

Constructing Gender Polarisation in Online Interaction: Affective Blame Attributions in Finnish Reddit Discussions

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Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2026, Vol. 14(2), 424–453, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jssp.20987>

Received: 2025-11-26 • **Accepted:** 2026-05-13 • **Published (VoR):** 2026-09-08

Handling Editor: Maria Fernandes-Jesus, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

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Supplementary Materials: Materials [see [Index of Supplementary Materials](#)]



Abstract

Debates about a growing ideological gender divide have intensified in public discourse, yet little is known about how such polarisation is constructed in everyday interaction. This study addresses that gap by examining how gender polarisation is discursively and affectively produced in online discussions in Finland. Drawing on an affective and critical discursive approach, the analysis focuses on affective blame attributions in two Finnish Reddit threads discussing the perceived gender gap. The findings show that polarisation is not simply asserted but actively explained and negotiated through competing attributions of responsibility – to societal neglect, failed dialogue, media dynamics, ideological extremism, and gendered power relations. These accounts are emotionally charged and often oppositional, reproducing the very divisions they seek to explain. The study contributes to social psychological research by conceptualising gender polarisation as an interactional and affective process, demonstrating how it is constructed and sustained through everyday online discourse.

Keywords

polarisation, gender polarisation, young people, Reddit, Finland, critical discursive psychology, affective practice theory, affective blame attributions



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Non-Technical Summary

1. Background

Many countries have seen increasing concern about growing ideological and emotional differences between young men and women. These discussions often take place on social media, where people debate the causes of gender polarisation and express strong emotions about gender, politics, and society.

2. Why was this study done?

This study aimed to better understand how gender polarisation is discussed and constructed in online interaction. It examined two Finnish Reddit discussions about the perceived divide between young men and women to explore how participants explained the causes of this polarisation and how emotions shaped these explanations.

3. What did the researchers do and find?

The researchers analysed the Reddit discussions using a qualitative discourse-analytic approach. They found that participants attributed responsibility for gender polarisation to a wide range of factors, including societal neglect of young men, hostile public debate, social media algorithms, ideological extremism, changing gender roles, and perceived discrimination against either men or women. These explanations were often emotionally charged, involving blame, resentment, irony, fear, and moral condemnation. Although many comments reinforced divisions between groups, some participants also encouraged empathy, mutual understanding, and dialogue.

4. What do these findings mean?

The findings suggest that gender polarisation is not only a political or ideological divide but also an ongoing social and emotional process that is created and reinforced through everyday online communication. Understanding how people discuss and make sense of these issues can help researchers, policymakers, educators, and platform designers develop more constructive ways of addressing polarisation and fostering dialogue across differences.

Recent scholarship from Northern Europe (Isotalo et al., 2024; Labore, 2023), Central Europe (Revers & Traunmüller, 2020), and the United States (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018) points to an emerging ideological gender divide among Generation Z – those born between 1997 and 2012. While younger cohorts have traditionally been associated with more liberal and postmaterialist values (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), recent evidence suggests a more complex pattern: young women increasingly align with left-wing and liberal positions, while young men are more likely to gravitate toward right-wing and populist orientations (Isotalo et al., 2024; Mannerström et al., 2020). This divergence appears to extend beyond policy preferences to affective polarisation, reflected in growing emotion-

al distance and distrust between young men and women (Iyengar et al., 2019; see also Milosav et al., 2026; Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024).

These dynamics are particularly visible in online environments. For example, the so-called ‘manosphere’ – a loosely connected network of men’s rights and anti-feminist communities (Ging, 2019) – has given rise to more extreme misogynistic formations such as involuntary celibates (incels) (e.g., Pettersson et al., 2025; Vallergera & Zurbriggen, 2022), alongside broader constructions of men’s victimhood (e.g., Venäläinen, 2022). At the same time, counter-movements such as the 4B movement, originating in South Korea, challenge traditional gender roles and reject heterosexual relationships (Handley, 2024).

Research on the scope and causes of the gender divide remains limited and inconclusive. Comparative studies point to an emerging gap among young adults in several European countries, with young men more likely to align with right-wing positions and young women with more liberal orientations, although patterns vary across contexts (Milosav et al., 2026; Nennstiel & Hudde, 2025). Survey findings similarly indicate gender differences in attitudes toward gender equality, with young women expressing stronger support and young men more scepticism (King’s College London, 2025). Emerging work suggests that such polarisation may have broader social consequences, including shaping interpersonal relationships and political participation (e.g., Huber & Malhotra, 2017), and is unfolding within wider contexts of economic insecurity, cultural backlash, and contested gender norms.

At the same time, findings remain partly contradictory, and the extent of the gender gap is debated (Bracho, 2024; Isotalo et al., 2024; Nennstiel & Hudde, 2025). Much of the existing research has examined gender polarisation at a broad societal level – for example, through differences in political self-placement, party preferences, or values (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2019; Milosav et al., 2026). While this work documents emerging patterns, it leaves open how gender polarisation is experienced and negotiated in everyday interaction.

The present study addresses this gap by examining how gender polarisation is discursively and affectively accomplished in online discussions in Finland, where recent research has identified both ideological divergence and increasing affective polarisation (Isotalo et al., 2024; Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024). Drawing on critical discursive psychology and affective-practice theory (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 2012), the analysis focuses on affective blame attributions to illuminate how polarisation is constructed, contested, and sustained in interaction. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature on polarisation by conceptualising gender polarisation not as a fixed, measurable outcome, but as an interactional and affective process embedded in broader ideological and socio-political discourses.

Identity Politics, Right-Wing Populism and Online Political and Social Realities

Polarisation is not necessarily negative; some degree of ideological polarisation is inherent to democratic contestation. However, affective polarisation – referring to emotional animosity between social or political groups – can undermine social cohesion and trust (Iyengar et al., 2019). While initially studied in the United States, recent work has documented similar dynamics in Europe (e.g., Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024; Reiljan, 2020; Rovamo et al., 2024).

The emerging gender gap among young people is closely tied to the growing prominence in public and political debates of sociocultural issues such as gender equality, multiculturalism, and national identity. Contemporary politics is increasingly characterised by identity-based mobilisation, appealing to categories such as gender, ethnicity, or sexuality (Noury & Gérard, 2020). These dynamics operate across the political spectrum but are particularly visible in right-wing populism, which constructs antagonisms between ‘the people’ and perceived elites or outgroups (Moffitt, 2016; Mudde, 2004), often mobilising affective responses to issues such as immigration, gender rights, and globalisation.

Such developments are reflected in both men’s rights and anti-feminist movements (Ging, 2019), as well as feminist and anti-racist mobilisations (e.g., Mani, 2019; Paul, 2019). Some scholars link the roots of gender polarisation to broader socio-economic and cultural transformations, including the 2008 financial crisis, globalisation, and intensified public debates around gender and equality, which have been associated with forms of cultural backlash (Inglehart & Norris, 2019; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). While evidence remains mixed, these processes have been linked to widening gender differences in political attitudes among younger cohorts (Isotalo et al., 2024; Nennstiel & Hudde, 2025). However, findings vary by measurement: gender gaps appear limited in general ideological self-placement (Nennstiel & Hudde, 2025) but pronounced in gender-related attitudes and voting behaviour, particularly in young men’s higher support for far-right parties (Milosav et al., 2026).

In Finland, analyses from the Finnish National Election Study indicate that gender differences in values and party choice have widened since the 2000s, particularly among young adults (Isotalo et al., 2024), with young women leaning more liberal and young men more socially conservative. At the same time, affective polarisation between party supporters has intensified (Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024), suggesting that political disagreement is increasingly accompanied by emotional distancing. These developments are reflected in both research and public debate and are visible in the mobilisation of young people online. In social media, right-wing populist and far-right movements have attracted particularly young men, while young women have increasingly aligned with liberal and feminist positions (Ajatuspaja Alkio, 2020; Isotalo et al., 2024). Recent

electoral shifts – especially the transition from Sanna Marin’s social democratic, women-led government to the current right-wing conservative coalition – further highlight Finland as a relevant context for examining gender polarisation (Palonen, 2024).

As young people increasingly use online platforms for news, political engagement, and identity work (Kligler-Vilenchik & Literat, 2018; Parmelee et al., 2023), the digital environment may intensify polarisation. Online political communication often relies on emotionally engaging content and can strengthen ties between audiences and political actors (Pettersson & Sakki, 2024; Törnberg et al., 2021). Algorithms further amplify content that aligns with users’ views, contributing to echo chambers and reinforcing ideological divisions (Futrell & Simi, 2004), while emotionally charged or hostile content tends to spread more widely (Crary, 2022).

Taken together, these developments position gender polarisation among young people as a broader socio-political phenomenon intertwined with identity politics and digital communication. Despite growing scholarly and media attention, research has largely relied on large-scale quantitative approaches. Studies typically operationalise gender polarisation through ideological self-placement, party choice, value divergence, or affective distance between groups (e.g., Isotalo et al., 2024; Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024; Milosav et al., 2026; Nennstiel & Hudde, 2025). While this work has been instrumental in identifying emerging gender gaps, findings remain partly inconsistent across countries and cohorts. Some studies detect widening ideological divergence, others emphasise shifts in party choice, and still others focus on affective polarisation. As a result, interpretations vary depending on how polarisation is conceptualised and measured (Bracho, 2024; King’s College London, 2025; Nennstiel & Hudde, 2025).

More fundamentally, these approaches conceptualise polarisation primarily as a measurable outcome – the degree of divergence between groups – rather than as an ongoing social process. They reveal whether young men and women differ, but not how such differences are constructed, justified, contested, or emotionally intensified in everyday interaction. The rhetorical and affective dynamics through which gender polarisation is reproduced at the grassroots level therefore remain underexplored.

Discursive and rhetorical approaches offer tools to address this gap. Critical discursive psychology (CDP) conceptualises attitudes, blame, and identity as situated social actions rather than internal states (Billig, 1987; Edley, 2001; Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993). Research has shown how polarisation and hate can be understood as socially constructed, interactional processes (Pettersson & Norocel, 2024; Pettersson & Sakki, 2023). Within this framework, emotions are treated as discursive resources used to manage accountability and identity positioning (Edwards, 1999; Wiggins, 2017).

While CDP clarifies how accountability and identity are organised in discourse (e.g., Sakki & Pettersson, 2018), affective-practice theory (APT) extends this framework by foregrounding the patterned and circulating nature of affect (Wetherell, 2012; Wetherell et al., 2020). Whereas discursive psychology treats emotions primarily as discursive

constructions, APT conceptualises them as embodied, discursively organised, and historically sedimented practices. This perspective widens the analytic lens to include affective intensities, embodiment, and the ideological organisation of feeling. For the present study, it enables analysis not only of rhetorical blame, but also of how affects – such as resentment, fear, contempt, irony, or hope – become attached to groups and issues in ways that sustain polarised moral landscapes.

Bringing CDP and APT together therefore allows a dual focus: on the interactional accomplishment of blame and accountability, and on the affective textures through which these attributions gain persuasive force. As Tormis (2025) shows, affective argumentation characterises populist discourse around sociocultural issues, where emotional registers function as central persuasive devices. In the context of gender polarisation, integrating CDP and APT makes it possible to examine how explanatory accounts are not merely cognitive interpretations but affectively charged attributions that position groups, allocate responsibility, and reproduce ideological divisions.

Thus, whereas quantitative research measures the extent of gender divergence and CDP illuminates the rhetorical organisation of accountability, an affective-discursive approach reveals how polarisation is emotionally animated and socially reproduced in interaction. By focusing on affective blame attributions in Finnish Reddit discussions, the present study moves from measurement to meaning-making: rather than asking how much young men and women differ, it examines how gender polarisation is constructed, contested, attributed, and emotionally negotiated in everyday online talk.

In doing so, the study advances scholarship in three ways. First, it conceptualises gender polarisation as an interactional and affective process rather than solely a macro-level variable. Second, it integrates critical discursive psychology with affective-practice theory to illuminate the emotional textures and ideological character of blame and boundary-making. Third, it situates these dynamics within the Finnish online context, demonstrating how widening gender divides are negotiated in everyday online interaction.

Method

Data

Data were drawn from two discussion threads in r/Suomi, a large Finnish-language subreddit focused on societal and political issues. Both threads were initiated by a post linking to a news media article that discussed gender polarisation among young people in Finland and globally. The first thread (2024) discussed an article in Finland's largest daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, HS (Puttonen, 2024). The article was entitled 'Why are young women leaning to the left and young men to the right? One dividing factor is concern about the future'. The article discussed the results of the most recent Finnish

Youth barometer that annually measures values and attitudes among young people and that reported a growing political divide among men and women when it comes to right- and left-wing preferences. The second thread (2025) was initiated by a link to an online article by the alternative news outlet *Uusi Juttu* ('New thing'), which was founded in 2024 partly through crowd-sourced funding. The article (Onninen, 2025) 'We grow apart: Algorithms shoot men to Mars and women to Venus' covered and analysed several studies and election results pointing to a growing gender gap. The HS thread consisted of 387 and the *Uusi Juttu* thread of 155 comments, resulting in a dataset of 542 comments.

These two threads were sought using the search words 'young', 'men', 'women' and 'polarisation'. This search rendered multiple hits around polarisation and adjacent topics, including hate-speech, relationships, life-choices, and attitudes among young people. The two threads described above were chosen as they explicitly discussed the topic of interest, as they were most recent at the time of data collection (August 2025), and as they consisted of a large number of comments.

The reasons for analysing discussions around polarisation in Reddit specifically are twofold. First, Reddit threads offer a pseudonymous environment in which users discuss social and political issues with fewer identity cues than on real-name platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. Reddit's user base tends to be younger, digitally fluent, and disproportionately male (Duggan & Smith, 2013), which makes it a relevant venue for examining emerging gendered dynamics in online political discourse. Since discussions are organised into topic-specific subreddits and structured through up- and down-voting, the platform surfaces viewpoints that resonate with particular communities while still preserving the spontaneity of informal conversation.

Second, Reddit threads constitute hybrid interactional spaces that combine elements of dialogue and broadcasting: comments may be oriented toward the original post (or article), toward specific interlocutors within the thread, or toward a broader imagined audience of subreddit readers. As Jowett (2015) notes, online communication often involves 'dual address', where speakers simultaneously engage immediate interlocutors and perform for a wider, unseen audience. In both cases analysed here, the original posts shared links to news articles using titles drawn from the articles themselves, without extended framing commentary. However, the threads quickly developed into multi-layered exchanges, combining debate between specific users with more broadcast-oriented position statements. Following work on online deliberation and digital interaction (e.g., Graham, 2015), I treat these discussions not simply as linear conversations but as interactional arenas in which affective blame attributions circulate beyond dyadic disagreement and may thus function as public performances of ideological alignment.

Analytic Procedure

The analysis was informed by affective-practice theory and critical discursive psychology (Edley, 2001; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016; Wetherell, 1998, 2012; Wetherell et al., 2020).

Building on discursive psychological approaches that treat emotions and blame as forms of social action (Edwards, 1999; Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993), I conceptualised participants' explanations as affective blame attributions – accounts that allocate responsibility while mobilising emotional registers.

My analysis followed Sakki and Pettersson's (2016) framework, structured around three dimensions: content, form, and function. First, I identified the key topics through which users discuss gender polarisation (e.g. social media, radicalisation, economic insecurity, education) and the explanations they provide for its emergence. Second, I conducted a discursive analysis of how these accounts are constructed, examining rhetorical devices, metaphors, emotional registers (e.g. anger, fear, hope; Edwards, 1999), and ideological positioning. Third, I analysed their function – how they produce social meaning, allocate responsibility, and construct boundaries between 'us' and 'them', thereby contributing to affective polarisation.

I define affective blame attributions as explanatory accounts that simultaneously assign responsibility for a social phenomenon and mobilise affect – such as resentment, fear, or moral concern – to make these attributions persuasive and meaningful (Billig, 1987; Wetherell, 2012). This concept builds on discursive research showing how lay attributions can intensify polarisation – for example in discussions of immigration (Rovamo et al., 2024) and populist sociocultural debates (Tormis, 2025). Accordingly, I treat these attributions not simply as explanations, but as social actions through which participants position themselves, reproduce or resist hierarchies, and negotiate moral evaluations (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2012).

The analytic process was iterative: I generated initial categories inductively, refined them through comparison across threads, and clustered them into affective blame attributions, with continuous reference to the original data. I conducted the analysis on the Finnish original data (see [Supplementary Materials](#)) and translated excerpts into English while preserving idiomatic meaning. Where necessary, I retained and explained original Finnish terms in the analysis.

Ethical and Reflective Considerations

Notwithstanding my adherence to the methodological principles outlined above, a brief reflection on my positioning is warranted. Drawing on standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991) and reflexive qualitative methodology (Willig, 2013), I approach this analysis with the understanding that knowledge is produced from particular social and institutional locations rather than from a neutral position. As a white Finnish academic woman trained in social psychology within a critical social scientific tradition, my reading of Finnish Reddit discussions is shaped by this situated perspective.

My engagement with Reddit is analytical rather than participatory: I observe discussions without interacting with users, and I do not necessarily share the ideological commitments expressed within them. This positioning informs how I interpret tone, humour,

irony, and ideological framing, as well as whose voices appear typical or marginal. It also reflects normative commitments associated with my disciplinary training, including attention to gender, power, and inequality.

Throughout the analysis, I engaged in reflexive practice, revisiting interpretations – particularly regarding irony, sarcasm, and affective nuance – to ensure analytic rigour. By making this standpoint explicit, I aim to render visible the interpretive lens through which the material is analysed, acknowledging that interpretation is situated and theoretically informed.

Finally, using online discussions as empirical data in research raises important ethical considerations, including respecting the expectations of privacy that users may hold despite the public and pseudonymised nature of the posts (Ditchfield, 2021). To minimise the risk of any of the users being identifiable, the excerpts are presented here in translated form without pseudonyms. This study is part of a larger research project on gender polarisation among young people that has received ethical approval from the ethical committee of the author's home university.

Results

Through my analysis of the two Reddit threads, I arrived at the interpretation of six affective blame attributions. Whilst these attributions were intertwined, they all served distinct social and political functions. The affective blame attributions, their associated affects, and social and political functions are summarised in Table 1 below. In this section, I present the results of my analysis through examples from the empirical data that as well as possible capture the richness and complexity of the discursive work that was conducted therein.

Before presenting the six affective blame attributions, it is worth noting that a small number of comments questioned the phenomenon altogether. These comments were characterised by empiricist discourse (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter, 1996), drawing on research and cross-national comparisons (Sakki & Pettersson, 2016) to challenge the idea of a gender divide. Other, similarly marginal, comments framed polarisation as a consequence of socio-economic change – particularly an education gap between young men and women – again invoking research and media sources to warrant their claims (Potter, 1996). Across both types, the discourse was marked by an unemotional, 'objective' tone resembling academic argumentation. We now turn to the six affective blame attributions, examining the rhetorical, affective, and interactional dynamics through which gender polarisation is constructed.

Table 1
Affective Blame Attributions, Associated Affects, and Social and Political Functions

Affective blame attribution	Affects	Social and political functions
Neglect of young (boys)	Worry and loss; nostalgic longing; moral concern	Constructs societal neglect as the cause; externalises responsibility to parents/society
Lack of dialogue	Suspicion; indignation; threat to reason	Blames hostile discussion culture; positions speaker as reasonable observer
(Social) media’s amplifying effects	Resentment; ironic distancing; grievance	Relocates blame to algorithms and media logics; frames users as manipulated
The turn to conservative or extreme ideologies	Cultural anxiety; moral alarm; contempt	Attributes polarisation to ideological excess; stabilises ‘reasonable’ vs. ‘extreme’ actors
Hegemonic masculinity	Disgust; indignation; moral repulsion	Positions authoritarian masculinity as the cause; intensifies gender boundary-making
Structural misandry	Grievance; resentment; injustice	Frames feminism/equality as overreach; legitimises male distancing as defensive

Affective Attribution 1: Neglect of Young (Boys)

The first attribution constructed gender polarisation among youth through a moral concern about the neglect of boys – both at a societal level and in terms of family upbringing – which ultimately was said to lead to radicalisation and even criminality. The comments could take the form of blaming either mothers or – more typically – fathers explicitly for upbringing failure of boys. Such comments oftentimes reflected a struggle over different interpretations of masculinity: a hard, stoic, and unemotional type, or a softer masculinity that is able and allowed to express emotions (Edley & Wetherell, 1997), debating which model is beneficial for young boys.

Other comments discussed the problem at a societal level. The extract below is part of a longer comment that discussed how contemporary societies have lost their ‘soul’, leading to a general lack of togetherness and neglect for each other, especially young people:

*Extract 1: Uusi Juttu Thread***Commenter 1:**

1 On the other hand, people do not learn to be social. Growing into
2 part of a community is difficult and requires the whole tribe to teach
3 the youth. Instead, society pushes children from a young age into a
4 mold in which they study for a profession. Culture and growth are
5 missing, and as a result young men end up glued to their gaming
6 chairs, and young women become anxious. In therapy they then
7 learn the emotional skills they lacked. There's nothing wrong with
8 that, but it's hard to imagine how people are supposed to have the
9 social skills to truly interact with one another.

The comment above constructs a causal relationship between contemporary society's loss of collective teaching of sociability and young men and women's distance from each other. Applying the term 'tribe' (2) to humans adds an evolutionary tone to this account, which together with the empiricist or factual language (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter, 1996) gives the argument a sense of credibility and 'matter-of-factness' – this is how things are. Using a metaphor ('mold', 4), young women and men are portrayed as being forced into certain societal obligations and professional paths without anyone caring for their sociability or fostering a sense of community. Inevitably, the line of argumentation goes, they drift apart, with young men metaphorically described as tied to computer games and women suffering from emotional anxiety. The option of therapy as a context for learning emotional skills is offered as a concession (Potter, 1996) but immediately followed by a disclaimer 'there's nothing wrong with that, but...' (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975), as, ultimately, people would remain unable to meaningfully encounter each other. Overall, the account above is characterised by a factual, empiricist tone, and responds more to the original article than to a particular interaction partner.

Yet the extract also mobilises affect to construct a particular version of the world: young women are portrayed as anxious (6), learning emotional skills is depicted as a struggle (6–7), and isolation as a viable risk (5–6). This affective-discursive work functions to create an almost nostalgic longing for a time gone, through building a contrast structure or binary opposition (Billig, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) between a 'better' communal past and a troubled, divided present. Simultaneously, it constructs an affective tone of worry for the future, where interaction between young men and women is lost. In summary, this affective attribution places the blame for an increasing societal polarisation on a collective failure – by society or by parents – to foster well-being, emotional maturity, and social skills among young men and women.

Affective Attribution 2: Lack of Dialogue

The previous extract also taps into the following affective blame attribution, illustrating their interconnectedness. This affective attribution associated the increased polarisation among youth with a wider and deeply ingrained lack of dialogue among non-like-minded in society. The following extract illustrates such discourse, and explicitly constructs the essence of the problem as a conflation of opinions and facts:

Extract 2: HS Thread

Commenter 2:

- 1 I've also noticed that the decline in the level of discussion has
 - 2 been strongly affected by the weakened understanding of the
 - 3 difference between opinion and fact.
 - 4 Especially when the message of one's own 'side' (read: opinion) is
 - 5 treated as absolute truth (read: fact), and everything else is seen
 - 6 as opposing it. It's very difficult to discuss any topic if the other
 - 7 party paints you as an enemy the moment any disagreement
 - 8 comes up.
 - 9 I do partly blame the media for this erosion of boundaries — damn
 - 10 'gossip' journalism.
-

The comment above begins with a personal stance marker, 'I've also noticed...', positioning the speaker as an experiential witness to the problem and aligning the account with the ongoing discussion. Subsequently, reported speech and passive constructions attribute blame to those who treat their own opinions as non-negotiable truths and construct 'everyone else' as adversaries, thereby rendering dialogue between non-like-minded groups nearly impossible. Through extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) such as 'absolute truth' (5) and 'very difficult' (6), the speaker intensifies the moral seriousness of this perceived communicative breakdown.

From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), the vivid formulations 'paints you as the enemy' (7) and 'damn "gossip" journalism' (10) do more than embellish the argument; they animate affects of threat, indignation, and loss (Wiggins, 2017). These patterns function as persuasive resources that render the blame attribution compelling and morally urgent. The discussion climate is constructed as one of mutual suspicion, where disagreement escalates into hostility, thereby positioning the speaker as a reasonable and concerned observer of a deteriorating public sphere.

The final sentence, which explicitly accuses the media of fostering this conflation of opinion and fact, consolidates the affective blame attribution by relocating responsibility from individual interlocutors to a broader institutional actor. In doing so, the comment

orients not only to the immediate Reddit exchange but also to a wider imagined audience (cf. Jowett, 2015), participating in the circulation of an affectively charged narrative in which media practices are held accountable for societal polarisation.

Affective Attribution 3: The Amplifying Effects of (Social) Media

The previous comment showcased how constructions lamenting the lack of constructive dialogue and those pointing towards the role of (social) media could overlap. Some commenters attributed the blame for increased polarisation to the social reality created on online platforms, which allegedly distort genuine human interaction and peaceful disagreement:

Extract 3: HS Thread

Commenter 3:

1 Is it really true that the youth are ‘ruined’? Isn’t this problem mostly
2 among people in their twenties and younger? Yours truly [*meikā*
3 *mandoliini*] is a right-wing, meat-eating atheist with a reductionist
4 worldview, my partner is a green leftist who advocates for animal
5 rights, and their family consists of more or less religious, colorful
6 personalities – and we all get along brilliantly, because no one
7 mocks or needlessly challenges each other’s views, and we know
8 how to be kind to one another.
9 I guess this social-media era, tinders and whatnots have made
10 people imagine that friends and partners must be some kind of
11 perfect matches in order to be successful, and that no compromise
12 can be made? Oh dear...

The comment above was not part of an ongoing exchange but initiated a new comment chain, positioning it as a direct reaction to the original article. It constructs polarisation – or more precisely, the failure to peacefully ‘agree to disagree’ – as a generational problem rooted in the age of social media. Through a series of rhetorical questions (1–2; 9–12; Pettersson & Sakki, 2017), the comment does not come across as seeking information but rather performing incredulity. From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), such questions function as embodied displays of common-sense exasperation, inviting readers to align with the speaker’s stance as self-evident and reasonable. Rather than merely structuring argumentation (Billig, 1987), they animate the account with a tone of ironic disbelief that subtly attributes blame to ‘the very young’ for having lost the capacity for compromise.

The personal narrative that follows further develops this affective positioning. By contrasting their own identity as a ‘right-wing meat-eating atheist’ with their partner’s ‘animal protecting green-leftist with a religious family’ worldview, the speaker constructs a harmonious cross-ideological relationship as proof that ideological difference need not lead to hostility. The colloquial expression ‘*meikä mandoliini*’, vivid characterisations, and the extreme-case formulation ‘we all get along brilliantly’ do not simply describe experience; they enact an affect of ordinariness, balance, and good-humoured tolerance. Following Wiggins (2017), these affective displays should not be read as reports of inner emotional states but as interactional accomplishments that manage stake and accountability. By performing ease and conviviality, the speaker positions themselves as emotionally mature and reasonable, thereby strengthening the implicit blame attribution directed at younger generations.

A second contrast structure is then mobilised between this balanced personal arrangement and those allegedly ‘swamped away’ by social media and ‘tinders and whatnots’. The term ‘*imagine*’ (10) constructs younger people’s expectations of perfect ideological alignment as illusory and unrealistic. From an affective-practice perspective, this formulation participates in a broader affective practice of generational moralisation, where frustration and ironic superiority circulate as patterned responses to perceived cultural decline. The phrase ‘oh dear’ (‘*voi hyvänen aika*’) may index resignation, yet it also performs a subtle moral distancing – an affective stance of weary common sense toward those portrayed as naïve or misguided (cf. Tormis et al., 2024).

Taken together, the comment exemplifies an affective blame attribution in which polarisation is not explained through structural or ideological conflict but through a generational failure of emotional maturity and relational competence due to the prevailing internet culture. Through irony, exasperation, and self-positioning as balanced and sensible, the speaker mobilises affect as a persuasive force that renders the blame attribution both reasonable and emotionally resonant.

Others expressed concern about especially young men being destroyed by the biased information available on social media:

*Extract 4: Uusi Juttu Thread***Commenter 4:**

1 In my opinion, the biggest factor affecting men's distress is the
2 internet and social media. They're full of misandrist content that
3 gets under people's skin, and men don't have good enough tools to
4 process their emotions. Online propaganda gets into them like
5 nothing else — for example TikTok rage-bait and similar content.
6 Pay attention to how much people here, too, build their worldview
7 around TikTok rage-bait instead of actually going outside and talking
8 with real people.

The comment above constructs a one-sided account of social media's effects on men by invoking 'misandry' (2) and 'propaganda' (4) as vague yet affectively potent labels. Their indeterminacy makes them difficult to refute (Billig, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992), while allowing the speaker to attribute polarisation to a hostile digital environment rather than to individual actors. From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012; Wetherell et al., 2020), these terms function as condensed moral-emotional signifiers that frame men as unjustly targeted (Venäläinen, 2022).

The metaphor that such content 'gets under people's skin' further intensifies this blame attribution. Rather than presenting men as active ideological agents, the formulation positions them as affectively penetrated and harmed by external forces. In Sally Wiggins' (2017) terms, this is not simply emotion talk but an interactional accomplishment that mobilises affects of injury and grievance. In this way, responsibility for polarisation is relocated to an affectively toxic media ecology said to undermine 'real-life' interaction, while also resonating with research on affective publics and the role of digitally mediated emotions in shaping collective interpretations of social issues (Papacharissi, 2016; Tormis, 2025).

A considerable proportion of the comments similarly attributed polarisation to algorithms, echo chambers, and platform logics, often in conjunction with claims about the persuasive power of right-wing populism online, as illustrated in the following exchange:

Extract 5: HS Thread

Commenter 5:

1 I personally didn't want to comment on whether there's actually
2 anyone among the right-wing parties who genuinely gives a fuck
3 about the struggles of young men, considering that their politics are
4 what they are. That's the clarification.
5 The youth wing of the Finns Party and right-leaning groups in
6 general have taken control of social media far better and far more
7 systematically than others. I'd argue that this has the biggest
8 impact among young people. In some TikTok video there isn't even
9 time to go through things in any real depth, so this kind of 'fuck the
10 immigrants' / 'lower fuel prices' ranting sinks in more easily.

Commenter 6:

11 Yep. + Everyone sees immigrants in their everyday life and hears
12 (negative) stories, so it's something that feels close to people's
13 daily reality — unlike some complicated structural issues, for
14 example in the school system or the gendered nature of traffic and
15 mobility.
16 Imo: fight fire with fire, and counter populism with populism.
17 Though I guess that's exactly what causes this polarisation and the
18 politicisation of everything.

The exchange above can be interpreted as an instance of discursive meaning-making oriented to the unfolding interaction: the first comment draws on earlier contributions, while the second responds directly to it. The first commenter uses forceful language (2) to question right-wing parties' genuine concern for young men, portraying their politics as driven by simplistic, populist slogans rather than engagement with complex issues (8–10). Right-wing populists are constructed as the 'masters' of social media, whose emotionally charged catchphrases (9–10) are said to exert particular influence over young people. Commenter 6 aligns with this account (11), arguing that anti-immigrant rhetoric resonates more readily in everyday life than abstract 'structural issues' (13). Through warranting consensus ('everyone' encounters immigrants; 11) and contrast structures (11–15), populism is framed as affectively immediate and therefore more persuasive than reasoned debate (Billig, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992).

The closing metaphor, 'fight fire with fire' (16), equates populism with an uncontrollable blaze, presenting it as both the cause and accelerator of polarisation. From an affective-practice perspective, such imagery can be understood as mobilising affective

dynamics of escalation and inevitability, linking emotional intensity to broader social interpretations (Wetherell, 2012; Wetherell et al., 2020). At the same time, this framing resonates with research on affective publics and the role of emotionally charged communication in shaping collective understandings of political conflict (Papacharissi, 2016; Tormis, 2025). In this way, polarisation is constructed as self-sustaining and emotionally combustible, with responsibility attributed to populist actors and digital amplification, while the commenters position themselves as relatively detached analysts of a development that appears both troubling and difficult to halt.

Affective Attribution 4: The Turn to Conservative or Extreme Ideologies

Discussing the influence of right-wing populism, the comments in Extract 5 above already touched upon another prevalent way in the analysed data of attributing the causes of polarisation: as a result of external influences in the form of rising ideological extremism in Finland and globally. Some comments pointed to the increasing impact of right- or left-wing extremism, whilst others highlighted the role of conservative interpretations of Islam:

Extract 6: HS Thread

Commenter 7:

- 1 Is it concern for one's own position, or concern that a progressive
 - 2 worldview appears completely upside-down to many young men?
 - 3 Ugly is beautiful, beautiful is ugly, obesity is healthy, thinness is
 - 4 sick, women are men and men are women... For God's sake,
 - 5 some women are so damn progressive that they turn straight to
 - 6 Islam and go all the way around the dial – from a completely free
 - 7 woman to standing between fist and stove, wrapped in a cloak and
 - 8 chained to the home. I, for one, am not at all surprised that men
 - 9 distance themselves from value systems typical of women, and it's
 - 10 not necessarily about feeling that their own position is threatened.
 - 11 [...]
 - 12 Well, there we go again – ended up writing a comment that
 - 13 resembles the far right's 'boo-hoo Islamisation' whining, but whatever
-

The comment above responds to an earlier explanation of polarisation as stemming from young men's sense of loss in an increasingly equal society (cf. Evans, 2024; Venäläinen, 2022). It challenges this account through an initial rhetorical question (1–2) and an extreme-case formulation that portrays young men's concern as exaggerated, claiming

their world is ‘completely upside down’ (2). This framing is reinforced through a listing (Jefferson, 1990) of paradoxes that construct contemporary society as disordered and irrational, where established gender categories and moral certainties no longer prevail.

Subsequently, further extreme-case formulations (5–7) and emotionally charged language (3–5) depict Western women as having ideologically ‘lost it,’ allegedly embracing Islam and voluntarily placing themselves ‘between fist and stove,’ dressed in ‘cloaks’. These formulations draw on familiar tropes in right-wing populist discourse that contrast a liberated West with an oppressive Islam (Norocel & Pettersson, 2022). From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), this account mobilises a register of alarm, cultural anxiety, and civilisational threat. The vivid imagery does not merely describe social change but performs an affective blame attribution: women’s alleged ideological extremism is constructed as the catalyst for men’s distancing and, by extension, for gender polarisation.

At the same time, the speaker introduces a shift in footing (Goffman, 1981; Potter, 1996), ironically referring to their reasoning as a typical ‘boohoo Islamisation’ narrative of the far-right. This self-ironic move complicates the positioning, allowing the speaker to both reproduce and distance themselves from the alarmist discourse. Nevertheless, the affect of cultural decline and gender disorder remains central to the explanation offered.

Interestingly, the argument that women are particularly susceptible to extreme or authoritarian ideologies, thereby creating ideological distance from men, recurred across the dataset, as the following extract demonstrates:

Extract 7: HS Thread

Commenter 8:

- 1 Of course, it must be noted that at almost 45 years old I’m no
 - 2 longer a ‘young’ man, but this divergence in values between the
 - 3 sexes has definitely been visible in my own life since the early
 - 4 2000s. I could just as well offer the explanation that nothing
 - 5 particularly significant has happened to men – it’s specifically
 - 6 women who have plunged especially deep into the left side. In my
 - 7 view, this is because women more readily accept a kind of
 - 8 collectivist authoritarianism in the socialist spirit, if it’s justified with
 - 9 supposedly good and nice outcomes. And the moralistic ‘good
 - 10 person’ framework is alive and well.
 - 11 This, by the way, is also why young women end up wrecking
 - 12 themselves with the demands they place on themselves.
-

Like the previous comment, women are here blamed for having ‘plunged especially deep’ into the left side. This extreme-case formulation positions women as ideologically excessive in contrast to men who, according to the speaker, have ‘not really changed at all’ (4–5). The opening disclaimer – ‘at almost 45 years old I’m no longer a ‘young’ man, but...’ – functions to establish experiential authority and reasonableness, presenting the speaker as reflective and detached before advancing a gendered explanation.

Women’s alleged radicalisation is then accounted for through an essentialist narrative: they are portrayed as inherently more susceptible to ‘collectivist authoritarian’ agendas (7–8), mistakenly embracing them as moral and benevolent while unwittingly contributing to their own destruction (11–12). From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), this account mobilises affects of ridicule, superiority, and contempt. Women are constructed as emotionally volatile and ideologically whimsical, whereas men are positioned as stable and rational observers (cf. Pettersson et al., 2023a). The blame attribution thus does more than explain polarisation; it affectively stabilises a moral hierarchy in which women’s supposed emotional excess becomes the catalyst for the widening gender divide.

Affective Attribution 5: Hegemonic Masculinity

We now turn to the two final affective attributions, which in and of themselves displayed the strongest elements of gender polarisation. As such, these two attributions oscillated between constructing either widespread ideals (among men) of hegemonic masculinity on the one hand, or a ‘feminism gone too far’ (among women) or structural misandry as the root cause of polarisation. In terms of the former type of attribution, several comments constructed young men’s increased conservatism as a direct reaction to women’s rising gender equality: ‘*And as for the growing conservatism among young men, as women gradually start to achieve equality, this is the reaction.*’ (HS thread). Other comments took a more confrontational approach, as illustrated in the example below:

Extract 8: HS Thread

Commenter 9:

- 1 Huh? I mean, you yourself are writing that traditional values include
- 2 gender roles. Well, those traditional gender roles are that the man
- 3 is the cock of the walk, does exactly what he wants, controls the
- 4 household and the money, makes all the decisions. The woman,
- 5 meanwhile, has the duty to serve the man in every possible way.
- 6 The woman does the housework, takes care of the children, brings
- 7 food to the man’s nose and endures the tantrums and the rough
- 8 treatment if the food isn’t to his liking, etc. Not to mention sex –

9 that's all done on the man's terms. And if the man beats and/or
 10 cheats and/or drinks, it's the woman's fault for choosing such a
 11 man, stupid hag.
 12 So in other words, to me it's very, very understandable that all this
 13 'home, religion, fatherland' rhetoric inspires mostly horror and
 14 disgust in women – who on earth would want that kind of life for
 15 themselves? And more generally: if your spouse sees you as a
 16 subhuman / domesticated animal, then that's not even a
 17 relationship.
 18 Good lord, you yourself write that you demand respect as the head
 19 of the family and that the wife should understand when she's
 20 supposed to keep her mouth shut (or she'll get beaten)? Jesus.

The comment above forms part of a longer exchange about whether polarisation stems from diverging expectations of gender roles. While the other commenter had advocated a traditional view of men as 'heads of household', the present writer persistently confronts this stance, expressing frustration and dismay at what she labels 'home, religion, and fatherland' pathos (13). The comment is dialogical yet overtly confrontational, opening (1) and closing (18–20) with direct challenges to the other's claims.

Through extreme-case formulations (3–5), sarcasm ('cock of the walk', 3; 'Jesus', 20), and vivid reported speech, the writer constructs an opposing version of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) as exaggerated, authoritarian, and morally unacceptable (cf. Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Men are depicted as domineering decision-makers, while women are portrayed in the reported account as obedient (6–10) and dehumanised (16; Tileagă, 2007). From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), the expressions of dismay and repulsion serve here as performative acts that establish moral boundaries. As Wiggins (2017) suggests, such emotion displays function interactionally to condemn the opposing position and intensify the attribution of blame.

In this affective blame attribution, hegemonic masculinity is constructed as the driving force of gender polarisation: women's distancing is presented not as ideological extremism but as a justified response to men's authoritarian and dehumanising gender ideology. Disgust here operates as a moral emotion that both delegitimises the opposing stance and stabilises a counter-position grounded in equality and autonomy.

Affective Attribution 6: Structural Misandry

In contrast to the previous affective attribution that highlighted men's increasing hegemonic and patriarchal worldview, the last one I present is that of 'structural misandry'. In comments of this kind, various movements, including feminism, left-wing liberalism, as well as DEI initiatives and so-called wokeism were accused of systematically and intentionally discriminating against men. Such affective blame attributions were sometimes

interlaced with highlighting the role of social media in spreading misandry, as seen both in Extract 4 above and the following quote:

Extract 9: Uusi Juttu Thread

Commenter 10:

- 1 It probably hasn't been a very good environment to grow up in,
 - 2 when the media is filled with feminists shouting about how men are
 - 3 this and that, potential rapists and monsters, and that they'd rather
 - 4 have a bear. That has then led to people going to listen to these
 - 5 Tates and other actual misogynists, because the other side only
 - 6 insults them.
-

In the extract above, a causal chain is constructed between feminists' alleged attacks on young men and these men's subsequent turn to influencers such as Andrew Tate. The comment escalates claims of misandry through reported speech (Potter, 1996), portraying feminist discourse as 'shouting' that dehumanises men into rapists and monsters (3; Tileagă, 2007). This depiction mobilises an affect of humiliation, injustice, and moral injury. From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), such formulations do not simply describe hostility but enact it, framing men as unjustly targeted and emotionally harmed.

Men's reaction – turning to misogynist influencers – is presented in factual and passive terms (4–5), which enables the speaker to externalise responsibility and adopt the footing of a detached observer (Edwards & Potter, 1992) broadcasting their views to an imagined broader audience. By labelling Tate an 'actual misogynist,' the writer simultaneously distances both themselves and the 'ordinary men' in question from extremism, positioning their response as understandable, if regrettable. In this affective blame attribution, polarisation is explained as the logical consequence of sustained misandry: grievance becomes the moral justification for ideological distancing.

At times, however, the exchange between constructions of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'structural misandry' intensified into overt hostility, as illustrated by comments such as, '*Your entire text is like some feminazi's misandrist manifesto*'. Here, anger and contempt circulate more explicitly, reinforcing polarisation at the level of interaction itself. Within claims of structural misandry, gender polarisation is thus framed as the inevitable outcome of systematic discrimination against men (cf. Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022), as the following quote demonstrates:

*Extract 10: HS Thread***Commenter 12:**

1 You're just ignoring the reality that women are absolutely the
2 privileged sex.
3 And when people who are already privileged keep demanding even
4 more benefits, that's the point where men start getting a bit fed up
5 with the whole thing.
6 Your rhetoric is very childish, and the only indication we have right
7 now is that young women have been raised to live in some kind of
8 pink bubble from which it's easy to look down on pigs.

The comment above replies to an earlier claim that increased gender equality has left men feeling weakened. It refutes this position by invoking 'reality' (1–2; [Potter, 1996](#)), constructing society instead as fundamentally unequal in women's favour. Through extreme-case formulations, women are described as the 'absolutely' privileged sex who nevertheless 'continuously' demand further advantages. The earlier commenter is dismissed as naïve (6), and women are said to inhabit a 'pink bubble' (8), from which they allegedly criticise and dehumanise men.

From an affective-practice perspective ([Wetherell, 2012](#)), these formulations deploy affects of grievance, resentment, and injustice. Women are portrayed simultaneously as childish and strategically misandrist, a familiar trope in misogynist political discourse ([Pettersson et al., 2023a, 2023b](#)). This affective blame attribution reframes gender polarisation as a justified response: men's distancing is presented as the understandable outcome of prolonged humiliation and unfair treatment. In this way, polarisation is not constructed as ideological divergence but as the emotional consequence of systematic discrimination against men.

Across the dataset, such accounts contributed to the impression of two solidified and oppositional 'camps', each attributing polarisation to the hostility and excesses of the other. Indeed, much of the data was characterised by reciprocal affective blame attributions, where either women or men were positioned as the primary cause of division. Although marginal, some comments disrupted this pattern, as seen in the final extract below:

Extract 11: HS Thread

Commenter 13:

- 1 These are multifaceted issues. At no point did I say that men are
 - 2 the source and origin of all evil, but as a man myself I think it's
 - 3 really childish to imagine that we're somehow in an oppressed
 - 4 position in a patriarchal society.
 - 5 The most important thing would be to try to empathise, instead of
 - 6 pointing fingers and competing in the victimhood Olympics.
-

In this comment, the previously dominant patterns of affective blame are partially unsettled. Rather than invoking factual language or extreme-case formulations, the writer begins by nuancing and problematising the issue of polarisation. A concession (Potter, 1996) follows (1–2), rejecting the one-sided attribution of guilt to men. The writer then explicitly positions himself as a man, invoking category entitlement (Potter, 1996; Sacks, 1992), but uses this footing to characterise men's claims of disadvantage in a 'patriarchal society' as exaggerated and childish (3).

From an affective-practice perspective (Wetherell, 2012), this move reconfigures the emotional landscape of the discussion (Wiggins, 2017). Instead of mobilising resentment or indignation, the comment tempers escalation by reframing grievance as misplaced. Although metaphors of accusation and competition appear (6), they are oriented toward de-escalation: the extract ends with an explicit call for coexistence rather than mutual hostility. In this way, the comment disrupts the prevailing repertoire of reciprocal blame and opens up an alternative affective positioning grounded in moderation and tentative solidarity.

Indeed, it is important to note that the relatively bleak picture presented in this study was not exhaustive. As illustrated in Extract 11, some commenters explicitly positioned themselves outside the polarised alignments typically ascribed to them (e.g., women against men; men against women), thereby disrupting the otherwise confrontational and emotionally charged dynamics of the discussion. Across the affective blame attributions analysed here, a recurring trope was the perceived absence of dialogue – variously framed as a broader societal problem, an effect of social media 'bubbles', or a consequence of the radicalisation of 'others'. Yet a small number of comments articulated an alternative orientation, expressing hope for mutual engagement: *'The future of humankind would already be much brighter if people – whether they're jerks or not – were able to discuss even difficult value-based issues with each other. The fact that someone is wrong should not be a barrier to dialogue'*. Although such contributions were rare and did not generate extended interaction, their presence nonetheless complicates the narrative of total polarisation and points to the fragile possibility of cross-cutting dialogue.

Discussion

This article has shown that gender polarisation among young people is not merely a divergence in political preferences but a contestation over both ideology and affect (Iyengar et al., 2019). By examining discussions on Finnish Reddit, the study demonstrates how polarisation is constructed, justified, and emotionally animated in everyday interaction. Rather than appearing as a stable macro-level divide, gender polarisation emerged as a set of competing affective blame attributions through which commenters allocated responsibility to societal neglect of boys, failed dialogue, social media dynamics, ideological radicalisation, hegemonic masculinity, or structural misandry. These attributions were frequently oppositional and emotionally charged, often reproducing the very polarisation they sought to explain through irony, sarcasm, dehumanisation, grievance, and moral condemnation.

Importantly, these dynamics unfolded within the specific interactional architecture of Reddit. As a pseudonymous and semi-public forum, Reddit combines dialogue between identifiable interlocutors with what Jowett (2015) terms ‘dual address’: comments could respond to the original article that was being discussed, orient to specific users, to a broader imagined audience, or to two or all of these simultaneously. It is possible that this hybrid setting amplified the performative dimension of the affective positioning and allocation of blame: commenters did not simply express opinions but displayed indignation, irony, contempt, or concern in ways that managed stake, accountability, and moral alignment toward each other or an unseen readership.

The present study makes three interrelated contributions to the existing (social psychological) scholarship on polarisation. First, in contrast to quantitative approaches that primarily conceptualise gender polarisation as ideological divergence, party choice, or affective distance between groups (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2019; Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024; Reiljan, 2020), this study foregrounds the processes through which such differences are made meaningful in interaction. Rather than treating polarisation as a pre-existing gap, it examines how it is discursively constructed, morally evaluated, and emotionally intensified in everyday talk. In this sense, polarisation is approached not as a static outcome, but as an ongoing social accomplishment (cf. Pettersson & Norocel, 2024; Pettersson & Sakki, 2023).

Second, by integrating critical discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wetherell, 1998) with affective-practice theory (Wetherell, 2012; Wetherell et al., 2020), the study demonstrates the value of analysing both the rhetorical organisation of blame and the patterned circulation of affect. While prior research documents rising intergroup animosity, the present analysis shows how such animosity is interactionally produced through affective blame attributions, mobilising affects such as grievance, disgust, resentment, irony, and cultural anxiety. Building on work on affective argumentation in

populist discourse (Tormis, 2025), the concept of affective blame attributions captures how accountability and affect intertwine in the reproduction of ideological boundaries.

Third, the study provides an empirically grounded account of how gender polarisation is negotiated within a specific national and platform context. Analysing Finnish Reddit discussions, it shows how global debates about gender, populism, and equality are locally articulated in a pseudonymous, hybrid interactional space characterised by ‘dual address’ (Jowett, 2015). This platform architecture amplifies the performative and moralising dimensions of discourse, making visible the micro-level processes through which ideological and affective divisions are reproduced in contemporary digital publics. Taken together, these contributions reposition gender polarisation from a measurable divide between groups to an interactional and affective process through which differences are constructed, interpreted, and made consequential in everyday digital communication.

The focus on two discussion threads within a single online forum in a specific national context is also a limitation of this study. While commenters frequently disclosed personal details such as age and gender, the pseudonymous nature of the data prevents firm conclusions about the demographic composition of participants. Moreover, analysing Reddit discussions captures gender polarisation as it is performed in a particular interactional and platform-specific setting. Future research could extend this work by examining how young people themselves construct and negotiate gender polarisation in individual or focus group interviews. Such approaches would allow for closer exploration of how affective blame attributions circulate across contexts and whether they take different forms in face-to-face interactions compared to online exchanges. This is particularly relevant in light of ongoing public debates about a growing gender divide among young people, including concerns about its impact on relationships, social cohesion, and political participation, which increasingly extend beyond online spaces into everyday life.

Funding: This work was supported by the Research Council of Finland (grant number 368051).

Acknowledgments: The authors have no additional (i.e., non-financial) support to report.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Data Availability: The data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials contain the extracts presented in the article in the original Finnish language (for access, see [Pettersson, 2026S](#)).

Index of Supplementary Materials

Pettersson, K. (2026S). *Supplementary materials to "Constructing gender polarisation in online interaction: Affective blame attributions in Finnish Reddit discussions"* [Original Finnish language extracts]. PsychOpen GOLD. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.22425>

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