

Women in the Manosphere
Femininities in Antifeminist Spaces

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Abstract

Women in the Manosphere: Femininities in Antifeminist Spaces

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This doctoral research examines women's involvement in the manosphere, an online network of antifeminist communities. In the wake of recent violent attacks against women and other groups, these communities and their activities are receiving increasing media attention across the Western world. Heeding the call for more in-depth investigation, many masculinity scholars have begun to study organized antifeminism online. But while the men who participate in online antifeminist networks are now receiving attention, with few exceptions, no scholars have examined women's participation in these same networks. Through a netnographic approach, the project presents a comprehensive case study of four women's groups within the manosphere, aiming to explore the motivations that drive individuals to participate in these antifeminist communities. The research goes beyond the prevailing focus on masculinity by examining how gender conceptions and lived experiences intersect with broader power structures, influencing women's participation in these online spaces. By centering women's perspectives within a predominantly male-dominated and often misogynistic discourse, the research contributes to the emerging scholarship on women and femininities within the field of men and masculinity studies, and complicates the way that these women are framed in the mass media. The findings reveal that women actively contribute to the perpetuation of dominant masculinities in local contexts, cooperating with and perpetuating discourses and practices associated with the hegemonic gender order. Simultaneously, these women carve out spaces for themselves, creating their own discourses to navigate the hegemonic gender order. This doctoral thesis contributes significantly to the understanding of women's participation in the manosphere, expanding the scholarship on men and masculinity studies and enriching our comprehension of gender dynamics in online communities and broader socio-cultural systems.

Keywords: antifeminism; femininities; manosphere; hegemonic masculinity; radicalization

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Chapter One

The Forgotten Voices of the Manosphere

I didn't start being hateful with [women]. Why would I? I don't give a shit how [women] behave or who they fuck, as long as they give me love too. But they won't. If I could find a girlfriend just by treating her nicely, do you think I would hate them? If women gave me sex the same as they give it to Chad, do you think I'd hate them? But they won't. That's why I hate them with passion. (comment from the Incel.co website, cited in Sugiura, 2021, Motivations for Joining Incel Communities, para 4.)

Women's nature is procreation oriented because it is their bodies that carry the wombs to gestate and deliver the next generation...In this paradigm of things, there is no incentive for the women to actually give a damn about the well-being of the man/men providing for her; in fact, it is in her best interest to not be attached to a single man in particular, but keep monkey branching to a stronger, better provider. (comment from the r/MGTOW subreddit, cited in Ging, 2017, p.649)

The quotations found above are just a few examples of the comments found in online communities associated with the manosphere. The manosphere, an intricate web of antifeminist networks and communities spread across various social media platforms, includes infamous groups such as Incels (involuntary celibates), The Red Pill, and MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way). These virtual communities are characterized by their penchant for violent and misogynistic language, perpetuating the objectification of women and advocating for rigid gender norms.

Originally a fringe movement, the manosphere came under media scrutiny in 2014, when self-identified Incel Elliot Rodger killed six people and injured fourteen, before killing himself in

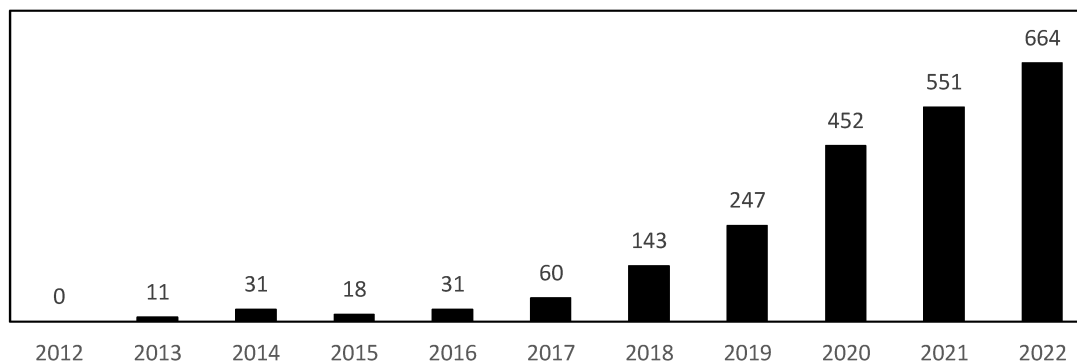
Isla Vista, California (Witt, 2020). He left behind a manifesto detailing his frustration with women that was widely circulated in Incel communities. Elliot Rodger is often praised by other perpetrators of mass killings (Witt, 2020). Other mass murders inspired by Elliot Rodger include but are not limited to the 2015 college campus shooting in Oregon, killing 9 (Turkewitz, 2015); the 2018 high school shooting in Parkland, Florida killing 17 (Rozsa et al., 2018); the 2018 Toronto van attack, killing 10 (Ribeiro et al., 2021); and the 2020 murder of a female spa worker in Toronto—the first time a crime motivated by Incel ideologies was prosecuted as an act of terrorism in Canada (Agence France-Presse, 2020). These incidents spurred widespread media coverage and rekindled academic interest in contemporary antifeminist movements.

The communities of the manosphere, while deviating in ideologies, share common concerns about the problems faced by men, such as difficulties in forming intimate relationships with women, fears of false allegations of sexual assault, and custody disputes (Messner, 2016). It is essential to recognize that these communities do not universally embrace the same levels of violence and misogyny exhibited by the perpetrators of the aforementioned attacks. Nonetheless, they all tend to attribute men's perceived loss of power in contemporary Western societies to feminism (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

The scholarly landscape has witnessed a burgeoning body of research about the manosphere in the fields of men and masculinities studies (e.g., Ging, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016), linguistics (e.g., Dayter & Rüdiger 2016; Jane, 2017), and computer modelling (e.g., Mountford, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2021) since 2013 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Number of Google Scholar Results for the Search Term “Manosphere” by Year of Publication



While believed to have originated on a blog in 2009 (Ging, 2017), it was not until 2013 that the term “manosphere” yielded relevant results on Google Scholar. This coincides with the publication of the book *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (Ironwood, 2013), a collection of blog and forum posts about men’s struggles which popularized the term “manosphere” (Ging, 2017; Sugiura, 2021). The slight uptick in studies in 2014 could be associated with the Isla Vista shooting that year, marking one of the first major attacks linked to the manosphere.

Studies about the manosphere have highlighted the critical role of masculine experiences and experiences of masculinity in driving men towards antifeminist and violent platforms, underlining their radicalizing potential. However, despite growing interest in online antifeminist networks, one significant manosphere population has been overlooked by scholars: women.

The presence of women in the manosphere is not a new revelation. Media accounts have been reporting on this phenomenon since 2014, shedding light on the existence of manosphere groups exclusively comprising of women, such as Femcels (female Incels), feMRAs (female Men’s Rights Activists), or Red Pill Women. Notably, prominent publications such as *Vice*

(Brook Lynn, 2014), *Elle* (Aronowitz, 2021) and *Marie Claire* (Ortiz, 2015) have featured articles on these women's communities.

Women of the Manosphere in the Press

The media has become increasingly interested in women's communities, with a growing number of press articles published about women in the manosphere. These pieces delve into the world of antifeminist women, featuring interviews and observations of their forums and websites. In the absence of comparable scholarly accounts on the subject, these press articles are a valuable introduction to women's manosphere communities. The following section provides a summary of the most popular articles, categorized by community.

The Honey Badger Brigade

The most represented women's manosphere group in the press is the Honey Badger Brigade, a group of female Men's Rights Activists (often referred to as feMRAs), named after the meme "Honey Badger Don't Care," (czg 123, 2011). Created by two Canadian women, Karen Straughan and Alison Tieman, the Honey Badger Brigade is known for its daily livestreams, published on their YouTube channels BadgerLiveStreams (n. d.) and HoneyBadgerRadio (n.d.). Lasting from fifteen minutes to two hours and a half, the podcasts cover topics such as "3 Things Men Care About in a Wife and Why They Should Stop" (Badger Live Streams, 2022a) and "Freedom Convoy 2022" (Badger Live Streams, 2022b), spanning topics from men's rights to broader conservative issues. Their two podcast channels have a combined 59,000 subscribers, approximately, at the time of writing (HoneyBadgerRadio, n.d.; Badger Live Stream, n. d.). Their podcast used to be broadcast through the prominent MRA website *A Voice for Men* (Ortiz, 2015).

The Honey Badgers first appeared in a mainstream media outlet in Brook Lynn's (2014)

short documentary produced for *Vice*. Filmed at the first International Conference for Men's Issues in 2014, it follows Allison Tieman and Janet Bloomfield—another prominent Canadian feMRA. It also features Paul Elam, the founder of *A Voice for Men*. In the documentary, Elam explains that women are important to the MRA cause because they can say things for which male activists would be chastised (Brook Lynn, 2014).

Ortiz's (2015) article, written one year after the 2014 conference, was published in the women's magazine *Marie Claire*. Ortiz (2015) uses a tongue in cheek tone, presenting the Honey Badgers as

a group of concerned individuals who have banded together to stand up to a society that unfairly targets a segment of the population vulnerable simply because of its gender. That marginalized group? Men. (para. 2)

Janet Bloomfield, Karen Straughan, and Allison Tieman are interviewed—the author remarks: “what is it about Canada?” (Ortiz, 2015, para. 20). Despite the light tone, the Honey Badgers are described as dangerous allies to the men's rights activism (MRA) cause because their gender has helped bring “scary legitimacy” to the antifeminist cause (Ortiz, 2015).

McKeon's (2020) article, published in the Canadian magazine *The Walrus*, employs a more sober tone. She explains that female MRAs have helped amplify the MRA message. According to McKeon (2020), antifeminist women are pushing forward

a version of empowerment that requires less of women, yet purports to offer more control and celebrates the ‘be yourself’ modern mantra. (para. 61)

This description of the Honey Badgers portrays them as accessories to the spread of the MRA message, without attributing them agency in their activism for men's rights. Kohn (2020a) puts forward a similar argument in her interviews with Straughan and Tieman, published in *MEL*

Magazine—an American men’s magazine. For Kohn (2020a), the Honey Badgers strategically use their gender as a ‘loudspeaker’ to amplify men’s issues.

Laura Bates briefly mentions the Honey Badgers, Karen Straughan and Janet Bloomfield in her book *Men Who Hate Women* (Bates, 2021). Her book is a journalistic investigation into the manosphere and is one of the most in-depth accounts of these antifeminist communities, which scholars have yet to reproduce. Covering mostly men’s communities, Bates (2021) mentions that there exist communities of women such as the Honey Badgers—she does not give any other examples. She argues that female MRAs like Karen Straughan and Janet Bloomfield can voice misogynistic opinions such as “a rapist is a very damaged man (usually damaged by women)” (Karen Straughan, as cited by Bates, 2021, *Men Who Blame Women*, para. 36), or, about the underage girls who were sexually assaulted by British television host Jimmy Saville, “[they] wanted all the benefits of hanging out with a big star” and “understood it came with a price and they paid it” (Janet Bloomfield, as cited by Bates, 2021, *Men Who Blame Women*, para. 36). Bates (2021) argues that the men’s rights movement strategically spotlights their female members to create the impression that their opinions are legitimate and supported by men and women alike. Like the previously described press articles, Bates (2021) argues that women can voice MRA opinions without facing the same amount of backlash as their male peers.

These articles present the Honey Badgers as an object of curiosity, a strange branch of activism where women fight for men’s rights. The journalists focus on the main leaders of the movement, which projects an image of a unified and organized group. However, these articles do not emphasize these women’s dedication to the cause of men’s rights. Instead, these publications focus on how feMRAs’ gender helps push forward the MRA agenda to more mainstream audiences.

Red Pill Women

Red Pill Women, active on the subreddit r/RedPillWomen, have attracted some, albeit limited, media attention. Binder (2016), in an article published by *MIC*, a magazine targeted to millennials, defines Red Pill Women as women who reject the feminist movement and reclaim their femininity by submitting to men. Binder points out the contradiction between the Red Pill ideology—that true femininity comes from submission to men—and Red Pill Women’s claims that it is not against women’s interest (Binder, 2016). The Red Pill ideology is discussed in further detail in the literature review chapter. In an article for *Inverse*, another millennial-oriented magazine, Watson (2016) takes a less neutral stance. She describes Red Pill ideas as “gross”, and those who could stomach these ideas as a “bad person”. She finds that these women are usually introduced to the Red Pill by their male partners (Watson, 2016). In both articles, the journalists provide a surface-level description of the r/RedPillWomen subreddit, pointing to its existence and voicing their personal disagreements with the group, without delving deeper into its significance for gender relations.

Femcels

When journalists tackle the subject of male Incels (involuntary celibates), they often introduce the topic by explaining that the community was created by a woman, contrasting the original blog, *Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project*, with the violence of contemporary Incel communities. The origin story is used as a hook, rather than as a reflection on the gendered experiences of loneliness and singledom. What is often ignored, is that there exist communities of female Incels, known as ‘Femcels’.

In their respective articles published in *Mel Magazine* and *HuckMag*, Kohn (2020b) and Chester (2018), both present Femcels as overlooked members of the Incel community. Femcels

often face rejection from some male Incels, who refuse to believe that female Incels can exist. Kohn (2020b) links this belief to popular representations of sexuality, where male sexuality is seen as monstrous and out of control, while female sexuality is thought to be pure and optional. Some male Incels believe that because men have an uncontrollable sexuality, women can easily find a sexual partner. Kohn's (2020b) article focuses on the subreddit r/TruFemcels—banned in 2021 for hate speech. She found that Femcels and Incels share the belief that their sexualities are negatively affected by their 'defects' (Incel terminology that refers to looks, personality, disabilities). This is where the resemblance stops for Kohn (2020b), who describes Incels and Femcels as "a pair of phobic, incompatible, fraternal twins". Unlike Incels, Femcels tend to direct their anger inwards, rather than towards those who reject them.

Schofield (2021) and Aronowitz (2021), in articles published in *HuckMag* and *Elle*, describe the creation of PinkPill.co (<https://thepinkpill.co>), a Femcel-dedicated website created after Reddit banned r/TruFemcel. Schofield (2021) questions whether the new website would help clear up the conflation of Incels and Femcels. Being a Femcel, according to Aronowitz (2021), is about refusing to be disrespected, and refusing to have sex or become intimate with men to whom one is not attracted. While the language used by both authors in portraying Femcels is sympathetic, Schofield (2021) points out that Femcels still share the same terminology as their male counterparts, such as "Chad," and "Stacy" to denote to attractive individuals, along with a shared belief in lookism, which is the discriminatory treatment of individuals based on their appearance.

Confused activists, subordinated wives, or suffering singles—these are the overarching themes in representations of women of the manosphere in the press, who are constantly compared to men's manosphere groups. The articles appear in men's and women's magazines, as

well as press outlets targeted to millennials. It is interesting that women's contemporary antifeminism is not covered in outlets with a broader and older audience. Perhaps these women are still perceived as a niche internet phenomenon, despite the crimes perpetrated by the most extremist members of the manosphere. When not employing a neutral tone, journalists tend to mock these women rather than attempt to understand what led them to join the manosphere. I argue that these women are misperceived in the media, and that it is a mistake to ignore women's presence and interest in the manosphere. However, these articles do raise some relevant points about the psychological toll of loneliness, or the impact of beliefs about gender roles. They are a good starting point for further scholarly investigation.

Despite these media accounts, the academic community has overlooked women's participation in the manosphere. By focusing on men as the center of analysis, manosphere studies fail to take into account gendered experiences of marginalization and loneliness, as well as crucial motivations behind participation in antifeminist groups that may not be solely tied to issues with masculinity. Understanding women's motivations is vital for comprehending the radicalization potential of these communities in a more comprehensive and holistic manner.

While there is an exploding body of research on men's engagement in the manosphere, women have been relegated to the sidelines, often reduced to mere objects of desire and hatred in the context of men's narratives. By conducting an exploratory study of women's participation in the manosphere, my research project intends to bridge this gap. Shedding light on women's experiences and perspectives will help us gain a greater grasp of the dynamics of antifeminist communities, which will contribute to broader understandings of this multifaceted social phenomenon.

The Feminine Other of Online Antifeminism

[My] goal is to recover the feminine other and place it in the center of a theory of gender hegemony. My use of the term “other” refers to the ways in which the feminine and femininity have been defined or displaced in work on masculinity. (Schippers, 2007, p.86)

[Why], when we embrace (or at least engage with) critical masculinity studies as a crucial part of our knowledge formation, do we so rarely imagine the possibility of critical femininity studies? (Dahl, 2012, p. 57)

Schippers (2007) and Dahl (2012) highlight an ongoing issue in the field of masculinity studies: the relegation of “the feminine and femininity” (Schippers, 2007, p. 86) to a marginal position. My doctoral thesis responds to their call for the centering of femininities within critical masculinity studies by drawing from established theories in the field, and shedding light on the role of women and femininities in gender dynamics. Additionally, feminist scholars have observed historical instances of women's involvement in antifeminist or conservative movements, highlighting a cyclical pattern of women's backlash against feminism. Therefore, the project endeavors not only to "recover the feminine other" within manosphere studies but also to bring manosphere studies in conversation with studies of women's antifeminist and conservative political activism.

Currently, the absence of research on women's participation in the manosphere represents a significant blind spot in our comprehension of these communities and the factors that drive individuals to engage with them. Existing social theories about the manosphere often focus on questions of masculinity, attributing men's involvement to their struggles to conform to prevailing norms of masculinity, their desire for homosocial spaces, or the need to share emotions with peers (Ging, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016; Van Valkenburg, 2018). However,

the presence of women in these networks suggests that men's personal concerns with masculine norms or heterosexual relationships are not the only motives for participation in online antifeminism. Antifeminist movements have historically included women (Faludi, 1991), and the manosphere is no exception. To comprehend the current antifeminist moment fully, an investigation into the women of the manosphere becomes imperative.

The study aims to answer the following research questions about women's presence in the manosphere: (1) What are their relationships to the men of the manosphere? (2) What roles do they play in the manosphere? (3) How does their participation in the manosphere relate to how they understand their identities as women? and (4) What motivates them to participate? To address these questions, my doctoral research employs a qualitative netnographic approach. The anticipated contributions of the study are threefold: empirical, theoretical, and methodological.

While many scholars have acknowledged the need for more research on the manosphere (e.g., Ging, 2017; Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016; Van Valkenburgh, 2018), there remains a lack of in-depth understanding of the motivations behind men and women's involvement in these antifeminist communities. The project is not a comparative study between men and women's groups, because a comprehensive analysis of women's groups has not yet been achieved. Instead, my doctoral thesis aims to contribute to the necessary mapping of women's manosphere groups by providing one of the first comprehensive accounts of women's presence in the manosphere, shedding light on their roles and reasons for participating.

Furthermore, the research project seeks to extend and supplement Connell's influential theory of hegemonic masculinity (1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) by examining how some women actively uphold dominant gender norms in an antifeminist context. Understanding women's participation in these online antifeminist communities can provide deeper insights into

the factors that lead individuals to endorse extreme ideologies. Additionally, exploring women's role in perpetuating hierarchies of gender contributes to the scarce literature on women's engagement in maintaining power imbalances between men and women. My project responds to the growing call from critical studies of men and masculinity scholars to understand women and femininities from their theoretical perspective (Dahl, 2012).

Finally, the project is characterized by innovative methodological components, as it ventures into the relatively new field of social media research. Social media platforms pose unique challenges for social scientists, and data collection on the manosphere is notoriously difficult to conduct, due to the massive amounts of publicly available data (Vu et al., 2021), as well as ethical challenges (Branthonne & Waldispuehl, 2019). Netnography, a qualitative research approach, emerges as a promising method for studying online communities. While the manosphere has seen limited use of netnographic approaches in previous research (Branthonne & Waldispuehl, 2019; Van Valkenburgh, 2018), my project aims to further develop and apply netnography to study the manosphere in depth. By using netnography, the project intends to contribute to the advancement of qualitative strategies for studying the manosphere, which has been lacking clear methodological frameworks in previous research (e.g., Lin, 2017; Massanari, 2017; Witt, 2020).

The overarching goal of my doctoral study is to address the growing social concerns about what takes place in the manosphere, and its implications for women's health and safety. Responding to the mainstream media's calls for further investigation into these online communities (e.g., Grandmont, 2019; Télé-Québec, 2019), my project provides an exploratory account of an understudied section of the manosphere: antifeminist women. By doing so, I hope to contribute to our understanding of the radicalization of individuals on social media platforms

while exploring the tools and frameworks that can be used to study this phenomenon.

The following chapter delves into the relevant literature, laying the groundwork for this exploratory study about the forgotten voices of the mansphere.

Chapter Two

Scholarly Perspectives on Conservative Women and the Manosphere

Despite a growing number of studies exploring various aspects of the manosphere, there remains a notable absence of research dedicated to understanding women's involvement in these communities. This research project therefore draws on two adjacent bodies of scholarship to help bridge this gap in the literature: studies on conservative women, and manosphere studies.

The literature on women's involvement in conservative and right-wing spheres is relatively limited and focuses on offline movements. However, it offers a point of entry into understanding women's engagement with movements characterized by extremist ideologies that are overrepresented by men, and can suggest insights into women's involvement in the manosphere. The following section is a concise synthesis of the primary findings of these studies, setting the stage for the exploration of women's involvement in online antifeminist movements. The subsequent part of this review of the literature turns to manosphere studies, whose focus has exclusively been on men.

Conservative Women

Periods of advances in gender equality in the Western world have historically been followed by periods of antifeminist sentiment in popular culture and in politics (Faludi, 1991; Howard, 2008; Messner, 2016). Faludi (1991) explains:

in the popular imagination, the history of women's rights is more commonly charted as a flat dead line that, only twenty years ago, began a sharp and unprecedented incline.

Ignoring the many peaks and valleys traversed in the endless march toward liberty, this mental map of American women's progress presents instead a great plain of "traditional" womanhood, upon which women have roamed helplessly and "naturally," the eternally

passive subjects until the 1970s women's movement came along. (p. 61)

While history remembers the advancements made for gender equality, the subsequent pushback movements and the accompanying losses in gender equality policy are often forgotten. In the same way that some feminist scholars categorize feminist movements into historical waves, scholars discussing historical antifeminism identify peaks of backlash. It is important to note that some scholars contest the wave model because it oversimplifies feminist activism and tends to invisibilize the feminist efforts taking place between the identified waves of feminism (Reger, 2015). The imagery is used here nonetheless because scholars of antifeminism rely on the wave model to recount the history of antifeminist activism.

Faludi (1991) identifies four periods of backlash since the Victorian times in America. The first, in the late nineteenth century, followed the rise of the women's movement led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The backlash in response to the women's movement manifested itself by the 1880s in American politics for example, with the ban of contraceptives and the outlawing of abortion by Congress. The second backlash followed the nationwide political campaign for women's suffrage in the 1910s. Feminists were accused of being communist sympathizers and could no longer get published in national newspapers (Faludi, 1991). The Great Depression further boosted the backlash: women were either pushed out of the workforce or paid much lower rates. The third period of backlash took place after the Second World War, when women were once again pushed out of the workforce, and the romanticization of the female homemaker appeared in popular media (Faludi, 1991). Finally, in the early 1970s, following the second wave of feminism, antifeminist groups rose once again, with movements such as those opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment or to abortion (Faludi, 1991, p. 63). Just like feminism and its waves, the intensity of antifeminist activity and sentiment

rises and dips. Antifeminism is not a new phenomenon, but exists in a pattern of cyclical backlash against feminism and gender-progressive policies.

Much of the research about antifeminist women's organizations focuses on the American context and the American conservative party. The literature mostly focuses on three key issues: (1) antisuffragism, from the end of the nineteenth century to the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920; (2) opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), from its passage by Congress in 1972 to its defeat ten years later; and (3) the anti-abortion movement, from the *Roe v. Wade* ruling in 1973 to contemporary debates. Scholars have found that antifeminist women's groups attempt to position themselves as alternative representatives of women's interests to feminism (Irvine, 2012; Schreiber, 2002). However, these interests are interpreted through the lens of the conservative ideology of separate spheres, where women's roles are limited to domestic tasks. These groups reveal the complexities of politically organizing around gender identity. Several scholars have underlined the apparent contradiction between the traditional gender roles upheld by conservative women, and their activism in the public sphere, a domain that their ideology reserves for men.

Klatch's (1988) two-year long fieldwork with female leaders of the New Right reveals that social conservative activists avoided any role contradiction by defining their political role within the confines of their traditional gender roles. However, the conservative view of the gendered division of labor means that women are often relegated to tasks that are thought to be more feminine, such as catering for gatherings, attending to children's education, or organizing letter-writing campaigns to protest policies and legislation (Blee & Deutsch, 2012). This causes some frustration for female activists who wish to be taken more seriously but are limited by heteronormative gender roles (Blee & Linden, 2012). When they are not integrated into men's

groups, right-wing women are often segregated into their own women's organizations. Bacchetta and Power (2002) argue that while this excludes them from organizational power, it does allow them to construct their own discourses and practices in a way that can threaten male power—though they do not give any examples.

Chafetz and Dworkin (1987) theorize that individuals are drawn to antifeminist groups by gendered fears: men fear a loss of class status and of their role as the head of the family, while women fear threats to their husband's economic interests and to their roles as housewives and mothers (Chafetz & Dworkin, 1987). This categorization is useful to begin thinking about the role of the heteronormative nuclear family model and class interests in antifeminist movements, but it echoes the idea that women's interests are the same as their husband's, an argument used by anti-suffragists in the 1920s (Marshall, 1997).

Hardisty (2001) studied women's anti-ERA activism. She presents a formula for the mobilization of traditionalist women in the public political sphere: a charismatic woman is accepted as a natural leader and recruits women by using issues that directly affect mothers, such as fears of women being drafted in the military and the threat of gender-neutral bathrooms (Hardisty, 2001). Meetings are then held within the home—the private sphere—where the right's agenda is gradually introduced. Hardisty (2001) emphasizes the importance of the feeling of safety that these women find in their roles as housewives, as well as the feelings of acceptance that they derive from meeting with like-minded peers. Hardisty (2001) theorizes that had these women's concerns been addressed differently, they could just as well have been recruited to the pro-ERA side.

In her critique of the concept of women's interests, Sapiro (1981) argues that various forms of feminism and feminist movements share three elements: (1) the belief that women's

opportunities and quality of life are detrimentally affected by their identity as women; (2) the desire to fight against constraints imposed by the patriarchy; and (3) the belief that collective action can improve the condition of women. Antifeminist women are not necessarily opposing the core feminist elements as defined by Sapiro (1981), but rather the stereotypical “other” constructed out of right-wing anxieties about the erosion of the American nuclear family and the moral decay of America. It is important to note that the notion of the traditional nuclear family is a myth, and these anxieties are based on an idealized vision of the family model that does not align with historical realities (Coontz, 1992). These idealized nostalgic visions often depict the past as a solution to present problems, framing modernity as the origin of widespread social insecurity (Bauman, 2017; Boym, 2008). Another explanation for women’s mobilization in antifeminist movements is the defense of their class interests. For example, Marshall (1997) found that anti-suffragists were part of the social elite and had access to large amounts of wealth and political power. For many of them, the ballot was not a tool for political expression, but a weapon that the masses would use to threaten their status (Marshall, 1997). These women were protecting their gendered class interests, more so than their traditional lifestyle (Marshall, 1997).

While these studies are far removed from antifeminist movements online, they nevertheless are a crucial foundation in our understanding of women’s presence in the manosphere, a movement that appears to fight against women’s gendered interests.

Summary

The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- In conservative movements, feminism is often portrayed as a public enemy seeking to destroy the nuclear family;
- Women who participated in historical antifeminist movements did so without

stepping outside of the confines of their gender role;

- The defense of class and race interests drove many antifeminist women to become politically active.

Manosphere Studies

The manosphere is made up of diverse online communities that share the belief that women—feminists especially—are responsible for men’s loss of power and status in Western societies (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). The degree of interconnectedness and proximity between manosphere communities is described in different ways in the existing scholarship. For Jane (2017), the manosphere is an alliance, while for other researchers, it is a collection (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016), a conglomerate (Ribeiro et al., 2021), or a loosely connected group (Van Valkenburgh, 2018) of antifeminist communities. There is no consensus on how exactly to qualify the nature of the relationship between manosphere groups. What is clear from these definitions is that manosphere communities are not completely disconnected from each other, nor are they consolidated into a larger organization. These communities are connected through a network of shared ideologies, members, social media posts and memes. Despite these shared connections, communities of the manosphere are diverse and sometimes hold opposing worldviews (Ribeiro et al., 2021). These descriptions are not without issues, as Cannito et al. (2021) point out in their overview of ten years of scholarship about the manosphere. They ask whether researchers’ tendency to define the manosphere as “loose” “applies to the phenomenon itself or to the theoretical and conceptual framework used to analyze it” (Cannito et al., 2021, p. iv). Cannito et al.’s (2021) remark about the dearth of theory in studies about the manosphere is echoed in this review of the literature. This overview shows that scholarship about the manosphere remains largely exploratory and empirical.

The manosphere began to attract scholarly attention in the mid-2010s, in the aftermath of the mass murder perpetrated by Elliot Rodger, a self-proclaimed Incel (Witt, 2020). In the social sciences, manosphere studies are mostly confined to the fields of masculinity studies, though there is an emerging body of research in linguistics and computer modeling. Research tends to either focus on specific communities, such as Incel forums (e.g., Incels.is), Men's Rights Activist websites (e.g., *A Voice for Men*, *Return of Kings*, or the *Canadian Association for Equality*), or pick up artist subreddits (e.g., r/PUA), or on comparing these communities to each other. In the following sections, I describe the most popular manosphere communities, as well as the most cited academic studies about them.

Men's Rights Activists

Context. Manosphere communities were not the first groups of men to organize around feminism. In fact, masculinities scholars often characterize manosphere communities, especially Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), as the continuation of some of the men's groups that emerged in the early 1970s (Carrigan et al., 1985; Kimmel, 2017; Messner, 2016). As the second wave of feminism gained traction, some activist groups and academic research began focusing on the effects of feminism on men's identity, status, and roles—especially heterosexual men (Carrigan et al., 1985). Carrigan et al. (1985) identify trends in masculinities scholarship from the 1950s onwards, noting the transformation from sex role theory to theories about power and oppression. Popularized by Talcott Parsons, sex role theory posits that men and women are different because of their socialization into different but complimentary gendered roles, which are based on a biological foundation of sex dimorphism, necessary for maintaining social order. Sex role theory would later be discredited by gender scholars and society more generally because of its oversimplification of gender relations and inability to account for power relations within genders

(Carrigan et al., 1985). Even so, the scholarship about gender that emerged in the 1970s bore traces of sex role theory.

New research on masculinity focused on the difficulties of living up to the image of the traditional man. The theories produced by this research often suggested that men and women were oppressed in a comparable way, though Carrigan et al. (1985) indicate that only right-wing men's movements went so far as to accuse women of oppressing men. This tension was reflected in men's activism groups in the 1970s in the U.S.A. While some groups were concerned with women's liberation and had connections with leftist campaigns such as the anti-war movement, others focused on self-improvement and therapy, disengaging themselves from the politicization of gender activism (Carrigan et al., 1985).

Messner (2016) and Kimmel's (2017) historization of the emergence of MRAs is often cited in the literature about the manosphere. In their accounts, a rift crystallized in the 1980s between the men's groups that supported feminism and those that believed that men and women were equally oppressed. Men's Rights Activists emerged from the latter movement. Distancing themselves from the pro-feminist men's groups, MRAs contended that feminism was responsible for white men's perceived loss of power and status in America (Kimmel, 2017; Messner, 2016). By the 1980s and 1990s, antifeminist backlash died down and the second wave feminist movement was replaced with an institutionalized version of feminism, focused on individual empowerment rather than structural reform (Messner, 2016). Messner (2016) notes a resurgence of MRA activity in the 2000s, mostly online, as some men perceived the institutionalization of women's rights as a threat to their status. Written in 2016, Messner's article predicted that contemporary MRAs would not attack feminism directly because they would not want to be perceived as openly misogynistic—a prediction that would not come true. It is important to note

that there are some disagreements with Messner and Kimmel's account of events. Namely, Ben Salah et al. (2017) point to a pro-radical feminist bias in Messner's account, as well as a lack of empirical verification and a U.S.-centric approach. They emphasize that MRAs were only one branch of a broader movement of diverse men's groups.

MRAs are now mainly present online, on blogs such as *A Voice for Men* (<https://avoiceformen.com>). MRAs also participate in dedicated communities on Reddit and other message-board based platforms. Their political interests are often centered on the North American context, but scholars have reported their presence in places such as India (Basu, 2016), Australia (Salter, 2016), or Taiwan (Chen, 2016). More examples of MRA activism outside of North America are presented in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, volume 28, issue 1, dedicated to the topic. Contemporary MRAs have moved away from the realm of formal politics (Gottell & Dutton, 2016). While the original men's rights movements of the 1970s tended to focus on men's rights in marriage, parenthood, and divorce, MRAs in the manosphere emphasize questions of sexuality, especially regarding rape accusations, harassment, and consent, shifting away from concerns with structural issues and focusing instead on individualized ones (Han & Yin, 2022). MRAs also discuss issues which they believe disproportionately affect men, such as suicide, homelessness, or domestic violence (Cousineau, 2021). Openly antifeminist, MRAs claim that women's empowerment is detrimental to men's rights (Abdulla, 2022). Hopton and Langer (2022) point out the similarities between MRA discourse and postfeminism. According to both ideologies, feminism is now superfluous in contemporary Western societies because women are thought to have achieved equality (Hopton & Langer, 2022). Any feminist gain is interpreted as an unfair advantage given to women, to the detriment of men (Hopton & Langer, 2022).

Academic Studies. Studies about MRAs on the manosphere tend to focus on discursive representations of masculinity, feminism, and gender, such as representations of manhood on men’s rights activism-related websites (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). Using Connell’s theory of gender, Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) propose a categorization of two distinctive groups of men represented on these websites: “cyber lads in search of masculinity” and “virtual victims in search for equality” (2016, p. 5). Cyber lads are characterized by rigid definitions of what it means to be a man, identifying feminism as the source of men’s oppression, and representing women as sexual commodities. This type of masculinity is represented on lifestyle advice websites encouraging men to embrace their masculinity. Virtual victims focus on the lack of social support for men. Websites representing this type of masculinity co-opt language from feminism, in an effort to appear more socially legitimate than the sites in the previous category. The themes in both of these categories are echoed throughout studies about the manosphere. Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) conclude that despite differing strategies, MRA websites encourage divisive gender relations and attacks on feminism. For the researchers, these websites are likely to speak to those who feel disempowered and draw them to antifeminist ideas (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016).

In a study similar to Schmitz and Kazyak’s (2016), Gotell and Dutton (2016) conducted a ‘cyber-ethnography’ of three prominent MRA websites between mid-2013 and the end of 2014: *A Voice for Men* (AVFM), “the most visible North American antifeminist MRA website” (2016, p. 69), the Canadian Association For Equality (café)—the main Canadian MRA organization, and MRE, the Men’s Rights Activists of Edmonton. They also analyzed Karen Straughan’s YouTube videos, a prominent female MRA (feMRA) in Edmonton. The study focuses on Canada because of Gotell’s personal experience with the MRE. She was a spokeswoman for an

anti-rape campaign in Edmonton that was the target of an MRE counter-campaign (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). This is one of the first studies to mention the presence of feMRAs in the manosphere.

Gotell and Dutton (2016) note a shift in MRA tactics and discourses, which have distanced themselves from state-centered discourses of the men's rights movement, echoing third wave feminism's turn away from the state and the law. Fathers are no longer portrayed as the principal victims of feminism. It is now young men being depicted as the victims of sexual politics. Additionally, MRAs claim that there is a feminist-enforced silence surrounding false rape accusations and male victims of sexual violence (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). The researchers found that feMRAs such as Karen Straughan are the strongest critics of the notion of rape culture, hypothesizing that their gender allows them to make claims about rape culture that would otherwise be perceived as offensive if they were put forward by men, a finding that echoes the press articles written about the Honey Badgers, of which Karen Straughan is one of the founders (McKeon, 2020; Ortiz, 2015).

Starr (2017), like Gottell and Dutton (2016), also found that MRAs had become increasingly hostile towards feminism in a study focused on the role of collective identity. The researcher analyzed 435 memes posted over two years, from 2015 to 2017, in the subreddit r/MRA. She found that they employ feminist rhetoric and frame MRAs as victims and feminists as their oppressors, echoing Schmitz and Kazyak's category of "virtual victims in search for equality" (2016, p. 5).

The discourse that men are discriminated against by feminists was also reported by Dickel and Evolvi (2022) in a more recent study of MRA blogs. The researchers analyze how the #metoo movement is discussed on the websites *Return of Kings* and *A Voice for Men*, websites

that were included in Schmitz and Kazyak's (2016) study. The researchers found that these websites dismiss #metoo as a feminist conspiracy against men. Women's abuse against men is often presented as "a factual and structural problem" (p.9), which needs to be addressed and solved.

Studies about the intersections of MRA communities and local political contexts are emerging, such as those conducted by Cannito and Mercuri (2022) and Liu (2021). Cannito and Mercuri (2022) examine representations of fatherhood and masculinity in an Italian non-resident father's rights online forum. Using quantitative analysis tools, they identify the most discussed key issues. They then use these key words to conduct a search for the most relevant posts, which they analyze using critical discourse analysis. Cannito and Mercuri (2022) found that forum members only discuss fatherhood in terms of child custody and alimony, but rarely mention their role as fathers and their experiences of fatherhood before separating from their partners. The authors also suggest that father's rights activists may employ fatherhood as a means to justify their antifeminist and antifeminine views (Cannito & Mercuri, 2022).

Liu's (2021) study also focuses on a specific MRA population: Asian American MRAs, who refer to themselves as MRAsians. Liu (2021) does not disclose her methodology, but she compares the ideas discussed in MRAsian groups to broader mansphere ideas. Like MRAs, MRAsians oppose feminism, yet view themselves as uniquely oppressed because of their Asian identities. MRAsians denounce the representations of Asian American men in American culture, where they are often portrayed as feminized, desexualized, and emasculated. Liu also found that MRAsians often harass Asian American feminists who support other racial and social justice causes. MRAsians accuse these women of being complicit with white supremacy, and by extension, with their emasculation. Liu's (2021) careful intersectional analysis study both

highlights the extent to which such analyses are missing from other manosphere studies, and highlights one of the recurring themes among MRA communities: women being blamed for men's feelings of emasculation.

Summary. The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- MRAs are the continuation of some of the men's groups that emerged in the early 1970s;
- Contemporary MRAs have moved away from concerns about structural issues (marriage, divorce, parenthood) and focus instead on individualized ones (rape accusations, consent, harassment);
- Their discourses are increasingly sexist and violent;
- In MRA communities of the manosphere, men are represented as the victims of feminism.

Incels

Context. The term "Incel" first appeared on the blog *Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project*, created in 1997. On her blog, Alana described her difficulties in forming intimate relationships and commiserated with her readers. The website was intended as an empathetic space for lonely people to share their struggles in deeply connecting with others (Zimmerman et al., 2018). One of the readers came up with the term "Incel," a shorthand for the phrase "involuntary celibate." (Taylor, 2018). According to Alana, "the word [Incel] used to mean anybody of any gender who was lonely, had never had sex or who hadn't had a relationship in a long time (as quoted in Taylor, 2018). According to a recent interview (Taylor, 2018), Alana stopped participating in the community in the 2000s.

The Incel community migrated from Alana's website to Reddit, where the first Incel

subreddit r/ForeverAlone was created in 2010 (Ribeiro et al., 2021). By then, the community bore little resemblance to Alana's. Now mostly made up of men, Incels are characterized by sense of entitlement to sexual or romantic relationships with women, as well as their resentment towards the women who reject them (Alfano et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2021). Incels believe that feminism, social media, and online dating have broadened women's choice of romantic and sexual partners, causing them to pursue the most attractive, wealthiest, and most intelligent men—'Chads' in Incel lingo (Abdulla, 2022; Stahl et al., 2022).

Paradoxically, Incels often ascribe women's tendency to pursue the most successful men to a biological urge to find the best mate for reproduction, thus naturalizing the very behavior they condemn (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). In its most extreme iteration, Incel ideology suggests that access to sex with a woman should be a man's natural right (Witt, 2020).

Incels believe in a social hierarchy based on looks, referred to as "lookism," wherein the most handsome men ("Chads") are the most successful in intimate relationships and in all other aspects of life (Cannito et al., 2021; Papadamou et al., 2020). Some Incels believe that they can ascend this social hierarchy by becoming wealthier or improving their appearance through diet, exercise, or plastic surgery (Abdulla, 2022). Other members believe that they cannot escape their Incel status because of their appearance and their supposed genetic inferiority to other men (e.g., asymmetrical physical attributes, deformities, severe mental health issues). Messages expressing suicidal tendencies are common on Incel forums (Han & Yin, 2022; Stahl et al., 2022). The state of hopelessness experienced by those Incels is referred to as "taking the black pill" (Abdulla, 2022; Cannito et al., 2021; Sugiura, 2021).

Incels are largely regarded as the most violent community of the manosphere by scholars and the media. Reddit began banning Incel-related subreddits for hate speech and inciting

violence in 2017 (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Incels are now mostly active on 4chan (a message board website) and Incel-dedicated websites such as Incels.is, lookism.net, or looksmax.me (Ribeiro et al., 2021; Stahl et al., 2022).

Academic Studies. Studies about Incel communities tend to focus on their most violent aspects. For example, Williams and Arntfield (2020) analyze the personal writings, social media posts and forensic documents of seven multiple homicide offenders who identify as Incels. The researchers found that these men all seem to believe that they are entitled to sex or romantic relationships with women. They also found that these men feel helpless in other areas of their lives, often being socially isolated, having employment issues, and psychological distress. Williams and Arntfield (2020) argue that the Incel offenders in their sample were trying to mask their issues through hypermasculine and violent behaviors.

While Williams and Arntfield (2020) focus on some of the most violent individuals who identify as Incels, Witt (2020) examines those who glorify such acts of violence without necessarily taking action. Namely, he examined how Elliot Rodger's manifesto was received by the Incel community. Witt compares Elliot's manifesto to a hagiography—“the textual account of a saint” (2020, p. 676). Rodger is often portrayed in Incel communities as a martyr whose actions were justified. The researchers argue that through this frame, Rodger's actions are interpreted as righteous, reclaiming masculinity through violence, and liberating himself from hegemonic hierarchies. This representation of Elliot Rodger becomes a symbol for the shared experience of the Incel community (Witt, 2020).

Papadamou et al. (2020) take a step back from the content of Incel posts and focus on the diffusion of Incel ideas and the extremization of individuals online. Their study is part of an emerging sub-genre of manosphere studies which focus on the structures of the platforms that

host manosphere communities. Papadamou et al. (2020) compared a sample of over 6,500 videos collected on Incel-related subreddits to 5,700 random YouTube videos, to measure whether YouTube's content recommendation algorithm steers viewers towards Incel-related videos. The researchers found that by starting from a non-Incel related video, users had a 6.3% chance of being suggested an Incel-related video within clicking on five recommended videos (Papadamou et al., 2020). They conclude that this shows that YouTube may be playing an active role in pushing Incel-related content to users (Papadamou et al., 2020).

Sugiura's (2021) book, *The Incel Rebellion*, is the most in-depth study about Incel communities to date. It sets itself apart from other Incel studies, and from most manosphere studies more generally, because it is based on ten interviews with men identifying as Incels or former Incels, combined with a netnographic approach. While manosphere studies often rely on publicly available text-based posts for data collection, Sugiura's (2021) interview-based study marks a rare and valuable methodological approach. O'Neill's (2018) ethnography of seduction communities, discussed in the next section, is another study that incorporates in-depth interviews.

Sugiura (2021) explores the development of Incel communities, and attempts to understand why men join them. She rejects the assumption often made in the media and by scholars that Incels are men who have experienced romantic rejection. Sugiura (2021) points out that rejection is a normal experience for many teenagers, and is thus an unreliable predictor of joining Incel communities. Instead, Sugiura (2021) argues:

[the] indication is that some boys and men are unprepared for disappointment and rejection, such that the pain of it occurring is overwhelming such that it has momentarily shaped the rest of their lives. The perception that they are unique that other boys and men

do not experience it is striking and raises questions as to why and what led them to feel that way and what part did broader societal attitudes towards men and women play in this process. (Motivations for Joining Incel Communities, para. 3)

Sugiura (2021) suggests that while romantic rejection is a common experience for all, especially in adolescence, Incels experience rejection from women as an extremely painful and isolating experience. In other words, for Sugiura, it is not the rejection itself that leads some men to Incel communities, but rather how they interpret and internalize the experience. However, she argues that Incels should not be characterized as “deviant others” (Weirdos or Extremists, para. 2), because it would suggest that Incels’ antifeminist and misogynistic attitudes are confined to their communities, rather than being a symptom of structural misogyny, an argument that echoes O’Neill’s (2018).

Summary. The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- Incels believe in “lookism,” a social hierarchy based on looks;
- They have unhealthy expectations for intimate relationships with women and experience romantic rejection as an extremely painful experience;
- They are widely regarded as the most violent manosphere community and research focuses on their threat to public security;
- The affordances of social media platforms may contribute to driving users to incel-related content.

The Red Pill

Context. The Red Pill (TRP) ideology draws its name from the *Matrix* movie franchise. In the first film, Neo, the protagonist, must choose between ingesting a red pill or a blue pill (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). He is told that the red pill will reveal the truth about his

reality, while the blue pill will allow him to continue his life unchanged, clueless about the truths hiding behind his illusory reality. After taking the red pill, Neo discovers that humans live in a simulation, created by machines that exploit them for their bioelectric power (Van Valkenburgh, 2018; Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999).

Drawing on the imagery from the *Matrix* movies, the Red Pill philosophy claims that feminism is a charade designed to exploit men. Through feminism, the ideology claims, women can easily fulfill their genetic imperatives, which include pursuing the most successful and handsome men (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). “Taking the red pill” means becoming aware of feminism’s supposed true role in society. In contrast, “taking the blue pill” refers to those who have not reached this level of enlightenment (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022).

Red pill adherents view gender relations in terms of a sexual marketplace, where women are a finite commodity. They believe that some men possess higher ‘sexual market value’ (alphas) than others (betas; Cousineau, 2021; Han & Yin, 2022; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). According to the Red Pill, women are sexually attracted to alphas because alpha men have better genetic material to pass on to their children, however, women are likely to settle down with betas with good material resources (e.g., wealth, steady employment)—hence the Red Pill saying “alpha fux, beta bux” (Ging, 2017, p. 650). Nuances to this hierarchy of masculinities are sometimes identified, with references to omega and sigma masculinities (Han & Yin, 2022). The philosophy proposes techniques for men to appear more ‘alpha’ in order to trick as many women as possible into having sex with them (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). The Red Pill philosophy is rooted in evolutionary psychology, a heteronormative conception of sexuality, and a binary conception of gender identity (Cannito et al, 2021; Ging, 2017; O’Neill, 2018). While the philosophy is discussed throughout the manosphere, there are some subreddits dedicated to the

topic, such as r/TRP.

Academic Studies. Studies about the Red Pill community generally focus on the r/TRP subreddit. In the first study about r/TRP, Van Valkenburg (2018) analyzes the “manifesto” posted in The Red Pill subreddit, a series of documents with which members must familiarize themselves before participating in community discussions (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). This manifesto explains the main ideas behind the Red Pill philosophy. Van Valkenburg (2018) explains that for members of the Red Pill, feminism is a myth that perpetrates the lie of female oppression, a theme that we have seen throughout the manosphere. TRP’s goal, then, is to help men find success within this unfair system by giving antifeminist self-help life and relationship advice (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). This approach echoes Schmitz and Kazyak’s (2016) “cyber lads in search of masculinity,” which are defined by the objectification of women and seek lifestyle advice for men to embrace their masculinity. Van Valkenburgh (2018) also found that relationships with women are discussed in terms of a sexual marketplace that responds to the law of supply and demand.

An important finding of Van Valkenburg (2018)’s study is the Red Pill ideology’s reliance on principles of evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology presumes that humans have evolved “to maximize gene reproduction” (2018, p. 8). References to evolutionary psychology are common throughout the manosphere, although researchers rarely draw attention to them, with the notable exceptions of Van Valkenburg (2018), as well as Vallerga and Zurbriggen (2022) and Cousineau (2021).

Vallerga and Zurbriggen (2022) conducted a discursive study of two manosphere communities, as previously done by Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) and Gotell and Dutton (2016). Vallerga and Zurbriggen (2022) explore the beliefs about men and women on a Red Pill and an

Incel message board, using thematic analysis. Echoing Van Valkenburg (2018), they found that men and women are discussed in terms of gender essentialism and evolutionary psychology. Women are portrayed as a homogenous group, motivated by their own sexual needs, and willing to manipulate men to obtain more power (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022), a finding also reported by Krendel (2020). Men are portrayed as naturally dominant over women with complete agency. These findings are similar to a study conducted by Cousineau (2021), comparing the r/TheRedPill subreddit to the r/MensRights subreddit. Cousineau (2021) found that both communities rely on biological determinism to justify their views on gender relations, but support for male supremacy is more overt on r/TheRedPill. r/MensRights presents itself as a space for all men, while r/TheRedPill identifies a 'good' masculinity (alpha) and bad masculinities (betas; Cousineau, 2021).

In a study situated between community studies and studies of the platforms that host them (e.g., Papadamou et al., 2020), Dignam and Rohlinger (2019) focus on a specific historical event: the election of Donald Trump in 2016. The researchers analyze 1762 posts from the two most popular discussion threads on the r/TRP subreddit, selecting the highest rated posts in these threads, from October 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019). They found that before 2016, TRP was understood as a personal philosophy, one that must be hidden from the public. In 2016, subreddit moderators began to suggest that political involvement would be a serious blow against feminism. Users wanting to be seen as alpha males could only express their support of Donald Trump, as the endorsement of any other politician was associated with beta masculinity. Dignam and Rohlinger (2019) argue that this political shift was made possible by the structure of subreddits themselves, where dissonant ideas are downvoted, and moderators control the code of conduct. Their study is one of the rare studies that identifies the influence of

manosphere communities beyond their social media platforms, comparable to Williams and Arntfield's (2020) study of multiple homicide offenders identifying as Incels, or Jane's (2017) research on the gendered language of cyberhate, to which I return in a subsequent section.

Summary. The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- The Red Pill philosophy claims that feminism exploits men, and Red pill adherents view gender relations in terms of a sexual marketplace;
- Women are objectified and portrayed as a homogenous group, and masculinities are categorized into a hierarchy of “alphas” and “betas”;
- The philosophy is rooted in evolutionary psychology and a binary conception of gender identity;
- Reddit's platform affordances enable influential members to control the main opinions discussed on the forum.

Pick Up Artists

Context. Pick up artists (PUAs), are a community focused on strategizing seduction. Growing out of the self-help and dating advice cultures of the 1990s, pick up artists were among the first manosphere-related subreddits to be created, reaching the peak of their popularity on Reddit between 2011 and 2012 (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Pick up artists are one of the only transactional communities of the manosphere, where seduction experts offer advice and sell training courses on how to date and have sex with women (Abdulla, 2022; Vu et al., 2021).

Pick up artists promote the idea that sex with a woman can be attained if one follows specific seduction techniques— “sequences of complicated actions to be overcome” (Krendel et al., 2022, p. 4). These techniques objectify women and are often comparable to harassment, rather than seduction (Ribeiro et al., 2021). They include approaching as many women as

possible to increase one's chances of having sex—O'Neill (2018) cites a source that recommends 100 approaches a day. "Negging" is another technique, which involves "making negative statements about someone so as to undermine their confidence" (O'Neill, 2018, *Seduction as mediated intimacy*, para. 6). Pick up artists often support their claims to expertise by providing video evidence of their seduction abilities—some going as far as recording intercourse (O'Neill, 2018). Having successful interactions with women is presented as a skill that any man can learn, and intimate relations are framed in terms of market logics and entrepreneurialism (Barker et al, 2018). On pick up artist forums and websites, a woman's value is based on her looks, the number of men with whom she has had sex ('body count'), and her age (Cannito et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2021).

Pick up artists came to public attention through their representation in the media. O'Neill (2018) cites some examples: the New York Times Bestseller *The Game* (Strauss, 2005), the hit movies *Magnolia* (Anderson, 1999) and *Hitch* (Tennant, 2005), and reality TV shows such as *The Pickup Artist* (Roth, 2007-8). In 2008, the first pick up artist subreddits, r/PUA and r/seduction, were founded. In November 2014, just a few months after Elliott Rodger's mass shooting, the seduction community made global news when pick up artist Julien Blanc was banned from entering the U.K. after a viral Twitter hashtag denounced Blanc's sexist and racist teachings, as well as his promotion of sexual violence as an acceptable seduction tool (O'Neill, 2018).

Academic Studies. The pick up artist community was covered in depth by O'Neill's (2018) year-long ethnography in London, during which she interviewed 32 participants and attended training events to understand why men were drawn to participate in the seduction community. She interviewed both male and female trainers. O'Neill (2018) describes PUAs as "a

kind of community-industry hybrid” (Introduction, para. 7), where there is a financial relation between pick up artists and their clients who purchase seminars and lessons. She found that pick up artists portray sex as transactional, and that they participate in the introduction of marketplace logics into intimate life, typical of neoliberal societies.

Another ethnography of the seduction community was conducted by Schuurmans and Monhagan (in press) in San Francisco. Their research reveals a significant motivation among men to join this community: a desire to address feelings of sexual inexperience and struggles in the realm of dating. However, contrary to the researchers’ expectations, the seduction community does not propel participants towards more dominant positions of masculinity. Instead, Schuurmans and Monhagan (in press) found that the hierarchy of masculinities is only further entrenched in the seduction community, demanding participants to constantly prove their masculinity. While seduction communities do foster homosocial bonding, they also amplify power struggles between masculinities (Schuurmans & Monhagan, in press).

Pick up artists are one of the least studied communities of the manosphere, perhaps because of their hybrid online–offline nature which makes them less accessible to scholars. The rising popularity of the Red Pill also contributed to the dearth of scholarly interest in pick up artists, whose popularity was dwindling (Ribeiro et al., 2021). The two communities are similar, although pick up artists tend to focus on teaching seduction methods, while The Red Pill encourages men to change their entire lifestyle, based on their ideology, and there are conflicts and disagreements between and among these communities.

Summary. The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- Pick up artists are one of the only transactional communities of the manosphere, where clients purchase seminars and lessons from pick up artists;

- Sex is promoted as transactional and pickup artists promote the idea that sex with a woman can be attained if one follows specific seduction techniques;
- Participants must constantly prove their masculinity, and masculinity hierarchies are entrenched rather than transcended.

Men Going Their Own Way

Context. Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) share some similarities with the Red Pill community. Some members of the manosphere describe taking the Red Pill as the first step towards becoming MGTOW (Han & Yin, 2022; Santos et al., 2021). MGTOW (pronounced “mig-toe”), like Red Pill adherents, also believe that men are victimized in contemporary societies corrupted by feminism. However, instead of attempting to game the system like members of Red Pill communities, or transforming it through activism like MRAs, MGTOW adopt a separatist approach (Trott et al., 2022). Men “going their own way” avoid relationships with women and work on personal development (Lin, 2017; Wright et al., 2020). Some MGTOW members take the separatist approach as far as attempting to withdraw from society entirely (Han & Yin, 2022). MGTOW criticize contemporary representations of masculinity, but they also reject traditional roles, which they see as “systematic mechanisms to extract resources from men” (Han & Yin, 2022, p. 9). Despite their separatist approach, MGTOW is still rooted in the misogyny that characterizes manosphere communities (Wright et al, 2020). For example, MGTOW discourses often reduce all women to stereotypes of manipulative nags whose only value “is derived from their sexuality and their ability to reproduce” (Abdulla, 2022, p. 147). MGTOW were mostly present on the subreddit r/MGTOW before it was banned in 2021. MGTOW communities are now present on dedicated websites, such as goingyourownway.com, as well as YouTube channels discussing MGTOW philosophy (Trott et al., 2022).

Academic Studies. Studies about MGTOW communities tend to focus on their tenuous relationship with women and feminism, such as Wright et al.'s (2020) analysis of the contradictions of MGTOW ideology. Analyzing content from the official MGTOW forum (goingyourrownway.com), they examined its structure, in-group dynamics, as well as discourses present in 102 comments on the forum (Wright et al., 2020). Despite MGTOW's professed separatist stance, Wright et al. (2020) found that their most commonly discussed topics are women and defining MGTOW as a collective. They also point out that forum moderation practices contradict the "liberal individualism" promoted by their ideology (Wright et al., 2020).

Lin (2017) examined the relationship between MGTOW and past feminist movements, to understand how the internet affects antifeminist identity formation. Her methodology is unclear, but an interesting finding is that MGTOW is a homosocial space where members demonstrate a symmetrical understanding of gender experiences—that is, that men and women experience different, but equivalent discrimination—echoing Schuurmans and Monhagan's (in press) characterization of pick up artist communities as homosocial spaces.

In another study of platform structures, comparable to Papadamou et al.'s (2020), Trott et al. (2022) used the subreddit [r/MRGTO](https://www.reddit.com/r/MRGTO) as a case study to explore the decisions made by automated platform moderating tools. By running 922 [r/MGTOW](https://www.reddit.com/r/MGTOW) comments through an automated moderating tool and analyzing its decisions, the authors found that automated tools tend to focus on internal community health, while Reddit's community guidelines focus on the potential harms caused to community outsiders (Trott et al., 2022). This study highlights an issue with communities such as [r/MGTOW](https://www.reddit.com/r/MGTOW) and other manosphere communities, where members share strong interpersonal bonds and tend to develop "highly contextual" language that aims to elude automated moderation tools (Trott et al., 2022, p. 13). Such communities are rated 'healthy' by

automated moderation tools, yet fail to comply with Reddit's community guidelines.

Summary. The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- Like red pill adherents, MGTOW also believe that men are victimized by feminism, but choose to avoid women entirely;
- Despite their separatist stance, women are the most discussed topic;
- MGTOW view men and women's issues as different but equivalent;
- The highly contextual language used in this community allows them to evade automated moderation tools despite failing to comply with Reddit's community guidelines.

Overviews of The Manosphere

Some manosphere studies, such as those presented in the previous sections, focus on specific communities. Others, like the studies presented in the following section, compare communities to one another or focus on the manosphere as a whole.

Ging's (2017) study "Alphas, betas, and Incels" was one of the first studies to apply Connell's theorization of gender to the manosphere (see also Schmitz and Kazyak, 2016). The study examined how the masculinities embodied by members of the manosphere relate to hegemonic masculinity. Ging (2017) conducted this study over six months, compiling a list of the 38 most cross-referenced websites about antifeminism. Using thematic analysis, Ging (2017) identified five key interest groups in the manosphere: Men's Rights Activists, Men Going their Own Way, Pick Up Artists, Traditional Christian Conservatives, and Gamers. Interestingly, while gamers are occasionally mentioned by other researchers as a source of online hate (e.g., Jane, 2017), they are never identified as an interest group in their own right, and Christian Conservatives are not mentioned by any other study reviewed here.

Ging's (2017) main contribution to the understanding of the manosphere is her articulation of manosphere masculinities in terms of Bridges and Pascoe's (2014) theory of hybrid masculinities. According to Bridges and Pascoe (2014), hybrid masculinities are dominant forms of masculinity that borrow characteristics and discourses from marginalized groups, obscuring the privileges afforded to some groups of men. Like other scholars such as Gottell and Dutton (2016) or Starr (2017), Ging (2017) argues that men of the manosphere position themselves as victims of feminism. However, by analyzing her data through the framework of hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), Ging highlights that men of the manosphere still benefit from hierarchies of power online. Members of the manosphere often claim that their masculinity is marginalized and subordinate, yet employ racist and misogynistic discourses, and encourage doxing and hacking, which Ging (2017) interprets as an attempt create male hegemony online.

In a study reminiscent of Schmitz and Kazyak's (2016), Hopton and Langer (2022) focus on the discursive strategies used in over 800 tweets about topics pertaining to the manosphere. While Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) categorize their findings according to two different types of masculinity, Hopton and Langer (2022) categorized the discourses in their dataset according to three discursive strategies: (1) "co-opting discourses of oppression" through narratives of women causing male victimization; (2) "naming power" by constructing a gendered hierarchy that excludes, and thereby invisibilizes, women; and (3) "disavowal by disaggregation", by reducing women to their body parts (usually their genitalia) to dehumanize them (Hopton & Langer, 2022, p. 8). These discursive strategies silence, objectify, and threaten women, yet rely on "the continued existence of an enemy-other, in the form of women" (17). The simultaneous rejection of women and reliance on their continued existence echoes Wright et al.'s (2020) findings about

the MGTOW community.

In a more recent study, Krendel et al. (2022) examined how gendered social actors are represented in five subreddits (Incels, MGTOW, PUAs, MRAs, and the Red Pill). The researchers found that women are often denigrated and discussed in “negative sexual terms” (Krendel et al, 2022, p.22). Men and women are usually represented as homogenous groups, but men are ascribed more possible variations than women. These communities all discuss men and women’s appearances, but women and girls are described in terms of sexual attractiveness (Krendel et al., 2022). The authors conclude that the ideas discussed in the manosphere are “a more extreme version of mainstream discourse, into which it may be re-imported” (Krendel et al., 2022, p.1), a similar conclusion to O’Neill’s (2018) study on pick up artists.

Massanari (2017), in a study focused on platform structure, questions how Reddit’s design facilitates the emergence of toxic communities. She states that she uses actor network theory to examine Reddit’s governance structure, but she does not explain how she applies this theory (Massanari, 2017). Instead, she describes two cases of doxing and coordinated harassment that happened in 2014, instigated by members of the manosphere against women. First, the leak of several female celebrities’ intimate photos, then “#GamerGate,” a harassment campaign targeting women in the video game industry (Massanari, 2017). For example, she points to the website’s reliance on the free labor of volunteer moderators, as well as the site’s upvoting system, which boosts the most popular posts to the top of a community’s feed, thereby pushing diverging or unpopular opinions to the bottom (Massanari, 2017), a point also highlighted by Dignam and Rohlinger (2019) in their study of the influence of r/TRP in the election of Donald Trump.

A few manosphere studies explore the historical transformation of language in

manosphere communities. In her autoethnographic investigation of the manosphere, Jane (2017) examines the hate directed at women online, highlighting the historical transformation of the language of “gendered cyberhate” (2017, p.4). What sets her study apart from the others presented in this chapter is its incorporation of 50 qualitative interviews with women who were targets of online hate. Unlike the other studies which also employ interviews, such as O’Neill (2018), Sugiura (2021), and Schuurmans and Monhagan (in press), Jane’s (2017) study stands out by focusing on the voices of those targeted by the manosphere’s violence. Although the aforementioned studies shed light on the negative consequences of participation in manosphere groups for their members, none of them include interviews with those who are direct targets of hatred. Jane (2017) found that the rhetoric of gendered cyberhate has not changed over time, but it is now used differently. Cyberhate has acquired a gamified aspect in online forums, where those who can spew the most hateful language—men and women alike—are praised by others (Jane, 2017).

Like Jane (2017), Marwick and Caplan (2018) took a historical approach to the use of language in the manosphere. In their study, they tracked the use of the term ‘misandry’ online since the 1990s. Misandry, or the hatred of men, is often used in the manosphere to express the idea that feminism unfairly benefits women to the detriment of men. In their study of internet archives, Marwick and Caplan (2018) identify three periods and locations where there was increased interest in the term misandry: Usenet groups in the 1990s, early blogs in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and social media in the 2010s. Marwick and Caplan (2018) found that the term misandry is used as a boundary object, signifying membership to different groups depending on its use. Men’s rights groups use the term to connote that feminism privileges women to the detriment of men, while feminist groups use the term to signify men’s rights activists’

misunderstanding of the victimization of women in patriarchal societies (Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

In a study similar to Marwick and Caplan's (2018), Farrell et al. (2019) examined the evolution of extreme and violent language against women across several Reddit communities. Using computer modeling, they examine the prevalence of hate speech in a staggering sample of 6 million posts (Farrell et al., 2019). The data was gathered from seven communities: r/MGTOW, r/badwomensanatomy, r/Braincels, r/IncelsWithoutHate, r/IncelTears, r/IncelsInAction, r/TruFemcels (Farrell et al., 2019). Most of the communities in the sample reference Incels, because they were found by searching for the term 'Incel' on Reddit (Farrell et al., 2019). The researchers do not address why they only selected communities appearing under that search term, nor why they did not expand their search to other prevalent manosphere communities, such as Men's Rights Activists or pick up artists.

The researchers found that violence and hostility toward women online have increased with time (Farrell et al., 2019). They also found that r/TruFemcels, a community of female Incels, showed the highest concentration of belittling and racist content. Farrell et al. (2019) note that this result is difficult to interpret because the community of women may experience internalized misogyny, but also trolling from male Incels—this was the extent of the researchers' insights about women's presence in the manosphere. Furthermore, Farrell et al. (2019) found that two common responses to feminism on the manosphere are either to not engage with feminist discourse, or to flip the narrative and portray men as victims.

The longitudinal analysis of the transformation of language in the manosphere was reproduced again in a recent study, where Ribeiro et al. (2021) expanded the sample size to include 28.8 million posts, spanning 51 subreddits and 6 forums over 14 years. The researchers

did not limit their analysis to the evolution of lexicons over time. They also tracked the intersection and migration of users between different communities. Their findings confirm Jane's (2017) and Marwick and Caplan's (2018): language is indeed becoming more violent towards women. They also report that active users of the manosphere have migrated from "milder and older communities" to ones with more extreme views, such as Incels and Men Going Their Own Way (Ribeiro et al., 2021, p. 1).

Summary. The main contributions of this literature can be summarized as follows:

- Overviews report the same general trends as studies about specific communities, namely the rise of violent and misogynistic language, facilitation of member radicalization through platform affordances, and representations of men as victims of feminism;
- Relationships with women are the central topic of discussion, and gender relations are understood from the perspective of evolutionary psychology;
- The ideal masculinity is heterosexual and based on traditional gender roles where women are subservient to and dependent on their male partners.

Motivations to Participate

The literature points to some ways of understanding men's motivations to join and participate in the manosphere, but no studies do so directly. Most studies point to Connell's (1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) model of masculinity to explain these men's behavior, rather than to empirical data. It should be noted that no studies reviewed here address the over-reliance on Connell's framework. Connell's theory is helpful to bridge the gap between the largely exploratory data collected in manosphere studies and the preliminary understanding of men's motivations to join. However, it is necessary to conduct more studies that explicitly

examine individuals' motivations to join and participate in the manosphere. Based on existing studies, men's motivations to join these communities could be summarized as follows: men often join the manosphere in reaction to feminism (Farrell et al., 2019). Men who join the manosphere either accuse feminism of failing to address men's issues (such as child custody disputes or higher rates of suicide), or they believe that feminism has marginalized and victimized men. These men often find that they cannot attain what they consider to be markers of success, which scholars interpret as frustrations with hegemonic expressions of masculinity (Van Valkenburgh, 2018; Witt, 2020). Communities of the manosphere provide men with ideologies that reflect their personal experiences of "masculine marginalization" (Witt, 2020). Additionally, communities like The Red Pill, imbued with neoliberal discourses, offer advice on how men can seemingly take control of their lives and find success romantically and financially (Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

The pressure to constantly work on bettering the self is another important element in understanding motivations to participate in the manosphere (O'Neill, 2018). This neoliberal imperative is exacerbated online, where the very structure of social media favors a focus on the individual, rather than on the collectivity (Fenton & Barassi, 2011). The major tenet of neoliberalism is that the role of the State must be reduced in favor of economic freedom (Gamble, 2016). The model of the market is disseminated into every aspect of life (O'Neill, 2018). Life and the self are quantified, rationalized, and treated as commodities (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). This has translated culturally into the belief that individuals should be self-sufficient, rational actors (Barker et al., 2018). Individuals compete against each other and are made responsible for their successes and failures (O'Neill, 2018). In turn, culturally shared problems become framed in terms of individual shortcomings (McGee, 2005; O'Neill, 2018).

The imperative for self-betterment drives the popularity of self-help media (McGee, 2005) and communities like those of the manosphere, where men can find spaces where self-betterment is discussed and encouraged (O'Neill, 2018). Thus, neoliberal tendencies that affect all individuals are important factors when considering motivations to join manosphere communities.

The Future of Manosphere Studies

There is a growing trend of employing quantitative research methods to study the manosphere. In recent scholarship, quantitative research methods have been employed to explore the “multiple dimensions of masculinity” in various manosphere groups (Alfano et al., 2023, p. 2), or the representation of gendered social actors across different manosphere subreddits (Krendel et al., 2022). Not only has the number of posts on the manosphere grown exponentially since it first began to interest scholars in 2013, but computer-assisted research methods are becoming increasingly popular in research about social media. However, computer-assisted research methods demand a level of technological skill and knowledge that may be unattainable for some researchers. To address this issue, a group of researchers has published a public dataset that contains 44 million posts collected from twelve manosphere and extremist forums, published over the past twenty years (Vu et al., 2021). Named ‘ExtremeBB’, this dataset provides researchers with access to data about the manosphere and extreme groups, without needing to perform computer-assisted data collection on their own (Vu et al., 2021).

As the amount of research on the manosphere grows, researchers are identifying new avenues for research. For example, Cannito et al. (2021) propose several future areas of research, including women’s role in the manosphere, as well as intersectional dynamics in manosphere communities (Cannito et al., 2021). Another recommendation comes from Ging and Murphy (2021), who highlight the overuse of the same methodology in manosphere research. The authors

argue that studies based on data collection from a single platform are contributing to the stagnation of knowledge production and theory building in manosphere research. Rather than focusing on a single group, the authors propose to study individual “pilling pathways,” by monitoring post activity, personal accounts of joining the manosphere, and browser history (Ging & Murphy, 2021, p.2). These methods would follow individual paths to the manosphere across platforms, while taking other factors such as life events into account. A version of this proposed methodology was used in Ribeiro et al.’s (2021) longitudinal study, which tracked user migration between subreddits. Habib et al. (2022) also used a similar approach, by tracking individual Reddit users’ post history to understand how some become manosphere members. Using clinical radicalization risk assessment lists, the authors found that “just a single instance of social acceptance inside the manosphere can cause significant increases in all warning behaviors” (Habib et al., 2022, p. 19), and that influential members are effective at increasing markers for radicalization in other members. They propose changes in platform design that take radicalization frameworks into account to better identify at-risk users.

Women in the Manosphere

Despite its name, the manosphere includes some communities of women. They are sometimes mentioned by scholars, such as the TruFemcel community that puzzled Farrell et al. (2019) or Karen Straughan, the female MRA whose videos were analyzed by Gotell and Dutton (2016). However, women are usually either treated as an exception or ignored altogether in scholarship. This is surprising given that for each of the communities described here, there exists a distinct but corresponding community for women: feMRAs, female pick up artists, RedPillWomen, WGTOW, and Femcels.

A few studies provide greater detail about women’s presence in the manosphere, but none

focus on women exclusively. O'Neill's (2018) ethnography of the pick up artist community in London is one of the first to discuss, rather than dismiss, women's presence in a manosphere community. In her study, O'Neill (2018) interviewed 29 men (students, event organizers, pick up artists) and three female pick up artists. However, O'Neill (2018) explains that she refrained from sharing too much from these women's testimonies to protect their anonymity in a male-dominated field. Female trainers reported being frequently harassed by their male colleagues, and having to curb seduction attempts by male students. O'Neill (2018) found that women's legitimacy as PUAs is called into question by their male peers, who believe that women think and behave differently than men, thus making them incapable of understanding what truly goes on in men's minds. The female trainers who were interviewed, however, claimed that their female standpoint is invaluable in teaching men how to seduce women (O'Neill, 2018).

Sugiura's (2021) ethnography of Incel communities also mentions women's participation in manosphere spaces. Sugiura (2021) does not center her analysis around these women, but she notes that women's roles in the manosphere should not be overlooked. She discusses two different groups: trad-wives (traditional wives) and Femcels (female involuntary celibates). Sugiura (2021) defines trad-wives as women who:

support and practice traditional domestic values, with a mutual nostalgic yearning to return to simpler times, when men and women knew their places – men as the breadwinners and women as the homemakers, and a rejection of feminism. (Why Young White Western Cisgender Men? para. 10)

Trad-wives believe that immigration and multiculturalism contribute to contemporary social issues, a stance shared by conservative and far right groups (Sugiura, 2021). Trad-wives originate from a Red Pill women's group, where women are urged be submissive to their

husbands. These women are generally supportive of men's rights movements, but Sugiura (2021) notes a contradiction in trad-wife discourse:

trad-wives also go to great lengths to highlight that though men are the ones who suffering [*sic*], they are not victims, such that their role as protector is untarnished (Why Young White Western Cisgender Men? para. 10).

Such tensions are also present in Femcel groups. Sugiura (2021) found that Incels often question the legitimacy of Femcels, in a similar way that PUAs mistrust their female colleagues (O'Neill, 2018). However, Femcels are not accused of lacking a male perspective. Instead, Incels believe that men are always willing to have sex, so a woman who cannot find a sexual partner does not fit within their worldview. Both O'Neill (2018) and Sugiura (2021) show how male members of the manosphere contest the legitimacy of women's presence. Aside from O'Neill (2018) and Sugiura (2021)'s extended mentions of women in the manosphere, no studies to date focus exclusively on women's participation in that space.

While the current online movement of antifeminism seems to be part of the previously established pattern of cyclical backlash (Jane, 2017), it took on a form that set it apart from its predecessors. In the 1920s, when the anti-suffrage movement opposed women's right to vote in America, their advocates argued that women had no place in the political sphere (Faludi, 1991). During the Cold War, when capitalist governments turned women away from public life, they claimed that women in the workplace were a symbol of communism (Howard, 2008). In the 1970s, when conservative women opposed the Equal Rights Amendment in the U.S., they declared that it was against their religious beliefs (Hardisty, 2001). But in the 2020s, when male members of the manosphere attack feminism, they do not deplore its effect on traditional values of the family, religion, and the state. Instead, they blame feminism for their lack of access to

women's bodies (Ging, 2017), for their heightened fear of being falsely accused of sexual assault (Wright et al., 2020), or for the demonization of masculinity (Lin, 2017). The new online antifeminist movement is less concerned with how feminism impacts society, and more concerned with how feminism impacts individuals, thereby confirming the emphasis on neoliberalism in so many of the studies (Farrell et al., 2019; Messner, 2016).

Most studies about the manosphere tend to focus on men, their disenfranchisement, and violence against women. Scholars explain that men participate in the manosphere because they are frustrated with their masculinity. But what are we to make of the women of the manosphere, and the historical cycle of antifeminist backlash? If we hope to deepen our understanding of these violent, misogynist communities, we must broaden our understanding of motivations to participate in the manosphere. This project, then, questions the involvement of women in these openly antifeminist online groups.

One of the ways that studies about conservative women's movements can further our understanding of the manosphere is the common argument that the driving motives behind these women's activism is not gender, but class and race. While it may appear that these women act against their gendered interests, these movements benefit white and middle- to upper-class heterosexual women above all. This is a dimension that often fails to be addressed in studies about the manosphere as well as in press articles about women of the manosphere. Another way that scholarship about conservative women can inform this present study is through its consideration of the dynamics of groups of women, who tend to meet in the private sphere and occasionally generate their own ideas about the conservative movements in which they participate. It is perplexing that scholars have ignored and dismissed women's presence in the manosphere. If we look at the historical pattern, it appears inevitable that online women's

antifeminist groups would emerge.

The following chapter outlines the theoretical approaches used in this project to answer my research questions.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Approaches to Femininity in Masculinity Studies

Existing scholarship has provided valuable insight into the discourses and conceptions of gender that circulate in the manosphere, but it has yet to address women's presence in the manosphere. The manosphere is occupied mostly by men and focuses on questions of masculinity—men's rights, antifeminism, heterosexual relationships with women. The women of the manosphere are very much in a man's world. However, in this study, I wanted to avoid characterizing these women as outliers, whose actions, discourses, and identities only have marginal importance in the manosphere. As previous studies of right-wing and antifeminist women's movements have shown, women's participation in such groups is a historical pattern with tangible political effects (e.g., Luker, 1984; Marshall, 1997; Schreiber, 2008).

To reflect my project's focus on women's participation in antifeminist communities, I selected theories of gender that reflect the role played by women in the reproduction of existing gender hierarchies. I also chose to situate my study in the field of men's and masculinity studies, so that I could be in dialogue with existing work on the manosphere. With these considerations in mind, I selected three theories: Raewyn Connell's (1987) theory of the gender order, Stevi Jackson's (2006) dimensions of the social, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989; 1990) concept of intersectionality. All three theories are informed by feminist theory and a social constructionist understanding of gender and power relations. These theories all consider the construction of gender relations at multiple levels of the social, from the microsocial to the macrosocial.

Connell's theory of the gender order is the most widely used theory in research about the manosphere (e.g., Ging, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). However, Connell's theory mainly focuses on masculinities. To address her under theorization of

femininities, I also drew on Mimi Schippers' (2007) theorization of femininities in the context of Connell's model. In addition, Stevi Jackson's (2006) dimensions of the social were used to contextualize my findings and were combined with Connell's theory so that it could be applied at multiple levels of the social. Finally, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality calls for a deeper focus on race and class as other social forces at play in upholding the current gender order. I combined these theories in a theoretical synthesis to help me think beyond the reductive tendency in existing literature to dismiss members of the manosphere as a group of "angry white men" (Kimmel, 2017).

Connell: The Gender Order

[The world gender order] can be defined as the structure of relationships that interconnect the gender regimes of institutions, and the gender orders of local society, on a world scale. (Connell, 1998, p. 7)

Raewyn Connell developed her theorization of gender over several books and articles, including *Masculinities* (Connell, 1995) and the widely cited *Gender and Power* (1987)—especially the section "Hegemonic femininity and emphasized femininity" (pp.183-188)—and a response to critiques of the theory, co-written with James Messerschmidt (2005). In *Gender and Power* (1987), Connell meticulously retraces the foundations upon which her theory is built. She describes and critiques the history of gender theory, focusing on specific theories such as sex role theory and evolutionary psychology. One of the shortcomings she finds in earlier gender theories is their tendency to view society as an ahistorical and invariant structure. Instead, she calls for a theory that views social reproduction as "constantly constituted rather than constantly reproduced" (1987, p. 44). For Connell, social reproduction is "an achievement by a particular alliance of social forces over others" (1987, p. 44). The current social order is never guaranteed:

it is constantly upheld by some and resisted by others. The dynamic constitution of the social order is an essential foundation for Connell's theorization of the gender order.

Connell's conceptualization of the gender order was intended to be refined, contested, and built upon, to stay as true as possible to the empirical reality encountered by scholars (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell's theory has undergone several reformulations, reviews, and additions by other scholars, some of which have been acknowledged by Connell and Messerschmidt themselves (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Messerschmidt et al., 2018; Schippers, 2007). The following section is an account of Connell's theory as it currently stands, drawing from a series of sources (Connell, 1987; 1995; 1998; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell & Pearse, 2014).

Connell situates the operations of gender at the interconnection of the relationships between institutions, local societies, and the global world order. Connell's theory of the gender order posits that Western societies, at the structural level, are characterized by multiple forms of masculinities and femininities, all of which are organized hierarchically (1987). Factors like class, race, or age influence the patterns of interpersonal relationships. These "face to face" relationships are far more complex than the structural organization of gender (1987, p. 183). At the structural level, however, masculinities and femininities become "stylized and impoverished," defined by "a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women" (1987, p. 183). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) later clarified that men's dominance over women is not an established fact, but rather a system that requires "considerable effort" to maintain (p. 844). Such efforts include the constant policing of men and acceptable masculinities, as evidenced by homophobic acts of violence or the bullying of boys at school for acting too feminine (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.844). The dominance of men over

women is also a historical process that appropriates local elements to adapt to specific contexts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

For Connell (1995), masculinity and femininity are not traits or attributes possessed by an individual. Masculinity and femininity are produced by engaging in specific practices that are socially understood as masculine or feminine. Masculinity is thus, according to Connell (1995):

... simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture. (p. 71)

Mimi Schippers (2007) neatly summarizes Connell's definition of masculinity as "a social position, a set of practices, and the effects of the collective embodiment of those practices on individuals, relationships, institutional structures, and global relations of domination." (pp. 86-87). Masculinities and femininities do not exist outside the social as individual attributes. They are produced in the context of the gender order, at multiple levels of the social (Connell, 1995).

Hegemonic Masculinity

Different masculinities do not sit side-by-side like dishes on a smorgasbord. (Connell, 2000, p. 10)

Hegemonic masculinity sits at the top of the hierarchy of the gender order. Hegemonic masculinity maintains its position of power through the subordination of other forms of masculinity and all forms of femininity (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is first and foremost heterosexual and, by extension, based on the sexual conquest of women (Connell, 1995, p. 78). Other forms of masculinities and femininities are defined either in compliance with the existing hegemonic gender order, or in resistance to it (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005):

It is men's and boys' practical relationships to collective images or models of masculinity, rather than simple reflections of them, that is central to understanding gendered consequences in violence, health, and education. (p. 841)

A common misconception of the theory addressed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) in their reformulation is that hegemonic masculinity refers to a structure of power, and erases the subject. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) clarify that hegemonic masculinity refers to a set of practices done by the subject in reference to “common cultural templates” and men and boys' masculine practices (p.841). While hegemonic masculinities may be far from men's empirical reality, they carry the “ideals, fantasies and desires” of a society, as well as “models of relations with women” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.838).

Another criticism of the original theory was that hegemonic masculinity was a fixed typology. In their response to this critique, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) clarify that hegemonic masculinity should not be thought of as a “fixed, transhistorical model” (p.838). Because gender is historically situated, the characteristics of a hegemonic form of masculinity in a society depend on its values and ideals at a given time. For example, in colonial and neocolonial economies, this fact manifests itself in the gendered division of labor on the structural level, organized around the “male-wage worker – female domestic worker couple” (Connell, 1998, p. 8). Through this division of labor, masculinity is associated with the public realm and femininity with domesticity (1998). Connell (2005) argues that the transition to global markets affected the dominant forms of masculinity in the U.S.A. The work-based masculinities that thrived under the previous stage of capitalism were undermined. Instead, the power is concentrated in the hands of particular men: the “managers and entrepreneurs” (Connell, 2005, p.

76). The most successful men in the global market exhibit a form of hegemonic masculinity characterized by competitiveness, individualism, and “energy focused on work” (Connell & Wood, 2005). In such a context, frustrations with the performance of one’s masculinity easily arise as these professional positions are associated with low security, mutual scrutiny, and the constant pursuit of profit (Connell & Wood, 2005).

In the reformulation of their theory, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) warn that scholarship often treats hegemonic masculinity as a reification of power and toxicity (p.839). However, hegemonic masculinities are not always characterized by toxic practices. Messerschmidt (2020) explains that masculinities are hegemonic when they help legitimize gender inequality, regardless of how they achieve this legitimacy. He illustrates this point by analyzing the differences in foreign policy speeches by two former American presidents: George W. Bush and Barack Obama (Messerschmidt, 2020). He found that they both construct their “ability to protect others from global terrorists as masculine qualities,” while constructing other people’s inability to do so as feminine (Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 20). In doing so, both presidents participate in the legitimation of gender inequality “through the discursive construction of a global protective hegemonic masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 20). Protective hegemonic masculinities illustrate how hegemonic gender relations can be sustained without relying exclusively on toxic practices.

Another common misconception is that dominant masculinities (the most common masculinities in a given context) are always hegemonic, or that the masculinities enacted by men in power are hegemonic. Citing a series of interviews conducted with teenage boys, Messerschmidt (2016; 2020) explains that the most popular boys did not enact a masculinity that legitimized gender inequality, yet represented the dominant form of masculinity in their school.

Emphasized Femininity

Gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848)

A central characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is the subordination or negation of other forms of masculinity. For Connell (1987, p. 136), there is no equivalent form of femininity that holds the same hegemonic power over other femininities. Western forms of femininity are constructed “in the context of the overall subordination of women to men” (Connell, 1987, p. 186) and are defined by “complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance, and cooperation” to the hegemonic gender order, but not domination (Connell, 1987, p. 183). Thus, femininity cannot, by definition, be hegemonic. I later discuss Schippers’ concept of “hegemonic femininity,” which she defines as the form of femininity that participates in the ongoing domination of hegemonic masculinity (2007).

One form of femininity, however, is characterized by its “compliance with this subordination” to men and its aim “to [accommodate] the interests and desires of men” (Connell, 1987, p. 183). Known as emphasized femininity, it derives its name from its overrepresentation in Western cultures, ideologies, as well as mass media and marketing (Connell, 1987, p. 186). Emphasized femininity is surrounded by far greater cultural representation and “folklore about how to sustain the performance” than any forms of masculinity (e.g., women’s magazines, rom-coms, or female sex symbols; Connell, 1987, p. 187). Emphasized femininity is “performed especially to men” (Connell, 1987, p. 187). This kind of femininity tends to value “compliance, nurturance, and empathy,” qualities that are impossible to sustain while attempting any form of hegemony akin to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, p. 188). In fact, Connell (1987) points

out the contradictions found in antifeminist women's groups who promote this version of femininity, yet whose political activism is at odds with the feminine values they support:

There is a familiar paradox about antifeminist women's groups [...] who exalt the *Kinder, Kirche und Küche* version of femininity: they can only become politically active by subverting their own prescriptions. They must rely heavily on religious ideology and on political backing from conservative men. The relations they establish with other kinds of femininity are not so much domination as attempted marginalization. (p.188)

Emphasized femininity does not maintain its cultural ascendancy through the domination of other kinds of femininity. For Connell, emphasized femininity marginalizes other forms of femininity by preventing them from “gaining cultural articulation” (1987, p. 188). To illustrate her argument, she points to historiography, which overemphasizes conventional forms of femininity, invisibilizing the experience of “spinsters, lesbians, unionists, prostitutes, madwomen, rebels and maiden aunts, manual workers, midwives and witches” (1987, p.188).

Levels of Operation

Adopting an analytical framework that distinguishes local, regional, and global masculinities [...] allows us to recognize the importance of place without falling into a monadic world of totally independent cultures or discourses. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 850)

The global dominance of men over women does not adequately represent the more complex gender relations on smaller social scales, such as at the interpersonal level. In their reformulation of their theory of the gender order, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) illustrate the intricacies of gender relations with “protest masculinities” found in “marginalized ethnic groups” or with bourgeois femininities that appropriate “aspects of hegemonic masculinity in

constructing corporate or professional careers” (p. 847).

To help researchers capture these complex relations, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose three levels of analysis at which gender relations can be studied: (1) the local; (2) the regional; and (3) the global. At the local level, gender relations are constructed through individual interactions with peers, communities, and institutions. At the regional level, they are constructed through cultural or nation-state norms. At the global level, gender relations are constructed through “world politics and transnational business and media” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 849). These levels of analysis allow researchers to focus on local forms of hegemonic masculinity while also examining their relation to the regional and global orders. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also call for further studies of femininities and their roles in the construction of masculinities to attain a “holistic understanding of gender hierarchy” (p. 848).

In the following section, I present Schipper’s concept of hegemonic (2007) femininity, an extension and reformulation of Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) theory, recognized by the two researchers as a pertinent addition to their understanding of the gender order (Messerschmidt et al., 2018).

Schippers: Hegemonic Femininity

[My] goal is to recover the feminine other and place it in the center of a theory of gender hegemony. (Schippers, 2007, p. 86)

By ‘feminine other’, Schippers refers to the tendency in men and masculinity studies to define masculinity “through its difference from femininity”, and to displace femininities to the outskirts of theorizations of masculinity (p. 90). Schippers (2007) proposes to resolve the under theorization of femininities by shifting the focus of Connell’s (1987) theory from hegemonic masculinity to the relationship *between* hegemonic masculinity its feminine counterpart,

hegemonic femininity. Schippers (2007) argues that Connell's (1987) theory downplays the role of femininity in upholding gender hegemony. Instead, Schippers (2007) asserts that the crux of gender hegemony lies in the construction of gender difference based on heterosexual desire. Drawing on Butler's (1990) concept of the heterosexual matrix, Schippers (2007) contends that the basis of masculinity is not the absence of feminine characteristics as argued by Connell, but the "possession of erotic desire for the feminine object" (p. 90). Heterosexual desire, as defined by Butler (1990), constructs masculinities and femininities as "complementary opposites" (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). The ascendancy of masculinity over femininity is then naturalized in contemporary Western societies by the construction of heterosexual sex as the physical domination of a man over a woman. Thus, the naturalization of the complementary and hierarchical relationship between masculinities and femininities is naturalized through "compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic constructions of sexuality" (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). In other words, Schippers (2007) argues that the gender order does not only naturalize the dominance of masculinities over femininities as in Connell's (1987) model, but it also naturalizes the relationship between men and women as both complementary and hierarchical.

In Connell's (1987) model, femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities are defined by their difference and inferiority to hegemonic masculinity. In Schippers' (2007) proposed model, masculinities and femininities are constructed "against the idealized relationship between masculinity and femininity" (p. 94). In this idealized relationship, hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity work together as "complementary opposites" to uphold gender hegemony (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). While Connell (1987) argues that hegemonic femininity cannot exist because femininities are subordinated to all forms of masculinity, Schippers proposes an alternative definition. For Schippers (2007), hegemonic femininity:

consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 94)

Schippers' (2007) hegemonic femininity is defined as being dominant over other femininities. In response to Connell's (1987) statement that there are no femininities that are hegemonically dominant over others, Schippers argues that "gender hegemony is produced through the relationship between femininity and masculinity", and that it creates configurations of gender that are organized in dominant and subordinate power dynamics, for both masculinity and femininity (p.94). While Connell's (1987) emphasized femininity is one example of femininity defined by its compliance with hegemonic masculinity, Schipper's (2007) hegemonic femininity actively participates in maintaining hegemonic masculinity's dominance as its necessary counterpart. It is through the idealized relationship between the two that hegemonic masculinity comes to be legitimized and naturalized (Schippers, 2007). Schippers' (2007) reconceptualization of hegemonic femininity gives a central role to femininity in the perpetuation of gender hegemony. It ascribes agency to women, even if this agency is not being put to emancipatory ends. It also accounts for the cultural valuation of some relationships between masculinities and femininities over others.

Schippers' (2007) alternative model is not only interesting for its centering of the heterosexual desire in gender hegemony. She also provides a methodological insight into how to identify hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity in local contexts, something with which scholars using Connell's (1987) model have sometimes struggled (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For Schippers (2007), the legitimacy of men's superiority over women is protected by portraying the qualities associated with dominant masculinity as exclusively accessible to men.

When women embody masculine characteristics, such as being promiscuous, having sexual desire for women, or being aggressive, they threaten male dominance because they are refusing “to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination” (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). Furthermore, when women enact characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, they embody what Schippers (2007) calls “pariah femininities.” These femininities upset the hegemonic gender order and are a “central feature of gender hegemony and, as such, central to the very real, material sanctions exacted on women who embody them” (p. 96). Schippers (2007) suggests that one way to identify context-specific hegemonic masculinities is to identify the local pariah femininities. In other words, researchers can observe which characteristics or practices are stigmatized when embodied by women in local settings (Schippers, 2007, p. 96). These characteristics, when embodied by men, are then indicative of local forms of hegemonic masculinity. Schippers’ pariah femininities flip the script of masculinity studies, where masculinity is usually used to discern associated femininities.

Connell’s (1987) theory is a useful tool to think about gendered power relations, but it can be difficult to wield. A number of criticisms of the theory—including by Connell and Messerschmidt themselves (2005)—point to studies that have misinterpreted hegemonic masculinity as the most dominant form of masculinity in a given context, or as a set of traits possessed by powerful men. Schippers’ (2007) hegemonic and pariah femininities facilitate the identification of hegemonic masculinities in a given context. Schippers’ (2007) theory responds to Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) call for a “holistic understanding of gender hierarchy” (p. 848). The combination of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Schippers’ (2007) theories proposes an understanding of gendered power as a dynamic system that operates at multiple social levels, where masculinities and femininities, and the relationships between them, uphold,

resist, or comply with the current gender order. To strengthen the analysis and interpretation of my data, I also drew on Stevi Jackson's (2006) dimensions of the social, which offer a precise methodological account for analyzing gender dynamics at multiple social levels, a dimension that is lacking in the other frameworks I employed.

Jackson: Dimensions of the Social

Jackson's (2004; 2006) dimensions of the social are based on a conception of gender comparable to Connell's. For Jackson (2004), gender is a "hierarchical social division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices" (p. 16). Additionally, Jackson (2004) defines heterosexuality as a sexual orientation, but also as an institution that orders social relations, in the same way as Connell (1987) and Schippers (2006). For Jackson (2004), while gender refers to the "hierarchical relation between women and men", heterosexuality is "a specific institutionalized form of that relation" (p. 27). Jackson (2006) takes issue with analyses of institutionalized heterosexuality—heteronormativity—which focus on "its role in regulating homosexuality" (p. 105). Instead, she calls for an analysis of heteronormativity as a "double-sided social regulation", which both marginalizes those who do not fit within the boundaries of heterosexuality and regulates those who do (Jackson, 2006, p. 105).

Jackson (2004) defines four dimensions of the social to help social scientists examine how heterosexuality regulates the social at multiple levels. She devised her dimensions of the social in response to highly discursive approaches to gender and sexuality (e.g., Simon & Gagnon, 2015). Jackson (2006) proposes an analytical tool that attends to both the discursive and the material. This tool defines four dimensions at which the social can be explored: (1) the dimension of subjectivity, which focuses on the understanding of the self as an embodied subject, through cultural norms and routine interactions; (2) the dimension of routine social practices,

which encompasses all the practices through which individuals enact their identities and make sense of the world around them; (3) the dimension of meaning, referring to the broader cultural discourses individuals draw upon to understand themselves and constitute their routine social practices; and (4) the structural or institutional dimension, which refers to the institutionalization of heterosexuality through institutional apparatuses such as the law or the State.

Jackson (2006) provides an example of how to use her analytical tool by using it to explore the phenomenon of heteronormativity. She shows how, at the subjective level, heteronormativity is expressed as the way we situate ourselves within the gender order. At the level of everyday practice, individuals enact heteronormativity in the ways they do gender and sexuality and interpret each other's actions. These practices are normalized at the level of meaning, through discourse that differentiates "the normative from the deviant", and male from female (Jackson, 2006, p. 112). Finally, at the structural level, the heterosexual male breadwinner/female homemaker ideal relationship arrangement is institutionalized through marital law, gendered labor markets and unequal pay (Jackson, 2006).

Taken together, these dimensions of the social help researchers understand how social phenomena operate at micro-, meso-, and macrosocial levels—which are comparable to Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) proposed levels of analysis of gender relations at the local, regional, and global levels. However, Jackson (2006) warns that the four dimensions she identifies are not meant to represent a "total theorization of the social", nor are they meant to come together to "form a unified whole" (p. 108). As she puts it: "they cut across each other, as well as interlocking, producing disjunctions between and within them" (Jackson, 2006, p. 108).

Connell (2005) and Jackson (2006) both demonstrate that it is imperative to treat gender as a complex process that is in constant constitution at multiple levels of the social. They both

acknowledge that unequal relations of power also operate along the dimensions of race and class. However, while both theories suggest that analyses of gender, race, and class are possible through their frameworks, they remain very much focused on gender. Connell addresses race in her original theory (1987), where she refers to men of color's masculinity as an example of marginalized masculinities. This blanket categorization of men of color was later criticized, and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) proposed to resolve this through further study of localized contexts. Jackson (2006) focuses on the impact of class on the construction of normative forms of heterosexuality and calls for the inclusion of race and ethnicity in analyses of social relations. Connell and Jackson only imply the need for analyses of class and race, without fully attending to them. For this reason, this project also draws on intersectionality as a "heuristic device" to help integrate race and class issues into my analysis (Hill Collins, 2003, p. 210; Crenshaw, 1989). By "heuristic device," I mean a concept that is an aid to analysis (Oxford Reference, n.d.). In other words, while I employed the other theoretical frameworks both in the collection and analysis of empirical data, I only drew upon intersectionality at the analytical level, for reasons that I explain in the following section.

Crenshaw: Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a legal scholar, coined the term "intersectionality" in her article "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex", where she argues that American courts view discrimination cases along a single dimension of marginalization, treating race and class as mutually exclusive categories. As a result, those belonging to multiple marginalized groups—namely, Black women—are often further marginalized by court proceedings. For Crenshaw (1989), this tendency to view discrimination along a single axis is extended to feminist theory and antiracist politics. Using three legal cases of employment discrimination, Crenshaw (1989)

examines how courts “frame and interpret the stories of Black women plaintiffs” (p. 141). In each case, the complaints against employers were treated as either discrimination based on gender or discrimination based on race, never both (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) argues that while Black women do face similar experiences of discrimination as white women or as black men, they also experience forms of discrimination that are unique to Black women. Analyses based on a single axis of discrimination thus cause Black women to be marginalized among women as well as among people of color (Crenshaw, 1989).

In “Mapping the margins”, Crenshaw (1990) further develops her concept of intersectionality. She finds that intersectionality operates on multiple social levels: structurally, politically, and representationally (Crenshaw, 1990). She clarifies that she is not calling for the end of group politics, but rather hopes that intersectionality will be used to reconceptualize how we think of these groups. For example, she qualifies race as a “coalition between men and women of color”, but also as a “coalition of straight and gay people of color” (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1299). When thought of as coalitions with intra-group differences rather than homogenous communities, marginalized groups can attend to issues that affect those with intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1990).

Hill Collins

Patricia Hill Collins (1990), a sociologist, builds upon Crenshaw’s (1989; 1990) theory. She describes race, class, and gender as “interlocking systems of oppression” that can only function together, creating a matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 221). This matrix of domination can be experienced and resisted on three levels: personal biography, cultural context, and social institutions (Hill Collins, 1990). In a later text, Hill Collins (2003) also refers to these levels as micro, meso, and macro. These levels are not hierarchical but work together to create

“specific social outcomes” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 221). The levels suggested by Hill Collins (1990; 2003) are reminiscent of Jackson’s (2006) and Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) proposal to look at the articulation of gender on multiple levels of the social. Hill Collin’s (1990; 2003) levels roughly correspond to Jackson’s (2006): macro (institutional), meso (routine social practices), and micro (discourses, subjective), facilitating the integration of an intersectional analysis to Jackson’s (2006) theory.

Criticisms and Applications

While intersectionality has been widely cited across scholarship, there have been some criticisms regarding its application (Bowleg, 2008; Carastathis, 2014; McCall, 2005). Hill Collins (2003) recognizes that:

not only does intersectionality, when applied to the level of groups, become more difficult to conceptualize, but because groups do not operate as individuals do, intersectionality on the group level becomes difficult to study. When examining structural power relations, intersectionality functions better as a conceptual framework or heuristic device describing what kinds of things to consider than as one describing any actual patterns of social organization. (p. 210)

Identities that are experienced as unique forms of oppression at the microsocial level become difficult to study without falling into the trap of an additive understanding of identity. An additive understanding adds different identities together, such as race and gender, without considering how these identities interact with each other (Kang et al., 2017). In other words, viewing an American Black man’s experiences through an additive lens might suggest that while he faces racialized discrimination, he benefits from gendered privilege. In contrast, Hill Collins (2005) argues that through an intersectional lens, the unique forms of discrimination faced by

American Black men can be understood, such as their hypersexualized representations in American culture. However, while the foundation of intersectionality is to move away from additive understandings of oppression, in practice, analytical approaches tend to rely on this additive characterization because intersectionality is a complex approach that is difficult to incorporate into data collection practices (Bowleg, 2008; Carastathis, 2014). To remedy this, Hill Collins (2003) proposes to use intersectionality as a heuristic device during the analytical phase of research, helping to focus the analysis on issues of gender, class, and race, rather than as a methodological device during data collection, which often leads to additive understandings of discrimination. However, the debate on how to avoid doing additive intersectionality remains unresolved and is still a live question among feminist theorists.

Weaving the Theoretical Threads

The literature on the manosphere has primarily centered on the experiences of male participants and their discursive portrayals of gender relations. While significant, this perspective neglects the presence and agency of women in these circles, indicating the need to explore power dynamics beyond men's frustrations with masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theorization of the gender order has been a crucial theoretical foundation for understanding the manosphere. It is the most cited theoretical framework in the literature, and has helped scholars understand how men of the manosphere position themselves in relation to women and other men (e.g., Ging, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016; Witt, 2020). However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have recognized that femininities are under-theorized in their understanding of the gender order. This gap limits the applicability of the theory to forms of femininities that actively uphold the gender order, particularly with respect to women's roles in the manosphere. There is thus a need for a more robust theory of femininities that reflects the established historical pattern of

women's participation in antifeminist movements, which does not neatly fit within Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of emphasized femininity, as a complicit but not active participant in the hegemonic gender order. To address this gap, Schippers' (2007) concepts of hegemonic and pariah femininities provide a holistic understanding of gender relations. Schippers' (2007) extension of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) recognizes that women can be both complicit in and actively challenge the hegemonic gender order, thus providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of gender relations in the manosphere.

Furthermore, it is imperative to consider the intersectionality of race, class, and religion when analyzing gender relations in the manosphere, given its association with right-wing movements. Gender relations are embedded in multiple systems and hierarchies of power, which complicate and create unique experiences of privilege of oppression, beyond the simple fact of men's oppression of women. Analyzing gender at multiple levels, as emphasized by Crenshaw (1989; 1990), Hill Collins (1990; 2003), and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), can help situate women in the manosphere within larger social systems and power struggles.

The theoretical frameworks selected for this study all suggest that gendered power operates at multiple levels of the social. Identities and communities are formed in structural contexts, such as imperialist systems of capitalist power, which have ramifications and influences on everyday operations of gender. By taking a holistic perspective on gender relations in the manosphere, this study aims to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the manosphere and its actors. This approach recognizes the importance of considering not only men's experiences of masculinity but also women's agency and the intersectionality of multiple systems of oppression and privilege in antifeminist spaces.

To conclude this chapter, I propose a synthesis of how I applied elements of each of the theories presented in this chapter to my research project. I drew on Jackson (2006) during the coding of my data to ensure a multidimensional analytical understanding of my data. The other theoretical frameworks informed my interpretation of the data. From Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), I borrowed the conception of masculinities and femininities as hierarchically organized around the domination of hegemonic masculinity, a form of domination that is articulated in different ways at the local, regional, and structural levels. These levels were further fleshed out with Jackson's (2006) levels of the social. Schippers' (2007) theory was used to conceptualize and identify femininities that actively participate in upholding the patriarchal gender order. I also drew on her concept of pariah femininities as a methodological tool to identify hegemonic forms of masculinity at the local level. Finally, Crenshaw (1989) and Hill Collins (1990) were used at the data interpretation stage, during which I drew on their theories to ensure that I had brought attention to the intersectional (or non-intersectional) ways that gender was enacted and discussed in the studied communities.

In the following chapter, I present my methodological approach, as well as the selected sample for this study.

Chapter Four

Methodological Approach and Ethical Considerations

The manosphere is a recent object of inquiry and most studies on the topic are exploratory (Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). Qualitative studies about the manosphere typically employ ethnographic methods (Jane, 2017; Massanari, 2017) or content analysis (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016; Van Valkenburgh, 2018; Williams & Arntfield, 2020), while quantitative studies often rely on computer-mediated analyses of social media posts. These quantitative studies usually involve large sample sizes and span several years (e.g., Wright et al., 2020; Farrell et al., 2019).

In this study, I adopt a qualitative approach to explore the daily experiences of women in the manosphere. Social media platforms present a relatively new and constantly evolving area for fieldwork. While some researchers have argued that the internet has fundamentally transformed the nature of fieldwork (Hine, 2000), others have adapted existing research methods to study it. Early sociological studies of the internet, such as ethnographies conducted in chatrooms (Rheingold, 1993) and multiplayer worlds (Turkle, 1995) paved the way for the development of qualitative methodologies in the study of online communities. One of these methods is netnography (Kozinets, 1997; 2002; 2006; 2020), which I employ in this project.

Netnography

According to Kozinets (2020), netnography is:

a form of cultural research that uses a set of qualitative practices to investigate social media.

Netnography is a popular methodology for research on online communities. (p. 2).

Kozinets coined the term “netnography” to describe this research method that shares similarities

with ethnography, involving the researcher's immersion in a particular culture. However, netnography differs from conventional ethnography and virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) as it focuses on the collection and analysis of publicly available online data, such as blog posts, comments, images, or videos. It is comparable to archival research.

The method of netnography was first introduced by Kozinets (1997) in an article about the *X-Files* fandom. Initially, the method was defined simply as “a written account of on-line cyberculture, informed by the methods of cultural anthropology” (Kozinets, 1997). Over time, as the internet and its communities expanded and grew increasingly complex, Kozinets revised the method of netnography three times (2002; 2006; 2020) to better reflect the contemporary internet landscape.

According to Kozinets (2020, p.133), netnography stands apart from other digital ethnographic methods because it combines four elements: (1) a focus on understanding the particular culture of social media communities; (2) data drawn from social media; (3) immersive engagement in the site of data capture, achieved through regular visits to data sites and writing detailed fieldnotes; and (4) a set of netnographic praxes followed by the researcher to ensure the high quality of data collection and analysis. The value of Kozinets' approach lies in the precise description of steps to follow, based on his own experiences in the field as well as a review of other netnographies. These steps have been updated and modified as the methodology has evolved. In its latest iteration, netnography is divided into six “procedural movements,” that guide the researcher from an initial idea to the communication of their findings (Kozinets, 2020).

Kozinets acknowledges that ethnography is a more intricate and iterative process than cannot be fully captured in a simple set of guidelines. Nonetheless, he expresses frustration with the vagueness of ethnographic methods. His six procedural movements serve as a guide,

outlining the main stages of a netnography and explaining how to transform a research idea into a concrete project (Kozinets, 2020, p. 136).

The Six Procedural Movements of Netnography

Kozinets (2020) presents the following alliterative list of main netnographic steps: “(1) initiation, (2) investigation, (3) immersion, (4) interaction, (5) integration, and (6) incarnation” (p. 138).

The first step, initiation, involves introspection on the part of the researcher. The researcher takes the time to reflect upon their own interest in the research topic, ensuring that they approach the fieldwork with a reflexive understanding of their positionality and role in relation to the communities they study. After this introspective exploration, the researcher designs their research question and investigates potential ethical concerns. They also obtain the necessary ethics approval for their study.

In the second step, investigation, the researcher focuses on narrowing down their site of data collection. They embark on a broad search for websites and communities that could provide insights into their research questions. This is done by transforming their research questions into a set of keywords and using search engines to explore relevant content. The researcher is encouraged to test different search engines and carefully examine the search results, taking note of interesting findings that warrant further exploration. Then, the researcher selects the most relevant sites based on their research question and the availability of suitable data.

During the immersion stage, the researcher investigates the culture of the online group(s) under study. They familiarize themselves with the specific language, rituals, identities, beliefs, and value systems that are unique to these online communities. During this stage, researchers also begin collecting and indexing the most significant data—the exact nature of which depends

on the research question. As Kozinets (2015) explains, the meaningfulness of data is determined by the netnographer:

The role of this data is not to encompass the entire great masses of all data on the topic and to reflect, in some sense, the general. Instead this is small data. It reflects some sort of a connoisseurship and then careful weighting of data. This is a strategy that carefully selects lesser amounts of very high quality data that are then used to reveal and highlight meaningful aspects of the particular (The 12 Phases of Netnography, para. 3).

Kozinets's data collection strategy underscores the importance of preliminary exploration and familiarization with the community's culture. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher maintains detailed fieldnotes about their experiences in these communities.

The fourth stage, interaction, is presented as an optional phase. During this stage, researchers have the opportunity to engage directly with online participants. This engagement can take various forms, such as conducting interviews, actively participating in the researched communities, or creating a dedicated research website, where group members are encouraged to share their insights.

As the pace of data collection slows down, indicating that the researcher is nearing saturation, the fifth phase, integration, comes into play. This stage involves relating insights back to the initial research question, through analysis and interpretation. It is an iterative process that involves constantly moving between collected data, existing literature, and the field site. The researcher in this stage aims to formulate their observations into a cohesive answer to their research question.

Finally, in the last movement, incarnation, the researcher focuses on effectively communicating their findings. This can be achieved through various means, such as transforming

the research into an article or thesis, as well as making the data accessible to broader audiences.

The netnographic research process is meticulously outlined to assist researchers in conducting high-quality, systematic, and reflective research. Additionally, the continuous updates and refinements to the method demonstrate its flexibility and adaptability, making it well-suited for investigating the ever-evolving realm of the internet and its communities (Kozinets, 2020).

Kozinets' netnographical steps offer clear guidelines for the data collection process. However, the fifth stage, or data analysis, lacks specific methodology on how to conduct the analysis. Therefore, while I relied on netnography for data collection, I drew on thematic analysis for the analysis of my data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Data Analysis

In conjunction with netnography, I incorporated Braun and Clarke's guidelines for thematic analysis (2006). Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis has been especially influential in gender studies scholarship in the social sciences, often serving as a methodical way of exploring representations of gender in the media (Schiebling & Lafrance, 2019). These guidelines were created to equip scholars with a rigorous and reproducible methodology to analyze qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) recognize that the strengths of thematic analysis lay in the flexibility and the adaptability of the method, but they also note that "an absence of clear and concise guidelines [...] means that the 'anything goes' critique of qualitative research [...] may well apply in some instances" (p.78). They propose a step-by-step guide that consists of six phases of analysis to guide researchers through the method (pp. 86-93).

The Six Steps of Thematic Analysis

The six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) are intended to be guidelines, rather

than strict rules, for analysis. The authors recognize that analysis is a “recursive” rather than a “linear” process, and thus researchers are encouraged to move “back and forth as needed, throughout the phases” (p. 86). The six steps are: (1) “familiarizing yourself with your data,” (2) “generating initial codes,” (3) “searching for themes,” (4) “reviewing themes,” (5) “defining and naming themes,” and (6) “producing the report” (pp. 87-93).

The first phase, data familiarization, involves careful and repeated reading of the dataset. Researchers are encouraged to read the entire dataset several times, while taking notes about initial patterns, meanings, and potential connections to theory. The initial familiarization with the dataset helps researchers establish an idea of the “depth and breadth of the content” (p. 87) and serves as the foundation upon which the next phases of the analysis will build.

After taking initial notes about the data, the researcher moves on to the second step, generating initial codes. This step requires the organization of data into “meaningful groups” (p. 88). These groups, or codes, “identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst” (p. 88). Codes are typically less broad in meaning than themes, the units of analysis which are developed in later steps. Braun and Clarke recommend that every data excerpt should be given “full and equal attention” and assigned at least one code (p.89).

When all data has been coded, the researcher moves on to the third step, searching for themes. During this step, the researcher sorts all the codes and their corresponding data into overarching themes. Relationships between codes, or between themes should be considered, as well as the hierarchical level of themes. The researcher might identify main themes, subthemes, as well as codes to be discarded.

These themes are then reviewed during the fourth phase, with the criteria of “internal homogeneity and external homogeneity” in mind (p.91). Themes may be combined, broken

down into smaller themes, or discarded from the analysis. The reviewing process occurs at two levels. First, the researcher should read all the data excerpts included in a theme and evaluate “whether they appear to form a coherent pattern” (p.91). If that is not the case, the researcher should consider revising the theme, moving data excerpts to other themes, or discarding them from the analysis. When themes are internally coherent, the researcher moves on to the second level of analysis, during which they consider whether the themes are coherent with each other and whether they accurately reflect “the meanings evident in the data set as a whole”. During this step, the researcher also re-reads their entire dataset to assess whether all data have been accurately coded according to the existing themes, and whether new themes are needed.

During the fifth step, defining and naming themes, the researcher looks for an internal narrative in each theme by reviewing the associated data extracts. In this step, the researcher must “conduct and write a detailed analysis” for each theme (p.92). The themes themselves must be considered, as well as their relation to the overall dataset. The researcher also refines the names of each theme, so that they “immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about” (p.93).

Finally, in the sixth phase, the researcher produces the report. The researcher’s account of the data must provide “a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell” (p.93). The validity of the analysis is supported by the inclusion of relevant data extracts in the write-up.

By following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) recommendations, I was able to review my dataset systematically and to categorize it into the codes and themes that are presented in the Results chapter.

Sample

Before beginning my PhD in 2019, I had begun to familiarize myself with the manosphere and its communities of women. I dedicated time to regularly monitoring the communities with which I was familiar, paying attention to their discussion topics, popularity, and the emergence of new communities. In November 2021, after several years of regularly checking in on these communities, I began the first two steps of Kozinets' research method, initiation, and investigation. To begin, I first translated my research questions into search terms. My research questions were the following: (1) What are their relationships to the men of the manosphere? (2) What roles do they play in the manosphere? (3) How does their participation in the manosphere relate to how they understand their identities as women? and (4) What motivates them to participate? The search terms included combinations of the following key words: women manosphere; woman manosphere; woman MRA; feMRA; Honey Badger; pink pill; TRP women; WGTOW; Femcel; Incel women; Incel woman; manosphere books; manosphere podcast; manosphere highlights daily; manosphere blogs. I entered the search terms into several search engines, including Google, Bing, Yahoo!, and DuckDuckGo. This yielded a total of 241 potential links for further investigation.

I then narrowed down these search results by visiting the selected links and assessing their relevance to my research project. During this selection process, I looked for communities that met the following criteria: communities of women, whose members were currently active on a weekly basis at least, whose posts were available to the public and who were associated with the manosphere or established manosphere communities. After sifting through the search results, I identified four communities of women within the manosphere that met the criteria: (1) The Honey Badger Brigade; (2) Femcels; (3) Red Pill Women and the related community Red Pill Wives; and (4) Mothers of Sons. These four communities became my research sample.

The Honey Badger Brigade, one of the most frequently mentioned women's antifeminist group in the media, has yet to be studied in an academic analysis of the manosphere. My interest in this group stems from their close affiliation with men's manosphere groups, as evidenced by their hosting of the 2019 International Conference on Men's Issues (Honey Badger Brigade, 2019). I chose to focus my data collection on their YouTube channels, where they consistently posted videos on an almost daily basis.

The second group, the Femcels (female involuntary celibates), had recently been banned from Reddit and were the most active on their own dedicated forum, thepinkpill.co. The website has been taken down at the time of writing. I focused my data collection on one of the sub-communities of the website, the TruFemcels. Described by the media as attempting to distance themselves from manosphere ideologies, I was intrigued to explore how Femcel content on an independent website compared to academic descriptions of Incel subreddits.

Red Pill Women and Red Pill Wives are two active subreddits where women engaged in discussions regarding the implementation of the Red Pill ideology in their lives. I collected data from these two subreddits because I was particularly interested in what women's perspectives and experiences of the Red Pill ideology could tell us about the power dynamics of domination and subordination that are endorsed by the Red Pill.

Finally, the Mothers of Sons community, although absent from media accounts of women in the manosphere, surfaced frequently in my search results during the investigation phase. The community describes itself as a group of mothers defending their sons from false allegations of sexual assault. I collected daily posts from their public Facebook page, as I was interested in the familial dynamic implied by their group's name, which set them apart from the three other communities.

I collected data from these four communities over a five-month period, from February to July 2022. This corresponded to Kozinets' (2020) immersion stage. During this phase, I collected all new posts from each group's social media feeds every day, using NVIVO's nCapture feature, which captures content from webpages. These captures were then stored in NVIVO for further analysis. However, while nCapture is able to collect a YouTube video's comments, it cannot capture the contents of the video. To capture the contents of Honey Badgers videos, I resorted to collecting video transcripts using YouTube's automatic transcription tool.

Data collection ceased after five months as I reached a point of data saturation, whereby no new themes or information were emerging from the data. During the data collection process, I simultaneously began to analyze my data using Braun and Clarke's (2016) method. This coding phase, corresponding to Kozinets' (2020) integration stage, continued for an additional six months after I had stopped collecting data.

It is worth mentioning that I did not follow Kozinets' (2020) interaction phase as outlined in his method. The reasons for this decision are explained in detail in the following section.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research on social media, one of the most important ethical considerations is whether the project involves research on human subjects (Moreno et al., 2013). According to the Tri- Council ethics policy (2022), research on publicly available online documents is not classified as research involving human participants. Therefore, researchers do not need to seek web users' consent when collecting data from public webpages. This was the case for the four communities in the sample in this project, as they were not password protected, and participation in the communities was not subject to moderator approval. Concordia University's Research Ethics Office of Research also agreed with this categorization. This is a

stance taken by some internet researchers (e.g., Moreno et al., 2013; Orton-Johnson, 2010) and by most researchers interested in the manosphere (Ging, 2017; Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). However, the internet is more than a repository of texts, it is also a social space (Eynon et al., 2009). This raises specific ethical issues regarding questions of consent, privacy, and confidentiality (Orton-Johnson, 2010; Sugiura et al., 2017).

The internet's private/public nature poses specific ethical challenges, extending beyond questions of website or community access (Kozinets, 2015). For Kozinets (2020), the main ethical issue faced by netnographers is the consent gap:

The consent gap is the difference between the ascribed and actual beliefs about social media users regarding the need for permission in the research-related use of the information they share online. (p.173)

Although many online communities are publicly accessible, their members often view them as private spaces. Kozinets (2015) describes the internet as “a series of territories”, that bring out users’ “possessive nature” and must be protected from outsiders (2015, Ethical Territory, para. 2). Therefore, the researcher must take precautions to ensure that they do not “damage, despoil or disrespect” the communities they study (Kozinets, 2015, Do It Well, para. 2). Researchers must strive to create an “accurate and empathetic portrayal” of those they study, even if they are troubled by parts of their informants’ lives (Kozinets, 2015, Ethical Territory, para. 7).

One such precaution is the navigation of informed consent. For Kozinets, online research can be broadly categorized into two categories: “direct communication with people” and “the use of archival materials” (2015, Public Data vs. Private People, para. 4). The former falls under the Tri-Council Policy’s (2022) ethical guidelines for research involving human participants, while the latter does not. However, unlike offline research, direct quotes of online content can be easily

traced back to participants and specific websites using a search engine. Therefore, researchers must take additional measures to protect the confidentiality of online community members, particularly those centered around controversial topics, such as the communities of the manosphere.

Branthonne and Waldispuehl (2019) conducted a netnography of *Return of Kings*, a masculinist blog that discouraged participation from LGBTQ+ individuals, where commenters often expressed hatred toward women and social scientists. As a result, Branthonne and Waldispuehl (2019) chose not to reveal their presence to the commenters and blog post authors. They concede that this practice poses a moral dilemma. For some researchers, any covert research, even online, is unethical (Murthy, 2008). However, members of the manosphere have a history of cyberbullying (Jane, 2017), sexually harassing (O'Neill, 2018), and doxing (Branthonne & Waldispuehl, 2019) female researchers. Expecting researchers to reveal their presence in publicly accessible manosphere communities can hinder their access to certain communities, particularly those who harbor hostility towards certain aspects of the researcher's identity or political convictions (Branthonne & Waldispuehl, 2019).

To ensure both the confidentiality of the online community members, as well as my access to the communities in the sample, I followed Branthonne and Waldispuehl's (2019) covert approach by paraphrasing all quotations from my dataset, using pseudonyms, and occasionally combining multiple quotes into one citation. However, I did not paraphrase any citations from the Honey Badger Brigade's videos, because they are a public-facing media product, where they discuss the news from an MRA perspective. They are also the most interviewed feMRA group in mainstream media, and use their real names in their online profiles. The Honey Badgers' social media content is created to be more public facing than, for example, a post on

r/RedPillWomen by a member asking for advice on how to communicate with her husband. I did, however, ensure that I paraphrased any comment left by viewers on Honey Badger videos.

A Note on Usernames

All usernames cited in this thesis, including in this section, are pseudonyms created for the purpose of the study. All comments authored by the same person are cited under the same pseudonym. In the case of the Mothers of Sons group, where community members used their real names, as well as for many Honey Badger commenters, pseudonyms were created using a fake name generator (<https://www.name-generator.org.uk/>). The generated aliases were chosen to respect the original names' gender and origin. For example, if an individual had a male Anglo-Saxon name, it was replaced with another male Anglo-Saxon name.

For the other groups, and the Honey Badger commenters who used usernames instead of their real names, I aimed to capture some of the username trends specific to each group. For example, in the Femcel group, it was common for usernames to incorporate puns related to ugliness or negative emotions, resulting in usernames like “despresso.” On the other hand, members of the Red Pill groups often used combinations of objects and numbers in their usernames (e.g., Bubbletea54), and, surprisingly, a few r/RedPillWomen usernames included the term “brat” (e.g., “House_Brat_78”). Many usernames were not capitalized.

To represent these trends, I paraphrased each username using related terms, ensuring that the resulting pseudonyms were not too similar to the original names. For example, if someone had the username “happy_cat89,” it would be paraphrased as something like “lion_cub94.” Then, to further protect the confidentiality of the community members, I randomized the list of created pseudonyms and assigned them to different users. This means that “happy_cat89” would not be represented by the pseudonym “lion_cub94”, but by a different pseudonym (and a

different community member would be represented by “lion_cub94”). By adopting this approach, I preserved username trends while preventing the identification of individual users based on their pseudonyms.

Research conducted on social media presents unique ethical considerations related to consent, privacy, and confidentiality. While covert research approaches may be necessary to gain access to certain online communities, netnographers must be cautious of the consent gap and uphold their responsibility to protect the confidentiality of their participants. Thus, all quotes cited in this study, apart from excerpts from Honey Badger video transcripts, were paraphrased and altered to prevent the original posts and their authors from being easily identifiable.

Limitations

The current study is subject to several limitations, which can be divided into three broad categories: methodological limitations, sample limitations, and potential biases resulting from my identity and political convictions.

Methodological Limitations

The first set of limitations concerns my application of netnography as a method. According to Kozinets (2020), netnographers can opt to interact with online communities, by participating in the discussions, interviewing participants, or asking them to record their own online activities in a journal. This then becomes overt research with human participants. I opted to limit my data collection to the “online traces” (Kozinets, 2020, p. 16) left by community members, for the reasons outlined in the Ethical Considerations section. This decision restricted my knowledge of these individuals to what they chose to share online. Without direct contact with community members, I was unable to ask questions that could have shed light on demographic details such as age, location, or motivations for expressing certain opinions, unless

they chose to share that information themselves. I could not ask a Femcel how old she was when she found the community, and whether she was comforted to know that there were others who related to her. I could not ask members of Mothers of Sons if any of their acquaintances had actually been wrongfully accused of sexual assault, and if that accusation had led them to the community. I could not press the Honey Badgers on the sources of their claims that societies are built on the backs of men, nor could I assess the number of stay-at-home wives in the Red Pill Women and Wives groups. My sample was also limited to English-speaking communities, which excludes non-English speakers from the study.

Additionally, my data collection was limited to what community members wrote, which may appear to be a surprising limitation for a study that aims to move past discursive representations of gender. However, I used the discursive data to inform my analysis of social representations of gender through my theoretical frameworks, especially Jackson's (2006) levels of the social. During the analytical stage of my project, I used Jackson's framework to identify descriptions of practices, such as the ways Red Pill Women perform their femininity, personal feelings, such as Femcels' expressions of disgust at their own bodies, and discussions about structural issues, such as Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers' opinions about trans-inclusive policies, or child custody disputes. In doing so, I used discursive data to explore how gender is done and undone, the feelings attached to gender performances, and how these communities' understandings of gender interact with systemic issues such as racism or violence against women.

Lastly, my application of netnography was entirely qualitative. Quantitative approaches such as social network analysis could have provided additional insights into the most influential community members, as done by Dignam and Rohlinger (2019) who identified which r/TRP

subreddit members were most likely to sway community opinions. Another computer-mediated quantitative approach could have traced the migration of users from the r/RedPillWomen to the newer r/RedPillWives subreddit, a method employed at a much larger scale by Ribeiro et al. (2021) over multiple subreddits. However, due to limitations in time, resources, and technical knowledge, these quantitative analyses were not possible in this study.

Sample Limitations

Another set of limitations to this study concerns the sample itself. A total of 1201 files were collected, ranging from a screenshot of a 15-word comment, to transcripts of two-hour long Honey Badger videos. Although this is a large sample size for a qualitative analysis, it only represented five months of activity for each community. Some communities posted regularly, such as the Honey Badgers who uploaded videos four to five days a week, and Mothers of Sons who posted between one and three news articles to their Facebook page a day. In contrast, other communities such as Femcels and Red Pill Wives, were more sporadic in their posting habits. The unpredictable amount of daily new data made it challenging to critically engage with the ever-growing sample size. While the data was collected over the period of five months, I continued to sift through the collected files for six more months, during the coding phase.

It was especially difficult to keep up with the Honey Badgers' long form content. They uploaded four to five videos a week. Some of their videos were only ten minutes long, but most of them were between one to three hours long. Due to time constraints, I relied on automatic transcriptions provided by YouTube instead of watching each video in its entirety. Although YouTube's transcription feature adequately captured what was said in each video, it did not identify who was speaking. I had planned to select relevant excerpts for the presentation of results, and then identify each speaker by going back to the original videos. However, the Honey

Badgers' YouTube videos were deleted twice during data collection, and again after it was concluded, for breaching YouTube's community guidelines. I was therefore unable to watch the original videos and identify the speakers. Consequently, the excerpts cited in the analysis do not identify the Honey Badgers individually.

Another limitation of the study was the inclusion of multiple platforms in the sample. The communities were all present on different social media platforms. As a result, I do not know if these communities share any members, because individuals can choose different user names on each platform and each platform has different affordances, making it difficult to track participants from one to another. Red Pill Wives and Red Pill Women were the exception, as they were both on Reddit, but the memberships at the time of data collection appeared to be mutually exclusive.

Treading Carefully: A Feminist Netnographer on an Antifeminist Terrain

My identity as a feminist woman played an important role throughout the research process, from my initial immersion into the communities in the sample, to the analysis of the collected data, which was interpreted through feminist-informed theoretical frameworks. I have identified three significant ways in which my identity and political convictions affected my fieldwork.

Firstly, as noted by Branthonne and Waldispuehl (2019):

The particularity of our e-terrain is not that we hate our object, but that our object hates us and denies our capacity to produce a rational analysis. (my translation, p.11)

Unlike the men's communities encountered by Branthonne and Waldispuehl (2019), the communities in my sample do not deny that women can "produce a rational analysis", yet they expressed negative views towards academic discourses about gender and feminism. For example,

in *Mothers of Sons*, Franklin Pittman stated that:

Most people are fooled by feminism and there is nowhere left to go where men and women are respected. (MOS, comment)

Femcels, in particular, were resistant to attention from journalists, who occasionally posted on their forums asking to interview members during my fieldwork. Femcel responses usually expressed annoyance or weariness that their forum was receiving attention from mainstream media, as shown in the following example:

Bluebox: I don't like how many journalists have been around here lately... (Femcel, comment)

I have explained how I dealt with the communities' aversion to academic inquiries by conducting covert research on publicly available data. However, being unwelcome was not the only issue. The rejection of feminist theories by the communities being studied posed a different ethical challenge regarding the interpretation of the data through feminist-informed theoretical frameworks. This constitutes the second way that my political convictions influenced my fieldwork. Avishai, Gerber and Randles (2012) have discussed the tension that exists between feminism as a political project and feminism as a mode of analysis that creates space for the voices of those being studied. This phenomenon is referred to as the "feminist ethnographer's dilemma", and the authors argue that "feminist researchers should incorporate institutional reflexivity on feminism as part of their ethnographic practice" (Avishai et al, 2012, p.394).

Furthermore, Béatrice de Gasquet (2015) notes that feminist ethnographers studying non-feminist subjects are often tempted to impose their "grids of perception of feminism" (p.5, my translation) on their respondents, by asking questions such as "are they feminists?" or "how could they not be feminists in their situation?" (p.4, my translation). De Gasquet's reflection on

the feminist ethnographer's perspective emerged from her own research on gender relations in synagogues in France as a non-Jewish person. She suggests resolving this tension by examining the collective construction of gender within a community, with the ethnographer as one actor among many whose understanding of gender is also constructed. Martina Avanza (2019) expresses a similar idea:

The dilemma is arguably solved not by measuring their claims with respect to feminist standards that they do not acknowledge, but by analyzing their gendered claims for themselves (p.5)

To ensure that I was not measuring the sample members' understanding of gender against feminist notions that they reject, I used a series of theoretical frameworks that seek to understand gendered phenomena on various social levels, accounting for both their personal feelings and experiences, as well as the structural realities at play. My netnographic methodology also allowed me to immerse myself in the communities prior to data collection, providing a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Nevertheless, a tension remained between the need to understand the studied communities in their own terms, in accordance with Kozinets' (2020) call for an empathetic analysis, and the need to address my research questions with a decidedly feminist objective. I contended with this tension by focusing my attention on portraying my sample in a fair and respectful way, rather than empathetically, which was more challenging given the antifeminist context of my study.

The third significant way that my feminist convictions affected my fieldwork concerned my emotional response to the ideas expressed in these communities. As a feminist woman, I experienced negative emotions towards these groups, particularly during the early stages of data collection. The ideas and beliefs expressed in the manosphere run counter to my own views on

gender and the relationships between men and women. This is a dilemma faced by ethnographers who study groups with whom they are politically opposed. Avanza (2008) describes a similar situation in her study of a right-wing xenophobic Italian political party. She notes that in anthropology,

[the] lack of empathy towards the studied group is considered a true professional fault that calls into question the quality of the study itself” (p.42).

She argues that empathy should not be a necessary condition for a successful ethnography, and that valuable research can still be conducted with “politically detestable subjects” (Avanza, 2008 p.56).

The immersion journal proved to be a valuable tool in managing my negative emotions while conducting research. Kozinets (2020) recommends netnographers keep an immersion journal where they collect personal reflections:

Ultimately, those reflective notes are what will allow the story of your own vulnerable humanity to suffuse your work. The insights of your own reflection on your work and its meanings will allow your engagements, be they intellectual, cultural, historical, emotional, or social, to shine forth from within your data-collection procedures. (p.301)

The immersion journal helped me keep track of my mood, without forcing me to distance myself emotionally from my research project. For example, one of my first entries shows strong negative emotions towards the Mothers of Sons community members:

Definitely feeling angry towards Mothers of Sons. I saw that they posted an article about gender studies programs being defunded in Wyoming. They were celebrating this news and hoping that it would happen “here” too (I don’t know where “here” is yet).

(immersion journal)

However, as I became more familiar with the rhetoric and common discussion topics, the negative feelings started to subside. As I read about their personal experiences of dating troubles, harassment, divorce, and domestic violence, I started to feel more sympathetic towards the community members. Avanza (2008) describes feeling guilty for concealing her feminist convictions from her right-wing participants. I experienced a similar sense of guilt, but it was further complicated by my feelings of sympathy for the community members, who embodied the very ideas I oppose. These conflicting emotions highlighted an important element of this research, namely, the ambiguity that exists between personal experiences and political ideas.

While drafting the Results chapter, I encountered a different emotional experience. After spending five months collecting, reading, coding, and recoding data, I took a month-long hiatus to focus on writing my literature review and theoretical framework. Upon returning to the dataset, I was taken aback by the hateful language:

I forgot how violent their language was. I just re-read some horrible things about incest and rape that I had completely forgotten about. I don't feel angry towards the communities anymore, but I am horrified at how numb and desensitized I have become to this language. (immersion journal)

I had become so accustomed to the violent rhetoric, that it had become familiar, akin to how Laura Bates (2021) describes the gradual spread of manosphere ideologies to mainstream audiences:

Of course, it doesn't all look like terrorism, murder, violence or even misogyny on the surface. It would be easier to catch it if it did. It has to be cleverer than that, because the only way it can become so wildly, [...] successful [...] is if its arteries creep outwards from that black heart of violent hate, [...] taking the leap out of the dank realms of the

internet altogether, slithering offline, penetrating our pubs and sliding around street corners, [...] fanning out tendrils across talk shows and newsrooms, taking deeper and deeper root until they're part of the very fabric of our shared consciousness. Meaning that, eventually, when the shoots sprout, the fruits bud and the flowers bloom, their taste does not disgust us and their colours don't surprise us, because they are familiar and known. (Introduction, para. 27)

Without the immersion journal, I would not have recognized the emotional detachment that had occurred during the data analysis phase. While this detachment may indicate that multiple iterations of data coding can be an effective means of distancing oneself from initial emotional responses, it also reveals that encountering violent and hateful discourses frequently can help normalize these ideas.

To summarize, this study is subject to limitations that are methodological and sample-related, as well as potential biases resulting from my identity and political convictions. The main challenge encountered in this study was the impact of the limitations and biases on my ability to provide an empathetic portrayal of the communities in the sample. To address these challenges, I practiced reflexivity through an immersion journal, as well as several iterations of analysis, to mitigate these issues and ultimately present a respectful and fair depiction of the communities in the sample.

In the following chapter, I present the results of my study.

Chapter Five

Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my fieldwork, focusing on the themes that are relevant to the project's research questions. The themes are classified into broad categories and presented in the following order: (1) competing definitions of community; (2) foundations of gender; (3) femininities and masculinities; (4) decontextualized individuals; and (5) seeking representation.

Competing Definitions of Community

Each community features an “About” section on its website or social media page. These “About” sections explicitly define the communities by describing their goals and main ideas. The communities are also defined by their members, who uphold community boundaries through their discourses and practices. The following section focuses on these explicit and implicit community definitions.

Femcels

There are several Femcel groups and platforms online, including the Pink Pill (<https://thepinkpill.co>). The Pink Pill, like Reddit, is a forum-based website that hosts several subcommunities, such as Femcels or WGTOW. Rather than analyzing the Pink Pill as a whole, this project focuses on one Pink Pill community: the TruFemcels.

The TruFemcels define themselves as ugly women who will never be able to “ascend” (that is, become more attractive) through plastic surgery, healthy habits, or proper skincare. Because Femcels most often use the word “ugly” to describe their appearance, this chapter also uses this word. The community had around 500 members throughout the data collection period. One community member, bluebox, explains what distinguishes TruFemcels from other Femcels.

She uses the terms “hardmaxxing” and “softmaxxing,” which are terminologies employed in Incel communities to respectively refer to cosmetic surgeries and non-surgical techniques aimed at enhancing one’s physical appearance:

A Femcel rates at 3/10 and lower on the lookism scale. She is ugly and sexless. I’d say about 10% of women are at a 3, 2, or 1 out of 10. Some Femcels can ascend to a 4 to 5 out of ten (normie tier) without hardmaxxing (plastic surgery). They do this by losing a significant amount of weight, or by gaining the right amount of weight, as well as constant softmaxxing.

However other 3/10s will NEVER reach the normie tier without hardmaxxing. These women are the ‘TruFemcels’. We are the women who will never look normal without plastic surgery. We will never fit in just with makeup, hairstyles, and weight loss/gain.

(Femcels, original post)

Bluebox’s post illustrates the particular language used by Femcels. She also references lookism, a popular theory in the Femcel, Incel, and Red Pill communities. Lookism is a system of privilege and discrimination, akin to sexism, based on physical appearance. In this system, attractive people are treated with more respect and sympathy than less attractive people, who are ostracized. TruFemcels often refer to lookism when describing their experiences of being bullied and harassed for their appearance. Common discussion topics on the TruFemcel forum include difficulties in developing friendships or romantic relationships, desired plastic surgeries or cosmetic interventions, and mental health issues.

Among the communities in this sample, TruFemcels are the most prohibitive about men’s participation in their forum. Forum moderators ban any suspected male participant. Community members are quick to call out any posts made by men as well, such as in the following excerpt,

where we see a conversation between community members that is critical of the presence of “moids.” Moid is a shorthand for “male humanoids,” a term frequently used by Femcels to refer to men:

Curious: Hey, I’m a guy from Edinburgh, and I was surprised to find out that there are Femcels. I’m looking forward to learning more about how to be a better man. If there are any women here who want to talk about anything, feel free to get in touch with me.

despresso: Why are there moids here? I don’t want to use this site any more if moids are around. Moderator, please ban this dude. (Femcels, comments)

TruFemcels do more than ban male users to police their membership. They also occasionally accuse each other of not being ugly enough to participate in the forum, as illustrated by coffeecup’s response to a Femcel who claims she ascended without plastic surgery:

Why are you commenting on here with a throwaway account, talking about ascending with makeup and fitness, and then get upset that we’re asking you if you did anything else or if you are a normie? Femcels spend a ton of money on hair, makeup and skincare and we still look the same. (Femcels, comments)

Coffeecup expresses her doubts about whether the original poster qualifies as a TruFemcel. However, dispelling these doubts is difficult because TruFemcels never post pictures of themselves to protect their privacy. Coffeecup’s comment also exemplifies the gap that Femcels perceive between their own lived experiences and those of more attractive people. TruFemcels often report feeling used by others and protect their community from anyone who might dismiss or diminish their experience.

Another way that TruFemcels establish community boundaries is by distinguishing themselves from men’s Incel communities, which they strongly criticize. Their critical stance is

illustrated by throwawaybye's comment:

Incels are sociopaths who murder people when they can't get a Stacy. Femcels are nonentities unless someone wants to bully us. Some Femcels on here are a little extreme, but they are nowhere near incel levels of fucked up. Femcels can be mean but they are not talking about pedophilia and abolishing the age of consent. They don't commit mass murders or stalk people. They don't dox people or leak people's nudes. Femcels just talk about how miserable they are and their suicidal thoughts (Femcels, comments)

Men's Incel communities, according to TruFemcels, are immature, violent, and perverted.

Throwawaybye's comment portrays Femcels as a group of isolated and lonely women who discuss shared experiences, while Incels are portrayed through the actions of their most violent members, highlighting the differences between the two communities.

During my fieldwork, the TruFemcels occasionally debated whether they should change their community's name. Some argued that it was too closely associated with men's Incel communities, as illustrated by the following discussion:

sup94: I have never really liked the name "Femcel", it makes us seem like we are equivalent to incels. But women experience loneliness and ugliness differently than men. Some of us may not even be celibate. Most of us are just mentally ill and ugly. People need to stop attacking us without bothering to see that we actually are different from incels.

Moonbeam: I wish our community name was not so focused on physical attractiveness so that people stop saying that men will fuck anything. This is the only place online where we can talk about ugliness and it would be nice for it to be separate from those pedos and shooters. (Femcels, original post and comments)

Sup94 and Moonbeam's comments highlight the rejection that is at the heart of the Femcel experience. Moonbeam also brings up a broader frustration with the Incel community. Incels often claim that female Incels cannot exist, because of men's uncontrollable sexuality. Yet, despite debating the community's name on three occasions during my fieldwork, the TruFemcels never changed their name. They are referred to as the Femcel community throughout this chapter.

Red Pill Women and Red Pill Wives

Red Pill Women, like the TruFemcels, were created as a women's counterpart to a men's manosphere community. Red Pill Women and Wives are Reddit communities where women share advice about living according to the Red Pill philosophy. While definitions of Red Pill lifestyles differ between the Red Pill Women and Wives communities, the Red Pill is usually said to entail a dominant male partner and a submissive female partner. From there, the partnerships take various forms, although the most discussed relationship ideal is that of a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home wife or mother.

The Red Pill Wives subreddit was created three years after the original Red Pill Women's community. In the following excerpt, cheerio explains why Red Pill Wives was created. Her comment references TRP, or The Red Pill, the popular men's subreddit:

The RedPillWomen sub was part of the TRP network up until a few years ago, but it had an active female mod team that made the rules and wrote the content. At some point, the TRP men started making posts and rules that went against the female imperative—so all of the original mods left and created RedPillWives.

Since then, RedPillWomen has been run by TRP men and two female mods who were approved by them. The final say in the future of the RedPillWomen sub is made by single

TRP men, not women. RedPillWives has always been run by and for women. Here, we can discuss our relationships from a red pill point of view without having to worry about men censoring us. We don't think a man, especially a TRP man who has never been married, can give better advice than a married red pill woman. (RPWives, original post)

Cheerio's comment shows that Red Pill Wives, like the Femcels, have to work at maintaining a particular kind of community membership, and engage in boundary maintenance to do so. The moderation efforts in both communities involve a gendered struggle for autonomy in a male-dominated space. Red Pill Wives, consisting of about 10,000 members during the data collection period, is a smaller community compared to Red Pill Women, which saw its subscriber count increase from 58,000 to 61,000 members throughout my fieldwork. Despite their name, the Red Pill Wives community was not exclusive to married women. The relatively smaller size of its membership suggests that the division described by Cheerio did not resonate with the majority of Red Pill Women members. During my data collection, Red Pill Wives was less active, and the subreddit sometimes went days without a new post, which never happened on Red Pill Women. Nonetheless, this study examines data from both communities because there were posts with rich data in each community. However, due to the abundance of content on Red Pill Women, this chapter contains many more citations from that community. I did not notice any notable differences in the two communities' content, so I analyzed their posts as a unit. They are referred to as the RPW communities throughout this chapter.

The "About" sections of both RPW communities state that the subreddits are for women to discuss "sexual strategy," with a "traditional, evolutionary psychology, or antifeminist foundation" (this language was used in both subreddits). Originating from men's subreddits like r/TheRedPill, the Red Pill ideology is based on ideas derived from evolutionary psychology and

biological determinism. Both theories underpin RPW's opinions and ideas about gender relations. I go into more detail about these theories in the following section "Foundations of Gender" and show that these underlying beliefs are also present in the other communities in this sample.

The RPW communities are generally more flexible about community boundaries than Femcels. Users are not required to demonstrate that they live a Red Pill lifestyle, and non-Red Pill women are welcome to ask questions in both communities. However, as Treebark's comment explains, the communities enforce rules for male participation:

This post is a reminder that most men have no business on RPW. We only accept participation from men who are experts in red pill theory. You can demonstrate this by investing time in elevating your status in the men's groups.

The three main conditions for male participation are that you need to understand red pill theory, be older, and be married or in a long-term relationship (we only want men who can talk about relationships from experience, not theoretically).

Men are not allowed to ask any questions. We are not trying to date you, so keep your preferences to yourself. Men's ideas about high value men are usually unhelpful. You can talk to other men in other subreddits. This group is for women. We will not hesitate to ban you without a warning. If you are still not sure if you belong here, contact a moderator. (RPWomen, original post)

The rules outlined by Treebark position Red Pill Women as more authoritative about the Red Pill ideology than Red Pill men, who are said to be "usually unhelpful". The strict but ambiguous rules ("older," "experts in Red Pill theory") outline the same consequence for unwanted male participation as in the Femcel group: being banned. Men's comments were rare during my data

collection. The following excerpt is an example of a comment made by Onwards_1451, a man, which was approved by the community moderators. Onwards_1451 replied to a woman who inquired about a man's sudden loss of interest in dating her:

I think he is just dealing with his own issues. You can either let him come to you when he's ready, or you can ask him if he needs any help. Us guys don't usually like sharing when we are stressed. We just shut down until we feel better. That's just how we've been conditioned. We learned that it's better to deal with it ourselves than to be made fun of or called weak (RPWomen, comments)

Onwards_1451's comment adheres to community guidelines because he offers a man's perspective on the situation, without telling the original poster what she should do. In his answer, he uses his gender as a point of entry into understanding other men's behaviors, portraying men's behaviors as predictable to those who know how to decode them. His comment is also interesting for the tension that is expressed between gender as biologically determined, as shown by his generalizations about all men ("Us guys don't usually like sharing"), and gender as a social process ("That's just how we've been conditioned"). Moments of conceptual tension such as in this comment were present throughout the data sample.

Unlike the Femcels, the RPW communities do not completely disassociate themselves from their male counterparts. However, they frequently disagree with the portrayal of women in men's Red Pill communities (such as TRP). RPW members find these representations to be dehumanizing, objectifying, and excessively focused on men's sexual pleasure. The following discussion highlights some of the differences between men's and women's interpretations of the Red Pill philosophy. In the following excerpt, Prettyinpink and gizmotron57 discuss "the wall," a widely held belief in Red Pill communities. According RPW communities, women cease to be

attractive to men after they reach a certain age because they no longer appear fertile. When a woman hits the wall, it means that she has reached that critical age. According to the RPW communities, women typically hit the wall when they go through menopause. RPW members often discuss how women can delay the wall by staying fit, healthy, and taking care of their appearance.:

Prettyinpink: Men on TRP are saying that staying thin is not enough to push back the wall. Why are men saying this? Are they just saying that any sign of age means that women have hit the wall? There's no point asking the men, they will just say something ridiculous. (RPWomen, comments)

gizmotron57: Are you trying to date someone on TRP? If not, why should you care what they think? I use the red pill to make my life and relationship better. I would not touch a TRP redditor with a ten-foot pole. (RPWomen, comments)

This discussion is a good example of the relationship between the RPW communities and men's Red Pill groups. Prettyinpink and gizmotron57 both are very explicit about their rejection of red pill men, who say "ridiculous" things and who they "would not touch [...] with a ten-foot pole." This language is common in the RPW communities when discussing Red Pill men. While they appear to share the same philosophy, the RPW communities are wary of men's groups who are thought to take the philosophy too far. Their discomfort regarding the wall also suggests a dissatisfaction with the underlying principles of evolutionary psychology on which their communities are based. A comment by renew_mn captures RPW's complicated relationship with men's communities:

I read a comment on this forum where someone told another woman not to take men's red pill spaces too seriously and I completely agree. Those men are venting to each other, and

they are showing a side they only want to share with other men. It is part of a healing process that some will never be able to complete. (RPWomen, comments)

While she empathizes with Red Pill men, renew_mn advises other RPW members to avoid men's Red Pill groups. The general mistrust of men's Red Pill spaces runs counter to the rule that men should be Red Pill experts and regular TRP contributors if they want to participate. Furthermore, the rejection of many of Red Pill men's ideas, as well as the creation of RPW's own version of the Red Pill philosophy reveals that the idea of submission to men espoused by RPW members is ambiguous and complex. Submission to men, it seems, does not extend to submission to men's ideas, neither does it encompass submission to all men. Rather, RPW members encourage submission to some men, deemed to be acceptable romantic partners.

The Honey Badgers

The Honey Badgers actively engage in challenging mainstream feminist discourse and advocating for men's rights. The Honey Badgers are the only sample community organized around an influencer/follower dynamic. During my fieldwork, the Honey Badgers uploaded four videos per week to their YouTube channels HoneyBadgerRadio (scripted videos, approximately 50,000 subscribers), and HoneyBadgerLive (live recordings, approximately 9,000 subscribers). The live recordings feature four main contributors: three women and one man. The Badgers rely on monthly supporter donations to fund the production of their YouTube videos. This dynamic differs from the forum-based groups, where any member can create content.

The Honey Badgers describe their interests on their website as follows:

We all came together because of a mutual interest in men's issues, which can be observed in most of our work. We touch on women's issues as well, but we do not shy away from critiquing feminine vices. The main women's issue we grapple with is how the

politicizing of female victimhood through misleading or outright false statistics traps women in an emotionally abusive web of punditry and public manipulation. (Honey Badger Brigade, n.d.)

The description of their interests emphasizes their commitment to raising awareness about men's issues. It denounces feminism, thought to obscure men's suffering behind exaggerated women's issues, and it also strategically invokes the alleged harms that feminism has done to women, thus portraying feminism as a damaging movement to society in general.

The Honey Badger videos are generally addressed to men, as reflected by a statement made by one of the hosts:

If any women are listening to this, [...] congratulations! You actually want to improve your life and be happy and you're willing to listen to things that you don't want to hear [...] in order to get to those ends which is [...] admirably pragmatic. (HBB, podcast)

The host mentions female viewers as an exception. Most of the comments left on the Badger videos also suggest that they are made by men, who often recount personal experiences of abuse. However, another video reveals that there may be a higher proportion of female viewers than the previous excerpt suggests. In the following excerpt, the hosts thank some viewers, including women, for their donations:

I want to do a few shout outs to supporters [...]. First of all, I want to do a shout out to Madi from Altan who gave us 500 and I believe she [...] is the highest donor to our fundraiser this this month, so thank you Madi from Altan [...]. I also want to thank Mrs. Leena who gave us 150 and I want to thank her because she's also a fairly [...] substantial patron. Thank you Mrs. Leena. Theresa M, the original gangster [...] who always puts a little bit in the hat for each of our streams, gave us two hundred dollars so thank you,

wow. [...] And Andrea B is a new subscriber, five dollars a month so thank you Andrea B. (HBB, podcast)

This excerpt does not state the actual gender ratio in the Honey Badger audience. Yet, it shows that some women watch and support the channels, and that the hosts recognize some of their most generous female patrons.

The Honey Badgers are the sample community that is the most closely associated with men's manosphere groups. The Honey Badgers occasionally mention other men's communities, such as Incels, or like in the following excerpt, pick up artists. In the following excerpt, the Badgers interview a men's relationship coach and dating expert who claims to have infiltrated the pick up artist community. The Badgers and the expert discuss the negative effects of pick up artist communities on men's health during the interview. According to the expert:

Guys [who] get into that, [...] they're thinking [...] this thing is telling me how to have the blueprint to getting into a girl's knickers, I'm going to do it [...]. So, a lot of guys get into this and they think that this is [...] the place where all their problems are gonna be solved as long as they spend enough time learning all this stuff [...]. They might even get laid, [...] and then of course that emptiness comes back again and then they seek the next thing, and then the next thing. The whole industry builds itself on trying to elicit that emptiness within guys and tell them they're inadequate and then offer the solution, it's that kind of problem–reaction–solution. I actually realized it was like a honey trap [...] for men [...]. Even though they were having more success talking to more women, [...] they would actually find themselves becoming more socially perverted, seeing women as a target [...]. (HBB, podcast)

This excerpt illustrates that the Honey Badgers, like the Femcel and RPW communities, do not

view all manosphere communities favorably. However, it is important to note that the Honey Badger's criticisms of pick up artist communities are based on concerns about men's health, rather than the impact of these communities on women. Their position on pick up artistry reflects their broader discussion topics, which center on instances of male victimization in contemporary feminist societies.

The Honey Badgers' exact political stance is ambiguous, as illustrated by the following commenters expressing their disappointment in the group:

ClassStruggle: This channel has slipped all the way into the right wing. I am glad that it popped up in my feed so I remembered to unsubscribe (HBB, comments)

Eddie Robertson: I had to stop watching HBB when it was slipping into Trumpism, but this video is exactly why I used to love this channel so much. (HBB, comments)

These two comments reveal the Honey Badgers' ill-defined conservative stance, which is occasionally accused of leaning too far on the right wing. Despite their ambiguous political position, the Honey Badgers remain staunchly antifeminist, which suggests that antifeminism transcends political affiliation.

Mothers of Sons

On their website, Mothers of Sons describe themselves as a group of mothers who are protecting their sons from sexual assault allegations and other forms of alleged discrimination against men:

Some of us have spent our life savings protecting sons from false sexual assault allegations, paying a huge mental and financial toll to prove the charges had no substance.

Other sons are experiencing discrimination in the workplace or in educational institutions

where advancement can be based on gender rather than merit. Some face #MeToo accusations, where unproven allegations can undermine a lifetime's achievement and cause loss of career and reputation. (Mothers of Sons, n.d.)

Mothers of Sons' stated goal is to share information and news stories demonstrating the unfair treatment of men. Their website does not state where they are based, but their Facebook page, where they are the most active, usually focuses on Australian news stories.

While the Mothers of Sons website describes itself as a group of mothers, men are welcome to join their Facebook group. In fact, the majority of active Facebook members are men, unlike the RPW and Femcel communities. It is common for community members to use their personal Facebook accounts to leave comments. Notably, the Mothers of Sons community stands out as the only sample community where using one's real name, instead of an anonymous username, is the prevailing norm. This distinction might stem from the community's presentation as an alternative news source, which fosters a sense of engaging with factual information. As a result, members may feel comfortable being associated with the claims made in the group, considering them informed and reasonable.

For the purposes of this project, I focused on their public Facebook page, which had around 4,500 members throughout the data collection period. Group moderators post links to up to three news articles per day under the name Mothers of Sons. Community members are not permitted to create posts on the page, but they can leave comments. The group moderators post articles about false rape allegations, crimes committed by women such as domestic violence against a male partner, and criticisms of feminist initiatives. Overall, Mothers of Sons focus on news stories in which men are victims of crimes, or are treated unfairly by the justice system or government policies.

Commenters usually express outrage when a news article reports on the biased treatment of men, or skepticism of gender-based study results, as illustrated by Zack Bishop's response to an article about the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment on Australian university campuses:

I remember this survey, it asked about harassment on public transportation when going to uni and also had questions like "have you ever felt uncomfortable because of the way someone looked at you?". They did this so they could get more responses and reach the conclusions that they had already decided on. (MOS, comments)

The comments often attempt to refute or criticize what are perceived to be feminist research and policies. Additionally, Mothers of Sons commenters, like the Honey Badgers, also frequently accuse governments and social institutions, such as education and the judicial system, of being influenced by a false narrative about men perpetrated by feminists.

Unlike Femcels and the RPW communities, Mothers of Sons do not enforce gender-based participation rules. However, community members and moderators still monitor comments, particularly if someone fails to show support for male victims, as illustrated by the following excerpt. These comments were made in response to an article defending actor Johnny Depp against domestic violence accusations made by his ex-girlfriend, actress Amber Heard:

Harriet Richmond: I can't believe how easily you are letting him fool you. I believe a lot of men are victims, but not this one.

Tony Donovan: Do you not believe male victims? You are a disgusting human being if that is what you meant.

Mothers of Sons: Please explain.

Harriet Richmond: I can't, you can just tell from his face, his charm, his money... It is all deception. (MOS, comments)

When Harriet Richmond refuses to give Johnny Depp the benefit of the doubt, other members attack her personally (“you are a disgusting human being”). However, when members state their support for a man accused of assault, they are not asked to justify their position. This is one of several arguments that occurred between members on the topic of male victims. With the exception of a few disagreements about the veracity of sexual assault claims and a few disagreements about the choices of the articles posted, members of the community mostly agree on the topics discussed on the Facebook page.

Mothers of Sons was the only sample community that did not mention other manosphere groups, apart from a reference to Karen Straughan, one of the founders of the Honey Badgers:

Mothers of Sons: Ryerson University is asking for \$1600 in security fees for a talk by the famous YouTuber Karen Straughan organized by a men's group on campus. Security fees are a great way for feminists to shut down free speech. (MOS, original post)

One of the commenters remarks that the article is outdated, but asks about Karen Straughan's whereabouts, indicating that some community members are familiar with the FeMRA figure:

Lucas Riley: This story is eight years old. But what's Karen up to these days?

Rahim Calhoun: This is further proof that we need a men's rights movement because of feminism. Regardless, happy to see Karen is back. (MOS, comments)

The previous exchange was the sole mention of any manosphere community or manosphere figures. However, the antifeminist discourses found on the Mothers of Sons page are similar to the Honey Badgers'. The following sections show how the discourses found in the Mothers of

Sons page fit into the manosphere network of beliefs and ideas.

Because each community is made up of diverse individuals who do not always agree with one another, these characterizations are only generalizations. However, it is in these moments of disagreement that we can begin to understand each community's boundaries, values, and norms. These disagreements offer insight into what ideas, practices, and opinions are considered appropriate for each community.

The upcoming section presents the foundational ideas about gender expressed by these groups. The discourses and practices of these communities are primarily inspired by the theories of evolutionary psychology and biological determinism.

Summary

The key findings discussed in this section are represented in a table form (Table 1) to provide a concise overview of my results.

Table 1

Summary of the Sample's Community Definitions

	Subject of group	Men's participation	Relationship to men's manosphere groups
Femcels	Personal experiences as ugly women	No men's participation	Critical of Incels
RPW	Red Pill Relationships	Some men's participation	Ambiguous relationship with men's Red Pill
Honey Badgers	Men's rights	Mixed group	Critical of some manosphere groups

Mothers of Sons	Men's discrimination in the justice system	Mixed group	Do not mention other manosphere groups
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Foundations of Gender

The Honey Badgers, Mothers of Sons, RPW communities, and Femcels all share similar discourses about gender, which often reference biological determinism and evolutionary psychology. Biological determinism is the belief that a person's behavior is influenced less by their environment and more by their genetic makeup or physiology (Cousineau, 2021). The theory of evolutionary psychology holds that human psychology evolved through natural selection to "maximize gene reproduction" (Van Valkenburgh, 2018, p.91). According to the theory, men and women have naturally different personalities due to "divergent reproductive interests" (Van Valkenburgh, 2018, p.91). According to the communities' loose interpretation of these theories, a person's genetic makeup influences their individual behaviors. In particular, these groups often claim that a person's biological sex determines their gendered behaviors. These theories shape these communities' views on gender and relationships. However, evolutionary psychology and biological determinism are based on the idea of a gender binary, from which queer gender identities are excluded. This point is elaborated on later in this chapter.

Evolutionary Psychology and Biological Determinism

Although the sample groups do not always explicitly mention evolutionary psychology and biological determinism, their attitudes towards sex and gender are evident in the discussions. For example, a Honey Badger video explains women's sexual behavior in terms of reproductive instincts:

I think it's time to start realizing that there is a lizard brain or perhaps a mammalian brain inside of every [...] human woman [...]. The idea is that you are going to be investing in an offspring because you're going to get pregnant, you're going to have a child [...] so you want to get the best possible genetic material for your offspring, period. That doesn't come from being coy, it doesn't come from having less sex than the males, it actually comes from attempting to have as many males as you can while being deceitful about how many males you've had. [...] So the males are trying to reserve themselves [...] and the females are trying to pretend like they've not been fucked by the entire football team [...]. (HBB. podcast)

According to this excerpt, women's behaviors in romantic relationships are influenced by their instincts to have children with the best possible mate. This excerpt illustrates how the communities make claims about men's and women's ancestral instincts to explain their behaviors. However, these groups occasionally come to opposing conclusions. In the previous example, the Honey Badgers use biological determinism to claim that women are manipulative and promiscuous. Mothers of Sons members also express similar ideas. Meanwhile, Femcels and the RPW communities who are more inclined to criticize men, use evolutionary psychology and biological determinism to argue that only select men are suitable romantic partners, as illustrated by soybrat's comment:

Men naturally take more risks than women and that's why they make more money. The bigger the risk, the bigger the reward. Women are biologically fearful. Fear has helped us and our children survive. Men are not as afraid but the key is to respect our biological differences. It's ok for him to want to do the thing and for you to be scared. Let him be a man and trust him. THIS ONLY APPLIES TO GOOD MEN. (RPWomen, comments)

Soybrat makes sweeping claims about the natural dispositions of men and women, claiming that men are biologically predisposed to take more risks. Yet, she also acknowledges the importance of being selective about which men to trust. This comment exemplifies the tension within these communities between beliefs about inherent biological differences between men and women and the understanding that variations exist among men and women, some of which can be attributed to social factors.

Femcels also argue that men have a natural desire to lead, but they typically discuss it in terms of physical and sexual violence, rather than domestic leadership, as in the following comment by sunsets:

Here are some things I tell myself when I feel sad that I will be single forever: I will never be forced to have sex that I do not want to have, I won't discover that my husband is a slob when he's at home, I won't have to do all the household work while he doesn't help, and I won't be kept around just to be a glorified sex doll. I won't be raped or murdered by my own husband, I won't be cheated on, I won't be abused. (Femcels, original post)

In her comment, sunsets lists the negative aspects of marrying a man: increased domestic labor, sexual assault, and the threat of violence. Thus, while the Honey Badgers claim that women are naturally manipulative, Femcels argue that men are inherently violent and threaten women's safety.

All of the communities in the sample consider monogamous, heterosexual relationships to be the norm. This norm is so pervasive that even Femcels, who are typically pessimistic about their ability to find long-term romantic partners due to their appearance, still uphold the heteronormative ideal. This is evident in sleighthand's comment:

Women will look for affection from men, it's in their biology and socialization as females. The problem is that all women got told that men are better people than they actually are. Most of the Femcels here have realized that reality but they also face other problems like trying to have a normal social life and not be harassed because of how they look. (Femcels, comments)

Sleighthand's comment is notable for its mention of both biology and socialization as factors in women's attraction to men. The members of the communities in this sample do not typically recognize the role of socialization in shaping gendered behaviors. Sleighthand's comment echoes the idea that the heteronormative instinct is so ingrained in women that they will seek out relationships with men, even if these relationships do not make them feel fulfilled. They do not typically recognize the role of socialization in shaping attitudes or behaviors, but rather see lookism as biologically determined and therefore inescapable.

All the communities in the sample portray men and women as complementary counterparts. According to the RPW groups, the happiest heterosexual couples are the ones that achieve the perfect balance between the woman's femininity and the man's masculinity. The RPW groups often attribute their relationship dissatisfaction either to their lack of femininity, or their partner's lack of masculinity, as reflected in *Water_Reader_345*'s response to the question: "How can I encourage my husband to be more masculine?":

You will naturally bring out his masculine side just by being more feminine. You need to embrace your vulnerability. If he loves you, he will respond to that vulnerability by creating a space to take care of you. By 'vulnerability,' I don't mean listing your anxieties and demanding emotional labor. A great example is simply asking him to hug you closely because you are feeling afraid. Don't use words, use actions. (RPWives, comments)

According to the RPW communities, when women act more feminine, their partners begin to act more masculine to rebalance the so-called natural homeostasis between masculinity and femininity in the heterosexual couple. Playing the appropriate masculine or feminine role is thought to increase happiness, reduce frustration, and improve sexual desire.

Water_Reader_345's comment calls into question the idea that men's domination is natural, as it requires women to modify their social behaviors to flourish. House_Brat_78's response to a post asking how to help a stay-at-home dad feel confident in his new role further illustrates the belief that women can encourage their partner's masculinity by changing their behaviors:

Telling him that you still see him the same way as a strong assertive guy won't help. You need to change your dynamic to help him fulfill his role as a supervisor and give him back some of his power. You should stop asking him to do things, at least for now. This might be contributing to his feeling of following your orders, instead of being in charge. You should also quickly respond to the things he asks of you. I would also change how you manage your finances. Make him in charge, and treat your paycheck like money that he manages. That will give him back his feeling of financial power. (RPWomen, comments)

House_Brat_78 identifies the original poster's issue as an unnatural reversal of gender roles. She suggests a solution in which the husband can resume his role as a provider by taking control of the household finances. This advice is echoed throughout the RPW subreddits, where members suggest that men's unhappiness can be alleviated by maintaining a distribution of labor in the household that respects each partner's natural gendered characteristics.

The Mothers of Sons community rarely engaged in discussions on theories of biological

determinism beyond the idea that biological sex determines one's gender, as illustrated by Paul Rice's comment:

If you want to declare that you are a man or a woman you need an objective definition.

What other objective definition is there than the biological difference between males and females? If that's not the definition, then saying you're a woman could just mean you think you're a canary. (MOS, comments)

The question "what is a woman?" is occasionally used by Mothers of Sons members to challenge feminist ideas about gender. These comments usually devolve into transphobic discussions, which I discuss in the following section. Comments such as Paul Rice's were the extent of the community's discussion on biological determinism.

This section points to a trend that becomes increasingly evident in the subsequent sections, which are the tensions between ideas about sex and gender, and the actual lived experiences of community members. The following section explores a significant by-product associated with a conception of gender influenced by biological determinism: the exclusion of non-cisgender identities and experiences.

Transphobia

A separate section is devoted to trans and nonbinary gender identities as they are a central topic of discussion among the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons, the more politically oriented communities. The RPW and Femcel communities also touch on non-cisgender experiences, although they do so less frequently. In all communities, trans and nonbinary identities are discussed in relation to their deviation from normative cisgender experiences, with biological determinism and evolutionary psychology serving as naturalizing discourses.

The Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities often discuss trans individuals,

particularly trans women, in the context of challenging feminist ideas. Within these communities, there is a perception that feminism provides unconditional support for all women, regardless of their actions, values, or morals. For the Badgers and Mothers of Sons, trans women constitute a challenge to this unwavering support. The two following excerpts are illustrative of the tone used in both communities when discussing trans women:

Mothers of Sons: It's fascinating to see how women react when they are attacked by the trans lobby for women-only safe spaces. This happened to Australian feminist activist Pam Heely, who created a social network for women. She told the Australian Magazine: "It's been hell. It's frightening and I've been dealing with threats throughout my pregnancy. I developed a social network for women that is an online space away from death threats and toxic male behavior." But in January, a trans activist made a discrimination complaint about Heely's network to the Australian Human Rights Commission (MOS, original post)

Honey Badger Host: The central core of feminism wants people who have uteruses to have certain rights [...]. So how are they going to deal with reserving rights for cis women [...] and excluding trans women from those rights? [...] How are they going to square that circle? [...] What they really want to do is to exclude penis people from things and the trans women are pushing up against that. [...] The T in LGBT is going to consume everything else and I'm here for it because it's going to be fucking hilarious to watch. [...] Feminists are eventually all going to be TERFs because that's the only way they can land right [...]. I don't see why a trans woman shouldn't be considered a full woman. (HBB, podcast)

It is worth noting that the Honey Badger host in the above excerpt was being sincere when they

claimed, “I don’t see why a trans woman shouldn’t be considered a full woman”. These comments highlight one of the most common ways that the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons oversimplify feminism. They do so by conflating certain ideas and groups with the entire feminist movement. One of these groups is the TERF movement (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism), which advocates for the exclusion of trans individuals from feminism. The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons often portray the TERF movement’s exclusionary position as representative of the entire feminist movement’s attitude towards non-cisgender identities. However, this oversimplified portrayal presents an inaccurate understanding of feminism and fails to capture its diverse perspectives.

Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers position themselves against the trans exclusionary positions which they attribute to the entire feminist movement. This positioning may give the impression that they are more inclusive of the transgender communities than the feminists they critique. However, their apparent embrace of trans people is not consistently upheld, as seen in the following excerpt where the Honey Badgers discuss the Russian invasion of Ukraine:

Several transgender people living in the Ukraine have reached out to Western media to address how their life has changed since the Russian invasion. Men who have transitioned report that they have been unable to exit Ukraine due to their IDs still listing them as male [...]. Women who have transitioned fear they will be forced to join the military. [...]

The men who want to be women are still going “I’m definitely a woman, I completely denounce my masculinity, [...] that means I don’t get drafted in the war. Oh wait, that’s not working”. [...] The amount of men who identify as women far outstrips the amount

of women who want to be men for various reasons. It's not just because of the draft, it's because of the numerous reasons that the government gives women a special treatment that it doesn't give to men. [...] In the West, [...] we don't get many women going "I'm a man," perhaps because they don't want to get drafted into war, perhaps because they don't want to get drafted into anything else that men get drafted into, such as being financially responsible for children or financially responsible for the upkeep of the country. (HBB, podcast)

In this excerpt, the Honey Badgers misgender trans individuals on several occasions, including referring to trans women as "men who have transitioned." Misgendering is a transphobic act that undermines trans people's gender identities while perpetuating the idea that biological sex determines gender. Although the Honey Badgers claim to support trans inclusion, the act of misgendering trans people raises questions about their respect for transgender identities. It appears that the Honey Badgers primarily champion trans inclusion as a means to exploit internal conflicts within the feminist movement, potentially tarnishing its reputation.

In the preceding excerpt, the Honey Badgers accuse trans individuals of avoiding their gendered social responsibilities by transitioning, a claim that both the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons frequently make. Both communities claim that in Western societies, women receive more benefits and are treated better than men. The two communities often view transitioning as a way to escape social responsibilities, such as being drafted into the military. They also claim that transitioning is a strategy to gain social benefits intended for women, as illustrated in the following excerpt from Mothers of Sons:

Mothers of Sons: Now here's an idea... A man in Switzerland found a loophole in his country's simplified sex-change law and registered as a woman to retire early and receive

a large pension.

Franklin Pittman: This is too funny. Well done ‘him,’ or should I say ‘her’ for taking advantage of the madness and discrimination against men. I am sure ‘she’ is also a lesbian now, so she can have true victimhood status. (MOS, original post & comments)

The Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities often represent trans women’s act of transitioning as an opportunistic decision. They frequently claim that trans women receive better treatment in society than cisgender men, disregarding the violence and oppression faced by women, and especially trans women. Trans women are regarded as a privileged group in these communities, unlike cisgender men, demonstrating a lack of recognition for the issues faced by the trans community. The Honey Badgers occasionally discuss discrimination faced by trans people, but they tend to present it as a problem caused by trans individuals themselves, rather than a systemic issue. For example, in the following excerpt, the Honey Badgers discuss a pilot program in California that provides guaranteed basic income to trans and non-binary residents, aiming to reduce the unemployment and homelessness rates among this population:

That doesn’t make much sense. I can imagine how joblessness is slightly more of a problem for a salesperson who happens to be six foot five with a seven-foot wingspan, who turns up in a tutu trying to sell you a kitchen, [...] maybe people who buy kitchens might be weirded out by that, but I don’t think landlords give a shit about that. [...] It’s a contractual relationship, you could be a fucking reptilian furry with tattoos in your eyeballs and a 30-millimeter piercing through your thyroid gland and the landlord will give zero fucks. (HBB, podcast)

In this excerpt, the Honey Badgers do not recognize discrimination as the cause of high unemployment and homelessness rates among the trans and non-binary population. Instead, they

attribute it to exaggerated or deviant gender performances. In this excerpt, the host claims that trans women's hyperfeminine and childish gender performances ("in a tutu") are at the root of their discrimination, ignoring the diverse ways that trans, cis and non-binary people present themselves. The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons hold trans women responsible for their own oppression, rather than condemning the societies that allow such discrimination.

The Mothers of Sons community discusses trans issues to a lesser extent than the Honey Badgers. However, they often mock the language used by trans and non-binary individuals to describe their gender identity, such as the practice of stating one's pronouns. This is a common joke in the community, and the following excerpts are just a few examples of a widespread trend:

Samia Gould: To avoid any problems, just identify as female or one of the other alternative identities on the never-ending list of letters. (MOS, comments)

Zach Bishop: I was born visible, but I now identify as invisible. I am transparent.

Pronouns: who/where. Lol! (MOS, comments)

Mothers of Sons frequently ridicule the language used by trans and non-binary individuals to disclose their gender identity, calling into question the validity of their identities. Additionally, the act of transitioning is depicted as something that can be done easily and impulsively to avoid social consequences.

The other communities in the sample occasionally mention trans people, but in different contexts than the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons. For example, one comment thread from the Femcel forum stands out. In the following discussion, Femcels share their concerns about appearing too masculine and becoming potential targets of transphobia:

Sup94: I was lurking in a terf subreddit once, and I read this post about analyzing people to see who is trans? There was even a list of physical attributes to look out for and I

realized that they described me. I am a cis woman. So now do I have to worry that ‘feminists’ will believe that I was born a man because I am a masculine woman?

bitterbeast: I’ve researched hormone replacement therapy before because I thought it could help me feel more like a woman, but I got annoyed because trans people were saying that estrogen is safe for them but not for cis women. So I don’t get the “pros” of being a woman because I am not attractive, and I can’t even use hormones to feel more feminine? Who wants to pay for my facial feminization surgery?

Bookshelf: I think it’s just mob mentality. With the rise of misogyny, women are trying to keep themselves safe by vetting each other. (Femcels, original post & comments)

The comments in this thread acknowledge the violence faced by trans people, but they focus on the consequences of this violence for Femcels. These comments reveal a common challenge faced by Femcels and trans women, which is the tension between their identities as women and the fact that their appearances may not conform to normative expectations of femininity. Femcels also express fears of not being able to pass as women, a common concern among trans women. However, in bitterbeast’s comment, she notes that Femcel lack access to feminization technologies that are commonly associated with trans women. Although there seems to be common ground between Femcel experiences of gender and those of trans women, the group’s attitude towards trans femininities is ambiguous. For example, Bookshelf’s comment implies a distinction between women who validate each other’s womanhood, and trans women who must be outed, while Sup94 appears more critical of TERFs.

In another notable thread, despresso asks other Femcels about their experiences of gender dysphoria:

Has anyone here had moments of gender dysphoria? Sometimes I feel detached from my

body because of the trauma of being an ugly woman, and I start thinking about how different things would be if I had a man's body. I get disgusted by my own hips and breasts. I absolutely do not want to be a trans man, because I know that I will never pass as a man and I don't want to be part of the cult that is the trans community. But I also hate being a woman and often feel like an inferior woman.

traumalice: No, never, but I have moments of disassociation. I do think I would prefer being an attractive man over being an ugly woman. I don't relate to most women, but I am also hairier, uglier, and more masculine than half of the men I see. I feel dirty, disgusting, and desexed, but any 'dysphoria' I feel is because I am too masculine to enjoy being a woman. But I also think that there is a gross movement out there that targets 'failed women' and socializes them into men. (Femcels, original post & comments)

In this remarkable exchange, despresso and traumalice describe feelings of gender dysphoria and discomfort in bodies that do not conform to expected norms of feminine appearances, but they also express hatred for the trans community, accusing it of being cult-like and manipulative. Some of the undertones of these comments are similar to those made by the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons about avoiding gendered responsibilities through transitioning.

The previous comment thread reveals the tension between Femcels' identities as women and their experiences with gender dysphoria. Rather than expressing empathy for trans women who also experience gender discomfort and discrimination, Femcels reinforce the "us versus them" divide between Femcels, seen as cis women who are denied their womanhood, and trans individuals, who are thought to be part of a "gross," cultish, and predatory movement. However, these threads are the only two instances where trans individuals were discussed, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the entire Femcel community's attitudes towards non-cisgender

individuals. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that no comments opposed the transphobic discourses at the time of data collection.

The topic of trans issues was also scarce in the Red Pill Women's subreddit, and was entirely absent from the Red Pill Wives group. However, one comment thread touched on the relationship between trans activism and feminist activism. The following is an excerpt from that discussion:

cheaplife: I do not recognize myself in modern feminism anymore. When I became pregnant, I had a lot of unpleasant conversations, with people calling me a pregnant person, asking me for my pronouns, what gender my child will be assigned. I was also basically accused of condemning my baby for life because I assigned her as a girl and made her wear pink! But the big turning point was my religion being accused of being transphobic. That's when I started questioning everything.

opal: I wholeheartedly support trans rights and I believe that trans people are people too. But I think the movement has destroyed the original goals of first wave feminism. Early feminism praised motherhood and recognized that men and women were biologically, emotionally, and mentally different. Now, we have biological males competing in sports against biological females. The woman of the year is a biological male! In my view, modern feminism has erased womanhood altogether. I do think that the trans movement should exist, but feminists need to stand up for their rights again and deny that a biological male can ever become a woman. (RPWomen, comments)

Despite opal's apparent sincere desire to support trans rights, her comment reveals how difficult it is to claim to support trans people while remaining firmly planted in a biologically deterministic paradigm of gender, a tension that was observed among the Honey Badgers as well.

Some Red Pill Women in this thread were critical of contemporary feminism for including trans and queer gender experiences. These two comments illustrate how some Red Pill Women perceive non-cis bodies performing femininity as a threat to their own femininity, rights, and social roles. opal, like the Honey Badgers, claims to support trans rights while undermining their gender identities by focusing her comment on biological sex, and misgendering trans individuals. These remarks reflect a common narrative in conservative and antifeminist circles that trans rights are incompatible with women's rights and that trans individuals pose a threat to traditional gender roles and norms.

Non-cisgender identities challenge the conceptions of gender held by the communities in this study. These communities' conceptions of gender, based on biological determinism and evolutionary psychology, leave no room for trans and non-binary identities, which are considered to be deviant from the norm. The disproportionate focus on trans femininities compared to trans masculinities, especially among the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons, suggests concerns about deviant femininities and fears of emasculation. Despite some Femcels expressing gender discomfort, no community members identified as non-cisgender. The discussions about trans individuals in these communities illustrate the tensions that biological deterministic understanding of gender create, which lead to a range of what appear to be fairly incoherent positions between and within the communities of the sample. This tension is also evident in the way these communities approach discussions about sexuality, which are explored in the next section.

Sexualities

Discussions about sexuality are also intertwined in the communities' conceptions of gender. Men and women's sexualities and sexual behaviors are viewed as different yet

complementary, naturally monogamous, and heterosexual, with a few exceptions in the RPW groups.

Red Pill Women are the only group in which some members mention having been in polyamorous relationships, although such instances are rare. Swanlake's comment is an example of one such instance:

I don't think that open relationships work with a red pill relationship, but it can depend on the person. I have had two long term partners, both of which ended up being open relationships. I'm happy I gave it a try, but it was too difficult for me. I think it's because open relationships require you to hold back your emotions so that you don't get hurt, but then you are also holding back your love for your partner. Both of those relationships ended because the men decided to commit to other women. (RPWomen, comments)

Red Pill Women occasionally discuss open relationships and polyamory, but always in terms of personal preference, such as in Swanlake's comment. Yet, polyamorous relationships are ultimately said to be incompatible with Red Pill lifestyles. This perspective is likely due to the Red Pill ideology's emphasis on monogamy and traditional gender roles, which may lead members to view non-monogamous relationships as unnatural and as a threat to their core values.

Red Pill women's views on polyamory reflect their overall attitudes towards sexuality. They respect individual preferences while gently reminding others of the Red Pill approach to intimate relationships. During my data collection, the only communities where some members disclosed their queer sexual orientation were the RPW communities. Yet, within these communities, queer sexualities are still framed in terms of traditional gender roles, as illustrated by Eternalnacho's description of her queer relationship:

I am a lesbian and I don't relate to the general LGBT ideas. I tend to be the leader and the

protector in my relationship. I know that there are biological differences between men and women, but that doesn't mean my relationship can't follow the same foundation. My partner has her own ways of being strong, but she is the submissive one. She prefers housework, I prefer work.

I know that some trads would say that my relationship is unnatural, but I believe that the red pill is just a way to understand you and your partner's strengths and weaknesses, and working together to create a strong team. (RPWives, comments)

Eternalnacho's comment shows how some women in the RPW communities negotiate the tension between their queer identities and conceptions of gender based on biological determinism. Eternalnacho deals with this tension by distancing herself from the LGBTQ+ community and reframing her and her partner's roles in terms of the dominant provider and submissive caretaker dynamic that is valued in RPW communities. Underlying her comment, is the claim that homosexual relationships can fit into the Red Pill norm, or, in other words, that biology can be subordinated to culture. This demonstrates how Red Pill Women adapt Red Pill principles to fit their individual circumstances, even if they challenge traditional sexuality norms. Eternalnacho's comment received no pushback, suggesting an implicit agreement with her claims.

Red Pill Women occasionally mention homosexual men, but only in the context of opposite-sex friendships. These communities generally disapprove of platonic relationships between men and women because men are thought to have uncontrollable sexual desires that could lead them to try to seduce their female friends. An example of this discourse can be seen in Ownvg's comment, which reflects the common belief that men are unable to control their sexual urges:

The truth is that men want sex. That is the main thing that attracts them to us, like bees to honey. When we have premarital sex, we are treating it like a fun activity or a utility. If that's what you want, then go ahead! But when you treat sex like a utility, don't be surprised that men will treat you the same and leave when you are no longer useful. Don't blame them for not wanting anything more: all they wanted was sex, and you gave them what they wanted. (RPWomen, original post)

Ownvg's comment illustrates a contrast in how sexual instincts are viewed in Red Pill communities. While men are often portrayed as being driven by their evolutionary instinct to reproduce, women are expected to manage this drive if they hope to have long-term relationships. Women are said to be the gatekeepers of sex and are held responsible for the frequency, timeline, availability, and decision whether to engage in casual sex. However, when discussing friendships with gay men, men's natural desire to procreate no longer applies, as illustrated by renew_mn's comment:

I think male friends are generally ok if they are gay. I have a childhood gay friend. We went to primary school and church together. I wouldn't drop him for the world.

(RPWomen, comments)

Renew_mn's comment shows that RPW members are prepared to forgive gay men's transgression of their heteronormative conception of gender, particularly if the men make up for it in another ways, such as by going to church. Just as in Eternalnacho's commitment to enacting heteronormative roles in her lesbian relationship, we see here that gay men are accepted as long as they fit into other acceptability criteria set by the group. In this way, gay men figure as non-masculine men who do not pose a risk to Red Pill Women's virtue. The perception of gay men in the RPW communities reveals an inconsistency in their understanding of gender. The fact that

gay men are considered non-threatening to women contradicts the Red Pill interpretation of evolutionary psychology, which emphasizes the desire to procreate as a key aspect of masculinity. The acceptance of gay men shows that while RPW members promote essentialist ideologies, more contemporary principles of equality—which are inspired by feminism and which many clearly espouse—make it impossible for them to completely adhere to essentialist ideologies.

The RPW communities advise women to avoid having too many sexual partners, without specifying an acceptable number. They also warn women that men may not pursue them if they have never had sex, as some men are said to view virginity (outside of religious reasons) as a lack of experience. This view is exemplified by a man's response to a Red Pill Wife who regrets not waiting until marriage to have sex:

IlyaNovikoff: You don't need to put yourself down. Your husband loves you as you are, and you say that you have only had sex with one other man? That's practically virginal by today's standards. (RPWives, comments)

IlyaNovikoff assures the original poster that virginity is not significant in contemporary societies, while also highlighting her small number of sexual partners. Meanwhile, among Femcels, virginity is often seen as a reminder of their social exclusion, as traumalice explains:

I don't think any adult virgin, man or woman, would admit to it. It's a sign that nobody wanted you and that you are a loser. It's something that you should hide from people. (Femcels, original post)

Femcels and the RPW communities' attitudes towards virginity seem to depart from traditional and religious values, which encouraged women to remain virgins until marriage. For Femcels, virginity is a marker of social isolation, while the RPW communities consider it a lack of

experience that could hinder a woman's ability to attract a partner. The other groups, apart from Femcels and the RPW communities, did not discuss women's virginity during my data collection. Men are not expected to remain virgins either, as it is seen as a sign of poor social skills. This is exemplified by a comment from Iwillnotbegoverned:

I am from the U.S., and in my area, the only virgins in their mid-twenties either come from strict religious families or have first-generation immigrant parents. They usually stay virgins until marriage. But the remaining ones are absolute weirdos that no one would want to date. (Femcels, comments)

Iwillnotbegoverned's comment emphasizes the importance of culture and religion in her consideration of virginity. Her comment also shows the pressure on men and women to conform to certain expectations regarding their sexual behavior, particularly around the idea that being a virgin past a certain age is seen as undesirable.

Both Femcels and the RPW communities scrutinize women's sexuality. There is a tension between men's alleged uncontrollable sexuality, adapted to the contemporary world of casual sex, and women's need to prove their value by restraining access to their sexuality, while not appearing too prudish. Sexuality, for members of the RPW groups, becomes a question of risk assessment. cockatoo's comment is an example of how women's sexuality is described in terms of risk:

Sex is risky, especially casual sex. You can catch an STD, or get a UTI. And babies! No birth control is 100% effective. It doesn't matter if you are pro-life or pro-choice. You have no idea how you will react once you get pregnant and those hormones kick in.

Respect your future self by not putting her in that situation. (RPWomen, original post)

The RPW communities do not take a firm stance on casual sex, but they do express opinions

about women's sexual behaviors, often focusing on the number of sexual partners. By framing the decision to engage in casual sex as a personal choice, the RPW communities place the responsibility on women to consider the risks and consequences of their actions. While abortion was not a common topic in this sample, cockatoo's comment also points to the existence of a more complex position on abortion within RPW groups. Her point was not met by any pushback from her fellow members, suggesting an implicit agreement with an undefined stance on abortion. Given the conservative ideologies that characterize these groups, it is surprising to see that these women do not seem strictly opposed to abortion, just as they are not strictly opposed to premarital sex.

Femcels approach sexuality differently than the RPW communities. Although they occasionally discuss men's alleged uncontrollable sexual desires, they do so in terms of violence. A few comments, such as Kilo's, go as far as to claim that men have a natural proclivity for rape and pedophilia:

No one wants to be raped. The problem is that men fetishize rape, even of little boys.

They only care if a boy gets raped if the woman is ugly or fat. If the rapist is a hot woman, they say the boy is lucky, and if he didn't enjoy it, he's gay. Let's not forget that men love to make stepmother and son porn. (Femcels, comments)

None of the Femcels in the sample expressed a desire to pursue romantic relationships with men. For some Femcels, the topics of sexuality and romance are associated with feelings of anguish and disgust towards their own bodies, such as in the following exchange:

Idkwhynot: I have these phases where I avoid anything sexual or romantic. I don't masturbate during those periods because I feel extremely disgusting. I also avoid anything that has to do with love or romance, like romcoms. I don't even daydream about

having a boyfriend anymore.

traumalice: I have the same thing. Wanting anything, as a Femcel, is torture. I shut down sometimes too and all that is left is exhaustion and rage. I don't even want to feel being inside my own body, it's like an animal that is attached to me. I think psychology would call this disassociation, but there's a logic to it for Femcels. (Femcels, original post and comments)

Femcels often express a feeling of being denied the right to live a normal life because of their appearance and social discrimination. They are less concerned than RPW members about being perceived as too promiscuous or prudish, and are more concerned with surviving in a world where they are harassed, bullied, or ignored.

The idea that men are naturally sexually deviant is highly contested among Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers, who prioritize discussions related to men's issues. They often object to the idea in comments such as the following:

Honey Badger Host: Women are generally allowed to touch people [...] more than men.

Go to any restaurant, watch the waitresses and waiters and you'll see that the waiters avoid touching the customers, [...] they avoid touching the kids of the customers in particular. [...] Just ask any man who's tried to go into massage therapy, a career as a dental hygienist, or as a nurse. [...] The people receiving the service will always say that they prefer a woman to be doing that job than a man. [...] In our society, [...] we're going to [...] ignore the fact that men can't engage in the same level of casual touching as women. Maybe that's why men are a little touch starved overall. (HBB, podcasts)

Carter Foley: A lot of men have quit their teaching jobs, especially if they are heterosexual and white. One of my friends, a very kind man, is a preschool teacher. He

told me that he constantly feels like the parents are suspicious of him when they see him interact with their kids. (MOS, comments)

Both comments mention the impact of gender stereotypes on men's lives. For Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers, the stereotype of the hypersexual man is harmful to men's professional images and reduces their career opportunities. These stereotypes grow out of gender essentialism, yet both the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons align themselves with certain essentialist beliefs while selectively rejecting others. This creates an ambiguous relationship with gender essentialism, as they embrace some of its conclusions while disavowing others.

Both the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons communities discuss women's sexuality to a lesser extent compared to the other groups. However, both groups claim that women are naturally promiscuous, unlike RPW members and Femcels. This shows how biological determinism can be used selectively by each group to reach contradicting conclusions. The Honey Badgers argue that women's promiscuity, previously controlled by traditional societies, was unleashed by the second wave of feminism, such as in the following excerpt:

Honey Badger Host: The assumption is, of course, that men are interested in a more short-term [relationship], but in my experience that's really overstated. Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems like there's a lot of men [who] want to get married more than women. [...] Women right now appear to be less interested in commitment when they're young compared to men. [...] If you think about what happened during the second wave movement [...] that basically led right to what they're calling the sexual liberation movement. [...] They were big on women not getting married, women delaying childbirth and starting families because they wanted to essentially try to construct a reality where men were not necessary, except as tax slaves or something. (HBB, podcast)

The Honey Badgers view women's sexual liberation as a threat to men's role in society, although it is unclear how this perceived threat actually materializes. Nevertheless, the Honey Badgers, like the RPW communities, view sexual promiscuity negatively, and as a threat to the idea of the traditional family model.

Mothers of Sons addressed the topic of sexuality the least among the communities in this sample. The only instance when they discussed the topic was in response to an article on how consent is taught in sexual education programs. The members of Mothers of Sons take issue with the "yes means yes" conception of consent, as they fear it will give too much power to women to falsely accuse their male sexual partners of rape or assault, as illustrated by the following comments:

Ania Campbell: Everyone is responsible for their actions. It is unacceptable that girls are excused for anything and allowed to blame men. How are male politicians allowed to throw other men under the bus? Does this not affect them and their families?

Kaleb Francis: I am amazed that this double standard persists. I don't know if these politicians really believe in bad men and innocent women, or if this a political move to get more votes. (MOS, comments)

Unlike the other communities, Mothers of Sons are less concerned with men's uncontrollable sexuality and more wary of legal protective measures for women, thought to take advantage of a legal system biased against men.

Discourses about sexuality vary between communities, but there is a general consensus that men and women's sexuality is naturally heterosexual and monogamous. The following section continues the exploration of the implication of deterministic understandings of gender, by focusing on how these foundational beliefs shape their ideas about masculinities and

femininities.

Summary

The key findings discussed in this section are represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of the Sample's Understandings of Gender

	Men's Nature	Women's Nature	Transphobia	Sexualities
Femcels	Men are naturally dominant and violent	No mention	Unclear – Mentions of trans community as a cult	Heteronormative
RPW	Men are naturally dominant and risk-takers	Women are naturally submissive	Ambiguous—Trans women should be excluded from feminism	Heteronormative and some openness to queer sexualities, framed in heteronormative terms
Honey Badgers	Men are the backbone of society	Women are naturally promiscuous and manipulative	Trans people used opportunistically as rhetorical device	Heteronormative

Mothers of Sons	Men are the backbone of society	Women are naturally promiscuous and manipulative	Trans people as butt of joke	Heteronormative
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Femininities and Masculinities

In this section, I present the themes related to representations and practices of femininity and masculinity. I first focus on the communities' discourses about gendered social roles, and then on community members' descriptions of their performances of gender.

Social Roles

Providers and Nurturers. In these communities, biological differences, particularly in the reproductive system, are often thought to determine men and women's social roles. The Honey Badgers often discuss this topic, as shown in the following excerpt:

Men are constructing comfort for women. In previous eras, that comfort might be a place where they're not getting raped and murdered by raiders in extremely tumultuous times, or that comfort might be a situation where they live in an apartment that is in a safer city [...]. Every single step of the way, throughout human history, [...] men are constructing a more comfortable and safe and secure existence for women. [...] I think [protecting women] is also instinctual because human females are pretty helpless during certain parts of the reproductive cycle so if they didn't have the means to actually manipulate men to do shit for them, [...] the whole human race would be completely out of luck, so I mean forgive them a little bit you know. (HBB, podcast)

This excerpt reveals a heteronormative and essentialist view of gender roles in which women's perceived need for protection and care is attributed to their biology. It implies that women are biologically predisposed to rely on men for their safety and comfort, and that men are biologically inclined to protect women. Moreover, this excerpt is another example of how the Honey Badgers draw on evolutionary psychology to argue that women are naturally manipulative.

The RPW communities often echo the idea that men and women play separate roles in society, as illustrated by WitchyHours's response to a Red Pill Woman's question about whether it is wrong to want to be taken care of by her husband:

It's not bad, but you need to take care of him too. Us women are naturally nurturers. Femininity is all about taking care of our male partners. Be careful not to make your husband shoulder the burden of masculine and feminine roles, he might become burnt out. (RPWomen, comments)

WitchyHour's comment reflects the RPW communities' emphasis on distinct but complementary roles for men and women, normalized by essentialist discourses about gender. This excerpt stresses the importance of fulfilling one's natural role, while also maintaining balance in a relationship. In these discussions, men are often assigned the roles of protector and provider due to their perceived physical strength. Women, thought to be naturally nurturing, are assigned the role of caregiver to their partner and children.

The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons hold a more extreme view of gender roles than the RPW communities, occasionally claiming that men do not only play an essential role within the family unit, but that they are the fundamental basis upon which society is built. This claim is illustrated in the following excerpt from the Honey Badgers:

When you look at everything that our civilization builds, I would say that women were a part of that insofar as they raised the men who later went on to do this. [...] We have homes, we have plumbing, we have electricity, we have [...] sewage, we have airplanes, [...] we have spaceships... We got all of this because of men working together. [...] It's not like we're saying men are better, we're different. That's the point. (HBB, podcast)

This excerpt is one among many examples in which the Honey Badgers attribute modern civilization's achievements to men, while reducing women's role to raising the men who made it possible. They justify this claim by referring to biological differences between men and women, rather than addressing the social and cultural norms that have historically led to gender-based division of labor. This discourse is also illustrated by the following comment left on the Mothers of Sons page on an article about the increasing number of female elected officials in Australia and their potential impact on politics and policies:

Chris Friedman: Men vote with their wallets because they are the suppliers of money in society. Women vote for whoever can give them the most money. The government is making men obsolete. (MOS, comments)

Chris Friedman's comment portrays men as the sole providers in society, denying women the agency to support themselves financially. He also implies that the government, by providing financial assistance to women, is endangering men's roles in society, a common argument made by members of Mothers of Sons. Feminism is seen as a threat to men's social roles because it promotes women's independence and challenges traditional gender roles.

In the RPW communities, the caretaking role is generally thought to come naturally to women, such as explained by Pantone:

Unlike men, women do not get a sense of satisfaction from working full time in an office.

Women get satisfaction from caring for their loved ones and building relationships.

Motherhood, despite its stressful parts, made me feel so much more feminine, especially during breastfeeding or cuddling with my children. If you don't have a family, look for other women in your community, relatives, or even plants or pets. When men come home from a long day at work, they are looking for a soft place to land. (RPWomen, comments)

Caregiving, according to Pantone, is essential for women's sense of fulfillment, regardless of whether they have a partner or children. Motherhood is a significant aspect of femininity in all the communities analyzed, except for Femcels, where the possibility of motherhood was not mentioned during my data collection. Despite motherhood being portrayed as an essential part of womanhood, all of the groups in this study, apart from Femcels, hold negative attitudes towards single mothers. The following excerpts from the Honey Badgers, Mothers of Sons, and Red Pill Women reflect this sentiment:

Honey Badger Host: In the wild, human children without fathers die. [...] In fact, children who are born without fathers have cognitive and social deficits that make it difficult for them to gain a functioning healthy social system for them to raise their children. Now, that's not to say that every child of a single mother is totally screwed, but they are going to be dealing with disabilities because of their mother's choices (HBB, podcast).

Francisco Mullen: The biggest issue faced by young men today is being brought up without a father, or with one that was too weak to stop what was going on. There are too many physically and verbally abusive mothers that ruined young men and killed their confidence, turning them into angry and introverted men. (MOS, comments)

Throwawaypls: I think that an absent father does have an impact on your relationships

with men. Without a strong father figure, you have not been taught to discern good from bad men. And you are at risk of being preyed on by a bad man who will take advantage of that (RPWomen, comments)

These excerpts all suggest that having a father figure is crucial for children's healthy development. Single mothers are thought to reduce a child's chances of success, which is especially important for Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers who believe that women are responsible for raising the men who uphold society. Single mothers are often chastised for bringing up children in a fatherless environment, while single fathers are frequently praised for their sacrifice, particularly in the Mothers of Sons community, such as in the following exchange:

Rex Kaufman: I have been a single father for 6 years, and I wouldn't trade my life for the world. I have a low income, but I would never consider that a fatherhood penalty!

Rueben Phelps: What makes you rich is your loving family. (MOS, comments)

Despite the absence of a feminine role model, single fathers are viewed positively as devoted family men, and are not accused of raising ill-adjusted children. While single mothers are often criticized for failing to fulfill their traditional role as the primary caregiver in a two-parent family, single fathers are perceived as stepping up to fill the maternal void left by a woman who shirked her natural responsibilities.

Breadwinners and Homemakers. The RPW communities promote an ideal relationship in which men are breadwinners and women are stay-at-home mothers or wives. This relationship arrangement, however, is not followed by all RPW members. Some RPW members acknowledge that living on a single income is not always feasible. For example, Frequent147 comments on some of these challenges:

Submission to your husband does not always mean that you shouldn't have a job, and to be honest, it probably isn't possible in today's economy. Submission is about having a strong relationship and being traditional. (RPWomen, comments)

Members of RPW communities are frequently unable to achieve the traditional model of relationships that they desire due to financial constraints. However, as illustrated by the previous comment, RPW members continue to view their relationships through the lens of the Red Pill philosophy. According to Frequent147, as long as women submit men, both partners can work and earn an income, while being in a relationship that is consistent with Red Pill beliefs.

A common reservation that RPW members have about being a full-time housewife and leaving paid employment is the risk of relying on their partner for income, as explained by Peacefulgal:

Are any of you afraid that your partners will kick you out? My mom was a homemaker and my father kicked her out a few times. I also wanted to try being a homemaker but my ex fiancé threatened to kick me out if I didn't obey him (I left him). So, are housewives legally protected in your country, or are you just trusting your partner? (RPWives, comments)

Peacefulgal's comment highlights housewives' economic vulnerability and also points to the need for legal protection, which contradicts the supposed natural character of the housewife/breadwinner relationship. She does not question the role of housewife itself, but she is concerned about its potential precarity. In response to these economic risks, RPW members often advise each other to maintain a separate savings account from their partner's. They also advise each other to pursue higher education and better careers, in order to secure financial independence in the event that they never meet the right man. soybrat's comment is an example

of such advice:

I think moving in together before marriage is a good way to know if you'd be a good team. But make sure you have a backup plan. Have some savings for an emergency. I know you trust him, but he's also still young. Just make sure you are on the same page.

(RPWomen, original post)

RPW members advocate for the Red Pill ideal of single earner couples, in which men are breadwinners and women are homemakers. They do, however, warn each other about the economic vulnerability that comes with quitting their jobs and relying on their partner's income. This concern reveals yet another gap between Red Pill ideals and reality. The fact that women must take so many precautions to pursue these social roles begs the questions of how natural and sustainable the role of homemaker really is, and how viable gender essentialism actually is when put into practice.

When discussing dual-earner relationships, RPW members adjust their idea of the fair division of labor. Instead of relying on natural gender roles like caregiving and protecting to determine the allocation of tasks, the division of labor is quantified. Women in dual-earner relationships are encouraged to divide all paid and unpaid labor equally with their partner. This is illustrated by magicalrealm's response to a Red Pill Woman asking if it is fair that her boyfriend expects her to contribute to his mortgage payments, without being named on the house title:

You are not married and you do all the house chores. You said your boyfriend does not help you with any housework, but expects you to help out with bills. He wants to buy a house in his name but expects her to help pay it off, while she also does all of the chores. I would think long and hard about this. It sounds like your boyfriend is taking advantage of your caretaking instinct and this will only build resentment between you two.

(RPWomen, comments)

Magicalrealm's comment shows some of the limits of RPW members' adherence to the submission imperative. She points out the imbalance in the original poster's relationship, framing it in terms of fairness. While her partner expects her to fulfill her role as a homemaker, he also expects her to contribute to the mortgage and bills, and is thus not stepping up to his role as the provider for the household. Magicalrealm's comment is an example of how the division of domestic and paid labor is calculated and negotiated in relationships where women also earn money. The goal is to create a more equitable distribution of labor, which does not place an undue burden on women to perform both homemaker duties and paid employment responsibilities. These instances reveal how RPW members adapt Red Pill ideas to fit their personal circumstances and also show that RPW members are reluctant to relinquish some of the aspects of gender equality gained through feminism.

Femcels are not included in the section discussing social roles in heterosexual relationships because they do not often discuss intimate relationship experiences. However, Femcels, like the other communities in this sample, do discuss the practices of performing gender.

Practices of Masculinity and Femininity

The communities in this sample have specific expectations for masculinity and femininity. They value complementary forms of masculinity and femininity that align with their conception of heterosexual relationships and the associated gender roles. The RPW communities, and to a lesser extent the Femcels, discuss the practices and challenges of performing femininity. Although masculine expectations, preferred qualities, and men's social roles are occasionally discussed, they are not subjected to scrutiny as intense as are femininities.

Previous sections have shown that masculinity in these communities is associated with the notion that men are natural leaders who are more interested in sex than romantic relationships. For Femcels in particular, men's natural tendency to dominate women can lead to domestic violence and sexual assault. For the other communities, masculinity is associated with thriving in the role of breadwinner, but struggling with caretaking responsibilities.

The RPW communities extensively discuss the forms of masculinity they value. They often talk about the characteristics of a "high value man" (often abbreviated to HVM), with whom they hope to have a long-term relationship. Caffeinated19 describes some of the traits of a high value man:

A high value man will be resourceful, will be able to protect his partner, have emotional maturity, but also have a few feminine traits like the ability to show affection.

One easy way to spot a high value man is his status and resourcefulness. It can take time before you uncover his other traits. But be careful, not all men who have resources are HVM. A lot of successful men are cheaters, so you need to vet them carefully. It might also be beneficial to start with a younger partner, who may have less resources but more ambition, as well as the energy and discipline needed to get more resources. (RPWomen, original post)

High value men are defined by their ability to provide for their families. Their masculinity is defined by their occupation, social status, and wealth. For RPW members, not all men possess these qualities. Caffeinated19's comment also shows how other qualities, such as showing affection, are not defined as part of the high value man's masculinity, but rather as a trait borrowed from femininities. The notion of high value is used as a conceptual mechanism to reconcile the idea of so-called natural masculinity, and the reality that many men do not willingly

play the role of protector and provider of the family. The notion of value also provides RPW members with a rationale to evaluate suitable partners, without compromising their biologically deterministic views on gender roles.

In contrast, the qualities associated with femininity in the RPW communities are grace, charm, and patience, as well as frugality, modesty, and submission. These qualities are highlighted in the following excerpts:

alone: I think of some women as true ladies. When I think about their most defining qualities, they are compassionate, generous, and understanding. Those qualities go a long way in making a woman beautiful and valuable. (RPWomen, comments)

Lettuce: To become a better homemaker, learn how to become more frugal. I recommend looking into growing your own food, or learning a skill that you may be able to monetize once you master it (sewing, knitting, interior decorating...). Basically, a good homemaker creates a warm and welcoming home and cultivates a gentle, caring, and warm soul.

(RPWomen, comments)

High value women possess qualities that are consistent with traditional gender roles that expect women to be caregivers, although Lettuce hints at the possibility of monetizing these traditional skills to supplement the husband's income. Women are naturally inclined to fill these roles, according to RPW members, but discussions such as the one above reveal that not all women excel in these roles, and that the role of homemaker requires learned skills, thus calling into question their naturalness, once again. Additionally, unlike high value men, who are primarily defined by their social status, high value women are defined by personality traits and homemaking skills.

Cultivating Femininity. The RPW and Femcel communities often discuss strategies and

tools to appear more feminine. They also discuss potential threats to their femininity, such as aging, or, as the RPW members put it, “hitting the wall.” This fear is based on the belief that, according to the Red Pill philosophy, men are naturally drawn to younger women in their reproductive prime.

Members of the RPW communities actively engage in strategies to combat the effects of aging and maintain their desirability. They share advice about physical fitness, mental health, skincare, and fashion, as illustrated by House_Brat_87’s comment:

If you are at a healthy BMI in your twenties, take care of your skin (sunscreen, ladies!!!), eat healthy, drink in moderation, have a fitness routine, dress well, have a good hairstyle, use light makeup, natural nail polish and have a few accessories, you’ll probably be more desirable than the average woman. Of course, there are some things like your bone structure that you can’t change, so there are some unlucky people who will still be unattractive, even after doing all this. (RPWomen, comments)

House_Brat_78’s comment illustrates the pressure to constantly work on the self, found in RPW communities.

The concept of the wall is occasionally used to rationalize relationships between older men and younger women. However, opinions within the RPW communities vary when it comes to the acceptability of significant age gaps in romantic relationships. Some women, such as RoseGarden, warn others about pursuing relationships with large age gaps:

I think relationships with large age gaps tend to have more issues, especially when the woman is younger (twenties, early thirties). My mom and mother-in-law are both married to men over ten years older than them. They look like they had their youth and energy drained from them. Older men provide security but you’re often sacrificing so much as a

young woman: family, adventure, generational understanding, sexual attraction, being in a house centered on life instead of illness and death... (RPWomen, comments)

RoseGarden's comment emphasizes the challenges that younger women may face when partnering with older men. Her comment also raises the issue of women's perpetual responsibility as caretakers within the family, compared to men who can retire from their roles as providers. Her comment reveals one of the tensions in the idea of natural age gaps, which is the idea of men's natural roles as providers and protectors, compared to the reality of ageing. Her comment shows that some RPW members are aware of the limits to their roles as caretakers, as well as of the labor required to play this unpaid role.

There is a significant tension between the belief that men are naturally attracted to younger women and the RPW members' quest to find a lifelong partner with whom they will grow old. To contend with this tension, RPW members claim that men in committed long-term relationships develop "love goggles" that prevent them from losing attraction for their aging partner, as explained by Quietly:

Men will biologically respond to your appearance; they can't control it. Your appearance is a representation of your fertility and tells men whether they should invest in you. They can develop some 'love goggles' with time, but it is important to maintain your appearance to keep his primal instincts focused on you. There will always be women who are younger and more attractive, so you have to keep his love goggles on for him to stay with you. (RPWomen, comments)

The concept of love goggles bridges the gap between men's supposed natural instincts to pursue women with higher reproductive value and the long-term monogamous relationships valued in the RPW communities. However, as Quietly's comment suggests, love goggles do not relieve

women from the pressure to maintain an attractive appearance once they enter a relationship. Women are still expected to uphold their attractiveness.

Age and its implications for women's desirability are also discussed in the Femcel community, albeit to a lesser extent than in the RPW communities. Femcels often portray youth as their only redeeming quality, such as expressed by traumalice and vague:

traumalice: I fantasize about being beautiful as much as I fantasize about being young. I am in my thirties, so I hit the wall a long time ago. I am so ashamed of it. I haaate ageing as an ugly person, and I don't have the money to take care of my physical problems just so I can feel a bit better about myself. I HATE ageing as an ugly woman because even with surgery, I will only ever be a consolation prize to a man (if even that). (Femcels, original post)

vague: I think the most important thing is youth. Aunties were so cruel to me growing up, and I know that they were never jealous of my Femcel ugliness, but I think my youth reminded them that there are other young women who could steal their husbands, so they projected their jealousy onto me. They knew that if they bullied a pretty girl they would come off as the bitter bitches that they are. (Femcels, original post)

Traumalice's comment shows how her sense of hopelessness as a Femcel is influenced by the belief that women's desirability declines with age. Meanwhile, vague's remark reflects a common sentiment among Femcels that aging only exacerbates the harassment and ostracization they face as ugly women. It is worth noting that even though Femcels are generally resigned to a fate as perpetually single women, Femcels such as the ones cited above still express bitterness towards the prospect of losing their youth.

The concept of femininity within these communities revolves around an ideal esthetic

that values an effortless and natural appearance. While enhancements like makeup, hair dye, or nail polish are accepted, they are expected to appear natural. RPW members stress the importance of dressing attractively for their partners (or future partners). Red Pill femininity also places a significant emphasis on health, or rather, the appearance of health. The emphasis on healthy lifestyles is frequently accompanied by negative views on fatness, such as exemplified by Lelo_587's comment:

Women who let themselves go and gain weight in relationships do not realize how great of a disservice they are doing themselves. To keep your partner attracted and interested in you, you should keep your physique in check, dress well, and keep a positive and feminine demeanor. If you keep adding value, he is not going to leave. (RPWomen, comments)

RPW members associate fatness with the loss of control over one's appearance, which is seen as an unattractive trait in these communities. Lelo_587's comment also points to the limitations of love goggles, as women are expected to "keep adding value" if they do not want to lose their male partner. Femcels are generally more accepting of others' fatness and speak out against weight loss advice, which they see as a superficial solution to a deeper issue, as explained by Magenta3:

I hate it when normies give advice to Femcels, it's so clear that they have never dated an ugly woman or even befriended one. I'm sick of seeing Reddit comments telling ugly women that all they need is to get in shape. Women aren't stupid. We try everything before coming to the internet for help. Let's face it, telling a woman to lose weight is just a sneaky way to shift the blame from their own lookist ideas onto suffering women. (Femcels, original post)

Femcels shift the responsibility of fatness away from the individual and onto other factors such as genetics or health issues. However, fatness remains an undesirable trait for Femcels, who often talk about the disgust they feel towards their own fat bodies, as described by Inmyworld:

Wherever I go, I am always the ugliest person there, and by far. Even when I look at my individual body parts, they are all the ugliest: ugliest face, smallest boobs, fattest legs... I feel so disgusted with myself (Femcels, original post)

The expectation of maintaining a fit and thin physique is prevalent in these communities. Fitness is often associated with ideals of health, cleanliness, and natural beauty. These communities uphold a narrow ideal of natural beauty while simultaneously sharing the constant efforts and discipline necessary to attain beauty that is only effortless in appearance.

Plastic surgery is discussed in all communities, apart from the Honey Badgers, as a tool to enhance one's femininity. The communities' attitudes towards plastic or cosmetic surgery varied. For Femcels, it is a common topic of discussion with many expressing their desire for specific procedures or sharing their personal experiences, such as seen in Ella123's comment:

I want to get several plastic surgeries, but I still think that they won't be enough. I will still be below average. I want a nose job, under eye fillers, liposuction, a brow lift, and braces. I inherited some money from a family member and I am planning to spend most of it on plastic surgery, even though I will still be unattractive. (Femcels, original post)

Ella123's comment echoes a common belief in the Femcel community that plastic surgery might not be a guaranteed solution for improving their appearance to a socially acceptable level.

Despite its limitations, plastic surgery is often framed as a necessary means for Femcels to be accepted by society and is discussed as a necessity rather than a luxury. The Femcels' widespread acceptance of plastic surgery contrasts with the occasional disparaging references to it by

Mothers of Sons, as seen in the following exchange:

Sonia Sullivan: Gen X were known as the hardest generation to advertise to because they rejected consumerism. Now it's all about appearances, botox and anything injectable, and mob mentalities. They think they're revolutionary but they just have herd mentality. Boomers and Gen X should have never indulged their children, we are paying the price now.

Leia O'Connor: The botox and makeup industries target young girls so aggressively. Since when is natural beauty not enough? (MOS, comments)

Mothers of Sons portray Botox as a symbol of society's superficial concerns and disregard for genuine issues, such as the challenges faced by men. They associate plastic surgery with liberal ideology, which they blame for men's declining social status. Here, too, natural beauty is upheld as the ideal feminine esthetic.

RPW members are more open to the idea of plastic surgery, occasionally expressing a desire for procedures that help preserve a youthful appearance. However, they tend to discuss less invasive surgeries and cosmetic interventions than Femcels. This can be seen in the following comments:

Dawn: I personally wouldn't say no to a teeeeeny bit of botox to help me ease into the wall. (RPWomen, comments)

Doitall641: I make a huge effort to optimize my appearance and to be social. I want to be feminine and classy. I get my hair, lashes and nails done. I take care of my skin, and I eat healthy. I even got a tiny bit of botox to erase some frown lines. I am very happy with my appearance. (RPWomen, original post)

RPW members view cosmetic surgery as a tool to optimize their appearance and delay the signs

of aging. Unlike Femcels, who often see plastic surgery as a life-altering procedure, RPW members discuss it as one option among many in their pursuit of maintaining a youthful and feminine appearance. Plastic surgery, for RPW members, is put in the service of enhancing nature, rather than transforming it.

Cultivating femininity is an ongoing project for RPW members and Femcels. The two communities discuss various strategies to appear more feminine and how to deal with threats to their femininity. Age is a shared concern in both communities, as women are thought to become less attractive as they grow older. While both communities uphold natural beauty ideals, they also discuss beauty practices and technologies, including plastic surgery, that deviate from the notion of natural femininity. The upcoming section delves into instances in which Femcels and RPW members describe their struggles with embodying and performing femininity. The other communities in this sample are more focused on political issues and men's rights, and do not discuss practices of femininity as extensively so they are less represented in sections about femininity.

Failing Femininity. The RPW and Femcel communities engage in ongoing discussions about femininity and the labor and maintenance required for its performance. Some women in these communities express feeling bored by the labor required to perform femininity. They seek advice on how to navigate these challenges, as illustrated by valley01's comment:

I am new to the red pill life. I am starting to learn to embrace my femininity more, but I do find getting dolled up to be tedious. What motivates you to dress well? I always tell myself I will dress up tomorrow, but I never follow through. Do you have any advice on how to make dressing up less tiring? (RPWomen, original post)

Valley01's comment highlights a tension between her desired performance of femininity, and the

energy required to consistently perform femininity according to Red Pill ideals. In response to valley01's question, Red Pill women suggest wearing dresses as a clothing option that minimizes decision-making about outfits. Another commenter shares her experience of eliminating non-feminine items from her wardrobe, such as jeans, so that she has no choice but to dress femininely. While this advice simplifies the process of expressing femininity through clothing, the underlying expectation to dress up is not challenged.

Some women report feeling judged by others when they attempt to perform Red Pill femininity correctly, as illustrated by CatTree:

For the past year, I have started putting effort in my appearance to look more feminine, wearing dresses, cardigans, and pearls. I also do my makeup and hair to look put together. But whenever I go out, I get a lot of negative stares or comments from strangers. I usually brush it off, but it hurts. The people who I know have made comments about how I dress, asking if I am going to church, or assume I am a conservative and homophobe. How can I still make friends without changing my appearance? (RPWomen, original post)

In response to CatTree's concerns, some commenters suggest that she may be suffering from anxiety, causing her to imagine negative stares from others. Others wonder if she is overdressed for certain occasions. It is interesting that Red Pill Women question CatTree's perception of being judged, when community members often police and judge other women's performances of femininity. This is evident in Masked_Mischief's response to a Red Pill Woman who expresses concerns about not having found a husband by the age of 30, despite devoting a decade to applying Red Pill principles:

At your age, and given that women in the west are currently of low quality, you can still recover from this situation. Don't lose hope. (RPWomen, comments)

By comparing Red Pill femininity to other women's performances of femininity, such as in the previous excerpt, Red Pill Women seek validation that their interpretation of femininity aligns with the ideal path towards securing higher quality partners and attaining a superior quality of life. This comparison serves to reinforce their belief in the efficacy of the Red Pill approach to femininity.

Femcels also describe feeling judged or monitored by others. They often express encountering stares and being singled out because of their ugly appearance, as illustrated by pony's comment:

Being ugly affects every aspect of our lives, including our own minds, our identities, and how we are permitted to act in the world. We have to conform to expectations far more than others. Coloring inside the lines drawn for us by others can drive anyone mad. But add every depressing or traumatic event that happens to us because of the way we look, and you have a recipe for the complete destruction of the self. (Femcel, original post)

Femcels often discuss the experience of feeling monitored and harshly judged for their expressions of femininity, particularly when they deviate from society's limited expectations for unattractive women. According to Femcels, ugly women are expected to strike a delicate balance between appearing well-groomed and dressed up, while also not visibly putting too much effort into their appearance, which can expose them to mockery. Because of the constant scrutiny and pressure to conform, it is challenging for Femcels to authentically embody the femininity they desire, as illustrated by idkwhynot and Oh_no:

idkwhynot: One of the reasons I feel so alienated from other women is feminism. For them, it's empowering to reject femininity because it's always been imposed on them. For ugly women, we are often regarded as some sort of pervert if we do classically feminine

things, such as wear nail polish or dresses. It's the same with the decision to have children: I feel like I've never been given the space to consider motherhood because other people already decided that I was too ugly to find a man with whom to have children. I feel like ugly women are not given the grace of agency. (Femcels, original post)

Oh_no: The hardest part about being an ugly woman is being denied my femininity. I don't meet the physical qualifications to be a woman, so I've been made to feel unworthy and masculine. I have never felt like an actual woman. I am treated like a genderless blob. I am not seen as a sexual being. Even though I have the same desires as every other woman, men have decided that I don't qualify so I don't get to participate in anything feminine. All I get is pain, humiliation, and unworthiness. (Femcels, comments)

Idkwhynot and Oh_no's comments shed light on the importance of external recognition in the performance of femininity. For Femcels, the recognition of their gender performance by others plays a crucial role in their experiences of femininity. Femininity is constituted through others, and the denial or sanctions experienced by Femcels negate their gender performance.

Idkwhynot's comment also underscores a contradiction in the Femcel rejection of feminism. While feminism is recognized as a movement that has empowered women to defy beauty standards, Femcels criticize the movement for overlooking their suffering as ugly women. Many Femcels claim that they cannot forgo the very beauty standards rejected by feminists because the experience of rejection for not fitting into these beauty standards is at the center of Femcels' distress.

Some Femcels no longer engage in certain beauty practices, considering them futile, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

where: I hate putting any effort into my looks because it just brings attention to how ugly

I am. I get weird looks when I put in the smallest effort like a bit of makeup or doing my hair. I hate that I can't do anything with my deformed face. Doing hair and makeup just makes me feel like a man in drag. In some teen movies the ugly main character gets a glow up by straightening her hair and removing her glasses and fixing her acne. I did all that and I still look ugly.

adventurelauren: I know what you mean. I stopped putting on makeup, wearing feminine clothes and doing my hair. I stopped it all. I feel freer and I hope you do too if you decide to give up those useless tools. It's still hard to exist in public as an ugly woman, but it's even worse to have all that stuff on your face and feel trapped. (Femcels, original post & comments)

Femcels who choose to forgo some aspects of beauty labor call into question the assumption that women should constantly work on their appearance. The two women cited above put their own comfort ahead of meeting impossible social expectations. However, choosing to abstain from some aspects of beauty labor does not prevent women, such as adventurelauren, from feeling judged by others because of their appearance.

Submission and Domination. RPW representations of gender are heavily tied to romantic relationship dynamics. In particular, femininity is usually associated with submission to one's male partner. The RPW communities often describe relationship dynamics by using the metaphor of a captain and his first mate. Women serve as first mates to their male partners, the captains of the family unit. Throwawaypls elaborates on this metaphor:

As first mates, we make sure the ship runs smoothly and we are a buffer for our Captains to make the hard decisions, instead of being caught up with the day-to-day issues.

Deferring to your captain for the important decisions is healthy, it makes him feel

masculine, and lets you relax into your soft femininity. But you should only defer to a man you trust entirely. Know your values and let him earn your trust. (RPWomen, comments)

Throwawaypls reiterates the idea that not all men are suited for a Red Pill relationship, and that women can choose to whom they wish to submit. While it is the captain's role to provide and protect, the first mate supports the captain by taking on the household labor. This metaphor is often used in the RPW communities to provide guidance for how women can apply feminine ideals in their romantic relationships, and what they should expect from high value partners. alien_eater289's comment illustrates how the captain-first mate relationship plays out in practice:

My husband is going through a stressful time at work, so I have been treading carefully and trying not to increase his stress. I have been trying not to complain about anything, but when he shows that he wants to talk, I drop everything and make time for him. I take care of the small things and pick up after him. I make his favorite dinners without asking for his input, so that I am not worsening his decision fatigue. I am trying to make sure that I am not bringing him any additional problems (RPWomen, original post)

Alien_eater289's actions are typical of how RPW members support their partners in their first mate roles. In addition to taking on household responsibilities, RPW members also provide emotional support to their male partners, who are often hesitant to share their feelings with anyone other than their partners. However, when RPW members find themselves in need of comfort, they are advised to seek solace through their hobbies or female friends rather than burdening their male partners.

The "shut the fuck up" rule, commonly shortened to STFU in the RPW communities, is the most common relationship rule observed among the RPW communities. This rule advises

women to remain silent and not voice their disagreements with their male partners, particularly when the disagreement is deemed inconsequential. Women are encouraged to trust their captain's instincts, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

where_are_mice: I made a delicious breakfast today, and my boyfriend was quiet as usual. But today, instead of nagging him about not saying thank you, I just STFU. He then offered to make us some tea to drink outside in the sunshine together. I'm glad I STFU because this was a wonderful moment with my boyfriend. (RPWomen, original post)

mayhem: RPW has been amazing for my relationship! My boyfriend (27) and I (25) have been together for almost a year, but his job has asked him to move across the country. I told him that I would not upend my life unless I wasn't at least engaged to him. He said he understood, and any conversations we've had are about "OUR move", but we haven't talked about getting engaged since. Should I keep following the STFU method and trust my Captain to do the right thing? (RPWomen, original post)

The STFU rule is meant to remind women not to undermine their partner's leadership by questioning their decisions. However, this rule can lead to women suppressing their own feelings and concerns, as seen in the previous excerpts, where the commenters chose not to express their feelings of being unappreciated or their anxieties about the future. In both cases, the responses encouraged them to keep following the STFU rule to maintain happy relationships.

During the data collection period, a few comments in the RPW communities disagreed with the premise of women's natural submission to men, such as seen in meeptow's comment:

I (21) am freaking out. I feel like everything I read here is based on the assumption that women need men to exist, but that men don't need women, and that you need to be a very

specific type of woman to appeal to a man. If you manage to get a man, your job is to make him happy and keep his house nice and respect, submit, and obey him. You shouldn't speak up if he's wrong, you should STFU otherwise he'll feel emasculated. His existence as a man is the center of your world, and his. Your life is not about you but about giving to others whose lives are about themselves.

Reading this makes me feel like I am barely a human. I don't want to have to negate myself out of existence by submitting to someone. I feel worthless. I've been crying about this all day. I know this is not a normal reaction and that I need help. (RPWomen, original post)

Meeptow raises concerns about the place of women in the Red Pill philosophy, and how it reduces her sense of agency and personhood. meeptow's comment highlights some of the implications of the RPW communities' conception of masculinities and femininities. The belief in gender complementarity, where women are expected to be submissive to men, reduces women's roles to subservience within their households. Meeptow's objection shows that she does not personally identify with the desire to be submissive to men, calling into question the Red Pill philosophy's claim that women are naturally submissive.

Any reservations about Red Pill principles are always met with comments explaining that women are not required to follow every single principle discussed on the subreddit. This is illustrated by Banana_bread's response to the previous post:

Red Pill Women are looking for men who will lead their households (Captains). But that does not mean we are their doormats. It means choosing a smart, loving, devoted man who makes good choices. We still get to provide input and say no. But we take comfort in being cared for and letting our partners take on some of the load in life. This does not

always mean being a homemaker or having children. We just approach our relationships in a different way. The Red pill is a toolbox, take what you like, and leave what makes you uncomfortable. We aren't forcing you to do anything. (RPWomen, comments)

By telling women that they do not need to apply every Red Pill principle, the Red Pill philosophy is presented as a set of choices for women, allowing them to selectively apply its principles for better relationships with men. RPW members often refer to this as a “toolbox” approach, where they can choose which principles resonate with them. They emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all Red Pill interpretation. This highlights how RPW members adapt the philosophy to align with their individual circumstances, which leaves some ambiguity regarding what exactly constitutes a Red Pill lifestyle.

Manipulative Women and Toxic Masculinity. While the RPW groups explore romantic relationships through the lens of submission and domination, Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers take a different approach by emphasizing the negative aspects of relationships, particularly the harm they allegedly cause to men. Both groups tend to minimize domestic violence against women, while highlighting domestic violence against men. The Honey Badgers often discuss violence as an issue that affects all genders, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

It's funny, as a men's rights activist [...] I've always advocated for seeing domestic violence as a non-gendered issue, it's a social ill. Men engage in abuse, women engage in abuse, men and women can be victims of it. [...] [Feminists have] built on a foundation of conservatives who regard protecting and providing women to be far more important than even fairness when it comes to men and the justice system. (HBB, podcast)

In this excerpt, the host disavows the conservative tendency to view women as needing to be protected, showing that the Honey Badgers are not straightforwardly aligned with conservative

views, but rather that their position is more complex. Both the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons perceive the allocations of more resources to female victims of domestic violence as evidence of unfair treatment of men in abusive relationships. Mothers of Sons frequently advocate for increased media and social recognition of men's experiences as victims, contrasting it with what they perceive as an inflated emphasis on female victims. Some commenters in Mothers of Sons share their personal accounts of abuse, where they were often accused of being the aggressor, such as in the following excerpt:

Bic.ejg90: The biggest obstacle we face for equality in sentencing is getting female sexual assault perpetrators charged with a crime. I was in a toxic relationship where she burned me with her cigarettes, followed me home and smashed my window. When I called the cops on her, I was taken away in handcuffs. When I tried to file a report of her trying to rape me, I got laughed at. When she ran after me with a knife, the police asked me what I had done. I called the cops a dozen times on her, and I am the one with the arrest record, even though she was always the initiator. She knew she was untouchable, so she was encouraged to act even more violently every time she got away with it. (HBB, comments)

The justice system is often portrayed as biased against men and perpetuating their victimization in violent relationships. In such comments, Mothers of Sons members and the Honey Badgers point to stereotypes of men as inherently dominant and violent, which they believe lead to the mistreatment and dismissal of male victims by law enforcement. These groups, however, failed to recognize that their own representations of gender, based on evolutionary psychology, also perpetuate these stereotypes.

Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers often discuss divorces, portraying them as a

means for women to manipulate men. They claim that divorces benefit women more, because they gain financial advantages and custody of their children. The topic of child support and custody disputes is particularly favored by Mothers of Sons, as illustrated by Larry Bright's comment:

I have not been allowed to speak to my son in 12 years, but I was falsely accused of violence by my ex-wife. She got an attorney and won full custody even though I was the one who went to court. I've had to go through so much in my life, I was sexually abused as a child before being kicked out at 10 and homeless until I was old enough to sign a lease. No one helped me, I got lost in the system. I have no one. All I had was my son. This has destroyed me. Nothing matters anymore. (MOS, comments)

Commenters in the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities occasionally share their own stories of unfair outcomes in child custody battles. These narratives highlight the perception that relationships with women pose a risk to men, as they potentially face the loss of their children and financial resources in the event of a divorce. This portrayal of intimate relationships stands in stark contrast to the representations of gender found in the RPW communities, which center around long-term monogamous relationships.

The Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities frequently caution their members about women who are perceived as inherently manipulative and disloyal. This sentiment is illustrated in the following excerpts:

Ania Campbell: I do not believe most women because they manipulate the truth and lie hide things they are guilty of. You can't be both a strong independent woman and a fragile victim. (MOS, comments)

Honey Badger Host: A lot of times people don't hold women accountable, and then it

becomes harder for us to tell which women are virtuous [...] and which women are just being thots, and they're crying victim afterwards because they have this legal and political leverage to do so. (HBB, podcast)

In the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities, femininity is associated with deceit and manipulation. The two communities often claim that feminism has promoted a discourse of women as victims, which they argue has obscured women's manipulative nature from the eyes of society. Female victimization is thought to be a way that feminism is dissimulating the extent of men's victimization in Western societies, while protecting women from criticism.

The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons differ in their approach to masculinity compared to the RPW Femcel communities. The Badgers and Mothers of Sons' discussions are primarily focused on highlighting injustices faced by men, rather than offering advice on how to perform masculinity. However, it is worth noting that both communities do engage in discussions about toxic masculinity, a form of masculinity that is seen as being under attack by feminists.

The concept of toxic masculinity is never clearly defined in the communities and its meaning varies depending on the interests of the group mobilizing it. In the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities, toxic masculinity typically refers to the masculinity in power that is often criticized by feminists. Toxic masculinity, according to the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons, unfairly labels men as inherently evil or bad. In contrast, feminism is thought to ignore women's harmful actions, on account of their gender. This alleged double standard is illustrated by Conrad James's comment, on an article stating that Putin's invasion of Ukraine is a demonstration of toxic masculinity:

So, Catherine the great's conquests was toxic masculinity? Cleopatra and the Egyptian civil war? Thatcher and the Falkland war? They must have had some crazy testosterone

build up for those acts. (MOS, comments)

Conrad James questions the idea that acts of war are solely the result of toxic masculinity. For Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers, the concept of toxic masculinity represents the damage done by feminism to all men's reputations. These communities claim that feminism is responsible for vilifying men's masculinity practices, and they often discuss threats to masculinity, such as humiliation, slander, and the failure to recognize men's roles in society.

This section focused on representations and practices of gender in the communities in this sample. The following section explores the decontextualization of individuals from systems of power. It explores how community members approach the topic of power dynamics without addressing systemic issues.

Summary

The key findings discussed in this section are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of the Sample's Depictions of Masculinity and Femininity

	Gendered Social Roles	Femininity	Masculinity
Femcels	Men as providers, women as nurturers	Ongoing project, constrained by others	Naturally dominant and violent
RPW	Men as breadwinners, women as homemakers	Ongoing project, value tied to youth	High value masculinity based on social status and financial resources

Honey	Men as providers,	Manipulative and	Under attack
Badgers	women as nurturers	threatening	
Mothers	Men as providers,	Manipulative and	Under attack
of Sons	women as nurturers	threatening	

Decontextualized Individuals

By “decontextualized,” I refer to the process by which social phenomena are severed from their historical context and become framed in individualistic terms. The communities in this sample generally do not engage in in-depth discussions about the systemic issues that contribute to gender inequality, instead attributing gender differences to natural tendencies. However, when discussing more personal experiences, RPW and Femcel community members often use an almost-intersectional discourse, such as contextualizing their gender experiences by mentioning social class and race, without connecting these experiences to broader systemic trends. When community members reflect on their own material circumstances, they do so in individualistic terms and often express frustrations with gender ideals.

This section delves into the impact of four key systems of power and circumstances that profoundly influence gender practices and representations in the communities in this sample: social class and education, upbringing, religion and cultural contexts, and race. These systems were gleaned from the data and constitute the most discussed themes relating to systems of power and oppression. While these power systems and contexts enable a deeper understanding of how intersectional power dynamics shape gendered experiences and perspectives in the communities in this sample, the concept of intersectionality is not raised by the community members themselves.

Social Class and Education

While members of the communities in this sample do not explicitly reveal their social class, discussions about topics such as household finance management and financial hardship can provide hints about their socio-economic status. Applecrunch33's comment is an example of such a reference:

I have just realized I am pregnant. I don't know if I want to keep the baby yet, but my boyfriend (26) wants me (22) to live in a trailer with him. We're not married and I'm not sure how this is going to work. He promised that he would provide for me and the baby and I can be a stay at home mom, but right now I earn more than he does. How do I get rid of the feeling that he needs to prove himself to me? I am trying to let him lead, but I'm second guessing any of his decisions about this baby. He didn't even know the baby would need a doctor! (RPWomen, original post)

Applecrunch33's comment emphasizes the influence of financial considerations on the decision to follow traditional gender roles. She cites her boyfriend's smaller salary and limited access to healthcare as obstacles to conforming to the desired gender arrangement. Notably, her focus is not on criticizing the systemic issues that contribute to low wages and unaffordable healthcare. Instead, she demonstrates an ongoing preoccupation with value hierarchies, questioning her boyfriend's ability to be the leader of the household. However, by framing her issues in individualistic terms, she introduces the possibility for an individualistic solution, which is much easier to implement compared to systemic change.

In the RPW communities, wealth is often viewed as a determining factor for success in life. For certain women, poverty presents a challenging obstacle to overcome and becomes a focal point in their self-improvement journey to attract an ideal lifelong partner. RPW members

regularly discuss the financial burden of pursuing higher education. Some women express reservations about pursuing higher education as it conflicts with their aspiration to become stay-at-home wives and mothers. They are concerned about accumulating debt that will be unable to repay if they choose to leave the workforce, as explained by throwawayyyhayyy:

I have always wanted to be a stay-at-home mother. But I got distracted somewhere along the line and decided to pursue medical school, heavily encouraged by my immigrant parents. I studied hard to get into med school, but when I started I realized how long it would take. I have been there for two years now, and I feel like I have wasted my college years because I was focused on studying instead of meeting someone. I also can't leave medical school because I already have 200k in debt, and the only way I'll ever be able to pay it off is if I graduate. I feel like I messed up my life. (RPWomen, original post)

throwawayyyhayyy's comment sheds light on the challenges involved in navigating contemporary expectations for women's education and careers, and her own desires to pursue a traditional relationship. However, within the RPW communities, university degrees are also seen as a backup plan in case women fail to find suitable partners. This is illustrated by the advice given by Ok_Obligation_6110 about pursuing graduate studies:

Going to graduate school will not stop you from finding a HVM. I even think that you'll increase your chances there. I am a stay-at-home wife, but I don't think my husband would ever had been interested in me if I wasn't highly educated like him. I don't know very many stay-at-home wives who weren't high earners with degrees before leaving the workforce. (RPWomen, comments)

Ok_Obligation_6110's comment is noteworthy because she is one of three women in my sample who has actually achieved the ideal Red Pill relationship and knows other women who have

done the same. Her observation suggests that men who want—and can afford—stay-at-home wives expect their partners to be highly educated and from a similar social class. This expectation may pose a challenge for RPW members from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The idea that affluent men prefer to date women within their own social class is further supported by Jewels’s response to a woman who is having difficulty finding a partner, and is asking whether she is dating outside of her league:

Are you going after guys with a comparable social background? We don’t talk enough on here about how high-status men almost always choose women of a similar class background. The women aren’t always the most attractive, but they are part of the ‘right’ crowd. If you are not part of their world, it can be very hard to date them. (RPWomen, comments)

Jewels draws attention to the implicit social hierarchy and exclusivity that can exist in certain dating dynamics. This hierarchy creates a challenge for less privileged women to achieve the Red Pill relationship ideal, yet RPW communities continue to encourage all of their members to pursue it.

Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers do not value university education as highly as the RPW communities, especially for men. These communities portray universities as feminist and liberal institutions where men are at risk of being falsely accused of sexual assault or harassment, in line with the right wing’s broader tendency to reject universities and academia as sources of authoritative knowledge and beneficial social value. This viewpoint is illustrated by Bailey Swanson’s response to an article about a university student who was accused of sexual misconduct, but found not guilty:

How many more stories do we need to hear before we start making men accountable for

even attending university? University rules are arbitrary and enforced by ideologues. If you attend university, you shouldn't be shocked if this happens to you. It's dangerous.

(MOS, comments)

Bailey Swanson's comment places responsibility on men for willingly attending institutions where they may face false accusations of sexual harassment. In the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities, universities are portrayed as hostile environments to men. These communities also frequently address the issue of boys in schools, expressing concern about the considerable number of boys who fall behind academically, such as expressed by a Honey Badger host:

We are looking at an article on how teen girls feel more pressure [...] to be perfect despite the fact that statistically teen boys or boys in general are more likely to drop out, they are more likely to be given remedial classes, they are more likely to be punished or given detention or suspensions, they're more likely to end up in juvenile detention.

(HBB, podcast)

Schools, like universities, are seen as hostile environments for boys and men. Discussions about attending university differ significantly between the RPW communities, where it is seen as a pathway to social status for women, and the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities, where it is regarded as a potentially dangerous experience for men.

While RPW members recognize the importance of social class and education in achieving their desired relationship arrangement, not all communities regard higher education as a status symbol. The RPW discourse reflects the challenges of navigating financial constraints and the expenses associated with pursuing a Red Pill lifestyle, highlighting the intersection of social class and gender even if it is not formulated as such. In contrast, Mothers of Sons and the Honey

Badger portray universities as tainted by feminism and consider them unsafe environments for men, deviating from the view of education as a marker of social class. Femcels were notably absent from this theme, although they regularly discuss their limited financial resources when talking about desired plastic surgeries.

Upbringing

Community members often emphasize the importance of their upbringing and family dynamics in shaping their gendered representations and expectations. A common theme among RPW members is that they were not raised in traditionally minded families, as illustrated by DaisyONeill's comment:

I was brought up in a feminist household. My mom always told me that marriage only benefits men and that made it hard for me to accept the red pill. But it helped me identify where my parent's marriage went wrong. I was unhappily married before looking into red pill theory things and how to be more feminine. I have been dating a new guy and it's going great. It has been so freeing to lean into my softness and femininity, to learn the joys of being kind, and to assume the best of people (RPWomen, original post)

DaisyONeill and other RPW members often attribute the failure of past relationships to a feminist perspective. Embracing the principles of a Red Pill lifestyle is often seen as a positive shift that improves their relationships with men. Many RPW members share stories about growing up in dysfunctional households, attributing the dysfunction to their parents' feminist or liberal perspectives. In these women's narratives, the Red Pill theory presents a set of guidelines that promise happy and stable relationships, offering a hopeful alternative to their childhood experiences.

Some RPW members share personal accounts of growing up with abusive parents.

Notably, four different commenters specifically mention having a narcissistic mother and alcoholic father, emphasizing the challenging family dynamics they faced, as seen in ginko's comment:

I am visiting my parents soon. My father is an alcoholic, and my mother is a narcissist, and their marriage and parenting have been unbelievably unhealthy and depressing. The more I learn about the red pill, the more I wonder if my parents' marriage would have been happier if they had known to implement red pill principles. (RPWomen, original post)

ginko's comment reflects a common sentiment among RPW members, who occasionally speculate whether adopting Red Pill principles would have improved their parents' relationship. This reflection suggests that the Red Pill philosophy is seen as an alternative framework for healthier relationships. The philosophy provides clear guidelines for navigating romantic relationships, eliminating uncertainty, and promising a sense of stability. The desire to reclaim control over romantic relationships may draw some women to the Red Pill philosophy, particularly those who witnessed their parents' chaotic and violent behaviors during their childhoods.

Femcels also commonly discuss their experiences of dysfunctional relationships with their families. However, their difficulties stem less from differing opinions about romantic relationships and more from a lack of understanding and empathy from their parents, as explained by pony:

It took a long time for my mother to understand that I was being bullied at school, and she would threaten to drag me there on the days I didn't want to go. Parents need to have empathy for their ugly kids instead of telling them to tough it out. I hate parents who

demean their ugly children. If they were really so disappointed by their appearance, why don't they offer them money for plastic surgery? When they insult their kids, they are insulting their own genetics! (Femcels, comments)

Femcels frequently describe the feeling misunderstood by their families, which contributes to their overall sense of isolation and the lack of understanding surrounding their struggles as ugly women. They also occasionally blame their issues on their parents who decided to have a child, despite having a disability, or being unattractive. Femcels occasionally push this eugenicist discourse further. Some Femcels debate whether people with disabilities or physical deformities should be allowed to have children, such as in Pinked's comment about a video showing a mother and her baby with similar facial deformities:

She should not have been allowed to have a child. She should have been sterilized. Most of us are already messed up enough, we don't need more genetic diseases like hers in the human race. Plus, who was the guy who put that baby in her? (Femcels, comments)

Pinked's comment dehumanizes disabled individuals, endorsing the eugenicist notion that humanity should be improved through the careful selection of the appropriate genetics. While not all Femcels share Pinked's opinion, many Femcels express resentment towards their own parents for having ugly or disabled children, as it has forced them to endure a life of bullying and loneliness.

The Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities also address the issue of abusive family dynamics, but from the standpoint of perceived injustices against men in the legal system. These communities often accuse women of getting away with abusing their children, such as illustrated by the following excerpts:

Cassia Young: [Link to a bibliography compiling academic articles about female

perpetrators of domestic violence against male partners]

Here are over 300 studies that prove that women are just as abusive as men to their partners. The proof has always been there, but society wants to ignore it. (MOS, comments)

Honey Badger Host: We are going to be talking about Evan Rachel Wood and Marilyn Manson. So, Evan Rachel Wood has a docu-series coming out [...] where she centers her experience of being victimized by Marilyn Manson who allegedly groomed her and abused her for years. [The documentary also discusses] the need to expand the statute of limitations for survivors of abuse, specifically women survivors, let's be real. (HBB, podcast)

Cassia Young claims that society minimizes the evidence of female-perpetrated abuse, while the Honey Badgers imply that legal protections for abuse victims primarily prioritize female victims. Both communities often accuse social institutions such as the legal system and academia of ignoring male victims and female perpetrators of domestic violence.

All communities frequently discuss dysfunctional family dynamics, although the root causes of dysfunction vary between them. In the RPW communities, dysfunction is attributed to a lack of a structured relationship system such as the Red Pill. It is worth noting here that when RPW members describe having an emotionally or physically abusive partner, they are advised to leave the relationship. In the Femcel community, dysfunction is believed to stem from a lack of understanding and empathy towards Femcels and their experiences as ugly women. In the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities, women are frequently accused of being the source of dysfunction and abuse, and the members often claim women's abusive behaviors are overlooked by the media and society.

Religion and Cultural Contexts

Religion and cultural contexts play a significant role in the discussions about gender and gender relations within these communities. Most mentions of religion occur in the RPW communities. These discussions often revolve around whether certain advice applies to individuals based on their religious or cultural backgrounds. Members frequently refer to religion as an explanation for someone's actions, or as a reason someone might choose to deviate from the community's general advice, as illustrated by Hey_lacie's comment:

We are a Christian couple who is waiting until marriage. We don't live together either. I wanted to know if you had any advice on what I can do to prepare for marriage and children? (RPWomen, original post)

Hey_lacie's comment reflects the influence of religion on her approach to sexuality. By mentioning her Christian faith, Hey_lacie establishes her cultural background and values, indicating that her approach to gender roles and relationships is influenced by both religious beliefs and Red Pill ideology. Within the RPW communities, where abstinence is a matter of personal preference, Hey_lacie announces her religion as a quick way to establish her cultural background and general values.

The most frequently mentioned religions within these discussions are Christianity and Islam. RPW members who openly state their religious affiliation, such as FantasyWorld in the following comment, tend to exhibit a stronger adherence to Red Pill norms compared to those who do not disclose their religious beliefs:

My husband is an imam who practices the five daily prayers and follows Allah's teachings. I was an atheist when we met, but he helped me believe in something bigger than myself and he continues to guide me in strengthening my relationship with God. I

admire his values and his trust in Allah in all of his decisions. I trust him to lead and make decisions for our family (RPWomen, comments).

FantasyWorld's comment shows how religion can provide a solid foundation for some RPW members to embrace Red Pill principles. The compatibility of the Red Pill lifestyle with some religious traditions is highlighted, particularly in relation to the concept of husbands as being the leaders of the household.

When discussing gender relations, Femcels and RPW members will sometimes mention cultural contexts. Occasionally, women explain how their location or cultural background influences their experiences, and why advice based on Western social norms may not apply to them. In the following example, a Red Pill Woman responds to a poster who mentions she is Arabic, complaining about her toxic family situation:

All_done: I am also Arab, and I'm so sorry. A lot of Arab families are very toxic and it can carry on for generations. I noticed this pattern in my family and I live in an Arab country. (RPWomen, comments)

All_done's comment acknowledges the original poster's experiences with toxic family dynamics while acknowledging her cultural context. By identifying herself as an Arab woman, All_done highlights the diversity within the community and challenges the expectation that the community is only made up of Western women. She also challenges the assumption that families are always safe spaces for women.

RPW members and Femcels occasionally discuss the topic of arranged marriage. In these discussions, women often disclose their geographic or cultural context to explain that advice based on the Western context does not apply to them. For example, when a Red Pill Woman expresses concern about her husband leaving for a study abroad program without her,

Sweetie123 responds:

You should specify that you are in an arranged marriage. In Western cultures, it would be very odd for a husband to leave his wife like that. But I don't know enough about your culture. You should ask women in arranged marriages who will understand your situation better. (RPWomen, comments)

Sweetie123 redirects the original poster's question to those with experience with arranged marriages, indicating that it is not the norm among RPW members. Respondents from the same region or cultural background are likely to offer advice in such cases, while others refrain from commenting.

Femcels also occasionally discuss arranged marriages, but their focus is usually on sharing their experiences as unattractive women within cultures that practice arranged marriages. These discussions shed light on the unique challenges that Femcels face in such cultural context, as illustrated by the following examples:

daydreamingaway: I come from a culture with arranged marriage, and it's so superficial because only the beautiful women get married. The only man that ever wanted me was my first cousin who just wanted a way to get into the UK. I know that arranged marriages are bad, but it's humiliating to never even have been given the opportunity to participate at all. (Femcels, original post)

Adventurelauren: It is so much worse to be a Femcel in a culture of arranged marriages. In those cultures, you get rejected for the smallest thing, so being an ugly woman I know that I don't have a chance. And then when the unattractive women are still not married by their thirties, they get shunned socially. I know that this is my fate. At least in other cultures, the pressure to be married is not as bad. (Femcels. Original post)

Daydreamingaway and Adventurelauren's comments shed light on the challenges faced by unattractive women in cultures that practice arranged marriages. daydreamingaway describes the humiliation of being excluded from a cultural practice, while Adventurelauren highlights the consequences of being unmarried in her thirties. These perspectives differ from those found in RPW communities, where arranged marriages are viewed from a different angle. The focus of RPW discussions tends to be on the selection of a suitable partner and how to achieve a harmonious relationship, rather than the social consequences faced by women who are not deemed attractive enough to be considered as a potential candidate.

Religion, cultural contexts, and marital norms occasionally reveal the heterogeneity of the RPW and Femcel groups. In contrast, the Honey Badgers primarily center their discussions on North America, while the Mothers of Sons predominantly focus on Australia. Their narratives primarily revolve around Anglo-Western contexts, with limited discussions about local variations or cultural specificities. However, it is important to note that we cannot assume that the memberships of the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons memberships are any less heterogenous than the RPW and Femcel communities. The distinction lies in the regional emphasis of their discussion, rather than the diversity—or lack thereof—of their memberships.

Race and Racism

Some women mention their race or ethnicity as an additional factor that shapes their gendered experiences when discussing cultural contexts. These references, however, primarily serve to highlight the gap between their situation and the perceived norm, which is often associated with whiteness.

RPW members rarely disclose their ethnicity, preferring instead to refer to their cultural specificity in terms of geographical location or religion. Among the communities in this sample,

Femcels were the most open about disclosing their ethnicity. Several posts in the sample specifically discuss Black women's experiences of being unattractive, such as in the following examples:

Duckling: It hurts so much to get rejected by black men. I expect it from other races, but it makes me feel so hopeless when I realize that even black men do not prefer black women. It hurts when it comes from your own race. (Femcels, original post)

bitterbeast: I think that features like dark skin and curly hair are not objectively ugly, they're just considered that way because of racism. I may have some internalized racism, but I honestly can't see big wide noses as beautiful. (Femcels, comments)

Duckling speaks to the racism experienced by Black women, highlighting the emotional pain that comes from being rejected by Black men, while bitterbeast reflects on the impact of racism on beauty standards and her own internalized perceptions of beauty. Black Femcels, as in the previous examples mention their race to convey the distinctiveness of their experience with ugliness among Femcels, and to show how lookism gets entangled with other hierarchies like race. Another of Duckling's comment is a standout example of the differences between white and Black beauty norms:

I was never able to relate to the pressure to be thin for Asian and white women. I am black and it's the opposite, you get treated much worse in the community as a thin black woman than a fat white woman. Black men tolerate thinness on non-black women because they worship them. I have done everything I can to gain weight, but I can't. I've had a former supervisor ask me if I had an eating disorder. (Femcels, comments)

Duckling's post shows how some of the common traits that Femcels associate with ugliness, such as fatness, are not universally recognized as unattractive. Duckling also touches on the

double standard in how Black men may perceive thinness on non-Black women, shedding light on the intersections of body weight, race, and beauty standards.

Race is seldom a topic of discussion among the Honey Badger community. However, when it is brought up, the focus tends to be on experiences of men's suffering, such as in the following excerpt, where the Badgers focus on Black men's experiences of suffering:

While it's true that Black women are the most educated of any demographic in the United States, so they're earning probably the second most—white women are still on top as far as that goes. [...] So if Black women are among the most, if not the most, educated, but Black men are the most disenfranchised, then I have to ask how did that happen? (HBB, podcast)

Regardless of the erroneous nature of the statistics cited here, true to their habits, the Honey Badgers redirect the focus of structural inequality away from women, and towards disenfranchised men, displacing the blame onto women, rather than on systemic racial issues. This pattern is observed by one of the commenters:

Haaris S: I love how the Honey Badgers deliberately take race out of the discussion and care about men first and foremost, not white or Black. (HBB, podcast)

This comment, intended as praise, draws attention to the Honey Badgers' limited incorporation of intersectional analysis when discussing men's issues. By primarily focusing on men's issues, they overlook the influence of other social identities, such as race, which also affect men's experiences. A more inclusive consideration of various social hierarchies would not only lead to a more comprehensive analysis of men's suffering but also reveal the nuanced disparities in the experiences of different groups of men. This nuanced approach might disrupt the narrative that all men suffer equally and could potentially highlight that certain groups, especially white men,

may not face the same degree of challenges as others. Embracing intersectionality would demand a more nuanced power analysis within the male demographic, challenging the oversimplified notion that women are solely responsible for all of men's problems. Haaris S also points to a possible reason for the absence of race-related discussions, which could be that the Honey Badgers might aim to maintain a unified front to foster strength in numbers. However, this approach occludes structural dynamics of power and oppression tied to race and other social identities.

The Honey Badgers occasionally bring up critical race theory to criticize it, a tendency in step with their general mistrust of academia. In these instances, they tend to highlight the perceived lack of focus on men's suffering, arguing that it is yet another tool used by feminists to blame white men for the suffering of others. The following excerpt exemplifies their perspective on critical race theory:

The entire woke dogma on whiteness [...] begins by establishing power through the privilege dialogue in gender and race studies. The concept of privilege is intended to amplify the perception of the target group's power while diminishing the appearance of its vulnerability. Meanwhile, when current or historical events are examined within these academic areas, information is cherry-picked and then falsely framed to amplify and generalize the target group's appearance of malice while dimming that of the victim demographics.

This contribution from critical race theory uses the term 'whiteness' where feminist dogma uses 'patriarchy' which effectively means men. They've even given it a vague nebulous personality instead of a definition, just as feminist dogma does with patriarchy. [...] It appears that the concept of whiteness is going to suffer from the same willful

ambivalence among its proponents. (HBB podcast)

This excerpt is noteworthy because it combines the Honey Badgers' critique of critical race theory and feminism. The host claims that these ideologies are based on vague notions of discrimination and privilege, calling their academic credibility into question. Although the Honey Badgers reject the theoretical perspectives and claim that these theories are potential threats to the social status of men in Western societies, this quotation demonstrates at least a functional fluency with these theoretical perspectives, which sets the Honey Badgers apart from the other communities of the sample.

The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons were the only two communities in the sample to mention Indigenous people, although they both did so only once. The Honey Badgers brought up Indigenous people during a discussion about the criticisms that liberals level against others:

Every Western country [that liberals] want to attack, there's a different kind of progressive cocktail that they mix for each one based on that country's demographics, based on its history, whatever it needs to be. So, in Canada, for example, they base it on their number one victim group aside from women, that's a universal everywhere, is the Indigenous population. [...] It's built into [Canadian's] political practices, whenever they give a speech [...] there's this land acknowledgment. It's basically 'I'm sorry for being white and living in this country, Indigenous people'. There's this constant apologizing that gets weaponized against Canadian people. (HBB, podcast)

In this discussion, the Honey Badgers bring up Indigenous people as a group that is considered more oppressed than others. The Badgers' discussion of Indigenous people resembles their discourse about women, accusing them of weaponizing their status as an oppressed group to inflict suffering on others, particularly men. These claims not only undermine the credibility of

victims and minority groups, but also dismiss the systemic oppression that has placed these groups in vulnerable positions.

Mothers of Sons also mentioned Indigenous people on one occasion, in a discussion about how women are more violent than society recognizes:

Mothers of Sons: We rarely hear about women who are violent towards their children, and especially not when the mothers are indigenous, even though they are the most dangerous group of mothers in Australia. (MOS. Original post)

The mention of Indigenous people in this comment is limited to illustrating social failures towards men rather than engaging with the complexities of Indigenous issues. It is worth noting that discussions in the Mothers of Sons community are remarkably devoid of questions of race, and that no other communities in the sample mention Indigenous people.

The following section discusses the interpretive lenses employed by the communities in this sample, offering alternative perspectives to the feminist framework that they collectively reject.

Summary

The key findings discussed in this section are represented in Table 4.

Table 4*Summary of the Sample's Depictions of Intersecting Systems of Power*

	Social Class	Upbringing	Cultural Contexts	Race
Femcels	Financial resources occasionally mentioned as limitation for plastic surgeries	Experiences of growing up ugly misunderstood by family	Occasional mention of culture with arranged marriage	Occasional mention of being Black
RPW	Social mobility aspirations, poverty seen as a personal challenge	Progressive but dysfunctional families, or conservative upbringing	Religion, or occasional mention of non-Western geographic location, or culture with arranged marriage	Rare disclosure of race or ethnicity
Honey	Higher education	Unfair legal	Exclusive focus on	Occasional
Badgers	as dangerous for men	protection for female victims of abuse	North America	mention of race as a rhetorical tool to criticize feminists
Mothers of Sons	Higher education as dangerous for men	Mothers who perpetuate abuse go undetected and	Exclusive focus on Australia	No self-disclosure of race or ethnicity, rare mentions of

Seeking Representation

In the “about” sections of their respective platforms, each community of the sample states that they are antifeminist. In their discourses, the community members often accuse feminism of distorting reality. The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons criticize feminism the most, claiming that the movement falsely portrays women as being oppressed by men. Members in each community of the sample express that they do not feel that their issues are represented in the feminist movement, and adopt different interpretive frameworks to make sense of their own lived experiences. The upcoming section delves into these interpretive lenses, examining each community separately.

Red Pill Women and Wives

In the few posts and comments where RPW members describe how they discovered the communities, their paths generally fall into two categories. In most of these instances, women describe being raised in feminist or non-conservative families, often characterized by dysfunctionality. This is exemplified in the following excerpt:

pinkkimono: I realized that my mom, who was raised very liberal and feminist by my grandmother, is envious of my relationship because my boyfriend does so much for me. My dad was mostly absent during my childhood, and he has some untreated mental issues that led to abuse, but my mom is part of the problem because she does not let my dad lead the way my boyfriend does. (RPWomen, comments)

Pinkkimono’s comment showcases how some women in the RPW community attribute their parents’ dysfunctional relationship to feminist beliefs and the resistance to traditional gender

roles. It highlights the perceived conflict between feminist values and the idea of a harmonious relationship with clearly defined gender roles.

The second type of path that leads women to RPW communities involves those who come from conservative or religious backgrounds and want to perpetuate the traditional dynamics with which they were raised, as Strawberrydanish explains:

I never really felt like I fit in with the girls I knew. I come from an Eastern European background, and I was raised in a disciplined environment where having a nuclear family is the ideal. I was never interested in partying and I often felt like an outcast growing up because I enjoy housewife tasks like cooking or cleaning. It was nice to find a community that accepted and praised those sides of me. The red pill community made me feel like I didn't have to force myself to be someone I'm not. (RPWomen, comments)

Strawberrydanish contrasts her experiences of rejection and isolation with non-Red Pill women, and the acceptance she found within the Red Pill Women community. This exemplifies how the RPW communities serve as a supportive space for women with similar perspectives and beliefs. Whether women come from feminist or non-conservative backgrounds, or have diverse cultural upbringings, the Red Pill communities provide a sense of belonging and support for these women, unified by their desire to follow a shared set of Red Pill principles.

Among the communities in this sample, the RPW communities are the least hostile towards feminism. Community members position the Red Pill as an alternative to the values and ideals advocated by liberals and feminists. Fitlady explains the difference between the Red Pill and feminism:

The red pill represents a decision to become aware of the truth about the male-female relationship dynamic, while the blue pill involves accepting the propaganda and

misinformation (mostly from feminism) that society has adopted.

The red pill and feminism are based on conflicting assumptions. For the red pill, men and women have inherent psychological and physiological traits, which translate into optimal ways to organize society, while for feminists, our social systems are a way for men to preserve their power. That's why our forum rules state "No Feminism". (RPWomen, comments)

Fitlady's skepticism towards feminism echoes the antifeminist discourses found in the other communities in this sample. She claims that the Red Pill reveals the truth about gender relations, while feminism only spreads propaganda. While they reject modern feminism, RPW members often acknowledge the importance of the first wave of feminism, as seen in throwawayagain's comment:

The first wave of feminism was about the right to choose. Modern feminism is more like a cult that dictates your opinions. (RPWomen, comments)

Although the RPW communities recognize the importance of ensuring women's fundamental rights, they often reject contemporary forms of feminism, while wishing to maintain the rights already gained by previous feminist movements. The rejection seems to suggest that they see feminism as no longer serving their own interests, which may, in turn, imply that they are member of a more privileged group of women.

To members of the RPW communities, the Red Pill serves as an alternative to feminism, offering a different framework for understanding gender dynamics. It promises an escape from dysfunctional relationship dynamics, or the continuation of conservative values learned as children. The Red Pill provides women with a set of guiding principles to navigate their lives, offering reassurance in an uncertain world. Yet, while the RPW communities describe themselves

as antifeminist, they are reluctant to relinquish the steps towards gender equality gained through historical feminist movements, which enable them to have fallback plans involving the pursuit of university education and successful careers.

Femcels

Femcels engage in fewer discussions about feminism than the RPW communities, and their forum does not have a specific rule against feminism. However, when feminism is mentioned, Femcels' main criticism is directed at its failure to address lookism as a form of discrimination. This perspective is illustrated by idkwhynot:

Beauty standards will always persist as long as lookism exists. TikTok “feminists” like to shame women for wanting to wear makeup or get plastic surgery, because they say it upholds the patriarchy. But the same thing always happens when I comment about how society treats ugly women so badly that some engage in these practices because it improves their quality of life. I get told that these women are upholding toxic beauty standards, until I say that I have a facial deformity, then they suddenly understand my argument. They just don't want normies to get plastic surgery because it would be a waste. They don't care about the “uglies”.

My main takeaway is that unless people are willing to address the challenges that come with ugliness (reduced job opportunities, not being believed when reporting sexual assault, daily rejection, and isolation...) then they can shut the fuck up. (Femcels, original post)

Femcels generally feel misunderstood by the feminist movement, which aims to shift the focus away from women's physical appearance as their defining characteristic. They also accuse some feminists of shaming women who aim to enhance their physical appearance, thus simultaneously

accusing feminists of focusing too much on beauty practices, while also claiming that they do not care enough about women's appearance. However, Femcels argue that their appearance has consistently been the primary factor in how they are perceived by others, leading them to feel disconnected from the feminist movement. For Femcels, lookism is an important part of their experience, because it provides an explanation for the mistreatment they face, as explained by bitterbeast:

Men will never care about lookism. Straight men who are able to truly care for women they are not attracted or related to are very rare. Capitalism is really what made us shift from millennia of traditional gender roles so that women can work too instead of being confined to the role of housewives. Women's sexuality isn't a big deal anymore either. But lookism and objectification? Those are here to stay. Just look at the horrific porn industry. (Femcels, original post)

Bitterbeast portrays lookism as an ongoing form of inequality experienced by women. Her comment provides an interesting contrast to RPW members' perspectives on feminism. In bitterbeast's comment, the role of housewife is limiting, and women's sexual liberation is viewed positively, opinions which are not shared by the RPW communities. This highlights the different priorities and perspectives between the communities. While Femcels do not discuss feminism at length unlike the other communities in the sample, their characterization of feminism as a homogenous movement that does not recognize or acknowledge community members' lived experiences is shared by all communities in the sample. Femcels, like the other groups, depict feminists as a homogenous enemy-other that is concerned with frivolous issues.

Feeling misunderstood and marginalized by their peers, being victims of harassment and bullying, and feeling like they are not represented by the feminist movement, Femcels seek

solace and understanding within their own community. Femcels tend to reject feminism, which they portray as a homogenous group that is unconcerned about appearance-based discrimination, yet overly concerned with women who attempt to enhance their appearance. In the Femcel community, Femcels find other women who share similar life experiences and challenges, and they connect with others who do not dismiss them.

Mothers of Sons

Both Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers focus on engaging their audiences with current news events. While they cover a wide range of topics, from celebrity news to electoral campaigns, Mothers of Sons tend to prominently feature cases of domestic violence against men. An example of this is seen in the following excerpt, which discusses the implementation of increased paid domestic violence leave in Australia:

Mothers of Sons: People are questioning whether male victims of domestic violence will have access to the new domestic violence leave. Even if the leave is gender-neutral, male victims will be hesitant to request it and may worry about potential negative consequences on their job. The Fair Work Commission stated that although men can be victims of family and domestic violence, women are disproportionately affected by it, and it is a gendered issue. The system seems to focus solely on women as victims.

Zack Bishop: If a woman requests this leave, she should be given it without hesitation. However, if a man requests the same leave, he may be subjected to questioning that would make the Spanish Inquisition seem like a walk in the parc. (MOS, original post & responses)

The page moderators and Zack Bishop engage in a discussion about the potential biases against men within support systems for domestic violence. The Mothers of Sons community portrays

male victims as a group that has been forgotten or neglected by government interventions, emphasizing the need for recognition and support for male victims of domestic violence, yet they fail to address that the misrepresentation of male victims comes from the judgment of their peers (“negative consequences on their jobs”), rather than from the government initiative itself. Additionally, while MOS members highlight the stigma encountered by certain men, they never address the fact that some men are stigmatized *by other men*, indicating a failure to acknowledge power imbalances within the male population.

A recurring narrative within the Mothers of Sons community is the perception that when straight white men are victims of abuse, their experiences are often overlooked or disregarded. This discourse often portrays women as exploiting the perceived lack of protection for male victims, allowing them to escape accountability for their abusive behavior. Mothers of Sons often claim that the legal system is biased against men, and tends to administer lenient punishments to women who are found guilty. This perspective is illustrated in the following excerpt about the different sentences handed to parents involved in a case of child neglect:

Mothers of Sons: This baby boy was terribly neglected, but the mother gets to walk free while the father has to spend two years in jail. The mother’s defense argued that she was the victim of emotional abuse by her husband. I bet we are going to hear that line a lot from now on. (MOS, original post)

Members of Mothers of Sons claim that women do not only receive more lenient punishments when found guilty, but they also benefit from making false accusations of sexual assault. This is thought to be so widespread that community members often refer to the unfair treatment of men in the justice system as the “domestic violence industry” (which they shorten to DV industry), as illustrated by the following comment on an article about the trial between actors Johnny Depp

and Amber Heard, where Depp accused Heard of falsely claiming that he was abusive:

Mary Ellen : I stand with Johnny. He is championing men and their rights. Men are so undervalued in our society – the DV industry is a classic example. There is plenty of funding for abusive women. I will never support the use of taxpayer money to support slap happy women and their lies. I wouldn't believe any of them. (MOS, comments)

The *Depp v. Heard* trial was seen as a rare representation of male victims of domestic violence in mainstream media. Both the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities expressed their support for Depp's case. Mary Ellen's comment suggests that society is deceived by abusive women, leading to the misallocation of funds intended for victims of domestic violence, a common narrative in the community. This issue is exacerbated by the widespread discourse in the community that most initiatives to protect victims of domestic violence are funded by the taxes paid by men, the taxpayers of society. This characterization of men as the main taxpayers appears to recognize that men earn more than women, therefore contributing more to taxes overall. Yet, the structural inequality that has caused this imbalance is not considered.

The term "DV industry" does not just refer to the alleged bias against men in the justice system. It also refers to the belief that this discrimination has become a profitable enterprise. Ben Stark breaks down how he believes the domestic violence industry operates:

How does the DV make money?

1. Laws are made that allow men to be accused with no evidence
2. Men are always presumed guilty... They say it is to protect women and children from violence
3. Women are not prosecuted for false accusations
4. When men are accused, they have to defend themselves in court to preserve their

reputations, allowing the law institutions to get rich, but also the women who use this as an excuse to create a new environment for their children and ask for 95% custody.

(MOS, comments)

Ben Stark's comment suggests that falsely accusing men of assault benefits both women and the legal system, creating a world in which men are at risk within their personal relationships and are not supported by the legal system.

Mothers of Sons mainly criticize feminism for allegedly failing to support male victims. Their most common complaint is that feminism does not appear to fight for equality for all, but instead seeks to prioritize women, as shown in Elaine Fry's comment:

Feminists want equality for all, but only for the good things. They don't mind leaving the higher suicide rates, rates of being victims of assault, or military draft to the men, because apparently men started it. Feminists support gender fluidity, but they refuse to budge on their "men are evil" stance. Real women want true equality. (MOS, comments)

Mothers of Sons members often accuse feminists of hypocrisy for ignoring the issues faced by men.

Despite their claim that feminism is a widespread movement, the members of MOS and the Honey Badgers often depict feminists as being incapable of advocating for multiple issues. Namely, feminists are often accused of only caring about women's power and privilege, and ignoring men altogether. The concept of the domestic violence industry provides members of the Mothers of Sons community with a way to make sense of the difficulties some members may have encountered in the justice system. Ultimately, Mothers of Sons accuse feminists of creating and perpetuating a society that is biased against men.

The Honey Badger Brigade

The Honey Badgers is the sample community that most often discusses structural-level power dynamics between men and women, as well as between feminists and antifeminists. The Badgers often discuss the concept of a feminist narrative, according to which feminism falsely claims that women are systematically oppressed by men in society, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

There is no good feminism [...]. Feminism is all predicated on patriarchy theory and patriarchy theory [...] is not a real theory. It's not confirmed or validated, it's [...] not even good enough to be a hypothesis [...]. You can't disprove it because it's untestable [...]. It's basically the allegation [...] that throughout history, [...] the male population have collectively arranged our law and policy and culture and standards [...] to give legal social policy power to men and exclude women from it [...]. So that belief is [...] the thing that disgusts me the most about this [...]. (HBB, podcast)

The Honey Badgers often discuss how the patriarchy is not a fact, but a discourse used by feminists to support women's status as a discriminated group, while continuing to oppress men. They contend that feminism is used as a manipulation tactic for women to gain more privilege over men, while maintaining their status as victims. Feminists are portrayed as posing a threat to men, as shown in the following excerpt:

This is something that I always say to men if you get involved with feminist women, you're putting yourself in a lot of danger, even if you could be doing it because you think [...] I'm gonna get some ass because [...] these women are more open and sex positive. But they can use the system to screw you over bad so you should probably not associate with those kinds of women. And if you can, I wouldn't associate with any women at work because that's just like a minefield [...] it's asking for trouble [...] because they have this

legal and political leverage. (HBB, podcast)

Sexual liberation is not seen as something beneficial to women, but rather as an additional tool for feminists' manipulation arsenal. Honey Badger viewers are told to beware of feminists, who have the power to ruin men's lives—a discourse similar to the domestic violence industry found in the Mothers of Sons group. Men are advised to avoid situations where they would risk being accused of harming a woman, such as in the workplace. This discourse portrays feminists, and women by extension, as a threat to men, and discussions about relationships between men and women often turn to descriptions of an internecine gender conflict. The Honey Badgers often allude to unfair social systems, such as the political system in this excerpt, or education and judicial systems, yet they do not propose solutions to these issues, in individualistic, or in systemic terms.

The Honey Badgers also criticize feminism for its alleged disinterest in men's rights, as illustrated in the following response to a feminist's article about her issues with the men's rights movement:

I strongly disagree with your characterization of the men's rights movement as having been co-opted by men with hateful, oppressive attitudes and interests, as your use of listing such allegations together with the labels for other men's groups as a way of disparaging them without offering any real criticism. [...] I'm not surprised by what you've said about us, because "Hey men! You're advocating for yourselves wrong! Let feminists tell you how to do it!" is one of several commonly repeated feminist tropes and tactics used to try to undermine male control of the men's issues dialogue. This is far from the first time I've heard it. (HBB, podcast)

The Honey Badgers portray feminists as a controlling political force that must be resisted if they

hope to protect men's rights. Yet, as shown in this excerpt, the Honey Badger's position is a contradictory one: they wish to protect "male control of the men's issues dialogue", while also repeatedly criticizing feminists for not caring enough about men. One way that the Honey Badgers propose to resist feminism is by sharing news stories which they believe are overlooked by mainstream media such as in the following example, where the Honey Badgers are discussing an attempted school shooting by a woman:

If this was a man who tried to shoot up a kindergarten it would be all over the news. As determined as they are to fill the headlines with nothing but Ukraine, [...] they would postpone everything in the event of a man anywhere in the world doing anything like shooting up a fucking kindergarten. But you'll notice we here at Honey Badger Radio are the first and only news outlets wherein you will ever hear anything about this story and it's not because we're trying to sensationalize this kind of story. It's because [...] it's the kind of story you're supposed to give a shit about, but you don't because it's a woman. [...] The next time you hear about a man endangering any amount of women and children just see if you can give equal shits. See if you can spread your outrage butter equally across the toast of whatever you give a shit about or just stick to your uncritical human nature see where that gets you. (HBB, podcast)

The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons position themselves as alternative news sources that strive to cover stories that are overlooked by mainstream media. They often claim that incidents involving women committing violent acts receive less coverage than similar incidents involving men. The Honey Badgers position themselves as the voice of reason against the alleged harm caused by feminism to men and society as a whole. However, the Honey Badgers claim that their message is suppressed by feminist media, in the same way that Mothers of Sons believe that

women's violence against men is underreported. For the Honey Badgers, feminism is a deceptive movement that has successfully convinced society that women are oppressed by patriarchal systems. They criticize feminism as if it were a homogenous movement, condemning it for its negative portrayal of men. They argue that feminism's focus on women's issues has resulted in a lack of support for men's issues, depicting gender equality as a zero-sum game, where the gains for women result in losses for men, rather than a movement that can benefit society as a whole. Yet, they do not propose solutions to the feminist issue.

Summary

The key findings discussed in this section are represented in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of the Sample's Antifeminist Positions to Make Sense of their Lived Experience

	Main Criticism of Feminism	Perspective to Make Sense of Lived Experiences
Femcels	Feminism wants to move the focus away from appearances and criticizes women who work on their appearances	Lookism
RPW	Feminism does not support single-earner relationships	The Red Pill philosophy
Honey Badgers	Feminism manipulates society to gain power over men	Men's Rights Activism
Mothers of Sons	Feminism ignores men's suffering and allows women to get away with abuse	Domestic Violence industry

Chapter Six

Discussion

This research project set out to answer the following four questions about women's presence in the manosphere: (1) What are their relationships to the men of the manosphere? (2) What roles do they play in the manosphere? (3) How does their participation in the manosphere relate to how they understand their identities as women? and (4) What motivates them to participate? This qualitative research project examined four women's groups in the manosphere: (1) TruFemcels on the Pink Pill website; (2) r/RedPillWomen and r/RedPillWives on Reddit; (3) Mothers of Sons on Facebook; and (4) the Honey Badger Brigade on YouTube. I conducted a five-month long netnography, paying particular attention to themes relevant to my research questions, as well as topics frequently discussed by the communities in the sample.

This research was based on the hypothesis that, by studying women's presence in the manosphere, I could gain a broader understanding of general motivations for participating in online antifeminist groups, going beyond existing scholarly accounts that focus primarily on masculinity. I also hypothesized that women's involvement in the manosphere is part of a larger pattern of cyclical antifeminist backlash. In the following sections, I address my original research questions before discussing some of the study's unexpected findings.

Relationships to the Men in the Manosphere

The communities in the sample were not all, strictly speaking, women's groups. Each sample community had different rules in place to regulate men's participation in their groups. Men's participation was the most restricted in the RPW and Femcel communities, who also happened to be the most critical of their male counterparts, r/TRP and Incels. Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers had a higher proportion of male members and were far less critical of

men's manosphere groups. In the following sections, I discuss each sample community's relationship with men in the manosphere and men in general.

Femcels

The Femcels' attitude towards men was reminiscent of MGTOW men's attitudes towards women described in existing scholarship. Trott et al. (2022) describe MGTOW men as having similar beliefs about men's victimization in contemporary feminist societies as Red Pill men, but taking a separatist approach rather than attempting to exploit the system. Wright et al. (2020) found that despite their separatist stance, the most common topics on the MGTOW forum were women and their collective identity. In the same way, the Femcels in this study held similar views about men's nature as the RPW communities, but Femcels tended to avoid relationships with men rather than risk harassment and bullying from them. Femcels, like MGTOW men, often discussed who they wanted to avoid—men, but also attractive people in general. They also frequently debated who was a true Femcel, and, on occasion, the origins of their community's name, which was derived from the Incel community they despised. The Femcels' disdain for the men's Incel community found in this study echoes Kohn's (2020) journalistic account of The Pink Pill website. Kohn (2020) found that Femcels disagree with the Incel's commonly held discourse that female involuntary celibates cannot exist because of men's uncontrollable sexuality. This finding was reproduced in the current study.

An intriguing departure from the literature concerns Farrell et al.'s (2019) study about the evolution of misogynistic language across several Reddit communities. The researchers' sample was mostly made up of Incel communities, including the now-defunct women's subreddit r/TruFemcels. According to the researchers, r/TruFemcels had the greatest amount of belittling and racist content in their sample (Farrell et al., 2019). During my own fieldwork, I came across

some derogatory language directed at non-Femcels in the TruFemcel community on the Pink Pill website. While a few Femcels mentioned their ethnicity as a source of discrimination, sometimes referring to the privilege afforded by lighter skin tones in their communities, I found no racist language. Perhaps the notable lack of racist comments can be attributed to the location of the new TruFemcel community, on the Pink Pill website, which may have different moderation rules than the defunct subreddit. This could also be explained by a significant loss of membership when the community was banned from Reddit, where it had over 27,000 subscribers (<https://subredditstats.com/r/truFemcels>), and migrated to the Pink Pill where the TruFemcel community only had 500 members during my data collection period. This core membership group was perhaps more interested in sharing their lived experiences with their peers than in perpetrating racist discourses—although this research has shown that other hateful discourses, such as transphobia, were common in the community.

To summarize, Femcels' relationship with men in the manosphere and with men in general was defined by rejection and isolation. In a subsequent section, I examine how this rejection affected Femcels' identities as women.

Red Pill Women and Wives

The relationship between the RPW communities and men's Red Pill groups was ambiguous. In research about men's Red Pill groups, scholars describe forums where men discuss strategies to have as many sexual encounters as possible (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Women are reduced to commodities in a sexual marketplace and are used by men to gain alpha status (Ging, 2017; Vallergera & Zurbriggen, 2022). RPW members rejected the discussions of sexual domination that characterized men's Red Pill groups, and frequently stated that they would never date men who used the Red Pill philosophy to objectify and degrade women. Yet,

the RPW communities welcomed interventions from men who were Red Pill “experts,” as defined by their “elevated status” in the men’s Red Pill subreddit (r/TRP), their age (“older”), and relationship status (married or in a long-term relationship). While the RPW groups accepted male participants, it was on the basis of their status in r/TRP, a group whose ideas they largely rejected, and whose members they avoided. Aside from the contradictory message about men’s Red Pill groups, the rules of men’s participation were also noteworthy because some men met the criteria for participation in RPW communities. The existence of men who are considered to be active participants in r/TRP while being in successful long-term relationships points to a gap in the literature about men’s Red Pill groups, which does not yet address Red Pill men who are not focused on sexual strategies, but instead on living according to the Red Pill philosophy with a long-term female partner.

According to Ging (2016), the phrase “alpha fux, beta bux” (p.650) is commonly used in Red Pill men’s groups. It suggests that women are sexually attracted to alpha men but tend to choose beta men as long-term partners because they have more financial resources. Within these groups, women are frequently accused of exploiting men and are labeled as “gold diggers” (Ging, 2017). “Alpha fux, beta bux” speaks directly to the difference between men’s Red Pill groups and the RPW communities. Red Pill women rejected men who solely sought sexual encounters and instead valued men with the social standing and financial resources to support them as housewives, thus seeking the very type of relationship despised by Red Pill men. Additionally, while the Red Pill philosophy in men’s groups is portrayed as an alternative reality, hidden by a deceptive feminist narrative, the RPW communities portrayed it instead as a set of guiding principles, lending the communities an air of self-help, rather than the conspiratorial tone found in men’s Red Pill groups (Ging, 2017; Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

The divergence between men and women's Red Pill communities is compounded by the idea of using the Red Pill as a "toolbox," frequently discussed in RPW communities. The toolbox approach rendered the Red Pill lifestyle more adaptable, allowing members to apply its principles to suit their individual circumstances. Total adherence to the Red Pill philosophy, as encouraged in the men's groups (Van Valkenburgh, 2018), places a significant portion of domestic and beauty-related labor on women. In contrast, men's responsibilities according to the Red Pill are to provide for their families through employment. Living up to Red Pill norms is more challenging for women due to structural reasons such as the necessity for all individuals, including women, to engage in the workforce under neoliberalism (Gamble, 2016). The flexibility seen in RPW communities might stem from women's need to navigate and to opt out of certain of the expectations and standards set by the Red Pill philosophy.

This difference in interpretations of the Red Pill philosophy shows the importance of women's perspectives within antifeminist groups. Bacchetta and Power's (2002) research on right-wing organizations indicates that women's groups provide an opportunity to deconstruct discourses and practices in a way that can challenge male power. This finding aligns with my observations in the RPW communities. Rather than complying to their own objectification, RPW members had developed an alternative interpretation of the Red Pill theory that allowed women to benefit from Red Pill relationships—although they still adhered to the discourse of submission to men. The creation of an alternative understanding of the Red Pill, and the rejection of many men's interpretation of it is at odds with the captain/first mate dynamic that RPW members seek to follow in their intimate relationships. When it comes to ideology, RPW members felt empowered enough to devise an alternative interpretation of the Red Pill that goes against the original philosophy created by men, thereby calling men's reasoning into question. A similar

transformation of, and departure from, men's group discourses were also observed in the Femcel community, who rejected the Incel idea that men's sexuality is so uncontrollable that women cannot be involuntarily celibate, because all they have to do to have sexual relations is find a man and ask. No departures from men's discourses were observed in the Mothers of Sons or the Honey Badgers, both of which had mixed membership.

In the RPW communities, the primary focus of discussion revolved around romantic relationships with men. However, these communities were discerning when it came to allowing men to participate and comment in their forums. Although RPW members did not completely reject Red Pill men, as Femcels did with Incels, they approached men's interpretation of the Red Pill philosophy with caution due to their tendency to objectify women, and RPW members promoted an interpretation of the Red Pill philosophy devoid of the sexual components found in men's groups.

The Honey Badger Brigade and Mothers of Sons

When I began my fieldwork, I knew that Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badger Brigade counted both men and women among their members, but I did not expect their content to be virtually identical to that of men's manosphere groups. The content found on the Mothers of Sons Facebook page and in the Honey Badger Brigade videos corresponded to descriptions of contemporary MRA movements by scholars. These movements have been found to concentrate on issues which they believe disproportionately affect men, such as suicide rates, the military draft, and false sexual assault accusations (Cousineau, 2021; Han & Yin, 2022), issues that were widely discussed among the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons—although suicide rates less prominently so. Men's MRA groups also attack a feminist enemy-other, an oversimplified depiction of feminism as a homogenous movement that is said to victimize men and falsely

claim that women are oppressed (Cannito & Mercuri, 2022; Hopton & Langer, 2022; Starr, 2017). Scholars have also found that MRAs tend to portray women as selfish, manipulative, and self-serving (Krendel et al., 2022), discourses that were also echoed in the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities. While most manosphere communities are often associated with conservative political perspectives (Ging, 2017), this association was not always straightforward within the Honey Badger community. Instances such as their alleged support of trans people and occasional comments from their viewers expressing uncertainty about the hosts' political stance created ambiguity in their overall political alignment.

During my fieldwork, I found myself questioning the relevance of including the Honey Badger Brigade and Mothers of Sons in my research sample because of their similarities with men's manosphere groups, already documented in the scholarly literature. The wealth of data I collected from the RPW and Femcel communities alone could have sustained this dissertation. However, I ultimately decided against excluding them from my sample due to the way these groups described themselves. Although the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons share striking similarities with men's manosphere groups, they identified themselves as women's groups. Mothers of Sons' website describes them as a "group of mothers," while the Honey Badger hosts portray themselves as female MRAs in media interviews (e.g., Ortiz, 2015; McKeon, 2020). Further, Brook Lynn's (2014) documentary about the Honey Badgers suggests that female MRAs lend credibility to the MRA message. Thus, the characterization of Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers as women's groups appeared to play an instrumental role in their presence in the manosphere. Yet, the portrayal of the Honey Badgers as the mouthpieces of the broader MRA movement denies their agency in participating in antifeminist movements. It implies that they are manipulated or coerced into their roles, rather than willingly advocating for men's rights. In a

subsequent section, I further elaborate on why women in Mothers of Sons or the Honey Badgers may choose to participate, going beyond the notion of them being mere puppets or parrots of men's movements.

The Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers were enmeshed with men's manosphere groups through shared discourses, and they did not limit male participation in their groups. During my fieldwork, the Mothers of Sons did not reference other communities within the manosphere, but the Honey Badgers criticized certain groups such as MGTOW and pick up artists for their detrimental effect on men's well-being.

The relationship between the sample groups and men's manosphere groups varied. In my sample, two groups portrayed themselves as women's spaces, deliberately distancing themselves from the men's groups upon which their communities were originally based. The two other groups, focused on men's rights, closely resembled men's manosphere groups, yet still portrayed themselves as women's groups.

Women's Roles in the Manosphere

The second research question, "What roles do women play in the manosphere?", was inspired by the theories of gender by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Schippers (2007). According to Connell (1987), femininities are constructed in "compliance, resistance, and co-operation" to the hegemonic gender order (p.136). Schippers (2007) adds another dimension, suggesting that certain femininities actively perpetuate the dominant gender order. This research question aimed to investigate whether women in the manosphere complied, resisted, co-operated, or actively perpetuated forms of hegemonic masculinity at the local level (within the communities), and in a broader context (the structural level)—or if they related to hegemonic masculinities in a way unforeseen by Connell or Schippers. To explore this, I propose to analyze

how women's roles were described within these spaces, first focusing on the acceptable social roles for women according to each community, before examining the local forms of pariah femininities as defined by Schippers (2007) to identify local forms of hegemonic masculinity.

Acceptable Femininities

Van Valkenburgh (2018) identified the reliance on evolutionary psychology and biological determinism in the men's r/TheRedPill subreddit to justify beliefs about gender, a finding replicated by Cousineau (2021) in the same subreddit and in the r/MensRights group. In the current study, the communities of the sample were also found to rely on biological determinism and evolutionary psychology to support their understanding of gender relations, indicating that the use of these theories is more widespread within the manosphere than what the scope of Van Valkenburgh's (2018) and Cousineau's (2021) studies showed. The gender dynamics described by each community in the sample revolved around heteronormativity and the notion of complementary social roles and expressions of gender.

However, this study also proposes a new articulation of Van Valkenburgh's (2018) and Cousineau's (2021) findings. My findings indicate that different manosphere groups drew varying conclusions from evolutionary psychology, using it retroactively to justify gender views that align with the interests of their community members. For example, The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons, concerned with the alleged victimization of men in contemporary societies, claimed that women are naturally manipulative and selfish. On the other hand, the RPW and Femcel communities, focused on women's perspectives, portrayed men as being driven by their uncontrollable sexuality, whose inclinations to leadership can lead them to violence. Adopting an essentialist perspective has its drawbacks for women, as evolutionary psychology portrays them as weaker, more submissive, and primarily relegated to domestic roles. Women within the

manosphere navigate their roles in this rigid conception of gender by negotiating more agency for themselves in a limited framework, such as the Femcels who choose to isolate themselves, or RPW members who “vet” men. Through these choices, Femcels and RPW members create opportunities to exercise their agency, without completely stepping outside of the essentialist discourses about gender and heterosexuality.

Despite their differences, all the communities in the sample portrayed men as natural leaders and defined femininity in terms of compliance and submission to men. It is important to note that Femcels did not entirely fit into this characterization as they rejected relationships with men. This rejection often led to further stigmatization for Femcels, who were aware that their decision to remain single would make them stand out from the social norms of long-term, monogamous relationships. However, Femcels’ rejection of relationships with men did not entirely align with a resistant stance towards the prevailing gender hierarchy as outlined by Connell (1987). This is because, despite considering the ideal of a heterosexual, monogamous couple as unattainable, they still defined their femininity within the framework of such a relationship, portraying women as naturally more submissive, and men as naturally dominant. Even in the Femcel community, femininity was defined by complementary characteristics to a dominant masculinity. Femcels exhibited a compliant or cooperative relationship with the dominant gender order—although I would qualify this relationship as reluctantly compliant—striving to coexist with oppressive social norms without actively challenging them. They did not resist the hegemonic gender order, but rather constructed their femininity around their failure to live up to acceptable forms of femininity, without calling these acceptable femininities into question.

Similarly, men in the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons communities were warned

about the pitfalls of romantic relationships with women. In both communities, relationships with women were typically portrayed as dangerous settings for men and children. Despite these warnings, however, their conceptualizations of masculinity and men's social roles remained rooted in heterosexual relationship dynamics. Importantly, both male and female members within these communities expressed such perspectives. Women within these groups positioned themselves as advocates for men's rights and actively participated in criticizing other women and feminists. The female members of Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badgers participated in the policing of appropriate femininities, the condemnation of feminism, and did not challenge claims about women's manipulative nature. Their participation in these communities can be seen as compliance or co-operation with their own domination according to Connell (1987). However, their ongoing involvement in these groups, along with the significant labor expended by the Honey Badger hosts in creating almost-daily videos, aligned more closely with an active perpetuation of the hegemonic gender order, as proposed by Schippers (2007). Consequently, the women within these mixed-membership communities actively contributed to the dissemination of antifeminist discourses and the reinforcement of the existing gender hierarchy.

Members of the RPW communities often engaged in discussions about women's roles. These conversations, in line with Connell's (1987) notion that masculinities and femininities are "stylized and impoverished" at the structural level (p.183), predominantly revolved around the concept of an ideal feminine role and the challenges faced by RPW members in striving to fulfill it. The concept of submission to men was central to the RPW communities' understanding of women's roles. Unlike the portrayals by the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons, who depict gender relations as sources of domestic terror, RPW members portrayed traditional roles as sources of domestic bliss and safety for men and women alike. Binder's (2016) article on Red

Pill Women highlights a contradiction within their community, as they depict women's submission to men as a lifestyle that serves women's best interests. This observation resonates with the findings from this project.

However, while Binder (2016) points out the contradiction of women seeking their own subordination, she fails to acknowledge that most RPW members do not perceive women's submission as being against their own interests. Instead, they exchanged advice on how to effectively navigate the dynamics of submission and domination to cultivate fulfilling romantic relationships and lead, as one RPW member stated, "a soft life" devoid of paid employment. Far from being seen as oppressive, the Red Pill lifestyle presents a romanticization of submission, portraying it as a means of improving one's social class by attracting powerful and wealthy men. In practice however, very few RPW claimed to have achieved this lifestyle. The RPW ideal is filled with contradictions and inconsistencies. It romanticizes a specific form of heterosexual relationship, steeped in nostalgia for the traditional breadwinner-homemaker dynamic of the past, rejecting modernity and contemporary feminism viewed as contradictory to women's traditional roles. However, as Coontz (1992) demonstrates, the idea that families of the past adhered to a certain traditional model is a myth. The RPW ideal is essentially nostalgia for an imagined past that never truly existed.

Furthermore, this heterosexual fantasy is built upon an inconsistent notion of submission. RPW members often emphasize the importance of submitting to the right man—in the words of one RPW member: "THIS ONLY APPLIES TO GOOD MEN." As a result, the assertion that men possess inherent power and authority over women becomes paradoxical. It is no longer a natural, biological fact but rather something that women can choose to surrender to certain men, undermining the claim that men are natural leaders and suggesting that women inherently

possess this authority, which they have the power to willingly give away. The RPW communities rely on the notion of “value” as a conceptual tool to reconcile the discrepancy between the ideal that men are natural providers, and the reality that many do not fulfill this supposed biologically determined role. Additionally, the concept of value also acts as a protective measure, enabling RPW members to reject “low value men,” essentially serving as a safeguard for their relationships and well-being.

Within the RPW communities, many adopted a postfeminist perspective that regards feminism as an outdated movement, due to the perceived achievement of formal gender equality. This echoes Marshall’s (1997) study on anti-suffrage women, who prioritized safeguarding their own class interests over the broader advancement of women’s rights. However, the RPW communities’ modes of submission rely on contemporary principles of gender equality, as members encourage each other to create contingency plans in case they are unable to find a suitable provider. These alternative paths, relying on lucrative careers and higher education, are made possible by the strides made towards gender equality. Thus, the RPW ideal is not articulated so much around an antifeminist perspective, but rather relies on a postfeminist one that refuses to go back on previous historical gains for women’s rights.

The simultaneous rejection of modernity, accompanied by RPW members’ reluctance to relinquish early feminist achievements, underscores the tenuous position of women within the Red Pill lifestyle, where submission is mandated, yet women seek to protect their safety. The desire for personal safety is evident in the frequent discussions about contingency plans, a unique concern not commonly observed in research on men’s Red Pill groups. The necessity for contingency plans highlights the expected transition experienced by women upon entering a Red Pill relationship—transitioning from independent agents responsible for their own self-

sustainability, to submissive wives reliant on their husbands. In contrast, men do not undergo a comparable transition, as their primary role remains closely linked to their ability as earners and does not require placing their financial security in their partners' hands.

RPW members' discourses aligned with Connell's (1987) concept of emphasized femininity, characterized by the compliance with one's own subordination, and the accommodation of the "interests and desires of men" (p.183). However, it is worth noting that in Connell's (1987) conceptualization of emphasized femininities, she acknowledges that this form of femininity seeks to culturally marginalize other forms of femininity to maintain its dominance. In the RPW communities, this tendency appeared somewhat moderated, except when it came to trans femininities, which were entirely rejected. RPW members presented the Red Pill as a toolbox that may not suit all lifestyles, and Red Pill femininity was presented as one option among others. This tempered marginalization of other femininities could potentially reflect the growth of feminist influence in contemporary Western societies. It could also reflect the growing influence of neoliberal pressures for anyone, regardless of gender, to prioritize paid employment, rendering the femininity pursued by RPW members nearly unattainable.

The femininities embraced by the communities in the sample aligned with Connell's (1987) and Schippers' (2007) frameworks for the various relationships between femininities and the hegemonic gender order. Additionally, the RPW communities pursued a form of femininity that aligned with Connell's (1987) concept of emphasized femininity. However, the sample groups also engaged in discussions about unacceptable forms of femininity, providing insights into the local forms of hegemonic masculinity.

Unacceptable Femininities

Schippers (2007) suggest that the stigmatization of certain practices and characteristics in

women serves to protect the legitimacy of men's domination over women. When women embody characteristics that are associated with a local dominant form of masculinity—embodying and performing pariah femininities (Schippers, 2007)—they threaten the perception that these qualities are only accessible to men, and are stigmatized as a result. In this section, I identify the forms of pariah femininity and local hegemonic masculinity within each sample group, drawing on Schippers' (2007) framework.

The behaviors associated with pariah femininity were clearly identified in the Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badger communities. Women who are manipulative, self-serving, and irresponsible in their choice of partners were stigmatized within these communities. Moreover, women who deviate from traditional gender roles, such as by relying on government assistance rather than on a male partner for income were also subject to criticism. It is doubtful that community members would use these negative terms to describe a valued form of masculinity. However, when we remove the negative connotations of these characteristics and examine their underlying traits, a picture of hegemonic masculinity appears. The hegemonic man is intelligent rather than manipulative, independent instead of self-serving, and charming rather than irresponsible. These communities also commended men who took on traditionally feminine roles in addition to their masculine roles, such as single fathers who fulfilled caretaking responsibilities.

In the Femcel and RPW communities, women faced criticism for being too promiscuous, not conforming to the ideal feminine aesthetics, and lacking qualities such as grace, patience, and submissiveness. When these same characteristics are enacted by men, they align with the highly valued qualities sought after by RPW members: a high sex drive, impulsiveness, and leadership. This form of hegemonic masculinity, centered around the ability to provide for one's family,

reflects the work-based masculinities described by Connell (1998). However, such masculinities have been undermined by neoliberal markets that no longer support single-earner family models (Connell, 1998), pointing to a fundamental flaw in the heterosexual fantasy perpetuated by the RPW communities, which has become unachievable for most.

RPW members navigated the challenges of neoliberal realities in which individual actors are expected to become self-sufficient (Barker et al., 2018), while also attempting to uphold an ideal family model characterized by women's reliance on a male provider. This delicate balance often required RPW members to make concessions, such as bending the Red Pill rules regarding dual incomes or establishing a safety net through higher education or a career in case their pursuit of the ideal Red Pill relationship fell short. Consequently, these compromises placed the burden on women to address the shortcomings of the neoliberal economy by constantly working on themselves to become not only an independent individual capable of navigating the demands of the neoliberal market, but also a desirable marriage prospect. In contrast, while the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons also complained about the loss of traditional values, they tended to blame it on feminists and did not propose self-help solutions.

All the communities in the sample endorsed a form of hegemonic masculinity rooted in leadership and providing for one's family. The corresponding hegemonic femininity was positioned in compliance to this hegemonic masculinity, even in groups where relationships between men and women were discouraged, such as Mothers of Sons and Femcels.

Identities as Women

When I first began this research project, I had not anticipated how similar the answers would be to the previous research question, about women's roles, and the present question about their identities. During my fieldwork, I realized that community members' identities are closely

bound up in their definitions of gender roles. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) observed that men's "practical relationships to collective images or models of masculinity" are at the center of "gendered consequences" in other aspects of their lives (p.840). Similarly, the community members studied here compared themselves to collective representations of masculinity and femininity. While the previous section explored gender roles and acceptable forms of femininity, this section focuses on community members' personal relationships to these gender models. To put it in Jackson's (2004) terms, this section focuses on the subjective dimension as well as the dimension of routine social practices.

RPW members and Femcels often discussed the subjective dimension of their femininity, with members openly sharing their personal experiences and feelings. Discussions about aging, in particular, provided valuable insights into how these community members experienced their identities as women. In the RPW communities, aging was seen as a deterioration of femininity, and "hitting the wall" represented the loss of men's natural attraction. Femcels perceived aging in a similar way, although "the wall" represented the end of a grace period that younger ugly women may have enjoyed, characterized by reduced levels of harassment and bullying.

Two distinct models of femininity emerged from the dataset, characterized by different representational styles, which I will call perishable and predatory femininities, respectively. For the Femcels and the RPW members, femininity was characterized by domestic bliss and soft places for men to land, in the RPW communities especially. The ideal femininity in the RPW and Femcel communities was limited by a small window of time. After women hit the wall, their practices of femininity, particularly in RPW communities, revolved around concealing the signs of lost youth. This conception of femininity, which I characterize as femininity with an expiration date, or perishable femininity, was tied to ideas about women's fertility. In contrast,

the masculinity valued by these women was not constrained by age, as qualities associated with being a good provider and protector, such as material resources and social status, tend to increase with age. This ageless form of masculinity contrasts with perishable femininities, which position women as consumable commodities, a characterization of women that RPW members criticized in Red Pill men's groups. While RPW members did challenge the notion of the wall as defined by men's groups and pushed back the age at which women are said to hit the wall, they still did not attempt to step outside the frame of perishable femininity.

Other ways that RPW experienced feelings of inadequacy in relation to their femininity included struggling to keep up with domestic tasks, failing to let their partner take the lead, or failing to sustain their lives on a single income. Women in the Red Pill were often left with the feeling that they were not working on themselves enough, or that their practices of femininity were lacking. This sense of never being enough is typical of self-help communities, fueled by the neoliberal imperative to constantly work on the self to meet an ideal that is ever-changing, and thus always out of reach (McGee, 2005).

Femcels, on the other hand, did not fit as neatly in the self-help model compared to the RPW communities. Much of their discussions revolved around feelings of helplessness, with references to topics such as suicide, discourses that echo those found by scholars in men's Incel communities (Han & Yin, 2022; Stahl et al., 2022). Instead of sharing advice on how to improve their lives, Femcels primarily engaged in commiseration about shared experiences of harassment and violence, reflecting a sense of resignation to their fate. Yet, even within this context, Femcels still expressed a desire to work on themselves and attain a more conventional appearance, still participating in the neoliberal discourse of self-optimization.

The other model of femininity found in the dataset, referred to as predatory femininities,

predominantly emerged in the discourses within the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badgers communities. These groups often depicted gender relations as antagonistic and hostile. Women, particularly those who assert themselves against men, were portrayed as threats to men's safety in these communities. The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons members frequently painted gender dynamics as a battlefield, where men were depicted as constantly at risk of falling into traps set by feminists, such as the risk of false assault accusations or unfair child custody outcomes in divorce proceedings.

The concept of predatory femininities prevalent in these discourses portrays women as potential threats to men's safety, crafting a narrative wherein men are seemingly under constant siege and vulnerable to manipulation or harm from assertive women. Predatory femininities sharply contrast with the perishable femininities observed in the RPW and Femcel communities. While predatory femininities are characterized by the threat they pose to men, perishable femininities are defined by men's perceived attraction. In this context, it is men who potentially jeopardize perishable femininities, for instance, by expressing preferences for younger women.

In the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons communities, masculinity is portrayed as a casualty of predatory femininities, revealing another parallel between the two communities and men's communities described in the existing literature (Ging, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). They all depict men as victims of feminism. However, the concept of perishable femininity, found in the RPW and Femcel communities—groups centered around women—does not present a direct opposition to predatory femininities, where women are portrayed as victims of men. Instead, perishable femininities reveal women actively participating in upholding a gender hierarchy where women embrace submissiveness to men, engaging in their own objectification, and contributing to the discourse of the sexual marketplace, prevalent in the manosphere (Van

Valkenburgh, 2018).

Applying intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw (1989) and Hill Collins (1990), as a heuristic device—serving as an analytical aid rather than a data collection method—revealed the ways in which community members discussed their identity. However, these discussions often fell short of a truly intersectional approach. While intersecting systems of power were occasionally acknowledged, they tended to be portrayed as additional obstacles to community members' quest for self-betterment, rather than recognized as systemic axes of oppression. Members occasionally shared information about their race, geographic context, social class, or religion, particularly when their experiences did not align with the expected white, Western, middle- to upper-class Christian norm, such as being in an arranged marriage, or being a Black woman.

In the RPW and Femcel communities, instances of women disclosing the intersections of their identities were predominantly framed in terms of divergence from the expected norm. When a member named a marginal aspect of their identity, responses were generally limited to those who shared a similar identity. Consequently, the act of naming a non-normative part of one's identity simultaneously distanced members from the majority of the community, and also amplified the voices of others who shared similar experiences. This dynamic was particularly evident in testimonials from women in cultures with arranged marriages. When these women shared their stories, responses mostly came from other women with similar backgrounds, while the rest of the community refrained from commenting. Despite the potential for discussions touching upon intersectionality, the experiences of marginalized women were often treated as too different from the norm to warrant the usual range of responses from other members. Approaching discussions about identities with intersectionality as a heuristic device, aimed at

identifying intersectional moments in the collected data, also brought to light instances where such discussions were notably absent, especially in the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons groups where women's testimonies and perspectives were rare. While women would comment on posts, they rarely shared personal stories unless they involved a close male family member or friend. Given that these groups were primarily focused on men's rights, it is not surprising that discussions about women's identities on the subjective level were relatively absent. As a result, it is difficult to glean women's own perceptions of their identities in these groups. Their alignment with antifeminist discourses suggests a disconnect between their own personal experiences of femininity and womanhood, and the ideals promoted by feminist initiatives and policies. It is also possible that internalized misogyny played a role, wherein women within these communities exhibited hostility towards their own gender.

In contrast, the RPW and Femcel communities placed a greater emphasis on discussing women's identities compared to the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger Brigade. Within the RPW and Femcel communities, women often reported feeling like they did not live up to their community's ideal of femininity. Their identities became bound up in this failure, even if it stemmed from natural processes such as aging. I have suggested the term "perishable femininity" to describe the idealized femininity in these groups. Perishable femininity is associated with youth and implied fertility, yet the RPW and Femcel members continued to uphold this feminine ideal, even after they believed they had become too old to be attractive to men. In contrast, the women in the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons groups did not engage in subjective discussions about their own identities. However, their criticisms directed at feminists and women, portrayed as selfish and manipulative, suggested a different model of femininity, "predatory femininity" that encapsulates the conflictual depiction of gender relations that

characterize the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons communities. The use of intersectionality as an analytical tool (Hill Collins, 1990), revealed that experiences deviating from the White, Western, middle- to upper-class Christian norm were rarely discussed in the RPW and Femcel communities, even less so in the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons communities.

Furthermore, these rare discussions were not met with as many comments as the usual discussions, pointing to a potential disconnect between overarching RPW and Femcel ideas and diverging identities, or a subtle silencing of differing voices by lack of engagement with them.

Motivations to Participate

Each sample community explicitly identified as antifeminist in their community descriptions—their website or social media page’s “about” sections. Their attitudes towards feminism aligned with Sapiro’s (1981) findings in her critique of the concept of women’s interests. According to Sapiro (1981), antifeminist women do not necessarily oppose core feminist principles, namely, that women are discriminated against because of their gender, and that this discrimination can be alleviated by fighting against the patriarchy through collective action. Instead, antifeminist women’s opposition is often directed at an enemy-other constructed out of right-wing anxieties about the erosion of nuclear families and the moral decay of America (Sapiro, 1981). The fear of the erosion of traditional family values was echoed across the communities in the sample, except for the Femcels who did not discuss traditional gender roles. Furthermore, all communities also portrayed feminism as a monolithic movement, with the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons attributing trans-exclusive ideas to feminism as a whole. However, it is worth noting that the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons opposed the idea that women experience discrimination, showing a more fundamental opposition with feminist principles than the other groups in the sample.

Another factor in the antifeminist positions taken by these groups stemmed from the fundamental disagreement between an essentialist view of gender and feminist theories that distinguish between sex and gender. This fundamental disagreement made it impossible for the communities to see eye-to-eye with feminist perspectives that depart from a binary conception of gender. The communities in the sample contended that feminism distorted reality and manipulated public perception. All of the studied communities expressed a sense of frustration with society and a belief that feminism did not adequately address their personal concerns. This sentiment was particularly prominent in the communities geared towards men—the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons—who lamented the decline of men’s social status in the face of neoliberal expectations for individual productivity (Barker et al., 2018), although they blamed this decline on feminism. The Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons rejected feminism for similar reasons, asserting that feminists overlook men’s victimization in contemporary societies and exaggerate the extent of women’s oppression. They perceived feminism as an attack on men’s lives and actively resisted it by sharing what they considered to be unbiased news stories about men’s victimization.

The official Mothers of Sons website stated that their motivation to participate was driven by mothers’ desire to protect their sons from false accusations of sexual harassment and assault. In practice however, the members tended to focus on the unfair treatment of men in current events and politics. While some men did share experiences of being falsely accused of violence, testimonies from mothers discussing their sons’ accusations were rare. Thus, the actual motivations for community members to participate did not align with the website’s stated goal. Instead, the group functioned as an alternative news source outside of mainstream media, emphasizing stories about male victimization and providing a platform for members to express

their antifeminist opinions. Unlike the RPW members who offered the Red Pill toolkit and Femcels who proposed solutions such as working on their appearance or isolation, the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons remained critical of the alleged problems created by feminists without proposing solutions. Although RPW members and Femcels proposed individualistic solutions, they presented a more hopeful way forward than the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons, for whom gender relations are an internecine conflict with no way out.

The questions of participation did not quite apply to the Honey Badgers, whose YouTube videos were more geared towards consumption, rather than participation. Yet, we still need to address their solid subscriber base, which provided financial support to their YouTube channels during my fieldwork, and continues to do so at the time of writing. Similar to the Mothers of Sons, the Honey Badgers offered an alternative news source focused on men's issues, presenting themselves as being factually driven. They portrayed feminism as a false narrative that conceals the true extent of women's power and men's victimization, a commonly found narrative in men's manosphere groups (Hopton & Langer, 2022; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Trott et al., 2022). This interpretation of the feminist movement provided an outlet for men who feel victimized and perceived a discrepancy between the power to which they believe they are entitled as men and their actual experiences, and for the women who support them.

By framing men as the primary victims in contemporary societies, the Honey Badger's perspective offered reassurance without attributing responsibility to men for the oppression of others, while positioning feminism as the source of their discontent. The concerns expressed by the Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities highlight a contradiction in their beliefs stemming from biological determinism and evolutionary psychology. These groups assert that men are natural-born leaders, yet also place the onus on feminists to address men's issues. They

seek acknowledgment for men's concerns but resist taking active responsibility for addressing these issues themselves.

The RPW communities promoted the idea of achieving a better life through adherence to specific rules and constant self-improvement, which corresponds to the self-help model described by McGee (2005). This study revealed that some RPW members were drawn to the communities because of the heterosexual fantasy promised by these groups, characterized by wealth and relationship stability. Safety and security were major reoccurring sub-themes in RPW discussions. Feminism was often portrayed as a disruptive force that destabilizes relationships between men and women by advocating for both genders to contribute as providers for their families. In practice, the ideal of being a single earner family proved to be unattainable for most women. Some members even recognized that this model was no longer sustainable in contemporary societies, yet RPW members continued to pursue a femininity based on this traditional model.

Femcels were drawn to their community because of shared experiences as ugly women. Femcels generally felt misunderstood by the feminist movement, which seeks to shift the focus away from women's physical appearance as the defining characteristic of their identity. However, Femcels argued that their appearance consistently played a central role in how they were treated by others. Lookism, or discrimination based on physical appearance, held significant importance in Femcels' experiences as it provided an explanation for the mistreatment they encountered. In the Femcel community, feminism was not necessarily rejected due to a loss of traditions, but rather because Femcels perceived a lack of representation for specific issues within a movement that advocated for bodily acceptance. However, the Femcels' conception of feminism, as was the case in the other communities in the sample, was based on an oversimplification and

homogenization of a complex movement. Femcels rejected the monolithic idea of feminism, and did not discuss the many different currents within the movement.

To contextualize this research within the broader patterns of antifeminist backlash, it is important to consider how the motivations of the communities in the sample align with those found in existing studies on antifeminist women's movements. Marshall (1997), for example, observed that anti-suffragettes primarily belonged to the elite classes and were sought to protect their class interests by denying political rights to women. This perspective is echoed by Chafetz and Dworkin (1987), who found that women are drawn to antifeminist groups due to perceived threats to their husbands' economic interests. In the Mothers of Sons and the Honey Badger communities, we saw similar concerns about men's loss of status being voiced. This discourse was also present in the RPW communities, where the aspiration to find a wealthy partner often took precedence over concerns about women's discrimination at the structural level. Some members claimed to support the first wave of feminism, but criticized the current movement as overly focused on undermining men. Thus, these three groups very much continued the trend of class-based antifeminist backlash as identified by scholars such as Faludi (1991), Howard (2008) and Messner (2016). These findings emphasize the significance of intersectional analyses of antifeminist movements. A noteworthy aspect to consider is how the sense of exclusion from the feminist agenda led some women to oppose feminism, such as Femcels. The mainstream message of feminism that emphasizes the irrelevance of women's appearance contradicted Femcels' personal experiences of facing harassment, bullying, and discrimination based on their looks. Unlike the other groups, Femcels did not extensively discuss issues related to class or gendered interests. Instead, their primary focus was on the perceived limited scope of feminist concerns and their feelings of being marginalized and overlooked.

Although the groups claimed to be antifeminist, their stance on feminism and progressivism often seemed unclear. While they generally accepted homosexuality, they rejected transgender individuals, indicating a partial incorporation of feminist principles of inclusivity within their right-leaning beliefs, albeit not fully embracing them. Moreover, their attitudes towards women's virginity and sexual promiscuity contradicted conservative religious views on sexuality that typically advocate for female abstinence. Hence, despite their apparent animosity towards "feminists," whom they portrayed as a unified and homogeneous group, these communities did not outrightly reject all feminist ideas. Instead, they engaged in a negotiation process within the context of increasing acceptance of progressive ideologies. Consequently, these groups might appear more inclusive compared to their historical counterparts, who were often associated with racism (Blee & Deutsch, 2012; Marshall, 1997), for example. However, this ambiguous and unpredictable relationship with feminism is likely challenging for members to fully embrace.

The motivations for participating in the communities in the sample aligned with existing studies about antifeminist women's groups (Faludi, 1991; Howard, 2008; Messner, 2016), which highlight class-related concerns regarding the consequences of women's empowerment. Other motivations to participate also stemmed from a feeling of being overlooked or unrepresented by the feminist movement, particularly evident among Femcels, as well as a fundamental disagreement between the essentialist view of gender held by the sample groups and the feminist understanding that distinguishes between sex and gender. This fundamental disconnect led the sample community members to find alternative frameworks and theories to make sense of their lived experiences.

Unexpected Findings

The data collected for this research yielded unexpected insights that went beyond the scope of my research questions. In this section, I briefly discuss three major unexpected findings. These unexpected findings are a testament to Jackson's (2006) analytical approach, as it allowed me to sift through abundant data in a systematic way that uncovered unexpected findings.

Firstly, I initially assumed that women's antifeminist groups would differ significantly from the men's groups described in the existing literature (e.g., Ging, 2017; Hopton & Langer, 2022; Marwick & Caplan, 2018), as I thought that I would not find any animosity towards women's nature. However, the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons subverted this assumption. Through my analysis using Jackson's (2006) levels of the social, I found striking similarities to men's manosphere groups, from the routine social practices expressed through men's testimonies on their social media pages, to the discourses and meanings shared by community members, and the structural issues they invoke. Their similarity to men's manosphere groups led me to reevaluate the motivations for women's participation in such groups. These two groups not only espoused the same antifeminist and misogynistic rhetoric as men's groups, but saw active participation from women, and in the case of Honey Badgers, were even led by women. While I had expected to encounter internalized misogyny in my sample, the explicit misogynistic discourses within the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons communities came as a surprise. Unlike the RPW and Femcel communities, who offered reinterpretations of manosphere ideologies, the discourses in the Honey Badger and Mothers of Sons communities upheld the same criticism and animosity towards women prevalent in widespread manosphere rhetoric. This indicates that some women engaged with manosphere rhetoric without challenging or altering its misogynistic underpinnings. Women's involvement in the manosphere, as illustrated by these contrasting groups, demonstrates complex and varied relationships with the ideas about gender

relations present in the manosphere.

Secondly, another unexpected finding pertained to the prevalence of transphobic discourses across the communities. During the preparation of my fieldwork, I had come across a Honey Badger video that mentioned trans issues, but I had not looked into it further. At the time, I had interpreted their interest as a sign of actual support for the queer community, rather than a superficial one, dissimulating transphobic discourses. In Jackson's (2006) terms, transphobia at the level of meanings and discourses was present throughout the communities. Although initially surprising, the shared nature of this discourse across communities revealed the influence of essentialist views of gender, rooted in evolutionary psychology and biological determinism, in shaping their understanding of themselves and of society. Trans people do not fit into such understandings of gender, and thus the few declarations of support for the trans community rang hollow when compared to the broader ideology of gender found across the communities of the sample.

Thirdly, I had anticipated encountering understandings of gender based on traditional ideas about the family. However, I did not expect the extent to which community members adhere to these ideas. I was surprised by the rigid framework of femininity within the RPW communities, where any deviation was interpreted as a threat to women's ability to find a high value man. The attachment to the notion of men as providers and protectors was prevalent in all communities, except for the Femcels, despite many members acknowledging the unsustainability of this masculine role in contemporary societies. The strong inclination to cling to traditional gender roles, rather than exploring alternatives such as those proposed by feminism, was both surprising and noteworthy.

Jackson's (2006) framework enabled a systematic analysis of data at several levels of the

social. This approach helped my analysis to move beyond the discursive level, allowing explorations into various ways that gender is performed, discussed, and criticized, and to uncover unexpected findings that might have otherwise been overlooked.

The Contradictions of Femininities in Antifeminist Spaces

This study revealed inherent contradictions in the expressions and perceptions of femininities within the Femcel, RPW, Mothers of Sons, and Honey Badger communities. Some contradictions present within the communities included the Femcels' ambiguous stance on the social emphasis on appearance, criticizing lookism while simultaneously rejecting the feminist idea that a woman's value should not be tied to her appearance. Within the RPW communities, inconsistencies emerged from their application of the Red Pill philosophy, such as their rejection of participants from men's Red Pill groups as suitable partners, despite seeking men's expertise on the Red Pill. Additionally, RPW members often expressed a simultaneous desire for a traditional lifestyle without giving up the rights gained by early feminist movements. The Mothers of Sons and Honey Badger communities expressed concerns about men's issues and victimization, while criticizing feminists for not adequately addressing these issues. However, they hesitated to delegate the responsibility of managing men's issues to feminists. Both communities often referred to men as natural leaders or society's taxpayers but failed to propose solutions that could leverage this perceived natural leadership to resolve men's issues.

A recurring source of contradictions across these groups stemmed from their reliance on ideas rooted in evolutionary psychology and biological determinism to inform their gender-related beliefs. For example, while the Femcel community portrayed male sexuality as uncontrollable and threatening, the Honey Badgers and Mothers of Sons used similar theories to assert that it is women, not men, who struggle to control their sexual urges. Conflicting notions

about the natural quality of masculinity and femininity also emerged, notably in RPW communities where members described the constant efforts required to maintain an acceptable Red Pill femininity. Furthermore, tensions arising from interpretations of gender based on biological determinism were evident in discussions about trans individuals, particularly in the RPW and Honey Badger communities. While members professed support for trans issues, their discourse often carried transphobic undertones, reflecting the challenge of fostering inclusivity when their gender beliefs relied on biological determinism and evolutionary psychology.

Overall, the study highlights a complex interplay of contradictions within the Femcel, RPW, Mothers of Sons, and Honey Badger communities, stemming from their diverse interpretations of gender informed by evolutionary psychology and biological determinism. These contradictions underscore the complex, intricate nature of these communities' gender ideologies. While my findings answered my research questions, they also unveiled unexpected insights, such as the adoption of men's mansphere ideas by some women, the extent of transphobia and the persistence of traditional gender roles. The following chapter concludes this dissertation.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This doctoral research project set out to explore women's involvement in the manosphere, a network of online communities known for their antifeminism, misogyny, and violence. Through a netnographic approach, this case study of four women's groups has shed light on the motivations driving individuals to participate in these antifeminist groups. Individuals' involvement is not solely rooted in frustrations with masculinity, but is also influenced by confrontations between conceptions of gender relations and lived experiences, a sense of misrepresentation in feminist discourses, and fantasies of upwards social mobility.

The focus of this exploratory research project was to amplify the forgotten voices of women in the manosphere. In previous studies, there was a tendency to relegate women to the role of objects of men's hatred and desire, following the dominant narratives pushed by the men of the manosphere. Most manosphere research is situated in the field of men and masculinity studies and this project is no exception; however I undertook to address the "feminine other" (Dahl, 2012) of the manosphere and to position women as subjects rather than objects, offering an unprecedented understanding of women's contributions to the discourses present in these communities.

By centering women's perspectives in a space dominated by men and misogynistic discourse, this study has made a substantial contribution to the scholarship of women and femininities in the field of men and masculinity studies. Notably, this research project has revealed how women play a significant role in perpetuating dominant masculinities in their local contexts by cooperating with and actively perpetuating discourses and practices associated with the hegemonic gender order. Simultaneously, the women who actively perpetuate dominant

masculinities carve out spaces for themselves in this hegemonic gender order, finding ways to benefit from it. Additionally, the research project demonstrated the diverse forms that antifeminism and transphobia can take, highlighting the absence of a coherent set of motivations underlying these sentiments.

While this study has provided valuable insights into women's presence in the manosphere, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The netnographic approach and case study design inherently restrict the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the complexity of the manosphere and its online nature present challenges in fully capturing the dynamics of the communities. Despite its limitations, this study is an important first step toward a more comprehensive examination of women's participation in the manosphere. This study reveals that women's discourses in the manosphere are similar to men's, while also creating their own spaces where their perspectives and material realities take center stage.

This study also opens the door to several promising avenues of future research. Firstly, the in-depth exploration of postfeminism and neoliberalism within the discourses and practices of women in the manosphere. While these concepts were touched upon in this dissertation, a comprehensive analysis could reveal valuable insights. Rosalind Gill's (2007, 2017; Rottenberg, 2019) characterization of contemporary postfeminism as a shift towards individual responsibility and self-improvement, akin to a gendered form of neoliberalism, is particularly pertinent. This framework suggests that women in the manosphere may be encouraged to assume responsibility for their own oppression and engage in constant self-improvement under the guise of empowerment. While scholars have acknowledged the neoliberal turn among men's rights activists (Gottell & Dutton, 2016; Han & Yin, 2022), delving into the gendered dimensions of this phenomenon within women's communities presents an intriguing area for further

investigation. Employing a framework of gendered neoliberalism to analyze women in the manosphere could enhance our understanding of their practices and discourses, particularly regarding manifestations of antifeminism. Additionally, it may elucidate any similarities and differences between women's and men's discourses within these communities.

Secondly, it is important to continue mapping women's manosphere groups so that we can begin conducting comparative studies with men's groups and gain a better understanding of these antifeminist networks. Thirdly, investigating the intersectional aspects of antifeminist radicalization, such as the roles of race, class, or of neoliberal narratives, will enhance our understanding of how these different dimensions interact and shape extremist ideologies. Fourthly, exploring the relationship between the manosphere and historical antifeminist and conservative backlash movements presents a fertile ground for in-depth analysis. By contextualizing contemporary online misogynistic discourses within a historical framework, scholars can uncover potential continuities, discontinuities, and shifts in antifeminist ideologies over time. Fifthly, as the manosphere evolves and adapts to changing digital landscapes, ongoing research should delve into the impact of social media platforms and their moderation rules on the dissemination and censorship of antifeminist ideas. Understanding how these communities use these platforms and respond to moderation attempts will be crucial in devising effective strategies to counter online extremism. Finally, I want to echo Ging and Murphy's (2021) call for research on individual pilling pathways to better understand individual paths leading to participation in extremist groups, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the various factors contributing to radicalization.

As we embark on these future directions, it is essential to remain attuned to the ethical considerations surrounding research in these sensitive domains. Striving for a fair and respectful

approach, which avoids harm and respects the voices of those studied, will be paramount in advancing our knowledge while ensuring responsible scholarship in the study of extremism.

As the first comprehensive account of women's presence in the manosphere, this research has revealed the need for holistic approaches to gender, even within the scholarship of men and masculinities. By incorporating women's perspectives, this study has enriched our understanding of the motivations driving online antifeminist groups beyond existing accounts primarily centered on masculinity. The bridging of manosphere studies with historical antifeminist and conservative backlash research has opened new avenues for exploration, emphasizing the significance of understanding antifeminism within its historical context.

This research project was challenging, not only methodologically, but on a personal level as well, as I delved into communities whose ideologies are starkly opposed to my own. Immersing myself in spaces where misogynistic and sexist discourses abound was emotionally difficult. I was surprised, however, at how quickly I became desensitized to these narratives, until I had the opportunity to temporarily distance myself from them. This experience serves as a cautionary tale for researchers studying extremism and radicalization, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness as well as the emotional toll that such investigations can take. Policymakers, educators, and activists can draw on these findings to create interventions that encourage radicalized individuals to step away from extremist communities, even if only temporarily. Interventions should also be tailored to meet individuals where they currently stand in terms of their perceptions of gender and gender relations.

In conclusion, this doctoral research project has delved into the unexplored realm of women's involvement in the manosphere, revealing their complex motivations and contributions to the antifeminist landscape. By shedding light on the profound influence of incompatible

foundations of gender, this study underscores the critical importance of considering the roots of antifeminist ideologies when studying and devising targeted interventions for communities of the manosphere. My findings emphasize the need for holistic approaches to men and masculinity studies, encouraging future scholars to expand our comprehension of gender dynamics and their intersections with online communities and movements of antifeminist backlash.

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