Typology of Hate: Hegemonic Sign Systems in Hate Speech

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Abstract: *If culture fossilizes in language, what does language say about us? Typology of Hate: Hegemonic Sign Systems in Hate Speech* examines how culturally semiotic signs build the themes of gendered hate speech in the contemporary hybrid media environment. More than ever, the role taken in discourse previously governed by "intellectuals" is shifting, and ideas of significance are circulated, debated and constructed online. Hate speech occupying space in mainstream culture is seen as a risk that modern technology enables in a completely new way. Online hate speech forms a complicated network of multimodal interactions, which makes defining it – and consequently, managing it – more challenging. Definitions of hate speech cannot focus on individual utterances or speech acts alone but must be looked against a wider socio-cultural impact by studying the meanings of signs and significations constructed in language against their cultural backdrop.

This Master's Thesis attempts to define hate speech by recognizing some of the thematic tropes repeated in its different variations, particularly its gendered form, which are semiotized online. Through an observation in digital ethnography and methods of discourse analysis, the qualitative data of the research was collected from r/TheRedPill on Reddit in March 2022. Data shows that the case study's discourse is largely built on three thematic tropes defining gendered hate speech. Heteropatriarchal constructions of gender, systemic devaluation and regulation of femininity, and pseudoscientific beliefs are at the core of the group's hateful discourse. This thesis has recognized dominant patterns through examples of gendered hate speech in radicalized language in the case study of the Red Pill community, and further paves way towards a practical index manual on hate speech reporting and recognition.

1. Introduction

Language preserves culture: in it, fossilized evidence of the histories of cultures, societies and individuals are carried to this day. Looking at which ideas or opinions are highlighted, and which are rejected, can be taken as suggestive to what that particular community holds as valuable and attainable at a given time. Roots of "semiotic awareness" go back to Augustine (c. 397 AD), John Locke (1960), Poinsot's *Tractatus de Signis* where he described Aristotelian *philosophiae naturalis*, and C. S. Pierce (b. 1967) (Idris, n.d.). In 1892, Max Nordau, perhaps best known for his work as a physician and an author, exerted his concern over the influence of literature and arts "on the masses", particularly in the light of the emerging, new, threatening cultural form: the Novel.

> "Books and works of art exercise a powerful suggestion on the masses. It is from these productions that an age derives its ideals of morality and beauty. If they are absurd and anti-social, they exert a disturbing and corrupting influence on the views of a whole generation. […] The verbose rhetorician exposes with more or less grace, or cleverness, the subjective impressions received from the works he criticizes, but is incapable of judging if these works are the productions of a shattered brain, and also the nature of the mental disturbance expressing itself by them."

(Nordau, 7).

A similarly threatening cultural force has emerged, and the internet now functions as the fertile ground for discussion where those previously considered as "intellectuals" reigned through a new type of epistemic authority (see e.g. Harambam and Aupers, 2014). The intertwining of "old" and "new" media logics forming the hybrid media environment (see e.g.

Toivanen, Nelimarkka and Valaskivi 2021 or Sumiala et al. 2018) have enabled hate speech to thrive on new digital platforms like never before. Circulating ideas prominent in hate speech could signify new-found importance they might take in a society undergoing a gradual or exponential change. While restricted speech is not a new idea, even today, ideas of pure and impure speech are persistent, and speech is actively limited, sometimes to the extent of censorship. Hate speech, however, functions on the basis of violent ideologies towards those it targets, and it cannot be justified through arguments of free speech. A collective responsibility lies in plucking out hateful content from online platforms. The aim of this master's thesis is to provide a framework for evaluating hate speech through semiotic analysis. Here, cultural semiotics will function as a theoretical basis in newly built digital spaces.

At the focus of this thesis is The Red Pill community, which is founded upon principles of misogyny, and how it functions in the context of Reddit. Reddit, as the self-identified "front page of the Internet" is known to foster hateful groups next to other types of content. The group actively reports how modern women have been brainwashed by feminism and control men to their advantage, how feminism is harmful to men and that men are its victims, and that men are entitled to sex and that women should therefore be sexually available to them. Reddit, as the self-identified "front page of the Internet", has been known to foster hateful communities before. Each subreddit functions on macroscale as a smaller community focused on a specific theme on the platform. Forum-like in its functions, registered users can publish posts, comment, and build their own profiles. Most of its content is in the shape of longform text posts, supplemented by the multimodality of photos, videos and gifs. Most popular content is displayed in **r/all** on Reddit's default home page. Users can "subscribe" to specific subreddits, and all subreddits to which a "redditor" (the user) is

subscribed to form their own customized home page. Reddit also relies on filtering content collaboratively through "voting". Porter (2020) describes the online landscape and contemporary online cultures as a "Wild West realm of large-scale social media and massive multiplayer online games, where the membership boundaries are not firmly set as with those older digital communities." Each subreddit is governed internally, which may be a problematic solution as it suggests belonging to the particular in-group the subreddit focuses on. Volunteered moderators work as "subject matter experts" (Badalich, 33) where "strong sense of community identity drives moderators to remain engaged and build specific norms and cultures within a subreddit" (34). Each subreddit also has its own set of rules and guidelines.

Often, radicalized ideas represented by online communities are taken as being limited to these carefully engineered digital spaces, hidden behind cultural texts online. However, is it possible that they will slowly seep through to other spaces as well, and direct us towards new formations of cultural change, slowly leading towards new cultural deposits of power and hegemony? Incidents of radicalization and masculinist violence have already proven this in effect. Perpetrators such as Jake Davison ("Plymouth shooting"), Elliot Rodger ("Isla Vista killings"), Alek Minassian ("Toronto van attack") are revered in these communities for their crimes of misogynistic terrorism, and their ideas remain well-circulated in the online discussions. Minassian's manifesto has remained a staple in the community's reading list, and it is regularly referenced in discourse. Although their crimes deserve no more space in this text, these violent bursts of desperate acts for the sake of ideology have brought new attention and interest to the formation and functioning of misogynistic groups online.

The main intention of this thesis is to recognize dominant patterns through examples of gendered hate speech in radicalized language in the case study of the Red Pill community and pave the way the towards a practical index manual on the recognition and reporting of hate speech. This will be done by recognizing dominant thematic tropes through discourse analysis and analyzing them through a methodological framework in cultural semiotics (from the Greek *semeion*, 'sign'). Symbols, and their consequent signs, can function as vehicles for hostility and adversary ideas, and today they are circulated in unprecedented speed. Taking a closer look at the discursive constructions of semiotic signs in hate speech, representing hegemonic formations of the core beliefs of these subgroups of culture, may aid in the recognition and prevention of further forms of radicalization in these online contexts.

The following chapters of the thesis will first locate the concept of "hate speech" within its appropriate legal and cultural contexts, by looking at it in terms of legal aspects and performative speech acts. Secondly, the theoretical foundation from cultural semiotics is laid out, and some considerations regarding a unified typology suitable for analyzing hate speech in multimodal media environments are suggested. Thirdly, ideology as the driving force in hegemonic formations is recognized in structures of power that guide processes of signification in different cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the following research questions focus on the preliminary tropes of "femininity" and "womanhood" in categorizing data:

1. What kind of culturally signified ideas of femininity and womanhood arise from the Red Pill discourse? Are they showing hegemonic features?

2. How do the semiotic signs that build the three thematic tropes structure misogynistic hate speech, and what considerations for unified typologies of hate speech in online contexts can be determined?

Question 1. was later changed into "discursive constructions of gender", as discussions surrounding masculinity proved to be interrelated.

2. Theoretical Framework

"If we are formed in language", Judith Butler writes, "then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by its prior power" (Butler 1997, 2). The problem of injurious speech, she continues, is to recognize "which words wound, which representations offend" (ibid., 2). Hate speech deceives with its elusiveness: its boundaries are hard to define, and what is offensive to one individual may not be offensive to another. It does not consist of mere speech acts and utterances alone, but forms a complicated web of multimodal actions, particularly in the rapidly developing hybrid media environment.

Hate speech is connected to positions of power: individuals are often targets of hate as representatives of as "certain ascriptive characteristics" (Brown 2015 in Di Rosa, 108), such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and age. Di Rosa (2019) discusses hate speech in relation to performativity and possible legislation within human rights law. Di Rosa recognizes the position of hate speech within a larger debate on freedom of speech and the need to analyze the philosophical issues underlying freedom of expression, followed by its placement in the eyes of law. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) provides legal definitions of hate speech, and prohibits "any advocacy of *national, racial and religious hatred* which constitutes *incitement to*

discrimination, hostility or violence" (Art 20.2, my italics). Di Rosa underlines, that "the Covenant makes it mandatory for Member States to prohibit hate speech not only in public but also in private" (106). Interestingly, the "recommendation" by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers (1997) on hate speech defines it as follows: "Hate speech covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance." Di Rosa points out the inclusive formula of "*or other forms*" at the end of this definition, which inevitably allows the definition to remain open. Next to this, the statement could be taken as suggestive that these are issues that may all present themselves on an ideological level. Whether or not hate speech is *malum in se* ("wrong" or "evil" in itself) or *malum prohibitum* ("prohibited wrong") seems to depend on situational factors, as well as on the speech act and consequent actions in question.

In relation to performativity, Di Rosa uses locutionary ("act of saying something"), illocutionary (possible acts "in saying something") and perlocutionary (consequences caused "by saying something") speech acts as defined by Austin (1962, 110) to measure the three-dimensional effect caused by a speech act (110). Similarly, an extralinguistic dimension is recognized: drawing from Derrida's work, the concept of "echoing responsibility" (Medina 2006, 140) suggests a performative level in hate speech utterances which constructs social realities by carrying the meanings that it has acquired from the practices of a particular society over time. This could, in part, explain why some expressions are "more offensive" to others. Individual intentionality cannot be meaningfully isolated from speech acts, and scholars like John Searle emphasize the significance of social conventions, rules, and contexts in determining what they consist of. In terms of hate speech, hatred is included either in the motive, content, or effect of the "relevant speech or other expressive conduct" (Brown 2015, 4

– 5). Yet often, even in the more elaborate depictions, the focus seems to be more on the target of these speech acts rather than on the perpetrator. Ideology, however, draws us closer to the discussion on hegemony and its effect on culture, with their consequent traces in the language we speak.

2.1.Ideology in Hegemonic Formations

Establishing the definition and significance of "hegemony" and how such systems emerge in communities and cultures in general is beneficial before progressing into exploring which specific ideologies emerge as hegemonic in The Red Pill (and other online hate communities). Hegemony, in Gramsci's terms, maintains a hierarchy without violence but on an ideological level. In 1975, he described hegemony "as a form of power" that is "very different from mere force, coercion or domination *(dominio)"* and as "intellectual and moral leadership". The supremacy of a social group is "dominant over those antagonistic groups it wants to 'liquidate' or subdue even with armed force, and it is leading with respect to those groups that are associated and allied with it" (Gramsci 1975 in Fontana 1993, 141). Intellectual and moral leadership is thus at the core of Gramsci's theory. Fontana discusses how hegemony functions as the vehicle whereby dominant social groups "establish a system of 'permanent consent' that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven *ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals*" (141). Moreover, it is a "system of reciprocal links and relations whose common elements are consent and persuasion: in other words, it forms a type of alliance based on mutuality of interests and an affinity of values" (Fontana 1993: 141 in Selg and Ventsel, 2008). Hence, hegemony can be perceived as a type of contingency in meanings or discourses in a culture and society.

Some forms of power may be systematically concealed: especially the power of discourses. Ventsel (2011) describes how "legitimization of hegemonic formations" is not in consequence of propaganda or brainwashing, or explainable "as a calculation of rational interest" (63). Foucault, on the other hand, does not consider power to be only an instrument of repression: power "makes things and talking about things possible" (Ventsel, 63). In discussing power, inevitably tied with ideas of hegemony, Foucault (1980) suggested power to "produce things, infuse pleasure, form knowledge and produce discourse" (119). Foucault also suggests that power needs to be "considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (Foucault 1980: 119). Mechanisms of power are based on "techniques, ideals that express 'normality and various mechanisms of control' rather than having their basis in justice, law and the threat of punishment" (Foucault 1990: 89 – 90 in Ventsel, 2011):

> "Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies."
>
> (Foucault, 1990: 92–93)"

Hence, Ventsel states, social and cultural meanings of power cannot be undermined. Hegemony, here, is perhaps nothing more than "an articulation of meanings, a particular logic of the signification process" (65). Ventsel also discusses the role of opposing discourses alternative to dominant discourse that could have the same logic of signification. It must be further acknowledged, that the process of constructing and reproducing meanings is not automatic, but involves choice, as meanings in discourse are not fixed but fluctuate and take according to the needs of the speaker (Ventsel 2008, 26). Ventsel also states that "[…] those placed in a subordinated position often develop counter discourses *as forms of resistance* in order to bring the dominant system of meaning into question and change it" (Raik 2003: 26 in Ventsel, 2011), which is particularly notable in the Red Pill community's self-identification as social outcasts, where misogynistic ideology becomes a tool for undermining social order.

Perhaps more dangerously in relation to radical ideas and hate speech, Gramsci also suggests that those oppressed by the ruling ideas, or the ruling hegemony, of a society can mobilize through the shared hegemonic ideologies of a collective consciousness. Burton (2018) describes the emerging form of online cybersectarianism as nearly cult-like: online communities may take over the space traditionally occupied by religion. More than ever, the role previously governed by "intellectuals" is shifting, and ideas of significance are circulated, debated, and constructed online. Accessibility of online spaces has granted people equal footing in such discussions, as opposed to the past where only select religious or intellectual figures could establish discourse and such power was strictly gatekept. In carefully crafted digital spaces, this also contributes to the nature of the group functioning as a type of echo chamber for shared ideas where outsiders are shunned out. Whilst the echo chamber theory is subject to criticism, it remains relevant regarding the Red Pill community, which functions as a virtual haven for members who self-identify as social outcasts to find support, solidarity,

and camaraderie amongst their peers. New possibilities provided by the internet and technological advancements nullify former obstacles such as geographical, social, and physical borders, and reflect the transnationality of online contexts. This new digital projection could be seen as a manifestation of the Durkheimian "collective consciousness". If so, ideologically hegemonic structures are bound to arise from this pool of thought, albeit in limited capacities specific to different, segregated subsets of culture, and strive for hegemonic dominance over the culture's semiospheric core.

The analysis of mass cultures, according to Gottdiener, "involves a three-way relationship among (1) cultural objects that are produced by an industrial process, (2) a set of institutions that produce and distribute such objects on a relatively large scale, and (3) a collectivity(ies) or social group(s) of those who use such objects in contexts that can include use within a creative or transfunctional setting" (979). (Re)production of dominant meanings can take the form of the exercise of, or struggle for, power, where the dominant discourse "is the power which is to be seized" (Foucault 1980, 52 – 53). In perceiving mass culture as cultural domination, hegemony saturates every aspect of society: in particular, the social institutions. Consequently, then, cultural hegemony is "one of the reasons that the working class does not revolt against the conditions of its own oppression" by this industrially controlled consciousness (Gottdiener, 982). In contrast to the Red Pill's subcultural practices which reject some hegemonic practices and authorities, mass culture, in the framework of hegemony, is understood as a "fundamental ruling class instrument used to maintain political and social control through the production of ideological 'false consciousness' (Lukáscs 1971 in Gottdiener, 981) or "contradictory consciousness" (Gramsci 1971 in Gottdiener 981) in the minds of the working class", dominating "class-specific perceptions of reality" (Livingstone 1976 and Cheal 1979 in Gottdiener 981). This ties in with the hegemonists' idea of

consciousness as either "false" or "contradictory", which suggests that "the masses perceive illusion and not reality" or "the masses are confused and their judgement is fragmented" (981). Gottdiener criticizes this as a "very simplistic view of humanity and the nature of cultural expression in everyday life" (981). Gottdiener also proposes an alternative approach in "capturing interdependency" and using the approach of semiotic analysis, which according to them, is in its entirety the only methodology fully able to specify the "multiplicity of meanings involved in mass culture" (978).

Lastly, hegemony, for the purposes of this thesis, is understood as both the governing signification practices visible in the discourse of a specific subculture (here: The Red Pill community and misogynistic hate speech), and the battle of competing ideas or ideologies within a wider semiospheric core-periphery movement of a given culture, discussed more closely in the next chapter.

2.2. Towards a Semiotic Typology of Online Hate

Emphasis in semiotics focuses on objective systems of signification and the intersubjective basis of meaning. As a transdisciplinary subject, it studies how signs – "including codes, media and language, plus the sign systems used in parallel with language" (Idris, n.d., 13) – produce interpretation and meaning "in human and in nonhuman living systems as prelinguistic communication systems" (ibid.). Following Saussure, "the production of meaning takes place only by virtue of social relation, because language is a *sui generis* social construction" (Gottdiener 1985, 985). The object of analysis in semiotics is "the socially sustained system of signification, including its material objects and their interdependencies, that produces and sustains meaning through socio-structural interaction" (ibid.). Regardless, no unified semiotic typology exists: here, it is understood in the traditionally triadic sense of

sign – signifier – signified, relying on theories by Peirce, Saussure and Lotman. The symbolic value of a sign is taken as culturally learned (both conscious and subconscious), it is never accidental but very purposeful and intricate, and it communicates with its cultural environment and is laden with symbolic value.

Dimensions of typologies of signs, particularly in relation to speech, are difficult to achieve due to their abstract nature, and the consequent categorization of signs into arbitrary classes seems counterintuitive. A more holistic, over-encompassing understanding of signification practices in language may be needed for understanding the complexities words and their impact have. Acknowledging the work done on sign indexicalities or the "symptomatic" nature of signs does not seem sufficient. In hateful expressions, words become weapons rather than merely function as messages someone must receive and encode. Covert systems of power at play in discourse also make it possible to use evasive communication which varies in degree. Degrees of evasion are not fixed but motive- and context-dependent, something where language as the instrument of communication bends to serve its master's purpose, and at times, even breaks. Next to only categorizing signs into a unified typology, scholars like Eco (1979) have recognized ten semiotic criteria, among which are context-related markers, such as "source and channel" and "replicability of the signifier", which might be particularly significant in online contexts. Eco's typology of sign production might thus be relevant in further considerations of the dimensions of hate speech. The nature of the hybrid media environment in phenomena such as virality or circulation of content provides a unique dimension that might not have been previously accessible or even coherent in the way it is today to the scholars of the past. Hence, for the purpose of analyzing hate speech, references and suggestions regarding a more unified typology are made throughout this work in order to pave the way towards a practical manual for its analysis.

Negotiations of what a culture consists of are rarely very clean-cut and straight forward, but instead thrive during times of change, unrest, and destabilization. Periods of destabilization could be contrasted with gradual historical change, where the measured unit of (cultural) "change" can develop at different speed depending on the cultural phenomena surrounding it. Lotman describes how culture as "a collective memory" *destructs* and *purges* cultural texts from the reserve of cultural memory, or a type of collective consciousness, by essentially creating a hierarchical order based on what the culture considers as the most valuable at a given time (Semenenko 2012, 57.). Lotmannian *cultural explosions* could help explain how societal change comes about, where the centripetal forces of the semiosphere allow peripheral elements to burst into the core of a culture.
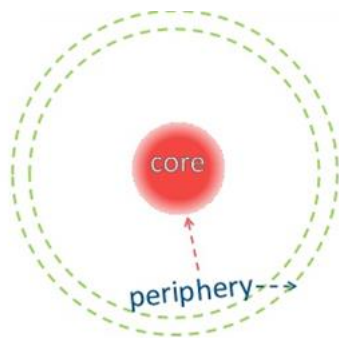
Figure 1. Showing the semiosphere's core-periphery movement (from Fiadotau, 2016).

The centripetal force of the semiosphere is the central core - periphery movement (Figure 1.), where the culture's core ideas (well-established, logical structures closest to "hegemony") work in constant interaction with the forces shunning phenomena towards the periphery (unstructured, marginalized, foreign elements and ideas) of that particular culture (Semenenko 2012, 101 – 102). It is this movement from the core to the periphery that

establishes fixed significance, either marginalization or well-established and recognized core elements, in a given culture. In ethnonationalist radical discourse, cultural texts of, for instance, nationalistic idealized past become tools through which ideological significance is portrayed, and through which any kind of deviance from their represented significations is shunned out. Cultural explosions – periods of crisis – also provide a fruitful ground for spreading misinformation (deliberate or not), intended to affect the perception of the cultural texts as social, collective imaginaries.

In conceptualizing power, hegemony, and social realities, Selg and Ventsel (2008) describe their research into semiotic theory of hegemony as "a dialogue" between two different theoretical frameworks, namely those of Lotman (in terms of cultural theory) and Laclau (in terms of hegemony). The main function of the Lotmannian centre is self-description (*samoopisanie*), the creation of codes (ideologies, myths, grand narratives) that "organize a certain area of sign generation into a coherent whole" (Kliger, 2010):

> "Whether we are talking about language, politics or culture, the mechanism [of the centre] is the same: one part of the semiosphere [. . .] in the process of self+description creates its own grammar [. . .]. *Then it strives to extend these norms over the whole semiosphere.* A partial grammar of one cultural dialect becomes the metalanguage of description for culture as such. The dialect of Florence, for instance, became, during the Renaissance the literary language of Italy, the legal norms of Rome became the laws of the whole Roman Empire, and the etiquette of the Parisian court of Louis XIV became the etiquette of all the courts of Europe. A literature of norms and prescriptions comes into being in which the later historian will tend to see an actual picture of real life of that epoch, its semiotic practice. This illusion is supported by the evidence of the

contemporaries who are in fact convinced that they do live and behave in the prescribed way."

(Lotman in Kliger 2010, 265, my italics).

In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim examines different hegemonic cultural structures as sites for semiotic signification, terming these as "collective representations" (*représentations collectives)*. Essentially, he discusses signification practices shared by a collectivity that are not reducible to individual subjectivities alone. They can include words, ideas and/or symbols, created through "intense social interaction", where the concepts exist as external to the individual, since they are not controlled by a single individual alone but recognized by a wider collectivity. Yet, each individual perpetuates the signification related to the collectively recognized sign by bringing it alive in discourse. Sometimes signs seem to be an accumulation of concepts established over centuries, sometimes they emerge seemingly spontaneously or *ex nihilo*, and sometimes they may be deliberately hidden. Here, it is perhaps also relevant to acknowledge the relationship between a semiotic sign, representation and a stereotype. In the most simplistic sense, (collective) representations might utilize stereotypes in order to keep their semiotic signs comprehensible or interpretable, and in doing so, often feed into the maintained stereotypic elements that uphold and maintain their semiotic meanings, simultaneously enabling and enhancing hegemonic beliefs related to the interpretation of the sign.

Regardless: even an over-encompassing model of culture, such as the semiosphere, cannot fully take into account cultures' dynamism, flexibility and unpredictability (265): 'The semiosphere, the space of culture, is not something that acts according to mapped out and pre-calculated plans. It seethes like the sun, centres of activity boil up in different places, in the

depths and on the surface, irradiating relatively peaceful areas with their immense energy'
(Universe of the Mind, p. 150; translation adjusted by Kliger). The ideas that are emerging
from the periphery to the core, those that "do rise and begin to generate behavioural codes,
ideologies and grand narratives", are no longer foreign: instead, they "are based on cultural
codes which in the distant past were stimulated by invasions from outside, but which now
have been wholly changed through the many asymmetrical transformations into a new and
original structural model" (Kliger 2010, 268). As a consequence, new semiotic forms are
produced due to the interaction between the core and the periphery: "its passive state changes
to a state of alertness and it begins rapidly to produce new texts, bombarding other structures
with them, including the structure that 'provoked' it" (Kliger 2010, 268). "It is on the
periphery", argues Lotman, "or rather in the process of the interaction between the periphery
and the core, in the tension between official, dominant discourse and more disorganized
sections of semiosis, that true innovation happens" (Lotman in Kliger 2010, 266). In essence:
the struggle and motion of cultural elements from core to periphery and vice versa could be
looked at as the struggle for hegemony and counter-hegemony.

When considering the role of language and meaning systems in the analysis of culture,
the cultural text is taken as functioning through collective cultural memory. Its purpose is to
not only generate new meanings, but also to condense cultural memory. Ventsel, referring
closely to Lotman, suggests, that "no meaning can ever become completely stabilized due to
its multilingual constitution and because of its retrospectivity. Texts that preserve their
cultural activity reveal a capacity to accumulate information, that is, a capacity for memory —
this means that it is also the memory of all its interpretations, and what is more, it is also the
memory of all those historical events which occurred outside the text but with which the text
can evoke associations. And this is what gives the text new meanings" (Lotman 2001: 18–19).

Exclusion or sometimes even omission – what is not said – can be taken as another type of hegemonic practice. Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, that is, "practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony" (Mouffe 2005: 18 in Ventsel, 2011). Ventsel suggests, that "every (dis)articulating process is a process of translation, and it depends on the nature of this process within cultural context whether the process acquires a hegemonic status or not". Therefore, it can be stated that typology of different metaphoric translations and tropes are taken to be suggestive of, and centrally significant, in the study of hegemonic relations in the framework of semiotic analysis of cultures. It is thus justifiable to take a look at what thematic tropes emerge from the case study's language, in order to better understand the subcultural, peripheric movement that defines the core of their existence.

3. Methodology

For the purpose of studying, processing and analyzing hate speech, semiotics seems like an ideal tool for its standardization: drawing from cultural studies, it is here combined with a linguistic perspective. Semiotics focuses on levels of meaning: an informational level where the sign is recognized, a symbolic level where the network of meanings is established, and a secondary level of analysis, which examines what is signified. In order to recognize and establish cultural signification practices in the formation of different sign systems, a mixed-methods is necessary. Ideals conveyed in the case study's hate speech are classified as extreme in the sense that they diverge from the hegemonic, semiospherically established core ideas of a culture and are instead found on the margins of a more radical discourse, and actively attempt to challenge the core.

Here, the case study of the subreddit **r/theredpill** is looked at through close reading and discourse analysis. Discussions on different media outlets surrounding the topic of hate speech and its various manifestations were followed it for two years prior to the observation phase of the research paper both globally (in English) and locally (in Finnish). An intensive observation period of two weeks was conducted in March 2022, where discussions of the quarantined subreddit were followed systematically every day for approximately one hour. This approach enabled real-time following of the developing discussions, however, it has to be noted, that the platform on its own does allow later editing and modification of messages. If needed, different versions of the messages could be accessed by replacing the "reddit" in the URL with "removereddit" (e.g. www.removereddit.com/[rest of the URL]), but this method was not needed for analyzing the data.

The observation was focused on this particular subreddit because it is taken as one of the main platforms where the case study organically functions: naturally, other platforms exist, but the discussion on Reddit is well contained inside the "quarantined" subreddit.
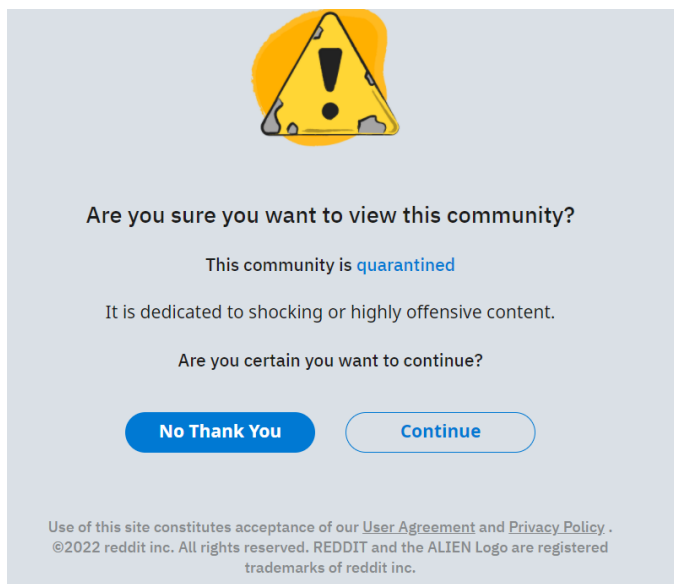

Figure 2. Showing the "quarantined"-warning of the r/TheRedPill-subreddit before entering.

This warning, as portrayed in Figure 2., ensures that only users who provide their deliberate consent can view the material on the subreddit. Particularly explicit topics usually found on Red Pill and/or incel-platforms (such as topics concerning minors, sexual abuse or direct incitements to violence) in the dark web were filtered out of this research, although their existence is acknowledged.

A conceptual model for hate speech recognition suitable for the analysis of hate speech in online contexts was established on theoretical basis, with reference to the works of Donald Holbrook ("Designing and Applying an 'Extremism Media Index', 2015), Leena Malkki and other scholars. Based on these theoretical considerations, the following model for analysis is suggested for these newly emerging digital ecologies online.

Following Holbrook, the model covers material or "content" encompassing of:

(1) moderate material conveying ideological/political/religious content without advocating violence;

(2) radical political content that is hostile, confrontational or isolationist;

(3) material glorifying violence and perhaps dehumanising 'enemy' people"

(Holbrook 2015, 59).

This model, visible in Figure 3., demonstrates, that even though some expressions of hate speech may be subjective and relative, the approach to its analysis can still be systematic and organized in recognizing its wider impact or potential dangers. Malkki et al. (2021) similarly highlight the characteristic of extremist speech as "justifying violence" and as "dehumanizing others".
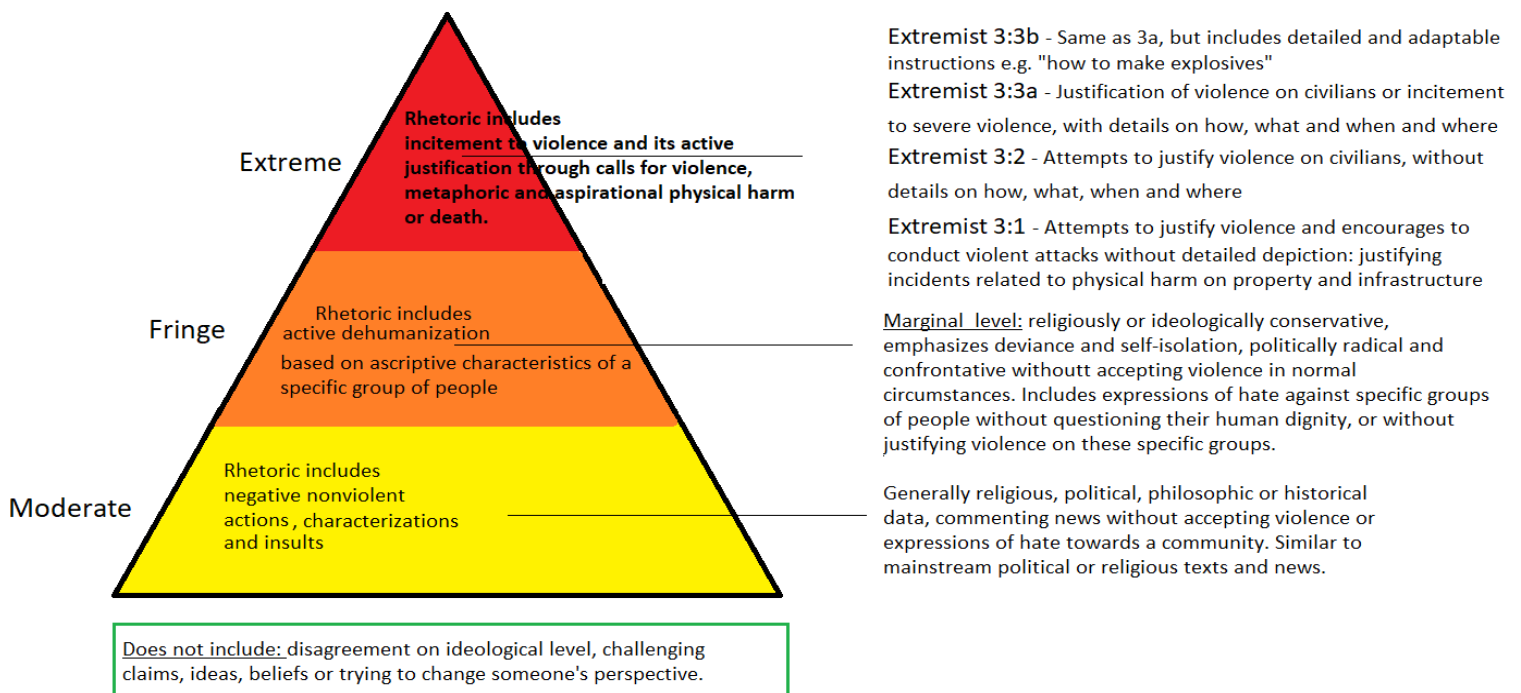
Figure 3. Conceptual Model for Hate Speech Recognition

On its most basic level, hate speech may begin as as naming-practices where the ascriptively recognized target is semiotized as an actively dehumanized subject in speech. As soon as something is named, it is semiotized at least on the surface level (Selg and Ventsel 2008, 13). The meaning of the name functions **as a representation of a continuous totality** (of the sign), or in the extreme case, it *becomes* that totality. Selg and Ventsel (2008) propose that naming is "one of the central translating strategies in the politico-hegemonic discourse", and thus central to signification processes: in hate speech, on the most basic level, this could already indicate active dehumanization of the targeted group or individual. As such, in utilizing a variety of derogatory names when discussing "women", hate speech in the Red Pill Community is already perpetuated on moderate levels.

3.1 Data

The posts and comments utilized in this data set were timestamped, thematically categorized and copied how they were found ("as they are" or "prima vista") to a separate document at the time of observation. Content samples of most recent threads were subjected to discourse analysis. The time for the observation changed depending on the day of capture. The average number of "threads" read per daily hour of data collection varied between 5 and 7, and due to the varying amount of content, resulted in a total dataset of 86 threads. The posts retained for the thesis are left "as are" in their typography, although some modes of typographical emphasis, such as the authors' use of bold or italicized text, have been removed to improve the overall flow of the text.

3.2. Ethical considerations

On social media, everything happens at an accelerated speed: a couple of clicks on a platform might lead a user deep down the alt-right pipeline. Hence, it is inevitable to keep in mind that these platforms may function as potential sites for radicalization. Due to this accelerated effect, measures such as limiting the time spent per week on observing the discussions were taken to maintain objectivity and to minimize personal bias against the target group. Whilst the classification of data as 'radical' and 'misogynistic' speech implies an intrinsic value judgement of the material, one should note that such discourse is inherently polarizing in nature. To reduce the likelihood of potential research biases resulting from these considerations, the observation time was limited to one hour per day. Next to minimizing potential bias, establishing these boundaries enabled enough time to retain objectivity in observing heavy topics, and reduced the risk of negative psychological or mental health outcomes during the writing process.

Modern readings of Gramsci's research have recently been widely recognized in the radical alt-right communities. Parts of the theory remain relevant for the coming discussion. Simultaneously, it is also important to know which theories are utilized by radicalized communities online. Gramsci also forms a basis for discussion on gender roles, when considering concepts such as "hegemonic masculinity" later on.

The instances of textual data and in-text citations have been rendered anonymous, since many of the users who are actively participating in the Red Pill discussion area are recognized and "known" by their usernames. Moreover, the choice to respect anonymity, and thereby avoid so-called "outing", ensures that the textual data remains the primary focus of research, and thereby avoids drawing attention to individual contributors. Similarly, whilst specific incidents of incel-related terrorism are referenced by name and perpetrator in the introduction to facilitate the option of further investigation by the reader, these events are not discussed in detail to avoid perpetuating their notoriety: for some perpetrators, inciting further acts of violence was a key motive[1], which gives more validity for the authorial choice made here. Gotell and Dutton (2016) describe the interaction between feminist and misogynistic ideologies as "parasitic" in terms of how MRA's rely on "feminist outrage" (70), and describe accurately how "scholarly attention can thus have the unintended consequence of amplifying their messages". They rightfully also point out how it could reinforce a simplistic "us versus them"-narrative that "leads to a number of strategic problems" (ibid.) through a dichotomized framing, which takes away from the real question at hand. However, on the other hand, it has to be pointed out that leaving misogynistic speech

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[1] "In a nearly four-hour interview after his arrest, Minassian told police officers that he was virgin who had never had a girlfriend, admitted to using the van as a weapon and said he wanted to inspire more attacks." (The Guardian, 2019).

and hate speech unchecked and uninvestigated would, in technicality, also suggest an ethical stance.

Having considered my own positionality as a researcher particularly focused on, for example, feminist readings in literature, it was relevant to conduct this research observationally. Researchers like Ging and Menzie also recognize, that some communities – like the Red Pill or Men's Rights Activists (MRA) – revere in their hatred towards different feminist actors and actively juxtapose the two ideologies as opposing. As such, when considering alternative forms of research design, I opted not to engage personally in conversations on the Red Pill forum: as a researcher particularly focused on, for example, feminist readings in literature, avoiding direct involvement preserved my personal objectivity. Based on these reasons, I concluded that an observation in digital ethnography would be the least invasive method. Moreover, the choice of not engaging with the community makes it more possible to write about them while remaining "under the radar": commenting and interacting within their community would surely elicit a type of response to one way or another, but this non-invasiveness enables a methodology where members would actively have to seek out academic articles on the topic, have access to them in order to be able to discuss them and still lend them for wider circulation before any similar effects or interactions would occur.

Finally, it has to be noted, for the sake of the reader, that the next chapter will contain direct references to instances of graphic hate speech found online for the purpose of documentation and referencing the collected data.

4. Analysis

Lumsden (2019, 11) describes, how the "participants of the manosphere have adopted a common language", believe that feminist values dominate society, and that "men must fight back against an overreaching, misandrist culture to protect their very existence" (Marwick and Caplan 2018, 4). The men in question are "preoccupied with the 'operationalizing tropes of victimhood', 'beta masculinity' and 'involuntary celibacy (incels)'" (Ging, 2017). This has led to the emergence of "heavily masculinized and geekified" misogynist, heterosexist and racist lexicon, described by some scholars as "memetic" (see e.g. Sparby), which includes terms such as "cuck" (a weak "beta" male whose girlfriend cheats on him), "going caveman" (sexually dominating a woman), negging (manipulation strategy where backhanded comments are designed to deliberately undermine a woman's confidence), pawning (using attractive women to demonstrate high "SMV" or sexual market value) or "the bitch shield" (female defense against unwanted male attention) (see, for instance, Ging 2021, 649). Ascriptive characteristics on the basis of gender function as facilitating factors for violence or incitements to it through active dehumanization in language, enhanced by feelings of camaraderie, as described by one user:

> "There were losers who couldn't get girls in every generation in human history. The only difference is now, they have the ability to find each other in online communities like Blackpill and Incel forums and live in an echo chamber. Look around with an objective lens and you'll see that Blackpill isn't reflective of mainstream reality, just for a few select unfortunate men who failed the genetic lottery and don't have the necessary IQ/Grit to pull themselves out of misery."

Another user describes, how the "terminally online" habit the internet which is "socialized" by an introverted majority:

> "[W]hat are the so called "terminally online" often doing in those screen-time moments? Using the internet to interact with others. […] Internetverts often call themselves introverts because surfing the Web is a solitary activity, and they need to feel special. However, if one has a twitter account and relentlessly stalks comment sections, is that really solitary? Their desire for socialization is there, they have simply resigned themselves to cheap, safe alternatives. The online persona is easily moldable and unbodied; it can be whatever it pretends or LARPs to be. This process becomes the perfect form of escapism, satisfying the urge to socialize without needing to address the unconscious mind, or deal with the confrontation a real life discussion entails."

This identification of "the terminally online" in regards to "deviance", as described by Durkheim, is used to reaffirm the radical ideology as it is believed that not only is this type of deviance rebellious and points out flaws in society, but in-group reactions to it seem to increase camaraderie and social support. Camaraderie is further enhanced by sharing successful stories on dating "from the field" and consequent "gaming strategies" in order to ensure their success with women. Practical experiences with the "gaming strategies" are also shared:

A. Useful to help establish a "connection" earlier in the relationship. Doing this lowers ASD[2] dramatically

B. Those works perfectly, but only if you remove your dick from her throat so she can answer. A girl will fall in love if she feels you are incredibly more valuable than she is, and this usually happens if you fuck her face and then leave.

C. make sure you throw them in subtly and don't barrage the questions. and remember that these are comfort building techniques, but also remember to balance it out with attraction techniques so things don't get too stale. just my two cents.

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[2] "Anti-Slut Defense"

Most of the strategies are developed by revered pickup artists, and include heavy

manipulation which may lead to sexual violence and strategic undermining of consent:

> "There is another important reason to ensure she does not say no. With respect
> to the power dynamic, the alpha gives orders and the beta takes orders, which
> means the alpha says no and the beta does not say no. Therefore, if she starts
> saying "no" to you, her subconscious mind stops seeing you as the alpha.
> Generally speaking, if a woman says no to you more than 2 or 3 times in a row,
> for any reason, she is drifting away and you should maybe even end the
> interaction."

The author of this post continues, that they sometimes deliberately "say no" in order to incite

an affective response and to assert their dominance (see "alpha"):

> "Sometimes I say no to innocuous, silly things just to generate the right
> subconscious emotion. And because the power of "no" exists purely in the realm
> of subconscious emotions, you cannot let her conscious mind know that you are
> intentionally saying "no." She must feel that your "nos" are natural and
> genuine."

This level of deliberate manipulation and narratorial unreliability has to, naturally, be

acknowledged and taken into consideration when taking a look at the following findings

stemming from the data. Lumsden (2019) equally points out the self-reflective capabilities of

the case study group, where a member suggests, that "I want to kill you in front of your

children" is "not a threat, [but] an expression of desire", showing deliberate language-

conscious considerations in the signification practices of the speaker.

4.1.1. Trope 1: Heteropatriarchal Constructions of Gender

Hegemonic assumptions of gender are embodied by different gendered caricatures, or collective representations, in the Red Pill discourse. The data suggests, that gender – most often, understood as a type of hyperfemininity or hegemonic masculinity – is operationalized for social capital: in the Red Pill discourse, sexual access and relationships are perceived as unique form of capital that they are denied of. While some users still fetishize men the primary "protectors" and "providers" and women for their "innocence" and "modesty" (which are perceived as increasing their "sexual market value"), more interestingly, incels and the Red Pill simultaneously also reject more traditional performances of masculinity. Those who "fail" at masculinity are sidelined by society, develop a grudge against women, where there should be a "natural ownership" in place. There is an idealized form of masculinity, with its dissenting varieties existing as hierarchically inferior, which sustains and promotes dominant social positions of men and the subordinate social position of women across all spheres of society.

Traditionally, some semiotic signs from Western cultures regarding masculinity could include hetero-patriarchal family structures, privileging of white men with Western-European traits, suits ("western businessmen uniform") as symbols of male power, cultivation of physical strength, group sports and drinking as acts of masculinity or idealization of military masculinity (Assumpção, 2020). The Red Pill seems to reject these conventional signifiers of more traditional variants of hegemonic masculinity, while paradoxically being simultaneously preoccupied in achieving hegemony over women in the traditionally masculinist sense.

A: We are blessed to be at the top of the hierarchy, WE ARE MEN. Someone created us to be the powerful ones, to not depend on anyone, thats why we have testosterone, thats why we are stronger. […] Women are emotionally and physiologically designed to respond to men, we fuck them, they get in love with us, they raise our children, they lie to their friends to keep fucking us, they cry when we dump them etc etc.. So don't come here and say it's not about us, what a damn joke, the problem is that men today are too afraid to be selfish in that matter and then keep crying because no one loves them gives them the right amount of respect.

B: […] I'd take her home, keep her on her knees for an hour, remove all performance anxiety, caressing her head and telling her how pretty she is with my cock in her mouth maybe make her cum a few times for the fun of it. BOOM - girlfriend achieved. Woman loving man done.

But you don't want that, most incels don't want that. Most men that can't connect with women or only meet dating meat via tinder or clubs DO NOT WANT THAT.

Men want to feel like the boss. Like the man. Like their father in some alternative reality would actually be proud of them. And that feeling... can not be achieved with a woman. You are in bitter need of mothering, of an emotionally safe space where you can be weak, where it's ok to not know, not be competent, not be witty.

I am sorry, there is no such space.

Next to rejecting conventional, hegemonically masculinist signifiers, The Red Pill community seems to shift between idealizing types of masculinity for their sexual capital or "holding frame", versus being overshadowed and "cucked" by these perfect ideals of masculinity or "Chads", which are a radical contrast to the average member of the community. Furthermore, "alpha" and "beta" masculinities are seen as competing with one another.

C: But every man must understand, rich men don't make her wet. Meaning, make
her sexually attracted towards you. When a women see's any rich

or resourceful guy, in her eyes, it's (Yess lifelong comfortable income guy). By you driving the best car for the validation of women, showing off your wealth and what not, is making yourself look like a fool with a badge that says, "I'm a beta provider, pick me." Of course, why wouldn't any women pick you? You love getting used, and women love using and extracting resources from you, while she will be giving herself away for free to the Alphas.

D: Women have 2 great needs, which can only be fulfilled by 2 types of men. Their need for sex, and their need for financial security and emotional support. The need for sex can only be fulfilled by an Alpha, but he's emotionally unavailable, while their need for security can be fulfilled by a beta […]The beta because, he doesn't have many options and will always be loyal to her, and she knows she can win him over easily and manipulate him. While for an Alpha? Women will compete to be exclusive to him but little do they know, because he has so many options, he will never stick around. And then, these women get heartbroken and become emotionally broken women. Aka Alpha widowed. Anyways. All men must remember in the modern age, marriage = you're a beta and the statistics show this itself.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out, how a newly emerging "geek masculinity" seems to both "[repudiate] and [reify] elements of hegemonic masculinity" where the Red Pill perceive themselves as marginalized or "deviant" regardless of being white, male and possessing significant cultural capital, with scholars like Massanari (2015) suggesting that this makes geek males less able or willing to recognize their own privilege. These newly emerging hybrid masculinities online may "conceal systems of power and inequality in historically new ways" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 246). Ging (2021) suggests, that anonymity "enables contributors to create fantasy personas or avatars, liberating them from physical limitations" which functions as a distancing element which may facilitate "hostile and often illegal

performances of masculinity, which would not go unchecked in face-to-face contexts" (643).

Ging further describes, how in virtual spaces factors like identity, the body and

socioeconomic status can be "obscured or reimagined", further complicated by the

transnational nature of online spaces (643):

> "Men can dodge among multiple meanings according to their interactional
> needs. Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable; but the same
> men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other
> moments. Consequently, 'masculinity' represents not a certain type of man but,
> rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices."
> (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 840 in Ging 2021, 643).

New online articulations of masculinity are preoccupied with men's relationship to women,

with varying reactions to marriage and traditional relationships:

C: Society wants you to believe in the idea of marrying a former hoe, and turning her into a housewife and in the process becoming miserable. Marriage in the modern age can never work. It's an failed institution and the statistics don't lie. All these Trad cu-cks wouldn't tell you the misery they are in, you know why? Because once you're married legally, you're stuck as a man. She can deny and manipulate you with sèx, be disobedient towards you, and still take half of your shi and get away with everything. The state/laws give them the power to. That's how easy it is for women to play men in today's times.

D: they seem to not realize the two most probable outcomes of any marriage:
1. She will either get bored with you and she will cuck you and divorce you or,
2. You will get bored with her and will either: put up with it and cheat on the side or live miserably doing self-destructive stuff like: over-drinking, banging prostitutes, therapy sessions, etc. In both

> cases you both will be miserable and live to regret it.
> Like OP said, marriage in the modern world is like religion: it is
> sold to the fools.

E: As a sub 8 male you can forget Tinder, and for cold approaching random girls there are prison sentences now. You will get assrammed by a pack of Tyrones in a gaol. You are just genetically too weak for this time and place. It is over

Sometimes, types of "Chads" can be founded on racist stereotypes (such as the "Tyrone" in excerpt E.), which exemplifies how types of hate may be integrated with other forms of bias through a kind of indexicality in the signification practice.

4.1.2 Trope 2: Systemic Devaluation and Regulation of Femininity

In addition to labels like "Becky and Stacy", Incels use other figurative elements to systematically devalue and dehumanize women. To position "women" as "others" in this context would simply be an understatement. "Femoids" (female humanoids), "feminazis", "cumdumpsters", "alpha widow", "bitches" and "AWALT" ("all women are like that") position women not only as less than men, but as less than human.

F: Never commit fully, boys. Bitches come and go. Enjoy the grind and know women for what they really are.

G: to wife somebody up - she'd have to be thin, feminine, domestic, loyal and smart with none of the horrorshow stuff (tats, kids, addictions, metal things stuck in her face, a stadium full of exes, sex-worker, etc.) And that's really rare.

H: In the modern age, majority of women are emotionally broken/damaged, and by you being the "good" husband to come and save the day, who doesn't understand female nature and how

they work, and who was always told be "nice" to women will only get manipulated and be miserable. She knows whatever you're doing, (all those roses/dinners and fake compliments) is to get access to what's between her legs, and she'll use that great power she has over you, and manipulate you in getting whatever she wants.One must understand the greatest power any women has over you, is not her physical strength, neither her intellect, neither her character. It's just what's between her legs.

Next to these, women are often equated to children in their qualities, and in the sense that they should be reprimanded "as children are" in their wrongdoings.

"Loving someone is like loving a dog or a child. *Being* in love is like being completely enamored/enveloped by someone. You're *in* love. This implies you're lower on the hierarchy of love. Masculine loves the feminine. Feminine loves children. Children love puppies.
I use masculine and feminine terms because men can be feminine and sometimes women can be masculine. But humans work at their best when they work with their original form (in our case, being male)."

"Woman" in patriarchal culture is described by Mulvey (1975) as the "signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which a man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as *bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning*". These cultural inscriptions on the bodies of women are described by Menzie (2020), suggesting that women in the incel imaginary are "deserving of condemnation, even violence, for subverting gender hegemony" by failing to be sexually available or providing "a right of access" (3).

Differently performed femininities are demonstrated by the caricatures of "Stacy" and "Becky":

Figure 4. Showing the caricatures of "Becky" and "Stacy.

"Stacy" and "Becky" are, in the incel analogue, intended to function as opposing figures of the collective representations of femininity. Stacy's exaggerated hyperfemininity is contrasted by Becky's "averageness". Menzie (2020) describes, how Stacy is "critiqued for not embodying all of the heteropatriarchal conditions as understood by incels" while still benefitting from her femininity (4). "Being with" a type of woman is understood as a type of social value, related to the concept of "sexual market value" or "capital". Femmephobia, in the caricatures of "Stacy" and "Becky", places women as objects where their femininity is a marker that is performative, consumable to men.

Next to these archetypal depictions of femininity, the discourse largely places modern 21st century feminism to be the main cause for men's oppression. One user justifies their perspective in the following:

> "Most girls were taking a minor in gender studies where they discuss how to beat the patriarchy. These girls are on their phones for half the class on Facebook or tinder talking to Chad. And were often major sluts because having a lot of sex was empowering because if Chad can do it, why shouldn't Becky be a ho."

Gotell and Dutton (2016) have analysed the antifeminist men's right discourses on rape in the manosphere, and found "a set of interrelated claims" that are also supported by the data here: the outcome in their research suggests, that sexual violence, like domestic violence, is perceived as a gender neutral problem, that feminists are responsible for erasing men's experiences of victimization, that false allegations (towards men) are widespread and that rape culture is feminist-produced moral panic (66). Hence, The Red Pill community seems to be sharing some perspectives with contemporary men's rights activists. Interestingly, Gotell and Duttell also point out "the dissemination of a caricatured depiction of anti-rape feminism as harmful", which has also come to define popularizing stereotypes of feminist activists in popular discourse:

> A: A smart woman knows, a patriarchal society will benefit and
>   protect her in many ways, no matter on the contrary what their
>   obese fèminíst "kweens" say. Feminist "kweens" will say
>   that, women are "strong, free and independent and don't need men"
>   but deep down, they know they need men.

Another user describes "AWFL" or "affluent white female liberals" as following:

B: "Why does an AWFL (fucking phenomenal acroynm) play White Savior in a ridiculous way? Could it be that their Shadow[3] made them cross the street a few too many times when a gang of "yutes" was on the same sidewalk? Could the experience of legitimate racism by a person of color cause them to later imagine it everywhere, like a boogeyman?"

 Other scholars like Ging (2017, 646) have also pointed out the increase in hate crimes where known feminist activists are targeted individually rather than being targeted based on collectively recognized ascriptive characteristics. Moreover, often in this representation, those "ideologically feminist" are characterized as hysterically angry "feminazis", perpetuating a harmful stereotype meant to undermine the credibility of feminist critics.

Behaviour and characteristics perceived as feminine are also attributed mockingly to their own peers:

C: Please stop behaving like constant attention and sympathy-seeking females who only talk and never listen. Let your brothers express themselves and keep your own causes to your discussions or those which are related. It just makes you look obsessed, feminine and pathetic.

D: Also, it's best to not yourself in situations like this where a bitch is correcting you. Handle your shit. There shouldn't be much a bitch should know that you don't. Sounds ghey as fuck. Explaining trivial shit to a woman is ghey.

4.1.3. Trope 3: Pseudoscientific Beliefs

Beliefs in pseudobiology and "natural order" are utilized as tools to justify an ideology where predetermined biological characteristics support women's subordinate position to men.

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[3] Reference to Jungian psychology

Science, much like in the beliefs of conspiracy theorists, is "at once sacralized for its intentions but demonized for its manifestations (Harambam and Aupers, 2015). At the core of the ideology is the belief that women are hypergamous, a concept in biology suggesting that women seek to "mate upwards" in the social ladder as women seek to have relationships with men who are of higher status than themselves, or than the men they are currently partnered with. "Swinging" from one relationship to another suggests that women are opportunistic and disloyal:

> F: A woman is biologically programmed to go for a guy who is making more than her, and who is more higher of status, especially, when it comes to choosing a long term partner. For the short term, they'll screw the guy who makes her 🐱 tingle, and she won't look at his finances/status etc. But for the long term? His finances and his status matter's the most, as studies show. They will choose a man that ensures her and her offsprings survival because women instinctively know, they're too weak to operate alone.
>
> Women instinctively know, they were created physically and mentally weak and since the cavemen days, they have latched on to whatever high value male they could find, that would ensure their survival and the survival of their offspring. […] his was just the way it worked, since the beginning of time.

> G: Women were never intended to compete with men in the male sphere. This isn't a knock on women, or a concept that's inherently anti-woman. Nature is the biggest fascist of all and has carved out meticulously defined roles for men and women without any concern for feelings. The true secret to a successful life is to work in harmony with the role you were given, and do the most you can with it.

> H: Women do not like men who cater to them and sacrifice their manhood on the altar of pussy. To women, those men are food, a plant, something to use and abuse until something better comes along. It's not personal. It's just nature at work. Those types of men got women killed in the past, and women developed an ability to use them to their advantage to keep them and their offspring alive. Alpha fucks, beta bucks at work.

> I: I wonder if it is, or if it is only her instinct to take care of her "asset" that insures her survival. The same way women are often interested in everything

> about us that represents a benefit to them. They are not interested in something about us that does not represent an asset or benefit to them.

J: Here's the Red Pill part. Hypergamy is not a problem, it's a fucking guide!!! It literally tells you : be fucking awesome, have a great life and then let the best woman that tries reaching out to your branch in for a test run. After you test drive a few girls, you will naturally want to spend time with only one. Evaluate what she can to for your life and tell her what you want. Let dread tie the emotional knot and enjoy your bottom bitch, the mother of your child, or your partner in crime.

I: While, most men keep and multiply their wealth, women still only get wealthy by 2 things. That is either through marrying a wealthy man and then divorcing, or they inherit wealth from their father's. Source 1, Source 2.

Also, studies show, women hold more debt and are more irresponsible with their money, compared with men.

Interestingly, r/TheRedPill lists 10 rules on its quarantined subreddit page. Rule number 10, "Do not announce that you are a woman", reads:

> "Women frequently use their sex to try and seize special attention on the internet. This does not fly in our community. Having a vagina does not afford your words special weight or wisdom, or give you any inside understanding of how men should deal with women.
>
> If you are female, do not say "woman here," or "as a female" or anything that identifies you as such. Your comments and posts should be able to stand on the merit of your ideas alone."

This seemingly suggests a "men-only"-space, where women – should they even be interested in entering such a space – would need to prove themselves on the basis of their "ideas alone", whereas for the male members of the community, references to Jungian psychology, biasedly attributed biological theories and "as studies show"-types of references work to enhance their credibility in the eyes of their peers. In contrast to the area's male posters, credibility is achieved in sharing practical experiences from the gaming strategies used in "the field", contrasted by Jungian philosophy and attempts to create credibility through expressions like

"as studies show" for the purposes of creating an authority in science. Pseudoscientific beliefs particularly found on biology are used to justify the "natural place" for both men and women.

5. Discussion

Findings generally range from marginal levels of hate speech to extremist 3:3b-level hate speech. Overall, a common lexicon has emerged to facilitate discussions of common beliefs and experiences. These more radical manifestations in language distinguish the discourse as "misogynistic hate speech" rather than suggest it merely exist in "milder" formations such as "sexist speech". Therefore, the typology of different metaphoric translations and tropes emerges as centrally significant to the semiotic analysis of The Red Pill community and the hegemonic ideologies and discourses prevalent therein. The findings suggest hate speech relevant to the following thematic tropes: 1) heteropatriarchal conceptions of gender, 2) systemic devaluation and regulation of femininity and 3) pseudoscientific justifications of ideological beliefs. These may be conducted through rhetorical elements, such as:

- hyperbolic exaggerations,
- deliberate simplifications ("AWALT" or "all women are like that"),
- metonymic expressions (generally related to the female body),
- incitements and instructions to, for instance, sexual violence,
- devaluing consent
- active dehumanization through deliberate strategies like name-calling (which may, for instance, be conducted metonymically).

The case study group emphasizes its self-identification as "deviants" on the margins of society, enhanced by expressions of "camaraderie" through this sense of self-identification.

Often, this may happen through reappropriation and assimilation of language, satire and hypermasculinist, homosocial bonds, where "sexist humour may be a part of male group bonding" (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). Nissinen (2018) points out, that in expressions of hurtful speech, oftentimes the aim of the expression is intended to "situate the target in a subordinate position against the speaker." Here, "performative aspects of hate […] don't work only on the linguistic level, but also on a non-verbal symbolic level: different gestures and visual messages (such as a burning cross) deliver the same hateful messages." (Nissinen, 99). Nissinen also discusses the symbolic violence of hate speech, where "hateful language simplifies the target violently as a single feature" (Zizek in Nissinen, 77) through a kind of hypersimplification: different features are overrepresented while less preferable ones are shut out. This is also actively evident in the sample and examples of the thematic tropes that arose from the pool of data based on the live observation.

Naturally, in online contexts, issues such as tonal variation (such as in "satire" or "irony") can be more difficult to recognize, particularly if the reader is not adeptly equipped to recognize different ways of multimodal communication. In this particular type of communication, tone may only be expressed through one mode: textual evidence might point to a matter-of-factual tone, but visual evidence such as gifs, emojis or memes add a layer which is suggestive of a particular tone like irony which adds to the memetic dimension of online communication. Moreover, some of the stand-alone expressions used by the Red Pill – such as "hold the frame", "naturally red pilled" or "this girl was special™" – cannot be inherently categorized as hate speech on their own unless if we maintain an ideological and cultural dimension in their consequent analysis. Here, the reader must share an interpretive community (Fish, 114) with the author of a text to be able to decode its intended meaning and to have access for the signified meanings, through the Lotmannian semiotic procedure of

"translating of the untranslatable". Barthes (1991) suggested, in *Mythologies*, that the masking of "ideology" as "culture" allows ideological domination of social connotations between the signified and signifier and socio-political influences upon meaning-making (81 – 82), challenging structuralist notions of the arbitrary connections and correlations between sign systems. With respect to the quarantining practices, a study published in March 2022 found that the so-called "community-wide moderation intervention" model on Reddit in two quarantined communities, r/TheRedPill (TRP) and r/The_Donald (TD), made it more difficult to recruit new members (Chandrasekharan, Ihaver, Bruckman & Gilbert, 2022). Next to this, "existing user's misogyny and racist levels remained unaffected", supporting the suggestion that those willing to consume such content will do what they need to do in order to access it regardless of potential content restrictions a platform may put in place.

Keeping this ideological cultural dimension in mind, the processes of signification in relation to hate speech may function more aggressively and be easily recognizable, but they can also be more covert and concealed, affected by the positionality of the reader in relation to the culture. Moreover, the intruding cultural text may acquire a dominant position in discourse and start determining the ways other texts can be interpreted (Ventsel 2000, 18). The invading text subordinates earlier texts in order to generate new meanings. This alien text then functions as "text-in-text", where it takes on series of functions: "to be a catalyst for meaning, to change the character of primary signification, to remain unnoticed" (Lotman 2004c: 66 in Ventsel, 2000, 18).

Ventsel (2012) suggests, that "principles of organization in the process of signification" that operate in concealed manners can also be distinguished from cultural texts:

> "For an external observer, it may be both ambivalent and polyvalent, can be divided into a paradigm of equivalent yet different meanings, or again into a system of antonymic oppositions, but for the inhabitants of the culture "the code-text is nevertheless monolithic, compact and unambiguous [...] organizing their memories and defining the limits to the possible variations of the text" (Lotman 2005b: 426). The hegemonic logic of the code-text is in operation in a more concealed manner than in previous coding strategies. By imposing specific mutual relationships between the positions of the subjects and the conditions for their positions, it functions as a dominant process of signification, since it establishes some positions as active and others as passive, allows some positions to engage in relations with other elements in the text and denies this to other positions, approximately determines how to depict the beginning and the end of the narrative, etc. "
>
> (1447)

Following this positionality of the cultural text in the context of hate speech, Banko, MacKeen and Ray (2020) suggest a more unified typology for analyzing hateful content online. A three-dimensional scheme attributed to Vidgen et al. (2019) suggests analysis based on **the target of abuse** (like individual; identity; entity or concept), **the recipient of abuse** (like women; a specific individual; capitalism) and **manner of articulation** (insult; aggression; stereotype; untruth) (126).

Based on this, the following markers are suggested for the ongoing, future analysis of hate speech in online contexts:

- **"source" and "channel"** (see Eco 1976),
- **"replicability of the signifier"** (ibid.),

- **the target of abuse** (like individual; identity; entity or concept), (Banko et al.)

- **the recipient of abuse** (like women; a specific individual; capitalism) (ibid.)
  and

- **manner of articulation** (insult; aggression; stereotype; untruth) (ibid.)

Rhetorical elements that construct the semiotic signs and have an effect on the cultural signification practices have also been listed (see page 41). Ramos (2014, table 1.0) has suggested a type of categorization on insults and harassment received by female gamers on Xbox Live, which shows the presence of expressions from Reddit, also found in this study, visible in other contexts. This shows type of snowball effect in practice where expressions are not context-bound but take on new meanings depending on the environments where the semiotically constructed expressions exist. It also highlights the pervasiveness and speed through which they exist outside of their birth contexts. Moreover, it has been recognized by scholars like Badalich (2018), that features of online landscape may be utilized by different radicalist recruiters to their advantage. Gendered topics and weaponized platform features, such as likes; shares; comments; hashtags, that facilitate interaction, were, in Badalich's study, utilized to "cultivate a sense of community" where through involvement with the production of each topic the users were eventually radicalized to an organized form of white supremacy. Badalich also recognizes how the algorithmic considerations or "recommendation algorithms" of each platform could unintentionally "facilitate the spread of conspiracies, misinformation and hateful content" through users interaction with users, posts and other content (30).

Radicalization rarely occurs only by consuming material online (see e.g. Malkki et al., 2021), but it has to be noted that online material is more readily and effortlessly available as the online environment offers a chance to multimodally share content and interact

with others regardless of the geographical location. Moreover, even if the vast majority of the community would not commit acts of violence offline, the online spaces are still be used by violent extremists preying to recruit younger people. Particularly vulnerable groups of people, even in these minority subcultures, are at risk in the event of radicalized grooming attempts, since the self-identification and peers compose a very real and significant place for social support. Hence, developing young people's media and information literacy and critical thinking should be at the core of any potentially preventative measure to recognize attempts to radicalize vulnerable people online.

Further research in natural language processing could approach hate speech through this kind of categorization by looking more closely at the manner of articulation where semiotics could be beneficial in the coding of cultural signs in a wider corpus. Future research might also consider testing these new manifestations, and their consequent reception, of digital rhetoric in practice. Ritualistic elements in the reception of digital rhetoric visible in online speech and computer-mediated communication could be another viewpoint, as each platform has their own governing norms of usage. Next to this, further research could be conducted on different speaker types in relation to hate speech and looking at semantic change in hate speech with categorizations by scholars like Andreas Blank and Joachim Grzega. With regards to different speaker types and different Reddit users, it would be possible to compare the percentages of shared users between two or more Reddit communities and see whether there is overlap. These considerations could include so-called "dog whistles" or disguised language in covert hate speech used by radical groups in online contexts.

6.   Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has not been to come to definitive conclusions, but rather, provide a new way of thinking about online typologies, web-based interactions of users and their consequent interrelationships. A semiotic typology of online hate is starting to take shape, and recognizing its dominant, hegemonic constructions is of vital importance for the future.

Next to this, Holbrook's model for the categorization of radicalized speech demonstrates the wide spectrum of expressions in hate speech. The case study's expressions range through all three levels and show demonstrably the challenges tight categorization models might have in analytical phases. Ideological considerations and issues in power structure presented in the theoretical framework have also been kept in mind throughout the empirical phase, and inevitably influence the social conditions that found the basis for the emergence of hateful ideologies and their consequent manifestation in language. Further research in natural language processing could approach hate speech and its typological considerations through semiotic categorization by looking more closely at the manner of articulation where semiotics could be beneficial in the coding of cultural signs in a wider corpus. Next to this, further research could be conducted on different speaker types in relation to hate speech and looking at semantic change in hate speech with categorizations by scholars like Andreas Blank and Joachim Grzega. These considerations could include so-called "dog whistles" or disguised language in covert hate speech used by radical groups in online contexts.

As the online environments keep developing, and discourses construct new meanings, we will continue to witness the emergence of new semiotic formations in culture. Discussion on freedom of speech remains a relevant concern in discussions of hate speech, and its

consequent deconstruction into categorizations is not very easy. Regardless: allowing hate

speech to thrive on platforms and go unrecognized may prompt crimes against any individuals

or groups it targets. Naturalizing radical ideologies may increase violence against target

groups of hate speech. Active and constant dehumanization in gendered hate speech may lead

to objectification of women and sexual violence, harassment, and their consequent

normalization. A collective responsibility in plucking out hateful content should be

highlighted and utilized, and sometimes users engaging in different ways with the platforms

may be even better at recognizing these instances than paid moderators. Reporting practices

will hopefully continue to develop in the near future, supplemented by developments in

algorithms dedicated for hate speech detection and automatic identification of misogynistic

speech. Inevitably, we will continue to witness the arising of new cultural configurations and

forget the elements of the past that once seemed essential, and, in another moment, recall

others with newly found-significance, through the ebb-and-flow of endless semiosis.

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