

‘The World is Not a Safe Place for Men’:  
The Representational Politics of the Manosphere

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## Abstract

This thesis offers an overview of the representational politics of the online antifeminist community known as the ‘manosphere’. It analyzes how gender and gender politics are represented in the discourse, with an eye to how traditional gender constructs, and traditional gendered norms and inequalities, are reproduced.

This project—the first study to focus exclusively on the manosphere—contributes to our understanding of the community in two ways; it addresses a significant gap in the literature on the topic, and it tests the accuracy of the ‘conventional wisdom’ on the manosphere.

Using mixed-methods critical discourse analysis, the study analyzed the discourse of the two primary subcultures of the community, and found that traditional gender norms and relations are reproduced therein, and that for the most part the conventional wisdom is accurate: femininity and women are disparaged, masculinity is imagined to be ‘in crisis’ (constantly under siege by feminizing forces), and feminism is represented as hypocritical and oppressive.

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*Women's liberation is the liberation of the feminine in the man and the masculine in the woman.*

Corita Kent, artist

*It is not women's liberation; it is women's and men's liberation.*

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, United States Supreme Court Justice

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

You need not venture too far into the waters of the internet to see it—the manosphere. Read the comments section of any news story on rape, domestic violence, or ‘women’s issues’ and you will find it there—where commenters allege reverse sexism, argue that men are invisible victims of their abusive wives and girlfriends, and seethe about ‘feminist ideological lies’, social justice warriors, and political-correctness. Look at the replies to and mentions of Twitter users speaking out against sexism on the platform, where feminists—men and women both, but especially the latter—endure tirades of sexually violent and graphic threats of death and rape from anonymous users—that is the manosphere too.

The manosphere is the online expression of the offline men’s rights movement, which emerged in the 1980s. Various analyses have suggested that the emergence of a variety of political phenomenon under the name ‘men’s rights movement’ (MRM) are essentially backlash attempts by men to reassert or redefine a particular throw-back vision of masculinity that is in conflict with feminist ideals and the shifting roles of women.

Since the advent of the internet, manifestations of the MRM have surfaced online, in what has come to be known as the manosphere. The manosphere is an informal cyberspace network of blogs, websites, and forums that concentrate on issues concerning men and masculinity—issues as diverse as men’s rights, the male sex role, sex and relationships with women, the economy and feminism. Commonly held amongst its frequenters is the feeling that the culture in the West is one of misandry—hatred of men and masculinity—that men are oppressed, and that women dominate and are more privileged than men.

The manosphere exists online—but its players, its participants do not. They exist in the real world. One such player is Daryush Valizadeh, also known as Roosh V. He runs two prominent manosphere sites—*Return of Kings* and his own personal blog. Roosh is part of a prominent subculture of the manosphere known as pickup artistry, and in the summer months of 2015, he embarked on a ‘Roosh World Tour’, holding events about self-improvement and how the culture disfavours men, in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and in two Canadian cities—Montreal and Toronto. His events in

Canada proceeded as planned despite a petition against his being permitted to enter the country—a petition that was signed by nearly 13,000 people. Women and activists in both Montreal and Toronto organized protests outside the events. The basis of their standpoint? That Roosh would be inciting hate speech. One of the protest organizers allegedly received rape and death threats from Roosh supporters (Khandaker, 2015) for speaking publicly against him. The manosphere, unplugged, bleeds into the real world.

Increasingly prevalent over the years is the understanding that the lives of men and women are governed by a hierarchical gendered order. Much of the writing on this question has been done by feminist scholars focusing on femininity and women. Only since the late-1970s has the other side of the coin been examined. At that time, it began to be recognized that the construction of masculinity—ideas about what it means to be a man, and the social role and meanings of masculinities—are an important part of the gendered order (Kimmel & Bridges, 2011). Men are asked and ask themselves everyday what it means to be a man—to be a boy, a brother, a friend, a partner, a father. This meaning in manhood affects the lives not just of those men and boys, but of the women, men, girls and boys who are near them. After nearly four decades of work studying how masculinities are constructed, there is a strong and established framework for studying the topic—it is understood, for instance, that masculinities are multiple and vary according to context. There is opportunity now to expand upon the study of masculinities by examining how they are produced and reproduced in new contexts.

While studies of masculinities have focused on the MRM as a broader phenomenon quite extensively, they have rarely touched upon the manosphere. Where it is discussed, the manosphere tends to be bundled with the MRM, and the peculiarities of the manosphere as a unique fragment of the wider phenomenon, have not been focused upon. The dominant thinking on the MRM has therefore been applied to the manosphere without adequate testing. The current understanding of the manosphere is limited—it is not widely known even what it is. In terms of the question of how gender—masculinity in particular—is produced in the MRM, the literature has offered very strong explanations. The question is, is it an accurate portrait of the manosphere in particular? This question has never been tested, and it is for these reasons that I propose the expansion and deepening of the study of the manosphere here.

## 1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND JUSTIFICATIONS

In a broad sense, this project seeks to contribute to our understanding of how gender is represented in the manosphere. My overarching research question is: How are gender and gender politics represented in the manosphere, and do these representations challenge or reinforce traditional constructs of contemporary masculinity and femininity? I am mainly interested in how masculinity is represented in the discourse, but while masculinity is at the centre of the analysis, it is important to also examine other representations (of femininity, and of perceived threats to masculinity), which inform the construction of masculinity, and which tell important stories about the gender politics of the discourse more broadly. The literature on the topic—as I discuss below—suggests that the mode of masculinity (re)produced in the manosphere conforms to traditional gender ideology—but is this the case? And if so, how does it play out on the actual pages of the manosphere?

The existing literature on the manosphere is limited, and there have been no academic studies that offer a comprehensive overview of the community. Much of the literature on men's rights groups has focused on the discourse and actions of these groups offline/in real life, and have only briefly touched upon the online realm if it is made mention of at all. In other cases, the manosphere is grouped in with the offline MRM as if they are one in the same. The literature on the MRM indicates that it reproduces traditional constructions of gender. This understanding of the men's rights movement has been applied to the manosphere without rigorous examination to determine if and how the manosphere differs discursively and in its construction of masculinity from the offline men's rights movement.

As such, my research project has sought to address the gap in the literature and answer the broad research questions outlined above by undertaking two related, but distinct, types of analyses:

### *Analysis 1: Mapping the manosphere*

- What is the manosphere and what are its key characteristics?
- What are the various strands of the manosphere?
- Where can they be found? Which sites are the key venues?
- Which actors are the key players? What demographic information can be gathered about the contributors and audience, if any?
- How much interaction is there between the various strands?

*Analysis 2: Analyzing manosphere discourse: interrogating representations*

- How is masculinity represented in the discourse?
- How is femininity represented?
- How is feminism represented?
- How is language used in the manosphere to represent gender and gender relations?
- Do these representations support, disprove, or complicate the conventional wisdom on gendered representations in antifeminist movements?

It is important to note that my objective is not to explain the internal motivations of manosphere participants. Questions around the motivations of participants are valid and very important—but that is not my project here. Moreover, my goal is also not to explain the *why* behind the manosphere.<sup>1</sup> Rather, my question is *how*: how does the discourse operate? How does it persuade? How does it build narratives about men and women? How does it frame itself and its antifeminism?

Why is it important to ask not only ‘why’ questions about the psychological motivations of its adherents, but also ‘how’ questions about the representational practices of the manosphere?

For one, because those discursive practices can have very significant, real-world impacts. On May 23, 2014, a short distance from the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara, a 22-year old man took seven lives including his own. Prior to his rampage, he had engaged with an online network of forums and blogs that encouraged and celebrated his rampage (both before and after the attack), and offered him the framing discourse for his misogynistic ‘manifesto’ (NPR, 2014). This online space was the manosphere, and his chilling 137-page manifesto is brimming with language commonly found there. It goes without saying that this young man was very troubled and going without the support services he needed—but dismissing attacks such as his as being strictly related to mental health ignores the manosphere, and occults its power to define knowledge and subjectivities. While “[t]he manosphere did not create Elliot Rodger ... it seems undeniable that ... the manosphere reinforced Rodger’s mindset, telling him, in effect, that he was perfectly right to be enraged at half the human race. Men’s rights activists did not tell Rodger to

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kimmel (2013) offers a compelling and robust analysis of why men are drawn to ‘angry man’ movements, including the MRM.

kill—but in their writings, it seems like many of them wouldn't mind doing some killing of their own," (Potok, 2014). It is important that we investigate how power operates through discourses such as that of the manosphere, particularly when they can possibly incite harm by championing a misogynist attitude towards women.

Some may question the utility of studying extremist or fringe discourses. I respond by questioning the categorization of this discourse as extremist.<sup>2</sup> At moments, it is certainly extreme in its misogyny, but labeling a discourse as extremist creates an artificial distinction between the dirty 'fringe' element and sterile mainstream ideology. The extremist, and the mundane 'versions' of various ideologies are in fact the same ideology—the same assumptions underpin both the mainstream and the fringe. The ideology by which transgender persons are labeled 'freaks' and all-gender bathrooms are railed against—they are one in the same. The ideologies that beat the gay man and lynch the black man—they are the same ideologies that live at the punchline of 'ordinary' homophobic and racist jokes, uttered and excused by tolerant, disavowing-of-the-extreme individuals.

The artificial distinction between the extreme and the mainstream enables a sort of moral licensing, by which one's complicity in systems of oppression is excused if one believes oneself to be part of the benign mainstream—tolerant society. Mundane, daily oppressions and micro-aggressions are given license amongst 'tolerant' persons who denounce extreme homophobes, xenophobes, racists, or misogynists. Focusing on extreme expressions of ideologies obscures 'ordinary' expressions of the same—it obscures how certain groups are oppressed on a daily basis and in mundane, mainstream interactions. The extreme/non-extreme distinction also facilitates dog whistling and code politics by obscuring and excusing systems of oppression.

In studying extreme discourses such as that of the manosphere, not only do we improve our understanding of such movements, but it also enables us to identify how assumptions that underpin the extremist discourse are also present within the mainstream majority, and how mainstream gender ideology flows into the men's rights movement, into the manosphere, and vice versa. Moreover, the men's rights movement may have had slight real world influence thus far, but R.W. Connell points out that even though "[o]n a world scale, explicit backlash movements are of limited importance, ... very large

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<sup>2</sup> Here I am drawing on Ferber (1996) who argues that using the label 'extremist' when discussing white supremacy "often has the result of absolving the mainstream population of its racism, portraying white supremacists as the racist fringe in contrast to some non-racist majority," (p. 9, note 30).

numbers of men are nevertheless engaged in preserving gender inequality,” (2005a, pp. 1816–17).

There is an emerging debate on how best to protect persons from harassment and unsafe circumstances online while also protecting free speech (A. Collier, 2013). Gaining more intimate knowledge on the operations of a misogynistic community—that has a reputation for lashing out at its dissenters with harassing comments online—can only contribute positively to this debate.

For normative purposes, it is helpful to understand how antifeminist discourse functions so that progressive projects may be safeguarded or furthered. It is also important to gain a richer understanding of antifeminist or misogynist discourses so that we may know how feminism can best respond, as well as how we can move towards promoting models of masculinity that are healthy for both men and women.

Perhaps most important within the context of academia, there are important gaps in the literature on the topic. The manosphere has not been particularly well studied. Little work has been done on the manosphere as a related but distinct expression of the men’s rights movement—it is typically bundled with the offline men’s rights movement as if they are one in the same. Examining it as a stand-alone phenomenon will address these gaps, and will test the accuracy of the traditional understanding of the discourse of the manosphere. The existing literature on the manosphere in particular and the men’s rights movement in general will be discussed in the literature review below.

### **1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Before diving into my study of the manosphere, it is important to contextualize the topic by sketching the main contours of the portrait (to the extent it exists) offered by the existing academic literature. As such, in this section I examine the existing literature on the manosphere in three disciplines: political science, communications studies, and gender studies.

#### **1.3.1 Political Science**

There is a serious gap in political science literature when it comes to the manosphere, the online expression of the MRM. If articles published in scholarly journals indicate the ‘state of the union,’ the glaring absence of studies of the manosphere from political science journals is noteworthy. At the time of writing, a search for the

term ‘manosphere’ uncovers zero results from seven of the largest and most influential political science journals: *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Theory*, *Theory and Event*, and the *British Journal of Political Science*. Searching these same journals for articles containing the phrase “men’s rights” also returns zero relevant results—none pertaining to the phenomenon addressed in this thesis. A search for other relevant terms one could reasonably expect to find in articles on the manosphere—“Paul Elam,” “pick-up/pickup artist,” or “A Voice for Men”—also returned no results. Political science as a discipline is ignoring the manosphere and the wider phenomenon of the men’s rights movement. The absence of studies on the topic from political scientists needs to be addressed. It is this gap that my thesis seeks to reduce in size—and it is because of this absence of literature that the work of other disciplines must be taken into account in reviewing the literatures relevant to my topic.

### **1.3.2 Computer-mediated Communications Studies**

While studies of the manosphere are absent from political science literature, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the cyberdiscourse would be addressed by studies of computer-mediated communications (CMC). While the topic of representations of gender online has been addressed in CMC literature, and while figureheads of the manosphere—such as Paul Elam—and acts by the community have made appearances in studies of gendered online communications, there are no studies that focus exclusively on the manosphere or how gender is produced and contested therein. Studies of even the much wider topic—representations of gender in cyberdiscourse—are very limited. The *Springer International Handbook of Internet Research* (2010), and *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies* (2013), for instance, both do not include a chapter on the manosphere, nor gendered representations in cyberdiscourse, indicating a deficiency in the literature when it comes to the question of (gendered representations in) the manosphere.

Early studies of gender in CMC focused on gendered ‘discursive traits’, and laid important foundations for more recent studies that focus on misogyny in cyberspace. Susan Herring (1994) was amongst the first, in the mid-‘90s, to understand that the internet may have a structural bias that perpetuates male advantage, and to interrogate the claim that the internet is inherently gender-neutral and equalizing. Herring examines differences in the way that men and women interact

online. She finds differences around discursive norms of gendered performativity and communicative ethical norms, and argues that these norms disfavour women. The masculine communicative ethic accepts flaming because men tend to value 'free speech' above freedom from flaming. When communicating online, men tend to post longer messages, begin and close discussions, assert opinions strongly and frame them as 'facts', use crude language (including insults), and generally take an adversarial orientation towards their interlocutors (2003, p. 7). The female discursive style, conversely, is marked by short messages, assertions that are qualified and justified, apologies, expressions of support for others and, in general, an 'aligned' stance towards interlocutors (ibid.). These discursive and ethical norms of masculine net culture, which are codified in netiquette rules, posits Herring, can make cyberspace inhospitable to women (1994). Others following Herring have similarly critically examined masculine discursive norms and the claim that the internet is gender-neutral and equalizing, arguing that feminine discursive practices are subjugated in cyberspace (Dwight, 2004; Herrmann, 2007; Yates, 1997). A related trend is to focus on the masculine practice of 'flaming', particularly in regard to how the characteristics of the discourse medium (such as anonymity) facilitate the practice and affect how it is experienced by women and men (Biber, Doverspike, Baznik, Cober, & Ritter, 2002). 'Flaming' has been defined as strong negative emotion, the use of derogatory, vulgar or inappropriate language, and/or ad hominem attacks (Herring, 1994). It is sometimes used as a catch-all term for a variety of online practices that violate behavioural and ethical norms, including trolling, cyber-bullying, -harassment, -stalking, -hate, and that often rely upon misogyny, homophobia, racism, religious prejudice, and so on (Jane, 2014b, p. 537). Patrick O'Sullivan and Andrew Flanagin (2003) have made an important contribution to this domain by conceptualizing flaming. According to their framework, flames are intentional negative violations of interactional norms (p. 84). They require intent to flame on the sender's part, and the perception of flaming on the part of the receiver as well as a third-party (p. 88).

Steven Vrooman (2002) marks a departure from this trend. He argues that flaming is not caused by characteristics of the medium of CMC itself, rather the practice is used as a performance of identity; flaming performances are, he argues, 'resolutely masculine'. Lori Kendall (2000) also examines gendered performances of identity online. Her analysis of discourse on *BlueSky*, an interactive text-based forum, focuses on how nerd identity intersects with hegemonic mas-



culinity,<sup>4</sup> and the implications of this intersection, particularly in regard to expectations of heterosexuality. She finds that in the discourse of *BlueSky*, both men and women distance themselves from femininity and (to some extent) women themselves—this in keeping with acceptable performances of hegemonic masculinity (p. 263). She also details how male participants on *BlueSky* express ambivalence toward hegemonic standards of masculinity, and represent the problem as falling with women rather than with the hegemonic gender order. Men on *BlueSky*, she posits, portray “themselves as ‘nice guys’ left out of the standard ... heterosexual dynamic of violence,” and blame “women who like the abuse they get from such men. ... [T]hey represent themselves as reacting to having been ‘cut down brutally’, ‘laughed at’, and ‘seen as weak’,” as well as being used by women who put them in the ‘friendzone’ (p. 267). Kendall argues that the *BlueSky* discourse reproduces the hegemonic gender order, which “depicts women as inferior and not acceptable identity models [while requiring] that men desire these inferior (even disgusting) creatures,” (p. 267-68). Distance from femininity is central to the masculinity espoused on *BlueSky* and hegemonic masculinity alike, and women are consistently represented as sex objects in conversations, regardless the gender of those individuals participating (p. 271).

Kendall also has some interesting findings around how whiteness comes into play in the performance of identities online. She points out that “[g]iven online demographics, participants tend to assume that others they encounter online are white. ... Whiteness thus becomes the ‘default’ identity,” (p. 268). ‘Colour blind’ discourse also contributes to this ‘whitewashing’, “[enabling] whites to assume that other online participants are also white ... the advantage to non-whites constitutes a form of ‘passing’ for white rather than a true dissolution of racial difference and hierarchy,” (p. 270).

Recently work on gender in CMC has begun to focus on the anti-woman flavour of online communications. Maria Stoleru and Elena-Alis Costescu (2014) performed a qualitative analysis of comments on online articles about legislative changes in the field of domestic violence against women. They argue that detrimental attitudes towards women are visible in these comments, and identify two types of discourse on domestic violence against women—one that blames

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<sup>4</sup> The hegemonic masculine subject dominates all others. Hegemonic masculinity is the standard against which other masculinities are judged and most often found wanting. It is a masculinity that defines white, middle- or upper-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual, and able-bodied men (Kimmel, 1994, pp. 124–25).

women, and one that insists domestic violence is a private issue. At the centre of these two discourses, they argue, is the pathologizing of femininity.

Recent work is also taking a new and more critical look at flaming—taking issue in particular with how sexually-explicit and violent practices of flaming have become normalized. Karla Mantilla (2013) dubs these new practices ‘gendertrolling’, and discusses recent examples of the practice from a range of internet communities. Mantilla argues that gendertrolling is more destructive to its targets than ‘regular flaming’ for six reasons. It involves the participation of numerous people. It involves gender-based insults and the widespread use of pejorative terms (‘cunt’, ‘whore’, ‘slut’), and comments designed to humiliate the female target (focusing on weight, physical appearance, and ‘fuckability’). Gendertrolling is also marked by the use of vicious, hateful language, and ‘vivid descriptions of vile and violent acts the troll would like to do to the woman’ or would like to have done to her. There is also the issuing of significant and credible threats—threats of rape, death, job loss, the destruction of reputation, and so on. Gendertrolling attacks are also unusual in their intensity, scope, and longevity—some women are targeted for years and across different platforms and into real life, or have their friends and supporters targeted. Finally, gendertrolling typically comes as a reaction to women speaking out about some form of sexism (p. 564-65).

Emma Jane is another scholar doing important work in the area of hateful speech towards women online. Like Mantilla, Jane (2014b) also takes issue with the discursive practices of flaming, harassment, sexualized threats of violence, trolling, cyberbullying, and so on (practices she collects under the umbrella term ‘e-bile’) that disproportionately target women online, and critiques the way the literature has traditionally approached the topic. She argues that e-bile has become normalized in CMC, and that women are modifying their behaviour and participation online in response. She defines e-bile as “any text or speech act which relies on technology for communication and/or publication, and is perceived by a sender, receiver, or outside observer as involving hostility,” (p. 533). When women are the targets of e-bile, it “commonly includes charges of unintelligence, hysteria, and ugliness; these are then combined with threats and/or fantasies of violent sex acts which are often framed as ‘correctives’ ... Female targets are dismissed as both unacceptably unattractive man haters *and* hypersexual sluts who are inviting sexual attention or sexual attacks,” (ibid.). Where men are the targets, e-bile commonly undermines “their masculinity via derogatory homophobia or the sug-

gestion that they suffer some kind of micropenile disorder,” (ibid.). E-bile is characterized by its targeting of women who are visible in the public sphere, by its anonymous or difficult-to-identify authors, by its sexually explicit rhetoric and use of homophobic and misogynist epithets, by its prescription of coercive sex acts as all-purpose correctives, and by its ad hominem invective (2014a, p. 560).

Jane argues that e-bile targeting women is a “(new) articulation of (old) sexualizing misogyny”, which has been inadequately addressed by academics “partly because of the very hostility, odiousness and ineffability that makes it so problematic, (p. 559). The scholarship that has interrogated the phenomenon, has focused on versions of three research questions—is flaming shaped by characteristics of the medium? is hostility more common online than offline, or is it more offensive online than offline? is online hostility really that bad?—that, Jane argues, “are being asked at the expense of other, more ethically-pressing lines of inquiry,” (2015, p. 80), and indicate a (likely unintentional) pro-flaming bias ranging from celebratory endorsing to optimistic reframing (p. 82).

The field of critical communications studies—while becoming increasingly aware of the need to study online misogyny—does not at this time offer a comprehensive mapping of one particular and important manifestation of misogyny in cyberspace—the manosphere. While it or its key players have made an appearance in some studies, it has not been the sole focus of any study. The question of the representational politics of the manosphere has not been answered in CMC literature, but to the extent that the wider context—cyberspace—has been examined, we may identify six key assumptions about representational politics online. First, flaming is a masculine discursive practice and a masculine performance technique. Second, the masculinity that is constructed online—at least in misogynist spheres—often involves the rejection of feminine discursive and ethical norms. Third, where the nerd culture of the cybersphere interacts with hegemonic masculinity, an ambivalence towards hegemonic masculinity results, and women—rather than gender norms—are blamed for men’s failure to live up to an unattainable standard. Fourth, heterosexuality and whiteness are key aspects of the masculinity (re)produced online in anti-woman or nerd spaces. Fifth, violence against women is reproduced in online contexts. Sixth, e-bile/gendertrolling is normalized, targets women, seeks to keep women out of public spaces (including the internet), and involves the patrolling of gender boundaries.

### 1.3.3 Feminist Analyses of Antifeminism

Feminist theorists and gender studies scholars have examined the men's rights movement since its inception, but have been slow to acknowledge the importance of the manosphere as a related yet distinct phenomenon—a search of the term in the archives of fourteen prominent feminist, gender studies, or gendered communications journals yields no results.<sup>5</sup> There is however, significant literature on the men's rights movement. In fact, most people's frame of reference for the manosphere is writing about the offline/wider men's rights movement, and the two are often confused, or the distinction between them is not made clear. This tendency is evident in some scholarly work on the men's rights movement (take for instance Flood, 2004, p. 266), which mentions the 'use of the internet' by (offline) men's and fathers' rights networks, but fails to acknowledge the way the manosphere has changed since the early 2000s to become much more than just the websites of offline groups. Another example: Bethany Coston and Michael Kimmel define the men's rights movement as “a loose but loud collection of Internet blog sites, policy-oriented organizations, and a legion of middle-class white men who feel badly done by individual women or by policies they believe have cheated them,” (2013, p. 375). Here Coston and Kimmel bundle offline men's rights groups and the manosphere together. While 'men's rights movement' can be used as a moniker for both online and offline expressions of the phenomenon, it is important to distinguish between the two so that the complexities of each—but particularly the manosphere, which has tended to be ignored—are not lost. Take as another example the 'guide to the men's rights movement' authored by Rebecca Cohen (2015) writing for *Mother Jones*, “Welcome to the Manosphere,” which includes terms specific to either the manosphere or the offline movement together in its glossary. Given this tendency to bundle together the manosphere and the offline men's rights movement, along with the lack of studies on the manosphere, it makes sense to review the literature on the offline men's rights movement, and antifeminisms generally, as a means to establish our current frame of reference for the manosphere.

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<sup>5</sup> The journals included in my search were the following: *Journal of Men's Studies*; *Men and Masculinities*; *Sex Roles*; *Sexuality and Culture*; *Signs*; *Communication and Critical Culture Studies*; *Gender and Society*; *Gender, Place and Culture*; *Journal of Sex Research*; *Violence Against Women*; *Feminist Theory*; *Politics and Gender*; *Feminist Media Studies*; *Women's Studies in Communication*.

The literature on the men's rights movement tends to either focus on the offline work, discourse, and rhetorical tactics of men's rights and fathers' right groups (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2004; Hacker, 2013; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Keskinen, 2013; Kimmel, 2013; Maddison, 1999; Mann, 2008; Williams, 2001), to examine activism by men's and fathers' rights groups in a legal context (R. Collier, 1996; Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2011; Girard, 2009; Mann, 2008), to look at 'backlash events' that are not necessarily 'men's rights' antifeminist expressions (the anthology edited by Superson and Cudd (2002) offers a compelling uncovering of antifeminism in philosophy departments), or to analyze 'canonical' men's rights texts such as Warren Farrell's *The Myth of Male Power* (1993), or Andrew Kimbrell's *The Masculine Mystique* (1995) and other early writing and expressions of the men's rights movement (Clatterbaugh, 2000; Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Faludi, 2006; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1994; Williams, 2001). Where studies *do* look at the manosphere, they tend to do so to supplement research on offline men's rights groups, and engage only superficially with the venues of the manosphere—examining, for instance, posts about the venue's 'mission', without looking at the 'day-to-day' communications of the sites (Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Williams, 2001).

In the area of feminist studies of antifeminism, there is a prominent strain of analysis that views the men's rights movement as embodying a variety of hegemonic tendencies, denigrating women, and valorizing traditional masculine constructs. Journalist Susan Faludi in many ways set the foundation for studies of antifeminisms such as the men's rights movement. 'Backlash,' a word with many meanings (including 'violent backward movement'), rose to prominence as a term for regressive social movements in the early 1990s, when Faludi (2006) published the first edition of her seminal work, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. *Backlash* chronicles the antifeminist reaction to advancements made by feminists in the 1960s and '70s. Faludi characterizes antifeminism as grounded in male hostility and fear surrounding the "increased possibility" that women might win full equality, upsetting the privileges enjoyed by men (p. 11). An antifeminist backlash is defined as "an episode of intensified sexism caused by the perception that women are gaining power ... [that attempts] to set back women to the position they previously held—that is, to halt their accrual of power," (Superson, 2002a, p. 203). The backlash, she argues, is chiefly reliant upon two main narratives—first that women and men are now equal and there is no need for feminism (indeed, the narrative goes, men are now the victims of

‘reverse discrimination’ as feminism has ‘gone too far’), and second, that women are less happy now than they were before the women’s liberation movement, tried by all sorts of difficulties, including a ‘man shortage’ and an ‘infertility epidemic’ (p. 1). The backlash narrative says to women, “you may be free and equal now ... but you have never been more miserable,” (p. 1). Backlash discourse thus blames feminism for the unhappiness of men and women who actually benefit from the victories of the women’s movement. It also appropriates “the language of liberation as a new and powerful tool of subjugation,” (p. xiv).

Faludi analyzes popular culture as well as law and psychology discourses, and places at the center of the backlash the perception that masculinity is ‘in crisis,’ experienced by men who have lost the ‘foothold’ of masculinity, such as being the prime breadwinner. Faludi observes that masculinity seems to in fact be in a *continuous* state of crisis, “in constant need of trellising and nourishment,” (p. 76). Men attempt to resolve this crisis, argues Faludi, by calling for a return to traditional gender ideology (p. 77). Faludi does not devote much space to a discussion of the ‘men’s rights’ groups which were starting to emerge at the time, but she does discuss Robert Bly and ‘New Age masculinism,’ offering it as an example of a discourse that celebrates traditional masculinity, a masculinity that completely excludes femininity and women (pp. 318-20). While Faludi successfully theorizes about backlash and antifeminist discourses, she does not offer much in the way of a conceptual analysis of misogynist backlash discourses. Where Faludi does offer some analysis of men’s movement discourses (such as that of Robert Bly), it is difficult for us to know if it is a true description of manosphere discourse, particularly as over twenty years have passed since the publication of *Backlash*, and since the manosphere (as an online discourse) exists in a different context than the mythopoeic men’s movement (this contextual difference is discussed in more detail below). Faludi theorizes that antifeminist backlash is a response to a perceived crisis in masculinity, and that it harks back to traditional forms of masculinity in a restorative effort. The backlash thesis that she puts forth is a strong explanatory theory about the motivations that inspire antifeminism. It also forwards important claims about gendered representations which are relevant to this project.

Melissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri (2012) respond to the backlash thesis (which they describe as a ‘scapegoat thesis’ since the backlash wrongly targets women and feminists (p. 24)). They argue that the ‘scapegoat thesis’ is insufficient, because it cannot satisfacto-

rily explain the core rationale of the men's rights movement: "[m]asculinists not only scapegoat women and feminists for the problems men face ... they also mobilize to defend male privileges (such as those related to the gender-based division of labour) and to oppose the real advances achieved by women ... [It] is grounded in political, economic, and social power relations between men as a class and women as a class," (p. 25). In this sense, the men's rights movement goes beyond resistance to change and actively works to maintain—or win back—male power and privileges (Superson, 2002b, p. 96).

Michael Kimmel, a scholar at the forefront of work on masculinities and 'angry man' discourses (including the men's rights movement), has made significant contributions to the field. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (2013) provides a compelling explanation of misogynist antifeminism. Kimmel examines men's groups (such as fathers' rights and men's rights groups), the actions of men who identify with the 'angry man' mentality, and the targeting of women by men who oppose feminism. He argues that at the core of these new expressions of misogyny is a sense of entitlement—or rather, *aggrieved* entitlement. Aggrieved entitlement is the feeling that one's 'birthright' has been robbed. It is at the root of the actions of men who commit violent acts (particularly those targeting women), or who feel discriminated against when their expectations (in regard to their work, sex, or marital lives) are not met. Aggrieved entitlement encourages a mobilization towards the past, as well as "misdirected anger towards those just below you on the ladder, who deserve what they have less than you," (p. 24).

In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel investigates men's rights and fathers' rights groups that believe men are the victims of reverse discrimination (p. 102), and that stand against the 'wimpification of American manhood' by protecting traditional masculinity (102). These men, argues Kimmel, champion a return to the traditional nuclear family, with traditional gender roles and gender inequalities (p. 151). Kimmel here links aggrieved entitlement to traditional forms of masculinity, which promise "unparalleled acquisition and impoverished emotional intelligence" (p. 9). As mentioned above, Faludi points out that when the foundational attributes of masculinity (such as 'being a man means providing financially for my family') are disrupted, backlash may ignite. In a similar vein, Kimmel argues that when masculinity is defined as being in constant and total control, then losing control can result in a sense of damaged or challenged manhood that is experienced as humiliating and emasculating (p. 87). These feelings need to be resolved through a restoration of masculinity that Kimmel

argues is achieved through the use of violence. From a young age, he posits, boys learn that violence is restorative of masculinity (p. 92), and that it is justified: “an acceptable means of conflict resolution—acceptable and admired,” (p. 75). Other scholars have similarly linked a perceived crisis of masculinity to the use of violence (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Lisak, 1991; Nagel, 1998; Stein, 2005). The combination of aggrieved entitlement, traditional masculinity, and the belief that violence is restorative of masculinity, posits Kimmel, justifies violent acts such as those perpetrated by rampage killers.

As with political science and communications literature, gender studies has tended to more or less ignore or sideline the manosphere—it has never been studied as a related but distinct expression of the men’s rights movement. That being said, feminist analyses of antifeminism, including the men’s rights movement, offer strong explanatory theories that carry with them a set of assumptions about discursive representations of masculinity and femininity—and idealizations contained therein—in the men’s rights movement. It is these core claims about representational politics in the men’s rights movement that are relevant to this project. First, in men’s rights discourse, feminism is represented as having ‘gone too far,’ as being unnecessary (even harmful), because women are equal to men (some would go so far as to say women now dominate men). Feminism is also represented as being responsible for the unhappiness of men and women, both of whom are unhappier now than they were before feminism began to make significant gains. Second, men’s rights discourse appropriates the language of liberation and frames men’s discontent as a ‘human rights’ issue. Third, the discourse mobilizes towards the past; it embraces traditional gender ideology, seeks to protect the traditional nuclear family with traditional gender roles and inequalities, and celebrates a masculinity that completely excludes femininity and women. Fourth, violence is represented as restorative of masculinity.

#### **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WORDS MATTER**

*The word is mightier than the sword.* This pervasive adage, which dates back to the 7th century BC, strikes a cultural nerve—the understanding that words matter. Words have power. Words have the power to define and redefine perspectives on reality, the realm of possibilities, and who we are. They “have the power to revolutionize what we think about politics,” (Luntz, 2007, p. xxi). They are conformist and revolutionary. In studying words, in studying discourse, we study how power operates.



This project examines how discourse operates in the manosphere. This is not to say that it investigates the internal motivations of manosphere participants—what drives a man or a woman to the manosphere, what experiences, what fears, beliefs, wants, colour the mind of a participant. These are valuable questions, but they are distinct from those forwarded by my thesis. *Discourse functions* to persuade, to recruit, to reframe. Discourse is productive. In examining how discourse functions, we can understand how norms are produced and reproduced through language in the daily lives of individuals. No one lives outside of discourse—rather we exist within it, and our reality is defined by it—by “its power to define what it does and does not make sense to say, the power to define knowledge,” (Ferber, 1996, p. 7).

#### **1.4.1 Discourse, Language, Power and the Mind**

The work of a number of scholars writing on discourse is informative to my project. Michel Foucault has made perhaps the greatest contribution to the study of discourse. Foucault (2002) intimately connects power and language in defining discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak,” (p. 54). This ‘forming’ of the object happens in the production of truth by power, and power, posits Foucault, cannot be exercised without the production of truth (1980, p. 93). Power, in other words, is closely involved in the production of knowledge, and this knowledge reproduces power relations. For Foucault, “the goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated: in knowing we control and in controlling we know,” (Gutting, 2014). Thus in studying discourse we study power. If we were to ignore discourse—write it off, so to speak—it would be impossible to see how norms are created, how truth is produced, and how discourses “subject our bodies, govern our gestures, [and] dictate our behaviours,” (Foucault, 1980, p. 97).

Words do not matter exclusively to great philosophers such as Foucault. In the last twenty years, cognitive scientists including George Lakoff and Drew Westen have begun to study how language works in the brain. Lakoff (2009) finds that language informs ‘reality creation’—a fact that is absent from the public radar (p. 41). He studies how narratives can actually hide or alter reality by defining “our possibilities, challenges, and actual lives,” (pp. 35-7). Strategies (such as repetition) can affect reality and our minds (p. 40). Words are used to activate or change a person’s worldview (p. 74). The use of metaphor in language makes two different parts of the brain activate together. Eventually, these two parts form a single circuit, and we equate

the two parts as one (Lakoff demonstrates for instance that in using a wealth metaphor for well-being (evident in statements like ‘I’m in your debt’ as a thank you for a favour), over time, well-being is equated with wealth) (pp. 83-98). Metaphors play a large part in how issues are ‘framed’, and framings affect how individuals feel about the issue at hand. In a similar vein, Westen (2007) studies what he calls ‘networks of associations’—emotional associations in the brain that are fostered through framing. He uses the example of framing gay rights as ‘special rights’, the word ‘special’ activating a sense of unfairness in the mind (p. 14). These networks and narratives, maintains Westen, function to persuade. In reading Lakoff and Westen, it is clear that language changes minds. It alters reality. In so doing it is immensely powerful. How might language be changing minds when it comes to gender? How might it be changing the perception of reality in the manosphere? These are important questions.

#### **1.4.2 Computer-mediated Communication: A different context**

It was mentioned above that the manosphere exists in a different context than offline expressions of the men’s rights movement. Words matter—and they matter in a different way online. This is because cyberdiscourse is governed by a different set of ethical and discursive norms. This difference in context is discussed here. First I briefly review how scholars across a number of disciplines studying CMC have found that it is gendered, and that characteristics of CMC impact discursive practices online. Second, I highlight research on the online communications of ideological groups. Reviewing the literature on CMC, particularly vis-à-vis gender and ideological groups, provides ample evidence that the manosphere ought to be examined as related to, but different from, offline men’s rights discourses.

In the literature review above, I discussed how in the 1990s, communications scholars began to examine how CMC is gendered. Susan Herring was one of the first to argue that CMC (and the internet as a whole) is *not* inherently gender-neutral (as was previously assumed). Scholars following in her footsteps have similarly found that the internet is structurally biased against women and that the ‘netiquette’ of online communications is based on masculine discursive and ethical norms. This structural characteristic of the Internet means that online communications are governed differently and exist in a

different context than do offline communications.<sup>6</sup> This contextual difference is ignored by studies of the men's rights movement that bundle together offline and online expressions of the movement.

The characteristics of the medium also distinguish CMC from offline communication. Certain characteristics of the medium mean that online interactions and discourse are taken differently than they would be in real life. Some behaviours are seen as more harassing when happening online versus offline because a) online interactions often lack context (such as body language and facial expression) and b) online written communication implies a sort of sober second thought—when something is posted online, it has been reflected upon, written out, and then the decision has been taken to post it (where it will remain indefinitely)—making harassing comments more sinister online than if they were blurted out mistakenly or impulsively in real life (Biber et al., 2002), where the speaker is known and their tone and body language is evident. The anonymity of online communications also has a disinhibiting effect—traditional rules of behaviour therefore seem not always to apply, and the identity—the gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability—of an individual may be unknown (Biber et al., 2002).

It seems clear that communications that happen online are governed by gendered discursive, ethical, and performative norms, that are different from those norms our language is governed by in real life. Cyberdiscourse is regulated differently than offline discourse, and has different characteristics. Communications scholars recognize that “CMC is considered a separate, isolated social world distinct from interaction in the real (read: offline) world. This suggests that the rules of offline communication are not necessarily applicable to CMC research,” (Herrmann, 2007, p. 550). It is thus problematic to study the two as one in the same, operating within the same context, governed by the same rules.

There is a growing body of literature on the communications of ideological groups online specifically, much of it focusing on hate speech (overwhelmingly white supremacy). Some of this literature examines how characteristics of CMC (such as anonymity) affect user behavior, can weaken moral self-sanctions, fostering a culture of vio-

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that offline/face-to-face communications are not also governed by structures that favour masculine discursive norms and disfavour/discount communications that exhibit feminine discursive norms—but this process takes different forms in online versus offline communications (flaming, for instance, or e-bile, which are pervasive and normalized online, typically are not accepted in real life).

lence (Angie, 2011), and may benefit ideological groups (Allen et al., 2009). Others have focused on identity formation in online discourses. Lacy McNamee, Brittany Peterson and Jorge Peña (2010) study how hate groups use the internet to promote their message and recruit new followers, and find that their constructions of the self are self-valorizing. Examining the white supremacist site *Stormfront*, Jessie Daniels (2008) argues that through both cloaked and uncloaked pages,<sup>7</sup> the group amplifies its propaganda and validates white entitlement. Another study that looks at *Stormfront* focuses on the construction of the Other: Priscilla Meddaugh and Jack Kay (2009) find that the Other is constructed as tyrannical, manipulative, genocidal, inferior, and false martyr.

Don Radlauer (2007) examines the differences between ideological groups in real life versus online. He argues that the internet differs from real life in that it is *both* a social venue *and* an information source, which creates a sort of ideological echochamber: “a virtual community that influences its members to obtain their news and other ‘facts’ preferentially from certain websites can serve as a self-contained, isolated milieu for both socialization and information-gathering,” (p. 71). Moreover, political virtual communities are based on ideas and ideologies (contrasting with offline communities that might be founded upon geography or family relations). Successful communities, argues Radlauer, act to strengthen and perpetuate themselves (p. 74). In the case of virtual communities, this can lead to extremism: “the best ‘success strategy’ consists of deepening members’ commitment and extremism, since extremism encourages intra-group solidarity and renders group members increasingly imperious to contrary sources of information,” (p. 74). Online communities are thus more prone to extremism than communities that form in real life.

The literature on CMC makes it clear that the manosphere ought to be understood as distinct from offline men’s rights discourses. Online, what is said and how it is said, is shaped by gendered discursive and ethical norms, by characteristics of the medium, and by the gendered structural bias of the internet. Online communications exist within a different culture than offline communications, and this context should be recognized in the literature on the manosphere. In fo-

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<sup>7</sup> Cloaked pages are white supremacist pages that appropriate the language and imagery of civil rights (right down to their URLs), to the extent that upon first visiting a cloaked page, one might believe oneself to be on a page celebrating civil rights rather than white supremacy. Daniels stresses that if young persons lack digital literacy, they might consume cloaked pages uncritically. Uncloaked pages are overtly racist and do not attempt to conceal their message.

cusing solely on the manosphere, this project takes the context of CMC into account.

### 1.4.3 Gender and Discourse

Language also plays an important role when it comes to gender identity. Judith Butler's work on gender in the 1990s and early 2000s is the foundation of our contemporary understanding of gender as performative. Butler (1999) states, "gender proves to be performative ... gender is always a doing ... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results," (p. 33). Gender is not a fixed object that is perennial and can be owned or held, and that is performed—rather, the performance *is* gender. Here Sara Salih's (2007) reading of Butler is helpful. Salih posits that gender identity is performative in that "gender identities are constructed ... by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language ... it is not that an identity 'does' discourse or language, but the other way around—language and discourse 'do' gender," (p. 56). Studying discourse therefore allows us to uncover how gender is being done, how it is being constructed.

The gendered categories masculine and feminine are fluid: "their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose," (Butler, 2004, p. 10). These categories come to be produced and normalized through gender (p. 42), which is typically understood in dichotomous terms. Signification and regulation—making regular, or normalizing—happen through repetition (Butler, 1999, p. 185). Butler argues that this normalization-through-repetition process leaves room for agency; the repetitive pattern can be varied or disrupted.

Mimi Schippers expands upon this notion of gender as performative:

[m]asculinities and femininities can become 'gender projects' in the lives of individuals, but they do not refer to features of or specific kinds of people. Instead of possessing or having masculinity, individuals move through and produce masculinity by engaging in masculine practices [. ... M]asculinity is an identifiable set of practices that occur across space and over time (2007, p. 86).

These 'identifiable sets of practices' have to do with how gender is enacted through signifiers: "we are swamped with a plethora of signi-

fiers of masculinity: bodies, dress, patterns of consumption, sexual orientation and vigor, speech and discourses, work, fatherhood, relations with women, and many more besides,” (Nye, 2005, p. 1944). Gender is fluid and it is (re)produced on our bodies and through language, and “through the course of our daily interactions as well as within the larger institutions of society,” (Kimmel & Bridges, 2011). This project and its core research question are grounded in this understanding of gender: that gender is enacted through signifiers and that it is constantly being produced, reproduced, and contested on the level of the individual and above. Asking how masculinity is constructed in the manosphere is to ask what meanings of ‘masculine’ are preferred in the discourse. These questions are foundational to understanding the conduct, problems, and identities of boys and men.

At the top of this chapter I introduced the concept of multiple masculinities. This notion was first conceptualized by R.W. Connell. Connell argues that there is no singular Masculinity—rather there are many masculinities that are enacted by different people in different times and spaces. Masculinities are multiple and intersectional, and gender identities and gender relations are fluid and constantly changing (Connell, Hearn, & Kimmel, 2005). Connell and two other scholars at the fore of masculinities studies, Jeff Hearn and Michael Kimmel (2005), argue that it is this fluidity that allows for political transformations to occur (p. 7). It is now recognized in the field that masculinities vary in four ways: they vary historically (over time), cross-culturally (according to culture), intra-physically (over the course of one’s life), and contextually (according to different people in different spaces) (Kimmel & Bridges, 2011). Connell asserts that “to recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, domination and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate and exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity,” (2005b, p. 37). Masculinity is a relational construct. It is constructed in relation to—and at the intersection of—multiple categories. It is these intersections to which I now turn.

#### **1.4.4 Intersectional Analysis**

Theorists of intersectionality stress that it is not enough just to pay attention to gender (focusing on masculinity versus femininity, without examining the intersections within one or the other). Being manly is not just about *not being* womanly; it is also about race, sexu-

ality, class, and ability: “[w]e come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of ‘others’—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women,” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 120). Gender is produced at the intersections of multiple constructed categories and multiple systems of power: “[masculinity] as a site of privilege is not absolute but rather cross-cut by a range of other axes of relative advantage or subordination; these do not erase or render irrelevant [gender] privilege, but rather inflect or modify it,” (Frankenberg, 2001, p. 76)<sup>8</sup>. My thesis accordingly examines these intersectional elements. I begin here by discussing the manner in which masculinity is constructed in relation to femininity, before turning to four additional categories and sites of privilege that also intersect with masculinity: white privilege, compulsory heterosexuality, class privilege, and (dis)ability.

Most obviously, masculinity is constructed in relation/opposition to femininity. Many critical masculinities scholars argue that the animating disposition of masculinity is fear: masculine fear of the feminine. Stephen Ducat (2004) argues that this fear has been at the foundation of masculinity since the beginning of history until the present day (p. 1) This fear, argues Ducat, a psychologist adopting a psychoanalytic approach, stems from an *internal* identification with the feminine, which results in the individual sensing, worrying, that he is not a ‘real’ man. An ‘unconscious defence’ thus manifests: the fantasy of being under constant siege by *external* feminizing forces. According to Ducat, this fantasy is “employed to keep out of mind something even more disturbing—an *identification* with women,” (p. 1). Identification with women, with femininity, is so problematic for masculinity, because of the cultural and discursive context in which it occurs. Ducat argues that this fear of feminization stems from “the psychological cost of developing a male identity in a culture that disparages the feminine and insists that the boundaries between masculine and feminine remain unambiguous and impermeable,” (p. 5). Emphasis of this boundary is vital to the maintenance of traditional masculine constructs.

Preserving the boundary between femininity and masculinity takes various forms, one of which is the disparaging of femininity, the effeminate, and women. An anti-woman or anti-feminine tone may therefore be said to be maintaining the boundary between the genders,

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<sup>8</sup> The unmodified quote references whiteness/race. I edited it to speak to masculinity/gender, as I feel it articulates well the way positions of relative privilege or subordination are modulated by their intersection with other categories.

and in so doing conforming to traditional representations of masculinity: “[o]ne of the centerpieces of that exaggerated masculinity is putting women down, both by excluding them from the public sphere and by the quotidian put-downs in speech and behaviors that organize the daily life of the American man,” (Kimmel, 1994, pp. 133–34). Women may be excluded and put down, or may be disparaged in subtler ways. One such technique involves reiterating the notion that women are ‘of nature’ (whereas men are ‘of culture’): “women are viewed as guided by instinct, prisoners of biology,” (Ferber, 1996, p. 107). Women are also disparaged by a construction of male sexuality that is based on the sexual objectification and conquest of women and girls (a construction that also normalizes heterosexuality) (p. 118). Masculinity is represented as being always already under threat, in need of constant shoring-up. This anxiety gives root to a rejection of the effeminate and the feminine. Kimmel argues that “the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated ... the dominant culture exacts a tremendous price from those deemed less ... manly: women, gay men, nonnative-born men, men of color,” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 135). Kimmel here links homophobia and sexism. Both, he argues, stem from a rejection of effeminacy or femininity (p. 133), an animating condition at the core of hegemonic masculinity.

Traditional masculine constructs are also marked—or, more accurately, *unmarked*—by whiteness. The hegemonic masculine subject is white. While femininity is marginalized, whiteness is privileged in hegemonic representations of masculinity. The category ‘white’ began to be deconstructed, and made visible, primarily in the second half of the twentieth century. Like masculinity or femininity, there is no ‘true essence’ of whiteness—there are only constructions of whiteness as a category (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 293). Traditionally, whiteness is normalized. It is invisible, everything, default—and this invisibility means that whiteness is a site of power (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 292). Whiteness is mundane, it is everyday, it is unmarked. In a way, it is traditionally represented as not-race, whereas non-white persons are represented as racialized: “[i]n the realm of categories, black is always marked as a colour (as the term ‘coloured’ egregiously acknowledges), and is always particularizing; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality, because it is everything—white is no colour because it is all colours,” (Dyer, 1988, p. 45). In online communications, the universality of whiteness is still more pronounced/invisible. Whiteness is taken to be default even more so than in real life, since “[g]iven online demographics, participants tend to assume that others



they encounter online are white. Whiteness thus becomes the ‘default’ identity,” (Kendall, 2000, p. 268).

Sexual orientation—heterosexuality—is another vitally important axis of traditional constructs of masculinity. As was introduced briefly above, compulsory heterosexuality stems from masculinity’s opposition to femininity and the effeminate. Sexualized and gendered epithets link male homosexuality to femininity: “molly and nancy-boy in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, buttercup, pansy, and she-man of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America, and the present-day sissy, fairy, queen, and faggot,” (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, p. 104). Gay men, by this logic—which links sexism, homophobia, and compulsory heterosexuality—are thought not to be ‘real men’ (p. 105). Thus hegemonic masculinity stresses the importance of (hetero)sexual prowess. Heterosexuality is tied intimately to the nuclear family: “[s]ince heterosexuality is integral to the way a society is organized, it becomes a naturalized, ‘learned’ behaviour,” (ibid.). It also preserves the male-female gender binary, and maintains the boundary between masculinity and femininity by naturalizing the concept of two distinct, separate, and exclusive categories (Ferber, 1996, p. 21). Compulsory heterosexuality is normalized discursively through the disparaging of homosexuality, and in representations of homosexuality as unnatural and abnormal. It is also normalized in representations of gender (that, for instance, represent women as essentially penetrable and men as innately penetrating).

Gender intersects with socio-economic status in important ways, but is overlooked in the literature on men and masculinities more often than race, sexuality, or ablebodiedness. Hegemonic masculinity defines a middle-class manhood, a manhood that emphasizes self-sufficiency, independence, and being a breadwinner for the family. Tying masculinity to socio-economic status in this way means that when that status is lost, one’s manhood is undermined—and changes to the economy since the 1990s (including women and other ‘marked’ groups entering into the workforce in larger numbers) have led to the perception that masculinity is threatened (Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Kimmel, 2013; Weis, 2006).

Hegemonic masculinity favours white-collar jobs, while the working class (defined by jobs that require less formal education, (sometimes) less skill, and often low pay) are imagined as ‘dumb brutes’. Like the ‘dumb blonde’ stereotype, working class men are celebrated for their physical virtues (their physical strength, stamina, and rough hands) but imagined to be weak intellectually (Coston & Kimmel, 2013, p. 107).

Hegemonic constructions of masculinity represent men as able-bodied, autonomous, in control, independent, rational, stoic and invulnerable (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2013). Men who are read as being ‘disabled’ do not meet these “unquestioned and idealized standards of appearance, behavior, and emotion for men,” (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, p. 102). These standards of hegemonic masculinity are internalized even though (being ideals) they are unreachable, even for able-bodied men (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, p. 102; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 149). Robert McRuer (2013), influential crip theorist, argues that in this sense, virtually everyone is disabled—for one, because able-bodied ideals are unattainable, and for two, because able-bodied status is always temporary (p. 374). Though they are unattainable, however, these norms of hegemonic masculinity are formidable. The (dis)ability system, which intersects with constructions of masculinity, “functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent—all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such status, who can reside within these subject positions,” (Garland-Thomson, 2013, p. 336).

The hegemonic masculine subject is white, straight, white-collar, able-bodied, and preoccupied with the boundary between masculine and feminine. The compounding of these multiple sites of privilege means that hegemonic masculine constructs are marked by control and dominance: “[t]he hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, and in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women,” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 125). As discussed above, the existing literature on the men’s rights movement suggests that the masculinity championed in the manosphere would reproduce hegemonic constructs of masculinity. My project examines to what extent this is the case.

## **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Hypotheses**

In light of the above discussions about the existing literature and theory on the topic, I have identified a number of key hypotheses about the manosphere, that are made either explicitly, or are the most probably extensions of logic one would apply to the manosphere, giv-

en what has been said about the men's rights movement and masculinities. These sixteen hypotheses are returned to throughout the analysis.

### ***1.5.1.1 Hypotheses from the literature***

There are ten key hypotheses about gendered representations in the manosphere that are evident in the existing scholarly literature on the manosphere:

1. The discourse maintains a traditional (oppositional) relationship to femininity and women—the masculine construct excludes femininity and feminine traits;
2. It mobilizes towards the past, embracing traditional gender roles and inequalities;
3. The discourse emphasizes that masculinity is marked by control, privilege and entitlement—and that masculinity is therefore undermined by advancements made by women towards gender equality;
4. Feminism is represented as being unnecessary, going too far, or being responsible for the unhappiness of men and women;
5. The discourse appropriates the language of liberation and feminist/progressive tropes;
6. It maintains a traditional understanding of masculinity vis-à-vis violence—that is to say that violence is represented as restorative of masculinity;
7. Violence against women is reproduced in online contexts;
8. In online discourse, gender is represented through discursive styles such as flaming, and performances of masculinity online involve the rejection of feminine discursive and ethical norms;
9. Gendertrolling/e-bile plays a key role in patrolling gender boundaries online and in an effort to keep women out of public spaces;
10. In nerd cultures, an ambivalence towards hegemonic masculinity (because of its emphasis on high standards of heterosexuality) is articulated—but heterosexuality and whiteness remain key aspects of the masculinity in these spaces.

### ***1.5.1.2 Hypotheses from theoretical analyses***

The theoretical analyses of gender surveyed above also offer a number of key hypotheses about masculinities one might reasonably expect to find in manosphere discourse:

11. The boundary between male and female, masculine and feminine, is vital to the maintenance of masculinity. Boundary maintenance can involve:
  - a. the disparaging of femininity, the effeminate, or women (including put-downs, negative representations, or homophobia);
  - b. the naturalization of heterosexuality, including the use of sexualized and gendered epithets, the representation of gay men as not ‘real men’, and emphasis on the importance of heterosexual prowess;
12. Masculinity is represented as being under constant siege by feminizing forces and in need of shoring-up;
13. Whiteness is assumed or taken to be ‘default’;
14. A middle-class manhood is embraced—one that emphasizes self-sufficiency, independence, and bread-winner status;
15. Working-class/blue collar masculinity is disparaged—men in this category are represented as ‘dumb brutes’ (celebrated for their physical virtues but imagined to be weak intellectually);
16. Ideal masculinity is ablebodied—men are autonomous, in control, independent, rational, stoic, and invulnerable. Ideal men are beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, and intelligent.

## **1.5.2 Operationalization**

My study explored its research question primarily by testing the above hypotheses using mixed-methods discourse analysis of a sample of blog posts from the manosphere. In this section, I discuss the specific interpretive framework and data set that make up the methodology of my study.

### ***1.5.2.1 Interpretive framework***

This project aims to both map the manosphere and offer an understanding of how gender is represented in the discourse. I employed a mixed methods critical discourse analysis approach to do so. My findings stem primarily from close qualitative reading, typical of critical discourse analysis, which allowed me to uncover persuasive mechanisms at work in the discourse—such as the use of metaphor—that quantitative discourse analysis methods (data mining, for instance) are less geared for. Using close reading alone, however, can mean that it is difficult to get a sense of how broadly or frequently mechanisms are invoked. Combining close qualitative reading with

quantitative analysis provided me additional insights. I was able to gain a better understanding for instance, of how frequently certain representations are produced, as well as how practices differ within the manosphere according to subculture. I therefore used coding to keep track of trends and practices, to facilitate comparison between the included subcultures included, and to gain a better understanding of the frequency of said trends and practices.

The 192 cases included in the data set were manually coded through a detailed qualitative reading. This coding strategy is captured by my coding dictionary (see Appendix A: Coding Dictionary), which I assembled by drawing on the literature, and after the pilot coding of a small number of cases. Once the coding of each case was complete, the codes were analyzed quantitatively. I used the application QDA Miner to organize and analyze the data.

The coding dictionary was designed to capture the hypotheses discussed above, while also allowing for contradictory and unexpected findings. The codes are organized under eight main sections. Section one asks questions pertaining to how the discourse functions to persuade, and what rhetorical strategies are used. It asks, for instance, what metaphors are employed. These questions gave me insight into discursive traits of the manosphere that I address in the chapter on manosphere rhetoric (chapter 6).

Section two contains questions that pertain to the content of the discourse. With these questions I gained an understanding of which issues are discussed most commonly, what the attitude is towards violence, if there is interaction between manosphere venues, as well how often race, class, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability are discussed.

The third section explores representations of gender in the discourse. The codes in this section helped me to understand for instance, whether or not manosphere participants believe men are no longer ‘real men’, and women no longer ‘real women’, as well as which traits are associated either positively or negatively with masculinity and femininity.

Section four examines the manosphere’s antifeminism. It asks questions around how often feminism is mentioned, how the participants position themselves and their work in relation to feminism, and how feminists are represented in the discourse.

The sixth section looks at gendered discursive norms at play. Is the discourse itself masculine or feminine—does it feature frequent (masculine) uses of sarcasm, or are (feminine) expressions of self-doubt more common?

Section seven allowed me to understand whether or not hegemonic masculinity is explicitly considered problematic in the discourse.

The eighth section includes codes having to do with the presence and traits of gendertrolling/e-bile in the discourse.

A final ninth section features a single open code, which facilitated the collection of any bothersome moments—mosquitos in the ear—that did not fit into another code, but that I sensed were interesting, part of a larger theme, or important for some other reason.

### ***1.5.2.2 Data set***

My project analyzed blog posts from four manosphere venues. The venues and the posts were selected with the aim of generating a sample that is representative of the core of the manosphere.

The manosphere that is the subject of this study is largely the Anglo-American manosphere, and particularly the North American variant. In reality, cyberdiscourses are functionally state boundaryless. In this sense, it is difficult to nail the discourse down to a specific locale or national context. The venues included in the data set are all based in the United States (registered using an American address), but they do not label themselves ‘American’, the way, for instance that an offline men’s rights group is called ‘Canadian Association for Equality’. The manosphere typically addresses problems with Western society/culture at large, not just within a certain state. Of course at times specific cases are addressed, but more often than not, the issues discussed in the manosphere are framed as problems with the ‘the West’, ‘North America’, or some other supranational or non-state actor or force.

The first question I had to answer in constructing the data set was which subcultures I would look at. As I discuss in chapter 2, there are four primary and distinct subcultures in the manosphere, that—while they are known to be quite critical of each other at times (the pickup artist community, for instance, is sometimes critical of men’s rights activists, who (it is argued) feminize themselves by focusing on their victimhood)—are united by their perception that society has been feminized and that the culture is one of misandry (hatred of men). Since my goal was to build a sample that is representative of the core of the manosphere, I decided to analyze two of these subcultures—the men’s rights and pickup artist communities—for three reasons. One, these two subgroups are the most mainstream, most publicly known, manosphere communities. Two, they are the largest and most influen-

tial subcultures. Three (though some participants would no doubt disagree with this assessment), the manosphere can be roughly divided into two ideological camps; men’s rights activists and men going their own way (MGTOW) on one side, pickup artists and involuntary celibates (incels) on the other. I chose to focus on the two largest communities on each side of this divide.

The second question I had to answer was which sites to choose given my focus on these two subcultures in particular. I chose the four sites that are most frequently visited or most frequently recognized by manosphere participants and observers as the most influential venues. Two of the four sites are men’s rights activist and two are pickup artist sites. I selected these blogs because they are very much the public face of the community—those with the most popular, most widely known, faces at the helm, those most frequently written about by observers of the manosphere and journalists, and those most commonly mentioned in the news.<sup>10</sup> My belief is that any person (observer or participant) familiar with the manosphere would agree that these four sites are both highly significant presences in themselves, and broadly representative of the manosphere more generally. Below I discuss the specific venues, why they were chosen, and what selection criteria was used to identify the specific individual texts (‘cases’) that were analyzed from each site.

### *The Venues*

*Return of Kings* ([www.returnofkings.com](http://www.returnofkings.com))

The ‘About’ page of *Return of Kings* (ROK) states that it is “a blog for heterosexual, masculine men. It’s meant for a small but vocal collection of men in America who believe men should be masculine and women should be feminine. [It] aims to usher the return of the masculine man in a world where masculinity is being increasingly punished and shamed,” (ROK, n.d.).

ROK is published by Roosh V and edited by Winston Smith. It is aligned most closely with the pickup artist (PUA) subculture. *Alexa* ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)), a web-based service that provide analytical insights into web traffic, ranks ROK as the 16,250<sup>th</sup> most popular web-site worldwide at the time of writing, and 10,119<sup>th</sup> in the United

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<sup>10</sup> While it is often acknowledged that the forum site reddit is also a major host of manosphere discourse, threads and posts on manosphere subreddits (such as *r/TheRedPill* or *r/MensRights*) are not often the public face of the manosphere in the same way that major blogs such as those included in my data set, are. The manosphere subreddits are not written about by journalists, for instance, with the same frequency that the blogs are.

States. The estimated number of unique visitors *in the United States alone* for the thirty days ending August 5, 2015, is 357,037. The estimated page views over this same period number over two million. *Alexa* estimates that over 1800 sites currently link to ROK. For comparison, the University of Ottawa website is ranked 25,453<sup>rd</sup> globally, with an estimated 172,060 unique visitors in Canada over the same period.

*RooshV* ([www.rooshv.com](http://www.rooshv.com))

*RooshV* is the popular personal blog by Roosh V. As such, it espouses many of the same beliefs as ROK—beliefs that make up Roosh V’s ‘neomascularity’, which “combines traditional beliefs, masculinity, and animal biology into one ideological system,” (RV, 2015f). *Alexa* ranks *RooshV* 72,070<sup>th</sup> globally and 33,485<sup>th</sup> in the United States. Over the same period mentioned above, it is estimated that *RooshV* had 102,943 unique visitors and over 350,000 pageviews—this over a period during which the blog was not active (its author took the summer off to complete his ‘World Tour’—the same tour that was petitioned in Canada).

*A Voice for Men* ([www.avoiceformen.com](http://www.avoiceformen.com))

*A Voice for Men* (AVFM) is easily the largest men’s rights venue in the manosphere. *Alexa* ranks it 27,651<sup>st</sup> globally and 17,165<sup>th</sup> in the United States. Over the same period mentioned previously, *Alexa* estimates that AVFM had 253,393 unique visitors and nearly 3.1 million page views. AVFM uses the moniker ‘Men’s Human Rights Movement’ to describe its project of addressing the “gynocentric parasitism that inhabits every level of men’s existence” and that has resulted from “efforts to enhance the rights of women [that] have become toxic efforts to undermine the rights of men,” (AVFM, 2015a). AVFM was founded and is edited by Paul Elam, and is owned by AVFM Operations, LLC (of which Elam is the CEO).

*JudgyBitch* ([www.judgybitch.com](http://www.judgybitch.com))

*JudgyBitch* is a men’s rights blog that is primarily written by Janet Bloomfield, who goes by the online alias JudgyBitch, and who is the Director of Social Media for AVFM. There is no traffic data available for the site, but it is frequently listed on the ‘blogrolls’ (a sort of recommended reading list) of other manosphere sites, or mentioned as a favourite site by commenters, and Bloomfield has become a public representative of the manosphere, profiled or mentioned along with Paul Elam in media about the community.



### Case Selection

My project coded and analyzed a total of 192 cases (each case is a blog post) chosen from the above venues. The cases were selected amongst those published between June 2012 and July 2015 (inclusively). The sampling was contained to these two years in order for the findings to be representative of the manosphere contemporaneously. A total of 48 cases from each blog were selected according to the following rule: two blog posts a month were selected (those on or closest to the first and the fifteenth days of each month). Where on those days there were no posts, or none that were appropriate for analysis (for instance if the posts linked to a video and did not include text sufficient for analysis), a post was selected from the following day. Each blog post makes up a single case. Comments on posts were not included in the case—this because the blog post as a communicative medium does not rely upon contributions from commenters in the same way a forum post does. This random sampling over two years ensured that my data set would not be influenced by my own selection bias and which posts I found most interesting (which could have resulted in my data set being unfairly representative of the more obviously extreme posts). This method also built a data set that was large enough that the findings could be, I believe, generalizable at least to the level of the venue.

## **1.6 CHAPTER OVERVIEW AND AUTHOR NOTE**

As the manosphere is not a phenomenon with which many people are familiar, my thesis begins by offering a primer on the manosphere, discussing its history and contemporary nature. Based primarily on secondary sources, chapter 2 traces how the manosphere became the online expression of the MRM, a social movement that itself evolved out of the early men's (liberation) movement. Chapter 2 also provides a brief overview of each the four primary subcultures of the manosphere.

While the analysis of masculinity is at the centre of this thesis, it is also important to discuss femininity (because it affects the construction of masculinity and vice versa), representations of feminism (because these representations demonstrate how the manosphere conceptualizes men, masculinity, and threats to them), as well as broader linguistic patterns (because they too can tell us how masculinity and femininity are represented in the manosphere). As such, the core analytic chapters of this thesis—chapters three through six—present the

findings of my discourse analysis of the manosphere, and cover these four questions (how femininity and women are represented, how masculinity and men are represented, how feminism is represented, and how the language itself represents these categories).

Chapter 3 analyzes representations of women and femininity in the discourse. I start by characterizing what the discourse presents as the feminine ideal, before continuing on to discuss how women (in actuality) are represented. This chapter speaks to hypotheses 2 and 11 (having to do with the maintenance of traditional gender roles, and the boundary between male and female), and outlines how the discourse is reproductive of traditional gender ideology in that it champions idealized images of femininity that are traditional, and disparages femininity and women.

In chapter 4, I discuss representations of masculinity in the discourse. I start the chapter in the same manner as above—by examining idealized images of masculinity in the discourse. I argue that the discourse embraces a traditional model of masculinity which I call ‘classical masculinity’. In the remainder of the chapter I discuss how the discourse understands masculinity to be in crisis, under threat by feminizing forces. The pickup artist community in particular, I explain, focuses on the level of the individual, and concerns itself with the ‘pussification’ of man, while both communities focus on the level of society and argue that the feminization of *society* is also a problem. Chapter 4 touches upon a number of hypotheses (namely the first, second, third, sixth, and twelfth), all having to do with representations of masculinity and the reproduction of traditional gender norms. My findings for the most part are supportive of the conventional wisdom on masculinity in antifeminist discourses.

Chapter 5 looks at representations of feminism, feminists, and antifeminism. I outline how the discourse critiques feminism, how it characterizes feminists, and how it positions itself in relation to feminism. This chapter focuses on how feminism is represented as oppressive and sexist (as is suggested by the fourth hypothesis), as well as how the manosphere appropriates the language of liberation to frame itself as progressive and further denigrate feminism (as is suggested by the fifth hypothesis). This chapter also speaks to the hypothesis that violence against women is reproduced in online contexts—my findings support this claim.

The sixth chapter examines additional representations and speaks to a number of hypotheses (hypotheses 10, 11, and 13-16 on intersectional categories, hypotheses 8 and 9 on gendered discursive style and ethic, and hypothesis 3 on entitlement). Specifically, it discusses rep-

resentations of intersectional categories, as well as how the masculinity of the manosphere is white, straight, able-bodied, cisgender, and emphasizes middle-class virtues (such as self-sufficiency and providing for the family). Chapter 6 also explores how language itself is productive of gender ideology. I argue that the discursive style of the manosphere is masculine, and discuss how metaphors both represent feminists as violent and violating, and naturalize male entitlement to women.

The concluding chapter summarizes my findings, considers the implications for the hypotheses, discusses the generalizability and limitations of the findings and proposes avenues for future research, and explores the implications for the study of conservative politics (in the United States), for the study of gender and the practice of feminist politics, and for the study of online communities.

In the chapters that follow I quote—at times quite heavily—from the blog posts I analyzed. I paraphrase where I feel the tone and message of the example would not be lost in my doing so, but for the most part I feel that, given the nature of the discourse, it is important that I capture the language as it is, without altering or interpreting it in my own words. For this same reason I do not censor or sanitize the discourse in the examples that follow in any way. This is a deliberate strategy to represent the discourse most accurately in all its colours. On a related note, I refrain from the use of ‘sic’ after grammatical, spelling, and syntax errors in quotes from blog posts. I also do not use ‘emphasis in original’—emphasis in quotes should be taken to be original unless otherwise stated.

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## Chapter 2: A Primer on the Manosphere

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The manosphere is little-known, outside the circle of its observers and participants. My thesis in part seeks to address this deficit of knowledge—particularly in academia—of the online community. One of the core objectives of this project is to offer a mapping of the manosphere. This chapter is concerned with that objective, and addresses a simple question—what *is* the manosphere?

The goal is to prime the reader for my analysis of manosphere discourse, by establishing a basic understanding of the movement itself. I start by outlining where the manosphere came from. I then discuss what the manosphere is today via a discussion of its four key subcultures: men’s rights activists (MRAs), pickup artists (PUAs), men going their own way (MGTOW), and involuntary celibates (incels).

### 2.1 THE ORIGINS OF THE MANOSPHERE

The origins of the men’s rights movement are muddy; it is possible it dates back to the late 1800s, with

groups like the League for Men’s Rights in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century London (it advocated against the ‘encroachment of women’ and Der Bund für Männerrechte, or the Federation for Men’s Rights, which formed in Vienna in 1926 and focused on divorce and paternity rights but also ‘fighting all the monstrosities that have come from the emancipation of woman’ (Brook Lynn, 2014).

For the most part though, scholars and observers of the movement consider it—at least in its modern form—to have emerged out of the men’s liberation movement. By the early 1970s, men’s liberation activists began to apply feminist analyses of gender to critique the male gender role. They argued that gender roles are equally oppressive to men as they are to women, and highlighted how men are the victims of institutional discrimination also (since, for example, at the time only men were required to register for military service). By the 1980s, the core question of this movement was, ‘*what causes* the male malaise—why are men unhappy?’ (Kimmel, 2013, pp. 103–05). Michael Kimmel argues that there emerged three answers to this question. One answer—the mythopoetic men’s movement—focused on ‘the search for an authentic masculine identity’. Based largely on the work of Robert Bly, Michael Meade, and Sam Keen, its participants “were

largely gender separatists, neither feminist nor antifeminist in their politics; rather, they said, they were ‘masculinists’—of men, by men, and for men (p. 105-06). Another response was profeminist. It considers feminism to be good for men too. After all, feminism undermines the attachment of masculinity to workplace success, enables men to connect with their children and their partners, and facilitates the unraveling of masculinity and violence (p. 106-07). The third response is that espoused by the men’s rights movement (MRM). It blames women and/or feminism for the predicament of men (p. 107), and while it

may have shared the initial critique of the oppressive male sex role ... that critique morphed into a celebration of all things masculine and a near infatuation with the traditional masculine role itself. Men didn’t need liberating from traditional masculinity anymore; now they needed liberating from those who would liberate them! Traditional masculinity was no longer the problem; now its restoration was championed as the solution (ibid.).

The true problem, according to MRAs is feminism—and the rights gained for women especially in its second and third waves: “[t]o the MRAs, the *real* victims in American society are men, and so they built organizations around men’s anxieties and anger at feminism, groups like the Coalition for Free Men [currently the National Coalition for Men], the National Congress for Men, Men Achieving Liberation and Equality (MALE), and Men’s Rights, Inc. (MR, Inc.),” (p. 111). Prominent groups today include the National Coalition for Men, Canadian Association for Equality, and Men’s Rights Edmonton.

Men’s rights advocacy began to gain wider political support due to its attachment to the issue of father’s rights throughout the 1980s, particularly in North America (Gordon, 2015). Father’s rights activist (FRA) organizations

campaign to help men retain the rights to *be* fathers ... following a divorce—maintaining visitation rights or sharing or gaining custody. These are laudable goals, to ensure that men can continue to be ... active and engaged fathers ... Sadly, the movement also contains activists who want nothing of the kind, but rather ... are virulently antifeminist and even those who seek to enable men who have been violent or abusive toward their ex-wives or even their children (Kimmel, 2013, p. 136).

FRAs are still active today, adjacent to and overlapping with the MRM. In some areas, for instance in regard to the so-called ‘domestic

violence industry’ (discussed in chapter 5), both groups are completely aligned.

Throughout the 1980s and ‘90s, the MRM ripened. Dr. Warren Farrell, an icon of the movement (considered by many to be its father), emerged during this time. Before Farrell turned to men’s rights, he was a prominent second-wave feminist, associated with Gloria Steinem and even serving on the board for New York’s National Organization for Women (NOW). He became disillusioned with feminism in the mid-1970s, and since then he has focused on men’s issues from an antifeminist standpoint (Roy, 2014). Farrell champions the idea that men are oppressed—the victims of reverse discrimination, the second sex. In the 1980s, Farrell ‘came out swinging’ against feminism: “[i]n 1993, Farrell published his full-throated manifesto, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*. The book tackled a number of pressing issues affecting men. It also took some bizarre turns: at one point Farrell pondered whether the American male was the new ‘nigger’. ... He took a sledgehammer to bedrock feminist ideals,” (Blake, 2015). Farrell also argued that women wield vast sexual power—and that this power overshadows any advantages that men might have: “thanks to feminism, he argued, when women felt ill-treated they could now more easily pursue sexual-harassment or date rape charges—a notion that carries strong currency among today’s men’s rights activists,” (Blake, 2015). *The Myth of Male Power* is considered by many contemporary MRAs to be their touchstone, and the influence of his ideas is obvious to any observer of the movement as it exists today (ibid.).

The MRM today is primarily concerned with five issue areas—the family court system, government programs that assist only women (particularly those that give aid to female victims of sexual assault or domestic violence), the right to opt out of raising a child (since women can opt out of pregnancy), false rape accusations, and fighting back against feminism (Brook Lynn, 2014). The movement has

ridden the wave of right-wing backlashes against ‘political correctness’ and efforts at ‘social justice,’” and is thought to embrace “essentialist and biologically determinist accounts of gender, ... complain that men are being demasculinised and feminised ... by women and feminism, venerate a mythical past, and argue that men must reclaim their masculinity and usurp women’s power (Flood, 2004, pp. 268–70).

Occasionally the activities of MRAs gain mainstream attention, as when they filed a class-action suit against Manhattan nightclubs,

claiming that offering free or reduced admission to women on ‘ladies’ nights’ constituted discrimination against men (the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case) (Kilgannon, 2011), when they sued a women’s networking group for sex discrimination (Cauterucci, 2016), or when CAFE purchased a billboard in Toronto that read, ‘HALF of domestic violence victims are men’ (Edmiston & Thompson, 2016).

Kimmel (2013) argues that three social changes have transformed the men’s rights movement into a ‘much angrier and more vociferous collection’ than it was when it was first emerging in the 1980s and 90s. First, dramatic social inequality and the redistribution of wealth upwards has undermined the identities of middle-class men, which are attached to employment, success, and breadwinner status (p. 113). Second, the association with father’s rights has given some legitimacy to the movement:

[though] the story is far more complicated than the fathers’ rights movement would have it, there is some truth to their claims that the reason so many fathers feel utterly screwed by the divorce and custody proceedings is because the laws, and their enforcement, are woefully out of date ... the father’s rights movement does have a legitimate gripe. As long as they have that tenuous hold on credibility, their other, more unhinged, claims get a fuller airing (ibid.).

Third—and most relevant when it comes to the manosphere—the development of the internet has “fueled websites and blogs that keep the conversation going and the blood boiling,” (ibid.). The emergence of this new dimension of the movement—the development of the manosphere—will be discussed below.

### **2.1.1 Men’s Rights Moves Online**

The MRM today exists both offline and online, but has proliferated in recent years with the growth of the internet. There, in the cyberspace of blogs, forums, and websites dubbed ‘the manosphere’ by those who study it, men’s rights discourse evolves and flourishes—or festers. The manosphere is a loose collection of websites, blogs, forums and YouTube channels, published and/or consumed by its participants. The internet gives the manosphere qualities that distinguish it from offline movements. It is heterogeneous and nebulous, constantly changing and without a central establishment. It is read, written, contested, added on and replied to, by thousands of contributors, each with their own understandings and intentions: “[f]or some, [it]

offers a place to air real grievances about issues such as bias in family courts or sexual abuse suffered by men. But it also has spawned a network of activists and sites that take Farrell's ideology in a disturbing direction,” (Blake, 2015).

Jaclyn Friedman (2013), writing for *The American Prospect*, offers this helpful description of the infrastructure of the manosphere:

Comment threads and message boards serve as the public square for MRAs, a kind of ... combination of locker room, group therapy, and organizing. Recently, on the Men's Rights subreddit, one MRA complained of how much he had to pay in child support, and how trapped he felt by the situation. His fellow MRAs helpfully suggested that the solution to his problem was to murder his wife, a tactic many on the subreddit were eager to echo, upvote, and get disturbingly specific about. Blogs like AVFM and *The Spearhead* [a popular site which has since closed down] serve as what passes for the 'think tanks' for MRAs, developing and promoting the MRA agenda.

The 'think tanks' and 'public square' analogy is fitting. The largest blogs are typically thought to—this impression bolstered by the publishers themselves—present a sort of reasonable, mediated version of the discourse. Blogs are written either by one author, or by a set of contributors with an editor managing content. They can be published anonymously or not (in the manosphere, most blogs—especially those written by a single author—are not published anonymously). Below blog posts, readers have a chance to respond to the post, or have a related conversation with either the author or each other.

Message boards and forums, such as reddit, 4chan, or 8chan, are more collaborative and conversational. An 'original poster' (OP) writes a post—it could be an image, a link to a webpage, a question, or a lengthy written post. Other users reply to OP, and to comments made by other users. The conversations are 'threaded' as users reply to a comment replying to a comment, replying to a comment, and so on. Posts and comments are upvoted or downvoted by users—upvoted to express agreement or enjoyment, downvoted to express disagreement or lack of enjoyment. Each submission has a score—the number of upvotes minus the number of downvotes. Submissions with a high score gain visibility to other users—while posts with a low score become less visible. On some platforms, such as reddit, members gain 'karma,' a score reflecting “how much good the user has done for the reddit community” (“Frequently Asked Questions,” n.d.-a). Users of forums submit under usernames and are anonymous. On reddit, each



subreddit<sup>11</sup> has a set of moderators—users who have control over configuring the subreddit (such as setting the language, editing the subreddit title and description, and creating and enforcing rules around, for instance, what sort of content is allowed). A popular manosphere subreddit is *r/TheRedPill*, which (at time of writing) has over 145,000 subscribers.

For the most part the manosphere has little interaction with offline men’s rights groups, and it is difficult to know what proportion (if any) of manosphere participants are involved in the men’s rights movement in real life. The most interaction we typically see between the two expressions of the movement, are when manosphere sites write about or are supportive of campaigns or events carried out by offline groups. Occasionally manosphere venues organize activities in the flesh, such as *A Voice for Men*’s ‘International Conference on Men’s Issues’ held in Detroit in June 2014, Roosh V’s ‘International Tribal Meetup Day’ (which was cancelled in the week leading up to the date<sup>12</sup>), or smaller/local pickup artist meet ups (Lyonnais, 2013), but for the most part the manosphere limits its undertakings to cyberspace—and they are quite the undertakings. Some activists have “published names of women they consider enemies and have praised online stalkers, such as the ‘Gamergate’<sup>13</sup> mobs who bombard feminist critics with rape and death threats,” (Blake, 2015). MRAs online are also known for “[p]ublicizing personal information to make someone a target of harassment (a.k.a. ‘doxing’)” (ibid.). The ‘keyboard warriors,’ that harass women and feminists who speak publicly

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<sup>11</sup> Reddit describes itself as “a large community made up of thousands of smaller communities. These are sub-communities within reddit known as ‘subreddits’, created and moderated by users like you, dedicated each to certain topics or ideas,” (“What are communities or ‘subreddits’?,” n.d.). There are subreddits for nearly every topic imaginable—*r/Ottawa* is a space for dialogue about Canada’s capital city, *r/TwoXChromosomes*, a space ‘for women’s perspectives’, and *r/worldnews* for world news—from the widest of topics to the most niche of interests.

<sup>12</sup> The meetups were cancelled, according to Roosh V, out of concern for the public safety of attendees. It is thought by some observers of the community that the meetups were publicized, and then publicly cancelled, in order to represent the PUA community as martyr—unfairly oppressed and censored by feminist protesters—therefore legitimizing it.

<sup>13</sup> The RationalWiki entry on Gamergate defines it as a “reactionary and virulently misogynistic subculture in the video gaming community. The movement has its roots in anti-feminist attacks directed at media critic Anita Sarkeesian beginning in 2012, and came to fruition in 2014 as a hate campaign against independent game developer Zoë Quinn” about her sex life, (“Gamergate,” n.d.). Gamergate is an MRA-adjacent movement that MRAs involved themselves in and supported. Notable MRA Paul Elam claims that Gamergate was initiated “by MRAs within the gaming community,” (Paul Elam, 2015).

about (feminist/women’s) issues or speak out against sexism and misogyny online, are heavily associated with—and generally understood to be participants in—the manosphere.

It is also difficult to know manosphere demographics.<sup>14</sup> Some who study offline MRA groups indicate that the movement is made up mostly of white men, usually of the middle- and upper-classes (Kimmel, 2013, p. 17). While others identify the movement more with working- and middle-class men (Gordon, 2015). The academic literature on offline MRA and FRA groups has tended to portray the members as “typically in their forties and fifties, often divorced or separated, and nearly always heterosexual,” (Flood, 2004, p. 263). Kelly Gordon (2015) finds that, “[w]hile recent journalistic coverage of the MRM claims the presence of millennials is growing within the movement ... men over 50 continue to comprise the vast majority of contributors to formal organizational materials.” Interestingly, Gordon posits that Canadian men’s rights groups want to present the movement as one led by younger men and women. Gordon also points out that it is likely that demographics are different in the various subcultures of the manosphere (it is understood, for instance, that the pickup artist community is saturated with younger men). In terms of race, while manosphere participants are usually understood to be mostly white (one scholar going so far as to argue that men’s rights is a uniquely white movement which emerged because of the singular entitlement of white men (this is a pillar of Kimmel’s (2013) thesis on the movement)), there are clues that the reality may be more complex. It is interesting to note, for instance, that a significant portion of the manosphere readership is based in India. At the time of writing, *Alexa.com*—a site offering website traffic data and analytics—estimates that 5.2 percent of *A Voice for Men*’s visitors are in India. When it comes to pickup artist blogs, the estimated rates are more surprising still; 9.1 percent of *Return of King*’s visitors, and 8.6 percent of *RooshV*’s, are in India. For both of these sites, India ranks second after the United States in terms of where the readership is based.

What *is* clear is that the manosphere is frequented by a wide assortment of men—men who are brought together by their common

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<sup>14</sup> There are instances of the manosphere posting surveys for its participants to take (one, for instance, taken by the *r/MensRights* subreddit, “found that 95 percent of their membership identified as ‘atheist’ or ‘religiously indifferent.’ Another, broader study of the men’s rights movement on reddit found that 84 percent identified as ‘strongly conservative,’ with particular policy preferences along a libertarian, not traditional, bent,” (Rensin, 2015)). User-posted surveys such as these might be a useful method for gaining a deeper understanding of *who* the manosphere is in the future.

worldview: “[t]hese are guys, mostly, who range in age from their teens to their fifties, who have embraced misogyny as an ideology, as a sort of symbolic solution to the frustrations in their lives—whether financial, social, or sexual,” (Futrelle, n.d.). The various subcultures of the manosphere address these frustrations in different ways.

## 2.2 SUBCULTURES OF THE MANOSPHERE

How best to envision the manosphere and its subcultures? Jeff Sharlet, professor of English literature and observer of the manosphere, offers this analogy: “‘the manosphere’ refers to an online network, nascent but vast and like the universe constantly expanding ... Some galaxies of the manosphere are composed of self-declared ‘pickup artists’ ... who want to help ordinary guys trick women into bed; other solar systems deal earnestly with child custody and the Adderallization of rambunctious boys. There are constellations of ... ‘men going their own way,’ separatists ... and recluses,” (Sharlet, 2014). Each subculture is like a galaxy—this is likely a good way to visualize the manosphere, but it is not quite so simple. Manosphere participants might identify with or frequent more than one subculture, or they might not identify with any single subculture. The subcultures at times also interact with and bleed into each other. At times they are aligned, and at other moments they take pains to distinguish themselves from one another (one PUA writes, “lost count how many times we’ve had to say ‘We’re not a men’s rights site,’” (ROK, 2015e)).

These disparate galaxies however, converge around their worldview. It is a worldview based upon the belief that women dominate, and are more privileged than, men. Some in the manosphere frame one’s arrival at this worldview as ‘taking the red pill’: “[i]n the classic sci-fi film *The Matrix*, the hero must choose between swallowing a blue pill, which will allow him to remain in a pleasant illusory world, or a red pill, which will open his eyes to the reality in which he is enslaved. In men’s rights parlance, ‘red pillers’ realize that men, not women, are oppressed,” (Cohen, 2015). Men, like the humans unknowingly plugged into the Matrix, are slaves; all manosphere participants—even those who do not label themselves ‘red piller’—agree with that. Their approaches to this problem, however—the issues they choose to focus on, the language they use, and even some of the positions they take—vary quite dramatically from subculture to subculture. For this reason, I will now discuss each subculture in some detail.

### 2.2.1 Men's Rights Activists

The MRA subculture is perhaps the largest and most recognizable of the manosphere. Like offline men's rights groups, most adherents of the MRA subculture consider Warren Farrell to be the intellectual father of men's rights (Cohen, 2015). Journalist David Futrelle, who documents the goings-on of the manosphere, describes the men's rights subculture in the following terms: it is a "loosely defined, but largely retrograde, collection of activists and internet talkers who fight for what they see as 'men's rights.' ... [MRAs] are pretty rabidly antifeminist, and many are frankly and sometimes proudly misogynistic," (Futrelle, 2011).

The MRA subculture primarily concerns itself with issues related to men's legal rights. These issues include, amongst others, circumcision or 'male genital mutilation', men in the military (selective service), choice in parenthood for men (allowing men to reject paternal rights and obligations), mandatory on demand paternity testing for 'alleged fathers' ('no man shall be held legally responsible for a child he did not father'), paternity fraud, the abolishment of Affirmative Action programs based on sex, the abolishment of the Violence Against Women Act, and the abolishment of alimony (AVFM, 2015a).

Paul Elam, often referred to as a protégé of Farrell, founded *A Voice for Men* (AVFM) in 2009.<sup>15</sup> It is widely considered to be the largest and most influential MRA site, and one observer of the manosphere writes that it is unquestionably the most prominent manosphere group in the United States (Brook Lynn, 2014). Elam has stated that AVFM is "*aimed at those turned off by the fringe politics of other men's rights forums,*" (Cohen, 2015, emphasis mine).

AVFM is known for a number of web-based campaigns, among them the creation of two websites. *Register-Her.com* (no longer online) was modeled after sex offender registries, and "purported to track female murderers and rapists, as well as women who scheme against men. The site's motto: 'Fuck Their Shit Up,'" (Blake, 2015). AVFM also set up a cloaked website (*WhiteRibbon.org* (tagline: "End Violence Against Everyone")) that seemingly is "intended to divert traffic and donations from the White Ribbon Campaign, a violence prevention group founded in response to the 1989 mass shooting in

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<sup>15</sup> It is notable, I think, and probably not a coincidence, that AVFM was founded in 2009—in the midst of the 2008 financial downturn (the 'mancession', as it has been called, because of the way it asymmetrically impacted—and continues to impact—men).

Montréal,” (ibid.). Journalists covering AVFM are quick to highlight Elam’s misogyny: he “has justified violence against women and written that some of them ‘walk through life with the equivalent of a I’M A STUPID, CONNIVING BITCH—PLEASE RAPE ME neon sign glowing above their empty little narcissistic heads,”” quotes one journalist (Blake, 2015). Another oft-quoted and notorious post: the satirical “If you see Jezebel in the Road, Run the Bitch Down,” in which Elam declares October to be ‘Bash a Violent Bitch Month’ (Elam, 2013). At time of writing, AVFM has twelve affiliates worldwide (affiliates are versions of AVFM in a different language or focusing on a different country) including their flagship American site (“AVFM Affiliates,” n.d.).

Other notable MRA venues include the *r/MensRights* subreddit (with over 116,000 subscribers at time of writing), and the blog *JudgyBitch* (JB), authored by Janet Bloomfield. Bloomfield is the social media director at, and a contributor to, AVFM. She is also a member of the ‘Honey Badger Brigade’—a group of fierce female MRAs who flaunt their disregard for the opinions of other women or their ‘mangina’<sup>16</sup> friends. These are women who own the term ‘labia traitor’ (Sharlet, 2014). Bloomfield is most well known for being the driving force behind the viral social media campaign Woman Against Feminism, in which women share photos of themselves holding signs with anti-feminist slogans (Blake, 2015). Her politics may seem contradictory to some: “while [she] takes a progressive stand on some issues—she supports gay marriage and a women’s right to choose, for example—many of the ideas she flogs are anything but. She calls single mothers ‘bona fide idiots’ who don’t ‘give a shit’ about their children’s well-being and pens blog posts with titles like ‘Why Don’t We Have a Dumb Fucking Whore Registry? Now That Would Be Justice.’ She also dismisses the concept of ‘rape culture,’ as ‘a giant rape fantasy—one in which all women can imagine all men desire them with such force and such passion that they’re willing to commit a crime,”” (Blake, 2014). Bloomfield’s writing often focuses on women and/or feminism (the JB tagline is ‘The radical notion that women are adults’) rather than issues that are strictly ‘men’s rights’ related. In

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<sup>16</sup> An obvious portmanteau, ‘mangina’ is a favourite pejorative of the manosphere. It refers to feminist, feminised, or ‘blue pill’ men who ‘put women on a pedestal’. Similar terms include ‘white knight’ and ‘social justice warrior (SJW)’.

March 2016, for instance, she published a post titled with a hashtag:<sup>17</sup> #FuckYourHijab (“The hijab is not a religious requirement or expression of faith. It’s a political statement. And fuck political Islam” (Bloomfield, 2016d)).

The men’s rights subculture is the one most often profiled in media about the manosphere, and manosphere participants are sometimes grouped altogether under the umbrella ‘men’s rights (activist)’, despite the existence of other discrete and important groups. As we shall see, there are important distinctions to be drawn between men’s rights and the other subcultures.

### **2.2.2 Men Going Their Own Way**

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW, pronounced by its champions as ‘mig-tow’) are a smaller subculture of the manosphere, and the closest relative of men’s rights. MGTOW is a sort of online lifestyle community. Futrelle (2011) describes it as, “a lot like lesbian separatism, but for straight dudes. MGTOW often talk vaguely about seeking ‘independence’ from Western and/or consumer culture, and a few MGTOW try to live that sort of zen existence. But most of those who embrace the term have a deep hostility towards and/or profound distrust of feminists and women in general. Many MGTOW refuse to date ‘Western women’ and some try to avoid women altogether.” This rejection of relationships with women stems from a deep distrust of and dissatisfaction with women who, they insist, have been ‘programmed’ to ruin men’s lives (Lamoureux, 2015).

There are four stages of the MGTOW lifestyle. After taking the red pill and realizing that men are oppressed, MGTOW reject long-term relationships with women. Next, they proceed to reject short-term relationships and casual encounters with women. In the third phase, the MGTOW refuse to earn more money than is necessary for sustaining life, and ‘disengage’ economically. The final stage is one of complete societal disengagement—the MGTOW refuse to interact with society (ibid.).

The MGTOW community is more decentralized than the MRA or PUA subcultures. It exists mostly on forum/messaging sites, the most popular being *MGTOW.com*<sup>18</sup> (a forum with close to 14,000

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<sup>17</sup> Creating or using hashtags encourages one’s audience to share content related to (and tagged with) the hashtag on social media, spreading the message to a wider audience.

<sup>18</sup> *MGTOW.com* states that most of its members are from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. It elaborates, “Toronto and sur-

members at the time of writing), rather than blogs. While the community infrastructure is managed by individuals, they tend not to identify themselves as such. On the About and Contact pages of the website, for instance, the site’s founders and administrators do not identify themselves or discuss their involvement. The MGTOW community does not have identifiable thought leaders in the way that the larger subcultures (MRA and PUA) do.

A MGTOW Facebook page (with over 14,000 likes/followers at the time of writing) defines the community as ‘a male reaction to the excesses of feminism’. It goes on to state, “[t]here’s no ‘one right way’ to deal with women, and the screwed-up society that encourages them to indulge their baser instincts. But women and society must be dealt with.” The page identifies three core goals of the community: to instill masculinity in men (to “make men self-reliant, proud, and independent”), femininity in women (to “make them nurturing, supporting, and responsible”), and to work towards limited government (and the expansion of “freedom and justice”) (“About MGTOW,” n.d.).

In terms of their connection to the MRA community, MGTOW certainly share similarities with MRAs—they both believe that patriarchy is a myth and that men are oppressed—but they differ in their responses to the issue: “MRAs are out to fix the problem through action and activism, [while] members of MGTOW hold self-preservation above all else, and because of this the majority of the community seems to have decided to bow out,” (Lamoureux, 2015). MGTOW also tend to distinguish themselves from MRAs:

[w]here an MRA will actively pursue a compromise to restore an equilibrium in the hugely anti-male/biased divorce and family court system ... a [man going his own way] can/will/may take another stance, and is more likely to assume 100 [percent] agency in his personal life to protect and preserve his own sovereignty by rejecting cohabitation, and/or refusing to sign a fraudulent marriage contract in the first place. *MGTOW.com* is not associated or affiliated in any way with any entity or other website in the [men’s rights movement] (“Frequently Asked Questions,” n.d.-b).

It has been stated that “there exists an animosity between the two [subcultures]” (Lamoureux, 2015) because they tend to overlap and compete in the same space, so to speak. AVFM however, for its part, seems to more or less endorse the MGTOW approach. Under the ‘Ed-

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rounding areas is the epicenter. It’s been stated elsewhere in the Manosphere ... Toronto is the worst city in the world if you are a man,” (“Frequently Asked Questions,” n.d.-b).

ucate Yourself’ banner on its front page for instance, a book about MGTOW, authored and self-published by Peter Wright and Paul Elam, is advertised. AVFM also features posts, fairly regularly (averaging about once a month) about MGTOW.

The PUA community, on the other hand, is decisive in its reproach of MGTOW: “[t]he ‘hyper-masculine’ culture of pick-up artists just doesn’t mesh with the men who have decided to no longer pursue women. An article on *Return of Kings* ... calls MGTOW ‘The creeping cult of male loserdom’ and goes on to disparage the community,” (Lamoureux, 2015). It is to this hotbed of ‘hypermasculine culture’, the PUA community, that I now turn.

### 2.2.3 Pickup Artists

The PUA community makes up a significant portion of the manosphere and, along with MRAs, is a core subculture. PUA members (self-proclaimed, or aspiring ‘alpha males’) share insights with each other about how to master

‘Game,’ espousing elaborate ‘scientific’ theories of male superiority while trading tips on how best to pressure or manipulate drunk women into bed. This ... subculture has a considerable overlap with a subset of traditionalist and far-right blogs. Many ... don’t simply embrace misogyny; they also proudly embrace ‘scientific’ racism and other bigotries (Futrelle, n.d.).

In the PUA community, game purportedly helps men pick up and date women, but it is heavily informed by the red pill worldview that men are oppressed and women are unfairly privileged, and tends towards misogyny: “often, if not always, ‘game’ involves reducing women to sexual targets, rating their attractiveness on a scale of 1 to 10, and deploying techniques like ‘negging’<sup>19</sup> to get a girl to notice you,” (Dewey, 2014).

Neil Strauss’s international bestseller *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*, published in 2005, is thought by many to be ‘the bible’ of the PUA community. Today, Roosh V is the most visible and well known figure. Roosh runs several prominent

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Negging’ is a trick aimed at undermining a woman’s confidence by making a backhanded compliment or unkind remark. The idea is that it gives the pickup artist the upper hand in the interaction by making the target want to earn his approval (Woolf, 2012). *Seductionscience.com* offers examples of negs: ‘your roots are showing’, ‘your body language is all closed off,’ or “I like your eyes ... are you wearing colored contacts???” (before she can answer) Oh my god, no way, you are...” (Charger, n.d.).



PUA sites—his personal blog *RooshV* (RV), the *RooshVforum*, and the blog *Return of Kings* (ROK), and is (in)famous for, amongst other things, proposing that rape be made legal on private property. The PUA subculture exists mostly on the personal blogs of notable pickup artists (like Roosh, along with Heartiste,<sup>20</sup> and Julien Blanc,<sup>21</sup> among others) and in PUA forums, like the subreddit *r/Seduction* (with over 217,000 subscribers at the time of writing), and the forum *pick-up-artist-forum.com* (with over 163,000 members).

The influence of the red pill worldview in this subculture is slightly less obvious than it is in the MRA community (where ‘inequality’ is the primary focus), but it is still overt. The ROK About page states its mission as,

to usher the return of the masculine man in a world where masculinity is being increasingly punished and shamed in favor of creating an androgynous and politically-correct society that allows women to assert superiority and control over men. Sadly, yesterday’s masculinity is today’s misogyny. The site intends to be a safe space on the web for those men who don’t agree with the direction that Western culture is headed (ROK, n.d.).

Roosh identifies two major problems with the culture: for one, “[i]f you're a man, society has no role for you except ‘listen to what women want.’ Second, ... culture is telling men to hate themselves,” (Rensin, 2015). These are arguably the same grievances with which MRA and MGTOW concern themselves.

### 2.2.4 Involuntary Celibates

If MGTOW is a cousin of MRA, then the involuntary celibate (incel) community is like the PUA’s anxious younger brother. Futrelle defines the incel mindset in the following manner: “the term ... seems to suggest that the world owes incels sex, and that women who turn down incel men for dates or sex are somehow oppressing them. For those (male, straight) incels who are genuinely socially awkward or phobic, this can be a self-defeating stance that can lead to bitterness

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<sup>20</sup> Heartiste, formerly known as Roissy, publishes a personal blog called *Chateau Heartiste*, and is widely condemned as a white nationalist (and misogynist) by his critics (French, 2015; Futrelle, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Blanc runs the PUA service *Pimp by Real Social Dynamics* (pimpingmygame.com), and is known for being barred from entering Australia, the UK, and Singapore, and for advocating and/or demonstrating assaultive pickup techniques like “grabbing women by the throat or forcing women’s heads into his crotch,” (Gibson, 2014).

towards women. And often does,” (Futrelle, 2011). Incels feel that women owe them sex—and that women are cruel and oppressive for denying them their wont. Incels are typically former-PUAs that have become disillusioned with the pickup community and think pickup artistry is a scam (“Description,” n.d.). They feel cheated by PUA gurus and their broken promises to help shy men get a woman into bed (Brook Lynn, 2014).

Like the MGTOW community, the incel subculture has no identifiable leaders. Individual members contribute to subreddits (such as *r/ForeverAlone* (with over 40,000 subscribers at time of writing)) and forums (like *LoveShyI* (love-shy.com) (4422 members at time of writing) and *SlutHate* (sluthate.com) (5197 members)). *SlutHate* was formerly known as *PUAhate*, but rebranded after one of its members and frequent contributors, Elliot Rodger, published a misogynist manifesto and YouTube video online (both laden with PUA/incel language), before massacring six people and injuring fourteen others (Cohen, 2015; Woolf, 2014) in a rampage.

Incels form a small community within the manosphere, but the ideas aired there permeate other, less fringe, areas. Roosh V, for one, said of the Isla Vista massacre, “[u]ntil you give men like Rodger a way to have sex, either by encouraging them to learn game, seek out a Thai wife, or engage in legalized prostitution ... it’s inevitable for another massacre to occur,” (Cohen, 2015).

### 2.3 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These four subcultures make up the bulk of the manosphere but—as I stated above—the manosphere does not fit neatly into four boxes. The subcultures overlap, are both aligned, and at odds, with one another, and are changing continuously. No doubt new subgroups are constantly emerging, merging, and dissolving, as the manosphere continues to mutate, and as its participants continue to collaborate with, and contest, one another.

It should also be noted again that the manosphere—while its biggest venues are based in North America—exists, and attracts members, across the globe. My study focuses on English-language sites based in North America because they represent the public face of the manosphere, and are amongst the most influential venues in the community.

We turn now to the findings of my study, beginning with a discussion of how femininity and women are represented in the discourse.

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### Chapter 3: The Disparaging of Femininity

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This chapter and the three that follow interrogate representations of gender and gender politics in the manosphere. Gender is represented not just in constructs of a gendered ideal or in representations of men or women—gender is signified in representations of the ‘opposite’ gender, in representations of relationships, of the family, of gender politics, and in discursive practices. While my main interest is in how masculinity is reproduced in the manosphere, I would be remised if I did not look at the representational politics of the discourse more broadly. Analyzing representations of women and femininity, gender politics and feminism, and other representations (of intersecting categories, of gender in speech, and of relationships) not only tells us important information about representations in the manosphere in general, but it will also enrich our understanding of how masculinity is reproduced in the discourse. Moreover, as my first chapter made clear, the literature and theoretical analyses relevant to this study contain important hypotheses about these additional representations (of femininity, gender politics, and intersectional categories), that I test herein and throughout.

In this chapter, I focus on representations of femininity and women. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I outline the ways in which femininity is represented positively in the manosphere—in other words, I describe representations of the feminine ideal in the discourse. The literature on the men’s rights movement suggests that manosphere discourse embraces traditional gender roles and inequalities (this is the second hypothesis of those outlined in chapter 1). I find that this is the case—the feminine ideal is unquestionably traditional. In the second section, I discuss negative representations of women and femininity in the discourse. Hypothesis 11 suggests that in the discourse, femininity or women are disparaged as a means to maintain masculinity, and shore-up the boundary between male and female. In section 3.2, I discuss the ways this plays out in the discourse. Femininity is disparaged in the discourse in representations of women as irrational, mean, bad mothers, and improperly sexual. In the third section, I argue that the discourse articulates the problem with ‘modern women’ as stemming from their inability—or unwillingness—to live up to the feminine ideal. The fact that women are disparaged *because of their failure to embrace traditional femininity*, is further evidence that manosphere discourse mobilizes towards the past and embraces traditional gender norms (supporting hypothesis 2).

### 3.1 THE FEMININE IDEAL: DEVOTED AND SUBSERVIENT

The literature on the men’s rights movement suggests that the manosphere champions a return to the traditional nuclear family, with traditional gender roles and inequalities. In this section I discuss the ways in which this hypothesis is supported vis-à-vis representations of ideal femininity in the discourse. The feminine ideal is, I argue, obviously traditional—a sort of ‘housewife’ femininity (emphasizing devotion, beauty, pleasantness, loyalty, and motherhood). Moreover, the discourse champions traditional understandings of the (subservient) role of women in relation to men.

In the manosphere, women and femininity<sup>22</sup> are not often represented positively. My analysis found instances of positive representations of femininity in only 27 out of 192 cases – 14 percent of those coded. These representations emphasize a sort of traditional femininity, one based upon commitment to family, pleasantness, loyalty, selflessness, and beauty. The traits most commonly attributed to femininity in positive terms, are ‘amenable’, ‘attractive’, ‘loyal’, and ‘maternal/nurturing/caring’ (see Table 1). The PUA sites focused more on pleasantness and physical attractiveness, while the MRA sites were more likely to focus on loyalty and mothering.

*Table 1 Most Common Positive Representations of Femininity (Percentage of Cases in Data Set Where Category Present)*

Trait	MRA (%)	PUA (%)	Total (%)
Amenable	0.0	3.1	3.1
Attractive	0.0	2.1	2.1
Loyal	1.0	0.5	1.5
Maternal/nurturing/caring	1.6	1.0	2.6

*Note: Codings are not mutually exclusive – if a case had two distinct representations in it, it was coded twice (once for each code).*

A (relatively) common theme on the PUA blogs was that women ought to be “attractive, thin, [and] pleasant,” (ROK, 2014a). One contributor speaks in the following terms about femininity and attractiveness: “I grew up in a small town ... where women were quite plain. I never saw a woman in a sexy, fine dress or extremely feminine attire (makeup, accessories, and more). ... After moving to a bigger city ... I did see slightly better examples of womanhood,” (ROK, 2014c). Women ‘in other cultures’ are spoken fondly of for taking pride in

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<sup>22</sup> In this section I am speaking about representations of femininity and women in the manosphere. I use the terms interchangeably.

‘being feminine and maximizing their sexual attraction’: “[o]ne of my favourite types is a fine Latina in ass-tight jeans and sexy high heels, along with matching earrings, painted nails, dolled-up hair, and a little bit of eyeliner,” (ibid.). Roosh V writes that a woman’s value to a man lies in her ability to give men boners and be pleasant. Speaking to women, he states, “understand that men come to you for the boner and then stay for your feminine pleasantness. ... If you want to experience any sort of happiness with men, you must satisfy a man’s boner,” (RV, 2014d). For the PUA, femininity is equated with beauty—defined in narrow terms—and pleasantness. The best, most feminine, women, are sweet, kind, deferential, interesting, and “most importantly, ... pleasing,” (RV, 2013d). ‘Foreign women’ are repeatedly associated in particular with these traits, and represented as the ideal.

This representation of ‘foreign women’ as embodying the feminine ideal is an interesting departure from traditional colonial representations of women, which typically represent white women only as the holders of ideal femininity. In colonial representations, non-white women are represented as Other—unable to live up to the standards of femininity exhibited by the white woman. It may seem at first glance that the manosphere—by associating ‘foreign women’ with the feminine ideal—is disrupting this colonialism. Looking more closely though, it is clear that femininity in the manosphere is not constructed according to a Western versus non-Western binary (whereby Western women are unfeminine and non-Western/‘foreign’ women embody the feminine ideal). Rather, and interestingly, in manosphere discourse, femininity is constructed along a modern versus non-modern binary. The feminine ideal of the manosphere is thus defined as *non-modern, not non-Western*—and is embodied both in traditional (Western) white femininity (of the unliberated housewife of the era pre-dating the second feminist wave), *and* in femininity from ‘non-Western’ (read: ‘non-modern’) cultures. Contemporary/‘modern’ femininity is resented in the discourse because it is *too free* (politically and/or sexually). It is clear that rather than disrupting colonial representations of the Other, manosphere representations of the feminine ideal actually reproduce these colonial tendencies—tendencies to represent other/non-Western cultures as non-modern (and thus backwards), and non-Western women as exoticized, (extra) pure, submissive, weak, and dependent.

The MRAs also emphasize pleasantness, but in somewhat different terms—while the PUA speaks of sweetness, kindness, and amenability, the MRA is more likely to invoke loyalty, selflessness, and nurturance. Janet Bloomfield, for instance, associates the feminine

ideal with Jane Austen’s heroines: “[as a girl they] were my models for what womanhood should look like. I adored their femininity, their commitment to family, and their essential graciousness ... Anne [Eliot], for me, is the epitome of womanhood. Loyal, strong of heart, and always willing to consider the needs and wants of others,” (JB, 2015i).

When it comes to the role of women in heterosexual relationships, MRAs and PUAs seem all the more aligned. There is a definite emphasis on loyalty. One PUA says the following of his parents: “I’ve been blessed with the good fortune of having a great father that taught me a lot about life. I also have a great mother who has stood by his side for over three decades,” (ROK, 2014l). The role of the father, we are to understand, is intellectual—to teach his son about life. The role of the mother, conversely, is to ‘stand by his side’. Bloomfield argues that in relationships, women should focus on contributing to the ‘team’ by being intelligent, loyal, and honest (JB, 2013a). Marriages, she writes, are like partnerships between a First Officer and a Captain. The Captain has the ultimate authority. First Officers are usually the wife, and the Captain, the husband. In theory, she says, the roles can be reversed—but she warns that “[m]en who relinquish authority are well on their way to a cheating wife,” (ibid.). The role of the wife, then, is to “ADVISE, because that is the main role of the First Officer,” while the role of the Captain—the man—is to lead and hold authority over the unit. PUAs also stress the importance of the man having deciding authority. Roosh V maintains that it is imperative that the man set the tone of the relationship by making all decisions on the first date, lest he “stain [himself] as a compliant beta,” (RV, 2014g). It is clear that the belief is that women ought to submit to the authority of men in relationships. At times this is stated explicitly—one PUA, for instance, writes, “[women] need to be controlled by and submit to men, and men need to be given the green light to enforce the superior will of man on their families,” (ROK, 2014e).

Women are also represented as naturally maternal and inherent caregivers: “nature has designed women to care for small children. Those breasts sitting on your chest are all the evidence you need. That doesn’t mean men can’t do a good job caring for children, but most prefer to provide and have a responsible, reliable woman at home taking care of the private sphere,” (JB, 2013g). Bloomfield argues that women are traditionally assumed to be natural caregivers because it is true—they *are*. Women are instinctively maternal, it is said, and women usually most desire a life of taking care of the family (JB, 2013f, 2014a).

Where femininity is represented positively, it is attached to ‘housewife’ ideals. The PUA blogs analyzed emphasize attractiveness and pleasantness. The MRA blogs focus on ‘maternal’ virtues—loyalty and selflessness. In relationships, it is understood that women ought to be in a subservient position in relation to men. These representations of ideal femininity as selflessness and subservience can be understood to be producing the traditional feminine ideal of the housewife, but they arguably stem from the presumption—enduring still today—that a woman’s value is in her selflessness. Traditionally it is assumed that a woman’s value is in her selfless service to her male partner, her children, to her community, or to God. There is a nervousness—and we see it at play here—around the notion that women have selves—that they might have their own authority, their own desires—and that they might put their own selves first.

Some observers of the manosphere might express surprise at this classification of the feminine ideal as that of the ‘housewife’—particularly when it comes to PUAs, who seem to applaud the sexual availability of women today. My analysis however found that their position may not be as obvious as it appears at first blush. This (seeming) contradiction will be discussed in the last section of this chapter (section 3.3).

The hypothesis that the discourse champions a return to the traditional nuclear family, with traditional gender roles and inequalities, is supported by the findings discussed above. The feminine ideal that emerges from the discourse is undoubtedly traditional. It is a femininity that emphasizes ‘housewife’ ideals such as selflessness, motherhood/caregiving, pleasantness, beauty, and loyalty. The discourse also champions and naturalizes traditional gender inequalities in its representations of gender roles and relations. The masculine role is to have authority over the family and make decisions, while the feminine role is to—at best—support or stand by her man, or—at worst—submit completely to his control. Women are represented as naturally maternal and caring, which in effect naturalizes the traditional feminine role in the family of caregiver.

These representations of the feminine ideal also naturalize heterosexuality by defining the role and nature of women *in relation to men*. By defining femininity as being pleasing, and deferential, to men, it exists in women’s relations with men—not (or not completely) in women themselves.

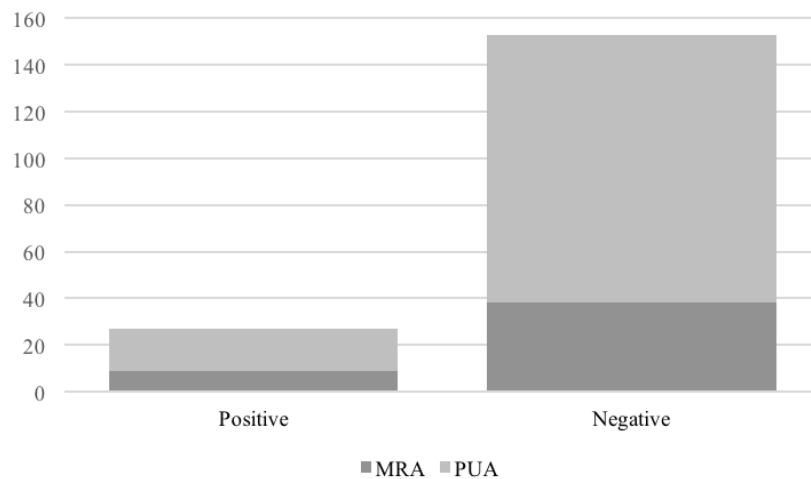
In the next section I turn to the question of negative representations of women in the discourse. The feminine ideal represented in the manosphere reproduces traditional gender roles and inequalities—but

what of negative representations? Do they too champion traditional understandings of gender in some way?

### 3.2 DISPARAGING REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

Theorists studying masculinities suggest that the boundary between femininity and masculinity is vital to the maintenance of traditional constructs of the latter. As I outlined in chapter 1, boundary preservation can take various forms. The disparaging of femininity, or adopting an anti-woman tone, fortify this gender boundary and therefore reproduce traditional gender constructs. In this section, I discuss negative representations of women in the discourse—which are common—and highlight the ways in which women are disparaged.

*Figure 1 Positive Versus Negative Representations of Women in the Manosphere (Number of Cases Where Categories Present)*



Women were represented negatively in 153 cases—79.6 percent of the total data set. The MRA blogs represented women negatively significantly less often than the PUA blogs, and for both subcultures, negative representations starkly outweigh positive representations (see Figure 1). Given the extent to, and frequency with, which women are represented negatively in the manosphere (particularly given that positive representations of femininity are rare), it can be argued that the tone of the discourse is anti-woman.

As with positive representations, the subcultures differed somewhat in which traits were emphasized when representing women negatively (see Table 2)—though there are definite and obvious similarities. On the MRA blogs, where discussed in negative terms, women were most often represented as entitled, irrational/unintelligent, lazy,



manipulative, or selfish. On the PUA blogs, conversely, women were most commonly represented as attention-seeking, entitled, irrational/unintelligent, manipulative, only good for sex, promiscuous/‘slutty’, or selfish.

### 3.2.1 Irrational, Emotional Creatures

Negative representations of women in the discourse disparage and put down women and femininity in a number of ways. For one, femininity is disparaged by representations that characterize women as irrational and unintelligent. Taking the subcultures together, this is the most common sort of representation of women in the discourse (see Table 2). Representations of women as irrational play out differently on MRA and PUA blogs, but common to both communities is the belief that female unintelligence is intrinsic to women/femininity. MRA posts tend to represent women straightforwardly as illogical or stupid, often with snarky remarks. One post, for instance, states, “[i]f you’re logically inclined, you might assume that X implies Y, but when you’re dealing with women, then X can imply anything ... She giggles when you tell her that you’re an electrical engineer since she believes it’s a word you just made up,” (AVFM, 2013d). PUAs sometimes employ the same tactic: “never, ever, try to be rational with women,” (ROK, 2013g) writes one. Being assertive, it is said, goes against a woman’s nature (RV, 2014b). Another offers advice on how to speak to women: “[w]hen dealing with women, you must have a switch that creates diarrhea of the mouth, especially before sex. Thankfully after sex you can revert back to a more stoic presentation,” (RV, 2014e). This representation of women as stupid and foolish surfaces repeatedly. ‘Feminine’ activities and interests—like ‘reading *Jezebel*’, or ‘being obsessed with foodie trends and celebrities’ are represented as frivolous (RV, 2014d). One contributor uses this representation of women to argue that they should not have voting rights: “[w]omen have no business voting in elections for public office, let them stick to voting for things they understand, like the X-factor. This may seem like a quixotic idea. But remember—so was women’s suffrage, once,” (ROK, 2014h).

In a similar vein, at moments women’s education is jabbed at. Roosh V writes of his interaction with a ‘hyper-educated’ woman who, despite her education, could not ‘accept simple logic’ (RV, 2015d). This language frames female education as excessive (note the use of ‘hyper’—the audience is to understand that this woman’s education had gone too far), and pointless (a sort of ‘you can take the

man out of the jungle but not the jungle out of the man’ argument—no matter how much you educate a woman, she will still be illogical). Bloomfield suggests that schools be divided into two categories—qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative schools would teach skills like hairdressing, childcare, food preparation, and liberal arts. “Girls will skew qual”, she writes, though they could study quantitative skills if they so chose. The quantitative schools would focus “on developing analytical, mathematical, hard skills [and would] bring men back into the teaching profession in droves, because they tend to be the ones who have those skills,” (JB, 2014a). Bloomfield disparages the ‘Barista of Arts academic tradition’ (with its focus on “‘female values’ such as sensitivity, cooperation and socialization”) and makes fun of teachers who “dislike teaching hard facts and quantitative skills (math is hard, Barbie!)” (ibid.). Here Bloomfield—though she concedes that not all men and women will conform to the binary—reproduces the construction of women as naturally better suited to certain types of work.

*Table 2 Most Common Negative Representations of Femininity (Percentage of Cases in Data Set Where Category Present)*

Trait	MRA (%)	PUA (%)	Total (%)
Attention-seeking	1.0	5.7	6.7
Career-driven	0.5	2.6	3.1
Entitled	2.6	4.2	6.8
Irrational/unintelligent	2.1	5.7	7.8
Lazy	2.1	0.5	2.6
Manipulative	2.6	4.7	7.3
Non-maternal/cold/uncaring	1.0	2.6	3.6
Only good for sex	0.0	5.2	5.2
Promiscuous/‘slutty’	0.0	5.2	5.2
Selfish/greedy (gold digger)	2.6	4.7	7.3
Other negative representation	1.6	2.6	4.2

*Note: Codings are not mutually exclusive – if a case had two distinct representations in it, it was coded twice (once for each code).*

Bloomfield argues that women are just not as good as men at certain tasks and in certain environments, and ‘the glass ceiling effect’ results from a lack of merit amongst women, rather than because women and women’s work is undervalued. “Why,” she asks, “are there no Big Important Women™ in tech? Uhh, because your ideas suck and you’re all pansy-assed cowards?” (JB, 2015c). The only thing holding women back is their lack of intelligence and assertiveness: “[i]f women ... want to improve their positions, they need to do two things: grow a set and have better ideas. Easy peasy,” (ibid.).

Moreover, money spent encouraging women to enter male-dominated fields is mostly wasted because women ‘aren’t interested’ and ‘lose interest in working once they have children’ (JB, 2014k). Women and girls, she argues, do not make any useful contributions to society: “[g]irls don’t typically grow up to do useful shit that we NEED as an economy and society to survive ... Work that typically doesn’t take place in an air-conditioned office, and tends to be hell on manicures,” (JB, 2013e). According to Bloomfield, women are too weak and unintelligent to do the hard work that helps society thrive.

In terms of representations of women as irrational, PUA discourse departs from that of MRAs noticeably in one area. Women are repeatedly characterized as being guided by their emotions—by their baser instincts—and without the values held by men. Women are irrational either because they naturally lack rationality entirely, or because their emotions completely override the ‘rational’ mind. PUA often speak of women being attracted to ‘bad boys’, or only attracted to men for superficial reasons. Roosh V writes, “what you see as value is not valuable to a woman, and even ‘good’ girls will be more attracted to essentially a smooth-talking con artist than a scientist who is working on a revolutionary cancer drug ... Almost everything we do in game is how to entertain women and stir their emotions, which for whatever reason makes them attracted to us in a way that being virtuous, intelligent, thoughtful, and self-reliant doesn’t,” (RV, 2014e). Women tend to love men who are ‘sociopathic and borderline abusive’ (RV, 2013a) because they are inherently irrational. Their emotional nature means that women lack morality and do not hold the same values as men: “women are not like men. They don’t think in the same way. They don’t understand or value freedom the way men do. Women have a herd<sup>23</sup> mentality. Rugged individualism, healthy masculine debate, and raucous male laughter offend their sensibilities,” (ROK, 2014h). The PUA believes that women do not like freedom and prefer to be dominated by a controlling partner (ROK, 2013b).

Since women are ruled by their emotions and do not hold the same high/rational values that men do, women are guided by their baser instincts. This representation plays out in characterizations of women as disloyal and unfaithful. Women are “hypergamous by na-

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<sup>23</sup> Note the language here—the use of ‘herd’ subtly draws a connection between women and animals through metaphor. Elsewhere women are referred to in terms of the ‘current breed’ of women, and are called ‘land-whales’. This language functions to represent women as primitive, and animalistic, distinguishing them from civilized, rational, human, men.

ture” (ROK, 2014p), cheaters, and tattletales (ROK, 2014m, 2014n). They are fundamentally at the mercy of their messy, emotional minds. Roosh V contends, “25 [percent] of women are diagnosed as mentally ill. Many others are neurotic and approach senility in some form, making them unable to handle normal life situations. Women will constantly whine and stress over their first-world problems and you’ll notice firsthand how it affects their mood, pleasantness, and willingness to have sex,” (RV, 2015e).

In chapter 1, I mentioned that one technique used to subtly disparage women is the use of metaphors. Through repetition, metaphors work in the mind to equate two concepts as one. Gendered binary metaphors link gender to a particular descriptor in a powerful way. One binary invoked in traditional representations of gender is that of primitive woman/civilized man (by which women are represented as being ‘of nature’, while men are represented as civilized (in chapter 4 I discuss in more detail the ways in which masculinity is associated with civilization). Representations of women in the manosphere—such as the examples above—that characterize women as inherently immoral, guided by their lower instincts, and unable to appreciate values like freedom, reproduce traditional representations of women as ‘of nature’ or primitive.

Another gendered binary metaphor visible in the discourse is that of the childlike woman/adult man. A PUA for instance, writing about the ‘pussification of men’ argues that men have been made more feminine, which is to say more childlike (ROK, 2015b). Femininity—in both men and women—is associated with childhood, immaturity, and dependence, while masculinity is represented as adulthood, maturity, and independence. One contributor to ROK, for example, in a statement disparaging gay men, writes that they ‘function like children,’ (ROK, 2014j). These representations clearly denigrate women, femininity, and the effeminate.

As hypothesized, the tone of the discourse is anti-woman. Representations of women as irrational, emotional, incompetent, immoral, primitive, and childlike, disparage women and femininity. These negative representations preserve the boundary between masculine and feminine, and in so doing, reproduce traditional constructs of masculinity.

### **3.2.2 Sluts and Boner-killers**

Another way in which women and femininity are disparaged in the discourse, is in representations of women as sex objects. In chap-

ter 1 I mentioned that women are disparaged by representations that emphasize the sexual objectification and conquest of women (Ferber, 1996, p. 107). Representations of this sort are visible in manosphere discourse, especially in one particular community.

The PUA subculture is unique in its focus on women's physical appearance and sex behaviours. MRAs and PUAs both refer to women as sluts, whores, hoes, or other related epithets, but this happens more frequently in PUA discourse. I coded fifty-six instances of the use of these terms in PUA blog posts, versus ten occurrences in MRA cases. While MRAs seem to use these terms as a sort of short-hand for 'women,' there is also a noticeable trend in PUA discourse to attach a woman's sex life, sexual availability, and sexual history to her worth. One PUA explains that he would never 'date a chick like that'—someone who he heard had slept with three men since starting university. He frames as common sense the opinion that no man should date a woman he slept with 'before he knew her name'—since the woman's sexual availability speaks negatively to her moral and feminine character (ROK, 2013g). Roosh V suggests that women should be 'punished for a life of selfish whoredom' (ROK, 2014e), and that he would "rather be an evolutionary dead-end than let a whore be the mother of my child," (RV, 2014m) implying that women with an active sexual past are tainted forever and unfit to ever be wives or mothers. 'Sluts' are represented as if they have an incurable disease—they cannot escape their history, and past behaviours are taken to be indicative of their inherent nature and behaviours forevermore: "[c]hicks I witness take on three dudes in a hot tub now throwing up pictures of their baby and poor husband who has no idea what a selfish slooter his wife once was, and probably still is," (ROK, 2014d). Another PUA writes, "[the] lifestyle of whoring around is ... completely destroying the worth of women as long-term partners, wives, and mothers," (RV, 2014m). These representations of women as 'sluts' or 'whores' reproduces a construction of femininity that understands a woman's worth to derive from her 'cherished virginity' and purity. They also reproduce the double-standards that women face around their sexuality. Women who are sexually available are 'sluts', while chaste women are 'prude'. A man's sexual behaviours are not taken to speak to his value, personality, or behaviours in other domains—but for women this is not the case, particularly where the PUA is concerned. Sex is thought to 'defile' women, but no such notion is held about men. As justification and in order to explain and legitimize their position on 'sluts', the PUAs invoke nature. Women "intrinsically know that them sleeping around with men—even if it's

as little as four or five over a lifetime—degrades themselves,” (ibid.). An illusory notion—that having sex ‘degrades women’—is taken as fact, a biological truth ‘intrinsically known’.

Along with female sexuality, the PUA blogs also speak often about the importance of a woman’s appearance. Of the ninety-six PUA blog posts included in the data set, 15.6 percent (fifteen cases) had instances of implicit or explicit statements about a women’s physical appearance being her most important (in some cases, her *only* important) characteristic. Many posts discussed attractiveness in pseudo-scientific terms. Roosh V, for example, writes of Polish girls, “I was the first to mention how [they] have a butterface problem, but now the extent of this issue is obvious to me. *I can say with 100 [percent] certainty* that Polish girls are less attractive than girls from [other] European countries ... It’s not a matter of makeup or wearing high-heels but *a structural deficiency in their face*,” (RV, 2014b, emphasis mine).

A common theme on PUA blogs is the importance of long hair—again discussed in ‘scientific’ terms. Roosh V explains, “hair is a sign of fitness, of health. When a girl has short hair, she’s mimicking a state of malnourishment ... long female hair correlates to health and fertility,” (RV, 2015d). It is only natural, he argues, for men to be attracted to women with long hair—after all, it is just evolutionary attraction at work! The shocking moment comes when Roosh likens having short hair to engaging in self-harm: “[i]f a woman cuts her hair to a short length ... we can now confidently say that she is making herself appear less fertile, less beautiful, and less healthy. A woman cutting off healthy hair is one step away from literal cutting of her skin with a sharp object, because both behaviours denote a likely mental illness ... She must be monitored by state authorities so she doesn’t continue to hurt herself,” (ibid.). In another post, he argues that all women who have short hair, face piercings, and tattoos, should be institutionalized, and if that seems not to discourage women from continued ‘self-harm’, then the ‘infected’ should be placed in “colonies where [they] can be shuttled off to and left to fend for themselves,” (RV, 2015g).<sup>24</sup>

The discourse also chastises women for focusing on their appearance, while simultaneously maintaining that it is all that matters

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<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note here how Roosh V, in talking about women with ‘short hair, face piercings, and tattoos’ implicitly invokes images of butch (queer) women. Queer women are rarely made explicit mention of in the manosphere, but they are implicitly hinted at in moments such as this—where they function to embody the ‘unfeminine modern women’ archetype.

(ROK, 2014g), and disparaging ‘unattractive’ women (‘boner killers’). Roosh V offers a list of things that ‘kill boners’—reproduced here in full:

Obesity, cursing, careerism (putting job before family), tattoos, piercings, and other forms of self-mutilation, feigning intelligence after reading *Huffington Post* or *Jezebel*, short hair, talking too much nonsense, calling out a man’s game at key intimate moments, getting angry at men for not believing in bullshit feminist theory, seeking self-esteem through accomplishments instead of femininity, negging, graduate degrees, changing behaviour after reading a stupid book (*Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Eat Pray Love*), addicted to iPhones, promiscuous behaviour that doesn’t reward good men, snarkiness, penis envy, obsession with foodie trends and celebrities, refusal to learn basic homemaking skills, cheap flip flops, pajamas in public (RV, 2014d).

This list nicely encapsulates the manosphere’s position on women. While there are differences between the subcultures—the PUAs focus more on physical appearance, and the MRA more on the role of women in the family—this list illustrates how negative representations of women run the gamut.

Representations of women such as these—representations that objectify women, use sex-related epithets, attach a woman’s worth to her virginity/purity, that represent sex as degrading of women, and that emphasize the importance of physical attractiveness—denigrate women and femininity, and can be understood to be preserving a boundary between masculinity and femininity, and therefore reproducing traditional gender constructs.

### **3.2.3 Negating the Feminine Ideal**

While representations of women as irrational are not incompatible with the feminine ideal (since the feminine ideal is not associated with intelligence), and representations of women as sex objects (either sluts or boner-killers) also reproduce traditional understandings of femininity, there is an interesting trend in the discourse that complicates things—the presence of representations of women that are *discordant with the feminine ideal*, and traditional constructions of femininity. Namely, women are represented as selfish/uncaring and non-maternal/bad mothers.

Representations of women as wickedly selfish—abusive, manipulative, competitive, and self-interested—are relatively common in the manosphere. As with representations of women as irrational, and sluts or boner-killers, women are characterized in the discourse as *inherently* bad—it is their ‘nature’.

In writing about relationships, personal narratives offered by the authors often convey stories of women ruining the lives of men. This trend is evident in both subcultures. One contributor writes about “years of her physical attacks, vandalism, theft, bitching, nagging, lying, golden uterus fake-outs, and all-around crazy,” (AVFM, 2014g). Women are both physically violent (“[they] hit, punch, slap, bite, whip men because they take for granted that they won’t get it back in spades,” (JB, 2013g)), and emotionally violent, employing ‘feminine’ tactics of abuse. One MRA writes that women use “methods of coercion and manipulation ... followed by emotional and/or physical abuse,” (AVFM, 2014f), while a PUA argues that “deception, emotional manipulation, and shaming—primarily tools of women—are allowed to run rampant,” (ROK, 2014q). Manipulation is at the core of all that women do. They manipulate others by wearing makeup (JB, 2015j), they even manipulate themselves through self-deceit and by denying their true nature (ROK, 2014m).

Women are spoken about in ominous terms. Bloomfield warns, “one rapacious, cruel woman can ruin the lives of everyone she touches,” (JB, 2014l), and in a post titled “Most Women Don’t Deserve a Good Man,” one PUA argues that most men fail to realize “what shady creatures women are by nature,” (ROK, 2014d). All women, we are told, are this same way at their core. These representations are disparaging of femininity because women’s faults are tied to their gender—they are cruel, deceptive, and manipulative ‘by nature’ *due to* their gender.

Another common negative representation of women in the manosphere portrays them as competitive and attention-seeking. Both MRAs and PUAs represent women as competitive and jealous to the point that they are unable to have female friends or support each other in any way (JB, 2014a, 2015c; ROK, 2014d; RV, 2014e). The representation of women as attention-seeking is more common in PUA discourse than it is in the MRA community. In posts on *Return of Kings*, women are frequently characterized as hungry for attention: “[o]ne thing a female cannot give up until the day she dries up is attention,” (ROK, 2014d). At times, this hunger for attention is attached to a critique of the modern way of life: “[o]ne of humanity’s greatest mistakes was putting a camera in the hand of every woman. Not only



did it convince an entire generation of chicks that their banal activities are art, it allowed them to gorge themselves on bottomless portions of attention-whoring.” (ROK, 2014g). ‘Attention-seeking’ behaviours are taken by PUAs and MRAs to be evidence of women’s inherent vain and unpleasant nature—rather than, say, of a culture that teaches girls and women that their value lies in their desirability, attractiveness, and being approved of by strangers.

Women are also commonly understood in both subcultures to have a sense of entitlement. Women, it is argued, feel entitled to everything—to (successful, attractive) men, to ‘men’s protection’, to pleasure, to being unfaithful (AVFM, 2014j; JB, 2013d; ROK, 2014k). Women are represented as arrogant, snarky, and with superiority complexes—and this results from a “female-worship” culture that puts women on pedestals (ROK, 2014i; RV, 2013d).

In these representations of women as selfish, cruel, competitive, attention-seeking, and entitled, women are disparaged. The discourse characterizes women’s ‘bad nature’ as being tied to femininity; women are bad because of femininity, and they are bad in a feminine way. Worse perhaps, the (feminized) culture has too become consumed by these feminine vices (more on this in chapter 4), further enabling the bad behaviours of women.

Femininity is also disparaged in the discourse in representations of women as bad mothers. Representations of motherhood follow many of the trends discussed above—mothers are characterized as incompetent, lazy, abusive, and selfish. There are tales of women ‘slacking’ as stay at home moms and ‘relying on the government to pay the bills’ (ROK, 2013f). In the MRA community there is talk of mothers divorcing for the fun of it, with no regard for the well-being of their children. Both subcultures, but PUAs especially, represent mothers as bad for children and bad for society. One post on *Return of Kings*, titled “Mothers Have Become the Main Source of Harm to Children,” argues that “mother’s spend those first few days after the miracle of birth hating their child because its existence inconveniences hers. It’s an open secret that most women are mentally ill ... It makes you wonder how many of today’s mothers ... ever stop hating their kids,” (ROK, 2014e). The author goes on to state that women are fundamentally incapable of being good people, and are not good mothers. Mothers complaining about their children is equated with ‘sucker punching children to the ground, hoofing them in the gut while they’re helpless’. Women are so selfish that they do not care at all for the wellbeing of their children. Single mothers in particular are singled out. They are blamed for not aborting the pregnancy while

they had the chance,<sup>26</sup> and it is argued that children in single-mother homes are more likely to suffer abuse and grow up to engage in criminal activity—and this is the mother’s fault, it is argued, since women are more likely to initiate divorce (ROK, 2014e).

In these representations of women as bad mothers, the boundary between masculine and feminine is maintained by the disparaging of femininity. Interestingly, these practices of negative representations of women reproduce traditional masculinity (by disparaging women/femininity) while *also undermining the traditional feminine ideal* (by representing women as selfish, uncaring, competitive, and not motherly). It seems counterproductive for the discourse to undermine traditional femininity (by representing women as not-that) if, as the conventional wisdom would suggest, the manosphere is interested in *preserving* traditional gender constructs. The manosphere resolves this incongruity by articulating the problem with ‘modern women’ as one of their *not being feminine enough*, or not properly feminine, as I argue in the next section.

### 3.3 THE UNFEMININE WOMAN

In the above section I outlined the ways women are represented negatively in the discourse and thus disparaged. In this section, I posit that these negative representations of women are understood by the manosphere to stem from (or be symptomatic) of the fact that women are less womanly—less feminine—than previous generations of women. By articulating the problem in this way, the discourse mobilizes towards the past and champions traditional gender norms and roles.

Comparing the above two sections, the disparity between the manosphere’s understanding of the feminine ideal, and the way it represents women, is clear; the manosphere understands women to be less feminine than they were in the past. Measured against the feminine ideal, women today, the discourse makes obvious, fall far short. While the feminine ideal embodies selflessness, maternal nurturance, and beauty, women are represented as selfish, abusive, and unattractive. Instead of attending to the family, women focus on careers, and seek “self-esteem through accomplishments instead of femininity,” (RV, 2014d). Roosh V laments, “[h]ow we see women is not the same

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<sup>26</sup> Roosh V writes that single mothers should be blamed for making “the decision to keep spawn of a bad boy who wanted little or nothing to do with the child,” (RV, 2015a).

as how our grandfathers see women. They saw them as delicate creatures who could be a source of happiness, love, and, most importantly, children, but modern men are stuck with a different breed of women who care less about intimate relationships and creating families than pursuing money, seeking validation and attention online, being trendy consumers, and satisfying their hedonistic needs ... A man who tries to emulate his grandfather by treating a modern women with love or care is certain to get emotionally or financially destroyed,” (RV, 2015h).

The PUA community has a name for these decidedly unfeminine women—‘Western women’ (WW). These ‘modern women’ are described as fat “land-whales with deep voices and short hair,” (ROK, 2014a). They are “plain, [dress] far too casually, [are] overweight, and [put] little value in sexual attraction. Plain, naked faces in dire need of some eyeliner and makeup are everywhere,” (ROK, 2014c). The WW is a woman who calls herself ‘strong and independent’ and she is derided for being so—for not “[knowing] how to shut the fuck up,” (ROK, 2014l). The WW—empowered, liberated—is a slut. One PUA puts it thus: “[t]he ‘strong and independent’ woman is nothing more than a talker—a blabbering mouth that moves at a thousand miles an hour and only stops when there’s a dick nearby that needs to be sucked,” (ibid.). Empowered women are represented as

loud, confrontational, entitled, fat, and power hungry. They are *terrorists* who are showing absolutely no empathy for the needs of men, no willingness to compromise. Their ongoing war against us is creating an angry generation of men who are tired of their behaviour and corpulence. These men are now active in trading notes on how to either find better women abroad or how to use these unfeminine specimens for easy sexual gain (RV, 2014a, emphasis mine).

The modern WW cannot fulfill her feminine role. Where she used to be loyal, maternal, and a homemaker (the manosphere feminine ideal), she is now none of these things. This argument is invoked repeatedly in the manosphere—particularly in the PUA community. Since these unfeminine women are not fulfilling their proper gender role, they are only good for sex. Roosh V asks, “[h]ow can any man who approaches a girl today see her as more than a cum bucket?” (RV, 2014m).

Men are represented as the victims of these unfeminine women: “this is not a good time to be a normal man with the normal need to reproduce with a good woman who will stay loyal to him, raise his kids right, retain a thin figure, and take care of his home. ... It’s

amazing that in just three generations, women have gone from being potential wives and mothers to nothing more than fuck toys. Men used to meet traditionally minded virgins, but are now stuck with a seemingly unlimited pool of mediocre sluts who have been fucked in the ass by multiple men. This is complete and utter decimation of the female human. Men can no longer gain any meaning or value from a woman beyond sex,” (RV, 2014m). Women, according to the PUA, who are unwilling or unable to be feminine, to fulfill their feminine duties, are worthless—worthy and ‘useful’ for nothing but sex. MRA discourse features similar expressions of frustration at ‘modern women’—but MRAs are unlikely to discuss how women are ‘only good for sex’. Instead, they might suggest going the way of the MGTOW and avoiding all relations with women (as one author suggests explicitly (AVFM, 2014c)).

The decimation of feminine women and the rise of the unfeminine hoard is linked decisively to liberties gained by women in the second feminist wave and thereafter. Women are mean *because of their advancement*: “possessing a degree has become a reason to discard all humility and common courtesy. Where has the highly desirable and respectable female trait of modesty absconded to?” (ROK, 2014l). Women are now taught to believe, it is argued, that their worth lies in earning money and ‘dominating others’—both traditionally masculine responsibilities (ROK, 2013c). Equal rights policies like Title IX<sup>27</sup> of the United States Education Amendments (1972), are pointed to as examples of ‘masculinizing’ schemes. The sexual revolution is also blamed for the masculinization of women—who are now taught to be sluts (RV, 2015e).

In section 3.1, I mentioned that casual observers of the manosphere might assume that the PUA wants the best of both worlds—he enjoys the sexual availability of women today, while also wanting the traditional housewife ideal. What I have found, and what I think is clear, is that the PUA does not relish the sexually availability of women—rather it is thought to be a sad consequence of ruined femininity. The PUA only needs the community, only needs to use women for sex, and rack up ‘notches’, because sex it all that modern women are good for. If only women were more feminine—more selfless, ma-

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<sup>27</sup> Title IX states that, “no person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” (Office for Civil Rights, 2015). According to one critic, it “has masculinized women by increasing their participation in *male sports* by a factor of 9. It has made them hyper-competitive,” (RV, 2015c, emphasis mine).

ternal, beautiful, pleasant, and better homemakers—the PUA could settle down and be happy. In no cases included in the data set, and at no point in the time that I have been observing the manosphere, have I encountered an instance of a woman represented positively (or even neutrally) for being sexually available. Women who have sex are called sluts. The PUA would much rather things be as they were in the past, when women had fewer options, when relationships between men and women were so much more orderly, and when men and women knew their roles: “[i]n the past, a man had to simply be polite, have character, and be gainfully employed to get and keep the attentions of a good woman. He only had to be a professional in the job that put bread on the table for his family. That man today would either die a virgin or attempt a murderous shooting spree,” (RV, 2015e). The language here is violent and threatening, particularly given that it was written shortly after the Alta Vista massacre, during which a virgin went on a murderous spree. On the manosphere, ‘unfeminine’ women are often spoken of in violent terms—they are represented as ‘terrorists’ harming men because they do not—or are thought not to—live up to the manosphere’s feminine ideal.

As I mentioned in the previous section, it seems counterproductive for the discourse to represent women as decidedly *not* traditionally feminine (in other words, to represent them as selfish, mean, and non-maternal). One might reasonably expect that a community that supposedly is concerned with the maintenance of traditional gender constructs, would be careful not to undermine traditional representations of the feminine ideal. The manosphere resolves this incongruity by articulating the problem with women as one of their not being feminine enough. In the discourse, women are represented as failing to fulfill the traditional feminine role. Instead of being selfless and focusing on the family, women are self-involved and career-oriented. The problem with women today is understood to have resulted from women’s liberation and advancements made towards gender equality. The liberated woman is unattractive, fat, ‘strong and independent’ (meaning she does not know ‘when to shut up’), and is a slut. Representing the liberated woman as unfeminine functions to reproduce the traditional feminine construct that equates femininity with subservience and subordination. If the liberated woman is unfeminine, it follows that ‘feminine’ women are submissive.

In the first section of this chapter I explained that the discourse champions an ideal femininity that mobilizes towards the past and embraces traditional gender roles and inequalities (supporting the second hypothesis). In the second section I discussed disparaging repre-

sentations of women in the discourse that function to maintain the illusory boundary between masculinity and femininity (supporting the eleventh hypothesis). In this third section, I have drawn a connection between these two hypotheses/findings. Representations that disparage femininity *are at the same time* mobilizing towards the past and reproducing traditional conceptions of gender—this is because women are disparaged for being not feminine enough. By articulating the problem with women in these terms, the discourse is doubly productive of traditional gender roles and inequalities. Women are represented as decidedly unfeminine because of their selfishness and liberation. These representations disparage women while simultaneously mobilizing towards the past and championing traditional gender roles and inequalities.

Representations that disparage women for not being feminine enough also facilitate the linking of disrupted traditional norms to the destruction of society (this topic is discussed in more detail in section 4.2.2), and enable representations of men as victims oppressed by liberated, unfeminine women (which are at the core of the manosphere worldview).<sup>29</sup>

### 3.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I examined representations of femininity and women in the discourse, with a particular focus on two hypotheses from the literature on antifeminism and from theoretical analyses of gender. First I addressed the hypothesis that the discourse mobilizes towards the past, embracing traditional gender roles and inequalities. My analysis of manosphere discourse supports the hypothesis that the feminine ideal championed in the discourse champions traditional gender roles and inequalities.

It is worth briefly discussing here how the manosphere’s approach to gender in general also reproduces a traditional understanding of gender. In the discourse, gender is very much tied to biology. The MRA and PUA communities both equate gender with biology (masculinity, for instance, it is thought, *is* testosterone) and maintain that gender is not ‘constructed’ as feminists and critical scholars suggest. Bloomfield declares, “gender is not a choice. It is not the prod-

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<sup>29</sup> Some PUAs would resent this depiction of their community. PUAs have been known to argue that MRAs feminize themselves by portraying themselves as victims. It is true that PUAs do not often explicitly call themselves victims—but they do represent themselves as oppressed by modern women, and by the destruction of traditional gender roles and norms.

uct of social conditioning. It is not a performance. It is a biological reality. That you do not choose,” (JB, 2015a). The biological nature of gender is represented as common sense in the discourse. Masculinity and femininity are not constructed categories that exist discursively—rather they are the ‘true essence’ of men and women—stable, innate, and primordial: “masculinity is what men are like, just as femininity is what women are like,” (AVFM, 2015f). By conceiving of gender in terms of ‘true essence’—stable categories based on biological realities (rather than discursive constructs)—femininity *necessarily* excludes masculinity and vice versa. The position that gender is based entirely on nature, on biological realities, is one way by which the illusory boundary between male and female is maintained. That boundary draws a distinct divide between men and women, and masculinity and femininity, and reproduces the narrative that men and women are two discrete and exclusive groups—men are masculine and women are feminine. Conceptualizing gender in terms of constructed categories, and undoing the attachment of gendered categories to sexed bodies/biology, allows for feminine men and masculine women—and for men and women to embody both genders—and begins the work of undoing the boundary at the foundation of modes of manhood that exclude femininity.

The manosphere’s approach to gender is conservative in that it does not allow for the interrogation of gendered categories, and because it naturalizes traditional gender roles and norms. Femininity is subservience and selflessness. According to the manosphere, it is not *represented* or *constructed* as such—that is just *the true essence* of femininity. Representations of traditional gender constructs as natural inhibit the interrogation of gender—further strengthening traditional conceptions of gender roles. Feminists and critical gender theorists thus represent a danger to persons (such as manosphere participants) who seek to preserve traditional gender constructs and the systems of power built upon them.

The second hypothesis this chapter was concerned with is the suggestion that masculinity is produced through the maintenance of the boundary between the genders. The theory suggests that boundary maintenance can involve the disparaging of femininity, women, and the effeminate. My findings support this hypothesis; negative representations that disparage women and femininity are common in the discourse.

In the final section of this chapter I linked the two hypotheses and argued that by articulating the problem with women as one of their not being feminine—by disparaging women for being unfemi-

nine—the discourse mobilizes towards the past and reproduces traditional gender constructs, while at the same time disparaging women.

In the discourse, women are understood to be less good, less womanly, *because of their advancement*. This finding speaks in part to the third hypothesis listed in chapter 1 (“the discourse emphasizes that masculinity is marked by control, privilege, and entitlement—and that masculinity is therefore undermined by advancements made by women towards gender equality”). The manosphere—as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter—certainly understands masculinity to be undermined by advancements made by women. Men are represented as the victims of modern unfeminine women—men are either the victims of (abusive) women themselves, or as victims of disrupted gender norms and roles (unable to build the home and family they aspire to, since women are now unable to fulfill the feminine role). Women’s liberation has made (unfeminine) victims out of men, and has made women more dominant (and thus less feminine), undermining the authority and control of men.

Having discussed representations of women and femininity in the discourse, it is clear that traditional gender roles and norms are championed, but what of the masculine in the manosphere—how are men and masculinity represented in the discourse? It is to this question that I now turn.



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## Chapter 4: The Feminization of Masculinity

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In this chapter, I discuss representations of masculinity in the manosphere. The first section considers the masculine ideal championed in the discourse. The literature on antifeminisms suggests that the discourse reproduces traditional gender constructs—that masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, that traditional gender roles are embraced, and that masculinity is marked by control, privilege, and entitlement. When it comes to ideal masculinity in the manosphere, my analysis supports the hypothesis that the discourse is traditional in this way. The masculine ideal in the manosphere, which I call classical masculinity, emphasizes mastery, productivity and rationality, loyalty and honour, and courage and the capacity for violence.

In the second section of this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the manosphere understands masculinity to be under threat, addressing the twelfth hypothesis of this study (that masculinity is represented as being under constant siege by external feminizing forces and in need of continuous shoring-up). In the manosphere, masculinity is perceived to be under threat of feminization—but this position is articulated differently across the two subcultures I studied. In section 4.2.1 I discuss the PUA community’s articulation of the issue, which focuses on the feminization of the *individual*. In section 4.2.2 I discuss how the manosphere talks about the feminization of *society*, a concern that is voiced in both subcultures.

### 4.1 CLASSICAL MASCULINITY AS MASCULINE IDEAL

As I discussed in the literature review above, feminist analyses of antifeminism suggest that the manosphere celebrates a mode of masculinity that maintains a traditional relationship to femininity, that embraces traditional gender roles and inequalities, that is marked by control, privilege, and entitlement, and that maintains a traditional understanding of masculinity vis-à-vis violence. In this section I analyze representations of the masculine ideal in the manosphere, with an eye to understanding the accuracy of these hypotheses. My findings support the first of these hypotheses while complicating the last.

The masculine ideal produced in the manosphere emphasizes mastery, productivity and rationality, loyalty and honour, and courage and violence. I have named this mode ‘classical masculinity’. Classicism values clarity, elegance, and rationality. To be classical is to ex-

embody greatness or perfection, embodying a standard against which contemporary society can be judged, and to venerate a (mythical) past (Crane, 2004). The masculine ideal in the manosphere is classical in that it emphasizes classical, old-fashioned values from a sort of ‘golden age’ of manhood. It is also employed to critique the current state of masculinity and society in the West. In the subsections that follow, I focus in turn on the three characteristics of this classical masculinity. First I discuss the emphasis on mastery, productivity, and rationality. Next I look at the importance of honour and loyalty in the classical man of the manosphere. Finally, I explore the emphasis on courage and violence.

#### **4.1.1 Master of his Domain**

One important feature of the classical masculine ideal espoused in manosphere discourse is the emphasis on mastery, productivity, and rationality. As I discuss in the introduction to this thesis, feminist analyses of antifeminism make three suggestions that are relevant here. First, the literature indicates that the discourse of the manosphere maintains a traditional relationship to femininity—that is to say that the discourse celebrates a mode of masculinity that completely excludes the feminine. My findings indicate that this hypothesis is accurate. While the feminine ideal emphasizes submissiveness, dependence, and caregiving, and while women are commonly represented as irrational or emotional, the masculine ideal emphasizes traits opposite to these—mastery, productivity,<sup>30</sup> and rationality. Second, the literature hypothesizes that the discourse embraces traditional gender roles and inequalities (Kimmel (2013) argues that antifeminist men’s groups champion a return to the traditional nuclear family, with traditional gender roles and inequalities, as a means to stand against the ‘wimpification of American manhood’ (p. 102)). My analysis supports this hypothesis—by emphasizing mastery, productivity, and rationality, the masculine ideal of the manosphere reproduces traditional gender roles. Third, it is suggested that the masculine construct is marked by control, privilege, and entitlement—and that masculinity is therefore undermined by advancements made by women. In this section, I focus on the first part of this hypothesis. With its emphasis on mastery (over nature, over women, over one’s own body), the

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<sup>30</sup> I name caregiving and productive work as opposites, not to suggest that caregiving is—or disparage it as—unproductive, but rather because the work of homemaking and caring for the family is traditionally represented as such.

masculine ideal championed in the discourse indeed does reproduce a model that is marked by control.

One of the core aspects of how ideal masculinity is represented in the manosphere, is the focus on mastery and productivity. ‘Real men’ are (naturally) hard workers, and manhood is about mastery, productivity, and rationality. Being skilled, productive and hardworking is central to manhood: “[a] man ... engages in productive work to his own benefit and in support of his family (if he chooses to start one),” (ROK, 2014i). Here manhood is represented as being about providing for the family.

Excellence and mastery are repeatedly discussed. In 9.3 percent of PUA blog posts analyzed in this study, (masculine) personal development was a primary issue discussed. Roosh V repeatedly stresses the importance of being ‘excellent, not average’. One PUA explains that,

[m]astery can mean a myriad of different things, but here it more closely resembles becoming extremely proficient in a particular discipline. The act of applying yourself in a dutiful manner to improving your craft, whatever it may be, is a journey that builds character. It is also an essential part of being your own man (ROK, 2015a).

A common topic on PUA forums is that of bodybuilding and self-care. Bodybuilding can be understood as mastery of the body. Forums that discuss self-care emphasize independence—no man should rely on anyone but himself.

Men are also represented as rational, logical, and intelligent. Rationality is repeatedly attached to man’s ability to work hard, be productive, and accomplish his goals:

[s]ince you’re a man, you have something called a logic module hardwired into your brain. If something you’re doing is not helping you accomplish a specific goal, you make adjustments to improve your chance of success. American women, who lack this module, instead say that the goal they want should become sentient and drawn to her just because (RV, 2015a).

In this, the disparaging of women—who are frequently represented as lacking those virtues that men possess (rationality, capability, and loyalty, among others)—is again evident.

Bloomfield most commonly speaks about men in terms of their intelligence, productivity, and usefulness to society. In one post, Bloomfield, responding to feminist campaigns against ‘manspreading’, argues that men are entitled to take up a lot of room in public

spaces because it is men that designed, built, and maintain said spaces, and who do the hard, dirty, and difficult work of generally making society survive (JB, 2013e). Unlike women, she writes, men “actually MAKE SHIT THAT WE USE,” (ibid.). This sort of argument makes the case that what privileges men *do* enjoy (and there are not many left, according to the manosphere), are deserved, because men are the ones who keep society running. This logic builds an association between masculinity and privilege—to be a man is to enjoy (deserved) privileges. Sadly, so the story goes, these privileges have been taken away from men (therefore making men, some would argue, less manly).

In the previous chapter, I outlined how women are represented as lazy and stupid—and the absence of women from positions of power is evidence of a lack of merit amongst women, rather than institutional sexism against them. Bloomfield appeals to a similar argument in discussions of masculinity. Men, she argues, gave women *everything* they have. Speaking directly to women, she states,

[o]ur stunning achievements in wealth and freedom have come under the stewardship of MEN. Pretty much every luxury and every amenity you enjoy in your life was invented, designed, manufactured, maintained, and repaired by a man. Men continue to control most of the formal institutions of power in our culture, and they are the main reason you are not currently living in a fucking mud hut trading berries for hand-woven linen (JB, 2013g).

She expresses outrage at representations of men as ‘dithering’ and unable to solve problems—men are the ones actually running the world! She cites figures about male-dominated legislatures to prove it.

Bloomfield seems to align quite easily with PUAs when it comes to her representations of men as productive. At moments, she even uses their language, stating for instance that our ‘best and brightest’ are men at the peak of their professional lives, calling them ‘alpha males’ (JB, 2014f). Bloomfield and the PUA community also agree that the ability to lead or dominate others—especially women—is key to masculinity. Man’s domination is framed in terms of controlling women and managing their immorality, like parenting a disobedient child. Bloomfield states that it is key that men signal their ability to lead other people, especially women, and warns, “[m]en who relinquish authority are well on their way to a cheating wife,” (JB, 2013a). Here again we find the familiar theme of women being represented as wenches, naturally unfaithful and immoral, in need of taming by a strong and decisive man.

Classical masculinity, the masculine ideal produced in the manosphere, is about mastery of man over his world—mastery over his body, mastery of rationality over the natural world, and mastery over women and the family. The classical man is intelligent and logical, hardworking, productive, and independent—he depends on no one, especially not women (his mother in particular). These male virtues, it is believed, are the basis of a thriving society. The emphasis on providing for the family reproduces traditional gender roles and norms, and the logic of the traditional nuclear family (in which the husband is head of household, breadwinner, and provider). The emphasis on mastery produces a mode of masculinity that is marked by control—control of the family, of one’s body, and over one’s environment. Linking masculinity to control sets up the circumstances by which progression towards greater gender equality (which disrupts patriarchal control) is perceived as undermining of masculinity.

#### **4.1.2 A Man of Honour**

The second key aspect of classical masculinity is the representation of the ideal man as loyal and honourable. These representations of masculinity support the hypothesis that manosphere discourse maintains a traditional relationship to femininity (by celebrating a masculinity that completely excludes femininity and is drawn in terms that contrast representations of femininity). Virtuous men are represented in stark relief against the immoral, selfish and abusive woman oft present in the discourse. Roosh V, for instance, writes, “[m]en believe in reciprocation, honour, and loyalty, while women only follow their feelings to rationalize a complete lack of obligation or burden to kindly repay someone’s prior investment and commitment to them,” (RV, 2014j). The classical man is a man of his word and a man of pride: “[h]e understands that a man is judged socially by how well he keeps his word and how consistently he meets his obligations—in other words, he understands and operates according to personal honour ... He takes pride in himself and in his possessions,” (ROK, 2014i). This emphasis on honour and loyalty seems to exalt a romanticized past—a time when a man would duel another to protect his honour; a time when ‘a man’s word was all he had’.

An accompanying representation is that of the man as protector. Men are represented as fighters who “put their lives on the line to protect their communities. Who risk everything to protect those they love,” (JB, 2014d). Bloomfield asserts that men are naturally protective when it comes to women: “[t]he instinct to protect women is in-

nate in the vast majority of men ... Part of what makes men different from women is their overwhelming desire to protect us,” (JB, 2013f). Here she implies that men do not often hurt women because it would be going against their very nature and their impulses (the impulse, she states, is ‘you don’t hurt women’ (JB, 2013g)). Women, conversely, have no such instinct when it comes to men. Instead of protecting men, women are quick to launch campaigns that ‘dehumanize’ them—campaigns addressing violence against women, or in support of sexual assault survivors. These campaigns are dehumanizing not only because, Bloomfield argues, they portray all men as rapists or abusive, but also because this representation negates man’s *very nature*; not only are men *not abusive*, but they are *innately protective of women*—by ‘representing men as rapists’, men’s nature, their virtue, is denied. In the manosphere, particularly in the MRA community, it is commonly said that women do not recognize or appreciate the sacrifices men made—and make—for women.<sup>31</sup> Our ‘entire economy and civilization’, Bloomfield declares, depend on men fulfilling their role as providers and protectors—and women would do well to remember that (JB, 2014a).

These representations of masculinity—which emphasize virtue, honour, loyalty, and protectiveness—celebrate a mode of masculinity in opposition to femininity. These representations contrast noticeably with representations of women as lacking virtue, loyalty, and honour. The emphasis on man’s innate protectiveness is also celebratory of traditional gender roles and the traditional family—in which the husband protects the hearth and his vulnerable wife and children.

### 4.1.3 Like a Warrior of Old

The third core component of classical masculinity is ‘warrior functionality’—courage, strength, and the capacity for violence. The literature on antifeminist men’s movements suggests that the manosphere maintains a traditional understanding of masculinity vis-à-vis violence, which is to say that violence is thought to be restorative of (an undermined or humiliated) masculinity, and is an accepted means of conflict resolution (Kimmel, 2013). While the classical masculine

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<sup>31</sup> The name of David Futrelle’s blog *We Hunted the Mammoth* is a reference to a quote from a MRA who “felt women weren’t sufficiently appreciative of what men had supposedly done for them over the ages.” The quote reads, “men gave you this modern world now you take it for granted we hunted the mammoth to feed you we died in burning buildings and were gassed in the trenches but that was jut for fun right?” (Futrelle, n.d.).

ideal in the discourse of the manosphere has an element of combativeness, the above hypothesis is not strictly supported; instead of violence being represented as restorative of a damaged masculinity, violence is considered innate to man, inherent to masculinity. The capacity for violence, for self-defence, is emphasized.

In manosphere discourse, ‘real men’ are those that take risks and move forward in the face of adversity (RV, 2014k). According to the PUA community, manhood is about being able to handle oneself—and men know this intrinsically: “[a]s men, we crave the feeling of power, of knowing that we can handle ourselves when shit goes down. ... Here’s a newsflash: real men don’t wear pink, real men don’t make crying displays of being in touch with their feelings, and real men don’t run from a fight,” (ROK, 2015c). This—the ability to defend himself in a dangerous world—is what one contributor calls the masculine ‘warrior function’ (ROK, 2014i). The warrior is considered profoundly masculine *because* of his violence, and violent men are celebrated as the founders of Western civilization as we know it. ‘Noble Europe,’ it is theorized, was “founded on the warrior class,” unlike China, India, or South America, “that all had priest-led societies,” (ibid.). The implication here is that non-Western/non-white cultures are less than. This argument reproduces colonial representations of these cultures (and their men) as inferior and effeminate (or less than because of their femininity) that were—and continue to be—the basis of colonial systems of power (representations of racialized groups are discussed more fully in chapter 6).

The attachment of masculinity to violence in classical masculinity is legitimized in a manner that will be familiar to manosphere observers—it is framed as common sense and natural, intrinsically known. The narrative that men need to and should be violent, that men enjoy violence, and that men are naturally violent, is taken as fact. This is a framing that is employed repeatedly in manosphere discourse; constructions are accepted as—and defended because they are—natural and intrinsic. In the PUA and MRA communities, efforts to interrogate these constructions of masculinity are perceived to be attacks on men, their nature, and masculine virtues. A campaign against violence is a campaign against men—after all, violence is inherent to manhood and innate in men.

Kimmel (2013) posits that honour, masculinity, and violence are intricately intertwined in many cultures—but this notion is deeply held in the United States in particular: “[t]he American version just happens to be so intimate as to feel primal, even natural. Violence has long been understood in America as the best way to ensure that others

publicly recognize one’s manhood,” (p. 178). This conceptualization of masculinity understands violence to be restorative of honour and respect—of damaged masculinity—and a corrector for humiliation. In the manosphere, the relationship of masculinity to violence plays out somewhat differently. The masculine ideal celebrated in the discourse undoubtedly is celebratory of violence, but rather than violence being restorative of masculinity, masculinity *is* violence. Violence is believed to be a natural ‘virtue’ of masculinity, and the type of violence that is celebrated is defensive/warrior violence—violence not to punish or control, but to defend and civilize.<sup>32</sup> Where violence is eschewed, where ‘cowardice’ and ‘feminine values’ take its place, masculinity is damaged, and men are less manly. Classicism—it was mentioned above—venerates a mythical, perfect past. In the manosphere, the veneration of a ‘warrior culture’ of the past is used to construct a masculine ideal that is celebrated for embodying this lost manliness of the past. PUAs revere the manhood of warriors and mourn the current state of things: one contributor laments, “[w]ill any of us ever experience something this profoundly masculine ever again?” (ROK, 2015c). Western cultures today renounce violence, and men are afforded few opportunities for violence. As a result, men are cowardly, and their masculinity is in crisis.

The masculine ideal in the manosphere emphasizes mastery, productivity and rationality, loyalty and honour, and capacity for violence. As the literature on antifeminism suggests, the masculinity celebrated in the discourse maintains a traditional relationship to femininity, embraces traditional gender roles, and is marked by control. It also maintains traditional associations between masculinity and violence.

While the masculine ideal constructed in the discourse is marked by these traits, masculinity is also represented in the manosphere as being in crisis—threatened constantly.

## 4.2 MASCULINITY UNDER SIEGE

Theoretical analyses of masculinity suggest that masculinity is traditionally represented as being constantly under threat and in need

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<sup>32</sup> The celebration of this specific use of violence—to defend and *civilize*—contributes to the narrative that colonial violence is ‘productive’ (rather than destructive) because it is ‘civilizing’. This narrative legitimizes and celebrates violence against colonized peoples, erases the suffering of colonized persons, and reproduces that narrative that (masculine) mastery over nature, over the feminine, and over other cultures and peoples ought to be celebrated.



of shoring up; Ducat (2004) for instance, posits that masculinity is imagined to be under siege by external feminizing forces. This hypothesis, where the manosphere is concerned, is supported. The following two subsections discuss representations in the manosphere of masculinity in crisis. First, I focus on a trend particular to the PUA community, who concern themselves with the feminization of the *individual man*. Next I discuss the perception, common to both subcultures, that *society* has been feminized.

#### 4.2.1 The Pussification of Man

The PUA community primarily conceptualizes this crisis of masculinity in terms of how it plays out on the level of the individual. Men are understood to have been ‘pussified’—made feminine. Masculinity is under constant threat from external feminizing forces, including advancements towards greater gender equality, ‘blue pill’ ideology, pop culture, and progressivism.

Men are *very* rarely represented negatively in the manosphere (and practically not at all in MRA discourse), but where they are, it is nearly always in terms of their not being manly enough. The most common traits employed in negative representations of men in PUA discourse can all be characterised as feminine (see Table 3).

*Table 3 Most Common Negative Representations of Masculinity (Percentage of Cases in Data Set Where Category Present)*

Trait	MRA (%)	PUA (%)	Total (%)
Beta/desperate for women	0.0	4.7	4.7
Dependent	0.0	1.6	1.6
Submissive	0.0	1.1	1.1
Weak	0.0	1.1	1.1

*Note: Codings are not mutually exclusive – if a case had two distinct representations in it, it was coded twice (once for each code).*

The pussified man is a ‘beta male’. He is feminine because he fails to properly dominate women—he might even respect women or appear desperate for them. Betas, or ‘nice guys’, are described as having traditionally feminine characteristics. They are risk averse, dependent (upon women), meek, humble, and “sadly in many cases, submissive to a woman,” (ROK, 2014c). They are represented as ‘emotionally weak’ and needy. Their main problem though, is that they do not understand the truth about women—they have not taken the red pill. Not only are betas often submissive to women—they put women on pedestals, are desperate for attention from them, and they

support women's independence (ROK, 2013a, 2014b). They give compliments and flowers to women, spend time in the 'friend zone, and 'want girlfriends, not notches' (RV, 2014k). The 'blue piller' is thought to be "a fool at the hands of woman," (ROK, 2014c) for working to please 'his precious damsel'. A contributor to *Return of Kings* describes his blue pill past in the following terms: "[i]n all cases where a woman took advantage of me, disrespected me, or otherwise acted out of line, the cold truth I see is this: I allowed it. I didn't put a bitch in her place," (ROK, 2014c). Dominating women and keeping them in line is what real men and red pillers do. Sadly, according to PUAs, too many men are not manly in this way.

It is interesting that the PUAs in particular disdain the notion of chivalry (that men should do certain things for, or behave a certain way around, women) and damsels (presumably because a 'damsel' is on a pedestal, or is asking for a 'white knight'/chivalrous man), while also championing traditional representations of gender, including those of man as noble protector and woman as submissive and weak. Perhaps the idea is that since women are not holding up their end of the bargain—by being subservient, pleasant, pretty, and good homemakers—any 'chivalry' paid to them would be undeserved. Perhaps the issue the PUA has is not with the 'damsel' herself, but with women today demanding chivalry from men *as if they were* damsels—when clearly they are nothing of the sort.

This pussification of the individual man is blamed in large part on 'society' and on societal changes taking place in the past half-century: "[i]f you are a male born any time after 1960, you have been subjected to continuous efforts to make you into a big pussy," (ROK, 2015b). Popular culture (such as MTV programming, and cartoons that teach lessons about caring and working through problems without resorting to violence) is thought to be feminizing. Advancements in gay rights are also thought to be contributing to the pussification of men by 'teaching' men to be homosexual and feminine—this is discussed further in chapter 6.

According to the PUA community, the solution to the pussification of man is simple: "[t]he good news is that none of the effects of pussification are permanent. All it takes to escape the programing is to swallow the red pill (or ... embrace neomascularity). Don't let your life revolve around women. Stop waiting for the government to fix all your problems. Have kids and give them actual guidance. Get to work as the craftsman of your own life," (ROK, 2015b). To escape the spectre of femininity, to evade pussifying forces, one need only learn what a real man is and realize the truth about women.

Hypothesis 12, which emerges from the theoretical analyses of gender surveyed in chapter 1, is supported in regards to PUA discourse, where masculinity (at the level of the individual) is represented as under siege by external feminizing forces.

#### 4.2.2 The Feminization of Society

While the PUA community focuses on the pussification of men, both subcultures are concerned with the perceived feminization of society. MRAs and PUAs both imagine that masculinity is under siege at the level of society—that the *masculine nature* of society is being undermined and disrupted by feminizing forces. The basic argument is that society is going down the drain because masculinity and men have been devalued. I identify three core arguments about the feminization of society in the MRA and PUA blog posts analyzed. First, it is argued that a strong society is one of male rule. Second, society is thought to be weakened because the traditional family model has been disrupted. Third, it is argued that masculine virtues have been replaced on a societal level by ‘feminine vices’.

The argument that a strong society is one of male rule plays out in a couple of ways. One emphasizes man’s role in the march of civilization. In section 4.1.1 I discussed how the masculine ideal—the ‘real man’—is represented as productive and rational. Men, it is argued, are the ones who create, build, and maintain thriving societies. Men are responsible for all human achievement, and all of human civilization is dependent upon men and masculine virtues. Another expression of this argument focuses on how patriarchy is the basis of a strong *and moral* society. A blog post on *Return of Kings* argues that women should not be allowed to vote. The author maintains that the fall of the British empire was caused by women’s suffrage:

[this] was the empire on which the sun never set, the undisputed global leader in science, technology, and commerce. And then, in 1918, the British Parliament made a historic mistake. It gave women the vote. ... Western civilization was unashamedly patriarchal and capitalist. Masculine virtues had propelled Europe out of the dark ages and colonised the New World, creating mighty new nations from scratch ... opportunity was real and a man with grit and ability could make ... something of himself. Many of the richest and

most famous men of that era had been born poor and were self-taught. Where stands Western civilization today? (ROK, 2014h).<sup>34</sup>

According to the manosphere, patriarchy has been undone; women now dominate men and society in the West is matriarchal, and for this reason it is in decline. All of today's problems are understood to derive from the end of patriarchy. One contributor writes,

[a]fter only a few decades of Mother's rule our society stands on the brink of a deep darkness. The legacy of feminism and matriarchy is shaping up to be hollow celebrity worship, crony capitalism, mass drug induced escapism, mass poverty and a world where progress is now a hijacked euphemism standing for the tyranny of politically correct demagogues who want to take away the hard fought for rights of individual freedom (ROK, 2014e).

Even if systems of power that exclude women *are* oppressive, the discourse contends, they are still good, still more moral, than alternatives:

[m]isguided people rile about the patriarchy, but under the patriarchy we created strong, moral societies whose humanism gave the world some of the *greatest peace* it's ever known, and whose social achievements put us on the moon. Children were raised properly and brought up to be good people, and everyone benefited. Humanity prospered. Society was just, people were happy, and *progress wasn't an abstract dream but a wonderful reality* (ROK, 2014e, emphasis mine).

In this example, reverence for an idealized (mythical) past, against which contemporary culture is judged, is obvious.

The second argument about the decline of society is that society has been weakened by the destruction of the traditional (nuclear, patriarchal) family model. The traditional family is championed as "the best form of family organization," (JB, 2013h) and the basis of a strong society. By allowing high divorce rates, and 'staggering' number of out-of-wedlock births, society is 'committing suicide', argues Bloomfield (JB, 2014a). Mothers are singled out as causing unique harm (in chapter 3 I discussed how mothers are represented in the manosphere as uniquely harmful). Single mothers in particular are blamed for the decline of society. Single mothers are so dangerous, and do such harm, that "[e]ven living near single mothers causes

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<sup>34</sup> In this example correlation is taken to imply causation, an inaccuracy relatively common in the manosphere.

problems for otherwise stable communities,” (JB, 2014d). This problem, according to the discourse, is two-fold. For one, just as society benefits from patriarchal rule, families are stronger and more moral when lead by an authoritative father figure. For two, without fathers, boys do not learn how to be men—and grow up to be improperly masculine.<sup>36</sup> One PUA contributor argues that this lack of masculine role models is why “[b]lue pill men are often especially the result of single-parent (read: single mother) homes ... The end result? Boys ... grow into quasi-men without the strong confidence and characteristics needed to live at their masculine potential,” (ROK, 2014c). Single mothers are responsible for raising beta sons who do not learn how to be ‘real men’, they are also responsible for the destabilising of society. MRAs and PUAs also take issue with the government taking over the responsibilities of the family unit. Bloomfield argues, “Marxist feminism<sup>37</sup> in particular [renders] the family a meaningless unit, incapable of supporting the individuals within, leaving society with no choice but to expand the control and power of the state,” (JB, 2014j). The disruption of the parental role by the state is harmful because the nuclear family is considered the ideal tool for civilizing children and raising proper men and women (JB, 2013h; ROK, 2013e). Men—fathers—are being usurped by ‘Daddy government’: “[t]he welfare state pays single mothers to squat out feral kids by multiple men without having to hold down a husband to pay for it all. The welfare state means the government is substitute Daddy for these women and their bastard offspring,” (ROK, 2014h). The argument that society is in decline due to the disruption of the traditional family model not only represents masculinity as being in crisis, but is also plainly reproductive and celebratory of the traditional family, with its traditional gender roles and inequalities.

The third argument is that masculinity is devalued, and that masculine virtues are being replaced by ‘feminine vices’. The manosphere believes that Western culture is one of misandry—hatred of men. The ‘obviousness’ of misandry and gynocentrism are discussed in the manosphere in the way that feminists discuss obvious patriarchy. MRAs and PUAs argue that culturally, masculinity is degraded, and

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<sup>36</sup> One criticism leveled at father’s rights activists is that they focus nearly exclusively on harm done to sons when discussing absent fathers. The effect of a father’s absence on his daughter is ignored by FRAs, and we see that same tendency in MRA and PUA discourse here.

<sup>37</sup> The manosphere often refers to feminism as Marxist. The label is applied by MRAs and PUAs more as a pejorative (in the same way President Obama’s critics call him a Marxist) than as a means to identify a particular school of feminism in the way Marxist or feminist scholars would use the term.

that men and boys are now taught that their masculinity is problematic. Traits that the manosphere understands to be innate in men are, it is believed, essentially outlawed and pathologized in the West. Bloomfield states that “[m]en are neutered, essentially from birth, and taught that their energy and desire to interact physically with the world is a mental disorder that requires medication,” (JB, 2014a). Masculine virtues—energy, combativeness, confrontation—are discouraged, and replaced with feminine ‘vices’. Bloomfield argues that the West is in decline because it has embraced ‘female values’ (like cooperation, sociality, and sensitivity) at the expense of masculinity (JB, 2014a).

In the discourse, ‘political correctness’ is often invoked as an example of feminine ‘vices’ usurping masculine virtues:

[t]he modern religion of the West—political correctness—is every feminine vice writ large: bossy, deceitful, petty, and false.<sup>38</sup> Almost everything that is wrong with modern life can be traced to the decline of masculine virtues and their replacement with feminine vices. For civilization itself is the triumph of masculine energy, vision, and courage (ROK, 2014h).

The old gendered binary of civilization versus nature is reproduced here. Masculinity is attached to civilization, and the decline of civilization is described as resulting from the spread of femininity. It is worth also noting here how the language infers a critique of the secularity of the West—religion and spirituality have been replaced with secular political correctness, the ‘new religion’. This sort of occidental<sup>39</sup> representation of the West is employed with some frequency in the manosphere—surprising, considering that manosphere participants are often understood to be atheist (and there are certainly atheist communities within the manosphere).

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<sup>38</sup> The notion of ‘political correctness’ has been gaining in prevalence over the last number of years, particularly in American politics, where it has been centre-stage in the 2016 presidential race. Donald Trump, Republican nominee, speaks frequently about political correctness. His campaign is also marked by an (at times explicit) refusal to empathize with people who do not look or live like himself and the persons he venerates. In the Trump worldview, empathy (which the manosphere would consider a ‘feminine vice’) is political correctness, and political correctness is oppressive.

<sup>39</sup> Occidental representations of the West are “distorted and stereotyped [representations] of Western society, which can be held by people inside and outside the West ... [and] in which the West is occidentalized as the land of autonomous, calculating individuals,” (Carrier, 2002). Occidental representations of the West often portray it as cold, machine-like, and spiritless.

While still relatively rare, arguments against capitalism are more common in the discourse than one might think (especially since it is sometimes profiled by casual observers as being universally celebratory of capitalism)—nearly 6 percent of cases in the data set articulated an anti-capitalist position. Interestingly enough, while at some moments capitalism is associated with patriarchy and masculinity (it is after all, based on masculine values such as competition and ‘freedom’), at other times capitalism or consumerism are associated with femininity and represented negatively.<sup>40</sup> Women are derided for ‘voluntarily enslaving themselves’ to corporations (RV, 2015e). Men who work corporate jobs are not judged in the same way. Perhaps women enslaving themselves to corporations is more problematic than men doing the same, because the manosphere believes that women ought to submit to men, rather than to the state or corporations. The corporation is understood to be appropriating the masculine role of master—ridding men of their manhood in the process.

In both PUA and MRA discourse, masculinity at the level of society is perceived to be under threat by external feminizing forces, as hypothesis 12 suggests. These feminizing forces are the disruption of systems of male rule and the advancement of women, the destruction of the traditional family model, and the replacement of masculine societal virtues with feminine ‘vices’.

These imaginings of feminizing forces (on both the level of the individual, as discussed in the previous section, and that of society) speak to (and support) three other hypotheses from the literature—that the discourse mobilizes towards the past, embracing traditional gender roles and inequalities, that femininity is disparaged in order to maintain the boundary between male and female, and that masculinity is undermined by advancements made by women towards greater equality. First, by emphasizing that male rule (over the family and society) is the foundation of a strong and moral society, the discourse celebrates traditional gender roles and inequalities. Second, femininity is disparaged in that where men are represented negatively, they are represented as effeminate, and also in that the destruction of society is thought to result from the spread of femininity. Third and finally, masculinity is represented as undermined by advancements towards

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<sup>40</sup> This sort of contradiction is quite common in the manosphere, particularly when it comes to discussions about feminism. Capitalist participants write about how ‘Marxist feminism’ is ruining society. Anti-capitalists write about how feminism is capitalist. Atheists say feminism is like a religion, while occidentals critiquing the machine-like secular humanism of the West, blame feminism for the decline of spirituality and meaning in people’s lives.

gender equality given that disruptions to male rule are perceived as feminizing—at both the level of the individual (men who do not properly dominate women are feminized), and society (which is feminized because it is now matriarchal/‘dominated by women’).

### **4.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Idealized images of masculinity in the manosphere are defined in opposition to femininity, embrace traditional gender roles and inequalities, are marked by control, privilege, and entitlement, and draw an association between masculinity and violence. Masculinity is also represented as being under constant siege by feminizing forces—at two locales. At the level of the individual, men are represented in PUA discourse as having been feminized. Both communities represent society as being in decline due to the disruption both of masculinity itself, and of masculine control over society and the family.

In these representations around masculinity—of masculinity, of men, and of (male) society—the veneration of a mythical and romanticized past is evident. Idealized images of masculinity as well as of society are produced—images that reflect tradition, traditional power systems, traditional gender roles, and gendered inequality. Things are not as they were back in the good old days—society is going down the drain. This sentiment is not exclusive to the manosphere; it is visible in mainstream (American) conservative discourse: “[b]eliefs in social and moral decline are widespread ... [even] when conditions are actually improving,” (Eibach & Libby, 2009). Representations of society or men as being in decline are used to critique modern life and counter progressive movements by representing them as disruptive and dangerous. In the manosphere, one progressive movement in particular is focused upon—feminism.



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## Chapter 5: The Manosphere's Antifeminism

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In this chapter I discuss representations in the manosphere around feminism. There is no question that the manosphere is anti-feminist. Feminism is mentioned explicitly in 72.9 percent of all MRA cases included in the data set, and 26 percent of all PUA cases. Explicit mentions of feminism are more frequent in the MRA community, because PUAs more often speak in general (and negative) terms about problems that are implied to have resulted from feminism or other progressive movements. In the first section of the chapter, I discuss representations of feminism, feminists, and the manosphere's antifeminism, in the discourse. This section discusses findings that speak to two hypotheses from feminist studies of antifeminism—the fourth hypothesis (that feminism is represented as being unnecessary, going too far, or being responsible for the unhappiness of women and men) and the fifth (that the discourse may appropriate the language of liberation). Both hypotheses are supported by my findings. The first section of this chapter is divided into three subsections. First I outline various critiques the discourse levels at feminism. Next I discuss representations of feminists. Third I explore how the manosphere represents itself and its antifeminism.

In the second section of the chapter I discuss two of the main arguments against feminism articulated in the manosphere—that ‘the patriarchy’ is a myth made up by feminists, and that feminists have incited rape and domestic violence ‘hysteria’ through myths about sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Both of these ‘myths,’ the discourse contends, are used by feminists to demonize and villainize men, and to represent women as perpetual victims. The findings discussed in section 5.2 and its subsections touch on the fourth hypothesis (about representations of feminism as it having gone too far) but speak primarily to the fifth (about the language of liberation) and seventh (that violence against women is reproduced in online contexts).

### 5.1 THE MANOSPHERE VERSUS FEMINISM: REPRESENTATIONS

In the three following subsections I discuss, in turn, critiques of feminism in the discourse, representations of feminists, and self-representations of the manosphere and its antifeminism. Both subcultures of the manosphere focused on in this study are resolutely anti-feminist. From the literature on antifeminism, I identified a number of

hypotheses that inform the conventional wisdom on the manosphere—two of which are relevant here. First, it is suggested that feminism is represented as being unnecessary, going too far, or being responsible for the unhappiness of men and women. Faludi (2006) argues that antifeminist backlash discourses are chiefly reliant upon two core narratives—that women and men are now equal and therefore there is no need for feminism (or the related narrative that feminism has gone too far, women have now surpassed men, and men are the victims of ‘reverse sexism’), and that women are less happy now than they were before feminism (p. 1). Second, it is suggested that antifeminist backlash discourses may appropriate the language of liberation. Faludi contends that using progressive language and arguments against feminism is a “powerful tool of subjugation,” (p. xiv). As the findings I outline below will make clear, both of these hypotheses are supported where the manosphere is concerned.

### **5.1.1 Critiques of Feminism**

The manosphere, and MRAs in particular, level a number of critiques at feminism—a number of which either represent feminism as oppressive, appropriate the language of liberation, or do both simultaneously.

One common representation of feminism revolves around it being ‘ideological’ (see Table 4)—with the most disastrous of potential consequences. Bloomfield calls feminists ‘social terrorists’ (JB, 2014i) and goes so far as to imply that millions of people will die if feminism continues its advance: “feminism is really Marxism in disguise ... Stalin. Lenin. Mao. Somewhere between 85 and 100 million people died when Marxism was put into practice. ... it looks like that is exactly where feminist/Marxist thinking is taking us ... How long will it be before it simply becomes legal to kill men?” (JB, 2013g). The manosphere—and MRA discourse in particular—characterizes feminism as ‘reverse sexism’ and hatred of men (misandry). One contributor for instance, writes, “[f]eminists see masculinity as evil. ... Their hateful and deluded understanding of men doesn’t allow them to re-evaluate their bigoted view of men ... In their bigoted brains, we need to change the definition of masculinity to something that can never ever be toxic—femininity. ... They don’t see that masculinity is what men are like, just as femininity is what women are like,” (AVFM, 2015f). Feminists looking to undo constructions of masculinity are represented as hateful. Constructions themselves are under-

stood to be natural, and questionings of gendered constructions are taken to be attacks on men themselves.

In a similar vein, feminism is equated with racism in the discourse. Bloomfield argues that feminism “is an attempt to reframe old-fashioned man-hating as if it’s some kind of human rights movement, much like organized racism has periodically tried to reframe itself as a ‘white pride’ movement,” (JB, 2015h).<sup>41</sup> In one post, feminists are described as being like lynch mobs (AVFM, 2015c). Feminism, it is stated, *is* female supremacism (AVFM, 2015d).

*Table 4 Most Common Critiques of Feminism (Percentage of Cases in Data Set Where Category Present)*

Position	MRA (%)	PUA (%)	Total (%)
Feminism has gone too far (men are now subordinate)	5.7	0.5	6.2
Feminism is a conspiracy (with hidden agenda)	3.6	0.5	4.1
Feminism is ‘ideological’	14.1	0.5	14.6
Patriarchy is a lie made up by feminists	7.3	1.0	8.3
There is no need (men and women are equal)	2.6	0.5	3.1
Other position	14.6	0.5	15.1

*Note: Codings are not mutually exclusive – if a case had two distinct representations in it, it was coded twice (once for each code).*

A primary criticism of feminism is a critique of third-wave/‘modern feminism’—what they call ‘victim feminism’ or ‘gynocentric feminism’. Of the ‘other positions’ coded during the data collection, the position against victim feminism was by far the most common (see Table 4). The MRAs in particular are likely to explicitly single-out victim feminism as the problem. Victim feminism is thought to be more about power and female dominance than equality. Victim feminism, it is argued, represents all women as victims (of men) and all men as villains. In so doing, victim feminism puts women (who ‘can do no wrong’) on a pedestal, makes them into children with no sense of responsibility, and demonizes men and masculinity.

<sup>41</sup> Ironically, Bloomfield goes on here to argue that “[f]eminists, who spend most of their ‘activist’ energy roaming around the Internet, harassing anti-feminists and men’s rights activists and pushing misandrist myths that women never lie about rape and never marry men for financial exploitation, are clearly bad for men,” (JB, 2015h). The irony is that many critical observers of the manosphere would characterize the manosphere using these same terms—critiquing it for its harassment of feminists and pushing of misogynist myths.

Bloomfield puts it thus: “feminism has morphed into an ideology that reduces women to the legal and moral status of children, while screaming for them to have the social privileges of adults,” (JB, 2015j). According to the discourse, feminism has gone too far and has morphed into a perverse ideology of female supremacy—what rights it has won for women, it ‘does not want to share’ with men (JB, 2014b). On occasion, ‘equitable feminists’ are mentioned approvingly, but this is a rare occurrence (it is very uncommon even for first and second wave feminisms to be spoken of approvingly—more often, feminism is disparaged entirely, or victim feminism is criticized without mention of earlier feminisms). One contributor to AVFM writes that ‘equitable feminists’ “offer refreshing objectivity, but the individual contributions of ‘the good feminists’ are drops of pure water in a polluted ocean that too few people bothered to clean when bigots littered,” (AVFM, 2014e).

While the MRAs are more likely to call out victim feminism in particular, in the PUA community it is more common to see all waves of feminism criticized (there are instances of participants arguing that women should not be allowed to vote—a right won for some women in the first wave of feminism). In PUA discourse, *any* rights won for women are thought to infringe upon those of men. One contributor for instance, writes,

[a]s with most female demands, capitulating to women's suffragists didn't satisfy them. Not content with invading the traditionally male space of political affairs, women started insinuating themselves into every other masculine sphere. The universities admitted them, which is why male students today find themselves harangued about imaginary ‘rape culture’. They swarmed into the workplace, which is why working men today find themselves terrified of sexual harassment or discrimination accusations from spiteful female co-workers. Even the military became feminised and sensitised, with deleterious consequences for the fighting man (ROK, 2014h).

Women in this blog post excerpt are represented in violent terms—they are described as ‘invading’ and ‘swarming’—while men are ‘harangued’ and ‘terrified’ (the implications of this sort of language are discussed further in the following chapter). Feminism is tied here to the decline of man, to the feminization of traditionally masculine spaces, and the ‘sensitization’ (read: feminization) of masculinity itself.

Victim feminists, it is argued, want all women to be victimized, to be treated and thought of as childlike. Feminists do not respect

women. This representation of feminists is central to the manosphere's framing of feminism as anti-woman. A post on AVFM reads, "[u]nlike feminists, people respect women every bit as much as they do men ... I know this comes as terrible news to radical feminists<sup>42</sup> who desperately hope and pray for everyday people to demean and despise women," (AVFM, 2013e). Under feminism, it is argued, women are not allowed to be human—they are infantilized and victimized by feminism. MRAs posit that (victim) feminism is not about 'female empowerment' at all—rather its goal is female supremacy at the cost of men. One contributor characterizes feminist modern culture in the following terms: "feminism ... has sunk countless women into a state of arrested development while also creating a legal structure that amounts to a gun pointed at the heads of all men. Women have largely become children backed by thugs," (AVFM, 2014c). This critique of feminism as anti-woman at times veers into bizarre territory. One MRA writes that feminists "hate independent, empowered women," (JB, 2014i). Feminists, her argument goes, would rather see women defenseless than empowered—and most feminists "view women as pathetic mewling simpletons incapable of navigating the tiniest bump or challenge," (JB, 2014k). Perhaps most bizarrely, a guest post on *JudgyBitch* states that "[f]eminists want women to be raped, so that other rape victims will not feel bad about having been raped," (JB, 2014i).<sup>43</sup>

Feminism is also critiqued for being white—for working for white women only. This is perhaps the manosphere's most legitimate critique of feminism. 'White feminism' is certainly problematic—and it is why the importance of intersectional feminism is emphasized in many feminisms. Bloomfield is the most vocal and explicit on this front, though others—in the MRA and PUA communities both—represent feminism as being concerned only with 'first world problems' of little true consequence or importance, while 'real' problems are ignored.

Bloomfield argues that white women enslave black women, and that feminism champions only rich white women, ignoring other demographics (JB, 2013h). She argues that white women are the masters of black women. Feminism and 'feminist myths' uphold this master-

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<sup>42</sup> The term 'radical feminist' is employed quite frequently in the manosphere. Typically, it is used not to differentiate between different feminisms, or to refer to a specific sort of feminist (strategy), but as a pejorative, to represent feminism/feminists in general as 'radical'.

<sup>43</sup> The *JudgyBitch* slogan is, 'The radical notion that women are adults'—a jab at victim feminism which, she argues, infantilizes all women.

slave power system: “[w]hen you embrace feminist ideas like ‘the patriarchy’ and ‘equality,’ you play right into their hands. Black men are not your enemy,” (JB, 2014d). It is impossible, she argues, for feminism to ever represent the interests of any groups other than wealthy white women,

because the white ladies cannot engage in their teary-eyed hand wringing over the plight of poor colored ladies without immediately implicating themselves as the principal source of racism and exploitation. Intersectionality and inclusiveness has never been part of feminism and never can be (JB, 2013h).

Bloomfield presents the men’s rights movement as the answer—only the MRM will address the perspectives and interests of non-white women. These representations of feminism as being for rich, white women only, takes a legitimate criticism of one particular type of feminism, and applies it to *all* feminisms. In other words, instead of critiquing white/liberal feminism specifically, all feminisms are represented as being for white people only.

Another trend in representations of feminism has to do with it being a sort of conspiracy.<sup>44</sup> At times, the discourse focuses on the ‘feminist’ media and entertainment industries. PUAs in particular are known for calling for boycotts of popular films they consider feminist. A post on *Return of Kings* about *Mad Max: Fury Road* warns, “if they sheepishly attend and [it] is a blockbuster, then you, me, and all the other men (and real women) in the world will never be able to see a real action movie ever again that doesn’t contain some damn political lecture or moray about feminism, SJW[social justice warrior]ing, and socialism,” (ROK, 2015e). By their imagining, movies about women are political (and some sort of feminist/socialist<sup>45</sup> propaganda), but presumably movies about men are not. It seems the offense here is that an *action movie*—typically understood as a ‘masculine’ genre—is understood to have been feminized, and will therefore never be ‘real’ again.

These representations of feminism—which characterize it as ideological, like racism, basically ‘female supremacy’, for white women only, and a (media) conspiracy—support the hypotheses from the literature. They either depict feminism as oppressive, appropriate the language of liberation, or do both at the same time.

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<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to note here how the manosphere’s critique of the (feminist) media is a sort of variant of anti-Semitic critiques of (‘Jewish’) media.

<sup>45</sup> Curiously at moments feminism is explicitly critiqued for being capitalist, supporting capitalism, or being concerned only/primarily with making money.

As I mentioned above, Faludi finds that in antifeminist discourses, feminism is represented as being unnecessary (since men and women are now equal) or as going too far, or for being responsible for the unhappiness of men and women. In manosphere discourse, it is uncommon to come across arguments that men and women are equal and that feminism is therefore unnecessary. The argument forwarded far more frequently is that feminism has gone too far—women now dominate society and oppress men. The manosphere critique of (third wave) feminism as ‘victim feminism’ explicitly represents feminism as going too far and being unnecessary. It also represents feminism as anti-woman (and responsible for the unhappiness of women) because it makes victims of women and forces women to ignore their ‘true nature’. Feminism is also represented in the discourse as making men unhappy by demonizing men and making villains out of them all. Other representations of feminism—that it is ‘propaganda,’ ideological (misandry/‘reverse sexism,’ a conspiracy aiming to disrupt masculinity and spread the spectre of femininity—also contribute to the narrative that feminism has gone too far.

In terms of the discourse appropriating the language of liberation, it is clear that this is a technique employed by the community. In the critique of white feminism, and in representations of feminism as being analogous to racism, and as anti-woman, the manosphere turns progressive/feminist tropes and uses them against feminists. In these representations, the discourse effectively tears down feminists, steals their logic, and represents them as hypocrites and oppressors, and men and anti-feminists as victims.

### **5.1.2 Representations of Feminists**

In many ways, feminists are represented in similar terms as the modern/Western woman discussed in chapter 3—unintelligent, manipulative, dishonest, entitled, and attention-seeking. The representations of feminists employed in the manosphere also echo in many ways stereotypes about feminists—that they hate men, and that they are ‘screechy,’ ‘hysterical,’ ‘neurotic’ and ‘dumb’—that we find in mainstream media. These representations depict feminists (and feminism) as mean, bad, and hateful, contributing to the narrative (discussed above) that feminism—instead of working for equality—intends to implement ‘female supremacy’.

The most common representation of feminists in the manosphere is that they hate men (see Table 5). Bloomfield,<sup>49</sup> for example, asserts that this ‘hatred’ stems from a psychological issue stemming from trauma: “[f]eminism is typically an unconscious hatred that women form early in life, often as a result of a trauma involving a male figure they trusted. An abusive father, brother, teacher or boyfriend can plant a seed deep down in their brain’s subcortical matter,” (JB, 2015e).<sup>50</sup> Here women’s feminism is pathologized and trivialized. Women have arrived at feminism not after thinking critically about gendered norms and power systems, but because of an unconscious hatred of men related to a past trauma. Feminists, it is stated, “get off on treating men badly. Every time they can put down a man or hurt his feelings, they unconsciously feel good because deep down in their hidden brain, their bad behavior is rewarded with a dose of the pleasure chemical dopamine,” (JB, 2015e). Manosphere discourse often uses ‘scientific’ language in this way to support a claim, without offering anything in the way of evidence to the fact.

*Table 5 Most Common Representations of Feminists (Frequency of Occurrence)*

Representation	MRA	PUA	Total
Feminists are liars	16	1	17
Feminists are manipulative	7	3	10
Feminists are rude/hateful in general	14	0	14
Feminists are too easily offended	8	2	10
Feminists are unintelligent	18	2	20
Feminists hate men	38	1	39
Other representation	48	1	48

A significant number of representations of feminists were coded as ‘Other representation’ during the analysis (see Table 5). The most

<sup>49</sup> Bloomfield champions a number of bizarre theories about feminists. In a blog post titled “12 Ways to spot a feminist,” she describes feminists as having a ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ personality. Feminists “will be late for appointments and dates with men, but be quite punctual with women” ... “she is extremely competitive”. Feminists are called intellectual thieves and stealers of money. “Sexually,” Bloomfield announces, “she lives to control men and gives little or no attention to their sexual pleasure ... She likes oral sex but only as a recipient. Her favourite positions ... avoid looking the man in his eyes. She will cheat on men,” (JB, 2015e). Like sirens from the deep, “[the feminists’] ability to lure men in with their charm and charisma adds to the difficulty of spotting the early-warning signs,” (ibid.).

<sup>50</sup> It is interesting that feminism is understood as a pathological result of a woman’s individual experience of male violence, while such violence is also celebrated at moments in the discourse.



common representation from amongst those ‘others’ is representations of feminists as hypocrites. These representations of hypocritical feminists rely upon those narratives discussed in the previous section—that feminism is anti-woman, and not intersectional or for equality (as it claims to be).

Another theme amongst those ‘other’ representations is depictions of feminists as abusive—just as women and mothers are represented as abusive (as discussed in chapter 3). In the MRA community, feminists are represented as abusive as well, or as protective of abusers. The notion of the ‘domestic violence industry’ (discussed below) is key in this characterization. One contributor speaks explicitly of feminists in these terms:

[a] man cannot peacefully protect his church from vandalism without being sexually abused by feminist protesters. A man cannot crack an innocent joke without a feminist getting him fired. A man cannot attend a speech about boys without being verbally abused by violent feminist protesters. A man cannot record corrupt individuals in a public place without being struck (AVFM, 2014e).

As activists, feminists are also represented in MRA discourse as being incompetent—lazy and absent, achieving nothing, or too stupid to ‘complete an article let alone to follow through on a campaign’ (AVFM, 2013a, 2014b, 2014e). Feminists are also represented as fat, ugly, and poorly groomed, and are characterized as “[promoting] obesity, poor grooming, unhygienic uses of body fluids, unflattering clothing and personal styles as a means of punishing both women and men for preferring conventionally attractive women,” (JB, 2015h). Feminists who are publicly visible—like Lindy West or Jessica Valenti—are attacked in both the MRA and PUA communities. These attacks often have to do with the target’s physical appearance.

The fourth hypothesis examined by this study suggests that backlash antifeminisms are reliant upon narratives about feminism such as that feminism has gone too far and is no longer about achieving equality. Representations of feminists in the discourse—which depict feminists as unintelligent, manipulative, dishonest, entitled, attention-seeking, hateful of men, screechy, hysterical, neurotic, dumb, hypocritical, abusive, incompetent, fat, and ugly—certainly contribute to such a narrative.

### 5.1.3 The MRM: Harbinger of the Non-feminist Revolution

When it comes to representations of feminists and feminism, the discourse clearly represents feminism as having gone too far, and appropriates feminist liberation language in doing so. In MRA discourse especially,<sup>51</sup> feminism is represented as a movement for female supremacy and hatred of men—not a movement for equality. I turn now to the question of how the community represents itself and its anti-feminism, and argue that the same patterns emerge again; the discourse employs liberation language to represent itself as the true movement for equality—reproducing the narrative that feminism is oppressive of, and sexist to, men.

Feminism is without question discussed more than antifeminism in the discourse. Of the cases I examined, there were very few instances of the discourse being explicitly self-referential in regards to its activism. In MRA discourse, the MRM is represented as the true movement for equality. In the very naming of the thing this framing is obvious—dubbing it ‘men’s rights’ or ‘men’s human rights’ represents the movement as fighting for rights that have been infringed upon—for a disenfranchised group that needs a movement to speak for it. By representing feminism as inequitable, the antifeminist MRA community establishes itself as fighting *against inequality*—for equality.<sup>52</sup>

In section 5.1.1, I outlined how MRA discourse represents feminism as being anti-woman. Unsurprisingly, the MRM frames itself as the truly pro-woman movement. This pro-woman framing primarily takes two forms. For one, it is argued that feminism denies women their nature and robs them of their deepest desires. Bloomfield writes, for instance: “feminism outright lies to women and actively attempts

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<sup>51</sup> In the PUA community, the analytical locale exists more at the level of the individual than the community or society. The role of the manosphere as anti-feminist movement is therefore not discussed on PUA sites—instead, the role of the manosphere at the individual level is focused upon (its purpose being to masculinize men and spread ‘red pill’ wisdom).

<sup>52</sup> Looking at the discourse it seems that equality would not be the objective—women are represented as not as good as men in certain domains (and vice versa). Some social conservatives, for instance, argue that equality should not be the goal. Bloomfield seems to invoke this sort of argument when she states, “men are given more responsibility and more prestige than women in the public sphere. Could that possibly be because women are given more prestige and more responsibility in the private sphere?” (JB, 2013g). Here she appears to imply that equality is beside the point—men and women should not be ‘equal’ because men and women are different and should have different roles. Despite this contradictory trend in the discourse, the MRA community frames itself as being concerned with equality.

to deny women what they most desire: a life with children and family. A movement that has at its heart the destruction of women's most deeply held desires does not come across as 'pro-woman' to me," (JB, 2014a). This argument contributes to the narrative that feminism has made men and women less happy, supporting the fourth hypothesis. For two, while victim feminism, the thinking goes, infantilizes and victimizes women, and works to prevent women from becoming 'empowered', the MRA does not. Instead of representing all women as victims, the MRM represents itself as enabling women to be thought of as adults. This is achieved by debunking feminist 'myths' (discussed in the two following sections), and asserting that women should be responsible for themselves. As I discuss below, this often takes the form of asserting that women be held responsible for the actions of those around them as well—including when they are unconscious.

A third core representation of the MRM centres around its role as the harbinger of the antifeminist revolution. The 'revolution' is defined by one contributor in the following terms:

[it] is not a 'movement,' but a largely unconscious demographic upwelling of resistance to feminism and its consequences. It is an objectively historical process, of a spontaneous, organic and amoral character. Its centre is everywhere, its perimeter nowhere, and its parts do not always accord with each other. We did not initiate or instigate this 'revolution'. We did not invent it. We merely recognized it in action, and gave it a name (AVFM, 2015d).

The MRM is represented as on the up-and-up, and feminism as soon to be found out ("[b]uh bye, embittered, man-hating feminists. Your days are numbered," (JB, 2015h)).

The MRA community frames itself as the true movement for equality, the movement that is *truly* pro-woman, and the movement that is truly intersectional and representative of the interests of racialized persons. These representations in MRA discourse of the MRM and its antifeminism reproduce the same patterns that we saw in representations of feminism and feminists. Hypotheses 4 and 5 are supported—feminism is represented as having gone too far, and the discourse appropriates the language of liberation in order to represent feminism and feminists as hypocritical and oppressive.

## 5.2 FEMINIST ‘MYTHS’

The manosphere concerns itself with two feminist ‘myths’—that patriarchy is real, and that there is a ‘rape culture’ and violence against women problem. These ‘myths,’ so the argument goes, are used by feminists to demonize and villainize men, and to represent women as perpetual victims. In the subsections that follow I explore how the manosphere speaks about both these ‘myths,’ and focus on two relevant hypotheses (that the discourse appropriates liberation language, and that violence against women is reproduced in the discourse). Both hypotheses are supported. The first subsection addresses the ‘myth’ of the patriarchy. The second subsection—itsself divided into two sections—addresses feminist ‘myths’ around rape culture and domestic violence against women.

### 5.2.1 The Patriarchy

In the discourse, it is widely accepted that patriarchy is a lie, and that the culture is one of misandry (hatred of men), though the MRA community tends to focus on this myth significantly more frequently than PUAs (this makes sense, as MRAs tend to concern themselves more with ‘political’ systems and issues). MRAs argue that “[f]eminists are now the ruling class, adding their brackets to the end of our civil liberties,” (AVFM, 2013f). ‘Symptoms’ of misandry are discussed quite frequently in the discourse—the most common being (the belief) that women are more privileged than men under the law, a position articulated in 20.8 percent of cases in the MRA data set (not surprising, given that the MRM (and its relative, the father’s rights movement) tends to focus on (their perceptions of) legal bias against men).

According to MRA discourse, the myth of ‘The Patriarchy’ is used to dehumanize and villainize men, and is at the centre of victim feminism.<sup>53</sup> Feminism’s misandry, argues a contributor to AVFM,

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<sup>53</sup> In manosphere discourse, patriarchy is spoken about differently at different times and in different spaces. Some argue that ‘The Patriarchy’ is a pervasive myth made up and popularized by feminists. Others argue that patriarchy—male rule—is the basis of a strong and moral society, and that societal problems stem from patriarchy being undone. These two notions are not strictly incompatible—many would argue that patriarchy *is* good, but that it has been undone to the point that men are now subordinate/oppressed—and that therefore the idea that society is *still* patriarchal is a myth. Others would say that society has *never* been patriarchal (citing military conscription and male on-the-job death rates as evidence).

stems from “harmful myths about men, and the biggest myth is the myth of male socioeconomic omnipotence, also known as the capital-‘P’ Patriarchy. Patriarchy is your excuse for remaining willfully ignorant of male pain ... Patriarchy is your excuse for blaming men’s problems ON men,” (AVFM, 2014e). The argument goes that it would be difficult for feminists to represent women as victims if they admitted that in fact women dominate and are more privileged than men—so they perpetuate the notion that patriarchy endures. An MRA writes, “The Patriarchy™ is not a real thing. It is only an imagined thing—a fetishized object of imagination that exists in the minds of feminists and other morons. It exists to perpetuate a shallow and one-dimensional narrative that presents women as objects-of-victimization,” (AVFM, 2013b).

The discourse attempts to debunk feminist evidence of the patriarchy. Take, for example Bloomfield’s argument that the notion of a ‘gender pay gap’ between men and women is a myth. She argues that if women truly do not earn as much as men, companies would only hire women in order to save money, and that if men *do* earn more for the same work, it is because they are better at the work, or work harder or longer hours than do women (JB, 2013c, 2015c).

Framing ‘the patriarchy’ as a feminist myth, crafted by feminists in order to demonize and villainize men, enables the antifeminist narrative that the culture is one of misandry now that feminism has gone too far.

## **5.2.2 Rape and Domestic Violence ‘Hysteria’**

In the manosphere, false accusations of rape or domestic violence, and the feminist myth of ‘rape culture,’ are key concerns. Feminist rape and domestic violence ‘hysteria’ is thought to play an essential part in the demonization of men by feminism.<sup>55</sup> In the following two subsections I discuss the different articulations of this concern. First, I discuss the discourse on rape and sexual assault—feminist ‘rape hysteria’ and the ‘epidemic’ of false accusations. Second, I discuss the discourse on domestic abuse—the feminist ‘domestic violence industry’. Both ‘myths’ have to do with violence against women, and both are represented as being hysterical, and as inciting an epidemic of false accusations. Here as above it is clear that the dis-

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<sup>55</sup> At times this argument veers into bizarre and concerning territory in the manosphere. Bloomfield, for instance, in a blog post titled “In defence of pedophilia” writes that “[p]edo-hysteria has absolutely nothing to do with ‘protecting’ children and everything to do with demonizing male sexuality,” (JB, 2015f).

course appropriates feminist/progressive tropes. I will also discuss in these sections the seventh hypothesis, that violence against women is reproduced in online contexts.

In the literature review in the first chapter, I highlighted a study by communications scholars Stoleru and Costescu (2014) of the comments on articles published online about legislative changes in the area of domestic violence against women. The authors identify two narratives that informed the responses—that women are to blame if they are victims of domestic violence, and that domestic violence is a private issue. These narratives, they argue, are reproductive of violence against women. It is reasonable to imagine that in manosphere discourse, violence against women might similarly be reproduced. The findings of my analysis support this hypothesis, as shall be discussed in more detail below.

### ***5.2.2.1 Rape hysteria and false accusations***

The notion of a ‘rape culture’ is characterized as a feminist lie that degrades and villainizes men, and treats women like children, allowing them to evade responsibility for their actions. One contributor figures that the end goal of this rape ‘hysteria’ is to restrict ‘male autonomy’ by unfairly criminalizing men’s actions (AVFM, 2014d). Others express outrage at the idea that the West has a rape culture problem. ‘Real rape culture,’ argues one PUA, is like Germany at the end of WWII, when invading soldiers raped German women on a large scale—what is going on in the West is not ‘rape culture’ but rape hysteria, and “[w]omen in the [W]est are extraordinarily lucky to live with such civilized men,” (ROK, 2014f). An MRA argues that if the West really had a rape culture, raping women behind dumpsters would be allowed—but the everyday encounters that some women experience as threatening or violent—such as street harassment—that certainly is not ‘rape culture’ (AVFM, 2014h). This contributor goes on to argue that feminists do not delineate between mundane experiences of harassment and rape. In the discourse, there are mentions of ‘the 1-in-5/1-in-4 myth,’ referring to the popular statistic that one quarter of women will be sexually assaulted during their college years.

There is, according to the manosphere, an epidemic of false rape accusations in the West. While the blog posts I analyzed quite frequently discussed cases of rape and sexual assault, I did not come across a single instance where the accuser was *not* characterized as either falsely accusing the alleged perpetrator, or as at fault herself for

failing to protect herself. It is argued that women publicly accuse men of rape or sexual assault in order to make money. In the discourse, there seems to be utter faith in the criminal justice system in cases where the accused is a man and he is not convicted—the truth does not matter, it only matters whether or not the accused was found guilty (Bloomfield writes for instance, “[t]he question is not did Woody Allen molest Dylan Farrow? The question is has Woody Allen been convicted of abusing Dylan Farrow?” (JB, 2014c)). In cases where the accused *is* found guilty, it is argued that he was wrongly accused and is a victim of a hysterical system stacked against men. MRAs in particular are wont to make this sort of argument; they are more likely than PUAs to argue that there is an institutional problem—a legal bias against men—facilitating false accusations. One MRA characterizes this ‘legal bias against men’ in the following terms: “[i]n cases of rape or sexual assault, the disturbing changes to the legal system are thus: 1. The presumption of guilt; 2. A shift of the burden of proof onto the accused; 3. Removal of mens rea or ‘guilty intent’ as a requirement for conviction; 4. Rape shield laws that interfere with public hearings and defence rights,” (AVFM, 2013f).

The MRA is more likely to argue that the rape never happened, than the PUA, who—while also maintaining that rape hysteria is widespread and that false accusations are common—more commonly argues that (it does not matter if it happened or not because) rape is a woman’s fault.

Discussions of false accusations are common. One theme evident in the discourse is that women falsely accuse their partners with mal intent. Roosh V offers this explanation of why women falsely accuse men of rape: “I saw women who, once feeling awkward, sad, or guilty for a sexual encounter they didn’t fully remember [would accuse a man of rape],” (RV, 2015b). A common argument in the PUA community is that women claim to have been raped because they do not want to admit to being ‘sluts’. This echoes the claim—oft employed in the discourse—that women are inherently dishonest, and ‘intrinsically know’ that they should not be ‘sluts’. One PUA writes, “[w]omen would rather jail men with false rape accusations than admit that they slept with them,” (ROK, 2013g). In a similar vein, Bloomfield states, “I have a hunch that a good number of real life ‘rapes’ are not rapes at all, but cheating women covering up their infidelity, even if it has gone unnoticed. They are so guilt ridden, they want to confess, but not face any consequences. So the cheating becomes rape,” (JB, 2015d). She also argues that if it is not mal intent,

women have been convinced by feminists to believe they have been raped, when it is not true:

that's where we are at with rape culture. I sincerely believe that most women who claim they were raped TRULY believe they were. They are operating in Euclidian space. Of course, there are point blank liars and false accusers, and the number of those may actually be pretty high [but] the rest of the ladies, the so-called 'one in four' really, truly, deeply believe they were raped. And as long as we use their definition of rape, they were (JB, 2013b).

Here we see common misconceptions about rape emerge—'real rape' so to speak, is done by a masked stranger, lunging forth from behind foliage at night. Rape done in other contexts—by persons known to the victim—are not considered 'legitimate'.

These sorts of mistaken beliefs about rape are common place in the discourse of the manosphere. If a woman does not fight back, does not scream, cannot recall a timeline of the attack, or has polite contact with the accused after the fact, her account of the attack is questioned, and she is labeled a false accuser. One PUA offers this account of an 'experiment' he conducted, proving, in his mind, that rape cannot happen nearly as much as he has heard:

Several years ago I also conducted an experiment with my ex, whom I was with for five years. I'm a big dude, well over 6 [feet] and 200+ pounds. She was about 5'4 and 110 pounds. Bear in mind, this was a mutual endeavor—a test to see how well she could protect herself against an attacker. The goal was to get her jeans and underwear off. Basically, a simulated rape attack. She could do whatever she wanted to defend herself within reason—as in don't punch me in the face, gouge my eyes, kick me in the dick, etc. After about four minutes of wrestling with her, I was able to get her jeans unbuttoned and her zipper down—that's it (ROK, 2014n).

This 'report' clearly does not account for the fact that rape occurs when women are unable to fight back—when they are unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, when (fearing for their lives) they are incapable of fighting, when (not wanting to be 'rude', 'difficult' or 'a tease') women feel at fault, ashamed and deserving of the attack. In the same post, the author estimates that thirty percent of the women he has dated claim to be survivors of rape while at college (even though "[he makes] it a point not to date women that come from the bars or clubs"), but he has never met a rapist. Instead of understanding the stories he heard as being indicative of a serious epidemic of



rape on college campuses, the author concludes that “something doesn’t add up” and that his ex-girlfriends were lying about being survivors.

Another common theme in the discourse is that women are at fault if they are raped. Perversely, this argument is employed by the manosphere in framings of the movement as pro-woman. Victim feminism, it is argued, allows women to avoid taking responsibility for themselves, and means that women do not take the steps necessary to protect themselves. Bloomfield, for instance, dislikes that women are not forced to take responsibility for the behaviours of men while she is unconscious. She states, “every adult human is responsible for their own decisions, no matter how drunk or impaired they are,” (JB, 2013b). Another MRA echoes this sentiment: “the girl who went to a party full of people she did not know and got passed-out drunk never had to answer for her complete failure to be safe and protect herself from the boys who ultimately raped her. I do not think it is unreasonable to expect women to protect themselves,” (AVFM, 2014i). One MRA writes, “yeah bitch, absence of a firm ‘no’ is definitely a yes,” (JB, 2014e).

In perhaps his most infamous article, Roosh V proposes that rape be made legal on private property. He begins the article with a pro-woman framing—he has arrived at his position, he states, out of concern for his college-age sister. His goal is not to facilitate rape, but to *end it*. He goes on to state,

[b]y attempting to teach men not to rape, what we have actually done is teach women not to care about being raped, not to protect themselves from easily preventable acts, and not to take responsibility for their actions. At the same time, we don’t hesitate to blame men for bad things that happen to them. ... I thought about this problem and am sure I have the solution: make rape legal if done on private property. I propose that we make the violent taking of a woman not punishable by law when done off public grounds (RV, 2015b).

Again here is the assumption that the only ‘real rape’ (for which women are presumably not at fault) is that perpetrated at knifepoint by strangers in public spaces. Rape that occurs on private property—by a person known to the victim—is the fault of the victim herself.

A related theme in the discourse around sexual assault has to do with expressions of concern for the accused, the ‘injured men,’ rather than the victim. This sort of victim blaming is visible in mainstream media coverage of sexual assault cases, such as when CNN reported

on the ‘promising future’ of the boys—‘very good students’—involved in the Steubenville rape case (Ortberg, 2013). This same sort of language is visible in the manosphere. Rapes/sexual assaults are called ‘stupid youthful indiscretions’ or ‘stupid decisions’ (AVFM, 2014i). Concern is expressed for the men who “are at high risk because of feminist ‘rape myth myths’” (AVFM, 2013f). One post on *Return of Kings* reads,

[w]hen I was listening to these women make their sketchy rape claims, I would often think of the men they were accusing. I would think of how incensed they would be to know that women they were once intimate with (or possibly not) are now desecrating their characters in an attempt to procure a morsel of pity that they don’t deserve—all at his expense ... Almost no men are rapists, but almost all women will play Faust at the crossroads and sell off their dick-stained 10-cent souls in exchange for attention (ROK, 2014n).

An incensed MRA states that, because of false accusations and ‘rape hysteria’, “[t]he world is not a safe place for men,” (AVFM, 2013f).

### ***5.2.2.2 The ‘Domestic Violence Industry’***

The MRA community in particular is concerned with what it calls the ‘domestic violence industry’ by which feminist judges, lawyers, police officers, and investigators, back wives who lie about domestic abuse in order to steal money from their husbands and gain custody over their children. Feminism is represented in the discourse as a ‘multi-billion-dollar industry’. Feminists have created ‘the industry’ in order to get money from the government and demonize men (AVFM, 2015b).

MRAs are known for publicizing the myth that men are equally as victimized by domestic violence as women—if not more so (because, the argument goes, female perpetrators go unpunished and male victims do not have the support services they need). Feminists, it is argued, ignore this ‘fact’ and therefore have to lie and create a ‘myth’ and ‘industry’ around the idea that women are more brutally victimized by abusers in the home. One MRA states, “[w]hat’s so inconvenient about things like domestic violence, child custody, violent crime, etc. is that, if you’re a feminist, you’re always having to make stuff up,” (AVFM, 2013e). In the discourse, proportionality in domestic violence is not a concern. A PUA expresses dismay at the unfairness that a professional athlete who was filmed knocking out his partner and dragging her out of an elevator, had his career and reputation

damaged in the aftermath. It was unfair, the author states, because she deserved it, since she ‘initiated physical contact’ (she was moving towards him when he hit her) and was ‘knocked out in retaliation’ (ROK, 2014q).

Feminist myths and ‘hysteria’ around domestic violence and sexual assault, it is argued by MRAs, obscure ‘actual victims’ and obstruct justice. Concern about the ‘epidemic’ of false accusations, for instance, is framed as concern for ‘actual rape victims’: “[f]alse reporting is not only horrendous for the accused it makes it harder for actual rape victims to get justice,” (AVFM, 2015h). Worse still, feminist ‘myths’ about domestic violence demonizes men and ignores male victims. One MRA argues that the very term “[v]iolence against women’ is exclusionary and ignore half of all domestic violence victims. Even worse, it demonizes men as perpetrators and women as victims in the majority of domestic violence cases, which simply is not true,” (AVFM, 2013c). Not only do these ‘myths’ erase male victims, they facilitate the violent actions of abusive wives and mothers. It is argued, for instance, that instead of being concerned about ‘domestic violence against women,’ we should be talking about ‘family violence’—violence against children by their mothers and the men their mothers bring into their lives (AVFM, 2015e).

In the manosphere, narratives about feminist ‘myths’ represent feminism as having gone too far (being oppressive or sexist (by ‘demonizing men’)) and as being responsible for the unhappiness of men and women, as is suggested by the literature on antifeminist movements. They are also used to represent feminists as hypocrites and oppressors, a hateful group that makes up lies in order to villainize men and hurt women. In this way—by representing feminists as oppressive—the discourse appropriates progressive tropes to use against feminists, as is theorized. The manosphere frames itself as pro-woman—according to MRAs and PUAs, victim blaming is pro-woman because it treats women like adults instead of children (as feminists supposedly do).

These narratives about feminist ‘myths’ also reproduce violence against women. As was discussed above, narratives are productive of violence if they blame victims for violence done to them, or otherwise turn a blind eye to the problem (by, for instance, insisting that violence against women is a private issue). Much of the rhetoric in the manosphere around sexual assault or domestic violence is violent in this way. The narrative of an ‘epidemic’ of false accusations of sexual assault, common in the manosphere, makes it more unlikely that survivors who report will be believed (discouraging survivors from re-

porting). It also has influenced, and continues to influence, how the law approaches and handles cases of alleged rape (Rumney, 2006, p. 128). The discourse also reproduces harmful myths about sexual assault (for instance about what constitutes a ‘legitimate’ or ‘real’ rape, who a ‘real’ victim is, and what a false accusation ‘looks’ like). There are also the trends in the discourse of blaming victims for their sexual assault, and representing the *accused* as the true victims. The popular manosphere narrative that women and men are equally brutalized by domestic violence obscures female victims and the gendered nature of the problem.

### 5.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Representations around feminism in manosphere discourse are as one would expect, given what is theorized in the literature on antifeminist movements. Feminism is represented as having gone too far and as being responsible for the unhappiness of women and men. The discourse appropriates the language of liberation to use against feminism, and violence against women is reproduced discursively.

The appropriation of liberation language is a core discursive strategy in the manosphere—particularly the MRA community. Feminism is represented as racist (responsible for the continued subordination of racialized persons), sexist (a movement, motivated by a deep and visceral hatred of men, for female dominance and power, not gender equality), and anti-woman (because it does not respect women—it infantilizes and makes victims of them). Language of the Civil Rights Movement is appropriated and used to represent feminists as being similar to, or as bad as, white supremacists (feminism is called ‘female supremacism’ and feminists are described as being like racists or lynch mobs). MRA discourse especially appropriates progressive tropes and language, and uses it against feminism, effectively representing feminists as oppressive hypocrites. This strategy enables the manosphere to frame itself as fighting for what is right—the *truly* inclusive, intersectional movement for all peoples (women included) supportive of gender ‘equality’.

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## Chapter 6: Additional Representations

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We have explored how femininity, masculinity, and gender politics are represented in manosphere discourse—but there is more to the representational politics of the manosphere than this. For one, it is important to analyze intersectional categories to learn how these categories intersect with gender, as well as how they themselves are represented in the discourse. For two, representations are constructed not just by using language to build depictions—they are also made *through* and *in* language. Looking at rhetorical devices can therefore tell us more about the representational politics of the manosphere.

In this chapter's first section I discuss representations of race, sexual orientation, class, (dis)ability, and trans politics, as well as how these categories intersect with masculinity. This section speaks to a number of hypotheses outlined in chapter 1 around hegemonic masculinity which suggest that the masculinity reproduced in the discourse is white, straight, upper-/middle-class, and ablebodied. My analysis supports these hypotheses, except for that about class identity, which is complicated by my findings.

In the second section I explore how gender is performed through the language itself—how is the discourse itself a performance of gender, or gendered? This section speaks to two hypotheses about gender in computer-mediated communications. It is suggested by the literature on gender in online communications that the masculine discursive style and ethic are preferred, and that gendertrolling/e-bile plays a key role in patrolling gender boundaries in the discourse. My analysis supports the first of these hypotheses while disproving the latter.

In the third section I discuss commonly used metaphors in the discourse and their implications. I discuss how metaphors of violence are deployed to represent feminists and the government as violent and violating, as well as how metaphors about relationships naturalize men's entitlement to women (supporting the hypothesis that masculinity is marked by entitlement).

### 6.1 INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS: FINDINGS

In the five subsections that follow, I address the way that the masculinity of the manosphere reproduces hegemonic modes of masculinity. As I discussed in chapter 1, this study recognizes the importance of looking not just at gender (and how masculinity and femininity are constructed in opposition to one another) but also at how

other categories intersect with gender to form a construct that is raced, classed, gay or straight, and so on. The following subsections speak to the hypotheses that emerge from intersectional theories on hegemonic masculinity—that heterosexuality is naturalized in order to maintain the boundary between masculine and feminine (hypothesis 11), that whiteness is taken as ‘default’ (hypothesis 13), that a middle-class manhood is embraced (hypothesis 14), that working class masculinity and men are disparaged (hypothesis 15), and that the masculine ideal is able-bodied (hypothesis 16). These hypotheses are all supported except for the fifteenth, which is complicated, by my findings.

The following subsections look not only at how the masculinity of the manosphere intersects with these categories—they also examine how these categories (race, sexual orientation, class, (dis)ability, and transgender) are represented. Doing so reveals important information about the representational politics of the discourse, and provides more insight into how the discourse reproduces traditional representations not just of gender constructs but of these multiple categories.

### **6.1.1 Race**

In the manosphere, representations having to do with race are handled very differently in the two subcultures I analyzed. For the most part, and across the field, it is not mentioned often. Rarely does the discourse speak implicitly or explicitly about race—12.5 percent of MRA cases and 6.3 percent of PUA cases included some discussion on the topic.

For the most part, MRA discourse uses race to frame the MRM as the truly inclusive, intersectional movement—similarly to how it frames itself as pro-woman. Where race is discussed, most of the time the discussion is about black people. A number of blog posts about men’s issues mentioned that black men are impacted (by laws and cultural narratives that disfavour and ‘demonize’ men) differently (to a worse extent) than white men. The discourse seemingly invariably uses these discussions to blame feminism for the institutional racism at the heart of the problem. In chapter 5 I discussed MRA critiques of white feminism. Feminism is represented as ill-equipped to speak for non-white persons or, worse still, as responsible for the continued marginalization of racialized persons, men and women alike. Bloomfield, for instance, argues that it is ‘standard feminist operating procedure’ to blame black men especially for any and all issues possible (JB, 2013d). Feminism is characterized as inherently racist, and re-

responsible for injustices in the lives of black men and women. It is argued, for instance, that (feminist) child support laws are responsible for the shooting death of a black man (by police) (AVFM, 2015g). Black and Hispanic men, it is argued, are common targets of false rape scandals, “and false rape claims strike a very sensitive nerve in those communities, given this nation’s sad history of lynching black men,” (AVFM, 2015c). I discussed in chapter 5 also how feminism is equated with white supremacy, and feminists are described as being like lynching mobs. It is stated that ‘young black males’ are most at risk when it comes to wrongful accusations (AVFM, 2015c), and that high rates of incarceration of black and Hispanic men are linked to unfair child support laws (AVFM, 2015g). These representations redirect anger against institutional racism towards feminists. Feminists hate black people, according to MRAs—one contributor writes that feminists have been quick to proclaim Bill Cosby guilty because they are “blinded with their frothing hate of him, his race and gender,” (AVFM, 2015f). The MRA community uses these representations of feminists as racist, and invokes race, in order to frame itself as the truly inclusive movement—the only movement that can represent the interests of non-white men and women, as well as other marginalized groups: Bloomfield writes, “[m]en of color have long known that the [MRM] has inclusiveness at its core, as have gay men, disabled men, poor men, every other category of man you can think of: no condition other than the simple fact of biological sex comes in to play when it comes to [men’s issues],” (JB, 2013h).

The situation is quite different when it comes to representations of racialized peoples in the PUA community. In chapter 2 I discussed how some prominent PUA personalities are alleged white supremacists. Troubling racist tendencies are visible in the segment of the discourse that I analyzed. Representations of racialized men in the discourse are problematic and tend to reproduce stereotypical and/or colonial representations.

One such representation is that of the threatening black man. In one blog post, it is insinuated that being cheated on is doubly humiliating if the ‘other man’ is black (ROK, 2014k). Black men are also represented in the discourse in terms that represent them as being primitive rather than civilized (like white men). Black men are described as ‘giving girls the black snake’ (ROK, 2013d) This use of animal terms to describe the male anatomy is unique to representations of black men—white men are not described as ‘giving girls the snake’. In this same post, Roosh V makes the argument that PUAs should not care that black men ‘like fat girls’—hinting that PUA

commonly think that all black men are attracted to a curvier body type, and that they are wrong, are inferior, for this reason. The PUA rationale would be that black men are contributing to the ‘fat acceptance’ problem by giving ‘fat girls’ attention. This sort of argument problematically reproduces colonial representations of black bodies as hypersexual and sexually primitive (Ponzanesi, 2005). Elsewhere in a PUA post, ‘non-Western’ men are also represented as uncivilized. Take for instance this extract, quoted in part in an earlier chapter:

[w]omen in the [W]est are extraordinarily lucky to live with such civilized men. And yet they and their pathetic manslaves are trying to destroy our once phenomenal and nowadays mostly all-right culture by voting in politicians and parties who are already flooding our countries with non-[W]estern men from societies that have real rape cultures (ROK, 2014f).

Here, non-Western men are represented as uncivilized (rapists) and threatening (they ‘are already flooding our countries’). The colonial gendered and racialized binary of civilized versus primitive/‘of nature,’ attaches masculinity and whiteness to civilization in a powerful manner that endures today.

The masculine ideal championed in the manosphere is undoubtedly white. In chapter 4 I discussed how ‘classical masculinity’—a traditional masculinity that emphasizes honor, civilization, rationality, and providing for and protecting the family—is produced in the discourse. It could be argued that traditional representations of masculinity are necessarily always white, but I would add that the classical model of the manosphere is particularly so, because of its emphasis on rationality and civilization (both traditionally associated with whiteness (as opposed to irrationality and primitiveness, which are traditionally associated with non-whiteness)). Moreover, most blog posts make no mention whatsoever of race or white privilege, and in this sense whiteness *is* assumed to be ‘default’ (as theoretical analyses of online communications suggest is the case).

The discourse also represents race in very interesting ways. The MRA community depicts racialized persons as suffering at the hands of feminism. Representations of this sort use progressive tropes and arguments against feminists, and contribute to the narrative that feminism is only for rich white women, and is not truly an intersectional movement for equality. In PUA discourse, conversely, problematic stereotypical/colonial representations are evident—racialized men are characterized as primitive/uncivilized and irrational.



### 6.1.2 Sexual Orientation

When it comes to sexual orientation, the tone adopted in the discourse is for the most part homophobic. It is suggested in theory on gender that heterosexuality maintains the boundary, foundational to traditional gender constructs, between masculinity and femininity. Boundary maintenance in this respect can involve the naturalization of heterosexuality (including the use of sexualized and gendered epithets, the representation of gay men as not ‘real men,’ and emphasizing the importance of heterosexual prowess). Coston and Kimmel (2012) argue that compulsory heterosexuality results from the opposition to femininity and the effeminate at the heart of traditional modes of masculinity (p. 104). In the manosphere, these representations are for the most part reproduced, supporting the hypothesis at hand.

In the MRA posts I analyzed, there were moments where the MRM was framed as an ally to gay rights groups and gay men in particular.<sup>59</sup> One post for instance mentions that straight men are not the only male victims of intimate partner violence—gay men and transgender men can be victims too (AVFM, 2013c). These framings of the MRM as *the* movement for gay men are typically employed on AVFM where homosexuality is being discussed. Bloomfield, however, on her own blog, voices an anti-gay rights position. A common theme on *JudgyBitch* is the argument that gay men get ‘special treatment’. In her post ‘In defence of pedophilia,’ Bloomfield argues that pedo-hysteria targets straight men only: “[t]he hysterics only come out when those men are heterosexual. Gay men seem to get a pass when it comes to ‘protecting children’ from dangerous male sexuality,” (JB, 2015f). In another post written by a guest contributor, the author expresses anger at how gay people receive special treatment: “it’s in vogue these days to be extra super nice to gays, because they’ve had it so rough dontcha know. Never mind that nowadays most of the abuse historically associated with being gay just isn’t a thing anymore,” (JB, 2014e). Here, a denial of homophobia is apparent, similar to the denial in the discourse of patriarchy and sexism against women.

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<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, at the time of writing, the front page of AVFM features a banner advertisement for a book marketed at gay men. The objective of *The New Gay Liberation: Escaping the Fag End of Feminism* (Lye, 2016) is to convince gay men that feminism is not on their side. The book is described as “[ripping] the cover off of feminism’s false pro-gay front to reveal Westboro Baptist Church level hostility toward gay men that has burned through feminist rhetoric for 40 years.”

The PUA community is strongly anti-gay rights and homophobic. In the discourse, gay marriage is tied to the destruction of the traditional family and the decline of society. Roosh V writes that one good thing about travel abroad is that one encounters more ‘traditional human beings’: “[t]here are less homosexuals abroad. I don’t care what gay people do in private, but it annoys me to be surrounded by their flamboyant, deviant, and abnormal behaviour in public, especially with their excessive displays of affection,” (RV, 2013d). Heteronormativity is apparent here—homosexuality is represented as ‘deviant’ and ‘abnormal’. Stereotypical homophobic representations of male homosexuality are reproduced. One contributor writes, “[g]ay acceptance is built on the false myth that they’re ‘just like you and me’ and that ‘love is love’. To win societal acceptance, they need to obsessively pretend they’re family-focused, because they seem to operate on two driving desires: sex and approval ... [m]ale homosexuality is not monogamy, hand-holding, and baking—it’s ass fucking an insane amount of strange men, often without protection and without any care of not spreading HIV,” (ROK, 2014j). Gay men are represented as ‘a public health threat’ because they ‘spread HIV’ and are ‘the bringers of death,’ (ibid.).

As with Bloomfield above, PUA discourse denies the existence of homophobia; instead, the culture is one of *heterophobia*. One ROK contributor writes that ‘America is becoming a homosexual nation,’ (ROK, 2013e). Roosh V argues that the ‘heterophobic’ culture in the West means that “[p]romoting a heterosexual or traditional family lifestyle is becoming increasingly shamed while criticism of homosexual lifestyle is no longer allowed,” and that “we’re only 10-15 years away from when homosexuality or bisexuality will be seen as a superior lifestyle to heterosexuality,” (RV, 2013c). Roosh also argues that sexual orientation is a choice: homosexuality is a ‘lifestyle with no genetic basis’: “yes, I am saying that gayness is not 100 [percent] biological—there is absolutely an environmental component ... A genetically straight man could be turned gay if raised in an environment that nurtures and encourages his slightest homosexual tendencies, which is what America is doing today,” (RV, 2013c).

The ideal masculinity produced in the manosphere is indisputably straight—this is obvious in PUA discourse in particular because of the blatant homophobia, as well as the inherent emphasis on the topic of picking up women. More generally though, the classical masculinity espoused in the discourse is straight because of the prominence of the traditional (heteronormative) family in the masculine ideal. Classical masculinity stresses the importance of the traditional

family, the traditional male-female power divide, and traditional gender norms. We have also seen an emphasis on the traditional family in representations of femininity (chapter 3), and feminism (which, by disrupting the traditional family, has incited the decline of society (chapter 5)).

The hypothesis that homosexuality is disparaged in the discourse is supported. The PUA community, and MRA Janet Bloomfield, both speak in disparaging terms about homosexuality. Bloomfield maintains that gay people are privileged and that homophobia no longer exists. The PUA community reproduces traditional homophobic representations of gay men—who are depicted as different and dangerous.

There is another hypothesis from the literature that is relevant here. It is theorized in CMC literature that nerd communities may express ambivalence about hegemonic masculinity because of its (emphasis on) high standards of heterosexuality. Kendall (2000) posits that this ambivalence stems from *unmet expectations* of heterosexuality. Men feel frustrated because they—failing to attract women—feel unable to live up to standards of heterosexuality that are central to traditional modes of masculinity. She finds that in the discourse she analyzed, the problem is thought to be the fault of women, rather than of traditional masculinity. Essentially it is argued that the issue is not that the standard is unattainable—rather that *women's* standards are too high. If women only lowered their standards, sex (with attractive women) would be more available to men and their frustration would be resolved. This same practice is apparent in manosphere discourse. Women are blamed for men's frustrations with the masculine ideal (and its standards in terms of heterosexuality (to which they feel they cannot live up)), and for the consequences of men's frustrations.<sup>60</sup> Women, it is argued, need to lower their standards and give men more sex and attention. One MRA writes, “[w]omen ... need to examine their own actions in encouraging street harassment. I don't mean in terms of how they dress. Women need to look at their selection criteria. Boys evolve into Gamesmen [another word for PUA] because they no longer want to be invisible. The only way for them not to be invisible is for women to change their criteria,” (AVFM, 2014j). A contributor to ROK suggests that it is immoral for women to deny

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<sup>60</sup> In a recent article not included in the data set, this sort of argument is made in regards to terrorism. Young men turn to extremism because they are sexually frustrated, the argument goes. Society has failed to “understand the power of male sexuality,” (its power is such, apparently, that if a man's sexual needs are not met, he will be driven to extremism) (Berne, 2016).

men sex—especially ‘nice’ men—and implies that women should be punished for doing so: “[t]here is no god; there is no moral order to the universe: just as the ‘nice’ guy doesn’t get the girl, so bad people are not punished for their crimes,” (ROK, 2014o). Despite these expressions of ambivalence towards heterosexual standards inherent to hegemonic modes of masculinity, heterosexuality remains a key aspect of the masculinity of the manosphere.

### **6.1.3 Class**

In terms of representations of working- and middle-/upper-class men, the subcultures are less at odds. Socio-economic differences were not discussed in the PUA posts that I analyzed. In the MRA community, as with race and sexual orientation, there are moments where it is recognized that men’s issues affect men differently according to socio-economic status. As with race above, economic problems are blamed on feminism or women. Bloomfield asserts, for instance, that “[t]he children of single mothers everywhere are more prone to social problems. A lot of that grows out of grinding poverty, which is far more likely when children do not have two committed parents raising them,” (JB, 2014d). Mothers and feminists are blamed if they are single parents since, it is argued, women initiate divorce more often than do men, and since feminists encourage divorce and parenting out of wedlock.

The fourteenth and fifteenth hypotheses, from theoretical analyses of masculinity, have to do with the ‘class’ of the masculinity in the manosphere. Theoretical analyses suggest that the discourse embraces a middle-class manhood—one that emphasizes self-sufficiency, independence, and bread-winner status. My findings complicate this hypothesis. While these three traits are undoubtedly pillars of the masculine ideal in the manosphere, the discourse does not associate them necessarily with the middle-class. It is also theorized that working-class or blue-collar masculinity is disparaged—that men in this category are represented as ‘dumb brutes’ (celebrated for their physical virtues but imagined to be weak intellectually). The masculine ideal championed in the manosphere is, I would argue, not exclusively either upper-/middle-, or working-class. At times it is one or the other, and at times it is both. Blue collar work is quite often valorized—the rough, dirty, difficult jobs that men are so good at (see my discussion of masculinity in the manosphere in chapter 4). At other times, the masculinity championed in the discourse is quite posh and high brow—both MRA and PUA writers speak about ‘reading

philosophy,’ and PUAs in particular, especially prominent/full-time PUAs such as Roosh V, speak extensively about traveling abroad, and seem to have an abundance of leisure time at hand. Blue-collar masculinity is certainly not disparaged. If anything, the working-class and lower educated are not represented as rural simpletons, but are rather celebrated for their ‘working-class values’—like having no concern whatsoever for political correctness.

If ‘middle-class manhood’ is defined as emphasizing self-sufficiency, independence, and bread-winner status, then yes, the masculine ideal of the manosphere is middle-class—but I do not think that it would be accurate to label the masculinity as such. In the community, these traits are not relegated exclusively to middle-/upper-class men (though undoubtedly it is easier to be self-sufficient, independent, and a provider, if one is better off financially), rather it is only important that a man work hard, be rational, be independent, and provide for his family should he have one—regardless of his socio-economic status.

#### **6.1.4 Ablebodiedness**

(Dis)ability is largely ignored in the manosphere. As above, there are instances of MRA blog posts asserting that the MRM is an inclusive movement—for all men, including men with disabilities. Of the PUA posts I analyzed, there were no mentions of (dis)ability, except for one. In a discussion about rape, survivors are described as being broken, sick, undesirable, problematic, and like someone in a wheelchair: “[i]f a woman was involved in a car wreck that wasn’t her fault and found herself paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, I wouldn’t date her either. Why? Because I don’t date women in wheelchairs,” (ROK, 2014n). This characterization of rape survivors reproduces stereotypical and harmful representations of persons with disabilities.

Theorists of gender and (dis)ability suggest that ideal masculine constructs are ablebodied; they emphasize autonomy, control, independence, rationality, stoicism, and invulnerability (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2013). The masculine ideal reproduced in the manosphere is ablebodied in a number of ways. The focus on sexual desirability and virility in the PUA community produces an ablebodied masculine ideal, particularly in moments such as that quoted above, in which persons with disabilities are represented as undesirable. The classical model celebrated in manosphere is clearly ablebodied in that it emphasizes independence, control, rationality, productivity, protectiveness and ability to provide.

### 6.1.5 Trans Identity

It is also interesting to note representations of transgendered persons in the discourse. There is a stark difference in how MRAs and PUAs speak on this issue. While neither community discusses trans politics often, overall the MRA community seems more tolerant than the PUA subculture. Bloomfield for instance, writes, “[t]here are two genders. Male and female. They exist in our brains and when our biological sex does not match the gender we know we are, the consequences are shattering ... if one of my children were born transgender, I would do everything in my power to make sure they lived life as the gender they know themselves to be,” (JB, 2015a). Bloomfield also appears to critique what she understands the feminist perspective on transgender people to be. She argues that it is wrong to group transgender men and women in with lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (ibid.). It seems that she takes issue with the grouping because—while being transgender is a biological fact, something one is born with—homosexuality is a choice (ibid.). She also argues that feminists who maintain that masculinity and femininity are constructed categories, do a disservice to trans people by implying that one’s gender identity is a choice (ibid.). Here again the narrative that feminists are hypocrites is apparent—as is the practice of the MRA community framing itself as an inclusive and intersectional movement for equality.

The PUA community, conversely, is severely transphobic. Transgender women in particular are seemingly disdained. A blog post about Kaitlyn Jenner, for instance, argues that she underwent gender confirmation therapy because she was jealous of other women in her family that were getting more attention than she. The author writes, “[h]as Jenner equated being female with the fame, ‘respect,’ and adoration he seems to desperately crave?” (ROK, 2015d). Transgender persons are called ‘freaks’ by PUAs, and one contributor writes about learning about transgender politics at college, and how it inspired him to harass and humiliate trans women:

I learned a whole lot about transsexuals ... I was the typical college liberal do-gooder who worked for an LGBT group as an ally. I learned all the stupid terms that transsexual freaks used. I can argue about transsexualism for hours. I know their secrets and what stuff they’re hiding. Every blue pill/mangina/feminist/white knight has something they’re hiding. There is a closet of skeletons waiting to be unearthed. Immerse yourself in their world to learn how to fight

... In my town we have a transsexual freak problem ... I learned back in the day that transsexuals have this crazy expectation that they're women since birth. They retcon their personal history and are always bitching about not being seen as a chick. In my mind they were trying to pass themselves off as 'legitimate' but they were faking. They weren't 'authentic' at all, so I started a local Philly trend by calling them bootlegs out in public (ROK, 2014a).

The subcultures are clearly at odds here; the PUA community disparages trans persons and is relentlessly transphobic, while the MRA community expresses tolerance when the topic is breached—which happens rarely. What is also clear is that the masculine ideal produced in the discourse is undoubtedly cisgender. Where trans persons are not being denigrated by PUAs, they are for the most part invisible in the discourse.

The mode of masculinity reproduced in the manosphere is for the most part as theoretical analyses of gender suggest—it is white, straight, able-bodied, and cis. When it comes to class identity, the masculine construct is upper-/middle-class insofar as it emphasizes self-sufficiency, independence, and providing financially for the family—traits that are commonly attributed to upper-class manhood. What is interesting in regards to the manosphere is that these traits are not attributed exclusively to the upper classes—nor are working-class men disparaged, as the literature suggests. Taken into account these factors complicate the hypothesis that the masculinity is upper-/middle-class.

It is also interesting to note how various groups are represented in the discourse. The MRA community tends to be more accepting of, and more careful in how it speaks about, marginalized groups. Though there are contradictory moments (such as when Bloomfield asserts that homophobia has ended and that gay people therefore are receiving special treatment), for the most part MRAs seem to 'tokenize' racialized, gay, (dis)abled, and trans people in order to position the MRM as an inclusive and intersectional movement, and represent feminism as working against the interests of these groups.

## **6.2 GENDERED DISCURSIVE STYLES**

In the introductory chapter I discussed how computer-mediated communication is gendered. The literature on gender in CMC suggests that in online discourse, gender is performed discursively in two ways—through the discursive style and the discursive ethic. This hy-

pothesis is supported by my findings; masculinity is represented in the discursive style and ethic of the manosphere.

In terms of the discursive style of the speech, the literature suggests that the masculine style is to post longer messages, use sarcasm, self-promote, begin and close discussions, assert opinions strongly and frame opinions as fact, and use crude language (including insults).

The discourse of the manosphere is obviously masculine in that its participants espouse the masculine discursive style. Most blog posts are several pages long. Sarcasm is used frequently, particularly by MRAs when attempting to ‘speak directly’ at feminists, or to undermine feminist arguments. Bloomfield, for instance, writing about feminist campaigns against ‘manspreading,’ writes:

[b]ecause you KNOW it’s only ever men who sit with their legs apart on the tube, right? And women never, ever keep their bags between their feet. And they certainly never collapse over into someone else’s seat. Nor do they ever take up an inordinate amount of space giving each other pedicures on the fucking train. They never fall asleep with their legs splayed. And they never, ever sport asses so huge they have little choice but to take up two seats (JB, 2013e).

Self-promotion is also quite common; authors make grand statements either about themselves or about men’s rights activism, pickup artistry, or the manosphere. It is not uncommon to come across self-promotional statements—especially from manosphere heavyweights such as Elam, Bloomfield, or Roosh V—such as these statements from Bloomfield: “I signed with a New York literary agent who reps a Pulitzer Prize winner and multiple international bestsellers, and we have been working to take my war novel to market,” (JB, 2014h); “we [MRAs] intend to save our whole world,” (JB, 2014a), or this from Roosh V: “I consider myself a good man overall, who brings rays of sunshine into a woman’s life (I have testimonials if you want to see them),” (RV, 2014h). I also found that the authors of blog posts begin and close discussions, rather than posing questions for commenters to respond to, asking others for their opinions, asking for feedback, or recognizing that one still has things to learn. I hope that over the course of this thesis, and in the many examples I have cited, it has become clear that in the manosphere, opinions are often asserted as fact without any qualification. Crude language, including insults, are also heavily employed in the discourse. In many of the examples cited across the pages of this thesis, the language is coarse. It is also common for insults to be hurled (at ideological opponents in particular),



such as when Bloomfield said this in an open letter to a named feminist: “is there ever a time, just one single time, when it’s not about you, you selfish bitch?” (JB, 2014g), or Roosh V disparaged Lindy West’s physical appearance (RV, 2015g). Misogynist language is also used with some frequency. The term ‘bitch,’ or variations on it (including ‘bitching’)<sup>61</sup> appeared fifty-three times in the posts I coded (43 times in MRA posts, 10 times in PUA posts). ‘Slut’ and related terms (‘whore,’ ‘hoe,’ and variations on those words) appeared a total of sixty-six times (10 times in MRA posts, 56 times in PUA posts).

Feminine discursive traits—such as apologizing, expressions of appreciation, qualifying statements, suggesting facts (as opinions), expressing (self-)doubt, or asking questions—are very rare if not altogether absent. Over the course of my coding, I did not take note of any instances of obvious feminine discursive norms.

Another gendered aspect of online communications has to do with the discursive ethic. In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed how the masculine discursive ethic champions free speech (freedom from ‘censorship’) as the primary concern, and therefore has a higher tolerance for, or altogether embraces, trolling and harassment. Free speech, censorship, and ‘political correctness’ are important concerns of the manosphere—8.9 percent of cases in the data set primarily discussed censorship/political correctness. This is a concern that is shared by mainstream conservatives as well; who dub symbolic changes (like putting abolitionist Harriet Tubman on American currency) ‘pure political correctness’ (Gass, 2016).

The ninth hypotheses that emerged from the literature review suggests that gendertrolling/e-bile play a key role in patrolling gender boundaries online. This hypothesis is disproved by my findings. When it comes to the segment of the discourse that I analyzed, harassing gendertrolling (of the sort known to feminists on Twitter) was not apparent. I did not find this surprising, as the most popular blogs (which tend to have more outsider eyes on them) tend to offer a more sanitized version of the discourse than found on more anonymous, insider venues such as forum pages or subreddits. That being said, it is not uncommon to come across posts that call out, humiliate, and use harsh language against, feminists. Roosh V, for example, in one post writes about ‘Lindy West Disease’: “[a]fter a set of beliefs infected her brain through an indoctrination mechanism ... the disease took charge to destroy her physical appearance into something unhu-

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<sup>61</sup> Irrelevant occurrences, such as occurrences as proper nouns (like *JudgyBitch*, or *Bitch* magazine) were not coded.

man and beast-like. Small children instinctively shy away from her ... The disease has fully ravaged her body and caused a massive gain in weight,” (RV, 2015g). The post features unflattering photos of feminists. Bloomfield, for another example, often calls feminists bitches. It is also worth noting that while the worst sort of harassing gender-trolling (featuring graphic and brutal rape and death threats), were not apparent in the blog posts I analyzed, manosphere participants are widely thought to be responsible for most of the online harassment women (especially those writing about, or publicly speaking out against, sexism) endure.

In the manosphere, masculinity is reproduced not just discursively with words, but also in language itself—in the discursive style and ethic of the community, both of which are masculine.

### **6.3 METAPHORS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS**

Examining commonly used metaphors in the discourse tells important stories about representations of gender and gender politics in the manosphere. In chapter 1, and briefly again in chapter 3, I discussed how metaphors function to equate two concepts as one—since metaphors make two parts of the brain activate together, over time, we come to equate the two parts as one (Lakoff, 2009; Westen, 2007). In the two subsections that follow, I discuss two types of metaphors used commonly in the discourse—metaphors of violence, and metaphors for relationships—and their implications. I argue that metaphors of violence justify a violent response to a non-violent event or entity, and that the relationship metaphors deployed in the discourse create a context in which men feel that they are owed, or entitled to, sex or attention from women.

#### **6.3.1 Metaphors of Violence**

Metaphors of violence can have troubling implications, primarily because they, it has been argued, justify a violent response to a non-violent event or entity. Kimmel describes this effect in terms of how metaphors we use to talk about women justify the use of violence against them: “the words we use to describe women’s beauty, women’s sexuality, women’s attractiveness: they’re words of violence and injury—to men. Women are *ravishing* or *stunning*; she’s a *bombshell* or a *knockout*; she’s *dressed to kill*, a real *femme fatale*. Women’s

beauty is perceived as violent to men:<sup>62</sup> men use violence to even the playing field—or, more accurately, to return it to its previously uneven state that men thought was even,” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 183). In the manosphere, there are instances of violent metaphors used to describe feminists and the government—of the blog posts I analyzed, metaphors of this type appeared in 11.5 percent of MRA posts, and 14.6 percent of PUA posts.

Government involvement is understood as violent and penetrating by members of both subcultures. One MRA argues that feminists use or intend to use ‘government violence’ to ameliorate issues like street harassment (AVFM, 2014h). In another example, a ROK contributor argues that, starting after women got the right to vote, the “[g]overnment, which had once been small and limited, began to spread its tentacles like a rape-beast from the sickest Japanese anime porn until it penetrated the lives of every citizen,” (ROK, 2014h). This representation of the government characterizes it as decidedly masculine—penetrating and raping citizens. Elsewhere, the government is referred to as ‘daddy government,’ and is resented for usurping the proper role of man as protector and provider.

Similar metaphors of violence are employed in manosphere representations of feminists. Feminism is equated with the Ku Klux Klan (AVFM, 2014a). Feminists are described as ‘literally Nazis’ (JB, 2015b), going in “with verbal guns blazing,” (AVFM, 2013a) and MRA and PUAs alike talk about a ‘war of the sexes,’ ‘getting ready for war,’ feminist mobs, enemies, and opponents, and manosphere allies. Roosh V writes, “SJW’s must be dealt with swiftly, forcefully, and without mercy,” (RV, 2014l), and calls Western women “terrorists who are showing absolutely no empathy for the needs of men ... Their ongoing war against us is creating an angry generation of men who are tired of their behaviour,” (RV, 2014a). Bloomfield states that *Buzzfeed* can ‘prepare to die’ because “it’s balls are in feminism’s purse,” (JB, 2015g).

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<sup>62</sup> This perception—that women’s beauty oppresses men—is at times voiced literally in the manosphere. Take this example from a reddit ‘ask me anything’ that Warren Farrell participated in: when asked why the cover image for the latest edition of his book *The Myth of Male Power* is ‘a woman’s rear,’ Farrell answered, “i chose that to illustrate that the heterosexual man’s attraction to the naked body of a beautiful woman takes the power out of our upper brain and transports it into our lower brain ... the sooner men confront the powerlessness of being a prisoner to this instinct, we may earn less money to pay for women’s drinks, dinners and diamonds, but we’ll have more control over our lives, and therefore more real power,” (warrenfarrell, 2014).

The use of violent metaphors such as these represent the actions of feminists, some women, and the government as violent and violating—and government and feminist entities themselves as inherently violent. This metaphorical tone sets up a circumstance by which ‘re-taliatory’ violence against these groups is justified. This is not to say that the use of violent metaphors will invariably lead to violence—far from it (think of how often we use violent metaphors in our daily lives in perfectly benign interactions—‘you kill me!’ when a friend makes us laugh). Nevertheless, violent metaphors are sometimes used by persons who take violent actions in their justifications for doing so.<sup>63</sup>

### 6.3.2 Metaphors for Relationships

In terms of metaphorical tone in manosphere discussions about relationships with women, the most frequently used metaphor by a large margin, is economic/transactional metaphors (see Table 6). PUAs *far* more than MRAs employed metaphor when talking about women.

A common concept in the PUA community is that of “sexual market value”—a rating on 10 that denotes one’s ‘quality’ or desirability to potential sexual partners. PUAs often speak of their market value, or the quality of their ‘targets’ in these terms. One contributor for instance, writes that mothers are “now too old, undesirable and tied down to be worth anything on the market,” (ROK, 2014d).

*Table 6 Metaphors for Relationships with Women (Frequency of Occurrence)*

Metaphor	MRA	PUA	Total
Economic metaphor	2	44	46
Impenetrable - penetrable	0	2	2
Predator - prey	0	10	10
Master - slave	0	4	4
Other metaphor	0	7	7

In the economic metaphor, sex is the ‘sale’. If the PUA fails to have sex, it is a ‘delayed sale’. PUAs speak of ‘return on investment’ (getting sex (the return) after putting the effort in (the investment)), or call women themselves investments (“don’t invest 100 [percent] in a woman,” (ROK, 2014c)). Roosh V writes that he wishes he had bought a woman an ‘insurance shot’ before leaving the bar, inferring

<sup>63</sup> Kimmel offers a helpful review of some of the literature on how rapists and domestic abusers use metaphor in speaking about why they perpetrate these crimes (2013, pp. 182–84).

that the drunker his target was, the easier it would be to get her into bed (RV, 2013b), and offers the following advice on relationships: “you must approach the relationship like a job, putting in the required amount of labour (game) to get the consistent payment (sex) you desire,” (RV, 2014f). ‘Pussy’ is the *payment* for a man’s effort to pickup a woman, and PUAs are described as ‘expending *labour*’ (RV, 2014j, emphasis mine). PUAs express frustration or outrage at ‘failed investments’. Women are represented as cruel for not—as one PUA put it—‘paying [him] back’ with sex (ROK, 2014c). Women are represented as selfish and dishonourable for not repaying their due. As Roosh V argues, “women only follow their feelings to rationalize a complete lack of obligation or burden to kindly repay someone’s prior investment and commitment to them,” (RV, 2014j).

The use of economic metaphor to describe relationships with women creates a circumstance by which men feel that they are owed, or entitled to, sex or attention from women. In our economic lives, we expect that if we labour, we are paid—that if we invest in something, we own it, and enjoy the returns. If we worked with the expectation of payment and were not paid, we would find this unfair (and be justified in finding it so). The use of economic metaphor in representations of relationships with women, sets up the understanding that a woman owes a man something (attention, sex, a smile) if he has invested something in her.<sup>64</sup> If a man makes the investment in, or labours for, a woman (whether desired by her or no) by spending time with her, communicating with her, or buying her things, he expects to be ‘paid’ for, or to gain returns on, his investment in the form of sex.<sup>65</sup>

The literature on antifeminisms suggests that antifeminist discourses emphasize that masculinity is marked by control, privilege and entitlement. These economic metaphors for relationships reproduce representations of masculinity as being marked by entitlement—entitlement to women, their attention and their bodies.

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<sup>64</sup> Economic metaphors of this sort are not limited to the manosphere—they are evident in everyday mainstream discourse, and the sense of entitlement in men that it inspires, is visible in everyday encounters between men and women. Take for example this sort of street harassment—a man may *pay* a woman a compliment—and if she does not respond positively to him, she is called a bitch or some other epithet. She owes him a pleasant response as reciprocation for his investment (the compliment).

<sup>65</sup> Another related but less common metaphor that I came across is what I call the ‘code-breaker metaphor’. Women are described as ‘codes to break,’ and the same pay-for-play understanding is implicated: put in enough work, make the right moves, and eventually she/‘the code’ will break.

Metaphors are used in the discourse to represent gender and gender politics. The PUA community uses metaphors that draw associations between picking up women and labour, sex and payment, that naturalize men's sense of entitlement to women. Violent metaphors are used to represent feminism and the government as violating, oppressive, and penetrating.

#### **6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In analyzing representations of gender and gender politics in the manosphere, it is not sufficient to look exclusively at how gender is talked about—we must also examine the ways that talk itself is gendered, and that rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, are used to represent and persuade. Moreover, looking exclusively at gender and no other category, is not adequate. Gender categories are informed by and inform in turn, other identity categories with which they intersect.

In the manosphere, the ideal masculine construct is reproductive of hegemonic masculinity—as is hypothesized by the literature—in that it is white, straight, embodies upper-/middle-class masculine virtues, is able-bodied and cisgender.

The discursive style and ethic of the community is decidedly masculine. In this sense the discourse itself is a performance of masculinity. Language is also used to represent gender and gender politics in the discourse. Metaphors of violence characterize feminists, their actions, and the societal changes they bring about, as violent and penetrating. Metaphors used in speech about relationships—such as code breaker or transactional metaphors—naturalize the notion that men are entitled to women, and contribute to the construction of a masculinity that emphasizes control, entitlement, and privilege.

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## Chapter 7: Conclusion

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The manosphere is a vast and nebulous universe. Constantly changing and completely decentralized, the defining contours of the phenomenon are difficult to make out. My hope is that this project has contributed to our understanding of the community, their worldview, and the ways they represent gender and gender politics, at least in part.

### 7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research project examined representations of gender and gender politics in manosphere discourse, a topic little addressed in academic literature. As we have seen, the discourse reproduces gender constructs that disparage femininity and women. The feminine ideal championed in the manosphere is that of the devoted and subservient wife. I found that where femininity is represented positively, it is attached to ‘housewife’ ideals including selflessness, pleasantness, attractiveness, loyalty, and caregiving. Negative representations of women far outweigh positive representations in the discourse. Women are represented as irrational, abusive, bad mothers, and sluts or women unconcerned with men’s opinion of them. I argue that the discourse articulates the ‘problem’ with the ‘modern woman’ as a sort of deficit of femininity. Women are represented as failing to fulfill their role as feminine (subservient, dependent, pleasant) women.

Examining representations of masculinity, I found that the masculine ideal in the manosphere emphasizes mastery (control and dominance), honour, and ‘warrior values’. I named this ideal ‘classical masculinity’ because it venerates a mythical past. I argue that the discourse represents masculinity as being in crisis—under constant siege by feminizing forces. The PUA community articulates this problem in terms of the ‘pussification’ of man, while the MRA and PUA communities both, understand the problem to exist at the level of society, where masculine ideals have been replaced by feminine vices, resulting in the feminization of society.

My analysis also examined representations of feminisms and feminists in the manosphere. Third wave/‘victim’ feminism is singled out as particularly problematic for having ‘gone too far’ and for its hatred of men (and women). Feminists are represented as unintelligent, manipulative, dishonest, hateful of men, screechy, hysterical, and lazy. The MRM represents itself as the true movement for equali-

ty—a pro-woman movement that will become increasingly accepted by the mainstream. I argue that the manosphere is primarily concerned with two core ‘feminist myths’ that, it is believed, are the mechanisms by which feminists demonize all men and represent all women as victims (of men)—these ‘myths’ are that patriarchy is real and that women are victimized by rape and domestic violence.

I also analyzed additional representations in the discourse—namely representations of intersectional categories, as well as representations of gender and gender politics *in* language. I found that the masculinity of the manosphere essentially reproduces a hegemonic mode of masculinity. I also found that the gendered discursive style and ethic of the manosphere is masculine, and that metaphors are used to represent feminists and the government as violent, and to reproduce traditional gendered power relations.

## **7.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HYPOTHESES**

In part, this project seeks to test the conventional wisdom on representational politics in the manosphere—to understand how the representational themes and discursive practices play out in actuality—if at all—on the pages of the manosphere.

Throughout the analysis chapters I discussed my findings in relation to the hypotheses established in the literature on topics related to the manosphere, and in theoretical analyses of masculinity. Here I summarize my findings in relation to these hypotheses.

In chapter 1, I identify ten hypotheses from the literature that we might reasonably expect to find in the manosphere. The first is that the discourse maintains a traditional (oppositional, disparaging) relationship to femininity and women—that is to say that the masculine construct excludes femininity. I found that indeed masculinity is represented in stark relief to femininity. The traits associated in the manosphere with femininity (either positively (selflessness, caring, dependence), or negatively (irrationality, incompetence, abusiveness, cruelty, unattractiveness)) are the opposite of those attached to masculinity (rationality, independence, loyalty, honour, control and dominance).

My findings also suggest that the second hypothesis—that the discourse mobilizes towards the past and embraces traditional gender roles and inequalities—is accurate. The traditional family is championed, as well as traditional gender norms therein. It is understood that women are natural caregivers, while the paternal role is to nourish his children’s minds and provide (financially, by working hard) for the



family. It is also suggested in the discourse that the strongest societies and families are those ruled by men. In the PUA community especially, traditional gender inequalities are celebrated—such as female disenfranchisement.

The third hypothesis is that the discourse emphasizes that masculinity is marked by control, privilege, and entitlement—and that masculinity is therefore undermined by advancements made by women towards gender equality. Here things are murkier. While masculinity in the manosphere is associated with control (control over the family, and institutional control), male privilege and entitlement are very rarely discussed. The ‘mastery’ emphasized in the discourse is also about control—control over nature, over one’s environment, of one’s body, and of one’s destiny. In chapter 6 I argue that the use of transactional and code-breaker metaphors for relationships with women, legitimizes the belief that men are entitled to attention or sex from women. Otherwise, entitlement and privilege are railed against and are largely associated with women and femininity. This is a masking strategy the discourse employs to obscure the privileges enjoyed by men and to represent women as dominant, and feminists as oppressors. By representing women as privileged and entitled, and by explicitly railing *against* privilege and entitlement, the manosphere mimics progressive social movements, except that the roles (of victim and villain) have been reversed.

In terms of representations of feminism, the discourse does represent it as having gone too far, and for being responsible for men’s and women’s unhappiness, as is theorized by the fourth hypothesis. Feminism is represented as being like racism or sexism—more about power and ‘female supremacy’ than equality. It is blamed for the decline of man and the decline of society.

The fifth hypothesis is that the discourse may appropriate the language of liberation. This is far more obvious in MRA discourse than that of the PUA community. While PUAs at times represent themselves as, for example, pro-woman (it was discussed in chapter 5 that Roosh V, in an article advocating making rape legal on private property, frames his stance as pro-woman), the MRA discourse features explicit and frequent uses of liberation language. The manosphere uses feminist tropes against feminists in order to represent them as hypocritical, oppressive, and anti-woman. It speaks often about equality, and frames itself as a human rights movement—the only truly inclusive, pro-woman and pro-man intersectional movement (unlike feminism), that best represents the interests of men and women. This framing of the MRM by its proponents has on occasion

been accepted by mainstream media. One critical observer of the manosphere explains:

[w]hat makes the MRAs particularly insidious is their canny co-optation of social-justice lingo ... MRAs claim to be a movement for positive change, with the stated aim of getting men recognized as an oppressed class—and women, especially but not exclusively feminists, as men’s oppressors. It’s a narrative effective enough to snow the mainstream media: ... *The Daily Beast* ran a profile of MRAs that painted them as a legitimate movement overshadowed by a few extremists. Trouble is, even the man ... singled out as the great ‘moderate’ hope that other MRAs should emulate ... is anything but. According to Futelle, ‘This is a guy who blames the epidemic of rape in the armed forces on women, who celebrated one Mothers Day with a vicious transphobic rant, and who once ... argue[d] that ‘after 25, women are just wasting time.’ He published posts on why women’s suffrage is a bad idea ’ (Friedman, 2013).

The sixth hypothesis from the literature is that the discourse maintains a traditional understanding of masculinity vis-à-vis violence. My findings complicate this hypothesis somewhat. Instead of violence being conceptualized as *restorative of* damaged masculinity, the capacity for violence is represented as *central to* masculinity. The mode of violence is also particular—defensive violence is celebrated, as well as the violence of the ancient ‘warrior class’ that built and maintained civilization. Offensive violence is not condoned in the discourse. Instead of violence being represented as a corrective after humiliation, manosphere participants are more likely to suggest that separating oneself from women, or ‘taking the red pill’ are the best ways to become properly manly once more.

The seventh hypothesis is that violence against women is reproduced in online contexts. My analysis found that in the blog posts I analyzed, explicit threats, celebrations, or encouragements of violence are virtually non-existent. But the discourse certainly reproduces violence against women in subtler ways. For one, misogynist rhetoric such as that found in the manosphere—even if it does not condone violence—can lead to violence, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, if it takes seed in the mind of a person like Elliot Rodger, or Marc Lépine (who fatally shot fourteen women at a university in Montreal) (Blake, 2015). For two, by denying the existence of a rape problem (on college campuses), by asserting the existence of an epidemic of false accusations of rape and domestic abuse, by victim blaming, and by maintaining that men and women are equally victim-

ized by domestic abuse, violence is reproduced in and facilitated by the discourse.

In chapter 6 I argue that the discursive style and ethic of the manosphere is masculine. The eighth hypothesis is that in online discourse, gender is represented through gendered discursive styles such as flaming, and that performances of masculinity online involve the rejection of feminine discursive and ethical norms. While instances of flaming were rare in the blog posts I analyzed, my findings are congruent with this hypothesis—the discourse rejects the feminine discursive style and ethic.

The ninth hypothesis is that gendertrolling/e-bile plays a key role in patrolling gender boundaries online. As I discussed in chapter 6, the posts included in my data set featured very few instances of gendertrolling. Gendertrolling is most commonly used, I found, to humiliate feminists and disparage ‘Western women’. Harassing e-bile— involving, for instance, graphic threats of rape— were not apparent in the discourse I analyzed (though the manosphere is commonly associated with this sort of online harassment of women). This finding is not all that surprising; manosphere blogs are the public face of the wider community. Often receiving more attention from journalists, the blogs seem to sanitize the discourse somewhat and not encourage or engage in, gendertrolling.

The tenth hypothesis from the literature is that in nerd/online cultures, an ambivalence towards hegemonic masculinity is articulated because of its high standards of heterosexuality—but heterosexuality and whiteness remain key aspects of the masculinity in these spaces. Interestingly— though perhaps unsurprisingly—I found that masculinity is, as a general rule is not critiqued often. While many of the issues discussed in the manosphere stem from problematic constructions of masculinity, the problem is not identified as such. Where participants do express frustration with not being able to live up to hegemonic masculine standards of heterosexuality, women are blamed (for having too high standards). Masculinity is not critiqued—and any critiques of constructions of masculinity are taken to be attacks on men themselves. As discussed in chapter 6, whiteness is also a key aspect of the masculinity of the manosphere— where it is taken to be default.

In chapter 1, I also identify six hypotheses (hypotheses 11-16) about the manosphere from theoretical analyses. The first of these is that the boundary between male and female, masculine and feminine, is considered vital to the maintenance of masculinity. Boundary maintenance can involve the disparaging of femininity, the effeminate, or women (including put-downs, negative representations, or

homophobia), or the naturalization of heterosexuality (such as the representation of gay men as not ‘real men’, and an emphasis on the importance of heterosexual prowess). In the discourse I analyzed, it can certainly be said that women and femininity are disparaged. Negative representations of women/femininity far outweigh negative representations of men. While women are commonly represented as irrational, selfish, dishonest, and lazy, men are represented in opposite terms. Men are understood to be rational, honourable, honest, and hardworking. While masculinity is associated with human advancement and civilization, femininity is associated with the decline of society, and with primitivism. Homophobic representations of gay men are common in PUA discourse especially, and homosexuality is represented as ‘unnatural’. Heterosexuality is also naturalized in representations of femininity that define women in terms of their relation to men (women are dependent (on men), subservient (to men), caring (for men)), and in the manosphere’s championing of the traditional (heterosexual) family model. Moreover, the manosphere’s very approach to gender maintains the boundary between masculinity and femininity. By insisting that gender is not constructed—that gender categories signify a ‘true essence’ that is innately known—the illusory boundary is maintained.

The second hypothesis from the theoretical analyses (hypothesis 12) is that masculinity is represented as being in crisis, under constant threat and in need of shoring-up. My findings indicate that this is a trend across both communities I analyzed. Masculinity is understood to be threatened by ‘feminizing’ forces, as well as by feminists and others who, by critiquing constructions of masculinity, seek to demonize and criminalize it. The PUA community concerns itself with the feminization of masculinity at the level of the individual, while both communities express concern about the disruption of masculinity at the level of society.

The third hypothesis from the theoretical analyses (hypothesis 13) has to do with the whiteness of the discourse—whiteness is assumed or taken to be ‘default’. In the discourse I analyzed, whiteness is very much taken to be default. Race is not mentioned except in discussions about non-white men or women, which are relatively uncommon. Race is thus invisible more often than not, and its very invisibility makes it white.

The fourth and fifth hypotheses from the theoretical analyses (hypotheses 14 and 15) have to do with the class identity of the masculinity in the manosphere. Hypothesis 14 suggests that the discourse embraces a middle-class manhood—one that emphasizes self-

sufficiency, independence, and bread-winner status. As I discuss in chapter 6, while these three traits are undoubtedly pillars of the masculine ideal in the manosphere, the discourse does not associate them necessarily with the middle-class. The fifteenth hypothesis suggests that working-class or blue-collar masculinity is disparaged—that men in this category are represented as ‘dumb brutes’ (celebrated for their physical virtues but imagined to be weak intellectually). As stated, I found that neither working-class nor middle-class status was stressed in the discourse. At times one is celebrated, at other moments, the other. While the work of blue-collar jobs is romanticized to a certain extent (Bloomfield especially writes quite often about the ‘hard, dirty jobs’ endured by tough, hard-working men), activities typically associated with the middle- and upper-classes (reading philosophy and travel for instance) are also emphasized. Blue-collar masculinity is certainly not disparaged. If anything, the working-class and lower educated are not represented as rural simpletons, but are rather celebrated for their ‘working-class values’—like having no concern whatsoever for political correctness.

The sixth hypothesis from the theoretical analyses (hypothesis 16) is that the masculine ideal is able-bodied—it stresses autonomy, control, independence, rationality, stoicism, and invulnerability. Ideal men are beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, and intelligent. In chapter 6 I discuss how this is indeed the case—the classical masculine ideal is able-bodied because of its emphasis on these traits. While both the MRA and PUA communities stress the importance of control, independence, rationality, and so on, PUA discourse also emphasizes physical attractiveness and fitness as key components of ideal masculinity.<sup>66</sup>

It is clear that the manosphere celebrates and reproduces traditional gender constructs, roles and inequalities, as the literature on related topics suggests. Femininity and women are disparaged, the gender categories are constructed in strict opposition to one another, and the imagined boundary between masculinity and femininity is maintained. The traditional family is championed as the basis of a strong and moral society, and patriarchal society is similarly represented as moral and the best organizational mode.

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<sup>66</sup> This concern with physical appearance was not as obvious in the PUA discourse I analyzed as it is elsewhere. While ROK and RV both discuss the importance of one’s ‘sexual market value’ (based primarily on one’s physical attractiveness), they do not discuss techniques to improve one’s physical appearance and fitness in the way some other PUA venues do (there are, for instance, PUA forums dedicated entirely to working out).

### 7.3 THE GENERALIZABILITY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This project seeks to contribute to academic knowledge of the manosphere—which has not previously been the sole focus of a study. Given that it addresses a large gap in the literature, it is worthwhile to explore the generalizability and the limitations of my findings.

In any research project, building a data set that is a representative sample of the population is a complex endeavor—but that task is particularly challenging when it comes to the manosphere, a chaotic, decentralized, heterogeneous, and constantly changing nebulous online community. This project analyzed blog posts from four popular manosphere sites, representing the two core subcultures—men’s rights and pickup artist. My findings are very generalizable in terms of establishing an understanding of the manosphere worldview. There are important core beliefs that are common to both subcultures and that define the manosphere worldview, arguably across the board. It is a worldview that adopts an anti-woman tone, venerates traditional gender norms and gendered systems of power, understands ‘modern’ women to be unfeminine, and believes that masculinity—in the individual and/or at the level of society—is under threat. My project adds nuance to the conventional wisdom on the manosphere worldview, and highlights important and subtle differences between the two subcultures I analyzed.

The data set was broad and large enough that I believe my findings are representative of the venues—the blogs—they sample. Moreover, while only two of the four main subcultures outlined in the primer (chapter 2) were included in the analysis, and while there are important differences between the MRA and MGTOW, and PUA and incel, communities, I believe my findings capture the main differences in the approaches and worldview of the two core strains (MRA and MGTOW being one, PUA and incel being the other). Such differences include variances in the locale of analysis (individual versus societal level), in how women, men, and feminists are spoken about and in how the subcultures frame themselves and their purpose/activism.

That said, as with any research project, there are certain limitations to the findings. Specifically, where this project is concerned, there are limitations to the generalizability of the findings and to the questions it answers. Given the characteristics of the manosphere in particular, there are significant limitations to the findings. My goal in designing the data set and the research methodology was to analyze

the public face of the manosphere—the venues more frequently profiled in mainstream media coverage of the community, which inform the conventional wisdom on the topic. This choice means that my findings cannot speak to the particularities of other, smaller subcultures, including the MGTOW and incel communities (as well as countless others). This choice also means that my findings speak only to the one medium—blog posts—and do not cover more fringe, decentralized manosphere discourse (on forums and subreddits), other manosphere online activity (such as activity on Twitter, YouTube, and other social networking platforms), or manosphere discourse outside of the English-speaking/North American sphere.

As stated above, this project makes an important academic contribution by expanding our understanding of the manosphere, and adding important nuance to the conventional wisdom on the topic. That said, widening and deepening the study of the manosphere further—and examining other subcultures, other venues, other mediums, other participant activity online, and national/regional differences—would add further nuance to our understanding and greatly enrich academic knowledge of the manosphere.

Similarly, our understanding of the manosphere would be improved by using other methods to answer questions not addressed by this study. It would be interesting, for instance, to explore manosphere demographics, the internal and individual motivations and convictions of participants, how many and what sort of manosphere participants are also active in offline men’s rights or pickup artist groups, and how much interaction there is generally between offline and online groups.

## **7.4 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

My findings hold a number of implications for scholars who study conservative politics, gender, or online communities, and for activists engaged in feminist politics.

### **7.4.1 Implications for the Study of Conservative Politics**

Where the study of conservative politics is concerned, my findings speak strongly to an emergent and pertinent phenomenon in American politics on the right—the Trump phenomenon.

The past year has seen the emergence of a particular type of conservatism—*cultural* conservatism. Cultural conservatism is a conservatism that grows out of cultural grievance, that is concerned with

wanting to go back to the way things were, culturally speaking, and that celebrates a (mythical) cultural past. I hope it is clear that the manosphere can be classified quite neatly as a cultural conservatism. It is undoubtedly centred upon a cultural grievance (resentment of the modern way of being men and women). It certainly wants to return to a previous cultural moment (a moment during which gendered roles and norms were clearer and more traditional, and gendered systems of power had not yet begun to be dismantled). The veneration of a (mythical) cultural past is also explicit—in lamentations about how things ‘aren’t like they used to be,’ how women ‘aren’t like the girls our grandfathers married,’ how ‘it was so much easier to find a good wife back then,’ how society ‘isn’t thriving like it used to’.

Much of the writing on the current cultural conservatism focuses on the xenophobia and nationalism often at its core (see for instance Hawkins, n.d.; Malone, 2016). As I hope my findings make clear, there is also an important dimension of antifeminism and sexism to cultural conservatism, especially where the manosphere is concerned.

Donald Trump’s campaign for president of the United States is animated by a cultural conservatism that stems from class and racial resentments, and a fierce xenophobia. Much has been made of the Republican candidate’s failure to disavow, and propensity for re-tweeting, white nationalists. Receiving far less attention is his popularity amongst antifeminists, including manosphere participants. In the manosphere, support goes overwhelmingly to Trump. At the time of writing, every single blog post that mentioned Trump’s campaign on *Return of Kings*, *RooshV*, and *JudgyBitch*, were favourable of the candidate.<sup>67</sup> I did not find any instances of blog posts supporting other candidates—either Republican or Democrat.

The question is: Why this support for Trump in the manosphere? Journalist Nick Confessore, in an interview with Jacob Weisberg on Trump’s support amongst white nationalists, offers a compelling and relevant analysis of their fondness for the candidate:

What I found striking in talking to the activists in the white nationalist world, was their sense that Trump was intuitively speaking their language, and leading other white people—mainstream white people—into an understanding of their language. And to be specific

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<sup>67</sup> I was unable to find a search feature on AVFM, however browsing through the posts in the ‘Politics’ category, I did not find any posts about the 2016 election. I did find however a blog post in which Paul Elam (2015) discusses refraining from talking politics on the site in an effort to keep it ‘apolitical’. This stance likely explains the lack of writing on Trump or the election.



about how that works, the people who are white nationalists today don't call themselves white nationalists, for the most part. They're younger, they're smart, they're articulate, they're online, they have tried to re-fashion themselves by appropriating the language of multiculturalism itself, in which they are another interest group with pride in their European-American culture, and desire to protect it and see it expanded and preserved (Weisberg, n.d.).

What is striking here is how accurately this passage would seem to apply to the manosphere, too. Trump—who rails against ‘political correctness,’ who said that fathers who change diapers are “act[ing] like the wife,” (Bellstrom, 2016), who speaks of ‘[his] beautiful women’ as if he owns them (O’Malley, 2015), and who suggested that his opponent in the presidential race was only doing well because she is a woman (Steiger, 2016)—is ‘intuitively speaking’ the language of the manosphere. Just as white nationalists appropriate the language of multiculturalism, the manosphere appropriates the language of feminism and gender equality, and represents itself as working for greater justice, concerned only with preserving masculinity (which is under attack by feminists) and restoring traditional femininity and patriarchy.

As mentioned above, much has been made of the sense of class and racial resentments stirring up support for Trump—but there is a gendered resentment that is also at play. In today’s cultural conservatism in the United States, xenophobia combines with class and gendered resentments, and we see it in the way the manosphere speaks about Trump. Only Trump, it is argued, is willing to do combat the threats posed by ‘Islamic terrorism,’ refugees, and immigrants. Liberals, SJWs, white knights, feminists, and the media (‘with their gotcha questions’) are identified as villains. The common media representation of Trump as misogynist is false, argues Bloomfield—Trump is not misogynist; actually he is the exact opposite, because he does not treat women like delicate dainty flowers nor childlike victims (as feminists do—the true misogynists) (Bloomfield, 2016a).

Manosphere support for Trump is related to—if not a subset of—another online political phenomenon—the alt-right subgroup of the neoreactionary (NRx) movement, which similarly folds xenophobia and misogyny into its ideology. The NRx movement (also known as the ‘Dark Enlightenment’) is “a loosely-defined cluster of internet-based political thinkers who wish to return society to forms of government older than liberal democracy,” (“Neoreactionary movement,” n.d.). Neoreactionaries are anti-democracy because they believe that

democracy is inherently progressive and enabling of the march leftward (one of the founders of the movement is famous for putting it thus: ‘Cthulhu might swim slowly, but he swims left’ (“Dictionary,” 2014)). While little is known about how the manosphere and the NRx movement are related (if at all), there seems undoubtedly to be some overlap between the two. Broad themes of the NRx movement can include hostility to feminism, multiculturalism, and progressivism, as well as pickup artist jargon and men’s rights activism (ibid.). Neoreactionaries are also heavily involved in Gamergate, which—as was discussed in chapter 2—manosphere participants are also involved in (and may have incited) (Matthews, 2016).

The alt-right subgroup seems to be the NRx subculture most closely aligned with the manosphere (particularly the PUA subculture). It is

the less intellectual end of neoreactionary discourse ... These are the people who have whole-heartedly embraced the overt racism, misogyny, neo-Nazi affectations, bullying and trolling ... as a lifestyle ... they make up a sizeable fraction of the more radical uncouth sections of Gamergate. They’re also the ones who popularized ‘cuckservative’ as a term of abuse for those on the right who are deemed not racist enough (“Neoreactionary movement,” n.d.).

Roosh V, in blog posts about Trump, rails against cuckservatives, and fiercely articulates anti-immigration and naturalist stances (both of which are held by alt-righters as well).

The alt-right, Trump, and the manosphere all speak the same language—it is the language of a cultural conservatism that is xenophobic, antifeminist, and sexist. It is clear that this new, anti-establishment, nationalist, misogynist and right-wing cultural conservatism is an important political movement. Studying the discourse of groups such as the manosphere and the alt-right—communities that together form a major base of Trump’s online coalition—can garner important insights into how and why Trump has ascended politically, as well as where American conservative politics may be headed.

## **7.4.2 Implications for Gender Studies and Feminist Politics**

My findings also hold a variety of theoretical and practical implications for, and raise important further questions to consider about, feminist gender studies and feminist politics.

### ***7.4.2.1 Implications for the feminist study of gender***

My findings speak to a number of important recent trends in gender politics and raise important further questions for scholars of gender. In this section I explore the implications for the way we understand the state of gender politics, particularly in the United States, today.

It is clear that in manosphere discourse, liberation language is appropriated, and a pro-woman framing is adopted. This practice emulates the wider trend of conservative movements employing such strategies. The English Canadian anti-abortion movement, for instance, has adopted a pro-woman framing—appropriating feminist tropes to represent abortion as harmful to women (Saurette & Gordon, 2015). In the United States, abortion is equated with slavery (“this idea—that fighting against abortion rights is similar to the abolitionist cause—is an incredibly common one in the pro-life movement,” (Crockett, 2016a)), and Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP) bills, that limit access to abortion, are framed as protecting patient health and safety (NARAL Pro-Choice America, n.d.).

Arguments about ‘protecting women’ are also invoked by conservatives in debates about sex work, and around rights for LGBTQ persons. Take for example North Carolina House Bill 2 (HB2), the “Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act” (*An Act To Provide for Single-Sex Multiple Occupancy Bathroom and Changing Facilities in Schools and Public Agencies and to Create Statewide Consistency in Regulation of Employment and Public Accommodations*, 2016). HB2—commonly referred to as the North Carolina ‘bathroom bill’—eliminates protections against discrimination for LGBTQ persons, and legislates that in public buildings, individuals must use the washroom matching the sex on their birth certificate. HB2 was framed as ‘common sense’ legislation by its proponents, and was represented as being about ‘protecting women’ rather than limiting the rights of LGBTQ persons (McCrary, 2016; Scharl, 2016).

In the past year we have also seen Islamophobia wrapped in progressive (pro-woman and pro-LGBTQ) language. Donald Trump, in the aftermath of the Orlando Pulse nightclub massacre (which targeted the LGBTQ community), suggested that he is the better protector of women and LGBTQ people, because of his proposed ban on Muslim immigration (Miller, 2016). Trump’s argument is his opponent Hillary Clinton hates gay people and women because she is ‘letting in’ Muslims and inviting ‘sharia law’ upon the nation. Similarly, Bloomfield maintains that progressives (including feminists) are be-

traying women and the LGBTQ community by *not* appropriately responding to the West's 'war' with Islam (she frequently sites statistics about support for 'sharia law' amongst Muslims in the West) (Bloomfield, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d).

This strategy of framing conservative projects as pro-woman is doubly effective because not only does it represent feminists or progressives as hypocritical and betrayers of women, it simultaneously allows conservative movements to frame themselves as progressive and supportive of rights for women and minorities—when in actuality the opposite is often true. In the case of the manosphere, feminist tropes are appropriated in order to represent a privileged group (men) as oppressed victims of a power system stacked against them. This practice is a masking strategy that obscures the privileges enjoyed by certain groups, and represents progressive agents as regressive.

This study also highlights the contemporary relevance of antifeminism. The language and worldview of the manosphere are not contained within its membrane—they permeate the mainstream, they colour judges' verdicts and media reports, they exist in boardrooms, in parliaments, and on the street. Even where an antifeminist backlash is not explicit, progress in the area of gender politics is sometimes met by increases in sexism (such as the sexist attacks former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard faced, especially during her time as the head of the Australian government). This study highlights how a particular antifeminism is crafting narratives around men, women, and gender politics, and employing them in order to persuade others and spread its message. It is important that we continue to study both explicit and couched antifeminisms.

My findings also highlight the gendered nature of the internet. As I discussed in chapter 1, in the early days of the internet, it was optimistically believed that the internet would be equalizing. The work of gender communications scholars has demonstrated that in fact the discursive style and ethic of the manosphere is masculine, which can make cyberspace hostile to women. It is vital that we continue to study the ways in which the internet is experienced differently by different persons—and the ways in which one's experience of online life are impacted by one's gender, race, and sexual orientation.

Throughout the thesis I have discussed the ways in which the discourse of the manosphere is violent. I mentioned the Isla Vista tragedy. I explored how the capacity for violence is considered inherent to masculinity. I contend that it is absolutely vital that we continue to explore the connection between misogyny, domestic violence, and mass violence. It is becoming clearer that men who commit acts of

mass violence often have histories of domestic violence. The man who drove a truck through a crowd in Nice, the man who killed 49 and injured 53 others in Orlando, the man who killed three and wounded nine at a Planned Parenthood, the man who killed six in Santa Barbara, the man who killed two and injured nine others at a screening of the film *Trainwreck*, and the man who murdered 20 children in their elementary school classrooms—in every case, he had a history of domestic violence, or he had written about or voiced misogynist convictions (Crockett, 2016b; O’Neil, 2015; Taub, 2016; Traister, 2016). In an analysis of mass shootings that took place in the United States between January 2009 and July 2015, *Everytown for Gun Safety* found that in 57 percent of the shootings, a current or former spouse, or other family member, was amongst those targeted—and in 16 percent of the cases, the attacker had a record of domestic violence (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2015). It is extremely important that we continue to study the connection between masculinity, misogyny, and violence.

These are important topics that feminist scholars of gender ought to continue to study, but it is equally important to consider the *practical* implications of my findings—a question to which I now turn.

#### ***7.4.2.2 Implications for feminist politics***

This study highlights important implications for the conduct of feminist politics regarding the manosphere. Given what we now understand about how the manosphere frames its politics and talks about gender, it is worth briefly exploring how feminists might endeavor to respond to the manosphere’s antifeminism.

For one, I believe it is important not to dismiss the manosphere for any reason that makes it easily dismissible (such as the fact that it exists online, that it is disorganized and lacks central leadership, that it is at times contradictory, confused, and incomprehensible). It is also important not to ignore arguments that are false; arguments do not have to be correct or true in order to persuade—oftentimes it is the emotional value of an argument (the extent to which it *feels right*, the degree to which it feels like *common sense*) that gives it power. Similarly, it is important to recognize that the resentment that animates the manosphere grows out of legitimate grievances. It is important to understand the nature and causes of these grievances so that feminism can best acknowledge and resolve the unique challenges that men face. At the same time, it is important to communicate that even

though individual men have grievances, that does not mean that they are institutionally and culturally oppressed or disadvantaged.

Feminists can also develop strategies to counter the manosphere's main arguments against, and narratives about, feminism. Specifically, in order to counter the narrative that feminism is anti-woman and that the manosphere is the truly progressive, pro-woman movement, feminists can:

- clearly communicate that the manosphere is not a progressive/human rights project, by highlighting instances of misogyny, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia across its many venues;
- counter the narrative that feminists are anti-woman because they 'think of women as victims' by a) stressing the many ways that women have benefitted, and continue to benefit, from feminism, and b) maintaining that acknowledging patriarchy does not mean that feminists think of women as childlike victims, and stress that feminists actually strive to undo constructions of femininity that represent women as helpless, infantile, and dependent victims;
- respond to the manosphere's antifeminist social media campaigns (such as #WomenAgainstFeminism) by launching similar campaigns that use the same tactics to disrupt manosphere narratives about feminism by, for instance, encouraging men and women to share stories about how feminism has empowered them and improved their lives;
- disrupt representations of feminists as man-hating by demonstrating how feminism has improved and continues to improve the lives of men too, and by stressing that undoing traditional gender ideology—as feminism aims to do—benefits and liberates both men and women;
- partner with allies, including civil and LGBTQ rights groups, to present a united front against the manosphere, and disrupt the narrative that feminists are anti-LGBTQ and racist.

It is also important to avoid representing feminism and antifeminism as equal opponents—opposite sides of the same coin. This sort of representation implies that both sides ought to be given equal weight, and middle ground sought between them. Feminism is not a movement against men which requires a counterweight for balance—

it is a movement for the increased liberation of both women and men, a movement that seeks greater gender equality.

We must also consider the current policy around ‘hate speech’ in the United States and Canada. We must strongly maintain that hate speech is not protected speech, and continue to push for online hate speech to be recognized as such. Along the same vein, it is imperative that feminists continue to put pressure both on social media companies, and on the government, to better protect persons from online harassment.

It is also important that mainstream entities—publications, institutions, and individuals—are called out for their (sometimes accidental) complicity with the manosphere worldview, such as when *Men’s Fitness* was criticized for publishing an article, titled “How to Turn a ‘No’ Into a ‘Yes’,” and written by a prominent pickup artist, that advocated sexual harassment (the article was later taken down) (Cuen, 2016).

The above are merely a handful of ideas about how to conduct feminist politics regarding the manosphere. What is clear is that it is important that feminists continue to actively respond to the manosphere, and challenge its antifeminist narratives.

### **7.4.3 Implications for the Study of Online Communities**

There are important characteristics particular to online communities that my analysis highlights. For one, the echo-chamber effect is obvious. Communities online generally—but especially ideological communities—tend to validate one’s already held convictions, as one is exposed—sometimes exclusively—to sources and stories that confirm one’s worldview. Online ideological communities are more prone to extremism than such communities that exist in ‘real life’.

This movement towards extremism is facilitated by characteristics of both the medium (computer-mediated communications), and of online communities. In chapter 1, I discussed how the literature on online ideological communities suggests that they are pre-disposed towards extremism because of characteristics of CMC (such as anonymity) and because ideology is the one thing that unites the community.

During my analysis, it became clear to me that two other factors also contribute to the echo-chamber effect. For one, manosphere thought leaders who own or run popular blogs, have an interest in sensationalism and extremism, and in printing what their audience wants to see and what will draw new eyes to the blog. For two, prom-

inent personalities wield vast influence in the manosphere—this is clear in looking at my data set. *Return of Kings* and *RooshV* (the two PUA blogs I analyzed, both with very large audiences) are both owned, and authored, edited, or managed, by one individual. The fact that prominent individuals, such as Roosh V, run multiple manosphere venues, means that some manosphere participants acquire their information not just from one ideological sphere (the manosphere), but actually from one individual source who manages multiple venues, constantly reverberating the message.

In chapter 1, drawing on computer-mediated communications literature, I argued that it is important methodologically, when studying discourse, to distinguish between online and offline expressions of the same movement. Communication is governed by different rules, and exists in a different context online versus offline, and it is therefore problematic to apply the same methodology to study both.

That being said, I take issue with the utility of this distinction outside of the methodological question. While it is helpful for scholars to take this difference into account when designing discourse analysis research projects, the distinction between online and ‘real life,’ also creates an artificial distinction between our online and offline lives, as if what happens online is experienced separately from what happens offline—as if our online experiences are packaged neatly in a box that exists outside of ‘real life,’ as if what happens online does not count as much as—is not as serious as, or as real as—what happens in the real world.

The power of this artificial distinction is obvious in looking at the response to Trump’s language on the campaign trail. Repeatedly, the media has expressed shock at how Trump speaks—but the way he speaks is intimately familiar to anyone who spends time online. Trump speaks the way many spheres of the internet speak—so why the shock? It is shocking because internet speak has always been considered separate from ‘real life’—not of the same world. It is shocking that internet language has slipped from the online world into the physical world—and onto a presidential debate stage no less. Trump is widening the portal between the online and offline worlds. In speaking in the way the internet speaks, and in using social media as his main communicative medium (he even announced his running mate on Twitter), Trump is making glaringly obvious how arbitrary the distinction between online and ‘real life’ is.

This artificial distinction is also visible in narratives around our online lives and online harassment, such as the narrative that online harassment is less harassing because it happens online (when in fact



the opposite is true (Biber et al., 2002)), that the solution to online harassment is for the victim to “just disconnect,” or that the internet is a hostile environment because “that is just how the internet is.” More and more, our lives exist online—we work online, learn online, meet new people online, communicate online, and share our opinions online—and it is therefore nonsensical to continue to speak about the online world and our experiences there as if they are not ‘real life’. ‘Just disconnecting’ is not an option in today’s world—not for many people, especially those whose livelihoods depend on their online presence. “That is just how the internet is” is unsatisfactory. We demand better of the offline world—we must demand better of the internet.

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## Appendix A: Coding Dictionary

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### Variables

- File
- Document
- Venue
- Class
- Subculture
- Date Published
- Author Gender
- Age
- Region

### Codes

- 1A. Villain/enemy/threatening opposite
  - feminists/feminism villain
  - liberal elite villain
  - male (general) villain
  - media villain
  - other enemy/threatening opposite
  - other specific female villain
  - other specific male villain
  - progressives
  - society at large villain
  - 'terrorist' villain
  - 'western women' ('WW')
  - women (general) villain
- 1B. Victim narrative
  - children victim
  - 'foreign women'
  - manosphere participants victim
  - men victim
  - other victim
  - society at large victim
  - women victim
- 1C. Hero narrative
  - 'alpha' men heroes
  - antifeminists heroes
  - 'manly' men heroes
  - manosphere participants heroes
  - men (general) heroes
  - men's rights activist heroes
  - pickup artist heroes
  - women (general) heroes
- 1D. Metaphorical tone
  - aggressive/non-compromising
  - collaborative
  - economic metaphor

- nurturing parent (empathetic)
- other metaphorical tone
- strict father (punitive)

#### 1E. Gendered metaphors

- child-like v. adult
- immoral beings v. moral beings
- nature v. culture
- other gendered metaphor
- penetrable v. impenetrable
- predator v. prey
- slave v. master

#### 1H. Evidence

- appeal to common sense
- appeal to faith or religion
- appeal to populism
- appeal to tradition/status quo
- expert/research/statistics
- narrative/personal experience
- no evidence
- philosophical explanation

#### 1I. Use of strong language

- expressing negative emotion strongly
- expressing positive emotion strongly

#### 1J. Writing is incomprehensible

- writing is incomprehensible
- writing is somewhat incomprehensible

#### 1K. Writing is contradictory

- writing is contradictory

#### 2A. Primary issue(s) being discussed

- (male) personal development
- activism
- anti-capitalist/'modern life'
- censorship
- chivalry
- decline of men
- decline of society
- destruction of traditional family
- domestic violence (against men)
- domestic violence (against women)
- domestic violence (half of perp. are women)
- event advertisement
- false rape accusations
- fatherhood
- father's (legal) rights
- females in male spaces
- femininity/women
- feminists/feminism
- gender roles
- legal bias against men
- male inequality/disadvantages

- men in the military
- men's (legal) rights
- men's health
- misandry (a culture against men)
- other issue
- picking-up women
- political correctness
- progressive issue (against)
- rape culture
- relationships with women
- reproductive rights for men
- reproductive rights for women
- sexual abuse of boys
- sexual assault of men
- sexual assault of women
- sexual frustration
- the decline of boys
- welfare state (against)
- women's (legal) rights

2B. Is the entry advancing a political agenda/goal/concrete policy suggestion

- decriminalization of sexual assault/rape
- expansion of public services
- father's rights issue
- law and order approach
- less government involvement
- more education
- more government involvement
- need for individual self-responsibility
- need for nuclear family to take responsibility
- none
- other
- retrenchment of the welfare state
- return to traditional family models

2C. Does the post link to another manosphere venue?

- linking outside subculture
- linking within subculture

2D. Invokes liberation movement

- arguments about choice
- arguments about emancipation from gender hierarchy
- arguments about emancipation from gender roles
- arguments about equality
- arguments about justice
- 'human rights' arguments

2E. Mention of race?

- explicit mention of race
- implicit mention of race

2F. Mention of class/socio-economic status?

- explicit mention of class
- implicit mention of class

2G. Mention of homosexuality

- explicit mention of homosexuality
- implicit mention of homosexuality

## 2H. Flagged terms

- beaner/wetback
- bitch
- butt-buddy
- butt-hurt
- fag
- freak
- gimp
- homo
- mangina
- moron
- n-word
- other ablebodiedness epithet
- other classed epithet
- other gendered epithet
- other racialized epithet
- other sexuality epithet
- pussy
- retard
- slut/whore/ho, etc
- terrorist
- wimp

## 2I. Other instance of homophobia

- gay men are not 'real men'
- homosexuality is unnatural/heterosexuality is natural
- other homophobia

## 2J. Mention of trans- issues/identity?

- explicit mention of trans- issues/identity
- implicit mention of trans- issues/identity

## 3A. Explicit argument that gender roles and norms have been disrupted

- gender roles and norms have been disrupted
- gender roles and norms have not been disrupted

## 3B. Belief that men are no longer 'real men' -- they are less manly

- men are less manly than they used to be and that is alright
- men are less manly than they used to be and that is a problem

## 3C. Belief that woman are less womanly

- women are less womanly than they used to be and that is a problem
- women are less womanly than they used to be and that is alright

## 3D. Belief that biological basis of gender is important

- no - biological basis of gender is not important
- yes - biological basis of gender is important

## 3E. Explicit mention of need to protect or enhance the boundary between masculinity and femininity

- gender boundary does not matter
- gender boundary needs to be maintained

3F. Explicit or implicit call for return to 'traditional' masculinity/gender roles and norms

- traditional norms/roles do not need to be returned to
- traditional norms/roles should be returned to

3G. What masculine traits are represented positively?

- + absence from family's life
- + blue collar work
- + bread-winner
- + collaborative/willing to compromise
- + combativeness/capacity for violence
- + competitiveness
- + decision maker/leader
- + disregard for women's desires
- + emotionally closed off (unemotional)
- + emotionally open
- + fatherhood
- + hard worker
- + heterosexual orientation
- + impolite/politically incorrect
- + independent
- + intellectual weakness
- + intelligent
- + involved in family's life
- + invulnerability
- + nerdiness
- + other positive trait
- + physical strength/fitness/attractive
- + polite/politically correct
- + protector/protective
- + receive attention from women
- + self-sufficient (financially)
- + sexually prolific
- + sexually unsuccessful
- + successful (employment)
- + testosterone (abundance)
- + white collar work
- + white knight (male feminist)
- + won't back down (uncompromising)

3H. What masculine traits are represented negatively?

- absence from family's life
- beta/desperate for women
- blue collar work
- breadwinner
- caring
- collaborative/willing to compromise
- combativeness/capacity for violence
- competitiveness
- decision maker/leader
- dependence
- disregard for women's desires
- emotionally closed-off (unemotional)
- emotionally open
- fatherhood
- heterosexual orientation

- impolite/politically incorrect
- independence
- intellectual weakness
- intelligent
- involvement in family's life
- invulnerability
- lacking physical strength/fitness/attractive
- nerdiness
- other negative trait
- polite/politically correct
- receive attention from women
- self-sufficient (financially)
- sexually prolific
- sexually unsuccessful
- submissive
- successful (employment)
- testosterone (abundance)
- weakness
- white collar work
- white knight (male feminist)
- won't back down (uncompromising)

### 3I. General position on women

- all women are bad
- all women are good
- attractiveness is most important
- neutral opinion of women
- some types of women are good and some are bad
- women are delusional/unintelligent
- women have sense of entitlement
- women should not be in men's lives
- women's fertility is key

### 3J. Positive representations of women/femininity

- + amenable
- + attractive
- + career-driven
- + collaborative/non-competitive
- + competitive
- + emotional
- + has attitude
- + irrational/unintelligent
- + loyal
- + maternal/nurturing/caring
- + non-maternal/cold/uncaring
- + 'of nature'/guide entirely by biology
- + other positive representation
- + promiscuous/'slutty'
- + rational/intelligent
- + selfless/not greedy
- + subservient
- + trustworthy
- + untrustworthy/liars/manipulative

### 3K. Negative representations of women/femininity

- abusers/abusive

- amenable
- attention-seeking
- career-driven
- collaborative/non-competitive
- competitive
- disloyal
- emotional
- has attitude
- irrational/unintelligent
- lazy
- manipulative
- maternal/nurturing/caring
- non-maternal/cold/uncaring/calculating
- 'of nature'/guided entirely by biology
- other negative representation
- promiscuous/'slutty'
- rational/intelligent
- selfish/greedy (gold diggers)
- subservient
- superficial
- trustworthy
- unattractive (fat)
- want to be dominated -- dislike 'freedom'
- wear too much makeup
- women are only good for sex
- women who do not give men attention/have sex with them are prudes/snobs/users/friend zoners
- women who give men attention/have sex with them are sluts

### 3L. Explicit argument that power and privileges need to be won back

- (they were never lost) power/privileges do not need to be won back
- (though they are lost) power/privileges do not need to be won back
- power/privileges need to be won back/men need more power/privilege

### 3M. Male entitlements

- male entitlements are being met
- male entitlements to control over family (members and resources) are not being met
- male entitlements to employment are not being met
- male entitlements to wealth are not being met
- male entitlements to women are not being met
- males are entitled to 'privileges'
- men are not entitled to anything

### 3N. Culture of misandry

- financially women are more privileged than men
- in some ways women are more privileged, overall men are more privileged
- men dominate women in all spaces
- patriarchy is a lie/narrative made up by feminists
- politically women are more privileged than men
- sexually women are more privileged than men
- socially women are more privileged than men
- the culture is one of misandry (anti-men)
- under the law women are more privileged than men
- women are more privileged (in general/not specific)



- women dominate men in all spaces
- 3O. Crisis of masculinity
- explicit mention of crisis of masculinity
  - implicit mention of crisis of masculinity
- 3P. Nerd culture
- explicit mention of nerd identity
- 4A. Mention of feminism
- feminism is mentioned
- 4B. Position on feminism
- equality should not be the goal
  - explicitly anti-feminist
  - feminism has 'gone too far' - men are now subordinate
  - feminism has not gone far enough - women are still subordinate
  - feminism is a monolith (there is only one Feminism, not many feminisms)
  - feminism is like a religion/cult
  - feminism is pointless - doesn't change anything
  - feminism is soon to be 'found out'
  - other position on feminists/feminism
  - there is no need for feminism - men and women are equal
- 4C. Feminism is the lives of men and women
- feminism makes/has made men less happy
  - feminisms makes/has made women less happy
- 4D. Representations of feminists
- feminists are a conspiracy (with hidden agenda)
  - feminists are 'ideologues'
  - feminists are ignorant
  - feminists are liars
  - feminists are manipulative/good at marketing
  - feminists are out of touch with reality
  - feminists are powerful (running the game)
  - feminists are represented positively
  - feminists are rude/hateful in general
  - feminists are the majority
  - feminists are the minority
  - feminists are unintelligent
  - feminists hate men
  - feminists represent all men as being villains
  - feminists represent all women as being victims
  - other representation of feminists
  - too easily offended
- 4E. Representations of the mansphere
- other representation of the mansphere
  - the mansphere is ahead of the curve
  - the mansphere is fighting for what's just/right
  - the mansphere is going to become increasingly accepted
  - the mansphere is the only group not blind to reality
  - the mansphere is villainized

- 5A. Attitude towards violence
  - call to violent action (against feminists)
  - call to violent action (against women)
  - call to violent action (general)
  - celebratory of violence (against feminists)
  - celebratory of violence (against women)
  - celebratory of violence (general)
  - denouncing violence (against women)
  - denouncing violence (general)
  
- 5B. Arguments about (sexualized) violence against women
  - other argument about sexualized violence against women
  - sexual assault should be legalized
  - violence against women is a private issue
  - women are deserving of violence against them
  - women are responsible for violence against them (victim blaming)
  
- 6A. Masculine discursive norms
  - ad hominem attacks
  - flaming
  - sarcasm
  - self-promotion
  - strong (contentious) assertion (stating opinion as fact)
  
- 6B. Feminine discursive norms
  - apologizing
  - asking question
  - expression of appreciation
  - expression of self-doubt
  - suggesting (rather than stating as fact)
  
- 7A. Hegemonic masculinity is problematic
  - gender norms/roles constrain men
  - its ablebodiesness is problematic
  - its emphasis on sexual conquest is problematic
  - its heterosexuality is problematic
  - its white-collared-ness is problematic
  - its whiteness is problematic
  - men cannot live up to masculine ideals
  
- 8A. Occurrence of gendertrolling/e-bile
  - occurrence of gendertrolling/e-bile
  
- 8B. Traits of gendertrolling/e-bile present
  - a reaction to a woman publicly speaking out about sexism
  - charge of unintelligence or hysteria
  - explicit threats--of rape, death, job loss, destruction of reputation
  - female target
  - gender-based insults
  - homophobia/undermining of masculinity
  - humiliating comments (focusing on physical appearance)
  - male target
  - threat is framed as a 'corrective'
  - use of gendered pejorative term(s) (cunt, whore, slut)
  - use of vicious, hateful language (vivid descriptions of sexually explicit acts)

9A. Open code (mosquito in ear)  
- open code

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