

“In the Name of Pro-Women”: Intra-Women Surveillance and Internalized Misogyny in Digital East Asia

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Submitted: 8 February 2026 **Accepted:** 27 April 2026 **Published:** 21 May 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Gender Politics and Moral Norms Across Media” edited by Tonny Krijnen (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Zhen Ye (Meiji University), and Qian Huang (University of Groningen), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.i505>

Abstract

Across East Asian digital platforms, “pro-women” discourse can become a site of intense intra-gender surveillance rather than durable solidarity. This article reconceptualizes “internalized misogyny” as a networked and platformed formation: not simply a private attitude, but a publicly enforced orientation continually produced through visibility, evaluation, and anticipated backlash. Drawing on multi-round interviews with young women in China and South Korea who participated in pro-women discussions in digital publics, I show how platform affordances including ranking, metrics, reposting, and comment cascades can translate feminist scripts of “refusal” into coercive tests of moral purity. The analysis identifies a dynamic of affective governance in which women who negotiate patriarchal bargains are cast as “compromising women” and disciplined through shame, disgust, and exclusion that travel and intensify via algorithmic circulation. These dynamics are further conditioned by platform governance regimes and state censorship environments, which constrain the outward expression of feminist critique and redirect its critical energy inward. By tracing the mechanisms through which moralizing affects attach to feminist objects and scale through platforms, the article clarifies how affective governance and attention-economy logics transmogrify feminist critique into a punitive apparatus which functions as an infrastructure for narrowing what women can say, desire, or endure without sanction. Solidarity, in this environment, emerges as a fragile, mediated achievement rather than a stable outcome of shared gendered interests.

Keywords

affect; East Asia; intra-women surveillance; misogyny; platform affordance; pro-women

1. Introduction

Across East Asian digital platforms, “pro-women” discourse, defined here as rhetoric explicitly prioritizing women’s interests and rights, has become a prominent vernacular for articulating gendered grievance, survival, and resistance. In China, this discourse circulates in feminist-leaning digital spaces among social media platforms such as Weibo and Douban; in South Korea, it resonates through platform publics including Twitter (now X), Naver Cafe, and theqoo. Yet, the empirical puzzle that animates this article is that the affective and moral force of “pro-women” talk does not consistently consolidate solidarity. Instead, as my interviewees repeatedly describe, these spaces can intensify peer-to-peer disciplining: Women scrutinize other women’s conduct, intimate choices, and affective attachments; they police the boundaries of “proper” feminist stance; and they administer sanctions that range from shaming to callout cascades and exclusions. What appears, on the surface, as pro-women political speech can thus function as an infrastructure for intra-gender surveillance, especially as it is reorganized through platform affordances that reward visibility, virality, and moral clarity.

This paradox unsettles a common analytic habit in the literature on misogyny online: the tendency to locate misogyny primarily in men’s antagonistic formations, such as manosphere-like communities, or in straightforward male-to-female harassment (Banet-Weiser, 2018a; Jane, 2016b; Laughren, 2025). In the cases examined herein, however, women are not only targets of misogyny but can become its proximate agents, mobilizing pro-women language to discipline other women into narrow repertoires of “correct” resistance.

This reorientation raises an analytic question that must be addressed at the outset: What does it mean to characterize these intra-women dynamics as misogynistic rather than merely divisive or politically ineffective? The article does not claim that all feminist disagreement or norm-setting is misogynistic. Rather, following Manne’s (2017) analysis of misogyny as a system of enforcement, one that polices women’s conduct through shame, contempt, and punitive consequences, I argue that a dynamic becomes misogynistic in outcome when it deploys the same patriarchal mechanism (discipline of the feminine through humiliation, surveillance, and exclusion) regardless of the ostensibly feminist framing of its content. The fact that the disciplining agent is another woman, and that the language is “pro-women,” does not render the mechanism non-misogynistic; what matters analytically is whether the apparatus reproduces a regime in which women’s legitimate range of conduct—their desires, ambivalences, and relational lives—is narrowed, policed, and punished. The present research specifies precisely how and where this reproduction occurs, rather than asserting it axiomatically. Through focusing on intra-women surveillance, the accounts gathered in this study suggest that what looks like internalization is continually made, intensified, and circulated through platformed interaction.

To address this puzzle, I advance the concept of internalized and networked misogyny, arguing that platform affordances do not merely host feminist discourse but actively restructure it into a regime of peer surveillance. Here, “internalized” names an affective orientation: an embodied and evaluative relation to oneself and other women, through which homogenized femininity is rendered as the sole common sense, moral necessity, or political correctness. “Networked” foregrounds that this orientation becomes actionable and punitive through platform mechanisms: callout dynamics, screenshot circulation, comment pile-ons, and algorithmically amplified visibility that can transform moral judgment into mass participation. Under these conditions, self-policing is not merely self-imposed, but socially produced and continually refreshed through mediated encounters, generating a collectively administered regime of evaluation that disciplines women in the name of being “pro-women.”

Building on Harrington's (2025) account of misogyny as socially produced affect, I track how contempt, disgust, irritation, and moralized anger circulate within women's publics and become tethered to a narrow image of "ideal feminist womanhood," thereby reshaping peer relations into a disciplinary field. Thus, this study first asks: What norms of "ideal feminist womanhood" circulate as moral imperatives in pro-women discourse, and how do participants experience these norms in everyday platform use? Second, I explore the platformed mechanisms where these norms become networked and punitive. Here, I trace how callouts and moral denunciations are enabled by platform features and visibility economies, and how algorithmic amplification, as experienced and anticipated by users, translates normative judgment into an escalatory dynamic.

This research further examines how China-Korea similarities and differences illuminate the political economy and governance conditions under which pro-women disciplining thrives. The comparative design foregrounds platform cultures as politically situated environments that shape what forms of feminist expression become rewarded, risky, or routinized. In China, feminist public discourse operates under conditions of platform censorship and selective content removal: Hashtags associated with #MeToo and related movements have been repeatedly blocked on Weibo, and feminist accounts have been forcibly suspended (Liao & Luqiu, 2022; Yin & Sun, 2021). This creates a distinctive displacement dynamic: When critique directed outward—at state institutions, at patriarchal capital, at men as a class—is rendered risky or structurally unavailable, the critical energy of women's publics tends to be redirected inward, intensifying policing within the community as a socially safer outlet. In South Korea, a different but related condition obtains: The sharp polarization following the 2016 Gangnam Station femicide and the "gender war" that followed have produced a context in which feminist speech and activism such as the 4B movement (a feminist refusal of the heterosexual patriarchal life script, organized around "no marriage, no childbirth, no dating, and no sex with men") is simultaneously hyper-visible and intensely contested, shaping norms of antagonism (Lee & Jeong, 2021). Together, these governance conditions help explain why intra-group disciplining, rather than coalition-building, becomes the dominant mode of feminist sociality in both contexts: not because of individual bad faith, but because structural pressures narrow the available forms of feminist expression.

This research is grounded in interviews with 50 young women (33 in China, 17 in South Korea), whose accounts foreground the lived textures of being positioned within pro-women publics: the anxieties of misrecognition, the pleasures of belonging, the fear of callout exposure, and the everyday labor of self-curation under conditions where political identity is continuously evaluated. In what follows, I develop internalized and networked misogyny as an analytic lens that keeps two things in view at once: the cultural work through which "pro-women" moral imperatives become desirable and compulsory, and the infrastructural work through which platforms scale, accelerate, and weaponize those imperatives. These dynamics clarify how spaces of feminist critique simultaneously operate as spaces of feminist constraint. Understanding digital misogyny in the platform era therefore requires attending not only to who speaks against women, but also to how women are made governable to each other through the platformed circulation of affect, judgment, and visibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Digital Misogyny Beyond “Men vs Women”*

Research on digital misogyny has been shaped by a set of now-canonical problematics: hostile and hateful speech directed at women, gendered harassment and intimidation, and the consolidation of explicitly anti-feminist online formations (Banet-Weiser, 2018a; Gan, 2021). A substantial body of scholarship demonstrates that misogyny online is not merely “incivility,” but a patterned form of gendered power that works through threats, sexualized abuse, doxxing, and reputational destruction, often with chilling effects on women’s participation in public culture (Citron, 2014; Jane, 2014, 2016a; Mantilla, 2013). This work is complemented by analyses of the platformed political economy of gendered cyberhate and manosphere-like formations: the ways in which attention-driven architectures can reward antagonism, intensify visibility for polarizing content, and normalize harassment as part of everyday participation (Ging, 2019; Krendel, 2020; Liao, 2023; Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

These approaches have produced vital conceptual and empirical insights, but they also tend to stabilize an analytic division between misogynists (male) and targets (female), foregrounding male-to-female hostility as the paradigmatic form of digital or popular misogyny. As Banet-Weiser (2018a, p. 2) shows, popular feminism and popular misogyny are “living side by side as warring, constantly moving contexts in an economy of visibility.” The result is a relative under-theorization of how misogyny can be reproduced within women’s publics, including within spaces framed as feminist or the “pro-women.” Yet feminist scholarship has long cautioned against equating “women’s spaces” with solidarity, and against treating feminism as a singular moral orientation rather than a contested cultural field (Ahmed, 2017; Browne, 2016). The empirical paradox motivating this study’s investigation of “pro-women” discourse intensifying peer-to-peer disciplining in online spaces in China and South Korea pushes this critique further by insisting that misogyny can operate through intra-women hierarchies and moral sorting.

Harrington (2025) directs attention to misogyny as a socially produced affective economy: patterned negative orientations and emotional investments that stick to the feminine and work to secure gendered hierarchies in everyday life. This framing opens analytical space for examining how such feelings can be mobilized within women’s publics, where the feminine is not only defended but also policed, stratified, and disciplined via competing images of “proper” womanhood and “proper” feminist conduct. What matters, then, is not only what is being said in the name of women, but how disciplinary speech acquires force. The combative, binary, and publicly shaming style of pro-women callouts may be read as reproducing communicative modes conventionally coded as “masculine”; however, this framing risks reinstalling gendered norms about what counts as “appropriate” feminist discourse (Ross, 2025). This article takes a different analytic position: The issue is not that aggression is inherently masculine and therefore inappropriate for feminist politics. Rather, the concern is functional and structural: The specific combination of public shaming, decontextualized evidence, and scalable escalation operates, regardless of gendered origin, as a mechanism of conduct regulation—narrowing the legitimate repertoire of feminist practice and punishing deviation through humiliation. The distinction between this and feminist critique with accountability lies in what the dynamic produces: not changed minds or expanded understanding, but self-censorship, withdrawal, and the silencing of precisely those women whose ambivalent or negotiated lives most need feminist resources (Clark, 2020; Ross, 2025).

2.2. Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny as Co-Constitutive

One route into this missing problem is the scholarship on the ambivalent visibility of feminism in public cultures (Banet-Weiser, 2018b; Ge, 2022, 2025). Banet-Weiser (2018a) suggests that popular feminism and popular misogyny are deeply entangled: Feminism's mainstream visibility is not a linear victory narrative but an ambivalent formation in which empowerment discourses circulate alongside intensified misogynistic backlash, each shaping the other. This "co-constitutive" framing is crucial for rethinking pro-women discourse as potentially disciplinary. If feminist language is increasingly part of platform vernaculars, it can also become a resource for boundary-making and moral hierarchy: a way to distinguish the "right" kind of feminist subject from the "wrong" kind, and to attach status, legitimacy, and belonging to particular performances of gender politics. Zhang and Tang's (2025) analysis of "Rat Rat" culture and digital misogyny in China shows how extreme misogynistic cultures can coexist with (and be shaped by) other gender discourses in the platform environment, including forms of "problematic feminisms," and how state and platform governance dynamics condition what kinds of gender politics become legible, permissible, or incentivized. The present study is not collapsing pro-women discourse into misogyny, but taking seriously the possibility that pro-women talk can function as a disciplinary technology: It can organize a moral economy in which certain femininities and life choices (especially those intimacies with men, e.g., dating, having sex, or marriage with men) are rendered suspect (Huang, 2023), while other stances such as refusal, purity, and hardness are elevated as politically correct.

2.3. Digital Populism, Antagonism, and Mirroring

A second route into the paradox is scholarship on antagonistic feminist strategies and their entanglement with misogynistic formations under conditions often described as "digital populism." Kim's (2021) analysis of the online feminist movements Megalia and Womad in South Korea develops the argument that feminist counter-speech can "mirror" misogyny, becoming polarizing and co-constitutive with misogynistic dynamics. The concept of mirroring foregrounds how political contestation online is not merely content-based ("what is said") but form-based ("how politics is done"): the adoption of combative, meme-ready, morally binary repertoires that travel well in attention economies.

Studies of online outrage highlight how moral-emotional expression can be preferentially amplified and rapidly escalated through sharing, quote-posting, and group alignment (Brady et al., 2017). Marwick's (2013) and Phillips's (2015) research on networked harassment and conflict shows how platforms facilitate decentralized coordination: pile-ons without a single organizer, through mechanisms of visibility and repetition. While they primarily examine harassment directed at public figures or out-groups, the infrastructural insights of these works travel: Conflictual repertoires can become normative infrastructures that set the terms of recognizable political speech, including within feminist or pro-women publics. Marwick's (2021) morally motivated networked harassment demonstrates that networked harassment on social media is not primarily driven by dislike or bias, but by moral outrage. This process functions as a norm reinforcement mechanism: Participants signal group membership and reinforce collective standards through the act of harassment itself, while frequently producing self-censorship in the target. Applied to pro-women discourse, callouts in feminist spaces can function as norm-enforcement technologies rather than simply as expressions of feminist disagreement. Crucially, antagonism can reshape intra-movement relations. Kim's (2021) intervention supports a key move of the present article: to treat pro-women disciplining as a

platformed dynamic intensified by visibility pressures and the affective rewards of antagonistic alignment, rather than as the simple expression of individual hostility or a culturally specific idiosyncrasy of a single national context.

3. Theoretical Framework

This article theorizes “pro-women” peer policing as a form of affective governance that is simultaneously internalized (lived as self-evaluation) and networked (scaled and intensified through platform infrastructures). Rather than treating misogyny as a stable ideology or a set of explicit hateful attitudes, I develop the theoretical framework from Harrington’s (2025) argument that misogyny can be productively conceptualized as affect and emotion: a socially produced formation of negative orientations that become mobilized toward “the feminine,” thereby normalizing gendered hierarchies. This reorientation shifts analysis away from searching for “misogynistic beliefs” inside individual minds and toward tracing the social conditions under which certain feelings become legitimate, contagious, and actionable. Misogyny, in this sense, operates through patterned emotional logics, including contempt, disgust, resentment, and moralized anger, that stabilize who can be valued, who must be corrected, and who can be punished. These affects do not simply express power; they help constitute it by making hierarchies feel intuitive, deserved, and even pleasurable to enforce.

Ahmed (2004) further clarifies how feelings become political infrastructures. Emotions circulate, “stick” to bodies and figures, and become attached to moral evaluations. Misogyny is not only directed outward (e.g., toward women as targets of harassment) but can also be reproduced within women’s publics through intra-gender sorting: Some women become objects of admiration and identification, others become objects of contempt, disgust, or punitive suspicion. Harrington’s conceptualization explicitly opens space for this intra-women dynamic by emphasizing that misogyny is relational and social, not reducible to male subjects or straightforward hate. In this case, “pro-women” discourse functions as a cultural technology that attaches affect to normative figures. As my fieldwork shows, women participants describe how moral imperatives circulate around a figure of the “good feminist woman” (self-sufficient, refusing, unambivalent, morally clear) and a contrasting figure of the “failed” or “complicit” woman (too accommodating, romantically attached to men, insufficiently refusing, perceived as lacking feminist consciousness). These figures are not merely descriptive categories; they are affectively charged. Admiration, pride, and belonging become attached to the “good” figure, while anxiety, shame, contempt, and disgust become attached to the “failed” figure. The consequence is a moralized emotional economy in which feminist identity becomes a continually audited performance: One’s life choices and affects are read as evidence of political worthiness. Misogyny here is not voiced as “women are inferior,” but enacted through affective hierarchies that narrow what kinds of femininity and feminist practice are deemed legitimate.

Three mechanisms are central to my analysis. First, the stickiness and circulation of affect. Following Ahmed’s (2004) formulation, affects become “sticky” when they repeatedly attach to particular figures and situations, making certain responses feel self-evident. In “pro-women” discourse, repeated exposure to callouts and moral denunciation can make some positions appear obviously shameful (e.g., expressing ambivalence about marriage; narrating compromise in heterosexual relationships) and others obviously admirable (e.g., refusal, non-negotiation, categorical rejection). This stickiness matters because it organizes

anticipatory self-surveillance: Participants learn not only what to think, but what to feel—and what feelings will be rewarded or punished.

Second, moral imperative framing. I treat moral imperatives not as abstract norms but as affective commands: They organize what counts as virtue and vice and attach emotional intensities to compliance or deviation. In the empirical material, a recurring framing positions refusal as virtue and compromise as vice. The moral weight of refusal is not simply ideological; it is lived through the promise of belonging and the threat of expulsion. This framing can transform feminist critique into a narrow script of correct life conduct, where political alignment is inferred from intimate choices and affective stances. Importantly, the moral imperative does not need to be coherent or uniformly held; it gains force through repetition, visibility, and the emotional consequences of being seen to deviate.

Third, callout as an affective technology. Callouts are often justified as accountability practices, but they also function as affective technologies that produce shame, fear of exposure, and anxiety of misrecognition. These affects are not incidental; they are the mechanism through which discipline becomes effective. When a user sees others being publicly corrected, mocked, or excluded, she learns to anticipate similar treatment and adjusts her speech accordingly. This is how peer policing becomes a structure of conduct rather than a series of discrete disagreements. The platformed nature of callouts—screenshotting, quote-posting, thread accumulation, rapid visibility—matters because it makes judgment durable and scalable, transforming local critique into networked sanction. Albrechtslund's (2008) notion of participatory surveillance is instructive here: Online social networking can produce forms of mutual, voluntary, and identity-building surveillance. Pro-women publics both exercise and submit to peer surveillance: They are simultaneously agents of communal norm-enforcement and subjects of networked monitoring. Yet, as Gill (2019) suggests, the emancipatory dimensions of participatory surveillance are unevenly distributed by gender: The “watching” that appears mutual and horizontal at the level of form consistently attaches itself, in content, to the regulation of femininity—what women wear, desire, love, and tolerate. In pro-women publics, participatory surveillance does not merely affirm feminist community; it can also become a horizontal peer-policing apparatus that governs feminine conduct in ways structurally continuous with patriarchal surveillance, even as it shifts the “watching” from men to other women. Drawing on Ross's (2025) distinction between calling in (inviting people into dialogue that allows complexity) and calling out (public naming of transgression that forecloses response and recruits punishment), this article argues that the intra-women surveillance and disciplining operate through the latter's structural disposition toward punitive publicity, and it is this orientation, rather than the presence of shared norms, that renders its outcomes misogynistic.

I define internalized and networked misogyny as a platformed formation in which hegemonic feminist norms are reproduced through affective self-surveillance and infrastructural scaling of peer discipline, even when voiced in “pro-women” terms. Internalized refers to an affective orientation through which hegemonic feminist ideals are adopted as criteria for self-evaluation and self-regulation. This is not simply belief, but feeling: anxiety about being “not feminist enough,” shame attached to perceived compromise, aspiration toward the morally elevated figure of the “good feminist woman,” and the everyday labor of calibrating one's speech, relationships, and self-presentation to avoid misrecognition. Internalization in this sense is socially produced—learned through repeated encounters with judgment and through the anticipatory management of reputational risk in a platformed moral economy. Networked refers to the platform-mediated collectivization of that self-surveillance into public discipline. It names how platform affordances (visibility

metrics, ranking, re-posting, screenshotting) enable moral judgements to escalate into callouts, pile-ons, and reputational sanctions that are scalable, persistent, and difficult to exit. Networked discipline operates through the contagious circulation of affect (especially shame and contempt) and through the practical knowledge that visibility can turn a single perceived transgression into mass participation. Misogyny here is not reducible to hatred of women; it is a disciplinary system that reproduces hierarchy by governing women's conduct: who may speak, how she may live, and what forms of desire, compromise, or ambiguity are permitted, through affectively charged peer policing that platforms make actionable at scale.

This framework, therefore, directs the analysis toward the interplay between cultural norms and infrastructures: how pro-women moral imperatives become affectively compelling, how platforms intensify their circulation, and how the resulting networked disciplining produces subjectivities that are governed "from within" while being enforced "from without" through public judgment.

4. Method

This study draws on multi-round, in-depth interviews with young women in China ($n = 33$, aged between 17 and 32) and South Korea ($n = 17$, aged between 21 and 33). All interviews were conducted online via voice or video calls on the instant messaging platforms WeChat, QQ, KaKao Talk, and Instagram, between January 2024 and December 2025. The empirical basis of this study is participants' recounted and perceived experiences of pro-women digital publics: their accounts of encounters with callouts, peer judgment, and platform dynamics as they experienced and interpreted them. The study adopts a comparative design to examine how "pro-women" discourse and peer-to-peer disciplining take shape across distinct platform ecologies and governance contexts, while remaining attentive to shared regional conditions: high platform penetration, intense visibility economies, and public contestation around gender politics. China and South Korea were selected not as equivalent national containers but as analytically generative sites where feminist publicness is both vibrant and contested, and where platform infrastructures and wider regulatory environments condition what kinds of gender talk become amplified, sanctioned, or strategically avoided by users.

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, beginning with entry points in feminist-leaning online communities on social media platforms Weibo, Douban, Twitter (now X), and theqoo, and extended through participant networks to capture variation in experiences of pro-women discourse, including both active contributors and more cautious or peripheral users. Sampling aimed to include participants with differing levels of engagement (posting, commenting, lurking), different trajectories of platform use (single-platform reliance versus multi-platform migration), and different degrees of exposure to callouts and peer policing. The two national sites were also selected with attention to their distinct platform governance and regulatory regimes, which shape not only what can be said in pro-women publics but also the structural conditions under which intra-women policing becomes an available affective outlet.

Interviews were designed to elicit participants' lived experiences of "pro-women" discourse as both cultural meaning and practical environment. Rather than treating pro-women talk as a stable ideology, the protocol foregrounded interactional scenes: moments in which participants felt judged, compelled to align, or strategically silenced. Interview prompts proceeded in three linked blocks. First, participants were asked about everyday encounters with pro-women norms: where they see such discourse (platforms, accounts,

groups, threads), and how they define it in their own words. Questions were designed to invite concrete examples such as posts, comment patterns, recurring phrases, and probed how “refusal” imperatives emerge around topics such as marriage, reproduction, heterosexual relationships, and perceived compromise with men. Second, I examined disciplining experiences and perceived risks. Participants were asked whether they had been called out, shamed, mocked, excluded, or otherwise sanctioned; whether they had witnessed such events; and how these episodes unfolded. Third, interviews attended to affective responses and coping strategies, inviting participants to describe how encounters with peer policing shaped their subsequent platform conduct. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese or Korean, and transcribed and translated into English by the author. Where vernacular terms carry culturally specific meanings (e.g., *lian'ai nao*, *hyungja*), original terms are retained with translation and contextualization provided.

Data were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) oriented to affect/emotion and platform mechanisms. Following initial open coding of all interview transcripts, codes were grouped into provisional themes and iteratively refined across the full dataset. A second coding pass attended specifically to affective language—how participants named feelings such as anxiety, disgust, shame, and relief—and to participants’ accounts of platform features and perceived algorithmic behavior. Analytic memos were written throughout to track emerging interpretive patterns and to flag disconfirming cases. Importantly, the analysis treats participants’ accounts of algorithmic amplification as experienced reality-shaping conduct. I analyze how users’ practical theories of platform ranking, i.e., what they believe becomes visible and why, structure their self-governance, anticipatory fear, and strategic participation. Following Bucher’s (2017) framing of algorithmic imaginaries, the analysis treats participants’ accounts of algorithmic behavior as consequential, whether or not they correspond to actual platform operations.

Given the potential risks associated with discussing callouts, harassment, and contested gender politics, participants were assigned pseudonyms; identifying details (platform handles, group names, unique incidents) were removed or generalized; and excerpts were selected to minimize traceability in searchable online environments. Interviews were conducted with an emphasis on participants’ control over disclosure, including the option to skip questions or stop at any point.

5. Findings

“Pro-women” discourse becomes a disciplinary environment through which patriarchal femininity norms are reproduced among women. Across my interviews, Chinese and Korean participants described encountering a narrow script of “ideal feminist womanhood” framed as a moral imperative, especially through refusal politics around marriage, heterosexual intimacy, and reproduction, and experiencing that script as both psychologically internalized and infrastructurally networked. I trace how this script becomes a yardstick for judging other women, how critique escalates into public callouts and pile-ons, and how algorithmic visibility and metricized attention accelerate sanctions. The analysis foregrounds affective textures including anxiety, shame, contempt, disgust, and the desire for moral recognition, and theorizes them as part of misogyny’s social production as affect/emotion: a patterned economy of negative orientations that normalizes hierarchy through what feels “obvious,” “deserved,” and “correct.”

5.1. The “Ideal Feminist Womanhood” Script as Refusal Imperative

Shaoyu, a participant working in Shanghai, China, like many other interviewees, described “pro-women” discourse as organized around a relatively narrow standard of feminist respectability. This standard is not presented as one possible feminist stance among others; rather, it circulates as a moral benchmark for how a woman ought to live. The central elements of this “ideal feminist womanhood” script include autonomy and independence; dis-identification from marriage, male attention, and reproduction as measures of worth; and a moralized emphasis on self-love and self-support.

Participants did not merely report encountering these ideals as slogans. They described them as practical demands: expectations that women should demonstrate refusal in everyday speech and conduct, and that any sign of compromise, especially in heterosexual relationships, could be read as political failure. This is how a normative script becomes a yardstick. Rather than evaluating claims about gender structures, pro-women publics often evaluate persons: Their life choices, desires, and affective attachments become evidence for whether they qualify as “properly” feminist, “pro-women,” or “awake.” As Shaoyu related:

It feels like there is a checklist for entry. If you are single, you are safe. If you date men, you are a suspect. I saw a thread where a girl asked for advice about her boyfriend, and the comments weren’t helping her at all! They were attacking her for having a boyfriend at all. They called her a “brain-damaged lover” (*lian’ai nao*) and asked, “Why are you still picking through trash in the garbage heap?” It makes me feel that to be “pro-women” (*ainü*), I must be completely autonomous. Any emotional reliance on a man is not just a personal choice; it is seen as a betrayal of the group.

Ji-min, based in Busan, South Korea, also mentioned:

There is a specific image of the “perfect feminist” on X: She has short hair; she doesn’t wear makeup; she has taken off the corset; and she is financially independent enough. She is cold, rational, and has cut off all men. I look at that image, and I want to be her; she seems so powerful. It feels like if I slip up, if I watch a romance drama or buy a nice lipstick—I am failing the movement. The standard is absolute purity, and I am always afraid I am too weak to meet it.

Both Shaoyu and Ji-min’s accounts suggest that the force of the script lies in its moral imperative framing. “Refusal” appears not simply as a political tactic but as an index of virtue. “Compromise” appears not simply as pragmatic negotiation under constraint but as vice. The implication is that feminist identity is proven through the management of intimacy and desire: who one dates, what one tolerates, what one publicly disavows, and how one narrates one’s choices. In this environment, the ideal feminist womanhood script becomes a template for interpreting others, not only oneself. This yardstick operates through an affective texture that participants repeatedly described in two registers. The first is anxiety of inadequacy: the sense of being perpetually at risk of failing the standard, of being “not feminist enough,” or of being misread as complicit. The second is shame and pre-emptive self-silencing: the anticipation that speaking candidly about ambivalence, desire, or compromise will trigger punishment, so it becomes easier to remain quiet, to lurk, or to adjust one’s narration to fit the acceptable script.

The story of Soo-jin who is based in Seoul, South Korea, reveals how the fear of networked sanction changes participation:

I used to be very active on theqoo, arguing for women's rights. But after seeing how they tore apart a user for admitting she was lonely and wanted a partner, I stopped posting. They called her a *hyungja* [literally, a vile person], referring to her as a useless sympathizer of men, and ridiculed her for days. I just read it now. I'm afraid that my own complexities aren't welcome. If I can't be the "warrior" they want, it's safer to be invisible.

Following Harrington (2025), misogyny can be understood as socially produced affect/emotion mobilized toward "the feminine," normalizing hierarchies through negative orientations that become culturally legitimate. In this case, the target of negative orientation is not "women" in general but "insufficient" women: those cast as compromised, naïve, needy, or politically impure. The cultural legitimacy of shame and contempt is secured through pro-women language: correction is framed as protection; denunciation as feminist pedagogy. This is precisely how patriarchal norms can be repackaged in empowerment vocabulary and redeployed as moral discipline among women.

Moreover, this moral disciplining often involves boundary work. As a widely circulated post on theqoo from 2024 illustrates:

If you can't even cut off the corset, don't talk about women's rights here. We don't need fashion feminists who cater to the male gaze while claiming to be one of us. Go back to Instagram. This space is for those who are serious about survival, not for those who seek male validation.

The post uses evaluative terms to classify and exclude "failed" women (those who wear the corset or seek validation), enforcing the ideal feminist womanhood script through exclusion and the policing of "proper" feminist stance.

Such a moral imperative framing is distinct from feminist accountability or norm-negotiation. The analytic threshold is crossed when enforcement operates through a coupled mechanism of public exposure and binary classification: Deviations are made hyper-visible through screenshotting and recirculation, and members are sorted into trusted versus suspect categories on the basis of single utterances. Shame, exclusion, and the denial of ambiguity are the affective and procedural resources through which this exposure-and-classification operation does its work, systematically foreclosing the capacity of members to negotiate, voice complexity, or remain in the community without performing purity. The case of pro-women groups is not clear ideological conflicts, for example disagreements with explicitly anti-feminist positions like TradWife advocacy, but rather the disciplining of women whose lives involve negotiation under constraint: women who date men, who feel ambivalent about marriage, who hold complexity about their desires, precisely the constituency that feminist politics has historically sought to support rather than police. When "pro-women" communities treat lived ambivalences under patriarchy as moral failure equivalent to complicity, they have crossed from accountability into governance. The pro-women disciplining documented herein overwhelmingly takes the form of calling out, rather than calling in (Ross, 2025), and it is this structural disposition toward punitive public exposure, rather than shared norms per se, that this article identifies as misogynistic in outcome.

5.2. From Internalization to Network: Callouts, Pile-Ons, and Algorithmic Visibility

The ideal feminist womanhood script becomes effective not only because individuals internalize it, but because platforms collectivize and scale it through networked disciplinary mechanisms. Three mechanisms recur across my interviewees' accounts: public callouts as "moral pedagogy," amplification as acceleration, and peer surveillance as anticipatory governance.

First, callouts were widely described as pedagogical events: moments where someone is publicly corrected so that others learn what is acceptable. The pedagogy is enacted through publicity. Participants reported that callouts often rely on decontextualization techniques—screenshots, partial quotes, re-posting across groups—to make the "transgression" legible and shareable. Over time, these events accumulate into a repertoire: Users learn the standard by watching punishments unfold. As related by Chen, a heavy Douban user based in Beijing, China:

I posted a reflection in a private Douban group about feeling tired of the constant anger. Within an hour, someone screenshotted it and re-posted it to a public bot account on Weibo. They cropped out the context where I said I still supported the movement. They just captioned it: "Look at this pick-me giving up." Suddenly, hundreds of strangers were dissecting a fragment of my thought without knowing me. It taught me that nothing is truly private; anything can be taken out to be used as evidence against you.

Min, similarly, recalled being called out:

It starts with one person commenting, "This sounds like *hyungja* logic." Then the comments pile up instantly. "Real." "Agreed." "Look at her past posts." It turns into a relay race of insults. Then I was treated as a confirmed enemy. You can't stop the momentum once the thread gets "hot": The pile-on becomes a way for others to prove they are awake. (Min-ji, Seoul, South Korea)

Second, participants frequently attributed the intensity of disciplining to visibility dynamics: how quickly a critique can circulate, how metrics recruit new participants, and how the perceived "algorithm" makes some conflicts unavoidable. The point here is not to claim technical knowledge of recommendation systems; it is to take seriously how perceived algorithmic amplification becomes a practical reality, shaping conduct. Users act as if visibility can spiral; therefore, they manage speech, identity, and participation to avoid becoming the next target. Jing, a 21-year-old woman working in Beijing, recalled:

I went to sleep and woke up to 99 plus notifications. My hands were shaking. It wasn't even a controversial post, just a complaint about a specific radical influencer. But it got picked up by the algorithm, or a big account re-posted it. It felt like an explosion. I deleted everything immediately, but the fear that they had already saved my photos...it stayed with me for weeks. The speed is what scares you; you have no time to explain.

Jing's account reveals that digital networks do not merely host misogyny; they structure and accelerate it: transforming internalized self-policing into a collective punitive force. These punitive practices also speak to platformed visibility economies: Where attention is scarce, and metrics are socially meaningful, moral denunciation becomes a high-visibility genre.

Third, peer-to-peer surveillance functions as anticipatory governance. The cumulative effect of callouts and amplification is a shift from episodic conflict to anticipatory self-regulation. My interviewees described behavioral adaptations: self-censorship (not posting personal experiences), content tailoring (adopting acceptable phrases), lurking (reading without participating), platform migration (moving to smaller groups or different apps), and identity management (multiple accounts, private vs public selves). Ying, a 24-year-old woman working in Hangzhou, China, related the following:

On Weibo, I have a “safe” account and a real account, but even on the real one, I don’t say what I actually think about marriage pressure....If I admit I’m struggling with loneliness and am almost persuaded by my parents to attend their arranged dates with men, they will say I’m weak or brainwashed.

Su-ah, a 29-year-old woman living in Incheon, South Korea, also shared:

I left theqoo. It was too scary for me there. Now I only talk in a small, private Discord server with five friends I trust. We check with each other before letting anyone in. It’s the only place I can say “Actually, I don’t agree with what that feminist influencer said” without being buried alive by comments.

These mechanisms clarify why pro-women discourse can be politically productive yet disciplinary. Visibility enables feminist vernaculars to circulate, but the same infrastructures also intensify boundary work and punitive sorting, particularly under conditions where moral clarity is rewarded and ambiguity is risky.

5.3. Affective Formations: How “Pro-Women” Disciplining Feels

Many interviewees described belonging as precarious: One misphrased post, one disclosed compromise, one insufficiently militant stance could trigger scrutiny. This fear is not reducible to personal insecurity; it is structurally produced by the visibility of punishment and the unpredictability of escalation. The result is a “watchfulness” that participants carry into everyday posting, and in some cases into offline self-evaluation.

Wei from Shenzhen, China, describes the precarity of belonging, showing how the observation of arbitrary punishment travels inward, transforming into a mechanism of self-regulation and “cold watchfulness”:

It feels like living in a glass house where the walls are made of screenshots. I saw a girl get dragged for days because she used a word that sounded like a “male-identified” term....Now before I hit send, I freeze. I think: “Is this pure enough?” It’s exhausting, but I can’t stop checking.

Moreover, participants do not only fear judgment; they also describe directing contempt and disgust at what they cast as “insufficient” women, demonstrating how discipline is sustained through the affective rewards of righteous enforcement. Participants not only describe being afraid; they also describe moments of joining judgment, feeling disgust at certain femininities, or experiencing relief when moral boundaries are reasserted. This matters analytically because it demonstrates how discipline is sustained: Punitive emotions can be experienced as righteous, cleansing, or protective, especially when framed as pro-women solidarity. The moral economy, therefore, offers affective rewards for alignment.

Eun-ji, a Korean woman in her mid-20s working in Seoul, reflected:

Honestly, there is a satisfaction in it. When we see someone acting like a “conceptual woman” [*gaenyeom-nyeo*, a woman who caters to patriarchal concepts to be liked], it feels disgusting. It’s like she is selling us out. So when people comment about her, it doesn’t feel like bullying. It feels justified. I catch myself thinking, “Good, she needs to wake up,” even if the words are harsh.

The desire for recognition and moral standing runs powerfully through the pro-women communities. Participants often described “doing feminism right” as a scarce form of recognition within these publics. The desire to belong to the “right” community—one that is seen as truly pro-women—can motivate conformity to dominant scripts and participation in callouts. Recognition is not merely social approval; it becomes a moral credential in a contentious gender field. As Ting, who was in her late 20s and working in Shanghai, China, said:

I want to be seen as a “sister” (*jiemei*) who gets it. When I post something sharp and radical, and the big accounts like it, I feel validated. I feel like I have shaken off the brainwashing. It’s not just about likes; it’s about proving...to them and to myself.

These affect clusters clarify how misogyny, as Harrington (2025) conceptualizes it, combines contempt, fear, and desire and thereby produces hierarchy. In this case, the hierarchy is intra-women: a stratification of feminist respectability where “good feminist womanhood” is elevated and “failed/complicit” femininity is disciplined. The crucial point is that the punitive affect is not external to feminism; it is made legitimate through feminist-sounding vocabularies and pro-women moral imperatives. That is why it is analytically apt to treat this as a misogynistic formation in outcome, enforcing patriarchal femininity norms, even when participants experience it as empowerment or protection.

6. Discussion: Misogyny as Affective Governance Inside Pro-Women Publics

The empirical evidence presented here reconfigures feminist solidarity not as an assumed property of pro-women spaces, but as a fragile, mediated achievement. While feminist scholars often locate misogyny in male-dominated antagonist publics, this research demonstrates that platform affordances can reorganize “pro-women” discourse into an infrastructure of intra-gender surveillance. By elevating specific scripts of “refusal” into a metric for moral ranking, these digital publics produce a distinct form of governance: one where the boundaries of feminist respectability are policed through the very tools—shame, visibility, and exclusion—often associated with the patriarchal systems they oppose.

The core mechanism driving this governance is the hardening of “refusal” from a political tactic into a compulsory moral identity. In the digital moral economies of East Asian feminism, the “refusing woman” who is independent, disidentified from male attention, and distinct from the institution of marriage accrues algorithmic and social capital. Conversely, the “compromising woman” who negotiates ambivalence, intimacy, or patriarchal bargains becomes a target of disgust and punitive correction. This dynamic suggests that platformed misogyny does not merely target feminist speech from the outside; it can also discipline it from within, standardizing what counts as legitimate feminist expression. The ideal feminist womanhood functions as a yardstick, turning complex lived experiences into binary assessments of “correct” or “failed”

performance. As Harrington (2025) suggests, misogyny operates through the attachment of negative affect to the feminine; here, affect is redirected internally. Contempt is not abolished but re-routed toward those women who fail to embody the aesthetic and political purity demanded by the platform's most visible users.

This internalization of discipline is inseparable from the technical architecture of the platforms themselves. Marwick (2013) notes that social media environments turn participation into an ongoing project of impression management subject to algorithmic ranking. In this context, pro-women policing is not simply an ideological disagreement but a product of governed visibility. The callout functions here as a dual-use technology: It is a method of feminist pedagogy, but also a mechanism of reach. The networked nature of these sanctions facilitated by screenshotting, quote-posting, and searchability accelerates judgment, allowing local disagreements to scale rapidly into mass shaming events (Jane, 2014). Consequently, users engage in anticipatory surveillance, sterilizing their speech and hiding their ambivalences to avoid the reputational costs of a pile-on.

A critical objection to this framework might be that conflict is endemic to all political movements; disagreement regarding tactics or norms is not inherently misogynistic. However, the formation documented here is distinct from "feminist conflict" because of its outcome: the reproduction of hegemonic norms of regulation. When pro-women publics treat compromise or relational complexity as moral failures to be purged, they reinstall the logic that women's worth must be adjudicated through strict adherence to a behavioral script, enforced through shame and exclusion. A related concern is whether the problem lies less in pro-women norms themselves than in their mode of enforcement, particularly when that mode appears combative, blunt, zero-sum. I do not treat such styles as deeply problematic because they are supposedly "masculine." Gendered prescriptions about "appropriate" feminist speech can themselves be a mechanism of silencing; insisting that feminist discourse should be gentle or non-confrontational reproduces the very injunctions that feminist politics has sought to contest. The critique here is therefore structural and functional, not tonal: What is at issue is whether the mode of enforcement expands or contracts the range of legitimate feminist subjectivities. When callout dynamics operate through decontextualized screenshotting, rapid escalation, and mass-participation shaming, they do not merely express political disagreement—they produce self-censorship, withdrawal, and the systematic removal of ambivalent voices from feminist publics (Marwick, 2021; Ross, 2025). The test is not whether the speech sounds harsh, but whether its effects are disciplinary and exclusionary in ways that serve patriarchal interests, regardless of the speaker's feminist intent. If solidarity is to survive the platform era, it requires a resistance to the drift from accountability to punitive sorting, and recognizing that the compromising woman is often the subject feminism was meant to support, not the enemy it was meant to destroy.

The comparative evidence also suggests that the intensity of intra-women disciplining is not simply a function of platform affordances or feminist culture in isolation, but is conditioned by the political economy of expression in each context. In China, where feminist discourse circulates under pervasive censorship risk, the displacement of critique onto intra-group policing serves a partially protective function: It keeps feminist anger alive within a narrower perimeter of political safety. Yet this displacement also channels affective energy away from systemic critique and into interpersonal governance, weakening feminism's solidarity-building potential. In South Korea, where feminist discourse and movements circulate with greater latitude but within a highly polarized gender-political field, the antagonistic communication repertoires that have been effective in naming misogyny externally have been internalized as normative within feminist

publics, producing a mirroring dynamic (Kim, 2021) in which the tactics of the gender war are replicated inward. In both cases, the structural conditions do not cause misogynistic disciplining, but they do intensify and channel it—a finding with implications for how feminist movements might strategically respond to governance pressure without replicating its effects internally.

7. Conclusion

Through connecting misogyny-as-affect with platformed moral economies, this article demonstrates how the internalized and networked misogyny—when hegemonic femininity norms are reproduced through affective self-surveillance and then collectivized through networked discipline (callouts, amplification, ranking)—produces intra-women hierarchies of feminist respectability. Comparative evidence across China and South Korea shows how a refusal-centered “ideal feminist womanhood” script becomes a yardstick for judging women and a mechanism for regulating participation.

The findings also carry implications for how feminist publics might be organized otherwise. If the default orientation of pro-women publics shifted from punitive publicity toward deliberate invitation, from treating deviation as grounds for expulsion to treating it as grounds for conversation, this would not dilute feminist politics but potentially expand it, reaching precisely those women in negotiated or ambivalent positions who most need feminist resources. This is not a counsel of niceness; it is a recognition that feminist solidarity, in the platform era, is not a given but an achievement that must be structurally cultivated against the grain of visibility economies that reward punitive clarity. This reorientation is not only a political task for feminist communities; it also implicates platform designers whose affordance choices, including visibility metrics, ranking, and virality incentives, currently reward punitive clarity over deliberative complexity.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the academic editors and the two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading and valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

Funding

Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between the University of Manchester and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available in order to maintain the confidentiality of participant data, given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed.

LLMs Disclosure

No generative AI tools were used to produce the intellectual content, analysis, or arguments of this manuscript. Claude (Anthropic) was used only at a late stage for proofreading to improve clarity and readability.

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