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**GENDER FACTOR IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION
(BASED ON MODERN ENGLISH)**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
I. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER STUDIES IN ONLINE MEDIA DISCOURSE	8
1.1 Digital discourse as a subject of linguistic research.....	8
1.2 Gender as a discursive and sociolinguistic category	13
1.3 Linguistic perspectives on gender representation in media texts.....	19
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER I.....	25
II. GENDERED LANGUAGE PATTERNS IN ONLINE OPINION ARTICLES (2020–2026)	26
2.1 Lexical characteristics of gender representation	26
2.2 Stylistic and discursive features of gendered language	33
2.3 Implicit gender bias and stereotypical representations.....	39
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER II	47
CONCLUSION	48
REFERENCES	50

АНОТАЦІЯ

Кваліфікаційна робота присвячена дослідженню лінгвальної репрезентації гендеру в сучасному англомовному онлайн-дискурсі думкових статей. **Актуальність** теми зумовлена зростанням впливу цифрових медіа на формування соціальних смислів та ідентичностей, а також недостатнім рівнем вивченості гендерних аспектів мови в жанрі аналітично-публіцистичних інтернет-текстів.

Метою роботи є визначення специфіки мовної репрезентації гендеру в сучасному англомовному онлайн-дискурсі. Відповідно до мети сформульовано такі **завдання**: окреслено теоретичні підходи до вивчення цифрового дискурсу та гендеру в лінгвістиці, проаналізовано лексичні характеристики гендерної репрезентації, досліджено стилістичні й дискурсивні особливості гендерно маркованої мови, а також виявлено прояви імпліцитної гендерної упередженості в медіатекстах.

Об'єктом дослідження є сучасний англомовний онлайн-дискурс думкових статей. **Предмет дослідження** становлять лексичні, стилістичні та дискурсивні засоби мовної репрезентації гендеру в онлайн-медіатекстах. **Матеріалом** слугувала вибірка з 22 думкових статей англійською мовою, опублікованих у британських та американських онлайн-виданнях упродовж 2020–2026 років.

Методи дослідження включають аналіз і систематизацію теоретичних джерел, а також описово-інтерпретаційні методи — спостереження, класифікацію, дискурс-аналіз, що дали змогу встановити зв'язок між мовними формами та їхніми соціальними конотаціями. У **результаті дослідження** встановлено, що гендерні особливості онлайн-дискурсу проявляються не через чітке протиставлення «жіночих» і «чоловічих» мовних моделей, а через гнучке

використання мовних стратегій залежно від тематики, жанру та комунікативної мети тексту.

Структура роботи: вступ, два розділи, висновки, список використаних джерел.

Ключові слова: гендер, онлайн-дискурс думкових статей, гендерна репрезентація, дискурс-аналіз, мовні стратегії, імпліцитна упередженість.

ABSTRACT

The qualification paper studies the linguistic representation of gender in contemporary English-language online discourse of opinion articles. **The relevance** is determined by the growing influence of digital media on the formation of social meanings and identities, and by the insufficient study of gender aspects of language in analytical internet texts.

The aim is to determine the specifics of linguistic gender representation in contemporary English-language online discourse. **The objectives** are: theoretical approaches to digital discourse and gender in linguistics are outlined, lexical characteristics of gender representation are analysed, stylistic and discursive features of gender-marked language are investigated, and manifestations of implicit gender bias in media texts are identified.

The object is the contemporary English-language online discourse of opinion articles. **The subject** comprises lexical, stylistic, and discursive means of linguistic gender representation in online media texts. **The material** encompasses 22 opinion articles in English from British and American online publications (2020–2026).

Research methods include analysis and systematisation of theoretical sources, as well as descriptive and interpretative methods – observation, classification, discourse analysis – which established the link between linguistic forms and their social connotations. The study found that gender features of online discourse manifest not through a clear opposition of “female” and “male” linguistic models, but through the flexible use of language strategies depending on topic, genre, and communicative purpose.

The structure of the paper consists of an introduction, two chapters, a conclusion, and a list of references.

Keywords: gender, online opinion discourse, gender representation, discourse analysis, language strategies, implicit bias.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, online communication has emerged as a primary means of interaction. Technology has been developing rapidly, reshaping the ways in which language is used and leading to new forms of discourse. Notably, online media discourse, especially opinion pieces on digital platforms, influences what people think and how they perceive themselves and society. Linguists have become increasingly interested in examining how word choices reveal and shape ideas about gender. In online spaces, where written communication often replaces face-to-face interaction, language plays a key role in expressing identity, including gender identity. The ways authors select words, styles, and discourse may reinforce, challenge, or neutralise gender stereotypes.

The **theoretical foundations** for gender and language studies have been laid by several key scholars. Robin Lakoff (1975) introduced the concept of “women’s language” and identified specific linguistic traits associated with female speech. Deborah Tannen (1990) proposed the theory of gendered communication styles, distinguishing between rapport-oriented and report-oriented interactions. Additionally, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) framed gender as a social practice shaped through discourse. These foundational theories help us understand how gender is expressed in language, while current research expands these concepts into the realm of digital communication.

The relevance of this study is determined by several key factors. First, there is the growing importance of online media discourse, especially opinion articles, as platforms for actively shaping social meanings and identities. Additionally, while many studies have explored gender and language, there is still a pressing need for more targeted research on how gender is represented linguistically in modern English-language online opinion pieces. Analysing these texts helps us understand

how gender identities, stereotypes, and biases are constructed and disseminated in online spaces.

The purpose of this research is to explore how gender is linguistically represented in contemporary English-language online opinion discourse.

In accordance with the purpose of this study, **the objectives** of the research are:

- to examine theoretical approaches to digital discourse and gender in linguistics;
- to analyse lexical characteristics of gender representation in online opinion articles;
- to identify stylistic and discursive features of gendered language;
- to investigate implicit gender bias and stereotypical representations in media texts.

The object of the study is contemporary English-language online opinion discourse.

The subject of the study is the system of linguistic means (lexical, stylistic, and discursive) used to portray and shape gender in online media texts.

The research material is a corpus of 22 opinion articles written in English, sourced from British and American online media and published between 2020 and 2026.

Research methods are based on the analysis and systematisation of theoretical sources, as well as on descriptive and interpretative techniques such as observation, classification, and discourse analysis. These methods help uncover the connections between language forms and their social implications.

The structure of the work consists of an introduction, two chapters, a conclusion, and a reference list.

I. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER STUDIES IN ONLINE MEDIA DISCOURSE

1.1 Digital discourse as a subject of linguistic research

Since the 1990s, researchers have been reconsidering approaches to language use in digital environments. The focus of early studies was on how technological features influenced computer-mediated communication (CMC) [Herring 1996]. The development of social media platforms, mobile communication, and digital technologies has led to the emergence of a new form of online communication, known as digital discourse.

At the same time, defining digital discourse is not straightforward. It is often unclear what unites various phenomena under “digital” beyond a reference to computers [Bateman 2021]. Several scholars have sought to clarify the concept by balancing technological and social perspectives. One of the more comprehensive approaches is proposed by Tagg, who offers a comprehensive technological map: she defines digital communication as interactions mediated by digital technologies (internet or GSM networks) across devices (computers, tablets, smartphones) and platforms (social media, websites, messaging services). She observes that such communication can be asynchronous or synchronous, with interactivity remaining central regardless of temporal delay [Tagg 2015].

Although Tagg’s definition captures the technological infrastructure, it is equally important to consider the role of the user in the shaping of digital language practices. In this regard, there was a gradual shift in focus from medium-centred to user-centred analysis [Androutsopoulos 2011]. Rejecting technological determinism, he argues that digital language use cannot be reduced to a set of “typical” features of “netspeak.” Instead, communication technologies are locally appropriated by users for the purpose of affecting diverse discourse genres. Across

these definitions, a consensus emerges regarding the role of digital discourse, influenced by both the affordances of platforms and the situated practices of users.

The present study is founded upon a user-centred approach, and contemporary research identifies several interrelated characteristics that distinguish digital discourse from traditional communication. In her subsequent work, Susan Herring built upon her earlier contributions by developing the concept of “Discourse 2.0” or convergent media computer-mediated discourse, which encompasses new content types (status updates, video annotations, social tags, wiki edits) and new usage patterns, notably media coactivity (near-simultaneous engagement with multiple activities on a single platform) and multiauthorship (joint discourse production) [Herring 2013]. These developments have been facilitated by technological advances, including collaborative editing environments and tagging systems. Crucially, users also circumvent platform constraints through creative adaptations. For example, the use of the symbols @ and # on the social media platform Twitter, retweeting practices, and performing interactivity on otherwise monologic blogs.

The nature of digital discourse is interactive, and this factor also leads to the emergence of "networked publics." The term 'social networking platform' refers to a virtual public sphere that functions analogously to traditional public spaces while displaying distinctive technological characteristics [boyd 2008]. The author's analysis posits that “networked publics which are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” [boyd 2008, p. 1].

A further defining characteristic is multimodality. Contemporary communication studies have increasingly emphasised that meaning in digital environments is constructed not only through the use of language, but also through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources, including images, video, typography

and layout [Thurlow 2018]. This perspective, which is pivotal in contemporary communication studies, directs attention to the manner in which language interacts with – and is only made meaningful through – other semiotic systems. The convergence of “old” and “new” media, combined with the layering of different digital platforms, makes a multimodal approach essential. Overlooking these risks reduces the analysis of digital texts to mere linguistic content, ignoring the creative potential that emerges from the orchestration of multiple resources. As Kress & van Leeuwen illustrate with the example of a bedroom, texts are inherently multimodal, requiring the ‘orchestration’ of multiple semiotic modes [Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, p. 11]. Similarly, Jones invokes the bedroom as a common site for young people’s digital media practices, underscoring the situated, spatialised nature of digital discourse [Jones 2010].

Compared with traditional forms of communication, digital discourse operates on fundamentally different principles. Traditional discourse is typically linear, stable, and characterised by clear author-audience roles [van Dijk 2008]. Digital discourse, by contrast, is frequently non-linear, fragmented, and dynamic, enabling many-to-many interaction and immediate or near-immediate feedback. The terminology used to describe language in digital environments remains unstable – terms such as “netspeak” imply a homogeneity that does not reflect the actual diversity of online language use [Crystal 2011]. This instability has significant implications for discourse analysis, as traditional genre boundaries become indistinct and texts become embedded in dialogic, interactive spaces where readers can comment, share, and reinterpret content.

This fundamental shift has opened several significant research avenues in linguistics. One strand of research explores the impact of technological advancements on linguistic phenomena, encompassing novel orthographic practices, abbreviations, and the pragmatic functions of emojis [Dürscheid & Frehner, 2013].

Their analysis reveals economically motivated features such as consonant spellings, letter-number homophones, and omission of apostrophes, alongside expressive uses of repeated letters, capitalisation, and non-standard punctuation. It is noteworthy that even seemingly playful elements such as emoticons carry substantial pragmatic weight, functioning as markers of illocutionary force, humour, or irony. This finding suggests that technological affordances, such as the speed and asynchronous nature of email, encourage both efficiency and creative expression.

A secondary strand focuses on newer forms of communication, including memes and GIFs. The challenge posed by these to conventional notions of text and genre is a salient point of discussion. As demonstrated in the analysis of participatory media, ‘memes, as networks of mediated cultural participation use them, are multimodal artefacts, where image and text are integrated to tell a joke, make an observation, or advance an argument’ [Milner 2012, p. 11]. Their circulation is dependent upon constant remix and recontextualisation, whereby readers are transformed into co-creators, resulting in a dissolution of the boundary between production and consumption. This finding suggests a more extensive transition towards genres that are characterised by fluidity, collaboration, and user interaction in their shaping.

Finally, digital discourse is deeply intertwined with questions of identity and power. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) treats language use as social practice – simultaneously shaped by social structures and actively shaping them [Fairclough 2013, pp. 1–2]. Discourse is not merely a reflection of reality; it is an active agent in the formation of social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. Power is exerted in the context of asymmetries amongst participants, as well as through the control over the processes of text production, distribution, and interpretation. Consequently, this enables an influence over the established conventions of discourse. Ideology, in its fundamental aspect, functions primarily

via the process of naturalising particular representations and practices, which become accepted as "common sense" and thereby serve to maintain and perpetuate relations of domination. The CDA's objective is to deconstruct these ideologies by examining the interrelationships among textual characteristics, discursive processes, and the broader socio-cultural contexts.

The concept of FCDA (Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis) serves to extend this framework by positioning gender as a fundamental category of critical inquiry. The FCDA's research focuses on the examination of how gender ideologies that reinforce power asymmetries become integrated into specific communities and discourse contexts, and the potential for their challenge [Lazar 2005, p. 1]. Central to this perspective is the claim that gender is an ideological structure that divides people hierarchically based on the presumed naturalness of sexual difference. Adopting a constitutive view of discourse, FCDA draws on feminist scholarship emphasising that gender is actively "done" or "performed" through language, rather than being a pre-existing category. The objective is to demystify and challenge discourses that naturalise gendered inequalities – from overt sexism to increasingly subtle forms of bias – across a range of social domains, including digital media.

With this theoretical framework, networked publics emerge as key sites for identity performance. Social media enables users to "write themselves into being" through self-presentation, often in ways continuous with their offline identities [boyd 2014, p. 37]. She identifies four affordances that shape identity work in networked publics: persistence (online expressions are durable), visibility (content can reach broad audiences), spreadability (content can be easily shared), and searchability (content can be found). These technical features create both opportunities and challenges for identity performance, as contexts collapse and audiences become invisible. In response, users develop strategies – encoding

messages, adjusting privacy settings, switching between platforms – to perform their identities for intended audiences while navigating visibility and surveillance.

Complementing this, the role of digital discourse in the construction of identity is explored through a detailed examination of everyday storytelling practices on social media [Page 2012]. Her analysis demonstrates that identity is performed through linguistic choices, including topic selection, evaluative language and stylistic devices that signal the narrator's stance towards their audience. It is crucial to acknowledge the role of social dimensions, such as gender and age, in shaping these patterns. Users strategically utilise culturally available resources to establish their position within their respective peer groups. Collectively, these studies suggest that online identity is not a static attribute transferred to digital spaces, but rather an evolving, interactive accomplishment achieved through situated linguistic practice. This renders digital discourse a particularly valuable lens for examining how social categories – especially gender – are constructed, reinforced, and potentially contested through language and social interaction.

1.2 Gender as a discursive and sociolinguistic category

Any study of gender and language must begin by distinguishing sex from gender. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet state, “sex is a biological categorisation based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex, exaggerates biological difference, and carries that difference into domains where it is completely irrelevant. There is no biological reason, for example, why women should mince and men should swagger, or why women should have red toenails and men should not” [Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003, p. 10].

However, the distinction between sex and gender is not as clear-cut as is often assumed. Most people treat sex as a biological fact and gender as a socially

constructed, changeable overlay. Nevertheless, there is no single biological test that can definitively assign an individual as "male" or "female". When doctors assign sex, they take into account anatomy, hormones and chromosomes. Which criteria they prioritise, therefore, depends on cultural assumptions about what constitutes maleness or femaleness. Consequently, the definition of the biological categories "male" and "female" – and people's understanding of themselves and others as such – is ultimately social. As Anne Fausto-Sterling summarises: "labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender – not science – can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place" [Fausto-Sterling 2000, p. 3]. This suggests that gender is not a biological reality but rather a social construct that is negotiated through everyday practices, including language.

From this perspective, gender is not something we are born with, nor something we have, but something we do [West & Zimmerman 1987] – something we perform [Butler 1990]. West and Zimmerman's concept of "doing gender" posits that, in all social interactions, individuals are held accountable to gender norms, and language becomes a principal instrument for either reinforcing or challenging these expectations. As illustrated by the use of tag questions ("It's a good idea, isn't it?") or directives ("Do this now"), it is evident that such linguistic acts do not constitute a neutral performance. Rather, they are implicated in the performance of gender. This foundation is essential for the analysis of online opinion discourse. When a user posts a comment such as "Well, actually, I think you're wrong" versus "I'm sorry, but I'm not sure I agree," they are not merely stating an opinion - they are constructing a gendered stance, projecting assertiveness or hesitancy by drawing on culturally available linguistic resources.

One of the earliest and most influential approaches to language and gender was proposed in *Language and Woman's Place* [Lakoff 1975]. She argued that women are socialised to use a distinct set of linguistic features that both reflect and sustain their subordinate social position. Drawing on introspection and media examples, she identified “women’s language”: precise colour terms (*mauve, lavender*), empty adjectives (*divine, lovely*), weaker expletives (*oh dear, goodness*) vs. stronger ones (*shit, damn*), tag questions, rising intonation on declarative answers, and an overall preference for politeness and hedging. Lakoff claimed these features make women sound uncertain and less authoritative, diminishing their credibility in public discourse. She also examined how women are spoken *about* – for instance, the euphemistic use of *lady* versus *woman*, or how *professional* applied to a woman often implies prostitution. While Lakoff’s work was groundbreaking, critics have noted that she treats “women’s language” as a fixed property of female speakers rather than a strategic resource available to all. This is a significant limitation, especially in online contexts, where male users may employ hedging language to be polite while female users may use direct assertions to establish authority. Speech patterns are tools that speakers deploy depending on the audience and situation.

A different but related perspective is presented, contrasting men’s tendency toward “report-talk” – a means of asserting independence and negotiating status in a hierarchical social order, often through public speaking, storytelling, joking, or sharing information – with women’s preference for “rapport-talk” – a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships, with emphasis on displaying similarities and matching experiences [Deborah Tannen 1990, p. 36]. Tannen observed that women feel most comfortable speaking privately (at home or with a few close friends), whereas men are more comfortable speaking in larger, less familiar groups. She noted this pattern in her own lectures: regardless of the gender

balance in the audience, men almost invariably asked the first question, more questions, and longer questions, while women often felt that men were dominating the floor. In online opinion discourse, Tannen's model offers a useful lens. One might observe male users stating opinions as facts ("This is clearly wrong") and female users hedging or inviting dialogue ("Does anyone else feel that...?"). However, critics have warned that Tannen's work may inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes and downplay the roles of power, context, and individual variation. Moreover, when users can hide behind usernames online, or when platforms develop their own unwritten rules, these gender patterns may not hold. This criticism is particularly relevant because digital anonymity and platform-specific norms can disrupt the patterns observed in face-to-face conversation as described by Lakoff and Tannen.

Instead of just asking whether men and women talk differently online, researchers are now more interested in understanding how and why people perform gender differently across different digital spaces. This shift has considerable implications for analysing online discussions, where individuals may lean into or push back against gendered ways of speaking to project expertise, build rapport, or express disagreement.

A more nuanced approach comes from the concept of indexicality, first developed by linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs. She argued that few linguistic features directly and exclusively signal gender. Instead, language *indexes* specific stances, behaviours, or traits that are culturally associated with gender. The relationship between language and gender is typically non-exclusive – the same forms can be used by speakers of any gender, though with different frequencies. Crucially, Ochs proposed a constitutive relation: linguistic forms first index stances (e.g., hesitancy, confidence) or social acts (e.g., requesting confirmation), and these stances and acts themselves come to be associated with particular gender images

within a community. For instance, tag questions do not directly signal "female"; they may index an epistemic stance of uncertainty or a social act of checking for agreement. In cultures where women are expected to adopt a less assertive stance, such behaviours are often interpreted as "feminine". It was also clarified that indexing functions across temporal domains: "the practice of speculation can recontextualise past events or precontextualise future events by changing 'certain' events into 'uncertain' events" [Ochs 1992, p. 345].

A recent study extends this framework by examining how uptalk – rising intonation that makes statements sound like questions – affects perceptions of credibility in legal contexts. In a medical malpractice trial (a setting with relatively weak gender ideologies), uptalk reduced confidence ratings for both male and female witnesses [Levon & Ye 2020]. However, in a rape trial, where gender ideologies are of particular significance, the male defendant's use of uptalk enhanced his likability and persuasiveness, while the female complainant's credibility remained unaffected. It is striking that the same linguistic feature can carry opposite social meanings, depending on the speaker's identity and the ideological context of the situation.

Moving from offline to online spaces is not simply a matter of carrying over the same gendered behaviours observed in person. Three features of digital platforms are particularly important for gender performance: anonymity, asynchronicity, and public visibility. Anonymity allows users to experiment with gender presentation, but research shows mixed results. While anonymity can reduce stereotype threat – for example, voice masking has been shown to improve women's performance online – it does not fully eliminate gender bias. A large-scale study across multiple universities analysed over 1.4 million posts on a discussion platform and found that posts with "female" names received significantly lower ratings, even when usernames were randomly assigned [Botelho, T. et al. 2022]. Furthermore, negative content posted by women tends to have a more damaging effect on them than similar

content posted by men. This suggests that cultural biases persist even under conditions of anonymity, and that gender bias runs deep in how we evaluate contributions.

Asynchronicity – the delay between posting and response – gives users time to craft, edit, and self-monitor their opinions. Unlike spontaneous spoken conversation, online comments can be revised, balanced, or written with a specific intention. On one hand, this allows users to present different facets of their identity; on the other, the lack of paralinguistic cues (tone of voice, body language) can make messages seem more aggressive or less confident than intended.

Public visibility is a key factor in the enforcement of gendered norms, manifesting through trolling, backlash, and undermining evaluations. Research on the subreddit r/ChangeMyView (CMV) shows that when users explicitly disclose their gender – e.g., “I am a woman” – community responses break down along gender lines. Posts by women who self-identify receive significantly more comments and higher ratings than posts by men, yet they also attract male commenters explicitly stating “as a man” to argue against the woman’s point. Moreover, explicit gender disclosure is associated with lower overall post ratings [Falenska, Vecchi & Lapesa, p. 7-8]. This suggests that when a woman performs her identity publicly online, she may encounter both support and opposition simultaneously. Similarly, analysis of news comment sections on stories like #MeToo and Missing White Woman Syndrome finds that women – particularly feminists – are consistently undermined through labels such as “irrational,” “hysterical,” or “fake” (e.g., “completely incapable of logical thought”) [O’Farrell 2024]. Such attacks are not rare; they form a regular part of comment threads and create a hostile climate. As a result, women report feeling less safe speaking up online and are more likely to withdraw from political discussions after receiving negative feedback – a tendency observed less often among men. The fear of negative

reactions, whether direct or indirect, serves as a powerful mechanism of social control. It shapes who feels entitled to speak, in what manner, and on which topics, thereby perpetuating existing gender power dynamics online. Consequently, gender is not an innate trait; rather, it is a social construct shaped by linguistic practices, social expectations and cultural ideologies. The study of gender as a discursive and sociolinguistic category thus provides a robust framework for examining how social identities are constructed and represented in online communication.

1.3 Linguistic perspectives on gender representation in media texts

To understand how gender operates in online opinion discourse, it is insufficient to simply count the presence of men and women as subjects. Instead, the focus must be on how people talk about gender – the specific words and grammatical structures they choose. Media language does not passively reflect social reality; it actively shapes it. Following Fairclough’s framework, media discourse is a form of social practice in which meanings are negotiated and naturalised. Through repeated patterns of representation, media institutions construct particular versions of femininity and masculinity that come to feel normative.

This process is remarkably consistent across cultural contexts. An analysis of Turkish TV dramas using transitivity revealed that female characters are systematically portrayed as passive participants rather than active agents, reinforcing deeply rooted gender stereotypes regardless of the surface narrative [Sancar 2025]. A similar phenomenon has been observed in the context of online harassment of Pakistani influencers, with documented tactics ranging from body shaming and moral policing to religious condemnation - all of which marginalise women’s public voices and reaffirm male authority [Yasmin et al. 2025]. Across these studies, a clear pattern emerges: media discourse consistently positions women as objects of action rather than initiators, and this bias operates through subtle linguistic micro-choices.

The preference for one word over another, or passive voice over active, subtly shapes how readers perceive gender.

Since language carries ideological weight, it is possible to outline a multi-level framework for identifying gender representation in media texts. Three levels are particularly relevant: lexicon (word choice), syntax (grammatical structure), and discourse strategies (framing, topic selection, and voice attribution).

The most visible way gender is represented is through the lexicon. Lexical choices often expose hidden assumptions about gender roles and social hierarchies. Three lexical phenomena are especially significant. First, gender-marked terms – such as feminine suffixes (*-ess*, *-ette*), compound nouns (*woman doctor*, *male nurse*), or the use of *lady* versus *woman* – function to mark the referent as deviating from an implicitly male default. When one gender is marked (“actress”) and the other is not (“actor”), the unmarked category is presented as the normal human state.

Second, naming strategies reveal bias. This includes the use of first names rather than surnames or titles (e.g., “Kamala” vs “Mr Trump”), or the inclusion of relational or familiar descriptions for women in professional contexts (e.g., “mother of three”) when such information is absent for men. A study of Albanian opinion articles (2021–2024) found this pattern precisely: the word for “man” (*burrë*) frequently collocated with terms denoting political power and strength (e.g., *burrë shteti* [“statesman”], *burrë i fortë* [“strong man”]), positioning men in authority. Conversely, the word for “woman” (*grua*) appeared alongside terms meaning victim or housewife (e.g., *grua e vrarë* [“killed woman”], *grua e dhunuar* [“abused woman”]) [Qafzezi & Kaçauni 2024]. This suggests that women are depicted as recipients of action or as role models rather than as autonomous agents. Furthermore, computational analysis of English news headlines has revealed a consistent tendency to portray women using victim-oriented or relationally defined terms (e.g., *scammed*, *missing*, *husband*, *honour* in crime reporting; *protest*, *activist*, *uproar* in political

coverage). In contrast, men were linked to institutional authority and active roles (e.g., minister, governor, suspect, kills) [Arshad & Akram 2026]. Despite the fact that women appeared as frequently as men, the language still portrayed them as outsiders, victims or troublemakers rather than as holders of genuine power.

Third, evaluative vocabulary carries gendered connotations. Words like *hysterical*, *shrill*, *bossy*, and *emotional* are disproportionately applied to female politicians and leaders, while *ambitious* shifts in meaning depending on the gender of its referent. These lexical patterns create a semantic “halo” that shapes readers’ judgments without explicit awareness.

While the lexicon provides content, syntax demonstrates how that content is organised. The systemic functional grammar approaches clauses from two perspectives, namely the transitive (Actor + Goal) and ergative, by means of the following interrogative: who is in control? [Halliday 1994]. From an ergative perspective, the key distinction is between self-generated action (middle voice) and action caused by an external agent (effective voice). A crucial syntactic variable is the choice between active and passive voice. A structure such as “The woman was assaulted” (passive without agent) backgrounds the assailant, whereas “The man assaulted the woman” (active) emphasises male agency. Conversely, overuse of passive constructions when discussing women’s accomplishments (“The bill was passed by the senator”) can diminish perceptions of their active role.

Recent research shows that this syntactic gendering is systematic. To reach this conclusion, an analysis was conducted of scripts from 98 children's television programmes, covering a period of almost six decades [Vial et al. 2025]. They found that words referring to men and boys were consistently placed in the ‘agent’ role, while words referring to women and girls appeared more often in the ‘patient’ role. A parallel analysis of French and English texts reveals that masculine nouns and pronouns demonstrate a stronger tendency to function as subjects in comparison to

their feminine counterparts, even when the semantic role is identical [Da Cunha and Abeillé 2025]. Both studies demonstrate an enduring bias, whereby male referents are assigned grammatically prominent roles, while female referents are allocated less prominent ones.

Beyond the sentence level, gender representation is achieved through broader discursive strategies that organise texts and position audiences. Framing refers to selecting which aspects of reality to highlight, thereby pushing audiences toward particular interpretations of problems, causes, and solutions [Entman 1993]. In the context of gender, framing determines whether a story about a female politician focuses on her policies or her appearance, and whether domestic violence is treated as an isolated crime or a widespread social problem. These framing choices are not neutral; they systematically guide readers toward specific evaluations.

Topic selection – a macro-level discursive choice – determines which events and voices are deemed newsworthy. The persistent underrepresentation of women in “hard news” sections (e.g., politics, economics) and their overrepresentation in “soft news” (e.g., lifestyle, celebrity) constitutes a form of discursive gatekeeping. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the largest international study of gender and news, documents these disparities. An analysis of UK and Irish data from 2020 reveals a disproportionate representation of males in media content: for every two female individuals depicted, there are five male individuals [Wheatley et al. 2025]. While the number of women journalists is slowly increasing, they remain less likely to cover politics and government, instead succeeding as news anchors and presenters – roles often perceived as less prestigious than “hard” news reporting. This gendered division of topics minimises women’s expertise in public life.

Voice attribution – who is cited as an expert versus who is quoted for emotional reaction – validates or undermines perspectives. A computational study was conducted of 22,627 vaccine-related quotes from 76 South African news

sources, collected over the period 2020–2023 [Ohamadike et al. 2025]. They found that journalists consistently treated white sources as go-to experts on global vaccine issues, while largely limiting Black voices to local community reactions. Male speakers were also quoted significantly more often than female speakers. In opinion journalism, the choice of whom to quote reveals a hierarchy of perceived credibility and authority organised by gender and race.

Gender bias in media texts is rarely expressed as an overt statement (e.g., “Women are less rational”). Instead, bias operates through implication and presupposition – information hidden between the lines or baked into cultural assumptions. Two related strategies are particularly important.

Implicit linguistic strategies use shared cultural knowledge to convey gendered evaluations without direct assertion. A thorough analysis of Italian online press coverage of feminicides reveals the utilisation of the term “mind engineering practices” to denote practices that serve to reinforce biased social ideologies [Cominetti and Belotti 2025]. For example, when articles about professional women include unnecessary details about their appearance or family situation – details that would be absent in articles about men – they subtly anchor women’s identities back to domestic and relational spheres.

Covert gender strategies operate even more subtly, often going unnoticed because they are not explicitly stated. A study of Spanish media coverage of female soccer players at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics found that the media focused on women’s family background, appearance, and age, while male athletes were portrayed as “young heroes” with natural talent. Women’s success was attributed to luck or hard work rather than innate ability [Yu and Shin 2025]. This kind of coverage demonstrates how unconscious bias undermines women’s achievements even when surface language appears supportive. Bias is produced through what is omitted as much as through what is stated. Thus, language is not a neutral tool for

describing gender – it actively shapes how femininity and masculinity are understood in media discourse. As demonstrated by recent cross-cultural studies, this framework has broad applicability. For the analysis of online opinion articles, this framework provides a robust method for looking beyond explicit textual content to examine how micro-linguistic choices cumulatively shape readers' perceptions of gender.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER I

Digital discourse constitutes a multifaceted environment in which diverse forms of interaction converge, and language simultaneously reflects and participates in ongoing social processes. Within this context, gender is understood not as a fixed biological attribute but as a category discursively constructed and continuously negotiated through social interaction.

Research indicates that media discourse plays a role in shaping the circulation of gender representations. Media texts do not merely reflect existing social realities; they contribute to the formation of socially accepted norms regarding femininity and masculinity. This process operates across multiple linguistic levels – from lexical choices and syntactic structures to broader discursive strategies such as framing, topic selection, and voice attribution.

These mechanisms produce not only overt gender portrayals but also implicit biases and recurrent stereotypical patterns. Across diverse cultural and media contexts, a consistent tendency emerges: linguistic choices systematically position men as active agents and women as passive recipients, attribute different evaluative vocabularies to each gender, and allocate public voice and authority unevenly.

The theoretical framework outlined in this chapter thus provides a foundation for examining how gender is expressed in online opinion articles. This framework enables a systematic analysis that moves beyond explicit content to investigate how linguistic micro-choices cumulatively shape gendered meanings in contemporary media discourse.

II. GENDERED LANGUAGE PATTERNS IN ONLINE OPINION ARTICLES (2020–2026)

2.1 Lexical characteristics of gender representation

Lexical choices represent a fundamental aspect in the construction of gendered meanings within discourse. This section examines vocabulary patterns in opinion articles by male and female authors writing on comparable topics, focusing on four analytical categories: gender-marked words (explicit references and roles), evaluative vocabulary (judgmental adjectives and nouns), semantic fields (clusters of related terms), and author positioning through pronouns and authority claims. The analysis draws on eight articles from *The Guardian*'s Comment is Free section (2020–2026), covering dating, the economy, religion, and artificial intelligence. Following the presentation of each thematic pair, a brief synthesis is provided which aims to identify recurring patterns.

Dating

The article “*Are dating apps giving people the ick?*” draws heavily on the semantic fields of technology, warfare, and economic collapse [Schilling 2026]. Dating apps are “*digitised dating solutions*” offering “*shiny optimisation and algorithmic simplicity*” but also “*anonymous, flat and impersonal drudgery*”. His lexical choices – “*fetid and teeming with malicious bacteria*”, “*poisoned lake*”, “*rancid stew of solitude*” – construct dating as systemic failure rather than relational experience.

Evaluative terms are consistently cynical and ironic. Valentine’s Day is called a “*holiday designed purely to justify our own self-worth*”, and new app features are dismissed as making online dating “*even more tedious*”. Self-deprecating humour appears in “*I’m 41 and losing my hair*” and the coinage “*baldmaxxing*”, which positions the author as a sceptical insider.

Schilling cites financial data (Tinder subscriptions down 7%) and refers to exclusive platforms (Raya, Soho House), establishing authority as a cultural critic who is also a participant. The pronoun “I” appears frequently, grounding the argument in individual experience, while “you” generalises (“you will be ghosted”). No explicit gender-marked words occur, but the perspective remains coded as masculine through its focus on market logic, competition, and the lone individual navigating a hostile system. Women appear only as described figures – the girlfriend he mentions, the costume designer who rejected him (“*not Black enough*”), or the anonymous “*her*” in “*I told her she was beautiful.*” None is positioned as an analytical subject.

The article “*Don’t filter your dates by age and hobbies, ask them how they shop*” operates in a different register [Hudson 2025]. Hudson’s lexical choices operate within domestic and relational semantic fields. Her vocabulary includes “*supermarket technique*”, “*checkout camera footage*”, “*takeaway cup*” etiquette, and “*Christmas decs*”. These everyday items serve as diagnostic tools for compatibility, framing dating not as a market transaction but as a collection of revealing habits.

Evaluative language is playful and observational: the “*relentless hell*” of deciding what to have for dinner, the “*baffling stance*” of her husband on takeaway coffee, the “*unforgivable waste*” versus “*food poisoning attempt*” dilemma of expiry dates. Her judgments are rendered through humorous exaggeration: couples who disagree on airport arrival times will find themselves “*instantly murderous at the mere mention of an airport*”. Unlike Schilling’s cynical distance, Hudson’s tone conveys thoughtfulness—she is inside the domestic world she describes.

Hudson positions herself as a veteran observer whose authority derives from her fifteen-year marriage: “*we have been bickering ... for nearly two decades now*”. Her use of “*you*” is direct and advice-giving (“*if you really want to know*”, “*you*

can't future-proof your relationship”), but it is a collective “you” that includes herself and readers in shared experience. The first-person “I” appears but is less dominant than in Schilling’s piece; instead, the perspective is that of a community member exchanging wisdom about relational minutiae. While explicit gender markers are absent, the focus on domestic detail and emotional labour aligns with stereotypically feminine discourse.

These two articles propose that authors from both genders tend to approach the subject of dating by drawing upon different lexical repertoires. Schilling emphasises systemic critique and individual navigation, a pattern often associated with masculine discourse styles. Hudson’s emphasis on everyday practices and shared experiences aligns with prevailing associations with feminine styles. This finding suggests that gendered lexical differences may emerge in the absence of overt references to men or women.

Economy

This pair compares a female-authored article (Zoe Daniel), a former foreign correspondent and independent MP, and a male-authored article (Greg Jericho), a columnist and chief economist, both arguing for a windfall tax on gas companies in response to the Iran war.

The article “*The Iran crisis is hurting Australians’ hip pockets and driving inflation*” uses vocabulary grounded in domestic impact and moral urgency [Daniel 2026]. She frames the crisis through its effect on “*everyday Australians*”, “*farmers*”, and “*households*”. The phrase “*hip pockets*” anchors the argument in lived experience rather than abstract economics. Evaluative terms are direct: the opposition’s narrative is “*breathtakingly disingenuous*”, the government’s previous tax tweak “*measly*”, and she uses the colloquial “*well, duh*” to align herself with ordinary citizens. Daniel positions herself as a witness and

advocate, citing her own 2022 Q+A appearance and quoting experts such as Alison Pennington and Tony Wood. Her pronouns blend “I” (personal testimony), “we” (collective national interest), and “you” (addressing policymakers). She employs conflict metaphors: the crisis “*punches*” those who “*can least take it*”, and leaders are “*finally getting with the program*”. The article closes with a call for “*targeted price relief*” framed as fairness.

However, the article “*Never waste a fuel crisis: the Albanese government must seize the moment*” employs an economic, strategic, and political vocabulary. He uses terms such as “*excise*”, “*wholesale gas prices*”, “*operating profits*”, “*revenue*”, and “*royalties*” [Jericho 2026]. His argument relies on data – Senate questions, research, polling, budget estimates – and his tone is pragmatic rather than emotive. The tone is pragmatic rather than emotive: gas companies are “*laughing*”, but the evidence of their windfall is presented through charts and figures.

Jericho speaks of “*political calculus*”, “*risky options*”, and “*voters turn their anger*”. He uses “we” to include himself among policy commentators (“*calling for better taxing ... for many years*”), but this is a professional “we” of policy analysts, not the domestic “we” of affected households. His authority derives from institutional expertise (chief economist at the Australia Institute) and sustained policy critique.

Despite the similarities in their policy prescriptions, namely windfall taxes, the authors employ divergent rhetorical strategies. Daniel's discourse places significant emphasis on domestic fairness and the perceived moral urgency of the situation, while Jericho's text is characterised by a focus on economic strategy and the utilisation of institutional data. This finding serves to reinforce the observed pattern in the dating pair, whereby female authors tend to prioritise lived experience and ethical consequences, while male authors tend to prioritise systemic analysis and strategic calculation.

Religion

The authors are Kat Eghdamian, who works in human rights and has experience with refugee and interfaith issues, and Shadi Khan Saif, a journalist who grew up in Kabul and Karachi. The two writers explore the question of how religion and ritual fit into modern life.

The article “*What if the world’s religions aren’t competing but rather one unfolding truth?*” uses a conceptual, integrative vocabulary: “*progressive revelation*”, “*shared inheritance*”, “*moral imagination*”, “*connective thread*” [Eghdamian 2025]. Her evaluative terms are constructive and hopeful: “*better language*”, “*humility, inquiry and hope*”. She grounds her authority in personal testimony (family persecution as Bahá’ís) and field experience (refugee camps, doctoral research). Frequent use of “*I*”, “*we*”, and “*our*” creates an inclusive, collective voice.

The article “*Spirituality isn’t rigid dogma. It’s a living, breathing practice...*” employs a concrete, sensory vocabulary drawn from everyday ritual: “*bowl of water*”, “*esfand herb*”, “*tiny black dot behind her baby’s ear*”, “*whispered prayers*” [Saif 2025]. These are material objects and gestures, not abstract concepts. Evaluative language is affective and nostalgic: rituals are “*soft*”, “*bittersweet*”, “*quiet, innocent acts of hope and protection*”. Saif positions himself as a witness and inheritor, tracing practices passed “*from women to girls, from grandmothers to mothers to daughters – and sometimes to sons*”. His authority derives from memory and observation, not institutional expertise.

They both write about spirituality with genuine depth, yet their word choices vary distinctly. Eghdamian conceptualises religion as a universal ethical system that necessitates conceptual synthesis, a register that frequently evokes masculine-coded associations with systematisation. Saif conceptualises spirituality as an embodied, inherited practice, rooted in domestic ritual. This perspective aligns with the

feminine-coded attention to care and transmission. These observations imply a persistent presence of gendered lexical patterns in literary composition, irrespective of authors' cultural backgrounds and personal sincerity in their works.

Artificial Intelligence

The article *“Elon Musk’s Grok made the world less safe – his humiliating backdown gives me hopium”* uses a morally charged, combative vocabulary: *“nonconsensual deepfakes”*, *“image-based abuse”*, *“child sexual exploitation”*, *“unforgivable cruelty”* [Badham 2026]. Her lexical field is that of harm and accountability – AI is framed as an instrument of violence against women and children. Evaluative language is fierce and sarcastic: Musk is a *“Bond-villain cosplayer”*, *“ketamine-addled rich-kid dipshit”*, his backdown a *“humiliating”* act of eating *“a shit sandwich”*. She cites civil society letters, legal frameworks (the Take it Down Act), and government actions, grounding her authority in research and outrage. The perspective is explicitly protective, framing AI as a threat to vulnerable populations.

The article *“The AI assistant was offering me any help I needed. All I wanted was a living, breathing human”* employs a personal, affective, and existential vocabulary: *“terrible, enervating, life-shortening faff”*, *“empty soul”*, *“chilling charade”* [Chiles 2026]. The AI assistant *“Rachel”* is a *“deceptive imitation”* – *“almost human, but not quite”*, the *“aural equivalent”* of deepfake videos. Evaluative language is melancholic and weary: he feels *“uncomfortable about participating in such a chilling charade”*, *“hating my complicity”*. Chiles positions himself as a vulnerable user whose authority derives from lived emotional experience. The human technician Stuart becomes the hero: *“I could hear Stuart breathing and thinking ... this was beautiful, because it was human”*. The

perspective is individualistic: the problem is not AI's harm to others but its failure to provide a genuine human connection for the self.

While both authors offer criticism of AI, their respective lexical priorities diverge. Badham's work is characterised by a focus on social harm, ethical accountability, and collective risk, a tendency that aligns with the themes prevalent in articles authored by female scholars. Chiles's work is characterised by a foregrounding of personal frustration, existential longing, and individual disappointment, a pattern that is consistent with the literature produced by male authors. These findings suggest that gendered lexical preferences manifest in technology discourse, where females tend to accentuate collective risk, while males gravitate towards individual disappointment as a primary concern.

Across eight articles on dating, the economy, religion, and artificial intelligence, a consistent pattern emerges. Male-authored articles tend to deploy vocabulary drawn from semantic fields of systems, competition, strategy, and existential critique – technology, warfare, markets, and individual frustration. Their evaluative tone tends to be cynical, ironic, pragmatic, or melancholic, and they tend to position themselves as detached analysts, insider critics, or vulnerable users. Female-authored articles, by contrast, tend to favour domestic, relational, material, and morally urgent vocabularies – home, shopping, ritual, care, harm, and accountability. Their evaluative tone tends to be playful, observational, or fiercely protective, and they tend to position themselves as embedded witnesses, community members, or advocates whose authority derives from lived experience, relational longevity, or moral outrage.

It is noteworthy that explicit gender-marked words are infrequent across all articles. Instead, the construction of gendered meaning is achieved through a variety of means, including word choice, semantic fields, evaluative register, pronoun use, and claims to authority. This observation indicates that gendered language functions

not solely via explicit allusions to men and women, but predominantly through nuanced, persistent lexis that structures subjects, positions speakers and prompts readers to discern alternative perspectives on the world.

2.2 Stylistic and discursive features of gendered language

The lexical patterns identified above establish that male and female authors tend to draw on different semantic fields, evaluative registers, and authority claims. However, word-level choices form only one layer of gendered discourse. While lexicon reveals *what* is said about gender, stylistic and discursive features determine *how* it is said – through tone (confident, gentle, ironic, emotional), argumentative structure (logic-driven vs. narrative-driven), the balance between personal experience and generalisation (e.g., “I think/feel” vs. “people believe”), and the degree of certainty expressed (modals of obligation like must/should vs. modals of possibility like might/could). These features actively position the reader, construct the author’s persona, and may reinforce or challenge the patterns observed at the lexical level. The following section, therefore, examines whether the gendered tendencies identified in the previous chapter also operate at the level of style and discourse. The present analysis examines three pairs of articles from lifestyle and opinion media, following the same thematic pair structure as in Section 2.1.

Weaponised incompetence

Refinery29 article adopts the perspective of a partner who enables or suffers from the behaviour [Zhou 2022]. The GQ UK article is a first-person confession from a man who positions himself as responsible for the behaviour [Gale 2023]. Before undertaking the stylistic analysis, it would be beneficial to establish the context. GQ UK is a more niche publication, focusing on men's lifestyle, fashion, and entertainment. Its relationship content is often authored by women, which makes a man's personal essay on domestic failure relatively rare. Refinery29 USA is an

exception to this rule. The journal covers a broad range of topics, including politics, careers, social issues, and women's health. The period covered is of significant importance in the context of feminist social commentary, particularly in the area of reproductive health. These approaches likely offer a valuable explanation for the marked variation in their writing styles.

Zhou's tone is analytical, reflective, and mildly exasperated. She cites TikTok trends and expert definitions. Gale's tone is confessional, self-deprecating, and vulnerably humorous; he admits specific failures (e.g., not knowing flight times, leaving administrative tasks to a partner) with regret mixed with ironic self-awareness. This finding lends support to the hypothesis that the female-authored article adopts an explanatory stance, while the male-authored article adopts a personal moral-confession stance.

The argumentative structure of these articles strengthens the gap between them - Zhou's article follows a direct, explanatory path: personal opening, definition of weaponised incompetence, evidence from social media and experts, and concluding advice. Gale's article reads as a personal narrative: a concrete scene (*"Bloody Marys at the airport"*), a series of past failures, gradual realisation, and an open-ended resolution. Thus, the *Refinery29* piece argues through categorisation; the *GQ* piece traces a messy journey of self-improvement.

In terms of personal experience versus generalisation, Zhou uses first-person singular (*"I've unknowingly done"*) to position herself as a recovering enabler, but balances this with generalisations about *"so many of us"* and *"the victims"*. Gale relies almost exclusively on first-person narrative (*"I didn't think"*, *"I realised"*), with generalisations reserved for expert quotes. This indicates an inversion: the male author's article is more personally exposed, while the female author's article is more socially situated.

Zhou uses moderate certainty – declaratives about what weaponised incompetence is, but also modals of possibility (“*it might look like*”, “*can also manifest*”). Gale uses hedged and tentative language throughout: “*I’m more likely not to act*”, “*perhaps subconsciously*”. Even his final resolution (“*I will*”) is undermined by past failures. This suggests that the confessional mode tends toward uncertainty, while the explanatory mode offers greater certainty about the phenomenon itself.

The *Refinery29* article presents a woman who was initially involved in the dynamic but now treats it as a social problem, combining personal experience with broader observations. The *GQ* article presents a man who concedes his personal shortcomings through narrative, charting a trajectory of self-doubt that serves as a form of personal accountability. These stylistic differences can be attributed not only to author gender but also to publication genre (social commentary versus personal essay).

Fitness advice

This pair compares a male-targeted article from *GQ UK* [Ward and Taylor 2025] and a female-targeted article from *Refinery29* [Longman and Wells 2020], both offering strength training advice.

The *GQ* article has a confident, efficient, and slightly technical tone, opening with a brisk imperative: “*We get it, you have a never-emptying inbox...*”. The *Refinery29* article adopts a gentle, understanding tone, discussing the trainer’s loss of motivation (“*I have personally felt less motivated than in the last six years*”) and validating anxieties about pandemic inactivity. This indicates that the male-targeted article assumes the reader requires optimisation, while the female-targeted article assumes the reader requires permission and encouragement.

The argumentative structure supports this: the *GQ* piece follows a straightforward problem-solution structure: problem (lack of time), justification (efficiency and longevity), evidence (studies and expert quotes), followed by five labelled workout protocols (*“The Callisthenics Cruncher”*, *“The TRX Tornado”*, etc.). The *Refinery29* article prioritises narrative and affect: pandemic backstory, trainer’s personal history as a new mother, emotional function of the workout (*“cope with my anxiety”*), and only then the workout as a slide-by-slide guide. Thus, logic is prioritised in the male-coded piece; personal story is prioritised in the female-coded piece.

In *GQ*, personal testimony from the authors is almost absent; instead, the article relies on generalisations about what *“people don’t realise”* and expert generalisations (e.g., *“Vegas says that in their experience...”*). In *Refinery29*, the first-person singular is prominent and strategic: *“I wrote this program for who I was six years ago as a new mum”*. Direct address (*“you”*) validates the reader’s potential feelings (*“like many of us”*, *“folks who’ve been a little less active”*). This pattern is further reinforced by the fact that male-coded fitness discourse privileges generalised expertise, while female-coded discourse privileges personal, peer-supportive testimony.

GQ consistently uses language of obligation: *“you should comfortably manage”*, *“you must not lock out your knees”*, *“this is excellent for...”*. Even hedged claims are framed confidently (*“may not necessarily be better”*). *Refinery29* favours modals of possibility and conditionality: *“you might be sore”*, *“it can be completed”*. Uncertainty functions as honesty about motivational difficulty. The workout instructions use descriptive present tense (*“you place”*, *“you lower”*) rather than imperatives. The high degree of certainty is represented by the masculine and authoritative coding, while lower certainty is characterised by the feminine and gentle coding.

The *GQ* article constructs an authoritative, efficiency-focused voice – logical, generalised, high-certainty – which reads as traditionally masculine and expert-centred. The *Refinery29* article constructs a position of empathetic coaching – narrative, personal, gentle – which reads as feminine and peer-supportive. These stylistic decisions actively create gendered relationships between text and reader, shaping who feels entitled to exercise knowledge and on what emotional terms.

Celebrity scandal (Sydney Sweeney)

Controversy surrounds the accusation of homophony (“great jeans”/“good genes”) and claims of eugenicist dog whistles in a Sydney Sweeney jeans advertisement. It is argued that “jeans have always been political” and that Sweeney is unfairly blamed [Gogarty 2025]. Furthermore, the argument is made that Sweeney knew exactly what she was doing and that her alleged Republican affiliation matters [Newman-Bremang 2025].

Gogarty’s tone is measured, scholarly, and mildly defensive of Sweeney. He opens with “*We are not in a calm and measured cultural climate*” and provides a history of denim politics, implying overreaction. Newman-Bremang’s tone is sardonic, accusatory, and emotionally charged: “*gestures wildly — everything*”, “*fucking weird*”, “*heavy sigh*”. This reversal subverts the stereotype that men are more assertive: the male writer adopts an analytical approach, while the female writer employs confrontational moral judgment.

Gogarty uses an explanatory structure: he lays out the controversy, rejects extreme claims, then traces denim’s political history from the 19th century to the present, concluding that Sweeney is a “*lightning rod for larger forces*”. Newman-Bremang uses a debate-style structure: breaks down different positions (left outrage, right embrace, centrist fatigue), then dismantles each excuse for Sweeney (tax purposes, naivety, team’s fault), concluding that the advertisement was

deliberate provocation. This indicates that the male author explains, while the female author judges.

Gogarty barely uses first-person, relying on generalisations about cultural history (*“jeans have been saturated with political meaning”*) and third-party references (Derek Guy, Bing Crosby, Reagan). Newman-Bremang uses first-person plural (*“we’re too smart for that”*, *“I refuse to believe”*) and direct address (*“you’d think...”*), positioning herself as a clear-sighted community voice. She also quotes a LinkedIn post from American Eagle’s VP as evidence. This observation serves to reinforce the earlier pattern that was established: male authors tend to generalise from external history; female authors tend to ground judgment in personal or communal voice.

Gogarty is moderately confident about historical facts (*“jeans were workwear”*, *“this meant youthful rebellion”*) but expresses lower certainty about Sweeney’s intentions (*“maybe the real lightning rod isn’t Sweeney”*, *“perhaps less so”*). Newman-Bremang is highly certain throughout: *“Sydney Sweeney and American Eagle knew exactly what they were doing”*, *“We are too smart for that.”* She also uses the modal *should* (*“we should probably be more outraged”*) to prescribe the correct response. A notable reversal occurs: the female writer is more certain and morally prescriptive, while the male writer is hesitant and contextualising.

Gogarty adopts the role of a detached cultural historian, defending Sweeney by shifting blame to denim’s political history, relying on broad evidence while remaining cautious. Newman-Bremang adopts the role of a cultural critic unafraid to assign responsibility, drawing on moral conviction and making definitive statements. This pair reverses the stereotype that men are more certain and women more tentative; here, the woman is the assertive judge, the man the careful contextualiser.

Across the three comparative pairs – weaponised incompetence, fitness advice, and celebrity scandal – several patterns emerge. First, male-authored articles in fitness and celebrity contexts tend toward detached, explanatory, or efficiency-focused tones; female-authored articles tend toward personal, narrative, or morally charged tones. However, the weaponised incompetence pair showed an inversion, with the male author adopting a confessional, uncertain tone and the female author an explanatory, certain tone. This indicates that genre (personal essay versus social commentary) can override gendered expectations.

Second, across most pairs, female authors more frequently ground authority in personal testimony and communal voice (“*we*”, “*you*” inclusive), while male authors more frequently rely on external data, expert quotes, and historical generalisations. Yet the weaponised incompetence example disrupts this pattern, suggesting that confessional genres available to men may also privilege first-person narrative. Third, high certainty (modals of obligation, declarative judgments) is not inherently masculine. The fitness pair associated high certainty with male-targeted discourse, but the celebrity pair associated high certainty with the female author. This suggests that certainty is deployed strategically based on the author’s rhetorical goal – to coach, to accuse, to explain, or to confess.

What remains consistent is how tone, argumentative structure, personal voice, and degree of certainty combine to position readers in a specific relationship to the text – a relationship that is often gendered, though not in a fixed or predictable way. These stylistic choices work in concert with the lexical patterns identified previously, thus producing coherent gendered discourses.

2.3 Implicit gender bias and stereotypical representations

The lexical patterns identified in Section 2.1 (semantic fields, evaluative vocabulary, authority claims) and the stylistic features examined in Section 2.2 (tone,

argumentative structure, degree of certainty) do not operate independently. Together, they construct implicit assumptions about gender, authority, and competence. This section, therefore, moves from describing *what* words are used and *how* they are styled to identifying the unspoken worldview these patterns cumulatively build – that is, to implicit gender bias. Bias is analysed not through overtly sexist statements but through recurring linguistic cues: who is positioned as subject versus object, active versus passive, expert versus lay, rational versus emotional, and which spheres (domestic versus institutional) are treated as authoritative. The analysis examines two thematically matched pairs of articles, tracing how lexical and stylistic choices converge to produce implicit gendered meanings.

Parenting advice

The first group comprises four practical advice articles on parenting, all from *The Conversation*. Two are by female authors [Barnes & Lafferty 2026; Hain 2026] and two by male authors [Mulligan 2026; Boerma 2025]. Each article offers guidance to parents, allowing a controlled comparison of how gender interacts with the construction of expertise and authority.

All four authors position themselves as analytical subjects – they explain, advise, and draw conclusions. Barnes and Lafferty state: “*we have conducted a study and developed a theoretical framework*”. Hain writes: “*I explain what adolescence entails and evaluate strategies*”. Mulligan notes: “*I have developed school resources on AI*”. Boerma opens with statistical prevalence. In the domain of parenting advice, professional credentials supersede gendered expectations: both male and female authors assert the role of the expert explainer. No author positions women or other gender groups as passive objects of analysis

In all four articles, the active role is assigned to the parent (reader) or to the child being guided. Barnes and Lafferty advise parents to “*build metacognitive*

agency” in children; Hain encourages parents to “*help teens understand emotions*”; Mulligan positions parents as “*protectors against algorithmic influence*”; Boerma frames parents and children as “*gradually becoming braver*”. Passivity is attributed to the child or young person (e.g., “*the child forgets homework*”, “*the teen reacts emotionally*”). No gender category is consistently associated with passivity. This indicates that in this genre, action vs. inaction is developmental, not gendered.

Female-authored articles blend expert knowledge with domestic application. Barnes and Lafferty cite cognitive science and their own school-based study, but frame findings within home routines (“*how families live and relate*”). Hain combines research citations with emotional scripts (“*research actually useful for real families*”). Male-authored articles tend toward systemic or clinical knowledge. Mulligan discusses “*cognitive off-loading, platform policy, and legal cases*”; Boerma uses “*clinical diagnostic frameworks and prevalence statistics*”. However, Boerma’s article also applies knowledge to home contexts (“*rules for school camp*”), which complicates a strict binary. The difference is one of emphasis: female authors more often *embed* expertise in relational language; male authors more often *foreground* systemic or clinical terminology. Implicit bias is not manifested through the exclusion of women from areas of expertise; rather, it is evident in the expectation that they will translate this expertise into a domestic context.

Emotion is a central topic in Hain's (teen emotional development) and Boerma's (anxiety). Yet neither author positions themselves as emotionally expressive. Hain writes: “*I examine strong feelings and suggest coping strategies*”. Boerma writes: “*I analyse anxiety and avoidance calmly*”. Barnes, Lafferty, and Mulligan maintain a rational, detached tone throughout. No author adopts the role of an “emotional feeler”; all four write as analysts even when the subject is feelings. This reinforces the observation from 2.2 that in advice genres, emotional distance is a marker of credibility, regardless of author gender.

The clearest implicit bias emerges in the allocation of spheres. Barnes, Lafferty, Hain, and Boerma focus on family life, emotional connection, household routines, and school collaboration. Mulligan's article, by contrast, shifts to system-level concerns: "*age limits for platforms, corporate accountability, regulatory lag, and cognitive off-loading in digital environments*". While both male and female authors write authoritatively on parenting, male authors more readily extend their analysis into public policy and institutional critique. The domestic sphere is shared; the systemic sphere is implicitly coded as a legitimate extension of male expertise.

In the parenting advice genre, explicit gender bias (e.g., men as explainers, women as participants) is absent. All authors claim analytical authority. However, implicit bias surfaces in two ways: first, female authors tend to embed expertise within relational, domestic language; second, male authors more readily move from domestic advice to systemic critique. While professional credentials now enable women to access roles of expertise, the unspoken assumption that "systemic commentary belongs to men" may persist.

Personal mental health essays

The second group comprises four deeply personal mental-health essays from *Medium*, written in a confessional, first-person mode. Female authors: "*Repair Over Perfection*" [Stewart 2025] and "*Can We Heal Our Ancestors by Healing Ourselves?*" [Vercillo 2026]. Male authors: "*My Father's Mourning Dove*" [Zonneveld 2026] and "*A Eulogy for My Ex-Wife*" [Spaulding Ryan 2026]. Unlike the parenting articles, this genre explicitly invites emotional disclosure, providing a test of whether gendered patterns shift.

Contrary to the stereotype that men analyse and women experience, here two women position themselves as analysts. Stewart writes as "*a communication scholar*

and mediator”, using structured problem-solving (“*I lay out a step-by-step repair process*”). Vercillo writes as “*an expert on creativity and mental health*”, providing an intellectual framework for intergenerational healing (“*I trace patterns through ancestral traditions*”). Among the men, Zonneveld narrates without professional framing (“*I grieve, I remember, I describe*”); Ryan, however, adopts an analytical role (“*I explain how addiction works, critique denial, and make social arguments*”). Genre and individual authorial strategy override simple gender binaries: female authors claim analytical authority, and male authors adopt narrative modes.

The men’s essays focus intensively on a single other person. Zonneveld describes his father in loving detail: “*his hands, his voice, the doves nesting*”. Ryan describes his ex-wife Wendy with clinical precision: “*before addiction, during addiction, the custody battles*”. The women’s essays distribute attention more widely: Stewart analyses her own mistake and her defensive reaction; Vercillo traces patterns across ancestors, traditions, and herself. Thus, in this set, male authors place a female or elderly male figure as the described object, while female authors are more self-reflexive. This reinforces the pattern that implicit bias can appear as “men describe/evaluate specific others; women generalise or self-reference”.

All four authors present themselves as active. Stewart acts, makes a mistake, then repairs: “*I apologised, I changed my behaviour*”. Vercillo actively seeks connections across traditions: “*I question linear time, I synthesise*”. Zonneveld engages in archival work: “*sorting videos, writing, tending to the past*”. Ryan recounts interventions and custody battles. Passivity is consistently attributed to the subjects of the essays (the client, the ancestors, the father, the ex-wife), not to the authors or to gender categories.

A striking inversion occurs. The female authors explicitly anchor their personal narratives in professional expertise. Stewart writes: “*I draw on Gottman’s research and neuroscience*”. Vercillo writes: “*I apply psychological theories of*

intergenerational trauma and my own research background". The male authors, despite being a historian (Zonneveld) and a lawyer (Ryan) by profession, deliberately step away from their professional roles. Zonneveld uses no academic language; Ryan speaks about addiction as a "*lay expert, not a legal expert*". Within the confessional genre, female authors feel entitled – or obliged – to legitimate personal experience through professional credentials, while male authors feel entitled to speak from lived experience alone.

The emotional criterion produces the most complete reversal of traditional stereotypes. Zonneveld's essay is the most emotionally explicit: "*I cry, my heart breaks, I feel the physical weight of loss*". Ryan's eulogy is driven by "*grief, fury, love, and guilt*" named openly. The women are not unemotional, but they express emotion within an analytical frame. Stewart writes: "*I felt defensive and hurt, but I then analysed these reactions rationally, organising my thoughts with numbered steps*". Vercillo writes of "*silence, longing, ancestral pain*" but approaches it "*with intellectual curiosity, posing questions rather than yielding to feeling*". Whereas in the parenting set all authors maintained rational detachment, here the men express more unguarded emotion, while the women temper emotion with analysis. This indicates that implicit bias about emotionality is not a fixed binary but is mediated by genre expectations.

Three articles remain within the sphere of home and intimate relationships. Stewart blends professional and personal life; Vercillo focuses on family, spirituality, and ancestry; Zonneveld explores father-son bonds and domestic memory. Ryan's article is the exception: it begins with personal grief but extends into systemic critique. He writes: "*I call out how society judges people with addiction, expose the culture of denial among friends and family, and call for structural change*". Once again, as in the parenting set, the only author to move from private suffering to public

argument is male. This suggests an implicit bias: personal pain becomes a legitimate systemic critique more readily when voiced by a man.

In the confessional mental health genre, gendered patterns shift significantly from the parenting set. Women write as confident analysts who legitimise personal experience through professional credentials. Men write as emotionally exposed narrators, with one exception (Ryan), who combines raw emotion with systemic critique. The most persistent implicit bias is the ease with which a male author transitions from intimate loss to public argument. This reinforces the pattern observed in the parenting set: men are more readily granted the authority to connect personal experience with wider institutional critique.

Across the two genre contexts – parenting advice and personal mental health essays – implicit gender bias does not manifest as a fixed set of stereotypes (e.g., “men analyse, women feel”). Instead, it appears as a flexible but still patterned set of assumptions that shift by genre. Three consistent findings emerge.

First, expertise and domestic translation. In both genres, female authors who claim expertise tend to embed it within relational, domestic, or emotionally accessible language. Male authors who claim expertise more often present it as systemic, clinical, or policy-oriented. This suggests an implicit bias: women’s expertise is expected to serve domestic or relational ends; men’s expertise is regarded as suitable for institutional commentary.

Second, emotional expression is genre-dependent. In the rational advice genre (parenting), all authors maintain emotional distance. In the confessional genre (mental health), men express more unguarded emotion, while women express emotion within analytical structures. This indicates that implicit bias about emotionality is mediated by genre expectations, not a simple binary.

Third, the systemic turn is gendered. In both pairs, the only authors to move from personal or domestic examples to explicit systemic critique (policy, corporate

accountability, structural change) are male. Zonneveld does not take this turn; Ryan does. Mulligan takes this turn in the parenting set; Boerma does not. This suggests a persistent implicit bias: men are more readily accorded the rhetorical licence to translate private experience into public argument. Women's personal narratives, even when professionally grounded, tend to remain within the domestic or relational sphere.

These findings demonstrate that implicit gender bias operates through subtle, cumulative linguistic cues – the choice to embed expertise in domestic language, the degree of emotional exposure permitted, and the rhetorical move from private to public. Lexical patterns (2.1) and stylistic features (2.2) together construct these biases, which this section has made visible by systematically tracing subject positions, knowledge claims, and sphere allocations across matched articles.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER II

This chapter examined gendered language patterns in online opinion articles published between 2020 and 2026 across multiple platforms, including *The Guardian*, *The Conversation*, *GQ UK*, *Refinery29*, and *Medium*. Comparing articles by men and women on matched topics (dating, parenting, fitness, economy, AI, religion, celebrity, mental health), the analysis focused on lexical choices, stylistic features, and implicit bias.

Explicitly gendered words were rare across the corpus. Male-authored articles tended to draw on semantic fields of systems, competition, and technology; female-authored articles favoured domestic, relational, and moral vocabularies. These patterns were tendencies, not absolute rules - some female writers used analytical language, and some male writers adopted emotionally expressive registers.

The analysis of tone, argumentative structure, and degree of certainty did not consistently align with stereotypes. Some male authors wrote detached, efficiency-focused prose; others wrote confessional, uncertain narratives. Female authors ranged from empathetic to highly assertive. Genre and publication context shaped style as much as author gender.

Openly stereotypical or sexist statements were absent from the corpus. Bias surfaced in the allocation of spheres (domestic versus systemic) and in the licence to move from personal experience to institutional critique. Female-authored articles tended to remain within relational contexts; male-authored articles more often extended personal narratives into systemic commentary.

The findings of Chapter II indicate that gendered language in online opinion journalism operates flexibly, not through fixed oppositions. Online opinion discourse, therefore, reflects an evolving representation of gender, shaped by broader changes in digital communication, authority construction, and emotional expression.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how gender is linguistically represented in contemporary English-language online opinion discourse. The analysis integrated theoretical frameworks from language and gender research (including performativity, indexicality, and media discourse) with a systematic empirical investigation of opinion articles published between 2020 and 2026 across multiple platforms (*The Guardian*, *The Conversation*, *GQ UK*, *Refinery29*, *Medium*).

The theoretical foundation established that digital discourse is a user-centred, multimodal, interactive space in which gender is constructed and negotiated through language rather than simply reflected. Building on this framework, the empirical analysis moved beyond overt gender markers to examine lexical choices, stylistic features, and implicit bias across thematically paired articles (dating, parenting, fitness, economy, artificial intelligence, religion, celebrity culture, mental health).

With regard to lexical patterns, the analysis showed that male and female authors do not consistently adhere to stereotypical “masculine” or “feminine” styles. Gender differences emerged through semantic fields, evaluative vocabulary, pronoun use, and claims to authority. While certain tendencies appeared, these gendered lexical patterns were frequently overridden by genre, topic, and authorial role. In personal essays, for example, male authors expressed the most unguarded emotion, while female authors anchored personal narratives in professional credentials. This finding implies that gender is not a consistent predictor of linguistic behaviour; rather, it is a resource that writers adapt to suit the communicative context.

The stylistic and discursive features observed in this analysis suggest that stylistic differences cannot be attributed solely to gender stereotypes. Instead, they emerge from the interaction of gender with rhetorical purpose, platform norms, and

subject matter. Advice genres (parenting, fitness) prompted rational detachment and expert positioning across both genders, thus reinforcing traditional expectations of impersonal authority. Confessional genres (mental health, relationships) licensed emotional disclosure, which allowed male writers to express vulnerability and female writers to adopt analytical stances – thereby subverting stereotypes. The same author or platform could produce traditionally gendered patterns in one context and counter-stereotypical patterns in another.

A subsequent analysis revealed that implicit bias in online opinion discourse operates primarily through differential access to systemic authority, rather than through overt stereotypes. Female-authored articles were found to remain within relational or domestic contexts, even in instances where the author claimed professional expertise. Male-authored articles more frequently incorporated personal narratives into systemic commentary – a pattern observed in both parenting advice and mental health essays. This phenomenon suggests that implicit bias persists as an uneven distribution of the right to translate personal experience into publicly observable, systemic argumentation.

The employment of gendered language in the context of online opinion journalism is characterised by its adaptability and context-dependency, rather than the presence of fixed oppositions between "male" and "female" stylistic approaches. Gender interaction produces linguistic choices with the potential to reinforce, qualify, or challenge traditional norms. Implicit bias persists not as a rigid binary but as a set of flexible assumptions about whose personal experience carries systemic weight and whose authority requires professional legitimation. Further research could extend this analysis to larger corpora and to emerging digital formats in order to continue tracking these developments.

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