

“PICK ME” AND INTERNALIZED MISOGYNY: A CRITICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

In the landscape of digital feminist discourse, the term “pick me” has emerged as a label frequently used by women on social media platform X to criticize perceived internalized misogyny among other women. Originally employed to describe behaviors that seek male approval at the expense of female solidarity, the term has evolved into a linguistic mechanism of exclusion and ideological policing. This study investigates how the term “pick me” reflects internalized misogyny and functions as a form of social labeling. Drawing on Kate Manne’s theory of misogyny and Howard Becker’s labeling theory, this research critically analyzes the dual function of the term, as both feminist critique and a tool of discursive control. Using a qualitative method with critical discourse analysis, this study examines a corpus of purposively sampled tweets from 2016 to 2024 that include the term “pick me”. The findings show that the term has undergone semantic broadening and pejoration, expanding its usage across gender and context while losing ideological clarity. Although initially rooted in feminist resistance, its overuse has transformed it into a generalized insult that enforces conformity and silences dissent within online feminist communities. This study contributes to the understanding of how feminist language can be co-opted to reinforce patriarchal logic and urges reflexivity in the use of ideological labels in digital spaces.

Keywords: Internalized misogyny, labeling theory, social media

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of digital communication, social media platforms have become fertile ground for the emergence and transformation of new cultural expressions and gender discourses. One notable term that has gained traction in recent years is “pick me”, often used in the context of online conversations among women on X (formerly Twitter). Initially referring to women who seek male validation by distancing themselves from other women, the phrase has developed into a label of derision, weaponized to critique behaviors perceived as internalized misogyny. This phenomenon illustrates how linguistic practices on digital platforms not only reflect societal power structures but also serve as mechanisms of gender policing. The recurring use of “pick me” by women themselves raises critical questions regarding the role of language in sustaining or challenging patriarchal ideologies within virtual feminist communities.

The pervasiveness of the “pick me” discourse underscores its function as more than a passing internet trend. It represents a linguistic artifact that encapsulates intra-gender tension,

identity negotiation, and collective boundary-setting in the digital age. As users co-construct meanings through discourse, the term becomes a tool for inclusion or exclusion within feminist narratives. The rise of this term aligns with broader conversations on internalized sexism and the complexity of feminist solidarity, wherein some women adopt patriarchal values to gain social advantage or male approval. As such, “pick me” is not only a descriptor but also a discursive strategy used to regulate womanhood in a postfeminist media environment. Investigating this phenomenon is crucial to understanding how gendered language both reflects and enforces cultural ideologies through digital interaction.

Previous studies have explored the intersection of internalized sexism and digital culture, notably Rosida et al. (2022), who analyzed the Pick Me Girl trend on TikTok. Their study highlights how internalized sexism manifests in performative behaviors by women who disparage other women to appeal to male audiences. By utilizing Kate Manne’s framework of misogyny, the authors demonstrate how women’s self-objectification, enforcement of beauty standards, and competition for male attention are key indicators of patriarchal influence embedded within online interactions. Their qualitative analysis focuses on audiovisual content, specifically TikTok videos tagged with #PickMeGirl, revealing how sexist values are reproduced through language and performance on this platform. The study provides valuable insight into the mechanisms by which social media accelerates the circulation of internalized patriarchal norms among women.

Despite its contributions, Rosida et al.’s study is limited in scope by its exclusive focus on TikTok as the site of analysis, and on visual-verbal expressions within video content. The research does not address how the term “pick me” itself functions as a discursive label within textual environments like X, where its usage relies heavily on written language, hashtags, and contextualized replies. Furthermore, the TikTok study centers on behavioral manifestations of sexism rather than examining the linguistic construction and ideological function of the “pick me” label. This research seeks to fill that gap by focusing on how women on X use the term “pick me” to enforce or critique patriarchal standards through discourse. By incorporating both internalized misogyny theory and labeling theory, this study offers a novel critical analysis of how language is weaponized within feminist spaces to regulate identity and maintain gendered social boundaries.

The first problem addressed in this study concerns how the usage of the term “pick me” on social media X reflects forms of internalized misogyny among women. As the label is frequently deployed by women to criticize one another’s alignment with perceived patriarchal behaviors, its function extends beyond personal commentary to ideological enforcement. This phenomenon suggests that some women may consciously or unconsciously adopt the role of patriarchal gatekeepers, reinforcing dominant gender norms under the guise of feminist critique.

Understanding this dynamic is essential, as it reveals the internal contradictions and tensions within contemporary feminist discourse online. This study, therefore, interrogates the linguistic practices that enable women to perpetuate patriarchal control through mutual surveillance and digital judgment.

The second problem explored in this research is how the label “pick me” operates as a mechanism of social labeling within online feminist communities. Drawing on Howard Becker’s Labeling Theory, this research investigates how assigning the “pick me” label marks certain behaviors as deviant or undesirable according to dominant feminist values. The act of labeling not only stigmatizes individuals but also reinforces the boundaries of group identity by excluding those who do not conform. On X, where conversations are shaped by visibility and virality, the repeated use of the term may lead to the social isolation of certain users and the silencing of diverse expressions of femininity. This research aims to uncover how this process contributes to the construction and regulation of online feminist norms through language.

The overall objective of this research is to critically examine the role of the term “pick me” in reproducing gendered power relations among women on social media. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze the ways in which this term functions both as an expression of internalized misogyny and as a linguistic label that enforces social conformity within feminist digital spaces. By highlighting the dual function of “pick me”—as both critique and control—this study intends to reveal the ideological work performed through language in the context of gendered digital interactions. The findings are expected to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how feminist discourses are shaped, challenged, and sometimes co-opted in online environments.

Kate Manne (2017), in her seminal work *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, redefines misogyny as not simply hatred towards women, but as a systemic and structural mechanism that disciplines women to conform to patriarchal expectations. Misogyny, in this framework, functions as the law enforcement arm of patriarchy, punishing women who fail to comply with normative gender roles (Manne, 2017). Importantly, Manne emphasizes that this enforcement is not always perpetrated by men; rather, women often act as active agents in upholding and policing these standards. This phenomenon, known as internalized misogyny, occurs when women adopt patriarchal values and use them to judge, shame, or exclude other women. The use of the term “pick me” by women on social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) reflects this internalized regulation, as it is frequently used to critique those perceived to be performing femininity in ways that cater to male approval.

Internalized misogyny is deeply embedded in everyday interactions and digital discourse, manifesting in subtle acts of shaming and exclusion. According to Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne

(2009), internalized sexism involves behaviors such as competition between women, objectification, and devaluation of fellow women, all of which contribute to a fragmented sense of female solidarity. In the context of online feminism, calling someone a “pick me” can be a way of excluding them from collective identity based on perceived betrayal of feminist ideals. However, this act can paradoxically replicate the very patriarchal values it seeks to critique, as it often upholds narrow standards of “acceptable” womanhood. Manne’s framework allows us to interrogate how this linguistic practice reflects the covert dynamics of gender policing among women, emphasizing that patriarchal ideologies are often sustained through internal, not just external, enforcement (Manne, 2017; Rosida et al., 2022).

Howard Becker’s (1963) labeling theory provides a sociological lens to understand how deviance is constructed not through intrinsic behavior but through societal reaction and categorization. In his work *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Becker argues that labels shape social identity and influence how individuals are perceived and treated by others. The act of labeling someone as a “pick me” in digital feminist spaces can be interpreted as a mechanism for designating deviation from collective values, particularly those rooted in feminist ideologies. By labeling a woman as a “pick me”, online communities mark her behavior as undesirable, aligning her with patriarchal norms rather than feminist solidarity. This form of linguistic policing reinforces community boundaries and delineates the limits of acceptable gender performance within feminist discourse.

Labeling theory also highlights the consequences of such social classification, including stigmatization, exclusion, and the internalization of deviant identity. On social media platforms, the term “pick me” is not just descriptive but carries a strong moral judgment that can isolate the labeled individual from the wider community. As noted by Link and Phelan (2001), labeling becomes a form of social control when it is embedded in power structures that allow certain groups to impose dominant norms on others. In feminist digital spaces, the power to label is often wielded by those who conform most closely to prevailing feminist narratives, thereby marginalizing alternative expressions of femininity. Thus, Becker’s theory elucidates how the label “pick me” operates not merely as an insult, but as a strategic tool in constructing and maintaining ideological conformity in online discourse (Becker, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001).

The first objective of this study is to examine how the use of the term “pick me” on social media reflects internalized misogyny among women. According to Kate Manne (2017), misogyny is not merely a personal attitude but a systemic enforcement of patriarchal norms, often upheld by women themselves through internalization. This research investigates the extent to which women who use the term “pick me” contribute to the policing of other women’s behaviors based

on patriarchal standards. The study aims to reveal how this self-regulatory mechanism, though seemingly feminist in intent, paradoxically reproduces the very gender hierarchies it seeks to resist. In doing so, it offers a critical lens on the cultural logic that enables women to act as agents of patriarchal discipline in digital spaces.

Secondly, this study aims to explore the term “pick me” through the lens of Howard Becker’s Labeling Theory (1963), which posits that deviance is socially constructed through the act of labeling. In the context of digital feminism, “pick me” functions as a negative label that excludes women who deviate from dominant feminist norms by signaling alignment with traditional or male-centered values. This labeling not only defines the boundaries of acceptable gender performance but also reinforces exclusionary dynamics among women. By applying critical analysis, this research seeks to uncover how the “pick me” label operates as a form of social control, marginalizing certain expressions of womanhood and reinforcing a normative feminist identity. The study thereby contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital discourse constructs deviance and conformity within gendered communities.

This research applies a qualitative method to explore how the term “pick me” is used and interpreted within digital feminist discourse on X (formerly Twitter). Qualitative research is particularly suited for uncovering the meaning-making processes embedded in social interaction, language use, and ideological discourse. By employing critical discourse analysis, this study examines how power relations, gender ideologies, and identity politics are articulated through the use of “pick me” in social media conversations. This approach enables a contextual and interpretative understanding of digital communication as both a cultural and political practice, particularly within the framework of internalized misogyny and labeling theory.

The data for this research consists of selected public posts (tweets) on the platform X that contain the phrase “pick me” and are authored by self-identified female users. The data collection involves purposive sampling to gather posts that explicitly use the term in contexts related to gender behavior, validation, or inter-female judgment. Each post is analyzed to identify patterns in the discourse, thematic concerns, and ideological assumptions underpinning the use of the label. The analysis procedure involves categorizing the tweets based on their semantic content, social function, and intertextual references, thereby enabling the researcher to interpret the socio-discursive mechanisms through which the term operates. This process facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how the “pick me” discourse is constructed, circulated, and contested within digital feminist communities.

Manuscript length 10-20 pages, A4 format, 1.5 spacing. There are no strict requirements on the format. However, the manuscript should contain the essential elements: abstract, keywords,

introduction that includes the background; research problem; theoretical framework; research methodology; analysis and discussion of the results; and conclusion.

Result

In the initial phase of the term’s emergence around 2016–2017, posts on X consistently depicted the “pick me” girl as a woman who seeks male validation by demeaning or distancing herself from other women. For instance, users criticized behaviors such as cooking for men to demonstrate submission or rejecting feminist ideals for the sake of appearing more desirable to men. These early usages align closely with Kate Manne’s (2017) notion of internalized misogyny, where women not only absorb but also enforce patriarchal expectations. The act of calling out such women with the label “pick me” ostensibly serves as feminist resistance. However, as Manne emphasizes, this form of intra-gender policing can paradoxically reinforce patriarchal logic by constructing a narrow archetype of acceptable femininity and punishing those who deviate from it, even if their behavior stems from internalized cultural norms rather than malice.

As the usage of the term evolved between 2018 and 2020, the label “pick me” began to be applied to a wider variety of behaviors, extending beyond overt self-objectification. Users criticized women who expressed preferences perceived as “too masculine” or who avoided aligning themselves with feminist discourse. In this context, the term operated increasingly as a form of social labeling, as described by Howard Becker (1963), targeting women whose behaviors were seen as deviant within the boundaries of acceptable feminist identity. By labeling someone a “pick me”, users symbolically expelled them from the collective feminist identity, drawing rigid ideological boundaries. This reinforces Becker’s claim that labeling not only defines deviance but also enacts social exclusion. The consequences of such labeling include digital shaming, marginalization, and the construction of a normative feminist persona that can be weaponized against non-conforming women.

Between 2021 and 2023, the term “pick me” experienced semantic broadening and pejoration. It began to be used indiscriminately—even humorously or insultingly—to describe people of any gender or behavior perceived as attention-seeking. For example, users labeled someone a “pick me” merely for expressing differing opinions or choosing personal preferences that deviated from mainstream groupthink. This development illustrates a shift from ideology-based critique to an increasingly arbitrary and hostile labeling practice. Through the lens of internalized misogyny, this trend suggests a dilution of feminist purpose, as the label becomes a tool for personal attacks rather than ideological analysis. Simultaneously, labeling theory helps explain how this transformation reflects a breakdown of social norms, where the power to label

becomes detached from shared values and instead becomes a mechanism of control and exclusion for its own sake.

By 2023 and 2024, the term “pick me” had undergone a noticeable semantic shift. It was no longer exclusively associated with women or with behaviors rooted in patriarchal validation. Instead, it evolved into a generalized insult applied to men, fan communities, or even harmless individual preferences. Examples from the data include labeling a male fan as “pick me” for publicly admiring an idol, or mocking someone as a “pick me” simply for choosing to lie down in a group photo. This generalized use reflects what Bloomfield (in Sukma Rani, 2022) would call semantic broadening and pejoration, where the term's original function is diluted. In terms of internalized misogyny, this shift reveals how the feminist-critical edge of the term may be lost as it becomes a tool for shaming rather than constructive critique, often used by women to express personal dislike rather than challenge systemic norms.

The arbitrary application of the “pick me” label in later years suggests that the term has become detached from its ideological origins. Tweets from 2021 onwards include complaints that any woman expressing non-mainstream opinions is automatically branded a “pick me”, regardless of intent or context. In Becker’s (1963) terms, this reflects a labeling inflation, where the criteria for deviance are so loosely defined that the label loses its regulatory clarity while intensifying its punitive function. As Link and Phelan (2001) argue, stigmatizing labels gain power when used to mark individuals as socially unacceptable, and in this case, the term “pick me” serves to delegitimize dissent, enforcing conformity under the guise of feminist unity. Consequently, the term risks reinforcing a monolithic view of feminism that punishes nuance and difference.

Moreover, the evolution of the term “pick me” illustrates how digital feminist discourse can unintentionally replicate patriarchal dynamics. While early uses of the term aimed to expose internalized sexism and promote solidarity, its later usage reveals a pattern of ideological policing, where women regulate each other’s identities to fit an increasingly narrow vision of feminist authenticity. Kate Manne’s theory helps to reveal that this behavior exemplifies the internal contradiction of postfeminist culture—in which the language of empowerment is used to discipline rather than liberate. The use of “pick me” thus becomes a double-edged sword: it can resist patriarchal narratives, but when overused or misapplied, it risks replicating the very forms of exclusion and control it was meant to challenge. This critical insight underscores the need for reflexivity in digital feminist activism and discourse.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the term “pick me” has undergone a significant semantic and ideological transformation since its emergence on social media. Initially employed to critique specific behaviors tied to patriarchal values—such as self-objectification, competition

among women, and overt male validation—the term functioned as a feminist tool to expose internalized misogyny. Through Kate Manne’s framework, the act of calling someone a “pick me” can be understood as an attempt to challenge systemic misogyny by recognizing how it is perpetuated from within. However, the same discourse has increasingly contributed to intra-female policing, wherein women regulate one another’s behavior using patriarchal standards cloaked in feminist language. This paradox reflects the nuanced ways in which internalized oppression operates—not as a simple binary of victim and oppressor, but as a complex network of normative expectations that shape social behavior.

Furthermore, the data illustrates how “pick me” has become a powerful label in defining and policing feminist identity, which aligns with the principles of Howard Becker’s labeling theory. Labeling someone a “pick me” effectively marks them as deviant within feminist discourse, stigmatizing not only their actions but also their perceived political alignment. The consequences of such labeling are evident in the social isolation, silencing, and shaming that occur within online interactions. As the term broadened in use, it lost its conceptual clarity and became an all-purpose insult, often applied with little regard for the original ideological context. This transformation supports Becker’s view that labels, once socially established, can be reappropriated or distorted in ways that serve new forms of social control. In feminist digital spaces, this control is increasingly enacted through informal linguistic mechanisms that determine who belongs and who does not.

Taken together, the results suggest that while “pick me” originated as a critique of patriarchal complicity, its evolution reflects a broader tension within digital feminist communities between solidarity and surveillance. The weaponization of the term underscores the difficulty of maintaining inclusive feminist dialogue in spaces governed by virality and instantaneous judgment. Both Manne’s and Becker’s theories highlight the dangers of ideological overreach: one through the lens of internalized enforcement, the other through the punitive effects of labeling. Therefore, this research calls for a critical re-evaluation of the role of language in feminist activism, especially in digital contexts where nuance is often sacrificed for performative alignment. Reclaiming the integrity of feminist discourse requires awareness not only of what we resist but also of how our methods of resistance may mirror the structures we seek to dismantle.

Conclusion

This study has explored the linguistic, ideological, and discursive dimensions of the term “pick me” as used by women on X (formerly Twitter), focusing on how it functions both as a critique of patriarchal complicity and as a mechanism of internal regulation within feminist communities. Drawing on Kate Manne’s concept of internalized misogyny, the analysis reveals

how women themselves may adopt patriarchal norms and enforce them upon other women through seemingly feminist language. The findings demonstrate that while the original intent behind using the label “pick me” was to resist patriarchal values, it has gradually shifted toward becoming a tool of intra-feminist policing, often reinforcing the very structures it seeks to dismantle. This transformation underscores the ambivalence of feminist discourse in digital spaces, where empowerment and exclusion often coexist.

Additionally, this research highlights the relevance of labeling theory in understanding how the term “pick me” operates as a social classification device. As Howard Becker theorized, labeling acts to define and reinforce deviance, and in the context of digital feminism, this can result in the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals who deviate from dominant feminist narratives. The data suggests that the term has undergone semantic broadening and pejoration, leading to its use as a generalized insult devoid of its original ideological focus. In doing so, the label contributes to rigid boundary-making within feminist discourse, promoting conformity at the expense of ideological diversity and nuance.

Ultimately, this study calls for greater reflexivity in the use of feminist language online. While terms like “pick me” can serve as important tools for challenging internalized oppression, they also carry the risk of reproducing exclusionary practices when used without critical engagement. The analysis urges feminist digital communities to remain vigilant about how discourse is employed, not only to resist patriarchy but also to avoid mimicking its mechanisms of control. A more inclusive and reflective feminist practice must be grounded not just in critique but in the recognition of complexity, difference, and the evolving nature of gendered expression in the digital age.

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