

# **The Discursive Style and Reactionary Politics of the Manosphere**

by

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to unpack the styles of discourse adopted and implemented by the Manosphere, an online community of self described Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) and “Red Pillers”. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of Manosphere texts, the research explores how issues of gender and race inform the culture and politics of the community. It identifies common linguistic markers that distinguish the Manosphere from the historical Men's Rights Movement and liken it instead, to the the Alt-Right movement. For example, devices like metaphor, hyperbole and dog whistles operate in the discourse as modes for negotiating meaning making and accelerating the dissemination of extreme right discourse in mainstream political spaces. I argue that this process in part explains why particularly since 2016 and the election of Donald Trump in the United States, political sentiment has become more open to the iterations of misogyny and racism emblematic of the Manosphere. I reference and reflect upon the renewed push towards gender normative thinking and how it intersects with ultra-nationalism in Manosphere discourse. Finally, I explore how best to categorize the Manosphere—as an ideology, a political formation or something else entirely.

**Keywords:** Manosphere; Alt-Right; Digital Misogyny; Discourse; Populism; Fascism; Nationalism; MRM; Incels; Red Pill

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## Mapping the Alt-Right and the Manosphere:

The Manosphere is a broad formation, which doesn't have a precise or stable definition. The following diagram is a rough approximation of how I conceptualize the Manosphere in relation to its proximal counterparts, including the Dark Enlightenment, Alt Right and sub-cultures within those broader groups. This is to hopefully assist the reader to better visualize where these factions lie in the context of other far right movements and online communities. The Alt Right is covered in more depth in future sections of this analysis, but the Dark Enlightenment and Neo-Reactionary movement or NRx is not. In brief, NRx is an explicitly anti-democratic, anti-liberal blogger community. Many consider the Dark Enlightenment to be an earlier school of thought that precipitated what is now known as the Alt Right. For this reason, I group them both together under the Alt Right label going forward.

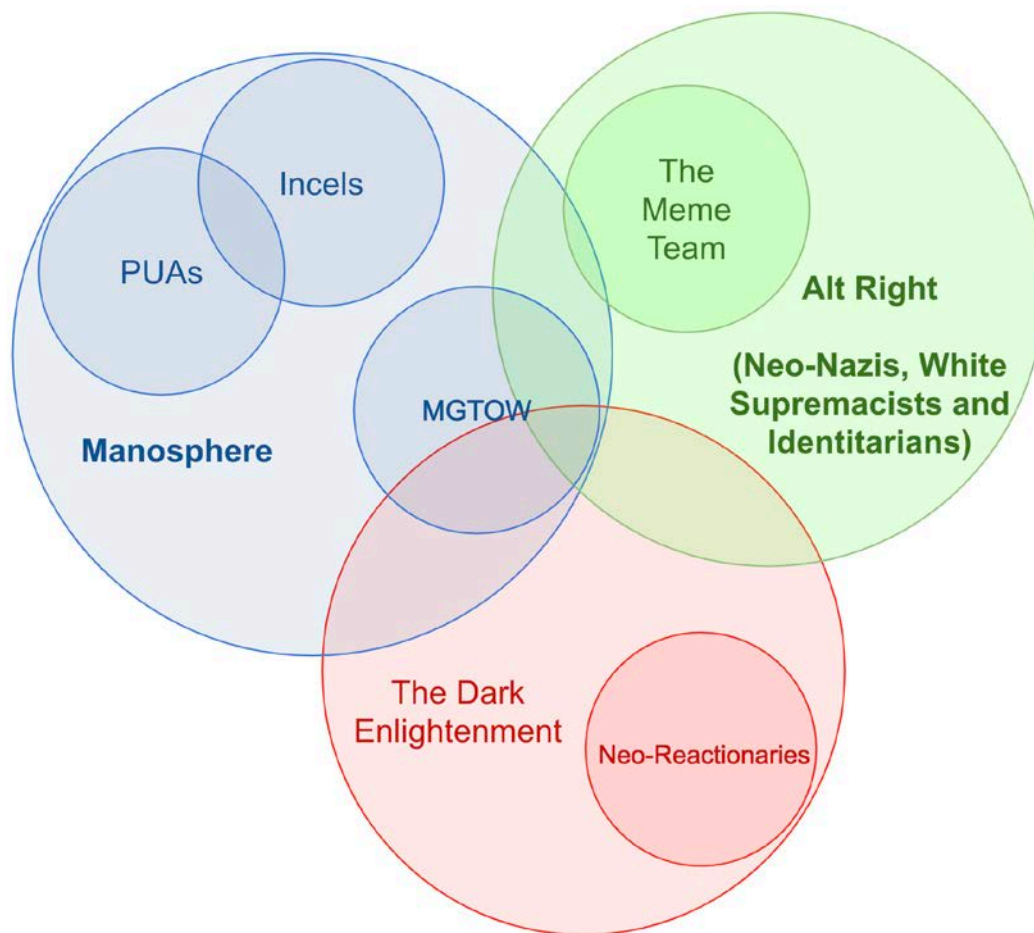


Figure 1: Diagram of the Alt-Right and Manosphere Eco-System



# Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

## 1.1 Introduction

Online communication is a contentious topic among discourse theorists. It is both heralded for its “potential to democratize communication” (Halbern & Gibbs, 2013, p. 1160) while also criticized for increasing political polarization (Gruzd, 2012). Largely, it is credited (Walsh, 2004) with creating opportunities for involvement, while promoting social tolerance and increasing overall participation in public and civic discourse (Halbern & Gibbs, 2013, p. 1160). Central to this conception of online discourse and public deliberation are the ideals of egalitarianism, civility and rationality. It is largely these same ideals that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is said to enhance and bolster, while enabling decentralized knowledge production and communication from many to many. Halbern and Gibbs (2013) suggest that other factors contribute to the proposed democratizing nature of online discourse, including asynchronicity and anonymity, which allow users to freely express opinions and carry out “rational and argumentative conversations” (1160). In this research, I work to problematize these assumptions around the public sphere by exploring the online Men’s Rights Movement and community known as the Manosphere.

The Manosphere is an online formation that dedicates itself to pushing far right ideologies including white nationalism, white supremacy, anti-LGBTQ family values and, perhaps most coherently across the numerous online Manosphere groups, misogyny and anti-feminism.

In the last ten years, and most strikingly since the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the United States, rhetoric of, by and about The Manosphere has found its way increasingly into mainstream discourse, becoming less marginalized in political and social spaces. Normative frames of acceptability seem to be shifting further toward the far right, exemplified by the way the Alt-Right has become a popular identity marker for factions of political conservatives and a key base of supporters for populist leaders globally. The Alt-Right is characterized in part by

a rejection of traditional conservatism or “cuckservatism” as well as a rejection of multi-cultural neoliberalism, in favor of an authoritarian proto-fascistic brand of conservative activism that values nationalism, white supremacy and patriarchy. As such, it sees multi-culturalism and neo-liberalism as products of the progressive left. In many ways, the Alt-Right acts as a euphemism for groups that might previously have been termed neo-Nazi or White Supremacist, just as the term “Manosphere” now soft pedals the misogyny, sexism and violence pushed by members of the extremist online Men’s Right Movement. This research seeks to uncover the ways in which the Manosphere is benefiting from a net culture that is pre-emptively self-congratulatory vis-à-vis the improvement of democratic and rational discourse it lays claim to. This notion of digital discourse glorifies argumentation (Halbern & Gibbs, p. 1161, 2013) and unfettered free speech as cornerstones of web etiquette. The practical implications of these standards are that those communities most targeted by the Manosphere, who seek to push back against their exclusionary brand of civic engagement, are accused of irrationality, of stifling free expression, or of being excessively sensitive to harmless, rational critique.

The Manosphere community has recently experienced a boom in activity and influence, in part pushing back against the successes of feminism in popular culture and equally, attempting to reinforce a status quo of male hegemony based on traditional gender roles. As such, the Manosphere is not simply a space dedicated to anti-woman and anti-feminist speech, it also stands in opposition to LGBTQ rights and racial equality, both of which posit that power has historically lain with and continues to tip disproportionately towards white, cis, male actors in public and private life. These assumptions therefore, fundamentally question any victim status claimed by the Manosphere and Alt-Right actors more generally, which rest on the notion that white, middle and working class men have been disadvantaged by the push for social progressivism and economic redress for historically oppressed groups. As well as considering technology’s role in the growing Manosphere movement, this research will attempt to understand the context amid which the online Men’s

Rights community makes their claims and how this has contributed to their popularity, especially within the upper echelons of political leadership in the United States.

There are numerous examples of mainstream audiences becoming desensitized to both overt and subtle forms of misogyny, as a result of repeated exposure in combination with widespread apologism by groups like the Manosphere and the Alt-Right. Perhaps the best known example is Donald Trump's now infamous leaked interview (2005) in which he boasted about making unwanted sexual advances towards women saying, "I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything... Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything" (New York Times, 2016). The fact that following the interview going public, he still won the US presidential election in 2016 says something about the increasing acceptability of such rhetoric. While the initial leak caused widespread scandal, it didn't significantly damage Donald Trump's political prospects. Instead, it marked a point at which the Overton Window, or the range of political discourse accepted in the public sphere had shifted. The fact that Manosphere and Alt Right discourse is fantastical shouldn't "undermine its potential as a threat" (Kelly, 2017, p. 70). Donald Trump's leaked interview is just one among many instances of what appears to be a new form of public misogyny lacking any recourse and backed by notions of the "every man", who doesn't betray any softness or weakness by adopting politically correct language. "Politically correct" in this sense is used in Mansphere circles as a misnomer for "The 'terrorism' of feminists and anti-racists in, for instance, their attempts to gain institutional acceptance [and] guidelines for anti-racist and antisexist language use". Fairclough identifies the birth of contemporary discourse on political correctness in feminist and anti-racist circles as a backlash to the harsh neo-liberal policies of the Reagan-Thatcher years (Fairclough, p. 20, 2003).

In addition to Donald Trump in the US, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has built a name for itself largely on a platform of anti-political correctness and anti-elitist populism (Malik, 2018). Nigel Farage, the former leader of the party credits the rise of populists like himself and Donald Trump to

growing communities “who feel so many of their representatives are politically-correct parts of [a] liberal media elite” (PinkNews, 2016). This has immunized many such leaders, Farage and Trump included, against charges of sexism, racism, ableism and any other brand of bigotry. Charges of which are quickly written off as just political correctness run amuck. For instance, in early 2017, it was revealed that the former Chairman of UKIP in Scotland, Arthur Misty Thackery had made “obscene phone calls” to 10 different women over a period of eight years (Aitken, 2017). Yet, he was only fired from his position three months after he openly admitted his guilt and a considerable swell of public outrage amassed in reaction. Closer to home, in November, 2016 Canadian MLA (Province of Alberta), Sandra Jansen “shared examples of violent, hate-filled abuse directed to her online” simply for being a woman in politics (Sturino & O'Brien, 2017). Her charges were met with indifference, credulity and aggression, particularly online (Wiebe, 2016). It is amid this growing climate of sexism in mainstream political discourse and the subsequent push back against accountability in the form of anti-PC politics, that this research on the Manosphere positions itself—focusing on North America as the site of the most active demographic of participants in the Manosphere (Lilly, 2016, p. 50). While, as Mary Lilly (2016) also notes, “cyberdiscourses are functionally state boundary-less” (p. 38), the sources of data in this research are discursively America-centric. For example, Roosh V is from Washington D.C. (“About Roosh V: Daryush Validazeh”) and his blog site RooshV.com deals primarily with American social and political issues, suggesting that the majority of his most avid followers are also largely American. This is supported by comments that reference the state of American politics specifically. For example, in “How to Save Western Civilization” he writes that “empowered female voters abort nearly 60 million American babies” (2017). While the real life identity of other popular Manosphere leader the Sandman is not as clear, his content and accent suggest he is at the least, North American. His video *Red Pill Monster* (2017) references the University of Toronto, indicating he may be Canadian. While the instances above demonstrate that misogyny in politics is not a solely American

phenomenon by any means, the birth of the Alt-Right and the Manosphere and their influence as it's manifested in an increased tolerance for overtly sexist behavior and rhetoric without consequence, is outsized in the contemporary American political context. As Matthew N. Lyons (2017) notes, the extreme right is "based primarily in the United States" and encompasses "White nationalism, misogyny, antisemitism, and authoritarianism in various forms and in political styles ranging from intellectual argument to violent invective". As an offshoot of the Alt Right, the Manosphere also exhibits a distinctly American flavor in much of its discourse. This is in part due also to a wider disillusionment and distrust in the US political establishment from within the United States. A study from the Harvard Institute of Politics found that "the distrusting, cynical attitudes toward politics among young adults [in the United States] contribute to their political disengagement" (Yamamoto et al., p. 150, 2017). Additionally, such "chronic disengagement undermines the efficacy of a democracy" (p. 150). I argue that this breakdown in healthy democratic process necessitates the eroding of healthy publics insofar as healthy publics require spaces for civil debate and a strong base of political moderates and centrists. I analyze and critique the Manosphere as symptomatic of this broader crisis in democracy as well as a driving force of social polarization. Due to a perceived lack of agency in the traditional modes of civic engagement and a collective belief that social democracy is failing them, groups like the Manosphere look to extremist movements and ideologies that give them a promise of something else. In the case of the Manosphere, members push for a return to a revered past or a vaguely utopic future. Mary Lilly (2016) terms this a brand of cultural conservatism which is characterised by this desire to return to a past moment in political and social relations. In this case, gender is the focal point of concern, but as we will see, the Manosphere is deeply connected to cultural conservatisms around race, nationality and religion. It also diverges from previous conservative movements in its adoption of an idiosyncratic lexicon of slang that is in some instances incompressible to outside spectators. For this reason, I come to conclusion in the Findings of this research, that the Manosphere represents a discursive shift in politics away from meaning

and towards affect. It is not a force that seeks to alter politics, but which seeks to attack sociality by disrupting meaning and promulgating restrictive view of who warrants consideration and even who constitutes a person. These are key aspects of the Manosphere that are contrary to sociality and distinct from other political formations. They also warrant a different approach to analysis as I will demonstrate.

## **1.2 Literature Review: History of the Modern Men's Rights Movement**

The history of the Manosphere and in certain ways, the modern Men's Right's Movement (MRM) in North America is bound up, often inextricably, with traditions of cultural conservatism, white nationalism and what has become popularly known as the Alt-Right (Mary Lilly, 2016, p. 135). In discussing what it means for the Men's Rights Movement to be transposed into online discourse and subsequently, how that discourse operates to form the Manosphere, it is important first, to extricate the MRM and then the Manosphere from the sub-communities and subcultures with which they overlaps or share lineages.

Michael Messner's 1997 work, "Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements" explores the history of Men's Rights and the connection, whether reactionary, supportive or subversive that men's movements in the United States have had to feminism and women's liberation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the first iteration of a national men's movement assembled in the 1910s and early 1920s in response to the first widely felt "crisis of masculinity," resulting from a gender and class reallocation of power in and around the First World War. This took form as traditional hegemonic masculinity was threatened by the relative increase in power and social mobility for women and working class men. These changes were largely "due to a combination of changes brought on by modernization of social life and by the rise of organized feminist movements" (Messner, 1997, p. 9). Fears surrounding the introduction of women into traditionally male spaces at the outset of World War I prompted many adult men

to seek out “homosocial” spaces that were separated from women entirely. The military as well as institutions such as the Boy Scouts of America and university fraternities (Messner, 1997, p. 9) were among the first of these enforced homosocial spaces but less formal clubs and movements also began to form at this time in response to the so-called “crisis” (Messner, 1997). The military in particular was seen as a homosocial means of proving and strengthening manhood in the context of increasing social “feminization” (p. 9).

The term “crisis” will come up again in later chapters of this research and I therefore think it prudent to clarify the way in which I will use it going forward. The phrase “crisis of masculinity” is a problematic one (p. 10) because it presupposes a neutral or coherent stasis of masculinity or femininity from which a crisis can emerge. Sam de Boise (2013) rejects this concept on the grounds that it assumes “a transhistorical sense of men’s ‘true’ identity” which can be disrupted. Rather than relying on this definition, I use crisis to describe two distinct phenomena: (1) the perception of a masculinity in danger coupled with the notion that masculinity is in apparent decline, both of which are common narratives in the modern MRM and the Manosphere; and (2) the social apparatus of gender which tends toward crisis because it is a disordered method of exerting power and control over a population. Gender as a construct is frequently in flux and to norms that rely on steady classifications of male and female roles, this can constitute a crisis. Hence, we have seen many intentional disruptions of gender in the feminist movement. The second of these crises plays an important role in exacerbating the first.

The modern MRM is an amalgam of what arose as a men’s liberation movement in the early 1970’s (Messner, 1997), focused on the legal rights of men, often in relation to family law (divorce and child custody). This has since morphed into a political ideology comprised of a mix of individualism, nationalism, and social or cultural conservatism that deals less and less with the concept of liberation from gendered roles and gendered legal discrimination. I will make a case for the notion that the MRM in North America today is in many ways more akin to cultural conservatisms like White Nationalism than it is to its supposed

forbear from the 1970's. Warren Farrell emerged in the mid 1970's as an advocate for men's rights, introducing the claim that "it is women who have the power, and men who are powerless" (Messner, 1997, p. 43) by citing inequalities in the workplace and in family law. This developed into what became known as the "father's rights" movement (p. 44). Father's rights activists consisted mainly of divorced men who in negotiating the emotional toll and financial burden of divorce developed a "masculinist discourse on divorce" (p. 44) and pushed for changes to child custody law and alimony requirements. These discourses have persisted in the modern Men's Right's Movement but have both taken on additional points behind which to rally, as well as adopted a very distinct semiotic flavour. One significant change is the prevalence in the Manosphere of appropriating liberal feminist concepts like equality and rights to legitimize grievances (Messner, 1997) whilst opposing feminism and in some cases blaming it for those same grievances. The Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) from the 1970's did not position themselves in direct opposition to feminism but rather suggested Men's Rights as an addition to it. What has also changed to a certain degree, is the nature of grievances voiced by the Manosphere in comparison to the historical MRM. Rather than advocate specific legislative or policy-based changes that benefit men, the Manosphere's mission statement, much like that of the Alt-Right demands fundamental changes at the cultural level, both in the language we use and the identities we adopt. These changes however, are often broad, unclear, contradictory or hyperbolic.

## **1.12 Deconstructing Ideology**

In addition to the historical Men's Liberation Movement, the modern Men's Right's Movement, and more specifically, the Manosphere shares a great deal of characteristics with the Alt-Right. I argue that the Manosphere actually represents an important ideological tier of the Alt-Right. Nancy S. Love (2017) defines the Alt-Right as a subgroup that has arisen as part of a global movement of "trendy fascism" born in part through a tactical combination of "apocalyptic



images...alliances between KKK, Neo-Nazi, and Christian Identity groups; sophisticated use of new technologies, including the Internet; and recruitment strategies focused on so-called vulnerable populations, especially prisoners [and] teenagers..." (Love, 2017, p. 264). The Manosphere similarly has drawn on these tactics and alliances to further its political goals. There is also significant cross over between the above groups and the Manosphere. Matthew Lyons (2017) describes how "many manospherians have also become active in the Alt-Right, and the manosphere's online harassment campaigns against women have strongly influenced the Alt-Right's own activism" and popularity with men over women. Even within the Manosphere, there exists hierarchies of masculinity which tend to place white men above black, Hispanic or Asian men in their ability to dominate and engage women sexually (Paradkar, 2018). Men's Rights Activists in the Manosphere engage in a type of "cultural politics" which draws on and shifts popular culture as a means of "mobilizing the radical right in western democracies" (p. 265) through aesthetic appeals as well as more traditionally political or legislative ones. "Trendy fascism" then is a tactical move among contemporary far right groups to appear "fashionable, up to date in style or influence...keenly aware of and responsive to the latest developments," (p. 265). In this way, they resist notions of being "backwards", traditionally conservative or old fashioned. We can see here a distinct semiotic and discursive flavor beginning to emerge, which will be a key element of later analysis.

The Alt-Right is a combination of political and social conservatism as well as a newly rebranded version of White Nationalism. While drawing on "ominous grievances" (Smith, 2016) and old tropes of losing ground and being replaced, the Alt-Right has only recently embraced a "self-presentation as being new, hip, and irreverent" (Lyons, 2017, p. 2). Lyons characterizes the Alt-Right as sharing "a contempt for both liberal multiculturalism and mainstream conservatism" (p. 2). Nevertheless, while its roots are in new iterations of nationalism and populism, the Alt-Right still borrows much of its political portfolio from conservatism, both in its selective individualism. Members also seem to preference laissez faire capitalism and libertarianism on average. Of course this is a very paradoxical

position among conservatives, and in fact, one conservative movements often struggle with mightily. Such movements are nationalist, often authoritarian and thus unreceptive to the focus on difference represented by individualism. They nevertheless support a loose notion of individualism insofar as they stress individual responsibility in areas of economic opportunity and equal treatment, over systemic or institutional considerations. At the same time as “Trendy Fascists” succeed in marketing to the mainstream, social issues have risen to the fore of American politics since the 1990’s, sparking a “growing political division between those that hold traditional versus progressive moral values” (Kaufman, 2002, p. 283); these include values around gender, race, religion and nationhood.

For example, Karen Kaufman’s (2002) research indicates that “cultural values and religious beliefs increasingly define party cleavages; in particular, evangelical and otherwise observant Christians increasingly make up the ranks of the Republican Party” (p. 284). Rosemary Radford Ruether (2014) points to the oppressive patterns in Christianity toward women and details how Christian doctrine is bound up in a “patriarchal interpretation of God...creation, sin, and salvation.” These interpretations heavily inform social ideals in largely Christian conservative communities, including the Manosphere. The ongoing contradiction is that while holding regressive views on gender that are often informed by a conservative Christian mentality, the Manosphere still seeks a radical image that departs from the Republican or Conservative images of years past. Much of this image is cultivated by the departure from traditional modes of organizing and spreading information, and a move towards online discourse. Memes, gifs and internet slang have become key communicative tools in the Manosphere, playing a significant part in how Manosphere messaging is disseminated. While some of the core tenets remain, popular styles of discourse in the Manosphere have more in common with contemporary internet culture than they do with the discourse of conservative traditionalists like Barry Goldwater or even Mike Pence (Brewer, 2017). Interestingly, the same could in many ways be said about President Donald Trump who also defies the traditional conservative mold. He presents

himself as anti-establishment despite operating on behalf of powerful political and corporate insiders (Serazio, 2016, p. 181). He does so successfully, by blaming “vague socio-cultural specters” in a manner similar to the “language of leftist critiques” (p. 181) but surrounding issues that appeal to hyper-conservative audiences. The Manosphere achieves a similar balance in their discourse. They construct a monolithic image of leftists, university elites, feminists and the political class as the subject of blame amid a climate of “rising discontent” (p. 183). This is strategically done as a distraction from taking a sober look at economic, racial or gender-based inequality.

Misogyny and the subjugation of women are increasingly loud platforms of the broader Alt-Right movement and according to Annie Kelly (2017), this is in large part due to the marrying of renewed social conservatism, Christian conservatism and White Nationalism, all of which are male dominated movements with ideological doctrines that naturalize a patriarchal social order. Annie Kelly makes the case that we have neo-conservatism to thank for “laying the groundwork that would go on to underpin and encourage the burgeoning alt-right digital scene” (2017, p. 69). She defines the Alt-Right not as a coherent movement in the classical sense, but as “a network of smallish digital social hubs” which have at their core, “logics surrounding liberalism, manhood and national security” (p. 69). There is a conceptual connection between the need for “strictly delineated borders” (p. 70) in the national sense and the need to define gender in similarly black and white terms. It should be unsurprising then, that we often see the members and content of certain Alt-Right groups bleeding into the Manosphere. Some might recall Christopher Cantwell who in August, 2017 became known as the Weeping Nazi when his identity and role in the violent White Supremacist rally in Charlottesville, North Carolina was made public in a Vice documentary. Salon.com later reported that Cantwell had “started off as a men’s rights activist” (Marcotte, 2017). The connection between the Men’s Rights and Alt-Right movement is perhaps unsurprising: both rely on tactics that include “engaging in extremist discourse, using deceptive irony and... internet memes... and spreading false and misleading information (Vox.com, 2016). However, less

explored by scholarly work thus far, are the ways in which the digital discourses produced within these movements interact with mainstream political trends and exacerbate a larger crisis in deliberative democracy. It is this process in combination with the echo chambers and homologous social circles online that have left a vacuum inside which extremist alternatives can incubate and grow.

In 1996, Cas Mudde published research on the resurgence of distinct waves of alt-right ideologies beginning in the 1980's. He identified this as a third-wave in right wing extremism since the end of World War II (Mudde, p. 227) and noted that the wave spread throughout Western Europe, before entering North America. The wave then gained momentum as right wing discourse began to penetrate online spaces. This process was accelerated when in the early 2000s, the internet became a space dedicated to user generated content and social exchange where previously the focus had been on "information provision" (Fuchs et al., 2010) rather than exchange. Marginal communities began to arrive and thrive online during this period, carving out spaces for knowledge production and dissemination where otherwise, they were largely dispersed and disorganized. Far right wing groups were just one of many of these early internet groups.

Christian Fuchs (2016) explored how nationalism and xenophobia operate as ideologies when they are transposed into the digital sphere. In doing so, he provides a worthwhile means of understanding what is meant by ideology in the first place. Ideology here, just as Fuchs describes is comprised of those,

"thoughts, practices, ideas, words, concepts, phrases, sentences, texts, belief systems, meanings, representations, artefacts, institutions, systems or combinations thereof that represent and justify one group's or individual's power, domination or exploitation of other[s]... by misrepresenting, one-dimensionally presenting or distorting reality in symbolic representations." (Fuchs, 2016, p. 173)

Fuchs observed that even in virtual environments, ideology is not an abstract concept but a "concrete, lived reality" (p. 173). This is consistent with earlier thinkers like Stuart Hall who defined ideology as a framework comprised of language, imagery, categories and systems of representation that allow different

classes of social groups to make sense of their world (Fuchs, 2016, p. 174). Discourses online are not self-contained, single texts but rather, networks of profiles, articles, messages and comments (p. 181).

The intricacies of online right wing discourse will be explored further in later sections, however the importance of this development in the evolution of Men's Rights Movements, is that the Manosphere capitalizes on this structure, drawing on popular culture, celebrity culture and the commodification of politics in ways its antecedents were unable to. Members of the Manosphere are able to simultaneously and seemingly consistently present themselves as "Robin Hood" figures, outsiders who transgress authority, while also self-presenting as "rich, famous and/or attractive" (p. 182) and at least in that way, part of the existing social hierarchy. Incels are one aspect of the Manosphere who don't present this façade, yet still they idolize it as the ultimate achievement. This is the new (and incongruous) aesthetic of the online MRM and one of the important ways it differs from its policy-oriented predecessor. The Manosphere effectively protects and reinforces existing power structures while claiming to oppose them. Members maintain the aesthetic of being anti-establishment rebels while relinquishing the ambitions and motives to truly overhaul the current dynamics of social and political power. While historically, the Robin Hood ethos was a product of the working class and underserved minorities, it has become "a political project of building and maintaining power"(Serazio, 2016, p. 183). In effect, the Manosphere today "putatively addresses the anxieties of those feeling marginalized without actually redressing the policies and patterns that gave rise to many of their concerns" (p. 183). Instead, they concern themselves with rigidly enforcing gender conformity and white masculinity.

Little and Feldman (2017) explore the connection between new forms of media and the suspension of mainstream political life in favor of populist figures (p. 4) who provoke an affective sway on national narratives. The "once-vaunted Cordon Sanitaire against political extremism" (p. 2) implemented in Europe following World War II (p. 2) is no longer effective at moderating political discourse in the American context and this is largely due to the "new breed[s] of

media [and] news organization[s] operating...online". On right wing political views and their recent resurgence as popular rhetoric in mainstream media—including gender traditionalism and anti-feminism, Littler and Feldman (2017) suggest that the “mainstreaming of their discourse may be traced potentially... to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the imposition of neoliberal capitalism as the sole political system of the developed world”. This in turn “created the preconditions for mass unemployment, the decline of traditional manufacturing, and the collapse of traditional national and regional identities” (p. 3). The subsequent seismic shift in world order, preempted widespread feelings of disillusionment and distrust in the mainstream political system, moderating as it may have been in decades past. This has made participation in alternative and often extremist groups that openly oppose the status quo, more appealing to those directly affected by social decline.

### **1.3 Situating the Manosphere**

Mary Lilly (2016), one of the few scholars to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the Manosphere, defines it as the online expression of the offline Men’s Rights Movement (MRM). Lilly notes that the Manosphere is a broad community consisting of “an informal cyberspace network of blogs, websites, and forums that concentrate on issues concerning men and masculinity” (p. 1). Various subsets of the Manosphere have different ideological priorities. Pick up artistry and personal self-improvement are popular as subcultures of the Manosphere (Lilly, 2016). However, other factions have a far more explicitly political mandate and as noted previously, intersect with White Nationalist, Alt-Right and Paleo-conservative movements in varying combinations and to various degrees. While Lilly’s work details the particularities of the Manosphere as distinct from the larger MRM—for instance, how masculinities are negotiated and constructed in that space, she doesn’t explore how the discourse emerging from the Manosphere influences mainstream political discourse, nor does she critically

discuss the strategies activists in the Manosphere use to push their rhetoric into the mainstream, many of which are appropriated from progressive activist movements and exploit seemingly progressive theoretical or communicative frameworks. These are the issues I aim to address in this research, as well as what such considerations say about the classification of the Manosphere as a political formation in the first place.

The Manosphere is not defined by geography but its most active and numerous participants are from North America and this is reflected in their political and social priorities. Mary Lilly (2016) suggests that while there is little operational overlap between the offline Men's Rights Movement and the Manosphere, the online stream of the movement occasionally organizes offline gatherings, including the "'International Conference on Men's Issues' held in Detroit in June 2014" organized by A Voice for Men (AVFM) (p. 41). AVFM describes itself as a non-profit supporting "Humanist Counter-Theory in the Age of Misandry" ([avoiceformen.com](http://avoiceformen.com)). Aside from these infrequent occasions of offline organizing, the Manosphere is comprised of a network of websites, blogs, forums and message boards giving it both an agility to pivot its focus when convenient and a particular precarity as a cohesive group.

In research on the Men's Right's Movement in Canada, Kelly Gordon (2015) found that even while a curated image of the community would like to portray it as driven by millennials and youth members, "men over 50 continue to comprise the vast majority of contributors to formal organizational materials". This says something at the very least, about the image the Manosphere wishes to present and the incongruity with the reality of the movement's most active, embedded members, whose age varies widely but certainly includes older men. Subcultures of the Manosphere like those dedicated to pick up artistry are disproportionately occupied by younger men (Lilly, 2016, p. 42), as are a number of the social media and networking sites that the Manosphere uses to spread their messaging ([Reddit.com](http://Reddit.com), [4Chan.com](http://4Chan.com) and [YouTube.com](http://YouTube.com)). However, other sites such as [MGTOW.com](http://MGTOW.com) are frequented by older men. This is evidenced by the prevalence of topics like divorce and child custody on MGTOW, as well as by

the style of discourse which is less memetic and more traditional, employing complex imagery and natural metaphors, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, the demographic range of the Manosphere is wide: men are brought together by a common feeling of disillusionment leading them to fervently embrace a misogynistic worldview as a “symbolic solution to the frustrations in their lives” (p. 43). The key point here however, is that in keeping with the Manosphere’s self-branding as anti-establishment, radical and alternative, it presents itself with a younger face.

In 2016, *The Economist* sought to answer the question “What is the Manosphere?”. The answer eventually provided was that the Manosphere was “not a concrete umbrella organization so much as a concept” (H.C., 2016). The community has many different factions, not all of them with identical goals or mandates, but all of them see the world as divided between Red and Blue Pill thinking. This is a metaphor that defines Manosphere discourse from that of other movements in the Alt-Right family. Taking the red pill symbolizes an unplugging from what the community deems a gynocentric system (Lilly, 2016). The red pill, blue pill reference is taken from the 1999 hit film “*The Matrix*” in which the protagonist, Neo is given the choice whether to stay plugged in to the Matrix computer system, inside which his reality is merely a virtual facade, or unplug and become liberated from the lie. This metaphor as well as other pop culture allusions give the Manosphere a distinct semiotic character. It speaks to the way the movement is entwined with popular media culture and both plays against and with that culture, finding its greatest fame in spectacular bursts and discursive acts that invade or borrow from, popular culture. In the late 90’s, Michael Kimmel and Kaufman (1993) regarded certain aesthetic preoccupations of the (at that time) “new” Men’s Right’s Movement as “mythopoetic”, a term that came to symbolize a culture of manhood that valued communion with nature and love of women without the need for domination. In the Manosphere by contrast, this notion has been overtaken by a reimagining and re-mythologizing of classical masculinity. Manhood is defined in relation to archetypal figures like the Matrix’ Neo as well as to classical conceptions of heroic masculinity as the epitome of



strength, rationality and reason. As such, a new type of mythopoetic manhood is an important aesthetic driver of the Manosphere. That is, the movement draws on caricatures of manhood sourced from popular culture as well as myth and legend. Whether Greek and Roman, Jungian or Judeo-Christian, these “images of heroic manhood” are routed in common themes. Firstly, they all rely on “essentialist assumptions about gender distinctions, a contemporary diagnosis of feminization of American manhood... and a vision of retrieval of heroic archetypes as models for men” (p. 4) Much of this aesthetic is echoed in Manosphere discourse, accompanied by more modern sources of the same archetype, most notably video game and comic book heroes. This is facilitated by the online medium where embodiments of manhood and masculinity are buffered by personas and avatars which can be far more exaggerated than in offline contexts. In some cases, the Manosphere “also facilitates hostile and often illegal performances of masculinity” (Ging, 2017, p. 5) including forceful sex, domination and control, examples of which will be covered in Chapter 2.

Finally, I discuss the Manosphere in the context of an emerging politic that focuses on affect as a form of hucksterism—selling a feeling and favouring narratives that aren’t tied to meaning but rather appeal to emotions like fear, despair and anger. While all political action is couched in affect to some degree (Massumi, 2015), the Manosphere rebels against standards of narrative consistency and meaning. An important factor in this process described by Massumi (p.115) is the imminence of catastrophe and the constant bracing for disaster that primes responses to political or social events to be reactive and charged with emotion. Social justice movements have utilized affect in their discourse, but as Lumsden (2014) notes, the Manosphere and other Alt Right groups have “co-opted the language of affect, emotion, feeling, and the personal being political to meet its own ends” (p. 97). The study of affect is a robust and rich theoretical field, a small portion of which I draw upon to help characterize the nature and praxis of the Manosphere.

## 1.4 Networked Misogyny Online

Networked misogyny is a broader, umbrella term that indicates the structure, operation and effects of anti-feminism and sexism online. It refers to the way in which network infrastructures offer platforms to amplify and intensify misogyny, just as such infrastructures and platforms amplify all forms of participation. While the Manosphere is an extreme online expression of the modern Men's Rights Movement, which is not strictly or entirely misogynistic or anti-feminist (although these are certainly prominent features), networked misogyny denotes those expressions of the Manosphere that intentionally and vocally target women and feminists. Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate M. Miltner (2016) introduce the concept of networked misogyny as an "especially virulent strain of violence and hostility towards women in online environments" (171). The concept of networked misogyny is as much about the structural nature of anti-feminism: the fact that certain mediums facilitate its growth and propagation more than others, as it is about the cultural ubiquity of misogyny. Banet-Weiser and Miltner argue that to focus on the structural or legal elements of misogyny alone, is to disregard the fact that it is, above all, an "insurmountable cultural and normative battle" (p. 171). However, they also point to the importance of considering how networked misogyny differs from other forms of gendered oppression. Just as popular feminism has recently gained momentum and widespread support, popular misogyny has likewise experienced a boom. While the most obvious form popular misogyny takes is the "basic anti-female violent expression that circulates to wide audiences on popular media platforms" (p. 172), there are more insidious elements of popular networked misogyny. As noted in the previous section, a large part of the Manosphere's discursive style, is the obscuration of explicit meaning in favor of euphemism, metaphor, and popular reference. Therefore, not all of the Manosphere contributes directly to networked misogyny but it is a significant enough aspect of the community's modus operandi, as to warrant attention in any serious analysis of the community's discourse.

There are in essence, two aspects of networked misogyny: the infrastructural aspects that consider how the Web 2.0 environment amplifies and enables misogynistic discourse, and the content and semantics of that discourse itself. It is thus not only important to explain how technology mediates social practices (Puentes & Jiménez, 2011), including those that bolster and spread misogyny, but also how and why there is currently a growing trend toward misogynistic discourse in political and social spaces online. In attempting to explain this second point, Susan Faludi (2006) proposes what has become popularly known as the Backlash Theory. Originally, this theory wasn't intended to apply specifically to online spaces but instead to explain a cultural trend toward backlash in times of transition. Nevertheless, it is a useful framework through which to consider online backlash movements. She suggests that the modern Men's Rights Movement in North America arose largely in reaction to a long-fought-for women's liberation movement in the United States which left men feeling threatened by the notion that women could indeed achieve full equality. Despite its conception as a theory applicable to offline movements, the Backlash theory rests upon two primary premises; both of which feature heavily in Manosphere discourse. The first is that feminism has not only succeeded in granting women full, unequivocal equality in all areas of public and private life but it has in fact, been pushed too far so as to disadvantage men. Following from this, many Men's Rights groups posit that this has actually resulted in increasing unhappiness for women who are now forced to resist their biologically determined urges to nurture, nest and partner with domineering men.

The prospect of women's growing dissatisfaction with their own liberation is echoed in popular media, as is the proclamation that feminism has "gone too far". Faludi (2006) points to "publications from the New York Times to Vanity Fair" which "have issued a steady stream of indictments against the women's movement". Notable headlines decrying the feminist effort include "when feminism failed" and "the awful truth about women's lib" (p. 2). Nevertheless, Backlash is not the only factor to consider in the ballooning of networked misogyny. Lilly (2016) rightly points out that the Backlash Theory is incomplete

insofar as it doesn't explain why beyond scapegoating women and feminists for the real or perceived social inequalities men face, the modern Men's Rights Movement also aggressively defends the privileges and benefits already enjoyed by men as a gendered class. Michael Kimmel, an experienced scholar in the analysis of anti-feminism and men's rights discourses presents an alternative theory for the rise of Networked Misogyny in "Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era" (2013). Kimmel's "Angry Man" hypothesis rests less on a reaction to gains made by feminism and focuses more on the belief that traditional American masculinity is being "wimpified" by a culture that accepts and celebrates gender roles outside of the traditional, nuclear structure (Lilly, 2016, p. 15). While backlash plays a role in this urge to re-masculinize society, Kimmel points out that it is the fundamental belief that "violence is restorative of masculinity" (Lilly, 2016, p. 16) that drives misogyny.

Addressing the structural elements of Networked Misogyny, Keith Grint and Rosalind Gill (1995) ask "what sort of assumptions go into the design, production and use" of [network] technologies? They point to a gendered division of labour in designing communication technologies, resulting in the reproduction of hierarchical thinking as opposed to an "emphasis on caring as a basis for design and development" (p. 176). The "patriarchal nature of technological design" (p. 176) necessarily bleeds into the ways in which those devices are used as well as the ways in which women are subsequently marginalized by that usage and by the communities taking part in it. Grint and Gill (1995) also rightly note the problem with reifying technology and arguing the "translation of masculinity into the artefact or system" (p. 177). Rather than fall prey to this pitfall, my discussion will focus on practices of use and the systems and platforms on which those practices are developed, investigating how together they reinforce gendered power relations. This method is what Grint and Gill (1995) identify as a study of culture. One shortcoming of Gill and Grint however, is that their research doesn't touch on the online environment in particular and instead focuses on analogue technologies such as the telephone. I intend to

expand their notion of misogyny in technological design and architecture and apply it to the digital space.

In further developing a clear picture of what the Manosphere is and how to characterize its function in the context of networked communication online, I draw from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's concept of "communities of practice" (2007) and Gunawardena et al.'s (2009) research on Web-based community building. A community of practice denotes any group formed "around mutual engagement in an endeavor". It is through engagement in this endeavor, that both linguistic practices and their corresponding social meanings emerge. Social meanings often correspond to a group's particular understanding of gender, race, class, ability as well as other societal positionalities. In the case of the Manosphere, meaning is negotiated according to a very narrow and binary understanding of gender identities: man, woman; masculine and feminine. Networked communication allows for wider participation in this practice despite it lacking internal consistency and a coherent rational or scientific foundation. The online space is differently composed than offline public forums. In a study of the reactionary online Men's Right's Campaign against a feminist effort to "Lose the Lads Mags", García-Favaro and Gill (2016) observed that the "internet induces a level of freedom of expression inhibited in other spaces, and that this often means that online discussion fora are highly affectively charged spaces" (p. 34). This is at least in part a result of the potential anonymity and pseudonymity of the online sphere, where the dehumanization of one's ideological opponent becomes much more easily accomplished. Furthermore, while harassment is often conceptualized as a behavior from one individual to another, it is just as often networked in that it takes shape through group coordination and the interactions of many individuals. The occurrence of harassment online is inexorably connected to systems and patterns of violence elsewhere. As Marwick and Caplan note, "Such networked misogyny is often organized in subcultural online spaces such as Reddit, 4Chan, and chat rooms" (2018, p. 545). A comment is posted in an anonymous network and members of that network engage with it, it may then be reposted on different networks like Twitter or Facebook. If the

comment receives enough attention, it then gets mainstream coverage which drives users to the original site of the comment and the cycle continues. This is the pattern of networked or group coordinated ideological engineering: how new ideas enter and circulate, first in small marginal networks and then in wider public forums.

Early studies of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and gender have focused on the history of technology as a male dominated domain. Susan Herring (2000) cites the first analysis of Gender and CMC occurring in the 1980's—initial studies throughout the following two decades seemed to indicate a promising trend. In a 1998 study by Graddol and Swan, “the traditional pattern of domination of mixed-sex discourse by men” was equalized in an anonymous online conferencing system put in place for university use (Herring, 2000, p. 2). Nevertheless, there were only a handful of examples of this kind where gender was the focus of the research. Even with these important exceptions, until the 1990's the internet was almost entirely a male-only space (p. 2). By this time, emergent research began to increasingly “problematize claims of gender-free equality in cyberspace” (p. 2). Numerous instances of women being harassed, intimidated and deceived for sexual gain by men arose in both academic research and the press (p. 2). Karla Mantilla (2013) comprehensively explored the dimensions of misogyny in contemporary online discourse, using the term “gendertrolling” to describe the process by which users deliberately bait and target women using sexually explicit language and credible threats. Gendertrolling, like flaming is an extreme example of how “culturally-learned gender styles” (Herring, 2000, 2016, p. 6) infiltrate CMC. Similar to Faludi's (2006) backlash hypothesis, one of the key features of gendertrolling is that it most often occurs in reaction to women opposing and countering sexism online. “Gendertrolling” is a variant of the wider discursive phenomena known as “trolling” which when first defined in the 1990's came to mean incendiary comments made with the intent of disturbing and disrupting a thread of dialogue, conversation or in some cases, community as a whole (Mantilla, 2013). The practice of gendertrolling can take a variety of forms but all involve gendered

insults, vicious tactics including personal attacks and credible threats (Mantilla, 2013, p. 569) and sometimes entail organized networks of trolls acting collectively to publicly intimidate their targets. Matilla's work (2013) exemplifies one method employed by the Manosphere, but doesn't address those forms of discourse that are not so easily identified as trolling.

The multi-platform and multi-media nature of online spaces also means that the Manosphere is able to decentralize their content production, resulting in a "truly remarkable gallery of anti-feminist content" (Gotell & Dutton, 2016, p. 67) to the extent that many women who have tried to oppose their speech have found that they inadvertently direct traffic to their platforms and become the targets of their often vicious retaliations (p. 67). Despite the fact that a number of MRA groups are now classified as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Centre (SPLC) (p. 70), the virtual environment can protect even the most inflammatory and violent members of the Manosphere from any legal repercussions that might otherwise result from such threats in an offline context. Speech that would be condemned in formal political settings is left unchecked in cyberspace and as "gender conflicts have increasingly moved outside [of] formal politics", so have the tactics of the MRM. The shift from offline to online MRMs may also be read as a symptom of a wider anti-government and anti-state mentality indicative of other Alt-Right groups. Gotell and Dutton's (2016) work is formative for the research presented here in that they recognize the new anti-establishment sensibilities of groups like the Manosphere. No longer is the focus on amending existing policy, but rather an overhaul of the culture as a whole and failing that, an emancipation from society as much as possible—hence the "unplugging" imagery of the red pill and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW). The Manosphere also increasingly portrays feminism as "complicit in the consolidation of the neoliberal law and order state" (p. 69) while ignoring that their ideological reverence for so-called "gender-neutrality, formal equality and individual responsibility" (p. 71) are highly neo-liberal ideals. Thus their use of online spaces is only superficially a means of distancing themselves from formal

political institutions and values. The inconsistencies therein will be an ongoing focus of my analysis.

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

I first employ a feminist theoretical framework in order to clarify what discourse means in the context of this analysis. In other words, when I am claiming that the Manosphere is creating politically impactful online discourse, what am I claiming about the agency, intention and tactics of this community? Carol Bacchi (2017) notes that a recent increase in feminist discourse analyses has highlighted “the importance of meaning-making in political life” (p. 198). Bacchi subsequently distinguishes between two uses of the term discourse, relating to two methods of studying text. The first uses discourse to describe language itself: that is, the rhetorical devices and structural elements of syntax, word choice etc. The second use of the term discourse relates to “the ways in which issues are given a particular meaning within a specific social setting” (p. 199). The former she terms “discourse analysis” while the second she describes as an “analysis of discourses”. While some feminist critiques sit firmly on one side or another of this divide (Stapleton & Wilson 2004; Roberts, 2004), Hege Skjeie and Mari Teigen (2005) not only explore the rhetorical devices employed in their texts but deconstruct dominant systems, contexts and positions that influence meaning, as is the tradition in analysis of discourses. Similarly, I will analyze the rhetorical strategies of the Manosphere as a means of deconstructing how they operate as proliferators of misogyny, power and fear in a climate dominated by the politics of affect.

Bacchi (2017) also provides a useful discussion as to what feminists mean by dominant or hegemonic discourses. “These discourses are called dominant or hegemonic in order to highlight the power they exert in society” (201). Dominant discourses are those that are taken prima facie to be true: “they become fixed and pass as truth” (Durrheim, 1997, p. 181). Foucault helps to fill out this picture



by describing the way in which selves and identities are molded in the context of dominant and, disciplining discourses. According to Social Constructionist epistemology, “It is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 205). Van Dijk (2008) expands the relationship between discourse and power in methodological terms: for example, how by looking at “special intonation, visual or auditory properties...syntactic structures, lexical selection, the semantics of presuppositions or person descriptions, rhetorical figures or argumentative structures” (p. 5) can reproduce social inequality, reflect group ideology and work to fabricate identities that reflect and bolster existing power relations. In line with Foucault (1977): people don’t speak discourse, discourse speaks them — discourse establishes the parameters of what can and cannot be stated. However, despite situating this analysis within a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and its mediation of power, I think it important to speak about the work of discourse creation in the context of ideology<sup>1</sup>. Christian Fuchs (2016) provides a valuable account of ideology that I borrow going forward.

For Fuchs, ideology is a social practice: “an active communicative process and a social relation, in which humans, groups and classes produce and reproduce power relations” (p. 174). It is humans that use ideology to persuade, influence, reify or distort what Fuchs calls “dominative interests” (2016, p. 175). For example, he identifies nationalism as an ideology that constructs an in-group as homogenous and collective which is then contrasted with an out-group that is Other by virtue of its race, biology, kinship or culture (p.176). Ideologies according to this theoretic characterization can be logically linked. For example, racism as an ideology follows from nationalism as a construction of the out-group as inherently inferior to the in-group in that they are “not part of the illusionary

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<sup>1</sup> I don’t therefore extend Foucault’s theory on discourse and power to include his rejection of ideology as essential to a rejection of inherent Truth. Instead, I draw on Fuchs (2016) for a working definition of Ideology without an assumption of essential Truth.

national collective” (p. 176). This research considers the Manosphere through the lens of Fuch’s theory on ideology to explore how it reproduces and disrupts structures of power around gender and race.

In unpacking the ideological discourse produced by the Manosphere, I utilize feminist research on the public sphere and participatory democracy as well as feminist perspectives on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), including aspects of the online space that create damaging trends in discourse mediation and engagement in political speech, whether overt or implicit. Kendall and Tannen (2015) note that women tend to express similarities and seek to find overlapping experiences when engaging in dialogue. In contrast, “conversational rituals common among men are based on ritual opposition or “agonism”” (p. 643-644). These antagonistic discursive tendencies are much more common and encouraged in the Manosphere. While I don’t flat out reject this “difference” approach to analyzing gender in discourse, I seek to also take a “dominance” approach in that I address how discourse directs and adjudicates power within a system. Gendered discursive trends are fabricated in a system that demands “disciplining and oppressive” (Zoonen, 1992, p. 18) prescriptions based on biological sex. Therefore, while the gender dichotomy is a fabrication of the system, it nevertheless impacts how men and women communicate and participate in discourse formation online.

Additionally, there is the question of identity and socialization in online interactions. Sonia Nunez Puente and Antonio Garcia Jiménez (2011) point to the fact that technological competence itself is popularly construed as a masculine trait, consistent only with a masculine identity (Puente & Jiménez, 2011, p. 40). I will focus on how such social differences impact access to and participation in CMC and argue that the Manosphere’s denial of the importance of these positionalities is an indication that the commitment to rational discourse expressed in the community is rarely followed up on. Far from decry the use of technology or characterize it as deterministically harmful to the goals of equality and justice movements, I contend that technology is a fundamental mode of identity building and has the potential for fostering identities that are resistant to

domination and patriarchy. However, this is only possible if we first carefully consider “the relationships between power, identity and technology” (Puente & Jiménez, 2011, p. 41). Masculinity in this system is primarily defined defensively against the fear of emasculation and feminization: “the dominant culture exacts a tremendous price from those” gender expressions that lie outside of hegemonic masculinity (Lilly, 2016, p. 24). Men are socialized in the context of technological rationalism, to dominate the digital space and assume dominance as the neutral and natural order of things.

In conducting a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Manosphere, I draw on feminist theories of gender in which gender is construed as a construct. In other words, gendered stereotypes like those that characterize men as rational and political against women as emotional and personal (Zoonen, 1992, p. 19) are not essential and rely on the particularities of context, culture and power. Gender is a system of discipline that fabricates identities within its bounds and prevents and oppresses any subversive notion that lies outside of the current paradigm. Foucault argues, “That is why discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion” (1977, p. 206). The theory of gender underpinning my exploration of the Manosphere is one that recognizes gendered ideals as dominant constructions enforced through disciplinary systems of power. In *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender*, Shelley Budgeon (2011) describes how,

“Through the gendered dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, particular forms of subjectivity have been denied to women, and this refusal to grant women the status of individual; has provided a central focus for feminist critiques of gender inequality.” (p. 50)

This understanding operates in conjunction with Ecofeminism’s contribution which highlights how the design and production of technology is gendered and the socially reinforced affiliations we make regarding technology run counter to how we conceptualize femininity (Zoonen, 1992, p. 17).

I also draw on a constructivist conception of the value relation between technology and social liberation. I am not arguing here that technology is in any

deterministic way, harmful but rather that the utopian expectations of it as innately democratic can create complacency and stunt resistance efforts to online movements like the Manosphere. If we assume that communication technologies are inherently progressive, then any reformation or attempt to hold actors accountable for harmful discourse can be construed as an attack on freedom of speech or expression, or a universal attack on technology. Jaeho Kang (2010) notes that critique of technology must move beyond blind optimism “by exploring the formative role of the media, its impact on the crisis of the representative system, and the subsequent emergence of fascism” (p. 2). Feminist critiques of technology and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) are not uncommon (Zoonen, 1992), yet critiques that focus on technology’s role in furthering a wider democratic crises is less abundant. Kang (2010) argues that the media facilitates the aestheticisation of politics, which in turn creates a climate of legitimacy for “the emergence of fascism as a form of direct political communication between a political power and the public” (p. 1). I don’t classify the Manosphere as proto-fascist but rather as an off shoot of the extreme right or Alt-Right which is more accurately propelled by populism. More fundamentally, I argue that the Manosphere operates differently than traditional political formations and thus must be analyzed differently. Nevertheless, the success of the Manosphere relies heavily on Kang’s notion of the aestheticisation of politics, in which affect and image becomes more important and more fundamental than meaning.

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The objective of this analysis is two-fold: I will first unpack the discourse of the Manosphere in order to address how the community is using rhetorical tactics such as metaphor, hyperbole, enthymeme, dog whistling and euphemism in order to render their message more palatable to mainstream audiences and in so doing, perpetuate their disruptive sentiments in wider spheres of public life. I will

explore Manosphere discourse as a politic of affect insofar as the community deliberately obscures certain levels of meaning by engaging discursive devices and rhetorical tactics so as to disrupt the conditions upon which rational and productive political discourse occurs. These conditions include common understandings of truth, respect despite difference and diversity of opinion and identity. Secondly, I will focus on the particular infrastructures unique to online knowledge production that (1) have so far largely been construed as progressive and/or facilitative of progressive social and political goals and (2) have been exploited by movements like the Manosphere to counteract and oppose equal participation and democratic or pluralist discourse in cyberspace.

In doing so, I hope to answer two key research questions:

- In what ways are the “aggressive unravelling of collectively won gains in gender, sexual and racial equality, the appearance of new planes of discrimination, and the social consequences” (Diamond et al., 2017) indicative of an emergent crisis in democracy whereby the collective understanding of power is disrupted?
- How has digital media, and more particularly the structure of information channels and customs of discourse online allowed overt misogyny back into forms of legitimate public and political organizing both on the so-called Alt-Right as well as in mainstream, popular discourse? How do the characteristics digital media impact the expression of misogyny in discourses and expressions represented by the Manosphere?

By exploring the style of discourse used in the Manosphere, its expressions of masculinity, femininity, whiteness and national identity, I highlight the inconsistencies, obscurations and precarities of the movement. In so doing, I seek to explain why analyses thus far have failed to explain why the Manosphere is succeeding in shifting public opinion and political sentiment and instead, have focused on countering its ideological points. I also hope to explain why

addressing the Manosphere as a coherent ideological or political formation fails to accurately characterize it and thus, why these efforts are ineffectual at slowing its growth.

## Chapter 2: Findings

### 2.1 Methodology

The methodology employed in this research relies primarily on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach is a means of studying text and talk “from a socio-politically conscious” (van Dijk, p. 17, 1995) perspective. In doing so, CDA allows analyses to consider the intersections between discourse and society as well as how one affects the other. van Dijk (1995) distinguishes CDA from other forms of discourse study by noting that the ideal in a critical approach is an oppositional lens through which “the structures and strategies of elite discourse and their cognitive and social conditions” are examined. The goal, broadly speaking is to uncover “patterns of dominance and manipulation” (p. 19). Discourse is construed as the product of social practices that reproduce, disrupt and otherwise mediate social dynamics of power. Discourse has been described as “an amalgam of history, historiography and cultural studies that is associated with the work of Michel Foucault”, Seamus Miller (1990) as well as other prominent proponents of CDA like Norman Fairclough (1995). Later proponents expand on Foucault in order to connect the use of discourse in the formation and dissemination of ideology, as well as how power is negotiated through discourse (p. 115). As noted in more depth in Chapter 1, ideology refers generally to fixed ideas that are hard to change and often comprise a system of belief shared by a social group (van Dijk, 2000, p. 6). A competing definition of ideology born from Marxist theorizing characterizes ideology as a “false consciousness” or “misguided belief” instilled by a ruling or dominant class. This however, sets up a binary between true knowledge and false belief that is both simplistic and difficult to quantify, relying on an “us versus them” paradigm (p.7). In this research, ideology will be construed according to the former definition. “Fairclough points out that ideology is closely tied to the use of language, especially in social and political context[s]” and how these expressions infiltrate, perpetuate or disrupt systems of power (Sulistyo, 2017). Discourse is one indication of how ideology

manifests in daily life. By considering discourse as part of a group's wider social practices (van Dijk, 2000, p. 8), we can begin to uncover which ideologies are at work and how they are influencing behaviours like discrimination, exclusion or violence.

In this analysis, discourse is the medium through which we can begin to understand the codified social relations of an online community, as well as that community's impact on the ideological exchange with wider society: this includes its influence on political norms. For example, in the case of the Manosphere, I ask in what ways it has impacted the rise of populism and anti-political correctness movements in many parts of Europe and America. In this case, the analysis seeks to explore how Manosphere discourses indicate a tension regarding how its members negotiate concepts like free speech, social equality, gender and race; but, also how these discourses spill out and entail far-reaching consequences, from "the campaign and subsequent election of Donald Trump in the United States, to Marine Le Pen and her National Front party's unsuccessful bid for Emmanuel Macron's presidency in France" (Massanari, p. 1, 2018), to the 2018 van attack in Toronto committed by a self-described "Incel" (Racco, 2018). More specifically, this research considers how Manosphere discourses push harmful notions of gender, race and identity in its text and talk in ways that are deliberately seductive and covert. Ultimately, it considers the ways in which the Manosphere advances its political and personal goals of contesting, challenging and delegitimizing social movements while also remaining precarious in its location online and its identification as a distinct group. By examining the linguistic customs of the community, we can discern the key themes, patterns and ideas that comprise Manosphere discourse. This is done through the categorization of customs in text and talk, the identification of commonly used devices like metaphor, hyperbole, euphemism and allusion as well as the consideration of how such devices shuffle, highlight or distort meaning. Finally, how does this meaning impact the building of socio-cultural and political knowledge? Possible sites of impact are then broken down into dominant themes that draw key lines through the texts and do the complicated work of decoding



the language of the Manosphere, distilling it down into its most basic, elemental ideas.

The objects of analysis in this research have been selected to represent a broad sampling of Manosphere discourse from different online spaces. The first text is a description of what the Manosphere is and why (according to its author) it has become such a popular online community. The description is posted on [MGTOW.com/TheManosphere](http://MGTOW.com/TheManosphere). This text is a “from-the-horses-mouth” example of how the group is defining and describing itself: a piece of outward facing propaganda from a website that self-identifies as a Manosphere space and which conforms to a number of the community’s key features. For example, while the site was founded by prominent Manosphere figure, the Sandman, the author(s) of the site’s numerous pages is entirely anonymous as are the users on the site who all use pseudonymous usernames. Secondly, the site is an example of how different subgroups in the Manosphere intermingle. Men Going Their Own Way focuses on men’s isolation from women as a means of coping with feminism and a feminized society. Pages on MGTOW.com include a members Forum, a History of the site, Red Pills (resources), site Favourites and a general About menu including descriptions for MGTOW, the Manosphere, a glossary of terms and a FAQ. I draw primarily from the page dedicated to a summary description of the Manosphere.

The second text under analysis is a video titled *Red Pill Monster* (2017) uploaded by YouTube’s The Sandman, a popular member and outspoken advocate of the Manosphere, as well as the creator of MGTOW.com. This text was selected as an example of content produced by and about the Manosphere for consumption by existing community members. This content is designed to be persuasive and a number of rhetorical techniques are employed to this end. However, it is also a text facilitating direct dialogue and conversation between members of the Manosphere. The video format is such that viewers send in questions to which the Sandman responds. Thus, it provides some insight into how members communicate amongst themselves, the jargon they employ, and the ideas they tackle. The Sandman is a moderate by Manosphere standards

and focuses more on interpersonal relationships than on political propagandizing. Nevertheless, his ideas about women's nature, feminism, and biological roles have direct consequences in the construction of explicitly political goals in other Manosphere texts. In addition to the video, I analyze a sample of 50 comments posted in reaction to the *Red Pill Monster* to ensure a broad spectrum of voices within the Manosphere are accounted for and again, to get a sense of the dialogue taking place within the community. Comments were selected by date, beginning with the most recent as of January, 2018. This strategy was used to get a general sense of current sentiment and as much as possible, to represent the community in its current iteration.

Finally, I will examine an article written by prominent Manosphere figure, Roosh V titled, "How to Save Western Civilization" (2017) which sets out some of the political ambitions of the Manosphere and makes clear some of the opaque connections between the Manosphere and other Alt-Right movements. I selected a Roosh V text for a number of reasons. First, his style of discourse is common in the Manosphere, more so perhaps than may be expected. While he is often considered "caustic or toxic" (immeasurablematt, 2017), he is one of the most followed and venerated spokesmen for the Manosphere because his rhetoric reflects and validates the "Anger, bitterness, and denial or resentment" that Manosphere blogger immeasurablematt, in his article "The Start of my Redpill Journey" (2017) claims to be common in the "early stages (1 or 2 depending who you talk to) of 'unplugging,'" . Comments on the article support the notion that radicalism is at least to some degree revered by members of the Manosphere. (2017). On "How to Save Western Civilization", Laguna Beach Fogey congratulates Roosh V on taking an extreme stance on women's suffrage:

"Taking away the female vote is much more radical than most in the Alt-Right and Alt-Lite are willing to go, so well done" (2017).

Similarly, user Harsh Madhok responded to immeasurablematt's blog post writing,

"Brother — I am on the same path as you. We will be called bigots and misogynist for bringing these ideas

out in the open but that's the price a hero must pay to share his wisdom" (2017).

For its ferocity and frankness, "How to Save Western Civilization" (2017) has gained wide circulation in the Manosphere. The article was originally posted to Roosh V's online community site, Return of Kings where it gained widespread readership and over 400 comments. It was then posted to Roosh V's personal blog on RooshV.com and subsequently covered in his Kingmaker podcast under an episode titled "The Death of Western Culture" (2017). These repostings and reiterations of the article indicate its popularity in the community. Alt-Right publication Brutalist Media tweeted a link to the article to their almost 50k followers and self-described NRxer or member of the "Dark Enlightenment", HuelessJoeJackson referenced it in this tweet from 2017:

"How to Save Western Civilization, also how to find a wife: 1. Become Worthy 2. Accept Power 3. Rule #NRx"

Sentiments expressed in Roosh V's article are echoed in other Manosphere content, including a 2017 article titled "3 Steps to Save Western Civilization (Oy Vey!) – The Time to Act is NOW!" by Manosphere member and blogger, Jon Anthony on his website MasculineDevelopment.com. Many of these subsequent blog posts present more moderate versions of Roosh V's ideas, but retain his core masculinist goals. As Roosh V is an extremist member of the Manosphere and is recognized as such, his text will be used as a comparative example with which to unpack how discourse is constructed by different streams of the community and how hyperbole is operationalized depending on whether the text is inward facing (intended to be read largely by existing members) or outward facing (intended to convince non-members or recruit new ones) in which case metaphor and discreet language are more common. The Manosphere is porous and undefined, so within the community and indeed, between individual members there are frequent disagreements and contradictions. By including Roosh V's text, the nuances and inconsistencies of what is often represented in media (Bate, 2018) as a cohesive and stable movement are better illuminated. In conjunction with the article itself, I analyze a selection of the 50 most recent

comments under Roosh V's text. My intent is to consider as much as possible a broad spectrum of voices, rather than solely the loudest, most aggressive spokespeople for the Manosphere while nevertheless acknowledging that the loudest, most aggressive voices tend to command significant influence. This is a crowdsourcing approach to defining a community of practice (CoP) and its aims and values. In other words, it emphasizes "what members do: the practice or activities that indicate that they belong to the group, and the extent to which they belong" (Meyerhoff, 1999, p. 175). Despite the range of communicative styles and topics of concern covered in the Manosphere, certain discursive customs emerge that span all five primary sources included in this research.

Data for this research was first coded into one or more of the following discursive categories, each of which was then unpacked in relation to how it operates in the text as well as the perceived purpose with which it was invoked. I have narrowed the examples of each device to two or three subcategories according to their topic or usage. For example, metaphor is discussed with reference to two common metaphors in the text: the red pill metaphor and a collection of metaphors that relate in some way to nature, biology or animal behaviour. This was done to give the reader an understanding of how the device is being operationalized while remaining within the limited scope of this research. The subcategories of each device will also inform the broader themes of the discourse which are discussed at more length in Chapter 3. The discursive devices covered in this chapter and their subcategories are as follows:

- a) Metaphor
  - i. Rep Pill
  - ii. Nature Metaphors
- b) Hyperbole
  - i. Systemic victimization
  - ii. Subjugated and suffering because of women
- c) Enthymemes
  - i. Consequences of women's behaviour

- ii. Degradation of the West
- d) Dog Whistle politics
  - i. Leftist bias of Universities
  - ii. Alpha/ Beta/ Sigma
  - iii. Racist dog whistles
  - iv. Gynocentrism
- e) Misappropriation of feminist or leftist lexicon
  - i. Victimhood
  - ii. Rights
  - iii. Oppression

Metaphor is defined here as “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them” (Merriam Webster). Mary Lilly (2016) notes that “Metaphors play a large part in how issues are ‘framed’, and framings affect how individuals feel about the issue at hand” (p. 18). Thus metaphors in the Manosphere are a discursive method of persuasion, shaping popular opinion and the accepted connotative properties of a phrase. They often couch statements in a manner more digestible to a prospective audience. In this case, the imaginary audience is taken to be “white, middle- or upper-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual, and able-bodied men” who fulfill the features exonerated by hegemonic masculinity (Lilly, p. 9, 2016) and who are most drawn to the Manosphere. As such, many of the metaphors relate to subcultures recognized as popular within this demographic; for example, comic book superheroes, action films and Westerns, most of which reproduce and idealize traditional gender roles for men and women. Matthew James Fleming (2015) in an analysis of the Avengers franchise, studied how comic book narratives and the culture that surrounds them reward “hierarchical structures and male superiority, [embrace] competition and aggression, and [celebrate] the domination of weaker individuals through power and violence” (p. 1). Certainly metaphors such as “taking the red pill” and “achieving lift” call to mind the superhero journey which commonly

involves a struggle followed by a resurrection or rebirth through which the hero is irrevocably changed. The hero is then presented with a reward for his struggle, this is what Joseph Campbell calls Seizing the Sword (Stroud, 2001). In the Matrix films for instance (where the Red Pill metaphor gains its currency), Neo confronts reality no matter how dystopic and as a reward, gains the power to completely dominate and control the Matrix simulation, distinguishing himself from those still stuck in the program.

While hyperbole, like metaphor has a well understood and widely accepted literary definition that is utilized in the coding of these texts, it carries a certain symbolic or directional quality in the Manosphere. Generally defined as an instance of “extravagant exaggeration” (Merriam Webster), the Manosphere’s use of hyperbole is most often in reference to the consequences of a feminist or female-dominated society and “increasingly on the toxic consequences of feminism on men’s lives” (Schmitz & Kazyak, p. 1, 2016). This thematic trend is reflected in the subcategories referenced above. The identification of hyperbole in this research will be cautious so as to avoid discounting what might be valid or empirically sound arguments as a result of author bias, by conflating exaggeration with falsehood. The key indicator of hyperbole in this analysis is a combination of two factors: the absence of linguistic hedges, which are “associated with politeness, vagueness, hesitation, uncertainty, and indirectness” (Hinkel, p. 29, 2005) combined with a non-cooperative tone, featuring name calling, vulgarity or provocation. The absence of “down toners” in addition to the presence of overstatements intended to “trigger strong emotions in order to receive extreme feedback” (Rüsel, p. 9, 2017) are the metrics according to which I classify hyperbole. In other words, the presence of hyperbole is not related to the truth or falsity of the statement. For example, user Sretching08 from the comments section of the *Red Pill Monster* writes, “Women are annoying and are monsters these days.” (2017). Within the parameters just mentioned, this statement would be codable as a hyperbole due to its deliberately broad and exaggerated nature, in addition to its use of affect and ad hominem name calling. Christopher Zhen in his article “Hyperbole is Decimating American Political

Discourse” (2017), notes that hyperbole in public discourse—particularly discourse of a political nature, tends to degrade “the way we think about policy and others around us”. This reflection on the effects of hyperbolic discourse will be a fundamental aspect of how hyperbole is applied and analyzed in this project.

An enthymeme refers to an argument, traditionally a logical syllogism in which at least one proposition is left unstated. The proposition of an argument can be either one or more of its premises or its conclusion. In the context of the Manosphere, enthymeme takes on a more rhetorical definition—“an instrument, be it in the format of the spoken or written word” (Faure, 2010, p. 67) formed with the “implicit or explicit intention...to realize en-thymematic understanding with their respective audiences” (p. 68). In this application, enthymeme refers to any phrase or statement making a claim in which the premise or conclusion is left unstated and instead, replaced by “dramatic pauses, unfinished sentences and... place-filling “somethings”” (Reuters, 2016). Thus, enthymemes are often an element of persuasive speech because they allow audiences to fill in the blanks of an argument in a way best suited to their own existing beliefs and assumptions. This subsequently makes them more likely to agree with and/or not actively oppose the argument. In “Rhetoric and Persuasion: Understanding Enthymemes in the Public Sphere” (2010), Murray Faure describes how the process by which ideas claim widespread adherence in the public sphere “is often... tied up with how they are enunciated and articulated” (p. 62). Additionally, enthymemes as they exist in a digitized public sphere, increasingly rely on condensed messaging that is then replicated in part or whole by subsequent transmissions: meaning that the messaging becomes even more incomplete. This process relies on an expected, but unspoken normalized response. In other words, transmitters of a message can predict how receivers will fill the gaps in their arguments and therefore use enthymematic discourse to push ideological conformity.

In “The enthymeme as postmodern argument form: Condensed, mediated argument then and now” Roger Aden (1994) describes how a method he terms

“Mortification” is often present in forms of condensed argumentation. This strategy entails distancing oneself subtly and often indirectly from a group whose ideas you simultaneously champion, while rebuking their past actions as a way to sidestep real guilt or ramifications resulting from them. The example Aden uses to demonstrate this method and how it connects to enthymematic speech, is David Duke the infamous former KKK member who purports to have disavowed the Klan’s racism while invoking racist speech that frames white people as victims rather than oppressors (Aden, 1994). Aden notes that mortification involves an “act of self-sacrifice that relieves guilt . . .”. Duke blames his prior associations on “youthful indiscretion” (Aden, 1994), which simultaneously distances him from the Klu Klux Klan but also minimizes his earlier involvement with them to something not necessarily blame-worthy. This is a common trope in the discourse of the Manosphere as will be demonstrated, particularly in the outward facing texts – i.e., those intended for public consumption, not simply to be viewed by those within the community.

Dog whistles serve to persuade listeners about an idea that seems much more agreeable than it is. Pnina Werbner (2012) notes how the phrase, the “failure of multiculturalism” in political speech has, particularly since the rise in anti-terrorism discourse, come to be a dog whistle for anti-immigration and anti-muslim sentiment (p. 201). In this same way, popular terms in the Manosphere like “gynocentrism” dress up the claim that society is female-dominated in a cloak of ambiguity and formality, lessening the force of the statement and its ability to offend.

Dog whistle politics can come in the form of euphemism but are more generally defined as “multi-vocal appeals that have distinct meanings to different audiences” (Albertson, 2014, p. 3). Unlike euphemisms, they are almost always an intentional invocation of something not referenceable for all audiences but used as a form of “doublespeak” in which one audience draws one meaning and another draws something either entirely different or similar but with a different tone or connotation. In other words, “the sender of a message sends a targeted appeal to an ingroup” (p. 5) who, due to shared knowledge or “past practice”



(p.5) understands the appeal in a way that the outgroup is unable to. In this way, Albertson describes dog whistles as a form of targeted marketing, not dissimilar to the marketing of for example, video games to adolescent boys. They're not the only target demographic, but the messaging is designed specifically with them in mind. I argue that it goes one step beyond just marketing to a particular group insofar as it also disables the outgroup in their ability to criticize a message by virtue of their not comprehending its true meaning. This is not as common in product marketing. The prevalence of dog whistling in public and political discourse has increased in tandem with an intensified use of marketing techniques over commitments to truth and ideas in news media (Cosgrove, 2017). This occurred seemingly in response or reaction to a "rightward shift in political discourse," beginning with the Reagan and Bush eras (Herman, 1992. p. 1) and reaching further extremes with the election of Donald Trump. Political parties are more and more described like brands, with their candidates brand spokespeople and their policies a kind of product. Donald Trump's election for example, was a triumph in the "brand refresh" of the GOP, combining traditional Reagan-esque conservatism with anti-elitism and the intrigue of a reality TV show. The campaign linked Trump to a variety of Republican figures and built a strong emotive identity for him that allowed him to drive the marketing and media narratives throughout the election cycle (Cosgrove, p. 49, 2017). More and more, we see the rhetorical style in political contexts being modelled after marketing strategies well-known in the advertising world.

The Manosphere is a precarious amalgamation of right-wing conservatives, alt-right white nationalists and Men's Rights Activists focused primarily on political goals on one side; and MGTOW, Pick Up Artists and Incels occupied with interpersonal conflict on the other (Lilly, 2016, p. 36). As a community, it is precarious because it exists almost entirely online, in the form of blogs, message boards and social networking profiles. Many of these have sprung up in reaction to a worsening crisis in democracy, expressed in increasing political and social polarization. The deepening divide stems in part from strides made for gender and racial equality following the Civil Rights and Women's

Liberation movements. In addition to these factors as the genesis of reactionary politics, communities like the Manosphere also arose in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 and the consequences of this crisis on job markets, social welfare support, housing and security. Without other stable institutions to look to in times of upheaval, the Manosphere developed as a reactionary body offering answers and a direction in which to direct blame or responsibility. It is a community brought together by a shared aversion to progressivism. While this applies especially to changing gender relations, the Manosphere also expresses disillusionment with traditional conservatism which has in recent years bred classism and elitism in its upper ranks. The discursive style that runs through much of Manosphere discourse distinguishes it from mainstream conservatism. Florian Cramer in a lecture titled “Meme Wars: Internet Culture and the Alt Right” (2017), argues that the Manosphere and its members are also united by a general consensus that traditional conservatism has failed. This is demonstrated by the term “cuckservative”, a derogatory name for moderate conservatives originating in the Manosphere (Cramer, 2017). Cuck is derived from the word cuckold which denotes the husband of an unfaithful or adulterous wife (etymonline.com). This notion was then extended to apply to any conservative who does not identify as an extremist (Cramer, 2017), branding him a lesser or “beta” male. In this way, the extent of one's conservatism in the Manosphere is linked to a member's perceived masculinity or perceived lack of masculine dominance. Traditional conservatives are considered both politically impotent and thus associated with feminized forms of masculinity in the Manosphere.

My exploration of the Manosphere is designed to account not just for its internal customs of communication but also how those customs impact the wider climate of gender politics and women's involvement in discursive democratic or participatory spaces. As such, I have coded the data from each source into additional categories that are thematic rather than strictly discursive. These themes are consistent across the Manosphere and indicate prominent topics and in some cases, ideologies that characterize the community and distinguish it from other brands of right wing organizing. As such, thematic codes tend to be either

overarching ideas, whereas discursive codes are designed to show just how such themes are operationalized in the discourse of the Manosphere. In other words, how are the observed rhetorical techniques used to develop the particular semiotic fields that emerge in the Manosphere? A semiotic field in this context, points to the emergence of knowledge, meaning and intention within Manosphere discourse.

Thematic codes were selected using a grounded theory method. In order to avoid excess author bias in categorizing the intentions and underlying ideologies of the Manosphere, I developed the coding categories during the process of analyzing the text. While I am aware that my biases will inevitably be present in and influence the coding of the Manosphere, grounded theory allows for a directed but open-ended analysis (Charmaz, 2003). Subsequent “analysis and conceptualisation” can then be “engendered through the core process of constant comparison, where every slice of data is compared with all existing concepts and constructs, to see if it enriches an existing category... forms a new one or points to a new relation” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 4). Whether a segment of data fit into and enriched an existing code or required a new one, guided me as to which codes were useful and an organic representation of themes for the sources. Grounded theory is juxtaposed with other methods of coding that rely on prior research in the field of study to define coding categories. The concern with this more traditional method is that the findings and eventual theorizing will be contaminated with preconceptions and assumptions that are naturalized in that body of knowledge. While no research is free from bias, grounded theory is here intended to acknowledge the degree to which my assumptions about anti-feminism, the Manosphere or the Alt-Right influence how I unpack and analyze the data. I acknowledge that I come from a background that celebrates feminist theory and progressive thinking. This necessarily shaped the lens through which I coded the texts. Grounded theory however, allows for a tactical distancing between myself and the text and is an important reminder to let the texts speak rather than simply determining what the texts have to say. Thematic coding

categories, which start to explore the meaning behind the discourse, will be examined in Chapter 3.

At present, it is important to note that the semiotics of the Manosphere are linguistic signs and tags that connote meaning for and between community members. The Manosphere is in essence, a system of symbols passed between and reproduced by those engaging with the movement. This again is what defines the Manosphere as a CofP: in their pursuit of a common enterprise, members develop a “shared repertoire of joint resources for negotiating meaning, often distinct from that of the general population (Meyerhoff, 1999, p. 176). Through the identification and analysis of these symbols the meaning-making of the Manosphere can be further demystified and its influence on wider spheres of political and social communication, explored. “Signs and systems can be loosely or tightly connected or articulated, and the relations within them can be various: homological, analogical and even metaphoric” (Manning and Callum-Swan, 1994, p. 466). Analogies to pop culture are often invoked in the Manosphere and this creates a certain symbolic cannon that can be contrasted for example, with academic discourse or traditional political speech. Other signs and symbols are visual rather than linguistically based. Memes and cartoons play an important role in Manosphere messaging, and will also be discussed in the course of CDA.

## **2.2 Discursive Customs of the Manosphere**

In this section, I present key examples of discursive customs and literary and rhetorical devices operationalized in Manosphere discourse. In doing so, I outline key techniques used in the Manosphere to communicate an approximate ideology and system of belief that is more or less common among those active in the community, while also highlighting the inconsistencies and digressions that disrupt clear definitions of this formation as a political group.

The difficulty of this enterprise lies in the opaque nature of the Manosphere’s coded language . Many of the texts are hard to translate and

make sense of, particularly for those not familiar with the movement and its reliance on symbols, memes and metaphors. As will be demonstrated in the following examples, members frequently employ a confusing use of terms, remixing or replacing common definitions, inventing phrases and portmanteaus. That use of language is in turn operating to legitimise and make legible Manosphere positions that might otherwise appear immediately dubious if they were more readily comprehensible. Finally, there is a distinct difference in the communicative style of prominent figures or spokespeople for the Manosphere and general members. Public figures tend to write and speak clearly, avoiding grammatical errors and using complete, formal sentences. Members by contrast, often comment using slang, abbreviation and incomplete or run on sentences.

This chapter outlines the devices at play and lays the groundwork for a more in depth analysis. Thematic points, though present, are not discussed in detail until Chapter 3. Rather, the emergence of themes is observed first through discursive and rhetorical customs. The following chapter is concerned with how these customs are used, how they intersect and what this says about the communicative styles of an elusive and expanding 'movement' that seems to play an increasingly important role in steering political conversations. The consideration here is not yet how and why "Negative representations of women far outweigh positive representations in the discourse" (Lilly, 2016), nor how and why white nationalism and identitarianism play an important role in shaping Manosphere ideology; but rather, how and why devices like metaphor, hyperbole, euphemism, enthymeme, dog whistles and misappropriations of feminist lexical terms are used with such frequency in the Manosphere. What do they contribute to the discourse and how do they serve to construct an image that is both marketable and extreme, intelligible and opaque. How does the discourse sell ideas that might otherwise be rejected outright?

## 2.3 Metaphor

Metaphor is arguably the primary discursive custom of the Manosphere and is used to communicate concepts central to the formative narratives of the movement. Such narratives include deploying “a human rights framework to argue men are oppressed” (Bate, 2017), venerating and encouraging violence against women and furthering heroic representations of male dominance and control. The most prevalent and important metaphor in the Manosphere is the Red Pill metaphor which as well as alluding to the 1999 film *The Matrix*, has come to be short hand in the Manosphere for a philosophy that “purports to awaken men to feminism’s misandry...[It] is the key concept that unites all of these communities” (Ging, p. 3, 2017). Some variation of the red pill metaphor appeared 36 times throughout the source texts in this study. As a consequence, this will be a concept revisited often in the following presentation of findings.

The excerpt below from the About page for the Manosphere on [www.MGTOW.com](http://www.MGTOW.com) exemplifies the most common way in which the red pill is invoked in Manosphere discourse: a noun describing the process of “enlightenment” whereby men recognize and reject an oppressive matriarchal society. This process is also referred to as “unplugging”.

“Slowly but surely, the Manosphere is gaining steam and extending its reach. Men in their late 30s and beyond who had the luxury of semi-rejecting the red pill while still finding moderate success are being outnumbered by a younger generation who realize they really don’t have a choice in the matter. Unlike the older men, these men didn’t choose to unplug; they were unplugged. Yet they thrive.”  
(MGTOW.com/manosphere)

In this introduction to the Manosphere, the author uses two important metaphors: the rejection of the “red pill” and the imagery of “unplugging”. It is through the coding of these discursive practices that themes relating to hero-culture, anti-modernity, white nationalism and gender essentialism eventually come to the fore, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. In this section, I focus on key examples of the red pill (or some variation of it) as well as the notion of

unplugging and nature/sustenance metaphors. These were selected because of their frequency in the texts and their broad adoption by members throughout multiple sources.

As a metaphor, red pill is also invoked as a verb. In describing his journey into the Manosphere, for instance, user “dat boy orly” writes in the comment section of *Red Pill Monster* (2017),

“My uncle was divorced [sic] 2 times and lost 1.4mill and my dad and his mate red pillled me at the age of 6 years old they told me to never get married its not worth it” (dat boy orly, 2017)

Another comment under the same video describes not only the process of getting “red pillled” but also what members of the Manosphere see as being at stake should they fail to choose the red pill or be otherwise forced to take it.

“Well, you just wait until horny men and teenage boys in the future also have sex robots as an option; when future fathers (who're getting red-pillled right now) make it a tradition to get a sexbot for their son on his 14th birthday, as a safeguard to prevent him from getting accused of (newer definitions of) rape by 5th-wave feminists, ending up in jail and social media, and destroying his future prospects forever.” (Oslo MGTOW, 2017)

The above comment encompasses a number of important discursive and thematic findings that will be explored in greater depth in subsequent sections. As well as the red pill metaphor, the user engages hyperbole regarding the likelihood and danger of a boy being falsely accused of rape at 14 years old simply because he didn't have a sex robot. This says something not just about how men in the Manosphere view women but also how masculine identities and normative beliefs around what it means to be a man are shaped, contested and solidified.

Some variation of the red pill is also used as an adjective, as is the case in these two comments from the *Red Pill Monster* (2017) comment thread addressing what they call “red pill rage”:

“With both your video and Howard Dare's video on understanding and dealing with red pill rage i've gain such an insight on the motivations of men's lives.” (Sly Cat, 2017)

“When my red pill rage wore off, i was left with peace and one simple answer, just pump em and dump em.” (Mr. Otaku, 2017)

Red pill rage is a common descriptor in the manosphere and yet another application of the Red Pill metaphor. In the case of red pill rage, members combine the notion of personal realization with outrage in response to perceived injustices. Red pill as a descriptor is also used in the phrase, “red pill knowledge” which appeared in the video *Red Pill Monster (2017)* in response to which the previous two comments were posted. YouTube creator, the Sandman takes questions from his audience and subscribers to address in videos. The question addressed in *Red Pill Monster (2017)* is:

“Do you have any thoughts on whether an unhappy childhood can give you some kind of red pill knowledge?” (0:06-0:11)

Red pill here describes a particular kind of knowledge. Exactly what this knowledge is depends largely on the subset of the Manosphere being engaged. MGTOW for example consider red pill knowledge the realization that successful relationships with women are rare if not impossible, and segregation is the only solution to men’s liberation from a misandrist society. Modern MRAs would rather engage women but strip them of rights and privileges won through or by feminism. PUAs and Incels are more concerned with how to engage women sexually but might embrace any or all of the above forms of red pill knowledge (The Manosphere (In a Single Graphic)).

Finally, on the topic of what the “red pill monster” is, The Sandman (2017) explains:

“Feminism has awakened a sleeping giant bigger than GodZilla with balls bigger than a Mac truck. It’s mean, angry and spills more and more red pills out of it’s mouth and it can’t be stopped.”



The red pill monster acts as a metaphor for the Manosphere movement as a whole.

Another prevalent metaphor used in the Manosphere involves some combination of nature or animal imagery. Examples include, “turbulent waters”, the earth’s “crust”, a plant’s “roots” and an animal’s “sustenance”. These metaphors are almost exclusively used in the Introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW.com, appearing seven times in one page, but animal imagery is also present in a political cartoon that accompanies Roosh V’s article “How to Save Western Civilization” (2017) in which a man and woman are depicted as a rooster and hen. Starting with MGTOW’s description of the Manosphere, the author or authors, who remain anonymous, write:

“Happiness is an eagle soaring through the air, because that’s what it was made to do; it worries not about the wind, because the same wind that creates resistance also gives lift. Happiness is a fish swimming in the water, because that’s what it was made to do; it worries not about strong currents, because the same turbulent waters that cloud its view also churns up sustenance. Happiness is a tree growing deep roots, because that’s what it was made to do; it worries not about its lack of freedom, because the same roots that hold it down also allow it to weather the storm.”

They continue in a later paragraph, expanding on the concept of sustenance:

“...He doesn’t fear resistance, turbulence, or commitment, because his masculine frame turns resistance into rise, finds sustenance in turbulent waters, and relies on the steadfast roots of commitment to provide stability for himself and safety for those he vowed to protect.”

The turbulent waters metaphor is repeated again towards the end of the text, when addressing the ways in which boys and men are,

“...told to “man up” and tough it out through turbulent waters while being called misogynists for expecting sustenance.” (MGTOW.com/TheManosphere)

This last point also appropriates a tenet of feminism in trying to expand the bounds of traditional masculinity to allow for healthy expressions of sadness, anxiety and fear. Turbulent waters and crust seem to act as metaphors for our current social milieu: the climate in which boys are growing up and learning to be men. It is never explicitly stated what sustenance is, just that it is something men are owed and like nourishment, something that is necessary for survival. Different variations of this metaphor appear three times in the introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW.com, suggesting the semantics of the phrase are widely known and understood throughout the community.

In Roosh V's article "How to save Western Civilization" (2017), he similarly embraces the use of nature metaphors, in this case claiming that revoking women's voting rights would entail that,

"Even the concept of masculinity will be built into the crust of society where only men have a political voice and not women."

He also includes the following image, noted previously, which metaphorically likens the roles of men and women to a cock and hen, implying that it is unnatural for women to take on roles beyond rearing children:

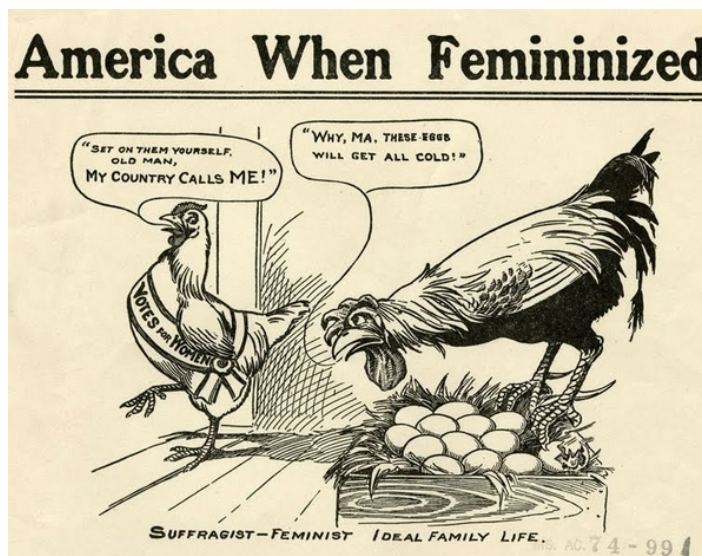


Figure 2: Text reads, America When Femininized "Why, Ma, These eggs will get all cold!" "Sit on them yourself old man, my country calls me!" Suffragist-Feminist Ideal Family Life.

There are numerous other nature metaphors in the above examples, which connect to essentialist notions of gender and biological roles. For example, the idea that men are “made to” do something just as fish are made to swim, presents a deterministic view of gendered behaviour. In some cases, this view also relies on a Christian conception of “creation” as it suggests we were made with a specific and predetermined purpose in mind, particularly if “made” is intended in the literal sense requiring an agent to do the making. This is demonstrated in the refrain “...because that’s what it was made to do” which is repeated multiple times in the above excerpts. Other notable metaphors include the concepts of resistance and rise as well as the roots of commitment. All these phrases relate to nature or the natural order, which is a common trope in the Manosphere according to which patriarchy is defended as being tied to biology and therefore essential or moral. Part of this is to “maintain that gender is not ‘constructed’ as feminists and critical scholars suggest.” (Lilly, 2016, p. 70).

The use of metaphors in the Manosphere acts as a means of framing the discourse. This act of framing creates networks of associations, often tied to emotions. For example, roots are firm, grounded and evoke images of trees which are sturdy and strong. Similarly, the concept of resistance is contrasted not with acceptance in the text which might be its most common antonym, but with rise. Rise is associated with a higher state, enlightenment and the position of being above something or someone. Acceptance in contrast, can be conceptualized as passive and weak. By framing our associations in this way, the discourse subtly dictates how we begin to think about and negotiate the deeper issues at play. Another example of this framing is the use of a cock and hen as metaphors for a husband and wife. Hens exhibit brooding behavior as a result of a hormone called PRL, which when present encourages them to sit on and incubate eggs (Chaiseha & Halawani, 2015): if a hen doesn’t sit on her eggs to keep them warm, the eggs won’t hatch. By framing the conversation regarding women’s rights and suffragettes in this context, we are overtly delivered the message that women deviating from traditional gender roles carries serious consequences, perhaps even life threatening ones. All the nature metaphors

discussed here serve to naturalize traditional gender roles and encourage us to frame divergences as unnatural and immoral.

## 2.4 Hyperbole

Metaphor is often employed to mask or minimize intensity of meaning through direct analogy. However, exaggeration is also an important tool in persuasive discourse. One of the key markers of Manosphere discourse is the use of extreme and polarizing language, often presented in absolute or universal terms. Such language is coded as hyperbole in this research. Mary E. Stuckey describes hyperbole as largely comprising “the rhetoric that underpins partisan imaginaries” (Stuckey, p. 668, 2017) . Similarly, increased use of hyperbole tends to mark major incoming political change, as do markers that often couch hyperbole such as “an accompanying tendency toward incivility; a certain vagueness regarding means and ends; and a reliance on hope and nostalgia” (p. 676). These techniques are designed to “arouse citizens to extremes of loyalty and antipathy” (p. 674) and thus it is important to track their appearance in the discourse of reactive movements that seek to propel or suppress change. Hyperbolic statements in this research generally fall into two broad categories: first, the victimization of men by women or “white-knights” (i.e., men who ally themselves with women) and second, the degree to which men universally suffer while trying to please or provide for women. These are the two broad themes the examples of hyperbole I focus on tend to fall under. Roosh V is particularly known for his deliberately hyperbolic rhetoric, and his use of hyperbole also tends to adhere to these two categories or topics. The first category includes hyperbolic statements that relate to feeling victimized. Examples in this category focus on being bullied and mistreated at school or by the school system. Secondary school and university are often implicated in the Manosphere as institutions that prop up patriarchy and gynocracy and are thus important topics to examine. The second includes statements about being subjugated and

experiencing suffering. Hyperbole in both categories were coded 14 times across the source texts and represent dominant threads of discourse in the space.

For example, the following texts were extracted from the comment section of the Sandman's video *Red Pill Monster* (2017) and are coded as examples of hyperbole that reference systemic victimization. The first introduces the idea of "gynocracy" and provides an example of how it tends to be operationalized.

"Male boys are SO defenseless out there against women, and things are just getting worse, thanks to the Gynocracy." (AvyScottAndFlower, 2017)

The term gynocracy is common in the Manosphere but is rare outside of that context. It's an example of the community developing its own unique lexicon. In the same vein as the above point, user Oslo MGTOW, a frequent commenter I observed on multiple Manosphere blogs and forums, describes being victimized not just by women but by men who claim to be feminists or act in defence of women. He calls these men "White-Knights", which is a derogatory term used against feminist men in the Manosphere. White-Knight, unlike gynocracy has gained a wider usage outside of the anti-feminist and Alt-Right groups.

"I could write a number of diaries on getting bullied and mistreated by White-Knight male teachers, simply because I stood up to a gang of females at school who were trying the same tactics on me, that they've learned from watching their moms abuse and emasculate their dads." (Oslo MGTOW, 2017)

A subsequent comment in the same thread also uses the term white knight in describing his experience of highschool, writing,

"Highschool was bullshit too though, make up girls, white knight, group homeworks.  
Btw never team up with girls, it's bullshit." (cwillfried, 2017)

As noted, one of the key points to identify about these comments is their use of names like white knight for men who champion women and their use of swear words ("bullshit") or inflammatory language for emphasis. For example, the first comment uses caps lock to stress the severity of a point while the second

comment substitutes a word like group for ‘gang’ in “gang of females”. Topically, as noted previously, they tend to focus on school-age experiences and rhetorically, they loosely overlap in style and technique. It’s only when we begin to read comment after comment in this same vein that an obvious pattern emerges. There were at least 9 mentions of “school” in the comments captured under the Sandman’s video. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the question posed to the Sandman had to do with whether an unhappy childhood can lead to “red pill knowledge”, indicating that the topic will relate at least in some way to experiences of youth, often the most poignant of which involve school. However, the focus on school and childhood development is important in another sense. Childhood experiences are often presented as the catalysts of red pilling later in life. The Introduction of the Manosphere echoes this:

“The young man shudders as he realizes the father who “did the right thing” by sacrificing his life for his family can fit everything he owns into a 580 sq ft apartment with plenty of room to spare. The young man has finally learned that men and women share the same inherent character flaws, but not the same consequences. He has sinned, and he has paid dearly. She has sinned, and she has been exalted.”  
(MGTOW.com/Manosphere)

Similarly, commenters under Roosh V’s “How to Save Western Civilization” reiterate the fact that childhood and adolescence are considered sites of struggle in the Manosphere—they are ages at which political views emerge and sides are chosen. This is not a new concept and is in fact, common in other political discourses on both the left and right. It’s a tactic designed to generate fear and distrust, particularly toward forces that could steer a young adult into adopting a political worldview through persuasion and manipulation. On the right, these forces can include educational institutions, anti-bullying legislation, neutral bathrooms and gay pride parades. The nature of the threats these organizations, spaces or events pose is vague and undefined. Nevertheless, the underlying sentiment expresses a need to protect children from moral corruption. An examination of data on political affiliation among young adults

however, betrays the fact that most of this fear is speculative and hyperbolic. According to a Pew analysis of over 10,000 participants' survey data, the political typology of Americans aged "18 to 29 is split, with one-in-five representing "Young Outsiders — GOP leaners who favor limited government but are socially liberal" and exactly the same percentage of the "Next Generation Left, who tilt more to the Democrats but are wary of social-welfare programs." A full 17% of this demographic were classed as Bystanders, because they are not registered to vote and don't follow politics. These statistics suggest that approximately the same percentage of young people tend towards social conservatism, as others do social liberalism and a significant percentage of them appear largely disengaged from politics. Additionally, it suggests that political affiliations are not black and white. Young Outsiders are Republican supporters but they tend to be socially liberal, while the Next Generation Left are libertarian-leaning Democrats. The Manosphere repeatedly relies on binary, simplistic framing devices that erase these nuances. Anon1, an active commenter on Roosh V's article writes,

"...the left has taught young people to think mathematical and science facts are 'racist'. see-you are seeing a few hotep type pro trump muslims but its not openly said because they'll get their shit kicked in by other peeps that prefer perma victim status."  
(anon1)

Hotep here is another example of a misappropriated word. It originates from the Egyptian word meaning "peace" but has come to be a term used online to describe a hyper-masculine black man. In other words, a man that fulfills all the requirements for performing and perpetuating patriarchy but is generally othered for being black. Anon1 therefore, is arguing that "hoteps" or hyper-masculine Muslim black men don't speak openly about their support of President Trump because their liberal peers would abuse or ostracize them. The above research however, suggests that socially liberal Republicans represent a significant portion of young voters under the age of 29.

Finally, hyperbole is also deployed to foreground subjugation and suffering. There is a shared sense of effort that members report exerting to either

excel in relationships with women or overcome a cultural or political climate that intends them to fail. Many report being intentionally undermined or targeted by women. Some version of this hyperbole relating to subjugation and suffering occurred 12 times in the source texts. From the comments section under *Red Pill Monster* (2017), for instance, Kalidar expresses his distrust of the law, saying that it will punish him even for what he deems consensual sex with women:

“Once i had a dream of making my random kids and watch my life. Now that i realized "the law" will punish me for that even if the woman was agreeable im skipping the family part...” (Kalidar, 2017)

I observed a similar use case of this hyperbole in the Introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW.com:

“Men haven’t lost their need to find happiness by providing, protecting, sacrificing and conquering; we’ve simply discovered that providing for the modern feminist, working like a dog to protect a family that can be taken away at a moment’s notice, or risking our lives to conquer resources for some ungrateful women who claims she can do it on her own is an empty way to live.” (MGTOW/Manosphere.com)

Roosh V extends this hyperbole to include damage to the state and to societal order more broadly, in addition to suffering at the individual level. In doing so, he indicates that men will have to sacrifice leadership to an authoritarian “strongman” in order to fix the wrongs imposed or cause by women’s political agency. This is classed as hyperbole due to the assertion that his method is the “only” one that could “single-handedly” solve all others.

“Within my lifetime, I’m certain that at least one country, in an attempt to save itself, will elevate a barbarous and ferocious strongman to fulfill this task, and he will have my full support, because repealing women’s suffrage is the only issue of our day that can single-handedly solve all the others” (RooshV, 2017)

This sentiment is buttressed by the below anti-suffragette political cartoon included in the article. This cartoon sets up a false binary between respectable



women and women who protested for the right to vote prior to women's suffrage in the United States.



Figure 3: *The Home or Street Corner for Woman?*

The suggestion is that women outside the home threaten not only the political stability of a state, but also the healthy functioning of a family and the prospect of properly raising of children. The woman on the left is depicted holding a young child while the woman on the right holds a protest sign. The expressions of both women are also intended to support the idea that women outside the home are shrill, entitled and unattractive while women who remain in the home are nurturing, demure and alluring. While again, this dichotomy is not a new one, it gains new meaning and application in its modern iterations. Roosh V focuses on how women's expanded roles in public life impede men's political control and subsequently endanger the state.

## 2.5 Enthymeme

In some cases, exaggeration can alienate moderate or casual audiences who may only be marginal participants in the Manosphere. This is especially the case when marketing the ideology to brand *new* audiences. In this instance, it

serves the Manosphere to be vague and equivocal rather than hyperbolic. Enthymemes are arguments or statements in which one or more premises are not explicitly stated. Enthymemes are at times more difficult to identify in text than other devices, because they involve the lack rather than the presence of something. However, Craig Allen Smith (2005) beautifully sums up the importance of enthymematic language in political rhetoric. He describes how by using an “enthymeme of evil” President Bush, following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre, turned “a faceless coward’s attack on [the United States] into evil’s attack on everything good and proper in the world” (p. 32). By weaponizing a particular set of incomplete arguments, he primed the American people to accept retribution aimed far beyond those immediately responsible for the attack. Enthymemes are more common in verbal speech than in text and are frequently employed in argumentative speaking, including in political speeches and news broadcasts. They have become increasingly a part of Alt-Right discourse and part of the work of this research is to explore why.

I argue that the enthymemes in these texts fall under two broad umbrellas. The first umbrella includes arguments relating to the “Consequences of women’s behavior”. These arguments use enthymeme as a device to imply something about women’s nature or to imply a negative outcome to women’s behavior that is not explicitly stated. The second class of enthymemes titled, “Degredation of the West” suggests first (and importantly) that there is some cohesive entity called the West, and second that this entity is in decline. They may vaguely point at reasons for this devolution but fail to conclude or complete the argument meaningfully. Broadly speaking, enthymemes in the text comment on gender in the first category and culture or nationhood in the second. Enthymemes in these two categories occurred 12 times in total and were coded from the following four sources: comments from the Sandman’s *Red Pill Monster* (2017), “How to Save Western Civilization” (2017) by Roosh V, comments on “How to Save Western Civilization” and the introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW.

The following excerpts are gender-pointing enthymemes. They imply a strict and ideologically fixed understanding of gender, tending to objectify women.

Simultaneously, they remain incomplete arguments and thus open to interpretation. For example, from the comments section of *Red Pill Monster*, user Toby Williams writes,

“...I had no Dad and I learned very early about women.” (Toby Williams, 2017)

What the commenter learned about women is the implicit conclusion of the claim, but it is left unsaid. A similar enthymematic statement from commenter, A Man Going His Own Way from the same thread claims,

“Women have made their bed, now they can lay in it.”  
(A Man Going His Own Way, 2017)

The metaphor employed in the first half of his comment is a common one, but it is coded as an enthymeme here because the nature of what women have done to “make their bed” is left unstated.

Roosh V’s use of enthymeme is in the same vicinity: the “degradation” he references below is left for the readers to assume.

“Take away the power of women to vote, and the degradation stops. The paltry population of male feminists, who are likely suffering from low testosterone due to environmental plastics, would offer no barrier in stopping the return to patriarchal normalcy.” (Roosh V, 2017)

Roosh V argues here that male feminists are likely suffering from low testosterone but logical premises that would link environmental plastics to low testosterone and low testosterone in turn, to an inability to prop up patriarchy are all missing. Additionally, the term “patriarchal normalcy” is not adequately defended or defined. There is no premise asserting that patriarchy is normal and no definition of normal to clarify the exact meaning of the term. Thus by asserting that patriarchy is the norm in his conclusion, Roosh V effectively begs the question, inserting his conclusion into the body of his argument.

Enthymetic language is primarily used in the Manosphere to talk about contentious issues in a fashion more digestible to a wide or diverse audience.

These issues include race, immigration and nationalism. As we will see, this is distinct (though the devices share similar forms) from dog whistles which intend to target a narrow audience with messaging that is opaque or unclear to the wider group. On the topic of a so-called crisis in the West, Roosh V writes:

“The demographic crisis the West faces today is primarily due to allowing women to do as they please instead of imposing healthy standards on their behavior and choices.” (2017)

This claim is again a subtle form of enthymetic language. The argument that women’s behavior should be controlled to avoid a demographic crisis rests on the truth of the claim that a crisis exists in the first place. Roosh V fails to provide an opening premise to substantiate the idea that there is a demographic crisis in the West. The term “demographic crisis” itself, could be considered a dog whistle in that certain groups would read it immediately as referencing abortion and immigration rates in the West while others might read it and not know what exactly it’s referring to. Finally, the healthy standards for women’s behavior he cites are also left unstated. Normative ideology helps one predict what those standards are assumed to be, the details of which will differ depending on the reader, hence it’s classification as an enthymeme.

Commenters on Roosh V’s “How to Save Western Civilization” also use enthymematic language in talking about the west and the so-called “antiwest”.

“We do not live in the west. We live in the antiwest. Lets destroy the antiwest, then build a new west with the best of the old west.” (Temmy9, 2017)

“They're taught bs about the west by far left professors and begin to internalise this bullshit about "Scientific colonialism" and the like ...And don't even get me started on the normalisation of pedos that the world seems to be doing [first L,G then Trans, next is normalising children as adults capable of consent and then all the slave shit these fat elites are doing in poor 3rd world countries will be done openly in the west as well].” (anon1, 2017)

While a range of themes are touched upon in relation to the claim that the West is being degraded, all these statements lack precise exposition as to what the West is, how its degradation is caused or accelerated by forces like feminism, women's suffrage, immigration or LGBT rights. It is apparent in reading these texts, that some key argumentation logically linking the starting premises to the conclusions is missing. More will be said on the themes that emerge here in the following chapter. In most cases, the statements are intentionally vague so as to make them less easily deconstructed and countered. The West is vague because in many cases it's a stand in euphemism for the white race. The demographic crisis facing the West is a covert reference to what more forthcoming white nationalists call ethnic replacement or white genocide. Crucially, none of these details are obvious to an audience who isn't imbedded in or familiar with the discourse of the Manosphere already.

## **2.6 Dog Whistle politics**

Not unlike enthymemes, dog whistles serve to create deniability in the communication of potentially offensive statements. In describing the aftermath of the 2016 American presidential election, Luiza-Maria Filimon (2016) recalls how the election itself "brought to the surface a dormant longing for a privileged past rooted in open discrimination, inequality, segregation, and white supremacy, echoed by Donald Trump's campaign" (p. 25). While some of this has made "dog screaming" more acceptable, the dog whistle has also made a surge in political discourse. The term describes how groups call in their members by speaking in coded language that does not immediately make sense to outsiders who are not accustomed to the group's modes and styles of discourse. Dog whistles are more frequently linked to racism than to sexism (Goodin and Saward, 2005, p. 475), in that they expose how "white racism ha[s] evolved from its nastier blatant forms to [forms of] respectable racism" (Filimon, 2016, p. 28). Goodin and Saward (2005) give the example of "A conservative party dog-whistle[ing] an encouraging

message to racists that its own traditional supporters would instantly repudiate” (p. 475). I intend to demonstrate how dog whistling is also employed in the expression of subtle and veiled sexism and misogyny in the use of terms like gynocentrism. There were 21 dog whistles in the texts, 30% of which were racist dog whistles. The rest (70%) related to gender-based affirmative action, gynocentrism or the Alpha/Beta model of masculinity. Dog whistles are a key discursive tool in political communication. They are “manipulative mixed messages”—“a way of sending a message to certain potential supporters in such a way as to make it inaudible to others whom it might alienate or deniable for still others who would find any explicit appeal along those lines offensive.” (Goodin and Saward, 2005, p. 471).

A common dog whistle that’s associated with both discourse on race and gender for example, insinuates that all admissions of women or racial minorities to universities are products of leftist bias. These dog whistles use terms like affirmative action and multi-culturalism to call in extreme conservatives without alienating moderates. While race is an important object of this device, the following examples deal mainly with gendered affirmative action. The suggestion is either that by admitting women, institutions are lowering their standards or conversely, that they must lower their standards in order to admit women. In either case, there is a subtle indication of a “group-based double standard in the allocation of resources” (Federico & Sidanius, 4. 489, 2002). The Sandman (2017) goes a step further and suggests that Universities also produce leftist, communist thinkers. There is some confusion as to whether he thinks this is a bad or a good thing. Earlier in the *Red Pill Monster* he describes how he was “shamed by feminist professors” who tried to have him kicked out of his university for hate speech (0:58-1:02) but later also applauds Marxist teachers for illuminating the capitalist system for him. In both instances however, he suggests that universities are inherently leftist. For example The Sandman (2017) recalls how he,

“learned not to trust corporations in University when my Marxist Communist professors showed me how

the capitalist marketing machine influenced me to buy iPads and Gap Kakis.”

While he initially seems to value this education on corporate marketing and capitalism, he continues by suggesting that it leads graduates to dead end work, entitlement and eventually, participation in ANTIFA. ANTIFA is “a loose collection of groups, networks and individuals who believe in active, aggressive opposition to far right-wing movements” like facism (ADL.org), and an organization the Sandman clearly derides.

“The first real pain most people face is in their early to mid twenties when they graduate from college and have to get a job serving coffee. Suddenly they get upset and angry that others are more successful than they are and that’s why they go out and become ANTIFA members.” (Sandman, 2017, 2:58)

In comparison, Roosh V (2017) employs a less subtle dog whistle to talk about the role of academic institutions in pushing left wing thinking.

“I haven’t even touched the surface of the problems we have today that stem from having to appeal to the female vote: lowering of academic standards in universities to allow them to ‘excel.’”

The use of Alpha, Beta, Omega and Sigma dog whistles are less common outside the bounds of the Manosphere as those surrounding affirmative action, and are therefore even harder for those not in the community to fully decode. We have standard definitions for these terms originating in ethology—the study of animal behaviour. The terms characterize specific roles in the social hierarchies of animal species, most notably primates. Alphas are strong and dominant, omegas are the “lowest caste” in the social hierarchy and betas are the second in command to alphas: usually lower ranking males who assist the leader (Frans de Waal, 2007). In the Manosphere, these terms take on a host of additional connotative meanings and implications that are only really detectable to those familiar with the rhetorical traditions of the community. Nevertheless, the use of this language implies a continued reliance on sex role theory in the support of “a recurring catalogue of claims: that women are irrational, hypergamous, hardwired

to pair with alpha males, and need to be dominated.” (Ging, 2017, p. 12) and that non-alpha men are disposable, sub-man and doomed to a life without female support or romantic love. The only way to escape this inevitability is to become a Sigma male. The popular pick up artist website [girlchase.com](http://girlchase.com) defines a sigma as a man who “Instead of trying to climb to the top of the social hierarchy... ignore[s] or make[s] an effort to avoid social hierarchies in the first place.” From a comment under the *Red Pill Monster*, one can get a sense of how these terms are used and what their connotative associations might be:

“I've also had family members threaten my life. I developed/matured slowly and I'm introverted so everyone assumed I was weak. Unbeknownst to them I was actually a sigma male and got strong very quickly as I got older. All those years I was analyzing and studying everyone, learning how people manipulate and eventually I threw it all back in their face. No one really messes with me anymore.”  
(Sneakers O'Toole, 2017)

From the MGTOW Introduction to the Manosphere, the author suggests that betas aren't true men, saying,

“Welcome to the Manosphere; a place where we're not afraid to call it exactly as we see it, turning betas into men is a group effort...”  
(MGTOW.com/TheManosphere)

Finally, Roosh V (2017) also references the Alpha/Beta dichotomy in describing how women interact with men whom they perceive as dominant:

“...it has become necessary to gain their votes by promising whatever they want in the moment, including the removal of all gates to the sexual market so they can engage in the great game of alpha male hunting, which has led to such unbridled chaos and sterility that we have to import third-world people as these empowered female voters abort nearly 60 million American babies.”

Of all the texts considered in this analysis, Racist Dog Whistles were most prevalent in Roosh V's article “How to Save Western Civilization” (2017) and the user comments on it. In particular anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and anti-semitic



sentiment comprised most racially charged comments. While Roosh V had the most obvious examples, racist dog whistling can be observed in multiple spaces throughout the Manosphere. In Roosh V's blog, dog whistles offer a means of proliferating extremist ideas in such a way that the true extent of meaning will only land with those familiar enough with his style of discourse to be looking for them. For the average reader, much of what Roosh V says below his obvious and inflammatory attacks, will fly over their head (Shankar, 2017). Putting forward the consequences he foresees of women's sexual empowerment coupled with their voting rights, Roosh V argues that, "...empowered female voters abort nearly 60 million American babies." This is not just a dog whistle calling for the revoking of women's political autonomy but also a dog whistle pointing to a white identity that is believed to be under threat. According to Roosh V, the white race is in danger due to decreased birth rates among white women in America, coupled with an influx of non-white immigrants.

Roosh V then goes on to postulate how men would change immigration policy if they revoked women's suffrage and were empowered to make such decisions without push back.

"[Men] will automatically regulate immigration and replace it with a policy of natalism, diminishing the alt right. And they will automatically have high standards for citizenship, diminishing the alt lite." (Roosh V, 2017)

As we can see, many of the comments on Roosh V's article are primarily concerned with the cultural and racial implications of progressive policies, rather than strictly focusing on the implications for or impact on conceptions and expressions of gender. User Anonymous Disqus Account comments on "How to Save Western Civilization:

"Q: Given no alternative choice, would you rather Europe in ten years to be:  
(a) Racially European but Muslim religion. (b) Racially Arab but Christian religion.  
I wont speak for anyone but myself on this one, I'd choose (a)." (2017)

Another seeks to contest the theory of scientific colonialism, insinuating that the negative stereotypes ascribed to Muslim countries that relate to primitivism or underdevelopment, are not a product of colonial thinking or a history of political and cultural domination.

“They're taught bs about the west by far left professors and begin to internalise this bullshit about "Scientific colonialism" and the like. the left has taught young people to think mathematical and science facts are 'racist!...' (anon1)

As touched on briefly in the section on Hyperbole, the term gynocentrism and the corresponding adjective “gynocentric” are central to the Manosphere’s ideological foundation and important dog whistles that must be decoded in order to comprehensively unpack the core discursive tenets of the movement. The loose definition of gynocentrism is a “dominant or exclusive focus on women in theory or practice; or to the advocacy of this” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009).

Gynocentrism.com, a popular website in the Manosphere adds to this by defining gynocentric culture and specifying the way in which it is most commonly operationalized in the Manosphere as, “the practice of enforced male sacrifice for the benefit of women”.

In *Red Pill Monster* (2017), the Sandman talks about the impact of gynocentrism on boys growing up, and how gynocentrism impacts their ability to succeed.

“I think I had it bad back in the day, but what about all those women putting boys on prescription drugs from a younger and younger age? All those boys doing poorly in school and having bad childhoods as a result. They feel hopeless because they see girls around them succeeding in the gynocentric system.”

This idea is echoed in multiple comments under his video but without some knowledge of how gynocentrism is used in the Manosphere and the ideological commitments its use generally indicates; outsider audiences might believe it relatively innocuous, even perhaps mistaking it for a scientific or medical term.

“Like another mgtow once said, mgtow is the product of gynocentrism and they are reaping what they've sown.” (navigator of none, 2017)

MGTOW, as outlined in chapter 1, stands for Men Going Their Own Way. It's worthwhile to note that this acronym would likely also not be clear to casual or readers of navigator of none's the comment.

The Introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW.com refers to gynocentrism with another term, calling it the "female support machine":

"He doesn't hate women; he hates the unforgiving female support machine."(MGTOW/Manosphere.com)

This last data point is also an example of what van Dijk (1992) calls an apparent denial euphemism insofar as the author denies hating women before saying something that subtly implies hate towards women. Apparent denial euphemisms are created by positioning statements between "apparent denials" and "apparent concessions" (van Dijk, 1992, p. 249). Denials involve saying something to the effect of "I don't hate women BUT...", while concessions take the form of, "some women are logical BUT...". Both of these "tactical disclaimers" represent a kind of euphemism aimed at either understated derogation or face-saving (p. 249). The above comment begins, "He doesn't hate women", followed by a supposed reason to hate women, conforming to the structure of an apparent denial euphemism. In exploring discourses on race in news publications, van Dijk (1992) found that "present norms and laws prohibit explicit racism and that even among the radical new right, public discourse of race is often (but not always) veiled" (p. 249). This tendency toward veiled language can similarly be observed in certain instances of Manosphere dog whistles and euphemisms regarding women and feminism.

## **2.7 Misappropriation of feminist or leftist lexicon**

While dog whistling is a discursive form that has become characteristic of the Right, much of the language in the Manosphere has been appropriated, wrongly or not from other movements, many of them leftist or progressive. These

include the modern Feminist movement, Black Lives Matter and ANTIFA, all of which the Manosphere actively opposes. While the Manosphere draws from expected sources, such as the ideological forebears of the Alt-Right including traditional conservatism and white supremacist movements, it has likewise adopted regular use of terms popularized by these traditionally progressive social movements. Such appropriations represent some of the most surprising and baffling linguistic customs of the Manosphere. Terms popularized by feminism and also used frequently in online Manosphere discourse include the notion of victimhood: being victimized by a system in which you as a subject lack any substantial control, the language of rights: the notion that rights are inherent to people and can be violated by unequal treatment and lastly, the language of oppression: the idea that large structural forces exist which disadvantage certain groups and push them to the margins of society. This can be done economically, politically or socially. Missappropriations of feminist or left-wing lexical markers were coded 14 times throughout the texts.

In some cases, previously liberal ideas such as a commitment to free expression and critical thought are championed, so much so that these are now quintessential ideological flags of the “dark enlightenment” (DE) and anyone fervently defending them online is assumed by default to be associated with the DE or the Alt-Right. Ging (2017) provides some explanation for this connection, noting that often, the “invocation of free speech principles [are used] to defend unfettered misogyny, racism, and “niche” pornography” (Ging, p. 3, 2017). This is further demonstrated in the rhetoric and platform of Dark Enlightenment spokespeople like Milo Yiannopolis and Dave Rubin, who oppose political correctness due to its advocacy of limits to free speech. The Sandman echoes this in his video *Red Pill Monster* (2017) saying,

“As men, we’re very pissed off you see. We’ve had our childhoods ruined with Political Correctness”  
(6:55-6.58)

Free speech is not the only concept the Manosphere borrows from progressive movements. In his “How to Save Western Civilization”, Roosh V (2017) stresses

the importance of breaking free from oligarchy in order to topple the “leftist causes” that proliferate liberal thinking.

“Individual globalists work together as an oligarchy to enact a divide-and-conquer strategy among races and sexes to fund leftist causes...”

Leftist ideological movements like feminism and socialism have also criticized structures of wealth that leave power in the hands of just a small elite class (Perera, 2008). For example, Marxist-Feminism advocates against globalization due to its exploitation of women workers at the economic periphery in developing countries (p. 3). Roosh V superficially appears to hit some of these same notes, just as Sandman seems to hit a note in the same key signature as a simple appeal for free speech. They intentionally appropriate terms so that their views appear on the surface to be comparable to those espoused by the movements from which they draw.

In a comment on Roosh V’s blog, user *Unsungdrummer* promotes free and independent thinking, explaining that,

“Cynicism of others and skepticism of reality will serve you far greater than any amount of female, peer or familial validation...With deference to great thinkers (in agreement or opposition), think for yourself, and develop your own wisdom.” (*Unsungdrummer*, 2017).

Again in *Red Pill Monster* (2017), Sandman uses both form and terminology made popular by feminism in his claim that women’s treatment of men will change when they are “disenfranchised” and “replaced” by “lover bots”:

“Young women’s childhoods are better and better and therefore they’re getting complacent and treating young men poorly. But I wonder how the daughters of the first women that live after the mass proliferation of lover bots will respond. They will see their mothers powerless and disenfranchised, and replaced by machines. And they will be depressed because they will see that as their future” (9:10-9:28)

In all the above cases, the Manosphere uses terms popularized in movements in actively opposes. Initially, it’s not clear why the Manosphere borrows so heavily

from the vocabulary of feminism and social justice. One reason is that this strategy creates a sense of political legitimacy. It helps to position the Manosphere in the same category as other political formations.

## 2.71 Victimhood

Language of victimhood broadly relates to a common practice among Manosphere members in which they distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity through “emotionally charged claims to victimhood” (Ging, 2017, p. 6). We’ve already observed that a large part of Manosphere discourse describes how men are mistreated and victimized by societal institutions such as school and family, particularly in their formative years. What’s novel about the language of victimization, is it again entails the use of rhetoric which implicates bodies and institutions in the maintenance of men’s systemic marginalization. This points to an ability of men to socially inhabit dominating forms of masculinity when convenient, yet distance themselves from those same masculinities in order to “dismantle perceived threats—both online and offline—to power and privilege” (Ging, p. 6). Furthermore, the idea that systems of power operate to oppress individuals originates in social justice spaces, and yet has heavily influenced Manosphere discourse. By using the language of victimhood, the Manosphere is able to conceal “systems of power” (p. 5) while maintaining personas and performances of masculinity that are highly hegemonic. One method of claiming victimhood is for men to distinguish themselves against other forms of masculine performance such as the White Knight—the chivalrous man who may be a Chad<sup>2</sup> but aligns himself with women politically or socially. For example:

“He doesn’t hate feminists or White Knights; he hates navigating the environment they create.”  
(MGTOW.com/TheManosphere)

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<sup>2</sup> Alpha males associated with jock culture rather than geek culture and also sometimes referred to in the Manosphere as frat boys or normies (Ging, 2017, p. 13)

“...the law of the schoolyard was out in the open where everyone could see- who was popular and who was not, who was considered the lunchmeat and got picked on, who was considered so unattractive they aren't worth picking on, and this sort of thing.” (K0ntakt5, 2017)

In addition to school, work and homelife, the author(s) of an Introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW report feeling victimized by Christian doctrine, which is contrary to widespread pro-Christian sentiment elsewhere in the community but an important aspect of the ideological tensions apparent between and within even self-described Manospherians.

“Bible used to preemptively absolve women of all past, current and future transgressions is used to condemn men.” (MGTOW.com/TheManosphere)

Other men in the Manosphere defend Christianity in opposition to feminism or in some cases, other religions like Islam and Judaism. The following are examples from the comments section under Roosh V's article, “How to Save Western Civilization”. The authors maintain that Christianist is an ideal patriarchal model, particularly in relation to Judaism and Islam.

“Islam isn't the only historical Patriarchy. Christianity has been a Patriarchy most successful until recently. Not all Patriarchies are equal.” (Titan000, 2017)

“That is a picture of Freud on the left, and he was a Jew, most of the Jews have been working against the interests of traditional patriarchy, they completely turned western society upside down with feminism.” (disqus\_2015ScorpioWater, 2017)

However, white Christian fundamentalism is not the default and appears to be a more negotiable aspect to the Manosphere than male supremacy. User Maximus Decimus Meridius in the comment thread under Roosh V's article writes,

“Roosh... well thought out post and something I concluded a while back. I also think this is going to come to be reality faster than you think. It will either be a take over by conservative, traditional nationalists that will take power BECAUSE the destruction of feminism/LGBT will be impossible to ignore any longer. When that happens, taking away the vote will

be a gimme. And if this does not happen, Islam is coming and will do the job in the end. I prefer the former, but won't reject the latter when it happens."  
(2017)

In this instance, white, straight men are framed as the victims of feminist and LGBT "destruction". The word destruction denotes violence and harm and is used intentionally as a hyperbolic and affective term. It's highly visual and allows Maximus to convey a sense of fear, alarm and danger.

## 2.72 Rights

The sub-category of rights under misappropriation more generally, applies to claims that the legal system, courts and legal precedents are discriminatory against men. These arguments have more direct ties to the historical MRM outlined in Chapter 1 as they deal with policies and double standards in law or social practise.

Wishful ThinkN comments on *Red Pill Monster* (2017), echoes this notions that the law unfairly and disciminately punishes men and caters to women.

"When the world is all your oyster, at the start, the pretty girl,  
Why would she be reflective about the cruelty in the world?  
So they stroll blithely ,they strut their feathers,  
With ALL unfurled in glory, 'til dim applause, support all laws;  
Our gynocentric story..." (2018)

Oslo doesn't reference the law but his comment is relevant to the topic of rights in a less obvious way. He argues that in school, girls

"...control the social hierarchy and dictate who should be ostracized. Then the boys start their own thing, but the teachers force them to include the girls." (Oslo MGTOW, 2017)

Oslo MGTOW's comment contains the paradoxical notion that there exists a right to exclude girls and women and that if this exclusionary practise is challenged or prevented, then that right has been violated. It's not unlike the logic used to claim



that businesses have the right to discriminate against and/or refuse to serve LGBT people.

Interestingly and in contrast to the previous examples, [disqus\\_2015ScorpioWater](#) from the comments section of Roosh V's blog piece, seems to negate the importance of rights altogether:

“All those countries swimming in money, and despite the hoopla over "civil rights" the average citizen in those places are much better off than most Americans. Also its the USA that has the highest incarceration rate in the world, much higher than any of these rich Muslim countries. Even if you factor in capital punishment in these places its still does not make up for what is a prison industrial complex in America.” (2017)

The internal contradictions and fissions which are often erased in discourse *about* the Manosphere complicate its characterization as a clear and cohesive movement. There is no consensus on the importance of rights to the project of patriarchy. Some manosphereans reject the concept altogether, while others claim the right to exclude women or other groups from their spaces but don't address positive rights.

### **2.73 Oppression**

In the category of oppression, men describe a state of being the powerless subjects of a matriarchal system whereby government, corporations and educational institutions are all conspiring to disempower them. Women are frequently conflated with these larger systems of power and interpersonal relationships are compared with the dynamics between individuals and macro-institutions. This is reminiscent of the second and third wave feminist catchphrase “the personal is political”, first coined by Carol Hanisch in 1970 “to characterize the close relationship between public and private aspects of feminist struggles” (Schuster, 2017, p. 647).

The Sandman invokes this notion in his descriptions of how the political biases of his University framed and iterated many of the internalized failures of his early life.

“I also used to get shamed by feminist professors while I was in University.”

“...and the University getting the hate crimes unit of the Metro Toronto Police to try and charge me and throw me out of the University...”

“I couldn’t deal with being under a woman’s thumb because my natural state is to fight the authority that tries to control me and manipulate me. Those that are more powerful and abusive, I usually avoid or fight if I have no other choice.... So when I began learning about female nature and all the behind the scenes manipulation, I already had practice unravelling the mechanisms and mysteries of control because people, governments and corporate systems have been trying to control me my entire life.” (2017, 0:52-4:30)

Finally, Roosh V’s argues that technology has facilitated a redistribution of power and resources to women and away from men, exemplified in the phrase “techno-matriarchy”. In this way, he reverses one of the primary enterprises of cyberfeminism: first, the recognition that “Historically, technology has been male dominated, and...new technologies are...continuing this tradition” (Mulyaningrum et al., 2007, p. 1) and second, the activist efforts to correct this imbalance. He writes,

“Thanks to leftism, we have seen the rise of a techno-matriarchy with an agenda of male disempowerment and persecution that transfers resources and soft power from men to women...”(Roosh V, 2017)

## 2.8 Concluding Thoughts

This is a necessarily limited picture of the discursive practices of a broad and elusive community. While certain members and subgroups of the

Manosphere engage in these practices, others may not. Nevertheless, the examples provided above are characteristic of common patterns I observed in all the sources captured for this research. The general insight thus far is that platformed sociality has given a voice to the growing influence of misogynistic, racist and ethno-nationalist voices in what presents as political discourse. Additionally, as Ging (2017) points out, “emotion—in this case anger—is a key driver in the political coalescence of digitally networked publics (p. 10). The Manosphere has developed key linguistic tools to communicate affect as a means of disruption. While these examples are not an exhaustive list of all the rhetorical techniques employed in Manosphere discourse, they were the primary categories that emerged in the course of the coding process, and represent a sample of the important rhetorical practices taking form in the community.

In the next chapter, I will explore the thematic fields of the Manosphere, including inconsistencies and deviations, and in doing so, unpack how and whether the discursive customs outlined thus far stitch together a semi-cohesive ideology or political formation.

## **Chapter 3: Analysis**

### **3.1 Introduction to Thematic Considerations**

Through the implementation of discursive and literary customs like metaphor, hyperbole, enthymeme and dog whistling, the Manosphere touches upon, negotiates and critiques a number of larger themes that can be grouped into approximate categories. These thematic categories will be the focus of Chapter 3. While the media has tended to represent the Manosphere and the Alt-Right as a cohesive group for which ideological commitments are fixed, the previous chapter revealed that the ideology of the Manosphere is malleable, contested and often secondary to conversational articulations and re-articulations about current problems, both personal and political, as well as frustrations, observations and comedic parodies that serve to question and disrupt the norms of political discourse broadly speaking. There are frequent contradictions and disagreements between members as well as multiple goals, not all of which everyone at the table agrees upon. It becomes apparent that the Manosphere is a practice in co-opting the language of otherness and using it to carve out a space separate and in opposition to the mainstream consensus of acceptability in the context of discussions, most often around gender and race. In an important way, mainstream consensus regarding the negotiation and positioning of gender within political discussion is disrupted by the Manosphere. The work of this chapter is to take the disjointed, often opaque and idiosyncratic discursive customs outlined in Chapter 2, and make sense of them in the context of dominant themes. The goal of a great deal of technological feminist critiques is to find out what a group or ideology is arguing and oppose it with better formulated or more logical arguments. What has become apparent in the course of this research is that there is no consistent argument or ideology behind the Manosphere. There are disjointed points that can be loosely sewn together but many remain contradictory or only partially formed. This is a key point to keep in mind throughout the following analysis.

This chapter will centre on the themes of Deviant Femininity and Masculinity in Danger, Mythologized Masculinity, Gender and the Digital Sphere, Race and Religion and finally, Disruptive Discourse. These themes and the literary devices by which they are constructed effectively draw narrative lines through the examples outlined in Chapter 2. The broad notion that the Manosphere is carving out a separate space of political discourse where the previous expectations of correctness and acceptability don't apply will be explored in further depth. I will argue that inpoliteness simply put, serves to disrupt and disorient a collective compass guiding definitions of power and how power operates in society. This disruption is distilled and applied to four major areas: gender, race, religion and class. Rather than evaluate the truth of claims made by members of the Manosphere, I seek to illuminate how the proliferation of mistruth and exaggeration disrupts the tie between political discourse and meaning. I contend that the truth of the Manosphere's "ideology" is less pertinent to this discussion than the fact that on a macro level, truth in politics is now at stake. The more effective the disorientation, the more destabilizing the Manosphere becomes toward the project of politics as a whole. While the practice and proliferation of networked misogyny is one example of this disruption, it seems to operate merely in alignment with a much broader enterprise, where the status quo assumptions that underlie democracy are challenged.

We are therefore confronted with the idea that hashing out the truth of statements made by the Manosphere is less relevant than what the practice of making such statements does on collective understandings of meaning, morality and convention. If one strips meaning from discourse, all that is left is power and a struggle over who has or weilds it. The Manosphere holds and clings to presence and platform, not position or ideas, which is why many of even its most fundamental ideas are inconclusive and insubstantial. As a result, public commitments become oriented towards relevance, power and exaggerated status rather than meaning. Roosh V acknowledges this when he invokes the politics of the strongman:

“...at least one country, in an attempt to save itself, will elevate a barbarous and ferocious strongman to fulfill this task, and he will have my full support” (2017).

Another obvious example of this is President Trump who has exploited the space created by groups like the Alt-Right and the Manosphere. The politics of distribution and politics of recognition (Fraser, 1992) have traditionally been key to liberal democratic space. Questions regarding access to resources and who is a political subject have similarly been considered central to the growth and strength of democracy. It's not that these politics are recalibrated in the Manosphere, they are instead displaced by a chaos that leaves them insusceptible to public rational discussion. They become "outside", beside the point and non-credible in political spaces. All that matters in the absence of a meaning based paradigm is the status and degree of power the actors in question have. We saw this clearly in the aftermath of the leaked Access Hollywood tapes during the American 2016 presidential campaign cycle, in which Donald Trump bragged about grabbing women by the pussy. The defense of “locker room talk” and his later election to office, introduced and underlined the idea that women’s comfort in public space is beyond the concern of politics. Sentiments like those expressed in the Sandman’s video such as,

“that crazy cat lady called gynocentrism is out of the bag and everyone can see what it’s doing to men”  
(10:11-10:13)

are presented with few facts, instead relying on anecdote and affect. The concerns of women are minimized and mocked by the image of the crazy cat lady. The term gynocentrism In yet other channels of the Manosphere, ad hominems become even more forceful, with women being commonly referred to as “cumdumpsters,” “feminazis,” “femtards,” and “cunts” (Ging, 2017, p. 9). Women’s humanity is repeatedly delegitimized and their opinion on political decision making either pronounced irrelevant or disappeared entirely. This is considered acceptable because women don’t have the political power to make it unacceptable.

Finally, in response to the second research question regarding how the online space operates as a field of incubation for extremist communities, I will

address the platforms and websites from which text was captured in Chapter 2. In doing so, I attempt to explicate how the discursive landscape of the Manosphere is shaped by internet culture and digital infrastructure. Internet culture is borne out in the Manosphere through pop culture references and the use of memes. In the case of texts like Roosh V's, the meme is given an antiquated twist in that the images are actually of what appears to be 1920's political newspaper cartoons. This points yet again to a fascinating matrix between the desire to appeal to traditional sensibilities while also presenting an image of radicalism, and transgression which has been a key element of online discourse since the early 2000's (Bebić & Volarevic, 2018). As use of the internet for everyday communication and the circulation of news increased, online discourse became first and foremost about spreadability (p. 45). Elements of spreadability include being popular, humorous and easily remixed or iterated from user to user while retaining a core thread or theme (Bebić & Volarevic, 2018). Memes are a key example of this. Another instance of this is the coded language of the Manosphere which is often a remix of standard English where words tend not to conform to standard definitions. A clear example of this is the Alpha/Beta/Omega dog whistles that reimagine and rearticulate hegemonic and hybrid masculinities for a younger, internet based audience.

The spread of alternative usage and new semantics such as these is possible largely because of networked communication. In the same way that online communication has adopted slang, abbreviations and short hands that virtually all those embedded in the discourse understand, the Manosphere has crafted its own coded language that serves both as an identity marker to clock other members of one's community and also as a means of distinguishing them from older iterations of related ideas, such as the historical Men's Rights Movement discussed in Chapter 1. Debbie Ging (2017) refers to this process as a "prolific cross-fertilization of ideas" (p. 8). This rapid dissemination of ideas online is coupled with affective force which propels the spread of extreme and emotional sentiment faster than those ideas that lack a sense of affect. In the case of the Manosphere, the cycle described here amounts to a "cultural politics of emotion" whereby activism is

replaced by “invective and personalized, often spectacular” (p. 9) attacks on women, feminists and the “gynocracy”. The space in which the Manosphere exists depends fully on the time in which it arose. It is an internet age phenomenon and yet, it longs for an imagined reality the likes of which has only existed in the distant past, if ever at all. This is the heart of the many contradictions and thematic peculiarities explored in this chapter.

### **3.2 Deviant Femininity and Masculinity in Danger**

Feminity and Masculinity are constructed as both biologically essential and in constant opposition in the texts. Not only is there a reluctance by members of the Manosphere to acknowledge gender as a constructed discourse, but the vast majority of texts invoke gender as equal to biological sex and thus strictly a binary between man and woman, masculine and feminine. Their critique of modern society centres frequently upon how it emasculates and feminizes men. This framework positions feminism (and by extension, femininity) as “intrinsically prejudicial and threatening toward men”(Marwick & Caplan, 2018. P. 2). This is done most often with the use of hyperbole and metaphor. Firstly, there is a protectionist masculinism in the Manosphere according to which traditional hegemonic or hyper-masculinity is consistently presented in terms of victimhood and scarcity. This will be referred to as a “masculinity in danger” trope and denotes a repetitive mode of perceiving masculinity as threatened by feminism or else by societal institutions seen as having been feminized. Most common among these institutions are schools and universities where liberalism and feminism may be openly taught or advocated. The masculinity in danger trope is usually a product of two distinct lines of thinking. First, the idea that men’s roles in the public sphere are compulsory while women’s roles in the public sphere are a matter of choice, due to the liberation of women from the home. In this view, women are increasingly taking over men’s roles, stripping men of their value as “breadwinners” while neglecting their domestic duties. The second is that men are relentlessly taken advantage of by women in order to provide financial gain for women. In essence,



the position seems to be that men are made chattel by women, who control and use men for resources.

Roosh V references the first example of the trope in the chicken cartoon he includes in “How to Save Western Civilization” (Chapter 2, Figure 1). Using the metaphor of a rooster and hen for a man and woman, the cartoon suggests that not only are men displaced by women’s access to the public sphere, but also that their families suffer neglect as a result of them taking advantage of this access. We see this model of conceptualizing gendered roles echoed frequently outside of the Manosphere as well. The underlying theme of this trope is that men, especially those drawn to the Manosphere, tend to be highly suspicious of women seeking or achieving power. As Jill Filipovic wrote in response to media coverage by former NBC hosts Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose, on Hillary Clinton following her electoral defeat in 2016, “these particular men hold deep biases against women who seek power instead of sticking to acquiescent sex-object status” (2017). Women’s ambition is viewed as inherently threatening to masculinity.

The second lens through which the concept of masculinity in danger is most often invoked, is summed up in the quote from the Introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW in which the author explains,

“we’ve simply discovered that providing for the modern feminist, working like a dog to protect a family that can be taken away at a moment’s notice, or risking our lives to conquer resources for some ungrateful women who claims she can do it on her own is an empty way to live.” (MGTOW.com/TheManosphere)

Through hyperbole, the “ungrateful woman” caricature is set up as a threat to men’s lives.

However, what this comment really highlights is the contradictory relationship between the two distinct lines of logic through which the notions of ‘masculinity in danger’ are constructed. We are told on one hand, that women are taking over men’s roles and thus endangering their masculinity in work and family life by stealing work outside the home and neglecting their domestic, caregiving responsibilities. On the other, we’re told that men are working “like dogs” to provide

for and to protect their family, while women who may claim they can do the same, are incompetents who don't contribute and instead, deviously bide their time only to steal it all away in a divorce settlement. The “ungrateful woman” is therefore juxtaposed with the “devious woman” and much like the Madonna/whore complex (Conrad, 2006, p. 310), there is very little room left for women to be. This meeting of contradictions serves as a site of ontological tension where it's unclear what the argument truly is, let alone if it's valid.

In this way, the Manosphere's ideological goals consist largely of transforming “long term, unfocused, and passive popular beliefs about existing society” into affective propaganda (Conrad, 2006, p. 306). As Nicholas and Aguis (2018) put it in “The Persistence of Global Masculinism”, by subtly reinforcing tropes like masculinity in danger and the devious/ungrateful woman duality,

“we are witnessing the continuation and increasing acceptability of traditional forms of gendered domination, as well as the constitution of new gendered logics with dominative outcomes in less overt, more devious, and sometimes illogical and contradictory forms.” (p. 33)

Finally, masculinity in danger is also embodied in the use of the pejorative name, “cuck” as an emasculating slur toward men perceived as feminine or in support of liberal ideas including feminism. As outlined in chapter 2, ‘cuck’ derives from the word cuckold, denoting a man raising another man's child, and has also spurred a branch of porn in which a white man is typically seen watching his wife have sex with another man, generally a man of colour. The term is therefore, also highly racialized as well as indicative of a masculinity under siege. The idea here is that one must be uncucked or red pillled “in order to fully re-masculinise the self” (Kelly, 2017). This involves unlearning liberal beliefs including feminism and racial equality. The racial overtones evident in Manosphere discourse will be discussed in the Race and Religion section.

In contrast to the devious or ungrateful feminine that is considered to be endangering masculinity as discussed above, ideal femininity is illusive insofar as much of the discourse addresses current problems and fails to clearly carve out a

viable solutions beyond fantasy imaginings of submissive femininity. The alternative option offered by MGTOW, is a kind of gender separatism or what they would see as self-determination, in which relations between men and women are relegated solely to sexual transactions:

"When my red pill rage wore off, i was left with peace and one simple answer, just pump em and dump em."  
(Mr. Otaku, 2017).

However, one can deduce from what is said to be wrong with contemporary feminine roles and expressions, that ideal femininity for the Manosphere is defined by passivity. This is typified by the popularity of the prospect of realistic sex-robots among Manosphere members. Sex robots act here as a metaphorical reification or manifestation of a belief that women should be agreeable, submissive and their value should be derived solely from the pleasure they can provide men. It says nothing about the actual implications of robot/human relationships or their real or potential dynamics. Rather, the sex robot concept is an abstract placeholder for an ideal feminine form constructed within the Manosphere. The sentiment is that women should fall in line or be replaced by these ultimately passive alternatives:

"Well, you just wait until horny men and teenage boys in the future also have sex robots as an option" (Oslo, MGTOW).

Women must be open to sex but not so open as to be deemed a slut, intelligent enough not to be deemed airheads or dimbos but not so intelligent as to threaten the intelligence of the men in their lives. These contradictory standards are not new to misogynistic thinking. Rather, the novelty is in how the Manosphere operationalizes these old ideas, remixing them in the form of memes, and obscuring them in enthymematic language and metaphor. To reiterate, it's crucial to note that this discussion has very little to do with real sex robots and the consequences they're introduction may pose for society. The criticism is therefore not about a real subject's complex relationship to a sex robot but rather that the sex robot here is a metaphor for women's passivity and lack of agency being construed as desirable. In other words, they are the embodiment of an imagined state of womanhood that has never existed and is therefore, relatively

meaningless. Women have never been truly passive objects because they possess inherent subjectivity. Longing for a fully passive human subject is equal to longing for a fantasy. This reliance on fantasy and myth is a recurrent pattern of practice in the Manosphere.

### **3.3 Mythologized Masculinity and Geek Masculinity**

In addition to abstract ideas around deviant femininity and endangered masculinity, men in the Manosphere perform a particular type of masculinity that goes beyond simply reproducing tacit notions and expectations around gendered roles. The masculine ideal in the Manosphere is certainly hegemonic and dominative but in addition, it has a mythological and heroic quality that distinguishes it from other discourses on hegemonic masculinity. The assumptions underlying mythologized masculinity are that first, "there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life" (O'Brien, 2014, p. 10,) This assumption is embedded in notions of the "real man" and the "natural man" (p. 10), against which subversions of true masculinity are compared. The second is that masculinity, in particular, heterosexual, white masculinity acts in society "as 'a structuring norm'" which should not be questioned, analyzed or critiqued (p. 11). These two fundamental assumptions comprise what Daniel O'Brien (2014) calls classical or heroic masculinity and is expressed in the Manosphere through devices like repetition, nature metaphor and the use of enthymemes. Classical here denotes "the transcendence of history, claiming a 'transcultural appeal and universality' associated with 'a timeless sense of beauty, proportion, harmony, and balance derived from nature'". This is best demonstrated in the introduction to the Manosphere on MGTOW.com (see Chapter 2). The author combines natural imagery and nature metaphors in describing the essential roles of men in society.

"Happiness is an eagle soaring through the air, because that's what it was made to do; it worries not about the wind, because the same wind that creates resistance also gives lift. Happiness is a fish swimming in the water, because that's what it was made to do; it worries not about strong currents, because the same

turbulent waters that cloud its view also churns up sustenance." (MGTOW.com/TheManosphere)

There is an attempt at poetic flow in how the author constructs this description of masculinity. The style mimics a myth, ritual or chant, something that is distinct in the milieu of digital discourse which tends to be intentionally abbreviated or compressed, relying on slang and often forgoing formal spelling and punctuation. This is common in Manosphere adjacent communities like "4chan's "Politically Incorrect" board (/pol/) and Reddit's "The\_Donald"" subreddit thread ("Memes are taking the alt-right's message of hate mainstream", 2018). While there are other discourses in the Manosphere that employ these more common techniques of internet based communication, the fact that the author of MGTOW.com writes formally and without shorthand, points to how they want to be perceived: as serious, reflexive and reasonable. It also intentionally resembles a classic form of literature in its use of repetition and symbolism.

This, in conjunction with the Red Pill metaphor, point to an important construction of masculinity as it relates to geekhood and popular culture. Discourse between Manosphere members and outsiders is often conceived within the community in terms of resistance and conflict. In Stephen Marche's exploration of the Manosphere for an expose in The Guardian, he found that much of the community consisted of "feral boys wandering the digital ruins of exploded masculinity, howling their misery, concocting vast nonsense about women, and craving the tiniest crumb of self-confidence and fellow-feeling" (Marche, 2016). This is a coherent commentary given the confusing, idiosyncratic and often seemingly absurdist texts captured in this research which fluctuate between comparably eloquent pros like the above excerpt and angry alarmist rants that are full of grammatical and syntactical errors. For example, the belowing hyperbolic diatribe is typical of comments on Manosphere message boards:

"damn all of these spoil American women who just don't want to be women any longer so really these women are all just fakes and frauds not what a man wants and needs in his woman at all." (James Stanley, 2019)

However, by utilizing the narrative of hero versus "villains or obstacles" (Braithwaite, 2016, p. 1), the Manosphere masks the discontinuity and chaos that is the collision of many defiant definitions of masculinity and modes of expression converging in a community that strives to be cohesive. The reasoning behind this heroic form is also described in part by a fundamental aspect of the archetypal hero's journey seen commonly in movies, video games and comic books (*Woman as Reward*, Anita Sarkeesian, 2015). The hero's journey encompasses the idea that a certain number of difficult deeds, performed without error are deserving of a reward in the form of a woman, wealth, power or a combination thereof. This is a familiar narrative but in the Manosphere, it serves to build a logic and language of victimhood, as discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 86). When the reward is not granted at the end of the task or challenge, it is perceived as injustice. The prevalence of this narrative does some work to explain why even certain texts in the Manosphere use heroic or mythopoetic language. The heroic narrative is yet further propped up by devaluing feminine roles and narrowing women's participation in important, myth-worthy ventures:

"The brotherhood dates back to hunting parties where the success of the group (trusting your team mates and watching each other's back) was crucial for the survival of the tribe. On the other hand the sisterhood was more about nurturing the children and elderly than any other thing; these activities weren't necessarily done in group and their survival never was on the line as they performed these duties.

Because of this women lack the capacity to team up for a common goal and can't deal with the pressure of life threatening situations." (John Brown, 2018)

Lastly, the red pill as a concept is the ideal metaphor through which to discuss the culture of masculinity cultivated in the Manosphere. It relates not only to gender but also to status and wealth. Heros are distinguished not simply by their woman as reward, but also by their power, money and status. As *dat boy orly* (2017) uses it in a comment on *Red Pill Monster* (2017), the red pill is a shield that wards against predatory women who endanger men financially.

“My uncle was devorced 2 times and lost 1.4mill and my dad and his mate red pilld me at the age of 6 years old”.

The red-pilld male is independent and therefore “safe” from the dangers of intimate relationships with women. This element of the Manosphere is not just unrealistic in how it perceives and navigates interpersonal relationships, it is part of the post truth fantasy that prefers larger than life personality, make believe and escapism to truths that might be uncomfortable, mundane or complex. In some cases, this is all but explicitly expressed. Roosh V demonstrates this in his depiction of the “strongman” (Chapter 3, p. 83). He is convinced that strength can overcome any barrier. This is a notion born out solely in fantasy. The origin of the red pill metaphor also helps to explicate this idea.

In *the Matrix* (1999), Neo is told that his world is not real and that if he takes the red pill, he will wake up from the computer simulated world and be confronted with true reality. If he masters this understanding, he becomes invincible in the simulation. This binary is a fiction that provides little framework for understanding the complex realities of our social relations. However, it is the basis of the Manosphere’s most foundational concept.

### **3.4 Masculinity in the Digital Space**

Technology has in many ways been defined as an arena for boys. In fact "Western culture has long conflated masculinity with technology, giving rise to processes whereby technological power accrues disproportionately to men and boys" (Salter, 2018, p. 248). Computing technology thus becomes an ideal vehicle for certain forms of "reactionary masculinity" because technological rationality has tended to "promote the instrumental attitudes and exploitative relations that naturalize gendered inequalities and drive mass campaigns of online abuse" (p. 248). This theme therefore has more to do with the platforms that make the Manosphere possible than particular devices used in the discourse. Digital platforms not only rationalize social inequalities, they make possible the

dissemination of abusive and oppressive language at scale. The algorithms that govern information retrieval and communication online are fundamentally hegemonic because they cater to dominant ideas that are profitable for advertisers (Noble, 2018). The Manosphere is a sustained example of this but there have been concentrated bursts of misogynistic abuse in online spheres (Braithwaite, 2016). The most widely examined of these was the #Gamergate controversy during which Anita Sarkeesian, Zoe Quinn and a number of other high profile online feminists, video game developers and video game critics became the target of a large scale hate campaign. Their offence was simply calling attention to the more or less uncontroversial fact that “dominant gaming cultures... skew towards straight, White males” (Braithwaite, 2016, p. 1). The resulting attacks were carried out largely by self described male gamers who disagreed with feminist critiques of video games and situated themselves as victims at risk of having their culture replaced (p. 1). As such, feminist gamers were subjected to threats of violence and rape, in some cases their home addresses and other personal information were published online in a tactic called doxing, and their lives disrupted by the sheer amount of online abuse. Braithwaite (2016) described the event as “an articulation of technology, privilege and power” (p.1). #Gamergate, like the wider Manosphere movement was in large part orchestrated as a defense of traditionally male dominated spaces and roles from the "perceived encroachment by women and more diverse users" (Salter, 2017, p. 248). There is a degree to which the Internet and other related technologies play a facilitative role in rationalizing misogyny and sexist harassment (p. 247).

At the same time, it becomes increasingly apparent that the ontological position of the Manosphere is made precarious by the very online space in which it operates. Networked communication is slippery, particularly when certain dialogues are considered part of a larger discourse, as is the case with texts that comprise the Manosphere. Looking at individual texts, there are few things any one has in common with the others. The styles range from inflammatory and hyperbolic to poetic and understated. Lilly (2016) argues that “the extremist and the mundane versions... are in fact the same ideology” (p. 5). However, I have



found through this analysis that beyond a general belief that feminism oppresses men, which can be traced through most discourses and campaigns organized by the Mansphere, the secondary beliefs and assumptions of Manosphere members are widely variable. The Alt-Right too is an elastic concept. This is important when considering what, if anything makes up the core of its ideology. The curious presence of coded language—the language of performance and counterpublics is best executed in spaces of precarity and movement. All of this discourse is moving constantly and doesn't actually have a centre, which is yet another factor problematising the characterization of the Manosphere as a distinct and coherent community with a distinct set of imperatives.

However, for these same reasons, feminist groups have used online spaces in similar ways to create coded language and distinct terminology that has become central to the ways feminist communities define themselves in opposition to the mainstream. The Manosphere has reappropriated terms and techniques employed by feminism and other Leftist movements in order to disrupt and confuse the aims of the ideologies and movements it opposes. It has a fraught relationship to feminism and a fraught and complicated connection to progress and conceptions of the future. While the views of the Manosphere are culturally conservative and in many ways regressive, they also invoke a vague picture of an imagined, idealistic future. Sandman for example, looks forward to a time when young women,

“will see their mothers powerless and disenfranchised,  
and replaced by machines” (9:25)

This strange projection for technology to somehow supersede or replace women's roles at home is something we see frequently in the discourse. However, in parallel with the suggestions that women should be stripped of the right to vote; it has little bearing on how we understand technology and what its limits are in terms of replicating human behavior. As such, the argument Sandman and other Manosphereians are making, loses any sense of realism or pragmatism and reads instead as juvenile and fantastical. However, as noted, these exact qualities are what makes the discourse spreadable and affective online.

Research on the Manosphere dispels the myth of progressive participation in online media. Instead, it illuminates the characteristics of digital media platforms that lend themselves to the popularization of the rhetorics of the Manosphere and other extremist groups. The Manosphere is not a stable object, however, and yet, it has far reaching political influence. Among these influences is the notion that women don't belong in the formation and management of technological spaces. Culturally and industrially, technological spaces have and are still to a large extent, male spaces. Therefore, it makes sense that this work is carried out primarily online and uses metaphors and references to technological fictions like the Matrix.

Networks break down historic gatekeepers of media and information dissemination. It's no coincidence that Roosh V runs his own, un-moderated blog, for instance, which is not subject to the policies of large social networking aggregators like Facebook or Twitter. While Sandman uploads his podcast to YouTube, he also founded MGTOW.com, another independent outlet, effectively unproctored by gatekeepers. The online space itself, even on mainstream sites de-legitimizes gatekeepers. This allows for the free re-appropriation of terms that have customarily been used in other ways. Words like "safe space", "free speech", "feminism", "misogyny", "men's rights" and a host of other popular social justice terms become floating signifiers, divorced from their origin. Instead, they're used to bolster an indiscriminate invocation of victimhood and the language of victimhood by historically dominant groups. We see this in the discourse of the Manosphere which frequently uses familiar terms in unfamiliar ways. Unsungdrummer (2017) for instance writes,

“Cynicism of others and skepticism of reality will serve you far greater than any amount of female, peer or familial validation...”

Cynicism and skepticism provide no historical or logical imperative to oppose or argue against feminism. Yet this is how they are used in this context.

The language of victimhood can be invoked without evidence and contrary to the ways in which power is commonly understood to operate. Still at times, the absence of evidence becomes the strength of such claims, by sidestepping the

traditional rules of engagement and becoming almost immune to fact-checking. This is clearly a tactic employed by the more hyperbolic members of the Manosphere. For example, when Roosh V asserts that if we,

"Take away the power of women to vote... the degradation stops." (2017)

In this instance, he is relying on the broad, elastic and exaggerated nature of the term "degradation" such that if anyone were to try and refute it in earnest, they would in some way also lend it legitimacy. This again, is why approaching the Manosphere as one would another subject of critical discourse analysis is not a viable methodology.

Roos V and other polemic Manospherians are contributing to a growing trend in our political culture, wherein truth itself has become a widely "contested phenomenon" (Meharchand, 2017, p. 3). Discursive reality is tied to how power operates and who is understood to have access to or a monopoly on knowledge. By asserting claims that are beyond the realm of logical reasoning or falsifiability, often through the use of enthymemes and metaphor, the Manosphere and other Alt-Right groups deliberately call into question the notion that truth is discoverable and instead perpetuate the notion that only they have access to the right kind of knowledge, just as they have a monopoly on digital spaces. This is the crux of the term "alternative facts" which became widely used after its introduction by President Donald Trump's media spokesperson Kellyanne Conway in 2016 (Meharchand, 2017, p. 1). The instability and uncertainty surrounding the concept of truth has been pursued not as a post-modern appeal to human limitation or the complexity of reality, nor as a critique of how absolute truths have historically been used to disempower marginal groups (p. 4). Rather the widespread distrust of facts is useful when the goal is for so-called "alternative facts" to be curated and presented in the service of a political meta narrative that favors those in positions of power. Through this lens, it becomes increasingly obvious why Roosh V, Sandman and their followers care so little whether or not people debunk their arguments with evidence and care much more how many times their ideas are repeated (in a positive or negative light) on as many digital platforms as possible.

The power of Alt-Right and Manosphere discourse is in its use of "deceptive irony" and extreme misogyny masked by the misnomer of "male bonding" (Romano, 2018) or solidarity in online spaces whether they be spaces for gaming, blogging or networking.

### 3.5 Race and Religion

Race and religion are also common topics in the Manosphere around which discussion about gender and men's rights revolve. The community is comprised largely of white men (Lilly, 2016, p. 12) and this is evident in the sometimes subtle and other times, overt racism that permeates the space. Roosh V's dog whistle exemplifies this:

“...empowered female voters abort nearly 60 million American babies” while if given the authority, men would "automatically regulate immigration and replace it with a policy of natalism" (Roosh V, 2017)

His fears around immigration are a product of white anxieties around racial purity and subsequently are presented as justification for controlling women's sexual and reproductive freedom. Anonymous Disqus' in response asks,

"would you rather Europe in ten years to be: (a) Racially European but Muslim religion. (b) Racially Arab but Christian religion. I won't speak for anyone but myself on this one, I'd choose (a)" (2017).

These two points touch on the fact that while Western Civilization is a commonly referenced concept in the Manosphere, there is no clear sense of what it is. Some members define it as white civilization while others consider Christianity to be more central to Western culture than Whiteness. In this case, both seem to agree that race outweighs religion but it's clear from Anonymous Disqus' phrasing that not all in the movement agree. Regarding the rhetorical approach to making this point, Roosh V uses highly coded dog whistles to obscure his intended meaning, while Anonymous Disqus uses clear and direct language in a very structured format—he asks a direct question and answers it. Roosh V's coded message, seems to be

that women are aborting white American babies, which in combination with increased immigration from non-white countries, puts the status of white supremacy at risk. The solution he less subtly hints towards is that abortion should be illegal and immigration halted from all but white European countries. This level of control over immigration informed by racial profiling is becoming a popular policy proposed in right wing populist governments (Matthews, 2016). Not dissimilarly, Anonymous Disqus is preoccupied with the racial makeup of Europe, suggesting he'd like it to be a kind of white ethnostate. What's particularly interesting about both claims however, is that neither can be rooted in any reality we are familiar with in contemporary America or Europe. In the case of the United States, the nation itself was built on the influx of settlers and slaves from elsewhere. The nostalgia for a pure White or purely Christian state is something so far removed from our reality in Europe and North America that it doesn't hold any bearing as a viable solution to today's social inequalities. It's difficult to conceptualize what such a state would look like and the lengths to which a government would have to go to achieve it, that the idea doesn't warrant serious consideration. When engaging in a critical analysis of discourse, the urge is to make sense of the argument and weigh its merits with its consequences or inconsistencies. I contend that this is too generous an approach to the Manosphere, as it necessitates constructing a common sense or reality based argument where there isn't one. The Manosphere is engaged in the politics of affect, and thus the critical examination of their discourse must step back and ask, what devices make this discourse affective and how is it disruptive to discourses of meaning?

What might be called, Anti-PC non-conformism is one sensibility that ties race-based discourse to discourses on gender. In the interest of opposing feminism and efforts towards racial equality or diversity, political correctness becomes a "phantom menace" according to which liberalism and multiculturalism can be universally condemned under one ideological umbrella. To this end, universities are implicated in the creation of PC-culture and the rebellion against it is presented as a rebellion against conforming to institutional or political norms that are seen as restrictive, controlling and elitist. The Sandman alludes to this when

he describes how while attending University in Toronto, the school tried to have the metro police charge him with a hate crime and have him expelled (Sandman, 2017, 00:57-01:02). He seems to view universities as breeding grounds for feminism and multiculturalism and thus mechanisms for upholding PC culture. The tie between academic institutions and the increased enforcement and subsequent reactive critique of political correctness came as Universities began offering courses that "interrogated the experiences, and emphasized the cultural contributions of groups that had previously been excluded from the academy and from the canon: queer people, people of colour and women" (Weigel, 2016). The Sandman again echoes this, claiming he was "shamed" by feminist professors at university. In effect however, the focus on PC culture is a dog whistle that allows the Manosphere to minimize and ignore the experiences of underprivileged groups in settings like school and work. For example, Roosh V argues that university standards are lowering in the interest of "allowing [women and minorities] to excel" (2017) when in recent history they had been excluded entirely (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). The use of PC-culture has since been invoked by think-pieces critical of social justice movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, "trivializing them by saying that they were obsessed with policing speech" (Weigel, 2016) rather than engaging directly with the demands or arguments posed by the proponents of the movements. This again, is effective because it engages affect and inspires fear.

Much like the gendered discourse of the Manosphere, racial discourse is obscured by coded language. Anti-political correctness, anti-immigration and nationalism are all concepts understood within the community to be consonant with white supremacist thinking. The hegemonic, hyper-masculine or neomasculine ideal for men produced in the Manosphere is understood to be white, able-bodied and straight and this is in many cases, the foundation of nationalistic and ethnocentric thinking. This profile of ideal masculinity is by and large supported by both mine and others' (Lilly, 2016; O'Brien, 2014; Kelly, 2017; Kimmel, 2013) analyses of the movement and its discourse. While there are men of colour in the Manosphere, their race is often self-described as a burden that prevents success

with women, such as was the case in infamous Incel Elliott Rodger's manifesto, in which he wrote:

"How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy" (p. 13).

This allusion to white purity pervades much of white nationalist discourse and has become a foundational aspect to the Manosphere's conception of pure masculinity. The "vagueness" of such "white nostalgia helps boost, rather than hinder, its power as an artefact of propaganda." (Kelly, 2017, p. 73).

In a comment on Roosh V's blog post "How to Save Western Civilization (2017), Titan000 compares the historical patriarchies of Christianity and Islam, and states that "Not all Patriarchies are equal" (2017). Through this insinuation, he ties patriarchy to religious tradition and sets up a value judgement whereby non-Christian origins of patriarchy are inferior. Similarly, disqus\_2015ScorpioWater (2017) adds in the same thread that,

"most of the Jews have been working against the interests of traditional patriarchy".

This fits with the neo-Nazi and white supremacist rhetoric that Jews constitute their own non-white ethnic group. In this way, even non-white Judeo-Christian traditions are frequently positioned in opposition to male dominance and patriarchy. Emergent in these comments is the fact that there is a faction of the Manosphere that puts white identity above all else, preferring "European" racial purity to any consideration of religion regardless of that religion's patriarchal tradition. In opposition to that view, there is another faction that puts the continuation of patriarchy above both race and religion, celebrating Islam for the ways in which it has in certain parts of the world, aided in sanctifying male dominance. For example in Maximus Decimus Meridius' comment on Roosh V's he argues that destruction caused by feminism and LGBT rights could be stopped by

"taking away the vote [from women]. And if this does not happen, Islam is coming and will do the job in the end" (2017).

While he claims to prefer the former, he would accept the latter as an alternative to what he sees as feminist and LGBT dominance. Most Manosphere members included in this research draw at least some essential connection between patriarchy and white, Christian masculinity. Whether this connection is necessary to their picture of an ideal society is negligible due to the number of internal inconsistencies and devices used to mask or dull meaning.

### **3.6 Disruptive Discourse**

While internally, there are many more inconsistencies and disagreements between and among community members as might be apparent in news media coverage of the Manosphere, pointing out these inconsistencies is not the primary work of this research. Rather, I hope to illuminate what the genre of mis-truth telling has done to disrupt the status quo of discourse building and communication in political spheres, as a new space opens up in which the truth is merely a footnote and not the primary concern in debating social or economic policy. This so-called post-truth era is both exploited and perpetuated by groups like the Manosphere who seek to popularize a certain critical lens toward mainstream subjectivities, understandings of political practices and norms of behaviour. This is done through the development of discursive techniques that echo but also distort the language of other social movements. However, unlike progressive social movements, the Manosphere is not outcome oriented: rather the disruption itself seems to be the end-game, despite proxy goals related in most cases to gender and race. This is precisely why disproving or even opposing claims made within this space, is futile and in some instances, elevates the legitimacy of such claims in the public collective conscious. All of this despite many such arguments having previously been considered obvious or unequivocal falsehoods. For example, when Roosh V (2017) states that,

“repealing women’s suffrage is the only issue of our day that can single-handedly solve all the others,”



the consideration as to whether he believes it, or whether he's right or wrong is less important than what such a hyperbolic declaration does to our tacit understanding of what can be questioned. At a fundamental level, it disrupts notions about how power operates in the context of societal institutions and interpersonal relationships. Participants in the Manosphere claim that feminism has erected a gynocentric state where women are at an advantage in all areas of life compared to men. While we can debate the truth of this idea with facts on either side, it's irrelevant to the core mission of the movement which seems to be disruption for disruption's sake. Left out of the conversation largely, is what these conceptions of equal treatment do to people at the margins and how genders outside of the binary operate or how they fit into the Manospherean equation. This is because the Manosphere doesn't engage in reality based thinking. Both it's picture of the present and its imagined futures, are simplistic and intentionally removed from the now. Words that have taken on common usage in the Manosphere like "gynocracy", which in Chapter 2 was discussed in reference to both hyperbole and dog whistling, describe a state of the world entirely foreign to most people's perception. Depending on how gynocracy is used, it can either obscure the meaning of a sentence, particularly if the audience isn't familiar with the term or intensify the force of a claim. This is true if the text is speaking to audiences familiar with the term's usage. In both cases however, it is specifically designed to disrupt how the public views power. If as AvyScottAndFlower (2017) says, "things are just getting worse, thanks to the Gynocracy", then it would be imperative that we rethink the notion that women experience gendered oppression. These large scale disruptions to common understandings are what the Manosphere is aimed at achieving.

This same process of disruption is also how the Alt-Right and the Manosphere both, capitalize on the famous liberal platitude "The Solution to Poor Opinions is More Opinions" (Legg, 2018, p. 43). When "strong opinion is considered to be worth more than facts, precisely due to its (apparent) strength", more opinions are not necessarily a straightforward path to more truth. Social media is an instrumentalization of this concept. "Its speed and the access it

provides to all who have the time to give tongue from President downwards, sometimes in amazingly illiterate forms, to their concerns, views, proposed priorities and personal opinions—or prejudice” (Peter et al., 2018, p. vi) is hailed as a vehicle for free speech. However, it has also in large parts, given rise to the post-truth present. Fuchs (2016) observes in his discussion of the rise of Austria’s Far Right, that “By engaging in helping to perform the right-wing populist spectacle”, users gain followers, subscribers and listeners which then becomes adequate replacements for truth. Figures like Roosh V and the Sandman are examples of this phenomenon whereby lies are introduced on right wing blogs and websites, repeated until they become quasi-truths and subsequently picked up by mainstream conservative broadcasters which further solidifies their legitimacy (Toobin, 2016). For instance, Roosh V (2017) writes about the need for a powerful strongman to “automatically regulate immigration and replace it with a policy of natalism”. This sentiment is mirrored in mainstream right wing media, most strikingly in discourse surrounding Donald Trump’s proposed immigration policies, but also in European democracies like Hungary, Poland and the Netherlands. While Donald Trump built a successful presidential campaign on the “build a wall” policy, Hungarian “Prime Minister Viktor Orban has depicted migrants as rapists, job-stealers, terrorists and “poison” for the nation, and built a vast fence along Hungary’s southern border” (Haraszti, 2016). Orban has also adopted the Alt Right discursive technique in which traditionally liberal values or lexical markers are appropriated, equating liberal progressivism with a “dictatorship of political correctness” (Haraszti, 2016). This is yet another example of how discourse once relegated to the dark corners of online forums is now rampant in mainstream political speech.

Other forms and styles of discourse that support and facilitate social disruption remain largely specific to digital, networked communication. For example, the memetic culture that has developed in and around the Alt-Right and the Manosphere represents a new mode of “engaging with democracy and citizenship today” (Lange-Böhmer, 2018, p. 181). Memes are one way in which the Alt-Right employs “ironic vocabulary to further its political agenda” (p. 182). Irony,

humour and parody all play an important role in mediating a “potentially toxic internet culture, which is carried over into offline political campaigns” (p. 182). Memes have become so much a part of Alt-Right communication that certain iconographic images are now inexorable from the meaning imbued upon them by the Alt-Right: Pepe the frog perhaps being the most widely known example. Memes like those shared by Roosh V have an altogether different flavour from the more troll-worthy images of 4Chan and Reddit. They tend to repurpose historical newspaper cartoons or re-create the aesthetic of more traditional political imagery. This serves to differentiate their messaging, adding a sense of legitimacy and scholarship that is missing from content produced by the meme team or by trolls. Nevertheless, both styles of memetic discourse “imply a specific kind of regressive, heterosexual masculinity” (p. 183) and by extension, denigrate women who are perceived as trying to commandeer or threaten that brand of masculinity. Figure 2 (Chapter 2, p. 60) is a strong example of this. Women seeking the vote were seen as destroying the natural order of society and in particular, men’s role in it. Whether invective, humorous, traditional or ironic, memes are a new form of discourse which enable “the rapid spread and homogenization of MRA rhetoric” (Ging, 2017, p. 7).

### **3.7 Summary of Findings**

The potency of Manosphere discourse relies on both the representation of the community as traditionalists and the embracing of new modes of masculinity embodied by geek culture and techno-rationalism. This apparent collision of conflicting ideals is a recurrent theme in the movement and rather than weaken it through a lack of ideological consistency, it has made the discourse more or less immune to critique and scrutiny from without. The use of metaphor and other such devices creates an opacity to the intentions of the Manosphere’s members that has enabled it to seep ever more into mainstream arenas of political text and talk. In the context of the Manosphere, masculinity as a concept overlaps with other

categories of identity including race, religion, class and (dis)ability. While not discussed at length here, ideal white masculinity is assumed to be able-bodied. This is most overt in the assumptions regarding sexual ability in Manosphere offshoots like the Pick Up Artists (PUA) and Incel communities. In a time when the the composition of President Trump's most avid supporters are primarily poor Americans (Khazan, 2018), class seems to have become less of a deciding factor in a new hegemonic picture of manhood. There used to be a relatively clean divide between rich and poor, republican and democrat whereby rich people favored the fiscal conservatism of the GOP and poor people, particularly poor people of colour (Regnerus et al., 1998, p. 482) favoured the democrats who in general support social programs to help the poor. In recent years, economic concerns have been outstipped by social considerations like race (7%) and immigration (11%) as the primary factor in determining voting patterns (The Economist, 2018). The Economist (2018) posited that just 2% of Americans consider class an important factor in their voting. This explains why amongst extremist right wing voters, the Alt-Right and the Manosphere, there appears to be far more vitriol towards racial minorities, women and LGBT people than toward the poor.

The Manosphere is situated amid a multitude of other far right and Alt-Right groups and draws much of its ideological conclusions from similar movements operating in tandem offline. However, it's locale being primarily in the digital space means that its borders as a community are slippery. Much of what I consider Manosphere discourse, I categorize this way first because it is self-described as such by the associated authors, and second because it conforms to the stylistic and topical choices that have come broadly to characterize the community. Needless to say however, this is a flawed and in some ways, circular method because it relies on self-report in conjunction with patterns of discourse that often exist elsewhere. The movement would like to portray itself as a unified body with aligning goals but this is often not the case. The modes of discourse are more consistent than the arguments themselves which are typically fragmented, enthymematic, incomplete and at odds with other aspects of the community's supposed mandate. What is clear, is that the Manosphere as it is understood in

this research, negotiates a Masculinity imagined to be victimized by feminism and in conflict with progressive notions of gender as performed, socially constructed or variable beyond the traditional binary. Nonetheless, the findings outlined here point to a larger hypothesis: namely that men whose gender identity or gendered dominance is threatened, tend on average to become more conservative in response, and not just in relation to gender but also in regards to things like race and nationalism.

Key to the narrative of the Manosphere is the phrase, “things are just getting worse” (AvyScottAndFlower, 2017). The notion that gender relations between men and women are reaching a crisis point reverberates in political discussions in the Manosphere and fuels anxieties around immigration, gun control and abortion rights. As Roosh V (2017) writes, “The demographic crisis the West faces today is primarily due to allowing women to do as they please”. In one sense, the Manosphere is a reactionary response to what many men in the community perceive as a society skewed towards the needs, desires and successes of women. On the other, the increasing resonance of such claims in mainstream discourse which is evidenced in part, by the rise of populism across the Western world (Joffe, 2017), is a signal that something might indeed be wrong with the ways in which we conduct social democracy, particularly how it is conducted through or supplemented by discourse online. The Manosphere is a reaction to social and political change, especially progressive social change. However, it’s success and the modes of discourse it has adopted in order to thrive in the margins and increasingly, seep into the mainstream is indicative of a deep seated resentment toward and distrust in the current system.

Roosh V (2017) consistently comments on the crisis in the West. The Sandman too, has his ideas regarding what drives young adults to join ANTIFA which he sees as evidence of a dysfunctional political and social climate:

“Suddenly [new graduates] get upset and angry that others are more successful than they are and that’s why they go out and become ANTIFA members” (Sandman, 2017, 2:58).

The Sandman's reference to ANTIFA and the economic factors that in his mind, drive membership is yet another example of how gender in the Manosphere intersects with multiple other ideological sticking points which may only loosely relate to the core focus of the community but connect it to an emerging position that sees itself as a counter-public to the increasingly liberal and intellectual leftist mainstream. This mindset can be summed up by what Michael Kimmel in "Angry White Men" calls "aggrieved entitlement" (2015). He describes this as a state of resentment and fear in reaction to changes in the social and political climate in social democracies around the world. Men are angry because they feel as though they are being misplaced. This sense of loss is nothing new, as Roosh V's use of the anti-suffragette cartoon (Figure 2, p.59) reminds us. However, the rise of the Manosphere, like the rise of Trumpism and neo-fascism is not the crux of the crisis. Rather the crisis concerns how disparate groups are negotiating their relationship to the pressing social realities that have come to dominate political knowledge production and debate in 2016 and onward. It's clear that "men who perceive that their masculinity is under threat change their political behavior" (Cassino, 2018). This is evident not just in the Manosphere's support of "barbarous and ferocious" (p. 54) strongmen as political candidates but in the frequency with which men begin in the Manosphere and transition to participating in Alt-Right and neo-nazi communities or vice versa (Phillips & Yi, 2018, p. 222). Misogyny in other words, has a pragmatic and observed connection to nationalism and racism. This is something that certainly warrants more research.

The morphing of Alt-Right activists and MRAs into chaos driven "subcultural trolls" (Massanari, 2018, p. 5) is both a sign and symptom of a crisis in participatory media and consequently in democracy which relies on these public spaces of discourse and public opinion to inform policy and procedure. While the Alt-Right emerged from marginal spaces like online forums and dark web chat rooms, it has now begun to infiltrate state level discourse around the world. In other words, it has become an "an amorphous networked community that gazes, illuminates, objectifies, and actively constructs a particular social reality" (Massanari, 2018, p. 4). Whereas previous iterations of nationalistic and

misogynistic thinking were geared towards turning the political tide toward these goals, the Manosphere and indeed, the Alt-Right more broadly feeds off of a “culture of connectivity” in order to shift, fracture and break the mechanisms that have strove to balance power for traditionally marginalized groups. It also fractures the bonds of social cohesion by calling into question common understandings and “truths”.

Scholars like Daniel Bessner and Matthew Sparke have argued that even in the wake of these disruptions, “Democracy demands ongoing engagement with the public, not ridicule or avoidance” (2017, p. 1217). They advocate a plural response networked through social media that rejects “the fusion of fascism and free-market fundamentalism that Trump is fomenting” (p. 1222). While the effort to fairly consider and respond in kind to claims launched by the Manosphere may be worthwhile in certain cases, the findings of this research suggest that the Manosphere and in some ways, while responding to a supposed crisis, are primarily engaged in an effort to incite and cause disruption. As the Sandman says in describing the Red Pill Monster, or wave of red pill adherents,

“It’s mean, angry and spills more and more red pills out of it’s mouth and it can’t be stopped” (2017).

There is no particular end goal to the movement, particularly not one that’s agreed upon by its members. Thus there is no assuaging the adherents of the Manosphere whether by gentle reasoning or vitriolic push back. The Red Pill is personified as a beast or strongman that can’t and won’t be stopped, suggesting there is no compromise to be had.

The Manosphere discourse is not something with which it is productive to engage because at its heart, it is against sociality. MGTOW in particular is based around the premise that men should disengage from a society that is dominated by women and therefore also avoid any personal relationships with women. This type of rhetoric doesn’t allow for the basic conditions of plurality and difference to exist in the same space. It is a critique of the fundamental elements of a healthy public: being plural, social and based on common understandings of the law, power and truth or else at the very least, an ability to discuss differences

peacefully. As such, red pill thinking is largely impervious to debate because it rejects these premises. Truth is a force that binds people and brings them together through shared experiences and understandings. The Manosphere seeks to break these down in what can be described as a radical critique of the social. An attack on the concept of truth breaks down “truth talk” as a resource of connectivity. This same pattern can be seen in the Manosphere’s decry of identity politics. Personal identity, most strikingly the personal identities of its very own members are frequently subject to attack. Men who aren’t masculine enough, aren’t white or are immigrants are thought of and talked about as lesser—as beta, incel or hotep. The Manosphere is destructive towards the sociality even of men who claim to support it.



## Chapter 4: Conclusion

### 4.1 Implications for the Hypothesis

At the outset of this research, I intended to address three key considerations. Through an exploration of how the Manosphere, as an online community, uses rhetorical tactics such as metaphor, enthymeme, hyperbole and dog whistling to appeal to mainstream audiences and disseminate their views in wider spheres of public life through the dilution and sanitization of their core message. I also explore how the exaggeration of those same arguments to the point of absurdity, create a politic of affect. These tactics are seen today not only in the margins of the internet but also increasingly in large-scale political organizing—the 2016 US presidential election being the most cited example of this influence in the research. Regardless of the device used, in most cases there is a general disregard for facts under the assumption that publicity and attention are worth more. Secondly, I set out to discover how the particular infrastructures unique to online knowledge production are ideal for the galvanization of support around movements like the Manosphere and the styles of discourse it has cultivated. In so doing, I posit that the success of the Manosphere in recent years is symptomatic of a perceived deficit in democracy and a vacuum of purpose, belief and willingness to work within the bounds of the traditional political system by communities that have until very recently, held the vast majority of political and social power. In an effort to disrupt the political system and make room for alternative and often contentious views on how power operates in relation to race, gender and ability, the Manosphere has developed a distinct discursive style. This study aimed to pull apart that style, identify a number of the key devices therein and posit how these devices work to bridge the gap between mainstream political thought and extreme misogyny and racism. We have witnessed a recent increase in overt racism and misogyny in the highest tiers of state politics in the past three years and this research makes a case that the growth and success of movements like the Manosphere account for part of why

that is. The research successfully plots a number of important linguistic markers and techniques used in the Manosphere, as well as key themes that run through the discourse. It also identifies where those same techniques and themes are observed in political speech more broadly. However, this is a correlative finding and doesn't fully substantiate the claim that the Manosphere is a causal force for these themes becoming increasingly present in mainstream politics. The latter, stronger claim necessitates a comprehensive study of how proto-fascist, populist and Alt-Right political discourse work in conjunction with the Manosphere and in turn, how these formations have influenced the enterprise of politics in general.

The linguistic markers of the Manosphere are numerous but the most widely known and used of them is the Red Pill metaphor. By appropriating references from popular culture, the Manosphere piggybacks on internet based geek sub-cultures and more importantly, on the rise of geek masculinity in that space. Geek culture teaches men, especially young men that, "women, like money and status, are just part of the reward [they] get for doing well" (Weiser and Miltner, 2017, p. 172). Misogyny through this lens is viewed as the logical push back to boys doing everything they should do (getting good grades, jobs, wives etc.) yet not being rewarded appropriately. Geek spaces including the trolling and meme cultures of Reddit, Twitter and YouTube are socially male dominated. Much of the defence of keeping them this way, is the argument that men need a safe space to "circumvent the conflict and alienation caused by female feminists migrating to formerly male spaces" and demanding accommodation (p. 173). As an Introduction to the Manosphere puts it, the average "meninist" "doesn't hate feminists or White Knights; he hates navigating the environment they create" (MGTOW.com/The Manosphere, 2017).

The red pill provides a compelling cultural motif under which a broad range of religious, political and social commentaries can find common ground. In effect, it helps "generate consensus and belonging among the Manosphere's divergent elements" (Weiser and Miltner, 2017), making a much more potent public than the multifarious micro-groups that held little power and political sway prior to the recent Alt-Right wave. Metaphors and other forms of cooperative

meaning-making create a shared language and mode of speaking about experiences which ultimately binds the groups together and reinforces shared conceptual frameworks. This is true as well, of terms with connotative meanings only well understood within the community. Alpha, Beta, Sigma and Omega for example, have become signifiers for emergent forms of masculinity. Now that masculinity affords men the option of wearing form fitted clothing, doesn't demand a certain level of homophobia and allows for more nuanced displays of emotion beyond rage, Alpha becomes a descriptor for a masculinity that hasn't relinquished the traditional hegemonic script.

## **4.2 Limitations of the Study**

This study captured data from three major sources. First, the independent blog space. Data was captured from MGTOW.com, a domain thought to be owned and operated by the Sandman. Also included in the texts, is an article from Roosh V's website RooshV.com. Corporate gatekeepers are less empowered to moderate the speech of online users on independent sites and blogs than on corporately owned platforms with clear user policies. These were therefore important sources to consider as they provided a candid and uncensored view of the Manosphere that represents its internal dialogue with existing members. Second, data was sourced from the comments section of Roosh V's blog where users generally feel the most uninhibited as they are both operating under pseudonymous usernames, as well as not writing as a figurehead for the movement as is the case for Roosh V and Sandman. As such, individual anonymous users can be particularly hyperbolic, aggressive and confrontational with very little regress. Finally, I looked to the YouTube space where the Sandman uploads regular podcast style videos on Manosphere topics. The Red Pill Monster was a fitting video to include in the research because it encapsulates and expands upon the red pill metaphor. While creators on YouTube are more and more becoming vestibules for advertisers, there still

remains the capability to produce long-form video content that combines visuals and audio in such a way that quickly and effectively cultivates communities of interest around both mainstream and marginal topics. The Sandman has built a strong, tight knit community of viewers around Manosphere content on YouTube. The platforms and mediums covered in this research, I hope provide a broad and inclusive view of Manosphere discourse online.

Missing from this picture are most notably, Reddit, 4Chan and 8Chan which are popular platforms for the “current strain of virulent racism and sexism that falls under the “alt-right” rubric” (Massanari, 2018, p. 2). Twitter, which is a heavily frequented site for debate and short form, micro-blogging is also absent from the data sources for this research. These omissions are major limitations to the *scope* of the study. The primary reason for their absence is the focus of this research on the Manosphere as a particular subculture existing under a wider Alt-Right umbrella. By zooming in on websites that self describe as belonging or contributing to the Manosphere, I avoided wrongly labelling discourse on other mediums as such. Even capturing data from hashtags like #RedPill on Twitter run the risk of coding tweets by external observers who may even be satirizing or opposing the Manosphere.

Online infrastructure is just as much formed and filled out by individual websites, social networking platforms and video streaming sites as it is by hyperlinks, embeds and browser extensions which are the highways, brick and mortar building blocks and bridges of what we might formulate as a digital city. How these elements increase “the flow of antifeminist ideas and information across groups, platforms and geological boundaries” (Ging, 2017, p. 7) is not laid out in full in this research. This consideration is a key part of explaining why discourse online operates so starkly differently than discourse in offline spaces and why consequently, inflammatory discourse can travel so far, so fast. In other words, the online context has shifted how men’s rights groups and their more extreme counterparts in the Manosphere have conducted their activism and in what direction their “discursive tone” has developed (Ging, 2017, p.3). Since the widespread adoption of online modes of discourse production, the tone of men’s

rights activism as it's exemplified in the development of the Manosphere has taken a turn toward anti-feminist imaginings of masculinity and manhood. This more affective approach to political organizing is enabled by the highways of communication dissemination. A more in depth analysis of these infrastructural considerations is needed to fully understand how the discourse operates and how it travels.

Lastly, while this research has much to say on the performances of masculinity online in relation to Geek culture, technology and memeology, it doesn't have the scope to cover how these same men enact gendered social roles offline. It's not clear how active or not they are in anti-feminist, alt-right or men's rights movements in their daily lives. Many seem to fully disclose their ideas online but keep them veiled in other settings. To some degree however, the danger of raising this question risks further supporting the false dichotomy between online sociality and self, versus offline sociality and self. There is nothing "less real" about online discourse. It has the same potential impacts and consequences as discourse that takes place in a coffee shop or at a rally. We've witnessed this clearly in brutal attacks like Alek Minassian's Toronto Van attack and Elliott Roger's attack in Isla Vista, California in which 6 people were killed. Both Minassian and Roger shared their plans with followers online prior to the events (Joseph, 2018) and both seemed to have been heavily influenced by the Manosphere. Nevertheless, this study doesn't seek to explore who the members of the Manosphere are in their daily lives beyond what they express online. This is a blind spot in the formulation of one important aspect of the Manosphere: who are its members? How old exactly are they? Where do they tend to be from? How educated and affluent are they on average? Do they tend to be partnered with women or not? Are all or most of them Caucasian? These questions can only be partially or inferentially answered by looking solely at online discourse. Unfortunately, there are very few other sources for these lines of inquiry as members of the Manosphere tend to be highly secretive. Even the Sandman, a prominent Manosphere figure, keeps his full name and identity concealed.

### 4.3 Opportunities for Further Research

There are two key lines of inquiry set out in this research, both of which provide a foundation upon which more research is needed. The first examines how networked misogyny operates in the Web 2.0 ecosystem and is bolstered by emerging forms of geek masculinity which have been mythologized in popular movies, video games and comic books. This hybrid masculinity combines traditional hegemonic masculinity with a hero narrative of victimhood and triumph. Men who have not yet been red pillled are considered in a constant state of victimhood while those who have taken the red pill, are triumphing over a gynocentric system. The second line investigates how a crisis in social democracy and more exactly, in our politicized understandings of power in society has left a vacuum in which communities of disruption like the Manosphere flourish. Both of these lines warrant further research.

Another aspect of this study is how networked communication operates in combination with what Ging (2017) calls the politics of sentiment. That is, in order to go mainstream the Manosphere relies on at least a guise of rationality and civil debate. However, more and more the underbelly of the community is moving away from “activism and lobbying toward ad hominem invective and personalized, often spectacular attacks” (p. 9). It’s unclear how these two tactics intermingle and in which contexts one or the other is used and why. Previously, mainstream politics steered clear of the latter but that, in recent years is no longer the case. This research provides a snapshot of the community, how its discourse operates and how the values of its members are negotiated, buried in euphemism or exaggerated in the service of different goals. For example, Roosh V’s goal is to stir his followers into action, reinforce their existing beliefs and experiences and provide a voice for the Manosphere. His discourse tends to be hyperbolic and direct. Sandman’s goal is to relate to his followers, provide a voice of comradery and support while introducing new people to the online community. His discourse tends to be layered with metaphor and euphemism. He also centres most of his discussions around questions from community

members, building an active social support system. The website MGTOW.com speaks to active members but in a more instructive and formal fashion: it spells out the manifesto of the Manosphere and provides a space for community discussion. It's has an entirely different feeling to Sandman's videos because despite the fact that he is the creator and most likely author of MGTOW.com, he operates on and publishes most of the website's content anonymously. These distinctions warrant further exploration, as does research on the Manosphere's engagement on other platforms entirely. The balance of sentiment and affect with reasoned argumentation is different depending on the platform and audience.

What I hope has been demonstrated however, is that the culture and discourse of the Manosphere is intentionally destructive to social bonds and the common understandings that make them possible. Through a complex adoption of new and appropriated terms as well as devices like metaphor, hyperbole, enthymeme and dog whistling, the Manosphere has inserted their language and modes of thought into mainstream political consciousness. The popularization of the Manosphere coincides with the rise of the Alt-Right and its adjacent communities including Incels, the Dark Enlightenment, PUAs and White Nationalists. However, much of the Manosphere's agility and also its precarity is due to its position as an almost entirely online phenomenon.

#### **4.4 Final Thoughts**

The formation and heightened activity of the Manosphere has coincided with a shift towards populism, proto-fascism and overt misogyny in many of the world's most progressive and established democracies. It's likely that the catalysts that lead to the formation of a "Manosphere" were the same or similar to those that precipitated the wider global shifts towards extreme right movements. Equally, it's clear that the Manosphere's activity has in turn, fueled these other movements. While the Manosphere's discursive style and praxis has aided in

pushing politics into a space more open to marginal conservative ideas like those brought by the Alt-Right, the discourse within the Manosphere itself is not particularly or obviously goal oriented. Rather, it serves to disorient the audience in relation to the tactical understandings of how power operates and what inequality looks like.

Red Pill Rage was discussed in chapter 2 as a metaphor describing the process of waking up to injustice and becoming angry at social and economic inequalities towards men. For members of the Manosphere, these inequalities include the lack of men's access to a free sexual market of women, lack of control over women's reproduction and the predominance and success of non-white or racialized people in the pursuit of work, love and respect. In essence, the red pill is a simple solution to a pervasive ideological angst surrounding a perceived loss of social and political control. It's a word that in many ways describes a form of alienation. Yet this alienation, unlike economic alienation is self-imposed by the anti-social and self-defeatist rhetoric of the Manosphere. While there are genuine economic and social concerns that disproportionately affect men and likely play into the issues discussed in the Manosphere, the pre-occupation with gender expression, gender roles and racial purity act as smoke screens that disable any real conversation about the underlying feelings of inadequacy and redundancy that are apparent among those active in the community. I suggest that this is where the resentment towards identity politics gains much of its fervor.

I argue in light of these findings that the Manosphere does not operate like a traditional political formation. It's a mischaracterization to place it on the regular political spectrum and expect to react to it as one would another political group or ideological movement and see predictable results. The Manosphere is a social reality with major social and political consequences but it doesn't behave like a cohesive political unit. Rather than exist on the political spectrum, it aims to explode the spectrum altogether and open up new spaces entirely. It's hostile to sociality and to the common understandings that make healthy publics possible.



This leaves us to question how best to respond to groups like the Manosphere and the Atl-Right when debate and critique are ineffective at refuting their views. In other words, the Manosphere is a formation that claims a political space to which the typical forms of political response do not apply. Yet, it poses real threats to liberal democracy, not to mention the vulnerable groups it actively attacks. In order to find appropriate and effective ways of dealing with a social phenomenon that is actively pursuing a “metapolitical” transformation of... political culture” (Lyons, 2017), it’s imperative to first, see it for what it is. The Manosphere doesn’t have a consistent or reality-based worldview to contribute and therefore relies on affect and force to propel its messages online and beyond. Its goal is not to integrate into the political landscape but to disrupt it entirely with noise and hyperbole and confusion. This is perhaps a first step is recognizing how the Manosphere operates and eventually, how to mitigate its growth in online spaces.

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## Appendix : Coding Dictionary

Node	Description
Dog Whistle	Dog-whistle politics is political messaging employing coded language that appears to mean one thing to the general population but has an additional, different, or more specific resonance for a targeted subgroup.
Enthymeme	A rhetorical phrase or argument in which the premise or conclusion is left unsaid. An argumentative tactic designed to maximize the agreeability of a message by letting the receiver fill in the blank premise or conclusion in a way most agreeable to them.
Euphemism	The substitution of a mild, indirect, or vague expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh, or blunt. Often invoked to lessen the intensity of a message.
Hyperbole	An obvious and intentional exaggeration. It may not be literal in the mind of the message sender, but is often used with the knowledge that it will be taken literally by message receivers.
Metaphors	A metaphor is a figure of speech that directly refers to one thing by mentioning another for rhetorical effect
Mis-appropriation of feminist lexicon	Use of terms that were created, popularized or widely used in feminist movements that are intentionally appropriated by another group.
Oppression	Unjust control, persecution or abuse committed against an individual or group, usually by a powerful body or agent
Rights	Basic rights that are inherent regardless of race, religion, nationality, sexuality, language or any other status.
Victimhood	The state or perception of being targeted or victimized by an individual or group.

Thematic Nodes	Description
Anti-LGBT	Criticism of or disagreement with the freedom, equality, rights or morality of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer people.
Anti-modernity	Sentiments that are anti-technology, progressive change or criticise “modern society” as inferior to past civilisations.

Thematic Nodes	Description
Conservative Libertarianism	An extreme laissez-faire political philosophy advocating only minimal state intervention in the lives of citizens. a political philosophy and ideology that combines right-libertarian politics and conservative values.
Christianity	Pertaining broadly to the Christian religion which entails belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God.
White Nationalism	A type of nationalism which holds that white people constitute a race and that seeks to build and maintain white majority societies and/or the economic and political dominance of white people in primarily European or North American States.
Fascism	Promotion of authoritarian style governments, majoritarianism or otherwise ruling by force.
Gendered violence	Physical threats to women including rape and assault or discourse that trivializes or promotes such acts.
Hero culture	References or allusions to comic book heroes, action movie protagonists or mythological gods: most often men who share traits of bravery, physical strength and dominance. Also includes references to honour, duty and self-sacrifice: also important themes in comic/hero culture. Sometimes manifests in the triumph of the underdog narrative, mirroring The Matrix, Spiderman, Hercules etc.
Anti-establishment	Positioned against or in opposition to established authority or select societal institutions.
Hyper-Masculinity	A reverence for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behaviour, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and sexuality.
Objectification	Language that reduces women to their bodies, treats them as objects without agency or values them only in relation to sex.
Derogatory language toward women	Language that is threatening, insulting or offensive to women. Includes the use of name calling and ad hominem attacks
Paternalism	The policy or practice on the part of people in positions of authority of restricting the freedom and responsibilities of those subordinate to them in the subordinates' supposed best interest. Paternalism may be observed in men's attitudes towards women, white society's attitudes toward people of colour and able bodied people's attitudes toward disabled or differently abled people, among others
Traditional Gender Tropes	Expectations and ideals of gender that enforce traditional, Western or European roles and behaviours for men and

Thematic Nodes	Description
	women, discounting or discouraging variation or alternative expressions of gender
Essentialism	Gender essentialism is the belief that there exist certain characteristics that comprise the essence of women and men. According to essentialism, all women share the same set of essential and fixed traits universally. Essentialism makes the same claim about men and thus renders any notions of gender reorganization, seemingly impossible. Traits most commonly attributed to women include passivity, subservience and nurturing. Those attributed to men include assertiveness, dominance and logical thought. Essentialism can be related to biologism as well as certain theologies.
Transphobia	Intense dislike of or prejudice against transsexual, transgender people and gender non-conforming or non-binary people
Women as vindictive and demanding	Framing women as needlessly or maliciously demanding or controlling by nature, particularly in their expectations of men