Of Victims, Mass Murder and 'Real Men' - The Masculinities of the 'Manosphere'[1]

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, a network of misogynist blogs, websites, wikis, and forums has developed, where users share their bigoted, sexist, and toxic views of society in general and masculinity and femininity in particular. This male supremacist online network has come to be collectively known as the manosphere. However, emerging analyses have tended to portray it as a homogeneous bloc of misogynist ideals. While all toxic, and in essence misogynist and antifeminist, in this chapter we show that the masculinities advocated in the manosphere differ in nature. We conduct an in-depth analysis of the masculinities of the manosphere's five major groups: Men's Rights Activists (MRA), Pick-Up-Artists (PUA), The Red Pill (subreddit), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and misogynist involuntary celibates (incels). The analysis is informed by feminist literature on socio-cultural conceptualizations of hegemonic and hybrid masculinities and their construction vis-a-vis one another as well as femininity. Through content analysis of popular forums of the five different subgroups, we assess how forms of masculinity are represented and performed by the groups, how they overlap with and contradict one another and how, despite common claims of marginalized and victimized masculinity/gender relations, they end up reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and the

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subjugation of women. We argue that understanding how these masculinities work is a prerequisite to understanding the pathways of radicalization in the manosphere and the resulting particular reactions ranging from political activism to sexual harassment and on- and offline violence.

Over the last few decades, a network of misogynist blogs, websites, wikis, and forums has developed, where users share their bigoted, sexist, and toxic views of society in general and masculinity and femininity in particular.[2] This male supremacist online network has come to be collectively known as the manosphere. While there had initially been only marginal interest in academia, mostly by feminist scholars,[3] more recently misogyny has been taken more seriously as a driving force by both terrorism studies[4] and social movement studies scholars.[5] Another strand of research subsumes the manosphere under a broad umbrella of digital hate culture, addressing the toxic environment these and white supremacist communities produce online.[6] However, studies have tended to focus on subgroups of the manosphere without assessing the manosphere as a whole;[7] consider the online community as a more or less homogeneous[8] arena;

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[2] CONTENT WARNING: In this article, we cite violent misogynist language which is used in the manosphere. While this language is only employed contextually to illustrate the discursive constructions of the groups, some of the terms and expressions refer to sexual assault, self-harm and suicide, body hatred and fat phobia, and other physical, psychological, and structural types of violence.

[3] Molly Dragiewicz, "Patriarchy Reasserted," *Feminist Criminology* 3, no. 2 (2008), https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085108316731;
Emma A. Jane, ""Your a Ugly, Whorish, Slut"," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.741073;
Karla Mantilla, "Gendertrolling: Misogyny Adapts to New Media," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013), http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719068.

[4] Chris Wilson, "Nostalgia, Entitlement and Victimhood: The Synergy of White Genocide and Misogyny," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1839428.

[5] Poland, Bailey. Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online. Lincoln: Potomac Books an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2016.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=1354282.
Corredor, Elizabeth S. "Unpacking "Gender Ideology" and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 44, no. 3 (2019): 613–38. https://doi.org/10.1086/701171.

[6] Bharath Ganesh, "The Ungovernability of Digital Hate Culture," *Journal of International Affairs* 71/2 (2018), https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/ungovernability-digital-hate-culture
Ashley Mattheis, "Understanding Digital Hate Culture," Center for Analysis of the Radical Right, accessed September 17, 2019, https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2019/08/19/understanding-digital-hate-culture/.

[7] E.g. Callum Jones, Verity Trott, and Scott Wright, "Sluts and Soyboys: MGTOW and the Production of Misogynistic Online Harassment," *New Media & Society* 200, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819887141
Scott Wright, Verity Trott, and Callum Jones, "'The Pussy Ain't Worth It, Bro': Assessing the Discourse and Structure of MGTOW," *Information, Communication & Society* 3, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1751867.

[8] Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," *Men and Masculinities* 19 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401.

rely on concepts that no longer fit the full extent and diversity of male supremacist groups[9]; or even misattribute separate groups[10] or individuals.[11] While this has helped to draw attention to the relevance of misogyny for mobilization into violent acts, it arguably often leads to a limited understanding of the broader space of the manosphere, the pathways of mobilization, and the types of action and discourse it brings about.[12] The groups of the male supremacist network do not espouse a unitary vision of society and their position in it. Instead, they vary in their understanding of gender relations in society and their corresponding repertoire of both violent and non-violent responses. In this chapter, we argue that these differences become visible in the different ways the groups of the manosphere construct and perform masculinity, which is at the core of their gendered construction of society. We pull apart and disaggregate the manosphere by providing an analysis that dissects the different masculinities embraced and performed by its various groups and shows how they are related to the differences in the groups' strategies and ideologies. Our analysis of the manosphere provides a needed intervention correcting past mischaracterizations of the manosphere.

We conduct an in-depth analysis of online content from the five secular male supremacist groups most prominent in the manosphere[13]: Men's Rights Activists (MRAs),

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[9] Schmitz and Kazyak, *"Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men's Rights Activist Websites".*

[10] Rachel Schmitz and Emily Kazyak, "Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men's Rights Activist Websites," *Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2016), https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci5020018

[11] Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459.

[12] Jasser, Greta; Kelly, Megan and Rothermel, Ann-Kathrin "Male Supremacism and the Hanau Terrorist Attack: Between Online Misogyny and Far-Right Violence," ICCT - International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, accessed December 10, 2020, https://icct.nl/publication/male-supremacism-and-the-hanau-terrorist-attack-between-online-misogyny-and-far-right-violence/.

[13] The manosphere is an umbrella term, and at times there have been other configurations of which groups are counted as part of or identify as belonging to the manosphere. However, these five groups have been frequently analyzed as the core umbrella groups, which means that most groups or communities, which are mentioned in the context of the manosphere can be grouped into one of them.
(see e.g. Filipe N. Ribeiro et al., "The Evolution of the Manosphere Across the Web," 2020, accessed August 25, 2020, https://arxiv.org/abs/2001.07600; Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, "Die Manosphere. Die Rolle Von Digitalen Gemeinschaften Und Regressiven Bewegungsdynamiken Für on- Und Offline Antifeminismus," *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 33, no. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1515/fjsb-2020-0041, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/fjsb-2020-0041/html).

Pick-Up-Artists (PUAs), the Red Pill, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs), and misogynist involuntary celibates[14] (incels). The analysis is informed by feminist literature on masculinity, in particular Raewyn Connell's and Demetrakis Demetriou's socio-cultural conceptualizations of hegemonic and hybrid masculinity. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a normatively encoded way of "being a man," which requires other masculinities to "position themselves in relation to it."[15] In this way, masculinities should be considered as "performed" rather than as an inherent quality of their members. This conceptualization allows us to expose how the relationship between hegemonic masculinity, nonhegemonic[16] masculinities, and femininity is a pattern that legitimizes unequal gender relations,[17] and encourages male supremacist violence. Additionally, we use the concept of hybrid masculinity by Demetriou, according to which hegemonic masculinity can borrow elements or characteristics produced by other nonhegemonic masculinities to continue to ensure hegemony in a changing landscape.[18] These concepts help us to uncover how each of the groups of the manosphere "repudiates and reifies elements of hegemonic masculinity."[19]

The results of the analysis show that while all in essence misogynist and antifeminist, the masculinities advocated by the various subgroups of the manosphere differ in nature. We

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[14] Throughout this article, we refer to "misogynist incel (s)" which as defined by Kelly et. al. (2021), "can be understood linguistically as similar to the construction of the term "racist skinhead")" Following Kelly et. al. (2021) we use it "to distinguish the male supremacist ideology and movement from personal identification with the term incel." This is not to say that the other groups analyzed are not misogynist, but rather to distinguish the women, men, and non-binary people that have historically and currently identify with the term incel but not the misogynist worldview.

[15] R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005), https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639, 832.

[16] In reference to nonhegemonic masculinities, some authors distinguish between marginalized and subordinated masculinities, whereby subordinated masculinities include those that profit from hegemonic masculinity and are nonhegemonic, but not marginalized. For this chapter, we refer to nonhegemonic masculinities as inclusive of both types of masculinity.

[17] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity"

[18] Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001), http://www.jstor.org/stable/657965, 349.

[19] Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815608807, 332.

find that masculinity is performed in a dialectical reproduction of 1) the diagnosis of the current situation of society and 2) the resulting strategies/reactions chosen and enacted by the group. Focusing on these dialectics provides important insights into the ways in which hybridization in the manosphere works to reproduce male supremacist ideology. We argue that a better understanding of how the groups of the manosphere conceptualize their masculinities can help to disentangle the web of the manosphere's radicalizing discourses. The analysis aims to expose the different ways in which the masculinities of the manosphere establish gender hierarchies and reinforce patriarchal norms. We argue that this is a prerequisite to understanding the pathways of radicalization into male supremacist beliefs, as well as the resulting reactions of those who are radicalized, ranging from political activism to sexual harassment and on- and offline violence.

The chapter is structured as follows: We first outline the conceptual framework of hegemonic and hybrid masculinity. We then provide a brief overview of the historical development of the manosphere and its various configurations and present our analysis of the masculinities performed by the five groups of the manosphere. The final part summarizes the results of the analysis and relates them to the growing discussions on male supremacist violence.

Hybrid and Hegemonic Masculinities

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was articulated by Connell and colleagues in the 1980s as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue."[20] This pattern of practice defines the "most honored" way of being a man and establishes hierarchies with other types of

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[20] Connell and Messerschmidt, 832.

(nonhegemonic) masculinities. What is defined as hegemonic is thereby open to change both across time and place. Moreover, hegemonic masculinity is not a trait of individual men. Its different elements can be adopted and discarded situationally through discursive practices.[21] Similarly, nonhegemonic masculinities cannot be defined per se but only in relation to historically specific hegemonic masculinities. For instance, in the 1960s, a very specific romanticized vision of idealized masculinity in the form of "boy culture" took hold in some contexts. This was established by juxtaposing "real masculinity" as opposed to "visibly feminized" soft men of the new left ("a new lumpen leisure-class of assorted hippies, homosexuals, artistic poseurs, and 'malevolent blacks'").[22] This highlights that the relationship between hegemonic and other masculinities is based on a complex web between performed femininities and masculinities, and that idealized masculinities are both temporally and spatially specific.

Demetriou[23] argues that masculinities should be read in a dialectical way, because, as Connell and Messerschmidt write "hegemonic masculinity appropriates from other masculinities whatever appears to be pragmatically useful for continued domination."[24] Drawing on Bhabha's notion of hybridity, he explains that hegemonic masculinity is "a hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy."[25] Demetriou identifies two forms of hegemony: domination over women/femininity (external) and domination over other men/masculinities (internal). Both forms of hegemony must be read as fluid and in conjunction with one another. In other words, in order to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity and its effect on the subordination of women,

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[21] Connell and Messerschmidt, 841.

[22] Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 5 (1985), http://www.jstor.org/stable/657315, 562.

[23] Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique"

[24] Connell and Messerschmidt, 844.

[25] Demetriou, 337.

one has to understand how different masculinities (and femininities) work together in discourse and practice and adjust to fit particular political and historical situations.

Developing the theoretical approach further, in 2010, Messerschmidt concluded that masculinity is "fluid and flexible" at regional and global levels.[26] Relatedly, Bridges and Pascoe found that hybrid masculinities specifically have "attained ideological power and influence on a global stage."[27] They argue that the process of hybridization, in which hegemonic masculinities appropriate aspects of nonhegemonic masculinities, obscures gender inequalities through three mechanisms: (1) creating symbolic distance between men and hegemonic masculinity, (2) positioning the masculinities of "young, White, heterosexual men as somehow less meaningful than the masculinities associated with various marginalized and subordinated Others," and (3) reinforcing existing social and symbolic boundaries, which then work "to conceal systems of power and inequality in historically new ways."[28]

While all these mechanisms serve to establish hybrid masculinities as nonhegemonic, and separate from a patriarchal order, a careful look at the process and effect of hybridization exposes how they do work to uphold the patriarchal gender order on a global level. For example, studies of hybrid masculinity have centered on "new ways of performing heterosexuality while engaging in 'gay' styles, practices, and sex."[29] While the adoption of traits of nonhegemonic, subordinated masculinities might at first seem subversive, rather than challenging a patriarchal gender order, the adoption of hybrid masculinities can instead work to obscure systems of power and inequality.

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[26] James W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinities and Camouflaged Politics*: *Unmasking the Bush Dynasty and Its War Against Iraq* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2010), 161.

[27] Tristan Bridges and C. J. Pascoe, "Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities," *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 3 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12134, 251.

[28] Bridges and Pascoe, 246.

[29] Bridges and Pascoe, 249.

Ging attributes the increasing globalization of hybrid masculinities to the rise of the internet, which has allowed hybrid masculinities to transverse local and regional boundaries and evade containment.[30] Similarly, both Massanari and Salter identify the internet and various online platforms as vehicles for further hybridization.[31] One particular example of this is "geek masculinity." In her work on the online platform Reddit and targeted harassment, Massanari explores geek masculinity as a form of hybrid masculinity, which both "repudiates and reifies elements of hegemonic masculinity." She points to geek masculinity's embrace of "facets of hypermasculinity by valorizing intellect over social or emotional intelligence," but points out that simultaneously individuals that perform geek masculinity might "demonstrate awkwardness regarding sexual/romantic relationships" and "reject other hypermasculine traits"[32] like showing interest in sports or athletics.

In recent years, the manosphere has become more prominently known as an online space where the construction and reproduction of hybrid and hegemonic masculinities (internal domination) and, in turn, patriarchal subordination of women (external domination) occurs. However, extant analyses have tended to conceptualize the manosphere as a (more or less coherent) whole.[33] For example, in their analysis of men's rights activists, Schmitz and Kayzak[34] subsume Men Going Their Own Way and Pick-Up Artist forums as men's rights groups or "men's rights affiliated." While they pick up on some of the nuances and divergences of these groups, they fail to acknowledge the distinct groups in the network, by placing them

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[30] Ging, 16.

[31] Michael Salter, "From Geek Masculinity to Gamergate: The Technological Rationality of Online Abuse," *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 14, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659017690893

[32] Massanari, 332.

[33] Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton, "Sexual Violence in the 'Manosphere': Antifeminist Men's Rights Discourses on Rape," *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 5, no. 2 (2016), https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.310;
Mary Lilly, "'The World is Not a Safe Place for Men': The Representational Politics of the Manosphere" (Université D'Ottawa / University Of Ottawa, 2016).
Donna Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[34] Schmitz and Kayzak

all under the men's rights label. Others have focused on deconstructing the performance of masculinity prevalent in one of its various groups of misogynist "involuntary celibates" (incels),[35] men's rights activists (MRAs),[36] Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs),[37] the Red Pill,[38] and Pick-Up Artists (PUAs)[39]. Moreover, with increasing interest in the manosphere among terrorist studies scholars, there has been a rise in misattributions of (often violent) misogynist reactions to individual groups, mostly misogynist incels.[40]

In this chapter, we draw on this work, but provide a deeper engagement with the differences and overlaps between the masculinities of the various groups of the manosphere. Our analysis provides a reorientation from the conflation, common to previous work, of the groups of the manosphere and the masculinities therein, as well as from the mischaracterization of one prominent group, like misogynist incels, as emblematic of the network as a whole. We borrow analytical concepts from Oliver and Johnston's work on movement ideologies and their

[35] Jan Blommaert, "Online-Offline Modes of Identity and Community:: Elliot Rodger's Twisted World of Masculine Victimhood," Tilburg Papers in Culture Studie, no. 200 (2017);
Stephane J. Baele, Lewys Brace, and Travis G. Coan, "From "Incel" to "Saint": Analyzing the Violent Worldview Behind the 2018 Toronto Attack," Terrorism and Political Violence, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1638256;
Sylvia Jaki et al., "Online Hatred of Women in the Incels.Me Forum," Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict 7, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.00026.jak;
 Christopher Vito, Amanda Admire, and Elizabeth Hughes, "Masculinity, Aggrieved Entitlement, and Violence: Considering the Isla Vista Mass Shooting," NORMA 13, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2017.1390658;
[36] Srimati Basu, "Looking Through Misogyny: Indian Men's Rights Activists, Law, and Challenges for Feminism," Canadian Journal of Women and the Law 28, no. 1 (2016), https://doi.org/10.3138/cjwl.28.1.45;
Carl Bertois and Drakich, Janice "The Fathers' Rights Movement," Journal of Family Issues 14, no. 4 (1993), https://doi.org/10.1177/019251393014004007;
 Michael A. Messner, "Equality with a Vengeance: Men's Rights Groups, Battered Women, and Antifeminist Backlash," Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews 42, no. 3 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306113484702d;
[37] Jie L. Lin, "Antifeminism Online: MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way): Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces," in Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces, ed. Urte U. Frömming et al., Media studies 34 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017);
Jones, Trott and Wright, "Sluts and soyboys: MGTOW and the production of misogynistic online harassment"
[38] Pierce A. Dignam and Deana A. Rohlinger, "Misogynistic Men Online: How the Red Pill Helped Elect Trump," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 44, no. 3 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1086/701155;
Shawn P. van Valkenburgh, "Digesting the Red Pill: Masculinity and Neoliberalism in the Manosphere," Men and Masculinities, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18816118
[39] Ran Almog and Danny Kaplan, "The Nerd and His Discontent," Men and Masculinities 20, no. 1 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15613831;
 Rachel O'Neill, Seduction: Men, Masculinity and Mediated Intimacy (Cambridge, Medford, MA: Polity, 2018).
[40] Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence".

conceptualization of movement's "diagnosis (how things got to be how they are), prognosis (what should be done and what the consequences will be), and rationale (who should do it and why)."[41] We employ these concepts to analyze how the groups' social theory and their proposed reactions and solutions serve their construction of masculinity and vice versa, as well as how these constructions of masculinity interact with hegemonic masculinity.

This analysis also challenges the misconception that these groups solely represent nonhegemonic masculinities. In particular, Nagle (2017) portrays the growing antifeminism online as a backlash to "evermore radical liberal gender politics and increasingly common anti-male rhetoric that went from obscure feminist online spaces to the mainstream."[42] Nagle characterizes the masculinities advocated for in the manosphere as nonhegemonic or "beta" masculinities that are defensive in nature and therefore do not uphold hegemonic masculinity.[43] This portrayal buys into a narrative endorsed in the manosphere and other antifeminist movements: that there is "too much feminism," that gender equality somehow "got out of hand," and that whoever is a feminist now, must simply hate men, conveniently manufacturing a men-hating society.[44] However, as Bridges and Pascoe posit, while "discursive distance" between men and hegemonic masculinity can be created in hybrid masculinities through self-representation as subordinated, this distancing can also, subtly, allow men to align themselves further with hegemonic masculinity.[45] Building on this, the analysis shows the specific ways in which marginalized and subordinated masculinities can, and through their hybridity do, contribute to reproducing hegemonic masculinities.

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[41] Pamela E. Oliver and Hank Johnston, "What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 4/1 (2000), 43.
[42] Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 86.
[43] Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies*: *The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump* (Winchester, UK, Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2017).
[44] Kristin Anderson, *Modern misogyny*
[45] Bridges and Pascoe, 250.

A Brief History of the Manosphere

Prior to the advent of the manosphere, an online iteration of male supremacist mobilizations, both men's rights activists (MRAs) and pickup artists (PUAs) developed as offline movements in the 1970s. MRAs have long organized around issues such as "father's rights" and to oppose legal protections against sexual harassment and violence.[46] MRAs have repeatedly attacked feminist groups and spaces, which they blame for a decline in men's rights. This has led to a general consent among (feminist) scholars that, despite their framing around "men's rights" as a reversed mirror of women's rights activism, the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) is "defined as much *against* feminism as it is *for* men's rights."[47] Scholars have shown that they remain caught up in "an endless polarizing reproduction of anger and outrage that has become [their] signature online."[48] They engage in "indignation mobilization mechanisms," providing a "mix of highly biased opinion pieces, disinformation, and accurate information in order to provoke indignation and mobilize their readers."[49] In contrast, PUAs tend to consider themselves as less political and more associated with popular culture and relationship advice. In the 1970s, the term "Pick-Up Artist" was coined to describe men who used manipulation and "seduction" strategies to try and "pick-up" women. (In the mid-2000s, PUAs became part of the pop culture mainstream, largely due to a best-selling book *The Game* and the VH1 Reality

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[46] Gotell and Dutton, "Sexual Violence in the 'Manosphere': Antifeminist Men's Rights Discourses on Rape" International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy 5, no. 2 (2016), https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.301.

[47] Alice E. Marwick and Robyn Caplan, "Drinking Male Tears: Language, the Manosphere, and Networked Harassment," *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1450568.

[48] Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, ""The Other Side": Assessing the Polarization of Gender Knowledge Through a Feminist Analysis of the Affective-Discursive in Anti-Feminist Online Communities," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaa024.

[49] Julia Rone, "Far Right Alternative News Media as 'Indignation Mobilization Mechanisms': How the Far Right Opposed the Global Compact for Migration," *Information, Communication & Society*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1864001, 8.

show "The Pick-Up Artist." This pop culture spotlight led to new growth in existing PUA forums and content.[50])

In the 1990s and early 2000s, both MRAs and PUAs increasingly moved online—inhabiting forums, wikis and websites to disseminate their content and create spaces for exchange between their followers—and another group, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), emerged. While some scholars have categorized MGTOWs as an MRA group,[51] MGTOWs are a distinct group that emerged from existing men's rights activist and antifeminist spaces of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In their initial form, MGTOWs were "almost uniformly libertarian, and their distaste for 'big government' led to a schism with the men's human rights movement."[52] Today, MGTOWs advocate for men to abstain from (legal)[53] relationships with women.[54]

In the early 2010s, the online space of these various groups became more and more consolidated, and the manosphere emerged as an umbrella term.[55] At the same time, the groups associated with the manosphere experienced several shifts in content and following. In 2012, on the social media board *Reddit*, the subreddit r/TheRedPill was created anonymously by former Republican New Hampshire State Representative Robert Fisher.[56] For the manosphere, "taking the red pill" describes "becoming enlightened to life's ugly truths. The Red Pill

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[50] Rebecca Lewis and Alice E. Marwick, "Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online" (Data & Society Research Institute, n.d.), https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/DataAndSociety_MediaManipulationAndDisinformationOnline.pdf.

[51] Jones, Trott and Wright, "Sluts and soyboys: MGTOW and the production of misogynistic online harassment"; Wright, Trott and Jones, "'The pussy ain't worth it, bro': assessing the discourse and structure of MGTOW".

[52] Zuckerberg, 19.

[53] There are MGTOWs that pursue romantic relationships with women, but the group broadly rejects marriage.

[54] Lin, "Antifeminism Online"

[55] Emma A. Jane, "Systemic Misogyny Exposed: Translating Rapeglish from the Manosphere with a Random Rape Threat Generator," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 6 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877917734042.

[56] Bonnie Bacarisse, "The Republican Lawmaker Who Secretly Created Reddit's Women-Hating 'Red Pill'," Daily Beast, accessed February 11, 2021, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-republican-lawmaker-who-secretly-created-reddits-women-hating-red-pill.

philosophy purports to awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing."[57] Members of "The Red Pill" groups center around this shared narrative of awakening. In 2016, The Red Pill leadership took a political stance and rallied behind Trump's campaign, especially in light of sexual assault allegations made against him.[58] While members explicitly distance themselves from MRAs and PUAs, the forum contains material from both groups. The two most active sections on the forum are "Red Pill strategy" and "Men's Rights," highlighting the interconnectivity of the different groups of the manosphere.

Throughout the 2010s, the manosphere also gained attention in the media due to its connection to both sexual[59] and mass violence.[60] Some men who had come to believe PUA strategies were a scam began to congregate on the now defunct website PUAhate.[61] Many of the members of this site were not only angry at PUAs, but also at women for (still) rejecting their sexual advances. PUAhate made headlines after a member of the site named it in his manifesto before murdering six people and injuring fourteen others in Isla Vista, California in 2014. In his manifesto and online postings, the perpetrator stated that he wanted to punish all women, whom he blamed for his "lonely, celibate life."[62] In the years since this attack, multiple new online misogynist incel communities have formed, grown, and been connected to more recent acts of violence.[63] Analysis has shown that there has been a considerable shift of followers from MRA and PUA forums to misogynist incel and MGTOW forums.[64]

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[57] Ging, 3.

[58] Dignam and Rohlinger, "Misogynistic Men Online: How the Red Pill Helped Elect Trump"

[59] Emily Crockett, "Did Roosh V Really Organize "Pro-Rape Rallies"? No, but Here's Why People Are Protesting Him." Vox, accessed February 11, 2021, https://www.vox.com/2016/2/6/10926872/roosh-pro-rape-rallies.

[60] Alex DiBranco, "Shooting in Tallahassee Illustrates Increasing Misogynist Violence," Political Research Associates, accessed February 11, 2021, https://www.politicalresearch.org/2018/11/08/shooting-in-tallahassee-illustrates-increasing-misogynist-violence.

[61] Other similar misogynist sites included r/ForeverAlone and love-shy.com.

[62] Jack Bratich and Sarah Banet-Weiser, "From Pick-up Artists to Incels: Con(Fidence) Games, Networked Misogyny, and the Failure of Neoliberalism," *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019).

[63] DiBranco, "'The Incel Rebellion': Movement Misogyny Delivers Another Massacre".

[64] Ribeiro et al., "The Evolution of the Manosphere Across the Web"

The network of the manosphere emerged organically from separate antifeminist and male supremacist spaces and groups, which have found a home in an ever-growing online conglomeration of blogs, websites and forums. While the space can broadly be divided into these five groupings (MRAs, PUAs, MGTOWs, the Red Pill, and misogynist incels), their content and membership within the manosphere have shifted over time. All these groups have shown that they are able to generate a following around gender and masculinity which has resulted in both on- and offline violence.[65]

Analyzing the Manosphere

The manosphere is centered around masculinities. The emphasis of our analysis lies on the ways in which the different groups construct and perform their concept of masculinity. We focus in particular on the role of masculinity in the respective group's 1) social theory, i.e. their *diagnosis* of society, and 2) their *reactions* to this diagnosis. The social theory of a group is a belief "that explain[s] how social arrangements came to be and how they might be changed or strengthened."[66] This social theory—or the diagnosis of society, which determines where "society went wrong" or what ought to be changed in the current social fabric—is vital to understanding what unites the groups of the manosphere, as well as their differences. It sets up their worldview. Second, we analyze the reactions the groups formulate to these diagnoses and society as they perceive it. The diagnoses and reactions of the groups connote the way the respective group performs masculinity. It encompasses both the options the group members consider as societal and individual "solutions" or "strategies."

As data, we selected one forum per group. Forums, compared to more static websites, enable individuals to form a virtual community around interests and issues, and afford a space

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[65] Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, "Die Manosphere. Die Rolle Von Digitalen Gemeinschaften Und Regressiven Bewegungsdynamiken Für on- Und Offline Antifeminismus,".

[66] Oliver, and Johnston, 37–54.

for exchange.[67] We analyzed: r/MensRights, MPUAForum.com, mgtow.com, r/TheRedPill, and incels.co.[68] MPUAForum.com, mgtow.com, and incels.co are stand-alone sites while r/MensRights and r/TheRedPill are subreddits and therefore hosted on Reddit. In choosing these forums we aimed for information-rich cases that best show the nature of each of these communities. To achieve this, we purposefully selected the 10 threads that created the highest engagement from users (as measured by the number of comments/replies) and those 10 threads that were deemed essential or popular (as measured by most views or indexed as "must-read" or "most popular" by the forum moderators) from each forum. The five most popular threads from each forum, i.e., those that appeared on both the top 10 comments/replies list and the most read/viewed/popular list, were then selected for analysis. To keep the data to a size fit for a qualitative analysis, we extracted the first 50 comments. Overall, we analyzed 250 comments for each group, and a total of 1,250 comments overall.

Additionally, we analyzed homepages, FAQs, or wikis that were directly linked to by each of these forums (for full data see Table 1). The resulting data were subjected to a qualitative content analysis with a focus on hegemonic and hybrid masculinity, as well as social theories (diagnosis) and (re)actions of the groups. In a collaborative and iterative process, we inductively added and compared codes to account for themes across the threads and groups. The results below show the different ways the groups position themselves (and their masculinity) in relation to other masculinities and how these result in reproducing or challenging hegemonic masculinity.

Table 1: Selected text corpus divided by groups of the manosphere

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[67] Willem de Koster and Dick Houtman, "'Stormfront Is Like a Second Home for Me': On Virtual Community Formation by Right-Wing Extremists," *Information, Communication & Society* 11, no. 8 (2008), https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802266665.

[68] We acknowledge that within these communities, there were other popular forums that have been analyzed in the past. We add to this research by focusing on forums that remained online (i.e., were not taken down due to their harmful content or by the creator). Further, we want to clarify that these forums and groups might not be representative for all strands of each group more broadly.

Group	Forums Analyzed
MRA[69]	r/MensRights/, Wiki4Men.com, avoiceformen.com
PUA	MPUAForum.com
MGTOW	mgtow.com
The Red Pill[70]	/r/TheRedPill
Misogynist Incels	incels.co,[71] incel.wiki

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[69] Forums on Reddit have to adhere to Reddit community-guidelines. These are often stricter than forums hosted on external webpages. The MRA subreddit remains easily accessible.

[70] r/TheRedPill is also on Reddit, and it has been quarantined since September 2018.

[71] As of March 2021, after our data collection, incels.co became incels.is.

MRAs (Men's Rights Activists)

Diagnosis

Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) perceive their respective societies as inherently stacked against men. These societies are seen as feminist, "gynocentric," and/or favoring women over men. As one post read, "Well, men are disposable to today's society, so of course only women are counted [in homelessness statistics]." While most issues MRAs invoke are societal issues that need addressing, they fail to identify the broader, underlying structures causing them and focus their analysis on the fate of men and the unfairness they face (compared to women). Their main grievances surround family courts, which they make out to treat men unfairly, sexual violence against men, male suicide rates, and rape allegations against men, which they consider false. All of these issues are presented, not as broader social issues, but rather as gender issues whereby men are disproportionately affected and disadvantaged. To emphasize this assessment, MRAs often adopt terms and language from the civil rights movement, as well as feminist movements. For example, they juxtapose the "glass ceiling" women face when striving for higher positions usually held by men with a "glass cellar," as one post stated: "MR [Men's Rights] is about the vast number of people at the bottom - the glass cellar - including the homeless, unemployed, divorced, victims of violence, depressed/suicidal, etc. These are also predominantly men."

Reaction

As the name of the movement indicates, MRAs navigate the framework of human and civil rights. They position themselves as activists. A large proportion of their forums and websites is dedicated to recruiting new members and/or convincing readers that MRAs' causes are worthwhile. They provide material for school projects as well as answers to questions that are likely to come up, when being challenged on MRA views. They largely claim not to be

antifeminist nor anti-woman. However, they often attribute their grievances to a feminist society. Besides identifying grievances, online MRA communities focus on activism. Following this positioning, the outward-facing MRA webpages are oriented towards changing laws and policies and often call for signing petitions. In an introductory page on the MRA wiki, they situate themselves alongside other movements as "working toward equality": "The MRM want[s] to resolve certain issues facing men and boys and achieve equality of opportunity for all. The MRM opposes the enforcement of traditional gender roles, as well as the perspective to gender relations presented by most forms of feminism."

Masculinity

MRAs emphasize the vulnerability of men, and center their masculinity around a status of victimhood in modern societies. Their masculinity is hybrid, as it does not emphasize the classical traits of hegemonic masculinity, but centers injustices, grievances, and a victimhood status based on their gender. Some strands decidedly reject traditional gender roles, as they are considered harmful to men, in particular vis-a-vis child custody, child support, and alimony. In contrast to other groups of the manosphere, MRAs do not tend to distinguish between different "types" of men and masculinity but present all men as victims of society (with few exceptions). In turn, femininity and all women are presented as the winners under the societal status quo.

While their activism is constructed as geared towards equal rights, their suggestions for change often aim to reclaim lost entitlement. For example, the conception of "fixing" the court system culminates in a reversal of the perceived power dynamics, whereby men have power over the outcome of a divorce, or pregnancy ("my wallet my choice"). MRAs aim to reinstate a (supposedly) lost patriarchal order, which incorporates traits of hegemonic masculinity (power over money, dominance in relationships and as the head of household) that put them in a position of power and privilege they deem rightfully theirs.

PUAs (Pick-Up Artists)

Diagnosis

PUAs have no shared diagnosis of society. What unites them is that they strive for individual

success to attract women and become involved with them, either aiming at sexual encounters

or seeking long-term relationships. To achieve this, PUAs use different "seduction techniques,"

which they refer to as "Game," and share tips for self-improvement. Aside from temporary

obstacles to their sexual success, which are to be solved individually through self-improvement,

PUAs are not actively advocating against the society and economy in which they live. Their

explicit social diagnosis only seems to concern gender relations, which they tend to frame in

the economic language of "investment." One post stated,

> attraction is triggered any time we invest in something. The harder we work to achieve
> it, the harder we want it. The key to getting women to want you is to get them to invest
> in you. Certain characteristics may cause them to invest in you without the need to try
> hard or even approach. Many people are blessed with a number of these characteristics
> already, and for the most part, this explains many [of] the success [of] what typical guys
> get. Increasing the number and quality of these characteristics will have a direct positive
> effect on our ability with the opposite sex.

Reaction

Generally, PUAs can be described as subscribing to an individualistic, self-help ideology. The

signatures and profiles of the forum users are filled with inspirational and motivational quotes

about believing in oneself. PUAs see their problem as an individual one, thus the strategies to

overcome it are developed for individual execution and aimed at individual success. Strategies

recommended by (semi-)professional PUAs include "demonstrating high value" and

"controlling the frame." In other words, PUAs advise to present oneself as sovereign and

dominant in dating situations. Building on the idea of investment, they seek to transfer the

tactics and virtues of business negotiations to dating. Detailing strategies for successful phone calls with women, one PUA post notes, "There's a rule in business that goes something like 'Face to face is always better than a phone call, and a phone call is always better than an email.' Business and pickup have many of the same rules, and this one is no exception."

While some PUAs' advice is confined to developing self-help, others propose techniques that involve attempts at manipulation. In one pertinent example from one forum thread, "negs" are defined as "backhanded comments that just destabilize a girls [sic] ego, help her lower her 'bitch shield'. They make her think you are not another loser coming up to her in a bar wanting to score." This belief that men must pass "women's defenses" in order to engage in sexual relations encourages sexual harassment and coercion, and is rooted in misogyny. In individual instances in the analyzed material, some PUAs question whether manipulative behavior like "negging" is unethical. Most often however, ethical concerns are quickly brushed aside, and the tactics are characterized in the responses as harmless, funny banter. Other concerns about manipulation are mostly focused on the demoralizing effect of such tactics on the men who use them, or the feeling that the tactics are an unfair advantage and constitute "cheating," rather than on the effect of manipulation on women. This exposed the underlying misogyny hiding behind the language of investment and self-improvement.

<div align="center">Masculinity</div>

PUAs approach gender relations in society with the transactional logic of doing business. The advice for seduction thus often relies on the (economic) value of a PUA, which (more than his actual financial situation) is based on his performance of masculinity vis-a-vis women. One forum user posted: "His [successful PUA's] simple thing is that he uses loads of confidence, and he always frames himself as being the MAN!" While PUAs are focused more than the other groups on their individual trajectories rather than broader societal issues, they share a sense of

masculinity as capital in today's society, which is necessary to achieve their goal of sexual relationships with women. Much like with other sources of capital, they believe that their individual masculinity can be optimized and "increased," which will allow them an optimal outcome in the "dating market." Their strategies to increase masculine value most often rely on performing traits that are traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity, like dominance and self-confidence. Women in this equation become the buyer of a product of masculinity, whose ideal value is calculated by its proximity to hegemonic masculinity.

MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way)

Diagnosis

MGTOWs historicize their group by placing themselves among "great" men of history. They hypothesize that historically significant men (Tesla, Locke, Beethoven, van Gogh, "or even Jesus Christ") were able to achieve their level of success and fulfill their genius precisely because they avoided romantic attachments with women. MGTOWs also firmly believe that men are naturally more likely to be risk-takers, creators, and do-ers than women, which has allowed men to be the "creators of civilization." However, they believe that men have not been given the proper credit or respect that they deserve. Instead, they feel that they are persecuted, that any attempt to acknowledge pro-male sentiment is wrongfully labeled "toxic and misogynistic," and that society is increasingly "gynocentric," favoring women at the expense of men. At the core of this belief is the idea that women are naturally inferior to men. MGTOWs argue that women's only power is their beauty, and that their power diminishes as they age.

MGTOWs are opposed to relationships with women in current society because they believe that women use and manipulate men, and trap them into relationships in order to access their money, status, or sperm. They cite feminism as the reason for this perceived increasingly

hostile environment for men, which they believe "was created to destabilize society" and has allowed women to run rampant. They argue that feminism's influence has led to men having little "legal control" in situations like divorce, which they argue is an industry "deliberately designed to transfer his wealth (men's) and freedom to her (women)." MGTOWs position themselves as victims of feminism. Their philosophy to distance themselves from women is framed as a direct reaction to feminism and the ills they believe that feminism has wrought. As an article on the "About" section of the mgtow.com forum explains,

> Men haven't lost their need to find happiness by providing, protecting, sacrifcing [sic] and conquering; we've simply discovered that providing for the modern feminist, working like a dog to protect a family that can be taken away at a moment's notice, or risking our lives to conquer resources for some ungrateful women [sic] who claims she can do it on her own is an empty way to live.

<div align="center">Reaction</div>

The main MGTOW reaction to a perceived gynocentric society is to not engage (legally) with women or with society altogether. This most often takes the form of encouraging men not to marry or have children with women. While some MGTOWs have short-term relationships, other MGTOWs consider even this a risk. MGTOWs suggests that men overall should work to take "women off the pedestal" that the "gynocentric order" has put women on. Another method that MGTOWs employ is to shame women for their sexual activity or looks. One MGTOW thread centers around shaming women who have "hit the wall" and is filled with jubilant MGTOW comments about how women are eventually punished by losing their beauty, and therefore their power, when aging. Within these posts about women "hitting the wall," there is also a sentiment that MGTOWs have experienced a societal expectation to marry a beautiful "trophy wife" as a status symbol. However, they state that taking the red pill has unburdened them of this pressure and saved them the trouble of these imagined women one day "hitting the wall." When discussing actresses that were once considered "bombshells" but have since aged,

they express pity towards their husbands and gratefulness that they've "taken the red pill…

therefore this scenario will never happen to me. I save face. I save sanity."

Masculinity

MGTOWs frame themselves as independent, self-sufficient, and self-empowered men. Their main proposed strategy for dealing with the "gynocentric society" they believe they live in is to withdraw from that society and instead form an independent and self-sufficient life. They align themselves with some of the stereotypical traits of hegemonic masculinity (risk-taking, dominance, rationality) and with "great" men of history that they believe embodied these traits. Further, they advocate for male domination over women, arguing that men as the supposed creators should be able to dictate the rules and norms of "civilization." While MGTOWs claim that they are "going their own way," have been relieved of social pressures to seek out relationships with women, and are carving out independent lives for themselves, much of the discussion on their forums is dedicated to how women have wronged them. They position themselves as victims of women's manipulation and feminism's oppressive nature. Further, in rejecting the role as a "provider" specifically to women and children, they upend stereotypical expectations of hegemonic masculinity. MGTOWs present themselves as rejecting the breadwinner role, and in doing so seem to set themselves apart from their perceived expectations of men and challenge hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, they reinforce hegemonic masculinity through this rejection, arguing that men naturally embody greatness, rationality, dominance, and risk-taking, while valuing women only for their beauty and presenting women as an obstacle for men's potential greatness. In doing so, they reassert hegemonic masculinity.

TRP (The Red Pill)

Diagnosis

TRP members frame feminism as a "sexual strategy" that they believe has allowed women to be in, as the introduction page states, the "best position they can find, to select mates, to determine when they want to switch mates, to locate the best dna [sic] possible, and to garner the most resources they can individually achieve." They then frame the "red pill" as "men's sexual strategy" for a changing world and the "sexual marketplace."[72] They believe the red pill is needed because they perceive society to be feminist, and the public discourse to be a "feminist frame." As a result, they believe men have "lost [their] identity because of it [the feminist frame]." TRP members believe they are persecuted for expressing these views. This fear is expressed, for example, through concerns around deplatforming from Reddit. The perpetrator of this persecution is often thought to be an increasingly "politically correct," "cultural marxist [sic]," and feminist culture that does not allow men, specifically TRP-members, to speak their minds or to expose how they perceive the world actually operates. One major aspect that is discussed in the forum is the changing nature of the workplace, where a company is described as being forced to "hire enough feminits [sic]/SJWs [Social Justice Warriors] and they will hold [the] company hostage." There is also the sentiment that they as men, especially "straight white males," are suffering the brunt of a "punishment" for "wrongthink," and that groups that purport to be "tolerant" and "open" are hypocritical as they are not open to the opinions of TRP and other views that are "critical."

Reaction

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[72] The sexual marketplace is a common trope in the manosphere. It has been used by early MRA and PUA forums and is still heavily used in TRP, incel, and, to a lesser extent, MGTOW terminology and discussions.

The main strategy that TRP suggests for men to contend with feminist-centric society is "male sexual strategy." One facet of this proposed strategy is "Game," which they believe helps elevate men's status in the "sexual marketplace." While users of TRP critique existing PUA "Game," they also embrace many aspects of PUA strategies. In their critiques, they claim that in communities like r/seduction there seems to be an attempt to "feminize the discussion (basically making it sound politically correct if read by a female)." In supposedly "feminizing the discussion," men are just succumbing to women's manipulation and sexual strategy. TRP therefore does not frame itself as wanting to help men "become better men," but rather as providing strategies on how to manipulate women in order to have sex. The r/TRP forum is littered with "Game" advice and resources from users. One such resource focuses on men strengthening their "frame," which is later defined as being a "natural leader" and "masculine," in order to seduce women. The author of this resource proposes that women will always go for a man with a stronger "frame," and that women will "test your frame to test your masculinity." The proposed way to pass these "frame tests" is to not take a woman's rejection or "no" for an answer, as these rejections are really just a test to see if the man who approached her is "masculine enough." This is reminiscent of PUA strategies and similarly encourages coercion, sexual violence, and rape: "She'll act like a bitch. She'll pretend to ignore you. She'll tell you outright to go away. She wants to see if you'll buckle to social pressure, or if your frame will remain calm and consistent regardless of external feedback. She actually WANTS to sleep with you — but she needs to test your strength first."

Masculinity

TRP members present their beliefs as "rational," "scientific," and "natural" or "biological." Thus, they have an essentialist and binary understanding of gender (femininity and masculinity), whereby men are framed as naturally more rational, stronger, dependable, and

hardworking than women. Some users claim that women are attracted to men because of a man's performance of masculinity. TRP members claim that feminists are irrational because they are working to change these "natural, biological" differences between men and women, including in the workforce. They therefore express strong support for hegemonic masculinity and the resulting hierarchical patriarchal order, which they perceive as being threatened. They also align themselves with ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity, proposing both physical and psychological self-improvement to what they perceive to be nonhegemonic traits and characteristics. TRP members do not perceive themselves as having unchangeable traits of nonhegemonic masculinities. Instead, their victimhood results from a perceived oppression by feminism, which is threatening hegemonic masculinity.

Misogynist Incels

Diagnosis

Many misogynist incels take on a biological determinist and essentialist view that women "naturally select men based on looks rather than personality and that women select men with the best genes." This belief is referred to as the "blackpill." Misogynist incels tend to consider themselves as particularly unattractive and genetically disadvantaged ("subhuman"). They blame women for their existence as involuntary celibates because of "female hypergamy," through which men with a lower "market value" are sidelined in the "sexual marketplace." As a result, misogynist incels present themselves as victims because they do not have access to sex with women, which they consider a natural and fundamental part of the human, and especially male, experience. This victimhood is framed in terms of how they perceive they are treated compared to other men, particularly "Chads" (attractive white men). They believe that "Chads"

have sexual access to women because of their physical features. In contrast, misogynist incels believe they are genetically unlucky and will continue to be "involuntary celibates" because of their looks.

Even if misogynist incels "ascend" and have sex with a woman, or even have children with them, they still consider themselves victims of their genetics, as they had to work for something that other men were easily given. Additionally, they believe unless a woman is "bound to one man," she will eventually leave for a man with a higher "market value." Women are therefore portrayed by misogynist incels as cruel, stupid, and beholden to their biological impulses. Feminism is particularly egregious to misogynist incels, as they believe that its influence on social and cultural norms has allowed women to be even more hypergamous now than they previously were able to be with stricter patriarchal norms in place. Misogynist incels believe that their numbers will continue to rise as women continue to pursue men with higher "sexual market value," leaving more men competing over the few women with lower standards.

Reaction

Many incels who accept the blackpill express a sense of nihilism and the idea that there is nothing they can personally do to change their perceived suffering. This nihilism results in a variety of "copes" or strategies for how to address a society they believe has wronged them. Most of the strategies suggested are violent or abusive reactions that attempt to assert dominance over women or punish society. Explicit calls for mass violence and sexual violence targeting women specifically are suggested as punishments for women's perceived promiscuity, their rejection of misogynist incels (whether real or imagined), and their hypergamous nature. Some misogynist incels argue that access to sex is and should be recognized as a human right and propose society-wide solutions to achieve dominance over women, which include "socially arranged or enforced monogamy," meaning that the "state-issue[s] girlfriends as a solution to

inceldom." Misogynist incels argue that this could work because they believe that women "naturally fantasize about sexual coercion." They acknowledge that it would likely require an "authoritarian state" to enact this as a policy. Other possible solutions include taxing individuals that practice a "promiscuous lifestyle" in order to encourage monogamy, taking away women's right to vote, "reinstalling patriarchy," and lowering the status of women compared to men.

Despite many misogynist incels claiming that there is nothing they can personally do to change their situation, many still aim to have sex with women. They aim to do this either by altering their bodies through working out, steroid usage, and/or plastic surgery. Other solutions include paying for sex at home or abroad or traveling to countries they perceive as "poor" in order to get girlfriends or sexual partners.[73] Some misogynist incels believe that pursuing impoverished women is a possible solution to their inceldom, as having a financial advantage over women means that misogynist incels, as one poster posits, are not "reduce[d] to their looks" alone and have a higher chance of coercing poor women into sex. Additionally, misogynist incels seek to punish women for being the supposed perpetrators of their perceived suffering. Members speak of waiting for the "day of retribution," a reference to the 2014 Santa Barbara attack, during which they believe women will be punished for the suffering of misogynist incels. Finally, "LDARing" (lay down and rot), (mass)-violence, suicide, and "incelicide" (genocide of all incels) are suggested as appropriate coping strategies by misogynist incels who have accepted the blackpill.

Masculinity

While they are more concerned about their own plight, rather than the plight of all men, misogynist incels believe that their suffering and "subhuman" status is a specifically gendered

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[73] If a woman enters a relationship with an incel, it is assumed to be only for money or immigration purposes. Some misogynist incels claim that this option is only available to white incels. For more, see Julia DeCook, "Curating the Future: The Sustainability Practices of Online Hate Groups" (2019).

masculine victimhood that cannot be experienced by other genders, least of all women. Misogynist incels demonstrate an interesting case of hybrid masculinity through their merging of (masculine) victimhood and superiority. Misogynist incels construct masculinity in relation to physical embodiment as determined by genetics and a man's access to sexual conquest. They then create a hierarchy where men who meet these criteria of masculinity are superior ("Chads"), while misogynist incels who do not believe they meet these criteria are inferior and denominated "subhuman." Misogynist incels claiming they lack these characteristics might seem to separate themselves from hegemonic masculinity. Yet, the very construction of masculinity around physical embodiment and sexual conquest aligns with hegemonic masculinity, even if they frame themselves as victims through this construction. Further, misogynist incels believe themselves superior both to men who are ignorant of the blackpill and to women. Their aim to assert dominance over or to punish women for their perceived transgressions speaks to the core construction of hegemonic masculinity. Though misogynist incels might view and present themselves as victims, the strategies they suggest reveal that their goal is dominance and (authoritarian) control over women or complete nihilism until exerting dominance and subordinating women would be installed on a societal level. They thereby demonstrate aggrieved entitlement[74] as an extreme outcome of an ideal hegemonic masculinity, as demonstrated through their suggested "coping strategies," such as enforced monogamy (corresponding with their belief that they are entitled to a woman's body) and sexual and mass violence.

Masculinities of the Manosphere

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[74] Rachel Kalish and Michael Kimmel, "Suicide by Mass Murder: Masculinity, Aggrieved Entitlement, and Rampage School Shootings," *Health Sociology Review* 19, no. 4 (2010), https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.2010.19.4.451.

The results of the analysis show that there are both overlapping characteristics as well as differences between the ways in which the groups discursively construct and perform their masculinity in relation to women (external) as well as other men (internal). In particular, we observe a repeating dialectical construction between how the groups consider themselves in society (diagnosis) and how they react to it (reaction). All groups use the three mechanisms of hybridization (discursive distancing, strategic borrowing, and fortifying boundaries)[75] by framing themselves as victims of current society in general and feminism (which they construct as a dominant societal discourse) in particular. However, the ways in which they do so through gendered hybridized constructions of femininity and masculinity vary (see Table 2).

Table 2: Constructions of masculinity in the manosphere

Group	Diagnosis	Reactions	Masculinities[76]
MRAs	Feminism has established a societal and legal system that is stacked against men, in which men's problems are ignored or downplayed.	Recruitment, indignation mobilization, activism, and advocating for policy change.	Focus on injustices, vulnerability and victimhood of white, heterosexual men. The focus on victimhood symbolically distances men from hegemony, while also aiming to reinstate a (supposedly) lost patriarchal order, which puts men in a position of power and privilege.
PUAs	Approach gender relations with transactional logic where seduction relies on the (economic) value of a PUA, which is based on his performance of masculinity.	Self-improvement and manipulation of women as a way for men to seduce women.	Center transformation towards hegemonic masculinity as improvement. Individual (often nonhegemonic) masculinity can be optimized by performing traits that are traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity, like dominance and self-confidence. Reinforce oppression of other masculinities and femininities as

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[75] Bridges and Pascoe, "Hybrid Masculinities"

[76] Rather than reflecting a binary of 'hegemonic' or 'nonhegemonic' masculinities, this column refers to how masculinities are framed (through hybridization) in ways that reproduce hierarchical and oppressive gender relations.

			a legitimate gender order accessible and beneficial to every man.
MGTOW	See women (enabled by feminism) as manipulative and dangerous to men's autonomy, including financial autonomy, and society as gynocentric (overly focused on women).	Idealized withdrawal from society and self-reliance, limiting relations with women, especially legally binding ones, and avoiding (all) interactions with women altogether.	Reify hegemonic masculinity as self-sufficient and praise "great" men that deserve recognition and respect for being the "creators of civilization." Hybridization by rejecting certain traits of hegemonic masculinity (breadwinner, caretaker). These (and an imagery of toxic femininity) are portrayed as reasons heterosexual men are victims of a gynocentric gender order. Imagined historical, hegemonic masculinity as the "solution."
TRP	Economize relationships and believe in a sexual marketplace, in which everyone has a certain value. See feminism as the "sexual strategy" of women to gain higher value males/mates, and perceive the "sexual marketplace" as stacked against them as a result	Manipulation and "game" to contend in the sexual marketplace, "The Red-Pill" as men's sexual strategy, and an "awakening" to a previously hidden truth.	Detailed ideology of hierarchies between masculinities. Nonhegemonic masculinities produced as victims of both hegemonic masculinity and femininity. At the same time, consider TRP masculinity as superior to other men and women. Aim for a new oppressive hierarchy with TRP masculinity at the top without making hegemonic masculinity itself less oppressive.
Misogynist incels	Believe their looks and feminism to be the reason they are rejected by women. Consider rejection as unjust victimization of their identity and that some part of their humanity is unfulfilled, rendering them "subhuman."	Nihilism that can result in a variety of violent or abusive reactions (e.g., poverty sex-tourism, self-harm, societal insurrection, sexual violence, or mass violence), each asserting dominance over and punishing women.	Detailed hybridization through extensive ideology of masculinity hierarchies. Misogynist incel masculinity is presented as nonhegemonic, powerless, oppressed by "other" masculinities, feminism, and ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Use this (masculine) victimhood to justify sense of superiority over and violence against women and other men.

On one hand, MRAs, MGTOWs and to a lesser extent TRP-members clearly position themselves as part of a superior male gender. They claim a deserved superior status in society

as men, because they believe men espouse superior traits to women: as "creators of civilization" (MGTOW), "more rational" (MRA), and "scientific" (MRA, TRP). Especially in MRA and MGTOW content, these characteristics are considered justification to dominate women and other, "less masculine" men. In their assessment, MRAs' and MGTOWs' status as victims is therefore not due to their insufficient, nonhegemonic masculinity, but rather due to society having unjustly turned against masculine traits. This turn is described as having not been caused by shifts in the ideals of hegemonic masculinity (which would make the groups nonhegemonic), but rather by society's supposed rejection of masculinity and men altogether in favor of a "gynocentric order" ruled by feminism. The groups' reactions are thus to quite literally restore the hegemony of masculinity politically (MRAs) or to create a safe space to perform their understanding of masculinity outside of a feminist society (MGTOWs). In this way, both groups consider themselves to be part of a hegemonic masculinity, a "most honored" way of being a man, and to be victimized through feminism, which they use to justify their misogyny toward individual women as well as feminist activism.

On the other hand, incels and to a lesser degree PUAs and some TRP-members align themselves with non-masculine aesthetics and personality traits and portray themselves as victims of hegemonic masculinity. They particularly express this victimhood in comparison to other men. However, instead of using this observation to question hegemonic gender expectations and their harm to both men and women, PUA and TRP strategies aim to emulate these very traits. In fact, many of their strategies are even more explicit in their attempts to uphold hegemonic masculinity, advocating for rape, manipulation, and exploitation of women as a way to "prove oneself" as a man. In that sense, the very invocation of nonhegemonic masculinity is used to construct an extreme (toxic) masculinity as the best and only alternative to their own previous performance of nonhegemonic masculinity. They declare this extreme hegemonic masculinity desirable, and all their strategies are geared toward achieving it.

At first glance, misogynist incels appear to reject the enactment of behavior typically associated with hegemonic masculinity (albeit not because it is considered bad but rather because it is deemed unachievable). However, looking through the lens of hybrid masculinity, the discursive distance they create between hegemonic masculinity and their own masculinity is also used to justify extreme strategies of oppression, including stripping women of their lifestyle and relationship choices and their right to vote, own property, or even to live at all. In this way they navigate hybridity and use nonhegemonic masculinity to ensure continued hegemony.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyze the masculinities of the manosphere and how they "repudiat[e] and reif[y]" hegemonic masculinity and male supremacism.[77] The analysis shows that, while all groups overlap in their use of hybridization to create a sense of victimization because of their particular masculine identities, they underline this claim by using and constructing their masculinity as intertwined and juxtaposed with other masculinities and femininity in different ways. Hybridity is essential for their own masculine identity construction; however, the inclusion of nonhegemonic masculine traits does not serve to make them more inclusive towards other men, let alone women. Rather, it justifies their entitlement to oppress women and creates a sense of superiority over other men who are not "redpilled" or "blackpilled" and thus supposedly not aware of the "truth" about gender relations.

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[77] Massanari, "#Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures".

Recently, the manosphere has entered more into public discourse after media outlets have linked it to a range of public instances of misogyny and violence.[78] However, existing analyses have tended to homogenize and conflate groups and misattribute individuals. These mischaracterizations have led to problematic descriptions of the radicalization pathways into the manosphere as 'apolitical'[79] and removed from hegemonic masculinity.[80] We have shown that it is essential to keep track of the inner workings of the network. Despite claims of victimization, all groups end up reinforcing rather than challenging hegemonic masculinity and the oppression of women (and other men). Moreover, their hybridization of nonhegemonic and hegemonic masculinities vary according to their social theory. By focusing on the differences in how the groups use hybridization, we show how the groups of the manosphere utilize masculinity to justify their construction of gender relations and identities in society. Online communities like those of the manosphere promote a variety of reactions, ranging from political activism to sexual harassment and violence. Understanding how the masculinities of the manosphere work to produce a network of interweaving, overlapping, and contradictory understandings of masculinity, femininity, and gender relations in society is a prerequisite to understanding the pathways of radicalization into antifeminist activism and violence.

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[78] E.g. Baele, Brace and Coan, "From "Incel" to "Saint": Analyzing the violent worldview behind the 2018 Toronto attack"

[79] Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence".

[80] Angela Nagle, Kill All Normies

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