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### Is the Truth In the Comments? Anti-feminism and Anti- immigration in Norwegian Online Newspaper Comment Threads

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Is The Truth In the Comments?

Anti-Feminism and Anti-Immigration in Norwegian Online Newspaper Comment  
Threads

By Iselin Maria Ihrstad

A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts  
In Gender and Women's Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

May 2015

Is The Truth In the Comments? Anti-Feminism and Anti-Immigration in Norwegian  
Online Newspaper Comment Threads

Iselin Maria Ihrstad

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's  
committee.

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Dr. Shannon Miller, Advisor

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Dr. Kirsti Cole

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Dr. Laura Harrison

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## **Abstract**

An abstract for the thesis of Iselin Maria Ihrstad for the Masters of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota, 2015.

Title: Is the Truth in the Comments? Anti-Feminism and Anti-Immigration in Norwegian Online Newspaper Comment Threads

Norway has implemented many progressive social policies focused on the equality and inclusion of women, as well as immigrant and non-ethnic Norwegian individuals due to a commitment to state feminism. Yet recently it seems to be a number of anti-feminist and some anti-immigration stances expressed through online discussion threads. In order to highlight and explore the presence of a backlash against feminism and immigration in Norway, this study conducts a feminist textual analysis of online comment threads that follows pro-feminist online opinion pieces published in the two largest newspapers in Norway, Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG) published between July 2014 and December 2014. This project also focuses on whether or not the commentator is anonymous or non-anonymous to investigate whether that might have an impact on the nature of the comments, believing that when posters are given the ability to appear anonymous it might heighten the possibility of the use of anti-feminist, anti-immigration stances and generally negative and harassing behavior online. This research concludes that the majority of comments found do not address feminism in any fashion. However, the comments that do discuss feminism show a higher frequency of anti-feminist than pro-feminist stances, in addition to a few comments that discusses immigration, and a combination of these various stances within online discussion threads.

Ultimately, this research provides numerical evidence of a feminist backlash within online comment threads as well as anti-feminist and harassing stances and behavior found in online comments. It also discusses a small number of anti-immigration and Islamophobic comments and their relation to anti-feminist beliefs, concluding that there is a minor presence of a combination of anti-feminist, anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances found within these online comment threads. This in turn shows the discrepancy between Norway's progressive social image and the opinions expressed by its actual citizens.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Norway has made great social and political progress to ensure gender equality for its citizens, reflecting a feminist approach. In this project, as there are many varying definitions, feminism is defined as a social, political, and academic movement to promote equality in all aspects of life, particularly paying attention to gender. Holding a sense of state feminism, Norway utilizes affirmative action policies to ensure women's representation within political and boardroom positions and has progressive social security policies such as lengthy maternity leaves and state-sponsored childcare, in order to ensure that women are included and supported socially, politically, and economically. Kantola and Squires (2012) explains that "state feminism is a term that has emerged to describe 'women's policy agencies', 'national machineries for the advancement of women' or 'gender equality machinery' within state bureaucracies that deal with women's policy issues or gender equality" (pg. 384). This is intended to result in equal female participation in all aspects of Norwegian life. At the same time, there is a growing backlash against feminism in Norway that can be seen festering largely outside of the major public and political discussions. Tjernshaugen, Foss and Dommerud (2014) states that when Norway prepared itself for the 2014 election, a contending party proposed to change the 1975 Abortion Act arguing for a general physician's right to refuse to refer to abortion services because of conscientious reasons. Ultimately, Nordberg, Skirbekk and Magelssen (2014) informs that "in 2013, after much debate, The Norwegian Medical Association came to support a limited right to conscientious objection," (pg. 2) and after massive protests from the Norwegian public, no changes were made to the existing abortion law.



However, it seemed to spark a new interest in feminist issues amongst a number of individuals within the Norwegian population, and the beginning of 2014 seems to reflect that reignited interest in feminism highlighted by mass media. By the second half of 2014 several articles and opinion pieces began to discuss gender-specific issues, sparked by real-life social happenings and contexts. Thoughts on various feminist matters ranged from a middle-aged male radio host who likened a young, female blogger's appearance to that of a "fuck doll," (Marthiniussen, 2014) to whether or not Norway's existing law on prostitution should be revised, once again (Bugge and Ekehaug, 2014). These feminist-focused articles and opinion pieces highlighted a growing interest in discussing the connection between feminism, legislation, and various social structures. While these newspaper articles and opinion pieces inspired heightened public interest, the conversations that followed in the online article discussion threads showed a sense of backlash against feminist issues and various gender-oriented policies, through anti-feminist stances and harassing utterances. Chafetz and Dworkin (1987) argue that antifeminism is reflected "by those who feel threatened by the social and economic changes, (p. 56) that feminism brings forth. Further, in this project, hostile comments ranged from using *Ottar*, a radical feminist Norwegian organization, as a derogatory term to mean all feminists, to using sarcasm and stereotypical gendered insults towards commenters with pro-feminist stances.

Further, which is reflected in the comments used in this study, with increased immigration and progressive social immigration policies perceived by many to be direct product of feminist-driven policy making, a small number of individuals also expressed negative and hostile attitudes towards immigration as well. Figenschou and Beyer (2014)

states that “outside the mainstream media, online activities, such as blogs, online news sites, and social media, have increased both anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic criticism” (p. 436). Further, Fitzgerald, Curtis and Corliss (2012) argues that most of anti-immigrant attitudes are based on fear, or a perceived threat towards a particular country’s economy or culture, (p. 481) believed to be results of heightened immigration. In addition to anti-immigrant stances, some comments also reflect a sense of Islamophobia. Bleich (2011) states that “Islamophobia has taken root in public, political, and academic discourse... It exists not only for political reasons but also because it attempts to label a social reality—that Islam and Muslims have emerged as objects of aversion, fear, and hostility in contemporary liberal democracies” (p. 1584). Because some individuals perceive feminism to be positive towards immigration, some comments reflect attitudes that are both against feminism and immigration, sometimes specifically focusing on the immigration of Muslim individuals and its perceived negative effects.

In addition to a limited number of anti-feminist, anti-immigration, and Islamophobic stances found in these online discussion threads, there are also a number of comments that show negative and harassing online behavior. The Internet is argued to be as a male-dominated, public space (Barak, 2005, Megarry, 2014), which may have resulted in the invisibility or dismissal of marginalized groups and their voices. Chao (2015) argues that “online commenting systems in theory allow anyone to claim the authority to publish their opinion. The information orgy held on the internet would seem to add incentives and argumentative tools for harsh and uncivil online comments to news stories” (p. 63). Further, Marwick and Miller (2014) states that “research suggests that those most likely to be the victims of hateful online speech are women, sexual minorities,

and people of color” (p. 5). Overall, the comments used in this project seem to reflect anti-feminist, anti-immigration, and Islamophobic stances held by certain individuals within the Norwegian society, expressed in sometimes hostile ways, creating online spaces that seems to silence or dismiss voices of marginalized groups.

This thesis explores the conversations within these online discussion threads to highlight the current backlash against feminism and liberal immigration policies in Norway, a country that carries the image of facing less of these kinds of issues because of a perceived sense of state feminism. Further, this thesis seeks to contribute to the conversation about online harassment and what that means for the voices of marginalized groups within a male-dominated, public cyberspace.

This thesis contains four chapters. Chapter Two, named Literature review, explores and discusses previous research on important bodies of knowledge featured in this thesis, namely the growth of and backlash against feminism in Norway, growth of immigration in Norway and reactions it has garnered from feminism and the Norwegian society, and women’s experiences with sexual harassment and being present in public spaces, specifically online.

Chapter Three, named Methodology, details the process of how the research data was gathered and analyzed. Sixteen online opinion pieces and their following comment threads featured in online Norwegian newspapers between July 2014 and December 2014, six from Dagbladet and six from Verdens Gang (VG), were categorized and analyzed. The comments were sorted into five categories, namely feminist, anti-feminist, pro-immigration, anti-immigration, and neutral or non-applicable. Further, posters that

were anonymous and non-anonymous were noted, and finally several themes emerged and were recorded and discussed.

Chapter Four, named Results, discusses the findings and themes that emerged from the online comment threads. Comments that did not focus on feminism, immigration, or the topic of the opinion piece were recorded as non-applicable. It concludes that the majority of commenters fall into the neutral or non-applicable category, both anonymous and non-anonymous, and comments that do discuss feminism appear to more so hold an anti-feminist stance. A small number of commenters also seem to hold an anti-immigration or Islamophobic stance.

Chapter Five, named Discussion, concludes the research study and discusses the findings, themes, and need for further research. The study finds that the majority of the comments are of a neutral or non-applicable nature, not discussing the pro-feminist theme of the opinion piece or feminism in general. Comments that do discuss feminism are largely anti-feminist, challenging Norway's image of being largely accepting of feminism. Unexpectedly, comments that discuss immigration are few, they reflect only anti-immigrant and Islamophobic views, and are combined with anti-feminist stances. It becomes apparent that there is a significant lack of understanding of what feminist theory and activism entails, as well as a lack of knowledge of terms and concepts like intersectionality and privilege. A large amount of comments also contain harassing language and statements, with frequent use of sarcasm and stereotypical insults. It becomes clear that these online comment threads reflect a lack of understanding and respect of feminism, feminists, and commentators of either gender that supports feminism. It is my hope that this study will highlight the continued need for feminist

theory and practice in Norway, as well as the need to enhance the knowledge of what feminism actually entails. Further, this study contributes to the larger discussion of the negative treatment and silencing of marginalized groups in public spaces, and particularly in online spaces.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Norway is perceived by many as one of the most gender equal, woman-friendly, and immigration-welcoming countries in the world, and continues to score high on various global equality measurements and rankings. In fact, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index of 2014 ranks Norway as number three, with a score of 0.8374 (weforum.org). However, discussion threads following certain Norwegian online newspaper opinion pieces reveals anti-feminist and a small number of anti-immigration comments, some specifically negative towards Muslim immigrants, suggesting a potential discrepancy between Norway's public image and the actual attitudes of its citizens. In this literature review, I will discuss the growth and current state of feminism in Norway, and highlight the presence of anti-feminism in Norway to identify feminist backlash. Next, I also review literature on growth of immigration in Norway and anti-immigration stances, as doing so is vital when applying a feminist, intersectional lens. Further, in this literature review I will address missed opportunities to address immigration and culturally-specific practices within current Norwegian feminist scholarship. Lastly, I will discuss the presence of and sexual harassment of women in public space, then specifically harassment in online spaces and self-identified feminists online, to theorize how gender affects women's treatment within and use of online public spaces.

### **Feminism in Norway**

Norway's image has long been of a country with great social equality, especially concerning gender. In fact, Dahl and Pedersen (2006) states that "the United Nations has declared in a comparative perspective women in Norway are ranked on top in welfare,

social equality and opportunities, as compared with men” (p. 32). Continuing to be ranked in the top spots in various global gender equality measurements and rankings, Norway continues to hold the image of great gender equality on multiple levels. In order to better understand this social equality context within the Norwegian society, it is important to identify the role feminism has played in creating these social policies that ensure this high level of equality.

### ***Growth of feminism in Norway***

There has long been a positive relationship between feminist scholarship and Norwegian public policies, with Mortensen (2009) arguing that feminist academia has served as an important influence in crafting policies that secure equal rights for women in various areas within the Norwegian society. This has further led to an implementation of what Dahl and Pedersen (2006) identifies as a “Nordic welfare state model [which] is characterized by a low degree of social inequality” (p. 34), that include specific policies regarding sickness benefits, transitional benefits for lone parents, parental leave, and cash benefits to families with children that opts out of using subsidized daycare to name a few. This has further ensured the creation of what some argue is a sense of state feminism, which focuses on gender equality in every aspect of its citizens lives within the Norwegian society, where feminist scholarship and policy development and implementation are closely linked, as stated by Mortensen (2009) above. While these social policies have increased female inclusion and participation in social, political, and economic arenas, it has created what is now identified as the “good girl-syndrome,” or the pressure to perform perfect in every area both personally and professionally. Storvik and Schøne (2008) argues that there are no barriers for women achieving high managerial

positions except the pressure to having to manage it all, so fewer women choose to apply for these positions, decreasing female participation. This is further discussed by Casey, Skibnes, and Pringle (2011) when they argue that while Norway devotes “direct policy attention towards fostering gender equality at all levels of the labour market... the OECD reports that Norway has one of the most gender-segregated labour markets of all its member countries” (p. 614-615). Women continue to be over-represented in part-time work and work within the public sector, that generally pays much less than male-dominated work counterparts.

While the implementation of set female quotas through affirmative action have increased amounts of women’s visibility and participation within previous male-dominated work sphere, some Norwegian women experience an increased pressure to take on certain higher managerial roles they do not want, such as the role of a board member (Casey, et. al., 2011) However, they might feel a sense of duty to take on these roles, to not show disrespect to social and political efforts made to make Norway as gender equal as possible. The close ties between feminist academia and public policies have created a gender-equal system that works to include women in social, political, and economic areas, but has also created an increased amount of pressure to perform perfectly in multiple areas at once. This has led to heightened critiques of the effects of feminism in Norway, seen in the comments used for this study; especially focusing on the added pressures it has put on women to “have it all.”

### ***Feminist Backlash***

Susan Faludi in her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (1991) was at the forefront in exploring the creation and resurgence of what she



deems the feminist backlash, argued to be a part of a postfeminist argument that centers on the perceived negative impacts of feminist social, economic, and political advances.

Faludi (1991) argues that:

Although the backlash is not an organized movement, that doesn't make it any less destructive... A backlash against women's rights succeeds to the degree that it appears *not* to be political, that it appears not to be a struggle at all. It is most powerful when it goes private, when it lodges inside a woman's mind and turns her vision inward, until she imagines the pressure is all in her head, until she begins to enforce the backlash, too- on herself (p. xxii).

This backlash is communicated through various different instances, most notably mass media. Mendes (2011) following her content analysis of US and British newspapers argues that recent rhetoric adheres to dominant ideas of patriarchy and capitalism, which paints an image of the feminist agenda as either useless or challenging the current male-dominated power structure within the society. Efforts to maintaining male privilege have, and continues to, manifest itself in various ways, and with Girard (2009) claiming that "antifeminist organizations often align themselves closely with law enforcement in their attempts to block the advancement of feminist equality-seeking initiatives," (p. 7) in addition to voicing their opinions in various public spaces. This might reflect a backlash against structural feminist advancements.

While the effects of the feminist backlash creates an array of negative responses within the feminist community, Browne (2013) argues that Faludi misses the opportunity to address the re-invigorating power the backlash can potentially hold for women. She agrees that the backlash argue that "feminism is not only bad for society as a whole;

feminism is bad for women. This message is transmitted through various media and political platforms,” (p. 907) and paints a picture of a tired, stressed woman who fails to “have it all.” However, Browne (2013) argues that instead of only using Faludi’s pessimistic view of a continued, repetitive sense of feminist backlash, one can reimagine the periods of backlash as an inspiration to further promote change, rather than a purely negative force to stifle the potential that feminism carries to create change. The feminist backlash can actually inspire continued acknowledgement of the need for feminism as well as re-activating the desire for activism to promote further social change. Browne also critiques Faludi’s work for failing to include experiences of women within the feminist movement beyond white, heterosexual, middle-class women, which in turn ignores the intersectional effects that a feminist backlash can have. It is vital to include an intersectional lens when discussing the effects of feminism and anti-feminism, and the impact that a feminist backlash can have on a diverse population. One can see in the comment sections used for this project that there is a backlash against individuals that support feminism, as well as a small number that critiques non-ethnic Norwegian immigrants and perceived issues with Islam and Muslim culture.

### ***Anti-feminism in Norway***

While there is limited existing academic scholarship centered on anti-feminism specifically in Norway, one can see postfeminist rhetoric and feminist backlash arguments through mass media and certain political agendas. One notable event that was in part provoked by extreme anti-feminist opinions was the 2011 Oslo terror bombing and shootings by Anders Behring Breivik. His manifesto released online argues that “women, having exploited feminism to achieve the privileged status of victimhood, set

about penalizing European men and bestowing privileges on other chosen groups of victims through policies of affirmative action” (Walton, 2012, p. 5). Breivik further believed that the presence of feminism within politics had allowed for a great influx of Islamic immigrants that would ultimately take over Europe and rid the continent of its Christians, which is also referred to as cultural Marxism. Walton (2012) concludes with stating “Breivik’s crime was clearly politically motivated and directed against a political organization, its aim to destroy ethnic diversity and gender equality. Apparently he acted alone, but he did not emerge from a vacuum” (p. 10). Breivik’s extreme opinions and actions reflects a link between anti-feminism and anti-immigration, and more specifically Islamophobia that can currently be found in the Norwegian population, and expressed in online discussion forums on a regular basis. The connection between feminism and immigration will be discussed in the next section.

### **Feminism and immigration in Norway**

Feminism and immigration is perceived to be inextricably linked in Norway, as feminist scholarship has long advocated integration and inclusion, regardless of gender or race. Yet Norwegian feminism seem to cultivate “a kind of unified Nordic exceptionalism, which is largely blind to diversities within its own state orders and thus homogenizes conceptions of women’s interests” (Bochorst & Siim, 2002, in Siim & Skjeie, 2008, p. 323). Further, issues that link feminism and immigration together tends to focus on a ‘crisis’ narrative through sensationalized media reports rather than discuss systematic inequalities and lack of political voice and involvement of immigrant populations within its own borders. Intended to ‘save’ immigrant women from perceived oppression, “policies adopted within a ‘crisis’ frame encompass a series of new state

initiatives to combat honour based violence, genital mutilation, forced marriages, ‘limping’ divorces” (Siim & Skjeie, 2008, p. 323). However, these policies might restrict, rather than free certain women within the Norwegian society by taking away their cultural and religious choices through these policies. To better understand the current relationship between feminism and immigration, one has to look at the changes within Norwegian attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism.

### ***Growth of immigration in Norway***

Brochmann and Hagelund (2011) explains that immigration started to increase in Norway, and the rest of Scandinavia in the 1960s, when the Scandinavian economy and welfare-state welcomed foreigners to fill various work positions to increase the labor force. However, in the early 1970s as the number of immigrants increased along with the instability of the Scandinavian economy, immigration started to raise critiques among the ethnic Norwegian population and certain political parties. Finally, in the 1980s and 1990s following a large influx of asylum seekers to Norway, there was a substantial increase in anti-immigration rhetoric, leaving immigration a highly contested issue.

However, Brochmann and Hagelund (2011) argues that in the 2000s one saw the motivation to create mandatory Norwegian language classes and various programs to ensure a comprehensive introduction into Norwegian social structures, which was created and agreed upon across all the various political parties in Norway. This reflects a focus on integrating immigrants into the Norwegian social structure, yet it also signifies a sense of idealized “Norwegianness” that immigrants are encouraged to adopt. Akkerman and Hagelund (2007) states that these programs “includes compulsory education for all immigrants in the Norwegian language and social customs, a two-year compulsory

initiation programme for refugees, and increased controls over family reunification cases in order to prevent enforced and abusive marriages” (p. 206). Many will argue that this creates a hierarchical permanent divide between the categories of “ethnic Norwegian” and “immigrant,” regardless of the efforts put forward to adopt and enact expected “Norwegianness.” Svendsen (2014) states that continuing to labeling immigrants as “outsiders” within social and political discussion creates an insider/outsider dichotomy and further creates the image of the immigrant being a liability to society. The belief that immigration hurts the Norwegian welfare model and takes away resources from perceived more “deserving” ethnic Norwegians, combined with the idea that immigrant populations are almost solely responsible for spiking crime rates within Norway, ultimately increases this binary divide. Stereotypical views of this “immigrant” category continue to spark heated debates within the Norwegian public arena.

### *Anti-immigration in Norway*

Fekete (2006) argues that political ideologies that support right-winged, anti-immigrant, and Islamophobic stances have historically been featured within European politics, but have recently become more engrained in mainstream parties than before. This seems to also hold true within the Norwegian political system. Akkerman and Hagelund (2007) states that:

In Norway, the Fremskrittspartiet (FrP, Progress Party) was a key player in putting immigration on the political agenda in the 1980s through its opposition to asylum-seekers but influential contributions to the general problematization of cultural diversity have also come from other actors- academics and activists- outside the party. (p. 199).

Further, Hagelund (2005) argues that by calculated use of inflammatory rhetoric within mass media and public debates, this political party and its leaders have positioned themselves as the leading immigration-opposing political party in Norway. Although FrP has received little actual policy decision power in these matters, their opinions continues to spark conversations about immigration in Norway on a regular basis.

Largely, anti-immigration rhetoric is formed on the basis of protecting the rights of women and children, again utilizing the “crisis-narrative” to justify limited immigration to combat issues like forced marriages and genital cutting. Siim and Skjeie (2008) argue that:

Norwegian authorities, under mainly Christian democratic-conservative coalitions in office from roughly the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s- have concentrated their attention on ‘crisis prevention’ efforts- producing a series of so called ‘governmental action plans’ which either aim to prevent forced marriages or violent practices of female genital mutilation. (p. 327).

This focus creates an image of the immigrant as in opposition to Norwegian values and attitudes, and highlights cultural-specific issues that are perceived to be harmful to the Norwegian welfare model.

### ***Feminism addressing immigration and Islamophobia***

Often the feminist response to immigration in Norway has been focused on specific cultural issues that are perceived to be linked to the immigration population, like female genital cutting and veiling. Here the belief is that Western feminism can “rescue” and “enlighten” immigrant women from perceived backwards cultural practices and offer

a chance to adapt Western beliefs and attitudes to better their lives, which can be seen as the use of the ‘crisis narrative’ to argue their stance. This reflects “the construction of ‘third World women’ as a homogenous ‘powerless’ group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 23). In Norway especially, Islam is made out to be the main oppressor of all women, and specific cultural practices are used as evidence for that firm stance. Public debates centered on veiling seem to have increased Islamophobic attitudes both within the general public, but also within feminist circles. Siim and Skjeie (2008) concludes that while feminism continues to influence the creation and implementation of public policies, these policy-making, governmental institutions are still dominated by the voices of the privileged majority. Therefore, rather than including the voices of immigrant women in these important public policy debates, white, Norwegian feminists speaks for them using a Western-oriented lens sans intersectional efforts.

Further, this perpetuates the divide between the “ethnic Norwegian” and the “immigrant,” as well as upholding white, Western feminism at the core of these gendered discussions. In order to problematize this issue, Narayan (1997) states that:

Political challenges to the status quo, feminist challenges as well as others, are calls for critical reassessments of prevailing understandings of important institutions and practices. The rethinking and revisioning they call for are often difficult and painful, since prevailing pictures of one’s Nation and History, of one’s cultural traditions... are tied to one’s picture of oneself as a social individual and as a citizen. (p. 37).

Norwegian feminism and further Norwegian social structures and policies have missed the call to reexamine their stances and actions connected to immigration and religion beyond a “crisis narrative” and thereby hinder intersectional analysis and actions that should be taken in this regard. Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, and argued that “because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (1991, p. 1244), yet Norwegian feminism and public policy seem to largely ignore the intersectional experiences of immigrant women of various ethnic origins and religions other than the Norwegian majority. The need to apply intersectionality when addressing various issues of anti-feminism and anti-immigration sentiments seems vital to better combat this issue. In the next section, I will discuss the potential role that the internet plays in facilitating these public discussions and debates, as well as potential spaces for positive and negative treatment of certain groups.

### **Women and the Internet**

While the utopian intent behind the creation of the Internet might have been to create a public cyberspace to connect the voices of the world, yet it came to be “characterized as a primarily White, male domain, used by those in privileged positions in academia, government and the military. Arguably, these origins have shaped the way the technology has been viewed and accepted by society” (Royal, 2008, p. 152). This has created a belief that the Internet is a male domain, and that the majority of voices that are, and should be heard in this public cyberspace, are male. It is important to examine women’s visibility and use of the Internet to better understand the presence and effect of anti-feminist sentiments online.



### ***Women in Public Spaces***

The Internet can be seen as a public space, where “the term ‘public’ connotes ideas of citizenship, commonality, and things not private, but accessible and observable by all” (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 10). Historically, women and whomever that did not fit into the white, male, middle-class, heterosexual mold have been actively dismissed in and denied access to the public space and the ability to have their voices be heard. While for many the Internet showed promise to allow women and disadvantaged populations a new mode of raising their voices in a public space, many argue that the majority of the cyber spaces are still adhering to the traditional beliefs of who has the power to speak in public. Royal (2008) concludes that rather than enhancing the possibility of democracy and equality, the Internet widens the gender gap in this very technological setting. Although the Internet is overall accessible to a large number of individuals, the content and specific spaces within this cyber sphere where voices are raised are highly gendered.

Women also face the issue of having their bodies valued over their voices in public spaces, and points to “the historical importance of aesthetics to dominant cultural ideas of what it means to be a female in public, in short, the proper place for the feminine in the public eye is as aesthetic object” (Nurka, 2014, p. 485). The Internet and its required technological advances and opportunities have created a space where images of sexualized female bodies can be accessed in an abundance, creating merely a new, more accessible space to gaze upon women as aesthetic objects (Nurka, 2014). In turn, the female presence in public spaces, such as the Internet, seems to be governed by the attention paid to female bodies over female voices. Further, certain interactions between male and female Internet users may entail remarks and comments about her body, as seen

in the comments used in this project, even though on the Internet she is just a voice. One might argue that this reduces her presence to a sexualized body and a silent voice.

### ***Sexual Harassment***

Sexual harassment can be divided into three different types, which are, according to Holland and Cortina (2013) sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment. Traditionally, sexual harassment has been linked to discrimination against women in the workplace. Brunner and Dever (2014) further argues that one needs to look at the specific work that is being done to assess probability of sexual harassment and argue that the new nature of work that promotes sexualized “body work” within service work actually facilitates and normalizes sexual harassment. They also discuss the difficulty of identifying sexual harassment, as it is perceived as “part of the job.” Russell and Trigg (2004) however, argue that it is important to identify how individuals tolerate sexual harassment, and that will determine the effect of and the likelihood of detecting this behavior. They found that “although women are less tolerant than men of sexual harassment, both men and women who tolerate sexual harassment are likely to harbor ambivalence and hostility towards women” (Russell & Trigg, 2004, p. 571). This might suggest that negative sexualized and gendered views towards women are so pervasive, that women themselves remain ambivalent or hostile towards other women, even though they have experienced those hostile acts of harassment personally. Ayres, Friedman and Leaper (2009) argue what matters are how women respond to sexual harassment that will determine the effects of this behavior. They found that responding to sexually harassing behavior might leave younger females humiliated and emotionally stressed, in addition to the risk of direct physical harm. Confronting sexually harassing behavior seems to always

carry some level of risk for women, either physically or emotionally. This seems to hold true in this project, as some commentators will launch negative language and attitudes directly at certain commentators they do not agree with, that might cause emotional distress.

Identifying as a feminist does have an impact on one's experiences with sexual harassment. Holland and Cortina (2013) found that women who openly participated in feminist activism were more likely to be targeted with sexually harassing utterings, than women who self-identified as a feminist. This statement is in congruence with Berdahl's (2007) argument that this is because "women openly engaging in activism for women's rights may pose a more obvious threat to the existing gender hierarchy- a hierarchy that grants more power to men than women. Men may react to this threat with sexually harassing behavior, degrading women in an attempt to maintain a system of male dominance and female subordination" (Berdahl, 2007, in Holland & Cortina, 2013, p. 202). However, either self-identifying as a feminist or openly participating in feminist activism might also lead to a heightened awareness of and ability to identify sexual harassment, to in turn confront and protest it. One might argue that confronting sexual harassment online rather than offline offers some form of safety from physical harm while confronting these harassing behaviors, yet it does not protect from emotional harm from harassing comments and language from internet users.

### ***Online Sexual Harassment***

Gender-specific harassing behaviors on the Internet occur on a frequent basis. "Women have never been equal in the online public sphere, and it appears that social media forums remain firmly grounded in the material realities of women's everyday

experiences of sexism in patriarchal society” (Megarry, 2014, p. 49). Further, Barak (2005) states that gender-specific harassment “is portrayed in several typical forms that Internet users encounter very often, whether communicated in verbal or in graphical formats and through either active or passive manners of online delivery” (p. 78). This can range from interpersonal conversations of sexually harassing nature to sexualized pop-up images that internet users experience frequently by simply being in that online space. Further, Barak (2005) argues that the Internet, in addition to be a masculine space, works contrary to what it was designed for, especially when discussing the experiences of women and minorities in online spaces. Rather than being a tool for inclusion and accessibility to information and voicing opinions in a democratic space, it can serve to further push certain groups away from participating in this space all together, or at least limit their participation considerably. Barak (2005) argues that:

[Sexual harassment] exist on the Internet as much as it exists off the Internet; indeed, [sexual harassment] behaviors parallel those offline. The special characteristics of the Internet, such as anonymity, make this medium more prone to provide the means needed for unlawful and unethical behaviors, despite the ability of surfers to mask their identifying features as well as their ability to abruptly disconnect contact at will. (p. 87).

Facing sexual harassment online on a nearly daily basis is considerable emotionally draining and one can imagine it would deter many women from participating in certain online spaces. This in turn will serve to perpetuate the gender separation of the Internet, and ensuring that female voices will not be heard in predominately masculine spaces, both online and offline.

Self-identifying as a feminist online can lead to a particular sense of online harassment. Dixon (2014) states that while “identifying online communities such as Twitter and Facebook as safe spaces for expressing feminism views and politics, its ramifications present dire consequences which lead to online harassment, hate speech, disagreements, and a miscommunication in rhetoric” (p. 34). This negative and harassing speech and rhetoric, which Jane (2014) calls ‘e-bile,’ are frequently found on various online discussion boards and social media outlets, like a number of comments analyzed in this project. Jane (2014) further states that “gendered e-bile frequently spikes in response to feminist activism and perceived feminist gains. Furthermore, women who speak about these attacks tend to draw even more hostility,” (p. 562) suggesting a relationship with experiencing harassing online speech and one’s gender and pro-feminist identity and beliefs. This might arguably be another tactic to silence women’s voices in public spaces, especially self-identified feminist voices, through the use of what Cole (2015) identifies as disciplinary rhetoric. Cole (2015) states that “the online backlash to feminists is so highly visible in social media, and so prevalent, it is also amplified,” (p. 357) with violent gendered and sexualized threats and harassment frequently featured on these social media sites. Further, by allowing individuals the ability to leave comments in these online spaces, they have the ability to widely and frequently use disciplinary rhetoric towards certain commentators. Jane (2014) found through a research project that “the back-and-forth banter permitted by online message boards seemed to encourage what looked very much like game play: a spirited competition to see who could generate the most offensive declamations”(p. 560). Not only do these online comment functions allow for negative and harassing language directed at specific commentators, they might also create a space

that amplifies such online speech and behavior. Looking at the comments used in this project, this seems to especially hold true of commentators that express pro-feminist stances.

## **Conclusion**

Reviewing the various existing literature makes several themes and issues apparent. While Norway is perceived to practice state-feminism, there are clear discrepancies in the perceived effect of feminism, and what it has meant for the social and structural equality of women. Further, one can see a link between a Westernized feminist view and responses to immigration, and opinions that express anti-immigration attitudes. In some instances, these anti-immigration stances are directed at Muslim immigrants specifically, adding the component of Islamophobia when discussing immigration in Norway. While these attitudes have long been held among extreme political parties and selective extremist individuals, reviewing the comments used for this project suggests that these attitudes might be held by other individuals in the Norwegian population as well. Further, the Internet offers a space where these attitudes are expressed in a larger public sphere. Simultaneously, these comments serve to alienate women because of their anti-feminist sentiments, and alienate immigrant- and marginalized population caused by anti-immigration, Islamophobic, and hostile stances. Interestingly, Norwegian feminism, many pro-feminist comments, and by extension Norwegian immigration public policies are formed by a “crisis narrative” and the focus is to save women and children from other perceived “second-grade” cultural practices, rather than hearing and elevating their voices, experiences, and expertise, they are excluded from

social, political, and economic areas of the Norwegian society, as suggested by Siim and Skjeie (2008) above.

With this knowledge, looking at online comments in Norwegian newspaper will explore and uncover the varying attitudes that Norwegian citizens possess, and further highlight feminism and certain discussions on immigration as contested concepts within the Norwegian society. It is apparent that these comments need to be analyzed using a feminist, intersectional lens in order to fully understand the impact and further social, cultural, and political implications of these online comments.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This research is grounded in a feminist theoretical framework, where Kolmar and Bartkowski (2013) explains that the goal is to “examine and try to explain the causes and conditions in which men are more powerful and men’s production, ideas, and activities are seen as having greater value and higher status than women’s” (p. 2). This research was also conducted through an intersectional lens, ensuring that intersecting identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and nationality are at the forefront when collecting and analyzing the data. Further, this project utilizes a feminist research lens, stated by Hesse-Biber (2014) to place gender at the center of the research (p. 3). As conversations used in this project centered around gender equality typically adhered to the gender binary, while also questioning notions of masculinity and femininity, this project puts these conversations at the center of this research.

Further, this research uses a feminist media analysis. “Feminist media research is interested in examining and deconstructing the ideas about gender expressed in mainstream mediated texts, as well as in the process of change exhibited in these texts as cultural ideas about gender also shift” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 267). In order to understand the shift in perception of gender equality and feminism within Norway, one has to examine public mediated texts where these conversations occur, by using a feminist textual analysis.

Because these texts are constructed within a particular set of cultural, social, economic, and political contexts, and they inform the values audiences receive about themselves and others, and the world around them, their analysis can reveal



much about the social context in which they are produced and received” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 268).

The texts that will be used in this research are online discussion threads that follow pro-feminist online opinion pieces published in two newspapers, Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG).

### ***Texts***

Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG) are two of the largest newspapers in Norway, by some deemed as tabloid newspapers. While they are both said to be politically neutral, many would argue that Dagbladet has a slight more liberal leaning than Verdens Gang (VG). Both newspapers are published once a day, seven days a week, with their online editions being updated regularly throughout the day. Both newspapers allow for the option to comment on certain online articles, especially opinion pieces. These online discussion threads are monitored, and are open between 7am and 12am every day. Beyond these hours comments are not visible and one cannot leave new comments. Both online newspapers include a statement above each comment thread that urges individuals to debate with respect and refrain from using derogatory language. On Dagbladet’s discussion thread one can see when a comment has been removed by a monitor, on Verdens Gang (VG) comment threads, one cannot. While Dagbladet allows their users to create usernames and allows for anonymity, Verdens Gang (VG) requires their commentators to use their Facebook account when positing comments to a discussion thread.

## ***Hypotheses***

This study will operate with two research questions and hypotheses:

RQ 1: Are there higher rates of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances than pro-feminist and pro-immigration stances within VG (Verdens Gang) and Dagbladet's online article discussion threads?

RQ 2: Are rates of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances higher in Dagbladet's anonymous comments or in VG (Verden Gang)'s non-anonymous comments in online discussion threads?

H1: Overall, there will be a higher number of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances than pro-feminist and pro-immigration stances within VG (Verdens Gangs) and Dagbladet's online discussion threads

H2: The rates of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances will be higher when the poster is anonymous

## ***Coding***

This research used comments attached to twelve pro-feminist opinion pieces posted on the online version of the two major newspapers in Norway, namely Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG) between July 2014 and December 2014, with a total of 1933 comments. The amount of articles chosen was based on their publication dates and availability online. This specific period of time was chosen because of a perceived heightened public interest in discussions surrounding feminist issues, focusing on who feminism is meant to include, global feminism and debates between feminist groups of

different political leanings to name a few. First, I used a specific search term in order to select the articles and attached comment threads to be examined further. The search term that was used was “feminism.” Articles, more specifically opinion pieces that featured a pro-feminist message published between July 2014 and December 2014 were chosen for further examination. All of the opinion pieces were seen by coder to add to current debates about feminism in Norway at that time, matching the definition of feminism being a social, political and academic movement promoting gender equality, here particularly focusing on gender. Second, all comments were counted, dated and coded to fit into a 5-point scale. The categories in this scale are “anti-feminist,” somewhat anti-feminist,” “neutral or non-applicable,” somewhat feminist,” and “feminist.” (See table 1). The varying degrees of pro-feminist and anti-feminist categories were included to reflect common misconceptions of what feminism is and means, and to include comments that specifically stated they were against feminism, but still had (perhaps unknowingly) a pro-feminist message. If a coder said they were against feminism, but for equality, it would be considered a pro-feminist message, even though the commentators specifically stated they were against feminism. A small number of comments were also found to reflect anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances and were examined for the possible connection of anti-feminism, anti-immigration, and Islamophobia within the same comment. Here, Islamophobia is seen as negative attitudes towards Islam, Muslim individuals, and discussions centered on perceived issues that stem from Muslim religion and culture. Comments can fit in one or multiple categories, which were recorded, in addition to the amounts of “likes/upvotes” each comment receives, as well as if the poster is anonymous

or not. Anonymous posters were recorded as Anon and a number, and non-anonymous posters were recorded as NonAnon with a number to ensure their anonymity as well.

*Table 1: Feminism scale*

Anti-Feminist	Somewhat Anti-Feminist	Neutral/Non-applicable	Somewhat Feminist	Feminist
-2	-1	0	1	2

Third, the percentage and total numbers of comments that fit into each category are calculated to highlight the frequency of comments that fit into these categories occur in online discussion threads. Fourth, there is a discussion on comments that are anonymous versus non-anonymous to see if they differ in their level of pro- or anti-stances. My findings will be able to answer in a numerical fashion if there is a significant feminist backlash, and a possible presence of anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances in online comment threads.

The belief is that in these comment sections there are comments that clearly oppose certain policies aimed at gender equality, and they contain aggressive stances against feminism as a whole. Further, certain comments also shows anti-immigration stances, in line with Norway's perceived heightened immigration rates in the last decades, and the social policies created to accommodate that influx. Some of these comments specifically focus on Muslim immigrants and the perceived negative effects of Islam, additionally reflecting an Islamophobic attitude when discussing immigration. Often, anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances will be stated in congruence to anti-feminist statements, "blaming" feminism for the perceived over-population of immigrants

in Norway, certain stances focusing particularly on Muslim immigrants, revealing a discrepancy between the image of Norway and the opinions of certain individuals within its own population.

### ***Reflexivity***

While examining and coding these comments it is important to practice reflexivity, which is “a process by which [the researcher] recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions can influence the research” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 3). As the sole coder, I bring forth certain experiences and opinions that might affect my way of coding and categorizing the different comments. I am a white, cisgender, woman born and raised in Norway, although I have been largely absent from Norway since 2008. I self-identify as a feminist and most of my education has been rooted in feminist-oriented scholarship, which will influence my interpretation of the comments. In my opinion, feminism plays a large role within the way one looks at immigration and the challenges that it brings, and I believe feminism’s role is misunderstood in this debate. Rather than blaming feminism for increased immigration and the perceived problems it brings, I believe feminism need to highlight the importance of transnational feminist solidarity. I do believe that my feminist background and commitment to working through a feminist and intersectional lens will allow me to uncover underlying power structures and problematic anti-feminist and anti-immigration beliefs illustrated in these comments that might not be apparent at first sight.

### ***Potential Limitations***

There might be several possible limitations to this research project. First, articles might not end up being selected and consequently certain comments and discussion threads will not be included in this research. This might be if articles are not published in the selected timeframe, and comment threads with potentially important information would not be included in this study. Next, the comments will be in Norwegian, so certain translations done by the researcher might not reflect its essence fully when translated into English. This might lead to meanings of certain words or phrases not being translating into English sufficiently. Third, these comments will be coded by one researcher only, and while another consultant can be contacted to discuss a comment and its meaning, the final coding and categorization will be at the researcher's discretion. Fourth, because these comment threads have already been moderated by an online site moderator, some comments might have already been removed and will not be included in this study. Lastly, this research is not a polling of the entire Norwegian population, so only certain individual's opinions will be represented in this study.

In the end, this research provides numerical evidence of the frequency of anti-feminist comments that are featured in online pro-feminist Norwegian newspaper opinion piece discussion threads. It also discusses a small number of anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances found within comments that also takes an anti-feminist stance. Further, this project highlights the potential discrepancy between image of Norway as socially and politically progressive country and opinions of its actual citizens by identifying certain themes that emerges within these comments. It is my hope that this project will serve to inspire further dialogue about feminist backlash and what can be

done to reduce this backlash. Hopefully it can help raise questions about the ability to and effect of appearing anonymous online in these settings, and inspire further conversations about online harassment.

## Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I discuss my findings in both numerical and thematic fashions. First, I explain the 5-point scale used to categorize all the comments found in the comment threads attached to both newspapers. I provide actual comments to illustrate the way of coding. Next, I break down comments following both newspapers to highlight the percentages of different stances found on feminism. Further, I highlight different emerging themes within the comments that reference feminism. I also introduce a small number of comments containing anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances which are analyzed for their connection to stances on feminism. Finally, I break down comments that discuss feminism, immigration, and Islam within the same comment, in an attempt to illustrate the connection between these concepts.

I discovered six pro-feminist opinion pieces published in Dagbladet with a total of 1599 comments and six pro-feminist opinion pieces published in Verdens Gang (VG) with a total of 334 comments published between July 2014 and December 2014. These articles were chosen using the search word ‘feminism’ and all reflected pro-feminist views. They discussed feminism being important for both gender, global feminism, political leanings within different branches of Norwegian feminism, and the inclusion of trans individuals in a Norwegian feminist organization to name a few. Overall, 1933 comments were categorized into a 5-point scale, namely anti-feminist, somewhat anti-feminist, neutral or non-applicable, somewhat feminist, and feminist. Table 1 presents this scale, and table 2 provides category definitions and examples:



*Table 1: Feminism scale*

Anti-Feminist	Somewhat Anti-Feminist	Neutral/Non-applicable	Somewhat Feminist	Feminist
-2	-1	0	1	2

*Table 2: Definition and examples of categories*

Category	Example of comment:
<p>Anti-Feminist (-2)</p> <p>Definition: Against feminism as a social, political, and academic movement that promotes equality in all aspects of life, here particularly focusing on gender.</p>	<p>“Feminism is a corrosive cancer that slowly, but surely is sneaking upon the Nordic countries. Norway DO NOT need feminism because Norwegian women are already independent, feminine, and equal... I hope Norwegian women get off the feminist-train before it is too late- the end station is back in the kitchen”- Anon1</p>
<p>Somewhat Anti-Feminist (-1)</p> <p>Definition: Somewhat against feminism as a social, political, and academic movement that promotes equality in all aspects of life, here particularly focusing on gender.</p>	<p>“The dictionary defines feminism as to promote women’s rights in pursuit of gaining economic, social, and political equality, which is admirable, but to promote women’s rights at the cost of men’s rights, is not. It is about time to replace this with something more gender-neutral, and we would avoid this confusion. If we had only called it equality, we would get rid of all this fuss”- Anon3</p>
<p>Somewhat Feminist (1)</p> <p>Definition: Somewhat for feminism as a social, political, and academic movement that promotes equality in all aspects of life, here particularly focusing on gender.</p>	<p>“I do not think they are overreacting. Nobody forced them to watch the concert, but to dismiss that they are raising awareness to problems that are symptomatic of issues in our culture and call it ‘whining,’ is too dumb. It is a lot of important problems in the world to focus on, but objectification of women is one of those important problems”- NonAnon1</p>
<p>Feminist (2)</p> <p>Definition: For feminism as a social, political, and academic movement that promotes equality in all aspects of life, here particularly focusing on gender.</p>	<p>“I believe there are many misunderstandings about what feminism is, and it is probably also many different opinions (also among feminists) of what feminism entails. The way I understand it, is that the goal is equality and equal worth</p>

	between the genders, no more and no less. It is not a goal to put women before men, or to say that the society owes women a lot, just because they are women. It is not to work towards an apartheid-like society, rather the opposite. It is to work towards a society where we have equal opportunities regardless of being born a boy or a girl”- Anon2
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## Comments on Feminism

### *Comments on feminism, Dagbladet:*

Dagbladet is one of Norway’s largest newspapers, and allows their commentators to create their own usernames/nicknames or the option of post as a guest on certain online articles and opinion pieces. These comment threads are monitored and several comments are continuously deleted, as visible in the comment thread. The comments that are deleted are deemed not appropriate by the moderator as it is determined that they do not follow their rules of online discussion. Overall, the opinion pieces posted in Dagbladet had a higher number of comments attached. In this section, I present all comments following six opinion pieces published in Dagbladet. The majority of the comments, 57%, fall into the neutral or non-applicable category (see table 3), and 14% are categorized as anti-feminist and 16% somewhat anti-feminist. This is roughly double compared to comments that reflect somewhat feminist views at 8% and feminist views at 5%.

*Table 3: Comments on feminism, Dagbladet*

Newspaper/ date	Total comments	Anti- feminist -2	Somewhat anti- feminist -1	Neutral/non- applicable 0	Somewhat feminist 1	Feminist 2
DB 1 07.22.14	512	17% (88)	16% (82)	49% (253)	10% (50)	8% (39)
DB 2 07.25.14	30	17% (5)	33% (10)	43% (13)	3% (1)	3% (1)
DB 3 07.31.14	488	14% (68)	12% (59)	63% (307)	7% (34)	4% (20)
DB 4 08.26.14	296	10% (31)	18% (53)	61% (181)	9% (25)	2% (6)
DB 5 09.04.14	176	14% (25)	18% (31)	56% (98)	6% (11)	6% (11)
DB 6 10.17.14	97	9% (9)	25% (24)	56% (54)	7% (7)	3% (3)
<b>Total/ 6 articles</b>	<b>1599</b>	<b>14% (226)</b>	<b>16% (259)</b>	<b>57% (906)</b>	<b>8% (128)</b>	<b>5% (80)</b>

*Comments on feminism, Verdens Gang (VG):*

Verdens Gang (VG) requires all comments to be posted via a Facebook-account, leaving the commentator non-anonymous. These comments are monitored, but there is no visible sign when a monitor deletes a comment. I found that the majority of the comments, 60%, were neutral or non-applicable (see table 4). 10% of comments were anti-feminist, 24% were somewhat anti-feminist, compared to 10% somewhat feminist and 1% feminist.

*Table 4: Comments on feminism, Verdens Gang (VG)*

Newspaper/ date	Total comments	Anti- feminist -2	Somewhat anti- feminist -1	Neutral/non- applicable 0	Somewhat feminist 1	Feminist 2
VG 1 08.10.14	98	1% (1)	21% (21)	63% (62)	12% (12)	2% (2)
VG 2 10.16.14	21	14% (3)	24% (5)	57% (12)	5% (1)	0% (0)
VG 3 10.18.14	99	12% (12)	23% (23)	56% (55)	9% (9)	0% (0)
VG 4 10.23.14	9	0% (0)	33% (3)	56% (5)	1% (1)	0% (0)
VG 5 11.24.14	16	0% (0)	44% (7)	44% (7)	13% (2)	0% (0)
VG 6 12.17.14	91	2% (2)	24% (22)	65% (59)	8% (7)	1% (1)
<b>Total/ 6 articles</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>10% (34)</b>	<b>24% (81)</b>	<b>60% (200)</b>	<b>10% (32)</b>	<b>1% (3)</b>

In summary, 57% comments following opinion pieces in both Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG) reflect a neutral or non-applicable nature. However, regardless of the commentator being anonymous or non-anonymous, some comments reflect somewhat anti-feminist and anti-feminist stances at 14% and 18% respectively. Even though all opinion pieces were pro-feminist, only 8% somewhat feminist and 4% feminist comments were found. Table 5 is all anti-feminist, neutral or non-applicable, and feminist comments:

*Table 5: Comments on feminism, Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG)*

Newspaper/ # of comments	Anti- feminist -2	Somewhat anti- feminist -1	Neutral/non- applicable 0	Somewhat feminist 1	Feminist 2
Dagbladet/ 1599	14% (226)	16% (259)	56% (906)	8% (128)	5% (80)
VG/ 334	10% (34)	24% (81)	60% (200)	10% (32)	1% (3)
<b>Both/ 1933</b>	<b>14% (260)</b>	<b>18% (340)</b>	<b>57% (1106)</b>	<b>8% (160)</b>	<b>4% (83)</b>

### Perceptions of Feminism

Several themes emerged, including differing perceptions on feminism and equality, the role of feminism, and the rejection of feminist concepts. I discuss these themes in this section using the definition of feminism as a social, political, and academic movement to promote equality in all aspects of life, here paying particular attention to gender.

#### *Feminism and Equality*

There seems to be a great disagreement in what feminism is and what it stands for. Some comments contain arguments that feminism is an ideology and a movement that is working towards equality for all, with Anon52 arguing that “a feminist is by definition a person who is for equal rights for men and women. I bet most men and women are feminists in Norway.” This reflects the belief held by some commentators that argue that if you believe in equal rights, you are a feminist, if maybe only by default. Further, Anon18 states “do not be fooled by the ‘femi’ in the name, feminism is for full equality. It is just called feminism because mainly women have been the oppressed

group.” Another commentator, Anon9, believe that “feminism is not just about women’s issues, but has long been about it because women have been oppressed by men. You can understand that we have come a long way, but there are still many inequalities.” Finally, Anon22 states “equality is about many different issues, but it started because (and is the reason that it is called feminism) women have been discriminated against by men throughout the times. And still are! Men have many problems as well, but few that stems from structural discrimination on the same level as women are subjected to.” Here commentators reiterate that feminism means equality for all, but also recognizes gender-specific issues that feminism addresses.

However, a number of commentators seem to believe that feminism and fighting for equality is not the same. Anon31 argues “feminism has nothing to do with equality. I am for equality, but against feminism. The concept of equality should be unattached to gender.” In Norway, the term equality can also be understood as ‘like positions’ or ‘likestilling,’ and while these words are largely interchangeable, ‘likestilling’ is mostly used meaning equality between men and women. Many will say they are for ‘likestilling’ but against feminism, or that feminism and ‘likestilling’ is not the same. Anon6 states that “no, feminists are not about ‘likestilling.’ They want to give special rights to women and give women attractive positions through affirmative action. And demonize and oppress men.” Anon10 seems to agree, arguing “likestilling is about likestilling. Feminism is about special rights for women.” Comments like these reflect the belief that ‘likestilling’ means equality between men and women, but that feminism means pushing for special rights and privileges for women only.

Further, some commentators confuse feminism and the term ‘likestilling’ and believe that it means the push for men and women to be alike, or the same. NonAnon4 states “fortunately there is a difference between boys and girls, woman and man. Thank God for that difference. State feminism will never erase that.” These commentators seem often to express a disdain for a movement they believe is out to erase masculinity and femininity. Anon53 illustrates this by stating:

It is time to retire the concept and start with a concept that in itself is not discriminatory. A concept that does not insinuate that men have to become more feminine, but that you can have equal rights and opportunities without losing masculinity. Likewise a concept that does not insinuate that women have to become more masculine.

Overall, there seems to be a general lack of understanding of what feminism entails, reiterated by a high number of commentators believing that feminism and fighting for equality are two separate movements.

### ***Role of Feminism***

As stated above, a number of commentators believe that feminism is a movement to push for special rights and privileges for women, especially when discussing feminism in Norway. Norway utilizes affirmative action, meaning the need for a certain percentage of female representation, within politics and various boardrooms, and also has gendered study points. Vidnes (2015) defines study points as a certain number of points accumulated throughout secondary education needed to be accepted into higher educational institutes, and gendered study points are meant to steer female students

towards male-dominated educational directions and in limited educations vice versa by adding on a number of points based on the applicants' gender. Affirmative action particularly seems to be a contested issue, with NonAnon2 asking:

Why should special rights and affirmative action only available for women, there is a lot of other people that are also discriminated against because of who they are. If this is such a wonderful tool, we should use it even more! Immigrants, handicapped individuals, fat and ugly people, openly gay people etc. are not necessarily better off than women in job interviews, and is not more easily elected into board rooms, but we have not made a "fat and ugly" affirmative action quote because of that.

Affirmative action and gendered study points are often argued to be discriminatory against Norwegian men, with Anon16 asking "why are the tractor feminists so blind of the discrimination of men? They gladly position women in the victim role and hold on to affirmative action despite this lowering the standards in Norway, like in companies, schools etc." Further, some commentators argue that the feminist movement ignores issues that pertain to males, with Anon10 stating:

Men live shorter lives, more men commit suicide, more men die in accidents. More men drop out of school; more men lose their rights to see their children. More men end up in jail, more men end up in prison, more men end up homeless, and men have fewer rights and more responsibilities. But if you mention this to a feminist, it will get explained away, rejected, or you will be ridiculed.



Many commenters are seen listing various areas where men are being discriminated against, or various issues they believe are largely ignored by the feminist movement.

However, some commentators will argue against this belief, with Anon20 stating:

I am not afraid to use the F-word, but for me feminism is about equality. Equal rights and equal responsibilities. That means –of course- that women should NOT be prioritized over men, in for example custody battles... The reason that I call myself a feminist and not for example an ‘equality fighter’ is that women are still being oppressed internationally, and the reason that we have a relatively equal society in Norway, is that people fight for it. But also in Norway there are still issues connected to violence against women, involuntary part time work, less pay in certain professions etc.

Yet many commentators seem to continue to hold the belief that Norwegian men are the group that faces discrimination in Norway today. Anon38 seem to support this belief and argues that:

Feminism is fighting for female interests- at times as the maintenance of privileges at the expense of men. This is most obvious when feminists screams ‘for the sake of the child’ and try to claim mother’s rights in a divorce. You will also notice this as a man trying to report a violent woman in the home. Or the situation where two people of the opposite gender have sex- both near unconscious because of alcohol. The woman wakes up as a victim, the man as a perpetrator.

Other comments feature arguments that the presence of Norwegian state feminism has led to unfair and feminized treatment of male students by mostly female educators in primary and secondary education, as well as leaving males disadvantaged in higher education, the job-application process, and general treatment as working professionals. The resistance to state feminism is expressed by NonAnon3 “state feminism, or organized feminism in general, is a contradictory ideology to give women rights at the expense of men, regardless of morals and consequences, completely shameless in whomever it affects.” Anon51 seems to agree, and argues that “state feminism does not belong in modern, democratic states. Period,” believing that state feminism has no place in Norway.

In addition to rejecting state feminism, some commentators seem to also reject the idea that men can be feminists. Anon34 argues that:

There is nothing sadder than men calling themselves feminists in an effort to look modern and progressive. We need a revised male role for a new society, with men and for men. Men that claim they view the world through female glasses are only trying to hide their insecurities and get away with it. They will never be men.

Questioning the manhood of male feminists seems to be rather common, with Anon26 stating “men should not call themselves feminists, they might as well call themselves self-haters. Men are progressive enough to support equality, but to take another step and calling self a feminist is ridiculous.” Other commentators argue against these sentiments, with Anon22 stating “men that call themselves feminists do so because they work for women’s rights. It is quite possible to think that, and to work towards, women getting

better rights, even if you are a man.” However, Anon24 concludes that “all men that call themselves feminists are dorks.” Again, feminism is seen to be largely be a movement and ideology for women and women’s rights only.

Many commentators also argue that Norwegian feminism ignores issues faced by non-ethnic Norwegian women both within Norway and internationally. Common arguments is that there are more important issues faced by these groups of women, and that Norwegian feminists “whine” about issues deemed not as pressing, and thereby ignores issues faced by their “sisters” like arranged marriages, genital cutting, or perceived forced religious veiling. Anon17 says that “I do not understand why Norwegian women, who have it the best in the entire world, are making Norwegian men into the biggest hate object. It is incredibly disrespectful to women in disadvantaged countries.” Anon19 continues this sentiment, saying:

If you want to find oppression of women today one has to look beyond Norwegian borders or among minority cultures in Norway. But because it is so politically incorrect to criticize minority cultures, feminists have a tendency to lump together all violence against women, and call it a male problem, even though the violence happens in pockets of minority cultures.

Here one can see that there is a tendency to defend ethnic Norwegian men, while blaming social issues on immigrant men or men of cultures other than Norwegian. Anon29 argues that “you do not need to travel outside of Norway to find women’s rights to fight for. While ethnic Norwegian women have achieved full equality, their foreign cultural sisters have a looong way to go. But Norwegian feminists cannot be bothered to do something

about this, egotistic as they are.” This might suggest that feminism in Norway is disproportionately a white, ethnically Norwegian movement, much like how feminism have been criticized as ignoring the experiences and contributions of women of color within the movement as a whole. A small number of commentators also argue that feminism allows the oppression of non-ethnic Norwegian women by supporting immigration, or issues such as rape and sexual assaults are caused by non-ethnic Norwegian immigrant men whose entry to Norway is supported by feminists. Anon21 argues that:

What you never hear feminists discuss, even though the police stated it in the media that it was only non-western men that were perpetrators of “attack-rapes,” and the victims were exclusively white, Norwegian women. It has been a wave of these rough rapes of Norwegian women, but here the media and the feminists have been persistent in denying the pattern. They have only discussed lone incidents, and not placed it in the bigger picture. Here feminists prove that they do not represent women, but is just a political tool to spread lies and deception.

This seems to suggest the tendency to blame social issues on immigrant populations and blame feminism for their support of immigration, but also a general hostile attitude towards immigration and non-ethnic Norwegian groups. This view is illustrated again by Anon21 who says:

I’m pretty pissed that certain people uses us to promote a divide between us, as they claim to be true feminists but don’t want to talk about how Norwegian girls are sexually harassed daily by men from foreign cultures, groped and fondled,

spat on and being called names like ‘blonde Norwegian whore’ etc. They never talk about this, but only about empty accusations that Norwegian men abuse and oppress.

These comments then illustrate the connection between anti-feminism and anti-immigration, a lack of understanding of what feminism entails, and overall hostile language and attitudes towards feminism and immigration. It seems that because feminists and feminist activism are often seen positive towards increased immigration and are generally seen as promoting a multi-cultural society, individuals that are opposed to increased immigration are by extension also opposed to feminism, and vice versa. The combination of anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances in comments will be further discussed later in this chapter.

### ***Rejection of Feminist Concepts***

It also became clear that concepts produced by and highlighted in feminist theories and arguments, like intersectionality and privilege, is largely missing from these online conversations. Only one commentator explicitly talked about the importance of intersectionality, being Anon48 saying “I agree with the content of the article, but unfortunately the headline invites to a general discussion of feminism- then again creates discussions in the comment threads that are unreasonable and borderline laughable. It is a pity, because inclusion and intersectionality are important aspects of feminism.” Further, the concept of privilege was widely contested. Many commentators did not believe that white, heterosexual, middle-class men enjoyed any privilege because of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class, and as seen above seemed to argue

that these aforementioned individuals were the ones facing the most discrimination in Norway today.

In addition, the concept of patriarchy was also seen as false. Anon28 states that “feminists scream about patriarchy- which is a fever fantasy stating that somehow men of the world actively work against women and hinder them in achieving success. They complain and whine about men having privileges that they don’t have, while COMPLETELY ignoring the privileges they has as women.” Other commentators stated that patriarchy was either non-existent, not present in Norway, or replaced by matriarchy or state feminism. Other concepts like cisgender and heteronormativity was almost not present, or quickly dismissed or ridiculed. Anon43 stated that “heteronormativity’ is a constructed concept from a very little number of gay/lesbian/trans persons that are not really focusing on respect and basic rights for themselves, but actually hate heterosexuals because of their sexual orientation.” Not only does this demonstrate a lack of understanding of the concept, but also an ignorant and hostile attitude towards individuals that do not identify as straight, and thereby serves to reinforce heteronormative beliefs.

### ***Insulting Language and Content***

A high number of the comments demonstrated hostile and insulting attitudes, expressions, and language. Many of the comments expressed a negative view of feminists in general, with Anon8 stating “and then these p\*ssies have the audacity to state that ‘feminism is about equality.’ Over-privileged, small self-loving, narcissistic, gender-worshipping princesses.” Another commentator, Anon33 argues that “feminist= woman that hates pretty women and the men that likes them,” while Anon39 concludes that “the

more I read of these PMS-writings of feminists, the happier I am on so many levels that I am not a woman. It has to be horrible to walk around and be so unsatisfied and under the influence of ones hormones that profoundly for that long period of time.” Words like ‘whiny feminists,’ ‘bitter-feminists,’ ‘man haters,’ ‘feminizts,’ and ‘panzer feminists,’ seemingly meaning a militant aspect to feminism, were also used, some repeatedly, as well as the claim that one cannot take feminists seriously and that feminists have no sense of humor.

Further, many of the comments also attacked and insulted the author of the opinion pieces where these comment threads follow. Commentators would tell the author to stop whining, stop crying, ‘to get a grip,’ and ‘to pull her head out of her ass, woman!’ Anon46 said about one of the presumably female-identified authors:

Oh my God...wtf... Publishing writings of a psychotic radical feminist that is, after contribution from the welfare system (majorly paid by men...) sitting in a hotel room (also paid for by the welfare system) and spews out nonsense about how awful men are. Please, can someone buy this woman some soap?

Further, some commentators would launch personal attacks towards the author while making insulting assumptions about her way of life. This is illustrated by Anon21 that stated:

Exactly, she does not represent women, she represents a skewed ideology that uses lies and manipulation to promote own political agenda. She is just a poor soul that has never experienced love from a man, she has probably a bedroom closet full of toys and a cat meant to compensate for her empty life, love life. Her

opinions stay true to the radical feminist spirit where the 'white, heterosexual man' is a perpetrator that lurks by for every opportunity to abuse 'poor' women.

Many of the commentators also demonstrated a negative view of immigration and non-Norwegian cultures and using that as an insult towards feminists and women in general. Some stated that Norwegian women should be happy they do not live in a Muslim culture and should stop complaining, while another suggested one should 'send all the feminists to ISIS.' The next comment made by Anon15, while lengthy, seems to illustrate and summarize different sentiments that were held by several commentators:

Typical fanatic panzer-feminist, that chronically sees 'female oppression' or 'male chauvinism' if a man as much as takes a breath. Little girl: Simple biology says that men are more decisive and involved in the most critical phases of functions of society and the everyday processes that surround us; they have always been and will always be. Not because of discrimination, but because men are drawn to leadership roles, while in average women prefer to be a follower, and to be protected. It is called survival instinct. How about pulling your head out of your vulva for a second, and THANK men for you having water in your faucet, food on the table, the ability to travel, drive a car, roof over your head, legal security, somebody that will come and put out the flames if your house is on fire, the military, over all the larger parts of the wealth that surrounds you... Shut up and be happy that you don't live in Afghanistan, because then you had been told fairly quickly the lay of the land. Be happy that Norwegian men LET you have all the benefits you have, because if we wanted to, we could take them away from you and all the women in the society in a matter of a few hours, without you being



able to do anything about it, without just whining like a little child, which you already do, although maybe not as melodramatic.

Here one can see insults towards the author's gender and identity as a feminist, hostile language, and negative views of both feminism and non-ethnic Norwegian cultures. It seems that because feminists are generally seen to favor immigration and a multi-cultural society, they are blamed for the perceived issues that increased immigration is believed to bring forth. The connection between stances in feminism and immigration will be discussed further later in this chapter.

In addition to insults towards the authors of the opinion pieces, insults towards other commentators were also found. Anon14 says "PS: Stop crying. Feminists like you are fun for people to bully, use your head and write with the right angle, so that something can be done, without creating hate and debates that end up without results." Another commentator, Anon8, directs his comment to participant in the comment thread, asking "and seriously, are you still a little princess in your head, aged 27, a person that still require positive discrimination because you have breasts and a vagina?" In addition to directly insulting commentators, some commentators argue that this way of debating is to be expected in this environment. Anon8 says to a commentator "that you choose to not participate in a debate where you can risk being steamrolled, says more about you, and especially your attitude, than what it says about me." One incident also showed a presumed male commentator apologizing to another male commentator for perceiving him as female, and another presumed female commentator stated that she withdrew from the discussion as she was tired and worn out.

Finally one commentator, Anon50 argued that “it is limited room in the public sphere and within the governments’ capacity for action. When one group more or less take up all the space and yell, scream and require massive attention to their problems, small and large, imaginative and real, there will not be a lot of room left for others!” It seems that this comment insinuates that feminist authors that bring attention to feminist issues take up too much space in the public sphere, which again seems to be illustrated by the insults hurled at the feminist-oriented authors and commentators as seen above. This also seems to connect with the beliefs about women and public space discussed in the literature review above, as here women, and particularly feminists, are being criticized for their visibility and engagement in the public sphere. However, Anon23 concludes that “almost all of these comments show very clearly why feminism is important. Keep going all women and girls! The world is always a better place when women are equal to men.” This might suggest that while the comment threads appear to largely be anti-feminist and hostile, other commentators will utter positive stances on feminism, making these comment threads a space for a variety of opinions.

### **Feminism, immigration, and Islamophobia**

When categorizing and analyzing these comment threads, an unexpectedly small number, namely 2% of the comments also held anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances in addition to discussing feminism as shown in some of the comments discussed above. There were no comments found taking a positive stance on immigration or rejecting Islamophobic beliefs in comments attached to Dagbladet’s opinion pieces, and no comments found discussing immigration or particularly Muslim immigrants in any fashion in within any comment threads attached to Verdens Gang (VG). While these

stances were a rare occurrence within these comment, I did analyze the 29 comments found in three discussion threads in Dagbladet that did discuss immigration and some comments particularly focusing on Muslim immigrants. 15 of the comments were deemed anti-immigration, 11 of the comments were seen as Islamophobic, and 2 of the comments were categorized as a combination of both. In this section, I break down the comments that discuss feminism and immigration, feminism and Islam, and a combination of both.

A small number of comments reflect a combination of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances. The majority of these comments fell on both the anti-feminist and anti-immigration side of the scale. Since there were no pro-immigration stances found, table 6 provides definitions and examples of these comments and table 7 shows the categorization of each comment:

*Table 6: Definition and examples of comments, anti-immigration*

Category	Example of comments:
<p>Somewhat anti-immigration (-1)</p> <p>Definition: Somewhat perceive immigration to be threat towards the country's economy and culture.</p>	<p>"The whiny feminists probably will not stop until all men that are ethnic Norwegians beg on the street for food. Men from other cultures that are actually oppressive to women are however allowed to oppress more. They should be respected for their oppressive ways, anything else would be racist"- Anon4</p>
<p>Anti-immigration (-2)</p> <p>Definition: Perceive immigration to be threat towards the country's economy and culture.</p>	<p>"If you are looking for oppression of women you have to look beyond the borders of Norway or within minority cultures in Norway. But it is so politically incorrect to criticize minority cultures, so feminists have a tendency to count all violence against women and call it a man's problem, even though the violence happens within pockets of immigrated culture"- Anon19</p>

*Table 7: Breakdown of anti-feminist and anti-immigration comments*

Article/ comment	Somewhat anti-feminist -1	Anti-feminist -2	Somewhat anti- immigration -1	Anti- immigration -2
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 1		x		x
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 2	x		x	
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 3		x		x
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 4		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 5		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 6		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 7		x	x	
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 8		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 9		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 10		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 11		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 12		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 13		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 14		x		x
DB 08. 26.14/ Comment 15		x		x
<b>Total: 15 comments</b>				

Further, an even smaller number of the comments reflect a combination of anti-feminist and Islamophobic stances. A slight majority of these comments fell into the somewhat-antifeminist and somewhat Islamophobic categories. Since there were no stances taking a positive approach to Muslim immigrants and Islam, table 8 provides definition and examples of these comments, and table 9 provides a total breakdown of these comments:

*Table 8: Definition and examples of comments, Islamophobia*

Category	Example of comments:
<p>Somewhat Islamophobic (-1)</p> <p>Defintion: Somewhat see Muslims as an object of aversion, fear and hostility in contemporary liberal democracies.</p>	<p>“It is the feminists that support the burka”-Anon? (Guest)</p>
<p>Islamophobic (-2)</p> <p>Defintion: Somewhat see Muslims as an object of aversion, fear and hostility in contemporary liberal democracies.</p>	<p>“They are naïve. To uncritically open the borders for a culture where the men from Islam decide everything is sick, idiotic, and loser-like. They allow them to come here, and they go after Norwegian women, while they keep their own women imprisoned in the home. Incredibly self-destructive. I think every other couple I see in Oslo now is a blonde girl with some other n***o”- Anon5</p>

*Table 9: Breakdown of anti-feminism and Islamophobic comments*

Article/comment	Somewhat anti-feminism -1	Anti- feminism -2	Somewhat Islamophobic -1	Islamophobic -2
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 1		x	x	
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 2		x	x	
DB 07.22.14/ Comment 3	x			x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 4	x		x	
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 5		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 6	x		x	
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 7	x		x	
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 8		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 9		x		x
DB 07.31.14/ Comment 10		x		x
DB 08.26.14/ Comment 11	x		x	
<b>Total: 11 comments</b>				

Finally, only two of the comments reflected a combination of anti-feminist, anti-immigration, and Islamophobic stances. Deemed somewhat anti-immigration and Islamophobic in addition to anti-feminist, Anon42 states “this is what is clear with feminist argumentation. White, heterosexual men have given you the right to vote, right to education, and right to marry whomever you want. However, men from non-Western honor cultures and men that fight for Sharia are very exciting and rarely criticized. You are welcome to have those preferences, but do not expect it to go unnoticed.” In the other

comment deemed somewhat anti-feminist, somewhat anti-immigration and Islamophobic, Anon55 asks “are feminists so scared to be called racists that they are scared to talk about the real problems connected to women’s rights? The ones largely found within Islam and immigrant environments?”

While the majority of the comments in this project did not discuss immigration or Islam, a few comments reflected exclusively negative views on immigration and some particularly Muslim immigrants while also discussing feminism in some fashion. Some comments made snide remarks towards perceived negative Muslim and non-Norwegian cultural practices, with Anon12 stating “men cannot do much more for women’s equality. Women have to deal with that problem themselves. Body image hysteria, career pressure and other problems women grow up with in 2014 is made by women, not men. If it was up to us you would be in burkas home in the kitchen.” Anon15 seem to agree with that sentiment, saying “shut up and be happy you don’t live in Afghanistan.” Another commentator, Anon56, seem to believe that the issues connected to female oppression are linked to non-ethnic Norwegian individuals, stating “don’t come and blame me for women’s oppression, genital cutting etc, that you can address the patriarchal (religious) social structures/groups that continue to want more power in this country.” Further, Anon57 states “blaming Norwegian men for genital cutting? Speaking of ‘patriarchy,’ there is many of you that use equality to pull partners here from the patriarchy (Middle East)!? No wonder the Muslims are taking over with you as equals.” Anon27 concludes that “I think the feminism that the radicals are yelling about, will be cast out with the bathwater. How can they keep that kind of feminism when they at the same time celebrate the mass import of 100.000s of Muslim welfare-immigrants that costs 5 million



per head, and simultaneously have a view on women stemming from the Stone Age. Poor, naïve, silly feminists.” Here the belief seems to be that problems connected to women’s issues is to be blamed on non-ethnic Norwegian immigrants, and that they are a burden both culturally and financially within the Norwegian society.

Other commentators focus on the perceived negative effects that immigrants have in regards to ethnic Norwegian women. Believing that non-ethnic Norwegian immigrants are responsible for the majority of rapes committed in Norway, Anon21 also states that “feminists do not want to talk about how Norwegian girls are daily harassed by foreign-cultured men, fondled and spat after, and being called names like “blonde Norwegian whore, etc.” Anon58 seem to agree, stating “it is a paradox that women in Norway are the ones that are pushing for that men from these places that rape is used as a weapon should come to Norway by the thousands. It is the feminists that are pushing for this, even though that means more rapes in Norway.” Believing that feminists are at the forefront of accepting large numbers of immigrant individuals, it seems that certain commentators also believe that they are themselves to blame for women’s issues that might occur in Norway, as those issues are in turn linked to immigrant individuals. Because immigrant populations, especially Muslim immigrants, seem to be blamed for the majority of women’s issues, one can see a connection between anti-feminist, anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances within a certain number of the comments analyzed in this project.

## Conclusion

Overall, the majority of all the comments found in all comment threads following both Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG) were neutral or non-applicable. The comments that did discuss feminism were largely anti-feminist. A small number of comments did also discuss immigration and Islam, which were exclusively in negative terms. Returning to the hypotheses, although they were confirmed when the comments did discuss feminism, immigration, and Islamophobia, the majority of the comments in this project did not discuss these comments in any fashion.

*Hypothesis 1: Overall, there will be a higher number of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances than pro-feminist and pro-immigration stances within Verdens Gang (VG) and Dagbladet's online discussion threads.*

Unexpectedly, the majority of the comments of comments that were found regardless of what newspaper they were attached were neutral or non-applicable at 57%. These comments did not specifically feature a stance on feminism or immigration, or the pro-feminist topic of the opinion piece. When comments did feature a stance on feminism, there were a higher number of anti-feminist stances than pro-feminist stances. Further, there were a much lower number of comments featuring a stance on immigration than expected. The few comments that did discuss immigration did so in an exclusively anti-immigrant nature, some also discussing Islam and Muslim immigrants specifically, also in negative terms.

*Hypothesis 2: The rates of anti-feminist and anti-immigration stances will be higher when the poster is anonymous.*

There were surprisingly few comments that discussed immigration, namely only 2%. The few comments that did, did so in only an anti-immigration fashion, and were only found in Dagbladet where commentators are allowed to be anonymous. A small number of commentators also discussed Islam in negative terms when discussing immigration, revealing Islamophobic beliefs.

Overall, while both of the hypotheses posed in this research were confirmed, the majority of the comments were of neutral or non-applicable nature. There were more anti-feminist than feminist stances in both Verdens Gang (VG) and Dagbladet's comment threads. The few comments discussing immigration were seen as only be anti-immigrant, as no pro-immigrant stances were found. Some of the comments also focused specifically on Muslim immigrants, and were deemed as Islamophobic. The comments that discussed immigration in any fashion were only found in Dagbladet's anonymous comment threads and not Verdens Gang (VG) non-anonymous comment threads. By categorizing comments, collecting numerical evidence and identifying certain themes within these comments, these comment threads seem to reflect a sense of feminist backlash among certain Norwegian individuals and online commentators. Interestingly, regardless of the commentator being anonymous or non-anonymous, non-neutral comments were found to be largely anti-feminist. However, it seems that when anonymity is offered, the commentator was more likely to use insulting language and in a small way more likely to include both anti-immigrant and Islamophobic stances when also discussing feminism. Some comments would reflect only anti-immigration views in addition to an anti-feminist stance, while others would focus particularly on Islam and Muslim immigrants, revealing an additional Islamophobic component of their comment, and two comments combined

all three concepts. This suggests Islamophobia as an additional set of belief held by some individuals when discussing anti-immigration stances as a whole. It also seems that when anonymity is involved, individuals are more likely to comment in the first place, as there is a much higher number of comments in Dagbladet's comment threads than in Verdens Gang (VG). Overall, these comment threads reveal that feminism is still a contested topic within the Norwegian society, in addition to a continued, but limited, focus on immigration, which continues to create social and political debates.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This thesis reveals that after analyzing 1933 comments found in comment threads following twelve pro-feminist opinion pieces published in two of Norway's biggest newspapers, most of the comments, 57% were neutral or non-applicable. That means that the majority of the commentators did not discuss feminism or the pro-feminist theme of the opinion piece in any way. Some discussed proper ways of participating in online debates, others conferred with each other on how to use the technical features of this particular online discussion function. Other commentators focused on discussing various political parties and leanings within Norway, educational directions and the prison system, not directly mentioning feminism. Some commentators expressed their dismay with the newspapers in Norway and their perceived biased political leanings, and others stated that online discussions are mainly a waste of time. Many comments were also short responses to other comments that were deemed non-applicable, as they did not discuss statements on feminism in the comments they were attached to. The fact that so many comments did not mention feminism or took a stance on the pro-feminist theme of the opinion piece, might suggest that a number of individuals do not believe feminism is necessary or worth discussing, or do not find the topic interesting and use these particular online spaces for other discussion purposes instead.

The rest of the comments that did discuss feminism, namely 43% did so in a mostly negative fashion, with 18% of comments categorized as somewhat anti-feminist and 14% as anti-feminist, compared to 8% as somewhat feminist and 4% as feminist. This suggests that when feminism is discussed, there is a sense of feminist backlash reflected in these particular comments. The backlash against feminism found in some of

these comments reflect the view of feminism having negative social, economic, and political effects as stated by Faludi (1991). Several of the comments discussed affirmative action, gendered study points, and general favoritism of women within a system of state feminism in Norway, perceived in turn to have a discriminatory effect on men in various aspects of life. Notably, many of the comments claimed that feminism is no longer needed in Norway, and that self-identified feminists or feminist organizations are wrong or delusional in trying to argue for the continued need for feminism or social issues using a feminist lens. Arguably, to some feminism is then seen by some as unnecessary, outdated, or even as hurting certain individuals within the Norwegian society. Some comments pointed to the aforementioned “good girl-syndrome” and believed that the high number of women in part-time jobs and few numbers of women in high managerial positions were due to added pressure to perform equally in multiple aspects of life, as stated by Storvik and Schøne (2008). This seems to support the suggestion that feminism adds pressure to women’s lives, rather than helping their situation within the Norwegian society. However, a few comments pointed to the fact that because many of these comments reflected negative and hostile views against feminism and feminist commentators, it should be taken as a sign that feminism is still needed. As Browne (2013) argued, the sense of feminist backlash can also be used as inspiration to keep working within a feminist framework and continue to push for change. Although few, some commentators were clear in their beliefs of the importance of feminism, suggesting that while there might a sense of backlash against feminism demonstrated by some commentators, there are still also individuals that support feminism in Norway.

Within the comments deemed to be anti-feminist, the sense backlash against feminism could perhaps be due to a lack of understanding of what feminism really entails. In addition to a large number of commentators arguing that feminism and equality is not the same, many rejected or mocked feminist concepts and arguments like the existence of patriarchy, privilege, and heteronormativity. Only one commentator mentioned intersectionality, and the need for implementing an intersectional lens when discussing various issues. Interestingly, many commentators suggested that the only groups that needed attention from Norwegian feminist individuals and organizations were non-ethnic immigrant women. While this demonstrates a link between gender, race and ethnicity that influence these particular women's experiences, the concern for these women were largely shown using the "crisis frame" by focusing on particular culture-specific practices, like genital cutting, as discussed by Siim & Skjeie, 2008. Adhering to the image of the powerless "third World woman" introduced by Mohanty (2003), this suggests that many commentators believe that feminism is only valid when it is used to 'save' non-ethnic Norwegian immigrants and non-Western women beyond Norwegian borders. Working towards creating a better understanding of feminism and feminist concepts seems vital when addressing various feminist and social issues within the Norwegian public and is therefore an important component in promoting positive and effective discussions on these matters.

Further, another element of the feminist backlash found in certain comments, seems to be the perceived paradoxical support of immigration and multiculturalism by Norwegian feminists. While comments on immigration were few, some of these comments argue that feminism supports a "mass import" of immigrant individuals and

certain immigrant cultures that harms the Norwegian society, especially culturally and economically, as argued by Fitzgerald, Curtis and Corliss (2012). This further seems to be for many a reason to reject feminism as a whole. In addition to believe that increased immigration and large immigration groups are a serious liability for the Norwegian welfare system, some commentators also argue that certain immigrant individuals are a threat to Norwegian women. A few commentators believe that immigrant men are solely responsible for the rates of sexual harassment and assaults in Norway, and often these are believed to be Muslim male immigrants. Although very few, some commentators reflected Islamophobic stances by believing Muslim men to be a serious threat or liability to the Norwegian society. By arguing that feminism is responsible for allowing and supporting increased immigration, especially from Muslim cultures, by extension this seems to suggest that many believe that feminists supports perceived harmful behavior towards women, which is in turn seen as very ironic. This might propose that a backlash against and rejection of feminism is justified, because within this logic feminism hurt women rather than help them. Here too it becomes clear that these issues needs to be explored through an intersectional lens, as there are several social issues connected to gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality simultaneously. This reflects a heightened need for intersectionality within Norwegian feminism as well as the Norwegian society.

Lastly, this thesis illustrates the possibility of online spaces being utilized to express a sense of feminist backlash. Seeing that most of the comments in this project were neutral or non-applicable, might suggest that a large number of commentators are not willing to discuss feminism online at all. However, the comments that did focus on feminism did so in largely negative ways using negative, harassing, and insulting



language. It seems that because commentators were allowed to be anonymous in an online setting, they were more likely to participate in these discussions and more likely to use negative rhetoric. While difficult to confirm as they were anonymous, it seems that most of the commentators that discussed feminism in negative ways were male-identified. This might suggest that the online comment threads in this project were largely male-dominated, just as Royal (2008) argues the Internet is as a whole. Commentators that expressed feminist views or self-identified as feminists were often dismissed as delusional or called various derogatory anti-feminist terms and one male commentator that self-identified as a feminist were mocked and deemed non-masculine. This suggests that self-identified feminists online are especially targeted with negative language, as Cole (2015) defines as disciplinary rhetoric, which was apparent in some of the comments in this project. Negative and harassing language can serve to silence certain voices and groups in public online spaces, which proved true in at least one incident where one commentator stated that she was too tired to continue discussing because of certain online behavior.

In conclusion, this research shows that there might be a resistance to discuss feminism and feminist issues in public online spaces, as most of the comments in this project were neutral or non-applicable. Within the comments that did discuss feminism, there is still some sense of backlash against feminism in Norway, as well as a very limited number of anti-immigration and Islamophobic stances, especially expressed in anonymous online discussion threads. There is still a limited understanding of feminism and feminist concepts among the Norwegian population, and an apparent need within Norwegian feminism and general population to strengthen the use of intersectionality.

While online spaces may facilitate fruitful discussions to address these issues, there is also a need to address the nature of these online spaces, as they can serve to deter certain voices of marginalized groups to participate in these important public debates. It is my hope that this research serves as an addition to the continuance of feminist scholarship, debate and work to address feminism, immigration, and the nature of online debates when discussing these issues in Norway and beyond. I also hope that this research shows that while these discussions might be hostile and certain voices might be attacked or harassed for uttering their opinions in a public space, they are not alone. It is important to recognize that this is an issue that needs to be addressed, but hopefully it will inspire more voices to speak up and continue important discussions about feminism and the positive effect that feminist scholarship and activism can have on addressing various social issues.

This thesis can inspire further research seeing that this study only featured a small sample of comment threads following twelve pro-feminist opinion pieces published in two online newspapers, so a larger number of articles and their following discussion threads might continue to yield results more suited for generalizations. Other online newspapers with different readerships might also provide more diverse natures of commentators and content of comments. Comment threads following anti-feminist articles might also yield different results, and offer additional information and comments to analyze further. Another possible future research approach could be further exploring the gender of the author of the opinion pieces, to see if a male author would yield different responses from commentators than if the author is female. Also, it might be fruitful to explore the gender of the commentator wherever that is possible, and analyze the nature of their comments to see if their gender seems to influence their utterances and

language use. Further, it might also be helpful to investigate whether or not certain authors of certain gender or identities have been faced with online harassment which has deterred them from participating in future public debates. Ultimately, hopefully by continuing research on this matter, one can improve the understanding and use of feminist scholarship and activism; address the nature of online public spaces and its treatment of marginalized groups and voices that are vital to public discussions on social issues.

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### Appendix 1:

List of articles in Dagbladet:

Date	Author	Title (Norwegian and English)	# of comments
07.22.14	Kristine Solvin	Åpent brev til pappafeministene/ Open letter to the “daddy feminists”	512
07.25.14	Marte Skolem	Pappaer må også få være feminister/ Dads should also be allowed to be feminists	30
07.31.14	Julie Odner Sigurdson	Global feminism for begge kjønn/ Global feminism for both genders	488
08.26.14	Madeleine Schultz	Ikke din feminism/ Not your feminism	296
09.04.14	Rannveig L. Stava	Er feminismen ved veiens ende?/ Is this the end of the road for feminism?	179
10.17.14	Aina Stenersen	Fremtidens feminisme/ Feminism for the future	97

## Appendix 2:

List of articles in Verdens Gang (VG):

Date	Author	Title (Norwegian and English)	# of comments
08.10.14	Tonje Haabeth and Ingvild Mangseth	Ræva kvinnesyn!/ Sucky view on women!	107
10.16.14	Julie Østengen	Ikke kødd med statsfeminismen!/ Don't mess with the state feminism!	21
10.18.14	Hanne Skartveit	Udugelige men- og dyktige kvinner/ Useless men and skilled women	100
10.23.14	Victoria Wæthing	Vi er alle feminister/ We are all feminists	10
11.24.14	Sanna Sarroma	Kvinner som forsvinner/ Women that disappear	16
12.17.14	Rannveig Svendby	Født til sølvplass/ Born first runner-up	91