

Argumentation strategies in an online male separatist community

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Abstract

This thesis explores the legitimization of ‘male separatist’ ideology in an online community known as ‘Men Going Their Own Way’ (MGTOW). I take a discourse-historical approach to critical discourse studies (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016), as adapted for social media data (Unger et al., 2021), in order to examine the argumentation strategies and *topoi* used by members of this community to persuade others to abstain from relationships with women and reject feminism. The dataset comprises fifty threads totalling 46,000 words from the major MGTOW community hosted on Reddit. As well as contributing to a growing body of research on the manosphere, this thesis demonstrates how the DHA and *topoi* can be applied to social media discussion forums, where argumentation may be collaborative or expressed multimodally.

Findings indicate that women were constructed as a homogenous group, meaning men must separate from all women. Arguments in favour of separatism typically relied on a *topos of freedom* in order to suggest that separating from women will increase men’s independence. This was often combined with a *topos of finance*, where increased personal freedoms included the freedom to decide how one’s money is spent and freedom *from* financial obligations to others. Relatedly, relationships were framed in economic terms and as a series of financial transactions, discussed in terms of the costs (to men) and benefits (to women). Furthermore, arguments against marriage used the *topos of threat* to construct women as a danger to men’s physical and emotional wellbeing, for example by arguing that married men risk having their lives ‘ruined’ by false claims of abuse. Arguments in opposition to feminism employed the *topos of justice* in order to highlight the purported the unequal treatment of men by feminists. Equality appeared to be equivalent to sameness and treating different genders in exactly the same manner, enabling commenters to delegitimise feminist activism targeting women as evidence of male oppression.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. An earlier version of chapter five has been accepted to appear as part of a special issue of *Modern Languages Open*.

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Glossary ¹

- **Alpha male:** A physically attractive, high-status male at the top of the social hierarchy whom all women desire
- **Alpha fucks beta bucks:** Principle which states that women have sex and conceive children with 'alpha males' who have superior genetics, but settle down and raise the children with 'beta males' who can provide for them financially
- **AWALT:** 'All Women Are Like That' i.e., suggestion that all women will always behave in the same way, in the same circumstances
- **Beta male:** A pejorative term for an average-looking man of middling social status, who is subordinate to women and 'alpha males'
- **Blue pill:** Not having taken the 'red pill' and thus living in ignorance, unaware of the true nature of women and feminism
- **Briffault's law:** "The female, not the male, determines all the conditions of the family... where the female can derive no benefit from association with the male, no such association takes place" (Briffault, 1931, pp. 21-22)
- **Cock carousel / CC:** The idea that young women live in a world of sexual abundance and can 'ride the carousel' (i.e., have sex with lots of men)
- **CDS:** Critical Discourse Studies
- **Chad:** Name given to the prototypical alpha male, usually White
- **Cougar:** An older woman who dates much younger men
- **Cuck:** A pejorative term for man who has been cuckolded, i.e., his partner has cheated on him with another man
- **Divorce rape:** The loss of at least half of one's assets during divorce proceedings
- **DHA:** Discourse-Historical Approach
- **Dual mating strategy:** see 'alpha fucks beta bucks'
- **Foid, femoid:** A contraction of 'female humanoid'
- **Foodie call:** Going on a date with someone for a free meal, without the intention of starting a relationship
- **Gynocentrism:** A social order in which women are privileged and society revolves around women
- **Hamster:** Idea that women have a hamster in their brains which spins a wheel in order to rationalise bad decisions into good decisions

¹ This glossary defines the manosphere lexis that appears within this thesis from the perspective of r/MGTOW users. It is not intended as an endorsement of such vocabulary or the ideas and concepts represented by such terms.

- **Hug box:** A space intended to be warm, comfortable, and free of conflict or disagreement
- **Hypergamy:** Women's supposedly innate biological drive to marry or enter a relationship with someone of a higher socioeconomic status
- **Incels:** Portmanteau of 'involuntary celibate.' Someone (usually a man) who desires a romantic or sexual relationship but perceives themselves as being unable to attract a partner
- **Karen:** A pejorative term for middle-aged White women perceived as obnoxious, entitled, and often racist
- **Manosphere:** A loose network of antifeminist social media communities, including MGTOW, MRAs, PUAs, and incels
- **MGTOW:** Men Going Their Own Way. A group of male separatists who argue men should avoid relationships with women
- **MRA:** Men's Rights Activist
- **PUA:** Pick-Up Artist.
- **Red pill:** Coming to learn the truth about the world, i.e., that society is gynocentric and men are oppressed
- **Shit test:** Testing your partner, for example by pretending to be bankrupt, in order to see how they will react
- **Simp:** A pejorative term for man who puts women on pedestals and is desperate for a woman's attention.
- **SJW:** Social Justice Warrior. A pejorative term for feminists or left-wing progressives thought to be aggressively pre-occupied with social justice matters
- **Thot:** Alternative to 'slut' i.e., a pejorative term for a woman perceived as sexually promiscuous
- **The wall:** Idea that at some point in their late 20s or early 30s, women reach their 'peak' and rapidly decline in their level of attractiveness and fertility
- **War bride syndrome:** The supposed psychological tendency for women to develop empathy with their captors
- **White knight:** A pejorative term for a man who defends women online, possibly with the intention of gaining her affection
- **Unicorn:** A unique special woman, who is not like the others
- **Virtue signalling:** Making progressive statements in order to make yourself look good, rather than because you genuinely agree with said statement

Chapter 1: Introduction

In August 2022, British hate speech charity Hope Not Hate warned teachers that children may have been exposed to sexist and misogynist content online during the summer holidays. Andrew Tate, a former kickboxer and *Big Brother* contestant, rapidly rose to fame during the summer of 2022. As a self-described misogynist, Tate has claimed that rape victims must “bear responsibility” for their assault and that women should be treated as “property” (Dimsdale, 2022b). Although Tate was later banned from Facebook and Instagram, this was not before he had amassed over 4 million followers. Tate was especially popular on TikTok, though he did not have a personal account, where content posted under the Andrew Tate hashtag reached almost 13 billion views.

This thesis investigates the manosphere, of which Tate is only a small and relatively recent part. The label ‘manosphere’ refers to a “constellation of masculinist social media communities loosely unified by an anti-feminist worldview” (van Valkenburgh, 2019, p. 1). Researchers typically distinguish at least four major manosphere communities: involuntary celibates, who perceive themselves as desiring a relationship but unable to find a partner; pick-up artists, who share seduction strategies for attracting women; men’s rights activists who argue that men are oppressed in contemporary society; and male separatists, who argue that men should avoid relationships with women. These groups are discussed in further detail in chapter two. Specifically, this thesis investigates the discourse and argumentation of the specific manosphere group known as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) as hosted on the social media platform Reddit.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by explaining the rationale for this study, with reference to the research context and gaps in the literature. Next, I state my aims and objectives for the thesis and introduce my research questions. In doing so, I explain the value of this research and the intended empirical contributions of this thesis to our understanding of the manosphere, in addition to its theoretical contributions to the field of critical discourse studies and social media. Finally, I conclude by outlining the thesis and providing a road map of the remaining eight chapters.

1.1. Rationale

In the early days of the Internet, it was hoped that the anonymity and disembodiment of this new communicative context would render gender invisible and allow men and women to participate equally in digital space (Herring and Stoerger, 2014). However, such optimism has not been realised. A 2017 report found that 23% of women surveyed across eight countries reported experiencing harassment and abuse online (Amnesty, 2017), while a survey of Australian women found that 47%

of respondents experienced online harassment, increasing to 76% of respondents under 30 (Reilly, 2016). In contrast, a study by the Pew Research Centre found that more male respondents claimed to experience online harassment than female respondents (Duggan, 2017). However, they found that women were over twice as likely to be targeted due to their gender, to experience *sexual* harassment specifically, and to describe their harassment as either “extremely or very upsetting.” Scholars have produced long lists of the types of abuse commonly directed at women on social media, including but not limited to: threats of rape, violence, or death; non-consensual sharing of intimate photos or videos; photoshopping victims onto pornography; stalking; doxing (i.e., releasing personal information such as one’s address or place of work); swatting (i.e., hoax calls to emergency services); and vandalism of web pages (e.g., Citron, 2014; Ging, 2019b; Jane, 2016; Poland, 2016; Siapera, 2019; Sobieraj, 2018). Overall, social media has been described as a “toxic place for women” (Dhrodia, 2018, p. 381).

Digitally mediated abuse affects how women participate online. Researchers have described the “mental maps” (Sobieraj, 2018, p. 1708) and “safety work” (Vera-Gray, 2017, p. 73) that women create and undertake in order to mitigate potential or actual abuse. For example, women may avoid disclosing their gender online or assume a male identity (Citron, 2014; Jane, 2016; Kim, 2018). Alternatively, women may self-censor and avoid speaking about topics perceived as contentious or likely to incite abuse (Dhrodia, 2018; Jane, 2016; Lewis et al., 2019; Megarry, 2014; Kim, 2018). This limits women’s ability to equally participate on social media and by extension, their ability to equally participate in public life. Consequently, Siapera (2019) argued that online abuse of women involves “important stakes in the future of our societies” as it prevents women from accessing the means of technological production (p. 39), while Jane (2017) argued that it potentially constitutes a new digital divide if women cannot equally or meaningfully participate online in the same way that men can.

While any woman may be the target of such misogynistic abuse, much research has focussed on the abuse directed towards specific groups of women, such as academics (Veletsianos et al., 2018; Yelin and Clancy, 2020), politicians (Dhrodia, 2018; Esposito and Zollo, 2021), and journalists (Gardiner, 2018). Research has also considered how sexism and misogyny intersect with other forms of oppression. For example, Dhrodia (2018) found that Asian and Black women MPs received a much greater volume of abusive tweets than White women MPs and that Diane Abbott alone received more abusive tweets during a 6 month period than all other women MPs from the Conservative Party and Scottish National Party combined. Furthermore, women who are vocal feminists, or are

perceived as being feminists, are especially likely to receive abuse (Alichie, 2022; Esposito and Zollo, 2021; Jane, 2014; Kim, 2018).

The latter point is especially relevant given the prevalence of antifeminist beliefs. Polling has suggested that women are more likely to identify as feminist or be sympathetic to feminism than men (Barroso, 2020; Carter, 2020; Henry, 2016; IPSOS, 2019; Miller, 2022; Young Women's Trust, 2019). For example, a survey of 18-24 year olds in the UK found that 50% of male respondents agreed that "feminism has gone too far and makes it harder for young men to succeed" (Carter, 2020 p. 42), compared to 23% of female respondents. In the US, the Southern Poverty Law Centre similarly found that men were more likely than women to agree that feminism has "done more harm than good" (Miller, 2022). A particularly striking result was the prevalence of young, Democratic men who held negative beliefs about feminism, considering that previous research suggests that these factors *increase* the likelihood of identification with feminism among women (Barroso, 2020; IPSOS, 2019). While only 4% of Democratic men over 50 agreed that feminism had done more harm than good, this rose to 46% among young Democratic men (Miller, 2022). In fact, younger Democratic men were slightly more likely to hold negative beliefs on feminism than older Republican men. Hope Not Hate connected antifeminist sentiment among young men to the growing influence and popularity of the manosphere (Carter, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that researchers seek to understand this community and its potential impact on society.

Previous research into the manosphere has used computational or quantitative methods such as natural language processing or topic modelling (e.g., Mountford, 2020; Rafail and Freitas, 2019; LaViolette and Hogan, 2019). In particular, computational methods have been employed in order to determine the prevalence of 'toxic' or misogynistic language within manosphere communities (e.g., Farrell et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2020; Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021; Jaki et al., 2019; Trott et al., 2020). Within linguistics, researchers have employed corpus linguistic methodologies to study the language of the manosphere as a whole (Krendel et al., 2022) or of specific groups (e.g., Heritage and Koller, 2020, Tranchese and Sugiura, 2021, on incels; Wright, 2020, on pick-up artists). Qualitative research has utilised ethnographic (Lin, 2017), discourse analysis (Gotell and Dutton, 2016) and content analysis methodologies (Schmitz and Kazyak, 2016). However, as KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) have argued, more research is needed into online sexism from the perspective of critical discourse studies and social media critical discourse studies. Such an approach allows the researcher to focus empirically on textual and discursive content and analyse the text within multiple levels of context, considering how the affordances of the specific social media technologies in addition to the broader

sociocultural and historical context contribute to the production and dissemination of sexism and gendered hostility online.

Furthermore, not all groups within the manosphere attract equal attention. Much academic research has focussed on involuntary celibates, likely because this group has the most links with violence and mass murder (see DeCook and Kelly, 2022; Hoffman et al., 2020; Zimmerman et al., 2018, for discussion of incel violence). However, there is a relative absence of research into MGTOW (though see Lin, 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020, for important exceptions). When MGTOW are the object of study, they tend to be discussed alongside other manosphere groups (McGlashan and Krendel, 2020; Krendel et al., 2022), especially incels (Farrel et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2020; Johanssen, 2021). As research has suggested that MGTOW are becoming more popular over time (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2020), particularly on platforms with younger userbases such as TikTok (O'Connor, 2021), this lack of attention cannot continue.

Finally, it has been suggested that argumentation strategies are useful directions for future research into the manosphere (Krendel et al., 2022). Previous research has attempted to critically evaluate the accuracy of core manosphere beliefs, for example by reviewing evidence that men are oppressed (Hodapp, 2017). However, it is also important to examine the language of these arguments as well as their content and consider what makes them so rhetorically effective. Even if manosphere arguments are not based in empirical evidence, the fact that millions of men are subscribed to such communities suggests that their arguments are persuasive. It is therefore urgent that we understand the logic of manosphere argumentation and consider how an antifeminist ideology is made legitimate and attractive to young men.

Overall, this thesis aims to address the call by KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) for more research and theorisation of digitally mediated sexism and misogyny from the perspective of critical discourse studies. To do so, I examine the discourse of the manosphere, who have been connected to the growth of antifeminist sentiment and online abuse of women, specifically the discourse of the group known as MGTOW who remain relatively under-researched. Furthermore, this thesis also aims to address certain gaps within the current literature on the manosphere, namely analysis of argumentation strategies and persuasive discourse.

1.2. Research questions and objectives

The overarching aim of this thesis is to investigate how the ideology of male separatism is legitimated and the argumentation strategies used to justify withdrawing contact from women and rejecting feminism as a social movement. Indeed, male separatist ideology is unique within the

manosphere; while pick-up artists and incels are explicit in their desire for a romantic or sexual partner, MGTOW argue that men ought to avoid women. Their separatist aims are also to some degree incongruent with broader heterosexual patriarchal ideology, in which men and women are expected to marry and raise children in a nuclear family. Although a bachelor lifestyle has historically been more acceptable for men than for women and marriage rates are declining in several countries, marriage remains popular among men. For example, in 2021 there were over 67 million married men in the US (Statista Research Department, 2022a), while in 2017 over 235,000 heterosexual marriages were recorded in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that marriage can increase men's health and life expectancy and lower their mortality risk (Harvard Health Publishing, 2019; Jia and Lubetkin, 2020). Overall, this raises questions as to how and why a male separatist ideology is popular.

In order to investigate argumentation and legitimation of male separatism, this thesis examines three broad questions.

RQ1: How do users of r/MGTOW represent themselves and how do they argue in favour of separatism?

As van Dijk (1998) suggested, an important legitimation strategy is positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Therefore, in this thesis I seek to examine the strategies of self-representation within r/MGTOW to discern the extent to which they represented themselves, their community, and their ideology as positive. To address this question, I consider the discursive content produced by individual members of r/MGTOW in addition to the subreddit 'sidebar' which includes a description of the community for new members and the rules of participation. Such analysis will allow me to consider how MGTOW presented themselves to new members and provide an insight into the sort of content which was permitted or prohibited. Furthermore, I aim to examine the argumentation strategies used in discussions of separatism through an analysis of *topoi* (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, discussed in further detail in chapters four and five). In addressing this research question, I prioritise arguments in favour of separatism. In other words, these are arguments which emphasise the benefits of being single and living on your own, such as increased freedoms and improved mental health.

Within this thesis, I will refer to users as men and use he/him pronouns unless the user explicitly mentioned identifying otherwise within the data. Of course, I do acknowledge that it is difficult to verify the identity of individual users and it may be the case that the sample also includes comments written by users who identify as female or non-binary. However, given that the community positions

itself as part of the manosphere and the name of the community is “men” going their own way, it can reasonably be assumed that the vast majority, if not all, users identify as men. Therefore, users will be referred to as such for the sake of simplicity and to highlight the masculinist ideology and power dynamics.

RQ2: How do users of r/MGTOW represent women and relationships and how do they argue against relationships with women?

My second research question concerns the representation of women and relationships, as the latter has received relatively little research. Although the representation of gendered social actors within the manosphere has been addressed previously (Heritage and Koller, 2020; Krendel, 2020; Krendel et al., 2022; Tranchese and Suguira, 2021), the representation of women has not been studied within r/MGTOW specifically. Furthermore, this previous research has employed corpus linguistics techniques such as collocation and key word analysis. However, it is also important to examine the representation of women using more qualitative means. For instance, some negative representations of women may be expressed through implicature that cannot be captured through isolated concordance lines and key words, or be expressed multimodally through memes or pictures.

To address this research question, I focus on argumentation which emphasises the negative aspects of heterosexual relationships, such as the portrayal of relationships as emotionally abusive or burdensome. However, with this research question I do not intend to suggest that heterosexual relationships are the only relationships to exist, or that women and men are the only valid gender identities. Instead, this is to reflect the heteronormative, binary nature of MGTOW discourse. In going one’s own way, it is assumed that one is going away from *women* specifically. As there was little-to-no discussion of homosexual relationships within the dataset, it was not explicitly addressed whether gay and bisexual men could legitimately call themselves MGTOW or whether marriage between two men would be considered acceptable. However, given that one of the subreddit rules prevented ‘LGBT proselytizing’ (see section 6.1.2), it is likely that the answer would be no.

RQ3: How do users of r/MGTOW represent feminism and how do they argue against feminism?

Finally, the representation of feminism and feminists within the manosphere remains under-researched (Krendel et al., 2022). In line with the ideological square strategy (van Dijk, 1998) and previous characterisations of MGTOW as antifeminist (Lin, 2017), I initially anticipated that the representation of feminism would be negative. However, it is important to examine the particularities of MGTOW antifeminism. Indeed, antifeminism can be ideologically, theoretically, and linguistically diverse (Dworkin, 1983; Jordan, 2016; Kelly, 2020), just as feminism can. Thus, in this

thesis I seek to investigate the extent to which r/MGTOW discourse on feminism was influenced by postfeminism or even feminism itself, in addition to antifeminist and patriarchal ideologies.

Furthermore, although there is a lack of research into the discursive representation of feminists within the manosphere, there is research into stereotypes and evaluations of feminism in broader culture (e.g., Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Mendes, 2011; García Favaro and Gill, 2016; Twenge and Zucker, 2001). Thus, I seek to examine the extent to which MGTOW discourse on feminism aligned with, or diverged from, more mainstream representations of feminism and feminists.

1.3. Outline of thesis

This thesis is comprised of nine chapters. In chapter two, I provide a literature review of antifeminism and the manosphere. Taking a diachronic perspective, I discuss how the contemporary manosphere grew out of the men's rights movement, which split from men's liberation movement which has roots in second wave feminism. Then, I describe the four main manosphere groups, namely men's rights activists, involuntary celibates, pick-up artists, and MGTOW. Although this thesis focuses on MGTOW, it is useful to discuss the manosphere as a whole and its other constituent groups given the cross-fertilisation of ideas (Ging, 2019a) and overlapping userbases (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021). Chapter three is a second literature review, discussing research into persuasion, deliberation, and argumentation on social media and how this is influenced by anonymity and the formation of so-called 'echo chambers.' In this chapter, I also consider the specific communicative genres of memes and narratives and how these can be used for antifeminist ends.

Next, I move on to discuss theory and methods. In chapter four, I discuss my theoretical background of critical discourse studies (CDS) and the discourse historical approach (DHA). Furthermore, in this chapter I discuss the feminist theory that has influenced this work such as definitions of sexism, backlash, and patriarchy. Following this, in chapter five I explain my data and methods. I present my methods of data selection, collection, and preparation and describe the structure and affordances of Reddit, the social media platform from which data were taken. Furthermore, I describe how I approached the eight steps of the DHA and my methods of argumentation analysis in particular. In this chapter, I also highlight ethical concerns regarding data collection and analysis.

Chapters 6-8 present my analysis and main findings. Chapter six addresses my first research question, discussing the strategies of self-representation within MGTOW and the argumentation strategies used to justify separatism. Next, chapter seven addresses my second research question concerning the representation of women and relationships. While chapter six addresses arguments

concerning the purported benefits of separatism, chapter seven addresses argumentation focused on the purported drawbacks of marriage or relationships. Finally, in chapter eight I address my third research question concerning the representation of feminism, gynocentrism, and misandry. Lastly, chapter nine will conclude the thesis, providing a summary of the main findings in addition to reflections on the limitations of this research and avenues for future research.

Finally, before moving on to chapter two I would like to include a content warning. This thesis includes examples of explicit sexism and misogyny throughout, as well as explicit racism, antisemitism, homophobia, and transphobia. In addition, all three analysis chapters discuss abusive relationships, while chapters seven and eight discuss rape and sexual assault. Chapter eight includes excerpts which discuss real-life cases of murder, Nazism, suicide and rape of male children. As I will further justify in chapter five, all linguistic examples are presented in unexpurgated form. By including these examples, it is not my intention to grossly offend or upset readers, but to demonstrate the scale of MGTOW sexism and misogyny.

Chapter 2: The Manosphere

This chapter will discuss the background to my research. I begin with a discussion of antifeminism generally, considering why resistance and backlash towards feminism remains popular in spite of increased feminist visibility. Next, I chart the historical development of organised men's rights activism since the early 1970s. Finally, I discuss the contemporary network of antifeminist social media known as the manosphere and its four constituent groups.

2.1. Backlash and resistance to feminism

Walby (2005) wrote that backlash "appears to be a recurring feature in the history of feminism" (p. 76). For example, Kimmel (1987) documented resistance to first-wave feminism and women's suffrage campaigns, while Faludi (2006/1991) described the "powerful counterassault on women's rights" (p. 9) in the 1980s, where feminism was blamed for myriad social problems such as rising divorce rates, infertility, and women's unhappiness. In the present day, backlash and resistance towards feminism continues to be seen across the globe, as demonstrated by the election of openly sexist or antifeminist politicians such as Donald Trump in the US, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy (McRobbie, 2016) and Yoon Suk-yeol in South Korea (Rashid, 2022), the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the US (Donegan, 2022b), and the banning of gender studies university programmes in Hungary (Oppenheim, 2018). In addition, there have been intense negative reactions towards contemporary feminist media campaigns such as #MeToo (Boyle and Rathnayake, 2020; Dickel and Evolvi, 2022), 'lose the lad mags' (García-Favaro and Gill, 2016), and an advert by shaving company Gillette cautioning against 'toxic masculinity' (Brown, 2021; Trott, 2022).

Flood et al. (2021) theorised that backlash and resistance are "inevitable responses to social change" (p. 395). Consequently, resistance to feminism may be indicative of feminist progress and success (Chafetz and Dworkin, 1987; Flood et al., 2021). It has also been suggested that antifeminism is reactive and functions as a counter-movement to feminism (Blais and Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Chafetz and Dworkin, 1987). Banet-Weiser (2018) compared the strategies of antifeminists and men's rights activists to a "funhouse mirror," in how they distortedly parallel feminist campaigns in order to address perceived injuries and injustices felt by men (p. 39). For example, the popularity of #MeToo was met with a parallel #HimToo campaign, which presented false accusations of rape as an equivalent social problem to rape itself (see Boyle and Rathnayake, 2020, for analysis of the hashtag). However, it would be incorrect to suggest that the contemporary sociopolitical moment is characterised entirely by regressive attitudes towards feminism. In fact, feminism has increased in visibility and popularity over the previous decade (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Many celebrities openly

identify as feminists and feminist issues are regularly covered in the media (Gill, 2016; Mendes, 2011). Feminism is thought to be undergoing a “fourth wave” marked by increased use of digital media (Munro, 2013) and is becoming increasingly institutionalised and incorporated into state governance and corporations (Gill, 2016; Halley et al., 2018; Lilja and Johansson, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014). However, this popular, corporate feminism has been criticised by some feminists for emphasising neoliberal notions of choice, self-improvement, and individual empowerment, as opposed to tackling structural issues such as women’s poverty (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2016; Rottenberg, 2014). In addition, this institutionalization may open up new opportunities for backlash. For example, feminism may be accused of “being hegemonic... of having power while claiming to be powerless” (Lilja and Johansson, 2018, p. 90, see also Johansson and Lilja, 2013). As feminist resistance against gender inequality becomes more visible and popular, this generates further resistance against feminist resistance.

While backlash is diverse, there are some recurring features. First, it typically involves a denial of male privilege or gender inequality, or a disavowal of the responsibility for those issues that are recognised to exist (Flood et al., 2021). Opponents of gender quotas in male-dominated fields argue that such initiatives are unnecessary because women and men are equal or because gender imbalances will naturally resolve over time (Johansson et al., 2017; Richardson-Self, 2021). Alternatively, gender imbalances are argued to be the result of women’s individual choices (Gill, 1993; Richardson-Self, 2021). Furthermore, resistance toward feminism may involve co-option of feminist ideas and claims of reverse discrimination (Flood et al., 2021). Here, gender quotas may be argued to be anti-meritocratic and discriminatory against men (Johansson et al., 2017; Richardson-Self, 2021). Finally, backlash and resistance may manifest as “violence, harassment, and abuse” (Flood et al., 2021, p. 395). As described in chapter one, scholars have noted the prevalence of abuse and harassment directed towards feminists on social media. This can have a chilling effect wherein women are deterred from openly identifying as feminists or discussing sexism (Dhrodia, 2018; Jane, 2016; Lewis et al., 2019; Megarry, 2014; Siapera, 2019). However, these experiences are often normalised as something part-and-parcel of using social media (Lewis et al., 2019; Sobieraj, 2018) and delegitimised as not constituting ‘real’ abuse (Jane, 2016). Therefore, violence, harassment, and abuse are particularly effective methods of antifeminist backlash.

Flood et al. (2021) highlighted societal developments and trends which can enable backlash and resistance towards feminism, such as ineffective teaching regarding gender equality, the language of ‘sex roles’ (discussed in section 2.2.1) and postfeminism. McRobbie (2009) described postfeminism as the “undermining” of feminism, wherein postfeminism “positively draws on and invokes feminism

as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved,” and therefore feminism “is no longer needed” (2009, p. 15). Postfeminism also involves celebratory slogans of ‘girl power’ and emphasis on individual women’s success in order to further emphasise the irrelevance of an organised feminist movement (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2009). While postfeminism is not the same as antifeminism, the two are interlinked. Anderson (2015) explained that if feminism is perceived as unnecessary because equality has already been achieved, then women who continue to identify as feminists must be seeking superiority over men, which may facilitate further backlash towards feminism. Furthermore, Flood et al. (2021) discussed the popular conceptualisation of a ‘masculinity crisis’ which presents men and masculinity as “under siege as a result of feminist reforms” (p. 401). Resistance towards feminism may involve claims of White male victimhood and emasculation (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Brown, 2021; García-Favaro and Gill, 2016; Trott, 2022), where feminist critiques of patriarchy, male privilege, or hegemonic masculinity are recast as critiques of individual men. In addition, accounts of a ‘masculinity crisis’ often present gender relations as a zero-sum game in which gains for women inevitably mean losses for men. For example, women’s increasing educational attainment relative to men is used as evidence that men are ‘losing out’ (Anderson, 2015; Heartfield, 2002; Kimmel, 2013; McDowell, 2000; Walzer, 2002).

Most importantly, antifeminism is prevalent because of sexism. As Dworkin succinctly wrote in 1983, “feminism is hated because women are hated” (p. 195). Furthermore, Flood et al. (2021) argued that resistance to feminism is shaped by “widespread acceptance of gender inequalities” and is “above all, a response by dominant groups who feel threatened by challenges to their privilege by disadvantaged groups” (pp. 399-400). In his ethnographic research, Kimmel (2013) described the feelings of “aggrieved entitlement” motivating male antifeminists, in other words “the sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by forces larger and more powerful” (p. 18). Kimmel’s interviewees believed themselves entitled to jobs, to a high salary, to positions of “unchallenged dominance” (p. 21) and nostalgically yearned for a past when they did not have to compete with women and ethnic minorities in the economic sphere. When this entitlement is thwarted, due to increasing gender and racial equalities as well as economic shifts where one salary can no longer support a household, this can prompt reactionary feelings of anger and resentment.

Negative stereotypes and derogatory depictions of feminism in the media are also indicative of resistance towards feminism and may prompt further resistance. A particularly prominent stereotype is the man-hating feminist. Although feminists who express anti-male sentiment do exist (see chapter 5 of hooks, 2015, for a critique of ‘man-hating’ feminism), research has suggested that

non-feminist women are more likely to report negative attitudes towards men than feminist women (Anderson et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the stereotype of the angry, man-hating feminist continues to persist. For example, male college students interviewed by Gough and Peace (2000) “almost universally” presented feminism as “dangerous and alienating to men” (p. 391). More recently, García-Favaro and Gill (2016) found that online comments responding to an article about a feminist campaign against lad magazines not only portrayed feminists as man-haters, but also as extremists comparable to fascists and Nazis. Feminists’ purported hatred towards men is often labelled *misandry* (see Marwick and Caplan, 2018), suggesting that it is equivalent to misogyny.

Other research finds more ambivalent or positive attitudes towards feminism. For example, Twenge and Zucker (1999) found that American college students evaluated feminists positively and stereotyped feminists as holding liberal political beliefs and being assertive or career-minded. On the other hand, they found that feminists were evaluated more negatively in comparison to “the average woman” (p. 602). Edley and Wetherell (2001) suggested that feminists are divided into a ‘Jekyll-and-Hyde’ binary, where a distinction is made between reasonable liberal feminists who ‘just’ want equality and unreasonable, unfeminine, man-hating radical feminists. Such a dichotomy allows a speaker to present themselves as pro-feminist, while simultaneously emptying feminism of “any radical potential” (p. 453). Similarly, Mendes (2011) found that newspapers between 1968-1982 expressed some support liberal feminist goals such as equal pay, but constructed ‘militant feminism’ or radical feminism as a “threat to the social order” (p. 78). Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016) repeated Edley and Wetherell’s (2001) study and found that such a dichotomy continues to be recreated. However, most of Calder-Dawe and Gavey’s (2016) participants spoke as ‘informers’ on unreasonable feminism and did not endorse such views but instead presented them as irrational and misguided.

Overall, backlash and resistance to feminism are not new nor are such attitudes exclusive to social media, although the Internet does have the potential to amplify its effects. In some respects, the situation is improving as some research suggests that attitudes towards feminism are becoming more positive, especially among young women. In addition, Mendes (2011) found that 51% of news articles about feminism in 2008 employed supportive frames. While this would suggest that attitudes to feminism are more positive than negative, it should be noted that the statistic was 50% from 1968-1982 suggesting a rather miniscule change in attitudes. Furthermore, while some feminist stereotypes are decreasing in their prevalence, such as the stereotype of the lesbian feminist (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016; Twenge and Zucker, 1998), others remain more entrenched, such as the man-hating feminist (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016; García-Favaro and Gill, 2016). Negative

stereotypes and constructions of feminism continue to be reproduced and may deter people from identifying as feminists, even if they agree with the ideals of gender equality, or even encourage people to identify as antifeminists or as men's rights activists.

2.2. Historical overview

As Flood et al. (2021) claimed, backlash may take place at the individual level or it may be collective in the form of organised antifeminist groups and institutions. This section will review the history of organised men's rights activism, including the early pro-feminist men's liberation movement, the antifeminist men's rights movement, and the mythopoetic movement.

2.2.1. The men's liberation movement

Coston and Kimmel (2013) wrote that "the seeds of the contemporary Men's Rights movement were initially planted in the same soil from which feminism sprouted" (p. 369). So-called 'men's liberationists' aimed to attract men to feminism by emphasising the ways in which men were harmed by patriarchy and consequently the benefits they could gain from feminist activism (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 1998). Many men's liberationist actions and practices were directly inspired by second-wave feminists, such as the formation of consciousness-raising groups, the foundation of institutions such as National Organisation for Men Against Sexism, and the publication of men's liberationist literature (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 1998). Feminist critiques of the 'female sex role' and women's subordination to the domestic sphere resonated for some men, who formed their own parallel critiques of the male sex role as a breadwinner and provider (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 1998). For instance, Farrell (1974) compared men's relegation to a "success object" to women's relegation to a "sex object" (p. 49). However, such arguments were not always endorsed by feminists at the time. Hanisch (1978) criticised the name men's *liberation* for inferring "liberation from female domination" and claimed the movement rested on individualistic analysis and "anti-woman" principles (p. 72). Additionally, hooks (2015) wrote that they "run the risk of overemphasizing personal change at the expense of political analysis and struggle" (p. 74), though her criticism also applied to women's groups. Reliance on sex role theory was particularly subject to critique, due to its positing of a "false symmetry" between roles (Messner, 1998, p. 258) and lack of emphasis on men's "sexist exploitation and oppression of women" (hooks, 2015, p. 81).

Despite these criticisms, sex role theory was still widely used within men's liberation groups, which Messner (1998) claimed led to a shift from men's liberation to men's rights movement. Early men's liberationists gave "equal analytic weight to the 'costs' and 'privileges' attached to the male sex role"

but by the mid-1970s, members began to argue that men were equally oppressed, or even more oppressed, than women (Messner, 1998, p. 261). Eventually, the movement split. On one side was a pro-feminist men's liberation movement; on the other was an antifeminist men's rights movement which "either downplayed or angrily disputed" feminist claims that women were oppressed and exploited by men (Messner, 1998, p. 256). This shift is perhaps best exemplified in the career trajectory of Warren Farrell. In the mid 1970s, Farrell was "the most public 'male feminist' in the United States" (Messner, 1998, p. 262). His 1974 book *The Liberated Man* drew on Friedan's (1963) concept of the oppressive 'feminine mystique' to argue that a similar 'masculine mystique' oppressed men. While his book emphasised the costs of masculinity, he still positioned himself as a feminist and argued that women's liberation and men's liberation were mutually beneficial. However, by the early 1990s Farrell had moved away from feminism and later published *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men are the Disposable Sex*, demonstrating an ideological shift towards the men's rights movement.

2.2.2. The Men's Rights Movement

Like men's liberationists and feminists, men's rights groups founded their own institutions such as Men's Rights Inc. and National Coalition of Free Men (Messner, 1998) and published literature theorising male oppression. Clatterbaugh (2000) described key texts as including *The Hazards of Being Male* (Goldberg, 1976) and *The Myth of Male Power* (Farrell, 1993/1994). Men's rights activists argued that women held power over and exploited men, rather than the other way around. Feminism was cast as a "hateful ideology" and the true source of men's discontent (Coston and Kimmel, 2013, p. 372), as feminists were thought to either ignore or deliberately conceal evidence of male oppression (Messner, 1998). This evidence typically included factors such as: lack of support for male victims of abuse and no male equivalent for battered women's shelters; male-only military conscriptions; circumcision; higher rates of male suicide, workplace deaths, homelessness and incarceration; lower life expectancy for men and lack of funding for research into male health issues such as testicular cancer; and false allegations of rape and abuse against men (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Fox, 2004; Messner, 1998). Men's rights activists (MRAs) across the globe campaign for similar issues, but there are also important differences relating to the specific political, historical and socio-cultural contexts. For example, the Polish men's movement is influenced by Catholicism (Wojnicka, 2016), while feminism is decried as a Western, colonial influence in India (Cockerill, 2019; Lodhia, 2014) and a soviet communist force in Russia (Rothermel, 2020).

The “most successful rallying point” of MRAs according to Messner (1998, p. 267) concerns father’s rights. MRAs argue that family courts are oppressive towards men, as women are more likely to be awarded full custody of children post-separation while men are more likely to pay child support and alimony (Bertoia and Drakich, 1993; Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010; Jordan, 2009; Kaye and Tolmie, 1998). However, feminists have pointed out that father’s rights groups offer little discussion of equality before separation, demanding equal rights to their child without equal responsibilities in childcare (Bertoia and Drakich, 1993; Boyd, 2004; Jordan, 2009). Mothers are constructed as privileged for having both child custody and child support payments, suggesting that responsibility for raising children is a financial advantage (Busch et al., 2014). Moreover, Boyd (2004) found that father’s rights activists suggest, either implicitly or explicitly, that mothers are greedy and do not use child support payments in a way that benefits the child.

Another major concern is abuse and sexual violence against men. MRAs claim that women are equally violent towards men as men are towards women, if not more so, and therefore support or laws relating to violence and abuse should be gender-neutral (Busch et al., 2014; Dragiewicz, 2008). While male victims of abuse should certainly not be ignored, gender-neutral language and legislation can obfuscate that women are at greater risk of violence from their male partners than vice versa (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; DeKeseredy, 1999). A related concern for MRAs is that women supposedly make false claims of abuse or rape for personal gain, such as to gain an advantage in custody disputes or divorce settlements (Boyd, 2004; Flood, 2010; Gotell and Dutton, 2016; Kaye and Tolmie, 1998), and that male victims of these false accusations have little recourse.

Many feminists agree that some issues advanced by men’s and father’s rights groups are important, such as the need to tackle misconceptions that men cannot be victims of rape or abuse. Conversely, others are less worthy. For example, research suggests that false rape allegations are rare and no higher than false accusations of other crimes such as theft and burglary (Lazard, 2017). Indeed, scholars have critiqued men’s rights groups’ use of anecdotal evidence or poorly sourced statistics to bolster claims of male oppression (DeKeseredy, 1999; Kaye and Tolmie, 1998). Hodapp (2017) argued that although the issue identified may be important, MRAs misidentify the source of these issues as women and feminism instead of capitalism and patriarchy. Similarly, many feminists have critiqued the normalization and proliferation of sexism and misogyny within men’s rights groups (Boyd, 2004; Flood, 2004; Jordan, 2009, 2016). Rather than pro-equality, men’s rights activism typically comes across as anti-women.

2.2.3. Mythopoetic Men's Movements

Alongside pro- and antifeminist men's movements, there also existed a more ostensibly neutral faction known as the 'mythopoetic' movement who described themselves as "largely gender separatists, neither pro-feminist nor anti-feminists" (Kimmel, 2013, p. 106). The label 'mythopoetic' was originally used by Shepherd Bliss to highlight this groups' use of "ancient mythology and fairytales" in teachings and theorisation of masculinity (Bliss, 1987). According to mythopoets, men were unhappy because they had not been properly initiated into manhood and lacked proper male role models (Fox, 2004; Clatterbaugh, 2000). Therefore, men must learn how to reconnect with other men in homosocial spaces so that they can reclaim their inner masculinity and become better partners (Coston and Kimmel, 2013). Mythopoets organised male-only events such as wilderness retreats and stadium rallies, with readings and activities often inspired by neo-Jungian psychology and ancient Greek or Indigenous mythologies (Clatterbaugh, 2000; Kimmel and Kaufman, 1994). Mythopoets sought to restore "their sense of power" by "reclaiming masculine myths" (Kimmel, 2010, p. 22), as opposed to engaging in collective action or protest.

Mythopoets and MRAs also differed in their relationship to feminism, as mythopoets claimed to be indifferent to or unaware of feminism rather than oppositional to it (Fox, 2004). Some feminists, particularly feminist men, praised mythopoets for encouraging men to share their emotions with other men and fostering nurturing homosocial relationships (Fox, 2004), while other feminists critiqued their gender essentialism, derogation and blaming of women, and appropriation of Indigenous spiritual practices (Ferber, 2000; Kimmel and Kaufman, 1994). Moreover, Ferber (2000) argued that the mythopoetic movement shares much in common with White supremacist groups, as both construct an essentialised masculinity that is under attack and blame 'emasculatation' as a major cause of societal decline.

Finally, the mythopoetic movement began to decline in popularity by the late 1990s (Fox, 2004). According to Clatterbaugh (2000), this was because the movement "promised only occasional gatherings" with "no vision of social justice or how to get there," (p. 891). Conversely, men's rights activism has continued to proliferate, not only in the USA but also in the UK (Jordan, 2009, 2016), Canada (Blais and Depuis-Déri, 2012), Australia (Salter, 2016) and New Zealand (Busch et al., 2014) as well as Germany (Träbert, 2017), Poland (Wojnicka, 2016) and India (Cockerill, 2019; Lodhia, 2014). In particular, men's rights activism has proliferated on social media, where men's rights discourse can reach an unprecedented global audience and connect people who would otherwise never have the chance to interact.

2.3. The manosphere

Paralleling shifts within feminism (Munro, 2013) and other social movements (Earl and Kimport, 2011), men's rights activism has capitalised on the proliferation of social media. Extant organisations such as National Coalition for Men have established an online presence and new men's rights websites have been founded, such as A Voice For Men and Return of Kings. As well as self-hosted blogs and forums, men's rights and antifeminist groups have a strong presence on mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube. This network of antifeminist social media is often referred to as the 'manosphere' (Marwick and Caplan, 2018). Central to the manosphere is a metaphor of taking the red pill, an intertextual reference to science-fiction film *The Matrix* (1999). In *The Matrix*, taking the red pill entailed becoming aware of the truth that humanity had been long enslaved by machines and the human world was a simulation; in the manosphere, taking the red pill entails becoming aware of the 'truth' that feminism has brainwashed men and women into believing that our society is misogynistic and patriarchal, when in reality it is men who are oppressed (Ging, 2019a). The dominant social order is argued to be *gynocentrism*, meaning that society revolves around women.

The manosphere is usually described as a loose network of small communities rather than a single tight-knit community (Ging, 2019a; van Valkenburgh, 2019). While there may be prominent figures, such as aforementioned Andrew Tate, there are no official leaders or websites connecting every self-identified member. For such reasons, Ging (2019a) and Siapera (2019) characterised the manosphere as constituting an 'affective public' (Papacharissi, 2014) as opposed to a social movement or form of collective action. Researchers typically distinguish at least four major communities: men's rights activists; incels; pick-up artists; and men going their own way. Some researchers also include generic red pill groups (Krendel, 2020; Krendel et al., 2022), traditional Christian conservatives and geek subcultures (Ging, 2019a) within their definitions.

However, the label 'manosphere' is not without problems. Bates (2020) expressed concern that the man- prefix may lead some to view it as a harmless joke through analogy with other derided terms like "man cave" or "man flu" (p. 4). Moreover, the constituent groups are by no means homogenous as each espouse their own distinct ideology and produce unique lexis (McGlashan and Krendel, 2020) and differ in terms of popularity or level of toxicity (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021). Consequently, there exists tension and hostility between the different communities and some even reject the manosphere label altogether (Zuckerberg, 2018). Nonetheless, the manosphere is still a useful label for research purposes. First, Horta Ribeiro et al. (2021) found that manosphere sites increasingly share the same userbase and there is much migration between communities. Second, Ging (2019a)

highlighted the “prolific cross-fertilization of ideas” (p. 645) within the manosphere due to the affordances of hyperlinking and the existence of generic manosphere spaces such as r/TheRedPill. Third, while there are many differences between the subcommunities, there are also many shared language features and antifeminist beliefs (Marwick and Caplan, 2018; Krendel et al., 2022). Therefore, I continue to use the term *manosphere* to refer to this network of antifeminist social media, although I do not intend to imply any ideological or linguistic homogeneity.

Much research into the language of the manosphere has utilised corpus linguistic techniques. For instance, Krendel et al. (2022) built a 10.9 million word corpus comprising data from five manosphere subreddits in order to examine the representation of gendered social actors and identify consistent collocates (i.e., collocates that were present in each of the five sub-corpora) of the social actor terms *women*, *girls*, *men* and *guys*. Their results revealed sexism and objectification of women, as female social actors were frequently referred to via derogatory gendered or sexualised labels such as *bitch* and *whore*. While there were some derogatory nomination strategies for male social actors (e.g., *cuck*), there were fewer of them and they were less frequent than derogatory terms for female social actors. Furthermore, they found that discussions of gender relations often relied on biological essentialism, as male and female social actors were constructed as “homogenous, dichotomous groups” (p. 22). Similar patterns of homogenisation and sexualisation were also found in Krendel’s earlier work. Krendel (2020) used methods of appraisal analysis and social actor analysis to investigate the representation of gendered social actors in a corpus of 70,000 words from a manosphere subreddit. Her analysis showed that female social actors were negatively appraised in terms of their morality, propriety, capacity, and veracity, while male social actors were constructed as the unhappy and insecure victims of female social actors. Finally, McGlashan and Krendel (2020), using the same corpus as Krendel et al. (2022), investigated which keywords are unique to each manosphere community. r/TheRedPill was characterised by self-improvement lexis relating to topics such as lifestyle and relationships (e.g., *calories*, *LTR* [long term relationship]) MRA keywords related to the law and violence (e.g., *rights*, *abuse*), MGTOW keywords concerned media and technology (e.g., *marvel*, *sexbots*), PUA keywords concerned physical intimacy and appearance (e.g., *kiss*, *dress*); and finally incel keywords related to women and mental health (e.g., *foid* [female humanoid], *cope*).

Altogether, manosphere communities exhibit notable differences in terms of their language and topics of discussion, though sexism, dehumanisation and objectification of women remain prevalent throughout. Krendel (2021) questioned whether the Reddit manosphere constitutes hate speech. Indeed, some manosphere websites such as A Voice For Men and Return of Kings have been

classified as 'male supremacy hate groups' by the Southern Poverty Law Centre and several manosphere communities such as r/incels have been banned from Reddit. However, due to the lack of threats or incitement towards violence, Krendel (2021) concluded that the manosphere does not meet the legal criteria for hate speech in the UK. On the other hand, she argued manosphere discourse could be characterised as hate speech in an academic or linguistic sense, considering how women tend to be portrayed in a homogenous, dehumanising manner and the fact that such condemnations of women are often framed as universal facts rather than personal opinions.

Having provided an overview of research into the manosphere as a whole, I will now discuss research looking into four major communities: men's rights activists, involuntary celibates, pick-up artists, and men going their own way. This will allow me to examine how MGTOW positions itself in relation to the wider manosphere community.

2.3.1. Contemporary Men's Rights Activists

As discussed in section 2.2, men's rights activism has a long history originating in the feminist movement and continues to be popular in the present day. Many arguments and issues discussed in the 1970s remain important for contemporary men's rights groups. For example, Rafail and Freitas' (2019) topic modelling analysis revealed that the most frequent topics of conversation within the r/MensRights subreddit included rape and sexual assault; domestic violence; and family issues. While traditional methods of activism are still prevalent, contemporary MRAs can also capitalise on new media affordances such as memes (Cockerill, 2019; Ging, 2019; Kelly, 2020; see section 3.3. for further discussion of memes).

Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) studied twelve men's rights websites and divided them into two categories: 'Cyber Lads in Search of Masculinity' and 'Virtual Victims in Search of Equality.' 'Cyber Lads' websites were characterised by policing of masculinity, demonization of feminism, and explicit aggression or objectification towards women. Similarly, O'Donnell (2019) described MRAs' use of aggressive military or gaming metaphors, such as referring to harassment campaigns as "false flag attacks" and perceived feminist opponents as the "final boss" (pp. 658-659). Furthermore, LaViolette and Hogan (2019) combined machine learning with critical discourse analysis to distinguish the vocabulary of r/MensRights from r/MensLib (a men's liberation subreddit) and found r/MensRights users were more likely to use misogynistic and pejorative language such as *bitch*, *cunt*, and *sjw*. A particularly interesting finding was that r/MensRights users were significantly more likely to use the pronouns *she* and *her* and less likely to use terms like *masculinity* or *men* than r/MensLib users. They

suggested that this revealed “an us-versus-them mentality” (p. 331) and an antifeminist rather than a pro-men stance.

On the other hand, ‘Virtual Victims in Search of Equality’ websites presented men as “in crisis” and focused on providing evidence of misandry, while simultaneously delegitimising women’s issues (Schmitz and Kazyak, 2015, p. 6). Like McGlashan and Krendel (2020), LaViolette and Hogan (2019) found that r/MensRights was characterised by language relating to the justice system, body politics, and persecution e.g., *illegal, abortion, oppression* (p. 329). Progressive language and frameworks may also be used to criticise feminism. For example, Gotell and Dutton (2016) found that MRA websites adopted antiracist rhetoric in their discussions of sexual violence, such as pointing out the veritable fact that Black men are disproportionately targeted by false rape accusations. However, Hodapp (2017) argued that MRA websites’ appeals to antiracism are shallow, encouraging men to focus solely on their oppression as men rather than engage in genuine intersectional analysis. In general, Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) noted that although the Cyber Lads’ rhetoric was “much more extreme” than that of Virtual Victims, the latter has the potential to become “much stronger” and gain credibility through the use of “legitimated sources (research studies) and issues grounded in truth (men’s health inequities)” (p. 11), meaning it is more likely to be viewed as publicly acceptable and the sexism may remain unnoticed.

Overall, social media have provided ample opportunity for global dissemination of a men’s rights agenda, the formation of new digitally mediated communities, and the use of new tactics such as memes. However, this is not to say that contemporary men’s rights activism exists exclusively online. Men’s rights activists continue to meet in physical space and employ methods such as poster campaigns around university campuses (Gotell and Dutton, 2016). Moreover, A Voice For Men founder Paul Elam claimed that Farrell’s *The Myth of Male Power* was his “red pill” moment that persuaded him of the illegitimacy of feminism and invited Farrell as the keynote speaker at his conference in 2014 (Blake, 2015). Furthermore, there are many continuities in terms of the issues discussed: Messner (1998) suggested that men’s rights activists in the 1970s and 1980s were concerned about false rape accusations and domestic violence, while Rafael and Freitas (2019) found rape and sexual assault to be the most common topic within r/MensRights. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to draw entirely neat boundaries between an “online” and an “offline” movement.

2.3.2. Incels

A portmanteau of ‘involuntary celibate,’ the term *incel* dates back to 1993 when a university student known as Alana created the ‘Involuntary Celibacy Project.’ While the original incel community (then ‘invcel’) was open to “anybody of any gender who was lonely” (Taylor, 2018), contemporary incel forums are dominated by men and often forbid women from participating. Incels have received ample attention within popular media and academia. This may be due to several high-profile cases of violence and mass murder associated with incels, such as the 2014 Isla Vista killings and the 2018 Toronto van attack. Some scholars (Baele et al., 2019; Hoffman et al., 2020; Regehr, 2020; Tomkinson et al., 2020; Zimmerman et al., 2020) have argued that incel violence should be recognised as a form of extremism or terrorism. On the other hand, Cameron (2018), DeCook and Kelly (2022) cautioned that portraying incels as a unique terrorist threat would elide the connections with intimate partner violence against women and everyday sexism.

Regarding the language of incel communities, Jaki et al. (2019) calculated that 50% of threads on an incel forum could be classified as misogynistic when considering the presence of 50 offensive word combinations. Meanwhile, Heritage and Koller’s (2020) corpus analysis of r/braincels found that the 38.1% of female social actor references were negative, including common gendered slurs like *bitch* or *whore(s)* as well as incel-specific epithets like *roastie* (referring to the supposed appearance of women’s labia) and *foid(s)* (a contraction of *female humanoid*, or *femoid*). Tranchese and Sugiura (2021) also performed a corpus analysis of an incel subreddit and discovered that *woman/women* were attributed the predicates *whore*, *people* and *slut*, and were the object of verb phrases *attract*, *hate*, and *force*. Finally, Chang (2022) examined incels’ use of the word *femoid*, describing how it is used to portray women as sociopathic and subhuman with inherently inferior brains relative to men. Overall, this research suggests that women are portrayed extremely negatively within incel discourse, often in a dehumanising or sexual manner.

Men, including incels themselves, are also represented negatively within incel discourse, although not to the same degree. Heritage and Koller (2020) found that 18.1% of male social actor references were negative and that incels place men within a hierarchy with *Chads* at the top, *guys* and *cucks* in the middle, and *incels* and *faggots* towards the bottom (see Baele et al., 2019, for an alternate hierarchy). ‘Chad’ represents the prototypical ‘alpha male’, who is desired by all women for his physical attractiveness and genetic superiority in spite of, or because of, his aggressive behaviour towards them (Heritage and Koller, 2020; Menzie, 2022; Tranchese and Sugiura, 2021). Incel discourse is also characterised by self-deprecation and rigidity, as ‘black-pilled’ incels suggest their celibacy is the result of immutable biological qualities, meaning that nothing can be done to improve

their situation (Baele et al., 2019; Glace et al., 2019; Preston et al., 2021). The -cel suffix demarcates specific categories of incel, for example a *heightcel* believes he is an incel due to his short stature while a *currycel* believes he is an incel because he is South Asian (Chang, 2022; Glace et al., 2021; Menzie, 2022). On the other hand, Baele et al. (2019) found that incels engage in positive self-representation with regards to their mental capacities and intelligence, especially compared to women. Furthermore, Glace et al. (2019) found that incels derogate so-called 'beta men (i.e., men of lesser status than alpha males) as desperate, feminized, and exploited by women. Ging (2019a) and Glace et al. (2019) thus theorised that incels represent a 'hybrid masculinity' (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014), as they distance themselves from the hegemonic masculinity and physical superiority of Chads, while simultaneously policing the masculinity of beta men.

In sum, women are typically homogenised within incel discourse, while men are placed within a hierarchy and afforded more diversity in their representations. Relative to other manosphere communities, incels engage in more negative self-representations although they still represent themselves as superior to women. Women are frequently dehumanised and violence against women may be justified as something that women desire or deserve for their rejection of incels. This violence against women may be carried out in the physical world, as numerous cases of murder and attempted murder have been attributed to incels. However although incels' sexism and misogyny may be shocking, incel sexism cannot be isolated from older and more entrenched patriarchal stereotypes and negative beliefs about women (Chang, 2022, DeCook and Kelly, 2022; Tranchese and Suguira, 2021).

2.3.3. Pick-Up Artists

Pick up artists (PUAs) comprise "men who practice speed seduction of women," (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2022, p. 2). King (2018) traced their emergence to the explosion of seduction manuals in the 1970s, rising to further prominence the mid-to-late 2000s following the publication of Strauss' (2006) *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* and TV shows such as *The Pickup Artist* (2007-2008). According to Dayter and Rüdiger (2022), PUAs initially enjoyed positive media attention but began to attract scrutiny in the late 2010s following scandals such as a viral Return of Kings article claiming to advocate the legalisation of rape, which author Roosh V later claimed to be satire. Consequently, the community attempted to rebrand as the 'seduction community' or 'seduction industry' with an emphasis on lifestyle. As well as posting on social media, PUA 'experts' and 'lifestyle coaches' host regular training seminars and residential programmes (see O'Neill, 2018, for an ethnographic study of the London seduction industry) and publish seduction manuals (see Denes, 2011 for an examination of a PUA seduction manual) aiming to train men in seduction techniques.

However, scholars have critiqued these seduction strategies for encouraging sexual aggression towards women (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2022; Denes, 2011; Wright, 2020). For example, the concept of 'last minute resistance' posits that women feign resistance to sex in order to avoid appearing promiscuous (Denes, 2011; Wright, 2020). Wright's (2020) corpus analysis of a PUA forum revealed that resistance was constructed as symbolic, or something to be "overcome, battled and pushed through" in order for men to achieve their desired outcome, i.e., sexual intercourse (p. 7). When resistance was perceived to be genuine, this was portrayed as deviant and evidence of a personality defect on behalf of the woman. Furthermore, perhaps unsurprisingly, research also finds a tendency towards objectification and sexualisation of women. For example, Mountford (2018) noted that PUAs refer to women via identifying features such as "blonde" or describe women in terms of their clothing, while Dayter and Rüdiger (2022) described the PUA 'hot babe' scale where women are rated on a scale of 1-10. A woman's 'sexual marketplace value' (SMV) can be increased by wearing push-up bras and wearing makeup or decreased by ageing and gaining weight (van Valkenburgh, 2021; Zuckerberg, 2018). Thus, PUA discourse demonstrates some interdiscursivity with economic discourse.

Dayter and Rüdiger (2022) suggested that "pseudo-scientific vocabulary" is a "cornerstone" of PUA discourse" (p. 51). For instance, they found that PUA 'field reports' (i.e., reports of sexual encounters or seduction attempts) contained precise numerical detail, such as calculating the percentage of successful seductions or the average 'hot babe' score of women approached. Furthermore, van Valkenburgh (2021) described how a seduction subreddit presented itself as based on "empirical evidence" and "pragmatism and truth based on observation" (p. 90). In particular, PUAs interdiscursively draw on biology and evolutionary psychology (Denes, 2011; O'Neill, 2018; van Valkenburgh, 2021). For example, O'Neill (2018) described how PUAs employ evolutionary narratives relating to male sexuality, where it is suggested that men evolved to have an incorrigible need for sex in order to maximise gene reproduction, making seduction a moral imperative.

Although pick-up strategies are usually unsuccessful (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2022), this does not make them harmless. Denes (2011) and Wright (2020) concluded that the propagation of concepts like 'last minute resistance' have dangerous potential: if men are encouraged to ignore women's consent, this may lead to women's increased risk of sexual harassment or rape. However, it is worth noting that these concepts did not originate within PUA forums - 'token resistance' has been the object of several academic studies (see Denes, 2011 for a review). Ging (2019b) suggested that appropriation of evolutionary psychology was facilitated by postfeminist bio-essentialist explanations of gender, such as the "explosion in pseudo-scientific self-help manuals on

heterosexual gender roles” in the 1990s (p. 56). Consequently, she argued that the adoption of evolutionary psychology within the manosphere was not so much an “aberration” but more an “intensification of dominant thinking about gender” (p. 57). Therefore, while often abhorrent, PUAs should not be regarded as particularly extreme or unique with regards to their beliefs about gender and sexuality.

2.3.4. Men Going Their Own Way

Finally, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) comprise the male separatist faction of the manosphere. Believing that heterosexual relationships are oppressive to men, MGTOW abstain from relationships with women and pursue an individualistic lifestyle (Lin, 2017; Wright et al., 2020). Lin (2017) detailed the four ‘levels’ of MGTOW which reflect an increasing degree of separatism. At level one, a man has taken the red pill and is generally aware of misandry and gynocentrism but still desires a wife or long-term partner. Moving to level two, a man avoids serious commitments such as marriage, cohabitation, and co-parenting but continues to pursue short-term relationships or one-night stands. At level three, a man abstains from casual relationships and may limit platonic interaction with women. Finally, level four comprises societal disengagement, also known as “going ghost” (p. 90). Other interpretations of MGTOW include “trad-cons” who believe even married men can be MGTOW as long as they maintain self-sovereignty and “monks” who practice celibacy (p. 91). Despite these differences, MGTOW are united by the belief that women are inherently toxic and heterosexual relationships will inevitably lead to exploitation and abuse of men.

The emergence of MGTOW is typically dated to the early 2000s (Bates, 2020; Zuckerberg, 2018), with the publication of a ‘MGTOW manifesto’ in 2001 (see No Ma’Am, 2001, for the original text; Koller et al., forthcoming, for analysis). Two men known as ‘Solaris’ and ‘Ragnar’ are recognised as the founders of MGTOW, although some users claim famous historical bachelors, such as Galileo, da Vinci, and even Jesus Christ, as evidence of MGTOW’s long lineage (Bates, 2020). However, contemporary MGTOW differ significantly from the initial libertarian vision. The original manifesto made no mention of marriage at all, instead claiming to advocate three main goals: instilling masculinity in men by living independent lives and promoting male role models; instilling femininity in women by encouraging their nurturing and supportive traits and holding them accountable for their actions; and working towards limited government and reduced taxation (No Ma’Am, 2001). Since then, the MGTOW community has continued to grow with their own dedicated forums (Wright et al., 2020) as well as maintaining a strong userbase on mainstream platforms such as Facebook, YouTube (Bates, 2020), Reddit (Trott et al., 2020; Krendel et al., 2022), Twitter (Jones et al., 2020) and TikTok (O’Connor, 2021).

It has been suggested that their separatist approach has facilitated perceptions that MGTOW are benign, especially compared to violent groups such as incels (Bates, 2020; Jones et al., 2019). Judging by the name alone, one may conclude that 'going their own way' entails leaving women alone rather than harassing them. However, r/MGTOW was placed in a quarantine in January 2020 and banned in August 2021 for promoting hate. Though Reddit administrators provided no further reasoning for their intervention, some speculated that it related to an ongoing legal case (Pedroja, 2021). The day before the initial quarantine, a news story revealed that r/MGTOW was the most visited site of a US coast guard officer arrested under suspicion of attempted domestic terrorism (Owen, 2020). Empirical research has attempted to assess the prevalence of 'toxicity' or hateful language within MGTOW. Trott et al. (2020) applied the *Perspective* toxicity-detecting machine learning tool to the top 10 most popular r/MGTOW threads of all time and reported a low level of toxicity overall, with 30% of posts labelled as "low toxicity" and only 10% as "loud." Similarly, Farrell et al. (2020) calculated that 36.2% of r/MGTOW posts used misogynistic language, 27.29% used hostile language and 17.65% used physically violent language. However, in terms of raw numbers, this was higher than any other manosphere subreddit in their study, including three incel subreddits. Furthermore, Horta Ribeiro et al. (2021) found that MGTOW were more toxic than MRAs and PUAs and were becoming increasingly toxic over time. Turning to non-computational studies, Jones et al. (2020) studied tweets posted by MGTOW Twitter accounts and found that 29% could be classified as harassing, though over half of the harassing tweets originated from the same three accounts and only 4% had a specific target. In a later study, the same authors found that 61% of mentions of women within a MGTOW forum were misogynistic, while 8% of posts denigrated men in some way (Wright et al., 2020). Collectively, this research suggests that MGTOW produce a mild-to-moderate degree of hateful, toxic or misogynistic language, but more extreme toxicity and targeted harassment is less common. Furthermore, MGTOW self-hosted forums may be more toxic than MGTOW Reddit or Twitter communities (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021). This could be the result of increased moderation and stronger norms against hateful speech on mainstream platforms.

While MGTOW advocate separation from women, research suggests that much of their discourse revolves around women. Wright et al. (2020) found that women were the most frequently discussed topic in the MGTOW forum, as 59% of posts mentioned women and 33% of posts centred on women, while Johanssen (2021) observed that r/MGTOW posts discussing "the 'evil' nature of women" outnumbered the posts aiming to celebrate "male independence and strength" (p. 124). Jones et al. (2020) suggested that their contradictory focus on women is perhaps due to the tensions surrounding what it means to be a man going his own way, as the community tends to centre around what a man is *not* doing (i.e., dating women) rather than what he *is* doing. Furthermore,

Wright et al. (2020) claimed that narrating personal negative experiences about women is a “primary method of performing one’s MGTOW membership” (p. 921). Writing sexist and misogynistic comments signals that one has taken the red pill and understands the true nature of women and so should be considered a legitimate member of the community.

Finally, although MGTOW are occasionally conflated with MRAs (for example, MGTOW.com appeared in Schmitz and Kazyak’s, 2016, list of MRA websites), MGTOW claim to be less political. Wright et al. (2020) found that calls to political action were “rare” and did not tend to involve the government (p. 919). Furthermore, Vivenzi (2018) wrote that MGTOW are reluctant to engage in forms of advocacy such as marches, citing reasons such as privacy concerns or not wanting to be seen as a victim. Instead, MGTOW are individualistic, focussing on how men can improve their own lives through limiting interaction with women rather than improving men’s collective lives (Lin, 2017; Wright et al., 2020). To this end, some MGTOW deny their categorisation as a group or movement at all (Wright et al., 2020). Vivenzi (2018) suggested that MGTOW comprise a community of emotional and moral support rather than a community of action. This aligns with Ging (2019a) and Siapera (2019)’s characterisations of the manosphere as representing an affective public.

Overall, MGTOW represent the separatist camp of the manosphere, aiming to improve their lives and avoid perceived misandry by abstaining from relationships with women rather than campaigning for institutional or systemic change. In this vein, MGTOW may be compared to the mythopoetic movement as both groups focus on individualistic self-improvement, although MGTOW primarily communicate on social media and do not organise retreats or rallies. However, while the mythopoetic movement was mixed regarding its position on feminism, MGTOW are staunchly antifeminist.

2.4. Conclusions

This chapter has explored the historical background to the manosphere and how it relates to earlier manifestations of the men’s movement and generalised resistance to feminism. Disparate groups in the manosphere are connected by a shared antifeminist ideology and metaphor of the red pill, which allows members to represent themselves as the only group aware of key societal truths. Namely, these ‘truths’ include a perception that men are subject to pervasive, systemic misandry while women are privileged by systems of gynocentrism. While it is agreed that feminism is the cause of a multitude of societal ills, there is much disagreement regarding most the appropriate solution - whether it is best to game the system and use red-pill philosophy to seduce as many

women as possible; to change the system through political campaigning; or to opt out of a rigged system altogether.

It is important not to dismiss the manosphere as harmless or as existing at fringe corner of the Internet. First, the sexism and misogyny expressed within the manosphere is not unique to these forums, but is a continuation of historical patriarchal ideology and mainstream beliefs about gender relations. Many of the antifeminist arguments circulated within the manosphere today are very similar, if not the same, as those used to oppose earlier waves of feminism. Second, not all grievances remain contained to their own subreddits and forums – while it may be less frequent than expected, members of the manosphere still harass women online. Issues of online harassment and abuse cannot be resolved by merely logging out, as it can have long-lasting impacts on women’s mental health and lead to chilling effects where women are discouraged from fully participating online.

Third, even if it is true that manosphere members devote more time to producing misogynistic rhetoric online than offline political participation, this does not mean that there is no offline impact. Whether manosphere users avoid women or attempt to seduce women, women will inevitably be affected. Moreover, manosphere rhetoric may lead to discursive change in how gender politics are discussed in the public sphere. Bower (2019) reported that following #MeToo, 27% of men avoided one-on-one meetings with women and 21% were reluctant to hire women for jobs involving close interpersonal interactions with men in fear of being falsely accused of inappropriate conduct. Bates (2020) explained that these results evidence mainstreaming of MGTOW ideology, as men increasingly believe that false accusations are so prevalent that the best solution is to avoid women and treat them with suspicion. This may have detrimental impact on women’s careers if their superiors are unwilling to have meetings with them or hire them in certain positions. Therefore, it is important to study and take seriously the misogynistic and antifeminist rhetoric propagated in the manosphere.

Chapter 3: Digital Communication and Argumentation

This chapter will provide an overview of digitally mediated communication and the affordances, dynamics, and discursive features which are relevant to argumentation and persuasion within MGTOW and the manosphere. First, I define social media and discuss digital media communication in a general sense in order to account for the broad context in which the data for this thesis were produced, shared, and received. Next, I discuss argumentation and deliberation on social media and review potential barriers to deliberation online, including echo chambers and pseudonymous communication, and consider how these factors may impact discussions within r/MGTOW. Following this, I discuss two prominent genres in digital communication which may have persuasive or argumentative functions within MGTOW and the manosphere more broadly, specifically memes and narratives.

3.1. Digital communication

‘Social media’ is an umbrella term for “Internet-based sites and services that promote social interaction between participants” ranging from social networking sites like Facebook to content-sharing sites like YouTube (Page et al., 2022, p. 5). In contrast to unidirectional, one-to-many messages disseminated through traditional broadcast media, social media consists of “mass-self communication” in which the production of messages is self-generated, self-directed and self-selected (Castells, 2009, p. 55). Thus, users can create their own content and disseminate it to a potentially unlimited global audience while bypassing traditional gatekeeping mechanisms. As well as producing original content, users simultaneously consume and engage with content produced by others. Consequently, users are sometimes labelled as ‘producers’ (Bruns, 2008) or ‘prosumers’ (Ritzer and Jurgensen, 2010) to signify this dual role.

boyd (2010) posited four major affordances of networked technologies: persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability. First, most content posted to social media remains online indefinitely, although sites like 4chan or Snapchat where content is deleted within hours or even minutes are notable exceptions. Second, social media users can share their own and others’ content both internally (e.g., by retweeting on Twitter) and externally (e.g., by cross-posting to another website). Third, content posted to social media can reach a potentially unlimited global audience, although this is no guarantee. Finally, many social media platforms have built-in search engines meaning it is much easier to find individuals and their content, especially when combined with the affordance of persistence. Following this, boyd (2010) discussed three central dynamics of networked technologies: invisible audiences, where users may not know the size or demographics of their

audience; collapsed contexts, in which users' (imagined or actual) audience includes multiple dispersed groups with different expectations regarding appropriate content; and the blurring of public and private, as content that is originally intended for a small audience may be broadcast to a much larger audience.

The emergence of the Internet and social media has been theorised by some to lead to “fully decentralised and democratised access to discursive power” (KhosraviNik, 2018, p. 582) and an overall enhancement of a deliberative public sphere (see Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren, 2006; Jones, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002, for further discussion). In theory, all one needs is an Internet connection and a social media account in order to share their opinions with the world. The lack of gatekeeping mechanisms could facilitate the production and dissemination of transgressive content that otherwise may not be published in traditional broadcast media (Jones, 2008; Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Additionally, users have access to an increased volume of information which means that they could become more informed about important national and international issues (Papacharissi, 2002; Jones, 2008). Political groups and social movements can take advantage of social media in order to raise awareness of their cause, gain new members, and mobilise members into action (Earl and Kimport, 2011).

However, Papacharissi (2002) stated that in practice “online technologies render participation in the political sphere convenient, but do not guarantee it” (p. 15). First, access to the Internet is limited to the globally most privileged. In April 2022, it was estimated that only 63% of the global population were active Internet users (Statista Research Department, 2022b). Moreover, a lack of digital literacy skills may pose barriers to participation among those who do have access. For example, users may not know what to do with the sheer quantity of information they have access to, or may struggle to discern its quality or veracity (Jones, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002). In addition, users may choose not to participate even if they possess the relevant skills. A survey of Reddit users found that 78% of users never or seldom submitted content of their own (Singer et al., 2014), while Kruse et al. (2018) found that social media users avoided online political discussion, fearing harassment as a result of sharing controversial opinions among other reasons. This calls into question the idea that social media users are necessarily empowered to speak out and participate online. Finally, as Fuchs (2017) pointed out, even if users do feel empowered to participate, attention is unequally distributed. Online discussions may become dominated by powerful voices, such as the accounts of corporations and celebrities, as opposed to everyday citizens.

The same affordances which enable activism and deliberation may also enable the proliferation of hostile communities or hate speech. As explained in chapters one and two, pseudonymous virtual

spaces are not free from sexism, racism, or other forms of oppression. Daniels (2018) explained how White supremacists have always capitalized on new technologies, including the Internet. The first neo-Nazi forum Stormfront was created in 1996 and remains “one of the most influential far-right online communities in the world” (Bliuc et al., 2019, p. 1772) with over 300,000 registered users. These sites enable White supremacists and neo-Nazis to build their social movements, engage in collective identity formations, disseminate their ideology, and recruit new members in a similar manner to progressive social movements (Bliuc et al., 2019; Caren et al., 2012). Moreover, access to information online can easily be manipulated. For example, far-right groups are adept at search engine optimisation (Daniels, 2018), meaning that White supremacist or far-right websites often rank highly in search engine results for certain queries.

Hate speech or general controversies may prove profitable for social media platforms. Massanari (2017) speculated that part of the reason why Reddit administrators hesitated to ban r/TheFappening (a subreddit dedicated to sharing stolen naked photographs of celebrities) was because subscribers were buying large amounts of ‘Reddit Gold’ i.e., the platform’s virtual currency which pays for server costs. Moreover, social media companies increase their revenue by maximising time spent on the platform in order to harvest more personal data which can be used for targeted advertising (Fuchs, 2017). One method to achieve this is to “produce a constant stream of controversy” (Harrison, 2020). Kelly (2020) explained how manosphere websites effectively utilise a strategy of “outrage clicks” by writing purposefully inflammatory headlines in order to elicit traffic (p. 164). It does not matter if visitors to the sites vehemently disagree with the content because, as Grimmelman (2018) succinctly put it, “hate clicks are still clicks” (p. 230) and thus, the platform can still make money from advertising. On the other hand, too much offensive content may threaten a platform’s profits and reputation (Harrison, 2020). Gillespie (2018) showed how social media platforms police the activity of users in order to appeal to advertisers who would not want their products or services associated with hateful content, as well as to prevent users leaving the site due to a perceived toxic environment.

Thus, there appear to be several barriers and obstacles to civil discussion on social media. The potentials and affordances which would enable democratic and political discussion may not always be realised by the users, or may be realised for the production of hateful speech and building anti-democratic social movements.

3.2. Deliberation and argumentation on social media

Deliberative democracy consists of “informed discussion between individuals about issues which concern them, leading to some form of consensus and collective decision” (Wright and Street, 2007, p. 850). Drawing on the work of Habermas, Dahlberg (2001) summarised the main requirements for deliberative communication: two or more participants must discuss their difference of opinion in good faith and both must be amenable to having their minds changed as a result of the discussion. Each participant must back up their views with rational, reasoned arguments and critiques must relate to the content of their interlocutor’s argument rather than their character. Finally, all participants should be able to freely take part in the discussion and nobody (including outsiders) should attempt to prevent someone from advancing their point of view. However, deliberation is not the only possibility for digital communication. Elaborating on Dahlberg (2001), Freelon (2010, 2015) discussed liberal individualist and communitarian models of communication. The liberal individualist model emphasises personal self-expression “without regard to civility or reciprocity” and “without listening to or considering the opinions of others” (Freelon, 2015, p. 775-776). On the other hand, communitarian spaces promote group cohesion and collective identity and thus interactions tend to be with like-minded others and “comparatively little direct interest in outsiders except as adversaries” (p. 775). While liberal individualist discourse may comprise monologues, insults, or personal disclosures, communitarian discourse tends to comprise inter-group dialogue, in-group identity labels, and calls to action (Freelon, 2010).

Wright and Street (2007) argued that “technology is both shaped by, and shaping, political discussion on the Internet” (p. 855). Social media platforms can be designed in order to facilitate specific forms of communication, including deliberative, communitarian, or liberal individual norms (Freelon, 2015). For example, practices of pre-moderation may enhance deliberation given that comments which are off-topic, abusive, or otherwise unproductive can be removed before they appear on the site, while threaded formats allow users to more easily keep track of each other’s messages and reply to one another (Wodak and Wright, 2006; Wright and Street, 2007). In addition, Halpern and Gibbs (2013) suggested that platforms with higher levels of user identifiability are more suited to deliberative communication. In their comparative study of YouTube and Facebook, they found that discussions on Facebook were politer, longer, and had a more equal distribution of participations which indicated a higher level of deliberation. Meanwhile, liberal individualist online spaces are “anarchic” in their design and enable users a “broad degree of expressive latitude” (Freelon, 2015, p. 777). Platforms such as Gab or Voat could be considered liberal individualist spaces, as the platforms claim to be dedicated to freedom of speech and pose minimal constraints on

what pseudonymous users are allowed to post (Zannettou et al., 2018). Finally, communitarian discourse architectures facilitate bonding between members and exclusion of non-members (Freelon, 2015). A communitarian space may be more heavily moderated and pose restrictive membership criteria. However, while some aspects of a platform's structure may facilitate a particular type of communication, it is no guarantee. Although Facebook discussions were more deliberative than YouTube discussions, Halpern and Gibbs (2013) found that Facebook discussions also contained a large amount of unfounded, irrational arguments, which is antithetical to deliberation. Moreover, Freelon (2010, 2015) suggested that it is possible, and indeed likely, for platforms to exhibit characteristics of deliberative, communitarian *and* liberal individual models, rather than neatly sitting in one category.

Wright et al. (2020) applied Freelon's (2010, 2015) framework to the official MGTOW forum and found that the discourse cut across all three categories. Overall, they concluded that communication was "predominantly communitarian in form" (p. 920) due to the high presence of group support and affirmations and low presence of disagreement. Communitarianism was also evident in the practices aiming to exclude non-members. Only men who already conformed to MGTOW ideology were permitted to post and members could be awarded "Cunts Punted" points if they were able to identify illegitimate users, such as women or feminist men (p. 917). On the other hand, political mobilization and calls to action were rare meaning the space was not entirely communitarian. Furthermore, they also found evidence of deliberation as there was much dialogue between users and threads tended to stay on topic. Conversely, there was little evidence of critical, rational arguments as claims tended to be made as assertions without supporting evidence and 74 "super-posters" created half of all posts, meaning there was not an equal distribution of participants (p. 918). Finally, they found evidence of some liberal individual characteristics through the high prevalence of personal disclosures (including narratives) and monologues.

Researchers have attempted to examine debate and argumentation in various social media contexts. For example, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) studied comments underneath a pro-LGBT YouTube video and found that argumentation was highly polarized and monologic. Users tended to submit singular comments highlighting their own opinion as opposed to engaging with other users' comments and the most common closing sequence within a debate was for one user to simply withdraw from the conversation. In another study of YouTube comments, Sagredos and Nikolova (2022) also found evidence of polarisation. Both users who challenged and users who sustained the sexist gender ideologies that were advanced in the initial video engaged in polarising behaviour, such as ascribing positive traits to their own group and negative traits to the opposed

group. Relatedly, Cospers (2022) found that both feminist and antifeminist Tumblr users engaged in strategies of name-calling and recontextualisation. Users would recontextualise another user's voice and produce sarcastic or hyperbolised approximations of what the other person *sounded* like, as opposed to an accurate quotation of what they actually said, in order to refute their argument. Finally, Mueller (2016) described the use of 'pseudo-arguments' on Reddit, wherein users "mimic the wording of a *potential someone* they would disagree with" (p. 95, my emphasis) followed by *"/s"* to signal that the quote is intended as sarcastic and not the actual view of the commenter. Unlike the recontextualisation practices described by Cospers (2022), the quotes described by Mueller (2016) are not ascribed to anyone in particular but instead a hypothetical adversary such as a 'typical' feminist. Pseudo-arguments thus serve affiliative and disaffiliative purposes, as commenters can distance themselves from people who supposedly hold the views quoted and bond over their shared mockery of the hypothetical arguer.

Overall, Wright and Street (2007) claimed that "technology can facilitate deliberation but cannot guarantee that it will happen in any one particular way" (p. 855), as users may not take full advantage of all of the technological affordances of the platform or use them in different ways than the platform designers intended. Furthermore, as the studies reviewed above indicate, discussions online may take polarised forms rather than deliberative forms as users can engage in monologic communication, insults, and critique pseudo-arguments or distorted approximations of the other person's viewpoint. In what follows, I will discuss the factors of anonymity and echo chambers, as both of which are relevant to the manosphere and are thought to decrease the potential for deliberation and have negative effects on online communication.

3.2.1. Anonymity

Broadly, anonymity refers to "the inability of others to identify an individual" (Christopherson, 2007, p. 3039-3040). Technical anonymity refers to the "removal of all meaningful identifying information" while social anonymity refers to the "perception of others and/or one's self as unidentifiable because of a lack of cues to use to attribute an identity to that individual" (p. 3040). A user could be technically anonymous if they use a pseudonym but not socially anonymous if their communication style enables others to infer aspects of their identity such as age or gender (Herring and Stoerger, 2014). Different social media platforms have different norms and expectations regarding anonymity. Facebook's terms of service state that users must "use the same name that you use in real life" and "provide accurate information about yourself" (Facebook, 2020). In contrast, over 90% of posts submitted to 4chan are made anonymously (Bernstein et al., 2011). However, anonymity cannot be reduced to a simple binary of absolute identifiability or absolute anonymity as users engage in

complex practices to manage their level of identifiability (van der Nagel and Frith, 2015). For example, a common practice on Reddit to manage identifiability is the use of temporary ‘throwaway’ accounts (i.e., accounts intended to be used for a single post and then discarded) when divulging personal or sensitive information that users do not wish to be associated with their primary Reddit identity (Leavitt, 2015)

Research into online anonymity often refers to the ‘Social Identity Deindividuation Model’ (SIDE) which posits that in situations where individual identity is not salient, people are more likely to engage in disinhibited or uncivil behaviour (Postmes and Spears, 1998). Relatedly, the ‘online disinhibition effect’ (Suler, 2004) posits that Internet users may be more likely to engage in negative behaviours online such as posting inflammatory or aggressive messages if these behaviours cannot be easily linked to their offline identity. Halpern and Gibbs (2013) found that political discussion on Facebook was more polite than political discussion on YouTube, which they attributed to the higher identifiability of Facebook users. Similarly, Teneketzi (2022) found that impoliteness was more frequent on YouTube than on Reddit. Although both platforms are pseudonymous, Redditors have a higher level of identifiability due to the existence of user profiles and a public comment history. However, identifiability was not the only difference between the platforms and other factors like increased moderation and a more close-knit community on Reddit possibly played a role.

As a result, anonymity is “one of the most widely recognised factors boosting online hostility” (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018, p. 47). This would have negative consequences for the potentials for the Internet to function as a public sphere, as engaging in online hostility or hate speech is not conducive to critical, rational discussion. However, anonymous hate speech is not unique to the Internet. First, it is possible to engage in relatively anonymous hate speech in physical space, for example by shouting racial slurs at a stranger on the street (Brown, 2018). Secondly, not all hate speech online is produced by anonymous accounts, as demonstrated by the amount of hate speech or threats of violence posted to Facebook (Carlson and Rouselle, 2020). Third, anonymity may also empower the victims of anonymous hate and their allies to engage in counter-speech against their original attackers (Brown, 2018). Finally, there are many positive applications of anonymity that should not be ignored (van der Nagel and Frith, 2015). Anonymity may increase users’ willingness to discuss issues they would not feel comfortable discussing in identifiable settings, such as disclosing mental health problems (De Choudhury and De, 2015) or debating political beliefs (Papacharissi, 2002, 2004). Thus, anonymity may also have the potential to *increase* democratic and equal engagement.

Papacharissi claimed that “the anonymity of cyberspace makes it easier for individuals to be rude, although not necessarily uncivil” (2004, p. 267). This was later empirically verified by Halpern and Gibbs (2013), who found that although communication on YouTube was more impolite than communication on Facebook (measured via the presence of swear words, insults, and pejoratives), there was no significant difference in the level of civility (measured via the presence of antagonistic out-group stereotypes). Wodak and Wright (2006) also found that political discussions on the anonymous forum Futurum were largely polite and respectful. More recently, Jaidka et al. (2022) found that discussion quality increased when technical anonymity was combined with social identifiability markers such as political party affiliation. Furthermore, research has found that technically anonymous users still engage in forms of identity work and use various interactional resources to establish credibility, authority, and expertise. Jacknick and Avni (2017) demonstrated how users of an anonymous forum engaged in identity work in order to demonstrate their own expertise and weaken the expertise of others in discussions about the approval of a new Hebrew school, for example by making claims to knowledge about the local area or self-positioning as Jewish or a parent. Research has also examined how anonymous users can establish their legitimacy and right to participate. For example, when making their first post to a discussion forum, users may state their goals or rationale for joining, describe how long they have been ‘lurking,’ or make reference to the shared history of the group (Armstrong et al., 2011; Galegher et al., 2018; Page, 2011). On MGTOW, Wright et al. (2020) found that new users establish legitimacy through describing their previous negative relationship experience with women. Thus, this research problematises assumptions that technically anonymous communication will inevitably degrade the quality of online discussions, although it can often be a factor in the production of online hate speech and participation in hostile online communities.

3.2.2. Echo Chambers

Another concern is the impact of so-called ‘echo chambers,’ wherein participants are exclusively exposed to information or opinions which confirm rather than challenge their pre-existing beliefs. Participation in such echo chambers has been theorised to lead to increased polarisation and extremisation of beliefs (Sunstein, 2002). For example, Wojcieszak (2010) found that participation in a neo-Nazi forum led to an increase in extreme neo-Nazi beliefs. However, the term does not appear to be used in a consistent way within the literature and discussions often conflate concepts such as fragmentation, homophily, selective exposure, or polarisation, leading Boulianne et al. (2020) to suggest that the theory is “not well developed conceptually” (p. 684). A more coherent definition of echo chambers has two dimensions: homogeneity of debate and homogeneity of information

(Boulianne et al., 2020; Wollebæk et al., 2019). In this view, an online space could be characterised as forming an echo chamber if a) participants engage in debates exclusively with like-minded others and b) participants are exclusively exposed to information which reinforces their pre-existing beliefs.

Ideological homophily is a concern for any group (Sunstein, 2002), but such fears have become increasingly articulated with the rise of social media. KhosraviNik (2017) claimed that echo chambers are “natural consequences of the way Social Media are commercially designed” (p. 64). In order to keep users on the site for as long as possible, many social media platforms offer personalized news feeds which aim to show users the content deemed ‘most relevant’ for them. Because this is based on content that users have previously engaged with, this could lead to users seeing an increasingly narrow selection of material (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Even platforms without personalisation algorithms are prone to echo chamber effects. Reddit enables community voting wherein content that is upvoted by users moves to the top of the page, while content that is downvoted is obscured (see section 5.1.1 for further discussion of Reddit affordances). In theory, this would allow for more democratic or meritocratic filtering of content as the Reddit userbase decides for themselves what is most relevant or important. However, case studies of r/The_Donald (Gaudette et al., 2021) and r/MensRights (Rafail and Freitas, 2019) have demonstrated that the voting mechanisms can create echo chamber effects, as subscribers tend to upvote content which conforms with the predominant subreddit opinions and downvote content which challenges those views. Because downvoted content is obscured from view, this means that users will not be exposed to diverging or contradictory opinions. Moreover, being downvoted can affect a user’s reputation and perceived level of credibility (Maclean, 2018; Squirrell, 2019) and consequently Redditors may refrain from posting opinions that are deemed taboo or controversial (Jhaver et al., 2018). Finally, community-led moderation may have an impact if moderators delete content that they believe to be antithetical to their visions and goals of the forum. While this may have a positive effect, such as the removal of spam or disruptive content, this could also lead to stifled debate. For example, r/The_Donald banned supporters of Bernie Sanders and deleted content which attempted to reach a compromise between Sanders and Trump (Mills, 2018; Robards, 2018). This could further prevent or deter users from posting challenging or controversial views.

Empirical evidence regarding the broader presence of echo chambers presents mixed results. Kruse et al. (2018) found evidence of homogeneity of debate online, as their interviewees claimed to intentionally limit their social media connections to like-minded others and only shared political content with people they knew would agree. Regarding homogeneity of information, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) found that Republicans preferred to read Fox News and avoided CNN and vice versa for

Democrats. On the other hand, other studies have found that Internet users consume online news from across the political spectrum, including news which contradicted their own political beliefs (Garrett, 2009; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2011; Nelson and Webster, 2017). Findings from Karlsen et al. (2017) further complicate the picture. Based on survey results, they found that 71% of respondents claimed to “sometimes” debate with users who have the opposite basic values and only 11% claimed to “never” do so (p. 265). However, although the users claimed engage in debate with differently-minded others, this does not necessarily mean that they would change their mind as a result. In fact, only 6% claimed that online debates made them change their mind and one in four said this “never” happened (p. 265). Instead, the authors concluded that online debates operate via “trench warfare dynamics” in which users aggressively debate with other users with the intention of strengthening their own views, rather than wanting to genuinely learn more information with the possibility of having their mind changed (p. 261). Similarly, both Garrett (2009) and Wojcieszak (2010) suggested that users may share or read information written by ideological opponents in order to formulate criticism and provide rebuttals, rather than out of genuine desire to understand their point of view. Thus, exposure to contradictory information and discussion with differently-minded others online does not constitute deliberation in itself.

Finally, echo chambers are relevant to the manosphere. The manosphere as a whole has been described as an echo chamber or having echo chamber-like dynamics (Ging, 2019a), as have specific manosphere communities including incels (Hoffman et al., 2020; Lindsay, 2022; Zimmerman et al., 2018), men’s rights activists (Cockerill, 2019; Rafail and Freitas, 2019) and generic red pill groups (van Valkenburgh, 2019). While the term ‘echo chamber’ was not used, Wright et al. (2020) concluded that the MGTOW forum operated predominantly via a communitarian logic where opinions tended to be affirmed rather than deliberated and the membership policy meant that alternative perspectives (such as women’s perspectives, or feminist perspectives) were marginalised. Ging (2019a) cautioned that the echo chamber effects of the manosphere function to “exclude, intimate, and spectacularly punish some women with a view to warning off all women” (p. 653) and that that participation in such communities may lead to an intensification or entrenchment of sexist and misogynistic gender ideologies.

3.3. Memes

The term ‘meme’ was first coined by Dawkins (1976) as a cultural analogue to gene, describing cultural units that spread via imitation. Today, a meme typically refers to a humorous image or video which is shared online. Shifman (2014) proposed the following definition of Internet memes:

“(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance; (b) that were created *with awareness of each other*; and (c) were circulated, imitated and/or transformed *via the internet by many users*.” (Shifman, 2014, p. 8 original emphasis).

Memes typically consist of a humorous picture with a caption. Users can share these memes as they are, or they can use an existing meme as a template to create new iterations of it, such as keeping the picture intact but altering the text. Properties of successful memes include humour (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007; Milner, 2013a; Shifman, 2014), versatility, expansion potential and cultural relevance (Lerat and van den Berg, 2019), simple and whimsical content (Shifman, 2014), and intertextuality (Laineste and Voolaid, 2016; Shifman, 2014; Wiggins, 2019). As well as popular culture, memes often intertextually reference other memes (Milner, 2013a). For example, #WomenAgainstFeminism memes involve women taking pictures of themselves holding handwritten signs reading “I don’t need feminism because...” (Christiansen and Høyer, 2015). This meme template was created as a direct response to a previous viral hashtag campaign by feminists at the University of Oxford, where participants took photographs of themselves holding signs explaining why they *did* identify as feminists.

Memes can fulfil important functions regarding the construction of communities and collective identities (DeCook, 2018; Gal et al., 2015; Hakoköngäs et al., 2020). Nissenbaum and Shifman (2015) explained how memes can function as cultural capital on 4chan. Appropriate application of community-specific memes marked a user as a legitimate member of the community, while misuse of memes or using memes associated with other platforms led to condemnation and mockery. Moreover, memes can be used for public expression or discussion of political matters such as commentary on current affairs or scandals (Laineste and Voolaid, 2018; Shifman, 2014; Wiggins, 2019). In addition, Milner (2013a) suggested that memes exhibit “pop polyvocality” in that memes on any given topic can represent diverse opinions and ideologies (p. 2388).

Memes can also be used in order to convey certain ideological messages or for the purposes of persuasion and argumentation (Hahner, 2013; Hakoköngäs et al., 2020; Shifman, 2014; Wiggins, 2019). For example, Fahmy and Ibrahim (2021) examined pro- and anti-#MeToo memes and found that the traditional rhetorical appeals of logos, ethos, and pathos could be identified, with pathos being particularly prevalent. In addition, Huntington (2016) analysed ‘Pepper Spray Cop’ memes, where users took a famous image showing a policeman pepper-spraying a protester and placed his image onto other images such as civil rights marches, famous works of art, and TV shows in order to argue against police brutality. Milner (2013a) found that Occupy Wall Street memes were highly argumentative and several of the arguments that were presented in anti-Occupy memes reflected

arguments that were produced in the mainstream media. Memes can also be used to delegitimise dominant actors and counter hegemonic beliefs (Coates Nee and de Maio, 2019; Huntington, 2013; Wiggins, 2019). For example, Davis et al. (2016) examined memes created by climate activists regarding Shell's plans for oil drilling in the Arctic. At first glance the memes looked advertisements by Shell, but actually conveyed an ironic message intended to call the legitimacy of Shell into question. Shell eventually halted their arctic drilling plans, in part due to the backlash generated by these memes. This demonstrates the potential of memes to bring about important social changes, although this effect should not be overstated.

However, there are also negative potentials associated with memes. Researchers have studied the use of memes by far-right, White supremacist or neo-Nazi groups and how such memes can be used to normalise extreme ideologies and violence (DeCook, 2018; Guenther et al., 2020; Hakoköngäs et al., 2020) while others have studied how memes can be used to express racism (Milner, 2013b; Yoon, 2016) and sexism (Coates Nee and de Maio, 2018; Drakett et al., 2018; Milner, 2013b). The humorous nature of memes may act as a shield against criticism, allowing the meme creator to distance themselves from its problematic implications and dismiss critics as taking the meme too seriously or not getting the joke (Cockerill, 2019; Chang, 2022; Hakoköngäs et al., 2020; Milner, 2013b; Yoon, 2016). Kelly (2020) suggested that meme creators strategically deploy irony and absurdity, so that the content appears "meaningless" or apolitical to some, while functioning as an "effective 'dog-whistle'" to others (pp. 186-187). Eventually, antifeminist memes may become so popular that they reach mainstream usage and become detached from their original context.

Finally, memes are important to the manosphere. Cockerill (2019) argued that MRAs use memes like "advertisements or propaganda, presenting their worldview with polarizing language intended to catch the attention of men who see themselves as put-upon and disadvantaged" (p. 89). Memes are politically useful, as they allow the users to "succinctly represent their ideas" in a manner that is easily accessible and shareable (p. 107). However, she also noted that these memes can be highly problematic as they often contain "violently misogynistic" content which can then attract other people who agree and go on to produce more violently misogynistic memes, creating a self-sustaining cycle (p. 89). In addition, Cockerill wrote that MRA memes are more likely to engage in demonization of women than draw attention to men's rights concerns. Moreover, memes have also been acknowledged as important for the incel community, where users share highly misogynistic and dehumanising memes about women (Chang, 2022; Lindsay, 2022; Regehr, 2020). In addition, Regehr (2020) described the proliferation of memes which celebrate and deify incel mass murderers

such as Elliot Rodger. Thus, memes have the potential to reinforce patriarchal gender ideologies and normalise violence against women.

3.4. Narratives

Definitions of narrative typically involve three important characteristics: temporality, causality, and to a lesser extent evaluation (Hoffman, 2010). According to Ryan (2007), a prototypical narrative retells an event which actually happened to real people and which involved some kind of non-accidental conflict which transformed something about the character's lives. Similarly, Labov (1972) defined a narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (pp. 359-360). Labov examined the prototypical structure of a narrative and identified six components: an abstract phase which summarises the content and convinces the audience that the story is worth listening to; an orientation phrase introducing the setting, characters, and time period; an evaluation phase summing up the point or relevance of the narrative; the complicating action; a resolution; and a coda which signals that the story has ended. However, there are many texts which resemble narratives that do not include all of these components. Therefore, rather than consider narrative as a binary quality where a text either is or is not a narrative, researchers increasingly talk about texts in terms of their 'narrativity' (Ryan, 2007). Furthermore, Ochs and Capps (2001) identified five narrative dimensions: linearity, tellership, embeddedness, tellability, and moral stance. The majority of narrative research has privileged narratives that are highly linear and highly tellable, told by a single teller, involve a clear, constant moral stance, and can easily be detached from their context.

Another important type of narrative is the 'small story.' 'Small story' is an umbrella term for narratives which are not captured within the above definitions and criteria, such as "tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events," and "allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 381). In terms of topic, they may be about relatively minor or mundane events that would be uninteresting to an outsider, or report 'breaking news' (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2007, 2008). In terms of function, small stories may be told "quickly and elliptically" in order to support an argument or lay claim to certain identities (Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 601). Furthermore, the architecture of social media platforms, such as status updates and short character limits, can facilitate the production of small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2016).

Page (2011, 2018), using the terminology of Herring (2013), explained how social media offer new opportunities for familiar, reconfigured, and emergent forms of narration. Regarding the structure of

online narratives, Arendholz (2010) found that narratives posted to a 'life stories' section of a discussion forum included most of Labov's (1976) narrative phrases, but the abstract phase was either not present or heavily reduced. Arendholz (2010) surmised that there was little need to include an abstract and claim the floor because the 'life stories' page explicitly invited users to post narratives and the layout of the webpage included summary descriptions of the content that can be found there. In addition, Arendholz analysed these narratives according to Ochs and Capps' (2001) narrative dimensions and found that the discussion forum narratives were similar to prototypical narratives in that they involved a single teller, a high level of linearity, and constant moral stance, but differed due to their middling level of tellability and high degree of thematic embeddedness within the forum context. In contrast, Page (2011, 2018) found that social media offer opportunities for non-linear narratives and multiple co-tellership. First, social media narratives can be open-ended and episodic, for example stories could be told across distinct tweets or blog entries with irregular breaks between posts, or presented in reverse chronological order (Page, 2011, 2018). Page (2011) noted a tendency for users to post very recent stories or tell stories as they are unfolding, as opposed to a retrospective account. Second, Page (2011, 2018) explained that social media present more opportunities for collaborative storytelling. For example, users could post a story to a discussion forum and other users could respond with a second story of their own, or become involved in the co-telling of a story by asking for elaboration or qualification. Alternatively, multiple tellers could work together to tell the same story, such as editing a Wikipedia page. However, not all co-tellers may be as equally involved in the construction of a narrative and some users may have different storytelling rights, for example administrators have the permission to delete other's contributions.

In both physical and digital contexts, narratives fulfil important functions for identity work. Stories can be used to claim group membership and reinforce the core values of a group, especially the narration of stories that have previously been told and are already familiar to other group members (Georgakopoulou, 2008; Page, 2011). Alternatively, narratives can be used to distance oneself from a group and express polarised stances on an issue (Page, 2018). Moreover, narratives can assist in the construction of individual identities, such as self-positioning as an expert or source of authority. When performing potentially face-threatening speech acts such as giving advice or providing criticism, narratives of personal experience can help demonstrate that one has the right to speak on the subject and is worth listening to (Armstrong et al., 2011; Galegher et al., 1998; Page, 2011). In addition, narratives can help users offer advice in a more indirect manner, for example users may narrate stories of a time when they were in a similar situation and describe what they did and whether it was successful (Page 2011).

Narratives of personal experience do not present objective accounts of events, but rather perspectives on events (Ochs and Capps, 2001). Therefore, stories are not neutral but are imbued with particular viewpoints and so can be used for persuasive or ideological ends (Bilandzic and Buselle, 2013; Schubert, 2010). Schubert (2010) explained how narratives can support the persuasive aims of political speeches by fulfilling the subordinate functions of personalizing the speaker, integrating the speaker with the group and emphasising their common values and achievements, exemplifying a point the speaker is trying to make, or conveying the problematic actions of an opponent. Furthermore, van Leeuwen (2007) discussed the strategy of “mythopoesis”² in which legitimation can be conveyed through narrative. In “moral tales” protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practices, whereas in “cautionary tales” protagonists are punished for their non-conformity or deviant actions (pp. 105-106).

In addition, narration can be used for argumentative purposes (Carranza, 2015; Lukianova and Steffensmeier, 2020). Rhetorically, anecdotes may serve to attract audience attention and to clarify or illustrate a point, while logically they can be used to demonstrate that something exists or to provide a counter-example to a generalisation (Govier and Jansen, 2011). For example, Georgakopoulou (2008) showed how co-tellers in everyday talk would refute the arguments of their interlocutors by referencing shared stories that contradict their argument, as well as using stories to defend and justify their own points of view. Govier and Jansen (2011) claimed that arguments based on anecdotes are inherently weak, because they involve generalising from a single case to many cases. However, audiences may be persuaded by narratives regardless. This may be because stories are easier to remember than facts and because interlocutors often do not counter-argue against them (Bilandzic and Buselle, 2013; Krause and Rucker, 2020). Krause and Rucker (2020) found that narratives are more persuasive when facts are weak, while Biladnzic and Buselle (2013) suggested persuasive narratives will be more successful if the persuasive point is left implicit, as readers will be less likely to react with scrutiny and resistance if they are unaware they are being persuaded.

Finally, researchers have identified common themes and storylines within manosphere narratives. For instance, Kelly (2020) described how red pill ‘conversion’ narratives were popular on manosphere site Return of Kings, wherein users often told unflattering stories detailing their prior life “humiliation and subservience to women” before they finally took the red pill and achieved “sexual and financial self-determination” (p. 111) According to Kelly, these stories also function as “subtle threats” to the readership, cautioning readers of their potential fate if they stop visiting the site (p. 111). In addition, Kelly outlined two common plots in stories users told about feminism:

² Not to be confused with the mythopoetic men’s movement discussed in section 2.2.3

“threat” stories about losing their loved ones to feminism, or “conquering” stories in which feminists are “tamed” and (sexually) humiliated (p. 136). This may also function as a call to action and convince the reader of the necessity to fight against feminist advancement. Moreover, MGTOW narrate success stories of how they achieved solitude or independence (Johanssen, 2021) or stories of vindictive ex-partners which serve to illustrate the evil nature of women and justify separatism (Wright et al., 2020). Narratives may also play a role in men’s rights activism and antifeminism more generally. For example, DeKeseredy (1999) wrote that a “key tactic” to discredit evidence of violence against women is to counter-argue with “anecdotal stories of sensational and statistically infrequent violent crimes committed by a few [Canadian] women” against men (p. 1259) Similarly, Kaye and Tolmie (1998) described the use of “horror story” narratives detailing injustice or mistreatment suffered by a father post-separation (p. 176). While these stories are not representative of most fathers’ experiences, they represent the extent of potential harms and create a persuasive effect by arousing an emotional response and enhancing authenticity. In addition, these narratives may come to be represented as the norm “either through repetition or prominence” (p. 177) and the situated perspective of the storyteller often is not acknowledged.

3.5. Conclusions

This literature review has examined several features and functions of social media which are relevant for persuasion and argumentation within the manosphere and beyond. Although early accounts were optimistic about the potential for the Internet and social media to act as a new public sphere and open up new opportunities for citizens to engage in critical, rational discussions about important political topics, there are still several barriers to deliberative communication online. The phenomenon of ‘echo chambers’ is often cited as a problem, as users may exclusively interact with like-minded others. Discussion with differently-minded others does not guarantee true deliberation, as users may seek to entrench their own views rather than change their mind. These effects can be amplified by the architectures and infrastructures of social media platforms themselves, such as the voting features and algorithms which promote some content over others. Moreover, the attention economy on social media is not evenly distributed and gendered, racial hierarchies continue to be reproduced online even in anonymous and pseudonymous spaces. Just as progressive and activist communities can use the Internet and social media to recruit new members, disseminate their agenda and build their social movements, so can anti-progressive groups like the manosphere.

Finally, this literature review also examined two relevant genres of social media communication. While the primary function of memes is humour and entertainment, they may also be imbued with particular ideologies and fulfil persuasive and argumentative functions. In addition, narratives of

personal experience are abundant on social media. These narratives can be applied for positive and constructive purposes, such as aligning oneself with others and strengthening group ties, indirectly offering advice, as well as simply for entertainment and amusement. Stories can also be used to polarise, divide users, or distance them from each other when users have different recollections of how an event took place or interpretations of what the story means. Both memes and narratives can carry important persuasive and narrative potential and be used to convince others of a point of view, but could be difficult to contradict or argue against.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Background

This chapter will discuss the theoretical background to this thesis. First, I introduce the broad field of critical discourse studies (hence CDS), describing its aims and fundamental theoretical positions. Following this, I define some of the major theoretical concepts underlying this thesis, such as discourse and sexism. Next, I provide an overview of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse studies and how I have applied this framework to my research. Finally, I explain how CDS and the DHA can be applied to social media data.

4.1. Critical Discourse Studies

Critical discourse studies, also known as critical discourse analysis, is an approach to discourse analysis that “primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). CDS does not aim to provide “general commentary” or “just descriptive” analysis of discourse, but entails systematic, normative analysis of texts and aims to address social problems as reflected and enacted in discourse (Fairclough, 2013, pp. 10-11). Within this research paradigm, description and analysis of actual language use is conducted with reference to concepts such as power, ideology, and discrimination.

Importantly, CDS is “not a discrete academic discipline” but rather a “problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches,” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 394). Research falling under the CDS umbrella may use similar analytical frameworks or examine similar linguistic phenomena, but there is no singular method of carrying out a critical discourse analysis of a particular text (van Dijk, 2015). There are several approaches to CDS each with different analytical foci, such as the socio-cognitive approach (van Dijk, 1998) and the discourse-historical approach (described in section 4.3). Ultimately, what unites critical discourse analysts is “a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political or cultural change in society” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 394).

Consequently, CDS is not intended as “a dispassionate and objective social science, but as engaged and committed,” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 395). By aiming to “disclose the ideological and persuasive properties of text and talk” (Hart, 2014, p. 2) and shedding light on the ways that discourse reflects and upholds relations of domination and subordination, critical discourse analysts “intervene[s] on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups” and ultimately work towards a more equal and fair society (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 259). CDS

derives from leftist intellectual traditions such as Marxism and poststructuralism (Forchtner, 2018), while there is also a branch of feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2018). However, this explicit political agenda has attracted criticism, such as accusations of political bias, cherry-picking results, and privileging one's own subjective interpretation (see Breeze, 2011, or chapter five of Catalano and Waugh, 2020, for an overview of criticisms). Consequently, the analyst is encouraged to make their own subjective position explicit. For example, Fairclough (1989) began *Language and Power* by describing himself as a socialist. Furthermore, Wodak (2013) suggested that analysts be self-reflective and critical about their own position and recommended keeping description of language separate from interpretation of it in order to enable "transparency and retroduction" (pp. xxxviii). At the same time, as Mackay (2017) argued, while a critical discourse analysis can be justified according to rigorous, systematic analysis and ample textual evidence, the subjective and interpretive nature should not be denied but instead embraced.

Therefore, I wish to make my position clear. I write this thesis as a feminist. I am a feminist because I desire to see an end to sexist oppression and men's domination over women and because I believe that the liberation of women is socially and morally important for society. I do not consider 'misandry' to constitute an equivalent problem to misogyny, nor do I think that an organised men's rights movement is necessary to tackle men's issues. Instead, I believe that many of the issues advanced by MRAs and the manosphere could be solved through feminism and the abolition of patriarchy. I accept that my feminist stance will inevitably shape the interpretation of my findings and that researchers with different (or even similar) ideological positions may arrive at different conclusions, even if the same analytical steps were taken and the same linguistic features were identified. Similarly, I accept that this opens me up to accusations of 'feminist bias' and that members of the manosphere will likely disagree with my conclusions. Nevertheless, I agree with Fairclough that writing from a particular position does not necessarily entail "writing political propaganda" (1989, p. 5). There is also the question of whether or not an 'objective' stance is desirable. Reflecting on their research into PUAs, Rüdiger and Dayter (2017) note that because women are "expected" to dislike groups such as PUAs, there is a drive "to overcompensate, to cast the subjects in a positive light" in order to prove their objectivity (p. 264). Importantly, antifeminism is not a neutral ideology or a necessary counterbalance to feminism. A feminist perspective is vital in order to uncover both overt and covert sexist, misogynistic and patriarchal ideologies produced within the manosphere; to claim neutrality or objectivity through a non-feminist stance is to tacitly endorse, or at least ignore, the harms against women.

Regarding what it means to be 'critical' in CDS, Reisigl and Wodak (2001) distinguished three main types of critique. Firstly, text-immanent or discourse-immanent critique entails critique of the actual text or discourse itself, such as identifying "inconsistencies, (self)contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas" (p. 32). Second, sociodiagnostic critique concerns demystifying the "manipulative" or "problematic" (as defined by the analyst) character of a discursive practice (p. 32). To perform sociodiagnostic critique, the researcher must "exceed the purely textual or discourse internal sphere" and make use of background, contextual knowledge in order to interpret the text (p. 33). Finally, CDS researchers are politically motivated and seek to improve society. Thus, prospective critique is transformative and attempts to "contribute to the solution of specific social problems and dysfunctionalities," (pp. 33-34).

Fairclough and Wodak (1997, pp. 271-280) outlined eight major principles of CDS. First, CDS research addresses social problems. For example, analysts have studied issues relating to racism and xenophobia (e.g., Baker et al., 2008; Richardson and Colombo, 2017), fascism and right-wing populism (e.g., Richardson and Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2020), and sexism (e.g., Esposito and Zollo, 2021; Puchner and Markowitz, 2021). Second, critical discourse analysts believe that power relations are discursive and thus examine how power relations are "exercised and negotiated in discourse" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 272). In addition to examining how power relations are reproduced through discourse, scholars may also examine how dominated groups discursively resist or challenge these power relations (see Jones et al., 2022, for an example). Power and resistance will be discussed further in section 4.2.3.

Third, discourse is thought to constitute "society and culture" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 273). Analysts theorise a dialectical relationship between discourse and society, meaning that discourse both shapes and is shaped by society. Therefore, every instance of language use has the potential to reproduce or transform some aspect of society and culture. Fourth, discourse is thought to perform "ideological work" (p. 275). Analysts describe the ideology of the producer(s) of the discourse under investigation and consider how the discourse may reinforce, or challenge, the existing ideologies of the audience. The concept of ideology will be discussed further in section 4.2.2.

Fifth, discourse is "historical" and can only be understood through careful consideration of its context (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 276). Texts and discourses are never produced in isolation, but are always connected to previous and subsequent texts and discourses. Analysis may therefore concern intertextual and interdiscursive relations between texts and discourses. Sixth, the link between text and society is mediated. CDS is about "making connections between social and cultural structures" and "properties of text," but these connections are "complex" and "indirect" (Fairclough

and Wodak, 1997, p. 277). Seventh, the approach is “interpretative and explanatory” (p. 278). Analysts must acknowledge that different readers may interpret the same text in myriad ways depending on their identities, background knowledge, and pre-existing beliefs. Therefore, the analyst should not privilege their own interpretation of a text’s meaning as the only possible interpretation. Finally, the approach is a form of “social action” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 279). Practical application of results is an important goal of critical discourse studies. For example, the results of CDS research may be used to inform policy or language guidelines.

Overall, CDS is a theoretically diverse discipline. Having outlined CDS more broadly, I will now define some of the important concepts.

4.2. Important concepts

4.2.1. Discourse

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) described discourse as a form of social practice and emphasised its socially constitutive and socially constituted characteristics, meaning that discourse is shaped by society, but society is also shaped by discourse. While this dialectical and ideological character of discourse is commonly accepted by CDS scholars, the actual definitions of ‘discourse’ vary as does its distinctions from similar concepts such as ‘text’ and ‘ideology.’ Reisigl and Wodak (2016) acknowledged that the boundaries of “discourse” are partly fluid and so what constitutes a discourse is always dependent on the analyst’s perspective (p. 27). Therefore, the meaning of discourse cannot be taken for granted and critical discourse analysts must include a definition and explanation of how the term will be used and operationalised within the specific study.

Fairclough (2013) distinguished between discourse as an abstract, uncountable noun and discourses as a count noun, where the former refers to “language use conceived as a social practice” (p. 95) and the latter is “a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective” (p. 96). Discourse as an uncountable noun can be pre-modified to indicate the historical context and social realm in which the discourse is enacted (e.g., “late capitalist advertising discourse”), while discourse as a count noun can be pre-modified and post-modified to indicate stance, topic, locality, producer, and channel of distribution (e.g., “a nationalist discourse on immigration in British newspapers”) (Koller, 2012, p. 21-22). Reisigl (2018) explained that this is a mono-perspectival conceptualisation, in which a discourse corresponds to one social reality or one way of seeing the world. However, as Unger (2013) and Sunderland (2004) argued, this can make discourse difficult to differentiate from other concepts like ideology. This is exemplified by Wiggins (2019), who suggested that discourse is “perhaps best viewed as a synonym for ideology” (p. 24).

In contrast to a mono-perspectival conceptualisation of discourse, Reisigl and Wodak (2016) proposed a pluri-perspectival conceptualisation of discourse. Here, discourse relates to a macro-topic and so can contain multiple, even contradictory ideologies or perspectives. In such a conceptualisation, “macro-topic-relatedness, pluri-perspectivity” and “argumentativity” are the constitutive elements of a discourse (p. 27). Furthermore, Reisigl and Wodak acknowledged that discourse is not a “closed unit, but a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation” (p. 27). Therefore, what counts as a specific discourse will depend on the perspective of the analyst.

Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 27) thus defined discourse as:

- “a cluster of complex of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action
- socially constituted and socially constitutive.
- related to a macro-topic
- linked to the argumentation about validity claims such as truth and normative validity involving several social actors who have different points of view.”

Breaking down this definition, the first point indicates that discourses are situated within specific fields of social action. A field of action indicates a “segment of social reality that constitutes a (partial) ‘frame’ of discourse,” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 28) and different fields of action are defined by different functions of discursive practices. For example, Reisigl and Wodak (2016) differentiated between eight different political fields of action, such as law-making procedures and formulation of public opinion through press releases and speeches. A discourse about a specific topic can start within one field of action and continue elsewhere, meaning that discourses spread to different fields and overlap. The second point refers to the principle that every instance of language simultaneously shapes and is shaped by society. Thirdly, discourse is related to a macro-topic rather than an ideology, stance, or way of seeing the world. A text may relate to a relatively benign or uncontroversial macro-topic, such as travel, but still propagate a certain ideology, such as feminism or antifeminism. Finally, discourses have an argumentative dimension in that they make claims to truth (what is factually correct) and normative validity (what is morally right and just) according to a certain point of view.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between discourse and text. A text can be defined as a “specific and unique realisation of a discourse” (Wodak, 2008, p. 6). Importantly, texts do not only involve

written language but also may include spoken or signed language in addition non-linguistic modes such as images and gesture.

4.2.2. Ideology

A major principle of CDS is the belief that discourse does “ideological work” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 275). The term “ideology” was initially used to describe ‘science of ideas’ though has since developed a pejorative connotation associated with false consciousness and dogmatic, misguided beliefs (van Dijk, 1998, 2011). In everyday discourse, van Dijk (2011) noted how ‘ideology’ is used in a derogatory sense to characterise the ideas of other groups, often in a polarising sense in which “we have the truth, *they* have an ideology,” (p. 418, original emphasis).

Reisigl and Wodak (2016) defined ideology as a “perspective” or a “worldview and a system composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, values and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group” (p. 25). Similarly, van Dijk (2011) defined ideology as “fundamental, ‘axiomatic’ beliefs shared by a group,” (p. 422). Thus, ideologies are a form of “social cognition” as opposed to the personal beliefs of a lone individual (p. 421). Importantly, ideologies are not to be regarded as a form of flawed cognition or misrepresented reality. Alongside antifeminist and patriarchal ideologies, an analyst could also identify feminist ideologies. Furthermore, an ideology is “a particular interpretation of the way things are or ought to be” (Hart, 2014, p. 2). Ideologies may thus involve representational models of what society currently looks like, a visionary model of what society should look like, and a programmatic model of how this ideal society could be achieved (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016). For example, the representational model of society within an antifeminist ideology may be that society is matriarchal and oppressive towards men, while a visionary model is of a patriarchal society. The programmatic model may include proposed reforms for the judicial system to grant men more rights, for example in divorce proceedings (see Jordan, 2016, section 4.2.4).

van Dijk (1998) highlighted the “special status” of discourse in the reproduction of ideologies, given the fact that “various properties of text and talk allow social members to actually *express* or *formulate* abstract ideological beliefs” (p. 178, original emphasis). Group members can “discursively explain, defend or legitimate their ideologies” and discourse allows “direct and explicit expression of ideologies” (p. 179). However, van Dijk (1998, 2011) also warned against reducing ideologies to their discursive dimension, because ideologies can also be expressed and reproduced through non-linguistic modes.

Finally, an important concept for the analysis of ideology is the concept of the “ideological square” as outlined by van Dijk (1998, p. 245) or the strategy of positive self-representation and negative other-representation. This involves emphasis on the positive information about one’s in-group and negative information about an out-group, with simultaneous suppression of negative information about one’s in-group and positive information about an out-group. Importantly, this concerns the positive or negative representation of participants as members of a group, rather than solely as individuals.

4.2.3. Power and resistance

CDS researchers believe that power relations are discursive and that discourse and power are co-constitutive (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Flores Farfán and Holzschneider, 2010). Discrimination is often enacted linguistically and discourse is considered to be a crucial site for the negotiation and reproduction of asymmetric power relations (Blackledge, 2005; Flores Farfán and Holzschneider, 2010). As Blackledge (2005) suggested, “language is not powerful on its own, but gains power by the use powerful people make of it” (p. 5). For example, Wodak (2012) explained how powerful language, when used by powerful people such as politicians, can be used to draw boundaries between groups and even serve to legitimise violence against an opposing group.

CDS research typically considers three different dimensions to the relationship between discourse and power: power in discourse, power over discourse, and power of discourse (Holzschneider, 2005, cited in Wodak 2012). First, there is the power *in* discourse which refers to the struggle for “semiotic hegemony” in other words disputes over “meanings and interpretations of terms and discourses” (Wodak, 2012, p. 217). Second, if a person or group has power *over* discourse, this means that they have access to publics (Holzschneider, 2005, p. 57, cited in Wodak, 2012). This person or group will be able to control the discourse that others are exposed to by controlling the processes of discourse production (i.e., who gets to write a text) and dissemination (i.e., who gets to publish a text). Third, the power *of* discourse refers to the “influence of historically grown macro-structures of meanings, of the conventions of the language game in which actors find themselves” (Holzschneider, 2005, p. 57, cited in Wodak, 2012). Discourse is powerful because it can influence how we think about a topic and minimise the “potentially indefinite” ways we can talk about and perceive reality (Flores Farfán and Holzschneider, 2010, p. 141). The production of discourse is “at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures, whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers” (Foucault, 1981, p. 52). These procedures include prohibition, wherein discourse about certain topics becomes unsayable or taboo. Alternatively, people belonging to certain groups may

have the ability to speak, but their discourse is considered irrational, untruthful, and overall worthless.

CDS scholars may also examine how power relations are challenged through discourse. Accounts of power must also consider resistance, as the two co-constitute each other and cannot occur without the other (Baaz et al., 2017; Foucault, 1976/1990). Sharp et al. (2000) described resisting power as “that power which attempts to set up situations, groupings and actions which resist the impositions of dominating power” (p. 3). Resistance is diverse, so may be performed by individuals or groups, at a local, national or even international level and may involve small-scale or large-scale, violent or non-violent action (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014).

Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) theorised that the characteristics and strategies of resistance are linked to those of the power being resisted. For example, since sovereign power demands absolute obedience to a powerful sovereign and seeks to create subordinate subjects (Foucault, 1975/1995), resistance to such power typically involves acts of open defiance, such as rebellions, strikes, or boycotts (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014). Second, disciplinary power seeks to regulate and organise citizens through hierarchical observation, surveillance, and examination (Foucault, 1975/1995). Individuals come to submit themselves to discipline and continuously monitor themselves to ensure they are always acting in the appropriate, ‘normal’ manner. Resistance to disciplinary power could thus involve refusal to participate in self-disciplinary practices, showing outward compliance while secretly disagreeing, or constructing ‘reverse discourses’ (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014). A reverse discourse “employs the terminology of a pre-existing discourse but aims to develop an opposed semantic interpretation,” for instance humorously employing racist language or stereotypes in order to deconstruct racism (Weaver, 2010, p. 149). Third, biopower concerns the organisation and optimisation of human subjects as a population and taking control over matters of life and death, including birth, illness, and diet (Foucault, 1976/1990). It may entail public health initiatives or the production of statistics about a population, such as monitoring fertility rates. Thus, resistance could concern the refusal to participate in a national surveys or vaccinate ones children, or alternatively the creation of “autonomous conditions” and living off the grid (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014, p. 120-121).

Moreover, Baaz et al. (2017) argued that resistance is necessarily performed by subordinate groups, or people performing “solidarity resistance” or “proxy resistance” on behalf of marginalised groups (p. 142). However, this requires the analyst to decide who legitimately constitutes a subordinate, marginalised group. As discussed in chapter two, the manosphere presents a visionary model of society that is ‘gynocentric’ with men in a subaltern position. In contrast, feminist visionary models

suggest a patriarchal society, with women oppressed by sexism and misogyny. However, feminism has become increasingly incorporated into state governance and is entangled with systems of biopower, such as mandating parental leave or gender quotas in certain professions (Lilja and Johansson, 2018; Johansson and Lilja, 2013). This attracts criticism from both feminists and antifeminists alike. Feminists may accuse state or governance feminism as having lost its radical edge, while antifeminists may perceive themselves as subject to feminist disciplinary power. Some argue that antifeminist beliefs are now “judged as less legitimate and qualified” and that criticisms of political correctness have become unspeakable and taboo (Lilja and Johansson, 2018, p. 88). From this perspective, feminist discourses are “no longer to be regarded as subaltern, marginalised discourses, but as disciplinary tools” (p. 88). This constitutes a discursive struggle and complex network of power and resistance, where both feminist resistance to patriarchy and antifeminist resistance to feminism embolden and fuel the other, as feminists may feel silenced and questioned by antifeminists and vice versa (Lilja and Johansson, 2018; Johansson and Lilja, 2013).

Within this thesis, I aim to consider how MGTOW discursively construct themselves as powerless and the acts of resistance that are promoted. I show that MGTOW discursively construct themselves as resisting feminist power and as subordinate to all-encompassing systems of ‘gynocentrism’ and ‘misandry.’ Since the MGTOW subreddit was quarantined at the time of data collection, I expected that this would be used as evidence of feminist hegemony and censorship. Furthermore, actions such as abstaining from heterosexual marriage, refusing to pay taxes or child support, or ‘going ghost’ could be interpreted as resistance to perceived feminist disciplinary power and biopower.

4.2.4. Sexism

This thesis researches the manosphere, an antifeminist community that has been critiqued for sexism and misogyny and promotion of patriarchal views. Thus, it is important to define these concepts.

First, patriarchy refers to “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1989, p. 214). Walby (1989) theorised that the patriarchal system is constituted of six main structures: a patriarchal mode of production; patriarchal relations within waged labour; the patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; patriarchal culture (p. 220ff). For example, a patriarchal state may oppress women through denying women the right to vote, excluding women from political decision-making, or passing laws which harm women. Furthermore, oppression has a “systemic character” and refers to “structural phenomena which immobilize or diminish a group” (Young, 1990, pp. 41-42). In Young’s (1990)

conceptualization, oppression has five ‘faces’: exploitation; marginalisation; powerlessness; cultural imperialism; violence. Faces of sexist oppression include women’s exploitation through unpaid care work and acts of sexual violence against women. Importantly, describing society as patriarchal does not mean that every single man is in a position to wield absolute power over every single woman, or that men cannot be oppressed by racism, class exploitation or other forms of oppression (hooks, 2015; Walby, 1989). It should also not entail an analysis that presumes that all women experience sexist oppression in the same manner, regardless of their race, class, sexuality, or other social positions, or that women cannot propagate patriarchal or sexist ideologies.

Furthermore, while men benefit from the exploitation of women, this is not to say that there are no negative consequences for men under patriarchy. At the same time, as demonstrated in chapter two, an over-emphasis on these negative consequences can run the risk of a depoliticised analysis of gender relations. Overall, I agree with hooks that:

“Men do oppress women. People are hurt by rigid sex-role patterns. These realities co-exist. Male oppression of women cannot be excused by the recognition that there are ways men are hurt by rigid sex roles. Feminist activists should acknowledge that hurt – it exists. It does not erase or lessen male responsibility for supporting and perpetuating their power under patriarchy to exploit and oppress women in a manner far more grievous than psychological stress or emotional pain caused by male conformity to rigid sex-role patterns.” (hooks, 2015, p. 75)

In common parlance, ‘sexism’ and ‘misogyny’ may be used interchangeably to refer to the oppression of women, or ‘misogyny’ may be used specifically to refer to a more extreme *hatred* of women. However, Manne (2018) argued that such usage is problematic because it transforms misogyny from a structural phenomenon into a matter of individual psychology. Indeed, one can discriminate against women without necessarily bearing hatred for them. She thus conceptualised misogyny and sexism as two separate branches of patriarchy. Sexism is the “justificatory branch” that functions to naturalise and rationalise patriarchal social relations as inevitable, for example due to women’s supposedly weaker physiology or inherent maternal instincts, while misogyny is the more hostile “law enforcement branch” that functions to police and enforce patriarchal norms (pp. 78-79). Sexism discriminates between men and women, places men above women in the gender hierarchy, and portrays men and women as fundamentally different and belonging to separate spheres. Conversely, misogyny discriminates between the ‘good’ women who conform to their assigned role and the ‘bad’ women who refuse, such as lesbians, feminists, or unmarried women, heavily punishing the latter.

Glick and Fiske (2011) described the “paradox” of sexism wherein men and women routinely have close romantic and familial relationships in spite of men’s dominance over women (p. 531). Unwillingness to marry a member of another group is a common measure of prejudice, yet sexist men continue to marry women. To account for this, they distinguished between ‘benevolent sexism’ and ‘hostile sexism’ which work together to legitimise patriarchal ideology. Hostile sexism is an “adversarial view of gender relations” and concerns “antipathy towards women who are viewed as usurping men’s power,” (Glick and Fiske, 2001, p. 109). On the other hand, benevolent sexism is more chivalrous, positioning women as “pure creatures who ought to be protected, supported, and adored” (p. 109). For example, hostile sexism concerns agreement with statements such as “Women are too easily offended” whereas benevolent sexism entails agreement with statements such as “in a disaster, women ought to be rescued before men” (p. 118). Benevolent sexism is more subtle and may not even be considered sexism given that it entails preferential or amicable treatment towards women. However, benevolent sexism is harmful because it positions women as weak and in need of male protection. As Dworkin (1983) explained, placing women on pedestals denies women complexity and humanity: “to stay worshipped, the woman must stay a symbol and she must stay good” (p. 206). Furthermore, the protection and affection afforded to women by benevolent sexism is “readily withdrawn when women fail to conform to sexist expectations” (Glick and Fiske, 2011, p. 532). Benevolent sexism functions as the “carrot” to entice women to perform traditional femininity, while hostile sexism is the “stick” to punish women who violate these norms (p. 532).

Next, antifeminism has been defined as “a cultural discourse or agenda that positions itself in *explicit opposition* to feminism as a political or cultural movement” (Kelly, 2020, p. 11, my emphasis). However, while Kelly (2020) distinguished misogyny or woman-hating from antifeminism, others do not. For example, Dworkin (1983) described antifeminism as:

“Antifeminism, in any of its political colorations, holds that the social and sexual condition of women essentially (one way or another) embodies the nature of women, that the way women are treated in sex and in society is congruent with what women are, that the fundamental relationship between men and women – in sex, in reproduction, in social hierarchy – is both necessary and inevitable.” (Dworkin, 1983, p. 195).

For Dworkin (1983), antifeminism is a “direct expression of misogyny” and “is always an expression of hating women,” (pp. 195-196). Similarly, Lillian (2007) suggested that one cannot attack feminists without attacking women in general. While Kelly (2020) did distinguish misogyny and antifeminism, she acknowledged that misogyny is “frequently the rhetorical or aesthetic tool” of antifeminist practice and that the two are closely linked (p. 14).

To distinguish between different attitudes and positions towards feminism, I follow the framework devised by Jordan (2016) for her analysis of the UK fathers' rights movement. Jordan distinguished between feminist, postfeminist, and backlash perspectives according to their empirical claims concerning feminism and gender equality and their normative positions on gender equality and gender politics as detailed in Table 1. Importantly, the boundaries between these perspectives may be porous and it is possible to employ "dual narratives" (p. 33) and move between backlash and postfeminist positions for example.

First, Jordan (2016) described feminist perspectives. It is important to note that the feminist movement is theoretically diverse and it is thus difficult to make generalisations about what feminists believe, say, or do. For example, socialist feminists may argue the capitalist-worker relationship is the primary oppression, while radical feminists may argue that patriarchy is the primary oppression and consider men and women to be political classes in their own right (Mackay, 2015). There are also divisions between "reformist" feminists who emphasise gender equality and granting women more rights under the existing laws and "revolutionary" feminists who seek to transform and uproot the patriarchal system (hooks, 2000, p. 4). Nonetheless, there are some commonalities. Feminists of all genders resist "sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" and "come together with an organised strategy to eliminate patriarchy," (hooks, 2015, p. xii). For Jordan (2016), feminists make the empirical claim that women continue to be oppressed by sexism and promote feminist activism as a solution. In addition, feminists hold the normative position that equality (as opposed to male or female superiority, not necessarily a desire for legal equality under the existing system) is desirable, feminism should be evaluated positively, and that there is a need for collective feminist gender politics.

Table 1: Feminist, post-feminist and backlash positions , adapted from Jordan (2016, p. 33).

	Feminist	Postfeminist	Backlash (pro-equality variety)	Backlash (anti-equality variety)
Empirical claim on the nature of gender (in)equality in society	Significant gender inequalities remain, with women being disadvantaged relative to men.	Gender inequalities are non-existent or minimal, as men and women are equal in most, if not all, respects.	Significant gender inequalities remain, with men being disadvantaged relative to women.	Women’s equality has roughly been achieved, but this has led to a damaged society.
Empirical claim on the nature and necessity of feminism	Feminism has been beneficial for men and women. Feminist action is necessary to achieve gender equality.	Feminism is no longer necessary, as any remaining inequalities are minor and will disappear naturally over time.	Feminism has been detrimental for men and women. Antifeminist action is necessary to bring about true gender equality.	Feminism has been detrimental for men and women. Antifeminist action is necessary to bring about an unequal, but better, society.
Normative position on gender equality	Gender equality is a socially and morally desirable goal.	Gender equality is a socially and morally desirable goal.	Gender equality is a socially and morally desirable goal.	Gender equality is not a socially and morally desirable goal.
Normative position on feminism	Positive view of feminism – it is a necessary and benevolent force for change.	Ambivalent view of feminism – it has brought about equality, but is outdated and unnecessary.	Negative view of feminism – it has increased gender inequality.	Negative view of feminism – it is a damaging force in society.
Normative position on gender politics	Gender is political and there is a need for collective feminist gender politics.	Gender is not political and there is no need for collective (feminist or antifeminist) gender politics.	Gender is political and there is a need for collective antifeminist gender politics.	Gender is political and there is a need for collective antifeminist gender politics.

Next, as discussed in section 2.1, postfeminism makes the empirical claim that feminism has done its job and women have achieved equality with men in most, if not all, respects and so feminism is no longer necessary (Jordan, 2016). Postfeminism holds an ambivalent normative position on feminism, as it has a “tendency to entangle feminist and anti-feminist” positions (Gill, 2007, p. 163). On one hand, feminism is positively regarded as having achieved the desirable goal of gender equality and feminist values are transformed into “common sense,” but on the other, feminism is “fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 16). Furthermore, gender is de-politicised in favour of individual empowerment and entrepreneurship (Gill, 2007). Feminism thus becomes a “lifestyle choice” rather than a social movement or focus of collective gender politics (Jordan, 2016, p. 32). Examples of discrepancies between men and women may be rationalised as the result of individual choices rather than sexism.

Finally, backlash perspectives are “explicitly hostile to feminist projects” (Jordan, 2016, p. 32). In this thesis, I use ‘antifeminism’ and ‘backlash’ interchangeably. Antifeminist perspectives are diverse in their empirical claims and normative positions, just as feminism is (see chapter six of Dworkin, 1983, for different models of antifeminism). Jordan (2016) distinguished between two varieties of backlash depending on their perspective on equality. For further clarity, I have separated these two into ‘pro-equality backlash’ and ‘anti-equality backlash’ perspectives. A pro-equality backlash perspective makes the empirical claim that gender equality continues to exist yet, in contrast to feminist positions, here it is men who are regarded as oppressed by sexism. Feminism is derided as promoting female superiority, while antifeminist politics are thought to be necessary in order to rebalance the scales and achieve ‘true’ equality.

An anti-equality backlash perspective is similarly hostile towards feminism, though for different reasons. In this perspective, feminism is thought to have succeeded in achieving equality for women, but has damaged society in doing so. In contrast to other perspectives, gender equality is *not* viewed as a desirable goal. Instead the ideal vision for society is total patriarchal dominance with women in subordinate roles. Antifeminist gender politics are needed in order to achieve an unequal, but better, society. However, though pro-equality backlash may use the language of egalitarianism, Hodapp (2017) argued that the ideal societal vision promoted by antifeminist men’s rights groups is maintenance of the patriarchal status quo, rather than genuine gender equality. Thus, when I refer to ‘pro-equality’ backlash stances, it is more to highlight the rhetorical mobilisation of terms and concepts such as ‘equality’ or ‘liberation’ rather than to imply any genuine commitment to ending gendered domination and sexist exploitation.

4.3. Discourse-Historical Approach

The discourse-historical approach (hence DHA) is a school of CDS developed by Ruth Wodak and colleagues (Wodak et al. 2009; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Reisigl and Wodak, 2016; Wodak, 2020). Reisigl and Wodak (2016) outlined the most important principles of the approach, many of which overlap with Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) principles of CDS. First, the approach is interdisciplinary. Linguistic analysis is combined with theoretical insights and methodological approaches from other fields such as sociology, political science or psychology. Historical analysis is particularly important as the approach "attempts to integrate much available knowledge about the historical sources and background of the social and political fields in which discursive 'events' are embedded" (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p. 35). Importantly, Koller (2011) argued that discourse-historical analysis does not need to be "diachronic" and the historical period can indeed be the current period, as long as linguistic data are interpreted in its historical context (p. 123). As shown in chapter two, the historical background of men's movements is integral to this research project.

Secondly, the approach is "problem-oriented" (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 31). Reisigl (2018) explained that discourse-historical analysts are primarily concerned with issues relating to discrimination, politics, and identity. Consequently, the approach has been applied to diverse issues such as the representation of immigrants and asylum seekers in far-right political leaflets (Richardson and Colombo, 2017; Richardson and Wodak 2009), claims of 'anti-White racism' in Australia (Sengul, 2021) and the discursive construction of the Scots language (Unger, 2013). Thus, research into antifeminism is also well within its scope. Thirdly, the approach utilises the principle of "triangulation" so that various frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and methods of data collection and analysis are combined (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 31). While this research project will focus on data from a single source (i.e., one subreddit), the data itself will consist of different modes (both visual and verbal) and multiple methods of analysis will be carried out, such as analysis of nomination and argumentation strategies. Furthermore, analysis will involve theoretical triangulation in incorporating theoretical insights from multiple disciplines, such as social media studies and feminist theories.

Furthermore, the DHA considers four levels of context: the immediate language or text-internal context and co-discourse; the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between texts and discourses; the social variables and institutional frames of a specific context or situation; and the broader socio-political and historical context (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, pp. 30-31). Applying this model to my research, the first layer of context refers to the actual texts under investigation, in other words the language and images within threads collected from Reddit. For the second level, the

fact that posts were collected from Reddit meant that the intertextual relationships were particularly rich as each comment was posted as a response to an initial post and potentially another Redditor's comment. Furthermore, Reddit affords the opportunity to embed hyperlinks, meaning that users are able to directly link to other texts and hence recontextualise them. I also consider interdiscursivity, such as appropriation of economic discourse. For the third level, I consider the affordances and interactions allowed by Reddit, such as anonymity and upvoting (see 5.1.1 for further discussion). Finally, the fourth level entails consideration of the historical development of men's movements and the broader role and responses to feminism and antifeminism within contemporary Western societies (see chapter two).

Analysis within the DHA is three-dimensional. The first dimension involves identifying the specific content or topics of a specific discourse, while the second dimension involves identification of discursive strategies and the third dimension involves examination of the linguistic means and realisations of these strategies and topics (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 32). A discursive strategy refers to a "more or less intentional plan of practice (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal" (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 33). Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 2016) outlined five major discursive strategies which correspond to five key questions, as detailed below in Table 2.

Table 2: Five discursive strategies within the discourse-historical approach, adapted from Reisigl and Wodak (2016, pp. 32-33).

Question	Strategy	Purpose	Linguistic realisation
How are persons, objects, phenomena, events processes and actions referred to linguistically?	Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes, actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership categorisation devices • Metaphor • Metonymies, synecdoches • Verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions
What characteristics or qualities are attributed to them?	Predication	Discursive characterisation of social actors, objects, phenomena, events processes and actions (e.g., positively or negatively).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypical evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits. • Explicit predicates or predicative nouns, adjectives, and pronouns • Metaphor • Explicit comparisons, similes, hyperboles, euphemisms and other rhetorical devices • Allusions, evocations, presuppositions, implicatures
What arguments are employed?	Argumentation	Persuading addressees of the validity specific claims of truth and normative rightness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Topoi</i> (formal or content-related) • Fallacies
From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, arguments expressed?	Perspectivisation	Positioning the speaker or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deixis • Direct, indirect or free speech • Quotation marks, discourse markers
Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated?	Mitigation and intensification	Modifying the illocutionary force of utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminutives or intensifiers • Epistemic markers • Indirect speech acts • Verbs of saying, feeling, thinking

The first strategy is nomination or reference. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) explained that the “simplest and most elementary form of linguistic and rhetorical discrimination” is through “identifying persons or groups of persons linguistically by naming them derogatorily” (p. 45). Discriminatory referential strategies may be easy to identify, such as referring to women via derogatory gendered epithets such as *cunt* or *bitch*. However, it should be noted that such terms may not always be used with discriminatory intent, for example some women may use ‘bitch’ as a positive identity marker or refer to their friends as bitches as an expression of camaraderie (see Ritchie, 2017). On the other hand, discriminatory nomination strategies could be more covert. For example, Mills (2008) observed that women are frequently referred to as “wives” and “mums” in the news media, even when their family lives are not immediately relevant to the story (p. 149). Mills also wrote that nomination strategies like “single mother” and “career woman” often appear in the reporting of social issues like drug abuse or poor parenting, imbuing such terms with negative collocative meaning (p. 149). This suggests that even ostensibly ‘neutral’ nomination strategies can be used to discriminatory effect, such reinforcing the patriarchal notion that a woman’s most important role is a wife and mother.

Next, predication concerns the attribution of positive or negative qualities to social actors or objects (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). There is often much overlap between nomination and predication, as naming strategies can connote positive or negative attributes. For example, Sagredos and Nikolova (2021) examined the representation of women in comments posted to a YouTube video titled ‘Slut I Hate You’ and found that nomination and predication strategies were typically dehumanising and sexualising, such as metonymic references to women’s body parts and comparisons to animals or inanimate objects. In another study of YouTube comments, Esposito and Zollo (2018) looked at the representation of female MPs and found that female MP’s appearance and intelligence were often the target of negative predication strategies. For example, female MPs were described using adjectives such as “ugly” and “fat” and metaphorically compared to animals such as whales and hippos, while their mental capacities was also derogated as “stupid” “childish” and “unstable” (pp. 54-58).

Through perspectivization, speakers “express their involvement in discourse and position their point of view” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p. 81). Linguistically, perspectivization can be realised through devices such as deixis, reported speech, and discourse markers. For example, quotation may be used to express strong evaluations while maintaining a sense of objectivity and impartiality, or in order to distance oneself from the opinions expressed within the quote (Bednarek and Caple, 2012). As discussed in 3.2, Cospers (2021) described recontextualisation strategies on Tumblr wherein the user recontextualises the other person’s voice rather than their speech. This strategy involves presenting

the other person's point of view in a hyperbolised, ironic manner in order to highlight perceived contradictions or absurdities.

Finally, intensification and mitigation strategies involve modification of the "illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances" (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 33). Researchers may examine whether the discursive strategies are articulated overtly or covertly, such as through examining linguistic features such as intensifiers, hedges, epistemic adverbs, capitalisation, and hyperbole. Mills (2008) suggested that while overt sexism still exists, it is often criticised as "chauvinist" or "anachronistic" and consequently sexism is frequently mitigated or expressed indirectly (p. 11). For example, interlocutors may preface sexism with a disclaimer or denial of sexist intent, or conceal sexism through irony or presupposition. On the other hand, discriminatory utterances may be intensified. In their study of YouTube comments, Sagredos and Nikolova (2019) noted the prevalence of unmodalised declaratives and use of extreme case formulations like "all" and "always" when describing women (p. 182). Similarly, Krendel (2020) analysed intensification and mitigation within a corpus of manosphere Reddit data and finds that the data were characterised by "bare assertions" about social actors such as "women are" (p. 627).

There have been several critiques made of the DHA and its analysis of discursive strategies. First, Charteris-Black warned that "strategy" implies "intentional language use" (p. 128). Without asking the author, it cannot be guaranteed that a nomination strategy interpreted as sexist by the analyst was produced with sexist intent. Nonetheless, even if the illocutionary force of a text was not intentionally sexist, it may still have sexist perlocutionary effects. Second, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) described the DHA as "primarily taxonomical, not analytical" and criticised the positing of five distinct strategies (pp. 25). In particular, they argued that argumentation is fundamentally more complex than the other strategies and questioned why it is listed alongside simpler strategies like perspectivization. Similarly, Charteris-Black (2014) separated argumentation and moved it from the third strategy to the fifth due to its "epistemologically different status" (p. 151). Responding to this criticism, Reisigl (2014) countered that the word "taxonomy" has never been used within the DHA and explained the DHA is not intended as rigid or hierarchical, acknowledging that there will be overlap between categories such as between nomination and predication (p. 89). Furthermore, Reisigl asserted that the DHA analyses "strategies of argumentation," but does not assume that argumentation is a strategy in itself (pp. 89-90). Due to the complexity of argumentation, and due to the central role that argumentation analysis will play within this thesis, I will now devote a section to argumentation within the DHA.

4.3.1. Argumentation

According to Reisigl (2014), the DHA is one of two approaches to CDS with a “strong and organised focus on argumentation” (p. 67, see Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, for the other). Argumentation within the DHA is heavily influenced by pragma-dialectics (e.g., van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2003; van Eemeren et al., 1996; van Eemeren et al., 2002) and the work of German and Austrian argumentation theorists such as Kopperschmidt, Kienpointner, and Wengeler. Within pragma-dialectics, argumentation is conceptualised as a “verbal and social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge” (van Eemeren et al., 1996, p. 5). Meanwhile, Reisigl and Wodak (2016) explained that argumentation is a “linguistic as well as cognitive pattern of problem solving” which involves “challenging or justification of validity claims, such as truth and normative rightness” and its purpose is to “persuade recipients via convincing (sound) arguments and/or suggestive fallacies” (p. 35). In other words, argumentation involves a speaker or writer trying to convince their interlocutor, or audience, that their point of view is correct or legitimate.

DHA researchers may analyse the argumentation schemes used to “justify and legitimise the exclusion, discrimination, suppression and exploitation” of other individuals and social groups (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p. 45). To do so, the DHA considers formal, functional and content-related aspects of argumentation in one cohesive framework (Reisigl, 2014). For formal analysis, the analyst may identify the basic components of an argument. For example, an analyst may follow Toulmin (2003) who theorised six basic elements. First, an argument necessarily involves a *claim*, which is the controversial statement that needs to be justified or argued against (e.g., “men should not get married”). Second, an argument requires *data* or *grounds*, which refer to reasoning or evidence used to either support or attack the claim (e.g., “marriage is expensive”). Third, an argument requires a *warrant*, which serves as a bridge between the claim and data (e.g., “expensive actions should be avoided”). Within pragma-dialectics, these may be referred to as the *standpoint*, *argument* and *unexpressed premise* respectively (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2003), while Kienpointner (1996, cited in Reisigl, 2014) used the terms *claim*, *argument*, and *conclusion rule* or *warrant*. Within this thesis, I will use the terms *claim*, *data* and *grounds* developed by Toulmin (2003) in order to minimise confusion between *argument* as referring to evidence or set of reasons and *argument* as referring to a heated exchange or argumentation more generally. However, Kienpointner (2018) pointed out that these components can be difficult to reconstruct within an “authentic

argumentative text,” (p. 233). This may particularly be the case for argumentation within social media posts, as such texts may be shorter or involve visual forms of argumentation.

Within the DHA, analysis of *topoi* plays a central role. *Topoi* function similarly to a warrant or conclusion rule in that they justify the transition from the data to the claim. They are typically realised as conditional or causal paraphrases such as “if x, then y” (Reisigl, 2014, p. 75). Analysis may consist of identifying the *topoi* used within a specific discourse or text, either within their abstract form or context-specific substantiations. In formal analysis, *topoi* are considered content-abstract and so can be found in argumentative discourse on virtually any topic. For example, Kienpointner (1996, cited in Reisigl, 2014) distinguished nine content-abstract *topoi*, such as the *topos of authority* which means that if authority figure A says that X is true, then X must be true. Similarly, Boukala (2016) provided a list of *topoi* as identified by Aristotle, such as *topos of consequential* which can be paraphrased as “if an act has both good and bad consequences, then on the basis of good/bad consequences this act can be exhorted/blamed” (p. 256). Furthermore, as Reisigl (2014) pointed out, because argumentation is “always topic-related and field-dependent,” *topoi* can also be considered as “recurrent content-related conclusion rules that are typical for specific fields of social actions” (p. 77). While there are content-abstract *topoi* that can be applied in virtually any argumentative texts, the analyst can also identify specific realisations of these *topoi*. For example, Boukala (2016) considered that the *topoi of burden, disadvantage, and abuse* are all specific instantiations of the *topos of consequential*, each pointing to a different type of negative consequence. Therefore, scholars may examine the *topoi* that are typical for argumentation about certain topics such as immigration (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). The full list of *topoi* operationalised within this thesis will be detailed in Table 5, chapter five.

However, some argumentation scholars have noted that original conceptualisation of *topoi* within Aristotle’s work was supposedly content-abstract and formal (Boukala, 2016; Charteris-Black, 2014; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Žagar, 2010). The adoption of content-specific *topoi* within the DHA has therefore been argued to be problematic, with critics warning of the potential for an “enormous proliferation of categories behind analysis” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 25) or an “endless list” of *topoi* (Charteris-Black, 2014, p. 150) due to the fact that specific *topoi* must be named and elaborated for each specific research project. Furthermore, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) warned that the use of detailed, content-related *topoi* may “prevent a synthetic grasp of the nature of objects behind analysis” (p. 25). Reisigl (2014) responded that Aristotle’s conceptualisation of *topoi* was “ambiguous” and not the only possible point of reference for *topoi* analysis, highlighting other scholars who conceptualise *topoi* as a “dynamic, content-related concept” such as Wengeler and

Kienpointner (p. 86). Furthermore, he rightly argued that analysing and identifying content-related and specific *topoi* does not diminish the functional or formal properties of *topoi* as connecting an argument to a claim and that this “double quantity” of *topoi* has never been denied in the DHA. Additionally, Kienpointner (2013) proposed that context-specific *topoi* can be used to “profitably analyse” certain aspects of political argumentation such as “thematic threads” alongside abstract Aristotelian *topoi* (p. 302). Similarly, Amossy (2017) wrote that analysis of content-related *topoi* allow for an “ideological analysis” and unveiling of “world-views and ways of reasoning typical of a given period and place” (p. 267). Given the fact that the DHA places much emphasis on context, I would argue that an examination of content-related *topoi* is especially pertinent, as the researcher can examine arguments made within specific contexts by discourse producers with specific ideologies and agendas. Overall, the examination of content-specific *topoi* can be beneficial for discourse-historical analyses and does not preclude the analysis of formal or abstract *topoi*.

Moving on, the presence of *topoi* does not necessarily mean that an argument is invalid. Therefore, in order to perform text-internal critique an analyst must distinguish between sound and fallacious arguments. To this end, the DHA draws on insights from pragma-dialectics. Within pragma-dialectics, there are ten rules that when followed constitute sound and valid argumentation:

1. **Freedom rule:** parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints.
2. **Burden of proof rule:** a party who puts forward a standpoint is obliged to defend it.
3. **Standpoint rule:** criticism of a standpoint must related to the actual standpoint that was advanced by the other party.
4. **Relevance rule:** a party must defend their standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint.
5. **Unexpressed premise rule:** a party must not falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party or deny a premise they left implicit.
6. **Starting point rule:** no party may falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point.
7. **Argument scheme rule:** a standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defence does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied.
8. **Validity rule:** the reasoning in an argument must be logically valid or must be capable of being made valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed standpoint.

9. **Closure rule:** a failed defence of a standpoint must result in the protagonist retracting the standpoint and a successful defence must result in the antagonist retracting their doubts.
10. **Usage rule:** parties must not use any formulations that are sufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous and they must interpret the formulations of the other party as carefully and accurately as possible (adapted from van Eemeren et al. 2002, pp. 182-183)

Deviations from these rules constitute fallacious argumentation. For example, there are multiple methods of violating the freedom rule. First, an arguer may declare certain claims to be “sacrosanct” or “taboo” and therefore unable to be questioned (van Eemeren et al. 2002, pp. 110-111). Secondly, an arguer may threaten their interlocutor into retracting their standpoint (also known as *argumentum ad baculum*). These violations are particularly relevant within a social media context, as moderators have the ability to set the rules regarding permitted content and may ban certain groups from participating (see Mills, 2018; Robards, 2018). Furthermore, Redditors are able to utilise downvotes to punish users who post dissenting opinions (Gaudette et al. 2021; Squirrell, 2019). Consequently, users may feel prevented from criticising popular arguments or putting forward controversial arguments of their own.

Discrediting the character of one’s opponent, rather than the content of their argument, also constitutes a violation of the freedom rule. Presenting an opponent as “stupid, unreliable, biased or otherwise untrustworthy of credibility” can effectively deny them their right to participate in a discussion by ensuring that they will not be taken seriously by the audience (van Eemeren et al., 2002, p. 111). This is also known as an *argumentum ad hominem* fallacy, of which there are three main variants. First, there is a *direct personal attack*, or an *abusive variant*, which involves an attack on the opponent’s intelligence, morality, or general personality. The implication is that “someone stupid or evil could not possibly have a correct standpoint or reasonable doubt” (p. 112). Secondly, an *indirect attack* or *circumstantial ad hominem* involves casting suspicion on the other party’s motives. For example, an arguer may dismiss the other party’s argument by accusing them of having a vested interest in the topic under the assumption that a biased arguer must necessarily have a biased argument. Finally, the *tu quoque* variant entails an attempt to “undermine the party’s credibility” by pointing out contradictions between their standpoint and past actions or words, with the implication that anyone who is not consistent cannot be correct (p. 112). However, pointing out inconsistencies is only fallacious if the evidence comes from outside the argumentation context; if

someone puts forward contradictory standpoints within the same debate, then this would not be fallacious.

Other relevant fallacies described by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) and van Eemeren et al. (2002) include *argumentum ad verecundiam* which involves a misplaced appeal to authority, such as quoting an authority figure without relevant expertise or taking a relevant authority figure's quotes out of context. The *strawman fallacy* entails presenting a distorted, or even fictitious, version of an opponent's standpoint so that it can be discredited more easily. For example, one could remove qualifiers in order to present an opponent's argument as more generalized (Lewiński, 2011). However, simple misquotation or misrepresentation of an argument does not constitute a *strawman* in itself; specifically the misrepresentation must be used in order to refute or criticise an argument (Walton, 1996). In addition, a *secundum quid* or *hasty generalisation* fallacy means creating a generalised argument based on too few examples, while a *slippery slope* is flawed causal argument involving an assertion that one action will inevitably lead to other negative consequences without sufficient evidence that this will be the case (van Eemeren et al., 2002).

Finally, Forchtner and Tominc (2012) explained that pragma-dialectics differs from CDS as the former does not have an emancipatory agenda and is primarily concerned with the resolution of a difference of opinion. Thus, there may be cases where pragma-dialectics and CDS disagree regarding the acceptability of an argument. To demonstrate, Kienpointner (2009) provided the example scenario of Holocaust denial being illegal in Austria. From a pragma-dialectics point of view, a public debate that would forbid a party from putting forward a standpoint that gas chambers did not exist could be considered an example of *argumentum ad baculum* as the arguer is pressured into retracting their standpoint due to threat of imprisonment. However, Kienpointner argued that restriction of this debate would be acceptable because not only would such a debate be a "waste of intellectual energy" as the existence of gas chambers has already been proven, but also because Nazism has proven to be threatening to democratic society (p. 66). Nonetheless, pragma-dialectics still offers a useful theoretical apparatus framework for the analysis of the procedure of a resolution of a difference of opinion and for the critical evaluation of arguments, especially when performing text-immanent critique (Ihnen and Richardson, 2011). Ihnen and Richardson (2011) argued that pragma-dialectics can bolster the strengths of DHA critique, as the ten rules provide a more clear and operational set of criteria for judging whether or not argumentation is biased or problematic.

4.4. CDS and Social Media

Social media are a particularly rich source of data for CDS scholars and provide new opportunities for research, as they allow researchers newfound access to discourse produced by ordinary citizens without the use of focus groups, interviews, or other ethnographic methods (Koteyko, 2010; KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). In particular, social media platforms are a useful source of data for transgressive political views that are not well represented within traditional broadcast mass media (Bouvier and Machin, 2018). These new communication technologies have also “challenged assumptions regarding the discursive and symbolic power of media” within CDS (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 284). CDS research has typically prioritised traditional print or broadcast media texts produced by official institutions or elite figures, such as newspapers, political speeches, or corporate policy documents. In theorising the power of such texts, researchers typically assumed a “one-way flow of content from a few elite figures to masses of ordinary recipients” and a “clear-cut separation between the processes of production and consumption of media texts” (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016, p. 210). On the other hand, social media texts are “interactive, social, multimodal and circularly networked” (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 287). As the result of new social media technologies, the power *of* discourse may have been “compromised” while the power *in* discourse “seems to have received a boost” (p. 288). It is no longer solely elite figures or corporations that have access to publics; anyone with access to the Internet is able to freely publish and disseminate their own texts or engage in struggles over meaning. The lines between official and unofficial texts, or elite and non-elite, texts become blurred and both are easily available and appear alongside each other (KhosraviNik, 2014; KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). Overall, social media have challenged the ways CDS scholars theorise the power of media and conduct research.

Another important point for CDS researchers is the increased importance of multimodality in social media (KhosraviNik, 2018). Social media texts tend to be highly multimodal combining written text with images, video, audio, and even the written mode is often altered with different colours and fonts. Scholars must also contend with novel multimodal communicative resources, such as emojis, hashtags, likes, upvotes and downvotes, sharing, or hyperlinking. Furthermore, the actual design and layout of the platform are both relevant (Bouvier and Machin, 2018). Texts may be presented in a non-linear or reverse-chronological order, or be dispersed across multiple platforms (Page, 2011, 2018). These multimodal resources are not mere “window dressing” but can communicate significant meanings and ideologies (Bouvier and Machin, 2018, p. 186). For example, Graham and Rodriguez (2021) argued that the rating and ranking devices on Reddit (i.e., algorithmic sorting, upvoting and downvoting buttons) are “sociomaterial devices” which “actively co-shape sociality”

and contribute to the production and evaluation of content (pp. 2-3). The upvote and downvote buttons do not exist to just be clicked, but they encourage users to evaluate content and reflect on the relationship between the value of a text and the number of votes it has received and its position on their homepage.

Within the DHA, the third layer of context refers to the extra-linguistic social variables and institutional frames of a discourse (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Thus, scholars should take into account the social media platform itself and how its design, architecture, and affordances may shape the discourse and interactions between users (KhosraviNik, 2017, 2018). As discussed in section 3.2, the design features of a platform can to some extent promote deliberation, communitarian, or liberal individualist communication styles. Herring (2007) distinguished between “medium factors” which refer to the technological features of social media communication and “situation factors” which refer to social or contextual information. For example, medium factors include synchronicity, chronological ordering, and persistence of messages in addition to affordances such as the ability to privately message users or directly quote another’s message. Situation factors include participant characteristics and demographics, participation structures, and the communicative or ideological norms of the group. These factors could refer to the local level, such as the norms or demographics of specific subreddit, or to the platform as a whole.

However, it is also important to avoid technological determinism. For example, Davis and Graham (2021) found that downvoted Reddit comments received on average a greater number of replies than upvoted comments. This is relevant because the Reddit algorithm aims to *decrease* the visibility of downvoted comments, so arguably downvoted comments should receive fewer replies. They concluded that the features of a technology “shape, but do not determine usage patterns and social dynamics” as users could make use of the affordances in unpredictable ways (p. 662). Furthermore, KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) argued that CDS scholars should not treat the “online” context as strictly separate and independent from the “offline” context (p. 213). As Jurgenson (2012) demonstrated, a ‘digital dualism’ perspective is untenable because how we interact in the physical world influences how we interact in the digital world and vice versa. For example, users may primarily interact online with people they know ‘in real life’ or consider their physical interactions as potential social media posts. The digital and physical spheres thus “augment” rather than replace each other (p. 85). This point is especially relevant for critical studies of the manosphere, as digitally mediated misogyny is often dismissed as a problem confined to social media which can be solved by simply logging out (Jane, 2016).

Another important factor for CDS research into social media is content moderation. Moderation is not an occasional or ancillary practice, but is an “essential, constitutional, definitional” element of social media platforms (Gillespie, 2018, p. 21). Examples of commonly prohibited content include nudity/pornography, graphic violence, harassment, hate speech or promotion of self-harm or suicide (pp. 52-66). Moderation practices may be top-down, where the platform administrators and owners decide what is permitted, or bottom-up where the users are allowed to police themselves to some degree. Other strategies include “community-informed enforcement” (Kopf, 2019, p. 7) where users can flag certain content as offensive or in violation of the rules so that a moderator can take appropriate action, and the use of automated methods such as algorithms or bots (Gillespie, 2018).

Kopf (2019) argued that social media content policies are relevant for CDS, firstly because of their tangible consequences on the data collected as part of a research project. Administrators may remove content deemed to be offensive or discriminatory, so a researcher aiming to study racist or sexist language online may find that their data are removed before it can be collected. Because moderation enforcement is not always immediately visible, researchers should treat their dataset as “potentially incomplete, manipulated and distorted” (Kopf, 2019, p. 8) and avoid making claims that they collected “all” tweets within a hashtag for example (Gillespie, 2015, p. 2). Second, Kopf (2019) claimed that content moderation practices are a form of “social practice” which can thus “represent and enact certain social norms and structures” (p. 7). An examination of content policies could illuminate broader societal trends regarding the kind of language deemed acceptable at a given point in time. The critique produced through CDS could also extend to moderation policies. For example, researchers could examine the extent to which these policies actually help to protect vulnerable groups or their potential impact on issues such as freedom of speech.

Overall, when conducting a critical discourse analysis of social media there are three key points to consider (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). First, CDS researchers should consider the “social context of the users and their communication” (p. 215) rather than conduct analysis of the texts in isolation. Second, researchers should not aim to produce “mere description of genre, content, and communication” (p. 215). CDS research into social media is still critical and so text-internal, socio-diagnostic and prognostic critique could also extend to the platform itself. Finally, and relatedly, although CDS researchers should take the specifics of the digital context into account, social media texts should not be considered as exclusively digital or existing in a separate virtual world. Social media texts are produced online, but this does not mean that they have no offline impact.

4.5. Summary

To summarise, I situate my work mainly within the discourse-historical approach to critical discourse studies. The interdisciplinarity and triangulatory character of the approach facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of MGTOW antifeminism. For example, it supports the integration of important feminist theoretical concepts such as patriarchy and antifeminism alongside traditional theoretical concepts like power, discourse, and ideology, while the four-layer model of context enables an understanding of MGTOW within its historical and socio-political context. As I hope to demonstrate, many of the arguments and representations of gender, relationships, and gender politics are not new, nor are they unique to MGTOW, but instead reflect and reinforce dominant patriarchal ideologies.

Furthermore, the social media context is especially important. In conducting a critical discourse analysis of Reddit posts, it is necessary to account for the specific medium and situation factors and the multiple semiotic resources available to users. Alongside textual analysis of Reddit posts, I also aim to examine the multimodal representations of gender, relationships, and feminism. This includes an analysis of visual content such as memes, screenshots of other Internet content, and photographs, in addition to other relevant semiotic resources available to Redditors such as voting and cross-posting. Finally, the DHA also offers a practical framework, offering several useful analytical tools, concepts and methodological steps. In the next chapter, I will present my methodology and describe how I have applied insights from the DHA and followed the eight step approach.

Chapter 5: Data and methods

This chapter will discuss my methodology. First, I discuss the selection of data and provide a brief overview of Reddit, the platform from which data was collected. Next, I discuss the processes of data collection and reflect on the ethical considerations that were taken into account. Finally, I outline the methods of analysis and review each of the eight steps to the DHA.

5.1. Data source selection

The data under study comes from the subreddit known as r/MGTOW. This particular subreddit was chosen because it was the most well-known and most popular of the various subreddits dedicated to male separatism. The subreddit was created in 2011 and had over 145,000 subscribers at its peak (Subreddit Stats, n.d). Reddit was selected as a platform because it had been identified as a main hub of manosphere activity (Ging, 2019a) and because several previous studies of the manosphere had used Reddit as their primary source of data (e.g., Farrell et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2020; Heritage and Koller, 2020; Krendel, 2020; LaViolette and Hogan, 2019; Rafail and Freitas, 2019; van Valkenburgh, 2019, 2021). Previous research into the MGTOW community specifically has sourced data from a self-hosted forum (Wright et al., 2020), Twitter (Jones et al., 2020) or interviews with r/MGTOW users (Lin, 2017). Therefore, taking r/MGTOW as a single case study would enable me to compare my findings with these previous studies and consider the implications of Reddit platform affordances and infrastructures. For example, unlike the forum discussed by Wright et al. (2020), Reddit is not run by MGTOW, meaning that r/MGTOW subscribers had to abide by Reddit-wide rules and content policies, such as a prohibition of hateful speech against women and other minority groups. A final reason for selecting Reddit was my personal experience and history of using the site, meaning I was already familiar with the platform and its main affordances (discussed further in 5.4). The specific sampling methods for collecting data from r/MGTOW are detailed in 5.2.

Establishing the institutional and extra-situational frames in which a discourse is embedded is an important part of discourse-historical analysis (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016). Before discussing my methods of data collection, I will therefore first describe the Reddit platform, including its technological design, major features and affordances, and the community demographics and norms.

5.1.1. Reddit

Reddit is a social news and content aggregation platform founded by Alexis Ohanian and Steve Huffman in 2005. Describing itself as the “front page of the internet,” the site attracts over 52

million daily users (Reddit, 2021). While Reddit is a social site, it does not rely on “one’s online identity connecting to one’s ‘offline’ identity” and its users do not primarily interact with their pre-existing social network (Massanari, 2015, p. 6ff). In addition, the site is not centred around individual user profiles but rather communities known as ‘subreddits’ dedicated to specific topics such as science, politics, or sport, with nerdy or geek interests being particularly well represented (Massanari, 2015). In total, there are over 100,000 active subreddits (Reddit, 2021). Users visit the site for diverse purposes, such as entertainment, education, or seeking advice (Singer et al., 2014) and for many users, the site functions as their primary source of news (Barthel et al., 2016; Ovadia, 2015; Singer et al., 2014).

Some have argued that Reddit is not a singular community but rather a collection of smaller communities which may have differing ideologies (Ovadia, 2015; Robards, 2018). For example, Reddit is home to both feminist and antifeminist subreddits. While Massanari (2015) conceded that while individual subreddits may have “unique subcultures, norms, and rules,” there are still certain patterns which characterise interactions throughout the site and that researchers should understand how these larger cultural mores shape Reddit as a platform (p. 14). Even if Reddit does not constitute a community in sociological terms, Gil (2017) noted that administrators and users alike often refer to it as such. Research suggests that Reddit users strongly identify with the idea of belonging to a Reddit community (Howard and Magee, 2013) and that users visit the site frequently (Singer et al., 2014). This sense of community can also be seen in the fact that Reddit users have their own demonym of ‘Redditors.’

Most Reddit content is publicly accessible, but only users with accounts can create or interact with content. When logged in, Redditors can submit content in the form of text posts, images, or hyperlinks, to a subreddit of their choosing. Then, other Redditors may comment on the submission or reply to other users’ comments, forming a comment chain or comment tree. Discussions are presented in threaded format and all submissions include information such as the author’s username, the time of submission, and whether or not the submission has been edited, meaning that readers can easily keep track of discussions. By default, comments are sorted by ‘best’ meaning that users will first see comments with the highest upvote-downvote ratio, but users can also choose to sort comments according to other criteria such as recency. Redditors can also vote on posts and comments: an ‘upvote’ to indicate that they enjoyed the content, or a ‘downvote’ to indicate that the content is off-topic or irrelevant. Users can also bequeath a post or comment with Silver, Gold, or Platinum awards purchased with real currency in order to grant it more visibility. A cornerstone of Reddit is the ‘karma’ system. Each post and comment appears with a ‘karma score’ next to the

username, which is a rough indication of how many upvotes and downvotes a comment has received. Figure 1 shows an example of a comment chain from the data set.

User1 • 286 points 1 year ago
Because let's face it, we got personalized laws for everyone: poor, rich, men, women. Poor men are fucked twice by this system. And rich women may install email server in the basement for top secret content.
permalink save

User3 • -52 points 1 year ago
Come on Hillary was totally exonerated <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2020/01/13/hillary-clinton-has-been-exonerated-again/> and Mike Pence was using AOL when he was governor of Indiana and Trump was tweeting from an insecure android phone when he first became president. I HATE all politicians so don't get me wrong but the Hilary email thing was nothing but nonsense propaganda that we should stop perpetuating here.
permalink save parent

User4 43 points 1 year ago
"Media says media's favored candidate was totally exonerated." She destroyed 30,000 emails that were under subpoena. The director of the FBI went on TV and said "Yeah she committed crimes but prosecuting her would be unreasonable." Meanwhile lots of other people had been prosecuted for much less.
permalink save parent

User3 • -33 points 1 year ago
<https://us.blastingnews.com/news/2016/10/donald-trump-caught-using-unsecured-private-email-servers-details-revealed-001192437.html>
<https://us.blastingnews.com/news/2016/10/donald-trump-caught-using-unsecured-private-email-servers-details-revealed-001192437.html>
Sorry you can down vote me all you want but TONS of politicians use insecure email accounts. Email is an insecure system to begin with. All politicians are full of shit including the clintons, the trumps every last one. Why aren't we talking about how the government is trying to ban end to end encryption. Now that's a mgto topic
<https://9to5mac.com/2020/06/24/ban-end-to-end-encryption/>
permalink save parent

Figure 1: An example of a four-level comment chain from r/MGTOW, from thread 27 on 14th July 2020.

Karma is generally taken seriously on Reddit. The Reddiquette page provides guidance on how voting should work and explicitly prohibits users from downvoting posts they personally dislike or disagree with (Reddit, 2020). However, this rule is frequently disregarded (Graham and Rodriguez, 2021; Maclean, 2018; Squirrel, 2019). In general, upvoted content tends to be that which converges with subreddit norms and values, while downvoted content tends to diverge from these norms (Davis and Graham, 2021). Downvoted posts are afforded less credibility and visibility and are prone to 'bandwagon' effects where downvotes beget more downvotes (Graham and Rodriguez, 2021; Squirrel, 2019). Being downvoted generally "feels bad" (Davis and Graham, 2021, p. 660) and so Redditors may punish other Redditors or other subreddits through "downvoting brigades," (Massanari, 2015, p. 75). Maclean (2018) explained that karma functions as a "reputational economy" on Reddit, where a low karma score marks "trolls or disruptive" or otherwise less credible individuals (p. 118). Thus, Redditors typically seek to avoid being downvoted. At the same time, Redditors often accuse each other of engaging in "karmawhoring" (Massanari, 2015, p. 79). In other words, posting 'low effort' and unoriginal content designed to garner as many upvotes - and thus as much karma - as possible, such as submitting reposts of previously popular content or asking people

to upvote in the title of a post (Massanari, 2015; Richterich, 2014). Overall, Redditors must strike a balance between submitting content that is convergent with the subreddit norms, but not too convergent so as to appear unoriginal.

Reddit has been characterised as pseudonymous (Massanari, 2015; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015). No personal information such as gender or date of birth is required in order to create an account and Redditors typically use pseudonymous usernames rather than their legal names. A common practice is the use of temporary ‘throwaway’ accounts to be used once and then discarded (Leavitt, 2015). Due to the site’s pseudonymity and voting mechanisms, many Redditors perceive the site as egalitarian or “meritocratic” (Maclean, 2018, p. 129). However, Redditors tend to be White, liberal, college-educated, men (Barthel et al., 2016) who live in the USA (Dean, 2021). In addition, Brown et al. (2018) found that female users were significantly less likely to submit content than male users, although they were not less likely to read or vote on content. Furthermore, Redditors are more likely to upvote content which conforms with community norms (Davis and Graham, 2021) and content which has already been upvoted (Muchnik et al., 2013). This suggests Reddit is not necessarily egalitarian or meritocratic, but that the voices of White, American, middle-class men continue to dominate this digital space and that users’ voting practices are swayed by the practices of other users.

Regarding moderation, at a bottom-up level, subreddits are governed by volunteer moderators. These moderators are able to determine the rules of the subreddit, such as prohibiting ‘not safe for work’ content (i.e., nudity or graphic violence) or requiring posts to be written in a certain format (Fiesler et al., 2018). Moderators can delete content as well as ban or temporarily suspend users who break these rules, while subscribers can also flag content as requiring moderator intervention. At a top-down level, Reddit administrators also have the ability to ban or quarantine entire subreddits. When a subreddit is banned, no new content can be submitted and all previous content is removed from the site. In contrast, quarantined subreddits remain on the platform but are no longer available to users without a verified email address and do not appear in search engine results. When a Redditor tries to visit the quarantined subreddit, they are greeted with a warning of potential offensive content. Finally, there is no advertising and users cannot purchase awards for posts in quarantined subreddits, meaning that Reddit does not profit from these communities. Arguably, this constitutes an advantage for the quarantined users as Reddit is hosting their content for free.

Reddit in the past presented itself as a “bastion of free speech” (Maclean, 2018, p. 37). Consequently, the platform allowed openly racist, sexist, or otherwise hateful subreddits to remain

active as long as they did not violate the terms of service, such as sharing illegal content. Massanari (2017) argued that this laissez-faire approach facilitated the proliferation of “toxic technocultures” such as subreddits dedicated to racist abuse or sharing stolen nude photographs (p. 339). However, Reddit updated its content policies in 2015 and began to ban subreddits which engaged in harassing behaviours such as doxing, most notably r/FatPeopleHate. In 2020, the content policies were updated once more to explicitly ban communities that “promote hatred based on identity or vulnerability” (Reddit, 2020). However, many Redditors reacted negatively to such changes, viewing them as an attack on freedom of speech and as ‘ruining’ or signalling the ‘death’ of the platform (DeCook, 2022; Maclean, 2018).

Chandrasekharan et al. (2017) found that the ban of r/FatPeopleHate was successful at reducing the level of hate speech on Reddit. Many users who had previously participated in hateful subreddits either deleted or abandoned their accounts, while those who remained produced substantially less hate speech. While users did try to create ban evasion subreddits, these were shut down by Reddit admins or died out due to a lack of user activity. On the hand, the quarantine mechanism may be less effective. Chandrasekharan et al. (2021) and Copland (2020) both found that although there was a sharp decrease in the level of activity and number of subscribers in r/TheRedPill after it was quarantined, there was no significant decrease in the prevalence of hateful or misogynistic language. DeCook (2022) explained that the quarantine measure is positioned as an “opportunity for moderators to clean up their communities” before facing a ban (p. 212), but the actual purpose and function are vague if subreddits like r/TheRedPill can continue to remain quarantined after three years despite showing little improvement in the way of hate speech.

5.2. Data sampling and collection

To collect data, I wrote a Python script using the PRAW wrapper (Boe, 2020) to scrape threads from r/MGTOW that were designated as ‘hot’ by Reddit’s sorting algorithm, in other words threads that were currently receiving a lot of engagement in the form of upvotes and comments. The script retrieved initial posts and comments submitted in response to the post, as well as relevant metadata such as the karma score and time of submission. As mentioned previously, Reddit comments can reply to other comments. However, because there is no upper limit to the length of a comment chain, I limited the script to only collect the first four “levels” in a tree (i.e., a comment, a reply to the first comment, a reply to the second comment, and reply to the third comment) as previous research indicates that this where the majority of comments are situated (Weniger et al., 2013). Comments were sorted by ‘best’ and were kept within their original threads and comment trees in order to maintain coherence, while each thread was saved in an individual Microsoft Word

document labelled with a number from 1-50. As the script did not embed images, in order to collect images submitted by users I followed the given link to the image and saved them manually. For the remainder of this thesis, 'post' or 'initial post' will refer to a seed post that begins a thread, while 'comment' will refer to replies to a given submission and 'thread' will refer to the combination of an initial post and its comments. 'OP' refers to the user who submitted the initial post. 'Commenter1' refers to the user whose comment appears first in a thread when sorting by hot, 'Commenter2' to the second, and so forth. For example, 'Post 2' refers specifically to the submission entitled "Never forget this" uploaded by OP2, while 'thread 2' refers to the combination of Post 2 and its subsequent replies.

I initially collected ten threads in May 2020 as a pilot study (see 5.4 for details). Afterwards, beginning the first week in June 2020, I collected five threads per week until an additional 40 were collected. I collected these additional forty threads while still conducting my pilot study, due to the fact the subreddit had recently been quarantined (the ethical considerations of this are discussed in 5.3) and so was concerned that the subreddit would be banned soon afterwards. In total, the script returned 50 initial posts and 1335 comments. However, of these 1335 comments, 5 were returned as [deleted] and 30 were returned as [removed] meaning they had been deleted by either the author or a moderator respectively. After these were removed from the sample, the dataset consisted of 50 initial posts, 1300 comments, and approximately 46,000 words. Fifty posts were chosen in order to ensure the sample remained large enough to draw conclusions, yet not so large that manual, qualitative discourse analysis would be unfeasible. The posts received a mean karma score of 314.42 (ranging from 41 to 1073) and 26.06 comments (ranging from 2 to 131). The most-upvoted comment received a score of 500, while the most downvoted comment received a score of -46. Most comments were upvoted, though there were 38 comments with a score of less than 1.

These sampling methods allowed me to gain insight into what topics could be considered more 'typical' for MGTOW users. This allowed me to confirm that topics such as women, relationships, marriage, divorce/breakups, hobbies, and feminism were 'typical' or staple topics of discussion considering that they were discussed on a weekly, or nearly weekly, basis as opposed to being popular in a particular week. In addition, I found that each week it was typical for moderators would 'sticky' a new post to the top of the subreddit, meaning it would be the first post users would see. These posts tended to *not* be about women and instead focussed on hobbies and lifestyle, perhaps in order to deflect criticism that the community is pre-occupied with women. Therefore, collecting posts every week allowed me to include a variety of these stickied posts and consider the

representation of the MGTOW lifestyle in greater detail. On the other hand, I found that the prevalence of some topics was more tied to current events. For example, I found that race was brought up more frequently as a topic during the threads collected in June which was likely due to the revitalisation of the Black Lives Matter movement at the time. However, without longitudinal, ethnographic methods, I acknowledge that is difficult to say for certain what a ‘typical’ week on r/MGTOW was truly like.

I decided to collect ‘hot’ posts rather than the ‘top’ posts (i.e., the most upvoted posts of all time) because in my experience of Reddit, the top posts tend to be satirical or meta-posts commenting on the overall state of the subreddit. In addition, ‘hot’ is the default method of sorting posts and ‘best’ is the default method of sorting comments on Reddit, so this sorting criteria allowed me to capture data that was more reflective of how users viewed and interacted with the subreddit in practice. Furthermore, images tend to receive more upvotes on Reddit (Gilbert, 2013; Singer et al. 2014) and so collecting only the top posts would likely exclude text posts from the dataset.

As detailed in Table 3 multimodal posts vastly outnumbered text-only posts. Of the 46 multimodal posts, one was a direct link to a Facebook post while the rest were static images. Image posts were then divided into photographs, screenshots of other digital media, and memes/manipulated images. Some posts combined a social media screenshot with a ‘reaction image’ in order to create a meme. In these cases, these were tagged as memes.

Table 3: Post types in the r/MGTOW dataset.

Post type	Number of posts
Image: screenshot	24
Image: meme or remixed image	14
Image: photograph	7
Text-only	4
Hyperlink	1

In addition to the type of post, I also recorded the source of the posts as shown in Table 4. The most common source was self, including original photography, self-generated memes, or text written by the author. Some posts were unsourced, such as memes without watermarks where it was unclear whether they were created by the same person who uploaded it. The most common sources of screenshots were Twitter and Reddit, while other sources included Facebook, Instagram, 4chan, Snapchat, blogs, and Urban Dictionary. Posts could contain multiple sources. For example, post 47

was a user’s screenshot of his own Snapchat story, so was coded as both ‘self’ and ‘Snapchat,’ while post 25 consisted of a screenshot of an Instagram story which was itself a screenshot of a Tweet so was coded as both ‘Instagram’ and ‘Twitter.’

Table 4: Sources of posts in the r/MGTOW dataset

Source	Number of posts
Self	13
Twitter	10
Reddit	9
Unsourced	7
Facebook	5
Newspaper	4
Instagram	4
Other	4

5.3. Ethical considerations

Research into the manosphere, and hostile online communities in general, brings with it many difficult ethical decisions. However, detailed and explicit accounts of ethical decision-making are typically rare within (critical) discourse analyses of social media data (Gorup, 2019; Stommel and de Rijk, 2021). This is often due to the perception that social media texts do not constitute ‘human subjects research’ and that the analysis of social media texts is no different to analysis of any other written texts such as newspapers or books (see Walther, 2002, for such a view). However, the distinction between a “person” and a “text” for social media is less-clear cut, as most social media texts are produced by people and are used to construct identities (Page et al., 2022, p. 58). Even if there is no direct contact with the users by way of interviews or face-to-face observation, this does not mean that ethical considerations such as anonymity, confidentiality, or informed consent need not apply (Markham and Buchanan, 2012). Given the emancipatory aims of CDS and the emphasis on self-reflection, consideration of ethical principles should not be ignored by CDS researchers working with digital data. Thus, this section will discuss my ethical decision-making and some of the main issues that I have faced during this project.

The relative publicity or privacy of online data is often used as general guideline for judging whether or not data can be legitimately used in research and the types of ethical considerations that are required. For example, when data are considered to be publicly accessible, many researchers tend to forgo informed consent or anonymisation of data (McKee and Porter, 2009). However, users’

expectations of publicity and privacy do not always match up with the technical privacy settings, as users may publish posts on public platforms yet perceive their posts to be private and intended for a small audience (McKee and Porter, 2009), which often does not include researchers (Markham, 2012). At the same time, I would argue that it should also not be assumed that all users desire privacy online, as many users wish for their posts to reach a wide audience. Consequently, some researchers advocate respecting users privacy expectations rather than the technical privacy settings (Mackenzie, 2017; McKee and Porter, 2009).

In the case of MGTOW, the subreddit was quarantined and thus technically private at the time of data collection. In order to visit r/MGTOW during May-August 2020, a user would need to log in with a verified email address. It is possible for subreddits to be even more private than a quarantine; for example there are subreddits which are only available to existing subscribers and new subscribers must seek permission from moderators in order to join. The quarantine was decidedly *not* the decision of the userbase, nor of MGTOW moderators. As I will show in chapter six, the community response to this decision was overwhelmingly negative. Furthermore, many users questioned the purpose of the quarantine or did not appear to understand how the quarantine mechanism worked. This suggests that even though the community was more private, this did not match users' desires or expectations. Therefore, public-private distinctions were less-clear cut for r/MGTOW and ethical decision making was less straight forward. Despite the quarantine, I received approval from my institution's ethical review board to collect data.

In terms of concrete ethical decisions, I did not seek informed consent from either the users or moderators. As well as the practical difficulties associated with contacting hundreds of pseudonymous users, many of which have abandoned or deleted their accounts, there are also concerns regarding my own safety and wellbeing. Given my political views and identity as a female, feminist researcher, I had concerns that the community would be hostile towards me. Indeed, other scholars studying gender and sexism online have discussed experiencing forms of harassment as a result of their research (Kelly, 2020; Massanari, 2018; Parson, 2019; Vera-Gray, 2017). Furthermore, critical research in the social sciences, such as CDS, may be more likely to evoke negative responses, as the community and their discourse will not be presented in a neutral, objective light (Herring, 1996; Rüdiger and Dayter, 2017). Therefore, I desired for my research to remain as unobtrusive as possible in order to maintain a safe distance from the users.

A lack of informed consent does not mean that other ethical principles are unimportant. To compensate for this lack of consent, I chose to anonymise all usernames in order to protect the users' privacy and minimise potential risks of identification. Because Reddit has a culture of pseudonymity (Massanari, 2015; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015), redacting the already pseudonymous usernames should provide an extra level of protection. No usernames will be published in this thesis; instead, all usernames have been replaced with a generic label such as 'OP1' or 'Commenter3.' Furthermore, I have also endeavoured to remove references to potentially identifying personal information, such as their residing US state. One issue that I did not anticipate was the frequent sharing of social media screenshots. Often, these screenshots were posted with the intention of mocking the users depicted therein. Because these screenshots frequently included the original usernames, display pictures, and on one occasion a woman's partially naked body possibly taken from her OnlyFans account, I believed it was ethically important to anonymise these screenshots as well, with the exception of public figures such as celebrities or politicians.

However, it is difficult to ensure complete anonymity within social media research, as even anonymised datasets may still contain identifying information (Zimmer, 2010). Furthermore, if the researcher chooses to publish verbatim quotes, a reader could easily find the initial source by copying the quote into a search engine. Although Herring (1996) speculated that the likelihood of anyone actually doing may be "negligible" (p. 158), this should still remain a cause for concern. To mitigate such risks, some researchers advocate using paraphrases or otherwise modified quotes (Markham, 2012; King, 1996). However, such a practice is untenable for research where language and discourse itself is the object of study (Herring, 1996). Considering that CDS scholars are already frequently accused of engaging in cherry-picking and producing biased analyses, I would certainly not recommend modifying data or essentially engaging in analyses of paraphrases. Moreover, I agree with Jane (2016) who argued that researchers of online misogyny must be willing to reproduce a "multitude of *unexpurgated* examples" (p. 14, original emphasis) in order to demonstrate the scale of the problem and the normalization of misogyny. Thus, this thesis will include direct, verbatim quotes from r/MGTOW, including spelling mistakes, typos, formatting inconsistencies in addition to any derogatory language.

Furthermore, the intended purpose of a subreddit quarantine is to reduce the amount of traffic to a problematic subreddit and so when a subreddit is quarantined, its contents are no longer available through Reddit-internal or external search engines. A year after I collected data, the subreddit was banned entirely and so all content that had ever been posted to r/MGTOW was removed. As a

result, I believe it to be more acceptable to include verbatim quotes because the original users are even more difficult to find. Nonetheless, I have maintained my decision to doubly anonymise users because some users have remained active on Reddit after the ban. Of course, there are still issues with using deleted data (Pihlaja, 2017). I would argue that there is a difference between data that have been removed by the users themselves because they no longer wish for others to see it and data that have been removed by administrators against the will of the users. To this end, there were three examples where a r/MGTOW user had deleted their account but not their comments, so the Python script had retrieved the text but returned the username as [deleted]. In these cases, I removed the comment from the sample in order to respect the user's wishes.

There is a lack of guidelines for ethical CDS research and for ethical research into hostile online communities, so the fact that my research crosses both of these areas has meant that ethical decision-making was especially challenging. Multiple instances of platform intervention and unforeseen circumstances such as sharing partially naked photos have meant that my ethical decisions have had to be continually reviewed. Furthermore, as well as protecting the users, it was also important to consider my own safety and wellbeing. Before collecting any data, I had to complete a risk assessment covering the possibilities of harassment from users and the potential for this research to have negative impact on my mental health. As discussed previously, I did not contact any members of the subreddit in order to minimise the risk of targeted harassment. Despite this, I have occasionally received abusive, sexist messages as a result of my research. Following recommendations from the university risk assessment team and other researchers (Marwick et al., 2016), I take care to monitor who follows my social media accounts and report any abusive messages I receive. Another issue is that academics are often expected to be "microcelebrities" and use social media for self-promotion (Massanari, 2018, p. 7), meaning I have had to balance publicising my work in a manner that was visible to other academics, yet not to those in the community who had the potential to harass me. Furthermore, it was often personally difficult to read, let alone qualitatively analyse, disparaging, dehumanising comments about my gender – particularly at the beginning of this research project. Consequently, I made sure to take regular breaks from data analysis and maintain an appropriate work-life balance. Finally, it was important to have a good support network in place and connect with other scholars working with similar data in order to support each other and share strategies for fostering resilience.

5.4. Methods of analysis

Unger et al. (2021, p. 268-269) outlined an eight-step approach to conducting a discourse-historical analysis of social media data, based on the original model proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 34):

- (1) Activation and consultation of previous theoretical knowledge
- (2) Systematic collection of data and context information
- (3) Selection and preparation of data for specific analyses
- (4) Specification of the research question(s) and formulation of assumptions
- (5) Qualitative pilot analysis
- (6) Detailed case studies
- (7) Formulation of critique
- (8) Application of detailed analytical results

These steps are typically followed recursively and abductively, rather than in a linear manner. I will now describe each of these eight steps in turn and explain how I have approached each step in this thesis.

The first step involved reading previous literature in order to identify gaps in the literature and construct a comprehensive theoretical background. I decided to research MGTOW in particular because my initial literature review suggested that MGTOW was under-researched relative to the rest of the manosphere. The second step concerned collection of data and context information, orienting myself to the four levels of contextual information. Unger et al. (2021) suggested incorporating methods such as interviews or ethnography in order to gain this contextual information. However, as I detailed in section 5.3, I did not wish to engage directly with the community due to safety concerns. Instead, I collected contextual information by reading relevant sources such as Reddit content policies and the 'Reddiquette' page, consulting prior literature about Reddit, and taking into account my personal experiences as a Reddit user. This insider perspective meant that I could distinguish between interactional or linguistic behaviours which were unique to r/MGTOW and those that were more characteristic of Reddit more generally. For example, r/MGTOW users sometimes accused each other of posting fake stories and employed stock phrases such as "and then everybody clapped" to express their doubt. From my experiences with Reddit, I was able to recognise that this scepticism is part of broader Reddit culture and that the phrase is commonly used across the whole platform (see also Massanari, 2015). Another important source of contextual information was the r/MGTOW sidebar. A 'sidebar' is a section of a subreddit which

typically includes information such as a short description of the community, the number of subscribers and visitors, rules of participation, and names of moderators. Furthermore, analysis of textual content on social media must be linked its broader historical and societal context (KhosraviNik, 2018; Reisigl and Wodak, 2016). Thus, I also researched the historical development of men's movements and considered the similarities between MGTOW and previous groups such as the mythopoetic movement and men's rights activists, as detailed in chapter two.

Step three concerns the collection and preparation of data, which I have discussed in section 5.1 and section 5.2. Step four entails specification of research questions, which I provided in section 1.2. These questions were continually reviewed throughout the research project, for example after the identification of discourse topics in step five. Next, step five is qualitative pilot analysis. My pilot analysis began with an initial ten threads in order to test whether r/MGTOW would indeed be a useful source of data and whether the proposed methods and analytical frameworks would be appropriate for the research project. The preliminary stage of analysis involved an initial reading of each of the ten threads in order to familiarise myself with the content and record manosphere-specific vocabulary for which I would need to research the definition (e.g., 'AWALT' meaning 'all women are like that'). At this stage, I also recorded quantitative information such as the karma score and the number of comments in each thread. For this preliminary reading, threads were uploaded to ATLAS.Ti. Each individual post and each comment was made into a quotation and the 'comment' feature was used to record my initial reactions and thoughts for these quotations.

Analysis in the DHA is three-dimensional. The first dimension involves identification of the specific content or topics of the discourse (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 32). To do this, I created topic codes in ATLAS.Ti such as *women*, *marriage*, and *education*, with code names derived through inductive readings of the dataset (see Appendix for full list of topic codes). Each quotation could be tagged with multiple codes. Comments which did not include much propositional content and instead complimented another user or the thread (e.g., "nice post") were coded as *general*. Each thread was subject to three rounds of coding to ensure consistency and rigour, with the categories narrowed down and refined after each subsequent round. Following Krzyżanowski (2008), I distinguished between primary and secondary topics. While his original distinction referred to focus group discussions in which the primary topics were put forward by the interviewer and the secondary topics were those advanced by participants, KhosraviNik and Sarkoh (2017) demonstrated that such a distinction can also be applied to social media data. Therefore, I use "primary topics" to refer to the those put forward by the thread initiator and "secondary topics" to refer to those put forward by

subsequent commenters. A detailed analysis of topics within MGTOW discourse has already been conducted by Wright et al. (2020). Thus, the function of topic identification within this thesis was mostly to allow a 'way into' the data and devise research questions. From my analysis, I found that the topics of women, men, hobbies and lifestyle, marriage, relationships, divorce, feminism, privilege, and misandry were particularly salient, leading to the formation of research questions about the representation of MGTOW, women and relationships, and feminism.

The second dimension is the identification of discursive strategies, as detailed in section 4.3, and the third dimension involves examination of the "*linguistic means* (as types) and context-dependent *linguistic realizations* (as tokens)" (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 32, original emphasis). In this thesis, I mainly focus on argumentation strategies but consider the other four strategies when used to bolster argumentation; for example, if an argument against marriage involved derogatory labelling of women (nomination) and assignment of negative traits (predication). To analyse argumentation, I coded the *topoi* underlying arguments. These *topoi* codes were initially based on the list presented by Reisigl and Wodak (2001), but there were differences in the *topoi* that were coded and differences in the realisations of these *topoi* due to the difference in context and source of data. For example, Reisigl and Wodak (2001) included the *topos of culture*, while I did not code any instances of this within my data.

Additional *topoi* identified through analysis included *topos of censorship*, which was occasionally used in discussions of the MGTOW quarantine in order to protest the injustice of the measure. The most prominent of the new *topoi* was the *topos of freedom*, which was typically to argue that separating from women will increase men's independence or that marriage constrains men's ability to pursue their hobbies or interests. The full list of *topoi* operationalised within the study are given in Table 5.

Table 5: The list of topoi operationalised within this study, adapted from Reisigl and Wodak (2001). Topoi marked with * indicate topoi that were not originally included within Reisigl and Wodak's study.

Topos	Definition	Example from the data
Abuse	If a right, offer for help, or system is being exploited or abused, then the right should be changed, the offer for help should be withdrawn and/or measures against the abuse should be taken.	Like 90% of domestic violence accusations in court have known lies or exaggerations. Only a 1% conviction rate its always leverage in relationships and divorce. This privilege needs to b removed from them. [thread 19]
Advantage	If an action under a specific relevant point of view will be useful, then the action should be performed.	I am so glad I didn't get married and could instead spend that money on flying and enjoying travelling! It's been great! [post 31]
Authority	If an authority figure says that an action or statement is (in)correct or should (not) be carried out, then we should do as they say.	Youngsters. Listen to your elders. Go Your Own Way. [thread 13]
Censorship*	If a group's discourse is being suppressed, then that means it should be listened to/that what they are saying is correct.	Because Reddit is essentially the online version of China's social credit system (social cReddit, geddit?), and communists see independent thought and politically-incorrect truths as dangerous and requiring the gulag treatment. arrrh right yey. so from a perspective that they believe MGTOW to be dangerous!!!! Must be doing something right then! :) [thread 6]

Definition	If an action, thing, or group is named as X, then they should carry the qualities contained in the (literal) meaning of X.	New One: Remember that men don't marry, simps do. [thread 6]
Finance	If a specific situation or action costs too much money or causes a loss in revenue, then we should perform actions to diminish the costs or avoid the loss.	A simple advice for any tradcuck or simp lurking here. Try this for a change, cutoff girlfriends or stop chasing girls for a month and see how much you save financially, be at peace mentally in that period. Proven fact. [thread 24]
Freedom*	If an action increases, or impinges, on another person's freedoms, then the action should (not) be carried out.	For me bachelor lifestyle (mgtow) is better. More money, more peace and more FREEDOM [thread 18]
History	Because history teaches that specific actions have consequences, we should learn the lessons from or perform the same/different actions as we did in the historic example.	In the bible, written 4,000 years ago I believe, we have the Book of Job. Long story short, a successful shepherd lost everything. His wife leaves him. Then at the end of the story he became a rich man. He got the "hottest woman in the world." Since the dawn of civilization, women have been gold diggers. Financial vampires who are only in it for the money. [thread 22]
Humanitarianism	If an action or decision does (not) conform to human rights or humanitarian values, then the action should (not) be carried out.	Feminists would just as soon hang all men that walk away from the stupid games women torment us with. Feminists are the extremists. We just want to be left alone. [thread 37]
Justice	If persons, actions, or situations are equal in specific respects, then they should be treated in the same way.	They [women and society] don't give a rat ass on men why should we care about them. [thread 1]
Law	If a law or otherwise codified norm prescribes or forbids an action, then the action should (not) be performed.	You're not supposed to date them [cougars]. Learn the rules. [thread 12]

Numbers	If the numbers prove a specific topos, the action should (not) be carried out.	Yep. Foodie calls. 23-33% of women regularly engage in the practice... Don't even put yourself in a situation where you would have to shoulder the cost of a female's meal in the first place. [thread 6]
Reality	Because reality is as it is, a specific action or decision should be carried out.	Thats the truth and its insane to have to fight over it. Once we forgo the truth it all goes to hell. The naked emperor riding down the street in his new clothes. Is that what we want? [thread 44]
Responsibility	If a specific group is responsible for the emergence of a problem, they should be responsible for solving the problem.	why cant women understand the power of wanting to bust a nut? Like your litteraly retarded if you go out drinking with men and get offended or uncomfortable if they tried to make a move on you. Im all for sending rapist and sexual assaulters to jail for a long time. But you cant just think you aren't part of the problem and only part of the solution. I dont know where in society we decided that a women has zero input or causation to her sexual assault or rape. This js why i believe in gender segregation [thread 25]
Threat	If an action brings specific dangerous consequences, then the action should not be carried out.	No matter how long you've been together, as soon as you lose your job they flick that psycho switch and all of a sudden you don't mean shit. [thread 45]
Uselessness	If an action under a specific relevant point of view will <i>not</i> be useful or help us to achieve our goal, then the action should not be performed.	What is the use of having kids when a long term relationship last 5y tops in today clown world. [thread 20]

In addition to identification of *topoi*, I sought to identify the claims (i.e., the statement in need of justification) and the grounds or data in support of the claims. Often, the claim was left implicit. For example, many comments presented reasons why marriage or relationships are unfavourable for men or examples of feminists acting unreasonable, yet did not explicitly include a claim phrase such as “therefore men should not get married” or “therefore feminism should be rejected” and so this implicit claim had to be reconstructed from the surrounding context. For example, a commenter may not need to explicitly claim “therefore men should not get married” because a previous commenter had already made a similar claim, or because it is taken for granted in the community. Posts and comments were coded as ‘co-ordinate’ if multiple *topoi* were used to support the same claim, or as ‘subordinate’ if one *topoi* was used primarily to support another *topoi*. Furthermore, I also coded for the presence of fallacious arguments (see 4.3.1 for discussion of fallacies) based on the list of fallacies outlined by Reisigl and Wodak (2001, pp. 71-74) and van Eemeren et al. (2002, pp. 183-186) such as *strawman* and *hasty generalisation*.

After I completed my initial analysis of ten threads, I moved to analysis of the remaining 40 threads using the same methods as detailed above. For the sixth step, the researcher should aim to produce “detailed case studies on the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of linguistic analysis, as well as on the level of context” where results of linguistic analysis are interpreted within the “social, historical and political contexts” of the discourse(s) in question (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 55). As a result of the analysis, the researcher can create general descriptions of the discourse in question, including features such as but not limited to: the typical topics and social actors involved; contradictions in argumentation or ideological stances; interdiscursive relationships with other discourses.

Step seven concerns the formulation of critique, which as discussed in chapter four is an essential element of CDS. The point of this thesis is not to fact-check all the evidence produced by r/MGTOW or to assess the extent to which men can legitimately be considered oppressed (for such an enterprise, see Hodapp, 2017). Thus, text-immanent critique in this thesis entails a critique of problematic or fallacious argumentation strategies, such as distorting the results of academic studies. The final step is the practical application of results, such as sharing results with the public or on social media and ensuring that the research has practical benefit outside of academia (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016; Unger et al., 2021). As part of the MANTRaP research project, I have produced a guideline to the manosphere and manosphere language for the online safety charity *Internet Matters*.

5.5. Summary

This chapter has outlined my approach to discourse-historical and argumentation analysis within a dataset of fifty threads from r/MGTOW. Analysis of argumentative strategies such as *topoi* can illuminate how the ideology of male separatism is legitimated and how users are persuaded to withdraw from relationships with women and reject feminism as a social movement. The types of *topoi* revealed to be frequent can facilitate an understanding of the important values and ideologies within the community.

The following chapters will present the analyses. First, in chapter six I will discuss the representation of MGTOW ideology and lifestyle and arguments in favour of separatism. Next, in chapter seven I discuss the representation of women and relationships with women and arguments against marriage or relationships, including advice on how to navigate relationships in a way that maintains one's independence and sovereignty. Finally, in chapter eight I discuss the representation of feminism and gendered power and arguments against feminism or in favour of antifeminist or 'red pill' ideology.

Chapter 6: Self-representation

The self-label MGTOW implies some degree of resistance; to go one's "own" way suggests deviation from a prescribed path. However, what going one's own way entails, and who or what men go their own way from, is left vague in this label. In this chapter, I aim to examine how r/MGTOW represent male separatism and 'going their own way.' I begin with an analysis of the subreddit sidebar, rules of participation, and users' own explanations as to what MGTOW means for them. Next, I examine representation of the MGTOW lifestyle and how separatism was argued to be beneficial for men. Finally, I consider representations of MGTOW ideology and beliefs, discussing how users presented their ideology as constituting facts or truthfulness, but also as censored and marginalised.

6.1. Representation of the MGTOW subreddit

In this section, I examine the content from the r/MGTOW 'sidebar.' A sidebar is positioned on the right-hand of a subreddit webpage and typically contains information such as the total number of subscribers, current number of visitors, the list of moderators, rules of participation, a description of the community, and links to related resources. Therefore, an analysis of the sidebar enables an analysis of how r/MGTOW aims to present itself for new users, including how it describes the community's aims, values, and norms.

6.1.1. Sidebar description

The r/MGTOW sidebar provided the following brief description of the community:

(6.01) We are men going our own way by forging our own identities and paths to self-defined success; cutting through collective ideas of what a man is.

First, this description partially realised the ideological square strategy of emphasising one's positive traits and de-emphasising one's negative traits (van Dijk, 1998), although there is no parallel emphasis on the negative traits of an out-group. Academics and journalists alike have described MGTOW as sexist (Bates, 2020; Jones et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020), yet there is no indication of such within the description (see also Heritage and Koller, 2020, on the subreddit description of the incel subreddit r/braincels). Such an omission is unsurprising, given the ideological square and Reddit's content policies regarding promotion of hate. However, what is notable is the complete absence of women. Despite the fact that abstention from relationships with women is a fundamental tenet of the group, there was no mention of this fact - or any mention of women at all -

within the group description. Instead, MGTOW defined themselves in terms of positive capacity and what men are able to do (i.e., forge their own identities, become successful) instead of negative capacity and what men have to give up (i.e., dating women). This may allow MGTOW them to maintain their focus on men and avoid accusations of “woman-obsessed separatism” (Jones et al., 2020, p. 1914). Furthermore, adjectives “own” and “self-defined” suggest individualism: each user will have his own interpretation of what it means to be a successful man going his own way and so there can never be a one-size-fits-all definition.

As well as promoting “self-defined success,” this description also promoted self-defined masculinity: men should “forge [their] own identities” rather than conform to “collective ideas” as to how men should act or behave. However, these “collective ideas” of masculinity were unexplained. First, as MGTOW has been described as biologically essentialist in their view of gender (see chapter seven; Jones et al., 2020; Lin, 2017; Wright et al. 2020), this could entail a rejection of social constructionist theories of gender. Second, it could imply a rejection of negative depictions of masculinity within the media or notions of ‘toxic masculinity’ - a term that is becoming increasingly popular to describe practices ranging from men’s homophobic and misogynistic speech to mass shootings, though not without criticism from some feminists and academics (Harrington, 2021; Waling, 2019). Although the term originated within the mythopoetic men’s rights movement (Harrington, 2021), it is often perceived by conservatives or by the manosphere as an attack on men and masculinity in general (Bates, 2020; Trott, 2022). Thirdly, it could perhaps comprise a rejection of the ‘male sex role’ or cultural prescriptions that men should act as breadwinners or providers for their families.

The positive self-presentation means it would be difficult to disagree with the group’s aims without appearing authoritarian, as it would involve claiming that men should *not* be able to decide how they wish to live their lives. There was also an implication of societal mistreatment towards men – if “collective ideas” about masculinity were not harmful in some way, then there would be no need to “cut through” them. The description also implied that that other people try to dictate how men should conceptualise success or identity. Therefore, going one’s own way entails breaking free from these constraints placed on men and pursuing individual empowerment, so is ultimately a positive choice for men.

Finally, the sidebar included the following disclaimer:

(6.02) Disclaimer: this subreddit is not *official* and does not represent MGTOW *officially*.

All knowledge found here is posted by volunteers.

According to Wright et al. (2020), MGTOW “disavows the idea they are a group at all” (p. 911). In which case, there would be no way to “officially” represent MGTOW if such a group or movement does not officially exist in the first place. Instead, moderators claimed that the subreddit is made up of “volunteers,” thereby emphasising that men are posting there out of their own free will and that there is no commercial aspect. Finally, moderators referred to the content of the subreddit as “knowledge” as opposed than opinions or theories (see 6.3.2 for further discussion). This is similar to results from van Valkenburgh (2021), who found that the sidebar of manosphere subreddit r/TheRedPill constructed red pill ideology and recommended ‘red pill’ texts as objective truth.

6.1.2. Rules of participation

Formalised lists of rules are important in clarifying to newcomers the norms of appropriate communicative behaviour (Fiesler et al., 2018). Analysis of the r/MGTOW rules can therefore provide some insight into the community norms, in addition to the maintenance of subreddit boundaries. In total, r/MGTOW had ten rules, which was slightly higher than the Reddit average of 7.11 (Fiesler et al., 2018). All of these rules were restrictive, dictating what content was prohibited rather than what content was allowed. Some of the rules were in line with global Reddit norms, such as ban on “low-effort” content (Richterich, 2014) and self-promotion (Chandrasekharan et al., 2018; Fiesler et al., 2018). Other rules provided an insight into the local norms of r/MGTOW. The ten rules were as follows:

(6.03) We will allow no:

1. Low-Effort
2. SJW/LGBT [Proselytizing]
3. Juice Promotion
4. White Knighting
5. Hug Boxing / Entryism
6. Concern Trolling
7. Tone Policing
8. Virtue Signaling
9. Humble Bragging
10. Failed Blue-Pillers i.e., "Incels"

Any violations can result in immediate banishment. Posting here is a *privilege*. If you get a ban, *shrug it off* and improve.

While the short description made no mention of its explicitly antifeminist or anti-leftist stance, this became clearer in the rules. Many of these rules forbade actions associated with out-groups, namely SJWs, white knights, and incels. As an acronym for 'social justice warrior,' SJW is a pejorative term for left-wing progressives and feminists (Massanari and Chess, 2018; Kelly, 2020). Thus, rule two forbade LGBT people or SJWs from attempting to 'proselytize' or 'convert' users from MGTOW to social justice causes. The religious interdiscursivity fulfils multiple delegitimising functions. First, "proselytizing" is often used with negative connotations of "overzealous or coercive" (Kerr, 1999, p. 8). Second, since links have been drawn between the manosphere and "New Atheism" (Kelly, 2020, pp. 61-64), comparing social justice to a religion may be delegitimising in its own right considering that religion is associated with dogmatism and irrationality in these communities. Third, it reproduces the homophobic and transphobic stereotype that the LGBT community seek to 'convert' heterosexual and cisgender people into becoming homosexual or transgender.

Furthermore, the word "proselytizing" embedded a hyperlink to a YouTube video entitled "The History of Political Correctness (Complete)" produced by the conservative think tank Free Congress Foundation. The video description linked political correctness with 'Cultural Marxism' and the Frankfurt School. Cultural Marxism has been identified as an antisemitic conspiracy theory (Richardson, 2018; Mirlees, 2018). Originally derived from the Nazi term 'Cultural Bolshevism,' the theory posits that scholars from the Frankfurt School sought to translate Marxism from economic terms into cultural terms with the aim of destroying Western cultural values such as Christianity and the patriarchal family (Mirlees, 2018). A link to such a video implicitly aligns MGTOW with far-right antisemitic conspiracy theories.

Rule four prohibited "white knighting." Within the manosphere, 'white knight' is a term used to denigrate and emasculate men who support feminism (Waltman and Mattheis, 2017) or act subservient to women (Jones et al., 2020). The term originates from male-dominated spaces like online gaming communities, where men who defended women (e.g., from harassment) were viewed with suspicion, for instance as trying to win a woman's favour (Grieser, 2018). Therefore, if one user wrote negative comments about women or a particular woman, it would have been against the rules for another user to defend her.

Rules 5-8 prohibited certain communicative actions. Similar to white knighting, “virtue signalling” refers to the practice of making progressive statements with the hopes of gaining approval and recognition from others, rather than out of genuine concern for the issues discussed (Levy, 2020). Stollznow (2020) wrote that the term is often applied as an insult to dismiss an opponent’s arguments as mere grandstanding. In such case, an accusation of virtue signalling may also function as an *ad hominem*. Next, “concern trolling” refers to a scenario in which a participant in a debate “pretends to be a supporter to raise ‘concerns’ from within” (Robards, 2018, p. 198). This rule would prevent feminists or those with progressive beliefs from subscribing to r/MGTOW under false pretences and attempting to criticise or change the beliefs of other group members. “Tone policing” is a form of “derailing” that involves criticism of how an argument was made, such as accusing the opponent of being too angry or emotional (Poland, 2016, p. 47). This rule would prevent users from critiquing comments which discuss women in an angry or aggressive manner. While terms such as “virtue signalling” and “SJW” are associated with reactionaries, conservatives, or the political right in general (Levy, 2020; Kelly, 2020), the term ‘tone policing’ is more commonly used by feminists and antiracists (Biddle and Hufnagel, 2019).

Rule five banned “hug boxing/entryism.” Entryism is similar to concern trolling, while a “hug box” resembles a safe space or an echo chamber, where users interact with likeminded others who are guaranteed to agree with them (Kruse et al., 2018). A disdain for “safe spaces” has been noted as prevalent within contemporary antifeminism and conservatism (Kelly, 2020). However, as moderators have license to ban users who voice feminist, leftist or ‘politically correct’ beliefs that would counter the dominant ideology of r/MGTOW users, this rule is perhaps contradictory. On the other hand, a ‘hug box’ also connotes a “warm, safe, comfortable” environment (Kruse et al, 2018, p. 73), so perhaps this rule also aimed to prevent users from mollycoddling each other and to encourage a sense of toughness.

Most of these rules referred to prohibited actions rather than prohibited actors. Someone who identified as a woman or a feminist could legitimately have participated within r/MGTOW so long as they refrained from ‘virtue signalling,’ ‘proselytising’ or ‘white knighting’ behaviours. The only specific group who were mentioned as banned were “failed blue pillers i.e., “incels.”” This may be due to incels’ links with violence and terrorism (Hoffman et al., 2020; Zimmerman et al., 2018) and due to the superficial similarities between MGTOW and incels as both groups comprise single men. However, while incels view themselves as desiring a relationship with women but incapable of finding a partner, MGTOW view themselves as capable of finding a partner but actively *choose* to be

single. Incels were described as “blue pillers,” suggesting that they are ignorant or haven’t taken the red pill if they still desire a relationship with women. Furthermore, because both major incel subreddits had been banned at the time, the rule may have served to prevent r/MGTOW from acting as a ban evasion subreddit for incels which would lead to MGTOW being banned in turn.

Overall, the rules promoted a stereotypically masculine or aggressive communication style, discouraging users from defending each other or ‘tone policing’ antagonistic comments. Importantly, the rules served to maintain the boundaries of the in-group and prevent perceived outsiders, such as feminists and blue-pillers, from fully participating in the forum. Robards (2018) explained that r/The_Donald had similar rules due to paranoia surrounding being infiltrated by “opponents” (p. 198) which may also be the case here. Bates (2020) noted that “paranoia about normies who could be out to expose them,” and accusations of “moles or spies” are prevalent within MGTOW communities (p. 96), while Wright et al. (2020) described the practice of “tuna fishing” in which users “hunt out” women and feminised men lurking within the MGTOW forum (p. 917). While women and feminists were not banned outright, there were constraints on their participation as they were prevented and discouraged from voicing opinions which would contradict the dominant ideology of male separatism and antifeminism.

6.1.3. User descriptions

In the comments of various threads, users provided their own descriptions and definitions as to the meaning of MGTOW and attempted to correct misconceptions. For example, Commenter4 in thread 16 claimed that buying and restoring a boat “is a great example of what MGTOW mean” (see Table 6). According to Commenter4, a common misconception is that MGTOW is solely about “hating” and refusing cohabitation with women. The producers of this misinformation were referred to via the genericization “people” which suggests that false beliefs about MGTOW are widespread and are not just held by feminists or other out-groups. Commenter4 then juxtaposed this skewed understanding of MGTOW with his own, which is that MGTOW is about individual empowerment and achievement of personal goals. His description of MGTOW used positive, affective verbs (e.g., loving, respecting) and cognitive verbs emphasising mastery (e.g., understand, focus, execute). Implicitly, through a *topos of advantage*, readers may conclude that they too should go their own way if they wish to reap these benefits. Moreover, Commenter4 wrote that MGTOW are no longer “limited by women.” Through a *topos of freedom*, users may conclude that they should go their own way if they are to escape these constraints on their potential. Overall, rejecting women is a means to an end, rather

than an end in itself; it is the act of separation and refusing to cohabit that gives men the freedom and opportunity to realize their goals.

Table 6: Commenter4's use of the *topos* of advantage and freedom in thread 16.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
<p>Commenter4 (4): Congrats for having the courage to do it [buy a boat]. This is a great example of what MGTOW mean. When people talk only about the part where we don't want to cohabit with women etc., it's very belittling what MGTOW really is. It's for us men to find ourselves and understand what we want and to focus and execute those ideas, without being limited well by women (and men still being blue pillled) . People got it so wrong when they think that MGTOW is about hating women. Its about loving and respecting ourselves and achieving our little and big goals.</p> <p>Well done MGTOW brother! And good luck with your adventure(s)! [...] [thread 16]</p>	Advantage	MGTOW allows men to achieve their goals and learn positive values like self-love and self-respect. Therefore men should go their own way.
	Freedom	Women are a limiting, constraining force on men. Therefore men should go their own way.

Self-sufficiency and independence appear to be core values of MGTOW ideology. In response to post 32, where the OP shared a screenshot of a “bullshit” interaction with a feminist, Commenter2 advised his fellow Redditor to “cheer up” and move on from the encounter rather than dwell on it (see Table 7). He also employed a tricolon of negative imperatives, telling men that they should not care about the opinions of others, beg for help, or play the victim. Instead of changing the situation, they should change how they respond to it. A *topos of definition* was used here, arguing that MGTOW should avoid these actions because they are not what MGTOW is “all about.”

Table 7: Commenter2's use of the topos of definition in thread 32.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter2 (31): Don't care about what others say don't beg for help don't play victim that is what mgtow is all about Just fuck them man!!! And cheer up 🙌 [thread 32]</p>	<p>Definition</p>	<p>MGTOW is all about self-sufficiency. Therefore MGTOW should not take actions which contradict this, such as playing the victim or begging for help.</p>

Commenter2 associated MGTOW ideology with mental strength and disassociated it from victimhood. While men can acknowledge the hardships that they face, they should not identify or position themselves as a victim, nor should they “beg for help” from others. As Cole (2007) noted, there is a notable anti-victimhood sentiment within the US. Victims are associated with “weakness, passivity, dependence and effeminacy,” but at the same time, those making victim claims are also assumed to be “manipulative, aggressive” and even a potential danger to society (pp. 2-3). Claims of victimhood are thought to violate the ethos of personal responsibility, as victims supposedly blame everyone but themselves for their negative experiences and refuse to move on with their lives. Feminists are particularly derided, as they are perceived as unjustly taking up the mantle of victimhood and encouraging other women to identify as victims. Therefore, MGTOW should especially seek to avoid positioning themselves as victims.

Finally, users associated MGTOW with self-control, especially control over one’s emotions. Evoking a *topos of freedom*, Commenter8 in thread 1 explained that self-control is important because if men do not learn how to control their emotions and impulses, then men will not be able to break “free” from women’s control (see Table 8). Rather than being an ability that is inherent to all men, self-control was depicted here as a gradable ability that men need to learn and practice. It is not enough for men to merely possess the ability to control their emotions, but they must also be a “master” of this skill.

Table 8: Commenter8's use of the *topoi* of freedom and justice in thread 1.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims
<p>Commenter8 (6): Yes because society and women are controlling us using exactly those impulses. In order to be free you have to master yourself, your impulses first.</p> <p>For this reason we say all the time put yourself first, think what is best for you.</p> <p>We are conditioned to serve women and society from childhood.</p> <p>We say NO. MGTOW first accepted word was NO.</p> <p>No more. The purpose of MGTOW is self-serving, not women, not society.</p> <p>They don't give a rat ass on men why should we care about them. [thread 1]</p>	Freedom	<p>Learning to control one's emotions will allow men to be free from women and society's control. Therefore, men should learn to control their emotions.</p>
	Justice	<p>Women and society do not care about men. Therefore, men should not care about women and society.</p>

Themes of individualism and independence were also present in this comment. Commenter4 wrote that men are “conditioned to serve” and that “society and women are controlling” men. This suggests MGTOW perceive themselves sitting outside of society and as resisting the status quo, as they say “no” to this conditioning and refuse to be complicit in their subordination. The comment also drew on a *topos of justice* in arguing that men should not have to care about women or society, given that these groups do not care about men. Instead of working to improve men's status in society or to make society more equal, men are encouraged to disengage from society altogether.

Overall, MGTOW constructed themselves as an exclusively male group. The name of the subreddit indicated that the target userbase was men and members assumed that their fellow interlocutors would also be men through the use of masculine terms of endearment like “MGTOW brother” and “man.” Furthermore, r/MGTOW users represented their group as resisting subordination and embodying the ideals of independence, individualism, and self-sufficiency. In defining and describing MGTOW in these terms, users could downplay the importance of women. Rejecting women was

portrayed as a means to an end and an action that allows men to pursue the lives they desire. However, as hopefully will become clear throughout this thesis, women remained central to MGTOW discourse and argumentation.

6.2. Representation of the MGTOW lifestyle

This section will thus detail the arguments presented in favour of a male separatist lifestyle, focussing mainly on the 'pull factors' or the proposed benefits of singledom. First, I discuss 'transformational narratives' in which users described their transitions to a MGTOW lifestyle. These narratives typically juxtaposed their former miserable, married lives with their new happy and peaceful separatist lives. Afterwards, I examine representations of the MGTOW lifestyle, in which users detailed the new hobbies and experiences that they could pursue as the result of going their own way.

6.2.1. Transformational narratives

Post 1 is a self-post which took the form of a highly emotional narrative wherein the poster detailed how witnessing his mother abuse his father led to his decision to go his own way. OP1 described the feelings of hurt and anguish experienced by himself and his father through highly emotive lexis ("broken" "dead" "torment"). Metaphor was also employed to emphasise the negative emotional condition of the father, who is described as a "broken shell" rather than a full person. Meanwhile, the mother was depicted as abusive and controlling, using her children to manipulate her partner. As a result of this experience, OP1 decided he would "never" allow a woman to have power over him.

(6.04) OP1 (178): The longer I spend as a mgtow The more I come to realize that it is a philosophy of self control, to be above our base human impulses, and to free ourselves from that influence.

My entry into mgtow was bred from me being a child of a bad divorce. If my mother had her way my dad would be dead in prison by now. Even after that my mother wouldn't let go she used me and my sisters to find new and interesting ways to torment him. My father after it all seems like a broken shell of a man waiting for death

I dicided I would never allow a woman to have so much power over me, or any person for that matter.

This was all before I discovered mgtow, the red pill, and similar knowledge such as SET.

I never had that much reverence for humanity as a whole, and I disdain the human condition.

mgtow as a community has opened my eyes to a lot of things I was on the cusp of perceiving but never truly understood [...] [thread 1]

Discovering MGTOW is portrayed as a revelation, which “opened his eyes” and deepened his understanding of the world. The “red pill” and “SET” (an acronym for ‘Sexual Economics Theory’) are referred to as “knowledge” thus presenting MGTOW beliefs as more objective. The theory of ‘sexual economics’ originated in academia rather than in the manosphere. For example, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) considered sexual relationships in terms of marketplaces following the laws of supply and demand in which “men and women play different roles resembling buyer and seller” (p. 339). Sex is considered to be a female resource and so male sexuality has “little to no exchange value” in comparison (p. 360, though cf. Rudman, 2017, for critique). This interdiscursivity and appropriation of academic theories may enhance the persuasive effect of MGTOW beliefs about women, providing a veneer of scientific credibility. In addition, O’Neill (2018) and van Valkenburgh (2019, 2021) consider the implications of such an economized view of sexuality. Discussing r/TheRedPill, van Valkenburgh explained that such a view can be understood as an “*extension of and acceleration of existing cultural norms* (O’Neill, 2018, p. 7) insofar as it privileges scientific rationality and integrates common economic discourses involving [...] market-based exchanges,” (van Valkenburgh, 2021, p. 99, original emphasis). In addition, this functions to strip intimacy from relationships and allows users to commodify women.

Wright et al. (2020) suggested that storytelling of negative experiences with women helps to create solidarity between users and enables the performance of a red-pilled MGTOW identity. Narrating a story of mistreatment by women allows men to signal to others that they know the ‘truth’ about women and their manipulative, exploitative ways. At the same time, MGTOW may also wish to avoid ‘playing the victim’ or appearing weak (see Table 7 for further discussion). To reconcile these competing needs, users could tell ‘small stories’ in the form of allusions to their negative experiences (Georgakopoulou, 2007, section 3.4), or emphasised how they overcame those

experiences. For example, Commenter8 in thread 35 did not provide any specific details regarding his previous relationship, other than that it was like “hell” and that the girlfriend was responsible. A *topos of history* ran throughout the comment in suggesting that Commenter8 had to learn from his past mistakes and make difference choices in order to avoid going through a similar hellish experience. The negative experience was foregrounded through grammatical parallelism and repetition of specific syntactic frames (i.e., a pluricolon of “that’s why” followed by “that memory”).

Table 9: Commenter8 use of the *topoi* of history, freedom, and uselessness in thread 35.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
<p>Commenter8 (2): The memory of the hell she put me through. That's what sustains me as well. That's why I'm so happy being single. That why I never regret being on my own. That's why I'm never lonely. That's why I'll never give another woman legal or financial power in my life. That's why I keep women out of my life. That memory has and will drive all of my choices and decisions for the remainder. That memory ensures I'll never make that same stupid choice ever again. That memory will ensure I remain free, content and at peace. Pussy is way WAY over rated. [thread 35]</p>	History	Commenter8's previous experience with women has been entirely negative. Therefore, others should learn from his past mistakes and go their own way.
	Freedom	MGTOW allows men to be free, without ceding financial or legal power to women. Therefore, men should go their own way.
	Uselessness	Relationships with women are not as good as people make them out to be. Therefore, men should go their own way.

Being in a relationship with a woman is equated with ceding power to her, specifically “legal or financial power.” To enter a relationship with a woman is to subordinate oneself to her. In contrast, single men are “free”. Through a *topos of freedom*, readers may conclude they should go their own way in order to keep their personal, legal and financial freedoms. Furthermore, the comment ended with a *topos of uselessness* in suggesting that relationships with women are “way WAY overrated” and thus men may conclude they should not date women if relationships will not live up to their expectations. This sentiment was intensified via the repetition and capitalisation of the intensifier “way.” Commenter8 additionally employed a synecdoche in referring to relationships with women as “pussy” thereby reducing women to genitalia and sexuality. Overall, relationships with women

were portrayed extremely negatively as “hell” and comprising subordination, in contrast to a MGTOW lifestyle which allows men to be “free, content, and at peace.”

In some cases, the negative experience may only be worked out through implicature. For example, Commenter10 in thread 37 claimed that his life has been “so much better” since becoming MGTOW. There was no reference to any specific past events, or any negative evaluation of his history. However, in suggesting that his life is now “so much better,” readers may infer that his former, non-MGTOW life was negative, or at least not as good, in order for the improvement to be substantial. Again, through a *topos of advantage*, readers may conclude that they should go their own way if they seek to lead better lives.

Table 10: Commenter10 use of the *topos of advantage* in thread 37.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
Commenter10 (9): Lol I remember when I arrived. Life’s been so much better since then. [thread 37]	Advantage	Becoming MGTOW makes men’s lives better. Therefore, men should go their own way.

Overall, users may persuade others of the legitimacy of male separatism through juxtapositions between a negative, constrained married life and a free, content single life. The decision to become a MGTOW was typically portrayed as a pivotal, crucial moment that changed everything. These narratives could also function as legitimization of separatist ideology through mythopoesis and “moral tales” (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 105), as by separating from women the protagonists learn valuable lessons and are rewarded with a better life. A separatist lifestyle is argued to enable men freedom from subordination, as being in a relationship with a woman is the same as submitting to her power. In these examples shown above, users focussed on the positive aspects of separatism and described the abuse or trauma they faced in previous relationships in the form of a small story. Minimal references to the “hell” they experienced allowed men to showcase that they are truly red-pilled MGTOW as they recognise that relationships with women are dangerous and emasculating for men, but without the risk of being perceived as emotional, mentally weak or as “playing the victim.”

6.2.2. Hobbies and lifestyle

Subreddit moderators are afforded the ability to ‘sticky’ up to two posts, meaning that those posts will remain at the top of the subreddit homepage when sorting by hot regardless of the amount of upvotes or comments they receive. During the period of data collection, one new post was stickied each week. With one exception (post 1, shown in example 6.03), all stickied posts were on the topic

of hobbies. These posts typically functioned as MGTOW 'success stories,' detailing the exciting interests that subscribers have been able to pursue as a result of their separatism and offering encouragement for other users to do the same. Johanssen (2021) claimed that r/MGTOW posts fall into two broad categories: "one that celebrates male independence and strength" and "the other that discusses the 'evil' nature of women" where the latter is predominant (p. 124). Moderators perhaps used the 'sticky' function in order to encourage more frequent discussion of male independence and strength.

Furthermore, all of these hobby posts featured a photograph offering visual evidence of the author's separatist success. Johanssen (2021) observed that many photographs on r/MGTOW "document a blissful and *aestheticized* life experience" such as "photos of travelling alone, or treating themselves to an expensive purchase" (p. 144, original emphasis). This observation applied to my own dataset as well. There were photographs of users with motorcycles and Lego sets, as well as photographs depicting natural landscapes such as sand dunes and mountains (see Figure 2; Figure 3). The latter photos tended to be taken at a straight angle where the horizon is above the viewer's eyeline and at wide or medium distance suggesting a lookout position (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Longer distances have been noted to connote impersonality (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006), or isolation (Machin and Mayr, 2012). This effect may be exacerbated within these photographs, as other social actors were either indexed (for example, via footprints in the sand in Figure 2) or were entirely absent (Figure 3) giving the impression of complete solitude. This was occasionally made explicit by the OP in the title of the post (e.g., "away from everyone" in post 36). In such cases, the metaphor of "going their own way" was made more literal, as these men depicted themselves as spatially distant from others having physically 'gone their own way.'



Figure 2: Post 46, submitted with the title "Dune with a View." It received a score of 198.



Figure 3: Post 36, submitted with the title "Away from everyone. Corsica." It received a score of 200.

Although the actions depicted within these posts tended towards the mundane, such as going on holiday (thread 36) or buying a Lego set (thread 47), they were often represented as aspirational (see examples 6.05-6.06). To an outsider, predications such as “great work” and imperatives to “keep going” may come across as hyperbolic. However, this makes sense within the MGTOW worldview, where it is taken as basic knowledge that men are oppressed by systems of ‘gynocentrism’ and that men are expected to be subservient to others. Thus, everyday actions such as consumer purchases can be framed as acts of resistance, as such actions do not have wider benefit beyond the individual.

(6.05) Commenter4 (3): amazing view dude keep up the great work! [thread 36]

(6.06) Commenter19(9): My Transformers and G.I.joes say Hi to your Legos. It's great when you can spend your money on things you love. Keep going mate. [thread 47]

This is made even more clear in examples 6.07-6.08. In response to a post about riding motorcycles with his brother and father, Commenter2 ironically referred to OP21 and his companions as an “a bunch of outlaws.” Riding a motorcycle is of course not illegal, so at the literal level this nomination strategy would make little sense. However, within MGTOW it is assumed that there is a social norm against men being happy, so going on a motorcycle trip would be transgressive. By referring to the OP as an “outlaw,” Commenter2 reinforces this belief that men are subordinated and denied even the simplest of pleasures within a ‘gynocentric’ society. Similarly, in example 6.08, Commenter1 sarcastically chastised another user for buying a Lego set by appropriating an out-group voice and

approximating what out-groups would say to him regarding such a purchase. Buying a Lego toy was presented as courageous act (intensified via the capitalisation of DARE) that would leave the buyer open to disapproval. Therefore, this consumer purchase could be framed as an act of resistance or defiance given that it transgresses the social norm that men should spend their money on others or that men should have no say in how their money is spent.

(6.07) Commenter2 (6): What a bunch of outlaws! Guys aren't supposed to have any fun you know..... [thread 21]

(6.08) Commenter1 (25): How DARE you spend your money on things you like ?

Commenter2(7): My wallet, My choice! [thread 47]

Such ideas can be traced back to earlier men's rights texts. In *The Myth of Male Power*, Farrell cited the "spending obligation gap" as an example of men's powerlessness (1993/1994, p. 18). Although men consistently earn more money than women in the majority of occupations, he argued that this does not constitute male privilege since women are the ones who control how their partners' money is spent. Furthermore, Farrell suggested that the reason men choose more prestigious and well-paying careers is due to expectations to spend money on a female partner. Therefore, the fact that men earn higher wages than women can be construed as an example of female privilege, considering that it is women who supposedly reap the benefits.

In response to Commenter1's rhetorical question, Commenter2 alluded to the slogan 'my body my choice' replacing 'body' with "wallet." The slogan has been long associated with feminism, particularly regarding the right to an abortion (Smith, 2005), though it may also be used to encompass any personal choices that affect one's body, such as shaving (Weiss, 2015), or vaccination (Jong-Fast, 2021). Consequently, some feminists have critiqued the slogan for its reliance on "individualist, consumerist notions of 'free choice'" with no accounting for the barriers that may affect women's ability to make or act on their choice (Smith, 2005, p. 127). In example 6.08, the slogan was used in such a manner, equating the right to an abortion with the right to buy Lego. The analogy only seems appropriate if one has accepted the belief that men's financial freedom has been restricted or that there are forces attempting to constrain men's right to choose what they purchase in the same way that policymakers have restricted women's access to abortion.

Furthermore, the increased level of personal freedom was another common argument presented in favour of separatism. For example OP31 explained how he was able to take up his hobby of flying because he did not get married. Through a *topos of advantage* and *topos of finance*, OP31 argued that MGTOW is better than marriage, because they can put their money to better uses and control

how it is spent. This was explicitly framed as a benefit through positive adjectives like “great” and affective lexis such as “glad” and “enjoying.” The conjunction “instead” implies that he could either have gotten married or he could have enjoyed flying - there was no way to do both at the same time. Therefore, readers may be encouraged to pursue separatism so that they do not have to forgo these positive experiences.

Table 11: OP31’s use of the topoi of finance and advantage in post 31.

Text	Topoi	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
OP31 (41): I am so glad I didn't get married and could instead spend that money on flying and enjoying travelling! It's been great! [post 31]	Finance	Marriage is too expensive and does not allow men to spend their money on things they enjoy. Therefore, men should not get married.
	Advantage	The MGTOW lifestyle is great and enjoyable. Therefore men should not get married.

In the comments to this post, the dichotomy between marriage and hobbies remained unproblematised. For example, Commenter9 claimed that OP31 is “living the dream” and thus suggested that the OP is successful and aspirational. Through the predication and nomination strategies “freely” and “own boss,” OP31 was ascribed MGTOW ideals of autonomy and independence. As he is his “own boss,” he is self-sovereign and at the top of a hierarchy. The lack of “nagging” is also relevant, as nagging is a speech act commonly associated with women (Talbot, 2003) and so this implicitly suggested that the OP had freed himself from women. Therefore, the OP can be read as living the MGTOW dream specifically.

Table 12: Commenter9’s use of the topoi of advantage and freedom in thread 31.

Text	Topoi	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
Commenter9 (1): That’s it mate, you’re living the dream, flying freely without any nagging and you’re own boss. [thread 31]	Advantage	MGTOW allows to live out their dreams. Therefore, men should go their own way.
	Freedom	MGTOW allows men to be free and be in control of themselves. Therefore, men should go their own way.

Increased personal freedom often entailed the freedom to make consumer purchases. Users argued that a main benefit of MGTOW is the ability to buy whatever you like without having to justify oneself to a partner. For example, in post 47, the OP shared a photo of a Lego set that he had bought and wrote that the ability to make such a purchase is an “advantage of being MGTOW.” Again, this relied on *a topos of advantage* and implied that men would not be able to make such a purchase if they were in a relationship.

Table 13: OP47’s use of the topos of advantage in post 47.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>OP47 (234): A Lego set I got with my job money, even though I am 18 I am been fascinated with Legos again due to the Technic and Speed Champions themes. A benefit of being MGTOW 😊 [post 47]</p>	<p>Advantage</p>	<p>MGTOW brings men many advantages, such as being able to buy Lego. Therefore men should go their own way.</p>

In the comments to this post, users elaborated on why separatism is a precondition for such a purchase. Women were represented as an obstacle to men’s hobbies; only by going one’s own way can men purchase Lego or other objects of desire. For example, Commenter3 suggested that married men would not be able to buy LEGO sets or indeed “anything he likes” without permission from his wife (Table 14), reinforcing the belief that women control how men’s money is spent (Farrell, 1993/1994). Commenter4 then elaborated by providing further grounds – not only do women control men’s finances, but also men’s leisure time. This was demonstrated with a reference to a real-life example of his own friends, increasing the authenticity. Moreover, the need to ask for permission before playing D&D was portrayed as unreasonable and there was no attempt to understand the wives’ perspective. For these users, men should be able to buy whatever they like, whenever they like, without justification. Overall, women were portrayed as controlling men’s money and men’s time, so marriage does not fit in with MGTOW ideals of self-sovereignty and autonomy. Through a *topos of freedom*, users may conclude that they must go their own way if they wish to pursue their hobbies.

Table 14: Commenter3 and Commenter4's use of the topos of freedom in thread 37.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>[Commenter3 (50): Nice! If it was a married man, he'd have to ask for his wife's permission first if he wants to buy anything he likes.</p> <p>[replying to Commenter3] Commenter4 (26): I fucking hate when i want to play D&D with my friends and 2 of them have to ask for permission to their wives... and we play at night after dinner! [thread 47]</p>	Freedom	<p>In marriage, men are not able to make their own free choices about their money or how they spend their time.</p> <p>Therefore, men should go their own way.</p>

Consumer purchases can also be interpreted as resistant if they only benefit the purchaser. According to Commenter2 in the same thread, men should be able to buy anything that makes them “happy.” If a man is happy with his purchase, and he had the right to make the purchase, then it should not be criticised. Through *a topos of freedom*, readers may conclude that men should be able to do whatever they like with their own money. Interestingly, Commenter2 restricted his argument only to purchases where the man has “earned” his money. This is relevant because, as I will show in the next chapter, women were often portrayed as freeloaders who perceive themselves as entitled to men’s money.

Table 15: Commenter2's use of the topos of freedom in thread 47.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter (2): I bought my self a pair of Tommy Jeans yesterday, you can do what ever you want with your money Gentlemen, if it's a car or a Lego Set if it makes you happy and you have earned that money so be it... love for you all [thread 47]</p>	Freedom	<p>Men earn their own money.</p> <p>Therefore, men should be free to decide how this money is spent or buy purchases that make them happy.</p>

According to Lin (2017), MGTOW comprises mostly middle-class men and such assumptions of class were present here. Commenter2 only legitimised individual consumer purchases where the purchaser “earned” his money, potentially excluding lower-class men in receipt of welfare or who are supported by a partner or parent. A middle-class imagined audience was also revealed through the spectrum of consumer purchases mentioned (“whether it is a car or a Lego set”). Commenter2 mentioned buying himself a pair of “Tommy Jeans,” which is a premium clothing brand, while

Commenter41 (see Table 16 below) claimed he was able to spend “thousands of dollars” on himself as a result of his separatism. Such comments could potentially alienate lower-class men who do not have this sort of disposable income.

Finally, O’Neill (2018, p. 127) described PUAs as “following a logic of individualism centred on profit maximisation,” which Aiston and Koller (2021) suggested could apply to MGTOW as well. This can be seen in the following example, where Commenter41 predicated spending money on a partner as “wasting” money. This emphasises the act of losing money, rather than the potential positive outcome of one’s partner gaining something nice. Spending money on women is presented as losing profit without any gain for men, so it is a waste. Through a *topos of finance*, MGTOW is argued to be the better option that men should pursue. This reinforces the individualistic, self-centred logic of MGTOW – men should put themselves first and buy what makes *them* happy, as opposed to other people.

Table 16: Commenter41’s use of the *topos of finance* in thread 47.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter41 (1): I've been able to spend thousands of dollars on things I like thanks to not wasting a dime on women. MGTOW all the way! [thread 47]</p>	<p>Finance</p>	<p>Being single allows men to save money and spend it on things they like. Therefore men should go their own way.</p>

The discourse reproduced individualist ideology emphasising freedom of choice. Separatism was argued to be superior to relationships because it supposedly offers men more freedom. Freedom was universally understood to be a positive value and this status was never questioned. This entailed aspects of positive freedom and negative freedom, but was often linked with consumerism – for example the freedom *to* buy things for themselves or the freedom *from* women’s criticism regarding their purchases. Users shared photos and stories which exemplified how they had achieved success in their personal lives as a result of their separatism. Isolation often featured in such comments and posts, such as pictures of landscapes with no people in them or users praising them for being “free” and not having to answer to other people.

6.3. Representation of MGTOW ideology

This section will discuss the representation of MGTOW beliefs. First, I examine how r/MGTOW users denied that they constitute a group or needed to purposefully recruit new members. As I explain in the following section, this is because users portrayed MGTOW ideology as self-evident truths and

facts that all men have the potential to learn on their own. Finally, I show how users discussed the subreddit quarantine and portrayed themselves as unjustly censored.

6.3.1. MGTOW does not need to recruit

Thread 37 was initiated with a remixed version of a job recruitment poster from the late 1910s (see Figure 4 for the MGTOW version and Figure 5 for the original). The original poster was drawn by American artist Gordon Grant and depicts a soldier holding an honourable discharge note entering the Bureau for Returning Soldiers in order to look for a job. However, the version uploaded to r/MGTOW had been heavily modified in order to create an anti-recruitment message. In the remixed version, references to recruitment are negated (“this is *not* a recruiting office” “we *don’t* recruit”) and the name of the office has been changed to “MGTOW.” The anti-recruitment message conveyed is *not* that men should avoid becoming MGTOW, but rather that MGTOW do not need to actively recruit men.

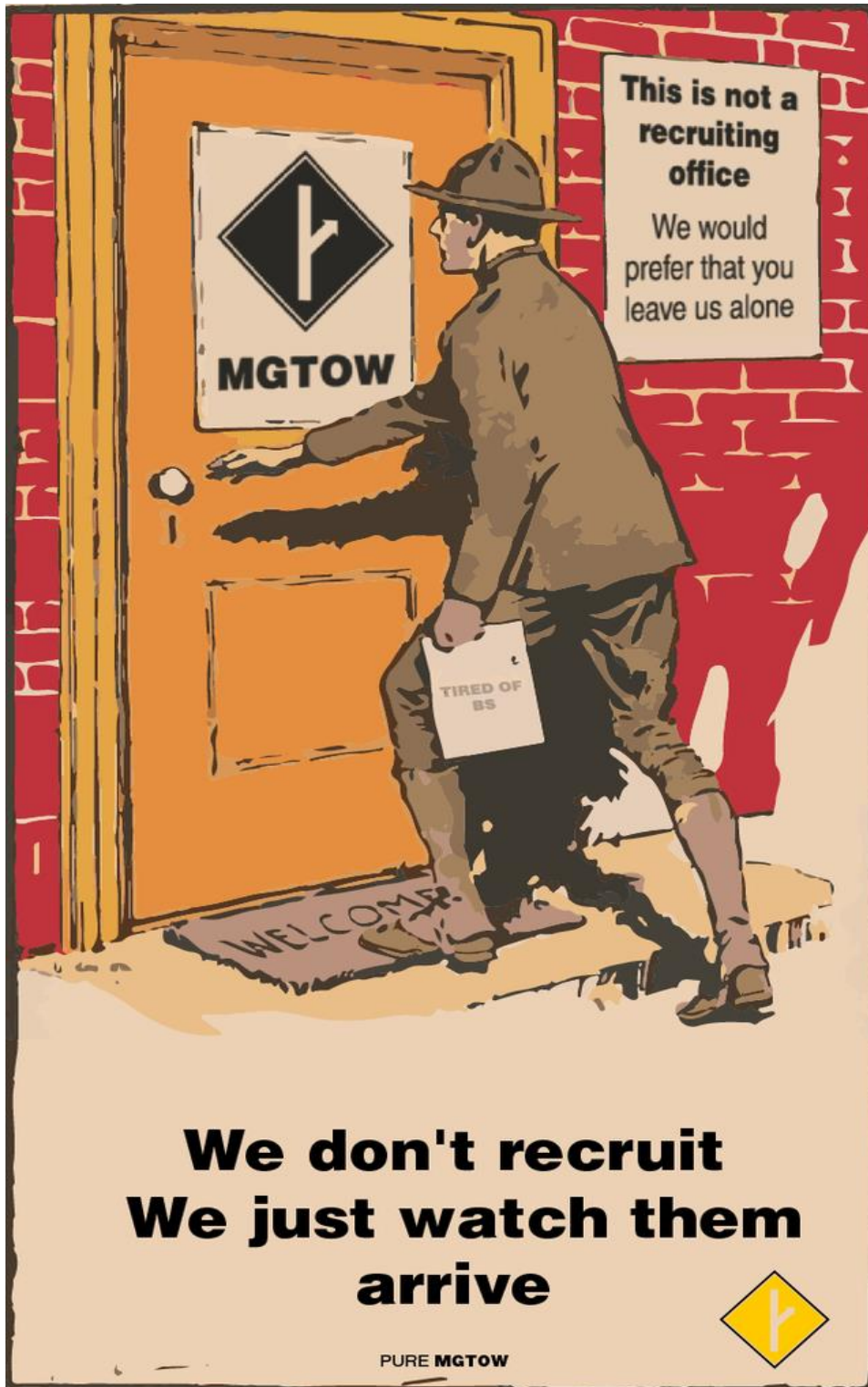


Figure 4: Post 37, submitted with the title "All thanks to [Username] for putting this one together – we don't recruit...." It received a score of 557.



Figure 5: The original illustration from which figure 4 was derived, drawn by Gordon Grant.

Within the remixed poster, MGTOW were represented as a building that men can find and enter. In addition, MGTOW were represented as less active. For example, MGTOW were the sensor of mental processes ("watch" "prefer" "tired") while material processes are represented as something they don't do ("we don't recruit"). Furthermore, the only character within the poster is shown holding a

piece of paper which describes his mental state, as opposed to holding an advert for MGTOW. The resulting message of the poster is that MGTOW do not need to actively advertise their community because men will still be able to find their way to the MGTOW building without those efforts. This fits in with the MGTOW ideals of independence and autonomy, as it is assumed that men will be able to come to the 'correct' decisions without being told what to do or what to think.

However, the message is somewhat contradictory, as the "welcome" mat and depiction of a man reaching for a door handle conflicts with the sign requesting visitors to "leave us alone." This contradiction was recognised by Commenter11, who attempted to pre-emptively correct misunderstandings and claim that MGTOW "will not turn anyone away." However, the legitimacy of such a statement is perhaps doubtful given that the name of the community excludes non-men, while the strict set of rules on the subreddit (see section 6.1.2 for discussion) ratified only men who already conformed to red-pill knowledge as legitimate participants.

(6.09) Commenter11 (6): Before anyone misunderstands, the welcome mat means we welcome everyone as they come. We will not turn anyone away. [thread 37]

In the comments section, users validated the message of the remixed poster by narrating how they too arrived at MGTOW on their own. Within these comments, discovering MGTOW was portrayed as a revelation and a stark contrast to their former ignorance. For example, Commenter2 referred to his pre-MGTOW worldview as "that bluepill shit," suggesting delusion and obliviousness. Society was predicated as "toxic and gynocentric" and this predication was portrayed as a fact he had to "realize" and learn for himself. Like the narratives discussed earlier in 6.2.1, the catalyst for becoming MGTOW was described at a high level of abstraction. Commenter2 referred vaguely to "some events in [his] life" with no precise detail. Some readers may presume that the initiating event involved a bad breakup or a toxic relationship, given the prevalence of such stories on the subreddit.

(6.10) Commenter2 (61): Yeah, I knew about this sub for a while and ended up coming here on my own. I was all over that bluepill shit just a few months ago. Some events in my life occurred that quickly snapped me right out of that, and I began to realize how toxic and gynocentric our society is. [thread 37]

Similarly, thread 30 recontextualised a story from r/relationship_advice in which a man narrated finding out that his girlfriend had lied about her sexual history (see 7.1.3 for analysis of the post). While the original author did not self-identify as MGTOW, when the post was shared to r/MGTOW some users predicted that this experience would lead him to become one. For instance,

Commenter31 claimed the story functions as “1 of the many examples” of men finding MGTOW. Not only was it suggested that the original author will become a MGTOW as a result of this experience, but so will “many” other men who have similar experiences.

(6.11) Commenter31 (8): Mgtow doesn't advertise, neither recruit men to become mgtow. This is just 1 of the many examples that men find it themselves after their experiences like these.

Commenter12 (1): I agree, we shouldn't go on places on like Facebook and raise 'awareness' about it, let them find it on their own. PUA led me to this.
[thread 30]

Although the above example appeared in a different thread to anti-recruitment poster, the argument is similar: MGTOW has no need to recruit men, because men will find MGTOW on their own. Commenter31 described the lack of recruitment strategies using declarative mood, writing that MGTOW “doesn’t recruit” or advertise. Commenter12 then affirmed this indicated state of affairs as desirable through the use of a negated deontic modal verb (“we shouldn’t”) – MGTOW does not currently recruit men, nor should it start doing so in the future.

Commenter12 also described his experience which led him to MGTOW, but rather than women it is another community in the manosphere network. Of the four main manosphere groups, PUAs and MGTOW are perhaps the most dissimilar: while PUAs teach men strategies for seducing women, MGTOW teach men to avoid women. Horta Ribeiro et al. (2021) found that the amount of overlap between MGTOW and PUA userbases was relatively small, especially in comparison to the overlap between MGTOW and MRAs. However, they did find some evidence of migration from PUA to MGTOW. Indeed, both groups share ideological similarities such as backlash towards feminism and biological essentialism. In addition, PUA seduction strategies are notoriously unsuccessful (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2022). Thus, it is not implausible to suggest that a user may become disillusioned with the PUA strategy but proceed by blaming women for rejecting his advances, rather than the PUA community for the poor advice, and decide to go his own way.

6.3.2. MGTOW is ‘the truth’

Some users constructed MGTOW as constituting truth, knowledge, or facts. For example, Commenter15 in thread 37 claimed that men find MGTOW when they are searching for “the truth.” In referring to truth in the singular and with a definite article, this suggests that there is only one truth which is represented by MGTOW. Beliefs or ideologies which contradict MGTOW are by

implication untruthful. The commitment to the truth was initially hedged by the adverb “ostensibly,” then later intensified by the adjectives “pure” and “unfiltered” (sic) which suggest that MGTOW represents the entire truth. “Unfiltered” also suggests that some elements of the ‘truth’ advanced by MGTOW may be difficult to hear, but it is nonetheless still truthful.

(6.12) Commenter15 (5): There's a reason why men 'find' MGTOW. It's not a club, not a 'movement', it's not advertised or glamourised. It doesn't judge. It's open. Ostensibly, it's the truth. The pure unfiltered truth that society desperately wants to obscure.

I think the reason men find MGTOW is because they are looking for it. Not specifically MGTOW, but searching for some truth, realising everything doesn't add up. Looking to see if there's the only one or if there are other men out there who think the same, see the same shit as they do. [thread 37]

There is also some negotiation in this comment as to the meaning of MGTOW. Commenter15 negated the assertion that MGTOW constitute a “club” or a “movement,” both of which may suggest a collective membership based around shared interests and prescription of appropriate activities. Moreover, MGTOW do not perform actions which would increase membership like “advertise” or “glamourise” the community. This corroborates previous research findings, where it has been suggested that MGTOW disavow the idea that they are a collective or social movement (Koller et al., forthcoming; Wright et al., 2020). MGTOW was also described as “open” and non-judgemental, though whether they would allow feminist men, women, or GBT men to participate without judgement is perhaps doubtful.

This truthfulness may be a reason why MGTOW do not need to advertise themselves. When men try and seek answers to contradictions or things that don't make sense, they will always find MGTOW because it is the “truth” and the answer to their questions. MGTOW was thus presented as inevitable – if men set out to look for it, then they will always be able to find it. If men find MGTOW without having to be told, this means MGTOW must be the truth, as opposed to other explanations such as MGTOW discourse being highly persuasive or particularly popular and easy to find online.

In constructing MGTOW as the complete truth and as something all men either know deep down already or have the potential to discover on their own, this raises the question as to why there are so many men who are married. To account for this discrepancy, Commenter15 suggested that there are malicious actors who aim to prevent men from learning the truth. For Commenter15, the actor is named as “society.” First, this suggests that the issue is much more widespread and problematic, as everyone is involved rather than a specific segment of society such as feminists or politicians.

Secondly, this nomination strategy implicitly positioned MGTOW as being outside of society in some way because they do not participate in the obfuscation of the truth. However, “society” was represented as the sensor of the mental process of *wanting* to obscure the truth, rather than the actor of the material process of actually *obscuring* the truth, which may suggest that their efforts are not entirely successful.

As well as MGTOW representing “the truth” more generally, users singled out certain beliefs as being especially truthful. For example, the initial post in thread 44 was a hyperlink to a Facebook post showing a photograph of a yearbook quote reading “There are two genders and a lot of mental illnesses” (see Figure 6). When shared to MGTOW, the OP positively evaluated the student as an “absolute giga chad.” In labelling the student as a “giga chad” this suggests that he is a billion times more masculine than the typical Chad, who is already at the top of the manosphere hierarchy of masculinity (Ging, 2019a; Heritage and Koller, 2020). In addition, the student is predicated as having “balls to put this in his year book.” Thus, his act of claiming non-binary genders as “mental illness” was framed as subversive and brave.

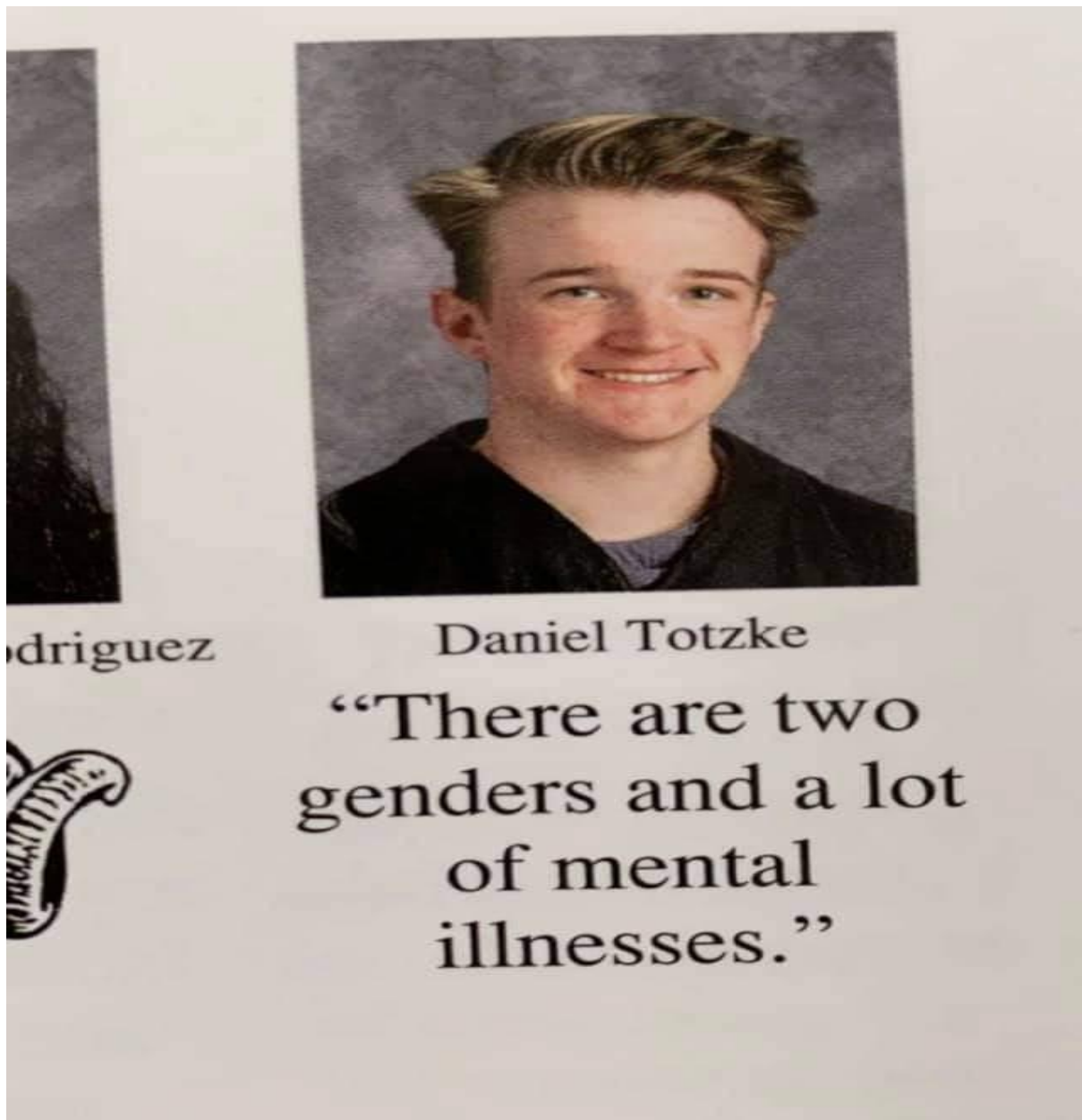


Figure 6: Post 44, submitted with the title "You dropped your crown absolute giga chad ... He got balls to put this in his year book ...look at the way these thots are crying over him." It received a total score of 797.

Other commenters supported the positive appraisal of the students' bravery, predicating him as "badass" and having "balls of steel" or a "spine of titanium" and thus attributing to him the metallic properties of hardness and strength. Others conferred on him high status, referring to him as "the King" or even "future President." As well as emphasising these positive traits, users simultaneously emphasised (what they perceive to be) the negative traits of the student's opponents. Many users positioned the student's yearbook quote as factual and consequently pro-trans and pro-non-binary stances were delegitimised as illogical and not grounded in empirical reality. For example, the most upvoted comment in the thread referred to the student's statement as "the truth," again referring to truth in the singular with the definite article and thus suggesting that there is only one definitive

truth. The argument rested on a *topos of reality* – because the gender binary is a true fact, it should not be disputed or fought over. This positions the existence of a gender binary as natural and not open for debate and so anyone who disagrees is “insane” and in denial of basic facts. Moreover, by describing this claim as “the truth,” Commenter1 could evade the burden of proof and no further evidence or argumentation would be required to back up the self-evident assertion that there are only two genders. Therefore, such an argument could be considered as violating both the freedom rule and the burden of proof rule.

Table 17: Commenter1’s use of the *topoi of reality and threat* in thread 44.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims
Commenter1 (175): Thats the truth and its insane to have to fight over it. Once we forgo the truth it all goes to hell. The naked emperor riding down the street in his new clothes. Is that what we want? [thread 44]	Reality	It is an incontrovertible truth that here are only two genders. Therefore, we should not fight over it.
	Threat	If we deny the truth there will be dangerous consequences for society. Therefore, we should not deny the existence of the gender binary.

Moreover, Commenter1 utilised a *topos of threat* to further argue that this truth should not be disputed, because it will lead to society becoming “hell.” He intertextually referenced Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. In the original text, the king is tricked into wearing clothing that is supposedly invisible to foolish people, but in reality he is naked and everyone must pretend they can see the clothes in order to avoid appearing foolish. By recontextualising this fairy tale, Commenter1 could draw a comparison between belief in non-binary genders and belief that there exists clothing that is only visible to the wise. Both the fairytale villagers and contemporary society are unwilling to contradict public opinion, even when this means denying basic facts. In addition, while nobody in *The Emperor’s New Clothes* was able to see the clothing for themselves, they believed that everyone around them could. By analogy, this could imply that nobody *actually* believes that there are more than two genders, but claim to do so because they falsely believe that everyone else does. The comment concluded with a rhetorical question, asking readers if this situation is what they “want.” In doing so, Commenter1 could suggest that this situation is avoidable and there is action that readers can take to prevent the emperor riding down the street in his new clothes. The storytelling here also functions as a mythopoetic cautionary tale (van Leeuwen, 2007), as the readers must take action to avoid succumbing to the same fate as those in the tale. Moreover, by using the inclusive first-person plural pronoun “we,” Commenter1 could suggest that everyone in

the in-group wants the same thing and that this situation would be perilous for the group. Overall, it was argued that the yearbook quote should not be disputed because it is based in reality and that to deny reality would lead to dangerous situations like mass self-censorship.

6.3.3. MGTOW as censored

Despite claiming to represent the truth, MGTOW also represented themselves as censored and silenced. This was not entirely unwarranted; at the time of collection, the subreddit was quarantined and thus closed to users without a Reddit account. The quarantine was mentioned in six separate threads, with discussions typically initiated by a user asking why the subreddit was quarantined. Administrators do not give subreddit moderators or users a warning before quarantining a subreddit or explain their reasoning. As a result of this lack of clarity, many r/MGTOW users expressed their frustration or confusion at this decision. Moreover, users also asked what being quarantined actually meant or whether there was a way to bypass the quarantine, further demonstrating a lack of transparency on behalf of the moderators.

For example, in example 6.13 below, Commenter20 in thread 2 asked why the subreddit had been quarantined and Commenter21 responded by claiming that MGTOW is perceived as a “dangerous” by ideological opponents due to their independence and free-thinking. Commenter20 then made a series of argumentative moves, utilising a *topos of censorship* (see Table 18). For Commenter20, the fact that MGTOW are perceived by others as “dangerous” validates MGTOW ideology as correct. It is not immediately obvious how the grounds (MGTOW are seen as dangerous) support the claim (MGTOW must be doing something right). To understand, one must refer back the previous comment where it was claimed that communists specifically try and censor the “truth.” By a symptomatic relation, MGTOW can also be argued to be the truth. In other words, if MGTOW were not speaking truthfully, then presumably Reddit would leave them alone. Therefore the fact they are actively censored provides the ‘evidence’ that they are correct. Alternatively, “communists” are understood as an ideological opponent within MGTOW and therefore anything that communists dislike must automatically be good.

(6.13) Commenter20 (1): not been on here for a while. I see that the sub has been quarantined. Does anyone know why? is that something that reddit forces upon you?
thanks

Commenter21 (3): Because Reddit is essentially the online version of China's social credit system (social cReddit, geddit?), and communists see independent thought and politically-incorrect truths as dangerous and requiring the gulag treatment.

Commenter20 (1): arrrh right yey. so from a perspective that they believe MGTOW to be dangerous!!!! Must be doing something right then! :)

thanks for replying

Commenter22 (1): You have no idea how much people hate independent men. Thoughts or action [thread 2]

Table 18: Commenter20's use of the topos of censorship in thread 2.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter20 (1): arrrh right yey. so from a perspective that they believe MGTOW to be dangerous!!!! Must be doing something right then! :)</p> <p>thanks for replying [thread 2]</p>	Censorship	MGTOW has been quarantined by Reddit and viewed as dangerous. Therefore their posts must be correct.

The comment chain realised an ideological square, with emphasis on the positive traits of the in-group (“independent” “right” “truth”) and negative traits of the out-group of Reddit ‘communists’ (ensorious, fearful). This positioned MGTOW against the status quo, because they produce their own ideas rather than repeating dogma. Moreover, their discourse was referred to as “politically incorrect truths.” As well as truthful, this further represents MGTOW as subversive. The predication “politically-incorrect” may also function euphemistically, cloaking the sexist and misogynistic character of the community.

In contrast, the out-group of Reddit were denigrated through associations with a different out-group. Despite being an American corporation, the Reddit platform was associated with the Chinese Communist Party. This comparison was made stronger through the adverb “essentially” and intensive attributive-relational process. Reddit was also referred to via the ideonym “communists.” While “communist” can be used as objective reference, it is often imbued with highly negative

connotations (Baumgarten, 2017; Finlay, 2007). In this comment, communists were portrayed as censorious, responding to perceived ideological threats with “the gulag treatment.” The use of the Russian word “gulag” as opposed to an English term like ‘prison’ further reinforces the association between Reddit and communism. Given that r/MGTOW presents itself as a community of independent men whose discourse constitutes “knowledge” and “truth,” this positions “communists” against MGTOW and readers may conclude that the “communists” are in the wrong.

In contrast, Commenter33 in thread 47 associated Reddit with capitalism. An alternative explanation is that Reddit censors r/MGTOW in order to protect its advertising revenue. MGTOW were predicated as “misogynistic,” which is less euphemistic than the previous predication “politically incorrect.” However, Commenter33 presented himself as the animator of this predication than the principal of them in Goffman’s (1981) terms; in other words he reproduced these opinions without necessarily implying that he agreed with them. To do so, he used the passive voice and a mental process type (“is considered at its core to be misogynistic”) rather than an attributive-relational process type (e.g., “MGTOW is misogynistic”), weakening the relationship between MGTOW and misogyny. On the other hand, although Commenter33 distanced himself from the viewpoints of Reddit administrators, he also provided a justification for their actions. While their “definite ideological” reasons may be suspect, their need to appeal to advertisers is “fair enough.” Reddit partially relies on advertising revenue in order to make money, so if r/MGTOW is considered to espouse a misogynistic ideology then this may lead to advertising companies refusing to associate with the website. Therefore, it is in Reddit’s interests to take action against misogyny. Indeed, this explanation is close to how social media business models operate (Gillespie, 2018; Fuchs, 2017). Reddit’s business model reliance on targeted advertising itself however, remained unproblematised.

(6.14) Commenter32(2): Quick question, why is this sub quarantined? I don’t understand what that implies for this sub.

Commenter33(3): Basically, the sub espouses a viewpoint (not an ideology, mind, though some take it to be one) that is considered at its core to be misogynistic. And to Reddit, between their need for appealing to advertisers (fair enough, it *is* a business after all) and the definite ideological lean of its owners and admins, that's not acceptable.

But, since MGTOW doesn't quite cross the line into something bannable (yet), they shoved the sub into the quarantine zone and just wait for something actionable to be posted so it can be banned. [thread 47]

Furthermore, Commenter33 legitimised the MGTOW subreddit by distinguishing between a “viewpoint” and an “ideology.” By suggesting that r/MGTOW espouses a “viewpoint (not an ideology)” MGTOW discourse is suggested to be less biased or dogmatic (see van Dijk, 1998, 2011). Finally, in writing that MGTOW doesn’t cross the line “yet” this implies that it is a future possibility. The administrators were said to “wait for something actionable to be posted” and the lack of modality suggests that it is an inevitability. Indeed, in two other threads, users made predictions as to when r/MGTOW will be banned. For example, Commenter69 in thread 22 considered whether it was the “final night” of the subreddit and Commenter14 in thread 24 predicted the ban would take place “tomorrow,” though the adverb “probably” weakened the epistemic modality. In addition, Commenter13 in thread 24 declared a ban to be inevitable through the use of a when-clause (as opposed to a less certain if-clause) and modal verb ‘will.’

(6.15) Commenter69 (3): I'm saving this and spreading it. If this is the final night of r MGTOW than this is a good send off. [thread 22]

(6.16) Commenter13 (60): When they ban this sub reddit it will be one more nail in the coffin for reddit. I will miss the good stories.

Commenter14(26): Tomorrow, probably. [thread 24]

In actual fact, Reddit did ban over 2000 subreddits the day after these threads were posted (29th of June 2020) for violating hate speech policies, including r/the_donald and r/gendercritical, but r/MGTOW remained untouched at least for a year. While the timing was off, users were ultimately correct in predicting that r/MGTOW would be banned. r/MGTOW users exhibited awareness as to how their subreddit is perceived by outsiders and represented their subreddit as controversial, but ultimately disagreed with these external perceptions.

In sum, r/MGTOW users represented their beliefs and worldview as representing the singular empirical truth, as grounded in facts and reality. This is opposed to the beliefs of out-groups such as feminists, communists, and trans activists, who participate in mass delusion and ideology. Such a representation has two important implications for MGTOW. First, this presents male separatism as an inevitability and the only logical conclusion for men. If men have questions regarding gender roles or gender relations, they will always find MGTOW because MGTOW hold the answers. As a result, MGTOW do not believe they need to actively recruit men to their cause or go out of their way to convince men that male separatism is correct; instead men are encouraged to come to these conclusions on their own. Secondly, because MGTOW represent the truth, any attempts to censor or intervene in their subreddit are morally wrong.

6.4. Conclusions

Analysis revealed r/MGTOW to be a highly individualist subreddit, to the point where members denied the labelling as a club or a movement. Important values included personal autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, rationality, and self-control. Users shared stories and pictures which championed male solitude and independence, juxtaposing their miserable, ignorant former lives with their new, happier live and thereby legitimising their separatist ideology through mythopoesis. Arguments typically employed the *topos of freedom*, claiming that relationships constrain men's personal freedoms and therefore men should go their own way. Often, this was utilised in combination with a *topos of finance* where increased personal freedoms mean increased economic freedom such as the freedom to purchase whatever one wants and freedom from spending obligations. MGTOW also portrayed themselves as self-sufficient, through sharing photos of themselves travelling alone and describing how they found MGTOW independently without intervention from others.

The MGTOW subreddit was constructed as representing "knowledge" and "truth" as opposed to an ideology or opinion. To emphasise their credibility, users also referred to their personal experiences with women or interdiscursively drew on scientific discourse. McCrea (2019) explained how terms such as facts, logic, and reason are used by antifeminists and reactionaries as a "kind of incantation, whereby declaring your argument the single 'logical' and 'rational' one magically makes it so," and by extension makes the arguer appear more intelligent, regardless of whether or not the argument is actually logical or based in evidence. Hong and Hermann (2020) described this trend as "fact signalling" or the "performative invocation of the idea of Fact and Reason" (p. 1). In describing their posts as based in facts and truth, r/MGTOW users could evade the burden of proof and confer upon their argumentation increased plausibility and legitimacy.

Despite possessing factual knowledge and common sense, MGTOW also portrayed themselves as an oppressed group as they could not espouse their knowledge to others without being branded as misogynistic or politically incorrect. The subreddit had been quarantined and according to some users, faced an imminent ban. As well as censorship, MGTOW also constructed themselves as oppressed because they are men (to be explored in further detail in chapter 8), though MGTOW represented themselves as subversive or resistant to the status quo. However, rather than collective action, MGTOW prioritised personal action. In the MGTOW worldview, men are understood to be a suppressed group who are conditioned to be completely subservient to women. Thus, small acts of individual self-love or self-care can be interpreted as an act of resistance, including consumer purchases.

While they represented themselves as subordinated, there was also derision against 'victimhood' or those who make complaints against offensive or harmful behaviour. Several users shared individual personal grievances and narratives of mistreatment at the hands of women and others, but these stories were more often told as small stories or allusions rather than fully fledged narratives. In addition, such narratives often featured a happy ending where the user has become a free man and learnt valuable life lessons about women as a result. This allowed MGTOW to cement themselves as a subordinated and oppressed group and legitimise their decision to separate from women, while at the same time preventing accusations of playing the victim.

MGTOW also positioned themselves apart from others. The ten subreddit rules helped to maintain the boundaries of the subreddit and prevent ideological opponents and out-groups from entering their space. Many users made comments about "society" acting against MGTOW, thus positioning MGTOW as external to society and in addition as a counter-cultural or subversive group, as opposed to a group who espouse mainstream or traditional patriarchal ideologies about women.

Furthermore, MGTOW also represented themselves as different to other men. Through derogatory nomination strategies like "blue pillers" and "white knight" to refer to men who desire relationships with women or men who support women, MGTOW were able to distinguish themselves from 'lesser' men due to their increased level of knowledge and independence. MGTOW constructed themselves as having privileged access to the truth about women and society as a result of having taken the red pill. Furthermore, MGTOW also positioned themselves as different and separate from other manosphere groups such as incels and PUAs.

Above all, MGTOW represented themselves as fundamentally different to women and there were many attempts to downplay the importance of women. For instance, there was no mention of women or relationships with women in the subreddit description despite the fact that abstention from relationships with women is a key tenet of male separatism. Subreddit moderators also 'stickied' posts which acted as exemplars of male separatist life. However, this did not mean that women were not present within the discourse – far from it. Even discussions ostensibly focussed on male independence were related to women in some way. For instance, users would argue that the only reason they can pursue their hobbies and interests is because they have overcome the 'barrier' of women and hypothesised how much worse their lives would be if they had a female partner. As the next chapter will demonstrate, in spite of 'separatist' aims, women are a prominent topic of discussion.

Chapter 7: Representation of Women and Relationships

This chapter will analyse the argumentation strategies used to persuade men against relationships with women. In the first half of this chapter, I examine the general representation of women within the dataset, as many arguments against marriage were to do with the 'nature' of women. In this section, I consider the acronym 'AWALT' (meaning 'all women are like that') and examine how women were constructed as a homogenous group. Next, I discuss two major traits that were frequently ascribed to women: promiscuity and deceitfulness.

The second half of the chapter will analyse the representation of marriage and relationships. I examine the representation of marriage as a financial burden for men and consider how many arguments against marriage were to do with saving money or avoiding 'gold digging' women. Following this, I consider the concept of 'divorce rape' and arguments concerning divorce. Finally, I examine arguments relating to abusive relationships, such as claims that women are more likely to be abusive than men or claims that men risk being falsely accused of abuse while in relationships with women.

7.1. Representation of women

Despite the separatist ideology of MGTOW, *women* was the most frequent topic within the dataset corroborating findings by Wright et al. (2020). Out of the 50 threads, women were a primary topic in 38. Women were brought up as a secondary topic in seven additional threads, meaning that there were only five threads which contained zero references to women. These threads tended to be short, with the primary topic of hobbies and lifestyle (see 6.2.2).

Similar to the results of Wright et al.'s (2020) study, I found that women were generally represented negatively. Regarding nomination strategies, women were referred to via sexualised and gendered slurs, the most frequent of which was *bitch(es)* (29 occurrences), followed by *slut(s)* (26 occurrences) and *whore(s)* (22 occurrences). Other gendered or sexualised nomination strategies included *thot(s)*, *cougar(s)*, *ho(es)*, *cunt(s)*, *MILF(s)* [Mother I'd Like to Fuck], *harlot*, *broad*, *bimbo*, *Karen*, *JAP* [Jewish American Princess], *slhuer* [a partial blend of *slut* and *whore*], and *twat*, while non-gendered derogatory references included *fatass*, *asshole*, *idiot*, *coward*, and *degenerates*. Furthermore, women were dehumanised through nomination and predication strategies which compared women to objects or animals. One function of comparisons to objects was to suggest that women deteriorate in value with their number of sexual partners, for example by referring to women as *damaged goods*, the *town bicycle* or a *2nd hand product*. Animal or creature metaphors were used to

derogate women's intelligence and cognition (e.g., *hamster, beast, chameleon*), to suggest uniformity among women (e.g., *flocking, herd animals, herd behavior*), to denigrate women's appearances particularly regarding weight (e.g., *landwhale, hambeast, walrus*), or to portray women as sponging on men (e.g., *vampires, leeches, sink her claws in, parasitic*).

The typical negative attributes ascribed to women are encapsulated in Figure 7, posted by Commenter17 in thread 2. The comic depicts a man and a woman climbing separate staircases, with their respective skills written on each step. Men's skills are mostly written as abstract nouns (e.g., "creativity" "leadership") while women's skills are written in gerund form using taboo language (e.g., "bitching" "cock gobbling"), emphasising women's lack of professionalism. In addition, women have fewer steps than men which may suggest that women possess fewer skills. The relay between image and text lends to an interpretation that it is easier for men to succeed because they have useful skills and personality traits. On the other hand, women rely on their sexuality and refuse to solve problems on their own, instead expecting men to treat them like a "princess." However, the comic uploaded to r/MGTOW had been heavily remixed and modified. The original comic was titled "Equal Opportunity: A cartoon about gender equality" and did not include any text (Figure 8). The comic can be interpreted as a commentary on barriers faced by women, as the rungs on the ladder are too far apart and so it requires more time and effort for the woman to climb to the top, while her male counterpart can ascend with ease. By remixing the image to include new text, the creator is able to reverse the meaning and appropriate a feminist comic for the purposes of sexism and antifeminism.

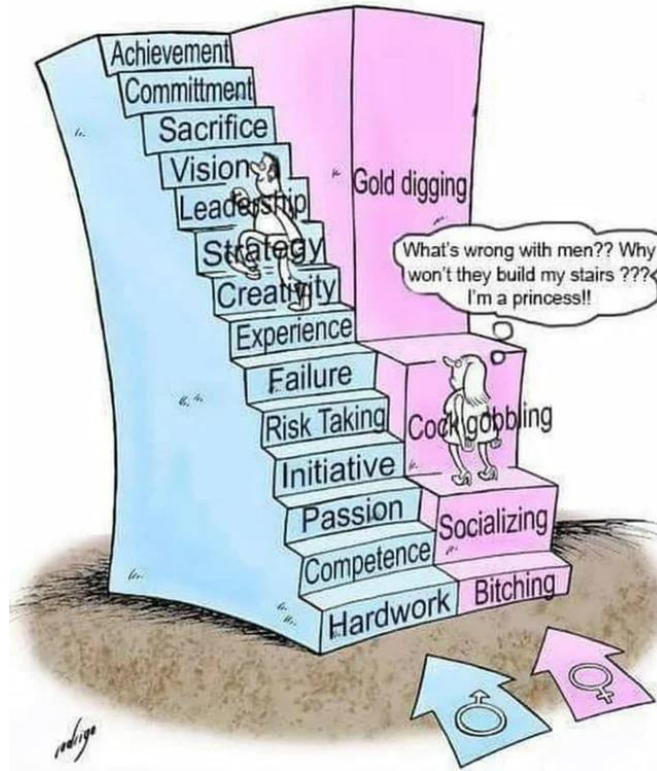


Figure 7: An image posted by Commenter17 in thread 2. It received a score of 2.

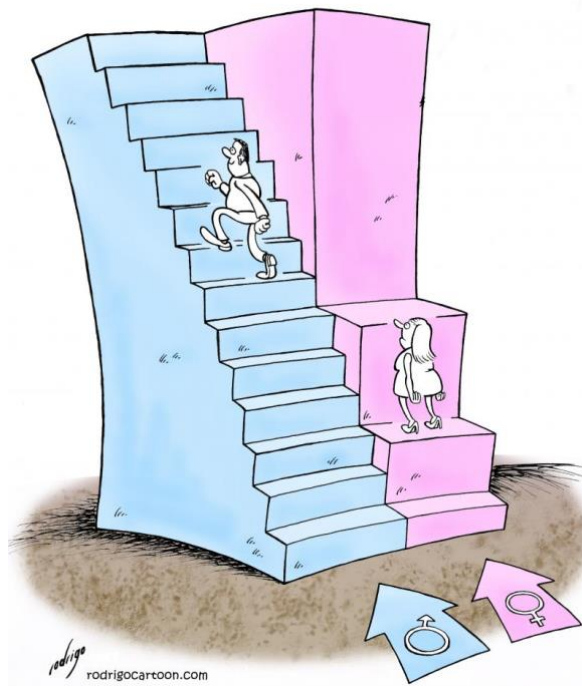


Figure 8: The original cartoon from which figure 7 was derived, entitled "Equal Opportunity." Retrieved from <https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/equal-opportunity>

7.1.1. 'All Women Are Like That'

Women were frequently represented as a homogenous group. Generalizations about women were encapsulated within the acronym *AWALT*, which stands for 'All Women Are Like That.' The acronym serves as "a programmatic declaration of universal female behavioural characteristics" (Zuckerberg, 2018, p. 26) that posits that "all women will behave in the same way in certain situations" (Wright et al., 2020, p. 922). In the dataset, *AWALT* was typically used as a *topos of definition*, allowing users to argue in favour of going one's own way due to the fact that all women have the same negative traits on the basis of their designation as 'woman.'

Table 19: Commenter44's use of the *topos of definition* and *uselessness* in thread 22.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims (subordinate)
Commenter44 (27): AWALT! There are no unicorns out there! [thread 22]	Definition	Women are all exactly the same by virtue of being women. Therefore, there are no exceptional 'unicorns.'
	Uselessness	There are no exceptional women. Therefore, men should go their own way instead of trying to find a suitable partner.

In the above example, "AWALT" was combined with a *topos of uselessness* to argue that trying to find a partner is futile, as all women are exactly the same. The animal metaphor of the "unicorn" was used to represent an ideal, but rare, woman who does not possess these negative feminine traits. However, Commenter44 negated the existence of unicorns – just as unicorns are fictional creatures which do not exist in our reality, so are women who are not 'like that.' As a result, users may conclude that the only logical solution is to go one's own way, rather than waste one's time trying to chase something that does not exist.

Generalisations about women were also achieved through the use of quantifiers and adverbs, as shown in examples 7.03-7.07. This included extreme case formulations ("every" "all" "100%") and pseudo-quantifiers ("most" "80-90%"). Through these extreme case formulations and pseudo-quantifiers, users could suggest that negatively evaluated or socially harmful traits such as abusive behaviour, deceitfulness, infidelity, and financial extortion are ubiquitous or even universal among women.

- (7.01) Commenter6 (26):** Men are ATM's for most women [thread 4]
- (7.02) Commenter16 (14):** It has become a trend for every woman to remark "Oh! I was in an abusive relationship." [thread 17]
- (7.03) Commenter25 (1):** Refusing to have sex with your partner is mental torture, 100% of divorced women are guilty of that. [thread 17]
- (7.04) Commenter26 (1):** I'd say 80-90% of the women I've known have been abusive or unfaithful to their husbands/girlfriends. [thread 17]
- (7.05) Commenter1 (83):** "She always presented herself as someone who agreed with my worldview." Yeah, bud. All women do that. [thread 30]

A male/female binary was often constructed in tandem with a reason/emotion binary. Collins (2000) explained that within such a binary, emotion and reason are conceptualised as existing in a hierarchical and oppositional relationship rather than a complementary relationship. Emotion is regarded as inferior to logic because "feeling retards thought and values obscure facts," (p. 70). Nicholas and Agius (2018) charted feminist and postcolonial critiques of rationality, explaining how the reason/emotion binary tends to privilege and universalise the experiences of White, Western men as inherently rational. Positioning women, especially women of colour, as driven by their emotions may have the effect of excluding them from public discourse and discrediting their knowledge as irrational (Poland, 2016; Sobieraj, 2018). Within the dataset, women were positioned as inferior to men due to their purported hyperemotionality, as in the following example:

(7.06) OP1 (178): As it stands in today's society

The modern man is like a broken automaton slaving away blindly without purpose. Often doing harm inadvertently, because it has been led down a fundamentally false path, and to stray from that path would make its prior actions devoid of meaning. The woman an impulsive beast led along by base instinct and raw emotion. And as such is wildly unethical and unpredictable.

Commenter3 (17): What separates intelligent man from all other beast is his ability to control his emotions and impulses, even woman can't do that.
[thread 1]

In this thread, men were mechanistically dehumanised ("like a broken automaton") while women were animalistically dehumanised ("an impulsive beast led along by base instinct"). According to Haslam (2006), animalistic dehumanisation involves presenting an individual or group as "uncultured, lacking in self-control, and unintelligent" or as "childlike, immature or backward," while

mechanistic dehumanisation entails presenting an individual or group as “lacking in emotionality, warmth, cognitive openness, individual agency,” (Haslam, 2006, pp. 257-258). Men and women were both represented as causing harm to others, though men cause harm “inadvertently” due to their faulty programming and poor guidance from others. While men’s immorality can be ascribed to them being led down a “false path,” women’s immorality is the result of her “base instinct.” Therefore, while it would be possible for men to stop causing harm to themselves and others, this is not the case for women.

In a reply, Commenter3 wrote that women are unable to control their “emotions and impulses.” Not only that does this make women categorically different from men, but also categorically different from humans. While Commenter3 did specify “intelligent men” rather than men as a whole, “women” was not pre-modified. This implies that there are no such intelligent women who would be capable of controlling their emotions in such a manner. Overall, within this comment chain women were dehumanised and represented as an unchanging, homogeneous group driven by base instincts.

Furthermore, some commenters represented women and men as psychologically different. For example, Commenter1 in thread 13 refers to “the Female brain” (Table 20). The pre-modifier “female” implies that women and men have different brains, while the use of the definite article implies singularity and a lack of diversity in women’s brains. It is thus possible for men to “understand” how a woman’s brain “operates” and that insights about one woman can be applied to women as a group. Several core mechanisms are posited that underscore the functioning of the female brain including “hypergammy” (a tendency to ‘marry up’, discussed in 7.2.1) and other negative personality traits such as “fickleness” and “inability to be satisfied.” Consequently, Commenter1 questioned how women can be deemed worthy of respect and claimed that trying to seek validation or approval from women is a “lost cause,” thus evoking a *topos of uselessness*.

Table 20: Commenter1's use of the topos of uselessness in thread 13.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter1 (10): Once you really understand how the Female brain operates: Never-ending hypergamy, Briffault's Law, solipsism, narcissism, fickleness, inability to be satisfied, war-bride syndrome, inability to really Love long term (Women don't love Men: they love attention, status, security, money, and "tingles") etc, etc....</p> <p>How can you respect it? Seeking validation from the hypergamous hamster brain is a lost cause. She might say she "loves" you today, but there is no guarantee that she will "love" you tomorrow. [...]</p> <p>[thread 13]</p>	Uselessness	It is impossible to seek validation from a woman and relationships are unlikely to last. Therefore men should go their own way.

The comment also exhibited interdiscursivity with scientific and academic discourse. As opposed to more common terms like “selfishness” or “arrogance,” Commenter1 referred to women’s “narcissism” and “solipsism.” These lower-frequency, Latinate nouns are associated with psychology and philosophy, so may lend the comment the credibility or prestige associated with these fields. Moreover, Commenter1 used pseudo-scientific labels alluding to psychiatric diagnoses and natural laws such as “war-bride syndrome” and “Briffault’s law.” In sociology, ‘war brides’ are women who marry foreign soldiers during periods of war or occupation and then immigrate to the soldiers’ home countries (see Anderlini-D’Onofrio, 1998; Lopez and Yamazato, 2003). Here, the term was used as a pre-modifier of “syndrome,” suggesting that being a war bride is a mental illness or psychiatric disorder. Tomassi (2017), of manosphere blog Rational Male, defined “war bride syndrome” as a psychological mechanism where women “develop empathy with their conquerors by necessity” and asserted that it developed to help women survive in times of tribal conflict. Moreover, “Briffault’s law” states that “the female, not the male, determines all the conditions of the animal family” and that “where the female can derive no benefit from association with the male, no such association takes place” (Briffault, 1931, pp. 21-22). While the original text referred to the animal kingdom, within the manosphere his ideas have been recontextualised and applied to human relationships in order to suggest that women prefer to exclusively enter relationships of men of a higher status. Both

“war bride syndrome” and “Briffault’s law” have been removed from their original academic context and used to posit biological truisms about the nature of women.

Commenter1 also predicated women as having a “hamster brain.” Also known as a “rationalization hamster,” within the manosphere this metaphor refers to “the thought processes used by women to turn bad behaviour and bad decisions into acceptable ones,” where “the crazier the decision, the faster the hamster must spin” (Futrelle, 2012). Such animalistic dehumanisation denies women higher cognition (Haslam, 2006) and allowed users to present women as illogical and unethical, given that women supposedly prefer to rationalise their poor behaviour rather than realise their mistakes and change their behaviour. In addition, this metaphor allowed users to differentiate between men and women because only women are said to have hamsters for brains.

Overall, the representation of women was highly homogenous and essentialist, suggesting that men and women are fundamentally different to each other on every level, including having different brains. Not only are women different to men, but women are also inferior to men because they lack rationality and are subject to psychological mechanisms which cause them to act in unethical ways. In addition, some users presented women as less than human or as possessing a similar level of intelligence or engaging in similar behaviours to animals. Through acronyms like ‘AWALT’ users could generalise about women and legitimise the idea of male separatism and the need to separate from *all* women.

7.1.2. Women are promiscuous

This section will discuss some features and personality traits that were posited as being unique or inherent to women. For example, women were frequently represented as promiscuous or as being especially likely to cheat on their partners.

An important concept was the ‘dual mating strategy’ which provided an evolutionary rationale for women’s supposed tendency to commit infidelity. The theory originated within evolutionary psychology and posits that women “may have evolved the willingness to secure a mate with material resources and emotional investment, while at the same time obtaining a high-quality genetic material from another partner” (Suschinsky and Lalumière, 2007, p. 359). This is because the mate who can provide the best genes may not always be the best life partner or parent. The theory has since been recontextualised within the manosphere and is particularly prominent among pick-up artists (O’Neill, 2018; van Valkenburgh, 2019, 2021) where it has been turned into the ‘alpha fucks beta bucks’ principle. The mate with the high quality genetic contribution is the attractive ‘alpha’

while the mate with the material resources and emotional investment is the 'beta'. This is explained by Commenter56 in thread 22:

(7.07) Commenter53 (8): Someone explain alpha fucks beta bucks to me

Commenter56 (9): Alpha: a man who is desired by many women.

Beta: everyone else.

This is part of women's dual mating strategy. Only about 20% of men fall into the alpha category. The dual mating strategy goes like this: they look for one man to fill her sexual needs, and another man to fill her non-sexual needs. Many women will do this, hoping for "the one" super special guy who checks all the boxes to come along, but that man doesn't exist. But, since women (before they hit the wall) have so much attention from guys, and an almost limitless supply of matches on dating apps, they assume it will stay that way, and continue to look for the better deal, while their expiration date comes faster than they realize. [...]
[thread 22]

However, not all manosphere concepts were fully explained. For example, it was taken for granted that readers would know what it means for women to "hit the wall" (meaning to become unattractive with age, discussed below). Commenter56 also explained that men experience "red pill rage" upon finding out that they are not alpha males, thus assuming that readers are familiar with the term "red pill."

In the second part of the comment (shown below in Table 21 the position of the beta was represented as undesirable. Beta men were referred to via the functionalisation "resource provider" and the animal metaphor "work horse." These nomination strategies suggest that women exploit and dehumanise men by reducing men to their labour or considering them to be beasts of burden. Commenter56 used a *topos of abuse* to argue that men can escape this exploitation by going their own way and resisting placement within this hierarchy. Users may conclude that it is better to be free and single, rather than take on the role of the beta male and accept being cheated on and exploited financially.

Table 21: Commenter56's use of the topos of abuse in thread 22.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter56 (9): [...] Red pill rage is often simply coming to terms with understanding that you aren't in that top 20%. It's okay. Most of us aren't. You might not get to be the alpha, but you don't have to play the resource provider / work horse of the beta either. GYOW brother [thread 22].</p>	<p>Abuse</p>	<p>The 'beta male' role is constrictive and exploitative for men. Therefore men should go their own way to avoid being placed in this role.</p>

In example 7.07, it was also claimed that women have an “almost limitless supply of matches on dating apps.” Within the dataset, it was commonly asserted that it is much easier for women to find a romantic or sexual partner than men and consequently that most women have multiple sexual partners over their lifetime, or even at the same time. Women’s promiscuity was occasionally encapsulated within the metaphor “cock carousel” or its abbreviation “the carousel” or “CC.” This metaphor was used in example 7.08 below in which Commenter14 employed pseudo-direct speech. This comment did not faithfully report the words of an actual woman, but instead offered an illustrative approximation of women’s typical speech patterns or typical arguments women make. In the comment, the fictional woman was portrayed as promiscuous and having cheated on her boyfriend with “Chad” which is the name given to prototypical alpha males (Heritage and Koller, 2020; Menzie, 2020). The woman tries to rationalise her behaviour by claiming that she was “drunk” and “didn’t do it on purpose,” and thus it is inappropriate and even abusive for her boyfriend to yell at her because of it. This also suggests that women have distorted the meaning of words like “abusive” to include behaviours such as verbal disagreement, even in cases where the woman is at fault (see section 7.2.3 for further discussion of false claims of abuse). Finally, the woman claims that now she has broken up with her boyfriend, she is able to go “back to the carousel” meaning she is able to pursue casual relationships again. Overall, within this comment women were portrayed as promiscuous and lacking in loyalty to their partners; even after they have been caught cheating their first thought is to have sex with other men.

(7.08) Commenter14 (3): "He... he yelled at me for getting drunk and fucking chad! I didn't do it on purpose. He's so abusive. so glad i'm free now (back to the carousel)"
[thread 17]

As discussed previously, many derogatory nomination strategies for women were sexual in nature. It is therefore unsurprising that women with multiple sexual partners were represented negatively.

Post 22 detailed a story in which a woman cheated on her partner and broke up with him before discovering that he is a millionaire (see 7.2.1 for further discussion of the thread). Commenter17 explained that the story should be a “lesson” to the girlfriend and to women in similar positions, in other words suggesting that the story should be read as a mythopoetic cautionary tale. Women were referred to as “slhuer(s)”, a possible spelling variant of “sluer” which is partial blend of “slut” and “whore” (Urban Dictionary, 2009). Women were also predicated as engaging in “p-nice chugging” (i.e., fellatio) and “C-Carousel riding” (i.e., riding the ‘cock carousel’). According to Commenter17, women who engage in these activities need to realise that this makes them undesirable to men. Commenter17 also used first-person plural pronouns (“we men”) to imply common opinion and that he is able to speak for all men when he asserts that sexual history matters. Interestingly, despite women often being presented as sexual or romantic gatekeepers in the manosphere (Tranchese and Suguira, 2021; van Valkenburgh, 2019) and in broader culture (Denes, 2011; Thompson, 2018), in this comment men were referred to as “the gatekeepers to relationships.” However, the boundaries of men’s gatekeeping were delimited to the matter of judging women’s sexual histories, rather than relationships as a whole.

(7.09) Commenter17 (17): Let that be a lesson to these P-nice chugging C-Carousel riding shluers. They might think their sexual history does not matter and should not matter. We as men vehemently disagree.

In this matter we are the gatekeepers to relationships, their opinion counts for Jack-Sh it's only our opinion that matters.

Have fun with your cats once you hit the wall slhuer! [thread 22]

Commenter17 also wrote that after hitting “the wall,” women will only have their cats for company, alluding to the trope of the spinster cat lady (see Probyn-Rapsey, 2018). The theory of ‘the wall’ suggests that at some point during their late twenties or early thirties, women reach their ‘peak’ and begin to decline in their level of attractiveness and fertility (Shaw, 2018; Zuckerberg, 2018). Consequently, women can no longer ride the ‘carousel’ or attract men as easily. ‘The wall’ was also referred in example 7.09, in which women are also said to possess an “expiration date” and thus compared to food. All references to the wall within the dataset referred to women, suggesting that it is a gendered phenomenon.

‘The wall’ was usually depicted as inescapable for women. In example 7.11, the use of the conjunction “once” in the declarative “once you hit the wall” suggests that hitting the wall is a temporal inevitability. Similarly, Commenter 5 in thread 45 represented hitting the wall as

unavoidable through the use of an extreme case formulation and habitual present tense (“all women do”). Because the wall is an inevitability, its existence can be used as ground for going one’s own way. Commenter5 explained that women “aren’t worth the grief,” and so through a *topos of uselessness*, readers may conclude that men should remain single, rather than enter relationships with women who are destined to hit the wall and become undesirable.

Table 22: Commenter5’s use of the topos of definition in thread 45.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter1 (30): I had a girlfriend dump me on Christmas Eve after I lost my job, saying she would not date a "broke loser".</p> <p>A week before losing my job, she was talking about getting engaged. Then, in her brain I transformed from husband material to "broke loser" in the space of a week.</p> <p>But that's OK, I worked on myself, retrained in IT, and today i'm a Senior Software Developer running a Software Team; she, on the other hand, turned into a fat single parent mother (not my kid, by the way).</p> <p>Karma... good old karma :-D</p> <p>[replying to Commenter1] Commenter5 (1):</p> <p>> She, on the other hand, turned into a fat single parent mother</p> <p>She hit the wall. All women do. They aren't worth the grief. [thread 45]</p>	Uselessness	Women will inevitably become unattractive and hit the wall. Therefore, it is not worth pursuing relationships or spending time worrying about women.

As well as an inevitability, hitting the wall may also be a punishment. The story may function as a cautionary tale for women, as this woman’s transformation into an “fat parent single mother”, women was depicted as a “karma” and a fitting punishment for breaking up with her partner for illegitimate reasons. On the other hand, Commenter1 was rewarded for his suffering as he is able to find a new job.

7.1.3. Women are deceitful

Finally, women were represented as deceitful and prone to lying, especially about their sexual histories, in order to manipulate men into relationships. This was especially prominent in thread 30, where the initial post comprised a screenshot of a submission to *r/relationship_advice* – a popular subreddit where Redditors can ask other Redditors for advice regarding issues in their romantic, familial, or platonic relationships. In the original text, the *r/relationship_advice* author narrated a story of how he discovered that his girlfriend whom he met at his Catholic church had had more sexual partners in college than she had previously disclosed and that she had posted videos to Pornhub. The author self-identified as conservative, though there was no indication within the story that he subscribed to *r/MGTOW* or identified with the manosphere. Nonetheless, OP30 reposted the story to *r/MGTOW*, indicating that the story is relevant to the *MGTOW* audience and aligns with their views about women. The post received 109 upvotes, with a 98% upvote percentage and there were no comments doubting the story's authenticity.

While the *r/relationship_advice* story only described the actions of one woman, *r/MGTOW* users portrayed the girlfriend's behaviour as illustrative of all women and directed moral judgements and advice towards women generally. For example, Commenter15 advised men to not judge women by their appearances, as even women who look wholesome "standing in wheat fields wearing a sundress" may have something to hide (Table 23). A *topos of definition* was used to argue that all women are deceitful by virtue of being women and therefore men must remain vigilant around all women. Women's act of wearing sundresses was predicated as a "scam," suggesting that women set out to intentionally deceive men by dressing in such a manner rather than because they personally enjoy the style. The pronoun "she" does not appear to refer to the original girlfriend, given that at no point in the post was she ever described as wearing a sundress or standing in a wheat field, but instead a hypothetical, generic woman. The universalisation of these deceitful traits is also emphasised by the acronym "AWALT" and the third-person possessive "their scams," suggesting that all women attempt to feign a wholesome façade. Furthermore, the argument also rested on the presumption that men would not wish to date a woman who has had multiple sexual partners. The derogation of these women is emphasised in the nomination strategy "the town's pump'n'go" to refer to such women. First, this hyperbolically represented the amount of sexual partners women can apparently have (equivalent to an entire town). Second, "pump'n'go" referred to the act of penetration, diminishing women's agency and suggesting that she is an object to be penetrated and then abandoned, rather than an enthusiastic participant in sexual intercourse.

Table 23: Commenter1's use of the topos of definition in thread 30.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter15 (28): Just because she now posts pictures standing in wheat fields wearing a sun dress does not mean she wasn't the town's pump'n go. Don't fall for their scams bros, AWALT [thread 30]</p>	<p>Definition</p>	<p>All women are scammers by virtue of being women, therefore men need to go their own way.</p>

This comment also reinforced the virgin/whore dichotomy, or the Madonna/whore dichotomy. The theory of the dichotomy originated in Freudian psychoanalytic literature, but has been taken up by feminists to describe polarized depictions of women's sexuality. Within this dichotomy, women are characterised as either nurturing, chaste virgins or condemned as promiscuous, immoral whores (Conrad, 2006; Gottschall et al., 2006). Once a woman is designated as a whore, she can never truly become a Madonna. The dichotomy was also reinforced in example 7.10, where Commenter19 in the same thread suggested that women "pretend to be a wholesome girl" and that their attempts to appear wholesome are "lies and deception." It is not considered that women may start attending church or stop pursuing casual sex due to a genuine change in their morals or religious beliefs; it is only in order to deceive and attract men.

(7.10) Commenter19 (6): That's where they hunt for the beta schmuck and pretend to be a wholesome girl. Women want to build long, lasting relationship based on lies and deception. [thread 30]

(7.11) Commenter24 (6): Whores fishing for suckers in church, looking for to marry one. Like I never have seen that before. lol! [thread 30]

In the above examples, men were also presented in comments as the victims of women's deception and manipulation. Women were represented as predatory towards men through the verb choices "hunt" and "fishing." Women are said to attend places like church not because they are religious, but because it is their preferred hunting ground for "suckers" and "beta schmucks." However, while men were acknowledged to be the victims of women, these men were not portrayed sympathetically. The nomination strategies "sucker" and "beta schmuck" instead suggest that men who enter relationships with women they meet in church are gullible or foolish, so are to some degree responsible for their exploitation or manipulation by women.

Women were also said to manipulate and deceive men by hiding their true appearance. Post 49 consisted of a meme reposted from Instagram, which juxtaposes men and women in the shower

(see Figure 9). The relay between image and text creates the meaning that men look better after showers than women, whereas women look worse because their makeup has been removed. In the comments, users represented makeup as a tool of manipulation. For example, in response to the meme Commenter10 referred to makeup as “magic tricks” while Commenter1 suggested that makeup is necessary for sustaining the population. This implies that men would find women less sexually attractive without makeup and so would not wish to engage in sexual intercourse with a bare-faced woman. Furthermore, Commenter1 embedded a link to a YouTube video entitled “CRAZY Asian Makeup Transformation” and in response, Commenter10 predicated Asian women as “disgusting.” Although this comment did receive at least one downvote, it nevertheless propagated racialised sexism through representing Asian women as deceitful and repulsive.

(7.12) Commenter1(86): Without makeup, most of the planet wouldn't be here. [See here for reference]

Commenter10(0): Always found Asian women disgusting, even before knowing their magic tricks. [thread 49]



Figure 9: Post 49, submitted with the title "I thought this was funny." It received a score of 373.

Finally, women were portrayed as dishonest about the reasons that they are attracted to men. Within the mansphere, women are said to be driven by a principle of "hypergamy" which refers "seeking a partner with the highest social status" (Krendel, 2020, p. 619). Krendel (2020) noted that the term originated in the 19th century India to specifically describe cross-caste marriages, but has since been co-opted and subverted in the mansphere as a "pseudo-scientific" term (p. 620). For instance, Table 28 Commenter7 and Commenter8 in thread 6 ascribed women's attraction to "intelligent" men to hypergamy (Table 24). Through a *topos of abuse*, commenters may conclude that men should be wary around women who claim to be attracted to them for their intelligence, as it signals that women will try to exploit or take advantage of their intelligence for their own personal gain.

Table 24: Commenter7 and Commenter6's use of the topos of abuse in thread 6.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter7 (5): I've always said that it's complete bullshit when a woman says intelligence turns her on, its the fact that intelligent men can make a lot of money that turns her on.</p> <p>[replying to Commenter7] Commenter6(2): Hypergamy only cares about resources. [thread 6]</p>	Abuse	Women are only interested in exploiting men's money and resources for her own personal gain. Therefore men should go their own way.

“Resources” is vague term used occasionally within the dataset. It was typically mentioned alone, or alongside entities like money, time, energy or abilities (see Table 29). Thus, “resources” may encompass anything that a woman could potentially exploit from a man. The open-endedness and vagueness of the abstract noun may function to emphasise the dangers of women for some readers, as there is no limit to what a woman can exploit from men. It may also allow users to make generalisations about women, as women in different time periods or different countries or women of different social standings may have different priorities for what she needs from a partner.

7.2. Representations of relationships

Given the separatist ideology of MGTOW, users tended to discuss former relationships or the relationships of others. As established in chapter 2, MGTOW practice separatism to varying degrees: some men may avoid even platonic relationships with women, while others may pursue casual relationships but avoid long-term commitments. Thus, there was also discussion of advice for maintaining independence and sovereignty while casually dating women.

In general, relationships and marriage were portrayed as burdensome, constraining, and overall a negative experience for men. The following example is illustrative of such a representation (Table 25). The comment resembled the genre of dictionary entries through its syntax (starting with a word to be defined, followed by a colon and a noun phrase which defines the word) and generally formal register. Marriage was defined as encompassing slavery and prostitution for men. Thus, Commenter23 in thread 17 implicitly argued against marriage through a *topos of freedom* and *finance*, as it is specified that men become “financial” slaves. Furthermore, marriage was further

derogated through the predication “state sponsored,” which suggests that misandry is systemic and supported by the government and important institutions.

Table 25: Commenter23’s use of the topoi of freedom and finance in thread 17.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
<p>Commenter23 (1): Marriage: State sponsored prostitution racket in which the male becomes the legal and financial slave of the female. [thread 17]</p>	Freedom	Marriage is the equivalent of slavery for men. Therefore men should not get married.
	Finance	Marriage does not allow men to control their finances. Therefore men should not get married.

The comparison to “prostitution” is noteworthy, as it parallels historical feminist arguments about women’s role in marriage (see Forward, 1999). Mary Wollstonecraft compared marriage “for support” to “legal prostitution,” (2010/1972, pp. 261-262), while similar comparisons were made centuries later by feminists such as de Beauvoir (1953/1949) and Dworkin (1983). However, the power dynamic posited within this comment is markedly different to that described by feminists. While feminists critique marriage as a patriarchal institution, here it is claimed that married men become the “slave of the female,” and thus suggesting that it is women who benefit the most from marriage.

7.2.1. Relationships are a financial burden

A particularly salient representation of marriage and relationships within MGTOW was that of a financial burden, in which men are expected to pay for all of women’s expenses in a relationship while receiving little to nothing in return. For instance, thread four began with reposted tweets (shown in Figure 10) in which a female Twitter user was called out for claiming she would leave her husband if he asked her to pay rent.

Twitter User 1

The day my husband asks me to pay halves on rent is the day I pack my bags .

Twitter User 2

and go where? You can't even afford half rent

Figure 10: A screenshot of two tweets, submitted as post four with the title "Go on Git." It received a score of 902.

The scenario depicted within the tweet was taken by some users as a rationale for separatism. For instance, Commenter15 (shown in Table 26) claimed that the tweet made him "laugh" at the concept of marriage. According to Commenter15, married men have to pay for everything, while their wives enjoy a "free ride" suggesting that they do not pay their fair share. Through a *topos of finance*, readers may conclude that men should not get married. This argument was supported through anecdotal evidence, a commonly noted feature within the discourse of men's and father's rights activism (Alschech and Saini, 2019; Kaye and Tolmie, 1998). The fact that Commenter15's friends pay for everything in their marriage may be interpreted as representative of all marriages, allowing the reader to conclude that marriage is a financial burden for *all* men rather than just for Commenter15's friends. Alternatively, this anecdote may have an illustrative rather than a representative function and demonstrate that there exist marriages where women do enjoy a free ride, rather than aiming to make a generalisation about all marriages and it is for this reason that marriage is not worth the risk.

Table 26: Commenter15's use of the topos of finance in thread 4.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter 15 (9): This is the stuff that makes me laugh at guys who try to sell me on marriage.</p> <p>They make it sound like you split costs. But I start digging and quickly have them reveal how they pay and she just enjoys a free ride.</p> <p>[thread 4]</p>	Finance	Men have to pay for everything in a marriage while women enjoy a free ride. Therefore men should not get married.

Casual relationships were also portrayed as burdensome and expensive. For example, post six shared a meme detailing a scenario in which a woman is only on a date with her companion for a free meal and has no intention of starting a relationship (see Figure 11). The most upvoted comment within the thread lexicalised this as a “foodie call” (Table 27). In the comment, Commenter1 used a *topos of uselessness* to suggest that there is little point in paying for a woman’s meal on a date, because it will not help men achieve their goal of finding a partner. Moreover, this was supported further through a *topos of numbers* in claiming that “22-33% of women” engage in the practice and a *topos of authority* in citing an academic study on the topic, as well as references to personal experiences of reading about foodie calls. Commenter1 linked to a press release about a study on foodie calls rather than the original study, likely because it is more accessible. However, in the original article Collisson et al. (2019) claimed that 23-33% of women had engaged in a foodie call at least once (p. 425), which is different from 23-33% of women engaging in them “regularly” as Commenter1 claimed. In actual fact, of those women who engaged in foodie calls in Collison et al.’s (2019) study, only 15-16% did so frequently and most women found the practice “slightly to moderately unacceptable” (p. 429). While these facts were included in the press release, Commenter1 omitted these results and in doing so, facilitated an argument that foodie calls are a regular and accepted practice among women and consequently men must never pay for women while on dates to avoid being deceived. Therefore, the argument is fallacious.

You want to take her out because you like her, she wants to come out because there's \$2.79 in her bank account and she's hungry. Meanwhile, she's texting the guy that's gonna rearrange her insides later



Figure 11: Post 6: A meme reposted from Instagram, entitled 'Imagine paying for a that's meal.' It received a score of 55.

Table 27: Commenter1's use of the topoi of numbers, authority, uselessness, and justice in thread 6.

Text	Topoi	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
<p>Commenter1(20): Yep. Foodie calls.</p> <p>23-33% of women regularly engage in the practice:</p>	Numbers	The numbers say that 23-33% of women are only going on the date for the free food. Therefore, men should not pay for women's meals in order to avoid being taken advantage of.
<p>https://nypost.com/2019/06/21/a-third-of-women-only-date-men-because-of-the-free-food-study</p>	Authority	NY Post and a scientific study both say that women regularly engage in foodie calls. Therefore men should not pay for women's meals on dates.
<p>They don't like you - they're just hungry.</p> <p>I have read of instances where the female will order a meal, and then another meal or a desert to go for the other guy she is seeing after she's finished her meal (the guy she is having sex with).</p>	Uselessness	Paying for women's meals is unlikely to lead to a relationship, as the women are more interested in the food than the companionship. Therefore, men should not pay for women's meals on dates.
<p>Don't be naive: never, ever, ever pay for a female's meal. Equality means Equality, all the time: make them pay. If they can't pay, they stay home or even better, invite them to the restaurant to watch you eat delicious food - they don't eat</p> <p>Don't even put yourself in a situation where you would have to shoulder the cost of a female's meal in the first place.</p> <p>[thread 6]</p>	Justice	If women and men are equal, then women should pay their fair share while on a date and men should not pay for them. Therefore, men should not pay for women's dates on dates.

Furthermore, Commenter1 also argued that men should avoid paying for women on dates due to the tautology that “equality means equality, all the time.” In this context, equality was taken to mean that formal equality wherein women should pay equally on a date rather than expect men to pay on their behalf, even in cases where their partner earns more money. The argument employed a *topos of justice*: if women and men are equal, then there must be equal expectations placed upon men and women when it comes to paying for meals. This equality argument was reinforced through the use of repetition, adverbials and strong deontic modality: men must “never, ever, ever” pay for a woman and she must pay “all the time.” By framing the argument in terms of “equality” Commenter1 justified what others may view as unfair treatment, namely inviting someone to a restaurant and eating a meal in front of them while not allowing them any food themselves.

Some commenters advocated that men “shit test” prospective partners to find out whether or not they are gold-diggers. For example, post 22 narrated a story about how a friend of the OP lied to his girlfriend about being bankrupt in order to gauge her reaction. The next day, girlfriend ended the relationship and revealed that she had been unfaithful and was only dating him for financial stability. In response to this post, commenters critically evaluated the utility of such ‘shit tests.’ For example, Commenter49 endorsed the practice through a *topos of advantage*: men should perform shit tests so that they can receive the benefit of finding out whether the girlfriend is “worth keeping.”

Table 28: A comment chain from thread 22, where Commenter49 uses the *topos of advantage*, Commenter50 uses the *topos of uselessness* and Commenter51 uses the *topos of finance*.

Text	Topoi	Data and claims
Commenter49: If you do choose to be in a relationship, this is the ultimate way in finding out if she is worth keeping.	Advantage	‘Shit testing’ women allows men to learn important facts about her that will determine whether the relationship is worth pursuing. Therefore men should conduct them.
(replying to Commenter49) Commenter50 (25): Let me save you some time and answer that question for you: she's not.	Uselessness	‘Shit tests’ are a waste of time, as the answer will always be the same. Therefore, men should not conduct them.
(replying to Commenter50) Commenter51 (6): Time and money. [thread 22]	Finance	‘Shit tests’ are a waste of money, as the answer will always be the same. Therefore, men should not conduct them.

However, other commenters were critical of the value of 'shit tests.' For example, Commenter50 used a *topos of uselessness* to argue that 'shit tests' are a waste of time: no woman will ever pass the 'shit test' and therefore there are no advantages to carrying one out. Commenter51 elaborated and used a *topos of finance* to suggest that men should avoid 'shit testing' in order to save themselves money, as well as their time. Both of these comments were highly essentialist and exemplified a *hasty generalisation* fallacy, assuming that all women will respond to a 'shit test' in the same way.

From these depictions of marriage and relationships as financially burdensome, it follows that women were represented as gold-diggers who are only attracted to rich, successful men. The representation of women as gold-diggers is illustrated in post four, which consisted of an Afrikaans meme (Figure 12) claiming that women are marrying for love because the currency is weak, implying that in normal circumstances women marry for money.



Figure 12: Post 9 – an image macro meme submitted with the title “A nice South African meme, it reads: “The Rand is so weak, women are actually marrying for love again.”” It received a score of 41.

However, Commenter6 disagreed with the meme and counter-claimed that if women cannot marry for money, this does not mean that women will necessarily marry for love but rather they will marry

for “resources and abilities.” The argument employed a *topos of abuse*: because women exploit men’s resources and abilities, men should avoid relationships with women even in times of economic trouble. There was also an implied *topos of threat* in the final imperative “stay safe gentlemen.” While the dangers were not explicated, it can reasonably be assumed that the dangers are women and that the precautions would involve not getting married or entering a relationship with a woman. Furthermore, the comment was framed as something “good to remember.” This perhaps reflects MGTOW ideals of independence and self-sovereignty, as phrasing these arguments as advice allows readers to come to their own conclusions and make their own decisions regarding marriage, rather than being told what to do or think.

Table 29: Commenter6’s use of the topoi of abuse and threat in thread 9.

Text	Topoi	Data and claims (co-ordinate)
Commenter6 (3): It’s good to remember that even though they aren’t looking for your money, because the rand is low rn [right now], they will still be after your resources and abilities! Stay safe gentlemen [thread 9]	Abuse	Women exploit and abuse men’s resources and abilities in relationships. Therefore men should avoid relationships with women.
	Threat	Relationships brings dangerous consequences for men. Therefore men need to “stay safe” and avoid entering relationships with women.

Finally, women’s gold-digging was posited as fundamental to female nature. For example, Commenter70 in thread 22 claimed that women have been gold-diggers “since the dawn of civilization” and demonstrated this with an example from the book of Job in the Bible. The Bible was predicated as being “written 4,000 years ago,” which further emphasises how long women have acted as gold-diggers. This citation of a historical biblical source functions as a *topos of history* and *topos of authority*, supporting the claim that women have always been gold diggers. However, within the retelling, the source of Job’s misfortune has been obscured – rather than his possessions being taken from him by God as a test of his faith, Job simply “loses everything” and his wife leaves him as a result. This could make the story more relatable and applicable to the contemporary context. Furthermore, the moral of the tale has been changed. One interpretation of the story is that Christians should trust in God even during times of hardship or that pain and suffering may lead to greater rewards in the future (Tucker, 2022). However, in this case the main lesson from Job is less theological but rather is about the true nature of women.

Table 30: Commenter70's use of the topoi of authority, history, and abuse in thread 22.

Text	Topoi	Data and claims (subordinate)
<p>Commenter70 (2): In the bible, written 4,000 years ago I believe, we have the Book of Job. Long story short, a successful shepherd lost everything. His wife leaves him. Then at the end of the story he became a rich man. He got the "hottest woman in the world."</p> <p>Since the dawn of civilization, women have been gold diggers. Financial vampires who are only in it for the money. [thread 22]</p>	Authority	The Bible, an authoritative source, demonstrates that women are gold-diggers. Therefore, women are gold-diggers.
	History	This historical example from 4000 years ago teaches about the nature of women and these lessons still apply today. Therefore men need to learn from this example and avoid gold-digging women.
	Abuse	Women are gold-diggers who are only after men for their money. Therefore men should not date or marry women.

Women were referred to as “financial vampires” and thus are compared to dangerous, monstrous creatures. While vampires drain their victims of blood, women are “financial” vampires and thus presumably drain their victims of money. Consequently, some readers may conclude through a *topos of abuse* that men should avoid marriage in order to avoid being exploited by these women.

7.2.2. ‘Divorce rape’ and the risks of divorce

Some arguments concerned divorce or separation. Throughout the dataset, divorce was commonly presented as an inevitability for married couples. Furthermore, it was often presented as common knowledge that divorce proceedings and family courts are biased against men and that men stand to lose half of their assets during divorce. Thus, many arguments against marriage employed a *topos of threat* or *topos of finance* in order to argue that men should not get married due to the risks associated with divorce.

This is demonstrated in the following example. In response to post four (see Figure 10), Commenter18 employed pseudo-direct speech to write a comment from the perspective of the divorcing husband. The use of the unmodalised future presented men’s loss of assets in divorce as an inevitability (“that is going [to] fuck me over”). Furthermore, the splitting of assets in a divorce was framed as a loss: men do not willingly give their assets to a partner, but rather women and

lawyers “take” them from men. The verb phrase “fuck me over” also suggests that this splitting of assets is unfair towards the man or that the woman will take what does not rightfully belong to her. Overall, the argument employed a *topos of threat* and men may conclude that they should not get married in order to prevent being “fuck[ed] over” in divorce.

Table 31: Commenter18’s use of the *topos of threat* in thread 4.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
Commenter18 (2): “Go on git” to an attorneys office, so I can pay for your lawyer that is going fuck me over and take half of everything. [thread 4]	Threat	Men risk being ‘fucked over’ in a divorce. Therefore men should not get married.

This experience was sometimes lexicalised as a ‘divorce rape.’ The feeling of violation in having one’s assets taken in a divorce is metaphorically compared to a “rape” which further emphasises the perceived dangers and harmful psychological impact of marriage and divorce on men. For example, Commenter10 in the same thread as the above example used a *topos of threat* to argue that men should not get married due to the danger of “divorce rape.” The adverb “simply” implies that this action of “divorce rape” is something that the ex-wife can achieve quickly and with minimal effort. In this comment, the pronoun “she” did not appear to refer to any specific woman, but instead to a generic, hypothetical woman who synecdochally represents all wives. This further reinforces the argument that men should avoid marriage, as “divorce rape” is an action that any woman is capable of and can easily succeed in accomplishing.

Table 32: Commenter10’s use of the *topos of threat* in thread 4.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
Commenter10 (15): If she is married, and even if in a sexless marriage by her own decision... She would simply divorce rape the husband once the thirsty dude decided to search outside the marriage what his wife was supposed to at least be providing him inside the marriage. Just keep that in mind in case anyone still considers getting married. 🙄👤🤔😏 [thread 4]	Threat	Marriage bears dangerous consequences for men (i.e., divorce rape). Therefore men should not get married.

Commenter10 also stated that wives are “supposed to” provide their husbands with sex. In the hypothetical scenario presented, the wife had not been fulfilling her duties and therefore the

husband was forced to “search outside the marriage” in order to satisfy his sexual desires. However, the wife is then able to use this infidelity as an excuse to separate from and consequently “divorce rape” her husband, despite the fact it was ostensibly her fault that he was unfaithful in the first place. Commenter10 was able to further delegitimise marriage: not only will marriage end in divorce and a loss of one’s assets, but this will happen as a result of the wife’s manipulations. Notably, this scenario relies on the presupposition that men require sex in a relationship and so will inevitably cheat on their wives if their current relationship is sexless. This reifies gendered stereotypes of men as hypersexual beings and women as the gatekeepers of sex, which appear in the manosphere (O’Neill, 2018; Tranchese and Sugiura, 2021) and in broader culture (Conrad, 2006). Consequently, a denial of sex is a denial of a man’s basic human needs and so the possibility of a “sexless marriage” is something else men need to “keep in mind.”

Finally, it was often assumed that divorce is an inevitability. This inevitability of divorce combined with the inherent unfairness in divorce proceedings means that users can argue against marriage on the basis that it will always end badly for the man involved. For instance, Commenter19 in thread 30 employed a *topos of finance* in urging men to remember the “eventual **divorce** where she will get half your asset” (Table 33). Divorce rape (though the specific term is not used) was presented as inevitable through the adjective “eventual” and use of the future form. The comment also exhibited interdiscursivity with economic discourse. Women were objectified and compared to products that can be “2nd handed” and “thoroughly used and worn out” or something that men can “invest in.” Just as it would be unwise to invest in used, worn out products, it would be unwise for men to invest in (i.e., marry) women who have been “used” by other men. Marriage presents a higher return on investment for women: women will gain half their husband’s assets, while the only thing men will gain is “used pussy” which is assumed to be less valuable. This reflects heteronormative gender role assumptions; it is taken for granted that men will be the breadwinner and earn more in a relationship, therefore if assets are split equally, then it is women to stand to gain and men who stand to lose. This comparison also reinforces patriarchal sexual double standards where sex is thought to change a women’s worth or value, so it is less socially acceptable for women to have sex (Farvid et al., 2015), in addition to the misconception that the vagina changes or becomes ‘loose’ after multiple sexual partners (Braun and Kitzinger, 2001).

Table 33: Commenter19's use of the *topoi* of justice, uselessness, and finance in thread 30.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims
<p>Commenter19 (8): Read so many posts from those "links" from the sluts, "I've tried a lot of freaky things in the past but I wouldn't do with a guy I'm in love with." -- sluts.</p> <p>Yeah, fuck that noise. **Lies** and **manipulation**. What moron would settle for a **2nd handed product.** You're not only "get to have a 2nd handed product" but you're told certain options are now off the table because "she has mature" out of her slut years.</p>	Justice	<p>Women engage in 'freaky' sex acts with casual partners. Therefore, it is unfair of women to refuse to engage in such acts with a long-term romantic partner</p>
<p>Oh, so now that she's mature enough she's no longer the slut that she used to be? GREAT! So a guy gets to **marry her** when she's **been thoroughly used and worn out**. Why would any man want to invest in a such a woman?</p>	Uselessness	<p>Women with multiple sexual partners are '2nd handed products' and men receive no value from dating them. Therefore, men should not date or marry these women.</p>
<p>Don't forget the eventual **divorce** where she will get half of your asset. You **got used pussy** and in a few years you're told she will **get half of your asset** simply because you were dumb enough to marry her. [thread 30]</p>	Finance	<p>If men marry women, they will lose half of their assets in divorce. Therefore, men should not marry women.</p>

Furthermore, the argument also used a *topos of uselessness* and *topos of justice*. Commenter19 derogated the intelligence of men who date women with multiple sexual partners through the nomination "moron," the predication "dumb" and repeated rhetorical questions to make men reconsider their actions. Women with sexual pasts were also represented negatively, through the repetition of the gendered epithet "slut" and metonymic reference to genitalia "pussy." According to Commenter19, there are no advantages to dating these women: not only are they "worn out," but

they also have sexual double standards. This comment relies on the assumption that if a woman had engaged in “freaky things” with a casual sexual partner, it is hypocritical or unfair for her to refuse to continue such acts with a long-term sexual partner. The comment thus exhibits entitlement and a desire for control over women’s sexuality, in addition to a disregard for women’s sexual boundaries.

7.2.3. Abusive relationships and false allegations of abuse

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and abuse was a final important theme within discussions of relationships. In these discussions, some users argued that men ought to go their own way in order to avoid being the victim of IPV or in order to avoid being falsely accused of it.

First, some commenters claimed that women are more abusive or violent towards men than men are to women. For example, Commenter4 in thread 5 employed a *topos of definition* in extending the meaning of “violent” to encompass actions such as “screaming/emotional neglect/insults.” Because women more frequently engage in these actions defined as violent, women can legitimately be described as more violent than men. Although Commenter4 did acknowledge that men can be violent towards women, as the predication “almost every relationship” allows for some exceptions, he conceded that this is only because men are more physically capable. This implies that the only reason women are not physically violent towards their partners is because due to weaker physiology, not because they are non-violent. Thus, women must resort to verbal and emotional forms of violence. This ties in with biological or essentialist gendered ideologies, where women are seen as physically weak and overly emotional in comparison to men.

Table 34: Commenter4’s use of the *topos of definition* in thread 5.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter4 (7): Women go on about men being violent but thats only because physically we can be. But if you take in screaming/emotional neglect/insults as a broader meaning of violence women are the violent party in almost every relationship. [thread 5]</p>	<p>Definition.</p>	<p>Screaming, emotional neglect and insults can be defined as violent. Therefore, as women more frequently engage in these actions, women can be defined as more violent.</p>

Women were represented as engaging in ‘victim reversals’ where they claim to be the victims of abuse, but in actuality were the ones perpetuating the abuse. For example, Commenter4 in thread 17 narrated a story about how his ex-wife asked for a restraining order and kept his child from him, despite the fact that he was not abusive. His ex-partner was represented as abusive and violent

through the adjectives “drunk” “psychotic” and verb phrase “threatening to stab.” This is in stark contrast to her own self-representation as being “spotlessly clean.” Importantly, within the second half of the comment, Commenter4 shifted from recounting a story about his ex-wife to making generalisations about women as a group, as shown by his shift from using singular pronouns “she” to plural pronouns “they.” It is not just his ex-wife who lies about her abusive actions and refuses to take responsibility for her actions, but all women.

(7.13) Commenter4 (5): Same thing here. Restraining order first few weeks of divorce like i was the one getting drunk and psychotic threatening to stab the her, which she was. Then that failed and she runs away for months with the child in fear! They manufacture stories that make them spotlessly clean or they dont tell them. Never heard a woman claim to have fault in any breakup. [thread 17]

However, in the multiple breakup stories within the dataset, many users did self-represent as “spotlessly clean” and placed the blame at their partner. For example, Commenter20 in thread 19 juxtaposed his own behaviour with his ex-wife’s. His ex-wife is infantilised, referred to as a “child” and predicated as “spoiled” and “throwing temper tantrums.” Not only was she represented as childish, but also as lazy and entitled as she refused to contribute to any household expenses or chores. There was also a difference in how the characters treated each other in the narrative: Commenter20 treated his partner “like a queen,” while his partner treated him “like shit.” While the wife threw “tantrums,” he “never so much yelled at her or insulted her.” Overall, Commenter20 presented himself as a kind, generous and overall unabusive partner and thus denied the credibility and legitimacy of his ex-wife’s claims of abuse.

(7.14) Commenter20 (35): Same when my wife left me and told everyone I was abusive. Even though I paid all her bills, and treated her like a queen, never so much as yelled at her or insulted her. The worst I ever did was explain how much of a child she was acting like (she spent 5 years running a store without helping out around the house or helping with our shared expenses, and generally acted like a spoiled child, throwing temper tantrums when she didn't get what she wanted).Meanwhile she didn't so much as clean up after herself and treated me like shit for years. [thread 19]

Furthermore, some commenters alleged that women make false allegations of rape or abuse so frequently that the only way for men to avoid being wrongly accused is to avoid women altogether. For example, Commenter5 in thread 19 used a *topos of threat* to suggest that men should be

“terrified” of heterosexual intercourse. Two major dangers are posited. First, there is the risk that even if the sex was consensual, women can successfully claim it was rape. Second, there is the risk of impregnating a woman. Commenter5 warned that if a sexual partner becomes pregnant, then she can “basically fuck up your life however she wants.” The specific dangers were left vague, but readers may assume this would involve having to pay child support or co-parent. While condoms were acknowledged as a possible mitigation against the latter threat, they are not a failsafe solution. Thus, for Commenter5 the only way to mitigate these threats is to avoid having sex with women altogether. The threat was hyperbolised by the assertion “I wouldn’t touch with a stick,” suggesting that not only should men avoid having sex with women, but also avoid being in close proximity to women.

Table 35: Commenter5 use of the topos of threat in thread 19.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter5 (30): How on earth guys in the UK and Spain are not terrified about being with women in the first place? I mean, I wouldn't touch with a stick if I know she could lie about getting raped and get away with it (and probably get some good money).</p> <p>It's hard enough to know that if you get woman pregnant she can basically fuck your life however she wants. Ofc there are condoms, which should protect against that, but you know accidents happen [thread 19]</p>	Threat	<p>There are several risks of having sex with women (e.g., she could lie about being raped, she could get pregnant). Therefore men should go their own way.</p>

When women were acknowledged as genuine victims of IPV, they were typically blamed for the abuse they received. One method of victim blaming was to suggest that women deserve abuse for their poor choice of partner. For example, Commenter27 used a *topos of responsibility* to claim that women who claim to be an abusive victim need to face “accountability” for being a “bad judge of character.” The blame is shifted from the abuser to the victim, who should have foreseen her partner’s abusive nature. Rather than offer sympathy to victims of abuse or find solutions that would help them to mentally recover or rebuild their life, the better option is to get them to “shut up” and encourage them to take responsibility.

Table 36: Commenter27's use of the topos of responsibility in thread 17.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter27 (1): Anytime they play the victim card(string of abusive ex-es) respond with “ so she was a bad judge of character”</p> <p>Nothing shuts them up faster than fear of accountability. [thread 17]</p>	<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>Women are responsible for any abuse they receive due to their poor judge of character. Therefore, they are not deserving of sympathy.</p>

In addition, women who disclose abuse were predicated as playing the “victim card.” Discussing the phrase “gender card”, Falk (2013) explained that the metaphor implies “tactical choice” and that the “playing” of this card confers an undue tactical advantage (p. 198). In addition, Donaghue (2015a) described how women who attribute mistreatment to their gender are often accused of playing the “gender card” or of using accusations of sexism as a shield against “legitimate criticisms” of their performance (p. 175). Commenter27’s predication of women victims as playing a “victim card” may function in the same manner, accusing women of strategically taking on a victim identity in order to achieve some kind of strategic benefit, such as garnering public sympathy or financial compensation (see 8.2.1 for further discussion).

Another victim-blaming strategy was to suggest that female abuse victims must have provoked their partner in some way. For example, Commenter17 in thread 17 claimed that there exists a double standard wherein the public hears about the actions of abusive men more frequently than the actions of women which led to the abuse. Women are blamed for abuse they receive because they “wouldn’t shut the fuck up” and thus violence is justified as a means of disciplining one’s partner. Alternatively, women were predicated as “push[ing] their men’s buttons till he snapped.” Thus, although a man may have “snapped” and abused his partner, ultimately it was the woman’s fault for angering him. Alternatively, an argument by men’s and father’s rights advocates is that women purposefully goad their husbands into committing violence against them so that they have grounds for a domestic abuse charge (Hodapp, 2017). Thus, some readers may consider that women purposefully try and push their men’s buttons.

(7.15) Commenter17 (11): Thinking about the average joe, Jose, chang or Abdul that you see. Vast majority are completely harmless people yet every day we hear about abusive men. We dont hear about the women that wouldn't shut the fuck up or pushed their men's button till he snapped. I am highly sceptical of things like domestic violence and "abuse".
[thread 17]

Furthermore, the “vast majority” of men were predicated as “completely harmless people.” If most men are not abusive, then it follows that most women are not abused. Interestingly, Commenter17 referred to “the average Joe, Jose, Chang or Abdul.” This is evocative of the highly racialised language used by the incel community, for example in that “Tyrone” refers to a Black alpha male while “Chad” refers to a White alpha male (Preston et al., 2021). However, there was a notable absence here as there was a first name stereotypically indexing White, Latino, East Asian and Arab men respectively, but not Black men. This omission may imply that the vast majority of Black men are not in fact “completely harmless” and therefore claims of abuse made against Black men are less likely to be fabricated. Collins discussed how Black men have historically been depicted as “sexually violent rapists” and “brutes” (Collins, 2000, p. 156) or as “bodies ruled by brute strength and natural instincts” (Collins, 2004, p. 152). Consequently, this comment reinforces racist stereotypes of Black men as inherently more aggressive and violent than men of other races. Furthermore, this also corroborates findings by Barber (2022) who demonstrated that in manosphere and far-right discourse, rape claims were always represented as fabricated except in stories where the perpetrator was Muslim or an immigrant.

7.3. Conclusions

In spite of their separatist ideology, women were a key topic of discussion within MGTOW. Johanssen (2021) theorised that MGTOW fantasies of male solitude depend on a “necessary fantasy” of women (p. 125). Indeed, in order to go your own way it first has to be established what you are going your own way *from*. In defining themselves in opposition to women and heterosexual relationships, it is necessary to refer to women and heterosexual relationships. r/MGTOW users reminded themselves and each other why they had chosen to reject heterosexual relationships and marriage and used a wide range of argumentation strategies that presented women as inherently toxic and to be avoided.

First, the discourse was frequently essentialist and binary, positing categorical differences between men and women and placing men in a hierarchy above women. Via the *topos of definition* and the ‘AWALT’ acronym, women were argued to share the same fundamentally ‘female’ nature which

causes them to act in an unethical manner. Negative traits commonly assigned to women included emotionality, irrationality, greed, entitlement, laziness, deceitfulness, irresponsibility, and promiscuity. These traits were presented as historically unchanging and the result of hard-wired psychological drives. Consequently, users could argue of the futility of relationships through the *topos of uselessness*: there is no use in trying to find the right woman to date because all women share these negative traits to varying degrees, nor is there is use in trying to change these traits in women. Relatedly, users employed the *topos of threat* and *topos of abuse* to argue that men must avoid relationships with women in order to avoid falling prey to women's manipulations and having their lives ruined by women. This suggests that the sexism of MGTOW is better characterised as hostile rather than benevolent (Glick and Fiske, 2011), as the predominant representation of women ran counter to benevolent sexist stereotypes such as women being naturally chaste and peaceful (Dworkin, 1983).

Equality emerged as a central component in the representation of relationships, as users highlighted women's purported double standards towards men. This allowed commenters to portray relationships as a bad deal for men, who are expected to contribute time, money, and effort into a partnership while receiving little to nothing in return. This is in spite of evidence that suggests that married women perform more household labour than married men (Bianchi et al. 2012; Pepin et al., 2018) even when the wife is the main breadwinner (Syrda, 2022). Moreover, there appeared to be an overarching economic framework, with relationships often discussed in terms of costs (to men) and benefits (to women). Marriage was portrayed as a series of financial transactions, where both partners should equally contribute. In this frame, marriage does not constitute an appropriate return on investment for men because men will always receive less than what they put in. Not only do women supposedly refuse to pay for any expenses within a relationship, but they are also guaranteed to take half of a partner's assets in the event of divorce through 'divorce rape.' As well as men's finances, women were depicted as exploiting men's resources and abilities. This indicated a positive view of men as intelligent and practical with a lot to offer in a relationship, in stark contrast to women who rely on men for everything. Commenters used the *topos of finance*, *abuse*, *justice* and *threat* to persuade others that they should avoid marriage and relationships with women in order to avoid being burdened and exploited by lazy, gold-digging women.

The representation of women as exploitative gold-diggers must be understood within the broader historical context and as having potential to shape larger cultural narratives and legal decisions regarding women and relationships. Donovan (2017) explained that although in practice, alimony

was awarded infrequently and men could easily avoid paying it (for example, by deserting their wives rather than divorcing them), moral panics and popular narratives surrounding gold-digging women were prevalent and led to reformation of alimony legislation in several US states. In a modern context, Thompson (2016) considered how the stereotype of the gold-digger is detrimental to women and how it is used to “deny women rights in property owned by men” (p. 1244). Prenuptial agreements concern protection of male property and neglect to consider women’s non-financial and often invisible contributions to a marriage, such as caregiving labour and household management. This was certainly the case within MGTOW, as any marital assets were assumed to rightfully belong to the man and thus the fact that women can be legally entitled to half of the marital assets was taken as an argument against marriage. Not only was there no recognition of men’s love or affection for their wives, but notably absent within these discussions was any recognition of women’s non-financial contributions, or the ways in which women’s emotional and domestic labour could help men earn and maintain their assets.

Finally, users argued that men ought to go their own way in order to avoid being a victim of women’s abuse or to avoid being falsely accused of abuse. When women claimed to be victims of abuse, they were usually assumed to be lying. If their claims were considered legitimate, then they were often blamed for causing their abuse or for choosing an abusive partner. On the other hand, when r/MGTOW users shared their experiences with abusive or toxic partners, they were met with solidarity and other users sharing similar experiences. There was no questioning the veracity of their stories, no assumptions that they must have done something to provoke the abuse, or questions posed about why chose to be with an abusive woman or why they did not simply leave. Users critiqued how women apparently present themselves as flawless and refuse to take any responsibility for their part in a breakup, yet the woman was always at fault in every breakup story within the dataset. While the support given to male victims of abuse is to an extent positive, this was undermined by the prevalence of victim-blaming towards women. Instead of supporting victims of abuse, r/MGTOW users upheld patriarchal ideologies which support violence and abuse of people of all genders - but especially towards women.

Chapter 8: Representation of Feminism and Gendered Power Relations

This chapter will examine argumentation on the topics of feminism, privilege, equality, and discrimination. First, I examine the representation of feminism/feminists and the prevailing ideologies and attitudes towards feminism, including postfeminism, anti-equality backlash, pro-equality backlash, and pro-feminism. In the second half of this chapter, I examine the representation of gendered power relations, including the representation of society as ‘gynocentric’ and discussion of female privilege, followed by the representation of ‘misandry’ and discussion of discrimination against men.

8.1. Representation of feminism

In line with previous research (Lin, 2017; Jones et al. 2020; Wright et al. 2020), the general attitude towards feminism was overwhelmingly negative, with feminism compared to destructive and dangerous phenomena. For example, feminism was compared to life-threatening diseases such as cancer:

(8.01) Commenter73(2): Feminism is cancer. [thread 40].

Cancer metaphors can be used to signal that a problem is “disturbing, growing and life-threatening” (Meisenberg and Meisenberg, 2016, p. 398) or that an ideological group embodying undesirable traits need to be “eradicated” (Massanari and Chess, 2018, p. 536). In addition, a cancerous tumour which starts in one part of the body can spread and cause deterioration to other parts of the body, meaning that early detection is vital. Through metaphor, the same logic may be transferred to feminism: feminism must be eradicated before it becomes powerful enough to spread and take over other important institutions in society.

Feminism was also represented as bigoted or extreme. Such a representation served to undermine feminism as a movement for social justice and liberation. For example, Commenter61 in thread 40 predicated feminism as “a supremacist hate movement.” While he did not provide any examples of how feminists promote hate, feminism was dismissed through a *topos of humanitarianism* as other users could be expected to recognise supremacy and hatred as negative, undesirable qualities. Through collocation, the adjective “supremacist” may further delegitimise feminism through associations with White supremacy and established hate groups such as the KKK. In addition, this predication was applied to “feminism” as opposed to certain feminists or a specific school of

feminism, allowing Commenter61 to delegitimise the entire feminist movement and all its adherents.

Table 37: Commenter61’s use of the topos of humanitarianism in thread 40.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
Commenter61 (3): Feminism is a supremacist hate movement. [thread 40]	Humanitarianism	Feminism is about supremacy and hatred. Therefore feminism should be rejected.

Finally, Commenter50 in thread 40 provided a definition of feminism, presenting himself as having the true knowledge of what feminism is really about. Rather than achieve equality with men, feminists supposedly aim to take credit for men’s achievements. As verbs such as “colonize” and “appropriate” are academic terms used in fields such as sociology and postcolonial studies, Commenter50 delegitimised feminism using its own vocabulary. Alternatively, “colonize” also connotes militarism and invasion. Commenter51 then offered a revised definition using additional language of militarism or warfare. Instead of mere appropriation, feminists were said to advocate the complete destruction of male achievements. This could be interpreted as suggesting that feminists wish to annihilate men metaphorically or symbolically by seeking to “destroy” everything that men have achieved.

(8.02) Commenter50 (6): Feminism: How women colonize and appropriate masculine achievements.

Commenter51 (5): >colonize and appropriate
More like search & destroy. [thread 40]

Common to these definitions and predications was a sense that feminists and feminism represent a danger to society. Feminists were represented as extremists and promoting hatred towards men, which may lead some readers or other users to perceive feminism as an illegitimate or harmful social movement that must be rejected or counteracted. Having discussed generalised negative evaluations of feminism, I will now examine different ideologies and attitudes towards feminism, beginning with postfeminism.

8.1.1. Postfeminism

While the manosphere is often described as antifeminist, some researchers highlighted traces of postfeminist ideologies (Chang, 2022; Rafail and Freitas, 2019; van Valkenburgh, 2019, see also

sections 2.1 and 4.2.4 for discussion of postfeminism). Within the dataset, postfeminist positions were less prominent than antifeminist positions. Nonetheless, a postfeminist logic was mainly revealed in comments which suggested a depoliticised understanding of gender relations, wherein women were said to be held back by personal failures rather than institutional sexism.

For example, women's underrepresentation in certain occupations was justified due to lack of qualified female applicants, as opposed to discriminatory hiring processes. In a thread discussing feminist campaigns for more female programmers (see Figure 13, section 8.1.3, for further discussion of the thread), Commenter74 explained that there are few female software developers in his company because women choose to work in other roles. However, one female developer was explicitly mentioned as receiving her job through merit. The predication "proved her competence," suggests that she had earned her position and was not simply a diversity hire, though it does insinuate that her competence was in doubt. In addition, the predication "performs just fine" implies that women merely need to possess adequate skills in order to be hired; they do not need to be exceptional or superior to men. There was no discussion of any barriers or discrimination faced by female developers and Commenter74 explicitly stated that male and female developers are given the "same" tests, presenting the company as equal and fair between men and women.

(8.03) Commenter74(2): I have one female coworker. She performs just fine.

She was tested before she was hired, the same test I took, and over 11 years she proved her competence.

The thing is, she behaves in a quite unfemale way. She is what we could call a tomboy.

Most female competent coders are tomboyish.

The femminist who made this meme most likely wouldn't last a day as dev.

Most women where I work are either scrum masters, managers or testers. The UX team is all female.

But the harsh life of C++ coding is but for few woman. [thread 40]

However, the female co-worker was also referred to as a "tomboy" and predicated as "quite unfemale," as were "most female competent coders." Although there was some mitigation through hedging adverbs ("quite unfemale") and suffixes ("tomboyish"), proficiency at coding was strongly

associated with masculinity. Furthermore, the occupation of a developer was represented as tough, predicated as a “harsh life” and where a feminist “wouldn’t last a day.” This implicitly suggests that most feminine women and feminists are soft and weak, unsuitable for difficult job positions unless they possess a sort of masculine toughness. Therefore, the fact that there are few women in these positions could be justified as a matter of practicality and lack of desirable qualities in women candidates, rather than sexism and institutional hiring bias.

Similarly, Commenter43 rationalised the gender pay gap as the result of men and women’s different choices on the job market: if women were willing to enter more lucrative industries such as mining or lumber, no pay gap would exist. A postfeminist logic was evident in the sense that gender was depoliticised and inequalities were denied. Furthermore, on Reddit and other digital platforms, alternating capitalisation typically signals irony or sarcasm (Nevin et al., 2022). Therefore, the orthography of “sExIsT wAgE gAp” implies that the wage gap does *not* originate in sexism and feminists are wrong to perceive it as such.

(8.04) Commenter43 (14): The funny thing is the perception of a sExIsT wAgE gAp is due to men working higher paying jobs in oil drilling, mining, lumber etc. The ones feminists don't care about, ever. Their ploy is so transparent, but it survives...thanks Gynocents [thread 40]

However, feminists were said to “not care” about these industries, which could be interpreted in different ways. On one hand, it may suggest that feminists have not encouraged enough women to enter these industries and that is why their attempts to close the wage gap have been unsuccessful. On the other hand, because these industries are dominated by men, claiming that feminists “don’t care” about these industries could suggest that feminists don’t care about men in general. Other comments in the dataset cited feminists’ apparent disavowal of men in these jobs and lack of campaigns for equality in these professions as a reason why feminism is illegitimate (see also 8.1.3 for further discussion of feminists’ ‘not caring’ about men). Furthermore, feminist action was described as a “ploy,” which may lend itself to the latter interpretation as it suggests feminists don’t care about these industries on purpose, rather than the result of ignorance. The label “gynocents” was used rather than feminists, evoking the concept of gynocentrism, which could further lend itself to an antifeminist interpretation in highlighting that feminists are focussed on maintaining women’s privilege and superiority rather than achieving equality (see 8.2.1 for discussion of gynocentrism). Overall, the comment slipped between postfeminism and antifeminism.

In sum, postfeminist positions were evident in comments which depoliticised gender relations and rationalised inequality of outcome as the result of individual failure. Therefore, feminism could be dismissed as unnecessary and irrelevant: if women wish to succeed in certain occupations, then they need to try harder or look for different professions. However, women's lack of competence and success was sometimes argued to be the result of their gender. In which case, feminist campaigns to introduce women to these fields could be dismissed as pointless or as setting women up for failure.

8.1.2. Anti-equality backlash

More often, discussions of feminism supported an ideology of antifeminist backlash. For some commenters, equality between men and women was argued to be impossible because men are inherently superior to women and have historically been the dominant gender. Consequently, feminism, and its goals of women's liberation and elimination of patriarchy, was argued to be futile, or even detrimental for a functioning society.

For instance, Commenter26 in thread 40 argued that feminism denies basic biological facts about women. First, through a *topos of definition* he argued that women are incapable of working certain difficult occupations because their categorisation as women means they lack "the tenacity" and "the endurance." The comment made interdiscursive connections with evolutionary psychology in asserting that women are "not genetically programmed" to perform certain jobs and naturalising the patriarchal division of labour as the result of "biological programming" and "evolution." Consequently, feminism could be delegitimised as a denial of basic science. Moreover, women's confinement to the home and looking after the children was predicated as women's "mission" which may evoke a sense of purpose or duty, or a religious connotation. This promotion of a return to conservative, traditional gender roles was overall reflective of the 'turn back the clock' variety of backlash documented by Faludi (2006/1991).

Table 38: Commenter26's use of the *topoi* of definition, history, numbers, and threat in thread 40.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims
<p>Commenter26(43): Women are not genetically programmed to have the tenacity, the endurance, or frankly the desire, to do hard jobs, especially if those jobs have a physical component. It's the result of 100,000+ years of evolution. Their mission is to stay home in the cave and raise the babies and cook the dinner. That's biological programming, not sexism.</p> <p>This twat can prattle all she wants about the jobs women deserve, but 50 years of feminism ain't gonna overcome 100,000 years of evolution. Right now is a brief moment in evolutionary history and will be forgotten soon enough (probably after China overruns our culture which has grown week by indulging this kind of bullshit) [thread 40]</p>	Definition	Women, by virtue of being designated women, are not capable of doing hard jobs. Therefore, feminism is illegitimate for trying to force women into it and it is not sexist for pointing that out.
	History	100,000 years of history tells us that women's role is domestic. Therefore, feminism is not going to be able to overcome this and we should look back to pre-feminist, pre-historic times for the ideal model of gendered behaviour.
	Numbers	The figures show us that feminism has been around for much less time than evolutionary history. Therefore we should pay more attention to the latter.
	Threat	Feminism makes our society weaker and prone to invasion. Therefore we should stop indulging in feminism.

Second, feminism was historicised as being a mere “50” years old and therefore miniscule in comparison to “100,000+” years of evolution. Even though the numbers were off by several orders of magnitude, this *topos of numbers* allows feminism to be easily dismissed as a temporary aberration from the normal state of affairs. In addition, women ought to “stay in the cave” and thus prehistoric times were endorsed as the appropriate model of gendered behaviour. Feminism’s irrelevance and ephemerality was further emphasised through its predication as a “brief moment” that “will be forgotten soon enough.” Through this *topos of history*, Commenter26 could argue that feminism is irrelevant and that we should look to prehistoric times as a visionary model for society.

Finally, evoking a *topos of threat*, feminism was argued to be directly responsible for making the nation “weak” and ripe for invasion. In addition to the women-vs-men distinction, another us-vs-

them distinction was created between “our culture” (presumably the United States, or the West more generally) versus “China.” Within White supremacist ideology, feminism’s critique of traditional gender roles and the nuclear family is argued to have made men weak and unable to protect their family or their nation from racial threats (Ferber, 2000; Kelly, 2017; Wilson, 2022). While this racial threat is often attributed to Muslims (Kelly, 2017), Jewish and/or Black men (Ferber, 2000), in this comment the racial threat was China. This reflects the socio-political context, as this comment was posted during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a marked increase in racist attitudes, hate speech, and even hate crime towards Asians (Gover et al. 2020; Tessler et al. 2020).

Through this triple discursive move, Commenter26 was able to delegitimise feminism in several respects: first, as contravening established evolutionary facts; second, as a temporary aberration; and third, as posing a threat to the security of the nation. However, there were some tensions and contradictions. Although feminism was posited as temporary and irrelevant, it was also posited to be powerful enough to genuinely threaten the nation. Gender roles were also presented as both biologically predetermined *and* as having been weakened. According to Kelly (2017), to reconcile the innateness of gender roles with the existence of “the degenerate, feminised modern man,” it has to be asserted that society has been “actively and deliberately derailed” by manipulative actors such as feminists, communists, leftists, and Jewish people (pp. 73-74).

A particularly explicit instantiation of an anti-equality backlash ideology was presented by Commenter2 in thread 39 (Table 39). First, the comment began with a combination of *topos of authority* and a *topos of history* in claiming that “wise men of the past” shared the opinion that women’s emancipation would be dangerous. In highlighting the intelligence of these men, Commenter2 thus conferred intelligence on this opinion and increased its persuasive potential. The appeal to “men of the past” is also noteworthy, as researchers have noticed the nostalgic tendencies of the manosphere (Zuckerberg, 2018) and the far-right (Kelly, 2017). Commenter2 harkened back to a vague, undetermined “past” where women had no rights and thus posed no threat to the social order and acknowledges the wisdom of these former patriarchs for recognising the potential danger of women’s emancipation.

Table 39: Commenter2's use of the *topoi* of authority, history, threat, definition, and justice in thread 39.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims
<p>Commenter2 (12): Men of the past were wise. They knew how damaging women could be to the society, if given the chance. We should take away women's rights, and all SJWs should be arrested. Sadly, we all know that this can never happen. [...] I don't know why females are treated better than men, when the opposite is what should be reality. For example, I am currently am in a city in India, and the pubs here let couples enter, or single females, but not single males. WTF? . After a long day of work, my friends and I want to go to the pub, and they have a few drinks while I drink some juice and we listen to some music, and relax in the pub, but we cannot enter, but single women can. [thread 39]</p>	Authority & history	Wise men of the past told us that women gaining rights would be dangerous for society. Therefore, we should have listened to them.
	Threat	Women pose a danger to society. Therefore, we should take away women's rights and arrest SJWs.
	Definition	Men are superior to women because they are men. Therefore, men should be treated better than women.
	Justice	Single women are allowed to enter pubs in India. Therefore, it is unjust that single men are not allowed to enter pubs.

Next, through a *topos of threat*, Commenter2 advocated the removal of women's rights and the arrest of SJWs because they are so "damaging" to society. This was intensified through the use of deontic modality ("we should") and an extreme case formulation ("all SJWs"). However, this suggestion was mitigated as an impossibility through another extreme case formulation ("this can never happen"). Therefore, the removal of women's rights was perhaps more of a representation of fantasy than a genuine call to action. This belies a fundamental distinction between MGTOW and MRAs, as the former make no attempt to organise politically or campaign for institutional changes that would improve men's social standing vis-à-vis women. Instead, within this comment men's supposedly subordinate position was taken for granted and something which would be impossible to change.

Notably, the anti-equality stance was visible through a *topos of definition*. Commenter2 asserted that women are "treated better than men" but this purported state of affairs is undesirable not because men and women ought to be treated equally, but because men ought to be treated *better*

than women. Men were argued to deserve special treatment or privilege as a result of their gender; he simply stated that “the opposite should be reality” without offering any reasons, thus utilising a *topos of definition* as readers will infer their own reasons based on what they claim to know about men and their qualities and achievements.

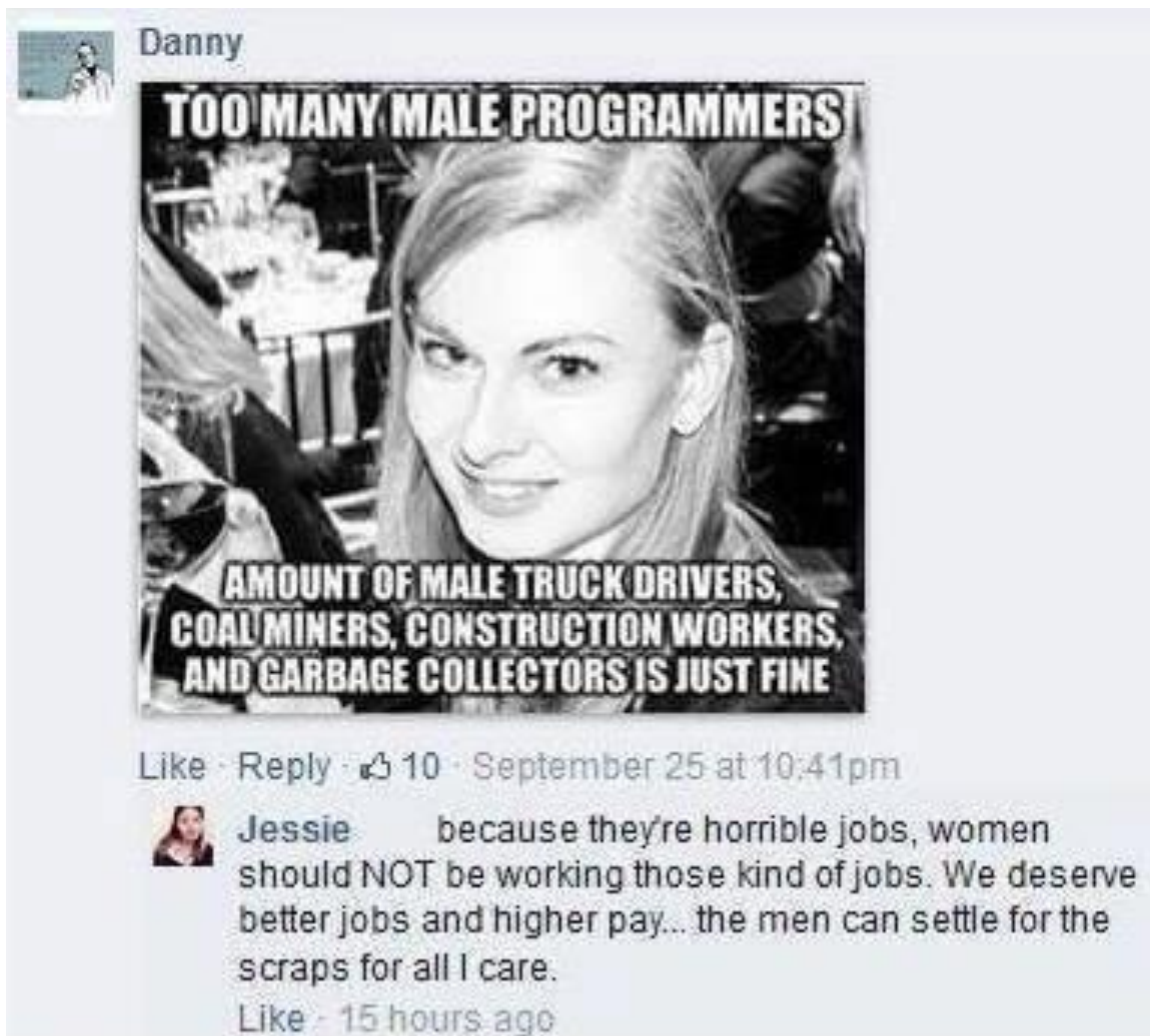
After having stated that women occupy a privileged position in society, Commenter2 then demonstrated this through narrating personal experience. Through a *topos of justice*, he highlighted a double standard in India wherein single women, but not single men, can enter pubs. This was framed as unjust and illogical through an expletive “WTF” and a justification of why men should be allowed to use pubs. The rationale behind this no-single-men rule was not explained, so readers would likely rely on a formal understanding of equality and conclude that it constitutes unfair discrimination. Several pubs in India have rules restricting ‘stag entries’ in order to protect female customers from sexual harassment (Dhankhar, 2012), though some pubs also deny women entry unless they are accompanied by their husband (Arora, 2018). However, Commenter2 represented himself and his friends as unthreatening; they simply want to “relax” and “drink juice.” Therefore it is especially unjust that they are not able to enter pubs and bouncers should not assume they are dangerous to women because of their gender. While Commenter2 appealed to notions of equality in highlighting a gendered double standard, ultimately equality was not taken as an important principle in itself given that in the same comment he argued that men should be treated better than women and fantasised about women having no rights. Instead, equality functioned more as a rhetorical concept invoked in order to criticise women’s increased rights and social status.

8.1.3. Pro-equality backlash

MGTOW critique of feminism often centred around the notion of equality. Users accused feminists of purposefully ignoring avenues in society where men are ostensibly disadvantaged and promoting female superiority instead of equality. This can be considered an pro-equality backlash ideology to the extent that equality is generally assumed to be a morally and socially desirable goal, or least that the language of equality is used. However, MGTOW typically relied on a formal definition of equality which is akin to sameness or gender blindness, as opposed to substantive equality which concerns redistribution of social goods towards marginalised groups.

Post 40 was the most upvoted post within the entire dataset, with a score of 1073 and over 100 comments. The post comprised a complex image (see Figure 13). First, there was a screenshot of a Facebook interaction between ‘Danny’ and ‘Jessie.’ Danny had shared a meme which highlighted the apparent hypocrisy of feminists, while Jessie sided with the feminist in the meme and argued that

women “deserve better” than jobs as coal miners or truck drivers. Underneath the screenshot read “Feminism – not even once” in bold red text. This may be intertextual allusion to the Montana Meth Project - an advertising campaign which aimed to warn teenagers of the dangers of methamphetamine abuse. A typical advert would depict a meth user in a dangerous situation with the slogan “METH: Not even once.” The campaign then became meme, where users created their own parody versions of these adverts using the same slogan (KnowYourMeme, 2008). Such an allusion may suggest that feminism is equivalent to hard drugs and therefore should be avoided completely.



**FEMINISM - NOT
EVEN ONCE**

Figure 13: Post 40, submitted with the title “The Feminist Agenda.” It received a score of 1073.

The overall image employed a *topos of justice*, implicitly arguing that feminism is illegitimate because feminists are only concerned with achieving equality with men in high-prestige careers such as programming, but not in blue-collar work such as coal mining or sanitation. The combination of the meme and the comment from Jessie is important, as the meme by itself could potentially be dismissed as a *strawman argument* given that a fictional feminist had created for the purpose of a delegitimising meme and there is no evidence of an actual feminist making such an argument. Given that Jessie then aligned herself with the straw feminist and explicitly argued that women should be treated “better” than men, it becomes harder to argue that the meme is an inaccurate depiction of feminists, although it is of course possible that the entire screenshot is doctored and that there was no ‘Jessie’ in the first place.

Table 40: Post40’s use of the *topos of justice*.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
Too many male programmers. Amount of male truck drivers, coal miners, construction workers and garbage collectors is just fine. FEMINISM – NOT EVEN ONCE. [Post 40]	Justice	Feminists do not care about equality in low-prestige careers as much as they care about equality in high-prestige careers. Therefore, feminism should be rejected.

One commenter argued that Jessie and the meme-feminist advocated “female supremacy” and “sexism against men” (see Table 41). This argument rested on a *topos of justice* and specifically analogy with racism, wherein the claims made about men by feminists are said to parallel claims made about Black people by White supremacists. However, this argument functioned according to a logic of formal equality and an understanding of the relationship of Black people vis-à-vis White people as being equivalent of men vis-à-vis women. Conversely, from a feminist perspective it could be argued that this constitutes a fallacy of false analogy because Black people are in a marginalised position relative to White people whereas men are not marginalised relative to women. Therefore, a woman saying that men deserve “scraps,” while not being very pleasant, is not as materially harmful as a White person saying the same about Black people. However, within MGTOW and the manosphere it is assumed that society is gynocentric and matriarchal and therefore a woman’s sexist statement about men would be directly equivalent to racism.

Table 41: Commenter31's use of the topos of justice in thread 40.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
Commenter31 (26): For those who have trouble understanding how this is female supremacy and sexism against men... just change 'woman' to 'whites' and 'men' to 'blacks' for them. [thread 40]	Justice	People would be outraged if someone said that White people deserve better jobs and Black people deserve the scraps. Therefore, we should also be outraged if women say this about men.

In other threads, users attempted to undermine feminism by pointing out apparent gaps in their practice. For example, Commenter2 in thread 2 provided examples of men's issues which are ostensibly ignored by feminists. While issues of suicide rates and work-related injuries were not explicitly labelled as men's problems, these are considered key issues within the manosphere (see sections 2.2.2, 2.3.1). Therefore it can be reasonably assumed that by claiming that feminists don't talk about suicide and workplace death, Commenter2 was claiming that feminists don't talk about men's issues. Additionally, not only do feminists avoid talking about men's issues according to Commenter2, but they also actively attempt to shut down conversations about these topics. This again used a *topos of justice*: if women and men are equal, then feminists should care equally about issues affecting women and men. Consequently, Commenter2 could portray feminism as a flawed and limited movement for equality and potentially persuade members of the community to not identify as feminists.

Table 42: Commenter2's use of the topos of justice in thread 2.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
Commenter2 (16): The best part is when women start talking about men and women's oppression and they always go straight to money. Greedy bitches wouldn't be able to define quality of life even if you slapped them with it. If they really wanted to talk quality of life let's talk suicide rate and work related death and injury rate. They call bringing those things up "disrupting the conversation" or "trolling"[thread 2]	Justice	Feminists only care about issues that affect women (e.g., wealth) but not issues that affect men (e.g., suicide). Therefore, feminism is a joke.

Furthermore, women were referred to as “greedy bitches.” This implies that women cannot have a true conversation about wealth inequality because they are greedy and therefore have a vested interest in acquiring wealth, so could arguably constitute a *circumstantial ad hominem* fallacy. Commenter2 also insinuated that issues of wealth are not legitimate quality of life issues or that they are at least less important or urgent than issues of suicide or workplace death.

Overall, a pro-equality backlash ideology was more prominent than an anti-equality backlash ideology. Arguments tended to rely on a formal perspective of equality and the *topos of justice*. This allowed users to dismiss feminism out of hand and argue that feminists’ prioritisation of women over men is an example of inequality and prejudice, given that one gender is being singled out for special treatment. Instead, feminists ought to treat men and women in the same manner and for each action they take that prioritises women, there should be an equivalent action that prioritises men.

8.1.4. Pro-feminism

Unsurprisingly, explicit support for feminism was almost non-existent. As described in chapter six, the subreddit rules created little space for feminist counterdiscourse. However, there were a few examples of comments which were somewhat sympathetic to feminism or attempted to criticise the dominant representation of feminists.

For example, Commenter67 criticised the OP of post 40 (Figure 13), and by extension other users in the thread who agreed with the post, for their *hasty generalisation* fallacy. Commenter67 used an aggregation nomination strategy in pointing out that feminism comprises “millions of people” and therefore a single person like Jessie should not be taken as representative of such a large group. In doing so, he implicitly acknowledged the diversity of feminist beliefs and diverted from the typically homogeneous representation of feminists within MGTOW. Furthermore, Commenter67 asserted that even if feminism *did* have a single representative, it is unlikely to be Jessie and therefore r/MGTOW users should pay little attention to her. The repetition of the prepositional phrase “from/on Facebook” may further diminish her legitimacy as a spokesperson, as she is confined to a social media platform (albeit, the largest social media platform in the world) and thus could be considered a mere ‘keyboard warrior’ (see Massanari and Chess, 2018).

(8.05) Commenter67 (2): I'm sorry but is it really a good idea to take "Jessie" on facebook as some sort of standard bearer for feminism? I don't know if feminism has a spokesperson or something but even if they do, I doubt Jessie from facebook is it. Why take a single facebook comment as representative of ~millions of people's views? [thread 40]

However, criticising other users *and* acknowledging the possibility that not all feminists are misandrists would likely be a face-threatening act and so mitigation strategies were required. The comment began with an apology ("I'm sorry"), which may serve as an acknowledgement of potential offence rather than an expression of remorse (Lakoff, 2015). Second, Commenter67 highlighted his possible lack of knowledge on the subject ("I don't know if"), which may allow others to offer corrections or supply additional information. Furthermore, two of his criticisms were written in the interrogative rather than declarative mood ("is it really a good idea?" "why take?"), enabling readers to reflect and form their own conclusions rather than explicitly being told that their opinions are incorrect. While this comment was not explicitly feminist, as it did not make any empirical or normative claims regarding gender relations or the necessity of feminist activism, it was at least critical of the dominant negative representation of feminism within MGTOW.

Meanwhile, Commenter5 in thread 3 argued that feminism "helps men" more than it does women (Table 43). This is in stark contradiction to the dominant negative representation of feminism on r/MGTOW, where feminists are accused of ignoring at best or hating men at worst. In thread 3, users debated the best solution to women's "poor behaviour" (e.g., selling nude photographs on OnlyFans). Through a *topos of uselessness*, Commenter5 argued that men should *not* stand up to women because it will not help men to achieve their goal of stopping women's poor behaviour and what's more, the resulting changes will be disadvantageous for men. Feminism was invoked in the final sentence, despite not being mentioned elsewhere in the thread, suggesting that feminism is the reason why women are now "irresponsible" and willing to "offer sex for cheap." Although this was framed as "poor behaviour," earlier in the thread, Commenter5 suggested that it is overall beneficial for men as it allows them to access "cheap sex."

Table 43: Commenter9's use of the topos of uselessness in thread 3.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter5 (1): Why should men stand up [to women's poor behaviour]? Suppose that men do stand up and stop women from offering sex for cheap, what would men get? They would lose cheap sex, women would still be the same, marriage will stuck (divorce is actually the best case scenario really), men would be forced to work more and take more responsibility while getting nothing of value in exchange really. Etc, etc. Feminism helps men more then it does women in the long term. [thread 3]</p>	Uselessness	<p>Calling out women will not lead to any positive outcomes for men. Therefore men should not stand up to women.</p>

However, I do not consider this comment to be deliberately supportive of feminism, despite making the empirical claim that feminism is helpful. First, women were presented as a homogenous group who will always act “the same” regardless of men’s actions (see 7.1.1). Secondly, the comment also reinforced the negative beliefs about marriage present within MGTOW (see 7.2), asserting that it will still “suck” even if men stand up to women. Moreover, although without naming it as such, he alluded to the existence of misandry and exploitation of men in suggesting that men are “forced to work” while receiving “nothing of value in exchange,” which is more in line with an antifeminist ideology than feminist ideology. Above all, feminism was advocated because it apparently provides men with “cheap sex.” In other words, the main advantage of feminism is that it supposedly allows men to purchase access to women’s bodies and sexuality, rather than genuine liberation for women and an end to sexist institutions.

More often, feminist ideology was invoked in order to repudiate it. For example, post 19 consisted of a screenshot of a 2017 tweet by writer and actress Lena Dunham which challenged the sexist myth that women lie about rape (Figure 14). However, directly underneath Dunham’s tweet was another screenshot of a 2016 *Daily Mail* headline (although the date and name of the paper are obscured, meaning some readers may assume it was more recent) from a news story about false rape accusations. The juxtaposition of these two screenshots functions to refute Dunham, providing evidence that not only do women lie about rape, but also that false allegations can lead to devastating consequences such as suicide. The post received a score of 917, making it the fourth most upvoted thread in the dataset, which may speak to the centrality of false rape allegations

within the manosphere (Gotell and Dutton, 2016; Zuckerberg, 2018, chapter two). In addition, the banner at the bottom of the image indicates that it had been reposted from r/conspiracy. Gotell and Dutton (2016), in their analysis of men's rights discourse on rape, found evidence of a conspiratorial view of feminism wherein MRAs alleged a feminist 'cover-up' of an epidemic of false rape accusations and sexual violence towards men in order to secure governmental funding for feminist initiatives.



Lena Dunham  @lenadunha... · 41m 

Things women do lie about: what they ate for lunch. Things women don't lie about: rape.

 175  176  1,157 

Heartbroken mother, 55, of teenager who hanged himself over false rape allegations kills herself after first anniversary of his death because she 'couldn't see a future without him'



Posted in **r/conspiracy**



Figure 14: Post 19, submitted with the title "This is a rough one, but false accusers need to be held accountable." It received a score of 907.

In the same thread, Commenter20 recontextualised arguments made on the (now-banned) 'gender-critical' subreddit r/pinkpillfeminism regarding rape convictions. He did not employ direct speech or include a hyperlink to any of their posts; instead the reader must assume that he is giving a faithful interpretation of their argumentation. However, by recontextualising r/pinkpillfeminism discourse on rape, Commenter20 was able to discredit it. Namely, their account of the low rate of rape convictions was predicated as an "excuse" rather than a "reasoning" or "explanation." This may suggest that their account is unsatisfying and hence should not be taken seriously. Furthermore, in asserting that r/pinkpillfeminism users don't believe that rape allegations affect a man's life, readers may rely on their background knowledge and conclude that this is untrue. Indeed, thread 19 detailed the suicide of a teenage boy and his mother following a false rape accusation (Figure 14) which would offer proof that r/pinkpillfeminism's assertion is untrue and incongruent with known facts. Overall, Commenter20 was able to summarise the content of an ideological opponent's argument and dismiss it as counter-factual and unsatisfactory, meanwhile strengthening MGTOW ideology as knowing the true facts about false rape allegations and their consequences.

(8.06) Commenter17 (12): Pretty sure that I've read somewhere that rape has something like a 5% conviction rate, yikes

Commenter20 (19): I was checking out pink pill feminism, and their excuse for this, is that police themselves are all rapists, and are covering for other rapists, so rapists never see their day in court. And they think rape allegations don't even affect guys anyways. [thread 19]

Alternatively, feminism was dismissed through irony and pseudo-arguments. This allowed r/MGTOW users to showcase the apparently illogical or ludicrous nature of feminist arguments in a manner that was entertaining to other users and did not run the risk of others believing them to be genuinely supportive of feminism, or others agreeing and becoming feminist themselves. For example, Commenter17 in thread 33 used a pseudo-argument to highlight apparent feminist double standards on the definition of rape (Table 44). This comment was posted in response to post 33, which shared a news article detailing the rape of two young boys by an adult woman (Figure 15). While the headline explicitly used the verb "rape," Commenter17 amended it (indicated by an asterisks, a common method of signalling corrections in CMC) so that "rape" was changed to "having sex with." This is an important change, as "having sex *with*" suggests that the act was consensual. Commenter17 then justified this correction by stating that rape can only consist of a male perpetrator and female victim. It should be noted that in some jurisdictions, such as England and Wales, rape is defined as penetration with a penis and therefore cisgender women cannot

legally be charged with rape, meaning that this comment is not entirely baseless³. However, this is not the case in Montana where the crime took place. Furthermore, Commenter17 directly addressed his fellow commenters through second person pronouns and a rhetorical question, referring to them as “you misogynists,” suggesting that believing that women are capable of rape is an example of prejudice against women.

Table 44: Commenter17’s use of the topos of justice in thread 33.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter17 (1): *"Having sex with" 2 young boys..... Haven't you misogynists learned this yet? If men do it with girls ->rape, if women do it with boys ->sex. /s [thread 33]</p>	Justice	Men having sex with underage girls is considered rape, therefore women having sex with underage boys should also be considered rape.

However, the /s tag signalled that this was a pseudo-argument (Mueller, 2016) and so Commenter17 was not literally suggesting that two boys consented to sex with an adult woman, or that it is “misogynistic” to call a woman a rapist. Instead, through a *topos of justice*, this comment argued that female-on-male rape should be taken as seriously as male-on-female rape. This suggests that society and the mainstream media are biased against men and boys – not only are male victims of rape neglected, but those who bring attention to the issue are pejoratively labelled as “misogynists.” Similarly, in the title of the post OP33 used an imperative to implore readers to “share” as the “main stream” media will not (see Figure 15). However, there are several contradictions here. First, the screenshotted article did explicitly refer to the crime as “rape” and rightfully did not employ any euphemisms to suggest that the boys consented (see Rojo-Rodriguez, 2020, for the article). Moreover, Commenter17’s claim that the mainstream media will not cover the story is undermined by the fact that the OP had screenshotted an article from ABC News, a popular and mainstream news site.

³ I do wish to make clear that I do not endorse this law, nor do I believe that women are incapable of raping men. Moreover, even if something is not defined as ‘rape’ under the law, this does not mean it would be treated as ‘sex’ like Commenter17’s pseudo-argument claimed.

Police: Doorbell video captures woman raping 2 young boys

by ELAYNE ROJO-RODRIGUEZ | KIMA-TV News
Friday, July 17th 2020

AA



(KIMA-TV, File)



YAKIMA, Wash. (KIMA) — A 19-year-old woman was arrested after police say a doorbell video camera recorded her raping two young boys between the ages of 5 and 9.

ADVERTISEMENT



Figure 15: Post 33, submitted with the title "Woman rapes 2 minors, doorbell footage shows. Main stream is not going to share this, please share." It received a score of 239.

In sum, there appeared to be very little genuine support of feminism within MGTOW. Rather, a feminist ideology was mobilised ironically in order to support an antifeminist ideology. Commenters recontextualised feminist arguments produced elsewhere on social media for the purpose of refutation, or ironically appropriated a feminist voice and put forward arguments that they believed a feminist might make in a manner that highlighted their contradictions and flaws. Furthermore, while there were some comments which attempted to challenge the dominant antifeminist ideology on MGTOW, these comments tended to be downvoted or ignored and even these comments reinforced sexist representations of women and antifeminist ideologies in other ways.

8.2. Gendered power relations

Within the manosphere, feminist theories regarding gendered power relations in society are reversed: men are argued to be oppressed by sexism, while women are argued to be men's oppressors. MGTOW believe themselves to be the victims of a 'gynocentric' system, wherein men are expected to be subservient to women and cater to their every whim (Lin, 2017). Related to gynocentrism is the concept of *misandry* which refers to hatred and oppression towards men, i.e., the male equivalent of misogyny (Marwick and Caplan, 2018). In this section, analyse MGTOW argumentation relating to the topic of female privilege and gynocentrism followed by argumentation related to misandry or discrimination against men.

8.2.1. Gynocentrism

Within a 'gynocentric' system, everything in society revolves around and caters to women. As discussed in chapter seven, r/MGTOW users often argued that women exercise female privilege in the context of intimate relationships. However, gynocentrism was also theorised to operate at a much broader level across all areas and institutions in society.

Women were represented as being particularly privileged during the prosecution of rape and sexual assault. It was frequently argued that women are able to falsely accuse their ex-partners of rape or abuse in order to secure advantages in custody disputes or to receive financial compensation. For instance, in thread 19 Commenter16 alleged that female victims of abuse in Spain are paid €426 a month while Commenter1 asserted that British women are paid £11,000 just "for filing police report," let alone successfully winning a court case. While such claims are demonstrably false, many users repeated the claim that women use false accusations of abuse to their advantage.

Commenter2 in thread 19 wrote two paragraphs detailing various benefits that female victims of abuse can claim, such as preferential hiring and housing, and claimed there is a "significant moral

hazard with that.” The specific “hazard” was left implicit: that women could make bogus allegations in order to unjustly reap these benefits. In this sense, the comment evoked a *topos of abuse* in implicitly suggesting that women could exploit systems intended to protect and safeguard genuine victims of abuse for their own gain, although no conclusion or solution is provided. Moreover, as well as taking benefits which rightfully belong to abused women, women were also assumed to be taking what rightfully belongs to men, such as custody of children and marital assets. It was also claimed to be standard operating procedure “to throw the husband under the bus,” suggesting that this is a conscious and very typical strategy for women.

Table 45: Commenter2’s use of the *topoi of abuse and definition* in thread 19.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter2 (91): There is a significant moral hazard with that. If you are an abused woman (the law is gendered, only applies to women) you become unfirable in your current job, if you have none, you get preferential hiring (tax deductions on private enterprises or assigned public employment) you can get extra cash paying for bills, preferential allocation of public housing or battered women shelters, sometimes, even a pension and a long list of benefits.</p> <p>It is pretty much SOP [standard operating procedure] in divorce proceedings to throw the husband under the bus, it then gets expedited and the woman is automatically allocated the house, children and much of the marital assets, as well as alimony and what not.</p> <p>Yet here women in polls feel oppressed like no place in the world, we even have a "ministry of equality" staffed by only women in the top spots, tasked in promoting and sanctioning *positive discrimination* policies; that, is quite orwellian</p> <p>here is hell, boys... [thread 19]</p>	Abuse	Women can falsely claim to be abused so that they can receive benefits. Therefore, there is a moral hazard with laws safeguarding abused women.
	Definition	The definition of ‘equality’ means that no gender should be preferentially hired. Therefore, the Ministry of Equality should not only hire women.

The conjunction “yet” at the beginning of the fourth paragraph functions as a stance marker, signalling that the following stance “women feel oppressed” is different from his own stance. The affective verb “feel” further negates sexism against women, suggesting that women’s oppression is only something that only exists in the subjective realm and is not an objective, observable reality. Following this, Commenter2 provided further evidence of ‘gynocentrism’ by referring to the existence of a “ministry of equality staffed only by women.” The unjust and gynocentric nature of this ministry was implied through a *topos of definition*, as the name “ministry of equality” should imply equal hiring practices. This perhaps contradicts the postfeminist logic employed when refuting feminist arguments of workplace discrimination (see section 8.1.1). The fact that this ministry is exclusively staffed by women was taken as evidence of discrimination in the hiring process, as opposed to men’s lack of qualifications or different choices on the job market. In addition, the existence of this ministry was described as “quite Orwellian,” creating an intertextual relation with *Nineteen Eighty Four* (Orwell, 1949). The novel featured four ministries, each of which were named with antonyms in order to hide their true function. For instance, the ‘Ministry of Truth’ was devoted to propaganda. In comparing the “Ministry of Equality” to Orwell, this could suggest that its true function is to promote discrimination.

Furthermore, there was some degree of vagueness within the comment. First, Commenter2 referred to “the law” in the singular with a definite article as opposed to specifying a particular law, suggesting that the entire legal system is gynocentric. Second, the use of deixis (“here is hell”) obscured which country and which legal system was being referred to. Readers may thus interpret ‘gynocentrism’ to be universal and unbounded by nations, so the entire planet could be accurately described as “hell” for men. Alternatively, given the prior discourse, it is possible that “here” referred to the UK and Spain. Moreover, the comment began by specifying that these gynocentric laws privilege “abused” women, but in the second and third paragraph this adjective was dropped and Commenter2 instead discussed how these laws benefit women in a general sense. Overall, the lack of precise contextual detail reinforced the idea of universal ‘gynocentrism.’

In the same thread, Commenter14 used a *topos of abuse* to argue that women are unfairly able to exploit the legal system and therefore these “privileges” must be “removed.” This was supported through pseudo-statistics and a *topos of numbers*, in alleging that “90%” of accusations are false and that the conviction rate stands at only “1%.” Moreover, Commenter14 also specified “known lies or exaggerations,” opening up the possibility for this figure to be even higher. Alternatively, the pseudo-statistics may function as hyperbole intending to demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of domestic violence accusations are untrue, rather than aiming to offer a precise figure.

Furthermore, the low conviction rate of domestic violence and rape was supplied as evidence for the prevalence of false accusations, where a conviction is equated with guilt. Therefore if a not-guilty verdict is presented, or if the charges are dropped, this is indicative that the prosecutor lied, as opposed to there being a lack of evidence to convict.

Table 46: Commenter14's use of the *topoi* of abuse and numbers in thread 19.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims (subordinate)
<p>Commenter14 (8): Like 90% of domestic violence accusations in court have known lies or exaggerations. Only a 1% conviction rate its always leverage in relationships and divorce. This privilege needs to b removed from them. [thread 19]</p>	Abuse	<p>Women are able to exploit legal systems by falsely accusing men of abuse in order to gain leverage to benefit themselves. Therefore we need to remove this privilege from women.</p>
	Numbers	<p>Because 90% of accusations have known lies, we need to remove this privilege from women.</p>

Another purported example of gynocentrism in the legal system was leniency towards female criminals. Post28 compared two real-life legal cases where a women received mere weeks in jail while a man received centuries in jail for an apparently similar crime (see Figure 16). The two cases were presented as equivalent as both incidents involved car collisions, and so through a *topos of justice* readers may conclude they should have received similar sentences. In the title, this was framed as an example of gynocentrism and “another example” of women’s “advantages” over men. The predication “another” suggests that there are other examples and that this is no isolated case.

Apologized after accidentally killing a woman as he fled an illegal ANTIFA street protest while being attacked with baseball bats, but he also posted edgy memes...



SENTENCED TO
**LIFE IN PRISON
PLUS 419 YEARS**

Yelled "**FUCK YOU, WHITE TRASH**" as she rammed her Mercedes SUV into a crowd, injuring 16 people...



SERVED **38 DAYS** IN JAIL

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lizzie_Grubman

Figure 16: Post 28, submitted with the title "Another example of how women have advantages over men!!" It received a score of 504.

Table 47: Post 28's use of the topos of justice.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Title: Another example of how women have advantages over men!!</p> <p>Text: Apologized after accidentally killing a woman as he fled an illegal ANTIFA street protest while being attacked with baseball bats, but he also posted edgy memes...SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON PLUS 419 YEARS</p> <p>Yelled "FUCK YOU, WHITE TRASH" as she rammed her Mercedes SUV into a crowd, injuring 16 people. SERVED 38 DAYS in jail.</p> <p>[post 28]</p>	Justice	These two people committed similar crimes. Therefore, they should have been given similar sentences.

Not only was the female criminal given such a meagre sentence in comparison to the male criminal, but her crime was also presented as more serious. There is a difference in speech acts, as the male criminal “apologised” to his victim while the female criminal “yelled” racial and classist abuse towards hers. Further attention is brought to her speech, as it is written in bold capital letters. OP28 also specified the model of her car as “Mercedes,” which may emphasise the harmful impact of her “white trash” insult as it is a luxury car brand. Moreover, while the male criminal “accidentally” killed a singular woman, the female criminal “rammed” her car into a crowd, “injuring 16 people” in the process, suggesting a difference in both intentionality and in the number of casualties. In addition, the man was positioned as acting in self-defence against “ANTIFA.” Consequently, readers may conclude that women are privileged relative to men if they can receive such leniency.

However, in constructing this narrative OP28 had left out several important facts. Firstly, OP28 included the name of the female perpetrator (Lizzie Grubman) but not the male perpetrator (James Alex Fields Jr). Second, the meme made no mention of the 35 people who were injured in Fields Jr’s car attack, presenting Grubman’s attack as more serious. Most crucially, OP28 did not mention that the male perpetrator was a neo-Nazi and his crime was the murder of Heather Heyer at the 2017 ‘Unite the Right’ rally (Demkovich and Duggan, 2019). His Nazi beliefs were euphemised by the predication “edgy,” which may establish common ground between Fields Jr and r/MGTOW users who may also post “edgy memes” online. By leaving out this crucial information, readers may gain a more sympathetic view of Fields Jr and agree that the main differentiating factor between the two cases was gender. Furthermore, as well as promoting antifeminist ideas, the meme is also subtly racist and supportive of a White supremacist ideology. The OP downplayed and justified the crimes committed by a convicted neo-Nazi and presented the antiracist “ANTIFA” protestors as truly culpable for Heyer’s death. In addition, the OP highlighted the anti-White insults of Grubman. Overall, White supremacy was mitigated, while racism towards White people was foregrounded.

Multiple commenters agreed that the discrepancy in punishment was related to misandry and gynocentrism. For example, Commenter35 claimed the meme demonstrated “systemic sexism against men.” This was intensified by the repetition of exclamation marks and use of intensifying adverbs (“seriously corrupt” “obviously”). The predication “systemic” also suggests that the problem is institutional and not a matter of individual biased judges. Moreover, Commenter35 employed a ‘victim reversal’ strategy in order to highlight a perceived double standard in the treatment of women and men, suggesting that were a man to only receive 38 days’ jail time after injuring 16 others there would be “a riot in the street.” This rests on a *topos of justice* in assuming that because both these criminals are equal, the public should respond to them in an equivalent manner.

Table 48: Commenter35's use of a topos of justice in thread 28.

Text	Topos	Data and claim
<p>Commenter35 (2): That is seriously corrupt! Goes to show you there's obviously systemic sexism against men in our courts! If the roles were reversed it would be a riot in the streets! [thread 28]</p>	<p>Justice</p>	<p>Female criminals are treated differently to male criminals. Therefore, there is systemic sexism against men and the public should be just as angry towards female criminals as they are toward male criminals.</p>

Another purported aspect of gynocentrism within r/MGTOW was the suggestion that women are celebrated for breaking the law. Some commenters in the same thread expressed disbelief that Grubman was sentenced at all. For example, Commenter39 offered three alternatives to a jail sentence, culminating in a “Netflix special.” This suggests that not only are female criminals rewarded materially, but also socially with celebrity status. Interestingly, both Commenter39 and Commenter31 used the adjective phrase “stunning and brave” to describe the award Grubman should have received. This was likely an intertextual reference to the title of the first episode of the nineteenth season of *South Park* which parodied political correctness. In the episode, the protagonists’ parents repeatedly insisted that Caitlyn Jenner was “stunning and brave” in order to avoid being assaulted by self-described “PC bros” (Parker, 2015). By referring to Grubman as “stunning and brave,” the commenters drew a parallel between the two women as Jenner was also responsible for a fatal car crash in 2015, though she was not criminally charged (BBC News, 2015). Moreover, users could suggest that both women benefit from gynocentrism as demonstrated by the fact that they both continued to enjoy successful careers despite having injured or caused the death of others, or perhaps that both women can use their identity as female (and in Jenner’s case, as transgender) as a shield against criticism.

(8.07) Commenter39 (1): I’m surprised she got any jail sentence. Shouldn’t she have gotten an award for being stunning and brave? ... along with a book deal and a Netflix special? [thread 28]

(8.08) Commenter31 (3): Why even give her a punishment? Give a medal instead. Stunning and brave medal...[thread 28]

In sum, in contradiction to feminist claims of patriarchy and male privilege, MGTOW constructed society as being driven by mechanisms of gynocentrism and female privilege. Moreover, women were represented as being fully aware of their privilege and as intentionally exploiting gynocentrism

to their advantage, such as by making false accusations of rape or abuse in order to gain leverage in a divorce settlement.

8.2.2. Misandry

Misandry featured as a prominent topic of discussion within the dataset, although the term itself was not always used. Users provided anecdotes of misandry that they have experienced, or discussed areas in society where men are supposedly discriminated against.

First, Commenter4 in thread 19 provided a link to a (now defunct) website named 'The Real Sexism Project' after another user asked for a "full list" of inequalities against men, thus evaluating the website as a relevant and useful source of information. The website name likely intertextually references the feminist campaign 'Everyday Sexism Project' (Bates, 2015), though the predication "real" sexism suggests that this project is more accurate than Bates' campaign.

(8.09) Commenter3 (14): This is saddening to read. Is there a website with a full list of these law inequalities? I'd love to read a full transcript

Commenter4 (6): <http://www.realsexism.com/>

You might find this relevant. [thread 19]

When active, the website provided 'evidence' of discrimination against men in areas such as healthcare and economics, showcased via statistics and graphs (see Figure 17). The homepage featured subheadings such as "Feminism debunked" and "Female privilege." Thus, the site positioned itself as explicitly antifeminist and aligned with men's rights. The website also claimed that "almost all lethal and legal discrimination" in the West happens to men, suggesting that sexism against women is mainly a problem outside of the Western world. While sexism against Western women was not completely denied, it was mitigated as less frequent, less acceptable and with less severe consequences. However, it should be noted that much of the 'evidence' was posted in the form of memes and the statistics were often decontextualised, for example mentioning that men make up the majority of homicide victims without mentioning the gender of the perpetrator. Nevertheless, linking to such a website could lend more credibility to MGTOW claims of misandry, as theories of misandry are supported through external evidence and statistics rather than isolated user anecdotes.

The Real Sexism Project

Welcome to The Real Sexism Project.

Despite what you have been told, in the western world today almost all legal and lethal sexual discrimination is against men.

Men are 97% of combat fatalities.

Men pay 97% of Alimony

Men make 94% of work suicides.

Men make up 93% of work fatalities.

Men make up 81% of all war deaths.

Men lose custody in 84% of divorces.

80% of all suicides are men.

77% of homicide victims are men.

89% of men will be the victim of at least one violent crime.

Change in Marriage and Earnings of Men 1970-2011



AS SHOWN BY THIS CHART THE CHANCE OF A MAN BEING MARRIED IS DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO HIS INCOME

WOMEN TREAT MEN AS CASH MACHINES - REALSEXISM.COM

Figure 17: A screenshot of *realsexism.com*, captured by the WayBack machine on 30th June 2020.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200630011913/http://www.realsexism.com/>

Moving on, Commenter18 in thread 42 asked for examples of men being “favored” and another user responded with the military draft. This played with the polysemy of ‘favoured.’ Men were said to be ‘favoured’ in the sense that men are preferentially chosen for the draft, but this does not confer any benefit to men. The existence of a male-only draft is a commonly cited example of misandry within men’s rights groups (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Hodapp, 2017), so it is unlikely that Commenter10 was genuinely suggesting that the draft is an example of male privilege, instead the opposite. The smiley face at the end of comment indicates playfulness, diminishing the possibility that others will take his suggestion seriously.

(8.10) Commenter18 (20): "I think guys get favored lots of times in their lives"

Really? I can't think of any thing where men are "favored". Do you guys know of any examples?

Commenter10 (3): Military draft :) [thread 42]

It is also worth noting that while male-only military drafts were argued to constitute misandry, it was also suggested that women do not belong in the military. For example, Commenter5 in thread 15 lamented the entrance of women into men’s spaces, with the military singled out as a particularly egregious example (“goddamn” “for god sake”). The verb choice of “invade” represented women as foreign occupiers, suggesting that they do not rightfully belong in those places. Furthermore, women’s entrance into these spaces was represented as particularly harmful because of their

“nagging.” Hearing women ‘nag’ is compared to a “life sentence,” suggesting it is inescapable and constraining to men’s freedom.

(8.11) Commenter5 (13): today women ' nagging is a life sentence
 from home to work to public space to every single institution public or private
 even in the goddamn military for god sake
 they invade every space men are and start complaining an nagging to accommodate
 themselves [thread 15]

Another institution where men were argued to experience misandry is education. In thread 42, Commenter20 claimed that male students are not scored as highly by female teachers and are more likely to be punished for misbehaviour. First, this was stated to have been “proven multiple times” alluding to prior research on the topic. However, no sources were provided so readers would have to take it at face value that these sources both exist and provide strong enough evidence to “prove” that female teachers are biased. Through a *topos of justice*, readers may conclude that there exists misandry in schools if male and female students are not being treated in the same manner. Moreover, this differential treatment may have an impact on male students’ wellbeing or mental health as they are said to be “well aware” of this discrimination.

Table 49: Commenter20’s use of the *topos of justice* in thread 42.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter20(18): It's already been proven multiple times that female teachers around the world deliberately mark down boys even if they give the same answers as girls. They are also more likely to punish boys for being naughty and more likely to send them to detention. The saddest part is that male students are well aware of this [thread 42]</p>	Justice	Male students are treated differently and more harshly to female students even when they perform in the same manner. Therefore, we can say that there is misandry in schools.

Users also provided examples of misandry in the workplace. These examples overwhelmingly related to office jobs, especially within computing professions, reflective of the demographics of Reddit as comprising mainly middle-class, educated professionals (Barthel et al., 2016). Usually, these were anecdotes of male employees being held to a higher standard than female employees. In telling such stories, users represented themselves as capable, competent workers, in contrast to their lazy,

frivolous female co-workers. Often, users denied that their female co-workers did any work at all. Therefore, misandry in the workplace could be represented as particularly unjust and in violation of the liberal principle of meritocracy as well as equality. For example, Commenter7 in thread 42 explained that higher expectations regarding productivity are placed upon male developers in his company, so that men are repudiated by managers for falling behind on work while female developers are given a “free pass” even when they “forget” to do their job. He employed a *topos of justice* in highlighting the discrepancy in treatment between two male and female developers, concluding that women live life on “easy mode.” This is a metaphor from video games, suggesting that women have an easier time at work as they may face fewer obstacles and can progress quicker than men.

Table 50: Commenter7’s use of the *topos of justice* in thread 42.

Text	<i>Topos</i>	Data and claim
<p>Commenter7 (42): This continues into the work place; e.g., I'm a Developer. I've worked on projects where we had to have a catch up meeting every Friday with the Software Managers (all female) to show where we were on the project.</p> <p>I'd be given a piece of work to complete during the week, on Friday if it was not complete i'd explain why, going into detail about requiring more details from the Project Manager (a female) as the specification was lacking technical details; e.g., algorithm's required. I'd then be torn by pieces and put down in front of everyone by the female Managers, and scorned for being behind.</p> <p>However, I've sat in Friday meetings where a female Developer was behind on a project, and when asked why she'd giggle and go "Oh I forgot to do it tee hee hee" and the female Managers would all laugh with her and not call her out for actually forgetting to do her job.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>This is life on easy mode. [thread 42]</p>	Justice	Male developers who are behind on the work are punished, whereas female developers who are behind on their work are not. Therefore, female developers are privileged over male developers.

In this comment, the gender of every social actor was made salient either through pre-modifying adjectives (e.g., “male developers”) or as a noun phrase in parenthesis (e.g., “the project manager (a female)”). In continually specifying *female* when discussing poor work ethic, this may suggest that their incompetence is not incidental to their gender. Furthermore, there was a difference in the representation of women’s speech acts. Women’s speech was presented as aggressive, having “torn apart,” “scorned” and “put down” male developers. In contrast, in homosocial communication, women were represented as engaging in friendly speech acts such as “gigg[ing]” and “laugh[ing]” together. Moreover, their laughter was phonetically written as “tee hee hee” which may connote childishness. Overall, women were portrayed as incompetent and infantile, making their poor treatment of men particularly unjustified.

Finally, some users argued that misandry is unjust because men are necessary for a functioning society. Users pointed out that men have achieved more than women, or that men were responsible for the inventions and institutions used in modern society. For instance, Commenter59 in thread 40 asserted that society would not even last five years without men, thereby associating masculinity with civilization.

(8.12) Commenter59(3): I want a scenario of the world without men for 5 years. Suddenly one morning men are gone and nowhere to be found. Let’s see how fast civilization comes to an end [thread 40]

Similarly, Commenter22 in thread 27 associated masculinity with progress and scientific discovery (see Table 51). First, he positioned men as victims whose happiness is “forbidden” and who are unfairly “coaxed into giving away all [their] wealth to minorities.” It is assumed that this transferral is unjust, because these “minorities” should not be entitled to another man’s wealth. As a result, Commenter22 claimed there is “no longer” an incentive for men to succeed in society, evoking a *topos of uselessness*. Instead, men should follow in the example of Commenter 22 and “enjoy the party.” There was an allusion to societal collapse in the ending sentence, with the hyperbole “ride this burning ship” which suggests that men should continue to enjoy themselves even if the world is literally on fire around them, rather than take it on themselves to fix it.

Table 51: Commenter22's use of the topoi of uselessness, history, and definition in thread 27.

Text	<i>Topoi</i>	Data and claims
<p>Commenter22 (3): If a man expresses happiness, it is a form of forbidden privilege. If he succeeds, he is coaxed into giving away all his wealth to minorities. No longer is there an incentive there for him to do well, and this is why the world is now going backward instead of forward.</p>	Uselessness	There are no incentives for men to achieve as all their wealth will be taken from them and they receive no respect. Therefore men should go their own way instead of applying themselves.
<p>When the strong, masculine, successful man was worshipped, we discovered laws of mathematics and physics that governed the world. We understood the fabrics of reality. Today, we discover jack shit.</p>	History	History tells us that society was able to progress when strong, masculine men were respected. Today, we don't discover things. Therefore, we need to learn from the past and show subordination to these men.
<p>Women and minorities taking charge is about a race to the bottom. And neither of those groups will like it when we get there, but they're too dumb to realize that a strong man deserves respect, and that they are subordinate to him. Only when they realize their subordination to him, and pay the proper respects, will man once again have the incentive to innovate and conquer the universe. Until then, I'm enjoying the party. Fuck bitches. Why apply myself when some useless cunt will just take it away? I'll ride this burning ship till its burnt chasis chars the fucking earth. [thread 27]</p>	Definition	Strong masculine men, by definition, are more worthy of respect than other groups. Therefore others should be subordinate to them and show them respect.

Commenter22 created a juxtaposition between the discoveries of the past (“the laws of mathematics and physics”) and the discoveries of today (“jack shit”). This discrepancy was also presented syntactically, as two sentences were used to discuss the past yet only one short sentence is used to discuss the present, reflective of the fewer discoveries. Furthermore, this lack of progress was argued to be the result of men’s diminished social position relative to the ill-defined, vague past.

Because men today are no longer “worshipped,” scientific progress has stalled. Through a *topos of history*, readers may conclude that we should learn from the past and start treating men with more respect.

In addition, women and minorities were predicated as being naturally “subordinate” to strong men. Interestingly, Commenter22 used an unmodalised declarative “they are subordinate” rather than a conditional (they should be subordinate). This naturalises patriarchy and White male dominance over other groups in society as a truth that people need to “realise” and internalise rather than challenge. Furthermore, women and minorities were predicated as unintelligent relative to men (“too dumb” “useless”). Women in particular were portrayed negatively, referred to via the gendered pejoratives “bitches” and “cunt.” The use of “minorities” as a term of exclusion is particularly interesting. The singling out of “women” as a group oppositional to men is to be expected, however there is room for overlap between men and minorities. Therefore, “strong men” likely excluded men of colour, GBT men, disabled men and other men belonging to minority groups.

This argument assumed that men do not innovate and make discoveries for the sake of knowledge, but must be encouraged to do so by women and minorities. In the dataset, women were frequently negatively depicted as entitled and greedy (see chapter seven) yet this comment also displayed entitlement to women’s respect and admiration as well as to positions power and dominance (see, Kimmel, 2013; Manne, 2017). Perhaps this contradiction would be reconciled by suggesting that women do not have a claim to men’s resources and finances, but men’s entitlement to respect is warranted because of the group’s previous achievements. This entitlement stems from group membership and a *topos of definition*, as men are entitled to respect and power on the basis of their categorisation as men, even if the individual man has not personally made such achievements. While Commenter22 critiqued women and minorities for their inertia, he freely admitted to not wanting to apply himself and wishing to happily “ride the ship” until it burns rather than actually stop the burning.

8.3. Conclusions

Overall, the prevailing attitude towards feminism was that of an antifeminist backlash, though there was some evidence of a postfeminist ideology in appeals to meritocracy and personal choice. Contrary to previous research in representations of feminism (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016; Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Mendes, 2011), there was a lack of distinction between ‘legitimate’ feminists who promote equality and illegitimate, extremist feminists. Furthermore, there was a lack of disclaimers or attempts to present oneself as pro-feminist before asserting antifeminist statements

(Gough, 1998; Gough and Peace 2000). Instead, r/MGTOW users distanced themselves from feminism and positioned problems such as female superiority and discrimination against men as inherent to feminism itself. Therefore, there can be no acceptable or 'legitimate' feminism.

While an antifeminist ideology was prevalent, attitudes towards gender equality were split. Some users explicitly promoted a patriarchal society, looking back to historic or pre-historic patriarchies as the visionary model for society. More often, users appealed to the language of equality in their arguments against feminism. Arguments in opposition to feminism primarily relied on the *topos of justice* and aimed to highlight double standards. This allowed commenters to portray feminism as an illegitimate movement for equality, given that it apparently does not treat men and women in the same way despite its supposed egalitarian aims. The model of equality promoted was typically formal, rather than substantive. When faced with a discriminatory scenario, some users employed a 'victim reversal' rhetorical strategy and asked users to consider whether the same scenario reversed would be acceptable. Discussing how this strategy is used in accusations of reverse racism, McVey (2021) considered how such argumentation is problematic because it elides contextual factors in presenting *all* instances of differential treatment as motivated by prejudice and also because it assumes that racism (or in this case, sexism) is an interchangeable, universal set of behaviours. For r/MGTOW users, pointing out double standards was often an end in itself rather than a means to an end. In other words, users would point out the existence of a double standard but rarely posit solutions to the double standard. Furthermore, the 'double standard' often consisted of highly simplified, decontextualised comparisons and the 'evidence' produced by such a thought experiment is necessarily hypothetical and so cannot be empirically verified.

Moreover, there was a notable contradiction in discussion of feminism and equality. Users argued that feminism is illegitimate and hypocritical because feminists supposedly promote equality in white-collar work but not blue-collar work and neglect men who perform dangerous, manual labour. At the same time, users narrated anecdotes of the poor work ethic of their female co-workers and claimed that women are unsuited to harsh labour. Working in such professions may be taken as a sign of masculine toughness and so women entering traditionally male-dominated professions may be perceived as an invasion. Therefore, it is likely that feminism would be undermined regardless of whether or not they campaigned for women's entrance in blue-collar fields.

Still, it was not the case that there were no traces of feminist ideology or that users were never exposed to feminist arguments. Users shared screenshots of feminist social media texts, summarised feminist arguments in their own words, or used feminist and social justice vocabulary. However, users did not share feminist arguments in order to endorse them or with the intention of engaging in

genuine deliberation with feminists; rather feminist arguments were invoked in order to be mocked and repudiated. While some users attempted to challenge these dominant negative representations of feminism, these were few and far between and generally tended to be either ignored or downvoted. Meanwhile, negative representations of feminism were often highly upvoted and the most upvoted post in the entire dataset (post 40) was about undermining feminist arguments for equality.

Finally, society was represented as gynocentric. Women were argued to receive privileges in the form of more lenient prison sentences and easier promotions at work, while examples of male oppression included false rape accusations and harsher punishments at school. A discussion thread on misandry could function as a digital equivalent to feminist consciousness-raising groups, as men shared their experiences of misandry and received validation from others that their experiences were unjust, while also confirming that their experiences were not isolated examples but instead part of a larger system of discrimination and oppression. However, there were very few calls to action and discussions of how misandry could be abolished. Supporting previous research (Wright et al., 2020; Koller et al. forthcoming), there was little-to-no discussion of political strategy, such as organising a grassroots campaign, voting, or lobbying for example. Instead, users argued that the best men could hope for is to go their own way and attempt to avoid or 'opt out' of misandric structures.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

In this concluding chapter, I begin by summarising the main findings from this thesis and addressing my research questions posed in chapter one. Following this, I consider the limitations of this research and propose avenues for future research into the manosphere phenomenon. Lastly, I conclude with some reflections on the current state of antifeminist backlash and the mainstreaming of manosphere arguments.

9.1. Summary of research findings

This thesis sought to address three main research questions concerning argumentation on the topic of male separatism, relationships with women, and feminism respectively.

RQ1: How do users of r/MGTOW represent themselves and their ideology and argue in favour of separatism?

My first research question concerned self-representation and argumentation on the topic of separatism. In general, I found that, in line with the ideological square strategy, r/MGTOW users tended to represent themselves positively and emphasise the positive traits of the in-group, such as independence and strength. Furthermore, I found that users and moderators preferred to describe MGTOOW in terms of positive capacity and what men are able to do as a result of their separatism, as opposed to what they refrain from doing. In addition, MGTOOW positioned themselves as an oppressed, marginalised group. First, MGTOOW represented themselves as oppressed due to their gender through systems of 'misandry' and 'gynocentrism.' Men were claimed to face discrimination in the workplace through higher expectations on male employees and overrepresentation of men in manual labour. Furthermore, men were argued to be marginalised in the context of intimate relationships due to expectations for men to subordinate themselves to their partners and neglect their own personal needs. Men were also argued to be the victims of individual women's manipulations, such as through being falsely accused of rape or by being tricked into settling down with a gold-digging cheater. Second, MGTOOW represented themselves as marginalised due to their red-pill beliefs and separatist ideology. Despite ostensibly representing common sense and the truth, MGTOOW represented their discourse as suppressed and censored by a politically correct, feminist orthodoxy.

Although MGTOOW represented themselves as marginalised, there were no calls to collective action or discussion of how men can come together to end their oppression. Rather than attack perceived

feminist power structures directly, r/MGTOW users sought to 'opt out' of the status quo and improve their individual lives while avoiding as much misandry and exploitation as they could. Moreover, small acts such as frivolous, individual consumer purchases were framed as acts of defiance against power structures which demand men's subservience to others. MGTOW represented themselves as protecting their own autonomy and personal freedoms above all. Relatedly, MGTOW promoted an ideology of neoliberal self-sufficiency. Although discrimination was a common topic of discussion, r/MGTOW users did not identify or describe themselves as victims and looked down upon those who did. Women and feminists were accused of playing the 'victim card' to secure undue advantage, while men who fall to women's manipulations were derogated as unintelligent and unmasculine. At the same time, MGTOW needed to position themselves as victims of women in order to bolster their claims of discrimination and justify their separatist ideology. To differentiate themselves from illegitimate victims, some users narrated small stories and allusions to past mistreatment from women or explained how this experience led them to go their own way and improve their lives for the better, rather than continuing to let trauma define them.

In terms of argumentation, the most salient *topoi* employed in arguments in favour of separatism were the *topos of freedom* and *topos of finance*. MGTOW argued that men ought to separate from women so that they can enjoy increased personal freedoms and escape the shackles of marriage, while saving themselves money at the same time. Other prominent *topoi* included the *topos of advantage* in highlighting the purported benefits of separatism, such as improved mental health and more free time. The credibility of these arguments was often bolstered by narratives and photographic evidence. Members shared stories and photographs which demonstrated to others the benefits of their separatist lifestyles and examples of the types of hobbies they can pursue or vacations they can take now they are no longer tied down by women. Furthermore, through the *topos of reality* and *topos of censorship*, MGTOW argued that their ideology represents established, verifiable facts, as opposed to opinion, and therefore should not be contradicted. For some users, the very fact that their discourse is censored or silenced functioned as proof of its veracity in itself. Relatedly, the fact that MGTOW represents the truth was also used to argue that MGTOW is self-evident and that there is no need for the group to advertise itself or intentionally recruit new members. Whenever men seek to find the 'truth' about society or about women, they will always come to learn that MGTOW is the answer. Overall, MGTOW presented themselves as rational and having made the logical, sensible decision to go their own way in the face of evidence.

RQ2: How do users of r/MGTOW represent women and relationships and argue against marriage or relationships with women?

The representation of women and relationships was overwhelmingly negative. The discourse was characterised by hostile sexism, as women were portrayed as inherently toxic, deceitful, irresponsible, entitled, untrustworthy, or even subhuman. Women's cognitive abilities were frequently the target of derision, as women were represented as having inferior brains to men or as being incapable of rational thought. In particular, women were hypersexualised and represented as promiscuous 'sluts' seeking to maximise their number of sexual partners and as being more than willing to cheat on and cuckold their partners. Even outside of the context of intimate relationships, women were portrayed negatively. For example, users shared stories of the incompetence of their female co-workers, the cruelty of female bosses, and the vindictiveness of feminists. Through acronyms like 'AWALT' and appeals to evolutionary psychology, women were represented as a homogenous group and fundamentally inferior to men.

Through the *topos of definition, history, and uselessness*, users argued that all women are fundamentally alike and have been throughout history, so there is little point in trying to find a suitable partner. The frequency of the *topos of uselessness* may speak to characterisations of MGTOW as the "abandon wing" of the manosphere (Lin, 2017, p. 14). Rather than try to find a suitable partner or try and 'train' negative traits out of women, the best option is to avoid women altogether. Furthermore, relationships with women were portrayed as expensive, exploitative, unequal, limiting, or even dangerous for men, so other prominent *topoi* included the *topos of finance, abuse, justice, freedom and threat*. Like arguments in favour of separatism, these arguments were frequently embedded within narratives of personal experience, in which users narrated stories about toxic relationships and manipulative partners. These arguments were also supported with references to academic studies or authoritative texts such as the Bible, although the actual factual content or general message of the original text may be distorted or cherry-picked to suit their separatist ideology. Furthermore, arguments against marriage and relationships were also presented in the form of memes, which could allow users to present their arguments in a more humorous, light-hearted fashion or in a manner which could potentially be easier to disseminate outside of the MGTOW context.

However, there was a strong tendency towards *hasty generalisations*. A common discursive pattern was for one user to discuss the behaviours or actions of a singular woman, such as his ex-girlfriend. Then, the next user would discuss the behaviours or actions of women in general; in other words, switching from discussing "woman" to "women" or from "her" to "them." Alternatively, this switch could occur within a comment by the same user. This tendency towards hasty generalisation

sustained MGTOW ideology; a user would describe an ex-girlfriend who was toxic and conclude that *all* girlfriends are toxic, or that a man could *never* be happy within a heterosexual relationship. As Johanssen (2021) explained, while such feelings may be a momentary over-reaction, when they are recorded and shared online it may contribute to a “cementing” of particular beliefs and ideologies (p. 124). Men were not encouraged to re-enter the dating pool and hope to build a more loving, healthier relationship, but to abstain from dating altogether.

RQ3: How do users of r/MGTOW represent feminism and gendered relations and argue against feminism?

Like the representation of women, r/MGTOW users typically represented feminists as a homogenous group. There was no distinction between legitimate, equality-seeking feminists and illegitimate, superiority-seeking feminists; instead, negative predications were applied to feminism and feminists as a whole. In general, feminists were portrayed as seeking superiority and dominance over men, as promoting hatred of men, and selectively ignoring areas in society where men are disadvantaged in order to maintain their false narrative that men are privileged over women. Society was represented as gynocentric, with women being privileged in every institution in society, including the legal system, education, workplaces, and intimate relationships. Overall, feminism was repudiated as unnecessary and as attempting to further entrench women’s privileges. While the homogenisation of feminists and lack of juxtaposition between good and bad feminists does suggest some divergence from previous research into representations of feminism (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016; Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Mendes, 2011), there were also continuities in the representation of feminists as hateful, extreme, and even violent towards men. Furthermore, many negative stereotypes of feminists overlapped with more general misogynistic stereotypes. For example, both women and feminists were represented as hypocritical, greedy, and exploiting the labour of men. Contradictorily, women and feminists were portrayed as weak, unintelligent, and pathetic, yet simultaneously powerful, dominant, and dangerous.

Users would argue of the illegitimacy of feminism through a *topos of abuse*, claiming that women can exploit feminist activism for their own personal gain such as by falsely claiming to be an abused women. Arguments against feminism predominantly relied on the *topos of justice*, where users would argue that feminism is illegitimate because it does not treat men and women in the same manner. Alternatively, this *topos* could be employed to demonstrate the existence of gynocentrism or misandry. However, this *topos* was reliant on a formal understanding of equality rather than substantive. In this understanding, any differential treatment between men and women could be framed as unjust, even when the differential treatment is aimed to resolve injustice and inequality.

Furthermore, the notion of 'equality' could be used to justify unfair treatment, such as inviting a woman out on a date and refusing her food, or to create false equivalences, such as equating the right to an abortion with the right to control one's finances. On the other hand, some users promoted a conservative, separate-but-equal version of equality wherein men and women ought to belong to separate spheres. Through a *topos of history*, some users argued that society ought to replicate historical models of gendered behaviour where women were encouraged to stay at home and take on a domestic role rather than enter the public sphere. For these users, feminism was illegitimate not because it fails to promote equality, but because equality is not a suitable goal in the first place. The *topos of definition* was used to argue that men ought to dominate women because they are men, while a *topos of threat* was used to argue that feminism destabilised the natural order. Thus, users would mobilise the concept of equality in order to criticise and undermine feminism, rather than to genuinely promote fairness and gender justice. Finally, many arguments against feminism exhibited similarity and continuity with much older antifeminist arguments. For example, appeals to men and women's natural, biological roles have historically been used to deny women the right to an education (Kimmel, 1987). Feminist critiques of gender roles have been portrayed as a "war against nature" and threat to the social order in both the 19th century (Kimmel, 1987, p. 268), the 20th century (Mendes, 2011) and in the 21st century. Again, this suggests that the antifeminism and misogyny of the manosphere should not be considered as a unique or exclusively online phenomenon, but a continuation of longstanding patriarchal gender ideologies.

Through the three chapters, some recurring themes could be identified. First was the prevailing ideology of neoliberal individualism. r/MGTOW users were highly atomised, as they denied that they were a group or a movement and favoured a logic of connective action and sharing individual grievances. Acts of resistance against gynocentrism were more likely to entail making oneself happy through consumer purchases than improving the lives of all men through revolutionary uproot of a gynocentric system. There was a general lack of sympathy for men in unhappy relationships and when facing examples of misandry, users were encouraged to toughen up and avoid playing the victim. Similarly, when cases of disadvantages against women were acknowledged, such as an underrepresentation of women in STEM occupations, this was rationalised as the result of women's individual choice rather than discrimination. Furthermore, users claimed that MGTO is about promoting autonomy and personal sovereignty and refusal of obligations to others. Users argued that men should not be obligated to use their wealth to the disadvantaged and that because society "doesn't care" about men, men should not care about society in return. In addition, users argued that a bachelor lifestyle was superior to marriage because single men are able to put themselves first and never need to ask permission or consider the feelings of others.

There were also some interesting examples of interdiscursivity throughout the dataset. First, there was a strong tendency towards interdiscursivity with scientific or academic discourse. For example, users referred to statistics or reported results of academic studies to support their claims about women or gynocentrism, though the statistics were often hyperbolic and users did not always accurately cite, or even name, the specific academic studies referred to. Furthermore, users would employ pseudo-scientific vocabulary when discussing women's nature, for example in claiming that women are afflicted by "war bride syndrome." Alternatively, MGTOW appropriated actual terminology from sociology such as "hypergamy" or theories from evolutionary psychology such as women's purported "dual mating strategy." Although evolutionary psychology and claims of there being substantial, innate differences between male and female brains have been criticised (Cameron, 2015; Denes, 2011; Donaghue, 2015), they perhaps lend legitimacy to MGTOW ideology as being grounded in scientific principles. Furthermore, researchers have also highlighted the challenges that reliance on evolutionary psychology may pose for feminism. Cameron (2015) explained that initially, Darwinian evolutionary theory was used by feminists to argue for women's rights, suggesting that if women were treated more similarly to men, then women would be able to increase their intellectual development and adapt to new demands. However, biology may also be used to justify gender inequalities and ignore the role of culture in explaining why men and women make different choices (Cameron, 2015; Donaghue, 2015b). This was also the case for MGTOW, where users suggested that men and women have different brains or that women's different physiology and psychology meant they were unsuited to manual labour or programming work.

Furthermore, there was also much intertextuality and interdiscursivity with feminism. Users recontextualised feminist discourse, such as by sharing screenshots of tweets by feminists or through indirect speech and summing up feminist arguments, for the purpose of refutation. In particular, users employed 'pseudo-arguments' and appropriated an exaggerated feminist voice in order to demonstrate the ludicrousness or hypocrisy of feminists, constructing feminist *strawmen*. Moreover, the discourse included remixes of feminist texts, such as taking a feminist comic and altering the content to convey an antifeminist message or by altering feminist slogans such as 'my body my choice.' The most prevalent *topos* used in argumentation against feminism was the *topos of justice*, with the *topos of humanitarianism* also being used, demonstrating that feminist concepts like fairness and equality may be rhetorically mobilised in order to undermine feminism. It was also notable how some MGTOW arguments against marriage or relationships paralleled both historical and contemporary feminist arguments, such as comparisons between marriage and prostitution or an emphasis on invisible labour within relationships. This is reflective of Banet-Weiser's (2018)

theory of the 'funhouse mirror' wherein feminist arguments become twisted and distorted for the purpose of antifeminism. To some extent, this could also be considered an attempt to construct a 'reverse discourse' in resistance to feminist disciplinary power, as users sought to deconstruct and dismiss feminism using its own language and argumentation.

Finally, the most prominent example of interdiscursivity was with economic discourse. Women and feminists were portrayed as greedy gold-diggers and feminist issues such as the wage gap or wealth inequality were dismissed as illegitimate issues in contrast to the 'real' problems faced by men. In addition, one of the most salient arguments proposed in favour of separatism was it allows men to maintain exclusive control over their own finances and frees them from spending obligations towards other people. Furthermore, relationships were framed in terms of marketplaces where women and men hold differing market values. For women, this value rapidly declines upon hitting 'the wall.' Similarly, relationships were discussed in terms of the costs (to men) and benefits (to women) and as a series of financial transactions to which women do not equally contribute. Women and relationships were also represented as poor "investments" because men will never receive a higher return on interest. Not only were women said to invest very little of their own money into a relationship, expecting men to pay for all their expenses, but through gynocentrism women can be allocated half of a man's assets during divorce. Relationships overall were denigrated as a waste of time and money, as there is no way for men to profit from them monetarily. There was no recognition of men's love or affection for their partners, or an acknowledgment that men may *enjoy* spending money on their partners. Likewise, there was no recognition of women's financial contributions to a marriage, let alone women's non-financial contributions such as emotional or domestic labour. Overall, like the pick-up artists described by O'Neill (2018), MGTOW "promote a logic of individualism centred on profit maximisation" (p. 127). The contradiction in denigrating women as greedy, gold-diggers obsessed with increasing their personal wealth, while also having their own preoccupation with finances was never acknowledged.

Overall, this thesis has made an empirical contribution regarding the discourse of MGTOW, who remain under-researched relative to other groups in the manosphere such as involuntary celibates and men's rights activists. In particular, this thesis has contributed to knowledge regarding the discourse of MGTOW on the Reddit platform specifically, contrasting with previous studies into MGTOW on Twitter (Jones et al., 2020) and self-hosted platforms (Wright et al., 2020). This study has also corroborated the findings of previous research into MGTOW, such as the prominence of women as a topic of discussion in spite of separatist aims (Johanssen, 2022; Wright et al., 2020), the importance of narratives as a means of persuasion and performance of a MGTOW identity (Wright et

al., 2020), the individualistic nature of MGTOW and lack of calls to collective action (Lin, 2017; Wright et al., 2020), and the sexist, dehumanising representation of women (Farrell et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). However, while this was not something I attempted to assess empirically, it appeared that the prevalence of misogynistic language was higher in Wright et al.'s (2020) study than in my own. This may be due to the differences in moderation and platform dynamics, given the fact that r/MGTOW had been quarantined at the time of data collection and so perhaps users were more careful to avoid using overtly misogynistic language in order to avoid their subreddit being banned. Cross-platform comparison would certainly be a relevant area for future research.

Furthermore, this research has addressed calls for further research into online sexism at the intersection of critical discourse studies, social media, and feminist theory (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018), in addition to calls for further research into argumentation strategies and the representation of feminists in the manosphere (Krendel et al., 2022). In particular, this thesis has contributed new knowledge regarding the argumentative and discursive strategies used within r/MGTOW to persuade other members to reject feminism as a social movement and withdraw contact from women. For example, I have discussed the use of certain *topoi*, such as the *topos of finance* and the *topos of justice*, and critiqued argumentative fallacies such as hasty generalisations. Another significant contribution is the examination of the discursive representation of feminism and feminists, considering how r/MGTOW discourse on feminism is influenced by postfeminist, antifeminist and even pro-feminist ideologies through the use of intertextual allusions to feminist slogans and remixing feminist cartoons. Overall, these contributions are significant as understanding the underlying logic of male separatist, antifeminist argumentation is necessary in order to come up with counter-arguments and strategies for preventing or minimising the harms of MGTOW and the wider manosphere.

Finally, this thesis has also made a theoretical contribution to the discourse-historical approach to critical discourse studies, as I have expanded on Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) work by identifying the additional *topos of censorship* and *topos of freedom*. In addition, this thesis has demonstrated how the DHA and analysis of argumentation and *topoi* can fruitfully be applied to Reddit discussions. Kienpointner (2018) wrote that argumentative components such as claims and warrants can be difficult to distinguish and reconstruct in "authentic" texts (p. 233). As I have demonstrated, arguments made on social media and Reddit may be expressed multimodally via memes and users can collaborate and build on each other's arguments, or share arguments or provide evidence made elsewhere online through hyperlinks and screenshots. In the context of echo chambers or online

communities operating via a predominantly communitarian logic, claims which may be taken as controversial in other communities (e.g., women are toxic, marriage should be avoided) may be taken for granted as common knowledge and therefore require very little in the way of supporting evidence and data, or may not even need to be stated as an explicit claim. In addition, I have demonstrated how discourse-historical argumentation analysis should consider the deployment of ironic and pseudo-arguments, where it can be difficult to discern whether or not the user is faithfully representing the argument of a non-present antagonist or is constructing an exaggerated *strawman*.

9.2. Limitations and future research

This research has qualitatively investigated the discourse and argumentation of the r/MGTOW using frameworks from CDS and the DHA, though there are of course several limitations to this thesis. First, this research was based on a small dataset from a specific subreddit with data taken over a period of four months. As the r/MGTOW subreddit was banned during the course of this project, this prevented me from collecting further data from this source. In addition, the analysis concerned the discourse from a singular subreddit. This decision was made because Reddit is an extremely popular mainstream platform with billions of monthly views and had previously been identified as a popular source of manosphere activity. However, the MGTO community does not exist exclusively on Reddit. Future research could consider the discourse of MGTO on other mainstream platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, or TikTok and examine the similarities and differences between these platforms, with a particular focus on the platform infrastructure and affordances. For example, self-hosted MGTO forums warrant further investigation as these sites can enable closer control over membership and do not need to appeal to external administrators and rules, meaning that analysis of such websites could reveal a greater degree of hostile sexism (see Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021). It should also be noted that this dataset concerned MGTO in the Anglosphere, hosted on an American platform. However, one post was partially written in Afrikaans (see Figure 12) and some users mentioned that they lived outside of the United States in countries such as France and India. Future research could examine data from MGTO from other countries or languages other than English and compare the differences in argumentation strategies relating to differences in the sociocultural and historical contexts.

Second, this research concerned argumentation and persuasion within MGTO discourse on relationships and feminism. While the amount of upvotes or positive comments a post received can to some extent reveal its degree of persuasiveness, ultimately the extent to which an argument will be effective at encouraging other users to change their behaviour is difficult to determine through discourse analysis alone. This thesis has discussed the potential persuasive effects of argumentation

and the possible conclusions that readers may come to as a result of engagement with MGTOW discourse, but it has not measured the actual, tangible effects of this argumentation or which arguments or *topoi* are the most effective at persuasion. It is of course possible that readers could visit the MGTOW subreddit and read sexist arguments about women or feminism without having their mind changed or deciding they must separate from women – as demonstrated by the fact that I have produced this thesis without becoming an antifeminist myself. Similarly, this analysis has not attempted to discern the empirical effects that such sexist language may have on women readers. The actual persuasive or perlocutionary effects of this discourse could be an interesting avenue for future research, for example through interviews with former or current MGTOW-aligned individuals or through experimental procedures. Similarly, further research could also consider the ‘mainstreaming’ of MGTOW discourse and argumentation, such as the extent to which language or arguments associated with MGTOW are being used in non-manosphere spaces and the potential impact of MGTOW and the manosphere on mainstream discourse surrounding gender and sexuality.

Third, there were several aspects to my findings which I did not have space to discuss fully within this thesis. The period of data collection (Summer 2020) coincided with a revitalisation of the Black Lives Matter movement, so the data included some discussion of BLM and antiracism. For example, post 38 comprised of a ‘starter pack’ meme describing the “average BLM activist.” In addition, there were a few posts discussing LGBTQ rights and trans activists. The representation of these social justice movements within MGTOW, and indeed within the manosphere as a whole, certainly warrants attention in addition to the representation of feminism. Another topic that I have not discussed was that of parenting and familial relationships. While it was accepted that MGTOW means abstaining from romantic and sexual relationships to some degree, whether or not separatism should extend to familial relationships was more contested. There was notable discussion within the dataset as to whether or not men should become parents and how men could maintain their sovereignty and independence as fathers. For example, some users advocated surrogacy and adoption as possible routes for men to have children without entering a relationship with a woman. In addition, some users argued that it was important for MGTOW to have children - including daughters - so that they could set a good example for the next generation and teach them the appropriate gendered behaviour. Conversely, others argued that it would be cruel to raise children in such a degenerate, feminist society or that ‘nature trumps nurture’ meaning it would be impossible for MGTOW to raise respectable daughters. ‘Separatist parenting’ would be especially interesting to investigate further.

Finally, the group known as ‘FDS’ or ‘Female Dating Strategy’ were mentioned a few times within the dataset. The subreddit claims to promote “effective dating strategy for women” and at the time of writing (October 2022) has almost 250,000 subscribers, though has remained inactive for several months. To help women find a ‘high value male’ users offer advice such as dating multiple men simultaneously or asking men to pay for dates. Therefore, it is unsurprising that this subreddit was discussed with ire on MGTOW given that their promoted strategies appear to verify their stereotypes of women and heterosexual relationships. Critics have accused the subreddit of promoting misandry or as replicating the toxic, essentialist gender ideology of the manosphere that it was founded to counteract (Sisley, 2021). When prominent manosphere subreddits are quarantined or banned, anecdotally many Redditors ask why FDS is allowed to remain. Indeed, with the use of terms like “scrotes” to refer to men or conceptualising relationships in terms of marketplaces, linguistic parallels can certainly be drawn between the manosphere and FDS. Of course, any comparison or discussion of toxicity must take note of the fact that no acts of violence or murder against men have been attributed to the FDS community – unlike the manosphere. In another project (Koller et al., forthcoming) my colleagues and I compared the language and argumentation of MGTOW with lesbian separatists. Our results demonstrated that while there were several linguistic similarities, such as homogenisation of the perceived out-group through vague quantifiers and unmodalised statements, the two groups were decidedly *not* the same phenomenon but with reversed gender ideologies. Thus, a comparison between FDS and other manosphere groups and whether there is any merit to popular claims that FDS are ‘just as bad’ as the manosphere would be especially fascinating to consider.

9.3. Closing remarks

Antifeminist backlash has certainly grown louder and more pernicious over the course of this project. Since I started my PhD in October 2019, there have been several notable moments of widespread antifeminist backlash. A particularly prominent example was in June 2022, when the US Supreme Court voted to overturn *Roe V. Wade* and in doing so plunging American women’s abortion rights in jeopardy. Following this, eight states have prohibited abortion entirely or almost entirely, with further bans soon to follow (McCammon, 2022). This has led to fears about the safety of abortion rights in other countries, such as the UK (Dimsdale, 2022a). For example, the British government was criticised for removing references to bodily autonomy and reproductive rights from its statement on freedom of religion and gender equality (Davies, 2022). While abortion is legally accessible in the UK, having an abortion is technically a criminal act and women may face prosecution for procuring an abortion without the permission of two doctors. Consequently, some

feminists have called for abortion to be fully legalised in the UK (Dimsdale, 2022a), rather than partially decriminalised as it stands today.

The overturning of *Roe V. Wade* occurred during the six-week defamation trial between actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. Depp had previously lost a libel suit in 2020 against *The Sun* for labelling him a wifebeater, as the judge found that there was sufficient evidence for 12 incidents of assault by Depp against his ex-wife Heard (BBC News, 2020). Two years later, Depp successfully sued Heard for libel over an article she published in *Washington Post* about her experiences facing backlash for speaking out about sexual violence and abuse, despite the fact Depp was never personally named in the text. The manosphere and men's rights activists latched on to the trial, using Heard as 'proof' of the prevalence of false rape allegations and the dangers of slogans such as 'believe women' (Kim, 2022). During the trial, it was striking to notice the similarities between the made about Heard and the arguments made about women within my own data. Similar to the representation of women within *r/MGTOW*, Heard was accused of being a gold digger and making fraudulent claims of abuse against her ex-husband Depp in order to receive financial compensation, while being abusive herself. Although Heard had evidence against Depp, including photographs and videos, testimony from multiple witnesses, even texts from Depp admitting to abuse, she was accused of fabricating this evidence such as by painting on her bruises with makeup or convincing witnesses to lie under oath. Later, it would be revealed that Depp himself had submitted manipulated photos and videos as evidence against Heard (Mahdawi, 2022). Furthermore, alongside texts about wishing to rape and burn Heard's corpse, one of Depp's texts read aloud in court said that Heard "will hit the wall hard" (VanHoose, 2022) – a term used within the manosphere and indeed within my own data from *r/MGTOW*. Therefore, the language and arguments used within the trial, and in media reactions to the trial, exemplify the mainstreaming of manosphere beliefs.

The trial, which was livestreamed online, has been described as a "public orgy of misogyny" (Donegan, 2022a) and "violent backlash to the Me Too movement" (Choudhri, 2022). The misogyny and abuse directed towards Heard was amplified by the work of bots and aggressive advertising by conservative media outlets – The Daily Wire alone reportedly spent almost \$50,000 promoting anti-Heard content on social media (Romano, 2022). However, this backlash was not confined to the manosphere. In fact, many of the strongest and loudest supporters of Depp were women and one of the most strongly pro-Depp platforms was TikTok (Choudhri, 2022), which has a majority female userbase (Ceci, 2022). Donegan (2022a) described how social media users sought to "mock or undermine Heard" by turning pictures and audio of her crying into memes and performing mocking re-enactments of her testimony. Brands such as Milani cosmetics and Duolingo were also involved in

the backlash against Heard – with one sex toy shop even creating a dildo in the shape of a glass bottle in reference to Heard’s testimony about being raped with one (Neumann, 2022).

For many, the trial was taken as definitive proof that #MeToo or feminism had gone too far (Choudhri, 2022; Donegan, 2022a). Some commentators drew parallels between the trial and Gamergate (Bardhan, 2022; Romano, 2022), as both brought antifeminist arguments into the mainstream and involved spectacular levels of misogynistic networked harassment in response to women discussing sexism and harassment. It is especially noteworthy that no male celebrity who has been charged with rape or sexual violence, such as Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, or Kevin Spacey, received anywhere near the extent of online abuse that Heard did. The backlash towards Heard exemplifies the culture of silencing towards women who speak up against sexual violence (Donegan, 2022c), while reinforcing myths of the ‘perfect victim’ as much of the vitriol directed at Heard was due to the fact she had used retaliatory violence (Bardhan, 2022). Overall, the spectacular misogyny of the Depp-Heard demonstrates the increasing influence and scale of antifeminist backlash, beyond manosphere subreddits and forums.

Constructing men and women as dichotomous, homogenous groups, suggesting that women are inherently manipulative, promiscuous gold-diggers, claiming that feminism has ruined the lives of innocent men – none of these beliefs originated on r/MGTOW. However, these beliefs become extremised within MGTOW and the solutions proposed are more radical. Rather than claiming that gold-digging women merely exist, MGTOW posit that *all* women are gold-diggers, that this is the result of women’s biology and psychology, and therefore men need to separate from *all* women as a result. Furthermore, although the largest MGTOW community has since been banned, as have other prominent manosphere subreddits, this does not mean MGTOW have disappeared or that their sexist, antifeminist ideology no longer has an impact on mainstream discourse regarding gender relations, as demonstrated by the misogyny of the Depp-Heard trial. Therefore, MGTOW must not be dismissed as a fringe phenomenon with little impact on the ‘real world’ nor must they be considered an aberration, unconnected to mainstream beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. Therefore, it is my hope that this thesis can be used to raise awareness about the harms of the manosphere and the dangers posed by sexism and antifeminist backlash for women and for all of society.

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ATLAS.ti Report

Codes

Report created by Jessica Aiston on 11 Jan 2023

- Fallacy – Argumentum ad ignoranium

Comment:

Appeal to ignorance - a standpoint is regarded as true if it has not been refuted, even if it has not been proven to be true

- Fallacy - Argumentum ad hominem

Comment:

Verbal attacks on the antagonist's personality or character rather than the strength of their argument, including a direct attack, a circumstantial attack, or pointing out contradictions.

- Fallacy - Argumentum ad populum/pathetic fallacy

Comment:

Populist appeals to masses of people, appealing to emotions and convictions of a specific group

- Fallacy - False analogy

Comment:

Comparing two scenarios which are not comparable.

- Fallacy - Hasty generalisation/secundum quid

Comment:

Making a generalisation based off too few examples, or a singular example.

- Fallacy – Misuse of authority

Comment:

Taking an authority figure's quote out of context, citing an invalid authority figure, misquoting an authority figure.

- Fallacy - Slippery slope

Comment:

Asserting that one event will inevitably lead to a chain of disastrous events, without sufficient evidence this will be the case.

- Fallacy - Strawman

Comment:

Twisting words, presenting a distorted picture of antagonist's standpoint so you can refute it more easily

- Fallacy - Tautology

Comment:

Premise is same as conclusion

- Topic: (Casual) Relationships

Comment:

Discussion of boyfriends, girlfriends, long-term partners, casual relationships, dating. If mentioning a girlfriend, code as 'relationships' - if mentioning a wife, code as 'marriage.'

- Topic: Abuse

Comment:

Discussion of abusive relationships, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse.

- Topic: Activism and social justice

Comment:

Discussion of social justice movements other than feminism (e.g. BLM, trans rights), mention of 'social justice warriors' or activist methods in a general sense such as protesting, lobbying.

- Topic: Appearance

Comment:

Discussion of physical appearance.

- Topic: Beta men

Comment:

Discussion of men perceived to be 'beta' or blue pill.

- Topic: Chad, alpha men

Comment:

Discussion of men perceived to be 'alphas' or 'Chads'

- Topic: Divorce and breakups

Comment:

Discussion of divorce and divorce proceedings, ex-partners, or breakups.

- Topic: Double standards

Comment:

Explicit mention of 'double standards' for men and women

- Topic: Education

Comment:

Discussion of education, including nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities, examination, homeschooling

- Topic: Equality

Comment:

Explicit use of the word 'equality.' Discussion of inequalities, differential treatment or outcomes - not necessarily named as being sexist, racist, homophobic etc.

- Topic: False allegations

Comment:

Discussion of false allegations of rape, abuse, violence.

- Topic: Family, Children

Comment:

Discussion of familial relationships (including mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, grandparents etc), raising children, and general family life.

- Topic: Female Dating Strategy

Comment:

Discussion of the group known as 'Female Dating Strategy'

- Topic: Female privilege, gynocentrism

Comment:

Discussion of female privilege, preferential treatment towards women or 'gynocentrism.'
Examples of women being treated better than men.

- Topic: Feminism, Female Oppression

Comment:

Discussion of feminists, feminism, the women's movement, including things that feminists claim to be 'sexism' 'misogyny' or 'female oppression.'

- Topic: Finances

Comment:

Discussion of finances - including income, saving money, spending money, child support, taxes, alimony.

- Topic: General comment on post

Comment:

Comments which do not add any extra information and mostly just compliment the user, e.g. "nice post" or a laughing emoji.

- Topic: History

Comment:

Discussion of classical societies, pre-history, or general discussion of life in the past.

- Topic: Hobbies and lifestyle

Comment:

Discussion of hobbies (e.g. travel, video games, cycling) and a bachelor lifestyle.

- Topic: Infidelity

Comment:

Discussion of adultery, or dating multiple people at once.

- Topic: Law and justice

Comment:

Discussion of legal system, laws, breaking the law, following the law, juries, judges, policemen.

- Topic: LGBT

Comment:

Discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, including discussions of homophobia and LGBT rights.

- Topic: Logic, rationality, intelligence

Comment:

Discussion of intelligence or rationality, discussion of male and female brains.

- Topic: Marriage

Comment:

Discussion of marriage, weddings, wives, husbands. If mentioning a girlfriend, code as 'relationships' - if mentioning a wife, code as 'marriage.'

- Topic: Men

Comment:

Code whenever there is a reference to other men, including use of he/him pronouns.

- Topic: Men's rights, misandry

Comment:

Discussion of examples of perceived 'misandry' or discrimination against men, areas where men are treated poorly in society, discussion of men's rights activism or advocacy.

- Topic: MGTOW

Comment:

Discussion of MGTOW, male separatism, MGTOW beliefs, the MGTOW subreddit or other MGTOW websites.

- Topic: Offence, cancel culture

Comment:

Discussion of 'cancel culture' or people being 'cancelled', people being 'triggered' or 'easily offended', reference to 'snowflakes'

- Topic: Other manosphere groups

Comment:

Discussion of PUAs, MRAS, incels.

- Topic: Politics

Comment:

Discussion of politics, including elections, governments, specific politicians, political campaigns.

- Topic: Race, racism

Comment:

Discussion of racism, explicit mention of another person's race or ethnicity.

- Topic: Rape, sexual violence

Comment:

Discussion of sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment.

- Topic: Red pill theory

Comment:

Explicit mention of the words 'red pill'

- Topic: Reddit

Comment:

Discussion of the Reddit platform, including moderation, quarantines, other subreddits, mention of reddit affordances such as upvoting, banning.

- Topic: Religion

Comment:

Discussion of religion in a general sense, or specific religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or followers of these religions.

- Topic: Science

Comment:

Discussion of science, including space travel, psychology, biology, experiments, specific scientists, or discussion of general scientific discoveries.

- Topic: Sex

Comment:

Discussion of sexual intercourse

- Topic: Sex work, OnlyFans

Comment:

Discussion of sex work and sex workers, including stripping, prostitution, OnlyFans etc.

- Topic: Society

Comment:

Discussion of 'society' in a general sense, e.g., modern society.

- Topic: Suicide and mental health

Comment:

Discussion of mental health and mental illness, including depression, self harm, suicidal ideation, suicide.

- Topic: Women

Comment:

Explicit mention or reference to women, including use of she/her pronouns

- Topic: Work

Comment:

Discussion of the workplace, jobs, going to work, employment

- Topos of abuse or exploitation

Comment:

If a group is exploiting another group, we should try to stop this exploitation / if a right or an offer of help is being abused or exploited, then the right or offer of help should be withdrawn.

- Topos of advantage

Comment:

If an action brings positive consequences, the action should be carried out

- Topos of authority

Comment:

If an authority figure says that an action or proposal is (not) right, the action should (not) be carried out

- Topos of censorship

Comment:

If a group's discourse is being suppressed, then what they are saying must be correct

- Topos of danger or threat

Comment:

If an action bears dangerous consequences, the action should not be performed.

- Topos of definition or name-interpretation

Comment:

If an action, thing, or group is named as X, then they should carry the qualities contained in the (literal) meaning of X.

- Topos of finance

Comment:

If an action is too expensive or causes a loss in revenue, action should be taken to diminish the costs.

- Topos of freedom

Comment:

If an action comprises another person's personal freedoms, it should not be carried out.
If an action was made freely, then the action should be supported.

- Topos of History

Comment:

Because history teaches that specific actions have consequences, we should perform a specific action in a specific situation comparable with the historical example

- Topos of Humanitarianism

- Topos of justice

Comment:

If persons/actions are equal in specific respects, they should be treated /dealt with in the same way

- Topos of Law or right

Comment:

If the law prescribes or forbids an action, then the action should (not) be performed accordingly.

- Topos of Numbers

Comment:

If the numbers prove a specific topos, the action should be performed

- Topos of Reality

Comment:

Because reality is the way it is, an action should (not) be performed

- Topos of Responsibility

Comment:

If a group is responsible for the emergence of a specific problem, then they should work to find the solution

- Topos of uselessness

Comment:

If an action will not be useful, or will not lead to our desired aims, the action should not be carried out.