an opposition to the stricter form of feminism in which androcentric and gendered language is dealt with harshly.

Next to only addressing the issue of masculine appellations as gender inclusive, there are multiple feministic Instagram posts that have a more educative nature and provide alternatives for the words, as the 'man' compounds posts in the previous subsection frequently did as well. These posts often were loaded with alternative terms to show that there are many other ways to address a group of people than using a gendered word. A few alternatives that were frequently mentioned are 'y'all', 'folks' or 'friends'. All these words do not have a gendered or sexist meaning and can be used for everyone without excluding a certain group of gender. Two examples by @twopiersconsult and @uafshcc of such inclusive Instagram posts are pictured below. Both of these posts are very crowded with colorful words that represent gender neutral appellations. In the post of @uafshcc, the words are pictured in a speech bubble, which reinforces the notion that those words should be used more in everyday speech.

4.3 Assigning labels that reinforce gender stereotypes

Different terms are used in everyday language. This also applies to terms that put a so-called label on someone. This can be because of a character trait that one finds suitable for someone or because of an action that someone performs. These labels are often different for men than for women, with women often portrayed in a more negative light (Black et al., 2019). Several examples encompass the use of semantic derogation, which is mentioned in the theoretical framework as labels that are initially neutral, but in a certain way is usage have a negative connotation to them (Litosseliti, 2014). In addition, such labels are also present in often used sayings or proverbs, which are more and more starting to get questioned for their stereotyping of genders (Banerjee & Lintern, 2000). Both forms of label use are discussed in the subsections below illustrated by examples from the analysis.

4.3.1 Masculine women and feminine men

The first type of labeling that emerged from the analysis was the negative assessment of women who behave (too) masculine according to the norm and men who behave (too) feminine according to the norm. The first form of this was by far the most common among the units of analysis. The word 'bossy' for a woman who is too dominant and assertive and the refuting of this term by feminists manifested the most in the Instagram posts. This negative labeling of women comes from discourses on men and women and the hegemonic ideas on how they should behave and act (Atkins & Vicars, 2016). These expectations are especially strong in people's career life. Traditionally, very different labels have been attached to professions that people perform and the attitude they adopt in doing so among men and women (Black et al., 2019). The overall expectation for someone who holds a higher management position is to adopt certain techniques. These management techniques all have their roots embedded in paternalistic discourse of masculinism (Atkins & Vicars, 2016). This means that a woman is expected to perform more masculine if she holds

a higher position in the workspace. However, men and women performing the same kind of actions, can get different values assigned to them. For example, the overall image of a successful men is one that is perceived as 'strong, ambitious, determined and dominant', but in contrast, the overall image of a successful women in the workplace is mostly perceived as bitchy, demanding and cold (Simon & Hoyt, 2019). The different kinds of values that are given to a woman that is being too masculine to adjust to the stereotype of feminine submissiveness thus get labelled negatively. Burgess and Borgida (1999) share this idea by stating that women who ''violate'' the shared beliefs about how they should behave are more likely to be discriminated against. In this case, women who perform leadership traits, are violating the expectation of them being purely altruistic and helping others instead of voicing their own thoughts (Heilman & Chen, 2005). It is likely that these negative labels are mainly perpetuated by men, because they are the ones who benefit from them (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). The label 'Bossy' can be viewed upon as a discriminating term, eliminating women who are ''too assertive'' from higher positions. A feminist Instagram post of @thisgirlcanbox is pictured below as an example of criticism on this subject.

The woman is holding the notebook and has a strong posture. This resembles an attitude that might be called 'bossy' from a stereotypical point of view. The school notebook implies the symbolic value of learning something. The posts could therefore be considered as the strong appearing woman wanting to teach young women that it's okay to be considered strong and not to be held back by traditional norms. The post explicitly resembles the problematic phenomenon that the previous stated literature argued. The trait of 'leadership skills' would be labeled differently among men and women is what the post is connoting. Men would probably get the label 'charismatic' while women would get the label 'bossy'. As Tarif (2015) mentions in her article, feminine forms of labels within language are often connected to negative connotations. This can also be derived from the Instagram

image. 'Leadership skill' is basically a neutral character attitude that someone can act on, however a woman gets a negative value attached to it when she possesses it. Another Instagram post supports this idea of women that are by default seen as less competent and talented and when they are accomplishing an act successfully, it's seen as masculine because to succeed in something is per definition (unconsciously) viewed upon as masculine. This Instagram post of @spookyboobs_art states that the biggest compliment a woman could get back in the day was ''You paint like a man''. In this post, a good painter is by default a man, so if a woman excels in painting, she paints 'like a man' instead of preserving her own gender and getting the acknowledgement that she deserves herself.

There are various other ways in which the label of women being 'bossy' are counteracted amongst Instagram feminism. One of the posts featured two images of a strong looking woman holding a sign with 'Bossy' on it in front of her. This is meant to be a kind of mugshot with bossy labeled as an indictment of her. The other image showed a threesome explanation of the fictitious charge of being bossy. These three qualities are all associated with a leadership position. The three 'charges' state: 'Being a leader', 'taking initiative' and 'voicing your opinion'. The two images posted by @spookyboobs_art are presented below.

The three charges are all contrary to the expected pattern of behavior of women. Historically, society sees women as submissive beings who follow a man and do not express their own opinions (Zhu & Chang, 2019). Certainly not if these conflict with current policy. The punishment that the woman receives for showing initiative by making her voice heard and therefore possibly be seen as a leader, is being labeled as bossy. This negative connotation can make it hard for women to reach higher positions within their career as well as in their social life. In addition, the visualization of the label of bossiness that is being used as a charge against a woman, could imply how harsh it hits women and how powerless a woman becomes when she is labeled like this. Even though women are taking

chances to emancipating further, these labels rigorously reinforce masculine dominance. The combination of women having to obtain masculine behavioral practices to be taken seriously in top position (Atkins & Vicars, 2016), but nevertheless get labeled negatively as they perform this way is a vicious circle that makes it much more difficult for a woman to receive equal treatment as men in the workplace. In addition to this post which rather outlines a situation, there are also more descriptive posts. Alice (2019) posted an Instagram post with feminist content in the form of a poem. In it she described that the label of being bossy for women is not correct and that it is used to belittle girls and women when they speak their mind. She also mentions that women expressing themselves openly should not be a taboo. The last four phrases of the poem are 'Don't call me bossy if I chose to speak my mind, what I think is valid so please don't be unkind' (Alice, 2019).

Another notable post portrayed a recently released term for which only a feminine form exists. The term 'Karen' is used for women who act privileged and bossy towards fellow human beings. The term is so recent that no academic literature has been written about it. A common phrase a 'Karen' would say is 'I want to speak to the manager' when an employee has already helped her. According to recent social media, this shows that a 'Karen' is behaving privileged. While there is little disagreement about the definition of the term and whether such 'Karens' exist, @thrivewellbeingcentre criticizes the fact that there is no masculine form for such a privileged, meddlesome type.

In the feministic post, two people with a horn are shown stating 'If there is a ''Karen'' … … there is also a ''Ken''. Ken in this case is introduced as the masculine form of a Karen. The post attempts to draw attention to the fact that while there is now some unanimity about the use of 'Karen', there is undoubtedly a male form of such a person. Until now, this has received little or no attention. This is probably due to the blind assumption that a 'Karen' is a type, but not necessarily that this type is

always a woman. The suppression phase of the MCDA made this very clear, because in this case, the posts already detected that there is unconscious suppression of the male term within language. To be more explicit, the term has not yet been invented and the post gives an example of a term that can be used in the future. In addition, the description of the post states that the naming of Karen is a result of sexism and the predicament of women who stand up for themselves. This is not to say that a so-called Karen is not rude and finds herself in a position of privilege, but @thrivewellbeingcentre does want to show that if a man were to display these characteristics, a much more positive label would be assigned to the person. This again substantiates the notion that women get assigned more negative connotations to their assertive behavior than men would get (Tarif, 2015).

Although most Instagram posts are about women who display stereotypical male characteristics and are therefore given a negative label, there was also a single post about men who display stereotypical female (appearance) characteristics. In her post, @rachaellhouse paid attention to the term 'manbun', which refers to men with relatively long hair who wear it in a bun. She addressed the term as erroneous gendered language and stated that instead society should address the hairstyle as just a bun. The Instagram post is pictured below.

The word manbun is a form of sexist language stating that a 'neutral bun' is for women and if a man wears it, it becomes a 'manbun'. In this case, perhaps unintentionally, the basic and neutral form of the hairstyle is placed in a feminine perspective. This is reinforces by the pink color which is overwhelmingly used within the post. The background, drawings and shirt off the displayed man are all pink, symbolizing femineity. It could be argued that the word 'bun' is a femicentric word, which is the opposite of androcentric language (Magenya, 2020). However, in androcentric language, the word 'man' or a masculine word is part of the composition. With the word bun, that would mean that the initial word would be 'woman's bun'. Hence, the word bun is a relatively neutral femicentric

word. However, the subconscious connotation of the word does mean that the hairstyle is aimed at women and that if a man wears it, an addition is added to prove this. As Guéguen (2015) argues, wearing a hair bun is associated with femininity. The poster of the message therefore pleads for a gender neutral use of the word hair bun, instead of making it gender specific to who wears the bun.

4.3.2 Feminine stereotyping and shaming the deviancies

This subsection includes feminist Instagram posts that sometimes unknowingly and unintentionally perpetuate the traditional stereotype about women. In addition, the analysis also found that many words and expressions are used against women when they do not confirm such traditional customs, but behave differently than the expected norm. This resembles the use of 'bossy' in the previous subsection, but in this section the terms are not based on traditional masculine character traits. One of these stereotypical expressions towards girls or women is to call them 'Young lady', as @feministwarrior_ argues in her post. The posts has an educational character since it purely contains text causing there to be no distractions from what the poster is trying to make clear.

The post states that boys and girls are taught different behavioral manners from the time of their upbringing and are treated differently according to them. Unconsciously, most parents are teaching their children the stereotypical norms and values that belong to that gender, like Winter (2015) also stated with the colors pink for biological girls and blue for biological boys. Therefore, it could be that children get overly simplified perceptions of what representation of boys and girls look like and the characteristics that they should obtain (Banerjee & Lintern, 2000). This could lead to rigid opinions about different genders and the failure of children to look beyond this categorical distinction of

stereotypical expectations (Banerjee & Lintern, 2000). As the Instagram post of @feministwarrior_ argues, for boys this would mean that they are allowed to do what they want due to the fact that they are a boy and for girls the same would mean that they have certain rules that they have to follow and obey. The term 'young lady', according to the post, implies that girls should behave from an early age on as adult women should act according to traditional standards. They have restrictions that they have to follow because they are a 'young woman'. For boys, on the other hand, the statement 'boys will be boys' is often used when they do something irresponsible (Banerjee & Lintern, 2000). This statement is discussed more thoroughly in the next subsection. The post of @feministwarrior_ states that they are taught from an early age that it matters less if they don't follow the rules. This shows that the gendered and sexist language that adult people use, is embedded in the language that is taught to children and youngsters from an early age on. This could be limiting to what women in their lives perceive as their restrictive frame of behavior. Through these feminist posts, an attempt is made to create more awareness about this kind of language use. For instance, a post by @revoltinggirls.ie depicted a birthday cake with the statement 'Young lady is not my name'. The post thus explicated that women do not want to be called 'young lady' but would rather have people just saying their names instead of labelling them. In the same vein as 'young lady' as being a semantic derogation as well, the analysis showed that 'drama queen' is also a widely used label for women. The term is mainly used for women whom society considers to be appalling. The compound which constitutes 'queen' makes the word femicentric, which means that in this word, women are considered the base. However, because the word has a negative connotation on expressing women's emotions, this word also shines a negative light on women in general. The usage of this term might lead or already have led to taken-for-granted perceptions about women in general that are over time seen as undisputed truths (Byrne & Swords, 2015). This places the position of women as subjects in discourse, therefore making discourse an agent of construction (Wetherell, 1998). The term drama queen is presented as a wallpaper in the Instagram post with no further explanation. However, it was posted by @spookyboobs_art, which assigns itself as a 'feminist collaboration' account. The post thus has a feminist activist background. In this case, it is likely that the purpose of the post is to counter discrimination based on stereotypical perceptions. Women are, amongst other things, traditionally expected to be 'warm', 'differential' and 'nice' (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). A woman that is (wrongly) considered to be hypersensitive by society, 'violates' these expectations and thus is likely to be negatively labelled. An Instagram post by the Dutch account @feminernl showed how women would be labelled and how men would be labelled if they showed the same emotion or performed an action. The post was titled 'Meten met twee maten', which translates to 'measuring with two different measurements'. When women are acting cold or distant, according to the post they would be labelled as an 'Ice queen' implying that she is an emotionless

cold-hearted person. However, when a man would act the same, he would be labelled as 'Keeping it cool' implying that the man is not bothered and is acting just doing his own thing. The man gets a neutral, even quite positive label assigned while the woman gets a negative label assigned. This again substantiated the argument that women are discriminated against if they do not act as is expected from them (Burgess & Borgida, 1999).

Another kind of feminine stereotyping and the assignment of labels to them that emerges from the analysis is making a compliment to a woman, but implicitly shaming other women for not possessing such skills, features of appearances. A thread of posts by @supervulgar regarding this kind of labelling and implicit shaming is depicted below.
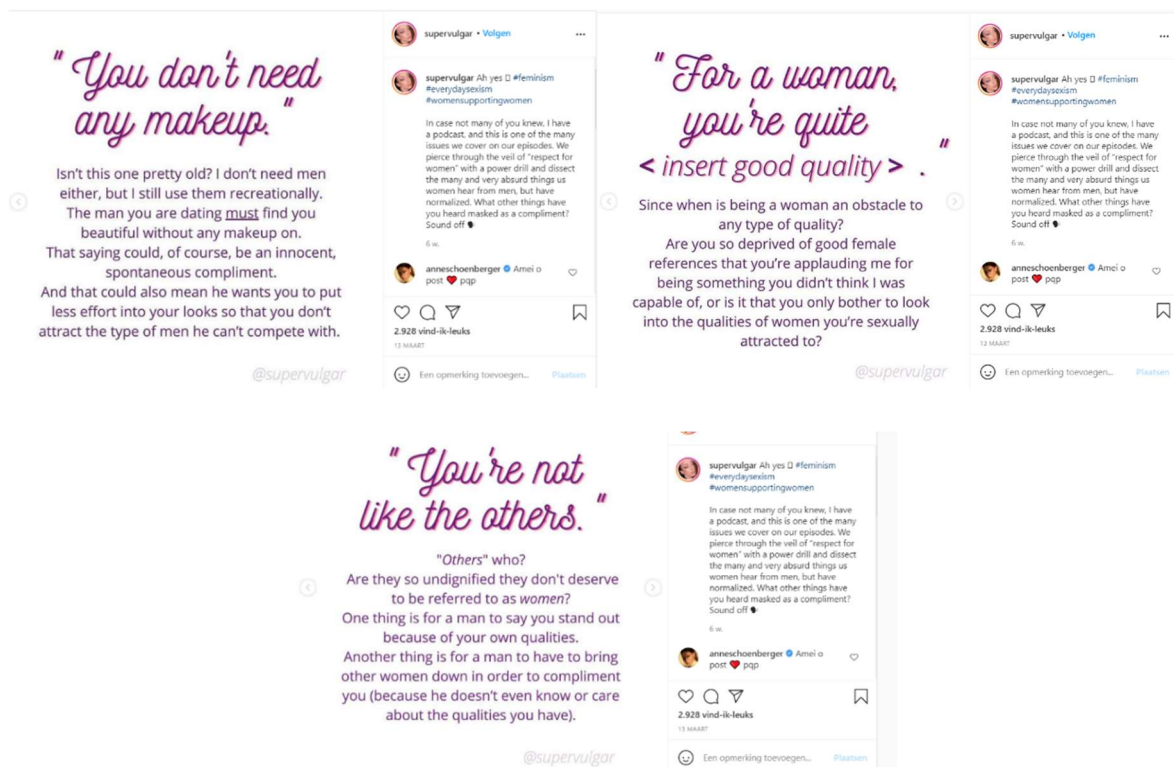
All of the three images are meant as a compliment for a woman by man. The pink color of the text symbolizes a sarcastic feminine touch to the often-used statements of the posts. They try to show that men often mean these statements as something positive, but that these ''compliments'' actually both reinforce stereotypes and implicitly negatively label other women. For instance, the post that states 'For a women you're quite <insert good quality>' is by default assuming that women are not capable of possessing such a quality and that the woman they are speaking to is an exception in this field. By mentioning gender, the compliment becomes sexist in a way that it is only sincere to the

amount of that gender. For instance, it could be interpreted that the woman who is spoken to is only good at the quality for a woman, but when compared to a man, the value of the complement expires. Below the masculine compliments of the three images is an explanation as to why this cannot be seen as a compliment. The post is probably not meant for men only per se, but for anyone who is not aware of the underlying connotation of these statements. It is possible that also women still see these statements as a compliment, but that @supervulgar wants to create awareness about this matter that making these statements or accepting these statements puts a negative label on other women. A post by @sonofgoddess1207 highlighted the same issue, but provided alternatives for these compliments as well. The post also mentioned the sexist compliment of 'You're really good at … for a girl' which is similar to the compliment of the post from @supervulgar. The alternative to give a non-sexist compliment, according to the post is 'You're really good at …'. By just leaving out the gender, the sentence becomes instantly more appealing as a sincere compliment.

4.4 Stereotypical expressions

4.4.1 Placing the narrative on the victim

This subsection includes the Instagram posts section of the analysis that focused on sayings or common statements that have a sexist nature. One of the most prevalent sexist sayings that manifested throughout the analyses feminist posts was 'Boys will be boys'. This statement is already briefly discussed in the subsection on female stereotyping and the shaming of deviations. The statement derives from laddish culture, which refers to boys who are not willing to put effort in studying, because they do not think it's cool (Van Houtte et al., 2019). As mentioned earlier, boys learn from a young age that they have freedom as to where girls learn more about their restrictions (Banerjee & Lintern, 2000). This statement is in line with the angle from which feminist activist posts on Instagram approach this statement. Most of the Instagram posts show the statement 'Boys will be boys' in a certain setting, but with a line through the sentence, signifying that the saying should be stated differently in order to be correct. An example from a post of @feminist criticizing the statement, is depicted below.

The image shows the initial statement in red in a big bold font on a male's chest. The choice for depicting the statement and adjustment of the statement on a male chest, can imply two things. First, it can mean that the men initially had the adage 'Boys will be boys' on this chest as an appearance of male immunity to make a statement and afterwards a feminist accommodated the statement by crossing out a part and adjusting it. This implies that men generally agree with the statement being used. Second, it could imply that the men wrote the entire text himself, therefore standing up to sexist language and trying to be a figurehead to actively challenge such language even if it does not affect you.

The statement connotes the idea that it is a widely used statement that is true just because of the way it is portrayed. However, the last two words are crossed out. Instead of these words, an alternative for the saying is provided. The alternative is directed towards not taking for granted actions of abuse under the excuse of 'Boys will be boys'. They need to be accountable and specifically hold each other accountable, instead of hiding behind the statement. The post claimed that abuse is normalized by society and that the statement is an excuse for boys to perform these kinds of acts. This may stem from men often feeling more overconfident than women (Barber & Odean, 2001). In addition, as Grant (2004) argues, when boys are still quite young, gender norms are not taught strictly yet and are quite fluid. However, from around the age of ten to twelve, boys are taught more and more to inherit masculine norms. From that point on, leadership is seen as a requirement for their behavior. Being too emotional and clingy is seen as an act of being sissy (Grant, 2004). In addition, from this age on they are very influenced by their friends, whose influence plays a central role in 'inculcating the tenets of masculinity' (p. 848). The statement in the Instagram post is thus not only directed at boys who will be held accountable, but also that boys will hold *each other* accountable. This emphasis probably relies on the influence that male peers have on each other, which would mean that if the culture of abuse changes among masculine groups, it will have a strong effect on all group members. In line with this argument

Another category of feminist Instagram posts that criticize sexist sayings can be considered an addition or response to the 'Boys will be boys' category. This category does not provide an

alternative to this saying. It rather refers to often used sayings about actions of (sexual) abuse towards women as @feminist mentioned in her post. The content relates to many sayings that lay the narrative on women, while the problem lies with the actions of rape and abuse of men. An example of this is the phrase that is often said to parents 'Protect your daughter'. The Instagram posts highlight that this is a commonly used phrase that has become a norm in language. Parents generally have a greater need to protect their daughter than their son, because they are presumably more vulnerable. Boys are freer in this. The masculine gender role stimulates boys to be more dominant and aggressive and that girls are inferior to them (Murnen et al., 2002). This relative freedom of boys thus in turn results in girls having to be more protected against them. This is exactly what the Instagram posts try to address. They try to rephrase the typical saying that people should protect their daughters and put the narrative where the problem lies, namely boys or men that perform the acts of violence or abuse. Therefore, Instagram posts about this instance often showed reconstructions of the saying as illustrated below.

In most countries where abuse and rape are strongly prevalent, women possess less authority and are less powerful and men are more encourages to perform a 'macho personality' (Murnen et al., 2002, p. 360). In addition, traditional gender roles are often more strongly taught, which means that encourage men to be more violent and women to be more passive. This is what the Instagram post of @feminist is meaning to refute. It shows a sign during a protest or demonstration with an initial statement and a statement that the carrier thinks it should actually be rephrased to. This as well shows the activism side of the Instagram post, being a photo presumably taken during an physical feminist march. Therefore, it might even be considered as a bridge between online feminist activism and physical, real-life feminist activism.

The statement implies that boys shouldn't be taught that they have to be more dominant or

be violent in order to be masculine. If boys are taught that it is not normal to treat women as if they are inferior, but that they should have equal respect for another, the problem does not arise in the first place. The post thus pleads for a preventive approach instead of the repressive approach now taken. Other Instagram posts by @feminisme.nl highlights the same topic included for instance a wall painting of a woman holding up a sign that reads 'Don't tell women what to wear, tell men not to rape'. This refers to accusing women for wearing certain clothes and therefore 'asking for it'. Research by Fraser (2015) shows that in frequent cases of sexual assault or rape, men used the excuse that she asked for it because of how she behaved or how she dressed. A feminist post by @thecatcallcollective approaching the same topic featured an image of a block of text that reads 'I wish men spent more time telling other men to stop being predators instead of telling women to ''be safe outchea/buy a weapon''. This again puts the onus on on women for an act done by a man and addresses that men instead should hold each other accountable for their action. The feminist content of these Instagram posts tries to address this explicitly.

4.4.2 Masculine features as a symbol of dominance

As frequently stated previously in this thesis, traditional masculinity entails being dominant, strong and acting like a born leader. Because society's image of a man is viewed upon as a figurehead for these characteristics, this also has consequences. What follows is that male characteristics, both traditionally seen as their inner and outer appearance, are associated with these values. Many feminist Instagram posts address this situation. In the first part of this subsection, Instagram posts that challenge stereotypical expressions about the masculine physical appearance are discussed. A common phrase mentioned in the analyzed posts, such as @bendr.lk's post was 'Grow a pair' which refers to growing a pair of male testicles. Linstead and Maréchal (2015) did research on the topic of male genitals and hegemonic ideas of masculinity that are associated with them by language. They state that the male penis is the most used metaphor that is being associated with masculine power and control, but that other parts of the male genitalia are used as well as an alternative for this same idea of strength and power. A synonym used for 'Grow a pair' is 'show some balls', which implies the same association (Karioris & Allan, 2017). On the contrary, feminine words are associated with cowardness, such as 'pussy' (Martín, 2011). The masculine association historically stems from the time of Imperial Rome. Here, male genitalia were considered having the power to procreate and perpetuate humanity and civilization. This involved a great responsibility. The association with perceiving male genitalia as hegemonically dominant and powerful thus is probably rooted in this period of time (Linstead and Maréchal, 2015). The post of @bendr.lk that addresses this issue is depicted below.

The Instagram post questions the usage of the male scrotum as a synonym for toughness or assertiveness. This is reinforcing gender role stereotypes. However, the pink background, which takes up much of the image, is traditionally more directed at women instead of men. The scrotum, other hand, is depicted blue, which might lean towards masculine colors. The combination of these bright colors could be purely used to draw attention because they stand out against each other, but their potential connotation should be taken into account as well.

In addition, this post should not be viewed upon from one kind of perspective. Using these allegedly synonyms could also be potentially harmful to men, because they are constantly expected to live up to the masculinity stereotype of exuding dominance, strength and charisma. The Instagram post argues that it is a sexist way of approaching an act of emotion and with this post implies that we should not use this kind of metaphor anymore. On the other hand, @bendr.lk also posted an image of a male penis, stating 'Don't be a dick!'. This statement disproves the notion that all male appearances are associated with dominance and strength. It links a negative association to the male phallus, as the word 'dick' is used in this sentence for someone who is not behaving pleasantly or desirable. Another common phrase that turned out to receive a lot of criticism while doing the analysis is 'Man up', which is for instance illustrated by @fem.power.ment and @onefunnygook. This is often said in the English language when someone wants to indicate that another person should not be too vulnerable or emotional, which are characteristics that are stereotypically linked to a feminine gender role. According to masculine gender norms, men should suppress their emotions well and it is perceived as weak when they show too much emotion. Not showing emotions is therefore associated with masculinity. Hence the expression 'Man up'. This sentence reaffirms and reinforces the traditional norms that men 'should possess' and in turn which women do not possess.

5. Conclusion and discussion

5.1 Main findings

The purpose of this thesis was to provide an answer to the developed research question: '*How do feminist Instagram users discursively challenge the sexist and gendered power structures within language on Instagram*?'. By conducting a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis among 150 collected Instagram posts, a well-considered answer can be formulated. I conclude that feminist Instagram users discursively challenge the sexist and gendered structures within language, overall by exposing, criticizing and rephrasing existing language structures and educating the audience on alternatives that can be incorporated as substitutes. On Instagram, this is performed through four main themes.

The first theme that is elaborated on is *gender inequality in the workspace*. The theme addresses male dominance in both the job application process and in the workplace itself. This includes revealing and refuting gendered jobs and seeming progressiveness of companies as well as exposing gender inequality on the work floor. The second theme, which flowed from the analysis and helped answering the research question is *masculine terms as generics*. This theme addresses taken-for-granted masculine words as if they are neutral. This includes terms with 'man' within the word as gender neutral and masculine appellations as inclusive, such as the use of 'hey guys' or 'dude' to greet a group of people who are not necessarily exclusively men. The third theme that emerged was a*ssigning labels that reinforce gender stereotypes*. These stereotypes of gender are consciously or unconsciously maintained by the language we use. This can be maintained by making an issue of masculine women and feminine men or by offending them. In addition, it can also work the other way around by zooming in on an affirming stereotypical character trait of a gender, so that this is seen as a problem if it does not correspond with what is expected. The fourth and last theme that emerges from the analysis, which helped to answer the research question is the use of *stereotypical expressions*, which preserve the inequal gender status-quo. The feminist Instagram posts showed that certain statements are deeply ingrained in our language, so that people no longer realize that they are sometimes sexist and gendered. This was challenged by posts that shred light on placing the narrative on the victim and exposing how some masculine features can serve as a symbol of dominance.

All these themes together substantiate the basis on which feminist Instagram users posts are exposing, criticizing and rephrasing existing language structures and educate the audience on alternatives that can be incorporated as substitutes. They form angles that are highlighted as problematic language areas and in which Instagram users want to make change.

5.2 Discussion

Many of the Instagram posts elaborated further on the concepts that are highlighted in the theoretical framework. Components of the gender bias as an abstract system and language as potentially sexist discourse paradigm recurred frequently, such as gratuitous modifiers, semantic derogation and asymmetrically gendered language. These were criticized and gender neutrally corrected within many of the Instagram posts. The understanding of the components of the paradigm was also expanded through the Instagram posts in that they were applied in other ways than initially intended, but still retained the same meaning. An example of this is the gratuitous modifiers that were intended by Litosseliti (2014) to unintentionally diminish someone's status by including gender. However, posts like the 'man bun' revealed that gratuitous modifiers are not only employed when status in involved, but appearance as well. Next to that, the gender construct of a woman portrayed by society, as discussed in previous literature, as submissive, docile and weak is both reflected in the Instagram posts as well as refuted afterwards through labeling. For example, the posts present how a woman that does not conform to these expected standards is viewed upon. As this is not in line with the prevailing norms, this is considered rebellious and therefore the woman is assigned a label that holds semantic derogative values. However, because of the feminist nature of these Instagram posts, they often not just expose, but also refute these restricted ideologies through elaborative explanations and in addition incentivize young women not to care about these labels. Two of the four examples of semantic derogation which were mentioned in the theoretical framework, occurred within the sample, such as 'lady' in the compound of 'young lady' and 'queen' in 'dramaqueen' and 'icequeen'.

Almost all of the posts had an underlying educational purpose. This forms the bridge to contextualizing and incorporating the posts into everyday life. The Instagram posts initially expose language, but mostly want to bring about actual change. By not only indicating that a phenomenon is incorrect and problematic, but also providing background information and possible alternatives so that these can be incorporated into language in the physical world, the Instagram posts gain a different dimension. An example of this was the, both in theory and results, commonly encountered topic of rape and assault. Although the literature and the Instagram posts both focus on discourse, the subject is nevertheless discussed from different perspectives. Existing literature pays particular attention to discourse on women and how their way of interacting and communicating can be an excuse for men to sexually assault her. However, the Instagram posts focus particularly on rape topics and statements that might seem logical to approach from the male perspective, but are refuted by changing the narrative. This form of the mirroring tactic makes it noticeable how certain perspectives illustrate the woman as a person who is responsible for the actions that a man does to her. So, creating awareness about a topic that is so deeply rooted in our structures of expression of

language starts with merely exposing that it exists and that many words or expressions are not as neutral or innocent as they may appear is the first step to actual change. However, providing the activist perspective and educational background that was incorporated in all of the feminist Instagram posts, may cause people to actually consider changing the way in which they verbally communicate to make it more neutral and accurate.

The representation of the way language is criticized in this thesis can be applied to many scopes of society. In the first place, language learning needs to be adapted in the education phase of children by their parents from the day they learn to speak. Girls mainly learn restrictions at a young age, while boys mainly are taught to demand freedom. According to the Instagram posts, this results in negative labeling when a girl or woman does not meet these standards at a later age. In addition, it also creates narratives for men as an excuse to serve abusive behavior or that give women responsibility for the actions of men. When this is addressed from an early age on and that men and women are consciously taught that they have the same rights and values, language can slowly but surely be partially changed retroactively so that it eventually no longer stands in the way of the emancipation of women. In addition, an essential place where language and the norms and values of interaction are learned is school. Children are taught language at school from the day they attend. During these language lessons children learn words, the compositions of sentences and proverbs. The relationships between children themselves and how they behave in school is also important in the creation of common language, in terms of what is appropriate and what not. When awareness about the topic of gender inequality within language is raised through feminist activism, it can be applied by teachers in school. Certain sayings can be reformed or disregarded, so that they will eventually change or even completely disappear. Text to these levels, as shown by the analysis of the Instagram posts, it is reccomended to pay more attention to the restructuring of language on occupational level. Both in the formulation of job names and in the language used in the workplace and how this language is interpreted, sexist and gender structures are hidden that result in a power disbalance in favor of male dominance. Employers could pay more attention to addressing this discrepancy in the form of awareness training and role plays. If there is more awareness on all these levels about language and what unequal power relations it can lead to, we can work towards a common neutral language in which no one is advantaged or disadvantaged.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

This thesis has attempted to provide an extensive and substantiated answer to a language-related research question. As mentioned in the method chapter, this thesis solely focused on feminist Instagram posts that contained English or Dutch language. Because Dutch is my mother

tongue and English is a language I am very familiar with and have an advanced level in, I have limited myself to these two languages for the units that were analyzed. However, the results and thus the conclusion are only representative for these two languages. As Martín (2011) argued, the usage of words and building of sentence structures can differ between different languages. The obtained results and the stated conclusion are therefore not necessarily generalizable for other languages as Dutch and English. Therefore, it will be interesting to compare the conclusion of this thesis to how feminism on Instagram in other languages. This could be done by a native speaker from that country itself. My suggestion would be to compare both languages and cultures. Dutch and English are both Western cultures, which are known to be relatively advanced in the process of women's emancipation. Because language apparently often still radiates male dominance even in these cultures, it would be interesting to contrast it with a more oriental culture. Perhaps the different structures in language can learn something from each other or it could be that they do not differ much from one another.

Another limitation of the thesis and its proposed relevance, is that actually changing basic structures in an entire language is hard to accomplish and it can take a long time (Blaubergs, 1980). Restructuring a taken-for-granted language and changing words or making them disappear requires direct participation at all levels. When children are taught to use completely neutral language, but they interact with the elderly who do not incorporate this into their language use, they might still adopt the language they hear from elderly people. People adopt habits from each other and with that it is inevitable that everyone would have to adhere to the new structures to entirely ban sexist and gendered language.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Examples Instagram posts with applied MCDA

1. BENDR [@bendr.lk]. (2019, May 16). ''*Dick pics and cock talk continue on BENDR this week. Why is is negativity likened to a penis while strength* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BxhT5WJBsie/?igshid=h8h6fjb6vbm0
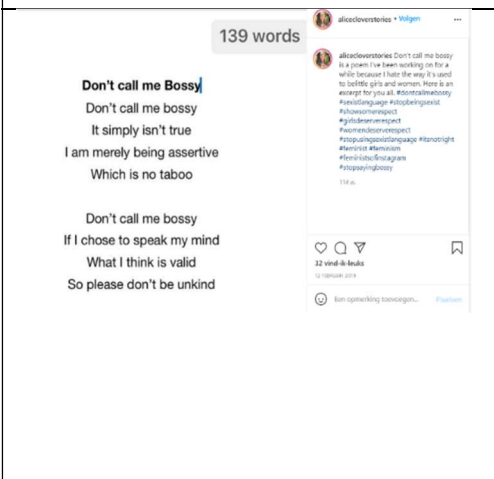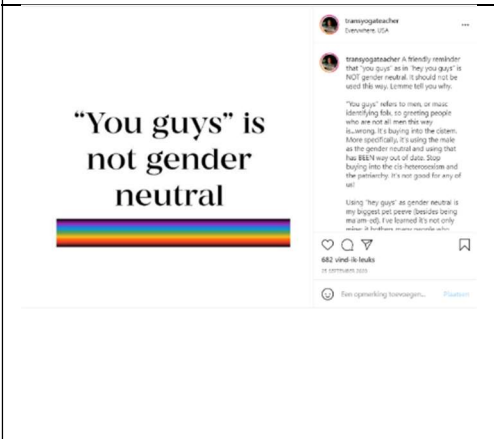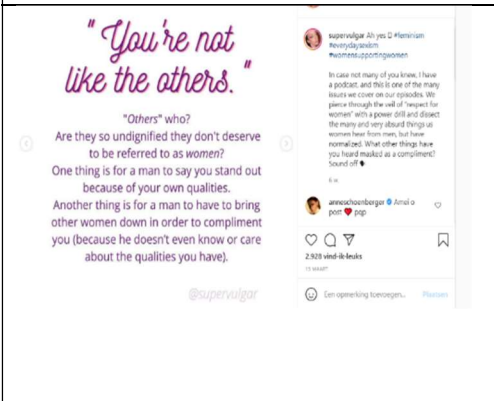

Critical Visual Analysis (CVA)	- Denotation: Yellow background with a pink and blue texts and images. An image of a penis above the text. The first line of the text is bigger than the rest below it. The bigger words state 'Don't be a dick!' - Connotation: The text states that a part of the male body is associated with a negative image. It asks if men are okay with that, so making men think about the way this word is used.
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)	- Word connotations: Usage of the word dick, which is a male genital used as a way of acting - Overlexicalization: Does not apply to this post - Suppression: Suppression does not apply to this post

	- Structural oppositions: It states that a men's penis is used as a negative word, therefore implicitly stating that it is a men's issue and not a women's issue. - Lexical choices and genre: It is used educative towards men to raise awareness about the everyday usage of the word dick as an assault.

2. BENDR [@bendr.lk]. (2019, May 19). ''*Hope you enjoyed our cock and bull content over the last week. Here's our final piece, asking why we compare* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BxobgPXhjGM/?igshid=1hbe4lq6c1n2k

Critical Visual Analysis (CVA)	• Denotation: Pink background with blue image and yellow text. An image of male balls is depicted with a text above it. The first line of the text is bigger than the rest below it. The bigger words state 'Grow a pair'. • Connotation: The bigger text is a statement that is used in everyday life by someone who thinks the person they say this to needs to be more tough. Growing a pair means growing a pair of balls, in other words being more like a man. Being tough is thus linked to being manly. The image of the pair of balls is depicted here, to make the statement more explicit. The pink background might be used to reinforce the statement about strength being linked to masculine anatomy. Because pink is a stereotypical feminine colour, it could be assumed that the post wants to

	make clear that strength can also be linked to femininity.
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)	• Word connotation: The sentence grow a pair is used to express that a strength of integrity is linked to the weakest part of the male body and that this is problematic. • Overlexicalization: Does not apply to this post • Suppression: The word testicles is not mentioned, even though that is what this image concerns • Structural opposition: It is clearly mentioned that the expression 'grow a pair' and the message it implies is linked to the male body. This in turn can mean that it is specifically linked to males and not females. • Lexical choices and genre: It is used educationally.

3. Feminer [@feminernl]. (2020, October 21). ''*SOLLICITEREN* 📄 *Terwijl je vacature na vacature langs ziet komen, zul je merken dat de één je meer trekt dan* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CGnUHE8F2oN/?igshid=1482cwu48eln8

| Critical Visual Analysis (CVA) | • Denotation: Orange background with partly Dutch text in front of it saying 'Let's talk inclusive vacatures' and beneath that options to name a job in a job offer. In the bottom left, there are three persons moving and making phone calls. There is also an orange arrow that point to the right of the image.

• Connotation: The image shows how some job offers are often direction towards a gender that stereotypically is most present in this work field. In also provides alternatives for these job offers that now are gendered. The description of the text explains that some job offers are biased towards a gender that stereotypically possesses that skill, therefore leading the job in a masculine or feminine way. The first four jobs are biased towards a feminine |

	perspective, the alternatives for these jobs are gender neutral. The last job is directed in a masculine way and the alternative that is given for this job are two words which are the masculine as well as the feminine form. This thought that some skills are more masculine or feminine reinforces gendered language. The image thus gives gender neutral alternatives that would be more suitable for non-biased, gender equal way to present job offers.
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)	• Word connotations: The words that are stereotypically used are all gender biased words • Overlexicalization: Does not apply to this post • Suppression: Does not apply to this post • Structural oppositions: The structural opposition in the post are the initial job offer titles. These state a gendered way of a job, therefore leaving out the gendered version of another gender as well as the gender neutral version. • Lexical choices and genre: No submissive / superior tone of voice
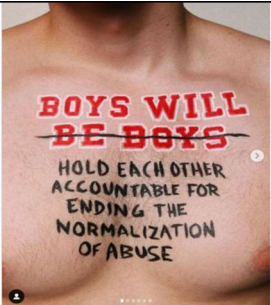
Instagram post	Description Instagram account	Citation
139 words **Don't call me Bossy** Don't call me bossy It simply isn't true I am merely being assertive Which is no taboo Don't call me bossy If I chose to speak my mind What I think is valid So please don't be unkind	She/Her, Writer 🖋, Author 📚, Blogger 💻, Breastfeeding Peer Supporter 🤱, Feminist 💪 Changing the Narrative to empower our children. www.aliceclovers tories.com	Alice [@alicecloverstories]. (2019. February 12). ''Don't call me bossy is a poem I've been working on for a while because I hate the way it's [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/Bty5tqjAuLm/?igshid=k4 6gfg43x26l
"You guys" is not gender neutral	🏳️‍🌈 I teach Yoga for Queer/ Trans & fat people 🏳️‍⚧️ I create space for collective care Meditation & Energy healing ❤️ Join Body Love Community ⬇️ transyogateacher .com/links	Allé [@transyogateacher]. (2020, September 25). ''A friendly reminder that "you guys" as in "hey you guys" is NOT gender neutral. It should not be used [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CFkC2KghfHL/
" You're not like the others. " "Others" who? Are they so undignified they don't deserve to be referred to as *women*? One thing is for a man to say you stand out because of your own qualities. Another thing is for a man to have to bring other women down in order to compliment you (because he doesn't even know or care about the qualities you have).	@supervulgarmu a @supervulgarp odcast 2M on TikTok +1.1M podcast plays 📧 supervulgarmua @gmail.com linktr.ee/auvxo	Ana d'Utra Vaz [@supervulgar]. (2021, March 13). ''Ah yes ⬇ #feminism #everydaysexism #womensupportingwomen In case not many of you knew, I have a podcast, and this is [Photograph, second image of thread]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CMXy- itp1rb/?igshid=nzr8xm2liupa
" For a woman, you're quite < insert good quality > . " Since when is being a woman an obstacle to any type of quality? Are you so deprived of good female references that you're applauding me for being something you didn't think I was capable of, or is it that you only bother to look into the qualities of women you're sexually attracted to?	@supervulgarmu a @supervulgarp odcast 2M on TikTok +1.1M podcast plays	Ana d'Utra Vaz [@supervulgar]. (2021, March 13). ''Ah yes ⬇ #feminism #everydaysexism #womensupportingwomen In case not many of you knew, I have a podcast, and this is [Photograph, third image of thread]. Instagram.

		supervulgarmua@gmail.com linktr.ee/auvxo	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMXy-itp1rb/?igshid=nzr8xm2liupa
		@supervulgarmua @supervulgarpodcast 2M on TikTok +1.1M podcast plays supervulgarmua@gmail.com linktr.ee/auvxo	Ana d'Utra Vaz [@supervulgar]. (2021, March 13). ''Ah yes ⬛ #feminism #everydaysexism #womensupportingwomen In case not many of you knew, I have a podcast, and this is [Photograph, fourth image of thread]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CMXy-itp1rb/?igshid=nzr8xm2liupa
		A platform for dialogue on all things gender and sexuality m.youtube.com/watch?v=6jmPSi-62GU	BENDR [@bendr.lk]. (2019, May 16). ''*Dick pics and cock talk continue on BENDR this week. Why is is negativity likened to a penis while strength* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BxhT5WJBsie/?igshid=h8h6fjb6vbm0
		A platform for dialogue on all things gender and sexuality m.youtube.com/watch?v=6jmPSi-62GU	BENDR [@bendr.lk]. (2019, May 19). ''*Hope you enjoyed our cock and bull content over the last week. Here's our final piece, asking why we compare* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BxobgPXhjGM/?igshid=1hbe4lq6c1n2k
		"Above all, the prophets remind us all of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible." -- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel theemondo.blogspot.com	David Mondelice [@sonofgoddess1207]. (2020, January 28). ''#Repost @unwomen • • • • • • *Let's eliminate #sexistlanguage in the workplace.* *#sexism #sexist #feminism #feminists #feminist #languagematters* *#healthymanhood #NextG enManhood*'' [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/B73OvlvhsXn/?utm_medium=share_sheet
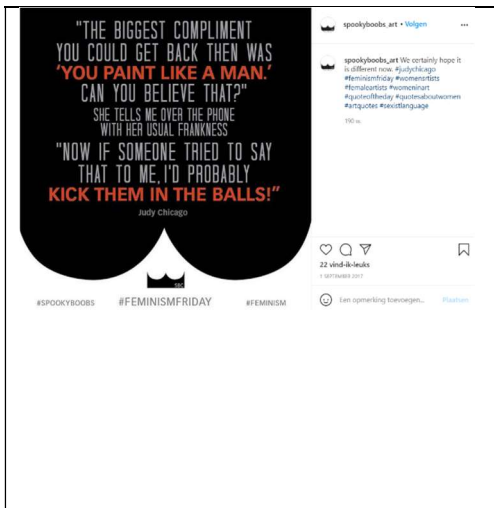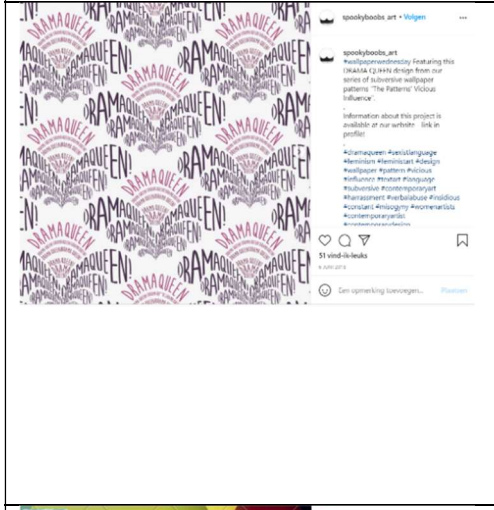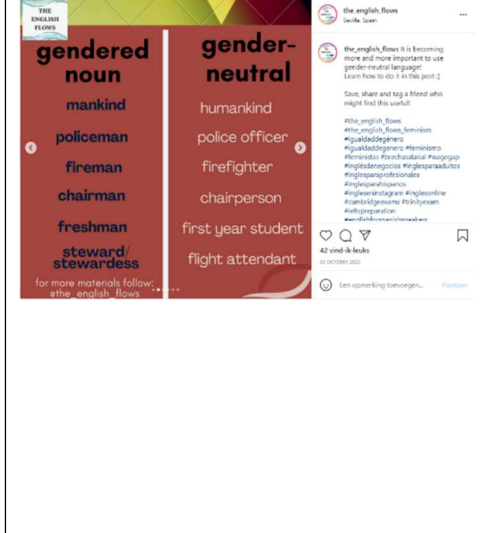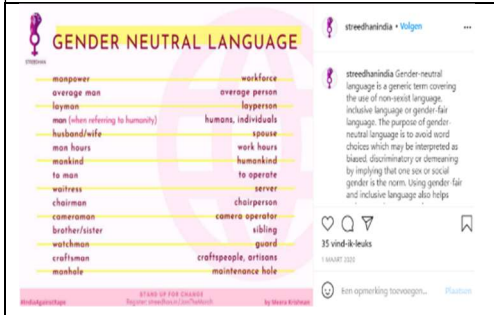
	Author, Educator, Therapist, Coach & Guide. 🌟 Serving people's empowerment, connection & transformation. Gender | Sexuality | Love | Identity | Freedom lesleygraydon.com	Dr. Lesley Graydon [@lesleygraydonphd]. (2020, April 22). *''Our words and language create our world. Most folks don't notice how patriarchal and masculine gendered their everyday language use* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/B_SgnwIHRnZ/?igshid=1efnr9moebclo	
	.. on a mission .. Female empowerment 🔥 Self love 👩🏽‍🦰💋👩 Equality 🚹 🚹 .. to change the world 🌠	Eva [@fem.power.ment]. (2020, July 17). ''Saying 'man up' to a man implies men are not supposed to be emotional and show their feelings. Saying [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CCvRh3iBKIK/?igshid=1lrzw1dhyi8k5	
	Calling out everyday sexism in all its insidious forms	Everyday Sexism [@canceleverydaysexism]. (2018, April 14). ''Phrases that subtly reinforce that a male is the neutral standard #manoverboard #everydaysexism #sexistlanguage @seattletimes'' [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/Bhh6Sk6HQfx/?igshid=ji6sbbii14wt	
	🔥 Hét netwerk voor jonge vrouwen vol ambitie! 👫 Voor een samenleving waarin vrouw zijn je carrièrekeuzes en -kansen niet beïnvloedt 👇 Get inspired	Feminer [@feminernl]. (2020, October 21). *''SOLLICITEREN 📄 Terwijl je vacature na vacature langs ziet komen, zul je merken dat de één je meer trekt dan* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CGnUHE8F2oN/?igshid=1482cwu48eln8	
	🔥 Hét netwerk voor jonge vrouwen vol ambitie! 👫 Voor een samenleving waarin vrouw zijn je carrièrekeuzes	Feminer [@feminernl]. (2021, May 23). *''METEN MET TWEE MATEN 💬 I Afgelopen week schreef @japke_d een stuk in @nrcnl over het verschil in taalgebruik dat* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CPLyeYQlEQC/?utm_medium=share_sheet	

	en -kansen niet beïnvloedt 👇Get inspired	
	Voor vrxuwen én mxnnen! (vrouw, man, x) 🏳️‍🌈⚧✊🏻✊🏽✊🏿 Zij/ haar Inspo delen of samenwerken? 📬	Feminisme Nederland [@feminisme.nl]. (2020, November 17). *''Als we hier anno NU mee beginnen. Komt het hopelijk een keer goed. #stopvictimblaming #stopvictimblamingandshaming #letstalkaboutyes #GeneratieJaEn ... #FeminismeNL* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CHskZzRKcvu/?igshid=gw0o0lef0ec0
	A community rooted in intersectional feminism. We exist to amplify a diverse network of change makers, activists & creators. Join us ↓ #FeministForAll feministforall.carrd.co	Feminist [@feminist]. (2020, September 7). *''@sarahcpr* 👏🏼👏🏽 *@thecooperreview "Here's an exclusive sneak peek at new book How to Be Successful Without Hurting Men's Feelings. These* [Photograph, third image of thread]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CE1slGEMHxC/?igshid=6u0bvvp8bh1x
	A community rooted in intersectional feminism. We exist to amplify a diverse network of change makers, activists & creators. Join us ↓ #FeministForAll feministforall.carrd.co	Feminist [@feminist]. (2020, September 7). *''@sarahcpr* 👏🏼👏🏽 *@thecooperreview "Here's an exclusive sneak peek at new book How to Be Successful Without Hurting Men's Feelings. These* [Photograph, sixth image of thread]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CE1slGEMHxC/?igshid=6u0bvvp8bh1x

	A community rooted in intersectional feminism. We exist to amplify a diverse network of change makers, activists & creators. Join us ↓ #FeministForAll feministforall.carrd.co	Feminist [@feminist]. (2021, April 1). *''April may be over but our movement is not! ▶▶ We must persist 👆 disrupt r*pe culture, support and believe* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/COTdXQXsLuC/?igshid=lkoytso07ej
	A community rooted in intersectional feminism. We exist to amplify a diverse network of change makers, activists & creators. Join us ↓ #FeministForAll feministforall.carrd.co	Feminist [@feminist]. (2021, March, 21). *''for the boys by #FeministPartner @mattxiv (posted with consent)''* [Photograph] Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CMsYk8MM73c/?igshid=meca1apb9lmr
	"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." www.womensaid.org.uk/get-involved	Intersectional Feminist [@feministwarrior_]. (2021, March 24). *''And that is why so many men think they can get away with things''* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CMz2JymL7bp/?igshid=1wd6t7cmmnz06
	Sassym ckassy, and a little bit gassy… #fartshamingisreal #endthestigma #normalizelettinggoofthepast	Karen J Larson [@onefunnygook]. (2016, May 12). ''End misogyny now... #sexistlanguagematters'' [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BFSa-Kegw1n/?igshid=1c0en14eji2y0

	Big. Barmy. Bisexual. #bi #bisexual #queer #LGBTQIA+	Layna [@bisexual_laalaa]. (2020, July 14). *''PSA #nonbinary #enby #pronouns #gender #genderneutrallanguage''* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CCo2Ou5nD6V/?igshid=1fxtc65e3kon5
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	Business English trainer based in Seville, Spain Topic-based resources for learners and teachers DM me for English classes (private or in-company) www.linkedin.com/in/stela-daneva-7b846b145	Stela Yordanova Daneva [@the_english_flows]. (2020, October 30). *''It is becoming more and more important to use gender-neutral language! Learn how to do it in this post :)* [Photograph, second image of thread]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CG9lpT3nOf4/?utm_medium=share_sheet
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	Fighting w you to have your voice heard ✊ DM or email your submission, all = anonymous 😬 Business inquiries: send us 📩 thecatcallcollective@gmail.com	The Catcall Collective [@thecatcallcollective]. (2020, January 24). *''more "don't be a sexist, entitled creep" to your friends, and WAY less "don't let yourself become a victim" #survivornotvictim* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CKb-J6IgcyG/?igshid=exoml7wism0a
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