



# 'STFU and start listening to how scared we are': Resisting misogyny on Twitter via #NotAllMen

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the strategies that were used to resist misogyny on the microblogging platform Twitter during March 2021, a time when the hashtag #NotAllMen was trending. We take a critical feminist approach, combining corpus linguistics with a qualitative analysis of #NotAllMen users' discursive strategies. This particular iteration of #NotAllMen followed the disappearance and subsequent rape and murder of Sarah Everard, a 33 year old white woman who was abducted from a street in London, UK, whilst walking home. Following a keyword analysis (Scott 1997) to survey a dataset of 18,701 tweets containing the hashtag #NotAllMen, we identify salient themes in a sub-set of keyword concordances, and produce a detailed qualitative analysis of the strategies deployed in ten randomly sampled tweets. Despite #NotAllMen initially being used as a statement of protest against supposedly unfair accusations levelled at 'all' men, our analysis illustrates the use of resistant and empowering strategies which challenge the misogyny of this message, re-framing the hashtag and thus acting as a form of resistance to its original message: that not all men engage in gender-based violence. We argue that this points to the strategic use of social media to challenge harmful rhetoric, whereby users exploit the affordances of hashtags. Twitter users engaged in strategies including resistance, opposition, and polarity to the hashtag, evidenced through the linguistic use of expletives, insults, and direct address, most often emerging through metadiscussion of the #NotAllMen hashtag itself; this works as a form of collective counter-protest through hashtag reframing. The hashtag reframing operates as a tool to show how those using the hashtag to focus on the defence of men, rather than critiquing the sociocultural dominance of misogynistic behaviour, ignored the fear experienced by all women and girls of being victims of gender-based violence, rape and murder.

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## 1. Introduction

In this article, we critically analyse a corpus of tweets that used the hashtag #NotAllMen during March 2021. This hashtag was first used in 2009 (McKinney, 2014) and rose in popularity in 2014, following a mass shooting in California by a perpetrator who identified as an incel (involuntary celibate). Following this event, discussion in traditional and online media considered how boys and men are socialised in terms of their relationships with women, which in turn led to a flurry of responses pointing out that not *all* men (hence #NotAllMen) are violent misogynists. From a feminist perspective, the 'not all men' stance is problematic: it is hostile towards and prejudiced against women for speaking out about gender-based violence. By focusing on the defence of men rather

than critiquing the sociocultural emergence of misogynistic behaviour, online conversations using #NotAllMen shifted attention away from the problem of sexual violence against women and girls. Indeed, enough women objected to the #NotAllMen hashtag in 2014 that they used the hashtag #YesAllWomen in direct response. The aim of this was to demonstrate that 'while not all men are guilty of violence or even disrespect toward women, all women face the threat of harassment and sexism all of the time' (Morikawa, 2019: 113).

In March 2021, #NotAllMen rose to prominence again, this time in response to media reports about Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old woman who went missing in London that month and was found murdered 7 days later. Everard's case has since been identified as a watershed moment in UK society. Women's collective response, through online discourse, televised debates and in-person protests, was clear: they were determined to speak out against the daily threat of violence experienced by women and girls. In this article, we investigate tweets containing #NotAllMen that were posted on

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the platform over a 14-day period after the initial news reports about Everard going missing. Our analysis focuses on public discussions taking place at the time on Twitter from members of the public about male-to-female violence. We employ corpus linguistic tools to identify keywords – words which occur in the analysed data more often than we would expect by chance (Scott, 1997) – followed by critical discourse analysis to further explore the contexts in which these keywords are used. In the article, we critically analyse the tweets from a feminist perspective. In doing so, we observe the frequent construction of an empowered and resistant stance which operates in a dialogic relationship to the broader, misogynistic ‘not all men’ rhetoric. This in turn evidences the tweeters’ willingness to move into what has been previously considered a misogynistic ‘echo chamber’ (KhosraviNik, 2017).

By focusing in on women’s linguistic resistance to the misogyny associated with Everard’s case, we aim to raise awareness of violence against women and girls, not from the perspective of policy makers or government, but through the voices of citizens who took to social media to express their anger and frustration in their own words. Through our analysis, we demonstrate how disparate individuals use platforms such as Twitter to collaborate in discourses of resistance; this builds on scholarly understanding of social media-based activism within critical discourse studies. Firstly, we present below a review of recent research that explores misogyny and hate speech in social media discourse, and how users push back against it. We then explain the methodological choices of this study: we have built a corpus of tweets and analysed them using quantitative and then qualitative means. We focus on tweets containing the top 5 keywords identified in our corpus and, in the discussion which follows, we consider the relevance of this study to the overlapping fields of feminist linguistics, language and online media, and critical discourse studies.

## 2. Background

Social media are fundamentally interactive, enabling users to develop and share content in a way that traditional media does not allow (Seargeant and Tagg, 2014: 4). Social media have also had empowering and democratising effects on people’s social lives, for example through the facilitation of ‘citizenry engagement, grass-root access, and use of symbolic resources’ (KhosraviNik, 2017: 583). However, social media have also given rise to uncivil and exclusionary practices (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018: 47), such as *trolling*, or ‘online antagonism undertaken for amusement’s sake’ (Hardaker, 2015: 202). One frequently cited reason for the rise of online incivility is the potential for anonymity: as Herring et al. (2002: 371) argued in a seminal study, the ‘relative anonymity of the Internet releases some of the inhibitions of a civil society, resulting in flaming, harassment, and hate speech online’.

Given its prevalence as form of online hate, a growing body of linguistic research has examined trolling. Trolling strategies may involve social media users deliberately undermining others’ posts through linguistic displays including antipathy, criticism and aggression (Hardaker, 2013) and these are frequently motivated by misogyny (see Kopytowska, 2021, Pérez-Arredondo and Graells-Garrido, 2021 for recent examples). This can also be seen in recent research exploring ‘red pill’, incel and other anti-feminist forums within the online discussion site Reddit, showing how misogynistic discourses can circulate in these contexts. Krendel (2020), for example, demonstrates that posts to an anti-feminist forum routinely dehumanise women and reduce them to their physical appearance, as well as positioning them as innately selfish and manipulative. Heritage and Koller (2020: 153) show that incel discourse is defined by gendered hate speech; in the Reddit threads they analysed, they found sexist language

being commonly used to position women as dishonest, manipulative, and capable of hurting men. However, it is also important to acknowledge that misogynist violence, online or offline, does not only occur in such niche, radicalised group contexts. On Twitter – a site with a very broad base of users – the hashtag<sup>1</sup> #NotAllMen also has the potential to be a vehicle for misogynistic discourse.

Whilst niche groups may perpetuate misogynistic views online, the participatory nature of social media also means that other users can read and then *respond* to this content. For example, Hardaker and McGlashan’s (2016) corpus analysis of rape threats on Twitter shows women being consistently positioned as the target of gender-based violence and abuse. However, they also point to the counter-discourse of users responding to these threats, such as by questioning the antagonists’ masculinity (i.e. they were not ‘real men’). Similarly, feminist scholars Lopez et al. (2019) conduct a content analysis of tweets using the hashtag #feminism in one 24-hour period. They find that the hashtag, as well as being used to promote both feminist and anti-feminist views, was also used to resist and respond to misogyny. They refer to these ‘attempts to counterbalance anti-feminist and misogynistic rhetoric on Twitter’ as *shielding* (Lopez et al., 2019: 214), arguing that the hashtag provides a platform from which users can respond directly to hurtful tweets. This suggests that feminist hashtags can be empowering for the user, and a potential vehicle for activism. Indeed, Clark (2016: 790) argues that social media has democratized feminist movements, ‘providing access to a visible platform and wide audiences without necessitating membership within a formal organisation, league, or caucus’. This form of online activism has been connected with a ‘fourth wave’ of feminism, often informally dubbed ‘hashtag feminism’ (though, as Munro, 2013 points out, the fourth wave also represents important theoretical developments in feminism, including prioritising an intersectional approach).

Hashtags are a popular focus for explorations of online feminist activism because they allow individuals to share and build upon personal content in a collective, collaborative way. By joining an emerging, momentary, but highly visible practice, hashtag users gain a sense of bonding through ‘ambient affiliation’ (Zappavigna, 2011), temporarily uniting around a particular idea or movement, but possibly never engaging again with other users of the hashtag. As Zappavigna (2011: 788) explains, tweets function to form ‘evaluative bonds’ between disparate users, and hashtags ‘upscale the call to affiliate with the values expressed in the tweet’. For example, Bouvier (2020a) finds that many users of the #MeToo hashtag, popular during 2017–18 as a way for women to share stories of sexual abuse, assume a shared identity. This is shown through the use of the inclusive plural pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’, and collective terms of address signalling solidarity, such as ‘sisters’, which Bouvier argues facilitates a sense of solidarity amongst women. Similarly, Palomino-Manjón (2020) used a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of #WhyIDidntReport, a hashtag responding to Dr Christine Ford’s allegation that the then-US President Donald Trump’s Supreme Court nominee sexually assaulted her in high school. Trump (amongst others) publicly argued that Ford’s allegation was questionable because she had not come forward about it sooner; survivors of sexual assault responded directly to this by tweeting their own experiences. Exploring the use of #WhyIDidntReport, Palomino-Manjón shows how users created a negative semantic prosody to both condemn rape culture and blame those in power for their inaction, and also to empower survivors of rape by giving credibility to their narratives. Palomino-Manjón argues that Twitter can feel like a ‘safe space’ for women to engage in acti-

<sup>1</sup> As Scott (2015: 12) explains, ‘any string of characters which is preceded by a hash symbol becomes a hyperlink, allowing users to search for any content that includes the same tag. If a large number of people post tweets containing the same hashtag within a short space of time, that hashtag will be said to be trending’.

vism, in part due to the possibility of anonymity. This combined effect, she argues, works to challenge hegemonic discourses of victim-blaming, resulting in an empowering form of protest.

On the other hand, it has been argued that 'hashtag activism' can be rather insular, with resistant discourse being restricted to 'echo chambers' instead of engaging in wider debate or influencing mainstream opinion (KhosraviNik, 2017). In Bouvier's (2020a) investigation of #MeToo, mentioned above, she argues the hashtag is often reduced simply to the status of buzzword, with tweeters focused on expressing affect or engaging in self-promotion, rather than participating in activism which seeks 'clear solutions'. Bouvier (2020b) goes on to argue that interaction on social media sites can actively work *against* social justice, with hashtags unhelpfully individualising issues. Despite this, hashtags may evidently still play a positive role in creating bonds and a sense of socio-political solidarity; as Matley (2018) demonstrates, in an analysis of #SorryNotSorry on Instagram, the meta-pragmatic nature of hashtags allows for irony, self-promotion *and* ambient affiliation. This reveals the multiple affordances of hashtags for identity construction and self-presentation; one might argue that not all users need to employ a hashtag for the same purpose for it to be meaningful.

Similarly, when examining disclosure of sexual violence on social media, Bates (2019) found that, for many women victims, using hashtags enabled disclosure of rape and sexual assault for the first time due to both a sense of solidarity with other women and the anonymity afforded by platforms. Rape, sexual assault and gender-based violence are notoriously under-reported to police (CSEW 2020; Mullany et al. 2021) but, we would argue, for many tweeters disclosing individual experiences about themselves, this is an empowering first step towards addressing what has happened to them. Morikawa's (2019) analysis of #YesAllWomen, mentioned above, reveals further benefits of hashtag activism, showing that those using this hashtag constructed identities which challenged hegemonic expectations of femininity (e.g. through language lacking politeness features and hedging). Morikawa argues that this form of transgression is a symbolic enactment of power, as indeed any engagement in activism and 'speaking out' can be.

In this article, we look at how a re-framing of the hashtag #NotAllMen was used to resist misogynistic responses to an instance of homicidal sexual violence. In March 2021, thousands of personal stories were shared online in response to the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard, as public appeals for information from the police featured in substantial media coverage<sup>2</sup>. Ordinary women who had experienced sexual assault or harassment, or felt unsafe and fearful on the streets, tweeted to argue that men must take responsibility for and address the broader misogynistic culture which facilitates sexual violence against women and girls. It is important to note that the UK was in national lockdown at this time due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and it was illegal to gather for protests or vigils<sup>3</sup>. Social media thus presented an important opportunity for everyday people to express their grief and anger. By 10th March, two days after the police reported that Everard's body had been found, #NotAllMen was a trending topic on Twitter. In part, tweeters used the hashtag to argue that most men would never engage in the sorts of behaviour women were reporting, and therefore it was unfair to suggest that *all* men should take responsibility. However, as our analysis will show, the hashtag was also reframed

by those wanting to critique and resist this stance. Below, we explain our approach to the selection and analysis of tweets that deployed this hashtag.

### 3. Methodology

We take a critical feminist approach to our discourse analysis, integrating tools from corpus linguistics to (a) identify key themes in the use of the #NotAllMen hashtag and (b) sample tweets for close qualitative analysis. Our data are taken from a specialised, purpose-built corpus of tweets containing the #NotAllMen hashtag posted between 4 and 17 March 2021. This represents data posted on Twitter over a 14-day period from when Everard's disappearance was announced. We discuss below how the case and its broad media coverage in the UK has likely propelled the re-surfacing of the hashtag, and the broader discussion of male-to-female violence. When compiling the corpus, we used Twitter's API, an interface allowing researchers and developers to retrieve data from the platform. Using API, we gathered not only the text of tweets containing the hashtag, but also accompanying metadata, such as counts of retweets or comments under each post, allowing us to establish what types of discourses were propagated more than others. The language of the tweets collected was mainly English, though some other languages were used. We did not exclude any data from the corpus.

In total, we collected 18,701 tweets, containing 462,164 words. Fig. 1 provides an outline of the number of tweets containing the hashtag posted each day over the two-week period. As Fig. 1 shows, the hashtag had some presence between 4 and 9 March (223 tweets, 1% of all data), during which time media coverage increased and footage of Everard in the moments before her disappearance was released. The hashtag's usage increased following two announcements by the Metropolitan Police: on 9 March, they announced they had arrested a police officer in connection with the case, and on 10 March, that they had found her body in Kent. On 11 March, 8,179 tweets containing the hashtag were posted (44% of all data). The majority of the tweets collected over the two-week period were tweeted between 10 and 14 March (15,358 tweets, 82% of all data). This suggests that, whilst the hashtag had an ongoing presence on Twitter, its usage likely spiked due to the publicity of Everard's case. This is also suggested by Everard's name featuring in the collected tweets, e.g., through 1,130 uses of #SarahEverard.

After compiling the data, our purpose-built corpus was imported into SketchEngine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). Using English Web corpus 2018 (enTenTen18: Jakubíček et al., 2013) as a reference corpus, we generated a list of keywords. The keywords identified in the #NotAllMen corpus were extracted using a simple maths method (Kilgarriff, 2009), focusing on medium frequency words (minimum frequency of a keyword in the focus corpus set to 50). The simple maths method helped us to establish roughly how many times more frequent a particular word was in the focus corpus in comparison to the reference one. A keyness score of 10, for example, suggests we are approximately 10 times more likely to encounter a particular word in the focus corpus than we are in the reference corpus. The top 20 keywords, their frequencies and keyness scores are provided in Table 1.

We note that the second most frequent keyword is 'everard'. While the re-emergence of #NotAllMen was evidently afforded by the publicity of Everard's case, the very high keyness of 'hashtag' demonstrates the frequent metadiscussion of #NotAllMen in our corpus. As we show below, the tweets engage primarily with the misogynistic 'not all men' rhetoric, with the specific case of Everard being simply a reference point. For example: 'seeing the #NotAllMen rear its head around the Sarah Everard story is

<sup>2</sup> During the trial of Everard's attacker – an off-duty police officer – in September 2021, it was revealed he had pretended to be working undercover to falsely arrest her on the street. The media narrative around her murder changed from this point, as more information was provided about the specific circumstances of her abduction. At the time of our data collection, the public only knew that Everard had been kidnapped while walking home in London before being raped and murdered.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a peaceful vigil in London on 13 March ended in physical clashes between attendees and police (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56389824>).

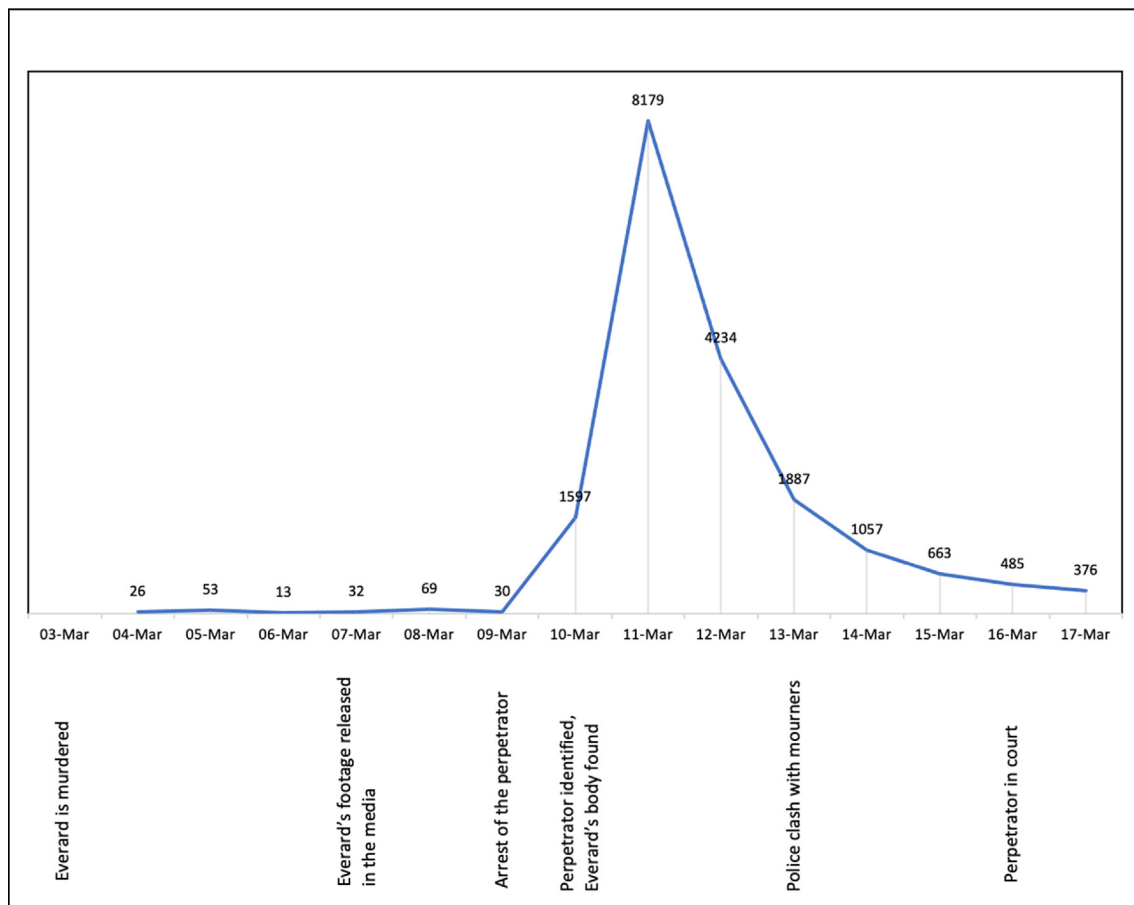


Fig. 1. Number of tweets containing #NotAllMen posted daily between 4 and 17 March 2021, alongside key events of Everard's case.

**Table 1**  
Top 20 keywords in the #NotAllMen corpus.

Rank	Word	Frequency	Keyness score
1	hashtag	958	413.305
2	everard	214	302.595
3	rapist	464	259.46
4	harass	473	126.096
5	misogyny	129	116.348
6	stfu [shut the fuck up]	78	110.786
7	catcall	71	102.977
8	curfew	124	89.371
9	unsafe	300	83.715
10	bullshit	227	82.635
11	fuck	1473	70.839
12	misogynistic	60	68.415
13	rape	889	68.002
14	ffs [for fuck's sake]	60	66.285
15	tweet	691	65.791
16	sexist	111	62.248
17	tw [trigger warning]	71	55.907
18	sexually	365	54.643
19	assault	907	50.706
20	sexism	84	46.756

pathetic. Everyone knows it's not all of us but it pretty much always is one of us.' Due to this, we omit 'everard' from our analysis below and focus on the next four keywords instead, leaving us with 'hashtag', 'rapist', 'harass', 'misogyny' and 'stfu' [shut the fuck up]. Each of these keywords reveals metadiscussion of #NotAllMen, and thus analysing them together allows us to focus on this negotiation rather than more explicit references to Everard, specifically.

For each of these keywords, we again used SketchEngine to generate a randomised list of 100 concordance lines (except 'stfu', which was only used 78 times), covering the different points in time when the keywords were being used. The tweets containing these keywords were then imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018). They were then coded following the processes of *initial* and *focused* coding widely used in grounded theory (e.g. Charmaz, 2014) and thematic analysis (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2022). At the *initial* coding stage, we created a long list of preliminary codes to capture our initial impressions of topics, expressions and meanings in the data. Although some tweets could reasonably be attributed to several codes, only one code (the one deemed most relevant) was used per tweet. At the *focused* coding stage, we revisited the data and codes, sharpening the analysis through a successive process of sorting, refining, merging, splitting or renaming codes. We then identified larger superordinate categories which represented overarching themes in the dataset, and were able to incorporate more specific, subordinate codes. As an illustrative example, the two superordinate categories with the highest number of references in the 'harass' keyword set, along with their subordinate codes, are shown in Table 2.

Through this coding process, as well as identifying thematic patterns in the keyword sets, we could establish the prominence of different themes by calculating the frequency of each category as a percentage of the total number of tweets in each keyword set. Table 3 details the percentages for the main categories and codes in each keyword set.

After this first stage of analysis, we sampled two tweets that corresponded to the most prevalent categories or codes in each



**Table 2**

Top two categories for the 'harass' keyword set.

Name	Files	References
(not all men, but) all women have stories of harassment or abuse	1	53
sharing stories of harassment or abuse	1	13
pointing to statistics around harassment	1	12
being shocked or saddened at the number of women affected	1	2
not all men are harassers but...	1	11
enough (or too many) men are	1	6
women can't tell which ones are	1	3
most harassers are men	1	2

keyword set – making ten tweets in total (two tweets per keyword) which we judged to be representative of each category – and subjected them to close discourse analysis. Our analysis is driven by the broad principles of critical discourse studies, in that we see language use as both constructing and reproducing ideological representations of the world (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Furthermore, following Lazar (2005: 11), we see the #NotAllMen tweets as having the potential to both propagate but also to resist and transform misogynistic views and practices; in this way, we adopt not just a critical, but an explicitly feminist stance. Our critical discourse analysis is bottom-up rather than following a specific prescribed CDA framework; we examine the linguistic strategies used around the #NotAllMen debate with a view to identifying patterns in the discourse which reveal how the hashtag was used to create meaning. This approach led us to pay particular attention to the pragmatic force behind the specific lexicogrammatical choices made by those contributing to the discussion.

When assessing the ethical implications of collecting and analysing #NotAllMen tweets, we first considered the nature of the platform itself, especially the accessibility of users' data. Twitter's (2020) privacy policy foregrounds the public nature of the platform, stating that 'Twitter is public and Tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world'. This policy

is aligned with Twitter's distinctive culture as a 'world-centered, public, and newsy' platform – an 'information network' first, and a 'social network' second (Burgess and Baym, 2020: 13). Although individual users can apply variable settings and strategies to control the visibility and interactivity of their tweets, the default setting of a user profile is 'public', meaning anyone can see and share a user's tweets. Furthermore, Twitter actively encourages third-party collection of tweets and corresponding metadata by making their APIs open and accessible to users, companies and developers. These APIs only collect information that the company deems 'public Twitter data that users have chosen to share with the world' (Twitter, 2021). Given that hashtags such as #NotAllMen are often used as strategies to enhance the visibility of tweets, we concluded that the tweets in our corpus were intended for consumption by the general public. Nevertheless, following established guidance (BAAL, 2021: 6), we protected the identity of tweeters by omitting usernames in our corpus prior to analysis, thus adding a layer of anonymity for the tweet authors.

#### 4. Analysis

The starting point for the analysis was the generation of the list of 20 keywords featured in Table 1. At this point, we were able to identify prominent themes on the basis of the keywords' semantic and functional properties: the two main themes were *misogyny* ('misogyny', 'misogynistic', 'sexist' and 'sexism') and *harassment and violence* ('rapist', 'harass', 'catcall', 'rape', 'sexually' and 'assault'). This indicated clearly that our corpus was imbued with discussions of violence with a potentially gendered dimension. At the same time, we observed the frequent use of expletives ('stfu', 'bullshit', 'fuck' and 'ffs' [for fuck's sake]), which may express frustration and anger but also polarity (through, for example, the direct address in 'stfu'). Finally, we saw that the corpus featured very prominently keywords such as 'hashtag' (the top keyword), 'tweet' and 'tw' [trigger warning], which topicalise the discussion and the use of the hashtag more generally. This points to the metacommunicative awareness of the posters and arguably the negotiation of meanings associated with the use of #NotAllMen itself. Through the coding process outlined above, it became clear that, although #NotAllMen began (and continues to be used) as a hashtag used to argue that not all men engage in misogynistic behaviour, in the days following Sarah Everard's murder this was not its predominant use. Instead, most tweets in our corpus engaged in metadiscursive commentary of the hashtag itself, e.g. 'All I can conclude from the hashtag is that #NotAllMen are listening to women or willing to face up to their role in the problem'. This was consistent across the 14-day use of the hashtag, as observed in concordancing of tweets posted across this time.

**Table 3**

Most frequent codes and categories.

Keyword	Categories and codes	Number of references	Frequency
Hashtag	Derailing and distancing from the #NAM debate	24/102	24%
	Disbelief, confusion and anger that #NAM is trending	16/102	16%
	Calling out men's selfishness, hypocrisy and inaction	12/102	12%
	Calling out women, feminists and #NAM denouncers	10/102	10%
Rapist	Not all men are rapists but...	36/92	39%
	Not all men are rapists	15/92	16%
	Not being a rapist isn't something to brag about	10/92	11%
Harass	(Not all men, but) all women have stories of harassment or abuse	53/96	55%
	Calling out Men's dismissal, hypocrisy or inaction	10/96	10%
Misogyny	Men need to take action and responsibility	25/99	25%
	Calling out men's dismissal, hypocrisy or inaction	22/99	22%
STFU	People using #NotAllMen need to shut up	33/51	65%

As outlined above, we focus our qualitative analysis on the following five keywords: (1) 'hashtag' (2) 'rapist' (3) 'harass' (4) 'misogyny' (5) 'stfu'. Each of these correspond to the broader semantic and functional groupings outlined above. Below, we consider in turn how these keywords were deployed in context, arguing that they reveal a set of prominent themes and strategies in the #NotAllMen tweets: resistance, opposition and polarity.

#### 4.1. 'hashtag'

The strategy of opposition and polarity is particularly apparent in the 'hashtag' keyword data, where most tweets engage in metadiscussion of #NotAllMen itself. 67% of these tweets represented anti-misogynistic responses to #NotAllMen. We coded the largest proportion of 'hashtag' tweets (24%) as *disbelief, confusion or anger that #NotAllMen is trending*. Tweets in this code express rage at the centering and victimisation of *men* instead of *women* through #NotAllMen and critiquing men's apparent reluctance to take ownership of or responsibility for misogynistic culture, e.g. "Fuck off with your fucking hashtag". This critique is also implied in the following example:

**Example 1.** The #NotAllMen hashtag is some trump level fragile nonsense.

Use of the adjective 'fragile' as part of the pre-modification of the noun 'nonsense' here alludes to 'fragile masculinity' – a term from behavioural science to mean an anxiety experienced by some men that they might 'fail to convincingly demonstrate their manhood [and thus] risk losing their status as "real men"' (DiMuccio and Knowles, 2020: 25). Ex-US President Donald Trump is invoked here through the phrase 'trump level', which quantifies the degree to which the hashtag is fragile 'nonsense'. Throughout his presidency, Trump was characterised as a bully who, through lies and braggadocio, tried to make himself seem more popular and successful than he really was (Kellner, 2017). His name is used metonymically here to denote arrogance and deceit, implying that those using the hashtag display this behaviour. This user trivialises the hashtag as 'nonsense', framing it as insignificant, reworking it, and giving it new meaning.

The second highest proportion (18%) of anti-misogynistic tweets including the keyword 'hashtag' were coded as *calling out men's selfishness, hypocrisy and inaction*. Half of the tweets within this code directly addressed (through the second-person pronoun) an imagined oppositional audience, creating a sense that there are two clear and polarised 'sides' in this debate, e.g. 'If you're a man and you think it's okay to use #NotAllMen when women are talking about their experience with sexual assault, YOU ARE THE PROBLEM'. 75% of these tweets belittled men who align unironically with the 'not all men' stance, for example through insulting evaluative terms such as 'idiotic' and 'stupid', and through rhetorical questions such as 'why do yall always have to victimise yourselves' and 'have you taught your sons not to rape and murder?', as well as positioning them as 'part of the problem'. They typically communicated significant affect, as in the following example:

**Example 2.** #NotAllMen is trending and honestly fuck every guy who thinks it's cool to post this idiotic hashtag as if they're the real victims. EVERY woman has a story. Hold your friends accountable. Better yet, choose better friends. Who you associate with tells us what you're ok with.

This tweet begins with a short declarative statement of the hashtag's 'trending' status, before moving to an assertive and affective stance against those using it. The expletive command 'fuck' indicates an aggressive rejection of other hashtag users, with 'every

guy' making it clear that male users are the target of this aggression. The complex post-modification of 'guy' and the lack of punctuation further communicates anger, while the adverb 'honestly' acts as an intensifier to demonstrate unapologetically the users' strength of feeling. The premodification of 'victims' with 'real' casts as false the #NotAllMen claim (as with 'nonsense' in the previous example) and works on the presupposition that the 'real victims' here are women, while the premodifier 'idiotic' effectively rejects the hashtag itself. Through these strategies, the user reclaims the hashtag, bringing attention back to women, and undermining the male-centred stance. However, this also reproduces binary gender by referring only to women and men, omitting other genders who may be both victim and assailant. This binary construction is repeated throughout the corpus; though problematic, it is arguably a consequence of the original hashtag focusing on men, specifically.

#### 4.2. 'rapist'

The keyword 'rapist' was commonly used to postmodify 'men' in the corpus; 35% of tweets including the keyword 'rapist' were coded to the category *not all men are rapists*. These tweets defended men who expressed the sentiment of the hashtag, with examples including 'A tiny %of men are bloody murderers and rapists, not fair to shame the vast majority of men who are decent'. In contrast, 65% of tweets were coded to the category *not all men are rapists, but*. These tweets respond directly to the observation that is inherent in the #NotAllMen hashtag: not all men commit acts of sexual violence towards women. 51% of these tweets draw attention to the fact that women cannot know which men might be rapists, and so they must assume all men are a threat, e.g. 'Yes, we know that #NotAllMen are rapists. But women can't keep playing russian roulette'. This is a logical counterargument, though it does by its very nature simplify and essentialise women's experiences. This is perhaps inevitable, given the use of 'all' as a determiner in the original hashtag, but the polarisation between men (who are potential attackers) and women (who are potential victims) does not allow for variation or intersectionality. This is particularly clear in the following example:

**Example 3.** #NotAllMen isn't about us females dismissing the fact rape also happens to men, it's not us saying "ALL" men are rapists. It's us women having to live in fear about things like walking home, alone, late at night because a minority cannot control themselves.

This tweeter uses the inclusive first-person plural pronoun 'us' three times, twice as a premodifier ('us females', 'us women'). This indicates firstly that the tweet has been written by a woman and, secondly, that she is creating an evaluative bond, using 'women' and 'females' as directly indexicalised in-group identity markers, in contrast to the out-group 'men'. This is also demonstrated by the contrast between the emotive phrase 'live in fear' – which positions fear as an everyday lived reality rather than an occasional experience – and the more neutral declarative construction 'rape also happens to men'. The user thus claims a discursive space for women specifically, and works to establish a collective voice around women's shared experience. This mirrors the findings of Bouvier (2020a), as collective pronouns operate as in-group markers, creating evaluative bonds and ambient affiliation with other Twitter users also want to challenge the original hashtag.

Similarly, Example 4 elaborates on the key issue in this category: it is not possible to know whether a given man poses a threat.

**Example 4.** Men don't wear a sign on their head that says "friendly" or "nice guy" or "rapists" or "asshole" I get to assume whatever the fuck I want if it gets me home safe. So while it may be #NotAllMen it has always been a man that made me feel like I needed to question my safety.

This tweeter uses imagined visual cues through the noun phrase 'a sign on their head' to position men on either side of a constructed masculine identity binary: as safe ('friendly', 'nice guy') or dangerous ('rapists', 'asshole'). Through the challenging agentive statement 'I get to assume whatever the fuck I want', the tweeter claims the right to be wary, on the basis that the 'dangerous' traits cited here cannot be seen. The agentive construction ('I get to'), alongside the expletive ('fuck'), indexes an emboldened, independent, but also angry persona. As found throughout the corpus, tweeters arguing against #NotAllMen consistently position themselves as simultaneously empowered and afraid – a complex stance which reflects the experience of many women who are determined to have independence (e.g. by walking home alone at night) but constantly aware of their vulnerability in doing so.

Overall, these tweets point to polarisation, not only between women (as potentially vulnerable) and men (as potentially dangerous), but between two sides of the #NotAllMen debate. This point is explored further in relation to our third keyword: 'harass'.

#### 4.3. 'harass'

As with 'rapist', some tweets including the keyword 'harass' were categorised as *not all men are harassers, but*, e.g. '#NotAllMen but enough men that there is a constant fear of getting sexually harassed', but this was not as prevalent a category, representing only 8% of tweets using this keyword. Unlike 'rapist', very few tweets (5%) using the keyword 'harass' defended men or positioned them as victims, though examples included exclamatories such as 'Real men would NEVER harass any woman!'. The majority of tweets (55%) using this keyword focused not on men, but on women, and were coded to the category (*not all men, but*) *all women have stories of harassment or abuse*, e.g. 'The whole #NotAllMen trending is so ridiculous and ignorant, like yeah not all men treat women like that but ALL women have been sexual assaulted or harassed and that's the issue'. These tweets work to foreground women's everyday experiences of harassment.

Another important factor which explains the keyness of 'harass' is a statistic released a week after Everard went missing and two days before police confirmed her body had been found: 97% of women in the UK have experienced sexual harassment (Choudhury, 2021); this is referenced directly in 23% of tweets within this category. Of note here is the fact that the survey this figure comes from, which was widely reported in UK news outlets, did not record *who* had done the harassing, but these tweets consistently frame *men* as harassing *women*. For example, 'if 97% of women have been sexually harassed or assaulted in the UK then it clearly shows a large number of men are the ones doing it'. The remaining 77% of tweets in this category did not cite the study directly but similarly made the point that harassment is experienced by all women, as in:

**Example 5.** you know what, maybe it is #notallmen, but it's all fucking women, and we aren't doing this to ourselves. i am aghast that almost every woman i know has been harassed at the very least, but somehow no man i know even knows of someone who's ever harassed a woman. makes me so angry.

The multiple use of the verb 'know' allows the user to cite their own social network as evidence that 'almost every woman' within it has been harassed, but no men are apparently aware of this. Whereas the adverbs 'almost' and 'every', pre-modifying 'woman', indicate a largely shared experience, there is no such mitigation around 'no man'. The adverb 'somehow' indicates disbelief or suspicion regarding this observation, and the adverbs 'even' and 'ever' modifying the verbs 'knows' and 'harassed' further foreground the unlikelihood of this. The implication is that these men do not admit

to being aware of others who have harassed women, even though they are (though of course, one might argue that men may not tell one another that they have harassed women). Given the tone of this tweet, it is possible that the affect shown in the adjective 'aghast' at the start may be sarcastic, but nonetheless the claim that 'every woman I know has been harassed at the very least' (with the final phrase indicating that some have experienced violence) is a powerful affective statement, helping the tweet to reframe #NotAllMen to focus not on the apparent victimisation of men, but instead on misogynistic culture more broadly. This reframing is seen explicitly in the next example:

**Example 6.** to all people who use #NotAllMen: THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU. this is not about how many men don't rape and sexually harass women, it's about how many women get raped and sexually harassed.

Here, the declarative phrases 'this is not about' and 'it is about' juxtapose a focus on men who do not harass women, with a focus on women who get harassed. In the construction 'it's about how many women get raped and sexually harassed', the agent is omitted; one might expect the postmodifier 'by men', given the context. This omission *may* imply that women also experience abuse at the hands of other genders, but it also has the effect of removing men from the conversation ('this is not about...men') and pushing women to the centre. This choice heightens a sense of bonding and ambient affiliation for women following this Twitter discussion, at the expense of men. In this tweet, then, the #NotAllMen stance is resisted and reframed so that, once again, women's experiences are foregrounded.

#### 4.4. 'misogyny'

The keyword 'misogyny', like 'harassment', was generally used to point out the persistence of male abuse against women rather than to defend men; only 9% of tweets using this keyword did the latter (e.g. 'To be fair, #NotAllMen excuse rape or misogyny'). Of the remaining tweets, there were two overlapping themes which dominated: 22% criticised men's behaviour (captured in the code *Calling out men's dismissal, hypocrisy or inaction*) and 25% were a direct call for men to take action (captured in the category *Men need to take action and responsibility*).

In the code *Calling out men's dismissal, hypocrisy or inaction*, 73% of tweets position men as a collective group in the third person, through statements such as 'this misogyny is a problem all men need to solve'. A smaller proportion (32%) speak directly to men (e.g. 'just know that I'm talking about you'), but these tweets have the same effect: they position men as wilfully ignorant of misogyny. Following the same theme as [Example 5](#), these tweets reframe #NotAllMen discourse to shift the focus from the extreme, violent behaviour of some men to the more widespread and often socially accepted problem of misogynistic behaviour, which not all men confront when they see it).

**Example 7.** Let us frame the #NotAllMen tag appropriately. Pretending misogyny and #maleviolence against women is not an issue for all men is quite frankly intellectually lazy.

In this example, the phrase 'not an issue for all men' invokes the language of the #NotAllMen hashtag, but changes its meaning from resisting the homogenisation of 'men', to recognising a problem that all men are part of. This shifts the focus onto feminist concerns (labelled 'appropriate' here) and away from those categorised as 'intellectually lazy': those who apparently do not think through the implications of violence towards women. By insulting (presumably men's) intelligence, this appears to target men's egos. By resisting and disparaging those who engage with

#NotAllMen and putting forward a collective change in perception through the inclusive pronoun 'let us frame', this changes the focus of the debate; it resists the original hashtag meaning and presents an alternative position for 'us' to collectively take instead.

It is notable that 'Misandry' appeared infrequently in the corpus (26 occurrences, compared with 129 for misogyny). When it did, it was in tweets defending the #NotAllMen stance by arguing that the backlash was sexist towards men, or drawing parallels between misogyny and misandry (see Mullany and Trickett, 2020; Mullany et al., 2021 for a discussion of public understanding of these terms). The frequency in our corpus of 'misogyny' (see Table 1) may also be indicative of the term's sole relevance to women; one might argue that men can also be the targets of sexism, but *misogyny* is directed specifically towards women. This is indicated in the next example, from the category *Men need to take action and responsibility*:

**Example 8.** STOP saying #notallmen, to address systemic misogyny and violence against women everyone including ALL men has to accept it exists, look to themselves, ask difficult questions and be prepared to change. Until those who hold power step up and speak truth, the abuse persists.

The imperative form which opens this tweet empowers the user in not only rejecting the hashtag but demanding that others do too. It clearly aligns 'misogyny' with 'violence against women', and argues that responsibility lies with 'everyone'. By clarifying that this includes 'ALL men', and emphasising the determiner through capitalisation, this tweet mirrors Example 7 by arguing that, indeed, all men *do* need to take some action in response to this problem. Although the use of 'difficult' to premodify the questions that must be asked offers some acknowledgement of the uncomfortable nature of this task, the tweet ultimately challenges the underlying principle of the original hashtag by foregrounding the role of men.

#### 4.5. 'stfu'

Our final keyword illustrates the prominence of a linguistic theme across the corpus: the expression of anger on all sides of the debate, expressed through expletives as acronyms and insults. 65% of tweets using this keyword were coded as *people using #NotAllMen need to shut up*. Of those tweets, 37% included the collocate 'listen', as in the following example:

**Example 9.** I'm sure every single woman murdered at the hands of violent men, and every single one of us who have been sexually assaulted, takes absolutely zero solace in the fact that its #notallmen So stfu and start listening to how scared we are.

Like 68% of tweets in this category, the imperative mood is also used here, so that 'stfu' is a command (rather than being indicative, as in the example '#Notallmen can stfu'). This tweeter takes an agentive stance through the imperative mood, demanding that #NotAllMen users 'start listening'. By invoking the horror of male to female violence through the constructions 'woman murdered' and 'violent men', women are positioned as 'scared'; the first-person collective pronouns 'we' and 'us' further frame the tweet as being voiced by a woman. In combination with the imperative, this simultaneously positions women – and the tweeter herself – as both *powerful* and *powerless*. This paradoxical state reflects the overall discourse of this corpus, where we see a tension between women assertively rejecting the intended stance behind the hashtag whilst also foregrounding their own vulnerability. The importance of spaces where women can *safely* use their complex positionality to resist misogynistic practices and male-centred perspectives therefore cannot be underestimated.

Similar to 'listen' in Example 9, the final example employs the associated imperative 'pay attention':

**Example 10.** #notallmen yous want a trophy for not being violent serial killers and rapists and that is so scary to me lol Instead of writing #notallmen just stfu and pay attention to what you're being told.

As with 74% of tweets in this category, and like Example 9, this tweet does not indicate to whom this group should pay attention, e.g. through the prepositional phrase 'by women'. However, the second-person plural 'yous' postmodifying '#notallmen' implies that 'men' are the addressee in this tweet. This reading is supported by the dominance of a male/female dichotomy in the corpus and the typical use of the hashtag to refocus attention on women *instead* of men. In this way, the tweets in this category do overall appear to be telling men, specifically, to listen to women, in particular. In this example, the command 'pay attention' and the premodification of 'stfu' with 'just' implies that this should be straightforward. Through these linguistic strategies, the tweeter indexes a condescending, authoritative stance in relation to their implied audience, reclaiming the #NotAllMen discourse in a way that is, once again, empowering.

## 5. Discussion

Our analysis shows that the dominant use of #NotAllMen in this corpus frames the hashtag as a symptom of misogyny in UK society. Each of the top five keywords discussed in the paper expresses a predominantly anti-misogynist stance. The high frequency of the keyword 'hashtag', indicating the metadiscursive evaluation of #NotAllMen within the corpus, shows in itself that most tweets in the days following Sarah Everard's murder did *not* align with its original message. The smaller number of tweets using the hashtag to demonstrate that not all men are a danger to women were thus overwhelmed by those aiming to bring the focus back to women's experiences and perspectives, rather than men's. This is shown most directly through the imperative keyword 'stfu', but also through the keywords 'rapist', 'harass' and 'misogyny', each of which are used to highlight women's collective vulnerability to male violence, and to reiterate the argument that men should take responsibility for misogyny. It is feasible that not all those tweeting in this way had actually witnessed #NotAllMen being used with its original intent; some users may have been responding only to the posts of others who claimed that they had. Evidently, though, this did not matter, as the very *existence* of the hashtag was sufficient stimulus for these tweeters to engage in resistant discourse.

We have shown that the purpose of this resistant discourse is to challenge the implication of the original hashtag: that misogyny is not a problem in UK society. This is achieved by claiming that, whilst most men would not attack women, the vast majority of women are fearful of being attacked due to their lived experience of harassment at the hands of *some* men. Often (as shown through the use of the personal pronoun 'us', for example), it is evident that these tweeters identify as women; in this way, the hashtag is used to create a space for themselves at the expense of men. The use of strong expletives, such as two of the top keywords 'stfu' and 'bullshit', allow these women to very openly resist and reject the ideological expectations of hegemonic femininity and stereotypically feminine speech styles, a strategy which Morikawa (2019) identifies as a symbolic act of power. Similarly, strategies such as using sarcasm and condescension to belittle men and frame them as fragile are also employed, allowing tweeters to exclude men from the discussion and place women at its centre instead. Tweeters also call out men who ignore evidence of sexual harassment, reframing the



#NotAllMen discourse to focus not on the apparent victimisation of men but instead on misogynistic culture more broadly.

The resistant discourse that we identify here is problematic in some ways; it relies on a heteronormative dichotomy between women and men (which erases other genders and sexualities) and on limiting, over-simplified characterisations of men (as shown in Bouvier, 2020b). However, it is clear that the polarisation in this discourse is effective as a form of counter-protest: it allows users to reclaim Twitter as a space for women to form evaluative bonds and collectively reflect on Everard's murder. By engaging in ambient affiliation through hashtag use, the tweeters effectively call on others to affiliate with the anti-misogynistic values and evaluations expressed by the reframed hashtag. In this way, our data provides evidence of tweeters exploiting the affordances of social media strategically; they take advantage of the collaborative nature of hashtags in order to confront misogyny directly and demand that they take up space online. Our analysis thus enables a view of antagonism on Twitter which, instead of foregrounding its negative use as a platform for hate (as a good deal of research has done to date), draws attention to the more positive and socially progressive uses of this platform's affordances. More specifically, we show how Twitter hashtags can be used as a resource through which disparate individuals – and ordinary people – can collectively resist harmful discourse and practice through vehement counter-argument. There is clear applied linguistic value in research with this aim, as it allows us to identify and understand the strategies of online discourse which resist and reject harmful social norms and practices.

Overall, and echoing Palomino-Manjón's (2020) study of #WhyIDidntReport, our analysis shows that those taking an anti-misogynistic stance through their use of #NotAllMen demand to be heard through the powerful resistant discourses that they use. They deploy empowering, resistant discursive strategies, most notably opposition and polarity, expletives, insults, and direct address. Through these strategies, they engage in the 'shielding' that Lopez et al. (2019) suggest is key to hashtag activism. Importantly, these strategies also help Twitter users highlight the significant, ongoing damage caused by misogyny and gender-based violence – just one consequence of which has been the murder of Sarah Everard. In this way, a tension is revealed between the assertive way in which the ideological message of the original hashtag is rejected, and the taking up of a fearful and thus weakened subject position, albeit as a strategy to call for social change. Whilst it is evident that #NotAllMen enabled Twitter users to co-construct an empowering space in which to express themselves and resist misogyny, then, it is clear that – for female users – this also requires them to acknowledge their inherent vulnerability as women. In itself, this tension reflects the continued discrimination, inequality and violence experienced by women on a daily basis in the UK and globally.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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