“It’s the power that women have … they abuse it”: Anti-Feminist Women in Western Canada and the Online Men’s Rights Movement

by

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Abstract

The Honey Badger Brigade is an organization affiliated with men's rights activism and the men's rights movement (MRM) that is primarily made up of women from Western Canada. These women refer to themselves as "gender apostates" (Honey Badger Manifesto, n.d.) and vehemently oppose what they view as ideological feminism and the culture of self-victimhood it creates for women. The Honey Badger Brigade fights for the widespread recognition of "male disposability": the belief that through feminism, men are an oppressed social class that society ultimately views as disposable. To make their positions and ideologies known to the world, the Honey Badger Brigade produces a daily podcast called Honey Badger Radio. By applying a feminist critical discourse analysis to a selection of these podcast episodes, this thesis explores the role women who actively engage in anti-feminist work play in the MRM. I argue that these women provide the MRM with legitimacy and bolster their principles to broader publics by building on Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2018) theory of reciprocity between popular feminism and popular misogyny. I examine the ways the Honey Badger Brigade maintains this legitimacy through the discourse of shame, a narrative that they produce repeatedly to widen and form their own community of men's rights activists by defining when and how men feel shame (Ahmed 2004). These arguments are situated within a regional context, drawing on Lisa Nakamura's (2002) concept of the cybertype in relation to images of settler colonial white femininity that is embedded within Western Canadian resource extraction economies. For the Honey Badger Brigade to maintain their belonging and power within the online world of the manosphere, they must weaponize their unique, regionally informed femininities and online identities.

Keywords: feminist media studies; men's rights activism; shame; critical regionalism; cybertypes

Dedication

For my Oma, who was always the smartest person in the room.

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List of Acronyms

AVfM	A Voice for Men
FCDA	Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis
HBB	Honey Badger Brigade
MRAs	Men’s Rights Activists
MRM	Men’s Rights Movement
GG	Gamergate

Preface

As a white settler and treaty person from Treaty 6 and Treaty 11 territory, I want to acknowledge my role and responsibilities in respecting Indigenous peoples and their rights to self-determination. In doing so, I want to acknowledge that I have written this thesis in amiskwaciy-wâskahikan (Edmonton) and the unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem) and Katzie Nations.

Chapter 1.

Introduction: The Honey Badger Brigade, Western Canada, and Anti-Feminism

In 2021, a screenshot from Plenty of Fish was shared on Twitter by a woman named Erin Cecile with the caption, “Behold! The best message I’ve ever received on a dating app.” (Cecile 2021; see figure 1 in appendix). The screen-captured image was a direct-message interaction between a 45-year-old unnamed man and Cecile, both presumably based in the Edmonton, Alberta area. The man who sent the message initially seemed romantically interested in the recipient but turned sour at one particular word in her bio: feminist. In response to this self-identifier, he writes: “then you took all of my hope and excitement away with one word.” In his effort to “re-educate” Erin (being in a relationship with a feminist would be, in his words, “toxic and abusive”) he suggests she seek out the work of another woman: Karen Straughan. The man claims Straughan will help Erin to “rejoin the human race,” via her YouTube channel where “she talks about the issues between men and women.” Referring to the YouTube channel, the man advances with a challenge: “I triple dare you to watch it.” Karen Straughan is a popular female men’s rights activist and a member of the Honey Badger Brigade (HBB), a larger group of women who publicly participate in the men’s rights movement. This provocation is just one example of the widespread notoriety the work Straughan, and other members of the HBB, have attained.

The HBB is made up of women who refer to themselves as “gender apostates,” who are “women who oppose outdated ideas of gender, particularly the association of womanhood with weakness … [offering] an alternative to the damaging portrayal of women as victims of geek and gamer culture” (The Mary Sue, n.d.). With their most prominent female members from Canada’s prairie provinces (specifically Karen Straughan from Alberta, and Alison Tieman from Saskatchewan), the HBB engages in anti-feminist and anti-left rhetoric online. In this work, they identify their biggest opponent to be “ideological feminism” which they view as trapping women in a constant state of victimhood that is ultimately destructive for all (Honey Badger Brigade, n.d.). The HBB itself is an entity well entwined with the work done within the manosphere. The most salient example of this is the ties the group holds to the men’s rights organization A

Voice for Men, or AVfM, identified by the Southern Poverty Law Centre as a group that espouses “male supremacy” and “extremist ideology”, and is currently the only male supremacy hate group being watched by the organization [SPL Centre, n.d.]. This connection is established through ties to founder Paul Elam as well as contribution credits to the website through work done by Alison Tieman, Hannah Wallen, and Karen Straughan, integral members of the group. The HBB is also an active participant in the International Conference on Men’s Issues, which self-describes as “the flagship [event] of the global MRM” (ICMI, 2021), going so far as to assist with hosting and event planning for the last in-person conference in Chicago in 2019 (Honey Badger Radio, 2019). This group has a specific goal of raising awareness for what they term ‘male disposability’: “the tendency of society to judge men by their usefulness and dispose of them when they are no longer useful” (Honey Badger Brigade, n.d.). Additionally, the HBB also argues for women to be freed from the chains of self-victimhood and provide a voice for men through changes to policy and shifts in cultural attitudes. To widely disseminate their ideas, the HBB regularly produce media on multiple online platforms, spanning social media accounts (Facebook, Twitch, and Twitter), YouTube videos, blogs, and their podcast, Honey Badger Radio. Of this podcast and their work, one listener with the username “Tank of Doom” shares this testimonial as a paying listener:

> Allison Tieman, reading testimony: I knew there were inequalities in how men and women were treated under the law. Some of them I already knew about: family court, the draft grants for college. A few others were new to me, like criminal sentencing, the legal definition of rape and rape shield laws, but HBR [Honey Badger Radio] put it all together for me in one giant, stinking pile of horseshit. I couldn't see the forest for the trees. I'm a nobody. I have a tiny voice that only carries so far. HBR is large and loud. I want to help them get louder. (Why Honey Badger Radio is a Failure, 2017, 11:09-11:46)

This thesis seeks to examine the language used on podcast episodes of Honey Badger Radio and popular videos on the HBB’s YouTube channel, to put forth a better understanding of women’s involvement in the mainstream men’s rights movement, explore the HBB’s relationship with this movement and establish how their specific, regionally influenced femininity and identity assist with their connection to and legitimacy within the manosphere. In pursuit of these topics, this thesis examines the ways the HBB legitimize themselves in the world of men’s rights activism, engage with and present Western Canadian femininities across their platforms, and what the engagement with the MRM broadly reveals about white femininity. These themes are explored in depth across

four chapters. First, I engage with related, relevant literature that focuses on the intersections of this topic: feminist media and related communication studies. This work represents issues such as the ways misogyny exists within online spaces, including interactions with popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018a) and postfeminism (Gill, 2007; 2016; 2017) to help extrapolate the positionality of the HBB and how they work towards legitimizing themselves within the online sphere of the MRM. This section of my literature review also addresses histories and outcomes of online harassment through the early stages of the Internet until now, with the assistance of work from Emma A. Jane (2016). The latter half of this literature review focuses on issues of sexual assault, victimization, and involuntary celibacy by exploring the ways the notion of victimhood within these contexts has been addressed (Banet-Weiser, 2019; Phipps, 2021). Following #MeToo, sexual violence is a "gateway" topic for men into the wider MRM, and the ways these groups frame sex and sexual politics speaks to the ways the HBB engages with forms of popular feminism. Finally, this literature review explores the ways race, place, culture, and the Internet intersect for the HBB. The second chapter of my thesis provides an overview of my methodology, feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). This chapter details how I applied the grounding principles of FCDA in my work and conducted an FCDA on episodes of Honey Badger Radio. It also offers a detailed overview of the overarching discourses I located within my data corpus. My final two chapters on shame and personal experiences are detailed and thorough examinations of two of these discourse threads. In my chapter on shame, I examine how the HBB isolates and creates an image of shame to apply to their male listeners. This is done both as a technique of audience and community building, but also so that they may engage in the work necessary to position themselves as a solution to shame. The final chapter in this thesis, personal experiences, engages with how the HBB present and express themselves on Honey Badger Radio. This chapter argues that the HBB position themselves within a larger, two-pronged metaphor of the frontier: they exist in an offline frontier that is entwined with settler colonialism and Western Canadian extractive economies, but also in an online frontier. Both facets come to form how they present themselves online, as detailed by their discussion of their personal experiences.

1.1. The Honey Badger Brigade and Men's Rights Activism

Broadly speaking, the HBB identify themselves as men's rights activists and operate within the contemporary men's rights movement (MRM). Today, in the United States and Canada, the MRM is constituted by organizations composed largely of men who feel that they are oppressed within society—typically by feminists and the systems that men's rights activists perceive to be disproportionately influenced by women, such as the court system. Historically, the MRM holds ties to the civil rights movement and second-wave feminism in the ways that it makes identity-based claims about equality and power. Proponents of men's liberation in the 1970s identified, along with popular second-wave feminist figures like Betty Friedan, that *both* men and women were subjects under a patriarchal system that is built on dehumanizing gender roles and performances (Clatterbaugh, 2007). Women's liberation gatherings would often hold workshops on men's liberation (Sawyer, 2004; Messner, 1998). Male liberation in this era called for men to be free of stereotypes that put them in positions of domination over others, acknowledging that when men are unable to succeed in these stereotypes, they are viewed as failures and that this domination is violence (Clatterbaugh, 2007; Sawyer, 2004). This movement resulted in works like *The Liberated Man* by Warren Farrell (1974) and Jack Nichols' *Men's Liberation: A New Definition of Masculinity* (1974), both representing men's liberation from a feminist perspective (Messner, 1998).[1] However, tensions between the two movements soon developed and a splinter between groups resulted in a pro-feminist MRM and an explicitly anti-feminist MRM (Clatterbaugh, 2007; Messner, 1998). Two issues motivated this split: one, men began to organize around the idea that they were equally or more oppressed than women, understanding patriarchy and male privilege to be false (Clatterbaugh, 2007; Messner, 1998); two, some men's groups began demanding an equal say in deciding abortion and joint custody, and called for men's studies departments and commissions on men from all levels of government (Clatterbaugh, 2007). It is during this shift that men's groups began to coalesce around father's rights and conservatism, forming The National Congress for Men in 1980 (Clatterbaugh, 2007; Messner, 1998).

1 Warren Farrell's stance on men's rights issues and their shared link to the goals of feminism and gender equality has now changed, and he is now prominent figure in today's world of men's rights activism.

Following this, the divide between men's rights groups and pro-feminists grew larger. Gradually, pro men's rights work began to introduce the erroneous ideas that men and women are equal victims of domestic violence, that women are initiators of violence, and concerns about "male-bashing" grew.[2] Essentially, these groups began pushing the idea that, for feminists, men are nothing but oppressors and abusers, that they are "good people who are badly treated by … feminist women" (Clatterbaugh, 2007, p. 432; Messner, 1998). Both in the 1980s and today, men's rights and conservatism share many values, and both push for traditional family structures, rally around high rates of workplace fatalities and suicide rates for men, and reject feminist principles and policies (Clatterbaugh, 2007). However, the organizing tactics and shared interests of the MRM would shift again with the emergence of Web 2.0 and widespread access to social media with the Internet becoming fundamental for the growth and popularization of men's rights and surrounding discourses (Ging, 2017; Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

1.1.1. The Men's Rights Movement Meets the Internet

The manosphere is a connected group of communities, or network (Krendel, 2020), on the Internet that is united by its anti-feminist sentiment where the MRM exists now (Van Valkenburgh, 2021; Ging, 2017). The term 'manosphere' first appeared in 2009 in a blog post describing the online network and was made further popular by Ian Ironwood, a porn marketer and author of *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (2013) (Ging, 2017). These connected websites have come to form six distinct sub-groups of members in the MRM: 1) men's rights activists (MRAs) who are strongly influenced by the 1980s MRM and believe they are disadvantaged in society; 2) men going their own way (MGTOW), who abstain from any type of relationship with women; 3) pick-up artists (PUAs), who fashion themselves as dating coaches, often dehumanizing and sexually abusing women (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022; Jane, 2018); 4) traditional Christian conservatives (TradCons); 5) gamers—although notably, Ging (2017) marks that only a subsection of geek and gamer culture exists in the manosphere; and 6) incels, who are sexually rejected by women and are therefore made involuntarily celibate (Krendel, 2020; Ging, 2017). It is also valuable to note that, while

2 Although impacted by under-reporting, statistics in Canada show that intimate partner violence overwhelmingly happens to women. In 2019, 79% of people who experienced intimate partner violence were women (Government of Canada, 2022).

there are several overlaps between ideology and beliefs between these distinct groups, there is also significant in-fighting (Ging, 2017). For example, MRAs and PUAs will "exaggerate their differences in displays of infight posturing" even though they share significant ideological overlap (Ging, 2017, p. 644).

The grounding philosophy for these groups is what they refer to as the "red pill", appropriately gaining widespread popularity and finding a home on the Reddit forum r/TheRedPill.[3] The red pill is an analogy pulled from a scene in the Wachowski sisters' film *The Matrix* (1999) in which the main character, Neo (Keanu Reeves), is given the option of taking two pills: one red, and one blue. The blue pill "means switching off and living a life of delusion; [whereas] taking the red pill means becoming enlightened to life's ugly truths" (Ging, 2017, p. 640).[4] Often, the red pill is related to ideologies of conservatism, like Republicanism, whereas the blue pill is related to left-leaning liberals (Al-Rawi, 2021). In the case of the manosphere, they have chosen what they believe is the red pill. However, rather than revealing life's ugly truths, the red pill in this context reveals the truth about gendered relations: feminism "disguises the truth of male exploitation and oppression" (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, p. 89). Feminism is creating the illusion that ordinary men are oppressed, but these men have woken up. Funnily enough, the qualms that are cited as men's issues on r/TheRedPill—like taxes, the only-male draft, child support and alimony—are all the result of state interference in intimate life, not feminists (Van Valkenburgh, 2021).

The manosphere and, in particular, men who self-identify as involuntarily celibate (incels) have become vast topics of critical analysis, assessment and reproach for communication and feminist theorists. This uptake in research can be attributed to a point of no return for the manosphere: the widespread coverage of the deadly 2014 Isla Vista shooting in California, USA (Srinivasan, 2020). This incident saw Elliot Rodger, a self-described incel, go on a rampage meant to target "spoiled, stuck-up, blonde [sluts]" (Srinivasan, 2020, p. 76), ultimately killing seven and injuring 14. Similarly violent events

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[3] Currently on Reddit, this community is under "quarantine". In order to access it, one must confirm they would like to enter and are given the warning that "[the subreddit] is dedicated to shocking or highly offensive content." Notably, rule no. 10 on r/TheRedPill is "do not identify yourself as a woman."

[4] Both Wachowski sisters, who made *The Matrix* and its sequels, are transgender—it is widely speculated that the red pill is allegory for being trans in a society that regulates gender so highly (Currin et. al, 2017).

happened on April 23, 2018, in Toronto, Canada when Alek Minassian drove a van through crowds of people, killing 10 and injuring 14 (Baele et. al, 2021). News networks soon revealed that Minassian had posted on Facebook just before the attack, stating "[t]he Incel Rebellion has already begun!... All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!" (Yang, 2018). While these are deadly examples of incel beliefs at work, "the extremist and mundane versions of various ideologies are in fact the same ideology" (Marwick & Caplan, 2016, p. 547). That is to say, the manosphere has created an insular subculture where targeted harassment and violence against women is a norm, both online and off. Of these websites, Elliot Rodger wrote in his manifesto that they "confirmed many of the theories [he] had about how wicked and degenerate women really are" (Val Valkenburgh, 2021, p. 85, quoting Rodger, 2014). Critical work on the topic of inceldom and men's rights organizations has largely (and justifiably) focused on a multitude of issues, including their violent rhetoric (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Byerley, 2021); male entitlement and masculinities (Ging, 2019); and men's perceived "ruined lives" following accusations of mistreatment or sexual assault (Banet-Weiser, 2021). This thesis, however, aims to address a gap in the literature in the fields of communications and feminist media studies by examining an under-researched area of men's rights and incel communities: women who actively engage in this anti-feminist work, ultimately providing the MRM with legitimacy and bolstering their ideologies, all while presenting their unique, regionally informed femininities and online identities in order to find belonging amongst these groups.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

While the manosphere has, in many ways, captivated scholarship in feminist media studies and communication studies since the establishment of online communities such as TheRedPill in 2012, there is little research exploring the role of women's involvement in the MRM. There has been considerable research done on how this facet of the Internet both functions and impacts women's lives, from networked misogyny and harassment to the discourses of sexual violence propagated by these online groups, that can help us better understand the HBB's motivations, claims to legitimacy, and the messages they disseminate. Several distinct areas of literature have emerged that will assist in assessing and understanding their ideological leanings, beliefs, and self-presentation: one, misogyny as it exists today in its mediated forms, including popular feminism and online harassment; two, sexual assault, victimization, and involuntary celibacy; and three, the ways in which region, race, place, and culture assist in the formation of online identities.

2.1. Mediated Misogyny in the 21st Century

Misogyny is not a new form of sexism in the world: it existed long before the Internet, reified in our cultural institutions like schools and governments. But there are specific ways that misogyny exists in online spaces and as a facet of our increasingly networked cultures (Banet-Weiser, 2019; Mendes et. al, 2019). The working definition of misogyny this thesis takes up comes from the feminist media studies scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser (2019), who defines misogyny by its popularity, networked nature, and omnipresence. For Banet-Weiser, misogyny exists everywhere but is ultimately decentralized as it circulates through dispersed digital channels. In the context of this definition, popular refers to misogyny's maintenance in society as something that is heavily networked and accessible. Misogyny circulates widely through media discourses and platforms but is also popular due to its relationship with what Banet-Weiser refers to as popular feminism. She argues that popular misogyny and popular feminism interact dialectically, acting upon and informing one another. These two concepts operate like—to use a metaphor borrowed from Banet-Weiser—a funhouse mirror. Here, the original image becomes warped when it is reflected back, much like how "the operation of popular feminism [is mimicked by popular misogyny] but the politics [have been flipped and

distorted]" (2015, n.p.). In this context, popular feminism exists as an active force, informed by, and made up of multiple different feminisms that are palatable, highly visible, and easily widespread. Popular misogyny is reactive and changeable, responding to popular feminism within networked contexts (2018a; Mendes et. al, 2019; Holmes & Clayton, 2018). This dialectical relationship is further exacerbated by notions of injury and capacity. In this model, popular feminism may highlight and place emphasis on how women have been *injured* by patriarchy (for example, by highlighting the high rates of sexual assault on university campuses). Popular misogyny will then respond by "[calling] out this injury", arguing that it is actually men who are injured by this narrative (attention to sexual assault on university campuses means all men who attend universities are viewed as potential rapists) (Banet-Weiser, 2018a, p. 45). As Banet-Weiser (2018a) notes, both popular feminism and misogyny may respond to this injury with "individual capacity as a way to suture this wound" (p. 45). In looking at our example of sexual assault on university campuses, both popular feminism and popular misogyny may offer a critique based on individual capacity that would argue university-aged women should behave responsibly at parties and not walk home alone late at night (p. 45). This model is provocative as it demonstrates the ways the relationship between popular feminism and misogyny can be symbiotic, offering a frame to examine how certain types of feminism are necessary to certain types of toxic masculinity, and vice versa. This model is also reciprocal and networked: popular feminism informs popular misogyny through internet-enabled connections, which facilitate a call-and-response interaction between injury and capacity (Banet-Weiser, 2018a). Overall, this interrelated relationship is useful as a tool to better understand the complex interaction between the ideology espoused by the HBB and the dominant notions behind misogyny in the world today. In exploring the concept of misogyny more extensively, this literature review has selected works that address the nuanced world of misogyny as it is today: highly networked in online spaces, and heavily impacted by the current state of feminist thought, which is popularized and further complicated by postfeminist structures. To best address this relationship, this literature review will explore two interrelated iterations of misogyny: postfeminism and misogyny, and misogyny in online spaces.

2.1.1. Postfeminism, Popular Feminism, and Misogyny

Postfeminism and popular feminism have thrust us into a tricky world, as far as parsing through the relationship between feminism, misogyny, and mediated digital cultures goes. To better understand the concept of postfeminism and apply it to the media created by the HBB (and the MRM more generally), this literature review explores multiple works from Rosalind Gill and Sarah Banet-Weiser, two pre-eminent scholars of feminist media studies, to address the concept of postfeminism as it is complicated and intertwined with misogyny and the latter notion of popular feminism. Citing an increase in women's rights generally, the main tenet of a postfeminist outlook is that we have successfully moved beyond all the barriers that second or third-wave feminists faced, effectively rendering feminist inclinations obsolete. Postfeminism is built upon a concept of disavowal: to properly function, it must deny any articulation of feminism—emerging only after this work is complete (Banet-Weiser, 2018a). Despite this more clear-cut articulation of postfeminism, this idea can be complicated further as it is understood best as a *sensibility*—through a critically analytical lens or by viewing postfeminism as a cultural object (Gill, 2017), rather than as a specific epistemology or a historical shift (Gill, 2007; Gill, 2016). As a sensibility, postfeminism is largely resistant to questioning structural inequality, effectively creating space for "an active disavowal of feminism as necessary politics" (Banet-Weiser, 2018b, p. 153; Keller, 2015). Postfeminism cites an emphasis on the individual and free choice and demonstrates a dependency on neoliberal capitalism. The sensibility is marked by a hyper focus on the body as the locus of femininity, rather than identity or action (Gill, 2007). Much like popular feminism, postfeminism is highly networked and represented in media. However, where popular feminism is highly visible within the network and working to "[restructure] feminist politics within neoliberal culture" (Banet-Weiser, 2018a, p. 17), postfeminism is working to erase the visibility of feminist thinking in popular culture and beyond (Banet-Weiser, 2018b; Keller, 2015). Despite this, the two are intertwined: they share structural similarities in that they are both mutually sustaining and focus on the white, middle-class, female subject, and they both subsist on neoliberal capitalism and the individual (Banet-Weiser, 2018b; Gill, 2016). This concept of postfeminism is helpful for thinking within our current contexts, of a moment defined by popular feminism and underscored by popular misogyny. Here, postfeminism can be useful as a tool through which we can interrogate the presence of mainstream feminism as it is represented in media and popular culture

(Gill, 2017). Popular feminism is shockingly visible. This visibility is caused by popular feminist attempts to underline moments of sexism, focus on gender inequality in our institutions (such as #MeToo) and redefine empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2018a; Holmes & Clayton, 2018). However, despite this visibility, popular feminism's mass circulation and focus on tenets of neoliberalism renders it toothless. Because popular feminism works across networks, focuses on individual capacity, and encompasses the most easily transmissible portions of feminist theories, it is easy for misogyny and the structures of patriarchy to undermine. This also undermines grassroots, feminist responses to misogyny. Postfeminism, rather, is framed by disavowals of feminist politics being necessary. It uses feminism as a strategy, it will take feminism into account and then rebuke it (Banet-Weiser, 2018b; Keller, 2015). While popular feminism is using feminist theories in ways that ultimately render them useless, postfeminism uses these theories as a way to prove that feminism is not needed (Banet-Weiser, 2018b; Gill, 2016; Keller, 2015).

As a concept, postfeminism and its interactions with misogyny are motivating tools for the HBB and MRAs: postfeminism provides the HBB with proof that we have moved beyond a need for the "ideological feminism" that they vehemently oppose. As discussed above, postfeminism is complex and multi-faceted: the argument can be made that today it has become synonymous in many ways with a popular feminist outlook and leaves open space for the development and maintenance of misogyny in online spaces. Utilizing these varied, nuanced understandings of postfeminism is useful for thinking about the positionality of the HBB as I explore their dissection of feminist movements and ideologies as well as their attempts to legitimize themselves in the world of men's rights.

2.2. Online Misogyny

Online and digital misogyny is another frontier of patriarchy that is useful to dissect for this thesis. Exploring the world of online misogyny assists in expanding an understanding of the MRM and incel communities online, as previous communications and feminist media studies scholarship has identified online misogyny as a key area where these communities are active. The online world has been highlighted as an area in which misogynistic attacks on female users have escalated, despite the increase of popular feminist claims and displays online (Gill, 2016). What is particularly interesting

about the intersection of the HBB and online misogyny is that previous work on the topic presents these instances as inflicted upon female users. When we apply instances of online misogyny to the HBB, they have the unique experience of most likely experiencing misogyny *while also* being perpetrators of it. In exploring previous scholarly work examining misogyny online, this literature review will focus on *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History* (2016) by Emma A. Jane, which, in addition to using the author's personal experience, extensively addresses the history, development, and visibility of misogynistic acts within online spaces in an expansive depth that allows it to stand out from other works on the topic. This work provides this thesis with a strong historical backbone for the development of online misogyny and lays the groundwork for an exploration of current understandings of misogyny and gendered harassment online.

One of the first key points Jane (2016) offers is that "cyberhate" speech (or, misogynistic comments and online harassment) can be classified as hateful whether the primary intention of the speaker is to 'troll', satirize misogyny, or have fun (2016, p. 22). Trolling has become fodder for entertainment amongst incel groups and members of the 4chan community (a website that is auxiliary to the manosphere). Jane also explores the fact that reports of cyberhate, specifically self-reports, are suspiciously low given its notoriety online. However, despite this, Jane applies a historical lens to gendered harassment online and concludes that comments classified as cyberhate have remained relatively stable and unchanging over time. Largely, these comments concern rape threats or inappropriate comments about the female user's body ("what's the matter? Were you the ugly flat chested girl at school?") and use sex/threats of rape to correct what is viewed as unacceptable behaviour on the part of the female user ("I'm going to a brothel tonight, and I'll be selecting the whore who most looks your age" [2016, p. 27]). While Gamergate (GG)—an often-cited event in the context of feminist media studies and gendered cyberhate that saw female video game critics and creators in 2014 and 2015 relentlessly harassed and threatened online—brought instances of misogyny online to the forefront, the actual content of online gendered cyberhate has not changed (Massanari, 2017; Massanari & Chess, 2018; Mortensen, 2018; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Rather, the instances of abusive, threatening messages and comments have increased greatly (Jane, 2016).

Jane's historical lens also leads us to question how the state of misogyny online developed to the point we are currently at. Here, Jane discusses the history of the

Internet, a space once thought of as radical and utopian by early cyberfeminists (Firestone, 1970; Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1997). The advantage of cyberspace was that, in many ways, it was designed to remove barriers; to create a different world free of the constraints of the body, whether it is marked differently by gender or race or not (Jane, 2016). Now, we understand this is not the case: the Internet cannot escape gendered or racial paradigms that exist in the offline world. Misogyny simply becomes further reified in cyberspace. As Sarah Banet-Weiser has posited, misogyny is a network that circulates and operates interconnectedly, through nodes that encompass our online world and real-life space, making it invisible (2018a). As such, specifically presenting as female or gender non-conforming in spaces where neutral means a white male body can result in targeted harassment. To illustrate this, Jane uses the example of "Tits or GTFO," a phrase commonly used on 4chan that is employed as a response when users identify as female (2016). Here, male users apply the concept of the Internet as a neutral site to punish women who participate in their online space, using this as an argument for the maintenance of masculine spaces untouched by women: either show us your breasts or get out, or show us your breasts and then get out (Jane, 2016). A 4chan user quoted by Jane (2016, p. 47) highlights this contradiction:

> "We are all [anonymous], no face, no gender nothing to set us apart from one another. Equil! [sic] … you being female has no FUCKING RELEVANCE! We don't care what your fucking gender is! To fight this, we invented Tits or GTFO … to shun away the attention whores."

Thus, Jane argues, utopian ideals about identity or bodylessness first touted by anti-racists and feminists about cyberspace have morphed into cultural norms that facilitate misogyny and toxic masculinity on the Internet (2016; Nakamura, 2002).

Focusing now on the specific content of comments and messages, a large portion of online misogyny—as outlined above—exists as an attack on the body. Rape threats in online spaces are so pervasive that Jane has coined a term for them: "rapeglish," a portmanteau of 'rape' and 'English.' Consistently, this "rapeglish" focuses on bodily harm or physical beauty: if it is not a violent rape threat, it is a comment about a woman's looks (ugly, fat), intelligence (stupid, idiot), or sexual proclivity (whore, slut). It is evident that vitriol levelled online is used as a tool to police and control women's online presence. Insults are often used to regain a loss of power following sexual or romantic rejection (Thompson, 2016) or prescriptive and corrective to a presumed

“mistake” in opinion, viewpoint, or action a female user displayed (Jane, 2016). Misogyny focused on the body is pervasive in technology industries outside of the Internet as well, adopted into other areas by tech developers and programmers. Male fantasies like “jacking in” to the network (White, 2018) have continued to be pervasive. In fact, at one 2017 tech conference, a developer revealed that “his virtual reality interface was based on the idea of a man wanting to touch a woman who did not want to be touched” (White, 2018, p. 95), effectively building sexual violence and misogyny into technology.

This is valuable to consider when thinking about the HBB, because this history of gendered online harassment works to place the current men’s rights movement in context. This is the environment that the HBB has grown out of, and it is one that rejects women wholeheartedly. Websites that are ancillary to the broader MRM like 4Chan, as explored above, are rampant with misogynistic abuse. This is also true for websites that are within the manosphere, like the notorious blog Return of Kings (RoK). RoK, now on hiatus, describes itself as a blog for “masculine men.” Articles that have been run on the website take up these forms of misogyny, like an article entitled “7 Ways Women are just like Abandoned Dogs” (Sharpe, 2017). Like other websites within the manosphere, RoK comes with a disclaimer: “women and homosexuals are strongly discouraged from commenting here.” While understanding these forms of gendered online harassment is useful to understand the position the manosphere takes on women’s presence both online and off, it also shows us what is at stake for the HBB when they participate within this community. These forms of harassment that emphasize women’s bodies and sexuality make it exceedingly risky to enter online spaces as women, as the HBB does. As such, the HBB must produce an online identity that offers them legitimacy within the MRM. This is especially useful to consider as the HBB use their femininity to exercise power within the world of the manosphere, whereas outlined above we can see that this is something that female users are often punished for.

2.3. Sexual Assault, Victimization, and Involuntary Celibacy

While instances of online harassment that focus largely on the body have been discussed, there is another valuable area of study that can be applied to the Honey Badger’s attempts to legitimize themselves online as well as how they approach feminist issues and popular feminist talking points: sexual politics in the online world and sexual

assault. Both facets work as throughlines in the manosphere—ultimately, the MRM (and by extension, the existence of the HBB) is entirely produced by sex—who has it, and who is deemed socially acceptable for having it. Yearly conferences that are held to bolster the movement regularly have panels for men who have been "falsely accused," where participants gather to bemoan their "ruined lives" and the perceived horrors of ideological feminism or the "witch hunts" behind the MeToo movement (Banet-Weiser, 2021). Of the most interest to this exploration is how the HBB utilizes the language of popular feminism to frame their own experiences of sexual assault in terms that further embed them into the MRM. For example, in one interview with *Bloomberg*, Karen Straughan states that all the women involved with the HBB have experienced some form of sexual assault. Despite this, they are "not victims," appropriating survivor-centred language used often by sexual assault centres. For the HBB, victimhood is only for feminists: it's how they have established the gender order. Because of feminism, out of fear of being accused of sexual misconduct or labelled as a sexist, men have cowed to the insistences of women being fearful of them, or lacking agency because of them. In exploring this more fully, this literature review will focus on the notion of victimhood in the context of sexual assault and the sexual politics that ground involuntary celibacy.

2.3.1. Victimhood

For the purposes of this literature review, I examine the notion of victimhood from a dual perspective: victimhood as it concerns women who have experienced sexual assault in the context of a post-MeToo movement world and victimhood as it is understood and used by men who have been accused of sexual assault. Both notions pull from work by Alison Phipps (2021) and Sarah Banet-Weiser (2021). It is valuable to complicate the notion of "victimhood" in this context as it is a galvanizing point in the men's rights community (Palmer & Subramaniam, 2018) and is often used as a talking point by the HBB. A robust and critical analysis of the history of this term assists with a feminist critical discourse analysis on the Honey Badger Radio in following chapters.

Alison Phipps' article, *White tears, white rage: Victimhood and (as) violence in mainstream feminism* provides a stark overview of "victimhood" in the context of mainstream [popular] feminism, utilizing the #MeToo movement as a placeholder for the concept of 'victim' today. Presenting arguments from Wendy Brown and critics of white feminism, Phipps puts forth a nuanced understanding of victimhood as weaponized by

middle-class white femininity. This is first done through an examination of the act of testimony, fundamental to popular (and white) feminism in the context of sexual violence as it has become a means of reclamation for those who have experienced sexual assault. Testimony is often utilized to reclaim one's subjectivity and control (Phipps, 2021). Despite this, public testimony has become a tool to make Western, white, and middle- to upper-class women visible. In doing so, the image of victimhood today has become synonymous with femininity and whiteness, of "'woman' as an identity based on injury" (2021, p. 82). This is especially evident as victimhood becomes central to popular feminist actions and displays, including the Women's March in 2016 and the popularization of the #MeToo movement, which by and large centred on whiteness and white celebrities (2021).

Further, this notion of victimhood—of an injured whiteness—has been weaponized as a tool of colonization and white supremacy to maintain norms of sexual politics and racial hierarchy. Phipps cites several examples of weaponized white victimhood (or "Strategic White Womanhood"), including the lynching of Emmett Till, in which the protection of a white woman's "purity" and safety led to the violent death of a young Black boy, and the tears of former Prime Minister Theresa May during her resignation despite a glaring record of maintaining inequality and profiting off the backs of the working class [Phipps quoting Hamad, 2021, p. 84]). The argument made by Phipps is strong: white women are perceived as victims socially and receive cultural and public power depending on how this de facto status of the victim is wielded, whether it be to cement the white supremacist aims of the state or to avoid personal accountability (2021). This is a valuable factor to consider when applying this understanding of victimhood to the HBB: as (largely) middle-class white women, they can decide when and how (whether subconsciously or not) to wield this "victim" status. This understanding of victimhood explores a clear power dynamic at play for white women like the HBB, particularly when placed within incel sexual politics, which frequently uses phrenological and race-based arguments to justify their celibacy and anger. The HBB bases their strategic uses of victimhood on their own experiences as they are situated regionally and politically, meaning that how they wield victimhood has been informed by their experiences of both place and race. The HBB are located generally within Western Canada, making their understanding of victimhood positioned within the context of both settler colonialism and resource extraction-based economies that rule the West.

Additionally, their understanding of what makes a victim is also highly nuanced: they wield the pejorative of being a victim strongly, while also utilizing their tears and status as white women strategically.

Sarah Banet-Weiser puts forth a related understanding of victimhood in her article *'Ruined' Lives: Mediated White Male Victimhood* (2021). Here, Banet-Weiser explores how men utilize the framework of victimhood following the "fall out" of the #MeToo movement or other highly visible sexual assault cases, such as the trial of Brock Turner. She analyses the public statements high-profile men have put out following such allegations. Whereas the terminology of "victim" had previous derogatory connotations when used by groups in power (such as "victim feminism" [p. 61]), it is now used to renegotiate and resettle a perceived loss of power (Banet-Weiser, 2018a; Banet-Weiser, 2021). Here, we see white men appropriate the concept of victimhood from feminist theory, both in their language and their method. Identifying injury publicly was a cornerstone of the second-wave feminist movement, developed through the confessional method of consciousness raising (Phipps, 2021; Brown, 1995). By utilizing the format of a public statement, men are able to position themselves both as a part of and in control of public discourse. The public apology also puts into action the spectre of "the lying woman" and establishes men as truth-tellers, drawing upon legal and moral norms in which male dominance is the status quo (Banet-Weiser, 2021, p. 64). This genre of public statement does not ask for forgiveness or offer apology, but rather "shore[s] up dominant dynamics of power" (p. 64). These new notions of victimhood do not end at the public statement: they are also adapted within the world of the manosphere, where they have become vastly popular, particularly with men's rights organizations that are increasingly concerned with single men and sexual assault. Here, the trope of the scorned woman—or feminist—hoping to gain advantage from making an accusation of sexual assault runs wild as networked misogyny abounds. Men's rights organizations profit and build membership from highly visible and widely circulated stories of false accusations, whether they are statistically accurate or not (2021). The claim that men's rights organizations attempt to make, which is that false rape accusations are widespread and repeatedly produce instances of injustice (or ruined lives), is a useful tool to co-opt the terminology of victimhood as a means to resettle power dynamics but also to draw attention away from structural issues like patriarchy by placing blame on individuals rather than systems of power (2021). Because of the extensive popularity of

male victimhood—especially considering how it is weaponized within the manosphere—this is a useful and complementary exploration to Phipps' discussion above. Both concepts of "the victim", either through men's claims to victimhood or white women's, inform the HBB's positionality when they publicly discuss victimhood. Oftentimes, their use of the victim is in the context of describing the position feminists have put other women in—but it also informs how they view men and their activism as men's rights activists. This is not to suggest that men cannot experience victimhood, but that the injustices that men experience are not systemic in ways like how the patriarchy impacts gender and sexual minorities. These dual understandings also speak to the nuance of the term victim as it is positioned within the manosphere. Victimhood here, and for the HBB, is something men *lack* but women have *too much of.* While feminist media scholars like Banet-Weiser suggest that victimhood as a status grants men power, the HBB believes men cannot be viewed by others in society this way. As such, both Phipps' and Banet-Weiser's understandings directly impact and inform how the HBB approaches questions of sexual assault, the concept of "the victim," and sexual politics in the manosphere.

2.4. The Intersections of Online Identities, Race, Culture, and Place: Cybertyping Western Canadian Femininities

Because the subject of this research pertains to a specific geographical area and a distinct part of Canada, it is critical to consider the roles regionality, race, and culture play in the HBB's engagements with the men's rights community and with femininity as white women. To explore these relationships further, this research employs notions presented by Lisa Nakamura in *Cybertypes* (2002), as well as Tara McPherson in *Reconstructing Dixie* (2003), and Sara O'Shaughnessy and Göze Doğu's chapter in the edited work *First World Petro-Politics* (2016). Nakamura's theories engage with the question of how race is presented online, understanding the Internet to be a site of both visual and written discourses that produces "cybertypes," or racial identities that are ratified by the Internet (2002). For Nakamura, the Internet provides users with a means to "pass" in rhetorical spaces and communities, to present as a privileged individual online (whether this is true or not). This grants users the ability to engage in "identity tourism" by participating in online spaces as a race you are not, often flattening race through racial stereotypes (2002). Fundamentally, for Nakamura, the Internet is a space

through which racial formation—and racism—happen. It is not a void in which identity disappears, but rather one in which identity is both *used* and *formed*. In pushing this notion of online cybertypes further, this research situates Nakamura's understanding of cybertypes in the context of white Western Canadian femininity, identifying the ways the HBB utilizes and presents race within their online sphere of influence. This understanding of the cybertype in the context of the HBB is useful because it allows us to see how the HBB has come to form their distinct online identities, and how these identities are wielded online.

Complimenting this understanding of Nakamura's cybertype is the work presented in McPherson's *Reconstructing Dixie* (2003). Here, McPherson puts forth a regionally specific image of white femininity that is present in the American South, utilizing the concept of femininity as a lens through which one can examine the relationship between race, gender, and region (2002). McPherson's analysis is furthered by an understanding of how femininity can be used to maintain political and social organization, particularly in the context of racial projects such as integration (2002). Extending McPherson's study of the American South to the context of Western Canada, white femininity plays a structuring role in the practice and maintenance of ongoing settler colonization and destructive resource extraction. For McPherson, images of femininity are not necessarily embodied by every Southern woman, rather, they are figures against which women evaluate their lives; they are "more ideology than reality" (2002, p. 152).

A key to understanding this relationship and the specific ways the HBB may present themselves online, as informed by place and social politics within that region, can be extrapolated from Sara O'Shaughnessy and Göze Doğu's chapter "The Gendered and Racialized Subjects of Alberta's Boomtown" in *First World Petro-Politics: The Political Ecology and Governance of Alberta* (2016), edited by Laurie Adkin. Using the approach of a feminist political ecology, O'Shaughnessy and Doğu examine how gender is established and changed by social, economic, and environmental shifts in Fort McMurray, Alberta, the heart of the Alberta tar sands (2016). While no members of the HBB are from Fort McMurray, the majority of them are from Western Canada (notably Karen Straughan from Edmonton and Alison Tieman from Saskatchewan), a part of the country that has palpably felt and been shaped by the boom-and-bust economy of the oil and gas industry. By and large, oil sands development and resource extraction in

Western Canada is premised on the belief that productivity results in wealth and well-being, which ultimately celebrates “masculine form[s] of labour and a masculine relationship of domination of nature that harkens back to colonial settlement” (2016, p. 271). O’Shaughnessy and Doğu put forth that the types of gendered relations seen in Fort McMurray are informed by what the *men do*. Masculinity, especially blue-collar and working class, or what they refer to as frontier masculinity, is a product of the type of labour men engage in within the region. This form of masculinity presents men as “strong, rugged, self-sufficient—conquering the dangerous wilderness in the hope of striking it rich” (2016, p. 268). In the Canadian context, frontier masculinity is anything but feminine, urban, and racialized, it is “defined against all that is deemed incapable of enduring the tough conditions of the frontier” (2016, p. 268). This leaves feminine identities to be articulated through men’s labour, and representations of women typically oscillate between a “good helpmate” and “bad woman” (2016). Here, the good helpmate is one who can withstand harsh conditions and work while maintaining households and communities. Informed by strong family values, women make a career of maintaining the home and children so that their male counterparts can be fully dedicated to resource extraction (2016). On the other hand, the bad woman is defined by sexuality and exists to fulfil the sexual fantasies of the frontier man. These two complex types of femininity present in Fort McMurray are not exhaustive or widespread across Western Canada, but they play a role in how femininity comes to be represented regionally to maintain certain socio-economic and political ideals. These gendered structures present a valuable intervention into the work done by the HBB, as the group utilizes images like the good helpmate across digital spaces to grant themselves legitimacy and maintain their position in the manosphere. In applying these notions to this thesis, a combined understanding of Nakamura’s cybertype with the regionally specific concepts presented by McPherson, O’Shaughnessy, and Doğu are fully employed to illustrate and extrapolate the contours of regionalism, gender, and whiteness that are produced by the HBB. These theoretical handholds, as well as the ones above—mediated, popular misogyny and feminism; the structures of postfeminism and popular feminism; gendered online harassment; and discourses of victimhood surrounding race and sexual assault—are all useful frameworks for thinking about how the HBB operates within the MRM and will be used in-depth in the coming chapters and assist in guiding the results of my feminist critical discourse analysis.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The HBB's podcast and YouTube channel, both sharing the name Honey Badger Radio, are the primary means through which the group communicates with their listeners and presents their viewpoints and ideology to the world. Through this venture, individual group members involve themselves in different, interrelated projects that revolve around topics within the manosphere. Some segments focus on men's health, for example, which discusses the benefits and downsides of therapy as well as a disproportionately high male suicide rate; and there is a specialized segment dedicated to "deprogramming women" from their learned feminist ideologies. New episodes of the podcast are released every 1 to 2 days and vary in length from multiple hours to under ten minutes. Often, episodes are released in succession on the same day. Typically, these podcast episodes cover a wide range of subjects: discussions oscillate between anti-feminism (with episode titles such as "Feminists Hate This One Fact About Sex Trafficking" [2022]) to current events that fit their narrative and help legitimize themselves in the world of the far right online ("Plague, Riots and Cancel Culture, oh my!" [2020]). Through these channels, the HBB have developed a sizable reach: approximately 50,000 followers across their platforms have access to live streams of Honey Badger Radio. The episodes typically air live on their YouTube, Facebook, and Twitch channels, and listeners can access archived versions of the episodes on their website and other streaming platforms, such as Spotify. A select few paid subscribers (131 at the time of writing) are additionally able to access restricted content from the podcast and receive entry to the dedicated Honey Badger Discord and Minecraft servers through the membership platform Patreon or the HBB's online store, aptly known as "Feed the Badger." At the time of writing, the HBB brings in $1,286 CAD per radio show based on their Patreon subscribers alone and receives more through view monetization and crowdfunding.

The HBB's YouTube channel is one of the most expansive records of their podcast and other enterprises. Joining the website on October 20, 2013, the group has amassed ~10 million views over roughly 1,130 videos spanning nine years. These YouTube videos are largely made up of full-length live streams of Honey Badger Radio, which can last up to 4 hours in some cases. The channel also features smaller snippets and interviews the group has clipped from the podcast that are under 30 minutes, as well

as a handful of stray videos that have been released exclusively on YouTube that are not connected to Honey Badger Radio itself. YouTube provides some measure of the HBB's reach through the platform's metrics, where each video is ranked by the number of views it receives. By examining this data through the framework of a feminist critical discourse analysis, this thesis pursues the following research questions: what steps do the Honey Badger Brigade take to provide themselves with legitimacy in the world of men's rights activism? How does the Honey Badger Brigade engage with and present Western Canadian femininities across its platforms? What does the Honey Badger Brigade's engagement with the MRM and the manosphere reveal about white femininity? This chapter will additionally explore the theoretical approach that informs my methodology, the method, and the structure of the method that I have selected to use, the means through which my data was collected, as well as the results from my feminist critical discourse analysis.

3.1. Overview of Methodology

Critical discourse analysis understands discourse as a social rather than linguistic category, wherein language is a social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and emphasis is placed on the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA as a method is most widely used for examinations of texts through which one considers the roles of institutional, political, and gendered discourses that exemplify "relations of struggle and conflict" (Wodak & Meyer 2001, p. 2). As a critical method, CDA engages in three concepts as it interrogates language: power, history, and ideology (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). It does so to lay bare structural inequalities and relationships of dominance and control. I have selected to do a critical discourse analysis (CDA) because of the particular attention this method pays to constructions of power and ideology within texts. I believe this methodology pairs nicely with the theoretical framework I have outlined above, which when applied to Honey Badger Radio presents a site through which power structures, place, race, and class are communicated. In addition to traditional CDA frameworks, this method will apply an explicitly feminist understanding to discourse analysis. In engaging with a strong feminist theoretical framework, this research takes up the sub-discipline of feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) to examine the language presented on Honey Badger Radio. This application of discourse analysis is informed by the works of Michelle Lazar (2007;

2014), with additional support from Allison Harvey (2019) and Liesbet Van Zoonen (1994) regarding the epistemological basis of the field of feminist media studies more broadly. In addressing this form of critical discourse analysis, I will explore the relevant literature below.

3.1.1. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

While I am engaging in a CDA, I have chosen to identify this methodology as one that is explicitly feminist. This consideration fits in line with my outlined theoretical framework, in which Banet-Weiser's understanding of a popular and networked feminism and networked misogyny is key. Feminist CDA (FCDA) is most suitable for my analysis because it is grounded within a feminist epistemology. The reasoning behind utilizing an FCDA framework rather than conducting a traditional CDA is that not all CDA that deals with gendered issues is necessarily *feminist*. FCDA, however, deals with gender explicitly from a perspective that is already permeated by feminist theory (Lazar, 2007). Engaging with FCDA as a methodology allows me to align this research with broader frameworks within feminist media studies. As a praxis, feminist media studies utilize an intersectional approach, in which one's experience with oppression is informed by race, class, and gender, to understand how gender is represented, communicated, and understood within media (Harvey, 2019; Van Zooten, 1994). Ultimately, the method of FCDA and its wider attachment to the field of feminist media studies are both academically relevant to my research questions, which place issues of gender, power, and identity at the centre of their inquiries. Using these frameworks to treat and examine the language used by the HBB on their podcast has allowed me to better extricate the broader relationships the group seeks to develop with the manosphere (and understand their communication as situated within imperialist, white supremacist hetero-capitalist patriarchy [Hooks, 1994]).

Michelle Lazar, one of the most prolific scholars in the field of FCDA, acknowledges that when CDA is used as an approach to discuss gender, the theories and methods remain unchanged. However, FCDA as a sub-discipline is flexible, and alters when engaged within a feminist activist framework (2014). FCDA is a deliberate off-shoot of CDA that considers and applies feminist theory in its analysis of discourse (Lazar, 2007). This is done to politicize gender—in other words, to analyse gendered power dynamics by centring critical theories of oppression (Lazar, 2007). Additionally,

FCDA acknowledges that gender disparities and misogyny are both materially and symbolically enacted under patriarchal systems (Lazar, 2014), including within and through language structures. FCDA addresses how gender operates in a more "pervasive and complex way than other systems of oppression" (Lazar, 2007, p. 3) and works to demystify the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology within discourse. Unlike other feminist approaches within the study of gender and language, FCDA operates "within a politically invested, socially explanatory program of discourse analysis" that isolates gender as a factor in its investigation of social worlds (Lazar, 2014, p.3; Wodak, 2008). As Ruth Wodak (2008) points out, CDA concerns itself with questions such as "how do we study the context of our texts, of the social problems we would like to tackle?", whereas FCDA adds a dimension to these integral questions, asking "how and in which way does gender come into play when studying texts in contexts?" and "how do we define and operationalise 'gendered discourses' or the influence of gender on communication?" (p. 194).

In theorizing an FCDA, Michelle Lazar has laid out a guiding framework of five principles to follow while conducting one's research or analyses. Undertaking these principles have allowed me to situate feminism in this thesis as a grounding and guiding epistemology, and when applied to my scrutiny of Honey Badger Radio, has allowed me to situate their work within feminist theory. The first of these frameworks is feminist analytical activism. Here, those engaged in FCDA acknowledge that there are highly gendered social practices that exist on two levels: one, that gender is an interpretive category that enables participants to make sense of and structure social practices; and two, that gender is a social relation itself that partially constitutes other social relations and activities (Lazar, 2007; 2014). Feminist critiques should be aimed at creating or nurturing social transformations and conducting FCDA that reveals the inner workings of power and social structures exists as a form of analytical activism. FCDA is critical praxis-oriented research, "making its political stance a part of its argument" (Lazar, 2007; 2014, p. 6).

FCDA's second framework posits that gender itself is an ideological structure. Here, FCDA recognizes that dominant ideologies are formed from perspectives to maintain unequal power relations, including gender. Gender within our current social systems is essentialist and divides individuals into two dominant classes of men and women. In this binary, both gender classes are upheld through social expectations that

differ depending on time and place. Additionally, as with all ideological structures and norms, gender exists as something that is naturalized, it appears as consensual. It is also upheld structurally, meaning gender is both “enacted and renewed” (2007, p. 7) within institutions and social practices. Despite these socially embedded infrastructures, gender as an ideology can also be contested: individuals can deviate from these norms. However, Lazar notes that deviations should be carefully considered and examined (2007; 2014). Such deviations, and the interrogation of them, have been a central focus of this thesis as the HBB exist within male-dominated communities and seemingly reject specific aspects of femininity.

Thirdly, there is an acknowledged complexity of gender and power relations. Here, an FCDA framework works to recognize how sexism and patriarchy are covert and everchanging: power is everywhere, and impacts subjects in different ways. In response to this, FCDA should engage with a variety of aspects related to power relations, including how individuals resist dominant ideologies. Broadly speaking, the theoretical approach that provides structure to this thesis engages heavily with this framework in its examination of patriarchal systems within media studies. An example of this is within Banet-Weiser’s work, which understands misogyny as a clandestine force that acts upon, and in tandem with, popular feminism. These dynamic understandings of feminism and misogyny inform this thesis as well as the work conducted in this FCDA. Additionally, power is discursive and impacts women differently, so FCDA should not universalize women’s experiences (2007; 2014; Wodak, 2008).

The fourth principle of FCDA is the (de)construction of gender. Here, FCDA views discourse as an element of social practice and examines how gender ideology gets reproduced, negotiated, and contested vis-a-vis representations of social practices. This is done through gender relationality, by not only looking at feminist discourses but also how members of all genders relate to one another. This principle also acknowledges that FCDA—like CDA generally—is a highly interdisciplinary methodology (Lazar 2007; 2014). In taking this principle up in my own FCDA, I acknowledge the ways in which the HBB are tied to the larger manosphere, and how this entwinement functions and reflects upon their own worldviews. Finally, FCDA acknowledges and highlights critical reflexivity as praxis. In this sense, reflexivity refers to individuals using knowledge about social processes in ways that shape their practices. FCDA should examine this reflexivity critically, whether within an institution’s practices or in one’s practices. When

considering one's reflexivity, it's valuable for researchers to be aware of their theoretical positions to not perpetuate harm (2007; 2014). As such, it is valuable to note that, as a white woman from Western Canada (in particular, Alberta) my own lived experience has shaped the way I have both viewed and conducted this FCDA. I understand the political leanings of the HBB's on a level that an outsider may not. Additionally, this thesis takes up theories that critically examine race and settler-colonialism. As a white settler I have written this thesis in amiskwaciy-wâskahikan (Edmonton), Treaty 6 territory and unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem) and Katzie Nations. It is valuable for me to acknowledge that, while this work acknowledges the impacts of settler-colonialism, I also practice self-reflexivity in understanding my role as a settler on these lands.

Like any methodology, some strengths and limitations come alongside conducting an FCDA. By and large, criticisms of FCDA itself highlight that, due to FCDA's constraining focus on gender, other identities have the potential to be ignored and differing positionalities neglected (Wodak, 2008). In addressing these criticisms, Ruth Wodak (2008) highlights FCDA's potential for working more interdisciplinarily through other disciplines, genres, and texts to integrate different perspectives concerning identity. I adopted this interdisciplinary approach to FCDA in my analysis: a significant portion of my theoretical undergirding—as well as close analysis in the coming chapters—pulls from broader concepts in media theory, such as conceptions of the Internet and the network, to better understand how these concepts approach gendered relationships. Because of this adoption of more diverse, interdisciplinary work, applying an FCDA framework to these episodes of Honey Badger Radio helps to mitigate these limitations.

3.2. Data Collection

To conduct an analysis of Honey Badger Radio within the scope of a master's thesis, I have aggregated the data by taking a sample from each year the YouTube channel has been active up until the end of 2021 (for clarity, this date range is from October 20, 2013 – December 2021). Because there is a large variance in the total run time of HBB videos, I wanted to be able to balance the amount of time selected from each video. Older uploaded episodes can exceed 3-4 hours, whereas newer videos are often as short as 5-7 minutes, making a time limit valuable to implement. To accommodate for

this disparity, I allotted a total run time of 90 minutes per year. I also made my selection based on YouTube's engagement metrics by choosing the top viewed videos posted to the HBB's channel in that calendar year. This was done to examine the HBB's most widespread and successful messaging. For older, popular videos exceeding this run time, I selected a 15-minute sound bite from each by selecting audio from the 10-minute mark to the 25-minute mark. This random selection of 15 minutes ensures I have an equal amount of data for each year, as well as ensures that I am not "cherry picking" data to use in my FCDA. In cases where the total run time of videos tended to be shorter (5-7 minutes), I selected more to meet the 90 minutes per year quota I had established. This resulted in a data set of 54 videos in total—6-8 from each year. I have set an equal amount of speaking time each year and enough diversity in subject matter to have an even spread of content. Additionally, by pulling data from individual years, it is possible to see whether the Honey Badger's politics and anti-feminist stances have evolved and adapted over time, especially when looking at how they present themselves with changing attitudes and movements concerning feminism and sexual violence, like the advent of #MeToo in 2017.

Following the selection of my data, the episodes had to be transcribed to create a body of text from which I could conduct my FCDA. I downloaded each video using youtube-dl, a command-line program that was accessed through GitHub and uses Python. Next, I used FFmpeg, an open-source software, to convert the video files into .mp3 audio files. Finally, to make these audio file into text transcripts, I utilized an audio-to-text transcription software called Otter.ai. From here, I collected all of the text files from Otter.ai and inputted them individually into the software NVivo, which is used for qualitative research. Using NVivo, I categorized key sections of text as I read the transcripts, which meant I was able to engage in a form of coding where I could group similar sections of text into distinct discourse strands or categories. As I read through the text of each episode, I simultaneously listened along with the original audio to make notes on turn-taking, intonation, and tone. I used methods from grounded theory to identify the categories of discourse within my FCDA, meaning I allowed these discourse strands to appear naturally as I conducted two critical, close readings of my data corpus. In conducting this reading, I asked questions of the text, such as: how is femininity reflected and/or performed within these texts, and in what ways? How do these texts engage with and represent feminism and concepts from feminist theory? How are place,

race, and culture represented? How does this discourse reflect dominant ideologies about gendered relations? From these close readings, the categories of discourse strands I formed were somewhat broad, in order to capture all sentiments related. Due to the highly discursive nature of language, however, these categories were not mutually exclusive, allowing the language to flow through the categories. This coding process occurred twice, once as an initial read-through and again, in order to ensure I had reached saturation with my data—meaning I had exhausted all of the possibilities for coding discourse strands. Using NVivo, I was able to visualize the presence of these discourses in each episode as well as the total coverage each particular discourse strand had through the whole corpus of my sample. This made it easier for me to determine which episodes may deal with certain subject matter better than others, to better pinpoint when and why the group was discussing a certain topic. Using NVivo for my FCDA allowed me to organize these themes and locate references with ease.

3.3. Summary of Results

In total, I identified nine major overarching discourse strands within the episodes I had selected, and coded for six tones, to assist with my FCDA. These discourse strands are 1. anti-feminist theory, 2. derogatory/misogynistic language about other women, 3. allegiances, 4. discourse surrounding sexual assault, 5. the politics of intimate life, 6. the use of feminist theory or elements of popular feminism, 7. the use of logic, 8. shame, and finally, 9. personal experiences. These tones were 1. angry, 2. apologetic, 3. crying or sad, 4. happy, or excited, 5. mocking, and 6. sarcasm or use of humour. Of these discourse strands, I want to distinguish the purposes behind each categorization. Some of these categories the HBB are using as “guaranteed returns”—meaning their invocation or discussion in an episode will result in mass appeal from their viewership. In other words, going on a rant about sexual assault or opining the loss of parental rights is a sure-fire way to boost views, comments, and likes, because these subjects are often used as rallying cries within the broader manosphere. In other cases, the HBB are using these discourses as a way to cement and further their ideology (such as the sentiments they put forth in discussions that are anti-feminist and misogynist). Here, I will give a summary of the results of my FCDA, as well as examples pulled from episodes of Honey Badger Radio to best represent the discourse strands, I was able to locate within my data.

I identified the two discourse strands of anti-feminist theory and derogatory/misogynistic language about other women to collect and pinpoint exactly what the HBB's aims were in addressing feminism as well as womanhood more broadly. The majority of the language used by the group here revolves around a notion of "victimhood" and is built on their understanding of feminism being an ideological strategy that is used primarily to keep men down. A clear example of this comes from the 2019 episode "The Curse of the Catabolic Feminine - Deprogramming Women," in which Alison Tieman puts forth her own gender-based theory of why feminists behave the way they do, using the metaphor of the metabolic system as a map onto today's society. In this context, feminists are a catabolic force (the function within the body that works to break down molecules):

> Tieman: So now we come to the two main feminine archetypes and their role in building, maintaining and ultimately destroying society. The catabolic, feminine archetype, which induces a strong desire to pursue altruistic punishment in men. Again, that's the main avenue by which you compel a normal, peaceful man to shove a gun in another man's face and pull the trigger. The catabolic, feminine archetype is the archetype of a woman done wrong. She is a victim of the enemy. She reclines limp, with horror and suffering, unable to fight or do much but whimper pitilessly about her situation, which she can't possibly overcome by her own efforts. Or if she's more bitter, she might whine loudly and incessantly about everything that's been done to her and how nothing is within her ability to change. And it's all men's fault. All men are to blame, because they either aren't saving her or they're causing the trouble in the first place. And incidentally, if men didn't exist, they wouldn't have to save her so they can't even expect, to expect gratitude for having done so. Regardless, she compels men to constantly look for an enemy to vanquish. (10:41-11:53)

By using a metaphor from the body, Tieman puts forth a catachresis that is a hyper-essentialist understanding of gender relations. She is suggesting that these functions are innate, that they cannot be changed, and that they are a part of a greater system. The catabolic archetype functions just like feminists do: to break down men and masculinity. It's this innate function that drives feminists towards victimhood and that drives men to be violent towards each other. Ultimately, this is one example of the gender essentialism the HBB both believe in and employ in their work.

Secondly, I identified the discourse strand of allegiances. This strand revolves around the rapport the HBB attempted to establish with guests, or individuals and groups mentioned on the podcast itself. The HBB largely use these allegiances to identify who is

of value to them and gain further notoriety within the MRM. Examination of this strand reveals a wide range of individuals. The HBB often connect themselves with fellow members on some gradient of the manosphere. For example, they have drawn ties to YouTube/content creators like Carl Benjamin (known online as Sargon of Akkad) who is notorious for his videos on anti-feminism as well as open harassment of Anita Sarkeesian. They have similarly drawn ties to Jordan Peterson, who is arguably a more liminal or gateway figure into the manosphere. Occasionally, the HBB will make connections to mainstream figures like Nelson Mandela, for whom the HBB held a moment of silence for during their episode “Bronies and the Shame Game” (2013). While this line drawn to Mandela may have been a way for the HBB to connect themselves to current events at the time, it also is emblematic of an attempt to align themselves with power and become identified as anti-racist (despite what they say on Honey Badger Radio).

As mentioned above, the discourses of sexual assault and the politics of intimate life are primarily used by the HBB as a reliable way to discuss issues they know that their base is interested in. False accusations have long been a sticking point for the manosphere—A Voice for Men (AVfM), one of the men’s rights organizations the HBB are heavily affiliated with, is known to traffic in the complaint that #MeToo is a conspiracy designed to victimize men, a ploy through which men will lose their privilege (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022). AVfM also believes that there is an “epidemic of false rape claims” (Jane, 2018, p. 666), and Straughan has advanced the argument that ideological feminism is to blame for our constant belief in sexual assault victims, resulting in false convictions (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). The spectre of the false accusation is a tried and true tactic for the HBB as well. One of Straughan’s most highly publicized forays with men’s rights groups was the postering of the University of Alberta campus in Edmonton, Alberta by Men’s Rights Edmonton (MRE). The posters in question boldly read “JUST BECAUSE YOU REGRET A ONE NIGHT STAND DOESN’T MEAN IT WASN’T CONSENSUAL… DON’T BE **THAT** GIRL” (Gotell & Dutton, 2016; appendix figure 2), meant to target women who might make false accusations. Local sexual violence organizations in Edmonton were bombarded with phone calls and media requests, bringing a significant amount of public attention to MRE (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). For the record, false accusations are demonstrably rare (although certainly influenced by racial politics, especially as a means through which to maintain racial hierarchies within settler

societies [Srinivasan, 2020])—recent studies determine an estimated 3-5% of allegations made are false (Lisek, 2010, McMillan, 2018). Nonetheless, the HBB continue to espouse claims that both spur on this moral panic about false allegations and minimize experiences of sexual assault. Take, for example, this statement made in the 2020 episode, “Those Rapists Over There - The Reputation of Feminist Men”:

> Hannah Wallen: …Narratives like patriarchy, theory, rape culture and toxic masculinity primed feminist women to feel victimized anytime their interests come into conflict with the interests of a man. How likely is that to lead to a greater number of allegations overall? How likely is it that a greater number of feminists than non-feminists might make allegations that turn out to be frivolous or even blatantly false? How equipped are feminist men to deal with this problem? Would they even be able to admit to themselves that they could be the target of a false allegation if the accuser is female, and feminist? In addition to imposing narratives on boys and young men that robbed them of pathways for developing functional, healthy adult masculinity, feminism takes away their right and ability to properly defend themselves when they are falsely accused. You can't call an allegation false if you're not allowed to imply that the person who made it might be mistaken or worse, lying. (7:45-8:55)

In this section, Hannah is arguing against the proliferation of feminist men in the wake of movements like #MeToo by using false allegations as a way to illustrate that feminists can target them with these fake claims as well. This single paragraph offers a summary of how the HBB use the notion of false allegations and for what aims. They suggest that false rape accusations are inescapable in two distinct ways: first, by highlighting the ‘victimhood complex’ of feminist women as something almost impossible to overcome, and something inherently bad for society, asking “how likely is that to lead to a greater number of allegations overall?” (8:05-8:09). Second, they suggest that men are rendered powerless against false accusations by our current cultural standards— “you’re not allowed to imply that the person who made [the false accusation] might be mistaken or worse, lying,” (8:50-8:55) a direct result of the hyperfocus on feminist victimhood we have today. Therefore, the solution to fighting back against this is to involve yourself in men’s rights.

A similar premise is put forth in the discourse strand on the politics of intimate life. I grouped these discourse strands based on their discussion of state involvement in family life: more specifically, this broadly includes discussions about parental rights and fatherhood, particularly with the question of child custody in divorce. Arguably, much like

false rape accusations, the loss of parental rights is another “gateway” into men’s rights: until recently, father’s rights were the basis of the majority of men’s rights groups organizing, arguing that fatherhood was under attack by feminists (Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Boyd & Young, 2004). Salient examples of this can be found across many HBB episodes, such as the 2015 episode “Anita Will Save Us from Our Sins” in which Hannah Wallen gives a history of custody law and suggests that “feminists accuse fathers of being abusive” (16:56-16:58) and “if dad wants more than an every other weekend visit, he’s in for the fight of his life” (21:56-22:02). A 2013-episode, “Men Going Their Own Way,” remarks that “courts are set up to, to benefit women, particularly wives, in custody disputes and property disputes, and in any accusation situation,” (15:59-16:13) suggesting that courts tend to benefit women in most legal cases where there is an “accusation” (here, referring to sexual assault, but also claims of domestic violence). Despite the HBB’s regular critiques of how spousal rights are lacking for fathers, there is a distinct effort by the state to maintain the traditional family structure by determining who is a father and in what capacity. In Canada, this extends beyond just biological fatherhood, made largely possible due to “paternity-by-presumption” laws (Kelly, 2009). This can include “making” social fathers or granting paternity rights to men who are not biologically related to children but cohabitate with the mother or are in a relationship with the mother within 300 days of the birth of the child (Kelly, 2009). Evidently, spousal and paternity rights are a more complicated beast than the HBB make it out to be.

Feminist theory and the use of popular feminism is an additional discourse strand I teased out while combing through my data and conducting my FCDA. For this, I was particularly interested in seeing what emerged within the language the HBB use to explore feminism, as well as how they may engage with feminist theory, either purposefully or accidentally through misuse. This discourse strand was incredibly useful in understanding both what the HBB understand feminism to be, but also how their own ideology works. The HBB have isolated an outcome from feminism and refuse to expand past it: they truly believe that feminism is the cause of men’s social ills *because* it makes women victims. To illustrate this, the group repeatedly refers to this victimhood as either a “victim complex” or a “persecution complex”—phrases they have used to describe feminists (and women, more broadly) since Honey Badger Radio began airing. Take this discussion, from the 2013 episode, “How to Be a Creep,” in which Straughan discusses gender and controversial findings from pop psychology:

> Straughan: If autism spectrum disorders could be described as the extreme male brain, then these other personality disorders could be described as the extreme female brain, and one of the major symptoms of the extreme female brain was attributing intentionality where it didn't exist. Sort of a, you meant to do that... you meant to do that, you intended that. And, and other things… one of the one of the things that really struck me was, as far as gaze awareness, being aware of other people looking at you, in autism spectrum disorders, according to the, the tests that they do, it's a completely lacking, and then in borderline personality disorder, it manifests as either erotomania or delusions of persecution. And when I think of erotomania and delusions of persecution, and I combine the two, what I get is rape culture. (10:03-11:12)

Here, Straughan is quite explicitly suggesting that rape culture—the pervasive cultural norms and values in society that excuse sexual violence (Laake & Calkins, 2017)—is a symptom of the "extreme female brain," (10:20-10:22) a result of "delusions of persecution" (11:03-11:04) rather than a real societal phenomenon. This understanding of rape culture, a steadfast concept used in feminist theory and popularized academic vernacular (Laake & Calkins, 2017), as belonging to a victimhood complex that infects feminists is telling of how the HBB view feminism more broadly. This belief has continued throughout their lengthy airtime. A similar understanding of feminism and feminist theory is put forth in the 2020 episode "Those Rapists Over There", centred around the feminist maxim of "believe women," which began to circulate in popular culture post-#MeToo:

> Hannah Wallen: Another part is the contribution made by another rule of feminism, "believe women." A lot of young men adopt the feminist label without realizing what it really is. They support equal rights for both sexes and have bought into the myth that women are uniquely oppressed in society. They may have a traditional sense of responsibility for women and girls, and they may be latching on to this ideology thinking it's a battle cry for defending and elevating the people they love. They are unaware that they're looking at an illusion, that the nice face feminism presents to the world is a false one. behind that mask, feminism is a complex female victim narrative based on a conspiracy theory that again, blames all of the ills in the world on the male sex all as a means to gain and maintain political power. (7:00-7:53)

Again, we see a return to the language of "victimhood". This is not to say that there are not notable critiques of feminism—especially second-wave feminism. These critiques suggest that the second-wave's heavy focus on the victimization of women revolved around an ontologised trauma in acts like consciousness-raising, resulting in

“[identities] based on injuries” rather than liberation (Phipps, 2021, p. 83; Brown, 1995). That being said, the HBB are heavily focused on a *motivated* victimhood that, rather than being built on shared experiences in order to raise awareness, is targeted to injure men. In the case above, feminism’s goal is to trick men, as “they are unaware that they’re looking at an illusion” (7:30-7:33) when they look at feminism. It is also the crux of the Honey Badger’s belief system, and what they purport to fight against, to “[maintain political power by blaming] all of the ills in the world on the male sex” (7:45-7:52).

The final two discourses, shame and personal experiences, I have explored more in-depth in the following two chapters. I have selected these two discourses to discuss in length because they reveal valuable insights into how the HBB appeals to and maintains their base of listeners and status in the men’s rights movement, in addition to how the HBB utilize their whiteness for specific means on Honey Badger Radio. These two discourses also reveal the unique ways the HBB engage in this work, as (white, Western Canadian) women involved in men’s rights. These are valuable aspects to evaluate, as they will reveal the motivating factors behind the HBB’s positionality and influence within the broader men’s rights community. For the discourse of shame, I argue that part of the HBB’s grounding ideology is built on shame, and they use this language and affect to grant themselves legitimacy in the MRM as well as to place themselves in a caregiver role, through a narrative of repair for men. For my analysis of how the HBB use their personal experiences on the podcast, I draw on of McPherson (2003) and Nakamura (2002) to argue the HBB carve out a unique cybertype, informed by Western Canadian regionality, as a means through which they can continue to hold power in their space on the Internet.

Chapter 4. Evoking Images of Shame

Shame, typically understood as a negative affect, can have unique repercussions and outcomes for those who feel it. However, shame is not necessarily something someone has (even though this is what our language around shame implies), it is a relational and *social* feeling that can be detached from individual bodies and move between people to create a "felt community" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 101). Shame is distinctly a bodily sensation; it is described as "the body's feeling of being out of place in the everyday" (Probyn 2004, p. 328) and as the "intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself" (Ahmed 2014, p. 103), it is bound up with failure, guilt, and embarrassment. As an affect, shame is harnessed quite palpably by the HBB both as a productive tool (Probyn, 2019) to motivate their listeners as well as to define a clear community by providing a definitive, emotive identity (Ahmed, 2004). They do this not by having their listeners necessarily feel shame—for example, listeners do not "claim" a specific identity through an act of shaming (Ahmed, 2004, p. 101)—but rather, by using shame as a prescriptive lens in which the feeling is applied to a particular group. As Elspeth Probyn notes, shame is an intimate, personal feeling, but shame also has social implications and understandings. In this sense, shame is "not only shame in the presence of others, but can also be shame one feels for them" (2004, p. 330), it is a social feeling. This understanding of shame is also interwoven with our ideas about sex and sexuality. Sexuality, like shame, is ultimately relational (Shadbolt 2009); it is built upon a relatedness that requires others in order to function and perceive difference (Shadbolt 2009). With these conceptions in mind, the HBB use shame as it circulates in relation to men's gendered and sexual relationships and their social encounters with feminists. This is how the HBB understands the process of shaming: they utilize shame as a social function, and in doing so decide when and how men as a social group feel shame, and in what ways. Theorizing on and thinking about these understandings of shame are useful for other feminist media studies scholars, in that understanding how this shame is wielded by the HBB can help expand our understandings of participation within the often violent world of the manosphere. Understanding and unpacking shame in this context is helpful for seeing it as a motivating tool that can form communities based around gendered violence, especially online.

The HBB's worldview revolves around affective, causal, circular theories of shame and victimization. They argue that women today perceive themselves to be victims in a plurality of ways—women are victims of sexual assault ("if you don't want to be victimized don't dress like this, like sluts" [#LiftHerUp #BecauseShe'sJustaGirl, 2016, 11:03-11:06]) and victims of patriarchy ("[in]... this idea of patriarchy, women see themselves as victims" [The Beauty of Male Sexuality, 2014, 24:50-25:01). Women's victimhood exists as a means to obfuscate male victimhood both historically and today ("I can't even begin to count the number of feminists who have told me male disposability doesn't exist" [Hatred Never Looked So Cute!, 21:50-21:58]). For the HBB, it is exactly this victimhood that supposedly "shames" and blames men; because women today are so ideologically aligned with feminism, any actions that men take are villainized as anti-women. It is also because of this shame that men are the true victims of patriarchy, but because of feminism, this victimhood cannot be recognized by the general population.

Shame itself is a powerful feeling: it is motivating, prescriptive, and identity forming. But there is a clear difference between experiencing shame on an individual or group level and having shame determined for you by another. As Sara Ahmed writes, detaching shame from individual bodies and applying it to a distinct group does "a kind of work within [a] narrative" (2004 p. 102). The concept of shame that the HBB utilize when discussing male victims of feminism engages in this idea of specific "work" by separating male listeners from others and implicating these listeners as a distinct group. By doing this, shame becomes a way to build a distinct community (Ahmed, 2004). This understanding of shame is most present in the HBB's work, and the language they espouse on Honey Badger Radio makes this type of shame real. This shame functions as a narrative that is reproduced again and again to create a viable community of MRAs (Ahmed 2004). The primary way the HBB utilize this concept of shame is by defining who *is* and who *is not* shamed, and exactly what the image of a "shamed man" may look like. They utilize shame in this way in order to control the narrative over who exactly feels shame and when. By using shame in this way, the HBB are able to position themselves as working tirelessly to refute shame as an audience recruitment strategy—following them can make you free of shame.

4.1. Defining Who Is and Who Is Not Shamed: Roman Soldier or Hidden in Mommy's Basement?

To use shame as a tool to mobilize or form a base, the HBB must identify what exactly the image of the "shamed man" is, and how this effectively functions in contradistinction to the stereotype of the victimized woman, or feminist, that the HBB also put forth. The formation of the image of the "shamed man," while explored in detail below, is broadly defined by the failure to comply with behaviours or physical attributes socially expected of men. For example, one of the clearest ways the HBB begin to develop this image is by bumping up against popular, widespread memes of what MRAs, incels, or pick-up artists look like or how they behave, paying particular attention to how feminists or critics online frame these groups as well as how they frame themselves in contrast to dominant narratives of masculinity in popular culture. To be more specific, the HBB attribute shame to men who are not "manly enough" or who do not abide by social norms of masculinity (for example, men who watch and are fans of the show *My Little Pony* [Schmitz & Kazyak 2016]). In building their image of a man who experiences shame, the HBB are working within the confines of what feminist theory would refer to as "hegemonic masculinity" —that is, an acknowledgement that there is a hierarchy of masculinities, and there are certain attributes that are more socially accepted as masculine than others, such as a chiselled jawline and body, charismatic behaviour, a high sex drive, and being financially stable. These narratives of shame work for their audience—by most accounts, men who are involved in the MRM are young, white, heterosexual, and middle class. Due to their race, economic position, and ideology, these men "buy into" hegemonic masculinity: they want to maintain a gendered hierarchy with themselves (white, straight men) at the top (Schmitz & Kayzak 2016). By recognizing that they can control the narratives of shame, the HBB can approach shame in distinct, mutually assured ways. They do this work by ensuring their listeners *feel* shame in the necessary ways while engaging in the reparative work of undoing this shame themselves. This is necessary in order to maintain their most lasting ideological viewpoint: "male disposability," or the belief that men's lives are less valuable in society than women's. Male disposability is threaded through the radio episodes and built upon an unwritten, implicit notion of shame (Honey Badger Brigade, n.d.). Male disposability marks men as no longer useful to society, in order to function as a belief, it is predicated on men feeling ashamed.

Using shame both as a defining function for their audience and a reparative tactic for themselves grants the HBB legitimacy to speak on men's issues. One benefit is the separation it creates between them and the women who are responsible for the shame men feel because they are deluded by feminism and cannot be "rewired." This outlook of feminist women is especially true in communities like the manosphere. Here, any attempt to reconcile feminism or femininity runs contrary to the Red Pill "philosophy", which positions itself as a way to free men from the grasp of ideological feminism (Ging 2019). Within the manosphere, there are also multiple different communities that create different entry points into men's rights with varying degrees of severity in beliefs (Ging 2017; Nagle 2015; Ging 2019). These two factors make the possibility of appearing illegitimate a large risk for the HBB. This combination of factors makes it valuable for the HBB's legitimacy to be affirmed through reparative work that centres men and male emotional wellbeing as the pinnacle of importance, in order to maintain their presence and place in the manosphere and their value through their ideological contributions. This image of shame created by the HBB functions in many ways with many iterations, but I focus on two notable examples where the formation of the "shamed man" is most evident: firstly, with the stereotype of the men's rights activist living in their mother's basement; and secondly, the idea of the "unfuckable" man (Sharma 2018; Srinivasan, 2021).

In standing up for men's rights, the HBB—most commonly Alison Tieman—focus strongly on drawing allegiances with other prominent members of the manosphere. This includes figures like Jordan Peterson, a former professor at the University of Toronto who rose to prominence in mainstream media for rallying against the use of gender pronouns and now distinctly focuses on men and masculinities (Murphy, 2016; Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). Peterson has become a well-known figure amongst MRAs and has developed his position within this movement by taking up an almost paternal role. He self-proclaims to teach men *how* to be men, with the assistance of the anonymity and viral nature of the Internet and the "amorphous", extreme nature of the manosphere (Ging 2017; Ging 2019, p. 639; Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). Unlike other sub-groups in the manosphere like pick-up artists, Peterson is viewed by his followers as showing genuine care for them and their feelings. Being a Peterson fan is not quite a proxy to being a men's rights activist: there is overlap between membership in both groups, but not all Peterson fans are involved in the MRM despite there being wide support in these groups

for his teachings (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). That being said, men in both groups are using each forum in differing ways to develop their relationships and adhere to aspects of ideal manhood through self-improvement (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). One such self-improvement is the potential antidote Peterson offers for these men to move past their feelings of shame, whether it be through cleaning their room or by assuring men that their desire to participate in conventional masculinity is normal (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). Much like the women in the HBB, Peterson also ascribes to and supports his fans' (and by extension, the MRM) belief that they are victims within society, in the way a coach or a parent might (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). Arguably, this paternal, pseudo-father figure role Peterson plays online can be read as a way he cares for men's shame. Like the HBB, Peterson also fully ascribes to an essentialist view of men and women and harkens back to elements of gendered conservatism in his work (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). The HBB draw allegiance with Peterson's ideals to cement themselves as a fixture within the MRM and extend their online reach to Peterson supporters who may not be full participants in the manosphere when the YouTube algorithm suggests the HBB as related videos in searches for "Jordan Peterson."

This work is evident in the episode "Professor Peterson, Cultural Marxism is Not the Problem," released in 2017, in which Tieman conducts a critique of Jordan Peterson's claim that "gender issues are a screen for postmodernism and Marxist power grabs" (0:58-1:01). Despite this being a critique, Tieman maintains ties to Peterson by highlighting his expertise and consistently referring to Peterson as "Professor," a title the HBB have not used for other female professors they have discussed (see, for example, the episode Rantzerker 44: #LiftHerUp… #BecauseShe'sJUSTaGirl). In this critique, Tieman discusses the state of the gender wars today, pulling examples from Roman Republic political life as an example of what society needs to strive for: a society pre-feminism, where masculinity in its innate form was allowed to be free (2017). The thesis of this critique revolves around the argument that Roman men's freedom to be men was possible because Roman women did not shame them for their masculinity. In this episode, Tieman utilizes this understanding of shame repeatedly:

> Tieman: *Roman men achieved unheard-of levels of cooperation because Roman women actively chose not to shame them*, not to draw the lines, not to… to draw the lines of cooperation between men wider than ever before conceived. Christian values are a reflection of the values developed in the crucible of that cooperation. Now we have a large body of women believing

> that social hardware they are responsible for creating and perpetuating actively oppresses them, either now, or in the past. Shame spurs men to compete, [to be in] competition with each other, but that competition has to be contained within an overarching cooperative superstructure, or it spills out and eradicates order. Due to our feminism… due to feminism, our society encourages no cooperative relationship between men. In fact, it requires such cooperation as sinful, explicitly calling men cooperating and helping each other its version of 'the great Satan:' suspect wherever it appears. Men used to be able to cooperate in service of being women's providers and protectors and adventurers and everything else that men did to ensure progress and prosperity. But after Fourier's feminism combined with Marx-- Marxism, men cooperating with each other in the absence of women creates patriarchy. And patriarchy oppresses women.[5] (HBR FIXED: Professor Peterson, Cultural Marxism is not the Problem, 10:26-11:44, emphasis added)

Here, Tieman is attempting to discredit Peterson's claim that 'cultural Marxism' (which has been identified as a conspiracy by the Southern Poverty Law Centre) is the cause for our crisis in gender and masculinity. However, for Tieman, the problem actually lies with feminism. To make this argument, Tieman uses relies on Ancient Roman history. Expressing nostalgia for this last, great time, she says, "Roman men achieved unheard-of levels of cooperation because Roman women actively chose not to shame them" (10:26-10:32). In other words, Roman men were so successful in their collaboration with one another because feminism—the tool through which women shame men—did not exist.

One of the more noticeable fragments that emerges here is the frequency with which the group—Tieman in particular—brought up Roman and Greek history and mythology to ground their counter-theories to feminism and their understanding of the role feminism plays in society today. The HBB's uptake of classicism is by no means novel: there is a notable history of the far-right invoking Greek and Roman history and tradition, drawing on an understanding of idealized societies as exclusively white (Blazevic, 2021). Classicism becomes white history and culture, which allows the far right to participate in identity politics by granting them a revisionist history of culture to cling onto (Zuckerberg, 2018). This claim about whiteness is categorically untrue (Blazevic, 2021). More worryingly, the far right has used examples from the classics to

[5] In fact, contemporary scholars such as classicist Mary Beard have traced our modern patriarchal cultures to their roots in Ancient Greece and Rome by examining the "silencing and invisibility of women [in these Ancient cultures]" (para 10, Tuttle, 2017).

support their claim that we are currently experiencing a “white genocide,” including the myth of the great replacement: the idea that white people in the Western world are being culturally, politically, and *physically* replaced by a non-white population over time (Zuckerberg, 2018).

Tieman’s “critique” continues, but this time brings the idea of shame into the modern era by applying the concept to the MRA stereotype of the man in his parent’s basement. As Sarah Sharma notes, the image of the grown man in “Mommy’s” basement is the image of an identity formed online, the image of “the gender separatist” (2018, p.87) who spends their time grumbling on Reddit forums and 4chan message boards. Sharma’s intervention foregrounds that these men are shaped by women’s “attentive care”—they live in Mommy’s basement, yes, but they also subsist off of technology that provides care for them; in this context, women become technological tools amongst other media objects (2018, p. 89). This intervention is also shaped by these men: isolated and deluded by their own misogynistic ideologies and convinced having relationships with women will force them into being viewed as a rapist, they turn to communicative technologies like apps and the Internet to replace women (2018). However, Tieman does not fully comply with this stereotype in noticeable ways:

> Tieman: The mass of aimless young men subsisting off of porn and games in their parent’s basement are not the ones creating this problem. They're the victims of all of this. They've been told to be women's breadwinners [and] then told the product of their service. A system in which they achieve and earn as instructed, is oppressive to women. And we shame, and we shame, and we shame them some more. Keep that shame on, God knows that won't inspire them into rioting based on simplistic narratives in which they can ease their shame by playing the hero, for black people, or women, or communism, or pet rocks, or whatever else can take the place of a damsel to save. Let's build that head of shame till every single young man throws himself into the fray to play the hero. That'll solve the problem of young men throwing themselves into the fray. Young men don't need to sort themselves out right now, older men do. And so do women. (HBR FIXED: Professor Peterson, Cultural Marxism is not the Problem, 13:29-14:25).

Tieman first works to identify this image of shame—the mental picture of a young man, in his parent’s basement, idly watching porn and playing video games—perhaps leading listeners to conjure up the embarrassing image of a “grown white man in his underwear” (Sharma 2018, p. 87). This image is a long cry from the image of the cooperative, strong Roman man heard earlier. But rather than treat this figure as one with agency to change

how they are perceived, Tieman engages in reparative work by identifying this man as a *victim*, as the victim "[in] all of this" (13:36-13:38), rendered so by the active force of feminism that is keeping them victimized. Tieman extends this framework of shame to excuse men's bad behaviour: it is the fault of shame that young men are "[throwing] themselves into the fray to play the hero" (14:10-14:12). Here, men are not the agents in this narrative, their actions are the result of feminism's shaming of them.

Lucas Gottzén discusses shame in a similar context, wherein shame becomes a productive force for men who have committed sexual violence, causing them to turn to feminist politics in an effort to regain respectability in the eyes of the public (2019). These "reform narratives" (2019, p. 293) run parallel to the work Tieman is doing here. By identifying men with images of shame tied to the MRM, men's attempts to "[play] the hero" are excused as efforts to regain respectability. Tieman uses this concept of shame to drive support for the MRM as a site through which respectability can be regained; shame is being used to "reintegrate subjects" from their perceived failure or embarrassment to live up to a new (albeit, twisted) social ideal (Ahmed 2004, p. 106). In the same way that young men will use shame as a form of moral development (Ahmed 2004) and confess to being sexually violent to distance themselves from being viewed as rapists, the men who experience shame through Honey Badger Radio will turn to the MRM as a way to obfuscate their feelings, precisely because it is this group that blames men's negative actions on an outside force: feminism. This narrative of shame is used to abdicate responsibility from men in their parent's basements and distance men from their actions (Gottzén 2019); here, shame effectively places men beyond the harms they have enacted (Gottzén 2019; Ahmed 2004).

After all, it is not the fault of young men that they are trapped in their parent's basements. Rather, older men and women who need to "sort themselves out" are to blame (14:26). This becomes more apparent as Tieman continues:

> Tieman: If you've left for [sic]… if you left foreign policy to young men, they'd decide everything over a game of Halo. It's the failure of older men and women when young men are in conflict, violent conflict. There are older men trying to ease younger man's burden of shame. And there are women trying to help ease that burden too and trying to get through to our mad 'Penelopes.'[6]They all belong to one particularly stigmatized group:

[6] Here, Tieman is using the story of Penelope, the queen of Ithaca from Greek mythology, to create an allusion between Penelope's insanity and feminism. In the myth, Penelope waits for her

> [whispers] Men's Rights Activists. (HBR FIXED: Professor Peterson, Cultural Marxism is not the Problem, 15:56-16:29, emphasis added)

Here, Tieman does the reparative work necessary to situate the HBB and the MRM as viable options for young men to resolve their feelings of shame. This is done by positioning a select group of people as the answer to "easing this burden," namely older white men (a reference to the work of Jordan Peterson and other older men involved in the MRM, such as Paul Elam from a Voice to Men, who is repeatedly mentioned on Honey Badger Radio) and women—likely the HBB themselves. By situating themselves in this position, Tieman sets the HBB up in two ways: one, she draws further allegiances between the HBB and men like Jordan Peterson, and two, she establishes that the HBB are *not* the women shaming men but members of an elite group trying to mend this shame: MRAs. The HBB certainly see themselves as a faction of the MRM—specifically, with emphasis on the *activists* portion of this declaration, rather than other sub-groups like incels, PUAs or MGTOWs. The HBB promote their work as standing up for men's rights and bringing attention to men's issues when and where others will not. In this capacity, their mission statement outlines their goals to "educate the public that our society's view of gender relations is wrongheaded and destructive" (Honey Badger Brigade Mission Statement, n.d.). The podcast episodes under analysis here are a direct result of this goal.

4.2. Cross-Eyed Men Who "Can't Get Laid"

The HBB also work to identify the most common trope about MRAs and incels in their own lives and personal experiences. They do this in a variety of ways, but did so most notably in a 2014 episode "The Beauty of Male Sexuality" with guest Mercedes

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husband Odysseus to return from the Trojan War. When he does not, she is visited by many suitors who wish to take her hand. To rebuke them, she begins weaving a funeral shroud and tells them she will decide about who gets to marry her once the shroud is completed—however, each night she secretly undoes the weaving, remaining unwed until Odysseus returns. In this analogy, one presumes that Tieman is suggesting that feminists are like Penelope: unravelling their funeral shrouds and lying about its completion much like how the work of feminism is everchanging. This analogy also plays into the manosphere's (and the far-right generally) love for Greek and Roman mythology, for whom Ancient Greece and Rome is the starting point of "civilized" Western culture (for the right, Western culture is white culture)—giving them a unified cultural point to build on and extrapolate from (Illing, 2019; Zuckerburg, 2018).

Carrera, a blogger, escort and porn star from California.[7] In this episode, the HBB discuss men who experience feelings of "contempt" from "very, very, attractive corporate women" and the difficulties men experience with their sexuality when forced to communicate in certain ways as dictated by victimized, Western women that results in men feeling emasculated and "subservient." One of the more cogent examples of the "shamed man" and the repair work done by the HBB to mend this shame comes following a discussion of the nurturing role both Karen Straughan and Carrera take in their relationships. Here, Straughan proceeds to explain in detail the type of men she used to sleep with before meeting her boyfriend:

> Straughan: Um, you know, I actually… my experience with, with guys is quite similar to yours. I've never been a sex worker, but I have always sort of been very open to casual relationships with you know, like the guy who has strabismus and who never gets laid, really, essentially, I was open to having sex with a guy like that, if, if we could connect on a human level, on a personal level. And one of the things that really struck me was that a lot of the guys that I was with, it was sort of like they would come over, and, and you'd have sex, and then there would be half an hour of like, really intense, just, just human to human talking about their issues, and then baring their souls and all of that, in this kind of place where they felt safe to do that. And then there would be another round of sex, and then they would, they would go, and they would feel like they'd been validated as a human being. … Yeah, they really are so starved, not even necessarily because I don't even know, I don't even know if they came back, continue to come back for the sex. It wasn't for the sex it was for the connection, that, that companionship and the being able to open, open up and talk about themselves and be vulnerable and expose, you know, all of their, you know, whatever it was, insecurities or the problems or whatever. …
>
> Carrera: Well, and in I think that that's an excellent point because what I noticed working as an escort and, and later as a tantrica, was exactly that were the reason that men search out sex, and it's interesting in this society, men are shamed for it, but what they're actually seeking out is, is the opportunity to be raw and bare and open and emotionally connected. (The Beauty of Male Sexuality with Mercedes Carrera, 13:10-16:20)

In this discussion, Straughan explicitly identifies men "who never [get] laid" (13:18) as men who are not typically attractive ("who have strabismus," or are cross-eyed) in ways similar to how incels describe themselves on online forums, with their physical

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7 In 2019, Carrera was arrested for and is awaiting trial on child sexual abuse charges (while one of the many controversial figures the HBB are happy to host on their show or draw allegiances to, Carrera is the only guest in the episodes analyzed to be charged with a crime).

attractiveness—or lack thereof—as the cause of their "unfuckability" (Srinivasan, 2020) and lack of romantic relationships. Notably, incels have been quoted as describing themselves as "ugly, monstrous, … a manlet [a portmanteau of 'man' and 'midget']" (O'Malley et al, 2022). Some self-ascribed incels will go as far as uploading images of themselves to online forums for other participants to mock—engaging in social, public shaming out of their own volitions—in the hopes of being identified as a "truecel," or an individual that is perceived to be so ugly according to mainstream notions of masculine beauty that they are completely alienated from sexual desirability, "even if they own a nice house or a car" (O'Malley et al, 2022).

Straughan leans into this idea of male undesirability and effectively *confesses* to having sex with men who are not conventionally attractive to better identify the image of the "shamed man," as a man that is unable to "get laid" (13:18) based on the arbitrary viewpoints of women. However, the HBB engage in repair work to control and wield shame while removing themselves from the perpetrators who cause shame. Like shame, repair, and reparative acts, are also social and relational—they are impacted by individuals and others and have the potential to create environments and conditions as they taken up and interpreted within a felt community (Wieger 2014; Ahmed 2014). Repair, Wieger (2014) notes in a summary of Eve Sedgwick (2002), is "loving that hurts" (p. 11). The HBB seek to identify a wound for men within the manosphere and offer themselves up as the remedy for that wound through repair. In engaging in this repair, the HBB seek to purposefully exclude themselves from the women who MRAs and incels would identify as gatekeepers of the sexual marketplace (O'Malley et al, 2022). After all, they cannot be champions of men's rights if they are the ones sleeping with attractive partners. Therefore, this image of the "shamed man" is not created by the HBB; rather, they are simply isolating the image and working identify its harms while simultaneously upholding and defining it further with their language.

To make this explicitly clear, Straughan goes so far as to discuss details about the deep, intimate connections she had with these men in language that bumps up against contemporary female sexualities commonly seen in popular women's fiction, or "chick-lit"; she highlights the casual nature of these relationships ("I've never been a sex worker, but I have always sort of been very open to casual relationships" [13:03-13:12]), evoking the liberated, post-feminist sexualities of heroines from chick-lit novels (and, ironically, liberated post-feminist sexualities in general), which highlight the sexual

prowess of female characters (Rowntree et al, 2012). Straughan further romanticizes these encounters by emphasizing the vulnerability that these men can demonstrate. When given the chance, these men can offer deep connections to women ("…there would be half an hour of like, really intense, just, just human to human talking about their issues" [13:43-13:51]) in as-seen-on-TV ways that women desire, fulfilling romantic tropes about men being open communicators idolized by women everywhere ("I don't even know if they came back, continue to come back for the sex. It wasn't for the sex it was for the connection…" [14:41-14:48]). These statements are corroborated by a professional, Mercedes Carrera ("…and it's interesting in this society, men are shamed for it, but what they're actually seeking out is, is the opportunity to be raw and bare and open and emotionally connected" [16:09-16:20]). Although Straughan has done work to articulate an image of shame, specifically this spectre of a man who can "never [get] laid" [13:18], she has also effectively distanced herself, and the HBB writ large, from this notion by using her own sexuality and common tropes found in Romance and chick-lit genres to remove the HBB from the act of shaming.

In brief, this chapter has explored in depth the ways in which the HBB seeks to use shame, a social and relational affect, as a tool through which they effectively harness their "felt community" of listeners (Ahmed, 2014). The HBB use shame to create a distinct identity for themselves and their viewers, through which they decide when and how shame is felt. They do this primarily by creating an image of a "shamed man." This chapter has explored two distinct examples of how the HBB utilize shame, first through the invocation of a picture of men under feminism, who are helpless and live in their parents' basements. In mending this image, the HBB situate the MRM as a solution to men's burdens, either through their own work or the work of others, such as Jordan Peterson. This use of the MRM is also offered up as the antithesis of feminism, which—following Tieman's logic—is how these men ended up in mommy's basement to begin with. The second way this shame work is done is through engagement with the image of men who are wholly undesirable to members of the opposite sex. Here, Straughan worked to identify men who are unable to have sex with women, latently drawing on incel culture by focusing on men's beauty standards. The repair work here used the HBB's own sexuality as a salve: Straughan admitted to sleeping with men who are not attractive, and in doing so positioned the HBB as possessing the ability to free men from

their shame through desirability. Much like in the first example, this work also positions the HBB as able to control shame, which shores up their power and position in the MRM.

Chapter 5. Weaponized Personal Experiences

On Honey Badger Radio, the HBB's discussion of their personal experiences often focuses on understandings of their positionality within gender dynamics and their gender expression, as they relate to both typical and atypical expressions of femininity. The HBB use discussions of personal experiences to carve out the contours of their own gender expression. This allegedly bolsters their positioning on men's rights issues and helps them move towards innocence in order to relieve feelings of guilt that have been applied to the group by feminists. One particularly poignant example of this reaction to guilt occurred after the HBB were removed from the 2015 Calgary Comic & Entertainment Expo. Their removal came after the group included the GG symbol in their booth's flag (see figure 3 in appendix) and disrupted a panel on women in comics. Ironically, the use of personal experience as a methodology for orienting oneself within the social world has a long history within feminist phenomenology. For example, Iris Marion-Young credits "scholarship in women's studies for leading critical social theory toward more systematic reflection on socialized bodies" (2005, p. 4). Feminist phenomenology centres on the embodied experience of women as a way to work through the gendered socialization of "femininity" and the normative presentation of womanhood as these powers discipline women within social scripts. While this may not be an ideological bent that is appreciated by the HBB, it is undeniable that their relationship with their own embodied experiences and their gendered worldview is informed by their subjectivities in a way that feminist phenomenology helps clarify. In framing this argument, I posit that there are two distinct ways that the HBB use their personal experiences and gendered identities to put forth their ideology: one, as a way to codify their viewpoints for male listeners and maintain their positionality within the broader manosphere, particularly through the formation of a specific, regionally influenced cybertype; and two, as a means through which their embodied experiences adopt feminist and queer critical frameworks to *become* a form of apologia, making moves to innocence as a penance for their viewpoints amongst broader publics. These latter examples of personal experiences also give us, in some cases, a glimpse into the motivating factors behind the work the HBB has done. Here, I will explore the specific lenses of femininity the HBB puts forth, using the notion of the frontier to help explicate a definitive *cybertype*, or a hyper-specific racialized and gendered identity presented online. Framing this cybertype helps to better understand the position the HBB aim to

take within the online manosphere. I will use this understanding to then explore the moves to innocence the group attempts to take to avoid blame from larger publics, with the assistance of both queer and settler colonial studies.

5.1. Frontier Mentalities and Gendered Cultural Images in Western Canada

After extensive profiles that list the locations of the various women aligned with the HBB and the broader MRM, a *Marie Claire* article from 2015 entitled “Hear Them Roar: Meet the Honey Badgers, the Women Behind the MRM” asks: “what is it about Canada?” (Ortiz, 2015, para. 19). The HBB is spearheaded by two Western Canadians: Alison Tieman from Kelvington, Saskatchewan (which is also where the Honey Badger Radio’s registered office address is listed) and Karen Straughan from Edmonton, Alberta. Given this rootedness in Western Canada, a consideration of the role regionality plays in their expression of femininity and culture is important for understanding how the HBB choose to present themselves both on the Internet and within the manosphere. To quote the feminist writer Susan Brownmiller, “if one fact should be clear, it is that femininity is used” (McPherson quoting Brownmiller, 2003, 182). This is to say, in addition to thinking about the way femininity and masculinity present themselves within this networked context, it is also valuable to think about how other identity markers, including regionality, are formed and translated through femininity (McPherson, 2003). By approaching femininity this way, I triangulate gender, race, and place, to locate the cultural geography of the HBB’s ideology. Cultural images of Western Canadian femininities, much like American Southern femininities (such as the Southern belle) explored by Tara McPherson in *Reconstructing Dixie* (2003), serve a purpose. These images can be used to maintain political and social organization. In the American South, this is within the context of racial projects such as integration. In Western Canada—especially the Prairie provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, where Karen Straughan and Alison Tieman hail from, respectively—this context is the racial project of ongoing colonization. This is especially evident when looking at the extractive processes in these prairie provinces like the oil and gas industry, ranching, and large-scale crop farming (Adkin, 2008; Harder, 2003) that maintain the economy and have helped build a cultural base of conservatism.

Cultural attitudes of individualism found in these provinces, in particular Alberta, are often described as a "frontier mentality" (Harder, 2003, x; Stoeltje 1975; Miller 2003; Miller 2002; Anahita & Mix 2006; Doğu & O'Shaughnessy 2018). The "frontier" is a geographical setting encapsulated by an image of the land that *demands* to be settled through an "interaction of the settling people with the physical environment" (Stoeltje 1975, p. 25). The frontier creates images that mimic the fantasies of manifest destiny, demonstrating "the active subordination of nature" (Anahita & Mix, 2006). Like most physical and psychic environments, this notion of the frontier plays a role in the establishment of gendered norms and social dynamics, which are co-determined through social relationships amongst people (Anahita & Mix, 2006). Beverly Stoeltje, an interdisciplinary scholar in folklore and anthropology, explores these popularized images of femininity and masculinity in a 1975 article about gender and the frontier. These images have since been adapted to describe place-based presentations of gender in Alberta (Doğu & O'Shaughnessy 2013; Miller 2003; Miller 2002). Stoeltje puts forth six examples of masculinity and femininity built from popularized, cultural images of men and women on the frontier. While these images are typically American, there is a significant amount of crossover between the world of the frontier and Western Canadian lifestyles, economies, and histories due to economic and cultural connections between the two countries and regions that spans from the settlement era to the modern day. For example, Calgary, the most populous city in Alberta, is often referred to as "Texas of the North" due to its large population of American oil industry offices and the influx of American oil workers from Texas, Wyoming, and Oklahoma in the 1990s (Miller, 2002). The masculinities described within this notion of the "frontier" encapsulate images of Southern American culture, specifically the gun-slinging cowboy, the settler, and the bad man (Stoeltje, 1975). The cowboy archetype put forth in this image of frontier masculinity is perhaps the closest to the lived reality of men working in the oilfields of extractive economies. This "cowboy" image is viewed as a symbol of "man's conquest of nature and the last frontiersman," characterized best by "membership in an all-male group, alcohol … loneliness, contact with raw elements [and] mobility" (Stoeltje, 1975, 27). Additional popular reconstructions of the cowboy trope play into the imagery of the frontier and what is required of someone charged with conquering it: "rugged individualism, savage ruthlessness, and emotional self-reliance" (Prasad, 1997, p. 136). Overall, this description of the cowboy image aptly describes the heavily masculine working conditions and the rotational two-weeks-on, one-week-off shift work required of

the often-times fly-in jobs that define the oil patch (Doğu & O'Shaughnessy 2013; Cornfield 2013).

Other images of masculinity, like the settler, play into stereotypes of men who bring their families to establish a sense of permanency within a region. These men are landowners (most likely ranchers and farmers), self-confident, and succeed in taming the frontier (Stoeltje, 1975). While this is an image of the settler, it is valuable to note that the term settler does not denote an identity but rather a political position of privilege and power. This understanding is extended even further in this case, considering its cultural image is directly connected with land ownership (Richards, 2019). The final image of masculinity is that of the bad man, or a figure akin to Jesse James: an outlaw, a renegade, or man who otherwise lives outside of established societal norms (Stoeltje, 1975). The feminine foil to this masculine triad is shaped and informed by the images of frontier men. This is similar to the ways that gendered dynamics in working-class communities—like the blue-collar town of Fort McMurray, for example—are defined according to what the men *do* (Doğu & O'Shaughnessy 2013 quoting Scott, 2007). Consequently, images of women on the frontier are rarely depicted as positive or of value (Stoeltje, 1975). Here, the images we see operate in accordance with what men need: the refined lady, who is sensitive and hyperfeminine, upholds ideas of piety and purity and works as a foil to the "cowboy" archetype (Stoeltje 1975); the good helpmate, who serves both her family and the community, has "successfully adapted to the frontier conditions," and works as a partner in settling the prairies (Stoeltje 1975, p. 32); and finally, the bad woman, who is associated with sex and sex work and typically depicted as a racialized other, often Indigenous, in literature focused on the frontier (Stoeltje, 1975). Despite Stoeljte's article being published 47 years ago, these cultural images have had staying power. The notion of the frontier is still very much present in literature about and politics within Western Canada and other rural areas in North America (Harder, 2003; Miller 2003; Miller 2002; Anahita & Mix 2006; Doğu & O'Shaughnessy 2018), perhaps even a driving cultural factor in the Alberta separatist movement. With the frontier comes gendered practices that align with its principles, identities, and values. As a result, these are all gendered images that can be found in oil-boom towns in Alberta and other natural resource dependent states and provinces (Doğu & O'Shaughnessy 2018; Anahita & Mix 2006; Miller 2003; Miller 2002). These images

provide a framework for identities that the HBB are attempting to create in situating themselves within the manosphere.

5.2. Bringing a “Frontier Mentality” and Its Images to Men’s Rights

The evocative image of the “frontier,” in this context, draws up images of barren land waiting to be conquered and is quite fitting for commentary on natural resource extraction and the gendered cultural images it produces. Arguably, the same can be said of theorizations of earlier formulations of the Internet. These theories, conceived in the early 1990s, position cyberspace as a libertarian technological frontier to be explored, experimented with, and settled. Utopic conceptions of the early Internet were shored up with technologically determinist ideals that understand the Internet as a site that is difficult to regulate and free from legal control (Hasinoff, 2015). In this environment, there would be "unprecedented levels of free market competition and unrestrained political discourse" (Hasinoff, 2015, p. 130). A lack of regulation and order was viewed as a naturalized, innate part of the Internet. *The Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*, originally written by John Barlow in 1996, helped cement this view. On the Internet, Barlow writes "we have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one … cyberspace does not lie within [a government's] borders … it is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions." (2015, p. 27).

Built on concepts of unregulated freedom, these utopic interpretations of the Internet align with the myths and metaphors of the wild west, cowboy lifestyles, and the frontier in general. The “anything goes”, lawless attitude of something newly established marked the Internet as an uncontrolled place that needed to be tamed (Levy, 2017). Early cybersurfers were not yet users, they were “information loving freedom cowboys [exploring] new territories” (Lindström, n.d.). Websites and blogs were “tiny towns scattered around a wasteland” (Palacios, 2019). These spaces—much like the present manosphere—were also largely dominated for men, by men. In an exploration of early WIRED articles focused on the Internet, Willis (2002) notes that "… you have to be a 'tough guy' to survive in this wild, anarchic, computer-mediated frontier environment", and that the frontier "is also a place where women traditionally do not go" (p. 172). In this understanding of the frontier, women come to the frontier once law and order has been established by men. Otherwise, it is simply not safe. For men on the early Internet, this

set and affirmed a status quo that women do not belong in cyberspace (Willis 2002), and if women are there, it is after men have provided a settlement. Thinking about the state of the manosphere today, similar ideals are present. After all, rule number ten on the men's rights reddit forum TheRedPill is "do not identify yourself as a woman."

Much like these early conceptions of the Internet, early feminist theorizing also thought of the Internet as a site of utopic opportunity. However, this utopic outlook was situated more around oppressed identities, in which one could be free of their gender, race, identity, or body (Nakamura 2002). Rather, technology has offered up a means through which users can form distinct identities in online spaces that differ from how they exist offline. Similarly, the Internet has become a space where, rather than entering free from a body, one's body matters more than ever (Nakamura, 2002; White, 2018). This is especially true for any group that is "othered," for whom technology has come to represent a site through which heterosexual men have more power than ever, whether this is through online interactions or within the labour conditions of the tech industry itself (White 2018). Arguably, our ideas about race and gender are shifting anew, every time we log on and log in (Nakamura 2002; Chun, 2011). Theorizing these attempts to "[racially] pass" or engage in "identity tourism" on the internet, Lisa Nakamura (2002) introduced the phrase *cybertype*, a play on stereotypes adapted for the digital age. This term effectively works to examine the way race and racism exist on the Internet. Here, the cybertype is used as a tool to understand how images of race are "[propagated, disseminated, and commodified]" by users (p. 3). Nakamura describes this as a mixing of the cultural norms and ideological understandings of race and the social mores that individuals bring with them when they enter cyberspace. Nakamura understands this as a blending of a "cultural layer", which are our beliefs outside of the Internet, and a "computer layer", which is all of the interfaces that come along with the Internet (p. 2, quoting Manovich, 2001). Nakamura extends this language of the racial cybertype to encompass the intersection of gender as well.

5.3. The Good Helpmate Goes to Work: Forming a Cybertype Through Personal Experience

The HBB use personal experiences that are informed by both their whiteness and their gender to carve out their specific online identity. They often align themselves with a faction of the MRM that is overly concerned with the status of white men in society

(Marwick & Caplan 2018). When I apply this concept of the cybertype to the specific realm of the Internet the HBB participates in, I seek to extend two aspects of this cybertype: one, that of a curated, online-specific identity that operates in-between the world of the cultural and the world of the technological; and two, within the metaphor of the frontier, a place that is built by its ruggedness and individualism, but is also a site through which settlers work to displace others. This understanding of the frontier is also influenced by the fact that the HBB are settlers in a settler-colonial country: Canada. This work is done to excavate the specific roles and reputations the HBB must hold within the manosphere to maintain their legitimacy. This work is valuable in order to flesh out a regionally informed cybertype that captures the unique expressions of race and gender in the Western Canadian sphere evident on Honey Badger Radio.

We can see the formation of a specific cybertype at play in a 2016 episode entitled “The Horrors of MANWORKING!,” in which the HBB examine and give commentary on a Buzzfeed video released in the same year titled “Being A Man in the Workplace,” which was designed to show viewers gender disparities in the workplace. They discuss a scene in which one of the female characters in the video is talked over by men at a meeting:

> Karen Straughan: But what, what drives me crazy about this whole thing is like, as somebody who has spent a ton of my time around men, men of all kinds, you know, like, nerdy engineers, nerdy guys, geeky guys, oil rig workers, servers, cooks. Um, I've never ever, ever had any problem being heard.
>
> Alison Tieman: No, me neither.
>
> Hannah Wallen: [adamantly] No, you know, all you, all you got to do is project a little fucking confidence.
>
> Karen Straughan: Mm-hmm. Because… because no one wants to listen to you. If you're meek, and you're not, you know, confident in what you're saying. Because if you're not confident in what you're saying, you're not giving people the idea that they should be confident in what you're saying. So, it's not, this isn't sexism that she's seeing here. This is just her not being, you know, loud enough, her not being assertive enough. That's all that was. Let's, let's, let's continue. (12:49-13:46)

Here, Straughan explicitly works to align herself with work typically performed by men and man-camp culture, focusing on blue-collar, working-class jobs affiliated with natural resource extraction sites (engineers, servers, cooks, and more obviously oil-rig workers).

She also emphasizes men who are typically seen as having less social capital and may be more likely to identify with the manosphere by playing to a sense of geek masculinity. Geek masculinity is a specific type of white masculinity that took rise following GG. Straughan's connection to it here is a type of allegiance building, considering this episode was released in 2016 and GG was still avidly discussed online. Geek masculinity allows white men to identify themselves as victims by being self-proclaimed nerds and geeks, identifying with a distinct culture that is often ridiculed in popular culture (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). This is who Straughan identifies as "nerdy guys and geeky guys" (13:01-13:03). Straughan's language also includes herself in the world of these men. She is someone who "has spent a ton of [her time]" (12:52-12:53) amongst them, and unlike the other women in the Buzzfeed video or meeker women in the workplace, she has "never, ever had any problem being heard" (13:09-13:13). Straughan placing herself within the world of men evokes the image of the good helpmate feminine archetype of the frontier, who has successfully "settled" the land by being gritty, tough, and brave. The good helpmate's successes are found through collaboration with men. Rather than standing by like other images of women such as the refined lady, the good helpmate collaborates and works with other frontier masculinities to achieve success (Stoeltje, 1975). Straughan constructs her role in the workplace as being in collaboration with frontier/settler men, to remove herself and the other women in the HBB from what they would describe as "self-victimization" or the "victim narratives" of popular feminism.

Straughan's identification with masculine co-workers rejects typical femininity through the adoption of "good helpmate" tropes. This strategy is also commonly seen amongst women working in the trades alongside or as oil and gas workers. Straughan alludes to having worked in this industry herself: she "spent a ton of time around men … [including] oil rig workers" (12:53-13:04). Based on their interviews with female oil and gas workers in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Doğu and Shaughnessy (2018) discuss the different gendered performances female workers engage in to integrate into a male-dominated workplace more easily (as of 2022, women compromise only 15-22% of oil and gas positions). One female participant, a self-identified tomboy, opines the presence of what she refers to as "Tiffanies": giggly women, who wear makeup to work and chat up male co-workers (Doğu & Shaughnessy, 2018, p. 288). This complaint is similar to Straughan's dismissal of women who are "not loud enough, who are not assertive enough" (13:39-13:43), and Wallen's discussion of how women who enter men's spaces

are detracting from what makes those spaces interesting. Female workers in the oil patch also push back against women who try to make themselves appear more masculine in order to fit into the status quo on job sites. The same interviewee refers to these women as “bitches” because they have an unfriendly attitude towards others and are generally disliked and excluded from on and off-site socializing but are more successful in the working environment (p. 289). Men in crews often refer to these women by derogatory terms meant to police gender presentation, particularly with insults normally used to disparage transgender people.

Using these examples from real-world oil and gas worksites in Western Canada, we can see how the HBB attempt to operate within this socially established limit of performative femininity in male-dominated online spaces. Here, the goal becomes to align oneself with masculinity, but not too much. We can also see this trend in an earlier episode titled “Anita Sarkeesian and the Scourge of the Girl Gamer,” released in 2013. In this episode, the HBB discuss how feminists and women attempt to integrate into men’s spaces, and reflect on their personal experiences in men’s spaces:

> Hannah Wallen: I mean, some of these communities are all male, but a lot of these communities already have women in it, who have... who are part of the community and like the community for what it is. Yeah. And then they have other women coming in and saying no, we got to change everything. And we have to do it because, because vagina feminism, misogyny, you know, like, yeah, and they take away what made that community interesting, and women who were part of it … it never occurs to them, that it's part of the fun. Yeah, that shit talk is part of the fun, that listening to… you know, just being one of the guys is part of the fun.
>
> Karen Straughan: … I go to work every day. I probably issue 100 threats of “I am going to punch you so hard,” right in the you know, whatever, the boob, the penis, whatever, right? My pregnant boss, you know, “I'm going to punch you so hard.” I said to her she's, you know, she cradles her belly, and I said, “I wouldn't punch you in the baby, I'd punch you in the glasses.” … Nobody gets offended. Everybody thinks it's hilarious. Right? Everybody thinks it's funny. (11:49-13:21)

In both of these instances, we can see the HBB working to align themselves with men while still maintaining a sense of separation from them. Much like in the frontier of the online world of men’s rights, the HBB have to maintain a certain sense of the masculine status quo in order to be viewed as legitimate and welcomed by members of the MRM. By presenting themselves as well-seasoned, and in tune with what male cowboys and settlers construct as shared spaces, they successfully embody a digital version of the

“good helpmate.” This is the image of someone who can successfully settle the territory, who is gritty, tough, and strong, but still maintains a specific type of femininity to be seen as respectable and *useful* in the eyes of her male counterparts. This framework of masculinity is something Straughan plays with when discussing her workplace habit of “I probably issue 100 threats of I am going to punch you so hard” (12:37-12:45) This signal to listeners that Straughan is a blue-collar worker, or at least as rugged as one, who embodies a certain type of femininity that aligns itself with aspects of masculinity, much like the good helpmate.

5.4. Using Personal Experience to Move Towards Innocence

The HBB employs a second distinct aspect of their own experience in their attempt to absolve themselves of guilt by using their specific cybertype as a throughline to settler moves toward innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012), extending the frontier even further. Eve Tuck, an Unangax̂ scholar in the field of Indigenous studies, and K. Wayne Yang, a scholar in Indigenous organizing and critical pedagogy, discuss settler moves to innocence in their article “Decolonization is not a metaphor” (2012). Here, settler moves toward innocence are understood as “strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.10). In working to reconcile the feelings of settlers, these moves to innocence function as a way to maintain settler-states by absolving settlers of feeling guilt and “[rescuing] settler futurity” (p. 3). This is not to say, however, that there is an equivalent relationship between how the HBB treat feminists and how our colonial settler-society treats Indigenous peoples, continuing to dispossess them from their land and culture. Rather, I am suggesting that there are certain intellectual throughlines between the HBB’s use of settler aesthetics through the good helpmate cybertype, and broader attempts to move towards innocence as a fundamental discursive strategy of settler colonialism. This is to say that the members of the HBB exist as settlers/good helpmates on two planes. Firstly, they use these aesthetics online within a frontier mentality that positions them as good helpmates; secondly, they quite literally are settlers by participating in and extracting benefits from ongoing, persistent systems of settler colonialism in North America. This is especially true considering the emphasis the group places on experiences related to the petrocultures that surround oil and gas extraction. The good helpmate cybertype works to

replicate how the group exists offline; it is the online manifestation of their real-world settler attitudes.

Secondly, intertwined with these settler moves to innocence is the tactical use of their gendered whiteness and the co-opting and misuse of queer studies under the guise of victimhood. The act of being a victim has connections to colonial power, patriarchy, precarity, and disenfranchisement that have morphed due to the rise of "democratizing" social media platforms (Banet-Weiser & Chouliaraki, 2021). This shift has effectively made it possible for "victimhood" to act as a "dominant communicative logic" that works to re-situate the powerful back into positions of power via weaponized victimhood (Banet-Weiser & Chouliaraki, 2021, p. 4). The HBB put forth this version of victimhood in the examples I describe below. This strategy is similar to the "white tears" narrative harnessed by white women as a means of social control that has been widely documented in use against racialized and colonized populations (Phipps, 2021). What is of particular interest here is their move towards self-identification as *victims* rather than an unapologetic, impossible-to-insult MRA. This is particularly ironic considering the HBB's propensity for associating feminists with self-victimhood, and it is valuable to think of their positionality in the manosphere as *allowing* them to criticize other women as victims while they can choose when and how to utilize this framework for themselves.

Perhaps the most poignant example of the HBB engaging in an attempt to appeal to innocence is in the video "Banned for Not Damselling," posted to their YouTube channel in 2015. This video follows the expulsion of the HBB's booth at the Calgary Comics and Entertainment Expo. The HBB's presence at the Calgary Expo was achieved through crowdfunding on their Feed the Badger website, which is specifically designated as a way for them to crowdsource funds and donations (The Mary Sue, n.d.). While the crowdfunding page on Feed the Badger has since been deleted, the Wayback Machine through the Internet Archive reveals the group raised $9,380 CAD from 211 supporters to attend the conference (exceeding their fundraising goal by 114%) and described their presence as a "plan to infiltrate nerd culture cunningly disguised as their own" in order to distil the message that "nerd and gamer culture is… perfectly wonderful just as it is" (read: feminists should stop attempting to disrupt gamer and geek culture, which is what pre-empted GG). They did just that: the HBB flew a flag related to GG at their Expo booth and were openly hostile to feminists on the Women in Comics panel held during the event. One panel participant stated that the HBB had self-identifying

MRAs in the audience for the panel who attempted to steer the conversation towards a discussion of female victimhood, and in a video discussion shared by the HBB that evening they described the other female participants on the panel as “donning the ball gowns of [their] victimhood.” In return, citing their anti-harassment policy, the Calgary Expo asked the HBB to leave the event (Calgary Expo, 2015).

Following this expulsion, the HBB, led by Alison Tieman, sued the Calgary Comics and Entertainment Expo and the website The Mary Sue (which self-describes as a “feminist community of people” that is the “heartbeat of geek culture” [n.d.]) for breach of contract and injurious falsehood (Honey Badger Radio, 2015).The HBB also engaged in crowdfunding, supposedly for their legal fees, raising $30,839.21 CAD from 868 supporters (exceeding their goal by 102.8%), and again for continuing their legal battle, to the tune of $18,005.00 CAD from 327 supporters. In the end, the judge presiding over the case ruled against the HBB on all counts. The video under discussion here, “Banned for Not Damselling,” came before this court ruling but after the HBB were removed from the Expo. It was likely partially responsible for a significant amount of revenue generated for the group as it is one of the most-viewed videos the HBB posted to their YouTube channel in 2015. Throughout this lachrymose video, Alison Tieman attempts to use aspects of the “good helpmate” cybertype, and reverses the group’s typical critique of victimhood to absolve the HBB from wrongdoing:

> Alison Tieman: [near tears, voice sounds full of emotion] … As you probably know by now, I've been banned not just from Calgary Expo, but from all of the events that the organizers put on across Canada … I just wanted to say a bit about myself and where I'm coming from, because there seems to be a lot of hatred being directed towards me, by various feminists in media outlets. And I can understand, you know, because I'm a very difficult... I can be a very difficult person to relate to, because, and this is just to explain, um, I've recently a while back, I received a, you know, we've had seen all kinds of tweets about us about the HBB as a group and one of them, in particular, was about, they- they look really mannish, they look like men, but very masculine, from a feminist. And maybe I'd like to address that. Because I think in some ways, it's right. We have in the brigade, we have a very gender atypical expression of femininity, I wish it wasn't atypical, but we have, all of us in the brigade have a tendency towards wanting to assume a position of strength, and stewardship of other people's vulnerabilities, in this case, men's, and that's part of our identity as women and that's very atypical because you're really supposed to be the damsel, the victim, as a woman, you're really supposed to say, I'm oppressed by men, and how can you possibly be in a position of helping men's vulnerabilities if you're oppressed by them? And this is something that I

> think all of us in the brigade just don't identify with as women, which makes us very atypical, I guess you could say we are transgender in some ways … And I am drawn to men's rights because I want to be able to help and protect someone. (0:12-3:00)

In this example, we can see Alison weaponizing her bisexuality and femininity to present herself as a victim. It's also valuable to note that presenting oneself as a victim here is largely *useful* for a greater means to an end. It is weaponizing the image of victimhood for publicity and financial gain: the HBB want a media spectacle about being removed from the Calgary Expo so they can build a bigger base of viewers, and profit from this moment through crowdfunding. It is also a way to separate themselves from other female attendees of the expo, and speakers on the Women in Comics panel.

We also see Tieman feed into the good helpmate cybertype as a means to solidify her positionality in the frontier of men's rights online. She reiterates her motivation for participating in the frontier life of men's rights as "wanting to assume a position of strength, and stewardship of other people's vulnerabilities, in this case, men's, [as a part of her] identity" (1:57-2:04) The focus here is on participating in men's lives in a caretaker role, much like the way the good helpmate's defining feature is to "fulfil their duties which enabled their men to succeed" (Stoeltje 1975, p. 32). Tieman also rejects other typically feminine archetypes of damsels and (once again) victims, removing herself from other images of women who are stereotypically much weaker. However, she treats her differences from them as a sort of wound and something that she must publicly confess for. By doing so, she is participating in a larger settler move to innocence by "[equating] stories of personal exclusion" through which she identifies herself and the other members of the HBB as "atypical" repeatedly. This strategy evokes Tuck and Wang's argument that settler moves to innocence depend on telling "stories of structural … exclusion" as a means to "remove involvement in and culpability for systems of domination" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, quoting Mawhinney, 1998, p. 9). Effectively, Tieman is using this confessional method to sew up the rupture she has caused by targeting other women and being punished for it, both online and at the Calgary Expo. She is positioning herself as the oppressed, never as the oppressor (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

This move towards confession through performative woundedness (Phipps, 2021) is paired with the use of keywords borrowed from queer theory, which begins with

Alison seemingly admitting that the HBB are “gender atypical” (1:49-1:50) in their self-presentation. This is a somewhat accurate claim—the HBB tend to dress very casually, and Karen Straughan in particular is known for wearing white men’s undershirts (or “wifebeaters” [sic]) and having cropped, short hair. Here, we see the HBB draw on the language of queer theory and sexuality studies to put forth their narrative of victimhood. While the term “pinkwashing” is largely a descriptor reserved for attempts made by other settler-colonial countries like Israel and large corporations to appear more progressive, I argue that the HBB’s use of queer-coded language is also a form of pinkwashing. Pinkwashing, a portmanteau of pink and whitewashing, is the promotion LGBTQ+ rights or queer-coded language in order to obfuscate wrongdoing (Anderson, 2019). In participating in pinkwashing, the HBB appropriate terms and concepts from queer studies to wash their message in progressive language and distract from how they behave oppressively (Anderson, 2019). A good example of pinkwashing applied to the Western Canadian settler colonial context is an ad run by the Alberta based group Canadian Oil Sands Community to promote Canadian oil and gas. This 2016 ad stated “In Canada lesbians are considered hot! In Saudi Arabia if you’re a lesbian YOU DIE!” suggesting that buying Canadian oil was good for the LGBTQ+ community, despite the dismal environmental track record of the oil and gas industry (Kornik, 2016). Here, Tieman adopts this framework of pinkwashing to push the boundaries even further. She does this by stating that the members of the Brigade are also “transgender in some ways” (2:28-2:32) because of their willingness to stand up for men and not feel patriarchal oppression. This rhetoric continues:

> Allison: And you know, I am, I'm bisexual, but predominantly, I tend to have relationships with men. Specifically, I've been married to my husband for about seventeen years. And I want that feeling that I can protect him, and he can protect me. So, I've always been drawn to that, that expression of strength. And for me, men's rights, is the ability to express strength, and to be strong for someone else to steward to be to take responsibility for another group's vulnerabilities, men's vulnerabilities. And I don't want that to be separate from being a woman or being feminine. I really don't want that to be gender atypical. But yesterday I realized how fucking gender atypical that apparently is. Women like me, women who are not… don't present as damsels, we don't believe in damselling. And we don't believe in the ideologies based on damselling, are obviously not wanted, our voices are not wanted in a Women in Comics panel. Like, we're not wanted there. And you can… again, I'll link to the stuff that was spoken about in here. Why people have asked, why I brought up why we did the Gamergate thing. I honestly thought that we were still… the-the expo organizers would not have a problem with it. I thought that we would have free speech in the

> Expo as long as we obeyed all the harassment rules, and all of the other stuff, that we could support a cause that has spoken to me personally … This very, very focused narrative is exactly the same narrative that I don't feel comfortable with as a woman, which is that women are victimized by cultures like the geek culture, the comic culture. Well, I haven't felt victimized till now ... And I know that I'm gender atypical. I'm sitting there looking up at a panel of women who know how to damsel, you know, that this is something that they're comfortable with. This is, this is something that they feel like is a part of their life. And it's like, they don't have a problem with it, they can sit there and say, "I'm a victim." And they can sit there and say, and cry and do all of these feminine things that I've never been able to do really well. Or just, I've always had a mental block about it. I've just, it's not… doesn't come easily to me. So being gender atypical watching a bunch of women, tell me how we're supposed to be and then saying, throwing me out because I am the way I am. Is, it was fucking shocking. (3:01-8:38)

Here, Tieman and the HBB are using techniques of pinkwashing by adopting queer identities (repeated statements about their "atypical" [1:49] gender presentations, referring to themselves as "transgender" [2:28-2:30], declarations of orientation in "and you know, I am, I'm bisexual" [3:01-3:04]) in order to put forth a certain level of hybridity to absolve them of guilt. Not only is Tieman a men's rights activist and someone who openly mocks women and Social Justice Warriors for their displays of damselling, she is also protecting herself from criticism because of this identity. This use of the language of queerness is based on historical processes that make 'coming out' or saying your queerness out loud culturally significant. Celebrating queerness through queer sex and queer identities publicly is a way to challenge the coherency of heteronormativity (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Coming out publicly, or speaking your sexuality out loud, was a radical strategy of LGBTQ+ liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s and remains an important facet in theories of queer liberation and social justice (Monaghan, 2021; Jay & Young, 1992). Celebrations of identity through performativity, fluidity, and rejection of gender binaries help solidify queer culture and identity formation.

Extending this use of queer identities and queer language to frontier imagery, Tieman's attempts to pinkwash through her gender and sexual identity are fundamentally tied to the HBB's broader construction of a regional, settler colonial white femininity. Considered in this context, Tieman's tactics are reminiscent of what Tuck and Yang call move to innocence through settler nativism: "an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land" (Tuck &

Yang, 2012, p. 11). Here, Tieman is deflecting her connections to the MRM by taking up a queer-coded identity. By utilizing settler nativism, Tieman is placing herself in the position of (white) queer and transgender people who experience oppression based on gender and sexuality (but maintain white privilege and complicity in settler colonialism). She reminds the audience that she identifies as bisexual but is careful to make sure the good helpmate is close by, explaining that most of her relationships are with men so that the reciprocal nature of the settler man and the good helpmate remains intact (Stoeltje, 1975). Bisexual Tieman "[wants] that feeling that [she] can protect [her husband] and he can protect [her]" (3:12-3:17). Tieman also suggests that the atypical gender presentation of herself (and other members of the HBB) is an innate, unchanging part of her, while also suggesting this is the reason the group was removed from the Expo ("...throwing me out because I am the way I am…" [8:32-8:34]).

This move towards innocence through settler nativism is also worth considering because Tieman paints a picture of her oppression that attempts to weaponize gender provocatively. Her move to innocence is entirely predicated on building an oppressed other that effectively removes the HBB from oppression because they are women. Instead, Tieman moves the goal posts: the group experiences oppression because they are queer. If the HBB had focused on being removed from the Expo because they were women, they would be viewed as fraudulent within the wider men's rights community. As Tieman recounts this oppression because of her atypical presentation she cries, further cementing herself as a victim. This video consists of periods of Tieman either near-tears or actively crying. This affective strategy fits the recent shift towards testimonial, public proclamations white feminists have taken up more widely following #MeToo (Phipps, 2021). The use of crying in this video, and by white women in general, is a demonstration of power against racialized others. Historically speaking, white women's tears have been used to maintain power and threaten others who dare to defy the racial status quo (Phipps, 2021). Crying as a strategy adds another dimension to the metaphor of the frontier. The HBB's whiteness and femininity, even when disavowed through "atypical expression of femininity" (1:49-1:52), are used to assert power and dominance over the digital (and physical) landscape. While this is perhaps an implicit understanding already in place within the cybertype of the good helpmate, this particular use of tears suggests a more manifest understanding of race and gender. When they tear up, the HBB may not view themselves as embodying the delicate, white femininity that typically begets a protective response from white men

within a racial hierarchy (Phipps, 2021). They are nonetheless using crying and its effects to their advantage—a term referred to as Strategic White Womanhood (Hamad, 2019). This Strategic White Womanhood is a historical dynamic that still exists in the present and is weaponized against women and people of colour. In this dynamic, white women use their status as a victim in order to undermine or obfuscate guilt for their own mistakes. The targets of this obfuscation are women of colour, effectively shielding white women from accountability (Phipps, 2021).

To sum up, this chapter has explored the ways in which the HBB use their personal experiences in discussions on Honey Badger Radio and their YouTube channel. In approaching this subject, I have utilized the metaphor of the frontier—in cultural texts, a rugged, barren land that requires settlement and demands tenacity and grit, but also terminology used to describe the Internet—to put forth two distinct but inter-related ways the HBB utilize their personal experiences. The first of these ways is through the formation of a regionally influenced cybertype. This cybertype is informed by the image of the 'good helpmate', through which the HBB are able to locate a rugged, self-sufficient Western Canadian femininity that can be translated within the digital sphere. Here, the group takes up language and imagery borrowed from the days of settlement, as well as their own personal experiences living as settlers in a settler-colonial nation, to maintain their positionality within the MRM and codify their viewpoints for male listeners. The second way this frontier metaphor is used is to acknowledge the HBB's attempts at moves towards innocence, which they do through the use of pinkwashing in their language and appeals to white victimhood by weaponizing their identities as white women. These premises, coupled with the frontier, are situated within Tuck & Yang (2012)'s notion of settler moves to innocence. Ultimately, these personal experiences allow the HBB to engage in elements of settler nativism—attempts to deflect settler identities while enjoying settler privileges—to absolve themselves of wrongdoing.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In 2022 as I finished work on this thesis, a court case between actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard (*Depp v. Heard*, running from April 11, 2022, to June 1, 2022) captured the Internet by storm. This was largely the result of it being broadcast live whenever the court was in session, like a spectator sport or valued political debate. The case was brought against Amber Heard by Johnny Depp, who sued for defamation based on a 2018 op-ed Heard wrote for *The Washington Post* about surviving domestic abuse and sexual violence allegedly committed against her by Depp (although, notably, he was not named in the article). Throughout the trial, Depp's lawyers attempted to show that he was a victim of domestic violence and that Heard was the main instigator. This claim was widely supported by content creators on social media, for whom the trial created a new cottage industry of pro-Depp videos (Lorenz, 2022) that micro-analysed Heard's behaviour and statements. This trial operates within a new mediated economy of visibility for popular misogyny. Depp, his legal team, and the content creators mocking Heard compete for visibility against popular feminism, which has essentially marked Amber Heard as a stand-in for all sexual assault and domestic violence survivors. Her elevation by popular feminists takes place against the backdrop of "believe all women" and the #MeToo movement writ-large (Banet-Weiser, 2018a). All-in-all, content creators on both sides of the political spectrum cash in.

In the trial's uptake by viral media, men are injured by false accusations and sexual violence is an injury to men: the "realities of systemic sexism [contort and distort] so that … reality somehow works in favour of popular misogyny" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 61). In the end, the final verdict ruled that Heard had defamed Depp in her op-ed, and that Heard had been defamed by one of Depp's lawyers. The same day, the American anti-sexual violence organization Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) stated it had received a 35% increase in calls to its sexual violence support line (Alptraum, 2022). The results of the case also have anti-sexual violence organizations worried about what it will mean for accusers. One organization in Georgia, USA received a phone call from a woman who wanted to seek legal action for domestic violence but was "worried she'd be seen [as a] liar like Amber Heard" (Dale & Noveck, 2022). Right-wing pundits were quick to take to Twitter in the aftermath of the case, celebrating the end of "believe women." For example, Ann Coulter blithely tweeted "And thus ends the

#MeToo movement" (2022). Others have proclaimed the trial to be the new GG (Romano, 2022).

The HBB were also quick to celebrate Depp's win, both through their official YouTube account and through their personal channels, which had been in a state of semi-stasis for the past year. Karen Straughan, arguably the most popular member of the group, had been absent from her YouTube channel for nearly a year. She last posted in September 2021, sharing a video of a former member of Men's Rights Edmonton speaking against Covid-19 vaccine mandates. Straughan returned to make four videos about the *Depp v. Heard* trial in a month. Honey Badger Radio made eighteen videos about the trial in May and June 2022. The first, published on May 5 is titled "How the Duluth model is being used to frame Johnny Depp" (Honey Badger Radio, 2022).[8] The HBB's eagerness to jump on the coverage of the trial is understandable given the massive amount of money this content generates. One content creator reportedly earned upwards of $80,000 in one month after pivoting to create videos of the trial (Lorenz, 2022). The HBB's eagerness to cover the trial, and the money such coverage results in, also indicates that this cultural event may be a gateway for other women to participate in the manosphere. The fevered pace of this online content generation shows the highly mediated, cultural popularity that this trial created about the threat of "false accusation," a galvanizing point in the manosphere ignited by a perception that the tides of the #MeToo era have begun to turn. Reaction to the trial speaks to how highly reified the intertwined concepts of popular misogyny and popular feminism have become in our culture (Banet-Weiser, 2018a). A nuanced feminist media studies that considers the dangers of the misogynist far right online is needed more now than ever. This thesis carves out a way for us to think about how different types of white femininity have been weaponized within these online spaces, including in relation to emerging events that continue the cyclical relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny.

[8] The Duluth model—originally created as the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, or DAIP—is a model for domestic violence prevention that focuses on abusive behaviours perpetrators use to gain control and power over their victims. The model is founded on feminist principles and is used for most mandatory intervention laws the United States (Stylaniou, 2013).

This thesis also demonstrates the deep presence of anti-feminist and misogynistic rhetoric that exists in online spaces, propagated by the HBB. While the viral, misogynistic response to the *Depp v. Heard* trial may appear as a new mainstream cultural phenomenon, these discourses have been present on Honey Badger Radio for the entirety of the eight-year period examined in this thesis. Evidently, this shows that the online misogyny espoused by the HBB has staying power and is wildly capable of entering popular culture. This is a phenomenon that is provably dangerous for gender and sexual minorities following Elliot Rodger's misogynistic attacks in Isla Vista and Alek Minassian's Rodger-inspired attack in Toronto. While the HBB themselves do not identify with the violent ideology of incels, they assert allegiances with extreme members of the men's rights community on Honey Badger Radio often. It is also valuable to consider how closely linked the different facets of the manosphere are. While these attacks have been (explicitly) disavowed by the men's rights community, "the extremist and mundane versions of various ideologies are in fact the same ideology" (Marwick & Caplan, 2016, p. 547). Despite not identifying with the incel community within the manosphere, the ideology that the HBB espouses on Honey Badger Radio establishes misogyny as a potentially violent norm. Considering this, the discourse analysis conducted in this thesis may be used as a guide moving forward by providing a framework for understanding the ways their specific white, Western Canadian femininity has coalesced around men's rights and the tools the HBB uses to create a broader men's rights community amongst their listeners.

Throughout this work, I have aimed to explore the HBB's involvement in the manosphere as a group of women who are largely from Western Canada. Through a feminist discourse analysis of their podcast and YouTube channel Honey Badger Radio, I have detailed how the manosphere operates in relation to networked, popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2019; Banet-Weiser, 2018). This feminist discourse analysis utilized online harassment (Jane, 2018), the reciprocal relationship of popular feminism and popular misogyny, understandings of victimhood, and regional images of femininity within Western Canada as theoretical lenses to examine Honey Badger Radio through. I have argued that the HBB legitimizes itself and its place within the MRM by using shame as a tool to isolate an image of men that their listenership identifies with, while they engage in repair work as a remedy for this shame to control their position in the manosphere. Finally, I have examined the ways the HBB utilizes discussion of their

personal experiences by applying Lisa Nakamura and Beverley Stoeltje's work to demonstrate that the HBB represents a distinct, regionally informed cybertype framed by the settler-colonial image of the "good helpmate" (Stoeltje, 1975). These personal experiences also operate as attempts to move towards innocence, an examination guided by the work of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) as well as queer theory. Ultimately, this examination showed that the HBB weaponize their personal experiences of femininity, whiteness, and status as settlers in Canada to reify the "good helpmate" cybertype within the manosphere.

There remain future sites of research related to this topic to engage with. Most notably, the above case of the *Depp v. Heard* trial shows that the push-pull relationship for visibility between popular feminism and popular misogyny has staying power and should be examined and challenged at every turn. It also shows that discourses of men's rights—whether they be built through claims of false accusations, worries around sexual assault, or misogynistic vitriol against feminism—enter mainstream popular culture quite easily, and groups like the HBB will not hesitate to continue in capitalizing on them.

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Appendix. Images Referenced in Text

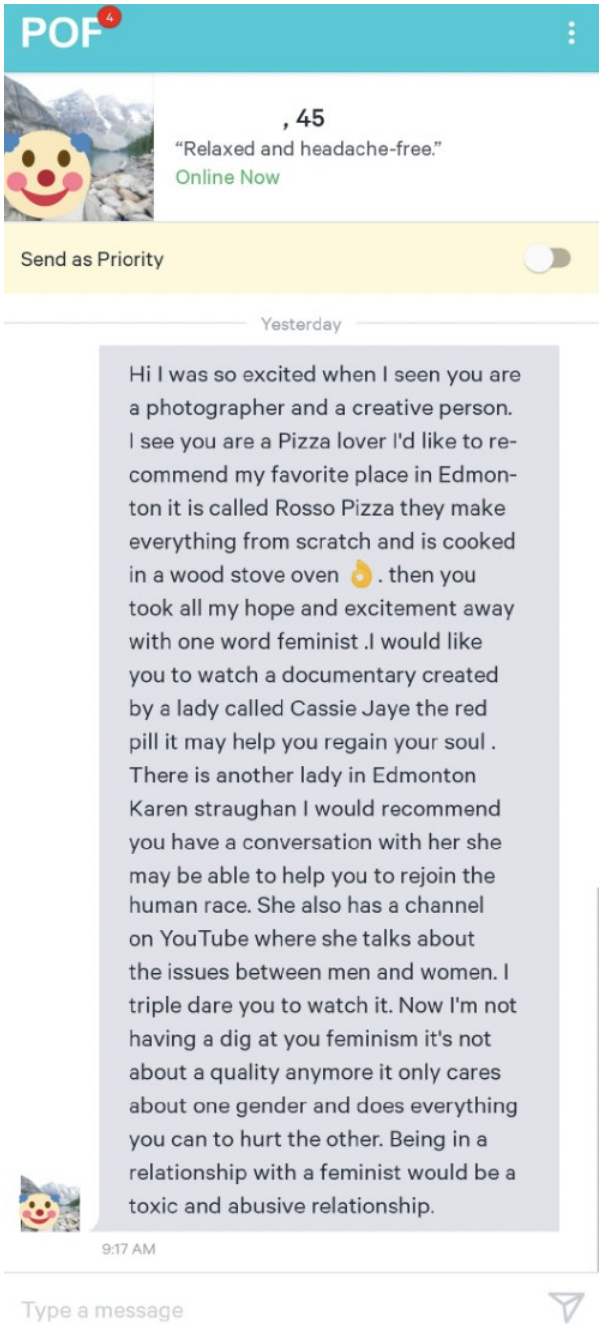

Figure 1. The message sent to Erin Cecile on Plenty of Fish (2021).
Source: Cecile, E. (2021) [@itserincecile]. Behold! The best message I've ever gotten on a dating app. Twitter. https://twitter.com/itserincecile/status/1455976689154990089

Figure 2. The posters created by Men's Rights Edmonton in opposition to a wider anti-sexual assault campaign (2013).

Source: Gotell, L. & E. Dutton. (2016). Sexual violence in the 'manosphere': Antifeminist men's rights discourses on rape. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *5*(2), pp.65-80.

Figure 3. The Honey Badger Brigades' booth at the Calgary Expo (2015).
Source: Relaxation Rachel [@naughty_nerdress]. (2015, April 17). Day2 of #CalgaryExpo and our booth being shutdown because being anti-censorship is bad #GamerGate [Tweet]. Twitter.