Rise of the Far Right

Technologies of Recruitment and Mobilization

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Chapter 7

'A Positive Identity for Men'?: Pathways to Far-Right Participation through Reddit's /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill

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Far-right ideologies are committed to defending particular conceptualizations of masculinity and male power, embedded in a certain type of Western traditionalism (Cornwall, Karioris, and Lindisfarne 2016; Pai 2016). When we think of the far right, most people imagine neo-Nazis, white nationalists/white separatists or the militia-focused second amendment enthusiasts in the United States: mostly white, sometimes armed, confrontational. Far-right groups are each of these things, and while women make up a small percentage of participants in their political and public activities (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2006), these groups are mostly made up of men (Gordon 2018; Ebner and Davey 2018). Far-right and alt-right communities have rooted and flourished online, and among them 'men's rights' groups have been particularly successful in community building and expansion (Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir 2019; Kelly 2017; Munn 2019). Using men's rights groups as an example, this chapter shows how Reddit provides affordances for the development of collectivity and community for people with harmful traditionalist and anti-feminist ideological values. These affordances are useful to this type of men's group – groups adjacent to the far-right in their obsessions with Western traditionalisms of gender and (in some cases) male supremacy – because they allow for the proliferation and radicalization of ideas within bounded and self-referential communities subject to limited censorship.

Men's groups that fall under the broad banner of 'men's rights' share much of the (Western) traditionalist and conservative rhetorical positioning of the far right and alt-right about gender; a 'natural' structuralist position where men should hold power and control over women and the 'Other' (Dragiewicz and Mann 2016; Jordan 2016; Messner 2016). Staunchly anti-feminist, these groups argue that gender equity has 'gone too far', and that it renders men (particularly white men) a disadvantaged class (Kalish and Kimmel 2010).

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For the participants in these groups, and proponents of these ideologies (which include women), feminist-spurred social changes require a reset of public and moral values. As a larger movement composed of many different groups, the broader men's 'rights' community has expanded into a web of inter-related ideological constructs that share a common central message, then diverge from one another along different pathways. Ideology in this case is understood in Žižek's sense of both conscious and unconscious phenomena that, along with hiding how the world works for the purposes of control, serve themselves to shape the reality we live in. Men's 'rights' groups, while always being about sex, power and control, range in focus from perceived unfairness in fathers' custody rights cases (Crowley 2009), to the belief that the proper social orientation is a *Handmaid's Tale*-esque total domination of society, sexuality and culture by men (Jordan 2016). These groups have both shared and divergent ideological constructs.

Men's rights and aligned groups use similar tactics to other far-right groups when recruiting members. Using generalizable and unnuanced statements (e.g. 'white men have lower and decreasing employment prospects') and narrow interpretations of public controversies (e.g. the U.S. Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Brett Kavanaugh as an unfair witch hunt against a white, conservative man), these groups play on the latent desires and fears of their target audience (Willer et al. 2013; Munn 2019); which is (mostly) men. Then, through curated echo chambers, new participants are indoctrinated into the deeper recesses of these ideologies (Munn 2019; DeCook 2019). Using the website Reddit.com and the curated nature of its user interface as a backdrop, this chapter will explore how the Reddit user experience and platform design provide ideal spaces for the proliferation and dissemination of far-right rhetoric and ideology, and can serve as a pipeline toward more extreme views. I explore two groups that occupy different parts of the men's rights spectrum, /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill, both active on the website Reddit.com (reddit.com/r/MensRights and reddit.com/r/TheRedPill).

WHAT ARE MEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS AND WHY DO THEY EXIST?

Western culture is shaped by entrenched sex/gender systems (Rubin 2009) that dictate and regulate power, control and personal interactions (Foucault 1979; Connell 2005). Men and women are situated in particular ways through these oppressive systems, and formulations of meta-control, like hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy and systemic racism, which organize us into hierarchies that disproportionately give power and value to (white) men over others. Put simply, this type of valuation of one over others, or one

group over others, leads to oppression of the individual or subordinate group through exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence; these are Iris Marion Young's five faces of oppression (Young [1988] 2013). There is a deep body of literature that has explored elements of Young's five faces in online environments (e.g. Noble 2018), and as our use of networked technologies continues to proliferate, so too will egregious oppressive acts and opportunities to study them. These systems of social control and oppression are dynamic, and are subject, often with some latency, to changes in dominant social worldviews. The construct of masculinity, and in particular Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, provides a useful prism for examining how these flexible systems of control function.[1]

Conceptualized as the 'specific form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide social setting that *legitimates* unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities' (Messerschmidt 2018, 28, emphasis in original), Connell's *hegemonic masculinity* positions an 'ideal' masculinity as one that is difficult, if not impossible to achieve, that is enacted differently at different times and in different places, and that changes with cultural hegemony. For example, while an ideal masculinity of the 1990s would have excluded non-athletic, non-machismo forms of manhood such as the archetypical computer nerd, a new geek masculinity and 'techbro' masculine representation has emerged within the current world of app culture and the Internet of things (Reagle 2018; Braithwaite 2016). This change has opened up space in hegemonic masculinities for tech knowledge as masculine and appealing, but only if some more traditional expectations for masculine representations of the body are maintained (i.e. fit, white and handsome). The features of masculine interests may have changed, but relational power and control over others, including other men, remains (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The malleability of hegemonic masculinity (or any culturally hegemonic norm, gendered or otherwise) demonstrates that elements we often understand as static (like the 'ideal' man, or male dominance within relationships) are not immutable, and are themselves subject to change through cultural influence. For some, the types of cultural change that force evolutions in systems of social control and oppression are a threat to positions of power and dominance. For them, these shifts are a re-writing of a social contract that undermines their cultural capital, resulting in what Willer and colleagues (2013) called 'masculine overcompensation', or a set of feelings that Rachel Kalish and Michael Kimmel called 'aggrieved entitlement' (2010).

Like racist and other supremacist ideologies, discourses of masculinity and male dominance in men's rights groups extend from perceived entitlement (Martin 2004), and are rooted in North American institutions and social doctrines (Larkin 2007). Feelings of entitlement are derived from the perception

of male historical dominance over women, and are perpetuated through the oppression of the rights and abilities of non-white, non-male figures (hooks 2003). Male entitlement to domination has been enshrined by the state and in our canons of laws (Rifkin 1980), the military and militarism (Howard and Prividera 2004), police and police states (Franklin 2005) and the Abrahamic religions (Condren 2009). Understanding this can help to expose why some men would feel entitled to power and control. The anger they feel from that loss finds many targets, among them immigrants, non-Christians or those who are not 'Christian enough', and some women (i.e. feminists and others who might eschew North American traditionalism). Some groups of men make these women their primary targets and scapegoats; these men make up part of the men's rights movement (see Copland, this Volume).

Ranging from simple disgruntlement to violent hatred, anti-feminism brings together otherwise diverse groups of online men's groups under a loose affiliation called 'the manosphere' (Ironwood 2013). The concept of the 'manosphere' as a distinct cultural entity first appeared in a blog in 2009, and was popularized by the book *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (Ironwood 2013). Debbie Ging (2019) describes the manosphere as a 'loose confederacy of interest groups [that] has become the dominant arena for the communication of men's rights in Western culture' (Ging 2019, 1). This confederacy of Internet groups shares an ideological standpoint that runs contrary to achieved discourses of gender equality.

Men's groups, including groups discussed in this chapter, are ideological offshoots of the 1970s women's and women's liberation movements (Messner 1998, 2016), and have developed in parallel with contemporary feminism. Men, who were themselves part of the feminist movement, began leveraging the theoretical structures of feminist theory to highlight men's experience as gendered beings. This was done with the intent of developing and promoting 'progressive personal and social change' (Messner 2016, 8). In their view, men were also repressed and oppressed by gendered structures, masculinity and sex/gender systems more broadly (Messner 1998). They acknowledged that men were privileged by social and sex roles, but argued that they were 'simultaneously dehumanized' by them (Pleck 2004). The contradictory notions of acknowledging privilege and situating themselves as an oppressed group divided the early men's activists into pro- and anti-feminist actors. The anti-feminist faction turned to the oppressive nature of sex roles, and co-opted the language of liberal feminists to refocus the critique of symmetrical sex-role oppression on men's experience.[2] This produced a narrative about men and male privilege that situated male privilege as a socially constructed myth that served to oppress men (Goldberg 1976).

Rather than a continuum of more or less radicalized versions of the same group, the modern manosphere consists of groups that share some core

values, but diverge as they focus on different issues or aspects of men's experience. The philosophical underpinnings of these distinct groups 'manifest less as a continuum of ideologies (where on one end their work would be passive and contained, and on the other wild, aggressive, and militant)' (Cousineau 2021, 73), but instead like a sphere with filaments extending from the common core – like images of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 – where the spikes and trees extending from the core represent different areas of focus and the extremeness of those views (figure 7.1).[3] For example, Men's Rights and Red Pill groups (along with other 'manosphere' groups like *incels*) share anti-feminist sentiments, but their solutions to the feminist 'problem' vary. Men's rights advocates generally favour legal and social reform through traditional means via governmental or judicial reform (less extreme), where incels have resorted to violence in an attempt to force change (very extreme; Humphreys and Edmiston 2018; Reeve 2018).

The introduction in the 1990s of widely available home Internet allowed groups with small numbers dispersed over wide geographical areas (including men's rights groups) to gather and grow (Turkle 1996; Wellman and Gulia 1999). A newly networked world allowed for the development of
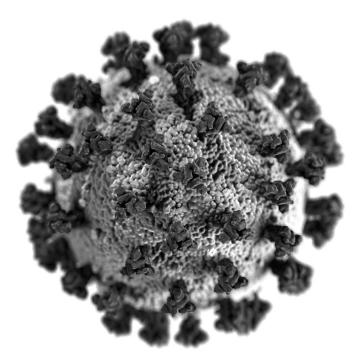

Figure 7.1.   Covid-19 Coronavirus as Representation of Manosphere.
Source: Royalty free CDC image under the CC0 Public Domain license.

more active, larger and even more micro-focused communities (Thomas 2011). While touted as a new frontier for building socially just and equal spaces by early feminists and social theorists (Spender 1996; Rheingold 1993), the Internet has played an equally significant role in the proliferation of oppressive ideas and actions (Lumsden and Harmer 2019; Forscher and Kteily 2020). Men's groups used early text-only networked communication spaces (Bulletin Board Services), early websites (including organizations like National Coalition for Men (National Coalition For Men [NCFM] 2019),[4] and other forums to build community and grow their numbers. These were the precursors to current misogynist men's groups, and many of these digital discursive spaces (or versions of them) remain mainstays of these groups for communication and community action today. The proliferation of groups within the manosphere has been aided by websites and services that host content of individual users, or aggregate content from a variety of online sources. Blogging platforms have been used extensively by individual men's rights activists and men's groups to promote their messages (Ironwood 2013), but conversation and the development of specific subgroup ideologies have been best encouraged by websites like Reddit.com. On Reddit, authored content can be posted, can contain links from other content on the web, can be filtered by users in a variety of ways and views can be isolated into echo chambers (Auxier and Vitak 2019). The following section will give a primer on Reddit, its functionality and features. Then I will explore the elements of /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill communities as they manifest on Reddit.

WHAT IS REDDIT?

Reddit.com is a website where user posts and off-site content are aggre-gated for user consumption. Open communities can be accessed and read by anyone online, but to comment, use the website's voting system, or access quarantined communities (Carlson and Cousineau 2020), a unique username is required.

   Reddit functions in five ways that are important for its success.

1. Users generate and/or share all of the content on the site, with the excep-tion of ads and announcements from the company.
2. Users can curate the content they see by subject, limiting or expanding their experience to suit their needs, and coming together or building com-munities of shared interest.
3. Any user can vote on any Reddit content on the site.[5] Users may upvote (positive) or downvote (negative) content, and the number of votes associ-ated with posts changes where they appear in the algorithmically mediated

pages of aggregated posts. Votes are logarithmically weighted, and users accrue points for their posts and comments in a sort of Reddit social credit called 'Karma'.

4. Users can comment and dialogue on any post or comment on the site. Discussion takes the form of asynchronous Bulletin Board System (BBS)–style threads where primary comments on a post become parent comments, and each parent may have a long and complex series of child comments/discussions associated with it.

5. Users have quasi-anonymity. The Reddit user can be as open or as anonymous as they want. As a user, I can be open about my name, where I live and my interests, or I can be a lurker/listener – never engaging or building a personal profile, and simply exploring and observing content.

The site is divided into 'subreddits' which allow for subject-based grouping of content (e.g. reddit.com/r/turtlefacts/ for photos and facts about turtles), and each subreddit has a set of unique rules moderated by volunteers from within that user community (Marwick 2017; Massanari 2015). This approach to content moderation allows Reddit to control the content available on the site, and maintain active users even if the content they are posting is contentious, such as with subreddits like /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill. These elements create a massive, mostly user-controlled, space for the sharing of content and opinion, and with so many communities, even users looking for niche content find space on the site.

New users are automatically subscribed to fifty subreddits selected by the site, but are able to remove all of those default subreddits and subscribe to any subreddits of their choosing. Doing so creates a personalized landing page when logged in that is unique to the user and aggregates content only from their subscribed subreddits.[6] Effectively, users create their own content filter bubble (Pariser 2011).

/R/MENSRIGHTS AND /R/THEREDPILL

www.reddit.com/r/MensRights
Created 19 March 2008
300, 855 subscribed members as of April 26, 2021

/r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill provide good case studies for the exploration of the spread of men's rights content as afforded by Reddit specifically. These subreddits were chosen as they represent two different communities within the manosphere and how they approach gender and male power. They share deeply anti-feminist values, but discuss and act on them in very

different ways (DeCook 2019). /r/TheRedPill, for example, regularly has posts about the differences between alpha (good) and beta (weak) men as a way of critiquing issues with the social order (/u/GayLubeOil 2019). /r/MensRights is more likely to post about current events, using them to high-light their perceptions of inequalities in the ways that men and women are treated in society (/u/Hibernia86 2019). While not the least or most extreme examples of manosphere thinking, they reveal contrast in the ways that different subgroups approach gender-linked social issues, but share some core values. They also demonstrate how Reddit's affordances allow groups to be driven by different kinds of content while espousing similar traditionalist values of the right.

The /r/MensRights subreddit is dominated by discussions of the misandry participants perceive in their lives. The users are mostly from Western democracies (e.g. United States, Canada, Australia and Western Europe),[7] and they craft narratives around specific issues to build a semi-coherent narrative of the oppression of men. The larger themes within this narrative include: statistically higher numbers of men are homeless or underhoused, murdered, incarcerated, die at work or die by suicide. They discuss issues of binary gender disparity between men and women in custody court proceedings; spousal support proceedings; allegations, convictions and relative severity of punishment for perpetrators in sexual assault and misconduct allegations; and the (United States) military draft. Posts and discussions most often begin with content from major news sources, national and local statistics, secondary news sources or social media that the user believes high-lights one (or more) of the subreddit's core issues (e.g. men losing custody of children). They often include a catchy title and brief commentary from the original poster intended to promote discussion and/or frame the content as a men's rights issue in a particular way. Comments from users are generally agreeable, conversation is generally civil when there are disagreements and users are supportive of others who have been negatively affected by the issue highlighted in the post (e.g. users who feel they have been disaffected by the child custody court system). Almost all threads in the subreddit begin with or come back to being critical of feminism, and what they view as 'misandrist' public and judicial policy.

/R/THEREDPILL

www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill
Created 25 October 2012
Quarantined September 2018
292,612 subscribed members as of September 2018[8]

/r/TheRedPill is dedicated to the 'Discussion of sexual strategy in a culture increasingly lacking a positive identity for men' (/r/TheRedPill 2019). What they mean by this is that they aim to help men (re)produce a specific type of masculinity, and leverage that masculinity to be dominant and sexually satisfied. Posts are largely divided between storytelling about sexual experience or lack thereof and the theoretical underpinning of their sexual and relationship ethos. Men are divided into successful (alpha) and unsuccessful (other – including beta, etc.) groups, and sexual strategy is discussed at length. Dominance and manipulation are paramount to the approach espoused by these men, and their understanding of male-female relationships is imbricated with ideologies of male supremacism. Discussion within the forum can be supportive and castigating, and while the tone is civil overall, users who challenge the red pill canon are quickly downvoted or banned.

CAN WE CALL THESE COMMUNITIES FAR RIGHT?

So, are /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill groups on Reddit far-right groups? Or do they occupy a kind of middle ground that can simultaneously expound or mobilize beliefs similar to those of far-right groups, but avoid the deleterious label associated with near-extremism? The work of Norberto Bobbio (1996) is useful here, as it provides a succinct way of discussing the difference between *left* and *right* as a representation of the 'original, essential dichotomy' (Bobbio 1996, 33) between opposing political viewpoints. The left, as Bobbio sees it, leans more towards the needs and benefits of the broader social group, and the right towards the needs and benefits of the individual. As Bobbio puts it, 'On the one hand, people who believe that human beings are more equal than unequal, and on the other, people who believe that we are more unequal than equal' (Bobbio 1996, 67). Citing Dino Cofrancesco, Bobbio explains that 'the soul of the right can be expressed succinctly in the motto "Nothing outside or against tradition, everything within and for the sake of tradition"' (Bobbio 1996, 46). Tradition here can mean a variety of things, including: as an archetype, the ideal of a past era, loyalty to a nation, a common destiny, historical memory, or as an awareness of the complexity of reality (Bobbio 1996). We can use Bobbio's interpretation of the binary between left and right (with the caveat that political ideology exists in spectrum, rather than binary) to evaluate whether /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill are in fact '*far-right*'.

For Bobbio, the fundamental question that separates the elements of this binary is the approach to equality, and whether a group works towards or away from equality. Understanding that Bobbio's conceptualization of equality is grounded in the Italian term *uguale* is essential, since this connotation makes the understanding of equality/inequality much closer to sameness/

difference, rather than having more of less of *something*. In the case of /r/
TheRedPill, discussion is frequently and deeply entrenched in the concept of
alpha and beta men (where alpha is always already different from and better
than beta), and that men should be in charge of (most) spheres of society (see,
e.g. Molten 2020).[9] While being problematically Western-centric and hetero-
normative, the crux of the belief is that there exists a permanent and socially
solidified set of differences between men, and between men and women, and
that given those differences (alpha) men should be in control. For the men of
/r/TheRedPill, these standardized gender differences, and male domination
as a result of them, are traditional in that they are archetypal, couched in a
historical memory of male supremacy and hold gender ideals of a past era.
They promote concepts of difference, and within the categories that separate
people (i.e. gender, male hierarchies, etc.) humans are more unequal than
they are equal. With these understandings in mind, we can certainly conclude
that /r/TheRedPill is situated on the *right*, and the male supremacist content,
centred on domination and control over the autonomy of others, makes for a
compelling argument that we should consider them a potentially dangerous
group on the far right of the spectrum.

/r/MensRights is slightly more complicated in this discussion of left and
right. On the matter of equality, members of /r/MensRights would argue that
the singular driver of their discussions and activism is to achieve Bobbio's
equality-as-sameness. The men's rights movement of /r/MensRights believes
that it is men who are widely disadvantaged in Western society, and therefore
their agitation towards equality is meant to return men and women to par-
ity in a world where feminist dogma has made women the privileged class.
The difficulty of the disconnect between how you (the reader) might see the
group politically, and how they (/r/MensRights users) might see themselves
lies, then, in ontological and epistemological differences – fundamental dif-
ferences in understanding how things are (ontology), and how we know what
we know (epistemology). Members of /r/MensRights understand that we live
in a world that is deeply unequal, which is true, but in their understanding it
is men who are oppressed by this unequal system. Justification of this world-
view comes in the form of personal anecdotes and posting of articles and
content that serve to highlight the core issues listed in the community descrip-
tion earlier in this chapter. Wage disparity is a favourite topic, and com-
munity members use articles from popular press (/u/JohnKimble111 2020);
social media posts they understand as feminist (/u/pritchie654321 2020); and
statistics about benefits, work fatalities and injuries (/u/mhandanna 2020) to
support the view that men are *the* subordinated class. Rarely are the assertions
of male subordination challenged in the community, and this often leads to

surface-level investigation of the resources and information the community uses to support its claims of male oppression.

On the surface, the counter-narrative presented by /r/MensRights should challenge our assumption that they are on the right, as they claim to stand in resistance to normative, gendered expectations of men. However, here too we can apply Bobbio's (1996) adherence to traditionalism as a mark of the right to help us establish their position. The rhetoric in /r/MensRights is deeply anti-feminist, and they use feminism as a foil and a scapegoat to demarcate their positions as advocates for men. They position their world-view as the alternative to feminist-influenced social structures – structures that they believe have made the world radically unequal in favour of women. They argue that feminism is, therefore, the reason for the male subordination they perceive in the world. Within their community, they agitate for reliance on meritocratic, neoliberal and capitalist ways of measuring value and social contribution; ways of knowing that disproportionately elevate and privilege (some) men and traditionally masculine ways of being over all others. In other words, when considered in relation to existing historical systems of oppression, they appear to push not for actual equality (sameness), but rather for a return to a system state that privileged men over women. One way they do this is through highlighting men's deeper engagement in dirty, dangerous or time-consuming professions and activities – roles traditionally taken on by men – without critical exploration about why these roles have historically belonged to men. They spend little time making arguments about opening up traditionally feminized professions to men (e.g. care work), nor changing traditionally male roles to be more inclusive to women (i.e. they don't seem interested in re-engineering tools and equipment to make them accessible to everyone, or changing the ways we work to make them more inclusive). This demonstrates that many of their arguments and intentions are steeped in a Western gendered traditionalism (both institutional and personal) and an historical memory of male privilege that would rather see the lives of men bettered, than strive for actual equality. There is also the implicit preference for an economic system that is fundamentally capitalist, where value is measured through time-at-work and 'production', at the expense of care work and other unpaid labour. While there are advocates within this group for more open emotional spaces for men, and an expanded role for men as fathers and mentors, the traditionalist undercurrents of gender and capitalist value orientation within /r/MensRights are enough to situate them on the *right*. The deeply anti-feminist discussion and calls for action are sufficient to place them on the far-right for the purposes of this chapter.

HOW REDDIT IS INVOLVED

Having positioned both /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill within the spectrum of anti-feminist far-right ideology, we can now consider how Reddit enables participation and recruitment to these groups, and provides space for expansion of far-right rhetoric and ideology. As a platform, Reddit builds community for its users in a number of important ways: (1) It brings groups together, either by allowing existing groups with low and geographically dispersed membership to gather online, or the formation of new groups of like-minded individuals (the de-coupling of shared experience from geography); (2) it allows those who would rather be listeners (lurkers) (Crawford 2011) to participate passively in group activities (it has an available spectrum of participation); (3) it acts as a safe haven for otherwise socially contentious groups (a free and open platform made up of communities of shared interest); and (4) provides the auspices of a legitimate and widely used site as a mode of connection (it feels cogent). Each of these affordances, as imbricated technological infrastructures and human agency (Leonardi 2011), are significant in their own way in the development of flourishing anti-feminist communities. Having an established meeting space helps build connection between community members, and allows low-participation members of the community to feel like part of the group (Glover and Sharpe 2020). Community sensibility helps groups better weather challenges (Kerwin et al. 2015), and community participation helps develop social capital and personal well-being (Glover 2016). Salazar (2018) argued that these concepts of personal and group gain through community should be applied to far-right groups, by positing the alt-right as a community of discourse. By doing so, Salazar helps us to understand the importance of community in the development and proliferation of the types of far-right anti-feminist ideology we see in /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill. These community elements, combined with Reddit's commitment to open speech, ease of use and the quasi-anonymity of users have allowed hate speech, misogyny and racism to proliferate on the site (Massanari 2017). Although much has changed on Reddit since it first introduced an actionable content policy in 2015, Reddit remains a place where individuals come to engage in contentious communities.[10]

Recruitment into /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill appears to follow the same types of trajectories identified in previous literature on the alt-right; work that is modelled on theories developed in the study of terrorism and extremist recruitment. Munn identifies three significant phases as individuals move from introduction of socially controversial views to extreme versions of those views: normalization, acclimatization and dehumanization. Munn points out that each individual journey is different and, 'while these phases might be loosely mapped to the start, middle and end . . . they should not be seen as mutually exclusive or strictly linear. They may overlap or occur in more

cyclical formations' (Munn 2019, para. 1). Described by Munn's participants as a 'gradual progression', initial exposure and internalization come when the individual is repeatedly exposed to content that, while problematic, does not push the user away. Through this repeated exposure, the user becomes acclimatized to the content, opening them up to more radical notions through another round of normalization. Through this process, users move slowly towards ideological extremes, and other forms of (often more radical) content.

We can see a simplified version of this process within manosphere men's groups. /r/MensRights content is unrestricted on Reddit, and so it occasionally makes its way into the /r/all feed, or into the suggested subreddits of users. With over 288,000 members, participants are active in many parts of Reddit, and other users are likely exposed to /r/MensRights content through their comments, user pages and post histories. /r/TheRedPill has a different path, as content from the subreddit no longer appears in the /r/all feed or other non-subscribed aggregate feeds since being quarantined in 2018. Users who come to this group post-quarantine must be told about it in order to find it and participate – something that occurs from other men's rights subreddits, like /r/MensRights. Other than having predominantly male users, the closest connection between the two communities is their disdain for feminism and feminists. This disdain, within the /r/MensRights community, drives some users to seek out other models for building and maintaining relationships with women, and this exploration leads (through shared content, or the other affordances of the Reddit platform) to communities like /r/TheRedPill.

WHY THIS ALL MATTERS

The combination of the users' ability to specifically curate their own exposure to content, the sense of community within individual subgroups, Reddit's algorithmic and user vote–based sorting mechanisms and the permissive orientation of the platform to many kinds of speech makes Reddit an ideal platform for sustaining undercurrents of masculinist far-right ideology, and developing new users for these groups. Like Munn's (2019) pipeline to extremism, the men's rights communities on Reddit have both introductory spaces for first contact of new initiates and deeper, more intense discussion spaces as breeding grounds for more radical action and thought. Where /r/MensRights leverages examples of men's potential social subordination and provides examples of popular cultural 'misandry', /r/TheRedPill takes these issues to be self-evident and instead engages in a type of male superiority socio-sexual warfare where women are to be treated as a subordinated class in all aspects of life; especially sexually. While it is possible to move directly to the extremes of ideological thought and action relatively quickly (e.g. going full 'red pill'), adherents to extreme ideologies are far more likely to move

through more socially palatable (mainstream) critiques and ideological standpoints before committing to strong extremist viewpoints (Munn 2019; Walklate and Mythen 2018). In this example, finding /r/MensRights, then moving on to /r/TheRedPill demonstrates this process. Reddit provides the type of scaffolded affordances required to carry new users into problematic ideological spaces and to mobilize misogyny.

If we can demonstrate the same kinds of inter-referential community patterns within men's groups as have been identified with far-right ideological development, then we must conclude that similar types of radicalization are occurring. Indeed, acts such as the murder of Daniel Anderl, son of New Jersey U.S. federal judge Esther Salas, by Roy Den Hollander (Marcotte 2020; Haworth et al. 2020) demonstrate that one end point of the ideological progression within men's groups is the murder of those who oppose their views. Den Hollander was involved in several federal lawsuits in the United States alleging discrimination against men, and was a known 'men's rights' troll' online (Marcotte 2020, para. 1). While acts of violence like Den Hollander's, or the murder of ten people by self-proclaimed incel Alek Minassian in Toronto, Canada (Humphreys and Edmiston 2018), are often positioned in the media as lone wolf attacks or stochastic terrorism, they link back to involvement in men's groups online – a phenomenon that demonstrates the interconnectedness of these misogynist murders (Marcotte 2020; DiBranco 2020). This should alarm us! While discussions within these men's groups are about the place of men and masculinity within modern (Western) society, they also push users to the ideological right and alt-right. This should be frightening, and participants in men's communities have demonstrated the ability to act on their feelings about gender and the social order with violence (Baker 2020; Humphreys and Edmiston 2018; Nasser 2020; Scaptura and Boyle 2019). Perhaps even more insidious is their less overt and non-violent push back against cultural and social justice movements. The embeddedness of sex role and gender traditionalism seen across the men's rights movement (overtly in places like /r/TheRedPill and more covertly in spaces like /r/MensRights), places them in lock-step with other far- and alt-right groups, while the absence of the same types of overt or obsessive racism or nationalism sets them apart.

While these men clearly see the progress achieved by feminism as an affront to male power and social order, the outcome of that sense of grievance has active and daily repercussions in civil society. Posts from /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill link to outside articles, YouTube videos and other forum platforms, and contain millions of words of topic comments and discussions. In many cases these outside links and comments direct the user further to the right, and deeper into the cultural and ideological spectrum of men's group participation discussed earlier. Reddit is designed to permit and encourage this aggregation of content, and creates focused ideological wind tunnels that carry information and users towards more radical viewpoints.

NOTES

1. Hegemony, throughout this chapter, can be understood through Halberstam's (2011) definition as 'multilayered system[s] by which a dominant group achieves power not through coercion but through the production of an interlocking system of ideas which persuades people of the rightness of any given set of often contradictory ideas and perspectives' (p. 17).

2. See the evolution of the writing of Warren Farrell (1975, 1996, 2005, 2012).

3. This chapter was authored during the Covid-19 pandemic, so this image is familiar to many; the image of the virus that causes the Covid-19 illness provides an excellent representation of how we can visualize the construction of the manosphere.

4. The earliest iteration of the NCFM website available is from the web archive of 1996 (National Coalition of Free Men 1996), but the copyright on that site reads 1995, indicating that the site was active at that time.

5. There are some exceptions to this rule, as users can be banned from posting or voting on content from a given subreddit if they are found to be in violation of the community rules of that sub-community.

6. Users can still navigate to /r/all to see content from the entire site if they choose, or set /r/all as their landing page.

7. There is a small but notable presence of users in this community from India and Pakistan, and although there are some women who participate in this subreddit community, the vast majority of users appear to be men.

8. This number is highly misleading and likely contains a high number of bots. In June 2019 the subscriber count was just over 400,000, and 292,612 subscribers at the time of quarantine in September 2018.

9. /r/TheRedPill also has an entire sorting category for posts labelled 'Red Pill Theory' which contains much of the group's discussion of topics of social order and men's positioning within that order.

10. There are signs that this may be slowing as Reddit has moved in significant ways to limit hate speech and harassment on the platform. Reddit's harassment policy has undergone some significant revisions since October 2019 that have resulted in the banning of a large number of communities, including /r/The_Donald and /r/Gender Critical, and in significant changes to what the site deems harassing behaviour (Allyn 2020; u/spez 2020).

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