

Grievance and Responsibility: Emotional motivators and knowledge production networks in
men's rights and pro-feminist men's groups in North America

by

Edwin G. Hodge

B.A., University of British Columbia, 2006

M.A., University of British Columbia, 2011

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Supervisory Committee

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M.A., University of British Columbia, 2011

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Supervisory Committee

Helga Hallgrimsdottir, School of Public Administration
Co-Supervisor

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, School of Public Administration
Co-Supervisor

Steven Garlick, Department of Sociology
Department Member

Min Zhou, Department of Sociology
Department Member

Abstract

The men's rights movement (MRM) is a loosely affiliated collection of primarily online communities that together form a substantial component of a broader constellation of online men's groups known as the "manosphere". Though the specific ideologies that comprise the core of the modern MRM have existed since the mid-1970s, it was not until the advent of modern online communications that the movement was able to iterate into the form it is today. This research project examines the MRM as a form of reactionary countermovement, rooted in a collective sense of *grievance*, which directs knowledge producers and movement participants alike to engage in collective identity construction and in-group boundary maintenance through a shared, collaboratively developed countermemory. The research, composed of a qualitative analysis of MRM-produced texts found across more than thirty websites and online communities, indicates that the bulk of MRM literature and online activity facilitates the maintenance of this countermemory and to enable the movement to challenge its ideological opponents. Additionally, through a limited number of narrative interviews with members of pro-feminist men's groups, this research contrasts the inward-facing orientation of MRM knowledge production and activity against that of pro-feminist men's organizations, which engage in outward-facing, community-focused activism rooted in a shared sense of *responsibility*. This dissertation contributes to social movement theory by illustrating how online movements make use of virtual space through the construction of what I term *virtual geographies* to facilitate identity construction and knowledge transmission. The MRM makes use of these spaces to construct alternative discursive frameworks – countermemory – which allow for a reconceptualization of men's social position from one of privilege and dominance, to one of marginalization and oppression.

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Territorial Acknowledgement

I respectfully acknowledge that I work, learn, and live on the unceded territories of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. As a settler on these lands, it is important for me to remember the history of this region, and to strive to do my part to further the goals of Reconciliation between settler-colonizers and the Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

Dedication

For Sarah. There may never be a way to repay the emotional labour you have invested in helping me finish all of this. Thank you.

For my parents. Your sacrifices and support have made everything I've done possible. This is for you.

Preface: Notes on authorial position

This project is the result of the interactions between subject and author that result from my social position and the reactions of my participants to it. Indeed, the strong, negative reactions to my biography and social position on the part of the men's rights activists I attempted to recruit into this project necessitated a significant structural change to the scope of the research. In the twenty-first century, social media networks make it difficult to bury or downplay one's past, and previous actions have a way of returning to haunt you.

In my early twenties, I flirted briefly with men's rights ideology. I spent a great deal of time on early blog pages and discussion boards associated with men's rights ideology. Later, as my university education came to include sociological theory – and gender theory more importantly – my convictions wavered and I came to recognize the logical and empirical errors present in some men's rights literature. It was not long before I had left the movement behind and began to explore feminist theory in a more serious fashion. By the time I had finished my master's thesis, I had firmly embraced feminist theory as a powerful tool in the examination of men and men's lives.

Some years later, I was interviewed for a relatively obscure men's health and lifestyle magazine, where the author presented a heavily editorialized version of the events I had related to him about my move from a fascination with men's rights ideology to a feminist perspective. I gave little thought to this exchange, though in retrospect, I clearly should have, as upon publication, the article was immediately shared and re-shared in men's rights spaces online. For several weeks, the article would appear in posts where I was called a liar, a gender-traitor, a feminist shill, and a host of less flattering terms. In addition, my home address, phone number, personal email address, and my university contact information were posted and re-posted in several men's rights spaces, resulting in a small but intense period where abusive emails to my personal and work email accounts became an almost hourly event. After a few months, the attention died down, and the harassers moved on, but every few months or so, the article resurfaced, where it again became the subject of mockery, derision, and I could once again look forward to receiving angry, sometimes-abusive emails from self-identified men's rights activists. In what can only be described as a painful irony, my story of leaving a movement that had become associated with anger and often-toxic rhetoric prompted some MRAs to send angry and often-toxic messages calling me a liar.

This all resulted in something of an unofficial boycott during the recruitment phase of the research; my invitations to publicly-known MRAs were met with either non-responses, or variations on the theme of "fuck off". During the research phase, I would occasionally encounter men's rights discussions where I was the subject, where I was routinely referred to as a "liar", "traitor", "cuck", "feminist shill", and a raft of other, less genteel names. What this indicated was that even were I to obtain interview participants, rapport building would have been a slow, fraught process, if it were to even happen at all.

As researchers – especially as researchers of people in movements – it is critical that potential participants feel they can establish rapport with us, and where that sentiment is absent, projects built on active, informed participation can be difficult. This is not to say that social researchers should not engage in activism for causes they believe in, but in the age of social media, precautions must be taken. Had I been more circumspect in my own online activities, this research may have taken a markedly different shape.

In the end, I chose to adopt the position of “passive oppositional lurker” (discussed in Chapter four) in MRM spaces. I could gain access to publicly available materials and to observe in-group dialogue without subjecting myself to the risk of attack by opponents. This necessarily limited the scope of the investigation, but it also provided me with an opportunity to thoroughly scrutinize and critique my own positions throughout the project’s runtime. The most important challenge came by way of self-assessment; like many progressives, I had fallen into a routine of judging MRM groups by their worst members – treating MRAs as though each of them was but one small step removed from Marc Lepine or Elliot Rogers. This can be a useful strategy for maintaining in-group motivations in the face of opposition; few things can get a movement motivated to engage like a fresh outrage from its ideological opponents. Yet, as I investigated, I found myself needing to reassess that position. The MRM, like most other movements, is not monolithic. It is a multi-tiered, dynamic ideological movement full of often robust internal debates about meaning, belief, and identity. It is often slow to call out radicalised elements of its membership, but such work does happen from time to time. I am still opposed to its epistemology, its rhetoric, and its goals, but I am less inclined to vilify it than I once was.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is common to refer to PhD dissertations as “investigations” or even more commonly as “research”. This is true, but it is also incomplete. Projects of this scope are research, but they are also journeys, explorations that demand their authors leave behind comfortable surroundings to investigate someplace else. In the social sciences, dissertations are rarely about discovery; as social researchers, our mandate is to visit places already inhabited, to engage with knowledge already being constructed and reconstructed, and to construct narratives, rooted in empirical observation that explain to others what we have seen. This dissertation is an account of my exploration of a space on the fringes of social discourse, but a space on the verge of becoming mainstream. It is not a definitive account, nor is it an exhaustive one; it is a sincere, good-faith attempt at understanding an often-discussed but often-misrepresented group of men and women whose beliefs and rhetoric have placed them on the outside of academic knowledge production.

The men’s rights movement (MRM) is a loosely organized constellation of largely online groups, organizations, and activist communities – often referred to as the “manosphere” – collectively operating under a shared, counter-intuitive belief: that it is men, not women, who are the most disadvantaged, most marginalized people in Canadian and American societies. For the men’s rights activists (MRAs) who self-identify with the movement – or with one of its fellow travellers in the so-called “manosphere” – the men’s rights movement provides a vehicle through which they can articulate an alternative version of recent history. It is an often-conspiratorial narrative where feminist activists, under the guise of seeking equality for women, have been engaged in a mission of female supremacy, seeking to overthrow the traditional social order and replace it with a new, feminist utopia where women are in charge, and men reduced to disposable beasts of burden.

Not all MRAs are so apocalyptic in their rhetoric, yet there are many highly visible members of the movement whose rhetoric is not merely incendiary, but violent. Where some MRAs see examples of a growing bias against men in North American societies, others see the opening shots in a “gender-war”,

“So it is in the gender revolution. Radical feminists have captured major institutions, using them to implement their ideology. Men have respond like frightened sheep. This has allowed feminists to implement drastic changes to America with blinding speed, as social changes go. Almost all the institutions in America have joined the new orthodoxy, from the Boy Scouts to conservative Christian organizations... So the men who rebel are outlaws. They craft solutions as individuals, such as Game and MGTOW (men going their own way).” *sic* (Kummer, 2018)

Men’s rights discussion groups will often object to such hyperbole, highlighting it as a case of being unhelpful to the cause of “true” equality, but such rhetoric remains common. Even some of the most high-profile and visible members of the men’s rights movement have become (in)famous for engaging in similar levels of hyperbole,

“I’d like to make it the objective for the remainder of this month, and all the Octobers that follow, for men who are being attacked and physically abused by women – *to beat the living shit out of them*. I don’t mean subdue them, or deliver an open handed pop on the face to get them to settle down. I mean literally to grab them by the hair and smack their face against the wall till the smugness of beating on someone because you know they won’t fight back drains from their nose with a few million red corpuscles.” *Sic* (Elam, 2010)

In 2013, the preceding quote appeared in a blog post by Paul Elam, founder of *A Voice for Men*, one of the most popular men's rights websites found online. Though he subsequently edited the blog entry to call it "satire" (Elam, 2013), the post stands as a reminder that violence against women – as rhetorical devices, jokes, or promises – remains endemic within the manosphere.

In recent years, the men's rights movement has moved from the fringes of society to a more mainstream position. Men's rights organizations have held public lectures by movement leaders in major cities across Canada and the United States, and held international conferences in America, Australia, and the United Kingdom and, in what must be the crowning achievement of the movement, MRAs from the National Coalition for Men have been invited to speak to Trump Administration officials, where their arguments and rhetoric have been heard by administration officials in charge of education policy in the United States (Moore, 2017). In the United Kingdom, the men's rights movement has emerged from the fringes of online discourse to the center of a small but vocal protest party called the Justice for Men and Boys (and the women who love them) Party. These developments have made an examination of the movement – its beliefs, practices, and organizational structures – necessary, even urgent. There has been a sharp increase in the number of misogynist attacks on women in recent years, so much so that the Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit organization that tracks active hate groups in the United States, has recently begun to track what they term "male supremacy" movements, of which several men's rights organizations are included (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). It is therefore important for social researchers to devote serious attention to such groups, attention which has not been present in the past several decades. Researchers must understand what draws potential recruits to movements like the men's rights movement, or any of its fellow travellers in

the manosphere; are they merely seeking a place to belong (Putnam, 2001) – a place that validates their feelings of alienation – or is there a resonance felt by potential recruits that goes beyond solidarity? This project is a contribution to this imperative.

Research purpose and questions

This research is situated within a qualitative framework, the purpose of which is to examine the knowledge production systems of an amorphous constellation of movements, communities, and organizations that collectively operate under the umbrella of the men's rights movement. It is difficult to accurately assess the number of individuals who identify with the ideology of the men's rights movement, and for the purposes of this research, such an estimate is not important. Certainly, there are many thousands of men – and a significant number of women – who self-identify with the movement's ideology, but a census of active men's rights activists is not the purpose of this research. Instead, this research focuses on an examination of what North American men's rights activists argue, how they argue it, why they argue it, and most importantly, what motivates them to argue what they do. This research draws on materials produced within the men's rights movement, by activists explicitly connected to the movement, as well as by scholars and academics whose materials are either sympathetic to the movement or openly supportive of it. These materials have been gathered from websites, online forums, video and podcast recordings, and books published by or for the movement. An annotated list of active men's rights websites can be found in appendix C.

To provide additional context, and to illustrate how a men-centric movement might operate outside of a men's rights framework, this research also involves an analysis of a small number of key informant interviews, conducted with individuals whose activism in various men's movements and groups hew to a pro-feminist framework. These interviews also illustrate

the antagonistic relationship many pro-feminist men's groups have with members of the men's rights movement. Most of these interviews involved individuals who identify as men.

This research asks two fundamental questions:

1. What feelings or attitudes motivate the actions and rhetoric of the men's rights movement, and how do those attitudes differ from those of individuals associated with pro-feminist men's groups or communities?
2. What is the shape of men's rights movement knowledge production networks? How is knowledge production structured, disseminated, and deployed by men's rights activists?

As this dissertation will illustrate, the answers to these questions reveal a stark difference in motivation and attitudes between men's rights activists and pro-feminist activists, despite each group's similarly stated goals of helping to empower men and to work towards a more egalitarian society. This dissertation will also illustrate how knowledge production and dissemination differs within each movement; men's rights knowledge production networks are largely self-referential and inward-facing, deployed primarily in service of maintaining in-group counter-memory in the face of historical fact, while pro-feminist men's knowledge production is largely other-regarding and outward-facing, deployed to facilitate men's acknowledgment and subsequent disassembling of privilege as part of a larger project of social justice activism. As a result, the knowledge production networks of men's rights organizations and pro-feminist men's organizations are not merely competitors, but antithetical in nature.

Contributions to literature

This project engages with social science literature in two key areas: social movements and gender theory, specifically theorizing around men and masculinities. Research in these fields is strong, yet several areas remain underdeveloped. This research contributes to these bodies of literature by addressing what I have identified as areas of theoretical underdevelopment.

Reactionary social movements

Research on contemporary social movements is richly developed and robust. The body of literature that has emerged from the study of social activism continues to grow. Yet when viewed from a distance, this growth has a distinctive pattern to it: researchers appear to have a bias towards studying equity-seeking activism, or activism rooted in progressive causes, such as civil rights, economic or social justice, environmental protection, or democratic reform (Morris and Mueller, 1992; Tarrow, 2011; Melucci, 1996; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Jasper, 2008). Indeed, this pattern has been apparent for quite some time and has been directly illustrated (Pichardo, 1997; Futrelle and Simi, 2004), yet it persists. The result is that reactionary, anti-equity, racist, or misogynistic movements remain understudied from a sociological perspective. In the past decade, reactionary movements including the Tea Party, new Militia groups and Patriot movements, xenophobic and white supremacist movements – including the Alt-right – and misogynistic movements like the Red Pill, Incel (“involuntarily celibate”), and men’s rights movements, have grown rapidly with relatively little academic attention being paid to them. While there has been a tendency in popular media to dismiss the MRM, doing so is more a product of ideological or rhetorical strategies than one of research; though reactionary, the MRM is a coherent social movement, with a recognizable and largely consistent ideological and intellectual tradition. It demands to be studied.

This research contributes to the study of reactionary social movements by situating and contextualizing men's rights activism within the constellation of counter-equity or reactionary movements. Further, this research illustrates several of the structural components of reactionary movements that help them grow and reproduce in social contexts where they face scrutiny and stigma, including their use of free spaces of prefigurative practice and collective countermemory in the construction of online communities bounded by (sub)cultural borders.

Cultural borders, identity, and virtual geographies

Revolutions in information technologies have fundamentally changed how social activism is structured. The unprecedented growth of communication networks in the twenty-first century has in some ways transcended geophysical, political, and even linguistic boundaries, resulting in networks of social action that span nations, continents and cultures. These patterns have been identified and theorized by several theorists (Castells, 2001; Castells, 2012; McEwan and Sobre-Denton, 2011; Yang, 2003; Harlow and Harp, 2012). Yet more research is needed. Researchers must engage more deeply with the ways that online communities – particularly those organized around reactionary or extremist principles – use online, virtual spaces to construct new cultural borders and identities that ignore traditional state borders in favour of staking out virtual geographies to claim and police.

This research contributes to such discussions through its analysis of online men's rights communities, and their position within the broader constellation of reactionary social movements rooted in gender politics. Through this examination, I illustrate how the men's rights movement emphasizes identity construction and maintenance to a greater extent than traditional social movement activism. I note how a significant portion of the MRM's time and energy is devoted to the reification of in-group identity and the maintenance of cultural (or sub-cultural) boundaries

around men's rights spaces online – especially where such spaces exist as part of a larger aggregation of disparate virtual communities. I illustrate how the MRM's countermemory and its dissonance with established historical facts require men's rights activists to expend a significant amount of time reinforcing and maintaining in-group identities. This in turn limits the time spent engaging in traditional patterns of social movement activism.

Gender theory: men and masculinities

The study of men and masculinities is a growing interdisciplinary element of the broader gender studies field. In the past three decades, the study of men and men's lives has grown from a relatively obscure sub-genre of women and gender studies to a robust field of its own (Messner, 1998; Messner, 1997; Connell, 2005; Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2005; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). Indeed, concepts like hegemonic masculinity and Kimmel's aggrieved entitlement form crucial components of this research project. Like most other social science disciplines, the study of men and masculinities owes a great deal to the pioneering work of feminist theorists and scholars, particularly feminist women of colour whose development and continuing contributions to concepts like intersectionality and the matrix of oppression (Collins, 2000) have both widened and deepened the study of gender and gender performativities.

This research contributes to this body of work through its analysis of the ways that the men's rights movement use feelings of anger, alienation, and isolation felt by some men to stoke feelings of resentment, grievance, and ultimately hostility towards and about progressive activism and progressive ideologies – feminism most importantly. This research illustrates that without adequate interventions or emotional support networks, vulnerable men – even those from otherwise privileged backgrounds – can be drawn into reactionary networks that are linked to broader networks of radical and even extremist ideologies. In chapters five and seven, I illustrate

the connections between the men's rights movement and the Alt-right, a loose coalition of reactionary groups rooted in racist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic and xenophobic ideologies.

Dissertation outline

This dissertation is laid out in three rough sections. In chapters two and three, I conduct an extensive literature review beginning with an analysis of the men's rights movement. I first examine the current state of academic research into men's rights organizations, noting that for the most part, the movement tends to be researched by those who see it as a reactionary countermovement. I also examine how the men's rights movement sees itself and its relationship to the rest of society, rooted often in an oppositional – and sometimes conspiratorial – dynamic that positions men's rights activists as oppressed (and suppressed) underdogs in the Culture Wars.

In chapter three, I conduct an historical review of the various North American men's movements that emerged out of the student and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on three distinct strands of men's activism: the men's liberation movement (which went on to become the pro-feminist men's movement), the mythopoetic men's movement, and the smaller, more radical men's rights movement. I illustrate the ways that these three movements begin to organize around distinct emotional attitudes: men's liberation around feelings of *responsibility* for men's complicity in violence against – and continued oppression of – women; the mythopoetic men's movement around feelings of *grief* at what they see as the loss of men's "essential" spirit and identity; the men's rights movement, around feelings of *grievance*, anger and frustration at what they perceive as the systemic oppression of men and the removal of men's access to social, economic, and political privileges.

In chapter four, I outline the empirical and conceptual frameworks I employ in the research. I describe the research instruments used to examine knowledge production within the men's rights movement as well as within pro-feminist men's groups. I introduce the concept of the "cultural diamond", first developed by Wendy Griswold (2013), and I illustrate its utility in examining the materials produced within the men's rights movement.

In chapter five, I present the results of my analysis of the men's rights movements online. I illustrate the self-referential nature of the movement's literature and discussions, and I present research indicating how MRA's collective sense of grievance leads them to adopt antagonistic attitudes towards feminists, progressive activists, and often women in general. In chapter six, I present my findings based on an analysis of the interviews I conducted with individuals involved in various pro-feminist men's groups and communities in Canada and the United States. I illustrate how unlike the men's rights movement, pro-feminist men's groups are generally outward-facing, concerned more with helping men to recognize their own complicity in perpetuating systems of dominance and subordination in North American societies, before presenting my interpretations and discussions of the research in chapter seven.

This research project illustrates that while anxieties over a perceived loss of social status and privilege do factor into men's rights ideologies, the more significant emotional motivators emerge from a collective sense of *grievance*. Participants in the men's rights movement see the world as essentially owing them something – a good job, a stable family, a well-defined social role – that has been denied to them. These participants locate the source of this denial in the dissolution of traditional patterns of gender, work, and family. In the men's rights worldview, men built society (all societies); men bled and died to defend society and therefore men deserve to reap their just rewards. In the more extreme corners of the movement, MRAs see feminist

activism and feminists in general as vectors of social instability and the root cause of men's problems. Men's rights ideology therefore demands that the world change to fit their normative framework; there is a right way to live, a right way to understand gender and gendered divisions of labour, and the world is doing it wrong.

Interviews conducted with key informants and participants in the pro-feminist men's movement indicate that the central emotional motivator is that of *responsibility*. Men are encouraged to recognize the sexist, discriminatory social structures that result in differential access to social, political, and economic capital for women and non-masculine citizens, and to recognize their complicity – knowing or otherwise – in it. Pro-feminist men's groups recognize that society is changing, and they believe that to be a positive contributor to that change is to accept that masculine privilege is real, and that they must share the burden of extending those privileges to all disadvantaged groups.

I conclude the research by revisiting my research questions, and I offer my perspectives on the research project's limitations. I also include several questions for further research, and reflect on my own subject position within the research project, noting my status throughout as a “passive oppositional lurker” (Daniels, 2009) throughout my investigation into the men's rights movement. Finally, I discuss my own personal journey through the various men's movements I examine, from my brief time flirting with men's rights ideology, to my time as a pro-feminist men's activist, to my current, ambivalent position regarding men's movements more broadly.

Chapter 2: Literature, Theory, and the Men's Rights Movement

The body of literature that has emerged from studying men's movements – and the men's rights movement in particular – is both extensive and multidisciplinary. In the social sciences, examinations of men's movements have remained largely the purview of sociology and psychology, with contributions from critical feminist criminology, social work and gender and women's studies (Mann, 2008; Dragiewicz, 2008; Allan, 2016; Gotell and Dutton, 2016). In many cases, this research and commentary is *about* the men's rights movement, rather than a product of it. This is unsurprising, as the men's rights movement and its attendant theories have little presence in academia aside from a few notable voices; there is some evidence of attempts to insert men's rights terminology into academic research through stealth, such as the insertion of men's rights terminology like “misandry” into discussions of gendercide by the political scientist Adam Jones (Jones, 2006), or the heavy use of the term by scholars Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young (Nathanson and Young, 2015; Nathanson and Young, 2001; Nathanson and Young, 2006) in their efforts to provide an academic foundation for men's rights thinking in their trilogy “*Spreading Misandry*” (2001), “*Legalizing Misandry*” (2006), and “*Replacing Misandry*” (2015).

The absence of academic research by self-acknowledged men's rights activists is at least partially explained by stigma; like many other reactionary movements, the men's rights movement emerges from a cultural space that not only attacks mainstream academic perspectives and research, but actively rejects them as irrational or worse, as products of a feminist-led conspiracy aimed at systemically depriving men of power or fundamental human rights,

“The Western world is home grown radical hate group has been infiltrating our education system with an insidious form of propaganda for decades but governments and the

average person has been manipulated by the disguised label of EQUALITY and WOMEN'S RIGHTS has hijacked a worthy causes into a one sided lens that renders white heterosexual males as untrustworthy and violent. The leaders of this ideology are the radical feminist authors and professors instructing students across thousands of women's studies across Western society who orchestrate an angered social change. Most wield their power while hidden inside the unchallenged ivory towers of government sponsored colleges and university bureaucracies." (*sic*) (Patten, 2017)

In the view of many MRAs, universities have become hotbeds of ideological radicalization, where feminist ideology and sensibilities are *de facto* cultural touchstones that pressure dissenters to remain silent or leave. This conspiratorial worldview has not lent itself well to attempts at establishing MRM-friendly research or programs of study, and so the bulk of men's rights knowledge production remains situated in alternative venues found largely online where MRAs are free to construct a narrative of victimization and marginalization that is not subject to the rigours of peer review or debate.

Academic research on men's rights activists and the men's rights movement often categorizes the movement as a species of social movement or "countermovement" (Blais and Dupuis-Deri, 2012), while other researchers have drawn on affect theory, feminist theory, or examinations of the role of status anxiety in men's rights activism. In this chapter, I engage with several of these theoretical positions to articulate a theory of men's rights activism that establishes it as a pattern of online activism rooted in shared status anxieties and feelings of *grievance*. I also construct a theory of online organization and activism among MRM participants that highlights how men's rights activists are building and laying claim to *virtual geography*, constructing cultural boundaries around online spaces that ignore national or

geophysical borders. Finally, I engage with literature produced within the movement itself to better illustrate the movement's goals, concerns, and identity. This discussion will contribute to a more complete picture of the men's rights movement.

2.1 Theorizing Masculinity

Masculinity within the men's rights movement closely aligns with a pattern of gender performativity called "neo-Traditionalism" (Gallagher and Smith, 1999; Willer, Rogalin, Conlon and Wojnowicz, 2013; Bartowski, 2000). This view of gender sees masculine and feminine gender performances as the product of intrinsic qualities associated with male and female bodies, and seeks to re-assert this ideology in the face of social change. Neo-traditionalist views are a reaction against contemporary social change and, as Willer et al illustrate can manifest as an increased desire to construct dominance hierarchies and enforce strict gendered divisions of labour (Willer, Rogalin, Conlon and Wojnowicz, 2013). Strict neo-traditionalist views are not universally held within the men's right movement, but are commonly held by many of the more influential voices within it (Elam, 2010; Straughan, 2016; Schmitz and Kazyak, 2016), and are ubiquitous in the more extreme men's rights communities online, where men are encouraged to adopt a narrow, dominance-focused pattern of behaviour that seeks to establish men as the undisputed rulers of society.

Gender performativity and neo-traditionalism

Though men's rights activists routinely and often vociferously reject the notion that masculinity is socially constructed, many academic researchers tend to view gender as a product of either social construction (West and Fenstermaker, 2002; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Rice, 2014; Butler, 2006), or more recently as emerging from the interactions of societies and bodies (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Sparkes and Smith, 2002; Messner, 1990). I

take the view that while the specific *coding* of gender ideologies remains largely the product of social forces, the performance of gender requires the existence of bodies and instantiates through body-reflexive practices (Connell 2005; Connell, 2001; Nayak 2006) designed to mould bodies into approximations of normative ideals. Bodies are thus inscribed by gendered practices, shaped in accordance with prevailing attitudes about the nature and expectations of masculinity; biological differences between sex categories are far less important than the social identifiers of gender in the construction and performance of gendered patterns of behaviour (Butler, 1998; Butler, 2006; Fine, 2012; Barad, 2003).

As a concept, body-reflexive practices are deeply enmeshed in intersectional understandings of gender performativity (Collins, 2000; Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989). Gender is a classed experience as much as it is implicated in race, sexual identity and orientation, ability, education or gender expression. As an ideology, gender informs individuals and societies about more than what socio-cultural traits to prize, it also informs us on how to behave; how to hold our bodies, move – or not move; how to take up space or surrender it; how to “earn” scars, and understand which ones are appropriate. In her examination of the lives of working-class white men employed in the construction industry for example, researcher Kris Paap noted the ways in which men took risks with their bodies as part of a larger pattern of working-class white masculinity, where safety was for “pussies”, and scars a measure of toughness and authenticity (Paap, 2006). By this understanding, “real men” worked through pain and illness; real men took risks and worked dangerous jobs; danger *was* manly, which meant that women who performed similar work, under similar conditions were a challenge to the correct performance of masculinity. So long as only men could do the heavy lifting, heavy lifting could be an effective stand-in for masculinity.

Intersectional analyses of men and men's lives owe much to the pioneering work of feminist theorists and scholars and to the contributions of Black feminist academics whose work forms the intellectual heart of intersectionality. While West and Zimmerman were critical in illustrating how gender manifested through social interactions (1987), it was Kimberlè Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins – among others – whose works revealed the distinct roles that race and class play in the formation of gender ideology and normative patterns of gendered behaviour (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Through this analytical lens, it becomes possible to see the ways that class and race (to say little of ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation) factor into gender performativity and to illustrate the extent to which men of different socio-economic, racial, or cultural groups are expected to engage in group-specific patterns of gendered behaviour (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Hurtado and Sinha, 2008).

This understanding of gender stands in stark opposition to the beliefs of the men's rights movement, which commonly argues for a view of masculinity rooted in biology, with culture playing an – at best – minor role in providing variation to a universal theme. In a discussion thread on the men's rights subreddit, a user posting under the name Rabid_pink_princess underscored this belief in a highly upvoted¹ comment, stating,

“... yes, men are very competitive too, of course, but it's a different kind of competitiveness. Competition among men is to unite them, competition among women is to divide us. Biologically men are hunters, they are designed to collaborate and form a

¹ On reddit as well as several other online communities, users can vote on posts made by other users. To “upvote” a post is to vote in favour of it, while to “downvote” is to signal disagreement. On reddit, downvoted comments will, after reaching a score of -5, be removed from visibility, while upvoted comment chains or posts will become more visible over time.

unit together, and they compete **inside** that unit, usually in order to create a hierarchy so their unit will operate better.

Women, instead, are gatherers. We, biologically, have to gather resources for us and our progeny. We are designed to be egotistic, we don't work together, we are not part of a unit with other women, every woman represents a different unit, and we compete with different units in order to remove them from our space. While men compete to create a hierarchy and work together, we compete to take different territories and resources.”

(Rabid_pink_princess, 2017)

The gender ideology of the men’s rights movement shares many similarities with that of other neo-Traditionalist movements that have emerged from socially conservative groups throughout North America. Such articulations reject the fluidity implicit in social constructionism by positing the existence of an “essential masculinity” drawn from some supposed inalienable nature. Whether this natural essence is drawn from Jungian archetypes as expressed in ancient hero-narratives a-la Robert Bly’s *Iron John* (1990), or from a God-given nature as is espoused by Christian writers like John Eldredge (Eldredge, 2001; Gallagher, 2005) is dependent on the religious or philosophical inclinations of the claims-maker, but it is useful to point out that both emerge from a reactionary critique of “feminist influence” on contemporary men. Both Robert Bly and John Eldredge saw changes in late twentieth century masculinity as both a result of feminism and as a crisis for men; both viewed the development of more egalitarian relationships between men and women as a threat to masculine virility and identity (Bly, 1990; Eldredge, 2001; Gallagher, 2005). Men, in the neo-Traditionalist view, are to be strong, self-reliant, and powerful, but they are also meant to be wild, untameable (by women or society), and even a little bit dangerous (Bly, 1990; Eldredge, 2001; Gallagher, 2005; Farrell,

1993). In Warren Farrell's own discussion of late twentieth-century masculinity, he points to changing family dynamics that have up-ended men's traditional roles and responsibilities, leading men to become confused and despondent as they come to grips with a feminist world that no longer seems to value them – if indeed it ever did (Farrell, 1993).

In the more extreme portions of the “manosphere” such as the “Red Pill” movement or the “Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)” movement, gender performativity is even more rigidly enforced, and follows an extreme version of neo-Traditionalist ideology that seeks to reproduce and enforce sharp divisions in gendered behaviour.

“They [feminists] hate the very idea that a boy might act in accordance with an inborn masculine proclivity. They hate the idea that a boy might learn to be tough and resilient at the expense of a vulnerability (weakness) because it contradicts the equalist belief set. They hate the idea that boys and girls have innately, biologically, different ways of dealing with emotions that don't align with their belief in a blank-slate... It's time we teach boys like they will become tough, strong, invulnerable young men we may need to provide future generations with a much needed security. And the time where we'll need them is coming faster than anyone today really thinks.” *sic* (The Rational Male, 2018)

The neo-traditional masculinity espoused by the men's rights movement argues that men ought to aspire to a kind of performative masculinity, organized around strength, reliance,

stoicism², rationality and logic, and a reliance on “biological truisms³” (sometimes referred to by movement critiques by the mocking term “biotruths”) which MRAs feel justify acting in certain ways.

There is a contradiction that lies at the heart of how MRAs choose to understand gender. On the one hand, many MRAs argue that masculinity is the product of biological forces; the presence of testosterone and a Y chromosome are enough to generate significant structural differences in the brains of men and women, as well as to impel significant deviation between the behaviours of typical men and women. It is a belief in a masculinity as resistant to change as any other biological component of the human condition; no matter what might happen in the future, humans will always have a single heart, a single stomach, a single brain. The masculinity of the men’s rights movement is innate and unchanging, because it is *natural*, unlike the soft, weak masculinity being imposed on men by feminists and their allies. Yet, the men’s rights movement also acknowledges the existence of different sorts of masculinities, often depicted as part of a hierarchy of maleness – alpha males to omega and zeta males (Elam, 2010). Some of the more progressive men’s rights activists even acknowledge that different masculinities are at odds with one another – or are even dependent on other factors like sexual orientation, class, or race. The result is a dissonance in the MRM’s vision of world: masculinity is inherent, hardwired, and biologically fixed to bodies, except when it isn’t; feminist discussions of gender

² Not to be confused with philosophical stoicism, the stoicism espoused by MRAs, red pill adherents, and men going their own way (MGTOWs) manifests as an imperative to bury emotions behind a façade of dispassion and indifference to the concerns or emotions of others. This position is sometimes referred to as “frame” (as in “maintaining frame in the face of challenge or critique”), or “NGAF” (Not Giving a Fuck). If a partner is upset or angry with a man’s behaviour, for example, the man is encouraged to “hold frame” by refusing to concede a point or position, and to demonstrate an attitude of not giving a fuck about their interlocutor’s feelings.

³ “Biological truisms” is a term I use to describe the central position that popular culture interpretations of evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology have in MRM discourse. Men’s attitudes or behaviours are often described as “biologically hard-wired” or “the product of evolution” and are therefore not only natural, but effectively mandated as appropriate forms of behaviour.

as the product of social forces are self-evidently false, except when they aren't. This contradiction is evidence of a long-standing debate within the men's rights movement about the nature of masculinity, and what shape it ought to take. This is not surprising: men's rights literature from the 1970s and 1980s drew heavily on sex-role theory, which posited a 1:1 relationship between biological and sex and gender, while more recent men's rights literature reveals a debt to contemporary gender theory's use of social constructivism. Unlike academic debates around gender theory however, MRM literature is rarely subject to peer-review or other formal review mechanisms, and as a result, some MRM websites continue to feature different philosophical positions – sometimes contradictory ones – on the same subject, with little substantive debate between them.

In other words, when viewing the gender ideology of the men's rights movement, it becomes clear that the movement sees masculinity not as a series of socially constructed performativities, but as a normative structure that ought to emerge “naturally” from biology. Men are men because they are male, and therefore are “meant” to take on certain social roles. Women are women because they are female, and they ought to gravitate towards what is in their nature. Masculinities that subvert or resist the normative ideals of the men's rights movement ought to be viewed with skepticism or hostility, because they are unnatural.

2.2 Theorizing the Men's Rights Movement

Academic research into the men's right movement draws on a wide array of theoretical lenses, ranging from affect theory to theories of masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, to social movement and countermovement theories (Allan, 2016; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Fox, 2004; Girard, 2009; Daniels, 2009; Ferber, 1998). Current investigations of the men's rights movement are problematic however, as despite numerous operational definitions of a

social movement put forward by researchers, none seem to capture the fundamental nature of the MRM. The largely online nature of men's rights activism does not fit well with more traditional definitions of social movements, while the inward-looking focus of the movement's dialogue places it at odds with recent, social-media focused accounts of online activism. While other researchers locate the men's rights movement within a broader discussion of extremism, and while there is a good deal of utility in such a stance, theories of radicalization and countermovement activism risk exaggerating the movement's links to extremist violence – though such links *do* exist.

Some researchers and authors have formulated a model of *aggrieved entitlement* (Kimmel, 2015), which is a useful analytical tool for the examination of the men's rights movement as well as other examples of activism aimed at (re)securing the social position of straight, white men in North American society. Despite its utility however, this model suffers from an issue of equivocation, whereby the use of the term “entitlement” can mean one thing to the author, while having somewhat more broad-reaching implications within the wider social justice activism community; the term also underplays the lived experiences of men's rights activists themselves, many of whom do not see themselves as entitled to anything other than equal rights. Though such a claim is certainly problematic, it speaks to a pattern of belief and practice within the men's rights movement that ought to be treated with more seriousness than the model of “aggrieved entitlement” allows.

Social movement theory

Research into the men's rights movement often draws on the literature of social movement theory to frame how MRAs organize, construct knowledge and mobilize to accomplish their stated, goals and while this approach is an appropriate one, it is not without

drawbacks. In one of the more comprehensive discussions of the history and structure of the men's rights movement, researcher Michael Messner drew on social movement theory to discuss not only the pro-feminist men's movements and mythopoetic men's movement, but the men's rights movement as well (Messner, 1998). This framing is certainly useful for discussing pro-feminist men's movements and mythopoetic men's movements, as both manifest the primary structures of a recognized social movement: group identity and vision/mission statements, infrastructure in the form of literature, physical spaces for gatherings and discussion, and coherent patterns of belief and practice (Staggenborg, 1998; Bagguley, 1997; Taylor, 1989). Yet the men's rights movement, despite its history as part of the constellation of men's movements, is different. Unlike the mythopoetic men's movement, with its retreats and safe spaces for men to discuss their experiences, with its organizational infrastructure, including office spaces and publishing houses (through organizations affiliated with the mythopoetic movement including the manKind Project or the Christian-themed Promise Keepers), the men's rights movement has little in the way of physical real estate or other offline footprints. Outside of a few small groups including the National Coalition for Men (NCFM), the relatively tiny Men's Rights Edmonton, or the "men's rights adjacent"⁴ Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE), the men's rights movement in North America is a largely online phenomenon. Such movements present some challenges to traditional articulations of social movement theory, as their disembodied nature removes them from the physicality of traditional social movement activism (Castells, 2011; Melucci, 1995; Melucci, 1996; Gerbaudo, 2018).

⁴ The Canadian Association for Equality explicitly states on their website that they are not affiliated with the men's rights movement (CAFE, 2018). Yet critics of the organization point out that the movement has in the past been linked to the men's rights website A Voice for Men (McLaren, 2015; Laxer, 2012), and that several of its members have been linked to men's rights groups and ideology (Spurr, 2014).

Despite this, traditional social movement theory retains its utility when examining the MRM. While the movement is largely found in online networks, it retains several of the core features of a “traditional” social movement including: worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment – WUNC (Tilly, 2004; Olesen, 2005). What makes online movements so fascinating for social movement scholars is how WUNC features manifest in digital spaces. Despite their often-anonymous identities, movement participants still meet in numbers on message boards and discussion groups; participants display a focus on community building and group unity (especially ideologically); they routinely profess their commitment to movement goals and visions, and they see those goals as not merely valuable *to them*, but valuable *to everyone*.

Social movements are more than collections of people who share a common identity. They are networks of individuals, bound in common purpose, with a shared, persistent vision of social change that produces a powerful sense of collective identity. Social movements act on that vision to manifest it in their societies. By this definition, the MRM is a coherent social movement.

Activism and Social Media Networks

In his influential work on networked social movements, Manuel Castells described a model of social-network-based activism which relied on social media and other online communications to conduct activism (Castells, 2012). Unlike earlier descriptions of social movement activism, Castells’ model attempted to integrate contemporary developments in social media technologies and services into an analysis of social action. Castells examined several important social movements that emerged in the mid-2000s including the Occupy movement in North America, the *Indignados* of Spain, and the various revolutions that made up the Arab

Spring. Castells' work pointed to what he termed the rhizomatic nature of information production and dissemination in online spaces; activists or users congregate in an online space (or small network of online spaces) where they debate, discuss and generate knowledge. From there, that knowledge is disseminated throughout online networks along pathways that are at first linked to the knowledge production nodes (Castells, 2012; Castells, 2011). In Castells' examples, knowledge production and dissemination were used primarily to organize and coordinate real-world protests in defiance of government media blackouts or internet outages, as was the case during the Egyptian revolution. The result was that activists gained access to an entirely new way of meeting, discussing and planning activist events that bypassed traditional word-of-mouth networks or leafleting campaigns.

The men's rights movement operates in similar ways, which makes Castells' model an attractive one. In the MRM, knowledge is generated in a relatively small number of online spaces (with A Voice for Men and the /r/mensrights subreddit community of reddit⁵ making up the largest components) by a low number of influential knowledge producers. These spaces are ideologically isolated; dissenting opinions are censored, either through removal of comments or banning of posters. These spaces operate like ideological purifiers, drawing in news articles, blog posts, YouTube videos and other materials, which are then interpreted through MRM ideology to support MRM claims (either about the "truth" of male oppression, or the "truth" about the vileness of feminist activism). These interpretations are then disseminated throughout MRM social networks, where they coningle and reinforce each other until new bursts of information

⁵ Note on terms: a "subreddit" is a specific community on the website reddit (spelled with a lower-case 'r'). Each subreddit (of which there are tens of thousands on reddit) is built around a specific interest or cluster of interests. Each community is categorized on the site by a name, preceded by the '/r/' prefix. For example, users interested in playing a specific video game might be found on the /r/Warhammer subreddit, while users interested in asking questions about feminism might join /r/askfeminists. On reddit, there are several men's rights-affiliated subreddits, with /r/mensrights being the largest by a fair margin.

arrive to supplant them. These networks operate in similar fashion to Castells' rhizomatic networks, which he describes as a system of knowledge production where information exchange grows outward along social networks from central nodes (sites or spaces with large or influential populations of users). But where Castells' networks provide an informational backbone to subsequent physical activism in offline spaces, MRM networks appear to turn back in on themselves such that knowledge dissemination from one MRM node (YouTube, reddit, or elsewhere), becomes an input for another MRM node. This will be discussed further in chapters five and seven.

With few exceptions, knowledge produced within MRM networks remains circulating in MRM networks. There have been a few isolated examples of MRM knowledge leaving its online ecosystems to be disseminated in offline spaces (including what is becoming an annual "men's issues" conference, and several smaller speaking events in cities throughout North America, Europe, and Australia), but such events tend to feature the same small stable of speakers discussing a similarly small cluster of specific issues (Elam, 2014; ICMI, 2017; A Voice for Men, 2018). This contrasts with feminist movement knowledge production which, while generated within feminist spaces, both online and off, is subsequently disseminated through feminist and non-feminist networks, such as family planning organizations, education and vocational programs, sexual and domestic violence organizations and non-governmental agencies like the United Nations or World Health Organization.

There is a final challenge to employing conventional social movement models to the men's rights movement: the anonymity that is embraced by many in the MRM's audience. In traditional social movements, group solidarity emerged in large degree to the shared practice – and risks – of social action (Cohen, 1985; Gamson, 1991; Staggenborg, 1998; Tilly, 2004;). Even

in extremist movements of the radical right, the threat of violence by movement opponents draws members together in solidarity and a shared collective identity (Futrelle and Simi, 2004; Simi and Futrelle, 2009; Futrelle, Simi, and Gottschalk, 2009). Instead, MRAs, like other reactionary movements, use technology in place of physical meetings. Instead of meeting in basements, community centers or other brick-and-mortar locations to build solidarity and identity, or to coordinate strategy or engage in community-building exercises, MRAs develop online networks to achieve the same goals. Now, MRAs are found on Facebook, Twitter, reddit, YouTube and Tumblr; on blog sites like Medium, WordPress and BlogSpot; on websites like A Voice for Men, Men's Rights.org, and across discussion boards in 4chan, 8chan, voat, and Gab. MRM groups can now even be found on video streaming services like Twitch or voice-chat services like Discord. Through these services, MRAs can solicit funding (through services like PayPal or Patreon⁶) and disseminate information globally with little overhead cost to themselves. For example, to run a blog on Medium, a popular blogging site costs the user nothing but has the potential to influence thousands of viewers.

Given the significant lack of offline, physical activism by MRAs, and the anonymous nature of online MRM discussions, men's rights "activism" becomes an ephemeral thing,

⁶ A service that allows individuals to donate small sums of money to bloggers, YouTube channels or other content producers in a way that can be done anonymously. Many influential YouTube personalities can live comfortably through such donations. Jordan Peterson, a controversial conservative psychologist maintains a Patreon account which earns him between \$19,000 and \$84,000 USD per month (Graphtreon.com, 2018)

manifesting often as social media “raids”⁷ or YouTube “response”⁸ videos. In these instances, group participation can be limited to something as simple as “liking” or “upvoting” a video, comment, or discussion thread, which adds an additional layer of anonymity to an already anonymized space, as in most cases, “upvoting” is anonymous.

Considering the challenges posed by online anonymity, and the ephemeral nature of online activism in general, it is necessary to adapt social movement theory to accommodate a new kind of activism. Further, research on the MRM quickly reveals that unlike other, more established social movements, the focus of activism is less on sustained interactions with elites or with government or with social convention, but rather with opposing the activism of feminist groups. , Researchers like David Meyer and Susan Staggenborg recognized that social movements tended to create their own opponents (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996) in the process of social activism, and their interactions with these opposing countermovements were crucial to the overall shape of social movement activism. Indeed, in the case of the MRM, countering feminist activism is a central element of their discussions. This dissertation contributes to this understanding by illustrating the ways that the mere presence of feminist activism in North American societies serves as a catalyst for increased MRM activism. More importantly, this research also highlights the fact that much of this activism is taking in place in anonymous spaces; since the identities of the people involved remain hidden – except in some exceptional

⁷ A “raid” in online spaces is when a group of posters or users in a specific online community such as 4chan or the /r/mensrights subreddit begin to post in a coordinated or semi-coordinated manner on another community site or even an individual’s blog site. Such raids can be relatively benign – raid members may opt to overwhelm a comment section or discussion thread with inane questions, links to silly or inappropriate images for example – or they can be more hostile, even abusive. In many cases such raids will include death or rape threats – particularly if the target is a woman, gender-queer, or non-binary.

⁸ Response videos are a common staple of YouTube’s anti-feminist and anti-social justice contingent. Response videos are typically formatted as a series of replies to claims made in the YouTube videos of another poster and are often mocking or derogatory in nature. Where a typical YouTube video may run between 10-20 minutes in length, response videos are often significantly longer, running anywhere from 30-120 minutes or more.

circumstances – and much of the discussion takes place in private forums or other closed online communities, there is a challenge to discerning just how influential MRM ideology has become. For example, in 2017, an American legislator named Robert Fisher was identified as an influential member of reddit’s “Red Pill” community, an explicitly misogynist segment of the men’s movement that emphasises emotional manipulation and infidelity as a lifestyle (Mettler, 2017). Due to the anonymous nature of his online activism, Fisher could effectively separate his political and online personas, and keep most of his fellow legislators in the dark regarding this facet of his identity.

Through anonymous networks, the MRM and other reactionary movements can provide spaces for their members to dialogue, build communities and identities, and to coordinate offline action that transcends national borders and grant such movements a reach they might not otherwise have. As Paul Virilio argued, speed is an essential component of determining the influence of ideas; the more quickly information can be transmitted and disseminated, the more influential it – and its possessors – become (Virilio, 1995; Virilio, 2005). Through anonymous online networks, MRM ideology can be transmitted quickly, cheaply, and with little fear that opponents could identify the people behind its creation. Even tracking the location of individual users becomes difficult as with a simple VPN application (Virtual Private Network), a user can effectively hide their location from all but the most dedicated or skillful observers. Free from external pressures to moderate their message, MRM participants are free to (re)construct ideologies and histories to suit their needs.

Countermovement theory

Theorizing around the nature of countermovement activism has been light in comparison to the work done on social movement activism more broadly (Burnstein, 1991; Meyer and

Staggenborg, 1996; Crowley, 2009; Kretschmer, 2014), though what exists has been used to good effect in analyses of anti-abortion activism, father's rights groups, anti-LGBTQ movements, and white nationalist/white supremacist movements. Countermovement theory emerges from political opportunity structure literature, and builds on social movement theorizing by scholars who employ Tarrow's definition of social movements (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996). Specifically, countermovement theory tends to examine instances where a movement's "sustained interactions with elites and opponents" (Tarrow, 1994) includes oppositional agents who have organized *because* of the actions of other social movements. A strong example of this dynamic emerges from anti-abortion activism, where anti-abortion groups like Operation Rescue emerged in direct response to the victories of abortion activists in the United States, including the landmark United States Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996; Kretschmer, 2014).

Countermovements are not always reactionary. Progressive countermovements would include the peace movements of the 1960s, which grew in response to sustained social action by elements of the American state and American media, which stressed the necessity of involvement in the Vietnam War (Staggenborg, 1996). Similarly, the anti-nuclear movement emerged as a counter-protest to a growing desire on the part of Western nations and the more hawkish elements of their societies to the acquisition and proliferation of nuclear weapons (Rootes, 1999; Carmen and Balsler, 2002). Despite this, countermovement theory has remained largely focused on the activism of reactionary movements, leading perhaps to a conceptual bias which sees the study of "conventional" social movements confined largely to an examination of progressive activism, while relegating reactionary movements to a subordinated, liminal status in the literature (Pichardo, 1997).

Countermovements that organize along conservative or reactionary lines are often faced with a significant challenge to their goals: framing their movement's goals in a way that elicits sympathy from observers, or that allows them to gain the moral high ground. When anti-abortion activists pushed back against the "pro-choice" arguments of abortion activists, they did so by first branding their movement as "pro-life", allowing the movement to reposition itself as the champions of human life in the face of "abortionists" who saw the selfish desires of women as greater than the inherent right to life of unborn children (Marshall, 1985; Kretschmer, 2014). Similarly, the Fathers Rights Movement of the 1980s and 1990s organized against what they argued was "systemic bias" in family courts, and created a psycho-social syndrome – "parental alienation syndrome" (Adams, 2006) – that enabled them to reposition themselves as marginalized fathers, beaten down by a hostile system, and the victims of a concerted effort by estranged spouses (and sometimes their attorneys) to turn children against them (Crowley, 2009a; Crowley, 2009; Adams, 2006).

Countermovement theory enables those who study the men's rights movement to make sense of the relative lack of physical organization and action on the part of the movement; since the movement's principle aim is to undermine and oppose feminist activism and ideology, it behooves MRAs to effectively be where their opponents are. Since the MRM continues to find little purchase in academia, it has great difficulty challenging feminist theory through peer review or academic debate. Where the MRM *can* actively oppose feminist ideology is online, where feminist voices can easily be found and attacked. Additionally, the MRM's status as a countermovement also means that it emerges in opposition to feminist activism where feminism is not already a countermovement itself. In academia, feminist theory comprises a significant – if small – component of social science research, but is largely absent from most other STEM

curricula. In public policy, feminist activism is a decidedly minor voice, operating more as a countermovement to the institutional conservatism of the state and its elected officials. In the current political climate in the United States, feminism is actively opposed by most of the Trump Administration's initiatives and senior officials; President Trump's education secretary, Betsy DeVos recently met with men's rights activists including members of the National Coalition for Men to help develop her department's new position on university campus sexual assault concerns (Moore, 2017). Given the oppositional nature of the MRM, and given its repeated insistence that its principle antagonist is feminist ideology in all its forms, countermovement theory represents a strong theoretical tool for the study of the men's rights movement, and the manosphere more generally.

Aggrieved Entitlement

Many observers of the men's rights movement and its fellow travellers in the manosphere have noted that the rhetoric of the MRM shares a similar theme with that of the white supremacist movement and reactionary social movements on the far right: a persistent fear that one's place in society is being stripped away by forces external to the state, or from sinister forces within the boundaries of one's own society; sometimes these forces work in tandem to achieve radical social reordering. Research on both men's rights activism and reactionary conservative movements has demonstrated that such status anxiety motivates groups of (mostly) men to engage in anti-social, even violent acts in response (Hodge, 2011; Hodge, 2018; Ezekial, 1995; Ezekial, 2002; Ferber, 1998; Levitas, 2002).

Countermovement narratives that focus on men's loss of standing or "rightful" place in society often couch their rhetoric in apocalyptic tones, which posit that the end of masculine dominance in public spaces is synonymous with the end of civilization itself (Molyneux, 2016;

Elam, 2009; Esmay, 2017). Often these narratives cast men as simultaneously the greatest warriors and creators in human history, while at the same time the greatest victims, as they have been tricked into submitting to the rule of weaker people, a pattern of behaviour I have previously termed the “warrior/victim” matrix (Hodge, 2011). The warrior/victim matrix allows men to simultaneously hold the position that men are “naturally” stronger, smarter, and more creative than women, while at the same time being oppressed and discriminated by them. The matrix enables men in reactionary movements to invoke conspiracy as a vehicle for the subjugation of a category of people who should, by nature and by right, be in control of the fate of civilization.

In his 2015 book *Angry White Men*, sociologist Michael Kimmel articulated a new way of understanding the motivations of men in reactionary movements: *aggrieved entitlement*. According to Kimmel, status anxieties that emerge among men during periods of social, political, or economic upheaval, can drive them to engage in a wide array of social activism, but those men who feel that such change is resulting in a systemic loss of what is “rightfully” theirs may channel their anxieties into movements designed to turn back the social clock (Kimmel, 2015). When faced with this perception of loss, men in reactionary movements feel a sense of both *grievance*, in that they feel the world has done them wrong by oppressing or vilifying them, and *entitlement* to the social status and capital held by their fathers, grandfathers, and other men from earlier times. *Aggrieved entitlement* allows men to engage in a pattern of counter-memorialization (discussed more fully in chapter four), whereby historical patterns of patriarchal domination of women can be re-imagined as “natural” divisions of gendered labour and status emerging from biology, and required for a stable, prosperous society.

Kimmel's model is promising, and indeed, serves as a crucial component of this study. As of this writing however, the model remains undertheorized and in need of greater empirical support, especially if it is to be differentiated from a more traditional analysis of status anxiety. As the research presented in this paper demonstrates, *aggrieved entitlement* is an apt description of the ways that men's rights activists especially articulate their sense of self and their current social position, though it is important to note that not every MRA makes claims to having a natural claim to social privilege. Indeed, among the more moderate – even mainstream – members of the MRM, the “pendulum theory” of society moving from masculine privilege to masculine oppression is a false narrative itself; contemporary society is – and has been since the 1960s – an egalitarian place that has only recently become “misandrist” thanks to the work of “radical feminists” who seek to replace egalitarianism with female supremacy:

“They don't actually want equality of opportunity, they don't want equality of outcome, they want "equality" based on a misinterpreted and dishonest view of the past where men owe them. Until there are no men and only women, we will not be "equal" because of the past. That's their view. They want to dominate men. That's why they are so angry. No one gets this. That's why when women get 50%+ (see: academia) we don't say "ok, let's hold up on the accelerator we just hit equal" we just shrug and go "yeah, men are pieces of shit, of course they're failing." (DifferentSquirrel, 2018)

The focus on *grievance* as a motivating emotion among MRAs is an apt one, as this research will demonstrate. Men's rights activists, unlike their counterparts in the mythopoetic movements or pro-feminist men's movements, do not see their position in society as one in need of change, or social change as a thing they need to adapt to fit. Rather, men's rights activists see their position as the natural, normative position for men to occupy, and that society has moved –

incorrectly – away from it. Society therefore is in need to changing, not men. Society must bend back towards men’s rights activists, who have planted themselves firmly on the ground and declared, “this far, no further.”

2.3 The Literature of the Men’s Rights Movement

Despite its lack of penetration into academia, the men’s rights movement has nevertheless compiled a significant body of material to support its positions. When MRM-friendly videos on YouTube and other online repositories are included, that body of material grows even more significant. Yet despite this, there has been little theoretical development within the movement since the 1990s and the publication of *The Myth of Male Power* by Warren Farrell; a great deal of contemporary knowledge production within the MRM effectively retreads the path broken by that author.

Material produced by the movement can be clustered around a small number of specific grievances. Traditionally, the men’s rights movement has concerned itself with issues of “male disposability”, and the disproportionate numbers of male deaths in workplace accidents or war; issues related to family dynamics including child support and “financial abortion”, “parental alienation syndrome” and the perception of systemic bias in family courts; anti-feminist activism, especially in online spaces, where men’s rights activists challenge what they see as feminist lies including the wage-gap, “patriarchy theory”, and concepts like toxic masculinity which they see as inherently anti-male. Finally, the men’s rights movement in general often concerns itself with “culture war” issues: free speech versus censorship, political correctness, identity politics, and pop-culture expressions of misandry.

In contemporary men’s rights spaces, much of the material produced emerges from the work of amateurs – bloggers, podcasts run by activists, and YouTube content producers. There

are few academics or public intellectuals engaged in knowledge production explicitly for the men's rights movement, though there are several whose work is actively endorsed by various men's rights sites and organizations.

Finally, the men's rights movement has made use of feminist theories to inform its own positions, adapting some feminist theories for their own uses, or deploying oppositional rhetoric designed to provide equal and counter concepts designed to parallel feminist ones. Examples of this include "misandry", as opposed to misogyny, "Kafka-Trapping" as opposed to gaslighting, and "apex fallacy" to dismiss examples of men occupying positions of power. Some men's rights activists have even adopted the language of intersectionality and identity politics from leftist and feminist discourse, turning it on its head to help bolster their own claims of masculine oppression.

Central concerns

Though the MRM claims to be concerned with a wide-ranging variety of issues, a smaller number of critical concerns remain at the heart of a great deal of the movement's discussions: male disposability in North American culture, bias in family courts, countering feminist activism, and active participation in contemporary culture war issues such as free speech, censorship, and political correctness.

Male disposability

In *They Myth of Male Power*, Warren Farrell explored what he called the "glass cellar" of labour, which saw most of the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs being done almost exclusively by men. In discussing men's role as the "disposable sex", Farrell declared that,

“Just as women provide a womb to create the children, men often provide a financial womb to support the children. Many men are motivated to enter the death professions to provide this financial womb. The unspoken motto of the death professions is My Body, Not My Choice.” (Farrell, 1993)

Farrell noted that in the most dangerous jobs, men make up between 95% and 100% of all workers (1993). These “death professions” included firefighting, logging, trucking (heavy), construction, and coal mining, and he contrasted these with “safe” professions – secretary and receptionist⁹ - which were made up of between 97% and 99% women. It is interesting to note that Farrell’s description of dirty and dangerous jobs did not include cleaning and janitorial services, nursing, home-care work, domestic service, or dry-cleaning services which are typically underpaid, dangerous, dirty, and often feature high percentages of women workers (Soni-Sinha and Yates, 2013; Duffy, 2007). In a curious inversion of mainstream discussions of low-paying work in the service sector and elsewhere, Farrell argues that such jobs naturally attract women, because they are flexible, comfortable, safer, provide a higher sense of fulfillment, and a host of other characteristics that make them in high demand (Farrell, 1993). It is that demand that makes their wages low; women earn less money because they take all the desirable jobs in dry-cleaning, retail, fast-food service, clerical services, and temporary office work for themselves. Men, by contrast, take all the highest paying, highest status jobs not because they enjoy them, but because women have effectively squeezed them out of their preferred jobs as restaurant hosts, file clerks, and day-care workers (Farrell, 1993).

⁹ Precisely what separates one from the other is not detailed by Farrell.

Farrell's arguments have been reproduced and explored by subsequent men's rights authors and "MRM-approved" authors in recent years. In a trio of books written between 2001 and 2015, conservative authors and academics Katherine Young and Paul Nathanson examined Western history and contemporary popular culture to argue that male disposability is not merely a modern product of gender relations, but rather a long-standing historical trend, dating back to the very beginnings of recorded history and beyond (Nathanson and Young, 2001; Nathanson and Young, 2016; Nathanson and Young, 2015). Like Farrell, Nathanson and Young argue that men have been effectively forced into gender roles that demand they adopt dangerous, high-risk activities by women choosing to embrace their natural, nurturing instincts and remaining in the home (or cave, depending on time-period) to care for family (Nathanson and Young, 2015).

Knowledge producers in the MRM also point to the draft and to warfighting more generally as another area where men are oppressed and their disposability put on full display. In the United States, MRAs frequently point to the continued existence of a male-only draft, and the requirement that able-bodied men sign up for selective service as a pre-requisite for registering to vote (A Voice for Men, 2013; Straughan, 2012; NCFM, 2017). These arguments are not always accepted however, as they imply that women ought to be made to register for selective service, or at the very least be encouraged to serve on front lines in combat operations which some MRAs feel will increase men's vulnerability in battle and result in more deaths,

"The real problem with it comes from the evo psych perspective. Modern TCCC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care) tells soldiers to continue the fight and to NOT render aid to a fallen comrade until the all the bad guys are dead. There is a reason for this. If I got shot and fell down, I'm probably in pretty clear view of a bad guy with a gun. If you run up to me, you will also be in clear view of a bad guy with a gun... We have learned

from [US experiences with snipers in Vietnam] and fortunately, it doesn't take much to reprogram men to ignore the calls of a wounded man. When a man hears a woman in distress, however, they are LITERALLY programmed by evolution to forget everything else going on and run to help her. Even if male soldiers were able to turn off that instinctual reflex, the mental pressure they would feel, just knowing a woman THAT THEY FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR was wounded and dying and they were ignoring it, would reduce their combat effectiveness dramatically.” (OhNoNowWhat, 2016)

On one hand, MRAs argue that women being excluded from selective service, the draft, and combat operations is a double standard which highlights the disposability of men, while on the other hand, the presence of women in combat is a troublesome issue; women are either too weak to do the work (and so will with few exceptions be rejected from service), or they will serve in combat roles but increase the risk to male soldiers as a result. These debates indicate the while most men's rights activists hold the view that men are (wrongly) seen as disposable, there is active debate as to what should be done, as many of the proposed solutions (increasing women's involvement in military operations, encouraging women to take careers in male-dominated “death professions”) conflict with the biological determinism that undergirds MRM gender ideology.

Family Courts: bias, parental alienation, and financial abortion

“*False allegations* of sexual abuse in divorce have become prevalent to the point that a name has been assigned; Sexual Allegations in Divorce, the S.A.I.D. Syndrome. In fact, with child custody disputes, some research indicates that up to 70% of the domestic violence allegations are considered false. The literature purports that the

prevalence of false allegations is up to 84% and approximately 85% of those are issued against men. Even if we go with the lower figure of 70%, this means that over two-thirds of the accusations are fabricated.” (NCFM, 2016)

Among men’s rights activists, there is little doubt that the courts, but particularly family courts, are systemically biased against men and fathers. On the website *A Voice for Men*, under the tag “Family Court”, readers can find dozens of individual articles detailing the many ways that courts in the United States, Canada, and Europe routinely deny fathers access to their children, or force men to pay exorbitant child support fees to women who routinely lie about domestic abuse or use parental alienation to turn children against their fathers.

In this realm of activism, the men’s rights movement aligns closely with the father’s rights movement (“FRM”) which first emerged in the 1980s in response to changes in social and legal discourse around parental rights and child-custody arrangements post-divorce (Crowley, 2009). Both the MRM and FRM claim that court systems are inherently biased against men and fathers, particularly in the awarding of child support, which tends to be awarded to custodial mothers far more than to custodial fathers (Crowley, 2009). That mothers continue to make up most primary caregivers, even in more egalitarian families is often understated by FRM groups, as are discussions of the underlying causes for the trend (Fox, 2009; Crowley, 2009).

Men’s rights groups identify several key areas where they feel men are discriminated against in custody cases, and in the justice system more broadly: men are incarcerated in greater numbers than women, men receive longer sentences than women for similar criminal convictions, and men are less likely to be awarded full custody of their children after a marriage or partnership ends. In issues around children and childcare, many men’s rights activists argue

that women possess far greater rights and privileges than men; if a woman “gets pregnant”¹⁰ she can always choose to abort the fetus – without ever having to listen to what the potential father might want – or give the child up for adoption, but men who father unwanted children have no such options (NCFM, 2009). To highlight this perceived discrimination, the National Coalition for Men unveiled what they called a “symbolic protest” in the form of the *Reproductive Rights Affidavit*, which reads in part,

“I hereby relinquish all legal rights and responsibilities for the child referred to in this affidavit. I have made no commitment to, and will accept no obligation for this child. I will not recognize the authority of a court to strip me of my constitutional right to reproductive choice and I will challenge any court order that seeks to impose a parental obligation upon me against my will. By filing the affidavit with a court of law I am joining with others in an act of peaceful resistance to unfair and unjust laws.” (Marsiglio, 1998)

The position taken by the affidavit ignores any qualitative or legal differences between a fetus and a child by conflating the abandonment of a child with the abortion of a fetus to make a point that for things to be “fair” and “equal” between men and women, men ought to be able to abandon an unwanted child in the same way that women can “abandon” an unwanted fetus through abortion.

Men’s rights groups also argue through language borrowed from the father’s rights movement, that custody battles are often tainted by the existence of “parental alienation syndrome”, an unrecognized psycho-social disorder in children that results from one parent

¹⁰ A “passive-voice” euphemism that ignores the role that a man plays in the process

(typically the mother) using lies and manipulations to turn children against their estranged parent (Adams, 2006). Parental alienation syndrome is not a recognized disorder, suffers from numerous methodological and conceptual flaws, and suffers from a lack of solid empirical evidence to support its central claims (Adams, 2006; Hoult, 2006). Despite these weaknesses, parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a common point of discussion in both men's rights and father's rights groups (NCFM, 2017; A Voice for Men, 2016).

Anti-feminist activism

By far the most common form of activism within the men's rights movement focuses on countering feminism and feminist activism. Many observers have noted that the contemporary men's rights movement seems to do little else (Blake, 2015; Lewis, 2017; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017; Baker, 2017). Any significant time spent reading men's rights materials will reveal a movement that spends a great deal of time talking to itself about the need to destroy feminism and feminist influence, which is illustrative of the self-referential nature of men's rights discourse more generally (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7). This is contrasted to the more other-referential, outward-facing discourse of pro-feminist men's groups, which emphasize sustained interaction with social institutions and agents to effect long-term change (discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7).

Men's rights activists typically challenge feminist ideology in two general ways: by attempting to refute specific claims made by feminists, such as the existence of a gendered wage-gap or the historical reality of patriarchal oppression, or by attempting to undermine the epistemological foundations of feminist theories *in totum* by alleging that feminist theory is both "anti-male" and "anti-equality". This last claim is made by stripping contemporary feminist discourse from its social and historical contexts, removing from consideration any historical

claims to oppression, while also ignoring the persistence of gender inequality in contemporary social institutions. These denials can be viewed as a form of counter-memorialization (see Chapter 5) whereby MRAs can reject historical patterns as the product of feminist re-interpretations of history (Nathanson and Young, 2015) and replace it with an imagined history where men and women were largely equal (or where women were really in charge), and where feminists sought to upset that balance by demanding “female supremacy”,

“It is formulaic to declare that feminism “seeks equality between men and women”, and whether you consider that an honest assessment of feminism, it is the one most commonly invoked. Yes, you hear it all the time. It is what a lot of people want the world to believe that feminism is.

So, if you believe that feminism is “about equality”, then you would naturally suppose feminism and female supremacism to be mutually exclusive. Yet counter-intuitive as it seems, nothing rules out their cohabitation in the same individual’s mind. And why?

Because “equality” is an essentially contested concept. The possible meanings of “equality” are so varied, so flexible, and so ambiguous that (given the right mental gymnastics) they can easily admit female supremacism in close moral proximity. That is especially true if the thinker does not expressly call supremacism by its correct name, or harbors the doctrine latently, as a logical result of unclear thinking in some other area...

Therefore, feminism and female supremacism converge upon the point of advocating for women’s interests. The only difference is that female supremacism, unlike “equality”, doesn’t sound respectable.” (Logan, 2015)

In the MRM, feminism is synonymous with sexism against men and “misandry” with one exception: self-styled “feminists” whose work or rhetoric closely matches the MRM’s own

perception of feminist discourse. In many debates or discussions between MRAs and their opponents, MRAs will allude to “good feminists” versus “misandric feminists”; good feminists are those like Christina Hoff-Sommers, a conservative scholar associated with the American Enterprise Institute, or Warren Farrell, who MRAs are quick to point out once sat as a board member of the National Organization for Women in the United States. Misandric feminists – also sometimes called “gender feminists” (Hoff-Sommers, 2009) – are those who see men as inherently evil and masculinity as always toxic. This framing allows MRAs to place anyone who discusses concepts like hegemonic masculinity or toxic masculinity into the camp of “misandric feminists”, while anyone who is critical of contemporary feminist research or feminist theories like Hoff-Sommers, in the camp of the “good feminists”. Given Hoff-Sommers’ vanishingly small presence in contemporary feminist discourse, it is no surprise that the ranks of “good feminists” is small indeed.

Another point of contention between MRAs and their opponents is the concept of “rape culture”, defined as a set of values and beliefs that provide an environment conducive to rape (Boswell, 1996; Rentschler, 2014). In North America, rape culture manifests several ways, from legal traditions that allow for women’s sexual histories to be used against them in court – even in cases where they are the victim of sexual violence – to the pervasiveness of rape jokes and the hyper-sexualization of women and girls; to the tendency of media and popular culture to humanize and empathize with convicted rapists like Brock Turner or the teenaged athletes from Steubenville, Ohio, while leaving their victims either anonymous, or cast as “sluts” or otherwise unworthy of respect. Feminists have long recognized that rape and other forms of sexual violence are not limited to random attacks on lone women by strangers who leap from the

shadows; indeed, women are most likely to be attacked by partners, family members, or acquaintances (RAINN, 2018).

While many MRAs will acknowledge the existence of sexual violence against women, they are quick to challenge it on many fronts. Some MRAs argue that feminists' focus on female victims of sexual violence casts a shadow over male victims who need respect and support, while others allege that feminists *deliberately* cover up instances of abuse against men to perpetuate victim-narratives that keep men in the position of abuser, and women as abused (Lewis, 2015; Newman, 2014),

“There are feminist groups, government departments, and research bodies that refuse to acknowledge the impact on male survivors because it will disrupt the focus from women. I find myself becoming outraged at the thought that a powerful faction of our society that rules our funding and education believes that one gender in the human race feels pain more than the other. The divide that this is creating is having an enormous and negative impact.” (Newman, 2014)

Other men's rights activists dismiss the notion of rape culture altogether (Sinclair, 2014). Similarly, while feminists and feminist-friendly organizations work to highlight the endemic nature of sexual violence in North American societies, many MRAs and MRM groups push back, arguing instead that the real endemic is one of “false rape accusations”, with some going to far as to claim that anywhere from 40% to 60%¹¹ of all rape accusations were “demonstrably false” (Taylor, 2014). No empirical, academic review of sexual violence or sexual violence

¹¹ These numbers fluctuate depending on the context; the 60% figure is associated with military investigations into rape accusations, while other numbers, fluctuating between 40% and 50% are associated with various police department interviews and studies that are reported by MRM sources.

reporting supports such claims. Yet the lack of empirical support does not function as a deterrent, as academic research of this nature is often lambasted within MRM circles for being biased or even fraudulent, due to the disproportionate influence feminists are felt to wield in much of the social sciences (Farrell, 1993; Harlan, 2012).

2.4 Summary

Research into men's rights organizations has increased in recent years, as the movement itself has been growing rapidly in online spaces. The elements of this research that emerge from academia have largely been confined to sociology, feminist, gender and women's studies, and occasionally from criminology, where men's rights groups and father's rights groups have drawn the attention of legal scholars and practitioners. For the most part, social science research into the men's rights movement has identified the MRM as a reactionary countermovement, which is a useful conceptual lens for analysis. Other researchers have identified status anxiety as a principle motivator for men who enter MRM spaces, where a collective sense of *grievance* – what Michael Kimmel refers to as “aggrieved entitlement” – motivates their anti-feminist activism. Men's rights activism tends to emerge along several key lines: concerns over “male disposability”, discrimination – both generally, and inside the legal system specifically – which they see as pervasive and systemic, and countering or refuting feminist ideology wherever they encounter it. This most commonly takes the form of anti-feminist posts in online spaces, or social media “raids” against feminist websites or YouTube channels. That anti-feminist activism forms a core of the men's rights movement is unsurprising, given its origins in the 1970s as a traditionalist reaction against both feminism and the men's liberation movement it inspired. Indeed, this ideological position and the movement's constructed countermemory effectively guarantee that

future iterations of the movement will continue to engage in anti-feminist rhetoric as a central component of MRM knowledge construction.

Historical patterns of investigation have positioned the MRM as a traditional – if reactionary – form of social movement, but as this dissertation illustrates, the movement’s primarily online existence, coupled with a significant lack of offline activity makes that categorization problematic. Instead, this dissertation will illustrate how the MRM has turned online community development and maintenance into a central, long-term project, with the aim of establishing a transnational oppositional culture rooted in shared *grievance* and a desire to redress the perceived diminishment of men’s social standing. Research that makes use of Castells’ network theory of action is more reflective of the MRM’s online dynamics, a position that is strengthened through an incorporation of Kimmel’s aggrieved entitlement to provide insight into the motivations of participants in the MRM.

Chapter 3: A History of Men's Movements

There has been a tendency among some observers of men's movements – and the manosphere specifically – to group them together and treat them as if they shared a collective vision of men and men's place in the world (Blake, 2015; Nagle, 2017). Even when distinguishing the men's rights movement from “the men's movement”, as some authors have done (Adair, 1992; Starhawk, 1992), the distinctions remain somewhat hazy, with terms like “men's liberation”, “pro-feminist men's movement”, and simply “men's movement” being used interchangeably. This presents a challenge to research on any one strand of men's movement thinking, as there are distinct and significant philosophical and operational differences between the various men's movements. There are sharp differences in how each group articulates its understanding of masculinity, in how each group relates itself to other projects of social justice, and how these groups relate themselves to feminist work and feminist ideology. To understand these differences, and to disentangle one group from another such that examinations of the men's rights movement or pro-feminist men's movement are unencumbered by equivocating terminology, it is necessary to explore some of the more salient differences between the three largest strands of men's movement ideology to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century.

This chapter examines the rise of three strands of men's movement in the North American context in the latter half of the twentieth century. Each of these strands, the mythopoetic men's movement, the pro-feminist men's movement, and the men's rights movement emerged from the men's liberation movement of the 1970s. Yet despite their similar origins, each movement diverged according to specific ideological and activist considerations, with only the pro-feminist movement retaining the feminist-friendly orientation of men's liberation.

3.1 1970 – 1980: the first men’s groups emerge

The MRM, like virtually all other men’s movements active today, traces its origins to the early 1970s, and the nascent “men’s liberation movement”, which saw primarily college and university-aged men begin to experiment with the language and philosophies of the feminist movements to which many of them initially belonged. Thus, to accurately trace the history of the MRM, it becomes necessary to first disentangle it from other men’s movements – many of which remain active and influential. This chapter will examine the recent history of men’s movements, digging down through the discourse and debates of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, to illuminate the common origins shared by the MRM, men’s liberation, and other contemporary men’s movements. While there are certainly men’s groups active throughout much of the world – including a fast-growing men’s rights movement in India (Naishadham, 2016) – the principle focus of this research remains on North American men’s groups located in the United States and Canada.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States opposition to the Vietnam War and growing support for the Civil Rights movement proved to be fertile soil for other, radical social movements. Of importance to an examination of men’s movements is the emergence of the second wave of feminist activism, which was marked by a high degree of activism on university campuses and through community organizations after a period of “abeyance” which saw relatively few recognizably “feminist” groups (Taylor, 1989). Sparked largely by young people born in the post-war “baby boom” of the late 1940s and 1950s, this new period of activism was more than a simple reaction against the stifling gender roles imposed throughout the post-war years (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1997). Young women from across the political spectrum began to agitate for social change; some retained a commitment to liberalism and pro-

capitalist ideology, while others saw capitalist systems and the individualism of liberalism as components of their own systemic oppression. Across the United States and other countries in the Global North, feminist calls for equality and justice were blended with a revolutionary Marxian ideology centered on solidarity and class emancipation aimed at breaking down the barriers that separated women from high-paying careers, Ivy-league university educations, and the trappings of middle-class financial independence and stability (Schuster, 2017). While the most visible elements of the movement remained focused on – and peopled by – white, middle-class and heterosexual women (Thompson, 2002; Coston and Kimmel, 2013), a small but vocal cross-section of men also found their way into activist and consciousness-raising circles, where they began to articulate new ways of understanding their own “sex roles” (Messner M. , 1998) and the ways in which they limited men’s freedom to act.

The participation of men in early feminist consciousness-raising activities were often greeted with suspicion by the women who occupied those spaces (Sawyer, 1970; Canarelli, Fager and Gibboney, 1974), and so some of these early pro-feminist men broke away to form their own, similar groups, where men could work collaboratively to deconstruct their social identities and actions using the language of the feminist movement. Some of these activists would eventually brand their nascent movement the “men’s liberation movement”, in recognition of its foundations in women’s liberation. It is certainly no coincidence that the early attempts at constructing independent men’s movements in the United States used language virtually indistinguishable from that used in liberal feminist groups; in most cases, early men’s groups tended to see themselves as allied off-shoots of the project of women’s liberation (Berkely Men’s Center Manifesto, 1970; Stoltenberg, 1975; Pleck, 1974.)

Men's Liberation in the 1970s

Early men's groups such as the New York Men's Center, the Berkeley Men's Center and the "Effeminists" of New York (a group of largely gay men who actively tried to reclaim the word "faggot", in addition to attempting to deepen other New York-based men's movements' use of feminist ideology) rallied under the banner of "men's liberation", and in its early years, tended to be closely allied with local feminist organizations. These early men's groups spoke in the language of "sex role oppression", and directed their energies to re-engaging with masculinity in a more philosophical and politically radical way. One of the very first publications to emerge from the men's liberation movement, *Brother* magazine, sought to clarify the position of men's liberation, as a starting point for further debates and discussions. The authors of the newsletter spelled out nineteen core values of the men's liberation movement which included, among others, "We [men] are oppressed by limitations on sensuality and compassion", and,

"We [men] are oppressed by trade-off of dehumanizing, exploitative, brutalizing work roles on the job for the expectation that it was be made up for by pleasure from the sex-object at home. 'Home' is [impersonalized], becomes simply an aspect of capitalist property relations. We are oppressed by our brutalization by the benefits that accrue to us as men in society in which sexual pleasure (for the man) becomes a commodity, a material benefit." (*sic*) (*Brother*, 1971)

According to the authors of *Brother*, men face oppression and exploitation in a myriad of ways, but some of the more oft-voiced concerns will be familiar to 21st century audiences: the fear of failing to live up to cultural icons of masculinity (John Wayne for example), the pain of separation from children and the act of parenting, the fear of being perceived as effeminate, gay, or otherwise unmanly for showing emotion, and therefore weakness; for the equating of

empathy, love, sympathy, and tenderness *with* weakness (*Brother*, 1971). At the heart of much of the writings, the articles, and the lines of poetry, produced by the movement was a recognition that men had largely been forced by society to abandon any semblance of emotionality, and it was against this oppressive regime that many of the men in the movement directed their attentions. One of the strategies that was adopted by several groups in both California and New York (among others) was to open various “men’s centers” (or “Men’s Rap Centers” as one group called theirs), where men could drop in and speak with other men without fear that their doubts and worries would be used against them – primarily by other men. It was, perhaps ironically, these sorts of emotion-heavy discussions that in part led men like Robert Bly to break away from the trajectory of the early men’s movement to start his own (Bly, 1990).

Like many other men in the 1970s and early 1980s, Bly recognized in modern articulations of masculinity that something was missing: men lamented their separation from their families and chafed against the demands to be little more than a provider and disciplinarian for their children. Finally, Bly saw in these ‘soft men’ (Bly, 1990) a grief born of their feelings of separation from their fathers (and by extension from the traditional patterns of masculinity that had informed their own lives). But if grief, and the plight of ‘soft men’ formed the heart of Bly’s reaction to the men’s liberation movement, it was not the only emotion to fuel such separation. Other men, like Warren Farrell and Herb Goldberg also reacted to men’s liberation, but for them, the impetus lay in feelings of *grievance*, rather than grief. For them, the men’s liberation movement had stripped – or was stripping – men of their masculine imperative, rendering men more feminine instead of helping them to grow as men (Goldberg, 1979). At conferences and gatherings, men were being told that their “John Wayne” role models were troubling – even violent – and that more emotionally aware and sensitive masculine role models were needed

(Kleiman, 1978). At other conferences, men listened as gay and effeminate men shared their experiences of being beaten or ridiculed by larger, more masculine men, where traditional masculinity was often equated with violence against the Other. While some men listened, and nodded along in agreement (Kleiman, 1978), others wanted to talk about what they saw as their own oppression. Men were “oppressed” by being the bread-winner, or by having to devote their time to their careers. Men were “oppressed” if they saw their books listed under “women’s studies” in bookstores or libraries (Kleiman, 1978; Goldberg, 1979; Farrell, 1993; Nathanson and Young, 2013). For men of this strain, being in command of the levers of social power is a form of oppression; the pressures of running government is oppressive, as is the need to be “in control” of their families (Ehrlich, 1975). That such burdens were not recognized for the oppression men like Farrell, Goldberg and others clearly saw them to be, was evidence of the suppression of non-feminist thought and proof that the men’s liberation movement needed an alternative where men’s *grievance* and the sacrifices of leadership would be validated.

Eventually, Goldberg, Farrell, and many other men would leave the largely progressive and pro-feminist men’s movement behind and develop their arguments about the systematic disempowering of men into a new sort of men’s movement aimed at “defending men’s rights” not only from a society that increasingly catered to the needs, interests, and desires of women, but from the feminizing influence of feminists (Goldberg, 1979; Farrell 1993; Clatterbaugh, 2000).

Ideological Schisms

By the mid-1970s, cracks had begun to form in the loose coalitions linking men’s liberation groups to feminist groups and other men’s organizations (Lamm, 1975; Kleiman,

1978; Brothier, 1971). One of the most pressing concerns among some men's groups was the decided lack of forward progress by their memberships – especially about their treatment of women. In some groups, members continued to refer to women by sexist terms like “chicks” or more commonly “girls”, which strained relations between some men's groups and their feminist sister organizations (Ehrlich, 1975; Gordon, 1993). According to early criticisms of the movement – sometimes levied by other members – at least a few of the men involved seemed happy to discuss the merits of a more liberal sexual culture that had emerged as a result of feminist activism, but when challenged to work on their own sexist attitudes, would defer claiming that their fellow members simply needed to “meet them where they were” – that place being one where personal sexism remained free from challenge or judgment (Lamm, 1977; Shewey, 1991; Kleiman, 1978; Fager, Gibboney, and Lamm, 1975). As one author bluntly argued, many activists in the men's liberation movement were only interested in “liberating” their sex lives by allying themselves with increasingly sexually liberated women (Lamm, 1977).

For other members however, the direction taken by many of the active men's groups towards re-discovering and re-awakening their empathetic, emotional selves carried with it a twinned fear: that men's “liberation” would result in the “feminization” of men, and that the critical stance taken by many men about the nature of masculine supremacy would effectively blunt the earlier focus on men's oppression (Goldberg H. , 1979). These concerns soon grew into arguments that eventually split the men's liberation movement into three distinct strains, all hostile to varying degrees with one another: The pro-feminist men's movement, which remained true to the original ideals of the men's liberation movement; the Mythopoetic men's movement, which sought to balance emotional development with a recognition of men's ‘essential’ warrior/leader ethos, and the men's rights movement, which rejected the feminist leanings of

men's liberation, and instead adopted a more antagonistic relationship with both feminism and the pro-feminist men's movement. Of these disparate groups, the men's rights movement is the one that best fits what Meyer and Staggenborg have labelled a "countermovement", a specific form of social movement that emerges as a reaction to social movements aimed at affecting social change (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996; Blais and Dupuis-Deri, 2012).

3.2 The Men's Movements: Mythopoetic Men's Movement

In his book, *Iron John*, Robert Bly introduced his readers to the problem of the 'soft male', a product of the 1970s feminist movement and the men's movement it had inspired. As Bly put it,

"In the seventies, I began to see all over the country a phenomenon that we might call the 'soft male'... They're lovely, valuable people – I like them – they're not interested in harming the earth or starting wars. There's a gentle attitude toward life in their whole being and style of living... But many of these men are not happy. You quickly notice a lack of energy in them. They are life-preserving, but not exactly life-giving. Ironically, you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy." (Bly, 1990)

Based on these understandings, Bly began to argue that what the men's liberation movement had done for men in the 1970s was to make them less masculine, and therefore less energetic and less 'alive'. It was very well and good, Bly argued, for the feminist movement to encourage women to become 'hard', but it had the opposite effect on men by making them 'soft' (Bly, 1990). Because of this dramatic shift in the 'essential' natures of men and women, men had become less happy; they were grieving the loss of their masculinity and needed a way to recover it. The solution to this crisis, according to Bly, was to allow men to reconnect with the mythological roots of masculinity – to look to the ancient masculine gods for examples on how

to live as men. Indeed, Bly felt that this form of reconnection would also help improve women's lives as well; by reconnecting with this primordial masculine energy, men could become role models for their daughters, who in turn would feel less anger about the world and therefore be less inclined to direct that rage against the patriarchy (Bly, 1990). Put another way, Bly seemed to blame the rise of the feminist movement on men who failed to adequately perform their 'correct' role as father to their impressionable daughters. Feminism, in other words, was a form of feminine rebellion against incomplete, 'soft' fathers.

Bly's worldview, as presented through his writings, is rooted in mythological archetypes of masculinity and femininity (the Sacred King and the Sacred Queen, to name but two), whose essences are critical to the proper functioning of the world (Bly, 1990). Without these archetypes to guide and shape men and women (and by extension without the mythological/sacred order of the cosmos) citizens of contemporary industrial – and secular – societies are no longer whole. What they were missing was the 'Wild Man', an archaic primogenitor of all masculinity, a hairy, almost bestial ur-man and the wellspring of that masculine energy that the 'soft male' so desperately lacked. While Bly was among the first to call upon this image in contemporary writings about masculinity (drawing no doubt on the mythological link between strength, masculinity, and hair a la Samson), others soon picked up the theme in their own works. For some, the Wild Man was a central figure in a modern-day mythology they and men like them were constructing together during retreats and rituals (Daly, 1992), while for others, the wildness of spirit these images represented was best viewed through the lens of traditionalist movements like the Promise Keepers and other evangelical movements (Gallagher, 2005). In some cases, what was being expressed were stories of marginalization and oppression even, as one author

describes, the ‘oppression’ of believing one’s typical and average-sized penis to be small and thus emasculating (Perry, 1992).

In addition to offering men a way of confronting the restrictions of their own gendered lives, the nascent Mythopoetic movement did something else as well: it began the work of rehabilitating the ‘warrior mythos’ of American masculinity that had been so badly damaged in the tumultuous years of the Vietnam War (Jeffords, 1988). Prior to Vietnam, American men had many archetypal male role models to draw upon: the rugged, self-reliant frontiersman, the fiercely independent law-man (or outlaw) of the Wild West, the stern, forthright and dependable breadwinner a la *Leave it to Beaver*, and the patriotic soldier, whose heroism and honour brought glory to the United States (Jeffords, 1988). The quagmire of Vietnam however, and the horrors of the war that beamed into American homes each night with the evening news, stripped the soldier archetype of its glory and its honour; what inspiration could be drawn from the images of poorly-trained and ill-prepared draftees fighting a losing battle against poorly equipped – and even more poorly trained – irregulars of the Viet Cong? Vietnam brought little in the way of prestige to America, and it laid bare the brutality of modern warfare. Instead of flags over Iwo Jima, there was Mai Lai; instead of the glorious victories of D-Day, there was instead the Fall of Saigon. American men who went to war in the 1960s and 1970s returned, battered and broken to a nation with little ability or interest in helping them to heal (Jeffords, 1988).

The result of this social upheaval was a generation of alienated men who, according to Bly and those like him, had no positive masculine role-models to draw on, and no supports to help them heal from the ‘deep wounds’ (Bly, 1990) to their psyches. For some of these men, the support groups and consciousness-raising workshops of the men’s liberation movement were frustrating, because they forced men to effectively ‘feminize’ themselves to fit into a new culture

that was itself feminized (Baber, 1991). What was needed instead – and what the Mythopoetic movement offered – was a way to become more loving, but remain committed to being *men*. For authors like Asa Baber, this dream was realized in the rejection of the feminist-inspired men’s liberation movement, and the embracing of programs like the “new warrior training” of the Mythopoetic movement (Baber, 1991). To be a man was to relish in the “warrior spirit”, a spirit in need of danger, risk, and adventure. Warrior men were those who had come to reconnect with their essence; they had transcended the feminization of society and their grief at being ‘soft men’. While this new movement quickly grew, it soon earned the opposition of feminists and pro-feminist men, who saw that much of the foundation of this strand of men’s activism had been laid in militaristic imagery and rhetoric that had been sanitized and mythologized to the point where the violence inherent in such imagery had been effectively obscured (Starhawk, 1992; Clatterbaugh, 2000).

Mythopoetic men’s groups emerged across North America and Europe throughout the 1970s and 1980s, where they were often promoted as self-help programs for men (Randall, 1992). Some of the largest of these include the manKind project, which organizes men’s retreats under the name “New Warrior Training Adventure”, and the manKind-affiliated West Coast Men’s Support Society located on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Such groups organize themselves around the Jung-inspired philosophies of Robert Bly; *Iron John* is a common, popular piece of literature men are encouraged to read and reflect upon (West Coast Men’s Support Society, 2018). Other groups were less long-lived – such as the Men’s Council of Greater Washington (McCoomb, 1991) – but Bly’s philosophies have remained quite influential; a periodical of men’s issues entitled *Wingspan: Journal of the Male Spirit* published essays and other materials inspired by Bly’s work, and ran from 1991 until 2011.

Though ostensibly non-political in nature, the Mythopoetic movement nevertheless carried within it the seeds of conservative pushback to the challenges raised by the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than acknowledge the historical facts of men's oppression of women, the Mythopoetic movement instead sought to concern itself with the ways in which men were being oppressed. While not as explicit in its rejection of the concept of masculine privilege as the men's rights movement, the Mythopoetic movement remained uncomfortable with such discussions. Where the men's liberation movement initially sought to weld men's liberation from gender roles with an acknowledgment of men's complicity in the continued oppression of women, the Mythopoetic men's movement sought to sever the connection entirely. Writers like Robert Bly acknowledged the restrictions put in place by men's gender roles, and sought to understand them before transcending them, but it also offered men a way to focus on their spiritual and emotional growth without the burden of admitting guilt or responsibility for gender inequality. In this way, the Mythopoetic movement became a fertile bed for conservative men's movements like the promise keepers (Gallagher, 2005), but for the men's rights movement as well.

3.3 The Men's Movements: The Men's Rights Movement(s)

Like the Mythopoetic movement, the men's rights movement traces its origins to the mid-1970s, though little in the way of formal membership was established during the early years of the movement. Of those groups that did form, many were concerned with issues like divorce reform and custody law (Newton, 2004). The movement began in much the same fashion as the Mythopoetic, men who felt keenly that something was 'wrong' with masculinity, but suspicious that feminist analysis or feminist-inspired men's groups could do anything to address it. Unlike the men of the pro-feminist men's movements and the early men's liberation movement, early

men's rights activists saw the restrictions of masculine gender roles as proof-positive that it was *men*, not women who were truly oppressed. Indeed, not only were men the truly oppressed class in society, but according to some early men's rights leaders, part of the problem was that men were too invested in suppressing their anger towards women – anger at women who caused them to hurt, and whose own social advances were perceived to come at the expense of men (Goldberg, 1977; Astrachan, 1986). In some cases, early men's rights authors and activists including Warren Farrell, Herb Goldberg, and Frederick Hayward also worried that a new era of women's empowerment would fundamentally change women – and thus change their 'role' vis a vis their partners. Instead of a relationship in which women sought the love, protection, and fidelity of their husbands, they would instead be incapable of giving that love, choosing instead to direct that energy into their careers (Astrachan, 1986; Hayward, 1985; Farrell, 1993).

The result of this change was the destabilization of the system of domestic labour division that had historically been built around men's comfort and career obligations, an arrangement that was largely natural by some of the men who would go on to build the early men's rights movement (Goldberg, 1977; Kleiman, 1978; Kelly, 1981). As women became more empowered outside of the home, men were expected to become more involved in the daily routine of raising a family as well as other domestic duties, and for many men, this new arrangement was not only burdensome, but struck at the heart of their sense of identity. Early writings by men such as Goldberg and Farrell lamented what they saw as the destabilization of men's "essential" place at the heart of the family and as the principle agent in society (Goldberg 1977; Farrell, 1993). As a result, some men began to lash out; any feminist critiques or attempts to alter patterns of behaviour were perceived as assaults on their identities as men and so were

met with hostility and even violence – what Judith Newton refers to as “male-defensive collapse” (Newton, 2005).

Farrell’s concerns about the coming collapse of masculinity were so great that he soon severed his association with one of the most active feminist organizations of the day, the National Organization for Women – of which he had been a board member from 1971 to 1974 – to embark on an at-first feminist-critical trajectory which quickly became openly anti-feminist. Farrell’s history with feminist activism did not seem to count against him in his new role as father of the men’s rights movement. Indeed, his former associations continue to be a part of his contemporary biography, and are often pointed to by men’s rights activists as evidence that he had and continues to have an inside track to feminist thought and ideology. This is unsurprising; such “deconversion” stories (“I used to be a feminist/liberal/atheist/progressive, etc., but then I had a change of heart when...”) are common both among reactionary countermovements and progressive movements alike, where they are form part of a larger narrative of constructing in-group identity or having one’s eyes opened to the truth (Smith, 2011).

By the beginning of the 1980s, some attempts had been made to more formally organize the disparate groups of divorce law-reformists, anti-feminist writers, and anti-feminist men’s groups into more formal structures. This resulted in the formation of groups like the Coalition for American Divorce Reform Elements (CADRE), or the Men’s Rights Association and its international counterpart, the Men’s Equality Now International. These groups worked towards ending what they saw as systemic discrimination against men; as evidence, they pointed to men’s shorter life expectancy, and the rates of (men’s) violence against men. The more successful groups tended to be those that were associated with the “father’s rights” movement, which sought to address the alleged discriminatory practices of family law and courts. Some of these

groups, such as CADRE, continue to exist today (though CADRE is now called “American Dads”), and continue to exert influence in various efforts to re-write divorce and custody laws. In the case of American Dads, the preferred shape of custody law is one in which the father is the presumed default guardian with sole parental rights; this configuration is, in the words of American Dads, a form of “affirmative action” to make up for “past inequalities” (American Dads, 2017). Other organizations emerged during this period as well, including the National Coalition for Men (NCFM), a father’s rights organization that grew to include several key men’s rights movement positions, and the National Center for Men (NCFM – no affiliation with the National Coalition for Men) which claimed as its mandate a struggle for men’s equal rights under the law.

No matter the specific focus of the various strands of men’s rights activism, the notion of ‘protecting’ traditional patterns of masculinity remains a chief concern to activists, as has been noted in examinations of recent iterations of the movement. (Maddison, 1999; Allan, 2016). Indeed, whole swaths of men’s rights literature detail the perceived attacks against traditional masculinity (often described through call-backs to the sorts of masculine symbols and representations common in the 1950s), which movement members refer to as “misandry”, a neologism invented by the movement and used to refer to ‘anti-male’ sentiments or policies. For many men’s rights activists, these sentiments and policies are virtually everywhere, from government policies like selective service in the United States, to academia – and particularly to what activists viewed as a radical feminist and leftist agenda infecting most of the social science and humanities departments in universities throughout the western world (Nathanson and Young, 2015; Serwer and Baker, 2015). While the disciplines of the physical sciences remain – for now – bastions of masculinity in an otherwise feminized ivory tower, the whole of the rest of the

university is not merely feminized, but actively hostile to men and masculinity (Maddison, 1999; Nathanson and Young, 2015; Nathanson and Young, 2006).

Where the Mythopoetic movement made similar charges against contemporary society and responded by seeking a spiritual salve for the modern man's grief, the men's rights movement by contrast sought to fight back, by giving voice to men's sense of *grievance* – their anger at the shape of the world and its supposed hostility to the preferred masculinity of the MRM. Sociologist Michael Kimmel refers to this patterns of anger and hostility as “aggrieved entitlement” which describes the reactions men have to a loss of privilege in a society that has become, if not more egalitarian, that at least less overtly discriminatory towards women (Kimmel 2013). Throughout much of the literature produced by the movement, a sense of *grievance* manifests largely as polemics against the perceived privileges of women in North American society (Elam, 2010; MrDoradus, 2016; RedPillGirl, 2014), but as some adherents to the ideology become increasingly radicalized (Daniels, 2009), their actions – both online and offline – can become more violent, even deadly.

In 1989 in Montreal, Quebec, Marc Lepine, a 25-year-old man, walked into the *Ecole Polytechnique*, an engineering school, and murdered fourteen women while injuring an additional ten women and two men before killing himself. When police searched his home, they found a manifesto which can be found in its entirety on several websites (Langman, 2014). In the letter, Lepine raged against women and feminists, who he alleged were responsible for ruining men's lives and bringing about the collapse of Western Civilization. Lepine's focus was single-minded in its anger: feminists and the generation of empowered women it had produced, had ‘stolen’ his rightful place at the top of the social order, and had stripped from men their right to the fruits of society. Yet while most of society roundly condemned Lepine and his actions, there

were some who continued to cheer him as a martyr for the cause of men's rights (Csanady, 2014), going to far as to name the sixth of December as "St. Marc's Day" (Allen, 2009).

Even in those cases when men's rights activists were not advocating physical violence against feminists, women, and other opponents, movement thinkers continued to espouse reshaping society to better reflect the social values and gender roles of earlier times, when patriarchal leadership in all fields was the 'natural' configuration of society (Goldberg, 1973; Amneus, 1979). These positions continue to form the foundation of contemporary men's rights activism, as modern men's rights activists tend to adhere to a strict biological essentialism to undergird most of their views about gender. As one writer for the men's rights website *A Voice for Men* states,

"The differences between men and women are the keystones of sexism, patriarchy, and feminism. If there were no differences between men and women, or the differences were so minor they were insignificant, there would not be discussions like this going on at all. Regarding masculinity, the crux that separates males from females, both physically and psychologically, is strength. It's something that men naturally have a lot more of and has always been one of the central qualities women have had to rely on men for." (Scott, 2016)

For feminist activists, the essentialist claims made by the men's rights movement were especially troubling, as they appeared to reflect a deep-seated belief in the inherent inferiority of women. The rhetoric of the men's rights movement was, to many feminist activists, no different than the language used in more explicitly patriarchal cultures to justify the oppression – and repression – of women (Eisler, 1992). The resultant opposition by feminist organizations to the men's rights movement in part fueled the anti-feminist and often misogynistic rhetoric of

subsequent iterations of the MRM, creating a vicious cycle in which feminists, or any person or position deemed sufficiently ‘feminist friendly’ were viewed as enemies – not merely of the movement, but of all men (Nathanson and Young, 2015). In such a system, violence against women becomes not merely acceptable, but necessary. On October 22, 2010, the founder of *A Voice for Men*, Paul Elam wrote in a blog post entitled, “If you see Jezebel on the road, run the bitch down”,

“I’d like to make it the objective for the remainder of this month, and all the Octobers that follow, for men who are being attacked and physically abused by women – *to beat the living shit out of them*. I don’t mean subdue them, or deliver an open handed pop on the face to get them to settle down. I mean literally to grab them by the hair and smack their face against the wall till the smugness of beating on someone because you know they won’t fight back drains from their nose with a few million red corpuscles.” (Elam, 2010)

In the post, Elam lamented that October is national domestic violence awareness month in the United States, which he felt was simply another excuse for feminists and women to play the ‘victim-card’ while simultaneously erasing the experiences of men who are victims of domestic violence. Some years after writing the piece, Elam returned to it to add a few edits and a belated disclaimer that the piece should now be considered ‘satire’.

In another post from the same website, contributor Christopher Cantwell argued that while it is certainly true that women face violence at the hands of men, they also are protected by men who will engage in violence on their behalf if they need ‘rescuing’. Women therefore should be grateful for the violence that men commit – even if some of it is directed at them – and so instead of condemning men for it, they should be saying ‘thank you’ (Cantwell, 2014).

Cantwell later went on to gain infamy as a white nationalist activist and self-proclaimed member of the “Alt-right”.

The trajectory of the men’s rights movement has taken it far away from its roots in the early men’s movements of the 1970s, though its course has been a logical one, if one first accepts the foundational axiom that men are oppressed in Western society by women who hold virtually all decision-making powers. Once this view is accepted, then it becomes self-evident that other, more pro-feminist men’s movements are flawed – even dangerous – and that feminism as a concept is antithetical to one’s goals. While this opposition to feminism had long been a central component to men’s rights activism, it was the advent of internet communications and the proliferation of social media in the early years of the twenty-first century that focused that opposition into a powerful new messaging tool for the movement. To many contemporary critics of the movement, the MRM is more about attacking feminists in online spaces than it is about helping men with their issues (Lewis, 2017). While some of the men affiliated with the MRM, like Warren Farrell, continue to position themselves as people who deeply care about men’s pain and grief, and who profess to want to help them cope and heal (Blake, 2015), many more devote their time to railing against feminists, their allies, and anyone else who they see as opposing their message. Rather than spend time, energy, and money on building a network of shelters for the legions of desperate, battered men the MRM asserts are in desperate need of assistance, movement leaders like Elam, or the Canadian men’s rights-affiliated podcast the “Honey Badger Brigade” instead raise funds to pay for their legal fees, rent, or other personal expenses (Elam, 2014; Futrelle, 2014; Honey Badgers Brigade, 2015). This has led some critics to accuse the movement’s leaders of effectively running a confidence game that targets

vulnerable men by exploiting their anger and alienation and turning them against women and feminists (Gilmore, 2016; Serwer and Baker, 2015).

After the initial rise of the men's liberation movement, while some groups or organizations evolved into the Mythopoetic and men's rights movements, others attempted to stay true to the original intent of men's liberation: to work within a pro-feminist framework to understand and address men's issues and men's lives in a changing world. Though relatively small, the contributions of this strand of men's movement were most strongly felt in academia, where several pro-feminist men carried the ideals of the early 1970s movements forward into the twenty-first century.

3.4 The Men's Movements: Pro-Feminist "Men's Liberation"

As the various men's movements of the 1970s and 1980s grew and shifted in their ideological footings, a small number continued to hew to the initial feminist framework of men's liberation. Rather than turn inward and focus on *grief* as a manifestation of men's loss of status, privilege and purpose *a la* the Mythopoetic movement, or strike back against feminist influence in mainstream culture by capitalizing on some men's sense of *grievance* as the men's rights movement did, the pro-feminist men's movement instead turned towards an examination of men's shared *responsibility* for both violence against women and the violence experienced by men at the hands of other men.

One of the earliest acknowledgments of the men's liberation movement was with regards to men's complicity in the continued oppression and suffering of women (Brother, 1971). Early men's liberation members also recognized that the project of men's emancipation from restrictive gender roles could not be accomplished without an acknowledgment of the roles that race, class, and sexual orientation played in maintaining systems of oppression throughout the

Western world (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004). These acknowledgments were a marked contrast to the writings of men's rights and mythopoetic authors, who rarely mentioned the different sorts of experiences of racialized, gay, or otherwise marginalized men, while in some cases, such as the work of Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young, the history being discussed is explicitly that of straight, white men (2015).

Pro-feminist men's groups grew out of the anti-sexist men's organizations of the 1970s, and like their ideological forebears, stood alongside feminist organizations in opposition to rape and sexualized violence, anti-abortion legislation, and other forms of violence against women (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004). Indeed, the first pro-feminist men's organizations were strongly focused on the issue of violence against women, such as the still-extant National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), and Men Can Stop Rape; in the aftermath of the *Ecole Polytechnique* massacre, several men including the former leader of the federal New Democratic Party, Jack Layton, founded the White Ribbon Campaign, a global movement aimed at ending violence against women (Kaufman, 2011). Though the White Ribbon Campaign was formed in the wake of the massacre at the *Ecole Polytechnique*, its outlook, philosophy, and strategies for action placed it firmly within the pro-feminist strand of men's activism (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2005).

The first pro-feminist men's groups to emerge in the 1970s were closely tied to what Michael Messner, Max Greenberg and Tal Peretz refer to as "grassroots movement feminism" (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, 2015), which emphasized active participation in consciousness raising groups, direct-action organizations and other traditional movements of engagement (Connell, 1995). Many of the men involved in such groups were also involved in other social movements of the time, from anti-war movements to the civil rights movement. Yet their

inclusion into feminist spaces were sometimes met with ambivalence from feminist women, and the men themselves often struggled with their own uncertainties about their place in the broader feminist movement (Messer, Greenberg, and Peretz, 2015). Finally, men involved in pro-feminist men's groups during this early period often struggled to reconcile their focus on helping men to grow and develop more socially conscious attitudes with the need to constantly remind themselves to address not only their own social privileges, but also to be better and more accountable feminist allies (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, 2015). These struggles continued in the decades that followed, and were present in the discussions I had with contemporary movement participants (discussed in chapter six).

While the other major strands of men's movements often included a suspicion of – or outright hostility to – academic research or development, the pro-feminist men's movements, especially those emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, often incorporated research and principles developed by the social sciences – especially from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology – which were used to place activism on a more empirical footing. Whereas the Mythopoetic movement (and to a lesser extent the men's rights movement) often drew from Jungian psychology and the self-help movement, the pro-feminist men's movement drew from feminist-led social research and theories, and eventually began to develop their own. Throughout the 1980s, academics like Michael Kimmel, Michael Messner, James Messerschmidt and Raewyn Connell began to develop new ways of theorizing and understanding masculinity – or masculinities, as Connell would later propose (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In addition, academic research into men and men's lives gained significant traction, so much so that several peer-reviewed journals including *Men and*

Masculinities, and the *Journal of Men's Studies* were founded and continue to publish research today.

Armed with a growing body of empirical research, many pro-feminist men's groups began to work on constructing new articulations of masculinity for men to embody, ones that were more engaged emotionally, and less reliant on traditional framings of masculine power and social position (Jewkes, et al., 2015). Organizations like the White Ribbon campaign drew on academic research in psychology, early childhood development, sociology and a host of other fields to construct workshops and other programs designed to teach men to be better husbands, fathers, friends and allies to feminists and others engaged in struggles for social justice (White Ribbon Campaign, 2017). Other groups, including NOMAS, directly and explicitly counter the rhetoric of other men's groups, including the MRM and various MRM-affiliated father's rights groups, especially with regards to the subject of custody rights, parental rights, and the MRM's use of the concept of 'parental alienation syndrome' in divorce proceedings, a syndrome that is not recognized by any professional organization (Goldstein, n.d.).

While it may seem that the preoccupation with countering the rhetoric of other men's movements would draw focus and resources away from the core goals of groups like White Ribbon or NOMAS, such activities have become increasingly important maintenance issues for them. In 2014 for example, individuals with close ties to the men's rights movement purchased the domain www.whiteribbon.org, which looked nearly identical to the official White Ribbon Campaign website: www.whiteribbon.ca. The individuals set up a corresponding Facebook page, wherein they cautioned people against donating to "false White Ribbon initiative" that were dedicated to "addressing violence against women" (Culp-Ressler, 2014; Futrelle, 2014). In response, the White Ribbon Campaign threatened legal action, at which point the false site was

taken down, only to appear several weeks later at a new domain: www.honest-ribbon.org, where the owners launched rhetorical attacks against everything from the reliability of domestic violence studies (only the ones finding that men make up most perpetrators), to the effectiveness of programs aimed at addressing perpetrator violence (honest-ribbon, 2017).

Contemporary pro-feminist movements span a diverse range of foci, from engaging with young men and boys on subjects of consent, relationships and non-violent conflict resolution (Tucker and Yourex-West, 2015), to working with men to deconstruct harmful constructions of masculinity (UVic Men's Circle, 2017). In each case, a central focus on activism and programming within these groups remains with the notion of *responsibility*; for one's actions, and for one's continued complicity in patriarchal systems of domination.

3.5 Feminist responses to the men's movements

Feminist activists and scholars have been engaged with these men's movements since their inception. Engagement has taken many forms, and runs the gamut from open support of specific forms of men's movements, to skepticism – even hostility – towards all forms of men's activism. Some feminist literature regards the pro-feminist, men's liberation versions of men's movements as a net positive, and a welcome ally to feminist activism (Steinem, 1992; Starhawk, 1992; Messner, 1993; hooks, 2000; Kimmel and Kaufman, 1993; Gardiner, 2002). Other feminists are much more ambivalent, seeing men's movements as unnecessary or problematic (Lamm, 1977; Noble, 1992; Chesler, 1992; Bueskens, 2015), a view that appears to be in the distinct minority. Feminist responses to the various men's movements are predicated on the ideological position of the movement in question, with pro-feminist men's movements being looked upon favourably, while men's rights organizations are heavily criticized. Mythopoetic men's groups tend to be viewed with skepticism, largely due to its reliance on essentialist views

of masculinity and its ambivalence to feminist activism (Ferber, 2000; Fox, 2004; Heinrich, 2014; Mills, 1997; Messner, 1997).

While online discussions of feminism and men's movements are, on balance, positive, with self-identified feminists often discussing the need and importance of a positive men's movement, caution remains a ubiquitous sub-thread. Several participants in this dissertation discussed their own feelings of ambivalence – often about the organizations they had or continue to be involved with – even as they work towards building a more positive space to discuss men's issues. Several of the individuals I interviewed considered themselves feminists, and voiced concerns that without strong oversight, masculine privilege and the tendency to project guilt on to women for men's own failings threatened to overwhelm men's spaces. These concerns echo those of several of the participants in Messner et al's study (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, 2015).

3.6 Summary

Though each of the major strands of contemporary men's movements emerged from the same span of years in the 1970s and from the same original men's liberation movement, they have each taken significantly different paths. Most of the research examining these movements has focused on the ideological differences between the various strands, this research has illustrated that there is an emotional component as well. While the Mythopoetic movement focused its attention on what it perceived to be men's *grief* at their loss of identity in a more egalitarian society, the men's rights movement rallied around a shared sense of *grievance* – at a society its members felt had left them behind, stripped them of their rights and power, and reduced them to a marginalized status. By contrast, the pro-feminist men's movements, no matter their framings or focus, centered their activism around their members' shared sense of

responsibility for the current state of gender relations. It is that shared sense of responsibility that drives contemporary pro-feminist men's groups activism, though in recent years that activism has also come to include countering other men's movements' rhetoric, particularly in online spaces. It is no longer a question of *if* the disparate men's movements will meet each other, but *when*, and what shape that contact will take.

This chapter examined the rise of three principle patterns of men's activism: the mythopoetic movement, the men's rights movement, and the pro-feminist men's movement. I highlighted the ideological and epistemological foundations of each of these movements and illustrated how those foundations supported intellectual and activist projects that not only differed sharply from one another, but also resulted in inter-group conflicts that continue to this day.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In chapter three, I show that MRM communities online use a shared sense of *grievance* to help build a collective identity. This focus contrasts with the work of pro-feminist men's groups, which emphasize the need for men to engage with their offline communities and to take *responsibility* for their complicity in sexist systems of power. To assess how MRM participants set about this task, it becomes necessary to conduct an analysis of the grey literature of the movement – to examine what the movement says about itself, its opponents, its past and its future. To ensure that the materials examined originated in North American MRM groups (except where it is stated otherwise), I used cultural and linguistic signifiers to locate the material. I looked for textual cues – spelling and word choices (color instead of colour; miles instead of km) – as well as linguistic. I identified idioms common in North American culture (sports metaphors rooted in baseball, football and hockey as opposed to British football/soccer, rugby, cricket, etc.), as a way of establishing a geo-political context for materials found online. When viewing YouTube videos, I looked for biographies of the speakers, or listened for accents or references to nearby landmarks or cities.

This research project makes use of two principle methodologies to generate data and provide analysis of knowledge production in two disparate men's movements. First, the examination of men's rights communities requires an examination of online discourse, as the bulk of MRM activism occurs online. To this end, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of movement literature. Second, to analyze the personal narratives of pro-feminist men engaged in community building in offline spaces, I draw on narrative analysis and narrative inquiry (Bruner, 1991). I discuss these methods in greater detail below. These methods illuminate the patterns of

knowledge production in men's rights communities and in pro-feminist men's groups, and illustrate sharp differences in the directionality of knowledge production and dissemination.

While the research methodologies adopted are each designed to provide a unique type of data, ranging from the qualitative (in the case of that obtained through interviews), to the more quantitative data produced through the use of pointwise mutual information (PMI), they share a principle concern with interpreting subjective user-made content and personal testimonials in a way that emphasises narrative authenticity (Cresswell, 2009), and the reliability of the interpreted data (Guba and Lincoln, 1982; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The examination of materials drawn from online communities associated with the MRM is grounded in a critical discourse analysis, which is modeled on the work of Griswold and Daniels, who have made extensive use of a concept known as the "cultural diamond" (Griswold, 2013; Daniels, 2009). This model was selected due to its demonstrated effectiveness at analysis other online communities and movements, particularly reactionary ones, and those on the far right (Daniels, 2009; Hodge, 2017). The model focuses on identifying four principle components of online discussion: the *social world*, the *cultural object* that is the focus of the discussion, the object's *creator(s)*, and the *receiver* (both intended and unintended). The use of the cultural diamond as a heuristic offers a framework for understanding the materials produced within communities, as well as for understanding the ways in which those materials flows through and between online spaces.

Materials for this research were drawn from communities and contributors across thirty-five websites including A Voice for Men, reddit, MarkyMarksthoughts, VivalaManosphere, the National Coalition for Men, Mensrights.org, Chateau Heartiste, YouTube (specifically several of YouTube's more influential content producers associated with the manosphere) the Anti-

Feminist and the Men's Rights Movement.net. A more extensive reference list can be found in Appendix six. On more traditional blog sites like A Voice for Men and Chateau Heartiste, I examined posts by blog founders and contributors, while on social media sites like reddit, voat, and Facebook, I examined user posts and discussion threads spanning more than four years. Discussion threads and submissions were prioritized according to popularity and activity. Discussion with fewer than ten comments were eliminated, while discussions with more than eighty comments were more closely examined. On sites with voting options, discussion threads with higher number of votes were prioritized as upvote/downvote ratios were taken as a rough stand-in for popularity among users. A more detailed list of websites and communities can be found in Appendix C.

Of secondary importance in examining the flow of materials through online spaces, is recognizing the extent to which such spaces resemble one another; as cultural objects created in one space radiate out through ideologically similar online communities, it becomes important to gauge the extent to which those communities come to resemble one another in content. To illustrate this similarity, this project makes limited use of a technique known as "pointwise mutual information" (Aji and Kaimal, 2012; Martin, 2016), which allows investigators to illustrate the contextual similarities of different online communities. Using a freely available online similarity calculator, the researcher was able to establish a "guilt by association" similarity index which ranked various subcommunities on the news aggregate website known as Reddit (which is home to several of the largest and most active MRM and "man o' sphere" communities online) (Martin, 2016). While the focus of the online investigation remains rooted in a critical discourse analysis, the incorporation of a secondary, quantitative methodology provides a much-needed buttress to the research's claims of reliability (Cresswell, 2009).

Like the investigation of online knowledge production, the methodology employed to examine the materials generated through interviews remains firmly grounded in both qualitative methods, and a critical realist ontology. The interviews conducted in this project made use of narrative inquiry and analysis, which focuses on enabling interview participants to construct richly detailed narratives of their experiences (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006; Harrison, 2002; Somers 1994) This interview style encourages participants to freely construct lengthy responses to open-ended, semi-structured questions in a relaxed, informal or comfortable setting. The product of these discussions is a cultural object – a *narrative* – that is deeply personal to the narrator, and contextually grounded in the social fabric of the narrator’s lived experiences.

The project’s scope indicated a desire for three principle participant groups for interviews. Of these, groups one and two were to be drawn from active or semi-active members of extant MRM groups or communities, while group three would be drawn from participants currently engaged in activism or programming related to men’s issues who did not identify with the MRM. Several attempts were made to solicit participation from individuals identified as belonging to groups one and two, but those attempts were universally greeted with either refusal or nonresponse. In a few specific cases (discussed in 4.4), my requests were met with abusive or threatening replies. In one case, my personal identifying information (home address, telephone number, email addresses, etc.) was posted publicly in an MRM forum, a practice known as ‘doxing’ in online communities, and one that is widely perceived as an explicit threat (Honan, 2014). At that point, I made the decision to limit my interactions with the MRM to that of a *passive oppositional lurker* (Daniels, 2009) in online forums and communities, while continuing with greater success to invite participants from non-MRM affiliated men’s groups to be interviewed.

Respondents who belonged to group three (non-MRM affiliated men's group members, active and semi-active) were in most cases eager to respond, and in all but two instances, my invitations to participate were promptly agreed to. For these interviews, I had initially decided to invite between ten and fifteen participants, but after conducting interviews and follow-up interviews with eight respondents, reached saturation (Naresh, 1996) and decided to close the interview phase of the research.

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis & the Cultural Diamond

At the heart of any analysis of online communities is the concept of 'culture' itself. Establishing an 'objective' definition of culture is a tricky proposition; agents attempting to define the concept are themselves both products and creators of culture and so cannot disentangle themselves from its effects. Indeed, any definition of culture wherein the defining agent attempts to place their own subject position outside and thereby beyond its reach must immediately contend with the notion that they are, in effect, attempting to pull a "God trick" (Haraway, 1988) – an attempt to place 'culture' in the same position as any other axiomatic physical law, immune to human challenges to its validity. Knowledge of the world is *situated* knowledge, and must be understood to be conditional, and contingent, as must any definition of culture.

These challenges do not absolve the researcher from staking out the ground on which they intend to build their case. Given that social research rests on shifting soil, it becomes even more important for a concise – or at least defensible – definition of culture to be presented. In this research, discussions of culture recognize four principle concepts: norms, values, beliefs, and expressive symbols (Peterson, 1979; Griswold, 2013). Norms, according to Griswold, can be thought of as patterns of action and expectation that govern behaviour between individuals in social situations; values are those deeply held beliefs that reflect what a person or a society feels

are valuable or important; beliefs are deeply held opinions about the way the world operates – its logics and laws; expressive symbols are representations of those values, beliefs, and norms expressed through language, action, and other social practices (Griswold, 2013).

Not everyone in a society agrees on precisely *what* constitutes a valuable belief, practice, or tradition however, and so smaller collectives of individuals, drawn to one another by shared values – or a shared rejection of dominant social values or beliefs – form cohesive subcultures that boast their own cultural tapestries. In these subcultures – as in the dominant culture – *cultural objects* are created and shared amongst members to help reinforce bonds of solidarity and identity. These cultural objects are examples of the “... externalization, objecti-fication, and internalization of *human experience*” which separates culture from nature (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Griswold 2013; Hodge, 2017). Recognizing and identifying the composite elements of these cultural objects can be difficult, but a useful heuristic in this endeavour is the *cultural diamond*.

Cultural Diamond

When faced with the task of understanding cultural objects, it is helpful to ask a series of specific questions, to focus the investigation and provide a framework for analysis. A researcher ought to begin by asking: “*What is the ‘social world’ – the social context in which this object has been created?*” What is the cultural object’s *provenance*? This helps to establish the social context of the object – and therefore of the investigation. Researchers ought to also ask: “*Who is the object’s creator(s)?*” and “*Who is the intended receiver(s)?*” Together, understanding these questions – and understanding the relationships that exist between these categories – can assist the researcher in gaining a better understanding of the cultural object itself.

The cultural diamond can be used at many different levels of analysis, from an examination of the MRM, to more granular examinations of specific products of the movement, such as the “Don’t be that girl” poster campaign launched by the group “Men’s Rights Edmonton” in reaction to an anti-sexual assault campaign featuring posters bearing the words “Don’t be that guy” (See appendix two) (Kozicka, 2013).

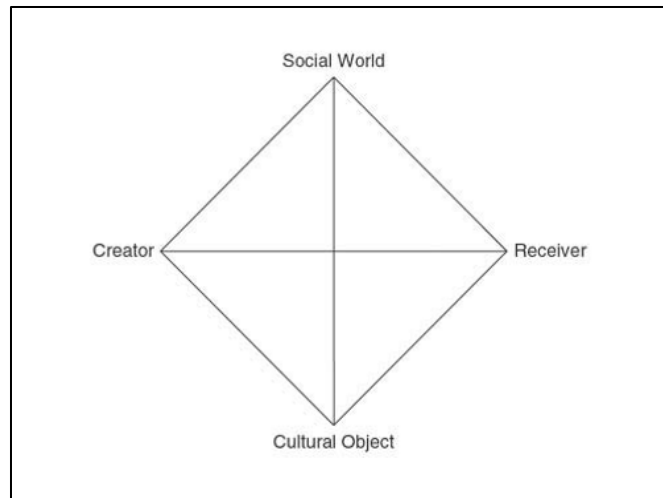


Figure 1 The Cultural Diamond

In each case, the cultural diamond can be used as a guide to help researchers parse out significant dimensions of the object of study, as well as gain insight into its purpose – stated or otherwise.

The cultural diamond can, for example, assist researchers in delineating a cultural object’s *intended receiver*, from an *unintended receiver*, whose interactions with the object may differ sharply from those of the intended receiver. In the case of the MRM, this is important for illustrating the different sorts of reactions seen by individuals who are exposed to movement-specific terminology or image-macros (also called ‘memes’ in online parlance). In a meme depicting a “joke” about raping a sex worker, found on a 2013 blog post on *A Voice for Men* (figure 2), the meaning behind the meme (and the subsequent reaction to it) will be significantly

different, depending on whether the receiver of the object is the intended receiver, or an unintended one.



Figure 2 Image 'meme' from *A Voice for Men* (Keene, 2013)

In the image, drawn from a 2013 blog post entitled, *Feminism and rape jokes*, the author used the image – known online as the “philosoraptor” – to illustrate the sort of humour that, in the author’s view, infuriates feminists who simply cannot take a good joke (Keene, 2013). The discussion about feminism, rape culture (and its lack of validity as a concept), and the importance of defending offensive or rude jokes serve as the social context –

the *social world* – of the meme itself.

In the context of the blog post, the image’s *intended receivers* are clear: the readers of the blog post, most of whom will either be self-identified members of the MRM, or people curious about its ethos. Indeed, the language of the blog post itself indicates that the author is intending the post to be received by a largely sympathetic argument; there is a distinct lack of any attempt to delineate ‘good’ feminists from ‘bad’ for example, or to present feminist counter-claims or arguments in their most charitable light. Instead, Keene simply refers to ideological opponents by the catch-all ‘feminists’, and indicates that their arguments are not merely wrongheaded or weak, but dangerous to a free society. The author concludes his post by saying, “These people [those who make crude or offensive jokes about 9/11 or rape] are not ‘rape apologists’ or ‘9/11

joke apologists’ they only want to defend the human right to offend and in return, be offended.” (Keene, 2013) Precisely where this supposed “human right to offend and be offended” resides is left unclear, but the implication is plain: feminists are attempting to censor the telling of offensive jokes, and are therefore potentially violating the ‘human rights’ of the joke tellers.

In this context, the meaning the intended receiver is to draw from the meme appears clear: the meme is the objecti-fication of the ‘human right to offend’, and is therefore a cultural object of deep symbolic importance; it is no mere image macro (though the specifics of the macro itself are fungible, to the extent that the message remains clear) but rather a rallying cry to those receivers who possess the necessary language to decode it. Those who lack that culture-specific language, and who attempt to interpret the object risk exposing themselves as outsiders should they attempt to unpack the meaning of the meme. In this way, the object becomes both worthy of protection, and gatekeeper of the community’s ideological borders.

The cultural diamond is not meant to be a discrete framework for empirical investigation; it is a guide for researchers to ensure that they are examining some of the more salient components of cultural exchange, while remaining aware of their own involvement in the exchange as both receivers and, through the articulation of their findings, creators of new cultural objects of their own. It is, in other words, an “accounting device” designed to encourage a fuller understanding of an objects relation to the social world (Griswold 2013; Daniels 2009).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Qualitative investigations of written materials, both in physical and online forms, draw on several different theoretical paradigms including critical discourse analysis, which allows researchers to examine language as a form of social practice – one deeply situated in flows and expressions of power (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000; Flairclough, 2013). Discourse, that is, the

conveyance of social meaning through ‘language’ constructs and is constructed by social reality; as individuals communicate with one another, their discourse is mediated through social context in a way that, in dialectical fashion, constructs and is constructed by an *order of discourse* (Fairclough, 2013; Fairclough, 1992), a ‘tone’ or ‘style’ of discourse that manifests in specific social contexts (such as politics, business, or academia). These orders of discourse are not discrete; they intersect with one another along other social vectors of opposition, oppression, and power that can alter – or disrupt – established orders of discourse in each social setting.

As an example, in American politics, political discourse is embedded in a specific – and often invisible – order of discourse that is raced, classed, and gendered. Historically, American presidents have been drawn from an incredibly narrow field of white, upper-class or wealthy men, with usually high levels of education. The order of political discourse in the United States therefore has been constituted of patterns of social interaction common to this segment of society. With the election of Barack Obama in 2008 however, one of these constitutive elements of American political discourse – race – was disrupted by the bi-racial social identity of the newly elected Obama. Considering this new reality, conventional analyses of official statements from the White House on current events – particularly those relating to race relations in the United States, had to contend with a perturbation of established orders of discourse (Cohen, 2013); what was the social significance of a *Black* president commenting on racial tension in America? How should one ascribe social meaning to an official address by a sitting president about a polarizing social debate, when the racial identity of that president had been made so central to his tenure?

Critical discourse analysis allows researchers to remain cognizant of these shifts in the flows of power in discourse, by continually drawing them back to the realization that discourse

of any kind is a form of *representation*, of constructing an account of social reality that takes as its foundations the cultural contexts of the one doing the building. It forces researchers to acknowledge their own part in the construction of social accounts, as well as reminding them that what they are researching is itself the product of an iterative dialectic between the subject and the world.

Passive Oppositional Lurkers

In her 2009 book examining the construction of identity and ideology in online white supremacist communities, sociologist Jessie Daniels referred to her own subject position – that of the research staff who assisted her investigations – as one of *passive oppositional lurking* (Daniels, 2009). This self-identification was an explicit recognition of Daniels’ political opposition to the ideologies and arguments of the subjects of her research and, further, an explicit declaration that while the substance of her analysis was as rigorously conducted as possible, her own subject-position nevertheless came with an implicit political bias. This admission, far from delegitimizing her work or rendering its conclusions suspect, was a necessary component of ensuring that her final analysis remained valid – that it’s conclusions could be trusted despite her own personal opposition to the groups she had chosen to study (Daniels, 2009; Cresswell, 2009). Indeed, when employing qualitative methodologies, an explicit enunciation of researcher positionality provides a useful check for outside examinations of researcher methodology, particularly in projects that make use of CDA and similar forms of inquiry, where the strongest check for reliability is to ensure that data obtained is internally consistent with other examinations of similar material (Heyink and Tymstra, 1993).

Throughout this project, I have similarly made the decision to identify my position within the research framework as one of passive opposition. In my examinations of MRM websites and

community discussions, I have striven to ensure that my interpretation of comments, claims or testimonies remains as *authentic* and *trustworthy* as possible (Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba, 2007). This directive is worked towards through several different pathways, the first of which involves adhering closely to the philosophical principle of *charity*, which demands that any interpretation of an argument or position rests on understanding said position using the strongest argument possible. Rather than simply accepting the text of an argument as written, I instead attempt to construct the most logically powerful version of the argument or claim, as to do otherwise runs the risk of incorrectly understanding the point or claim the argument was attempting to make or, worse, replacing their original position with a rhetorical ‘straw man’ that paints an argument as being weaker than it is.

Put simply, the ‘principle of charity’ states that, all things being equal, a reader ought to interpret a person as having reasonable beliefs (Gauker, 1986), which implies that any subsequent arguments a person makes are at least rooted in a rational line of thinking. As a passive oppositional lurker, there is a danger in my interpretation and analysis that I might instead choose to display a weakened or logically invalid version of a position, to discredit or undermine the position of a movement that I fundamentally disagree with.

A second method of ensuring that my interpretations remain both authentic and trustworthy is to ‘let the subject speak’ as often as possible, which means that whenever a complicated or important point is being made, I have made the decision to include not only the immediate quotation, but also the context where possible, or a charitable exposition of the context.

Accessing online materials

There are several difficulties to conducting online analyses that are not present in works that rely on either interviews or archival analyses of physical materials. Whereas monographs, newspaper articles or transcribed interviews are static objects (one cannot simply edit a book once it has been printed), online materials are more ephemeral. Websites change their look and formats from time to time, and the materials they present can – and often are – changed on a whim, sometimes without any notification or indication of change. This presents both a practical and an ethical issue for researchers whose primary sources of data are drawn from online sources. In practical terms, the often-temporary nature of online materials means that user comments or entire articles may be deleted between the time they are gathered by the researcher and the time they are read in the final draft. Ethically, online research presents another problem: given that any user can edit their posts or comments at any time to reflect a change of position or to correct a misunderstanding, is it fair for researchers to attempt to preserve a specific comment or cluster of comments by saving the materials as a static image, what is colloquially known as a “screen grab”?

Addressing the first concern is relatively trivial. In each case where this dissertation draws on online sources – from news articles to blog posts to user comments in specific discussion threads – that source is formally cited and added to the dissertation bibliography, along with a URL (Uniform Resource Locator, also known more colloquially as a “web address”) containing an active link.¹² In many cases, there are no page numbers associated with

¹² An active link refers to a web address that takes a user to a non-cached or ‘live’ version of a website. This is typically the sort of site that users most commonly access. In some cases, URLs may send users to a cached or archived link, which is little more than a stored and dated “snapshot” of a website as it existed on a certain day and time.

such a link, as nearly all of the websites cited feature scrolling text instead of specific pages. I chose to use URLs to active links instead of cached sites after considering the ethical implications of using cached versus live sites.

When a person writes a book, they invest significant time and energy into ensuring that what is written is what they wanted to say. They read and re-read the text, make multiple rounds of revisions and, in the case of academic works, submit that material to peer-review prior to publication. These steps tacitly imply – if not explicitly state – that the author stands by those words, and recognizes them as lasting in perpetuity. When citing these materials, a researcher can be reasonably certain that what has been written was what the author implied and stands by. These same assumptions cannot – and should not – be made by researchers conducting online research.

In discussion threads, user comments are text-based components of a *conversation*, rather than a monologue. Whereas a monograph or journal article are designed to impart information to a receiver, online comments are often posted to elicit responses; they are elements of a dialogical relationship between interlocutors and as such represent little more than slices of a much larger picture. Comment chains emerge over hours, days, weeks, months and sometimes even years; a single comment written in haste, is part of a larger conversation, and often carries little of the deliberation present in monograph or article drafts. For a researcher to take a screen-grab of these comments is to render permanent a fragment of a conversation that may yet be changed. Some platforms, like reddit or Facebook, indicate when a comment has been edited, and an “etiquette of edits” has emerged as part of a larger project of constructing etiquette online (Preece, 2004). Often, comment edits are accepted in good faith, especially when the user indicates the purpose of the edit (e.g. “Edited for clarity”, or “Edited to reflect a change in position”). In a recent

discussion on a topic posted to reddit's "change my view" subreddit (/r/changemyview), a user named DragonsBloodQ edited their post in response to other user's feedback to say "EDIT: This has come up a few times - my argument is not coming from a place of my own morality. I'm not saying this is "right" or "wrong" behavior; I'm simply stating that it is narcissistic." It is evident that the user felt their position was being misrepresented and felt the need to change their post to discourage misunderstandings. Had a screen-grab been obtained between the original and edited posts, readers might have misunderstood the user's position.

The ethics of handling user comments and posts on active websites are different than those regarding the use of static text. To address this, I chose to engage with materials found only on active websites rather than cached or archived sites, with the understanding that doing so increased the risk of comments changing significantly between when I first read them, and when subsequent readers may access them. Where appropriate, I quoted sections of text to illustrate a point or present an example, but in each case, the corresponding URL in the bibliography directs readers to the active site where subsequent edits or deletions are visible.

4.2 Grey Literature of the Men's Rights Movement

The materials gathered and analyzed for the critical discourse analysis component of this research was gleaned from publicly available materials found on both MRM websites like *A Voice for Men* or *Mensrightsmovement.org*, or from larger social media sites like reddit, Facebook, or voat. Accessing this material did not require me to register for any websites or gain access to private communities or discussion forums. YouTube videos that were used were publicly listed, as were the podcasts and other audio/visual materials examined. Online discussions in forums or reddit discussion threads were accessed publicly as well.

Written materials produced for the movement consisted largely of blog posts, both by regular posters and guest bloggers and made publicly available on MRM websites. In some cases, a single website could feature multiple posts written by different authors such that a wide sampling of men's rights ideas could be obtained by combing through the site's archives. The website *A Voice for Men* features essay-length articles (some reaching upwards of 4,000 to 6,000 words) by more than two dozen regular and guest bloggers. Other communities, like reddit's /r/mensrights community contain archives of almost every post and discussion since the creation of the community. While users can delete their posts or their individual comments, there remain hundreds of thousands of individual comments and thousands of archived discussions.

The result is a collection of long and rich textual archives spanning more than two decades of MRM knowledge production, in addition to hundreds of hours of audio and video materials containing debates, interviews, monologues and video essays pertaining to MRM concerns. In addition, authors associated with the MRM have produced numerous monographs, including some published by university presses, where men's rights concerns and arguments have been presented in a more formal format. This research drew from those sources in addition to the movement's online literature.

4.3 Pointwise Mutual Information

PMI: Assessing online community similarity across reddit communities

While many MRM communities have been established on stand-alone websites like *A Voice for Men*, others, including the /r/Mensrights¹³ community on the aggregator site¹⁴ 'reddit'

¹³ On reddit, the prefix /r/ indicates a specific community or "subreddit". In this case, /r/mensrights is the men's rights subreddit on reddit.

¹⁴ Aggregator sites are websites whose primary function is to serve as a collection and curation hub for content drawn from elsewhere online. Different communities will focus on different materials, depending on interests.

are instead established within broader, networked communities where individual users are able to post content in multiple different online communities using the same account, and without having to navigate to a different website. In these cases, researchers are often able to track individual users across multiple communities using various tools, such as the ‘tag’ and ‘mass tag’ features of an internet browser plug-in known as the “reddit enhancement suite”. Through this tool, a user can highlight specific reddit usernames with labels and colour highlights, which will remain associated with that user regardless of which community or ‘sub-reddit’ they post in. In this way, a user can identify a user – for example, a user who frequently posts in the /r/mensrights subreddit – and can ‘tag’ them with a label and a specific colour (such as a red-highlighted name and a label that reads “frequent /r/mensrights poster”) and that label will appear wherever the user posts comments. Indeed, many reddit users – particularly those active in the ‘debate’ and ‘meta’¹⁵ subreddits make frequent use of these mechanisms to track the ‘cross-pollination’ of users and ideas from one community to another.

Understanding the extent of this sort of ideological cross-pollination is important, especially on websites as large as reddit, because doing so allows investigators to better visualise the scope and ‘shape’ of an ideology’s penetration into ostensibly unrelated online communities. In this research, I make use of a quantitative methodology known as *pointwise mutual information*, which allows investigators to assess the contextual similarities between different online communities. The tool used to calculate the PMI scores for subreddit similarity in this research was developed by Trevor Martin, a PhD student at Stanford University, who developed

¹⁵ A ‘meta’ subreddit is a reddit community whose primary interest lies in discussing reddit in general, or a specific subreddit or cluster of subreddits more specifically. As an example, the subreddit /r/TheBluePill is a meta-community that primarily discusses the content of subreddits associated with the “manosphere” on reddit, including “Red Pill” communities (RedPill, MarriedRedPill, PurplePillDebates, etc.), MRM communities (/r/mensrights, MGTOW, etc.), and the “involuntarily celibate” or “incel” communities. In some cases, as in the case with TheBluePill, a meta-community’s official position is “look, but don’t touch” when it comes to other communities.

an online calculator using data drawn from Google’s BigQuery service, which allows registered users to download large volumes of raw data for analysis (Martin, 2016). PMI makes use of a process of identifying collocations of words and terms in different subreddits to construct a mathematical model of their level of similarity. Collocations are expressions of two or more words that together have a specific meaning that cannot be replicated through word substitution (e.g. “Netflix and chill” colloquially means “to engage in sexual activity”, rather than literally “Netflix and cool temperatures”), and so examples of specific terms across multiple subreddits can indicate a degree of semantic similarity. The formula for this operation is:

$$\text{pmi}(x, y) \equiv \log \frac{p(x, y)}{p(x)p(y)} = \log \frac{p(x|y)}{p(x)} = \log \frac{p(x|y)}{p(y)}.$$

As the similarity of two sub-reddits increases, the mutual information score (MI), $I(X; Y)$, approaches 1, so a pair or grouping of subreddits with high frequencies of collocations will feature higher overall MI scores. This procedure can be especially useful in searching large volumes of data for linguistic idiosyncrasies, such as the use of subculture-specific neologisms or phrases (e.g. to be “red pill”, “male disposability”, or “men’s human rights movement”) that can assist in establishing cross-community similarities (Bouma, 2009).

The dataset used for the PMI tests in this research were obtained from a publicly available database of reddit communities, users, and posts compiled through Google’s BigQuery data management service. The dataset is organized by subreddit community. To test two or more communities for similarities, a user simply identifies the subreddit by name (/r/mensrights or /r/theredpill, for example), and identifies any communities they wish to exclude from testing. As an example, if a user wishes to assess /r/feminism’s similarities to other communities, but does

not wish to include results from so-called “debate subs”¹⁶, they can enter that community’s name to exclude it from the search. While the results obtained are limited by the simplicity of the tool, the general findings provide useful empirical data.

In this research, I used reddit’s native search tool to identify communities and discussions using keywords including “men’s rights”, “feminism”, “anti-feminist”, “SJW¹⁷”, “Red Pill”, “manosphere”, “father’s rights”, “mythopoetic”, “misandry”, “anti-social justice”, and “MGTOW”. I then visited each community that appeared in the search results and read several posts on the “front page”¹⁸ to confirm they were in fact associated with the manosphere (and not a satirical or joke subreddit). In addition to reading the front pages, I also read the sidebar of each of these pages, and examined any links to associated communities present to help contextualize the nature of the community. The sidebar often contained a brief description of the community, as well as a list of rules or policies. On the /r/mensrights subreddit for example, the sidebar description of the community reads, “The Men's Rights subreddit is a place for those who wish to discuss men's rights and the ways said rights are infringed upon.”

Once I had constructed a list of subreddits that matched my search criteria, I then made use of the subreddit similarity simulator developed by Martin. I entered subreddits from my list into the search fields and executed the program, which generated both lists of subreddits ordered by MI score (figures six and seven), and digital maps of reddit communities with subreddits ordered by degree of similarity (figures three, four, and five). In addition to testing subreddits in

¹⁶ A “debate sub” is a community specifically designed to allow users to debate specific positions or ideologies, /r/FeMRAd debates for example, where MRAs and feminists can debate specific issues.

¹⁷ “Social Justice Warrior”. A pejorative term employed by alt-right groups and other reactionaries to describe social justice activists. A social justice warrior is a person who spends their time being outraged and offended by any opinions, jokes, or attitudes that differ from their own.

¹⁸ The top twenty-five or so posts that appear on the community page. Each post typically contains a discussion thread containing anywhere from one or two comments, to dozens, even hundreds of comments.

isolation, the tool also allows users to construct compound variables by grouping subreddits together to test their overall similarity to other communities. In this research, I constructed a compound variable combining the /r/mensrights community with /r/theredpill and /r/MGTOW communities as a way of examining how a large cross section of reddit’s “manosphere” participants related to other communities (figure seven). The results indicated that while the similarities between /r/mensrights and some of the more extremist or radical communities (such as those associated with the alt-right) were modest, the inclusion of the /r/theredpill community increased the degree of similarity with alt-right and other reactionary communities. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

Though much of this research project remains firmly grounded in qualitative methodologies, the inclusion of a quantitative form of analysis such as PMI was desirable as a form of triangulation; this project’s use of critical discourse analysis indicated a strong degree of content and user cross-pollination in online communities, but the use of PMI tests further supported these initial findings and thereby strengthened them.

4.4 Interview Methodology: Narrative Inquiry and Analysis

Interpreting and analysing participant interviews necessitates a different methodological approach than is needed for examining online or text-based discourse. Unlike many of the posts, discussions and debates found online, which tend to use direct, focused lines of text for both questions and responses, interviews often encourage participants to instead adopt nonlinear approaches to answering questions. An innocuous question like “tell me how it is that you came to be here today?” is capable of eliciting a near-limitless number of possible responses. Indeed, when asked to establish the context of their current position, participants have the whole span of their lives in which to construct a response. For some participants, their answer may begin with a

singular event from their childhood; others might locate the catalyzing moment in the not-too-distant past. The reason for this is, while simple-sounding in nature, nevertheless of critical importance to any understanding of many qualitative interview techniques: participants, if empowered to do so, actively construct a *narrative* of their lived experiences, which is deeply enmeshed in their social position, as well as illuminating of their attitudes, beliefs, friends, and antagonists (Bruner, 1991; Somers, 1994; Cullum-Swan and Manning, 1994).

Narrative Inquiry

This research project made use of a style of interview called *narrative inquiry*, which empowers research participants to construct a personalized accounting of their lives, in the context of the over-arching interview theme, in as much or as little detail as they feel the discussion merits (Harrison, 2002; Atkinson and Delamont, 2006). Rather than require the participant to answer each question concisely and clearly, I instead chose to adopt a more informal technique; I ‘primed’ each participant at the beginning of each interview by establishing a set of guidelines for answering that returned as much power as possible to each participant. I would begin each interview with a variation of the following,

“The purpose of our discussion today, is to get an understanding of how you see yourself and your role within the movement you’ve come to identify with. I have a number of questions to ask you, and if you choose to respond to them, I would encourage you to answer in any way you wish.”

If a participant chose to answer a question by first contextualizing their response, or if they felt that the most important place to begin answering the question was with a moment in their lives from a decade ago, they were encouraged to do so, and given as much time as they needed to answer. In some cases, this resulted in answers turning into extended monologues

lasting seven to eight minutes; in others, an answer may be less than a dozen words. Each question was designed to be open-ended, and the participant was encouraged to challenge the question, if they felt it was problematic, or to revisit questions later, if an answer to another question spurred additional commentary on an earlier topic.

After the participant indicated that they had answered a question, I would attempt to summarize what I had heard to ensure that a) I correctly understood what they had told me, and b) to give them an opportunity to hear their own answer spoken back to them. This ‘conversation loop’ (speak → listen → repeat → listen → speak) often resulted in an interview with a short list of questions lasting for more than an hour.

Over the course of each interview, as participants answered my questions in their own way, in their own time, and drawing on key moments or events that stood out in their memories, what emerged from them was a cohesive narrative – a story of their experiences that featured a recognizable plot, replete with twists and turns, protagonists and antagonists, climaxes and denouement. In each interview, the characters and the interactions remained unique at the granular level, but as more interviews were conducted, a series of recurring themes emerged that were common to virtually every story told by participants. The pattern of these themes was as significant as the individual lives that when taken, built the pattern.

Narrative Analysis

Once each interview was complete, I would take the recording and copy it from the device to an encrypted laptop. The files were stored in a password-protected folder, and only I retained access to the data. The interviews were transcribed by hand into word documents, with only minor edits made to them – removing extraneous “ums”, “uhs”, and other audible pauses. I would then take each word document and attach them to a Microsoft OneNote file, on to which I

would also transcribe my interview notes, as well as any immediate reactions I had to the interviews. The result was a Microsoft OneNote “notebook” with a unique page for each interview, containing a word document transcript, interview notes, and impressions. In each interview, I made specific notations each time a participant drew attention to a detail, person, object, or interaction; any point where the participant paused in their answer, or digressed into what they felt to be a salient detail in their narrative. These significant moments often related to a “turning point” or instance of personal realization about either their work or their own psyches that also represented a key development in the plots of the narratives the participants were constructing.

In one interview for example, Tay, a young activist engaged in harm-reduction work, paused while describing an encounter with an MRM activist online to digress into an extended discussion of a time when he was personally “called out” by an acquaintance of his whose own feminist activism was concerned with sexual violence against women. In this digression, Tay recounted how his own gender and class-based privileges were called into focus by a person who saw the work Tay was doing around men’s issues as generally good, but problematic in that it was ignoring his own social position as a white, straight man from a middle-class background and education. In spending time on this – at first unrelated – anecdote, Tay could pivot his narrative away from a simple recounting of personal experiences, and towards one that recast his own activism in the context of a broader, pro-feminist social movement.

Each interview was recorded using either a personal recorder, or by recording interviews conducted via video conferencing over Skype. Primary interviews averaged 1.5 hours in length, with follow-up interviews lasting between 45 minutes to an hour. Participants were asked a limited series of open-ended, narrative-style questions designed to elicit richly detailed narrative

responses (Berg and Millbank, 2009; Bruner, 1991; Cullum-Swan and Manning, 1994). Follow-up questions were posed during natural breaks in the respondents' narratives and were used to encourage the respondent to expand on earlier themes, or to clarify points where meaning was unclear. Interviews were transcribed manually and input into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis application to examine the material for recurrent themes and patterns.

Once input into Atlas, I constructed a codebook designed to highlight the presence of themes, phrases, and word-choices that reflected the emotional characteristics of participants' individual motivations for activism. Words such as 'obligation', 'imperative', 'duty', and terms like "I felt I had to..." or "As men, we must..." I categorized as "responsibility-focused" themes. Other word groupings were categorized as "anger-focused" or "grief-focused". Finally, I constructed a series of codes that highlighted whether a participant's responses or narrative were "self-regarding" or "other-regarding". Self-regarding responses indicated that the participant was largely interested in men's activism as a form of self-improvement, while other-regarding responses indicated that men's activism was more focused on helping other members of society or a participant's peer network.

Saturation

A key element in any research involving interviews is knowing when to stop – when subsequent interviews trod over well-worn territory, rather than offering substantial new insights. At this point in the research, new interviews may continue to reveal interesting personal narratives that can be rewarding to listen to, but nevertheless offer diminishing returns to the project (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). There are many ways of recognizing saturation in qualitative research, but one of the first is the principle of "knowing it when you see

it”; saturation is recognized through the process of listening to respondents during the interviews, and noting when subjects or concepts of relevance have been introduced before (Bowen, 2008).

In a practical sense, qualitative research has no – and can have no – easy protocol to handling issues of saturation. Depending on the nature of the research, style of coding and the codes being generated throughout the interview process, saturation can be reached after thirty interviews, or in as few as five (Marshall et al., 2013; Bowen, 2008). Once saturation is recognized by the researcher, there is often little benefit to continuing with further interviews, as doing so will result in little additional information gained. Worse, a researcher who is concerned with reaching an arbitrarily established ‘hard number’ of interviews may run the risk of harming the purpose of the research by overwhelming themselves with interview transcripts and notes, which limits their ability to dig deeply into any one of them. In qualitative research, the saturation point of any research project is in part dictated by a confluence of variables: research question, scope of the target population or movement, availability of active and receptive membership in such populations, research focus (themes, actors, group objectives or practices, etc.), all which impact who is invited to participate, and how many participants are needed.

4.5 Recruitment and interview strategy

Recruitment of key informants

Obtaining the participation of informants followed three distinct patterns, consisting of a) contacting potential informants through their publicly listed contact information, b) chain referral sampling through active informants, and c) opportunistic recruitment of specific informants. The initial phase of research focused on contacting organizers and facilitators currently active in pro-feminist men’s groups in Canada. Potential recruits in this phase needed to fit certain criteria: they needed to be active in the leadership of their groups; their organizations needed to be either

explicitly feminist or pro-feminist¹⁹ in their outlook, and such groups needed to have a publicly available program, mission statement, or literature available for potential members to peruse. If an organization was vague or secretive about their philosophical or ideological leanings, they were disqualified from consideration. During this phase of recruitment, three different organizations, including a nationally-recognized charity were excluded, as their mission statements and examples of public activism seemed ambivalent – sometimes even hostile – to feminist theory and activism.

Once potential recruits were identified, I sent out an initial introductory email, identifying myself, my research project, and my interest in having them participate. I also attached a letter of consent with additional information about the project; twelve potential recruits were contacted in this manner. Of that group, I received responses from five, and secured the participation of three, with the other two declining to participate, with one expressing concern that their participation might, upon publication of the research, lead to harassment by anti-feminist activists.

Chain referral sampling

At the end of each of the interviews with the first group of participants, I asked if they would be willing to facilitate an introduction with other activists from similar groups who they felt might contribute to my understanding of pro-feminist men's activism in a process referred to as chain referral sampling (Avrachenkov, Neglia, & Tuholukova, 2016; Heckathorn, 2002). Each of the three initial participants agreed, and emailed potential recruits a copy of the letter of intent, along with an introduction to me by way of cc'ing me to their emails, and providing the potential

¹⁹ “Pro-feminist” groups were those whose mission statements, public activism, and online activities made use of feminist language or philosophies, or that explicitly recognized and acknowledged their debt to feminist theories and activism. Pro-feminist men's groups frequently identify themselves as being open and explicit allies of feminist movements, while remaining separate to focus their efforts and attentions on men's lives and men's issues.

recruit with a brief account of their experience. I followed up each email with a brief, personal introduction and an invitation to contact me for more information or to set up an interview time. Two of the three potential recruits contacted agreed to participate. In each case, the participants recruited by these means were involved with men's groups other than those from the initial participant group, and were located in different communities than the initial group. Participants in these two phases of recruitment were involved in pro-feminist men's activism in Victoria, British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, and, Toronto Ontario.

Opportunistic sampling

The final two participants were recruited through chance meetings with individuals who not only expressed interest in the research, but also met the criteria I had established for other recruits. One recruit, living in the Northwest Territories, expressed a desire to participate and was interviewed while he was on holiday in Victoria. Another recruit reached out to me after reading an article about men who had left the Men's Rights Movement that featured my experiences. This recruit had been involved in pro-feminist activism since the early 1970s and was among the first to adapt feminist theory to an examination of men's lives.

In all but two cases, participants were interviewed in face to face settings; two participants were interviewed via Skype, with follow-up interviews conducted over Skype as well.

Interview setting

Once participants had confirmed their willingness to be interviewed, meet ups were scheduled. Participants were asked to suggest a space where they felt comfortable being interviewed, a quiet spot where they could feel empowered to discuss their experiences openly and honestly (Perry, 2000). Several participants chose to be interviewed in their favourite coffee

shops, where we sat in out of the way corners where foot traffic was lower, and the background noise was less. Interviews conducted over Skype took place in our respective homes, as the interviews generally took place late in the evening (and in one case, well after midnight). In each case, I left the choice of time, place, and date up to the participant, and adjusted my own schedule accordingly; I wanted to signal to the participants that they were in control of the interview space.

Prior to each in-person interview, I would arrive at the site early to secure a space, and to prepare my equipment. Once the participant arrived, we typically spent ten to fifteen minutes making small talk and building rapport, while going over the letter of consent. Once I had received verbal and written consent to proceed, I would begin recording our interaction and move into the interview.

Interview structure

Interviews for this project were semi-structured, with a loose script consisting of a few open-ended questions (see appendix A) designed to elicit lengthy, detail-rich responses. The interview itself was structured in several distinct phases, beginning with initial introductions and rapport-building, and ending with a wrap-up and debrief phase where participant questions could be answered in a less formal fashion, and where I had the opportunity to answer questions posed by the participant (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2014). After the introductory phase, I then introduced the research, offering a deeper explanation than was present in the letter of consent (phase two). It was during this phase that I obtained informed consent. The next phase of the interview consisted of the main body of the interview itself; questions were posed to the participant, who was encouraged to dwell on elements they felt were more important, and to digress if they felt a topic needed further explication.

During the fourth phase of research, I tried to speak less (to ask fewer direct questions, for example), and to focus instead on guiding participants through their accounts, by asking them to clarify points or to untangle contradictory or confusing elements of their accounts (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2014). As the interview moved towards its end, I began to draw the participant back into the present, encouraging them to discuss their current affiliations – if any – and to ask if they felt there was anything my questions had missed, or if there was anything they felt they needed to add to the discussion. If the participants felt that they had said everything they needed to say, then I would bring the interview to a close by thanking them for their contributions and insights, and asking if I could schedule a follow-up interview later. These interviews were conducted via Skype.

4.6 Limitations and Perception of Risk

“YOU ARE MY ETERNAL ENEMY NOW!” online harassment, doxing, and the risk of harm

This project initially sought to recruit active members of the Men’s Rights Movement to be interviewed, to gain a better understanding of their day-to-day activities, their perceptions of risk or opposition from non-group members and ideological opponents, as well as to gain their perspective on the future of the movement. This goal immediately encountered a challenge; as a pro-feminist activist in several different social movement communities, including the international skeptical movement, atheist movement, and social justice movements, my name and ideological perspective were well-known to my potential recruits. Additionally, my public record as having been a self-identified member of the Men’s Rights Movement who had subsequently abandoned it – only to adopt an explicitly feminist activist orientation – had further cemented my position among many MRAs as an unreliable and biased researcher and therefore not to be trusted. Most of my attempts to solicit participation among this group went

unanswered, and those few potential recruits that did respond, refused my invitation to participate, or sent insulting or abusive replies.

During my online research throughout this time, I also discovered a far more troubling point of concern: a user posting on the /r/mensrights subreddit had found an academic CV of mine and had posted it online. The document contained my home phone number, academic email, and a personal email, as well as my current home address. In addition, the user had obliquely suggested that other users begin to contact my work associates to ‘draw attention’ to what they saw as hateful, anti-male rhetoric online. It was at that point that I suspended my attempts to solicit participants to this study. The posting of personal information online by ideological opponents is an action known as ‘doxing’²⁰ and it is perceived as an overt threat by many of its victims; it serves as an unspoken invitation to “take harassment offline” (Kohn, 2015). This instance of doxing was not the first for me; several years ago, after giving a public talk about the rise of white supremacy in Canada, I found my personal information posted on a hardline anti-immigration website. It is difficult to describe the persistent fear that results from this sort of attack; dealing with online harassment and abuse is often a daily nuisance for people engaged in any kind of social justice activism, but when that abuse threatens to spill out into one’s offline world, or when dedicated ideological opponents can pinpoint exactly where a person and their family sleeps at night, that irritation quickly gives way to deep-seated anxieties about one’s personal safety. In my view, this pattern of harassment posed a significant risk to my

²⁰ “Doxing” is a form of electronic attack against a person or group of people. A user uncovers personal information about a specific user or poster (in my case, my full name, home address, home phone number, work contact information, and the name of my partner), which is then posted in forums or discussion groups whose members are then encouraged to use that information to harass, stalk, or otherwise harm the target. In my case, the harassment was limited to abusive messages directed to my work email, personal email accounts, blog site, twitter feed, Facebook page, and other social media.

personal well-being – if not physically, then emotionally and psychologically – and should therefore no longer be pursued.

Methodologically, this research is limited in several ways. First, sampling of interview participants was opportunistic and subsequently through chain referral. This can potentially bias the sample in favour of a specific organization or group, as more than one participant was a member of a single organization. To account for this, I cast a wide net in my initial phase of recruitment; I contacted individuals from several men’s organizations with both local and national representation, to ensure that I was not hearing from just one group or perspective.

Second, the project was limited by an absence of interviews with active members of the men’s rights movement. During the initial phase of recruitment, MRAs were contacted, but in response I either received nothing, or abusive and harassing emails. As a result, this avenue of investigation was abandoned, and a new strategy adopted wherein I spent time identifying autobiographical accounts of individuals associated with the men’s rights movement – posts, discussion threads, and articles featuring words like “I felt” or “I was”. In this way, I could include MRA voices, even if they refused to speak with me explicitly.

4.6 Summary

By including two different patterns of data collection in the form of interviews and discourse analysis of online materials, it was necessary to incorporate two primary research tools: narrative inquiry for interviews, and the cultural diamond as a framework for an online discourse analysis. Additionally, I wanted to buttress the findings of the discourse analysis with an additional empirical analysis and a point-wise mutual information test was useful in this regard. The concept of the cultural diamond is useful in ordering materials produced by groups

of interest, by encouraging the researcher to ask: “who made this”, “who is it for”, “what cultural context helped to create it”, and “what message does this carry”.

For interviews, narrative inquiry is a powerful framework. It empowers the participant to establish their own parameters for sharing information, and gives them the space to build cohesive, compelling narratives about their lives in ways that more structured, formal interview techniques cannot. The result of such interviews is a wealth of richly-detailed, context-heavy material that situates participants’ answers in their lived experiences. For interviews with participants involved in the pro-feminist men’s movement, this model of interview allowed each participant to dig deep into their biographies to identify what motivated them to engage in the activism they did, and thereby grant me a window into their emotional histories.

In the following two chapters, I use the methodologies discussed here to examine a) the materials produced by the men’s rights movement in their online communities, and b) the personal accounts of participants in various pro-feminist men’s communities and organizations across Canada and the United States. I illustrate how MRM materials are produced by and for men’s rights activists, and are primarily concerned with establishing and maintaining group identity in online spaces. In chapter six, I illustrate how participants in pro-feminist men’s groups are interested in examining their complicity in systems of oppression, and their *responsibility* to themselves and to others to dismantle or challenge patriarchal systems. In chapter seven, I compare the patterns of knowledge production and mobilization in MRM and pro-feminist men’s groups to show the differences in directionality between these groups.

Chapter 5: Findings: Men's Rights Communities Online

The men's rights movement is a vocal, active, and dynamic form of reactionary countermovement (Blais and Dupuis-Deri, 2012; Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996) with a primarily online membership and an infrequent offline activist presence. Like many other countermovements, the men's rights movement spends a large portion of its time engaging in boundary maintenance, working to establish and maintain an alternative worldview that positions white, straight men as an oppressed class (Daniels, 2009; Kimmel, 1987; Kimmel, 2013). At the heart of the men's rights movement's counter-memorialization (Bold, Knowles, and Leach, 2002; Burlein, 1999) is the shared experience of *grievance* – the conviction that the position of men in society as builders, defenders, and leaders has been weakened – even destroyed – at the hands of radical ideologues who see all men as enemies. An analysis of the movement's online activities, including an analysis of the largest men's rights community currently active online indicates that the movement's reactionary counter-narrative has placed it among a growing constellation of movements, actors, and communities associated with traditional values and a sometimes-conspiratorial worldview (Maddison, 1998).

Using a critical discourse analysis, coupled with a limited semantic similarities analysis, this chapter discusses how men's rights communities online construct knowledge, and how that knowledge is disseminated throughout men's rights communities. I show how men's rights communities are largely self-referential in nature, spending significant time and energy constructing online borders around in-group communities, and engaging in ideological and rhetorical struggles along those boundaries with their opponents.

5.1 Countermemory

A central critique of history by scholars aligned with the Men's Rights Movement is that what mainstream history is little more than a narrative – a story told by historians to the rest of society, but one clouded by ideological bias which positions women in the role of the 'eternal victim' of male depredations and oppression (Nathanson and Young, 2015). To read any academic investigation of history is to dive into a conspiracy-theory of history that has been constructed and bolted in place over the true history by feminists and feminist-influenced historians (Nathanson and Young, 2015). While much of this critique is a projection – condemning the historical record as it is known by mainstream academics as a conspiracy to discredit it and replace it with a *bona fide* conspiracy theory that men have always been oppressed – a central premise of it remains essentially correct. History *is* a narrative, one that often has as much to say about the signifier as it does about the signified (Foucault, 1977), but also one constructed through academic debate, and refined through an endless, iterative process of examination and re-examination. Indeed, it is the re-examination of history that sits at the heart of Foucault's 'countermemory', which he argues is an integral component of critical historical analysis; by examining those past events that are *not* spoken of, a critical historian can illuminate 'forgotten' histories, and contribute to a more accurate historical narrative (Foucault, 1977).

Countermemory and critical history have been integral to the work of historians and others who for decades have worked at the margins; queer theorists, feminist scholars, and anti-colonialist scholars have all made use of countermemory to illuminate hidden – often brutal – chapters in the history of the West (Assman, 2008; Stoller, 1994), and laying bare the hidden subtexts carried within mainstream historical accounts; within the history of the 'creation of

Canada' lies the counter-memory of genocide, colonial expansion, and systematic dehumanization of entire cultures.

Most invocations of counter-memory occur within critical and even sub-altern spaces, where marginalized voices draw counter-memory from history in a way that forces the listener to see beyond what is usually represented. Yet critical and marginalized voices are not the only ones to use counter-memory; in a peculiar inversion of the idea's original meaning, MRAs and anti-feminists of all stripes have deployed the concept for their own ends, using counter-memory to illuminate the hidden oppressions of men that have been trapped behind a 'feminized' rewriting of history (Burlein 1999).

In much the same way as white nationalist, identarian and neo-Nazi groups have re-written history to place whites in the role of oppressed, endangered minorities (Daniels, 2009; Gallaher, 2003), MRAs have grasped the subversive potential of cloaking revisionist history as a hidden, suppressed history – or as a revolutionary and emancipatory account of history (Nathanson and Young, 2015) – and many of the more popular MRA personalities make use of it in their blogs, YouTube videos, and public talks. Many MRA and MRA-affiliated sites, personalities and blogs make use of “Red Pill/blue pill” imagery in which the blue pill represents a continued acquiescence to established political, social, and historical narratives, while the red pill represents breaking free of such constraints and seeing the world for what it ‘truly’ is (an anti-male hell). In a discussion in reddit's /r/mensrights community, user Illimitable Man argues that the manosphere represents a stronghold for men who have been shown the truth of society,

“Men of the manosphere need to realise they're incredibly lucky to have found the manosphere. It's a way out of the darkness. Most men are locked away in blue pill purgatory and have to stumble onto the manosphere by typing the right thing into Google.

The mainstream media is not going to help bring the manosphere into the mainstream because it shits all over the religion of the now-time: feminism. If they did bring us into the mainstream they'd try to change/hijack everything we represent and tear it down. They'd label us women haters and try to ruin what I believe is a very special part of the internet. A part of the internet that gives a shit about men and gives them a fighting chance to be sexually and socially successful when the majority of developed societies fail to do either at present."

By applying Griswold's model of the cultural diamond, it becomes apparent that such language is an example of the ways that men's rights rhetoric is packaged such that its intended audience – other MRAs – immediately recognize both the content of the message (that men's rights ideologies are the only correct way of understanding men's positions in the world), and its appropriate contextual framing. In this example, the intended audience recognizes that to be "red-pilled" is to be awake in a society of sleepers, to be aware of the true nature of the world and of men's disposable, oppressed position in it. More than that, it tells MRAs that their "red-pill" knowledge is *dangerous*, so it is only natural that they will be met with resistance.

One of the principle challenges to the maintenance of an MRA-friendly countermemory is the existence of convincing alternatives or counterpoints to the logics of contemporary historical and social research, and to the empirical data such investigations produce. When an MRA presents an argument claiming that men have always been marginalized, oppressed, or otherwise under the power of women, the obvious counter is for their interlocutor to demand that they explain the historical fact that across much of the history of the Western world, women have almost universally been relegated to the status of objects, property, or marginal humans; how can women oversee everything, when by most accounts women have rarely overseen anything? In

many cases, the first response of the hypothetical MRA debater is to simply deny the historical evidence by dismissing it as misleading, disingenuous, or even logically fallacious, using neologisms constructed for that very purpose.

The language of countermemory: Kafkatrapping and the Apex Fallacy

Entering online spaces constructed by and for men's rights activists can be a daunting experience at first. Discussions often make heavy use of movement-specific jargon, which consists both of neologisms (e.g. "Kafkatrapping", which refers to what MRAs see as a fallacious form of argumentation in which a person's denial of their sexism/racism/transphobia, etc. is taken as evidence that they are, in fact, racist, sexist, or homophobic.), and re-purposed, context specific terms and phrases like "double-standard", which in MRA spaces is used almost exclusively to indicate areas where women avoid negative consequences that would certainly be present were they men. These terms and phrases are not incidental, but rather are components in a much larger project of counter-memorialization; the past – both in terms of cultural histories and personal experience – is reconstructed as an act of protest and connected to the present and future through performance and practice that assume the revised history has always been true.

Consider the concept of "Kafkatrapping", a neologism that appears mainly in MRA or anti-feminist spaces, and which first appeared in 2010 blog post by a men's rights activist named Eric Raymond. Kafkatrapping comes in several different forms, which all focus on the power of guilt, shaming, and the act self-censorship (or "thoughtcrime") in ensuring that critics of feminism, progressivism, or other socially-minded ideologies are silenced. In one instance, Raymond uses the concept to illustrate what he sees as a fundamental flaw in the concepts of oppression and privilege, which he argues are both rooted in the "Kafka trap".

“Sometimes the kafkatrap is presented in less direct forms. A common variant, which I’ll call the Model C, is to assert something like this: “Even if you do not feel yourself to be guilty of {sin,racism,sexism, homophobia,oppression...}, you are guilty because you have benefited from the {sinful,racist,sexist,homophobic,oppressive,...} behavior of others in the system.” The aim of the Model C is to induce the subject to self-condemnation not on the basis of anything the individual subject has actually done, but on the basis of choices by others which the subject typically had no power to affect. The subject must at all costs be prevented from noticing that it is not ultimately possible to be responsible for the behavior of other free human beings (*sic*).”

While the text of the kafkatrap emphasises the stifling and “oppressive” nature of feminist and progressive language, the subtext reveals a more central ideological preoccupation: the primacy of the individual over the group. The kafkatrap is, in other words, a protest the use of demographic or statistical data to illustrate complex social problems, or the existence of social privilege among certain elements of society (particularly among straight, white, cisgender men). The kafkatrap allows the interlocutor to thereby deny statistical trends or historical patterns, in favour of the more granular terrain of individual experience, where one man’s troubles are as valid – and useful as evidence of oppression – as any other’s, no matter their gender, race, ethnicity, or class.

A similar pattern can be identified in another commonly used neologism: the “apex fallacy” which, like kafkatrapping, is used as a method of invalidating statistical patterns of privilege or subordination. Unlike kafkatrapping, which finds its roots in the back and forth of informal online debates between anti-feminists and their opponents (Futrelle, 2013), the apex

fallacy serves as an attempt to short-circuit debates by attempting to label arguments of social privilege as logically unsound (and therefore worthy of dismissal without consideration).

The apex fallacy exists as a reimagined form of the hasty generalization, an informal logical fallacy rooted in flawed inductive reasoning. The apex fallacy is more specific; arguments that speak to the reality of masculine privilege stand accused of running afoul of the apex fallacy, by extending the privileges of a tiny segment of the population (billionaire CEO men) to the masculine population. When a person argues for the existence of “male privilege”, they are running afoul of the apex fallacy by assuming that the social privileges held by CEOs are the same as those held by all other men, even unemployed men in rural communities. Since any such claim is *prima facie* absurd, the argument must fail.

The principle function of the apex fallacy, like the concept of kafkatrapping, is to deny the relevance of macro-level trends, or the very existence of gender-based categories of oppression. Through the atomization of systems of privilege and subordination, MRAs and anti-feminists strive to annihilate society itself, to replace it with a vision of world where, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, “... there is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families.” (1987).

As cultural objects, kafkatrapping and the apex fallacy are important elements of both counter-mnemonic practices and as elements of in-group identity maintenance. Both concepts are constructed as explanations or argumentative strategies for in-group members to be used against out-group interlocutors whose own rhetorical strategies may be predicated on the invocation of statistical data or other empirical works. Like “Red Pill/blue pill” dichotomies, kafkatrapping and the apex fallacy are created by in-group members, to be received by in-group members, to be used as boundary maintenance in rhetorical debates against out-group members.

I reject your reality and substitute my own

In a 2004 episode of the *Discovery Channel's* series *Mythbusters*, one of the hosts, Adam Savage, when presented with information that he did not want to hear stated “I reject your reality, and substitute my own” (Savage, 2004), presumably with one where the laws of physics worked differently than the ones that were limiting him. In the Men’s Rights Movement, as in many other reactionary social movements, the desire to (re)construct reality to conform to a preferred narrative or historical arc motivates the use of countermemory – substituting one reality for another, more desirable version (Daniels, 2009). The logical first step, and indeed the most important, is to begin by delegitimizing social and historical trends, by either dismissing them as faulty ideological constructs, or as cases of mistaken identity. Indeed, historical revisionism is the only way for MRAs to erase the monopoly on power that men have enjoyed for much of the history of Western civilization. Such a desire is spelled out in explicit terms by Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young in their book, *Replacing Misandry*,

“The goal is to reverse the tide of misandry by *replacing* the conspiracy theory of history – that men rebelled against an egalitarian society in the remote past, established patriarchy, and have thus oppressed women ever since – with what amounts to a revolutionary theory.” (Nathanson and Young, 2015)

Like many other traditionalists and anti-feminists, Nathanson, a professor of religious studies at McGill university and his writing partner Katherine Young, a specialist in Hinduism and an associate fellow at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria, see the historical narrative of the West as one that has been written and rewritten by feminist-influenced scholars with an axe to grind against men (Nathanson and Young, 2015). In their estimation, successive technological and cultural revolutions in human societies had the

effect of divorcing men from their shared collective identity, rooted in the central position that male bodies played in the creation and advancement of human civilizations (Nathanson and Young, 2015). As technology advanced, men's bodies were removed from their central position in society, whether it was as cultivators and builders, or fathers (to be replaced by machines and sperm banks). It was only with the advent of mechanized warfare that men's bodies once again emerged as central players in civilization, only not as builders or creators of life, but as "sacrificial victims" and disposable fodder which effectively proved their second-class status (Nathanson and Young, 2015). These themes have been echoed by virtually every influential MRA; men as disposable fodder in war is itself a retread of Warren Farrell's 'disposable male' from the early 1990s (Farrell, 1993; Straughan, 2013; also, Blake, 2015). In a blog post entitled, "Are men disposable?", a user named RedPillGirl recounts her history as a single mother raised by a single mother who came to realize that while society tells women that men are optional (and thus, disposable), she – and the rest of society are wrong: men are needed,

"Women do need men. Men make a woman's life more stable and secure and safe and easy in so many ways, little and big, I can't even list them. Sure, there are men who aren't good partners or husbands, men women are better off without. But that's very different than saying women don't need men, that all men are disposable."

RedPillGirl's assertions come from a perspective that already assumes as true the claim that men are disposable. To buttress her beliefs, she maintains links in her post and the accompanying comments to a popular YouTube video by another MRA and Red Pill personality, Karen Straughan (also known as Girlwriteswhat) who presents a similar argument.

Like the 'disposable male', MRA countermemory relies on the strategic deconstruction of historical narratives and, more importantly, on the redeployment of historical patterns of

oppression from one axes to another. This redeployment is an active process, requiring an in-depth re-interpretation of history to build a narrative that underplays the importance of class, race, or other kyriarchal (Schüsler Fiorenza, 1992) patterns of dominance and subordination. Authors such as Farrell, and activists like Karen Straughan, see masculine disposability anywhere they see evidence of men being injured or killed in groups – such as in especially dangerous jobs, or in warfare (Farrell, 1993; Straughan, 2013). In their view, men are oppressed – and have always been oppressed – because ‘society’ deems men’s bodies to be of less inherent worth than women’s; women carry children, after all, while all men do is inseminate, therefore women are more ‘valuable’. Such an interpretation of history however, requires a mechanism by which the uncomfortable facts of history, such as the fact that the men who fought and died in wars, or who worked and died in dangerous jobs were sent there by other men in positions of power. Were those facts to be included, it would make the claim that men were oppressed due to gender far less tenable (men oppressing other men implies that men did, in fact, hold a great deal of social power), and so rather than seek to explain them, many MRAs deploy the “apex fallacy” as a way of obscuring them.

Instead of seeing a pattern of powerful and rich men sending poor, powerless men to fight and die for abstract principles, or sending them to work and die in extractive industries or other dangerous jobs, MRAs and anti-feminists see a tiny handful of men – acting in the interests of protecting women – agreeing to send their fellow men to die, because they have been convinced that women’s lives must be protected at all costs (Coulombe, 2016; Farrell, 1993; Forney, 2015; Marano, 2017; Marano, 1990). By engaging in such revisionist history, the men who are sent to die, or who spend their lives working in dangerous jobs are recast as oppressed – even enslaved – by women (and feminists more specifically), while the men who created the policies that sent

them there are dismissed as either a tiny fraction of the masculine population *a la* the apex fallacy, or pawns under the control of women operating behind the scenes. As blogger MarkyMark argues,

“Women "are" society. What women's wants are is what society's want's are. This is where women are lying when they talk about the dreaded "patriarchy." The patriarchy only existed because women explicitly approved of it, and endorsed it morally - causing the men to follow suit.

This is what is happening today too. Most of the anti-feminist battle is not going to be between men and women... it is going to be between women who want a "traditional man" and those who want a collective "government husband." In both cases, the women are advocating for men to take care of women - with little concern for the man's wants and needs - one wants a personal slave to serve her & her offspring, while the other wants a slave class to serve women and their offspring in general. (*sic*)”

Once established, Men’s Rights countermemory forms the epistemological backbone from which to construct an alternative historical narrative, and a new pattern of activism which emphasises resistance to the “feminization of society” and the threat of a future in which women adopt masculine traits (and body-types), and men are reduced to feminized shells of their former selves. In a post discussing this pattern of feminization, blogger and manosphere personality Roissy in D.C. (whose real name is James Weidmann) argues,

“That last part is happening too, in case you were wondering. I could show you a pic of John Scalzi [a contemporary science-fiction author well known for his progressive, social-justice activism] as proof and call it a day, but as demonstrated by the CH

[Château Heartiste] links above there is similar data-rich evidence piling up that something weird and disconcerting is happening to Western men to turn them into mewling manboobs, overweight male feminists, slope-shouldered hipsters, and huge beta sycophants. Although it isn't (yet) making the nightly news, far-flung quarters are beginning to pick up on the CH-identified disturbing inversion of men to a physical and psychological female form."

The worldview of many MRAs is one where women are the true wielders of social power, and always have been; men have spent most of our history beholden to the whims and needs of powerful women who control the shape of things from the shadows; women who use men as puppets to guide and control other men, and thereby shift the focus of men's anger and rage to other men. MRM spaces encourage men to seek solidarity with one another to combat the oppression they perceive at the hands of women, and encourage other men who they see begin to adopt this worldview. In the comments section below a video post on *A Voice for Men* that asserts that no-fault divorce was a legal innovation which incentivised women to divorce their husbands to gain access to their wealth, a commenter named "Barnesy" recounted his recent "conversion" to the men's rights worldview, and his revelations are supported and affirmed by other commenters. On commenter responds to the commenter by saying,

"Welcome to the real world Barnesy. Soon you will be looking upon other men with the same empathy, sympathy and with emotion attached as you did with women and in a way you never thought you could ever do.

From this day you are at, when I experienced the same thing, I am surprised at how I now find myself looking at other men not as competitors, but as my brothers who I actually care about.

We were always brainwashed to only look upon women with love, charity and affection, especially if those women are suffering. But for men, it was always scorn and indifference.

"Get of your arse you wimp, shake it off and man up for goodness sake!"

Now when I see a brother suffer and broken, it chokes me up and I am compelled to go and ask if he needs some help and I will give it gladly without ever asking for return.

To the contrary now, I look upon crying women with great suspicion and only ever step forward with trepidation and fear that this could be a trap, because indeed far too many Black Widows are out there looking for a compliant man.

Good for you Mate for finding your feet and standing tall as an independent man.

Breathe the free air Brother, and enjoy!"

It is a conspiratorial shadow-world, but one which validates the MRM's sense of collective *grievance* which in turns fuels much of the online rhetoric the movement produces (Kimmel, 2013; Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Broomfield, 2016). Men are expected to view each other as sharing a collective experience of oppression, while women are to be viewed with suspicion. To maintain these beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence and pushback from both feminist activists and data-driven social science research, MRAs lean on each other in shared spaces found primarily online, where they can speak the way they wish to speak publicly, and exemplify the sorts of practices they feel ought to be adopted by the world around them.

5.2 Imagined Communities & Free Spaces of Practice

Association with activist communities of all stripes carries with it a degree of risk that activists are expected to manage (Simi and Futrelle, 2004; Futrelle, Simi and Gottschalk, 2006), and this is especially true in reactionary communities such those associated with white

nationalism, misogyny, or those rooted in discriminatory politics (homophobic or transphobic movements, for example). In addition, reactionary activist networks must also contend with social stigma, sanction, and even criminalization in some jurisdictions in response to public demonstrations (Simi and Futrelle, 2004; Simi and Futrelle, 2009). In this respect, the MRM is no different; MRA rhetoric in online spaces is routinely highlighted in media reports and by critics of the movement, and individual activists are often singled out for mockery and critique (Futrelle, 2017; Adams, 2017).

In response to the heightened perception of risk that comes from association with reactionary movements, activists construct what researchers Simi and Futrelle call “free spaces for collective identity”, where activists can engage in speech and practice that reflects the sorts of patterns they wish to see enacted society-wide (Simi and Futrelle, 2004; Simi and Futrelle, 2009). In traditional reactionary movements, such free spaces typically take the form of annual gatherings, music festivals, religious retreats and other events that feature isolation from mainstream culture as a central component (Bohlen, Rafferty and Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway, 1996; Burlein, 1999). Free spaces provide activists a space where they can share ideas and strategies, debate concepts, and refine their rhetorical techniques, in addition to allowing for a kind of stylized ‘role-play’ where they manifest the patterns of behaviour they feel are currently considered ‘unacceptable’ in mainstream society.

Unlike other, older traditionalist and reactionary movements, the MRM spends far less time organizing in public spaces or through offline activist networks than it does constructing online free spaces, where activists are, behind a veil of anonymity, free to express the ideas and rhetoric they feel forbidden to speak in public. MRAs in online spaces use such sites to reiterate and strengthen the central arguments of the movement, to an audience that is overwhelmingly

sympathetic to them. In a reddit thread discussing the price of feminist activism in Western nations, user dis_mah_mobile_one argues,

“Men are always going to be seen as more disposable, because on a purely reproductive level (a level so deeply rooted it informs a lot of higher functions) men are more disposable.

Now that says nothing about individual worth, but society cares little for that anyways.

What past societies figured out - and which we will eventually once the costs of feminist idiocy grow high enough to collapse the largesse necessary to spawn it - is that part and parcel of men's disposability is men's greater utility as well. Men make most of everything, repair most of everything, and defend most of everything.

Men used to receive a concomitant amount of respect and legal authority due because of their greater responsibility, again in societies that worked with nature and not against it. Feminism and the larger equality cult has destroyed that, and will continue to do so until it starves itself out, is replaced by a culture that does not operate on such false precepts, or a combination of the two (*sic*).”

Comment responses that disagreed with minor elements of this comment were accepted as valid forms of debate and discussion (and were largely concerned with ensuring that the user was not *underplaying* the oppression of men), while comments that disagreed with the fundamental premises of the post were either down-voted (resulting in the post disappearing from view), or eliminated entirely. As Michael Kimmel has noted, comments like the above, despite ostensibly being about ‘male disposability’ or masculine oppression, are sub-textually concerned with *grievance*, and the belief that contemporary men are oppressed largely because of the entitlements they feel are being denied to them (Kimmel, 2013).

Across the ‘manosphere’, *grievance* is a common theme, and it forms a central element of the MRM communities that exist online. In a single, 24-hour period, the /r/mensrights subreddit (one of the largest online men’s rights communities), featured the following examples of ‘discrimination’ against men: a comedian hosting a ‘women-only’ comedy show (in which men who bought tickets were still allowed to attend)(Ramos, 2017); a New York Times article detailing the ways in which men were expected to conduct themselves in white collar jobs; a one-night, ‘women-only’ screening of the movie *Wonder Woman* by San Antonio, Texas movie theatre; a question to community members about perceptions of ‘misandry’ in high-school (reddit.com, 2017). Among the all-time highest rated examples of discrimination compiled by the community included being refused access to a washroom (according to a snapshot of a poster on the door of a York University washroom); a screenshot of a young man and young woman arguing about justifications for hitting men/women; A poster from a university student union stating that men’s opinions about abortion or reproductive rights are less important than a woman’s; a blog post in which the author claims that replacing the word ‘men’ with ‘black people’ in a post about feminism reveals the discriminatory nature of feminist discourse; an example of the double-standards of body image, comparing discussions of Leonardo DiCaprio and Amy Schumer’s ‘beach bodies’.

In each example, the subtext remains rooted in notions of *grievance*; at being unable to use a washroom; at being able to discuss domestic violence on a private Facebook page; at being discouraged from offering an opinion on women’s reproductive health; at being denied the ability to say what they want, act how they want, look how they want; at being able to attend a single showing of a single movie at a single theatre, free from criticism or even restraint. Though few – if any of these perceived insults rise to the level of systemic discrimination for MRAs,

these are examples of a ‘slippery slope’ leading towards the subjugation and enslavement of men (Farrell, 1993; Davison, 2014). As one commenter, MGTOW-Man stated, in response to a blog post detailing how society teaches young girls and women to turn men into slaves,

“Women---feminist or not---in general...vastly general, that is, want to run everything. Everything means just that: EVERYTHING. Men's emotions, inner thoughts, politics, jobs, schools, families, courts, churches...you name it. Nothing is exempt from their feelings-skewed idea that it all should revolve around them...and only them. To exacerbate this dilemma, apparently, most women do not even know this is a common trait shared amongst their sex...and thus, if any male or "outside' female disagrees, their feelings-induced protective shields cause them to automatically say men (and women) like that "hate women" are mean bigots, sexists, and oppressive brutes--whatever exaggerates and helps them GET MORE!.

Understand women, how they work. Understand men, how they work too, and we will have half of our work done. (*sic*)”

In the online spaces of the MRM, such assertions are commonly made, often defended, and rarely debated, because the *raison d'être* for such spaces is to maintain the pathos and resentment associated with *grievance*.

Despite sharing some similarities with other reactionary social movements, the MRM is distinct in that most of its activism takes place online. As a result, the movement’s use of free spaces as conceived by Futrelle, Simi, and Gottschalk (2006) is limited. Aside from a few small, real-world conferences and a relatively small number of offline meetups, the bulk of contemporary men’s rights activism takes place online; instead of protest marches, there is trolling ((Kimmel, 2013; Sharlet, 2014; Engle, 2016)). Due to the virtual nature of much of the

MRM's activity, the chances of any given member meeting other MRAs in offline spaces remains relatively small, thus minimizing the overall impact of free spaces to the construction of MRM culture. Instead, MRAs take part in imagined communities, online gatherings of like-minded individuals who signal their allegiance to core intellectual or ideological conceits through the display of culturally intelligible symbols, patterns of practice, and a willingness to disseminate ideas throughout broader social networks (Castells, 2011; Castells, 2012; Wilson and Peterson, 2002; Griswold, 2013).

The boundaries of imagined communities are fluid, due to the rhizomatic nature of online network construction (Castells, 2012); online networks grow outward from central hubs of knowledge production (websites including A Voice for Men and reddit), linking with other, ideologically similar networks and exchanging in-group symbols as a means of propagation. A prime example of this can be found in the case of 'Gamergate', an online eruption of reactionary activity centered – ostensibly – around the issue of "ethics in games journalism" which was itself a precursor to the mainstream arrival of the 'Alt-right' (Lees, 2016; Dewey, 2014). In late 2014, a series of online articles exploring the expanding definition of the term 'gamer' and the explosion in diverse, independent video game productions by an increasingly diverse cast of video game designers began to emerge in video-game oriented spaces. While not immediately sensational, they became so after a small group of online trolls from the 4chan website decided to use them as part of a campaign designed to target and harass female video game developers and journalists.

In a matter of days, the trolling campaign had erupted into a full-blown culture war that rocked the video games industry to its core, and made international headlines for its exceptionally vicious attacks on women (Todd, 2015; Massanari, 2017). Gamergate rhetoric and

imagery emerged from a small number of sites dedicated to producing pro-gamergate images and ‘memes’ but was quickly picked up and disseminated through existing networks, where individual gatekeepers (moderators, administrators, etc.) had to make a choice as to whether the images stayed or were deleted. Those sites that were at least sympathetic to the pro-gamergate perspective retained the images, thus signalling to prospective community members a site’s willingness to participate in the spread of the gamergate phenomena. By the time the phenomena reached its peak in mid-2015, pro-gamergate websites could be found connected to everything from white nationalist and identarian web communities, to Alt-right and conservative sites. Indeed, by the time the phenomena had run its course, gamergate iconography could be found throughout the right-wing and reactionary corners of the internet, including men’s rights websites and forums (Esmay, 2014; Lin, 2015; Futrelle, 2014).

The relative ease by which gamergate rhetoric (and subsequently Alt-right rhetoric due to the close relationship between the two phenomena) could find acceptance within the ‘manosphere’ is illustrative of the degree of ‘cross-pollination’ that occurs in reactionary online movements. Despite some claims to the contrary, a growing number of observers have pointed to an increasingly broad ideological overlap between the MRM and the Alt-right (Futrelle, 2017; Futrelle, 2017; Marcotte, 2017; also, Wilkinson, 2016). This overlap can be best illustrated through an examination of the similarities between online communities of a single website – reddit – which boasts more than 500 million unique visitors each month, and more than 250 million unique users, making it the eighth largest website in the world (Alexa, 2017; Smith, 2017).

An important caveat to any discussion of relationships between the various reactionary movements of reddit or in general is that in most reactionary groups, most members are not

radicalized (Daniels, 2009; Atran, 2010; Ezekial, 1995; Atran, 2015), nor do they necessarily share the beliefs of other reactionary groups. The bulk of most reactionary movements – like the bulk of most social movements in general – are comprised of ‘fair-weather’ members, or individuals whose beliefs are in accord with the tenets of the movement, but whose affiliation remains tenuous or casual (Tarrow, 1994; Moreau, 2017; Gamson, 1991). The MRM is no different in this regard, and as the data above indicates, the similarities between the MRM and other reactionary movements like the Alt-right or white nationalism while significant, are not enough to tar them all with the same brush.

Certainly, there is some overlap however, as prominent men’s rights activists including Paul Elam, Christina Hoff Sommers, and even Warren Farrell have appeared on explicitly white nationalist websites and podcasts, including *Radio 3Fourteen*, a white nationalist podcast that has also hosted holocaust denialists and other extreme edges of the white power movement (Angry White Men, 2016; Futrelle, 2017). As the reach and influence of the Alt-right has grown throughout networks of reactionary activism both online and off, it has been interwoven with the kind of misogyny frequently found in the more extreme corners of the MRM and anti-feminist movements alike (Romano, 2016; Futrelle, 2017; Gais, 2017). As a result, while some MRAs are loathed to admit any connection between the Alt-right and the MRM (A Voice for Men, 2016), many Alt-right websites and public protests have featured language that is so like the MRM’s own rhetoric as to be indistinguishable (Gais, 2017).

A dissection and enumeration of the reactionary groups associated with the Alt-right would be exhaustive, but some general points can be made; Alt-right rhetoric and imagery is found throughout the more radicalized fringes of other reactionary movements such that the more extreme the ideology of any given reactionary group, the more likely it becomes that one

will find Alt-right images, rhetoric, and language. At the intersection of online misogyny and the Alt-right, for example, sit several specific groups, including the “proud boys” a reactionary, misogynistic Alt-right group founded by Gavin McInnes (MacDonald, 2017; Dissler, 2016), and various groups associated with the ‘Red Pill’ school of thought (Pearl, 2016). While there remains some animosity between the various MRM, pickup artist, MGTOW, and Red Pill men’s groups, the differences are less about how men ought to treat women or who they ought to vote for politically, and more about the sorts of strategies men ought to use for sexual success or to achieve self-actualization.

5.3 Mapping Similarities

Reddit: a primer

Reddit is classified as an ‘aggregator’ site; reddit users submit material drawn from websites across the internet, and the submitted links, news articles, blogs, images, and other content are then voted on by the site’s userbase. Popular submissions become increasingly visible to other users (by rising higher up in ranked lists of content), while unpopular submissions are ‘downvoted’ until after reaching a certain threshold, they disappear.

The website is organized into more than 50,000 ‘communities’, semi-isolated groups of users organized around common themes such as basketball (/r/basketball), politics (/r/politics), religion (/r/religion), and many others. For users who wish to discuss these topics with a narrower focus, smaller communities are formed: /r/conservative, /r/liberal, /r/libertarian, /r/democraticsocialism, etc. In these smaller communities (called ‘subreddits’), the standards for discussion, including moderation, approval criterion for submissions, etc. are determined either through discussion amongst the userbase, or by the community’s moderators, who set the rules and enforce them. These standards can vary wildly from subreddit to subreddit, with some

communities enforcing a lax set of general guidelines, while others employ a rigid system of sanctions, bans, and appeals designed to maintain a set standard of discussion.

Users are not limited to participation in only one subreddit. A single user, once registered for the site, is automatically subscribed to reddit's 'defaults', a collection of popular subreddits designed to showcase the sorts of content available on the site. As of 2017, reddit's default subreddits includes subreddits for food, gadgets, landscape images, books, pictures of cute things (/r/aww), do it yourself projects, science, videos, and world news, to name a few (reddit, 2017). As users explore the site, they can subscribe to other communities, and can eliminate default subreddits from view to further customize the visible content on their feeds. A user's identity remains the same, no matter which subreddits they are subscribed to, and by clicking on an individual user's name, a person can see every comment and submission that user has ever made.

The smallest subset of subreddits, aside from personal subreddits or other single-user subreddits, are the so-called "meta-subs", which are communities organized around discussions of discussions that take place in certain subreddits, or between different subreddits. For example, the subreddit /r/mensrights is dedicated to the discussion of social issues from an MRA perspective, while the subreddit /r/againstmensrights is a community of pro-feminist users who discuss the particulars of conversations that occur in /r/mensrights. Similarly, the /r/theredpill subreddit is for discussing 'Red Pill philosophy', while /r/bluepill is a community established to mock and critique users of the /r/theredpill. Though small, many of these communities are very active, and their content is frequently 'cross-linked' to larger subreddits (where they are discussed in a strange ouroboros of discussions of discussions of discussions).

What makes reddit such an interesting case study is the way that its organizational structure allows for a multiplicity of different communities to emerge, and the fact that users'

identities remain constant throughout each community they are subscribed to. This means that an image of any given user's reddit interests can be constructed through an analysis of their commenting history. Further, a rough image of that user's popularity in any given subreddit (and, broadly, the extent to which their ideas are compatible with the majority view of the community) can be seen through an examination of the directionality of reddit 'karma' assigned to each comment. Reddit 'karma' is a system of determining popularity through voting on comments and submissions; 'upvoting' indicates approval, 'downvoting' indicates disapproval or even simple disagreement.

Contextual Similarities: Pointwise Mutual Information

Visualizing the constellations of reddit's subreddit communities is difficult, given the sheer scope of the site. With more than 50,000 individual communities, reddit's landscape is confusing at the best of times (should one subscribe to /r/politics, /r/worldpolitics, /r/conservative, /r/Obama, /r/liberal, or /r/the_donald for news and discussion?), and attempts at visualization are similarly confusing. Some order can be established however, by constructing maps of reddit based on contextual similarities, using individual user commenting patterns and subscription stats to plot a map based on subreddit similarities. Using a simple application developed for the blog "Short Tails", I constructed three visualizations of reddit communities (Figures three, four, and five). The application translates individual reddit communities into points on a grid, with larger communities represented by larger dots, and colour-coded according to rough contextual similarity.

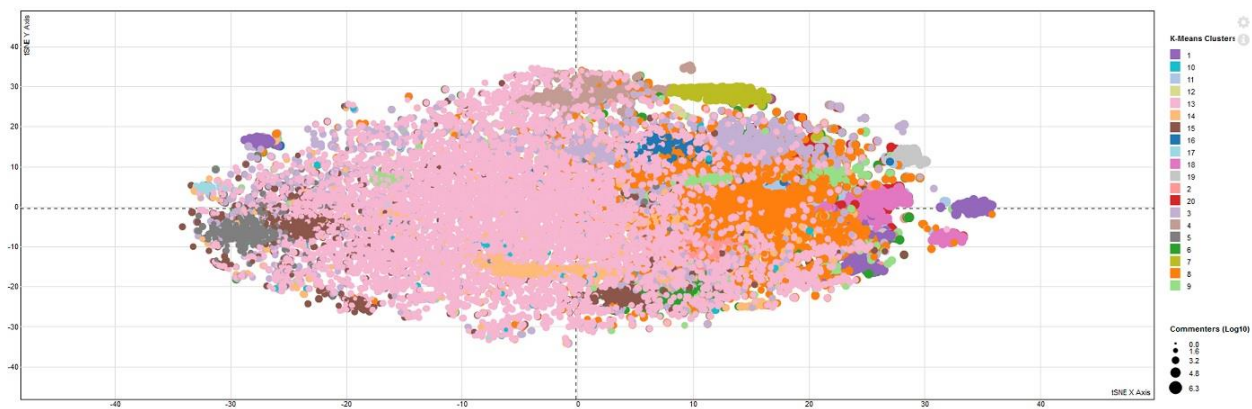


Figure 3 The Universe of reddit's subreddits, Martin, 2016

A map of all 50,000 subreddits (Figure 3) reveals certain broad themes. In the image above, a substantial portion of the site’s subreddits (shown in pink) are relatively tiny, with a small handful of commenters representing everything from personal subreddits (featuring a single commenter), to communities devoted to potty-training (23 commenters). Once these subreddits are eliminated, a more detailed and useful image of reddit’s geography emerges.

As the map in Figure 4 illustrates, reddit users tend to concentrate their activities in clusters, grouped around several different broad categories. The blue cluster of subreddits located beside the red circle labelled “Culture War Subreddits” is largely populated by subreddits such as /r/suggestmeabook, /r/eatcheapandhealthy, /r/tattoos, /r/legaladvice, /r/socialskills, and /r/sex, indicating an interest in self improvement. Near the bottom of the image, in the large green cluster are subreddits including /r/warthunder, /r/dragonage, /r/masseffect, and /r/elitedangerous – all communities built around discussions of specific video games, with the /r/games and /r/gaming subreddits located near the center of the cluster. In both macro-clusters, there can be found smaller clusters of subreddits representing a narrower focus within the broader subject field, and this pattern holds true across the site.

Several of these smaller clusters are isolated from the rest of reddit due to the specificity of their content. The purple-coloured cluster near the bottom-right is formed of subreddits devoted to specific sports (hockey, mixed martial arts, football, etc.), while the large green cluster at the bottom of figure 4 is dedicated to discussing video games. The pink cluster denotes technology subreddits (computer building, do it yourself tech projects, etc.), while the dark red and blue clusters represent general interest subreddits (legal advice, fashion and food advice, personal stories, humour, etc.). The cluster at the extreme left side of the map represents a small set of communities dedicated to LGBTQ issues (including the subreddits /r/asktransgender, /r/ainbow, /r/LGBTQ, and /r/askgaybros). What is most important for the purposes of this dissertation is to note the degree of isolation exhibited by the “Culture War” cluster from the rest of reddit’s communities. Unlike the other large clusters, the “Culture War” is composed of politically-charged, highly partisan communities, some of which contain (or contained, in the case of several now-banned communities) extremist, even violent rhetoric. This cluster is also interesting, given its lack of singular focus; whereas other clusters focus on “video games” generally or “sports” generally, the Culture War cluster is formed of communities focused around race, gender, and political affiliation (largely alt-right and traditionalist).

Within this cluster there are both MRM communities and anti-MRM communities, though in each case, the established rules of reddit and the specific community rules of a given subreddit provide a disincentive for users to “invade” each other’s communities. As a result – and with few exceptions – antagonistic Culture War subreddits exist apart, together. They are contextually linked (as anti-MRM subreddits frequently cross-post²¹ content from pro-MRM

²¹ A cross-post is a reddit feature that allows users in one subreddit community to create a link to another subreddit community’s content or discussions. There is some ability to monitor user traffic moving from one

subreddits for the purposes of mockery or discussion), yet they do not often discuss issues collaboratively. Each subreddit, especially those with strong moderation policies, become walled gardens where users can interact with little worry of outside influence. They are virtual gated communities, and while anyone can walk in, they can also be ejected at any time, without notice or reason, and permanently stopped from ever speaking within the confines of the community. In extreme cases, the entire community can even be made a private, invite-only space where potential users must be vetted by the moderation team before being allowed inside. Outside of such extreme measures, these subreddits are open to be viewed by anyone, but where the right to participate is reserved for those who accept the ideology.

subreddit to the next, and any widespread interference by one subreddit into another can result in temporary or permanent bans.

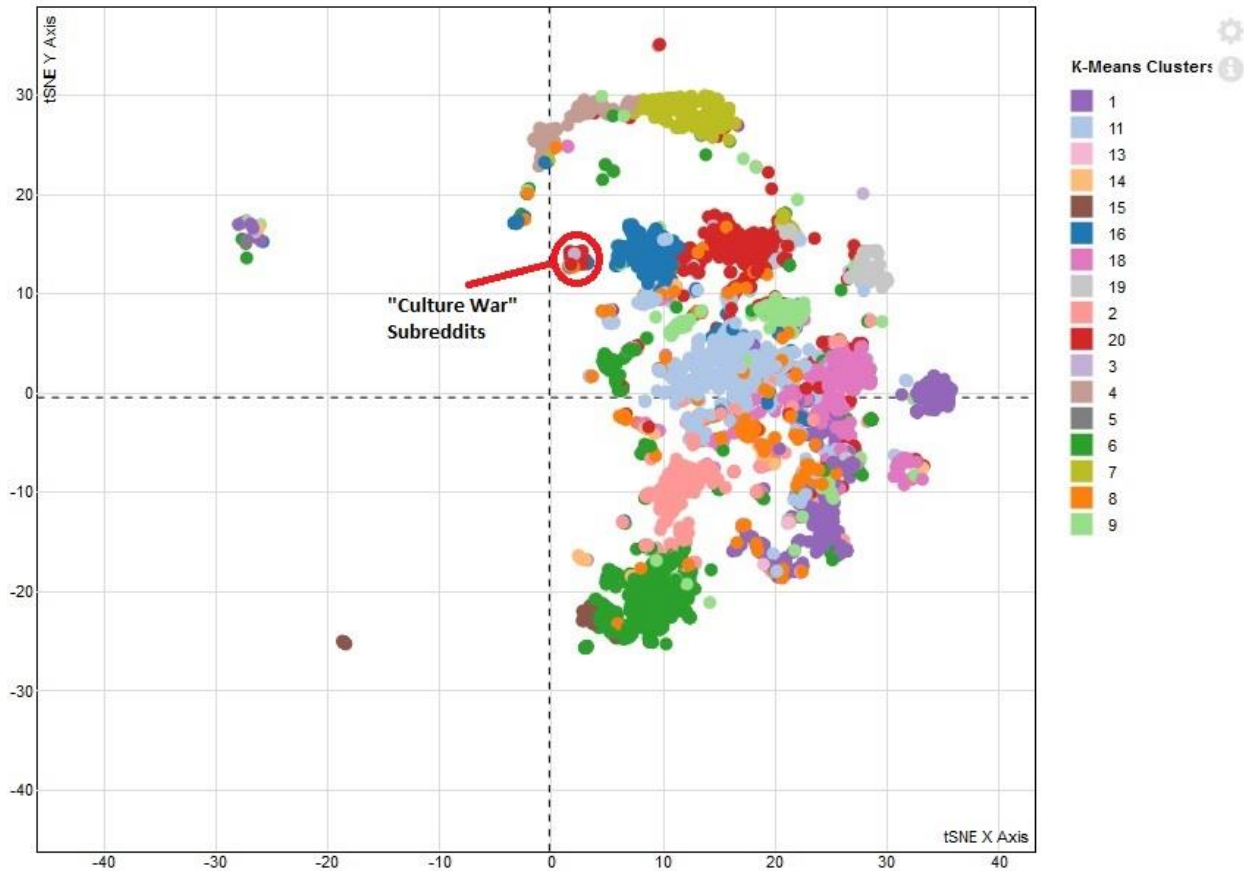


Figure 4 Culture War Subreddits, Martin, 2016

reddit.com's /r/mensrights community

The communities associated with men's rights and anti-feminism share the same pattern of contextual similarity. Like the communities associated with video games or self-improvement, the communities of the 'manosphere' share a high degree of contextual similarity. This similarity is strong enough that communities associated with the MRM, MGTOW, and Red Pill movements exist as an island apart from the rest of reddit. I have labelled these subreddits the "Culture War subreddits". Interestingly, anti-feminist subreddits are contextually similar – though ideologically opposed – to pro-feminist subreddits such as /r/feminism, /r/askfeminists, /r/againstmensrights, and /r/bluepill, many of which are actively opposed to the activity of MRAs

and other anti-feminists on reddit (Figure 5).

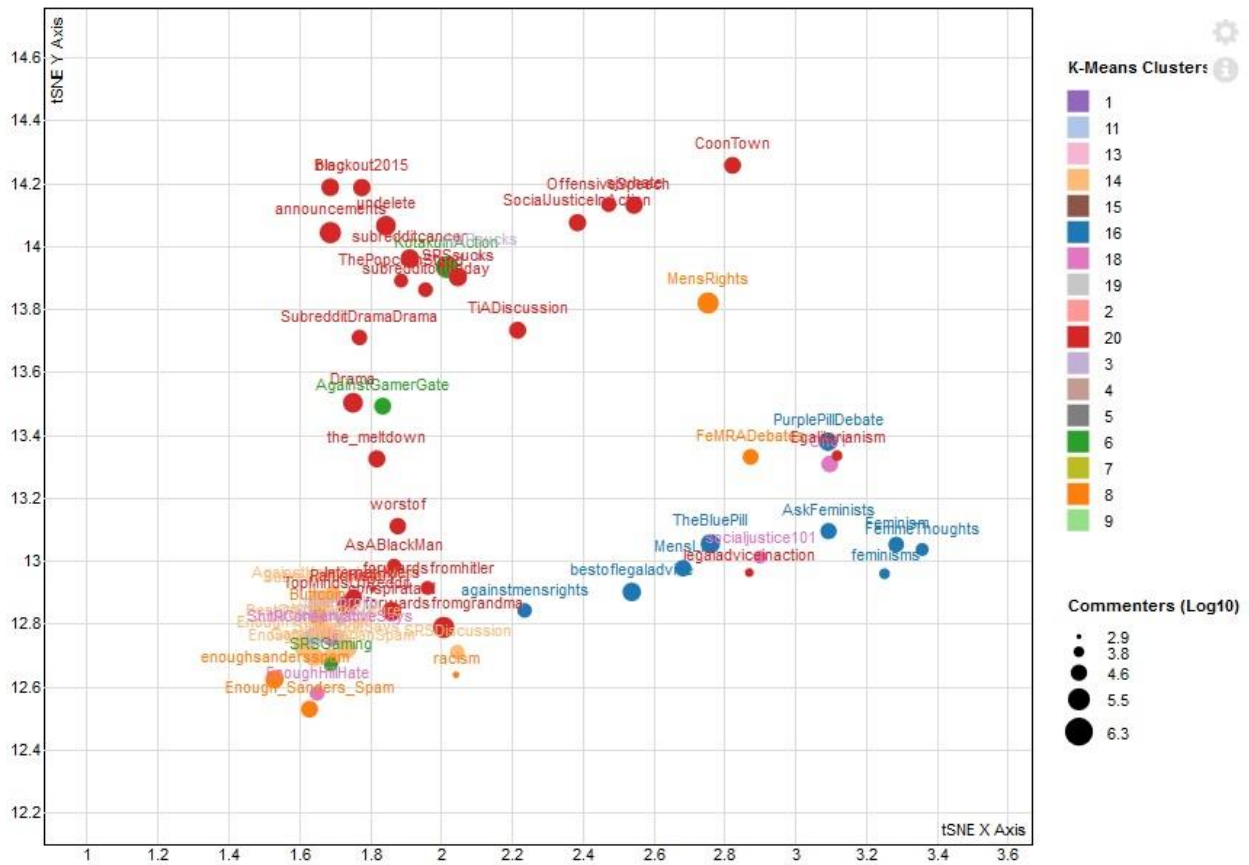


Figure 5 Culture War Cluster, Martin, 2016

In figure 5, the subreddits in red feature content that is predominantly reactionary in nature, containing links, comments, and other submissions that run the gamut from openly racist (CoonTown – banned in late 2017), to those that argue for traditionalist perspectives without open or explicitly eliminationist rhetoric (Neiwert, 2009). In communities like /r/TiADiscussion²², users often draw on essentialist constructions of human nature to push back

²² Tumblr-in-action Discussion – a subreddit for discussing and mocking discussion threads on a different social media platform called Tumblr. What makes Tumblr of interest is its reputation for being the preferred platform of “social justice warriors” (SJWs) and other progressive activists.

against what they see as feminist lies about gender, sexual identity and orientation, and the social construction of gender expression as shown in this post by user maybepenistomorrow,

“And I’m pretty sure there are things that up to the 98th percentile of the world dictate sex, and I’m pretty sure it’s what set of chromosome pair you have. Yes there are exceptions to this case, chromosomal abnormalities, and hormone imbalances but those are by and large not the status quo and are so statistically irrelevant that they should either be ignored or defined on a case by case basis. Bringing up intersex people is convenient but all the well sourced population numbers I can find put total world population at less than 2%. 2% of the world isn’t enough to suddenly redefine what sex and gender is. (*sic*)”

Many of the subreddits in the Culture War cluster are quite like others, largely due to the high degree of cross-pollination of users between them. Using a latent semantic analysis developed by Trevor Martin at the *Shorttails* blog, and using data sets developed by a pair of reddit users (fhoffa, 2016), an examination of these communities reveals a high level of similarity (Figure 6; Figure 7).

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | PurplePillDebate | 0.652951089931563 |
| 2 | TheRedPill | 0.651283842679626 |
| 3 | MGTOW | 0.629972815062433 |
| 4 | sjwhate | 0.615157430527859 |
| 5 | SRSsucks | 0.611209229545697 |
| 6 | uncensorednews | 0.610558756909228 |
| 7 | pussyassdenied | 0.599957220796619 |
| 8 | SocialJusticeInAction | 0.597142370935302 |
| 9 | conspiracy | 0.588182518538881 |
| 10 | FeMRADebates | 0.5709920971471 |
| 11 | OneY | 0.566977812273615 |
| 12 | OffensiveSpeech | 0.565986158192719 |
| 13 | asktrp | 0.555188123669763 |
| 14 | fatpeoplehate | 0.553049244370858 |
| 15 | Bad_Cop_No_Donut | 0.552025748053904 |
| 16 | subredditcancer | 0.550930538621058 |
| 17 | PussyPass | 0.548275303283383 |
| 18 | atheism | 0.545551588555892 |
| 19 | Shitstatistssay | 0.543927066495235 |
| 20 | european | 0.541273960445346 |
| 21 | undelete | 0.532077901425924 |
| 22 | TrueOffMyChest | 0.524342911569199 |
| 23 | KotakuInAction | 0.524001699456684 |
| 24 | TumblrInAction | 0.523082406611944 |
| 25 | worldpolitics | 0.520944920949141 |

Figure 6 /r/mensrights contextual similarity

When examined in isolation, the /r/mensrights subreddit's closest related communities are the Purple Pill (a debate-based community for discussion between Red Pill activists and their opponents), the Red Pill, MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way), and sjwhate (an anti-social

justice community which argues that contemporary social justice activists have gone too far). In the case of the relationship between the /r/mensrights and /r/theredpill subreddits, the similarity test indicates a 65.3% similarity of posts and users, while the similarity between /r/mensrights and /r/MGTOW stands at 63% similarity. When similarities between ostensibly disparate communities like /r/mensrights and /r/conspiracy²³ are tested, it reveals a similarity score of 59%. Many of the more closely associated communities are organized around the same basic tenets of anti-feminism, conservative politics, and traditionalist social roles. In a few cases, /r/mensrights shares a good amount of similarity with white nationalist communities (/r/european and /r/worldpolitics) with 54% and 52% similarity respectively, as well as communities associated with the Alt-right (/r/kotakuinaction, /r/conspiracy, /r/subredditcancer).

When the /r/mensrights community is combined with the MGTOW and Red Pill communities, the resultant variable can be thought of as an expression of the ‘manosphere’ in general. When tested for similarities with other communities, the ‘manosphere’ amalgamated category reveals a different pattern of similarity:

²³ /r/conspiracy is a community based around the discussion of various fringe conspiracy theories, ranging from government mind-control conspiracies and the Illuminati, to the promotion of various New World Order conspiracies. In addition, the community often indulges in speculation about the undue influence of “globalists”, feminists, and intellectuals in controlling “media narratives” about society.

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | asktrp | 0.77847018810335 |
| 2 | PurplePillDebate | 0.72337889633397 |
| 3 | marriedredpill | 0.649454449876357 |
| 4 | seduction | 0.617870884815724 |
| 5 | sjwhate | 0.602725636085941 |
| 6 | DarkEnlightenment | 0.598041055475609 |
| 7 | RedPillWomen | 0.593045672942794 |
| 8 | fatpeoplehate | 0.589319182943197 |
| 9 | conspiracy | 0.582043253875792 |
| 10 | altright | 0.57389028054178 |
| 11 | NoFap | 0.572665745398597 |
| 12 | AskMen | 0.571775099834978 |
| 13 | pussyassdenied | 0.559275679587365 |
| 14 | uncensorednews | 0.556802972233796 |
| 15 | european | 0.554412986385435 |
| 16 | OffensiveSpeech | 0.554351866467525 |
| 17 | OneY | 0.551996425091766 |
| 18 | SocialJusticeInAction | 0.549355006330142 |
| 19 | SRSsucks | 0.549121495284277 |
| 20 | short | 0.54696562380516 |
| 21 | The_Donald | 0.545250718478947 |
| 22 | Shitstatistssay | 0.543840482219763 |
| 23 | pillscollide | 0.543703227371417 |
| 24 | DeadBedrooms | 0.543200709508607 |
| 25 | PussyPass | 0.541844277077276 |

Figure 7 Manosphere similarities

The new list features not only the conspiracy subreddit, but also the Alt-right (57.4%) and dark enlightenment (60%) subreddits, both of which are explicitly members of the broader constellation of Alt-right communities online. Though /r/altright has since been banned from

reddit, many of its users remain active in other subreddits across the platform. While the similarities in each groups' userbase are not as strong as the relationships between /r/mensrights and /r/theredpill, or between /r/mensrights and /r/mgtow, they are far stronger than the relationships between non-manosphere communities such as /r/feminism or /r/askfeminists and Alt-right affiliated communities; lists of similarities for these subreddits reveal that /r/altright, and /r/darkenlightenment do not appear in the top 500 similar communities.

The data presented in figures four and five, and the ranked similarity indices of figures six and seven indicate the degree to which conversations in the "Culture War" cluster are separated from the rest of reddit's many digital communities. When visualized, these networks of discussion appear as an isolated island, cut off from the mainland of reddit, where users interact with one another (and a small number of critics). In other areas of reddit, users often post in a wide range of communities, from news to fashion to video games to relationships; in the "Culture War" cluster, users' discussions remain self-referential. This visualization supports the findings of this dissertation's discourse analysis which revealed a distinct lack of outside, critical perspectives in MRA discussions and communities.

Users embedded in these networks are engaged in constructing a set of interrelated beliefs, rooted in a common ideology, that can be shared across social media networks. When MRAs speak of "male disposability", or "female hypergamy"²⁴, or argue that a term like "toxic masculinity" is feminist code for "all men are toxic", they are engaged in constructing counter-memory. Indeed, for these counter-mnemonic claims to be accepted requires that its

²⁴ In the MRM and the broader manosphere there is a belief that all women (literally all women, a belief captured in the acronym "AWALT" – all women are like that) share a deep-seated desire to "marry up" and will likely cheat on a spouse or partner if the opportunity to enter a relationship with a "higher status" male presents itself. The criteria for what counts as "higher status" is variable, ranging from socio-economic status to education to body-type to testosterone levels.

constituent elements be both understood in the same way, and accepted. To accept the concept of “male disposability” is to also accept the “fact” of men’s oppression across time and culture; it is to accept the “fact” that women have always been sheltered from the violence of war or revolution, or that women have long been able to reap the rewards of full citizenship while men have had to sacrifice²⁵ to achieve the same privileges.

The counter-memory of the MRM is a packaged deal. It contains not only an ideological framework, but social scripts complete with enemies, allies, a new vocabulary, and strategies for countering opposition while denying purchase to dissenting views or counterarguments. It is an object that requires the presence of a constantly self-referring system of knowledge production to operate, and it finds that in online communities like reddit.

5.4 The Cultural Diamond Revisited

Men’s rights literature, as a cultural object, can be viewed as a project of re-orienting history by turning it on its head. Some MRM-friendly authors, like Nathanson and Young argue that such a change is necessary to undo the influence that feminist ideology has had on contemporary versions of history, and they have plenty of support within the men’s rights movement. Men’s rights activists like Paul Elam, Dean Esmay, Karen Straughan and Warren Farrell have all been crucial in the construction of MRA-specific counter-memory and identity formation. These writers have accomplished this by assembling a distinct cultural object in the corpus of MRA literature that, when analyzed through models like the cultural diamond reveal

²⁵ A common argument in MRM circles is that while women in America have full citizenship rights with no qualifiers, they are more privileged than men, who are forced to register for selective service if they wish to have the right to vote. In the MRM, this is proof of a societal double standard that oppresses men, where they are expected to throw themselves into the meat-grinder of war for the privilege of voting, while women do not.

that much of it is designed to re-socialize MRAs and prepare them for often-aggressive interactions with movement opponents.

By revisiting the cultural diamond, it becomes possible to map the general structure of MRA literature as a cultural object. From within the men's rights movement, the social world appears discriminatory; men are disposable, often sacrificing their entire lives for the comfort of women (Straughan, 2013) while routinely having their rights as husbands, fathers, and citizens disregarded or infringed upon. Since most empirical observations of the world disagree with such a view, it becomes necessary to (re)construct social reality through counter-memorializing it.

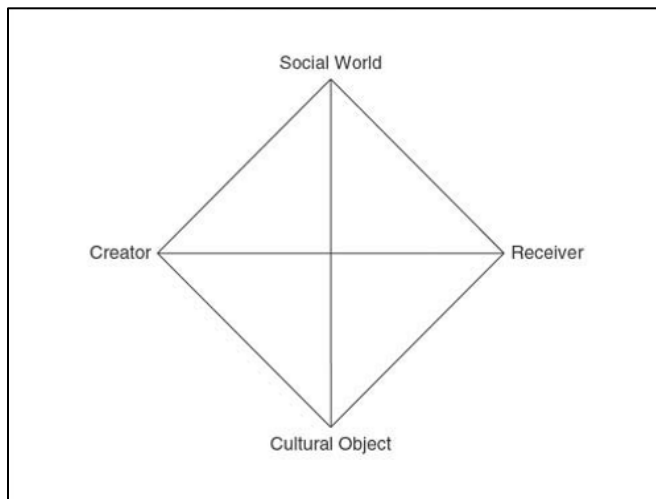


Figure 8 The Cultural Diamond Revisited

MRA knowledge producers (creators) craft an historical narrative that recasts social, economic, and political gains by women as necessarily coming at the expense of men, thus creating a corpus of men's rights literature that is an outgrowth of the interactions between knowledge creators and the social world they interact with. The

materials created and the conversations within the men's rights movement comprise the men's rights movement *as a cultural object* that is disseminated throughout the participants in the movement to help construct and maintain group identity among the membership.

While both *unintended* and *intended* receivers have access to the materials, the *intended* receivers' association with other MRM members and knowledge creators allows them to interpret men's rights materials the way their creators intended; while all receivers might read a blog about how being "hard red-pilled" saved a man's marriage, *intended* receivers are able to

interpret that to mean how “using amoral emotional manipulation and the threat of marriage termination resulted in my wife more easily adopting traditional feminine values, including submissiveness and a willingness to do whatever I say even in the face of infidelity because she has been biologically hardwired to accept the domination of an alpha male and needed me to remind her of it”.

When discussing the ingredients of a successful marriage, Red Pill blogger Rollo Tomassi argues,

“Early marriage has a few advantages, but all of these depend on the personal nature of the woman a man marries. That sounds kind of obvious, but if you go into a marriage with a solid Frame²⁶ and a woman who expects to defer to your dominance, I think young marrieds might have a better shot at long term success. If a woman is a virgin, yes, this can be a real source of attachment for her if her husband imprints on her as solidly dominant Alpha.”

Tomassi goes on to argue that egalitarian relationships result in adversarial conditions between men and women, which makes traditional conservative unions wherein women accept their subordinate roles more attractive for long-term stability.

In this case, Red Pill philosophy is demonstrated through example, rather than through argumentation or debate. The principles make themselves known through their application and while outsiders may have difficulty parsing the specifics of the ideology, in-group members can unpack Red Pill ideology with little difficulty. More importantly, in online communities, the

²⁶ “Frame of mind”. Disagreements between couples are often seen as a struggle between competing “frames”; the person with the stronger frame pulls their partner into it, thus dominating the debate by setting its terms and conditions. Men who use this term often employ various “games” (strategies) for maintaining frame, including emotional manipulation or threats of abandonment, often referred to as “dread game”.

neologisms of Red Pill and manosphere ideologies are rarely opposed; participants are free to engage with one another in an idealized fashion, where in-group concepts are used without fear of challenge. These free spaces are critical to in-group identity formation, but they also lend themselves to the ongoing isolation of manosphere communities from other online groups.

Men's rights ideology, as a cultural object, emerges from a specific configuration of social interactions: largely online, largely self-referential, and rooted in an often-contrarian worldview that rejects progressive activism as discrimination against men. Participants in MRM communities collectively build men's rights ideology for an intended audience of alienated, angry people – mostly men – who are anxious about what they see as a diminishing social role for men. Potential recruits are directed to MRM and MRM-friendly spaces online where they can interact with MRM materials and participants and thereby develop an affinity for MRM ideology. Those recruits who adopt MRM ideology are then able to spread it across their own social networks, thus growing the network of MRM friendly sites and spaces in rhizomatic fashion (Castells, 2011).

Yet MRM ideology also reaches into places where it is not welcome. Many gender-focused websites online are feminist or feminist-friendly, and the appearance of MRM materials in their spaces is unwelcome. In these spaces, heavy moderation of content and discussion threads ensures that the growth of MRM networks is severely stunted, and on sites where user bans are employed, the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable materials can be more strongly enforced. In these spaces, MRM cultural objects are received differently and interpreted differently. Instead of being interpreted according to the logics of MRM countermemory, the ideology is interpreted in the context of established social and historical contexts, which can often render MRM claims as nonsensical. In a social and historical context where women are

strongly encouraged to sacrifice careers and financial security to adopt their “natural” roles as mothers and caregivers; where women are routinely victimized by masculine friends, family, and partners; where rates of sexual violence against women are at endemic levels, the argument that it is men who are “truly” oppressed and women “truly” privileged, makes little sense. In this context “flipping the script” on gender relations requires more than accepting a few facts or individual arguments, it requires a complete suite of historical revisions, assumptions of logic, and spaces where the ideology can grow unencumbered by opposition.

5.5 Summary

Though ostensibly the online MRM claims to engage in activism aimed at ending discrimination and oppression of men in the West, the activities engaged in, and the materials produced by MRAs seem more focused on two principle ends: recruiting and retaining greater numbers of men and countering the perceived dominance of feminist perspectives and ideology in online spaces. For many MRAs, stopping feminism is the primary tactic by which men will be ‘freed’ from oppression in Western societies, and so the bulk of their activism is directed towards that end (Serwer, 2014; Serwer and Baker, 2015).

Men’s rights spaces online, in addition to functioning as platforms from which to engage in activism, also serve as spaces for the collective practice of idealized patterns of behavior. Members are free to speak about their perceptions of oppression and marginalization, in a space where they are unlikely to receive much in the way of criticism, while being more likely to receive positive reinforcement – especially if their posts or conversations are grounded in a rejection of feminism. Indeed, the online spaces of the MRM provide members with imagined communities of like-minded travellers who offer each other a shared countermemory that

repositions men as the marginalized underdogs in history-spanning war of the sexes that has seen men repeatedly lose ground against their feminine foes and oppressors.

Online communities, including those of the MRM, do not exist in isolation from one another. Some of the most influential online communities of the MRM and the broader manosphere in terms of knowledge production and exchange, exist on a single website (along with tens of thousands of disparate communities), where their users freely move between different communities and ideas. In such spaces, cross-pollination is inevitable, and it sometimes even used by members to ‘infiltrate’ new communities and expose them to new ideas as a way of spreading influence as user FromGoytoMan argues in this post from the alt-right affiliated website voat,

“r/ NoFap and r/ Pornfree seem like great places to infiltrate and redpill: most of the people in those subs are conscientious enough to look past mainstream ideas (porn is good, goyim) and I'm certain that many of the posters there are upset with the way Western society is going. I should know, NoFap was my first taste of questioning the mainstream culture... [user inserts a link to a post he made in one such subreddit]

About as subtle as can be, only name dropping Alt-Right and Identitarian, not leaving links or mentioning our more grown-up sites (Dailystormer, etc.) I'm hoping that this will get the idea in peoples' heads, maybe lead to a google search or two. Furthermore, NoFappers share the common distinction with us of being hated by Reddit normies, so they're more likely to see past the typical vitriol directed at us and be sympathetic. Especially since our movement is the only widespread one that condemns porn.” (*sic*)

Using a test of contextual similarity, the connections between different communities on reddit becomes clearer. An analysis of the users and commenters of the various subreddits I categorized as “Culture War” communities reveal that subreddits associated with the MRM are closely associated with other manosphere communities, including the Red Pill and its subsidiaries, and MGTOW and its subsidiary groups. Additionally, and despite many MRA claims to the contrary, a contextual similarities test reveals that the men’s rights movement on reddit also shares a good amount of overlap with both Alt-right and explicitly white nationalist communities, a relationship supported by available qualitative evidence (Futrelle 2017; Futrelle 2016; Gais, 2017; Romano, 2016).

The image that emerges from this analysis reveals a movement deeply wedded to a shared experience of personal *grievance*, rooted in a perceived loss of social status, power, and privilege that members feel is theirs by birthright (Kimmel, 2013; Coston and Kimmel, 2013). Unlike the *grief* of the Mythopoetic movement, or the sense of shared *responsibility* of the pro-feminist men’s movement, the *grievance* felt by the MRM is unidirectional; MRA’s sense of *grievance* is a demand, an expectation that the world around them change to accommodate their feelings and expectations. When progressive activists push back against these demands, some members of the MRM, seeking validation of their anger, turn to other, more radicalized voices within the broader constellation of far right and traditionalist movements, including the Alt-right. While it is important to state that not all – or even most – members of the online MRM share these more extremist beliefs, empirical analysis does reveals significant connectivity.

Chapter 6: Offline and pro-Feminist: Men's Groups in North America

While examples of offline activism by MRAs remain relatively few and far between, finding cases of non-MRA activism by men and around men's issues in offline spaces is relatively easy. Men's groups, men's organizations, and programs targeting men can be found in most major cities across Canada and the United States, and there exists a wide array of printed material, videos, and online databases to supplement such initiatives. To situate the activism of MRAs within a larger social context, I conducted a limited number of qualitative interviews with members of pro-feminist and ostensibly 'neutral' men's groups across Canada and the United States. Interview participants were contacted through their publicly available information, and in some cases, were referred to me through chain referral sampling by other participants. In total, seven participants were recruited, for a combined thirteen interviews and follow-up interviews. These participants were active members – in most cases founding members – of men's groups located in Victoria, British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, White Horse, Northwest Territories, Toronto Ontario, and New York, New York.

Throughout the interviews several recurring themes emerged. These themes were reflected in virtually every interview and follow-up interview, and represented a central philosophical commitment to the activism the participants engaged in. Unlike the online rhetoric of the MRM, the emotional core of these activists' work was *responsibility*, for their actions, and for their impacts on their communities. This sense of *responsibility* in part drove them to engage in community organizing and personal development aimed at empowering men to take ownership of their actions and their consequences – for good or ill.

A second, related theme emphasized the work men needed to do to reconnect with their emotional selves. The participants of the men's groups I interviewed displayed a near-universal

focus on working with men to develop emotional awareness, as well as to enhance men's ability to express themselves in emotional terms as a stepping stone towards responsibility. Men in these groups were expected to own their mistakes, acknowledge and apologize for them, and then to move on to develop strategies for avoiding them in the future.

Finally, participants described their attempts to encourage men to experience emotional vulnerability as a way of helping men to learn to ask for help. Some participants recounted how this request was sometimes met with ambivalence and even hostility, as men who had spent a lifetime distancing themselves from the thought of being vulnerable were now asked to explore those sensations in a group setting. These themes indicated a sharp epistemological break between the worldview of MRAs and pro-feminist activists.

6.1 Setting the stage: Interviews and Rapport Building

The interview process moved through several different stages, beginning with rapport building (both before the interview began, and continuing once the interview was underway). Once rapport had been established, and the participant felt comfortable relating their experiences and impressions to me, I moved the interview into the formal interview stage, where the bulk of the exchange occurred (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). As the participant and I moved through their narrative, I would occasionally ask them to revisit an earlier point or clarify a thought or impression they might have mentioned but passed over. At the end of each of their answers, I would attempt to summarize what they were saying in my own words and seek clarification and explication from the participant. As each participant's narrative began to resolve itself – as each participant began to draw their narrative to a conclusion, I would move our interaction into the resolution and debrief stage, where I would remind the participant of the time, and ask if they felt that there was anything missing or overlooked during our interview

(Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). I would ask them if they had anything else they might wish to add to the conversation, or if they would like to amend or change anything they had said earlier. Finally, I would conclude the interview, thanking them for their time, and letting them know to expect an email from me to schedule a follow-up interview at some point in the future. I would also remind them that they were free to revoke their consent to their participation at any time, just as they were free to refuse to engage in any follow-up interviews.

In conducting these interviews, establishing rapport with the participants was of paramount importance. For many men, discussing one's feelings was akin to admitting weakness, and so some participants refused to consent to an interview before having me 'prove' I could be trusted. In some cases, this meant engaging in a 'pre-interview interview' in which the participant could ask *me* questions about my own history. In an age where individuals have become searchable entities, a person's public history becomes a book for anyone to read. When I began the process of contacting potential research participants, I began to anticipate an increased interval between initial contact and response, as I assumed – rightly, in most cases – that my potential recruit was Googling my name.

Prior to beginning recruitment, I had undertaken a serious effort to 'scrub' my online footprint to minimize the number of imprints of my that were searchable online. I deleted my Twitter account and all but one social media portal, set my personal blog to 'private', and generally tried to make myself as small as possible. My online posting history openly and directly tied me to several pro-feminist, pro-social justice organizations and online communities, and I did not want those affiliations to be used by potential recruits as excuses to avoid speaking with me. Additionally, I did not want those online portals active for potential attacks by opponents, an experience I had been subjected to already. Despite these efforts, several public

posts remained searchable and as a result, many of my potential recruits subjected me to a battery of questions prior to any discussion of whether they might consent to be interviewed.

During these exchanges, I made no attempt to deceive, or gloss over any details. If my interlocutor asked me a direct question, they would receive a direct and honest answer. I had committed to establishing rapport on a foundation of honesty and trust, and I felt that any attempt to dissemble or obfuscate my own position, outside of my work to minimize my online profile, would tarnish my attempts to build trust.

6.2 A Commonality of Interests: Men's Issues in Offline Men's Spaces

In each of the interviews conducted, participants described their relationship with the various forms of men's activism they were engaged in as having two principle aims: to help themselves grow into better sorts of men (in terms of emotional availability with friends and partners, and with regards to their commitment to principles of social justice), and to help other men begin their own journeys along the same path. Throughout interviews and follow-ups, participants were categorical in their belief that men's activism needed to be about more than self-help; men's activism needed to be focused on men's responsibility for their actions in their communities and in their immediate lives, in addition to emphasizing the role of embracing vulnerability as a stepping stone towards a more positive pattern of behaviour.

Self-Improvement

In the view of this project's participants, the purpose of any "valid" form of men's activism needed to focus on changing men's behaviour, towards women, towards other men, and towards their own feelings. This was brought sharply into focus when I was invited by one of the participants, a young white man named Tyler, to attend a men's meeting in Victoria. Though Tyler made it clear that my attendance was not a requirement of his participation in the project, I

nevertheless felt that the opportunity was an important one, as it would enable me to gain a more immediate view of how some men's activism worked in practice. The workshop reflected what Messner argues has been the professionalization of movement feminism (Messner, 2015). The workshop drew on professionally developed tools and modules from pro-feminist organizations such as the White Ribbon Campaign, and was overseen by a pair of professional workshop facilitators who had built careers from delivering pro-feminist workshops on men and masculinities.

The group itself was diverse, in terms of age, gender identity and expression, ethnicity and cultural background, and was concerned that evening with helping participants to become familiar with "interruption" strategies – non-violent patterns of behaviour designed to disrupt sexist or violent incidents. Before the group activities commenced, I introduced myself to the attendees and indicated that I was conducting research on men's activism. The group's facilitators that evening welcomed me and asked if the other attendees were comfortable with my presence, so long as I agreed not to film or record them, and to ensure that their identities remained hidden. The group agreed, and I spent the next few hours participating in several different activities and role-playing scenarios. The facilitators of the evening's exercises were a pair of white, gay men from Vancouver whose principle aim to illustrate how interrupting sexist or violent behaviours in others were a more positive and constructive strategy of intervening on behalf of others than violence would be. The men in the group, myself included worked through several scenarios, including breaking up a fight among our friends, and interrupting friends when they engaged in sexist behaviour.

One of the greatest challenges the facilitators seemed to face was assuring some of the men present that engaging in nonviolent conflict resolution was not "weak" or overly feminine.

A few of the participants challenged the facilitators, asking them why the behaviour they were interrupting was wrong, or how they were supposed to “save face” in front of their masculine friends after refusing to engage in violence. The facilitators encouraged the participants to examine their beliefs about what it means to be a man, and to challenge themselves where they felt that violence was a better solution than nonviolence. The workshop provided an important context for understanding the responses of some of my subsequent participants.

Several days after the workshop, I agreed to meet Tyler at a coffee shop he enjoyed. At first, Tyler was content to sit inside at an out of the way table for our interview, but at the last minute, requested that we speak outside on the patio. It was early winter and raining, and Tyler and I spent a great deal of time shivering in the cold, but Tyler felt freer to talk now that there were no patrons nearby.

For Tyler, the men’s group we had attended was helpful for him in many ways. Much of Tyler’s early adulthood had been marked by confrontations with others, from hounding men’s rights activists in the streets of his hometown, to aggressively challenging men’s sexist attitudes in public spaces. In the controlled spaces of the men’s group, Tyler felt he could begin to challenge this more aggressive masculinity.

“... at first, I didn’t know what to expect at all. I mean, I was in a room filled... a really wide variety of people, where you know, “granola types” and very well-dressed people and like, I don’t want to stereotype, but you know... It was a very diverse crowd of men, and everyone went around the circle and “did pronouns” [indicating their preferred gender pronouns], and seeing really masculine-looking men indicate they wanted to be referred to by “them” or “they” or questioning their position was really interesting to me. And this was a space where masculinity wasn’t what it was everywhere

else. I was able to see men who were more in touch with emotions and feelings and that was something that was more present in that space and that was very new... I was still uncomfortable a bit with that, because I'm not quite there yet, and I still revel in my masculinity..."

This ambivalence towards "abandoning" his traditionally masculine identity continued to trouble Tyler, and while he recognized the value of doing so – in addition to recognizing the value of learning new coping strategies and new ways of identifying sexist attitudes or practices – he nevertheless felt that he "wasn't really there yet" when it came to modify his own patterns of behaviour.

Tyler was not alone in his ambivalence towards deconstructing the problematic elements of his own lived experience. Other participants also described feelings of discontent, even hostility, towards arguments, philosophies, or research that encouraged them to question their own position in gendered hierarchies of social inequality. For Dean, a young queer man who had spent much of his early adulthood volunteering with various gay men's health initiatives, the notion that he had any real social privilege was one he tended to reject – at least at first. Dean felt that feminist research and feminist-based programs at universities were exclusionary, even hostile to the idea of studying men's lives in any meaningful way,

"When I was a baby gay activist, I found it very frustrating that I saw the women's center as an exclusionary space, and I saw women's studies as the source of – I mean, that's where 'gender is' in the academy; its so focused on women and as a queer man I really wanted to be able to engage with men and study masculinity – and not in a supremacist sort of way, and not in an excluding women sort of way, but I wanted to study gender.

And so I was a bit grumpy about it for a couple of years – with some very patient friends (who helped me to understand)”

Once he moved past his feelings of hostility and began to examine feminist writings more closely, he began to realize that systems of power and privilege were far more complicated than he had first thought, and that he – like Tyler – was implicated in them, despite his marginalized status as a queer man.

“... so that helped me to understand some of my history, and I guess it was helpful that some of my friends were transmen and really the first privilege I learned about was having cis-privilege and I think it was easy because I had never thought about having it until I learned about it. It’s like having gender and being a man [you don’t recognize that you are gendered until someone points it out]. I have huge gratitude to them for helping to educate me and bringing me along. So, when I started looking at sexism, I could really start to see where I was involved, and that helped to get me [over my hostility to women’s studies] and into the door of some women’s studies courses.”

For Ryan, the oldest of the participants, this ambivalence – both towards the deconstruction of masculinity and towards incorporating feminist philosophies into their personal work – was an unwelcome echo of his own experiences in the men’s movements of the early 1970s. By his own estimation, Ryan was among the first of the first wave of “men’s liberation” activists in the 1970s, working with a group of largely Jewish men in New York City – part of the grassroots movement phase of pro-feminist men’s activism (Messner, 2015). In these early spaces, Ryan recalled that men seemed more interested in deconstructing the forms of masculinity that were performed by other men, rather than themselves.

Ryan's activism was greeted with some enthusiasm by women's consciousness-raising groups and liberal feminist groups in his area, and he felt both drawn to, and validated by his work. When speaking of his early impressions of men's liberation activism, Ryan remembered how enthusiastic he was, saying,

“...this is great, partly because I never was successful in traditional masculinity, and I had some sense that it was really fucked up and it wasn't a culture I was eager to defend in any real way. Basically, what I was hearing was the liberal feminism of that time which was 'oh, we should change these restrictive sex roles and that would be good for everybody and that would be great!'”

Different men were in the group at different times, but there were five of us who were the biggest part of the group. At certain points there were others who came and went, and that's where my involvement in the movement got going. At that time, I had a very much of a men's liberation perspective. It wasn't anti-feminist, but it wasn't pro-feminist, it was really like 'these changes are going to be better for men, or there are some parts of masculinity that are horrible, and so this is going to be better...’”

In addition to discussing the ways that masculinity had negatively impacted their lives, Ryan also recalled that after a short time, the men's group was eager to put their discussions into practice, to see if adopting new ways of doing masculinity might help them become better people.

“We did this interesting experiment with sports. We had a regular basketball night. We would play against other guys that we knew, and we tried to figure out how to combine what we were doing with our love of sports; we talked about the games at our meetings, finding out how men felt about them – did people feel like they were being supported, did

they feel excluded, that sort of thing. All these things that men never talked about, we talked about and it changed the way we played the game, it became a really nice experience.

We [also] had a thing about cooking. At first, we met on a weekday night and then on weekends, and it became an ethic where the meetings took place at each other's homes, and if you were the host, you were supposed to cook a meal for everyone – a significant meal, not a lot of crap. Some of us didn't know how to cook, and the ethos was if you don't know how to cook, that's fine, we'll help you."

For Ryan and his friends, these practices were a way of subverting traditional gendered expectations of men; changing the focus of competitive sports to one that emphasized inclusivity and mutual support; changing the expectations around domestic labour by encouraging men to take on traditionally feminine-coded work like cooking and serving food.

In all but one of the interviews I conducted, participants were eager to illustrate the ways that their activism and their challenges to traditional notions of masculinity were constituent elements of a larger program of self-improvement that nevertheless retained an uncertainty, an ambivalence about moving "too far" from hegemonic masculine norms – even among those participants who identified as something other than heterosexual. One participant, a non-binary person named Kelly, centered their critique on a specific point of intransigence among the participants of the men's self-help group they helped to create and manage. In our discussion, Kelly highlighted the problem saying,

"...I could see men struggle with patriarchy. Men, Indigenous men, struggling with how toxic masculinity was doing such harm to themselves and really harm to their partners.

One of my friends just came to me and said [of her partner] you know, he talks a really good game, and I thought that I'd be moving towards a really liberated space with them, and I'm up to my knees in patriarchy.

These men know some of the processes involved in unlearning these patterns of violence, but they don't know how to give up power or create vulnerability for themselves."

Kelly argued that many of the men they had seen come through the group were struggling against the same issue: it was one thing to adopt the rhetoric or slogans of a pattern of masculinity that positioned itself in opposition to hegemonic norms; it was another thing entirely to *embody* those patterns by exploring emotional self-expression and vulnerability. In this respect, Kelly, as a facilitator of a successful men's program and Tyler, an active member of a similarly configured men's group, had each identified a core element of an idealized pattern of non-hegemonic masculinity – vulnerability – but Tyler and others like him were unable or unwilling to explore it more fully. As Tyler had said, "I was still uncomfortable a bit with that, because I'm not quite there yet, and I still revel in my masculinity..."

Empowering men to explore emotionality or vulnerability

Kelly's experiences facilitating men's groups, and Tyler's experiences as a member both contained within their narratives an explicit call for men to engage with their emotional selves in ways that challenge hegemonic standards. This work is risky; open displays of emotion run counter to hegemonic ideals (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes, et al., 2015) and therefore open men up to challenge and even delegitimizing attacks by other men (Connell, 1987; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2013). These experiences were echoed in the accounts of other participants, including Dean, and Cameron, a straight man originally from the Yukon, whose work with men in the northern territory was remarkably like that of his southern counterparts.

Despite the often wildly divergent backgrounds of the men in Cameron's groups, his experiences with the participants in his group, a chapter of the international White Ribbon Campaign, echoed the same anxieties and concerns as other men's groups I investigated. When asked about the sorts of concerns his participants would raise during their groups, Cameron did not hesitate in identifying some central themes,

“...A lot of guys struggle with the idea of their own masculinity – living up to somebody else's ideals. A lot of men don't like being measured against the classic, out-dated [hegemonic] masculine standards. Every man I've met, from the farthest flung little village to the bigger cities has said that they feel that if they step out of line, if they show even a tiny bit of vulnerability or emotionality, they get called 'fag', they get called 'gay', they get emasculated and bullied.”

In response to these disciplinary mechanisms, some men resorted to attempting to solve their problems through violence, to the exclusion of any non-violent options. Cameron's workshops often featured participants who had histories of domestic violence or assault (both of spouses and of non-intimate relations), and he was not alone. Kurtis, a professional working with a national men's organization in Canada revealed similar patterns among the men his organization worked with. One of the greatest challenges to ending patterns of gender-based violence was the over-reliance on violence by men. In his view,

“Men lack spaces to adequately discuss their fears, the pressures they face and their hopes. They also suffer from a lack of resources to help them navigate their feelings and as a result, they often begin to feel that violence is the only option or resort.”

It was these cycles of violence that activists like Kelly, Dean, Cameron and others were interested in disrupting. During the workshop that I attended with Tyler, the main idea the group

had elected to work on that evening was non-violence disruption of sexist behaviour. Throughout the evening, men were invited to roleplay different methods of stepping in to a potentially dangerous situation without resorting to violence. During one such round of roleplay, I was paired with a quiet young man in his early twenties, named Don. Like Tyler, Don had been drawn to pro-feminist men's activism out of a feeling that there had to be a better way of 'being a man' than the hypermasculine images he had been inundated with for most of his life. For Don, part of that better way included focusing on developing his sense of emotional awareness. Don wanted to help other men explore different ways of experiencing masculinity,

“... For the first ever group that we put together, we focused on teaching men about the problems with the gender binary, showing them that there was more to gender than that... we try to help men to figure out who they are – who patriarchy tells them they are, and who they want to be. We introduce them to ways of thinking and acting that are different from sort of patriarchal or traditionally masculine norms.”

More than anything else, Don's group was centered around a model of harm reduction, of meeting with men who either had histories of harming others, or who were concerned about their patterns of behaviour – particularly in terms of how they treated their partners and family. Don's group, like Kelly's, Cameron's and Dean's featured a fair degree of fluidity, as men entered and leaved the groups voluntarily. As a result, while the men's groups I investigated all tended to feature a small group of facilitators and volunteers (the largest of these cohorts numbered less than ten such people), the rest of each group's membership was highly transitory. In Don's group, as in Kelly's and Cameron's, long-term participation by non-facilitating members remained the exception rather than the rule. To account for this, each meeting or session functioned more like a self-contained workshop than as a long-term project of self-improvement

or development; participants were given a series of tools with the expectation that they would work with them on their own, at their own pace, outside of the group itself.

Responsibility: personal and community

Throughout that evening working with Tyler and Don in their local men's group, the common refrain by the facilitators was one of responsibility. The men present were encouraged to use their social privilege to aid them in disrupting the sexist practices they encountered in their own lives, as a way of taking responsibility for not just their actions, but the actions of their masculine-identified friends and family members. In recounting his own journey towards a more responsible social position, Tyler recounted a point in his life when he began to see his beliefs shift away from an adversarial model of social and gender relations, to one that acknowledged the harms that traditional masculine behaviour can visit on marginalized groups.

“I was interested in feminism, but I wanted to make sure that men were still being looked at you know, that men's issues weren't being ignored or that the pendulum wasn't swinging too far back the other way, you know? I was less interested at that point in blaming feminists for my problems, and more interested in finding solutions to things. That was my starting point. Then I left university and I went out into the world – in Alberta, specifically – and I saw some of the harms that masculinity caused... I worked on a construction crew with an actual rapist, who used to brag about how he did it and he wasn't exactly celebrated by the others, but he was certainly not attacked. I started seeing a lot of the harm that traditional masculinity was responsible for, and that we [men and women] still aren't on an equitable playing field... I used to run into men's rights activists at this time, and... I used to attack them, you know, verbally, for their beliefs, because I saw that what they were doing was wrong.”

Tyler believed that MRAs, by championing a very traditional form of masculine behaviour, were perpetuating both individual and social harms by undermining attempts to have discussions about rape culture, sexual violence, and restrictive gender roles. Throughout this anecdote, Tyler often referred to his physical stature and his willingness to engage in violence to support his self-described feminist beliefs. Given Tyler's size and good physical shape, this was perhaps not an idle boast.

For Don, his opposition to conventional patterns of masculinity – particularly those patterns that perpetuated what he saw as social harms – spurred him to work on holding himself accountable, for his own actions and beliefs, and to work on helping other men to hold each other accountable as well.

“We really wanted to help men learn to be accountable for their actions... sometimes, our work with other groups [focused on harm reduction in the community] would mean that they would direct a certain person or two to come to us, where we would help lead them through accountability workshops or sessions... the people coming in via those avenues have really broad and diverse opinions on everything to do with masculinity, or violence... In fact, our group originally started as a program aimed at helping specific individuals who had been involved in sexist or harmful practices in the community to learn to be responsible for those harms, but it's really grown out from there.”

Throughout each of the interviews, the participants were eager to discuss the ways that their work was not only about helping men become ‘better’ people, but also focused on *other-regarding* activities, such as acknowledging the ways that their actions and beliefs interact with others in their lives. When Dean spoke about the need to consider the positions, experiences, and

feelings of others, he drew a connection between *other-regarding* sentiments and vulnerability. In his view, being emotionally vulnerable opened the door to really being able to see things from another person's perspective, because in his mind, vulnerability and emotionality – and responsibility – were interconnected themes.

“... as a man, in my position of privilege, I need to be responsible to that. As I man acknowledging all the shitty parts of privilege, the antidote to that is to be vulnerable... one of my friends use to talk to me about some of her friends - women who date men – complaining about dating straight men and having to engage in emotional labour all the time for [these] men who refuse to do it themselves.”

Dean's example illustrated that for some men at least, projects of self-improvement, or of improving emotional awareness are necessarily *social* projects; for many men, emotional labour is barely recognized as a phenomenon (Blee, 1998; Hancock, Sullivan, and Tyler, 2015), and coded feminine if it is. Resultantly, much of the emotional labour that is done in heterosexual relationships is shouldered by women even if the issues that cause the work to be necessary are centered in men. In my discussion with Kelly, the same theme emerged: women in relationships with men who ‘talked a good game’ about changing their behaviours to ones that were less harmful, were nevertheless still expecting their partners to carry the weight of emotional work and deal with behaviours that Kelly and their friends considered toxic.

“I could see men struggle with patriarchy. Men, Indigenous men, struggling with how toxic masculinity was doing such harm to themselves and really harm to their partners. One of my friends just came to me and said [of her partner] ‘you know, he talks a really good game, and I thought that I'd be moving towards a really liberated space with them [but] I'm up to my knees in patriarchy.’”

6.3 “It’s about holding space”: The importance of Intersectionality to Offline Men’s Groups

Through participating in a men’s group session, and in subsequent interviews with individuals associated with different men’s groups in North America, I observed a far greater recognition of the role of intersectionality than I did while examining the rhetoric of the MRM. In the interviews I conducted, I spoke with individuals of a wide range of backgrounds; Jewish men, non-binary folk, queer, bi-sexual, and heterosexual men from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds.

In our discussions, many of these individuals acknowledged that their lived experiences, particularly those having to do with the performance of masculinity, in large part relied on these other social signifiers. Dean described his confusion after first being referred to as “privileged” by someone else, until it was explained to him that while he had certainly experienced homophobia in his life, he nevertheless benefited from belonging to the dominant gender and racial categories of his home culture. On the other hand, Ryan’s experiences as a Jewish man made the acceptable performance of hegemonic masculinity difficult, as so much of what he saw as the dominant expression of masculinity in his culture was deeply wedded to western European and Christian traditions. Kelly’s Indigenous heritage, and their non-binary gender identity placed them at disadvantages by almost any available metric.

These manifold systems of dominance and subordination (Collins, 2005; Connell, 1995) made each of their individual gender performances more complicated to analyze for harm or problematic behaviour, as it was often impossible to disentangle experiences of marginalization by ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or gender expression. The participants in my interviews were cognizant of these challenges to varying degrees; unsurprisingly, those participants whose

subject-positions placed them in greater degrees of disadvantage placed greater importance on intersectional understandings of privilege and marginalization. The acknowledgement of the complicated systems present in social matrices of oppression (Collins, 2005) stood in stark contradiction to the more common articulation of masculinity-as-class present in much of the MRM material I investigated.

The acknowledgment of the roles played in marginalization by race, sexual orientation, class, ability, and age highlighted the need for facilitation and leadership in men's groups to ensure that voices coming from positions of social privilege did not drown out the voices of marginalized groups members. Kelly recognized early in the development of their program that a form of progressive stacking (a system of group management in which leaders attempt to call on marginalized voices before hearing from more privileged groups) (Penny, 2011) was required, and so they drew on an Indigenous tradition called "holding space" to help. In the end, it was the collapse of this system, along with several interpersonal conflicts, that caused Kelly to withdraw from the program they had founded.

"I was with the group for 3 years and it was a wonderful experience, for the most part. But after about 2 years, I start getting feedback from some people in the circle that indicated that the facilitators were no longer holding space for softer voices, they were disorganized, and they weren't interrupting sexism when it was happening. It was really hypocritical and that was really troubling."

6.4 Summary

Interviews with people involved in several different men's groups and organizations across Canada and the United States revealed several common areas of concern. First, the groups represented were focused on harm-reduction models that emphasized the role of taking

responsibility for individual actions within a social context. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the ways that their actions might have harmed those around them, and were encouraged to take responsibility for the harm done.

The groups represented were also interested in facilitating men's self-improvement, by encouraging them to become more emotionally aware, and more comfortable expressing feelings of vulnerability with their partners, friends, and families. Facilitators argued that this was a necessary condition in enabling their participants to begin changing their behaviours, and to improve their communities as a result.

Finally, these men's groups attempted to draw men in with the aim of helping them to develop a sense of *other-regardingness* – a willingness to place their own actions within a broader social context that acknowledged the impacts that their actions and inactions had on those around them. Research participants all acknowledged that their own projects of self-improvement were enmeshed in a broader project of community improvement. These orientations and philosophical commitments placed these groups at odds with their (primarily online) MRM counterparts, and indicated a sharp divergence in movement ontologies.

Chapter 7: Discussion

An analysis of patterns of practice in men's groups both online and offline revealed several important findings. Men's rights groups are like other forms of reactionary social movements in that they are continuations of the Culture Wars, a series of ideological struggles over the normative shape of future societies that was fought most keenly in North America in the years following the "Cultural Turn" of the 1960s (Hartman, 2015; Snyder, 2015). Men's rights groups are an outgrowth of a series of conservative moral panics at the progressive shifts seen throughout American society because of the civil rights movements, women's liberation movements, gay rights movements, and critical theoretical approaches developed in academia. Rather than see these changes as movements towards greater equality and representation, men's rights activists tend to see them as expressions of a loss of social power and status among men.

The analysis also revealed that one salient difference between men's rights activism and pro-feminist men's activism – aside from the obvious ideological differences – was the *directionality* of activist energies; whereas pro-feminist men's groups concerned themselves with changing men's behaviours with the aim of changing the lives of others, many men's rights groups were primarily concerned with maintaining the correct ideological attitudes of their rank-and-file members, and ensuring that MRAs displayed the correct attitudes and beliefs within MRM spaces. Since little explicitly men's rights activism takes place in offline spaces, much of the energy of the movement is consumed with continuously reinforcing acceptable patterns of belief in online spaces. While offline pro-feminist men's groups stressed the importance of accepting *responsibility* for past actions as a way of motivating better (read: inclusive, supportive and positive) actions in the future, men's rights activists were more concerned with documenting

examples of what they saw as double-standards, oppressive practices, and other harms committed against men as a way of maintaining and reproducing a shared sense of *grievance*.

The research also revealed a tendency for men's rights groups to lean towards conspiratorial thinking – especially insofar as doing so facilitated feelings of animus towards women and feminists. Conspiratorial thinking also assisted men's rights activists to limit constructive contact with out-groups such as women's groups or academics whose work might serve to disconfirm or merely challenge MRM rhetoric. As a result, many MRM communities online closed themselves off behind impermeable boundaries that remain resistant to outside perspectives. Inside these boundaries, MRAs are exposed to arguments that grow increasingly extreme the further one moves through online spaces. While the majority of MRAs encountered throughout this research remained moderate in their views about women, feminists, and the position of men in contemporary society, it was not difficult to find links to increasingly hostile, even paranoid writings about the “inherent” duplicity of women, feminists, and their “cuck” allies.

7.1 The Culture Wars continued

In his 2015 book, *A war for the soul of America*, historian Andrew Hartman describes the so-called “culture wars” as a resurgent moral struggle fought amidst the “ruins of normative America”, a period after the 1950s where the patriarchal, Christian, heteronormative, middle-class, white America had been replaced by a more secular, pluralistic, and cultural fluid social context (Hartman, 2015). For conservatives, particularly social conservatives, the new American landscape, where feminist women demanded equal pay and employment opportunities, and where immigrant populations sought to practice their own religions and cultures in an environment free from the moral regulation of the past, was a dark and frightening place. Gone

were the comforting, familiar norms that governed much of American (and Canadian) life; the cultural objects of white Christian Americana were being joined by the strange objects that emerged from the various protest countercultures of the 1960s, and some conservatives saw in them a world they no longer recognized (Hartman, 2015). American society was in decline, spurred on by the “collapse” of the nuclear family and the rise of working women and racial minorities who no longer knew their place; only a return to the familiar, predictable norms of the 1950s could save it.

This was the rallying cry of Pat Buchanan, Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, and a host of other conservative voices throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the early years of the twenty-first century, where social conservatives fought progressive and liberal voices in academia, in political arenas and school-board meetings over everything from the teaching of comprehensive sexual education in high-schools, to the teaching of evolution, sexual orientation and identity, and reproductive health (Snyder, 2015; Hartman, 2015). In their view, things had gone too far; women had obtained their rights to the detriment of children, families, and the bread-winner wages of their husbands; feminists had poisoned the minds of young women and girls, causing them, in the words of Pat Robertson, “to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians” (Schwartz and Cooper, 1992).

In his own work on the place of men in society, Warren Farrell also lamented the loss of status for men in America because of feminist-led advances for women that privileged women’s rights while, in his view, exempting them from any attendant responsibilities. Farrell’s solution to this perceived problem was to argue for a new constitutional amendment to enshrine in law women’s responsibilities to men and to society:

“An Equal Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (ERRA) would outlaw male-only

responsibility for draft registration; it would prevent men in the armed services from being required to enter combat (if needed) unless women were also required to enter combat (if needed); it would permit community property only in conjunction with community responsibility; it would give incentives to schools to educate females to be equally responsible for taking sexual initiatives and risking sexual rejection rather than lecturing only males on how not to do it wrong; it would replace discussions of sexual harassment in the workplace with discussions of how both sexes make sexual contact in the workplace.” (Farrell, 1993)

Unlike Buchanan, Gingrich and other conservatives, Farrell argued that some feminist activism – what he termed “Adult Feminism” (Farrell, 1993) – had improved things for some women, but he concluded that for the most part, such advances came at the explicit expense of men. Farrell’s views however, remained moderate compared to those of other men’s rights activists, like Paul Elam, who argued that feminist victories had only enabled women’s naturally rapacious tendencies to explode into the mainstream, where they could now sue men (and win) with little effort due to “biased courts” that treat women like perpetual victims, or could marry and then divorce men arbitrarily solely to strip them of their wealth, their homes, and their children²⁷ (A Voice for Men, 2017). Indeed, despite the almost three decades separating the publication of *The Myth of Male Power* and the current production of men’s rights blogs, articles and podcasts, little change in substance is present in men’s rights literature; technological innovations have allowed for the movement’s message to reach a wider audience, but many of

²⁷ This is a common position in the MRM; the assets and children in marriages are framed as ‘his’ by default, so that when discussing divorce, it is often framed as ‘his’ wealth being taken, ‘his’ children stolen, ‘his’ house given to the ex-wife. There is little mention of the labour – paid and unpaid – that goes in to the marriages discussed, nor is there much mention given to the role that the female-dominated reproductive economy (Peterson, 2003) plays in enabling men to engage in paid labour elsewhere.

the principle concerns of the movement have remained. Like other reactionary movements engaged in conservative activism, men's rights spaces remain dedicated to fighting the same cultural battles as Buchanan, Farrell, and others of an earlier generation of culture warriors.

The analysis of men's rights discourse reveals that while many MRAs vehemently oppose the labels of conservative or even right wing (Jaybee, 2017; Esmay, 2015; Haffner, 2016), there is nevertheless a broad streak of conservative – even social conservative – sentiment running throughout the movement. A PMI test of the men's rights subreddit indicates the community shares a strong similarity to explicitly conservative or right-leaning communities including MGTOW (63%), sjwhate (62%), and European (54%), while self-selected surveys conducted by the men's rights reddit community itself revealed a community that trended right-wing – conservative and libertarian, primarily (reddit, 2013; Constant, 2014). While the survey data is relatively old, PMI tests conducted for this research indicated that the men's rights community of 2017, remains significantly like conservative, right-wing and anti-progressive communities. This data is supported by an analysis of the materials produced by the wider men's rights community, where support for conservative politicians, positions, and causes remain common.

PMI tests of reddit's "manosphere" communities, coupled with a larger discourse analysis of men's rights materials online also indicate that while much of the rhetoric of the movement portrays MRAs as social justice activists fighting for a progressive, egalitarian world (Esmay, 2015; Haffner, 2016; Farrell, 1993), in practice MRA emotional labour instead focuses on challenging and undermining feminist and other progressive causes. Men's rights websites across online spaces devote significant bandwidth to positioning themselves opposite feminist activists, often standing in defense of traditional views of gender and gender roles.

“This is why men’s rights activists oppose regressive traditional family structures and societal expectations that force men into bondage for life. They support the liberation and independence of life choices for both men and women. What can ever be more progressive than this?

It is a well-known fact that men are the most productive elements of society. This is why liberating men from the burden of the family will liberate all of the society. It is, in fact, the petty divisions among men that lead to wars and policies for the benefit of the rich and powerful at the cost of the poor and unemployed. This is why raising awareness of men’s exploitation and men’s rights is simultaneously a campaign for peace, harmony and prosperity.” (Jaybee, 2017)

Stripped of its context, this argument seems like the author is advocating for a radical shift in family dynamics designed to “emancipate” men from restrictive gender roles and expectations. In an earlier section of the same essay, the author hypothesizes a society where children are raised in a communal creche to free women and men from the burdens of raising children in traditional families. Yet, as Jaybee points out in the excerpt above, communal children’s creches are not nearly as important as freeing men from the “burden of the family”, a common assertion in the MRM which refers to the “unfairness” of shackling men’s economic freedom by forcing them to pay child support. What sounds at first like a progressive vision of a radical future is revealed as a novel take on an old Farrell-esque argument about the unfairness of alimony and child support.

An analysis of MRM rhetoric reveals a preoccupation with gender-based counter-activism designed to cement existing gendered divisions of labour or, in some cases, with demands that feminists focus their attentions on encouraging women to enter dangerous or low-

prestige professions²⁸, rather than spend time helping women break into high-pay, high-prestige careers like medicine, law, or government. At the same time, women who do move into dangerous, male-dominated fields can expect to face sustained harassment and abuse (Paap, 2006; Padavic and Reskin, 1990; Bergmann, 2011). Like many MRM arguments, claims that “true equality” can only be reached when women are made to enter dangerous – and discriminatory – work environments ignore the systemic discriminations that women (and particularly women of colour and LGBTQ women) experience there and further, often deny that such discrimination exists (England, 2010).

Like participants in the early culture wars, contemporary MRAs root many of their grievances in social changes that began in the 1960s, and like those early culture warriors, argue that the changes have left men behind or, worse, have placed men in subservient or oppressed social positions relative to women. It is this fear of loss that motivates many in the MRM to work to undermine feminist activism, as it is feminism that threatens to unravel men’s social status.

Status anxiety and a defense of traditionalism

“Back in the Nineties, emboldened by the successes of feminism, women sought to slay the dragon of patriarchy by turning men into ridiculous cissies who would cry with them through chick-flicks and then cook up a decent lasagne...

A man who is too in awe of his woman isn't going to tear her blouse open and ravish her on the couch; he isn't going to pull her hair and whisper profanities in her ear. Whenever my marriage is at a crisis point, and my wife's ego and mine are jostling for a position of supremacy, we inevitably have strenuous, battling sex...

²⁸ Such arguments often ignore or downplay the historical reality that women have always worked in such professions.

Bring back the real men, girls. You might just remember why you loved them in the first place.” (Daily Mail Online, 2006)

Throughout much of the MRM literature analyzed in this study, a recurring theme was the perceived loss of both social status and masculine identity because of the “triumph” of feminist thought in mainstream discourse. The cultural revolutions of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had created a new sort of man, one only too eager to adopt a submissive, effeminate social role in deference to the powerful, career-focused identities of feminist-empowered women. Across many websites included in this study, and throughout the comment threads and discussion pages of the MRM, men’s social position was described as precarious; equality is a zero-sum game with men increasingly on the losing side of things. Each step forward for women constituted a step backwards for men; as women gained the right to no-fault divorce, men lost the right to keep their families whole through difficult times. As women gained reproductive freedom through contraceptives and access to birth control, men lost the right to have a say during a pregnancy – or became trapped by women who gave birth to babies without their permission, then demanded child-support (Wadsworth, 2014).

The research revealed that men who participate in online MRM spaces tend to frame their experiences in terms of either a loss of status or a fear of losing status – a form of status anxiety that has been identified by several researchers who have investigated the men’s rights movement (Kimmel, 2015; Schmitz and Kazyak, 2016; Blee and Creasap, 2010). MRM rhetoric stresses that the effect of feminist thought on men and men’s lives has been one that shackles men’s sexuality (Ley, 2017) and restricts their access to full and equal participation in the family, while undermining and silencing men who are victims of sexual or domestic violence (Straughan, 2015). This research indicates that in response to these perceived challenges, the solution was a

return to more traditional patterns of masculinity and femininity; men, as the above quote illustrates, were to return to a position of power and (literal) strength in their relationships with women; tell them to shut up when they are too hormonal; strike them if they are being hysterical; if they catch a man cheating, don't deny it, then engage in rough, "dominating" sex with their partner to show her what she'd miss if he were gone (Daily Mail Online, 2006; reddit, 2016). In the MRM, masculinity and femininity are normative and binary, and it is the preferred state that society ought to return to. I argue that this is a manifestation of the MRM's collective *countermemory*, and the practice of MRM sites like the /r/mensrights community of labelling submitted stories as "discrimination", "false rape accusations", "feminism" or "legal rights" is a form of *counter-memorialization*, by which events can be reframed to support MRM allegations of oppression. These labels frame news articles, blog posts, YouTube videos and other media according to community-specific codes, informing readers of the expected take away from each article. Readers are thus primed to see these submissions in such a way as to bolster collective patterns of belief that support group *countermemory* and patterns of *counter-memorialization*.

The status-anxiety of MRM communities and participants motivates an almost-utopian vision of collective action. Society has a normative shape, one where men have a specific position (often interpreted along traditional lines: defender, protector, provider, builder, creator, etc.) just as women do (supporter, mother, nurturer). The influence of feminism on society has resulted in a distortion of that shape, and therefore resulted in social instability, the reversal of roles, and the oppression of men. For the ideal social state to be restored, men must come together to attack feminist ideologies and annihilate their influence in society; only then will the natural state of things be restored.

Online spaces as incubators

MRA knowledge production in online spaces is largely self-referential. An examination of larger men's rights communities revealed that in discussions between MRAs and their interlocutors, MRAs often supported their arguments with materials drawn from other MRM or MRM-friendly websites, rather than from news articles or scholarly sources. In discussions about "male disposability" on reddit for example, MRAs often linked their arguments to a single YouTube video by Karen Straughan, a prominent MRA, or to her online essay about the subject (Straughan, 2013). Straughan's arguments were themselves drawn from the work of Warren Farrell, whose ideas about the disposability of men often draw on the work of earlier men's rights activists like Goldberg (Straughan, 2013; Farrell, 1993). Once established, these self-referential networks establish an alternative framework for supporting MRM arguments that require little outside support.

Self-referencing is a common feature of most social movements, but in the MRM, patterns of inward-facing knowledge construction are exaggerated. Just as in other social movements, the MRM incentivizes motivated reasoning on the part of its participants, who actively engage in selectively curating sources of information pulled from outside of the movement. When discussing domestic violence for example, MRAs make heavy use of a limited number of studies on the subject and in particular focus on studies that make use of the conflict tactics scale (CTS), a controversial methodology (Kimmel, 2002; Archer, 1999). When disconfirming evidence is presented, MRAs are often quick to dismiss it as "feminist bias" or a product of a problematic research program or agenda. In other cases, MRAs will attempt to discredit not only a single report or study, but the entire field of research that spawned it, claiming that any research conducted by feminists (or gender studies professors) is illegitimate,

“It is obscene that majority-male tax payers are funding an ideology that teaches hatred against their own sex. A very good argument can be made that gender studies should be banned in the same way that "nigger studies" would be banned if such a thing existed. However, I am content with (a) defunding or (b) requiring gender studies "professors" to include scientific evidence and contrary evidence in their courses.” (reddit, 2018)

Indeed, conspiratorial thinking is common in MRM spaces and is a central component of the movement’s self-referential nature. It is not unusual to find criticisms – especially those that include links to academic research that refutes MRM claims – dismissed as “feminist bias” in a particular research field. Conspiratorial thinking provides in-group members with a “self-defence” mechanism (Kay, 2011) that positions troubling or critical arguments or evidence outside the boundaries of acceptable material. Evidence that contradicts central MRM claims is dismissed as a *de facto* product of conspiratorial forces bent on the destruction of men. Such conspiratorial thinking exacerbates the movement’s pre-existing skepticism of non-MRM sources of information.

In cases where academic work is utilized by MRM knowledge producers, it is done so selectively, and with little regard for the context or impact of the work. For example, in men’s rights spaces, domestic violence is routinely referred to as a “non-gendered” phenomenon, because domestic violence rates are roughly equal with regards to the gender of the perpetrators. Put simply: domestic violence is not a gendered problem because men are just as likely – if not slightly *more* likely – to be the victims of domestic violence as women (reddit, 2017; Rhymes, 2014). Research that supports this assertion is limited and of questionable methodological soundness (Kimmel, 2002; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson and Daly, 1992). Throughout the course of the analysis, I encountered one source that was cited more frequently than any other, a book

chapter by Murray Strauss published in 1980 entitled “*The marriage license as a hitting license: Evidence from popular culture, law, and social science.*” (Strauss 1980). While most of research on domestic violence indicates that both the instances of violence and directionality/severity of violence are distinctly gendered, with women on the receiving end of the bulk of it (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson and Daly, 1992; Kimmel, 2002), the minority view of the Strauss paper fit seamlessly with the counter-mnemonic narrative constructed by the MRM.

Examples such as this indicate the extent to which MRM spaces function in similar patterns to other reactionary movements, forming a patterns of knowledge production and distribution that favour bolstering in-group counter-memorializations over knowledge distribution through sustained interaction with opponents (Tarrow, 1994; Daniels, 2009; Blais and Dupuis-Deri, 2012). Much of the knowledge production within online spaces examined in this research was mobilized in a self-referential manner, designed to reinforce in-group beliefs and maintain a sense of *grievance* rooted in a perception of oppression.

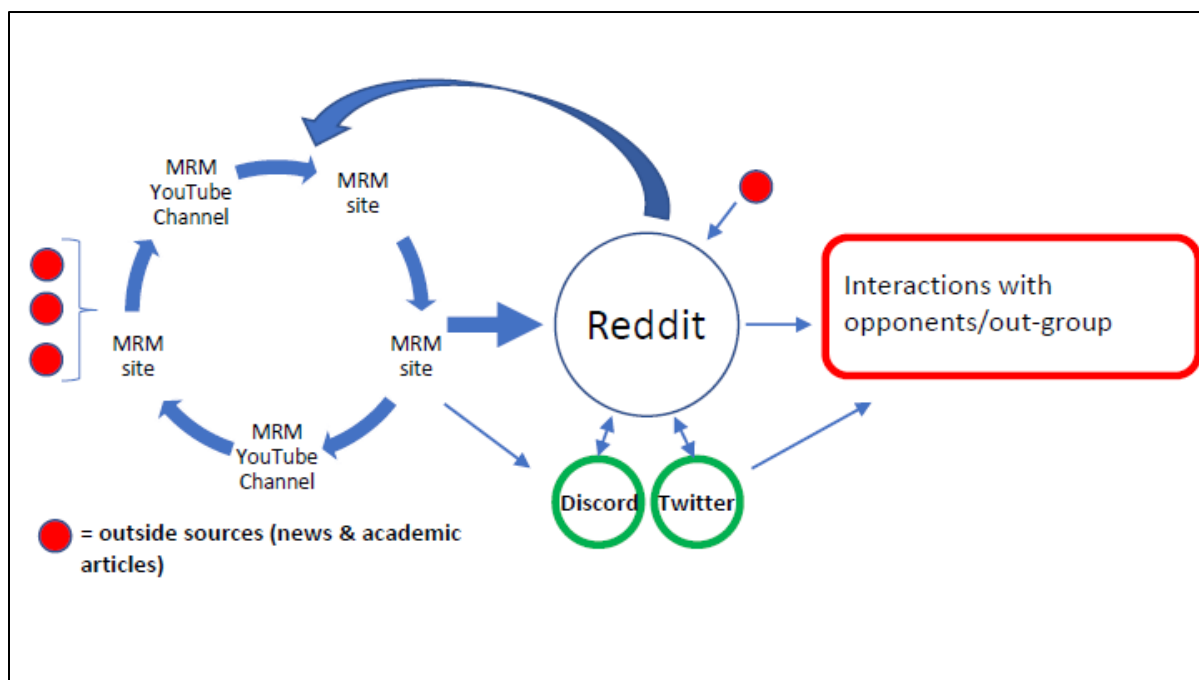


Figure 9 Knowledge production map of the men's rights movement

In the network map depicted above (figure 8), I have detailed the movement of knowledge production within MRM spaces. The cycle works in the following way: a men's rights blogger on a site like *A Voice for Men* publishes a post about a topic of interest to MRM participants. That post is shared by other MRM sites like the National Coalition for Men or Justice for Men and Boys. Users on those sites will share the blog with other sites, either by linking to the original, or to one of the other sites where it can be found. If the post is provocative enough, or popular enough, it might find its way to YouTube, where MRM content creators release a video discussing the blog post or their reactions to it; the blog's original writer may also share a video blog discussing the issue in greater detail. These video blogs are then shared back into MRM networks. In one example, a blog post about parental alienation was shared to more than a dozen MRM sites, while a video blog by the same author was shared to the same sites a

similar number of times. The most popular content is then shared to large discussion communities like reddit, where users discuss the issue in greater detail.

From reddit, topics pulled from popular posts is then taken into private discussion channels or voice chats, or posted on Twitter, which then links to discussions from reddit and Facebook. While some of this information is used in debates with movement opponents, the rest remains in MRM networks where it can be posted and reposted.

Much of the original materials produced by the MRM (blogs, opinion and think pieces, podcasts and YouTube videos) emerges from within a self-referential network of in-group knowledge producers. The individuals in this network will post and cross-post the materials they produce on multiple platforms, all of which can be found within the greater “manosphere”. An influential MRA writer and content producer, Karen Straughan (also known as “GirlWritesWhat”) will produce a YouTube video on the topic of “male disposability” for example, which she will upload to that site. At the same time, she will produce a written essay that she will post on A Voice for Men, which she will link to her YouTube video and to the website of the *Honey Badgers Brigade* podcast, a men’s rights podcast produced weekly in Edmonton, Alberta. Visitors to these sites will find easy connections to other men’s rights sites or content; the material will also find its way to reddit (and has, on more than one occasion), where it becomes the focus of discussion amongst the members of the various men’s rights communities on the site (emagnim77, 2012; myalias1, 2014).

As material produced in the manosphere circulates through reddit, it is discussed, debated, and analyzed by participants in the communities the material is linked to. From there, the discussions, comments and criticisms make their way back into the production cycles of the manosphere (since many content producers there are also members/participants of the various

reddit communities), while some participants will take the information and move it outwards, to Twitter, Facebook or into face-to-face discussions with opponents as a form of activism.

Reddit communities also draw in materials produced outside of the manosphere, either to support their own arguments directly, or as foci for discussions which use the material to illustrate how the application of MRM analytical lenses (often referred to as “red-pilling” or being “red-pilled”) can reveal the hidden oppressions men face. A news article about the Boko Haram kidnapping of young women and girls will, for example, be used to illustrate that the media simply does not care about the plight of young boys who similarly had been kidnapped, thus proving that society neither knows nor cares about men (imnotmrabut, 2017).

Reddit communities – and the communities of the manosphere more generally – are in practice ideological incubators, where ideas can be discussed in a space free from outside antagonism or dissent (Futrelle and Simi, 2004). Since offline activism by explicit men’s rights groups remains limited (Goldwag, 2012; Blake, 2015), the bulk of activity in men’s right spaces remains focused on identity construction, boundary maintenance, and reproduction across generations, which is common in reactionary movements where open and public activism remains fraught (Tarrow, 1994; Futrelle and Simi, 2004; Simi and Futrelle, 2009).

Finally, as the map in figure four, and the data in figures six and seven illustrate, members of the men’s rights communities of reddit share significant levels of similarity with reddit communities associated with the Alt-right, including /r/sjwhate, /r/uncensorednews, and /r/theredpill. These relationships place the content of men’s rights and “manosphere” communities outside of the more common materials and discussions that take place on reddit, which contributes to the insular orientation of community discussions. On reddit, users who post frequently in men’s rights subreddits tend to move in relatively small and isolated orbits through

other subreddits that share similar content. Were users of /r/mensrights more active in non-culture war subreddits, the PMI tests would have indicated greater levels of similarity with non-culture war subreddits. While it is certainly the case that /r/mensrights users frequent other subreddits not associated with their online activism, it remains clear that MRAs active on reddit have constructed an online community that closely resembles the communities of other reactionary and traditionalist groups.

Virtual geographies

These self-referential networks resemble the free spaces of the white supremacist movement in spirit if not content (Futrelle and Simi, 2004). Where white supremacist groups have made use of music festivals and annual gatherings to renew and refine their collective identities (Futrelle and Simi, 2004; Futrelle, Simi and Gottschalk, 2006), the MRM uses online discussion boards, YouTube channels and comment sections, chat services and video streams to achieve the same effect. The structures may initially appear different, but a closer examination reveals the similarities. Like members of reactionary movements, participants in the MRM often feel a sense of persecution and worry that their activism and identities – if known – would result in social stigma and perhaps even sanction. As a result, MRM participants require a controlled space where their preferred patterns of behaviour and language can be performed without fear of reprisal. Online social networks serve that function well. Like a physical space, unwanted visitors can be vetted before entry, monitored while present, and ejected if needed; the borders of online subcultural spaces can be made as impermeable as any geopolitical or physical border. In online spaces, even language itself becomes a tool of border maintenance. The MRM uses in-group specific jargon that has specific meanings and using these terms out of their correct context can be a useful shibboleth for identifying outsiders. On reddit, identifying where MRM

rhetoric is welcome is important, as some communities are more receptive than others. While MRM ideology is taken-as-given in most manosphere subreddits, it is explicitly rejected in men's discussion communities like /r/menslib (a men's liberation subreddit), which has an explicit ban on anti-feminist posts.

In articles where reporters have spent time in MRM spaces, there is often a point where the experience is likened to visiting a strange or alien world; there is a sense that a boundary has been crossed. On one side of the boundary, the world follows familiar rules; history is what it has always been, and basic truths about the gendered nature of social existence are taken for granted. On the other side, those same facts no longer seem evident. History has changed, and the truths about gender have been reversed. Travellers in these spaces encounter unfamiliar terms: the “feminization of society”; “cucks” and “betas” and “misandry”; “hypergamy” and “taking the Red Pill”. This language is at the same time exposition and gatekeeper, depending on who is reading it. For the initiated, these terms make perfect sense and their veracity is taken as given, but for the uninitiated, they seem almost nonsensical, and the reader knows they are outsiders there. Like the mutable boundaries of nation-states, the boundaries of online communities can shift so that where MRM terms are accepted, and routine become *de facto* provinces of the MRM nation. Wars are fought over such terrain.

In late 2014, a precursor movement to the alt-right, dubbed “Gamergate” swept across social media. For months, Gamergate-related content dominated Twitter, reddit, 4chan, and other online communities. The movement drew the attention of major media outlets all over the world, and resulted in the disruption of tech conferences, university public lectures, and the careers of journalists, video game developers, while boosting the profiles of alternative media personalities like Steve Bannon and Milo Yiannopoulos. On reddit, site moderators and administrators

attempted to limit discussion of Gamergate by shutting down certain communities that had become associated with it. In response, thousands of reddit users abandoned the site and moved to discussion groups on voat and 8chan. By early 2015, 8chan and voat were widely seen as strongholds of Gamergate supporters and eventually as incubators for alt-right ideology (Hodge, 2018). Though there was little to stop anti-Gamergate users from forming their own communities on those sites, there was little incentive; anti-Gamergate users continued to find sheltered communities on reddit where they were free to mock Gamergate supporters with relative impunity.

In this example, collective outrage at the actions of pro-Gamergate supporters forced administrators and moderators of reddit (and Twitter to a lesser extent) to step in and limit the ability of Gamergate supporters to spread their message. The way they did this was to make *discussion* of pro-Gamergate positions an offense worthy of a site-wide ban. Similarly, Twitter users developed tools that allowed them to mass block any user who used specific pro-Gamergate hashtags, or who followed specific pro-Gamergate users. The result of these actions was that a user's Twitter feed automatically filtered out any language associated with pro-Gamergate positions. On reddit, communities saw similar results, as user bans and community moderation identified pro-Gamergate content as unwelcome and therefore worthy of deletion.

The example of Gamergate was extreme, but similar patterns exist in relation to MRM content spread through networks. While some networks – typically those associated with conservative, traditionalist or manosphere ideologies – remain friendly, safe terrain for MRM ideology to flourish, other spaces remain hostile. In both cases, language determines belonging, as communities use moderation, deletions, and user bans to enforce limits on what sort of language passes across community boundaries.

Mainstreaming the men's rights movement through stealth

The stigma attached to explicit activism by MRAs is well known by members of the movement (Fairington, 2013; Kimmel, 2015) and it has made many of them hesitant to declare their membership openly. As a result, the spread of MRM ideology outside of online social networks is limited. But where open men's rights activism remains somewhat fraught, some MRAs have instead opted to attempt to mainstream movement ideology through stealth. Rather than advocate for the creation of openly MRM-affiliated groups or chapters for example, some MRAs will instead opt for creating ostensibly unaffiliated groups that focus on "men's issues" or "human rights issues", which take pains to establish themselves as separate, unaffiliated entities while continuing to draw from the established canon of men's rights rhetoric, literature, and speakers.

Throughout this research, I identified several individuals whose work is integral to the men's rights movement, including Warren Farrell, Christina Hoff-Summers, Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young, and Karen Straughan. Each of these individuals have written extensively as men's rights activists, or in explicit agreement with the ideals of the MRM. Karen Straughan, Warren Farrell, and Christina Hoff-Summers have all made frequent contributions to MRM websites and other productions, or have been interviewed extensively by them, with Farrell and Straughan both explicitly endorsing the movement and actively participating in its growth. Yet these same figures are routinely cited, and their works included in the recommended reading sections of the Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE), a federally-recognized charity based in Toronto that has on several occasions denied any association with the men's rights movement (McLaren, 2015; Heuser and Kay, 2017).

The Canadian Association for Equality is an example of how successful men's rights activists can inject MRM ideology into mainstream dialogue simply by – as CAFE founder Justin Trottier argues – changing the terminology used (Heuser and Kay, 2017). Instead of calling one's self a “men's rights activist”, instead, adopt the label of “human rights activist”, as Karen Straughan is labelled on the events page of CAFE's website (Canadian Association for Equality, 2018). This tactic has resulted in the rapid growth of CAFE membership across the country, with chapters springing up in virtually every major city, including Vancouver and Victoria, BC. The organization's strategy and branding have also allowed it to affiliate itself with mainstream campus groups, offering men's rights rhetoric a path on to university campuses, where historically it has not been welcome. As a result, the few non-MRM affiliated men's organizations active on university campuses have needed to develop systems to identify and check the influence of men's rights activists who participate in non-MRM groups.

7.2 “Yeah, we've had a few issues with those guys”: boundary maintenance in pro-feminist men's groups

Though the frameworks and principle foci of the various men's groups whose members participated in this research differed significantly, they all shared a concern with ensuring that meetings were not derailed or taken over by MRAs who had joined their spaces unannounced. In my conversations with Don, Kelly and Tyler, there was a feeling that their group facilitators needed to be constantly on guard to identify and counter MRAs when they entered pro-feminist spaces for men. While Tyler's narrative tended to highlight the physicality of his own interactions with MRAs in offline spaces, Kelly and Don were more interested in elucidating the philosophical and ideological ruptures between their worldviews and those of the MRM. Kelly was firm in their belief that while it was not MRA presence *per se* that was the problem in pro-

feminist spaces, it was rather their tendency to disrupt planned discussion topics, derail group work or conversations, and challenge basic philosophical premises that were foundational to pro-feminist work. Kelly's narrative focused on the challenge of keeping the men's group centered on the experiences of the survivors of patriarchal violence, as doing so ensured that the men in the space remained engaged with the effects of privilege, as opposed to merely thinking about the concept in the abstract. This was a challenge in their view, as often the men in the group seemed more interested in focusing on their own lives and their own experiences, which carried the risk of opening the door to MRM-style rhetoric:

“At first we went into the men's circle and asked ourselves, ‘how do we keep this centered on the survivors?’ we had seen other men's groups go this other way, into a sort of gnarly, twisted ‘we are the *real* victims’ sort of place and we're like ‘how did that happen!?’ So we knew that we couldn't allow our movement to go that way, and so at first we knew that our physical bodies would have to be in that circle to remind these men that they are here gathering to address their privilege and power they are benefitting from [and the harm they have done] in society, and if I have to sit here and remind you... It was a challenge to keep the movement from centering men in the discussion... we realized that this could easily have turned into a more men's rights type of space. We needed to hold us accountable.”

Tyler's relationship with MRAs in offline spaces were in his narrative, far more antagonistic; what seemed important for him to tell me was how he could use his own physical presence to confront MRAs, to dare them to back up their words with violence – or at least by performing their own version of masculine posturing. Tyler's insistence that MRM ideology (and to a lesser extent MRAs themselves) were not welcome in pro-feminist spaces is not unusual

amongst members of pro-feminist men's communities – both online and off. Respondents all had stories to tell about encounters with MRAs and took pains to emphasise the extent to which MRM ideology was both unwelcome and prima facie absurd on its face. This disavowal and repudiation of all things MRM was present in each conversation I had with participants, and in most cases, the rhetoric was accompanied by nonverbal expressions of dismissal and disgust; a firm shake of the head; frowns, mouths twisted in grimaces of distaste; bodies leaned back and tense. These were not merely denials of belief but acts of repudiation, designed to signal to the viewer that MRM views were not merely disagreeable, but distasteful; it was a performance of the rejection of non-progressive thoughts and actions. Instead of simply banning a user and deleting their comments, participants in offline spaces can use discomfort as a tool of boundary maintenance. By showing discomfort, participants signal that their boundaries are being crossed; by making others feel discomfort, participants can show newcomers that their viewpoints are not welcome.

De-centered growth and accountability

The various facilitators, organizers, and participants of pro-feminist men's groups interviewed for this research spoke often about the importance of 'de-centering' men's experiences and men's lives in discussions of privilege, power, and violence (both violence against women and violence against non-women others). The reasoning behind this was simple: placing men's experiences as holders of privilege pulled focus away from the people that privilege had harmed. When men spoke of the harm they did, but without first de-centering themselves, the result was a discussion that acknowledged the harms done to others, without dwelling on victims' feelings or perspectives. The discussions returned to focus on men; men as victims of socialization, of the pain men felt at knowing they had harmed others, of the struggles

men faced in coming to terms with the harm they had done. While each of these topics is worthy of discussion and reflection, for several of the participants I spoke with, what really mattered was for the men to place themselves in the position of their victims – to empathize with them and thereby gain a new perspective on their own actions. So long as men could refocus discussions to how perpetrating oppression or violence made *them* feel, their victims would continue to remain in the background.

For Kelly, de-centering men in discussions of violence or oppression and re-focusing on the harms done to victims flowed from their Indigenous philosophies of healing, which emphasized the community dimensions to harm, harm-reduction, and accountability,

“My Indigenous philosophy is that when people are hurt, you bring them to the wellness of the community so we gather around you and tell you ‘you’re not well’; when you derail yourself, you need more love. You don’t need less love. Because I understood the power of angry women and the aversion men have to listening to angry women, I knew that it couldn’t be women that held space for those men to deal with their hurt. I asked myself: if it was me, I would want others like me to help me and support me in my struggles? I don’t want them to suffer; I want them to be held, you know?”

Like Kelly, Don’s experiences with group work echoed this need for men to hold themselves accountable – and to be held accountable – when their speech or actions threatened to pull the focus of their conversations away from their impacts with their victims, to more abstract discussions about the extent of their complicity in patriarchal systems,

“... it’s interesting because we always start our new sessions with a “gender box”²⁹ exercise – you know ‘what does mainstream, patriarchal society tell us needs to go in the box – and as we go on, we always get a lot of, you know, ‘moves to innocence’, where guys will say ‘but I’m not *that* sort of masculinity...’ like, you’ll get the more sort of ‘intellectual masculinity’ or ‘hippie masculinity’... all these alternative types of masculinity. And they use that to sort of challenge the extent to which they participate in hegemonic, patriarchal gender patterns.”

Don then went on to recount how once these sorts of discussions got started, it was sometimes difficult to redirect them, as men were far more eager to show how they personally were not involved in patterns of oppression or violence, or that their sort of masculine identity was not truly a privileged one. Once men could be engaged to move beyond such protestations, Don and several other participants argued that workshops could return their focus to discussions of how men might engage more constructively with their privileges, with the goal of contributing positively to their society.

7.3 Grievances versus Responsibility

The research revealed a significant variation in *directionality* within the various men’s rights communities and pro-feminist men’s organizations studied. In each case, the overall direction of action – inward, in the case of the men’s rights movement, and outward in the case of the pro-feminist men’s movement – is rooted in what I identify as two principle motivators of action: a shared sense of *grievance* among men’s rights activists, and a sense of *responsibility*

²⁹ The “gender box” exercise encourages men in the group to reveal their beliefs about what society expects men to be like by asking them to volunteer traits or physical characteristics that they feel men are supposed to embody. The exercise often allows facilitators to illustrate the ways in which contemporary hegemonic masculine ideals place strict limitations on what men can acceptably do.

among pro-feminist men. While both pro-feminist men and men's rights activists espouse disparate ideologies rooted in competing knowledge-claims and propositional logics, the motivations that facilitate the construction and maintenance of those systems are rooted in emotionality – on activists' emotional connections to the social networks they are embedded within; how they feel about the world and their place in it motivates their adoption of specific patterns of belief and action. This connection between emotion and social action has been studied extensively in the past, particularly by researchers engaged in study of reactionary social movements and the radical Right (Altemeyer, 1996; Hodge, 2011; Atran, 2010; Atran, 2015; Altemeyer, 2006; Neiwert, 2009; Daniels, 2009; Ferber, 1998). In this research, I contribute to this discussion by illustrating how these patterns exist in less radical, though still reactionary social movements. Further, I show how emotions can fuel the development of radical counter-memory and patterns of counter-memorialization that enable reactionary movements to reconstruct their social position such that changing the world to accommodate them becomes, in their view, the only reasonable course of action.

More recent work by researchers examining contemporary reactionary and far right groups has also illustrated that activists are frequently motivated by fear, anger, or anxiety (Kimmel, 2013; Costa and Kimmel, 2015; Schaffner, 2018; Hodge, 2018), particularly about fears of losing one's social status or privilege. This research also indicates that the emotional dynamics at play in the lived experiences of individual members of activist groups colour the sorts of activism the group engages in. In the men's rights movement, individuals often relate feelings of anger, frustration, and sadness in the face of what they see as society's demonization of men (Rekai, 2013) leads to feelings of collective grievance, a sense that the world has done a great wrong to them, and that they are owed something that has been taken. As a result, men's

rights activism focuses less on changing men to make them fit more comfortably into society, and more on demanding that society realign itself to their values; MRAs stand as rocks in a dam against the currents of social change and demand they acknowledge their presence. In the face of pushback from sectors of society that are interested in amplifying social change, MRAs turn inwards, forming self-referential networks among themselves where they shelter that shared grievance and feed it, using the presence of opposition as proof of their oppression.

In pro-feminist men's groups, on the other hand, there is anger, frustration, and sadness as well, but unlike their MRA counterparts, their energies are directed in several ways: outward, as they declare their acknowledgment of the harms they have done by maintaining and reproduction oppressive systems, as well as inwards in a pattern of self-examination and criticism, with the aim of improving themselves, according to the metrics of pro-feminist logics. In pro-feminist men's groups, men are taught to recognize the impacts their actions – or lack of action – have on others, and are shown how to perform masculinity in less harmful ways. When I participated in a pro-feminist men's gathering, the leaders of the evening's discussion illustrated how standing by silently while our male friends made sexist jokes or aggressively flirted with women perpetuated and enabled the continued degradation of women. The evening's facilitators wanted us to recognize that something was wrong in our treatment of women, and in society's views about women, and encouraged us to see our own role in perpetuating it, as well as to see our role in ending it. Our efforts may have been directed inwards at self-criticism and self-examination, but our focus was on the potential victims of our (in)actions.

Unlike the self-referential networks of the MRM discussed in chapter five, the pro-feminist men's groups I interacted with featured a different pattern of knowledge construction and transmission. Unlike knowledge production in the MRM, the pro-feminist men's groups I

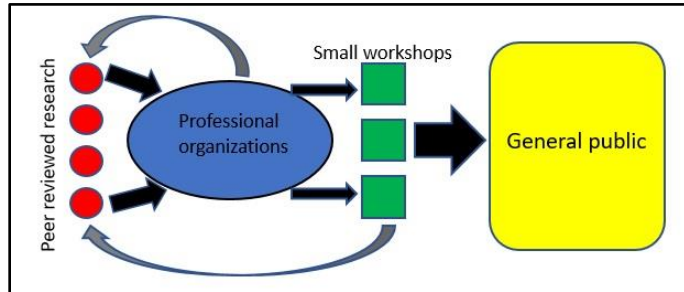


Figure 10 Pro-feminist men's group knowledge production

examined transmitted knowledge outwards. The participants I interviewed described their workshops, groups and meetings as relying on materials produced by several professional organizations

including provincial and territorial health authorities, non-profit agencies, and government-funded programs. This material was itself the product of research conducted by both academics and non-governmental organizations. The workshops themselves had stated goals, such as reducing incidents of domestic violence, or improving men's sexual and emotional health in relationships, to helping men understand and deal with their emotions in constructive ways, to providing ongoing assistance to men trying to build more positive masculine identities. Rather than building self-referential systems of identity construction, the men's groups I examined were components of a larger system of knowledge translation, with the explicit goal of positively impacting society by engaging men to become forces of positive change in their lives and the lives of others. Where knowledge production in MRM spaces was inward-facing and designed to reinforce collective identity rooted in *grievance*, the networks constructed by pro-feminist men's groups were designed to be outward-facing, grounded in a shared sense of *responsibility* for the state of society and for men's role in changing it.

7.4 Summary

In chapter seven I revisited the findings presented in chapters five and six and used them to present a new way of understanding knowledge production in MRM and pro-feminist men's movement spaces. I first established the MRM as a reaction to feminist activism and an outgrowth of conservative, traditionalist moral panics about the changing nature of families, labour demographics, and gender ideology between the 1970s and the 1990s. I discussed how the men's rights movement and the pro-feminist men's movement both emerged as responses to feminist activism, with pro-feminist men's groups reacting through an acknowledgment of personal and social *responsibility* with regards to the systemic discrimination of women and the effort to end it, and the MRM as a reaction against such activism. The men's rights movement fundamentally disagreed with feminist arguments, choosing instead to recast men as the true victims of gender-based discrimination.

Throughout chapter seven, I positioned the MRM as a vehicle through which men's anxieties over a perceived loss of status could be reconceptualised through counter-memory into a shared sense of *grievance* that motivated participants to reject feminist arguments (and any social actions or policies that could be interpreted as feminist in origin). I compared this position to the accounts given by participants in various pro-feminist men's groups which described activism as a way of expressing feelings of *responsibility* for gender-based inequalities. These accounts acknowledged feminist arguments and built on them while remaining focused on men's experiences.

Finally, I illustrated how MRM literature and discussions are *inward-facing*, self-referential systems of knowledge production designed to reproduce and maintain in-group identities; the movement becomes about reproducing itself. I contrast this to systems of

knowledge production in pro-feminist men's spaces that emphasize the de-centering of men's experiences as a strategy of keeping focus on how men's actions impact others in society. In this sense, pro-feminist men's knowledge production is *outward-facing*, and other-regarding. Such patterns are less about managing individual men's status anxieties, and more about helping men navigate social systems while minimizing the harm they might do to others.

In the concluding chapter, I revisit my central research concerns, and discuss some of the limitations of this dissertation. I also offer some potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

The men's rights movement of today is as dynamic as it has ever been, and remains committed to many of the same positions as it did when it first began to take shape in the 1970s: concerns about "male disposability", the loss of social status and privilege for men, the dissolution of the nuclear family and perceived unfairness in the arbitration of child welfare and support, and an abiding suspicion of feminist theory and activism. The birth of the modern internet and subsequent emergence of social media technologies and services granted the men's rights movement access to a potential audience greater than any it had known before, and the movement's principle knowledge-producers have capitalized on it. Though the advent of modern information networks has radically altered how MRAs meet, construct knowledge and engage in recruitment, some of its core principles have remain unchanged. Men's rights communities online today boast hundreds of thousands of subscribers and contributors, spread across dozens of networks and services, yet they continue to look largely inward; despite technological innovations, the MRM remains self-referential. This project was designed to contribute to contemporary theorizing and analysis of the men's rights movement and its fellow travellers in the manosphere.

This project sought to answer two important questions. The first was: what feelings or attitudes motivate individuals to associate with the men's rights movement, and how do those attitudes differ from those of individuals associated with pro-feminist men's groups or communities? To answer this, I conducted an analysis of men's rights literature and activity in online spaces, using a qualitative-based discourse analysis that was supplemented by a limited quantitative component. Through this analysis, I illustrated that the men's rights movement is motivated by feelings of *grievance* – a persistent, collective sense that the world has wronged them by stripping them of their historical social rights and privileges. This reversal of fortunes, according to MRAs, is the result of a long-term project by feminists and their allies to undermine traditional social, economic, and political roles with the aim of replacing social equality with female supremacy. To contextualize these findings, I contrasted them with a limited qualitative study of pro-feminist men's groups operating in cities across Canada and the United States. These interviews revealed a movement organized around a collective sense of *responsibility*, where men were encouraged to recognize, accept, and take responsibility for their involvement and complicity in systems of power that have marginalized women and perpetuated systems of masculine domination.

The second question asked in this study was: what is the shape of men's rights movement knowledge production networks? How is knowledge production structured, disseminated, and deployed by men's rights activists? This question sought to uncover the shape and directionality of knowledge production within men's rights spaces, to determine how knowledge was ordered and deployed by movement activists. An analysis of MRM websites and community posting patterns revealed that the movement is largely self-referential; MRM sites referring to other MRM sites both for information and support for empirical claims. These self-referential

networks indicate that a great deal of time and energy – arguably most it – is spent reinforcing the MRM’s counter-memory and counter-memorialization (Foucault, 1977; Burlein, 1999) aimed at reproducing movement grievances. Unlike the knowledge production of pro-feminist men’s groups involved in the study, whose activities remained largely out-ward facing and oriented around community engagement, the MRM’s efforts were largely self-contained.

This dissertation contributes to the literature by illustrating how online activist groups like the men’s rights movement construct *virtual geographies* online, where national or geophysical borders are ignored in favour of constructing (sub)cultural boundaries around online communities. These virtual geographies are bordered by ideological permeability, where participants communicate thoughts and ideas through distinct cultural objects that are transmitted, received, and interpreted according to shared in-group understandings. In spaces friendly to MRM ideology, the cultural objects of the MRM move freely; where its acceptance is more conditional or problematized, those same cultural objects are resisted. It is these sites of resistance that form new cultural boundaries identifying the edges of MRM-friendly spaces. Once established, the online free spaces of the MRM become incubators where knowledge is produced, and where plans can be made for social activities that move with ease between online and offline activism. This new, digital dimension of identity formation, knowledge production and mobilization present a challenge to social movement theorists that demands to be addressed.

In addition to its contributions to social movement theory, this dissertation also contributes to research on reactionary social movements, particularly those rooted in white, masculine status anxieties and identities. Where earlier research has indicated that white, masculine status anxieties emerge from feelings of loss – loss of status and prestige or loss of access to social and political capital – this dissertation shows that reactionary movements can

also form from a collective sense that such fruits were never there to begin with. Rather than argue, as white nationalists do, that white men deserve to dominate because they are biologically destined to (because of their “superior” genes/culture), the MRM argues that men must act merely to be considered equal in a society that has *always* devalued and misused them. This dissertation builds on research into other traditionalist movements and situates the men’s rights movement within a broader constellation of reactionary countermovements.

Finally, this research contributes to examinations of men and masculinity by revealing how movements like the men’s rights movement use feelings of anger, alienation and isolation to stoke resentment and a sense of grievance towards progressive politics and activism that they feel ignores them or worse, tears them down to build up other groups; a chief component of MRM ideology is the belief that contemporary feminist activism aims at improving women’s lives by impoverishing men’s. As the analysis of MRM literature online indicates, the MRM’s emphasis on resentment and *grievance* is like other reactionary movements, including several radical or extremist movements such as the alt-right. Future research could build on these findings by examining how constructing emotional support networks for vulnerable men might blunt recruitment by such groups.

Research limitation and questions for the future

This research examined the materials and literature produced by the men’s rights movement and contrasted it with the materials and texts produced by a small number of pro-feminist men’s groups. The results produced align with contemporary research into the movement conducted by other academics, as well as the findings of journalistic investigations by several contemporary media outlets. The research was however limited by a lack of participation on the part of self-identified men’s rights activists. The narratives of currently active MRAs

would have strengthened the empirical findings of this project and may have provided additional contextualization. Subsequent investigations into this topic would benefit from the inclusion of active men's rights voices as a component of a qualitative study.

This research was also limited to publicly-available literature and material produced by the men's movements being investigated; the research could have been further strengthened through the inclusion of personal notes, meeting minutes, or other private correspondence by active members, as these might have provided additional clarity regarding the goals and tactics of the movements and groups involved in the study. This correspondence, and the inclusion of interviews conducted with active MRAs could also have been used to contextualize and expand upon the quantitative components of the project. While the inclusion of point-wise mutual information tests did provide empirical support for the self-referential nature of men's rights knowledge production networks, additional information in the form of qualitative interviews would have strengthened those findings.

Future investigations into the movement must take a closer look at the tactical decision-making of movement activists, particularly considering the tendency of several new men's rights groups such as the Canadian Association for Equality, or even the National Coalition for Men to mute their more aggressively anti-feminist rhetoric in favour of a more "politically neutral" approach. This pattern of "stealth mainstreaming" appears to be yielding positive results (especially in the case of CAFE which now boasts chapters in nearly a dozen Canadian cities, including Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto). More troubling is that the movement has had some success in making its way onto university campuses, largely through similarly undercover operations.

While some limited work has been done profiling the women who populate the manosphere (Lynn, 2014; Ortiz, 2015), greater attention needs to be paid to the work by several influential women within the men's rights movement. Like other reactionary movements, the men's rights movement, while being portrayed as an angry club of misogynist men, also includes a growing number of women who engage in active support and leadership. Similar patterns have been observed in white nationalist and white supremacist movements (Blee, 2004; Ferber, 1998; Gallaher, 2003) where women make up a significant percentage of street-level activists and organization leaders. Understanding the role of women in traditionalist movements is important for two reasons. Firstly, women are agents in their own lives; while misogynist movements may seem like strange places to find active female participation, to assume that women are only there as submissive helpmeets of their masculine partners strips women of their self-agency and limits the ability to researchers to uncover new dimensions of the groups in question. Women who participate in such groups have their own reasons for being there, and those reasons might have little to do with the desires of their partners or husbands.

Women's participation also needs to be examined because if research focuses solely on the activism of men, it ignores the strategies employed by women to advance the group's causes. Some of the women currently involved in the MRM began their activism after feeling attacked for taking on the role of a traditional housewife, or after experiencing what they felt was unfair treatment during their own parents' divorces (Lynn, 2014). In other cases, women who have participated in the MRM have done so because the movement seemed more in line with their own conservative values, or because they see contemporary society as one that coddles women and places them in the role of "perpetual victims" (Lynn, 2014). While the MRM remains dominated by men, it is increasingly women's voices helping to shape it, and to provide it with a

rhetorical shield from critics who point to its often-blatant misogyny; after all, how can the movement “hate women” when women are so prominent within it?

Finally, more research needs to be conducted on the intersectional nature of the men’s rights movement. To what extent is the “quintessential man” of the men’s rights movement rooted in class-based identities or racial imaginaries? Is the men’s rights movement only by and for straight white men in North America, or does its appeal spread further? If so, what forms might it take that are not so easily recognizable to academic investigation?

Policy suggestions

Reactionary social networks such as those of the men’s rights movement present unique challenges to policy makers and law enforcement agencies. Where traditional, offline reactionary networks such as white supremacist or anti-government groups can be infiltrated and their meetings disrupted, online groups, while still susceptible to the former are more easily insulated from the latter. Further, while the sometimes-vitriolic misogyny of the MRM is troubling, it is not necessarily *illegal*, which makes policing such movements a challenge in the best circumstances. Certainly, when the rhetoric of the more extreme fringes of the manosphere spills over into offline acts of violence, law enforcement can become involved, but only to the extent that they can address or prosecute deliberate threats, intimidation or acts of violence. In the meantime, online communities will continue to be sites of radicalization.

Several policy suggestions emerge from this dissertation to address these challenges. When monitoring online discussions, there is a tendency for some law enforcement agencies to pursue a strategy of disruption; law enforcement seeks to shut down websites or physical infrastructure like servers, or to prevent the physical movement of suspected members of monitored groups across borders (Public Safety Canada, 2013; 2018). In such cases, the focus

remains on the prevention of physical movement across international borders and not on the prevention of ideological movement. In efforts to prevent the radicalization of Canadian citizens, strategies at all levels of government emphasize education – including teaching children how to be safe online (Government of Canada, 2018). Whereas the prevention of mobility is a strategy of *disruption*, attempts at education can be thought of as strategies of *avoidance*. In both cases, the strategies discussed appear to book-end the problem by addressing it before it occurs, and after. But how might the process of radicalization be thwarted once it is already underway?

In addition to increasing attention – and funding – to education efforts, law enforcement agencies should also adapt a policy of direct engagement with radical communities online that emphasizes what I term *network distortion*. Rather than attempt to shut individual networks or knowledge production sites down (which will result in the community simply relocating elsewhere), law enforcement agents should instead attempt to distort pathways of knowledge production. These distortions do not need to be dramatic; gradual, subtle efforts to introduce moderate positions and sources of information would still have the effect of weakening the boundaries around online communities by making them more permeable to a wider array of acceptable positions and information. If the goal of intervention into online communities is to reach their participants and de-radicalize them or reintegrate them into society, then directly attacking their communities is a poor strategy. Instead, interveners need to work with established networks, to gradually change them in ways that marginalize attempts to dehumanize or delegitimize targeted groups.

Preserving online networks is important and though counterintuitive, must remain a central consideration when constructing de-radicalization programs or policies. As researchers like Scott Atran have pointed out, online networks, like social networks, are valuable to their

members; they are the product of emotional labour and their destruction may feed into feelings of alienation and persecution (Atran, 2015). Indeed, recruits into marginalized or extremist movements have legitimate fears of arrest or attack from opponents, which makes online gatherings not only appealing, but central to how they communicate with one another (Ariza, 2005). Rather than deconstruct or “disrupt” these networks, it may be productive to validate them. Recognize the time and energy invested in their construction and recognize – without judgment – the perspectives being represented (as much as one is morally capable of doing). Using empathy and compassion, enter these networks on their terms, and use the avenues available to promote alternative perspectives aimed not at the annihilation of movement ideology, but at its modification. In this way, networks that facilitate radicalization may be distorted, and new sources of information inserted.

People join networks and movements because they wish to belong. In societies where people feel alienated from the mainstream, - especially when that alienation is coupled with feelings of frustration, anxiety, or anger – reactionary movements can be appealing. Such movements carry the twinned benefits of validating a person’s anger without asking them to do the sometimes-painful work of self examination. In the MRM, participants’ pain is the fault of others; the fault of feminists and their allies, who in the myths of the movement exist to annihilate masculinity. In their dealings with feminists and feminist allies online, their perspectives are routinely invalidated, ridiculed, or vilified in conversations that are often antagonistic. These sorts of conversations rarely produce positive results, as both sides are more interested in “debunking” or otherwise invalidating the position of their interlocutors. In this environment, activists’ feelings of alienation are not addressed, in favour of attacking their ideology. If the goal is to reduce feelings of alienation or to de-radicalize individuals who are

already on the path of radicalization, debate may be less important than reintroducing them back into other social networks.

In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam argued that as individual participation in civic organizations declines, feelings of alienation increase, and people begin to isolate themselves from society (Putnam, 2001). Such environments are prime recruiting grounds for groups who seek to capitalize on the frustration and anger of alienation. As technological innovation makes online community building easier, such movements can proliferate.

Yet, as Putnam argues, when people join civic organizations and thereby reintegrate into society, feelings of alienation diminish as people can recognize themselves and their values in others. This observation is reflected in the analysis of pro-feminist men's groups in this dissertation. Participants in these face-to-face groups could see their own struggles mirrored in the faces of the other men present and that recognition allowed them to see their struggles as part of a larger picture. Unlike online communities, these face-to-face groups are moderated by individuals who can recognize and intervene when participants begin to express radical or extremist views. Such groups could be powerful elements of a deradicalization strategy that could bring together stakeholders from law enforcement, education institutions, health-care authorities and government to provide an open, supportive space for men to discuss their concerns and issues and receive evidence-based, constructive feedback and the tools to help them address issues in their own lives. Rather than feeling that the only place to discuss their concerns are online MRM communities, men could instead find validation and support among offline social networks.

It is important that the men's rights movement not be cast as a monolith, nor dismiss it as a loosely-organized cluster of angry men. The movement is just that: a movement – coherent and distinguishable from the background noise of online trolling and misogyny. Just as there are many strands of feminist, environmentalist, or other social justice ideologies, so too are there variations within the MRM. Yet there are common threads: a fear of loss of status, a collective sense of anger and *grievance*, a shared ambivalence and sometimes even hostility towards feminist activism or feminists more generally. Some strands of the men's rights movement are decidedly conspiratorial, while others can mirror the progressive rhetoric of liberal feminist positions. No matter the orientation however, it must be recognized that the movement is active, it is dynamic, and it is growing. It demands to be engaged with – and must be – if there is to be continued forward movement in the struggle for gender equality in Canada and the United States.

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Appendix A: Letters of Informed Consent and Interview Scripts

Faculty of Social Sciences | Department of Sociology
Cornett A333 PO Box 3050 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 3P5 Canada
T 250-472-4723 | edhodge@uvic.ca

Hello, my name is Edwin Hodge. I am a PhD Candidate from the University of Victoria (Sociology). I am conducting interviews of members of various men's advocacy groups in cities across Canada, including yours. Your knowledge and insight into the beliefs and practices of men's advocacy and activist groups in your area are valuable and would enhance the quality of my investigations. You have been invited to participate because you are recognized as an activist or explicit member of a men's advocacy group.

I hope to interview you about (1) the nature and day to day activities of the men's advocacy group(s) to which you belong, (2) your feelings or opinions on the nature of men's advocacy and the state of awareness regarding men's issues and (3) your opinions concerning the future of men's advocacy, including any perceived challenges to achieving your group's goals. With your consent, interviews will be recorded. Interviews will be flexible to allow conversation to move in different directions. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I am hoping to interview 15-20 people. At some point after the initial interview, I would also like to schedule a follow-up interview with you to be conducted over Skype or Google Hangouts.

I do not anticipate any risks to you. If the questions or conversation becomes upsetting to you, you may decline to answer the questions and you may end the interview and even withdraw from the project. If you do end the interview or withdraw from the project, I will destroy the interview notes and recordings. Any electronically stored materials will be deleted and the hard drives they were stored on formatted to prevent data recovery.

You do not need to participate if you are not interested. Please feel free not to participate if you feel any pressure or if you feel uneasy with how this process is going. Once again, your participation should be entirely of your own choosing and not based on any previous relationship with the researcher.

To protect your identity to the greatest extent possible, a substitute name will be used for your real name on all the written or electronic materials that you have provided and any details that might identify you in the final report will be changed. No statements will be attributed directly to you. Material gathered from this research project will be published in academic journals and presented at academic conferences, and the PhD dissertation this research is related to will be published on

the University of Victoria’s “UVicSpace” database. No one besides the principle researcher (myself) will have access to the research material.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the information will also be protected within the full limits of the law by: 1) keeping it secure at all times; all data, recordings, and transcripts will be electronically encrypted, while physical copies will be kept under lock and key. 2) I will also restrict access to the information. I will be the only individual to have access to this information for coding and analysis purposes; no other individuals will be able to obtain this material.

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

I, _____ have read the above document and agree to participate in the study being conducted by Edwin Hodge of University of Victoria Sociology. I agree _____ do not agree _____ to be audio taped throughout the interview, and I understand that I may ask to have the audio recorder turned off at any point.

Participant’s Name (please print): _____

Participant’s Signature and Date: _____

Researcher’s Signature and Date: _____

Sample Research Questions

The following questions represent the general shape of the research questions that will be asked during the interview. Other, follow-up questions may be asked throughout the course of the interview, which will be based on the specific details of that discussion. When answering these questions, please feel encouraged to answer using as much detail as you would like, as your experience and expertise in this area are valuable.

How did you first learn about the men’s advocacy group(s) to which you belong?

What was it that drew you to the movement?

Describe, in your own words, the path you took from hearing about the group, to becoming more formally affiliated with it.

**How would you describe the first meeting or group event you attended?
How did it make you feel?**

What sorts of materials or literature did you seek out or to help you become more familiar with the goals and beliefs of the movement? Where did you gain access to this information?

If you were to direct a new member of your group to materials to help them gain an understanding of the movement, which materials would you suggest? What websites or forums would you suggest? What makes those materials or sites influential, in your view?

If you had to list the most pressing issues facing men and boys today, what would they be? Why do you feel those issues are the most important or concerning?

In your own words, could you describe the steps you or your group would take to help solve some of the issues you’ve mentioned?

How would you describe the “ideal” society, from the perspective of your group? What would it look like?

What are some of the most significant challenges or obstacles you or your group face in attempting to address these issues?

I’d like for you to describe for me the sorts of activism or outreach that you are involved in; what does it look like? Who are your allies? Who are your opponents? Why do you feel they oppose your work?

If you could explain your group’s position or agenda to non-members who might be uncomfortable or unsure about it, what would you like to say?

If I – or anyone else – wanted to learn more about your group or about men’s advocacy more generally, who else should I speak to? If you know them personally, would you be willing to introduce me to them?

Appendix B: Men's Rights Poster: *Don't be that girl*, and original *Don't be that guy* poster



Figure 11 Sexual Assault Awareness Poster



Figure 12 Counter-Protest Poster created by Men's Rights Edmonton

Appendix C: Men's Rights websites and communities

Each of these websites features a brief description and an active link to their homepages. I have embedded the links into each title.

[A Voice for Men](#) – A Voice for Men is the largest dedicated men's rights website online. The website contains blogs, videos, podcasts, and discussion forums focusing on anti-feminism, anti-political correctness, and discussions of male issues.

[Dads America](#) – Dads Against Discrimination is a father's rights organization that has operated since 1977. The website emphasizes issues including challenging the "[divorce industry](#)", and demanding that federal definitions of "family" necessarily include the word "father".

[armed and dangerous](#) – Not an explicitly MRA website, but rather a general lifestyle blog which deals with a diverse set of issues ranging from gun control and the threat of government tyranny, to theorizing about "feminist logics" such as [kafkatrapping](#)

[The World According to Bob](#) – the personal blog of a men's rights activist and conspiracy theorist which traffics in extreme viewpoints, including arguing that December 6, the anniversary of the Ecole Polytechnique massacre, ought to be remembered as "[Saint Marc Lepine Day](#)". The blog argues that Marc Lepine was a soldier and martyr in the war against the "feminazi hate machine".

[Canadian Association for Equality \(CAFE\)](#) – The homepage of a Canadian registered charity that claims to address men's issues from a politically neutral position. Many of the issues and resources present on the website are the same as those found on openly men's rights websites.

[Chateau Heartiste](#) – A blog affiliated with both the alt-right and the Red Pill movements.

[Cultural- Misandry.com](#) – A men's rights website discussing topics ranging from male discrimination and misandry to anti-feminism.

[fabiusmaximus.com](#) – an alt-right, Red Pill website featuring blog posts by a small number of authors. Topics range from climate change denialism, to anti-feminism, to anti-immigration.

[Honey Badgers RadioBadger Brigade](#) – The homepage of an Edmonton-based men's rights and Red Pill group of predominantly women, who routinely discuss anti-feminism, anti-male discrimination, and various alt-right topics.

[illimitablemen.com](#) – A blog site dedicated to Red Pill ideology, and the philosophy of the [Dark Triad](#) of personality traits: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism.

[In Mala Fide/Viva la Manosphere!](#) – A lifestyle website featuring dating and life advice from a men's rights/Red Pill perspective. The site's frontpage includes many links to other men's rights pages including A Voice for Men.

[Justice for men and boys \(j4mb\)](#) – The official website of the United Kingdom political party known as the Justice for men and boys (and the women who love them) party. J4mb is a men’s rights focused political party.

[masculineprinciple.blogspot.ca](#) – a Red-Pill lifestyle blog focusing on the “art of seduction”. Includes blog entries such as “Woman: The Most Responsible Teenager in The House?” and “Feminizing the Decline: Hypergamy & Birthrates”.

[Matt Forney.com](#) – The personal website of Matt Forney, a prominent anti-feminist and founder of the Red Pill website *in mala fide*.

[Men’s Activism.org](#) – A men’s rights website that serves as a blogging space and news aggregate site for articles showing either evidence of anti-male bias, or evidence of women and feminist behaving badly.

[Men’s Rights Association Facebook page](#) – A men’s rights Facebook page associated with the rapidly growing men’s rights movement in India.

[Men’s Rights Association.org](#) – A contact site for the Indian men’s rights association. Contains links to the organization’s mission statement and goals.

[Men’s Rights Edmonton](#) – The Homepage of Men’s Rights Edmonton, one of the largest and most vocal men’s rights groups in Canada.

[Men’s Rights Movement.net](#) – A men’s rights website featuring a wide range of topics. One of the site’s principle stated aims is the establishment of men’s studies courses in universities. The implied purpose of such courses would be to provide the men’s rights movement with [evidence](#) of anti-male discrimination in society

[mensrights.com](#) – A men’s rights website focused on perceived anti-male discrimination in divorce settlements, domestic violence reporting, “paternity fraud”, and financial discrimination against divorced men and fathers.

[MGTOW – Men Going Their Own Way.com](#) – One of the larger websites of the “Men Going Their Own Way” movement, which instructs men on how to cut themselves off from the influence of women and “feminized” elements of society.

[National Coalition for Men](#) – A men’s rights and father’s rights website and charitable organization.

[Nikita Coloumbe @ Medium](#) – A blog post by conservative author Nikita Coulombe (co-author of *Man Interrupted*) which argues that women do not really want to be equal with men, and that feminist notions about patriarchy are false.

[Notes From a Red Pill Girl.com](#) – A blog site dedicated to discussing women’s lives and social roles from a traditionalist, Red Pill perspective.

[owningyourshit.blogspot.ca](#) – The personal website of Karen Straughan, a prominent men’s rights activist and Red Pill follower.

[Reddit](#) – reddit is a content aggregator website, where users upload content or links to specific communities (subreddits) for discussion and sharing. The website is the third most visited website in the United States, and the sixth in the world. In 2018, reddit averaged roughly 542 million monthly visitors. Listed below are several subreddits associated with the men’s rights movement and the manosphere, along with their subscriber counts as of June 2018.

[/r/mensrights](#) – 181,772 subscribers

[/r/mensrightslaw](#) – 634 subscribers

[/r/mensrants](#) – 2,445 subscribers

[/r/FeMRADebates](#) – 6,237 subscribers

[/r/Masculism](#) – 3,725 subscribers

[/r/TheRedPill](#) – 273,000 subscribers

[/r/PurplePillDebate/](#) - 16,578 subscribers

[/r/MGTOW/](#) - 61,273 subscribers

[Return of Kings](#) – A website for “masculine men”, Return of Kings is associated with Red Pill, seduction, and alt-right communities.

[The Anti-Feminist](#) – A men’s rights website focused almost exclusively on anti-feminist rhetoric.

[The Counter Feminist](#) – A blog site dedicated to opposing the “female-supremacist hate movement called feminism”.

[The Family Alpha](#) – Website aimed at providing relationship and marriage advice from a Red Pill perspective.

[therationalmale.com](#) – An anti-feminist, Red Pill lifestyle site.

[titleixforall.com](#) (On A Voice for Men, this site is linked under the heading “A Voice for Male Students”) – Title IX For All purports to be a resource page for college and university men who feel discriminated against – especially by university sexual assault guidelines and procedures.

[unknownmisandry.blogspot.com](#) – A traditionalist and conservative anti-feminist site featuring discussions ranging from female serial killers to the recent lawsuit against Wilfred Laurier University launched by former teaching assistant Lindsay Shepherd.

[West Coast Men](#) – The homepage of the West Coast Men’s Support Society, an organization rooted in mythopoetic philosophies and associated with the [ManKind Project’s](#) New Warrior Adventure Training.

[Women Against Feminism](#) – This blog site focuses on women’s stories about leaving feminism, and features anti-feminist discussions across a range of topics from reproductive health to domestic violence.

YouTube

[An Ear for Men](#) – A men's rights YouTube channel operated by Paul Elam

[Paul Elam](#) – YouTube Channel of Paul Elam of A Voice for Men

[Karen Straughan](#) – Personal channel of prominent anti-feminist Karen Straughan

[ShoeOnHead](#) – Channel of an anti-feminist YouTube content creator

[SargonofAkkad](#) – Anti-feminist, alt-right content creator

[Stefan Molyneux](#) – Channel of Stefan Molyneux, a prominent figure in anti-feminist and alt-right communities