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NETWORK ANALYSIS OF THE MANOSPHERE  
ON REDDIT**

Fitzgerald, Kelly C.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**MAPPING THE MANOSPHERE: A SOCIAL NETWORK  
ANALYSIS OF THE MANOSPHERE ON REDDIT**

by

Kelly C. Fitzgerald

December 2020

Co-Advisors:

Sean F. Everton  
Christopher J. Callaghan

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**MAPPING THE MANOSPHERE: A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF THE  
MANOSPHERE ON REDDIT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The manosphere network is a dispersed collection of online spaces that proliferate an anti-feminist ideology that in some cases has been associated with violence. This thesis aims to observe the manosphere network structure as it exists on Reddit by using a mixed method research design of digital ethnography and social network analysis (SNA). This research identified a unifying anti-feminist framework and found that informal social divisions within the network faded over time, which indicates that both moderate and extreme manosphere subgroups are now sharing common online spaces. It also found that platform algorithms helped with network resilience by acting as gatekeepers of information that suggested related content and shielded unrelated content to users that helped to grow the network in size and interconnectivity.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
Incel	involuntary celibate
MGTOW	men going their own way
MRA	men's right's activist
MRM	men's rights movement
NCFM	National Coalition for Men
OLS	ordinary least squares
PUA	pickup artist
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SIT	social identity theory
SNA	social network analysis



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ten years ago, the word *incel* was a term known primarily within niche online gaming and nerd communities. Today, the term has become better known for its association with young men who express rage at being unable to have sex and high-profile mass murders that target women.<sup>1</sup> Involuntary celibates, better known as incels, ascribe to a particularly nihilistic form of male supremacism that blames bad genetics, feminism, and society for denying them sex with women.<sup>2</sup> Until recently, incel violence has largely been gawked at because of the absurdity of its ideology or dismissed as being a product of mental illness.<sup>3</sup> Some practitioners and academics describe incel violence as terrorism and point to emergent trends in terrorist violence having a hate-based crime dimension.<sup>4</sup> Others feel that the word, terrorism, is being inappropriately applied because incels are not a politically motivated group, and adopting anti-terrorism strategies against an ideology may cause security agencies to see “risk” everywhere.<sup>5</sup> While the label may be debated, what is known is that incels are part of a larger network linked to violent events that have seldom been investigated in quantitative studies.

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<sup>1</sup> “Incels (Involuntary Celibates),” Anti-Defamation League, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/incels-involuntary-celibates>; “‘I Laugh at the Death of Normies’: How Incels Are Celebrating the Toronto Mass Killing,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/04/24/i-laugh-death-normies-how-incels-are-celebrating-toronto-mass-killing>; Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, “Incels: America’s Newest Domestic Terrorism Threat,” *Lawfare* (blog), January 12, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/incels-americas-newest-domestic-terrorism-threat>.

<sup>2</sup> “Scientific Blackpill,” Incel Wiki, accessed April 18, 2020, [https://incels.wiki/w/Scientific\\_Blackpill](https://incels.wiki/w/Scientific_Blackpill); Hoffman and Ware, “Incels.”

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Berger, “The Difference between a Killer and a Terrorist,” *The Atlantic*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/the-difference-between-killer-and-terrorist/558998/>.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (2020): 4, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459; Hoffman and Ware, “Incels”; “RCMP Adding Incels to Terrorism Awareness Guide,” Global News, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7021882/rcmp-incel-terrorism-guide/>; Berger, “The Difference between a Killer and a Terrorist”; Sadiya Ansari, “Terrorism Laws Have Long Been Used against Brown and Black Men. When Will They Be Used to Protect Them?” *Maclean’s*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/terrorism-laws-have-long-been-used-against-brown-and-black-men-when-will-they-be-used-to-protect-them/>.

<sup>5</sup> Fahad Ahmad and Reem Bahdi, “Why Charging Incels with Terrorism May Make Matters Worse,” *The Conversation*, accessed September 12, 2020, <http://theconversation.com/why-charging-incels-with-terrorism-may-make-matters-worse-139457>.

Incels represent one corner of a male supremacist extremist network known as the *manosphere*.<sup>6</sup> The manosphere ecosystem is dispersed across websites, social media and news platforms, blogs, vlogs, and message boards. It can seem ambiguous because it is not a centrally located place or group but rather a constellation of points online that form and die out rapidly.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is a very real dwelling for some individuals seeking support and refuge from a society they perceive as stacked against them. This paper and its findings hope to provide new insight into the manosphere by examining its structure and filling a gap in quantitative research on the network. This thesis builds on existing feminist and linguistic research by using a mixed methods design with digital ethnography and social network analysis (SNA) to observe the broader manosphere structure as it exists on Reddit.

The major findings from this research indicate that the informal social barriers of the network are disappearing, and that platform algorithms are helping network resilience. Current literature on the manosphere separates its subgroups into four major ideological domains: the men's rights movement, pickup artists, men going their own way, and incels.<sup>8</sup> Each domain has a unique social identity, lingo, and semiotics, and each domain falls along a spectrum of moderate to extreme ideologies and tactics. Despite domain differences, this research develops an anti-feminist framework that identifies shared beliefs that orient members of all domains to view women and feminism as the root cause for personal and societal crises. This viewpoint is supported by the social network analysis used in this thesis, which suggests that the informal social barriers of the network are fading. In other words, both moderate and extreme subgroups appear to be congregating on shared spaces within the Reddit platform. With online spaces becoming less "incel" or "pickup artist" specific, developing anti-terrorism strategies for incel groups becomes more challenging

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<sup>6</sup> Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 639–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Lilly, "'The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men': The Representational Politics of the Manosphere" (master's thesis, Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa, 2016), 20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20381/ruor-5184>; Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 643.

<sup>8</sup> Manoel Horta Ribeiro et al., "From Pick-Up Artists to Incels: A Data-Driven Sketch of the Manosphere," ArXiv:2001.07600 [Cs], 2, January 21, 2020, <http://arxiv.org/abs/2001.07600>.

because they do not have the exclusive spaces they once did. The causes for a unifying manosphere may be coming from outside influences from larger hate-based networks that share in anti-feminism, but it also may be coming from within Reddit.

While a platform like Reddit, which advertises itself as “The frontpage of the internet,” may seem like a free space of minimal oversight where user-generated content gets equal visibility, the reality is much different. Reddit is a user-generated social news aggregate platform made up of more than two million discussion boards called, subreddits.<sup>9</sup> Subreddits are virtual communities that allow members to post, comment, and vote on content, but the way members become acquainted with these spaces is not as simple. Platform algorithms act as gatekeepers of information by suggesting related content and shielding unrelated content to users.<sup>10</sup> In this case, it means that users who search for something related to one of the many cultural touchpoints in the manosphere, some of which are not explicitly misogynist, may find their suggested subreddits influenced by these algorithms. The social network analysis of the manosphere used in this project suggests that Reddit platform algorithms performed exactly as they were designed to do: namely, help people in the network find each other and keep their attention. Reddit may employ these algorithms to grow and sustain the platform writ large, but the unintended consequences these have had on the manosphere have helped its resilience.

The manosphere is a growing network that deserves attention from the homeland security community as an emerging threat, which if unchecked, may continue to escalate. An innovative homeland security strategy aimed at social media algorithms and the companies that benefit from the growth of extremist groups on their platforms may be required, rather than specific individuals or groups.

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<sup>9</sup> “New Subreddits by Month—Reddit History,” RedditMetrics, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://redditmetrics.com/history/month>.

<sup>10</sup> Adrienne Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fapping: How Reddit’s Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures,” *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (March 2017): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815608807>.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Male supremacist extremism is a growing phenomenon of digital hegemonic masculinity, which in some cases, has resulted in violence that transcends the virtual world.<sup>1</sup> Since the advent of Web 2.0, male supremacist extremism has found a new home on social media platforms, such as Reddit, which provide a fertile environment for it to grow and evolve from online to real-world violence.<sup>2</sup> Online male supremacist groups, specifically those known as incels, or involuntary celibates, have been associated with a growing number of deaths in high-profile attacks.<sup>3</sup>

While members of the incel community are credited with the most violence among anti-feminist groups, many other groups have similar ideologies that support and intersect with each other in a scattered network of online forums, social media groups, and message boards known as the *manosphere*.<sup>4</sup> The manosphere flourishes in online spaces with user generated open-sourced content, relaxed or absent hate speech and harassment governance, and algorithms that curate content for readers based on what they and their existing network are already reading. Reddit is one of many platforms with governance and algorithms that create a protected echo chamber for male supremacist content to spread unchallenged.<sup>5</sup> This thesis uses social network analysis (SNA) and digital ethnography to map connections within the context of the so-called Reddit manosphere. The goal is to map the contours of this digital environment and to examine how it is affected by exogenous factors.

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<sup>1</sup> Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 638–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>; Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (March 2017): 330–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448156088071>; Mairead Eastin Moloney and Tony P. Lovem, "Assessing Online Misogyny: Perspectives from Sociology and Feminist Media Studies," *Sociology Compass* 12, no. 5 (May 2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12577>.

<sup>2</sup> Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 333–34; "How Rampage Killer Became Misogynist 'Hero,'" BBC News, April 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189>.

<sup>3</sup> "Grant Will Fund Research into Growing Male Supremacist Subculture Online," Georgia State University, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://news.gsu.edu/2019/06/26/federal-grant-will-fund-research-into-growing-male-supremacist-subculture-online/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 639–40.

<sup>5</sup> Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 330–31.



## A. RESEARCH QUESTION

- What effects do identity affirming real-world events have on the manosphere network?
- How has the manosphere network structure changed between 2012 and 2018?

## B. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the manosphere, this thesis will first examine the masculine constructs that support the ideology. Scholars describe masculinity as a relational, restrictive social construct with a multitude of expressions.<sup>6</sup> To expose the complex masculinities and power narratives of online male supremacism, this literature review focuses on the debates surrounding hegemonic masculinity to explain gendered power difference. It first explores the predominant narrative of male victimization offered by online male supremacist groups, then examines the theory of hegemonic masculinity, and finally investigates debates surrounding the evolution of hegemonic masculinity.

Many online male supremacist groups have a narrative of male victimization that embraces an *alpha* and *beta* masculinity to rationalize the hierarchical relationship between men that has caused some to feel socially isolated and even penalized for not performing well in traditional manhood.<sup>7</sup> Alpha/beta masculinity is the idea that some (alpha) men demonstrate physical and sexual dominance over women, and consequently, marginalize less dominant (beta) men. From this standpoint, women are the currency used to garner masculinity and are thus blamed for a person's *lack* of masculinity. This narrative is reinforced and amplified in the echo chamber of like-minded online forums, social media platforms, and message boards; in other words, the manosphere.<sup>8</sup> Most masculinist

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Donaldson, "What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (1993): 643–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/657988>; Jon Swain, "Needing to Be 'in the Know': Strategies of Subordination Used by 10–11 Year-Old Schoolboys," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2, 2003, [http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/10003842/1/Swain%2Cstrategies\\_of\\_subordination%2C\\_6.pdf](http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/10003842/1/Swain%2Cstrategies_of_subordination%2C_6.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 638–57; Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 329–46.

<sup>8</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 639–40; BBC News, "How Rampage Killer Became Misogynist 'Hero'"; Georgia State University, "Growing Male Supremacist Subculture Online."

academics see this explanation for gender power difference as contradictory and antifeminist and point to hegemonic masculinity as a better explanation for the victimization felt by male supremacists.<sup>9</sup>

The theory of hegemonic masculinity emerged from a synthesis of feminist theory on patriarchy and intersectionality, dual standpoint theory, cultural hegemony, Freudian psychoanalysis, and a large body of research on men and boys.<sup>10</sup> Hegemonic masculinity proposes that not just one masculine expression exists but a multitude do that can be observed in a hierarchy of masculine power difference. The hierarchy is influenced by intersecting racial, sexual, socio-economic, ability, and cultural identities, to name a few, with gender to create a profile of privilege and oppression.<sup>11</sup> Hegemonic masculinity suggests one privileged performance of manhood exists: white, heterosexual, wealthy, physically intimidating, able-bodied, brutally competitive, crisis-prone, virile, dominant, emotionally unavailable, and unable to admit weakness.<sup>12</sup> This type of man must not only demonstrate these characteristics but also reject people who challenge them. In other words, it is not enough for a man to be heterosexual; he must also be homophobic.<sup>13</sup> Mike Donaldson argues that its foundational tensions rest in homophobia and a resulting fear of female sexual rejection: “A fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity, then, is that women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men. Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this.”<sup>14</sup>

The hierarchy reveals itself in the rejection of challenges from outside identities and the method of rejection. Raewyn W. Connell’s research on social inequality among

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<sup>9</sup> Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fapping,” 329–46; Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels,” 638–57; Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

<sup>10</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 830–32; Zillah Eisenstein, “Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism,” *Insurgent Sociologist* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 2–17.

<sup>11</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, 830–32.

<sup>12</sup> Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?,” 647; Connell, *Masculinities*, 645.

<sup>13</sup> Donaldson, 646–47; Connell, 648.

<sup>14</sup> Donaldson, 646.

high school boys in Australia was foundational and critically timed with the gay rights, civil rights, and women's liberation movements.<sup>15</sup> Each of these social and political movements opened debate on male roles and responses that gave way to an increased awareness of class differences among men that influenced how they participated.<sup>16</sup> Michael Messner asserts that male participation displays itself in one four ways: "stop dead in your tracks, befuddled; attempt a U-turn and retreat toward an idealized past of male entitlement; turn right and join a backlash against feminism; or bend left and actively support feminism."<sup>17</sup> Connell's theory on hegemonic masculinity would say that these responses are directly affected by male power difference and hierarchy, which dictate how strongly a man feels the need to defend the existing gender order, or not, and in what way.

More recently, some scholars have observed a *personalized* or *inclusive* masculinity meant to replace hegemonic masculinity.<sup>18</sup> Debbie Ging points out that expressions of heteromascularity have shifted over generations to include clothing, hairstyles, emotional expression, affect, and other cultural markers that have not traditionally been associated with hegemonic descriptions.<sup>19</sup> Some see this shift as a positive move away from hegemonic masculinity and toward heterosexual men being less homophobic and less violent toward women in a post-feminist society.<sup>20</sup> In his interviews with fraternity members, Eric Anderson notes this shift to a "new age man" who accepts gay men as fraternity brothers, a "softer masculinity" that distances itself from past *Animal House* depictions of fraternity life.<sup>21</sup> Anderson and Dennis Altman assert that hegemonic

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<sup>15</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 832.

<sup>16</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, 831.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Messner, "Forks in the Road of Men's Gender Politics: Men's Rights vs Feminist Allies." *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy; Brisbane* 5, no. 2 (2016): 7, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.301>.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Anderson, "Inclusive Masculinity in a Fraternal Setting," *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 5 (August 2008): 606, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X06291907>.

<sup>19</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 641.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, "Inclusive Masculinity in a Fraternal Setting," 604–20; Dennis Altman, "The Collapsing Hegemony and Gay Liberation," in *Homosexual: Oppression & Liberation* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012), 163–96, ProQuest.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, 609.

masculinity fails to capture the coexistence of amicable forms of masculinity since the decline of societal homophobia.<sup>22</sup> This observation has been received by some as a hopeful and optimistic view of progress away from hegemonic masculinity.

Conversely, other gender studies academics reject the notion of inclusive masculinity, as it overemphasizes the significance of decreased homophobia as a superficial indicator of gender equality. Rachel O’Neill argues that by overemphasizing decreased homophobia, the theory of inclusive masculinity ignores the hegemonic practices of racism and sexism.<sup>23</sup> Others like Ging and Adrienne Massanari see inclusive masculinity as a way to avoid taking accountability for the privileges of heteromascularity and ignore the way non-homophobic or homosexual men can exert dominance.<sup>24</sup> Connell and James Messerschmidt would call this *complicit* masculinity: “Men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity. . . . Hegemony did not mean violence although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.”<sup>25</sup>

Accepting inclusive masculinity as a theory of positive societal shift ignores persistent hegemonic practices by focusing on some masculine behavior in a vacuum. Donaldson explains that hegemonic masculinity affords men the privilege to distance, challenge, reproduce, impose, or even give up hegemonic privilege selectively.<sup>26</sup> It can also explain modern distancing from past homophobia as a selective practice rather than a sign of equality gained. Lori Kendall and Ging point to geek male culture as such an example in that it both enforces certain aspects of hypermasculinity while simultaneously

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, 604–20; Altman, “The Collapsing Hegemony and Gay Liberation,” 163–96.

<sup>23</sup> Rachel O’Neill, “Whither Critical Masculinity Studies?: Notes on Inclusive Masculinity Theory, Postfeminism, and Sexual Politics,” *Men and Masculinities* 18, no. 1 (April 2015): 111–12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14553056>.

<sup>24</sup> Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels,” 641–42; Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fapping,” 332–33; Sam de Boise, “I’m Not Homophobic, ‘I’ve Got Gay Friends’: Evaluating the Validity of Inclusive Masculinity,” *Men and Masculinities* 18, no. 3 (August 2015): 319–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14554951>.

<sup>25</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 832.

<sup>26</sup> Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?,” 646.

rejecting others.<sup>27</sup> Geek male culture may in some sense be accepting of homosexuality and even participate in homoeroticism while also using homophobic slurs to insult other men and put heterosexual virility on the pedestal of masculine achievement.<sup>28</sup> Geek male culture has also used hegemonic practices to demean and harass women out of online spaces and transformed platforms like Reddit and 4chan into hotbeds for misogyny.<sup>29</sup> However, its less intimidating appearance gives its members the ability to deny masculine privilege when necessary. Massanari argues that this practice of promoting a less-offensive form of masculinity makes men less willing or able to acknowledge their own privilege while simultaneously cultivating hegemonic dominance in the spaces they maintain.<sup>30</sup>

*Hybrid masculinity* is a theory that explains Anderson's observations among fraternity brothers and the contradictions Massanari, Kendall, and Ging describe as part of geek male culture. Hybrid masculinity describes a hegemonic practice that strategically selects aspects of some cultures to replicate.<sup>31</sup> By performing or coopting marginalized male identities, some men maintain hegemonic dominance while simultaneously concealing systems of power.<sup>32</sup> In other words, men appropriate certain qualities of marginalized populations that give them social credibility and the path of least resistance to sustain dominance.<sup>33</sup> Hybrid masculinity allows modern oppressive forms of masculinity to survive in the era of fourth-wave feminism, social justice, and transgender and gay rights because men strategically distance themselves from more orthodox

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<sup>27</sup> Lori Kendall, "'White and Nerdy': Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype," *Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 3 (2011): 505–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00846.x>; Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 638–57.

<sup>28</sup> Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 329–30; Kendall, 505–24.

<sup>29</sup> Massanari, 329–30.

<sup>30</sup> Massanari, 329–30.

<sup>31</sup> Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (June 2001): 337–61, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017596718715>.

<sup>32</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 638–57.

<sup>33</sup> de Boise, "I'm Not Homophobic," 318–39.

masculinities, which allows them to deny their privilege while nevertheless benefitting from it.<sup>34</sup>

Hybrid masculinity could offer a better explanation for the pressures felt and the simultaneous hegemony exerted by some online male supremacist members. This thesis examines both in an effort to understand the isolation, extreme rhetoric, and violence exerted by misogynist networks.

### **C. CHAPTER ROADMAP**

Chapter I provided an introduction to the thesis topic. Chapter II describes the methods and research design. Chapter III provides manosphere background and context through a descriptive ethnographic review of relevant literature and journalistic coverage, as well as a review of manosphere-related websites, vlogs, blogs, social media sites, and message boards. Chapter IV presents the SNA of the manosphere. Chapter V builds a discussion and suggests future research topics based on the findings in Chapter IV. Finally, Chapter VI concludes this thesis by addressing the initial research questions.

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<sup>34</sup> Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fappening,” 329–30; Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels,” 638–57; Kendall, “White and Nerdy,” 505–24.

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## II. HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores the research design and the methods used in this thesis. SNA is the primary methodology for the structural analysis of the manosphere network, but it is paired with ethnographic research to provide qualitative context. This chapter contains the hypotheses, as well as detailed information on the data obtained for this analysis.

### A. HYPOTHESES

I use a mixed methods research design to test the following hypotheses: Since its formation, Reddit has gone from being a niche platform to the sixth most popular website in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Reddit administrators have noted that site traffic grew exponentially as a result of misogynist events like The Fappening, where stolen images of women were shared and highly viewed on Reddit.<sup>36</sup>

**Hypothesis 1:** Since Reddit has steadily increased in content, subreddits, and traffic over time, it can be assumed that the manosphere network has similarly increased in size between the years 2012–2018.

Reddit’s aggregate algorithms create echo chambers around users by suggesting subreddits of similar interest and making new and highly voted content more visible, which will be explained later in this chapter.<sup>37</sup> It has also been observed that users frequently migrate between manosphere subreddits and specifically from moderate towards extreme ideologies.<sup>38</sup>

**Hypothesis 2:** As Reddit usership increased, channels of similar ideology were suggested, and users expanded network boundaries and patronage on the platform; as such,

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<sup>35</sup> Jack LaViolette and Bernie Hogan, “Using Platform Signals for Distinguishing Discourses: The Case of Men’s Rights and Men’s Liberation on Reddit,” in *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 13 (July 6, 2019): 325.

<sup>36</sup> Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fappening,” 336.

<sup>37</sup> Massanari, 335.

<sup>38</sup> Manoel Horta Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels: A Data-Driven Sketch of the Manosphere,” ArXiv:2001.07600 [Cs], 2, January 21, 2020, <http://arxiv.org/abs/2001.07600>.



one would expect this activity to have a significant positive effect on the network's overall interconnectedness and an inverse effect on its centralization between 2012–2018.

Pro-social events are events at which like-minded individuals gather in a way that benefits a group and creates a secure environment that enables discussion and sharing.<sup>39</sup> This research identified pro-social manosphere events, such as conventions, as identity affirming because they are places where men and women from many manosphere groups come together to meet with other like-minded individuals. Individuals who participate in pro-social events may share an ideology with those who participate in anti-social events, but the nature of pro-social action means that these events do not need to be hidden from law enforcement, which would indicate a difference in the network structure because of less secrecy.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, they cannot advertise the same way as other conventions because they frequently are protested and kicked out of their host spaces.<sup>41</sup> These events coordinate with a wide variety of groups and are intended to bring people from various corners of the manosphere together but must also balance their visibility to ensure the event can happen.

**Hypothesis 3:** Network interconnectedness, centralization, the number of distinct subcommunities, and size increase following a pro-social event.<sup>42</sup>

Anti-social events are events self-focused, intimidating, threatening, violent, disrupt societal norms, and are intended to violate other persons.<sup>43</sup> Similar to pro-social events, these too can bring people together in an identity affirming way that reinforces

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Gilbert and Jaskaran Basran, "The Evolution of Prosocial and Antisocial Competitive Behavior and the Emergence of Prosocial and Antisocial Leadership Styles," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00610>.

<sup>40</sup> Arie Perliger and Ami Pedahzur, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence," *Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 1 (January 2011): 49.

<sup>41</sup> Kate Abbey-Lambertz, "Controversial Men's Rights Conference Sparks Backlash," HuffPost, May 29, 2014, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mens-rights-conference\\_n\\_5405300](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mens-rights-conference_n_5405300); Sally Weale, "Row after University of York Cancels International Men's Day Event," *The Guardian*, November 17, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/nov/17/row-after-university-of-york-cancels-international-mens-day-event>.

<sup>42</sup> Perliger and Pedahzur, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence," 49.

<sup>43</sup> Gilbert and Basran, "The Evolution of Prosocial and Antisocial Competitive Behavior."

ideology. This research project observed two types of anti-social events: harassment campaigns and mass murders. Despite both being anti-social, the execution of these two crimes is diametrically opposite. One is a coordinated group activity and is done primarily online, and the other is one actor committing a crime in the real world.

**Hypothesis 4:** Harassment campaigns must leverage the large number of users in the network to get the mob-like feel of a hate campaign. Based on the need to leverage existing ties during harassment events, there should be a significant effect on the network's interconnectedness during these events.<sup>44</sup>

**Hypothesis 5:** The second type of anti-social events include mass murder attacks. These are committed by single individuals, who may have a small trust network around them that encourages their plans to commit these attacks.<sup>45</sup> These trust networks may exist across a few related subreddits that are related to more extreme or violent corners of the manosphere. Thus, a relationship can possibly exist between interconnectedness and centralization measures following violent attacks.

While current research suggests distinct subgroup ideologies and masculine expressions occur within the manosphere, something causes all these divergent groups to coalesce around certain controversial topics and events.<sup>46</sup>

**Hypothesis 6:** Despite having nuanced social identities within manosphere subgroup ideologies, a universal ideology shared by the network exists.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This research project utilizes a mixed methods approach that combines critical identity ethnography with SNA tools and methods. Ethnography is used to analyze the manosphere on Reddit and its domains, and SNA is used to measure network changes over

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<sup>44</sup> Krebs, "Mapping Networks of Terrorist Cells," 49; Perliger and Pedahzur, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence," 49.

<sup>45</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "I Laugh at the Death of Normies."

<sup>46</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 653; Ribeiro et al., "From Pick-Up Artists to Incels," 2.

time.<sup>47</sup> This methodological approach is chosen to observe the quantitative changes of the network within a qualitative context that gives meaning to the events selected.

## 1. Scope

This project reviews 84 monthly slices of manosphere data from Reddit.com ranging from 2012–2018 to observe network changes over time in relation to relevant identity affirming events. The 2012 is selected because of the sharp increase in overall Reddit traffic, and 2018 is selected because many of the groups being analyzed were shut down after 2018. This particular year range is chosen to highlight recent manosphere growth and activity. 2012–2018 was chosen because it marked an increase in platform Reddit is selected because the platform is actively used by each domain in the manosphere, so it can demonstrate full network activity.<sup>48</sup>

## 2. Object of Research

Reddit has been criticized for creating a fertile environment for misogyny while, as noted previous, also being the sixth most popular website in the United States.<sup>49</sup> The site is a user-generated social news aggregate platform, also referred to as a micro-blog, made up of more than two million discussion boards called, subreddits, where users post and vote on content.<sup>50</sup> Highly up-voted content gets more visibility in user feeds, whereas down-voted, or content without any votes, gets less visibility, or in some cases, is removed.

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<sup>47</sup> Jennifer A. Scarduzio, Gino A. Giannini, and Patricia Geist-Martin, “Crafting an Architectural Blueprint: Principles of Design for Ethnographic Research,” *Symbolic Interaction* 34, no. 4 (2011): 454–55, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2011.34.4.447>.

<sup>48</sup> Tracie Farrell et al., “Exploring Misogyny across the Manosphere in Reddit,” in *Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Web Science—WebSci '19* (Boston: ACM Press, 2019), 87–96, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3292522.3326045>; Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fapping”; Tanya Basu, “The ‘Manosphere’ Is Getting More Toxic as Angry Men Join the Incels,” *MIT Technology Review*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/02/07/349052/the-manosphere-is-getting-more-toxic-as-angry-men-join-the-incels/>; Emma Grey Ellis, “Reddit’s ‘Manosphere’ and the Challenge of Quantifying Hate,” *Wired*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/misogyny-reddit-research/>.

<sup>49</sup> Farrell et al., 87; LaViolette and Hogan, “Using Platform Signals for Distinguishing Discourses,” 325; “Top Sites in United States,” Alexa, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/US>.

<sup>50</sup> “New Subreddits by Month—Reddit History,” *RedditMetrics*, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://redditmetrics.com/history/month>.

Reddit allows users to create subreddits on a wide range of topics that have a multitude of cultural representations, but foundationally was a platform popular in geek culture.<sup>51</sup> Each subreddit has its own rules that volunteer moderators independently enforce. Recently, Reddit has made strides to moderate incel specific subreddits on their platform, but in general, Reddit administrators have taken a hands-off approach to moderating content.<sup>52</sup> They have also been criticized for being slow to respond to misogynist subreddits or content because of how events, such as the spread of illegal photos of women on the subreddit /r/thefappening, grow their platform by attracting new users.<sup>53</sup> Reddit's aggregating algorithms and karma point voting system have created echo chambers of male supremacism and violent misogyny worth observing from a homeland security perspective because they have been identified as an emerging trend in hate-based terrorism.<sup>54</sup>

The initial dataset was downloaded from the Pushshift Reddit archive, which is maintained by Jason Baumgartner.<sup>55</sup> Pushshift's Reddit dataset is selected for this research because it includes historical data dating back to Reddit's inception. As such, it offers a complete archive not limited to a subset of subreddits or a narrow time slice.<sup>56</sup>

To delineate the contours of the manosphere, 11 initial subreddits were identified for analysis that represents each manosphere domain:

- r/beatingwomen
- r/beatingwomen2
- r/Creepshots
- r/Braincels
- r/incels

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<sup>51</sup> Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 331.

<sup>52</sup> Massanari, 331; "Content Policy," Reddit, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.redditinc.com/policies/content-policy>.

<sup>53</sup> Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 336.

<sup>54</sup> Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 643; Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 330–31.

<sup>55</sup> Jason Baumgartner, "Directory of Contents," Pushshift, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://files.pushshift.io/reddit/>.

<sup>56</sup> It is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

- r/inceltears
- r/MensRights
- r/TheRedPill
- /r/MGTOW
- r/shortcels
- r/Incelswithouthate

These subreddits were identified by looking through other manosphere sites that Reddit administrators have identified, banned, or quarantined for hateful content towards women, and through news sources identifying subreddits in their reporting.

Next, the identified subreddits were used as filtering parameters to down-sample the entire Pushift Reddit archive. The resulting data includes all activity (posts, authors, content, etc.) within a narrow set of boundaries.

This author's initial intention was to analyze both those actively participating in this niche within the broader platform and the linkages between channels based on shared patronage. However, upon closer examination of the data, it became clear that a significant portion of Reddit users had deleted their accounts either after posting on these subreddits or at least prior to data ingestion. This unforeseen gap in the data made it impossible to map the user network safely across the manosphere.

Rather than limiting the network boundaries based on the 11 initial subreddits, the initial downsized data was mined for unique user screen names. Once again, the Reddit archive was filtered down into a much more manageable data set using the screen names as querying parameters. The resulting data set includes all interactions, anywhere in the platform, by any account linked to activity within the 11 initial subreddits. Finally, these data were manipulated further to generate a unimodal network of subreddits interconnected by shared authors.

### **3. Digital Ethnography**

The critical identity ethnographic portion of my research can be broken into three parts: (1) gathering existing research on the manosphere, (2) observing manosphere

narratives through websites, message boards, video content, presentations, interviews, and blogs, and (3) verifying and corroborating observations through journalistic coverage. Based on my research and observations, this portion of the project defined the boundaries of manosphere domains and identified a series of identity affirming events for analysis.

From a social identity theory (SIT) perspective, semiotics plays a significant role in group identity, especially when trying to incite peace or conflict.<sup>57</sup> They become reminders of community struggle, sacrifice, martyrdom, and victories that can be leveraged for group engagement. Symbols cannot only promote a group's social identity, but they can also highlight social divisions.<sup>58</sup> They remind members of who are part of the in-group and who are outsiders. Events are key semiotics because they are experienced objects that become part of the group history and self-identity. Some of these symbolic events are interpreted as affirming group identity while others are interpreted as threatening, all of which cause behavior that promotes certain identities and while silencing others.<sup>59</sup>

Despite being decentralized and primarily online, the manosphere has many emotionally salient events that are general to the network and some that are specific to the previously discussed groups.<sup>60</sup> Compared to real-world networks that might draw inspiration from the symbolism of uniforms, flags, songs, flowers etc.; the manosphere semiotics rely heavily on memes, videos, linguistics, hashtags, and events.<sup>61</sup> As mentioned

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<sup>57</sup> Rebekah A. Philips De Zalia and Scott L. Moeschberger, "Symbolic Reminders of Identity," in *Understanding Peace and Conflict through Social Identity Theory; Contemporary Global Perspectives*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 121.

<sup>58</sup> De Zalia and Moeschberger, 132.

<sup>59</sup> De Zalia and Moeschberger, 127.

<sup>60</sup> "A Definitive Guide to Incels Part Two: The A-Z Incel Dictionary," *Tim Squirrel* (blog), accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.timsquirrel.com/blog/2018/5/30/a-definitive-guide-to-incels-part-two-the-blackpill-and-vocabulary>; "WTF Is a MGTOW? A Glossary," *We Hunted the Mammoth*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.wehuntedthemammoth.com/wtf-is-a-mgtow-a-glossary/>; Hailey Branson-Potts and Richard Winton, "How Elliot Rodger Went from Misfit Mass Murderer to 'Saint' for Group of Misogynists—and Suspected Toronto Killer," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-elliott-rodger-incele-20180426-story.html>; "After Toronto Attack, Online Misogynists Praise Suspect as 'New Saint,'" *NBC News*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/after-toronto-attack-online-misogynists-praise-suspect-new-saint-n868821>.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (2020): 11, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459; *We Hunted the Mammoth*, "WTF Is a MGTOW?"; Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening," 341.

in the previous chapter, the manosphere network coalesces around contentious issues and highly controversial events, and for this reason, events are central to this research project.

The selected events were chosen because they affirmed male supremacist ideology and were interpreted by some members to be positive for the network.<sup>62</sup> While not all in the manosphere approve of the extreme tactics of these events, they are still considered affirming because they do not actively threaten the male supremacist ideology and, in fact, support its more virulent factions.

The affirming events are organized by mass murders, harassment campaigns, the Trump candidacy for President and the period after he was elected, and conventions to demonstrate a spectrum of involvement with the movement. One event, Incel Quarantine, is included but is not considered an identity-affirming event, which will be explored later.

#### *a. Mass Murders*

Sentiment is increasing within the homeland security community that the manosphere, and specifically incels, are an emerging terrorist threat, in part, due to several high-profile mass murders.<sup>63</sup> The Isla Vista shooting, Toronto Van attack, and Florida Yoga Studio shooting were attacks that brought incel violence to the attention of the homeland security community because individuals committed them who claim explicitly

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<sup>62</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “I Laugh at the Death of Normies”; Branson-Potts and Winton, “How Elliot Rodger Went from Misfit Mass Murderer to ‘Saint’ for Group of Misogynists”; NBC News, “After Toronto Attack, Online Misogynists Praise Suspect as ‘New Saint’”; Michael Salter, “From Geek Masculinity to Gamergate: The Technological Rationality of Online Abuse,” *Crime, Media, Culture* 14, no. 2 (August 1, 2018): 247–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659017690893>; Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fappening.”

<sup>63</sup> Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” 4; J. M. Berger, “The Difference between a Killer and a Terrorist,” *The Atlantic*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/the-difference-between-killer-and-terrorist/558998>; Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, “Incels: America’s Newest Domestic Terrorism Threat,” *Lawfare* (blog), January 12, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/incels-americas-newest-domestic-terrorism-threat>; “RCMP Adding Incels to Terrorism Awareness Guide,” Global News, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7021882/rcmp-incel-terrorism-guide/>; Justin Ling, “Incels Are Radicalized and Dangerous. But Are They Terrorists?” *Foreign Policy*, June 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/02/incels-toronto-attack-terrorism-ideological-violence/>.

to be incels targeting women.<sup>64</sup> Bruce Hoffman describes them as part of a trend in hate-based terrorism towards societal upheaval, which in this case, includes violence targeting women and “normies.”<sup>65</sup> For this research, I selected a series of mass murders (see Appendix A) that were either:

- Committed by individuals claiming to be part of the manosphere (or incels specifically) in a manifesto.
- Celebrated within the group because of whom they targeted.<sup>66</sup>
- Committed by individuals who posted incel or manosphere social media content.

***b. Harassment Campaigns***

In 2017, the Pew Research Center reported that four in 10 Americans have experienced online harassment, with women ages 18–34 twice as likely to experience online sexual harassment.<sup>67</sup> While many experience it at the individual level with many of the same physical and mental health effects as real world harassment, the attack itself often comes from a barrage of users converging on one or a few specific targets.<sup>68</sup> The manosphere has been associated with several coordinated online harassment campaigns that specifically target women, feminist journalists and organizations, gamers, and

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<sup>64</sup> Branson-Potts and Winton, “How Elliot Rodger Went from Misfit Mass Murderer to ‘Saint’ for Group of Misogynists”; Southern Poverty Law Center, “I Laugh at the Death of Normies”; Steven Hendrix, “He Always Hated Women. Then He Decided to Kill Them,” *Washington Post*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/local/yoga-shooting-incel-attack-fueled-by-male-supremacy/>.

<sup>65</sup> A term used by some in the incel, and larger Manosphere networks, to describe average people who have not taken the red pill.

<sup>66</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “I Laugh at the Death of Normies.”

<sup>67</sup> Maeve Duggan, “Online Harassment 2017,” Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, July 11, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/>; Monica Anderson and Emily A. Vogels, “Young Women Often Face Sexual Harassment Online—Including on Dating Sites and Apps,” Pew Research Center, March 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/06/young-women-often-face-sexual-harassment-online-including-on-dating-sites-and-apps/>.

<sup>68</sup> Ruth Lewis, Michael Rowe, and Clare Wiper, “Online Abuse of Feminists as an Emerging Form of Violence against Women and Girls,” *British Journal of Criminology* 57, no. 6 (November 2017): 1464–65, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azw073>.



celebrities.<sup>69</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, those events that bring out a unified response within the manosphere are important for analyzing the network because they offer anonymity that emboldens individuals to participate who otherwise may not under more pro-social conditions.<sup>70</sup> These moments of mobilization allow for insight into what these types of events may do for the network.

Defining online harassment can be difficult because of how it has evolved in both scale and complexity.<sup>71</sup> While many terms are associated with different types of attacks, it is relevant for this paper to define online harassment through a gendered perspective because the network being analyzed is one that specifically targets women, and the attacks often include an element of gender or sexuality, including, rape threats, revenge porn, gendered insults, and sharing illicit photos of targets.<sup>72</sup>

A series of harassment events connected with the manosphere occurring between 2012–2018 are selected for this research. These events are primarily identified through news coverage and from manosphere websites, some of which can be confirmed through existing manosphere research. Online harassment comes in many different forms, and the virtual environment offers new and innovative ways to intimidate, shame, and threaten individuals.<sup>73</sup> Coordinated mob attacks like #Gamergate indicated a coordination among users for planned online harassment and a mob-like aggression shown by the large number of participants converging on one or a few targets, but this attack also included doxing the

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<sup>69</sup> Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fapping”; Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels,” 653; Alice Marwick and Robyn Caplan, “Drinking Male Tears: Language, the Manosphere, and Networked Harassment,” *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 (March 26, 2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1450568>; Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton, “Sexual Violence in the ‘Manosphere’: Antifeminist Men’s Rights Discourses on Rape,” *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 67, <https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view>; Lindy West, “Now Roosh V and His Band of Sad Men in Dark Rooms Know How It Feels to Be Bombarded with Bile,” *The Guardian*, sec. Opinion, February 7, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/feb/07/daryush-roosh-v-valizadeh-and-his-acolytes-pilloried>.

<sup>70</sup> James Tremewan and Eryk Kryowski, “Anonymity, Social Norms, and Online Harassment,” Auckland University, 16–18, October 2015, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3211.8246>.

<sup>71</sup> “Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/onlineharassment>.

<sup>72</sup> Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fapping.”

<sup>73</sup> Anti-Defamation League, “Online Hate and Harassment.”

targets. Other campaigns like The Fapping are done by hacking into cloud storage to obtain and spread stolen images of women, but also include coordination to keep the images from being erased. Most of the harassment campaigns contain multiple elements of attack and intimidation and are labeled to reflect that (see Appendix A). This research focused on three main types of harassment: coordinated mob attacks, hacking, and doxing that contained an element of gender or sexuality in the attack and were praised by one or more domains in the manosphere.

*c. Conventions*

Conventions held in person by men’s rights groups have occurred despite public controversy and struggles to find locations that will host them. The International Conference on Men’s Issues and the 21 conference are the two main conventions.<sup>74</sup> They are both annual events that host speakers to talk about men’s rights issues and are included as pro-social examples of identity affirming events, since it is assumed that conventions may cause new connections to be made within a network. My research included all publicly available conference dates from 2012–2018.

*d. President Trump Candidacy and the Election of President Trump*

These two events are slightly different from the aforementioned categories because they are politically affiliated and not directly related to the manosphere. Despite not being organized by the manosphere, frequent references are made concerning the Trump administration on manosphere platforms and a manosphere conference titled, “Make Women Great Again.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “The 21 Convention,” The 21 Convention LLC, accessed July 19, 2020, <https://the21convention.org/>; “Announcing the International Conference on Men’s Issues 2020—Sydney, Australia,” A Voice for Men, August 19, 2019, <https://avoiceformen.com/featured/announcing-the-international-conference-on-mens-issues-2020-sydney-australia/>.

<sup>75</sup> “The 22 Convention: Make Women Great Again<sup>SM</sup>,” The 22 Convention, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://22convention.com/>.

*e. Incel Quarantine*

This last event was included as a test for some of the oddities in the data. The subreddits *r/incels* and later *r/braincels* were both quarantined during the timeframe that was analyzed. If a subreddit gets controversial and regularly allows violent content to go unaddressed by moderators, Reddit administrators will quarantine it. When a subreddit is quarantined, it will not be recommended, will not appear on popular feed lists, can only be viewed by verified users, and will display a warning and ask users to opt-in to enter.<sup>76</sup>

**C. LIMITATIONS**

Some of the limitations that come from observing human behavior online are also the factors that allow extremist groups to thrive. The anonymity afforded in many online spaces makes verifying a username to a real person impossible. Also, it is not possible to verify that people do not have multiple Reddit accounts, specifically “burner accounts” associated with one person intended for posting particularly controversial content, which are commonly used on Reddit. Non-human factors, such as social media bots, automation, recommendation algorithms, and policies shape online cultures and further complicate what is actually being observed online.<sup>77</sup> For this reason, I chose to focus this research on subreddits rather than users, and observe overall network trends rather than looking for key actors.

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<sup>76</sup> “Quarantined Subreddits,” Reddit, accessed September 3, 2020, <http://reddit.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360043069012>.

<sup>77</sup> Massanari, “#Gamergate and the Fappening,” 336.

### III. MANOSPHERE NARRATIVES AND IDEOLOGY

The manosphere is a term applied to a network of online male supremacist groups dispersed across websites, blogs, message boards, micro-blogs, and less-mainstream social media platforms. The online ecosystem creates an echo chamber of anti-feminist sentiment around its users who move frequently between these virtual spaces.<sup>78</sup> It can seem ambiguous because it is not a centrally located place or group but rather a constellation of points online that form and die out rapidly. Nonetheless, it is a very real dwelling for some individuals seeking support and refuge from a mainstream society they perceive to be stacked against men. One manosphere website moderator describes it as an awakening:

To the casual observer, the manosphere may seem like a disjointed collection of blogs and websites, but the manosphere does not exist online; it exists in the hearts and minds of the next great generation of men. The manosphere is the Big Bang of chaotic masculine disruption that will eventually bring into existence a new personal world of freedom for those who choose to be free. It's evolving and forming right before our very eyes.<sup>79</sup>

Research has identified four domains of manosphere ideology: men's rights activists (MRAs), pickup artists (PUAs), men going their own way (MGTOW), and incels.<sup>80</sup> While the four categories help bucket different types of anti-feminist thought, these are not fixed points in the network. Individuals often migrate between groups, and the extreme content means groups get restricted, de-platformed, and reform under new names frequently.<sup>81</sup> As a result, some manosphere communities and ideologies get lost in this organization because they do not fit concisely into these categories or are too small to track. Despite the disorganized, contradictory, and at times, confusing nature of the manosphere, it is important that the homeland security community not dismiss these

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Lilly, "'The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men': The Representational Politics of the Manosphere" (master's thesis, Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa, 2016), 20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20381/ruor-5184>; Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels," 643.

<sup>79</sup> "The Manosphere," Men Going Their Own Way, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.mgtow.com/manosphere/>.

<sup>80</sup> Ribeiro et al., "From Pick-Up Artists to Incels," 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ribeiro et al., 10.

groups.<sup>82</sup> They are part of a growing trend in hate-based terrorism motivated by societal upheaval rather than political change.<sup>83</sup>

This chapter examines the manosphere domains for the purposes of finding where the groups come together as a network and determining if it is a homeland security threat worth further analysis. This thesis first defines the boundaries of each domain by examining existing research, journalistic coverage, as well as websites, blogs, and video content of each domain. After examining the different domains, an overlapping ideological space is identified for the purposes of examining what these discrete groups agree on to form a larger network. Finally, this thesis provides an analysis of whether this group should be considered a homeland security threat, and if researching the network as a whole is worthwhile.

#### **A. ANTI-FEMINIST FRAMEWORK**

Anti-feminism is a term that has been applied to various movements, people, and groups for as long as feminist efforts to bring gender equality have been ongoing. This anti-feminist framework (see Figure 1) is specific to the manosphere and suggests four areas of agreement between each of the domains discussed later. This overlap is useful for identifying what types of issues and events these groups coalesce around and what unites them as a network.

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<sup>82</sup> Elise Thomas, “The National Security Implications of Extreme Misogyny,” *The Strategist*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-national-security-implications-of-extreme-misogyny/>.

<sup>83</sup> Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” 4.

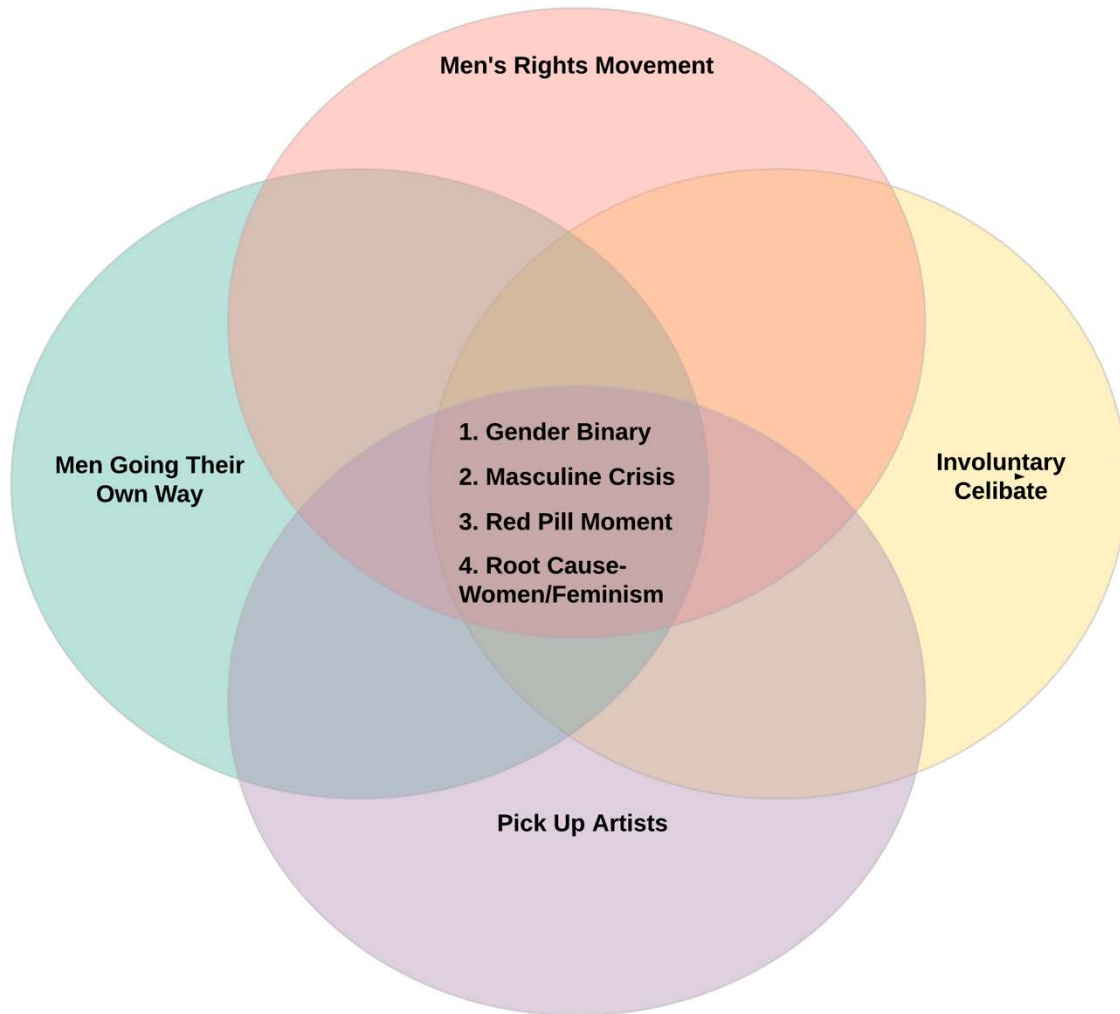


Figure 1. Anti-feminist Framework

### 1. Gender Binary

The acceptance of a gender binary—male and female—and heteronormativity is foundational to the anti-feminist framework. In the case of some groups, it appears as the reinforcement of “natural order” arguments or the language of Sandra Bem’s sex roles.<sup>84</sup> For others, it may look like a reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity through virgin shaming, homophobic or transphobic rants, discussing relationships between men and women as dominant and submissive, ascribing value characteristics to masculinity and

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<sup>84</sup> Messner, “Forks in the Road of Men’s Gender Politics,” 8.

femininity, or placing heterosexual sex as the ultimate masculine goal or entitlement. The masculine expressions vary within the manosphere, but they center on a foundational acceptance of a weighted gender binary.

## **2. Masculine Crisis**

All the manosphere domains described indicate a masculine crisis. They may describe that crisis differently. For example, MRAs claim politically correct culture and feminism created systemic negative portrayals of men in society, PUAs describe a society in which men are pushed out of the dating game by feminism, MGTOWs describe men as the victims of a “gynocentric” society, and incels describe a genetic inferiority to “alpha” males. The common thread is that all identify a crisis connected to masculinity and posit women as the common cause.

## **3. Red Pill Moment**

All the groups within the manosphere discuss a “red pill” moment when they “became aware” that society treats men and boys unfairly and actually favors women and girls.<sup>85</sup> It is a reference to the 1999 film, *The Matrix*, when the main character is given the option of a red or blue pill. The blue will let him wake up in bed and go about life as usual, and the red pill will take him out of the matrix and let him see life as it actually is. Some also consider it its own domain of the manosphere, and the philosophy also features prominently within alt-right groups.<sup>86</sup> A documentary sympathetic to the manosphere, “The Red Pill,” interviews prominent voices from across many of the groups within the

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<sup>85</sup> Squirrel, “A Definitive Guide to Incels Part Two.”

<sup>86</sup> “The Manosphere: A Positive Future for Men, Boys, & Fathers,” May 24, 2020, Anthony Dream Johnson, video, 50:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omi5cIb-Sck&t=759s>; Shawn P. Van Valkenburgh, “Digesting the Red Pill: Masculinity and Neoliberalism in the Manosphere,” *Men and Masculinities*, December 4, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18816118>; Aja Romano, “How the Alt-Right’s Sexism Lures Men into White Supremacy,” *Vox*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2016/12/14/13576192/alt-right-sexism-recruitment>.

manosphere.<sup>87</sup> Many spin-off “pill” philosophies build on the red pill, but essentially, it is a moment when an individual’s perception of the world and society shifts dramatically.<sup>88</sup>

#### **4. Women/Feminism Are the Root Cause**

The manosphere domains orient individuals to see women and feminism as the beneficiaries and cause of male oppression. A deep-seeded mistrust of women is expressed across manosphere domains that views issues like domestic violence, sexual assault, workplace harassment, and child custody, among others, as being caused by women. Men, as the scapegoats in the narrative, are portrayed as victims whose livelihood is in the hands of women who hold the power to devastate them with false abuse claims.<sup>89</sup> Some conspiratorial viewpoints see feminism has having control of the justice system and other government institutions that ensure women maintain this power.

#### **B. MEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND MEN’S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS**

The men’s rights movement (MRM) is the more moderate face of the manosphere and is a politically minded faction concerned with gender roles and men’s oppression in society.<sup>90</sup> The MRM draws on a legacy dating back to the 1960s and 70s in the United States and is often credited with being the foundation of the manosphere, but it is far from the first feminist backlash.<sup>91</sup> The MRM grew simultaneously with the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s but had an ideological split over men’s roles in the oppression of women. The group originally followed second-wave feminist thinking with a focus on male consciousness-raising around gender roles and their oppression of men, as well as

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<sup>87</sup> “A Cassie Jaye Documentary,” *The Red Pill*, accessed June 30, 2020, <http://theredpillmovie.com/>.

<sup>88</sup> “The Extremist Medicine Cabinet: A Guide to Online ‘Pills,’” *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed June 20, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/the-extremist-medicine-cabinet-a-guide-to-online-pills>.

<sup>89</sup> Laura Bates, “Men Going Their Own Way: The Rise of a Toxic Male Separatist Movement,” *The Guardian*, August 26, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/aug/26/men-going-their-own-way-the-toxic-male-separatist-movement-that-is-now-mainstream>.

<sup>90</sup> Messner, “Forks in the Road of Men’s Gender Politics,” 7; “Male Supremacy,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy>.

<sup>91</sup> Lilly, “‘The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men’,” 36–37.



women.<sup>92</sup> Eventually, the men's liberation movement split into two groups, with one aligned with the feminist movement and focused on male privilege and men's roles in violence against women, and the other using the language of Sandra Bem's "sex roles" to argue that men and women were equally oppressed but in different ways.<sup>93</sup>

The latter philosophy broke from its progressive foundation, and in the 1970s, developed into an anti-feminist backlash that appropriated the language of feminist discourse of patriarchy and sex roles to make its argument of institutionalized male victimhood.<sup>94</sup> Warren Farrell, one of the prominent foundational voices still heard in the movement today, began his career studying and teaching feminism and gender studies. He made the argument that in the same way women claim to be objectified as sexual objects, men are equally but differently objectified as breadwinners and sexual predators by women.<sup>95</sup> One of his books, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*, is widely popular in the MRA movement and argues that as feminism liberated women, it simultaneously oppressed men because women grew too powerful from the sexual power they hold over men.<sup>96</sup> MRM arguments and publications utilized pseudo-academic language that mirrored the language of gender studies as a way to gain legitimacy, but they lacked the peer review or acceptance by the larger gender studies academic community to make their claims mainstreamed.

MRAs today argue that men are the true and ignored victims of prostitution, false rape claims, divorce settlements, required military service, custody settlements, paternity fraud, negative media portrayals, and domestic violence.<sup>97</sup> Like many of their

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<sup>92</sup> Consciousness raising: a type of activism popular in the second wave feminist movement that brought people together to discuss topics with the goal of making participants aware of a larger social concern. This viewpoint was particularly valuable to the feminist movement that did so in reaction to women's isolation in the private family and the home sphere.

<sup>93</sup> Messner, "Forks in the Road of Men's Gender Politics," 8.

<sup>94</sup> Messner, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Messner, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "Male Supremacy"; Kate Zernike, "Feminism Has Created Progress, but Man, Oh, Man, Look What Else," *Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 1998, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1998-06-21-9806210422-story.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Messner, "Forks in the Road of Men's Gender Politics," 9.

predecessors, MRA groups often mirror feminist arguments but employ anti-feminist and misogynist language. While some MRAs make legitimate claims about male suicide, homelessness, and incarceration rates, these arguments are then often used to orient supporters toward viewing women as the common root cause of such problems.<sup>98</sup> Moderate groups within the MRM play on the implicit biases against women to make “common sense” arguments that appeal to supporters.

A common tactic used by MRM groups is litigation and social organizing to influence decisions on policy issues, while also using distinctly misogynistic and at times violent language to build their defense.<sup>99</sup> For example, the non-profit National Coalition for Men (NCFM), where Ferrell remains on the advisory council, famously went to court in 2008 to defund domestic violence shelters that serviced women only.<sup>100</sup> The NCFM argues this move was attempting to bring equality and health services to male domestic violence victims, which is a legitimate concern. However, rather than utilizing legislation to create opportunities to help male victims (i.e., create men-only victim spaces), the NCFM instead chose a more punitive approach that targeted spaces that protect women victims. Den Hollander, a trained corporate attorney turned self-proclaim civil rights activist for men’s rights, funded his own lawsuit against the Violence against Women Act arguing that it was discriminatory towards men because it specifically scrutinized violence perpetrated by men.<sup>101</sup> It was thrown out of court. The year before he went to court against six New York bars that offered ladies’ night promotional discounts, which again was thrown out of court. The legal tactics of the MRM have not been particularly effective at

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<sup>98</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Male Supremacy.”

<sup>99</sup> “October Is the Fifth Annual Bash a Violent Bitch Month,” archive.is, October 1, 2015, <http://archive.is/2HDYK>; Southern Poverty Law Center, “Male Supremacy”; Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 2.

<sup>100</sup> Rebecca Cohen, “Welcome to the Manosphere: A Brief Guide to the Controversial Men’s Rights Movement,” *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/01/manosphere-mens-rights-movement-terms/>.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (Hachette UK: Nation Books, 2017), 115.

creating the systemic change they desire, but these cases speak to the overall spirit of the group.<sup>102</sup>

Another common tactic utilized by the MRM is to mask extreme, controversial, or even violence content as satire. A Voice for Men is a for-profit organization started in 2009 and led by Paul Elam, famous for his extreme anti-woman and violent language cloaked as satire. While he claims his call to designate October—currently Domestic Violence Awareness month—“Bash a Violent Bitch Month” is just humor, his more directly violent efforts through his doxing site Register-Her are far more sinister.<sup>103</sup> Elam explains that women are vessels and gatekeepers for sexual power, which is how they maintain societal domination:

It’s not about equality, it’s about pussy. . . . Members of the Red Pill community can take some pride in being the exception to that rule. . . . Pussy is the only real empowerment women will ever know. Put all the hopelessly wishful thinking of feminist ideology aside and what remains is the fact that it is men and pretty much men only who draw power from accomplishment, who invent technology, build nations, cure disease, create empires and generally advance civilization. Women whether acknowledging it makes us feel warm and fuzzy or not, depend on men for all of that and the only tool they have at their disposal to have any sort of influence on any of it is the power of pussy and pussy is powerful indeed.<sup>104</sup>

From the outside, these two groups look different; one appears to seek equality and men’s rights, while the other is more anti-feminist and extreme. As Messner accurately points out, the former represents a moderate face of the men’s rights movement and takes on “common sense” legal issues that resonate with implicit anti-feminism.<sup>105</sup> The latter is

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<sup>102</sup> Kimmel, 116; “Action,” National Coalition for Men, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://ncfm.org/category/action/>.

<sup>103</sup> Register-Her: A wiki site with the motto, “Why are these women not in jail?” that publishes photos and personally identifying information (doxing) of women convicted of murdering or raping men, making false sexual assault or rape claims, protesting MRA events, or critiquing the men’s rights movement or posting feminist content on social media. Mark Potok, “War on Women,” *Intelligence Report*, August 20, 2014, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2014/war-women>; Paul Elam, “Another Reminder on Comments—A Voice for Men,” November 28, 2010, <https://avoiceformen.com/a-voice-for-men/another-reminder-on-comments/>.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Elam, “Sex Robots—Part 3—Disempowering Pussy—Paul Elam,” accessed June 20, 2020, <https://www.paulelam.com/sex-robots-part-3-disempowering-pussy/>.

<sup>105</sup> Messner, “Forks in the Road of Men’s Gender Politics,” 13.

an escalation in misogynist thinking, which adds vitriolic language to discussions of men's rights and positions women and feminism as the cause of these systemic problems.

Ferrell is one of the members who disapproves of the extreme misogyny seen in some parts of the manosphere but believes it is a necessary evil, "I've been through the movements... I've seen how Martin Luther King alone was dismissed. It took Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver to say things that were pretty ridiculous in some ways, but that brought attention that led to Martin Luther King being seen as the nice, centered, balanced person."<sup>106</sup> While Farrell does not entirely approve of the extremism in the movement, it is clear that he benefits from it by making him, and others like him, look more balanced.

Despite their differences, MRM conferences are attended by a variety of men's rights groups and MRAs looking to connect with like-minded individuals who can identify with their experiences as men, expand their network, and share resources. These conferences adopt a professional appearance with well-produced advertisements and charismatic speakers who often have popular social media platforms and books for sale.<sup>107</sup> Many of the non-social media famous speakers are advertised to have doctorial or law degrees, which like the professional appearance, lends credibility to the event. In 2014, journalist Jessica Roy attended the International Conference on Men's Issues where both Ferrell and Elam, along with many other speakers, spoke on MRM topics. Despite calls by Elam for it to be a press-conscious version of the movement, she observed speakers making rape jokes in presentations, blaming "bad" mothers for violence in adult men, and hearing claims that women can avoid rape by dressing more modestly.<sup>108</sup> Roy also met men at the

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<sup>106</sup> Mariah Blake, "Mad Men: Inside the Men's Rights Movement—and the Army of Misogynists and Trolls It Spawned," *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/01/warren-farrell-mens-rights-movement-feminism-misogyny-trolls/>.

<sup>107</sup> "Welcome to Dream World—Official #21Convention Inside the Event Trailer," December 28, 2019, 21 Studios, video, 2:51, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=8&v=oiG8CseFZ0o&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=oiG8CseFZ0o&feature=emb_logo); "International Conference on Men's Issues 2019," ICMI 2019, accessed August 7, 2020, <https://icmi2019.icmi.info/>; The 21 Convention LLC, "The 21 Convention."

<sup>108</sup> Jessica Roy, "What I Learned as a Woman at a Men's Rights Conference," *Time*, July 2, 2014, <https://time.com/2949435/what-i-learned-as-a-woman-at-a-mens-rights-conference/>.

conference who came seeking help and solidarity around suicide and sexual assault among other life-threatening issues. Their interest in the MRM represents how many find their way into the movement by looking for a safe space to find help that does not threaten their masculinity:

Brendan Rex . . . confided that he lost his virginity at the age of 14 when a woman climbed on top of him and had sex with him while he was drunk and unconscious. “It kind of took me a few years to come to terms with the concept that I had nowhere to go. . . . Then about six years ago I kind of realized that there were a lot of other people like me. . . . It’s not uncommon for men to be sexually abused by women.”<sup>109</sup>

When you talk to someone like 68-year-old Steve DeLuca, the legitimate need to remedy some of the issues raised by men’s-rights activists becomes more evident. A Vietnam veteran who was injured in combat, DeLuca spoke movingly to me about the two brothers he lost to suicide, and the unfathomable toll the high suicide rate among men can take. There are men out there, like DeLuca . . . who have a real stake in the movement’s success. The paranoia and vitriol of its leaders can’t possibly do anything for them.<sup>110</sup>

The press-friendly, and at times, pseudo-academic or pseudo-scientific appearance of the MRM may appeal to individuals with legitimate life-threatening concerns like DeLuca and Rex, but often are the beginning of a journey into more misogynistic and extreme groups.

### **C. PICKUP ARTISTS**

PUAs are another domain within the manosphere that share similar ideas of heteronormative masculinity with the MRM, but they focus more on personal coaching rather than political or legislative change. PUA websites and influencers circulate strategies and techniques that teach men to change the way they dress, talk, and act to overcome their awkwardness and ultimately seduce women.<sup>111</sup> Despite the PUAs’ appearance as a self-help community, the advice and techniques range from deceiving, insulting, hypnotizing,

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<sup>109</sup> Roy.

<sup>110</sup> Roy.

<sup>111</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 2.

and harassing to sexually assaulting women.<sup>112</sup> PUA theories include pseudo-psychological concepts, such as “replication instinct” and “neuro-linguistic programming” meant to manipulate women’s biology for the purpose of sexual conquest.<sup>113</sup> To be successful, they argue, men must change, lie, or hide their looks, strength, charisma, money, job, and political power—among other things—for the purposes of gaining greater “value.”<sup>114</sup> Simultaneously, a PUA must also lower the value of his “target” woman by doing and saying things that make her see herself as being less valuable.

The PUA community has many influencers who utilize their platforms to promote their ideologies and “self-help” products. Roosh Valizadeh (Roosh V.) is a prominent influencer, self-proclaimed “neo-masculinist,” founder of the group Return to Kings, and is one of the more extreme voices in the movement who has crossed over to alt-right groups as well.<sup>115</sup> He published a series of controversial “travel” books he later claimed were satire, which detailed many non-consensual sexual encounters with women. He also called on his followers to organize a “fat shaming,” which targeted other internet influencers and journalists.<sup>116</sup> On his blog, he advocates for the legalization of rape on private property, which he again later claimed was satire:

I propose that we make the violent taking of a woman not punishable by law when done off public grounds. . . . Consent is now achieved when she passes underneath the room’s door frame, because she knows that that man can legally do anything he wants to her when it comes to sex. Bad encounters are sure to occur, but these can be learning experiences for the poorly trained woman so she can better identify in the future the type of

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<sup>112</sup> “Daryush ‘Roosh’ Valizadeh,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/daryush-roosh-valizadeh>.

<sup>113</sup> Steve Almond, “Confessions of a Playboy,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2005, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-oct-23-bk-almond23-story.html>; Duncan Campbell, “Dating Game Turns Ugly,” *The Guardian*, sec. World news, January 15, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/jan/16/uk.duncancampbell>.

<sup>114</sup> “The Matrix Couldn’t Dream Up the Internet of 2018,” A.V. Club, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.avclub.com/the-matrix-couldn-t-dream-up-the-internet-of-2018-1822353087>.

<sup>115</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Daryush ‘Roosh’ Valizadeh.”

<sup>116</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center; West, “Now Roosh V and His Band of Sad Men in Dark Rooms Know How It Feels to Be Bombarded with Bile.”

good man who will treat her like the delicate flower that she believes she is.<sup>117</sup>

This quote is from a blog post by Roosh V. that does something common in the manosphere, which is to walk back controversial or violent statements that threaten their platform by claiming satire. Their strategy primarily serves as self-preservation since de-platforming can ruin their online career, which later happened to Roosh V. after Amazon decided to no longer carry his books.<sup>118</sup> More insidiously, it serves to both deny women's injuries from online violence and further the narrative of male victimhood.<sup>119</sup> Karen Lumsden's research on the manosphere suggested that many did not believe in such a thing as online or verbal violence, like the kind seen in the previous quote, and again, often claimed their violent misogynist statements were jokes or satire. Women who report this kind of violence to moderators or law enforcement are mocked as "damsels" looking to be saved from their feelings. Ultimately, members of the manosphere see reporting male transgressors online as further victimhood of those men who are believed to be held wrongly or overly accountable for claims of online sexual harassment or violence.<sup>120</sup> Controversial manosphere content creators, like Paul Elam and Roosh V., have

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<sup>117</sup> "How to Stop Rape," Roosh Valizadeh, February 6, 2015, <https://www.rooshv.com/how-to-stop-rape>.

<sup>118</sup> "Amazon Has Banned 9 of My Books without Explanation (UPDATE)," Roosh Valizadeh, September 10, 2018, <https://www.rooshv.com/amazon-has-banned-9-of-my-books-without-explanation>; Caroline Haskins, "After PayPal Ban, Men's Rights Activist Roosh V Shuts down His Site," Vice, October 2, 2018, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/9k7bae/after-paypal-ban-mens-rights-activist-roosh-v-shuts-down-his-site](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9k7bae/after-paypal-ban-mens-rights-activist-roosh-v-shuts-down-his-site); Tom McKay, "Amazon Takes down Nine Books Self-Published on Kindle by Virulent Sexist 'Roosh,'" Gizmodo, September 11, 2018, <https://gizmodo.com/report-amazon-takes-down-nine-books-self-published-on-1828958245>; Sebastian Murdock and Jesselyn Cook, "EXCLUSIVE: Amazon Removes 9 Books by Notorious Rape Apologist 'Roosh,'" HuffPost, September 10, 2018, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/amazon-removes-books-rape-apologist-roosh\\_n\\_5b96ea09e4b0511db3e54945](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/amazon-removes-books-rape-apologist-roosh_n_5b96ea09e4b0511db3e54945).

<sup>119</sup> Karen Lumsden, "'I Want to Kill You in Front of Your Children' Is Not a Threat. It's an Expression of a Desire': Discourses of Online Abuse, Trolling and Violence on r/MensRights," in *Online Othering: Exploring Digital Violence and Discrimination on the Web*, ed. Karen Lumsden and Emily Harmer (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 102–7, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12633-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12633-9_4).

<sup>120</sup> Lumsden, 103.

strategically avoided that accountability from social media and social news platforms by making violent statements and claiming them as satire once backlash ensues.<sup>121</sup>

The PUA community has not historically been interested in the political or societal change of the MRM. It instead wants to leverage existing systems of oppression for its goal of creating a following around its brand of masculinity. What makes PUAs distinctly part of the manosphere, compared to other pickup artists, is their connection and infighting with other manosphere groups. Their hyper-masculine performance and the monetary gains made by PUA gurus earn the community criticism from others in the manosphere, but they unify over the same anti-feminist sentiment.<sup>122</sup> They have also adopted some of the same philosophies as other manosphere groups, such as the red pill, which describes an awakening to the true nature of society and women.<sup>123</sup> PUAs are considered a comparatively less extreme group within the manosphere but are often a gateway to extreme misogynist thinking.<sup>124</sup>

#### **D. MEN GOING THEIR OWN WAY**

MGTOW, pronounced “mig-tow,” are an anti-woman community for men who want to eschew relationships and interactions with women and society as a whole. A more militant, extremist part of the manosphere, the MGTOW community believes women are biologically programmed to ruin the lives of men and promotes a fundamental distrust of women.<sup>125</sup> MGTOW members use the word “gynocentrism” to describe the current state

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<sup>121</sup> archive.is, “October Is the Fifth Annual Bash a Violent Bitch Month”; Valizadeh, “Amazon Has Banned 9 of My Books without Explanation (UPDATE)”; Valizadeh, “How to Stop Rape.”

<sup>122</sup> Mike Wendling, “The Extreme Misogyny of ‘Pick-up Artist’ Hate,” *BBC News* (blog), May 31, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-27640474>.

<sup>123</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 10; “How YOU Can Become a REAL MAN (Masculinity, Game, PUA, Red Pill...) (with Rollo Tomassi),” April 3, 2019, Bulldog Mindset, video, 1:23:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAlcM-XaTFM>; Mumia Ali, “Bang: The Definitive Interview with RooshV (Part Two),” archive.is, February 15, 2015, <http://archive.is/OMeqy>; “How the Manosphere Crushed Feminism (Kingmaker Podcast),” January 31, 2017, Roosh Valizadeh, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WgAn6GFU0E>.

<sup>124</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 10.

<sup>125</sup> Lilly, “‘The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men’,” 47.



of society as one that rewards women by trapping men as *breadwinners*.<sup>126</sup> The language of MGTOWs is a blend of MRA and PUA rhetoric with anti-government sentiment.<sup>127</sup>

A MGTOW website defines the group as a statement of sovereignty:

Men Going Their Own Way is a statement of self-ownership, where the modern man preserves and protects his own sovereignty above all else. . . . Refusing to bow, serve, and kneel for the opportunity to be treated like a disposable utility. And, living according to his own best interests in a world which would rather he didn't.<sup>128</sup>

MGTOW progression moves in five stages: (1) taking the red pill and realizing that men are oppressed by society, and specifically feminism, and that patriarchy is a lie, (2) rejecting long-term romantic relationships with women, (3) rejecting short-term sexual relationships with women in any form, (4) disengaging financially by recognizing that the government is tyrannical and supported by the economy and that the individual will earn only enough money to sustain life, and finally (5) disengaging with society, that is, refusing to interact with society.<sup>129</sup> From the outside, the MGTOW community looks similar to feminist separatism because it criticizes Western consumerism and seeks to build support within communities of men, but it differs in that it lacks the adoption of socialist principles seen in the feminist separatist movement.<sup>130</sup>

The isolated nature of the MGTOW community has created a decentralized and primarily online presence, but despite their isolation, they are considered part of the manosphere by both academics and from others within the manosphere who accept them

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<sup>126</sup> Jie Liang Lin, "Antifeminism Online: MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way)," in *Digital Environments, Ethnographic Perspectives across Global Online and Offline Spaces*, ed. Urte Undine Frömming et al. (Bielefeld Germany: Ethnographic Perspectives across Global Online and Offline Spaces. Transcript Verlag, 2017), 78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxrxw.9>.

<sup>127</sup> Mack Lamoureux, "This Group of Straight Men Is Swearing off Women," *Vice*, September 24, 2015, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/7bdwyx/inside-the-global-collective-of-straight-male-separatists](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/7bdwyx/inside-the-global-collective-of-straight-male-separatists).

<sup>128</sup> "About," MGTOW, accessed June 30, 2020, <https://www.mgtow.com/about/>.

<sup>129</sup> Lamoureux, "This Group of Straight Men Is Swearing off Women."

<sup>130</sup> Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power—Feminist Reprise," accessed June 14, 2020, <https://feminist-reprise.org/library/resistance-strategy-and-struggle/some-reflections-on-separatism-and-power/>; We Hunted the Mammoth, "WTF Is a MGTOW?."

as a variation of the larger male supremacist ideology.<sup>131</sup> MGTOWs and MRAs share similar ideas of masculinity and femininity, the red pill, government overreach, and male oppression, and they more or less support each other despite some philosophical disagreements.<sup>132</sup> Conversely, the PUA and MGTOW communities are diametrically opposed to one another because of their views on sex with women, and they often use their respective platforms to criticize each other.<sup>133</sup> Recent research has indicated that the growth and extremism of the MGTOW communities overshadows the PUA and MRA groups.<sup>134</sup>

## E. INVOLUNTARY CELIBATES

Perhaps the most infamous manosphere group comprises incels. This group was originally founded by a Canadian woman in the early 1990s who was interested in creating a supportive virtual space for those intimidated by romantic relationships or “love shy.” Today, incels have been associated with up to 10 different attempted or completed mass murders and have been called a terrorist threat by academics, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).<sup>135</sup> The term incel describes the unifying crisis felt by its members; by circumstance, not choice, they are unable to have sex with women. Their perspectives toward sex with women have been described by some as aggravated, entitled, and resentful.<sup>136</sup> Some in the group have blamed the sexual

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<sup>131</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 2; Lilly, ““The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men’,”” 31; “The Manosphere,” Men Going Their Own Way”; Johnson, “The Manosphere.”

<sup>132</sup> Lamoureux, “This Group of Straight Men Is Swearing off Women.”

<sup>133</sup> Ali, “Bang.”

<sup>134</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 2.

<sup>135</sup> Jim Taylor, “The Woman Who Founded the ‘Incel’ Movement,” BBC News, August 30, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45284455>; Hoffman and Ware, “Incels”; Berger, “The Difference between a Killer and a Terrorist”; Global News, “RCMP Adding Incels to Terrorism Awareness Guide”; Wikipedia, s.v. “incel,” last edited September 15, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Incel&oldid=962414889>.

<sup>136</sup> Shannon Zimmerman, Luisa Ryan, and David Duriesmith, “Recognizing the Violent Extremist Ideology of ‘Incels,’” *Women in International Security*, 1, September 2018, [www.wiisglobal.org](http://www.wiisglobal.org); “What an Incel Support Group Taught Us about Men and Mental Health,” Vox, June 20, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/20/17314846/incel-support-group-therapy-black-pill-mental-health>; Zak Foste, “Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era,” *Journal of College Student Development*, Baltimore 55, no. 6 (September 2014): 633.

revolution and feminist efforts to protect women’s bodies as disrupting a “natural order” where men are entitled to a female partner.<sup>137</sup>

Incels make up an extreme corner of the manosphere.<sup>138</sup> They do not have the political agenda of MRAs, the “game-theory” of PUAs, or militant separatism of MGTOWs, though they all share many similar views of women, gender roles, race, and society. Instead, the incel community expresses hopelessness, resentment, and anger toward women that they believe reward a narrow standard of masculine aesthetic and performance with sex.<sup>139</sup>

The incel mindset is distinctly nihilistic towards themselves and society. The *black pill* incel philosophy is a fatalistic spin on the red pill and suggests that the true awakening is realizing that incels are ultimately condemned to a life of forced celibacy because their inferior physical attractiveness, bone structure, and genetics have predisposed them to a life alone.<sup>140</sup> The Incel.co discussion boards frequently mention suicide and death, and a frequently seen response of “rope or cope” is applied to individuals who post content about their desperation.<sup>141</sup> Banned user Robinxyz posted:

It is as I have always thought: personality means shit. I have been rejected by women all my life despite of [*sic*] being a good person. I have been also rejected by my extended family because of my looks. I have always been an outcast. . . . I am so broken and tired. I just want my eternal rest at this time. People like me weren’t made for this world, maybe it is the way my brain has been wired. This crap isn’t for me. I want out.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Zimmerman, Ryan, and Duriesmith, “Recognizing the Violent Extremist Ideology of ‘Incels,’” 1;

<sup>138</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 6.

<sup>139</sup> Lilly, “‘The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men,’” 49–50.

<sup>140</sup> Alice Hines, “How Many Bones Would You Break to Get Laid?” *The Cut*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.thecut.com/2019/05/incel-plastic-surgery.html>; Ling, “Incels Are Radicalized and Dangerous.”

<sup>141</sup> “Must-Read Content,” Incels.co—Involuntary Celibate, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://incels.co/forums/must-read-content.23/>; “Unattractive Men Not Viewed As ‘Dating Material,’ No Matter How Great Their Personality,” Incels.co—Involuntary Celibate, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://incels.co/threads/unattractive-men-not-viewed-as-dating-material-no-matter-how-great-their-personality.41815/>.

<sup>142</sup> Incels.co—Involuntary Celibate, “Unattractive Men Not Viewed As ‘Dating Material.’”

Robinxyz's post is one of many posts seen on the Incels.co discussion boards that talks about feelings of unjustified rejection. The post takes a deterministic view that women have rejected them despite being a good person and that family has rejected them based on looks. This perspective is not dissimilar to one seen in Elliot Rodger's manifesto where he repeatedly mentions how poorly and unjustly he has been treated by women despite being a "magnificent gentleman," "a superior gentleman," "an intelligent gentleman," and a "kind gentleman."<sup>143</sup>

Rodger's 2014 attack represented a shift in the incel community from online frustration to real-world violence. It was the first known deadly attack attributed to incels, and it elevated him to the status of martyr in some corners of the community.<sup>144</sup> The Isla Vista violence inspired six other attackers from across the country (see Figures 2 and 3) who explicitly hailed Rodger.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Rodger Elliot, "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger," 28, 82, 99, 118, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1173619-rodger-manifesto.html>.

<sup>144</sup> Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," 6; Berger, "The Difference between a Killer and a Terrorist"; Kashmir Hill, "The Disturbing Internet Footprint of Santa Barbara Shooter Elliot Rodger," *Forbes*, May 24, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2014/05/24/the-disturbing-internet-footprint-of-santa-barbara-shooter-elliott-rodger/>; Branson-Potts and Winton, "How Elliot Rodger Went from Misfit Mass Murderer to 'Saint' for Group of Misogynists."

<sup>145</sup> Jennifer Mascia, "In the Years since the Isla Vista Shooting, the Incel Subculture Continues to Inspire Gunmen," *Jezebel*, May 23, 2019, <https://jezebel.com/in-the-years-since-the-isla-vista-shooting-the-incel-s-1834959960>; "The New Man of 4chan, Angela Nagle," *The Baffler*, March 8, 2016, <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/new-man-4chan-nagle>.

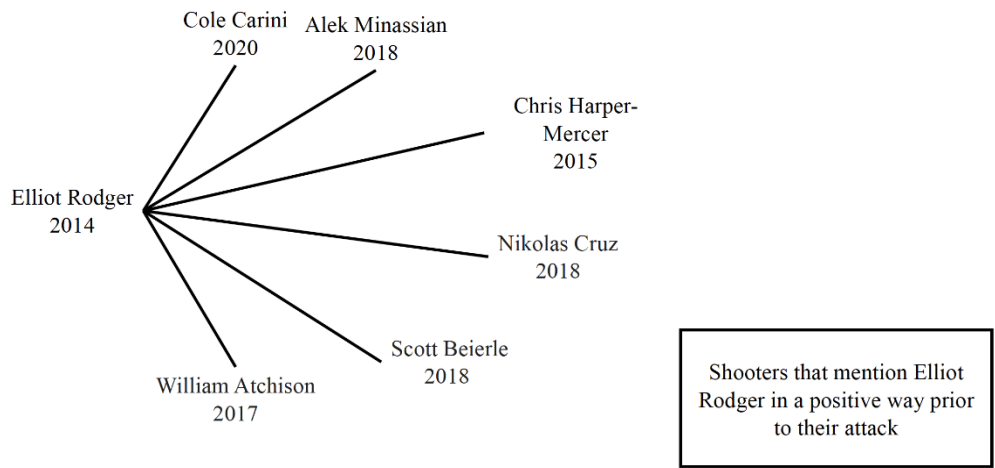


Figure 2. ER Influenced Violence Connections

**Location of violent events associated with Manosphere**  
 Events involving shooters that mentioned Elliot Rodger prior to the attack (2014 - 2020).

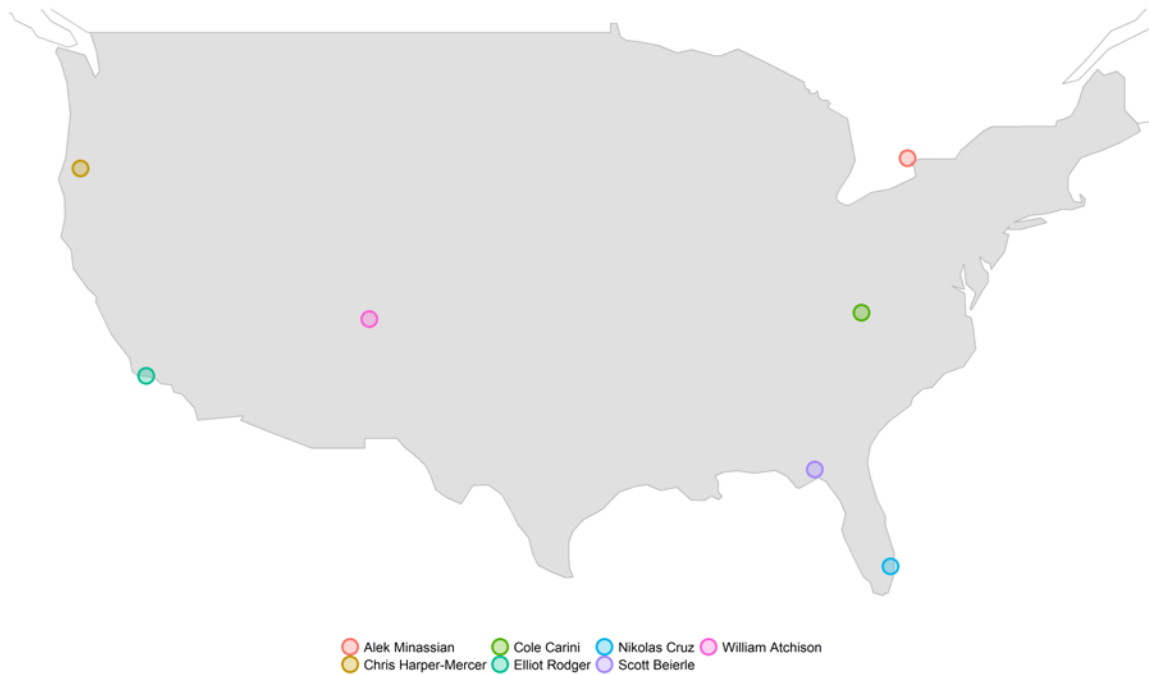


Figure 3. ER Influenced Violence Location

The 2015 Umpqua Community College mass shooter, Chris Harper-Mercer, left behind a manifesto listing Rodger and other incel attackers as “people who are elite, people who stand with the gods.”<sup>146</sup> In 2018, Scott Beierle uploaded videos of himself praising Rodger and identifying with the incel movement before his attack at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida.<sup>147</sup> Before the 2018 van attack in Toronto, Alek Minassian similarly posted an homage to Rodger on Facebook.<sup>148</sup> In June 2020, Cole Carini lost a hand and several fingers after a homemade improvised explosive device exploded in his home. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigators recovered a half-burnt letter that detailed a plan to attack “hot cheerleaders” in the same spirit as Rodger: “No matter what I will be heroic. I will make a statement like Elliot Rodger did.”<sup>149</sup> Others, such as William Atchison and Nikolas Cruz, are less connected with the incel movement, but still reference Rodger in usernames and social media posts. Not unlike other terrorist organizations, Rodger’s attack inspired a culture of martyrdom around individuals who commit mass murder with the larger intention of inspiring a social uprising.<sup>150</sup>

The homeland security community became aware of incels because of their association with mass murders, but incels do not exist in a vacuum. As a group within the manosphere, incels proffer the same type of misogynist thinking as MRAs, PUAs, and MGTOWs, and research suggests that individuals within the manosphere typically radicalize towards incel and MGOTW communities from more moderate groups like PUA and MRA.<sup>151</sup> Notably, not all incels condone or support violence, but these extremist voices are in the greater manosphere echo chamber, where they amplify and spread quickly.

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<sup>146</sup> Rick Anderson, “‘Here I Am, 26, with No Friends, No Job, No Girlfriend’: Shooter’s Manifesto Offers Clues to 2015 Oregon College Rampage,” *Los Angeles Times*, sec. World & Nation, September 23, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-school-shootings-2017-story.html>.

<sup>147</sup> Ling, “Incels Are Radicalized and Dangerous.”

<sup>148</sup> Mike Wendling, “Toronto Van Attack: What Is an ‘Incel’?” *BBC News* (blog), April 24, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-43881931>; Berger, “The Difference between a Killer and a Terrorist.”

<sup>149</sup> “Man’s Hand Blown off; Note References Violence against Women,” AP News, June 6, 2020, <https://apnews.com/4aede80947dc6faead4c49a3ea15c840>.

<sup>150</sup> Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” 11.

<sup>151</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 10.

## F. CONCLUSION

Each domain within the manosphere is individual but lives within the same-networked community that finds common ground on issues of gender and sexuality. Each has its own distinct history, subgroups, key issues, semiotics, ideologies, and community rules that can seem at times contradictory.<sup>152</sup> The language, memes, and acronyms of each group are distinct and sometimes unrecognizable to outsiders but generally characterized as misogynist hate speech.<sup>153</sup> While a few prominent voices, content creators, and defining events do exist, the movement is generally leaderless.<sup>154</sup> Aside from some conferences, meetups, and published books, the majority of the movement exists online dispersed across a variety of platforms.

Knowing the distinctions and crossover among manosphere ideologies is worthwhile because they provide context for network analysis, but it is important to note that none of these fit perfectly into any box.<sup>155</sup> Ging accurately points out:

While the manosphere is by no means an ideologically homogenous bloc, accommodating much infighting between Christian and atheist, homophobic and pro-gay, and pro- and anti-MGTOW and PUA elements, what is perhaps most striking is the way in which ostensibly contradictory masculine formulations—alphas, beta, jock, geek, straight, gay, Christian, and atheist—can coalesce around any number of contentious issues or flash point events when the common goal is to defeat feminism or keep women out of the space.<sup>156</sup>

These moments of unified activation are what make it a *network*, rather than disparate groups online. The following chapter utilizes this digital ethnographic research as a framework for a SNA that examines how the network responds to some of these flash point events.

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<sup>152</sup> De Zalia and Moeschberger, “Symbolic Reminders of Identity,” 121.

<sup>153</sup> Ribeiro et al., “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels,” 2.

<sup>154</sup> Lilly, “‘The World Is Not a Safe Place for Men’,” 141.

<sup>155</sup> Lilly, 50.

<sup>156</sup> Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels,” 653.

#### IV. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF THE MANOSPHERE ON REDDIT

In a basic sense, SNA is a collection of tools and methods that help analysts and researchers understand and quantify social ties in a network.<sup>157</sup> When used with reliable data and social science expertise, it can provide novel insights into a network, but its efficacy relies on the quality of the other two components.<sup>158</sup> Pulling these three pieces together can be difficult when analyzing criminal, terrorist, or extremist groups, which are referred to as *dark networks*.<sup>159</sup> The size, fuzzy boundaries, partial or unverifiable data, and the inherently covert and changing nature of dark networks, present a challenge for social network analysts.<sup>160</sup> With these challenges in mind, and without overselling it as a panacea, SNA can be a practical tool for homeland security professionals developing destabilizing and disruptive strategies against dark networks.<sup>161</sup>

The manosphere is a dark network that is a challenge to analyze for the reasons mentioned previously. This thesis attempts to use SNA tools and methods to provide

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<sup>157</sup> Daniel Cunningham, Sean F. Everton, and Philip Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks: A Strategic Framework for the Use of Social Network Analysis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 3.

<sup>158</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, 3.

<sup>159</sup> Sean F. Everton and Dan Cunningham, "Dark Network Resilience in a Hostile Environment: Optimizing Centralization and Density," *Criminology, Criminal Justice Law, & Society* 16, no. 1 (2015): 1.

<sup>160</sup> Morgan Burcher and Chad Whelan, "Social Network Analysis as a Tool for Criminal Intelligence: Understanding Its Potential from the Perspectives of Intelligence Analysts," *Trends in Organized Crime* 21 (May 24, 2017): 278–79, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-017-9313-8>; Peter Klerks, "The Network Paradigm Applied to Criminal Organisations: Theoretical Nitpicking or Relevant Doctrine for Investigators? Recent Developments in the Netherlands," in *Transnational Organised Crime: Perspectives on Global Security*, ed. Adam Edwards and Peter Gill, 1st. ed. (Florence, United States: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 103, ProQuest.

<sup>161</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*; Sean F. Everton, "Network Topography, Key Players and Terrorist Networks," *Terrorist Networks* 32, no. 1 (June 2009): 12–19; Everton and Cunningham, "Dark Network Resilience in a Hostile Environment," xvii–3. Burcher and Whelan, "Social Network Analysis as a Tool for Criminal Intelligence"; Krebs, "Mapping Networks of Terrorist Cells"; Malcolm K. Sparrow, "The Application of Network Analysis to Criminal Intelligence: An Assessment of the Prospects," *Social Networks* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 1991): 251–74, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8733\(91\)90008-H](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8733(91)90008-H); Francesco Calderoni, Domenico Brunetto, and Carlo Piccardi, "Communities in Criminal Networks: A Case Study," *Social Networks* 48 (2017): 116–25; Kathleen M. Carley, Ju-Sung Lee, and David Krackhardt, "Destabilizing Networks," *Connections* 24, no. 3 (2002): 79–92.



insight into the greater network structure. The ethnographic analysis in the previous chapter provided the subject matter expertise component, and this chapter adds the data and SNA components. In this chapter, I begin by describing the network, its boundaries, and unit of analysis. Then, I will apply SNA measurements to describe the network. Finally, I conclude by testing how exogenous events affect the network structure.

#### **A. REDDIT DATA SOURCE**

The Pushshift Reddit archive, maintained by Baumgartner, supplied the data for analysis.<sup>162</sup> As mentioned in Chapter II, the 11 initial subreddits (see Figure 4) were identified for analysis by looking at relevant manosphere blogs and websites, identifying manosphere subreddits banned or quarantined by Reddit administrators, and reviewing journalistic coverage of controversial manosphere subreddits. The following subreddits grouped by manosphere domain supplied the initial boundaries.

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<sup>162</sup> Baumgartner, “Directory of Contents.”

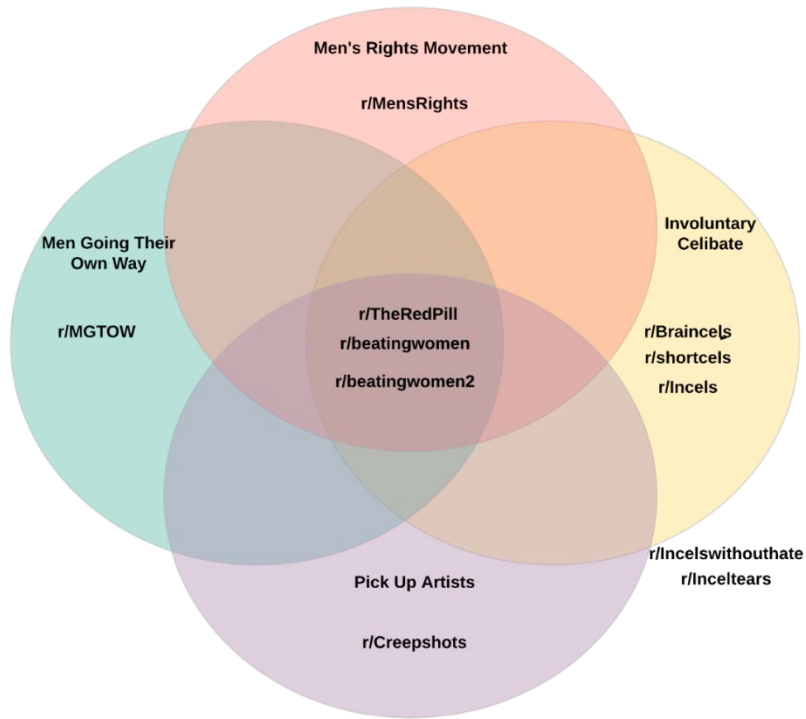


Figure 4. List of Subreddits by Domain

The CORE Lab at the Naval Postgraduate School helped with the network analysis portion of this thesis by filtering the entire Pushshift archive. The downsized data included all activity (e.g., posts, authors, and content) associated with the aforementioned subreddits, and this corpus was then mined for unique user screen names. The complete Reddit archive was again down sampled using the screen names as filtering parameters. The resulting data set included all activity within the platform by any account linked to the 11 initial subreddits. Finally, a unimodal network of subreddits interconnected by shared authors was generated for analysis.

## B. RELATIONAL DATA DESCRIPTION

A relational edge list generated by the CORE lab contained the subreddit unique identifiers and the ties between these, along with other edge attributes, such as a timestamp and a weight. In this network, ties represent cross-channel activity between two subreddits in each monthly time slice. For example, if User A posted on r/MGTOW and then posted on r/TheRedPill within the month, a tie was “drawn” between the two subreddits. Finally,

in this network, the linkages between nodes are undirected. As mentioned in Chapter II, SNA assumes that communication between actors implies a relationship. Here, it is assumed that users posting between subreddits are attracted to these digital spaces for a reason. They may share a similar anti-feminist sentiment or an interest in promoting the manosphere, or they may be part of a not directly misogynistic gaming or libertarian group on the fringe of the manosphere. Whatever the motivation, the shared userbase establishes a connection between subreddits. Mapping the cross-posting between subreddits creates a natural boundary by discerning the natural pathways of users. Observing how actors naturally cluster within the network can also indicate subgroups of ideological homophily if cluster membership is comprised of subreddits with similar posting rules and content.

### **C. DATA BOUNDARIES**

This chapter analyzes the manosphere's presence on Reddit by examining 84 monthly slices of network-level measurements from January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2018. I scoped the date range for this research to capture the years leading up to and following the 2014 shift to real-world violence. The date range also coincides with an overall increase in Reddit traffic and encompasses the timelines for the 11 subreddits.<sup>163</sup> Before 2012, a version of the manosphere did exist on Reddit, but it was not included in this research because it was much smaller in size and not considered violent.

The ethnographic analysis in Chapter III identified manosphere-related subreddits to distinguish a natural boundary of the network. As mentioned previously, I chose these subreddits because they either appeared frequently in the literature, were referenced by manosphere websites and message boards, or were banned or quarantined by Reddit administrators for their role in facilitating or promoting manosphere violence. These subreddits were selected as the sample for analysis because they represent the four domains of manosphere ideology: MRM, PUAs, MGTOW, and incels.

I chose to analyze subreddits because the project was intended to examine the constellation of groups that form the manosphere for broader network-wide trends.

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<sup>163</sup> RedditMetrics, "New Subreddits by Month—Reddit History."

Additionally, individual accounts were not analyzed because they are not verified to users and confirming their identity is nearly impossible. Additionally, account data is lost if the account is deleted whereas subreddit activity is archived permanently.

#### D. NETWORK-LEVEL DESCRIPTION

Topographical measurements are critical for analyzing the manosphere network’s resiliency and capacity over time.<sup>164</sup> These measurements provide structural information that can be leveraged when crafting strategies to disrupt the network. The ethnographic research suggested the existence of four main domains and numerous subgroups within the manosphere. To decompose the network into smaller units based on patterns of interactions, two community detection algorithms were included alongside the topographical measurements to gauge the degree to which the network was separated into distinct subgroups.<sup>165</sup> The measurements were grouped by their function into basic descriptors, centralization measurements, interconnectivity measurements, and community detection measures. The following measures were calculated for each network time slice in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Topographical Measures

Topographical Measures				
Base Descriptive Measurements	Centralization Measurements		Interconnectivity Measurements	
Size	Degree Centralization	Betweenness Centralization	Average Degree	Clustering Coefficient

Table 2. Community Detection Measures

Community Detection	
Walktrap Modularity	Louvain Modularity

<sup>164</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, 85.

<sup>165</sup> Everton, “Network Topography, Key Players and Terrorist Networks,” 15–16.

## 1. Base Descriptors

The base descriptor measures present fundamental information about the manosphere's persistence, capacity, and size over time. Network analysts use the term node to describe the units of analysis, and edge to describe the connection between them. The number of nodes and edges make up the overall size of the network. The graph in Figure 5 of manosphere size suggests a consistent growth in both nodes throughout the period of interest. The figure shows two points where the size significantly drops in July 2017 and again in November 2018. The potential causes of these anomalies are explored later, but it is important to note that they do not deter the overall trend of network growth. The large size, close to 60,000 nodes, suggests a shared user base; however, to gain a fuller understanding of the interconnectivity between these subreddits, it is necessary to go beyond base descriptors.

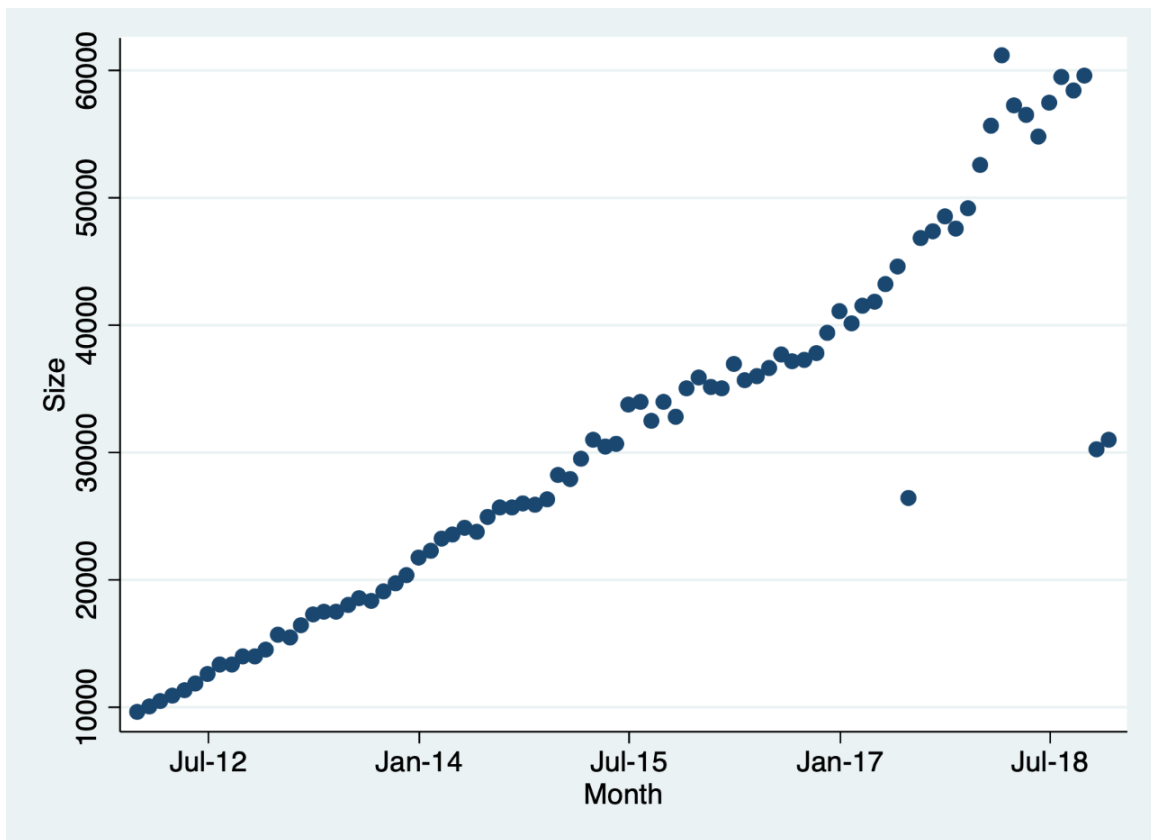


Figure 5. Size Graph

## 2. Centralization Measurements

Networks like the manosphere that are controversial, and at times violent, seek a balance between operational efficiency and visibility to survive.<sup>166</sup> Centralization measurements are a collection of measurements used by social network analysts to identify how distributed or disconnected a network is, which some argue has operational impacts.<sup>167</sup> Networks with high centralization are described as more hierarchical and with higher operational capacity because they are able to mobilize, communicate, move resources, and make decisions more efficiently due to the shorter ties between actors.<sup>168</sup> In more centralized terrorist networks, for example, such a hierarchy may look like a prominent leader with a close group of operatives who can coordinate and carry out an attack. This structure clearly has its benefits, but a hierarchy relies on a critical leader and his vulnerability in being visible to law enforcement. Some research suggests that decentralized networks may be less operationally efficient but more adaptable to changing environments and are less visible because they lack central actors. Between these two poles of network structure—decentralized and centralized—lies an optimal level to achieve both operational efficiency and resilience.<sup>169</sup>

Manosphere network centralization is measured with betweenness and degree centralization. Since centralization scores are estimated from vertex centrality scores (e.g., degree, closeness, betweenness), these can be interpreted in the light of the centrality metric.<sup>170</sup> Betweenness centralization can be helpful in identifying how often a node or set of nodes act as a bridge connecting components within the network. Degree centralization measures how frequently within the network actors have the most ties while others do

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<sup>166</sup> Wayne E. Baker and Robert R. Faulkner, “The Social Organization of Conspiracy: Illegal Networks in the Heavy Electrical Equipment Industry,” *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 6 (1993): 844, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095954>; Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, 91; Krebs, “Mapping Networks of Terrorist Cells,” 49.

<sup>167</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, 91.

<sup>168</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, 91.

<sup>169</sup> Everton, “Network Topography, Key Players and Terrorist Networks,” 15.

<sup>170</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, 92.

not.<sup>171</sup> Networks with high betweenness or degree centralization are considered hierarchical in nature; conversely, graphs with low centralization are often associated with heterarchical network structures.

Figure 6 suggests that both centralization measures began below 50% and consistently trended lower. This trend supports the assertion in Chapter III that the manosphere is a constellation of points online and not a centrally located online space. Decreasing centralization trends may be common for online extremist groups that find themselves regularly de-platformed for controversial or violent content and migrating to new spaces. They also suggest that the network enjoys high resiliency since it does not rely on a single actor or a few key actors. Put differently, despite its growing size, the manosphere's decentralized structure makes it more resilient to detection because it is more dispersed and thus immediately less visible.<sup>172</sup> That said, lower centralization could make it difficult for the manosphere to achieve a unified operational goal. This is not to say that parts of the manosphere are not capable of coordination, as the organizers of Gamergate coordinated between Reddit and 4chan to plan their attack.<sup>173</sup> Roosh V. leveraged his Return of the Kings platform to coordinate a "fate shaming week."<sup>174</sup> Moreover, the various conventions listed in Appendix A all required coordination. Nevertheless, these coordinated efforts did not engage the entire network, or even most of the network, and doing so would be a challenge for a decentralized network like the manosphere.

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<sup>171</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, 93.

<sup>172</sup> Although there are outliers in both 2017 and 2018, the centralization trends remain consistent.

<sup>173</sup> Aghazadeh et al., "GamerGate: A Case Study in Online Harassment," in *Online Harassment*, ed. Jennifer Golbeck, Human-Computer Interaction Series (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 179, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78583-7\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78583-7_8).

<sup>174</sup> Roosh Valizadeh, "Fat Shaming Week," Return of Kings, October 7, 2013, <https://www.returnofkings.com/18782/fat-shaming-week>.

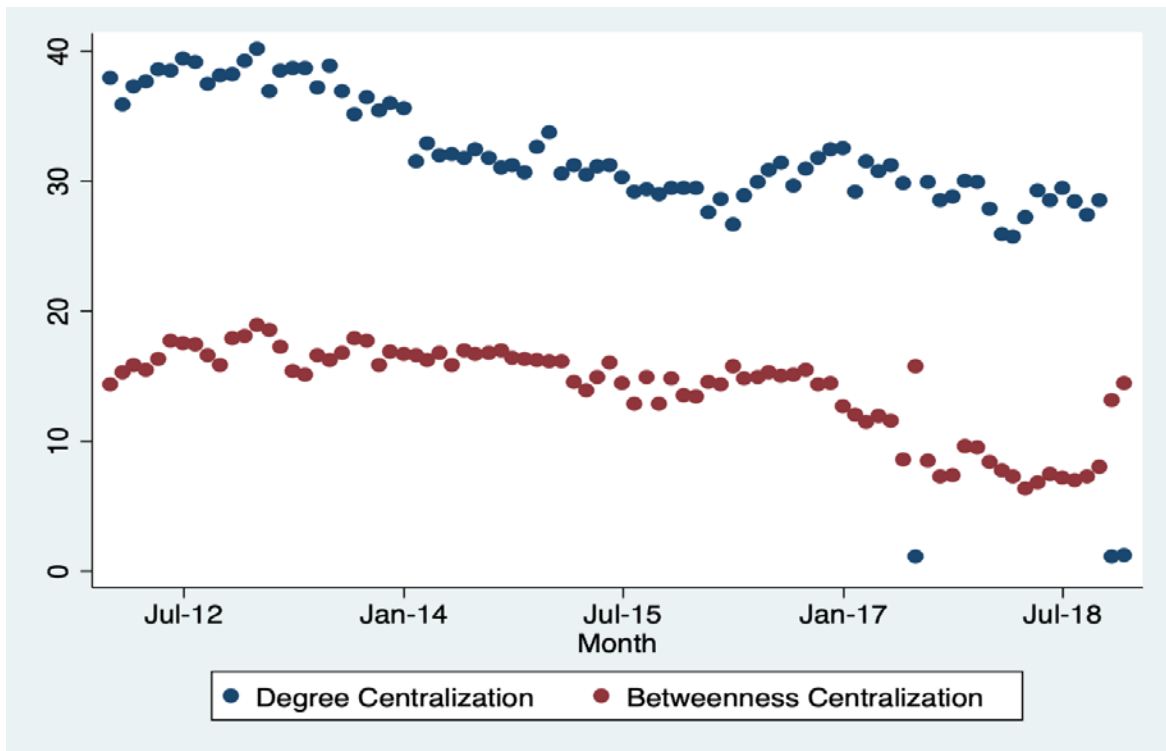


Figure 6. Centralization Graph

### 3. Interconnectedness Measurements

Recruitment and indoctrination are essential for the growth and resilience of any dark network. Typically, it is done along trust lines to avoid detection by law enforcement.<sup>175</sup> Recruitment through strong ties eventually brings actors with weaker ties closer to the network through a phenomenon known as Granovetter’s “forbidden triad.”<sup>176</sup> This theory states that two disconnected actors who share a strong connection with a third actor will themselves connect over time, and thus create triadic closure. The more triadic closure results, the more interconnectedness occurs within the network structure. Figure 7 is a simplified visual of Granovetter’s theory that demonstrates triadic closure between three nodes.

<sup>175</sup> Everton, “Network Topography, Key Players and Terrorist Networks,” 14–15; Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, 96.

<sup>176</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, 97.



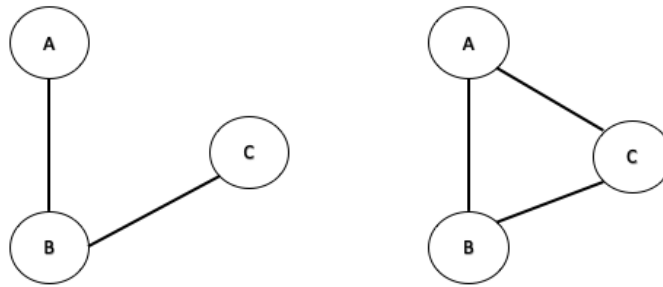


Figure 7. Simplified Granovetter's "Forbidden Triad" Showing Triadic Closure

Interconnectedness was measured using two common metrics: average degree and clustering coefficient. Average degree expresses the overall average number of edges each node has in the network. The clustering coefficient measures the amount of triadic closure across the network. In Figure 8, the manosphere network's clustering coefficient range began at 0.65 and grew to just under 0.8. Average degree in Figure 9 grows from around 1,200 to 9,000. These numbers suggest a moderately high level of interconnectedness occurs within the manosphere, which is typical for dark networks, but may also be influenced by the nature of the platform.<sup>177</sup>

Terrorist networks require a high level of trust to operate covertly, and thus, are often characterized as highly interconnected and grow even more so over time, but this characterization is typically applied to real-world networks.<sup>178</sup> Disconnected virtual networks, like the manosphere, are afforded a higher level of anonymity because of the virtual platforms within which they operate. In other words, the interconnectivity measure is less indicative of a trust network and more indicative of the Reddit algorithms successfully suggesting subreddits to users based on the groups they already follow.

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<sup>177</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, 97.

<sup>178</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, 97.

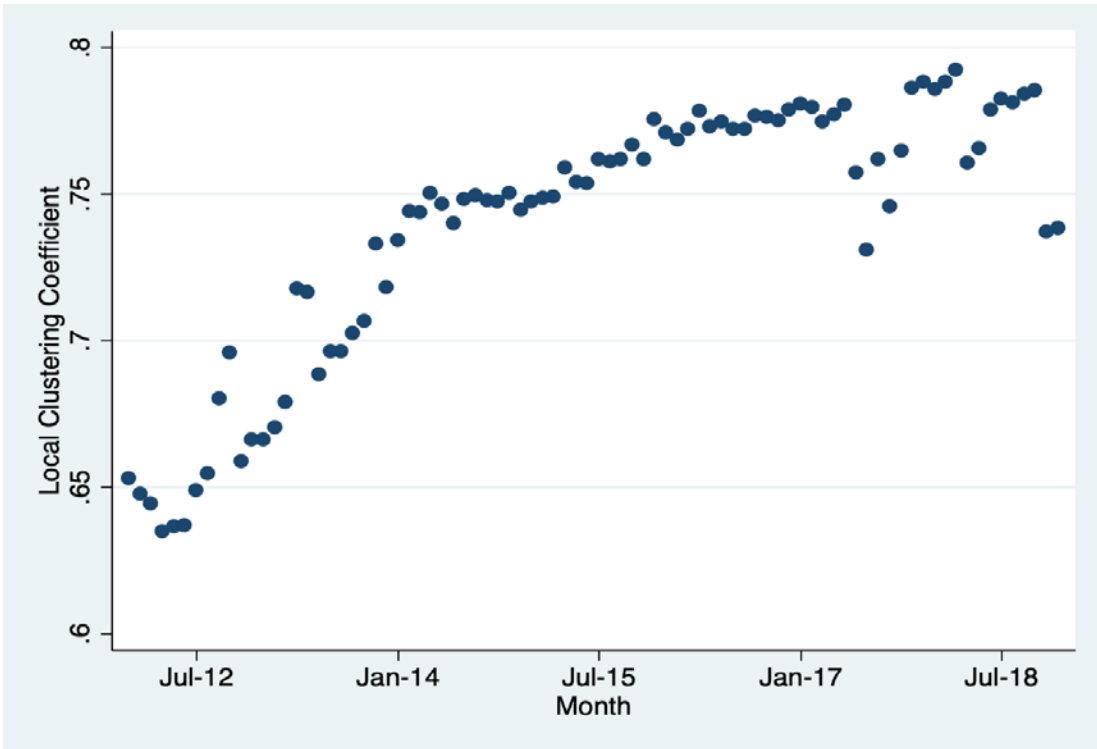


Figure 8. Local Clustering Coefficient Graph

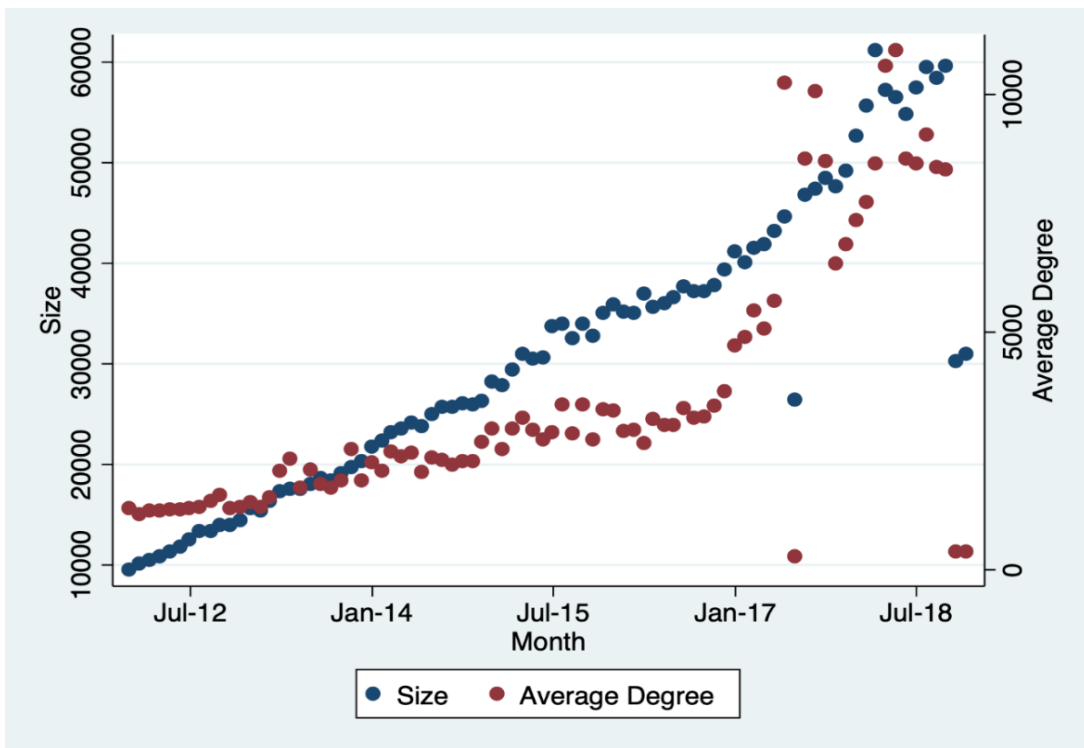


Figure 9. Size and Average Degree Comparative Graph

#### 4. Community Detection

An advantage of SNA in terrorism studies is that it allows for the detection of informal divisions within the network that may not be overtly apparent.<sup>179</sup> Much of the existing manosphere research focuses on cultural and subgroup divisions for the purposes of understanding what appears to be a uniquely motivated terrorist group.<sup>180</sup> Digging into the nuanced ideologies can provide significant insight for homeland security professionals looking to leverage rivalries or alliances between groups, and utilizing SNA may prove even more useful for analyzing the manosphere where groups and members migrate frequently. Analyzing the domains, subgroups, and non-misogynistic cultural influences within the manosphere may also illuminate a pathway of entry and further radicalization.

Two popular community detection algorithms—Walktrap and Louvain—were utilized to measure the network’s modularity, which captures the degree to which the network was separated into distinct subgroups. Figure 10 suggests that the manosphere network was initially divided into various subcommunities based on the patterns of ties. This trend shifts in 2014 and the overall network grows homogenous over time.

This supports the notion that the manosphere is a unified network, rather than a collection of misogynist groups, and it supports the hypothesis of an anti-feminist framework shared between the domains presented in Chapter III. The 2014 shift in modularity seen in Figure 10 appears to coincide with the 2014 shift to violence, which is explored in the linear regression that looks for relationships between the attacks and community detection.

It is hard to imagine the geeky, video gaming, and adolescent expressions of masculinity from some corners of the manosphere having anything in common with the

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<sup>179</sup> Perlinger and Pedahzur, “Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence,” 47.

<sup>180</sup> Lin, “Antifeminism Online”; Mascia, “In the Years since the Isla Vista Shooting”; Ling, “Incels Are Radicalized and Dangerous”; Squirrell, “A Definitive Guide to Incels Part Two”; Roy, “What I Learned as a Woman at a Men’s Rights Conference”; The Red Pill, “A Cassie Jaye Documentary”; Wendling, “The Extreme Misogyny of ‘Pick-up Artist’ Hate”; Sirin Kale, “50 Years of Pickup Artists: Why Is the Toxic Skill Still so in Demand?” *The Guardian*, sec. Life and style, November 5, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/nov/05/pickup-artists-teaching-men-approach-women-industry-street-harassment>.

jock-like hyper-aggressive masculinity of other groups, but these social identities may be fading away over time and unifying around shared anti-feminist sentiment.

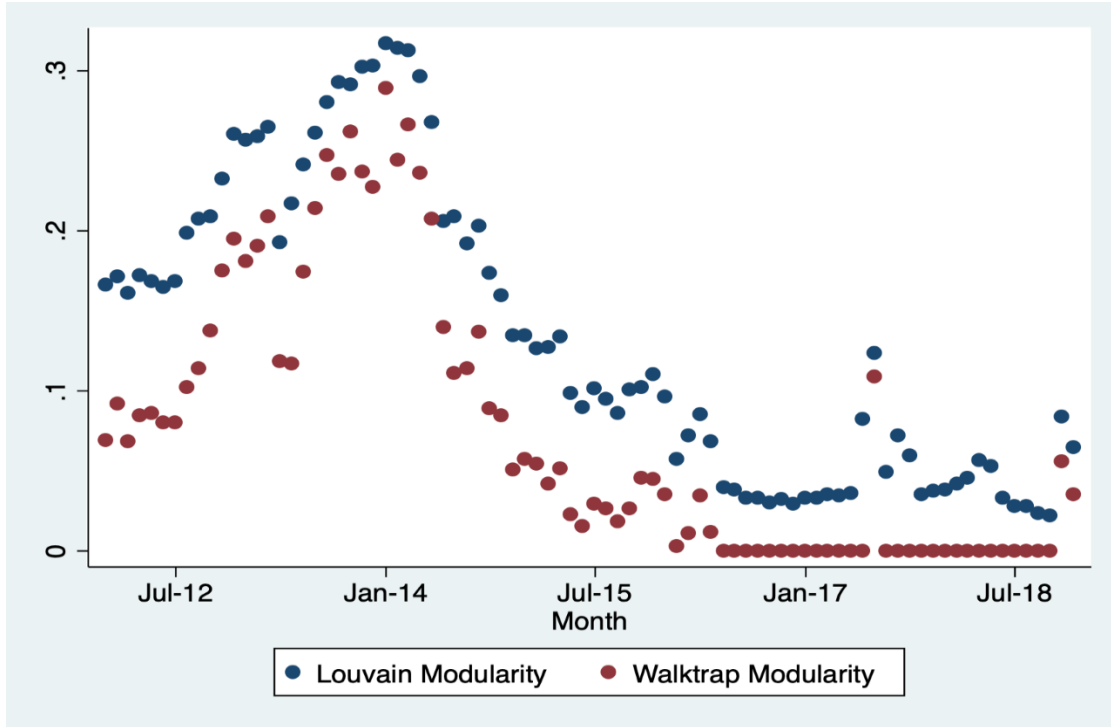


Figure 10. Community Detection Graph

## E. LINEAR REGRESSION

Figures 5 through 10 presented the topographical and community detection measures. The next step is to move beyond descriptive statistics and examine the effects of identity affirming real-world events against network structure outcome variables (e.g., size, clustering coefficient, to name a few). In this thesis, the outcome variables analyzed are continuous measurements; thus, an ordinary least squares (OLS) model was utilized to regress these measurements on a series of events believed to account for the variation.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Sean F. Everton and Dan Cunningham, “Terrorist Network Adaptation to a Changing Environment,” in *Crime and Networks*, ed. Carlo Morselli (New York: Routledge, n.d.), 297.

Identity affirming exogenous factors (see Appendix A) are identified in an attempt to explain variances in the outcome variables over time.<sup>182</sup> The first set of explanatory variables are identity affirming events carried out or celebrated by members of the manosphere that include: (1) mass murder attacks committed by individuals claiming to be part of a group in the manosphere or received praise by members of the manosphere, (2) harassment campaigns coordinated by groups within the manosphere, and (3) conferences coordinated by groups within the manosphere. The second set of explanatory variables is included to explore influence of the Trump campaign for President (from July 2015 to October 2016) and the time following his election as President (November 2016 to December 2018). The final explanatory variable is included to indicate a quarantine placed on a popular incel subreddit by Reddit administrators.

Finally, independent variables that capture the passage of time are included to control the effect time had on the dependent variables. A *month* variable is included to capture the initial effects of time and a *month squared* variable is included to account for the opposite effects of time.<sup>183</sup>

Tables 3 and 4 contain *full* and *best* results for each model. The full column presents the results from an OLS regression with all explanatory variables included, regardless of statistical significance, while the best model focuses on a few statistically significant explanatory variables. The discussion following the tables focuses on the best-fit results for each model.

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<sup>182</sup> Everton and Cunningham, 297.

<sup>183</sup> Everton and Cunningham, 297–98.

Table 3. Linear Regression for Basic Detectors and Interconnectedness

Independent Variable	Basic Detector		Interconnectedness			
	Size		Average Degree		Clustering Coefficient	
	Full	Best	Full	Best	Full	Best
Month	19.89***	19.35***	2.22***	1.49***	.0094***	.0088***
Conventions	-340.22		847.79	955.11**	-1.4845*	
Post-conventions	-3260.94***	-3282.38**	-661.57		-1.4879*	
Harassments	-224.75		-451.40		1.18690*	.8703+
Attacks	1710.34	1983.91	892.96	951.99	-.1294	
Incels Quarantine	-24751.56***	-23914.87***	-7328.08***	-7249.71***	-6.9159***	-7.0005***
Trump Candidacy	-2016.96		-930.10*		-1.8251*	-1.5622*
Trump Presidency	-528.61		1812.22*	2979.06***	-7.0690***	-6.6074***
Constant	-370145.70***	-360056.60***	-41568.72***	-27503.89***	-113.9815***	-103.5842***
N	84	84	84	84	84	84
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.9529	.9527	.8234	.7976	.8832	.8728
AIC	1595.636	1592.425	1438.343	1438.584	317.7508	322.2347
BIC	1,617.514	1604.579	1460.221	1453.169	339.6281	366.8196

+ < 0.10, \* < 0.05, \*\* < 0.01, \*\*\* < 0.001

## F. RESULTS

Tables 3 and 4 present the estimated coefficients in the linear regression models that regress the topographical and community detection, measures against the exogenous variables. In this analysis, I chose to concentrate on overall trends and statistically significant regressors.

The first significant findings are the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> scores that regress for each of the topographical and modularity measurements. Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> scores capture the amount of variation in the dependent variable accounted for by the independent variables and range

between 0–1. The scores range from 0.5880 to 0.9529, suggesting that the models sufficiently explain the variability in the dependent variables.<sup>184</sup> The high-adjusted R<sup>2</sup> scores coupled with the significant P values in the size and average degree models suggest a strong model fit. The lowest adjusted R<sup>2</sup> scores belong to the Walktrap measurements, but again are still high enough to be considered a good fit.

Table 4. Linear Regression for Centralization and Modularity

Independent Variable	Centralization				Modularity			
	Degree		Betweenness		Louvain		Walktrap	
	Full	Best	Full	Best	Full	Best	Full	Best
Month	-.0058***	-.0063***	-.00002**	-.00002**	.1611*	.1539*	0.16*	0.15*
Month <sup>2</sup>					-4.14e*	-3.95e*	-.000*	-.000*
Conventions	.8420		-.00286		.0487		-.44	
Post-conventions	-3.1116*		.00519		.0447		-.37	
Harassments	-.4760		.00501		-.2820		-.9	
Attacks	.8663		-.01053		1.5662		-.17	
Incel Quarantine	-23.2835***	-24.4730***	.04798***	.05222***	8.7274*	8.3089*	8.65+	8.75+
Trump Candidacy	-.4507***		-.00141		-10.7510***	-10.8042***	-10.55***	-10.33***
Trump Presidency	1.4647	2.2667	-.04159***	-.04101***	-6.509+	-6.7214+	-5.99	-5.87
Constant	148.7876***	158.8296***	.52877***	.55469***	-1546.887**	-1475.982*	-1550.112*	-1,471.998*
N	84	84	84	84	84	84	84	84
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.7483	.7435	.7911	.7927	.7527	.7637	.5880	.6071
AIC	457.5768	454.5626	-450.8455	-456.0898	504.758	497.3852	534.0789	526.5078
BIC	479.4542	464.2859	-428.9682	-446.3665	529.0662	511.9701	558.3871	541.0927

Note: Month<sup>2</sup> variable included in modularity models to account for the curvilinear shape of modularity scores

+ < 0.10, \* < 0.05, \*\* < 0.01, \*\*\* < 0.001

<sup>184</sup> Everton and Cunningham, 302.

The independent variable, month, is statistically significant and consistent with Figure 5, which suggested that the simple passage of time contributed to the manosphere's growth on Reddit.<sup>185</sup> The negative incel quarantine coefficient is statistically significant in all models, indicating that the quarantine had a negative impact on size, interconnectivity, and degree centralization. The negative shift suggests that the quarantine successfully slowing down the growth and connectivity of the manosphere for that time. Interestingly, the quarantine positively affected betweenness centralization and network modularity, which could indicate that when a subreddit (e.g., r/Braincels) was quarantined, an important unifying conduit between manosphere subreddits was removed, which in turn created more social division. Although the quarantine does not appear to have derailed the overall trends seen in the topographical and community detection measurements, it did create the outliers (November 2018) captured by the graphs in the previous section. The widely felt significance of the incel quarantine suggests that non-human factors like quarantines and bans, algorithms, and overall platform growth not included in this thesis, may play a greater role in structural trends. It also could suggest that identity-challenging events have different effects than identity-affirming ones.

Real-world events did not have consistent statistical significance the same way that time and the quarantine did. Despite the change in direction of the modularity scores seen in Figure 10 (which coincides with when the manosphere network became violent and several high-profile events including the Isla Vista attack, Gamergate, and the iCloud photo leak known as, The Fappening), the regression results indicate that no statistically significant association exists between harassment or attack events and the dependent variables. The lack of statistical impact is interesting and again supports the previous assertion that perhaps non-human factors play a larger role in network changes. Harassments did have a positive effect on the clustering coefficient, which could potentially mean the mob-like harassment style of the manosphere promotes triadic closure. The results indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between size and the month following a convention, possibly indicating that conventions help attract

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<sup>185</sup> "New Subreddits by Date—Reddit History," metrics for reddit, accessed September 6, 2020, <https://frontpagemetrics.com/history>.



new followers. The positive and statistically significant association between attacks and both size and average degree might be because attacks receive considerable news coverage, which could draw people to view the related subreddits voyeuristically or legitimately.

Two real-world events that did have consistent statistically significant effects on the dependent variables were the period of time that Trump was a candidate and after he won the election. These had a negatively effect on centralization, modularity, average degree, and the clustering coefficient, suggesting that while “Trumpism” may have caused more unity across the manosphere, it also led to lower levels of triadic closure and centralization. The time since Trump was elected did have a positive effect on average degree, indicating that it contributed to an increase in ties beginning in November of 2016.

## G. CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a substantial analysis of the manosphere network leveraging SNA and inferential statistics. These statistics provided structural insights into the research questions in this thesis. The results from this chapter and the previous one can help address the hypotheses posed in Chapter I.

**Hypothesis 1:** Since Reddit has steadily increased in content, subreddits, and traffic over time, it can be assumed that the manosphere network has similarly increased in size between the years 2012–2018.

Figure 5 provides evidence to support this hypothesis. Consistent size growth occurred between 2012–2018, and the linear regression showed a statistically significant relationship between time and network size.

**Hypothesis 2:** As Reddit usership increases, channels of similar ideology were suggested, and users expanded network boundaries and patronage on the platform, as such, one would expect this activity to have a significant positive effect on the overall network interconnectedness, and an inverse effect on network centralization between 2012–2018.

Both interconnectivity measures, average degree, and clustering coefficient provide support for this hypothesis. The analysis indicates that overtime the network saw less clustering. Conversely, the centralization decreased over time.

**Hypothesis 3:** Network interconnectedness, centralization, the number of distinct subcommunities, and size increase following a pro-social event.<sup>186</sup>

Three pro-social event variables were included into the regression analysis: conventions, Trump's candidacy for President, and the period after Trump won the election. This third hypothesis assumed that pro-social events could cause some in the network to meet, have like-minded conversations, and would be introduced to new groups within the manosphere that further polarized in their thinking. The conventions had no statistically significant effect on size, the clustering coefficient, centralization, or the modularity measures, but it did have a positive and statistically significant effect on average degree. The post-convention variable had a negative and statistically significant negative effect on size, suggesting that conventions did not have the anticipated effect on the network as hypothesized. The results of the other two pro-social events were mixed. The period following Trump's election had a positive and statistically significant effect on average degree and betweenness centralization. However, it and Trump's candidacy had a statistically significant negative impact on the network's clustering coefficient and both modularity measures. Aside from the effects on the network's average degree, this hypothesis is not supported by these findings.

**Hypothesis 4:** Harassment campaigns must leverage the large number of users in the network to get the mob-like feel of a hate campaign. Based on the need to leverage existing ties during harassment events, there should be a significant effect on the network's interconnectedness during these events.<sup>187</sup>

The evidence supporting this hypothesis is mixed. On the one hand, the statistically significant positive relationship between harassment campaigns and clustering coefficient provides support. On the other hand, the relationship between average degree and this regressor variable was not found to be statistically significant.

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<sup>186</sup> Perliger and Pedahzur, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence," 49.

<sup>187</sup> Krebs, "Mapping Networks of Terrorist Cells," 49; Perliger and Pedahzur, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence," 49.

**Hypothesis 5:** The second type of anti-social events included mass murder attacks. These are committed by single individuals, who may have a small trust network around them that encourages their planned actions, commit these attacks.<sup>188</sup> These trust networks may exist across a few related subreddits that are related to more extreme or violent corners of the manosphere. Thus, a relationship can possibly exist between interconnectedness and centralization measures following violent attacks.

Attacks had a positive and statistically significant effect on size and average degree. While these results lend support the hypothesis, the lack of a statistically significant effect between harassment campaigns and both the clustering coefficient and centralization measures do not.

**Hypothesis 6:** Despite having nuanced social identities within manosphere subgroup ideologies, a universal ideology shared by the network exists.

The anti-feminist framework in Chapter III presents evidence supporting this claim and is based on relevant literature and journalistic coverage of the manosphere, as well as manosphere websites, blogs, and message boards. This qualitative claim is then supported by the community detection metrics which trend down over time; suggesting a less clearly partitioned network.

This chapter builds upon the existing ethnographic research by providing a structural network picture of the manosphere. The results lend support for some of the hypotheses posed in Chapter I and provide novel insight into manosphere network changes between 2012–2018. The next chapter discusses those two findings further and makes suggestions for future research.

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<sup>188</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “I Laugh at the Death of Normies.”

## V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SNA of the manosphere provided some interesting findings worth further discussion and research.

### A. DISCUSSION 1: BLENDING IDEOLOGIES

First, the negative relationship between the Trump candidacy and presidency and the community detection results are an interesting finding. It is an overstatement and inaccurate to say that Trumpism unified the network, but it does suggest that it helped and thus further legitimizes the need to study the network as a whole. The distinct social identities of the manosphere appear to be fading and potentially connecting to a greater “American male crisis” that could reverberate well outside the manosphere.<sup>189</sup>

Michael Kimmel’s book, *Angry White Men*, explores American male identity and aggravated entitlement at a loss of previously held societal privileges.<sup>190</sup> “A sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful. You feel yourself to be the heir to a great promise, the American Dream, which has turned into an impossible fantasy for the very people who were supposed to inherit it.”<sup>191</sup> In his book, Kimmel interviews men in extremist movements around the world and found their feelings of being socially, politically, and economically ignored were intertwined with their masculinity.<sup>192</sup> It is no surprise that the anti-feminist framework from Chapter III shares many similarities with what Kimmel discusses, such an overwhelming sense of societal crisis and an orientation

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<sup>189</sup> Hunter M. Boehme and Deena A. Scott Isom, “Alt-White? A Gendered Look at ‘Victim’ Ideology and the Alt-Right,” *Victims and Offenders* 15, no. 2 (October 24, 2019): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2019.1679308>; “Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism, *When Women Are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy*, ADL Center on Extremism Report (New York: Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism, 2018), 14–15.

<sup>190</sup> Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, xii.

<sup>191</sup> Kimmel, xii; Boehme and Isom, “Alt-White? A Gendered Look at ‘Victim’ Ideology and the Alt-Right,” 5.

<sup>192</sup> J. Oliver Conroy, “‘Angry White Men’: The Sociologist Who Studied Trump’s Base before Trump,” *The Guardian*, February 27, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/27/michael-kimmel-masculinity-far-right-angry-white-men>.

to the *other*, in this case women, as the cause. Even the red pill concept is not exclusive to the manosphere, but is shared by other extremist groups, such as the alt-right.<sup>193</sup>

He republished his book in 2017 in light of Trump's election, in which he argues that Trump provides a leader to a variety of existing extremist groups, including those of the men's rights movement.<sup>194</sup> This is not to say that Trumpism created the amalgam of hate-based ideologies that exist online, but rather, the symbolism of bringing back an idealized America of the past, or to "Make America Great Again," emboldened these disparate ideologies of aggravated entitlement out of seclusion and obscurity.

## **B. DISCUSSION 2: NON-HUMAN INFLUENCE ON THE MANOSPHERE**

A second finding is the non-human influence over the manosphere network, which refers to the time and incel quarantine variables that are statistically significant to each measurement in the linear regression. The manosphere consistently grew over time, except when confronted with a quarantine, which was an algorithmic change that did exactly as it was designed to do, minimize traffic. While it did not halt the overall growth, interconnectivity, and centralization trends, it did have an impact worth exploring. The positive effect of time on size and interconnectivity is also worth exploring further, as this occurred despite real-world influences.

A platform like Reddit that advertises itself as, "The frontpage of the internet" may seem like a free space of minimal oversight where user generated content gets equal visibility, but the reality is much different. As mentioned previously, subreddits are virtual communities that allow members to post, comment, and vote on content, but the way members become acquainted with these spaces is not as simple. Platform algorithms act as gatekeepers of information by suggesting related content and shielding unrelated content to users.<sup>195</sup> In this case, it means that users who search for something related to one of the

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<sup>193</sup> J. B. Mountford, "Topic Modeling the Red Pill," *Social Sciences; Basel* 7, no. 3 (2018): 1, 42, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.3390/socsci7030042>.

<sup>194</sup> Conroy, "'Angry White Men.'"

<sup>195</sup> Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and the Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (March 2017): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815608807>.

many cultural touchpoints in the manosphere, some of which are not explicitly misogynist, may find their suggested subreddits influenced by these algorithms.

Reddit platform algorithms help people find each other, find content, and keep their attention. There are personal benefits to aggregating algorithms like having a curated online experience tailored to individual interests and helping individuals sort through the entangled mass of content online, and benefits to the large companies that use them to grow their platforms. Nevertheless, the concerns of algorithms censoring information based the demographic and behavioral analysis of users is problematic. A person's virtual presence including their credit score, location, search history, political affiliation, etc., may relegate them to one online environment, like the manosphere, which contradicts the perception of a free virtual existence. Reddit may employ these algorithms to grow and sustain the platform writ large, but they are also increasing manosphere network resilience simultaneously.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The major findings from this research indicate that the informal social barriers of the network are disappearing, and that platform algorithms are helping network resilience. As mentioned in Chapter III, existing literature on the manosphere separated its subgroups into four major ideological domains: the men's rights movement, pickup artists, men going their own way, and incels.<sup>196</sup> This research suggests that previously rigid divisions between these domains may be blurring and merging, and that moderate and extreme subgroups could be congregating more on shared spaces than before. With subreddits becoming less "incel" or "pickup artist" specific, it makes developing anti-terrorism strategies for incel groups more challenging and potentially irrelevant. Being subgroup and ideologically specific may put blinders on analysts or investigators who are limiting themselves by the cultural or linguistic markers of one group, when the virtual signals of violent behavior may not be as simple as claiming to be an incel or posting an incel meme. The actual boundaries of anti-feminist ideology are much larger than incels, and viewing

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<sup>196</sup> Manoel Horta Ribeiro et al., "From Pick-Up Artists to Incels: A Data-Driven Sketch of the Manosphere," ArXiv:2001.07600 [Cs], 2, January 21, 2020, <http://arxiv.org/abs/2001.07600>.

the whole network could be of greater value since there is no way to definitively place someone in any of the subgroups.

The first recommendation from this research is to use the anti-feminist framework, rather than subgroup signals, to identify cultural boundaries of this ideology. While some linguistic and meme signals may seem incel specific, the results presented here indicate that these may be false markers and could now represent a variety of blended manosphere ideologies due to how homogenous the network has become. Being incel specific does not benefit an investigation when individual membership is not well defined, and anti-feminism is the stated motivation rather than any specific group goal.

A second recommendation questions the call for anti-terrorism strategies against this ideology. This is not to say that this network does not deserve attention from the homeland security community, but rather that anti-terrorism strategies may not be the best approach since the manosphere may be sustained by variables outside of itself or its control. Since algorithms pose more of risk or benefit to network resilience, a better strategy may be to either regulate existing algorithms that proliferate extremism or create counter extremism algorithms to work against them. Both options will receive push back from private companies that have been the sole algorithmic creators and regulators, but it is also important that they not continue to benefit from the growth of extremism on their platforms. It is also the best way to protect people from being nudged into these networks who otherwise would not have been, or to further radicalize individuals who may be viewing more moderate men's rights content.

The manosphere is a growing network that deserves attention from the homeland security community as an emerging threat, which if unchecked, may continue to escalate. An innovative homeland security strategy aimed at social media algorithms and the companies that benefit from the growth of extremist groups on their platforms may be required, rather than continuing to target specific groups.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis built on existing ethnographic manosphere literature by using SNA to observe the broader manosphere structure as it exists on Reddit. The research and its findings hope to provide new insight into the manosphere by examining its broader structure and filling an academic gap in quantitative research on the network. SNA was used to complete the research of the manosphere network between 2012 and 2018, as were identity-affirming events as variables to test changes in the network over time. The two research questions answered in this thesis were, (1) what effect do identity affirming real-world events have on the manosphere network?, and (2) how has the manosphere network structure changed between 2012 and 2018?

The effects of identity affirming real-world events are mixed, as explored thoroughly in the previous two chapters. The identity-affirming events with the most consistent significance were not manosphere specific. They can however indicate that the manosphere is part of a greater movement sharing in anti-feminist sentiment.

The manosphere significantly changed between 2012 and 2018. It appeared to grow steadily in size and interconnectivity, it became more decentralized, and the informal social boundaries faded away. It would be difficult to point to any one, or series of identity-affirming events that caused these changes, but future research on non-human variables and outside networks connecting with the manosphere could prove to be insightful.



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## APPENDIX A. LIST OF EVENTS

Events	Attacker	Place	Date	Type
Van Attack	Alek Minassian	Toronto, CA	04/23/2018	Van Attack
Yoga Attack	Scott Beierle	Tallahassee, FL	11/2/18	Mass Shooting
Stoneman Douglas High School	Nikolas Cruz	Parkland, FL	2/14/18	Mass Shooting
Umpqua Community College	Chris Harper Mercer	Roseburg, OR	10/1/15	Mass Shooting
Isla Vista Attack	Elliot Rodger	Isla Vista, CA	5/ 23 2014	Mass Shooting
Operation Harpoon or Project Harpoon	ThinnerBeauty	Online-Reddit, FB, Instagram, Twitter	8/1/15	Coordinated Harassment, Hate Speech, Non-consensual images, Online sexual harassment

<b>Events</b>	<b>Attacker</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>
Gamergate	Eron Gjoni	Online-4chan, Reddit, Twitter	8/1/14	Coordinated Harassment, Doxxing, Hacking, Revenge porn, Death threats, Hate speech, Online sexual harassment
iCloud Photo Leaks; “The Fappening 3”	Ryan Collins, Edward Majerczyk, Emilio Herrera, and George Garofano	Online-Reddit	9/26/14	Hacking, Online sexual harassment, Non-consensual images
iCloud Photo Leaks; “The Fappening2”	Ryan Collins, Edward Majerczyk, Emilio Herrera, and George Garofano	Online-Reddit	9/20/14	Hacking, Online sexual harassment, Non-consensual images
iCloud Photo Leaks; “The Fappening”	Ryan Collins, Edward Majerczyk, Emilio Herrera, and George Garofano	Online-Reddit	8/31/14	Hacking, Online sexual harassment, Non-consensual images
Register Her	Paul Elam, MRA	Website	2011–2014	Doxxing

<b>Events</b>	<b>Attacker</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>
Occidental College	MRA	Online-college website	12/1/13	Coordinated harassment, Message bombing
Fat Shaming Week	PUA, Return of Kings, Roosh V.	Online	10/1–14/2013	Coordinated harassment, Hate speech, Non-consensual images, Online sexual harassment
21 Convention	NA	Warsaw, Poland	10/24–27/2019	Convention
21 Convention	NA		10/11–14/2018	Convention
21 Convention	NA		09/28–10/1/2017	Convention
21 Convention	NA		10/20–23/2016	Convention

<b>Events</b>	<b>Attacker</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>
21 Convention	NA		10/24–26/2014	Convention
International Conference on Men’s Issues	NA		08/16–18/2019	Convention
International Conference on Men’s Issues	NA	London, England	07/20–22/2018	Convention
International Conference on Men’s Issues	NA	Australia	06/09–11/2017	Convention
International Conference on Men’s Issues	NA	London, England	0708–10/2016	Convention
International Conference on Men’s Issues	NA	Detroit, MI	06/26–28/2014	Convention
Trump Candidacy	NA	Online	2015-2016	Political Event
Trump Presidency	NA	Real world	2016-2018	Political Event

<b>Events</b>	<b>Attacker</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>
Incel Quarantine	NA	Online	November 2018	Subreddit Quarantine

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## APPENDIX B. KEY TERMS

Network size: refers to the number of subreddits in the network

Betweenness centralization: Identifies how often a node or set of nodes act are located in central brokerage positions within the overall network.

Degree centralization: A centralization measurement that detects how frequently within the network actors have multiple ties while others do not.<sup>197</sup>

Average degree: An interconnectivity measurement that expresses the average number of edges each node has in the network.

Clustering coefficient: An interconnectivity measurement that measures the amount of triadic closure across the network.

Community detection algorithms: These measurements detect informal social boundaries within a network.

Dark Networks: Covert criminal, terrorist, or extremist group networks.

Involuntary Celibate (incel): A fringe nihilistic domain of the manosphere that blames bad genetics, feminism, and society for denying them sex with women. This group has been associated with high-profile violent attacks beginning in 2014.

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW): A separatist domain of the manosphere that seeks to recuse women from their lives socially and economically.

Men's Rights Activist (MRA): An activist who is part of the Men's Rights Movement.

Men's Rights Movement (MRM): A movement that wants to create political, social, and economic change based on an assumption that men are the victims of systemic oppression.

Pickup Artists (PUAs): A domain of the manosphere that trades and sells strategies for coercing women to have sex.

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<sup>197</sup> Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, 93.



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